

'Anti-gala' with puppies, circus performers funds experiences for CPS students



Embarc Variety Spectacular

Brianna Wissink, from left, Jordan Milanowski and Maureen Andersen. (James C. Svehla/for the Chicago Tribune)

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By Candace Jordan | Candid Candace The “Unbelievably Amazing and Terribly Entertaining Variety Spectacular” lived up to its name, complete with aerialists, stilt walkers, live performances and a sword swallower, all to benefit Embarc Chicago, a nonprofit that offers experience-based learning opportunities to low-income high school students. The May 16 “anti-gala” attracted 550 guests to Moonlight Studios on Chicago’s West Side for the organization’s 9th Variety Spectacular. The party began with a VIP reception where guests could pet pit bull puppies from Peace for Pits. They also enjoyed magic by Sean Masterson and mind-reading demos from Mark Toland. Sam Trump and his eight-piece brass band marched guests into the circus-themed main hall. NewMoon Chicago performance artists served food and beverages from vintage bicycles while aerialists and ball walkers from The Actors Gymnasium delighted the crowd. Dinner stations featured delicious fare prepared by Boka Catering Group and, following the event, L’Patron’s food truck served tacos. Jordan Cornette of ESPN and The Jam welcomed guests and introduced [Sally Marvel](#), “Chicago’s pain-proof woman,” a sword-swallowing burlesque performer. Embarc alum Cassandra Riviera sang an original song, The Remedy performed R&B songs a cappella and The Future Kingz concluded the evening with a dance performance. Impact speaker and Embarc alum Jeffrey Williams, 19, became emotional

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“If experiences make us who we are, then experiences should be how we teach. Everyone should have access to the city’s resources and opportunities. This is why we exist.” Embarc experiences, called “journeys,” include site visits to arts and cultural institutions, universities, restaurants, small businesses, marketing and tech agencies and more. The event raised more than \$450,000 with 100% of the funds raised going directly to Embarc programming. Next year, the nonprofit will double the number of students it serves through its partnership with the New Englewood STEM High School. Freelance writer Candace Jordan is involved in many local organizations, including some whose events she covers. More coverage: Find more photos and events at www.chicagotribune.com/candidcandace. Visit Candid Candace’s website at www.candidcandace.com, or follow her on Twitter @[CandidCandace](https://twitter.com/CandidCandace).

(Candace Jordan)

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