

The stars sparkle at family's Emerald Ball for SAM

ACTOR Jimmy Nesbitt has got behind a charity set up by a Hillsborough family to raise money for research into Congenital Muscular Dystrophy. And last week the well known star co-hosted an Emerald ball with TV personality Emma-Louise Johnston.

The event was organised by the McCausland family whose little boy Sam was tragically diagnosed with Congenital Muscular Dystrophy just a little over a year ago.

There is currently no treatment or cure for this devastating muscle wasting disease, which causes scoliosis and painful muscle contractures, eventually leading to complete loss of muscle function, ultimately rendering children incapable of breathing and eating without assistance.

The Europa Ballroom was transformed for the evening as Jimmy and Emma-Louise, the charity's celebrity spokesperson, took to the stage to commence the serious business of the evening. They emotionally relayed to the assembled guests the story of the McCausland family.

Emma-Louise explained that, faced with such a bleak prognosis for their child, Sam's mum and dad determinedly set about doing something to change the future for their son and the many other children suffering from CMD. With the help of friends, family and colleagues they set up the charity Struggle Against Muscular

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Dystrophy (S.A.M) to increase awareness of this cruel condition and - most importantly - to raise vital funds for research in the hope of finding an effective treatment for the disease before it's too late.

The charity's promotional video introduced Sam and other young sufferers of the disease and was barely a dry eye in the room. Jimmy Nesbitt made an heart-felt appeal to guests to dig deep for a worthy cause, and the charity auction was a huge success, with amazing prizes including a specially commissioned Jason Millar printing, kindly donated by Quantum Images, and a fitted kitchen donated by Cabra Kitchens of Lisburn helping to raise a substantial sum for the charity. The auctioneer for the



The lucky winner of the Emerald Necklace with Emma-Louise Johnston and Tracy McCausland (Struggle Against Muscular Dystrophy).

RIGHT - Jimmy Nesbitt and Emma-Louise Johnston, who hosted the Emerald Ball in aid of S.A.M.

evening was Peter Johnston of Wilsons Auctions.

Following the ballot, the ladies in the audience were invited to the stage where each person selected a gift box from prestigious Belfast jeweller Fred J. Malcolm. Moved by the charity's plight, Malcolms had commissioned a unique Emerald and Diamond Art Deco Style pendant containing a single octagon cut emerald of 1.00ct surrounded by two floating frames of brilliant cut diamonds,

totaling 0.45ct.

The stunning pendant, mounted in 18ct white gold with a retail value of over £2,200, was secreted in one of the jewellery boxes, and when Emma-Louise instructed the ladies to open the boxes the delighted winner was invited on stage.

Although final figures have yet to be released, the charity hope to have raised in excess of £60,000 from the event. S.A.M. is unique in that it is a 'zero cost' charity as everyone involved gives freely of

their time, expertise, products and services in order that every penny raised can go directly towards research into Muscular Dystrophy.

Tracy McCausland expressed delight at the success of the Ball.

"The staggering amount of money raised to date will now enable us to fund the setting up of a vital International Patient Registry for sufferers of CMD, including a DNA database for the scientific community to draw from" she said.

"We have also committed to invite tenders for the first Struggle Against Muscular Dystrophy Translational Research Grant by the end of August 2009, which will give us real hope of finding a treatment for our children before time runs out."

The charity website www.pleasefixsam.com includes information on the aims of Struggle Against Muscular Dystrophy and up-to-date news on the 'Please Fix Sam' campaign.

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