

ETTA's Silver Anniversary Celebration Brought Together Hearts of Gold *Tova Abady*

The ETTA 25th Anniversary Gala—held November 28th at the Beverly Hilton—began with a “big bang,” thanks to host Mayim Bialik, co-star of the *Big Bang Theory*, and Bill Prady, the TV series’ co-creator and executive producer.

Mayim Bialik said her eight-year run on the “Big Bang Theory” embraced inclusivity and has been the biggest joy of her career, which is why she is so happy to be involved with ETTA. The thing that strikes her the most about ETTA is its warmth, “everyone from staff, to clients, to volunteers.” She said the heart and soul of ETTA are the clients. One of the clients, Jacob Katz, was given the 2018 Moselle and Lazare Hendeles Youth Award.

A short video illustrated Jacob’s invaluable contributions as Administrative Assistant at YULA boy’s high school. Principal Rabbi Schreiber and other staff members had nothing but high praise for Jacob’s communication skills, his *middot*, and the way he has become a role model for all the students. Jacob’s nephew, Josh Glettner, spoke about skills that Jacob

taught him and said that they were very proud of each other.

Mr. Katz delivered an eloquent speech to the audience. “What is *tikkun olam*?” he asked. “It is to heal and repair the world. How do we do this? It’s by being kind to nature, to the earth, to animals, and to all people, especially when people are different from you. We can together make this a kinder and more beautiful world.” Jacob concluded, “I am a happy guy.”

Cathy Gott, Gala Committee Chairwoman, announced this year was the launch of the “Art of ETTA,” showcasing the amazing talent of ETTA clients, and asked attendees to take home a piece of ETTA selected from the beautiful art available on display.

Executive Director of ETTA, Dr. Michael Held, told the audience that Mrs. Etta Israel taught a small amount of students, but emphasized quality. ETTA, he said, is now about quality and quantity as they serve 150 clients who are their real champions. The program continued with a rousing rendition of Queen’s “We are the

Champions,” sung by Scott Siegal, a singer-songwriter and recording engineer with autism. He received a huge ovation.

Actor Tony Denison introduced his dear friends, Dena and Joel Bess, recipients of the ETTA 2018 Community Champions Award. Denison said he could speak for hours about Dena and Joel and never come close to how wonderful their whole family is, including their twins Alana and Michael, who worked at the summer youth program and are responsible for their parents’ involvement with ETTA; their son Robbie; parents Rabbi Gershon and Carol Bess; and Dr. David Sherman. L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti congratulated Joel and Dena by video.

Dena Bess spoke about a headline by a local publication which caught her attention. It read, “Celebrate, don’t separate.” Dena said, “The ETTA clients are who and what we celebrate.” She stated that celebrating each and every client for being exactly who they are as created by G-d is the guiding principle of ETTA and the fundamental reason for ETTA’s tremen-

fundamental reason for ETTA’s tremendous growth over the past 25 years. Dena said that Mrs. Etta Israel understood that to separate or to hide the special needs community from the public domain would be a loss to clients and a much bigger loss to the community.

Mayim Bialik introduced the recipient of the 2018 Visionary Award, Bill Prady. Mr. Prady has received dozens of awards, including Emmys, Golden Globes, and People’s Choice Awards. What impresses Mayim most about Bill, she said, is his vast knowledge about a wide range of subjects, and his love for all aspects of *Yiddishkeit*. Bill, she said, is a loving father who puts people at ease and gives so much time and effort to many charitable causes including ETTA.

Bill Prady spoke about meeting Oscar winner Ira Wohl during the time he worked as a production assistant on a kid’s talk show called “Livewire” on Nickelodeon.

In 1979, Wohl produced a short documentary film called “Best Boy.” The film tells the story of Ira’s cousin Billy, who was developmentally disabled. Billy was 52 and still living with his elderly parents. Ira helped his parents face the reality that they would soon not be able to take care of him. They had to call agency after agency until finding a home for Ira. Bill Prady said that in 40 years, things have not changed, which is why the work of ETTA is so necessary. He said caring is not just about just eating or sleeping. Prady said that ETTA doesn’t only provide basic needs, but lets kids go to camp—just like his own kids.

The president of ETTA’s board of directors, Kambiz Baboff, introduced eloquent ETTA client Shaina Barnett. She said that she has dreamed of living in a place with her friends where they can live and work together. Her dream is coming true with



L-R: Kam Baboff, ETTA Board president, honorees: Bill Prady, Dena and Joel Bess and Jacob Katz, Dr. Michael Held, ETTA executive director

ETTA’s project the “Village,” which will be in the heart of the Jewish community.

The importance of the “Village” was also shared by Jeff and Kelly Singer. Their family was introduced to ETTA five years ago when looking for a summer program for their daughter, Sophie. The Singers were thrilled to find a place where Sophie

could thrive among her peers. The Singers knew they found an environment where Sophie could be active, creative, and included. As a result of being treated with care and respect, their daughter became confident, independent, and able to find her place in this world. Sophie wishes that she could one day have her own place to live, own her own bakery, and be with her

friends. This is becoming a reality with ETTA “Village.” The “Village” will provide a place for adults with disabilities to live independently in a safe community surrounded by friends.

Mayim said that funding is the life blood of ETTA. It takes a lot of financial assistance to build the “Village” and while four million has been raised to date, many more millions must be raised to build this ambitious, progressive, and inclusive model for generations to come.

To top off an inspiring evening, Mayim introduced the big surprise, popular *cappella* group Six13 who have recently gone viral with their amazing Chanukah rendition of “Bohemian Rhapsody.” To the delight of the audience, they performed songs from their new album *Blessings*.

