

The party before the party

By [Lisa Bertagnoli](#) April 21, 2016

The March 15 gathering at the Sanfilippo family's Trump Tower pied-a-terre felt like a cocktail party. Guests clustered at the windows of the 60th-floor condo to enjoy expansive east, west and north views. Uniformed servers passed drinks, and tables were loaded with sushi, cheese and crackers, miniature desserts nestled in paper flutes.

In a two-minute speech, Jim Sanfilippo, the evening's host, unveiled the event's purpose: To drum up support for the Chicago-area fundraiser for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis. Sanfilippo, president and CEO of Clear Lam Packaging in Elk Grove Village and co-director of the Sanfilippo Family Foundation, asked the assembled to "please mark your calendars. We'd love to have you support St. Jude."

Kickoff parties "build excitement and buzz prior to the actual event," says Ann Marie Arzt, president of EventScape, a Barrington-based event-planning company whose clients include the Alzheimer's Association Rita Hayworth Gala. "It's a cultivation tool."

The parties, a favorite tool among organizers of high-priced galas, are a low-barrier way for event organizers to expose new people to their cause and recruit host committee members, Arzt says. The drawback: Cost. "Charities don't want to do a kickoff if it's a line-item expense back to them," she says.

The Sanfilippos' soiree was the first-ever kickoff for Four Stars of Chicago Restaurant Extravaganza, now in its 22nd year.

Fifty-five people, including St. Jude staffers, Trump Tower neighbors, friends and family, attended. Clear Lam sponsored the event, spending about \$3,000 on food and drink.

Guests left with samples from another Sanfilippo company, Fisher's Nuts, as well as a gala invitation and literature on St. Jude. In the following weeks, Sanfilippo and his assistants called attendees to sell tables and tickets; a status report on their efforts was not available.

Alzheimer's Association, based in Chicago, has held kickoff parties at upscale retail stores for its Rita Hayworth Gala. This year, the March 14 kickoff took place at Jenn-Air Master Class Studio in River North.

The party featured cooking demonstrations by local chefs, who donated food and their time. "It was a very interactive evening," says Maggie Murzanski, co-chair, along with June Barnard, of the event. Some 150 attended, about 50 of whom were new to the cause.

"It was one-on-one sharing, board members talking to other people" about Alzheimer's, she says. Brian



St. Jude Four Stars of Chicago Restaurant Extravaganza

When: 5:30 p.m. May 3

Where: Sheraton Grand Chicago, 301 E. North Water St.

Tickets: From \$350

More info: 773-313-4300

29th Annual Alzheimer's Association Rita Hayworth gala: "Time is of the essence"

When: 6:30 p.m. May 7

Where: Hilton Chicago, 720 S. Michigan Ave.

Tickets: \$750 and up

More info: 312-604-1669

Maynard, head of marketing at Jenn-Air, was one of the speakers. His father was recently diagnosed with what is most likely Alzheimer's.

Unlike the St. Jude party, this kickoff doubled as a mini-fundraiser. Raffle tickets for gift certificates from the participating restaurants were sold.

Previous kickoff affairs have grossed \$2,000 to \$5,000. This party raised \$12,000. "I think the personal stories, and the sharing and the attitude of those there—of hope and the future, really made the night," Barnard says.
