

PALM BEACH DAILY NEWS

The Shiny Sheet

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International Red Cross Ball balances tradition with fun for more than 400 at Mar-a-Lago

By Shannon Donnelly, DAILY NEWS SOCIETY EDITOR

Here's the thing about striving for an elegant and dignified event. Too often, you can't have "Elegant" and "Dignified" on the guest list without inviting the ugly stepsisters, "Stuff" and "Boring."

The International Red Cross Ball, however, pulled it off quite nicely. The 54th annual white-tie dinner dance took elegance to a new level — 'there' without being 'out there.'

The evening at The Mar-a-Lago Club began with the traditional diplomatic receiving line in the Gold-and-White ballroom, where the Sweden's comely Princess Madeleine joined emissaries from Liechtenstein, Monaco, Mexico, the Netherlands, Barbados, South Africa, and Hungary to greet arrivals.

After the diplomatic niceties, the more than 400 guests mingled poolside, moving only enough to grab a champagne glass from a passing tray, or to do a surreptitious appraisal of the precious gems resting on ample bosoms like so many baby harp seals sunning on warm rocks.

Trumpeters called guests into the Grand Ballroom — where gold lace linens covered tables set with gold-rimmed china and centered with masses of roses and hydrangea in shades of pink, coral, and peach — for the introduction of the ambassadors by Stuart Bernstein, former ambassador to Denmark, who was the night's protocol chairman. The traditional Presentation of the Colors, made even more poignant by the knowledge that many of the Marines present are about to be deployed to Afghanistan, was followed by the National Anthem.

Here's the thing about the Red Cross Ball — it's one of the few events in town where everyone stands straight and stays quiet during the anthem. It probably has something to do with those young Marines, who look like they mean business.

The evening continued with remarks from the chairwoman; dinner; music by Jimmy Vali, and a surprise appearance by a guy who grabbed a microphone and, without introduction, walked across the stage like he was Vic Damone or something.

Turns out it was Vic Damone, who invited everyone to the dance floor while he sang some of the most romantic songs ever.

Michele Kessler was chairwoman of the ball for the third consecutive year. Susan Keenan and Mary Mochary were co-chairwomen.

Patrick Park was honorary chairman, with Florence deGeorge, who was unable to attend, serving as honorary international chairwoman.

Guests included former Afghanistan Ambassador Said Jawad and his wife Shamim, event designer Bryan Raffanelli — fresh off his triumph at the White House state dinner honoring Chinese president Hu Jintao — John Mashek, Talbott Maxey, Brownie McLean, James Berwind and Kevin Clark, Kate Ford and Frank Chopin, ball chairman and chairwoman emerita Bill and Nancy Rollnick, Donald Trump, Hilary and Wilbur Ross, Elaine and Gerry Schuster, Martha Kessler, Norma and Bill Teifel, Betsy and James Meany, Clinton lawyer Bob Bennett, Stephania Conrad, Sharon and Al O'Neil, 2012 Heart Ball chairwoman Veronica Mersentes and her husband Alexis, Michele and Kurt Sylvia, Suzanne and Bob Tomsich, Rhoda and David Chase, Terry and Joe Mendozza, Suzi and Rick Goldsmith, Ambassador Mary Ourisman, Mary Frances Turner, Bob and Arlette Gordon, Elizabeth Bowden, Toni Kramer, Martha Kessler — who left her CIA service medal at home — George and Anne Lichtblau, Herman and Gina Porten, Linda and Richard Zecher, and lots more who know their ambassadors from their elbows.



Former Ambassador of Afghanistan Said Jawad, Bonnie McElveen-Hunter and Shamin Jawad dance during the annual International Red Cross Ball



Baltimore attorney Clifford L. Hardwick (www.hardlaw.net) and photographer and artist Donna W. Long of Palm Beach, Florida at the International Red Cross Ball at The Mar-a-Lago Club.



Donald Trump at the International Red Cross Ball at The Mar-a-Lago.



Lt. Col. Aaron Marx escorts H.R.H. Princess Madeleine of Sweden and Per-Olaf Loof into the International Red Cross Ball at The Mar-a-Lago Club Saturday.



Vic Damone sings during the annual International Red Cross Ball