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Inside the Ropes

Schooner Classic proves these kids are A-OK

Amy Bond thought about it all night. The OK Kids Korral, a Toby Keith Foundation project, had touched her heart in a profound way at the banquet before the Schooner Fall Classic. The Florida State coach went to her car after the first round and got her checkbook.

The Korral, scheduled to open in November, will be located at the OU Medical Center in Oklahoma City.

The facility will serve as a cost-free, 16-bed home for children being treated for cancer at the center and their families.

"Our (players) get so wrapped up in their day-to-day stuff, they don't see what's going on in the outside world," said

Bond, who called the inaugural tournament a "big-picture event."

Charity-driven tournaments in women's college golf are rare, yet everything about the Schooner Fall Classic pointed toward benefitting others.

The driving force behind the new event was Tricia Covel, wife of country music star Toby Keith. She flew to Las Vegas during the Women's Golf Coaches Association convention last December to hand-deliver invitations at a dinner hosted at one of Keith's restaurants.

The tournament, held at Keith's Belmar Golf Club in Norman, featured a sold-out college-am that included LPGA stars Juli Inkster, Angela Stanford and Stacy Prammanasudh, plus former baseball pitcher Roger Clemens.

But the lasting images of

this event came Friday, when 19-year-old Lorelei Decker told the story of her two-year battle with cancer, and 6-year-old Charlie Keith (no relation) melted the crowds' hearts with a simple wave.

"(Lorelei) is 19 and she spoke with the eloquence of a 35-year-old," Arizona State coach Melissa Luellen said. "Because she was their age, (players) were astounded."

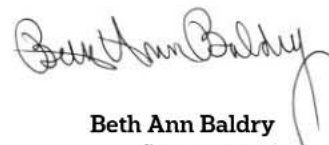
As for Charlie, the bald-headed boy who believes he's a cowboy, he'll be the first patient to stay at the Korral. Every day is a battle for Charlie to stay alive.

"You've never seen so many kids want to hang out with a 6-year-old boy,"

tournament chairman Bill Hildenbrand said.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of the event was the pay-it-forward opportunity for the winning team. The Toby Keith Foundation presented Oklahoma State with a check for \$3,000, to be used in any philanthropic way the team desired. The Cowgirls opted to donate the money back to the foundation and hope to volunteer at the Korral once it opens.

"What a crucial time to do it in the college years, when you have a lot of blessings," OSU coach Courtney Jones said. "Hopefully this is just the start of something greater."



Beth Ann Baldry
Senior writer

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