

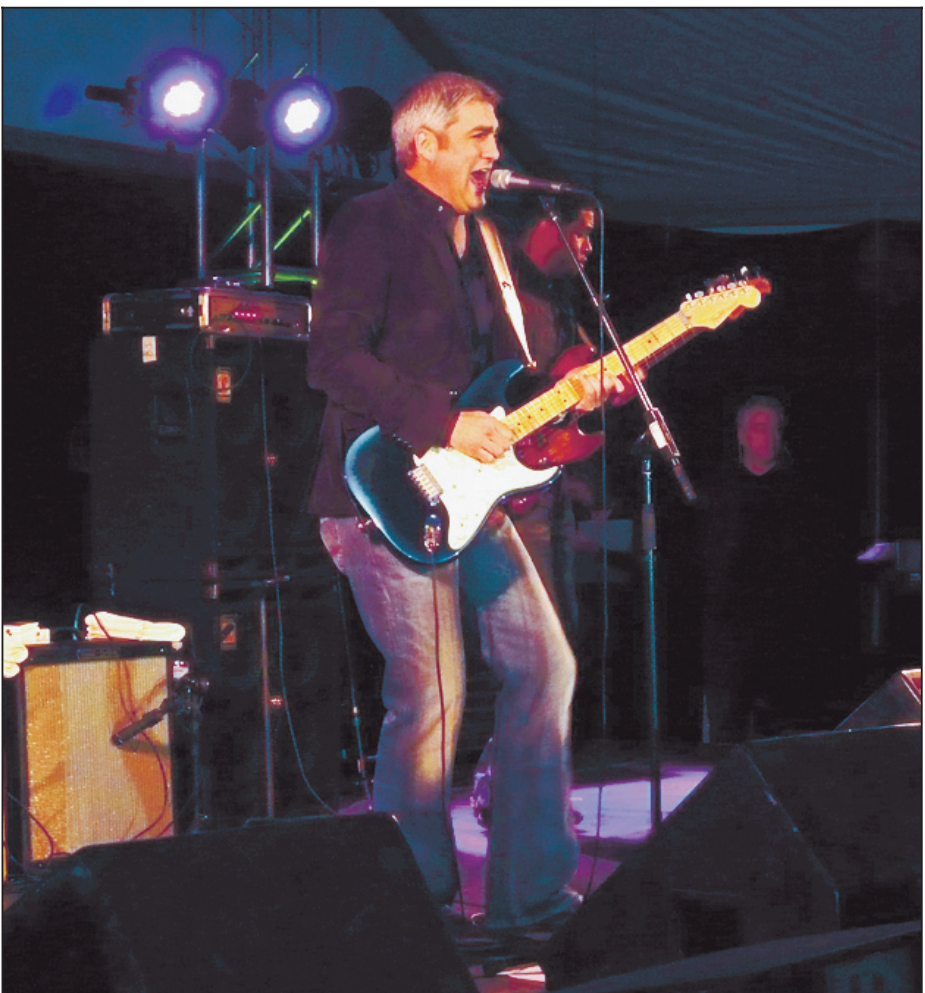


Party tip | Pat Viser came up with a perfect party favor for the VIP reception for the Mint Museum of Art's new Chinese porcelain exhibit: a fortune cookie that read "Best Wishes for a Happy 2008 from the Mint Museum." She ordered them from Invitations by Lee. "They're not expensive, and you can make the message personal to your event," says Viser. Details: 704-770-0838.
— OLIVIA FORTSON

Scene & Heard | BY OLIVIA FORTSON, ofortson@charlotteobserver.com



DANIEL COSTON - SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER
Family Center board member Harlee Palmer (left), a former social worker, and Family Center supporter Karen Keatley were among the 250 guests.



OLIVIA FORTSON - ofortson@charlotteobserver.com
"American Idol" winner Taylor Hicks brought his rock and soul to Palm Night.



DANIEL COSTON - SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER
Family Center CEO Daryl Hollnagel (from left) with Sikky Rogers and Angela Gala of Rogers & Gala Creative Partners, the event planners for the evening. "We had a wonderful time working with the Family Center," said Rogers. "They are so dedicated to helping others."

The heart and soul of Palm Night

Guests had the heart, and "American Idol" winner Taylor Hicks brought the soul, to Palm Night Jan. 26 at the Palm restaurant. Hicks and his band performed at the benefit for the Family Center, which works to prevent child abuse and neglect. The Palm's general manager, Joey Profeta, closed the restaurant on a Saturday night for the party. Top Charlotte event planners Sikky Rogers and Angela Gala of Rogers & Gala Creative Partners gave a modern spin to the festivities. Among their chic touches was the Scott McCloud Duo playing jazz in the fountain in front of the restaurant, which was filled with crystal mylar to make it look like ice. Christine Young of Classic Party Rentals helped with the decor. Party favors were miniature porcelain versions of Tiffany's signature blue box with a white ribbon.

Checkered Ball for brain charities

Dale Smith (from left), Karen Dunn, Marty Foil III, Nadine Bennett and John McNair have fun at the Checkered Ball Jan. 26 at the Westin hotel. Foil and his family hosted the event that raised money for the National Brain Injury Research Treatment and Training Foundation and Hinds' Feet Farm, a long-term living facility in Huntersville for people with traumatic brain injuries.



PAUL WILLIAMS III - SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER



DANIEL COSTON - SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER

Celebrating Hope

Shelby Stout (right), mother of the late Hope Stout, greets Carolina Panthers president Mark Richardson and his daughter, Raven, during Hope's namesake fundraiser, A Celebration of Hope. The Jan. 25 party at the Westin hotel benefited the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Central and Western North Carolina. Hope Stout, who died in 2004 at age 12 of bone cancer, has become an inspiration to many. Even while she was ill, she helped raise funds for the foundation to grant the wishes of other ill children.



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'Made in China' exhibit at Mint

Dr. William Thomas and his wife, Patricia, were among the guests at the Jan. 24 opening party for the Mint Museum of Art's new exhibit, "Made in China: Export Porcelain from the Leo and Doris Hodroff Collection at Winterthur." They're holding one of the hits of the party: Chinese takeout boxes filled with sesame noodles and chicken sataay from Something Classic Catering. The exhibit of Chinese export porcelain from 1550 to 1850 is on view through April 20. Details: www.mintmuseums.org.

Love Stories
READERS
SHARE THEIR TALES
OF ROMANCE

Doris Ezell-Schmitz and Jim Schmitz



COURTESY OF JIM SCHMITZ

A love of literature brought teachers Doris, 57, and Jim, 56, together. Doris teaches middle school language arts. Jim, who teaches high school English, tells their story:

The summer: Our paths crossed at the Bread Loaf School of English in Vermont in 1995. We came there as graduate students for a brief summer interlude sandwiched between our regular lives as seventh-grade language arts teachers. Doris came from Rock Hill, and I came from Keams Canyon, Ariz. We met over lunch in the common dining hall.

The parting: We shared a common love for literature and writing: Doris for poetry, and I for fiction. As the summer days passed, reality forced us to say our goodbyes. Doris returned to the South and I to the West. We promised to stay in touch by phone and letter.

The winter: We did stay in touch. But 2,300 miles is a long way. I managed to fly to Charlotte for a fall weekend reunion, yet it seemed our summer romance would pass the way of all too many flings and never become a permanent love. Then that winter, in response to a resume I sent out on a whim, I received a phone call from a South Carolina technical college offering me a teaching position. I took it.

The commitment: A year and a half later, we married while studying at the Bread Loaf campus in Santa Fe, N.M. More than 10 years later, we are living the life of two committed teachers, motivated by our love of words, our students, and each other. — KATHY HAIGHT

TELL US YOUR LOVE STORY:

E-mail living@charlotteobserver.com. Type "love story" in subject field. Photographs encouraged. The rules: Everything must be true. Include your name, town, daytime phone number and wedding date. We'll contact you if your story is chosen. To read past Love Stories, go to www.charlotte.com/love.

BOOST FROM TV, MOVIES

Step right up to ballroom dancing

Once relegated to the 40-and-overs, it now has fans of all ages

BY BILL WARD
Minneapolis Star Tribune

It's not easy to feel like you're on the cutting edge of a trend when you're doing the fox trot with your mom. Especially at the snarly state of perpetual petulance known as age 15.

Lauren Sirota can only barely chuckle about it now, a full six years later. Six years in which millions of Americans, including a handful of friends who once taunted Sirota, have joined her in embracing ballroom dancing.

"When I first started, everyone interested in the sport

SEE UPSWING | 4H



CAROL KAEHLSON - ABC PHOTO

"Dancing with the Stars" has helped fuel the return of ballroom dancing. Indianapolis 500 champion Helio Castroneves and professional partner Julianne Hough were champions of the show's fifth season.

Online Extras See more photos of area events in our 'Black Tie' slideshow feature at WWW.CHARLOTTE.COM/living

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