

Bridging Bionics gala features two dancers in wheelchairs

Nonprofit depends on the annual gala to raise two-thirds of its annual budget

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Kimberly Nicoletti Follow



The Bridging Bionics 2026 gala will feature world para dancesport champions.
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This year's Bridging Bionics gala, on Friday, July 10, at Hotel Jerome, features world para dancesport champions Edelyn de Asis and Julius Jun Obero. The two accomplished artists from the Philippines both dance in wheelchairs — a first for the gala; although last year's performance showcased Bridging Bionics' athletes performing aerial moves, it's the first time two dancers pair up to perform in wheelchairs at the Rise Up gala.

Obero contracted polio as a 1-year-old in the Philippines and lost the ability to carry out daily functions most people take for granted. He uses a brace to stand and walk and began para dancesport — dancing in a wheelchair — as part of his physical therapy. He was so good at it that he honed his skills and became an international para dance sport champion with his partner, who is not in a wheelchair, Rhea Marquez in 2015. They performed at Bridging Bionics' gala in 2023.

“You can be the world champion if you decide to become one,” Obero said. “That was the best piece of advice that I have kept in my mind and heart at all times.”

De Asis, a wheelchair dancer and single-leg amputee, is also a world champion in women’s single freestyle, as well as a decorated pairs competitor. She wears a prosthetic leg when not using her wheelchair. She met Obero at the University of the East Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Medical Center in the Philippines, and he introduced her to para dancesport. She joined the sport in 2021.

“My artificial leg is just a part of the journey, not the limit,” she said on TikTok. “Keep moving, keep smiling and always dance to your own beat!”

De Asis and Obero have become dance partners, working together through various performances worldwide, representing the Philippines. They most recently performed in a circus show in Switzerland last winter.

“This experience is very meaningful for us because it shows how far we have come from where we started,” she said. “Our story is about courage, teamwork and believing in opportunities that change our lives.”

“These two are mind-blowing. He lifts her up in her wheelchair, and they do things that I’ve never seen before,” said Amanda Boxel, executive director of Bridging Bionics. “They’re just beautiful, passionate individuals.”

Dancing has helped Obero develop trust in — and expand — his abilities; it mirrors just one aspect of wellbeing that Bridging Bionics promotes in people with neurological mobility impairments through its unique programs. Both Obero and Bridging Bionics promote self-confidence and support people to extend beyond their previous limitations.

“I hope that through my talent in dancing I can help others build their confidence, to go outside their house and not just hide,” he said. “Just because you have a disability does not mean you are limited from doing things that you love.”

Obero consistently reminds people not to let any disabilities hinder goals in life and encourages them to believe in themselves.

“Make your disability a motivation to always move two steps forward,” he said. “Never be afraid of failure, never get discouraged once you failed and never get tired of trying. Consider these things as your stepping-stones towards success. Don’t be afraid to fail. Worry about the chances you miss that you don’t even try.”

He encourages everyone to believe in themselves.

“That will be the time others will believe in you,” he said.

Bridging Bionics’ gala also features energetic auctioneer Harry Santa-Olalla and likely the most inclusive dancefloor you’ve ever experienced, as DJ Naka spins tunes until the end of the night.

The gala raises two-thirds of the nonprofit's annual budget, so in addition to being a warm, emotionally moving and fun night out, it's also essential for Bridging Bionics' mission to give the gift of mobility to people who otherwise would not be able to afford the physical therapies and technologies the organization provides free of charge.

"Our organization operates efficiently and responsibly with mission-focused spending, using 81% of funds to directly benefit those in need," Boxtel said.

The other portion of finances support fundraising (9%) and administration (10%).

This year, an anonymous donor has stepped up to match every dollar raised at the gala. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit bridgingbionics.org.