

Newsletter

From The PDS Executive Director

Over the years people have asked me how I got interested in the field of serving adults with developmental disabilities, and my answer is always the same: It was because of my great aunt **Lena**. She had Down Syndrome, and I absolutely adored her. I first began visiting her at Sonoma State Hospital when I was just three years old. My grandpa and I would arrive at her "cottage", and she was always there waiting for us in the lobby. As soon as she saw me approaching on the walkway, she would bound outside and overwhelm me with hugs and kisses. She called me her "Muma Lisa", which was her take on Mona Lisa. I can vividly remember how good it felt to be with her and how much fun my grandpa and I would have taking her to Mary's Pizza Shack for the works—gnocchi, pizza, *AND* salad. I always wished that I could do more with Lena. I thought that once I started driving, I might be able to take her to the movies or to my house to stay overnight for instance. Sadly, she became ill and died when I was a teenager.

As a result of my relationship with my aunt, I knew from a very early age that I wanted to work with people with disabilities. I knew that this was what I wanted not just because I wanted to help them live better lives, but because I wanted to relive all those wonderful times that I had with Lena.

Except for the institution where I went to visit Lena, I rarely ever saw people with Down Syndrome while I was growing up. I knew they were out there, though, and soon I began to seek out people like my aunt by doing volunteer work at "special schools" during the summer. People with disabilities seemed so hidden back then. It was not until my junior year in high school that I discovered there was a class for kids with developmental disabilities on our campus. One day a special education teacher visited our class looking for teacher's aides. We could earn school credit by helping out in their classroom, which had been located in a portable building out near the football field. Needless to say, I joined right up. I loved being a classroom aide with those kids.

At this point, community-based instruction was just becoming popular, and it was so exciting for me to take the students off campus to the store to buy an ice cream or to involve them in a school rally. I even babysat one developmentally disabled girl named Dana, who was close to my age, but extremely ill. At first my mom was worried about me getting too attached to people like Dana, and she was concerned that the people I befriended might depend on me too much. Eventually my family and friends learned that I was committed to the integration of people with developmental disabilities into my life and into our community, and they embraced my "special" friends with open arms.

When I started college in San Francisco, I told my mom I was bringing home a parentless friend, **Joe Argueta**. Joe also grew up at Sonoma State Hospital, and he had no contact with his natural family. He was in his 40's at the time, and sadly, had never participated in anything like a family holiday celebration. Joe is the same age as my dad, and it must have been a little strange for my parents when Joe "adopted" our family as his own and started calling my father "Daddy!" Joe was also invited into my college life, hanging out in my dorm room and getting rides home with one of the soccer players who lived down the hall. When I was a paraprofessional at Washington High School, my roommates quickly got used to me bringing home students to learn how to cook in our apartment. They were great sports when I held a reception at my place before their prom. My roommate even cooperated with me once by clearing out our furni-



*Lisa's Great Aunt Lena
She was the inspiration for PDS*

ture so we could have a dance, which was kind of a mixer for the special education kids and "regular" students.



Joe Argueta with Lisa's husband Leo Giraldi

Once I got married, my husband **Leo Giraldi** learned right away that PDS was my passion and that to be with me meant accepting my clients as well. When my client **Kevin Peak** and I were invited to Japan to do presentations about PDS, Leo jumped at the opportunity to be Kevin's personal assistant on the trip, and the two of them became quite close. He also employed PDS client **Minh Tien Phung** in his first job as a tennis ball boy, as well as gave many of my clients free tennis lessons.

Now that I have a son of my own, I am determined to make sure that he grows up with exposure to all different types of people, including those who have developmental disabilities. Yet, I don't want him to spend time with my clients just for the sake of educating him or teaching him tolerance, but so that he can share the appreciation I have for all the wonderful people that have enriched my life.

One client in particular, **Kasie Sollid**, has become one of my son's best friends. Kasie has been spending every Friday with us since **Andre** was born. Now that he is two and talking, he looks forward to seeing Kasie each week and begs me to take him to Petco with us in order to pick up her paycheck. He laughs at and repeats her jokes and funny sayings, stuff like "Help me Wanda!" (instead of "Help Me Rhonda"). Once I asked Kasie where she ate dinner with her mom, and she replied, "Red Lobster!" I asked her what she ate, and she said, "Red lobster!" And what her mom ate? "Red lobster!" And what they had for dessert? "Red lobster!" Andre thought that was hysterical, and he of course now runs around our house shouting "Red Lobster!" and cracking himself up. He cries when Kasie goes home each afternoon and loves to look at the pictures on the fridge of the three of us in the photo booth at the zoo. It means so much to see the true affection

between them. Once he said, "Kasie is not a mama, Kasie is Andre's friend." Kasie was just brimming with pride when she heard that.

Recently I took Andre to a Special Olympics swim meet. He was so thrilled to see PDS clients **Donna Celestine** and **Lisa Toney** (he thinks it's really funny that she and I have the same first name), and he enjoyed standing at the end of **Robin Sloan's** lane and cheering her on at the top of his lungs. We also sat with **Betsy Leeb** for a while. I have a soft spot for Betsy since she looks and acts a lot like my great aunt Lena did. Betsy, like Lena, can be abrasive at times because she gets frustrated when people don't understand her speech. Yet Andre is not intimidated by Betsy in the least. He was so excited to see her and was happy to share his lunch with her, which is quite something, since being a typical two year old, sharing is usually a dreaded task.

All parents dream of creating an ideal world for their children in which their kids will experience all the best things about their own childhood, as well as hopefully improving on the not-so-positive experiences. I too dream of this kind of ideal world, not just for my son Andre but for my clients, whom I also love. I know that many of you reading this newsletter share in that dream, and I thank you so much for everything you do to make it possible for people with and without disabilities to live side-by-side, each benefiting from the other's strengths and gifts.

I hope that when Andre goes to school there will be kids with disabilities in his classes. I hope that he and the other students will be so accustomed to living in a community in which people with disabilities are present, seen, and paid attention to, that they will not think twice about playing with children who happen to be disabled. In my dream, they will naturally invite them to their birthday parties, share their lunch, or advocate for them if necessary.



Lisa's son Andre and PDS Client Kasie Sollid share a lot of laughs together

There are still times when I feel discouraged, but every Friday, after spending a day with Kasie and Andre, I feel blessed, reassured, and inspired. I only wish Lena were here to join us.

Hellos & Goodbyes

Everyone had a great time at the going-away party at **Ping's Mandarin Restaurant** for **Steve Yeh**. Steve worked at PDS for over two years as a Community Support Facilitator and Job Coach, and he was very generous with both his time and spirit. PDS went all out to show him a proper farewell, hosting an 11 course meal at Ping's, in the private banquet room, complete with Karaoke. Everyone ate and sang merrily, and a few clients made speeches about how they felt about Steve. "I want to make a big hole and bury him so he can't leave!" said client **Kevin Peak**.

Taking Steve's place is **Darian Cash**. His previous job was as a volunteer coordinator for a nonprofit that prepared and delivered meals to needy people in Marin.



Though he has never worked with adults with developmental disabilities before, so far he loves it and the clients really like him as well. "He really makes me laugh," says client **Donna Celestine**. Executive Director **Lisa Giraldi** is really impressed with how easily Darian has fit in with PDS. "It's like he has worked here for years," she says.

As for Darian himself, he can't believe how lucky he feels to spend time with our clients on a daily basis. "Every day's a new adventure," he says. "I love working with these guys!"

PDS Staff, Clients, and Volunteers all had a fantastic time singing Karaoke at Steve's big going away party



Client Spotlight: Kelly Bernardini

If James Brown is the "Hardest Working Man In Show Business", then **Kelly Bernardini** is the "Hardest Working Woman in PDS". By her own choice, Kelly works seven days a week! She shares her time between both **Cost Plus World Market** and **Macy's** in Corte Madera. She has been in PDS since 1991 and has made life-long friendships with both the clients and staff here, especially **Lisa Toney**. She values friendship and family above everything else.

Incredibly independent, anyone who knows Kelly knows that she is always up for adventure. She has traveled extensively on various PDS trips, everywhere from Hawaii to Las Vegas to Mexico. She looks forward to more excursions in the future. When she's not working she likes to go to the gym and catch lunch with her friends.

Kelly is known for her easy laugh and enthusiasm, and she is the direct opposite of WC Fields in that she simply adores dogs and babies. "A loyal friend," is how most

clients describe her. "She's a conscientious, hard worker," says her job coach at Cost Plus, **Katy St. Clair**.

"I love life," says Kelly. And it shows.



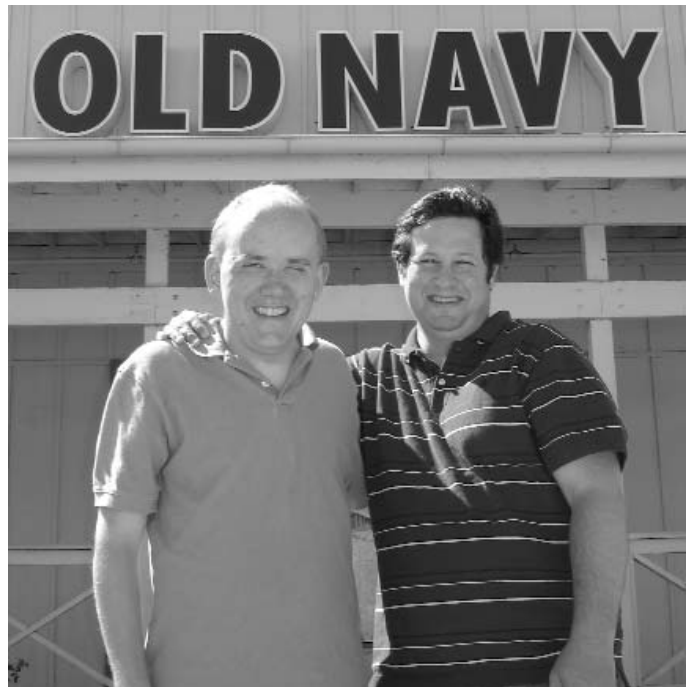
Kelly Bernardini with her boyfriend Kevin Peak

Happy Anniversary!

A couple of our clients are celebrating 10 year anniversaries at their jobs. **Lisa Toney** has worked at **Banana Republic** in Corte Madera for over a decade now! She is a popular member of their team and everyone has nothing but praise for the work she is doing. "Where to start?" says Lisa's manager Stacy, "She comes to work with a smile each day, and every day she is excited to be here. She works very hard, and she takes great pride in her work and the team she works with." Sounds like she is a model employee. Congratulations Lisa!

Another client passing her 10 year mark is **Cathy Adams**, who has been working hard in the returns department at **Borders Books And Music** in San Rafael since 1996. Cathy is a very popular member of the staff, and her plucky sense of humor is really appreciated.

Though they haven't made it to their 10 year mark yet, it only took **Marc Tucker** and **Don Mangrubang** six months to be voted "Employees of the Month" by their peers at **Old Navy** in Novato. "We adore Don and Marc!" says Lara Presti, a manager there, who noted how versatile both of them are. "They are fantastic workers." Don and Marc are very proud that their coworkers appreciate them so much.



Marc Tucker and Don Mangrubang are proud to be a part of Old Navy's stock team

Staff Spotlight: Josh Satt

With his easygoing energy and down-to-earth sense of humor, **Josh Satt** has become "best buddies" with many of the clients, especially those who share his interest in basketball and music. Josh was born and raised in San Anselmo. Before he came to PDS he worked for the City of San Rafael. Besides the close friendships he has made in PDS, he has an incredibly cute 5 year old daughter named Shaelin, and he is glad that she is learning about people with disabilities at such a young age. "This job gives me good karma," he says. "I get a warm feeling and a lot of satisfaction at the end of the day."



*Staff Member Josh Satt hanging out with the guys
Clockwise: Josh, Don Mangrubang, Mihn Tien Phung
and Eric Alonso*

Pacific Diversified Services encourages everyone to frequent the following progressive businesses that employ PDS' Clients

*Banana Republic
Borders Books and Music
Cost Plus World Market
Costco
Macy's
Meridian Sports Clubs
Old Navy
Pasta Pomodoro
Petco
Target
The Body Shop
Whole Foods Market
Woodlands Market*

These businesses have opened their minds and hearts to help people with developmental disabilities become productive, welcomed members of the Marin community.

PDS on TV!

Anyone who watched CNN in the month of April may have noticed that one of our clients, **Robin Sloan**, appeared on "**Comcast Local Addition**" with the Executive Director of PDS, **Lisa Giraldi**. Both were appearing to promote our program, and so far it seems to be working. Since it has begun airing, Robin has been recognized by strangers on the street who stop and introduce themselves!

Fundraising Update

It's funny how the saying "every cloud has silver lining" rings true.

Due to the fact that PDS has been struggling to fundraise without anyone employed solely for this purpose, **Shirley** (Office Manager), **Dave** (Program Coordinator), and I (Executive Director) have been wearing as many hats as we can--making client services our number one priority, but also writing grants, meeting with potential donors, and drumming up any resources we can to keep our clients employed and active. The task has been daunting, to say the least, but the silver lining has been the support rallied among the clients, family members, associates, and friends of PDS to help PDS continue to thrive.

A group of parents and board members including but not limited to **Betty Burns, David and Ginger Koel, Robin and Jennifer Sloan, Pati Stoliar, Stan and Gail Sollid, Larry and Gloria Toney, Dennis and Angela Tucker, Alison Falvey, and Warren Wertheimer** have been meeting regularly to find innovative ways for PDS to get exposure and to fundraise. This group is organizing a fantastic raffle that we will be selling tickets for all summer. Prizes will include themed prize packages such as an Electronics Extravaganza, a trip to Mexico, a spa package at the Claremont Hotel, a Mendocino Coast Get-Away, and a Sports Prize. We are pleased that many employers of PDS clients are also generously donating prizes for our first raffle, including a temporary membership to the **Meridian Sports Club** where **Dana** works and gift certificates from **Banana Republic** and **Macy's**.

Many relatives of PDS clients will be contributing to add dinners to the packages, manicures and pedicures, and sports tickets, lessons and equipment. There will also be prizes for the people who sell the most tickets. The drawing will be held in September, right after Labor Day. More details to come.

Having a committee dedicated to helping PDS in this way has been tremendously inspiring and uplifting for our morale. I am very grateful to all of you who show your appreciation for our services and who open your hearts and wallets for people with developmental disabilities to live their lives with fun, laughter, dignity, and pride.

Generous Donors for the 2005 - 2006 Fiscal Year

Thank you to the following foundations, organizations, companies, and individuals for your incredible generosity in donating to Pacific Diversified Services

\$10,000 or More

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The Thomas J. Long Foundation

\$5,000 to \$9,999

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