

Julie's Family Learning Program paused for an all-too-brief evening to honor four new Guardian Angels, and to celebrate the achievements of the past year, at their Seventh Annual Dinner.

by Rick Winterson

It was one of those rare evenings that glow in the memory. The Seventh Annual Dinner of Julie's Family Learning Program took place last Thursday. About 500 people attended - the good fellowship was warm and solid enough to touch. Everyone was glad to be there on such a special occasion. The friendly buzz told you that.

Enthusiastic bidders thronged the tables filled with auction items. A shopping extravaganza from the Hicks, an Ireland trip from Jon and Nicole Cronin, and a brace of Pats-Colts tickets (with tailgate party) from Maureen Dougherty were among the live auction items.

A surprise auction item was donated by Oprah Winfrey. Executives from her publication, O Magazine, were in Boston for a business meeting at the Convention Center. In a chain of events that should be

the subject of a separate news story, they heard of Julie's and the upcoming Dinner. In addition to giving tickets to her show, Winfrey made a \$10,000 donation to Julie's through the Oprah Winfrey Foundation.

Julie's has established a tradition of awarding "Guardian Angels" certain key individuals. Since these awards began in 1999, twenty-seven persons have been recipients of "Guardian Angel" status.

Four new members joined Julie's firmament at this year's Dinner. They were Thomas Flynn, Anne Louise Hicks, Sr. Catherine Panetta, and Anthony Gilardi. All of these deserving individuals were profiled in Online's October 26 issue. They received standing ovations when their awards were conferred. Flynn was eloquent in his pledge of union support for Julie's; Gilardi gave a stemwinding speech praising the successes at Julie's.

Sr. Louise Kearns, SND, Sr. Jean Sullivan, SND, and Bob Monahan took turns presiding over the ceremonies. Two alumnae of Julie's told their stories of how they turned their lives around at Julie's. A touching video graphically showed how Julie's works. Joe "Dodo" Nee finished the evening as the Julie's auctioneer.



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Julie's 7th Annual Dinner and Auction represented yet another major achievement for this winning program.

With such exotic and varied items up for bid as trips to Ireland, Newport, RI, The White House in Washington, D.C., Martha's Vineyard; and wineries in Westport and Sakonnet Vineyards, and Chicago to visit a taping of the Oprah Winfrey Show, as well as tickets to Boston Celtics, Red Sox, and Bruins games, sports-related memorabilia, treasured works of art and photography, an assortment of dinner and lunch dates with elected officials and much more, one might think that the silent auction would be the highlight of the night's event.

But, as popular as this portion of the evening's festivities was, and as important as the donations are to the many people in the neighborhoods of South Boston and beyond who are served by Julie's Family Learning Center, most compelling were the personal stories shared by the very people for whom this night was created.

As hundreds of supporters filled IBEW Hall in Dorchester on November 2nd, member after member offered praise for the program that helped lead them to this day.

"I've been [with Julie's] since my son was 5," said Karen, a Family Learning Center member featured among others in a video presentation. "I came here to better my life and my son's. Julie's has always been supportive through thick and thin. When I'm crashing and burning, they're there with the fire extinguisher putting out the flames."

"I was one of the first to receive a diploma," said Arlene. "Today, I work at Julie's as a family advocate and I love it. I

to me. I think we're all on the right path."

One member who took the stage recalled surviving a situation that might have broken even the strongest of spirits if not for a persistent and caring place like Julie's.

"I'm a mother, grandmother, wife and alumni," said Eva. "Twenty years ago I came to Julie's. My mom and dad split [when she was younger]. If only I had a Julie's back then. By the time I came to Julie's, I was pregnant with my third child and I was hopeless. I had two alcoholic parents and my husband had one. He became an alcoholic and a drug addict and I became insane trying to fix him. It was a miracle that my children survived."

"At Julie's, I was able to relax," Eva continued. "My son Al went on to St. Augustine's. I found out that I was legally blind when Al was fourteen years old. I have two other daughters, so Al had three mothers. Al grew and shined at everything he did."

Eva went on to cite a letter that was written by faculty at Archbishop Williams School that praised Al for the honest, caring and socially conscious person that he has become, thanks in no small part to his mother who received critical and timely guidance and support from the programs at Julie's.

Another key component of the night was the presentation of the Angel Awards to four worthy and deserving recipients identified by Julie's for their commitment to rising beyond the call of duty to help others. Speaking eloquently and effusively about Julie's and its positive community impact, award recipients Anthony Giaroli of the South Boston Resource Center, Sister Catherine Panetta, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Thomas Flynn of the New England Regional Council of Car-

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a friend of Julie's accepted their awards with warmth and grace.

For all the speeches made and praise delivered, however, perhaps the most definitive embodiment of the mission at Julie's Family Learning Center came in the form of a one young woman who bravely told her story to the masses gathered to support her and others like her.

"I was raised in Old Colony with my two sisters," said the young woman. "My family sometimes needed government assistance. We always needed money, but I can't remember a time when there wasn't alcohol and drugs in the house. My sis-

ters eventually turned to drugs. By the age of fourteen, DSS stepped in and removed me from my family. They placed me with this wonderful foster family, but I still missed my family, so I ran away from Pembroke, and moved into an apartment with my boyfriend. Later, my mother died of a heroin overdose. I ended up feeling really guilty for the way I treated her the day before she died. I realized that I had to grow up faster. I became pregnant at 17 and thought my life was over.

"Before JFLC, I didn't think it was possible to find all the support that I would need to

make it. But I joined college prep classes, I took parenting courses, I took counseling when I needed it. Eventually, I enlisted in college courses and worked part-time at the Bank of America. I was reaching goals that I didn't think I could make before Julie's. Now, I've gotten my first promotion at the bank and I'm attending Quincy College and am two-thirds of the way to my Associate's Degree. Thanks to JFLC, I've learned how to become a responsible adult. Thanks to JFLC, I know that I'm on the right path."