

HOLLISTER FREE LANCE

San Benito nonprofits honor their volunteers of the year

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By Connor Ramey (cramey@freelancenews.com)

Huddled in front of 300 longtime volunteers were four teenagers. They were all different sizes, tall and short, and ages, from 12 to 18, but they all made the same impact to community.

They gave out food, helped the less fortunate and always tried to make the things around them better. And Tuesday night, they were celebrated as the future of the San Benito County's volunteerism.

One of them was 12-year-old Gus Bobsin, who was able to get more than 3,000 pounds of food donated to the food bank over the past year.

"It feels really good because people are taking notice of me," he said. I'm not doing this for the fame or anything but so I can help kids. And I'm glad they mentioned me tonight and I guess kids can make a difference."

Those four teenagers were honored as well as 55 other guests from 51 nonprofit organizations Tuesday in celebration of the county's 10th annual awards dinner to celebrate National Philanthropy Day hosted by the Community Foundation. To celebrate its 10th awards event, this year was the first dinner, the Community Foundation looked to its past and future.

For the first time the awards show honored junior philanthropists from the county. Bobsin, Sarah Bartholf, 17, Natasha Guaracha, 17, and Jimmy Goudge, 18 all received recognition and a standing applause from the room of 300 volunteers.

The Community Foundation also recognized 11 past honorees that have passed away but their legacy and impact is still strong. Some of the past philanthropists include Angie Annotti, Dorie Hoyle and Sonny Paullus.

"Each one gave their time, talent and their treasure, and in so doing made our community a wonderful place in which to live," Mary Damm said as she spoke about each of the past philanthropists. "Their love for our county and for all of us who live here is very apparent. I'm sure their philanthropic actions were influenced by many who preceded them just like the actions of these 11 have inspired us."

But it was the teenagers that stole the evening.

"That was the most inspiring thing just to see these four young people and what they are giving already," Community Foundation Director Gary Byrne said.

Each of them had different reasons to donate their time helping others, but they all continued to do it because they loved to see the reactions of others.

"I love helping people and the effect of some being able to smile greater and just be more happy after receiving something," said Bartholf, who helped raise more than \$20,000 for a San Benito High classmate who had cancer. "And it feels good to know that I did something for another person. "

For Guaracha, who volunteers with Habitat for Humanity and the Health Foundation, giving back to the community where she lives is important.



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"I feel it's good to give back because in our generation you receive a lot and you almost focus on possessions instead of what we don't have and giving back to people that have less than us," she said. "I enjoy the impact that it has on people and I can see how it helps people in ways that you never thought possible."

Overall, the night was to congratulate everyone who had an influence in the community over the past 10 years. The dinner was a celebration of the hard work for many volunteers throughout the county and the organizations for which they work. The dining room at San Juan Oaks Golf Club was full to its capacity with 300 people. Because of capacity, organizers had to turn away 30 other community volunteers, Byrne said.

"It's the most we've ever had," Community Foundation Director Gary Byrne said.

Most didn't receive an award, but it didn't matter. The night was a celebration of not only the individual volunteers but also the community as a whole.

Byrne, in front of the 300-member audience, outlined the community's growth over the past 10 years. The Community Foundation's total assets have ballooned from a little less than \$200,000 in 2000 to more than \$6 million.

"It all has to do with passion," Byrne said. "It's the passionate people of San Benito County giving back to the community - your passion drives the nonprofits."

For the full list of winners, look back, while it also will appear in the Pinnacle.

Connor Ramey

Connor Ramey is a staff writer for the Free Lance. You can reach him by [email](#) or at (831) 637-5566.