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# Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week kicks off

## Kulongoski enlists help of four kids to show its impact

CAPI LYNN  
Statesman Journal  
February 12, 2007

Their names are Alyssa, Landon, Peyton and Rachel, and they have lots of love to give.

The four Salem-Keizer children and their families will open their hearts today to Gov. Ted Kulongoski in hopes of raising awareness for congenital heart defects.

The children, ranging in age from 3 to 5, all were born with heart defects and have defied the odds by surviving multiple surgeries.

Landon and Rachel, who have each undergone a successful three-stage reconstruction of the heart, have been featured in the Statesman Journal.

Both of their families belong to a support network called Northwest Families With Heart and will be among those that gather this afternoon in the governor's office for the signing of a proclamation declaring this Congenital Heart

### Contact information

Northwest Families With Heart: E-mail: [nwfw@open.org](mailto:nwfw@open.org)

Children's Heart Foundation, Oregon Chapter: Call (503) 708-2751, e-mail: [chdhelp@yahoo.com](mailto:chdhelp@yahoo.com) or go to [www.chforegon.org](http://www.chforegon.org)

### Meet the governor

These Salem-Keizer children, born with congenital heart defects, will meet today with the Gov. Ted Kulongoski, who is proclaiming this Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week:

Landon Bell, 3, Salem

Peyton Donaldson, 3, Keizer

Alyssa Moorefield, 5, Salem

Rachel Whisman, 5, Salem

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## Defect Awareness Week.

"We are very pleased he has taken an interest," said Tonia Whisman, Rachel's mom. "Maybe we can spread the word a little more."

According to the Oregon chapter of the Children's Heart Foundation, nearly twice as many children die from congenital heart defects each year in the United States than from all forms of cancer, yet pediatric cancer research receives nearly five times the funding.

The state chapter was formed in 1996 and has raised more than \$1.9 million and funded 24 research projects, according to the nonprofit organization's Web site, [www.chforegon.org](http://www.chforegon.org)

"The money is raised in Oregon and stays in Oregon, so it benefits children in Oregon," Whisman said.

Whisman is co-founder of Northwest Families With Heart, which now includes more than 60 families in mostly Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

Landon's mom, Darla Bell, said the support network has been invaluable.

"We're able to say we've been there and done that," Bell said.

Her son, who turns 4 on Feb. 19, was born with a rare, congenital heart defect called hypoplastic right heart syndrome. The right side of his heart was underdeveloped, leaving him with just one pumping chamber.

Rachel Whisman, 5, was born with the same defect, but on the left side. She suffered complications during her third and final open-heart surgery, but today no one would ever know.

Other than having a feeding tube in her stomach and a paralyzed vocal chord -- an injury that probably occurred when she was on a ventilator -- she is a normal, active preschooler.

"She doesn't walk anywhere," Whisman. "She runs, hops, jumps, crawls."

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