

Community Awards a 'Family' affair

It was a family affair at the Napa Valley Community Awards luncheon held at the Napa Valley Marriott Hotel and Spa May 20. The top honor — for the outstanding nonprofit organization — went to Cope Family Center, which provides parenting support and education for local families. It was gratefully accepted by Cope Executive Director Joelle Gallagher. “This shows me just how much this community values families,” she said.

There was plenty of family to go around at the annual event, sponsored by the Napa Chamber Foundation and Mechanics Bank to recognize the contributions of Napa County community leaders, individuals, businesses and nonprofit organizations.

At the beginning of the ceremony Jeff Gerlomes, chair-elect of the Napa Chamber Foundation, said, “If you don’t live here you just can’t understand the warmth of the people here.” It was a sentiment echoed again and again.

“Over the years, Napa has grown but it still maintains a closeness,” said Bruce McCall, who along with partner Glenn Hughes was honored as outstanding healthcare professional. The two partners in Napa Valley Physical Therapy Center give generously of their time to provide game-day care and follow-up for high school athletes up and down the valley. “People here in the valley love to give back to it,” he said. Accepting the award, both made a point of thanking their wives, families and staff for “allowing us the time to do this.”

Outstanding public safety officer Deputy John Hallman of the Napa County Sheriff’s Department said he was born and raised in the Napa Valley, “Now that I’ve grown up — well, sort of! — I’m honored to serve this community,” he joked. Hallman was praised for, among other things, initiating a fundraising effort each holiday season to purchase and distribute warm clothes to homeless and needy people he encounters on duty.

Shontaine Brayton, Napa Valley College student of the year, threw her arms around PG&E representative Joe Horak when she learned that her award came with a tidy sum of sponsor award money. Those funds will help her achieve her goal of earning a degree in social work at Sacramento State University after she graduates from Napa Valley College next spring.

A single mom for 25 years who has overcome many hardships, Brayton said, “My driving force is to be a positive role model for my children.”

Alexandra, age 10, described her mother as “awesome,” and “fun and funny.” Daughter Catrina, 25, said, “She’s my inspiration. Not many people in this world have overcome the challenges she has, and can still stand next to you and make you feel proud.”

The Teacher of the Year award went to Vintage High School teacher Mark Teeters, a music instructor at Vintage High School.

“Selecting the winner was a long process,” said Napa County Superintendent of Schools Barbara Nemko. “We even interviewed students. I asked one of Mark’s students, ‘How does choir fit into your academic program?’ She looked at me like I’d asked the dumbest question in the world. ‘Are you kidding?’ she said. ‘It’s like my whole life.’ So this award goes to the teacher who can inspire a student to say that!”

Accepting the award, Teeter quoted Aristotle: “In the rhythms and melodies there are moral qualities,” and added, “This award acknowledges that music and the arts have a place in academic life.”

There were a few sad moments, too. Francis Ortiz-Chavez of nonprofit Puertas Abiertas (“Open Doors”) could not accept the award due to a family emergency, but sent a letter making clear her own priorities of putting family first by “spending time with my very ill brother, my Vietnam hero.”

The crowd bowed its head in a moment of silence during the presentation of the “Legend Lives On” award to Mondavi estate manager Christopher Barefoot. The award was originally intended to be accepted in person by Robert Mondavi, who passed away May 16.

Other honorees included Jackie Richmond, owner of Wine Country Concierge and winner of the hospitality/tourism award, and Betty Rhodes, a member of the Napa Valley Commission on Aging and winner of the community booster award.

The award to 80-year-old Rhodes was presented by Bill Dodd, chairman of the Napa Board of Supervisors. “She has changed the way seniors are represented here,” he said, “and we thank her for it.”

Summing up the event, Mechanics Bank Vice President Thomas Kawazoe said, “It’s an honor and an inspiration to be in the room with these amazing people. The nominees and the winners make up the fabric of this community. They’re the reason that Napa Valley is such a special place.”

For further information about the Napa Valley Community Awards and how to become involved with next year’s event, contact the Napa Chamber of Commerce at 226-7455.

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