

# News

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## FRDA holds fundraiser for Holiday for Hope

December 3, 2010



The four youngsters in front had fun with face painting at a Dreams for Kids event.

**By Jennifer Nunez**

The Fulton River District Association’s philanthropy committee held a fundraiser Nov. 11 at Jefferson Tap and Grille to support Holiday for Hope, an annual event hosted by Dreams for Kids. More than 80 people attended, contributing more than \$2,000 for the Holiday for Hope event to be held December 18 at the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Hall in the Fulton River District.

Attendees enjoyed appetizers, an open bar, and a sports ticket raffle; the evening’s proceeds will support up to 100 youngsters through Holiday for Hope.

Alderman Walter Burnett of the 27th Ward, a longtime Dreams for Kids supporter, said he personally chooses some of the children in his ward who benefit from Holiday for Hope.

Jon Dean, president of Dean Media Group, brought in about half the guests that night. He had sent out an e-blast invitation to more than 80 clients, publishers, vendors and employees and their spouses asking them to come together for a good cause, and more than 40 showed up. “I’m picking up everyone’s tab so I don’t see why they would say no to that,” said Dean. “As a company we aim to do something charitable once every quarter.”

The Holiday for Hope event started in 1989 when Tom Tuohy, founder of Dreams for Kids, met with Clara Kirk, who runs the South Side homeless shelter Clara’s House.

“We found 54 kids sleeping in a shelter, doubled up on beds and sleeping on the floor,” said Tuohy. That Christmas Eve a dozen volunteers, including Santa Claus, delivered gifts and food for the children.

When Kirk thanked them for coming, Tuohy said it was the least they could do. Kirk replied, “No, you don’t get it. If you wouldn’t have shown up, these kids wouldn’t have known it’s Christmas. We had nothing and we couldn’t give them anything.”

The next year, Tuohy and his group went to two shelters; the third year they went to three. “We ran out of days by the fourth year, so we brought kids to one place,” he said.

For the past 16 years, Dreams for Kids has hosted more than 1,000 youngsters at the IBEW Hall on Washington Street; children come from all over Illinois, as far away as Peoria. Organizers give away more than 3,000 toys to children who range in age from newborn to ten. The event also features face painters, clowns, games, crafts, music, and food.

Tuohy smiled when he recalled two boys who had their faces painted like Spider Man and the Lion King last year. “They were six and five,” he said. Their mother had told Tuohy they had just moved to their very first place of their own. “My boys have lived in shelters their whole lives,” she said. One of the boys shouted, “These are the best presents we’ve ever had in our whole life!” The mom pulled Tuohy aside and, with tears in her eyes, said, “These are the only presents they’ve ever had.”

Before the event kids sign up and “pay it forward” to do something in their community, said Tuohy. “To remind them that, as tough as it is for them, they have something to give, too. And they can help out people.”

In the past kids have cleaned up the neighborhood, painted a shelter, visited a nursing home, or done fundraising. “Whatever it is they want to do to help out another person,” said Tuohy.

“I was one of those kids,” he explained. “My father disappeared when I was eight years old. My mother was a single parent. We had to sell our house. It was a very difficult time for us.”

Tuohy said he knew he wanted to be a lawyer, and as soon as he became one his mother said, “Now it’s time to help out other kids.”

“I woke up the next morning and thought, ‘Dreams for Kids,’” he said.

Dreams for Kids started another program in 1996 called Extreme Recess, dedicated to giving youngsters with developmental and physical challenges the opportunity to participate in sports such as snow and water skiing, baseball, and martial arts.

In 2007, Dreams for Kids went global, launching the international Dream Leaders program in several countries. The program, geared for teenagers, includes leadership training, cultural and global issues awareness, and Take Action skill building. Through the program youngsters learn to see themselves not as the problem but as the solution for changing for the world.

Since its inception, Dreams for Kids has touched the lives of more than 28,000 children, and it now has a presence in more than 30 countries. Holiday for Hope will be held at the IBEW Local #134 Union Hall Saturday, Dec. 18; organizers and volunteers will pack toys Thursday, Dec. 16. Dreams for Kids always is looking for toys, sponsors, and volunteers; for information, visit [www.dreamsforkids.org](http://www.dreamsforkids.org) or call (866) 729-5454.

For more information about the Fulton River District Association, log on to [www.fultonriverdistrict.org](http://www.fultonriverdistrict.org).