Jennifer Hudson to headline Annual Benefit
Presented by Starkey Hearing Technologies

When Jennifer Hudson stole the show in the film version of *Dreamgirls*, critics proclaimed, “A star is born!” That star will shine brightly for PACER audiences on May 12, when Hudson headlines the 36th Annual PACER Benefit presented by Starkey Hearing Technologies at the Minneapolis Convention Center.

The Academy and Grammy Award-winning performer, who starred as a coach on last season’s “The Voice,” is renowned for her powerful voice and stage presence. Hudson has performed at the Super Bowl and the White House; she’s starred in films, on television, and on Broadway. Most recently, she was hand-picked by the legendary Aretha Franklin to play her in the upcoming biographical movie.

“Jennifer Hudson is amazing,” said PACER Executive Director Paula Goldberg. “She has won just about every award there is, and she has such a wonderful, powerful voice. Every day we hear how excited people are to see her perform at PACER’s Benefit! This is going to be a magical night for PACER supporters.”

PACER’s Annual Benefit supports our programs for children with disabilities and their families, as well as PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center. The evening includes the spectacular live and silent auctions, followed by the performance. Tickets start at $75 and can be purchased at PACER.org/benefit or by calling PACER at (952) 838-9000.
2018 PACER BENEFIT: LIVE AUCTION

PACER’s Live Auction
Many exciting prizes!

VIP Tesla experience and California getaway
You and your guest will enjoy a behind-the-scenes tour of Tesla’s headquarters and factory in Palo Alto to learn about the innovative technology behind the world’s most premium electronic vehicles. You will be provided your very own Tesla for four days; travel to Napa Valley for a two-night stay at a beautiful resort, then head south for an additional two nights at an amazing resort in Big Sur, where you’ll take in breathtaking coastline views.

Celebrity experience at Los Angeles event
You and your guest will enjoy the exclusive opportunity to attend a special VIP dinner event in Los Angeles supporting PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center. Have your picture taken with a celebrity guest, and meet movie producers Chris Moore (Good Will Hunting and Academy Award nominee Manchester by the Sea) and Jenno Topping (Academy Award nominee Hidden Figures). You will also meet other well-known PACER supporters, such as Jimmy Pitaro, President of ESPN. Don’t miss this once-in-a-lifetime evening!

Culinary experience with Andrew Zimmern
Enjoy an exclusive culinary experience with Andrew Zimmern, creator and host of the award-winning Travel Channel series, “Bizarre Foods.” The acclaimed multiple James Beard Award-winning chef and television personality will prepare a spectacular dinner for eight guests at his kitchen studio in Minneapolis. All guests will receive autographed books and special surprises during your evening of food and fun!

Limited-edition Opus One wine
If you are a wine connoisseur, you know about this ultra-premium wine created by Baron Phillipe de Rothschild and Robert Mondavi, and you will delight in owning 18 bottles of this polished and age-worthy wine. Opus One is produced with uncompromising attention to detail, from the way the vineyard is planted and maintained to the quality of the cork that seals the bottle.

VIP tickets to see ‘The Ellen DeGeneres Show’ and tour Warner Bros. Studio
You’ll receive four exclusive tickets to a live taping of the show during Ellen’s “12 Days of Giveaways,” when every guest receives fabulous gifts; last year they were valued at nearly $3,000 per person! You’ll enjoy an exclusive tour of Warner Bros. Studio and watch actors on the set of a popular television show. Round-trip airfare provided by Travel One and two nights of luxury hotel accommodations at the Sofitel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills included.

Chef’s Table at Bellecour and Spoon & Stable
James Beard Award winner Chef Gavin Kaysen invites you to experience the highly acclaimed Bellecour, his French bistro in Wayzata. Gavin and his team will entertain your group of six guests at the famous chef’s table, where you can watch the preparation of your fantastic dinner. This foodie’s dream package will also include an experience for six at the chef’s counter at Kaysen’s Spoon & Stable Restaurant in downtown Minneapolis.

Exclusive tour of Jay Leno’s Garage
You and a guest will have the exclusive opportunity to tour Jay Leno’s Big Dog Garage to see one of America’s greatest collections of cars and motorcycles, from classic cars to super cars and everything in between.

Thank you to Benefit volunteers!
PACER would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who give so much time and energy to make the Benefit a success.

Special thanks to the volunteer leaders:

Corporate Sponsor Committee co-chairs Don Davidson, Hal Lieberman, and Jim Oricchio.

Silent Auction Committee co-chairs Lee Heilicher, Gail Kenton, Carrie Kilberg, Don McNeil, Theresa Read, Raleigh Segal, and Amy Weiss.

PACER also thanks the Benefit Committee members, generous sponsors, dedicated volunteers, and loyal attendees who are all Champions for Children.
The Silent Auction at PACER’s Annual Benefit is believed to be the largest in Minnesota! Each year, PACER supporters are invited to bid on incredible items — from unique electronics to beautiful jewelry and sports memorabilia.

The auction also includes some one-of-a-kind experiences. Here are just a few of the amazing packages you can win at the 2018 Annual Benefit:

**VIP tickets to Jimmy Kimmel Live!**

Your unforgettable experience starts when you and your guest enjoy refreshments in the greenroom before the show, and then are seated in the VIP section of the audience of the award-winning “Jimmy Kimmel Live!” at Disney’s El Capitan Theater, located on Hollywood Boulevard’s Walk of Fame.

**Behind-the-scenes tour of Instagram and Facebook**

A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for you and your family or friends to tour Instagram and Facebook. You will experience a virtual reality demonstration and see Facebook’s new office, designed by renowned architect Frank Gehry, that features a large room covered by a nine-acre rooftop park.

**Puerto Vallarta holiday getaway**

Enjoy two weeks at Starwood’s Buganvilias Club Resort in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, in a spectacular two-bedroom Imperial Suite! This beautiful resort is located on the Las Glorias beach near downtown Puerto Vallarta. Take a stroll on the Malecon to relish the town’s typical Mexican architecture.

**Tesla experience**

Drive a Tesla Model S85 or similar for a full week! Vehicle seats up to five passengers and includes music streaming. Tesla vehicles are the premium electric sedans and SUVs, offering the quickest acceleration and the longest range of more than 200 miles.

**Chef-prepared dinner at Paula Goldberg’s home**

Eight guests will enjoy a spectacular dinner prepared by a gourmet chef at the Minneapolis home of PACER Executive Director Paula Goldberg. This is a unique opportunity.

**VIP tickets to Late Night with Seth Meyers**

You and your guest will enjoy two VIP tickets to a taping of “Late Night with Seth Meyers,” hosted by the Emmy Award-winning writer and former “Saturday Night Live” cast member, at NBC Studios in New York City.

**Bid on these items during the Silent Auction at PACER’s Benefit on May 12!**
The small item on page 6 of the May 1983 edition of the Pacesetter newsletter carried a simple headline: “Audience favorable to benefit.” The article told the story of PACER’s first benefit at the Children’s Theatre Company in Minneapolis. The evening included a performance of Hand in Hand, a play by Leslye Orr, who is blind, that was based on the lives and writings of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan.

“For the first benefit, we had 75 people and we charged $25 a ticket,” said Paula Goldberg, PACER’s Executive Director. “The board and staff made brownies and cookies. We made $2,000 and we were delighted.”

PACER’s benefit has come a long way! Today, the benefit features high-profile entertainers, a live auction with incredible, one-of-a-kind travel and culinary experiences, large silent auction, a raffle, and an amazing fine jewelry Extravaganza. The event draws more than 2,500 people.

This year’s benefit will be one of the best yet, with the legendary Jennifer Hudson entertaining the audience.

The history of the benefit is fascinating and one fact has remained constant: All proceeds support PACER and its innovative programs for children with disabilities and those who are bullied.

Early benefits featured theatre performances. Twin Cities musician Peter Himmelman was the first entertainer to perform in 1990. As the audiences swelled, the event outgrew theatre spaces. When the Minneapolis Convention Center opened, PACER’s 1991 Benefit, featuring Joan Rivers, was the first nonprofit event held there.

The benefit began to feature national names; the star-studded group has included Ray Charles, Harry Belafonte, Aretha Franklin, Earth, Wind and Fire, Sheryl Crow, Jay Leno, and others.
Lionel Richie, 2005’s headliner, remains one of Goldberg’s favorites.

“He asked Carl Pohlad to stand up and dance! He was marvelous, his songs were fantastic, and he was so much fun,” Goldberg said. “I also loved Idina Menzel, who came in 2016. She kicked off her shoes and she asked young people to come to the front and sing with her. It was everyone, from three years old to adults, and all with disabilities. She has a great voice.”

When Frankie Valli performed in 2009, he made time to meet with seven-year-old Isabella Rupp of St. Paul. She had memorized most of Valli’s songs and had his entire anthology on her iPod. Valli hugged Isabella, who has autism and other disabilities, and she gave him a drawing.

“She was so excited,” Isabella’s mother, Libby, told Pacesetter at the time. “She skipped all the way to the concert and skipped all the way back. Isabella had never skipped before. It was a moving time for us.”

Goldberg credits Irwin Jacobs with beginning the live auction in the later 1980s. He donated two tickets to a Michael Jackson concert and suggested auctioning them to raise funds for PACER.

“Somebody paid $1,000 for those tickets and I couldn’t believe it,” Goldberg said.

Jacobs served as the event’s first auctioneer and often traded that responsibility with Carl Pohlad, former owner of the Minnesota Twins. Polly Edmonds started the silent auction in 1984 with 30 items. A Pacesetter article about the 1985 benefit noted that the silent auction “proved very popular last year due to the many contributions of items by PACER supporters.”

PACER appreciates all the supporters who have made the last 35 benefits so special! There are still plenty of opportunities to be part of this year’s benefit. Order your tickets or find out about sponsorship opportunities by calling (952) 838-9000 or visiting PACER.org/benefit.

‘Secret Movie Night’ at Emagine Willow Creek benefits PACER

PACER partner Emagine Willow Creek, in Plymouth, Minn., has hosted several events benefitting PACER — the “Night at the Oscars” red-carpet event featuring nominated films, the sneak preview of Wonder — and now they’re hosting “Secret Movie Night” at 7:00 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month. The film is a secret — you won’t know what you’re watching until the lights go down and the movie starts rolling! Each movie is selected by local film experts, and a Q&A session with a special presenter follows each screening. Featured films have included Singin’ in the Rain, Fargo, and The Blues Brothers. Admission is just $6 and, best of all, $1 of each ticket purchase benefits PACER! The next Secret Movie Nights are April 12 and May 10. For more information, go to emagine-entertainment.com/secret-movie-night.
PACER’s Annual Benefit Committee co-chair Mary Holmes says that when she asks people to donate Silent Auction items, “PACER needs no introduction.” In other words, PACER’s reputation precedes it.

Mary says the role of a co-chair is to run meetings, serve on committees, and gather donated items for the event. “We’re lead ambassadors,” she explained. She has donated a pedigreed yellow lab puppy to the Benefit each year for the last several years.

Mary has volunteered for many nonprofit organizations and charities. “I narrowed my focus,” she explained, “because I want to be involved with children and mental health.” Mary, who is the mother of three grown sons, two of whom have ADHD, went to graduate school as an adult, earning her master’s degree in marriage and family therapy.

In addition to her personal interest in children and mental health, Mary said, “I am so impressed with Paula. Her passion is contagious.

“I’ve done a lot of benefits and galas. PACER is the gold standard. It runs so smoothly, like a well-oiled machine, with all of the kinks worked out ahead of time,” Mary said. She added that there is nothing like the day of the Benefit. “I love setting up. You walk in, get your assignment, and everything is all laid out. I marvel at how organized PACER’s Benefit is!”

“Mary is a wonderful volunteer leader,” said PACER Executive Director Paula Goldberg. “She is dedicated and welcoming to newer volunteers. We’re so lucky that she chose to devote her time and energy to PACER.”

In addition to co-chairing the Benefit, Mary has served on the Corporate Sponsor Committee. “People who come to volunteer for PACER are lovely. It’s all about the cause. It’s a place where you can use your gifts, whether it’s sending out invitations or getting donations for the silent auction.

“The caliber of volunteers is amazing! It is such a joy to see all these wonderful people come together to help kids with such a range of disabilities,” she said.

“It is such a joy to see all these wonderful people come together to help kids with such a range of disabilities.”

-Mary Holmes
PACER had the exciting opportunity to be part of Super Bowl LII thanks to Esera Tuaolo, a former NFL football player and contestant on NBC’s “The Voice.”

More than 500 people attended Esera’s first-ever Inclusion Party, which took place on Jan. 31 at The Pourhouse in downtown Minneapolis. The party was hosted by his nonprofit organization, Hate Is Wrong, and was presented by Adidas. The party raised financial, educational, and networking support for diversity and bullying prevention organizations.

When Esera competed on Season 13 of NBC’s “The Voice,” he was mentored by country music star Blake Shelton. The Inclusion Party featured musical performances from Esera’s fellow team members Natalie Stovall, Kristi Hoopes, Dennis Drummond, and others. Guests included Minnesota Vikings legends Robert Smith and Carl Eller, and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey.

Proceeds from the evening’s silent auction were donated to PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center. Esera visited PACER on March 14 and presented a check for $10,000. This was his second visit to PACER, and staff and volunteers were lucky enough to hear him sing “Hallelujah” and “Rise Up,” which is Paula Goldberg’s favorite.

“Esera has really touched my heart,” Goldberg told the staff.

Esera played nine seasons in the NFL, including five with the Minnesota Vikings. His Inclusion Party was approved by the NFL and will take place annually in each Super Bowl host city. Next year it will be held in Atlanta. He said he hopes to partner with PACER each year.

And the survey says… Support PACER with SurveyMonkey

Helping PACER is now as easy as taking simple online surveys. PACER supporters can sign up on SurveyMonkey Contribute to receive short surveys from SurveyMonkey customers who need opinions on a variety of topics. For every survey completed, SurveyMonkey makes a donation to PACER, and participants have the opportunity to win $100 in an instant win game. Participants’ identities and information remain confidential. Sign up at contribute surveymonkey.com/charity/PACER.
It can be challenging for children with mental health and emotional or behavioral needs to receive the services they are entitled to. Parents often have to navigate multiple systems of care to access the education and supports their children need.

That’s where PACER’s Children’s Mental Health and Emotional or Behavioral Disorders Project (CHM-EBD) comes in, said Renelle Nelson, the Project’s coordinator. “We provide information and support to families who have a child, youth or adolescent with mental health challenges.” The Project offers parents individual advocacy and support to help them participate in educational planning for their child at school, connect to community-based resources, and promote peer support.

The Project also helps develop parent leaders, who in turn impact mental health services planning and policy development. The leadership of these parents helps improve the lives and outcomes of children and adolescents with mental health, emotional or behavioral disorders.

Karen and her daughter Talia have benefitted from the Project’s services. “I called PACER when Talia was nine, and she’ll be 18 in April,” Karen said.

“Talia has faced challenges since birth. She just couldn’t settle or self-regulate.” Preschool teachers told Karen that Talia had sensory issues. In kindergarten she was diagnosed with ADHD, and Ritalin was prescribed. It was to be the first of many medications. Some didn’t work; others worked for awhile then stopped working; some, like Ritalin, had severe side effects. “Our world came tumbling down,” Karen said, describing her daughter’s reaction to the stimulant. “Talia had huge, unpredictable mood swings.”

Talia was on her third school and had been hospitalized by ambulance when Karen called PACER for the first time. “I talked to Renelle, and she helped me so much,” Karen said. “She said, ‘You’re not alone,’ and that is huge!”

There were multiple schools, public and charter, and multiple hospitalizations. Some schools didn’t want Talia to come back. One recommended that Talia be sent to a residential treatment center. “I said no, I can’t send her off, she’s had so many rejections! She was always the sweetest kid, she never harmed herself or other kids.” Throughout all of it, Karen said, “Renelle was there. She saw Talia as a human being, not a disorder. She reassured me and helped me advocate for her. That’s hard to do when she’s having serious issues. She was viewed as ‘bad,’ when, in reality, she had a mental health disorder. Renelle saw past all of that. She saw, back then, what no one could see.”

Karen found a school that offered three days of physical classes and two days online. “We went from Talia having to try to fit into a box, to having the box designed around her.”

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The inspiring take-away message from the book and movie is to always “Choose Kind.” More than 36,000 people have shown that kindness matters by purchasing the film’s official “Choose Kind” T-shirt.

Thanks to a partnership with Wonder, Lionsgate, and Omaze, proceeds from sales of the T-shirt support PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center, which is directed by Julie Hertzog.

“Choose Kind” is the simple, yet powerful message, that PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center works to spread during National Bullying Prevention Month and throughout the year. How can you help? Easy — just wear kind, do kind, and, most of all, choose kind.

“Choose Kind” is one of Omaze’s most successful campaigns to date, and has been extended through May 2018. To learn more and purchase a T-shirt, visit Omaze.com/wonder.

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Talia flourished. She became a straight-A student, went on a school trip to Washington, D.C., and spoke at middle school graduation. But Karen wanted more. The school was tiny; she wanted Talia to experience the social aspects of a larger school. They found an inter-district school that offered the supports Talia needed to succeed.

During the middle of Talia’s junior year of high school, she started taking classes at the University of Minnesota through the Post-Secondary Educational Options (PSEO) program. Today, as a senior, all of Talia’s classes are at the U of M.

High school is not Talia’s only graduation this year: when she turns 18, she will “graduate” from her position on PACER’s Mental Health Youth Advisory Board.

Talia has taken on multiple board leadership roles; last year she was its president. “The board gave Talia a voice. She is very articulate! It helped her not to feel stigma. She could talk to legislators, and get up and speak in front of 1,500 people. It is very impressive on a college application to say, ‘I was on the youth board for Children’s Mental Health.’ It is just as okay as debate team or a varsity sports team.”

Speaking of those college applications, Talia has been accepted at four colleges and is now deciding where she wants to go.

“It has been a long journey,” said Karen, in a voice brimming with pride for her incredible daughter. “We could not have done it without PACER.”
One of the founding principles of PACER Center is “parents helping parents.” Many of PACER’s staff of parent advocates have children with disabilities. In her work as a parent advocate, Deanne Curran draws on her experience as a mom of two children with disabilities.

Both of Deanne’s children, Jorden and Abie, are deafblind and have other disabilities. She learned early that because her children have multiple diagnoses, their educational needs are important.

“My son is 25, so I’ve been in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings for almost 24 years,” Deanne said. “I spent a lot of time asking school administrators to understand my children’s unique needs and see beyond their label. It’s hard for school districts because my kids don’t fit into what schools are used to seeing.”

Deanne, a South Dakota native, advocated for improved services for those who are deaf and hard of hearing at the South Dakota legislature. She also worked as an advocate at South Dakota Parent Connection, the state’s parent training and information center (PTI), where she first encountered PACER Center.

“It’s amazing what PACER has established in the area of advocacy, especially its parent training program,” she said.

As Deanne’s children grew, she and her husband made the decision to move to Minnesota. Deanne initially reached out to PACER as a parent and was later approached to serve as a staff advocate. She has been at PACER for more than five years.

Though Deanne often works with parents and students who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind, she understands that every family’s experience is unique.

“Each family is different and I’m not walking in their shoes, but I share my own experience if I think it will help,” Deanne said. “Parents of kids with hearing loss assume that they won’t talk to an advocate who has that experience. I can recommend something that has worked for my daughter or I can speak as the mother of a young adult who is deaf. Parents say, ‘I really appreciate you letting me know that.’”

Deanne is fluent in American Sign Language (ASL), though she communicates with her children in different ways. For Jorden, she uses ASL and tactile ASL; with Abie, she uses ASL and verbal support.

Deanne regularly uses Skype or Facetime to communicate with parents and students in ASL. “It’s important to communicate with someone in their language,” she said.

Deanne said communication is key when it comes to helping parents understand their rights and how to advocate for their child’s needs. Attending IEP meetings has helped her appreciate the perspective of school staff, and she offers tips to parents on ways to communicate more effectively with the school.

Deanne also works with transition-age youth, both at PACER and at home. Her son Jorden recently started his own business; Abie is 17 and experimenting with different work options.

“They are the guiding force for me to be doing this, and they’re inspiring me to do more for young adults,” Deanne said. “I want my kids to define themselves based on their strengths.”
Taste the best that the Big Apple has to offer at two of New York’s most well-known restaurants — and be part of the live audience at a cooking-themed talk show. You and a guest will spend two nights relaxing at the New York Grand Hyatt Hotel, located in the heart of the city.

**VIP Tickets to see The Chew!**

Experience a live taping of this Emmy Award-winning show that celebrates and explores life through food. Meet the cast, sample the delicious creations, and make your TV debut at the famous Tasting Table!

**Restaurant Daniel**

Savor French cuisine at celebrity chef Daniel Boulud’s flagship restaurant in New York! Enjoy a four-course dinner with sommelier selected wine pairings at this two-star Michelin rated restaurant.

**The Spotted Pig Restaurant**

At this famous restaurant, experience chef April Bloomfield’s inimitable fare.

*All experiences are for two people. Tickets for The Chew must be redeemed by 6/30/2018. Some restrictions apply.*

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**For your chance to win, purchase a $100 raffle ticket at PACER’s Annual Benefit featuring Jennifer Hudson on May 12. You may also pre-order by calling (952) 838-9000.**

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Purchase one of the 200 Extravaganza jewelry bags, and you may be a big winner! Each bag contains a beautiful piece of jewelry, but 10 of the bags have something extra special. One of the Extravaganza bags will include this one-of-a-kind jewelry set: custom designed sterling silver choker with multiple gemstones, paired with amethyst earrings and a sterling silver bracelet. *(Suggested retail value: $3,500)*

*This year’s Extravaganza is presented by Eagles Rock Jewels.*

**Available at PACER’s Annual Benefit on Saturday, May 12.**
PACER’s endowment fund: The gift that keeps giving

The families of children with disabilities, and children who are bullied, count on PACER. That’s why PACER has established a $20 million endowment fund: to ensure that PACER will always be there to help children and families as challenges arise.

Your gift to PACER’s endowment is permanently invested; only the annual investment income is spent. An endowment reduces the impact of economic downturns and fluctuating funding and ensures that the PACER programs that families depend on will continue for years to come.

There are many ways to give. Donors who are older than 70-1/2 can donate up to $100,000 per year directly to PACER as part of their mandatory IRA distribution without incurring income taxes on the distribution. You may also give through wills, trusts, and cash donations. It’s important to consult your attorney or financial advisor to discuss how to make your contribution to PACER in a tax-friendly way.

For more information about PACER’s endowment, contact Paula Goldberg, PACER’s Executive Director, at (952) 838-9000 or pgoldberg@PACER.org.

“As the parent of a daughter with a disability, my family has been involved with PACER for a long time. Please join me in giving to PACER’s endowment so PACER will always be around to help children and their families.”

— Muffy MacMillan, Chair, PACER Endowment Fund