



The Hoch Family, including WWFC CEO Amy Wender-Hoch with her husband John and son Nathan at last year's Holiday Heroes.

HOLIDAY HEROES

The season's family-friendly fundraiser returns to AT&T Park on December 5.

Wender Weis Foundation for Children Founder and CEO Amy Wender-Hoch takes a look back at building a nonprofit with the aim of helping at-risk youth and highlights just why WWFC's winter fundraiser has become such a beloved San Francisco event.

You have been raising funds for at-risk youth for over 20 years. What is the most rewarding part of your work?

Seeing the children's smiles light up at our event is a feeling that cannot be expressed. Over time, we have been able to sponsor more and more underserved children at our events. And getting to interact with the families, and especially the kids, warms my heart at a very deep level. Knowing that Holiday Heroes, for some, is their only holiday celebration helps to keep me going when times are challenging. One organization says that an invitation to Holiday Heroes is like a "golden ticket" in Willy Wonka's world. Kids wait all year to see if they will be able to return to Holiday Heroes, and that motivates me to keep going out there, pounding the pavement, and really trying to create more special, unique experiences for all kids attending.

We have many families that have been coming to Holiday Heroes for years. They kick off their holidays with us, and we are part of their holiday tradition. My hope is that when kids are older, they remember fondly their times at Holiday Heroes, and they want to try to create something special for the kids in their lives.

The Gift of Giving



The Holiday Heroes event features many children's activities.

How many children do you hope to impact in 2018?

We hope to impact more and more children over time as well as directly impact a few individual children via scholarships and grants through organizations. As an example, we provide a scholarship for a level 1 student through the SF Ballet School, and while the impact there is only one child, we hope that child grows and blossoms from his/her experience and then, in time, gives back to others. On the other hand, through a partnership with Warriors Community Foundation and the Good Tidings Foundation, we refurbished a basketball court for underserved middle school students. The impact there will be endless as more and more youth get to have a safe place to play after school while also learning about core values and teamwork. ➔



The scene at last year's Holiday Heroes event at AT&T Park.



Adonal Foyle and guests at Holiday Heroes

Tell us about the evolution of Holiday Heroes from a Halloween-centered event to the mega-fundraiser that it is now at AT&T Park.

I think having the event during the holiday period, where families are looking to give back and to make an impact, has really changed the flavor of the event. We have opportunities for families to sponsor children at Holiday Heroes, and many people have sponsored a child, and they feel really good about it. This event brings kids from all backgrounds together and it is special that many times you cannot tell the kids who are sponsored from the ones who are not. Everyone feels comfortable, seen, and special. And this is a chance to see your family's giving up close and personal, and you can show your family, in a nice way, that some kids do not have things that, perhaps, others take for granted.

What has also been nice is that we have a history with many of the athletes. We have partnered with sports teams since our inception, and having a 20-year history of giving is very special.

What exciting things are in store for guests this year?

We have some really exciting treats this year. We have an entire "Broadway in San Francisco" area during our VIP Reception. We will be having performances from Disney's *Aladdin* as well as from Broadway star, Jenn Gambatese, who is flying out here from New York City ("School of Rock") to be a part of our event.

San Francisco Giants legend and Home Run King, Barry Bonds, will be accepting our Inspiration Award. And we are so excited to welcome him to our Holiday Heroes family. Amy "G" Gutierrez, of Giants broadcasting fame, will be presenting the award to Barry as well as headlining our literacy corner with a reading of her children's book. We also have SF 49er rookie sensation Solomon Thomas scheduled to attend, along with 49er fave, Joe Staley, and 49er alums Dennis Brown and Eric Heitmann. Chris Wondolowski of the San Jose Earthquakes returns for a third consecutive year along with Earthquakes alum, Khari Stephenson.

Sourdough Sam and Lou Seal headline our mascot crew, and we'll have members of the Warriors dance team and the 49ers Gold Rush cheerleaders back at the event. New this year is our inaugural Teen Hangout, where kids ages 11 – 15 will have their own special place to be together and experience the event with their peers.

What are you looking forward to most about this year's event?

I love feeling the energy from all the excitement that is created by being there. It is infectious. No matter what your day was like, when you walk into Holiday Heroes, you will be transported to a magical experience. You will see so many smiles. You will have the chance to spend time with your family and make lasting memories. We have something for everyone. You want to meet a sports star—we have that. You want to run the bases—you can do that. You want to see at-risk children having the time of their lives, just turn around and witness the pure joy on their faces. Knowing that we are creating memories for everyone attending is what I am most looking forward to this year. ♦



Natalie Coughlin, Amy Wender-Hoch, and Jonny Moseley

Holiday Heroes

THE HOLIDAY SEASON'S ULTIMATE PARTY BENEFITTING UNDERSERVED CHILDREN

Tuesday, December 5
5:30PM – 8:30PM
AT&T Park, San Francisco

For tickets and details, please visit www.wenderweiss.org.



S'mores at Holiday Heroes

PHOTOS: DREW ALTIZER