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Phoenix Center celebrates 20th year

More than 375 guests helped the Phoenix Center of Nutley celebrate its 20th anniversary last month at the Newark Club.

The fundraiser honored individuals and raised more than \$100,000 for the center's programs. The evening included dinner and dancing.

Chairpersons Maria Sedlack, Chris Ruymen, Paul Panicali and their planning committee helped make the event a success. Sponsors included Browning-Forshay Funeral Home, Columbia Bank, De Meola Zawacki Mingione & Co, The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation of Ridgewood, Insera Shop-Rite Supermarkets, JB Autism Consulting and RJG Insurance Group.

The center honored Dr. James Ball, president and CEO of JB Autism Consulting; George and Mary Forshay, owners of Browning-Forshay Funeral Home; and the Dorothy B. Hersh Foundation. All honorees have helped the Phoenix Center provide programs and realize its mission.

Drs. Douglas Berrian and Geraldine Gibbia founded the Phoenix Center in 1991.

It is a New Jersey Department of Education-approved 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit private school for students with autism and moderate to severe developmental disabilities. Students represent 69 districts from Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Passaic, Sussex and Union counties.

Many of the Phoenix Center's 146 students, aged 5 to 21, have learning profiles that may not "fit" into traditional programs because of their unique and complex needs. Many students require a program tailored to their individual needs. Because of their communication and behavioral challenges, they may have difficulty

being "mainstreamed" into public schools.

Nevertheless, the school and its co-founders believe these children have gifts that deserve to be nurtured and have the potential to

become independent, productive members of society. The Phoenix Center was founded on the belief that, with advanced, bold and research based integrated interventions, these children can thrive.