

# Toast of the Town

## Fulfilling promises, answering wishes

BY VINCE MILLER

Staff Writer

Jason Douglas Creager was 18 years old when he lost his battle with bone-marrow cancer in 1992. Just before he died, he told his uncle, Dennis McGinnis,

**RED BANK**

that if he couldn't cure him, he wanted McGinnis never

to forget him.

McGinnis promised his nephew he never would, and he backed that up that same year by forming an organization called Jason's Dreams for Kids. Since its founding, the organization has raised funds and received donations to put smiles on the faces of hundreds of children suffering a life-threatening illness, McGinnis said.

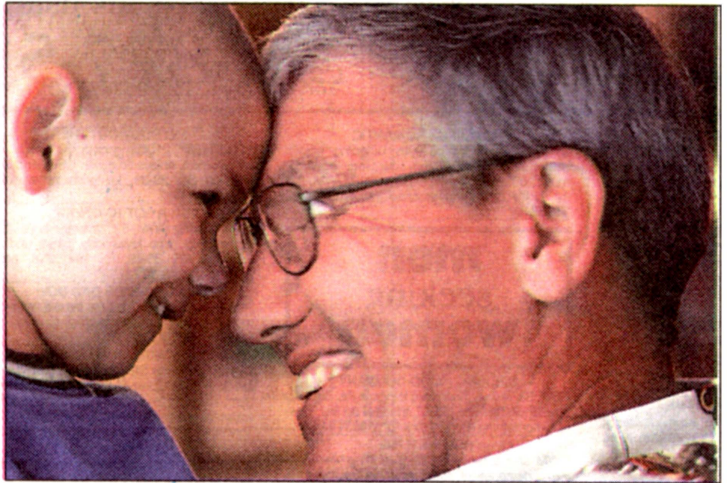
Jason's Dreams for Kids learns of children with serious illnesses through social workers, hospitals, friends and families previously helped by the organization. Its five board members meet bimonthly to discuss the children they are helping and what they want to accomplish.

"Children's dreams have run the gamut from meeting a famous person to flying in an F-14 fighter jet," said McGinnis, a Middletown resident who owns McGinnis Printing in Red Bank. "If I didn't make their wishes come true, I would be breaking a promise to my nephew."

Among some wishes fulfilled included Timothy Gigl's, a 19-year-old resident of the Colonia section of Woodbridge whose Hodgkin's disease has been in remission for a year, McGinnis said.

"We couldn't locate an F-14 for Tim last weekend, but we found a World War II biplane that the owner agreed to take us up in," McGinnis said. "We went for a ride at Allaire Airport (now Monmouth Executive Airport) Saturday, and Tim was absolutely thrilled. You would have thought I gave this teenager a new life.

"And Richie Eccles of Wash-



**Dalton Pederson, 5, of Long Branch smiles with Dennis McGinnis, founder of Jason's Dreams for Kids.**

(STAFF PHOTO: ADENA STEVENS)

ington Township wanted to play a part in a movie," McGinnis said. "We got him to play a part in the movie 'Gloria' (1999) with Sharon Stone."

Another youngster who is having his wish fulfilled is 5-year-old Dalton Pederson, the only child of William and Laura Pederson of Long Branch. Dalton didn't ask for anything as far-out as a jet-plane ride or a part in a movie. He wanted a room in which he could play with his trains. That room is under construction in a section of an old shop connected to his parents' home on Grand Avenue.

Remodeling the room is Kevin Freibott, a Middletown police officer with construction experience. Freibott has had another experience that drew him to Jason's Dreams. He lost his 26-month-old daughter to bone-marrow cancer Easter Sunday 2002.

Freibott had told McGinnis he wanted to help the organization that helped his daughter. Jason's Dreams had raised funds to offset the medical expenses for Freibott's daughter through a dinner-dance and auction.

McGinnis said some of the board members and 17 honorary board members have been helped by Jason's Dreams and have volunteered their

services and time to see a child's wish fulfilled.

One of the organization's supporters is Lee Mazekian, owner of the Outback Steakhouse in Middletown. He asked guests at his 50th birthday party to make donations to Jason's Dreams in lieu of gifts, to raise money needed to build Dalton's room.

"I think it's truly amazing that these people are taking the time out to help other people," Laura Pederson said.

As for Dalton, "He keeps asking when is his train room going to be ready," his mother said. "He has a bunch of trains throughout the house, in every conceivable place except the kitchen or bathrooms. Now he just needs a place where we won't be tripping over them, someplace he can call his own."

The Pedersons can thank Laura Pederson's employer, the Eatontown law firm of Wilentz Goldman and Spitzer, for purchasing a train set for her son.

"We're going to hire someone to help set up the electrical train set," she said. "Local artists already have volunteered to come here and paint murals on the walls of Dalton's room."

To make a donation or to volunteer at Jason's Dreams, call (732) 758-0060.