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## Event Report

### Futuristic Benefit Has Robots, Staff on Segways

California Science Center's Discovery ball  
California Science Center and Exposition Park Rose Garden,  
Los Angeles  
Sunday, 06.25.05, 6:30 PM to 1 AM

The **California Science Center** likes to take care of its board members, so at the seventh annual **Discovery** ball, the museum sent out a welcome committee of one to greet high-level guests. The greeter was graciousness personified, but she didn't observe the black-tie dress code, opting instead for top-to-toe metal adorned with blinking red lights. "Have a good time tonight," she said, toodling after new arrivals.

#### List of Resources

Audiovisual Production	<a href="#">U.S. Sound &amp; Lighting Inc.</a>
Catering	<a href="#">Kensington Caterers</a>
Entertainment	<a href="#">Andre Fischer Production Services</a>
Entertainment	<a href="#">James Ingram</a>
Entertainment	<a href="#">Splash</a>
Entertainment	<a href="#">Something for Rockets</a>
Flowers	<a href="#">C.J. Matsumoto &amp; Sons</a>
Invitation Design/Printing	<a href="#">Project Design Studio</a>
Lighting Design/Equipment	<a href="#">Brite Ideas Lighting</a>
Rentals	<a href="#">Classic Party Rentals</a>
Staging	<a href="#">Event Construction Services</a>

The greeter was among a posse of robots brought in by California Science Center vice president of food and events services **Christina Sion** to celebrate the current exhibit "Robots & Us." The first sign that the gala wouldn't be a party as usual was the pair of eight-foot robots flanking the center entrance, blanketed in mist from a fog machine.

Guests entered the lobby to find a futuristic lounge with bar tables topped with reproductions of 1950's toy robots dotting the room. Waiters bearing mushroom tartlets with silver leaf zipped around on **Segway Human Transporters**, electric-powered platforms on wheels; in a corner designated the Robotics Demonstration Lounge, guests could take Segways for a test spin. Graduate students from the nearby **University of Southern California** demonstrated a robot they'd created, while revelers played with high-end children's toys called Robosapiens that simulate human movement and Chatbots, computers that converse with their operators. Others lounged on white vinyl couches and tried their hand at **PlayStations** set up with Japanese fighting robot videos. "It's hard to get people to go upstairs when there's a bar and drinks downstairs, so the idea was to bring the exhibit down to the people," Sion said.

On either side of a sushi bar, trays of raw salmon spun around on wheel-shaped platforms. Bartenders in T-shirts emblazoned with toy robots served white cosmos—white cranberry juice and vodka—in tall glasses holding plastic ice cubes with flashing green lights. At one end of the square bar, a dancer sporting a platinum wig, fishnets, and a silver minidress and boots shimmed in a Tomorrowland-style phone booth. On a nearby stage, **Itzhak Perlman's** son, **Rami Perlman**, performed with his electronic-music band, [Something for Rockets](#).

Nearly 600 guests moved on to an al fresco dinner at tables ringing the fountain in the **Exposition Park Rose Garden** outside of the science center.

(Tables seating eight went for \$5,000 to \$50,000.) The tabletop picked up the garden theme with centerpieces of pink roses and dishes with floral patterns modeled on Sevres porcelain. The goblets were ringed in gold. After Los Angeles Mayor-elect **Antonio Villaraigosa** honored California Scientist of the Year **Kip Thorne**, **James Ingram** gave a longer-than-usual performance, serving up an hour's worth of hits including "Just Once" and "Find 100 Ways."

At this point, most galas would pack up the tent, but the science center was just pitching theirs in its ad hoc after-hours club, the "Funky Monkey." With the help of **Chris Yeager** of **Progressive Events**, the conference center was transformed into a playpen for adults inspired by the science center's **Imax** film, **Wild Safari 3D**, which opened the next day. Burnt-bamboo chairs, hammocks and bent-wood couches from **Modern Props**' new Palm Springs Collection topped zebra-print rugs. Tables were decorated with greenery and orchids, and the bar was covered with a tent decorated with pith helmets and banana bunches. While some guests went to the Imax theater next door to catch a *Safari* screening, others danced to the sounds of Splash. The party finally wound down at 1 AM, with guests drifting off toting boxes of animal cookies and floral gift bags with **Estee Lauder** cologne and **James Ingram** CDs. Says Sion, "It's fun when you throw a party and people actually party."

—[Irene Lacher](#)

Photos: *Nadine Froger Photography*

