

Manny Brings the Cause Nearer and Dearer

In 1997, Tiffany Wilke's brother (and former Bucky Badger mascot), Derek Hildebrandt, launched the Greater Bucky Open (GBO), an annual American Family Children's Hospital golf outing. Tiffany always helped out and loved coming to the hospital to visit patients while delivering donated toys. Yet she never dreamed how closely her family would be touched by this hospital.

"In 2006, I was 8 months pregnant with my son, Manny, attending a ceremony to celebrate the 'topping out' of American Family Children's Hospital during its construction.

"Just a few weeks later, I was back at the hospital as a stunned new mom, trying to make sense of my baby son. Much to our surprise, Manny was born with multiple birth defects, the most visible being no ears or open ear canals, making him legally deaf. Manny also began to choke whenever he ate, a condition soon diagnosed as Tracheoesophageal Fistula, whereby food was getting into his lungs through an abnormal connection between his esophagus and trachea. This was quickly corrected by surgery when Manny was just five days old.

"Soon," says Tiffany, "four more birth defects were discovered and we were back at Children's Hospital for several days. As stressful as things were, we were so thankful and amazed by how coordinated Manny's care was among all of the pediatric specialties, including surgery, cardiology, neurology, ophthalmology, genetics, ENT, audiology and many others. We were also so comforted by the doctors, nurses and hospital staff, who made us feel more like family members than patients.

"Without question," says Tiffany, "Manny's life got off to a rough start, but today he has become a pretty typical 4-year-old. He attends preschool with his friends; nurtures his 1-year-old brother, Abe; wrestles his 8-year-old brother, Eli; and learns baseball from



Tiffany Wilke (left) with her son, Manny

his daddy, Nate. We hope that Manny will undergo several reconstructive ear surgeries in the future, but for now, he wears a bone-conductive hearing aid to help him hear."

"Before Manny was born," says Tiffany, "I enjoyed giving to the hospital. Now I enjoy giving...and giving back. Being on the other side was a whole new experience, and our family has such an appreciation for the wonderful doctors, staff and the beautiful facility."

For more information, please visit uwhealthkids.org or call (608) 264-KIDS.

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