



## **Superhero window washers surprise sick children**

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### **They are squeegeeing out the smiles at hospitals nationwide.**

From Tampa to Pittsburgh, Chicago to Memphis, comic superheroes are being spotted all over the country -- and they are fighting grime.

On windows, that is.

In their off-hours, Spider-Man, Captain America, and Batman, to name a few, are washing windows at children's hospitals. Their mission? To bring happiness to the youngest of patients.

"We donned the Spider-Man costumes and we rappelled down the side of the buildings," said Harold Connolly, president of Highrise Window Cleaning of Clearwater, Fla. "We knocked on the glass, waved hello -- there were a lot of big smiles."

Connolly organized two superhero window-washing sessions at hospitals in Florida so far this year, and he isn't alone. Images of wide-eyed children in awe of their favorite superheroes washing windows have gone viral online, prompting hospitals and window washing companies nationwide to hop on board.

"Some of these poor kids, they don't get a lot of opportunities for anything fun there," Connolly says. "It cheered them up at least for the moment anyway."

Last week in Chicago, Captain America, Batman, and Spider-Man's mission for the day was surprising children into forgetting that they are in hospital beds at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago.

Mission: Complete.

Nolan Erickson, 6, has been spending a lot of time in the hospital with his 14-month-old brother Matthew.

Matthew was born with brain cancer and has undergone six surgeries and five rounds of chemotherapy; the family hasn't left his side.

"We have been in the hospital for 11 months out of the 14 that Matthew has been alive," mother Sue Erickson says. "Nolan has spent his last two birthdays here. Smiles come few and far between." But on one day -- for Nolan, Matthew and their 2-year-old sister Sophia, there was a break from all the sadness.

The three superheroes, window washers from Corporate Cleaning Services, were fighting grime as they rappelled down from the 23rd floor. The heroes circled all around the building, waving, giving a thumbs up and creating soap designs as they went.

"The superheroes' lines were hanging right in front of our window," Erickson says. "The kids just sat there waiting for 45 minutes to see which one it was. It was Spider-Man. When you see your kids excited and smiling – as a parent it was more than I could ever ask for."



**Three employees of Corporate Cleaning Services prepare to wash windows dressed as Batman, Spider-Man and Captain America at Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago.** (Photo: Kathleen Keenan, Lurie Children's Hospital)

Hundreds of kids, staff and families were mesmerized by the superheroes swinging around the building for hours.

"I have been here a lot of years but I have never seen anything like it — nothing can brighten a day like a superhero," says Kathleen Keenan, hospital spokesperson. "These three men truly became real-life superheroes when they were on that building and their ropes became their webs. It was magical."

Keenan added: "It was like each kid had their own superhero for a moment, it was like there was no glass between them."

The superhuman trend is spreading all over the country:

- Le Bonheur Children's Hospital in Memphis, Tenn., has had two visits, one in October from the American National Skyline's superheroes and one in December from elves, says spokesperson Sara Burnett.

- The youngsters at Ministry St. Joseph's Children's Hospital in Marshfield, Wis., got a big surprise in December when Spider-Man, Batman, and Captain America left the place smiling and squeaky clean, says Geoffrey Huys, hospital spokesperson.
- In St. Petersburg, Fla., at least 40 or 50 inpatient children at All Children's Hospital caught a glimpse of Spiderman last month, says hospital spokesperson Roy Adams.

"We try all the time here to make it as fun as possible," Adams says. "We are trying to make kids forget that they are in the hospital and are going through these tough medical issues. We have celebrities come in, but this was a different kind of VIP visit because, well, they were coming down the side of the building."

Last July, Michelle Matuizek, office manager of Allegheny Window Cleaning, Inc., saw pictures of window washers in London dressed as Spiderman.



**From left, Erasmo Lara, Edgardo Mejia and Santiago Guzman dress as superheroes to wash windows at Levine Children's Hospital in Charlotte, N.C. (Photo: Todd Sumlin, AP)**

"I looked around and – at that point - no one had done it in the states," Matuizek says. "I thought why don't we do a character theme for our Children's hospital around Halloween."

So on October 22, the patients at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC had visit from Spider-Man, Batman, Captain American and Superman.

"The kids went wild. They were all over the windows, smiling and screaming – it was just magical," Matuizek says. "The nurses, the kids, the families it was a wonderful experience for everyone. We are going to do it again next October."

Both Allegheny Window Cleaning, Inc and Highrise Window Cleaning have plans to do more superhuman fly-bys in the future, and Connolly hopes the trend catches on.

"The kids—that the important thing," Connolly says. "We are hoping it spreads throughout the country and beyond. Other hospitals see this and then ask your window company if they will do it – I bet you they will. Who doesn't like making children happy?"