Community leaders, Advance staff honored

Honorees at the Spotlight Theatre’s Gratitude Gala at the Veranda at Silver Lake Park on Thursday are, from left, Sophia Rizzo, Sophie Decker, Victoria Munro, Teresa Peloso, who accepted for Albert R. Caou, Cat Decker, Alice Chungard Fuchs, John Stewart and Mary Lee Alois, co-founders of the Spotlight Theatre Company. Advance columnists Carol Ann Benanti, Charita Siedenburg, Dylan Stanley, Gavin Mattitfas and Larry Hansen. Courtesy, Peter Montante

Spotlight Theatre and Staten Island chapter of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation thank community members for their service at separate gala events Thursday evening

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Two Staten Island Advance reporters and the news organization’s executive editor were recognized for their contributions to the community at events on opposite ends of the borough Thursday night.

Columnist and features writer Carol Ann Benanti was among the dozen community and youth leaders honored at the Spotlight Theatre’s Gratitude Gala at the Veranda at Silver Lake Park.

Meanwhile, public interest reporter Kristin Dalton and Executive Editor Brian J. Lallo were honored at the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) Staten Island chapter’s Night Under the Tuscan Moon event held at Angelina’s Risturante in Tot-tenville.

Backed by a bright pink sunset, organizers of the JDRF event thanked everyone for a great night.

Dalton and Lallo were recognized for the Advance’s reporting on 11-year-old Ethan Golden, whose insurance company suddenly denied the life-saving medicine used to manage the boy’s Type 1 diabetes. Follow- ing Dalton’s article, Rep. Max Rose stepped in and the decision was reversed.

JDRF raised funds that support research for Type 1 Diabetes, a disease that currently has no cure. Unlike the more common Type 2 diabetes, there is no way to prevent Type 1 diabetes through diet and lifestyle.

Among the details of the event designed by co-chairs Jennifer Appel and Kathleen Gaen were framed menus at each table of the evening’s dinner options, with the total menu listed for every food to be served.

For those in the room without Type 1 Diabetes, the menu was a reminder of how care- fully people with the disease have to manage their carbohydrate intake.

Back on the North Shore, Gratitude Awards from the Spotlight Theatre Company were presented at the organization’s Inaugu- ral Gratitude Gala.

The following were also honored in addition to Benanti: Alice Chungard Fuchs, president and CEO of Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden; Cat and Ross Decker, co-founders, Yellow Boots Disas- ter Relief; Charlie Siedenburg, director of Alumni Relations at Moore Catholic High School and adjunct theatre arts professor at Wagner College; Victoria Munro, executive director of Alice Austen House; Larry Han- sen, principal of St. Joseph Hill Academy Elementary School; and Albert R. Caou, head of school at Staten Island Academy.

The Spotlight Youth Achievement Award was presented to Sophie Decker and Gavin Mattitfas, and the Spotlight Youth Gratitude Award recipients were Sophia Rizzo and Dylan Stanley.

“It was thrilling to be under the tent with so many friends and supporters of the arts and being able to look into the future of Spotlight Theatre Company, both our youth department and professional repertory the- atre company, which have big plans during the upcoming year,” said Mary Lee Alois, who co-founded the theatre along with John Stewart and Vicki Florentino.

Spotlight aims “to provide employment for professional actors, artists, musicians and technicians, and to cast local performers in a year-round repertory of musicals and plays that inspire, challenge, surprise, and excite audiences of all ages,” she added.

“With the wonderful success of our multi- ple programs and productions, we were able to open Spotlight Studios — our new storefront and rehearsal studios in West Brighton,” said Stewart.

“With a home and financial base, our mission of creating professional theater for the family audience has been further advanced,” Stewart said.

“By using our network of professional per- formers and artists — and combining with a pool of great local talent — we are looking forward to having Spotlight Repertory The- atre become a magnificent addition to Staten Island’s cultural scene,” Alois said.

Alois and Stewart are both actors with experience performing on tour and at regional theaters across the U.S.; Stewart is also an award-winning director and chore- ographer.

Florentino is the scenic design director, a professional artist, painter and set designer. For more photos from the two events, check out the Advance’s newest photo fea- ture page, Seemaj, which appears every Thursday.