

THE 2009 AHJA BANQUET ... MORE THAN JUST AWARDS

The 2009 AHJA Year-End Awards Banquet just wrapped up tonight, even though it is actually January 24th, 2010. It was held at The Venue, a special events facility located in the heart of Old-Town Scottsdale.

The turn-out was good, the meal was great, the service was so-so and they ran out of clean plates and food. Perhaps the AHJA needs to look at how the banquet is run operationally ... to sell individual tickets, and then offer an unregulated open buffet never seems to work. People tend to pile on the food or go back for seconds. Thus, the folks who were last in line didn't get any Cheese-Stuffed Ravioli or White Chocolate-Covered Strawberries. I was nowhere near the end of the line, yet when I went to get dessert, the lady at the dessert window told me that they were out of clean plates. She suggested I scour the tables and look for a plate that wasn't being used. Hmmmm ... that didn't sound like a very good idea so I used a napkin instead. But enough about The Venue.

The banquet itself was a great success. The AHJA Board of Directors, along with a cast of dedicated and hard-working volunteers, put on a night to remember. From the AHJA Lifetime Achievement Award being presented to Ira Schulman, to the incredible video presentation prepared by photographer Paula Anderson and sponsored by Debbie Jamsa, to Pam Stedman receiving the Shelby Shank Award, to each and every award recipient from each and every hunter, jumper and equitation division, the entire night was fabulous! The cheering and clapping for everyone whose name was called. Every recipient, whether in sixth or a Champion, got to walk onto the stage, receive their award from AHJA President Wendy Dean Johnson, and get their picture taken. Then they got to walk back to their table proudly carrying their awards with the biggest of smiles on their faces. Tonight was a night many will not soon forget, including myself.

You see, the horse show production business is just that ... it's a business. Horse shows are designed to operate as a business, with revenues and expectations of a reasonable profit at the very top of the list. After all, if there were no profits in the business, few, if any, would do it. Yet, as I sat and watched the video presentation, I was moved by the other side of the business ... the side I rarely get to see while engaged in fifteen different things at once running a horse show. From the horses trying their hearts out, the kids smiling and having fun, trainers frantically running from ring to ring, show staff members working hard, dogs hanging out and putting a smile on all of our faces, the entries in the Stick Horse Classic giving it their all and grooms working more hours than there are hours in a day. But, somehow, some way, I managed to find a special moment during the hectic times of a horse show to give my incredible wife, Kendis, a kiss and see her smile (how on earth did Paula manage to capture that fleeting moment?). That video brought a tear to my eye. It reminded me of what I do ... it reminded me of why I do what I do ... it reminded me of all of the good that comes from every single person's involvement in this sport ... it reminded me that I am one of the luckiest people on the face of the earth. It reminded me that, while I run a business, everyone else is there because it is their hobby, their passion, their love.

From now on, I plan to take a few minutes each day at my shows to just stop and look around. To take in the sights and sounds of the horse show ... to look for the smiles, the tears, the joys and sorrows ... to remember the human side of all of it. Thanks, Paula, for capturing it so well with your camera. And thanks, Debbie, for bringing it to all of us in such an amazing fashion.