

Orangewood Children's Foundation



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Athlete/Model Gabrielle Reece Helps Orangewood Auxiliary Support Foster Kids' Dreams of College

44 Women for Children Event Nets \$100,000 for Scholarships

Newport Beach – About 275 Orangewood ladies (and a few brave men) gathered yesterday at The Island Hotel to raise money so that local foster teens can achieve their dreams of attending college. Hosted by one of Orangewood Children's Foundation's auxiliaries, 44 Women for Children, the luncheon was co-chaired by 44 members Jessica Aitken and Sandi Jackson. Title sponsor was Fidelity National Title, represented at the luncheon by Don DuBois, Executive Vice President and Regional Manager. The highlight of the luncheon was guest speaker athlete, model, wife (husband is big wave surfer Laird Hamilton) and mom, Gabrielle Reece. The event raised \$100,000, which will fund scholarships for former foster youth who don't have the benefit of resources or support from family members.

After welcomes and introductions, an Orangewood scholarship recipient currently attending UC Irvine shared her story of family abuse and about the opportunities Orangewood has provided her. As the victim of abuse, her first memory is of her father beating her mother. She and her sister were placed at Orangewood Children's Home and ultimately a school coach and his family became their foster family. She emancipated from the foster care early at the age of 17 when her social worker suggested that she be placed back with her biological family. At the age of 17, she rented a room and lived off of Cup-o-noodles. Today she is a successful college student and Orangewood Peer Mentor and plans to pursue a career with the US State Department.

She thanked her 44 mentor who she said "has helped shape me into the person that I am today." She concluded, "While at one point in my life I saw foster care as a nightmare, I

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now see that it was a turning point which positively altered my future. Without the generous support from Orangewood and the people involved in it, my life would have taken a different path. I'd like to thank all those who've donated or are thinking of donating or have simply become warm supporters of Orangewood Children's Foundation."

Keynote speaker was athlete, model, wife and mother Gabrielle Reece. Reece is a former professional beach volleyball player, author of a biography called "Big Girl in the Middle", and busy model, wife and mother. She thanked the 44 Women group for inviting her, adding that children and education are important to her. She shared about her childhood with her single mother, moving often and living with various friends and teachers. She noted that at the age of seven she was five feet tall, and by age 15 she was 6'3". The 39-year old Reece shared the important lessons she's learned along the way: having someone in your life that tells you "you can do it"; learning to love and embrace who you are; discovering your talents and expressing them. She added, "It's not where you come from, or your clothes or car or house that makes you who you are. It's where you end up that's important." At the end of her speech, she got choked up when noting that on her visit to the Orangewood Children's Home earlier that morning she saw a seven day old baby. After pausing to regain her composure, she simply stated, "We have to take care of each other," and thanked 44 Women and Orangewood for doing just that for Orange County's abused children.

The luncheon concluded with the announcement of the opportunity drawing winners:

1. \$1,000 Shopping spree at South Coast Plaza plus 1 year of free valet parking (Donated by South Coast Plaza): Won by Micki Rach of Laguna Beach
2. A Bed Set of the winner's choice with a retail value of up to \$1550 (Donated by Frette, South Coast Plaza): Won by Dana Linkletter (city unknown)
3. Gucci signature handbag – Value: \$1095, Donated by Gucci, South Coast Plaza: Won by 44 Board member and Luncheon committee member Yvette McCarthy of Newport Beach
4. Vintage Alhambra necklace in yellow gold with black onyx, 10 motifs – Value: \$4,900, Donated by Van Cleef & Arpels, South Coast Plaza: Won by Ellie Razmjoo of Newport Coast
5. Vintage Alhambra watch, yellow gold case on a satin strap – Value: \$5,450, Donated by Van Cleef & Arpels, South Coast Plaza: Won by Carol Altieri (city unknown)

Founded in 1999 by Susan Samuelli, 44 Women for Children (WFC) contributes to Orangewood Children's Foundation by nurturing, supporting and inspiring adolescents emancipating from the foster care system on their 18th birthdays. 44 WFC focuses on three key areas: providing mentoring and education; increasing community awareness about child abuse and neglect; and hosting annual fundraising events.