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## Donor Stories

### Small Town Indiana Janitor Surprises School with \$80,000 Gift.

By Nicole Cunningham

Jack Eggers was a living snapshot of simpler times gone by. He wasn't into frills; he never subscribed to cable, didn't drive his car much, preferred to grow his own food, and steered clear of the big city—never straying far from tiny Amo, Indiana, where he was born and raised.



Jack Eggers of Mill Creek West Elementary School.

Jack, a school janitor, preferred to live a poor man's existence. A year after his death, however, Jack showed that his poor man's life was really a façade. Jack was saving every penny, so someday after he was gone, he could do some good. He accomplished his wishes by leaving sizeable bequests to the school, church, and community he loved.

Todd Crosby is the principal of Mill Creek West Elementary School in Hendricks County, the school where Jack had worked since 1988. Crosby said Jack lived a solitary existence at his modest, two-bedroom house, but when he showed up for work, he showered the students and staff with care and compassion.

Crosby fondly recalls, "The kids absolutely loved him. Jack would give high fives to them, even though he was 6'3," and he'd have to crouch down to their level."

Crosby said when any kind of problem appeared, the kids would scour the halls looking for Jack. They respected and cared for him, the same way he cared for them.

Jack was famous for remembering birthdays and writing short poems for students and staff. He didn't have a family of his own, so he viewed the students, in a sense, as his very own.

Crosby said, "That's what's so different between businesses and schools, it's more of a family atmosphere. Jack was like a big daddy. He kept track of and cared for everybody."

There came a time when the favor of kindness would have to be returned. In 2003, Jack was diagnosed with an aggressive, rapidly moving brain tumor. Crosby, who lost a family member to a similar condition, helped take Jack to his doctor's appointments in Indianapolis, along with neighbors, school staff members, and friends.

Crosby said Jack didn't like traveling to the city, and even more to his dislike, was not being able to rely solely on himself.

"He knew he had to trust the doctors in what they had to do, but he didn't like the fact that other people had to take care of him. He was used taking care of himself, and he didn't want a lot of attention on himself."

Jack had surgery, but it only briefly slowed the tumor's progress. He took a leave of absence from his janitorial duties, but later decided to retire. Even while enduring all the pain, he managed to stop by the school to visit the kids from time to time. The students and staff all received frequent updates on his progress. In winter of 2004, Jack died at age 69.

A year later, Jack's goodness was revealed to everyone in a most unexpected way. Jack, who never bought fancy clothes or nice things, had amassed a large amount in savings. When his estate was settled in early 2005, Mill Creek West Elementary School received a whopping sum of \$80,000 from Jack's last will and testament.

Crosby said, "When we were told the amount it was shocking. We just found out this past winter, two weeks before the checks arrived. The school board approved the acceptance of the donations."

Jack also left an undisclosed amount to Amo Baptist Church and another \$120,000 to the Hendricks County Community Foundation.

At Mill Creek West, his money will be split in half between a new playground and a general fund. The playground, since it's used by the entire community, will be converted into a family friendly park with walking trails and all the latest and best playground equipment. The grounds will be named "Jack Eggers Memorial Playground."

The school library will get an update, and its crown jewel will be "Jack's Corner," a place full of poetry books and nice artwork—to celebrate Jack's love of writing and drawing.

News of Jack's bequests made local headlines, and Crosby knows Jack wouldn't like any kind of public recognition. His only wish would be that the children of Mill Creek West would remain happy, healthy, and safe.

"Jack was so dedicated to everyone here. He cared about everyone who walked in the door, said Crosby."

And in a school where reading, writing, and arithmetic are the main focus, Jack taught lessons of kindness that will last a lifetime.

"We don't think about people when we're with them. It always hits you when they're gone. But even in his passing his legacy will live on."

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*LEAVE A LEGACY® wishes to thank Mill Creek West Elementary School for sharing this story.*