

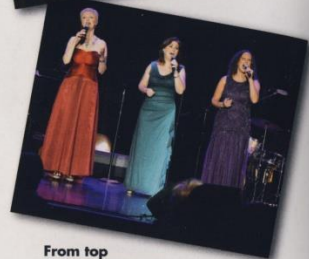
# Chicago Cabaret Professionals

## Sixteenth Annual Gala Celebrating a Century of Song

By **Carla Gordon**



Michael Currier



From top  
Chicago Cabaret Professionals' 2015 honorees:  
Presenter Denise Tomasello with Ron Hawking  
Acts of Kindness Cabaret

**T**he Chicago Cabaret Professionals' (CCP) sixteenth annual fundraising gala, *Celebrating a Century of Song*, featured several dozen of

Chicago's premier cabaret performers. Many of them honored the music of Frank Sinatra, Billie Holiday, Edith Piaf and other musical artists or songs in their centennial year. Chicago's iconic Sinatra devotee, Ron Hawking, and Acts of Kindness Cabaret were the 2015 honorees. The event took place on October 18 at the Park West Theater.

Selecting Ron Hawking as national honoree made sense to the Chicago Cabaret Professionals. According to its new president, Laura Freeman, "Each year,

the Chicago Cabaret Professionals honors someone who has taken the art of cabaret and the Great American Songbook to new audiences, guaranteeing that it will remain alive and vibrant." In the past, we have honored giants in jazz: Judy Roberts, Frank D'Rone, Joe Vito; queens of cabaret: Beckie Menzie, Suzanne Petri, Karen Mason; each one with a tie to Chicago, this great city of music. Who better to honor than Chicago's own Ron Hawking? Ron has entertained thousands with his salute to Frank Sinatra, bringing cabaret to theatergoers throughout the country. At the 100th birthday of Ol' Blue Eyes, it seemed only natural to honor this amazing entertainer."



From top  
Tom Michael & Beckie Menzie  
Joan Curto  
David Edelfelt  
Cynthia Clarey  
Nick Sula  
Kimberly Lawson  
Donna Kirshman  
Deb Steward  
Carla Gordon  
Howard Pfeiffer

### The Ron Hawking Story

Ron Hawking sang before he could talk. He appeared on television even before attending grade school and won talent competitions as a tot. He was a band singer and musician through high school and college. Soon, Ron went from singing and playing with his band in nightclubs, to singing in the recording studio in broadcast commercials. Yes, Hawking played Charlie the Tuna for Starkist.

In July 1995, Ron was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Following surgery, chemotherapy and a year-long hiatus from entertaining, Ron went from patient to cancer survivor, then back into the business. In December 1995, the entertainment world lost Dean Martin. Only two months later, Gene Kelly died. Hawking began to reflect on his idol, then eighty-something Frank Sinatra. Considering what the world would be like without Sinatra motivated Hawking to create a musical salute to Ol' Blue Eyes. (We lost Sinatra in May of 1998.)

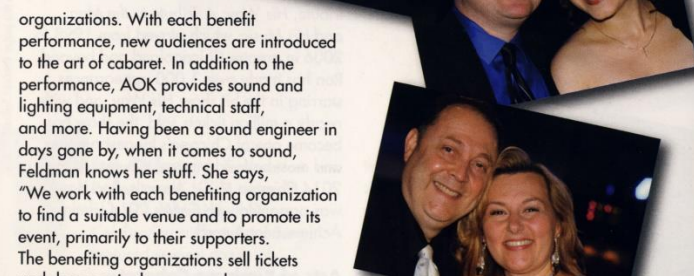
Ron is best known for his Frank Sinatra tribute, *His Way: A Tribute to the Man and His Music*, which played from 1998 to 2006 in greater Chicagoland and beyond. Ron has made over 1,000 appearances starring in the hit show *His Way*, and with nearly a million tickets sold, the show has become one of Chicago's longest-running and most beloved musical tributes. At the 2014 Chicago Music Awards, Ron Hawking was presented with CMA's 2014 Lifetime Achievement Award.

### Acts of Kindness Cabaret

Spearheaded by singer/producer Hilary Ann Feldman, Acts of Kindness Cabaret (AOK Cabaret) has partnered with charitable organizations for a decade enabling them to raise over a quarter million dollars to date.

AOK Cabaret is a volunteer, not-for-profit association of professional performers and technical artists. It provides cabaret performances as fundraising events for other Chicago-area non-profit

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From top  
Denise McGowan Tracy  
Cheryl Szucsits  
Suzanne Petri  
Barbara Lee Cohen  
Bob Moreen  
David Aarons  
Johnny & Stephanie Rodgers  
Ken Baker  
Laura Freeman  
Michael Unger  
Hilary Ann Feldman

Photos: Patricia Salinski

organizations. With each benefit performance, new audiences are introduced to the art of cabaret. In addition to the performance, AOK provides sound and lighting equipment, technical staff, and more. Having been a sound engineer in days gone by, when it comes to sound, Feldman knows her stuff. She says, "We work with each benefiting organization to find a suitable venue and to promote its event, primarily to their supporters. The benefiting organizations sell tickets and, less nominal expenses, keep the net proceeds."

Feldman is an active cabaret performer who tours with a tribute show to Audrey Hepburn and most recently in *Laughing Matters*, which salutes Carol Burnett. ○

**Editor's Note:**  
For more information,  
visit [www.chicagocabaret.org](http://www.chicagocabaret.org)