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Cocktail Hour Is Net Work for Them

New Economy mixers provide connection — or a job

By RACHEL SCHEIER
Daily News Business Writer

A freezing, driving rain fell outside the "First Blush of Spring Soiree" thrown by Courtney Pulitzer, Silicon Alley's first, though certainly not its last, professional party doyenne.

But inside the party, held recently at a red-curtained champagne bar called Flute Flatiron on W. 20th St., Pulitzer's A-list guests had to fight their way to the cash bar. Then they huddled in groups talking burn rates and severance packages, and waxed nostalgic about 1999.

Downtown at Scharmann's in SoHo, Laurel Touby, president of Mediabistro.com, was holding her monthly networking mixer.

"We got 150 people in the rain!" she said proudly a few days later.



Keivom for NEWS

MediaBistro.com's Laurel Touby (second from r.), throws Internet industry mixers, where new media professionals connect with new jobs and with each other.

The fantasy of instant Internet wealth may have long since evaporated, but certain aspects of the Internet boom live on. Strategic partygoing — a New Economy activity that has been parlayed into businesses by people like Pulitzer and Touby — shows no signs of dying, despite the obvious dearth of dot-com money and jobs.

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of dot-com money and jobs.

"Before it was like people trying to make a connection to help make their first million," said Timothy Appnel, technology director at online consulting firm Agency.com. "Now, they're just trying to get a job."

Bernardo Joselevich, who makes his living sending out a weekly e-mail roster of Silicon Alley parties known as Bernardo's List, credits the Internet with democratizing the elite executive tradition of doing business with a drink in one's hand.

"People have traditionally thought of parties as something you have to be in the mood for," he said. "But a party is really a cauldron of opportunity! Some people understand this; the hunter-gatherer in them knows what it can be."

Joselevich, a 38-year-old Argentine who was raised in Spain and came to Manhattan in 1999, was a dot-com entrepreneur himself until he thought up the idea for his list about a year and a half ago. A couple he knew, aspiring dot-com millionaires who'd just arrived from the Midwest and knew no one in town, asked him about industry parties in the city.



Carroll NEWS

**Professional
Internet industry
party hosts (l. to
r.) Courtney
Pulitzer, Bernardo
Joselevich and
Laurel Touby
disappeared."**

Bernardo's List now goes out to some 11,000 Web employees, venture capitalists and other members of what he calls the "schmoozing class." He has lined up some advertising, has a Web site in the works and plans to expand soon to other cities.

But even Joselevich concedes that the parties aren't quite what they were back in the days of the Web bubble.

"There was a time when you could go to five parties in an evening, be wined and dined at someone else's expense, and never actually know what the company does," he said a little wistfully. "Those days have

But New Economy networking parties remain a way for companies to schmooze investors or advertisers, form partnerships or recruit employees.

At Pulitzer's soiree, however, there seemed to be more commiserating than recruiting.

Scott Ettie of Tone House Broadband, an Internet production

SCOTT ELLIOTT OF TAPE HOUSE BROADBAND, an internet production company in Manhattan, was chatting with a woman he'd just met from J.P. Morgan. "Before it was much more of a networking thing. Now it's like, 'Hire me!' 'Have you got a job? I just got fired,'" he said.

Elsewhere, a "turnaround" expert, who specializes in fixing or, if necessary, selling off failing dot-coms, was passing out his card. Pulitzer herself, in a blue sequined dress, stood under a potted palm cheerfully giving an interview to a Japanese TV station.

A distant relation of the famous newspaper family, Pulitzer became known in the early days of Silicon Alley for her e-mail newsletter of gossip and industry happenings, The Cyber Scene. Later, she began hosting monthly "Cocktails with Courtney," where she tried to bring "a sense of manners and decorum" to an industry known for working in T-shirts. She now throws her parties in 15 cities, making money through sponsorships, advertising, ticket sales and membership fees.

Her events are not as mobbed as they were at the height of the boom, Pulitzer acknowledged.

"For awhile, at some of my parties there were 400 people and a line all the way down 20th St. I don't want to have events like that anyway. Now I'm really trying to keep them more high-end, more focused on people getting to meet other good people and not just the masses."

Touby, who favors retro eyeglasses and black clunky shoes in contrast to Pulitzer's pastel suits and floral scarves, throws parties of a slightly different flavor for journalists and other "content" folks.

Her Web site has become a popular clearinghouse for those looking to find or fill a job, generating income for Touby, a former writer at Business Week. Her events have always had more of a job-finding focus, and she said the recent layoffs that have swept the media industry have been a boon to her business.

"I'm getting terrific, top people lately," she said. "People who a year ago were haughty and indifferent to me are suddenly much more friendly."

But unemployed or not, there is another, more timeless reason why people continue to attend these parties.



"At a regular party, you couldn't just go up to a girl and start talking: you'd have nothing to hide your naked intent "

talking, you'd have nothing to hide your naked intent," Joselevich explained. "At a dot-com party, you can inquire about her business model."

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