

## Melmark's Mission Possible Gala Raised \$210,000 to Support Adult Autism Services and Innovative Adult Planned Community Pilot Project

*Honorees included the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and Teamsters Local 25.*



(L-R): Former WCVB NewsCenter 5 Anchor Susan Wornick, Melmark President and CEO Rita Gardner, and Magic 106.7 Morning Magic Executive Producer and Co-host Kendra Petrone.

(Andover, MA July 17, 2025) – Melmark, a nationally-recognized non-profit human services provider, recently held its *Mission Possible: Building for the Future* gala, which raised \$210,000 in support of an innovative new blueprint for adult autism services. Over 200 guests gathered at Melmark New England's (MNE) Andover campus on Saturday, June 21<sup>st</sup> in support of Melmark's transformational adult services project, which stems from the ever-growing need in the state of Massachusetts for adult services that are evidence-based and instructional for individuals with profound autism, intellectual, and developmental disabilities.

Longtime Melmark supporter and MAGIC 106.7 Morning Magic Executive Producer and co-host Kendra Petrone emceed the evening, which included a cocktail reception, silent auction, dinner program, and awards and Emmy-award winner and former NewsCenter 5 anchor Susan Wornick conducted the live auction, which featured international trips and jewelry.

The highlight of the evening's program was the awards ceremony which honored recipients for their philanthropy and commitment to Melmark and advocacy efforts on behalf of the autism community. The Vision of Hope Award was presented to the Teamsters Local 25. For many years, Teamsters Local 25, led by President Tom Mari, has hosted an annual Autism Gala with proceeds benefitting local and regional autism service providers. Melmark New England is honored to participate in the gala each year, and to be an annual recipient of the Teamsters' generosity, having received annual donations in support of MNE's adult day and residential programs since 2009, totaling more than \$750,000.00.



(L-R): Melmark President and CEO Rita Gardner and Teamsters Local 25 Secretary/Treasurer Steve South.

The Lighting the Way Award was presented to the International Brotherhood of Teamsters President Sean O'Brien. Sean's federal advocacy and guidance on the impact the workforce shortage has had on human service organizations nationwide has helped organizations like Melmark educate lawmakers and others to ensure appropriate compensation for the highly skilled workforce it needs in order to serve individuals within the diverse communities of autism, intellectual, and developmental disabilities.

"Together, we give a voice to those who have been talked over, we listen to those who have been ignored, and we raise awareness about the incredible things that people with autism can do when they have the resources they need," stated International Brotherhood of Teamsters President Sean O'Brien. "I'm proud to continue to champion this important cause because what we have done has had a real impact on this community and that would not have been possible without Melmark New England."

The funds raised from ticket sales, sponsorships, and the auctions will support MNE's creation of an intentional adult community, located on a three-acre site in Tewksbury, Massachusetts which will include four residences housing a total of 20+ adults, an instructional and vocational day program for 50+ individuals, a vocational coffee shop social enterprise, daily living activities, supports, community engagement, recreational opportunities, and affordable staff housing. With an expected cost of \$16 million and a fundraising goal of \$6 million to support the project, construction is scheduled for completion in spring 2026. To learn more about the Adult Planned Community at Melmark New England, Tewksbury, visit <https://www.melmark.org/planned-tewksbury-adult-community/>

Melmark President and CEO Rita M. Gardner closed out evening stating, "This pilot project is ambitious and we hope that our intentional adult community is going to provide the model for the future of adult services, both locally here in Massachusetts and nationally."

### **About Melmark**

*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.*

*Recognized as one of the leading providers in the country, Melmark has a combined staff of over 1,200 at its service divisions in Pennsylvania, New England, and the Carolinas and serves 600 individuals from across the country. [www.melmark.org](http://www.melmark.org).*