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Best of 2010: 10 Boston Event Industry Highlights

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As part of our Best of 2010 look back at the last year, we asked our local editors to share their—admittedly subjective—take on the most important things to happen in their markets this year. Here's what news editor Courtney Thompson had to say about Boston.

1. The Clinton/Mezvinsky Wedding

Chelsea Clinton tapped hometown event producer Bryan Rafanelli—who had previously worked with the bride's mother on fund-raisers over the years—to helm her top-secret nuptials in Rhinebeck, New York, in late July. The event took place at Beaux-Arts mansion Astor Courts, welcoming some 450 guests, while putting some national media attention on a leader in the Boston event community. Though Rafanelli was tight-lipped throughout the planning process, he did grant a [post-wedding interview to *The New York Times*](#), where he squashed rumors of \$150-a-piece invitations and \$15,000 portable toilets, saying, “I know Chelsea and Marc wanted to have the highest quality. That doesn't mean the most expensive; it just means really a beautiful wedding.” Highlights from Rafanelli's Boston-based work over the year included the [Boys and Girls Club House Party](#), [the Huntington Theatre Gala](#), and [Mass General's Storybook Ball](#).



Fan Pier's seaside views set the backdrop for *Boston* magazine's "Best of Boston" issue party over the summer.

Photo: [Aviran Levy](#) for BizBash

2. M.F.A.'s Art of Americas Wing

The Museum of Fine Arts' new 121,307-square-foot wing [opened to much fanfare in November](#); the wing is a central glass structure with two adjoining pavilions, as well as a 150-seat auditorium. Also included in the \$345 million expansion is a 12,184-square-foot glass-covered courtyard that holds 600 for a reception.

3. I.C.A. Gala & After-Party

Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art revamped its [annual spring fund-raising event](#) in May by adding an after-party for the first time. The evening kicked off with a cocktail party and dinner in the adjacent new One Marina Park building in Fan Pier, and afterward, the 430 guests were guided by large arrows formed from white fluorescent lights to walk across the boardwalk to the I.C.A. to join 300 additional guests at the after-party. "There's a brand-new format this year," said Susie Allen, the museum's director of special events. "We wanted to liven up the night. And not everyone could come to the dinner, so it was a nice way to let people come and not invest in a major ticket price." The evening raised \$800,000 for the museum.

4. Games Galore

Guests got interactive at events in Boston this year, partaking in everything from bag tosses to basketball shootouts. At the [Room to Dream Foundation's first annual gala at Cyclorama](#) in April, a carnival theme had guests mixing with juggling unicyclists and trying their hand at skee ball. In April, [Boston magazine celebrated its "Best of Boston" issue](#) on Fan Pier with summer-themed games like volleyball and bag tosses by the water. More recently, Boston nightlife players Ace Gershfield and Sal Boscarino of 6one7 Productions joined Boston Red Sox executive Kellen Benjamin in October to [celebrate their birthdays in a casino-themed setting](#) that included gaming tables and prize wheels.

5. Life Is Good Festival

Boston-based apparel company Life Is Good joined forces with Superfly Presents, the minds behind the Bonnaroo and Outside Lands music festivals, to introduce a [new family-focused music festival in September](#). The two-day event brought 30,000 people—including 5,000 kids—to Canton's Prowse Farm (20 minutes from downtown Boston) and raised \$600,000 for the Life Is Good Kids Foundation. The weekend's roster of performers included kid-centric artists such as Dan Zanes & Friends, as well as headliners Ben Harper, Guster, Corinne Bailey Ray, and Jason Mraz. "In the past we always tailored our [smaller] festivals to be family-friendly, and this year was no different, but we also targeted young, single music fans," said Bert Jacobs, the company's chief executive optimist. "Many people in the music industry told us we wouldn't be able to mix tattoos with toddlers. But we did just that, and there were no problems." The festival is confirmed to return in 2011.

6. Fan Pier

On 21 acres of waterfront on the Boston Harbor, and adjacent to the ICA and Harborwalk, Fan Pier became an increasingly in-demand, trendy venue in 2010. The area hosted its first event last December, when [Style Boston and Boston magazine](#) took over the raw 15th floor of a building on the pier for a holiday party. Next up was the [opening of luxury clothing purveyor Louis's outpost](#) on Fan Pier in June, which also marked the opening of [French and American restaurant Sam's](#) in the same complex. Others to flock to the area included the [I.C.A. for its annual spring fund-raiser](#), and [Boston magazine](#) again, this time for its ["Best of Boston" issue party over the summer](#).

7. Boston Ballet Spring Gala

Dubbed "Black, White, and Brilliant" in honor of the company's production of *Black and White*, [the ballet's largest fund-raiser of the year](#) garnered 700 guests and exceeded the group's \$850,000 fund-raising goal by raking in \$1 million. A major production change this year had ballet company members performing on two identical stages on either end of the main dining area, rather than one stage in the center of the room. Following the cocktail hour, three-course dinner, and performances, the gala underwent a changing of the guard: An after-party hosted by the Young Partners of the Boston Ballet drew in twenty- and thirtysomethings with a passion for the arts. "The goal of the after-party," said Ballet special events manager Renee Dunn, "is to give access to the Young Partners, who we see as the future donors of the ballet. It gives exposure to a whole new audience."

8. Catholic Schools Foundation's Inner-City Scholarship Fund-Raising Dinner

Previously a stewardship event that was free to donors, [the dinner became a fund-raiser for the first time this year](#) and cost \$750 a ticket. The event also went from being hosted for many years at the Marriott Copley Place to the Boston Public Library, which meant the planners had to hire many more vendors. "All of the other nonprofits in the area have this type of format, where they have an annual fund-raiser," said Meghan Horan, the foundation's development associate who oversaw the event. "For us to keep up with them, we had to make the switch to fund-raising, and the 20th anniversary of the I.C.S.F. dinner was the perfect time to do that." And the result wasn't too shabby: The foundation raised \$2.6 million thanks to a committee that, this year, was chaired by Patriots owner Bob Kraft and was a veritable who's who of New England C.E.O.s. The evening's honoree, Fidelity honcho and longtime philanthropist Peter Lynch, may have also helped bring in sponsors like Bank of America, CVS, and EMC Corp.

9. Long-Term Sponsorship ROI

The Boston chapter of For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (or "First") hosted its [fifth annual regional robotics competition](#) at the Agganis Arena in April, where some 1,500 area students competed in a "iron man"-like competition—for robots, that is. Launched in 1989 in New Hampshire, First aims to promote STEM—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—to students around the world, encouraging kids to eventually enter these fields as adults. The students are able to compete thanks to sponsorship dollars from N.A.S.A., Boston University, PTC, Chevron, General Electric, EMC Corporation, and many others. The upside for sponsors, explained software company (and First sponsor) PTC's senior vice president of solutions marketing and communications, Robin Saitz: "Our customers have a very grave concern about the pipeline of engineers coming into their companies. If our customers are concerned, then PTC is concerned. One of the things that's appealing about First is that we can work with our customers to solve this problem. Through funds and software and people donations, we can help grow the First program, which helps achieve this goal of exciting young people about STEM."

10. Boxed Eats

At the Boston Symphony Orchestra's 29th annual [Presidents at the Pops fund-raising gala](#) at [Symphony Hall](#) in May, caterer [Boston Gourmet](#) served preprogram canapes and cocktails, then guests dined on boxed meals of at their seats after the reception. The meals included shrimp, celery, and leek salad, beef tenderloin with smoky Vidalia onion dressing, and Yukon gold potato salad with lemon horseradish aioli.

—*Courtney Thompson*

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