

the Achiever



Life as Ronnie Weinmann knew it ceased to exist on Thanksgiving night in 2000. After leaving a friend's family gathering, his car was struck by a drunk driver. While his passenger was okay, Ronnie's life was permanently changed in an instant.

A sophomore in college, a former 4-year letterman varsity wrestler and avid outdoorsman, Ronnie found himself needing to use a wheelchair and unable to speak due to the traumatic brain injury he suffered during the accident.

Just 19 years old, Ronnie was faced with the seemingly impossible task of trying to recapture just a portion of his former life. After spending eight months in the hospital, he eventually moved

A Second Chance at Life

back home with his parents Jeanne and Ron and his younger brother to begin his long journey to recovery.

Although his doctors said he would never walk again, Ronnie was determined that he would defy the odds and not let his situation get the best of him. Looking back, he said that "my goal has always been the same—to gain my independence." So he began a grueling regimen of treatment plans which included physical, occupational and speech therapy sessions at a local hospital.

It was at one of these therapy sessions that his mom Jeanne first learned about the therapeutic benefits of horseback riding for people with disabilities. She'd heard how a horse's gait mimics the movement of a human pelvis, and for those with physical disabilities, it often aids in the improvement of the rider's own movements. After reading a brochure about the Achievement Centers' riding programs at Camp Cheerful, Jeanne knew that this was something that could be a major turning point for her son.

Jeanne was right. Horseback riding, as it turns out, was just what Ronnie needed to kick his recuperation into high gear. In the summer of 2005, Ronnie took the reins of his new life into his own hands during his first riding lesson. Since starting the program, Ronnie has seen vast improvements in his muscle strength, balance and coordination, motor skills and speech. Now better able to communicate, he said "the horses help my verbal speech because I have to tell them what to do when I give them commands such as 'walk on.'" He also added that his par-

ticipation in Therapeutic Riding brings him closer to some of his other goals, such as walking independently one day. "I think the best part [of riding] is I feel independent when I'm up there and can look down on my trainer," he adds.

Currently serving between 80 and 120 students per session, the Therapeutic Riding (TR) program at the Achievement Centers' Camp Cheerful in Strongsville has given this same sense of freedom to

Therapeutic Riding volunteers Debbie Hohenfeld, Kitty Kadas, and Bernie Kozak give riders like Ronnie, pictured with his favorite horse, Nick, a helping hand.

hundreds of participants, young and old, since its inception in 2005. During weekly sessions, riders of all physical ability levels are paired with specially trained horses that are chosen specifically for their ability to work with people with disabilities. While it is recreational in nature, TR provides numerous therapeutic benefits. Through a variety of physical tasks all performed while on horseback, participants condition their bodies and improve their fine motor skills all while learning the joys of horsemanship. Classes are taught by instructors who are certified through the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA). The program has also been made hugely successful through the help of hundreds of volunteers who serve as sidewalkers and support for the riders.

After noticing how much Ronnie's abilities and spirits improved since starting Therapeutic Riding, his parents decided to enroll him in the program on a year-round basis. His mom says that the days he comes for his lesson are his favorite days of the week. He has even become a favorite of one of the volunteers, Bernie, who makes it a point to be there to walk beside Ronnie during his lessons.

continued on page 3—see "Ronnie"



Message from the Executive Director

Patricia W. Nobili, MSSA



ACCREDITATION and LICENSURE

The Achievement Centers for Children's programs and services are licensed and accredited by many entities, including:

American Camping Association
Certified Medicaid Provider
Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities
Cuyahoga County Early Intervention Collaborative member
North American Riding for the Handicapped Association
Ohio Department of Education
Ohio Department of Health
Ohio Department of Human Services
Ohio Department of MR/DD
Ohio Department of Mental Health
United Way Agency
Numerous agreements with area universities and colleges

For information and referrals
216-292-9700

Visit our website
www.achievementcenters.org

If you would like to be removed from the Achiever mailing list please notify us in writing at: The Achievement Centers for Children, 4255 Northfield Road, Highland Hills, OH 44128.

SEASON'S GREETINGS!

During this wonderful time of year, many of us will be busy shopping, attending holiday parties and enjoying family gatherings. This is also a time of giving thanks and spreading good will. However, for some, the holiday season will bring with it more stress and very difficult times.

Like others in our community, many of the families that we serve at the Achievement Centers are feeling the strain of economic challenges and uncertainty about the future. However, their circumstances are even further complicated by the day-to-day responsibilities of caring for a child with a disability. Oftentimes, parents and caregivers of children with special needs feel isolated and may lack the support networks available to those with typically developing children. Additionally, the costs of obtaining ongoing quality care can be a huge strain for a family with limited resources or even average resources.

Not surprisingly, it is during these difficult times that many of the children with special needs and their families need our help the most. The Achievement Centers is faced with an ever increasing demand for services, as we simultaneously see funding sources at risk. However, the depth our commitment to meeting the needs of the children and their families we serve remains the driving force behind our continued efforts to find innovative ways to provide high quality services on a daily basis.

In this issue of *The Achiever*, you'll read about the ways in which individuals, from all walks of life, find creative ways to display their charitable spirit. Their efforts are so greatly appreciated! Their generosity and resourcefulness are critical to our continued success as we enter the New Year.

More importantly, you'll also read about overcoming tremendous odds as well as new beginnings. And without the collaborative efforts of our supporters, volunteers, donors and staff, none of these achievements would be possible. But because of all your efforts, we can ensure that many more children with special needs continue to grow, inspire and defy the odds for years to come. And for them, and all of you, we are most thankful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia W. Nobili".

Patricia W. Nobili, MSSA
Executive Director

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Highland Hills, OH 44128
216-292-9700

WESTLAKE
24211 Center Ridge Road
Westlake, OH 44145
440-250-2520

CAMP CHEERFUL
15000 Cheerful Lane
Strongsville, OH 44136
440-238-6200

NEW INTENSIVE THERAPY CLINIC DELIVERS REMARKABLE RESULTS

A 4-year old child sits up by herself for the first time. An 18-year old finally realizes her dream of taking steps independently. These are just a few of the major milestones being achieved at the new Intensive Therapy Clinic at the Achievement Centers for Children.

Earlier this year, Bonnie Boenig, Manager of Therapy Services, introduced the Intensive Therapy Clinic to the agency's Therapy Services department.

The Intensive Therapy Clinic is an ideal therapy option for children, adolescents and young adults with medical conditions that significantly affect and limit their physical abilities, negatively impact the development of motor skills, and limit their level of functional independence. Children and young adults with cerebral palsy in particular are ideal candidates. For this population, traditional therapy is not always the most effective method to acquire new skills.

What makes the Intensive Therapy Clinic so unique is the dramatic results it often delivers. Participants in the Intensive Therapy Clinic receive a customized therapy plan that increases the breadth and depth of their therapy sessions. For example, instead of weekly therapy sessions that can last for months and even years, a client would spend 3 hours a day for 5 days a week, for two to three weeks at the Intensive Clinic. During this time, extensive progress is made toward a specific functional goal. The results are immediately visible and sustainable, often providing the encouragement and positive outcomes that many participants and their families are seeking.

Boenig and her team use state-of-the-art equipment, such as the Universal Exercise Unit and Therasuit© to aid in the intensive therapy process. Each client's customized long-term therapy and fitness plan addresses their needs at different stages of their development and is often timed to coincide with the clients' growth and developmental spurts. Furthermore, the progress made during intensive therapy sessions can be extended through participation in other auxiliary fitness programs such as the Achievement Center's Adapted Aquatics program or other adapted recreational programs. These supplemental fitness programs are critical to the continued progress made during the intensive therapy sessions.

Families have said they are impressed and pleased with the rapid results of the Intensive Therapy Clinic. For many parents, an intensive model of treatment gives their children the immediate successes that can be so elusive with traditional methods. Also, they experience a renewed sense of hope when their children gain new skills and a much-needed sense of accomplishment.

Families that are interested in learning more about the Intensive Therapy Clinic at the Achievement Centers can contact Bonnie Boenig, Manager of Therapy Services at 216-292-9700 ext 275.

"Ronnie"—continued from cover

In the eight years since his accident, Ronnie has been able to resume his college classes, take up wrestling and fishing and is still an avid outdoorsman. While he knows that having a positive attitude and outlook on life has enabled him to accomplish so much, he says the horses (especially Nick) have made a tremendous difference in his growth. The gains he's experienced as a rider in the Achievement Centers' Therapeutic Riding program are major leaps in the right direction. Through TR, he's found a love of horses, friends, positive challenges, and many accomplishments. Ronnie still has his sights set on a full recovery and he says, "I always hope to do everything better—in every aspect of life." To that we say 'walk on', Ronnie. Walk on!



Ronnie and his faithful companion and therapy dog, Ike.

Children from the Achievement Centers' Child Development Center enjoyed classic Dr. Seuss tales performed by Jonathan Graham at "Seuss-A-Rama," a free literacy event made possible by a Help Me Grow TANF Community Grant from Invest in Children.



COMPANIES CONTINUE TO GIVE BACK . . .



ESCO TECHNOLOGIES

ESCO Technologies Foundation is giving the gift of camp to 10 children with disabilities from low-income families through a \$10,000 donation to the Achievement Centers' Camp Cheerful. In May, Jim Wojtila (pictured with Deborah Osgood, Director of Development and Marketing), Foundation board member and CFO of Aclara RF (ESCO's parent company), presented the Achievement Centers with a check that will provide "camperships" so children have a chance to enjoy a traditional camp experience in the barrier-free environment provided at Camp Cheerful.



Timberland Day of Caring Comes to Camp Cheerful

On September 18, Timberland Boot Company gave young riding enthusiasts a boost by donating 100 free pairs of boots to new and existing participants in the Therapeutic Riding (TR) Program at the Achievement Centers for Children's Camp Cheerful. The riders in this program, children and young adults with special needs, received their boots as part of Timberland/Lucky Shoes' Annual Day of Caring.

Each year, the boot company deploys thousands of employees across the country to volunteer at local charities, and last year decided to step up their efforts through the donation of boots to riders. Therapeutic Riding coordinator Jennifer Stankiewicz said, "Outside of witnessing their first time riding a horse, I've never seen some of our kids become so excited and smile so much!"

Following the Day of Caring, Timberland employees and onlookers were treated to a horse expo, which included family-friendly activities, including a "parade of breeds," pony rides and demonstrations from several TR participants and the Cleveland Metro Parks Mounted Unit.

To learn more about the Therapeutic Riding program, please contact Jennifer Stankiewicz at 440-238-6200.



These boots are made for riding! A Timberland employee gives Therapeutic Riding (TR) rider Zachary Kraley a helping hand during his boot fitting.

TR participants Emma, Malia, Carly, Amanda and Kelsey are all-smiles as they break in their new Timberland boots in preparation for their group's riding demonstration at the 2008 Camp Cheerful Horse Expo.

THE MANY FACES OF CHARITABLE GIVING

Whether it's corporate sponsorship, or a donation in the name of a loved one, the Achievement Centers relies on the generosity of its various supporters in the community to provide much needed services to more than 3,500 children with disabilities and their families each year. Highlighted below are just a few ways this is made possible.

BECOME A MEMBER OF THE OAK TREE SOCIETY



The acorn has become an important and meaningful symbol at the Achievement Centers for Children. To most people, an acorn looks like little more than a small nut. However, the staff at the Achievement Centers sees that same acorn as a mighty oak tree . . . as a symbol of possibility, achievement and growth. It is for this reason that the Oak Tree Society was the name

selected for the giving club that recognizes the permanent, ongoing value of bequests and other planned gifts made by individuals through their will or estate plan. These time-honored gifts help assure that the future needs of children with disabilities and their families' are met through the services they receive from the Achievement Centers for Children. Membership in the Oak Tree Society is open to all those who invest in the future of the Achievement Centers by making a will commitment or other planned gift. Oak Tree Society members receive special recognition in our annual report and receive other benefits as well.

Do you have plans in your will for a gift to the Achievement Centers for Children? We want to encourage those of you who intend to make an estate gift to the agency to communicate your intentions during your lifetime. This way we can properly acknowledge your gift and help you direct it to a specific purpose, if that is important to you.

As the financial demands of a helping children with disabilities grows, we encourage our supporters to consider joining the Oak Tree Society by making a lasting gift to help ensure the long term financial security of the agency and its important mission of helping children with all types of disabilities and their families.

If your estate plan includes a bequest, we encourage you to let us know of this arrangement so that we can say thank you! If you have questions about planning a gift to assist the next generation of Achievement Centers' clients, please contact Deborah Osgood, Director of Development and Marketing at 216-292-9700 ext 224 or e-mail her at deborah.osgood@achievementcenters.org. She will be pleased to answer your questions.

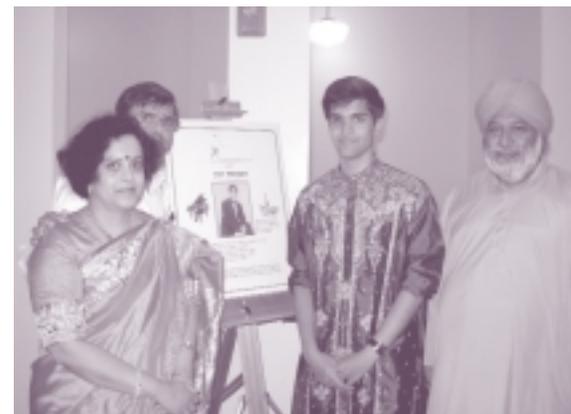
GIVING BACK STARTS EARLY!

ON August 24, Daniel Haldar, a student at Orange High School, held a benefit piano concert for 75 family members and friends to benefit the Achievement Centers for Children. Inspired by his volunteer work with children, Daniel found the Achievement Centers online and displayed his talents as a musician and composer in addition to organizing the event. The event was held at the Solon Center for the Arts and raised \$1,000 to benefit the Achievement Centers' programs and services.

Commencement came with much more than the traditional fanfare for recent Brush High School graduate Sarah Ely. Thanks to the generous donations of her friends and family, Sarah supported the horse stall of one of her favorite horses, Ridge, at Camp Cheerful's indoor barn and riding arena. As part of our Adopt-a-Horse Stall program, donations were made in honor of Sarah, who has Down's Syndrome, and is a rider in the Achievement Centers' Therapeutic Horseback Riding Program.

Interested in naming rights of your own? Find out how you can Adopt-a-Horse Stall by calling Deborah Osgood, Director of Development and Marketing at 216-292-9700 ext 224.

Daniel Haldar pictured with his parents Aruna (left) and Subrata Haldar (second from left), and Tabla percussionist Smastan Singh (far right).



ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS FOR CHILDREN SPECIAL EVENTS

Protect Camp Cheerful Campaign Comes Full Circle

The Achievement Centers for Children celebrated a major milestone at the "Protect Camp Cheerful Thank You" event on September 25 at Camp Cheerful in Strongsville. Community supporters, individual donors and Achievement Centers' staff gathered to commemorate the completion of the \$1.2 million capital fundraising campaign, which allowed the Achievement Centers to purchase land from a developer to prevent the building of a 5-story hotel on land adjacent to camp. Special guests at the event included representatives from KeyBank, the Cleveland Foundation and State Senator Robert Spada. Former and current campers and their parents were also on hand to thank everyone that helped protect Camp's natural environment for decades to come!



Supporters from the community helped celebrate Protect Camp Cheerful's success! Pictured (l to r): Bob Eckardt, the Cleveland Foundation; Karen Sorace-Thomas; Elizabeth McBride; Senator Robert Spada.

Blue Chip/Blue Tee



On August 4, 88 golfers paired up for a day of golf and charitable giving at the 24th Annual Blue Chip Blue Tee golf outing at the Kirtland Country Club in Willoughby. The event, co-chaired by board members David Dunstan of Western Reserve Partners and Henry Centa of JP Morgan Chase, raised more than \$85,000 for the Achievement Center's programs and services. Our thanks to Lexus Champions for Charity and our local sponsors for their continued support! Next year's Blue Chip Blue Tee outing will take place on July 27.

Camp Cheerful Fall Festival

Members of the Strongsville community and other Camp Cheerful supporters gathered for a night to remember at the 16th Annual Camp Cheerful Fall Festival on November 1. A beautiful autumn evening was the perfect backdrop as Fall Festival patrons enjoyed dinner, live entertainment by Time Trax, a silent auction featuring over 50 unique prizes, and Chinese, 50/50 and reverse raffles. The event raised over \$55,000 to benefit the Achievement Centers' Camp Cheerful. A special thanks goes to all of the Fall Festival volunteers and its major sponsors, The Baird Company and Catan Fashions for an enchanted evening.

A Most Excellent Race was had by all . . .



On your mark. Get set. GO! Campers from the Achievement Centers' Camp Cheerful kick off A Most Excellent Race with the Camp Cheerful Classic 100-yard dash.

The Achievement Centers sprinted to the end of our fundraising year with the 18th Annual *A Most Excellent Race*. With the leadership of the Achievement Centers' Friends group, over 700 runners, walkers, and families came out on June 22 to participate in the race and enjoy family-friendly entertainment while they helped to raise more than \$91,000 for the Achievement Center's Camp Cheerful.

Many thanks go to our Presenting Sponsor, Elk & Elk; Division Sponsors, The Cleveland Clinic, Edgepark Medical Supplies and National City Bank; and Gold Sponsors, MetroHealth Medical System, Park-Ohio Industries, Inc., and Victory Capital Management. Our 2009 Race date is Sunday, June 28!

Did You Know?

- The Achievement Centers for Children once again received the highest 4-star rating from Charity Navigator, America's largest independent evaluator of charities. With this rating, the Achievement Centers is recognized for excellence in successfully managing our finances efficiently and effectively.
- The Achievement Centers is going green! Remember, you can now read *The Achiever* and the Achievement Centers' other publications online. Invite other supporters to check out our agency video on YouTube. Start now by visiting www.achievementcenters.org.
- The Therapeutic Horsemanship program at the Achievement Centers' Camp Cheerful is looking for a few good men and women! We are currently accepting applications for year-round volunteers in our Therapeutic Riding program. Lend a helping hand to our riders and experience the joys of assisting children with special needs. No experience is necessary, call Cory Ramsey at 440-238-6200 for more information.
- The Achievement Center's Child Development Center recently received a perfect score during a recent Ohio Department of Jobs & Family Services inspection. Congratulations on a job well done!
- The Senior PGA Championship is coming to Cleveland in 2009! In its 70th year, the Senior PGA will be hosted at Canterbury Golf Club May 19–24, 2009 with weeklong activities. The Achievement Centers for Children is proud to have been named one of the beneficiaries of this prestigious annual golf event. For more information or to volunteer, visit www.seniorpga2009.com.

Family Support **ACCENT**s its Services

Providing a comprehensive “circle of care” for children with disabilities and their families has always been one of the Achievement Centers' distinctive features. Now, through support from United Way Services of Greater Cleveland, that “circle” is expanding. The Achievement Centers for Children is proud to announce its newest Family Support Services program, *ACCENT*, which is staffed by licensed, experienced social workers.

ACCENT provides a wide range of resources and supports to families as they face the various challenges that come with caring for a child with special needs. Each element of *ACCENT* serves as a key ingredient in the overall recipe for success for the children and families served at the Achievement Centers. Some examples of *ACCENT* at work are:

- A** **DVOCACY**—*ACCENT* gives parents a voice when it comes to choosing the best options for their child with disabilities. Social workers provide parents the tools they need to become effective advocates as they work with school districts, medical professionals and other providers.
- C** **OMMUNITY RESOURCES**—Parents of children with special needs may require assistance locating recreational programs or educational resources, or may need help with financial challenges or other concerns. *ACCENT*'s staff provides information that helps families access the resources and services best suited for their children and their family's unique situation.
- C** **COORDINATION OF SERVICES**—*ACCENT* social workers can coordinate services for a family among multiple providers helping to reduce duplication, enhance positive outcomes and reduce family stress.
- E** **MOTIONAL SUPPORT**—Sometimes, just being there to listen can make a world of difference. Families can count on *ACCENT* staff for support and guidance. *ACCENT* can also facilitate support groups where family members can meet with others who share similar challenges.
- N** **EEDS ASSESSMENT**—*ACCENT* helps families identify and prioritize the needs of their child and their entire family. Together, family members and *ACCENT* social workers address short-term issues and look for long-term solutions.
- T** **EAMWORK**—*ACCENT* social workers are part of a multi-disciplinary team that brings together families, therapists, teachers and/or mental health counselors to foster communication and create a shared vision of success for each child.

ACCENT is available free of charge and is now available to families receiving physical, occupational, or speech therapy, mental health services or Adapted Aquatics at the Achievement Centers' Highland Hills and Westlake locations. Families seeking additional information about *ACCENT* can contact Anne Smith at 216-292-9700 ext 231.



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About the ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS FOR CHILDREN

Founded in 1940 as the Society for Crippled Children, the Achievement Centers for Children provides a wide variety of therapy, recreation, education and family support services for children with disabilities and their families. We serve over 3,500 children with disabilities and their families each year.

Our mission is to work with children with disabilities and their families to strengthen abilities and create opportunities for lifelong achievement in society.

The Achiever is published by the Development Department of the Achievement Centers for Children.

Editor: Cariss Turner; Contributors: Patricia W. Nobili, Cariss Turner, Deborah Osgood, Rebecca Bendlak, Aimee Wade, Anne Smith, Bonnie Boenig



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ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS FOR CHILDREN
Services by Location

The Achievement Centers provides services through a variety of locations, including schools, child care centers, homes, and at the Achievement Centers' three facilities. The following is a list of services according to location.

Home and Community Services

(offices at the Highland Hills and Westlake locations)

ACCENT, Early childhood mental health counseling, early intervention program for children ages birth to three with special needs; Help Me Grow Service coordination for children with special needs and at-risk, ages birth to three; child care Technical Assistance Program (TAP)

East/Highland Hills

Child Development Center preschool for children with and without special needs; preschool for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder/PDD-NOS; kindergarten through fourth grade classroom for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder/PDD-NOS; social work and counseling; physical, speech and occupational therapy; Champ Camp and Sensational Day Program (summers only); parent support groups

West/Westlake

Preschool for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder/PDD-NOS; kindergarten through fourth grade classroom for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder/PDD-NOS; social work and counseling; physical, speech and occupational therapy; Champ Camp and Sensational Day Program (summers only); Adapted Aquatics; parent support groups

South/Strongsville/Camp Cheerful

Social work and counseling; recreational activities; residential and day camp programs; Sensational Day Program; therapeutic riding; High Ropes Challenge Course