



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Stirrup Some Glitz, Glam and Giving!
Equest 45th Annual Blue Ribbon Gala “Run for the Roses”
April 25, 2026 at Gilley’s Dallas

DALLAS, TX (August 28, 2025) – It’s time to *stirrup* some glitz, glam, and giving! **Equest** is excited to announce its **45th Annual Blue Ribbon Gala**, themed “**Run for the Roses**,” to be held on Saturday, April 25, 2026, from 6:00 to 11:00 p.m. at Gilley’s Dallas. Inspired by the timeless elegance and excitement of the Kentucky Derby, the annual gala promises a high-spirited mix of Southern hospitality, sophisticated style, and down-home fun, all in support of Equest’s mission to change lives through the human-horse connection.

Gala Chairs, **Melinda and Mark Knowles**, distinguished Dallas philanthropists and community leaders, will lead the charge for this milestone event, joined by Honorary Chair, **Lynn McBee**, whose civic leadership and tireless advocacy have shaped the philanthropic landscape of Dallas. Guests will enjoy a dazzling lineup of experiences including a gourmet seated dinner with signature cocktails, thrilling live and silent auctions, a prestigious awards presentation, and an electrifying performance from **Jordan Kahn’s Manhattan Orchestra** to two-step the night away. Don your finest Texas-chic attire—cowboy boots welcome!

Two distinguished awards will be presented at this year’s Gala to honor extraordinary individuals who embody the spirit and mission of Equest. The **Founders Award**, established in honor of co-founder **Susan Neustadt Schwartz**, recognizes individuals with lifelong dedication to Equest’s mission of improving lives through equine assisted services. The 2026 award will be presented to **Leslie and Hawkins Golden** in recognition of their outstanding commitment and support. The **Citation Award**, named after the legendary American Thoroughbred winner of the same name, celebrates a champion within Equest

who demonstrates the same spirit of excellence. The 2026 recipient of this honor is **Carol Huckin**.

Returning to lend their signature sparkle, celebrity event designer **Steve Kemble** will once again create a show-stopping experience, while **Calvert Collins-Bratton** reprises her role as emcee, guiding guests through the evening's festivities. A legendary team of committee chairs will ensure the Gala's legacy of excellence and impact, including **Bonner Allen** (Reservations), **Maggie Cooke Kipp** and **Nancy Gopez** (Auction), **Nancy Carlson**, **Alison Malone** and **Stacey Walker** (Underwriting), and **Amy Turner** (Patron Party Chair).

The Equest Blue Ribbon Gala's theme, "Run for the Roses," nods to the Kentucky Derby's iconic tradition of crowning its champion horse with a lush garland of over 400 red roses, a symbol of victory, heart, and resilience. These values reflect the essence of Equest's work: helping individuals with diverse needs achieve personal triumphs through the transformative power of horses.

"As we celebrate 45 years of Equest, we're not just looking back—we're galloping forward," said **Eric Lindh**, CEO of Equest. "Our therapy horses are the heart of what we do, while it's the people—our supporters, volunteers, and community—who make the impact possible. The Blue Ribbon Gala is our favorite night of the year to celebrate that joy, generosity, and impact, all under one roof."

The Equest Annual Blue Ribbon Gala will be held on Saturday, April 25, 2026, from 6:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. at Gilley's Dallas (1135 Botham Jean Blvd., Dallas, TX 75215). Tables of ten start at \$5,000, and sponsorships are also available. Underwriting opportunities are available at various levels starting at \$5,000 as a category sponsor. Individual tickets will be released closer to the date. For more information and to purchase tables, please visit www.equest.org/gala or contact Angela Escamilla at gala@equest.org or (972) 412-1099 ext. 209.

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About the Gala Chairs

Melinda Knowles is an alumna of Ursuline Academy and Mary Baldwin University and a pillar of Dallas philanthropy, having chaired and served on the boards of Dallas for Children, the Dallas Institute for Culture and Humanities, the North Texas Food Bank, The Callier Center Ambassadors, and more. She is a member of the Crystal Charity Ball committee.

Mark Knowles is Chair of the Banking and Corporate Finance Practice at Condon Tobin Sladek PLLC and President of the Secured Finance Network of Dallas. A Duke University

and University of Kansas Law graduate, he is consistently recognized by *D Magazine*, *Texas Monthly*, and “Best Lawyers in America” for his excellence in corporate law.

About the Honorary Chair

Lynn McBee has served more than 45,000 volunteer hours with over 30 nonprofits and currently holds leadership positions on numerous civic and cultural boards. From CEO of the Young Women’s Preparatory Network to her appointment as Workforce Development Czar for the City of Dallas, McBee is a powerful force for education, women’s leadership, and social change. A biochemist by training and a civic leader by passion, she embodies the values of service, innovation, and compassion that Equest champions.

About Equest

Founded in 1981, **Equest** provides equine facilitated activities, therapies and counseling to children and adults with physical, cognitive, sensory, coping and learning disabilities and veterans with adjustment challenges. The services provided include physical and occupational therapy, equine facilitated counseling and learning, therapeutic carriage driving, therapeutic horsemanship and competition. With 34 therapy horses, a dedicated team of professionals, and 869 volunteers contributing 20,611 hours annually, Equest transforms lives annually for more than 2,770 individuals. Equest was the first PATH International Premier Accredited Center in Texas and remains one of the largest in the country. www.equest.org

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