



"We have to talk about mental illness. We have to talk about suicide," Honoree Melissa Rivers said as she accepted the Beatrice Stern Media Award.

## Melissa Rivers honored at 2016 Erasing the Stigma Leadership Awards

Melissa Rivers remembers that no one said the word "suicide" out loud when her father, Edgar Rosenberg, took his life in 1987.

"Everybody whispered it," Melissa said. Refusing to stay silent in the face of stigma, the courageous young woman found her voice as a suicide prevention advocate. In April, Didi Hirsch honored the *Fashion Police* producer and co-host with the Beatrice Stern Media Award for all she does to help people affected by suicide. "We have to talk about mental health. We have to talk about suicide," Melissa said. "Look how far we've come ... that we can fill a ballroom and openly discuss

it!" The event featured the screening of "Stigma," a video of honorees and Didi Hirsch clients, employees and Board members talking about their families' experience with mental illness, and a moving stage presentation that included actress/ UFC fighter Ronda Rousey and her mother, AnnMaria De Mars. Also honored were writer/director Maya Forbes, whose film *Infinitely Polar Bear* is based on her father's experience with bipolar disorder, and Michael Botticelli, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, for his openness about his longterm recovery from substance use disorder.



(Left-right) Didi Hirsch CEO Dr. Kita S. Curry, Board Members and Event Co-Chairs Shawn Amos and Lisa Petrazzolo and honoree Maya Forbes.



Leadership Chair Marty Frank, a Didi Hirsch Board member, with CEO Dr. Kita S. Curry. Under his leadership, the event raised a record \$540,000!



Board Member Thomas Han with Actress/ UFC fighter Ronda Rousey, an Award presenter and former honoree, and Los Angeles City Councilman David Ryu.



Singer/songwriter KT Tunstall spoke before her performance about how stigma affected a friend with mental illness.



Melissa received the Beatrice Stern Media Award from Bea's granddaughter Andrea Stern (middle), a former *Fashion Police* intern; with parents Marilyn and Jeffrey.



Actress Eva LaRue, who emceed the event, with Melissa Rivers. Eva talked about how her mother's Attention Deficit Disorder made her childhood "chaotic."

# Three-time Olympian Suzy Favor Hamilton to speak and warm up runners at Alive & Running

Three-time Olympian, runner and author, **Suzy Favor Hamilton**, will speak and lead the warm-up at Didi Hirsch's 18th Alive & Running 5K Walk/Run for Suicide Prevention on **Sunday, Sept. 25, 2016**.

A seven-time U.S. National Champion runner, Suzy will talk about her and her brother's experience with bipolar disorder, his death by suicide and her own attempt.

Alive & Running raises awareness and funds for Didi Hirsch's Suicide Prevention Center, which helps people who have thought about, attempted or lost someone to suicide.

The event includes a Health and Wellness Expo, open between 7:30-10:00 am, where runners and walkers can learn more about suicide prevention while enjoying live music, a raffle with great prizes, free massages and giveaways including snow cones and animal balloons.

For the fifth year in a row, **Copenhagen Pastry** owner Karen Hansen, who lost her brother to suicide, will hand out slices of Danish kringle

from her booth in the Expo. Karen wakes before sunrise to prepare the almond paste-filled pastries in memory of her brother, Peter, also a baker, who suffered from depression and died by suicide 14 years ago.

Register or donate at  
[www.AliveandRunning.org](http://www.AliveandRunning.org)

"He was this really talented, honorable person and I wanted to celebrate his memory by doing what he loved," she said. "When you lose a loved one, you look for ways to pay tribute to them. Whether it's making the best pastries for my stores or donating them to Alive & Running, it is my way of honoring my brother and what Didi Hirsch does to help people like him."

Proceeds from the race fund support groups, student outreach, and training programs for chat counselors, among other things.

The Fletcher Family Foundation is the event's Presenting Sponsor; Platinum sponsors include the Kluff

Family and Andrew E. Rubin. Generous in-kind donors include Trader Joe's, Clif Bar, Dunkin' Donuts, Randy's Donuts, Starbucks and Western Bagel.



U.S. National Champion runner Suzy Favor Hamilton lost her brother to suicide. She will speak about his death, her family's experience with bipolar disorder and her own suicide attempt.

**ALIVE & RUNNING**  
5K Walk/Run for Suicide Prevention

## Couple who met at Didi Hirsch's crisis counselor training raises funds for Suicide Prevention Center



Michael and Kim Rexford with their children. The couple met while training for the Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Crisis Line and started a foundation that supports the Center.

Michael Rexford was in his early 20s when a doctor told him he had an illness that could take his life at any time. In response to the devastating news Michael thought about ending his life. Fortunately, the doctor was wrong and he fully recovered.

Michael decided to volunteer at Didi Hirsch's suicide prevention hotline to help others in crisis. On his first day of training, he sat beside a woman named Kim who worked for the agency as a psychologist. The two fell in love and married and now have two school-aged children.

Michael no longer has time to volunteer on the Crisis Line and Kim is no longer with Didi Hirsch, but the couple remains committed to supporting suicide prevention. They started LightHopeLife Foundation,

which raises money for organizations that provide advocacy, training, research and services in suicide prevention. Kim is an officer and member of the Board.

The group raised more than \$20,000 in its first few months and donated about half to the Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center. Michael, an entertainment lawyer, plans to organize a concert and motorcycle benefit to raise more money for the cause.

"The Suicide Prevention Center has been a leader in the effort to reduce suicide and needs funds to maintain that leadership position," Michael said. "There are so many people affected by mental illness, but because it carries a stigma, it doesn't get the necessary attention. We need to eliminate the stigma of mental illness so people can get the help they need."

# Moms and children recover together at renovated Via Avanta Zev Yaroslavsky Family Center

A cheerful nursery with play mats and rocking chairs and a classroom stocked with books and toys are “happy places” at Didi Hirsch’s Via Avanta, where mothers in recovery from mental illness and substance use disorders can bond with their young children.

Via Avanta is one of the few residential centers in Southern California where mentally ill mothers can receive treatment without having to live apart from their young children.

The family-focused program helps mothers develop positive parenting skills and better ways to cope with stress and the symptoms of their mental illness. Children learn developmentally appropriate ways to play with parents and peers and are more prepared to succeed in kindergarten.

In 2013, Didi Hirsch undertook a \$4.1 million project to renovate Via Avanta’s two buildings and grounds; it included creating space for therapeutic and recreational activities and improving the nursery, family living quarters and children’s areas. Former Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky helped secure \$2.2 million in county funds to renovate the 22,000-square-foot campus, now

called the Zev Yaroslavsky Family Center. At a dedication ceremony in March, Los Angeles County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl (3rd District) lauded her predecessor as a visionary for reducing family homelessness by addressing untreated mental illness in mothers. The W. M. Keck Foundation granted \$300,000 to renovate the children’s learning center. Other funders include the Ahmanson Foundation, the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, the George Hoag Family Foundation, the City of Los Angeles, the California Health Facilities Financing Authority and individual donors.



## Via Avanta dedication:

(Above) Mothers and children enjoy bonding time at Via Avanta’s new W. M. Keck Foundation Children’s Learning Center.

(Right) LA County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl (3rd District) with former Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, Didi Hirsch CEO Kita S. Curry, PhD and LA County Department of Mental Health Acting Director Robin C. Kay, PhD.



# Teen leaders shine at Glendale’s first Teen Summit



Teen support group graduates show leadership skills by organizing Didi Hirsch’s first Teen Summit.

Justin G. became so depressed in eighth grade that he dropped out of school. “It became a physical thing where I couldn’t move,” he said. “All motivation got sucked out of me and I didn’t look forward to anything.”

Referred to Didi Hirsch Glendale by his mom, he started treatment with a counselor who “helped clarify which direction I should take.” He also joined Band of Brothers, one of several teen support groups funded by Las Candelas. The group, which includes boys ages 14-18, “was super cool. They basically teach us what it takes to be men. They make it okay for us to ask questions and give us a safe place to talk,” Justin said.

Now back in school and on track to graduate in June, Justin was invited to Didi Hirsch’s Launch Pad

group for teens who have made enough personal progress that they are ready to take on a leadership role. Under the supervision of their therapists, the group hosted Didi Hirsch’s first Glendale Teen Summit on July 29, where about 50 teen clients learned about animal therapy, spraypaint art, poetry, LGBTQ issues and Glendale Community College opportunities. The all-day event included lunch donated by Scarantino’s, a poetry slam and panel discussions with community leaders, some of whom talked about their own experiences with mental illness.

“That was the best part,” Justin said. “As kids, we look up to adults as role models. Learning that a lot of them have gone through struggles, succeeded and gone on to do amazing things gave me and the other students a lot of hope.”

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Didi Hirsch Newsletter

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**Mission Statement**

Didi Hirsch transforms lives by providing quality mental health and substance use services in communities where stigma or poverty limits access.

**WRITER**

Randy Cohen

**DESIGN, LAYOUT**

Joey Buda

**PRESIDENT/CEO**

Kita S. Curry, PhD

**DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNICATIONS**

Kim Kowsky

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**For information about how you can support Didi Hirsch, call Joel Wyatt, Vice President of Development, at 310-751-5425.**

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If you would like to be added or removed from our mailing list, please contact the Development Department at (310) 751-5455

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