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Society: Parting the Cloud for Alzheimer's research

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The second Part the Cloud Gala, a benefit for Alzheimer's research in Northern California, was a success. Starting with its almost sold-out status as soon as the invitations were mailed, having high energy rock entertainer Chris Isaak as the headliner, and ending with raising \$4 million in one night.

Chairwoman and benefit originator Michaela "Mikey" Hoag and her committee welcomed 320 guests to the gorgeous gala on May 3 at Rosewood Sand Hill Hotel in Menlo Park. The evening was straightforward, with heartfelt talks by Alzheimer's affected families, a fund-a-need segment, entertainment by Isaak, and dancing late at an after-party headlined by the Cheeseballs.

Committee members Melissa Badger, Ellen Drew, Sue Foley, Lulu Frye, Liz King, Laurie Kraus Jacob, Ann Lawler, Bren Leisure, Betsy Matteson, Debbie Robbins, Paula Robichaud and Sally Robinson reprised their roles from the first gala, in 2012, with the addition of new members Stephanie Harman and Heather Pietsch.

They aimed for \$2 million, but exceeded their goal with \$4 million. It set a record for a benefit for Alzheimer's anywhere in the U.S.

In 2012, five research grants were awarded in Northern California. Now, projects anywhere in the nation will be eligible for grants. A committee of scientists evaluates and grades project proposals; only top projects obtain funding. These projects are termed "translational research," which means they are close to or ready for clinical trials.

The elegant evening with the feeling of an intimate gathering featured dinner in a silver and white tent with décor by J Floral Arts. Floral arrangements showcased white hydrangeas, calla lillies and roses.

The color scheme was repeated for the walkway to the reception, the reception area and after-party ballroom. A wall of large, white, paper-flower sculptures decorated the entrance.

Friendship, education and the goal of funding innovative research to slow, stop and cure Alzheimer's brought together a mix of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, physicians, celebrities from the entertainment and sports worlds, and generous guests. With 14 corporate sponsors, the event donated 100 per cent of its proceeds to research.

The gala was hosted in partnership with the Northern California Alzheimer's Association. Harry Johns, president and CEO of the Alzheimer's Association, gave some startling statistics: Women in their 60s are twice as likely to die of Alzheimer's as breast cancer; women have a six-in-10 chance of dying of Alzheimer's and it is the sixth highest cause of death in the United States.

Disturbing statistics also include the number of former athletes diagnosed with the disease; the early onset of disease is increasing at an alarming rate; and one in nine baby boomers will get the disease after they turn 65. Currently, there is no treatment, no means of prevention and no way to even slow the disease.

Dr. Lou Bordisso, who has suffered from the early onset of the disease, said, "My dreams have been shattered. I'm more dependent on medical care providers and the Alzheimer's Association.

"It's the analogy of a child learning to walk; I'm resting my arms in my care partner and the Alzheimer's Association. You give a reason for courage and hope because our arms are resting in yours."

There was a sudden change of plans when emcee Mark Shriver experienced severe pains, was taken to Stanford Hospital, and spent the night passing a kidney stone.

Actresses Virginia Madsen (she attended both benefits) and Brooke Shields, who are good friends, agreed to step in on the spur of the moment (literally) to take over Shriver's emcee duties. They were the hit of the night.

Shields said her late mother had a form of the disease. "She didn't know my name. That's why I'm here," she said.

Singer and actor Isaak, who grew up in Stockton, said that it was a "fantastic cause and the night was a dream come true."

His five-member band performed some Elvis favorites. When he sang "I Want to Fall in Love With You," and "Falling in Love With You," many couples danced spontaneously in the tent. His finale was "Great Balls of Fire," which brought everyone to their feet.

Seen giving standing ovations were Karen and Ronnie Lott, Suzanne Saunders Shaw, Wendy Schmidt, Lisa and Doug Goldman, Ellen and John Drew, Kathy and Rick Kimball, Dagmar Dolby and her family, Roz and Merv Morris, Mike Dreyfus, Hilary Valentine and Don Listwin, Gary and Perri Guthrie, Tina and Steve Bono, Jay Hoag and Dr. Mike Weiner, Dr. Frank Longo and Dr. Bill Newsome.

Hoag said, "Part the Cloud was the financially most successful fundraiser the Alzheimer's Association has ever held. However, the money we raised was incredible, touching those who have felt so alone was more meaningful than the money."

The gala lived up to the tag line of being "an evening to remember."

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Drew Altizer photo Connie Norland, Stephen Silver and Virginia Madsen at the Part the Cloud gala on May 3, 2014. (Drew Altizer)



Drew Altizer Stephanie Harman, Lisa Goldman and Natasha Dolby, from left, at the Part the Cloud gala on May 3, 2014. (Drew Altizer)



Drew Altizer photo Brook Shields, Mark Shriver and Mikey Hoag, from left, at Part the Cloud, before Shriver departed for Stanford Hospital, on May 3, 2014. (Drew Altizer)



Janet Duca Norton / For The Daily News Mikey Hoag, Chris Isaak, Paul Robichaud and Ellen Drew, from left, horsing around after the show at the Part the Cloud gala at the Rosewood Sand Hill Hotel on May 3, 2014. (Janet Duca Norton)



Drew Altizer photo Most of the Part the Cloud committee pose at the gala, on May 3, 2014, at the Rosewood Sand Hill Hotel in Menlo Park. From left are Melissa Badger, Susan Foley, Debbie Robins, Mikey Hoag, Betsy Matteson, Lulu Frye, Paula Robichaud, Heather Pietch, Bren Leisure, Ellen Drew and Stephanie Harman. (Drew Altizer)