

Spencer Guardian ad Litem Family Has True Holiday Spirit

(This letter appeared in the Salisbury Post on December 20, 2003)

Once upon a time there was a very special Guardian ad Litem. The average Guardian ad Litem volunteer spends 8 to 12 hours per month advocating for the best interest of 2 to 4 abused or neglected children who are involved in the court system. Most of these children have been removed from their homes through no fault of their own and are living in foster homes, group homes, or relative placements. Terrie Hess volunteered no less than 40 hours each week in her relentless pursuit of the best interest of the 13 children she represented in the court process. Terrie had a very strong support system in her husband, Tom Hess, as well as her extended family and friends. Because of Terrie's determined desire to ensure that her children were not forgotten, in the year 2000 she and husband, Tom had a special Christmas party for their extended family and friends. Instead of exchanging gifts with their invited guests, they presented each guest with the first name of a child and that child's wish list, interests, and clothing sizes. Numerous presents were wrapped and delivered to the Hess Home for these 13 children.

Several days later, Terrie and Tom secured a church building in Spencer. They decorated a tree and had a very special Christmas Party for 'Terrie's Kids'. The numerous presents donated by their friends were given to the children with the real 'Santa' in attendance. In 2001, Terrie lost her battle with cancer. In her loving memory, Tom, Tom's son Telley his wife, Sundie, and Terrie's mother, Doris Spencer, as well as extended family and numerous friends have continued the tradition of ensuring that many Guardian ad Litem children are remembered each Christmas with a special party.

This year, 23 wonderful children were recognized by Tom with a party at the Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall in Spencer. Ten individual Guardians ad Litem were in attendance and ensured that their GAL children and their caretakers were present. Christmas carols were sung and pizza, drinks, and cupcakes were enjoyed by all. Santa Claus had a special talk with each child. Each child opened numerous gifts that were wrapped especially for them. Next year Tom hopes to increase the number of children to 30! No words can describe the joy in the eyes of the children or the satisfaction in the eyes of Tom and his incredible family and friends. It is for sure that they have discovered the true meaning of Christmas.

Amy Collins

District Administrator
Guardian ad Litem Program
704-639-7517