PACER PARTNERS
Connecting families, friends, donors, and PACER staff

MOTOWN comes to MINNEAPOLIS
Legendary Smokey Robinson headlines Annual Benefit

PACER guests will spend an unforgettable evening being entertained by Motown co-founder Smokey Robinson, who helped shape the face of popular music and has been called “America’s greatest living songwriter.” He is best known for more than 30 chart-topping hits, including “Tears of a Clown,” “You’ve Really Got a Hold on Me,” and “I Second That Emotion.” Smokey continues to thrill audiences with his voice, impeccable timing, and profound sense of lyric.

This spectacular evening celebrates PACER’s programs for children with disabilities and their families, as well as PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center. The evening also includes PACER’s spectacular silent auction.

Tickets start at $75 and can be purchased online at PACER.org/Benefit or by calling PACER Center at (952) 838-9000.
Greg West: Supporting PACER in many ways

Greg West, a member of PACER’s Advisory Board, is also a familiar face every year at PACER’s EX.I.T.E. (EXploring Interests in Technology and Engineering) Camp for middle school girls with disabilities. For the last four summers, he’s taken time from his career as Vice President – LTL at C.H. Robinson to work with the girls for a day. This year, in addition to supporting the girls as a volunteer with a variety of activities related to supply chain logistics, Greg ran a “Jeopardy”-style trivia game.

“The girls are so smart,” Greg said. “It’s amazing how sharp and how willing they are to learn new things. It’s great to see them come to camp so excited about what they’re going to learn that day.”

Greg is quick to credit C.H. Robinson for their support of PACER. “C.H. Robinson has been a Benefit sponsor for five or six years. When PACER approached us about being involved with EX.I.T.E. Camp, we jumped at the chance. C.H. Robinson is all about diversity, technology, and people, so this was a great fit for us to be able to support STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) for girls who have some challenges, giving them an opportunity to grow in the field. The flavor we bring is teaching about how technology is evolving to support supply chain logistics. We love what we can do for the girls. We get as much out of it as they do.

“My wife Nancy started to volunteer with PACER and was even on PACER’s staff as a parent advocate for a while, until she became too busy with our kids,” Greg said. “I was on the periphery when my kids were young, and then I wanted to learn more about what PACER does and how we could support it. I’m one of those rare people who didn’t meet Paula [Goldberg, PACER’s Executive Director] on an airplane,” Greg joked. “I came in and sat down with her and said, ‘I’m interested in participating. I want to know more about how I can give my time and effort.’

“When you have young children, you sort of live in the moment. But then as they became older and high school-age, I had a little more time on my hands, and, subsequently, I rose in my career at C.H. Robinson, which is so great about helping support the community.”

Greg found himself fascinated with Assistive Technology when his children accessed the tools available through PACER’s Simon Technology Center. “As I sat with them, I thought, ‘I could use this for keeping organized myself.’

Greg’s involvement with PACER is still deepening. “I have learned how important it is for parents to learn to advocate for their children,” he said, “and not take for granted that schools will have all of the answers when your child has special needs.

“The work PACER does is so good and impactful for families,” Greg said. “I want to see it move forward and grow even more. The staff at PACER make everything work! They are so great, so talented and giving.

“Supporting them and the work they do is so important to me personally.”

Fun Times: 16 years and going strong

Fun Times, PACER’s social group for teens with and without disabilities, was started in 2003 by Win Bennett, whose sister Mara McMillan has Williams syndrome, a genetic condition that causes developmental delays and learning disabilities. Win noticed that Mara, who’s very outgoing and friendly, didn’t have the same opportunity for social experiences that he and other typical peers enjoyed. “If she was missing this social aspect, then other young people with disabilities could be missing it as well,” he reasoned.

“It’s amazing to me that Win had the insight and generosity to create Fun Times at such a young age,” said Paula Goldberg, PACER’s Executive Director.

After Win graduated from high school, his siblings Noel, Frankie, and Ben took on leadership roles in Fun Times. Today, Fun Times, led by high school senior co-chairs Liam Walsh and Maggie Broyles, is bigger and better than ever. It meets approximately six times during the school year, and in the past few years, has added more events due to requests from youth with disabilities and their parents.

Liam and Maggie are both students at Breck School. “Our relationship with the faculty and students at Breck has really enhanced the success of this wonderful program,” said PACER staff member Danna Mirviss, who coordinates Fun Times. Danna added, “Fun Times participants come back year after year, and new participants join on a regular basis.”

One of those participants is 17-year-old Elizabeth Neuville, who has Down syndrome. “Fun Times is great because you get to meet really awesome friends and you’re included,” she said. “I have been in Fun Times for two years.” Elizabeth enjoys all of the Fun Time events, she said. “I like that we go bowling and attend events like going to plays.” She’s even recruited one of her friends to join.

Breck School student co-leader Liam Walsh has been involved in Fun Times for four years. “I love the concept of Fun Times,” Liam said. “I think inclusion is so valuable, and I want to bring that forward in every way. I don’t think of Fun Times as a volunteer activity. It’s just something I look forward to. It is so powerful to bring together people with all types of abilities, to build inclusive spaces. My involvement in Fun Times has taught me that we have a lot to learn from each other.”

One person who has taught him the most about this is Fun Times participant Sam Broyles, 15. “I remember the first time Sam came up and hugged me,” Liam said. “Later that year we were at a movie, and Sam was sitting with his friends. He got up and switched rows to sit with me. I have really grown to cherish his friendship.”

Parents, too, are appreciative of Fun Times. One parent said, “I just love how open and welcoming the activities and people are, in particular Danna, the PACER staff member. It is a highlight of the month for my daughter and myself. I feel so good that she has something great going on, and the fact that there is no fee makes it doable for our family. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

This year Liam graduates from high school, and next year he will be off to college. “I am really going to miss Fun Times,” Liam said.

Mara MacMillan, who was the inspiration for Fun Times, looks back on it fondly. “It is so great for people with disabilities get out and make friends! I really hope everyone has the chance to be in Fun Times.”
Sharman Davis Barrett: The promise of PACER

Sharman Davis Barrett had just moved back to Minnesota from California when she walked into PACER Center at the invitation of a new acquaintance, Virginia Richardson. Sharman wanted to see “what this PACER Center was all about” and do some networking with Virginia. She did not expect to leave with a job offer.

After meeting PACER’s Co-Executive Directors, Paula Goldberg and Marge Goldberg, Sharman “agreed to work part-time at PACER for a year,” she said. “I wanted to get my kids settled, and I figured a year of part-time work would be a good fit.” Not only was Sharman newly home, she was also newly a single parent of daughter Devin, 16, and son Yusef, 9. Devin experienced autism and was profoundly deaf, cognitively disabled, and behaviorally challenged.

“That was 32 years ago. Never did I imagine that I would devote my career to PACER! I’ve worked on many projects, I even tried to retire, but I found I still had something more to contribute.”

Though Sharman’s professional background was in sales and marketing, she had a degree in speech and hearing therapy, and had volunteered in California for a nonprofit case management service for people with developmental disabilities. Advocacy came naturally to her, and she was dedicated to improving the lives of people with disabilities.

Sharman began with PACER as a project coordinator, managing two national projects that provided technical assistance to parent training and information centers around the country. She has served in a variety of roles at PACER, including managing the Minnesota Parent Involvement Resource Center (MN PIRC). For 15 years she was co-director of the National Parent Technical Assistance Center, working with 100 parent centers across the country.

Today, Sharman directs the new Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center, which works with 25 educational and community partners, and “serves families of children with and without disabilities, particularly those who are low income and culturally diverse. The project focuses on overcoming barriers to academic achievement and increasing parent engagement, which is key to a student’s success,” Sharman explained. “Along with supporting families and educators with workshops, webinars, in-services, and presentations, our multicultural staff can answer questions from families about their children’s learning and any issues related to school,” she said.

“I really believe that for all families with children in school, knowledge is power,” Sharman said. “I am passionate about families knowing their rights and responsibilities and how to navigate systems to support their students.” Reflecting on the changes to educational policies for students with disabilities, Sharman said, “Devin didn’t always have full civil rights; she was born before IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) was passed and the

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Donate to PACER: Tax-saving strategies

Donate to PACER through IRA distribution, tax-free
If you are age 70½ or older and have a traditional (non-Roth) IRA (Individual Retirement Account), you may make gifts totaling up to $100,000 to PACER Center to satisfy your annual required minimum distributions. Contributions made directly from your IRA to a qualified charity like PACER Center by December 31st are not taxable to you, and your gift is not taxable to PACER. You do not have to itemize in order to make a tax-free gift.

It's important to follow IRS rules for charitable IRA rollovers (also called qualified charitable distributions, or QCDs), and to consult your tax advisor before completing a charitable IRA rollover.

Bunching your charitable donation may save on your taxes
With the increase in the standard deduction, some taxpayers who are close to reaching the standard deduction may realize significant tax savings by “bunching” their charitable donations.

“Bunching” is making a larger charitable gift or gifts every other year. You may want to consult your tax advisor about using it to your advantage if your combined state and local tax, home mortgage interest and charitable gift deductions are close to the standard deductions. Making larger charitable gifts every other year could be an excellent tax-saving strategy.

Gifts of appreciated stocks and securities
If it works best for you, donating appreciated securities directly to PACER Center will earn you a tax deduction for the amount of your gift. PACER can provide you with easy-to-complete forms for this purpose.

Other ways to give
Gifts made by check or credit card must be postmarked or made online by December 31, 2019, to be tax-deductible for this tax year. Mail your check to PACER at 8161 Normandale Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55437-1044, or donate securely online at https://www.PACER.org/help/donate.asp.

For questions about making a year-end gift to PACER, contact Paula Goldberg at (952) 838-9000.

amendments enacted that guaranteed a free and appropriate public education (FAPE)."

When Devin died of renal failure from kidney disease at the age of 40, Sharman was devastated, but proud of the legacy her daughter left. “Devin was a pioneer,” Sharman said. “She was the first person with autism who received dialysis from her private provider. She successfully advocated for herself. Devin was a real trouper in how she dealt with her treatment. She was placed on the transplant list at the University of Minnesota, which was a real credit to her.

“At one point, after Devin died, I had to ask myself, was I authentic in this environment at PACER? I realized that I still had something to give and the energy necessary to advocate for families so that their children would receive the priceless gem of an education.”

Sharman, who is happily married to her husband, Richard, has three teenage grandchildren, the daughter and sons of her son Yusef. Sharman’s grandchildren have all volunteered with PACER. They are the fourth generation of the Davis family to be involved with PACER. Sharman’s late mother volunteered in PACER’s front office, and her father, who was co-owner of Ken & Norm’s, the first African American-owned liquor store in Minneapolis, donated wine to PACER events.

PACER has gone through many changes, and the landscape of education for all children has evolved. But the most important things are still the same, she said. “PACER gives families the tools they need to advocate for their children,” Sharman said. “The tools and resources we offer give families hope. I work every day to deliver on that promise.”

For more information about PACER Center’s Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center, go to PACER.org/about/programs/family-engagement-center, email mnsfec@PACER.org, or call (952) 838-9000. ■
Unity Day sparks worldwide celebrations of kindness, acceptance, and inclusion

Students, educators, parents, and community members came together on October 23 for Unity Day, the signature event of National Bullying Prevention Month. Unity Day was initiated by PACER in 2011, five years after PACER founded National Bullying Prevention Month. “Unity Day began with a simple call of action to ‘wear and share orange,’ and it has grown into an international movement,” said Julie Hertzog, Director of PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center (NBPC).

Schools coast-to-coast and around the world demonstrated their support in unique ways. In Minnesota, where it all began, Mary Cathryn Ricker, State Education Commissioner, and Tammy Pust, PACER Associate Director, made a Unity Tree with fifth graders at Parkview Center School. In Los Angeles, a student at Watts Empowerment Center created a community garden where people united to grow both vegetables and their connection to the community. The Anne Arundel County Public Schools of Annapolis, Maryland, distributed over 900 Unity Day posters to every school in their district. The district’s schools celebrated in a variety of ways, with one school featuring all orange lunch options! And across the ocean, the entire student body of nearly 600 children at Vilseck Elementary School in Vilseck, Germany, wore orange to show their support for ending bullying.

Unity Day and beyond

PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center focused on some incredible partnerships with Cartoon Network’s Stop Bullying: Speak Up initiative, Planet Fitness’ Judgement Free Generation, and Instagram’s Teen Bullying Prevention Design Workshop. EA, Electronic Arts, Inc., supported NBPC through their Play to Give campaign in early 2019, with a goal to keep the fun in gaming, and to prevent bullying by uniting for kind, inclusive, and accepting communities and online environments. These partnerships produced engaging content and resources to help spread the message of kindness, acceptance, and inclusion.

“The outpouring of support for this year’s Unity Day was astounding,” Julie Hertzog said. “We are all excited to keep the momentum going all year! Visit PACER.org/Bullying to learn more about our resources and how to get involved, or call us at (952) 838-9000.”

Left: Students at Hesperia High School in California celebrating Unity Day with a chalk mural promoting a message of kindness.
Raise a Glass event a smash success!

There was plenty of good cheer for a great cause at Raise a Glass: A Toast to PACER, held at Able Seedhouse+Brewing on November 12. The Friends of PACER event, organized by PACER’s Young Professionals Advisory Board, raised funds for PACER’s Children’s Mental Health and Emotional or Behavioral Disorders Project.

“The entire Young Professionals Advisory Board was astounded by the amount of support we received at this year’s event,” said co-chair Rick Strobel. “As one of the 19% of American adults that has experienced mental illness, knowing that PACER is at the forefront of empowering children to find mental health support is just one of the countless reasons why I’m proud and honored to support such an incredible organization.”

The evening’s guests enjoyed delicious beer and gourmet pizza. They picked up swag from the Plinko table, took photos at the instant-print photo booth, and entered for Donate-to-Win prize packages, which included a Minnesota Wild experience and a night on the town in Minneapolis. This event was more than just a fun night; it was an opportunity to support and raise awareness of PACER’s resources and services for families.

PACER is grateful to Old National Bank, Xcel Energy, and Amy Inserra Peterson for their sponsorship of Raise a Glass.

Unity Day by the numbers during October

- 9,700 Unity Day T-shirts sold
- 13,500 Unity Day posters distributed
- 4,900 signatures added to the “Together Against Bullying” pledge
Investing in PACER’s future:
Why Phyllis Heilicher supports the endowment

Phyllis Heilicher first became involved with PACER Center when her daughter Danna Mirviss began volunteering with PACER's puppet program. "When Danna told me more about PACER, I knew that I wanted to be involved," Phyllis said. "I served on PACER's advisory board and various committees. I did things like help set up for the Benefit."

When PACER established its endowment, Phyllis was one of the first to contribute. "Endowments are so important," she said. "Organizations always need to have a cushion, and I knew that by contributing to PACER, I would help the organization keep going."

"PACER does great work that is needed. It is important to so many people and their families. Supporting the endowment helps to ensure that the work continues, especially in times when government and other funding is uncertain," she said. "The needs of families and children change, and PACER has always provided resources to meet those needs. I hope others will support the endowment so that PACER will always be there to help families and children."

Your gift to PACER's endowment is permanently invested; only the annual investment income is spent. You may want to consult your attorney or financial advisor to discuss how to make your contribution. There are many ways to give. Donors who are older than 70-½ can donate up to $100,000 per year directly to PACER as part of their mandatory IRA distribution.

For more information about PACER's endowment, contact Paula Goldberg, PACER's Executive Director, or Renee Gallaher, PACER's Finance Director at (952) 838-9000 or by email at pgoldberg@PACER.org or rgallaher@PACER.org.