

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 Pelosi, who accepted for Albert R. Cauz, Cat Decker, Aileen Chumard Fuchs, John Stewart and Mary Lee Aloia, co-founders of the Spotlight Theatre Company, Advance columnist Carol Ann Benanti, Charlie Siedenburgh, Dylan Stanley, Gavin Matthias and Larry Hansen. *Courtesy, Peter Montanti*

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. Laline were honored at the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) Staten Island chapter's Night Under the Tuscan Moon event, held at Angelina's Ristorante in Tottenville.

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

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

JDRF raises 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 Coen were framed menus at each table of the evening's dinner options, with the total carbs listed for every food to be served.

For those in the room without Type 1 Diabetes, the menu was a reminder of how carefully 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 inaugural Gratitude Gala.

The following were also honored in addition to Benanti: Aileen Chumard Fuchs, president and CEO of Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden; Cat and Ross Decker, co-founders, Yellow Boots Disaster Relief; Charlie Siedenburgh, 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 Hansen, principal of St. Joseph Hill Academy Elementary School; and Albert R. Cauz, head of school at Staten Island Academy.

The Spotlight Youth Achievement Award was presented to Sophie Decker and Gavin Matthias, 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 theater company, which have big plans during the upcoming year," said Mary Lee Aloia, who co-founded the theatre along with John Stewart and Vicki Fiorentino.

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 multiple 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 performers and artists — and combining with a pool of great local talent — we are looking forward to having Spotlight Repertory Theatre become a magnificent addition to Staten Island's cultural scene."

Aloia 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 choreographer.

Fiorentino 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 feature page, Seen@, which appears every Thursday.



Advance reporter Kristin F. Dalton, center, receives an award from event co-chairs Jennifer Appel, at left, and Kathleen Coen, at right, during the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation's "Night Under the Tuscan Moon," event staged by the Staten Island chapter at Angelina's in Tottenville on Thursday night. *Gail Lubin, Staten Island Advance*