

Blue Zones

“Healthy citizens is the greatest asset any country can have.” – Winston Churchill

Skillet's restaurants make a little change go a long way for children in need



Left to right: Juan Carlos Hernandez, Aryany Bustillos, Ross Edlund, Noreen Edlund SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

By Sebastien Saitta

Change is good, they say, and Skillet's restaurants agree. While some see spare change as having insignificant value, Noreen Edlund, co-owner of Skillet's with her husband Ross recognize it as an opportunity to make a positive difference in children's lives. "Ten years ago I observed customers tossing their loose change on the host stand after paying their dining bill with cash," said Noreen. "The accumulation of pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters were adding up to dollars." That's when Noreen contacted a family friend who worked for the Children's Advocacy Center of Collier County (CAC) and told her that Skillet's wanted to support their mission of improving the lives of abused children. "I simply set up a charity box at the host stand of each Skillet's location and called it *Change for Children*." They took it a step further and decided to match the contributions dollar for dollar.

Thanks to the generosity of Skillet's and their customers, more than \$100,000 has been donated to the CAC. This money helps to provide clothing and counseling for needy and abused children in Collier, Lee, Hen-

dry, Charlotte, Glades and Sarasota counties. "We are so grateful to Skillet's and its generous customers who have made a huge change in children's lives," said Jackie Stephens, CEO of Children's Advocacy Center of Collier County. "You may not think it, but this small change adds up quickly and we are constantly amazed at how much we have been able to accomplish for the abused and neglected children because of this remarkable program."

Skillet's is celebrating its 25th year in business with five restaurants in Collier County and continues to grow up the Gulf Coast of Florida with nine total locations. They currently have seven Blue Zones Project Approved restaurants in the project area, and each of them offers 11 Blue Zones Inspired dishes. "It was a perfect fit with our emphasis on quality food and healthy dining," said Ross Edlund. "The ingredients were already on the menu and all we had to do was merge them to create several Blue Zones Inspired dishes. This made it easy for the customers to browse the menu and choose the plant-based items indicated by a blue check mark." To date, Skillet's has sold more than 123,000 Blue Zones Inspired dishes.

For more information on how to become a Blue Zones Project approved restaurant, email David Longfield-Smith at David.LongfieldSmith@sharecare.com.