

Ray of Hope Gala Raised \$515,000 for the New South Florida Autism Center

All funds raised at this year's event will go directly toward the construction and programming of the South Florida Autism Center

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- The [Friends of South Florida Autism](#) nonprofit

organization held its spectacular 16th Annual Ray of Hope Gala on November 9, 2024, at Gulfstream Park, bringing together supporters, philanthropists, and families for an unforgettable evening of celebration, compassion, and community. This year's vibrant theme, "Carnaval," sponsored by Akerman and Bank of America, set the stage for an exhilarating night filled with color, music, and a shared commitment to enhancing the lives of individuals with autism.



Guests at Ray of Hope Gala taking part in the live auction

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Dr. Tamara Moodie, Executive Director of Friends of South Florida Autism

The evening's centerpiece was a dynamic fundraiser to support the \$9 to \$10 million construction of the [South Florida Autism Center \(SFAC\)](#). This groundbreaking project will serve individuals and families throughout South Florida. The gala raised \$515,000 during its silent and live auctions, thanks to generous donors who bid on items and unique experiences -- everything from jewelry, a Gucci silk scarf, and a paella dinner for twenty to a seven-day South African Safari and an all-inclusive Lake Como and Northern Italy Wine Country Experience for two.

“The Ray of Hope Gala is an essential event for our organization, as it allows us to continue our mission of providing support and services for individuals with autism,” said Dr. Tamara Moodie, Executive Director of Friends of South Florida

Autism. "This year's Carnival theme perfectly captured the spirit of inclusion, joy, and the colorful diversity of our community, all while raising significant funds to help us build a lasting resource for those in need."

A highlight of the evening was the exceptional performance by charter school students on the autism spectrum. These talented young individuals captivated the crowd with their artwork, which was auctioned to raise funds for the new center. They also performed an energetic Soca dance performance to the tune of "Follow the Leader," which had everyone on their feet.

As the night progressed, guests participated in the highly anticipated "Bid from the Heart" live auction, a portion of the event focused on raising funds solely for the cause. Initially set to raise \$150,000, the live auction exceeded expectations, with the crowd generously pledging \$163,800 for the center's development.

All funds raised at this year's event will go directly toward the construction and programming of the South Florida Autism Center. This 30,000-square-foot, cutting-edge facility broke ground earlier this year and is slated for completion in 2026. The center will be next to the charter school at 3751 W. 108th Street in Hialeah, Florida. It will provide various services to individuals of all ages, including childcare, early intervention programs, a therapy clinic, a family gym, swimming programs, and recreational and vocational services for adults, such as job training and placement. The new center will be a transformative resource for the autism community, providing support and opportunities for lifelong success.

About Friends of South Florida Autism

Friends of South Florida Autism is a non-profit organization that supports the South Florida Autism Center, South Florida Autism Charter Schools, and The Villages of South Florida Autism so they can fulfill their missions of assisting individuals diagnosed with Autism who reside in



Austen Ochoa with his work of art being auctioned off



Dancing the night away at Ray of Hope Gala

South Florida. To learn more, visit <http://friendsofsfa.org>.

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