



Bernice Weissbourd and John W. Rogers Jr.

JENNIFER GIRARD PHOTO



Arne and Karen Duncan

JENNIFER GIRARD PHOTO



Eric Smoot Hemphill and Jenn Hemphill

JENNIFER GIRARD PHOTO



Ryan DeVore, Merri Ex and Amy DeVore

JENNIFER GIRARD PHOTO



Shari Runner



Tony Balkissoon, Laura Jarrett, and Gene and Adriene Dibble

## Candid Candace

BY CANDACE JORDAN  
Chicago Tribune



# Family Focus gala raises more than \$500,000

Family Focus celebrated its 40th anniversary with a gala honoring John W. Rogers Jr. at the Four Seasons Hotel Chicago on June 2. Rogers, chairman and CEO of Ariel Investments, received the Bernice Weissbourd Award for Family Support before a crowd of 400. Founded in 1976 by scholar and educator Bernice Weissbourd, along with Irving Harris and Bernard Weissbourd, Family Focus provides parents and their children from birth to age 18 with resources and learning opportunities to support healthy childhood development. Rogers has been involved with the nonprofit for 30 years, now as an emeritus board member.

Following a reception, the program began with welcoming remarks from Vaughn Gordy, event chair, and Merri Ex, Family Focus president and CEO. They presented the 2016 Outstanding Corporate Partner Award to Jones Day, an international law firm that was recognized for its pro bono contributions.

The evening included tributes to Rogers from Melloody Hobson, Ariel Investments president; Peter Carril, Rogers' Princeton basketball coach; and Arne Duncan, former U.S. secretary of education and Chicago Public Schools chief. A letter from President Barack Obama congratulated Rogers for "lifting up lives, empowering parents and ensuring a brighter future for young Chicagoans."

In an emotional speech, past Family Focus participant Eric Smoot Hemphill related his history with the nonprofit. His parents were drug addicts, and the family was homeless during his childhood. He said, "For many kids who go to Family Focus, life is about survival. My destiny and the trajectory of my family changed because of the people who came into my life there. They gave me hope and taught me that your circumstances don't define who you are." He's now a business owner recognized for his philanthropic work.

The gala raised over \$500,000 to support the seven Family Focus service centers throughout Chicagoland.

Freelance writer Candace Jordan is involved with many local organizations, including some whose events she covers.

### More online

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KRISTAN LIEB/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTOS



Vaughn Gordy and Patricia Mulcahy



Aaron Bianco and Roopa Weber



Carol Moseley Braun, Amanda Kloster and Sara Gourley



Stephen Majsak, Bobbie Hinden, Nora Barquin and Nora Figueroa