



Opera Canada's Barbara Opens 2011 Season
in fine fashion

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Life

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2013

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Dining for Women

Group giving focus of potlucks in local homes

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For a number of years, Melissa Hansen had been "searching for a way to make a difference.

"I would write checks to various charities, but I always felt that it wasn't enough. I wanted to do more. I wanted to help people who don't have the basic things that many of us take for granted. I feel very fortunate to have been born in the United States, able to have enough food and clean water, a roof over

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CARMEN SMYTH / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

At top, Toni Briones, from left, Emily Watkins and Pam Caswell enjoyed food with the flavors of India at a potluck dinner during a Dining for Women monthly fundraising event that supports programs that lift women out of poverty on a global scale. Above left, During a brief talk, Melissa Hansen, founder of a local Dining for Women chapter, explained that the national organization is dedicated "to empowering women living in the developing world to become healthy and economically self-sufficient." Above right, in her talk, Ms. Hansen used a graphic display to highlight the international accomplishments of DFW, a nonprofit national giving circle that makes a difference in the lives of impoverished women in Third World countries through the power of collective giving.

Many health woes in teens seeking obesity surgery

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Making a difference in people's lives

WOMEN

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my head, access to health care and a good education," she said.

The local certified public accountant found exactly what she was looking for while watching the NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams.

"I always like the segment called 'Making a Difference' because it shows good people doing good things. One evening, Dining for Women was featured, and I knew immediately that I wanted to be part of it," Ms. Hansen recalled.

Dining for Women is a nonprofit national giving circle that makes a difference in the lives of impoverished women in Third World countries through the power of collective giving. Chapter members meet for dinner in someone's home rather than a restaurant and donate the money they would have spent dining out to international programs.

The first Dining for Women meeting was held in January 2003 at the home of its founder, Marsha Wallace of Greenville, S.C. The 20 women who attended donated \$750. Since then, more than \$2.8 million has reached numerous international organizations.

"I looked up the organization online and found out that there was already a chapter here in Santa Barbara," said Ms. Hansen, 58.

And that's how she met Peggy Welik, 64, who moved to Santa Barbara in 2007 from Silicon Valley after she retired as a computer programmer.

"I was in a Dining for Women chapter in Sunnyvale, and one of the first things I did was start a group here," said Mrs. Welik.

Since the chapters meet in people's homes, the number of members per chapter is somewhat limited, usually to a maximum of 25. "Peggy's group was full, so I decided to start



CARMEN SMYTH / NEWS-PRESS

Peggy Welik, left, and Melissa Hansen are the founders and leaders of two DFW chapters in Santa Barbara.

the world — helping them with education and childbirth, women in extreme poverty who deal with rape and incest," she said as she sipped a glass of wine before dinner.

Another charter member of the group is Toni Briones, 57, a real estate agent with Keller Williams Realty and a good friend of Ms. Hansen.

"Melissa did the research about Dining for Women, and I decided it was a worthwhile organization. We meet once a month and usually raise about \$300 to \$400. Members donate on a sliding scale according to what they might have spent for dinner at a restaurant," said Ms. Briones.

Some members who travel frequently have a set amount automatically charged to their credit cards each month, according to Mrs. Welik.

Dr. Rachel Aarons, a psychotherapist in private practice for more than 35 years and a Santa Barbara resident for 17 years, was among the "newbies" at the gathering.

"I'm looking forward to learning more about

month and thoroughly vets them to make sure they align with the seven United Nations Millennium Development Goals:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

• Ensure environmental sustainability

Carrie Hutchinson, a professor at Santa Barbara City College who has traveled in India, presented illustrated information about "The Unforgotten," the program that would be receiving funds for the month of October. Its name refers to the overlooked, unemployed and undernourished mothers and their children who survive in the vast garbage dumps in the city of Pune (Poo'-nay), India.

"Mothers and children pick through the trash for scraps of food to eat and for items that they can sell for a few rupees. With luck, they will eat one meal a day. They construct hovels made of plastic bags and scraps of metal where they live with their children," according to information from the national DFW.

Recalling her time in India, Ms. Hutchinson said, "India is a compelling place, an assault on the senses — the noise, the bright colors, the smells. The problems are very complex."

DFW's grant of \$41,000 over two years will go to 50 mothers with 100 daughters presently living in the Pune dump with support counseling, microloans and facilities to provide training. The grant will also cover school fees and tutoring for 100 girls.

Microloans are a key element to the program for creating a means for women to leave trash picking permanently. Each woman will be given