

Nursing Home Plans Big Party For Its Resident Mothers

BY RHODA WEISS

Those who have an aging mother in a nursing home face an all-too familiar dilemma: They want to take her out for a Mother's Day celebration, but her special diet or need for a walker or wheelchair can make this a daunting task.

The Jewish Home for the Aging (JHA) of Los Angeles has a solution to this problem. On May 12, JHA will host its "Second Annual Largest Mother's Day Celebration in the World." Academy Award winner Martin Landau, who also emceed the 1995 event, will be joined this year by television personalities Monty Hall and Mary Hart in honoring the mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, and great-great-grandmothers who live at the two JHA facilities. The facilities' 750 residents include 700 women whose average age is over 90; 15 are over 100.

Last year's event drew more than 1,500 residents and family members, with some coming from as far away as Alaska and Guam. Loving messages, written by guests on heart-shaped stickers, were attached to a gigantic Mother's Day card. Attendees were entertained by an orchestra, clowns, singers, dancers, and celebrity look-alikes from the residents' eras. They were given gifts, T-shirts, and a brunch that included a Mother's Day cake.

The event's goal, according to JHA Director of Public Relations Michael Turner, is to "enhance goodwill among residents and their families and increase visitation and volunteer support from families." Another objective is to heighten public awareness of JHA, the largest and oldest elder care facility in Southern California.

Planning for the 1995 event began the previous fall, when organizers formed a committee representing the JHA board, employees, auxiliaries, volunteers, and donors. Various subcommittees handled sponsor solicitation, invitations, gift donations, entertainment, and resident assistance.

Everyone got into the act. One board member donated his valet parking service for the event. Another persuaded Warner Brothers to send Bugs Bunny to participate. Still others talked several



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entertainers and the members of an orchestra into performing for free. Some 30 companies volunteered free or discounted services. Residents participated, too, putting up posters throughout the facilities and sending invitations to their families and to the JHA's volunteer workers and donors.

The event's success was evident. The committee had sent out 6,000 invitations, expecting to see about 600 attendees. But the number of participants exceeded 1,500, including 425 residents, 1,000 family members, and 100 volunteers.

McDonald Media Services, which handled the event's publicity, estimated that if it had been purchased as advertising, the "free" electronic and print coverage would have cost JHA nearly \$400,000.

Event staff, corporate sponsors, individual donors, and vendors were presented framed certificates of appreciation. Major corporate sponsors received a video of the event and the news coverage concerning it. "As a result, we received an increased number of inquiries regarding residency and donation of funds and services," Turner said.

The event also allowed JHA "to break itself out of a mode of traditional funders and seek support from those who do not normally assist sectarian organizations," Turner said.

Planners of the 1996 Mother's Day party expect to draw more than 2,000 participants. Last year's event cost \$56,000, of which \$43,000 was raised through sponsorships, ticket sales, and donations. To help fund this year's party, JHA is producing a Mother's Day Tribute Book. Businesses contributing to the event will be named in this publication, which is to be distributed to all JHA residents and their guests at the coming celebration.

Organizers are already planning to unveil a JHA cookbook at the 1997 event. The book will feature traditional recipes, showing how they have been altered from generation to generation and providing low-fat, low-cholesterol versions. □

 For further information, contact Michael Turner, director of public relations, Jewish Home for the Aging of Los Angeles, at 818-774-3336.