Fashionable Philanthropy

Almost 1,200 people braved New York City's latest menace, the possibility of snow, to attend the YMA FEF Geoffrey Beene National Scholarship Awards Dinner on Tuesday.

They honored more than 100 college-aged adults pursuing careers in fashion from across the country, as well as Manny Chialvo, chairman and CEO of Phillips-Van Heusen, Jeff Kuntz, president of Merchandising at Macy's.com and Cecilia Dean, Stephen Gan and James Kallardos of Visionaire, an arts-and-fashion collective that created the magazine V.

But the night was really about the students, or so just about everybody repeatedly said, and the students appeared to be having a good time. They munched into a guided audience seated for dinner with banners marking their universities, bringing to mind the opening ceremony of the Olympics, except that they were marching to "Empire State of Mind" and seating themselves along a candlelit table at the Waldorf-Astoria.

Mara Banton, who with her husband Tom is a trustee of the Geoffrey Beene Foundation, regaled some of the students with a story about the gown she wore to the first scholarship fund dinner she attended, "No one could tell how my bosoms stayed in the top," she said, to their obvious delight.

One student, Ariel Aronson from the University of Wisconsin, appreciated Ms. Banton's generous attraction, and the purple jacket she wore with giant sequined ostriches on it. "I'm surprised more people aren't dressed as fabuloso as that," Ms. Aronson said, surveying the room. "I mean, every one's dressed nicely, but we're not seeing the outliers, really."

The student with perhaps the most chutzpah was John Sohn, from Cornell University, who approached Table 29 where the Visionaire team, plus Harper's Bazaar editor Glenda Bailey, Isabel and Ruben Toledo and Diane Von Furstenberg were all sitting.

He introduced himself to each of them, one at a time, not leaving until he had offered his business card. "All of them were great," he said, when asked who among the heavy hitters had been nicest, "but the Toledos were especially warm."

And what words of wisdom did the role models have to offer the fashion class of '11? "Big dreams in little steps," said Ms. Von Furstenberg.

"Patience. Don't be in a hurry because then you build nothing," said Ms. Toledo.

"Fight for your creative ideas," said Ms. Dean.

--Lizzie Simon

Diane Von Furstenberg (top) and Cecilia Dean with Stephen Gan at the scholarship dinner, which honored more than 100 students.