

Philanthropy, Fonzie Style

Like the beloved character he played on the sitcom *Happy Days* for a decade, Henry Winkler is funny, charming, and caring. From the moment he walked on stage during Philanthropy Southwest's Annual Conference in Santa Fe, Winkler had the crowd laughing and engaged. Throughout a humorous sharing of his life journey from New York to Hollywood, he wove in powerful points about his passion for supporting kids with learning disabilities.

Despite his fame and good fortune on TV, Winkler grew up being told – and believing – he was stupid. Not until he was 31 was he diagnosed as severely dyslexic.

“One out of five kids has some sort of learning challenge,” said Winkler. “It is up to us to make sure they are buoyed, and to help them fly like eagles.”

With the help of his business partner, Lin Oliver, Winkler is doing just that. Together, they have written more than two dozen “Hank Zipzer” books. Hank, short for Henry, and Zipzer, for “a woman who lived in my apartment building when I was growing up,” achieves great things, in spite of being dyslexic. “We celebrate the top 10% of school classes,” said Winkler, “and that’s great, because we need doctors, scientists, and engineers. But we also need to find ways to support the dreams and ambitions of all kids with different talents.

“You have greatness inside you. You are not defined by school. Find out what’s inside of you – there’s not one adult in the world who cannot wait to see what you will become,” said Winkler. His charitable endeavors support efforts to increase awareness about young people who live with learning disabilities. “I hope you too will support children in ways that help them get past struggles, because our future lives in very little hands.”