

STROLL®

Hope Ranch

THE SUNDERLAND FAMILY

*and the Heart of
Cottage Health*

Cover Story by Sharon Jordano
Cover Photo by Ingrid Bostrom





The Tiara Ball Committee, including Hope Ranch residents: Mari McAlister and Sharon Jordano

Cottage Tiara Ball 2026: An Evening of Gratitude and Giving

BY SHARON JORDANO
PHOTOS BY BARON SPAFFORD

A Community Gathers For The Children Who Count On Us

On a luminous evening at the Ritz-Carlton Bacara Santa Barbara, our community came together with a shared purpose and an unmistakable sense of pride for the annual Cottage Tiara Ball gala. The grand ballroom shimmered, candles flickered across linen-draped tables, and neighbors greeted one another with the ease that comes from living in a place where relationships matter. This was not simply a gala—it was a celebration of what becomes possible when generosity, excellence, and compassion meet.

The evening benefited Cottage Children’s Medical Center (CCMC), the only comprehensive pediatric medical center on the Central Coast and a vital part of Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital

and our region. For many in the room—friends, physicians, nurses, caregivers, longtime supporters, and of course, families from Hope Ranch—this cause is deeply personal. Nearly all of us know a child whose life has been touched by Cottage’s care or a caregiver whose steady presence has helped a family through a challenging time.

The evening opened with an engaging dance performance of “The Little Mermaid” by the State Street Ballet—an elegant and joyful beginning that captured the resilience and spirit of childhood. It set the tone for a night devoted to the well-being of the youngest in our community.

As the evening unfolded, the sense of connection in the room deepened. There was a shared understanding that the

work of caring for children is both tender and profound, and that each person in the ballroom plays a part in ensuring that families across our region have access to the medical care, comfort, and expertise they need.

Later in the program, guests were introduced to Hope Ranch residents Emily and Robert Sunderland, whose story was shared through a moving short film. Their journey — marked by resilience and the lifesaving care their daughter Athena received in CCMC’s Haselton Family NICU — reminded everyone why this community gathers each year. Their experience illuminated what becomes possible when we stand together: a child’s healing and a future strengthened by compassion.



Matt & Sheri Fay, Tony & Dina Chase, Sharon & Jeff Jordano



Cottage Health Board Chair Eric Seale with his wife, Sandy



Nicole Wester, who serves on the Cottage Tiara Ball planning committee, and her husband, Cottage Health President and CEO Scott Wester



Cottage Health Immediate Past Board Chair Steve Zola with his wife, Belinda



Emily Sunderland with Athena in the Cottage Children's Medical Center Haselton Family NICU. Photo by Ingrid Bostrom.



Patrick and Mari McAlister, and guests

The Sunderland Family's Journey of Courage and Community

When Emily and Robert Sunderland look back on their daughter Athena's earliest days, they describe a season marked by both profound uncertainty and extraordinary grace. After surviving the 2025 Palisades Fire, the family was just beginning to settle into their new home in Hope Ranch when Emily's water broke unexpectedly at 28 weeks. With three young children at home and baby Athena arriving prematurely, the Sunderlands found themselves thrust into a moment no parent ever expects.

At the Cottage Children's Medical Center Haselton Family NICU they discovered not only world-class neonatal care but a team that embraced their entire family with compassion and steadiness. Neonatologists, nurses, respiratory therapists, and Child Life specialists worked in concert to support Athena's fragile early weeks, while also caring for Emily and Robert as they navigated fear, exhaustion, and the logistics of keeping life stable for their older children.

The Sunderlands often speak about how deeply they felt the presence of community during that time — from the caregivers who celebrated every small milestone with them, to the neighbors who helped them rebuild their routines in Santa Barbara. "We're so grateful for the support and care we received from Cottage," Emily said. "Athena wouldn't be here without them."

Today, Athena is a thriving and joyful reminder of what becomes possible when skilled hands and a community's heart meet at exactly the right moment.

Watch Athena's story at cottagehealth.org/athena

Leadership with Heart and Vision

Cottage Health President & CEO Scott Wester has dedicated his career to strengthening nonprofit health systems and expanding access to exceptional care. His wife, Nicole, brings that same spirit of service to her role on the Cottage Tiara Ball Committee, where her thoughtful guidance helped shape this year's event. Their leadership reflects a deep belief in community partnership and the power of philanthropy to transform lives.

During Scott's remarks at the gala, what resonated most was his steady presence and clarity of purpose. He spoke of Cottage Health's mission and values—excellence, integrity, and compassion—not as abstract ideals, but as values lived out daily by caregivers across the organization. He acknowledged the physicians, nurses, and staff who bring expertise and humanity to every patient encounter, and he shared a vision for expanding clinical partnerships that strengthen pediatric care right here at home.

Education, he noted, is central to that vision. Cottage's pediatric residency program graduated its first class in 2025, marking a meaningful milestone of the the hospital's commitment to academic excellence. Generous Cottage supporters have also made it possible to create a new endowed chair of the pediatric residency program. Dr. Melissa Ruiz was appointed as the inaugural chair, ensuring that residents learn under exceptional mentorship as they care for children and families now and for decades to come.

The Caregivers We Trust with What Matters Most

Throughout the evening, heartfelt recognition was given to the caregivers who form the backbone of Cottage Children's Medical Center. Doctors and nurses stood alongside pediatric pharmacists, clinical dietitians, respiratory care practitioners, medical social workers, and child life specialists—each playing a critical role in the healing process.

Cottage Children's Medical Center serves more than 14,000 children each year. Its inpatient services include an 18-bed Acute Care Pediatrics Unit, a 22-bed Level III Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for the most vulnerable infants, an eight-bed Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, and a Level II Pediatric Trauma Center. Behind those numbers are children—and families—whose lives have been shaped by compassionate, expert care.

Cottage recently celebrated the opening of the new Grotenhuis Pediatric Clinics in January, expanding access to pediatric specialty care in a warm, family-centered environment. Located next to Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital, the new clinics double their capacity, support a team-based care model, and offer coordinated behavioral health services thanks to generous support from the McCausland Foundation.



Ann Gormican Anderson, Fabiana De Thuin, Geri Bidwell, Leslie Haight and Nina Katsev



Zack & Kristen Cantor, Emily & Robert Sunderland



Daniel and Yumi Bollag

The Giving Sea: Where Generosity Becomes Healing

As the program drew to a close, guests were invited to explore The Giving Sea, a collection of meaningful ways to support pediatric care. Each item—whether an Angel Eye camera that allows parents to see their newborn in the NICU at any hour, a bedside ultrasound that speeds diagnosis, or a pediatric simulator that helps teams practice life-saving skills—represents a moment of comfort, connection, or healing for a child and their family.

These are not abstract needs. They are tools that bring reassurance during vulnerable moments and strengthen the care teams who serve our community's children. For the Santa Barbara community, The Giving Sea offers a way to make a tangible difference—standing with families like the Sunderlands and ensuring that every child has access to the care they deserve.



Learn more at cottagehealth.org/givingsea



A Community That Lifts Children Up

The Cottage Tiara Ball is more than a gala. It is a reflection of who we are as a community—neighbors who show up for one another and who understand that when we care for our children, we strengthen our future. This year's event was a reminder that generosity is not just a gift—it is a legacy.



Drs. Lisa and Brock Metcalf



Diamond Sponsor Ben Bollag (center) with his sons Daniel and Michael