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Record amount of funds raised for museum

Lydia Kremer
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High season met high expectations at Friday's Palm Springs Air Museum Gala 2006.

Raising a record amount of funds toward their educational programs, the Air Museum's gala proved once again the valley's generosity knows no bounds, even during a whirlwind of fundraising social events.

The newly dedicated Don and Peggy Cravens hangar was transformed for the event's "Liberating Paris" theme.

Event planner **Todd King** from Gilding the Lily Events cleverly carried the theme throughout with the mini Eiffel Tower table décor, enormous canvases of Parisian scenes, and French overtones of the dinner menu, which was excellent.

The evening's celebratory mood was set early on in the program with a short film reel featuring original archival footage of the Allies' liberation of Paris from the Nazis on Aug. 25, 1944.

Seeing the jubilant faces of the cheering French crowds along the Champs d'Elysee was a truly moving scene.

With that, the scene was set for a generous show of support by the guests during the Raise the Paddle live auction after dinner, which raised a museum record of \$173,000.

Some of the credit for the successful bidding goes to auctioneer **Jay Fiske** who kept the auction lively.

Museum director **Sharon Maguire** anticipated the evening would raise about \$400,000 in total.

"With funds from last year's gala we provided visits to the museum for 5,000 children from area public schools and for 2,000 children from private schools. The museum also provided \$10,000 toward busing for the field trips," said Maguire.

Visiting the museum "gives children a sense of history and they learn about the miracle of flight," said Maguire. "It also gives them a renewed respect for their parents and grandparents who served their country for our freedom."

Not surprisingly, there were an impressive number of veterans among the 500 guests.

One of the many notable veterans was **Sandy Hirschaut** who served under Dwight Eisenhower's command during the liberation of Paris.

"I relive it in my mind quite frequently. It was such a monumental turning point in my life and in the world," Hirschaut said. "Just remember one thing, we did it for ourselves, too."

Other distinguished guests were Palm Springs Mayor **Ron Oden** and City Council members, Rancho Mirage Mayor **Alan Seman** and City Council members, **Ric and Rozene Supple, Don and Peggy Cravens, Tom and Rita Martin, and Arthur and Patty Newman** among a roster of desert luminaries.

The stellar event committee, chaired by **Lee Hixon**, was comprised by a group of diligent worker bees including **Isabel**



Loretta Vlach, Special to The Desert Sun
The Palm Springs Air Museum Gala "Liberating Paris" was held Friday evening at the Air Museum. Chairman emeritus Robert J. Pond (from left) and board member Jo Pond with Karen and Maj. Gen. Ken Miles beside one of the historic war birds on display at the museum.

Barnett, Dr. Maria Sheehan, Gloria Greer, Jan Oliphant, Jeannette Reuben, Joann Chlavin and Dorothy Lyons Berns.

Despite the fact that she noted someone else was wearing the same dress as hers, Hixon, a helicopter pilot, was extremely pleased with the outcome.

"We're very proud that we can support the museum's educational and community programs all with private money, no government money," said Hixon.

Two community leaders spoke to put a human face on the enormous impact the Palm Springs Air Museum has in the lives of valley children.

"The Desert Highland Community is extremely pleased with our partnership with the museum that gives our African American youth these programs," said **Jarvis Crawford**, community center manager for the James O. Jessie Desert Highland Unity Center.

Crawford charmed the guests with his youthful exuberance and powerful message: "A good investment pays dividends for generations - we invest a small amount now and reap huge rewards later."

Monica Abel, site coordinator for Cathedral City Elementary School, was an equally effective speaker.

"This facility is more than a museum; it is a living educational resource and a tribute to the nobility of the greatest generation that ever lived," said Abel to thunderous applause.

Known for its mission to honor, to preserve and to educate, the Palm Springs Air Museum added one more element to its mission at this year's gala - to entertain.

A wonderful and thoroughly enjoyable variety show performed by the Performing Arts Division of College of the Desert was followed by dancing to the always-terrific Pat Rizzo Orchestra.

Board Chairman Emeritus **Bob Pond** gave nods to **Phil Hixon** and many supporters such as Don and Peggy Cravens for their contributions to making the Palm Springs Air Museum what it is today.

"There are many people who have worked hard to make this museum a class act, and they have made it bigger and better," Pond said.

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