

'Coach Prime,' My Special Aflac Ducks surprise patients at Children's of Mississippi

By Guest Columnist Annie Oeth, University of Mississippi Medical Center

Jackson State University's Deion 'Coach Prime' Sanders and a flock of My Special Aflac Ducks designed to comfort children with cancer or sickle cell disease recently brought smiles to patients at the Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders at Children's of Mississippi.

"I'm happy to be here with Aflac to give back to the Jackson community and spend time with these wonderful patients at Children's of Mississippi," said Sanders, a spokesman for Aflac, coach of the JSU Tigers football team, and a former professional football and baseball player. "The kids are truly an inspiration."

Sanders brought My Special Aflac Ducks, robotic stuffed companions designed for children facing cancer or sickle cell disease, as a surprise to patients at the Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders, which is one of the largest centers for pediatric sickle cell care in the country.

Aflac, which pioneered the concept of cancer insurance policies after seeing the impact the financial burden had on cancer patients and their families, has contributed more than \$162 million to childhood cancer - and sickle cell-re-

lated causes, including Children's Miracle Network Hospitals. In 2018, the company decided to incorporate its well-known brand ambassador, the Aflac Duck, into their philanthropic initiatives in a very tangible way.

"We decided to use the Aflac Duck, beloved by so many people, to expand our commitment to those with cancer and blood disorders, and we created My Special Aflac Duck® - a social robot for children ages 3 and older who



Children's of Mississippi patient Hadley Black of Pearl gets an Aflac duck from Jackson State's Deion "Coach Prime" Sanders. (Photo by Justin Ford/Getty Images for Aflac)



Photos special to Pelahatchie News
Virgil Miller, Aflac US President, welcomes the community during local event and announces delivery of 1,000 My Special Aflac Ducks to Children's of Mississippi Hospital Cancer and Blood unit, alongside Coach Deion "Prime" Sanders and Buffy Swinehart, Senior Manager of Corporate Social Responsibility, Aflac on October 18, 2022 in Jackson, Mississippi. (Photo by Justin Ford/Getty Images for Aflac)

are diagnosed with cancer and sickle cell disease - to help them cope with their health issues," said Virgil Miller, incoming president of Aflac U.S. "To date, we have delivered more than 18,000 My Special Aflac Ducks to children in the United States, Japan and Northern Ireland, absolutely free of charge. The Jackson community has been through some rough times lately, which makes our ongoing support for Jackson State University - and our first trip to Children's of Mississippi alongside Coach Prime to deliver this joy to children -even more special."

Children's of Mississippi Chief Nursing and Clinical Services Officer Ellen Hansen thanked Sanders, Miller and the rest of the Aflac team for brightening the day for patients.

"Meeting Coach Prime and receiving My Special Aflac Ducks was a thrill for our patients and their families. To provide the services the children of Mississippi need and deserve, we rely on community and philanthropic support. Today is a great example of such support."

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