2018 MENTOR AWARDS GALA WAS A SUCCESS!

Almost 250 attendees helped us raise over $185,000 to support our vital programs and services for at-risk youth and families.

PLUS:

CEO’s Message ● Holiday Appeal ● Where Are They Now? ● Meet Our New Advisory Board Member ● OYHFS Honor Roll of Donors
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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Vice President Dennis Andolsek
Vice President Steven Duben
Vice President Leslie King
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Larry Moore Larry Smith
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Optimist Newsletter Winter 2018
A staff publication of OYHFS
Jennifer D’Alvarez, Editor
Rudy Martinez, Design and Graphics
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Our 19th annual Mentor Awards Gala was held at The Taglyan Complex in Hollywood on October 24th. The venue itself was spectacular as was the food and drinks. The program was streamlined to give guests the opportunity to socialize, which was appreciated by all. Thanks to my Development staff for their hard work in putting the evening together, to our honorees Steve and Pam Duben and Leslie King, and to our sponsors and guests, all of whom helped us raise $185,000.

The 7th Annual Autumn Lunch at our Pacific Lodge Campus took place Saturday November 3rd. This is an event with a long tradition and is coordinated and sponsored by volunteers. Guests were able to bid on silent auction items and enjoy a fine lunch and entertainment. City Councilman Bob Blumenfield was in attendance, as always.

Many thanks to past governing board president Terry McWeeney and his wife Linda for once again sponsoring the 11th Annual Classic Car Show for our residents. Our kids judged the cars and the car owners judged the pinewood derby cars that the residents made and raced. Great fun was had by all.

We are proud to be the first agency in the State to be approved to move from a provisional license to a fully licensed Short Term Residential Therapeutic Program. While this is an accomplishment, it also comes with many growing pains as we adjust to the new system, including having fewer residents in our programs for now. Though this is a financial burden in some ways, it is helpful as many of those currently under our care have severe mental health issues and extensive histories of trauma, and therefore demand much more attention and patience on the part of our staff. Nevertheless, our Optimist Stars football team won the league championship yet again!

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 abandonment, abuse, and other painful experiences, so we attempt to be 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 enjoyable as possible for our youth and families.

I also 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.

The Benefit of Donating Appreciated Stock Instead of Cash

By making a gift of appreciated stock to Optimist Youth Homes, the benefit is two-fold; Optimist receives the same amount of money we would had you donated cash instead of stock, and you avoid capital gain taxes while receiving a full deduction for your donation.

For more information on donating stock to Optimist Youth Homes, please contact Jennifer D’Alvarez at (323) 443-3023 or jdalvarez@oyhfs.org.
Meet Our New Advisory Board Member

Connie Weil recently joined our Advisory Board. She is first generation Chinese American and was born and raised in Los Angeles. She attended California State University, Los Angeles where she studied marketing and is currently a Wealth Management Banker at US Bank in Pasadena and has been with the company for almost 20 years.

Connie is married and has two wonderful children. She loves to cook and spend quality time with her family every chance she gets.

She chose to join the Optimist Advisory Board because she is inspired by all of the great programs and services offered through the organization. She looks forward to helping in any way she can with the goal of making a difference in the lives of our children and families.

Dinosaurs Deliver Cupcakes?

We were recently visited by our Enterprise Fleet Management representative, Lennon McGowan (who also happens to be a member of our Optimist Professionals), and two dinosaurs who hand-delivered (with tiny hands, no less!) delicious cupcakes in honor of Halloween.

Former NBA Player Larry Sanders Visits Pacific Lodge Campus

We would like to thank former NBA player Larry Sanders for visiting our Pacific Lodge campus and speaking to our residents.

The boys asked questions about basketball and other topics and were so excited to get to know him.

Thank you, Larry, for spending quality time with our boys and treating them to pizza, as well.

Thank You For Your Support! Please Visit Us at www.OYHFS.org
Meet Kristin Mochnick Abiragi, a volunteer and mentor at our Van Nuys girls’ home.

We recently asked Kristin why she was drawn to mentor and she said, “Although I didn’t grow up with a lot, I knew from an early age how fortunate I was to have two loving parents, a stable home and a safe community to live in. My aunt was an elementary school teacher in an underserved school and as a kid I would volunteer with her students. It opened my eyes to how much just one relationship with someone who is supportive and nurturing can shape an entire life path for a child and young adult. My aunt still has students decades later coming back to tell her she made a difference in their lives. As an adult and now a mother, I am even more aware of how positive young people interacting with other young people can have a huge impact on shaping who they become and helping them achieve their goals.”

“At Optimist, I plan to inspire and teach an improvisation workshop to the Van Nuys girls. I hope they enjoy the workshop and skills they learn and I’m happy to be able to share my knowledge and compassion with these young ladies.”

Thank you, Kristin.

Meet Jill O’Neil, a hair stylist and volunteer at our Eagle Rock girls’ home.

When Jill was asked why she began volunteering, she said, “I was interested in Optimist because I participated in mentorship programs in the community I’m from in Ohio and the kids and their struggles are very relatable to mine and people I know.”

“During my initial meeting with Brenda Watts-Bell, I still wasn’t sure which opportunity would be best for me but after talking to her, she reminded me to tap into my creative side. We brainstormed and she suggested I do Life Books with the girls, which allow kids to be creative and document day-to-day life and feelings, in addition to monumental moments. I appreciate and feel honored to share those moments with them.”

Thank you, Jill.
Meet Eric Mendez, a physical fitness volunteer at our Pacific Lodge campus. He comes to us with experience in functional weight training, mobility body work and powerlifting.

Eric currently motivates and trains residents in areas of physical fitness and is very encouraging and supportive. He promotes residents’ personal goals in muscle mass and cardio and is also educating our boys on the benefits of healthy lifestyle choices and proper nutrition.

Eric is a second year psychology student with an emphasis in the behavioral, cognitive and humanistic schools of psychology. We thank Eric for his time and commitment.

“\textit{The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.}”
\hspace{1cm}— Mahatma Gandhi

Optimist Professionals
First Annual Poker Night is a Success!

Our young professionals group, the Optimist Professionals, recently hosted their first Poker Night fundraiser and it was a huge success!

Held September 15 in Sierra Madre, 45 players participated in a Texas Hold’em tournament and 7 lucky winners ended up with prizes ranging from vacation homes to Diamond Club Dodger tickets.

The event raised almost $14,500 which will be used to help renovate the game room on our main campus.

We are incredibly grateful to the Optimist Professionals for working so hard to make this event a success and appreciate all of the table sponsors and attendees for helping us raise so much money. Here’s to next year!
### Mentor

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<td>Los Angeles Central City Optimist Fdn.</td>
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<td>Taylor Williams</td>
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<td>Lisa &amp; Alan Wykoff</td>
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### Friends

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<td>Howard R. Anderson</td>
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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
Almost $185,000 Raised at 2018 Gala!

The 2018 Optimist Youth Homes Mentor Awards Gala was a huge success resulting in $185,000 to provide vital services for the at-risk youth and families served by Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services.

We again wish to extend tremendous gratitude and congratulations to our honorees, Leslie King and Steve & Pam Duben, for their ongoing and generous support of our programs. Without them, none of this would be possible.
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cont. >>
Thank You
and
See You Next Year!

Thank You to all volunteers and sponsors for making this year’s event the best ever!

Photos (L-R)

1. Sil Orlando and Jessica Holmes
2. Leslie King and Robert Welther
3. Steve and Pam Duben
4. Shehab and Mary Mohammad
5. Deborah Kent Clark and Leslie King
6. Malak Kazan and Alan Polad
7. Crystina Rodriguez, Carolyn Rodriguez, Natalie Rodriguez and Arthur Arakelyan
8. Jeff Moscaret, Val Tesauro, Gina and Barry Shafer
9. Mike & Peggy Barclay, Dianne Stone and Terry Chapman
10. Cindy Osbrink and Achim Huber
11. Joe Binning and Elizabeth Becker
12. Colin and Megan Barr
13. Bruce and Jerrie Short
14. Marv Kaye and George Murphy
15. Gladys and Al Landegger
16. Irene and Walter Njboke
17. Ona Wexler and Mitch Pullman
18. Jessica Holmes
19. Robert Welther, Leslie King, Steve & Pam Duben, Robert & Sanja Jakini, Sil Orlando
20. Cathy & Gene Baum, David & Jen D’Alvarez
21. Jennifer Katell and Jennifer Parker-Stanton
22. Lenna Welling, Dennis Andolsek and Linnie Murphy
23. Alan Eskot, Bill and Mary Lea Carroll
24. Connie Weil
25. Russ Stolnack, Auctioneer Live Auction
26. Larry & Cheri Smith
27. Anthony Bird
28. Bruce Saltzer

For a wider selection of the Mentors Awards Gala 2018 event photos, please visit us at www.OYHFS.org
Mykail was admitted to Optimist in November of 2016 after being in a probation camp for nine months. The camp was very structured and Mykail learned many valuable living and coping skills through therapy and also graduated high school. Upon coming to Optimist, he was placed in our Independent Living Program (ILP), which is designed to help young men and women learn to live independently once they graduate our program.

“My being at Optimist was not hard for me because the camp I came from was extremely strict and structured and I had an amazing therapist who helped me work through issues. Being placed in ILP was more of an opportunity for me; maybe other kids looked at it differently. For me, it was a place where I could be free and apply the skills I learned.”

“In my mind, I thought I was only going to be at Optimist for a short time and it would be easy. However, it was almost the same as camp. It was structured and I had to go to therapy yet again, however, because I had already worked on so many things, it wasn’t too bad.”

“After graduating from ILP, I was able to get a job and got accepted into a transitional living program, which was very helpful. Today, I am working on my craft of becoming an actor. Being an actor allows you to explore new roles and characters different than yourself. It may be a little intimidating, but I remember that every famous actor had to start somewhere. The key to becoming an actor is practicing and learning as much as possible, branding yourself, and auditioning. Being given the opportunity to come to Optimist was a gift for me. I met a lot of great people and was provided the platform for my next step in life, and for that, I am grateful.”
7th Annual Autumn Lunch at Pacific Lodge Campus Raises over $23,000

On November 3, over $23,000 was raised to help at-risk youth and families at the 7th Annual Autumn Lunch at our Pacific Lodge campus. A silent auction, performances by the residents, boutiques and a delicious meal rounded out the event.

Thank you to all of the hard-working committee members including Gail Angress, Cindy Dunn, Kerri Gosnell, Julia Grant, Tara Hays, Coleen Kirnan-Friedmann, Tiffany Mortensen, Nina Prestidge, Shelley Rands and Beth Rider who make this event a reality each year and to the attendees for ensuring its success. Thank you also to David’s Tea for providing tea samples, Bonnie Abel of Nothing Bundt Cakes for generously providing treats during the event, JT Taylor for serving as the emcee, Ken Herbs for sharing his story and to Councilmember Bob Blumenfield for generously supporting and attending the event.

Samy’s Camera Provides Photography Workshop

Deborah Cloyed, the creator and director of the school program at Samy’s Camera which targets community members in-need, was delighted to provide a two-day photography workshop for the boys at our main campus.

They taught concept and theory in a classroom setting and let the boys practice nature photography throughout the landscaped grounds as well as food and macro photography in our hilltop vegetable garden.

The boys were especially interested in photojournalism, employing black and white photography to express their perception of the facilities and their juncture in life.

Day two of the course was a special field trip to Samy’s Camera in Pasadena which included a guided store tour and a gallery show of their work. They were also given diplomas for completing the workshop.

Thank you, Samy’s Camera and Deborah Cloyed for providing our youth with such an incredible opportunity.

Rotary Club of Woodland Hills Helps Boys Assemble Hygiene Kits for Victims of Sex Trafficking

The boys at our Pacific Lodge campus had the opportunity to participate in a community service project with the Rotary Club of Woodland Hills last week.

They assembled hygiene kits for a nonprofit organization that works with victims of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. The packages included items which were collected and donated by Pami Kaur and the members of the Rotary Club. The boys helped sort and organize the supplies and filled the bags with the items.

We would like to thank the Rotary Club for leading our boys by example and inspiring them with their giving hearts.

Optimist Professionals Host Tour of Jet Propulsion Laboratory for Residents

Thanks to longtime volunteer and Optimist Professionals member Kelli McCoy, several of our youth, staff and Optimist Professionals members were treated to an incredible behind the scenes tour of NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

The 2 ½ hour tour included a multimedia presentation on JPL entitled “Journey to the Planets and Beyond”, a visit to Mission Control, the Space Flight Operations Facility, the Spacecraft Assembly Facility in which Mars 2020 is currently being constructed, and viewings of several model rovers and spacecraft.

This was, by far, one of the most interesting outings our kids have been on and we are incredibly grateful to Kelli for making it happen.
Nowadays, it’s uncommon to see employees remain at an organization for 36 years. Optimist is fortunate to have one such employee, Muriel Greene, who just retired.

Muriel began her employment with Optimist in 1982 as a youth care counselor in A Dorm. She later worked in another dorm and then as a supervisor before transferring to our Foster Family Agency when we first opened it in the early 90’s.

Muriel worked as a line social worker and then as the supervisor of our Long Beach office for many years. When that office closed, Muriel moved to our Los Angeles office where she trained countless foster family personnel and worked with hundreds of foster children and parents. In fact, some of the foster parents that she recruited and trained early on are still with us today.

Throughout this 36-year period, Muriel was deeply committed to the agency and to the children we serve. We wish her all the best and are pleased to designate her as a true Staff Hero!
BOYS AT PACIFIC LODGE CAMPUS MEET AUTOMOTIVE PROFESSIONALS

On September 20, one of our dedicated volunteers, Steve Ford, arranged for several of the boys from our Pacific Lodge campus to visit two San Fernando Valley businesses to meet automotive career professionals and tour their facilities.

The first stop was to a car-fabrication and customizing shop called Picture Cars, where project manager Mr. Adolf Kruger introduced them to specially trained technicians who build, modify and customize movie cars. Picture Cars creates vehicles for unique car chases and stunts, movie police cars and ambulances, and provided cars for the original Fast & Furious movie.

The group then visited an automotive racing, engine and precision automotive machine shop called Valley Head Service, where business owner Mr. Larry Ofria took the group on a tour of the world of car engines and machining equipment. In addition to witnessing a race-car engine being assembled inside a “clean room” that looked more like a hospital surgery space than a place to find car engines, the boys learned of the precision machining world that takes cars to Indianapolis Speedway, or to the Bonneville Salt Flats to speeds of more than 400 miles per hour.

The boys thoroughly enjoyed the outing and realized how many careers are available to them in the automotive industry.

THE OPTIMIST FOSTER FAMILY AND ADOPTION AGENCY HOSTS A CASINO NIGHT

On August 16, the Optimist Foster Family and Adoption Agency hosted a Casino Night for our foster parents to express appreciation for all they do.

Participants played poker, blackjack, roulette and water pong which earned them “Optimist Dollars” and the top 8 winners received prize baskets.

In between games, the parents enjoyed food, drinks and a candy bar and laughed at the staff who were dressed like playing cards.

It was definitely a fun night for everyone!
Wells Fargo (Woodland Hills) hosted a money management workshop on October 23rd with the residents at our Pacific Lodge campus. They discussed Budgeting, Saving and Credit with the kids who found the presentation informative and fun.

Congratulations to the five Optimist Charter School graduates who received their high school diplomas at our August graduation ceremony!

All of the grads were on either the Honor Roll or High Honor Roll and one was our Valedictorian! We are so proud of these kids!

We love our new yoga mats donated by Stillwaters Collective and Bel Air Church. The boys have already put these beautiful and high-quality mats to use. Special thanks to Willis Robertson and JP Chism for the delivery!

We are incredibly grateful to Mary Steudle, Michael Villamor, Clarissa Gonzalez, Nadine Curias, Rich Caton and the rest of the employees of Firefighters First Credit Union for donating 50 gorgeous new backpacks filled with school supplies for the youth in our foster care program. The kids are going to love them!

The Rotary Club of Woodland Hills hosted a pumpkin painting project and brought pumpkins and acrylic paint for the boys to use. It was fun and therapeutic at the same time.

Congratulations to the five Optimist Charter School graduates who received their high school diplomas at our August graduation ceremony!

All of the grads were on either the Honor Roll or High Honor Roll and one was our Valedictorian! We are so proud of these kids!
November 23, 2018

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.

Thanks to supporters like you, during our 112th year of service, Optimist was able to help over 1,500 at-risk young men and women redirect their lives. Without partners like you, we simply wouldn’t be able to help our kids discover their potential and choose the right path. Thank you for always being there for us.

Unfortunately, the landscape is more challenging than ever and we need your help to continue our work in the New Year. Your tax-deductible donation will help ensure our kids get the help they need 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.

- With a gift of just $50, you can provide an enriching outing for one youth
- A donation of $100 will pay for a suit or dress for a high school graduate
- For $250, you can sponsor summer camp for a foster youth
- $500 will cover the cost of instruments and supplies for one student in our music or art therapy programs

Please act now to bring the gift of hope, happiness, and some holiday cheer to deserving children.

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 your gift if your employer matches their employees’ charitable giving. Check with your personnel office for more information. We also accept gifts of stock and our Chief Advancement Officer Jennifer D’Alvarez, would be happy to help you: (323) 443-3023 or jdalvarez@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.

Wishing you a happy holiday season and a prosperous New Year!

With Gratitude,

Silvio Orlando, CEO
A donation to Optimist Youth Homes is an investment in people like Ishta Mendoza, a graduate of our program who has moved on to lead a happy and successful life. Here’s her story:

In 2006, I was 16, had a baby boy, was living in a residential placement called St. Anne’s and began attending Optimist High School (now Optimist Charter School). I was taking life for granted but didn’t realize it.

I had been in and out of jail since the age of 12. I was deeply involved in gangs and more than anything wanted to make a name for myself, which I ended up doing. However, that landed me in juvenile hall and several placements.

I was excited to come to a new school but my mind wasn’t focused on doing well. For a while, I had one foot in and one foot out because the streets were hard to get away from and once you were in as deep as I was, it was very hard to escape.

I wasn’t the best student. I had my ups and downs but Optimist supported me and saw me through those issues even though I could be difficult. Staff kept reaching out to me as problems kept arising in my life and eventually I opened up.

When I graduated, my son was my only guest. No one believed I would actually graduate, so they didn’t attend. I wasn’t discouraged though because Optimist had become my family.

After graduation, Optimist helped me get into a transitional living program. Life wasn’t perfect and I made mistakes; however, I overcame them and changed.

Today I have a job I love at a lighting manufacturing company as a customer service agent and will soon get my own returns and credit department. I make enough to support my family. Like the staff at Optimist, my bosses are very professional, care about the wellbeing and needs of others and always offer help. I really feel at home.

I thank God for placing me at Optimist. There are countless staff members who helped me accomplish so much including the kitchen staff, drivers, teachers, therapists, group home and especially the school staff like Alan and Maureen. I even met my husband there and we now have three boys.

I can proudly say I am no longer gang affiliated and I don’t drink or do drugs. I live for God, my family and for the chance to help others by sharing my story and helping them avoid making the same mistakes I did.

Thank you for allowing me to share.
Thank You!

Alison & Partners Global Day of Giving

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Alison & Partners for choosing our Pacific Lodge campus for their first annual Global Day of Giving.

Several volunteers helped us clean up, organize and tidy the rooms in our Activity Center. They also assembled two foosball tables for the cottages where the boys live. This dedicated group did a wonderful job and we're grateful for all of their hard work.

Wish List

Optimist is always in need of the following items and accepts donations of goods and services throughout the year.

- Bikes (all sizes)
- Sports equipment (especially balls)
- Handheld electronic games
- Backpacks
- Socks
- Belts
- Wallets
- Hats
- Gloves
- Scarves
- Purses
- Books (all ages)
- Journals
- Sketchpads
- Arts & Crafts supplies
- Alarm clock radios
- Coin banks
- Batteries
- Gift cards (Best Buy and Target)
- Movie passes
- Board games
- Posters/Wall Art
- Bedroom throw rugs/decorative pillows
- Makeup bags
- Makeup
- Jewelry
- Jewelry boxes/holders
- Hair accessories
- Shampoo & conditioner
- Perfume/cologne/body spray
- Body wash/shower gel/lotion
- Bathrobes
- Overnight bags/luggage
- T-shirts
- Pajama bottoms
- Fleece blankets
- Pullovers/zip-up hoodies

To make a donation, please contact Jennifer D’Alvarez at (323) 443-3023.

We appreciate the generosity of donors like you! Once again, thank you for all your support.