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AUTISM SOCIETY OF ALABAMA RECOGNIZES FIVE INDIVIDUALS FOR COMMUNITY/ADVOCACY AWARDS

Birmingham - The Autism Society of Alabama, a non-profit that provides education and advocacy for the 1 in 68 families affected by an autism spectrum disorder, recently held its 20th annual Autism Shines Gala at the Grand Bohemian Hotel in Mountain Brook.

Over 360 attendees joined together to celebrate this past year's accomplishments within the autism community. "We were overjoyed to have a sellout crowd for this huge milestone event..." said executive director Melanie Jones, "without the support from individuals and local businesses, our programs like Camp FROG, Autism Respite Care and the Autism Friendly Initiative wouldn't be possible."

Guests bid on over 100 silent auction packages including beach getaways, designer fashion items and outdoor adventures for all ages. The live auction also rendered much attention when the Shelby County Humane Society featured a puppy paired with several dog essentials such as private training, a clean-up service and grooming to the highest bidder. Other items included a Disney vacation, Napa Valley excursion and a private wine dinner prepared by local chef John Hall.

The special program of the night featured Homewood native, Alvin Finch, as he wowed the audience with a performance of Nocturne, Opus 54, NO. 4 on the grand piano. Miss Amazing Teen Alabama, Mary Catherine Collins, also received a standing ovation after singing "Over the Rainbow." Program Director Bama Hager stated, "Individuals with autism can thrive when appropriate programs and services are available. Our mission is to increase education and awareness, continue advocating on a state and local level as well as expand opportunities so that more families have access to be successful."

Following the highlight performance - Lisa Riley, Catey Hall and Jim Patterson each who impacted the recent autism insurance reform in Alabama were presented with the Mike Tumlin Advocacy Award, a legacy of parent advocate Mike Tumlin who passed away in December. In addition, Jodie Smith and Kathy McCown received the President's Award for his and her longstanding involvement with the organization.

Sponsors from this year's Gala include Protective Life, Dale's Seasoning, Beasley Allen, Donohoo auto, Drummond Company, Paulette and Bill Pearson, McGriff Seibels & Williams, Peggy and Keith Stevens, Knights of Columbus, Prince of Peace Catholic, Yellowhammer Construction, America's First Federal Credit Union, Children's of Alabama, Cullman Savings Bank, Deshazo, FaceForward Staffing, Glenwood, Grandparents of Remy & Randi Cron, Catey and Cody Hall, HANDS Program, University of Alabama ASD Clinic, Honda Manufacturing, Regions Bank, Learning Tree, E Group, Nancy and Ernie Barnes, and Rachel and Russ Barton

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About the Autism Society of Alabama

The Autism Society of Alabama is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving services for as many as 55,000 individuals affected by autism in Alabama through education and advocacy. For more information about the Autism Society of Alabama and Autism Spectrum Disorders, please call (877) 4-AUTISM or visit www.autism-alabama.org.