



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 7, 2026

Contact:

Friendly Center

Fernando M. Donado

(714) 771-5300 x114

fernando@friendlycenter.org

Friendly Center's Havana Nights Gala Nets \$200,000, Honors Dr. Kenia Cueto's Leadership

ORANGE, Calif. — Friendly Center's sold-out Havana Nights Gala generated **\$200,000 in net proceeds** to support children and families across Orange County. Held October 2, 2026, at The Turnip Rose Promenade in Costa Mesa, the celebration brought together philanthropists, community leaders, donors, and partners while highlighting the organization's financial turnaround and collaborative leadership transition.

The evening honored **Dr. Kenia Cueto, PhD, President and CEO**, for guiding Friendly Center through a period of transformation, financial sustainability, and expanded community reach.

Since joining Friendly Center in December 2023, Dr. Cueto has led her team in eliminating an operating deficit of more than \$500,000 in less than two and a half years. She secured more than \$2.5 million in public funding, attracted over \$235,000 in new philanthropic support, and strengthened foundation and donor relationships to advance long-term financial stability.

Under her leadership, Friendly Center opened Friendly-Mart locations in Orange and Buena Park, allowing families to shop with dignity and choice. Expanded partnerships with school districts, colleges, universities, nonprofits, county agencies, and community organizations have increased access to food, family services, education, and workforce opportunities.

Doug Chaffee, Chair of the Orange County Board of Supervisors and Fourth District Supervisor, presented a County resolution signed by Chaffee and **Second District Supervisor Vicente Sarmiento**. It recognized Dr. Cueto's extraordinary leadership, trusted partnerships across sectors, and measurable impact on residents' quality of life. **Orange Mayor Dan Slater** also presented a proclamation on behalf of the City and City Council honoring her leadership and lasting community contributions.

These government partnerships have supported more than \$1 million in emergency rental assistance, the Buena Park Friendly-Mart, and expanded food assistance for local families.

During the gala, Dr. Cueto introduced **Jessica Tremontozzi as Interim President and Executive Director**. Their joint presentation demonstrated Dr. Cueto's support for Jessica's leadership and their shared commitment to a coordinated transition. Jessica brings 15 years of service to Friendly Center and a personal connection as a former program participant and volunteer.



Dr. Cueto will continue collaborating with Jessica and the team through the completion of her transition in **December 2026**, supporting key relationships and continuity. She plans to continue serving her community through future leadership, philanthropic, and service opportunities.

The evening's generosity included a **\$25,000 paddle-raise contribution from the Murphy Family Foundation**. The gala's lead supporters included Havana Partner Joe MacPhearson Foundation, Inc., and Tropicana Partners Ron and Claudia Nagele and John and Cyndi Ganahl. Friendly Center extends its appreciation to all sponsors, underwriters, honorary partners, donors, board members, staff, and volunteers whose generosity made the evening possible.

About Friendly Center

Founded in 1924, Friendly Center serves Orange County children and families through programs that address immediate needs and create pathways toward stability, opportunity, and hope.

For more information, visit friendlycenter.org.

###