

GOING FOR GOLD - 18th March 2007

Many locals might be aware of the Nicholas Rey Foundation, but not everyone knows just who drives it. PETA LEE chats to the main mover and shaker of this worthwhile cause

Someone, and it might have been rapper/movie star Ice T, once said that “Passion makes the world go round. Love just makes it a safer place.”

Ricky Smit would agree with that. The blonde powerhouse behind the Nicholas Rey Foundation – and the upcoming Rose Ball – is driven by her passion: passion for all things equestrian and passion for helping others. With the Foundation, both are inextricably linked. She loves what she does.

An avid horsewoman herself – she also runs the stables at Zimbali, where she lives with her husband and four-year-old twins – Ricky is the initiator of the unique Nicholas Rey Foundation.

“It is,” she tells me, “the only one of its kind in the world.”

In the unlikely event that you might not know anything about it, the Foundation is a fundraising organisation whose sole aim is to assist anyone, from anywhere in the country, who’s been injured in a horse-related accident.

“Nicholas Rey, who was injured in 2004, is the patron of the Foundation, and has lent his name to it,” she says. “There is a perception that funds raised are solely for his benefit, but that is inaccurate. We help anyone in a similar situation.”

I find out Ricky had a horseriding accident the year before Nicholas had his.

“I thought my world had ended: I crushed my right leg and ankle, now held together with pins and screws, but was devastated and went into complete depression. Then Nick Rey had his accident, and I realised just how lucky I was, and how lightly I’d got off. That’s when I decided to throw a big party and try to raise some money for a fund that would help people in a similar position. I had no idea it would snowball into the gigantic project it is today.”

In between raising her children, running the Zimbali equestrian centre, reading – “I love medical fiction, like Robin Cook, and biographies” – she spends hours on the phone and the internet, hooking up with sponsors, potential sponsors, and medical and health experts.

“People have no idea just what a rehabilitation programme can cost after a severe riding accident,” she says. “Your medical aid and your insurance cover only so much. When it runs out, what do you do?”

She cites the case of a black jockey who had a fall off his horse and is now paralysed. “The hospital sent him back to his home in a rural area. How can he live there? How does he make a living? How does he afford physiotherapy and a rehabilitation programme? We can’t just throw a lump sum of money at him: he can’t even get himself to the bank . . . nor is there anyone close enough to attend to his physio/rehab needs. Ideally, we need to relocate him to the city – we’ve got sponsors prepared to train guys in his position, so they can learn enough skills to earn a basic living, but where do we accommodate him and how does he get around? It’s going to cost an enormous amount of money . . . he – and others like him – is the reason we need support from donors at events like the Rose Ball and other fundraising efforts.”



*Caption: Ricky Smit looks stunning in a gown designed by **Gideon**, wearing exquisite jewellery from **Mark Gold**. Hair by **Cecilia** from **Hair 4 U, Ballito**, and make-up by **Lindsay Nixon** for **Nixon Make-up**. Styling by **Warren Morck**, photographs by **Margaret Tilling***