

Autism Speaks to Host an Evening Celebrating Ability, Community & Impact

Autism Speaks proudly announces the 14th Annual St. Louis Chef's Gala, taking place Friday, February 27, 2026, at the iconic Chase Park Plaza St. Louis.

ST. LOUIS, MO, UNITED STATES, January 27, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Autism Speaks](#) proudly announces the 14th Annual St. Louis Chef's Gala, taking place Friday, February 27, 2026, at the iconic Chase Park Plaza St. Louis. This signature culinary and community celebration brings together the region's most respected chefs, restaurants, and hospitality partners for an unforgettable evening in support of individuals with autism and their families.



14th Annual Autism Speaks St. Louis Chef's Gala

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We are honored to help bring St. Louis together in celebration of the talent, achievement, and boundless potential of our neurodivergent community.”

*Beth Kodner and Lisa Litvag,
2026 Gala Co-Chairs*

This year's theme, Reaching Full Potential, reflects Autism Speaks' unwavering commitment to supporting individuals on the autism spectrum across their entire lifetime. From early diagnosis and intervention to adulthood, employment, independence, and community inclusion, the evening will highlight what is possible when individuals are supported with the right resources at every stage of life.

The program will open with an inspiring performance by The Snakes, a student-led rock band from Coeur Academy

in Olivette, Missouri, a school dedicated to supporting and educating neurodivergent young people. Their performance sets the tone for a joyful, empowering evening rooted in talent, opportunity, and possibility.

Adding to the evening's impact, the Gala will feature special guest speakers Brody Herman, host of Wrestling on the Spectrum radio and podcast show, and Ava Duel, founder and creator of Nuro Apparel, a sensory-friendly apparel brand designed to empower neurodivergent individuals through comfort and confidence. Their stories exemplify creativity, entrepreneurship, and the transformative power of community support.

The evening will be emceed by local KMOV broadcaster and nationally recognized sports reporter Tamar Sher, whose warmth and energy will guide guests through an inspiring and meaningful program.

Autism affects 1 in 31 children in the United States, and more than 5.8 million adults are on the autism spectrum. Proceeds from the St. Louis Chef's Gala fuel Autism Speaks' mission to promote solutions across the spectrum and throughout the lifespan—ensuring individuals and families have access to advocacy, resources, and support from childhood through adulthood.

A Signature Culinary Experience

Guests will begin the evening with an elevated cocktail reception and tasting experience featuring creations from some of St. Louis' most acclaimed chefs, restaurants, and culinary institutions, including:

801 Local | 801 Chop | 801 Fish
Bellerive Country Club
Catering by Chef Cox & Co.
Deer Creek Club
Eleven Eleven Mississippi
Gatesworth Retirement Community
Greenbriar Country Club
Meadowbrook Country Club
Missouri Athletic Club – Downtown
Olive + Oak
Peacemaker / Sidney Street Café
Persimmon Woods Country Club
Racquet Club Ladue
Serendipity Homemade Ice Cream
Sling N Scoops
St. Louis Country Club
Sugarfire Smoke House
The Fox Theatre
Additional culinary partners will be announced.

This celebrated tradition is elevated further as chefs are joined by Culinary Champion Sous



Jake Litvag stands alongside his autistic peers as a Culinary Champion and a powerful example of full potential.

Chefs, children and young adults on the autism spectrum who participate alongside culinary professionals, building confidence, pride, and connection through the shared experience of food.

Program & Evening Experience

Along with the tasting reception, guests will enjoy:

Performances and personal stories from children and young adults on the autism spectrum

A curated pre-function experience

Silent auction and raffles featuring exclusive items and experiences

A high-energy live auction

A moving Mission Moment highlighting Autism Speaks' impact, including:

Expanding early intervention and diagnostic resources

Supporting lifelong care, including employment and housing pathways

Advocacy for inclusive education, insurance coverage, and community access

Tools and guidance that help families navigate autism with confidence

During the program, Autism Speaks will honor Sidney & Aaron Plaza, recipients of the 2026

Visionary Award, recognizing their leadership, generosity, and dedication to advancing inclusion and opportunity for individuals on the autism spectrum.

The evening concludes with a lively After Party, featuring a DJ, dancing, late-night bites, and an open bar.

Why This Night Matters

By supporting the St. Louis Chef's Gala, supporters directly strengthen Autism Speaks' efforts to build a more inclusive world. Funds raised help expand:

Access to early screenings and intervention

A nationwide Autism Response network

Community and workplace inclusion initiatives

Research and resources that improve quality of life across the spectrum

Together, we are helping individuals with autism not only succeed—but truly reach their full potential.

2026 Gala Leadership

Chairs

Beth Kodner

Lisa Litvag

St. Louis Autism Speaks Director

Staci Gerchen

Committee

Anna Abbacchi

Anitra Lee-Cole

Jessie Elkin

Joe Gerchen

Tonya Haynes

Tyler Haynes
Teresa Herrell
Todd Lazarus
Stacy Mesnier
Rochelle Muchnick
Evan Newbill
Scott Oglesby
Ingrid Payne
Bri Stout
Hayley Leach-Stratton
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