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Charity Spotlight: 11th Annual Visionary Women Caregivers Luncheon

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Caregivers luncheon at Rancho Las Lomas

Each year, the Visionary Women Circle of Alzheimer's Orange County holds a Caregivers Luncheon to honor caregivers who display extraordinary compassion in caring for those touched by Alzheimer's disease and related forms of dementia.

Caregiver honorees are recognized for their commitment to compassionate care, which distinguishes them and inspires others.

This year, as it has for the past several years, the Visionary Women Caregivers Luncheon was held at the beautiful Rancho Las Lomas event center in Silverado Canyon. Rancho Las Lomas is owned by Alzheimer's OC board member Jeannie Lawrence of Newport Beach.

The luncheon began with a boutique and champagne, followed by the luncheon of roasted red and yellow beet salad, roasted pepper and basil bisque with grilled chicken and grilled cheese bites—perfect for dipping in the bisque. Dessert was carrot cake bites and mini cheesecakes.



The event honored the following individuals: Medical Caregiver Award: John Alexander; Family Caregiver Award: Jens Hudson; Family Caregiver Award: Maria De Jesus Garcia; Family Caregiver Award: Cyndi Holmes; Professional Caregiver Award: Darwin Diaz; Professional Caregiver Award: Julie Sandoval; Youth Caregiver Awards: Shalom and Caleb Reguerin; Administrative Caregiver Award: Dawn Hayes.



Jeannie Lawrence telling her journey as a caregiver

Jeannie Lawrence was asked to be the guest speaker this year and tell her story of being the caregiver for her late husband, Rick, who suffered from dementia.

“When you start to talk about being a caregiver, it’s something I have always been very private about,” Jeannie told the attendees. “When they asked me to do this, I called my son Brett, and he said ‘do it mom, you should be vulnerable, say it like it is.’ And so, I felt an obligation and an honor to tell my story.”

“I’d like to tell you that being a caregiver is easy, I’d like to tell you that I came through it completely unscathed, but it’s hard,” stated Jeannie. “It’s the most devastating experience a person can go through, especially if it’s someone you love. Being a caregiver is really difficult. It’s heartbreaking, devastating, you feel helpless, I felt anxious, I felt I could not do enough.”

Jeannie talked about how the disease took a toll on her family, and how it took different twists and turns until Jeannie was not sure if her husband was faking the disease.

“There were moments when he was not with me, and then he was with me. I called the doctor and said I thought Rick was trying to control me, but the doctor said this was normal. Well, it’s not normal.”

Jeannie began to note events on a calendar to keep track of the pattern of dementia. If Rick disappeared for three hours and they found him later lying in bushes, that went on the calendar.



Brett Lawrence and his mother Jeannie Lawrence

“I have been incredibly blessed with this journey. I could not say that years ago, it took me years to accept it. I have seen so much, and I can say so much, but now they are just notes on a calendar, a diary of what I had to go through. And I cannot begin to tell you the impact it had on my children. My sons have a story too, their story is one I cannot presume to speak of, I can’t tell you what they went through.”

“As a mother, I know how heartbreaking it is. So moms, fathers, sisters, brothers, we each have our own story. The caregivers that are in this room today, I know what you’re going through.”

“I stand here today in what I like to call my little piece of heaven, and Rick is everywhere—he’s in the dirt, in the bushes, and in the eyes of that child, and that child. I am forever blessed that I got my family intact. I thank God that is where we ended up.”

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