



MARK C. DUSTIN / DAILY PILOT

Rebecca Beyer, left, and Samantha Mangione stand behind their collection baskets at their 14th birthday party Friday night. Instead of asking for gifts, the girls asked their guests to donate to the Ronald McDonald House and the Cystinosis Research Foundation.

Two teens give out party favors

Girls throw a party with and for friends, but for them, giving is the real gift.

Dane Grace
Special to the Daily Pilot

Two classmates celebrated a birthday party together at the Coastal Canyon Clubhouse in Newport Beach on Friday with a DJ and Italian food, but this party was about giving, not receiving.

Samantha Mangione, who will be 14 on Dec. 23, and Rebecca Beyer, who turned 14 on Oct. 14, asked partygoers to hold the gifts and make donations instead. Samantha attends Our Lady Queen of Angels School in Newport Beach. Rebecca attends Harbor Day School in Corona del Mar.

"At first, I was going to get presents, and then I was like, 'I don't really need presents,'" Samantha said. "I have everything I really need."

Samantha chose Ronald McDonald House of Orange County to receive donations in her name. The Mangione family has been involved with the Orange County Ronald McDonald House in Orange since it opened 15 years ago and have been longtime donors of time and money. Her family has owned McDonald's restaurants for about 35 years and owns nine in cities across Orange County.

Executive Director Deborah Levy said Samantha is a familiar face at the house, and earlier this month, Samantha and 10 friends helped raise \$6,000 by selling raffle tickets. But Levy never expected the teen to give up her birthday gifts.

"It's highly unusual that a child

will want to give up her birthday presents for charity," Levy said.

Samantha said she would feel the sacrifice but added that it's worth forgoing the gifts.

"I'm usually excited to get presents, so I think about the families and the children," Samantha said. "So, I try to think about it that way."

The house provides lodging for families who have to travel to receive treatment for their ill children, who are being treated at nearby hospitals. The house charges \$5 a day, but won't turn away families who can't pay.

Virginia Mangione, Samantha's mother, said her daughter's volunteer experience with the ill and their families influenced her decision for the birthday celebration.

"She's been involved with the house and she's seen what the families and children go through,"

Mangione said.

Rebecca chose the Cystinosis Research Foundation because of a friend who has the disease, a genetic disorder that causes a build-up of the amino acid — the building blocks of proteins — cystine. The accumulation does damage to the eyes, brain and liver. The disease often strikes children and can cause muscle wasting. Rebecca has gone to school with the girl since kindergarten and has known other kids at the school who've made donations. Rebecca just wanted to do her part.

"I wanted to do it to help my friend," Rebecca said.

Her mother, Lesley Beyer, said that her daughter's attitude has been nothing but positive.

"Rebecca said, 'The best gift I can have is to make the cure to Cystinosis a little closer,'" Beyer said.