

GRADES OF green

Environmental Education Nonprofit Ensures Continued Momentum with Annual Fundraiser

On a balmy SoCal evening overlooking a Pacific Ocean sunset, environmental education nonprofit Grades of Green held its annual "Verte" fundraiser at the historic Bel-Air Bay Club in Pacific Palisades. The celebrity-studded event last Thursday was MC-ed by award-winning television producer J.D. Roth and included actress/producer Mindy Kaling as presenter and entertainment from "Glee" star Darren Criss. Kevin Reilly, Chairman of Entertainment at Fox Broadcasting, and Republic Services were honored.

Manhattan Beach-based Grades of Green is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to providing parents, students and educators with the tools to inspire and empower K-12 school communities to develop a more responsible relationship with the environment. It offers a Web-based program, free to schools, that captures metrics for all aspects of environmental stewardship (including trash, electricity, water, paper, chemical, and emissions reductions), as well as empowering children to utilize what they have learned about environmental sustainability in their school communities to have a lasting, global effect.

Founded on Earth Day in 2010, Grades of Green already impacts more than 106,000 students

"In January, Grades of Green reached a milestone of bringing its lessons to 100,000 students," said Martin. "With funds raised at Verte, Grades of Green hopes to expand the movement to the next 100,000 students! Our vision remains the same: to make environmental protection second nature in young minds.

"In other words, we want to change kids' habits for a lifetime and make environmental protection part of everyday life for kids and their families."

Three of Grades of Green's four co-founders share the role of executive director, making decisions as a team, while Coppedge serves as Director of Programs and Kretschmer as Director of Operations. As well as a board of directors/advisors, Grades of Green also includes a 27-strong, student-staffed Youth Board of Advisors ("To make sure our program is serving the kids - that's who we're here for," says Martin).

While guests including "New Girl" actors Hannah Simone, Jake Johnson, Max Greenfield and Lamorne Morris mingled during Verte's sunset cocktail reception, a student jazz band played in the Bay Club's tranquil courtyard (led on vocals by one of Grades of Green's Youth Board Advisors, Jane Fishman) and guests got to



Mindy Kaling presents at VERTE 2013

Photo by: Ken Pagliaro

environmentalists in the entertainment industry by The Hollywood Reporter in 2011, was honored for his participation in Grades of Green's mission since its inception.

"Kevin is one of Grades of Green's original board members and has been committed to Grades of Green's mission and protecting the environment in general. He has provided Grades of Green with invaluable insight and the tools to be successful," Martin explained.

"He walks the talk - he led the environmental effort at Fox by supporting the development of the 'Green Production Guide', which recently merged with the other studios to become a major resource for film, television, and commercial professionals to turn their products green."

Republic Services was also highlighted at Verte (which translates as "green" in many languages) for its exemplary efforts being implemented in conjunction with Grades of Green to bring environmental education to hundreds of children at schools in the Inglewood, Whittier, Torrance, El Segundo and Hermosa Beach areas.

"Republic Services is proud of the composting and recycling programs that have helped reduce almost 25,000 bags of trash from entering the landfill," said Susanne Passantino, Senior Area Municipal Relationship Manager at Republic Services.

On Earth Day next week (Monday, April 22), the winning school in the second annual Trash-Free Lunch Challenge, created by Grades of Green and sponsored by the Sanitation Districts of L.A. County, will be honored. The contest teaches children to reduce trash by using reusable lunch containers and by sorting compostable and recyclable materials.

The three finalists, selected from a group of 17 entrants countywide, are all from the South Bay: Lunada Bay Elementary, Riviera Elementary and Washington Elementary.

"All three finalists have achieved amazing results, so this is going to be one tough competition," said Grace Robinson Chan, Sanitation Districts' Chief Engineer and General Manager. "The three finalists in this year's Trash-Free Lunch Challenge cut their trash destined for

landfills by nearly 90 percent on average, which shows the astonishing potential for this program. It's teaching kids how to protect the environment now and in the years to come."

A judging panel of five environmental experts visited the finalist schools to select the winner. All three will receive education grants from Chevron. The winning school will receive a \$1,000 grant; the second and third runners-up will receive a \$750 grant and a \$500 grant respectively. Contest sponsors also include LacarGuy and the Johnson Ohana Charitable Foundation.

Three additional schools - Chapman Elementary in Gardena, Beryl Heights Elementary in Redondo Beach, and Silver Spur Elementary in Palos Verdes - were given special honors for their effort and will receive \$450 education grants.

"Several schools went above and beyond in their environmental impact," said Nicole Sevier, Grades of Green's Program Manager for the Trash-Free Lunch Challenge. "One elementary school in Torrance asked their parents to pick up lunch compost to be composted in their home gardens. One school in Gardena, asked all their students to write poems about what it means to them to care for the environment. Another school attended a school board meeting to ask for



Darren Criss chats with Grades of Green Co-founders before his performance. (L-R Shaya Kirkpatrick, Kim Martin, Suzanne Kretschmer, Lisa Coppedge)

Photo by: Ken Pagliaro

Some of Grades of Green's students and educators were on hand at Verte to educate guests about Grades of Green Programs such as In-Class Composting and Walk to School Wednesdays, and to explain how easy it is for schools to adopt the organization's free and easy-to-use templates.

Grades of Green estimates that less than 15 percent of its donations are used for indirect costs, meaning that the bulk of these to go directly to implementing its programs.

"We strive to ensure that dollars donated go directly to kids being educated on the hows and whys of protecting the environment," said Martin. "Our expansion over the past year has all been in our programs area - where it should be."

Boosted by funds raised at Verte, Grades of Green continues to set itself lofty goals.

"Specifically, we would like to expand our current Youth Board of Advisors to a corps of literally thousands of students - all taking steps to care for our earth and inspiring other students, parents, educators, and businesses to join their movement," Martin concluded.

To learn more about Grades of Green or to make a donation visit gradesofgreen.org



Grades of Green Board Member CJ Olivares toasts with Grades of Green Co-founders. (L-R Kim Martin, Shaya Kirkpatrick, Lisa Coppedge, Suzanne Kretschmer) Photo by: Ken Pagliaro

in over 172 schools (a 70 percent increase compared with this time last year) across 27 U.S. states, Canada, Australia and Myanmar, and is a recipient of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's prestigious Environmental Award.

"Verte was a magical night - from Mindy Kaling's hilarious jabbing, to Darren Criss's heartfelt songs, to our fabulous honoree Kevin Reilly and the whole Fox team behind him, it was fantastic and a huge success," said Kim Martin, Grades of Green's Director of Communications.

Martin co-founded Grades of Green with three other mothers of students at a Manhattan Beach elementary school - Suzanne Kretschmer, Lisa Coppedge and Shaya Kirkpatrick - after they led a volunteer effort to help "green" that school. The organization's goal is to enroll thousands of schools with millions of students, all caring for the environment and collectively making a palpable difference.

peddle their own ice cream thanks to Peddler's Creamery. A silent auction included autographed Los Angeles Kings hockey memorabilia; a trip for 4 to Villa del Palmar, Mexico; and American Idol Season Finale tickets.

"The main purpose of Verte is to raise funds and awareness for and about Grades of Green's mission to inspire and empower kids to care for the earth," said Martin.

During the event's sold-out dinner, "The Mindy Project" creator and star Kaling introduced honoree Reilly.

"I'm actually a little surprised that I was asked to introduce Kevin since I hate the environment. I came in a Hummer and I didn't carpool because the passenger seats are filled with empty water bottles," she joked.

Reilly, who was named one of the three leading