

A Celebration with Heart: Gala Benefits UC San Diego's Sulpizio Family Cardiovascular Center

University friends and donors Gene and Hannah Step to be honored at March 21 black-tie "Heart of San Diego" Gala

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A 12-year tradition to conquer heart disease, the annual "Heart of San Diego" Gala to benefit the Sulpizio Family Cardiovascular Center at the University of California, San Diego, will take place March 21. University friends and philanthropists Gene and Hannah Step will be honored at the black-tie fete, which will include dinner, dancing, and silent and live auctions.

While working as a senior executive for Eli Lilly, Gene Step learned about the critical need for advanced cardiovascular care. When he was only 41-years-old, Step experienced a myocardial infarction, or heart attack. Ever since, Step has relied on cardiologists to keep a close eye on his heart to ensure his good health.

When Gene Step, and wife Hannah, moved from Indianapolis 12 years ago to retire in San Diego, he was referred to Anthony DeMaria, MD, director of UC San Diego's Sulpizio Family Cardiovascular Center for continuing cardiac care. When Step needed surgery on his aortic valve three years ago, it was performed by Stuart Jamieson, MB, FRCS, chief of UC San Diego's Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery. Step was so impressed with the medical attention he received from his doctors and the innovative research taking place at the university's comprehensive cardiovascular center that he decided to devote his time and resources to the facility's progress and growth.

"I view our support as an investment," Step said of the couple's longstanding dedication to the Cardiovascular Center. "I believe in the center because it has always been here for me when I needed it, so getting involved was something I wanted to do."

"We are pleased to recognize Gene and Hannah Step for their tireless efforts on behalf of the people of San Diego, and in particular for the Sulpizio Family Cardiovascular Center," said DeMaria. "Their sustained intellectual and philanthropic support has been essential to the continued advancement of the center and our new leading-edge facility currently underway."

Thanks to the private support of friends like the Steps, the new home for the Sulpizio Family Cardiovascular Center is now under construction on the UC San Diego campus. Advanced clinical care and research will be consolidated in one state-of-the-art facility dedicated to caring for patients with any stage of heart disease and stroke. Proceeds from the upcoming gala will help fund construction of the new facility and the center's mission of discovering and delivering novel techniques for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of heart disease and stroke—the leading causes of death and disability in the United States.

"The community is very lucky to have the Sulpizio Family Cardiovascular Center," added Step. "UC San Diego and its medical center are among the world's greatest facilities. It will be so rewarding when the front door of the new building is unlocked for the first time."

Longtime co-chairs of the "Heart of San Diego" Gala are Zandra Rhodes, founder of the Fashion and Textile Museum in London, and Salah Hassanein, chairman of Variety Children's Lifeline. They will be joined by co-chairs John Lechleiter, Michael Step and Sidney Taurel. The March 21 gala will begin at 6 p.m. at the Four Seasons Resort, Aviara in Carlsbad. Tickets are \$650 for premier Diamond Seating, \$500 for Ruby Seating and \$300 for Sapphire Seating. Sponsorship opportunities up to \$50,000 are also available. For reservations, please call (619) 543-3258.

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