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## Marine color guard opens heart-pumping event

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The beat goes on for the American Heart Association's annual fundraising gala held Saturday night at the Westin Mission Hills Resort. The entire program seemed designed to get hearts pumping, feet tapping and generosity flowing - and it worked!

The 18th annual gala was opened by the Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Color Guard and a spine-tingling rendition of the "Star Spangled Banner" by Staff Sgt. **Horace Miller**, along with an inspirational welcome by board president Dr. **Steven Gundry**.

Then, just moments after guests were seated, Broadway-movie-recording sensation **Sean McDermott** claimed the stage, the audience and everyone's heart with powerful and personalized renditions including "New York, New York" and "Music of the Night." He closed with "You Raise Me Up," after dedicating numbers to his mother, who was present, and honoree **Joel Smilow**.

Presenting the professional entertainment early, before the speeches and presentations, was a smart move that got the 400 guests charged up and in the mood for a grand evening.

After McDermott's half-hour musical appetizer, a dinner with pre-set salad was quickly served and then - before guests could signal for a second cup of decaf - the program really started to roll.

**Jay Fiske**, the "comic auctioneer," popped on stage for a fast-and-furious high-roller auction that raised \$28,000 in 15 minutes. But before guests could close their wallets, board member **Earl Greenburg** grabbed them by the heartstrings with a five-minute video on Camp del Corazon, a special summer camp just for children with heart disease.

And before guests could wipe their eyes after the video, they were greeted by attorney **Brian Harnik** with his daughter **Rachel**, imploring guests to support the camp.

With that, auctioneer Fisk quickly raised another \$330,000 in pledges for the camp, bringing the evening's total to more than \$500,000. He then invited guests to catch their breath over a sumptuous dessert of heart-shaped chocolate ganache cake.

### Changing lives

The program dessert was yet to come. **Greg Renker**, whose heart attack six years ago changed his life (primarily for the better) and who has since given millions toward curing heart disease, introduced Smilow, the evening's honoree.

Smilow, whose amazing career of worldwide billion-dollar deals was portrayed in a five-minute video, is a part-time desert resident and has made major donations to many local institutions.

He accepted the Heart Association's Individual Achievement Award, but joked about his long tenure as president of Playtex Corp. saying, "This seems like a lot of hoopla about a retired brassiere salesman."



Wade Byars, The Desert Sun

Brian Harnik (from left) and his daughter Rachel, representing the Heart Association's summer camp, join with supporters Stacy and Greg Renker at the American Heart Association gala at Westin Mission Hills Resort in Rancho Mirage on Saturday night.

### IT'S A WRAP

**Event:** American Heart Association 18th annual gala.

**Location:** Westin Mission Hills Resort

**Guests:** 400

**Funds raised:** More than \$500,000.

**Honoree:** World-known business magnate Joel Smilow.

And with that, the Pat Rizzo Orchestra slipped into dance-music mode, and the fastest, best-timed, most-invigorating, 150-minute show in town ended, leaving guests feeling as though they had had their cardiovascular exercise for the week.

What's more, the event met the demanding timing of Greenburg who says his goal is, "To always have folks out the door and home in time to watch 'Law and Order' (at 10 p.m.)."

## Roll credits

Show producer **Meredith Greenburg**, daughter of Earl, created the program and cracked the whip that kept it on schedule. Her co-producer was her partner, **Barbara Donner**, and a laboriously-devoted staff of 12.

The entire event was created by a committee of six, so modest they refused individual titles. Their names, in modest alphabetical order, were: **Bill and Poo Calkins, Earl Greenburg and David Peet, Bill and Maribeth King, Bill and Cydney Osterman, Bill and Guity Pierpoint**, and **Gary and Joanne Thompson**.

The utterly indispensable major sponsors of the event were Joel and Joan Smilow; Greg and Stacy Renker; Earl Greenburg and David Peet, Harold Matzner, Jim and Jackie Lee Houston, and Eisenhower Medical Center.

Information: 346-8109.

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