

# Annual fashion show keeps the League in green

By Peggy Bourland-Madison

INCLINE VILLAGE – The annual Oscar de la Renta and Saks Fifth Avenue Lake Tahoe benefit for the League to Save Lake Tahoe is a tradition that started in 1969.



Oscar de la Renta with fans at the annual fundraiser on Aug. 3 for the League to Save Lake Tahoe. Photos/Peggy Bourland-Madison

San Francisco-Tahoe philanthropist and socialite Diana Dollar Knowles conspired with a few of her notable friends, some still very involved today, to bring American designer and pal Bill Blass to Lake Tahoe for a benefit fashion show to support the work of The League to Save Lake Tahoe. Back then the show took place at a private residence on the West Shore's "Gold Coast", with a small number attending and tickets at just \$15. Now in its 44th year, the sold-out event accommodates 600, with a wide range of ticket prices. The event attracts fashion lovers from near and far, with the added appeal of helping to protect the lake.

In 1995, after 20 years of dazzling fashion events on the shore of Lake Tahoe, Blass at age 73 announced he would be retiring and would no longer be taking his fall collection to Lake Tahoe. This news was not entirely unexpected and with his help a replacement was quickly found. Blass convinced a friend and fellow designer that coming to Lake Tahoe was too much fun to miss and thus the Oscar de la Renta era began.

Though he calls New York City his home, de la Renta clearly has developed a fondness for Lake Tahoe. His shows, presented by Saks Fifth Avenue, have raised millions to benefit the League.

This year the event returned to the extensive grounds of Kern Schumacher's 5-acre lake front estate in the tony village of Incline. With de la Renta "in the house", excitement was high as guests arrived and passed through the gates to a live band and a hosted bar serving Tahoe's own Tahoe Blue Vodka that was swizzled into libations that set a festive mood.

Many of the guests' images are often found on the society pages of the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Nob Hill Gazette*. Last Saturday they were in Tahoe providing plenty of fashion diversion long before the runway show began. The hats, the dresses, and the bags were what you would expect to see at a fashion event. In spite of their best intentions, there were a few "fashion misses", but it was all good fun and highly entertaining.

This year's fashion show and luncheon was dedicated to the memory of Diana Dollar Knowles who died in 2013, at the age of 96. Knowles and the many blue blood families that have deep roots in Tahoe as summer home residents dating back to the early 1900s have made preserving Tahoe's clear blue waters a responsibility to restore some of the impacts their ancestors may have left behind.



Looking the part at the fashion show.

Lunch was served at noon and the first part of the live auction begins. Bidding is very competitive and items included the coveted New York Fashion Week with de la Renta. It was now time to settle into your seats to enjoy the show. Sixty designs are revealed worn by 19 stunning runway models. While this flotilla of \$10,000 couture dresses and gowns float down the runway, there is a flurry of activity back stage. South Shore's 25-year veteran, Mary Ann Werley is in "the tent" with her crew of 20 dressers getting the models in and out of the 60 costume changes. Saks has their hair and make-up teams making last minute touch ups before each model steps onto the runway. The final showing is the evening gown finale.

De la Renta's designs did not disappoint and are met with wild applause.



Designs by Oscar de la Renta.

Before audience members can rush backstage to order items from this 2014 Resort Collection, part two of the live auction begins. League Executive Director Darcie Goodman Collins is on stage to introduce the League's newest project – Eyes on the Lake. Eyes on the Lake is a volunteer aquatic invasive species monitoring program. Volunteers are trained to identify and document evidence of aquatic plant species considered to be one of the leading causes of Lake Tahoe's clarity loss. In just a few minutes more than \$30,000 is raised to fund this program.

Collins stated, "The real significance of this event is being able to fund the League's new programs that include tangible hands-on projects that will help improve water quality. Funding raised at this benefit makes that research possible."

In the end it is all about The League's iconic motto: Keep Tahoe Blue.