

# Urban Harvester Fundraiser a Hit with Community

*Many descend on Fresco Community Market for Food, Wine and Appetizers*

By Bill Glazier Review Editor

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When was the last time you entered a supermarket and found at the end of every aisle helpful, smiling and good-natured individuals ready to serve a variety of wines, world-class beers and tasty appetizers?

More than 250 people took advantage of that opportunity last Saturday night, enjoying the fine hospitality of Urban Harvester's first-ever fundraiser, indeed a hit with the community as Fresco Community Market, just beyond the South Pasadena city limit, hosted a festive and unique event.

“This is great,” enthused Thano Adamson, owner of Mission Tile West in South Pasadena and one of the many guests sampling food and beverages provided by dozens of vendors showcasing their products throughout the store.

In addition, a silent and live auction featured gift baskets, tickets to sporting events, trips, movie studio tours and gardening items.

Adamson held the view of many, milling around the Los Angeles market, enjoying the festive atmosphere and giving back to an organization relatively new on the scene.

Urban Harvester is the creation of Linda Hess, who launched the nonprofit in 2009 after witnessing an elderly woman’s kitchen cabinet containing cans of cat food. It took Hess less than 48 hours to fill her Prius with donated food from Trader Joes and deliver it to the lady, along with others she knew facing similar hardships.

Today, after the usual growing pains, Urban Harvester, according to Hess, puts 20 tons of food per year into the hands agencies, including pantries and soup kitchens, that feed those in need.

Hess points out that the agencies, some offering job training, rehabilitation and housing, receive fresh, high-quality food at no cost from Urban Harvester, anxious to help people looking for a bite to eat.

“One out of every six people in the United States is food insecure,” claims Hess, adding that 40 percent of all food produced in the United States is wasted.

That’s where Urban Harvester believes it can make a difference. Funds raised from \$40 event ticket sales for Saturday’s fundraiser, along with a silent and live auction, will help the organization develop a software program to connect food sources and agencies across the country.

“We will create the tools for educating, advising and guiding the food suppliers and the receiving agencies to create long lasting relationships,” Hess wrote in brochure handed out at the event. “As

the food matchmaker, Urban Harvester will continue to be the boots on the ground that trains, vets and matches the right donor to the appropriate agencies to connect the dots to end hunger.”

Recognized for giving back, South Pasadena City Councilman Michael Cacciotti and longtime South Pasadena Review photographer Henk Friezer were presented humanitarian awards by Hess during a ceremony in one corner of the market Saturday night.

Cacciotti, who serves as a deputy attorney general for the state of California Department of Justice in his professional life, has worked with food pantries in the past and delivered hot meals to the needy for St. Vincent’s Church in central Los Angeles.

Today, he’s a regular at the South Pasadena Senior Center, serving lunches to the elderly.

In addition to his City Council duties, Cacciotti is a board member for both the Santa Monica Mountain Conservancy and the South Coast Air Quality Management District, always pushing for open space, clean air, zero-waste and sustainability.

Hess stressed that redirecting nutritious food away from the waste stream to those who in need is one of Urban Harvester’s main objectives.

Over a 45-year stretch, Friezer has taken donated food from local markets to help many in a Los Angeles sector known as Skid Row. Hess praised Friezer’s commitment for addressing the basic human need of helping the hungry.

“These are the unsung heroes,” Hess told the crowd as Cacciotti and Friezer stood next to her on a stage. “These are the people who don’t tell you why they do it. They just roll up their sleeves and do it.”

Fresco Community Market owner Jon Murga met Hess in 2011 when he first opened the store, and sharing similar missions in wanting to help others, the pair became kindred spirits.

“It was an amazing meeting for both her and I,” Murga told the crowd

gathered in the staging area.

For Murga it was about putting the homeless to work when he opened Fresco, teaming up with the L.A. Mission and its Back to Work Program designed to hire employees for its store.

When he met someone who matched his will to help the down and out, Murga tipped his hat, recognizing that Hess was right in line with his way of thinking.

“She’s feeding people who need to eat, providing food that would normally be thrown away,” he said. “Fresco’s Urban Harvester partner initiative (is underway),” said Murga, explaining that Urban Harvester representatives stop by his store regularly to pick up food that the store cannot sell because it may “have a blemish, but it winds up in the hands of those who need it the most,” he said. “Urban Harvester’s mission is consistent with ours as Fresco is also committed to supporting our local community. From stocking our store with many healthy organic foods to hiring the homeless as our employees, we work hard to make our community a better place. We appreciate Urban Harvester’s mission and its effort to address hunger by proper food distribution in Southern California.”

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