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Remembering the year's memorable charity parties

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In spite of valiant efforts to avoid the spiraling effects of this economy, charity fundraising events were hit hard in 2009. Nonetheless, Metro Detroit philanthropists threw festive occasions that served a variety of causes and services.

Here are some of the best and most memorable social charity gatherings of 2009.

- Wine lovers found Paradise on May 19, when the Ritz-Carlton Dearborn was transformed into an elegant, massive wine shop with rows of tables filled with lots of wine and wine-related items for auction to benefit the Alliance for Vision Research, which supports vision restoration and improvement for children in our community. The event raised more than \$400,000.
- The Edmund T. Ahee Jewelers family made the usual impressive splash with their annual Capuchin Souper Summer Celebration. Held at Comerica Park on June 13, this was the 28th year for the event, which supports the Capuchin Kitchen, a human services organization that provides 2,000 meals daily to the less fortunate. To date, the Ahees have raised more than \$5 million for Capuchins.
- Detroit riverfront fireworks parties are always a blast, with the VIP Rooftop Gala supporting The Parade Company still the frontrunner. For the last few years, however, Cass Community Services has hosted a spectacular event at Coach Insignia that continues to be a strong contender. On June 24, about 300 people enjoyed the Target Fireworks from atop the Renaissance Center, with Magic Johnson as host and proceeds supporting Cass Community Services. Tickets were \$250, and \$185,000 was raised.
- Sailing farther out, the Detroit Area Agency on Aging hosted an elegant cruise on the Ovation Yacht on Aug. 18 to benefit Holiday Meals on Wheels. Recording artist Kimmie Horne had guests dancing on the tables as they cruised the Detroit River while enjoying cocktails and dinner.
- A few words don't begin to describe the 50th-anniversary party that Art Van Elslander hosted at his furniture store in Warren. Around 1,000 people were entertained by aerialists dancing overhead, food stations stocked to the hilt, cocktails flowing continuously and celebrities, including supermodel Cindy Crawford, working the crowd. Tickets ranged from \$100 to \$1,000. Van Elslander footed the bill for the party, allowing 100 per cent of the ticket sales -- \$450,000 -- to go to the Hermelin Brain Tumor Center and Neuroscience Institute at Henry Ford Health Systems.
- For 20 years, Hob Nobble Gobble, the black-tie, Thanksgiving eve fantasy party that supports The Parade Company, is still a perennial favorite. Where else can you experience themed buffets, open bars, live entertainment, carnival rides, games, marching bands, celebrity appearances and bags of gifts? This year's gala honored Art Van Elslander for his 20 years of support and \$300,000 was raised.

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