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## Norby Walters' star-studded Oscar party



For the past 27 years, Norby Walters has hosted Night of 100 Stars, an Oscar viewing party held at the Beverly Hilton. It's been covered in The New York Times, under the headline: "The Oscar Party No One Knows," and has been attended by the likes of J.K. Simmons, Gary Buscy (the one and only) and William H. Macy.

All right, so it isn't exactly Elton John's swanky soiree, but it's earned its chops as a veteran staple in the Oscar party world.

It takes Walters four months of arduous preparation to put on the event, from raising money to making sure enough stars attend. And at 84 years old, the former music and sports talent agent persists as something of celebrity in his own right.

Walters looks like he has a few stories to tell (and a simple Google search will confirm this). No stranger to the occasional controversy, even Night of 100 Stars has made headlines of its own: In 2004, for example, Walters settled a lawsuit for failing to register the evening as a commercial fundraiser.

Nowadays, Walters sticks to his guns when asked about his party. "It's not a charity. It's not a benefit. I'm just throwing a party," he told the Journal.

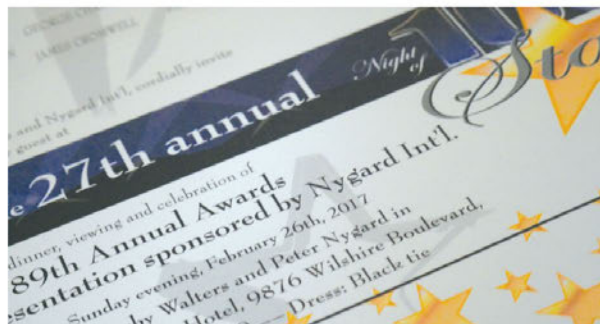
Set for Oscar night on Feb. 26, Walters' shindig is a really decked-out viewing party. A red carpet will be laid out with camera crews and paparazzi. Attendees will be wined and dined with a four-course meal, while watching the Oscars on mounted television screens.

"It's a lot of fun, you know," Walters said of the party and the preparation for it. "And it's interesting. Actors are interesting people."

During the commercial breaks, he introduces previous winners and nominees. "We usually have 12 to 15 of them right there in the audience," Walters said.

Media and celebrities get in for free, but a seat costs \$1,000 for the average Joe, or up to \$25,000 for a VIP table package. Night of 100 Stars is sponsored and underwritten by Nygard International, a Canadian apparel manufacturer owned by billionaire Peter Nygard.

This year, Night of 100 Stars will bestow a Lifetime Achievement Award for the first time. Comedian Richard Lewis will present actor Joseph Bologna with the award, and in Walters' Yiddish-inspired lingo, "shpritz him a little."



A ticket to the Night of 100 Stars party will cost \$1,000 or more, unless you're a celebrity or a member of the media. Photos by Tess Cutler

The party is more important to him than guessing who'll win Oscars. Walters has seen only two nominated movies this year. " 'La La Land' was good, and also that Annette Bening movie ["20th Century Women"]," he said.

Nowadays, besides his Oscar party, he is best known for hosting a celebrity poker game (that now is held every other week) in his Westwood high rise overlooking Wilshire Boulevard. James Woods and Jason Alexander went to the last one. The perpetually tan Walters, who looks like a character straight out of an Elmore Leonard novel, uses these poker games as part schmooze, part networking opportunity for his Oscar parties.

"It's only a dollar a game," he said about his low-stakes wagering, where an average win or loss is \$30 to \$50. "Basically, it's eight actors sitting around a table, talking show business."

Framed snapshots from previous games clutter side tables and bookshelves. Sharon Stone, David Arquette and Alex Trebek are just a few celebs who grace these 8-by-10 frames. In one, Bryan Cranston is being served cake at the poker table to celebrate his lead actor Oscar nomination for "Trumbo."

Sporting black-framed glasses, a partially unbuttoned Hawaiian shirt and well-worn Chuck Taylors, Walters also has that old-timey New Yorker tude that hails back to a time when hot dogs were only a nickel and neighborhood kids played games like stickball and kick the can in the street. He'd be a dream role for any character actor: With his Brooklynite banter, he's constantly schmoozing, attending galas and parties, trying to recruit more stars to fill seats at his dining room-turned-poker table.

Walters grew up in Brownsville, Brooklyn, a tough neighborhood filled with synagogues and corner delis. One place in particular was a hub for the comings and goings of Brownsville: Soldier Meyer's, a nightclub where locals convened. Walters' father, a prizefighter and Polish immigrant, owned the joint.



Walters has numerous framed photos from previous celebrity poker parties.

Located on Sutter Avenue, the nightclub booked jazz heavyweights such as Miles Davis, Stan Getz and Charlie Parker. At 23, Norby bought the club with money earned from working in the circus and converted it into a mambo club. "I love mambo," he told the Journal.

Walters eventually opened a string of mambo clubs, pizzerias, even a Chinese restaurant, before becoming an R&B music agent, representing artists such as Patti LaBelle, Marvin Gaye and Dionne Warwick. "From the jazz bebop days, to the mambo, to R&B, I've always been around music," he said.

Walters also became a sports agent, but that ended in corruption and racketeering allegations that he and a partner illegally paid college athletes to sign on with them. Those charges led to one conviction, later overturned on appeal.

He moved to Los Angeles and in 1990 hosted his first Oscar party.

The original Night of 100 Stars, which Walters' party is named after, was a star-filled benefit gala held at the Radio City Music Hall in New York, put on by big-time Broadway producer Alexander H. Cohen. "He died, and when I came out here, I decided I would keep up the tradition," he said. "Tradition," he said again. "Like from 'Fiddler!'"

That first year, 15 stars attended.

"Now, 26 years later, we've got 75 to 100," Walters said. "Not bad, huh?"



