

## **Renal Support Network**

# **Renal Teen Prom**

**By Gordon Lore**

**O**ne of the most visible and rewarding efforts of RSN is the annual Renal Teen Prom. It is a *free* event for teenagers and young adults with kidney disease who are treated to an evening of elegance and enjoyment and a visit from prominent Hollywood celebrities in the belief that just one special night can convince many kidney teens not to give up hope on their lifelong journey to maintain healthy, meaningful, and purposeful lives.

### **An Elegant Evening**

**S**ince many young people with kidney failure are unable to attend their own senior proms, the gala is set in that style. It has been held annually at Notre Dame High School, Sherman Oaks, CA, near Los Angeles, for the past seven years. In addition to the celebrities, participants are treated to a night of dancing, entertainment, dinner and *hors d'oeuvres*, limousine rides, and glamour photos.

The prom is co-hosted by student and alumni volunteers from the high school. They help organize the event, decorate the gymnasium where the prom is held, prepare the renal-friendly food and beverages, and even chauffeur the teens to and from their homes.

More than 450 young people with kidney disease, their guests, and volunteers from throughout Southern California attended the 2006 RSN Renal Teen Prom on January 15. The prom even attracted teens from as far away as Arizona, New Jersey, and Washington. With a “Music!

Music! Music!” theme, the special and unique event in the medical community was decorated with sets that were custom-designed by volunteers from a major motion picture studio. Every year, the evening gowns, which the girls can keep, are donated so the young attendees can radiate an aura of elegance.

### **Celebrity Appearances**

The elegant gathering drew appearances by such Hollywood celebrities as Kirsten Dunst (star of the *Spider-Man* movies and the forthcoming *Marie Antoinette*), Gary Sinise (*Forrest Gump* and *CSI: New York*), Mark Harmon (*Navy NCIS*), Alfonso Ribeiro (*The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*), Alexa Vega (*Spy Kids*), and Stephen Furst (*Animal House*, *Babylon 5*, *St. Elsewhere*). Furst, who is also a kidney patient, was the prom’s emcee.

Lacey Howard, a kidney patient and reigning World Cup champion in the Paralympics winter sport of mono-skiing, shared her beautiful singing and story of hope. Lacey said she will retire from the sport after the 2006 Paralympics Winter Games in Italy to spend full-time realizing her dream of becoming a singer/composer. At the 2002 Paralympics Winter Games, she joined renowned vocalist Patty LaBelle on stage for a song-fest.

### **Media Coverage**

The news media has picked up the inspirational story of the prom. There were live telecasts of the event, a special was featured on Lifetime Television, and a teen who attended the 2005 prom wrote about her experience in *Teen Magazine*. Malia Langen also described her experience at the 2005 prom with a Las Vegas theme and credited RSN Founder/President Lori Hartwell, a kidney patient for 37 years who missed her own senior prom because of her disease, with “dreaming up”

the very special annual event.

“Lori knew that having one friend who could relate to what you are going through could make all the difference, especially in the life of a teenager,” Malia wrote in the RSN newsletter, *Live & Give*. “With the goal of getting teens with kidney disease to meet one another in a fun, non-medical environment, Lori dreamed up the Renal Prom. What better way for kids to socialize than to get dressed up, be treated like princes and princesses, and dance the night away? Teens who might not go to their own high school’s prom could have a prom all their own.”

Next year’s prom will be held on January 21, 2007.