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Luncheon Honors 2010 Chicagoans of the Year

IN THE HEAT OF THE AFTERNOON: Six warm speeches by Chicagoans of the Year defrost crowd's winter woes

By Geoffrey Johnson

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(L to r) Rocky Wirtz, Dr. Daniel Ivankovich, Neli Vazquez-Rowland, Tim King, Susan Axelrod, and Gunny Harboe

On January 20, 2011, 13 years after she cofounded Citizens United for Research in Epilepsy (CURE)—and 30 years after her infant daughter, Lauren, had her first seizure—Susan Axelrod stood before a lunchtime crowd at the Four Seasons Hotel to acknowledge her selection as one of Chicago's Chicagoans of the Year for 2010. "CURE started in Chicago, so this is one of the most heartwarming awards," she said.

Axelrod's uplifting remarks, echoed by her fellow honorees, were a welcome antidote to a bitterly cold day. "This is a very humbling experience," said Gunny Harboe, who oversaw the rehab of the Carson Pirie Scott building and found two hidden Louis Sullivan façades on Wabash Avenue. "It's heartwarming that the work my colleagues and I do is appreciated by the city and its citizens."

The 17th annual luncheon, sponsored in part by American Airlines, drew more than 200 guests. Dr. Daniel Ivankovich, recognized for his response to last year's Haitian earthquake, asked them to remember the poverty and other problems plaguing Chicago. "It's hard to have that kind of need cry out and turn your back on it," he said. Tim King, the educator who founded Urban Prep Academies, agreed. "We have to work together as a city, as a country, to make sure everyone gets the chance to fulfill their destinies." And Neli Vazquez-Rowland, a cofounder of A Safe Haven—a network of shelters that helps homeless people overcome their addictions—invoked the words of President John F. Kennedy on the 50th anniversary of his inaugural address: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

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Little wonder that the final honoree, [Rocky Wirtz](#)—the principal owner and chairman of the Stanley Cup-champion Chicago Blackhawks—had to stop and wipe away a tear. On this humbling and heartwarming day, he was not alone.

PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRIS GUILLEN

1 2 Next »

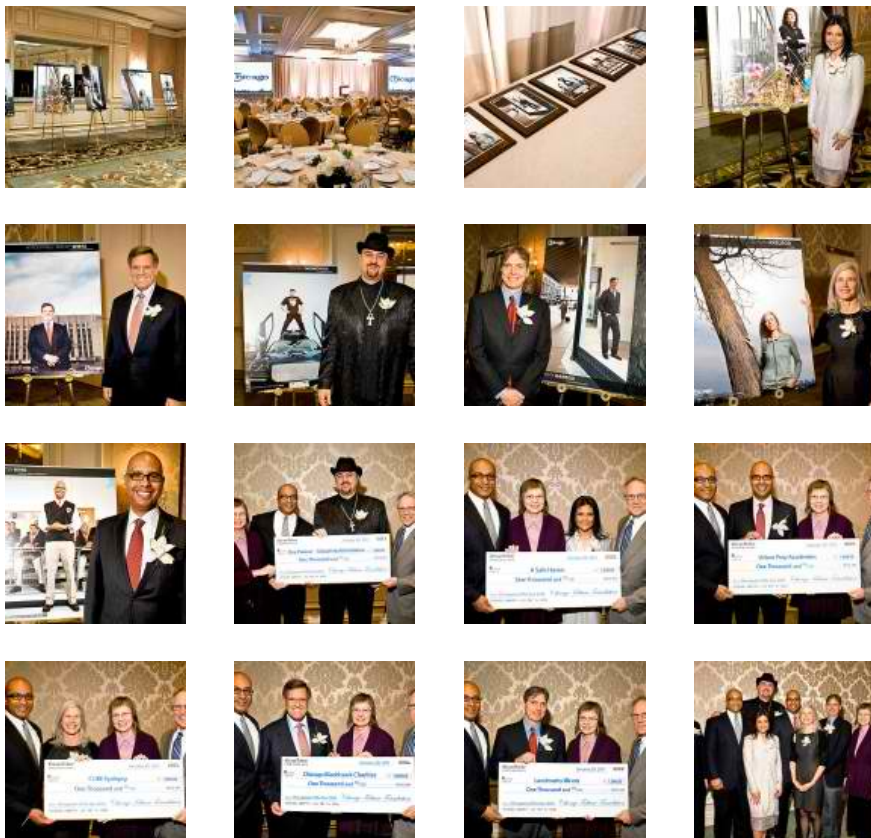
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This article appears in the [March 2011](#) issue of Chicago Magazine.

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