

# The Dancing Wheels Company & School

## News Release

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## Clay Aiken Foundation promotes inclusion through the Dancing Wheels Company & School

In the 2008/2009 season, The Dancing Wheels Company received a significant award from The Bubel/Aiken Foundation to help fulfill their mission of creating communities where ALL children can learn, live, and play together. The Dancing Wheels Company was one of over 100 applicants selected this year to promote the Foundation's mission of inclusion.

The Dancing Wheels Company has long been recognized for its award winning, fully integrated in school assembly and residency programs across the nation. Through an artistic approach, the Company dispels myths about disability and the arts and creates an entertaining and valuable message to thousands of children with and without disabilities each year throughout America. The Bubel/Aiken Foundation was established in 2003 to promote the full inclusion of children with special needs into the mainstream of society. The Foundation was established by Clay Aiken and Diane Bubel, a mother of a child with autism. The two met while Clay was pursuing his career in special education. The Bubel family and Clay witnessed the everyday isolation and exclusion of children with disabilities. Many camps, summer programs and extracurricular school activities do not have the means or structure to include children with intellectual, sensory or physical disabilities thereby excluding these children from participation. Aiken and the Bubel family felt that it was necessary not only to create awareness about inclusion but to also create and foster unique programming to include children of all abilities in education,

recreation and family activities. Today the Foundation has developed Let's ALL Play, a K-12 Service Learning Curriculum, and a children's book *Our Friend Mikayla*, as well as supporting other organizations that bring about inclusion.

The Dancing Wheels Company has utilized this funding to reach out to schools that would not otherwise have the financial means for such in-school and after school programming. The Company has embraced schools throughout Ohio and will be expanding its offer to schools throughout the nation. To date the Company has served over 1,200 students with and without disabilities with the Bubel/Aiken funding.

In 2009, The Dancing Wheel Company will have ongoing residencies with **Barrett Academy**, a school with multiply disabled children in Akron Ohio and **Hands That Speak Volumes**, an after school program for teens who are deaf which will be conducted in the Dancing Wheels studios in Cleveland. These children and teens will have the unique opportunity discover for the first time the freeing experience of dance and movement. The children will also have the added benefits of developing a skill that will eventually allow them to participate in other social events (such as dances or parties) that are fully inclusive. They will feel comfortable with their new-found skills and the social interaction that music and dance can bring.

Mary Verdi-Fletcher, President Founding Artistic Director of The Dancing Wheels Company and Jerry Aiken, Executive Director of the Bubel/Aiken Foundation collaborated on how to reach even more children in the future. "The connection and mission of the two organizations are incredibly close" said Mary Verdi-Fletcher. "When Jerry and I began to talk, our shared values and desire to bring equality to children with disabilities were so strong that we knew that we would be a winning team."

For more information on the Bubel/Aiken Foundation, visit their website at [www.bubelaiken.org](http://www.bubelaiken.org), and The Dancing Wheels Company & School or to apply for The Dancing Wheels Company to visit your school, please call (216) 432-0306 or visit

[www.dancingwheels.org](http://www.dancingwheels.org)

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