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CASA Spring Soiree raises much needed funds for local children



By BRENDA FISHER bfisher@chespub.com May 21, 2018 0



CASA Mid-Shore Executive Director Robin Davenport talked during the CASA Spring Soiree on May 19 about the children CASA serves.
 PHOTOS BY BRENDA FISHER



ST. MICHAELS — Not even the threat of rain could dampen the enthusiasm of the guests who mingled at Shipshead Farm for the CASA Spring Soiree on May 19. Under a clear tent that included crystal chandeliers and vintage furniture, guests at the CASA of the Mid-Shore event dined on classic French cuisine from Gourmet on the Bay while they listened to people share stories about the work that CASA does for children in need.

In order to raise as much money as possible for the CASA program, the evening's costs were underwritten by Chrissy and Rob McWilliams, George and Mary Torggler and Patricia and Vito Spitaleri. Numerous other sponsors from around the community showed financial support as well to help make the evening a success.

"We can't show you the faces of the children we serve because of privacy issues," CASA Executive Director Robin Davenport said. "But you see these children every day. They are hidden in plain view."

CASA stands for court appointed special advocate and these advocates volunteer their time to help children in crisis. The event was held to raise much needed funds for the CASA program and it is used to provide services to children that other CASA programs in surrounding areas can't, Davenport said.

Unlike in many metropolitan areas, many of the children who are part of the CASA of the Mid-Shore program stay in the area as they grow up Red Apple Auctioneer Sherry Truhlar told the guests as she started the fundraising portion of the program.

"We like to say that the definition of a benefit auction is your opportunity to pay more than you should for something you didn't need," Truhlar said. "Big difference between a commercial auction, which is about competitively bidding. This is about competitively giving, who can give the most to CASA."

Truhlar started accepting donations of \$5,000+. Several donors, both individual and corporate sponsors who weren't able to attend the event called in donations before it started. As Truhlar went from \$5,000 donations all the way to \$100, she told the guests to find the donation amount they felt comfortable with.

When donations got down to the \$100 mark, Truhlar announced whoever gave the last donation of the evening, regardless of the amount, would win a Hinckley sailboat cruise for six guests and receive the title of Last Hero. More than two dozen people vied for the title of Last Hero and the final bid was met by laughter and cheers from the audience.

In addition to the donations, two pairs of tickets to the sold-out touring show of "Hamilton" and an overnight stay at the Watergate were also auctioned off. The last pair of tickets went for \$2,400.

Rounding out the evening before the band Prime Time began playing for dancing, CASA volunteer advocate Bob Cowin shared his experience working with a child named Jimmy over the last three years. Cowin said there weren't outwardly visible signs of neglect with Jimmy, but the scars were there.

"I've learned to appreciate what consistency means to a child like Jimmy, that has been neglected and abused. I now appreciate what it means to a child like Jimmy to have a relationship with an adult where his safety and wellbeing are the focus. No judgment, just love and support," Cowin said. "We are a consistent and supportive presence in the lives of these precious children. We fiercely and competently advocate for their well-being in all facets of their lives. The positive and indisputable truth about CASA is our involvement in the lives of these children makes a meaningful difference."

"CASA makes a difference in the court room. CASA makes a difference in the classroom. And CASA makes a difference in the therapy room," he said. "CASA can make a difference in the room of life."

