

## LOCAL NEWS

# Sharefest lands \$1 million donation for continuation school programs in South Bay, Harbor Area

Large donations such as the one being given to Sharefest by Melanie Lundquist often motivate others to give similarly as word spreads about young nonprofit organizations



Philanthropist Melanie Lundquist, right, stands with councilmember Joe Buscaino, left, and Sharefest executive director Chad Mayer in the Sharefest office in the San Pedro Municipal Building on Thursday, Oct. 17, 2019. Lundquist recently gave Sharefest \$1



Established 12 years ago with a vision to reach society's most vulnerable youth in the South Bay and Harbor Area, Sharefest Community Development on Saturday, Oct. 19, celebrated what is a huge milestone: its first seven-figure donation, courtesy of area philanthropist Melanie Lundquist.

The \$1 million contribution, which will be used to support five Los Angeles Unified continuation high schools in the area, was formally announced at the nonprofit organization's 16th annual gala at the Torrance Marriott in Redondo Beach.

But it was a phone call earlier this year that brought the good news.

Sharefest founder and director Chad Mayer was on his way to Yosemite for an "unplugged" family vacation,, his wife and two children with him in the car, when the phone rang.

"I want to make this the best vacation ever," [Melanie Lundquist](#) said as she told him about the decision to give \$1 million.

"I don't remember what I said," said Mayer, a Lomita resident.

For Melanie Lundquist of Palos Verdes Estates, the joy really is in the giving.

"I like to do the things nobody else does," she said of her charitable giving. She and her husband, Richard, [two of Southern California's most generous philanthropists](#), earlier created the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, a model for reaching underserved students. Most recently, the pair donated \$70 million to the [Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute](#) (LA BioMed), a 67-year-old institution.

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“Philanthropy needs to be a public and private partnership, government can’t do everything alone anymore,” she said. “Sharefest is picking up what society needs, which is addressing the most vulnerable.”

When she met Mayer for the first time, she was instantly impressed.

“He’s probably one of the most authentic, genuine people I’ve met in my life,” Lundquist said of Mayer who has served as the youth and assistant pastor at Kings Harbor Church in Lomita where he remains active. “He made it very easy. He never asked for anything.”

The two met at an event at 20th Street Elementary School in Los Angeles, one of the schools the NFL’s L.A. Rams were assisting in getting playground equipment. The Rams franchise is one of the many partners supporting Sharefest.

Later, she scheduled a breakfast with Mayer in Manhattan Beach to learn more about the grassroots Sharefest concept.

“She made me cry twice,” said Mayer, a Florida native who served in the Air Force and earned his college degree in environmental engineering from Cal State Long Beach.

He recounts his own struggles growing up — one year he received two calls from jail, “one from my brother and one from my dad.”

Sharefest’s focus on young people, Lundquist said, was especially appealing. The daughter of a Russian Jewish immigrant mother, Melanie Lundquist had a financially modest upbringing instilled with lessons of giving back to others and leaving the world a better place than she found it. She recalls carrying around a can to collect change for the March of Dimes when she was 7 years old.

“Richard and I feel every child on the planet is our responsibility,” she said.

In a society where so many have become disconnected “silos,” Lundquist believes entities that employ collaborative efforts are most effective.

Sharefest is probably best known for its annual [community “work days”](#) that attract teams of volunteers who adopt specific projects throughout the South Bay, Harbor Area and Long Beach. Wielding paint brushes, tools and enthusiasm, volunteers fan out to improve their neighborhoods and communities on one day a year.

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But beyond that, Sharefest has dedicated much of its \$1.6 million budget toward assisting inner city children and teens. It had its start as [one of the organizations](#) that helped with building a [community center](#) in memory of Cheryl Green, 14, who was killed in Harbor Gateway allegedly because of her race.

Los Angeles City Councilman Joe Buscaino was an early supporter of Sharefest and has provided meeting space on the seventh floor of the old San Pedro City Hall under a \$1-a-year rent deal for 20 years. The space used to be occupied by the [“Seventh Heaven” jail](#). (The cells themselves remain intact in a separate section of the top floor.)

As an LAPD officer in the Harbor Area, Buscaino said his own passion for reaching troubled youth goes back to a Dana Middle School eighth grader named Manny, whom he knew and escorted to the hospital on the night when he was killed behind the Jack in the Box restaurant on Sixth and Gaffey streets.

“We’re saving lives here,” Buscaino said of the plans to use the new donation in the continuation schools. “I just want to prevent another Manny from happening.”

Lundquist hopes her \$1 million donation — which will establish the Lundquist Youth Leadership Center and provide programming for continuation schools in Wilmington, San Pedro, Harbor City, South Gate and Gardena — will inspire other large donations for the Sharefest cause.

“We like to lead by being an example,” she said. She and her husband have taken the Giving Pledge, a movement in which some of the nation’s wealthiest individuals and couples commit to give more than half their wealth away.

Melanie Lundquist talked about meeting with some of the youth already helped through their prior inner-city youth donations. They are now attending Ivy League colleges.

“Our inner city kids have been through way too much in their young lives,” she said. “They have resilience second to none, they have insight second to none. They are amazing young people.”

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 Author **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](mailto:dlittlejohn@scng.com)

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