

Evanston Community Foundation raises more than \$200K at annual benefit

Bailey Williams , Reporter

With record-breaking attendance, the Evanston Community Foundation's annual benefit raised \$221,000 more than \$100,000 Saturday night.

"Wonderful time to come together with community members," said Sara Schastok, president and CEO of the foundation. "To talk, laugh, celebrate the place we call home."

In addition to the fundraising haul, ECF sold out 300 tickets for the benefit at \$150 each. The program, which was held from 6:30-10 p.m. at the Levy Senior Center, 300 Dodge Ave., featured a sketch based on "It's a Wonderful Life" with cameos by U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), former Evanston Mayor Jay Lytle and Eric Witherspoon, superintendent of Evanston Township High School District 202. The skit showed what Evanston would look like without the foundation.

"Politicians never turn down the opportunity for a microphone," Lytle said of his role in the performance, adding he felt like a thespian — at least for the night.

Dance Marathon sold bracelets for a trivia game and gathered donor information at the event. Every year, DM gives 10 percent of the money it raises to ECF.

Anna Radoff, executive co-chair of DM, said her group works with ECF because it is "important to continue to give back to the community we live in," especially for NU students. The event allows DM and ECF to discuss how the money they raise is used, she added.

NBC-5 reporter Christian Farr returned as an emcee for the benefit. He spoke of his connection to Evanston through his wife, who grew up in the city and graduated from the Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications.

Last year, the event was held at the Woman's Club of Evanston, a smaller venue. This year, ECF hoped to increase attendance and fundraising with a larger space at the senior center. Lisa Altenbernd, co-chair of the benefit, said the foundation not only reached its goal with attendance, but also had a waiting list.

With the trivia game, participants paid \$20 to play and received a wristband that they held above their heads if they thought the question was true and behind their rears if they thought the question was false. After five questions, the competition ended in a continued coin toss, eventually resulting in two winners.

Evanston bakeries and restaurants donated birthday cakes for the first time to the event, marking the city's 150th anniversary. The benefit's attendees were able to vote for their favorite cake upon entering the event and claiming their name tag. Quince at the Homestead, 1625 Hinman Ave., won for the restaurant category, with what it called a "pumpkin cake with cinnamon Italian buttercream and fall spiced pecans."

The event focused on Evanston and making use of what the town has to offer, Altenbernd said. ECF does not offer direct programming but encourages collaboration between city organizations. Altenbernd said this model not only requires more education on the foundation's part, but also produces an "exponential effect" where even a dollar pays off in more than one way.

Clarification: A previous version of this story said the benefit raised more than \$100,000. The benefit raised \$221,000. The headline was also updated to reflect this change.

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