

# COASTAL VIEW NEWS

April 16, 2015

## International activism inspires at Girls Inc. luncheon

BY LEA BOYD

A farm-to-table style lunch filled the bellies of Women of Inspiration attendees while several powerful female speakers fed hearts and minds on April 13. The annual luncheon benefiting Girls Inc. of Carpinteria featured a moving talk by Saran Kaba Jones, founder of an African safe drinking water organization, and honored four Santa Barbara area women— Donna Jordan, Rendy Freedman, Jennifer Freed and Michelle Apodaca—for their closer-to-home accomplishments.

Jones was born in Liberia and enjoyed a happy, stable childhood until, at age 8, she and her family were forced to flee the country as it spiraled into civil unrest. "We were among the lucky ones that got away," she said. What was expected to be a few months away from home, became a year, then five and then 10. It was 19 years before Jones returned to her native country, which by then had become one of the poorest in the world.

In an effort to help Liberians in need, Jones founded FACE Africa as a scholarship fund but soon discovered that inaccessible clean water presented a much bigger obstacle to raising the country's living standards. Over 50 percent of Liberians lacked access to safe drinking water. In 2010 she quit her high paying job in private equity to pursue her passion, and last month, FACE finished its 50th clean water project benefiting rural African communities.

Jones told the Women of Inspiration crowd that everyone is born with at least

one gift that should be used to benefit others. "It is how we choose to use those gifts that determines our impact on the planet," she said. She encouraged attendees to contribute within their communities, be it with time or money.

Women doing great things within the area were also lauded. Jordan, Carpinteria's first female mayor and a four-term council member, was honored. The long-time teacher and tutor co-founded Carpinteria Beautiful as well as the city's HOST Program. Other honorees were Apodaca, who is CEO of Deckers Brands and oversees the company's philanthropic efforts, and Freed and Freedman, co-founders and co-directors of AHA!, an organization that provides character-building programs to area teens and families.

The event was hosted by two standout teen members of Girls Inc., Ana Delgado and Arianna Lopez, who have both attended Girls Inc. since early elementary school and are both recent recipients of the prestigious Girls Inc. National Scholarship. Each girl has overcome her own set of adversities, with the support of the local organization, and gone on to several impressive achievements. Delgado was selected by the JASON National Argonaut Program last summer from a global pool of applicants for a four-week, hands-on marine research experience in the Bahamas. Lopez was recognized for her community service efforts last year by Radio Disney with the Hero for Change award.



LEA BOYD PHOTOS

Above, this year's Women of Inspiration honorees are, from left, Rendy Freedman, Jennifer Freed, Michelle Apodaca and Donna Jordan.



At left are Girls Inc. of Carpinteria Executive Director Victoria Juarez, left, and inspirational speaker Saran Kaba Jones, founder of FACE Africa.