

## NARRATIVE

Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana's Inaugural Wish Ball | Among the Stars  
(Outstanding Fundraising Program, Less than \$2 million)

### **Description of fundraising program, including fundraising goal, net funds raised, time element, staff and volunteer involvement and impact on overall agency budget.**

Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana celebrated 40 years of granting life-changing wishes to children with critical illnesses this past year. The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration culminated on May 3, 2024, at the Post Oak Hotel at the inaugural *Wish Ball | Among the Stars*; the first-ever black-tie gala for the organization. The event paid tribute to Make-A-Wish Foundation co-founders, Tommy and Kay Austin, who helped to grant the “first wish,” on April 29, 1980 for 7-year-old Chris Grecius, who wished to be a police officer.

For 40 years, Chris’ story has continued to resound through the mission of the Make-A-Wish Foundation, evolving into the powerful lifeline that was this year’s Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana gala theme “Among the Stars”.

The power of wishes was highlighted by the numerous Wish Alumni and families in attendance. For Wish Alum Raj Sheth, a 35-year-old teacher in the Houston-area, the power of a wish continues to weave throughout his life in unexpected ways. As a two-year-old, Raj had already gone through a liver transplant due to the congenital liver disease, biliary atresia, prompting a nearly six-year hospital battle. His wish to meet Charles Barkley was granted on February 11, 1997, at the age of 7.

At the Wish Ball, Raj, who has now stepped into a volunteer role with the organization as a Wish Maker and Granter, surprised Wish Alum, Jeston, 15, heart transplant, with a personalized video from his idol, JJ Watt. This kicked off a night of surprises, with Raj receiving a surprise video from Charles Barkley. This prompted the first round of standing ovations for the night.

Franklin, 15, from Woodworth, Louisiana, who suffers from a genetic disorder, loves music, especially playing the piano. His wish for a baby grand piano was granted in January 2024, captured by a powerful home video. The video, which features Franklin’s first reaction to seeing the piano, was played at the event, quieting the entire ballroom of 750 guests. At the event, the video faded to black, revealing Franklin playing the piano live from offstage, illuminated by a spotlight. This landed Franklin a five-minute standing ovation.

Guests were so moved by the power of the wish that a surprise \$350,000 donation by Holly and Ryan Lambert kicked-off the special appeal of the night, which garnered \$760,200, far exceeding the conservative projection of \$150,000 by 400%. The donation by the Lamberts marks the single largest gift donated by them to the organization thus far.

When the organization began planning for this inaugural event, a conservative net goal of \$500,000 was determined. The event far surpassed that goal, raising \$1.7 million to support

granting more life-changing wishes for children across 47 counties along the Texas Gulf Coast and the 64 parishes in the State of Louisiana. Currently, there are 1,250 children waiting for their wish to be granted across our Chapter territory.

The event concept was shaped by event chairs Brad and Claudia Freels, and John and Carly Whitehurst. At the age of 17, Carly was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Her wish to attend the Country Music Awards was granted in 2014.

The massive undertaking of planning the first-ever Wish Ball in the chapter's 40-year history required collaboration across the Board of Directors and Board Advisors, as well as strategic cross-communication across multiple Make-A-Wish divisions, including Development, Mission Engagement, Corporate Engagement, Communications and Marketing, as well as with Houston-based production company Francisco + Co.

The event garnered an impressive 750-person guest list. Community partners from the Houston Astros, Houston Rockets, Houston Dynamos, and Houston Texans, were in attendance for a pivotal moment to show how the sports teams have contributed to many powerful wishes in the chapter's history.

A live canvas painting in the ballroom by Houston-based artist Edgar Medina wowed guests. Wish Kids and Alums contributed to the painting, increasing the net worth of the piece to priceless. The art piece was then auctioned off, with the help of Wish Alum, Melinda Moreno, a pediatric cancer survivor who got the chance to take art lessons from Edgar in 2021.

The event ended on a powerful note with a three-song performance from Andrew Marshall, a singer songwriter. Andrew, who had a successful run-on NBC's *The Voice* shared how the power of a wish moved him to pursue music, even after almost quitting. It was his chance to meet John Mayer at age 19, after his battle with leukemia, that gave him the confidence to continue.

The event would not have been possible without the help of the 25 employee volunteers from the Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana chapter, and the more than a year planning and work done by the Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana 18-person Board of Directors, 8-person Board Advisors, 44-person Host Committee, and countless Wish Alums, Wish Volunteers and Wish Granters who dedicated their time to make the event a magical success.

### **Description of originality, inventiveness and impact on fundraising goal**

The *Wish Ball | Among the Stars*, celebrating 40-years of the "Power of a Wish," had an original fundraising goal of \$500,000. The event exceeded expectations, raising more than \$1.7 million to support life-changing wishes for eligible children with critical illnesses across the Texas Gulf Coast and State of Louisiana. This was the first black-tie event for the Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana chapter in its 40-year history. The event was stewarded with the dream of celebrating the "Power of a Wish," and by leveraging countless stories of perseverance, hope, and joy throughout the night. The "Power of a Wish" was celebrated by over 750 guests.

Guests were immersed by the story of Make-A-Wish from co-founder Tommy Austin, who lives in Magnolia, who spoke deeply about the profound affect Chris Grecius, a 7-year-old boy who lost his battle to leukemia on May 3, 1980, played on the creation of the organization. A pin drop could be heard in the room as Tommy spoke, reminding everyone that if Chris was alive today, he would be 51 years old. Tommy spoke about how powerful a wish has become, and through this power Chris continues to live within each of us.

The \$1.7 million funds raised from the Wish Ball significantly impact Make-A-Wish's overall agency budget, particularly in light of the board-approved, budgeted deficit enacted in Fiscal Year 2021 to address pandemic challenges and a backlog of wishes. With a budgeted deficit of -\$2,514,000 for Fiscal Year 2023, the organization ended the year with a deficit of -\$1,269,241. In Fiscal Year 2024, a projected deficit of -\$1,249,880 is anticipated to be covered by withdrawing from unrestricted investments of \$3,644,591 and utilizing accumulated earnings on Investments Held for Long-Term Purposes.

The Wish Ball's funds contribute substantially to these efforts, representing a significant portion of the agency's annual revenue. With a budgeted public support revenue of \$5,550,000 for Fiscal Year 2024, fundraising efforts aim to surpass revenue targets, alleviating the deficit. Moreover, the introduction of an internal fundraising gala underscores the organization's commitment to developing a larger donor pipeline for sustained fundraising growth, with a strategic aim to eliminate the budgeted deficit by 2026.

### **Evidence of volunteer involvement and leadership**

Volunteer involvement and leadership played a pivotal role in the planning and implementation of the successful event. The volunteer auction committee was comprised of 20 passionate individuals and chaired by longtime Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana supporter and wish granter, Renee Montgomery.

Renee was instrumental in helping the Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana event coordinator with the design and creation of the auction committee, as well as acting as the boots on the ground volunteer to help aide in auction package creations and collections.

Event day volunteers shifts filled in less than 24-hours of posting, and 49 volunteers on event day were broken into 11 roles from set up to breakdown. Those roles including set-up crew, break down crew, volunteer check-in, registration, greeter, raffle, silent auction, star display/backdrop, floater, VIP reception, and Wish Kid hosts.

Brad and Claudia Freels, with the help of John and Carly Whitehurst, stepped into the role as Honorary Chairs, playing a pivotal role in securing over 70 sponsored tables. Board Chair, Thomas Hatfield, generously donated his time to share his own story of how his nephew Brock's journey with Make-A-Wish has impacted him.

See Make-A-Wish's Wish Ball Highlight Recap here: [2024 Wish Ball \(Extended\) \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2024WishBallExtended)

May 29, 2024

Dear National Philanthropy Day Award Committee Members:

I am delighted to recommend Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana's Wish Ball for Outstanding Fundraising Program (less than \$2 million funds raised category). This organization has been instrumental in giving kids hope during their journey.

As the Sidney L. and Donald F. Faust Professor in Pediatric Cancer Survivorship at Texas Children's Hospital, Professor for the Department of Pediatrics for Baylor College of Medicine, and a decades long volunteer with Make-A-Wish, I personally have been impacted by the power of a wish through my work.

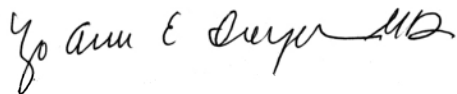
Every day, I am faced with stories from children across our area who are about to start their battle with cancer, are currently battling their cancer battle, or are closing out their battle with cancer. I have helped dozens of kids get their applications in for their wishes and have helped wishes be granted. It's been a privilege to be part of these kids wish journeys, and truly the impact Make-A-Wish plays in their stories, resonates with every smile, every laugh and every tear.

The funds raised by the Wish Ball are astounding, especially for the first year of this event. That shows the true power of this organization and how the need for more fundraising is so important. There are over 1,200 kids currently waiting for their wish to be granted in our territory, and without those dollars raised, this organization cannot do what it does best: grant wishes.

I applaud this organization's commendable work every single day, and to be a small part of the magic they make happen daily, is a true testament of their importance in our community.

This event marks a milestone for the organization, and I cannot wait to see what happens next.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "ZoAnn E. Dreyer MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. ZoAnn E. Dreyer  
Sidney L. and Donald F. Faust Professor in Pediatric Cancer Survivorship, Texas Children's Hospital  
Clinical Director, Long-Term Survivor Program  
Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Section of Hematology-Oncology, Baylor College of Medicine

# OWEN GRAY

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May 29, 2024

Dear Association of Fundraising Professionals Greater Houston Chapter,

My name is Owen Gray, and I am honored to write this letter nominating the Wish Ball 2024, hosted by Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana, for your prestigious National Philanthropy Day honor. As a Wish Alumni, my connection to Make-A-Wish has profoundly impacted my life, both personally and professionally.

When I was 17, battling a genetic disorder, my wish was granted to be an ESPN Game Day Guest Picker. The list of potential guest pickers included stars like Johnny Manziel, Von Miller, Lyle Lovett, and Jennifer Garner, but ESPN chose me, a young man from Cypress, Texas, to stand beside sports legends Desmon Howard, Kirk Herbstreit, and Lee Corso. This incredible opportunity not only fulfilled a lifelong dream but also propelled me towards a career in sports media. I predicted the Texas A&M Aggies' victory over the Clemson Tigers, and this experience led to invitations from other colleges to participate in their game day productions.

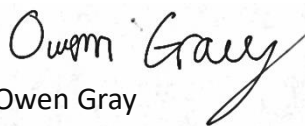
Inspired by my wish experience, I attended the University of Houston, where I became a student manager for the basketball team, and I recently graduated. I now work for the University of Houston, a testament to how Make-A-Wish helped shape my future.

The Wish Ball 2024 holds a special place in my heart. At the event, I had the privilege of working as a cameraman, capturing the magic of the evening, while my family enjoyed the festivities at their own table. Seeing the joy and hope on the faces of wish kids and their families was a powerful reminder of the incredible work Make-A-Wish does. The Wish Ball not only raises crucial funds to grant wishes but also brings the community together to celebrate the resilience and dreams of children facing critical illnesses.

Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana is deeply committed to its mission of creating life-changing wishes for children with critical illnesses. The Wish Ball exemplifies this commitment, offering an unforgettable experience that highlights the transformative power of a wish. The event's success is a testament to the dedication, passion, and generosity of everyone involved, from the organizers and volunteers to the donors and supporters.

I wholeheartedly believe that the Wish Ball 2024 deserves to be honored by the Association of Fundraising Professionals Greater Houston Chapter. It is a shining example of philanthropy at its finest, making a lasting impact on the lives of children and their families. Thank you for considering this nomination.

Warmest regards,



Owen Gray  
Wish Alumni



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## **Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** ***Wish Ball | Among the Stars***

### **Short Bio**

On May 3, 2024, the Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana *Wish Ball | Among the Stars* celebrated 40 years of life-changing wishes granted by the organization. The event raised \$1.7 million to help grant more wishes across the chapter's territory, which serves 47 counties in the Texas Gulf Coast and all 64 parishes in Louisiana. Currently, there are 1,250 children waiting for their wish to be granted.

Make-A-Wish traces its inspiration to 7-year-old Chris Grecius, a child with leukemia who wished to be a police officer, and whose wish was granted in 1980. That "first wish," sparked the creation of the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana has granted more than 11,000 wishes since its inception in 1984. We seek to bring every eligible child's wish to life because a wish is an integral part of a child's treatment journey. Research shows children who have wishes granted can build the physical and emotional strength they need to fight their illness.

### **Long Bio**

On May 3, 2024, the Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana *Wish Ball | Among the Stars* celebrated 40 years of life-changing wishes granted by the organization raising \$1.7 million towards its mission to create life-changing wishes for children with critical illnesses.

Make-A-Wish traces its inspiration to 7-year-old Chris Grecius, a child with leukemia who wished to be a police officer. In 1980, a group of caring individuals came together and made his wish come true. The impact of Chris' wish was felt throughout his community, becoming the inspiration for what is now the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

As the largest wish granting organization, Make-A-Wish has granted more than 585,000 wishes worldwide to children battling critical illnesses.

Wishes replace a child's fear with confidence, sadness with joy, and anxiety with hope. Wishes give children renewed energy and strength, bring families closer together, and unite communities.

Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana has granted more than 11,000 wishes since its inception in 1984. We seek to bring every eligible child's wish to life because a wish is an integral part of a child's treatment journey. Research shows children who have wishes granted can build the physical and emotional strength they need to fight their illness.

Our chapter serves 47 counties in the Texas Gulf Coast and all 64 parishes in Louisiana.

Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana is dedicated to influencing the healing journey of children through the magic and joy of a wish experience that unites and transforms communities. Together, we create life-changing wishes for children with critical illnesses.

This past year, Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana granted 575 wishes, a record total and an average of nearly two wishes per day! We recruited 163 new volunteers this year, bringing our total volunteer base to 545 dedicated individuals. We engaged 48 local corporate partners in support of our mission and captured more than 650 million media impressions.





	<b>Approved FY 2024 Budget</b>
<b>Public Support and Revenue</b>	
Individual Giving	2,015,000
Major and Planned Gifts	500,000
Corporate Contributions	1,775,000
External Events	460,000
Grants	300,000
Internal Event	500,000
Total Public Support	<u>5,550,000</u>
Wish Assist Fees	5,000
Investment Income - Dividends & Interest, net of Expenses	220,000
<b>Total Public Support and Revenue</b>	<u><b>5,775,000</b></u>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Direct Wish Expense	3,225,550
Salaries, Benefits and Payroll Taxes	2,935,020
Other Operating Expenses	443,810
Chapter Dues	420,500
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<u><b>7,024,880</b></u>
<b>Net Surplus/(Deficit)</b>	<u><u><b>(1,249,880)</b></u></u>

Make-A-Wish Texas Gulf Coast and Louisiana  
Fundraising Project: Wish Ball 2024

Outstanding Fundraising Program Application

Program Budget

Revenue	
Individual Contributions (Pre-Event Donations)	\$66,150
Foundation Contributions	\$0
Corporate Contributions	\$0
Post Event Revenue: Jewelry Sales and Additional Dona	\$820
Sponsorships	\$717,100
Night of Revenue: Silent Auction	\$122,885
Night of Revenue: Live Auction	\$80,000
Night of Revenue: Raffle	\$26,300
Night of Revenue: Donation Appeal	\$694,000
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$1,707,255</b>
Expenses	
<i>Venue, Food, and Beverage</i>	\$233,886
Decorations	\$23,720
Printed Materials	\$18,473
Program and Entertainment	\$23,987
Other	\$45,418
	\$0
	\$0
	\$0
	\$0
	\$0
	\$0
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$345,484</b>
<b>Net Profit of Fundraising Program</b>	<b>\$1,361,771</b>