

Friends of Taktse *UPDATE*

Taktse International School
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Sikkim, India 737101
www.taktse.org

"Thank You" Edition
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The Marion Institute, Inc.
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A Founder Reflects

by Taktse Board member Sonam Wangdi Bhutia a.k.a. Lok Babu

I was educated at a village school. I fear that my English may not be adequate to express the heartfelt gratitude of the founders of Taktse International School to those who have given us so much

support. Hopefully, the next generation of Taktse graduates will not suffer from this language handicap.

To begin with, I would like to give a background of the circumstances that led to the formation of Taktse.

Sikkim is also known as Bayul Demojong, or Blessed Place. In olden times, people from other parts of the Himalayan region would walk for seven days to be blessed by visiting this sacred land. Others who couldn't afford this pilgrimage would take seven symbolic steps and pray for this land. It is believed that even if a person could not accumulate good merits in a lifetime, he or she would not go to the three lower realms after setting foot in this holy land.

In 1994, an initiation and empowerment ceremony called Zhachen Phue Druk Ong/Lung was organized by the monks of Pemayangtse Monastery in West Sikkim, and presided over by H.H. Dodrupchen Rinpoche of Chorten Gonpa, Gangtok, Sikkim. Some of us, who years later would found Taktse, attended this Ong/Lung. On the first night, in keeping with tradition, we went to pay our respects to the elderly Head Monk, Dorjee Lopen. In the course of our meeting, Dorjee Lopen expressed his grief and sadness with his inability to halt the Rathong Chu hydroelectric dam project. He told us that this project would cause mass destruction of flora, fauna and the environment. Moreover, as predicted in the Nyesol, if this land's sanctity were desecrated, then the whole universe would be affected. There would be natural calamities such as landslides, earthquakes, floods, forest fires and epidemics. Dorjee Lopen told us that

since we had received modern education, and also had a bit of traditional upbringing, it was up to us to protect this land.

The next day Dorjee Lopen breathed his last. We felt obligated to carry on his work, so we organized ourselves under the name of Concerned Citizens of Sikkim to stop the dam.

Our protest began with Mr. Sonam Paljor Denjongpa undertaking a 28-day hunger strike, followed by a mass protest against the dam by both monks and lay people. We argued our case in both the high court of Sikkim and all the way to the Supreme Court in Delhi. In the end, the Government of Sikkim closed down the project.



Rathong Chu

In 1999, under the guidance of H.H. Dodrupchen Rinpoche, our group took up the task of organizing and performing Lama Gongdue Drupchen, an important Shapten (prayer for peace, healing and protection) for Sikkim and the universe, which is ongoing to this day.

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In 2000, the Government of Sikkim granted permission to an Austrian group to scale Mount Khangchendzonga, our guardian deity. In order to stop the desecration of our sacred mountain, we approached the Government and the Austrian climbers, but failed to convince them to call off their climb. We resorted to performing Kongso (invoking deities and offering). As a result, avalanches and continuous bad weather forced the climbers to give up their quest.

In 2001, we managed to record two cassettes of Denzong Sunglo (traditional songs) to prevent these songs from vanishing. We are still gathering more songs to record.

From 2002-2004, our group, with funds from the Sikkim Government and guidance from our teacher H.H. Dodrupchen Rinpoche, undertook construction of the 135-foot Guru Rinpoche statue at Samdruptse, South Sikkim.



Seeing how many government modernization projects have affected the people here, by way of massive damage to the environment, increase in drug abuse, and loss of irreplaceable traditional values, we again got to thinking, and thus decided that a school might help solve many of these problems. We felt that in this way we could teach the next generation to respect and uphold traditional values, which are gradually being lost, as well as to cope effectively



with the modern world. This aspiration led to the founding of the Taktse International School.

In the beginning, the school focused on taking care of basic needs like helping the children with their homework, washing their faces, and making their tiffin (lunch), thereby avoiding junk food which is detrimental to their health. We provided these services at an affordable price, so that parents could send their children to our school. The school is located in a pollution-free environment, which will go a long way toward bettering their health.

Our intention is not making money. Whatever money comes in is used for improving the school, providing more facilities to the teachers and staff, and creating a joyful educational experience for the students. We also want to provide scholarships for destitute children, regardless of tribe, caste or creed, so each student is valued equally.

At Taktse, all races and religions coexist together, respecting and learning from each other in harmony.

Another focus is the environment. The children learn to live simply, use resources wisely and nurture the environment by planting trees, recycling, etc.

By concentrating on these values, our school is different from other schools in the region, and offers something unique and beneficial.

It has been seven years since the school was founded. We now have 169 students from kindergarten to grade XI, 27 teachers, 3 assistant teachers, 8 administrative staff, 4 hostel staff, 8 kitchen staff, 2 security guards, 5 drivers, 5 estate staff, 3 janitors, a librarian, and an electrician. Our principal, Mr. Pintso Lauenstein-Denjongpa, is a Harvard graduate.

Taktse's farm has 11 cows and a calf, and vegetable gardens that provide the school with fresh produce.

The school has a soccer field, a basketball court, a volleyball court, and a children's playground. An exciting and sorely needed new Annex Building is under construction.



As H.H. Dodrupchen Rinpoche keeps insisting, we meet here on earth not by accident, but by our past Karmic connection. We are very grateful for your help. Our school would not be possible without all the selfless contributors, and volunteers who have spent their precious time with us here at Taktse. We benefit from your wisdom and blessing as we educate our children with the hope of making Taktse a model of education for the whole world to share. You are planting good seeds for the future of this universe.

On behalf of the Board and myself, I wish god's choicest blessings on each one of you and your families.



Connecting for Change

In October, volunteers Debbie Hilbert, Andy Knapp, Sherry Dickstein, Carla Dickstein, Lonnie Friedman and Paul Lauenstein manned the Taktse table at [Connecting for Change](#), a three-day environmental conference sponsored by the Marion Institute in New Bedford, MA.

Over 2,500 students, teachers, green business innovators, scientists, grassroots leaders and everyday folks gathered to network, see films, attend workshops, and hear renowned speakers such as Bill McKibben of [350.org](#).

The volunteers encouraged hundreds of attendees to support Taktse by leasing [Sungevity](#) solar panels. Every Sungevity solar installation leased through Taktse nets the school and the homeowner \$750 each, reduces the homeowner's cost of electricity, and reduces carbon emissions. Get a free iQuote at <http://sungevity.org/taktse-international-school>.

The volunteers also raised over \$600 for Taktse by selling merchandise such as Sikkimese scarfs, wrist bangles, notebooks, and Maria Lauenstein's new children's book, "Miss Lee and the Mosquito."



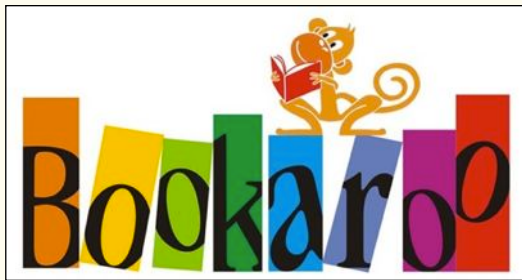
Taktse Wish List

Support Taktse students by providing them with books to stir their imaginations. See Taktse's [wish list at Amazon.com](#). Books and educational games can be sent to:

Lonnie Friedman
4 Gavins Pond Road
Sharon, MA 02067
lonnie.friedman@comcast.net

Visitors traveling to Sikkim will take donated books with them to Taktse.





Writers! Illustrators! The Indian Parliament! Google India! Humayun's Tomb! The Toilet Museum!

Every November a band of Taktse students and teachers travels to New Delhi to attend Bookaroo, an amazing children's literary festival at the Sanskriti Museum. They get to meet authors and illustrators from all over the world. They also visit archeological sites like the Mughal Emperor Humayun's tomb (built, by the way, by a woman), and get a taste of modern India by visiting Google India, CNN India, and the Scholastic Book warehouse to see how books are ordered, packed and shipped.

This year, thanks to Sikkim's Member of Parliament, Mr. Hishey Lachungpa and his able secretary, Mr. Pema Leda, the Taktse group had the honor of visiting India's Parliament. Binalakshmi Nepram, the founder of Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network, hosted Taktse students at a round table discussion about the Northeastern States at the India International Centre. [Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak](#), founder of the social service organization Sulabh International, spoke to our students at the Toilet Museum, and showed us their innovative bio-gas plant.

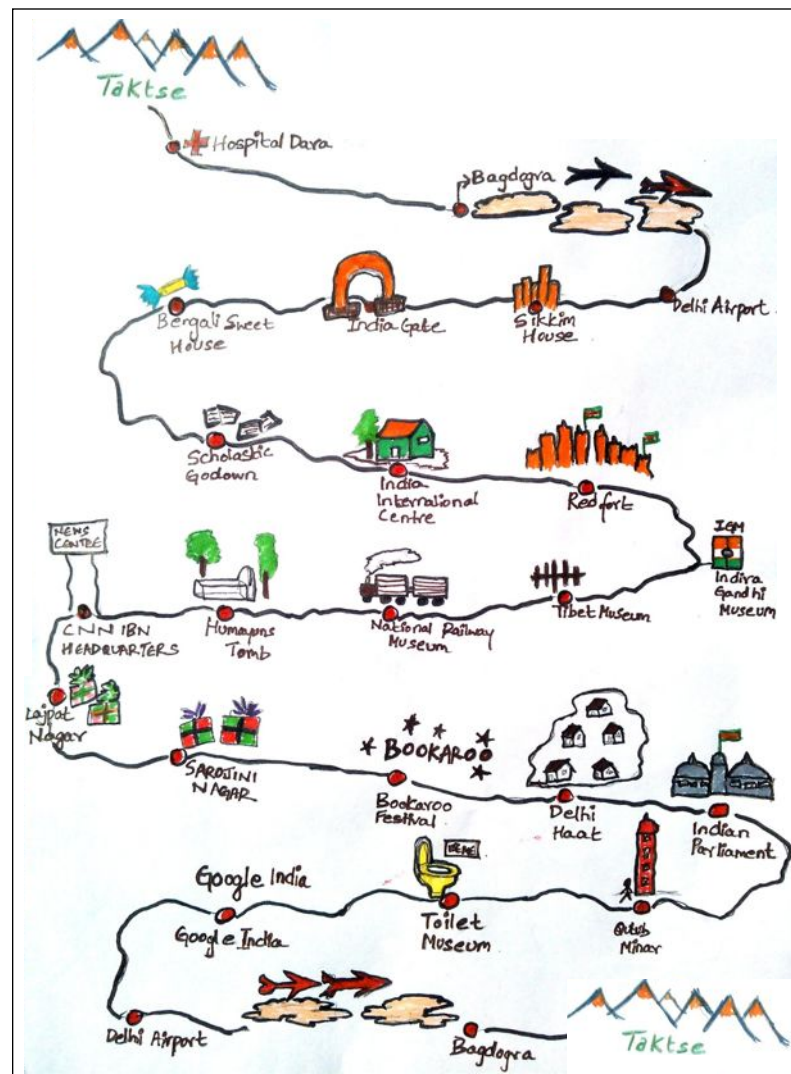
Sikkimese news anchor Karma Paljor and Rajdeep Sardesai, editor and chief of CNN IBN, took time from their busy schedules to interact with our students and show them how the news is gathered and broadcast. Mr. William Martin arranged for them to interact with Google team leaders at Google India.

We are deeply grateful for the hospitality and support provided by these generous people. Their efforts made the trip an extraordinary and inspirational experience for all of us.



Listen to what Taktse's Maria Lauenstein-Denjongpa had to say about her new book, Miss Lee and the Mosquito at:

<http://alpha.authortv.in/author/maria-denjongpa>



Good-Bye Old Road

by Mr. Lauenstein-Denjongpa, Principal

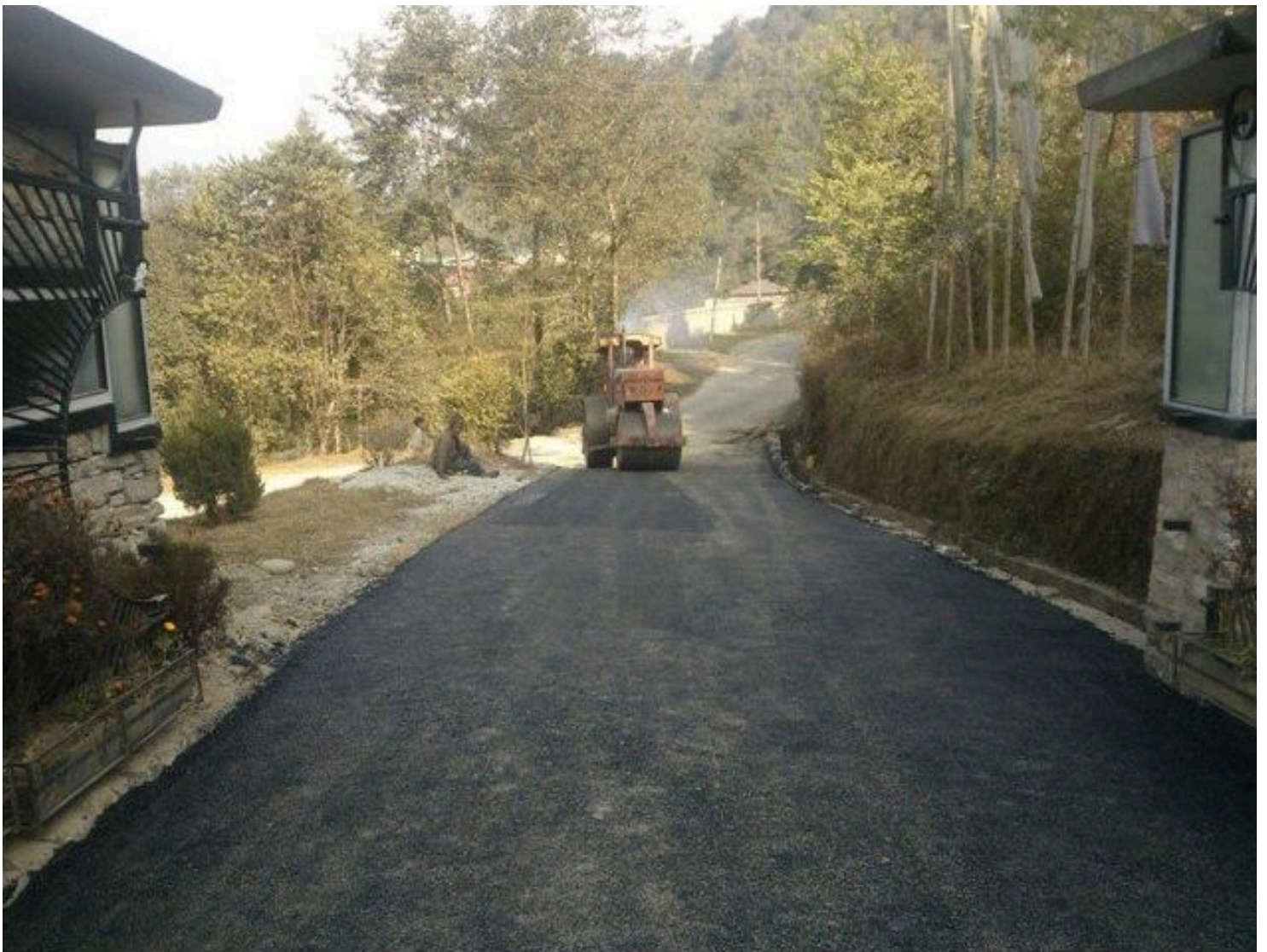
We are ecstatic about the new incarnation of the road to Taktse. It's a huge rite of passage for us as a school. Our students will say to their new friends, "You should have been here before it was paved. Those were the days!" Our parents will say, "Let's go to the Parent Workshop! Remember, they paved the road!" But in all the excitement, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the Old Road, and what it meant.

Any fledgling institution must choose where to devote its scarce resources. In the beginning, when we visited other new schools, we were advised to develop infrastructure first. We were told, "Pave the road, make athletic fields and build a swimming pool. Only after that, invest in training your teachers, if they really need it."

There was wisdom in this advice, but we did the opposite. We invested first in teacher training and educational resources (10,000 books, etc.). We invested in what was happening **INSIDE** the classrooms as opposed to **OUTSIDE**. We felt that our kids should know the meaning of the word "facade" before we built one. Meanwhile, the Old Road served the purpose, despite the bumps and ruts.

Now, finally, the quality of the road is catching up with the quality of the educational experiences to which it leads.

So, good-bye Old Road...thank you for your patience and for all the free Swedish massages! We celebrate your new incarnation and look forward to a long and healthy life together.



Taktse comes to America

Each winter for the past several years, Taktse teachers have visited progressive schools in the United States for training, observation and experiential learning. This is an important part of what makes Taktse different, and helps us blend the best educational approaches of East and West.

This year for the first time Taktse students came along with the teachers. 12th graders Sagun Limboo, Tenchung Namgyal, and Simrin Tamhane accompanied teachers Ms. Malisha Chhetri and Mr. Bhaskar Thapa. Kunga Denzongpa, a student at Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina and sister of Taktse student Songay Denzongpa, also appears in the photo below (4th from left).



Schools Visited

Massachusetts

Atrium School
Gann Academy
Kipp Academy
Mt. Holyoke College
Phoenix School
Waring School
Smith College

Maine

Gould Academy

New Jersey

Princeton University

New York

Bank Street School
Friends Seminary

North Carolina

Guilford College
Wake Forest University

The teachers and students visited schools that have influenced Taktse, and met some of the people who have supported the school from its inception.

Mr. Bhaskar with his "experiential science education" focus, and Ms. Malisha with her "boarding, behavior management and leadership cultivation" focus have identified strategies, techniques and systems that will benefit Taktse. Our capable students have impressed many with their reflections, their confidence, and their fluent English.

They are the first Taktse students that many of our friends and supporters have met, and they make a very good impression!



Dr. Maya Angelou, renowned author, poet, educator, historian, civil-rights activist, playwright, actress, producer and director, kindly hosted Taktse students and principal at her home in North Carolina. Last year the Taktse students studied Dr. Angelou's memoir, [I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings](#).

Want to make a difference?

Share your special talents with Taktse students, teachers, and staff through our Fellowship Program.

See: <http://taktsefellowship.org/>

Mt. Kanchenjunga Sunrise

Photographer Alex Maness made a dramatic time lapse video from Taktse of the sun rising over Mt. Kanchenjunga, at 28,169' the third highest mountain in the world.

Check it out at:

<https://vimeo.com/58208698>



A Shared Vision for a Sustainable Future

Taktse is proud to partner with Sungevity to promote clean solar power for a healthier environment and a more hopeful future. Sign up for Sungevity's solar energy lease program and they will donate **\$750** to Taktse. Plus, you'll receive a **\$750** American Express gift card! Click [HERE](#) to get a free iQuote!

Sungevity leases solar panels in the following states: AZ, CA, CO, DE, MA, MD, NJ, and NY. For a reference, contact Paul Lauenstein at 781-784-2986, or lauenstein@comcast.net.



A Heart-Felt Thank You to Our Volunteers



Taktse International School is blessed with a group of wonderful volunteers who enrich our program in so many ways. While too numerous to name all of them here, we would like to give you a sampling of some of the people who visited Taktse over the last year and the contributions they made to our school:

Pankaj Thapa, a Taktse parent, conducted poetry writing workshops.



Laila Goodman and Christine Carpenter of Gann Academy in Waltham, MA led hands-on science projects and helped to develop Taktse's spiritual/social curriculum.



Christine Stodolski, of Beverly, MA is spending the year at Taktse serving as Assistant Principal while her daughters Grace and Corrina are enrolled in Grades 11/12 and 7/8 respectively.



Brendan Pelsue, an educator from Cambridge, MA, supported our Teacher Orientation Program at the start of the school year.



Corina Charles, Terry Dozier and Shua Marquis, from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, taught our students how to do Spoken Word (poetry) performances, and made a [video featuring Taktse](#). Also, check out [One Shot, One Opportunity](#) by Tenzing and Yugyal.



Peggy Pearson, Director of Winsor Music based in Lexington, MA, helped our students put on last fall's Autumn Collage featuring a variety of musical performances.



David Johnston, of Toronto, Canada, taught our 11th grade Economics Class via Skype and his wife, Kaye Hamilton-Smith, introduced our students to Raz-Kids, an on-line guided reading program, and to Khan Academy, an online library of over 3,000 videos covering multiple topics from math, science, economics, and the humanities.



Caroline Maness and her son Alex visited from Greensboro and Durham, North Carolina. Caroline worked one-on-one with students to support their literacy skills and Alex took videos and photos of Taktse's activities.



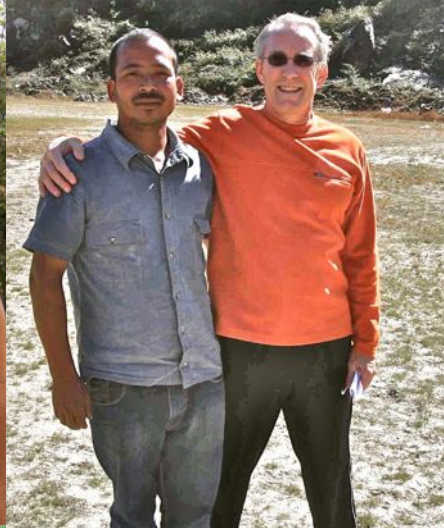
Sam Lasman, who works at the Huntington Theatre Company in Boston, MA, taught our students Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*, and helped them write plays based on life in Sikkim.



We are grateful to all of Taktse's volunteers for their expertise, commitment to our school, and big hearts! They truly make the world our classroom.

With boundless appreciation for the
Volunteers of 2012









2012 Donors

The Taktse Board of Directors, faculty, staff and students are deeply grateful to the following donors for their generous support over the past year. We also acknowledge the generosity of the many in-kind donors, especially His Holiness Doderupchen Rinpoche, and past donors, whose support has contributed so much to our success.

\$10,000 and up

Margie & Michael Baldwin*
Debra Hilbert & Andy Knapp*
Helen & Milt Lauenstein*
Russ Morrison*

\$5,000 to \$9,999

Christina & Charles Bascom*
Deutsche Bank
Sherry Dickstein & Kurt Lauenstein*
Eric Fingleson
Louisa Heyward*
Caroline Maness
The Weissman Family Foundation*

\$1,000 to \$4,999

Mimi & Tom Adams*
Susan Babcock*
Margaret & William Benjamin
The Bromley Charitable Trust*
Steve Daub*
Sean Edrington
Fish Family Foundation/Edward Fish
Emmy Howe*
Michael & Elizabeth Jones*
Ann & Dan Lasman*
Amanda & Richard Lerner*
Celene & Geof Lyon*
Jyothi & David Mann
Dr. G. K. Maravelas*
Evelyn Rice
Claudia Sims & John Vine
Young Man Wah Dilys

\$500 to \$999

Carla Dickstein*
Gloria Eng*
Lonnie Friedman & Paul Lauenstein*
Paula Lajaunie-Viscogliosi
San Diego Fundraiser*

\$250 to \$499

Kathy Adams & Bobby Doolittle*
Karen Friedman Brod & Andrew Brod
Christine Carpenter

\$250 to \$499 (cont.)

David Dvore
Gail Hosking*
Chris Potterpin

\$100 to \$249

Pete Caesar
Catherine Celestin
Elizabeth Strider Dain*
Joanna & David Delman*
Marion Gilbert
Brian Goldberg
Laila Goodman & Barry Moir
Katherine Griffith
Barbara Linane Guest & Chris Guest
Kaye Hamilton-Smith & David Johnson
Zetta and Phil Herrick*
Jung Hoke & Ross Houston
Helena Hughes & Paul Levine*
Lisa & Randolph Huiting
Donna Huse
Jean Ingwersen*
Kyu-Jin Lee*
Sally & Richard Lee*
Carol Lehman & Jonathan Howe*
Debbie Leiner & Bert Fields
Charlotte Coe Lemann*
Paul Lieb
Sarah & George Loring*
Sheila McBroom*
Susan Middleton
Francine Molay*
Sarah Allen Mowitt*
Dawn & Ryan Opel
Conceicao Pires*
Mary Remensynder*
The Ridge at Riverwoods*
Pauline Runkle*
Susan Schwarzwald
Madeleine & Clarence Scott
Ruth Solnit*
Roberta & Donald Stacey
Jeannie & Wayne Sykes*
Harold Talbott*
Katherine Wandtke*
Karin Weber

\$100 to \$249 (cont.)

Virginia Widmer*
Cate & Bob Wineberg

Up to \$100

Spafford Ackerly
Anonymous
Deborah Blagg & Benjamin Staples
Robert Bonne**
Casey Browar
Josh Browar
Ainslee Forrest
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Allie Kleinman*
Aka Lauenstein-Denjongpa*
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Caroline Gar Wang & Ronald Gee*
Wells Fargo Community Support Campaign
Karen & Sam West*
Lisa Young & Richard Zweigenhaft*

*also gave in 2011

*gift of stock

**in memory of Nancy Bonne

