



BERKSHIRE HATHAWAY | Kathy Reid Realty
HomeServices

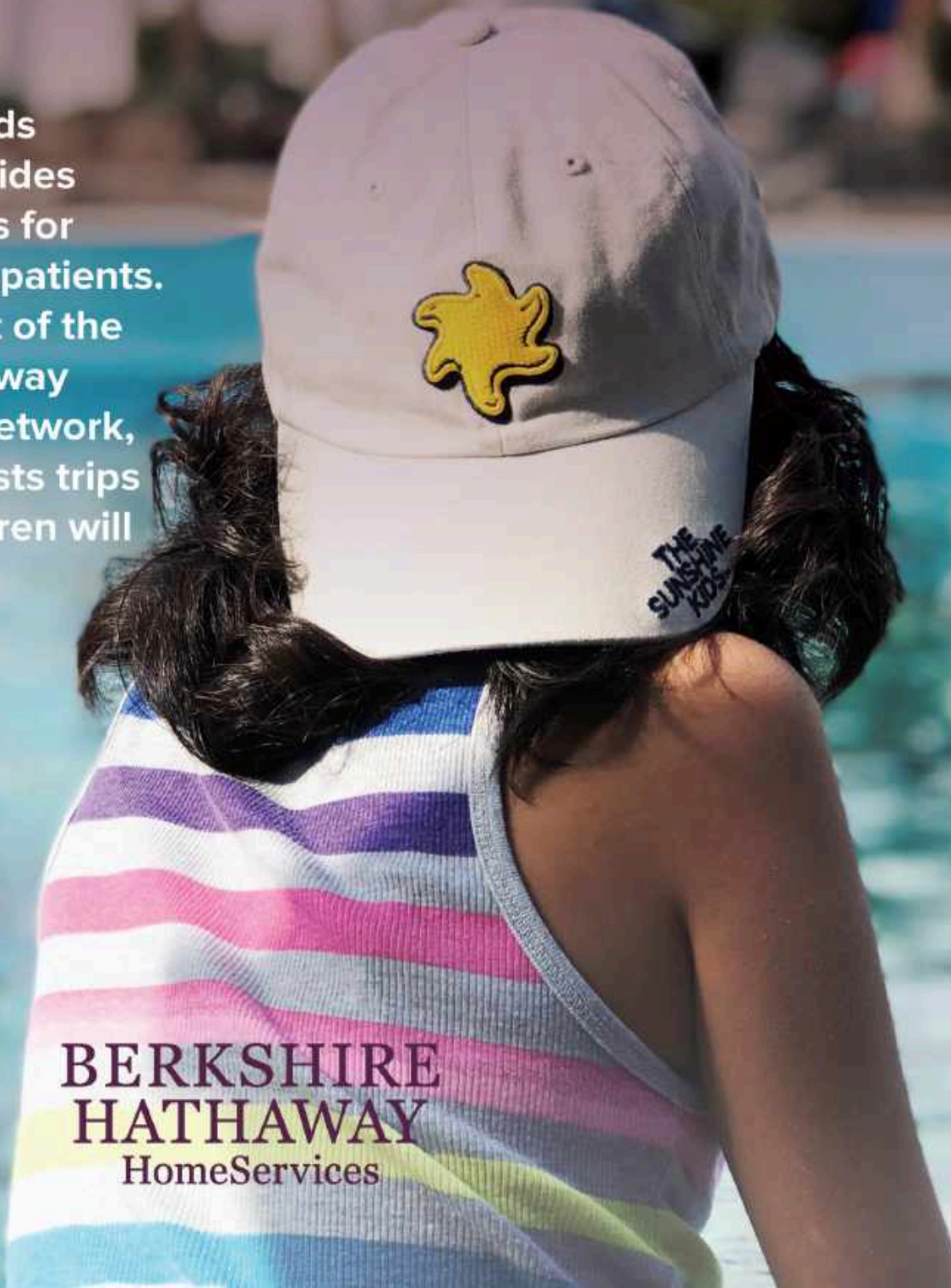
Here Comes the Sun

The Sunshine Kids Foundation provides lasting memories for pediatric cancer patients. With the support of the Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices network, the nonprofit hosts trips and events children will never forget.



SUNSHINE
KIDS™

BERKSHIRE
HATHAWAY
HomeServices



In 1982, Rhoda Tomasco had a mission. While volunteering in a pediatric cancer unit in Houston, Texas, she witnessed the toll and the sadness that cancer brought to the children and how the hospital treatments dampened their moods. Tomasco knew that the best way for the children to have a smile on their face would be to step out of the hospital and to enjoy a day in the sun. What began with a ski trip with 10 kids to Winter Park, Colorado, flourished into trips across the country. Tomasco founded the Sunshine Kids Foundation nonprofit upon her mission to be a shining light for these children — and for them to simply just have some fun.

Today, the organization holds 10 to 12 national trips a year, working with pediatric oncology units and hospitals throughout the country. Each trip is meant to bring children out of the hospitals, away

from their illness and, for one week or so, to allow them to just be a kid. “There are no parents, no siblings, it’s just them,” says Shannon Malone, the director of operations for the Sunshine Kids Foundation. “And they bond over their disease and they just have fun. We don’t talk about cancer, we don’t do research, we don’t counsel. We provide the fun. We get their minds off their cancer.”

Sunshine Kids offers exciting experiences, from skiing down slopes in Beaver Creek, Colorado, to seeing Broadway shows in New York City, to experiencing the magic of Disney World in Orlando, Florida. The hospitals that Sunshine Kids partners with across the country are eager every year to book trips with the organization in order to give children the opportunity to enjoy a week of fun. “We work with over 70 pediatric oncology units across the country,”

Malone says. Sunshine Kids brings four children from each partnering hospital, allowing the hospital to choose who can go on the trips based on medical history to ensure the safety of the children. “We have guidelines. Then the doctors and the social workers actually pick the kids. We don’t because we don’t know their medical history,” Malone says. “On all of our national trips, kids are on active treatment, so it’s really up to the doctors. They don’t want to send anybody that is way too sick.”

Along with the larger trips, the organization works locally to have events for children and their families to attend. “Outside of our national trips, we have four different offices and we do local events as well,” Malone says. “If the families want to sign up, on a local basis, the hospitals know who we are and we provide them the social workers.”



The Sunshine Kids Foundation takes children on trips, such as to Disney World, where they bond and create lifelong memories.



A check is presented at the Sunshine Kids luncheon in Nashville supporting its top 20 companies. In the photo are the 2020 National SpokeKids; National Spokesperson J.K. Simmons, an Academy Award winner; along with Candace Adams, CEO of Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices New England Properties.

Some examples of local trips are taking the children to local baseball games like the Astros in Houston, seeing local shows, themed parties for holidays and much more. For Sunshine Kids SpokeKid Emma Baker of Omaha, Nebraska, the trip she got to experience was one that she will never forget, "I attended the California Fun Time Fantasy Trip, and it exceeded my expectations of a good time tenfold," Baker says. "I can say, without a doubt, it was one of the happiest, coolest, and most supportive experiences I've ever had. From In-N-Out burgers to roller coasters to meeting actors, my smile truly never went away."

Every year, the Sunshine Kids chooses around four kids to represent the organization and be a face for their members attending conventions and fundraising events, getting the chance to speak on behalf of the other children in the organization. According to Malone, it takes a

lot of hard work and planning to put together enjoyable experiences for the children. In support, Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices helps raise money for the Sunshine Kids Foundation with numerous franchisees across the country organizing events to provide funds. "They've been truly amazing, it's a truly amazing company," Malone says.

"The network has been so supportive of us for over these 25 years. They do everything from golf tournaments to bake sales, yard sales, [to] galas." Besides the events, Malone explains, some franchisee' real estate agents donate part of their sales closings to the organization. "They're so supportive and they love the kids," Malone says. Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices offices also volunteer to help with different events and trips. Malone says the foundation even plans events near Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices offices to help them get involved. "We did a little

mini trip to Atlanta last year and the office there was tremendous," Malone says. "They give us advice on things to do, volunteer during the week — we couldn't have done it without them to be honest with you. We do have staff, but we don't have a huge staff... so we rely on our volunteers from Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices network members."





Shannon Malone, the director of operations for the Sunshine Kids Foundation, says it is inspirational to watch the children’s confidence grow during their week-long trips. During the national ski trip in Colorado, children go from not knowing how to ski or being afraid to, to going down the slopes with a smile on their faces.

For Malone, the foundation is thankful for what the corporation provides and how enthusiastic they are with being a part of the Sunshine Kids. “We love doing what we do and we can’t do it without Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices. They’re an amazing company. The franchisees are wonderful. We would not be here without them, that’s just truly it. They’re our corporate sponsor and we wouldn’t be here without them.”

With the support from Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices and other major contributors, Sunshine Kids gets to accomplish its long-standing mission. Malone says it’s something special to see the children from the beginning of the trip to the last day. “Watching their confidence go from zero to 100 by the end of the week is something truly remarkable to see.” For Baker, the Sunshine Kids family has left a lasting impression on her, making her proud to be a SpokesKid for the organization. “The Sunshine Kids Foundation has helped me find my passion, my friends and my voice. There is no other organization that makes sure you’re taken care of the way they do. The staff, the volunteers and

the nurses are all so much fun to hang out with.” Malone says Sunshine Kids hopes to one day “not exist,” meaning, there will be an end to childhood cancer, but until then they’ll continue to create smiles and memories. “Our mission hasn’t changed since day one. It’s basically is to bring kids together, have fun and celebrate life.”

<https://www.sunshinekids.org>



Story published in Prestige magazine, Summer 2020.

