

Donations fund equipment to allow disabled students mobility at Mount Tabor Elementary

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— Cerebral palsy may keep 9-year-old Benjamin Kiper confined to a wheelchair most of the time. However, technology is allowing him to walk and explore.

“Vroom! Vroom!” he said, holding a toy truck and pushing with his toes to move across the room at Mount Tabor Elementary Wednesday morning.

His mother, Michelle, watched as her son explored the two adjoining rooms and greeted people along the way while being held up by a harness, attached to a ceiling track that allows him to move without weight on his legs.

“It’s just amazing,” Michelle said, smiling as she watched her son glide across the room. “He’s all over the place anymore.

“The only bad thing is sometimes he forgets he can’t walk when he’s not in this at home.”

This was one of the recent purchases made by the school thanks to donations from the Horseshoe Foundation of Floyd County and Mike Sodrel, a candidate for the 9th District congressional seat.

“This is about trying to get these children to their highest level of personal achievement,” Sodrel said at a reception dedicated to the donors Wednesday.

Cindy Cecil, teacher of students with multiple disabilities, said the recent purchases, such as the track, help students gain independence. She said those confined to a wheelchair rely on adults to make choices for them, as to what to do and when.

“I would never have thought of that being an issue,” said Jerry Finn, executive director of the Horseshoe Foundation of Floyd County. “It makes me wonder watching him [Benjamin] what that has done for his world?”

Cecil said it changes a lot.

“They don’t have to wait for an adult to push their wheelchair somewhere for them to do something,” Cecil said. “They’ll be able to make their own choices. That allows the patterns in the brain to move more into an active role.”

She said being more active encourages even more activity, thus allowing the children to learn more.

With the donations, the school was also able to purchase a few multi-sensory activity centers, called “Little Rooms.” In those, children who may only be able to make limited movements can explore and learn with an array of items differing in texture and color, with some making sounds, all within reach while in a lying down position.

Cecil said the total cost for all the new technology was around \$26,000.

The Horseshoe Foundation made the largest donation, of around \$25,000, Finn said.

“There are so many needs and so many opportunities for [children with disabilities] to learn and it takes high tech equipment to help them learn,” he said as to why the donation was made. “[Helping kids with special needs] makes our community so much better.”

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Photos



Michelle Kiper holds a toy truck up for her son, Benjamin, 9, at Mount Tabor Elementary on Wednesday morning. Kiper's son is now able to move around the special needs classroom thanks to a newly installed rail system donated in part by Horseshoe Foundation of Floyd County and Mike and Keta Sodrel. Staff photo by Kevin McGloshen