



Children are the focus of outreach efforts for Jennifer and David Skinner.

# Helping the Children

## Skinner's Make the Day for Young People in Need

By Tom Schuman

The Skinners receive numerous cards and letters of thanks.

**D**avid Skinner summarizes the philosophy of community involvement in one simple sentence: "I've always believed that when you give, you get back." What Skinner and his wife, Jennifer, receive in return for their efforts are tears (of joy), fulfillment in helping needy Vincennes and Knox County residents (particularly young people) and satisfaction that they are joining others in improving their adopted home.

David terms the community "extraordinary when it comes to people volunteering for projects. When you undertake any project here, it will get done. There is no shortage of volunteers or creativity in this town."

Jennifer adds that through service on various community boards, "You meet a lot of neat people, and you realize the passion those people have for their community."

### Building a career

David, an investment representative who started his own Edward Jones office in Vincennes in 1982 and a regional leader for the company for the last 12 years, is a St. Louis native and University of Missouri graduate. As a 6-year-old in the 1960s, he appeared in several television commercials for Edward Jones with his father, a "great public speaker" who would discuss the importance of planning for retirement.

Originally slated to begin his career in Columbus, Indiana, he drove through Vincennes on his way back to St. Louis and liked what he saw. He's been a community fixture ever since.

"I'm grateful to the community," David reflects. "I was a 23-year-old who moved to a small Indiana town and the people embraced me. I had a number of opportunities to leave." He saw no need, however, as he was "able to build a successful career."

Community involvement was also a priority. After David and Jennifer married and began their own family, though, they took their personal passion to a new level. They established the Skinner Fund to make sure that needy children have a cake and presents to open on their birthday.

"In some cases, kids weren't having birthdays at all. It just broke our hearts," Jennifer recalls. Both say they can't imagine a child not being recognized on his or her birthday, although they acknowledge the circumstances that might prevent parents or others from being able to provide gifts or even a birthday cake.



The program, started in the late 1990s, is administered through the local Head Start agency. Approximately 150 to 200 children between the ages of three and seven get a special day each year. The Skinners chose the birthday theme, in part, because various agencies and other efforts already offer programs and support during the holidays.

Letters and cards from children, and sometimes parents, arrive often at the Skinner home. While they bring the tears of joy from David and Jennifer, they downplay their personal involvement. Jennifer notes, "This type of program can be started in any community."

## Camp experience

Another chance to assist young people – and bring tears to celebrate the accomplishment of a wide variety of efforts coming together – has taken place over the past four years. Jennifer has spearheaded ARTventures, a weeklong summer camp that allows first through sixth graders to express their creativity.

As the Psi Iota Xi philanthropic society was studying whether such a camp was a good idea, Jennifer's response was taken from the Nike theme – "let's just do it." Artists from local schools, the community and beyond volunteer to share their expertise. Areas of classes and fun include painting, sculpture, clay, handbells, weaving and more.

"The kids sample three different art areas during the week," Jennifer explains. "The goal is to have kids take something home with them at the end of the week. It's just very gratifying. I'm not an artist. I just try to organize things. That's where my skills come in."

The camp has grown from 75 children in the first year to 175 in 2006. Scholarships are available for those who cannot afford the modest camp fee. Half of the money from the fees goes back into grants for local art programs. Jennifer says it's good to see the community support the arts.

## On the go

Over the years, David has served as a coach of youth swimming and football teams, as well as a swim meet official. Other current community activities include a role as president of the local hospital foundation, and board member of the Convention & Visitors Bureau, Indiana Military Museum and YMCA.

Between the local and regional duties with Edward Jones, his volunteer commitments and his family, there are very few hours left in David's day. He considers it an honor to do what he can.

"Life would be very boring if you didn't volunteer. There's a lot of gratification in undertaking an interest and making it work."

Jennifer has organized a parent volunteer work weekend at her children's elementary school and was active earlier this year in the Family Day celebration associated with the Red Skelton weekend of activities. An upcoming long-term project, through her role on the county parks board, is putting together A Child's Dream playground. The facility will be handicap accessible and a place where "children of different needs and capabilities will come together."

## Continuing the mission

David notes that other Edward Jones representatives are also active in the community. In his regional role, he and Jennifer established philanthropic and spouses awards for his area that covers much of the southern portion of the state. A portion of the impetus is to give the younger brokers a recognition of the responsibility to give back.

In Vincennes, David has seen the town undergo an impressive cleanup with a strong emphasis on economic development and tourism efforts. "People put a lot of pride in their property. There is an abundance of interest in getting involved."

The Skinners plan to continue doing just that, including formal creation of the Skinner Foundation to benefit an even broader range of children. The Vincennes community offers its thanks.



ARTventures provides a variety of opportunities for students to express their talents and skills.

### INFORMATION LINK

**Resource:** David and Jennifer Skinner, Edward Jones, at (812) 886-9477