

With local support, Garden Party blooms

BY JONI HUBBARD
STAFF WRITER

Jeff Farber didn't expect a chance encounter with St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center 12 years ago would become a lasting, charitable relationship.

"We live right down the street," said Farber of Auburn Pharmaceuticals. "We never knew what the Center was, but when we heard a little bit about what they do, we decided to become involved."

Established in 1851 by the Daughters of Charity, St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center cares for children who are removed from their homes by the court system and offers help to teen mothers, among many other services. The Garden Party, which Farber and his wife, Jennifer, have supported, is the organization's biggest fund-raiser, held annually on the grounds.

This year's event - billed as the best of Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans right here in Farmington Hills - will be held Sunday, June 8.

Farber says the party has grown quite a bit since he started attending 12 years ago. "It's turned into a big event. I've invited a lot of friends over the years."

This year, a pre-event called simply, "The Ball" will be held Friday, June 6, beginning with hors d'oeuvres served at 6:45 p.m., followed by dinner at 7:30 p.m., music for dancing and a live auction at 9 p.m. Those who attend will enjoy fine dining courtesy of Shlitz and an exquisite selection of fine wines, overseen by sommelier Madeline Triffon, wine director for the Unique Restaurant Corporation.

The Ball is sponsored by Elliot Development, LLC. Sunday's celebration begins with a VIP reception at noon, during which guests will experience exceptional wines from around the world and preview the featured cuisine. Fifty area restaurants are participating, from The Loving Spoonful, Tribute and Vineyards Cafe & Catering of Farmington Hills, to The Townsend in Birmingham.

The Garden Party opens to the public at 1 p.m., which is also when the silent auction begins, followed by a live auction at 3 p.m.

Premiere wine-tasting packages include a 7 day/6 night trip to St. Malo, France and stay at Chateau Bonban for two. The historic castle is located on 65 acres just an hour and a half away from

Paris. Golf lovers will appreciate four clubhouse badges to the 2003 Buick Open at Warwick Hills Golf Course in Grand Blanc, July 29-Aug. 3. Other vacation packages range from a weekend trip at Mission Point Resort on Mackinac Island to a weekend getaway for two at the Ritz, with complimentary dinner at The Grill.

On the more affordable end of the scale, parents might want to watch out for two cooking classes for kids, two gift certificates to D&B Mystery Dinner Theater and a day at Capelli Spa.

Title sponsors for The Garden Party are Ford and MNP Corporation. Tickets for the Ball and Garden Party are available: a Ball & Garden Party Package for eight is available for \$3,000, with reserved table seating and valet parking at both events. Guardian Package for eight to the Garden Party and VIP reception on June 8 is \$1,700, and the Benefactor Package, for six, is \$1,200. Individual tickets for the Garden Party are available at \$150 each; The Ball tickets are \$90. For more information, call the Center, (248) 626-7527, ext. 3900 or go to www.svfcenter.org

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Community Relations Coordinator Maureen Conway and Development Specialist Debbie Bazakis are almost ready for the annual Garden Party. This year's St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center event has a New Orleans theme.

New director enjoys Garden Party planning

BY JONI HUBBARD
STAFF WRITER

This year's Garden Party at St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center won't be Paula Hebert's first, but still the first time she's been part of the planning.

The Center's executive director has been on the job just 10 months and attended last year's gala benefit just a month before she was hired. She recalls the weather was perfect, which is what everyone's praying for this year.

"It's our largest single event... We rely on this for operations and taking care of the children,"

she said, adding that the planning for it starts in January.

This week, the grounds crew is working to ensure a pleasant atmosphere and experience for everyone who attends. Hebert said about 100 flats of flowers have been donated and will be planted around the grounds by volunteers.

Children have been working on prizes for the Best in Show among the restaurant displays; those awards are always handmade, to give them even more meaning.

Hebert is especially enthusiastic about this year's Garden Party, because she has gotten a

first-hand look at how the Center operates.

"It's been a real learning experience," she said. "My background is in nursing, so this has been a real eye-opener as to all the workings of the child welfare system. How many children we serve in a year and the number of programs is overwhelming."

The Center's program serve more than 1,000 infants, youth and families in crisis each year. Programs include foster care and adoption, services for young fathers and mothers, healthy child and family counseling services.

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