



43 of 250 DOCUMENTS

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HEADLINE: WELL, AS THE QUEEN SAID WHEN I HAD DINNER WITH HER ...

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BODY:

Keep your elbows off the table. Address the gal with the tiara as "Your Majesty." And after it's all over, issue a press release.

"President Hrabowski Dines with Queen Elizabeth II at British Embassy," says the headline from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

About 120 people can say they had dinner with Queen Elizabeth at the British ambassador's residence last week. Just a few were actually at Her Majesty's table. Not Hillary Clinton. Not Martin O'Malley. But UMBC President Freeman Hrabowski scored big-time Britannic bragging rights. He was three seats away from the monarch, almost directly across the round table from her.

"While dining with Queen Elizabeth, President Hrabowski answered questions she posed about American culture and issues in education," the release says.

Hrabowski said he and his wife, Jackie, a T. Rowe Price vice president, were flattered just to have been invited to the event. Soon after they arrived, someone pulled him aside to say he'd be sitting with the queen.

"Oh," was about all he could summon in reply. "I was surprised and honored."

Also at the table: President Bush; Nancy Reagan; Virginia Sen. John Warner; Susan Eisenhower (who met the queen on her visit 50 years ago, when grandpa was in the White House); Shirley Massey (wife of retiring Morehouse College President Walter Massey); Amazing Grace director Michael Apted; the wife of an architect whose name Hrabowski didn't catch; and some guy whose identity escaped the college president altogether.

(The embassy does not confirm guest lists or table placement as a matter of policy. Gauche, I guess.)

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The royal dinner chit-chat was "very, very pleasant," Hrabowski said.

He asked the queen if the architecture in Williamsburg reminded her of England. She said she could see similarities. He told the queen that Americans have a great deal of respect for her and were delighted to have her in the country. She had a gracious reply.

"She just came across as a gracious woman," he said. "She laughed about different things. There was humor."

While Hrabowski enjoyed his brush with royalty, the son of a teacher and a teacher-turned-steelworker came away from the whole affair with renewed American pride.

"We, in this country, can come from so many different backgrounds and have so many opportunities to move into leadership positions - and have a chance to sit at a table with the queen."

The feeling was reinforced as he spotted someone at another table, a neighbor from his childhood in Birmingham, Ala. There she was, the daughter of his high school counselor - Condoleezza Rice.

Anyone who's a Democrat is on the list

Names being bandied about for state Democratic Party chairman, The Sun's Jennifer Skalka reports: Lise Van Susteren, the forensic psychiatrist, former Senate candidate and current sister of Fox News personality Greta Van Susteren; her brother-in-law, John P. Coale, the big trial lawyer and Democratic donor who came through with a \$500,000 loan to then-Mayor O'Malley in the final days of the governor's race; Josh Rales, the Montgomery County real estate tycoon who also ran for Senate; Lainy LeBow-Sachs, longtime aide to William Donald Schaefer; Lauren Dugas Glover, the party's first vice chairwoman and a civic leader from Prince George's County; Dan Clements, past president of the Maryland Trial Lawyers Association; Kennedy cousin and one-time congressional candidate Mark Shriver; former Del. Rushern Baker; and no Democratic wish list is complete without Kweisi Mfume, the former NAACP chief.

I reached just two of them. Clements: "Not interested." And LeBow-Sachs: "I'm very flattered and it's only a rumor."

Connect the dots

Spotted at Obrycki's Saturday: Michael Bloomberg and Bob Schieffer. I know what you're thinking: the NYC mayor and the longtime CBS newsmen were hatching a media strategy for Bloomberg's potential independent run for president. But they were at separate tables. They did greet each other and gamely posed for photos with fans, my spy tells me. ... Washington's City Paper reported last month on a fundraiser for Sheila Dixon. Tickets were \$2,500 to \$5,000 for the event, arranged by Joe Louis Ruffin, "a veteran of D.C. politics," the paper reported. In the article, Ruffin "calls cozying up to Mayor Dixon `a natural for aggressive, young D.C. entrepreneurs. The development here in Washington has reached its peak.'" ... Bruce Bereano sticks up for his profession with a lapel pin he special ordered: "Lobbyists are the people you hire to protect you from the people you elect."

Find Laura Vozzella's column archive at baltimoresun.com/vozzella.

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