



The lucky winner (second left) of the Emerald Necklace donated by F.J. Malcolm, pictured with Emerald Ball celebrity hosts Emma-Louise Johnston, and James Nesbitt and SAM founder Tracy McCausland .

£60,000 gathered as guests have a ball

Event a 'gem' for SAM

LOCAL charity SAM (Struggle Against Muscular-Dystrophy) netted a massive £60,000 from its inaugural 'Emerald Ball' at Belfast's Europa Hotel last week.

Hillsborough woman and charity founder Tracy McCausland, whose own son Sam suffers from Congenital Muscular Dystrophy, described the all new black-tie event, hosted this year by actor James Nesbitt and TV personality Emma-Louise Johnston, as "a fabulous evening".

The ball got underway with a champagne reception, to musical accompaniment from the Nua Band.

In a Europa ballroom transformed for the evening by Sarah B Designs, Irish dancers provided entertainment as the first of five courses was served, singer Martin John later weaving his way among the guests with a selection of romantic favourites.

The celebrity hosts then took to the stage, relating the story of the McCausland family and how they determinedly set about doing something to change the future for their son and the many other children suffering from CMD, a devastating muscle-wasting disease for which there is currently no treatment and no cure.

PAINFUL

The disease causes scoliosis and painful muscle contractures, eventually leading to complete loss of muscle function and ultimately rendering children incapable of breathing and eating without assistance.

James Nesbitt made a heartfelt appeal to guests to dig deep for a worthy cause and the charity auction was a huge success, auctioneer Peter Johnston, of Wilsons Auctions, supervising the sale of lots

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including a specially commissioned Jason Millar print, donated by Quantum Images, and a fitted kitchen donated by Cabra Kitchens of Lisburn.

After the ballot, the ladies in the audience were invited on stage to select a gift-box each, courtesy of Belfast jeweller Fred J. Malcolm, who had commissioned and hidden in one of the boxes a unique Emerald and Diamond Art Deco Style pendant, mounted in 18ct white gold and worth more than £2,200, a stunning prize for one lucky lady.

Otis and the Elevators then took to the stage and guests danced the night away to Blues Brothers classics.

As SAM is a zero-cost charity - everyone involved giving freely of their time, expertise, products and services - every penny raised goes directly towards MD research.

DELIGHTED

A delighted Tracy McCausland said, "The staggering amount of money raised to date will now enable us to fund the setting up of a vital International Patient Registry for sufferers of CMD, including a DNA database for the scientific community to draw from.

"We have also committed to invite tenders for the first Struggle Against Muscular Dystrophy Translational Research Grant by the end of August 2009, which will give us real hope of finding a treatment for our children before time runs out."

For further information on the aims of Struggle Against Muscular Dystrophy and up-to-date news on the 'Please Fix Sam' campaign log on to www.pleasefixsam.com.