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Gurwin Photo Contest celebrates 25 years of smiles

Arts & Entertainment Community Photography Times of Smithtown

by Heidi Sutton - June 22, 2018



'Big Sibling' by Michael Danielson

'You don't take a photograph. You make it'— Ansel Adams

By Heidi Sutton

Gurwin Jewish Nursing & Rehabilitation Center in Commack hosted an award ceremony for its annual Photo Contest last Thursday evening. The event, which was held in the center's Simon Rainbow Room, celebrated 25 years of bringing beautiful photos to their residents and featured a slide show of the winning selections from this and previous years.

Generously sponsored by the Tiffen Company for the 12th year in a row, this year's competition drew over 700 entries from amateur photographers across the country. Of those submissions,

47 photos were chosen to be enlarged, framed and hung on permanent display for the enjoyment of the residents, staff, visitors and volunteers.

“It’s hard to believe we’ve been doing this for a quarter of a century,” said Dennine W. Cook, public relations director at Gurwin, who came up with the initial idea in 1993 as a way of “making [Gurwin’s] bare walls worthy of a smile.” According to Cook, in its infancy, the contest had two categories – color and black and white – with less than 100 entries. The annual event has since expanded to offer 12 categories including Nature, Long Island/New York, Travel, Still Life and the ever popular Pets, Children and Nature. “Needless to say, we’ve come a long way,” she said.



'Indigo' by Stan Mehlman

Addressing the photographers in the audience, Cook said, “[At Gurwin] our mission ... is to provide the highest quality of care to our residents while also providing them the very best quality of life. And that’s where all of you come in.”

She continued, “This contest ... is different from any other contest you might enter. Sure there are winners ... and there are prizes, but that’s where the similarities end.” Cook went on to explain that each year’s winners are displayed permanently for the enjoyment of the residents, first in the center’s Helen and Nat Tiffen Gallery and then up to the resident units to make space for the current year’s winners.



'Popping Bubbles' by Donna Crinnian

The public relations director went on to speak of the profound impact these beautiful images have made on residents of the 460-bed facility. She spoke of Faith who loves to look at photos of babies. “The babies, it seems, make her smile the most and so we move the [baby pictures] to Faith’s unit.” She spoke of Len, who is visited each day by his wife. “Together they stroll the halls, stopping to admire a photo that catches their eye. They may go the same way each day but they find something new to discuss every time.”

While the original 8- by 10-inch submissions will not be returned, Cook assured guests that all of them will be put to good use. “Each photo ... is given to our recreation departments in our nursing homes, assisted living and day care programs to be used for all kinds of projects all year long.” Whether they become inspiration for a painting, part of a collage or even placed at the doorway of a resident’s room, “they have a much higher purpose.

This year’s judges, James Dooley (former Director of Photography for Newsday and Administrator of the Alexia Foundation), Susan Dooley (Emeritus Chair of the Art Department at Nassau Community College and member of fotofoto gallery of Huntington) and Tony Lopez (Tony Lopez Photography), were tasked with choosing a grand prize winner along with honorable mentions for each category as well as Best in Show, which this year was awarded to Kathleen Hinkaty of Huntington for her playful piece, “Diaper Races.”

In addition, Gurwin’s resident judges Nancy and Trudy selected five of their favorites to be honored. According to Cook, “They poured over the photos ... considering not only their own preferences but also what they thought others would appreciate.”

“Although this contest is a great achievement for you as a photographer, it’s really about the people who get to see your work once it is chosen,” explained Cook.

President and CEO of Gurwin Family of Healthcare Services Stuart B. Almer agreed, stating, “We always enjoy this particular event,” sharing that when he gives tours of the facility, “everyone always stops to admire the photos. This is not just a once-a-year event – this is a 365-day-a-year event,” he stressed, thanking the photographers for their contribution.



'Diaper Races' by Kathleen Hinkaty

“All of the selections will be judged, discussed and enjoyed by so many appreciative eyes for years to come and to me that is the real honor – that your photos will hang for decades in our resident’s home,” said Cook. “These photos make all the difference in the world.”

Entries for next year’s Photo Contest will be accepted between Feb. 15 and April 15, 2019. Visit www.gurwin.org/about/photo-contest to see more of this year’s winners.

All photos courtesy of Gurwin Jewish



Heidi Sutton