

# Storyteller's "Splash" A Huge Success

By **Melinda Werner**, Special to CASA

**T**HE GENTLE SOUND of waves crashing in the background and the crisp, clean scent of ocean air greeted a sea of partygoers on the evening of October 24th. Festively dressed in hues of blue and green, participants gathered for a special evening under an aquamarine tent at this year's Storyteller Children's Center's benefit. The open-air rotunda at Fess Parker's Doubletree Resort was magically transformed for this elegant affair appropriately titled *Splash*.

Well-attended and very successful, according to Co-Chair Rachael Stein, the committee was "pleasantly surprised" to see the community's continued support of this important cause despite current economic times. Co-Chair Kim Blankenhorn said that the event raised more than \$170,000, exceeding the committee's goal.

With joblessness and homelessness on the rise, the programs provided by Storyteller are now needed more than ever. The preschool provides a quality, tuition-free early childhood experience for homeless and at-risk children in Santa Barbara County. In addition to its excellent preschool program, Storyteller helps its families find stability. Parents are required to work or attend school and children

receive nutritious meals, medical screenings, and therapy for development delays, if needed. On-site counseling and parent education classes are also provided. Currently, 67 children ranging in age from 18 months to five years attend the Center.

During the Gala, Jon Clark, president of the school's board of directors, offered a moving speech, stressing the importance of Storyteller and explaining that many poor children enter kindergarten ill-prepared. Despite the best efforts of schools, these children never catch up and

are susceptible to dropping out of school, joining a gang, or going to jail when they are older.

Encouragingly, a recent study by the UCSB Gervirtz Graduate School of Education shows that Storyteller children are making significant gains in health, social-emotional skills, and school readiness before they leave for kindergarten. Although the study is ongoing, the preliminary results reflect that Storyteller children are better prepared for kindergarten at a rate twice the county average.

"Together, we can help the lives of these vulnerable children, and over time, we will have a dramatic impact on our community," Clark told the audience as he asked them to raise their paddles in support of Storyteller. The crowd of 350 offered an overwhelming show of support,

donating double the amount of last year's ask.

During the auction led by former Santa Barbara DJ Matt McAllister, guests bid on some exciting items including an opportunity to attend an upcoming Ho-Down event at the barn of Elizabeth and Lee Gabler. Local band favorite, The Mobile Homeboys, will provide entertainment at the western-themed party.

Other generous sponsors included Leslie and Peter Tolan, Marc Appleton and Joanna Kerns, Valerie and A.J. Rice, Geri and Jerry Bidwell, Rachael and David Stein, Tiffany and Frank Foster, Suzanne and Tom Deardorff, The Crawford Family, Deanne and Jim Dehlsen, Louisa Jane Judge, Kenny and Elizabeth Slaughter, Heidi and Chris Blair, and Marisa and Brett Grimes.

Two years ago, Storyteller opened a second school after its waiting list grew to over 100 children. Since then, a separate fundraising campaign has been raising funds to pay for the operation of the second school for the next ten years, securing the future of its families. The "Campaign for the Future" has earned more than \$2.9 million, leaving just \$270,000 left to raise by December 31st to secure a \$350,000 matching gift which will then wrap up the campaign.

For more information about Storyteller Children's Center or if you are interested in making a "splash" by donating, contact Victoria Juarez at 682-9585 or [victoria@storytellercenter.org](mailto:victoria@storytellercenter.org).



**Tiffany Foster**, Board of Directors member; **Rachael Stein** and **Kim Blankenhorn**, Gala Co-Chairs



**Kate Gura**, Gala committee member and **Jon Gura**



**Mike Randolph** and **Carrie Randolph**, Gala committee member; **Luann Caesar** and **Darren Caesar**



**Jonathan Raith**; **Elizabeth Raith**, Gala committee member; **Maggie Geyer**, Gala committee member; and **Will Geyer**



**Michele Cuttler**, Board of Directors member and **Bill Cuttler**



**Debby Peterson**, Gala committee member; **Kevin O'Connor**; and **Nancy O'Connor**, Gala committee member