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First Stage announces date for next year's Make Believe Ball: Saturday, May 10, 2025

-Milwaukee's premier black-tie event for the entire family will be held at Baird Center-

Milwaukee, WI – April 3, 2024 – First Stage, one of the nation's leading theaters for young people and families, will host its 31st annual **Make Believe Ball** on **Saturday, May 10, 2025** at **Baird Center**. The non-profit organization is the lucky winner of this year's Baird Center's Gala Giveaway contest, the second year of the contest. This unique fundraising event welcomes attendees of all ages and offers an exciting opportunity for the entire family to get dressed up, shine their brightest and dance the night away.

The exciting prize package First Stage won includes a fully funded gala featuring complimentary room rental at Baird Center's spectacular rooftop Baird Ballroom, pre-function space for registration and silent auction, a chef's choice 3-course menu and non-alcoholic beverages for up to 500 guests, two bottles of white and two bottles of red wine per table, a CTI audio-visual credit up to \$15,000 and more. The total prize package is valued at up to \$56,000. The Wisconsin Center District will also contribute 40 staff volunteer hours to First Stage. To learn more about the First Stage winning the grand prize of the Baird Center Gala giveaway, please visit: wcd.org/2025-gala-winner/

When asked why winning this prize was so important for First Stage, Director of Advancement **Kelly Gerlach** stated: "We're excited to announce the Make Believe Ball on May 10, 2025, at Baird Center, marking a special night for families and a pivotal moment for First Stage. This event is at the heart of our mission, bringing families together in celebration and support of the transformative power of theater. It promises an unforgettable evening of joy and community, essential for funding our impactful programs. We look forward to sharing this enchanting experience with our First Stage families!"

For over thirty years, First Stage has brought together families, donors, community members and artists at its annual Make Believe Ball to celebrate their three pillars – professional Theater Productions, unparalleled Theater Academy training and dynamic Theater in Education programming. These pillars define First Stage’s mission of transforming lives through theater and through them they serve more than 100,000 people annually.

Registration: Registration information will be available soon! Watch First Stage’s website and social media for updates. [firststage.org](https://www.firststage.org)

This year’s 30th Annual Make Believe Ball was held at the Pfister Hotel on Saturday, February 24, 2024. There were 307 attendees and \$144,000 was raised. The evening honored former and present leadership: **Rob Goodman**, First Stage Founder; **Betsy Corry**, Former Managing Director; **Jeff Frank**, Current Artistic Director and **Daniel Grambow**, Current Managing Director. Event highlights included a LIGHTNING THIEF: The Percy Jackson Musical flash mob performance featuring 43 young performers from both casts in the Pfister Grand Ballroom during the evening’s program. The 2024 Make Believe Ball Chairs were **Anne** and **Ben Swoboda**. Sponsors of the event included Gold Sponsor **Northwestern Mutual** and Corporate Sponsors **PNC, We Energies Foundation, Marcus Hotels & Resorts, Milwaukee Bucks, Madison Medical, Johnson Controls** and **Godfrey & Kahn**. Family Sponsors for the event included **The Esten Family, The Hirano Family, The Maloney Family, The Orr Family, The Pence Family, The Puechner Family** and **The Swoboda Family**.

To see photos from the 2024 Make Believe Ball, please view the Google drive below:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1D7q5TnmaV1w80mVbwZ_mrrie_NYxJ5CS

For more information, to register or to become a sponsor for next year’s 2025 Make Believe Ball, please contact Special Events Manager **Maddy Corson** at mcorson@firststage.org or (414) 267-2987

To learn more about First Stage and the remaining 2023/24 productions, please visit: [firststage.org](https://www.firststage.org) or call **(414) 267-2961**.

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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 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 autistic young people. 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 ensures that all programming is not only accessible to its community but that it is reflective of the community it serves. In order to do that, First Stage relies on its community of donors. With an annual operating budget of \$5 million, more than half of First Stage's revenue comes from generous contributions from individuals, corporations, foundations, government sources and the United Performing Arts Fund. Join First Stage's community of donors with [a contribution today](#) and transform lives through theater.

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

About Baird Center

Baird Center, located in the heart of downtown Milwaukee, is the hub of convention business in Wisconsin and is ideal for trade and consumer shows, conventions, banquets, business meetings and celebrations. The current convention center offers 188,695 square feet contiguous exposition space and 37,500 square feet of ballroom space, accommodating up to 1,000 vendors and 10,000 guests while also offering more intimate spaces for groups as small as 10. The convention center is undergoing a \$456 million expansion that will double its size, allow the convention center to host multiple events simultaneously and offer flexible space arrangements to meet almost any client's needs. The expansion will be completed in May 2024. For more information about the expansion, visit www.BuildingMore.com. Baird Center is owned and operated by the Wisconsin Center District. Recognized as a 2023 Top Workplace, the WCD staff is experience-obsessed and dedicated to providing unforgettable, buzzworthy moments for all clients and guests. For more information and to book an event, visit: bairdcenter.com