

GiGi's Playhouse Nashville

welcomes you to the

i have a voice

Gala & Auction

PRESENTED BY



MARCH 21, 2026 6 PM

COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME

Sierra Investment Partners
is proud to support
GiGi's Playhouse Nashville!



Sierra Investment Partners is honored to stand alongside GiGi's Playhouse Nashville and their unwavering commitment to the Down syndrome community.

Bruce Dereschuck, President/CEO
and James Anisi, SVP/CIO



Welcome Guests,

Thank you for joining us tonight at the Country Music Hall of Fame as we celebrate GiGi's Playhouse Nashville and the Down syndrome community of Middle Tennessee.

Because of supporters like you, GiGi's Playhouse is able to make a lifetime commitment to individuals with Down syndrome and their families—providing free educational, therapeutic, and career development programs that help them grow, build skills, and reach their full potential.

For my family, this mission is deeply personal. My daughter, Emmaline, is one of the many individuals whose life is touched by GiGi's Playhouse. At GiGi's, she is welcomed exactly as she is, celebrated for her unique gifts, and encouraged every day to grow, learn, and shine.

It is especially meaningful that we are gathered here tonight on March 21, 2026 - World Down Syndrome Awareness Day - a day dedicated to celebrating the abilities, potential, and contributions of individuals with Down syndrome around the world.

Because of you, these programs continue to open doors and provide individuals with Down syndrome the opportunity to learn, grow, and reach their greatest potential.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for believing in this mission and for making these life-changing programs possible. We are deeply grateful.

Thank you,

Emily Whitson

Volunteer Gala Chair



Schedule of Events

- 6:00** COCKTAIL RECEPTION & SILENT AUCTION
With music by Amanda Browning
Silent auction will close at 8:00 PM
- 7:15** WELCOME ANNOUNCEMENTS
Shane McCarrell, Emcee
- 7:20** PLAYHOUSE INTRODUCTION
Presented by Jim Anisi, Board of Managers President
- 7:30** DINNER
- 7:50** GLORIA & CINDY KNOCH VOLUNTEER SPIRIT AWARD
Presented by Tracie Michelson, Program Coordinator, and GiGi's Ambassadors Maddox Rodriguez and Abigail Horne
- 7:55** PARTICIPANT SHOWCASE
Aaron Tornquist, Maddox Rodriguez, and Robert May
- 8:15** KEYNOTE
Frankie Horne, GiGi's Participant Parent
- 8:20** LIVE AUCTION
- 8:45** I HAVE A VOICE
An opportunity to make a gift to support our GiGi's participants
- 9:10** CLOSING REMARKS
Emily Whitson, Volunteer Gala Chair, with GiGi's Ambassadors Abigail Horne and Maddox Rodriguez
- 9:25** CHECK OUT OPENS

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Thank you to our cocktail hour singer:

Amanda Browning

Amanda is an actress and performer with more than 22 years of experience in the entertainment industry. Actively working and auditioning throughout the Southeast, she has built a career rooted in authentic storytelling and a deep appreciation for the craft of performance. She will soon appear in the upcoming television series "Scarpetta" starring Nicole Kidman and Jamie Lee Curtis.

In addition to her work on screen, Amanda is passionate about mentoring the next generation of performers. She teaches acting classes for young actors helping them develop confidence, craft, and a professional understanding of today's industry using current audition material and techniques.

Music has also been an important part of Amanda's life for many years. She serves on the worship team at Rolling Hills Community Church where she enjoys using her voice in worship and community. Amanda is honored to be performing at this gala for the third time and is grateful for the opportunity to share her love of music and performance in support of such a meaningful event.



Meet Our 2026 Ambassadors

The goal of GiGi's Ambassador Program is to help adults with Down syndrome develop their public-speaking skills, confidence, and ability to advocate, while serving as our GiGi's spokespersons for the year.

ABIGAIL HORNE

Abigail Horne is a 19-year-old from Coweta, Oklahoma, and a 2025 high school graduate who is known for her positivity, determination, and love of community. She volunteers with children with special needs, serves in her church's children's ministry, and is an active Special Olympics athlete competing in basketball, baseball, bowling, track and field, and tennis. Abigail earned her second-degree black belt in Shotokan karate at age eighteen and now helps teach younger students. Passionate about becoming a teacher, she attended Gigi's Playhouse University in Nashville, where she participated in academic, fitness, and tutoring programs that helped her grow in confidence and independence. In 2026, Abigail achieved a major milestone when she was accepted into Oklahoma State University, where she will begin college in the fall—continuing to prove, in her own words, that “Down syndrome is only for cool people”.



MADDOX RODRIGUEZ

Maddox Rodriguez is a 19-year-old who has been part of the GiGi's Nashville community since he was six years old. Today, he participates in several programs including Fantastic Friends, Teen Tastic, and GiGi Prep, where he continues to build friendships and learn new skills. Maddox is also a talented singer-songwriter who records his own music with Empower Music Therapy, and his albums can be found on many major streaming platforms. In addition to his creative pursuits, Maddox is a dedicated employee who works at Barney's Sweet Shop, where he helps clean and package popcorn, and at the Café at FRA, where he makes coffees, stocks snacks and drinks, and tags clothing. Through his years at GiGi's Playhouse, Maddox has discovered many passions, including dancing, yoga, and cooking, and he continues to share his energy and enthusiasm with everyone around him.

We are so proud of Maddox and Abigail and honored to have them serve as our 2026 Ambassadors! We can't wait to see the incredible work they do in the Down syndrome community and beyond.

Save the Date!

June 1: Summer Programs Start

September 22: Annual Golf Tournament

Date TBD: GiGi's 5K

October 22: Whiskey Raffle



 We use responsible farming methods to grow organic produce	 We use community volunteers to plant, maintain, and harvest our donation gardens	 We host events and Farm-Stays to raise money for the growing season	 We partner with groups like Second Harvest to distribute the produce
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more on our website or social media

ByFaithFarm.com
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[@ByFaithFarm](https://www.instagram.com/ByFaithFarm)



Gala Attendants

Clayton Huffman, Maddox Rodriguez,
Abigail Horne, Ryan Pittman, Tori
McMahon, Natalie Pistole, Taylor Krieg,
Zachery Croft, and Spencer Quehl

At GiGi's Playhouse Nashville, we make a lifetime commitment to support individuals with Down syndrome of ALL ages and help them achieve their "Best of All."

Our adult programs focus on vocational, communication, fitness, and social skills to increase confidence and independence. We are so pleased that a number of our adult participants are joining us as Gala Attendants to help welcome you to the event tonight. Please take the time to mingle with them and learn their favorite things about GiGi's!



"Maddie is the bright light in our family and GiGi's Playhouse helps her shine brighter everyday!"

*Marc & Karen Sperber
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Down Syndrome Today

In the United States, Down syndrome is the most common chromosomal difference according to the National Institutes of Health. Over 450,000 individuals with Down syndrome currently live in the United States; when you include affected parents and siblings, that's over 2 million people who are impacted by this diagnosis every single day. There's an urgent need to improve the lives of those with Down syndrome as well as those who are touched by it.

GiGi's Playhouse, Inc.

GiGi's Playhouse is the ONLY network of Down Syndrome Achievement Centers nationwide and offers over 30 innovative programs that serve the unique needs of individuals with Down syndrome from birth through adulthood, all at zero cost to families. There are 62 existing GiGi's Playhouse locations in the U.S. and Mexico, and each playhouse operates independently and is locally concerned and enterprise minded. Across the network, the organization delivers 300,000 in program participation hours.

GiGi's Playhouse Nashville

GiGi's Playhouse Nashville joined the national network in November 2013. When we opened our doors, we envisioned a place where individuals with Down syndrome and their families could connect, build community, and be accepted just as they are. Today, we provide 100% FREE educational, therapeutic-based, and career development programs tailored to each participant's learning style. In 2025, we expanded our space to better serve our growing community and increase access to these life-changing programs. We encourage participants to give their "Best of All" every day while celebrating every milestone and achievement. We are proud of how far we have come and look forward to an even brighter future.

With admiration for the incredible individuals and families who make this community shine, we are proud to support GiGi's Playhouse Nashville.
Alex Soriano, MD & Gerd Peters



Keynote

FRANKIE HORNE



Frankie Horne is a CPA who lives in Coweta, Oklahoma, just outside of Tulsa. She holds a Master of Accountancy from the University of Tulsa and has built her career helping individuals and families navigate accounting and tax matters with clarity and confidence. Frankie is an active member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the Oklahoma Society of CPAs, and she also serves on the Northeastern State University Accounting Advisory Board in Oklahoma.

Outside of work, Frankie is a mom of two beautiful daughters, enjoys organic gardening and singing, and is deeply involved in her community as a volunteer with Special Olympics and the Down Syndrome Association of Tulsa. She brings both professional expertise and real-life perspective to today's benefit.

We are proud to support GiGi's Playhouse Nashville.

At HCA Healthcare, we are driven by a single mission: Above all else, we are committed to the care and improvement of human life. Here in Middle Tennessee, we live that mission every day by delivering compassionate, high-quality care through TriStar Health, serving our neighbors, families and communities with excellence.

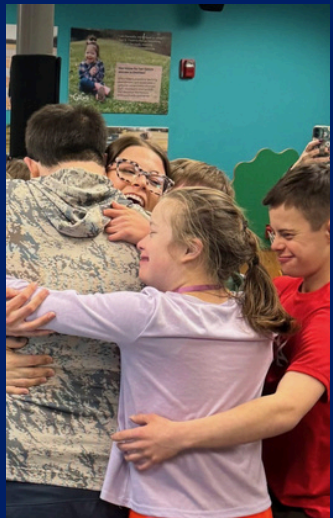


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2025 Nashville Highlights



- Provided FREE services to 344 participants for a total of 5,342 participation hours.
- Provided 522 hours of math and literacy tutoring.
- For the third consecutive year, GiGi's Playhouse Nashville was named Standards of Execution Champion at our Annual Leadership Conference, recognized as a Center of Excellence across Programs, Marketing, Operations & Facilities, Family & Community, Volunteer Management & HR, Board Health & Strategy, and Development & Fundraising, and achieved a rating of Strong in Financial Health.
- Hosted first Teddy Bear Clinic in partnership with Frist Medical College at Belmont University.
- Offered GiGi's Kitchen programming for all ages.
- Launched the Amina Grace Speech & Language Program in partnership with Braxy Speech Therapy.
- Welcomed Ambassadors on our Board and are developing training materials to support their success.
- Kept all of our programs 100% FREE for participants and families!

Playhouse Programs

GiGi's Playhouse Nashville makes a lifelong commitment to families to provide free, purposeful programs that are designed to holistically empower those with Down syndrome to thrive and reach their "Best of All."

GiGi's offers dozens of therapeutic-based programs that support fine and gross motor skills, speech and language abilities, health and fitness, and other key areas of development.

GiGi's offers goal-oriented programs for teens and adults that focus on the development of confidence, real-world skills, health and wellness, and career skills.



GiGi's offers one-on-one tutoring in literacy and math to increase success in school, using best practices that address the unique learning needs of students with Down syndrome.

GiGi's breaks down barriers and changes the way the world sees Down syndrome by creating opportunities and fostering acceptance through our international network.



ABOUT US:


Ellen and Bo Boyer founded The Brett Boyer Foundation in 2017 in honor of their daughter, Sadie Brett, who was born with a congenital heart defect (AVSD) and Down syndrome. Through her seven inspiring months of life, Brett was a bright light for her parents and everyone who loved her. Together with Brett's Aunt Caroline and Uncle Luke, our mission is to fund CHD research, support families & providers, and to celebrate the Down syndrome community.

WHAT WE DO:


- Fund research projects for advancements in the treatment of CHD
- Spread CHD awareness and education about the need for research and the lifelong challenges of current treatment options
- Ongoing inpatient support for CHD patients, parents, and providers
- Partner with organizations dedicated to inclusion, opportunities, and celebration for people with Down syndrome



LEARN MORE:

 thebrettboyerfoundation.org

 @brightforbrett

 /brightforbrett

The Brett Boyer Foundation is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization



MADDOX RODRIGUEZ

Maddox is an emerging artist whose latest project, *Waiting for the Snow*, marked his first Christmas album. He continues to build momentum with new music, with his next single releasing April 3, available to stream on all major platforms.



ROBERT MAY

Robert May is a Nashville-based singer and songwriter whose music spans a wide range of styles. After a diverse performance career in New York City, he relocated to Nashville in 2023, where his creative vision continues to evolve.



His latest release, *Christmas*, is an eclectic holiday album shaped by his new home. Featuring Nashville session musicians and produced by Thomas Dulin, the project marks Robert's first experience working in a local studio with the city's top players.

Robert began his career in New York City after graduating from The Juilliard School, contributing to a wide variety of projects as a singer and arranger. His work ranged from performances at Lincoln Center to collaborations at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and he became a valued member of the city's professional choral community.

Today, Robert coaches singers at Belmont University while continuing to write, record, and perform original music, as he explores new artistic directions inspired by Nashville's vibrant creative culture.

When he isn't making music, Robert can be found playing games with his wife and three sons, cooking unnecessarily complicated recipes, or looking up phrases in foreign languages.



AARON TORNQUIST

Aaron Tornquist has been an Elvis Tribute Artist for decades. He is 47 and has worked for Brixx restaurant near his home in Franklin for 8 years. His message is "Doesn't matter who you are. Everyone can make a difference."

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Volunteer Spotlight: Rachel Shanks



Rachel was born and raised in Middle Tennessee, where the value of service to others was demonstrated in her family, school, and church. After graduating from Belmont University, she worked as a preschool teacher until pursuing her master's degree in occupational therapy at Tennessee State University. Since 2023, she has volunteered in the yoga program, cooking program, and at the annual dance marathon, but her absolute favorite program is Teen Tastic, which she has led for several semesters.

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Down Syndrome Achievement Centers
where. inspire. believe.

Gloria & Cindy Knoch Award

The Gloria & Cindy Knoch Volunteer Spirit Award honors our founding benefactors Gloria Knoch, her daughter Cindy, and the entire Knoch family.



Gloria Knoch raised eight children—one of whom was Cindy, born in 1953 with Down syndrome. In 1953, there were very few, if any, resources for children with Down syndrome. Doctors recommended that Gloria institutionalize Cindy. Instead, Gloria and her husband brought Cindy home and into their loving family.

Despite the lack of resources for her child, Gloria was a pioneer and began a reading group for children with Down syndrome in her home. The family was not wealthy; despite that, Gloria managed to set aside money for Cindy's future. Sadly, Cindy passed away before Gloria. Upon Gloria's passing, her family wanted to do something that would honor their mother's courage and commitment to supporting and educating her daughter.

The family chose to honor their mother's legacy by giving to the newly opened GiGi's Playhouse Nashville. They recognized that our organization strives to help individuals with Down syndrome achieve to their fullest potential, which is everything that Gloria wanted for Cindy.

The Gloria & Cindy Knoch Volunteer Spirit Award embodies Gloria's giving spirit and her belief that her daughter Cindy could achieve great things if she was given access to the tools and encouragement she needed in order to be successful. We are pleased to award it to the volunteer of the year for GiGi's Playhouse Nashville whose giving spirit has greatly impacted our participants.



- Board of Managers -

Jim Anisi	Tori McMahon
Frank Ross Brazil	Sharon Sabol
Richard Coure	Karen Sperber
Chet Danto	Melissa Wenger
Andrew Donaldson	Emily Whitson
Glenn Harris	Courtney Wright
Judd Larson	

- Playhouse Staff -

Ryan Smiley, Executive Director
Emily Sheridan, Program Manager
Tracie Michelson, Program Coordinator
Tara Patil, Operations Assistant

- Auction & Gala Committee -

Jim Anisi	Glenn Harris	Emily Sheridan
Valerie Bayham	Janet McMahon	Meredith Sheridan
Grace Blair	Tracie Michelson	Karen Sperber
Richard & Kim Coure	Tara Patil	Madison Wasylewski
Randy Elliott	Gerd Peters	Melissa Wenger
Emily Fakhar	Kristen Powlas	Emily Whitson
Emma Fleet	Marcia Quehl	Alexa Williams
Mason Freiburger	Sharon Sabol	



With Gratitude...

We want to extend our gratitude to our awesome adult participants and their families for helping to create the beautiful floral centerpieces for tonight's event, which were generously donated by LMA Designs. Tonight's floral centerpieces are available for guests to take home for a \$25 (large vases) or \$15 (small) donation.



Some Very Special Thank Yous

We would also like to extend a very special thank you to the following people for their support:

- **Frankie Horne** for sharing her family's story.
- **Shane McCarrell** for emceeing tonight's gala.
- **Aaron Tornquist, Maddox Rodriguez, and Robert May** for their talented performances.
- **Amanda Browning** for her performance during cocktail hour.
- All of our **Sponsors** and **Donors** for providing the funds necessary to allow us to continue to offer free programming for our families.
- All of the **Individuals** and **Businesses** that donated items for our silent and live auctions.
- Our **Staff** and **Volunteers** for making this night possible.

Thank you for joining us tonight!



Nashville, TN

Our Mission & Purpose

To change the way the world views Down syndrome and to send a global message of acceptance for all. We make a lifetime commitment to changing lives and providing hope through the consistent delivery of FREE educational, therapeutic, and career development programs for individuals with Down syndrome, their families, and the community, using a replicable playhouse model.

Our Vision

To see a world where individuals with Down syndrome are accepted and embraced in their families, schools, and communities.

Our Promise

A lifetime commitment to families.

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