

The Annual Society Page

It was the usual political overdose at the 109th annual Pennsylvania Society confab.

by *Mary F. Patel*

Published: Dec 12, 2007



It was the usual political overdose — from eating, drinking and running around to make all the parties — during last weekend's 109th annual Pennsylvania Society confab, held at the Waldorf-Astoria in midtown Manhattan.

Despite the Pennsylvania moniker, the Society, which was founded by a consortium of journalists, politicians, businessmen and wealthy magnates, met in New York City because founding member **Andrew Carnegie** built the Waldorf. Back then, he convinced members to convene there, and the tradition has continued ever since.

Events kicked off at noon Friday with the Republican State Committee's annual Commonwealth Club luncheon held at the Rainbow Room, costing \$1,000. Next up was the Scrimmage Party at ESPN Zone; it was hosted by the sports-cable behemoth and Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney. That event rolled right into a reception honoring the new Pennsylvania House majority caucus at the InterContinental Hotel, which flowed into the "Friends of **Jack Wagner**" reception back at the Waldorf. (Wagner, a Democrat, is seeking re-election as auditor general.)

Competing parties included the Waste Management Group and the **Dan Onorato** event — the Allegheny County chief executive is considered to be a future Democratic gubernatorial candidate — and state Sen. **Dominic Pileggi**'s reception, before a bigger event hosted by Blank Rome at the InterContinental.

Always popular, the Blank gig was packed despite the retirement of chairman **David Girard-diCarlo**. On the scene was former Democratic mayoral candidate **Tom Knox**, who said he is running for governor.

Competing late-night parties included the Local 98 soiree, the Gov. Mifflin Society reception and another event at 21 hosted by Duane Morris chairman **Sheldon Bonovitz** and government affairs partner **Ken Davis**.

Gov. **Ed Rendell** and his wife, **Midge**, made an appearance at 21, as did former mayoral candidate and state Rep. **Dwight Evans**, and former city solicitors **Ken Trujillo** and **Nelson Diaz**. Diaz recently left Blank Rome and is now at Cozen O'Connor, while his wife, **Sara Manzano-Diaz** is now deputy secretary for regulatory programs for the commonwealth's Department of State. Also making the rounds was Attorney General **Tom Corbett**. Up for re-election next year, he found himself mingling with many Democrats, which is surprising when you consider that his office is investigating whether \$1.9 million in bonuses given by House Democrats to their staffers were shady rewards for last year's Democratic election victories.

"I wish everyone got along this well during working hours," remarked one Democratic House member as he watched Corbett schmooze.



Mara Toukatly

PUTTING ON THE GLITZ: Councilmen Jack Kelly and Frank Rizzo, along with Amber Rosenberry and Mara Toukatly at a Pennsylvania Society function.

[\(CLICK IMAGE FOR LARGER VERSION\)](#)

Holding court in the corner of the club was **Seth Williams**, the city's former inspector general, who is now back in private practice after Mayor-elect **Michael Nutter** appointed his replacement.

"I *will* be the next district attorney," said Williams, of what he predicts will be a successful quest to succeed **Lynne Abraham**, who is not seeking re-election in 2009.

Scott P. Sigman also made the rounds and discussed the need for a tough DA, reminding everyone of the importance of a two-party system in the city. (Williams is a Democrat and Sigman is a Republican.)

Back at the Waldorf, guests floated between the Gov. Mifflin Society party and the Local 98 bash.

The Mifflin party, hosted by lobbyist **David Urban** and attorneys **Gregg Melinson** and **Val DiGiorgio**, was less crowded than last year since guests not only had to be formally invited, but they had to wear wristbands to gain entrance. Wolf Block co-hosted this year because, as partner **Alan Kessler** explained, there was no window of time over the weekend to host a separate party. Wolf Block chairman **Mark Alderman** and **Brian Preski** helped to finance the Mifflin event. Front-and-center was U.S. Attorney **Patrick Meehan**, who was engrossed in deep conversation with **Tom Kline** of Kline & Specter.

The Local 98 party, held in a main ballroom of the Waldorf, attracted the biggest crowd. The union's business manager, **John Dougherty**, stood at the door and greeted everyone and anyone who dropped by to the no-invite-required event. Inside, the open bar, buffet stations and dance band attracted an eclectic crowd.

Saturday morning began with both the PNC and U of Penn breakfasts and the PMA seminar and luncheon, followed by Lehigh County Executive **Don Cunningham**'s Irish tea at the Bull and Bear Bar in the Waldorf basement.

A good place to stop in between events, that's where former state Rep. **Thomas Druce**, hung out. (Yes, Druce, who pleaded guilty to charges stemming from a 1999 hit-and-run accident that killed a Harrisburg man as well as insurance fraud, is out of jail and back on the scene.)

Evening parties began with the Mellon Bank reception and a larger event hosted by Buchanan Ingersoll. Everyone who is anyone political in Pennsylvania attended the latter event, including House Majority Leader **Bill DeWeese** and former Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Authority CEO **Joe Vignola**. Vignola dismissed rumors that he is aligned with state Sen. **Vincent Fumo** and is only running an opposition campaign to keep Fumo in the race. (Fumo is running for re-election next year despite his federal indictment.)

The main attraction Saturday night was the black tie dinner held in the Waldorf ballroom. Society executive director **Carol Fitzgerald** did a stellar job of organizing the event for 2,500. She was there with husband, outgoing state Supreme Court Justice **Jim Fitzgerald**, and their daughter, **Melissa Fitzgerald**, an actress who is wrapping up a documentary on the children of Uganda.

Former state Supreme Court Justice **Sandra Newman** was there, without husband **Marty Weinberg**, and current Justices **Ron Castille** and **Max Baer** also attended.

So, who had the best table? Public relations maven **Kelly Boyd**, in an **Oscar de la Renta** gown, commandeered one that included Radnor Trust presidents **Marla Green** and **Jim DiDio**, Goldman Sachs executive **Bill McLaughlin** and Philly Mag editor **Larry Platt**.

Platt said he is seriously considering running as a Democrat next year against GOP U.S. Rep. **Jim Gerlach** because he is tired of writing about change and wants to actually do something to change the political landscape.

U.S. Sen. **Arlen Specter** was the Society's recipient of the Gold Medal award this year, but when a video montage of Specter's long political career was shown on big screens during the dinner, gasps rippled through the audience. The video, compiled by the Pennsylvania Cable Network (PCN), showed Specter posing in photos with various third world leaders such as **Saddam Hussein**, **Yasser Arafat** and **Fidel Castro**. Later, PCN programming vice president **Bill Bova** said the video was based on an advance copy of Specter's speech sent to them by the Pennsylvania Society. In his remarks, Specter used the phrase "keeping your enemies close." Bova added that the photos were taken from Specter's autobiography, *Passion for Truth*.

After dinner, guests drifted into the governor's reception hosted by Ballard chairman **Arthur Makadon**, and **Holly Kinser** of the Wojdak lobbying firm. This party was open and drew a huge crowd; Rendell stayed a long time, state treasurer candidates **John Cordisco** and **Tom Ellis** made the rounds, and U.S. Rep. **Bob Brady** dropped by.

Fumo made his grand entrance at the Dilworth Paxson party sporting a new date and longer hair, but the party had a somber tone, since firm labor and employment law group partner **Gino Benedetti** was still in the hospital recovering from a brutal attack he suffered in Southwest Philly a few days earlier.

The Greenlee firm also held a party across the street at the W Hotel; **Vanessa DeSalvo Getz**, a former top campaign manager for U.S. Sen. **Bob Casey**'s campaign, is now a managing director at Greenlee. The last party was hosted by the Energy Association of Pennsylvania, where guests who still had some energy danced to a doo-wop band.

Ethical Society

Mayor-elect **Michael Nutter** attended almost every party with his security detail following closely behind. His new bodyguard, who refused to be identified, said that Nutter prefers the additional protection.

Prior to the weekend, there had been speculation that state staffers would avoid parties due to new ethics rules, but that was not the case as employees determined that it was OK to attend events that offered food and drink that was already paid for, as opposed to being taken out for dinner by any entity that conducts business with the state.

Correction

Sheila Ballen, who was not in New York for the festivities, called *City Paper* numerous times last week to say she is not running for Fumo's state-Senate seat. The item about Ballen's potential campaign, which was reported as a bit making the political-gossip rounds in last week's column, also drew several calls for a retraction from Fumo-foe **Anne Dicker's** camp, [Political Notebook, "Vincent's First," Dec. 6, 2007]. CP regrets the confusion.