



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **First Stage raises over \$150,000 at 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Make Believe Ball**

*-Managing Director Betsy Corry was also honored for her years of service at the event-*

**Milwaukee, WI – March 23, 2023** – On **Saturday, March 4, 2023**, First Stage hosted its 29<sup>th</sup> Annual **Make Believe Ball** at the Hilton Milwaukee City Center located in downtown Milwaukee. The cruise/nautical-themed event had attendees on the good ship First Stage sporting sailor’s hats and other appropriate seaworthy attire. 293 people attended the event – a combination of 155 Adults, 49 Teens and 89 Children. Managing Director **Betsy Corry** was honored for her years of dedication to successfully leading First Stage, considered one of the nation’s leading theaters for young people and families. The event also included a performance by **Thatcher Jacobs** and **Zachary Church** from the First Stage Starfish Cast of **THE SPONGEBOB MUSICAL FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES** (currently running now through April 2 at the Marcus Center’s Todd Wehr Theater). Attendees were also entertained by First Stage’s improv team, Organized Chaos.

A live auction was led by popular Milwaukee auctioneer **Dan Pronley**. More than \$150,000 was raised in total to support First Stage’s mission of **transforming lives through theater**. These funds will benefit First Stage’s professional theater productions, Theater Academy programming and Theater in Education programs.

Artistic Director **Jeff Frank** shared his thoughts on this year’s event: “My favorite thing about the Make Believe Ball is seeing different families coming together for a unique, fun and formal event. It is such a rarity for parents and their young people to go someplace truly special and have a magical and memorable experience. The Ball also raises a lot of money to help other young people come see shows at First Stage or take Theater Academy classes. All around it is just a spectacular event.”

The Co-chairs for this year's event were **Julie and Brian Gilpin**, First Stage Board Member. Additional Event Committee members included: Monica Arnstein, Jennifer Burfeind, Maggie Corry Steinbach, Ronda Davis, Laura Hirano, Marlee Jansen, Maggie Marks, Mary Mayne, Meredith Pence, Piper Plummer Mehigan, Melissa Radtke, Sheree Rhodes, Amanda Singh, Anne Swoboda, Julia Westphal and Heather Whitmill.

The Premier Sponsor for the event was **Northwestern Mutual**. Corporate Sponsors included: A.O. Smith Foundation, Astor Street Foundation, Associated Bank, Foley & Lardner LLP, Godfrey & Khan S.C., KPMG, Marcus Hotels & Resorts, Milwaukee Bucks, Physicians Realty Trust, PNC, and We Energies Foundation. Family Support: The Esten Family, The Gilpin Family, The Hirano Family, The Mehigan and Swoboda Families, The Orr Family, The Pence Family, The Pilarski-Haller Family, The Singh Family and The Townsend Family. Additional support: Beechwood Sales & Service and Paul Ruffolo Photography.

A special thanks also goes out to **Astor Street Foundation** who donated their table back to First Stage. This allowed two inspiring educators from First Stage partner organizations to be invited to the event. **Ja'Rahn Lveston**, Milwaukee Public Schools Program Director and **Retricia Byrd-Townsell**, Club Manager at Boys and Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee, along with their families, were able to attend the Make Believe Ball this year and join in the festivities.

Event photos and photo credits can be found here:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/12n8jiWN-B85NbuCk\\_7myc6kb7EooeVDo?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/12n8jiWN-B85NbuCk_7myc6kb7EooeVDo?usp=share_link)

Check our website and social media for more details about next year's 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Make Believe Ball!

To learn more about First Stage and its current and upcoming productions, please visit:

[firststage.org](http://firststage.org) or call **(414) 267-2961**.

To learn more about First Stage and supporting its mission, please visit: [firststage.org/support-us/](http://firststage.org/support-us/).

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### **About First Stage**

Founded in 1987, First Stage is one of the nation's leading theaters for young people and families, and a driving force behind the creation of the best and most innovative plays for family audiences, theater training programs for young people and education initiatives for its schools and community. First Stage ensures that all programming is not only accessible to its community but that it is reflective of the community it serves.

First Stage produces plays that honor the young person's point of view, include diverse and traditionally underrepresented voices and inspire meaningful conversations. First Stage has

presented more than 70 world premiere productions that address important subject matters relevant to today's youth. The Theater Academy is one of the nation's largest high-impact theater training programs for young people (3-18 years old). Through a challenging curriculum taught by professional teaching artists, the Academy nurtures life skills through stage skills and includes the Next Steps Program that tailors Theater Academy classes to the needs of young people on the autism spectrum and with other developmental disabilities. As Wisconsin's leader in arts-integrated education in schools, First Stage's dynamic Theater in Education Programs cleverly blend theater activities with standard curriculum – allowing more than 10,000 students annually to learn traditional academic subjects through creativity and self-expression.

First Stage is a member of TYA/USA, the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, the Wisconsin Alliance for Arts Education, Milwaukee Arts Partners and is a cornerstone member of the United Performing Arts Fund (UPAF). [firststage.org](http://firststage.org)