



The Main Event is a feature highlighting fundraising events for nonprofit organizations in the greater Rochester area.

If you know of an event we should cover, contact Life section editor **Marissa Block** at 281-7427 or send an email to [mblock@postbulletin.com](mailto:mblock@postbulletin.com).

# The Main Event

## CELEBRATING . . . FOR A GOOD CAUSE

### Up next

On Feb. 28, we'll feature the annual fundraiser for Rochester Montessori School.



Comedian Bob Zany entertains crowd members as they finish dinner and prepare for a night of fun and magic.



Guests are seated for dinner at the Rochester International Event Center. The room was transformed to a Las Vegas feel for the evening.



Posing with local magician Brent Coggins, better known as Singee, center, are showgirls Kelsey Ford and Brandy Hodges, left, and magicians Mac King and Lance Burton, of Las Vegas.

## Autism event draws record crowd

By Debi Neville • Photos by Scott Jacobson  
[lfe@postbulletin.com](mailto:lfe@postbulletin.com)

The **RT Autism Awareness Foundation** hosted its second annual "Mending Minds, A Magical Gala for Autism" on Jan. 27 at the Rochester International Event Center.

Headlining the event was **Lance Burton**, designated Best Magician 11 years in a row by the Las Vegas Review-Journal.

"When I was asked to join the performers for this event, I was happy to jump on board," Burton said.

**Michael Gourdeau**, lauded as the "most successful juggler in Las Vegas history," was the first to be contacted to entertain.

"I have a 12-year-old, autistic son, so of course this is of special importance to me," he said. "I made a few phone calls and here we are."

Comedian **Bob Zany** and comic-magician **Mac King** joined the others to provide an unforgettable night of entertainment.

Also joining the group was **Tim Decker**, speed painter and entertainer. The group was brought together by **Keith West**, a magician who performed last year.

"I thought it was such a great cause," West said. "I wanted to be involved again and make it even a bigger event."

His efforts paid off. The sell-out crowd of 680 was the largest dinner crowd in the event center's history.

"This is very gratifying, to have such interest and support for this event, and we are happy to be a part of it," said **Joe Powers Jr.**, who was in charge of the venue.

**Lonnie Strohschein**, of Rochester, was part of a group of parents taking a survey at the event.

"Our goal is to open a public charter school, Rochester Beacon Academy, specializing in alternative learning styles for children struggling with mainstream public education, focusing primarily on those with developmental disabilities," Strohschein said.

**Brenda Gadiant**, of Park Place Motors in Rochester, said, "We are happy to be a part of the event and throw our support behind this cause."

**Brad Trahan** and his wife, **Joan**, founded the RT Autism Awareness Foundation soon after their son **Reece** was diagnosed with severe autism in 2003.

"We have been dealing with this for nine years and four days. Our son is now 12, and we are still learning and continue to help educate others providing support for families through the foundation," Brad Trahan said. "I can't even begin to thank so many who made this huge gala possible."

**Judy Braatz**, membership director for the Rochester Chamber of Commerce, helped with the silent auction items.

"I was so impressed with the passion of the board members and families," Braatz said.

The evening included a social hour, silent auction, dinner and entertainment and was followed by a live auction, a video presentation by John Marshall High School students and a dance.

The major sponsor for the event was **Veolia Environmental Services**.  
*Debi Neville is a Rochester freelance writer.*



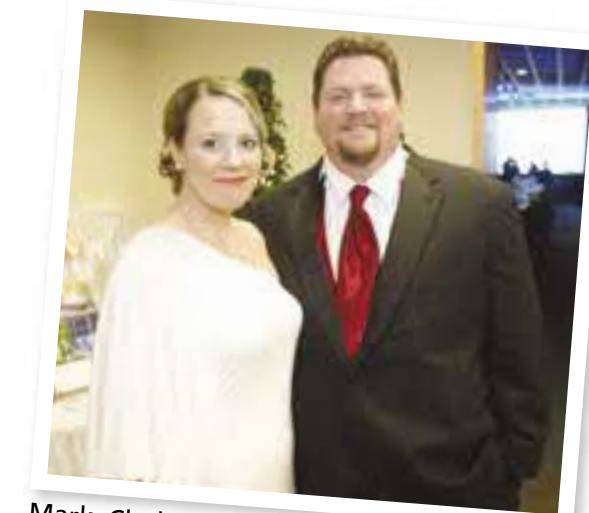
Payton Trahan, 8, and her friend Tessa Villeneuve, 12, socialize with Judy Braatz, membership development director for the Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce.



Gerry and Mary Anne Nonn check in and get a bidding number for the live auction, with the help of volunteer Katie Johnson. The Nonns were looking forward to the entertainment and an awesome event benefiting a great cause.



Sherry and Jim Rush, of Rochester, browse silent auction items before dinner. They were table sponsors for the event and liked the selection of auction items. They said they were looking forward to seeing Tim Decker, speed painter.



Mark Clark, of Rochester, was emcee for the event and ran the live auction. He and his wife, Angela, said they enjoy the great people this event attracts and sampling great food.



The Egglar family of Rochester — Maria, Laura, Master Gunnery Sgt. Todd Egglar and Larrisa — said they enjoyed the great people, auction items and dinner at the event.



It was a jam-packed lobby at the Rochester International Event Center as attendees catch up with old friends and make new ones and browse the many silent auction items.



Riley Meester, 14, of Elsworth, Minn., sings the "Star Spangled Banner" while the Marine Wing Support Squadron 471 Color Guard of Minneapolis presents the colors. Riley, who is also featured on YouTube, sang at Target Field prior to a Twins game on Father's Day in 2011.