

Sun Sentinel

Mental Health Association to erase labels and honor individuals at 'EPIC Awards Luncheon'

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The 19th annual "EPIC Awards Luncheon" will take place May 14 at the Signature Grand in Davie. This is the premier fundraiser for the Mental Health Association of Southeast Florida (MHA), event chairpersons are Yasmine Holbrook and Gary Dirda. advertisement

"EPIC is an acronym for 'Exceptional People Impacting the Community' and this year's honorees personify the essence of the award," said Paul Jaquith, president and CEO of MHA. "What these very diverse and dedicated individuals have in common is their commitment to the public well being, their efforts to improve the lives of citizens of our communities, and their advocacy for persons with mental illness."

Jen Klaassens, vice president of programs for The Wasie Foundation, will be the first recipient of the Hal Booth Memorial Award for Philanthropy. Sandra and Hal Booth were longtime supporters of MHA, volunteering their time and efforts. Hal passed away last year after a yearlong illness, and both Hal and Sandra requested that donations in Hal's memory be made to MHA.

Other honorees include Dr. Timothy Ludwig from the Broward Sheriff's Office, Gwen Henry of GEO Care, Lauren Zuchman of Henderson Behavioral Health, Lysandra Russell and Marcia Barry-Smith of Russell Life Skills and Reading Foundation's Dragonfly Darlings, Sandra McQueen-Baker from Fresh Start of Miami-Dade Inc. and Yueh-Mei Kim Nutter of Brinkley Morgan Law Firm.

"We are especially fortunate to have [Michael Mayo](#), longtime columnist at the *Sun Sentinel*, as the master of ceremonies," said Dr. Adam Rosenberg, chairman of MHA's board of directors. "Through his columns and his blog, [Michael Mayo](#) has been a tireless advocate for mental health issues." Mayo has worked for the Sun Sentinel for 25 years and has served as metro news columnist since 2002.

The theme of the event this year is "labels are for jars, not people."

"The event will feature individually hand-painted ceramic jars with a chalk surface label that people can write any label they wish," said Chris Yoculan, director of 9Muses - the arts program offered by MHA. The ceramic jars were painted by members of the 9MusesArtCenter and will be available for sale at the end of the event. "The MHA works in the community to reduce the stigma associated with behavioral health issues and labeling is a constant concern for anyone who receives a diagnosis."

"Since its inception in 1996, over 100 individuals have received an EPIC Award for their efforts to benefit the health and wellbeing of our community," said Jaquith.

Funds raised from the event will support the children's mentoring program Listen to Children and I'm Thumbbody. It will also help the 9MusesArtCenter provide art supplies and equipment for members who utilize the arts program.

Tickets are \$65. For more information, call 954-746-2055 or visit <http://www.mhabroward.org>.

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