Back in the 1950s, when Judy Roby was growing up with Down syndrome, she had no idea she would become an inspiration to her niece, Michele Heimes.

“She went to a convent in Chicago as a child,” Michele says, and she learned a number of skills. “She was happy and had a wonderful life,” she recalls fondly.

“That’s what I think about when I think about PACER,” Michele says, and she thinks about PACER a lot. So does her husband, Scott. Both are enthusiastic PACER volunteers who have taken that memory to heart, made it part of their own family life, and invested their time in the future of families of children with disabilities.

Their introduction to PACER began with a different kind of family connection—one with Robert Goldberg, son of PACER’s executive director, Paula Goldberg.

“Rob and I worked together on some music and entertainment projects for Target in 2003,” Scott recalls. “He invited us to his mom’s benefit.” The performer was Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Bonnie Raitt, and the evening, by all accounts, was amazing.

“I sent Paula a thank you note and said I’d love to become involved with PACER,” Michele says. Scott felt the same way. After a PACER tour by Mary Schrock, chief operating and development officer, the two realized there was a world of opportunity for volunteering.
Michele immediately joined the Friends of PACER Advisory Board (FOPAB), just in time to be part of the first discussions of HOT Party, COOL Cause. “It was awesome,” she says. Though she didn’t know it at the time, she would end up co-chairing the popular fundraiser for the next three years. “Paula also asked me to do publicity for the Benefit,” she notes, adding that she’s also now in her second year of co-chairing the Silent Auction.

With Michele on board, FOPAB also came up with Family Fun Day, an inclusive field day event that brings families together for a day of games, friendly competition, prizes, and treats. “One of my favorite things at PACER was my first Family Fun Day, when my children and husband were there, where kids could play, and where it was inclusive,” Michele says. “I remember one mother of a child with disabilities who was in tears, saying ‘We just don’t have days like this,’” she recalls. “It turned out to be such a neat thing.”

Scott cites Family Fun Day as one of his favorite PACER activities as well. “It brings together kids with and without disabilities, and you see a world where disability doesn’t matter. Everyone interacts seamlessly. “I’m a believer in the mission,” Scott adds. “I think PACER does tremendous work.”

As a charter member of PACER’s Marketing Advisory Board, Scott makes sure PACER’s work is promoted and presented in its best light. He was the primary force behind PACER’s new logo and branding strategy, lining up pro bono design services from Olson design firm and Straight Line Theory. The new identity further helps PACER with its mission.

“It positions PACER in a clear way to its communities,” Scott explains, “and it makes it easier to understand the value it brings as an enterprise. With more effective brand awareness, PACER will reach more people and provide value to its target audience.”

With an eye toward the future, Scott notes that “the new branding also will support and enhance PACER’s efforts to become more of a national player. That’s the next stage of evolution for PACER. We need to spend more time building national alliance partners and execute a marketing awareness plan to get more support behind the good work we’re doing.”

Michele, meanwhile, plans to remain an active member of FOPAB, and she sees the future in the eyes of a new batch of enthusiastic, energetic PACER volunteers. “There are a lot of younger people with fresh ideas becoming involved,” she says. “It’s fun to see their new ideas for fundraising events. They’re doing more Web-based, interactive things. They reach out to their peers and involve them online. This next generation is so community focused,” she says.

“If you’re looking to do good work in the community, PACER is an easy place to do it,” she adds. “There are many opportunities for people with any kind of background. You can feel good about what you’ve done and really make a difference. Nearly 90 percent of the money PACER raises goes to programs. There’s a continual commitment to putting money toward programs and children. I’ve never seen anyone at PACER waver from that commitment.”

Scott agrees. “You pick the organizations you choose to put your energy into. I chose PACER because I believe it provides a tremendous resource for connecting families with solutions. They are Champions for Children with Disabilities.”

Combined Federal Campaign
Federal and Military Employees Can Donate to PACER During Combined Federal Campaign Workplace Charity Drive

If you are a federal civilian, military, or postal employee, you are eligible to contribute to PACER Center through the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) charity drive at your workplace. You’ll find PACER listed in your local campaign booklet under “National/International Independent” organizations. To designate your gift to PACER, use code 12272. The charity drive will run from September through mid-December.
Ethan is a bright, talented 10-year-old who is involved in Boy Scouts, loves to go camping, and likes to give his little sister piggyback rides. He also has oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), which makes him strong-willed, emotional, and defiant in the face of authority. It’s a disability that interferes with his learning, causes him social problems, has led to bus and school suspensions, causes emotional outbursts at home and at school, and has resulted in significant school difficulties.

Ethan has “always been a tough kid,” says his mother, Amy. Even as a toddler, he had temper tantrums that wouldn’t stop and he would refuse to comply with simple instructions.

Feeling overwhelmed, Amy sought early intervention and special education preschool services when Ethan was 4. He had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and was making progress until third grade, when he transferred to a neighborhood school where Amy hoped he would find more social compatibility with cousins and neighbors.

Something went wrong, however. Instead of continuing his progress, Ethan began to act out physically and aggressively—even toward the principal. Ethan was removed from the main classroom, suspended from the bus, and eventually suspended from school for more than two months.

Amy learned that the teacher was not aware that Ethan had an IEP. As a result, the teacher didn’t understand what ODD is, she didn’t have the IEP strategies to manage Ethan’s behavior, the situation unraveled, and Ethan didn’t receive the education and services to which he was entitled under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

After unsuccessful attempts to end the suspensions and have Ethan returned to the regular classroom, Amy turned to PACER for help. A PACER parent advocate worked with Amy to help her take charge and build a team of teachers, social workers, psychologists, and physicians to support her son. The advocate also suggested that Amy seek further testing, such as a functional behavioral assessment, which would provide the foundation for a behavior modification plan.

Amy also attended PACER’s “How to Advocate for your Child” workshop and checked out other resources and alternative schools the advocate recommended. Eventually, Ethan was placed in a different school that was better equipped to deal with his needs.

The PACER advocate also assured Amy that Ethan could succeed and that he wasn’t a lost cause. In short, the PACER advocate gave the family the practical support as well as the optimism they needed to persevere.

“I went from the bottom of the pits to successfully asserting parental authority, thanks to PACER,” Amy says. “With PACER’s help, I learned how to have more input with Ethan’s IEP.”

Ethan now has more structure, routine, and positive reinforcement at school and home, and the changes are having a positive impact. Ethan has better self-esteem, he is helping other special education students with their math and science work, the teacher is giving positive feedback about his behaviors, the suspensions have stopped, and the school will be placing him back into a mainstream classroom in the fall.

“Ethan is beginning to see himself in a better light, and our relationship is much better now,” Amy says. Though she knows the journey continues and that challenges lie ahead, there’s no doubt that Ethan has progressed and improved and the future is brighter thanks to PACER.

*Names and photos have been changed to protect privacy.*
A sell-out crowd of over 3,200 gathered April 26 for the hottest ticket in town, PACER’s 26th Annual Benefit. This year’s record-breaking event with the Grammy Award–winning band Earth, Wind & Fire drew rave reviews and continued PACER’s long-standing tradition of world-class entertainment and successful fundraising.

Guests began their evening by inspecting exciting Live Auction items, participating in the elegant Bags & Bling Extravaganza, and shopping the renowned Silent Auction with nearly 1,000 fabulous finds. Once the program began, emcee Joe Schmit set an inspiring tone with his warm wit and style. PACER’s video highlighted the needs and possibilities of children with disabilities, and auctioneer Karen Sorbo started the energetic bidding for a variety of amazing Live Auction items.

When Earth, Wind & Fire took the stage, there was no stopping the energy as the band played its popular hits and put on a powerful performance. Enthusiastic fans and supporters filled the aisles and danced to the soulful groove of this critically acclaimed band. The group’s repertoire of music and exciting showmanship left the audience and media so impressed that the event was written about by reporters and columnists into the following week.

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame group joined a long line of PACER “hot ticket” headliners that have included such luminaries as Peter, Paul, and Mary, Marvin Hamlisch, Gregory Hines, Ray Charles, Bill Cosby, Natalie Cole, Gladys Knight, Harry Belafonte, Charlotte Church, Aretha Franklin, Bonnie Raitt, Jewel, Lionel Richie, and Jennifer Hudson.

PACER is grateful to the wonderful 2008 Benefit committee members, Corporate Sponsor committee members, generous sponsors, dedicated volunteers, and attendees who are all Champions for Children with Disabilities.
Mark your calendars for next year’s “hot ticket” PACER Benefit on Saturday, May 2, 2009!

Above: Lisa Appelhoff, left, and Kathleen Allen, right, join Benefit Committee member Lynn Wagner before the performance.

Above: Seated, left to right, Judy Earling and Liz Nordstrom (Benefit Committee members), Duane Nordstrom, Bill Snedeker. Standing, left to right, Lana Butler, Kristi Ostrosky, Tracey Ober, Larry Ober, and Karen Snedeker.

Above: Advisory Board member Anne Bentdahl brought her two daughters to hear legendary Earth, Wind, & Fire.

Above: Benefit co-chairs, left to right: Danna Mirviss, Colleen McGough-Wood, Jessica Broyles, and Patrice Alkire.

Below: Left to right: Shannon Robins, Everett Law, Kathy Robins, and Andy Marlett.
Outstanding national speakers delivered inspiring and informative messages at the third annual national Ted and Roberta Mann Foundation Symposium about Children and Young Adults with Mental Health and Learning Disabilities.

More than 900 educators and parents at the Aug. 13 event learned specific ways to help children succeed. Humor, advice, and encouragement were in ample supply at the daylong symposium, thanks to presenters who spoke from personal and professional perspectives.

Keynote speakers included author Jonathon Mooney, who didn't learn to read until he was 12 but graduated with honors from Brown University; Adolph “Doc” Brown, child and family psychologist and master teacher who has a daughter with cerebral palsy; and Richard Pimentel, who lost his hearing during the Vietnam War and subsequently helped spearhead the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. PACER’s Youth Advisory Board for teens with mental health and learning disabilities also gave poignant testimony as they shared experiences they’ve had in school.

The free, popular event was generously funded by Roberta Mann Benson, whose lifelong passion has been to raise awareness about mental health and learning disabilities. Through her work as a life coach, therapist, and philanthropist, Mann Benson has promoted a message about resilience, strength, and the contributions all people can make to the important work around mental health and learning disabilities in both children and adults. PACER, which has cosponsored the event for three years, thanks Roberta for her support of this symposium.

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What do you get when you cross 30 middle-school girls who have disabilities with computer chips, mysterious goo, and static electricity? An excited group of future scientists.

That’s exactly what IBM and several other Minnesota companies are counting on as they support EX.I.T.E. (EXploring Interests in Technology and Engineering), a five-day camp where girls with disabilities have the opportunity to investigate, create, invent, and even get messy with science, math, and technology. Underlying the fun is a corporate strategy to encourage girls to explore careers they may not have otherwise considered.

The efforts are paying off. At least one former camper is going to college to study biomedical engineering.

Generous corporate support is at the heart of the project. IBM and PACER Center have collaborated for six years to present the camp. Xcel Energy Foundation continued their support this year. Charlson Foundation, another funder, issued a challenge grant this year to inspire new support. H.B. Fuller Foundation and Medtronic Foundation rose to the challenge. Volunteers from 3M, Accenture, IBM, and Medtronic each led a day of the camp and provided all of the resources for the experiments.

Held in August, the camp had a stellar lineup of speakers, technology experts, and scientists from places as diverse as the Bakken Museum, KARE 11, NASA, and Underwater Adventures. Campers also toured the IBM campus in Rochester, hosted by the IBM Persons with Disabilities Diversity Networking Group. The value of the camp experience was captured in one girl’s comment that the most surprising thing she learned “was that I can have a career in science and math!”

All of the talents, resources, and insights of these Minnesota companies have inspired middle-school girls with disabilities to explore technology while they increase social skills, build confidence, and make new friends. Thanks to this corporate generosity, the future is brighter for these girls and the companies who someday may be lucky enough to hire them.

**Minnesota Corporations Make EX.I.T.E. Camp a Success for Girls with Disabilities**

**You Can Help!**

**Opportunities to support EX.I.T.E. Camp 2009 are now available.**

If you or your company would like to provide funding or volunteers for this important project, please call Mary Schrock, chief operating and development officer, at 952-838-9000.

Join 3M, Accenture, Charlson Foundation, H.B. Fuller Foundation, IBM, Medtronic Foundation, and Xcel Energy Foundation in shaping the future for girls with disabilities.
In 1999, a small group of young professionals, eager to assist PACER and their community, formed the Friends of PACER Advisory Board (FOPAB). Founded by Martha Dayton and Tom Nelson, this group has grown and evolved, as have the activities it creates. With a mission to increase visibility and support for PACER, the board has brought a range of innovative events to the community. Activities have included the PACER Bear Project, which gave Spinoza bears to children with disabilities in need, Change for Children coin collection sites, and participation in Toddler Tuesdays at the Mall of America.

One of its major activities is the annual HOT Party, COOL Cause, a hugely successful event brainstormed more than five years ago by a core group of FOPAB members. A PACER favorite, the HOT Party draws more than 500 young professionals to a sizzling evening of live music, dancing, and hors d’oeuvres while raising important funds that go directly to PACER programs that assist children and families.

Yet another FOPAB success is Family Fun Day, a field day event for children with and without disabilities. Designed to promote inclusion, the event attracts families of all backgrounds and offers a common ground for children to play and have fun together. Intended as a friend raiser, the event builds awareness of PACER while creating an inclusive community.

Some of the board members have been with FOPAB for many years and have shown a great investment in the projects they bring to fruition. At the same time, the board is always interested in attracting new people, projects, and ideas. If you would like to assist your community and have ideas to share, please contact Mary Schrock at 952-838-9000.
Believing that “the universal spirit of bread is sharing,” Panera shows its appreciation for customers not only within its bakery-cafés but also in the community by partnering with PACER Center.

Panera locations have PACER donation boxes at their registers so customers can support PACER programs and children with disabilities. Panera then magnifies that generosity by donating an additional 50 percent of the amount to PACER Center.

Panera hires employees with disabilities to work in their bakeries and models successful supported employment—a natural fit for PACER Center. Thank you, Panera, for being one of PACER’s Champions for Children with Disabilities!

PACER Center embraces the dedicated commitment of community business partners who generously share their success with the families of PACER through partnership and donation.

Caring and involved supporters arrive at PACER by many paths. A lifelong interest in children, health care, and the community, plus the volunteer work of a daughter, brought Phyllis Heilicher to PACER. Phyllis is a member of PACER’s Advisory Board and she has included PACER in her estate planning.

A licensed practical nurse, Heilicher worked at the Sister Kenny Rehabilitation Institute at the end of the polio epidemic. While raising her five children, she helped start the Teen Age Medical Services (TAMS) Clinic affiliated with Children’s Hospital, where she also volunteered for 10 years. The Red Cross and other organizations also benefited from her commitment to community before her volunteer journey brought her to PACER in the late 1990s.

“I was introduced to PACER through my daughter, Danna Mirviss,” Phyllis says. “Danna was a Count Me In® puppeteer, and I went to observe a puppet show and was so impressed.

As I continued to learn the breadth of PACER’s programs, I decided to become involved myself,” she says.

Since then, Phyllis has become a sponsor of the Benefit. She also is now a member of PACER’s Advisory Board, continuing her lifelong interest in helping children.

“PACER’s services to families are so important. I want to make sure that they will be available in the future, so I have made a provision during my estate planning to donate to PACER,” she explains.

“We are so fortunate to have someone like Phyllis committed to PACER’s mission,” says Mary Schrock, chief operating and development officer. “Not only does she give of her time, but she also gives of her resources both now and for the future.”

If you would like to make a planned gift, put PACER in your will or help PACER, please contact Mary Schrock at 952-838-9000 or an attorney who represents your interests. PACER Center, Inc., is registered as a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization in Minnesota.
Help PACER Meet the Challenge
The Frey Foundation Housing Project Challenge

PACER has been challenged! The Frey Foundation has given a $30,000 matching grant in support of PACER’s Housing Project, which helps thousands of families each year explore housing options for their youth with disabilities.

To receive the money, however, PACER must raise matching funds by Dec. 20, 2008. Those funds must come from:

- new donors
- previous donors who contribute 10 percent more than their largest previous contribution to PACER, and
- previous donors who have not contributed for two years or more.

This matching grant is the primary source of funding for the Housing Project in 2009. It will allow PACER staff to continue offering vital workshops, a popular information fair, a detailed resource guide, and helpful Web resources to families of youth with disabilities. These services are essential to families seeking ways to achieve maximum independence for their son or daughter with a disability. As one parent said, “I wish I would have known this information several years ago so we could have been proactive.”

To donate to this important project and help PACER earn the full $30,000, visit PACER.org and click the “Housing Challenge” link, or send a check, payable to PACER, to:

PACER’s Housing Project
c/o Willa Hathaway
8161 Normandale Blvd.
Minneapolis, MN 55437

Thank you!

PACER’s Cars with Heart Donation Program Helps Kids—and You

PACER’s Cars with Heart donation program is a win-win situation for both kids and you. Your donation of a car, boat, or truck raises money that supports PACER programs and services for children with disabilities, and you gain a tax deduction.

“Donating a vehicle to PACER is convenient and charitable. You are helping children with disabilities while avoiding the hassle of selling your car yourself or being disappointed by the trade-in value,” says Mary Schrock, PACER’s chief operating and development officer.

Easy as 1, 2, 3...

1. Gather your keys, vehicle title, and lien release (if applicable).
2. Call PACER (952-838-9000) to arrange a delivery or pick up time. We’ll give you a receipt at the time of exchange.
3. After the vehicle has been sold, you’ll receive a written acknowledgement of the final value of the donation. The letter will serve as your receipt for tax purposes.
The holidays are closer than you think! This year, you can give a present that spreads joy far and wide. Make a donation to PACER in honor of your friends, family members, and employees. When you do, you’ll receive a special card insert acknowledging your generous donation. You can place that insert in a holiday or special occasion cards to let the recipients know that you’ve given a thoughtful gift in their names.

You’ll warm their hearts—and directly support PACER programs that help families of children with disabilities.

Whether you’re looking for employee or client holiday gifts, hostess gifts, the perfect thing for a group gift exchange, or a wonderful addition to your holiday cards sent to friends and family, please consider a card insert that celebrates your gift to PACER. The minimum donation amount is $10 per card insert ($5 for orders of 100 or more). For more information or to place an order, please call PACER at 952-838-9000 or visit PACER.org.

Thank you for being one of PACER’s Champions for Children with Disabilities!

The 2008 PACER greeting card features the artwork of Ruthie Hardin, the winner of this year’s Creative Kids contest. Titled “Girls with Disabilities!” Ruthie’s vibrant drawing depicts a number of young girls with various disabilities and speaks to the heart of PACER’s mission.

PACER congratulates Ruthie and the nine finalists of the third annual Creative Kids contest, whose artwork was auctioned off at PACER’s 26th Annual Benefit. The young artists in this program participated in workshops led by PACER’s artist in residence, Anthony R. Whelihan.

The greeting cards are blank on the inside, which makes them perfect for any occasion. Each box contains eight cards and envelopes for $10 per box. Your purchase helps fund PACER projects and allows PACER to spread disability awareness into our greater community. Order your box of cards today and join PACER as a Champion for Children with Disabilities.

You can purchase your 2008 PACER greeting cards in three convenient ways:

- Mail payment in the enclosed donor envelope.
- Order online at PACER.org/help/creative2008.asp.
- Call 952-838-9000.

The Creative Kids program is made possible with the contributions of the following sponsors and volunteers:

Creative Kids Sponsors: B&B Adcrafters, Gallery Services, Gannett Offset, and Penco Graphic Supply.

Creative Kids Committee: Jan Forbes, Denise Jorgenson, Danna Mirviss, Bill Moeger, Anthony R. Whelihan, and Sophie Wild.

PACER Gift Card Inserts
Here’s a Great Holiday Gift Idea

2008 PACER Greeting Cards
Now Available!

2008 PACER Greeting Card created by Ruthie Hardin.
Changes Bring New Energy to PACER

Life is never dull in PACER’s development office. Parents, teachers, and supporters often give us ideas for new programs that PACER could start or fundraisers that we might consider. They have suggestions for changing existing events to keep things fresh. At this year’s Benefit, for example, we added the Bags and Bling Extravaganza that created a lot of excitement and proved to be a great fundraiser.

PACER listens to its volunteers and supporters, so if you have ideas regarding any PACER event, please e-mail Mary Schrock at mschrock@PACER.org.

Thank you to each and every one of you for giving of your time, talent, and resources. We couldn’t serve the thousands of families that we do without you!

WINTER 2008

December 20, 2008

Housing Challenge

Please contribute to the Housing Challenge at PACER.org or with the attached envelope. We must raise $30,000 from individual donors by Dec. 20 in order to receive $30,000 from the Frey Foundation. PACER needs all these funds to keep the Housing Project viable. Details of the Housing Challenge are on page 10.

SPRING 2009

May 2, 2009

PACER’s 27th Annual Benefit

Mark your calendars now for PACER’s 27th Annual Benefit on May 2, 2009! This year’s event featuring Earth, Wind & Fire was a huge success with the audience dancing and also bidding generously.