

Liberation Programs Works to Combat Area Addiction

By Dan Arestia on May 5, 2016



Heidi Smith Daileader, Sallyan Pelletier, John C. McCarty and Michelle Luttrell (photo credit: Kyle Norton/Moffly Media)

Liberation Programs held its Ninth Annual Spirit of Hope dinner on April 28, and Reverend Dale Rosenberger, Senior Minister at the First Congregation Church of Darien, was among the honorees. The dinner, co-chaired by Darien residents Michelle Luttrell, Heidi Smith Daileader, and John C.

McCarty, along with Liberation Program Board Chair and Darien resident Sallyan Pelletier, was attended by a crowd of approximately 300 people, and was held at the Hyatt Regency in Greenwich. The event raised \$135,000. Jayme Stevenson, first selectman of Darien, was in attendance, as were Stamford Mayor David R. Martin and Greenwich First Selectman Peter Tesei and other local elected officials. The dinner featured powerful and moving speeches from a former addict, Alan J. Mathis, the President and CEO of Liberation Programs, as well as Rosenberger himself.

The juxtaposition was an interesting one. Residents of Darien, Greenwich, and other Fairfield County towns filled the space. The large crowd moved through a beautiful dining room, and out into a lobby which featured silent auction and charity raffle items. Local business owners donated dinners, photography sessions, and other very valuable goods. Jet Blue tickets were there to be won, as were Yankee tickets, and even a flag autographed by Phil Mickelson from a golf major tournament, highly sought after by golf enthusiasts in attendance. And yet, looking around through the glitz and glamour, everyone seemed to know just what it was that really brought them there. Addiction and substance abuse are taking hold across all their respective communities, now more than seemingly ever, and the problems are ignoring any stigmas about race, social status, or financial situation.

First Selectman of Greenwich Peter Tesei, spoke first at the event, and set the tone for the night. Tesei said, "We have a serious problem. It's affecting our young people, and affecting our families. We should not be ashamed to admit we have a problem." Shifting the focus to be more on the night at hand, Tesei applauded Liberation Programs, saying, "Liberation Programs continues to do critical work". Tesei as followed by a former addict who discussed the struggle and challenges that life used to present, and

closed with the joy of now having a family and children who are successful college graduates, and credits her sobriety for that second chance. The former addict received a long standing ovation from the crowd.

Rosenberger spoke next. Rosenberger spoke about Liberation Programs saying, “the more I learn about Liberation Programs, the more impressed I am.” Rosenberger also spoke about visiting one of the facilities operated by Liberation Programs, and the way in which it had an impact on him. Rosenberger was to have dinner with men who were currently in treatment, and spoke about the answers he received to the simple question, “How are you”. Rosenberger said, “They looked me straight in the eye and told the truth about how their lives were at that moment. Unedited.” Rosenberger clearly had been moved by the experience. “Sobriety is a sort of insistence upon the truth,” Rosenberger said, “we cannot afford anything less than candor about addiction. It requires us to look each other in the eye and be unsparing in what we say”. Rosenberger, and all other speakers at the dinner, spoke about how this sort of frankness and honesty was the important first step in combating what Rosenberger had called, “a scourge of our time that is only becoming worse”. While addressing the crowd, Rosenberger would also call upon the crowd to be honest with themselves about the addiction itself. “We cannot run, and we cannot hide. We cannot afford a conspiracy of politeness. It doesn’t issue forth from inner cities or among those not like ourselves. This epidemic is spilling forth out of our medicine cabinets and liquor chests upon those whom we adore”. While the prospect of facing the problem is a scary one, and for most a foreign one, Rosenberger’s words still seemed to ring on a personal level with the audience.

The events of the evening were portrayed as the starting point to a battle with addiction. Alan J. Mathis, the President and CEO of Liberation Programs, spoke as well, highlighting the importance of his organization and calling for further action. “I stand in proxy for the thousands of kids who feel they can’t talk to a teacher, a police officer, or even mom and dad, about peer pressure,” Mathis said, continuing, “I stand in proxy for the mother who’s worried about the safe return of her son. I stand in proxy for the babies born to moms who have problems, 40,000 a year.” Mathis also spoke about the importance of fighting this problem as a community, a problem that is already here, and not something just looming in the future. “I don’t know anyone who has Zika virus. I don’t know anyone who has Ebola. But we are preparing for those things. How are we preparing our children? If my child is not safe, then neither is yours”. As Mathis drew to a close, he called on all to give as they could to help support Liberation Programs, saying, “46,000 people in our county are suffering in this moment. Who is their good samaritan?”

The Spirit of Hope dinner, glamorous as it may have been, appeared to have achieved its goal. While the fundraising for Liberation Programs was invaluable, as those attendance ate dinner, collected their auction and raffle winnings, and left, some could be overheard talking about doing more and getting involved in the fight against drugs in their town. Others seemed to grasp that the problem of addiction was not simply an inner city problem, but rather has taken hold in Fairfield County and was beginning to threaten their families.

Liberation Programs continues to serve those in need of help with recovery and sobriety, regardless of their situation. In order to become further involved, visit www.liberationprograms.org. Liberation Programs welcomes help of all levels, whether it be a small finite project or donation, or long term involvement.