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Sunshine Ball and Steppin' Up

It's always a treat to be invited to the home of Michael Budman and Diane Bald, whether for hot chocolate by the bonfire in their garden while hockey greats take to their Olympic-sized ice-rink, or an intimate dinner for 18 around their beautifully set table. The latter was what brought me to their home to celebrate their dear friend

Laurie David (yes, that Laurie David, ex-wife of quirky/neurotic/crazy funny-man Larry) and her new book *Family Dinner: Great Ways to Connect with Your Kids, One Meal at a Time*. There was much chatter about the fact that the concept of eating with your husband and kids is going the way of the dinosaurs, and we have to stop the madness. Laurie was a bundle of energy and she actually got me thinking about ripping the television out of my kitchen wall.

Diane Bald created a beautiful setting for the perfect family dinner, complete with good friends sharing a collaborative meal created by Jamie Kennedy. And those eye-popping peonies in the front hall and fragrant roses on the dining table were stunning!

Actor Tom Hanks summed it up best in a quote from Laurie David's website: "If you can muster the energy for only one tool to raising a healthy family, make it having family dinner. This book will help you make those meals easy, fun and of lasting impact." Sounds like the perfect holiday gift!

Ladies and their gents hoofed it uptown to the Eglinton Grand for some fun at the fourth annual Sunshine Ball. Slinky dresses seemed to be de rigueur among the ladies who attended the Seamus O'Regan-hosted dinner.

One couldn't help but get into the groove, with performances by the Toronto All Stars Steel Drum Orchestra and Canadian Idol winner Theo Tams. Patrons kicked it into high gear at the silent and live auctions, bidding on luxury vacations, exquisite jewellery and priceless keepsakes from the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games.

Among those shining brightly that night were Beatrice Kernan, executive director of Project Sunshine; Ben Mulroney; Patrick Burke, Scotia Capital (Scotia Capital was the title sponsor of the 2010 Sunshine Ball); Caroline Bell-Ritchie, president of Project Sunshine Canada and co-chair of the Sunshine Ball, as well as her fellow co-chairs, Sarah Miller and Lisa Parsons; and Rob Cowley, VP, Joyner Waddington's Canadian Fine Art.

The event raised \$200,000 for the free educational, recreational and social programs that Project Sunshine provides to children and their families facing medical challenges in Toronto and across the Greater Toronto Area.



Recently, the Magna Golf Club was the venue for Steppin' Up, a special event presented by National Homes, to benefit St. John's Rehab Foundation. The evening featured a spectacular meal of French cuisine created by master chef Didier Leroy and live entertainment from Juno Award-nominee and jazz-pop "musicologist" Matt Dusk. Superb wine pairings from Halpern Enterprises were especially popular.

The event supports survivors of traumatic illness or injury, funding new rehab research, leading-edge rehab equipment and further staff education, in order to help patients get back to their families, places of work and communities. More than \$305,000 was raised.

"St. John's Rehab rebuilds lives of people who have had a serious accident or illness," said Deena Pantalone Reale, Steppin' Up co-chair and former St. John's Rehab patient. "I know first-hand: I am one of their success stories. After a serious ski accident when I was just 14, the prognosis was not good — I was told I would likely walk with a pronounced limp and may not be able to have children. With help from the expert and caring team at St. John's, I learned to walk again, without a limp, and today I have two beautiful young girls."

Among the notables in attendance were event co-chair Paul Pellegrini and a committee of society guys and gals that included Bill Arvanitis, Melissa Baldassarra, Chris Bratty, Nicole Corriero, Aynsley Deluce, Christene DeGasperis, Laura Fracassi, Rob and Melinn Godfrey, Tony Lofranco, Jennifer Montemarano, Lianne McOuat, Jason Pantalone and Matthew Pantalone.

Weekend Post – Photos by Amoryn Engel for National Post

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