

PEOPLE

Circus, circus! JI fundraising gala goes over the 'Top'

BY MARY SCHENKEL
Staff Writer

The circus came to town in a big way last Wednesday evening at a Big Top by the Sea Gala at the John's Island Beach Club hosted by the ultra-creative John's Island Community Service League, which produced an event to rival Barnum and Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth.

"I always liked the circus as a child and I thought it would make a good venue for a benefit to celebrate our past," said Big Top Chair Ginger DeSimone. "It was just a coincidence that Ringling Bros. decided to fold their tent in May, right after our benefit. So now it seems like it's appropriate to have a farewell circus event."

Proceeds from the evening, as with

all the wonderful JICSL events, will support local charitable initiatives, this year funneling more than \$950,000 back in to the community. The money will fund grants to 37 different agencies and will also provide scholarships to children of John's Island employees.

Dress for the evening called for John's Island casual or PT Barnum, and more than a few of the roughly 400 guests let their imaginations run wild. DeSimone greeted arrivals as the French clown Pierrot, her white dress topped with a ruffled black collar and studded with black pompoms.

With no actual circus animals planned, folks took matters into their own hands, including DeSimone's good-natured husband Glenn, who donned a blow-up costume of a lion tamer

riding a lion.

John's Island staff got into the act as well, led by very buff strongman David Colclough, assistant general manager. "I just got through working out," quipped a mustachioed Colclough, hoisting his barbell with ease.

"They have such great enthusiasm," said DeSimone, watching as Steve Hudson, Steve Hanlon, Lennart Jonason and Kevin Caldabaugh clowned around with the crowd.

To keep costs down there was no actual circus tent, so illusion became the name of the game. Red and white tent stripes highlighted the entryway and huge backdrops in the lobby and buffet room gave the impression of being inside the Big Top.

Chef Farnsworth dazzled with a large as-

sortment of circus goodies, from cannonball cheese puffs and Ringling Bros.' popcorn shrimp, to fire-eating chicken, sword-swallowing fish and center-ring tenderloin; finishing it all up with clown cakes, elephant ears and a table of nostalgia, with penny candy, Cracker Jacks and Animal Crackers.

No circus is complete without performers, and they had them in spades, including stilt-walkers, jugglers, unicyclists, and even a tightrope walker.

"My favorite was always the trapeze, but we didn't have a ceiling," said DeSimone. Instead there was a hula hoop contortionist, spinning 40 lit hoops while twisting with the flexibility of Gumby. Later guests did a little spinning of their own, dancing to the band Street Talk. ■



BIG TOP CAPTIONS

1. Mary Ellen Brophy, Betsy Woodruff, Kate Thornton and Kate Graham. 2. Vicki Asbury, Anne Grealis, Emily Sherwood and Mary Anne Gargaro. 3. Front: Kevin Caldabaugh. Back: Steve Hudson, Lennart Jonason and Steve Hanlon. 4. Front: Pat Thompson and Steve Hudson. Middle: Ginger DeSimone, Lynn Keutz, Andrea Thibodeau, Pamela Hamilton, Katherine Seem, Kevin Caldabaugh, and Steve Hanlon. Back: David Colclough. 5. Tina Lyons, Ginger DeSimone, Jim Goett, Glenn DeSimone and Christi DeSimone. PHOTOS: DENISE RITCHIE

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BIG TOP CAPTIONS

6. Hope Woodhouse, Katherine Seem, Sherrie Petermann and Andrea Thibodeau. 7. Jon Seem with Laura and Bill Buck. 8. Sara Beth and Dillon Roberts with Vanessa and Justin Larson. 9. Bob and Wheatie Gibb. 10. Bill and Marlynn Scully. 11. Jay and Karen Kemmerer. 12. Liz and Steve McKeever. 13. Randy and Sandy Rolf with Scott and Gail Alexander. 14. Bill King and Libby Thompson with Tammy and Nick Purgatorio. 15. Bernie Murphy with Connie and Ron McGlynn. 16. Jo Ellen and Troy Hafner. 17. Don and Betsy Kittell. 18. Todd and Kathy Fennell with Chris and Debbie Marine. 19. Joan and Jay McLaughlin.



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