

## Legendary Duke Honored

# Star-studded gala honoring a legendary Duke brings in nearly \$2 million for UTHealth



**By Shelby Hodge**  
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For its first dip into the waters of gala fundraising, UTHealth scored an amazing success, bringing in \$1.85 million for student scholarships and faculty endowments at the dinner evening honoring Dr. James H. "Red" Duke Jr. at the Hilton Americas-Houston.

The inaugural "Constellation Gala" also honored "the star" clinicians, scientists and researchers advancing health care at the University of Texas Health Science Center. While the gathering of more than 600 guests included many of those rock start medical leaders, the ballroom itself was transformed into a glittering planetarium with a vast backdrop of rotating stars and swoops of cosmic lighting.

"I've been to a lot of goat ropin's and county fairs, but I ain't never been to one like this," Duke quipped in his signature twang adding, "This is a very, very important initiative. These students need all the help they can get."

The founder of Life Flight has served for more than 40 years as a surgeon, educator and innovator at UTHealth and Memorial Hermann — Texas Medical Center. He was escorted to the stage by his daughter, Sara Duke, and by Memorial Hermann TMC COO Tom Flanagan.

Praise ran high for the man who UT Health president Dr. Giuseppe N. Colasurdo described as a living legend, Houston's John Wayne in scrubs and "a skilled and humble man who has dedicated his life to healing patients."

"Thank you, Dr. Duke, for educating thousands of our medical students, residents and fellows," Colasurdo said. "Thank you for Life Flight. Thank you for your 24/7 commitment to your patients. Thank you for helping to lay the very foundation of our university, and for working every single day to make it the best training ground and trauma center in the world."

Colasurdo also gave a nod to the 10,000 students, faculty and staff that make up UTHealth where the focus is not only on training healthcare leaders but also on treating patients with high-quality care and solving pressing health related issues.

The fun continued after the dinner in another ballroom with the UTHealth Luminaries' (young professionals) "Club No Ursa Minor" after party.

Before the dinner concluded, emcee Linda Lorelle announced the launch of a fundraising initiative to establish the first full-ride, endowed scholarship at UTHealth — the James H. "Red" Duke, Jr. MD Endowed Scholarship. With only two live auction items, auctioneer Jeff Smith was able to bring in \$43,000 to start the effort, thanks to high bidders Marcie Zlotnik, Kenneth Lewis and Mark and Laura Musemeche.

The evening was chaired by Ginni and Richard Mithoff with Ward & Ames Special Events creating the spectacular galactical ambience. The fun continued after the dinner in another ballroom with the UTHealth Luminaries' (young professionals) "Club No Ursa Minor" after party featuring Skyrocket.

Star-gazers included UTHealth Development Board chairman Bob Graham and wife Annie, Memorial Hermann-TMC CEO Craig Cordola and wife Allison, Melinda and Mike Perrin, Leslie and Jack Blanton Jr., Cathy and Dr. Gary Brock, Beth Robertson and Steve Pearce and Suzan and Julius Glickman.