

Headwaters Health Care Foundation Gala raises \$380,000 for local hospital



By Brian Lockhart

An air of French culture drifted through the ballroom at the annual Headwaters Health Care Foundation Gala held at the Hockley Valley Resort last Saturday (May 4) evening.

The theme was Spring Time in Paris and many guests donned appropriate continental attire, which added a flare of fashion and frivolity to the event.

The Gala is the Foundation's largest fundraiser of the year.

Many people do not realize that capital equipment for Ontario hospitals is not provided through government funding, but is supplied through the fundraising efforts of the local hospital foundations and generous donors.

"The Gala is our premier fundraiser in terms of raising money for priority equipment at the hospital, both new and replacement equipment," explained Foundation executive director, Dora Boylen-Pabst. "We have four events each year. This is our largest by far in terms of size and revenue. We have a 'field hospital' here tonight. Those are smaller pieces of equipment usually under \$3,500, that are needed across the hospital. We have a live auction tonight with a goal of \$150,000 for larger scale pieces including five new beds, bassinets, and telemetry systems which are critical for heart patients. This is part of our annual effort to raise over \$2 million for priority equipment at the hospital."

Around 400 guests attended the gala. The event was sold out early this year.

"The \$2 million is the Foundation's goal for equipment specifically," Ms. Boylen-Pabst explained. "We also have other fundraising efforts we are working on. We as a foundation are hoping to raise over \$3,500,000. This year there are a couple of special projects. The largest is a complete lobby redesign and refresh to introduce a better registration process for patients and their families and improve the flow of the hospital."

The Gala takes a year to plan with committee members putting their efforts into next year's function soon after this year's event is over.

"We've had several themes over the years," explained Sarah Mailhot, Foundation board and Gala Committee member. "We've had the Kentucky Derby and Hollywood that was last year. We had the Roaring 20's because we celebrated 20 years of the Gala. In the

end, the job is to raise money for the hospital. The different departments of the hospital will submit a list of the most urgent needs that they have. The hospital services a lot of people and a lot of needs. The Gala raises a lot of money and I love seeing our community be generous. No one has to give, but this brings out the best in people.?

At the Field Hospital display, nurse Denise Erskine, who works in the administrative side of nursing at the hospital, showed visitors some of the equipment the hospital needs to purchase. The display featured bassinets for babies, and different tables and units that are specifically designed for hospital use.

Because the need is for specialty items designed to be used in a hospital setting, they are expensive.

?They need to hold the equipment properly. They need to be cleaned properly after use due to blood exposure,? Ms. Erskine explained. ?These are specifically designed for health care.?

Ms. Erskine pointed out features that are specific to a hospital setting and showed how even a bassinet is uniquely designed for a specific function.

?Even something like this bassinet ? the only way babies are allowed to be moved through the hospital is if they are in one of these. It's a safety precaution. It has to be able to roll properly. The shape and design are important. The type of plastic has to be able to be wiped regularly with bleach. A lot of products can't hold up to the level of sterility and cleanliness that is hospital grade clean.?

Ms. Erskine pointed out that hospital's never use real wood based products as the porous material would allow germs and bacteria to collect.

The Gala is an opportunity for guests to help support their local hospital but at the same time it's a fun event that many people look forward to every year.

Chair of the Gala Committee, Jenn Conroy, said the Committee works hard to make sure people enjoy the evening and want to come back every year.

?We love it because our guests embrace the theme and they always want to know what we are doing this year,? Ms. Conroy explained. ?This year we decided to do something fun and flirty and we came up with Spring Time in Paris. We started planning in September. It takes a big committee. There's 16 of us. At our auction and silent auction everything is donated. Everyone needs our hospital. It's our community and it's something we can do to give back to the community.?

At the end of the evening the Gala managed to raise \$380,000, net, to be used for equipment at Headwaters Health Care Centre. This is the largest amount of money the Gala has ever raised..

While a mime deftly worked the crowd and French berets were the fashion statement of the night, Gala visitors also had the knowledge they were contributing to keep their local hospital a vibrant and up-to-date facility.

In a news release Wednesday, the 15-member Gala Committee said, ?When the last bid had been placed and the final centime counted, the evening raised \$380,000 (net) in support of our local hospital, Headwaters Health Care Centre.?

?We are so proud and happy,? said Ms. Conroy. ?This year's event was an incredible success, and everyone involved did a wonderful job of ensuring it was a night to remember!?

The Foundation extended a special ?merci' to all the guests in attendance, as well as the invaluable support of the evening's donors and sponsors, who including: Lafert North America, Ledson Properties, The Waechter Family, Enercare, James Dick Construction, Northern Mat & Bridge, Ultramar, Carters Law Firm, RBC, AirFX, Bayshore Home Health, Hockley Valley Resort, and S. Burnett & Associates.