



# PACTT

## NEWSLETTER

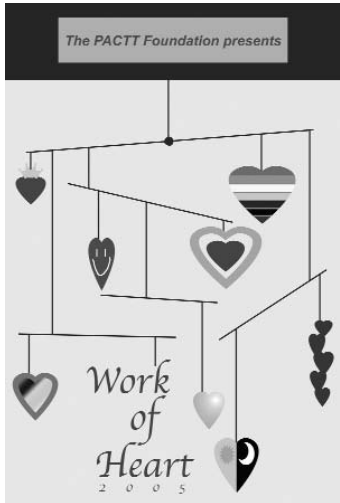


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Parents Allied with Children and Teachers for Tomorrow is a not-for-profit agency working to serve individuals with autism and their families. PACTT is an equal opportunity employer.

SPRING 2005

## Work of Heart 2005: Heartwarming Success



PACTT's fourth annual "Work of Heart" fundraising gala, held February 5, 2005, at the W City Center Hotel in downtown Chicago, was a terrific success. Attended by 300 people, the elegant dinner and silent auction raised \$80,000 to support PACTT's educational, vocational, and group home services for children and young adults with autism.

At the dinner, the 2005 "Work of Heart" award was presented to Chuck Vacala, president of Illinois Masonry Corporation, for his generous donation of masonry services at PACTT Learning Center and Vocational Services in Rogers Park. Read more about Mr. Vacala's gift to PACTT in the sidebar below.

This year, PACTT also awarded its first ever "Staff Member of the Year" award. Shaun Sherman, a six-year staffer at PACTT Learning Center, was the recipient. In presenting the award to Shaun, PACTT Executive Director Laurie Bushman praised his commitment to the students and his creativity and spirit which inspire both those who work with him and the children and young adults he teaches. For more about Shaun, read the "Our Staff" section of this newsletter.

During the dinner, a video production starring children, parents, and staff at PACTT created by Federici Video gave "Work of Heart" attendees a touching and very personal understanding of the pressing need for vocational services and solid plans for the future for teens and young adults with autism.

Mary Batterham again served as chairman of the "Work of Heart" event committee with Nancy Desmond heading the Silent Auction. They were joined by Mary Jo Krupkowski, Chris Good, and Ellen Hughes. Thanks to the hard work of the silent auction crew, guests at this year's gala were able to bid on over 100 items. The Chicago Symphony Protégé played during the cocktail hour, setting an elegant mood. Beverages for the event were generously provided by Dan Romano of Southern Wine & Spirits.

### Help from our friends

## New and Improved: PACTT Learning Center

PACTT's Rogers Park facility — including the main building housing PACTT Learning Center and PACTT's administrative offices, the coach house where PACTT High School and Vocational Services are located, and the large grounds surrounding it all — have received a wonderful, and much needed, makeover, courtesy of some very kind-hearted Chicago-area companies. The buildings are renewed, with tuckpointing provided by Illinois Masonry Corp., and now they are surrounded by all new, and very attractive, landscaping, brick walkways, new basketball court, and a brick patio. All of this was provided for our students by the collective efforts of some very generous and hardworking companies. Our thanks to:

- Illinois Masonry Corp. for providing tuckpointing and masonry;
- Walsh Landscape Construction for landscape design and installation;
- Orange Crush, LLC for 66 tons of asphalt;
- J & R 1st in Asphalt for installing the new playground;
- Kelty Paver, Inc., for designing and installing the new brick patio and walkway;
- Unilock for supplying the bricks; and
- Builders Ready Mix for donating the gravel underlayment

Altogether, the work and materials amounted to over \$45,000 in services. The benefit to PACTT — a safe, secure, and now very attractive environment where our children can learn and play — is priceless. Thanks to these generous businesses for improvements we will appreciate for years to come!



Kate and Adam decorating the new asphalt.

### From Laurie



This year has been one of transition and adventure for all of us. Our kids are turning into young adults before our eyes. What an awesome event to be a part of!

The teenage years are simultaneously fun-filled and difficult for everyone. This time in life brings changes, adventures, and the spreading of one's "wings." Parents cringe and struggle with letting go as their "babies" grow up. This process is no different, in many ways, for kids with autism and their parents and extended families.

For me as director, this has been a time of happiness as we join in the celebration of each individual's accomplishments. It is also a time of anticipation and concern. Where will our guys go from here? More school? Into the work world? Where will they live? Most young adults choose to leave home around this age. What's out there for us?

As I contemplate these questions and dream big dreams for each one of our up and coming adults, I am tempted to worry that they will come to the end of their school years with nowhere to go. Then I am reminded of all the incredible things we have been through already as we've "grown with our kids." New buildings, new programs, talented, caring staff...When we find ourselves standing on the edge of anticipation, searching for the next step...it comes to pass. In a miraculous way, you, our friends and loyal supporters, come alongside us and we work together to make the next step possible. I inevitably find myself standing in awe and appreciation. My anxiety turns to excitement as I look forward to this next step in our walk together.

### Our Staff: Shaun Sherman

Six-year PACTT veteran Shaun Sherman was named PACTT's first-ever Employee of the Year at the "Work of Heart" benefit February 5, 2005.

What did he think when his name was called for the honor? "I was shocked," he said. "I felt like I didn't deserve it as much as other people. I've learned more here through other people and the example they set."

Modest though he may be, Shaun has become one of those veteran staff people. In fact, his enthusiasm for PACTT over the years has led him to convince more than a few other teachers and assistants to join the team — people who then looked to him as the example.



Shaun (right) with Matt

assistance," Lisa said. "He is constantly giving of himself and asks for little in return."

From teaching assistant to job coach to maintenance helper, Shaun is PACTT's very own jack-of-all-trades. Shaun has worked with PACTT students from the youngest to the oldest. He currently works as a teaching assistant / job coach in the vocational program.

Beyond his life at PACTT, Shaun is pursuing a degree in elementary education. He says he'll student teach next spring, and eventually wants to work in the inner city, where the need for passionate teachers is strong. "If I'm going to teach," he said, "I feel like I should do it where they need good teachers."

Eventually, he wants to get a Master's degree in special education. For now, though, he's enjoying his place in the PACTT world.

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## Chuck Vacala Receives 2005 Work of Heart Award



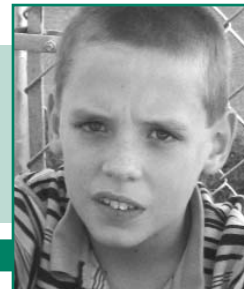
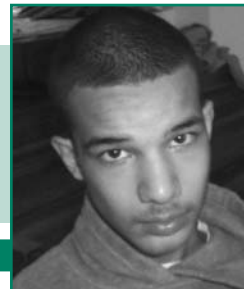
PACTT Development Director Terry Herbstritt (left) presents Chuck Vacala (right) with the 2005 "Work of Heart" award.

PACTT Foundation Board Member Bill Cahill originally approached Chuck Vacala about the need for building repair because of the reputation of Mr. Vacala and his firm. "Chuck grew up here in Chicago, one of eleven children, and he has been a mason in Chicago for over 25 years. His dedication to his work and to the Chicago area has made Illinois Masonry Corporation one of the largest masonry contractors in the state.

"Providing the best for our kids, including safe, secure, and attractive places to live and learn, is a big job. We couldn't do it without the dedicated help of people like Chuck Vacala and his team at Illinois Masonry Corp.," Bill said.

The 2005 "Work of Heart" award was presented to Chuck Vacala, owner of Illinois Masonry Corporation of Lake Zurich. Mr. Vacala was honored for his extremely generous donation of the complete and extensive tuckpointing and masonry repair job his firm provided for the PACTT Learning Center building and adjacent coach house, home to the PACTT High School and Vocational Services. Under Mr. Vacala's direction, Illinois Masonry craftsmen were on site at PACTT's Rogers Park facility for more than a week, meticulously repairing and refreshing the look of both structures.

"It was clear from the start that this was a true labor of love for Chuck," PACTT Development Director Terry Herbstritt said. "You could see it in the terrific way the workers related to our teachers and staff, and especially to our kids, that they really had their hearts in the work. Plus, the fine work speaks for itself. They put our buildings in great shape."



Continued from the front

"I think PACTT is good for anyone with an interest in education – or in people," he said. "It's a great place to be."

## Our Kids: Stuart



Stuart with Kristen

He knows Star Wars, is enthralled with bats and animals of all sizes and shapes, and loves being chased around the backyard.

From the moment he walked in the door last summer, PACTT teachers knew Stuart would find kindred

spirits here. It didn't take Stuart – or his mom – long to figure that out for themselves.

"He's finally around people who appreciate him for who he is," his mom, Ellen, said. "The staff here 'get' him!"

It wasn't always that way for Stuart. Last spring, Stuart was in a self-contained program in a public school. His teacher had little experience with children with autism, and Stuart had adopted some challenging behaviors. His mom said he was a danger to himself and others. "Last year was really frightening," she said. "We were afraid we were losing our happy kid."

Stuart's parents felt like he needed a drastic change. Through their speech therapist, they had met parents of another PACTT student. They hoped PACTT would be the change they sought.

"PACTT has made a huge difference to Stuart," his mom said. "He's so much more resilient now than he was before ... he's more comfortable and happy with himself. He feels like he's part of a community here."

Kristen Nielsen is Stuart's classroom teacher at PACTT. She has been with him since his first day at the school, and has loved watching his "big change" from the beginning. "Compared to how scared and upset he was when he first got here, it was amazing how fast he acclimated to our school and his real personality came out," she said. "We found the real Stuart."

From baby elephant eyes to kitten whiskers, teachers in Stuart's new classroom quickly learned to translate his endearing animal antics, and helped Stuart become more comfortable in his new surroundings.

"He's such a sweet, friendly, funny kid," Kristen said. "He makes you feel good about yourself when you're with him."

Stuart has indeed found kindred spirits.

The happy kid is back.



## Cruisin' with PACTT

Set sail with PACTT on Sunday, July 17, when we take an evening cruise on the Chicago River and out onto Lake Michigan. Enjoy great food,

music, and fun with friends on a private cruise aboard the Ft. Dearborn double decker. The 3-hour tour (a three-hour tour) starts at 6:15 p.m. with a tour of the Chicago River, then heads out onto Lake Michigan to take in the dazzling Chicago skyline at twilight. For more information, contact PACTT Development Director Terry Herbstritt. All proceeds from the cruise benefit PACTT, so — ALL ABOARD!

## Spring Fun at PACTT!

Students at PACTT Learning Center enjoy sunny spring days in their new and improved backyard.



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### This Newsletter is published by

PACTT

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Ellen Hughes, Paula Jablonski, *Editors*

At PACTT, our mission is to assist individuals with autism and developmental disabilities in becoming as independent as possible with the ability to integrate effectively into their home and community. Our team of parents and professionals will aspire to work together to create an educational environment that meets the needs of individuals with autism and developmental disabilities utilizing a positive intervention approach in an ever improving and progressive manner.

## PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR PACTT

Want to help? Contact Development Director Terry Herbstritt at 708-386-3904, or visit PACTT's website at [www.pactt.org](http://www.pactt.org). All donations in support of PACTT should be sent to the Foundation at P.O. Box 492, Oak Park, IL 60303.

## MAKE IT A MATCHING GIFT!

Many employers offer a matching gift program that could double or triple the impact of your investment in PACTT. For information about a program at your workplace, please contact your human resource or employee benefits office.



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## Upcoming Events

### Cruise with PACTT

Mark your calendar for July 17, 2005, when the PACTT Cruise will set sail on the Chicago River and out onto Lake Michigan on a freshwater fundraiser!

### 4th Annual Golf Classic

The 4th Annual PACTT Golf Classic will be held September 26, 2005, at the beautiful Beverly Country Club. Look for more information soon.