

~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

Dance for Kindness international flash mob spreads joy in Moraga

By Jenn Freedman



Photo provided

Approximately 50,000 dancers across 100 cities in 40 countries danced to the same song with the same choreography on Sunday, Nov. 11 – with 200 of those participants dancing right here in Moraga. The Dance for Kindness is an international event, founded seven years ago by Life Vest Inside (based in New York City) in celebration of World Kindness Day. For the past five years, Justin Cole, co-founder of local dance company Joy in Motion, has been involved in the event in various roles, from dance leader to group leader to choreographer. This year he led the community in the freeze mob and flash mob outside his new Moraga studio on School Street.

Even the smoky air couldn't keep the enthusiastic dancers inside; they danced in the studio's parking lot to a packed crowd of proud onlookers.

This year, the global impact of Dance for Kindness is greater than ever: Life Vest Inside is donating 10 percent of each city's overall fundraising to a local nonprofit chosen by the city's group leader. Cole's

choice was Luna Dance Institute in Berkeley, renowned in early childhood education for dance. Four teachers at Joy in Motion have taken the institute's training classes.

Cole explained why Dance for Kindness is so important to him personally: "It was one of the catalysts for helping me make the decision to co-found my own dance organization. ... I realized I wanted to spread more joy and kindness into the world and ... in our community. What is crazy is, once I did, so much opportunity and positive light started shining upon me.

"My favorite part is seeing everyone come together for good. Each year it seems like there is something horrible happening ... this year it was the fire ... and it's a much needed day for the community to come together and choose to spread love, kindness and joy. Regardless of our differences, kindness is universal, just like dance. That is why I do it year after year."

For more information about the event, visit www.danceforkindness.com.

LAMA charity event raises \$100,000 for local nonprofit

By Pippa Fisher



Grateful Gatherings co-founders Christine Flitter, left, and Donna Wright Somerville. Photo provided

When two local, volunteer groups team up with the generous and caring community in Lamorinda, good things are going to happen. In this particular case local nonprofit, volunteer group Lamorinda Gives Back hosted a 'Giving Back in Black' fundraiser held to benefit Grateful Gatherings, a local organization which helps furnish homes of families transitioning out of homelessness or crisis.

Held at a Lafayette home, emceed by Andrew Firestone, former star of the hit show "The Bachelor," with music provided by local cover band, The Peelers, and craft beers served by Canyon Club Brewery, the fun event raised over \$100,000.

Director of Programs Christine Flitter, who together with Donna Wright Somerville founded Grateful Gatherings just four years ago, said that they could have never imagined the outpouring of support for their small organization. "We are incredibly grassroots, it's run by the two of us, an amazing board and thousands of volunteers. In a matter of 20 minutes, LAMA and hundreds of donors allowed us to help so many more families next

year. It was incredibly powerful, humbling, and inspirational all at the same time.

"We have helped 125 people in 2018 and can't wait to see what holds for 2019 with an extra \$100,000 raised! We just feel honored to have been the beneficiary and can't wait to share the immediate impact of these donations," said Flitter.

LAMA consists of about 100 members dedicated to making a difference in the community through volunteerism, fundraising and advocacy and is not aligned with a single beneficiary. Instead the group is constantly seeking to identify new opportunities where resources are needed most.

LAMA President Brian Britton is grateful for the support that made the event such a success.

"Grateful Gatherings is a remarkable organization with great leadership who make real differences on a daily basis. We are so thankful for the support from our members, donors, and all the 'Give Back in Black' attendees who participated at this great event and helped raise money for this worthwhile cause."

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