

Society Notebook: Spurwink’s virtual gala succinct but still inspirational

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By Amy Paradysz

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Spurwink’s first virtual Humanitarian Award Gala on April 7 was an emotional appeal of support for the Portland-based nonprofit’s work in behavioral health and education services and a celebration of 2021 Humanitarian of the Year **Cullen Ryan**, executive director of Community Housing of Maine.

In keeping with the theme of “bloom,” Spurwink presented a touching video about its frontline workers finding ways to continue helping their clients grow during the pandemic.

“I’ve heard stories of caregivers willing to work hundreds of days in a row to keep clients feeling supported and safe,” said board Chair **Alistair Raymond**. “And others who were willing to live for extended periods of time away from their families.”

Event fundraising came in a bit shy of the \$140,000 goal with a total just over \$116,000. Close to \$100,000 of that was donated by host committee members and dozens of corporate sponsors led by Sun Life, The Boulos Company, USI, Aetna, Martin's Point Health Care, Wex and Foreside. Virtual paddle raises and an online auction brought in another \$16,000.

The money raised supports Spurwink in providing services to children, adults and families in Maine – about 8,500 people a year.

“Our treatment serves the critical needs of some of our most vulnerable neighbors,” said Spurwink President and Chief Executive Officer **Eric Meyer**. “We’re talking about foster children, refugee and immigrant children and their families, those affected by child abuse, those seeking opioid addiction treatment, and those who have faced human trafficking.”

Although the one-hour virtual program was much shorter than in years when the gala included dinner, dancing, mingling and multiple awards, one thing remained the same: The humanitarian of the year was an inspiration.

“When Spurwink selects the humanitarian of the year, they identify a community leader who not only makes Maine a healthier place to live and work but who also embodies the shared values of dedication, respect, innovation and partnership and is person-centered and caring,” said board member **Dan Fishbein**, president of event sponsor Sun Life U.S. “Cullen Ryan has demonstrated these values in his service to homeless and special needs populations for nearly four decades.”

Ryan focused his on-camera time on the core of his message: that we can and should end homelessness in Maine.

“I believe that we truly can end homelessness and that we can create a world that is more inclusive of people with disabling conditions,” he said. “We see resources coming in and a paradigm shift in the world where people are caring about each other better. We’re working to correct wrongs. We’re working on diversity, equity and inclusion and helping to make the world more equitable for Black, Indigenous and people of color. That word ‘inclusive’ is really important to me, because we have populations who are not yet fully included.”

The recorded program is available at spurwink.org/humanitarian. Donations are always accepted online.

Amy Paradysz is a freelance writer based in Scarborough. She can be reached at [\[email protected\]](#)

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