



Special Gifts Theatre, Inc.

Opening Doors to New Possibilities

October 2006

Special Gifts Theatre (SGT) is 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.



Executive Director's Corner

*Susan B. Field, Founder
& Executive Director*

SGT is entering its sixth year and will culminate this season with our production of Wizard of Oz. As I reflect back over these past years, I am amazed at the growth in our program in this short period of time. We started with six children and now have two casts totaling over 53 children with special needs. Our unique Peer Mentor program has grown from 10 children in its pilot program in 2002 to over 55. SGT has found a home and a family at Skokie School in Winnetka, who not only shares their theatre and classrooms, but also shares our vision for children with and without special needs working and thriving together in one community. Our staff that originally began with two teachers now boasts a staff of over 30 dedicated and committed professionals.

Our program recently presented at the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, a national conference in Washington, DC this summer, as a representative of new and exciting programming that opens minds, transforms lives and initiates change. Attendees at this conference represented over 40 states and US territories, as well as seven different countries. SGT was selected to present an interactive workshop that the Alliance felt was representative of best practices in the country. The requests from attendees to have us come to their state to present ways

in which they could set up either an SGT or a program like it reinforces the thirst for knowledge that people have expressed to us about creating unique ways that uses art to embrace diversity and challenge the status quo.

The input we have received from parents, mentors, and professionals has led SGT to officially begin its dedication to growth and expansion. We are traveling this road very carefully and taking small steps that we can evaluate and analyze as we go. Our first stage of growth this year is the formation of two individual casts of our production of The Wizard of Oz. Other steps we have taken this year included formalized training sessions and training manuals for our staff and peer mentors. Documenting SGT's program and its results is being accomplished in conjunction with our wonderful new partnership with the University of Illinois.

All of these steps are due in large part to all of you! Your belief in SGT and your financial support is helping to give us the resources we need to take this journey together! We can all learn from Dorothy and her friends from the Wizard of Oz. Taking a journey together can be fraught with choices and obstacles... but with the support of good friends helping you place one foot in front of the other, the journey will always be well worth it!

SGT Selected to be the Beneficiary of the Deerfield High School-School Chest for 2006!

And the winner is...Special Gifts Theatre!

Last month, Susie Field, along with some very talented SGT "stars", performed as part of a presentation on Special Gifts Theatre to the students from Deerfield High School's Student Council. SGT was over 25 organizations vying to be selected as the School Chest 2006 Beneficiary. After narrowing their selection to a final six, SGT was selected as this year's beneficiary.

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Students of the Deerfield High School "School Chest"

SGT Selected to be the Beneficiary of the Deerfield High School–School Chest for 2006! ▶ continued from front

School Chest is beginning their 46th annual fundraiser organized and coordinated by the efforts of Deerfield High School's Student Council as well as the entire student body. This fundraiser brings out the compassion and generosity of the students, faculty, parents and greater North Shore community in benefiting a local charity.

In past years, the School Chest has pledged the proceeds of their month long fundraising efforts to commendable foundations with relentless devotion towards improving the lives of children in need. Last year, over \$118,000 was raised for Children's Heart Foundation, a local research foundation dedicated to finding a cure for the devastating effects of congenital heart disease.

This year, Special Gifts Theatre has been selected as the beneficiary. "We are excited to be working with Special Gifts Theatre this year and look forward to a successful fundraising campaign," shares **Taylor Lustig** and **David Zwick**, School Chest 2006 Co-Chairs.

SGT would like to thank everyone who participated in representing SGT at this presentation. The SGT "stars" that performed were: **Andy Albrecht, Clay Brassil, Tim Finnegan, Scott Schaider, Peter tenBrink** and **Sarah Weinstein**. We would also like to thank **Ande Beller** a representative of our peer mentors, **Mrs. MariAnn Schaider** a parent representative and **Ellen Darnieder** and **Beth Rothschild** (SGT staff), as well as

parents who took time off of work to drive their children to Deerfield High School and then stayed to provide moral support.

The generosity of the students and the entire Deerfield community will enable SGT to expand our unique program to children with and without special needs in many other locations. The fact that these special teenagers are committed to helping SGT show the "special gifts" that ALL children possess is inspiring to all of us! These students are committed to changing the world and we have no doubt that they will be the ones to do it!

SGT and the University of Illinois Partnership

The University Of Illinois and SGT have been working together to share resources and experiences. Currently, SGT is providing fieldwork experience for two U of I Master students, **Barbara Flood** and **Debbie Victor**, that will be observing and working (under direct supervision of our staff) with our Tuesday students. We are proud that the University, with their reputation, sees value in SGT's techniques and wants students to carry these techniques and strategies into other clinics and affiliations. Welcome Barbara and Debbie!

The University of Illinois is also partnering with SGT in a formalized research project that is analyzing and documenting the incredible success and growth our students achieve.

Kids Helping Kids

Children in the community keep on giving. It is wonderful to see and witness these amazing acts of kindness and generosity. A special thank you to: **Kyle Kahnweiler**, who donated his monetary gifts received from his Bar Mitzvah to SGT. **Jessie Pace**, peer mentor wrote in a letter to SGT, "I loved the SGT peer mentor experience and program so for my 11th birthday I decided that instead of presents I would ask my friends to make donations to SGT." We are thrilled Jessie has recruited her sister, **Carly Pace**, to be a peer mentor this year as well!



SGT "stars" perform at Arts in Northbrook, July 9, 2006, demonstrating that the arts can be shared and enjoyed by all!

Macy's Fundraiser:

Thank you for everyone that participated in the Macy's fundraiser. 87 tickets were sold for a total of \$435.00 supporting SGT.

Coming Soon:

Wizard of Oz Production

The Skokie School,
Winnetka, 2:00 p.m.

March 10, 11 and 17, 18

Tickets go on Sale February 1, 2007

SGT Board of Directors

Len Rubin, Chairman
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Visit our Updated website at www.specialgiftstheatre.com