



25

We Change Lives
Gala Honoree & Guest Guide



The 2025 Inaugural Honorees & Guests



Honoring José M. Hernández

José M. Hernández, a former NASA astronaut, dreamed of flying in space ever since he heard about Franklin Chang-Diaz, the first Hispanic-American astronaut. The son of Mexican migrant farm workers, Hernández spent his childhood traveling across California for seasonal work before settling in Stockton. He overcame language barriers and economic hardships to earn a Bachelors degree in electrical engineering from the University of the Pacific and a Master's from UC Santa Barbara. His engineering career began at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, where

he co-developed the first full-field digital mammography imaging system, advancing early breast cancer detection.

Hernández joined NASA in 2001, becoming Chief of the Materials and Processes Branch before being selected as an astronaut in 2004. He completed training in 2006 and flew as a mission specialist on the STS-128 Space Shuttle Discovery mission in 2009. After leaving NASA, he transitioned to leadership roles in engineering and space exploration, founding Tierra Luna Engineering and serving as an advocate for STEM education. His journey from humble beginnings to space exemplifies perseverance and the power of education, inspiring future generations.



Honoring Denise Sparacio

Denise Sparacio is the Sales Director of Disney Imagination Campus at Disneyland Resort, leading the Youth Sales Team in promoting educational programs, performing arts experiences, field trips, and Grad Nite opportunities. With over 33 years of experience in Sales and Marketing, she has spent the past seven years specializing in the student market. Throughout her tenure at Disneyland Resort, she has held leadership roles across Corporate, Off-Site Conventions, Military, and Youth markets, driving a 150% increase in sales goals over five years. Her dedication

to team morale, client relations, and student-focused opportunities earned her the prestigious Disney Legacy Award for exemplifying Walt Disney's vision to Dream, Create, and Inspire.

Denise studied Business Marketing at California State University, Fullerton, where she was an active member of Gamma Phi Beta Sorority. Beyond her professional career, she is passionate about giving back, volunteering with Helping Hands for Kids, engaging in church activities, and spending quality time with family and friends.



Honoring Ambassador Gaddi Vasquez

Gaddi Vasquez, the son of migrant farm workers, was determined to pursue higher education as a pathway out of poverty. While still in high school, he took community college courses and graduated early to enroll at Santa Community Ana College before earning a bachelor's degree in public service management from the University of Redlands. As a youth, he was involved in Scouting America's Exploring program, which helped cultivate his passion for public service and leadership. His career has spanned law enforcement, public service, and leadership roles, including serving as a police officer and the chair of the Orange County Board of Supervisors. However, his most prominent roles came as Director of the Peace Corps and later as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture. Throughout his career, he has remained grateful for the education he received at Santa Ana Community College, crediting it with shaping his foundation for lifelong learning.

As Peace Corps Director, Vasquez launched initiatives to increase community college student participation in the program, recognizing that workforce training at these institutions provided essential skills for international development. One of his stops to promote this initiative was his alma mater, Santa Ana Community College. His dedication to public service extended to his role as Vice President of Public Affairs for Southern California Edison, reinforcing his commitment to community engagement and development. Vasquez's career reflects a lifetime of leadership, service, and advocacy for education and international cooperation.



Chelsie Hightower

Guest Star

Chelsie Hightower is a professional dancer, Emmy-nominated choreographer, and former *Dancing With The Stars* pro. Known for her standout roles on *So You Think You Can Dance*, she has choreographed for top artists, toured internationally, and launched Dance Elevated and Inside Out to inspire young dancers. Beyond dance, she has hosted TV segments, starred in *Strictly Ballroom*, and appeared in Hallmark and Lifetime films.



David Osmond

Guest Star

David Osmond, a singer, actor, and member of the iconic Osmond family, is also a passionate advocate for multiple sclerosis awareness, a condition he personally battles. An Eagle Scout, he earned the National Outstanding Eagle Scout Award for his leadership and service. Through his music, advocacy, and resilience, Osmond continues to inspire others.

