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Vineyard House: Sparkling Success on Tap

By REMY TUMIN

Sam is 47 years old and has been sober for a little over two years, the longest he's been sober since the age of 10. Brad, 49, became addicted to amphetamines in high school and has been sober for the past two years. Jill was the first graduate from the Vineyard House and is now a nurse's aid in Maine. These are a few of the life-changing stories that have come as a result of a patient's time at Vineyard House, and all of these people credit the facility with saving their lives.



Sipping as sun sets on Friedman property.

Vineyard House is not another step in the recovery process for Islanders; it is, as their new slogan says, a way home. Substance abuse is one of the biggest health care issues on the Island, and last Thursday evening, a group of devoted patrons and community members attended the 13th annual Water Tasting to benefit Vineyard House.

Vineyard House provides a residential program for recovering addicts, supporting them by giving them life skills as well as clinical therapy. Residents are required to attend meetings every day, and staff works with them to be prepared for a sober lifestyle outside of the house.

"There's a stigma attached to addiction despite the fact that everyone has been affected by it," Mary Nada, board adviser and volunteer fundraiser said. "There's no natural support group because everything's anonymous. It's an uphill battle."

But Thursday evening brought nearly 300 people under a tent at Richard and Nancy Friedman's estate on Oyster Pond in Edgartown. Staying true to the cause, the evening was a dry event and substituted for alcohol sparkling, still and flavored waters.

“It’s good to help a good cause. It touches every family,” Mr. Friedman said. “The Island is not an easy place to be sober.”

“There are so many triggers,” Ms. Nada added.

Attendees sipped on Pellegrino, Perrier, lemon soda, Vitamin Water, Smart Water and Saratoga water to name a few brands, and feasted on hors d’oeuvre provided by Jan Buhrman’s Kitchen Porch.

Dave and Vivian Stein were pulling into the estate when the state trooper who was directing traffic to the property saw that his inspection sticker expired 18 months ago. “You’re doing a good thing tonight so I’m going to let you go,” he said.

“That just set the mood for the entire night,” Mr. Stein said. “It’s a good and important cause; those are two strong words to describe it.”

A silent auction and raffle were held where people could win items such as a Ray Ellis painting, a Tuck and Holand metal map of the Vineyard, Lorraine Parish linens, and a weekend at the Liberty Hotel in Boston. “It’s never rained out,” treasurer Brian Mackey recalled. “It’s an opportunity to raise the attention level of the Vineyard House to the community and connect with good people.”

“It’s fun, with people who share the commitment to the Vineyard House and them helping Vineyarders at a fragile place in their lives,” board member Rufus Peebles said.

And as the sun began to set on the swans in the pond, the light hit the sparkling water in glasses on the red and white checkered tablecloths, causing reflections on the tent’s roof. “Vineyard House is trying to fight the disease, but we’re equally as concerned about the people’s families,” board president Mark Jenkins said. “We do whatever we can to help.”

Judy Fraser-Pearce has been a clinical therapist at Vineyard House for the past 12 years and has seen many patients come and go, and sometimes return. “People come to Vineyard House after long-term failure,” she said. “The addict affects at least four other people in their life so we support the family as well.”

The greatest reward of her work at the Vineyard House? “Seeing people change their lives.”