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Crystal Bell Gala benefits Mental Health America

An annual end of the summer benefit for a local agency, the Crystal Bell Gala — named to reflect a symbolic act of the 1950s and a sign of hope for the future — was hosted at the Wynlakes Golf and Country Club on a recent Thursday night.

Many area residents flocked to the east Montgomery venue to support the cause that continues to celebrate the work resulting from the efforts of Clifford Beers, a young businessman who launched the mental health movement in New York City in 1909. Beers, who suffered from mental illness, established the National Committee for Mental Hygiene in New York City that year; it later evolved into what is now known as Mental Health America.

As one of more than 300 affiliates across the country, Mental Health America in Montgomery has provided services locally for six decades and has hosted several gatherings over the years to help support its mission, including many events at the country club.

A symbol of hope

For the sixth year, the gala helped emphasize the agency's "crystal clear" mission of providing hope to those with mental illness.

During the early days of mental health treatment, asylums often restrained patients with iron chains and shackles. As better understanding and treatments evolved, this practice eventually stopped. In the early 1950s, Mental Health America's national organization issued a call for all the restraints, and in 1956 melted them down. They were recast at the McShane Bell Foundry in Baltimore into a sign of hope — the Mental Health Bell.

Looking toward the future, the proceeds from the Crystal Bell Gala are earmarked to supplement MHA's allocation from the United Way. **Jane Nichols** served as chairwoman for the fundraiser, which featured cocktails and a silent auction; dinner and live auction; live music; and encouragement from a popular television personality and a long-serving auctioneer.

Thanks for coming

Arrivals initially gathered in the lobby of the Swan Ballroom, where Mental Health America board president **Jon Howe** and his wife, **Lucinda**, greeted donors, patrons and friends, including **James Lane** of the Lane Corporate Group, the event's corporate partner. Also representing the Lane Group were **Carolyn Reames**, **Cindy Cannady** and **Frankie Martin**.

Bettye and **Kenneth Crosby** of Crosby Electric were among other corporate sponsors of the event accepting thanks for their support, as was **Jane Waites**, who brought along 15 others representing Crossbridge, another gala sponsor.

Other arrivals lending their support were **Judge Bob Bailey** and his wife, **Jannah**; **Stacey** and **Chappel Hill**; **John Teague**, **Bob Gambacurta**, **Anne King**, **Carolyn Lightfoot**, **Peggy Hillis**; **Carol Brewbaker** and **Dick Hodges**; **Dora Haas** and **John "Bubba" Trotman**; **Carolyn** and **Mike Sullivan**; **Tom Debray**; **Debbie** and **Stabley Borden**; **Sophia** and **James McKay**; **Nancy** and **Larry Stowe**; **Carol Sposato**, **Karen** and **Charlie Smith**; and **Reese**

Rainey.

Local personality adds spirit

Board treasurer **Tom Morris** joined **Zac Perry Jr.** and **Joyce Simmons**, both members of MHA's executive committee, who had the honor of welcoming WSFA anchor **Tonya Terry**.

Tonya grabbed a microphone and took her place along the club's beautiful loggia to serve as the night's official emcee, encouraging guests to bid during the silent auction segment of the evening.

Mingling with other patrons as Tonya urged them to "go for it" were other MHA board members, including **Paul Brown**, there with his wife, **Ramona**; **Joan Ensley**; **Joel Gill** and his wife, **Susan**; **Murry Whitt** and his wife, **CeCe**; and **Judge Calvin Williams**, who enjoyed the event with his wife, **Anita**.

Carol Kelley, the board's vice president, was joined by **Gary Harrison** and others who placed bids amid the more than 150 items donated for the gala.

Gala volunteer **Christine Hull** placed her bid sitting amid several colorful, handmade quilts, displayed to entice guests to enter the silent auction area. Nearby, supporters discovered collectible porcelain dolls and plates, coffee table books, jewelry and wines that filled table after table.

Gift baskets also were scattered throughout to tempt guests, as were theater tickets; tennis lesson packages; pet-sitting services; restaurant and spa offerings; an autographed Troy University football; wreaths inspired by Alabama and Auburn colors; tickets to the 2012 Auburn homecoming game; and dual boxes of chocolate roulage baked by MHA board member **Joy Germanos**.

Raising hope

Additional auction items were displayed inside the Swan Ballroom, where **Lucky** entertained the crowd on her electric guitar, playing "Rainy Night in Georgia" and other favorites.

Rose Morris, **Mickey Perry** and **Norma** and **Tony Moore** enjoyed the music as they reviewed the auction items displayed in the dinner area. They included several vintage fire extinguishers, paintings by local artists and special canvases created by mental health clients. All were offered at opening bids of \$5 or \$10 to encourage affordable participation.

As the main event got under way, guests found seats at tables where clusters of alstromeria in varying colors filled cubed vases, and where individual servings of turtle pecan cheesecake and key lime pie seemed to beckon at alternating place settings.

Mike Weaver and **Susan** and **Steve Dozier** were among those who enjoyed dinner at the Lane Group table, while **Wayne Thorn** enjoyed his Wynlakes' House Salad at another table with his wife, **Joyce**. Just as the entrée was being served, Wayne Thorn stepped up to serve as auctioneer and generate spirited action during the gala's live auction.

Chef James Riles had prepared Chicken Tosca with caper vin blanc for the more than 160 guests, who savored it with oven-roasted red potatoes and a zucchini, yellow squash and red pepper medley.

Forks later were stilled and hearts were touched as a United Way film featuring a Mental Health America in Montgomery consumer was shown. Inspired by the presentation, hopes were raised and checkbooks were opened when Thorn asked them to continue to help MHA by raising the ante on gala proceeds with their bids on antique tables and chairs; autographed Auburn and Alabama footballs; a tailgating party for 50; beach, resort and Napa Valley getaway stays; jewelry and

electronic equipment.

Ringing the bell of hope

Among the friends of MHA supporting the festivities were **Joyce and Rupert Wilson; David Mowery, Jim Gallaspie; Lamar McDavid, Billy Gordon, Becky and Doyle Fuller; Kim and Cal Franklin; Tommy Coleman, Ava and Jim Bohannon; Brenda and Jud Bentley; Paula Sims, Billy Berry, Bob Schultz, Judy Mosley, Kristi Ninesling, Regina Jeffrey, Carolyn and Brazil Rudolph; LaTanya Bell, Edna Madison, Pamela Donaldson, Debbie Dorris, Holli Cawthorne, Sreelekha Bannerjee, Dale Owen, Reid Smith, Laurie and Matt Morris; Robin Christian, Sue Garner, Wanda Fontaine and Cynthia Anderson.**

Also seen there were **Lynne and Brock Parker; Michelle McLendon, Ramona Barnes, Cynthia Dukes, Dianne Burke, Colenthia Wright, Karyn and Larry Hardrick; Sandra and Ed Tutt; Lisa and Lee Maurer; Megan and Wells Robinson; Julie Mann, Rick Manley, Joyce Bigbee, Sharon Bivens, Deb Kennedy, Terry Wilson, Phyllis Ingram; Mary and March Perry; Leslie and Julian McPhillips; Walter Rushton, Tony Lisenby, Julie Sanders, Beverly Rankin, Shankar Yalamanchili, Ramakanth Vemuluri, Anil Saini and Janet Beard.**

Among the volunteers supporting the gala set-up and auction details were **Seth Henry, Patty and Harvey Johnson; Kareen and Eulon Lee; Ben Nichols, Kim Khouri, Kristen Sherer, Paity Wallace; Merle and Tony Walters.**

Thanking them for their support toward "bringing wellness home" were **Brittany Wiggins**, executive director of MHA in Montgomery, and her husband, **Kyle**; her mother, **Gwen Cook**; her grandmother, **Peggy Stieringer**, and her assistant, **Gloria Moore**; as well as **Erica Knight**, the agency's outreach services coordinator.

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