

EYE ON O.C. By Anne Valdespino

To our Eye on OC Readers: Whenever parties are scarce, Eye on O.C. will keep fun photos of the county's most interesting people coming as we profile key philanthropists, organizations and fundraisers in this space.

GET TO KNOW | Sickle Cell Foundation

BY BENN HADLAND FOR THE REGISTER

Many Orange County residents don't know much about sickle cell disease, a genetic blood disorder that primarily affects African Americans. Star Simmons, a mother of two children with the disease, is out to change that. Simmons started the Sickle Cell Foundation of Orange County in 2006. The organization provides a variety of counseling and advocacy services for patients and their families and spreads awareness about the condition throughout the county.

HOW THEY PARTY



The big night

Posh Party: Held at the end of the year, the annual Black Tie Gala reached its seventh year in December. The masquerade theme encouraged guests to dress in a colorful array of masks. It also serves as an awards ceremony, recognizing outstanding volunteers.



Walkathon

Walking the walk: The annual Sickle Cell Walkathon promotes awareness of sickle cell disease and raises money for the foundation. Here, families, including kids in strollers, walk in the 2011 event. This year's walk will be in April at Irvine's Heritage Park.

FRIENDS IN DEED

Celebrity volunteer

Honored guest: Anna Darkwa and children's book author Quentin Holmes attended the gala in December. Holmes received an award that night for his work with the organization, which included reading to children at hospitals.



Hands-on helper

Pitching in: Cathy Woodard of Anaheim was one of the many volunteers who helped put together the organization's Black Tie Gala in December. She had the task of serving wine.



KATE LUCAS, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

WHO'S IN CHARGE

Starlerra ("Star") Simmons

Role: Founder and president of the Sickle Cell Foundation of Orange County, she teaches sickle cell patients and their families how to live with the disease, and promotes awareness of the illness to the general public.

Personal: Born and raised in south Orange County. She learned everything there was to know about sickle cell disease while caring for her son, Charon; for 15 years she drove to Los Angeles three times a week for treatment and support.

Words to live by: "Live by design, not by diagnosis" isn't just the foundation's motto, it's also a testament to Simmons' courage in facing down the disease.

"There are no victims in my house," she says.

Most recent award: Phenomenal Women Honoree 2012 from the Orange County section of the National Council of Negro Women.

Media: Has made multiple appearances on "Joy in Our Town" on the Trinity Broadcasting Network since 2009.

WHO THEY HELP



Mara Belle

Special visitors: Charon Simmons, left, and author Holmes pay a recent visit to Mara Belle, a sickle cell patient at Miller Children's Hospital in Long Beach.



Fountain Valley patients

Holiday party: Sickle Cell Foundation of Orange County volunteers pose for a group picture in 2012 with patients receiving treatment at Fountain Valley Regional Hospital.

Elliot Simmons II

Role: Vice president. He networks with and advises fathers of sickle cell patients.

Personal: Served two tours in Saudi Arabia with the U.S. Marines. He is Star's husband.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Address: P.O. Box 3780, Mission Viejo, CA 92690

Phone: 949-331-8121

Email: info@scfoc.org

Website: Scfoc.org

IN THE FAMILY



Charon Simmons

Dual role: In September 2011, Charon went into a coma and his heart stopped twice because of complications from sickle cell disease. At 24, he now counsels fellow patients, and he's a spokesman and secretary for the foundation.



Alyssa Simmons

Sister and spokeswoman: Like her older brother, Alyssa, 9, also has sickle cell. The youngest member of the Simmons family often speaks to young sickle cell patients. She understands what it's like to live with the disease and still have a happy childhood.

BY THE NUMBERS

\$43,000

Funds raised in 2012

9

Board members

450

Units gathered through blood drives

40

Average life expectancy of sickle cell patients

1 in 1,200

Number of Hispanic Americans with sickle cell disease

1 in 500

Number of African Americans with sickle cell disease

1 in 12

Number of African Americans with the sickle cell trait