

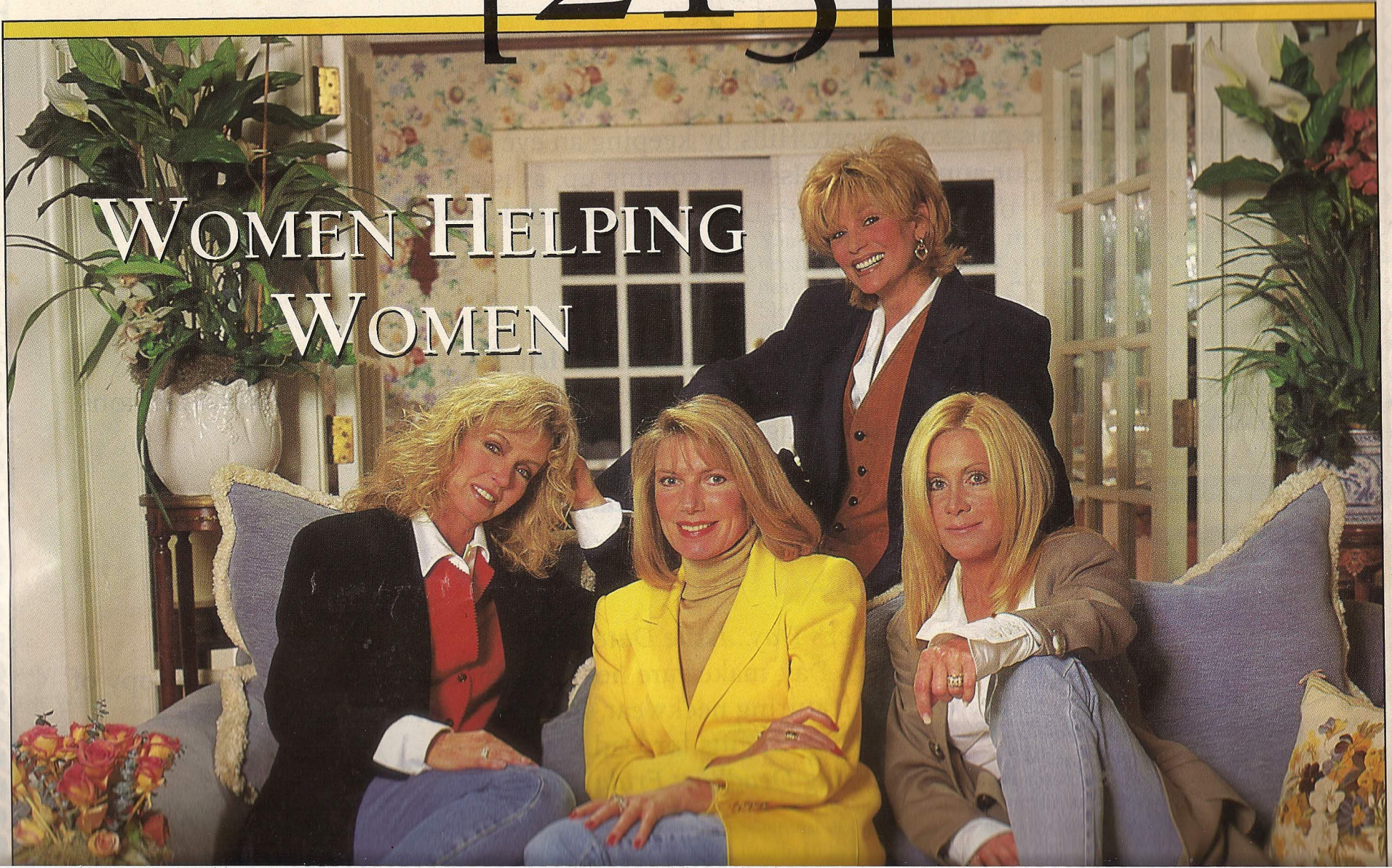
# BEVERLY HILLS

## [213]

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### WOMEN HELPING WOMEN



**W**hen the fourth annual "Women Helping Women" luncheon is held at the Los Angeles Mission on May 5, it will be the highlight of another very special year in the lives of some very special women—Mary Frann, Donna Mills, Susan Sullivan, Joan Van Ark, and the other members of the Celebrity Action Council. They are actively engaged in helping some other equally special women—those women at the Anne Douglas Center, the central facility of the Mission's City Light Women's Outreach programs. The residential program of the City Light Rehabilitation Program offers homeless or otherwise despairing women the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

The Celebrity Action Council, an auxiliary group of the City Light program, began with Mary Frann and Donna Mills. "We went down and talked to the women already committed to live there and then we each called friends. There were about five of us in the beginning," Frann says. "But there have been tremendous growth leaps. Our goal is beginning to take place. We always envisioned people would want to join us."

With more than 20 core members of the Council and some 300 individuals who attend the luncheon, Frann and Mills have reason to be proud of an effort that began with just the two of them and has now expanded to such size, including many men.

Originally, the members of the Celebrity Action Council met on an



informal basis with the women in the residential program. "They're starved for outside interaction. We offer our friendship and receive their friendship back," Frann says. "Every woman on this council is proactive, not just a name on the letterhead."

Mills agrees. "It doesn't cost any money to go down. We only started to do fund raising because we saw a need for an art program."

The "Women Helping Women" luncheon is designed to finance the art therapy workshops, and create a fund for special emergency needs for program participants. The

women in the program create masks, wood cuts, and mono prints. Prior to the luncheon each year, a small art gallery is set up where the women sell their works. Each piece of art has a story with it, a description of what the artist was trying to express.

For last year's luncheon, Joan Van Ark and her friend Kevin Miller created a video from the mask workshop. In presenting its viewing, Van Ark said: "Life imitates art, but down here at the Women's Mission, art imitates life. Art is healing, revealing, and therapeutic, but none of the work is as

honest, brave, or spiritual as that done in the mask workshop."

The video was entitled "The Masks," but it might have been called "The Smiles." After showing the work and imaginative effort that goes into creating the masks, the women—the artists—hold the masks to their faces and, one by one, remove them, revealing broad smiles of triumph and accomplishment.

"These women have lives as damaged as it's possible to be," Frann says. "And they're able to express themselves through the art programs."

Van Ark's loving video shows they are winning, taking control of their lives again—with the willing assistance of many who work to help ensure their success.

At the luncheon, Lilly Tartikoff will be honored with the "Women Helping Women" award. Tartikoff, along with Ronald O. Perelman, Chairman and CEO of Revlon, Inc., founded the Revlon/UCLA Women's Cancer Research Program to help eradicate breast and ovarian cancer. Tartikoff has been active in a number of other women's programs as well.

Diana and William Ellis will receive the "Friendship Award" for their significant contributions to the City Lights program. The first couple to receive the award, the Ellis's help underwrite the luncheon and, as a result, the art therapy programs.

But the interaction with the ladies of the L.A. Mission is not limited to the annual luncheon. Members of the Celebrity Action

Council are at the Mission each month. "We spend time down there with the women," Mills says. "We're their friends. It's a very hands-on kind of thing. Many groups raise money and never see the people they're helping. We go to their graduation and follow them when they leave the program. It's really quite gratifying."

Members of the Celebrity Action Council visit the center in the evenings. According to Mills, the evening visits could be private or a group might show up. On one occasion, for example, the women

with this. The struggle for these women is much more significant. I don't mean to diminish anyone's fight for success, but it's certainly more significant to get off a street corner and get your life in order," Sullivan says. "And I know I've received more help from these women than I've been able to give them."

In addition to friendship and funding the art program, the members of the Celebrity Action Council give in other ways. They are always looking for jobs for the women of the Mission after their

## The Celebrity Action Council and Women Helping Women

were taken to the Hollywood Bowl. On another occasion, the excursion was to the ballet.

The residential program offers the women who make the commitment the opportunity to turn their lives around. Counselors work to build the women's self-esteem and enable them to live productive and independent lives, permanently escaping the bonds of abuse, addiction, poverty, and shame. The program is of a year's duration and accommodates up to 29 women at any one time. During the program, the residents receive personal counseling and spiritual guidance, life skills training and parenting classes, job skills training, educational training, support groups, and classes in the arts, nutrition, and exercise.

The program works.

"There is a very high success rate. People do stay sober, rehabilitated, and reunited with their families," Mills says.

Susan Sullivan puts the program in perspective. "As an actress, this is a way of checking in with reality. The struggles around the industry are pretty shallow in comparison

graduation. Other needs are fulfilled by volunteer dentists who provide the care for long neglected teeth or by skin care specialists who travel to the Mission to help.

The ladies of the Mission are also actively involved in presenting the luncheon. "We wanted a program that involved them and us. It's a real partnership," Frann says.

"They're very involved in the luncheon and the details of the program. We have women who tell stories, who read poetry, a choir. The quality of the writing and poetry is outstanding," Mills says.

Everything about the luncheon, the Celebrity Action Council, and their work with the Mission is outstanding.

"We're all artists," Sullivan says, "and tend to think we can only do one little thing. But working with these talented and spontaneous women, I've learned we all have the capacity to be artists."

If only the opportunity is provided. . . .

There are a great many dedicated individuals working to provide that opportunity.

—GARY AMO