
Inaugural Twin Cities Dining in the Dark Offers Glimpse into the Lives of the Blind to Support Sight-Saving Research

Mayo Clinic Professor and Insurance Industry Leader To Be Recognized with Visionary Awards

Minneapolis, MN (February 22, 2012) The [Foundation Fighting Blindness](#), a national nonprofit focused on sight-saving research, will open guests' eyes to the challenges of the visually impaired community at its inaugural Twin Cities Dining in the Dark on Wednesday, May 23, at the Marquette Hotel. The Foundation's Visionary Award will be presented to Raymond Iezzi, M.D., M.S., associate professor of ophthalmology, Mayo Clinic; and Matt Clysdale, president, Maguire Agency, to recognize their accomplishments and dedication to the fight against blindness.

Dining in the Dark is a distinctive sensory awareness experience in which guests participate in an unforgettable dining adventure, in complete darkness. To get a glimpse into the lives of the blind, diners will wear special light-blocking blindfolds and enjoy their entrée using only their heightened senses of smell, sound, taste and touch. The unique event will benefit cutting-edge research into preventions, treatments and cures for vision-robbing retinal degenerative diseases like macular degeneration, retinitis pigmentosa (RP), Usher syndrome, and related conditions.

Chairing the event are Julie Anderson, of Maple Grove, MN, and Mark Valenziano, of Minneapolis, MN, who are both affected with retinal disease and have passionately supported the Foundation's mission for years as chapter and [VisionWalk](#) leaders in the Twin Cities area. "We're so thrilled to bring this impactful Dining in the Dark experience to Minneapolis," Anderson says. "Not only will the evening raise valuable awareness about the challenges more than 10 million Americans, including myself, face on a daily basis, but we're fortunate to recognize two visionaries as we generate critical funds for research."

Visionary Award Honoree and Mayo Clinic Associate Professor of Ophthalmology [Dr. Raymond Iezzi](#), of Rochester, MN, specializes in retinal and vitreous diseases of the eye. The Foundation has funded his research in the past, and Dr. Iezzi has lent his expertise as a speaker at local Foundation chapter meetings. Also being recognized with the Visionary Award is Maguire Agency President [Matt Clysdale](#), of Rosedale, MN, who has over 20 years of insurance and management experience. His admirable example of accommodating a visually impaired employee to allow her to continue working demonstrates his commitment to inclusion in the workplace. He's also been honored with a Business Journal 40 under Forty award, and was named Agent of the Year in 2007 by the Minnesota Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers (MIIAB).



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What: Twin Cities Dining in the Dark, Benefiting the Foundation Fighting Blindness

When: Wednesday, May 23, 2012
6 p.m. Reception
7-9 p.m. Dinner & Awards

Where: The Marquette Hotel
710 Marquette Ave.
Minneapolis, MN55402

(MORE)

Individual tickets are available for \$250 each and sponsorship packages begin at \$2,500. For ticket and sponsorship information, contact Events Manager Michele DiVincenzo at MDiVincenzo@FightBlindness.org or (847) 680-0100. To RSVP as a member of the media or to coordinate an interview with an event spokesperson, contact Allie Gebhardt at (410) 423-0643 or AGebhardt@FightBlindness.org.

About Foundation Fighting Blindness

The [Foundation Fighting Blindness](#) is a national nonprofit driving research that will lead to preventions, treatments and cures for retinitis pigmentosa, macular degeneration, Usher syndrome and the entire spectrum of retinal degenerative diseases that affect more 10 million Americans. In its 40-year history, the Foundation has raised more than \$450 million as the leading non-governmental funder of retinal research. Breakthrough Foundation-funded studies using gene therapy have restored significant vision in children and young adults who were previously blind, paving the way for using this method to treat a wide variety of retinal degenerative diseases, and proving a cure is in sight. With a network of nearly 50 chapters, the Foundation also provides support and resources to affected individuals and their families in communities across the country.

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