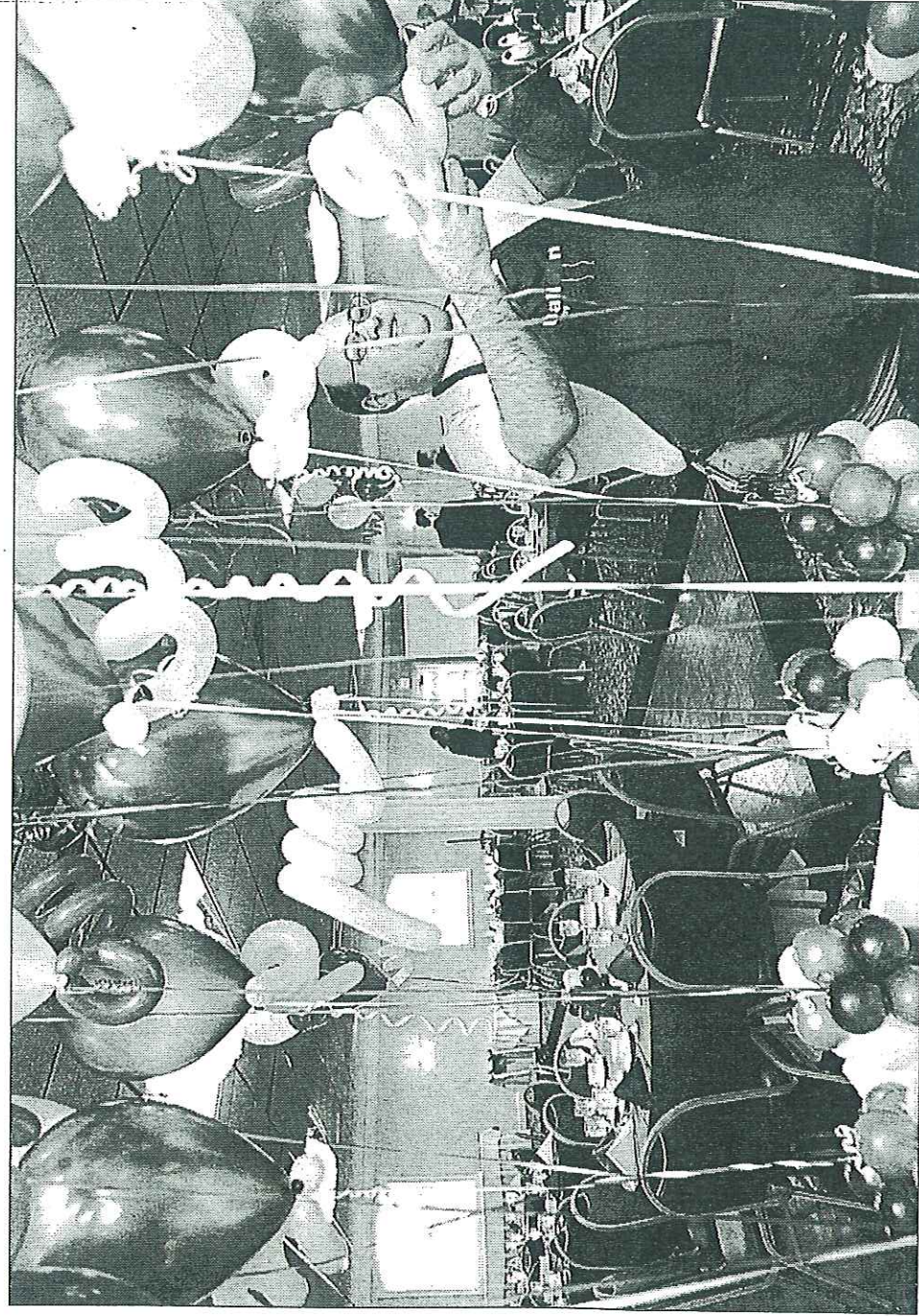


REMEMBERING REAGAN



PHOTOS BY AMANDA BROWN/THE STAR-LEDGER
 Red, white and blue balloons are the order of the day as Robbie Furman of Balloons by Robbie decorates the banquet room before New Jersey's annual Reagan Day at the Zeris Inn in Mountain Lakes yesterday. Fans of the 40th U.S. president came together to celebrate his legacy, listen to his speeches and admire memorabilia.

40th president's fans honor his legacy, leadership

BY SARA K. CLARKE
 STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Ronald Reagan was the first presidential candidate Nelida Kuhlmann voted for after becoming an American citizen in 1976.

Reagan's anti-Communist rhetoric resounded with the Cuban native.

"For us, the Cuban-born, he was the Holy Grail," said Kuhlmann, who is now second vice president of the Bergen County Hispanic Republican Organization. "He walked the walk and talked the talk. You don't find many politicians like that."

Reagan's fight against Communism was just one of the virtues extolled during New Jer-

sey's Reagan Day, held Tuesday at the Zeris Inn in Mountain Lakes.

In a room decked in red, white and blue, about 180 people paid tribute to the country's 40th president.

The annual celebration, now in its third year, was hosted by Morris Plains lawyer Jay Webber. The event is run by a volunteer committee and subsidized in part by donations.

Webber, who as a student at Harvard Law School celebrated Reagan's birthday, Feb. 6, said Reagan is the first politician he has a strong recollection of.

"His moral clarity, vision, courage and dedication to the principles our country was

founded on, that was all very attractive to me as a young man," said Webber, who ran for state Senate in 2003 but lost the primary election to incumbent Sen. Robert Martin (R-Morris).

Reagan admirers had a chance Tuesday to enjoy a display of memorabilia, taken mostly from the collection of

Dick Kamin, a former assemblyman and head of the Department of Motor Vehicles under Gov. Christine Whitman.

Among the items on display were a Dallas '84 poster, from the convention that nominated Reagan to a second term, framed holiday cards from the

[See REAGAN, Page 26]



Waiter Roman Matos, left, and head waiter Sabadas Sorin hang the banner high for the Reagan Day celebration at the Zeris Inn.

REAGAN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

Fans celebrate ex-president's legacy

White House, Reagan tie clips and cufflinks, a ball cap from the USS Ronald Reagan, and aged campaign pins and patches.

Reagan's speeches and his pictures flashed across a screen provided dinner ambiance.

"It was Ronald Reagan who was my inspiration for public service," said Kamin, who was Morris County coordinator for the Reagan campaign in 1980.

Kamin had his own story to tell of meeting Reagan at an event in Parsippany.

Before addressing the public,

the president required that a portable bathroom be placed nearby in case he needed it, Kamin said. But upon inspection, security agents determined it was in the wrong place. Kamin, along with Turnpike Authority Chairman Joseph "Bo" Sullivan, made a last-minute adjustment.

Kamin reported that Sullivan said of the event, "A lot of people get to shake the president's hand, but not many get to move his Port-o-John."

Attendees at the celebration credited Reagan (1911-2004) for ending stagflation, halting Fidel Castro's expansion and ending the Cold War.

"He turned this country from

going downhill to going up," said Jim Verga, a plumbing and heating contractor from Clifton who was wearing a Ronald Reagan medal issued to him in 2004.

The guest speaker for the event was John Fund, political pundit and columnist for the Wall Street Journal. Fund spoke about the effects of Reagan's presidency, highlighting the story of a personal friend who lived in East Germany and experienced firsthand the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Of Reagan, Fund said, "He made a real and permanent change for better in individual human lives."

Sara K. Clarke may be reached at (973) 539-7910 or at sclarke@star-logger.com.