



Word was spreading and Rodney was once again

inspired.

## After signing up for the challenge, kids receive protective eye gear, earplugs, and a white T-shirt. Once they reach their goal of mowing 50 lawns or yards for those in need for free, Rodney visits them

them to locations.

to deliver a brand-new lawnmower, trimming device, and blower. Donations from people and companies have made the program possible.

Participants, mostly between 10 and 14, can complete in the challenge at their own pace,

Rodney says, because some need a parent to take

Jami Weirich drove her 14-year-old son, Caleb, and his best friend, who's also named Caleb, to many of the lawns around Indianapolis they tackled together in the challenge. Between May and August 2017, the two mowed more than 100 lawns, including some with grass overgrown to above-knee length.

"He definitely built up a great work ethic," Jami says of her son. "He was able to do it with his best friend,

and it gave them a sense of teamwork."

Four years after starting R.M.L.C.S, Rodney continues to mow the lawns of Huntsville residents like Mary Gibbs for free. In January 2016, he officially formed Raising Men Lawn Care Services (R.M.L.C.S), an organization dedicated to providing free lawn maintenance, leaf raking, and snow removal, and encouraging community service among youth (boys and girls) in the process.

As part of the challenge, Rodney sends participants T-shirts for different milestones they achieve. Not all complete the full challenge, and these shirts reward kids for reaching smaller goals they may have. "It works like a karate belt system," Jami says. "After every 10 lawns, they got a different [color] shirt, until they reached the 50th yard and got a black shirt, a certificate, and a lawnmower, and Rodney mowed a couple of lawns with them that day." medica dala dalah adalah / AN ONGOING COMMITMENT / Rodney embarked on two nearly-50-state tours in 2017 and 2018 to promote the 50-Yard Challenge, driving to all the contiguous states to speak at schools, community events, and other venues. Social media posts and an appearance on the Kelly Clarkson Show also helped garner interest in the program. To date, more than 600 kids have participated in the 50-Yard Challenge, including young people in Canada, Bermuda, England, Australia, and Germany. Some, like Erika Channel's two sons, Michael, 12, and Jonathan, 11, who live in Sanford, Florida, have continued volunteering lawn services to those in need even after meeting their 50-yard

"They just like helping others," Erika says. "I wish there were more Rodneys in the world, because he

teaching the kids to give back, [which] makes them

inspires so many kids. It's a great thing-it's

In addition to instilling the value of community service in kids, the program is teaching them

"You hear a lot of stories from parents—'My kid was a guiet kid; now he's out there and interacting with people," Rodney says. "Just to see kids opening up and becoming themselves is beautiful. Some see it

goal.

be better people."

important life skills.

as a way to start a lawn mowing business [...] It's also creating entrepreneurs." Interest in the 50-Yard Challenge and R.M.L.C.S in general has remained high, according to Rodney; currently, the organization has young volunteers in every state except for Rhode Island and Vermont. Rodney-who still mows daily whether he's home or traveling-hopes to someday have kids involved in each major city and state. "The goal hasn't changed at all: an organization trying to encourage kids to get out and make a difference with a lawnmower in their community," he says. "I want to keep encouraging more kids nationwide—and more and more worldwide. There's a need everywhere I go."

"I wish there were more Rodneys in the world, because he inspires so many kids. It's a great thing—it's teaching the kids to give back, [which] makes them be better people," Erika says. To learn more about R.M.L.C.S and get involved, visit the organization's website. **About the Writer** Erin Brereton has written about travel and other topics for magazines, newspapers, and other publications for more than 20 years.

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