



ACTION FOR AUTISM

FALL/WINTER 2008-2009

SEMI-ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

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Financial Assistance Program Initiated

AFA is proud to announce that in late 2008, less than six months after AFA was founded, the organization approved its first funding, under our Financial Assistance Program, to the Felgenhauers...family photo shown above left, and Andrea, during Golf Event Presentation, shown above right.

MESSAGE FROM OUR CO-FOUNDERS

Welcome to our first Action for Autism (AFA) Semi-Annual Newsletter. AFA recognizes that today nearly 1 in every 150 children will be diagnosed with autism. In fact, our family has been directly impacted by the varying levels of the autism spectrum, with 2 of our 5 grandchildren being diagnosed with autism. And we can verify that early recognition and appropriate care, support, and resources can make a substantial difference in the lives of those affected with autism.

In each issue of our newsletter, we will try to update you on the progress of AFA, which we founded on the ideals that, to the extent possible, any child affected with autism should receive therapies, resources, and other support to help them attain their highest potential in life.

Highlights from the first eight months since AFA's inception in June of 2008 include...

- Our Inaugural Golf Event, which generated more than \$70,000, in October 2008.
- Approval of our request for tax exempt status under section 501(c)(3) in November 2008.
- Receipt of more than \$5,000 from our first third-party event (a privately-sponsored Holiday Party) in December 2008.
- Funds distributed for our first family under AFA's Financial Assistance Program in January 2009.

We look forward to building on these highlights in the coming years, and thank you for your help thus far in contributing to our organization's success! AFA has several exciting events planned for this year, and we hope to see you at some or all of them. Please enjoy a happy, safe, & prosperous 2009...And as always, any suggestions you have to improve this Newsletter or AFA in general are welcome!



Brad Buechler
Co-Founder



Stephanie Buechler
Co-Founder



The Action For Autism Team

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Brad Buechler

Vice President – Support

Dan Messmer

Vice President – Events

Brian Buechler

Vice President – Financial Assistance

Sheila Charlton

Treasurer

Kim Hornberg

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Christine Gustus

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Larry Thayer

Tom Warner

Curt Zamec

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Stephanie Buechler

Gail Grabish

Fred Salerno



ACTION FOR AUTISM'S OFFICERS

Left to Right... Sheila Charlton, Brian Buechler, Brad Buechler, Dan Messmer, and Kim Hornberg

AFA HOSTS INAUGURAL GOLF EVENT

Action for Autism held its **Inaugural Golf Tournament** at Pevely Farms Golf Club on Monday, October 13, 2008. Despite threatening clouds to start the day, the sun came out, giving us a wonderful afternoon for golf! After a superb lunch, over 100 players headed out to the course for a four-person scramble tournament. Groups were divided into three flights...Asperger, Heller, and Rett... each representing a syndrome on the autism spectrum.

Following a great day on the course, attendees had dinner and then heard a heart-warming story of the daily challenges experienced by a child with autism, as seen through the eyes of his mother. (for more, please see story on page 6 of this newsletter). The day concluded with a 50/25/25 raffle drawing (with the first winner, Jan & Ursula Niezing, donating their winnings back to AFA!) and very successful silent & live auctions. Thanks again to everyone who participated in our Inaugural Golf Tournament...we certainly hope to see you back at next year's event, which will take place on Monday, October 5, at Forest Hills Country Club.



AFA INAUGURAL GOLF EVENT

Arriving Players at Pevely Farms Register and Receive Attendance Prizes Prior to starting the day's Activities

Through the generous support of our Sponsors, Players, & Donors, we raised over \$70,000 in our first fundraising event! This certainly will go a long way in working to fulfill the mission of Action for Autism... bettering the lives of families affected by autism. We sincerely thank all who helped make the event a success, the staff of Pevely Farms Golf Club, our wonderful donors, and we especially want to recognize our volunteers, as well as our major sponsors.



GOLF EVENT MAJOR SPONSORS

Left to Right... Locherton Group (Brian Buechler), Medical Care Staffing (Tom Warner), TriEnda (Curt Zamec), Cornerstone Financial (Doyle Gustus), TigerHawk Profiles (Dale Hornberg), and McDonough Graville (not pictured)

GOLD SPONSORS

Locherton Group LLC
Medical Care Staffing

SILVER SPONSOR

TriEnda LLC

BRONZE SPONSORS

Cornerstone Financial
McDonough Graville
TigerHawk Profiles

AFA'S FIRST ANNUAL TRIVIA NIGHT

Gather a group of friends and put on your thinking caps for a night of fun at Action for Autism's **First Annual Trivia Night**. The event, featuring an "Irish Theme," will take place on Friday evening, February 27, 2009, at the Maryland Heights Community Center. Soda, beer, and light snacks will be provided by AFA, and prizes will be given for 1st and 2nd place in trivia, as well as an award for the best "Irish Themed" table décor. There will also be Live & Silent Auctions, a 50/25/25 Raffle, Merchandise Raffles, and much more!

Individual seats are just \$25 per person and tables of 8 are available for \$200. Players are invited to bring their own snacks and refreshments as well. Don't miss out on this wonderful event...seating is limited, so reserve your spot today! For more information or to get a Trivia Night Flyer, contact Sheila at 636-449-0352 or visit www.afastl.org and click on the "AFA Events" tab.

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION NIGHT

As a special thank you to the great team of volunteers and their families...who were key to AFA's Golf Tournament...a **Volunteer Appreciation Night** was held at Forest Hills Country Club (site for our 2009 Golf Event) on Thursday evening, October 30, 2008. Most of the AFA Board Members and Officers were on hand to personally thank the volunteers who helped make the Golf Event such a success.



KIDS ENJOY AFA'S VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION NIGHT

Left to Right... Andrew Falk, Lauren Falk, Maddy Charlton, Abby Charlton, Emily Altic, Ashley Messmer, Connor Altic, Joel Messmer, and Bailey Messmer

The evening had a Halloween theme, and the children... and adults alike...all enjoyed "spooky" Halloween décor! Most of the kids wore their costumes and participated in games/crafts, and the evening ended with a Halloween Trick-Or-Treat walk. Each child also received a Build-A-Bear Workshop character dressed in Halloween attire to take home as a remembrance of the event! AFA again thanks all of the wonderful volunteers...you are key to our success:

Golf Event Volunteers

Yvonne Altic	Devon McClain
Abby Charlton	Ashley Messmer
Elicia Darvish	Bailey Messmer
Jon Falk	Daniel Messmer, Sr.
Kathleen Falk	Joel Messmer
Carolyn Freund	Lisa Messmer
Abby Gustus	Amy Pogue
Chris Gustus	Nancy Schiera
Kim Hornberg	Katie Terbrock
Beverly John	Barbara Thayer
Jenny Livaditis	Deborah Walker



WONDERFUL VOLUNTEERS TAKE A BREAK FOR A PICTURE DURING AFA'S INAUGURAL GOLF EVENT

Left to Right... Lisa Messmer, Carolyn Freund, Yvonne Altic, and Nancy Schiera

For anyone wishing to volunteer at next year's Annual Golf Tournament (scheduled for Monday, October 5, 2009, at Forest Hills Country Club), or any other AFA Event held throughout the year, please feel free to contact Sheila Charlton by phone at 636-449-0352, via email at sheilac@afastl.org, or visit our website, www.afastl.org. Other volunteer opportunities include involvement in Action for Autism's new C-H-A-R-P Society. More information on this new group can be found on Page 5 of this Newsletter.

FAMILY FUN WALK AND PICNIC

Please mark your calendar for Action for Autism's first **Annual Family Fun Walk and Picnic**, scheduled to take place in June 2009. Additional details will be forthcoming as plans are finalized, or for more information please visit AFA's website at www.afastl.org or call Dan at 636-449-0352.

THIRD PARTY EVENT

During the Month of December, AFA received the proceeds (\$5,000) from our first Third Party Event... the **Buechler's Annual Holiday Party**. The selfless generosity of individuals, organizations, and businesses who hold such events on behalf of AFA will continue to help us reach more and more children, along with their families, each year! We certainly thank the Buechler Party attendees for their kindness to AFA!



BUECHLER HOLIDAY PARTY

Friends John & Therese Bezdichek with "Rudy"



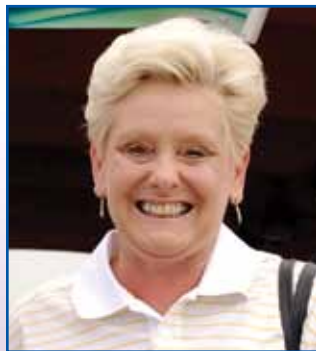
AFA BOOTH AT AUTISM SPEAKS WALK

On Saturday, October 11, 2008, Autism Speaks, the national organization that pioneers autism research, held its annual **“Walk Now For Autism”** event in downtown St. Louis. Action for Autism was proud to have a booth at the event to help promote our organization. AFA Board Member, Tom Warner, helped out by manning the booth and distributing information about AFA to attendees. We feel this booth was an excellent tool to help establish an increased awareness of the services AFA offers to the community.



AFA PARTICIPATES IN THE 2008 AUTISM SPEAKS
“WALK NOW FOR AUTISM” EVENT IN ST. LOUIS
Board Member, Tom Warner, Distributed Information to
Visitors at the AFA Booth, Shown Above

This year’s Autism Speaks Walk saw more than 21,000 participants, a 31% increase over last year’s number...the event continues to grow substantially each year since its inception in 2001. AFA intends to again sponsor a booth at the 2009 Autism Speaks Walk, currently scheduled for the fall of this year. More information will follow as it becomes available.



STEPHANIE BUECHLER
C-H-A-R-P Society President

NEW C-H-A-R-P SOCIETY

Early in 2009, the formation of a special group to further help autistic children and their families came to fruition with the development of the **C-H-A-R-P Society**. This group was formed to serve as the primary volunteer committee to help serve AFA, and the group will also be the key organizer of AFA’s annual dinner auction...the first tentatively scheduled for Spring 2010. Stephanie Buechler, AFA co-founder, has graciously accepted the nomination to serve as President of C-H-A-R-P (acronym for 5 primary types of autism) for the group’s first two years, and she is currently recruiting volunteers to join this most important asset for AFA. If you would like to become a member of the C-H-A-R-P Society, please email Stephanie at info@afastl.org or call AFA at 636-449-0352.

SPECIAL “AFA ANGEL”... TRIENDA, LLC



AFA “ANGEL”

Curt Zamec, with daughter, Katie, and wife, Nancy

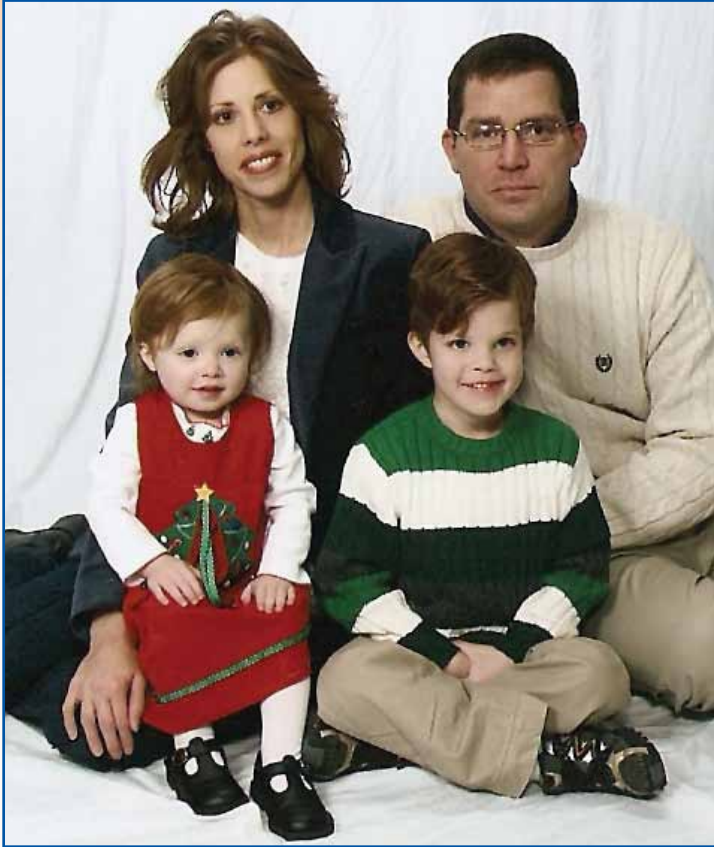
In each issue of our AFA Newsletter, we would like to recognize a special individual or organization who has been an integral part of AFA, through their donation of time, goods, or other resources.

In this, our first issue, we recognize **TriEnda LLC**, which served as a Silver Sponsor for our Inaugural Golf Event and will also be a Silver Sponsor at our 2009 Trivia Night. TriEnda’s majority owner, Curt Zamec, is a Board Member for AFA, and Curt’s generosity has also shown through in his kind-hearted donations to our organization events to date.

TriEnda LLC, headquartered in Portage, Wisconsin, is one of the largest industrial plastics processors in North America and a leader in single & twin sheet thermoformed and custom-designed products. TriEnda specializes in material handling products (including RFID technology) for numerous markets, including automotive, agriculture, government, grocery, food processing, and more.

Curt has been President of TriEnda since 2007, and previously served as Chief Executive Officer of Wilbert Plastics, Inc., where he received the Society of Plastics Processors “Thermoformer of the Year” Award in 2007. For more information on Curt Zamec and TriEnda LLC, please visit the company’s website at www.triendal.com.

AFA'S "FIRST FAMILY" ... MEET THE FELGENHAUERS



AFA's Mission is helping families, and nothing is more satisfying than seeing this become a reality by putting a smile on the faces of a family. One special St. Louis Family, the Felgenhauers, is the first family AFA has helped, making them near and dear to AFA.

The Felgenhauers have two children...Noah, 5, and Natalie, 2. At age 2, Noah was diagnosed with autism and, as you will read in his mother's speech, the lives of the Felgenhauers changed forever. Noah's parents, Andrea & Steve, were kind enough to attend our Golf Event in October, where Andrea gave a touching talk...offering a glimpse into the daily life of a family affected by autism. With her permission, excerpts from Andrea's speech, which left nary a dry eye in the house, follow.

How Autism has Affected My Family...

by Andrea Felgenhauer, Mom of Noah

I'm a mother, a wife, a teacher, a taxi driver, a cook, a house-keeper, a referee, but mostly I'm a firefighter – extinguishing meltdowns and potential meltdowns all day long. Often they come one right after the other and many times without warning. As I become more seasoned in my fire fighting skills I learn some ways to prevent the fires or at least keep them from becoming a four alarm blaze – but sometimes nothing can stop them. How did I become a firefighter?

- because he [Noah] is not able to get the corners of his blanket to lay perfectly flat
- because the smell of bacon (most smells – except the smell of peanut butter) bother him
- because someone is sitting in “his spot”
- because a peanut butter sandwich must be served folded in half so he can eat it down the middle until it is in two pieces, and just watching someone else eat it a different way can start a meltdown
- because he only wants to use the toilet at school
- because the wheels on his Hot Wheels car do not roll in unison
- because he only drinks out of plastic cups, and I accidentally gave him a metal cup
- because the kids call him diaper boy and it hurts his feelings — because he wasn't wearing a diaper — he was wearing a pull up

Autism is the 800 pound gorilla in the room...not something we ignore—one reason being—we have a small house. My husband likes to joke, “Our house is so small—you have to go outside to change your mind.”

I use a gorilla to illustrate how large of a role autism plays in our lives. It takes up a lot of space, a lot of time, a lot of money—and it takes a lot of effort to keep it from becoming a 1,000 pound beast. And although it affects our son—it is NOT WHO he is—who he is—is an adorable, sometimes charming, often hilarious boy with an infectious laugh—he is not an autistic child—he is 1 out of [every] 150 or so children in the United States affected by autism...by the gorilla.

The gorilla is ever present in our lives and in our home and affects everything we do or don't do...

- It affects every relationship in my life—and is the reason why I haven't been able to keep other relationships.
- It affects my relationship with my parents—who have jumped in when our family was in turmoil over what to do next.
- It affects my relationships with other moms—while other moms are mingling and talking at the park together I'm racing, keeping a hawk eye on my child who may be doing something dangerous, thinking about doing something dangerous, talking to someone he shouldn't be, or getting upset because another child won't play with him in the exact way that he wants to play. It's sometimes hard to find moms with "typical" kids who are willing to give our son a chance—once they "find out" he has autism—sometimes it feels as though they think their child might catch it if left to play with our son or they may be afraid that there is something wrong with their own child when their child actually **LIKES** to play with our son.
- It affects our economic status—childcare is more expensive when you have a child with special needs. And the extra time needed to coordinate therapies, stay on top of school communications, IEP's, monthly team meetings, educational assessments, etc. leaves little time to work outside the home. I've read that it takes \$250,000 to raise a child from birth to 18...How much do you think it costs to raise a child affected by autism? I know families who spend more than \$1,000 a month on therapies and interventions—and it still isn't enough.
- Autism affects who I choose to be friends with or who chooses to be friends with me (my family is a packaged deal).
- It affects how I think of myself as a mother—am I doing enough for him? Am I good enough? I worry about our typically developing daughter—are we giving her enough attention? Are we praising her enough?

- It affects my relationship with my husband—he works a full time job and two part time jobs while going to school two nights a week. While he works to make money so we can stay afloat—it's my job to check for leaks along the way... We work as a team—that's for sure...but often times there is little to no time left for the two of us to just be—Andrea and Steve—married couple—because our job as therapist, behaviorist, sensory specialist, and, above all, firefighter, comes first. I've heard reports that the divorce rate is 80-85% among couples raising a child with autism. And I can say the gorilla has definitely tested our marriage.

As parents of children with autism—we race against the clock — to draw our kids out of their own private world—and work hard to give them the skills they need to “close the gap” among their peers—I believe Action For Autism can make a difference in the lives of many families because they understand the urgency and the importance of early intervention—their vision to provide families with the financial support needed to access necessary therapies also serves to give their parents hope and a chance at keeping their family from being a family divided by the 800 pound gorilla. *[Thank you for listening to my story!]*



ANDREA FELGENHAUER
Speaking at AFA's Inaugural Golf Event





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Upcoming AFA Events

Friday, February 27, 2009

Trivia Night at Maryland Heights Community Center

June 2009

Family Picnic & Fun Walk - Location TBD

Monday, October 5, 2009

Golf Tournament at Forest Hills Country Club



*Additional information on these events or AFA in general
can be found at our website — www.afastl.org*