

During a visit to a Next Door classroom earlier this year, Paul Roller all of the sudden noticed a tug on his pant leg.

“When I stood up to go, he didn’t want to let go,” Roller recalled with a laugh.

Roller said that tug came from a boy in the Head Start program, and it was a moment he can’t forget.

“It just tears at your heart that here’s a kid that liked me obviously and looked up and it was just a heart-warming experience to see that,” he said.

It’s that kind of sweet connection that keeps Next Door dear to Roller’s heart. He is one our longest-serving donors, who began supporting Next Door more than 30 years ago while working for Miller Brands. After retiring in 2002, Roller and his wife, Kathleen, continue to share their generosity.

“I’m results-oriented, so when I see kids coming out of this program ready to go into first grade or kindergarten and directed to places where they have an opportunity, that’s just a terrific thing and hopefully that lasts until they can get through high school,” Roller said.

Roller revels in the progress he sees firsthand with Next Door children. He recalled a visit to our Capitol Drive location where he observed a class making caterpillars.

“These kids were incredible,” he said. “We talked about the number of the pieces that were on that little pipe cleaner, the colors of the pieces and they were right on, so it’s just affirmation of what we’ve done,” he said.

Roller also enjoys seeing the bonds the children form with their teachers, and is a big proponent of Next Door’s Adult Education program.

“That’s something I bring up with anybody I talk to about Next Door,” he said. “You have parents that want to keep up with their kids and be able to read to them and they are not literate. So what an opportunity, not only to have an effect on these kids, but the whole family.”

Inspired by this holistic approach at Next Door, Roller and his wife complemented their annual giving with a classroom sponsorship at the Capitol Drive building. More recently, they decided to pursue planned giving through a life insurance policy.

“This year, I just decided that I want to do something today that’s more significant and can set things up for the future, so Next Door was one of the recipients of that (policy)....I feel very good about that,” Roller said.

It’s a deepened commitment to Next Door, fueled by the agency’s mission and the families it serves.

“I’ve seen these kids when I park here and they are walking out with their father or mother. It’s just so rewarding to know that they they’ve had a great morning and they’ve learned something. You can see the brightness in their faces and their eyes.”