As she got texts that her friends and classmates were being shot, Lauren Hogg sat in a classroom. It was dark, and they were silent, afraid to make noise because the shooter might notice and come for them.
That Valentine’s Day, just more than a year ago, 17 students and staff at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., were killed. Seventeen others were injured. It had a profound impact on Hogg and many others in the school.

“Once I got out of there, I knew I didn’t want to be silent anymore,” Hogg told attendees in Utah on Saturday evening during a Gala For Gun Reform. So, she and the other survivors started advocacy work that became March For Our Lives.

That group has spread across the country, urging gun violence prevention measures. On Saturday, Utah’s chapter of the group held an event at the Ladies Literary Club Clubhouse, 850 E. South Temple, to celebrate gun reform victories and to raise money for future advocacy.

Through a silent auction and ticket sales, the group exceeded its goal and raised more than $4,500. Art Access, a Salt Lake City nonprofit group that wants to build an inclusive arts community through “creative opportunities” for people who are disabled or otherwise marginalized in society, will get 10% of the proceeds. The rest will go toward funding the March For Our Lives Utah chapter, covering trainings, transportation and clerical costs, like maintaining its P.O. Box and website.

The funds will also be used for suicide prevention training and scholarships for student activists who are in need, said organizer Elizabeth “Lizzy” Estrada-Murillo. Before the speakers at the gala, people moved through crowds in the historic venue to mingle, or bid at the silent auction, or take a photo in the photo booth or grab dinner and a drink. Two men stood across the street protesting as bouncy background music pulsed softly indoors.

But for all the revelry, there were the somber reminders of why everyone had gathered.
It was on posters that listed the names of Americans killed in mass shootings last year: Adrian Jashawn, Xavier Parish, Freddy Wheeler, and on and on and on. It was the #NeverAgain scrawled at the bottom of signs for the photo booth, next to feather boas and comically oversized sunglasses.

Estrada-Murillo summed up the event as it wound down and the group prepared announce the silent auction winners: “This is a real issue for us. For all of us, this life-or-death situation."

At the gala, the group also named this year’s Legislators For Our Lives, Utah lawmakers who the group said took steps to preventing gun violence by either proposing or passing gun reform legislations.

They honored Democrats Reps. Joel K. Briscoe, Brian S. King, Elizabeth Weight and Republican Rep. Raymond P. Ward, in addition to several lawmakers who didn’t attend.

Salt Lake City Mayor Jackie Biskupski was also at the event and spoke as the gala Mayor For Our Lives.

Biskupski told organizers she was impressed and inspired by their efforts to reform gun laws in Utah, and said the student activists follow in a long tradition of other young people who got things done, from the civil rights activists who fought for equity at lunch counters and on buses, to the students at East High School in Salt Lake City who two decades ago fought for a Gay/Straight Alliance.

She said it can be easy to be frustrated with slow change and laws that don’t help the cause. She pointed to the killing of Lauren McCluskey, who was fatally shot on the University of Utah campus in October by a man she’d previously dated. The man got the gun from a friend.
“I am frustrated,” she said, “But we cannot let frustration get in the way of progress. We have work to do.”