

# Largest charity lunch in Britain is held in Edinburgh



Now in its thirty first year, the Scottish property industry's festival of Christmas (Spifox) December Carol Concert held at St Cuthbert's was followed by a lunch attended by 1,434 guests at Edinburgh's International Conference Centre (EICC) and is believed to be the largest gathering of its kind in the UK.

The charity can trace its roots back to 1983 when a small group of property and construction professionals staged a carol concert at the Parish Church of St. Andrews and St. Georges followed by a lunch at Edinburgh's George Hotel where they raised £3,000 for the Royal Scottish Prevention of Cruelty to Children. By 2004 the carol concert had to be moved to the much larger St. Cuthbert's and the lunch was moved to what is now the City's largest venue.

The Spifox carol concert has played host to many celebrity readers over the years including Lulu, Esther Rantzen, Sir Tom Farmer, Tony Jacklin, Viv Lumsden, Anita Harris and many others. World renowned violinist Nicola Benedetti last year gave a heart warming speech about her passion for and involvement in children's charity El Sistema.

In 1995 and in recognition for their support for Childline in Scotland, Spifox were invited to a reception at Downing Street hosted by the then Prime Minister John Major. Trustee Alan Watt went on to present a cheque to Childline at Television Centre during Esther Rantzen's That's Life show.

Retiring Chairman Ronnie Urquhart who has presided over the charity for the last five years and who this year passed the reigns to Alistair Carlyle said he was overwhelmed at the events growth with all 141 tables selling out within 48 hours of release. Ronnie's County Properties Group HQ have been the nerve centre for Spifox where he and his team have worked

tirelessly for many years to develop the charity.

Spifox have made valuable contributions to 276 charities over the years, this year's benefactors being Action for Children, Teens Plus and Barnardo's. Funds are raised at a number of events during the year but the Christmas lunch is by far the largest contributor.



This year along with table donations and raffle tickets, former Scottish Rugby International and TV commentator Andy Nicol presided over an auction of fabulous lots including hospitality at the Monaco Grand Prix and an Aston Martin weekend at the five star Luton Hoo Spa, neither of which quite eclipsed the 1964 Ford Mustang sold to property developer Alan O'Connor last year, but helped raise an impressive £185,000 taking the total to well over £3 million so far.

Guests were further entertained by the amazing 16 year old soprano Ciara Harvie who performed a tear jerking Nessun Dorma. Ciara was accompanied at one stage by the Edinburgh Police Choir who performed throughout the day.

In recognition of his support over many years, a special presentation was awarded to retiring EICC Chief Executive Hans Rissmann OBE, who this year handed over control to new Chief Marshall Dallas.