

Northwest High student a longtime friend of food bank

By **MARISSA ALANIS**
Staff Writer

Teensie Wellborn of Trophy Club still remembers the 5-year-old boy with his red wagon piled high with canned food.

Freddie Main III wanted to give the food that he had requested for his birthday to the Roanoke Food Pantry, which Ms. Wellborn oversaw.

"To me, that was a very true act of kindness and generosity for a child to see the need, and to take the initiative to do something about it was very impressive to me," Ms. Wellborn said.

Now 17, Freddie still asks friends and family members to give him food donations instead of gifts on his birthday.

Northwest High School baseball coach Che Hendrix said others can learn selflessness from the 11th-grader.

"He's the guy who is totally giving of himself and never thinks about himself," Mr. Hendrix said. "He puts his teammates first. He puts the program first."

Freddie maintains this attitude even when faced with adversity. In the summer of 2004, he was diagnosed as having juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, a disease that causes inflammation and stiffness in his joints. He takes a chemotherapy drug each week to help with the inflammation.

"My knuckles are all red and swollen, and this is as straight as my pinky will be," he said, displaying a slightly curved finger.

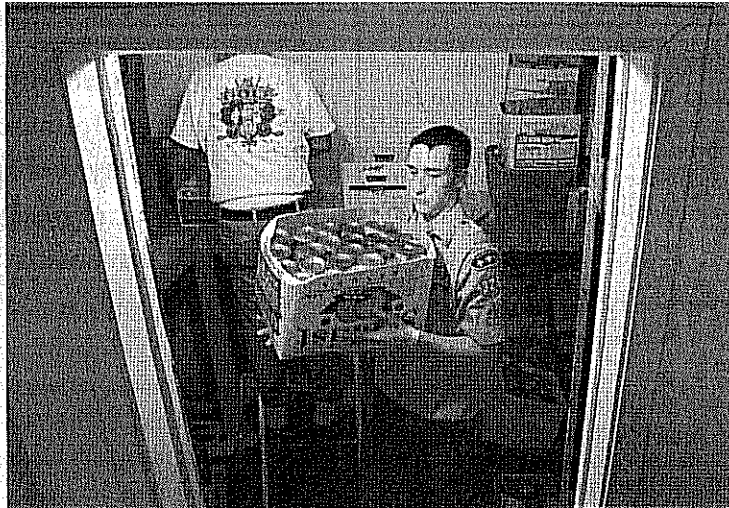
But his illness hasn't stopped him from playing baseball, one of his passions.

Freddie moved up to the varsity squad when the team advanced to the regional playoffs last year. Mr. Hendrix said he expects Freddie to serve as the main pitcher during the upcoming season.

But for the longest time, Freddie kept his disease a secret, even from Mr. Hendrix. Freddie said he feared that his illness would cause others to label him and treat him differently.

"I just want to be Freddie Main, the kid who goes to Northwest High School that's a junior who plays baseball," he said. "Somebody you can talk to, and be a good friend."

Freddie said his illness hasn't hindered his pitching ability. And he said the medicine helps him manage the disease.



Freddie sorts food at the pantry. For his birthday, he asks friends and family members to give him food to donate.

"When you have active arthritis in your fingers like he does, it's hard to make a fist, and you need to be on the medicine to decrease the inflammation, and then you have to stretch and bend to regain the motion," said Katherine Madson, Freddie's doctor and a pediatric rheumatologist at Children's Medical Center Dallas.

Freddie's baseball coach isn't the only one who relies on him to take the lead.

Ms. Wellborn and her husband, Dan Gordon, who run the Roanoke Food Pantry, agreed to let Freddie take charge of the pantry's food collection and distribution for Christmas for his Eagle Scout project.

"You can beat anything, and Freddie has that attitude," Ms. Wellborn said. "He has the will to live, the drive to live, and [the disease is] not going to slow him down. He has an incredible

amount of energy."

On a recent afternoon, Freddie's friends, baseball teammates, family members and even one of his teachers, Christy Edgar, showed up to help sort food for his project.

The food pantry bustled with activity as Freddie oversaw more than three dozen volunteers who hauled off boxes of canned food that would later be sorted.

Michelle Mann, one of Freddie's friends, said it's amazing that a 17-year-old is so responsible and does so much for his community.

"I'm excited to see what he does in the future because he has a lot going for him," she said.

Freddie credits his faith in God for helping him cope with his illness. He also praises his parents, LynnAnn and Freddie Main II, for making it easy to do the activities he does.

"He's so OK with it, manages it and does it so well," Ms. Main said about Freddie's disease. "I'm in awe of him. ... He blows me away. He's a good friend."

Freddie leaned over, planted a kiss on his mother's cheek and said, "I guess I was brought up right."

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