

Hope lives here.



**State Farm® and The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia®
The Arends Family and Project Ignition**

On a typical morning back in January 2003, Bonnie and Randy Arends said goodbye to their 17-year-old twin sons, Greg and Steve, as the teens drove off to school-related jobs. Bonnie and Randy didn't know that it would be their last goodbye to Greg. Speeding down a familiar road at 80 mph, Greg lost control of the car and it struck a utility pole head-on.

"People seem to think that having an air bag or wearing a seat belt is all you need to be safe, but it isn't enough," says Bonnie. "The boys were just driving too fast."

Even though both boys wore seatbelts, Greg took the brunt of the accident and died at the hospital. Steve survived the crash, but was left in a semi-comatose state for six months and today lives with a brain injury that severely affects his speech. After undergoing 18 months of intensive rehabilitation, he can now walk on his own with a slight limp and continues to exercise with a dream to eventually manage the family's fifth-generation farm.

Steve continues to push through his obstacles and share his story with teens across the nation, including peers at his former high school, Gibson City-Melvin-Sibley (GCMS) in Illinois. GCMS students were so moved by Steve's story, it motivated them to participate in Project Ignition, a State Farm®-sponsored program coordinated by the National Youth Leadership Council™. Project Ignition encourages students to develop a service-learning campaign addressing teen driver safety issues in their community.

GCMS's campaign, "Shattered Dreams," became a positive force for change, reaching every corner of the rural community and beyond. The school band wrote a song, the textile club made towels embroidered with the words "Buckle Up" and a local jeweler made gold-plated charms. Students posted signs on the roads reading, "Remember Greg and Steve" and "Slow Down." They presented to numerous community organizations, worked with emergency personnel to stage a mock crash and competed in an essay contest that highlighted the lessons learned as a result of Project Ignition.

"The accident was a tragedy, but Steve now has an avenue to admonish the students to buckle up, drive safely and think about what they're doing," says Bonnie.

The statistics don't lie. After reviewing the results of a survey the students took before and after their 90-day campaign, they reported that student seat-belt usage increased by 19 percent. Reports gathered from the Gibson City Police Department also showed significant decreases in teen-related accidents and teen speeding tickets—66.6 percent and 71.4 percent, respectively.

"It's been quite something to see the ripple effects of the accident," says Bonnie. "Project Ignition transcended the typical school assignment and allowed the students to develop skills they wouldn't get in regular classroom training. Because of Project Ignition, students walked away from accidents that could have left them disabled or dead. It warms my heart to be a part of this."

Year three of Project Ignition is already underway. For more information, please visit www.sfprojectignition.com.

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