

FUNDRAISING MILESTONE

Non-Profit Breaks Area Fundraising Record

Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation raises \$1.3M at Promise Ball

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Today

It was a night to remember. The local Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation reached the impossible dream; it topped an improbable fundraising goal of \$1 million by \$300,000 at its annual Promise Ball on May 5.

During the past two years, the foundation raised \$600,000 and \$800,000 respectively at its annual galas. While fundraising milestones, the organization wanted to raise the bar, and donate even more towards finding a cure for the disease.

William & Christiane O'Brien



Youth ambassadors, sisters Hannah Corcoran, 11, and Meghan Corcoran, 10, of Simsbury, received a standing ovation at the Promise Ball after sharing their stories about living with juvenile diabetes.

Prodded by Anthony Sisti, the president of the organization's board of directors, and with more than 100 volunteers, the organization set off to beat its own record.

One month before the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation North Central Connecticut/Western Massachusetts Chapter was to host its annual ball, it had raised just half of its goal — \$500,000 — through ticket sales and online auction items.

While an enviable amount by most standards, it fell far short of JDRF's ambitious \$1 million fundraising goal.

Just two days before the May 5 ball, the group was still behind by nearly \$200,000.

The question loomed; could the organization reach what even some stalwart JDRF supporters considered a fantasy?

All-Time Record

Until the night ended, no one knew. But when all the donations were tallied on the night of the ball, the nonprofit had not only met its \$1 million goal, it beat it by raising \$500,000 more than it had in the previous year, netting \$1.3 million.

On the night of the ball, Sisti was confident, but he also realized it would be a stretch. "We just never expected to hit it out of the park like this," he said.

"You can only go back to the same well so many times before it dries up," he said, referring to the fact that the same corporations and donors are asked to give year after year.

Personal networking by all the volunteers and a can-do attitude put the organization over the top to reach yet another fundraising milestone, he said.

"Using my Olympic analogy, we did take home the gold and we did break the world record in Hartford," Sisti said. He realized afterwards that the organization raised nearly as much in one night as it did with the two previous record-breaking galas, which in their own rights were also record-breaking events.

Sisti said that many of the 800 attending the ball wanted to play a part in creating the region's fundraising history. "There was definitely electricity in the air," he said. "It certainly was a shining moment for Hartford. There was civic pride for those who were there."

Raising The Bar

Ellen Kellie, in charge of JDRF's special events, agreed. "That night was incredible. It was, without a question, far beyond our expectations," she said.

JFDR's youth ambassadors, sisters Hannah Corcoran, 11, and Meghan Corcoran, 10, of Simsbury, were among the highlights of the event. The sisters received a standing ovation after sharing their stories about living with juvenile diabetes.

"People were standing with tears in their eyes," Kellie said. "They talked about what diabetes meant to their whole family, how much work it is. It was very poignant."

Three-Year Plan

The organization's dream started about three years ago when Sisti told the organization's board that he wanted to do something no other nonprofit had ever accomplished in the region — raise \$1 million at one event. The highest ever raised in greater Hartford was \$800,000.

Last month, Sisti acknowledged that the \$1 million goal was ambitious. "I'm looking at the goal post and I'm not naïve. A million dollars is a lot of money in any economy," he said.

But the stars were aligned just right on May 5. Kellie said

Some of the same auction items — a trip to Hawaii, a vacation at the Nicaragua home of Travis Knight, a former Celtics basketball player, and a private wine dinner at the Chef's Table at Max Downtown for 10 – raised double as compared to last year.

The event also attracted a larger crowd this year as compared to last year's, up by 150 people.

When the event's emcee Kevin Nathan, sports director for WVIT Channel 30, an NBC affiliate, announced the fundraising total at the end of the evening, the volunteers became emotional, Kellie said.

"Tears were streaming down their faces," she said. "Tony Sisti and [the leadership team] were all on the stage hugging."

So what's next?

With a proclamation from the governor in hand and \$1.3 million to donate towards more research to find a cure for juvenile diabetes, Kellie said, "We want to bask for couple of days."