

Monroe boy meets Bush, hailed by the chief

October 21, 2008
The News Star

Young James Christopher Allums is going to have a tough time topping Monday's field trip, and he's got the T-shirt to prove it.

Allums, 11, who's fighting a rare, possibly terminal, bone disease called Fanconi anemia, met President Bush in Alexandria, then toured Air Force One with his parents, Ellen and Chris Allums.

"I was nervous and excited — both," said James Christopher, who said he has been a fan of Bush since he was 4 and his parents, freelance florists and decorators, were among those called upon to provide flowers for Bush's first inauguration.

Fifth District U.S. Rep. Rodney

Alexander, R-Quitman, arranged the meeting, and Alexander and Bush began waving to James Christopher soon after they stepped off Air Force One at Alexandria International Airport.

"We were just beaming, and tears were pouring down my face," Ellen said.

Bush hugged all of the Allumses and put his hands on James Christopher's shoulders.

"He said, 'You're a strong young man, and I think you'll be just fine,'" the boy said.

Allums' parents have dedicated the past few years to searching for a bone-marrow match for their son. Without one, Chris said, his son's disease is fatal.

The Allumses have signed up more than 10,000 people to the bone marrow

register — at about \$55 each — during multiple marrow drives. Their efforts saved five lives last year, but so far the search for a match for their own son has been in vain.

"I talked to the president about trying to raise more money (to fund marrow drives), and he turned to Congressman Alexander and asked him to get more information about it and get it to his desk," Ellen said. "It was an unbelievable blessing."

The Allumses, who home-school their son to keep his exposure to illness at a minimum, also prayed with Bush at the airport.

"We asked him if we could pray for him, and he said yes," Chris said. "He was so down to earth. He looked into your eyes, and you knew that he was interested."

Alexander said his ability to arrange such meetings is the best perk of his position.

"It was very touching," the congressman said. "It makes all of the heartaches and politics of the office worthwhile."

After the Allumses left the airport to each lunch, they were called back by the White House staff for a tour of Air Force One.

"The cockpit was unbelievable," James Christopher said. "We got to sit at the president's desk and see his bedrooms and bathroom. There were also a bunch of TVs."

As they were leaving, the staff presented James Christopher with an Air Force One T-shirt "and a bag of other stuff, too," he said. "It was great."