

# Five Hours. Five Parties. One Night.

For three days every year, geeks rule. Vendors curry our favor, laugh at our jokes and throw elaborate parties in our honor. These are known as the three days of HITEC.

By David Sjolander



It's always easy to tell when HITEC is coming up by the number of invitations pouring in from vendors; invitations to see new products, visit booths and to attend the sales event of the season, the HITEC parties. I usually avoid the parties, preferring a wallflower's approach to the festivities, but this year I decided that my team and I would fill our dance cards and accept every invitation from every vendor for the parties on Wednesday night.

We set out as a group to hit five parties in five hours. We want to have fun, but of course still want to be tucked into bed by 11 o'clock that night, so 10 p.m. becomes the Cinderella hour, that time when the carriage will turn back into a pumpkin, the coachmen into mice and geeks into...well, I guess geeks.

**PARTY No. 1:** 5:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m.

**Sponsors:** Newmarket and Passkey | **Location:** Dallas Convention Center

This party scores points for convenience and is a great staging area for the rest of the evening. We walk out the main entrance to the tradeshow and stumble right into the party. After a long day walking the floor, everyone is relieved to grab a drink and a few appetizers. There is a huge crowd here, but it feels like we're still at the convention because essentially we are. The whole Cinderella "bibbity, bobbity, boo!" thing hasn't happened yet. We need a change of venue. Anybody seen our fairy godmother? Where's the pumpkin and the carriage?

**PARTY No. 2:** 6:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.

**Sponsor:** Hotel Information Systems | **Location:** Reunion Tower

We fly 50 stories up to the Observation Level at the Hyatt Regency Dallas. Typical party fare, but as we pass through the glass doors, we are standing on the open-air observation deck, with the wind blowing through our hair and tearing at the BlackBerry devices holstered to our belts. Now this is a change of venue.

"I'm the king of the world!" There's something about being 50 stories up that makes you feel like you can almost fly, which probably explains the chain-link fence and Plexiglas® that obstruct our view and encircle the tower. The carriage has arrived and we are on our way.

**PARTY No. 3:** 7:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m.

**Sponsor:** Wayport | **Location:** Dallas Aquarium

We have arrived at the ball, only better. It's the Dallas Aquarium. We walk through a 22,000-gallon tunnel, gawking at marine life from British Columbia to Australia. Is that a jellyfish? A sea turtle? A Dallas Cowboy cheerleader? Yes, that's right, the Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders are here. Nice.

But I have to admit that the presence of the Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders at a geek party begs the question, "Aren't these the girls who wouldn't talk to us in high school?" As a matter of fact, weren't they on the arm of the jock that stuffed us in our lockers during gym? I mean, where were they when the math team won the state tournament? On the sidelines cheering us on? Nooooo. Well, I guess the pocket protector is on the other foot now.

Oh well, that's all water under the bridge or through the 22,000-gallon tunnel. "Smile for the camera." And we head off to our next party with an autographed picture of a Dallas Cowboy cheerleader tucked under our arms.

**PARTY No. 4:** 8:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.

**Sponsor:** LodgeNet | **Location:** Hotel ZaZa

This is a very upscale affair in an ultra-cool hotel, with valet parking, passed hors d'oeuvres, great drinks, pool toys...and this time, the Dallas Maverick Dancers. "Smile for the camera." We add this to our growing collection of autographed cheerleader pictures...this really is a world gone mad.

We help ourselves to hors d'oeuvres and drinks and maneuver our way around the other partygoers who are mingling around the pool. And while we're on the subject, who was it that first came up with the concept of a poolside party? Think about it. Here we are at a venue with a big rectangular hole filled with water, and the one thing we don't want to do is get wet. We leave Hotel ZaZa, wondering who finally fell in.

**PARTY No. 5:** 9:00 p.m.-10:00 p.m.

**Sponsors:** Sprint and Nortel | **Location:** Gilley's

This room is cavernous and would make a great venue for 5,000 people; however, it's almost 10 p.m. and there are only about 200 of us left. We find ourselves drifting like tumbleweeds toward a mechanical bull. Is that for us? Does someone really expect us to ride the bull? Geeks aren't cowboys...we build mechanical bulls...for jocks to ride, yeah that's right, the same jocks who stuffed us in our lockers during gym...the same ones who wonder why the damn thing gives them a wedgie. We listen to a live band playing country western music and watch as a few people dance nearby. It's the Cinderella hour for convention-weary geeks and we collect our autographed pictures and cowboy hats and head back to the Radisson Hotel.

GECKS RULE: Top, Jim Irrgang (left) and David Sjolander. Bottom, (from left) Leo Boike, Dennis DuBois, Jim Irrgang, Brett Hartman and Mark Jury.