

# Making a Difference in Margaritaville

Local Parrot Heads find paradise in acts of kindness

BY ERIN GIBSON • PHOTO PROVIDED BY WHITNEY KISSEL

**ASIDE FROM GOING TO CONCERTS, DRINKING MARGARITAS, AND DREAMING OF CHEESEBURGERS IN PARADISE,** what do Jimmy Buffett fans like to do with their free time? For many Buffett fans in the Evansville area, the answer is: Lend a helping hand.

"We party with a purpose," says Whitney Kissel, president of the Parrot Heads of the Lower Ohio Valley Club, also known as PHLOC 186. "We try to maintain a [positive] outlook...do what we can and have fun doing it. When it's not fun anymore, it won't exist."

PHLOC 186 is a sanctioned chapter, the 186th one in fact, of the Parrot Heads in Paradise (PHIP), an organization with an international membership. According to the PHIP Web site, the purpose of the Parrot Head clubs "is to assist in community and environmental concerns and provide a variety of social activities" for Buffett fans.

In 2004, in its first full year as a club, PHLOC 186 raised more than \$11,500 for charities in Evansville. Some of the beneficiaries include the Vanderburgh Humane Society, the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, the local chapter of the Alzheimer's Association and the Evansville ARC, a service agency for children and adults with developmental disabilities.

The local Parrot Heads chapter, which has 79 members, typically participates in events organized by local charities. They raise money by forming teams to participate in events and by holding fund-raising parties. They've organized some events on their own, including an annual Poker Run for the Vanderburgh Humane Society, which raised more than \$3,000. But the best-loved event, says Kissel, is the annual Christmas party for kids. Each year, PHLOC 186 gets ahold of the Christmas wish-lists of some of the children at the St. Vincent's Day Care Center in Evansville, which serves a low-income clientele. The local Parrot Heads buy the presents and then host a party at St. Vincent's, complete with a gift-bearing Santa.

The staff at St. Vincent testifies to the power of the Parrot



**PARTY WITH A PURPOSE:** Members of the Parrotheads of the Lower Ohio Valley Club turn their love for Jimmy Buffett's music into a cause of celebration and charity.

Heads. "The kids are thinking it comes from Santa, but the parents just can't believe it—it brings tears to their eyes," says Jan Barnes, a social worker at St. Vincent's. "It's just really hard for (the parents) to make ends meet sometimes. Every parent wants to make Christmas special for their kids. When they have somebody help them make that come true—that just means so much more."

Kissel says the Parrot Heads delight in the annual Christmas party. "I'm not saying there's anybody in our club that's hugely rich," says Kissel. "But (many are) obviously blessed—blessed where we can help somebody who's less fortunate," says Kissel. "That's a very good feeling whether you're in a grass skirt or not." **CV**

## \* FIND OUT MORE

[www.phip.com](http://www.phip.com)

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