



l to r - Scott Palmer (Phillies Consultant), Roann Brown (ML Development Dir), Tracey Oberholtzer (ML Volunteer Dir), Mary Ann Gettis (Phillies Media Relations Admin) and Ruben Amaro, Jr. (Phillies Asst General Manager)

Phillies Charities Score Big

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By Joseph Santoliquito / Special to MLB.com

PHILADELPHIA -- The beaming smile Gia Nicole Gaudet wore was contagious. It seemed everyone the 14-year-old girl with spina bifida came in contact with was touched by her radiance at the annual Phillies Holiday Giving Party, sponsored by Phillies Charities Inc.

The Gia Nicole Angel Fund, named after Gaudet, was one of many charities that benefited from close to \$180,000 in cash grants the Phillies awarded to non-profit organizations and charities Tuesday night at the Diamond Club at Citizens Bank Park.

"This is our first year at the event and we're really excited about our relationship with the Phillies," said Amy Nadell, founder and president of the Gia Nicole Angel Fund, which has helped over 25 families with children that have spina bifida since its inception in 2001. "We raised \$15,000, and with the \$3,000 the Phillies have given us, we're going to be able to help an additional four to six families."

Phillies president Dave Montgomery was very pleased with the event. This is the fourth year the Phillies have held it.

"What I enjoy is being able to walk around, shake their hands and thank these people for what they do," Montgomery said. "These are really uplifting stories, but the real key is the smile on everyone's face. It's about helping."

"I attended the ALS luncheon this afternoon, where they honored three patients with ALS. You see people with this disease and it gives you perspective. We're just about winning baseball games. The challenges we face are trivial in comparison to what these people face and endure. It's just great to see these organizations here that reach out and provide the proper focus."

Phillies charities raised over \$820,000, including a record \$634,000 for ALS. Each donation had a tangible bearing.

For example, Phillies All-Star outfielder Bobby Abreu donated \$10,000 to the People's Emergency Center, which provides shelter, life skills and welfare to work programs

for homeless mothers. Abreu's contribution went right to buying school uniforms for hundreds of kids.

"I was there when the kids wore their new uniforms to school," said Dan Horowitz, a development and volunteer associate for PEC. "It's about self esteem and these kids all had new uniforms and new backpacks. You could see the smile on their faces."

Tracey Oberholtzer and Roe Brown, representatives for Mommy's Light Lives On, an organization that benefits children whose mothers are ailing or are deceased, were also on hand to receive a donation from the Phillies. This past season, the group was treated to a game against the Florida Marlins, and received a Chase Utley autographed bat to auction off for donations.

"The Phillies have helped us in a number of ways," Oberholtzer said. "We're an organization that lets children continue to enjoy a simple pleasure they may have had with their mother, and we like to continue that until the child reaches 18. Mary Ann Gettis [who works for the Phillies public relations department] has been a huge help to us, volunteering her services and getting us connected with the Phillies."

Said Brown: "We were treated to a game this past season and, for a number of families and for some for the kids, it's the first time they were ever able to attend a Phillies game. The Phillies have given us fabulous support, and baseball is such a family game to begin with."

Mommy's Light Lives On (www.mommyslight.org) is based in the Delaware Valley area, but Oberholtzer and Brown are hoping that the organization expands. They serviced their first child in 2000 and the number of children they have helped recently surpassed 100.

Gene Dias, the Phillies director of community relations, served as the master of ceremonies for the event, while Phillies assistant general manager Ruben Amaro Jr. handed out the checks to each representative.

"The concept is pretty simple," Dias said. "For years, Phillies Charities have been helping a number of small non-profit organizations by putting a check in the mail. This is more direct. We get to shake the hands of people who are really doing things to improve their communities and tell them thanks for what they're doing. They're unsung heroes. They deserve to be saluted. The response has been great. The holidays are all about giving."

This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.