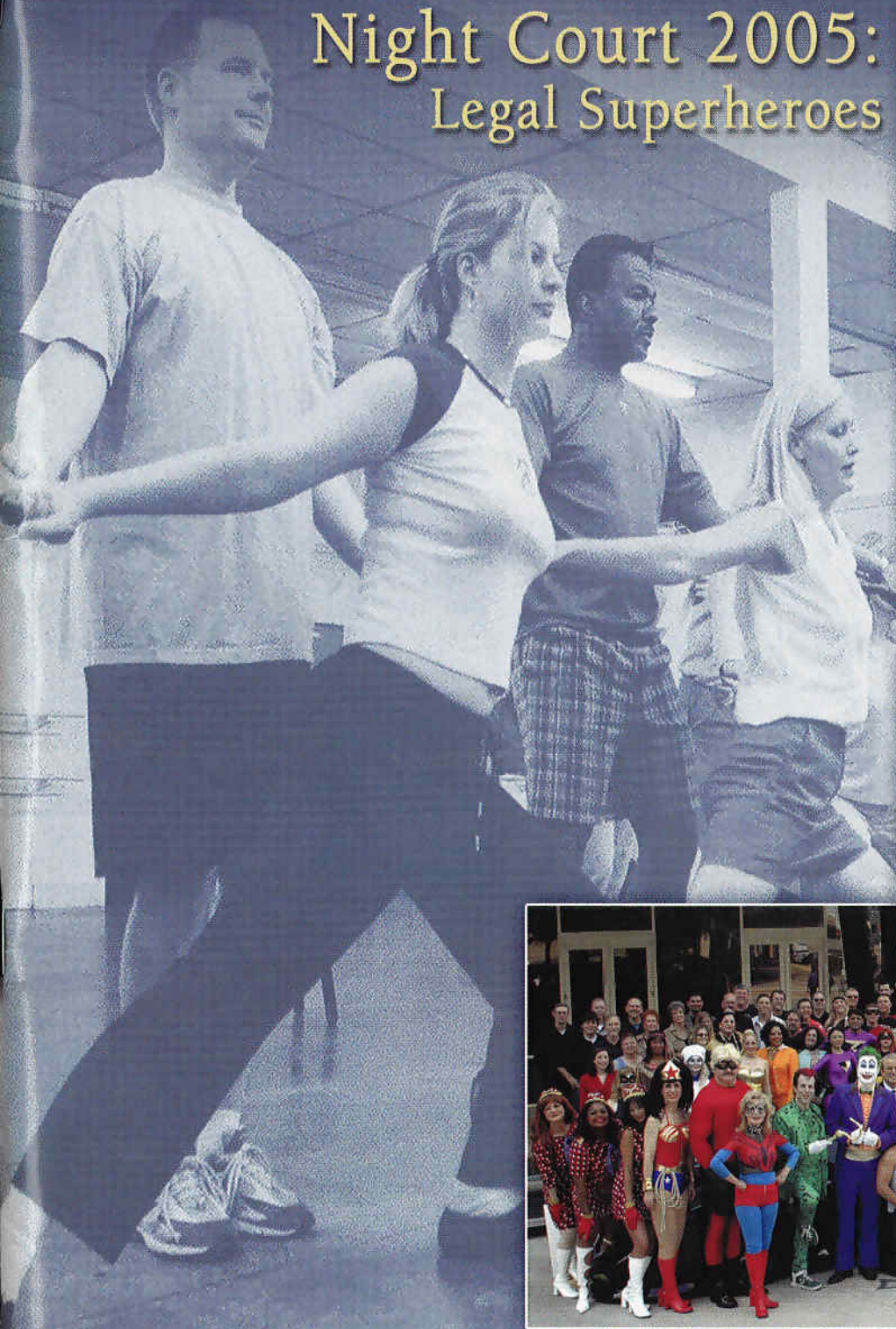


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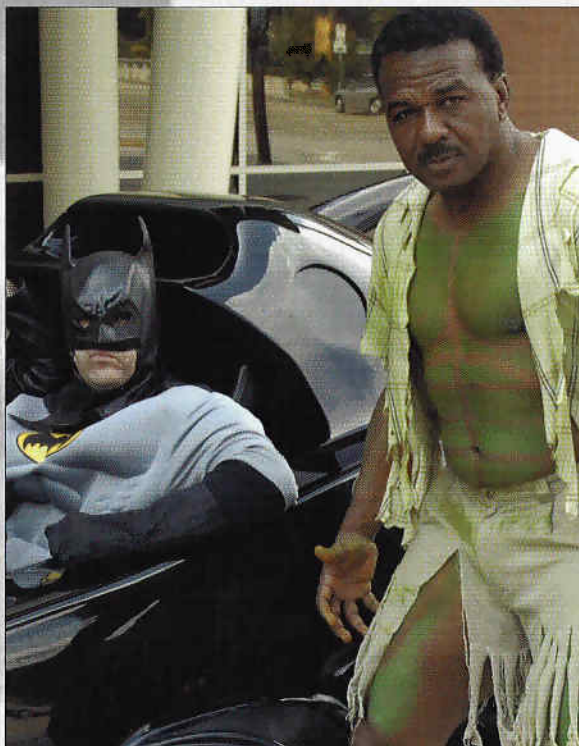
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Night Court 2005: Legal Superheroes



Lawyers Have Super Time Raising Money for Community Services



By TIM WELTIN

While tight schedules and tight presentations might be considered standard components of a legal career, performing in public while wearing tights is not typically part of life for most attorneys. Some lawyers, though, who recently staged "Night Court 2005: Legal Superheroes" actually donned tights, as well as boots and capes, while raising money for charity. Cartoon-inspired costuming was one element of the amalgam of

effort that resulted in the most successful Night Court production in its 15-year history.

Night Court is an annual all-lawyer musical comedy sponsored by the Houston Bar Association that brings together attorneys from across the legal spectrum for performances of parody each summer. Shows satirize current events, celebrities, and entertainment genres, as well as the legal profession. Taking the stage this year from June 15-18, more than 60 Houston-area attorneys danced, sang and super-spoofed in front of packed houses at the Hobby Center's Zilkha Hall. The 2005 version of the

project generated over \$50,000 in profits, shattering Night Court's previous fundraising record. In the past three years, Night Court has netted more than \$100,000 for the Houston Bar Foundation and various community service programs.

Over the years, the show has evolved from a modest series of skits to a full-blown stage show with a fluid plot line, production numbers and sophisticated staging. This year, a fifth performance was added when the four scheduled shows sold out. "We seem to have hit our stride," beamed Debra Baker, an environmental lawyer and a founding partner of Connelly • Baker • Maston • Wotring • Jackson. Baker is a co-writer and co-producer of Night Court. She is also a veteran performer in the show and has been affiliated in a variety of ways since its inception.

"We are so pleased to be able to appeal to both lawyers and non-lawyers with the Night Court brand of entertainment. The reason the end product is so satisfying is because there are a vast number of people who dedicate tremendous time, energy, and enthusiasm," Baker observed. Dedication is certainly a hallmark of participants since Night Court is a major commitment of time and resources. Cast members spend eight weeks rehearsing for the performances, sometimes five or more days a week. Most also donate their costuming, hawk tickets and recruit sponsors for the show.

In fact, many Night Courters work throughout the year to raise enough money to underwrite a high-caliber production that also yields sizable profits. Attorney performers also take on additional roles such as producer, writer, choreographer, music orchestrator, costume designer, set designer and light designer,

which can consume hundreds of additional volunteer hours, but also adds authenticity to the all-lawyer concept of



the Night Court production.

As the show has evolved, so has the size of the troupe. "With more than 50 folks on stage, we are much larger than

the cast of *Les Miserables*," commented Director Judy Frow. "It would take a crow bar to wedge another body onto the stage."

The size of the cast is not the only challenge for Frow, owner of Judy Frow's Show Business, who is in her ninth year as Night Court Director. From dealing with dozens of attorneys' ever-changing schedules, to directing a group of people who typically direct others in their law practices, Frow has learned to approach her job with ample fortitude. "But it's absolutely the highlight of my year," she said, "...a truly amazing process with truly amazing people. Who knew lawyers could be this zany and entertaining?"

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Having joined the project at Frow's side, Night Court Music Director, Jim Benton, takes on the challenge of training, coaching and cajoling the group's wide range of vocal talent. With a cast that includes both classically-trained singers and many people who, by their own admission, should not be singing in the shower, Benton also faces artistic hurdles. "In the end, it works. Plus, it's a lot of fun getting there ... In fact some of our voices are so strong that audience members have asked if certain vocalists are lip-syncing; talk about a tribute to their level of talent," he added, finishing with his broad, trademark grin.

Benton also leads the mostly-lawyer Night Court musicians, whose twenty-something piece grouping sometimes bill themselves as an orchestra and sometimes as a band. Ranging from electric guitars, electronic keyboards and drums to trombones, clarinets, and violins, the talented people who populate "the pit" during performances easily qualify as either incarnation. "As a cast member recently pointed out, without the musicians, it would just be lawyers




on stage talking for two hours, and I am not sure people would pay to see that," noted Benton.



Whether raising spirits of participants, raising funds for charity, raising the profile of lawyers in service to the community or simply raising the roof at the Hobby

Center with howls of laughter and bursts of applause, Night Court has officially taken center stage as a success story. Standing proudly along side the many other outstanding projects of the Houston Bar Association, the lawyers of Night Court continue to present their project of collaboration, creativity, and community to an ever-growing audience. The show is becoming an increasingly well-known part of summertime fun in Houston.

Night Court will return to the Hobby Center in 2006, performing "The Law of the West" from June 21 - 24. Tickets will go on sale on April 3, 2006, through the Hobby Box Office and, if history is any indication, purchasing tickets early is advisable. "It'll be a wacky western, that's really all we know right now. It'll get figured out," said Baker. "It always does. That's the magic of Night Court." 

Tim Weltin is a plaintiffs' attorney and founder of Weltin Law Firm, PLLC. Weltin is a co-producer, co-writer and performer for Night Court.



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