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## Hearts & Hands Gala Raises a Record \$530,500 To Benefit Connections School for Autism

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla., Feb. 21, 2024 — The 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Hearts & Hands Gala held Feb. 17, 2024, raised a record amount of \$530,500 for local students and adults with autism who attend Connections nonprofit school in West Palm Beach. Proceeds from the gala, which was held at the National Croquet Center, will fund specialized education, vital therapies and important family resource programs.

“We are beyond grateful for the incredible support of our community,” says Debra Johnson, executive director and principal of Connections. “This remarkable fundraising success is a testament to the generosity and compassion of our supporters, whose contributions will directly impact the lives of our students and adult clients as well as their families. We serve some of the most underrepresented members of our community, and we could not deliver the life-changing services needed without the support of our community.”

The Hearts & Hand Gala has become a cornerstone fundraising event for Connections, playing a pivotal role in the nonprofit’s ability to deliver adaptive education, therapeutic services, vocational training and more to individuals with autism, no matter the family’s financial status. Some 85 percent of Connections’ students live below the poverty line, 94 percent come from minority families, and almost 50 percent reside in single-parent families or with grandparents. Public funding covers less than 70 percent of the actual cost to deliver necessary services.

This year’s gala featured a delightful evening of philanthropy, entertainment and camaraderie, highlighted by engaging casino-style games, live music and inspiring updates on the progress made by Connections’ students and adult clients. WPTV anchor Michael Williams served as master of ceremonies, and special honorees were recognized for their significant contributions to the school’s mission. Honorees included Addy van Leeuwen of Palm Beach Gardens, Melissa Carman of Riviera Beach, and corporate partner SandyJames Fine Food & Productions.

“We’re humbled by the tremendous support of local autism advocates and caring people as we work to build a world where we all belong, including individuals with autism,” says Johnson.

For more information about Connections or this event, please visit [connectedpb.com](https://connectedpb.com).

### About Connections

Connections is a nonprofit educational center that delivers high-quality, specialized instruction to students with autism in Palm Beach County. They serve students ages 3-22 years and offer an innovative day program for adults with autism. Learn more at [connectedpb.com](https://connectedpb.com).

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