



NEWS RELEASE

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First Step's 5th Annual Caring Hearts Luncheon Sets Attendance and Fund-Raising Records

SARASOTA, FL -- A record 237 guests attended the 5th Annual Caring Hearts Luncheon benefiting First Step of Sarasota's Mothers & Infants program. SunTrust was the Platinum sponsor for the event, which raised more than \$40,000 for Mothers & Infants. The program, which provides substance abuse rehabilitation and counseling to pregnant women, recently celebrated its 200th healthy, drug-free birth.

This year's luncheon honored Lee Peterson as the first "Caring Hearts Mom of the Year." Lee, a mother of three, has dedicated much of her life to helping those suffering from mental illness. Along with her husband, Bob, Lee is well-known as a founder of the NARSAD Florida. Previously known as the National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression, NARSAD is the world's leading charity dedicated to mental health research. The organization has raised almost \$4 million for mental health research since 1998.

In her acceptance speech, Lee spoke of the relationship between mental illness and substance abuse, noting that many who suffer from mental illness use alcohol or drugs as a way to medicate their condition rather than seek treatment from a medical professional.

Always an event highlight was a speech by a Mothers & Infants client, Alisa, who shared the story of her own addiction and told how, with the help of the Mothers & Infants program, she has hope for a bright, promising future. Alisa graduated from Mothers & Infants on Valentine's Day and moved to an apartment with her 6-month old son, Matthew.

First Step of Sarasota has provided high-quality, affordable substance abuse treatment and recovery programs on Florida's Gulf Coast for more than 40 years. Last year, more than 15,000 individuals were served through the agency's prevention and treatment programs.



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