

Ladies Hospital Aid Gala held at the Westin Convention Center

Tuesday, August 25, 2009

By Marylynn Uricchio, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Michael Henninger / Post-Gazette

Dr. Michele Reiss, Jai Pausch
and Laura Kronk.

Raising money is never easy even in the best of times. In today's economic climate it's especially challenging, which is why the Ladies Hospital Aid Society gala Saturday was all the more impressive. By evening's end, \$800,000 had been generated, most of it earmarked for this year's cause -- funding research in the battle against pancreatic cancer, colon cancer and digestive diseases.

It was fitting that Jai Pausch, the gracious and articulate widow of Dr. Randy Pausch, served as honorary chair for "Come Fly With Me." His very public fight against pancreatic cancer made him the most unlikely national celebrity, and his "Last Lecture" inspired millions with its positive message.

"This evening is an opportunity to continue my healing process," Mrs. Pausch said as she acknowledged the doctors and nurses at UPMC who had helped her husband. She added that the researchers were "working in a field that is not as widely supported as it could or should be."

Mrs. Pausch was introduced by LHAS president Laura Penrod Kronk (with Claude) and WTAE's Sally Wiggin, who served as emcee. Both women wore wigs from the Hillman Cancer Center, as did some committee members including former president June Yonas. It was a way to call attention to another service supported by LHAS, which has donated \$13.5 million to the health care field in its 111 years of existence. Also welcoming the 300 or so guests were gala chairs Lisa Gaydos (with Joe), Sally Golden (with Tom) and Carole Schuman (with Joel), and the special guest was Dr. David Whitcomb.

Such a serious mission, so of course the rest of the evening was pure fun. The Westin Convention Center ballroom was breathtaking, an effect only event planner extraordinaire Bonnie Walker (a member of LHAS who donated her services) can create. The walls and ceiling were covered with white draping and butterfly light patterns for an ethereal atmosphere. Simple orchids in giant rectangular vases centered the tables. The hotel staff did an excellent job with a bibb lettuce and shrimp salad, filet mignon and black cod and several desserts topped with a chocolate butterfly (courtesy of Frank and Athena Sarris). The talented Jessica Lee sang sultry standards during dinner, and before and after Gary Racan and the studio-e Band kept the crowd well entertained on the dance floor.

Who was there? Dr. David and Barbara Adelson, in from Phoenix, newlyweds Beverly and Jack Weinstein, Debi Wheeler, Cate Linn, Drs. Ellen and Loren Roth, Dr. James and Ruby Kang, Barbara Barry, Bryan and Jodi Amos from sponsor Fifth Third Bank, Nadav and Nancy Baum, Susan Hurwitz, Jackie Dixon from the Giant Eagle Foundation, Diane and Jerry Holder, Dr. Pausch's doctors -- Dr. Herbert Zeh and Dr. James Moser, Sam and Joanie Kamin, Jack and Dolly Warwick, Judge Robert and Vi Gallo and LHAS executive director Dee Dee Troutman.

First published on August 25, 2009 at 7:01 am