

DIVA LAS VEGAS

BY MICHAEL SHULMAN

When Raising Money Is (Not So) Serious Business *Forget Hollywood—Las Vegas Has Philanthropy Down to an Art Form*

Show me, show me, show me....” In one of the great opening lines of ‘80s New Wave, that gloomy god of goth, **Robert Smith** of the **Cure**, eloquently voices my feelings about this time of year in Las Vegas. The flooding is over, the pollen is minimal, and if you adjust your climate control just right, you can drive with the top down. It’s bliss! Naturally, yours truly is nowhere near this November nirvana, and finds himself instead braving a tropical storm in Hawaii, heeding tornado warnings and hail (yes, hail in Hawaii—can you imagine?). It has been a pretty great month, though, full of fun times and philanthropic happenings that brought out the scene—and nothing gets in the way of my gifting jones, but more on that in a bit.

When people think of charity in Las Vegas, most often their thoughts immediately turn to the gala fund raisers thrown by some of our more well-known organizations—especially the triple threat each year of **The Andre Agassi Charitable Foundation’s Grand Slam for Children**, **Nevada Cancer Institute’s Rock/Bond for the Cure** (as well as its annual beach party) and **Keep Memory Alive’s Power of Love**. And why not? Buckets of ducats are raised on these few nights alone (last year to the tune of more than \$50 million), and have put Las Vegas squarely on the world’s philanthropic radar for star-studded fund-raising with A-list entertainment in a way that gives Hollywood, New York and Monte Carlo a run for their money. Furthermore, events such as these have become a *raison d’être* for many of the finer shops



Clockwise from top: Reagan Silber, Adam Frank and Trevor Pearlman at Jet for Frank’s 35th-birthday party; Larry Ruvo and Veuve Clicquot’s François Chirumberro at the Bellagio for the Tiffany & Co. benefit for Keep Memory Alive; Dana Lee, Marcelle Frey and Trina Pascal at the Bellagio for the Tiffany & Co. benefit for Keep Memory Alive.



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and boutiques in **The Forum Shops at Caesars**, **Wynn Esplanade**, **Via Bellagio** and **Grand Canal Shoppes**. That said, donning a pretty frock and bidding on a **Chanel** clutch while sipping Dom Pérignon is merely the fun part; there is so much more to it that most people never witness or partake in. I’ll even go so far as to say that I’ve

donned my dapper duds and swilled with the swells for everything from **Peace Games** to **Princess Grace** and **Fire & Ice** to **Free Arts** (quite nice), but nowhere outside of Las Vegas have I ever witnessed a doghouse fetch \$350,000 (let alone two of them)! Merely a generational tumbleweed’s roll from our rough-and-tumble roots, we

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Las Vegasans know the meaning of giving and will always put up rather than shut up. Case in point: Last May, a core of the sassy clique I've dubbed the Cool Mommies Club (**Heather duBoef, Dana Lee, Marcelle Frey** and **Trina Pascal**) were traveling together to an out-of-town charity event and they began to discuss an upcoming affair that Heather and Dana were chairing. They came to the realization that the money they spent doling up for these galas could also go directly to helping many of the lesser-established organizations in our city. Right then and there, the Nevada Women's Philanthropy was established. Each member (now some 40 strong) pays annual dues that are pooled together, and then solicits presentations from local groups about their aims and needs. On Thursday, October 19th, the NWP gathered at **Wynn Las Vegas** to hear presenta-



Top: Camille Ruvo, Desmona Desmond, Meital Grantz and Nicole Ruvo at the Bellagio for the Keep Memory Alive benefit. Far left: Liza DeGraff and Heather DuBoef at Wynn Las Vegas for a meeting of the Nevada Women's Philanthropy. Left: Caricaturist Evan Glusman at the Halloween Circus.



tions from this year's two finalists. An invited guest (much to my chagrin, even I can't pass as a Nevada Woman, although I'm still hoping to be grandfathered in—buh-dum-bum), I was able to join members including **Michelle Epstein, Jenna Morton, Liza DeGraff, Susan Molasky, Lovee Arum, Anne Kellogg, Anna Robins, Kimberly Gora** and others over a lovely breakfast of eggs Benedict, smoothies, waffles and espresso as the NWP heard presentations from the two very worthwhile finalists. Later they voted by ballot, and I'm delighted to announce that the first annual gift from the Nevada Women's Philanthropy (in the amount of \$180,000) has been donated to Foundation for an Independent Tomorrow—a group that helps its clients "break the cycle of dependency with individual guidance, resources and support for education, training and job-placement assistance"—to establish the Nevada Women's Philanthropy Employment Project. The NWP's first partnership (the group plans to be very hands-on with its gifts) will go a long way toward helping FIT's clients finally get the jobs they need to live happy and prosperous lives.



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Way to go, ladies! To quote that seven-foot-tall, self-proclaimed Supermodel of the World, **RuPaul**, "You better work" (literally)!

On Monday, October 23rd, I found myself at yet another Vegas birthday celebration—this one for **Adam Frank**, a partner in Edge-Star, the group of bright young things currently developing the **W Las Vegas Hotel Casino & Residences**. As Adam is an E-mob officer, the rest of the group turned

out in full force to ring in his 35th. Guests at the dinner in the private dining room of **Stack** at the **Mirage** included **Reagan Silber, Trevor Pearlman, Michael Landau** and **Sarah Hutnick**, Adam's folks, **Joe and Suzanne Frank**, mischievous merrymaker **Jeff Beacher, Laura Hayden**, the proprietors of New York's très hip **Pink Elephant**, **David Sarnier** and **Robert Montwaid**, the ever effervescent **Miss Farrah Smith, Shing Tao** and **Jeffrey Fine** (who drove up to me in a Bentley last month, rolled down the window and said, "Hey, Shully—you got any Grey Poupon?" Seriously...), **Elliot Karathanasis, Jeff Williams, Cirque du Soleil's Cara Luttrell**, Light Group execs **Marklen Kennedy** and **Andrew Wintner** and **Mandalay Bay VP Justin Manacher**, not to mention a veritable smorgasbord of beautiful blondes (à la **Clairol**, I'm sure, although as **Sean Connery** so acutely articulated as James Bond in **Diamonds Are Forever**, "As long as the collar and cuffs match"). After dinner, the party proceeded

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to **Jet** and twisted the night away.

A couple of evenings later, on Wednesday, October 25th, **Suzy Nagle** (director, **Tiffany & Co.**) and **Robin Greenspun** hosted an elegant event in the **Bellagio's Fontana Lounge** where the new **Frank Gehry** Collection for Tiffany & Co. was unveiled at an affair called Keys for a Cause. The event benefited Keep Memory Alive, the foundation of the **Lou Ruvo Brain Institute** dedicated to the fight against Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Huntington's, ALS and memory disorders. Attendees purchased the keys in question and tried them in two locks. The first revealed a lovely set of jewelry from the new Frank Gehry Collection, while the second had approximately 40 boxes with smaller gifts from Tiffany & Co. Prior to the key-turning festivities, though, KMA founder **Larry Ruvo** took the stage, where he was joined by Gehry and Dr. **Nancy Wexler**. Then, to toast the evening, Veuve Clicquot's suave winemaker **François Chirumberro** took a saber to the top of a methusalem of the savory champagne. (A little champers trivia: A methusalem is a large bottle of champagne that contains the equivalent of eight regular-sized, 750-ml bottles, and takes its name from the biblical Methuselah, an ancestor of Noah who is said to have lived for 969 years—which, in the words of **Prince**, is a mighty long time.) It was fun watching people line up to try their keys. One of the very first people found hers sliding right in and popping the lock amid a symphony of cheers and good-natured disappointment. Hey, you can't be a winner all the time—unless you're **Phyllis McGuire**. Never the shrinking violet, P-McG arrived in a leopard ensemble consisting of high heels, belted dress and fedora that immediately brought

to mind the film **Boomerang** ("You see, the secret is you've gotta coordinate"), only the couture version. And you could've slapped me silly and called me Susan when three of her keys fit the second lock—and thank God, because now finally her swans will have something to grace their necks as they glide around their pond! Also on hand to try their luck with the keys were **Barbara** and **Danny Greenspun**, **Camille** and **Nicole Ruvo**, **Victoria** and **Dan Otter**, **Heidi** and **David Strauss**, **Anna Robins**, **Meital Grantz**, **Cari Marshall**, **Desmona Desmond**, **Frederic Apcar**, kooky kitten **Kristen Graves** and

There was a sea of naughty schoolgirls, she-devils, flappers and kitty cats with flesh as far as the eye could see.

Milo Kostelecky, as well as KMA president Dr. **Zaven Khachaturian** and his wife, **Alidz**.

Rounding out the month was the Halloween Circus thrown by **Bryan O'Reilly** (in costume as the world's strongest baby) at his home on Saturday, October 28th. While it had been previously decided that the event would be a fund raiser, the death of **Brian "Jake" Baumgartner**—a much beloved Las Vegas and member of the **Big Dog's** team—from cancer, on October 14th, made the Nevada Cancer Institute the obvious choice. Even with (or perhaps because of) that morning's memorial service, every-

Top left: Veronica Bruce and Bryan O'Reilly at O'Reilly's Halloween Circus benefitting the Nevada Cancer Institute. Top: Jennifer and former City Councilman Michael McDonald at the Halloween Circus.

one was ready to get their drink on and boogie. There was a live performance by local rocker **Franky Perez**, and I manned the ones-and-twos for the likes of **Evan Glusman** (a caricaturist), **Milo Kostelecky** (a '70s guy), **Jimmy Sexton** (a pimp), **Todd Worthe** (ball juggler), **Veronica Bruce** (ringmistress), **Nick Tanno** (court jester), **Elisabeth Apcar** (showgirl) and **John Tippins** (preppy executive), **Frederic Apcar** (circus clown), former City Councilman **Michael McDonald** (convict) and a sea of naughty schoolgirls, she-devils, flappers and kitty cats with flesh as far as the eye could see. Two of the costumes that received the most kudos turned out to be tributes: **Seth Schorr** (a Las Vegas casino executive circa 1985 complete with large retro cell phone, cowboy hat, Ray-Ban aviator sunglasses and **Golden Nugget** Windbreaker) and me (**Benny Behnan** circa today, complete with baby-blue velour tracksuit, blue **Bally** shoes, brushed-back hair and a diamond pinky ring).

On the horizon for next month, I'll be reporting on the launch of the new Dom Pérignon Rosé held in the **Park Towers** aerie of **Neta** and Reagan **Silber** and the opening-night concert by Prince at his new club, **3121**, at the **Rio**. Also, the Nevada Cancer Institute's Bond for the Cure gala, where the latest James Bond blockbuster, **Casino Royale**, will premiere a day before its national release and luxury goods galore will be auctioned off to the highest bidder, and finally a look ahead to February, when we will strive to raise the monstrously high bar that was set at last year's Keep Memory Alive gala (\$20 million). It all comes back to, "Show me, show me, show me," huh? Aloha! ♠