



# NURTURE THE NEXT Generation

**"One of the highlights of my year is driving from my home in Cincinnati to Vandalia and walking into the school to match the amount the students have raised. I am touched by what these children do, learning to be charitable. I can only hope, by my giving, that I can inspire other partnerships to form between potential donors and teachers, schools and students."**

**-Bob Crotty, ASW donor**

**Through the halls and classrooms of Smith Middle School in Vandalia, Ohio, paper stars hang, each representing a generous gift a student has made. They drop coins and dollars into jugs and watch the levels rise.**

On the walls of hospital rooms at Dayton Children's Hospital, other children sit surrounded by "Get Well" cards and test results, coming closer and closer to receiving a wish one coin or dollar at a time.

A Special Wish Foundation has been granting wishes for 30 years, and for 29 years, Smith Middle School has helped make it happen. Generations of children, though in very different circumstances, have been impacted by ASW's mission.

Each year, the fourth and fifth grade classes participate in penny wars—friendly competition to raise money for the cause. The giving kicks off with a presentation by ASW and takes place between Thanksgiving and winter breaks.

"The Foundation shows a video about the organization to show the kids what they are working towards, and they take it pretty seriously," fifth grade teacher Kim Imwalle said.

Students can drop their coins and dollars into a jug anytime throughout the giving period, and proceeds and donations from the annual Santa breakfast and Grandparents Day help boost the numbers as well. Teachers are also welcome—and eager—to give. So

whether they give a penny, a quarter or a \$20 bill, everyone can feel confident they're making a difference.

"It starts out as coins, just copper and silver," fourth grade teacher John Schmidt said. "Then, all of a sudden, these coins turn into thousands of dollars."

When the time of giving ends, the money is counted and presented with an oversized check to ASW at an assembly before winter break. However, it's not the contest to raise the most, the star on the wall or the dollar sign on the check that marks the students' accomplishment. It's not a tangible reward they can hold in their hands, but rather the joy they can feel when they see photos of the children they've helped.

"They're not doing it for a pizza party, or even for the star on the wall," Kim said. "We're all doing it because it's the right thing to do."

This collaboration began in 1987, after students wanted a more dedicated way to give back. For the holiday season, teacher Rose Chin's fifth grade class decided that instead of exchanging dollar gifts, they would adopt a charity. Rose was familiar with ASW, and the students liked the idea of helping other children in the community.

Word of the class's efforts spread quickly, and eventually reached a local businessman, Bob Crotty, who was also interested in giving back. Inspired by the young philanthropists, Bob offered to match the amount the students raised

each year. After just a few years of doing so, he began thinking of himself as a permanent member of the fifth grade class.

The program has continued to gain momentum over the years. What began as a fifth grade service project has grown to a school-wide effort that has raised a total of \$40,611 to date, and has sponsored Wish trips to Walt Disney World. And there's no plan of slowing down; teachers have considered organizing a talent show for students and families to attend and donating the proceeds, or extending the giving throughout the entire year.

**"It's motivating because we feel like what we give goes directly to the Wish kids—local kids—and we can see our money in action," intervention specialist Renee Cope said.**

ASW offers unique opportunities to nurture the next generation of children in different, but equally impactful ways: the Wish children are given once-in-a-lifetime experiences to feel joy and hope for the future, while the students who give to ASW are learning how to help, and hopefully building a tradition of giving.

"Nowadays, it's all about test scores and performance, and we don't slow down enough to say, 'These things are important too,'" Kim said. "We want to teach the students to appreciate what they have, as well as help those who may not be as fortunate." ★

