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Contact:

Susan Shimon, executive director, WilPower  
(847) 501-2939 [www.wilpower.org](http://www.wilpower.org)

WilPower benefit raises \$91,000

Northfield, Ill., Sept. 21, 2004 - The Shandling Family Trio headlined the 13th annual benefit of WilPower Inc., which raised roughly \$91,000 for housing and rehabilitation for mentally ill people on the North Shore.

The benefit, held Sunday, August 29, at Westmoreland Country Club in Wilmette, featured a silent auction, a live auction and a gourmet supper. Attending were 288 supporters.

WilPower, a not-for-profit agency, operates a clubhouse at 444 Frontage Rd. in Northfield and has permanent housing for 39 members in Glencoe, Morton Grove, Skokie and Wilmette. It has provided psychiatric rehabilitation and supportive housing to the North Shore since 1989.

"The idea of the benefit," said event chair Susie Roberts of Highland Park, "is that we gather to raise money for our cause and we gather for the camaraderie of supporters. It's equally important to be among supporters and to enjoy a lovely evening. We expanded our base of support."

Sue Shimon, executive director of WilPower, said Westmoreland Country Club "looked great. People really enjoyed the beautiful surroundings and the delightful guests."

The Shandling Family Trio of Highland Park, which features Rick Shandling on saxophone, Debi Shandling on piano and their son Trevor on drums, played during the silent auction and the dinner. The trio performed personal interpretations of jazz standards by writers including George Gershwin, Cole Porter and Antonio Carlos Jobim. Rick is a regular on the Chicago jazz scene, appearing at the Green Mill on Friday evenings as part of the house band for the late-night jam session. He and Debi are also professional piano technicians.

Among the guests were State Reps. Karen May of Highland Park and Julie Hamos of Evanston. The evening began at 6 p.m. with a silent auction, coordinated by auction chair Carrie Katz of Chicago, that featured club memberships, sports tickets, memorabilia from Chicago's teams, gourmet meals and theater outings. State Sen. Jeffrey Schoenberg, a member of WilPower's advisory board, donated an opportunity to be a "page for a day" when the Illinois legislature is in session in Springfield.

Corporate and foundation backers included Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice Foundation, Design Tower, Abbott Laboratories, Baxter International, Fortune Brands, Glenview State Bank, Harris Bank Glencoe, North Shore Community Bank, Harris Bank Wilmette, Household International, Karis Pharmacy, Household International and Beacon Financial Services.

After an elegant supper Jimmy Carrane, one of Chicago's most respected teachers and improvisers, returned to WilPower to conduct the live auction. Items auctioned included a Silversea cruise in the Mediterranean, a villa in Puerto Villarta, Mexico, a 32-inch flat screen from Abt Electronics and Appliances, tickets to the 2005 Cialis Western Open, a W Times Square weekend and a baseball autographed by Cubs star Aramis Ramirez. Carrane, a genius at building enthusiasm in an audience, has performed at Second City, conducts improvisational workshops as a corporate trainer and teaches his own "The Art of Slow Comedy" at the Improv Olympic.

WilPower's day programs serve roughly 200 people ranging in age from 18 to 60. Most of them have grown up in North Shore communities and want to live and work close to their roots.

Many of the members work part- or full-time because of job opportunities and counseling that WilPower arranges. Day classes on independent living skills, wellness and social skills. Expressive therapy encompasses drama, art, writing and music. Funding for WilPower comes from government, from fees and from contributions.

People in the day program receive job training, pursue hobbies, form professional networks, do volunteer work in the community and receive medical care. Those in WilPower housing live in a family atmosphere and develop independence.