

UNICEF Hope Gala champions children around the world

Candace Jordan

Contact Reporter Candid Candace

More than 450 guests attended the ninth annual UNICEF Hope Gala hosted by the Midwest Regional Office of the U.S. Fund for UNICEF on April 9 at The Geraghty. Themed "Imagine," the gala supported the humanitarian organization's global efforts to put children first and ensure that no child dies of a preventable cause.



The festive evening featured a performance by Vanessa Williams, a silent and live auction, magical decor, performance artists, a live painting demonstration and so much more.

Members of the Ken Arlen Evolution Orchestra started the program with a special performance of Pharrell Williams' song "Happy" to thank the evening's supporters. Event co-chairs Kim K.W. Rucker and Mark Mitsukawa welcomed guests and introduced keynote speaker and Chairman of the Board of the U.S. Fund for UNICEF Vince Hemmer. "UNICEF saves more lives than any other organization on earth, which is an amazing track record of accomplishment. They're very good at what they do," remarked Hemmer.

Williams, clad in a silver and black Pamela Roland cocktail dress, performed a set that included "Colors of the Wind," "Love Is," "Save the Best for Last" and a Stephen Sondheim mashup. She said, "As a mother of four, children have always been very dear to me, and it's great to be able to be a world traveler and be in touch with all the kids I've come across in my travels. UNICEF is certainly the organization that addresses all their needs." She said she loves Chicago and planned on having a [Giordano's](#) deep dish pizza delivered to the venue after her performance.

Guests were encouraged to purchase UNICEF Inspired Gifts, which will go directly to help children in developing countries. Examples included an emergency tent (for \$1,633.03), anti-malarial bed nets (for \$34.56), family water kits (for \$867.88), and notebooks and pencils for 60 kids (for \$29.40).

Decorations were inspired by a large urban park and playground, featuring multicolored Slinkys suspended above the dance floor and chairs slip-covered with images of children's faces. Many of the tables were lit from within and topped with oversized dandelion, poppy and daisy sculptures.

Performance artists from The Actors Gymnasium delighted guests during the reception with juggling, contortionist acts and acrobatics against graffiti-covered walls. UNICEF's Youth Activist volunteers helped educate patrons about the organization's lifesaving work and its latest initiative, UNICEF Kid Power "wearable-for-good" activity bands. An after-party, hosted by the UNICEF Next Generation Chicago Steering Committee, featured dancing, cocktails and late-night bites.

The gala raised over \$1 million to support UNICEF's mission of providing health care, nutrition, clean water, education and safety for children all over the world. "UNICEF has been working to put children first for almost 70 years, and highlighting this work in Chicago — along with our passionate co-chairs and event committee — is a moment that we look forward to every year," shared Casey Marsh, managing director, Midwest Region, U.S. Fund for UNICEF.

Freelance writer Candace Jordan is involved with 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.