

UMHB students build playhouses for children of military families

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BELTON—Armed with paintbrushes and donning oversized white T-shirts, four siblings gathered around their new playhouse to add the finishing touches of paint. The Carter girls were among dozens of military children who received a playhouse thanks to the efforts of [University of Mary Hardin-Baylor](#) students.



Four-year-old Sarah Carter carefully paints the window of her new playhouse as she and her sisters work with University of Mary Hardin-Baylor students to finish their new Cru Playhouse. (PHOTO/Jennifer Jones)

Eleven families of military personnel each received a playhouse for their children, made possible by the Cru Playhouses initiative. Mike McCarthy, director of campus activities at UMHB, called Cru Playhouses “a way for us to honor (the families’) military service and a way for us to teach our students how to honor military service.”

Nearly all of the families chosen to receive a playhouse have a parent who is a student at UMHB or is employed at the university. Most of the families chosen to receive a playhouse also have one parent currently deployed.

Giving back to military families is the focus of Cru Playhouses, but McCarthy believes by participating in this program, students were able to learn more about fellow students who have children and a spouse in active duty.

"A lot of our students have no idea what a real military family is like," McCarthy said. "They only know what they've seen on TV. Cru Playhouses gives us a chance to be in contact with military families and see who they really are and what type of person devotes their life to military service."

Ten student organizations constructed the Cru Playhouses, including the Student Government Association and the [Baptist Student Ministry](#). A group of UMHB faculty also completed a playhouse this year.

Randy McSwain, a senior psychology major participated with other members of the Couch Cru, the student-spirit group dedicated to supporting Crusader athletic teams.

"We support the Cru, and this is something the Cru really supported, so we wanted to get involved," McSwain said.



University of Mary Hardin-Baylor students construct 11 playhouses on campus to give to children of soldiers as part of Cru Playhouses. (PHOTO/Jennifer Jones)

McSwain was part of a design team who met with the families to determine how the children wanted the playhouses decorated. The playhouses were built Monday through Thursday, and on Friday, the children came to campus to help decorate and personalize their playhouses.

Parents Dawnella and Rob Carter brought their four daughters to meet with the Couch Cru design team.

“Rob wasn’t home, so I spoke to Mike (McCarthy), and he said that they had 11 playhouses that they wanted to give to military children. I thought he was calling to ask for names of people,” Mrs. Carter said. “I told him that my husband just retired after serving 25 years, and he said we were a family that they would love to honor. I actually started crying when he told me.”

Rob Carter is a first-year graduate student at UMHB pursuing a master’s degree in psychology. Carter served 25 years in the military and retired from the Army in May.

The Carter family has an older son, Matthew, and four daughters—Calista, age 9; Nicole, 8; Amanda, 6; and Sarah, 4.

“We’ve been here (in Central Texas) for two years, but right after we moved here my husband was deployed,” Mrs. Carter said. “He’s only been out of the military since May, so (a playhouse) has been on our wish list, just not a possibility for us yet.”



Ten student organizations and a faculty group constructed the Cru Playhouses. The children then painted the playhouses.

The Carters tried to keep the surprise a secret, but they gave couldn't hold it in and told their girls the good news the day before they were set to go decorate their playhouse.

The girls have big plans for their playhouse, their mother said.

"They plan on landscaping around it, and they want to attract butterflies to it," she said. "They have a spot all picked out in the yard for it, so they're really excited."

The Carter family had no idea about Cru Playhouses until McCarthy called and said they were chosen to receive one.

"This is the best gift in the world," Mrs. Carter said. "We didn't know about this, we didn't ask them for this, it was just offered to us, which was really neat. It's the best gift in the world. When we saw our Carter Family Playhouse sign, we knew it was real."