

# REAL ESTATE WEEKLY

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By [REW Staff](#)

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The real estate industry's venerable Empire Ball, which benefits the [Diabetes](#) Research Institute (DRI) ([www.diabetesresearch.org](http://www.diabetesresearch.org)), celebrated its 30th incarnation on Wednesday, December 11th, at New York's Grand Hyatt Hotel. Nine hundred guests were treated to a wonderful evening, as they mingled, dined, danced, and paid homage to the evening's honorees.



Ball Chairman Peter L. DiCapua, Chairman of CodeGreen Solutions, kicked off the program by thanking those in attendance for the tremendous support to the DRI that they provide. Peter advised that, over the 30-year span of this industry event, more than \$32 million has been raised for [diabetes](#) research. This year's event has raised in excess of \$1.25 million, which includes an overwhelmingly generous anonymous gift of \$100,000.

Peter thanked the many Chairs, Committee members, and media partners who contributed to the evening's success. He singled out for special recognition his friend, and the man who brought the Ball to fruition, Charlie Rizzo, Principal of The Rizzo Group. Peter then introduced the evening's master of ceremonies, award-winning co-anchor of WCBS2 News, Chris Wragge.

Chris charmed the crowd with his trademark warmth and humor, and cited the evening's top-level supporters and gift-bag donors. Chris introduced Dr. Camillo Ricordi, Scientific Director of the DRI. Dr. Ricordi expressed his gratitude to the audience for their incredible ongoing support, which has made possible the research that proves islet transplantation can restore natural insulin production in clinical trials; with some patients now living free of insulin injections for more than ten years. Today, the DRI is taking the next quantum leap to a cure with the advent of the DRI BioHub, a bioengineered mini-organ that mimics the native pancreas, which will contain insulin-producing cells that sense blood sugar and release the precise amount of insulin in real-time.

Dr. Ricordi introduced a short video, which captured a visit to the DRI by the Ball's three honorees, each of whom was featured commenting on the powerful impression that their tour of the Institute left on them. Referring to the research, honoree Joe "Dee" Dussich commented, "The advancements blow me away."

The program then moved to recognize the stars of the evening, the event honorees. The recipient of this year's Distinguished Service Award, Joe "Dee" Dussich, CEO and President of JAD Corporation of America, was introduced by last year's award recipient, Frank Freda, Executive Managing Director at Cushman & Wakefield. Frank sang Joe's praises and brought him up to the podium. Joe, a long-time supporter and friend of the Empire Ball, thanked everyone involved for the honor, and mentioned in particular, his wife Victoria, his sons and business partners, James, Jeff, and Joe, Jr., and his assistant Amie. Joe asked his great friend and football notable, Boomer Esiason, to come up and say a few words.

Boomer regaled the audience with the story of how he met Joe, which began with an invitation 20 years ago from his 8-year-old neighbor, James Dussich, to come on over to the house for dinner. When Boomer showed up at the front door, Joe Dussich was nothing if not surprised, and that meal became the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Boomer Esiason, who runs a foundation dedicated to fighting cystic fibrosis, spoke about the value of private funding to the work of organizations fighting diseases such as [diabetes](#) and cystic fibrosis, and he encouraged the audience to continue their generous philanthropic support.

Richard Wood, President of Plaza Construction and last year's recipient of the Camillo Ricordi Humanitarian Award, came up to present this year's award to Jay Badame, President and COO of NY/NJ/PA Tishman Construction, an AECOM Company. Jay talked about his impressions of the DRI and in particular, he noted the passion of Dr. Ricordi and his team in their work toward a cure. Particularly proud audience members were Jay's fiancé Linda D'Alessandro and son Mike.

Al Amore, Senior Vice President at Trinity [Real Estate](#), then introduced the 2013 Leadership honoree, Andrew Cooke, Vice President Property Management with Hines and Morgan Stanley. Andrew indicated how honored he was to receive this award, and he thanked the many supporters of the DRI who were in attendance. He also thanked his own support team – wife Wendy, sons Reese and Ryan, and daughter Remi – all of whom were in attendance. The Cookes understand all too well how [diabetes](#) affects a family, as Wendy experienced gestational diabetes with each of her pregnancies. Regarding the race toward a cure, Andrew invoked the words of his lifelong inspiration, Nelson Mandela, who said, "It only seems impossible until it is done." Andrew's avowal that soon, a cure will be the standard of treatment, was met with rousing applause. Andrew's parting words to the audience, in deference to Nelson Mandela's personal doctrine, were "love what you do, lead by example, and leave a lasting legacy."

Peter DiCapua closed the program by thanking everyone for being there. Guests danced the evening away to the incredible sounds of The Jay Prince Band.

