

Tropical Nights Record-Breaking Gala 2025 Raises Funds in Support of South Florida's Autism Community

Milestone Celebration: CARD Shatters Fundraising Records While Honoring Community Champion

MIAMI – Apr. 8, 2025 – The Center for Autism & Related Disabilities (CARD) at the University of Miami and Nova Southeastern University hosted its 21st annual Tropical Nights Gala on Saturday, April 5, 2025, at the InterContinental Miami, surpassed its annual fundraising goal in support of its mission to provide lifelong services to individuals with autism and related disabilities across South Florida.

This year's success is credited to a highly engaged fundraising campaign led by event co-chairs Gianni and Cristian LaCapra, an unprecedented live auction, and the tireless effort of the event's leadership and supporters. The event brought together more than 600 guests and nearly 100 sponsors for an inspiring evening celebrating CARD's community impact.

“Co-Chairing Tropical Nights has been a deeply personal honor and privilege,” said Cristian LaCapra, Senior Wealth Strategist at Northern Trust. “Every dollar raised helps CARD expand its reach, ensuring that individuals and families navigating the autism journey receive the specialized support and vital services they deserve – all free of charge.”

The LaCapras' connection to CARD began in 2018 following their son Nico's autism diagnosis. Since then, they have become passionate advocates for the organization and champions for a more inclusive South Florida.

Funds raised from the gala will support CARD's continued expansion, including growing staff capacity, increasing outreach to underserved communities, and establishing new service locations.

“Each year, the extraordinary generosity of our community enables us to transform thousands of lives,” said Dr. Michael Alessandri, Executive Director of CARD. “Our impact extends from families to educators and employers, creating a ripple effect of positive change – and this vital work would not be possible without signature events like Tropical Nights and the passionate supporters who make them successful.”

The 2025 Gala honored Lileana de Moya, founder of The de Moya Foundation, for her pioneering efforts in creating employment pathways for individuals with autism and

developmental disabilities. Her work has led to meaningful careers for countless young adults and advanced workplace neurodiversity across South Florida's workforce.

Guests were treated to a moving performance by SofistyKat Strings, the professional violin duo founded by lifelong friends Katerina Rancano and Sofia Causa, both of whom are on the autism spectrum. Now university graduates, the duo has performed with world-renowned artists, including Itzhak Perlman, and continues to use music as a platform for inspiration and inclusion.

For more information, visit the CARD website, CARD.Miami.edu. If you would like to offer support, donations are still being accepted at development.miami.edu/page.aspx?pid=477.

About the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD)

CARD stands for the Center for Autism & Related Disabilities at the University of Miami and Nova Southeastern University. CARD's mission is to provide support and assistance with the goal of optimizing the potential of people with autism and related disabilities.

CARD offers support at no cost to families within the natural contexts of settings including the home, childcare programs and schools, businesses, and the larger community, and provides this support across the entire lifespan, from early childhood to adulthood. CARD in collaboration with The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation, supports adults on their journey to find meaningful employment and works with South Florida companies to create these opportunities. CARD empowers the community with training and resources to make their places and spaces more inclusive through its Autism Friendly Initiative. CARD serves families and individuals in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Monroe Counties. To learn more, visit www.card.miami.edu.

CARD is part of a statewide network of seven CARD centers at leading universities throughout Florida including the University of Miami and Nova Southeastern University in South Florida.

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