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Sentinel



Girl About Town*

with **Julie Bifano** Ms Bifano is drawn to micro-fiction and is currently writing her first novel – *The Grace Below*. She has a B.A. in English with an emphasis in writing from the University of San Francisco and a M.F.A. in Creative Writing, also from the University of San Francisco. More of Julie's stories and poetry can be viewed on her website julebifano.com.

An Evening in Bloom



Christina Prins, Kristin Roberts, and Ivan Van Wingerden are excited to support Girls Inc. of Carpinteria

Strolling down the red carpet to enter the Girls Inc. of Carpinteria's 2nd Annual Fundraiser, I couldn't noticed rows of delicate purple and blue orchids inside. Entering Westerlay Orchids, I had the chance to meet the approachable and friendly honorees of the event, **Ed Van Wingerden**, owner of Ever-Bloom, and **Win Van Wingerden**, owner of Maximum Nursery and honorary member of Girls Inc. of Carpinteria's board of trustees.

Nearby were the president of the trustees board, **Clyde Freeman**, and vice president **Stefanie Herrington**. Stephanie expressed, "This event is really special because it showcases our community at its finest. Carpinteria's flower growers have been instrumental supporters of Girls Inc. and we love having this event in an orchid greenhouse." Clyde added, "Girls Inc. is a gem in the Carpinteria Valley. Out of 18 National scholarships for girls, five have



Jessica Wetzel and Matt Mooney take a quick break from perusing the enticing silent auction items

been from Carpinteria."

I remembered how instrumental Girls Inc. had been in my life through a variety of creative activities, gymnastics, cooking classes, and art projects helped plant seeds of imagination.

It was particularly moving to see



President of Board of Trustees, Clyde Freeman, honorary board member, Betty Brown, keynote speaker, Graciela Rodriguez, Vice President Board of Trustees, Stefanie Herrington, and executive director, Victoria Juarez enjoy celebrating Girls Inc.



Susie Panizzon, Maureen DeMaio, and Joe Shoukder are happy to attend



Charismatic master of ceremonies, Andy Scheaffer, Westerlay Orchids owner and sponsor, Joe Overgaag, and vice president on the Board of Trustees, Stefanie Herrington, together before the presentation



It's a cheerful check-in to An Evening in Bloom with Megan Mackekkie and Cheryl Wright

attendees wearing buttons on their lapel, each with a photograph of a different Girls Inc. member. Public Relations representative **Daniella Alkobi** explained how the buttons were part of the fundraiser. Each button was \$50, and there was a 1-in-100 chance that an attendee would win three nights at a Club Med location. Additional live auction items included a ride in a vintage WWII-era AT-6 airplane,

and a trip to Italy.

After a tasty dinner buffet, and delectable blueberry cheesecake dessert were served, the presentation began with keynote speaker, Graciela Rodriguez embodying the Girls Inc. mission statement: strong, smart, and bold. Graciela explained how after countless struggles in her adolescence, the organization was her "lifeline". Among Graciela's achievements: being the first member of her family to attend college at UCSB, and graduate school with a Master of Education Credential at Azusa Pacific; she is now on the National Advisory Board of Girls Inc. and a first-grade teacher at the Adelante Charter School on the Franklin School campus.

Graciela's message that anything is possible, and that anyone can make something positive out of his or her struggles, was moving and poignant. It occurred to me that individuals, like flowers, could bloom into something beautiful given the care from organizations like Girls Inc. ☺