



EVENT STARCHITECT: Daffodil Ball founder Alison Silcoff keeps the important fundraiser in bloom year after year.

Daffodil doyenne fights cancer in style

BY JENNIFER CAMPBELL SPECIAL TO URBAN EXPRESSIONS

Brainchild of founder and event architect Alison Silcoff, the Daffodil Ball, which benefits the Canadian Cancer Society, has not only succeeded in dazzling us locals for the past 18 years but is also one of the most widely respected and award-winning benefits in the world. Which got me thinking: What fun it would be to sit down with Silcoff over a civilized lunch and ask several of the meatier questions I've been dying to ask since first reporting on the ball seven years ago. Given Silcoff's hectic sked (she just wrapped a conference for 2,600) lunch was tough. Luckily, tea proved just as enlightening:

Alison, few events have achieved the Daff's dizzying heights with respect to fun-raising and fundraising. Why is that?

I think it's because we've worked so diligently to make it the best in every area, an event experience. With respect to fundraising, of course the cause touches all our lives (sadly so) and the Canadian Cancer Society is the country's biggest funding organization for cancer. Also, our chief fundraisers (each year's chairpersons) are top business people who use their formidable energy and clout to help secure funds. ▶

PHOTOS COURTESY THE DAFFODIL BALL



DAFFODILS DELIGHT: Each year the ball, which benefits the Canadian Cancer Society, incorporates 30,000 daffodils into the decor in ever more creative ways.

As the ball nears, what's an average day?

An average night is about four hours! An average day is nonstop everything.

Every year you come up with an original theme. Where do you derive inspiration from?

All over! My travels are an excellent source. I also have a wonderful committee.

The ball is famous for incorporating over 30,000 daffodils in innovative ways. What's the craziest thing you've ever done with them?

The craziest thing we've ever done (laughing) is lose them! We almost had the non-Daffodil Ball!

You've seen many glittering guests. Any favourites? Even juicier, anyone banished from the ball?

The most glamorous guest ever was Sharon Stone. And she brought in close to \$100,000 by using auctioning techniques that wouldn't work for most of us!

What about the banished? ➤



STAR POWER: Sharon Stone, the Daffodil Ball's most glamorous guest ever, ups auction bids at the 2003 edition. Her lucky target is Rick Groome.



FASHIONABLE FUNDRAISER: Guests take style seriously at the Daff. From left: Fannie Charron, Belle Grivakis, Jeannie Saunders, Maria Antonopoulos and Kinda Jayoush heed this year's call for scarlet.



THE SHAKERS: Influential supporters of the Daffodil Ball like 2011's Norm Steinberg, senior partner Norton Rose, CAE CEO Marc Parent, Rupert Duchesne, president/CEO Groupe Aeroplan and CGI president/CEO Michael Roach play a vital role in raising funds.

There was one man who had to be removed by security a few years back...

For what?

Masquerading as a member of the press.

Ouch! Speaking of favourites, what about favourite moments?

There was this wonderful moment at the Pompadour and Circumstance Ball when all 68 chandeliers descended in unison to Pomp and Circumstance and the audience erupted in spontaneous applause.

Sounds spectacular. Alison, fashion has always been a defining trait of the ball. What, in your opinion, are the most memorable dresses or tuxes?

Ah, there have been so many. This year's ladies in red were particularly gorgeous. And Michelle Setlakwe in Dries Van Noten – stunning!

Speaking of stunning, despite the pressure, you're always the epitome of calm and beautiful the night of. Our readers want to know how.

Your readers must need contact lenses (laughing)! I do have a dedicated workout and replenishing philosophy. And if I can, once a year I go to a place like Shiva Sohm (a retreat in Bali).

And with that, the doyenne was off, in a cloud of chic and purpose, to, yes, a meeting for Daffodil 2012. ■



LET THERE BE LIGHT! Guests gawped with delight as chandeliers descended in unison at the Pompadour and Circumstance Daffodil Ball in 2003.