

My Life Outside Pfizer

Gary McQuillen Brightens Kids' Hospital Stays

Gary is a district manager with Pfizer in Louisville.

Inspired by a smile

My daughter Andie suffers from allergies and asthma and was hospitalized six times before her fourth birthday. During one of her stints in the hospital, my gift of a puppy balloon brought a big smile to her face. It was the first smile we'd seen in days, and it had a huge impact on my wife, Gina, and me.



A few months later, our minister encouraged the congregation to get involved in the community. Remembering the effect one small balloon had on Andie, Gina and some friends brought ten balloons to children at the local hospital. The balloons lifted the kids' spirits so much that Gina and I decided that we should find a way to deliver balloons on a regular basis. And Balloon Angels was born.

The nonprofit organization is funded by donations from individuals and corporations, and we are very proud that 100 percent of contributions go to buying balloons, which are delivered once a week by volunteers to three hospitals in the Louisville area. Our donations and the volunteers have grown steadily since we began the program—in 2005, we delivered almost 10,000 balloons. Now we're looking into expanding to more hospitals in Louisville and possibly surrounding areas.



Presidential honor

Last September, Balloon Angels received a President's Volunteer Service Award, established by President Bush as a way to thank and honor Americans who, by their demonstrated commitment and example, inspire others to engage in volunteer service. Balloon Angels was one of just two organizations to receive the highest level award, given to organizations that contribute 1,000 hours or more of service in a 12-month period.

Happiness is the greatest reward

Balloon Angels is a priority for our family, and it's something we enjoy doing together. We feel fortunate to spend time on something we love that also supports the children in our community. I try to deliver balloons as part of the team once a month, but my major contribution is running the business part of the company. I've become an expert grant-writer, fundraiser, newsletter writer and editor, bookkeeper, marketing director, and photographer, and I've loved every minute of it. But we all agree that our greatest reward is the happiness on the faces of the children, their parents, and the hospital staff when we show up with 150 colorful balloons.

Pfizer has contributed greatly to the success of Balloon Angels and is our top corporate sponsor. In addition to the help we receive from the Pfizer Foundation Volunteer Program, there are about 100 colleagues on our newsletter mailing list, many of whom have made donations or volunteered.

My experience with Andie and Balloon Angels has helped me better understand the patient's perspective. I am inspired by the courage of these children and I am continually reminded that we do can make a difference.

You can find more information about Balloon Angels on the web www.balloonangels.org.