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Gala Sheds Light On The Blind Experience

It was a hazy first gala for CRIS Saturday at Maneeley's in South Windsor — purposely hazy.

The nonprofit's "Dining & Dancing in the Dark" fundraiser included candlelight and special glasses, not so

much to set the mood but to show guests what the world looks like when you are blind or visually impaired.

"We thought it would give some insight," said executive director **Diane Weaver Dunne** of the gala's theme, designed to acquaint the revelers with the clients served by CRIS, a radio reading service for the blind..

And while the mission is a serious

one, it was left to emcee **Scot Haney** and those near him to ham it up as they tried out the glasses but thanked their lucky stars for their own good eyesight.

Among the guests was a very poised party animal, **Whitlee**, the seeing-eye German shepherd of **Steve Famiglietti**, one of several award winners. "She's a good girl," said Famiglietti, who manages the vocational center for adults at the Oak Hill School for the Blind in Hartford. He was awarded the CRIS Educator of the Year award.

Other award winners were: the Computer Co. of Cromwell, receiving the nonprofit's Small Business of the Year award; Windsor Federal Savings Banks, for Financial Institution of the Year; and the Lions Club, honored as Civic Organization of the Year.

There were other celebs at the event, which Dunne said will become an annual fundraiser. U.S. Sen. **Dick Blumenthal** made sure that, as honorary chairman, he made it to the event, despite a working late into the night the evening before in Washington. "He's amazing, and we were so happy he made it," said Dunne of the senator's arrival, which was a couple of hours later than planned. "He has been one of our biggest supporters."



MARYELLEN FILLO

IT WASN'T A 3-D EVENT at Cris Radio's "Dining & Dancing in the Dark Gala" but rather an exercise is what it's like to be blind. Guests included, from left in front: Judge Kevin Dubay; his wife, DUBY McDOWELL; and WFSB's Scot Haney, who was emcee.



STEVE FAMILIETTI, right, was among the gala honorees, joined by CRIS Radio executive director Diane Weaver Dunne, left; his mother, Linda Famiglietti; and his seeing eye dog, Whitlee.