



Former Seahawks receiver Jermaine Kearse gets Kindering crowd's attention

By [Patti Payne](#) – Puget Sound Business Journal, April 5, 2019

Kindering's 25th annual auction gala on March 30 brought in \$640,000, and donations and matching funds are still pouring in.

Bellevue-based Kindering, founded in 1962, is a neuro-developmental center helping infants and children up to 11 years old with special needs. This year, more than 6,000 children with special needs will be served, including those with Down syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy, extreme prematurity and developmental delays. That's way up from the 4,500 served last year.

The nonprofit has established campuses in Bellevue, Bothell and Renton. A fourth campus will open in Redmond on April 15.



Chairs of the 2019 Kindering gala from left to right: Phil Banta, Kevin Gleason, Dustin True, Marisa and Jermaine Kearse, Mike Azose, REB Bangert, and Greg Benn

This was Kindering CEO Lisa Greenwald's first gala in the top role, though she has been with the organization for 17 years, mainly as chief program officer.

"The highlight for me was seeing so many people supporting our Kindering families," Greenwald said. "That was extra special for me now in the position of CEO. We are so thrilled to have this kind of support."

The gala was held at the Westin Seattle, a new venue for the event. Mobile bidding was another change — and a popular one.

Some 400 people attended the gala, which had a glow-in-the-dark "Vintage Galaxy" theme and a remote-controlled robot named R2-D2.

People dressed as astronauts moved through the crowd, and a special cocktail was served which used Tang — the orange, powdered drink of the early astronauts — as its base.

A luxury house in Hawaii went for \$20,000 to high bidders Rob and Donna Mellison — the top grossing auction item of the night.

But it was a surprise item from NFL wide receiver and former Seattle Seahawk Jermaine Kearse — orchestrated with the help and encouragement of friend Dustin True — that caught people off guard and had attendees talking for days after the event was done.

At about the midpoint of the evening, Kearse asked the event planners permission to give an item. So, with an announcement from veteran auctioneer Paul Schenfeld of Stokes Auction Group, Kearse took the stage to wild cheers from the crowd. He said he and wife, Marisa, are big supporters of Kindering because they themselves are raising a child with special needs.

The family is part of the Kindering program, and Kearse emphasized how important it is to celebrate each accomplishment — no matter how small — and all small steps. Little victories lead to big wins, he said. You could have heard a pin drop at that point.

Kearse's auction item, a round of golf with him and a signed Seahawks jersey, went for \$4,000.

Among the hundreds of supporters were Kindering board chairman Glenn Lux; board treasurer Bill Palmer; Janet and Doug True; Lisa and Ben Slivka; Judith and John Pierce; Robert and Donna Mellison; Julia Calhoun; Susie and Brian Vowinkel; Mike and Erin Azose; REB and Kaitlyn Bangert; Richard and Dawn Bangert; Greg and Cari Benn; Kevin and Effie Gleason; Dustin and Stephanie True; Phil and Meghan Banta; Lorna Kneeland; Tina Quinn; Reinier and Rosie Van Coevorden and retired Kindering CEO Mimi Siegel.



Wide receiver and former Seahawk Jermaine Kearse surprised the crowd with an unscheduled auction item and shared that he and wife Marisa are raising their special needs toddler with the help, guidance and expertise of Kindering.