

## Boca Rotary OPAL Gala Honors 8 Civic Leaders, Raises Thousands For Scholarships

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**By: Dale King** Contributing Writer

The Rotary Club of Boca Raton held its 21<sup>st</sup> annual OPAL (Outstanding People and Leaders) Red Carpet Gala at Boca West Country Club in mid-January, honoring eight paragons of the community and raising more than \$200,000 for "scholarships and mentorships for students who could not go to college without your help," OPAL co-chair Spencer Siegel told a crowd of some 360 attendees.

Six people who stepped to the OPAL podium that night were first-time recipients: Aubrey and Sally Strul, founders of the Kelly-Strul Emerging Scholars Program at Florida Atlantic University; retired entrepreneur Art Polacheck and his wife, retired teacher-turned children's book author, Glorianne; Place of Hope founding CEO Charles Bender III and Rabbi David Steinhart, spiritual leader of B'nai Torah Congregation in Boca Raton for the past 25 years.

Two previous OPAL honorees, Arlene and Jim Sclafani, founders of Multi Image Group, returned to receive Lifetime Legacy Awards.

The evening included a number of speeches, but Arlene Sclafani delivered perhaps the best line of the night. After looking over the tuxedoed, evening gowned, well-coiffed and dressed-to-the-nines crowd, she said: "You are one hell of a good-looking group!"

Glorianne Polacheck offered this: "The Boca Rotary knows how to have a good time."



"OPAL recipients are chosen by former winners and represent those who have contributed through volunteerism to make our community a better place in which to live, work and play," Siegel noted.

"The Rotary Club of Boca Raton's motto is 'Service above self' and this unique scholarship program emphasizes mentorship in addition to financial assistance," he added. "It provides both life skills and confidence to these scholars."

"It has truly grown to be the premier event in Boca Raton, and it is only appropriate, considering the amazing honorees who lead by example and inspire us," said Neil Saffer, OPAL co-chair.

He pointed out that the Rotary Scholarship Program "has helped hundreds of students go to college and has provided more than a million dollars to fund those scholars."

A prior OPAL recipient, Jan Savarick, owner of a consulting firm and retired head of the Boca Raton Regional Hospital Foundation, returned as mistress of ceremonies.

Just before the awards presentation, one Rotary scholarship recipient, Garsendy St. Fleur, who came to the US in 2015 from Haiti, told how the club helped him out of homeless and provided aid so he could attend school, learn English and become a student at FAU. "I am the first in my family to attend high school and college," he said.

"My first semester went very well," the youth noted. "I have a 3.3 grade point average. I am studying business and hope to have my own someday. I want to thank you for taking a chance on me."

When called to the podium, Place of Hope founder and CEO Bender called the facility that helps abused and neglected foster children "a perfect name for a perfect place." Under his leadership, Place of Hope – formerly known as The Haven – has grown from a single group home to six group homes and various other places such as an emergency shelter, maternity home for young women and a transitional facility for young people aging out of the system.

"I am a team builder," he said as he thanked those in the community who "are stepping up and helping. Give [these children] a hand-up. They deserve it."

Aubrey and Sally Struhl were honored for co-founding the Emerging Scholars Program along with FAU president John Kelly and his wife, Carolyn. Natives of Johannesburg, South Africa, they came to the US in 1977. Their passion for helping others became a driving force in their lives as they assisted the Boca West Children's Foundation, Boca Regional Hospital, Jewish Federation of South Palm Beach County and Caridad Center, among others.

Rabbi David Steinhardt was recognized for various efforts at B'nai Torah Congregation, including establishment of the T.L.C. program. He has aided a variety of community groups as well, from Boca Helping Hands to the Milagro Center and Hands on Tzedakah. He and the Rev. Andrew Sherman of St. Gregory's Episcopal Church created the Boca Raton Interfaith Clergy Association.

Recipients of Lifetime Legacy Awards, Multi Image Group founders Arlene and Jim Sclafani have provided audio-visual equipment and assistance for OPAL ceremonies this year and in past years. They started the firm in 1979 with their sons in one room of their home in Wilton Manors. MIG became the first AV firm in the US to make computer-generated color slides using a process called Genigraphics.

The firm has grown into a 100,000-square-foot campus in Boca Raton with 150 employees. Their three children, Jay, Robert and Regina, are the MIG management team.