



# When People Come Together, *Miracles Happen*

By Tom Burgess, Owner, Christian Brothers Automotive, Cumming GA

*“We are honored to present you with this 2018 Kia Sedona Minivan!”*



**The look of amazement on Tammy’s face, and the tears that started to flow, warmed the hearts of the one-hundred plus who watched her accept the keys to her minivan.**

Her 14-year-old son Connor bounced with excitement in the back seat – a huge smile on his face. After the 20+ surgeries he had been through to keep him mobile, and the hurtful teasing from classmates he has endured due to his conditions, this was certainly a wonderful night to remember.

How does a mother of three children, all of whom have special medical conditions, who tried without luck every way she could think of to raise money to replace her vehicle, suddenly receive the keys to a fully paid for van? Simply put – an amazing community and the power of networking.

For me it started when my friend Bruce Troville asked if I would make a donation towards an American Legion Riders charity motorcycle ride in support of a single mother. Tammy’s conversion van had been borrowed and totaled, leaving her without transportation. My attention perked up at ‘conversion van’, and when I heard the whole story I knew there had to be a way for Christian Brothers to contribute more than a few dollars towards the ride. I contacted my home office in Houston and spoke to the head of the Giving Exchange Committee (GEC). Mark Carr, the CEO of Christian Brothers, has always believed in giving back to people in

need, and he established the GEC to sort the hundreds of requests that come in each year from Franchisees like myself. The Committee interviews the applicants and advocates for the family, and determines who will receive assistance and how much. This year Christian Brothers expects to give over \$350,000 dollars away to those in need. Tammy’s story is especially heart wrenching.

Her daughter suffers from a number of neurofibromas and was diagnosed with a brain tumor at an early age. She is also treating medulla astrocytoma, and has finished her chemotherapy. Unfortunately, she has inoperable tumors related to the Neurofibroma. Her middle son, who is 16, suffers from neurofibromas as well, and has a learning disability. Connor requires a wheelchair to move around. He suffers from Cerebral Palsy and is dealing with challenges facing yet another surgery to either lengthen the rods attached to his spine, or possibly replacing all the old hardware. To complicate issues, he has other medical and physiological challenges that create roadblocks for treatment. Currently he has several inoperable tumors in his spine and abdomen.

Without a means of transportation, and also due to the amount of daily care and commitment her children required, Tammy lost her job. To make matters worse, just recently the family lost their home due to inability to pay rent.

After I presented her case to the GEC they interviewed both Tammy and Derek Dugan, her advocate and the Chaplain of the American Legion Riders, Post 127 in Buford. When I called to check on the status of our request, I was told a check had already been sent out. Indeed, it was – a check for \$25,000!

Check in hand and with the help of several business owners and friends, we were able to pay for a conversion van, the taxes, an extended warrantee, four years of full maintenance plus auto insurance for a year. With help from Ric Cline, the Director of the Legion Riders and Service Advisor for the Mall of Georgia Kia, Mall of Georgia Kia General Manager Chad Sutherlind and online sales Holly Frankovich, and the money raised by the American Legion Riders, what was once a dream became a reality. What an incredible gift to give a mother who has been through so much in supporting her family.

From one person who wanted to help a Mother in need, to a group of compassionate American Legion motorcycle riders, to a sensitive Service Manager at Kia, this is a story that illustrates the power of people coming together to help a neighbor in need. Tammy’s ability to start a new job with reliable transportation and take her children to their many required doctor’s appointments can now take place, and her families future is certainly looking up, thanks to folks who truly care about others and want to help those in need. ■