



The 2015 Equestrian Aid Foundation Luminary Award was presented to Mark Bellissimo, CEO of Equestrian Sport Productions.

Equestrian Aid Foundation Presents Its Annual Luminary Award To Mark Bellissimo

Story and Photo by Julie Unger

The Equestrian Aid Foundation entertained hundreds on Sunday, Feb. 22 with its “One Stage, Three Legends” fundraising event that brought together the equestrian community and honored this year’s Luminary Award recipient, Mark Bellissimo, CEO of Equestrian Sport Productions. The evening took place at the Palm Beach International Equestrian Center Stadium, home of the Adequan Global Dressage Festival.

Equestrian Aid Foundation President Stephanie Riggio Bulger said that this year, the foundation chose to have a musical show during its popular annual fundraiser. The twist: the performers were a secret. Attendees were thrilled with look-alike performances by David Lowman and Ted Brightwell as Judy Garland, Reba McIntyre and Barbra Streisand.

The foundation brought back its always-popular diamond drop raffle, where one very lucky participant received a diamond at the end of the night. White Horse Catering put together a delectable, buffet-style dinner party accompanied by an open bar. During the show’s intermission, there was a live auction with items such as an African safari, a trip to a movie premiere and a day on a Palm Beach yacht.

The most anticipated part of the evening was the presentation of the annual Luminary Award. “Every year, we try to pick someone who contributes a lot both to the advancement of horse sports as well as to the betterment of the people who participate in these sports,” Riggio Bulger said.

This year, the foundation chose Bellissimo. “Mark was a really easy choice for us,” she said. “We found that not only has he revolutionized what we know as horse shows, but he does a tremendous amount for local organizations and is always speaking out to give back to the community.”

Bellissimo was honored to receive the prestigious award from the Equestrian Aid Foundation.

“The EAF has done such great things across the industry, helping those people who have been confronted with a bad set of circumstances and making sure they get sufficient resources to mitigate the effects of their situation,” Bellissimo said. “They have a very distinguished board and participation within their committees, and so it is quite meaningful to get recognition from such a well-respected group.”

The Luminary Award is a way to recognize those in the community who have taken great strides to give back to the community and truly make a difference. “The goal is really just to let someone who deserves a round of applause to stand up on stage and be appreciated by his or her peers,” Riggio Bulger said.

Bellissimo was quick to share the honor. “While I was personally selected, there are so many people who are responsible for this success, starting with my wife, my partners, and the strongest staff in the industry, led by [Equestrian Sport Productions President] Michael Stone,” he said.

After the show concluded, guests enjoyed an after-party at the Grille, which donated a portion of the proceeds of the bar that night to the Equestrian Aid Foundation.

The evening was hosted by Kimberly Van Kampen Boyer and co-chaired by Robert Ross, Stephanie Riggio Bulger, Monique Huntington Keitz and Missy Luczak Smith. The event committee included Emily Cleland, Ron Davis, Robert Dover, Janise Gray, Torrey Hardison, Martha R. Ingram, Martha Jolicoeur, Andrea Knox, Nora Kornheisl, Joni Moloney, Jacquie McCutchan, Louise Riggio, Luis Rodriguez and Kara Stevens.

The Equestrian Aid Foundation has raised more than \$2.8 million to help more than 100 equestrians through difficult times over the last 19 years. To learn more about the organization, visit www.equestrianaidfoundation.com. 