PACER Celebrates 25 Years

For 25 years, PACER Center has opened doors for children and youth with disabilities. Many of these children have received better education, obtained a more fulfilling job, or enjoyed a successful independent living situation due to the information and programs provided by PACER.

Festivities commenced this summer and will continue into the fall. “In planning the 25th Anniversary, we wanted to include a family event as well as a more traditional celebration,” said Kathy Graves, 25th Anniversary Chair.

All PACER families were invited to attend the July 21 PACER “Day at the Dome”, and thousands received PACER Hankies or baseball banks especially designed for the event. PACER Day at the Dome, chaired by Sarah Johnson, was made possible through PACER’s partnership with the Minnesota Twins and Panera Bread.

As part of the 25th Anniversary celebration, PACER is rolling out the red carpet. A dinner, co-chaired by Melanie Barry and Rosemary Fish, will be held at Le Meridien on September 20, 2004.* Families, PACER volunteers, friends, supporters, and staff have shaped PACER’s quarter-century of service. Several will receive awards at the dinner in a special ceremony.

“PACER could not have come this far without the many people who have contributed their time, ideas, and energy to serving children with disabilities. We’re thrilled we can celebrate our joint success and connect once again at these special events,” said Paula Goldberg, PACER Executive Director.

Through parent and community relationships, PACER has grown from one small pilot project to a nationally recognized organization of more than 30 programs offering information, individual assistance and specialized training.

As PACER looks to its next 25 years, it will continue its commitment to providing increased opportunities for children and youth with disabilities and their families.

Jim Rand, left, and Tom Wolfe, 2nd from right, of Panera Bread, presented a check to PACER’s Executive Director Paula Goldberg, right, Development Director Mary Schrock, 2nd from left, and Brandon Ziemke, center. Thank you to Panera and to all of you who put change in the collection boxes at Panera cashier stations. This check represents coin contributions and a corporate match from Panera. See article on page 2 for more information.

*Please contact PACER for an invitation to the 25th Anniversary Dinner. (952) 838-9000.

Right: Chloe Engstrom and her sister Madison (back) are all smiles before the Twins game. A special commemorative PACER hankie was handed out as well as “Change for Children” baseball banks. (See article on page 2 for more information on Change for Children.)
Banking on Community Spirit

Parents helping parents has been PACER’s mission since it opened in 1978. Now, in an effort to motivate the next generation, the Friends of PACER Advisory Board has developed “Change for Children,” a program designed to teach children how to reach out to other children in their community.

By participating in Change for Children, local children and adults can directly impact the services provided to children. Currently, there are more than 116,000 children with disabilities in the state of Minnesota.

Change for Children gives youngsters the opportunity to save their spare coins in a special baseball bank. The banks, provided by the Twins and Panera Bread, were distributed to the first 5,000 children attending PACER’s “Day at the Dome.”

Children can empty their banks at any metro-area Panera location and receive a free meal in exchange for their donation. Banks can also be emptied at PACER Center’s office located at 8161 Normandale Boulevard in Bloomington.

A special kick-off event is planned for Friday, August 20, at the Panera of St. Louis Park on Excelsior and Grand Way. Please see sidebar below for details.

All donations to Change for Children will benefit PACER’s COUNT Me In program, an educational puppet show that presents disability awareness programs in elementary schools throughout the Twin Cities and greater Minnesota.

Family Fun with PACER, Panera and the MN Twins!

Friday, August 20, 2004
11 a.m. – 12 noon
Panera Bread of St. Louis Park
3803 Grand Way • 952.922.2066

Have your baseball bank signed by a Minnesota Twins player!
Enjoy music, local entertainment, PACER Puppets and TC the Twins Mascot.

Panera Bread and PACER: Partners with Promise

Panera Bread bakery-cafés have helped dozens of nonprofit organizations through Operation DoughNation®, a program that developed from Panera’s belief that giving back to the community is in spirit with the sharing of bread.

This conviction is evident through Panera’s partnership with PACER. Since 2002, Panera has matched contributions made in its local bakery-cafés, publicized information about PACER to its customers, and donated food to PACER events, volunteers and board meetings.

“We hope to make this partnership real to our employees,” said Jim Rand, Director of Operations for Panera. “Opportunities for interaction are encouraged.”

As the relationship between Panera and PACER continues, both partners hope to provide new methods of serving their shared community. PACER and Panera remain committed to helping children and young adults with disabilities.

Thirty Panera Bread managers heard presentations by PACER’s staff, toured the building, and came away with a clearer vision of the work PACER does to help children with disabilities.
From the time her son, Trey, was born, Lisa Johnson has focused on his abilities rather than his disabilities. That’s why she is so grateful for the services provided by PACER Center.

“At first, many of the people I came into contact with just wanted to feel sorry for Trey,” said Lisa. “At PACER, the staff was able to empathize with our frustrations and provide real and positive solutions to our challenges. PACER helped me find the answers.”

Trey, now 8 years old, was born with Down syndrome and numerous other health problems. When he was 3 months old, he had to undergo heart surgery and at 10 months old, he was diagnosed with ITP (Idiopathic Thrombocytopenic Purpura)–a condition that sometimes mimics the symptoms of leukemia.

Following Trey’s second birthday, he developed gastro reflux and sleep apnea and had to have his tonsils and adenoids removed. Shortly thereafter, he was diagnosed with autism.

Lisa and her husband, Stephan, spent the first years of Trey’s life focused primarily on his many health issues. “When he was 5 years old, we finally got his medical conditions under control,” said Lisa. “Then all of a sudden we had to think about school and his educational needs.”

That’s when Lisa became involved with PACER. She began attending several of PACER’s parent workshops on how to be an advocate for your child and how to be involved in your child’s education.

“The positive approach PACER takes when teaching parents to be advocates is wonderful,” said Lisa. “I am a former school teacher myself, but as a parent of a child with a disability, all I could see was what I wanted for Trey.

“PACER taught me to be a strong parent advocate, but also to understand the school’s position. It was a win-win situation for all of us and because of PACER, Trey has had wonderful support from the school district.”

Early last year, Lisa learned about PACER’s Project KITE (Kids Included through Technology are Enriched) program and the Simon Technology Center (STC). One of Trey’s teachers had a daughter who had attended EX- ITE Camp at PACER and thought the STC would benefit Trey.

In January, Lisa, along with Trey’s regular teacher and his special education para-professional, attended the Project KITE training workshop.

“Because of Project KITE, I was able to create 123 file folders of games and a packet of flashcards for Trey,” said Lisa. “These programs were reinforced at home and at school and helped Trey learn new skills in an enjoyable way.”

With assistance from the STC, Lisa purchased software that helped Trey communicate with his classmates.

“When it was Trey’s turn to be ‘Star of the Week’ at school, he was unable to make a verbal presentation about himself to the class,” said Lisa. “With a computer software program, Trey was able to create a presentation for the class. He was able to be a typical kid and feel like everyone else, even though he is non-verbal,” she said. “This was very empowering for him.”

Last fall, Trey had to have major surgery on his spine and missed school for six weeks. Lisa said she once again turned to PACER. “I wanted to find out about tutoring services available because I felt that he was regressing,” said Lisa. “PACER provided me with the tools to have the situation at school resolved in a positive way, to everyone’s satisfaction.”

Because of Lisa’s efforts, Trey was able to complete the second grade and will begin third grade this fall. Lisa looks forward to her relationship with PACER as Trey continues his journey through school and into adulthood.
The Hopper Family and PACER Center:

By Jodi Legge

Rich and Gwen Hopper always wanted a big family, but they had no idea their journey would lead them to adopt six children over 15 years. Nor did they realize at the time that their experience would make them “experts” on children with disabilities.

The Hoppers’ children range in age from 15 years old to 29 years old and come from Korea, Mexico and Chile. Three of their six children have disabilities, ranging from autism to learning disabilities.

It was after they adopted Megan that the Hoppers first learned about PACER. Gwen explained, “About 20 years ago, when Megan was three years old, she started showing early signs of autism. Soon after we began noticing her symptoms, we received the doctor’s diagnosis.”

Rich said having a child with a disability was completely new to them and they had no idea to what services Megan was entitled or what would be the best way to help her.

“Our search for answers led us to PACER,” said Rich. “PACER staff not only encouraged us to enroll Megan in pre-school, but also helped us understand what we should expect when Megan went to elementary school and beyond.”

The Hoppers began attending PACER-sponsored workshops and then started volunteering on several PACER boards and at special events.

“It was difficult for me to volunteer in the early 1980’s, because I had four children under the age of six,” said Gwen. “PACER asked me to be on the Advisory Board, but I wasn’t able to do that until a few years later, after the children were older.”

Gwen soon became involved in the annual PACER Benefit, giving more and more time to PACER as her children grew up.

“I cannot begin to say enough about the Hopper family,” said Paula Goldberg, PACER Executive Director. “They have been extraordinary volunteers for PACER, all while raising six children, including three with disabilities.

“Rich and Gwen are fantastic parents who are committed to doing what is best for their family and their community. They have taught themselves and their children to be advocates and have set an example of what it means to be a contributing member of society. I cannot thank them enough for their support.”

Three of the Hoppers children have moved out on their own: Dan, 29, is married and owns a small business in the Twin Cities; Ginny, 27, is married and is a law student; and Steve, 25, works for Hennepin County.

The remaining children live at home: Megan, 23, attends Brown College (she will graduate in September with a degree in commercial art); Courtney, 18, and Bobby, 15, attend high school.

The Hoppers both agreed that their large family helped Megan deal with her autism. “I always felt the interactions with the other kids helped bring her out of her autism,” said Gwen. “She has really worked hard and done so well.

“Megan has been quite open with her friends about autism, and this has helped her tremendously, first in high school and now in college.”

Megan discovered art when she was very young, and through her art she

PACER Partners
20-years of Commitment

The Hopper family poses for a holiday card. Pictured (l. to r.): Ken Brown (Ginny’s husband), daughter Ginny Brown, son Dan, Stephanie (Dan’s wife), daughter Megan, daughter Courtney, son Bobby and son Steve.

Rich and Gwen remain dedicated volunteers to PACER Center. Gwen plans to remain on the PACER Board as long as possible and would also like to continue volunteering for the Benefit.

In addition to her commitment to PACER, Gwen’s efforts have spread into the community. After 29 years of being a full-time mom, Gwen recently went back to work as a student support aide for two elementary school students with autism. “I really love it,” she said. “I was a teacher before we had the children, and now I am able to expand my horizons again through education.”

Rich has been a Dakota and Hennepin County judge since 1989, and is a member of PACER’s Advisory Board.

was able to communicate with others. Megan hopes for a graphic design internship after graduation from Brown.

In addition to Megan’s autism, Courtney and Bobby, have learning disabilities. “We continue to utilize PACER’s services for our younger children,” said Gwen.

How can I make my tax-deductible planned gift to PACER?

Through a bequest as part of a will, specifying a dollar amount, a percent of the estate, or a residual of your estate

By creating a revocable or an irrevocable trust

Through a gift of life insurance by naming PACER as a beneficiary of an existing policy

By purchasing a new insurance policy naming PACER as the owner

By giving a retirement account or an IRA, designating PACER as the final beneficiary of any unused funds

By making a gift of appreciated stock or assets

If you would like to make a tax–deductible planned gift, please contact Mary Schrock, development director, at (952) 838-9000.

United Way Donor Choice Program

The United Way accommodates employees who want to support PACER Center through their workplace campaigns.

PACER benefits from the donor choice programs of the Greater Twin Cities United Way, Tri-State United Way and others.

Please consider writing in “PACER Center” under “Other” when a United Way campaign pledge card is presented for your selections.

Thank you for helping us serve families of children with all disabilities.
Twins Team Up with PACER

By Jodi Legge

Minnesota Twins pitcher Kyle Lohse has always been interested in helping children, but it was his relationship with a boy who shared his name that began his commitment to children with disabilities.

Lohse had been playing baseball for the Twins for several seasons when he met young Kyle Lohse (same spelling of the last name, but different pronunciation). Young Kyle, from Delano, was one of Lohse’s biggest fans and was looking to get his autograph during a TwinsFest event.

The similarities between the two were remarkable. Not only did the two come from similar ethnic backgrounds and look alike, but young Kyle, then 8 years old, was a baseball player and an ardent Twins fan.

Shortly after the two met, young Kyle accidentally fell down the stairs at his home and was in a coma for three weeks. As a result, he was diagnosed with severe brain damage and now uses a wheelchair.

Once again, the Twin’s Lohse stepped up to the plate, although for a very different reason than to pitch a baseball. Not only did he visit with young Kyle twice during his long hospital stay, but last spring, following Kyle’s release from the hospital, Pitcher Lohse invited Kyle and his family to be his special guests in a suite at a Twins game.

Because of his relationship with Kyle, Lohse began to focus his community service time to helping organizations that serve children with disabilities, including PACER Center.

“I want to do what I can to help,” said Lohse. “The fans are great and I’m impressed with the many different organizations working to assist children and youth with disabilities and their families.”

“Since I’ve been with the Twins, I’ve participated in a variety of charity events and made visits to schools, hospitals and nursing homes,” said Lohse. “Now, I try to focus my community service time to organizations that serve kids with disabilities.”

Lohse and the Minnesota Twins organization are helping PACER Center celebrate its 25th Anniversary by supporting a number of upcoming events this summer.

Twins Pitcher Kyle Lohse invited his namesake, Kyle Lohse, and young Kyle’s family, to be his special guests at a recent Twins game at the Metrodome. Lohse has dedicated his community service efforts towards organizations that serve children and young adults with disabilities.

“A Note of Thanks

PACER receives many expressions of appreciation from parents whose children have been helped by PACER services.

Dear Paula Goldberg and PACER Staff,

First thank you for all the energy, time and effort your organization produces for the community and for the world. After attending the Parent Advocacy Training and the Parent Leadership Conference I have been deeply moved by your excellent and dynamic work to make everyone more informed and more motivated to be informed.

Thank you again for all your positive work in the area of disabled children and their families.

~A Parent
said Mary Schrock, PACER’s director of development. “We need the help of PACER families, friends and supporters throughout Minnesota to start it, however.”

If you would like to contribute to the Toy Lending Library or any other PACER project, please use the enclosed envelope or go to PACER’s Web site at www.pacer.org.

Ready, Set, Click!

PACER has added another facet to its technology menu: online ticket sales, event registration, and donations. Just go to PACER’s Web site at www.pacer.org, click on donations in the upper right hand corner, and you are ready to go.

In addition to donations for general support of PACER programs, donations can be made in memory or honor of a particular person or to celebrate a special occasion. An acknowledgment will be sent to the person honored so that he or she is aware of your contribution.

PACER’s site is encrypted, so your donation information is safe and secure.
PACER Development Corner

PACER 25th Anniversary

PACER PHONATHON
Help with the PACER Phonathon, a fun event conducted in the fall.

HOT PARTY, COOL CAUSE
Last year’s event was a sold-out success! Don’t miss this year’s HOT Party; mark your calendars for Saturday, January 29, 2005.

KIDS AND PUPPETS
Become a puppeteer for the PACER COUNT ME IN and LET’S PREVENT ABUSE programs, and work with area school children.

TEAM PACER
Join “Team PACER” and help raise money for PACER programs. Pledge information is available online at www.pacer.org.

CALL RIANNE LEAF AT PACER CENTER, (952) 838-9000, FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THESE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES.

MARY SCHROCK, PACER DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

PACER 25th Anniversary
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