

BUILDING MOMENTUM TOGETHER: CRISTO REY ORANGE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL RAISES MORE THAN \$2 MILLION AT ANNUAL ¡VIVA! GALA

BY CRISTO REY STAFF

UNDER THE THEME “Building Momentum Together,” Cristo Rey Orange County High School raised over \$2 million at its third annual ¡VIVA! Gala, held at the Waldorf Astoria Monarch Beach Resort in Dana Point.

The milestone evening celebrated three years of growth and community impact, honored Fr. John Foley, S.J., the founder of the first Cristo Rey school in the nation, and drew more than 400 prominent Orange County philanthropists, corporate partners and community leaders.

Funds raised will support that shared momentum—helping ensure Cristo Rey remains an affordable option for students who might otherwise be unable to attend a Catholic, college-preparatory high school, one that offers a distinctive, year-round, real-world work experience as part of its curriculum.

The Santa Ana-based school, which opened in 2023, is completing its third year of operation and building on each year’s progress to grow its reach and impact.

“The Cristo Rey Orange County team has built an extraordinary high school for students from working-class families,” said Stephen Holte, founding president, Cristo Rey Orange County High School. “The overwhelming turnout and generosity of so many community and business leaders at this year’s ¡VIVA! Gala is further evidence that Cristo Rey’s mission is working—changing lives and preparing young people to be tomorrow’s leaders.”

The ¡VIVA! Gala’s success was made possible in part by the generosity of 31 sponsors whose commitment to Cristo Rey’s mission was central to the evening. WCM Investment Management served as the event’s Presenting Sponsor for the third straight year. Tim and Alanna Psomas were Platinum Sponsors. Birtcher



CRISTO REY STUDENTS WITH FOUNDING PRINCIPAL KARELYN ROBERTS, FOUNDING PRESIDENT STEPHEN HOLTE AND BISHOP KEVIN VANN. PHOTO COURTESY OF CRISTO REY ORANGE COUNTY

Anderson & Davis; Carmela and Ben Du; Michael and Debbie Felix Family; MJP Architects; St. John Vianney Chapel & Our Lady of Mount Carmel; and Woodside Credit joined as Gold Sponsors. Their leadership and philanthropy, alongside the full roster of sponsors, reflect the deep and growing investment the Orange County business community has made in Cristo Rey and the students it serves.

The success of this year’s gala is especially significant as construction continues on Cristo Rey’s new 63,000-square-foot campus in south Santa Ana. The new campus on South Harbor Boulevard in the heart of Orange County is on track to welcome the school’s first senior class when it opens this fall for the 2026–27 academic year.

“From the beginning, our vision was to acquire a home for a permanent campus to ultimately serve 500 students, faculty and staff members for years to come,” Holte said. “The success of this year’s ¡VIVA! Gala and the growing support from our passionate donors, corporate partners and the broader Orange County community is making it happen.”

Bishop Kevin Vann gave the opening prayer to begin the gala, and another of the evening’s highlights was honoring Fr. John Foley, S.J., Chairman Emeritus of Cristo Rey Network. Fr. Foley served as

the founding president of Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Chicago—the first school in the network—when it opened in 1996 and he is considered the founder of the national Cristo Rey movement.

Owners and top executives from many of the 60 Orange County companies partnering with Cristo Rey and its unique Corporate Work Study Program attended this year’s ¡VIVA! Gala. The work-study program develops confidence, professional capabilities and social skills in students who spend one day a week during the school year working onsite or remotely at area businesses.

Partners include: City of Hope, F&M Bank, Rady Children’s Health, Schools-First Federal Credit Union, Slater Builders, Hoag Hospital, Sperry Commercial and Sperry Equities, Brown and Streza, and Northgate Markets, among others.

“Our goal is not just to graduate students, but to send mission-driven young adults into the world who will serve and give back,” said Oscar Gonzalez, Chair of Cristo Rey Orange County Board of Directors and co-Chief Executive Officer of Northgate Markets.

Gloria Preciado, chief of staff at City of Hope Orange County and a member of the Cristo Rey Board of Directors, told the gala crowd her involvement with the school is deeply personal because of her

own upbringing.

“The first time I walked into Cristo Rey to speak to the students, I saw myself,” said Preciado, a first-generation Filipino who was raised by her single mother in a challenging environment. “I knew I wanted more for my life, and I knew it was possible in my heart. But I didn’t know how to get there. And that is why partnering with Cristo Rey is so meaningful because now we get to be that door for those students.”

Throughout the evening, Cristo Rey students served as ambassadors for the school, sharing their personal journeys with guests and offering a firsthand look at the program’s impact.

Among the Cristo Rey students greeting guests and sharing their stories of success, was Azusena, a junior and a member of the Cristo Rey’s founding class. During the formal program, she told her story about when she first learned about Cristo Rey as an eighth-grade student in Santa Ana. Azusena and her family worried the private high school would be out of reach financially and she might not fit in socially and make new friends.

“Well, three years later I’m still here! Attending Cristo Rey has opened many opportunities and I have grown and accomplished many things that I never imagined possible,” Azusena shared.

For more information, about Cristo Rey Orange County High School, please visit cristoreyoc.org.

If you are interested in becoming part of the Corporate Work Study program and hiring students to work for your company or organization, please contact Vice President André Feijóo at (714)-439-9626 x 301, afeijoo@cristoreyoc.org. If you are interested in supporting Cristo Rey Orange County’s broader mission, please contact Advancement Officer, Kelly Brennan (714)-439-9626 x 222, kbrennan@cristoreyoc.org. ✨