

Sharefest 17th annual gala goes online with Kobe jersey, other auction items



A signed Kobe Bryant jersey, donated by Joyce Sharman, will be among items up for auction on Friday, Oct. 30, to benefit Sharefest, a nonprofit that serves local students and provides volunteer help to South Bay and Harbor Area communities through annual workdays. Sharman's late husband, Bill, was the Lakers coach in 1972 when the Lakers earned their first championship. (Photo courtesy of Sharefest)

By **DONNA LITTLEJOHN** | dlittlejohn@scng.com | Daily Breeze

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In normal times, the Sharefest Gala fundraiser has all the bells and whistles: the red carpet, guests in formal attire and intriguing auction items.

But this is 2020. And so on Friday, Oct. 30, guests of the 17th annual evening gala will be able to attend in their pajamas and enjoy some popcorn — since it will be virtual. But they'll still get the entertainment and the fun auction, which will feature an autographed Kobe Bryant jersey and other items.

Participants also will be able to contribute to the local nonprofit, which is dedicated to helping under-served students and local communities throughout the South Bay, Harbor Area and Long Beach.

"I was hesitant to even doing a virtual gala," said Chad Mayer, executive director of Sharefest, "but our saving grace was that this event is in the fall rather than the spring" when the pandemic was still so new.

That allowed the nonprofit to learn and build on the experiences of other charities that had gone before them, Mayer said.

This year's event will be shorter than the live presentations but it's still attracted sponsors and participants that should give Sharefest a needed shot of both money and enthusiasm.

Since the pandemic, the nonprofit has had to cut its staff and expenses by 50%, Mayer said.

Even before the pandemic hit, the nonprofit already had chosen its theme for the year, which is "Dedication," inspired by a quote from Bryant, the Lakers legend who died earlier this year: "Great things come from hard work and perseverance. No excuses. Dedication sees dreams come true."

The signed jersey was donated by Joyce Sharman, wife of the late Hall of Famer Bill Sharman, who coached the Lakers for their first championship in 1972.

Other items include trips with flexible travel plans. The jersey will remain open for bidding until Nov. 13 while other items will only be available until 9 p.m. Friday, Oct. 30.

Plans for the virtual event, which is set for a pre-show at 6:30 p.m. with the regular program at 7 p.m., include special guests, including such as Pau Gasol, a former Laker who teamed with Bryant to win two NBA championships in 2009

Rounding out the evening will be inspirational stories from the youth, instructors and community members who have benefited from Sharefest. Raising typically about \$350,000 each year, the galas bring in a much-needed portion of Sharefest's annual budget.

Funds raised this year will help launch a new Workforce Development program designed to connect youth to the trade careers.

"Some of these students (Sharefest helps) are in foster care so this is such a huge hurdle" to provide a future while also helping to rebuild the nation's middle-class, Mayer said.

Sharefest, founded in 2003, also is hoping to expand its pilot Sharefest Alumni Program that provides funding and mentorship for youth who continue on to college.

"In a year when everything was going wrong in the world, we still got to watch (in 2020) 85 continuation high school students achieve their dream of high school graduation," Mayer said of the youth that have been tutored and mentored already. It was a record for the program so far, Mayer said.

Attending the virtual gala is free, though online registration is required. One you register — at sharefestgala.org — you can view the auction items.

In addition to serving youths in the community, Sharefest is probably best known for its annual volunteer community workday that sends hundreds of volunteer teams out to spruce up local school campuses, public buildings and parks by painting buildings, making repairs and planting greenery.

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Donna Littlejohn | Reporter

Donna Littlejohn received a bachelor's degree (double major) in journalism and political science from California State University, Long Beach, and began her career in daily journalism with the San Pedro News-Pilot, transferring to The Daily Breeze staff in 1998 after the San Pedro publication closed.

dlittlejohn@scng.com

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