

Cottages for Kids

A community auctions off playhouses to raise money for the Children's Volunteer Health Network. By **Richard Banks**

Kids literally climb the wall of one house, while others ring the bell atop another (which, incidentally, resembles a pineapple under the sea occupied by a certain square sponge named Bob). Meanwhile a flock of schoolkids stares up in wonder at the windmill churning atop a thatched-roof cottage that looks torn from the pages of a Grimm's fairy tale.

Imagination runs wild, as do hoards of happy children, the better part of each November at Rosemary Beach. That's when the Panhandle resort community becomes home to a village of fanciful playhouses as part of a fund-raiser for the Walton County-based Children's Volunteer Health Network (CVHN). Called Cottages for Kids, the event allows—no, encourages—interested parties to check out the playhouses before they are auctioned off the Saturday after Thanksgiving. The structures are donated to the organization by the architects and builders who created them, and proceeds from the sale help CVHN provide health, dental, and mental care to uninsured and underinsured children in Walton and Okaloosa Counties.

"It's like Disney World on a smaller scale," says Tricia Carlisle-Northcutt, the founder and president of CVHN. "The children run from house to house and wear themselves out and so do a few of the adults. It's so much fun for us all.

"Kate Johnson is the CVHN vice president and the chair of Cottages for Kids," Tricia continues. "She does an incredible job of rallying the volunteers, designers, and builders."

When Tricia first moved to Santa Rosa Beach in 2004, she was surprised to find out just how much a problem access to health care was in the area. "Few people



realize the extent of it," she says. "We estimate that about 22% of children in Walton County have no health insurance and 60% have no dental insurance. Those figures don't include kids who are underinsured."

Volunteer Efforts Since 2005, CVHN has helped make more than 1800 medical, dental, and mental care appointments for kids in need—including just about everything from dental checkups to heart and spinal surgery. The organization has accomplished such a feat in large part through the efforts of some 90 health care professionals donating their time and another 200 active community volunteers.

Tricia notes CVHN has recently hired a staff, including an executive director and two dental hygienists, and that its "dental bus" will start visiting area schools this year. "Our volunteers do a wonderful job, but our full-time staff can do things a little more efficiently and consistently. We still put

Several eye-catching cottages fill East Long Green Park at Rosemary Beach each November during the Cottages for Kids fund-raiser.



about 85% of the money we raise back into the foundation and the care for children."

The event raised about \$70,000 in 2006 and \$125,000 last year. "People have responded because they know how critical health care is not just for individuals but the entire community," says Tricia "This year we've even seen kids of people who were donors in the past needing our help. That's humbling, and it goes to show that we really do need to take care of each other." ●

Playhouses will be on display on select days November 8-29 in East Long Green Park. The fund-raiser will end with a silent auction on the final day. For more information visit www.cottagesforkids.org.