

Las Patronas prez Kelly Kjos, on serving community in La Jolla and fate of Jewel Ball

Editor's Note: La Jolla Light's "People in Your Neighborhood" series shines a spotlight on notable locals we all wish we knew more about! If you know someone you'd like us to profile, call us at (858) 875-5950 or [e-mail editor@lajollalight.com](mailto:editor@lajollalight.com)

In her sixth year as a member of La Jolla philanthropy group Las Patronas, Kelly Kjos is working to ensure the organization she leads is able to continue serving the community as it has done since 1946.

A La Jolla Alta Mesa resident for 20 years, Kjos lives with her husband and two teenage sons. She told the *Light* she took on the Las Patronas presidency in September 2019 and will relinquish it in September 2020, according to Las Patronas tradition. Las Patronas members serve a six-year term, and presidents are only in that role for one year.

As Kjos moves through her final six months on the board, she discussed the state of Las Patronas in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

Last year, the group raised over \$950,000 for its grant beneficiaries by way of its legendary Jewel Ball, and with the shelter-in-place rules now in effect, people are wondering if August's Jewel Ball will still go on?

What led you to join Las Patronas?

"I'd been going to the Jewel Ball for many years, and I'd done a lot of volunteering already in the community. I loved that Las Patronas works with so many different nonprofits. We're not just fundraising for one cause, we reach so many different areas. I also love that Las Patronas funds capital items that have a significant impact on the future operations of a nonprofit."

How is Las Patronas coping with the restrictions surrounding COVID-19?

“We are doing a lot of work at home! Our monthly board and general meetings are all being conducted on schedule via Zoom. We closed our warehouse in mid-March, which typically is where we spend a lot of time, this time of year, building our annual Jewel Ball gala decor. We pick up projects from members’ doorsteps, complete them at home, and drop them off again to be stored by one member in the warehouse.”

What is the fate of Jewel Ball 2020, the main event that culminates a year of heavy fundraising for major beneficiaries?

“We’re still hoping to have our event on Saturday, Aug. 8, and we’re working toward that. The Jewel Ball has only been canceled once in 74 years — in 2013, due to a torrential rainstorm. We’re behind in our usual progress at this point, but we’re hopeful we can continue to plan for our event to continue as scheduled.”

Are there contingency plans for the Jewel Ball in case gathering restrictions are still in place?

“If we’re not able to hold it as usual, we have some really great ideas. There will be an event of some kind on Aug. 8. Whether it will be the traditional Jewel Ball we’re used to, or some different kind of event, is to be determined. We’re looking at all possible plans; we have a commitment to our major beneficiaries to fund grants for them, and our nonprofits will need our support more than ever this year. We will work toward our mission, which is fundraising for the nonprofits of San Diego.”

Where is Las Patronas in its grant cycle?

“Las Patronas has two grant cycles per year. Right before the coronavirus-related restrictions began, we had distributed \$260,000 into the community for our spring grants. Our next grant cycle is not until the fall.

We've already selected the major beneficiaries who will receive major grants as a result of this coming Jewel Ball, which is why it's important we fund-raise for these groups we've committed to."

As you're in touch with the beneficiaries during this time, what are their common concerns?

"There's a mixture of concerns. In the healthcare industry, there's an urgent need for personal protective equipment (PPE) gear. We've been in touch with Rady Children's Hospital, which is now coordinating donations for all the area hospitals. The San Diego Food Bank, which we've supported many times, is looking to meet the demand for food donations, which has gone up exponentially. What they're seeing for need is far greater than what they ever could have anticipated.

Alpha Project, which serves the San Diego homeless, has housed many people down at the Convention Center, and they've reached out to say they're in need of bottled water. A lot of people are reaching out through Las Patronas members, and we're looking as an organization to see what we can do to help these various groups."

Las Patronas funds capital-improvement projects, which are specified in its grant applications. Is it adapting its rules to meet the rapidly-shifting needs of beneficiaries right now?

"It's a little bit difficult right now; it's not like we have the funds already raised to just jump in and help. We've talked about using our craftiness (usually directed toward Jewel Ball décor) in helping to make masks and face visors that are in demand.

We've been in contact with Rady's about that; they're actually using a 3D printer we funded to cut the plastic piece for the visors, so that was kind of exciting to see. Otherwise, we're looking into how we can support our organizations and figuring it out. There's so much need right now."

What are the challenges to fundraising during shelter-in-place restrictions?

“We’re not able to fund-raise to the capacity we normally would this time of year. We’ve put a temporary hold on those activities; we know the local businesses that typically support us are all suffering right now and it’s not the right time to fund-raise. We’d rather work with the community and support it and return to fundraising down the road. It’s a bit of a standstill now, but we’re hopeful we can resume, and we look forward to support from those who believe in our mission.”

Have there been any pleasant surprises lately?

“The use of the Rady’s 3D printer in making masks is definitely a silver lining ... with everyone staying at home, another positive is families are getting involved with our Jewel Ball projects, and that family time is always special. What I’ve really loved more than anything else, though, is seeing community coming together to help and support wherever and whatever is needed. I hope this is something that stays with us long after COVID-19 has gone.”

How are you spending your shelter-in-place hours?

“Well, we’ve been doing lots of puzzles, our ping-pong table is getting lots of use and we’re working on Jewel Ball décor and other projects. I’m still definitely working on Las Patronas while the boys are distance learning, and of course, someone’s always looking to eat. It definitely hasn’t been quiet! We know this is a tragic time, but we are so hopeful. We love the way everyone is working together and helping each other out.”

— *For more information on Las Patronas, visit laspatronas.org*