

THE YEAR IN MEDICINE

TIME

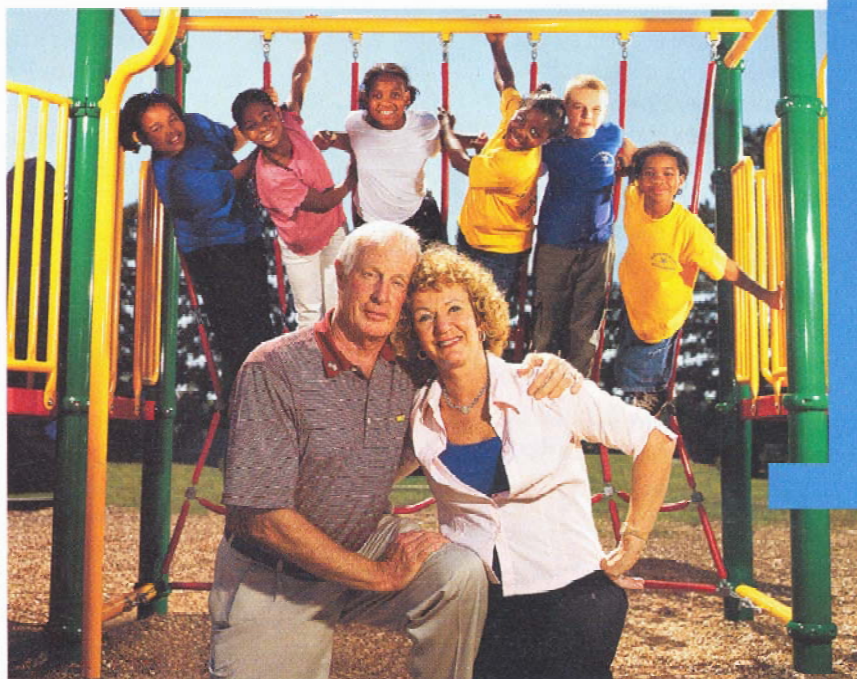
For kids to succeed, teach them to

Play It Smart

The I Have A Dream organization offers a chance for educational and personal growth **By Tom and Kathy Kelly**

We believe that anyone in our great country who's blessed with health and some wealth has a responsibility and opportunity to help those less fortunate. We also believe that one great way to give back and truly change lives is through education—and the younger the children are when you start, the better.

After researching various education-based programs, we chose to affiliate with the I Have A Dream (IHAD) organization, which Eugene Lang created to help some economically disadvantaged kids in New York City in 1981. Lang's well-structured concepts, motivations and commitments have proven to be very successful: 70 percent of his original Dreamers went to college. Today, IHAD programs operate in 75 schools across the country



and have extended post-high school tuition assistance promises to more than 13,500 youngsters.

When we decided to sponsor 54 first

graders through our own IHAD chapter in Greensboro, Ga., in the fall of 2000, we knew we were committing to an active and rewarding retirement—and we haven't

been disappointed. We've formed productive partnerships with the school (especially principal Joan Antone), the community and, most important, the 54 children and their parents. As the program has evolved, we've constantly gone beyond academics to address confidence, character, life skills, and the ability to dream about and then pursue a wide variety of careers and interests.

We're particularly blessed to have an incredible young lady and mother, Beth Thomas, as our full-time program director. Beth is the heart, soul and brains of our program, plus the driving force who makes it all happen with our six part-time teachers and an astounding average of 30 volunteers per week. As IHAD's first rural program, our location adds to the challenge of raising \$250,000 annually in operating costs and tuition accrual. Through perseverance, though, we've found many willing donors.

We're extremely proud of the children and the results they've achieved. Significant quantifiable improvements in national test scores and the increased number of kids on the honor roll are irrefutable. Dramatic improvements in behavior and, more important, self-confidence are very evident also. Best of all, these young Dreamers believe

they can be anything they want to be.

A special aspect of our IHAD chapter is the many field trips our kids have taken. We contend that it's easier to dream if you've had a rich variety of hands-on experiences, so we try to travel beyond Greensboro. To date we've taken all the kids on 42 field trips, including many museums, live theatre in Atlanta and

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Space Camp in Alabama. As recognition for exceptional grades, behavior and effort, smaller groups have been to New York, Philadelphia and Florida. One of our dreams is for the kids to appear on Oprah Winfrey's television show, because she's such a compelling role model.

Wherever we go, these trips are motivational and educational and provide a good opportunity to ask the children to consider the careers they've encountered (astronaut, actor, curator, restaurateur, etc.), as well as the skills and hard work they require. Even now, each

Dreamer could tell you what he or she wants to become.

In the next few years we'll try to make those dreams even more achievable. As our kids reach middle and high school, we want them to join sports teams, the band, the school paper, whatever their interests inspire. So we must let the program change and grow as they do.

If the IHAD Greensboro Dreamers can become productive citizens with a broad range of experiences, our work will benefit not only them but also their families, acquaintances and the communities they choose—including our own Greene County. So it's truly geometric when you help one youngster. While we aim to provide tuition assistance to each child seeking a degree, we're really embarking on a 16-year mission lasting from first grade through four years of post-high school education.

We want these kids to work hard and be comfortable as they move into different worlds. But we're already celebrating successes. Nothing beats having an excited youngster run up and say, "I just made the A honor roll." We're getting back so much more than we give.

Tom Kelly is a former health-care executive, and Kathy Kelly is the former mayor of Clearwater, Fla.

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"I HAVE A DREAM"® FOUNDATION

THE "I HAVE A DREAM"® PROGRAM MOTIVATE AND EMPOWERS CHILDREN FROM LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES TO REACH THEIR EDUCATION AND CAREER GOALS BY PROVIDING A LONG-TERM PROGRAM OF MENTORING, TUTORING AND ENRICHMENT AND TUITION ASSISTANCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION.

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