

Finding the Cure

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Stacie J. Stephenson combines her passion for cancer eradication with a creative intuition to chair Gateway for Cancer Research's over-the-top Cures Gala.

By Elle Cashin

Stacie J. Stephenson is somewhat of an anomaly. As a licensed medical doctor, she has spent 15 years developing clinical practices throughout the Midwest, specializing in integrative medicine—yet somehow she finds time to be ever the active socialite. She is sophisticated and well spoken yet boasts a brilliant mane of fiercely red hair. She's an avid equestrian and thrives in the outdoors but can rock an haute couture gown better than the rest. Her world is full of seemingly incongruous ideas, but they often come together through philanthropy.

Case in point: This month, Stephenson—alongside her husband, Richard J. Stephenson—hosts the annual Cures Gala benefiting Gateway for Cancer Research. She has been co-chairing the gala since its blowout 25th anniversary in 2016 (which raised a staggering \$4.4 million) and, despite also being the chair of functional medicine for Cancer Treatment Centers of America, has become something of a master party planner. "I never would have thought, as a doctor doing such serious things for a living, how fun fashion and design and event production could be," Stephenson says. "It's been like a second career for me. I was a competitive ice skater for 16 years—I suspect that's where some of

my creativity comes from."

Ninety-nine cents of every dollar raised at the gala goes directly toward cutting-edge phase one and phase two clinical research across the globe through Gateway for Cancer Research. "Our thinking is, if there's something going on in Switzerland, in Germany, in Japan, that needs funding—and if we funded, that we could help people in the United States—why wouldn't we?" Stephenson says. "The enemy is cancer. It crosses all boundaries, all ages, all socioeconomic statuses, and we just need to find the answer. We don't need to worry about who did it first; we just need to be part of getting it done."

When Stephenson is involved, you can guarantee those answers will get that much closer. This year's Studio 54-themed Cures bash will feature over-the-top performances, an ultraluxe live auction, decadent cuisine and a whole lot of glamour. It all goes back to those beautiful juxtapositions at the core of who Stephenson is. "I never forget that music and experience and socializing stimulate your immune system," she says. "So while we work in an extremely serious field—we're working at saving lives every day—I also know that joy feeds your soul." Nov. 2, Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center Hotel, tickets \$1,000, gatewaycr.org

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