

## Large-Scale Philanthropy and Vegas Movie Magic

'd like to give special thanks to our corporate sponsor, AOL...blah, blah, blah...and thanks to all of you, without whom...blah, blah, blah...raised more than eighteen million dollars!"

"What!?!?"

"Did she just say *eighteen* million dollars?"

The entire third floor of the **MGM Grand** Conference Center experienced something that was midway between utter amazement and sheer disbelief on Saturday, February 11th, as Clark County Commissioner **Lynette Boggs McDonald**, president of the Keep Memory Alive Foundation, announced the total monies raised at this year's gala to benefit the Foundation for the **Lou Ruvo Alzheimer's Institute**. It was something pretty amazing to behold (and a little bit bizarre as a wave of breath flavored by Dom Pérignon, sushi, short-ribs in horseradish, and various premium vintages of Cabernet Sauvignon rolled across the room due to the hundreds of jaws that all dropped in unison).

The evening was highlight-filled from start to finish, way before the staggering sum was revealed. To begin with, even before anyone arrived, a collective "hooray" was uttered when the men of Las Vegas found out upon reading their invitations that the suggested attire was open-collared shirts. I'd actually venture to guess that there were probably 30 couples who might normally have bagged out but opted to go based on that one detail, and they all have **Camille Ruvo** and her team to thank for that, as well as everything else that went into the planning and execution of the affair. The gala was honoring architect **Frank Gehry**—named the world's greatest living architect by *Time*—whose designs for the future **Alzheimer's Center** are now that much closer to being realized, as well as California First Lady **Maria Shriver**. Gehry, a menschy fellow if ever there was one, posed for the cameras while leaning patiently on his cane, and accepted a sculpture from Keep Memory Alive designed by the organization's de facto artist (well, not offi-

George Chanos, Emeril Lagasse and Adriana Chanos at the MGM Grand for the Keep Memory Alive Foundation gala.



Robin Leach, Kimberly Gora and Wolfgang Puck at the MGM Grand for the Keep Memory Alive Foundation gala.



Larry and Nicole Ruvo and Arnold Schwarzenegger at the MGM Grand for the Keep Memory Alive Foundation gala.



**While their wedding certificate might list his name as Arnold Schwarzenegger, that night the Governor of California was pretty much "Mr. Shriver" and happily let his wife take center stage.**

One of the funniest moments for me included the hysterical comedy that ensued when the culinary triumvirate of **Wolfgang Puck** (who announced that he'd be doing the restaurant at the new

center), **Nobu Matsuhisa** and **Emeril Lagasse**

were called to the stage to say a few words. This was a lovely idea in theory, but when you're in a situation where Emeril has the most easily comprehensible accent, you know you're in trouble! When I told him this at the after-party in his eponymous restaurant, he shook with laughter and made me promise to include it in this column (as if I'd even consider *not* mentioning it). Okay, Emeril, there ya go! Another giggle-causing moment occurred when, upon perusing the silent auction (which could've been an evening unto itself), **Lovee Arum** (who looked stunning in a divine dress by **de la Rent**) passed by me and asked, ever so sweetly, "Uh, Michael—where's the jewelry?"

cially, but he might as well be), **Romero Britto**. While their wedding certificate might list his name as **Arnold Schwarzenegger**, that night the Governor of California was pretty much "Mr. Shriver" and happily let his wife take center stage. Cheered on by her siblings and their families, Shriver charmed the crowd by telling of the nudgey way in which **Larry Ruvo** cajoled her into getting involved with the Alzheimer's Institute. She then read an excerpt from her fourth book, **What's Happening to Grandpa?**, which she had written to help her own children cope once her father (**Sargent Shriver**, brother-in-law to those late, great K's: **JF** and **RF**) was diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's. She too accepted a lovely Britto sculpture.

center), **Nobu Matsuhisa** and **Emeril Lagasse** were called to the stage to say a few words. This was a lovely idea in theory, but when you're in a situation where Emeril has the most easily comprehensible accent, you know you're in trouble! When I told him this at the after-party in his eponymous restaurant, he shook with laughter and made me promise to include it in this column (as if I'd even consider *not* mentioning it). Okay, Emeril, there ya go! Another giggle-causing moment occurred when, upon perusing the silent auction (which could've been an evening unto itself), **Lovee Arum** (who looked stunning in a divine dress by **de la Rent**) passed by me and asked, ever so sweetly, "Uh, Michael—where's the jewelry?"



## DIVA LAS VEGAS



Siegfried & Roy, with their friend Maria Shriver at the Keep Memory Alive Foundation gala.



Oscar and Carolyn Goodman at the MGM Grand for the Keep Memory Alive Foundation gala.

The auction highlight in my opinion was the two Frank Gehry-designed doghouses that fetched \$350,000 each! As you are probably aware (and if you're not—Hi! Welcome to "Diva Las Vegas!"), I'm all for extravagance. Actually, the case could be made that my taste in jewelry gives testimony to my years studying at the **Sammy Liberace Presley Davis, Jr.** School of Sparkliness (much to my mother's great chagrin), but with my dogs, they'd ignore the thing for a week, bark at it for a while, then hide a couple of squeaky toys inside, probably pee on it, and run back indoors, where they'd jump on my bed, take over my pillows and watch TV. On the other hand, that's how you raise \$18 million in an evening: with the unyielding generosity and altruism of some very incredible people.

But wait! That's not all! **Siegfried & Roy** were there to honor their friend Maria, who not only held her first interview many years ago with the dynamic duo but was also the first to be granted an on-air interview with Roy after the tragedy that befell him on-stage a couple of years ago and nearly claimed his life. Roy, exclaiming a desire to show Maria some "real magic," rose out of his wheelchair, made a lap around his table (sans cane, I might add) and told the amazed audience that he and Siegfried "will perform again, together!" The applause was deafening. Meanwhile, word is that S&R were seen chatting with **Steve Wynn** (himself on crutches as a result of a skiing mishap). Can a future deal be far off between the casino impresario and the maestros of magical mystery? Time will tell.

Earlier in the evening, Larry Ruvo

**Roy, exclaiming a desire to show Maria some "real magic," rose out of his wheelchair, made a lap around his table and told the amazed audience that he and Siegfried "will perform again, together!" The applause was deafening.**

announced that next year's Keep Memory Alive gala will be attended by every living First Lady of the United States (**Lady Bird Johnson, Rosalynn Carter, Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush**, Senator **Hillary Rodham Clinton** and **Laura Bush**), each of whom has agreed to sit on the center's board of directors. And there's more! By the next day, word had gotten out that, in a truly beautiful gesture, the one-and-only **Phyllis McGuire** (who'd evidently had sugar in the morning, evening *and* at suppertime that day) donated just under \$2 million—which brought the total for the event to a whopping \$20 million! You go, Phyllis! Get down with your bad self!

At one point in the evening, I glanced at an adjacent table and realized that **Tony Curtis** and I were wearing the same boots (think **Austin Powers**), which I immediately pointed out to my tablemates. **Ed Borgato** then remarked, "You know, he's a friggin' legend!" (As if I didn't know. Not

for nothing, but I did go to his daughter's alma mater, for Pete's sake. Not to mention that I majored in pop culture!) Tony was there with his stunning wife, **Jill**—and had donated two of his own fabulous collages to the silent auction.

To conclude the affair, de-crowned Miss America-turned-singer-turned-actress **Vanessa Williams** lit up the stage and screens (here's to Proactiv!) as she sang to the crowd about saving the "Best for Last" and of all the "Colors of the Wind." The entertainment had been eye-popping all evening, though. Aerial acrobats spun in the air, and dancers tangoed their way across the stage. Cupid and an angel perched on a swing high above threw rose petals on guests as they entered the dining room. It would be far

too difficult for me to give the usual shout-out to all of my philanthropic party-peeps, as the room was filled to the brim with the crème de la crème of Las Vegas' social set.

As such, I'm gonna jump back a night and land amidst the revelry that took place when **Vanity Fair** and **Grey Goose** teamed up with Vegas' own **Insomnia** Entertainment to host a party for the release of **Insomnia's** film **Standing Still**. The swanky

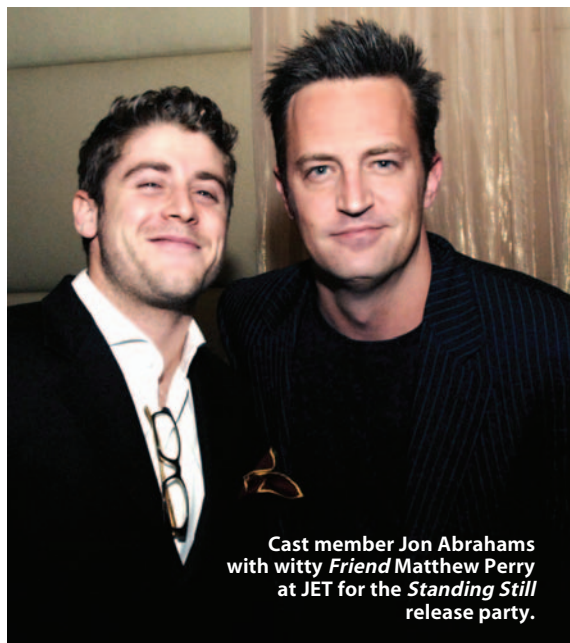


Insomnia's Christopher Ramirez and Frankie Dizonno at JET for the *Standing Still* release party.

SIEGFRIED, GOODMAN: CURTIS DAHL PHOTOGRAPHY; RAMIREZ: DENISE TRUSCELLOWREIMAGE.COM



## DIVA LAS VEGAS

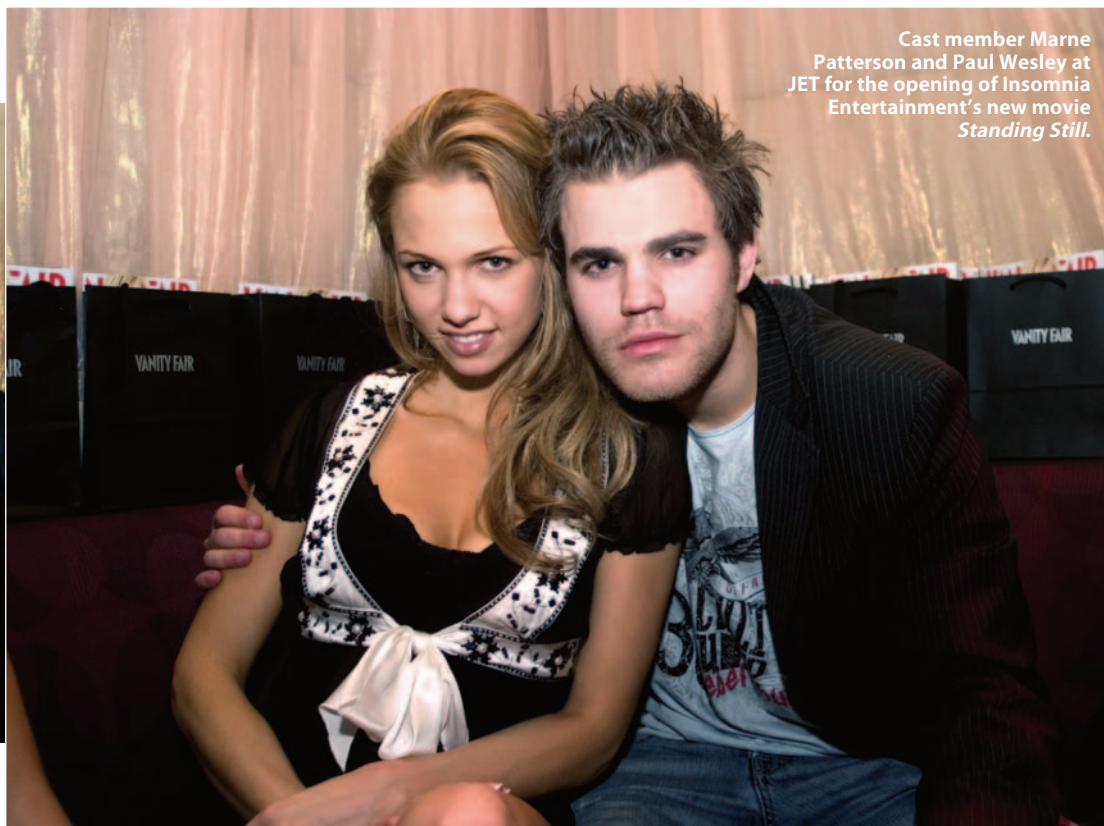


Cast member Jon Abrahams with witty *Friend* Matthew Perry at JET for the *Standing Still* release party.

affair—which took place on Friday, February 10th at JET at the *Mirage*—was great, and everyone there had fun, fun, fun ‘til her daddy took the T-Bird away.

Taking over JET’s rock ‘n’ roll room were cast members **Jon Abrahams** (who is re-teaming with *Standing Still* director **Matthew Cole Weiss**—also present at the party—for Weiss’ third time in the director’s chair for *The American Standard*, currently in post-production), **Ethan Embry** (most recently seen in an edgily disturbing role as a voyeur on NBC’s *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*), **Xander Berkeley** (best known in our neck of the woods as Sheriff Rory Atwater on CBS’ *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*), **Lauren German** (coming soon to a theater near you in *What We Do Is Secret*, a biopic of seminal punk rockers *The Germs*) and **Marne Patterson** (known to viewers of the WB as the newest addition to the charismatic cast of *Charmed*). Also seen groovin’ right along were some other folks who’d flown in from Hollyweird for the occasion, including **Charlie Talbert** (who did an interpretive dance atop a banquet and best described as **Martha Graham** at Studio 54) and **Aaron Himmelstein**—both cast-members of *Insomnia*’s other recent production, *Bachelor Party Vegas*—as well as that wittiest of all the *Friends*, **Matthew Perry**, who (if the rumblings are to be believed) might be doing a future project with the fellas at *Insomnia*, but you didn’t hear it from me. Actually, who am I kidding? Of course you did!

As I was the one fiddling around behind the DJ booth that evening, I feel obliged to extend my apologies to the lovely **Teresa Fertitta**, who requested a song that I (of all people) should have had. The song—“It’s Raining Men” by **The Weather Girls**—was meant as part of an inside joke involving some of the other guests, but lo and behold, I’d left it at home. Alas, the temperature wouldn’t be risin’ that night to the sweet



Cast member Marne Patterson and Paul Wesley at JET for the opening of *Insomnia Entertainment*’s new movie *Standing Still*.



Robert Brinkmann, cast member Lauren German and director Matthew Cole Weiss at JET for the *Standing Still* release party.

**I flicked my Bic and held it high over my head. Within seconds the room was aglow with light emanating from dozens of flickering lighters. It was truly a sight.**

sounds of **Martha** and **Izora**! That aside, the night was a blast, and played host to such festive types as *Insomnia* Entertainment president **Trent Othick** (who is mentioned on page 81 of *Vanity Fair*’s Hollywood issue) with his wife, **Erin**, **Tom Breitling**, **Lorenzo Fertitta**, **Michelle** and **Lawrence Epstein**, **Kimia** and **Matt Othick**, **Sasha Cramer** (who makes me horribly bitter considering she seemingly hasn’t aged a bit since our college days), *Insomnia* executive **Christopher Ramirez** (who, in true Hollywood fashion, actually performed a costume-change mid-party—the latter look including a rather dapper fedora!),

joining in, I did what any self-respecting lover of the ‘80s power ballad would do: I flicked my Bic and held it high over my head. Within seconds of realizing what I was doing and why, a mix of cheers and laughter spread across the room, which soon was aglow with light emanating from dozens of flickering lighters. Tom Breitling even raised the candle from his table. It was truly a sight that warmed me down to the very cockles of my jaded old heart. In the words of that iconic song: “*Some will win, some will lose; some were born to sing the blues. Oh, the movie never ends; it goes on and on and on and on....*” ♠

**Holly Donlon** (late of *Vanity Fair*, and recently promoted to *Condé Nast Traveler*, which one can only hope means we’ll be seeing more of her), **Nicole Ruvo** (in from New York for the Alzheimer’s event), **Milo Kostelecky**, **Darin Brookner**, **Darin Rosas**, **Dina Mondavi** (granddaughter of master vintner **Robert**) and DJ **Eddie McDonald**. I ended the evening with a trio of rock songs that I felt befitting the so-called rock ‘n’ roll room: “*Pretty in Pink*” by the **Psychedelic Furs**, “*Anything, Anything*” by **Dramarama**, and “*Don’t Stop Believin’*” by **Journey**. As the first refrains of the piano were heard, and just prior to **Steve Perry**’s voice

ABRAHAMS: DENISE TRUSCELOW/IMAGE.COM; PATTERSON, BRINKMANN: RICHARD CREAM