

Fundraiser helps autistic children



Don Leach | don.leach@latimes.com

By **Joanna Clay**, joanna.clay@latimes.com

MAY 2, 2011, 9:28 PM



Editor's note: This corrects the caption of the photo with ACT Today Executive Director Nancy Alspaugh-Jackson, "Young and Restless" actress Kate Linder and author Mara Brown.

NEWPORT COAST — Mother's Day was celebrated a little early Monday with the third annual ACT Today!'s Mother's Day fundraiser at the Resort at Pelican Hill.

ACT Today! is a nonprofit that provides resources to families affected by autism.

Around 200 people gathered at the seaside resort to bid on auction items, listen to speakers and hear country singer Stephanie Quayle in an effort to raise money for autism while celebrating women.

Katherine Schwarzenegger, daughter of former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, gave the keynote speech. She spoke about her book "Rock What You're Got," which seeks to empower young women to find their beauty

12 WEEKS FOR ONLY 99¢
Hurry, offer ends 2/28

SAVE NOW >

"ACT Today! is such an amazing organization and has such an amazing cause: helping people with autism," she told the Daily Pilot. "My family obviously does a lot with people with intellectual disabilities and I grew up helping people who are autistic. This is something that is near and dear to my heart, and takes two causes that I love so much and puts them together."

The theme of the event was "Fearless Women, Mothers and Daughters Moving Mountains."

Becky Estep, with Talk About Curing Autism in San Diego, was honored for her perseverance in autism awareness after her son Eric was diagnosed with the disorder at age 2.

"This is such an honor to be recognized for the work I've done," she said. "I always felt if I didn't speak out and talk about what happened to my child, I'd be a bad mother."

At 9 months Eric was given a Hepatitis B vaccine, which caused strange symptoms, ending with his diagnosis two years later, Estep said.

Estep believes the vaccine had a direct correlation to his diagnosis. She has since lobbied on Capitol Hill to try and raise awareness about infant vaccines. She's also appeared on TV shows, such as "Good Morning America," to spread the word about her cause.

"There are many things wrong with the vaccine system that can be changed," she said.

Estep is not anti-vaccine and does not think vaccinations are the only way children become autistic. She also believes a genetic predisposition is a large factor.

Her husband is a lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps and federal agent, so she said she's especially passionate about the plight facing military families with special-needs children.

ACT Today! Executive Director Nancy Alspaugh-Jackson called Estep a "fearless activist" for families affected by autism.

One out of 110 children in America has autism. When it comes to military families, the number goes up to one in 88.

Alspaugh-Jackson pointed out that after such momentous news on Sunday from the president, with the killing of Osama bin Laden, the appreciation for the armed forces was reinforced. Now it's time to help them, she said.

Copyright © 2018, Los Angeles Times

This article is related to: [Health](#), [Medicine](#), [Pharmaceutical Industry](#), [Chemical Industry](#), [Entertainment](#), [Television](#), [Mother's Day](#)