

LETTING GO

nsa NATIONAL STUTTERING ASSOCIATION

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2008 Conference Memories

Many conference attendees wrote their thoughts on the 2008 NSA conference and what the NSA means to them. Some were sent directly to Tammy Flores, NSA executive director, and many were posted on the NSA-conference Yahoo Internet mail group. Because of the limited space here we edited them, and they are printed as follows. Thank you, writers, for sharing.

That NSA Glow

"NSA has changed my life." I heard these words so many times, yet could not imagine that four days in New Jersey could have such a profound impact on my life.

I attended the conference with my parents and my 10-year-old son, Cameron, who stutters. We were excited, yet hesitant, but soon found ourselves surrounded and welcomed by a group of positive, knowledgeable, and genuinely loving people.

NSA members radiate a level confidence and friendliness that I had never experienced before. I remember thinking, "I need to wear sunglasses, because NSA members glow!"

Cameron had never met another person who stutters. I can only imagine that for a child who stutters, to be surrounded by hundreds of people with the same speech obstacle is both overwhelming and liberating. I wasted 10 years of my life believing that his speech issue was my fault and that the only thing that I could do was say, "Cameron, slow down and breathe."

Because of the golden time spent at the conference in New Jersey, my son, his grandparents, and I now all know, deep in our hearts, that he will be okay. We learned that Cameron's stuttering does not define his life. We absorbed not only statistics and facts about speech research, but also about life skills that every person should be familiar with, stutterer or not.

Cameron now struts when he walks. He is a different person. Several friends and neighbors have mentioned how his self-esteem has soared. When he speaks he holds his head up, he looks in my eyes. He confidently states his ideas and thoughts. My son now has that "NSA glow."

There was once a piece missing in the puzzle of my son's childhood. As a family, we found that perfectly fitting piece at the annual conference. NSA has not only changed our lives, but fulfilled them.

☞ *Cati Cosby*

Getting Goose Bumps

As if we need anything else to make us more relaxed, the conference next year is at a spa?! I love it.

This year's conference, what a good time. I loved meeting so many of you, look forward to meeting you all at some point. I still laugh and get goose bumps when I think back to some of the interactions I had.

After coming home, I met an 8-year-old boy who stutters. Listening to him talk about his fear and shame and guilt made me want to jump in a time machine and bring him to the conference.

See some of you sooner, some of you at next year's conference.

Don't forget to stutter! ☞ *Eric Jackson*

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2008 NSA Award Winners

BY MADISON GARCIA

There is a Franciscan blessing that states, "May you be granted enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in the world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done." Within the NSA we experience no shortage of this "foolishness"; the remarkable perseverance and fierce courageousness found in each of our members serves as the foundation and fuel of the organization.

The NSA's 25th annual conference took place in Parsippany, New Jersey, a stone's throw from the sparkling metropolis of New York City. This year's conference as dedicated to **Nina Reardon-Reeves**, former head of Family and Teen Programs, a stalwart advocate on behalf of those who stutter and a well known speech-language pathologist (SLP). She is truly a gift to our organization, and it was with great pleasure

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Letting Go

BY ANNE PITTARD

Thanks to you, I am finally LETTING GO. I am not a person who stutters, but the proud mother of a daughter who stutters. When Caroline began stuttering around age 3, the pediatrician said she would "grow out of it." What a relief! As she grew older, her stutters continued – not all the time, but when she was tired, excited, put "on the spot" or telling what I call a "he said, she said" story. She was good at hiding her stuttering by not making telephone calls, volunteering in class so she wouldn't be called upon, and substituting words.

Loving my child so much and feeling the pain of her stuttering, I became an enabler. I would order for her in a restaurant, make phone calls for her, and write notes to her teachers so they were aware she stuttered and, I hoped, give her a break. I did my best to help by telling her to slow down, breathe deeply, and think about what she wanted to say.

In elementary school, I referred her to the speech-language pathologist (SLP), but she never heard Caroline stutter. The years passed and it became evident in late middle school/early high school that she was not going to "outgrow" stuttering and that we needed more help than I could give.

We went to see Joanna Stith, a private SLP, together and there was no indication of a stutter until I put Caroline "on the spot" to answer a question. Then it happened, she stuttered. I was grateful that the SLP had heard the stuttering. But after the session, my daughter was in tears and furious that I had made her stutter in front of someone. She was angry for days and I wondered if I had done the right thing. Caroline continued to see her speech therapist, and a bond was created between them that continues until this day. She learned she could make phone calls, order what she wanted in a restaurant, and make a purchase in a store without her mother's help. Her speech was not perfect, but she was able to speak for herself.

Becoming an SLP

In 2005, Caroline graduated from Columbia College (South Carolina) where she earned her teaching certificate and a B.S. in Speech-Language Pathology. In Columbia,

she connected with an NSA support group led by Charley Adams, past South Carolina Speech-Language-Hearing Association (SCSHSA) president. She finally had others that stutter with whom she could connect. She gained such confidence in that group!

Caroline decided that upon graduation she would begin the master's degree program in Communication Disorders at the Medical University of South Carolina. I will never forget the initial meeting with the upcoming class, parents, and faculty – a roundtable meeting which began with, you guessed it, telling your name, where you are from, and something about yourself. The tears welled in my eyes when I saw the look on my child's face. Her turn came and she blocked on her name. There were the dreaded snickers, but this time they were from fellow students who were to become SLPs. After the meeting, we shared tears and anger, but neither of us shared with each other the fear that she may be spending her time in school for a career that might not accept her. Could a person who stutters be an effective speech therapist?

An Unforgettable Time

Fast forward to June 2007. For her graduation gift, Caroline wanted me to attend the NSA conference in Atlanta with her. Charley Adams and Caroline's fellow support group members assured us it would be an unforgettable time. And they were right! Both of us attended as many sessions as we could, exchanging notes on the ones we attended separately, and we hated that we missed some that ran concurrently. We met the most wonderful people: Presenters; SLPs, family members – some who stuttered; some who didn't. All supporting each other.

I learned that stuttering is OK, that my daughter could pursue her career and become anything she wanted to be, and that I was not the cause of her stuttering.

I learned that stuttering is OK, that my daughter could pursue her career and become anything she wanted to be, and that I was not the cause of her stuttering. But I did learn that some of the things I thought I had been doing to "help" her were not helping at all. Those things like "take your time," "think about what you want to say," and "take a deep breath."

I learned the best things I can do are to be a good and patient listener, listen to what Caroline is saying, look at her when she is talking, and don't interrupt or finish her sentences. I wish I had known this many years ago. Particularly hard for me to recall are hectic family dinners when her much older siblings' verbal input was allowed to be "more important" because of the nature of the things they were discussing, such as dating, drinking, drugs, grades, and college plans.

Caroline's passion for her profession and particularly working in the stuttering field became evident throughout the years as she attended and volunteered for any stuttering conference available. She received her master's degree in Communication Disorders in May 2008 and began a wonderful job as an SLP at Goose Creek Primary School in Goose Creek, South Carolina.

NSA Seminar and Workshop

Caroline decided that the Charleston area needed to have a stuttering seminar and workshop. She coordinated the seminar with the assistance of the NSA and Goose Creek Primary School. She advertised with area schools and SLPs via e-mail and brochures. She contacted the local newspapers, which advertised the seminar. Local newspapers ran articles to raise awareness of stuttering.

The seminar began on Friday, April 4, 2008, when Nina Reardon-Reeves, SLP, presented "School Age Stuttering Therapy: Becoming More Comfortable and Effective Communicators" to approximately 25 SLPs and family members from the Charleston area.

On Saturday, April 5, approximately 11 people attended a Family Fun Day.

A Chance Encounter

BY BEHNAZ ABOLMAALI

Parents attended a breakout group where they learned more about stuttering and the NSA. The children had a wonderful time: Drawing themselves and what makes them special, doing the limbo, showing their talents with hula hoops, making new friends, and sharing with each other about themselves. Charley, Caroline, and Tammy Flores, NSA's executive director, facilitated this portion. Also assisting with the seminar were Principal David Owens, Marion Burbage and Richard Fluharty.

I had the pleasure of attending both days of this NSA workshop, helping set up and making sure the food and drink were available and replenished. I learned more about stuttering, of course, and was able to see children and family members open up with each other and talk about themselves during "open mic."

Thank You for This Moment

But the most wonderful thing about this seminar is that I saw my beautiful 25-year-old daughter speak in front of a room of others. She had been "put on the spot," but for the first time ever I was not afraid for her. She took that microphone and was able to share so much of herself: Her passion for working with children who stutter and their families, her love for the NSA, and her desire to begin a stuttering support group in the Charleston area.

Afterwards, I wanted to say something into that microphone, too, but the lump in my throat and the tears in my eyes prevented me from doing so. I wanted to say to the NSA, Tammy, Nina, Charley, the SLPs, teachers, professors, mentors, and friends – thank you for this moment. I wanted to share with the families and children who attended that day that because of this experience, I had just learned that my child who stutters would be OK. I knew in that instant that she would make it in this world and the world would be a better place because of her. I knew she could make it on her own without my "help."

With thanks, pride, and relief, I am, sincerely, *letting go.* ■

Anne Pittard writes from Mount Pleasant, South Carolina.

I'd like to claim to have one of the most unique and telling stories about how I became acquainted with the NSA. It occurred during this past winter break at a bookstore where I work part-time while in college. Each day, I'm thrown into hundreds of difficult speaking situations, putting my dysfluency on display for hundreds of people. My job is a show of how far I've come in finally accepting my stuttering and not letting it affect the choices I make, but like all of us, I still face challenges from day to day and all the inevitable ups and downs in managing my stuttering.

One afternoon at work, Lee Reeves, the former chairman of the NSA, went through my checkout line. I greeted him at the register as I do any customer but soon noticed a warm smile on his face.

"I stutter too," he told me. "I think it's great that you took this job."

I told him with an assured smile: "I've done things that are a lot harder than this. So it's not a problem at all."

Before he left, he asked if I am familiar with the NSA. That encounter lasted less than a few seconds but I was touched enough by his kind words and encouragement that several weeks later, I thought to check the NSA Web site to try to find his name and contact information. We swapped a couple e-mails and as he was both surprised and pleased to hear from me, we met one afternoon for lunch. For an hour, we swapped our "stories" about dealing with stuttering – the years of unsuccessful speech therapy we each went through, the anxiety and depression related to our stuttering, and the path which eventually led us to acceptance (for me, that path led me to the Successful Stuttering Management Program (SSMP) at the University of Utah five years ago). We also shared our desire to educate people about stuttering and to give back to the stuttering community. Lee is now a great friend and an invaluable contact whom I will likely be in touch with for years to come.

I credit the SSMP for allowing me to accomplish everything I have. As opposed to many other stuttering treatment programs that focus on fluency shaping,

the SSMP empowers the stutterer to accept their stuttering and to turn it into something positive.

I started college soon after I left the program, and one of main interests has been my school's student newspaper, *The Daily Texan*, where I've now worked as a reporter and editor for six semesters. With graduation approaching and trying to make the transition into the next phase of my life, I've recently begun interviewing for jobs and internships. I first introduce myself as a stutterer and explain how the challenges I've faced have influenced my desire to go into journalism. When I make eye contact and speak confidently, despite my dysfluency, to a group of strangers, I truly feel like the strongest person in the room.

My encounter with Lee reinforced one of the most important lessons I took from Utah and what is in fact the central theme of the NSA: Reaching out to other stutterers. This summer, I reattended the SSMP, this time in Cheney, Washington, and in the coming years, I hope to get a chance to attend an NSA annual conference. If it as rewarding and inspiring experience as the one completely random encounter that set it off, I know it will be well worth it. ■

Behnaz Abolmaali will graduate from the University of Texas at Austin in December 2008 and hopes to pursue a career in print journalism.

Survey Says...Results from Atlanta '07

BY LAURA MACLEAN

Indevus Pharmaceuticals, a specialty pharmaceuticals company based in Lexington, Massachusetts, attended the Atlanta 2007 NSA conference to learn more about stuttering and people who stutter. We are always trying to increase our knowledge of stuttering (including the challenges that people who stutter may face, as well as the achievements that have been made). Thus, where we were humbled by the breadth of the courses and workshops; further we were inspired by the fabulous people that we met, each with a unique story on how stuttering had touched their lives.

One of the most exciting products under research at Indevus is pagoclone, an investigational medication intended for the treatment of stuttering. While we were at the conference, we conducted a survey along with Veritas Medicine; if you stopped by our booth then you may have participated in this survey! The purpose of the survey was to find out (from people who stutter, from their family members, and from speech-language pathologists (SLPs)) how individuals are obtaining pertinent health information about stuttering. We also inquired about satisfaction with current therapies for stuttering and whether there was an interest in participating in clinical research studies for the treatment of stuttering. We learned a tremendous amount at both the meeting and as a result of your survey feedback. The survey results have been tabulated by Veritas Medicine, and we are excited to share the results with you!

How Do You Get News on Stuttering?

A total of 152 surveys were completed at the meeting, with equal participation by females and males (it is interesting to note the equal participation in the survey given that stuttering generally affects more men than women, with approximately 3 men who stutter for every 1 woman who stutters). One of the objectives of the survey was to find out how information on stuttering is obtained. The majority of survey respondents reported that they watch TV (95%) and surf the Web (76%) in their free time; respondents also reported that they listen to the radio (70%) and read the newspaper (61%).

However, in speaking with meeting attendees at our booth, we learned that few of these "mainstream" news sources include information on stuttering; thus, in the survey, people reported having limited preferences for receiving news on stuttering. However (and not surprisingly), 80% of respondents indicated that the NSA is a great source for news and updates on stuttering, closely followed by support groups such as their local NSA chapters (33% of respondents), online search engines such as Google (30% of respondents), as well as the Stuttering Foundation of America (27% of respondents). Thus, the more mainstream media, including newspapers, TV, and magazines were mentioned less frequently as sources of information on stuttering. Of note, a number of respondents specifically reported visiting particular Web sites such as StutteringChat.com and the TheStutteringBrain.com blog to find out about stuttering updates.

14 speech-language pathologists completed the survey; they reported that they refer to the same resources for news on stuttering; however they also reported that they refer to American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) material. Generally, the importance of electronic media (e.g., e-mail) was highlighted by 63% of respondents as the preferred manner to receive information on stuttering; only 20% of respondents prefer information via postal mail. Clearly, the attendees at the NSA were "connected" to the Internet for much of their information on stuttering.

Current Stuttering Treatments

The onset of stuttering occurred before age 8 for 60% of survey respondents. Because Indevus is researching the use of pagoclone for the treatment of stuttering, we were very interested in how people who stutter may treat their stuttering. Therefore, the survey included a question regarding treatment options that people use to treat their stuttering. Of 93 people that responded to this question on the survey, 65% reported that they are not currently doing anything to treat their stuttering, while 26% indicated that they're undergoing speech therapy (with 58% of

these people reporting satisfaction with their therapy). Regarding alternative methods of treatment, 4.3% reported trying medication (e.g., Paxil, Cymbalta) but none of these respondents were satisfied with their medication, while 5.3% of respondents reported using the Speech Easy medical device (with only 20% reporting satisfaction).

It is important to note that 89% of survey respondents reported that they feel that there is room for improvement in the treatment of stuttering (of note, of the SLPs surveyed, 78% agreed that there is room for improvement). And 26% of respondents indicated that they would be interested in participating in a clinical research study for the treatment of stuttering. This outcome differs substantially from our online survey results (we also collected this survey online from 293 people who stutter and who had registered to receive future information on our pagoclone research on our company Web site). These online respondents had very similar survey responses to those received at the NSA conference; however, in the case of the question pertaining to interest in participating in clinical research studies for the treatment of stuttering, 90% of the online respondents indicated that they would be interested.

We appreciated the opportunity to gain more insight from the Atlanta 2007 NSA meeting and hope our research will assist in providing higher visibility of information on stuttering in mainstream America. If you would like more information or have questions regarding the survey outcomes, please contact me at 781-402-3419 or lmaclean@indevus.com. ■

Laura MacLean is a director in the Research and Development Division of Indevus Pharmaceuticals. She is well versed in the design and implementation of clinical research studies and has directly managed clinical studies involving from 12 patients to upwards of 1,200 patients.

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ODDS&ENDS

FROM DAVID BLAZINA

NSA Members Featured on StutterTalk Podcast

During the NSA's 2008 annual conference, the StutterTalk podcast recorded four episodes featuring interviews and conversations with NSA members. These special episodes were scheduled to be posted in July and August at StutterTalk.com.

A podcast is similar to an archived radio show. StutterTalk episodes may be heard at no charge by going to StutterTalk.com and downloading the episodes or by listening using a streaming audio player. Listeners may also subscribe via iTunes. StutterTalk episodes may be stored and played on computers and portable media players such as iPods and cell phones.

The first episode in this series features an interview held with **Sarah** and **Stephanie**, two college students who stutter. In addition to the audio podcast, a short video of this interview has been posted on the StutterTalk Web site.

The second episode features an interview with **Shawn** and **Drew**, two college students who stutter. Drew explained that he attends the annual NSA conference because, "It is just great...being with people who are going through the same things in their lives from all across the country that you are going through in your hometown."

The third podcast in collaboration with the NSA features **Shannon**, **Annette**, and **Julie**, who are all mothers of teenagers who stutter. The fourth and final episode features an interview with NSA veteran **Russ Hicks** and NSA workshop presenter **Lisette Wesseling**.

StutterTalk thanks **Nina Reardon-Reeves**, **Tammy Flores**, and everyone at the NSA for their support and assistance in scheduling and arranging these special episodes. StutterTalk is looking forward to next year's NSA conference in Arizona. In addition to speaking with many people who stutter, next year we would like to interview fathers and spouses of people who stutter (PWS).

Change for the Better Program

Tracey Wallace's goal as chairwoman of the Change for the Better Program is to illustrate to members how participating in the campaign benefits them and to encourage each able person to be a part of the future of the NSA. Their goal this year is to raise \$60,000 in new contributing/sustaining memberships. From October through December, the adult chapters will unify their efforts by soliciting Change for the Better contributions. Twenty-five people signed up to be Change for the Better supporters at this year's national conference where the additional sum of \$453.00 in loose change donations was collected. They are well on their way to meeting their annual goal!

Thanks to Conference Volunteers!

An extra special thank you to **Erica Lowman**, **Aaron Perez**, **Juan Villoch**, **Mike D'Achille**, **Melissa Lopez**, **Tommy Nguyen**, **Brandie Flores**, **Sally Peterson** and **Anthony Romano** for volunteering your time in helping with registration, the raffle, the auction, shuttles, at the NSA store and in numerous other ways.

Also, special thanks to **Debbie Nicolai** for putting together a great program for families and to **Sarah D'Agostino** and **Marybeth Allen** for helping to make it a tremendous success.

The NSA depends on its members and chapters to help out every year with items for the silent and live auctions. Thank you to all of you who sent or brought something. And as always, a big thank you to everyone who bid on all of the great items. We raised over \$3,000 in the silent auction and over \$60,000 during the live auction. Thank you for all you do!

Vicki Schutter Honored for Volunteer Work

Vicki Schutter, leader of the NSA's Houston, Texas, chapter, was recently honored with two volunteer service awards – one from the city of Houston and another from the President's USA Freedom Corps. Congratulations, Vicki! Everyone at the NSA is very proud of you!



NSA Tribute in Honor of Vivian Sheehan

The NSA hosted a tribute and reception in memory of **Vivian Sheehan**, the pioneering speech-language pathologist (SLP) and advocate for PWS who passed away earlier this year. The event took place on June 21 at the Desert Inn Resort in Phoenix, Arizona, as part of the 2008 ASHA Division 4 (Fluency and Fluency Disorders) Leadership and Clinical Conference. Speakers included (from left to right): **Tammy Flores**, NSA, executive director; **Vivian Sisskin**, coordinator of Division 4 and longtime friend and colleague of Vivian; **Liz Edwards**, SLP and colleague of Vivian; and **Marian Sheehan**, SLP and Vivian's daughter. Tammy delivered a tribute from **Annie Bradberry**, former NSA executive director, who could not attend.

Conference participants and friends celebrated Vivian's contributions in the areas of treatment for stuttering, university teaching, and mentoring of SLPs. Vivian was remembered not only for her clinical expertise, but for her boundless energy, volunteerism, and the warm friendships she shared with so many. A DVD containing two documentaries produced by **Ron Amick** and **Alan Holtzman**, **Joseph Sheehan's Message to a Stutterer**, and **No Words To Say** (featuring Vivian Sheehan) was presented as a gift to all attendees.

AWARD WINNERS *continued*

that we dedicated this 2008 conference to such a remarkable woman.

In addition, the NSA recognized a select group of its members at the annual Awards Luncheon, hosted by Joseph Diaz and Tracey Wallace, both well respected board members and longtime volunteers in Adult Programs.

The first series of awards were given in recognition of out-going board members. The first recipient was **Tim Bryant**, whose groundbreaking fundraising efforts have provided NSA with much of the life which sustains it to this day. His brainchild, Change for the Better, is one of the NSA's most fruitful programs, providing adequate funding for much of our operation as an organization.



The second recipient was **Scott Yaruss**, a highly respected SLP who has worked for years in "bridging the gap" between the NSA and SLP communities.

His vision was one of inclusion, an effort to extend a warm invitation to speech professionals to integrate themselves into the remarkable journey of the person who stutters.

The third recipient was **Joe Mirly**, the former director of Adult Programs, whose efforts on behalf of NSA adult chapters have enabled hundreds of people who stutter to receive support from the NSA in the form of monthly chapter meetings. It would not be a stretch to say that this man is a "facilitator of hope." His contributions to Adult Programs are far too many to list, as are the names of the people whose lives he has touched.

The second award given was for "Volunteer of the Year." This year's recipient was **Steve Kaufman**, a volunteer whose contributions are legendary, in light of the fact that he has only been with the NSA for a mere three years. He has consistently given inordinate amounts of his time to the NSA, from running chapter meetings, to assisting Tammy Flores, NSA executive director, in organizing this year's conference.



The third award given was for "Adult Chapter of the Year." The **Lafayette, Louisiana** chapter was this year's recipient, led by Mitch Trichon, Al Thomas, Heather Grossman, Jill Douglas, John Telnowski, and Kathleen Scaler-Scott, among others. The Lafayette chapter has experienced a year of extensive growth and has spearheaded a number of NSA outreach projects within their community, including hosting a family day and regional workshop.

The fourth award given was for "Youth Chapter of the Year." **The Dallas, Texas TWIST** chapter was this year's recipient, with chapter leader Nina Reardon-Reeves present to receive the honor. This teen group has evolved into something of legend due to the perseverance of its leadership and the faithfulness of its dedicated attendees.



The fifth award given was for "Adult Chapter Leader of the Year." **Jeff Olevson**, the leader of the San Jose, California, chapter was this year's recipient. Though he is still fairly new to the NSA, his energy and positive attitude have provided inspiration to those in chapter leadership, and his ability to effectively run and grow a chapter has served as a model for leaders both old and new.



The sixth award given was for "NSA Youth of the Year." **Sean Hare**, a spunky Florida native, was this year's recipient. Sean sits on the NSA's Teen Advisory Council and has been influential in shaping the course of decision-making within this

select group. He is best known for his sense of humor and leadership skills, serving as an irreplaceable member of NSA youth leadership.

The seventh award given was for, "SLP of the Year." This year's recipient was **Scott Yaruss**. In addition to his extensive professional resume, Scott is also known as a dear friend and mentor to many in the NSA; his gentle spirit and compassionate heart are a joy to behold. In his acceptance speech he declared those in the NSA to be "his dearest friends in the world."



The final award given was for "Member of the Year." And this is precisely the point at which my eyes fill afresh with happy tears, as I blankly stare at my laptop screen, knowing not what to write. Oddly enough, this year's award was so graciously given to **the author of this article**. And, so I am rendered speechless; anything I have done is the least I could do in return for all that this organization has done for me. ■

Special Kids Network Golf Tournament Benefits the NSA

The Special Kids Network, held its Annual Tennis and Golf event, August 2008, at Twin Orchard Country Club in Long Grove. Nina Reeves and Tammy Flores attended the event, representing the NSA by assisting with preparations, greeting golfers, and working the live auction.

Next year's event will be held July 2009 at Twin Orchard Country Club in Long Grove. For information, visit www.specialkidsnetwork.org.

We would like to say thank you to the Special Kids Network for allowing us to be part of this wonderful event and we look forward to seeing you next year.

CHAPTERNEWS

FROM BONNIE WEISS

Columbia, South Carolina

The Columbia chapter met on Thursday, July 10, at the University of South Carolina Speech and Hearing Center. Attendees included three students, two speech-language pathologists (SLPs), four people who stutter, and one first-timer. Aisha Haynes read the opening words, followed by introductions. Aisha and Charley Adams then provided a re-cap of their experiences at the NSA conference in Parsippany. The primary meeting function was to watch the movie "Rocket Science." They watched half of the movie at the July meeting and the other half at the August meeting.

Northern Virginia

The Northern Virginia chapter hosted a going away picnic on July 13 for one of its members. Takumi Fukuda, a native of Japan, has been on assignment with the Japanese Embassy in Washington, DC, for the past three years. His tour of duty ended in July, and he and his family returned to Japan. During his time in the Washington area Takumi attended both Northern Virginia and Rockville, Maryland, chapter meetings. The celebration was held at the home of Chapter Leader Matt Zenkovich. Twenty people were there to wish Takumi good luck and good wishes as he returns to Japan. Guests included SLP Vivian Sisskin, Rockville Chapter Co-leader Jerome Mortman, and Gary Auken who traveled from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to attend. A good time was had by all!

Omaha-Lincoln, Nebraska

The Omaha-Lincoln chapter held its annual summer potluck dinner meeting at Joanie Cahalan's home. They had 17 friends attending, including special guests Rich and Peggy Schwerdt from Tallahassee, Florida. This annual summer meeting is always great as members have a chance to catch up with those who can't attend evening meetings or meetings during the school month. They also had a family join

them this year with their 13-year-old son who stutters. Group members talked with young Evan, telling him how special he and his family are and that stuttering need not ever get in the way of achieving his dreams!

Rockville, Maryland

Chapter Leader Jerome Mortman said that there were eight people at the Rockville meeting on July 1, including a new person who is an SLP who also stutters. The group had a lively discussion on facing life's challenges. One member talked about a recent experience speaking into a microphone in front of a large audience at her church. She said that she was standing on stage and was caught off-guard when they started passing the microphone down the line. In the past, she would have sat down, but this time she decided to face the challenge head-on and say what she wanted for as long as it took. She was very happy that she did so. She also told the audience that she is a person who stutters and everyone clapped for her! Everyone who attended the conference in June had a great time. One member said that he was in an open-mike session when a TV crew from CBS came to film the meeting and filmed him speaking.

San Francisco, California

Five people attended the June meeting. Matt Schmidt says that their meetings are pretty low-key and without a lot of structure. They spent two hours chatting about a myriad of topics relating to stuttering. In particular they discussed various breathing techniques and the difficulty that many of them have incorporating them into everyday speech. Other topics include pros and cons of "speech circles." Other topics included making meetings a little more enjoyable with food and drinks.

Tucson, Arizona

Judith Eckardt, NSA-Tucson facilitator, writes that on June 20 at the annual conference of SID4 (ASHA Special

Interest Division in Fluency) in Scottsdale, Arizona, John O'Hare and David Carless participated in a memorial tribute to Dr. Curlee who died on January 29. He had been the fluency specialist at the University of Arizona and a member of the NSA Tucson chapter for many years. John and David both had been in therapy with Dr. Curlee and they talked about this experience and how it had changed their ability to communicate. Both men were very grateful for the opportunity to communicate this to those at the conference. Did they do it with perfect fluency? No, but they were able to communicate effectively about how Dr. Curlee helped them make changes regarding acceptance of their stuttering. Thank you, David and John, for representing people who stutter and the NSA Tucson chapter.

Support the NSA at your workplace!

You, your family members and friends can contribute to the NSA at your workplace. The NSA participates annually in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). Federal employees can designate #10853 on their CFC form to support the NSA. However, you don't have to be a federal employee to contribute. Each year many employees make donations to the NSA through matching gifts, stocks and many other ways. For more information call us at 888-937-8888 (WeStutter).

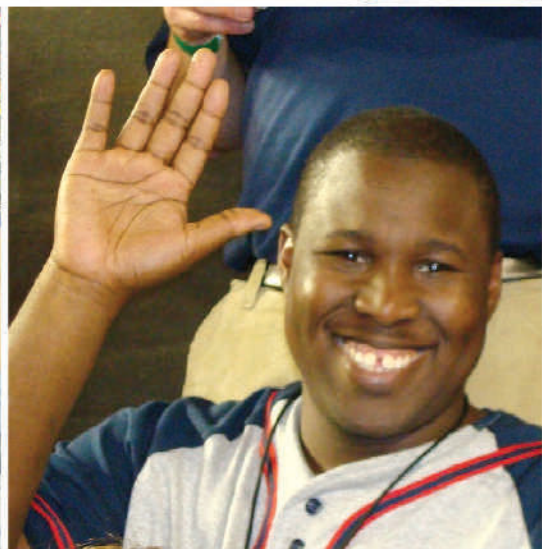
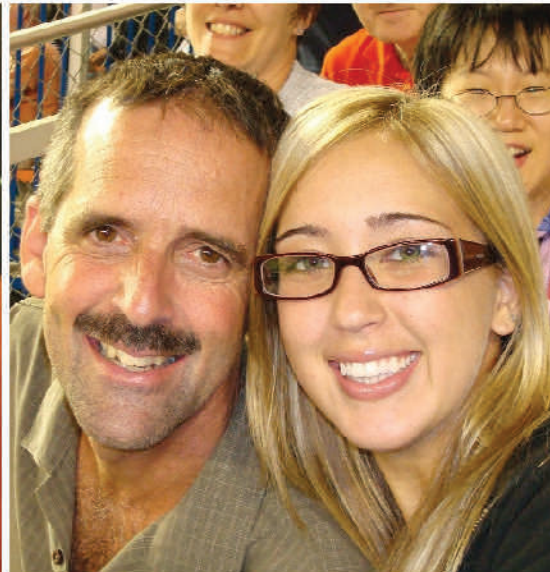
You can also email us at tflores@WeStutter.org.



Were you one of the 631 p
NSA's largest conference EVER
hope to see you in Scottsdale



[illegible]

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CONFERENCE MEMORIES *continued***My First NSA Conference**

What can I say about my first NSA conference? It was life changing, and this year's theme was more than appropriate.

I was born with a severe motor movement problem. I went to speech therapy from the age of 3–13. They had to teach me how to talk. I could not make consonant or vowel sounds. After years of therapy, my fluency improved but my stuttering was still there. I didn't find my voice until I found the NSA.

The NSA opened up many doors for me. An NSA chapter formed in Jacksonville, FL. I was asked to attend, and later asked to be the chapter leader. I then became a Florida Supreme Court Mediator, a member of the Mayor's Disability Council, and then an advocate and a spokesperson in my area for those who stutter.

I have been invited several times to go to the conferences, but I always had an excuse. The excuse would be that it was too expensive. I soon found out that the benefit would outweigh the cost.

First, the workshops were excellent. Steve Kaufman did an excellent job on "A Is for Attitude." He is so right. It is only when we accept ourselves can we move on and have doors open up for us.

Second, the speakers were excellent. Jeffrey Blitz spoke on his film "Rocket Science." His answers to the questions were relevant to all of us who stutter.

Last, the friendships I made will last a lifetime. I already came from a supportive family, a supportive church family, and now I have a new family – the NSA family. There's so much to gain at the NSA conference. You gain a whole network of friends, and you will gain confidence and the self-esteem to go out and live your dreams. You will find your voice. Sometimes the road in life does not always lead us to smooth paths, but with the NSA the road will always lead you back home to the place where we all belong.

Hope to see you all next year! ➔ *Robert Demers*

My 22nd Conference

This was my 22nd conference, and every one of them has been awesome. Who can forget touring Manhattan, late night

talk-a-thons, the pizza, the incredible general sessions, the amazing workshops, the City Lights Cruise, the baseball game, the banquet, auction and dance, Laura and Phil and Bernie and Jamie and 'Iammy and Bob and Anita and Jill and Lee and Marc and Betsy and Lisette and Al and Caryn and The Girl in the Red Dress and Sean and Sarah and Cathy and Barry and Robert and Steve and Brad and Steven and Jeff and CJ (the NSA's own Incredible Hulk), and "first timer Sarah" and Kellie and Sally and Ina and Erik and Peter and Glo and...the list just goes on and on and on. I tried my best to connect with as many people as I possibly could and still I know I missed probably 80% of the people there. I miss everyone so much! My NSA family is beyond incredible!

Now the post-conference work begins. My first job is to process all my pictures. I'll put them up on Flickr so that everyone can see them just as soon as I can. We'd love for everyone who took pictures to put them on the "Links" section of NSA-Conference so that everyone can see them. See <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/NSA-Conference/links/...> and you can see the Parsippany/NYC picture folder. That's where you'll load your conference pictures.

See all y'all in Scottsdale next year! I can't wait! ➔ *Russ Hicks*

Poem: Did You See That?

Did you see that?

Did you see that little girl heading for the stage to check out her Dad, "barking" in the mike, without feeling fear of being heard by everyone?

Did you hear that?

Did you hear those people jamming at the karaoke, some of them amazing, some of them so out of tune, still not giving a damn, just because it was so much fun?

Did you see that?

Did you see that woman, who doesn't let her lack of sight stop her from traveling the world?

Did you hear that?

Did you hear about that woman who was afraid to tell her husband she stutters, but who now found the power to do so?

Did you see that?

Did you see all those kids eagerly running around to ask for items for the scavenger hunt, something they would never have done if not for this conference?

Did you hear that?

Did you hear that girl who cried her heart out during a workshop and found comfort and understanding from the people around her?

Did you see that?

Did you see those people being here for the first time, surrounded with acceptance, support and friendship as if they were long lost friends?

Did you hear that?

Did you hear this group of people sharing things they thought were impossible to them, to do exactly that just a few minutes later?

Did you see that?

Did you see those "first timers," making their voices heard at workshops and open mikes, although some of them couldn't even walk or talk yet, being the loveliest babies ever?

Did you hear that?

Did you hear people who would never raise their voices anywhere, now sharing their life stories with the whole audience during the open mike?

Did you hear that?

Did you hear all those SLPs, parents and other family members, apologizing for being amongst us as they are fluent, not realizing they are our biggest fans and we wouldn't be where we are today if it wasn't for them?

Did you feel that?

Did you feel those hugs and the feeling that you have made friends for life, that you're fantastic and unstoppable and that the sun has come up to never go down again?

Now I don't know how that makes you feel, but maaaaaaan, am I happy to be here! ➔ *Anita Blom*

An Amazing Experience

What an amazing experience the NSA conference was! It was my first time, and I am saddened that I never knew about this before. Everyone was so friendly and made me feel so comfortable; thank you for that. I have never been able to say what I want without fear, and the conference made it possible for me to realize that I am not alone in this world and that there are people who know what I go through every day. It also taught me to accept myself a little more. I can't wait to go to Arizona next year!

⇒ *Samantha Temme*

The Power

I have to comment on The Power. There was so much in the rooms and shared between kids, families and adults, that we could solve the energy crisis if we could replicate the power we had over the 4 days.

I felt The Power in the Open Mic sessions, when so many first timers had the courage to come forward and tell their stories or share a joke, knowing they could take as long as they needed and there would be no judgment, just support. Witnessing that was so powerful.

I felt The Power when people were able to freely express and show emotions, during the Saturday keynote session, and again at Closing Ceremony. I saw so many people with tears streaming down their face, once thought so taboo, clearly here a sign that sharing emotion is a powerful way to connect. I have always had difficulty allowing myself to be vulnerable with others. It is powerful to be able to!

How wonderful to have been a part of this, and share the power of many! ⇒ *Pam Mertz*

Only a Phone Call Away

On the flight home, I reflected on how much my life has changed for the better because of the NSA...a truly grand organization! I try to remain positive knowing that many of you are only a phone call away and I am not alone. I was also able to see some of what goes on behind the scenes in organizing the conference. Once again, a great job by Tammy and the host of others who make this conference possible. Hope to see all of you next year!

⇒ *Dan Koblit*

Homeless at Parsippany

Atlanta 2007, my first conference, challenged me to allow a level of self-acceptance into my life that I never thought was possible. I took the path offered, and it changed my life.

Parsippany 2008, I had my doubts that this conference would be as significant. I had no idea what to expect and tried not to think about what could happen – I wanted an open mind to whatever was before me.

I liked this year's theme – the Wizard of Oz. However, I did have a clue how the theme would relate to my experience. I did not get the meaning as I clumsily tripped over the yellow paper walkway in the middle of the grand ballroom for the Saturday general session. Nor, did I get the message after an awe-inspiring, heart-grabbing, closing ceremony by the kids and teens. But later, as I was talking to Reuben, a new friend, at the evening reception about the magic of the presentation earlier that day, thoughts of home started to come to me – If Dorothy's journey led her to "There's no place like home," could this conference be about finding a home?

I think home offers to wanderers and non-wanderers alike feelings of acceptance and belonging which in turn provide a sense of security. This sense of security is what "feeling at home" is about.

On the flight home, I was perplexed with the thoughts of home as painful memories of isolation from my past came to mind. I have never had a sense of belonging. Since my speech evaluation at age five, I never knew of a place where I had that sense of well being and acceptance of who I am. Could it be, that after 50 years of homelessness, I was finding a home?

Like the Atlanta conference, I think that the 2008 conference at Parsippany has brought me another offering – an offering of a place of acceptance by others and of others and ending a homeless life. If I decide to take this path and it leads me to a home, this will certainly change my life once more.

The NSA is all about not being alone – my local support group and this conference could be the place that I find belonging, well being and acceptance that could end my being homeless – at Parsippany.

⇒ *Bob Wellington*

Tears of Joy

Dear Tammy, I just wanted to thank you again for the most amazing experience in New York. I am so grateful to the NSA for giving my son and me this opportunity to share with other families. Hearing my son say "there are other people that talk like me" made me cry with joy. Until now Robert thought he was the only one who stuttered. Now he knows he is not alone.

I thank you and the NSA for this conference. Hopefully we will see you in Scottsdale next year. ⇒ *Ralynn Snodgrass*

Deep and Instant Connection

I'm still digesting my conference experience. This was my 6th conference – though it seems like I've been to so many more. It was great to see a good many first timers at the conference. I hope your experience was as unique and fulfilling as my first conference was.

I love the NSA and always will. What other group of people can you feel such a deep and instant connection with? With so many common experiences we all share, it is great to come to a location where everybody "gets it."

I'm also very excited that so many speech-language pathologists and parents attended the conference. Your desire to learn more about stuttering and learn ways that you can support people who stutter is commendable.

Thanks to all of you for giving the support and confidence that has made such a great positive impact on my life. ⇒ *Joe Mirly*

An Incredible Experience

This conference was an incredible experience! At the conference two years ago I didn't expect there to be more than just a handful of people who are in the same boat as me, especially during the covert stuttering workshop where I felt the panelists were basically telling my life story. I was amazed by the diversity of the people I met here, people in various stages of life and accomplishments. It's really inspired me to take more chances and to have less doubt in my abilities.

Hope to see everyone next year.

⇒ *Helen Xin*

continued on page 14

CONFERENCE MEMORIES *continued***An Inner Fire**

I was nervous about attending the conference, which was my first. Getting to the motel I got my conference info. I put on my nametag and started on my journey. I went there with an open mind, not knowing what to expect.

Finally said hello to someone and had that first conversation. That changed everything. I learned rather quickly that I had to put myself out there and introduce myself. And by doing that I had many wonderful conversations and met some great people.

I attended 10 of the workshops, and each one spoke to me in different ways. It was so great to hear people talk about some of the hard times they faced, and how these experiences affected them. And how they overcame them. To see every presenter have the courage to stand up in front of everyone and talk about stuttering in their lives truly was magical.

To hear Jeffery Blitz tell his story and to meet him and tell him that "Rocket Science" was a great movie. To hear Anita Blom tell of the struggles that she went through. And to see where she is now. Wow, what an inspiration! To hear all the kids get up and talk. True courage on their part.

When everyone told me this will change your life I didn't really think that was possible. But it has changed my life. I will be coming back, and I want to get involved as much as I can. I'm hoping to start a support group chapter in my area. I now have an inner fire burning inside, and I want to keep it lit.

I thank everyone for being so kind and supportive. I can't put into words how blessed I have been to meet so many wonderful people. And to stutter without being judged or hurried, or ridiculed. I'm proud to have my new "family." I look forward to seeing my "family" next year. I also feel good to know that it's ok to stutter and that I'm not alone. *⇒ Steve Palmer*

The Luckiest Man

It would have been an honor for me to present a workshop about attitude and empowerment, which I did. It certainly would have been enough for me to speak at the opening ceremonies. To win the coveted "Volunteer of the Year" award,

combined with the two other achievements, is something spectacular, and it was a quantum leap forward to becoming the man I want to be.

My first NSA conference was in Long Beach, California. I experienced the apprehension, the panic beginning to set in, as it was building to a crescendo at the front desk. As I struggled with "I'm h-h-h-ere for t-t-t-the conference," I saw other people expressing themselves with difficulties too. It made me know I am never alone.

When I was receiving my award, I flashed back to July 4, 1939, the date of the farewell address from Lou Gehrig. He said eloquently, "I've been given an awful break, but I have so much to live for. Today I feel like the luckiest man on earth." When I had days where I had severe difficulties speaking, I felt like I was facing a vocal death; my chords locked in tight clenches from which I thought I'd never escape. I thought facing this struggle every day was a bad break. No longer do I feel that way.

I truly am the luckiest man on earth. I am lucky to have a very special family of people who understand and get me. For the first time, I belong...and I am going to make sure everyone who stutters will no longer have to feel shame and isolation. *⇒ Steven Kaufman*

Thank You, Tammy

I was watching 'Tammy [Flores, NSA executive director] at the sign-in table. She was pulled three different ways and I am sure had 30 different things on her mind. Then I came up and asked about the going home shuttle. One by one she took care of every one of us. One by one all the questions were answered. 'Tammy kept her cool and had a smile for us all. So 'Tammy, thank you for doing what you do and thank you for all those that help 'Tammy. (I don't remember your names but I still can see your faces.)

I hope everyone will encourage a friend to come next year and join in the fun. I have invited my aunt and uncle to join us for a day/evening. I wanted them to meet all my friends and I also want to show them the friendships that have been formed.

See you all next year. *⇒ Gloria Klumb*

Most Amazing Special Effects Ever!

I was told that this would be a "life changing experience." I have learned to be skeptical of such grandiose claims. If the NSA conference was a Hollywood thriller, the poster would have said "most amazing special effects ever!," "unbelievable drama!," and "a performance of earthshaking proportions!"

I experienced a group of people who are amazing in every way. My fear was the conference would solely be an oasis away from the fluent speaking world, a place where stuttering was not some bizarre mysterious condition subject to ridicule and rejection, and not carry forth any significant changes afterwards. The 600-plus people at the conference certainly created this spectacular oasis however; moreover, I found a powerful reflection of my past and present and possible futures.

I take away shared experiences and stories from those who stutter in the whole spectrum of severity and whose lives span the full range of occupations. I return home heartened by the children, teens, young adults, experienced professionals, retired elders, speech pathologists, persons who stutter, persons who do not, parents and families I met. They shared experiences of courage, conviction, endurance, honor and grace and I shared, in my best capacity, what I have of the same. "A life changing experience?" Five stars and three thumbs up. *⇒ Reuben Schuff*

A Great First Conference

I want to thank everyone who made it a great first conference for me! From everyone who planned it to everyone I met and talked to. I've known people who stutter before and I've talked to them before about it, but it was nothing like actually meeting 600 other people and attending workshops that I can apply to my everyday life.

Since the convention I put on my Facebook status that I was really going to miss the NSA conference, and two people messaged me asking me what it was like because they were thinking about coming next year.

I can't wait till next year!
⇒ Haley Mitchem

The Most Wonderful Conference of My Life

I arrived home to New Zealand after attending the most wonderful conference of my life. I met so many wonderful people, and most only too briefly. I only skimmed the surface, and yet I seemed to be talking and engaged in conversation all the time. Like somebody else said, I didn't know stutterers could talk that much. Thanks all for making me feel so welcome and helping me get to wherever I needed to be. The strength, love, and encouragement I received are truly amazing, and I will never forget it. ➡ *Lisette Wesseling*

A True NSA Kid

I know things are crazy at the conference and there was no time to talk. I just want to thank you for everything. You do so much and work so hard. The generosity of the NSA and people like you have made such a difference in Chloe's life. She is a true NSA kid. She is growing up in the NSA, and she is blessed. I would be a different parent if it were not for the NSA. I know I would be afraid for Chloe and I would think her stuttering could hold her back from her dreams. I now know this is not the case.

I saw lives changed this past weekend. Our roommate was so closed off from talking about stuttering...Chloe sat by her side and held her while she made a phone call to guest services to ask for washcloths. She was so proud of herself for facing her fears of the phone. Her life is forever changed because of the NSA.

Thank you from us from the bottom of our hearts. We are forever indebted to the NSA. And we are forever grateful.

⇒ Julie Whittaker

WOW

WOW...There is no better word to describe my trip to NY.

I felt so great to be welcomed by people I knew, but also by totally new people, as if you guys all knew me from “way back then.” I went to workshops that made a huge impact on me. I loved the karaoke, and the dancing was way too short. Those first timers having a ball and speaking up during the final open mike session in front of a packed room! You guys opened my tear canals! I’m so proud of you!



**The 2008 NSA conference was our biggest ever.
Let's make 2009 even bigger!**

Join us in Scottsdale, Arizona, July 8–12, 2009, for an unforgettable time at the Westin Kierland Resort and Spa. Once again, we have secured great room rates for the NSA.

Don't just come for the conference – make it a vacation. This luxury, 4-diamond resort has it all including:

- A floating river pool and mini water slide to cool you off.
- A luxurious spa to be pampered in.
- A golf course with golf carts that have AC. Speaking of golf, for the first time ever we will be hosting a NSA golf tournament, so be sure to get your name on the list now.
- Amazing views of the mountains and desert.
- Incredible restaurants & bars on site.
- Elite shopping & other restaurants in very short walking distance (5 minutes or less). Or better yet – the resort will drive you there.

For more info, check out kierlandresort.com.

Book your room now: starwoodmeeting.com/Book/nsastutter.

Look for the next issue of Letting GO for more information.

But my best moment was the closing ceremony...I cried my way through the whole thing. To see these kids sing and dance in front of all people, and at least one of them didn't take her costume off at all during the dinner. But most of all to see all of these young people, standing on stage, proud of themselves, having found the NSA and Our Time...to hear them thank their parents and other relatives who came to the conference to support them, so hear them thank their speech-language pathologists who took them there...You guys are what this is all about! And my tears still flow while writing this.

One more word – 'I thanks.

⇒ Anita Blom

Feel the Love

I agree with Russ [Hicks, see above] about how great everything was. I was especially impressed with the hotel. The rooms were larger than in the hotel last year. I also really liked that everything was on one floor – the lobby, the restaurant, the meeting rooms, the bar. That made it convenient to run into people and talk with them.

Although I loved the keynote speakers and the workshops I saw and the opening reception and the NYC bus tour and the banquet, the best part of all was seeing all you terrific people whom I love so much.

⇒ Vicki Schutter

Money Matters

BY BILL SMITH

We reported to you a year ago on "Money Matters" and are pleased to announce that your association continues to move forward on an even financial keel.

As before, we are happy to provide as many numbers as you would like to see, but here are some that really matter. Our normal revenue for 2007 was \$340,000. This includes your new and renewal membership fees, Change for the Better monthly contributions, donations from the twice yearly fundraising drives, revenue from our annual conference and workshops, sales of merchandise and books, and a few other items. In addition, in 2007 we received \$55,000 in donations which are restricted to a specific purpose. These funds were donated by a very generous board member, his family, and his friends, so that members and their families who could otherwise not afford to attend our Atlanta conference could participate in this life changing experience. Only a portion of these funds were used in 2007, so we will be able to provide similar financial assistance in subsequent years.

Our expenses for 2007 totaled \$346,000. According to the usual methods for allocating expense, only 9% of our expense dollars are associated with fundraising, another 9% is categorized as administrative, while the balance of 82% is allocated to Program Services, some \$284,000 that directly benefit people who stutter and their families – including the conference and workshops, our outstanding publications, LETTING GO

and *Family Voices*, our Web site, and of course, the expense of the personnel who bring these services and benefits to our members, their families, and others in the stuttering community.

We sincerely appreciate what you have done over the years to support the NSA and trust that you will continue to support generously our very special NSA family. There are so many ways to do so – we particularly encourage signing up for the Change for the Better program, where each month an amount you select is donated to NSA through your credit card. I do this, and I can vouch for it being a painless and efficient way to support your favorite charity. This method of support is particularly beneficial to the NSA staff – as many of our expenses are monthly it helps to have an offsetting reliable monthly income flow.

We also can receive donations of stock – transferring stock that has appreciated in value is very likely your most tax efficient method of supporting the NSA, and we ask you to consider this form of support.

And, while nobody likes to think about it, we would be honored if you would consider the NSA in your estate planning process. We welcome inquiries at the NSA office in New York regarding the various ways to support NSA, as well as any requests for additional financial information. ■

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Congratulations, Senator Biden

Although the NSA is a non-political organization, we acknowledge that "one of our own," Senator Joe Biden, will be seen, perhaps now more than ever, in the media. Presidential candidate Barack Obama has chosen Senator Biden, who was a keynote speaker at the NSA's annual conference in Baltimore in 2004, as his vice president. Congratulations, Senator Biden.



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Changing the lives of people who stutter

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