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By [Starla Pointer](#) • Staff Writer • February 8, 2016 [📄](#)

Mayor's ball a rip-roarin' success

Cowboy hats and boots, banjo picking and line dancing helped turn the McMinnville Mayor's Charity Ball into a rip-roarin' good time Saturday night.

With the theme "Country Charm and Rustic Elegance," the 27th annual ball raised thousands of dollars for Kids on the Block, the after-school enrichment program that reaches more than 400 children per term in six local elementary schools.

The receipts hadn't been tallied by press time, but KOB Director Janet Adams said she's sure this year's ball raised more than the one in 2015.

The return of the silent auction and a multi-prize raffle added to the kitty, which will go toward scholarships so more children can attend KOB. She added that the help of hundreds of volunteers kept costs down, maximizing proceeds.

"We're pleased folks had a good time," said Adams, whose favorite part of the ball was the line dancing, led by Mary Baker.

Decked out in a cowboy hat and red neckerchief, Abraham Lincoln greeted guests arriving at the community center. "Howdy Ma'am, Howdy, Pardner," the bronze statue seemed to be hollering.

Steve Lacy and Nikki Phillips were among the first guests Abe greeted. This was their second year in a row attending the ball.

Phillips said their children went to Kids on the Block, so they know how important it is to support the after-school enrichment program. Plus, Lacy said, the event gave him a chance "to have a good time with my gal."

As the couple and other community members arrived at the ball, an old Chevy pickup and a 1947 John Deere BH-N tractor helped set the scene outside. The sounds of bluegrass spilled through the open doors -- live music in the foyer was provided by Joel Kiff on banjo and Dave Sumner on guitar.

Inside the gym, Dana Libonati and Ad Lib played jazzy, familiar tunes in the background. Later in the evening, Five Guys Named Moe would have everyone up and dancing.

No matter whether "Take the A Train" or "I Will Survive" was playing, the room was decorated in country charm: hay bales, barn doors, a silo and a windmill, along with rural scenes. A chandelier made of paper flags joined the sparkling lights suspended from the ceiling.

Ingo and Holly Nehls, in matching white cowboy hats, found their way to a table for eight. They hosted the table on behalf of their company, Konect Aviation.

Konect gives helicopter tours, offers other rotary aviation services and recently assumed the fixed-base operation at McMinnville Airport. The owners attend the ball every year to support the children in the after-

school program.

“It’s a good community event,” she said.

And they already had hats to fit the country-Western theme — hats they picked up at the St. Paul Rodeo. They added white shirts and cowboy boots.

“It’s Ingo’s first Western outfit,” said Holly, noting her husband hails from Germany.

Mayor Rick Olson and his wife, Candi, socialized with the crowd. Olson also took time to chat with his predecessor, longtime Mayor Ed Gormley, who started the ball tradition with his wife, Candy.

The current and former mayors shared their favorite balls of the past. Each year, there’s a unique theme and decorations, and it was hard to choose a favorite, they said.

Olson really liked the 2016 theme, though. It gave him a chance to wear his boots, string tie and giant belt buckle.

His wasn’t the only string tie showing. Many men wore bolos instead of bow ties.

Jeans and Western shirts were as common as slacks and suit coats. And leather fringe joined glittery gowns on the dance floor.

Pamela Zoch went all out with cowboy boots and a Western dress.

“I love the themes and the cause,” she said, noting that she and her husband attend every year. Their kids have grown out of KOB, she said, but they still support the cause.

Kyle Cushman wore a blue plaid shirt and a straw hat with his boots and jeans. The Mac high graduate said he attended with a crew from his company, Applied Physics, and was looking forward to a fun night.

People crowded around the Watering Hole for wine and beer. Others dosie-do’ed into a side room for hearty appetizers — corn cakes with toppings, barbecued pork sliders, steak — prepared by Rogue Gourmet catering. Kaylyn Clevenger, Aubree Milks and other students from McMinnville High School’s culinary arts program did the plating.

More students, including a contingent from the Delphian School, greeted people and cleared tables.

Longtime ball volunteer Frank Butler kept an eye on everything. “I’m logistics, spotlight and announcer,” said Butler, who also supervises the inmate work crews who do a great deal of the set-up for the event.

This was his 19th Mayor’s Ball. He started when he was a McMinnville police officer and head of the police union. He’s continued through a move to the Carlton police department as its chief, retirement and a part-time job driving a school bus and training bus drivers.

“I saw the benefit of KOB with my kids, Frank, Brian and Kendra,” he said. “Now I’m ensuring that other kids can have that good experience.”

The Mayor’s Ball had special meaning for another volunteer, Elide Sanchez Rivera, who was overseeing the raffle prize table Saturday night.

A Linfield College freshman, she took part in Kids on the Block as a youngster at Newby Elementary School. Now she’s a KOB leader at Sue Buel Elementary.

“Kids on the Block helped me branch out,” she said, thinking of her elementary school days. “I was pretty shy as a kid, but at KOB I met new people -- made friends and got to talk to adults. That let me blossom. She

graduated from McMinnville High School last June. In addition to working with children in the KOB program, she wants to help youngsters later by becoming a doctor.

“I want to help families know that everything that could be done was done,” she said.

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