

STARS COME OUT FOR GROW CENTER



Photo/Ben Nelms. It was no small-time event. The Jack Hanna Benefit fundraiser at the Georgia Aquarium Jan. 18 for Georgia's only wildlife veterinary hospital and research center to be located in Chattahoochee Hill Country featured many of Hanna's animals and emerging country music star Jason Coley. The fundraiser was sponsored by Minerva Properties, WSB-TV and STAR 94 FM. Pictured are Minerva's Stacy Patton, Minerva co-owner Joe Harris, GROW Center board member Carl Hodges, television wildlife star Jack Hanna, Lisa Hartman-Black, country music star Clint Black, Minerva co-owner Brian Davison and GROW Center CEO Brenda Hudlow.

By Ben Nelms, South Fulton Citizen, Published on 01/26/08

It was nothing short of a main event. And it was one that signaled a landmark statement about the need to protect Georgia's injured wildlife. The Jan. 18 event was the Jack Hanna Benefit fundraiser for the non-profit GROW's upcoming Wildlife hospital and Clinical Research Center located at Cochran Mill Nature Preserve in Chattahoochee Hill Country. The fundraiser was held in the Oceans Ballroom at the Georgia Aquarium.

The hospital and research facility will be the only one of its kind in Georgia and one of the few in the nation. The "Jack Hanna's Into the Wild" television host praised the efforts of the GROW Center and University of Georgia's (UGA) College of Veterinary Medicine for the collaborative effort to address the care of injured and orphaned wildlife. "I want to thank each and every one of you tonight for helping to start this center," Hanna said to the large audience who paid \$250 per plate to attend the fundraiser. "What you're doing for wildlife is being looked at by other states."

The gala event was also a venue for emerging country music phenomenon Jason Coley, who played a short set toward the end of the evening. A native of the Cedar Grove area of South Fulton and no stranger to hometown area fans in south Fulton and Coweta counties, Coley played for the large audience that included country music star Clint Black and Lisa Hartman-Black, who came from Nashville for the GROW Center fundraiser.

UGA College of Veterinary Medicine's Dr. Stephen Hernandez-Divers said the hospital will serve as a teaching and research facility for the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine, enhancing the appeal of UGA's program. UGA has provided GROW with a Letter of Intent for a Memorandum of Agreement to supply veterinary staff and resident students to the facility. The GROW rotation will enable UGA to offer veterinary students a Certification in Wildlife Medicine. UGA anticipates this will attract an international applicant pool to their veterinary medicine program, he said. The wildlife hospital will treat all types of mammals, reptiles, birds, and amphibians in need of medical treatment for a variety of reasons, including those hit by vehicles and those shot or poisoned or displaced or attacked by domestic animals.

The non-profit GROW Center facility will be built on land donated by Minerva USA adjacent to an existing 20-year-old environmental education non-profit, the Cochran Mill Nature Center (CMNC), located in Cochran Mill Nature Preserve in Chattahoochee Hill Country, said Hudlow. "These two 501(c)3 organizations have agreed to partner on facilities' use and educational programs in a way that will benefit both of them. CMNC will be able to provide wildlife education to the general public that GROW feels is critically important, and can serve as a permanent home for wildlife that cannot be returned to the wild. GROW will provide veterinary care to the many animals brought to CMNC, many of which they currently turn away as they are unequipped to treat them," Hudlow said. "The city of Chattahoochee Hill Country is the first community in Georgia to adopt a sustainable land use plan offsetting high-density mixed-use villages with mandatory permanent green space. "Their Transfer of Development Rights program is serving as a test project for the State of Georgia. Locating the GROW Center in this sustainable community, on land that will eventually be connected to a multi-use trail built by the PATH Foundation, seems like a perfect location. To help minimize environmental impact of the facility, the GROW facility will be designed and constructed as a green building which is an eco-sensitive structure and is cleaner, healthier for occupants, and the environment."

Event co-sponsor Minerva Properties' co-owner Brian Davison said the company's donation of the acreage to construct the wildlife hospital adjacent to Cochran Mill Nature Center directly corresponds with Minerva's environmental vision for the upcoming 2,000-acre Friendship Village to be located immediately to the north. "The link between the wildlife hospital and the nature center is an amazing one," Davison said. "That link unites with the core environmental values of Friendship Village and it helps connect people and wildlife together." Aside from serving as a hospital and research center for UGA veterinary students, Hudlow said the facility will also serve as a data source for federal and state wildlife agencies. The center will also conduct wildlife symposiums to provide specialized training for Georgia's wildlife rehabilitators.