

# SIDS ball adds Roman flair



JOE MAHONEY/TIMES-DISPATCH

Guests look over silent auction items in the Science Museum rotunda.

BY SUSAN BOISSEAU  
Special Correspondent

**R**oman centurions stood guard at the Science Museum of Virginia last weekend while Roman goddesses welcomed guests to the sixth annual State of the Art Ball, "When in Rome, Baby."

Bacchus, the god of wine and revelry (aka **James Green**), mingled among the 400 guests poring over the silent auction possibilities displayed in the rotunda Sept. 22 at the benefit for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome research and prevention. After the silent auction, guests went downstairs to the Thalhimer Pavilion for dinner, dancing and a live auction.

In 2002, the first event was held at Cabo's restaurant. It now commands both the Science Museum's rotunda and Thalhimer Pavilion.

"It's so exciting that we've grown to that point so quickly," said **Kyra Oliver Hitzeman**, executive director of the Hayes Hitzeman Foundation.

The ball raised nearly \$130,000 for the foundation, \$10,000 more than last year. The foundation is dedicated to the prevention of SIDS and raising awareness about the syndrome. Hitzeman and her husband, **Ezra**, lost their 4½-month-old son, Hayes, to SIDS in 2002.

SIDS is the sudden and unexplained death of an infant younger than 1, according to the American SIDS Institute. More than 2,500 babies in the United States die each year from SIDS.

Hitzeman said she didn't realize how therapeutic working for the foundation would be. "It makes me even more proud of my son," she said. "I wish he were here."

Two of Hitzeman's family members from her home state of Tennessee attended the ball. Her brother, **Darren Oliver**, and cousin **Morgan Walters** of Livingston, Tenn., said family and friends in the Volunteer State

raise money for the foundation through an annual spring golf tournament.

**Bob Sledd**, honorary chairman of the ball and chairman of Performance Food Group, a ball sponsor, said he and the company were happy to help. If the foundation saves one baby, think of the grief that's been prevented, he said. "Of course, they save so many more."

"Plus it's a proactive solution rather than reaction," added his wife, **Melinda**.

**Kris Brown** said her 7-year-old son, **Chase**, saluted his father, Army Sgt. 1st Class **Jeff Brown**, twice when the couple left for the ball. The new Cub Scout first saluted military-style, then with the Scout salute.

Brown, who has been in the Army for 22 years, wore dress blues to the black-tie optional ball. "This is black tie for the military," he said.

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## SIDS campaign

The Hayes Hitzeman Foundation expects to reach 50,000 families in Virginia and Tennessee through the distribution of infant bodysuits with "This Side Up" printed on the front, said executive director **Kyra Oliver Hitzeman**.

The message on the "onesies" is a reminder that babies are at less risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome if put on their backs at naptime and bedtime.

The back of the shirt features additional tips to help reduce the risk of SIDS: give baby a pacifier at nap and bed time; breastfeed; keep baby out of a grown-up's bed; make sure baby sleeps on a firm mattress; and don't smoke around baby.

For more information, go to [www.hayesfoundation.org](http://www.hayesfoundation.org).



Bob Sledd, honorary chairman of the ball, and his wife, Melinda (right), are joined by Lisa Schaffner of WRIC.



Actor James Green, as Bacchus the Roman god of wine and revelry, gets in character with Trevor and Barbie Cumberbatch at the State of the Art Ball, themed "When In Rome, Baby."



Modelogic Wilhelmina models Nakita Patrick (left) and Jenna Miller as Roman goddesses chat with Darren Oliver and Morgan Walters.