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Star Light, Star Bright

Stars & Wishes Gala makes dreams come true for terminally ill adults

[Kay Daly](#) ▶▶ April 21, 2004

This Saturday night, each star that shines down on the [Adler Planetarium](#) will be more than just a heavenly body. It'll be a symbol of a wish that could come true.

At least, that's the hope of Fairygodmother Foundation, a Chicago-based wish-granting organization which will hold its yearly black-tie fundraiser at the planetarium on April 24.

Now in its fifth year, Fairygodmother Foundation is a unique organization with a worthy mission. Working with volunteers, donors and corporate sponsors, the Foundation grants important end-of-life wishes to the families of adults facing terminal illness. "We're the only charity in the Midwest that focuses on terminally ill adults, and one of only a couple in the entire country," says Leah Fox, the organization's director of development.

But while Fairygodmother Foundation focuses its efforts on adults, its impact is much wider. According to Fox, more than 80 percent of their wishes involve children about to lose a parent. The average recipient is a 40-year-old mother of two battling breast cancer looking for one last memory for her children. "Our wishes affect not just the recipient, but the entire family, sometimes the entire community," says Fox.

This year alone, Fairygodmother Foundation expects to grant 200 wishes to recipients from all over the country. By far the most popular wish, reports Gina Finamore, the organization's director of wish granting, is a trip to Walt Disney World. "Many recipients experience a great deal of sadness knowing they're going to miss out on so many 'firsts:' their child's first day of school, first prom, first job," explains Finamore. A wish granted offers a chance to enjoy a "first" experience, whether a first family vacation or the first time their children get to see the ocean.

And for many, the wish allows the recipient to fulfill a dream long delayed. Finamore recalls one recipient who asked to take his family on a fishing trip. "He said, 'We wanted to do this for years, and always planned to do it later,'" Finamore reports, "But now there is no 'later.'" For others, wishes supply services and equipment that would've been out of reach due to huge medical bills.

But most valuable are the memories that are created for a family about to lose a loved one. "In the process of fulfilling wishes, Fairygodmother Foundation creates an opportunity for



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peace," says Bonnie Ilyse Tunick, the group's founder and executive director. "Desperate families now have somewhere to seek refuge from illness and pain, and find closure and the serendipitous discovery of happy lasting memories." To help make these dreams come true, the Foundation relies on the funds raised from events like the Stars & Wishes Gala, which this year is made possible by support from Lincoln Park Hospital. The hospital also donates office space for the Foundation's administrative staff.

"Fairygodmother Foundation's requests far exceed its resources, so donations are crucial in continuing to make important end-of-life wishes come true for recipients," says Tunick. Last year's gala was the organization's first event of this kind, and raised \$100,000.

This year, they're planning an even more spectacular event. "We've kicked it up a notch," says Melinda Hartz, president of the organization's auxiliary board. Hartz and her committee of volunteers have been planning this year's gala since September. "We'll be weaving many of our current wishes into the event," she says. "It's a chance to joyfully reflect on the wishes we've granted and make even more come true."

So what kind of event is the Stars & Wishes Gala? "I tell people to expect a one-of-a-kind event because what we do is one-of-a-kind," says Fox. Lin Brehmer, the host of WXRT's Morning show, will serve as emcee, and guests will be treated to a cocktail reception, sit-down dinner, dancing and live music, as well as some "special surprises." Guests will also enjoy the attractions of Adler Planetarium, including a live feed from the Mars Rover.

During the gala, a presentation and program book will tell the stories of the families who have been touched by Fairygodmother Foundation, and guests will have a chance to grant future wishes through live and silent auctions. Participants can bid to become the exclusive sponsor of a current wish, or vie for a range of prizes. Included in the live auction are tickets to the Cubs/Sox game for July 4 weekend, a travel package to New York City, a seven-day cruise for two and a Honda scooter.

You can help Fairygodmother Foundation make wishes come true at the Stars & Wishes Gala:

[Adler Planetarium](#)

1300 S. Lake Shore

April 24, 6:30 p.m.

\$175 for individuals or \$1,600 for a table of 10

tickets: (773) 388-1160 or visit www.fairygodmother.org

Make a donation

Your dollars can make dreams come true for terminally ill adults and their families. You can also donate airline miles and tickets, services and equipment. For more information, visit www.fairygodmother.org.

Become a volunteer

Fairygodmother Foundation needs volunteers to help with programs and services, fundraising, administration, marketing and publicity, and event planning. Visit www.fairygodmother.org to learn more.

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