



# Special Gifts Theatre, inc.

Opening Doors to New Possibilities ★ ★ ★

September 2010

*Special Gifts Theatre (SGT) is a not-for-profit organization that provides children and teens with special needs, a unique, creative drama experience enabling personal growth while breaking down stereotypes related to disabilities within the community at large.*

## One Decade Past & a Future of Possibilities...

As we reflect on our amazing first decade of service to children with and without special needs, their families and the community, it is hard not to be proud of all we have accomplished. Initially serving only six children, we have now reached over 1,000 children and peer mentors, produced 33 musical productions and reached audience members totaling over 16,000. The excitement continued this past season as we had our first sold out Gala, flew in KayCee Stroh, one of the stars of Disney's High School Musical movies, and had an amazing turn out of SGT supporters and past alumni that came from across the country to share in this amazing milestone. *It is true...anything is possible if you believe!*



Susie Field, Founder & Executive Director

Though we revel in our past accomplishments and the many children and families, whose lives we have immeasurably touched, we are also keeping an eye to the future, creating a vision that will not only reach more children with and without special needs and their families, but will continue to lead the effort to fight stereotypes about disabilities. In this next decade, with the support of our dedicated Board of Directors, our amazing staff and *all of you*, we are reaching towards a vision that will impact children with special needs all over the country. *Please read on in this newsletter, to see the many new and exciting ventures SGT is taking on as we move forward to achieving the vision we have for "opening doors" for all children with and without special needs.* At SGT, we nurture, challenge and empower young people of all abilities. However, none of this is possible without your generous support. There are so many ways you can help...with financial support, in-kind donations and volunteer work. Please join us as we reach to create a world where differences are not to be feared, but rather honored and cherished.

## SGT Stars Prove Positive of a Future of Possibilities



SGT student **Aaron Holzmueller** competed in the National Junior Disability Championships (NJDC) which is a competitive sports program for physically and visually impaired youth, requiring

time qualifications to compete. This summer, Aaron qualified to participate in swim and track. He won medals in all his events, and broke two national records for his age and class in the 200M and the 440M!



**Peter tenBrink** stars in the movie, "By any Other Name" which is a story of a young man with Down Syndrome living independently as he attempts to navigate the tricky waters of friendships, women and relationships. The film, produced by Northbrook native Dave Midell and written by Nick Izzo of Play on Productions, is the first in a series of films

involving individuals with developmental disabilities. This will be marketed to many different film festivals with a special showing scheduled for this fall.

Congratulations to our **Peer Mentors** who have been recognized by the Winnetka-Northfield Rotary Club for their significant work, sacrifice and dedication in helping our SGT students. Our mentors received an award called the Steve Adams Young Citizens Award, named after a well respected individual who was instrumental in implementing significant accomplishments in the area.

OVER

## A New Decade of Programming

*With your support, SGT will be able to provide a sequence of programs that provides creative and life skills across the full range of development. At SGT, whether a child is involved in one program or progressing through the curriculum, students will gain skills for life. We stand for an individual's right to develop his or her potential on a timetable that is uniquely their own. The following programs are part of this continuum:*

### Early Childhood Creative Literacy Program (ECP): Ages 3-6 years old

This program is literacy based, as children make connections to stories utilizing story dramatization, music and other multi-sensory experiences. Research and practice have proven the powerful impact of utilizing the creative arts on a young child's cognitive and affective learning. This program has captured the attention of school special education consortiums and private and public school curriculum administrators. With your support, we can move forward in creating a licensing program that could bring our unique literacy program to schools all over the country. Our dream is to provide adults with developmental delays the opportunity to not only have paid employment by creating our "Creative Literacy Boxes," but to help young children with delays get a wonderful start to success!

### Creative Drama Program (CDP): Ages 7-9 years old

Our pilot CDP program will focus on executive functions, emotional literacy and pragmatic language. These skills are defined as the ability to identify, understand and express emotions in a healthy, socially competent way. Children will be encouraged to "think outside the box" as they learn spontaneity, expressiveness and flexibility in their active exploration of fractured fairy tales and stories they will create themselves.

### Musical Theatre Program (MT): Ages 10-21 years old

100 students this year in two casts, will perform the musical production of **Honk!** The classic fairytale of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Ugly Duckling" is transformed into a sophisticated comedy that won the Olivier Award, the British version of the American Tony Award. Don't be misled by the cute logo and the original fairy tale, as SGT's production sends an important message reminding us that being "different" can and should be embraced... although it isn't always easy! These concepts will be visited through classroom work, rehearsal and performances, utilizing costumes, props and sets in the fully equipped Skokie School Theatre. With all of its humor and charm, **Honk!** provides a message of acceptance, and is an exceptional show for audiences of all ages.

### Peer Mentor Program

Initiated in 2002, our unique Peer Mentor program consists of matching typically developing peers with our students throughout the entire program. The mentors volunteer their time to work one-on-one with our students through all classroom work and appear on stage in every production as part of the ensemble. The program has proven to extend beyond the walls of SGT, as friendships, understanding and respect grow on a daily basis. We are proud to have added peer mentors to our new CDP pilot program. Together, true friends develop as understanding and respect grow and extend beyond the walls of SGT.

### SAVE THE DATE!

**2011**

March 5 & 6  
March 12 & 13



### Your Donation Worth More!

A **challenge grant** is available from a private family foundation that will match any new or increased donation to SGT. If you have never donated to SGT before (or in the past two years), your donation will be doubled. If you have donated, any amount you give over and above your previous donation will also be matched 1 to 1. Your individual employer may also offer a match for your donations, so please check and let us know if that's available. We would sincerely appreciate any amount you can afford to give. Thanks so much for your support and helping to keep SGT thriving in this difficult economy.



**Lisa Aiken**, parent of an SGT peer mentor started an organization called *Women for Wishes*. Started in 2001, this was a way of gathering women together to help raise money for charitable causes that involve children. In the past it was hosted at restaurants with silent auctions, but this year Lisa put a new twist to it because of our economic times. This year *Women for Wishes* event took place at the Aiken residence where 120 women socialized, shopped and raised **\$5,025** for Special Gifts Theatre. Thank you so much!



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