

Sunday, May 5, 2002

Enjoy a 'Big Night Out' to help Gilda's Club

BY KEELY KALESKI WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER
kwygonik@oe.homedomain.net

Being involved in Gilda's Club is something Michael Radner can still do for his sister. Cancer makes you feel helpless. "No one should have to face cancer alone," he said.

On Thursday, May 16, Radner, a Southfield resident, will receive the "It's Always Someone Special Award," at Gilda's Big Night Out, a benefit for Gilda's Club of Metro Detroit that features comedian Wendy Liebman, a strolling supper and a silent auction.

"It's very nice, but I'm not going away," he said. Instead of dwelling on his accomplishments, Radner wants to talk about the club that was his sister's wish, and how it's the one place cancer patients look forward to going to.

"This event generates a lot of money," he said. "Free is very expensive. The money you raise on May 16 will make sure the red door stays open."

You don't have to pay anything to be a member of Gilda's Club, or to participate in the many programs that are offered at the big, comfortable house on Rochester Road in Royal Oak.

Creating a place where people living with cancer, and their family and friends, could gather to support one another and celebrate life was Gilda's dream. The comedian, known for the silly characters she created on *Saturday Night Live*, died at the age of 42 after battling ovarian cancer.

"Everybody loved Gilda," said Radner. "When she was living with her cancer she

Gilda's Big Night Out IV
What: Event featuring Wendy Liebman, to benefit Gilda's Club of Metropolitan Detroit
When: 6 p.m. Thursday, May 16
Where: Southfield Centre for the Arts
Tickets: \$150, \$250 and \$500, call (248) 577-0800, Ext. 22. To learn more about Gilda's Club visit www.gildasclubdetroit.org

expressed her experiences and wrote her book. She found a way to live life with cancer.

"People say 'If Gilda can do it, I can do it.' They pay attention to her, she still resonates with so many people. She was as nice in person and approachable as she seemed on TV. People identify with her and trust what she has to say. Just thinking about her makes me smile."

Gilda's Club Metro Detroit opened in January 1998 after four years of fund-raising. Marcia Gershenson, Jackie Grokin, Geri Lester of Franklin and Sherry Medsker, four of the original founders who still serve on its board with Radner, are the honorary chairs for this year's event.

Andi Sklar of West Bloomfield is co-chairing Gilda's Big Night Out with Karen Gunenberg.

"It will be a terrific, fun evening out," she said. "Gilda's Club is a really positive thing. It's such a warm place."

"Everything for the members is absolutely free, we're there for people every day," said Gunenberg, a breast cancer survivor, and West Bloomfield resident.

"We've listened to Wendy's tapes, she's funny. People have been very generous, they

just give with their hearts."

Lester said people can feel good about supporting this event knowing that a great percentage of the money goes right to the club, not to pay expenses.

A cancer survivor, Lester said she realized that the metro area had an incredible medical facilities, but was lacking a place where cancer patients could find a little support.

"Gilda's Club is for any person dealing with cancer, from any walk of life," she said. "It's a special place, it brings people together who ordinarily wouldn't come together."

"We offer something for everyone. A lot of healing comes from giving back to people facing the same situation. We hope to make the road smoother and more bearable."

Silent auction items include a seven-day Caribbean cruise for two, art work, jewelry, tickets to see *42nd Street* on Broadway, an hour of improv comedy, and University of Michigan tailgate party.

Area restaurants and caterers participating in the strolling supper include Leo's Coney Island, Amaryllis Catering, Lily's Seafood, Peking House and Shield's Pizza.

"It's a fun evening all the way around," said Radner. "It's a wonderful evening, and you'll be supporting something that's good for our community."

Radner also serves on the board of Gilda's Club Worldwide, which oversees programming for all Gilda's Clubs. There are currently 14 locations in the United States and Canada, and 18 in various stages of development in the United States.

"We hope to be online by the end of the year so that people who can't get to the club can still enjoy the programs. We hope to be able to offer everything but the hugs."



Portrait: The immediacy and power of this black and white portrait will make a permanent record of a brief moment shared with this Italian gentleman.

Take memorable portraits that show character

THE MOST successful portraits are those that go beyond showing a likeness of the subject...they bring out the character.

This is why my choice of film for portraits is black and white, which surpasses the familiarity of color. Black and white photography's ability to produce pure tones makes us pay attention to the contours and textures of a face revealed by the play of light.

In portrait photography, I enjoy the challenge of capturing not only the subject's appearance but also in revealing some of his or her character.

Visiting the small town of Trevi on a photographic trip to Italy, I chanced upon the stately gentleman shown here. I was impressed with his dapper suit, beret and even the cane he proudly held. Always ready for a new photo opportunity, I

made a brief introduction of myself and asked him if I could take his portrait.

Remember that to make a good portrait, you must be relaxed and confident in your abilities as a photographer, and have a thorough familiarity with your camera.

To me, this portrait is an example of what photography can do better than even a painting - depicting how the subject's personality is seen by the viewer. The result shows here suggests a map of the journey traveled through life by this delightful and wise man.

Monte Nagler is a fine art photographer based in Farmington Hills. You can leave him a message by dialing (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone. His fax number is (248) 644-1314.

FOCUS ON PHOTOGRAPHY



MONTA NAGLER

Comedian didn't get the part, but she is happy to perform

BY KEELY KALESKI WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER
kwygonik@oe.homedomain.net

Wendy Liebman auditioned to play the part of Gilda Radner in *It's Always Something: The Gilda Radner Story*; she didn't get it. But she was asked to perform at Gilda's Big Night Out on Thursday, May 16, and is happy to do it.

"I believe in destiny," she said. "I wasn't meant to play Gilda, but to raise money. I love Gilda Radner and grew up watching *Saturday Night Live*. I'm in awe of that kind of talent. When I was asked to do this, I thought what a perfect way to help people who went through what she went through."

Liebman has been doing comedy for 18 years, starred in her own HBO Comedy special, and is scheduled to appear on the *David Letterman Show* at the end of the month. Comedian wasn't something she planned to put on her resume. Liebman studied psychology in college, and signed up for a continuing

education class - "How Be a Stand-Up Comedian" - after leafing through a catalog she found in some misdelivered mail.

"People laughed, and in my heart I knew this is what I was supposed to be doing. It took me years to feel comfortable on stage. I'm just finding my voice."

"She's fascinated by word play, and jokes about driving, growing up, and graduating from I.O.U. Sometimes she dreams jokes, or sits down and gives herself an assignment."

"I'm really working hard on creating a CD," she said. "I want to put it out there by 2003." One of the names she's toying with is "Near Mrs.," because that's what she is.

"I've been engaged a year and a half," she said. She met Jeff Sherman while working on an animated sitcom. Being a step-mom to his two young sons is a role she relishes.

"My whole life has changed. I'm so blessed," she said. "I have new jokes about being a step-



Wendy Liebman

ing together to heal. People really need to laugh together."

Liebman is involved in a research project at the University of California, "RX Laughter," that shows how laughter can help children and teens suffering from chronic illness. You can learn more about it by visiting www.rxllaughter.org

Her life is falling into place. She's in love, and doing work she believes is extremely positive because it helps people.

Jeff recently lost his mother to cancer, and performing at a benefit to help Gilda's Club is just another way for Liebman to use her talents to help others. She's also been helping one of her favorite comedy clubs Joey's, in the basement of Patsano's Italian Restaurant in Dearborn.

"It's one of my favorite places to perform," she said. "There's so much energy there, I can't explain it. I'm trying to help them get big names in there. It's such a great gig."

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