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WINTER HAVEN HOSPITAL FOUNDATION ANNUAL GALA

W.H. Hospital officials thank community for its support

By DONNA KELLY
News Chief correspondent

WINTER HAVEN - Winter Haven Hospital officials honored those in the community whose support allows medical programs to expand and healing to continue during the 21st Winter Haven Hospital Foundation Gala Thursday night at Nora Mayo Hall.

George Aycrigg / News Chief

Members of the Little River Band performed for the attendees of the Winter Haven Hospital Foundation annual gala Thursday evening at Nora Mayo Hall.

More than 360 hospital staff and officials, community leaders and philanthropists gathered during the black-tie affair featuring dinner and dancing to the sounds of the 1970s rock group The Little River Band.

Eric Adamson, chairman of the foundation's board of trustees, thanked sponsors who supported the event to the tune of $500,000.

Despite a challenging economy, Adamson said, the Foundation has raised assets of $13 million. He thanked the community for the continued success of numerous fundraisers, including the Big Bass Bash, Mountain Lake Invitational, Lewis Family Fund "Swing for the Cure", 100 Challenge golf and tennis event and the Citrus Classic.

"It's been a great time to be involved with the Foundation but we couldn't do it without you," Adamson said.

Lance Anastasio, the hospital's president and chief executive officer, spoke of the organization's focus on clinical excellence. He reiterated the success of the hospital's Bostick Heart Center, which was recently given a 3-star rating - the highest ranking - by "Consumer Reports" and its nationally recognized Magnet Nursing Program.

"Clearly your generosity and that of the Foundation has enabled us to move forward," Anastasio said.

He announced another joint venture with the University of Florida establishing the

Winter Haven Hospital Center for Robotics and Urology and introduced Dr. Sijo Parekattil, a microsurgeon and the new director of robotics and urology.

"This will bring university research and clinical trials to the people of Central Florida," Anastasio said.

A portion of the evening's proceeds will benefit these new programs.

Those enjoying the dinner and music were also focused on the services offered by the hospital.

"It's so exciting to be a part of an event that brings out so many people on a Thursday night for such a worthy cause," said Daphne Garrison, who was attending with her colleagues at State Farm. "I'm so excited to hear the Little River band and bring back memories of growing up in Chicago."

The gala held even more meaning for Lisa Pearce this year as a couple of emergencies recently sent family members to the hospital for treatment.

"The treatment was absolutely awesome," she said. "The service has been upgraded over the years with the support of our community. We live here; we want to know we have tremendous service."

Pearce said she didn't attend the event specifically to hear the entertainment, but was thrilled to have the opportunity to hear a band from her high school days.

"They bring back a lot of memories," she said.

Tracy Porter, executive director of the Polk State College Foundation, described the gala as an anticipated event each year.

"I very much look forward to the Winter Haven Hospital Gala as the fall event to attend every year. This important event helps to save lives and give world-class care to members of our community and I am proud Polk State College is an important partner of the hospital," Porter said.

Bud Strang, president of the 6/10 Corporation was attending the gala for the first time.

"It's a great event and I certainly want to support it," said Strang, who said schedule conflicts prevented him from attending in the past.

Dr. Robert Cassell, medical director of the Cassidy Center, said the annual Gala allows the hospital to reach its medical goals.

The Cassidy Cancer Center was established by Gala funds of the past," he said. "Some of the funds from tonight will go to getting the urology department up and running."

This includes the purchase of a robotics surgery device.

"We appreciate the involvement of the community in the mission of the hospital and of the cancer center," Cassell said.

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