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Viva Fresh keynote luncheon focuses on health

By

Tim Linden, editor at large

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Viva Fresh, the regional show held by the [Texas International Produce Association](#), had an intentionally healthy vibe exhibited most visibly during its keynote luncheon session on March 31.



Charlie (Rocket)

Jabaley

The Expo, featuring the best fruits and vegetables grown in Texas or distributed through the state, was held the following day at the Gaylord Texan Resort in Dallas. The luncheon focused attention on the powerful life-altering attributes of a healthy diet as it recognizes member of the Texas produce community that are participating in the “Clean Eating Challenge.” And the keynote address was delivered by Charlie (Rocket) Jabaley, an advocate of healthy eating, who is CEO of the Dream Machine Foundation.

At the age of 29, Jabaley was a successful music producer, but he weighed over 300 pounds and was diagnosed with a brain tumor. At Viva Fresh, he told the story of his transformation from an overweight, out of shape man to an athlete, who participated in three marathons and starred in a Nike commercial urging ordinary folks to pursue their dreams.

Charlie Rocket credits healthy eating and thanked the crowd of growers, shippers and retailers for the healthy products they grow, ship and sell. By the end of the first two years of his own healthy eating journey, Charlie Rocket had lost 135 pounds and had reversed the growth of his brain tumor, while pursuing his seemingly unreachable childhood dream of being an athlete.

TIPA recognizes that eating more fruits and vegetables can change lives by improving not only how you feel, but also having the potential to impact chronic disease. The Clean Eating Challenge is a first-hand account of TIPA members doing exactly that. TIPA relays the stories of those taking the challenge through a blog posts and it also recognized those members during the Viva Fresh luncheon.

To emphasize the value of healthy eating, Viva Fresh maintains a website (vivacleaneating.com) where the blog posts live and where more information on the value of fruits and vegetables are memorialized. “We are excited to support our industry peers who are taking the challenge to eat more fruits and vegetables, while making the meaningful and often times difficult first steps to change their health and their lives for the better,” declares the site.

The site goes on to quote from the USDA dietary guideline: “Today, about half of all American adults — 117 million people — have one or more preventable, chronic diseases, many of which are related to poor quality eating patterns and physical inactivity. Rates of these chronic, diet-related diseases continue to rise, and they come not only with increased health risks, but also at high cost. In 2008, the medical costs linked to obesity were estimated to be \$147 billion. In 2012, the total estimated cost of diagnosed diabetes was \$245 billion, including \$176 billion in direct medical costs and \$69 billion in decreased productivity.”

The luncheon also featured a posthumously tribute to longtime TIPA employee Gracie Gonzalez by former TIPA President Bret Erickson, who is now with J&D Produce. The Viva Fresh Open golf tournament made a \$10,000 donation to the Viva Fresh Scholarship Fund in the former employee’s name. Her son Eli Gonzalez was on hand to represent the family.

[Tim Linden](#)

Tim Linden grew up in a produce family as both his father and grandfather spent their business careers on the wholesale terminal markets in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Tim graduated from San Diego State University in 1974 with a degree in journalism. Shortly thereafter he began his career at The Packer where he stayed for eight years, leaving in 1983 to join Western Growers as editor of its monthly magazine. In 1986, Tim launched Champ Publishing as an agricultural publishing specialty company.

Today he is a contract publisher for several trade associations and writes extensively on all aspects of the produce business. He began writing for The Produce News in 1997, and currently wears the title of Editor at Large.

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