

Special Gifts Theatre, Inc.



To provide children and teens with special needs, a unique, creative drama experience enabling personal growth and breaking down stereotypes related to disabilities within the community at large.

Volume IV

Executive Director's Corner

Amazing but true, we are beginning our 5th year at SGT. The number of children with special needs we have touched through our program has grown from our initial class of six children to over 100. Our Peer Mentor Program established in 2002, has doubled in size from 20 in our production of "Annie" to more than 40 Peer Mentors in our most recent production of "The Music Man." The waiting list for both students and mentors wishing to participate is growing exponentially. Initially, our staff was composed of one teacher and one occupational therapist. We now boast, twelve staff, representing occupational and speech therapists, special education teachers and theatre arts professionals.

With growth, often comes change. SGT embraces the challenge of looking for new opportunities that improve our program. You will read about some of these exciting changes in this newsletter.

Once again, I must thank all of you for your continued support and generosity. It is this support that allows all of us to share the magic!



Susan B. Field, Founder & Executive Director

Embracing Growth and Change

This year we have a new and wonderful venue for some of our SGT classes and ALL of our productions. Skokie School in Winnetka has generously provided us with classroom space and a theatre that rivals professional theatres in the Chicagoland area. This incredible theatre seats 950 people! We embrace the chance to share the magic of SGT with this warm and inviting community.

Our program this year is comprised of six small homogeneous classes based on the students' chronological age, developmental level and an understanding of each child's "special gifts." We are very proud of our teacher/student ratio of one teacher for every two to three students. We believe this will be the most successful season for our children to date!

The production this year will be, "The Circle of Life". It will lead our students,

staff and audience on a journey through the endless possibilities of life. This production is a musical review of life enhancing messages about growth and change. It incorporates the universal concepts of acceptance, friendship and unity. These concepts are woven into the lesson plans established for all of the classes. Some of our students will be taking an important role in not only performing in the production, but assist in the writing and design of the show. All of the students will come together to create a final production that reflects each child's special gifts.

We believe, as a staff, that providing different formats for children participating in SGT will give more depth to our program and ultimately lead to growth and independence of the students and staff alike. The staff are confident that the format this year will groom several of our "stars" for mainstream school or community theatre, which is one of our objectives.

SGT in the Spotlight!

• A wonderful article and photo appeared in the Chicago Sun Times in February, highlighting SGT and our wonderful production of "The Music Man."

• Two articles on Special Gifts Theatre and our Mentoring Program were featured in the May National newsletter of NADS (National Association of Down Syndrome).

• Kirk Players, a wonderful community theatre company donated part of the proceeds from their 2003-2004 year of productions to SGT. We feel fortunate to have them share their love of theatre with the kids of SGT.

• "The Morning Break" Chicagoland Sports Talk Radio (WSMC 1240 AM and WCFJ 1470 AM) made SGT their Charitable Organization of the Month. The radio station donated \$5.00 for all phone calls that came into the station for the month of October 2003. SGT broke all records for the station. Jon Cohn, the on air host, was so impressed with all the calls he received about SGT, that he came to our production of the "The Music Man" and brought his whole family! Thank you to all who called in!





Kids Helping Kids

Special Gifts Theatre is gifted from the heart by many wonderful children who have helped raise funds to support the theatre. These children want to make a positive difference in the world by helping other children! Included are some who shared their "special gifts":

Grove School's kindergarten/first grade music show was called, "Lemonade." At the end of the show Lemonade was served with all proceeds going to Special Gifts Theatre.



Susie Field accepting a check from some members of the Lean on Me organization

Lean on Me is an organization founded in August, 2003, by six Deerfield 8th grade students. Their goal is to help local kids who have physical or mental disabilities. Their first fundraiser, "Bagel and Bowl" welcomed in over 300 people and raised over \$15,000.00. SGT was one of three organizations selected to benefit from the generosity of these amazing children.



Ryan and Sean Manso and Peter tenBrink asked their birthday guests to give donations to SGT in lieu of bringing them presents!

Jori Lesk gave a donation to SGT from gifts she received for her Bat Mitzvah.

Rachel Weinstein donated blank audio, video and CD tapes, which was part of her Bat Mitzvah centerpiece.

How remarkable and thoughtful! We are so grateful to benefit from the generosity of these amazing children. Thank you!

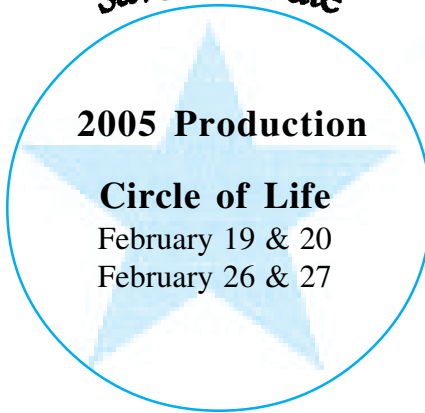
New Freedom Foundation Honors SGT

The New Ability Awards Gala is a formal awards ceremony, through the New Freedom Foundation in Chicago, acknowledging those individuals and organizations that help to bring focus on a person's ability, rather than their disability. Special Gifts Theatre was nominated in four different categories...Best New Community Program, Best New Ability Organization, Best New Ability Individual in a Supporting Role and Most Inspirational Award. SGT made the semi-finals in all four categories!

It was an honor to be nominated for these special awards with such prestigious organizations as Hewlett Packard, Chicago Bears Football Organization, Walt Disney Parks and Resorts, IBM, The Marriott Foundation, Mount Sinai Hospital and Shriners Children's Hospital to name a few.

We salute all of the New Ability Award nominees and winners, as well as all of the unsung heroes who strive to improve the quality of life for individuals that "happen to have a disability." This wonderful ceremony helps to remind us that we all have different abilities and should be recognized for what we "can" do rather than what we cannot do. ★

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SPECIAL GIFTS THEATRE, INC.
PO BOX 2231
NORTHBROOK, IL 60065-2231
T: 847.564.7704
SPECIALGIFTS@aol.com
WWW.SPECIALGIFTSTHEATRE.COM