

Shoulder to Shoulder

By Tom Pabst, HYPERAMS



Tony Blair

“This mass terrorism is the new evil in our world. The people who perpetrate it have no regard whatever for the sanctity of or value of human life, and we--the democracies of the world--must come together to defeat it and eradicate it. This is not a battle between the United States of America and terrorism, but between the free and democratic world and terrorism. We, therefore, here in Britain stand shoulder to shoulder with our American friends in this hour of tragedy, and we, like them, will not

rest until this evil is driven from our world.”

On Veterans’ Day, what possibly could have been more appropriate than having the author of those words appear as our guest speaker at the 2010 Executive Speakers Forum? Tony Blair, the former prime minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, spoke those words on September 11, 2001. He lived up to those words through the course of his time as prime minister, standing shoulder to shoulder with us in Afghanistan and Iraq. What a pleasure it was to have him join us for dinner, share his thoughts on his personal political “journey” and then field a host of questions as penned by our sponsors.

Blair’s presence was really the culmination of what had already been an outstanding overall event. The day started with an economic forum featuring Andy Busch of BMO Capital Markets and Michael Darda of MKM Partners. Both panelists shared their views on a variety of local, national and international economic and financial issues for the first half hour, and then answered a diverse array of questions from the audience. Actually, it was the first economic presentation in years where I walked away feeling like the economy--while still having a long way to go--was making real progress in the minds of the “professionals.” While neither party felt that “Quantitative Easing 2” was a good step by the Federal Reserve, and that the continuing sovereign debt crisis in Ireland and other Pan European countries would slow the overall recovery, there did seem to be a consensus that we are moving very slowly forward. I am not sure this is the message that our audience wanted to hear, but both seemed to feel economic growth would continue into 2011, and that the danger of a double dip had likely passed us by.

The economic forum was followed by the usual TMA tradition of networking, with a solid hour of cocktails and hors d’oeuvres. This gave the crowd a chance to mingle with 500 other guests from all areas of the business community, truly standing “shoulder to shoulder” with many individuals they had never met before. The ability to purchase tables provided an opportunity for many of our

member firms to invite clients, prospects and referral sources alike. This mix of invitees provided a great opportunity to expose the chapter to individuals whom were just learning about the TMA, but also gave our members the opportunity to shine in front of firms they do not frequently have a chance to network with.

A special thanks goes out to our Premier Event Sponsor, Freeborn & Peters, as well as to our Event Table purchasers, Alvarez & Marsal, LLC, Crystal Financial, LLC, Greenberg Traurig, LLP, Huron Consulting Group, Kurtzman Carson Consultants, MorrisAnderson, Pentwater Partners, LLC, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meahger & Flom LLP and William Blair & Company LLC. Without the incredible support of these firms, this event would never have been possible. Following the evening’s festivities, all of the invited guests of these firms were escorted to a private reception with Blair. Each individual was able to personally meet Blair and was given the opportunity to have a photo taken. Truly, what a thrill it was for everyone in the room.

Let me also say thanks to our Corporate Table purchasers, who played a huge part in the success of this event as well. Those firms are Capstone Advisory Group, Carl Marks Advisory Group, LLC, FTI Consulting, Gould & Ratner LLP, Great American Group, Mesirow Financial Consulting LLC, Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP, Regions Business Capital and Ungaretti & Harris LLP.

Lastly, a hearty thank you must be extended to our Special Programs Committee, consisting of Aaron Hammer, David Onion, Norm Newman and Joe Fobbe, all of whom put in countless hours planning the event, working the phones, pumping the flesh and otherwise selling their souls to find the financial support for this massive undertaking. Aaron, Dave, Norm and Joe, you truly left the 2011 officers and committee a very tough act to follow. Chris Glatz, Sue Fischer and the Management Services staff put together a best-in-class, well organized event that went off without a hitch (at least that was visible to the attendees). You are a first class organization, and have no peers in my mind when it comes to event planning.

Let me close the article with another quote from Blair. “This is a battle that can’t be fought or won only by armies. We are so much more powerful in all conventional ways than terrorists, yet even in all our might, we are taught humility. In the end, it is not our power alone that will defeat this evil. Our ultimate weapon is not our guns, but our beliefs. There is a myth that though we love freedom, others don’t; that our attachment to freedom is a product of our culture; that freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law are Western values. Ours are not Western values; they are universal values of the human spirit. And anywhere, anytime ordinary people are given the chance to choose, the choice is the same: freedom, not tyranny; democracy, not dictatorship; the rule of law, not the rule of the secret police. The spread of freedom is the best security for the free. It is our last line of defense, and our first line of attack.”

Thank you Mr. Blair, it was an unforgettable evening.

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