

Laughing to fight blindness

Lighthearted event uses comedy to fight serious disease

KAROLYN COORSH
Town Crier

The old adage, 'laughter is the best medicine' became more than just a metaphor when more than 400 people gathered at the Eglinton Grand on May 4 to enjoy a night of comedy and raise money for the Foundation Fighting Blindness (FFB).

Guests packed the renovated theatre-turned-banquet hall to sip wine, munch on hors d'oeuvres and laugh with four enthusiastic stand-up acts, including Meg Soper, Gord Paynter, Evan Carter and the headliner, Gerry Dee.

The annual event is the brainchild of Soper and her close friend Ann Morrison. In 1998, Morrison's five-year-old son Gavin, was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa — an eye disease that causes vision to deteriorate over time.

Soper, an operating room nurse by day and stand-up comedian by night, suggested to her friend that they hold a comedy benefit to raise money towards finding a cure. Since the first event in 1999, Comic Vision has more than doubled its audience members.

Morrison, who began working at FFB as a volunteer, is now the events manager for the organization.

The foundation also added additional shows in London and Oakville this year. The total money raised for all three events was over \$230,000, including \$75,000 from national sponsors alone.

Morrison is proud of how



TUNNEL VISION: Lesley Gunn (left) and Sabrina Picardo try on paper glasses at Comic Vision event to see as people with deteriorating eyesight do.
Photo by Karolyn Coorsh

successful Comic Vision is and attributes it to the fact that it's a little more light-hearted than the typical fundraiser.

"I think the most important thing is that it gives people an opportunity to get involved with us in a fun way so they learn what we're trying to do," she said.

The fundraiser also gave guests a chance to learn about degenerative eye diseases. Vendors meandered through the crowd, selling paper glasses that had only a pinhole to see through, so guests could get an idea of what it is like to live with RP.

Morrison said events like Comic Vision bring a whole new level of awareness to FFB.

"If they've never heard of the Foundation Fighting Blindness they now know that we exist. If they knew we existed, they now know what we do and what our mission is. And it allows them to be a part of it."

Money raised will go to medical research of degenerative eye diseases and other retinal dystrophies. The FFB has given more than \$12 million to eye research taking place at universities and hospitals across the country.