

## **Food Bank Gala at Levi's Stadium Scores Against Hunger**

**By Diane Andrews**

For a \$149-dollar ticket to the 2015 Taste of Champions benefit for Bay Area food banks, about 400 hungry sports fans had Levi's Stadium all to themselves on March 1. The benefit launched the March through May "Stand Up for Kids" campaign and raised over \$100,000 for the Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties and the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano.

The two food banks teamed for the first time to sponsor the gala, where attendees enjoyed a sweeping view of Levi's Stadium from the Yahoo! Fantasy Football Lounge, gourmet food prepared by stadium chefs, live music and—as a special draw—photo and autograph opportunities with more than a dozen NFL, NHL, MLB and Olympic sports champions.

Live and silent auctions benefitted the truly hungry. A plate of four peanut butter cookies made by U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame member and figure skating gold medalist Kristi Yamaguchi sold for \$300.

"I can't cook, but I can bake," she says. Growing up in Fremont, Yamaguchi loved her mom's spaghetti, cheese fondue and tacos. "Being a mom now, I try to do organic food and eat as healthy as possible."

A one-of-a-kind Epiphone guitar autographed by all the champion athletes present—including Stanley Cup hockey champion Brett Hedican (married to Yamaguchi) – was auctioned for \$3,500. Inspired by the annual Taste of NFL fundraisers, Eric Wright, a former 49ers cornerback and now the alumni coordinator for the 49ers, teamed with the food banks to rally the sports celebrities for the benefit.

The lineup of champions included former 49ers head coach George Seifert and former 49ers players Keena Turner, Gene Washington, Guy McIntyre, Dwaine Board, Allan Kennedy, Dennis Brown and Jesse Sapolu, who flew up from Orange County. Other champions present included former Oakland Raiders wide receiver Fred Biletnikoff and 1996 Olympic Track Gold Medalist Kenny Harrison.

"It's awesome. We met some incredible sports legends," says Alexia Nguyen, who flew from Colorado with her husband and daughter to attend the benefit. "And the food is great."

Sous chef Alvin Quinol is a member of the Levi's Stadium culinary team that prepared the gourmet Italian, Spanish and Asian food for Taste of Champions.

"We're one of the first stadiums to use fresh foods, and 70 to 80 percent is made in house by the culinary department," says Quinol.

"This is a fantastic venue. A lot of people are here as much for the stadium as for the event," says Larry Sly, Executive Director of the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano. "It's a thrill to have the 49ers alumni and Kristi and others we saw growing up in the Olympics—all here to encourage people to be here to raise money to feed people."

Kattya Breitenbach won a raffle opportunity drawing for two people to watch the 49ers practice.

"I'm really excited to see them practice. Maybe Colin Kaepernick will play catch with me," says Breitenbach.

"It was a success," says Crystal Ulrich with Second Harvest Food Bank. "I've had people come up to me and ask if we're doing it next year. It's a great way to raise awareness about hunger."

"This [area] is as rich as it gets, yet people need food," says Sly.

Every month, Second Harvest Food Bank and the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano feed enough people to fill 68,500-seat Levi's Stadium about six and a half times. And \$149, the price of a ticket to Taste of Champions, is enough to provide meals for one child for an entire summer.