

January 24, 2007

Celebrities at prom for teens with kidney disease

By Star staff

"Midnight at the Oasis: An Evening Among the Stars" was the theme for attendees at the eighth annual Renal Teen Prom.

Guests at Notre Dame High School in Sherman Oaks were treated to music, dancing, dinner, limousine rides, glamour photos, portraits by caricature artists and celebrity guests, including Moorpark resident Stephen Furst.

The special evening Jan. 14 was set up in the style of a senior prom, with sets depicting desert scenes complete with palm trees and desert plants. The prom is organized by the Renal Support Network and its founder and president, Lori Hartwell, who herself missed her prom due to kidney disease.

"I was on dialysis all through my high school years," Hartwell said. "My goal at the prom is to let other teenagers,

young adults, anybody who lives with a chronic illness know that they can live a joyful life in spite of chronic illness. And one of the most important things that allows you to do that is being able to connect with others who understand your particular brand of experience."

Hartwell thanked Amgen, Roche, Fresenius Medical Care, DaVita, Abbott, Astellas, American Regent, Watson and Donate Life for their financial contributions and sending volunteers to the event "and a very special thanks to Notre Dame High and all of their staff and students who really make this event a special night for everyone."

One favorite aspect of the prom is participation of various Hollywood celebrities. This year, Gary Sinise, Griff Furst, Christy Carlson Romano, Sinbad, Alexa Vega, John and Laurette McCook and Stephen

Furst were on hand to sign autographs and mingle.

Said Stephen Furst: "When my kidney disease started getting worse, I was put in touch with RSN and I then I was 'forced to volunteer' for the Renal Teen Prom. I've never been so happy in my life to have done so because I have never seen such happy faces before on teens who have this chronic illness.

"The prom is such a wonderful event. I had a great time and I could not stop dancing. They had to throw me off the dance floor!"

Next year, the Renal Teen Prom will be held Jan. 20, and names of anyone interested in attending can be submitted to the network at 818-543-0896. The prom is free to guests.

Copyright 2007, Ventura County Star. All Rights Reserved.