Basketball stars shine at Nasher gala

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DURHAM — Chuck Cooperberg took a series of photos of his wife, Maricela, with a number of very tall, very polite young men Monday night.

"To tell you the truth, I don't even know who they are," Maricela Cooperberg said. "But they are just fantastic. They are wonderful."

They were the members of the Duke men's basketball team and along with their coach, Mike Krzyzewski, they were the stars at the annual benefit gala for the Nasher Museum of Art.

More than 330 guests gathered in the museum's atrium to nibble on sesame-crusted tuna with wasabi aioli and seaweed salad and hobnob with everyone from assistant coach Jeff Capel to former players Mike Gminski and Kyrie Irving and current freshman Quinn Cook.

The gala brought in more than $100,000 that will fund the museum's exhibitions and education programs serving more than 8,000 K-12 students each year, as well as the Duke and Durham communities.

The oversized players, dressed in their dark warmups, stood out like spouted dark blue flowers among the shorter, stylishly dressed crowd.

But Krzyzewski, as well as Duke University President Richard Brodhead and Nasher Director Kimberly Rorschach, all made the point that the museum and the basketball team had more in common than would be at first apparent.

"We have the same standard," Krzyzewski said. "We both bring excellence to our community."

The coach acknowledged that when the idea of featuring the team at the gala was first broached to him, he wondered, "What the heck are we going to do? Are we going to be cleaning up, picking up all the dirty dishes?"

But, Krzyzewski said, the celebration was not just about what the team or the museum do, "but about what Duke does."

The Nasher and the basketball squad both offer "a window to other great things that occur at Duke," he said.

"They've allowed people to come in here and say this is a great place, this is a great school."

The Cooperbergs agreed. They are supporters of both the basketball team and the museum, but most of all, they are supporters of Krzyzewski.

"What he does for youth is tremendous," Chuck Cooperberg said. "He sets an example. He teaches how to learn. The kids may change, but he doesn't. That's why we're here."