

# INTERNATIONAL FINE WINE AND FOOD GALA

By Nikki Hervey

Nielsen Media Research and the Upper Tampa Bay Chamber Education Foundation hosted an International Fine Wine and Food Gala at Nielsen Media's Grand Hall in Oldsmar on January 20. Proceeds from the event enhance the educational and cultural opportunities for youth in the Upper Tampa Bay area.

Live music performed by the East Lake High School Jazz Band and the Pinellas Youth Chamber Ensemble filled the soaring atrium of Nielsen's Grand Hall. Aromas of the best samplings from area chefs and the sound of popping corks from local wine shops created an air of excitement. Ladies in long gowns, sequins and silks glowed as they mingled among the 300 plus party-goers.

A wide variety of food was provided by traditional restaurants, gourmet food assembly kitchens and a few newcomers to food galas. Traditional restaurants included GrillSmith, Restaurant Hapa, Dominics, Amici's Catered Cuisine, Jack Willies, Tarpon Turtle and Blue Heron's newly opened Soho Bleu Lounge.

Super Suppers and Let's Eat educated the crowd about the new trend in the area where you visit a well-equipped kitchen and assemble meals to take home. All the prep work, recipe vetting and clean up is done for you. Guests can often sip wine and enjoy appetizers while preparing their take-home meals.

Non-traditional exhibitor Sodexho, who operates the Nielsen Media Research cafeteria, featured a mouth-watering herb roasted pork tenderloin in a creamy garlic sauce and showed the crowd how far "cafeteria food" has come. Town and Country Hospital presented its world-class room service dining's margarita shrimp pasta. Who knew hospital food could taste so good?

New Year's resolutions were put to the test with desserts from the Melting Pot, Vanessa's Fine Chocolates and Cakes for Any Occasion. Cakes, cheesecakes, marshmallows dusted in graham crackers and chocolate-dipped fresh strawberries satisfied everyone's sweet tooth.

Wine shops – including The Grapevine at Racetrack, The Grapevine at Westchase and WineStyles – poured over 50 kinds of reds, whites and champagnes from around the world. Hops lovers sampled Micro Man beer.

Event sponsors included Nielsen Media Research; Johnson, Pope, Bokor, Ruppel & Burns, LLP; Flagship Community Bank; ERA Golf View Realty; TECO Energy; and the Upper Tampa Bay Chamber.

An auction featuring sports, travel, spa and home improvement packages helped raise funds for the Upper Tampa Bay Chamber's Education Foundation.

"We encourage student achievement and leadership through scholarships and internships for high school students and the student of the month program for elementary school students," explains Gerald Pappa, the Education Foundation's president. "This year we're launching a Youth Leadership program that brings together high school students with chamber members so they can gain a greater understanding of the opportunities available to them."

The Upper Tampa Bay Chamber Education Foundation honors teachers and support staff from Oldsmar's public schools with an annual Teacher Appreciation Breakfast. The Education Foundation is establishing an endowment to award annual scholarship.



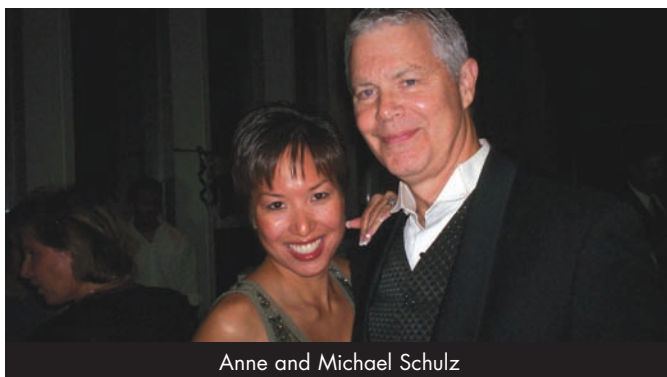
Nancy Weaver, Annie Scoggins, Becky Daly, Barbara Robinson, Trip Weaver, Tom Scoggins, Christina Kelly, Randy Daly, Wayne Robinson



Dan O'Brien, Martine Moore, Gerald Pappa



Maritha Ferreira, Rick Fitzgibbon



Anne and Michael Schulz



Michael Furnia, Jenny Tomanovich