

Gifts, vodka are generous at Toy Party

By RICHARD L. ELDREDGE | Monday, December 8, 2008, 10:41 PM

Judging by the jampacked parking garage, with cars tucked into every available nook and cranny, the sixth annual Toy Party at AmericasMart Building 3 was a huge success Sunday night. The annual toy drive, silent auction and holiday cocktail party is a benefit for 15 nonprofit organizations statewide that help children in need and their families, including Appalachian Children's Emergency Shelter, Chris Rainbow Kids, Cobb Christmas Inc., Crossroads Foundation, Easter Seals North Georgia, the Housing Authority of DeKalb County and Youthpride.



*Smiling in advance of Sunday's Toy Party, **Stephanie Keal** (from left), **Alison Hall**, **Jorge Esteban** and **For the Kid in All of Us** president **Frank Bragg** enjoy a pre-party at the Bill Lowe Gallery. (Eric Bryant)*

While he's been on the board since the benefit's inception, this was organizer **Frank Bragg's** first year helming the event as board president.

As favorable reports filtered into his earpiece, Bragg looked relieved as 400 volunteers stacked small mountains of unwrapped presents on the stage below him. The event drew hundreds of attendees into the massive space.

"I've had a lot of sleepless nights," Bragg told Buzz. "Due to the economy, we've had some sponsors pull out or scale back. It's remarkable that we have any sponsorships at all, given the times right now. Everyone's been amazingly generous."

The evening's presenting sponsor was Delta Air Lines, and major sponsor Metrotainment Cafes generously donated \$50 gift cards to every one of its metro Atlanta eateries, including the ever-popular Einstein's and Cowtippers.

Our favorite silent auction item of the evening? A 3.75-inch action figure to be created in the buyer's likeness (a \$500 value) donated by Toy Party patrons **Todd Vierling** and **Adam May**.

Thanks to donations from Smirnoff vodka, the Georgia Beverage Association and a small army of bartenders, last year's long lines for cocktails were ancient history.

Still, Outwrite Books owner **Philip Rafshoon**, a Toy Party event partner, came prepared this year. At the check-out of his Midtown business, small silver flasks were being sold to prospective Toy Party attendees.

Sure enough, Rafshoon himself had one filled with vodka.

Joked Rafshoon: "I wasn't taking any chances!"

Toy Party organizers remain optimistic about the future. On the opening page of the silent auction catalog was the following message to attendees: "Mark your calendars for next year's event Sunday, December 6, 2009."