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Santa Margarita Catholic High School Celebrates 25 Years



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Santa Margarita Catholic High School's 22nd annual "Valentasia" gala fundraiser celebrated the award-winning school's 25th anniversary Saturday night at the St. Regis Monarch Beach Resort. The 570-guest affair drew net proceeds of more than \$250,000 for the high school, with \$112,000 raised specifically for tuition assistance. Joining the three women co-chairs, from left, Oonagh Linzmeier, Monica Furman and Margarita Solazzo, for a photo op were gala honoree Randy Redwitz, left, and SMCHS President Paul Carey, right.

ANA P. GUTIERREZ, FOR THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER



DONNA BUNCE
PEOPLE WATCH
BY DONNA BUNCE, REGISTER COLUMNIST

donna@coastmagazine.com

It was a love fest Saturday night at Santa Margarita Catholic High School's 22nd annual "Valentasia" benefit celebrating the high school's 25th anniversary. Parents, students, teachers, and administrators alike spoke lovingly about the school. Senior Class President **Jameson Sansone** addressed the crowd of 570, saying, "I am truly honored to be able to stand in front of you today and share my love for Santa Margarita. I don't know what the future holds for me, but one thing I can be rest assured in is that I will have the skills, character, morals, and faith needed to be successful in life. I owe that to Santa Margarita."

The black-tie fundraiser commenced at the St. Regis Monarch Beach Resort with a group of talented singers from the high school entertaining guests with excerpts of performances from the school's 25-year history in the hotel's Hall of Mirrors as they registered for the gala. Down the winding stairway where the silent auction was set up, two more students, juniors **Justin Cai** and **Kayla Matthews**, entertained, in turn, on the grand piano in the rotunda, while the school's steel band held court on the patio.

Once inside the festively decorated ballroom with its silver décor, SMCHS President **Paul Carey**, who was joined on stage by Principal **Raymond Dunne** and Superintendent **Greg Dhuyvetter**, welcomed everyone and introduced the "Valentasia" steering committee, who were grouped on the dance floor. "They knew only the boundaries of time and space as they took a theme and made a memory," Carey said. Of the three co-chairs, **Monica Furman**, **Oonagh Linzmeier** and **Margarita Solazzo** (who all have students at Santa Margarita), he said, "They led, followed, laughed, cried, stuffed, snipped, and texted until the event was a masterpiece of love and care."

With the evening's focus on gratitude, each table setting featured a card with a thank-you from a SMCHS student – most impressive and no repeats! And, a top-notch video accompanied each of the gala's sub-themes, "Remembering the Past, Celebrating the Present, Ensuring the Future."

The gala's honoree was **Randy Redwitz**, who with his wife **Claudia** are founders of Santa Margarita Catholic High School as well as longtime benefactors. Four of the couple's five children are SMCHS graduates. Randy is the school's fiscal architect, working since the school opened to maintain its fiscal health and allowing the school to grow by securing funding to finance campus projects. Longtime SMCHS philanthropists **Gaye** and **Art Birtcher** introduced Randy, with Art saying of him, "Randy is the 'Godfather' of our \$20 million operating budget, and has been actively involved over the years in the development of our \$64 million of hard assets, including our Junior Varsity Baseball and Softball fields, our Coto land negotiations, the tennis courts, swimming pool, and our new Athletic Facility and Academic Buildings, as well as orchestrating the \$19 million bond, securing the school's economic future."

Randy was presented the Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque Award, a gift to him in the form of a framed, over-sized photo of the statue of the saint, and, in a tribute to the honoree's work as a member of the football games' "chain gang," he was given a down marker. Clearly touched by the honor, Randy said, "Santa Margarita is in my heart forever."

Auctioneer **Mike Grigg** presided over the Fund-A-Need auction, which raised \$112,000 for tuition assistance (one in six students need financial aid). The live auction followed and featured a mixture of trips, dinners, sporting events and even a catch of 49 select and premium wines with a designer wine rack, which was won by Linzmeier and husband **Ralph** for \$3,400. A tour for 10 of General William Lyon's classic car collection at his Coto de Caza estate with appetizers at the Linzmeier residence and dinner at the Coto de Caza Country Club was won by Santa Margarita parents **Charlene** and **John Palmer** for \$3,500, while the SMCHS Eagles State Champion football helmet signed by the 2011 Varsity Team went for \$4,500 to school parents **Devin** and **Brian Cronin**.

The centerpiece auction was great fun, with the table centerpiece at each table sold to the highest bidder, and the highest bidder among all the tables winning the Lugano Diamonds three-strand fresh water pearl necklace valued at \$2,500. **Ginni** and **Kent Valley** won it for \$1,200 and Ginni gave it to her mother **Mary J. Kopacz**, who was celebrating her 90th birthday. The couple also won a round of Soaring Eagle cocktails and a 25th anniversary chocolate cake for their table.

In the Sweet Treats raffle, guests could buy a box for \$25 and receive an equal or better gift via gift certificates, with each buyer entered into a Valentine raffle to win a \$300 pearl necklace, Godiva chocolates and Frisby Cellars cabernet sauvignon for her and a basket of chocolates, Valentine's boxer shorts, Pabst Blue Ribbon 12-pack, Dutch Masters cigars, and Styrofoam cooler for him. The winners were **Lisa** and **Alan Zawistoski**.

The three-course dinner, orchestrated by St. Regis executive chef and SMCHS alumni parent **Frederic Castan**, was delicious. I particularly liked the eagle (the school's mascot) stencil on the dessert plate. Each guest received a large foil-wrapped milk chocolate heart (yummy!), courtesy of Cinderella Cakes, and in case that wasn't enough chocolate for you, a huge chocolate bar

awaited with scoops and bags for departing guests. The awesome Rembrandt Band closed out the celebratory affair, which was later reported to have netted more than \$250,000 for the school.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the stellar duet performed by seniors **Carrie Dubeau** and **J.P. Jennings**, who sang "The Prayer," and senior **Kelly Christensen**, who sang a beautiful "Wind Between My Wings." And, finally, President Carey's toast to the families and friends of Santa Margarita Catholic High School touched hearts: "May our memories of the past shine bright, may our days be a celebration of friendship, and may the hand of another show us the promises of tomorrow."