

Decorating the people's house for the holidays

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Content

LOGAN — “Even though there was a little bit of chaos, at the end of the day it was completely worth it,” Caleb McCarthy stated as he reflected on his time decorating the White House for Christmas.

Earlier this summer, McCarthy applied for a volunteer decorating position at the White House, and out of 7,000 applicants he was chosen as one of approximately 60 to help decorate for Christmas this year.

Since McCarthy was 14, the Logan native has always had a dream of being able to decorate the White House for Christmas and hasn’t stopped making strides to accomplish that goal.

Last year, McCarthy started his own company, Captivate Designs Co. LLC, and since then has been working full-time while trying to start his business on the side. He decorates shopping malls, hospitals, for baby showers, weddings and events for churches around the area.

When McCarthy found out he was accepted — with only a two percent chance — he felt as though it was a dream, noting, “It’s pretty cool when you go into your emails and you type the White House, they pop up.”

McCarthy knew this was his chance to prove himself after having worked so hard to get to this point.

“What’s awesome about this is that it validates me — like it makes it — it’s not a joke anymore — like this is what I want to do,” shared McCarthy in an interview with *The Logan Daily News*.

Prior to leaving, McCarthy was nervous he wouldn’t be able to meet his goal he had to raise in order to make the trip. Each mall he worked to decorate this year had agreed to send his invoice earlier than normal so he could fund his trip, but he still needed \$700 and only had \$130 in his account.

McCarthy went to church the next morning and prayed that God would take care of the rest.

“My dad, without telling me, got on Facebook and messaged like 25 of his family and friends, it went to 250 people somehow and in my PayPal I had \$800,” exclaimed McCarthy.

The time had finally come, McCarthy was in Washington, D.C. the week of Thanksgiving and flew back after the dinner reception on Monday, Nov. 26.

Once the volunteers arrived they learned of their groups and the theme. This year’s theme was American Treasures, meant to celebrate patriotism and honor elements of the country’s

heritage.

There were two groups, one group of volunteers worked the first half of the week and another group worked the second half. Only half of the roughly 60 volunteers were selected to work both sessions — McCarthy was one of them.

Within the two groups were smaller groups divided by names based upon their duties; McCarthy was placed in the berry group. His job, among 30 of his colleagues that week, was to decorate 45 trees with cranberries.

Other groups had the chance to work in the White House for two days but because of the mess with the over 4,000 stems of berries, McCarthy's group put together their trees in a warehouse.

To begin the project, the styrofoam trees were painted red to match the berries and divided into sections since they were so large. In total there were 117 pieces that the team members had to assemble once they got to the White House later that week.

McCarthy knew right away that this was organized chaos, so he came up with a color-coded chart and system to help things run more smoothly. All 117 pieces of the trees were tagged with a color, size and location once they entered the White House, which made moving day much easier.

Since they didn't have the same opportunities as the other groups, they each received a presidential gift bag. In the bag of goodies was a travel cup, hat, an American flag pin, presidential key chain and pen — nothing that could be found in gift shops.

McCarthy shared an ironic story about his pin he received. One day McCarthy lost the back to his American flag pin and, "I told Melania's secretary and secret service found it — they found it on the stairwell... they were on top of everything, it was crazy how on top of everything they were, but they were so nice."

Although the secret service was "on top of everything," McCarthy noted that it didn't feel like the White House, that it felt like home because of how welcoming everyone was during his time there. The staff knew him by name — even without his name tag — asked how he was doing and never referred to it as the White House, it was always the people's house.

McCarthy's favorite aspect of the entire week was getting to know everyone he worked with. Every night they would go out to dinner and walk about 10 miles exploring the city together and wouldn't get back until one or two in the morning — even though they had to be up and working at 6:30 a.m.

When asked what his plans were next, McCarthy expressed, "If I could work at the White House I would in a heartbeat — I'm going to apply, I'm just going to do it."

Child images

McCarthy's project at the White House





McCarthy and friends at the White House