

# Rim Special Athletes hold Great Gatsby Gala

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The Great Gatsby was the theme of the Rim Special Athletes (RSA) fundraising dinner held in the garden of the home of Brian and Lisa Cohen in the Cedar Ridge Estates neighborhood of Lake Arrowhead. The invitations encouraged the participants to dress up in 20s attire, which many did. That set the scene for the partygoers, against the backdrop of a week of evacuations and fire.



Auctioneer and emcee Darren Diess (left) with Jeremy and his mother, Debbie.

A glass of champagne welcomed the partygoers to the backyard grass of the Cohen home, which was covered in beautifully decorated tables and the plentiful food catered by Lady of the Lake Catering, served buffet style under the covered patio. The menu was extensive, and the delicious desserts included a selection of cookies, lemon bars, chocolate dessert cakes and raspberry cheesecake, plus Thacker Whyte was grilling top sirloin on site. There were two photo spots, marvelous live music, a video of RSA participants and a comedian entertaining throughout the evening.

The reason for the event was to raise at least \$30,000 for the Rim Special Athletes, which, under program founder and RSA president Jack Cooperman, provides individual sporting activities for those with physical disabilities, amputations and cognitive functioning disabilities. These summer activities range from fishing to water sports such as water cycling, standup boarding, kayaking, swimming and more. These water activities are done at Lake Arrowhead under the supervision of specially trained activity directors, at no cost to the participants.

RSA uses specialized equipment, when needed, to enable and encourage these athletes to push beyond their normal expectation abilities, giving them new confidence in their abilities and new skills, but at their own level of comfort. This specialized program is available for local residents, students who come from Mountain of Promise and some adaptive programs who come from down the hill, such as Lighthouse for the Blind.

Other year-round programs have included golf, boating and yoga classes. Yoga was initially done in person and then pivoted to being presented during Covid by Zoom; at one time, participation surged to 100 in a Zoom class. They are about to pivot to mixed zoom and in-person yoga sessions again. This fund raiser will assist in making that possible.

During the winter, for over a decade, RSA has provided equipment and taught veterans who are physically challenged or have PTSD and other disabilities to ski, which has many times changed their whole outlook on the world. They learn a skill through RSA they never anticipated they would ever be able to do or do again had they previously skied. With skilled ski instructors and specialized and adapted equipment, these veterans gain respect for their newfound abilities and have fun again. Many have said this program has changed their perspective on the world, which has helped them perform in their jobs and enjoy life more. The instructors who ski with the participants come off the slopes excited about the successes and the skiers.

Cooperman has been a driving force behind these programs but he is supported by trained instructors, parents of the participants and encouragement from the participants themselves. The last fundraiser for this program was held before Covid at Snow Valley. Since then, RSA has been paying for ski lift tickets for the participants and buying only necessary items to repair equipment and run the program, which is mainly volunteer run.

At the fundraiser, representatives from Congressman Jay Olberholte and Assemblyman Tom Lackey presented Cooperman certificates recognizing his dedication to service and making a difference in the lives of the special athletes. Cooperman replied that this fundraiser will enable Rim Special Athletes to continue the programs and purchase some new specialized equipment for the athletes to use, such as specially designed kayaks for those who have seizures and cross-county snow skis for amputees.

In a video produced by Scott Rindenow, RSA participants talked about what the program has meant to them. Cooperman explained in more detail what the program has done and his future plans for it. The video enabled party goers to better understand the RSA program, which charges its members nothing for its services, and its needs.

Debbie and her adult son Jeremy spoke on how Cooperman became a mentor to Jeremy and helped remove his fear of snow and water through sporting activities and how her granddaughter is now enjoying helping others enjoy the RSA activities, too. Debbie met Cooperman through his involvement in Meals on Wheels as he has a heart

of giving and helping others.

The silent auction raised over \$30,000 during the evening for the RSA program. Some of the auction items included a week's stay in Kona, Hawaii, which elicited a \$6,000 bid; a natural holistic healing package; storage at the Boat Yard in Running Springs; a legal 25-year-old slot machine which everyone had the opportunity to play that evening; a weekend chalet stay for four with breakfast at the UCLA Conference Center; an ALA 2025 summer beach pass; a basket of Waterford glasses, decanter, wine and more from Timberline in the Glen; a vintage picnic basket of items from the Elevated Nest; and a restaurant tour of meals from six local restaurants which went for \$1,250.

"We at RSA are very thankful to have achieved our goal and grateful for all the many sponsors and attendees who supported this event," Cooperman said at the end of the evening.

If this is a program to which you would like to donate, donations are still being accepted for Rim Special Athletes on their website, [www.RimSpecialAthletes.org](http://www.RimSpecialAthletes.org).



Jack Cooperman is presented a certificate of appreciation from Assemblyman Tom Lackey's representative, with event host Brian Cohen on the right with Andrea, the gala's organizer.