

'Sadness and happiness intermingle' at Titz'n Glitz breast cancer fundraiser

Hundreds of women attended the tenth annual Titz'n Glitz gala Thursday night, a costume party that raises money for Nova Scotians living with breast cancer.

By: **Zoe Morawetz** <morawetz@dal.ca>

Date: **November 4, 2005**

When four women in her Halifax neighbourhood were diagnosed with breast cancer nine years ago, their friends asked Margo Kerr to host a fundraising event. Kerr, who had held a Titz'n Glitz party in her home the year before, said she was hesitant at first to take on the job.

"They had to encourage me three times before I said yes. It really wasn't meant to be an annual thing," said Kerr, who said the event became successful because of the enthusiasm and unique ideas many of her friends brought to the table.

"We had one friend who worked at the ice plant, who brought us a 600-pound block of ice," she said. "We had it chipped, by two artists that came over, into big breasts and we served the booze out of the nipples. It just took on a life of its own."

Titz'n Glitz held its tenth annual gala on Nov. 3 at Halifax's Pier 21, a venue that can accommodate up to 600 people. Besides growing in popularity in Halifax, the event, a women-only costume party that offers plenty of food, drink and entertainment, has gone national, with similar Titz'n Glitz galas taking place in cities such as Fredericton, N.B., Banff, Alta., Whitehorse and Collingwood, Ont.

Kerr held the first party in her basement when she had difficulty selling \$100 tickets for another breast cancer fundraising event, a price too expensive for many of her friends. She decided to have a party in her home and asked each of her guests to contribute \$25, then raffled off the more expensive tickets at the end of the night. She managed to sell all the tickets and raise an additional \$1,500. Since then, Titz'n Glitz has raised more than \$500,000 for women and men in Nova Scotia diagnosed with breast cancer who need financial assistance. That includes buying medication not covered by insurance, building ramps for people who can no longer walk into their homes, or paying for bus tickets or gas money for relatives to travel to Halifax, so that no one has to die alone.

"There were women missing their chemotherapy sessions because they couldn't afford a babysitter or transportation to get there," said Kerr. "And that's pretty pathetic. So that's where we help."

Celebrating Life

Kerr stood at the top of the ramp at the entrance of Pier 21 Thursday evening, watching the women arrive for the gala.

“I’m distracted by costumes – oh my god, those are so good!” she said, spying a group of about 15 women dressed in black, wearing top hats, with golden star-shaped plaques attached to their chests reading “Ritz Titz.”

For the best costumes, the gala offers Udderly Wonderful Awards in several categories (some of this year’s categories included Pier 21 or “Bust,” Sex and the Titty, and RealITITy TV).

Karen Ramstead, Trudy Carey and Diane Wile-Brumm hoped to win in the Trailer Park Girls category of the awards. The three friends, who have attended the gala as a group for the past seven years, took the Halifax-based TV show Trailer Park Boys as the inspiration for their costumes this year.

“We try to be as crazy as we can,” said Ramstead, “and as you can see, we don’t care how bad we look.”

The women said they go to Titz’n Glitz every year for the good food, good music, crazy people, fabulous women, and fantastic costumes, but most of all, to support the cause.

“We all have had friends who have had breast cancer and passed away, and also survivors,” said Wile-Brumm. “So we’re really supportive of the cause. But we try to make it as happy a celebration as possible.”

It’s that celebratory quality that makes Titz’n Glitz such a unique and powerful event in how it deals with breast cancer, said Carey.

“It puts a light heart into it,” she said “so when you’re feeling really high and emotional, you can let all of that emotion of sadness and happiness intermingle. And then, really, it just celebrates life.”

Besides providing financial assistance, the women said, Titz’n Glitz is also an emotional resource for people affected by breast cancer.

“Most years, when you listen to the survivors, they really talk about the feeling of support,” said Carey. “I think it makes a huge difference to know there are people out there supporting you.”

‘Not your normal black-tie crowd’

Holly Carr also said that Titz’n Glitz is unique because it is a celebration.

“I think it’s an empowering event for women,” said Carr, an artist who has painted images of the gala for the past five years. “Almost everybody here has somebody, whether their family, their friends, or themselves, who have been

affected by breast cancer. This night, it's a way of empowering yourself, it's about surviving.”

This year, instead of creating artwork after the event, Carr planned to paint a picture on-stage in front of the audience, and then auction off the painting at the end of the night.

One auction item that Titz'n Glitz creates every year, said Kerr, is the Press-a-Breast canvas, which bears the imprints of women who have painted a breast and pressed it against the material. The first Press-a-Breast canvas was actually a wall in Kerr's basement. This year, organizers hung up a canvas in the men's bathroom at Pier 21.

Kerr said that in addition to raising \$200,000 this year, the organizers behind Titz'n Glitz hoped to send everybody home inspired to do something good for other people.

“This kind of event is a level playing field; this is not your normal black-tie crowd,” she said. “This is a very intelligent, creative, fun, out-for-a-good-time with the girlfriends crowd, and that makes all the difference.”