

YMCA of West San Gabriel Valley Heart of the Community Fundraiser Lunch Honors Above and Beyond Award Winners

Grant for new building and need to enlarge life-line programs for underprivileged + homeless youth showcase what's possible when the community comes together

In a sold-out roomful of YMCA of West San Gabriel Valley supporters, guests could hear a pin drop as the three honorees spoke to the crowd about their passionate dedication to the vital programs that are the centerpiece of the Y, praising the collaborative giving spirit of the community.

Above and Beyond Award winner, Assembly member Ed Chau, speaking via video link, said he sought the \$1.825 million new building State grant when he learned from YMCA CEO Valarie Gomez and AUSD's Laurel Bear that the Y never turned away anyone unable to pay for membership and had decade-long commitment to helping students and families who are homeless and hungry. Chau pointed out the determination and tireless efforts of Gomez and said, "This grant demonstrates the power of community coming together."

Dr. Laurel Bear Founder, of Alhambra USD's nationally recognized Gateway to Success program for student mental health and safety, and an Above and Beyond Award winner, commended the YMCA's *What-More-Can-We-Do* approach, saying, "The real heroes in the room are all of you." Dr. Bear said that the YMCA supporters are a model for communities everywhere on how to come together as a family to make magic happen, underscoring the invaluable services the YMCA makes available to Gateway's 17,000 students and their families. Dr. Bear adds, "**Because of support like the Y's decade of partnership, AUSD Gateway has been able to build an infrastructure of hope and opportunity for our students. It takes all of us to help our children thrive.**"

SoCalGas Sempra Energy executive and YMCA Board Member, Andrew Kwok, received the Heart of the Community Award for his *Paying-It-Forward* philosophy toward volunteering, mentoring and giving. Quoting Pope Francis, Kwok said, "The measure of the greatness of a society is found in the way it treats those most in need." He adds that communities thrive when their children can flourish.

CEO Gomez thanked the honorees and supporters, reminding the crowd that the YMCA is a program-driven organization always in search of program funding. She said, "At the same time, the need for new 24/7 children's programs is growing. For the increasing number of working homeless families and disadvantaged parents working two jobs, their hungry children need weekend and school holiday programs."

The donations raised at the Lunch support the YMCA ongoing programs which include: Summer Day Camp, Weekly Field Trips, Camp Ta Ta Pochon, Basketball League, Swim Lessons, Afterschool Programs, all of which benefit AUSD students and families in need.

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