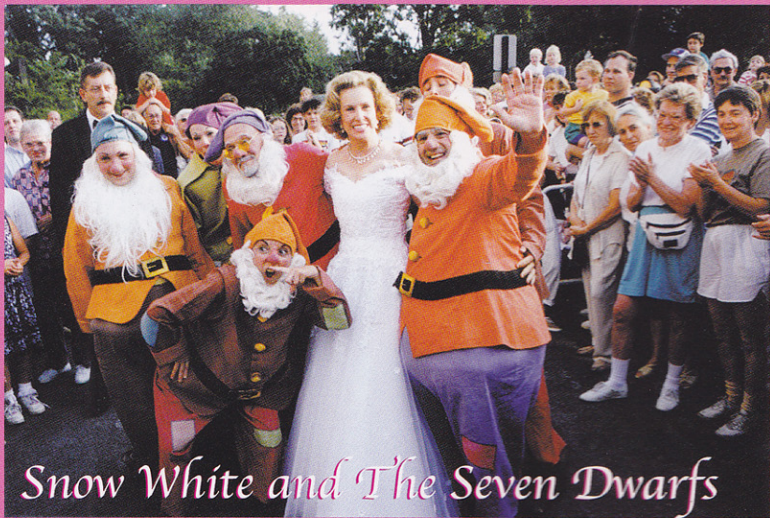
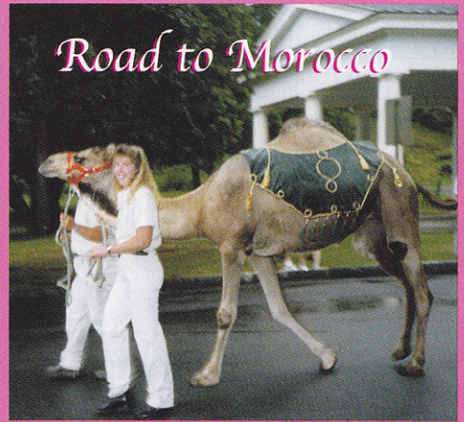


Marylou's Galas



Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs



Road to Morocco



The Phantom of the Opera

Fine Affairs wasn't yet in the theme party business when Marylou Whitney began what has become an annual racing season tradition in The Spa City in the 1970s. Over the past quarter century, the trendsetting jetsetter has arrived at Whitney Galas decked out as such diverse characters as Snow White, Glenda, The Good Witch from "The Wizard of Oz" and Scarlett O'Hara from "Gone With the Wind." Fine Affairs handled decorations and entertainment for the more recent "Phantom of the Opera" and "Road to Morocco" theme parties. Photographs courtesy of Cady Hill Estate.



Gone with the Wind



The Wizard of Oz



Fine Affairs don't just happen . . . unless, of course, you hire Michael Panza and Geriann Eddy, proprietors of the innovative Saratoga firm that goes by the same name. Whether you're planning a fairy tale wedding reception, a formal gala or a spectacular theme party, Fine Affairs, Inc. strives to make your decorating and entertainment wishes come true!

Since forming their partnership just over a decade ago, Mike and Geriann have earned a reputation as Upstate New York's premier event planners, offering the finest in talent from top-rated show bands to renowned circus troupes as well as theatrical lighting, stage props, backdrops, theme decorations — even trees and landscaping. "We want our clients to relax and enjoy their big day or night every bit as much as their guests," says Mike, who also leads his own band and sings with the popular Grand Central Station group.

"Fine Affairs takes the frustration and anxiety out of event planning. Geriann and I can get stressed — as long as we don't show it — but we don't want our clients to worry about a thing," quips Mike, who gained experience serving the public early in life working at his family's restaurant — Panza's on Saratoga Lake.

He and Geriann especially look forward to decorating and bringing in specialty entertainers for the annual Whitney Gala hosted by socialite



*They make Fine Affairs happen
so hosts can relax with guests!*

Story by Ann Hauprich with portrait of Mike Panza & Geriann Eddy by Antonio Bucca

"We call theme parties creative theater because every night is like the opening night of a play when we do one." -- Mike Panza, Fine Affairs

Marylou Whitney and her husband John Hendrickson. "Everyone at Cady Hill House (longtime summer home of the Whitneys) is wonderful to work with," observes Mike, adding that Marylou always comes up with the themes and allows plenty of advance planning time.

"It's her policy that local professionals be hired whenever possible to provide the flowers, entertainment, food, beverages and anything else we need to create a particular theme. Other than that, she gives us the creative freedom needed to bring the theme to life," he notes.

Marylou Whitney also has glowing words about Fine Affairs saying the owners have an abundance of talent and that they work well together.

Last August, Mike and Geriann once again rose to the occasion for their beloved client by transforming the Canfield Casino into the equivalent of a movie set for "The Road to Morocco" — complete with a live camel, costumed belly dancers, exotic acrobats and fortune tellers. The rented camel was an instant hit as it paraded through Congress Park in a rain storm with Marylou, John and members of the Rich & Famous set including Barbara ("I Dream of Jeannie") Eden and Dr. Ruth Westheimer. (Comedienne Joan Rivers, a regular at The Whitney Gala, skipped the walk in the rain, but was on hand to greet guests inside.)

"I'm always impressed by the crowds that gather to watch Marylou make her entrance," says Geriann, "but I was never more touched than last summer when Marylou, wearing that gorgeous emerald green designer gown, insisted on staying out in that downpour. She didn't care about her dress or her hair . . . she felt it was important to reach out to the people under their umbrellas to thank them for their support."

Mike and Geriann weren't yet in the theme party business when Marylou began what has become an annual racing season tradition in The Spa City with her late husband Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney in the 1970s.

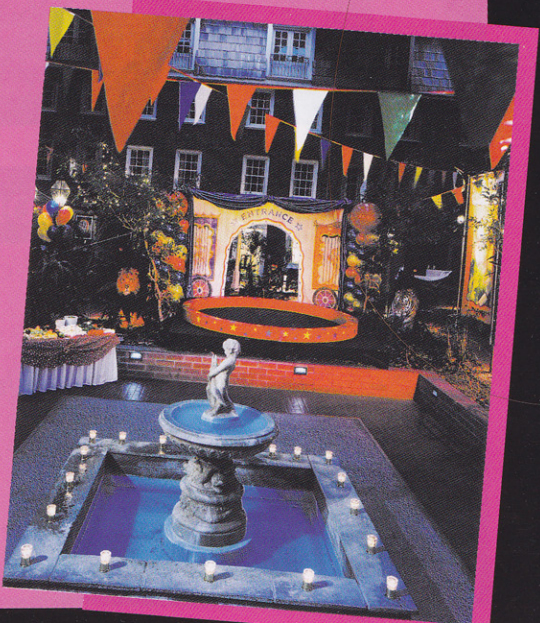
Newspaper clippings from that period show the trendsetting jetsetter costumed as Glenda, The Good Witch for "The Wizard of Oz" and as Scarlett O'Hara for "Gone With the Wind" theme parties, and Mike recalls being completely dazzled when Marylou's daughter, Heather Mabee, arranged for him to attend one in the early 1990s. "It was a tribute to the Winter Olympics and Mrs. Whitney had transformed the Casino into a dazzling Winter Wonderland complete with skating rink and ice skaters. It was absolutely spectacular," recalls Mike. "I had never seen anything like that in Saratoga before."

When the opportunity to bring a Whitney theme party to life came knocking, Mike didn't hesitate. "We call theme parties creative theater because every night is like the opening night of a play when we do one," he explains.

The first Whitney Gala that Fine Affairs was hired to produce was in 1997 and was built around the theme "Silver Buck" in honor of one of C.V. Whitney's favorite race horses. "A massive crowd of people turned out to watch the celebrities arrive and enjoy the outside entertainment that night," says Geriann. "It was the equivalent of Oscar Night in Hollywood only on a smaller scale." Interior decorations were silver on a grand scale set against a "Win-Place-Show" backdrop.

"Guys & Dolls" called for a huge grand marquis movie sign outside with stylized backdrops of Times Square from the movie as well as a vintage New York City set, faux gaming tables and casino decorations inside. Damon Runyon and Diamond Jim Brady would have blended in well with the costumed guests! For "The Phantom of the Opera", Fine Affairs brought in a theatrical drop with a ship's facade as well as a grass hut, wrought iron candelabras and tropical plants galore. There was even a giant dungeon, setting the stage for performance. For "Showboat" Mike brought in sets from the Broadway show, including a giant replica of the Giant Show Boat.

While The Whitney Gala is the undisputed "social affair of the summer" for Fine Affairs as well as being the one that takes the most prep work, it is far from the only one the company puts together during the racing season.



In fact, the week of last year's Whitney required "non-stop action" by the firm. Among the other events coordinated by Fine Affairs were the National Museum of Dance gala and a thoroughbred foundation celebration. Fine Affairs also put together an incredible Travers Ball that was the talk of the town. Other clients include General Electric, Quad/Graphics, Realty USA and State Farm Insurance.

Caterers for these events have included Glen Sanders Mansion-Hall of Springs, The Desmond, Longfellow's and, of course, Panza's, now owned by Mike's brother, Tony.

In addition to their "paying gigs", Mike and Geriann also give enormous quantities of time, energy and resources to non-profits.

Each year, Fine Affairs donates everything needed for gala fund-raisers for the Saratoga County Economic Opportunity Council and the AIDS Council of NYS. The proprietors also award generous discounts to other worthy community causes.

In preparation for the numerous parties, receptions and galas they arrange, Geriann spends much of the "off-season" shopping in diverse parts of North America for props, backdrops and decorations to use at future events.

The goods, which are stored in two secure warehouse locations in the county, now include a

"Can we talk?" JOAN RIVERS

Joan Rivers skipped the parade in the downpour, arriving at the gala looking ravishing in red. A stylist from A Mirror Image Hair Salon had just fussed with Joan's tresses and guests were impressed not only with the celebrated comedian's vibrant looks, but also her refreshingly down-to-earth personality. No wonder Joan's a regular on the Whitney guest list!



A fairy godmother was the only thing missing as Saratoga Living Publisher Ann Hauprich prepared to be whisked to The Whitney Gala by escort D. Keith Sherwood. "I'd been to grand balls in Copenhagen and Toronto and thought I'd seen it all, but I was wrong. If I only get to tell my grandchildren about one formal in my life, A Night in Morocco will be it." The event brought out the reporter in Ann who managed to squeeze in some impromptu interviews before the clock struck midnight!

Wish Upon A Star! BARBARA EDEN

The actress best known for her starring role in the "I Dream of Jeannie" TV series made the wishes of many fans come true when she mingled with guests at last summer's Whitney. As gracious as she was dazzling, Barbara said it warms her heart that a whole new generation has discovered "Jeannie" through the magic of reruns. Let's hope this lady, who is a class act in every sense of the word, agrees to an encore visit to The Spa City soon!

complete circus (except for the live animals which were returned to their homes in nearby zoos) and the complete set of "Moulin Rouge" including a backdrop depicting a vintage Paris street scene and a 14-foot replica of The Eiffel Tower.

Many of the authentic-looking props and backdrops later become available for rental by other party hosts or community groups.

In fact, Mike and Geriann hope any schools or churches in need of large stuffed straw camel statues (originally used as decorations inside The Canfield Casino at last summer's "Road to Morocco" gala) will give them a call come time for Christmas pageants!

Their number is 580-9441.



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