

ANNUAL LUNCHEON REVIEW 2023



Dr. Neill Epperson - Executive Director of the Johnson Depression Center and Chair of the Department of Psychiatry poses with singer/songwriter and author Michelle Williams



“REGARDLESS OF WHAT IT COST ME TO CHECK IN, I HAD COME TO REALIZE IT WAS A BARGAIN COMPARED TO CHECKING OUT.”

-MICHELLE WILLIAMS

CHECKING IN WITH MICHELLE WILLIAMS

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In a dazzling ballroom fit for a star, the Johnson Depression Center held its 13th Annual Luncheon with a star of its own as the keynote speaker: Michelle Williams, a Grammy Award-winning singer, songwriter, actress, entrepreneur, philanthropist, and now author, who first rose to stardom as a member of Destiny’s Child. The luncheon’s mission is simple: to raise money for mental health education and treatment while reducing mental health stigma. This year, the luncheon raised an astonishing \$500,500 prior to the luncheon and \$84,500 in donations from the attendees during a paddle raise. These efforts are paying off. In 2022, Colorado had a decrease in its suicide rate while the country overall showed an increase. After the fundraiser, the audience heard from Elizabeth Lee, a successful business owner as well as a patient at the Johnson Depression Center. She delivered a powerful speech on her transformational experience receiving a diagnosis and treatment for bipolar II disorder. Next, Michelle Williams spoke about her mental health journey. She was predictably glamorous but strikingly humble as she talked about her anxiety and depression that started in fourth grade when she was bullied and persisted with intermittent bouts throughout adulthood. Checking herself into a treatment facility for depression in July 2018 was a pivotal moment. Now, she speaks to the strength of being able to say “I need help” and encourages everyone to check in with themselves and others on their mental health. Her story is the basis for her recent memoir “Checking In: How Getting Real about Depression Saved My Life—and Can Save Yours,” and she signed free copies of it for attendees. The standing ovations that both received were an emotional reminder of how many stand with those who are brave enough to give voice to the mental health struggles that touch all our lives. The packed ballroom was a hopeful sign that so many people are willing to gather today to foster a better tomorrow.



Dr. Epperson presents about the importance of access to mental health care across the lifespan



Vic Lombardi checks in with Michelle Williams



Vic Lombardi hosts the Paddle Raise for an eager crowd helping to raise funds for the future of the Johnson Depression Center