

Storyteller “FantASIA” Gala is FantASTIC Success

By **Ann Pieramici** / Special to CASA

THE FAR EAST MET THE WEST COAST

on Saturday evening, November 1st at the Storyteller Children’s Center’s FantASIA Gala, held at the magically transformed Earl Warren Fairgrounds. One of the hottest charity events in town, Storyteller’s annual Gala draws a young, stylish crowd, nearly 450-strong, who dance into the wee hours while netting more than \$160,000 for an incredibly worthwhile cause. Storyteller Children’s Center is a preschool serving homeless and at-risk children in Santa Barbara.

Executive Director Terri Allison couldn’t be more delighted, sharing “The need for programs like Storyteller’s is dire; currently, for every child enrolled in the Storyteller program another must be placed on our waiting list.” In fact, it was after the waiting list swelled to 100 children that Storyteller secured a second school last year, thanks to the generosity of the Orfalea Foundation, which leased the second building to the school rent-free for the next decade. Board and Gala committee member Julia Rodgers noted, “Storyteller is still in the midst of an ongoing campaign to pay for the long

term operating costs of the new school. So far, we’ve achieved 70 percent of our \$3.2 million goal, and expanded daily enrollment from 42 to 65 children; we will continue to add children as resources permit.”



Gala Chair **Kim Blankenhorn** and **Chip Blankenhorn**

The gala raises money for Storyteller’s original school, located on State Street. Board President Jon Clark presented

one example to committee members of how funds are applied, telling of a young boy who could not sit

still during circle time. Thanks to money raised at previous galas, Storyteller is able to retain trained, experienced teachers, one of whom was ultimately able to gain the trust of the child and possessed the skills to discern the



Live Auction Chair **Rachael Stein** and committee member **Kelly Walker**

problem: the boy had been repeatedly abused from behind. Placing him in the circle with his back exposed put him in a vulnerable position. The simple solution, sitting with his back to the wall, enabled him to remain still and focused. Storyteller is able to maintain credentialed, caring teachers and a small teacher to child ratio thanks to privately raised funds.



Event planner **Kyle Irwin** and Storyteller Executive Director **Terri Allison**

“Storyteller is so much more than a preschool,” explained Clark. “Storyteller gives families a chance to succeed.”

Just as Storyteller is so much more than a preschool, its galas are so much more than another charity event. And this year

was no different. Gala chair Kim Blankenhorn should be crowned an empress for her calm, organized manner while her right hand guru, event planner Kyle Irwin, interpreted the Asian theme in his own off-the-wall style, infusing every element of the evening with Asian influences that were truly out of this world.

Shirtless men donning traditional Vietnamese hats ushered guests down a red carpet, past a giant Buddha,

and through the ornately arched tent into a chic, Asian nightclub. Bamboo, buddhas, fans, lanterns, shimmering dragons, and a bar serving mandarin margaritas set the mood. Guests dined on vegetable curry, gingered soy short ribs, bakwan, and green tea truffles while a contortionist performed a



Sponsor **Dagney Dehlsen**, Board Member **Julia Rodgers**, **Patty MacFarland**, and Committee member **Ann Pieramici**

Photos by **Mary Jane Photography**

mini *Cirque du Soleil* on center stage. Matt McAllister was back in town serving as the evening’s master of ceremonies.

The seamless flow of events belies the enormous amount of work that went into staging the affair. It took nine months of planning, 31 dedicated committee members, and four days of decorating to orchestrate such an elaborate event and fantASIA’s multi-talented dynasty included Robyn Bartling, Michele Cuttler, Tiffany Foster, Victoria Juarez, Sarah McFadden, Rachael Stein, and Valerie Rice among many others.



Storyteller sponsors **Valerie** and **A.J. Rice**

Key sponsors of the event included Valerie and A.J. Rice, Kim and Chip Blankenhorn, Louise and Tim Casey, The Dehlsen Foundation, Tiffany and Frank Foster, Marisa and Brett Grimes, Kyle Irwin, and Tracy and Eric Kanowsky. Tiffany & Co. at La Cumbre Plaza also donated gorgeous, diamond earrings for the live auction.

For more information on Storyteller, or to make a donation, please contact Victoria Juarez or Denise Hinkle at 687-4530 or visit www.storytellercenter.org.