Michaela Pereira
Master of Ceremonies
Stu Kaiser
2017 Mentor Award Recipient
Steve Davis
The Gary Troy Foundation, 2017 Humanitarian Award Recipient
Bishop Craig Worsham
Optimist Alumnus
Sil Orlando
CEO, Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services

Exclusive Mentor Awards Gala Photos and More!

Mentor Awards Gala 2017

>>> page 10

PLUS: CEO’s Message ● Honor Roll of Donors ● Where Are They Now? ● Staff Hero and more...
Our Mission
Our mission is to provide innovative and individualized treatment, education, and support services to children, young adults, and families to better their lives.

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Our “new and improved” annual Mentor Awards Gala was held in the penthouse of South Park Center in downtown Los Angeles on October 18. Guests enjoyed the new format with food and drink stations as well as a shorter program. The venue itself was spectacular with superb views of the city. I thank the honorees, event committee, Michaela Pereira, Craig Worsham, the restaurants and wineries, our development staff and of course our guests for helping us raise almost $160,000.

The 6th Annual Autumn Lunch at our Pacific Lodge Campus, an event coordinated and sponsored by dedicated volunteers, took place on November 4 and raised $25,000.

I am very grateful to governing board past-president Terry McWeeney and his wife Linda for coordinating the 10th Annual Classic Car Show for our residents. Our kids judged the cars and the car owners judged the pinewood derby cars the residents made and raced. Great fun was had by all.

We continue to adjust to the implementation of the State’s Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) efforts that affect our residential and foster care programs. Since Optimist was the first in the County to change its license from the group home category to the new STRTP format, the State was anxious to hear more about the challenges we faced, and as a result, some 25 legislative analysts visited our campus along with representatives from the Probation Department and the Department of Children and Family Services.

With the holidays fast approaching we are planning several activities for the kids in all of our programs. This is often a difficult time for those we serve as many reflect on the challenges and painful experiences they’ve faced, so it’s important that we’re even more sensitive and supportive during this time. I ask you to be generous with your holiday giving so that we can make this period as pleasant as possible for our youth and families.

I want to take this opportunity to wish all of our supporters, volunteers, and of course our dedicated staff, a happy and healthy holiday season and to also thank you for all you do for our children and families.

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Denise Di Novi is a film producer with over 30 films to her credit including Heathers, Little Women, Practical Magic & Crazy Stupid Love. She made her directorial debut with Unforgettable for Warner Brothers & has now turned her attention toward television, directing upcoming episodes of Sneaky Pete & Outlander.

Denise was born in New York City & raised in Woodland Hills & Laguna Beach. She has two adult sons, Mac, a writer & director & Nick, a senior at Evergreen State. She currently resides in Brentwood.

Mary Lea Carroll is a life-long resident of Pasadena. Her mother was a pioneer in special education in that she helped start and then administered Escalon School in Altadena.

Mary Lea and her husband, Bill, have three grown daughters and each has worked or been active in the arts. She is a writer and had, in her earlier life, worked in the travel industry. She looks forward to getting involved with the youth at Optimist.

Gina Shafer was born in New York but has spent most of her life in Southern California. She attended USC and majored in biomedical engineering, which is where she met her husband.

After graduating from USC, Gina attended Cornell University Medical College in the physician assistant program. She then returned to California and started working at Kaiser Permanente, where she has remained for the past twenty-one years as a physician assistant in orthopaedic medicine.

Gina has been married for eighteen years and enjoys a life of fitness, travel, great food and good wine. Through her life and her career, she has been fortunate to find joy in giving back to others so they can experience the same opportunities she’s been blessed with.

For more information on donating stock to Optimist Youth Homes, please contact Jennifer D’Alvarez at (323) 443-3023 or jdalvarez@oyhfs.org.
Mentor & Volunteer Spotlight

Tal Medovoy, Mentor

has been at Optimist since 2015 and was asked to share his experience. This is what he had to say:

“I would say that my journey to Optimist began in high school. With a passion for psychology already emerging, I founded a mentorship program serving a preschool for disadvantaged and ESL learners. During college, my studies focused on preparing to provide informed care to disadvantaged populations. In addition, I spent several semesters as a tutor at the Community Literacy Center.”

“After being exposed to literature about the prison industrial complex, I realized I wanted to work with at-risk & incarcerated youth and my professor suggested I volunteer at Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services. Soon after this, I met Optimist’s volunteer coordinator, Brenda Watts-Bell, who welcomed me to Optimist and facilitated what has been the single most transformative experience of my adult life.”

“Since graduating from Occidental College in May of 2017, I have begun working as a Child Care Counselor at Hillsides Treatment Center in Pasadena. While most of my time is now spent there, I continue to mentor clients at Optimist, and I credit much of my success thus far at Hillsides to my time volunteering at Optimist (and to the help of Brenda Watts-Bell specifically). Wherever I go in my career, I hope to maintain — or even expand — my role at Optimist because I truly believe in its mission and methodology and am dedicated to providing quality care to the gentlemen they serve.”

Thank you so much, Tal! We truly enjoy and appreciate your dedication to our kids.

-Ted Medovoy, Mentor

Kenton Nelson, Volunteer

Optimist volunteer and artist, Kenton Nelson, recently visited the agency to meet with our kids who have a special interest in art. He talked about the importance of using your talent as an artist to make a living and to follow where your heart and talent leads you. He said that during his time as an illustrator and graphic designer, he taught himself how to paint which is when he decided to make painting his career.

Kenton’s paintings have been featured on the cover of The New Yorker magazine five times and he has also done paintings for the American Contemporary Ballet. Additionally, his paintings were featured in the 2003 film, “Something’s Gotta Give”, his work has been exhibited domestically at the Pasadena Museum of California Art, the Peter Mendenhall Gallery in Los Angeles, the Reynolds Gallery at Westmont College in Montecito, California, the Cumberland Gallery in Nashville, Tennessee as well as the Eleanor Ettinger Gallery in New York City.

Our residents were excited to talk to him and see an up-close look into an artist’s professional works. Thank you, Kenton, for allowing our youth to experience this opportunity.

Shop for everyone on your gift list this holiday at smile.amazon.com/ch/95-1643340 and Amazon will donate to Optimist!
Robert Jakini is a former resident who was admitted to our Pacific Lodge campus in 1980.

Robert was a troubled child with substance abuse issues and a very damaged home life. His mom was an alcoholic and his father died and left behind an uncertain future regarding where he and his brothers would live. Here is what Robert says about his stay at Pacific Lodge:

"I got in considerable trouble and was "allowed" to go to the Lodge. My first day there I was spit on and got into a fight. Not an optimistic start to say the least. Within the year I was there the person who spit on me became my friend and I learned to function in a family and team environment."

"I arrived angry and indignant and left relatively stable and hopeful. The road after was still wrought with pitfalls, all placed in my path by me, but the foundation for life that I gained has carried me to where I now am."

"A boy arrived at Pacific Lodge 35 years ago and the beginnings of a man left a year later. Today those lessons have served me well. Without the Lodge, I would have been either dead or imprisoned, but instead I am free, alive, and well, and now I go back to the world that I so hated being a part of."

Robert is currently the Executive Director at Compassus Hospice. He organizes and directs different services and functions of the organization to improve patient care and employee efficiency. He has returned to Pacific Lodge many times to speak to the boys and was recently the guest speaker at the 2017 Pacific Lodge Autumn Lunch. He openly shared the trials and tribulations he’s experienced and made a significant impact on the residents and other guests.

Thank you, Robert, for your continued support!
Almost $160,000 Raised at 2017 Gala!

The 2017 Optimist Youth Homes Mentor Awards Gala was a huge success resulting in almost $160,000 to provide vital services for the at-risk youth and families served by Optimist Youth Homes!

We again wish to extend tremendous gratitude and congratulations to our honorees, Stuart Kaiser and The Gary Troy Foundation, for their ongoing and generous support of our programs. Without them, none of this would be possible.

We also wish to thank Bacari GDL, Crossings, Total Food Solutions, Jacks N Joe, Lincoln Pasadena, The Flats Restaurant, 1886 Bar at The Raymond, Nothing Bundt Cakes, Pence Ranch & Winery, Tanner Dafoe Winery and Tito’s Handmade Vodka for generously providing the delicious food and refreshments and the talented jazz trio led by Jonathan Richards, who consistently donate their time and talents at many of our events.
Staff Hero
Rudy Martinez

Rudy Martinez has been with Optimist for 23 years! For many of those years, Rudy was an effective instructor in our arts and crafts program involving our residents in many innovative and creative art projects. In 2003, our development director at the time recognized Rudy's artistic talents and co-opted Rudy to work part-time in the development department to design and create our newsletter, brochures, a new logo, and our first website. A short time later Rudy started working full-time in our development department as the agency's graphic artist.

Rudy's contributions are invaluable, as evidenced by this newsletter as well as the multitude of other projects he produces throughout the year.

Rudy is extremely loyal to the organization and its leadership, both lay and professional. We are so fortunate to have him as part of our team and are proud to designate him as the Staff Hero.

6th Annual Autumn Lunch at Pacific Lodge Campus Raises Over $25,000

On November 4, our 6th Annual Autumn Lunch was held at our Pacific Lodge campus and was a huge success. Thanks to the generosity and efforts of our volunteers and community members, we were able to raise over $25,000 for our programs to serve at-risk youth.

We wish to extend a very special thank you to our dedicated event committee: Gail Angress, Dorota Bazynska, Naomi Benghiat, Cindy Dunn, Kerri Gosnell, Tara Hays, Coleen Kirnan-Friedmann, Nina Odeimi Nicolas, Shelley Rands and Beth Rider. Your commitment, time and resources are critical for our youth. Together we will continue to build productive lives and we can't thank you enough!

YOUR DONATION MAY BE MATCHED BY YOUR EMPLOYER

You may be able to double, or even triple, the amount of your gift to Optimist at no additional cost to you.  How?

Many corporations match the gifts their employees and often retirees, gift to tax exempt charitable organizations.  These matching programs have been part of many corporate giving initiatives both to extend the reach of corporate giving and to encourage employees to be actively involved in supporting their communities.

To see if your employer has a matching gift program, contact the company's human resources or benefits department.  They can provide you with a Matching Gift form, part of which you fill out and the remaining part is completed by our office and returned to your company for the matching gift.

For more information about Matching Gifts, contact Jennifer D’Alvarez at (323) 443-3023 or by Email: jdalvarez@oyhfs.org

MATCHING GIFTS

1. You Donate.
2. They Match.
3. Double the Impact.

For a wider selection of the Mentors Awards Gala 2017 event photos, please visit us at www.OYHFS.org
RECENT Happenings

THANK YOU, AT&T PIONEERS!
The AT&T Pioneers was founded in 1911 as a network of volunteers who effect immediate, tangible change in our local communities. Today, it’s the world’s largest group of industry-specific employees and retirees dedicated to community service. Pioneers volunteer more than 15 million hours annually responding to the individual needs of their communities.

The group has supported Optimist Youth Homes over the years with tickets to Dodgers games and other event and recently, gave us $1,000 worth of school supplies which consisted of 100 backpacks, portfolios, binders, pencil sharpeners, pencil cases, colored pencils, crayons, felt markers, pens, highlighters, composition books, construction paper, notebooks, filler paper, and pocket folders which will be given to the children in our foster and adoption program.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment, AT&T Pioneers!

TAKE A HIKE!
The Optimist Professionals recently accompanied our residents on a beautiful hike along the coast in Rancho Palos Verdes.

The hike wasn’t easy but everyone had a good time and the kids enjoyed a delicious lunch afterward, courtesy of the Optimist Professionals.

FOX NEWS RADIO & AUTOMOTIVE NEWS INTERVIEWS
Jessica Rosenthal of FOX News Radio visited Optimist to interview our auto shop teacher, Brian Keis, one of our 18-year-old residents, Samuel, and Bob Smith of the Greater Los Angeles New Car Dealers Association. She wanted to learn about our successful auto shop program, the ways in which it helps our clients feel a sense of success in addition to teaching them a marketable trade and why organizations like GLANCDCA choose to support us.

Alysha Webb of Automotive News also visited our campus to interview our auto shop teacher and a resident who participates in the auto shop program. She’s writing a story about our impressive auto shop which is one of the last of its kind in a public school setting and will also explore the support the Greater Los Angeles New Car Dealers Association provides to the program.

EVERYBODY LOVES CANDY
In September, InviteManager employees donated their time emptying one of our rooms and turned it into a candy shop for the residents.

The shop provides work experience for our young men as they are the ones who stock and sell items to their peers. In addition, it’s an incentive to other residents to do well and run a good program.

We would like to thank InviteManager volunteers for all the lifting and cleaning. Your hard work was greatly appreciated!

FUN WITH FUNNEL CAKES
The funnel cakes the residents made with the Rotary Club of Woodland Hills last year turned out so delicious that we decided to make them again.

The boys enjoyed preparing the cakes and interacting with the wonderful volunteers who are so valuable and important to us.

We look forward to the next cooking class!

PEPPERDINE SERVICE DAY
We’re pleased and excited to be able to carry on the tradition of partnering with Pepperdine University for their annual service day.

On September 9, more than 20 students visited Pacific Lodge and played softball with our young men. The fun softball game was followed by some board games, basketball and video games.

Everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves and we are very appreciative of all the volunteers for supporting our youth. We hope to see you all again soon!
November 24, 2017

Dear Optimist Family,

Our children need YOU this holiday season...

Many of the kids in our care won’t be home for the holidays, but your year-end gift will continue to make Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services a place of hope, a place of healing, and a home away from home, especially at this time of year.

Your tax-deductible donation will help make Optimist the closest thing to being home for our kids and I hope you will include us in your gift giving plans. Please let us know if you would like your donation designated to our Pacific Lodge division.

Your support enables us to change and save lives. Because of friends like you, we’ve been able to accomplish so much over this past year, including:

1. Finalizing the acquisition of Pacific Lodge Youth Services resulting in our becoming the largest residential provider for probation youth in the State and enabling us to provide vital services to 1,500 clients a year through all of our programs;
2. Helping 21 students graduate from our charter high school and celebrating them at a formal ceremony and dinner;
3. Successfully operating the fourth year of our charter school which specializes in the needs of probation and foster youth;
4. Becoming the first agency out of 64 in Los Angeles County to meet the new State licensing regulations, which all agencies statewide must do by the end of 2018;
5. Receiving national re-accreditation agency-wide from the Council on Accreditation and re-accreditation for our charter school by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

Please act now to bring the gift of hope, happiness, and some holiday cheer to seriously at-risk children during what is often a difficult time of year.

For your convenience a reply envelope is enclosed. You can also make a donation online at www.oyhfs.org. Don’t forget, you can double or even triple your gift to Optimist if the company you work for matches their employees’ charitable giving. Check with your personnel office for more information. We also accept gifts of stock and our Chief Advancement & Communications Officer, Jennifer D’Alvarez, would be happy to help you: (323) 443-3023 or dalvarez@oyhfs.org.

We are very grateful for your support and dedication to our mission to provide innovative and individualized treatment, education, and support services to children, young adults and families to better their lives. Please see the reverse side of this letter to read two heartwarming success stories.

Wishing you a warm holiday season and a Happy New Year!

Sincerely,

Sil Orlando, CEO

A donation to Optimist Youth Homes is an investment in people like Jason McKinney and Sasha Gomez, graduates of our program who have moved on to lead successful lives.

Jason McKinney

Jason McKinney resided at Optimist for four years and did well in our program. He attended our onsite high school and then transferred to Eagle Rock High School, where he graduated in June 2012.

He moved on to Pasadena City College for two years and then transferred to the University of California, Irvine, where he is studying sociology. He just completed his second year and is slated to graduate in June 2019. He hopes to become a therapist.

We asked Jason what he learned while at Optimist and he said the staff taught him to be responsible and patient. He also realized that even though he was raised in a tough environment, he had the opportunity to become somebody and that the sky is the limit.

Jason is 23 years-old and lives with his girlfriend and their two-month old baby. His relationship with his family is much better than before he came to Optimist and he is appreciative of all the services he received from our agency, including the scholarships he continues to receive towards his education. He works as a security guard and has been at the same company for the past three years.

Sasha Gomez

In 2001, at the age of 14, Sasha Gomez arrived at Optimist’s Van Nuys Group Home. She was scared, felt alone, abandoned, and frightened.

During her time at Optimist, Sasha was angry and resistant to accepting the help offered to her. She ended up leaving in 2002 in a less than ideal state of mind but fortunately her anger eventually subsided and she was able to focus enough to graduate high school in 2005.

She eventually moved to Las Vegas where she enrolled in the University of Northern Las Vegas and was accepted into the University Studies Abroad Consortium. The program allowed her to study abroad in Costa Rica, Cuba and Panama before moving back to California.

Two years ago, Sasha visited Optimist to express her gratitude to the staff who helped her along the way. During the meeting, Optimist’s CEO Sil Orlando offered her a scholarship to help pay for textbooks and tuition at California State University, Northridge, where she recently graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree in Communication Studies.

Sasha’s dream was to work in broadcast media and that dream came true as she was recently hired by News-Press & Gazette Company, an ABC affiliate in Columbia, Missouri as one of their news reporters.

“Optimist provided me with an abundance of love and understanding of the life trials I would face during my twelve month stay in Los Angeles and beyond. I have learned to make decisions for myself and not be dependent on others to make decisions for me. Optimist helped me overcome my troubled experiences as a youth through motivation, love and support. And, more importantly, they provided me with a platform to motivate and empower youth to stand strong through it all. With God as my foundation, church members and the staff at Optimist, a print on my heart will forever remain.” – Sasha Gomez

As you can see from the stories above, your support makes life-changing differences in our client’s lives. From the bottom of our heart, thank you so much for choosing to support Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services.

Happy Holidays!
Save the Date

Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services

Youth Appreciation BRUNCH

Join Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services to celebrate and recognize our clients with food, fun and gifts.

Special guest speaker is past resident Craig Worsham.

March 24, 2018
Time: 11:00am-2:00pm (tours at 10:00am)
Location: Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services
6957 N. Figueroa Street Los Angeles, CA 90042

For more information, please contact Jennifer D’Alvarez at (323) 443-3023 or jdalvarez@oyhfs.org