

The Record

Sick boy never sees 'Yankee room'

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Antonio Reyes will never get to see his new Yankees bedroom.

The Paterson boy, just shy of his fourth birthday, died Sunday morning, succumbing to complications from Fanconi anemia, a chronic illness that leads to bone marrow failure, said his mother, Desiree Janica.

Antonio was to be the recipient of a room designed and created by 10 volunteers from the non-profit group Healing Spaces. The dream bedroom, complete with wood bed and matching dresser, sports-themed comforter and sheets, and bright yellow walls, was finished Saturday.

The makeover was the subject of a feature in The Record on Sunday.

Initially, Antonio was supposed to see his room for the first time on Sunday. But his two-week battle with pneumonia and a respiratory illness that had him in the intensive care unit at Hackensack University Medical Center was dragging on and doctors told his family he would probably need another two weeks to recover.

"He was happy, just playing the guitar Saturday night," Janica said. "Then he looked at his dad and said, 'I love you' and that was it. They worked on him for 12 hours, but his body was just too weak."

Janica said Antonio died about 11:45 a.m. He would have turned 4 on Dec. 30.

Fanconi anemia is considered primarily a blood disease, but it can affect all

systems of the body. Many patients eventually develop leukemia or some type of cancer. A successful bone marrow transplant cures the blood problem, but patients must still have regular examinations to watch for signs of cancer.

Treatments for FA symptoms such as bleeding and infections include transfusions or antibiotics. But patients frequently suffer with fatigue, shortness of breath, chest pain or dizziness and must see a multitude of doctors.

Antonio, whom his mother described as "a fighter," endured a successful bone marrow transplant on July 13, but he has been in and out of hospitals since birth, when he arrived almost three months early and weighed only 1 pound 15 ounces.

Regardless of the discomfort and pain from his illness, Antonio didn't complain much, Janica said. Rather, he was frequently "the life of the party. He was always the center of attention. Always happy. And always wearing his Yankee cap," she said.

Only hours after Antonio died, Janica entered her house for the first time since the renovations were completed.

In addition to her son's room, the group completely renovated a room for Antonio's sisters, and touched up the family's living room, basement and kitchen.

"It's just beautiful -- they did such a fantastic job," Janica said. "He would have loved it. He was really looking forward to seeing his Yankee room. Now at least I'll have somewhere to go to be near him."

This is the third family Healing Spaces had helped in North Jersey since 2005. Started by Wayne resident Mark Dumoff and his son, Matt, the group strives to give children dealing with serious, chronic illnesses a room of their dreams.

On Sunday evening, Mark Dumoff said they were shocked when they heard about

Antonio's death.

But he said he hopes that the space they provided for Antonio's family will help them "get through this difficult time.

"Our prayer is that the healing we brought into this home extends to them during this difficult time and gives them the resolve and strength to go on."