

## 25 years in one 'Starry Night'

**National Ability Center to celebrate achievements at gala benefit on Oct. 1**

**Alisha Self, Of the Record staff**

**The Park Record**

Posted: 09/24/2010 04:12:16 PM MDT

Twenty-five years ago, the National Ability Center (NAC) started with the vision to help veterans with disabilities get on the slopes. Co-founders Meeche White and Peter Badewitz ran operations out of their living room with an electric typewriter and not much else.

With funding from Disabled American Veterans, the pair taught about 50 ski lessons that first winter. In the summer, they shifted to riding bikes. "We started with what we knew," says White. "We were just mom and pop."

After two years, the organization moved to its first office a 300-square-foot space at Park City Mountain Resort (PCMR). As operations grew, so did activities and opportunities for people with all types of disabilities.

When White and Badewitz lost the lease on their office, the resort granted them use of a doublewide trailer at the base of the mountain. That trailer remains the headquarters for the NAC's adaptive ski and snowboard programs today.

Other activities, including swimming, cycling, waterskiing, horseback riding, rafting and camping trips, challenge course activities and leadership development training have been added and are now based at the Bronfman Family Recreation Center & Ranch, which lies on 26 acres of land donated to the center in 1996.

In 2009, individuals participated in 15,545 lessons and outings, a growth of more than 300-fold since the center's inception.

Kathy Stott's son, David, has participated in NAC programs for nearly 10 years. David has a genetic disease that is considered an autism spectrum disorder. Since the age of five, he has been involved in activities including aquatics, horseback riding, cycling, archery and skiing.

"It has opened a whole world to him," Kathy says. "There has been nothing that has given him a broader spectrum of therapy than being engaged in activities at the NAC. They have allowed him to develop physically, to mature, and to engage in social contact in the context of recreation. For David, that has made all the difference in the world."

Kathy sees the benefit of the programs not only for her son but for the entire family. "For the person who is participating, it's a great transformation, but for the parents and the families, it gives hope that there is a place where these young people feel welcome, feel accomplished and like they're enjoying life. That's so valuable. It's a wonderful program and I would love to see it continue to expand and grow."

On Friday, Oct. 1, the NAC will celebrate a quarter century of promoting self-esteem, confidence and physical development in individuals with disabilities at its annual fall fundraiser, A Starry Night. The gala dinner and auction will be held at the Basin Recreation Fieldhouse at Kimball Junction starting at 6:30 p.m.

"We will be highlighting the achievement of the center and additionally we will be honoring Park City Mountain Resort for its commitment to the Ability Center," says special events manager Jennifer Atkin.

PCMR has been an integral part of the NAC's success on the slopes. "They are a huge supporter with in-kind donations and they make it possible for us to have our ski program," Atkin says. Its employees are trained to handle adaptive equipment and the NAC's competitive ski team trains there as well, she notes.

A Starry Night will be a coming-out party of sorts for the NAC's new executive director, Gail Loveland, who took the helm in June. "It will be a great opportunity to get to know her and her vision for the center," Atkin says.

The event, which is one of the center's largest fundraisers, will feature interactive displays of all NAC programs, a tribute to PCMR, a video presentation showcasing the growth of several longtime participants, and live and silent auctions. Auction items include various recreation and vacation packages, Sundance Film Festival tickets, a two-year lease on a 2011 Subaru Impreza, fine wine baskets and more.

Proceeds from the evening will go toward sustaining the NAC's year-round operations.

*Tickets are \$250 per person, \$125 for NAC participants or \$150 for students. Tables for 10 people are available for \$2,500 to \$4,000. Purchase tickets in advance at [www.DiscoverNAC.org](http://www.DiscoverNAC.org). For information about volunteer opportunities, donating auction items and more, contact Jennifer Atkin at 200-0985 or [jennifera@DiscoverNAC.org](mailto:jennifera@DiscoverNAC.org).*