



## Singer left mark on Hoosiers

Before global stardom, Jackson was in family singing group from Gary

By David Lindquist  
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Michael Jackson's singing career began in Gary, where he spent his earliest years in a white house roughly the size of a two-car garage -- 2300 Jackson St. Nine children of Joseph and Katherine Jackson lived in the house, and sons Michael, Tito, Marlon, Jackie and Jermaine became the dynamic Jackson 5 singing group.

"Big Boy," a 1968 single released by Steeltown Records, made the Jacksons a regional sensation, says songwriter-producer Rodney Stepp. As a member of the Indianapolis-based Diplomats, Stepp was a fellow pre-teen in an R&B recording act.

"Michael's one of the most creative and gifted people who's ever graced our stages," Stepp said after learning that Jackson died Thursday at age 50.

The Jacksons left Indiana to make 16 Top 40 recordings on the Motown label, and Michael Jackson's work as a solo artist made him a global superstar during the 1980s.

Stepp said he met Michael in 1976, when Stepp played keyboards in the Spinners backing band and the Jacksons offered him a similar job in their touring act. "I made a bad decision once in life: I turned the gig down," Stepp said.

Jackson made a high-profile visit to Gary in 2003, receiving a ceremonial key to the city and greeting crowds of well-wishers at City Hall and at Roosevelt High School.

"Thank you for a magical day I'll remember for the rest of my life," he said.

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