

Fundraising Phenoms

By Christina Bohnstengel Photography by Craig Denis

ROY AND LEA BLACK ARE BREAKING TRADITION ON THE CHARITY CIRCUIT BY HOSTING AN OVER-THE-TOP ANNUAL GALA WITH ZERO EXPENSES.



LEA BLACK, AT HOME IN CORAL GABLES.

As far as charity galas go, the competition to outdo each other is fiercer than that of beauty pageant lore. Five-star venues, celebrity chef catering, and promises of appearances from A-list superstars are a must in order to impress the guests who have seen it, heard it, and done it all before. Flowers and decorations must be over the top, centerpieces should shock, and the evening's entertainment has to captivate an audience that is accustomed to having their every whim fulfilled. Any philanthropic ball worth mentioning on a society page includes an auction, whether silent, live, or both. Up for grabs can be anything from extravagant vacation packages to the South of France, to new Rolls-Royces, to Cartier jewels, to priceless art. Everything is designed to keep the town talking until the next event, which during the height of the charity season (typically from late September through April or May) could be as soon as the following evening.

While the measure of a successful gala can be calculated in a number of ways, (attendance numbers, ticket sales, and reviews from fellow gala girls) the dollar signs at the end of the day are the true gauge of victory—not just in the total amount raised, but the grand sum sent to charity.

As Lea Black, gala hostess extraordinaire, points out, for many of the over-the-top charity functions, the expense of producing such events can be exorbitant, leaving little left over for the charity of choice. "It's really not hard to put on a big gala and a big party if you're willing to just pay for everything. Pretty much anyone can do that," explains the Texas native who has made a name for herself in South Florida as a powerhouse fundraiser for Bay Point Schools. "What distinguishes our charity event from the others is that we commit 100 percent of the ticket sales and the profit from the auction items directly to Bay Point Schools and the Consequences Program. We get everything donated, sponsored, and underwritten, so we have zero expenses."

The nation first got to know Lea in 1991, not as a philanthropist, but as a juror in the trial of William Kennedy Smith. At the time she was a businesswoman running her own cosmetics company. Her future husband, Roy Black, was the attorney representing the defendant accused of rape. While legal codes of conduct prevented juror and lawyer from personally meeting during the Palm Beach trial, months later, a coincidental meeting in Miami marked the beginning of their storybook romance. They married in 1995 and have been doing their part to make a difference in the lives of troubled teenage boys ever since.

Bay Point Schools is an alternative boarding school in Miami for 14- to 18-year-old boys who have been in trouble with the law. The award-winning staff provides education, therapy, and vocational training in an effort to rehabili-

HAIR BY JOSE LUIS, OLAZABAL SALON, CORAL GABLES



LEA AND SON ROY JR. PREPARE FOR THEIR UPCOMING ANNUAL GALA TO BENEFIT BAY POINT SCHOOLS



ROY BLACK IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST SUPPORTERS OF JUVENILE REHABILITATION

“IF I’M GOING TO WORK THIS HARD TO RAISE MONEY FOR CHARITY AND ASK MY FRIENDS TO PUT UP THEIR MONEY, I WANT TO MAKE SURE THAT THE CHARITY ACTUALLY GETS THE MONEY.”

tate the young men. The program boasts astounding success; more than 90 percent of Bay Point graduates never commit another crime and the State of Florida’s Juvenile Justice Accountability Board rated it as one of the best programs of its kind. The Consequences Program, founded by Engin Yesil and Lea, is a proactive intervention program designed to redirect troubled teens before they find themselves in trouble.

It is a fitting charity of choice for the Blacks, considering their passion for fighting injustice. Roy’s fame as a criminal defense attorney spans decades and he has represented a variety of celebrity names like Rush Limbaugh, Marv Albert, Kelsey Grammer, Mary Hart, Peter Max, and Dennis Rodman. His most recent client is Indianapolis 500 racecar champion Helio Castroneves, who is facing charges from the federal government for tax evasion. Roy is the go-to-attorney for television networks seeking on-air commentators—he regularly appears on NBC’s *Today Show* to review high profile cases. Though his status as a celebrity lawyer for criminal defense has skyrocketed, his passion to fight for what is right remains grounded. “I’ve always had a great affinity for people in our society who have no power, no money, no connections, and little education. They don’t get a fair break from the system and are often viewed and treated as some type of underclass, less-than citizen,” says Roy.

HAIR BY JOSE LUIS, OLAZABAL SALON, CORAL GABLES



THIS YEAR’S GALA IS THEMED THE POWER OF HOPE. THE CHARITY BALL HAS RAISED MORE THAN \$10 MILLION FOR BAY POINT SCHOOLS



TOGETHER, ROY AND LEA BLACK HAVE BEEN RAISING MONEY FOR BAY POINT SCHOOLS SINCE 1996



THE BLACK'S ANNUAL GALA TO BENEFIT BAY POINT SCHOOLS WILL BE HELD ON APRIL 18, 2009 AT THE EDEN ROC RENAISSANCE BEACH RESORT & SPA. FOR TICKET INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT JASON CLARKE AT 305.443.8980 OR JASONFCLARKE@HOTMAIL.COM. FOR ADDITIONAL GALA INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.THEBLACKSANNUALGALA.ORG. FOR INFORMATION ON BAY POINT SCHOOLS, VISIT WWW.BAYPOINTSCHOOLS.COM.

LEA AT HOME ON A SATURDAY AFTERNOON

HAIR BY JOSE LUIS, OLAZABAL SALON, CORAL GABLES

The birth of his sympathy for the afflicted began in high school when his family moved from Stamford, Connecticut, to Kingston, Jamaica. He attended one of the top schools on the island, which was based on the English prep school model. In what Roy describes as an attempt to humiliate the new, white, American student, his spiteful teacher called him to the board, day after day, to do math problems using British currency, of which he had no knowledge. "He got tremendous pleasure out of torturing me over that, and it's where I really got a sense of what it's like to be treated as an underling and to be humiliated by someone in authority," he says.

That sense of injustice led him to law school at the University of Miami and then to five years as a public defender. Though today his client list includes only those with hefty bank accounts, he credits his work with Bay Point Schools as a way to keep alive the spirit of wanting to help people who don't have the resources to help themselves, particularly troubled teenagers.

"The two things that cause crime are lack of education and lack of opportunity," he says. His voice rises and the trial lawyer within emerges with a passionate argument regarding rehabilitating the youth of America. "Why are we putting kids who are 12- to 16-years-old in jail?" he cries forcefully, citing his favorite phrase, that correctional institutions do not correct, they only teach and enhance criminal behavior. "You know, these are young kids that we can change. We shouldn't be giving up on them because there is still time to change them and teach them how to be. Put them in school. Let's give them an education," he rests.

As a loyal and loving husband, he credits all of the hard fundraising work for Bay Point Schools to his wife. "She is extremely high energy and can motivate people. She is the backbone of this whole effort. If she weren't there it would

fall apart and dribble away to nothing, I can assure you."

The main fundraiser to which Lea devotes her time and energy is the Black's Annual Gala, which has raised more than \$10 million for Bay Point Schools since its inception more than 13 years ago. It is the primary funding source for the operational costs of the school. This year's affair is so grand that it had to be split into two events. Themed The Power of Hope, the pre-party will take place on April 4 at Canyon Ranch, while the main gala will be on April 18 at Eden Roc. Celebrity headliners include Lil Wayne, Patti Labelle, Pamela Anderson, Heather McDonald, and JenCarlos Canela. Guests have been instructed to be camera-ready, as Univision will be filming the event, and as in years past, it is expected to sell out, with a waiting list.

In separate conversations with both Roy and Lea, each emphasizes the fact that the entire affair has been 100 percent underwritten and sponsored, translating to zero expenses. "If I'm going to work this hard to raise money for charity and ask my friends to put up their money, I want to make sure that the charity actually gets the money," Lea says. "It's a huge amount of work. That's the point of why this gala and charity are so special. It's easy to pick up the phone and hire the florist; it's much harder to call around and get 20 flower companies to donate flowers. It's easy to pick up the phone and hire talent; it's much harder to get them to come in for free."

Roy reiterates the dedication that his wife has for her cause. "It's not an easy charity. You know, my wife took on something that is quite difficult because it's not easy to raise money for juvenile delinquents. It's not an easy sell," he says, "but we can promise anyone who gets involved that their money is going directly to educating and straightening out these kids." ☺