

MGYW's 2014 Annual Banquet

Since 2000, MGYW (Pakistani American Forum - Merit Grants for Young Women) has been successfully providing educational opportunities to young Pakistani women belonging to families making \$2 to \$3 per day and residing in urban slums or remote rural areas. According to UNICEF, youth literacy rate in Pakistan is about 70% with only 66% (70% of boys and 62% of girls) net primary school attendance. Overall, gender literacy gap is as high as 30% and MGYW is striving to fill this gap. MGYW does not build new schools but reaches all four provinces of Pakistan individually as well as by collaborating with renowned NGOs or with local community leaders.

MGYW's 1014 annual fundraising banquet was held recently in Southern California. The program was emceed by Sana Kamdar and assisted by Hera Kamdar - both young ladies are doctors and actively involved with local and global charities. Sana Kamdar started the program with thanking program sponsors, acknowledging the MGYW board members, and introducing Qari Tariq Fattani for Quranic Recitation. For the last 16 years, Qari Fattani has performed Qirat on almost all major TV channels of Pakistan. After soulful recitation by Qari Fattani, MGYW Vice President Zille Huma introduced the Chief Guest, Consul General Tasawar Khan. Consul General Khan commended the MGYW Board Directors who are also very active members of the community. He mentioned that while there are several U.S. organizations doing great work here and in Pakistan, he feels especially happy to support those who promote education. Statistically, he said, there are 18% women in the U.S. Congress compared to 22% in Pakistan's National Assembly. However, since 60 out of 67 Pak parliamentarians were inducted on reserved seats; real empowerment will be realized when all 67 women are directly elected. He also quoted Nelson Mandela: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." The MGYW Board member Dr. Farhana Mohamed followed with her presentation highlighting MGYW's accomplishments. Some of the significant projects which she described included Haripur Transportation, Pindi/Sagri District Graduation Incentive, Karachi Gift Pack, and Laboratory/Library setup at HSAF School, Kot Shera, Punjab. She also mentioned that MGYW has recently entered into an MOU with Pakistan Foreign Office Women's Association (PFOWA) for providing educational grants to bright young daughters of low-income foreign office employees. She then introduced talented and youthful Mrs. Iffat Tasawar Khan. In addition to raising four children, social and philanthropic work has been her passion for 25 years through active membership in diplomatic social welfare organizations, especially PFOWA. Iffat Khan briefly described many praiseworthy activities of PFOWA in bringing social and educational improvements to lives of many deserving foreign office employees. She appreciated MGYW's initiative and hoped in future many more PFOWA girls will benefit from MGYW grants.

The fundraising segment was conducted by Shaista Khan and Dr. Bina Kamdar. They successfully and passionately motivated the guests who made generous donations toward various MGYW projects spread throughout Pakistan. The event also included free raffle drawings on fabulous items donated by the Kamdar family. The musical entertainment segment was emceed by Ashraf Ali who passionately sang a favorite national song accompanied by the MGYW Board and Chief Guests on the stage. Arshad Ali & Shazia Ali gave enchanting musical performances throughout the evening. The program was memorable in all aspects and the MGYW Board Members who put tremendous effort included Tasneem Afzal, Sufia Altaf, Shaheen Awan, Iram Iqbal, Bina Kamdar, Shaista Khan, Farhana Mohamed, and Zille Huma Zaman. The Board is grateful to the event sponsors (Pakistan Link, Safer-e-Pakistan, Infinity Care, and Islamic Relief USA), generous donors, and volunteers for their support. The Link readers can visit MGYW website (www.mgyw.org) or the Facebook (www.facebook.com/pafmgyw) for more information. Tax-deductible donations are always welcome.

Photography: Anwar Khawaja, Ruby Faruqi, & Ambreen Mohamed

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