

MC for the evening, Karl George Washington Watson.

Heart to heart in Parliament

At the end of a very bruising week of political debate, Parliament took on a softer look and feel last Saturday night during an historic gala evening that zeroed in on a very serious matter of the heart.

Governor General Sir Elliott Belgrave and Lady Belgrave headed an impressive list of dignitaries for the **Red Dress Ball**, held to raise awareness and support for issues of heart disease in women.

Fittingly, 90 per cent of the ladies in attendance wore red for the social evening of music, heart healthy food and video presentations, organized by the Heart & Stroke Foundation at the very "heart" of this island's democracy.

As historian Karl **George Washington** Watson entertained guests with stories of his many and varied exploits with rum, **Ruth Pringle** mingled freely with the crowd of fine diners, including former parliamentarian Dame Maizie Barker-Welch, New Zealand High Commissioner Jan Henderson, Director of Public Prosecutions Charles Leacock and his wife Betty-June, as well as businessman Ralph "Bizzy" Williams and his wife Shelly, who occupied the VIP balcony area.

Red snapper, seared with **Scotch Bonnett** oil, and served with crispy yam cake and butternut squash and ginger, along with grilled okras and smoked red pepper sauce was the choice meal of the night, as Parliament's historic dining room was transformed for the **Diamonds In The Sky** affair, which was also highlighted by

performances from a guitar soloist who serenaded the ladies.

When it was time for the Heart & Stroke Foundation president Humphrey Metzgen to give his address, he made full use of his "rare privilege" to speak in Parliament.

First, he reminded guests of the historic significance of Barbados' Parliament, which is the third oldest in the entire Commonwealth, and that the **Statue Of Lord Nelson**, located nearby **National Heroes Square**, was older than the statue of the same name and fame in London.

"Tonight, however, we are not at sea but on the shores of Barbados to win an even more important battle than Nelson fought: beating heart disease and stroke among women, which are responsible in most countries for an estimated twice as many deaths in women as all cancers combined," said Metzgen, who went on to deliver some chilling statistics about the "silent killer" that is heart disease.

"Here in Barbados, according to the **Health Of The Nation Study**, commissioned by the Ministry of Health last year, two thirds of our adult population are either overweight or obese; two out of five have hypertension; and a quarter have abnormally elevated blood sugar, which all predispose to heart disease and stroke, so that on average about one heart attack and almost two strokes occur every day in Barbados," Metzgen related.

This compares to only 55 per cent of women in the United States who realize heart disease is their number one killer, and less than half know what are considered healthy levels for cardiovascular risk factors like blood pressure and cholesterol, he told the gathering.

And while, attempts may be made to quibble about figures, Metzgen warned that there were some other



From left, Director of Public Prosecutions Charles Leacock, Suzanne Costello-Haloute, Betty-June Leacock, Dr Camille Hope and Collin Francis, general manager of Global Directorles.

factors that could not be ignored, namely, that heart disease has no geographic, gender or socioeconomic boundaries; the clinical care is costly and prolonged; heart disease and stroke are highly disruptive to family dependents; and the burden of heart disease and stroke occurs most commonly among those of the lower socioeconomic groups, and ultimately has an impact on economic development.

In appealing for financial support in the fight against the disease, he said: "This very building has witnessed the passing of the legislation that provided tax relief to benefactors who have donated to registered charities."

As part of the Heart & Stroke Foundation's recognition of the 50th year of **Independence**, Metzgen presented a special cardiovascular time capsule, which will be opened on the 75th year of the island's **Independence**.

"Our wish is to see a reduction in the numbers of those afflicted by heart disease, and as such we hope this memento is a reminder to the next generation to do all they can to uphold our mission, as we place the future in their hands," the foundation president said. (KJ)



Dame Malzie Barker Welch (at right) and Gillian Metzgen, wife of Heart & Stroke Foundation president Humphrey Metzgen.



CEO of the Heart & Stroke Foundation, Gina Pitts, poses with Tony Butts, instructor at the Heart & Stroke Foundation.



Some of the attendees at Saturday night's Red Dress Ball.