

Luxury, love and a life-saving solution

A magical evening for Guys and Dolls

By **Katie Toussaint**

Sprays of color shot into the crowd as the eligible bachelor strode across the ballroom stage at the Hilton Charlotte Center City. Speakers bumped to Quiet Riot's "Bang your Head (Metal Health)" and the confetti cannons continued to pop. Thanks to Eric McCrickard, the crowd was getting "pumped up to bid" at the **Guys and Dolls Bachelor/Bachelorette Auction 2013**.

More than 600 guests had just finished mingling amidst a wine-and-beer bar, silent auction and displays of date packages created by 24 eligible bachelors and bachelorettes. They were ready for the live auction to begin, with every cent of date-package proceeds funneling into the **Cystic Fibrosis Foundation**.

McCrickard wasn't the first to go through with this, and the ballroom stage was no stranger to Charlotte's participating singles, who typically range from age 25 to 45. The bachelors and bachelorettes cannot be married or engaged and are nominated by someone involved with the event. Once official nominees, they learn more about the expectations of their involvement, fill out lighthearted questionnaires and get their photos taken.

Jason Kenna, another bachelor at the 2013 event, initially got involved

through his friendship with Sabrina Watt, Executive Director of CFF. He filled out his questionnaire, advertising that his favorite movie moment was the opening scene of "Super Troopers" and that he was most likely to make the evening news for "describing how big and bright a UFO was." After cracking jokes, he got cracking on his date package. Participants must reach out to businesses, soliciting to local companies as well as those in the areas

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— Bachelor Doug Brooks

where the date packages play out. The plus for donors? "They get to write it off on their taxes," said Gwyn MacMorris, Development Director for CFF.

Kenna assembled a package with a Texas twist and dubbed it: "Keep Austin Weird." He said, "Austin is an awesome

city. I have spent a lot of time there and kind of wanted to show it off." So he selected Austin City Limits music festival as the main feature – the event's previous headliners have included The Black Keys, Neil Young and Crazy Horse, and the Red Hot Chili Peppers. ACL promoters agreed to support CFF by donating two, three-day passes to the 2013 festival, round-trip airfare for two and a three-night stay at the Residence Inn Marriott.

Quoting a former bachelor, Co-Chair Matt Titus said, "The Guys and Dolls Auction is like the best wedding reception where no one was married." And although the evening is about fun, flirting and fantasy trips, it never stops being about the Foundation.

The **Western Carolinas Chapter** of the CFF, based in Charlotte, is committed to hosting fundraisers in Western North Carolina and the South Carolina Piedmont area. The national Foundation was founded in 1955 with a mission to cure and control the disease, and has turned into the highest contributor of funds to CF research. The Charlotte event alone grossed \$301,000 in 2013 before expenses, and the corresponding research will strengthen drug treatments and discoveries to battle CF, enhance quality of life and move toward a cure.

Bachelor Doug Brooks boosted the movement this year, raising \$10,000 through social media, donations from relatives and corporate colleagues, and more, and was auctioned off for \$2,000. "Carrying the title of highest fundraiser is important to me only in that it means more money for the Foundation and the children with the deadly, incurable disease," he said. The second-highest fundraiser, Katie Joseph, raised a total of \$8,763 prior to the 2013 event and was auctioned off for \$2,600. She said, "It truly was a magical night — one of the most amazing nights of my entire life — and everyone that attended agreed and said that they would be back next year. The whole Guys and



Simmons Trapp

Dolls process was crazy, fun, stressful, time-consuming and a lot of hard work, but knowing that we raised a quarter of a million dollars for CF is such a rewarding feeling."

The CFF is "Hope in Action," advocating for governmental and industrial priority, connecting patients and families to caregivers, and providing information and resources for support. To support all that the Foundation stands for, the annual auction is organized through a base of four Co-Chairs and 14 committee members. One former bachelorette and 2013 co-chair, Caroline Floyd, walked across the ballroom stage three years ago during the auction. "I have a personal connection to the disease," she said. "I had a friend pass away a few years ago and currently have a close friend living with CF."

In the midst of the bidding, guests also heard from Danny Trapp and his daughter Simmons who provided the history of CF. The disease prompts the body to produce mucus in excess, threatening their lungs with infections and their digestive systems with pancreatic problems. Simmons revealed the emotional side as well, sharing her hope to one day see her 10-year anniversary with her fiancé. Appealing to

that hope, Dr. Hugh Black from Asthma and Allergy Specialists gave a brief science update about progress made in fighting Cystic Fibrosis.

In January 2012, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved a groundbreaking drug supported clinically, scientifically and financially by the CFF. The oral drug, Kalydeco, is the first medication to attack the core cause of CF, which is a faulty gene and that gene's protein product. This gene is the reason why about 30,000 American children and adults have inherited the chronic disease. This gene is the reason why children like 6-year-old Vivi in Charlotte are supported by the CFF.

In preparation for the Guys and Dolls Auction, the bachelors and bachelorettes are divided into fundraising teams and, this year, Vivi was the inspiration behind Team Vivi. Former bachelorette and Co-Chair Shannon Voorhees headed the group of two guys and five dolls. "She is also one of the main reasons I continued to support this amazing cause," Voorhees said of Vivi. "Although her treatments and medication can be all-consuming, she's just a normal little girl who loves princesses, dancing and dreams of her future wedding to Justin



Willie Fleming, Sheryl Fleming and Regina Acheampong

Bieber."

Another Co-Chair and former bachelorette, Jessica Coniglio, focused on the part of the role that requires mentoring team members through group and one-on-one meetings. With her help, they brainstormed about fundraising methods, date-package details and sponsorships. They worked in the name of Team Fish, supporting young Colin and Katelyn Fish, who are affected by CF. "One of my favorite roles as a co-chair is setting up family days in which team members get to spend time with the CF family we're representing," Coniglio said.

"The commitment for the bachelors and bachelorettes requires lots of time and effort," Titus said, "but each year many walk away saying it was one of the best nights of their life." And despite the fanfare of his confetti cannons, McCrickard walked away from the Hilton still a bachelor, with the date package – "Rock Your Way to Sin City" – in the hands of his friends. But by the time they have seen Hinder and Bon Jovi in concert and stayed at Planet Hollywood on the Las Vegas strip,

the bachelor will have already realized the fantasy he's lived out – improving someone else's quality of life.

"It is amazing, once you start to discuss Cystic Fibrosis, how many people you know that are touched by this disease," he said. "I was able to spend a family day with Caroline, a little girl here in Charlotte living with CF, and it is amazing to see how her day-to-day life is and to know that the money you are raising is going to help her have a long and healthy life." ■

get involved

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Guys and Dolls bachelors and bachelorettes



Regina Acheampong Ashley Bigger Tracee Brodie Doug Brooks Christian Crute Fabiana Fanfani
Jennie Goins Paul House Alden Humphries Ashley Jones Katie Joseph Stephanie Johnson



Jason Kenna Taylor Loftis Donnie Malpass Eric McCrickard Ashley McFarland Kelly Melton
Cassie Nall Stephanie Norton Cameron Patterson Jennifer Smith Jessica Summers Uschi Woronin