

Toasting Tradition

Annual Chicago Event Celebrates Hoosiers

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

Hundreds of guests fill the Fairmont Chicago's sprawling Imperial Ballroom for a black-tie event honoring all things Hoosier. There's lots of hand shaking and friendly embraces. Attendees quickly turn their attention from talk of the cold December evening to the festivities that include college fight songs, popular comedians and musicians, and distinguished Hoosiers taking a bow.

This is the scene at the annual Indiana Society of Chicago (ISOC) anniversary dinner, which recognizes outstanding businesses and educational institutions. The upcoming event – the 106th – will honor Indiana State University (it also received the distinction in 1990) and the city of Terre Haute.

The opening events include Culver Military Academy cadets reverently extinguishing candles to salute ISOC members who have passed away since last year's gathering.

"One of the things everyone loves is 'Back Home Again in Indiana,' which starts almost as a funeral dirge and goes to almost Dixieland up-beat tempo. Then the party starts," shares Ernest (Ernie) Summers, chairman of the ISOC board of trustees and a partner at the Chicago office of Indiana-based law firm Baker and Daniels.

History

The ISOC story began in the late 1800s when two Purdue University graduates and fraternity brothers – George Ade (a namesake for his alma mater's Ross-Ade Stadium) and John T. McCutcheon – moved to Chicago to start journalism careers.

"What skyrocketed George Ade to fame was his coverage of the Chicago World's Fair (in 1893)," Summers notes. "The society grew out of homesickness, if you will. They missed their Hoosier roots and Hoosier friends."

The first dinner took place in 1905.

"It basically is a fun organization that just celebrates all kinds of aspects of being Hoosiers, and all of the board and all of our members have some tie to Indiana," Summers comments.

Enhancing education

In 1997, the Indiana Society of Chicago Educational Foundation was established.

"The most visible charitable thing we do is give scholarships to students attending our

honoree institutions," Summers explains. "The thought when we created the scholarship foundation was that financial aid is easier to get in your freshman year than (during your) junior or senior year, so we wanted to make funds available to upperclassmen who might not be able to finish without help."

Past recipients have utilized their scholarships at both public and private Hoosier universities.

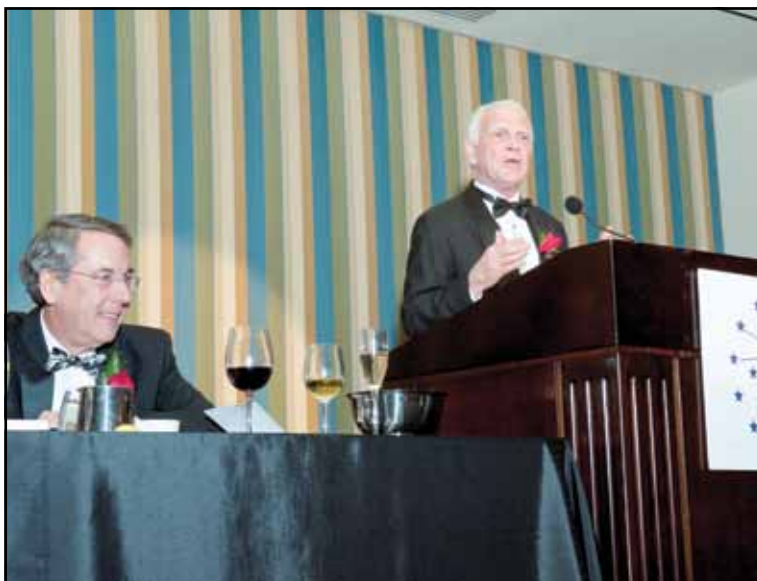
That's entertainment!

A popular portion of the evening is the entertainment.

One highlight from last year's gala was Miss Indiana Gabrielle Reed of Bloomington singing the National Anthem.

"We have a long relationship with the Miss Indiana and Miss America organizations," remarks Jason Brist, vice chairman of the board of trustees and senior vice president of advertising sales at web and digital media company Outdoor Channel. "For her to be at our

Ivy Tech Community College President Tom Snyder (left) and longtime business and government leader John Mutz were honored at last year's gala.



event was kind of a neat thing.”

Summers calls 2010 headliner Paula Poundstone “phenomenal.”

“Remarkably, she didn’t script her show,” he declares. “She ad-libbed the entire time.”

In recalling prior dinners, he points out, “The last time we honored Indiana University (in 2008), we were honoring Horseshoe Casino in Hammond. Gladys Knight (performed). Everyone was dancing in the aisles. The Second City (improv comedy group) customized a show (in 2004). We’ve had the Smothers Brothers (the following year). It can be very different entertainment.”

Another popular part of the event is a silent auction.

Local artists provide a variety of pieces. In addition, commemorative items from sponsors and universities (e.g., signed sports items, tickets to ballgames) are available, as well as gift certificates from restaurants and hotels. Proceeds benefit the ISOC scholarship foundation.

Attendees cap off the evening with an Afterglow Reception.

In their own words

Jim Marcuccilli, president and CEO of STAR Financial Bank in Fort Wayne, is a longtime attendee.

“The reason I continue to go is the great networking opportunity of seeing people from around the state who I do

not see in the normal course of the year,” he confides. “To add to that, both my brother and I started bringing all of our children and have given them an opportunity to meet other business people as well. The key is we’ve turned it kind of into a family weekend in Chicago during the holidays.

“It’s one of those nights where you get to dress up and really get an opportunity to enjoy the camaraderie of family and friends.”

Julie Griffith, vice president for public affairs at Purdue University, has attended the gala on several occasions over the last few years and is the newest member of the ISOC’s board of trustees.

“One of the many great benefits of membership to the Indiana Society of Chicago and attending the ball that is held each December is that – beyond the obvious benefit of networking – it gives you the opportunity to celebrate our history, the accomplishments of Hoosiers past and present and all that Indiana citizens have done to advance our state and nation,” she emphasizes.

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Ernie Summers and Jason Brist, Indiana Society of Chicago, at www.indianasocietyofchicago.org



(Clockwise, from top left). In 2008, ISOC President David Beering showcased his musical talents; Culver Academy cadets honor recently deceased ISOC members; attendees raise their glasses to toast Indiana; and among the more unique items at the silent auction, comedian David Steinberg (director of the television show *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and a past dinner entertainer) donated a walk-on part for an episode that will air this year. The winning bid: \$3,000.