

Girl's good will paying off

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MANCHESTER – A Merrimack girl who got to work with her heroes from "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" on a home for flood victims here last fall continues to spread smiles around the country.

Last October, the New Hampshire Sunday News told the story of Meghan Richardson, 10, who didn't let her own health problems -- she has cystic fibrosis and diabetes and spends a lot of time in the hospital -- keep her from volunteering to work on the new home for the Voisine family. As she put it: "I like to help people, and a lot of people have helped me."

That story caught the eye of the folks at Disney, who decided Meghan should get the chance to see the one person she admires nearly as much as the "Makeover" crew: Disney teen phenom Hannah Montana.

Tonight, Meghan and her mom, Sue Richardson, will join the crowd at the Verizon Wireless Arena to watch the "Extreme Makeover" episode that was filmed here, which airs at 8 p.m. But she'll be resting up afterwards.

Later this week, Meghan and her mom fly to Miami, where they have third-row seats at a Hannah Montana concert Thursday night. They're bringing as their guests a 7-year-old Make-a-Wish child from Florida and the girl's dad.

"Hannah Montana always gives me a humongous smile on my face, so I wanted to give another kid that humongous smile," Meghan told the Sunday News.

A little girl with a big smile -- it was a milestone when Meghan recently reached 60 pounds, according to her mom -- Meghan said she knows every Hannah Montana song by heart. One of her favorites?

"Nobody's perfect," she sang. "You live and you learn it ... Again and again till you get it right."

Working on the Voisine house was in many ways a life-changing event for her daughter, Sue Richardson said.

For one thing, there's her new best bud: "Makeover" star Paul DiMeo, who gave Meghan his phone number before the crew left Manchester, and made her promise to call every week.

Richardson said she thought the TV star was just being polite -- until the phone rang about a week later. "I thought you were going to call me every week," DiMeo scolded Meghan.

Since then, they chat regularly. "We talk about school, dance, medicine ... his animals," Meghan said. She's learned "some cool painting tips" from him, too.

Meghan also was invited to visit the Voisines' new home; the rest of New Hampshire has to wait until tonight for a glimpse inside. "It's awesome, and they're such a nice family," Sue Richardson said. "We did the zipline and played on some of the go-carts."

Meanwhile, the ripples of kindness are still spreading.

Meghan was invited to be a guest emcee during a charity golf tournament in Florida next November. The sponsor, Vets Helping Heroes, purchases service dogs for wounded veterans.

Tournament organizers asked Meghan if her friend Paul DiMeo could join them as well. "I don't know. I'll ask him," Meghan said.

She did. If they're not filming, DiMeo promised her, he'll be there.

"He said there's three things in the world he loves other than his wife," Sue Richardson said: "He loves carpentry, he loves kids and he loves vets."

Richardson said all the good that has come her daughter's way lately has made her even more attuned to helping others. "All these things are connected. It's people helping people," she said.

And that's the lesson she hopes Meghan takes away from her experience that started with the Voisine house.

"One little kid can make a difference," Richardson said. "If we all took five minutes, how much of a difference would that make?"