

Orinda woman honored for 30 years of volunteering for hospitalized children

By Sora O'Doherty

The Ronald McDonald House Charities Bay Area honored Orinda resident Deana Freedman at the end of February with the organization's 2018 Big Red Shoe Award. Every year, RMHC Bay Area's Big Red Shoe Award is presented to a member of the extended RMHC Bay Area community who has demonstrated exceptional dedication and commitment to supporting their mis-

sion to provide communities of support, access to medical care, and the healing power of family and home for critically ill children. Freedman and her husband, fellow RMHC Bay Area supporter Dr. Harvey Freedman, were also presented with Certificates of Honor from the city and county of San Francisco in recognition of the decades of support they have provided families in the hospital.

"As one of Ronald McDonald House's most valued and

appreciated volunteers, donors and ambassadors, it is fitting for Deana to be honored with this award, which we consider a lifetime achievement award," said Annette Eros, CEO at RMHC Bay Area. "Her enthusiasm, passion and commitment is unparalleled and has translated into much-needed and appreciated support for thousands of families here at the House." Her insights and experience led to the creation of the Child's Bedside Program, a mobile hospitality cart that brings the comfort and care of the nearby Ronald McDonald House directly into the halls and patient rooms of UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital San Francisco. The cart offers complimentary refreshments to their caregivers. Since its inception in 2008, the program has served thousands of individuals and is being extended to Oakland Children's Hospital.

"I am grateful to receive this award and honored to serve the children and families at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital," Freedman said. "The families experience enormous stress while their children are being treated at the hospital. The House, hospitality cart and all of the volunteers give them a little comfort and relief during some of the worst days of their lives."

Freedman, who has lived in Orinda for 18 years, once lived in a Ronald McDonald House for four months. She and her family traveled to Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1987 for her son David to undergo a bone marrow transplant for leukemia. Unfortunately, David did not survive.

In 1989 a Ronald McDonald House opened in San Francisco. Freedman read about the opening in a local newspaper and she called and offered to volunteer there. When she started, there were no other volunteers, "just me and the executive director," she said. The first thing Freedman did was to start a volunteer program. Since then, she has served on the



Deana and Harvey Freedman

Photo provided

board of directors and many different committees, and is now on the alumni committee of the board.

Her older son Matthew was 16 when his younger brother David died. Freedman recalls, "It was a very, very difficult time for all of us, but within two years Matthew was off at college," which gave her the time to volunteer. She identifies with the families she helps. "It isn't easy, but you just go day to day," she explained. "Parents who lose children are as handicapped as a person who has lost an arm or a leg. I talk and interact with parents all the time." She volunteers two days a week. One day for Ronald McDonald House and one day in a resource space for parents. Matthew is now married with children; he is currently on a Fullbright scholarship in Finland with his family, where Freedman will visit him next

month.

In addition to the Child's Bedside Program, RMHC Bay Area's in-hospital programs at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital San Francisco include: overnight housing services for families traveling 50 miles or more to receive care for their child; restorative family and sibling programs; and the megabites meal program that provides more than 4,500 meals each month to families spending long days in the hospital.

Freedman's additional outstanding contributions to RMHC Bay Area have included service on the board of directors and multiple other leadership councils. She leads volunteer orientation and training sessions and is a proactive and effective advocate for the House throughout the hospital community.



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In Memory

John Norman West

Oct. 6, 1921 - March 7, 2019



John (Jack) Norman West, loving husband, father, and friend passed away peacefully on Thursday, March 7, 2019 in Walnut Creek, California at the age of 97. John was born in New York City, New York on Oct. 6, 1921, the second son of the late Rehan (Spencer) West and Arch J. West. He spent his childhood in Salt Lake City, Utah, graduating from East

High School in 1937. John served in World War II as a pilot in North Africa, beloved as Captain "Smiling Jack". He developed a lifelong love of flying and continued flying as a hobby. After the war, he returned to school, earning a B.S. in Pharmacy from the University of Utah in 1950. John worked for Hoffman La Roche in many capacities in pharmaceutical sales until his retirement in 1987 and then continued serving as a convention coordinator for another 20 years. In addition to flying, John loved traveling, dancing, skiing, and watching football. He will be remembered for his devotion to his family and friends, his kindness and wit, his spontaneous tap dancing, and playing his ukulele (along with the card games Kings in the Corner and poker). John lived in Lafayette for 57 years, thoroughly enjoying Lafayette life. In his last few years, he could be found at Chow restaurant every Thursday morning, brunching with his family. He loved California, and in his last years kept a picture of Yosemite nearby to gaze at every day. The long-lived patriarch of the West family, he will be dearly missed.

John is survived by his devoted wife Joan, beloved daughters Sheila (Matt), Alexandra Kathleen (KC) (Michael), and Meghan (Brian); granddaughters Alison (Paul) and Kate; and beloved dog, Misty. John was preceded in death by his first wife, Kathleen, their second child, Erin, and his brother James.

Services will be held at 10:30 a.m. March 23 at St. Perpetua Catholic Church, 3454 Hamlin Rd., Lafayette, CA 94549. The family requests that in lieu of flowers, donations be made in his name to your charity of choice.

Playwrights' CageMatch pits writers against one another



Image provided

By Sophie Braccini

Over 300 playwrights from across the English speaking world entered a unique theater competition offered through Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette – all for the glory and the fun of it. The five best plays will be performed Sunday, March 24, with the audience choosing a winner. Susan Evans, THT artistic director, is sure it will be a memorable evening not to be missed.

Evans is not new at organizing such a competition; in her previous role as artistic director in Hayward she led a similar contest several years in a row, consistently receiving hundreds of entries. She said she was quite taken aback when plays kept pouring in at THT, ending with a whopping 310 entries by the final deadline. The theme was not particularly simple and the constraints framed it tightly: the action had to deal with connections; the play had to be set in a high-rise

apartment in a large community, in a corridor or common area; a bridge had to be somewhere in the story; and the maximum of four characters had to achieve gender parity. Since five plays selected will be performed in one night, the length is restricted to 20 minutes each.

Evans dove into the piles of texts and was reassured when she found some real nuggets in the middle of it all. "Some people just recycled other texts of theirs, adding an apartment or a bridge that has no real significance in the action," she said with a smile. That kind of text is not making the cut; she wants relevance, she wants good construction, and character development. She said that THT received texts from across the United States, as well as from Australia, New Zealand, England and even one from South Korea.

After Evans chose the 50 most relevant plays, a team

from THT worked hard to select the best ones. Following the selection, it is up to the actors to bring the plays to life, with very little prep time and rehearsal.

Evans already knew which actors would be given the opportunity to perform the selected plays, and says it's a lot of fun for both the actors as well as the audience – especially when audience chooses the winning play.

Spectators can buy \$5 tokens that they award to the play of their choice. Evans says one year in Hayward a playwright's mother bought 100 tokens to make sure her child would win. "It is not necessarily a fair process," says the director, adding that this is all about discovery, surprises and having a wonderful evening marveling over human creativity. She says that she is always surprised and happy to discover so many completely different stories, set in different time periods, and she wants to bring these unexpected literary pleasures to her Lamorinda audience.

Evans said that she cannot guarantee that the plays will appeal to a very young audience, but she states that she would not select those few texts that were too explicit or used inappropriate language; the purpose is not to offend or provoke the audience.

Admission for the Playwrights' CageMatch is \$5 (free to subscribers), and tokens to vote will be sold for \$5. The competition will start at 7 p.m. on Sunday, March 24, 3535 School Street,

Info: www.townhalltheatre.com