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Shrine Bowl Benefits Schroeder Family

Perhaps no one ever connected to the Kansas Shrine Bowl has a deeper appreciation of what the Kansas Shrine Bowl is about than Tom Schroeder, former head football coach at Liberal High School.

As a high school player, Tom played in a Shrine Bowl game in Wyoming, an event similar to the Kansas Shrine Bowl. This year, he's participating as one of the assistant coaches for the West squad in the 36th annual Kansas All Star game.

What separates Schroeder from others who have both coached and played in Shrine Bowl games comes from first-hand experience with Shriners Hospitals from within his own family.

Tom and his wife Darla are the parents of 5-year-old Jackson, who was born with spina bifida, a condition caused when a baby's spine does not close up completely during pregnancy. Some children with spina bifida don't have the ability to walk because of muscle weakness, paralysis of the lower extremities, hip problems, and foot and ankle deformities, including club feet.

Such was the case of Jackson, whose doctors told the Schroeders that their young son would probably never have full use of his legs.

Tom and Darla had the feeling more could be done for Jackson than what they were being told by doctors who were treating him. "We didn't think they were being aggressive enough", says Tom.

Tom and Darla had wondered if they might get help from a Shriners hospital, but it took a special event connected to the Kansas Shrine Bowl to get them started. It began with a notice in a newspaper just prior to the 2007 Kansas Shrine Bowl in Hays. The family happened to be visiting relatives near Hays the weekend of the game, and noted that a screening clinic for children who might be eligible for Shrine Hospital care would be conducted on game day. Tom and Darla decided to take Jackson, and Shriner's care began almost immediately.

"His life and our lives changed the minute Shriners got involved", says Tom. Darla says things began to happen quickly when Jackson made his first trip to the Shriners Hospital for Children in St. Louis. "We thought our first visit there was going to be an evaluation visit. Instead, Jackson had his very first surgery the next day", she says.

Jackson has endured 7 more surgeries in the two years since his first visit to the Shriner's Hospital, but all of the trips to the hospital became worth it one night in September of 2008. Darla recalls that Tom was able to see Jackson walk with the aid of crutches for the first time that night…..on Tom's birthday.

He's been an active little boy ever since, who "motors" quite capably on a set of crutches. He was often the center of attention on Saturday, zipping up and down the aisles of an Amtrak train carrying players, coaches, and Shriners on the annual trek to tour the St. Louis hospital and visit with young patients. Most of the time, he was followed by one or more of the 68 players or coaches, who sometimes had trouble keeping up with the speedy 5-year-old.

Saturday's trip was special for all three Schroeders, who have spent much time there during the past two years. For Jackson, it was familiar territory. "He could have led the tours", laughs Darla.

Schroeder and his family are enjoying this week of Kansas football before he moves on to Stillwell, Oklahoma, where he'll become the athletic director and head football coach at Stillwell High School this fall. His coaching career in Kansas has included stops Trego Community High School in Wakeeny, where he served as an assistant from 1990 to 2000, then six years at Hugoton and three years at Liberal as head coach.

But before Oklahoma comes the Shrine Bowl on July 25th in Wichita. It was an early Christmas present for Tom when he got the call in December from Kansas Shrine Bowl Executive Director Dave Mize, asking him if he would be interested in serving as a West assistant coach. "It was like 'Wow!', he says. "I can't think of anything to compare that to unless you were to coach your son in the Shrine Bowl."

The Kansas Shrine Bowl All-Star Football Game is an annual event featuring two football teams composed of 68 of the best graduated high school players from the East and West. Kickoff for this year's game at Cessna Stadium in Wichita is scheduled for 7 PM on Saturday, July 25. Proceeds from all Shrine Bowl events support the Shriners Hospitals for Children, a network of 22 hospitals that provide expert, no-cost orthopedic, burn, and spinal care to children under 18. Children are admitted free to Shriners Hospitals for Children without regard for race, religion, nationality, creed, or relationship to a Shriner.

Advance reserved chair back tickets for the game are $20.00. Adult general admission tickets are $12.00 in advance. Student tickets (K-12) are $6.00 in advance. Game day tickets, if available, are $1 more at Cessna Stadium. Other Shrine Bowl events scheduled in Wichita on July 25th include an open 2-Mile Road Race that includes 60 Cross Country All-Star Runners, a giant Shrine Parade, a Kids Fair, and a High School Combine. Additional information and tickets can be purchased through the Shrine Bowl office by calling 1-800-530-5524. The Shrine Bowl web site address is ksshrine.com and the e-mail address is ksshrine@kansas.com.

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