

Amber Granger has been collecting soda can tabs for almost nine years. Now she collects a lot more with the help of her students at Northeast Elementary.

When Granger began teaching in 2010, her cousin had a child who needed open-heart surgery, which required extended care and a stay at the Ronald McDonald house. The Ronald McDonald House provides a place for families to call home so they can stay close by their hospitalized child at little to no cost, according its website.

“It was a cause that started very near to my heart,” Granger said. “I think it’s important to let the students know they can make a difference, even if it’s a small difference.

Granger, a graduate of San Juan College and the University of New Mexico, continued collecting tabs in her class but recently extended the project to every class at Northeast after it became apparent that one student would unfortunately need her own stay at Ronald McDonald House.

“It’s important that families have a place to live while their family member gets better,” Jacob Garrison, a student in Granger’s fifth grade class said. “A sick person needs support and they need someone to help them. The tabs make sure their family can always be with them.”

Classmate Ryder Bond echoed Garrison’s thoughts.

“If someone is sick, they have to pay for their health problems, they shouldn’t have to pay for a hotel,” Bond said.

Granger took the project to Northeast Principal Candace Young and she agreed to make the project a school-wide effort.

“Quote from Mrs. Young”

While their classmate has returned to school this year in another state, the Vikings of Northeast continue stockpiling the tiny pieces of aluminum.

Granger’s classroom window sill is now sprinkled of giant pickles jars, gallon milk jugs and plastic bags packed with soda can tabs. Her class sorts and weighs the collection every quarter and the class who brings in the most is recognized at the school’s assemblies. At the end of the year, Granger will take the entire collection to Albuquerque to donate to the Ronald McDonald House New Mexico. The money is then used for supplies that support families with sick children with supplies for their stay.

Ellie Palmer has gone to great lengths to collect her soda can tabs. Palmer said she started to keep tracker of her soda can tabs with her first haul of 86, but lost count when her total hit 200.

“I think this project is important because when people are sick, I personally want to take care of them. I love helping people,” Palmer said. “I collect them and then Mrs. Granger takes them

down to Albuquerque. The families get to stay there and get treated nicely because there is more money from the tabs.

Palmer even searches her family's recycling bins in case soda cans are tossed before the tabs are removed. A mistake she says her bother makes quite often.

"He doesn't listen," Palmer said with a laugh.