

Politicos pay tribute to a poster boy of cronyism

By all accounts, it was a shindig to remember.

It was held Thursday night at the Westchester Manor catering establishment on Saw Mill River Road in Hastings-on-Hudson, and the attendees consisted of a veritable "Who's Who" of 125 politicians — among them current and former party bosses, past mayors and judges.

This was no rubber-chicken affair. Not hardly. Guests paid \$250 a plate to enjoy first-class grub and an open bar, the privilege of which surely aided and abetted the slap-

happy humor.

You might think such an affair was meant to raise money for a hotshot political candidate, or to wish some old crony well in retirement. But neither was the case.

They were there to recognize, roast and pay tribute to a man who may very well go to jail.

It was Ralph Arred's 67th birthday party.

They gave him a big, beautiful birthday cake, too. With candles. They serenaded him with the birthday song. Files and hacksaws



Phil Reisman

were not baked into the cake, according to firsthand reports.

All in all it was an extraordinary outpouring of gratitude for the former Yonkers Democratic chairman, who will be sentenced Sept. 29 on charges he evaded

personal income taxes between 2001 and 2004 and for failing to turn over federal taxes withheld from employees of his firm, Arred Electrical Contracting Corp. Arred could get up to four years in prison.

Over the years, Arred has also been the beneficiary of lucrative, no-bid contracts from the county and as such has been singled out as a kind of poster boy of corruption and cronyism in county government.

None of that deterred the invited insiders, power brokers and

deal makers, who, though they would never condone Arred's crimes, wanted to acknowledge him as a "stand-up guy" who did a lot of good things along the way.

As Rodney Dangerfield used to say, "I'm tellin' ya. What a crowd, what a crowd." Both political parties were well-represented, but the majority of attendees were said to be Democrats.

They included former County Clerk Len Spano, who represent-

Please see REISMAN, 2B

Tax cheat Arred gets a big turnout at party

REISMAN, from 1B

ed the vast Republican Spano clan. There were former Yonkers Mayor Angelo Martinelli and Gerald Loehr, who is currently a county judge. Three sitting Yonkers city judges were there — Michael Martinelli, Arthur Doran Jr. and his son, Arthur Doran III.

David Ford, a former chairman of the Mount Vernon Democratic Party and a staunch Arred ally, was there to wish him many happy returns. As were Pauline Galvin and Ann Muro, two of the former Yonkers Democratic Committee chairwomen. Joyce Fortunato, a former vice chairwoman, helped out, too. Kevin Cacace, a Yonkers politico and president of the Chamber of Commerce, was the evening's emcee.

The current Yonkers Democratic Party chairman, Ken Jenkins, was also there. Dave Alpert, the former county Democratic chairman, went to the party.

Lillian Coppola was there. She is the wife of Frank Coppola, the former Yonkers GOP chairman.

There were a number of lawyers on hand, including defense attorneys Murray Richman and Michael Weiner. Fittingly, Marty Rochelle, the well-known bail bondsman, was there.

At least two partygoers had served time in jail — former Bronx congressman Mario Biaggi (bribe taking) and the Rev. Nathaniel Grady (child molestation, but freed on appeal).

Jenkins laughed out loud when he told me yesterday that the party was "interesting."

"From my perspective," he said, "it was a fun-filled birthday party, and I had a really good piece of birthday cake."

Jenkins said he arrived late. He didn't know Arred well, noting that his career in city politics began about the time Arred was leaving the chairmanship.

"Everyone knew what was going on, so there wasn't any kind of

secret about what was happening," Jenkins said. "There was just recognition of some the hard work and things that he had done in his community-service life."

He added: "He clearly made a mistake. He clearly is going to pay a price for the mistake."

Biaggi said Arred appeared to be overweight.

"I hadn't recognized him," Biaggi said. "He put so much weight on. He couldn't button his shirt."

The former congressman and New York City cop, who was injured nine times in the line of duty ("I was shot, stabbed and clubbed") and became disabled, said his advice to Arred is to exercise in jail and work off the excess fat.

"Make this negative a positive," he advised. "Take advantage of the opportunities in the institution. He'll come out in better shape than he's ever been if he takes advantage of the facilities."

Biaggi said he liked Arred. "He's a personable guy," he said.

"He's a charmer."

And he remembered one of the good things Arred did.

"You know, I'm a little handicapped and I remember he was concerned about the disabled. He stressed making parking facilities for the disabled. That showed the inside of the man.

"I was always impressed by that. When it came to the real gutsy issues, he was there for the handicapped. And it touched me."

Arred's birthday party and the heavy turnout it attracted may prove a lot of things, but it certainly showed that you'll quickly find out who your friends are in the event you're facing jail.

"People respond," Biaggi said. "People remember, which is gratifying. It's a good commentary on human nature. Everybody didn't run because of his difficulty."

Reach Phil Reisman
at preisman@lohud.com
or 914-694-5008. Read his blog
at www.lohud.com/blogs/reisman.