

Greenville Spinners Safety Foundation—History

How One Man Made a Difference

It was a driveway moment. That was how the **Greenville Spinners Safety Foundation** got started. Jimmy Vissage was on his way home from work and listening to NPR as Dr. C. Everett Koop was being interviewed. He arrived home, sat in his car listening as Dr. Koop talked about how if there was one disease that was killing America's youth, there would be a national effort to eradicate it. The number one killer was **unintentional accidents**...“what are we going to do about it?” This was the Fall of 1993.

Soon afterward, Jimmy heard of a seminar to be held at the state museum in Columbia regarding Safe Kids, a nationwide philanthropic organization that was getting underway but not yet in the upstate. He took a day off work and attended the seminar. One of the topics was on bicycle safety and helmets. Jimmy loved riding a bike.

That November, he saw an article in the paper regarding the work the Jaycee's were doing in reconditioning donated used bicycles that were in turn given to the children attending the Salvation Army's Boys and Girls club at Christmas. That is when it all came together. The interview heard on NPR, the seminar in Columbia, and now a local need. “I bet those kids don't get helmets when they get a bike”, Jimmy thought...unintentional accidents.

Well, if you know Jimmy, he perpetually maintains an amazing amount of forward momentum. He contacted the Boy's and Girls Club, who in turn gave him a contact for the Jaycee's. He offered to raise money to give each child who got a bike a helmet. He called Joe Sullivan and they agreed that they would call Greenville Spinners Bicycle club members and try to raise enough money and if they fell short, they would make up the difference.

Shortly after their first helmet fund raising success, the Greenville Spinners Bicycle club board thought it wise to form a safety committee. The first members were; Jimmy Vissage, Sally Nicholson, Jesse Tate, Darcy Stewart, Eddie Shirley, Kelby Beezer, and Donna Sheppard (Pusty). Jesse suggested they put Jimmy in charge.

Within a couple of years, Safe Kids was formed in the upstate. Jimmy was asked to represent the Club and field the bicycle request/questions for Safe Kids. Bell Sports got involved with Safe Kids and made helmets available to foundations at discounted prices. In 1997 Maureen White spearheaded the effort as the **Greenville Spinners Bicycle Safety Foundation** was incorporated and became a separate eleemosynary organization with true 501(c)(3) non-profit status.

For 16 years Jimmy Vissage headed up the Foundation, grew the network of contacts, seeking out those who might need help, and working tirelessly calling club members, asking for volunteers to man various events. Though the leadership of the Foundation has passed into different hands several times, Jimmy is still active today, ordering and keeping the inventory of helmets and safety literature the Foundation gives away.

Greenville Spinners Safety Foundation—History

To date in 20 years of service, and countless Greenville Spinners Bicycle club members lending a helping hand along the way, the **Greenville Spinners Bicycle Safety Foundation** has given away over 11,000 helmets and conducted countless safety clinics, bike rodeos, helmet fittings and community health fairs. And it all began like any other day, on a drive home from work. It's just that on that Fall day in 1993, one man listened, one man cared, and one man followed through and got involved.

And of the 10,000 plus helmets that have been given away since 1993, I'm sure somewhere a child's life has been saved, saved because one man decided to make a difference.



Jimmy Vissage holding one of the original helmets purchased in 1993