

Urbana Team Member Surprises Young Customer with Christmas Wish

Christmas came early for Paulie Palermo, an Illinois teen with autism, who received a gift he's wanted since childhood thanks to a thoughtful Meijer team member.

A loyal customer at our Urbana store, Julie Palermo brings in her 13-year-old son, Paulie, each week to pick up his favorite bologna in the deli. Julie says he enjoys these outings, becoming acquainted with some of our team members – especially deli team member Catherine Peterson.

"Paulie struggles with his communications skills and for [Catherine] to always engage with him and ask him questions means a lot," said Julie, who also serves as President of the [Champaign Urbana Autism Network](#).

Catherine got to talking with Paulie one day and asked what he wants for Christmas this year. He said, for a long time, he's wanted a guitar.

The very next day, Catherine was prepared. She surprised him with an acoustic guitar she bought more than 20 years ago, but rarely used.

Catherine said she held on to the guitar so long because she wanted to give it to just the right person, and Paulie was the perfect one.

"He put it in his hands and he started strumming it. That was the most beautiful thing I could see," Catherine said, describing the moment when she handed the guitar to Paulie.


Paulie has loved the guitar ever since seeing some of his childhood heroes like Steve from "Blue's Clues" and Murray from "The Wiggles." Now he will be able to use the instrument as a part of his therapy.

"This random act of kindness just meant the world to us," Julie said. "With autism, every day is an adventure and you don't always know what you'll get. We're always striving for acceptance and having her take the time to get to know him is so special."

When Meijer leaders at the Urbana store heard about her generosity, no one was surprised.

"This was an amazing and moving gesture that Catherine did out of the love and kindness of her heart. Not only did she make Paulie's year, but moved his mother, Julie, in so many ways," Justin Walker, Central Illinois Market Director, said.

"I couldn't be prouder of Catherine and her act of kindness to bring joy to Paulie this season," he added.

Additional assets available online:  [Photos](#) ⁽¹⁾

<https://meijercommunity.com/Urbana-Team-Member-Surprises-Young-Customer-with-Christmas-Wish>