

Dancing ?Stars? raise more than \$140,000 for Easter Seals Kids



A milestone event for a popular local gala ended with a fundraising milestone as business and community leaders laced up and put their best feet forward for the 10th annual Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars.

The gala evening, which sees leaders teamed with professional instructors from Aurora's Artistica Ballroom Dance Studio, raised more than \$140,000 for the cause, fostering summer camp opportunities for children with mobility challenges and providing funds for assistive devices.

Among the participants were business owners Mae Khamissa, Joanne Russo, Shani Whittle, Joe Cappiello, York Regional Police Deputy Chief Paulo Da Silva, publishers Myles Doak and Debora Kelly, and Aurora Sports Hall of Famer Marco Di Girolamo.

While Doak took home the top prize, Di Girolamo was saluted for being the top individual fundraiser, collecting more than \$41,000 for the initiative.

"I didn't do it by myself; there are a lot of people in my life who stepped up," Di Girolamo told the crowds. "I went to the (Easter Seals fundraising) Conn Smythe Dinner last year and was so moved by the words on stage and the challenges faced by Easter Seals kids and just seeing you guys succeed in life is the driving force behind me. I am glad I was able to do that for you guys."

This appreciation was returned by Easter Seals Ambassador Shamil Sohail, who underscored exactly why every dollar counts.

He told attendees that Easter Seals helped him secure an electric wheelchair which not only enables him to get to school on his own, but also to his local mall where he can hang out with friends.

"I can elevate my chair to be at the same height as the table and I have a boost of confidence," he shared. "In addition to my wheelchair, I have also attended Easter Seals summer camp five times. I know no limitations, no boundaries, and it's just a place where I can make life-long memories and friendships, and try activities such as canoeing, kayaking, sailing, archery and many more fun, inclusive activities.

"All of this would not be possible without the generous support of donors such as yourselves. Thank you for supporting this dance and being here."

For more on the cause and this year's participants, visit eastersealsdancing.org/newmarket.

By Brock Weir