

Society Scene

by
Kelly Bennett

Exclusively For The Newport News



OVER \$2.5 MILLION RAISED AT CRISTO REY ORANGE COUNTY'S ¡VIVA! GALA: A CELEBRATION OF "THE SCHOOL THAT WORKS"

A celebration of promise, purpose, and possibility unfolded as Cristo Rey Orange County High School hosted its second annual ¡VIVA! Gala at the oceanfront Pasea Hotel and Spa in Huntington Beach.

Over 400 philanthropic guests, corporate partners, and community leaders raised more than \$2.5 million to support Cristo Rey's mission of providing a college-preparatory Catholic education paired with invaluable real-world work experience to students with limited economic resources.

The evening's energy was infectious, beginning with a lively cocktail reception on the Ocean Lawn and Terrace. Guests mingled under golden skies while being serenaded by the school's new student Mariachi band, a crowd favorite. Proud Cristo Rey students greeted attendees and shared heartfelt stories about their experiences working at top Orange County companies, making it immediately clear just how transformational this school truly is.

Inside the elegant Sapphire Ballroom, The Most Rev. Kevin W. Vann, Bishop of Orange, offered a special blessing over the evening's festivities, donors, and mission. The gala drew a host of high-profile supporters, including host committee members Ben and Carmela Du; philanthropists Robert Marrujo, Executive at Container Supply Company, and wife Lisa; Paul Nolta, Managing Director at J.P. Morgan Private Bank, and wife Karen; Rand and Rosemary Sperry of Sperry Equities and Sperry Commercial; and Tim and Alanna Psomas of Psomas Engineering.

The dinner itself was a culinary celebration. Guests began with a fresh and colorful little gem salad garnished with strawberries, Marcona almonds, fennel, and a light champagne vinaigrette. The main course offered a delicious duet of rosemary-basted filet mignon and salmon, accompanied by roasted wild mushrooms, fingerling potatoes, asparagus, and a bright chimichurri. For dessert, guests indulged in a family-style assortment of mini praline cream puffs, moelleux chocolat, red berry opera cake, and tiramisu cake, a sweet ending to an already heartwarming evening.

One of the evening's standout features was the whimsical Bloom Bar, a colorful and interactive floral station where guests could select their favorite blooms to create personalized bouquets to take home. The fragrant station was abuzz with creativity and laughter, sending guests off with a handcrafted reminder of the night's joy.

Cristo Rey's Corporate Work Study Program was celebrated throughout the event, with the spotlight on honoree WCM Investment Management, whose partnership has been pivotal in supporting students. WCM Co-CEO Paul Black delivered an emotional and inspiring speech.

"When I think about changing one life at a time, I can't think of a better way to do that than to invest in Cristo Rey," Black said. "This is about us really caring about kids and creating opportunities for them. We do it gladly, and we do it with joy, and we do it with immense gratitude in our hearts."

Then, a surprise announcement electrified the room: WCM would match every dollar raised that night.

"The Co-CEO of our firm, Mike Trigg, said, 'You know what, Paul? I'm so excited about what Cristo Rey is doing. Let's just agree that we will match every gift tonight, 100 percent.' Black concluded, 'We have been given so much and we want to give back so much. So please be generous tonight. A young person's life depends on it.'"

Guests certainly heeded the call during a high-energy live auction featuring luxurious and exclusive experiences. A five-day, four-night stay at a fully staffed oceanfront villa in Punta Mita, Mexico, went for a stunning \$65,200. Other popular packages included an Angels dugout suite, a decadent private dinner with a tequila specialist at Mercado Gonzalez in Costa Mesa, and over 80 tickets sold at \$500 each for a future "smash demo party" at the school's upcoming campus renovation, proving guests are excited to be part of building Cristo Rey's future, quite literally.

Founding president Stephen Holte spoke from the heart: "Cristo Rey is a miracle in motion that needs three things to happen almost simultaneously: resources for our students, jobs, and a permanent campus. Years from now, we'll look back on this moment and say we built this legacy together."

The night's most poignant moment came from sophomore Kristy, who shared how Cristo Rey has shaped her life. "Cristo Rey, Corporate Partners, family, and friends have helped me become a better person who is happy and open to trying new things."

Cristo Rey Orange County continues to rise as "the school that works," blending academics, work experience, and spiritual development into one powerful model. With the community's support, the students of Cristo Rey are not only being prepared for college and careers, they are being equipped to lead lives of purpose and promise.

To learn more about Cristo Rey Orange County High School or to become involved, visit www.cristoreyoc.org.



Founding President Stephen Holte and Paul Black - Photo by Ann Chatillon



Charo and Alex Montano - Photo by Ann Chatillon



Rosemary Sperry and Mai Huynh
- Photo by John Watkins



Sarah and Connor Covington -
Photo by John Watkins



David Paul Collins and Ben Du - Photo by Ann Chatillon