

The Joe Niekro Foundation Knuckle Ball...A Pitch for Life to Return in November

Written by Karah Van Kammen

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Returning to the Valley for its second year, the [Knuckle Ball Gala](#) will take place on Saturday **November 12th, 2016**, at the **Arizona Biltmore**. The event, hosted by the [Joe Niekro Foundation™](#), will support [brain aneurysm](#), [AVM](#) and [hemorrhagic stroke](#) research and awareness with proceeds benefiting neurological research at Barrow Neurological Institute.

The Joe Niekro Foundation™ was founded by Natalie Niekro, daughter of 22-year MLB veteran Joe Niekro, in 2008 after her father's sudden passing from a ruptured brain aneurysm. The first Knuckle Ball, named after the pitch that made Joe Niekro famous, took place in 2009 in Houston, TX where he spent the majority of his career. The Joe Niekro Foundation™ is committed to supporting patients and families, research treatment and awareness for brain aneurysms, AVMs and hemorrhagic strokes. The foundation provides education on the risk factors, causes and treatments of these conditions while funding the advancement of neurological research.

"It is so vital to raise awareness for an illness that can change a life in an instant, said Natalie Niekro. Events like The Knuckle Ball are a great platform for us to educate communities on the importance of research funding and bring a greater overall awareness to these life threatening conditions."

In 2015 Ms. Niekro decided to add Phoenix, AZ, where she lives and also where the funds will stay. This year, the Knuckle Ball gala will be presenting world famous neurosurgeon, Dr. Robert Spetzler, with the Joe Niekro Medical Humanitarian of the Year award. Dr. Spetzler is the director of the Barrow Neurological Institute where he has served as Chair of the Neurosurgery Department since 1983. "I am excited to be attending and receiving this honor from such a respectful organization," said Dr. Spetzler, "one which has also spent over a decade providing funds to assist in research and awareness for brain aneurysms, AVMs and hemorrhagic strokes, which does not discriminate and can strike suddenly at any age." At the age of 49, he was the youngest recipient to be the Honored Guest of Congress of Neurological Surgeons.

This year's Joe Niekro Humanitarian of the Year recipient will be awarded to Nancy Hanley, who established the Marguerite Clark Hobbs Ruptured Aneurysm Trial at Barrow Neurological Institute in 2003. The study is named in honor of her mother, an energetic, vibrant woman who died after suffering a ruptured aneurysm in her brain stem. "I lost my wonderful mother very suddenly from a brain aneurysm in 1978, so this cause is very personal to me", said Nancy. "When I was approached to be the Humanitarian of the Year recipient, I discovered this organization has made incredible strides to educate and support victims and their families of ruptured aneurysms, AVMs and hemorrhagic strokes, while raising awareness and funding important research opportunities. It also allows me to honor the memory of my dear mother, who was an exceptional woman, who loved her husband, children and grandchildren more than anything. The Knuckle Ball promises to be an exciting evening for an extraordinary cause." A native Phoenician, Nancy began her volunteer work at age 14 and has been a long time respected community advocate and philanthropist in the Valley.

For more information on the Joe Niekro Foundation™ visit <http://www.joeniekrofoundation.org/>.

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