



# David Johnson

## United in Support of His New Home

By Matt L. Ottinger

**N**ot only has David Johnson found a home in Crawfordsville, he's also found a niche as someone who selflessly gives back to the community. In 2006, he took over as executive director of the Montgomery United Fund for You (MUFFY), a fundraising non-profit that generated \$504,000 in 2007. Over 200 businesses and 4,000 individuals contributed to the fund, which in turn donated to 17 charitable agencies.

Additionally, Johnson spent the past year serving as president of Crawfordsville's Kiwanis Club.

When Johnson was a young man growing up in the small Tippecanoe County town of Battle Ground, he likely had no idea his life's journey would one day bring him to Montgomery County.

After graduating from Harrison High School, he found himself at Purdue University studying psychology and sociology (and later earning a master's degree in science and health promotion). While in West Lafayette, he met his future wife, Kim. She ultimately brought him back to her hometown of Crawfordsville, where the couple purchased a home in 2003.

Just 10 days after Kim gave birth to their daughter, Paige (the couple's first child), Johnson sat down with *BizVoice*® to discuss what he's been working on:

**BizVoice**®: What exactly is MUFFY?

**David Johnson:** "The United Fund brings the community together via a fundraising campaign, which works with all businesses in Montgomery County. The first campaign was in 1969, and it was started by citizens who wanted to see important resources help people in the community. It's based on the United Way model, but MUFFY is actually older than most United Ways."

"Every year, we establish a campaign goal based on historic trends and also based on needs in the community. We then raise money and donate it to non-profits. We're actually the only fundraiser in Montgomery County that's allowed to solicit funds through payroll deduction campaigns."

**BV:** Is MUFFY publicly funded?

**DJ:** "No, it's funded entirely through private donations."

**BV:** Is MUFFY a year-round endeavor?

**DJ:** "Yes, it's year-round and it's non-stop. The campaign itself takes place in fall from August to November. But in December, we start the agency review process and in January and February we evaluate the programs. We have two people on staff. I am the full-time director, and we have a financial/administrative assistant who works three-quarters time.

"We also kick off the campaign every year with a big golf scramble and luncheon in the fall."

**BV:** Since you took over MUFFY in 2006, what improvements have you strived to make?

**DJ:** "We needed to enhance the evaluation process and the assessment of community need. We wanted to evaluate with more objectivity to serve the community's needs.

"We've enhanced the processes and revised the application process for agencies seeking funding. There were two key areas we wanted to improve: The first was governance and oversight. We want to make sure the money goes where it should and so we favored agencies that showed a focus on governance and accurate reporting with demonstrable outcomes.

"The second area was the programmatic side. Sometimes we think we've found a great program, but it doesn't meaningfully help the clients. Our effort is to make things better, so we asked, 'Can this organization demonstrate that its clients will be better off?'"

**BV:** What else should we know about MUFFY?

**DJ:** "A key hope that we have in all of this is that we don't want to continue a culture of reliance. We want the people (who benefit from the fund) to be independent, and we want to offer them short-term help. So, in the future, they can help other people.

"Another interesting thing is that each year the campaign has a theme. This year, that theme is 'Power of Giving.' We chose this because people seem to feel out of control because issues like the economy and gas prices make them feel powerless. We want to remind people that gifts of all size have the power to make things better."

**BV:** What brought you to the Crawfordsville Kiwanis Club and how long have you been president?

**DJ:** "I've been president since September of 2007 (the tenure lasts for one year), and I've been on the board for four years.

"The Kiwanis Foundation provides service to the community, the world and specifically to youth. I was a director of a youth-oriented non-profit in my previous job, so it was a good fit for me. I was attracted to it knowing that youth will become strong leaders someday, and we do a variety of things every year to support them.

"It's been a wonderful experience and it's given me a chance to



**David Johnson, joined by artist Ben Glenn, at the 2006 MUFFY Campaign Kickoff Luncheon and with Wabash College students who volunteered to go door-to-door to collect funds for the MUFFY campaign. Johnson also served as president of the local Kiwanis Club, which generated more than \$5,000 for youth services with this Spaghetti Day Fundraiser.**

be a cheerleader for a large group of individuals who serve in the community. I've really enjoyed it, and I'm amazed at the amount of time the board members give."

**BV:** What are some of the challenges facing Crawfordsville?

**DJ:** "We need to find ways to communicate across all sectors. In a small community, you'd think it would be easier. There are a lot of dedicated folks in the community.

"But the challenge is that I feel we're like spokes of a wheel, ultimately trying to move the center in one direction. But sometimes so many people become involved that you end up moving in different directions. Sometimes we need to learn to find a consensus and move in a common direction together."

**BV:** What are some of the positives you've seen in Crawfordsville?

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**DJ:** "We have a great diversity in our social sectors here, and we have a great resource in Wabash College. It provides cultural events, world-renowned speakers and the school has educated many CEOs, attorneys, politicians and community leaders. I'm not sure the community fully understands the benefit of that resource."

**BV:** What else should we know about Crawfordsville?

**DJ:** "There's a true sense of community history here. There have been famous authors and artists from this area who have made significant contributions to society.

"We also have great fishing (nearby Sugar Creek is known as a small-mouth bass destination by many anglers). Sometimes I think we take it all for granted. I often feel like asking people, 'Do you realize what we have here?'

"Montgomery County is also a very independent community and people here are very proud of that. That tradition is kept alive by a nice balance of new folks coming in and people who have lived here all their lives. It keeps us moving forward, but we won't forget about our history either."