



# 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.

October 2005



## Executive Director's Corner

Special Gifts Theatre productions have proven over the past five years to be a life changing experience for not only the actors and their families, but for the audiences, staff, mentors, volunteers and everyone lucky enough to experience the magic. This year's performances of "Willie Wonka's Chocolate Factory" will be no exception. The story mirrors SGT's own story... when you believe, anything is possible!

SGT continues to flourish with classroom programs at three different schools performing for a full house at every performance. Our professional staff has grown to over twenty talented people who are helping to create a unique program for children and teens with special needs. SGT is trying to fulfill the challenge of reaching more children with special needs as we begin the process of creating a self-sustaining program that can support our next phase of development...geographic expansion. Through generous grants and donations we have been able to become committed to documenting and establishing a repeatable process that can be replicated in other communities, eventually across the country.

It is the dedication and commitment of our active Board of Directors, talented staff, countless volunteers and all of you that are helping SGT reach this new phase of development. As you read about the success of our on-going clinical research in this newsletter, you will understand why we are driven to create a process that can provide SGT's profound and lasting impact on more children with special needs and their families. We are carefully moving at a rate that will insure that the integrity of our program and the focus on our mission will not be sacrificed as we continue to open the doors to new possibilities for more children and teens.

I personally want to thank each of you for your continued support, generosity and belief in what was once a dream that has now become a reality that even I could never have imagined! Together, we will continue to showcase the talents and abilities of these wonderful children as we make the performing arts more accessible to everyone, while breaking down stereotypes of disabilities to the world at large.

**Susan B. Field, Founder & Executive Director**

## SGT Research

Anecdotal reports by parents and teachers of children participating in SGT strongly suggest the positive impact of SGT on our students. Prior to 2004, Dr. Sue Nesbitt of National Louis University conducted limited research through surveys and interviews of students, parents, teachers and therapists. Formal research was initiated in September, 2004 and is continuing this year due in part to a generous grant from **The Allstate Foundation**. The objective of the formal research has been to define the measurement of change due to the Special Gifts Theatre experience and to create a measurement tool or scale that more accurately measures these changes. Since a measurement tool of this kind does not currently exist for children with special

needs, it is hoped that the tool SGT creates could be used in other educational and clinical settings.

Dr. Dave Kroeze and Northbrook School District 27 are working very closely with us on this research program. Our current research team consists of specialized experts, professional researchers and graduate students from a variety of backgrounds and geographic areas. A research and measurement subcommittee of our board of directors has also been actively involved in our research. Preliminary results have indicated significant improvement in the subjects' communication and social skills. We are currently working towards publishing our research results.

## The Dream Team Grows

Special Gifts Theatre's creative drama classes and theatre programs utilize the special skills of Occupational, Physical, Recreational and Speech Therapists, as well as special education teachers and theatre arts professionals. Their training enables them to be flexible and adapt activities and programming to specific situations and individual needs.

As the program continues to grow, so does the SGT "dream team" of specialized professionals. With over 20 team members, each child has the benefit of experiencing a ratio of one teacher to every three students. Over the next couple of newsletters we will highlight members of our team that help make this "dream" a reality.

## Grant Support for SGT

SGT is a not-for-profit organization that solely relies on the support of grants and donations to help support the program. We are very pleased to announce that SGT was awarded three grants this summer. A generous grant was received from **The Illinois Arts Council (IAC)**, a state agency. This agency provides financial and technical assistance to artists, arts and other community organizations for the purpose of encouraging development of the arts throughout Illinois.

**The Allstate Foundation** has been a continued source of support and commitment. The SGT mission and direction aligns with the Allstate Foundation's belief that a strong community is one that recognizes and values people of varied backgrounds, including ethnicity, gender, physical challenges, age and lifestyle.

**Target** recognizes the efforts of SGT by awarding a grant that focuses on education, the arts, social services and other vital community partnerships.

**Thank you for your generous support!**



*Susie Field receives a grant check from Barry Paul of The Allstate Foundation.*

## “Rising Stars”



One of the goals of SGT is to mainstream children to other theatre venues. **Charlie Weil**, had performed with SGT for the past three years. His mom explains, “Charlie always seemed to enjoy singing and acting, but it wasn't until he started with SGT that he had his first formal experience with the theatre arts.”

The SGT team provided the support; encouragement and training Charlie needed to further his passion for acting. Not only were there noticeable differences inside the theatre, but changes started to occur outside as well. In school, Charlie was able to present

book reports and speeches with confidence. In karate, he demonstrated the necessary poise and determination when taking tests in front of judges and large crowds. The mission of SGT of enabling “personal growth” was evident.

Charlie's mother concludes, “We were hoping for a good program and got one!”

Charlie will be performing with the Lake Forest Children's Theatre in the production of “Grease.” He has also been invited to have a walk on part in the “Christmas Carol” presented at the Goodman Theater. Break a leg, Charlie!

## Kids Helping Kids



*Katy Krantz and Nathan Alter present their donation to Susie Field. (Sari Lesk not pictured)*

Many wonderful children have helped breathe life into SGT. They have donated their gifts to help support the continued efforts of the theatre program. A special thank you to Nathan Alter, Katy Krantz and Sari Lesk who gave a donation to SGT from the gifts they received at their Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

## Save the Date!

- 2006 Production
- Willie Wonka's
- Chocolate Factory
- March 12, 18, 19
- 2 pm, The Skokie School
- Winnetka, IL
- Tickets go on sale
- Wed., February 1, 2006
- Call 847.564.7704

## SGT Board of Directors

Len Rubin, Chairman  
 Scott Field  
 Jann Greenberg  
 Sandye Lerner  
 Harvey L. Miller  
 Barry Paul

## Contact Information

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