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THE CHANCE TO
Fly

Johnson Brunetti
Connecticut Children's Foundation Gala

November 8, 2025

Connecticut Convention Center





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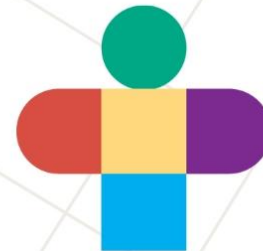
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A Most Pressing Announcement from Our Wizard

Dear Friends,

You have chosen to spend your evening supporting Connecticut Children's, and we are so grateful. Tonight promises to be a *thrillifying* soiree full of delicious dining, magnificent music and stirring stories throughout our Wicked-inspired Gala.

We believe, just as Elphaba sings, "Everyone deserves the chance to fly." That's why more than 3,500 team members work tirelessly every day to improve the medical and mental health and well-being of children. At Connecticut Children's—the state's only children's hospital—we are 100% Kids. That means that children never compete for space or budget or priority.

During tonight's Bid for Kids live appeal, you will learn about the miraculous work that occurs every day in our Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). As we prepare to open our new eight-story clinical Tower in December, our tiniest patients and their families will be able to move into private NICU rooms, designed to enhance healing and hope.

And, as it's sung to Glinda in Wicked:

For all this joy, we know who we've got to thank

Thank Goodness!

That means the Wizard, Glinda

But we know Connecticut Children's is not where it is today because of a faceless Wizard pulling strings behind a curtain. No, Connecticut Children's continues to expand services and provide more life-saving care to more children because of you—our sponsors, our donors and our fierce advocates.

So, thank you for helping us change the future of pediatric healthcare...*for good*.

With Wicked Sincerity,



Jim Shmerling, DHA, FACHE
President & CEO

Our Ozmopolitan Masters of Ceremonies

Elle Duncan

Since her SportsCenter debut in 2016, Elle has anchored ESPN's coverage of Women's NCAA basketball, WNBA Countdown and the March Madness tournament and makes regular appearances on the daytime debate show, *First Take*. An Emmy award winning host, Elle is also the author of a children's book, *For You, I Will*, which celebrates the unique bond between mothers and daughters. Elle is a tireless champion of all moms. She is a proud supporter of Helping Mamas, a volunteer organization that provides essential supplies to mothers in need and an avid supporter of The Boys and Girls Club. In the spare time she doesn't have, Elle moonlights as a waste management and snack acquisitions specialist at home with her husband and two kids under 7.

In addition to serving as our Co-MC, Elle is serving as one of the Gala Honorary Committee Co-Chairs.



Our Ozmopolitan Masters of Ceremonies

Nate

A big smile and a positive outlook

Meet Nate, an experienced actor and doting big brother, who doesn't let sickle cell disease dim his star. When Waterbury teachers Jenna and Tim met a quiet new first-grader, all three of their lives were changed forever. Over the next four years, they would become Nate's foster parents and then, on National Adoption Day in 2022, they officially adopted him. To save his life when he was a toddler, doctors amputated both of Nate's legs below the knee, his left arm, several fingers on his right hand and part of his ear.

Read more about Nate's story:

[Nate R. | 2025 All-Star | Connecticut Children's Foundation](#)



Our Thrillifying Entertainers



Jenny DiNoia, *Elphaba*

Jennifer DiNoia has the distinction of playing Elphaba more than any other actress is the show's history. She has portrayed Elphaba in *Wicked* on Broadway, in London and Chicago, during both National U.S. tours, as well as in Seoul, South Korea, and Sydney, Australia. Additional credits include the first National Tour of *Mamma Mia!* and Queen's *We Will Rock You*. Jenny debuted her first sold-out solo cabaret act this past year, at New York City's famous 54 Below.

Our Thrillifying Entertainers



Katie Rose Clarke, *Glinda*

Katie Rose Clarke most recently starred as Beth in the Tony Award winning revival production of *Merrily We Roll Along* for director Maria Friedman and opposite Jonathan Groff on Broadway, following a run at the New York Theatre Workshop. Best known for her role as Glinda the Good in the Broadway production of *Wicked*, she also starred in the role in the musical's first national touring company. Her Broadway debut was as Clara Johnson in The Lincoln Center Theatre's production of *The Light in the Piazza* directed by Bartlett Sher. She reprised the role of Clara in the production's first national tour and in the PBS national broadcast of *Live from Lincoln Center: The Light in The Piazza*. Her additional Broadway credits also include Hannah Campbell in *Allegiance* and Ellen in *Miss Saigon*. Katie will be starring as Dolly Parton in the world premier of *Dolly: An original musical* this summer in Nashville, Tennessee. On camera, she can be seen in roles on CBS' *The Good Wife* and *NCIS: New Orleans*.

Our Thrillifying Entertainers



Derek Klena, *Fiyero*

Derek Klena most recently starred as Christian in *Moulin Rouge* on Broadway, and played Joe Gillis alongside Stephanie J. Block in Kennedy Center's production of *Sunset Boulevard*. Previously he received a Tony Award nomination for his performance as Nick Healy in Alanis Morissette's critically acclaimed Broadway musical, *Jagged Little Pill*. Derek also starred and originated the role of Dmitry in the stage adaptation of the animated movie *Anastasia*. He first broke onto the NYC theatre scene in the 2012 Off Broadway revival of *Carrie*, where he was quickly noticed and scooped up by Oscar, Grammy, and Tony winners Benj Pasek and Justin Paul to originate the lead role of Eddie Birdlace in *Dogfight*. He then made his Broadway debut as Fiyero in the 10th anniversary company of *Wicked*, and followed that up by originating the role of Michael Johnson in Jason Robert Brown's *The Bridges of Madison County*. Derek can also be seen on television in *Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin* (Max), *The Code* (CBS), *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (Netflix), *Quantico* (ABC), *Last Week Tonight With John Oliver* (HBO), *Blue Bloods* (CBS), *Law and Order: SVU* (NBC), and *Carrie Diaries* (CW).

Our Thrillifying Entertainers



Savannah Connors

Savannah Connors is a 15-year-old sophomore at Canton High School. She has been in acting and musical production her entire life with some recent large roles as Sandy the Squirrel in *SpongeBob The Musical* and Annie in *Annie*. You will also see Savannah performing on stages around Canton with her dad and her band, Taste of Sheetrock.

Our Thrillifying Entertainers



Kaitlyn Roy

Kaitlyn Roy is a 17-year-old senior at South Windsor High School. She is a 4-year member of the SWHS award winning show choir Choral Spectrum and member of the female acapella group Treble Choir. Last year, she was selected to be the lead vocalist for Choral Spectrum's Rock Band, The Lid, during their Spring Performance. In addition, Kaitlyn has been a participant with Eastern Regions Choir. Creative in spirit, Kaitlyn also composes her own music, playing the piano, guitar and bass. Kaitlyn has participated in the SWHS Drama Club where she portrayed Brooke Wyndham in *Legally Blonde* and Cinderella in *Into the Woods*. Kaitlyn also has been a member of CAST Children's Theater where she portrayed Anna (young and adult) in *Frozen, Jr.*, Peter in *Peter Pan, Jr.* and Scuttle in *The Little Mermaid*. She has also played Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* with Newington Children's Theater and Anna in *Frozen, Jr.* with CT Performing Arts Center. She sings and plays bass for Descendants of Jupiter, a local band that performs under the leadership of Mach 1 Music.

Our Thrillifying Entertainers



Hailey Olints

Hailey Olints is a 16-year-old junior at South Windsor High School. She is a member of their elite and award-winning show choir Choral Spectrum where she was named a Best Soloist during the New England Show Choir Classic Regional Competition earlier this year. She is also a member of the SWHS Drama Club and proudly starred as Elle Woods in SWHS's production of *Legally Blonde the Musical*. She has a long history with CAST children's theatre, performing in over a dozen productions with some of her favorite roles being Janis in *Mean Girls*, Veruca Salt in *Willy Wonka*, Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*, and Sebastian in *The Little Mermaid, Jr.* She also performs with Middletown Stage Company's teen theater program where she has shined in roles including Ariel in *Footloose the Musical*, and Erzulie, Goddess of Love in *Once On This Island*. Hailey credits her fabulous vocal coach Kat Bowden and staff from Fox Hill School of Music with enhancing and supporting her musical journey, as well as her very loving and supportive family and friends. She is "wicked" thrilled and honored to be performing at the Johnson Brunetti Connecticut Children's Foundation Gala tonight.

Our Thrillifying Entertainers



Patrick Bogui, *Dr. Violin*

Patrick is a multifaceted artist, wielding his violin with soulful expertise while pursuing his dream of becoming a medical doctor. His journey has taken him across the country, gracing conferences, schools, private events, churches, youth groups, and various other venues with his music and contagious passion.

Throughout his career, Patrick has collaborated and performed with a constellation of esteemed artists, including luminaries such as Israel Houghton, Lalah Hathaway, John Stoddart, and Cece Winans, among others. These experiences have enriched his artistry and broadened his musical horizons.

Now a resident physician, Patrick has carried forward his vision of merging his passions for medicine and music. Building on the foundation he gained at the University of Connecticut, he remains steadfast in his belief that music holds a unique healing power, capable of touching lives in profound ways.

Our Thrillifying Entertainers

Avenue Groove

Avenue Groove is a Connecticut-based band formed in 2007 consisting of six very talented and dedicated musicians playing R&B/Funk/Dance Music. Known for being extremely tight and having fantastic vocals, Avenue Groove is very well received wherever they perform.



Gala All-Star Patient Ambassadors

Chloe

Dancing through the day-to-day of a chronic illness

Meet Chloe, a busy sixteen-year-old who shares a rare genetic condition with her brother and sister. They were all born with Gitelman syndrome, in which the kidneys are unable to hold on to potassium and other electrolytes. It can cause severe muscle weakness and dangerous heart arrhythmias. It requires lifelong monitoring and treatment, but that isn't slowing down Chloe. In addition to dancing six days a week, she mentors younger ballerinas and is active in her school and church.

Read more about Chloe's story:

[Chloe P. | 2025 All Star | Connecticut Children's Foundation](#)



Gala All-Star Patient Ambassadors

Daniela

Powering through a rare blood disorder

Meet Daniela, a resilient 7th grader and future nurse who lives with the daily challenges of beta thalassemia, a rare genetic blood disorder in which her body can't make healthy red blood cells. Treating it requires lifelong, regular blood transfusions, so for the past 11 years, Daniela has come to Connecticut Children's Infusion Center every three weeks. Living with beta thalassemia means living with fluctuating energy levels, but Daniela doesn't let that slow her down. She musters the energy to study lyrical dance and loves to cook.

Read more about Daniela's story:

[Daniela C. | 2025 All Star | Connecticut Children's Foundation](#)



Gala All-Star Patient Ambassadors

Jordyn

Heart of a champion

Just days after Jordyn was born, doctors discovered a serious heart defect—pulmonary stenosis, a narrowing of the valve controlling blood flow to her lungs. Jordyn was rushed to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, where specialists at Connecticut Children’s performed a minimally invasive balloon procedure in the Catheterization Lab to open her valve. “They found it was 92 percent closed,” her mom Bethany recalls. “We were lucky they acted so quickly.” Today, Jordyn is a vibrant, active pre-teen who dances competitively, builds engineering projects, devours books, and advocates passionately for children’s health—living proof of the lifesaving care provided at Connecticut Children’s Heart Center.

Read more about Jordyn’s story:

[Heart of a Champion: Jordyn’s Story | Connecticut Children's](#)



Gala All-Star Patient Ambassadors

Austin and Garrett

Twins who defied gravity

Born at 25 weeks, both boys endured heart surgery to repair birth defects as well as other medical emergencies that arose from being born premature. Garrett was ready to go home at 5 months, but scans showed Austin had a tumor on his liver. After brutal rounds of chemotherapy and surgery that removed 70% of his liver, Austin left the hospital after an extensive stay. Today, Austin is working through the challenges of cerebral palsy.

Read more about Austin and Garrett's story:

[Twins Beating the Odds | Connecticut Children's Foundation](#)



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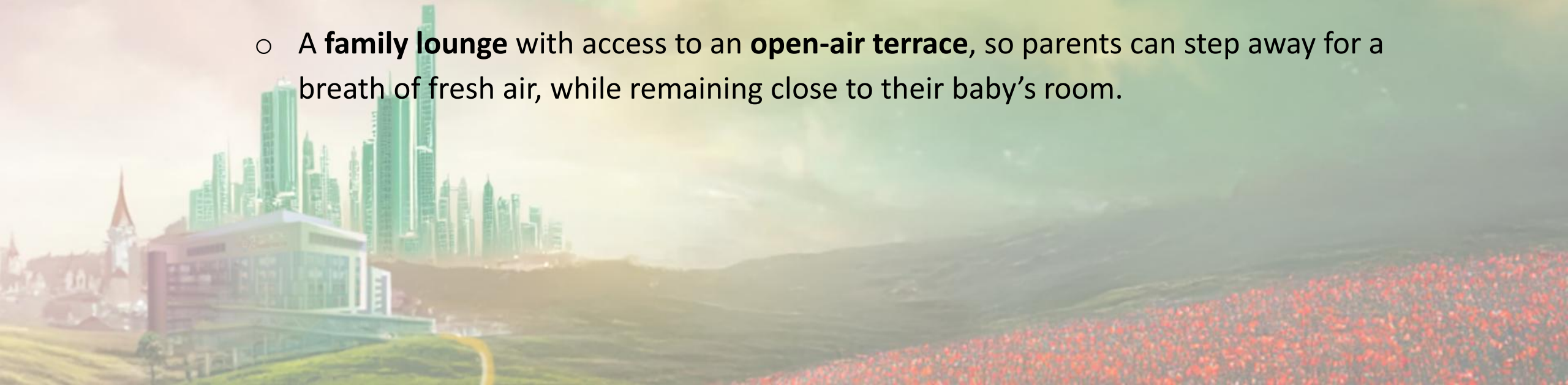


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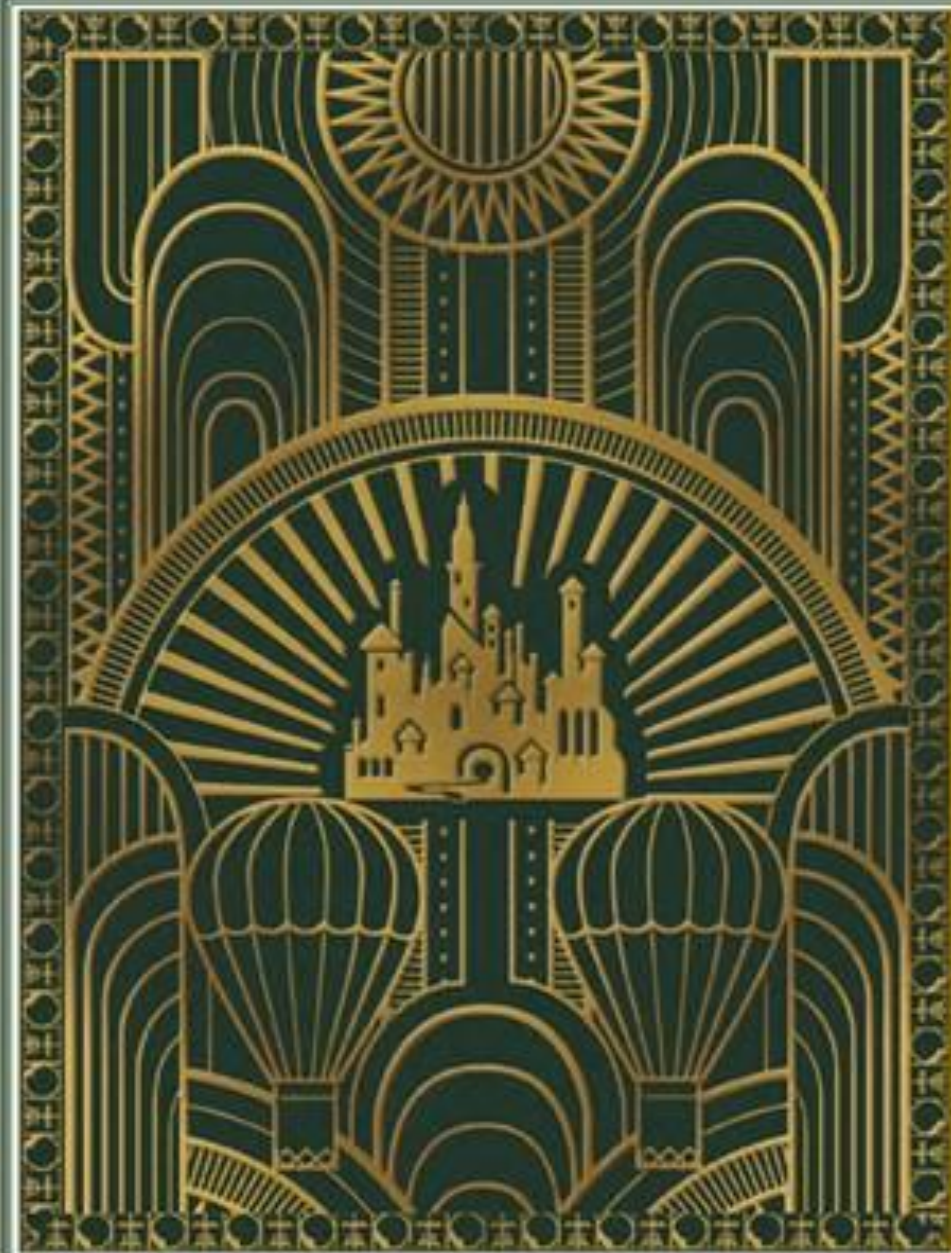
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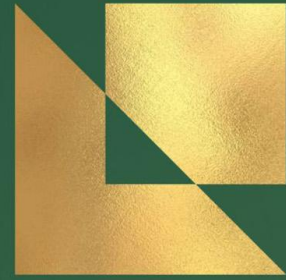
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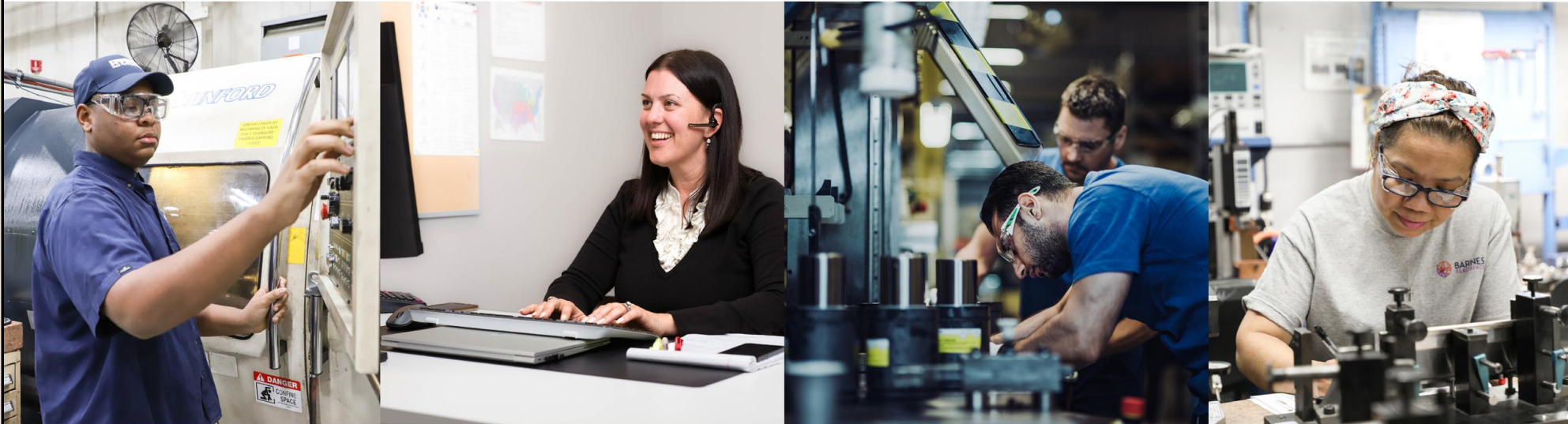
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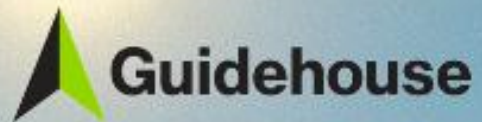
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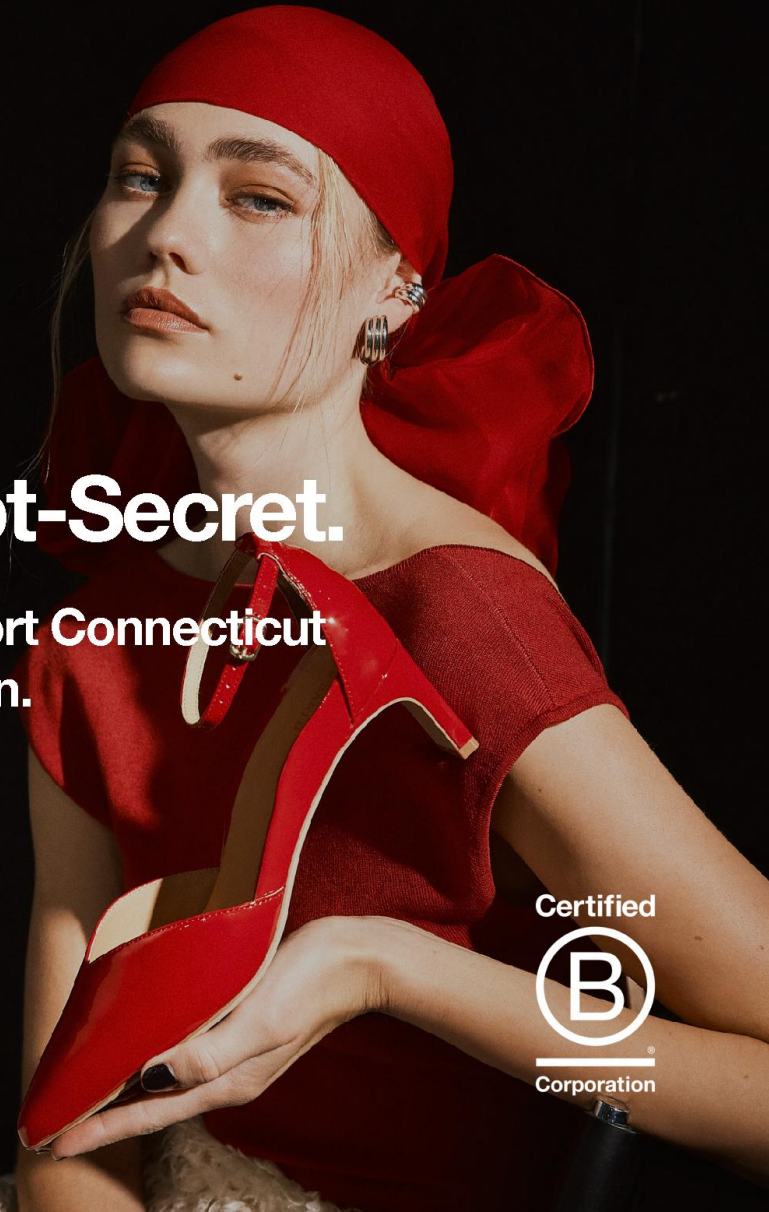
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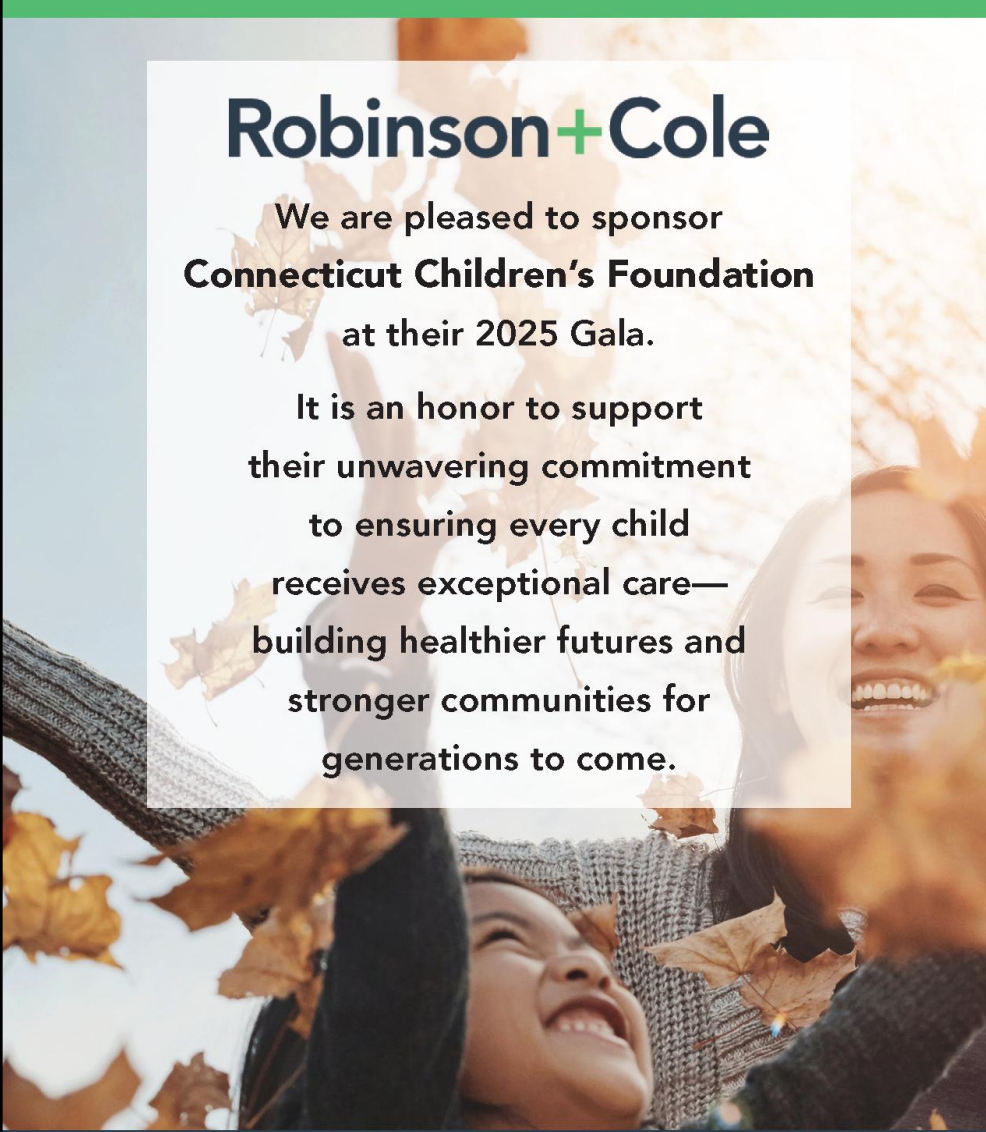
Add all ingredients to a glass rimmed with
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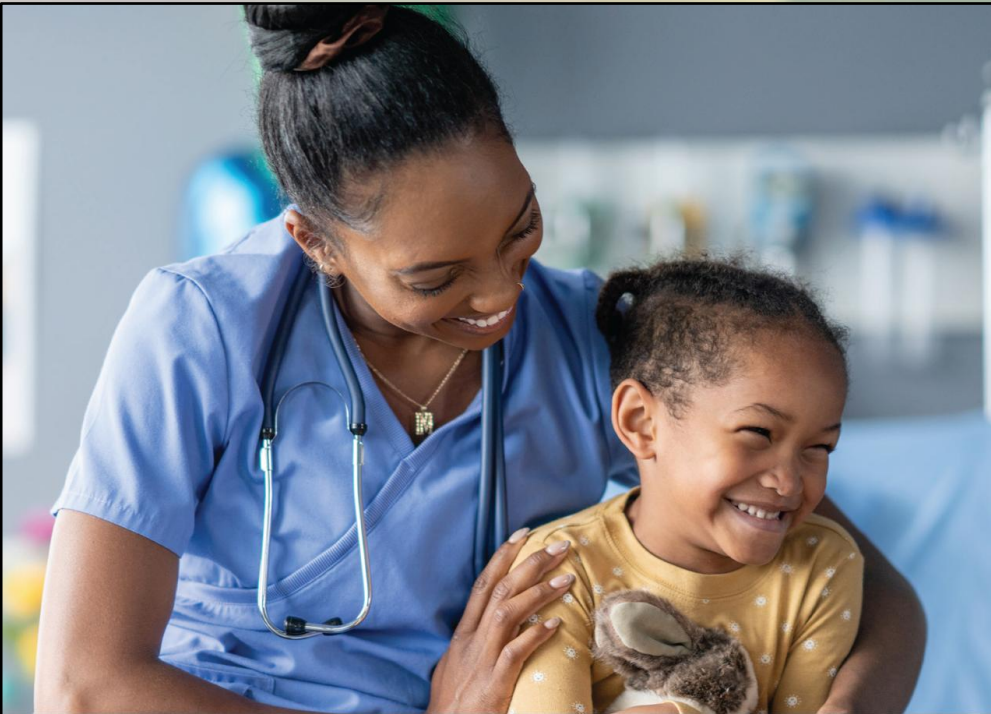
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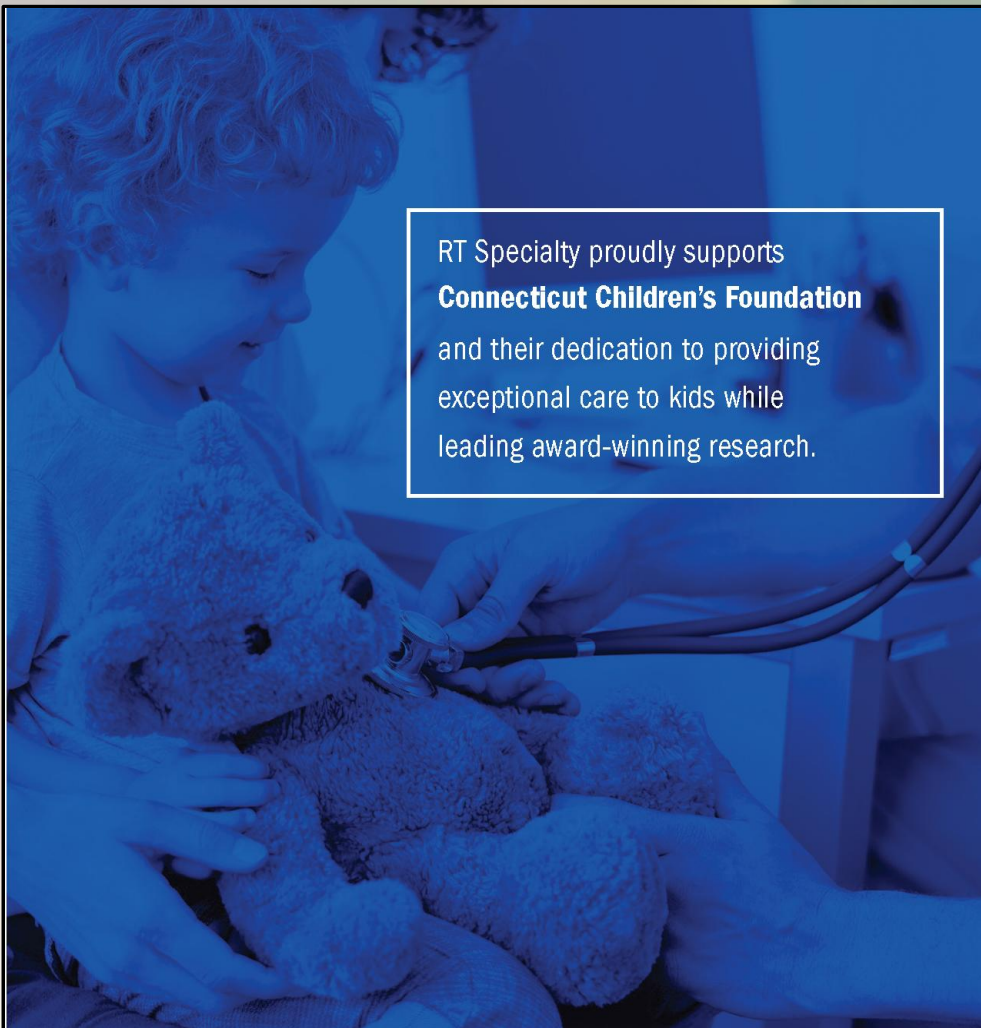
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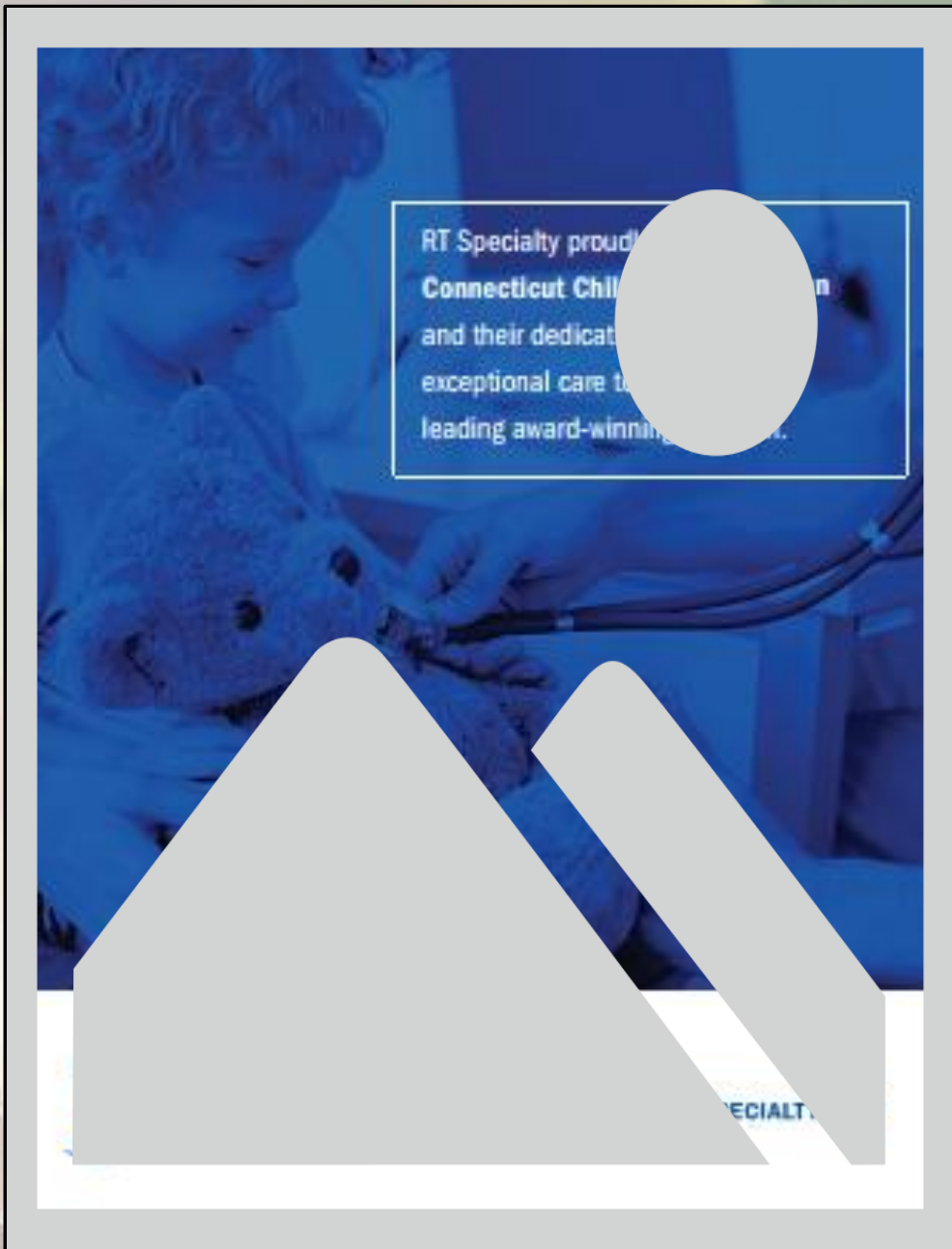
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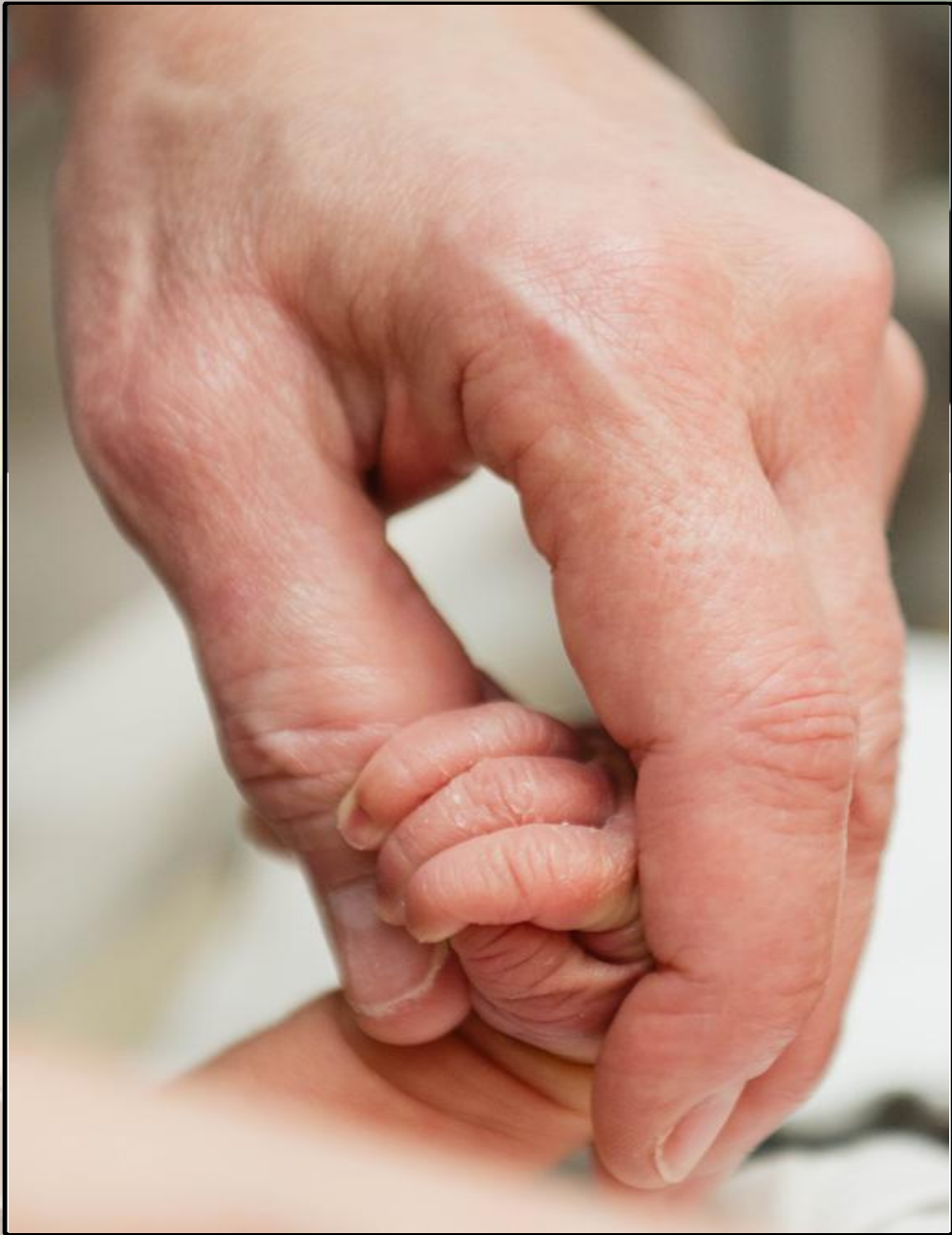
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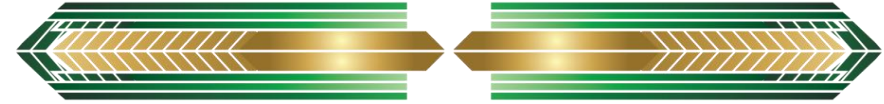


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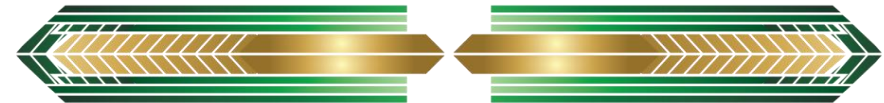
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Bid for Kids

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

The most advanced care for our tiniest patients

Twins Kenny and Neema started life facing very long odds. Born prematurely at 23 weeks, Neema's estimated chance of survival was 26 percent, Kenny's only 13 percent. Each weighed just over a pound. They were rushed to Connecticut Children's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) in Hartford. As extremely preterm infants, they needed the highest level of care and technology.



Our NICU is consistently ranked by U.S. News & World Report as one of the best in the country, caring for the smallest and most vulnerable babies and providing a supportive, compassionate experience for families when they need it most. The reach of our 150 NICU professionals is vital and extraordinary: they staff 14 NICUs and newborn nurseries regionally and provide care to the majority of NICU babies in Connecticut.



Small enough to fit in the palm of their mother's hand

We work with babies born so early they are at the very edge of survivability. Their organs and systems are still in an early stage of development—development that was supposed to finish in the womb. Their lungs, hearts, digestive tracts and brains are nowhere near ready to deal with the world. They need highly specialized equipment and extraordinarily skilled medical staff, which is what they find in our



Hartford NICU. But our current NICU space is an open bay style, meaning constant light, sound, and movement in one open space. It's not ideal for babies ... or for families.

A child leaving the womb four months early with undeveloped organs and multiple life-threatening conditions deserves to have the best possible circumstances to grow and develop properly. And that means trying to recreate womb conditions: a place that is quiet, calm, controlled, and private. Clinical studies have shown that NICU babies may have better neurodevelopmental outcomes if they are in a private room. That is exactly what we are going to provide.

In our new tower, which will nearly double the clinical space of our flagship hospital in Hartford, we are adding over 50,000 square feet of NICU space over two floors. The new NICU will feature 50 beds in private rooms, with additional space to perform complex procedures at the baby's bedside. Just as important as the benefits for the babies, individual rooms give parents the privacy to deal with the immense emotional challenges of having their baby in such a delicate condition.



Everyone deserves the chance to fly

Today, Kenny and Neema are 10 years old and defying the gravity of the odds they once faced. With your support, Connecticut Children's new NICU will give more kids the flying start they need for a healthier life.

You can make your difference today at
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SCAN TO JOIN!



Did You Know?

Investing in research and innovation isn't just about funding science—it's about investing in hope, possibilities, and life-changing breakthroughs. Heartbreakingly, research isn't covered by insurance. And now, with proposed federal funding cuts threatening critical pediatric healthcare research, private philanthropy is more important than ever. That's where Connecticut Children's Connection steps in.

Why Join Us?

Connecticut Children's Connection is a dedicated community of advocates who champion our most promising researchers. Each spring, a group of hand-selected researchers pitch next-generation, cutting-edge concepts to our members for the chance to receive seed funding. These grants fuel discoveries that could change the future of medicine. Whether you're an individual, a family, a medical professional, or a retired clinician, there are countless reasons to connect with us:

- **Create Lasting Impact:** Every dollar we raise is more critical than ever. Your support helps sustain innovative research that transforms children's lives today and shapes the future of medicine for generations to come.
- **Give Back:** If Connecticut Children's has touched your life or the life of someone you love, joining us is a powerful way to give back and ensure that life-changing research continues.
- **Network and Collaborate:** Join a dynamic community of like-minded professionals and advocates committed to driving change. Together, we can push the boundaries of pediatric medicine and bring new hope to families in need.

Let's Connect for our Children!

Join us during our annual membership campaign – May 30-September 30 – as we fight for the future of pediatric healthcare research. Together, we can transform children's lives.

Step Up and Make an Impact

Commit to increasing your gift over three years, and receive full recognition and benefits at the highest level starting in year one.

Visionary: New Member \$250 → \$500 → \$1,000

Catalyst: New Member \$500 → \$1,500 → \$2,500 or Renewal Member \$1,000 → \$1,500 → \$2,500

	Catalyst	Visionary	Ambassador	Supporter	Contributor
Member-only Experiences and Opportunities	\$2,500+	\$1,000+	\$500+	\$250+	Gift in any amount
Shape the future of pediatric healthcare by serving on the Funding Selection Subcommittee and choose the researchers invited to present at our Funding Selection event.	●				
Go behind-the-scenes with Connecticut Children's clinicians and researchers during their daily rounds with patients.	●				
Hear from promising researchers and help guide how critical research funds are invested at our annual Funding Selection event.	●	●			
Be recognized for your commitment with a featured listing on the Connecticut Children's Connection webpage.	●	●			
Experience the Mission through a lab or facilities tour or roundtable with clinicians, researchers and grateful patient families.	●	●	●		
Enjoy a guided tour of Connecticut Children's with a guest.	●	●	●		
Connect with members and Connecticut Children's leadership, clinicians, and researchers at Campaign receptions, Eat, Drink, Connect events, and volunteer experiences.	●	●	●		
Go Inside the Impact through bi-annual virtual events and exclusive online viewing of our Funding Selection event.	●	●	●		
Be in the know with access to quarterly Insider Access e-communications.	●	●	●	●	
Join a community of passionate individuals dedicated to transforming children's lives by investing in cutting-edge pediatric healthcare research.	●	●	●	●	●

Special Offer for Couples: Couples receive a \$100 discount per membership by using promo code **COUPLE2025** at checkout.

Flexible Giving Options: Membership gifts may be fulfilled through convenient monthly installments.

Maximize Your Impact: Employee matching gifts can help elevate your recognition level within the membership tiers.

Exclusive Recognition for Luminary Members: Individuals/couples who make a \$10,000+ annual investment will be recognized as Luminary Members on Connecticut Children's Connection's website and at select events.

Watch our [Funding Selection event](#) to learn about 2025 research award recipients: Allison Pfeffer, RN, BSN, and Sanjuka Majumder, PhD.





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