Ron Wanless understands the importance of learning from others.

It’s a lesson he and his wife, Betty, have put into action with the establishment of the Wanless-Claus Family Fund through the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln. Ron hopes their three children will learn in the same manner that he has learned by watching his colleagues at Springfield Electric.

“I have had great mentors at Springfield Electric and have learned about having a strong belief in giving back to the community; be thankful for what you have; and reach out and share when you can,” Wanless said. “As I’ve been coached, I also try to coach my children in the value and feeling good that comes from helping others.”

Wanless became familiar with the Community Foundation through Springfield Electric chairman Bill Schnirring and president Mike Barker. He met with Community Foundation representatives and felt this was an excellent method to direct his family’s giving.

“You learn from others. This was not an original idea on my part,” Wanless said. “(Bill) has encouraged all his employees to participate and get interested in the community where you can make a difference. Mike Barker, Springfield Electric president, had previously established a family fund and it seemed like a great way to involve the whole family.”

Ron and Betty Wanless hope the fund’s creation helps pass down those same lessons to their three children, Mark, Chad and Kelly. The children, who all live in the Chicago area, will be heavily involved in the grantmaking process. The Claus part of the fund’s name is derived from Kelly’s husband Jason Claus.

“The kids were interested and excited to be a part of it,” Wanless said. “The decision-making process is a family process. Whenever we start giving, it may go four ways.”

The fund will not have a specific giving focus and in the future might venture out to benefit the communities in which the Wanless children and their families live.

“It’s another way to bring the family together with a focus to help others,” Wanless said.