

Christmas came early for East Texas mother and daughter after husband, father killed last year

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The For Paul Foundation presented Kayla Eads with a plush bison bearing a photo of her late father, David, to bring on a trip to Disney World in Orlando. Andy Slaughter-Strassner, also on the trip, received a bear with a photo of his late father, Rick.

Courtesy

Christmas came early for Vicky and Kayla Eads along with another Texas family thanks to CSI Aviation, Inc. and The For Paul Foundation.

The gift included a trip to Disney World in Orlando on a private plane.

In November of last year David Eads, [a local EMS worker, was killed in a crash while on duty](#). Eads joined UT Health East Texas EMS in December 2020 and served the Tyler and Smith County area as a lead paramedic.

Vicky Eads met Dawn Besaw, founder of The For Paul Foundation whose husband also died while in the line of duty, during the National EMS Memorial Service in Virginia after her [husband's death](#).

“We started talking and I had asked where she was from and she said Florida. We spoke about our husbands and then I told her David wanted to take Kayla to Disney World,” she said. “Our family had plans to take all the kids to Destin during the summer of 2022, that was their Christmas from us for the year of 2021; and then take Kayla to Disney World afterwards.”



Kayla Eads smiles during a trip to Disney World provided by CSI Aviation and The For Paul Foundation. Eads' father, an EMS worker for UT Health East Texas, was killed last year while on duty.

Courtesy

“As we all know he was taken from us before that could happen,” Eads said. “Dawn told me about the foundation she created in her husband’s honor and that they wanted to do this for Kayla.”

The For Paul Foundation helps first responders and their families through education, support, and appreciation. Their “Hero for the Holidays” program supports families by granting them a wish in memory of a loved one lost in the line of duty.

CSI Aviation Inc. donated an air charter trip to The For Paul Foundation’s “Be Their Hero for the Holidays” program on Dec. 12 for the families.

The flight left from the Tyler Airport on Dec. 12 and returned on Dec. 16, according to CSI Aviation Inc. Marketing and Sales Manager Abigail Malakiman. CSI partnered with Chick-fil-A on the first flight to provide breakfast meals for those on board.

The For Paul Foundation also gave the families stuffed animals memorialized with pictures of their fathers to bring along on the trip.

Executive Vice President of CSI Tommy Dunn said the company was honored to support the program.

“As an air ambulance provider based in Texas and New Mexico, CSI is honored to support the ‘Hero for the Holidays’ program,” he said. “It’s a privilege to support a foundation like this. We understand the commitment and the sacrifice our first responders and their families accept in order to keep us safe and be there at a time of need. So, to give back in any way is an honor.”

Eads said the trip was a once in a lifetime event with every accommodation taken care of and in order.

“CSI Aviation donated everything for the flight from Tyler to Orlando and back to Tyler. Even with a weather delay which was several hours, and pilot swap outs, by flying in another pilot, they made sure we arrived to our destination and ensured we had a safe trip,” she said. “Once there, The For Paul Foundation made sure we were good to go. They checked on us every day and made sure our accommodations were in order.”

The trip was the first time Kayla, 13, had been on an airplane. A “first” that was welcomed after all the “bad firsts” the family went through over the year since her father’s death.

“We have had so many awful firsts this last year and this trip was a good first; God’s at work,” she said. “Kayla had her first plane ride and it was on a private plane, Kayla and I were able to drop our shoulders, take a deep breath, and for a moment in time just enjoy. We carried part of David with us on the trip and I could imagine his face smiling watching Kayla. It was bittersweet knowing he wanted to take her.”



Kayla Eads smiles during a trip to Disney Land gifted to the family by CSI Aviation and The For Paul Foundation. Eads' father, an EMS worker for UT Health East Texas, was killed last year while on duty.

Courtesy

Eads said her daughter’s favorite part of the trip was the plane ride, EPCOT, and meeting all the Disney characters which put a huge smile on her face — one she hasn’t seen since before her father’s passing.

“The smile and glow in her eyes made the whole thing so much more special,” she said. “I haven’t seen that smile since before David was killed.”

“The For Paul Foundation and CSI Aviation made that happen,” Eads added.

Eads said the foundation couldn’t have come into her and her daughter’s lives at a better time.

“Dawn and The For Paul Foundation came into our lives right when we needed them. The holidays are very hard and she knows this first hand. Dawn lost her husband five years ago in the line of duty,” she said. “The relationship Kayla and I have with other families that have lost a loved one from EMS in the line of duty during our hard time is very helpful.”



Kayla Eads smiles for a photo with Disney character Buzz Lightyear during a trip to Disney Land gifted to the family by CSI Aviation and The For Paul Foundation. Eads’ father, an EMS worker for UT Health East Texas, was killed last year while on duty.

Courtesy

Eads said The East Texas 100 Club and UTHET EMS have also shown wonderful support over the past year as well as UTHET Jacksonville Hospital where Eads works.

“I can call them if I need help with something and they make it happen. UTHET Jacksonville Hospital has given me time to spend with Kayla every time I have needed it,” she said. “God put us in the right place.”

Eads also had a message for those grieving and those around them, especially during the holiday season.

“The journey of grief is hard. Be easy on the people who are going through it and be grateful for the ones that help and stick by your side,” she said. “Every day hug your loved one goodbye, love your family as if it were the last day on earth, and if you haven’t, please ask Jesus into your heart. David is in Heaven watching over us.”

For more information, visit [The For The Paul Foundation](#) website.