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Liz Mackinnon

Taly Haffar greets a guest at the Gustavo Ipiña Memorial Scholarship fundrasier.

Woodrow Scholarship Inspires Spirit of Giving

Posted December 7, 2007, 17:21 p.m. by Liz Mackinnon

The spirit of giving came alive during this year's holiday party and silent auction to benefit the Gustavo Ipiña Memorial Scholarship fund.

One hundred eighty people attended the event at the Bodega Bar — more than the last two holiday fundraisers combined. More than \$13,000 has been generated from the benefit so far, and contributions continue to roll in.

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Dallas County prosecutors Erin Hendricks, seated, and Taly Haffar, pictured with Katherine Borrás, have worked tirelessly to create and fund the Gustavo Ipiña Memorial Scholarship.

"It exceeded all expectations. It was the best event we've ever had," said Dallas County prosecutor and scholarship founder Taly Haffar.

Haffar said donations were still filtering into the courthouse nearly a week after the event.

Several of Haffar's colleagues from the criminal justice community attended the benefit to support their friend and colleague with the project that has become a labor of love.

"We came out tonight because we're proud of him. He's put in a lot of time and effort and spent a lot of time promoting the benefit," said Messina Madson, an attorney in Haffar's court.

Madson said Haffar's dedication to the scholarship recipients goes beyond issuing checks for tuition.

"He's very interested in what they have going on, so it's easy to be enthusiastic," she said.

Many people from the Woodrow community attended, to show their support for the scholarship and to honor the former student who inspired it — Woodrow class of 1976 alum Kyle Rains, a regular at the fundraisers.

"Kyle has been great about getting the word out to the Woodrow community," Haffar said.

Other Woodrow faces included parents of former students, and several teachers and staff. Marjorie Shaw was one of Ipiña's teachers; she often inspires her English as a second language students to apply for the scholarship by sharing stories about Ipiña's hopes and dreams of going to college. However, Haffar was surprised to discover that many people at the benefit had never heard Gustavo's story.



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Stephanie Councilman, Cory Councilman,
and Messina Madson

"It was a great opportunity to revisit the story of the case and tell people about Gustavo and why we started the scholarship in his honor," Haffar said.

The story of Ipiña's 2004 death in a road-rage incident, one week before his senior year at Woodrow, was not an easy tale to tell.

"It's always upsetting to revisit, but at the same time I think people draw inspiration from it — it's a great opportunity for people to see something good happen out of an unfortunate and tragic incident," Haffar said.

Dallas County prosecutor Erin Hendricks has been by Haffar's side since the beginning, helping with every interview of potential scholarship recipients and every fundraising event. Hendricks said that local media coverage of Ipiña's story contributed to the higher than usual attendance.

"A woman called up [Haffar] out of a clear blue sky and said, 'Hey, I read about your fundraising event' and, 'Is it too late to come,' and he said, 'Absolutely not, come on,' because he has a generally inclusive attitude, and it helps," Hendricks said.

Haffar continues to be the heart and brains behind the scholarship program, with a level of enthusiasm that is contagious, according to Hendricks.

"He would have you believe that people really believe in the vision of the scholarship, to honor Gustavo's legacy, but I also think that it can't be ignored that Taly has a pretty magnetic personality and people want to be around people who are doing good things," she said.

Haffar and Hendricks agreed that the GIMS benefit allows them, and other members of the criminal justice community, a rare opportunity to honor a victim.

"Every human being that we ever encounter as prosecutors, we only encounter them because the worst possible thing has happened to them," Hendricks said. "Either they themselves have been the victim of a crime, or they are a family member of a victim, so doing something that helps Taly [with the fundraiser] makes it all the more worthwhile."

Haffar is grateful to everyone who helped make the event such a success, particularly the Lakewood and North Dallas businesses that contributed items to the silent auction. He also thanked longtime friend Amier Taherzadeh, president of the Chateau Wine Market and Bodega Bar, for "opening his doors once again, and donating all the wine served at the benefit."

The third Gustavo Ipiña Memorial Scholarship worth \$5,000 will be awarded May 5 at Woodrow Wilson High School.

Donations are still being accepted. Make checks out to: GIMS, and mail to:

*GIMS
3501 Bryan St., No. 3501
Dallas 75204*

1 response to this article

mf.tx said at 12:19 p.m. on December 8, 2007, 12:19 p.m.

I attended. It WAS great. Congratulations to Mr Haffar and to Ms Mackinnon for keeping this story of a wonderful young man's legacy alive.

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