

by Brook Dougherty 10.26.2009

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Since community service is mandatory, you'd think it would be easy to find a safe place for Young Angels to do a fundraising dance. In '03, we started at the Doubletree in Santa Monica, but that hotel was too expensive. Then we were at the Fairmont, but it was too big. Then Phyllis Keeley, rental czar of the Pacific Palisades Woman's Club, took a chance on us. The Woman's Club was just right. The Club was more ladylike than our past venues, and my partner Debbie and I hadn't fully realized that while some of our student guests had manners, others had evidently been raised by wolves. Some feral boy wrote graffiti in the men's room, and when we inspected the dance floor we found jelly beans mashed so far into the floor they couldn't be removed. Calvin the Custodian was not happy. We were not invited back.

After a year, the waters parted and Phyllis gave us another chance. We've been renting the Club house ever since. Last Friday, our middle school dance "FLASH" was sold out to 300 kids. We had high school dee jays from our new program to bring Young Angels dances to East L.A. Our professional security team did the usual bag checks to enforce our zero tolerance for drugs and alcohol. Guards were at each door and in the bathrooms. An undercover high school chaperone team was there to break up gross dance behavior.

Debbie was supervising check in, and the usual "my mom did so buy a ticket," and I was answering an email asking if we sold marijuana when producer Rachel Jaffe races up and says, "The Police are here." I strolled outside and said hello to Sergeant Scott Bays of Palisades Patrol. Not the Police. Scott said he had gotten a couple of calls, but it was clear to him this wasn't one of those out-of-control birthday parties.

Then, we look up and see Alice Karl of the Woman's Club waiting by the check in table. Alice said she had to come down in person to see for herself what was going on. She'd gotten a couple of calls too. We showed her our security guards, explained our charitable mission and told her we keep getting confused with private, crazy teen parties. She said it looked pretty tame. Just loud. We told Alice we were concerned about our reputation being hurt. She said she'd help us straighten out the confusion on the street, and now that she'd seen firsthand what we were about, she could help us calm the rumor mill. We were happy Alice Karl took the trouble to come visit our event at nine o'clock on a Friday. More folks should check things out themselves before deciding the sky is falling.

By ten the kids had been released to their parents. There was no graffiti in the bathrooms. No jelly beans on the floor. One lone boy waited outside for his mother. Calvin folded up the chairs. He said to us "You Young Angels have come a long way since that first dance."

The Woman's Club has given Young Angels a chance to keep our fundraisers local, and build our program in less-fortunate neighborhoods. They share our belief that all the children belong to all and have made it possible for local kids to help kids who aren't as blessed as them. We are grateful to the ladies of the Pacific Palisades Woman's Club for sharing their Clubhouse and their understanding of the true nature of community service.