Hollywood came out in force at the 31st Annual Vision Awards held Sunday, June 27th at the Beverly Hilton Hotel. The star-studded fundraising event celebrated 31 years of honoring pioneering visionaries in film, television, music, technology, and leadership, and proudly presents the science award to doctors and scientists who are now reversing blindness. As a result of the Los Angeles-supported effort, information and local referrals are available nationwide via RP International’s hotline, 1-800-FIGHT-RP.

Hosted by veteran Daily Variety columnist Army Archerd and entertainment reporter Mindy Burbano, this year’s Awards honored the creative contributions of performers such as Russell Crowe, Mel Gibson, and Laurence Fishburne, who took time out from filming his latest feature Assault on Precinct 13 with Ethan Hawke.

Director of Vision honorees included David Lynch (Mulholland Drive, Twin Peaks), Gus Van Sant (Good Will Hunting), John Singleton (Boys N the Hood) and Mike Figgis (Cold Creek Manor, Leaving Las Vegas), and Producer of Vision honors went to Robert Cort (Against The Ropes), Marshall Herskovitz (The Last Samurai), and Ashok Amritraj (Raising Helen, Walking Tall). The Television Producer of Vision award was presented to Scott Winant (Huff, Carnivàle).

In his acceptance speech, Laurence Fishburne stated, “We’re so fortunate as visual artists to have the opportunity to dream, not only to have vision but to actually see these things come to life.”

Stephen J. Ryan, M.D., Chairman of USC’s Estelle Doheny Eye Foundation, along with RP International’s Founder, Helen Harris, presented the Jules Stein Living Tribute Award to Founder and Chairman Emeritus of Allergan, Inc. Gavin S. Herbert, longtime pioneer in the development of pharmaceuticals for sight.
Legendary voice actress, June Foray Donovan presented the Lifetime Achievement in Animation award to Bill Melendez, whose career spans from the classic Walt Disney animated films and Warner Bros. cartoons to every one of the “Charlie Brown” specials on television.

Other award presenters included Bob Saget, Paul Michael Glaser, Jeffrey Kawitnetz, Diane Ladd, Hank Azaria, Paul Hall, Kasi Lemmons, Alan Thicke, Debra Wilson, Kristen Stewart, and veteran CBS newsmans Mario Machado. Other musical performances were given by blind singer/guitarist Raúl Midón and the New Orleans group “Collage.”

The attendees were also entertained throughout the evening by a variety of performers including “American Idol” finalist Diana DeGarmo, whose career spans from the classic Walt Disney animated films and Warner Bros. cartoons to every one of the “Charlie Brown” specials on television.

The Retinal Technology Vision Award was given to Michael Helmbrecht, Ph.D., for his work with micromirrors to enable doctors to have more accurate imaging of blood cells and photoreceptors inside the eye to help detect and prevent sight loss at the earliest possible stage.

Woman of Vision honors went to Screen Actors Guild President and critically acclaimed actress Melissa Gilbert and to Rainbow Media Guild President and critically acclaimed actress Lois Scali, recipient of the Vision of the Stars award honored William Morris agent John Marx, whose career has made a difference in the lives of so many, including clients Sheryl Crow, Peter Gabriel and Billy Idol.

Other honorees at the night’s event included Leader of Vision Brian Becker, Chairman and CEO of Clear Channel Entertainment; Music Artist of Vision Harry Belafonte; Cinematographer of Vision Russell Boyd, and the Agrama Harmony Gold and Light “Man of the Year” Award was presented to William Austin, founder of Starkey Laboratories.

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“My friends in med school and I each took turns into looking at each others’ eyes. When they looked into mine, they saw signs of retinitis pigmentosa. I was studying to be a heart surgeon and was nearly finished, but my friends urged me to go get a check up and I found out I had RP. I called RP International and found out I have full-blown RP. They say I’ll be blind soon… I hope not....”

“My two younger brothers both have RP. They left home, as we all did… but they did not get married; they just took an apartment together to get out on their own like other kids. It was a struggle for all of us, their brothers and sisters, to watch them slowly lose their sight. In school, there was one closed circuit TV reading machine, but when they went home they didn’t have the use of it, so they could not do school work.

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Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) and the other degenerative diseases can now be detected through very specific “questions” to even the youngest child. For instance, stumbling, bumping into things, and the inability to react in dim light are the first symptoms of RP which go unnoticed for many, many years at home and in school. Early detection can be the most important way to help preserve precious years of eyesight.
THE VISION AWARDS “SAVE OUR SIGHT®” NATIONAL BROADCAST TO PREMIERE SEPTEMBER 28/29 ON PAX TV, DIRECTV AND DISH NETWORK

Hollywood’s top directors, producers and celebrities shared the stage at this year’s 31st Annual Vision Awards, which is about to mark its first-ever television broadcast on September 29th. This special “Hollywood Cures Blindness” broadcast includes the first-ever Television Eye Test that will help aid early detection of oncoming blindness in children, and the now known precaution of wearing UV protected lenses. The macular degeneration test and other information which will be featured on-air, can be downloaded at www.VisionAwards.org.

“Thirty seven million people now have no ability to read print,” says RP International’s founder Helen Harris, herself now blinded from one of the degenerative blinding diseases, Retinitis Pigmentosa. Harris and Hollywood joined hands over 31 years ago when two of her three sons were diagnosed with the same degenerative disease.

This broadcast will be carried nationwide through PAX-TV cable outlets and via DirecTV and The Dish Network satellite outlets. It is the first-ever airing of the 31 year-old Vision Awards and will spotlight the epidemic of precious eyesight lost through macular degeneration, retinitis pigmentosa and other forms of degenerative blindness. The Vision Awards is hosted by RP International, a nonprofit organization, which now receives calls from people as young as thirty with juvenile macular degeneration.

Macular degeneration now affects upwards of 20 million people ages 40 to 50, and up. Now, it is thought that one out of two families will be severely affected by macular degeneration. The Vision Awards broadcast will highlight a simple test that will alert one when the symptoms of macular degeneration are beginning to appear. The test, known as the “Amsler Grid,” is a basic pattern of lines arranged in a small grid, with a dark dot at the center that is used as a focal point. One holds the grid at a comfortable reading distance, testing one eye at a time, and if the lines seem to move, then it’s time to see the eye doctor right away. Some forms of macular degeneration are treatable if discovered early enough. States Harris, “A youngster with vision loss who doesn’t know it is in a terrible position, and we can stop it now by informing everyone of the symptoms, and eventually train a child, young adult or senior how to move around safely with diminishing sight.”

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The Vision Awards broadcast will be carried on PAX-TV cable outlets on Sept. 29 at 1:00 a.m., and will also air nationwide on DirecTV channel 255 and The Dish Network channel 181 on Sept. 28 at 10:00 p.m. Pacific, 11:00 p.m. Mountain, 12:00 midnight Central, and 1:00 a.m. Eastern.

The Vision Awards broadcast will be featured on-air, can be downloaded at www.VisionAwards.org, call 1-800-FIGHT-RP, or write to P.O. Box 900, Woodland Hills, California 91365.

For additional information, please visit www.VisionAwards.org.
Dear Honorees,

Thirty one years is a very long time… but only when you look back. I, like you, never look back. If we did, perhaps nothing would be achieved. If I thought I’d be sitting here at this computer, blind…I might not even be here. But I had confidence that if I gave it all I could, the day would come when no mother would ever again have to listen to those words: “Your children are going blind… and so are you.”

That one single sentence is what motivated me to search for a cure and to force the issue so that research would begin. Now, 37 million people later, macular degeneration and retinitis pigmentosa… both in my own family… are finally being researched and in the past five years, treatments have begun in clinical trials.

In Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, a doctor was working on a drug for Parkinson’s disease. In Los Angeles a father of an RP child studied it from afar. Putting two and two together, he suggested that a trial of that drug on RP might show positive results. It did: the research showed that the drug slowed down the process of RP called apoptosis… the time in the life of the cell when it just dies off and the disease progresses until the damage is irreparable. The name of the drug is deprenyl… and has never been clinically tried on RP patients yet. Right now, the drug is sitting on the shelf in the office of some entrepreneur. It can be given to patients in the U.S. for Parkinson’s but not for Retinitis Pigmentosa. The father is presently desperately giving it to his daughter via another country.

Michael A. Helmbrecht, Ph.D., CEO and Co-Founder of Iris AO, recipient of the “Retinal Technology Vision Award,” and the most recent member of the RP International Scientific Advisory Committee: “We’re at a turning point in how we look into the eye. Adaptive optics will allow us to look at individual photoreceptors that are affected by retinitis pigmentosa, macular degeneration and other debilitating eye diseases. The ability to see these individual cone photoreceptors will greatly enhance our ability to track the progress of the disease for doctors, and will greatly speed up drug development time for drug researchers. Now they can see what is going on at the cellular level of living retina… a wonderful thing for fighting blindness.”

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Brian Becker, “Leader of Vision” Award recipient and Chairman and CEO of Clear Channel Entertainment: “Being part of the live entertainment industry is a wonderful thing, because every time we put on an event, all the people’s senses are exposed and excited by the wonderful things that go on stage. I can’t imagine what it would be like to have to experience that wonderful event without the benefit of sight. Millions of people do just that every year, and we need to continue our fight to prevent and cure eye disease. All of us gathered here tonight are part of the larger entertainment industry, thereby reaffirming that we, as an industry, continue to be committed to making the world a better place. I am very proud to receive this award. I’m very proud to be in the presence of my peers who are also being honored tonight. Congratulations to everyone, and please keep up the good fight with RP International. Thank you.”

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The father is presently desperately giving it to his daughter via another country.
You have been chosen tonight for a reason... in the book of life lies your name as a person whose life has foresight, creativity, and the ability to say “no” to blindness, and “yes” to children’s eyes.

For most of the world you have created wonderful entertainment to bring happiness and the moments in time we all need to get away from daily problems. Your work takes us away from the daily drudgery we endure in one way or another and sails us into a realm of creative hope and gives all of us another shot in the arm for yet another day or more.

Please know that you are not here by accident tonight. I truly believe that each of us has a part in the potential cure for blindness, and in that puzzle lies your name as part of the answer. For this I thank you, and on behalf of the thousands of people I personally have listened to over the years who count on you and me to change the forecast of blindness in their lives to a lifetime of sight and beauty that only eyes can give to each of us.

50% of what we learn is via the eye to the brain. Blindness stops that process, leaving an empty black hole that will deteriorate because it has nothing to do. I know that I must create my own images every day to survive that blank wall without light, to stimulate life. Exhaustion from struggling to see is immeasurable, yet no one talks about it.

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Vision Awards

On behalf of all Californians, I am pleased to extend warm greetings to all who have gathered for the 31st Annual Vision Awards - “A Clear View of the World.”

Californians are a committed and compassionate people, and for 31 years, the Vision Awards has improved the lives of those impacted by blindness by helping them enjoy the visual arts. Your event recognizes leaders in film, television, music, technology and the community and supports our visually impaired citizens.

I would also like to applaud RP International Fighting Blindness for its noble mission to find a cure for blindness.

Please accept my best wishes for a wonderful event and every continued success.

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Arnold Schwarzenegger
Dear Honorees,

Thirty one years is a very long time… but only when you look back. I, like you, never look back. If we did, perhaps nothing would be achieved. If I thought I’d be sitting here at this computer, blind…I might not even be here. But I had confidence that if I gave it all I could, the day would come when no mother would ever again have to listen to those words: “Your children are going blind... and so are you.”

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Hollywood Helps Fight Blindness

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Music Producer Arif Mardin of Manhattan Records was this year’s recipient of the Lester Sill Humanitarian Award. His longtime friend, Atlantic Records Chairman Ahmet Ertegun, sent in a special video message for the presentation, and Joel Sill, son of the late Lester Sill, personally presented the award.

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Dr. Bernard Davidofr administers an eye test to a young patient.
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