

# Airport hosts benefit to aid Lawrence-based PEI Kids

By Bridget Clerkin  
for The Times of Trenton

It was a night for food, wine and passion — for the work being done by local nonprofit PEI Kids.

Nearly 400 supporters showed up to the organization's ninth annual wine and food tasting fundraiser event Friday held at the Landmark Aviation hangar at Trenton-Mercer Airport in Ewing. Attendees could watch planes take off and land while sipping their wine, and décor scattered throughout the location included flashy sports cars and a private jet on display.

"This is what I call a guy's fundraiser," PEI executive director Roslyn Dashiell said, laughing. "There's lots of cool stuff here for them to look at."

But on a serious note, Dashiell mentioned how much the support of the attendees means for PEI, a Lawrence-based organization

working with Mercer County school districts to offer abuse prevention education and intervention services for children.

"The fundraising money can go directly into operation capital, meaning it's unrestricted funding," Dashiell said. "We can use it for whatever needs pop up throughout the year. It makes it so much easier for us to stay focused on our purpose, which is helping the community, when we don't have to chase as much money from grants to cover certain costs."

According to event organizer Jesse Elliot, \$40 of the \$50 ticket price — plus all proceeds of the night's silent auction — would go directly back to programs at PEI. Programs to be funded by the benefit include crisis intervention counseling for children who are victims of sexual abuse, which PEI typically offers to 250 children annually; a juvenile

intervention program, which typically serves up to 120 students in Mercer County annually; bullying prevention courses, which are offered to 14,000 first-graders throughout the county; and setting up supervised visits between foster children and their biological parents, which PEI does for nearly 1,600 children every year.

What makes every one of those programs so successful is the people at the organization who run them, said Dashiell, who was named executive director of PEI in September.

"All of our program directors have such a long history with PEI, and so many strong community connections, it makes my job easy," she said.

And that's exactly how PEI founder Evelyn Gill hoped the organization, formerly known as Prevention Education Inc., would be run in the future.



PEI Kids founder Evelyn Gill, left, and executive director Roslyn Dashiell at the organization's wine and food fundraiser held at Trenton-Mercer Airport in Ewing on Friday.

(BRIDGET CLERKIN/FOR THE TIMES OF TRENTON)

"Back in 1985, there were no programs, no services like this out there for children," she said. "We had a dream that we could make it happen, and slowly but surely, we did."

Looking around at the growing crowd buzzing about the hangar, Gill smiled.

"It's so overwhelming to see so many people support, what I still consider in my mind, to be a small agency,"

she said. "I hope it continues to grow and grow. As much as we've done, there's always more to be done."

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