

# Making exceptional costumes for exceptional kids



## Costumes are for everyone



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Krista is a cosplayer and craftswoman with a list of ongoing projects longer than Daenerys' titles on Game of Thrones.

**Warning: the following story contains tales of happiness capable of tugging at your heartstrings, possibly even causing you to shed a tear, or two.** This author did.

Reese Davis of Olathe, Kansas was born in 2005 with news that would change the course of his family's lives: he was born with cancer on his spine. Reese spent his first year of life at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City. After learning that the cancer had crushed his spine, Reese would need to rely on a wheelchair; he received his first wheelchair at three years old.

For Halloween that year, his dad, Lon Davis, asked Reese what he wanted to be for Halloween. When Reese replied that he wanted to be the beloved character from his favourite movie, *WALL-E*, Davis set out to make it happen. And thus, before Davis even realised, Walkin' & Rollin' Costumes had laid its ground floor.

Using a Dell computer box, tape, paint, plastic parts, and a whole lot of love, Davis got to work on making a *WALL-E* costume that would fit over little Reese in his wheelchair. After posting the costume to friends and family on social media showing an elated Reese in his *WALL-E* costume, soon people began contacting

Davis directly about costumes, which spawned the idea to create Walkin' & Rollin' Costumes.

Walkin' & Rollin' Costumes, formally founded in 2015, is a father/son team 501(c)(3) non-profit organisation with a huge heartfelt motto: "Exceptional costumes for exceptional kids". The organisation provides free costumes to kids in wheelchairs and walkers, and with costumes such as the *Ghostbusters* Ecto-1 car, the *Hogwarts Express* train, and the *Scooby-Doo* Mystery



**Right** ♦ It's always the disaffected janitor

**Above** ▣ Reese Davis' first wheelchair costume



**Above** ⬆  
Attempts to reach platform 9 3/4 are ongoing

Machine, exceptional is definitely a word we'd use to describe their work.

Year after year, Halloween would come along and Reese would request an even more elaborate costume, bigger and better than what Davis had done before, challenging him to perfect his designs, and learn what materials work and don't work throughout the process. Having had a few years to work out details on materials, Davis learned that 3mm PVC plastic sheets made a suitable and rigid alternative material to cardboard, and that EVA foam is a great product for builds that require a pliable material. As for the designs, those can be found inside Lon Davis's head.

### IN THE BEGINNING

Davis went to college to become a 2D Disney Animator but found himself in a very different field than what he'd planned. After college, he went on to work in Business and Marketing, and until Reese's WALL-E creation, he hadn't considered how much his roots would ultimately still be a part of his life. After the newspapers and internet had started releasing stories on the costumes he and Reese had been developing over the years, those illustration skills became even more useful when Davis began receiving requests from people all over the country to



**Above** ⬆  
Proton-packs at the ready!

build their child a wheelchair costume. By 2014, those stories also caught the attention of Kansas City's huge comic convention, Planet Comicon, who reached out to Davis to invite the family to showcase their builds.

At the time, there wasn't much behind the scenes at Walkin' & Rollin' Costumes, besides Davis's former builds and future build ideas in his and Reese's mind. When they were approached to be featured at Planet Comicon, they came up with a plan to help make costumes for others.

With each costume costing Davis an average of \$250, there was no way to afford the cost to make

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costumes for kids all over the country, so they developed marketing material for their booth at Planet Comicon with the aim to get donations and volunteers. Davis recalls a touching story of the first customer who visited their booth that weekend at Planet Comicon in 2014: "The first customer to visit our booth when the convention opened that weekend was an old man in a wheelchair. He sat there for a while, looking at the costumes we had on display, all the while, never speaking. After some time of studying, he laid \$100 →

**Below** ⬇  
Lon fulfills a wide range of requests





## FEATURE



Above  Adding wind power

Right  Ride on!

Below  Tie Interdictor made by the Olathe North West High School Team

on the table and spoke: 'I sure wish I could've had something like this when I was young,' marking the first donation to go towards making a costume for a child outside the Davis home. While it was their first success at securing donations and a few volunteers, they still weren't financed to make costumes for all the requests that had been coming in.

In June of 2015, Davis launched a Kickstarter for Walkin' & Rollin' Costumes to try to raise \$1000 for that coming Halloween season's costume requests. The campaign reached the \$1000 goal in two days, with a total of \$3000 secured that wound up funding the costume designs for eleven kids that first year.

When we asked Davis what his favourite builds have been, he listed four off the top of his head: WALL-E, since it was the beginning of Walkin' & Rollin' Costumes; the *Ghostbusters* Ecto-1 car (which played the *Ghostbusters* theme song); the *Back to the Future* DeLorean; and the Ant-Man costume. Davis says the ant's body for the Ant-Man costume was an

unusual build, moulded from EVA foam and coated with truck bedliner spray to give it texture. Its legs moved up and down, with rollerblade wheels attached so that the costume would seamlessly roll along with Reese.

### SOCIAL SUCCESS

When Davis posted the Ant-Man costume to social media, it spread like wildfire. The magic of social media quickly spread the video, with the *Ant-Man* director catching word of it and showing it directly to Paul Rudd himself while they were on set. The special effects director reshared it, gaining 1.2 million views in just under 24 hours.

Rudd, who is from Overland Park, Kansas, visits Kansas City every year for the Big Slick, an annual weekend-long celebrity fundraising charity event held for the cancer centre at the Children's Mercy. The event brings in massive crowds and donations, features a celebrity softball game at the Kansas City Royals baseball field, followed by a Kansas City Royals game. In 2016, the year of the Ant-Man costume, Reese got to meet his idol in person when he was asked to throw the first pitch to Rudd at the Kansas City Royals game. While meeting Rudd for autographs, Reese handed the picture of him wearing his Ant-Man costume to Rudd for him to sign. Shocked, Rudd responded "This is you?! You were the one in the video! Someone showed me this while I was on set!", and thus began a pen pal friendship between Rudd





and one incredibly happy kid. Davis said Reese and Rudd have remained pen pals throughout the last four years, with the Davis family even travelling this year to a comic convention in Chicago, Illinois called C2E2 to set up a booth for Walkin' & Rollin' Costumes, getting to see Rudd again, who was there as a celebrity guest.

Davis says the relationship with his son and Rudd is so incredibly heartwarming, one that makes all that they've created with Walkin' & Rollin' Costumes even that more memorable.

Celebrity status aside, Davis says that while they've been able to successfully make most of the costumes requested at this point, there are still times where they are unable to make a request happen due to shipping costs, such as the parents from the UK who recently reached out to him to make their child a costume. Davis says they've got a volunteer base set

**Davis believes that his projects should be open-source**

up in the US, the cost of shipping the costume once finished is often the biggest hurdle to overcome. To combat this, Davis hopes that more places will start up their own local chapters of Walkin' & Rollin' Costumes. The costumes can often be constructed in separate pieces to ship with assembly instructions

upon arrival, but costs can still be quite high. At times, Davis faces this obstacle in true maker fashion by working with parents to design and guide them on making the costume themselves. Davis believes that his projects should be open-source, and he's always willing to lend a hand. When we asked him details about starting up local chapters, he stated that no matter the location, every chapter is branched under Walkin' & Rollin' Costumes, and they are always there to assist chapters along the way.

Walkin' & Rollin' Costumes also work with schools and organisations, as well as hosting annual workshops in the Kansas City area where volunteers can work as a team on several different builds. This set-up allows for multiple builds to get done in a weekend so that kids get their costumes in time for Halloween that year.

As for Reese, (who's not quite so little anymore at 14-years-old), he's now in remission. He still loves spending time with his dad creating new ideas for fantastical costume builds, penpalling with Paul Rudd, and being a happy kid with a life full of exceptional possibilities.

If you'd like to set up a location for exceptional children in your country to receive their own exceptional costume, Davis would be thrilled to have you reach out to Walkin' & Rollin' Costumes about developing a local chapter. You can get in touch via their website, [walkinrollin.org](http://walkinrollin.org).



**Left** ♦ It's the attention to detail that makes costumes special

**Below** ♦ First Ant-Man Costume for Reese Davis

**Credit** Chuck Mason Photography

**Bottom** ♦ Reese Davis in his Ant-Man costume with Paul Rudd and Reese's little brother at C2E2