

Soroptimist International of Chico is proud to award Alexa Benson-Valavanis this year's Ruby Award: Women Helping Women. Created to celebrate women who have significantly enhanced the lives of other women through professional, business and volunteer activities, Alexa is being awarded \$1,000 to be donated to a woman-serving non-profit of her choice. Alexa will be honored at the March 10, 2021 award ceremony and her name advanced for another Ruby at Soroptimist Regional & Federation levels.

Alexa struggled to find her passion and realize her worth, seeking acceptance and understanding through what could be called a pilgrimage. It took a spur-of-the-moment trip to China to teach that led Alexa to the incredible philanthropic work she is doing today. In her moving memoir *Sipping Tea with Buddha and Christ* Alexa charts her soul searching and self-empowerment, a search that made her such a success as a entrepreneur and philanthropist at North Valley Community Foundation.

Alexa's innovative work at the North Valley Community Foundation began in 2005 when she was hired to rebuild the organization. Under her leadership the foundation has grown from serving a dozen non-profits to more than 500 by mobilizing social entrepreneurs and philanthropists locally and around the globe. She has generated \$175 million with over \$100 million going to causes in Northern California. When the Camp Fire devastated Paradise, Alexa transformed NVCF into the lead philanthropic organization in the relief and recovery efforts and now has built a COVID-19 response arm to slow the pandemic and provide relief to at-risk populations.

Alexa has been a warrior for women and girls, fighting for LGBTQ rights, writing a memoir about finding self-acceptance and children's book on the power of unconditional love, providing practical support to women's organizations, being a wife and mother, being a great boss to her staff and a great friend to many. As David Little, her Communications Director, puts it,

So much of what we (at NVCF) do benefits women and girls, or more specifically girls and women in at-risk situations. We try to fill in where funding holes exist for people who are typically overlooked. For example, we coordinated a project with many partners to bring 48 homes to low-income Camp Fire survivors who qualified. I got to know one very well, a woman who lives alone and has struggled for two years to find housing. She was so excited to get a home and is exactly the kind of person who should get one. There were so many recipients like her -- young moms raising a family, or older moms like Tina. They of course weren't chosen because they were women, but so many women were helped by that project.

He goes on to say that having a woman as CEO of any organization means women are going to get a "fairer shot." In the case of NVCF, 70% of its employees are women and a significant portion of its clients are women wanting to start a charitable fund. Indeed, many of the organizations that partner with NVCF are women-run and women focused. Alexa has the passion, perspectives and sensitivities to find practical and compassionate ways to serve her community.