



New Haven Youth and Family Services

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Inaugural Circle of Hope Gala offers rare peek into hilltop estate, glamorous tastes and rich story of redemption

Chef Jeff Henderson; Food Network host and San Diego native, shares street-to-stove story against beautiful backdrop of wine, chocolate, live music and gala glamour

Vista, Calif.; July 23, 2008... A luxurious evening of fine wine, delectable chocolate and delicious food in a one-of-a-kind, private estate with exquisite backcountry views reminiscent of a Tuscan villa await guests of the first annual Circle of Hope Gala.

On the evening of Saturday, October 4, 2008 Frank and Claudette Mercardante's luxurious hilltop villa--named *Casa di Fede* or house of faith--will be open to the public for the first time as they host an intimate evening with special guest Jeff Henderson. Jeff, a New York Times best selling author, host of the Food Network show *The Chef Jeff Project* and a former executive chef at the Bellagio in Las Vegas, will reveal to Circle of Hope guests how he went from hustling drugs on San Diego's streets to hustling foie gras in some of the world's most prestigious hotels including the Hotel Bel-Air and Beverly Hills L'Ermitage Hotel. With his life's story now sold to Columbia Pictures, Circle of Hope guests will be among the select few to hear his journey first hand.



During the evening, guests will be treated to live music from the Cecilia String Quartet, mouth-watering chocolate pairings by Chuao Chocolatier, wine tastings provided by Orfila Vineyards and led by wine connoisseur, columnist, and host of "A Taste of Wine," Frank Mangio as well as a Tuscan-inspired cuisine in a storybook setting.

Circle of Hope, a philanthropic partnership serving at-risk youth, is an initiative of New Haven Youth and Family Services. To become a member of Circle of Hope and to purchase tickets, a table or a VIP package for this special event, please contact David Piazza at 760-630-4035 ext. 223 or info@circleofhopegala.org.

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The host committee for the Circle of Hope gala includes: Chair Dawn Hall Cauthen, George Chamberlain, Robert M. Cunneen, Debbie Dorsee, Parisa Farokhi, Andrea Gherini, Deborah Haydis, Patrice Saxon, and Morgan Smith.

Learn more at www.circleofhopegala.org.

About New Haven Youth and Family Services

New Haven Youth and Family Services is a non-profit social services agency focused on reclaiming youth for 8 to 17 year old boys in Southern California. Since 1967, New Haven has helped 10,000 youth who have faltered in public school situations due to behavioral, mental health, substance abuse, learning disability, family distress, or truancy problems. Its intensive residential treatment, educational, vocational and clinical intervention programs are provided at its main campus in Vista plus 12 homes located in Vista, Oceanside and San Marcos in North San Diego County. Outpatient and in-home counseling services are also provided in Riverside County to at-risk youth and their families. New Haven contracts with more than 50 school districts across Southern California. In 2007, New Haven earned the annual Helping Hand award from the United Way of San Diego County in recognition of its YouthBuild career technical education program. More can be found at www.newhavenyfs.org.

About Chef Jeff Henderson

Award-winning chef Jeff Henderson made history in Las Vegas when he became the first African-American executive chef at the world-renowned Bellagio Hotel. In fall 2008, his own TV show will debut on the Food Network and his first cookbook, *Chef Jeff Cooks*, will also be published. Raised mostly by his single mother, who struggled just to keep food on the table, Jeff dreamed big, but turned to drug dealing to achieve his dreams of becoming 'the man.' Jeff was no ordinary drug dealer; by 21, he was one of the top cocaine dealers in San Diego, making up to \$35,000 a week. Two years later he was indicted on federal drug trafficking charges and sentenced to almost 20 years in prison. Assigned dish duty in the prison kitchen, Jeff became fascinated watching his fellow prisoners cook for the thousands of other inmates and prison officials. Henderson learned to cook in prison and his dream was born: Once outside, he would become a chef.

It was a tough, seemingly impossible journey for an ex-con. Few chefs would give him the opportunity to cook in their restaurants. And once hired, he endured racism and sabotage in the kitchen. But Henderson refused to accept rejection. Driven by a dream and an unshakable will to succeed, Chef Jeff worked hard to overcome unimaginable adversity and eventually reached the top of his profession, becoming executive chef at Café Bellagio in Las Vegas. Chef Jeff lives in Las Vegas with his wife, Stacy, and their three children. See www.chefjeffcooked.com.

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About Frank and Claudette Mercardante

Frank Mercardante is a native of New York but has spent his professional career entirely in San Diego. A 40-year veteran of the financial services industry, Mercardante is CEO of Discovery Bancorp and most recently served as chairman, president and chief executive officer of Placer Sierra Bank, a \$2.7 billion, 50-branch bank headquartered in Sacramento. Prior to joining Placer, he was a founding director, president and chief executive of Southwest Community Bank headquartered in Carlsbad, Calif., which Placer acquired in June 2006. Mercardante is an ordained deacon in the Roman Catholic church—allowed to baptize, marry, bury, preach and teach--and spends his time away from the office involved in ministry. Frank and Claudette met while working together early in Frank’s career at the San Diego Trust. Prior to building their dream home on a DeLuz hillside southwest of Temecula, the Mercardantes lived in Carlsbad.

About Chuao Chocolatier

Chuao Chocolatier (pronounced chew-WOW) is Southern California’s premier artisan chocolatier. Founded in 2002 by Master Chef Michael Antonorsi and his brother Richard, Chuao Chocolatier is pioneering “fusion chocolate” through a commitment to unusual, unexpected and delicious flavors using highly prized Venezuelan chocolate and fresh natural ingredients. The Venezuelan brothers, now San Diego residents, named the company Chuao Chocolatier after the legendary cacao-producing region of Chuao located in central Venezuela. Chocolate is part of their heritage, as their ancestors once ran a small family farm that was an important part of the criollo cacao plantation industry. Today, you can discover Chuao Chocolatier creations around the United States at fine specialty retailers including Whole Foods, Bristol Farms, Gelson’s, Wegman’s, Crate & Barrel and Cost Plus World Imports as well as premier restaurants, hotels and resorts. For more see www.chuaochocolatier.com.

About Orfila Vineyards

Orfila Vineyards & Winery is an ultra-premium boutique winery nestled in the picturesque San Pasqual Valley, approximately 30 minutes from San Diego, on the way to the Wild Animal Park. Winemaker and general manager Leon Santoro and his team produce award-winning Rhone-style wines from grapes grown on the hillside estate located approximately 15 miles from the Pacific Ocean and from other renowned grape-growing regions in coastal California. Orfila wines are available at the winery's Old World tasting room which overlooks the 70-acre estate, at select wine merchants and restaurants and through membership in the Orfila Wine Lovers (OWL) Club. Since its opening in 1994, Orfila Vineyards has been the recipient of more than 1,000 medals in major national and international competitions - a testament to the complexity, grace and opulence of its wines. The winery has been adopted by San Diego as a favorite venue for celebrations. It has beautiful facilities for weddings, anniversary parties, corporate events, fundraisers and all types of community revelry. For more see www.orfila.com.

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About Frank Mangio

After a career as a radio personality and later a successful business consultant in advertising, public relations and special events; Frank Mangio finally gave in to his true passion: the wine business. Beginning with a lengthy trip to Tuscany, Italy, Mangio absorbed more than a little knowledge and more than a lot of wine as he learned the wine business from its masters. Mangio has now dedicated his career to wine as a multi- media commentator in the surging international/national wine market. He has written a weekly syndicated wine column for Copley Newspapers and currently hosts “Taste of Wine TV” and popular website www.tasteofwinetv.com for Cox and Time Warner Cable in San Diego. His columns also appear in Italo Americano, the largest Italian newspaper on the west coast, and he lectures on wine at San Diego State University while also sitting on its Advisory Board. Other achievements include being named a Certified Wine Connoisseur, Wine Spectator Magazine; Citizen of the Year, Carlsbad, California; Officer and Board Member, Encinitas and Solana Beach Chambers of Commerce and Sons of Italy, the largest Italian American organization in the world. For more, visit www.tasteofwinetv.com.

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