



By Kellie Burns

SCENE & HEARD

The Power of Hugs ... Warehouse Chic ... Willard a Hero?



DAVID URBAN

Hugging it out: Left, Julie Koester, Stefan Andreev and Doris Siano Butchin distributed free Valentine's Day hugs at Waterside Shops. Above, John Sheehan and Jamie Yuccas at the Lee County Cattle Baron's Ball.

LOVE STORY

HOW SIMPLE. HOW INGENIOUS. How caring. Three Neapolitans—Julie Koester, Doris Siano Butchin and photographer Stefan Andreev—created a memorable Valentine's Day here by patrolling Waterside Shops and Mercato for six hours with signs offering free hugs. The reaction was so touching, so real. "We had an extraordinary time," Stefan told me. "A 60-something man almost started crying in my arms, claiming no one had done something so nice for him in years. Children just ran up to us. We heard from cancer survivors and their need for affection, and one woman told me she hadn't been hugged since her husband died. The funniest part? Tourists were asking if it was always like this in Naples,

"We heard from cancer survivors and one woman told me she hadn't been hugged since her husband died."

and Julie told them, 'Of course, welcome to Fantasy Island! Hug?'" To which I add ... embraces for each of The Hugging Three. Your gifts of love to Naples shoppers were priceless indeed.

BOOT-STOMPING GOOD

A tip of the Stetson to the Lubner family for helping turn the Lee County Cattle Baron's Ball into a huge success. The Lubners offered up their spacious Robb &

Stucky warehouse as the corral for 500 very enthusiastic guests in January (and saved the committee tens of thousands of dollars in tent rental fees). There was beef aplenty, the beverages flowed and the guests just had a boot-stomping great time. It was well past midnight when the last of them finally headed home. Great roundup, partners.

WHAT A VOICE!

Tori, start your vocal cords. Congratulations to Tori Osceola, 13, a student at the Community School of Naples. She was chosen to sing the national anthem at the Daytona 500 in February. Tori is the daughter of a Seminole tribe leader, O.B. Osceola Jr. She's been winning talent contests right

along, and tuning those engines at Daytona will certainly keep her rolling in the right direction.

COMING HOME

What a smart move. Arts for ACT, after some lean years following the death of stalwart sponsor Robert Rauschenberg, is coming back to downtown Fort Myers this August. The art auction to benefit the Abuse Counseling Treatment Center will be at the Harborside Event Center and return to the original format with less pricey tickets, cocktails, food stations and a more relaxed atmosphere. Executive Director Jennifer Benton has called in the heavy hitters to bring new energy to the event, with philanthropist/business owner Sandy Stilwell as honorary chair and Rose Rundle and Pam Cronin conjuring up the décor with a Grafitti Night theme. Go for it, ladies.



SEBASTIEN GIRARD

The next level: Cynthia and Bruce Sherman co-chaired the very successful Naples Winter Wine Festival.

TOAST A WINNER

What a corker! Naples Winter Wine Festival guests and trustees are toasting co-chairs Bruce and Cynthia Sherman for a job superbly done. The look and feel of the late January event turned heads, as did the \$12 million raised at the Saturday auction (\$4 million more than in 2010). The 70 lots glittered with great enterprise and creativity—

the wines, luxury cars, art and one-of-a-kind trips—and the bidders responded. Naples philanthropists Jay and Patty Baker claimed the largest bid with their \$1 million offer for the stunning bronze sculpture by Spanish artist Manolo Valdés. “I knew Bruce and Cynthia would take it to the next level,” fellow trustee Denise Cobb told me. And so they did.

Laugh lines never looked so good.



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PRIZE GUESTS

Speaking of winning bids and the Cobbs, Denise and husband Brian hosted a dinner for the Bishop of Venice Diocese Frank Dewane, having won the prize for 10 guests at the Hope for Haiti gala in March 2010. And what guests they were. They included Francis and Kathleen Rooney. Francis was U.S. ambassador to the Vatican and knew the Bishop during his time there. New Neapolitans Sherri and Joe Abruzzese were also on hand. Joe, the president of the Discovery Channel, had met the Bishop when he worked at NBC. Would you believe that, before the Bishop became a priest, he worked for NBC, helping to close the deal to cover the Olympics in Russia? Clearly, a man who can bring people together.

FAIR-WEATHER FRIEND

Shall we give the *Today* show's Willard Scott a cut of the tourist dollars or blame him for our

crowded restaurants this season? I'm sure that delivering his Smucker's 100th birthday announcements from sunny Fort Myers this past winter lured many snow-besieged Americans to Southwest Florida for some pleasurable relief. Willard does his live segments from the back of the NBC studios here. He's been vacationing in Lee County for decades and spends parts of his winters here.

MAGIC TOUCH

The Hearts of Hope Gala held last February by the Women's Committee for Hope Hospice worked its magic with some very special touches. Party planner Erlene Sanders transformed the Bonita Bay Country Club into an exotic oasis complete with red lights, butterfly women on stilts and opera-singing waiters. And instead of a live auction after dinner, the fundraising part took place during the cocktail hour. There was a silent auction plus six big-board auctions, and guests



STEFAN ANDREEV

Hearts for hope: Kellie Burns, Samira Beckwith and Sonya Sawyer at the Hearts of Hope Gala.

got to bid on such items as a trip to Great Britain with tickets for four to the British Open, box seats on the 50-yard-line for the Notre Dame-University of Southern California game this fall and—the one that brought in \$15,000—an excursion to the Canadian Rockies. In all, the event raised more than \$165,000. Then, it was cool to have the rest of the evening to enjoy dinner and the wonderful entertainment. Great idea, guys. 🌴

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