



'STAR DANCING GALA'

The Youth Foundation sparkles

When The Youth Foundation staff members Katie Santambrogio, marketing and event director, and Susan Milhoan, development director, sat down to brainstorm ideas for a fundraising event, the creative juices started flowing. All other options were pushed aside, however, when they came up with a dance-themed event based on the popular TV show, *Dancing with the Stars*. The idea of pairing local amateur dancers with local professionals generated instant buzz about the event that spread as dance practices commenced.

The 12 community members selected to dance at the Gala come from various backgrounds and professions – and few had any real dance experience. Dr. Chip Woodland, Linda Boyne, Bill Stephenson, Rivers Jardis, Tricia Swenson, Rob Wright, Doe Browning, Martha Brassel, Axel Wilhelmsen, Argie Tang, Sean Pack and Susanna DeChant donated their time and were willing to perform in front of a large crowd. Anything for the kids, right? After months of practice, each dancer had decided on music, had selected costumes and, with the help of their professional partners, had acquired notable dance techniques.

It is an understatement to say that the event was a success. With more than 600 guests in attendance, the Vail Valley Jet Center's hangar was bustling with excitement and anticipation as the lights dimmed, and the show began.

Youth dance group performances included Celebrate the Beat, Vail Performing Arts Academy and the Vail Youth Ballet Company. These young local dancers started the night with a contagious energy that continued to capture the audiences' attention throughout the evening.

Following the dancing, a video was shown about the mission of The Youth Foundation that highlighted programs for underserved children throughout the Eagle Valley. The emotional piece brought many people to tears and encouraged guests to support The Youth Foundation in order to achieve the goal of ensuring that every child in our community is known, needed and cared for. As one teacher stated, "An investment in The Youth Foundation is an investment in our future." The After School Enrichment program was highlighted as the primary beneficiary of the Star Dancing Gala.

After the dancers were recognized and applauded for their hard work and generosity towards The Youth Foundation, the auctioneer hit the stage. A live auction featuring items such as vacation packages to New York, California, Mexico, Austria and the Caribbean; home-catered dinners with renowned chefs; access to exclusive golf courses in Arizona; and private dance lessons with the Gala's professional dancers. Following the live auction was a Fund-A-Need portion during which guests were able to help fund The Youth Foundation's programs. Donors were assured that every dollar that they gave would be used to directly impact children due to the generosity of Youth Foundation board members whose goal is to cover all overhead costs for the organization. Both during and after the event, the response from guests was overwhelming and as one enthusiastic guest put it, "from the kids at the start, to the food preparation, to the dancers, the emcee, and the fundraising. ... It was truly remarkable! And, the best thing is, as we all know, it's all for the kids!"

And while the event was certain to have created a few stars, the ultimate stars of this event were most certainly the children served by the Youth Foundation. "Through the success of this event we are able to expand arts and cultural opportunities for youth in our after-school programs. It is so important for children to have creative outlets and when we can expand access to the arts through after school programs, everyone benefits," said Katie Santambrogio, event and marketing director for the Youth Foundation. "The Star Dancing Gala will be a night remembered for years to come and has helped to raise awareness of the Youth Foundation programs, while having a great time and raising money for a great cause!"

The Youth Foundation impacts youth with positive mentorship, community interaction and recreation applications that inspire self-confidence, friendship and integrity in the hearts of participants, volunteers and supporters. Everyone involved is charged with helping young people discover their individual gifts and qualities that will help them become happy and contributing members of society. The Youth Foundation makes learning about life's challenges a fun and fulfilling experience for everyone involved. ❖

For more information, go to www.theyouthfoundation.org or to see video from the Star Dancing Gala go to www.stardancinggala.com.



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