

Sun-Sentinel Society 10/27/03

# First Broward Mayor's Gala Sets High Standards

By Karen Lustgarten

The hottest ticket in town wasn't the first game of World Series rooting for the Florida Marlins. Instead, twelve hundred movers and shakers of Broward County dressed in black tie and packed the Grand Floridian Ballroom at the Broward County Convention Center on Saturday night to celebrate the first Mayor's Gala. The

major fundraising event was conceived by Mayor Diana Wasserman-Rubin, Broward County's first mayor elected a year ago. It was the scene in which to be seen; at \$250 a ticket, people had to be turned away.

The first mayor tapped Ginny Miller of Miller Construction and founder of the first Women's Way of the United Way to chair and produce a dazzling inaugural gala that would raise big

money for the county's neediest. In pulling off the stunning evening, Miller pulled together the first Mayor's Gala Production Team (MGPT) of some 80 volunteers working under the theme, "celebrating the diversity of Broward County from seagrapes to sawgrass." Nancy Strong, executive vice president of United Way of Broward County (UWBC), was the key liaison with the volunteer team.

Mayors of Broward County's 30 diverse cities, the county's local and state elected officials, business and community leaders and high society supporters all wanted to be a part of history in the making for

Broward County's several firsts.

The theme was reflected in décor, entertainment and guests. Among the diverse entertainment were Latin Grammy winner Nestor Torres and his band and the FAU Chamber singers. Radio personalities Kenny & Footy served as masters of ceremonies and auctioneers. Diverse live auction items ranged as high as an \$11,750 Broward hometown package with World Series tickets thrown in, \$15,000 for a Lexus two-year lease, a "priceless" TV commercial for the car dealer Maroone starring you and 29 others of your choosing.

Top-level sponsors included: Sun-Sentinel,

Huizenga Holdings, The McDonald Family Foundation, JM Family Enterprises, Inc. and JM Lexus, Comcast and The Herald. Other major sponsors were: Centex-Rooney Construction Company, GL Homes, Publix Super Markets and United Homes International.

Embodying diversity, Mayor Wasserman-Rubin was the first Hispanic (Cuban-American) elected county commissioner (2002). Making history, she was the first mayor of Broward County elected last November by the county's nine commissioners. "We elected her unanimously to

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show diversity in our community," said County Commissioner John Rodstrom, Jr. "She runs super meetings and has opened commerce and for-

eign trade here."

She was determined to make a difference during her one-year term by leaving a legacy of helping the needy in Broward. A former board member of the United Way of Broward County (UWBC), the mayor

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approached the year-old Women's Way of the United Way composed of women leaders with the skills, talents and resources to create social service solutions. The mayor suggested they team up to create a new fundraising concept, thus the inaugural Mayor's Gala became the debut of Women's Way. It proved to be a dream team.

"I would have been grateful if the first Mayor's Gala raised \$20,000 for the United Way to help fund their agencies that serve the neediest in our community," said Mayor Wasserman-Rubin. Instead, the gala is expected to net \$300,000, making it one of the most successful fundraisers in Broward.

"We didn't achieve our financial goal last year," said Robert MacConnell, president/CEO of UWBC, referring to the triple whammy of recession, war and terrorism. The non-profit organization that funds 64 social

service agencies and programs for 1.7 million residents countywide took a hit the last few years from a decrease in donations.

"The problem is we're running into unfunded mandates from the federal and state government, so cities can't meet their obligations" explained Joe Schreiber, mayor of Tamarac. "The challenge is getting enough money for our services."

State Sen. Campbell (Tamarac) said there's simply not enough money from the state for community projects. "We cannot submit financial requests for local projects because they won't go through, yet the state has a moral obligation to support them," he said.

One recipient of United Way funding is Planned Parenthood's teen programs. "Because of the economy, it's harder to raise funds to support much-needed social service programs in Broward County," said Mary Capobianco, president/CEO of Broward's Planned Parenthood. "This event is a great collaboration where everyone benefits." ■