

Local nonprofit fashions solutions to help educate poor children in Peru

By Kelsey Stuart

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Gabriella Brignardello returned to the runway of her nonprofit's third annual benefit fashion show, held June 29 in Westlake Village, and shared her good news with the crowd of supporters.

In March 2013, Mi Casa de Angeles and its Peruvian partners broke ground at a school site in Lima, Peru.

"It's not just about bricks and mortar," Brignardello informed the 250 people gathered for the fashion show. "It is about a positive environment with highly trained teachers given the tools they need to help change the world around them."

Founded five years ago by Brignardello when she was 15 and a sophomore at La Reina High School, Mi Casa de Angeles has raised just over \$100,000 in America and \$75,000 in Peru to improve the quality of education in impoverished areas throughout Peru.

"Education is a right that all children deserve," said Brignardello, of Thousand Oaks. "With the level of poverty in Peru, education is the key to changing lives."

Brignardello, whose father is from Peru, has had a love for the country and its people since she was little. As her family would visit Peru to see relatives, she took notice of the struggles and knew in her heart she would help to make things better someday.

"I've known Gabriella for 15 years," said Melissa Levinsohn, chief operating officer of Mi Casa de Angeles and a junior at Southern Methodist University. "As fellow overachievers at La Reina High School, I was drawn to her and promised to help when needed at the first mention of her plans for a non-profit. But I couldn't help thinking to myself, 'How often do high school students change the world?'"

Five years later, Levinsohn said she is honored to be a part of nonprofit and its annual garage sales, family movie nights and fashion shows.

More than 50 students came to the fashion show to help volunteer as servers, models and stage hands. Also participating were local fashion boutiques that donated 20 percent of the profits toward Mi Casa de Angeles.

"The cause is beautiful," said Twyla Monti, of Twyla K. "I love what she is doing and

what she has done.”

The Thrasher family came to support change in Peru.

“We visited the same shantytown that the Brignardellos go to,” Daryl Thrasher said, referring to his family’s 2007 trip to Peru through World Vision.

“We had a nanny named Maria Luisa that helped to inspire us towards helping Peru,” Thrasher said. Maria Luisa, also a Peruvian, was a close friend and nanny of the Brignardello family, as well.

“We just heard about what Gabriella was doing and wanted to help out,” said Thrasher, whose 6-year-old daughter Adair modeled in the show. “It’s inspiring and sets a good example for young people.”

Brignardello, who attends Stanford University, said her goal this year is to inspire a more innovative scene for her nonprofit.

“We are working on getting our social media sites together and hopefully setting up chapters at local colleges and high schools to raise more awareness,” she said.

On the Net: <http://www.micasadeangeles.com>

