



Joe Manganiello

HOMETOWN CHAMPION

Mario Lemieux
joined Honorary
Chair Joe
Manganiello at
Children's Hospital
of Pittsburgh
Foundation's 125th
Anniversary Gala.



Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of
UPMC launches a campaign to grow
its Creative and Expressive Arts
Therapy program with the heartfelt
help of actor Joe Manganiello

BY ANDREA BOSCO STEHLE
SPECIAL THANKS TO SAM BADGER, ANDREA KUNICKY, AND NIKKI SPEER

It's difficult to imagine what life is like for children spending their days in a hospital room. Surrounded by their loving parents and siblings, these ailing children are also deeply cared for by a team of doctors, nurses, and therapists, developing a bond so strong it can never be broken. At Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC, many young patients aren't fully aware of their diagnosis or why they had to leave home, yet they serve up strong, frequent smiles like superheroes. Because they *are* superheroes.

One growing program in particular inspires these patients, allowing them to express themselves creatively by using art and music as an outlet. This fall, our world-class Children's Hospital is launching a campaign to raise over \$5 million for the expansion of its Creative and Expressive Arts Therapy (CEAT) program. The campaign's honorary chair is actor and Pittsburgh native Joe Manganiello, along with co-chairs Ramsey Lyons and Sloan Overstrom.

Manganiello and I spoke just days after it was announced he will star as comic book villain Deathstroke in the new *Batman* movie. However, his role as an advocate for Children's is one we discussed at length. "I have a soft spot in my heart for children, especially children going through difficult times," he says. "I always knew that if my career took a real positive turn the way that it did, I would stay connected to Pittsburgh. I would use that success to help my community. It's been a real no-brainer for me."

His relationship started with the hospital when he hosted a party in Pittsburgh for one of the season finales of "True Blood," donating 100 percent of

the proceeds to Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh Foundation. During that trip home, he also visited and toured the hospital, which solidified his plans to continue to support the charity moving forward.

"I think one of the things that Children's does so amazingly is to provide an atmosphere that's fun for kids," says Manganiello, who served as the honorary chair of the Foundation's 125th Anniversary Gala last year. "The expansion of the Creative Arts Therapy program is the next step for

Children's to stay on the forefront, creating a facility to have fun and let patients leave their problems behind for as much of the day as possible. It's super important to allow kids to be kids."





Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC
President Christopher Gessner, Joe Manganiello,
PNC Bank President Sy Holzer

Led by four music and art therapists, the vital department is currently housed in two tiny rooms on the sixth floor. Funds raised for the program's growth will support the construction of a beautiful, airy individual art therapy studio, featuring a potter's wheel; a TV and radio studio, where local news anchors and radio hosts can mentor; a stage for aspiring actors; a music therapy room; and sustainable backing for programming and staffing.

Nikki Speer, director of major and planned giving at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh Foundation, is heading up the project and has witnessed its demand for some time. "There is no reason why a world-class Children's Hospital shouldn't have a world-class healing arts space and program," she says. "Our donors have always been heroes for sick kids and their families. Our vision is a bold one and we are challenging leaders in our community

to share it — we want to ensure that each child who visits Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC receives the custom creative and expressive therapies he or she needs to heal."

On the day of our visit, we accompanied music therapists Kory Antonacci and Nicole Steele, and art therapists Kate Gibson and Katie O'Connor, who were making their routine stops on the ninth floor. First, we met 3-year-old Simon and his proud parents, Adam and Misty. Simon has neuroblastoma. He is continuing treatment with radiation and antibody after tumor resection surgery, six rounds of chemotherapy, and high-dose chemotherapy with a stem cell transplant.

Antonacci and Steele lit up his world with an acoustic rendition of the "ABCs," to which he responded with drumming and laughter. I held





back tears as I watched and read notes of encouragement on his door from all who love him, including his older brother, Rio.

The feeling is mutual for Manganiello, who, too, gets emotional over the very human experience. “Whatever problem you think you have, all of that disappears when

Wanna Dance With Somebody,” Chyna’s request, as she embraced Gibson and O’Connor, and grinned, “Together, we’re The Three Stooges.” My cheeks ached from smiling.

“Our music and art therapists are among the many unsung heroes here at Children’s,” says Speer. “They have advanced degrees, but more importantly they have the biggest hearts. When a child is about to have a painful procedure, they are there for him. When a family is suffering through the most unimaginable pain because their child is dying, they are there for all of them. When a new diagnosis leaves a teenager spiraling toward depression, they are there for her. They are some of the strongest people I’ve ever met.”

The ultimate goal for the CEAT development is to have more space and the ability to serve more children. “That’s honestly the dream,” says Antonacci. “We are so honored to be able to use our creative modalities to meet patients where they are at emotionally during their hospitalization. But as far as having patients in our space, it’s pretty tight right now. So to have a bigger space, we’ll have the capability to serve more patients and more families.”

For Manganiello, campaigning for Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC comes with a great amount

of pride. “I look at something like the Telemedicine program — how they are monitoring hospitals around the world. The fact that my hometown’s Children’s Hospital — one of the world’s greatest hospitals, if not the world’s greatest Children’s Hospital — is helping to lower mortality rates for children post-operation in other countries is mind-blowing.”

He’s using his voice and distinction to restore hope and enrich the lives of thousands of children. “My job is to help spread the word and get people to understand that a donation to Children’s isn’t just a donation. I urge people to give to the hospital, come in for a visit, and meet the children that are fighting.”

Like anything, from framework to fruition, this venture will require hard work — two words we as Pittsburghers know well.



you’re at Children’s Hospital, watching these kids fight and watching how positive they are and how amazing their attitudes are,” he says. “It’s inspiring to watch, and my heart goes out to those kids because I just want them to feel like kids and not have to deal with such serious issues or have their minds be so consumed by the battle of their illness.”

Later, we were introduced to Chyna, a fashion-loving 14-year-old who was ready for her close-up. Donning a floral headband, she thoughtfully gave one to all four therapists to wear during their session. Diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia, she escapes into her colorful paintings, many of which she’s entered in the hospital’s art shows. Gibson, O’Connor, and Chyna never stopped laughing, singing, or painting as the city’s skyline basked in the sunshine behind them. Antonacci and Steele playfully harmonized on Whitney Houston’s “I





“There’s that old phrase that it takes a whole village to raise a child and that’s definitely how I would describe the vibe and the people of Pittsburgh,” says Manganiello. “There is an amount of putting your head down, working hard for what you have, and appreciating what you have.”

He attributes much of his success to his childhood in Mt. Lebanon and his studies at Carnegie Mellon University. “I grew up in a place that was so grounded and hard-working,” he says. “Being in a profession that is up to people’s opinions, I knew that I was going to go in there and work harder than everybody else, and I learned that in Pittsburgh.”

Manganiello’s mission in his career and in life goes hand in hand with his quest for Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC. For him, it all comes down to one word. “Pride. I’m very proud of the hospital.” [To learn more about the CEAT campaign](https://www.givetochildrens.org/ceat), visit [givetochildrens.org/ceat](https://www.givetochildrens.org/ceat). **Joe Manganiello**, @joemanganiello.



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