

NEW YORK POST

Commishing upon a star

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Last Updated: 7:42 AM, May 2, 2010

Posted: 4:00 AM, May 2, 2010

The biggest fixture on Manhattan's champagne circuit isn't a Park Avenue princess -- it's Police Commissioner Ray Kelly.

The former Marine has evolved into a ubiquitous presence at black-tie galas, charity balls and film premieres.

Kelly's nighttime posse ranges from A-list movie stars to deep-pocketed philanthropists to billionaire CEOs. Whereas Mayor Bloomberg has become very particular in choosing the events he attends, Kelly will show up "at the opening of an envelope," said society chronicler David Patrick Columbia.

Last weekend, on April 24, Kelly stepped out with his wife of 46 years, Veronica, to attend the premiere of the Eliot Spitzer documentary at the Tribeca Film Festival. When asked by a reporter what brought him there, he replied, "My wife."

The next evening, Kelly donned an apron and hammed it up at the Four Seasons for a Cancer Research Institute benefit with billionaire philanthropist John Rosenwald and Bloomberg.

His third night out in a row had him joining Jonathan Tisch, Leonard Lauder and Hizzoner at Gotham Hall for an open-bar fete, hosted by Rupert Murdoch, celebrating The Wall Street Journal's new Greater New York edition.

On April 20, the Kellys hit a Vanity Fair party, where he hobnobbed with Robert De Niro, Graydon Carter and Ron Perelman. The previous night, he had attended the SCAD style awards, where he mugged for pictures with Michael Douglas.

March was no less busy for the 68-year-old top cop, who is credited with lowering the crime rate by 20 percent since his 2002 appointment by Bloomberg. He partied with Douglas at a book launch at MoMA and found himself sandwiched between Jennifer Lopez and Sharon Stone at the Police Foundation gala, a once low-key Police Plaza event now held at the Waldorf.

That month he also attended an International Women's Day event at the United Nations with Diane von Furstenberg and joined Spike Lee, Andrew Cuomo and Knick players for the premiere of "Winning Time: Reggie Miller vs. the New York Knicks" at the Ziegfeld.

Kelly rang in the New Year and sipping champagne with Jennifer Lopez and her husband, Marc Anthony, at Charles restaurant in the West Village.

Kelly, a Battery Park City resident, "should run for mayor," says Julian Niccolini, co-owner of the Four Seasons Restaurant, where the commish is a lunch regular.

And that's exactly what some observers think Kelly -- the son of a milkman and a Macy's clerk -- is doing by making powerful, deep-pocketed friends on the society circuit.

"Ray is a rock star that also happens to be the police commissioner," said NYU public-policy professor Mitchell Moss. "He's smart, he's fun and he radiates power."

Police spokesman Paul Browne said Kelly's "ambitions haven't changed. He's focused on doing the best job possible as police commissioner."

He pointed out that society photographers and columnists often overlook Kelly's visits to hospitalized members of the service or to precinct community-council meetings.

Additional reporting by Murray Weiss