

Chicago Tribune

# Seth Meyers Headlines Record-Breaking Wish Ball

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Seth Meyers & David Goodman of Auction Results<sup>®</sup>, LLC (Fred Becker photo)

**An exciting live auction and paddle raise, conducted by David Goodman, brought in \$1. Million for Male-A-Wish!**

The 31st annual Make-A-Wish Illinois' Wish Ball drew more than 900 guests to Navy Pier on May 18. With the theme "Create Boundless Hope," the fundraiser featured inspiring stories from wish ambassadors and performances by Seth Meyers and The Soul Children of Chicago.



Colleen Van Ham, Katie Graham Shannon, Seth Meyers and Barbara Perino at the Make-A-Wish "Wish Ball" at the Navy Pier Grand Ballroom at 600 E. Grand in Chicago, Illinois. (Yvette Marie Dostatni/for the Chicago)

During a VIP reception, Zoraida Sambolin of NBC-5 emceed a short program that included a toast from Meyers and comments from Brian Paul, Make-A-Wish Illinois board chair. Paul shared his experience with the foundation, including his son's 2018 leukemia diagnosis. He described his son's wish journey as a "gift in and of itself" and "something to hope for."

"We have long witnessed and believed in the transformational power of a wish, and now a first-of-its-kind study out of Nationwide Children's Hospital

found that patients who were granted a wish were more likely to have fewer unplanned hospital and emergency room visits,” Sambolin said.

In the grand ballroom, guests heard from wish ambassadors. Ariella Duvel, 14, Bonaparte Moutima, 13, Allison Wittich, 6, and brothers Colman, 9, and Finnegan Kuzinar, 6, each had wishes granted, which included a trip to Hawaii, appearing in a film, skating with the Chicago Blackhawks and meeting a Disney character.

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Finnegan’s wish began onstage when he took an oath to become a “superhero” as the audience stood and applauded. His wish will be granted in full on June 9.

**Jeff Owen Hanson, 21, a visually impaired self-taught artist and wish alum, participated in the live auction with David Goodman, selling two of his original paintings for \$25,000 each. His wish was to meet Sir Elton John, who advised him, “If you give to the world, the world will give back.” The live auction raised more than \$500,000 and included a Shawn Mendes concert, a Super Bowl 2020 experience and trips to Belize, Napa Valley, Cabo San Lucas and Italy.**

Liz Vallejo, the mother of wish recipient Ian, shared the impact of the wish experience for her son, who was diagnosed with a rare, aggressive bone cancer. His wish to rock climb in the French Alps was granted in 2017. The

wish helped him endure his early treatments and “fueled his adrenaline dreams.” Ian passed away in July 2018.

Co-chaired by Kristin Komar, Simon Landon, Hilary Mikulich and Amie Milano, the event (presented by GATX Corporation) shattered previous records, raising more than \$2.7 million to fund wishes for children with critical illnesses.

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