

# Shea Gala Shows High Spirits

J F Shea Therapeutic Riding Center has their Annual Gala to raise funds for their non-profit riding center. This year it was called Sheanigans which is a playful trick or other display of HIGH SPIRITS! The event has been held at different locations throughout years but the last two years it has been held at the Montage Resort and Spa in Laguna Beach. As you stroll around looking at the silent auction items, with of course a glass of wine or some other libation to keep you amused, the backdrop of the Pacific Ocean is stunning.

When we entered the grounds there was what appeared to be a life-size Grecian statue—that was until it started to move. Then many of these statues took in a breath of life and started strolling throughout the silent auction, they continued to amuse and entertain.

At 7 p.m. folks moved into the ballroom for dinner, presentations and the live auction. The dinner was absolutely fabulous with huge prawn shrimp, sirloin steak and a decadent chocolate desert, I think I gained a few pounds but it is always well worth the extra workout!

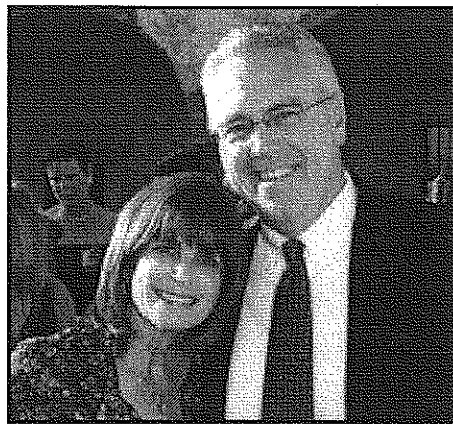
The entertainment continued during dinner, with jugglers, magicians and such and a lot of laughter!

The presentations then began with the Michael Lewis Award. Michael Lewis was the first client of the Center when it was formally Fran Joswick Riding Center and is awarded to those folks who give to the Center and/or the community. This year the awards went to me my husband David Ritchie and Dr. Richard Markell, equine veterinarian.

Dr. Markell has offered his time for more than 10 years providing medical care for the horses. David and I just met him for the first time and we both were in agreement that he is a great man and equine vet. He has his own practice in Encinitas and works with very accomplished horses and riders. So having him take care of the Shea horses is an honor. These horses give so much day after day and I know Dr. Markell appreciates the importance of their job as well as truly caring for these animals.

Let me express how privileged we were to accept this recognition because we know the Lewis family. Nancy and Derek Lewis are exceptional God-fearing parents and it's an honor just to be in the company of them.

As the presentations began, I was curious as I noticed former Mayor Sam Allevato and now City Councilman leave our table and enter the stage. As someone escorted David and me to our waiting area,



Renee and David Ritchie. Courtesy photo

prior to our accepting the award, Councilman Allevato proceeded to introduce me! He told of my contributions to our City and I want to say, I didn't realize I was so involved. I thought, "do I really do all that?" but what touched me more, was the fact that I have a dear friend in Sam and his wife Vicky. I knew that if I spoke afterward I would probably start crying, so my husband took the helm. Dana Butler, Director of JF Shea Therapeutic Riding Center introduced my husband with his many accomplishments i.e., Chairman of Orangewood Children's Home, former Chairman of the Shea Center, Trustee on the UCI Foundation and many more besides him receiving a college scholarship for water polo and joining the national team. Yes, I'm proud!

Our DNA is to give back, to keep giving and giving until there is not much more then to put more gas in the tank and continue.

Then one of the parents, Anne Marie Jennison, spoke about their families' life experience at the Shea Center and then introduced her son Charlie. Not only was this little guy handsome but his heartfelt little words, especially "I love you all" and "I love my horse Frosty at the Shea Center" were quite lifting. There wasn't a dry eye in the crowd and I know some of the men were trying to hold back. It is not because it was sad, just the opposite, tears of joy. From first words, to first time being able to balance himself properly after therapeutic riding and physical therapy combined, to now running across the stage and participating in T-ball!

There are so many more stories like this one. As a

matter of fact, the Allevatos have a grandson, Max, who has been a client for about a year at the Center. I was speaking with Vicki Allevato, and she told me Max spoke his first words, Momma, after riding at the Center—what awe-inspiring words to hear for his parents, it really gave me chills!

The other day, as I was multi-tasking, which really is the norm for Southern California residents, I had to drop photos off of my husband and myself at the Center. I told myself I would drop them off quickly then get onto my next oh so important errand!

Well I did drop them off but decided to take a look to see if any clients were out taking their therapeutic lesson. I pulled up a bleacher seat and saw two of the cutest children. They were two years old and full of smiles. I spoke with both of the Mom's who were watching their children and heard their stories. The same type of truly moving stories; their children had said their first words, because of this magical place—AMAZING!!

As I sat there watching I was taken away from the hassles of the day. The backdrop of San Juan's Hills and the recently purchased Shea Property were comforting and soothing. The horse's calmness and support of these children was uplifting. The staff's support and love as well as the volunteers made me proud to be a part of this organization. My soul was once again energized and ready to carry on to the next stop. Take the time, call the Center and be enlightened, your inner spirit will thank you and you will keep coming back; or let me know, I would love to show off the Center!

The reason I am involved with this city is because of the people I am privileged to come in contact with. My Open Space Committee comrades are loving, caring people who have no agendas besides wanting to do the best for all of us who live here and tenacious about preserving our history, our open space. The other equestrian and trail committees want to preserve our equestrian heritage for future generations. They are my friends and we all work as a TEAM.

Also, Jonathan Volzke is always supportive of our city, and *The Capistrano Dispatch* gives opinions from our citizens for all to peruse and have a better opportunity to decide if it rings true for them or not.

So I once again thank Sam for all his support of me and our equestrian community and all of you who make San Juan what it is—a truly High Spirit place!

Happy Trails!!

*Renee Ritchie is a longtime Capistrano equestrian and member of the Open Space Committee.*