

## Max reaches out to a new world

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By Brian Mosely

A whole new world has recently opened up for 16-year-old Max Michel, thanks to the efforts of the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Middle Tennessee's Make-A-Wish Foundation grants wishes to children with life-threatening medical conditions to enrich their lives. With the hard work and dedication of hundreds of volunteers and supporters, more than 480 wishes have been granted in Middle Tennessee since the chapter was founded in 2000.

Michel, a Shelbyville Central High School sophomore, suffers from cardiomyopathy and muscular dystrophy, which has all but confined him to his home because his wheelchair is too large for most vehicles. Trips to school and doctors' offices used to be the only exposure he had to the outside world.

But those days are in the past now that Michel has received a voice-activated computer complete with Internet access and the most up-to-date software that compensates for his disability. Due to the debilitating nature of M.D, he is unable to type, but that's something he doesn't have to worry about anymore.

Several months ago, Michel was given an application from the Make-A-Wish Foundation and he said the first thing that came to his mind was a voice activated computer. Three month later, it was all his.

Just before Christmas, the Foundation supplied a computer and all the other equipment and even provided someone to train him how to use the technology. "They came and set it up for me," Max said, relating about a lady named Kim who came down from Nashville to help. "I got the hang of it. It's easy."

Michel said that when he's using the computer, he has to be the only one talking since it can pick up other voices and react to them. He also remarked that the software that runs the program was very expensive. The whole set-up runs about \$9,000.

"It's pretty nice," aid the teenager.

Michel can use the computer for surfing the Internet or listening to music. There are three different tools he uses to operate the machine: a headset for voice activation, a trackball and a device that uses a reflector dot on his forehead so that interacts with a camera which allows him to "go anywhere he wants" on the computer.

Now, instead of just sitting at home after school, Michel is now able to communicate with as many people as he can find ... online. And since getting the equipment just a few weeks ago, he has made a lot of friends. While he occasionally has visitors at home, he doesn't get to go out much. "I just come from school and stay home," he says.

Michel is already thinking about college and hopes to major in business, although he hasn't picked a school.

He will also see a little time on the small screen when he is featured Friday on WSMV Channel 4's "More at Midday" for a live interview.

He and other children in Tennessee have also recorded their individual stories to be aired on WRQQ 97.1 and 106.7 "The Fan" over the next two weeks as part of the Third Stories of Light campaign held by Make a Wish, honoring the stories of children who have been granted wishes by the foundation in the past year.

Earlier this month, each joined his/her sponsor's representative in a lighting ceremony and celebration in the Rotunda of the Country Music Hall of Fame in downtown Nashville. The event was hosted by country performer Kevin Sharp, a cancer survivor, who told guests his story of receiving his own wish to meet a record producer -- a wish that launched his career as a country recording artist.

Every story is sponsored by an organization or company that has made a cash or in-kind donation.

Michel's nurse at SCHS, Patsy Cunningham, confirmed he is enjoying his new computer and is staying on it "as much as he can.

"He handles it so well ... it's just wonderful," Cunningham said. "He's just a great kid and the computer has really opened up a new world for him. He can't get out and with this, he can talk to people all over the world."

More information about The Make-A-Wish Foundation is available on its website: [www.midtnwishes.net](http://www.midtnwishes.net) or by calling (615) 259-2324 or (888) 492-WISH.

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