



# 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.

WINTER 2006

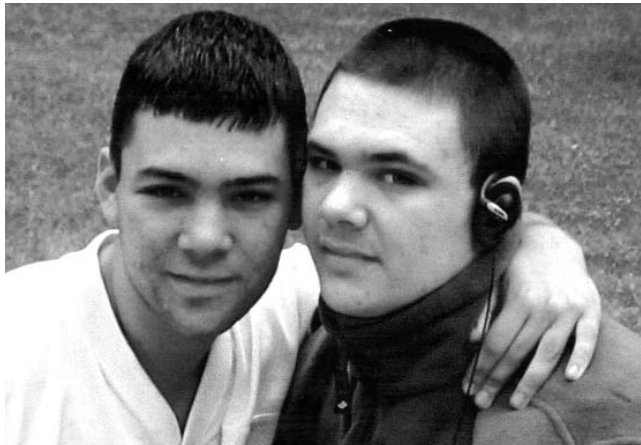
### A Brother's "Heart & Soul"

Putting in a lot of hard work — and a lot of heart — 17-year-old Ben Raanan staged "Heart & Soul, a Showcase of Talent" on December 10 to support PACTT and his brother Adam. This variety show including singing, drama and dance was staged at the Judea Mitzpah Building on Niles Center Road in Skokie, and raised over \$4,000 in support of PACTT. Ben, brother of PACTT student Adam Raanan, 16, was the show's creator and producer, responsible for every aspect of its production — the location, actors, singers, dancers, refreshments and publicity.

"PACTT means a lot to me since this is the first place we found for Adam that really focuses specifically on his needs. I thought I'd help out," Ben said.

Calling on his friends, some from the "Brave New Players" theater group and other talented students at Niles North, as well as a couple of Northwestern University students and a folk-singing friend from his synagogue, Ben put together a delightful evening of entertaining song, drama and dance, with all proceeds going to benefit PACTT. Temple Judea Mitzpah donated the auditorium for the event, and more of Ben's school friends manned the registration table, dessert trays, set up and clean up, and worked as stage hands and prop managers for the performers.

As director, Ben opened the evening and gave a brief talk about his brother and PACTT, before introducing PACTT teacher Kate Gilmartin who talked more about the agency's school, group homes and vocational services program. Items created by PACTT Vocational Services students were sold at a table while dessert was served, raising over \$200. Despite a snowy evening, over 140 guests attended. The evening's total proceeds of almost \$2,000 from ticket sales and donations were matched by Ben's father, Uri Raanan and his business partner Steve Cohen.



Ben (left) and Adam (right)

Autism can be a heavy burden for a sibling. Ben's response as a teenager has been to take a proactive approach. Last summer, he volunteered during PACTT summer school and went along as a counselor on a weekend camping trip for the group home kids. "He drives over to the group home with me, he gets involved," Marsha said, "I'm proud to see him tackling this with such a joyful spirit."

TAP Pharmaceutical Products, Inc., Marsha's employer, taking note, in part, of Ben's dedication to helping the students of PACTT, presented a \$5,000 grant to PACTT. "TAP Pharmaceuticals, through its Charitable Contributions Committee, gets involved in community organizations where their employees are actively involved, where they know they can make a difference," Marsha said, "I was delighted that they're supporting PACTT in this way."

PACTT expresses its deep appreciation to Ben Raanan for his successful fundraiser and to TAP Pharmaceuticals for their very generous grant!

### PACTT Goes to Work

PACTT Vocational Services is off to a strong start with 16 of its 16 high school students working at jobs out in the community. Nicole, Matt P., Matt G. and Rebecca set up a restaurant; Walker is a junior engineer; Matt H., Scott, Freddy and Adam are office assistants; Jonny A. is a kitchen aide; Johnny N. is a groundskeeper, Luis works in maintenance; Kyle, Richie, Amanda and Aleksey are food



Nicole working at Rock Bottom

packagers. PACTT students are working hard and enjoying their jobs.

"We see our students picking up new skills and gaining confidence everyday," commented Vocational Services Coordinator Lisa Fegert. "I'm so proud of every one of them."

She's also pleased with the response from the business community and says this is just the beginning. "We've got such terrific employers. They really get invested in our guys and want to help them succeed," she said. Current PACTT employers include: Rock Bottom Restaurant & Brewery, Imaginary Landscapes, Nathalie Salmon House, Howard Area Community Center, the Morton Grove Chamber of Commerce, Integrated Facilities Solutions, Inc., and Niles Township Food Pantry.

Some students are only working one hour a week as volunteers picking up and sorting recyclables at present, but others are working all morning, five days a week doing complex jobs at restaurants and offices and earning a paycheck. Every student is accompanied to work by a job coach. Some need one-on-one coaching while others require much less supervision.

When they aren't on the work site, PACTT voc ed students each have specific jobs for which they get paid back at school. With the money earned, they are learning about paychecks, money management, team work, following directions, time sheets, schedules, saving money and more. Plus, they can spend a little of their hard-earned cash at the school store where students take turns stocking and clerking.

With students earning high marks from their employers and fellow workers on the job, PACTT Vocational Services is reaching out farther, looking for new work sites and new challenges for its students, Lisa said. Want to put PACTT to work? Email Lisa Fegert at vocservices@pactt.org or call PACTT Learning Center at 773-338-9102.

### Congratulations, Dr. Lee!



for his work in Alzheimer's disease among other things. In addition, he has served on a number of professional editorial boards and is the author of numerous scientific articles. He also is a new member of the PACTT Board of Directors. "Dr. Lee has been a wonderful addition to the PACTT Board," PACTT Executive Director Laurie Bushman said. "He came to us with a deep understanding of autism and a real commitment to helping our kids."

The PACTT agency congratulates our new Board Member John Lee, M.D., Ph.D., on being named the new dean of Loyola University Chicago's Stritch School of Medicine. Prior to taking this new post on December 1, Dr. Lee served as professor and chairman of the school's Department of Pathology. He has received numerous teaching awards while at the university and has merited international attention

### From Laurie



"This is my best year ever, Mom!" My daughter Ashleigh is convinced that this, her senior year at the University of Indiana, will be the best yet. I believe her. It certainly has started off that way.

In August we began our 13th year as PACTT. What an adventure it has been! We have been privileged to be a part of so many lives and so many miraculous events over the last 12 years. I love my job! I must say though, I have a feeling that we also are on the verge of our "best year ever."

We are off and running. So far our vocational program has successfully placed sixteen out of sixteen high schoolers in community jobs/volunteer opportunities. We have more staff than ever attending college. At school everyone, young and old, seems to be on the road to learning new things and overcoming challenges.

Amidst all of this, we face another opportunity for expansion as an agency: the chance to provide a quality day and residential program for our young adults. The day program already exists and is running smoothly. We are developing a plan for the residential piece as well. I have confidence that we will see both programs come to pass in the near future.

After all...

We have a wonderful team and the capacity to teach even more people how to work effectively with our kids and families. (Staffing will not be a problem).

We are looking for just the right space (I don't think that finding a building will be a problem).

We certainly have young people ready to make the transition!

If we are lacking anything... it would be adequate funding (that does always seem to be at least a minor deterrent).

However, history at PACTT reveals that when the need is there, the resources tend to be available at just the right time and, just when we think it can't possibly happen, everything comes together and life goes on. Amazing! I do believe that God and His autism angels are watching over us. I am confident that we are indeed in for our "best year ever!"

### Our Staff: Lill

Lill Tarnow had been working with students with autism in Chicago Public Schools, and said, "Something about them just clicked with me."



Lill

When Lill showed up for her interview at PACTT in August 1998, she was taken by surprise.

"The staff kept asking such great questions, wanting to know about working in classrooms, working with teachers," Lill said, "...it was the very opposite [of her previous experiences]."

After her visit, her interview, and a few tears, she wasn't the only one convinced that she needed to be

PACTT's next Occupational Therapist. PACTT's Director, Laurie Bushman, was convinced, too. "By the time I got done explaining who we are, Lill was in tears," Laurie said. "She was compassionate and willing to learn. She had no idea what she was getting into, but she knew she belonged here."

Lill soon found herself immersed in the PACTT family. "The staff here is truly a family. We play with each other. We argue with each other. But in the long run, we're always there for each other," she said.



She has found that the same holds true for PACTT's relationship with school parents. "I have relationships with families [here] that don't exist in public schools," she said.

Lill's commitment to PACTT's collaborative teaching model takes her into every part of the agency. She co-teaches with the speech pathologist, consults with teaching teams and spends time in each program. Now, she also is joining the vocational students at work, watching them in action so she can brainstorm ideas with job coaches.

"[The staff] challenge my thinking ... They make me stretch to think about better ways to do things," she said.

Lill also has begun spending one afternoon a week alternating between PACTT's two group homes. She says it gives her a different perspective on the kids. "They're more independent there, because they can be. At home, you don't have to raise your hand to go to the bathroom."

PACTT Group Home Manager Robert Benassi says it's especially nice for the kids to see Lill in both settings. "She manages to integrate herself into the program without overwhelming the staff and the kids," he said.

Lill has hopes of being able to share ideas between the homes and the school. Her visits to the group homes allow her to get to know staff members there, and do some mentoring — and learning. "This gives me a chance to challenge myself to work more with staff, and to work with more staff, to better share information and ideas."

Staff members at the group homes appreciate Lill's input and ideas. "They're motivated by her — she shows us how to do things differently — or better," Rob said.

Seven years, one school, two group homes and a vocational program later, why is Lill still here? That's an easy question. "I love the kids. Everybody here loves the kids." Eleven-year-old Taylor reminds his teachers and friends that sometimes we all need to look at the world through rose-col-

ored glasses. His medium may change — to one of his many translucent red water bottles or a red plastic pencil box — but his occasional reminder to view the world with a rose-colored tint remains constant.

nication with anyone he gets to know and trust," Bob said. "He's interested in learning everything he can about how to empower himself to be heard and understood." Within the last year, Taylor received his own DynaMyte communication device. The device, which works almost like a mini-computer with voice output, not only provides Taylor with access to more extensive vocabulary, but allows him increased opportunities for interaction with his family, teachers and peers. "The DynaMyte has opened the door toward much more social interaction in the classroom," Bob said. "It has given Taylor a tremendous amount of confidence ... a sense of control of his environment in the classroom and in the community."

Those enhanced social interactions and connections with his classmates have become more and more obvious in recent months. Bob said, "Lately, Taylor has shown signs of real empathy toward others," something he hadn't often expressed at school in the past.

On one occasion, another student in the classroom was visibly upset. Taylor walked over to the student and gently put his hand on his cheek. The student quieted, and the two walked around the room together while he continued to calm down.

When asked what people should know about Taylor, Bob was hard-pressed to narrow it down: "He has a very dramatic flair ... He's extremely expressive ... He has incredible eye contact and gestural language ... He's hungry for knowledge ... curious ... methodical ... affectionate."

Wait. One more thing: "Everybody knows he's very intelligent, right?" Bob wondered aloud.

Yes, Bob — Without a doubt.

## Our Kids: Taylor

Taylor joined his current classroom at PACTT in October 2002. Since then, the PACTT staff has watched him learn and grow into quite an amazing young man. His teacher, Bob Mann, has been with him through this entire transition. Bob talked first about Taylor's communication breakthroughs. "Taylor thrives on intimate commu-



Taylor

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## Golf Classic a Winner

Over 100 golfers came out for the day, driving home over \$80,000 in proceeds benefiting individuals with autism in the Fifth Annual PACTT Golf Classic held Monday, September 26, 2005 at the Beverly Country Club. On a brisk fall day with the weather holding off, the golfers enjoyed a leisurely full round of golf at this recently renovated world-class course, followed by a wonderful buffet dinner in the Club House with awards for hole-in-one and other flag events.

Speaking to all those who participated to make this year's golf outing a tremendously successful event for PACTT, Development Director Terry Herbstritt said, "We want to thank all the golfers who supported PACTT at the Classic this year, and welcome everyone to join us again in September 2006 for another great game of golf benefiting the terrific children, teens and young adults PACTT serves."

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### This newsletter is published by

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773-338-9102  
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



Work of Heart  
Saturday, February 25, 2006  
W Chicago City Center