

JOHN TAPLEY QMI Agency GOLDEN GALA:

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It was a big night of dining and dancing that raised big dollars for three Oxford charities at the 13th annual Century 21 Heritage House Ltd. Golden Gala on Saturday.

Dressed in their finest apparel, the sold-out crowd that packed Oxford Auditorium helped raise \$75,000 that was divided equally between the Alzheimer Society of Oxford, Easter Seals Ontario and Alexandra Hospital's HUGO program.

"It's been a fabulous year," said Linda Stewart, who co-chaired the gala with Jane Zyma. "It's overwhelming the support we get from the community, the businesses and the charities we're supporting."

Paying \$125 per ticket, the 500 people who turned out to the event were treated to a gourmet meal catered by the Oxford Golf and Country Club (Craigowan) and entertainment by The Motions Band, featuring Ian Jutsun, Lorraine Lawson and Quisha

Wint. Once the charities that will be supported on a given year are chosen, representatives from those organizations become members of the gala committee.

"They work (to put the event on) just like every member of the committee," said Stewart.

The funds going to the three beneficiaries for this year's gala will make a difference for people of all ages in Oxford County, Stewart said.

"It's amazing, absolutely amazing," said Nicole Rombouts, senior development officer with Easter Seals, about the \$25,000 the organization received from this year's gala.

This is the second year Easter Seals has been a recipient of Golden Gala funds. Last year, the organization was presented with an \$18,000 donation.

"Easter Seals is so thankful to receive the funding from the Golden Gala," Rombouts said.

The money will be used to send children to Camp Woodeden in



Wint.

The gala also included a silent auction of more than 75 high-end items, including Toronto Maple Leafs tickets, autographed NHL jerseys, a trip to Mexico and a bottle of cognac valued at \$3,500.

Gala goers were entered in a draw for an overnight stay and meal package for six people at the Westover Inn in St. Marys, which was donated by

London, Ont., at a cost of about \$2,500 each.

There are more than 20,000 children in Ontario with disabilities, Rombout said, and the funding from the gala will "help kids be kids."

The Alzheimer Society of Oxford has received funds from the gala since 2012, and executive director Shelly Green said it's the organization's largest third party event of the year.

"We know first hand how much time and energy fundraising takes and when a group like the Golden Gala committee chooses to fundraise for us it's an incredible gift," Green said.

The society puts the money it receives into the multitude of programs and services it provides across Oxford County.

Alexandra Hospital's Healthcare Undergoing Optimization (HUGO) program is a first time recipient of gala funds.

The program, which was launched in June, 2013, and will cost \$1.1 million to

JMRD Wealth Management.

With more than 100 sponsors, the gala gained some new supporters this year, including several additional platinum and double platinum backers.

The setup for the event began Thursday and included the installation of more than \$1 million worth of sound and lighting equipment, along with decorations that transformed

the auditorium into a glitzy venue.

Century 21 Heritage House organized the first event in 2001 as a fundraiser in support of Woodstock's involvement with the Canada Games, generating \$50,000. From there, the decision was made to make the gala an annual event, and over the next nine years, \$850,000 was raised for the Woodstock Hospital Foundation.

In the past few years, the gala committee has added other local charities to its list of beneficiaries.

"This year, we'll break the \$1 million mark in what we've raised for the community," said Jane Zyma.

In deciding which causes it will support, Century 21's Golden Gala Committee reviews applications submitted by organizations.

"They must require community funding to provide their services and they must provide services that meet the needs of people in the community," said Stewart about the basic criteria for a charity to be considered.

"It's excellent, the band is amazing and it's a good mixture (of charities being supported)."

While cheques for \$25,000 were presented to each of the three charities on Saturday, the final amount the organizations receive could end up being higher.

"When all is said and done, hopefully we'll have even more than that (\$75,000)," said Linda Stewart.

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Shelly Green, executive director of the Alzheimer Society of Oxford, left, Nicole Rombouts senior development officer with Easter Seals Ontario, and Robin Schultz, executive director of the Alexandra Hospital Foundation, each received \$25,000 donations toward their respective organizations during the 13th annual Century 21 Heritage House Ltd. Golden Gala fundraiser at Oxford Auditorium on Saturday, March 1, 2014.

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Tracy Hiuser of Embro and John Huigenboss of Brantford check out some of the 75 high-end items that were up for bid in a silent auction at the 13th annual Century 21 Heritage House Ltd. Golden Gala fundraiser. The sold-out event generated \$75,000 that was divided equally between the Alzheimer Society of Oxford, Easter Seals Ontario and the HUGO project at Alexandra Hospital in Ingersoll.

"It's a difficult decision every year because we would like to help absolutely everyone."

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Brad Janssen was the emcee at the fundraiser. The sold out event included fine dining, musical entertainment and a silent auction.

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Cook Evan Hughes and chef Carlos Reyes from Oxford Golf and Country Club (Craigowan) prepare some of the gourmet food served to guests.

