

MONASTERY MADNESS AT 50TH CELEBRATION

BY BARRY DOUGHERTY

While the Friars have been around for 104 years it took a bit for us to settle in to one place for any length of time. So it's no surprise we didn't actually move into our current residence until 1957. Seeing as the Friars love a good milestone, 50 years in the Monastery gave us a great opportunity to celebrate—as former Abbot Ed Sullivan would have said—with a really big show.

The Monastery was decked out pretty much the way the The Kodak Theatre is for the Oscars—huge spotlights out front, red carpet, paparazzi confined behind red velvet ropes. Of course, the red carpet was only as wide as the sidewalk and the paparazzi could care less about any velvet ropes but it was impressive nonetheless. Add to the mix two very sleek convertibles from 1957 and it made for one awesome presentation. Supplied by Friar David Berley's Berley Auto Group the cars brought you back in time to when the Friars first set foot into their new digs.

Also like the Oscars the celebrities got to make an entrance. There may not have been flowing gowns and cleavage—although Danny

DeVito did show up—but it was still a highly entertaining New York happening. To keep the onlookers occupied they were served champagne and treated to appearances by a Joan Rivers look-alike, a cappella singers and various performers, some in the form of giant headed puppets resembling Friars Liza Minnelli, Bob Hope, Sammy Davis, Jr., Lucille Ball, Rodney Dangerfield, Jackie Gleason, and more.

Friar Hank Lane is responsible for importing the whimsey and he did an amazing job. His music and entertainment company set up lights, brought in talent, and created buzz on every floor.

More than six hundred members and guests filled our stately English Renaissance home for an evening of magic, complete with dancing and music from the 50s. The Billy Crystal Celebrity bar was the room be, with celebrities such as Danny Aiello, Richard Belzer, David Dinkins, Susie Essman, Gilbert Gottfried, Neil Simon and Elaine Joyce, Jerry Stiller, Stewie Stone, Meredith Vieira, and a few others who dined on exquisite hors d'oeuvres such as caviar, foie gras on crustini, ratatouille in quiche shell with quail egg, and other high falutin' canapés while sipping champagne and laughing it up.

It was almost a half-century to the day when

comedian Joe E. Lewis, along with Red Buttons, Jack E. Leonard, and other Friars, marched from their old space on West 56th Street to the new joint on East 55th. Lewis proclaimed that the doors would forever be open and tossed the key away! Of course, there was a mad scramble to retrieve it right after since what kind of crazy nonsense was that, leaving a building unlocked all night in midtown Manhattan.

Dean Freddie Roman, surrounded by the famous and not-so-famous, toasted the golden jubilee on the very same steps those Friars of yesteryear stood. He cut a red ribbon to welcome in a new century of laughs from within these hallowed halls.

Standing outside, if you looked up at this building from another era, a giant searchlight illuminating the clear night sky behind it, you might possibly have glimpsed the eyes of ages peering out from the Monastery's upper windows. Images of Milton Berle, George Burns, Jack Benny, Frank Sinatra, Johnny Carson, Henny Youngman, Alan King...eyes crinkled at the ends, inviting anyone with a sense of humor to join in the party that began 50 years ago. No passwords, no secret handshakes necessary—just people who enjoy a good laugh.



Photo by Richard Lewin

Friar Richard Belzer (holding Bebe), Friar Danny DeVito, Harlee Belzer



Photo by Judie Burstein

Lucille Ball (well, you know what we mean) cozies up to Friar Meredith Vieira



Photo by Judie Burstein

Friar Alan Zweibel, Friar Neil Simon, Elaine Joyce, Friar Susie Essman



Photo by Richard Lewin

Friars Marvin Scott, Jeffrey Ross, Lisa Lampanelli, Steven Scott and Gilbert Gottfried cut the cake



Photo by Richard Lewin

Cutting the ribbon: Michael Gyure, Friar Marvin Scott, Friar Stewie Stone, Friar David Dinkins, Friar Meredith Vieira, Friar Danny Aiello, Friar Hank Lane, Friar Neil Simon, Elaine Joyce, Dean Freddie Roman, and a Friar!



Photo by Richard Lewin

Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz presented a Proclamation to Friars Neil Simon, Stewie Stone, and Dean Freddie Roman



Photo by Richard Lewin

Gilbert Gottfried and Friar Jerry Stiller



Photo by Richard Lewin

Friars Angela LaGreca, Danny Aiello, Meredith Vieira



Photo by Richard Lewin

Back when poodle skirts and bow ties were like wow!

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Friars Steven Scott, Mr. G., Kaity Tong, and Marvin Scott



Photo by Richard Lewin

Friar Chuck Jackson, Friar Ron Cohen, Valerie Simpson, Nicholas Ashford



Photo by Judie Burstein

Friars Executive Director Michael Gyure and Prior Emeritus Sally Jessy Raphael



Photo by Richard Lewin

Friar David Berley with one of his vintage cars



Photo by Richard Lewin

Friars Hank Lane and Danny DeVito



Photo by Judie Burstein

Friars David Dinkins, LeRoy Neiman, Pat Cooper



Photo by Richard Lewin

The Friars Monastery



Photo by Richard Lewin

Friars Jean-Pierre Trebot and Susie Essman



Photo by Richard Lewin

Friar Frankie Gio makin' music with the juke box



Photo by Richard Lewin

Friars Jerry Coe, Krysi and Rick Newman, Susie Essman, Norman Spizz



Photo by Richard Lewin

Friar Jeffrey Ross, Friar Lisa Lampanelli, Gianfranco "Frank" Capitelli



Photo by Richard Lewin

Friars Alan Zweibel, Richard Belzer, John Roland