

Corona del Mar Resident Lucie Courtois Shares Inspirational Message at Beyond Blindness Gala



Corona del Mar resident Lucie Courtois and her mother Carol Trapani at the Beyond Blindness Gala.

Beyond Blindness, the region's leading provider of early intervention, education and enrichment, and family support services for children with visual impairments and other disabilities, hosted its seventh annual Vision Beyond Sight Gala on Feb. 29 at Mile Square Golf Course in Fountain Valley.

With the support of more than 200 guests, the event raised more than \$240,000 to fund and build bright futures for children and families in Orange County.

Held for the first time on a weeknight, the 2024 gala took place on Rare Disease Day in recognition of Beyond Blindness' commitment to empowering children of all abilities to live full and rewarding lives.

Beyond Blindness key speaker Lucie Courtois of Corona del Mar has received services from Beyond Blindness. She is a graduate of Corona del Mar High School and post high school completed independent skills and academic program at the California School for the Blind.

Lucie completed acting and scriptwriting courses with Inclusion Films by Joey Travolta, and has had private acting lessons from Access Acting in preparation of an audition with "All the Light we Cannot See." Lucie currently attends Orange Coast College in the Film School with a focus on her education in writing, film, and entrepreneur programs.

Lucie has developed a blind character and written three spec episodes for a Nickelodeon show that she is submitting for consideration. Her goals are to act and create work that includes all different types of people including people who are blind.

At the event, Courtois spoke about how Beyond Blindness has supported her journey since birth, which includes more than 20 eye surgeries.

"I have been part of the Beyond Blindness community since birth, but I am really part of two communities," Courtois told the audience. "Yes, I am part of the Blind community, but I am also part of the sighted community. And guess what? So are you. Because so many of you have been part of my community and supported my journey, I can stand here today as a confident young woman."

Courtois went on to say that she is working on fully navigating her Corona del Mar neighborhood, including safely and independently crossing Coast Highway.

"My goal for myself is to qualify to have a guide dog. My goal for my family is to be able to pick up my little cousins, Benjamin and Juliet, from school by myself on the last day of this school year," stated Courtois, who added that "my dreams are much bigger than that though."

In addition to writing a book and several spec scripts, Courtois aims to create work that includes all different types of people, including people who are blind.

"We don't get to see enough people with disabilities thrive. I want to change that for cast, crews, and fans. I want to tell stories that people can identify with and say, 'Oh, that's me!'"

Courtois acknowledged that Beyond Blindness changed her life in many ways, including giving her the courage and skills to live to her fullest potential.

"There is a reason I focus on telling stories that children can enjoy," she said. "I see children as valuable and equal to me. I am friends with people of all ages and backgrounds. I see everyone as equal. That is my vision beyond sight, and I believe my world is much better for it. Beyond Blindness envisions this world, too, and your support makes it possible for people like me to be equally valued anywhere we go."

Courtois ended her remarks by asking the audience to support other children and young adults who have visual impairments and other disabilities.

"Thank you Beyond Blindness for allowing me to share my story tonight, and thank you to all the supporters here tonight who have poured into my future."



World Blind Golf Champion Jeremy Poincenot

"Vision Beyond Sight supports our continuous evolution as we deliver life-changing, inclusive programming that paves the way for children with visual impairments and other disabilities to achieve their full potential," said Angie Rowe, President and CEO of Beyond Blindness. "It was an honor and a privilege to have an incredible community of supporters, families, sponsors, and members of our Board of Directors and Ophthalmic Advisory Board join us for this impactful evening."

The President of the Beyond Blindness Board of Directors is Newport Beach resident Carol Trapani, Lucie Courtois' mother.

Held for the first time on a weeknight, the 2024 gala took place on Rare Disease Day in recognition of Beyond Blindness' commitment to empowering children of all abilities to live full and rewarding lives. This year's reimaged event, which took place at Mile Square Golf Course in Fountain Valley, also included a VIP experience with World Blind Golf Champion Jeremy Poincenot, who later served as the evening's keynote speaker and spoke about his triumphs and the challenges he faced since losing his sight at age 19.

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Dr. Wilhelm de Nijs Vision Award, named for the organization's founder who dedicated his life to helping others navigate a world without vision after being blinded in the war against Indonesian Communists. Longtime supporter Barbara Alvarado was honored as the 2024 award recipient for dedicating her time, talents and treasures to Beyond Blindness for more than 20 years.

The event raised more than \$240,000, which will go to supporting nearly 500 children and more than 800 family members each year through innovative programming and services including two new inclusive preschool classrooms and a recently expanded Low Vision Optometry Clinic.

Beyond Blindness, formerly Blind Children's Learning Center, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with the mission to empower children with visual impairments and other disabilities to achieve their fullest potential. The Beyond Blindness team embraces a people-first approach and values family, connection, impact, inclusion, stewardship, and optimism. For more information, please visit www.beyondblindness.org.