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## Mardi Gras Gala Planned to Fund Crohn's Vaccine Research

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Dina Fiatarone and Annabelle Hall  
Photo Sophie Braccini

include painful surgeries and medication that can have disturbing side effects.

But Hall believes that Professor John Hermon-Taylor at King's College London has discovered the real origin of the disease - a bacteria, *Mycobacterium avium* subspecies *paratuberculosis*, or MAP - and has developed a vaccine to combat it. "Groups all over the world are now raising funds to finance the start of human trials," explains Hall. She says that foundations give money to emerging research, and that corporations invest to develop drugs that have already been tested on humans, but that there is a funding gap between the two that is hard to fill.

So far, associations around the globe have collected half of the necessary funds for the continued MAP vaccine research. Another \$330,000 is necessary, and the three Orinda mothers intend to do their part.

"My first fundraising event was the Orinda Fun Dog Show last October," says Hall. "That is where I met Dina and Christine." The three reconvened in the days that followed the event and brainstormed their next steps. "We wanted something very fun that would get people excited," says Hall, who spent her childhood in Louisiana and always had fond memories of the exuberance of Mardi Gras. "I remember the music, the food, people dancing in the streets," she says. "Planning an event in February, Mardi Gras seemed to be the best idea."

A self-professed wallflower, Hall says she has relied on Fiatarone and Pitt, who are more socially connected, to start making phone calls. Friends such as Ksenija Olmer gave them advice on how to organize their event, the auction and the entertainment. "So many people have come forward to help," says Fiatarone, "it has been very empowering."

Planning a benefit gala is never easy, but as Orinda activist Hannabelle Hall puts it, "When it involves your kids, you just do it."

Hall and two other Orinda mothers, Dina Fiatarone and Christine Pitt, are organizing a Mardi Gras fundraising gala in February, with all proceeds going to fund Crohn's disease MAP vaccine research.

The three organizers are mothers of young adults whose lives have been profoundly altered by the onset of Crohn's disease. "This disease is horrific and can be fatal," says Hall. According to the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America, up to 700,000 people in the United States have Crohn's, a debilitating inflammatory disease that can affect the entire digestive tract from the mouth down. Men and women are equally likely to be affected, and while the disease can occur at any age, Crohn's is more prevalent among adolescents and young adults between the ages of 15 and 35.

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Attune Wines of Sonoma County will be donating wine for the wine tasting, and Serge Hanne, who was executive chef at the Blackhawk Country Club, will use the sausages donated by Fabrique Delice, the French artisanal charcuterie of Oakland, for the jambalaya, and Orinda's Republic of Cakes has donated cupcakes, says Hall. Corporate sponsors are also helping such as Orinda Village Associates and Forma Gym in Walnut Creek. The gala will take place from 5 to 11 p.m. Feb. 6 at the Lafayette Community Center, where there will be music by Rue Prince band, and people are expected to dance into the night after the dinner.

"This is an opportunity for people to have a great night of fun and also to become part of history," says Hall, who is keeping her sights on the main goal: Having a Crohn's disease vaccine to give her son and all those affected by Crohn's disease, and a chance at a normal life.

For tickets, visit: <http://ahallgout.wix.com/mardigrasgala>. For more information about Crohn's disease, visit [www.ccfa.org](http://www.ccfa.org). For information about the Crohn's MAP vaccine, visit [www.crohnsmapvaccine.com](http://www.crohnsmapvaccine.com).



Jimmy Fiatarone Photos provided



Maria Pitt



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