

Executive Director Report Fiscal Year 2008



Dear Friends and Members of F.I.R.S.T.,

Over the past twelve months, F.I.R.S.T. has been continually fulfilling its mission to educate, connect, and inspire our members and donors in a variety of ways. Our four-year strategic plan has provided direction for key initiatives to better serve the needs of our constituency and improve the organization.

One of our major highlights this past year was the family conference in Chicago in June. This conference was our most successful conference in our 28-year history. Almost a year later, F.I.R.S.T. still receives comments and accolades from attendees who learned so much and connected with so many.

F.I.R.S.T. is taking a proactive role in connecting our members on a more frequent basis. The most common theme we hear at the close of every family conference is, "I wish we could connect with other ichthyosis families more often." We heard you and have put things in motion to make it a reality. F.I.R.S.T. will be hosting four regional conferences in various areas of the country over the next six to nine months. Although F.I.R.S.T. hosted regional meetings many years back, this new emphasis will refocus our goal of keeping our members and their families connected. Our first regional meeting will take place on July 18 in Mystic Seaport, Connecticut.

For the fourth consecutive year, F.I.R.S.T. has successfully continued its own in-house grant program, receiving nine new grant requests this year for funding. The careful review of these grants by the Research Review Committee determines the most promising projects deserving of F.I.R.S.T.'s limited research dollars. As the research fund grows, we hope to be able to fund many more investigators and their projects in the future.

From an infrastructure perspective, F.I.R.S.T. has purchase a new Constituent Relationship Management System. This database will help our staff to better track our members, donors, and friends. The new system will streamline data on each family's relationship to the organization and their needs and wants from F.I.R.S.T. This will, ultimately, help us better serve the ichthyosis community.

A comprehensive marketing plan is currently being developed to determine our business and communication objectives. Once determined, F.I.R.S.T. will allocate resources and develop strategies and communication channels to achieve these objectives. A small committee of dedicated board members and members-at-large will be working on this initiative over the next year. Our website will be receiving an "overhaul" in conjunction with the new marketing plan as well.

Despite this challenging economy, F.I.R.S.T. has fared remarkably well over the past year. Although we have all felt the effect of the economic downturn, rest assured that F.I.R.S.T. continues to offer the same programs and services as before. All non-profits feel vulnerable in this economy and this holds true for F.I.R.S.T. However, I am confident with the leadership of our CFO, John Schoendorf, and our board's careful stewardship of our donor dollars, F.I.R.S.T. has and will continue to "weather the storm." Please continue to give to F.I.R.S.T., as every dollar counts in our organization.

As you have read, F.I.R.S.T. has a very bright future. Our committed staff and Board of Directors will be meeting in November to evaluate our progress with the four-year strategic plan, review our policies and procedures, and develop new ideas to take us to the next level.

But most of all, F.I.R.S.T. would not be successful without our members and donors. On behalf of our board, I am grateful for your dedication to our mission and your constant, generous, financial support. In a world of rare diseases, belonging to a community that serves your educational, social, and medical needs, and connects you to new friends is an irreplaceable and exceptional service.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Jean R. Pickford
Executive Director