

Special Events Magazine, February 2009

Gala Winners Named at The Special Event 2009



A crowd of nearly 700 guests on Friday night applauded the winners of this year's Gala Awards competition, the oldest and most prestigious in special events. The Gala Awards ceremony, held at the San Diego Convention Center, was the final event during [The Special Event 2009](#).

This year's competition drew nearly 400 entries in 35 categories from Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, England, Germany, Spain, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and the United States. The Gala Awards have been given by [Special Events Magazine](#), the premier industry publication, since 1986, when the awards honored the "top 10 events of 1985." They recognize the finest work in special events worldwide.

The winners are:

BEST FAIR/FESTIVAL

THE LUNDQUIST CO., SACRAMENTO, CALIF.

More than 5,000 participants enjoyed the "First 5 Sacramento Children's Celebration," a free outdoor family event that included 49 educational programs. "Fairy Tale Town" brought to life Robin Hood's Sherwood Forest along with other book-related favorites, while "Tooth Fairy Lane" provided 450 children with their first dental checkup. The event entertained 4.6 percent more guests than anticipated but still came in 9 percent under budget.



BEST INVITATION

ASE GROUP, OVERLAND PARK, KAN.

For a bar mitzvah with the theme “connectivity,” ASE Group went for an interactive invitation. The celebration, dubbed “Ben-Mitzvah” for the honoree, featured an “iBen” invitation, which mimicked the look of an iPod. When invitees pressed the oversized “play” button, Ben invited them to his "Ben-mitzvah" via a sound chip imbedded in the invitation.

BEST DINING TABLE DESIGN

JANET FLOWERS WEDDING AND EVENT DESIGN, ROCKVILLE, MD.

For a Juicy Couture theme bat mitzvah dubbed "Couture Yourself," Janet Flowers Wedding and Event Design mixed fashion with floral to create fabulous centerpieces. Wrought-iron mannequins perched at the center of the tables were adorned with such creations as skirts consisting of layers of loose carnation petals or corseted tops made with brightly colored button mums. The fashionable centerpieces sported accessories too, such as rhinestones, silver charms, and pink and white strands of pearls.

BEST OFF-PREMISE CATERED EVENT

SOMEONE'S IN THE KITCHEN, TARZANA, CALIF.

At a minimum of \$10,000 a pop per couple, the cirque-themed "Bash in Bel Air" had high expectations to live up to. Since shellfish could not be served to the kosher-keeping supporters of the American Friends of the Hebrew University, seafood such as halibut cheeks with fennel and cracked green olives took its place in an entree duo alongside sliced filet of beef roulades with summer mushroom stuffing. Petit nondairy chocolate chip ice cream sundaes topped off the menu.

BEST CATERED EVENT BY A HOTEL BANQUET DEPARTMENT

HARITH PRODUCTIONS, WILLOW GROVE, PA., AND COPACABANA PALACE, RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

The catering team immersed guests in Brazilian culture during a "Spirit of Rio" event that combined dishes from different regions of Brazil with artistic presentation. For example, the spicy sea bass dish from the Pampas region was served in a half coconut atop a nest of thread-like leeks, while dessert featured a chocolate rendition of Brazil's Sugarloaf Mountain. The team purchased much of the products locally in order to reduce the event's carbon footprint.

BEST FUNDRAISING EVENT

ALISON SILCOFF EVENTS, MONTREAL

"The Daffodil Ball" went dashing, debonair and just a bit dangerous with a James Bond theme for 680 guests. Decor highlights included a laser "security system," a gold-painted beauty on a rotating circular bed, Bond-worthy gadgets and a helicopter, not to mention 30,000 daffodils. The event netted a record-breaking \$2.3 million for the Canadian Cancer Society.

BEST EVENT PRODUCED FOR A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION**E=MC2 EVENT MANAGEMENT, CALGARY, ALBERTA**

The "David Foster Foundation Gala" treated 1,000 guests to an event that raised awareness of the David Foster Foundation, which provides financial and emotional assistance to families with children needing organ transplants. The event included an Oscar-style red carpet, a "Star Search"-style event and celebrity entertainment, including singer Lionel Richie. The event raised \$3 million.

BEST WEDDING: BUDGET UNDER \$1,000 PER GUEST**FUTURE AFFAIRS PRODUCTIONS, EAST PROVIDENCE, R.I.**

A bride with a proud Irish heritage and a groom who spent 26 years in Hawaii combined their two cultures in "An Unconventional Wedding." Leis, hula dancers, Irish step dancers and an Irish band all contributed to the wedding day ambience. Because the couple did not want a tent to mar the scenery, the event team installed 35 white spandex four-cornered sails horizontal to the ground to shield guests from the sun.

BEST WEDDING: BUDGET \$1,000 AND ABOVE PER GUEST**HONEYSWEET PRODUCTIONS, LOS ANGELES**

For the first--and so far only--wedding held at L.A.'s Kodak Theatre, which hosts the Oscars ceremony, Honeysweet Productions opted for romance, drama and theatrics for "My Big Fat Kodak Wedding." Wedding scenes from famous films were projected on a screen; a musician played "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" on the ukulele; and the bride and groom duped the audience into believing they performed an intricate dance number with the help of excellent lighting, a mood-setting scrim and professional dancers.

BEST MULTIPLE-DAY INCENTIVE EVENT**JOBE & ASSOCIATES, DUBLIN, OHIO**

The "Island Royalty" annual sales conference hosted 220

guests at Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands, for four days of motivational morning sessions, afternoon excursions and themed evening events. The island locale was ideal for such activities as stingray encounters, deep-sea fishing and snorkeling. Evenings brought elegant, bohemian lounge areas and a surprise performance by singer Seal.

**BEST MULTIPLE-DAY EVENT PROGRAM FOR A CORPORATION OR ASSOCIATION
TOTAL EVENT RESOURCES, SCHAUMBURG, ILL.**

The three-day Parts and Services Expo addressed the question: "What drives your company?" with the event "Drive" at the Orlando World Marriott Center in Orlando, Fla. Some 1,800 truck manufacturers, dealers, employees and suppliers attended an opening session with a stage built around a real truck and surrounded by five LED screens hung at different heights and depths. The 1950s-style farewell dinner was followed by an after-party at a drive-in movie theater complete with antique cars as decorations and rock group REO Speedwagon as entertainment.

**BEST EVENT STAGED IN MULTIPLE LOCATIONS
AFFINITY SPORTS MARKETING, SOUTHLAKE,
TEXAS**

McDonald's hosted the "Midnight Gaming Championship" with 56 tournaments in 16 cities over 16 weeks. Four mobile gaming event crews produced tournaments simultaneously in four cities to promote the fast-food chain's "Many Stores Open Late" initiative to night-owl gamers. It was the largest video game tournament in the country and the first to have consecutive tournaments in multiple cities on the same day.

**BEST FLORAL DESIGN
THE PRECIOUS MOMENT BEIJING, BEIJING**

This gala brought nature indoors with floral displays representing different seasons. For instance, the second level of the venue embodied summer with 700 flowers and crystal beads strung from the ceiling to symbolize the rainy summer season. A reconstructed 300-year-old traditional Chinese opera house served as the venue for a fashion show with models dressed in styles made mainly of plants and flowers.

**BEST TENT INSTALLATION
CLASSIC PARTY RENTALS/DUCKY-BOB'S,
CARROLLTON, TEXAS**

Some 26,102 square feet of tented space served as the ceremony space for a "Ranch Wedding and Reception." To supply the authentic church ambience the bride and groom wanted for their ceremony, Classic provided a

70-foot steeple, which complemented stained glass windows and wooden pews. An 8,700-square-foot tent divided into three levels acted as the reception area.

BEST USE OF LIGHTING GLOBAL EVENTS, MADRID

A soccer pitch served as venue for the "Real Madrid Championship Celebration"; lighting was key to transform the space, which could not hold heavy structures. Spotlights produced stroboscopic flashes to transform the darkened stadium into a star-filled sky for the 80,000 attendees. More than 50 technicians worked nonstop for a day and a half with only one night to rehearse and check lighting for a production that would be broadcasted to 100 million people.

BEST ACHIEVEMENT IN TECHNICAL SUPPORT BRITE IDEAS BY GREG CHRISTY, FOOTHILL RANCH, CALIF.

The event team created a production for 1,000 seen-it-all-before guests, including Tom Cruise, Katie Holmes and Dennis Hopper, with the "Grand Opening of Broad Contemporary Art Museum" at LACMA. The team opted for a 165-by-145-foot portable soundstage structure and a ceiling that could support 70,000 pounds. Video-programmable, 12-by-12-foot box-like chandeliers hung from above, while the back of the venue teased attendees with a seemingly solid Kabuki wall, which eventually fell away to reveal the new museum.

BEST ACHIEVEMENT IN LOGISTICS VENETIAN RESORT HOTEL CASINO, LAS VEGAS, AND LUMINOUS, HONG KONG

The event team threw the multi-day "Celebration Macau 2008" in honor of a business mogul's 75th birthday. The event drew on different cultural aspects of the honoree's life, such as his Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Jewish heritage, as well as his business accomplishments in China. Day One included VIP courtside seating for a basketball match between the U.S. Olympic team and the Lithuanian Olympic team, while the third day included such entertainment as a 1,000 Hand Buddha Dance and the Red Army Choir from Moscow.

BEST ACHIEVEMENT IN EVENT RENTAL SUPPORT TOP PRODUCTIONS, RICHMOND, CALIF.

Top Productions developed a temporary village for the "Scion United" commercial shoot and marketing event. With less than a week's notice, the team created an event space with 20 tents ranging in size from 10-by-10 to 120-by-220 in a barren desert location. The temporary venue covered 60,000 square feet of land with rental items

from Top Productions' warehouse 600 miles away.

BEST NEW, INNOVATIVE EVENT

PRODUCT/TECHNOLOGY

VELON DESIGNS, SAN FRANCISCO

Velon Designs developed a Pucci-style print velon for the "Manus Valentine's Day Ball," which had an Austin Powers theme. The print served as liner for a 60-by-60-foot tent, enveloping guests in a fun, whimsical environment. A vintage swatch from the '70s served as inspiration for the print.

BEST EVENT ENTERTAINMENT CONCEPT AND EXECUTION: ENTERTAINMENT BUDGET UNDER \$25,000

DESIGNS BY SEAN, DANIA, FLA., AND ANDY KUSHNER ENTERTAINMENT, ROCKVILLE, MD.

"Inner Circle 2008: Daydream in the Desert" general session had a dream theme set against an Arizona desert backdrop. Identical triplet violinists appeared singly playing different verses of the song "Dream Weaver" before joining together to finish the song. The grand finale featured Aerosmith's "Dream On" performed by a guitarist/singer and a string-based instrumental section--a 20-person gospel choir entered through the rear of the room and joined the performers on stage to bring the song to a close.

BEST EVENT ENTERTAINMENT CONCEPT AND EXECUTION: ENTERTAINMENT BUDGET \$25,000 TO \$100,000

EXPERIENTIAL EVENTS, CALGARY, ALBERTA, AND BRAVO! ENTERTAINMENT, DALLAS

The "Feel the Beat" presentation stressed energy and teamwork for its corporate-employee audience through troupes of drummers, dancers and acrobats, along with interactive entertainment for the 1,500 guests. Acts performed in 20-minute segments on three different stages; guests moved throughout the space to follow the entertainment. The event team eschewed headliners, opting instead for unique acts including a Chinese Cube, Dan the One Man Band, and an Earth Harp.

BEST EVENT ENTERTAINMENT CONCEPT AND EXECUTION: ENTERTAINMENT BUDGET ABOVE \$100,000

TOM BERCU PRESENTS, LOS ANGELES, AND EXTRAORDINARY EVENTS, SHERMAN OAKS, CALIF.

For a high-tech client's 7,000-attendee welcome reception, the event team skipped the usual stage entertainers, opting instead to line the walls of the bare event space with a

900-foot-long projection surface for floor-to-ceiling video "wallpaper." In keeping with the event's status as a global meeting, the decor/entertainment included performers from throughout the world, ranging from sumo wrestlers to Bollywood dancers. Music embedded into the video further enhanced the experience.

**MOST OUTSTANDING SPECTACLE
THE FULL EFFECT, BEDFORD, ENGLAND**

The two-night "Light Fantastic" spectacle drew more than 160,000 people to the heart of an English city to enjoy son et lumiere shows, which included lasers, gas jets and fireworks, and large-format projections on building facades. Performers from avant-garde troupe Transe Express dangled from a giant child's mobile 150 feet above the ground. Local schoolchildren helped create models used for a lantern parade through the city streets.

**BEST EVENT FOR A PRIVATE INDIVIDUAL:
BUDGET UNDER \$1,000 PER GUEST
EVENTS OF DISTINCTION, SAN FRANCISCO**

An engaged couple completely overhauled the plans for their engagement parties, finally settling on a freewheeling gala at a Napa Valley, Calif., winery. A "kaleidoscope" theme enlivened the mood for 89 guests, from eight giant kinetic motion wheels at the outdoor cocktail reception to the after-dinner "Kaleidoscope Lounge," featuring cast-aluminum Versailles chairs, mirror cube tables and glowing bar stations.

**BEST EVENT FOR A PRIVATE INDIVIDUAL:
BUDGET \$1,000 AND ABOVE PER GUEST
VENETIAN RESORT HOTEL CASINO, LAS VEGAS,
AND LUMINOUS, HONG KONG**

A five-day 75th birthday celebration for a business tycoon drew on the honoree's Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Jewish heritage. Some 250 guests from throughout the world arrived in Macau for events including basketball games, tours of Macau and Hong Kong, and lavish entertainment. The birthday party included performances by the 1,000 Hands Buddha, the Three Tenors from Israel and Moscow's Red Army Choir.

**BEST EVENT MARKETING CAMPAIGN
VOK DAMS GROUP, WUPPERTAL, GERMANY**

To herald the spinoff of a major coal producer's "white," non-coal business, the event team replaced the corporation's old logo on its headquarters building with a glowing skin reading, "Hi, I'm the new one!" At the official press conference, the veiled building facade appeared to blast open, revealing the new entity's name, logo and slogan. A 33-city road show for the company's

43,000 employees helped communicate the company's new direction.

**BEST THEATRICAL ENTERTAINMENT
PRODUCTION
GLOBAL EVENTS, MADRID**

The event team created an artificial lagoon as the stage for the dramatic launch of a new car line. In place of the traditional training session, attendees watched a theatrical extravaganza in Spain that included a popular TV host interacting via satellite hookup with the automaker's CEO, who was at the Frankfurt [Germany] Auto Show. As a surprise to guests, the car models that were supposedly making their debut in Germany appeared as projections that morphed into actual cars racing onto the stage.

**BEST DECOR: TOTAL DECOR BUDGET UNDER
\$20,000
DESIGNS BY SEAN, DANIA, FLA.**

The rehearsal dinner for a Florida wedding took full advantage of flora at the venue--a marine park--to create a tropical paradise. Custom air-brushed spandex linen in floral designs covered each table; tables also featured dramatic floral centerpieces. Floor-length raffia skirting dressed serpentine buffet tables, which sported tropical leaf print overlays.

**BEST DECOR: TOTAL DECOR BUDGET \$20,000 TO
\$49,999**

THE PRECIOUS MOMENT BEIJING, BEIJING

For an interior design magazine's awards program, the event team showcased four trendsetting decorating styles--"spontaneity," "mix and match," "indulgence" and "naturalistic"--as table centerpieces. The popular "naturalistic" tabletops featured floral in jars functioning as tiny eco-systems. The 255-foot perimeter of the venue--a nondescript hotel ballroom--was defined by a 16-foot-tall silvery drape that threw attention to the centerpieces, which guests eagerly took away with them.

**BEST DECOR: TOTAL DECOR BUDGET \$50,000 TO
\$150,000**

THE PRECIOUS MOMENT BEIJING, BEIJING

The beauty of the seasons came to life at a residential developer's annual brand promotion event. To represent the dramatic summer rainstorms of China's southern regions, 700 strands of white orchids and crystal beads dangled from the venue's rafters. In the main banquet hall, tables were decorated in four styles, symbolizing the four communities the developer had created.

BEST DECOR: TOTAL DECOR BUDGET ABOVE

\$150,000

THE CATERING CO. DECOR, CHAPEL HILL, N.C.

Although they were actually in a nondescript gymnasium, guests at the final gala for the University of North Carolina's capital campaign had the sense they were dining inside the school's beloved "Old Well" landmark thanks to clever projections and iconic decor elements. A 360-degree screen showed images of the campus; the images slowly changed from day to night. Highboys were dressed in "Carolina blue" linen, a nod to the school's colors.

BEST EVENT FOR A CORPORATION OR ASSOCIATION: OVERALL BUDGET UNDER \$100,000
TOTAL EVENT RESOURCES, SCHAUMBURG, ILL.

Winners of a pharmaceutical company's incentive program visited a Caribbean island, where they turned treasure-hunters on the resort property. Challenges included physical and mental tests along with lighthearted stunts. Due to the tight budget, the event team created the scavenger hunt without benefit of an initial site visit.

BEST EVENT FOR A CORPORATION OR ASSOCIATION: OVERALL BUDGET \$100,000 TO \$249,999
TOTAL EVENT RESOURCES, SCHAUMBURG, ILL.

For a new twist on the corporate holiday party, 500 employees entered the "Holiday Workshop," which featured lunch buffets decorated with a holiday theme. The surprise came when the company chairman announced that the employees would build toys to donate to a local children's charity. The employees received \$100 gift cards and chances to win iPods and airline tickets, along with a wave of positive press for the 500 toys they created for needy children.

BEST EVENT FOR A CORPORATION OR ASSOCIATION: OVERALL BUDGET \$250,000 TO \$500,000

WELCOME EVENT MARKETING, COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

To create an unforgettable product launch heralding the new energy-efficient "Alpha" pump, the event team asked the 280 guests to sign a charter affirming their commitment to protecting the environment before transporting them to the top of a melting glacier, where they saw the impact of global warming firsthand. Upon returning to the mountain lodge for their social event, guests saw huge projections--using the mountain itself as the projection screen--of the pump.

BEST EVENT FOR A CORPORATION OR

ASSOCIATION: OVERALL BUDGET ABOVE \$500,000
GLOBAL EVENTS, MADRID

To boost both employee and retailer morale for a car line, the event team staged a splashy four-day program including meetings, car exhibition, gala dinner and lavish entertainment. Going beyond a presentation of the new car models themselves, the entertainment program stressed the resurgence of the brand via spectacular elements including fire and light cannons, water screens and hidden fountains. The show was staged on a huge platform system built beneath the surface of a lake.



GALA AWARD FOR
LIFETIME
ACHIEVEMENT

In recognition of her notable career in special events, Janet Elkins, head of Los Angeles-based [EventWorks](#), received the Gala Award for Lifetime Achievement.

Next year's competition opens June 1; entry forms will be available then.

Photo at top by Adrienne Grace

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