

'Lend Me a Tenor' Opening Night at the Limelight

By [Gilroy Dispatch Staff](#)

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Be prepared to laugh in support of a worthwhile cause at Lend Me a Tenor, Limelight Actors Theatre summer comedy and annual fundraiser for Parkinson's Disease research.

Opening Friday, June 24 at Gilroy Center for the Arts at 7341 Monterey St, the Pulitzer Prize-winning play will be directed by longtime community theater performer, Steve Spencer.

In 2004, Spencer was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, a chronic degenerative neurological disorder that affects one in 100 people over the age of 60, according to the Michael J Fox Foundation.

The annual shows, begun in 2008, help raise money for Team Fox, the grassroots fundraising arm of the foundation, which enables critical research into the disease. Parkinson's currently has no cure.

"There are a lot of nonprofit organizations relating to Parkinson's," said Spencer. "But the Fox Foundation struck me as taking a more aggressive approach to research and fundraising."

In the nine years that Spencer and wife, Kae, have hosted the fundraisers, the South County residents have raised \$38,000.

"The generosity of the South County community is astounding," said Spencer. In addition to the shows, local businesses also donate goods and services to raffle.

When Spencer was diagnosed with Parkinson's 12 years ago, he had mixed emotions.

"I knew something was wrong," he said. He had noticed a tremor and went to his doctor for tests. When the results came back and his doctor told him he had Parkinson's, Spencer recalled feeling a bit relieved. His mother had died from a form of ALS—and that is a "death sentence" he said. It was only later, during the drive home that he thought, "Maybe this is not such a good thing after all."

As he started finding out about Parkinson's, he decided that the only thing he could do to fight the disease was raise money.

"There is no cure, there is only chemistry to treat the symptoms," said Spencer, adding that fundraising for research is the only way new treatment or a cure will happen.

Spencer understands firsthand the importance of supporting ongoing research.

In November 2014, he underwent brain surgery to implant a deep brain stimulator to help with his Parkinson's symptoms. Describing it as similar to a heart pacemaker, but for the brain, the deep brain stimulation equipment was implanted in two surgeries about 10 days apart.

Spencer said the stimulator has improved some of his symptoms, including tremors, and helped with his walking. He was also able to cut back on some of his medication. After the system was implanted he worked with a programmer to set up the machine for his maximum benefit.

"It took about six months to get the system dialed in," he wrote, "but the doctors tell me I should get about 10 years of benefit from the system."

"This is a rather routine late-stage treatment for Parkinson's," Spencer continued. "However it is the product of a great deal of research and is an example of research developing new treatments for Parkinson's. This shows me that our fundraiser is all the more necessary."

At their 40th anniversary party recently at The Millas Restaurant, Kae said half the folks there were from the theater.

"A big thing in Parkinson's is depression," said Spencer. "A lot of people suffer from depression and I feel that what has kept me from that is having such a large social group to rely on and keep me busy. We consider them family."

Go to the show or donate directly at <http://bit.ly/263mXDA>.