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Sipping Water on Oyster Pond To Help Sobriety Across Island

By REMY TUMIN

The statistics never look good, but one thing remains clear: miracles do happen at Vineyard House. Thursday evening marks the 13th annual water tasting to benefit the only sober house on the Island, where staff, board members and volunteers hope not only to raise money for the organization, but to send people home with a message of helping out their neighbors.

“Whether they realize it or not, they are helping their [fellow] Islander . . . by supporting them and giving them a foundation to stay sober,” Vineyard House operations manager Kathleen Ferland said yesterday. “Everything goes to the house to help the residents so they can stay focused on staying sober, whether that means getting a job or learning how to balance a checkbook.”

Vineyard House was founded in 1997 and provides temporary housing for alcohol and drug dependent people who are beginning the road to recovery and need support during the transition. The residents, most of whom are Vineyarders, pay rent and attend support meetings while figuring out their next phase in life.

The elegant fund-raising event is hosted by Richard and Nancy Friedman on Oyster Pond in Edgartown, and will feature a water tasting provided by Nestle Waters, which owns Poland Springs, San Pellegrino and Perrier to name a few. Live music will be performed by Liz Longely; a raw bar and hors d’oeuvres will be catered by Jan Buhrman, and dessert will come from Espresso Love.

While most Island fundraisers have open bars, this one will be alcohol-free. President of the board Mark Jenkins says people are still guaranteed to have a good time on a beautiful summer evening overlooking the Oyster Pond.

And the fund-raising is important to help sustain Vineyard House. “Our residents are required to pay rent but that doesn’t cover the cost of what we offer, such as life skills, drug testing and such,” Mr. Jenkins said, adding: “Vineyard House is a really important organization that’s part of our community. We want people to have a good time but people should be aware that substance abuse is the Island’s largest health care problem and they’re

able to do something about it.

“We’ve seen miracles happen and seen people become important parts of this community.”

The evening will include raffle prizes, including a 24-inch copper repoussé wall map of Martha’s Vineyard from Tuck & Holand, a Provence basket, a surf-casting session, a Ray Ellis print, and a Farm Neck golf outing for four.

“I’m looking forward to people coming out to support the Vineyard House and the cause,” Ms. Ferland said. “We have 21 individuals in the house that really at some level are unaware of all the support that is behind them. It’s wonderful that people come out to support us.”

Because of the sensitivity and privacy of the success stories, it is sometimes difficult to share breakthrough moments. In today’s Gazette, a letter to the editor is published expressing gratitude to the program.

“I can honestly and sincerely say that the Vineyard House saved my friend’s life. The environment has offered him a safe haven with stability and support,” Pia Centenari-Lernard wrote. “Whatever my friend’s future holds, Vineyard House was there to hold his head above water in his most dire time of need . . . and that is commendable.”

The 13th Annual Water Tasting by the Sea is Thursday, July 29 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. For tickets call 508-693-8580 or visit vineyardhouse.org.