

Chicago Tribune

Digestive Health Foundation honors 'power couple' at record-breaking gala

By CANDACE JORDAN
CHICAGO TRIBUNE



David Goodman of Auction Results®, LLC (Fred Becker photo)

An exciting live auction and paddle raise, conducted by David Goodman, brought in \$350,000. The top lot, a luxury trip to Venice and Paris with business class airfare and tours included, sold for \$23,000.

The Digestive Health Foundation (DHF) hosted its third annual gala June 9 at the Four Seasons Chicago. More than 400 guests attended, raising a record-breaking \$2.41 million to support the foundation's cutting edge research and education to prevent and cure digestive disorders for patients and families at the Northwestern Medicine Digestive Health Center.

The evening honored Dr. Steve Stryker, attending colorectal surgeon at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and professor of clinical surgery at Northwestern University, and his wife, Andrea Schwartz, Macy's Vice President of Regional Media Relations, U.S.



Honorees Dr. Steven Stryker and Andrea Schwartz, from left, Judith and Dennis Schwartz, Laura Schwartz and Susan Santiago. (Chicago Corporate Photography/HANDOUT)

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Northwestern University, and his wife, Andrea Schwartz, Macy's Vice President of Regional Media Relations, U.S.

Emcees Mary Ann Childers and Jay Levine introduced Dr. Stephen Hanauer, Professor of Medicine at Northwestern University, medical director at the Digestive Health Center and Chief Medical Advisor at the Digestive Health Foundation.

Hanauer explained DHF's fundraising process, saying, "The way the foundation operates is that you provide seed money for our faculty and trainees to get projects initiated and the initial evidence in order to submit for larger grants."

Since its founding in 2015, the foundation has funded 30 research studies, two advanced physician fellowships, and the establishment of the Digestive Health Foundation BioRepository, a tissue bank designed to support global research on digestive diseases and other medical disorders.

Hanauer's surprise announcement of a \$1 million endowment brought gasps and applause from the crowd. Judith Blazer, a longtime patient of Stryker's, made the donation requesting that it be named the "Steven J. Stryker, M.D. Gastrointestinal Surgery, Education and Research Endowment" to support surgical trainees pursuing a career in G.I. or colorectal surgery.

Hanauer then introduced the honorees and spoke of their many accomplishments and philanthropic endeavors, calling them the "ultimate power couple."

Andrea Schwartz leads teams responsible for developing and executing public relations strategies for nearly 500 Macy's stores in 35 states. Additionally, she works with Macy's Corporate Giving to promote cause campaigns, such as the American Heart Association's "Go Red for Women" and Make-A-Wish's

“Believe,” as well as district grants, which count for nearly \$60 million of Macy’s giving back to the communities.

Schwartz lovingly introduced her husband of three years, Stryker, who has been a surgeon at Northwestern Hospital for 33 years. “Obviously, it took us some time to find each other but, as the saying goes, great things come to those who wait,” she said. Schwartz spoke about being touched by the poignant comments, calls and letters from Stryker’s patients thanking him for being such a positive force in their lives.

During Stryker’s remarks, he thanked Judith Blazer, who was not in attendance, calling her endowment “a bold statement of support of training and research in the distinctly non-sexy arena of digestive diseases.” He acknowledged his early mentors — Drs. Stuart Poticha, Gerald Ujiki, Bob Beart and Roger Dozois — and dear friends in the audience who he’d known since elementary school, Dr. Dean Velis, Harry Michas, Peter Sutterlin, Karen Kostas and Harry Manos.

Since its inception in 2015, the Digestive Health Foundation has raised more than \$6 million to improve the quality of life for those facing digestive disorders, including, but not limited to, colon and pancreatic cancers, ulcerative colitis, and Crohn's, esophageal, celiac and liver diseases. According to the National Institutes of Health, more than 1 in 5 people will be diagnosed with a digestive disease during their lifetime.

Freelance writer Candace Jordan is involved in many local organizations, including some whose events she covers.