

Hundreds Come Out for Whole Spectrum Gala

Whole Spectrum Autism Awareness

JERSEY CITY, NEW JERSEY, UNITED STATES, September 10, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Whole Spectrum Autism held its seventh annual gala fundraiser at The Ashford Restaurant on Thursday, although this is something of a misnomer. While Ashford catered the event, the anticipated crowd of nearly 450 people were treated to the restaurant's fine fair in a series of tents that filled a huge portion of the Newark Avenue Pedestrian Plaza for the evening event. "This is the best year so far," said Sherry Singh, founder of Whole Spectrum. "It keeps growing every year." Tents were lined up along the pedestrian plaza as waiters and waitresses scrambled in and out of the restaurant to deliver trays of food to the tables inside.

Hundreds of people lined up at one end of the string of tents to pass under the arch of blue balloons where they turned in their tickets and were greeted by hosts handing each a glass of champagne. Nearly all the guests were decked out, if not quite a black-tie event, then certainly one of the premier social events of the year, an annual fundraiser that helped raise money to Whole Spectrum's mission to champion autism acceptance and inclusion by facilitating community engagement and serving as a voice for families whose loved ones are on the spectrum. The funds raised support autism acceptance events, education and advocacy.

"What we are looking for is acceptance," Singh said. "The number one key is to get as close to normal as possible, every gesture, every smile helps."

The event included food, drinks, dancing and raffles, as well as an awards ceremony to recognize those who have significantly contributed or represented Whole Spectrum Autism this year.

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication. Because autism is a spectrum disorder, each person with autism has a distinct set of strengths



2022 Whole Spectrum Gala

and challenges. Some people with ASD require significant support in their daily lives, while others need less support and some live independently.

Founded by Singh, who was inspired to launch the organization after her son, Ravi, was diagnosed with autism and she realized just how crucial support and inclusivity are, holds events throughout the year raise awareness, acceptance and advocacy for all individuals with autism spectrum disorders. Singh's family members were on hand, several talking about how the diagnosis of autism brought them together to be there for their loved on.

Although purchasing a ticket to the event helped raise funds, so did the silent auction that featured dozens of collectable items music and sports related, including photographs and such from the likes of Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead, Kurt Cobain, Billy Joel, even Frank Sinatra, as well as a number of movie stars.

The gala was also a party, which featured a DJ at the far end of the line of tents and a dance floor where guests were encouraged to dance.

Rachel Sieg, executive director of the foundation, called this "a special night."

Former New York Giants Jonathan Casillas, who played on two Super Bowl championship teams, called the people in the audience "rock stars" for their efforts – many of whom had family members also diagnosed with autism.

"I was born in Jersey City Medical Center," he said. "If you're born here in Jersey City, you're tough."



Sherry and NY Giants #52 Jonathan Casillas



Singh Family

Despite his later success, he spoke about how he got in trouble as a kid, and how it affected his being drafted into professional football. While another close friend got a \$1 million signing bonus, he was offered \$7,000, and it took eight hours to even get that call on the night of the draft – this despite how well he did in college sports.

“I went undrafted,” he said. “Sometimes in life things don’t work out as planned,” he said. “Sometimes all you get is the opportunity. But that’s all you need.”

He said Singh’s foundation helps give the children and families it serves those opportunities.

“I see these kids are rock stars. They are unique,” he said. “And the families that give them support can be rock stars, too.”

Larry “Thunderbolt” Cureton, former World Heavyweight Kick Boxing Champion, as a retired Jersey City firefighter, said one in every 44 kids has some form of autism.

“We have to get behind programs like this,” he said. “While you might not have autism in your family, your next child might, or your grandchild or your great-grandchild.”

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