



FEEN ON THE SCENE

It seems pretty tranquil in South Florida these days. But behind the scenes there are events taking place on all corners of our lush green terrain.

The great news is that most of the events taking place are entertaining, but with a charitable bent. Giving back is considered one way to live a meaningful life.

In the Hindu tradition giving back is not just a nice idea, it's considered a core duty and responsibility. In the Jewish tradition Tzedakah is considered fulfilling a legal and moral obligation to balance the world.

When it comes to balancing the world a little bit at a time, **The YMCA of South Palm Beach County** does their part. A supporter of young people, the disabled and seniors they continue to uphold all traditions when it comes to giving.

That's why their **Annual Inspiration Breakfast** is a big hit with local community leaders and guests. This year was the 24th year for this festive breakfast that is filled with anticipation and Exaltation.

Being a night owl, my feathers were ruffled when the alarm rang at 6:30 am. But I thought about the speaker, the people watching and the goodness that would befall me, and I was all in. And boy it was worth it. Over 500 people came to hear guest speaker John O'Leary, and to revel in the authentic heartfelt words of those who make a difference every day.

Guests arrived in their finest attire and were seated inside a huge tent where kind hearts radiated warmth, kindness and purpose.

Event Chair Linda Gunn Paton wore a short fluffy bright green jacket and spoke beautifully about the YMCA and the importance of events such as the Inspiration Breakfast.

Nicole Grimes of Grimes Events & Party Tents (and her team) created a setting worthy of the mission. It felt like winter in the morning so there were heaters everywhere. But when breakfast was over summer had come though the receiving line.

The theme, "Building Possibilities," echoed throughout the room. Bryan Hunt, Executive Director, shared a heartfelt story that revealed he was once a frightened child afraid to attend YMCA camp. But his parents worked very hard and needed to engage young Hunt for the summer.



JUDY MOLLIA, STEVE MICHAELS AND ANGELA BURNS



JOHN O'LEARY SPEAKER, LINDA GUNN PATON EVENT CHAIR



SHANA CINDERELLA

The YMCA gave him belonging, confidence and eventually a career. "Your donation is not a transaction, it's safety, belonging and someone's future," he said.

The silent auction included a "Be a Firefighter for a Day" experience and other gifts that energized the crowd.

Generosity flowed. One woman pledged \$15,000, then another gift of \$25,000 was offered. Donations for sports programs, cancer survivorship initiatives and camp scholarships followed. Each pledge underscored a simple truth, that it's important to send children to camp, help teens find their voice and give families hope.

The keynote speaker, John O'Leary, was burned over 100 percent of his body when he was nine. He lost his fingers and endured unimaginable pain. But through the love of family, community and mentors (the most memorable was legendary TV broadcaster Jack Buck) O'Leary healed his mind, body and spirit.

Despite the serious complications, O'Leary discovered that life is a precious gift. His message was simple and stirring: "Live your life loudly and ask, 'What more can I do?'"

By the end of this outdoor fete, that included a piano rendition by O'Leary, hearts were open, love flowed and courage was renewed. The YMCA doesn't just run programs, it shapes character, builds leaders and changes lives every day.

"The YMCA Inspirational Breakfast was filled with energy, gratitude, and heart. John O'Leary inspired us to live with courage, serve with compassion, and lead with purpose," said Gunn Paton. Caterer **Abbey Furlong of SPRD the vibe** rose to the occasion with gusto.

Roots and Wings, the local nonprofit that focuses on literacy and teacher recognition, had their 10th Anniversary Gala at Good Night John Boy in Delray. It was a night of fun and fancy due to its Hollywood theme. There were lots of bikers and cool girls from "Grease" as well as Cinderellas, Malibu Barbie and Celebrity gals (like Amanda Perna who held



SHANNON EWING, PRINCIPAL RONDA SMITH



MARY STERN, ALLISON TURNER, JACK SCHULMAN



RENE ROSENBERG, LORI LEVENSON AT MORIKAMI

an Oscar statue and wore rhinestone sunglasses). Mary Stern (volunteer Extraordinaire) wore a poodle skirt and “Grease” attire and Principal of Plumosa School of the Arts, Ronda Smith looked Oscar ready in a red Marilyn Monroe gown with white furry stole.

Over 150 guests attended the gala that made its mark on Hollywood just weeks before the Oscars. They raised \$385,000 through ticket sales, sponsorships, donations, and auction purchases. Raffle items were trips to Africa, a round trip ticket on Jet Blue anywhere-anytime (sold to Patty Jones), Beatles items and other fun stuff.

The Best Male Costume award went to Brant Burchfield for his Top Gun attire and female award to Shana Ostrovitz for her Cinderella gown.

Roots and Wings collaborates with 20 schools to strengthen literacy outcomes and recognize exceptional teachers. “Seeing a sold-out room of supporters rally behind literacy and teacher recognition reinforces just how deeply our community values education,” said founder Ted Hoskinson.

The weekday evening channeled classic Hollywood glamour, with themed décor, entertainment and heartfelt moments of student success stories. The life-changing work of Project Uplift and “The Above and Beyond Awards” is an enormous gift that Hoskinson heartfully gives young people. <https://rootsandwingsinc.org>

THE 2026 DELRAY BEACH OPEN was a rare chance to see the wind move in tandem with great tennis players. This year was super entertaining with a Fan Zone, Food Village, Interactive Exhibition (a ten year old beat me at the simulated serve game in the IBM tent) and a foodie theme every night.

This was no week to count calories, perhaps better to count friends and finger food instead. The **Food & Wine Series** included Grand Tasting events such as Tacos and Tequilla, Ladies Day luncheons, Burgers, Bourbon & Brew, Tacos, Tequila & Tennis and a new Italian theme evening called Serve & Savor: A Taste of Italy (note to self – do not wear white).

At 6pm most nights there was a pre-game food frenzy. Different restaurants and caterers (such as VIP Caterers) showed off fab food, ranging from ice cream to pasta and pizza. There was also sushi, fried rice and orange chicken. Like a merry go round the food seemed to evolve and revolve around me. But the smiles were electric and local Delray folks were dazzled and bedazzled by all the libation and liberation from the days’ norm.

We saw real estate honcho (and tennis sponsor) Steven Mi-

chael of Banyan Group with wife Natalia and niece Anna (who is almost too beautiful to look at without sunglasses).

We also bantered with Judy Molica who recently won her commission seat against a competitive landscape of hopefuls. Terrence Moore was there with his beautiful wife Michelle and you couldn’t help but notice the tallest commissioner, Tom Markert.

One of the highlights off the court were the flaming donuts that had my endorphins sizzling into the stratosphere. Just as memorable were the volunteers, who worked tirelessly at their posts.

The tennis was swift and the weather was perfect. It was mesmerizing to watch, but a little annoying when people yelled out Tommy... Tommy...Tommy Paul (the player from Boca Raton).

The stadium overflowed most evenings. An exciting match was watching Sebastian Korda win his third ATP Tour title and defeat player Tommy Paul in the final.

Rafael Jodar ran around the courts in neon orange socks and sneakers. Apparently they are made by Nike Tennis, but the bright sight was not enough to beat opponent Taylor Fritz.

On more stable ground, but just as enticing was at the **Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens**. Called “A Taste of Asia: A Culinary and Cultural Experience” the event was held to support this Asian site of wonderment in Delray.

There was a colorful light show amid the luscious gardens with a Taiko drumming performance by Fushu Daiko. Artist Kimata Yasunori came from Japan to showcase his artistry on canvas in a live painting extravaganza.

There was a Sake Bar, food samples from Nobu Miami, Kapow! Noodle Bar, Hawkers, Stage Kitchen & Bar, Sushi Yasu Tanak and more. They all represented the vibrant culture so beautifully curated at this Japanese homage to culture.

Proceeds from the evening benefit Morikami’s Four E’s: Education, Exhibitions, Expansion, and Emotional Well-Being. The goal is to ensure the spirit of Japanese culture and heritage continues to inspire, educate, and connect for many generations.

The Morikami also has a lovely outdoor garden restaurant with terrific food.

If you want to see history and classic cars from the past, check out the 5th Annual International Delray Beach Concours d’Elegance from April 3 to 24th.

April 18th is a Great Gatsby cocktail party at OSS (tickets needed). There will be an art auto exhibit at the Cornell Museum and a fantastic car show April 19th. Proceeds go to local charities. Delrayconcours.com

See you next month at the gas pump!