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2 ■ Thursday, April 7, 2016

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Women inspire by giving back

BY LEA BOYD

The Women of Inspiration Luncheon did it again—left its audience without a dry eye in the house. The April 4 event raised funds for Girls Inc. of Carpinteria by showcasing a handful of women who dedicate themselves to improving lives on a local and global scale.

"I love that Girls Inc. is here to inspire young women to believe in themselves," said Arlene Samen, the event's inspirational speaker. Samen, a nurse practitioner in Maternal Fetal Medicine for the last 31 years, has spent over a decade working to reduce newborn mortality in remote villages of Tibet, Nepal and Mexico.

Samen told the crowd that being part of a safety net for others is a critical way of giving back. Delivering on her mission to provide poor, undereducated women with clean and safe births has come with numerous setbacks and the occasional night where she had to give up in order to get back to it the next day. "We will fall down. We will skin our knees. It's through that falling that we learn that there's a safety net around us always," she said.

The event also honored three women whose accomplishments are closer to home. Carpinterian Geri Ann Carty works as a nurse and is an indefatigable volunteer for Girls Inc. of Carpinteria as well as several other local causes. Carty serves on the board of the Plaza Playhouse Theater and Carpinteria Woman's Club and dedicates her time and energy to city events, Carpinteria Education Foundation and Hospice of Santa Barbara.

"If you could see inside Geri's heart, you would find infinite patience, generosity, love and endurance to help others," stated her sister Marybeth Carty.

Patsy Hicks, the second honoree, is the director of education at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. She has dedicated decades to art education and other Santa Barbara area causes, and she thanked Girls Inc. and the audience for its efforts. "They, you, we are creating a community of possibility," she said.

Natalie Orfalea, the final honoree, is a Santa Barbara County household name. As the co-founder and chair of the Orfalea Foundation, she has steered hundreds of thousands of dollars toward initiatives in early childhood education, food system reform, youth development, education and disaster readiness.

"They say behind every successful woman is a tribe of successful women—and men," Orfalea said. She asked the audience to consider whether they were part of the tribe supporting the community's young women.

Ana Delgado, longtime member of Girls Inc., emceed the event with the poise and confidence regular attendees have come to expect from the Carpinteria High School junior. She reminded the



From left are inspirational speaker Arlene Samen, honorees Geri Ann Carty, Natalie Orfalea and Patsy Hicks, and Executive Director Victoria Juarez.

audience that she started at Girls Inc. as a painfully shy kindergartner. It was Girls Inc.'s theater program, then led by Asa Olsson, that Delgado credits for pulling her out of her shell.

For the first time, the luncheon included a Strong, Smart and Bold Award. It went to CHS senior Noelia Romero, who joined the organization in 2008. She spent the last three summers volunteering 40 hours a week with the organization's younger members. She told the crowd that college once seemed like an impossible goal, but the mentors and friends she gained at Girls Inc. have shown her that it's a realistic goal, and one she now plans to achieve.



From left, Strong, Smart and Bold Award winner Noelia Romero and emcee Ana Delgado presented their heartfelt stories of how Girls Inc. has changed their lives.