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## Melmark's Dream Maker's Ball Raised \$500,000 to Support Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

*Honorees included Humanitarian Award Recipient State Senator Carolyn T. Comitta, Good Neighbor Award Recipient Simkiss & Block, and Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient Frank L. Bird*

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**(Berwyn, PA– May 3, 2024)**-- Melmark, a nationally-recognized non-profit human services provider recently held its biennial fundraising gala, *The Dream Maker's Ball: Melmark Generations*. Over 200 guests gathered at the Crystal Tea Room in Philadelphia on Saturday, April 20<sup>th</sup> to celebrate the generations of people who have dedicated time, expertise, generosity, and care in support of Melmark's mission.

Longtime Melmark supporter and 6abc Action News meteorologist Karen Rogers emceed the evening, which included silent and live auctions, and live entertainment from The Melmark Players, a theatre group from Melmark's Meadows Program who enjoy acting and musical theatre, and local band, Del's Groove. The funds raised from ticket sales, sponsorships, and the auctions will support Melmark's commitment to enhancing the lives of individuals within diverse communities with autism, intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. Additionally, during a five minute round of speed donating, guests contributed funds that will be used for critical health and wellness building projects that are currently underway at Melmark's Berwyn, PA campus, including an expanded healthcare center, a new activities center, and a staff gym.

The highlight of the evening's program was the awards ceremony which honored recipients for their philanthropy and commitment to Melmark. A valued partner for over a decade for both their philanthropy and volunteerism, Philadelphia-based insurance agency Simkiss & Block was presented with the Good Neighbor Award which recognizes organizations that are champions for mission-centered work that aligns with Melmark's focus.

Pennsylvania State Senator Carolyn T. Comitta was honored with the Humanitarian Award which spotlights individuals who, through their selfless acts of compassion, understanding, and public service, share Melmark's mission and commitment to improve the lives of all individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism. As part of her acceptance remarks, Senator Comitta said, "We all know someone - a friend, neighbor, or loved one who is part of the diverse communities with autism, intellectual and developmental disabilities." She added, "One of the best things is seeing our communities' progress from awareness to acceptance and this is happening because of the dedication of our advocates and professionals, the very people in this room tonight."

The Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Melmark's Executive Vice President of Clinical Services, Frank L. Bird, M.Ed., LABA, BCBA, CDE® for his 25 years of dedicated service to Melmark. Bird's expertise has benefited every child and adult Melmark serves in its divisions in Pennsylvania, New England, and the Carolinas and his outstanding service, leadership, and advancement of the behavioral analysis field will impact generations to come.

Melmark President and CEO Rita M. Gardner, M.P.H., LABA, BCBA, CDE® closed out the evening stating, "Tonight's celebration is rooted in close to 60 years of mission-driven work to serve those who need it most and our vision remains steadfast – a world in which the individuals we serve achieve their best possible outcomes and live fulfilling lives."

Melmark is a multi-state non-profit human service organization providing clinically sophisticated evidence-based special education, residential, vocational and therapeutic services for children and adults with autism spectrum disorders, developmental and intellectual disabilities, acquired brain injuries and other neurological and genetic disorders. All specialized special education services are based on the principles of applied behavior analysis (ABA) and are designed based on each student's individual needs. With service divisions in Pennsylvania, New England, and the Carolinas, Melmark serves 500 individuals from across the country. To learn more, visit [www.melmark.org](http://www.melmark.org).

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(L-R) Melmark President & CEO Rita M. Gardner, Simkiss & Block EVP James Hahn, and emcee Action News' Karen Rogers.



(L-R) Melmark President & CEO Rita M. Gardner, State Senator Carolyn T. Comitta, and emcee Action News' Karen Rogers.



(L-R) Samuel Gardner-Bird, Melmark President & CEO Rita M. Gardner, Melmark EVP of Clinical Services Frank L. Bird, and Noah Gardner-Bird.



The Melmark Players performing a scene from West Side Story.