

Special Events

GALORE!

May 2015 / Vol. 15, No. 5

MONTHLY IDEAS FOR THOSE WHO PLAN, ORGANIZE AND MANAGE EVENTS OF ALL KINDS

Some of What's Inside...

- Plan a profitable radiothon p. 2
- Get more alums to attend p. 3
- Host a social media contest..... p. 4
- Use a stand-alone event website..... p. 5
- Plan a Derby Day event p. 6
- Outdo last year's event p. 7
- Vary techniques for training events..... p. 8

Nurture Sponsors for Long-Term Success

When asking for donations or sponsorships from local businesses, the old adage applies: It's not what you know, but who you know.

So be sure to develop relationships with company and store managers. Encourage your volunteers to support local businesses and to put a good word in for your organization. Both you and your volunteers should become regular — and visible — customers who are recognized by store management. If you want your local businesses to support you, then you need to support them.

Look for Appropriate Sponsorship Synergies

Once you have decided on the type of special event you plan to hold, look for sponsors that make the most logical fit for that event. Here are three examples of synergistic sponsors:

- For a charity ride, consider sponsors such as a bike shop or motorcycle dealer.
- For an event that involves or benefits animals, look to a pet store or a kennel for support.
- In the case of a fashion show, look to clothing and beauty retailers for sponsorship assistance.

AWARENESS, RECRUITMENT EVENTS

Plug Volunteers Into Tabling Events

In 2014 the Alzheimer's Association Eastern North Carolina Chapter, which covers 51 counties, raised more than \$350,000 through its five Walk to End Alzheimer's events and effectively reached thousands of people affected by the disease through their fundraising and awareness-building efforts. None of this would have been possible without its many annual tabling events, where staff and volunteers generate support and educate the public about Alzheimer's. In 2014 the Eastern North Carolina Chapter was present at 15 events within the Triangle (Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill), and this year it aims to increase that number by more than 33 percent, bringing its annual tabling events up to 20.

"The volunteers build awareness by sharing important facts with the public, such as Alzheimer's disease is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States," says Volunteer Coordinator Mary Thompson. "The volunteers are consistently there to provide support for families who are dealing with the disease that is affecting their loved ones and to provide information on local and national services."

Because tabling events require the ability to interact with the public and a certain amount of knowledge, Thompson reminds nonprofits that it takes a special kind of volunteer to do the job. "Table events have high visibility. Even if a person does not stop and talk, the table and the volunteers must look inviting and engaging," she says.

According to Thompson, the best tabling-event volunteers for the Alzheimer's Association possess the following qualities, skills and requirements, many of which would apply to other nonprofits as well:

- A desire to advocate for research funding.
- Experience with caregiving (recommended but not mandatory).
- A passion for finding a cure for the disease.
- An intuitive nature and excellent listening skills.
- A sense of empathy for others.
- A true dedication to the cause. (Avoid those who are volunteering only as a school or public service requirement.)
- The ability to appear inviting and engaging to the public.
- A general knowledge of the cause and at least enough understanding to know what educational material to distribute to table visitors.
- A knowledge of other available resources pertinent to the cause.
- A willingness to promote at different kinds of events. "We have a table at a health events, which you would expect, but we have also had a table at a local farmer's market," Thompson says.

Source: Mary Thompson, Volunteer Coordinator, Alzheimer's Association, Eastern North Carolina Chapter, Raleigh, NC. Phone (919) 803-8285. E-mail: maryj150@gmail.com. Website: www.alz.org/nc

Catering Tip

- Instead of asking for bids from three caterers, where they would select the menu, set a fixed price before contacting them. Then you can ask three caterers, “What can you give me for \$X per person?” That way you’re getting the biggest bang for your buck. And by providing the caterers with a fixed cost, everyone is on the same playing field.

Copyright © 2015 Wiley Periodicals, Inc., A Wiley Company

Special Events Galore! (ISSN 1538-1625 • E-ISSN 2325-8586) is published monthly by Wiley Subscription Services, Inc., A Wiley Company, 111 River St., Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774.

Managing Editor: Scott C. Stevenson

Annual subscription rate is \$139 for individuals.

To order single subscriptions, call toll-free 800-835-6770 or email cs-journals@wiley.com. Discounts available for quantity subscriptions: contact Customer Service at cs-journals@wiley.com.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Special Events Galore, Jossey-Bass, One Montgomery St., Suite 1000, San Francisco, CA 94104-4594. Outside the United States, go to www.wileycustomerhelp.com and click the “Contact Us” link for additional information.

Copyright © 2015 Wiley Periodicals, Inc., A Wiley Company. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, 978-750-8400, fax 978-646-8600. Requests to the Publisher for reprint permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, c/o John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River St., Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, 201-748-6011, fax 201-748-6326. For more detailed information on permissions, please visit www.wiley.com/go/permissions.

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information regarding the subject matter covered. It is provided with the understanding that the publisher and editor are not engaged in rendering legal counsel or other professional service. If legal advice is required, the service of a competent professional should be sought.

JOSSEY-BASS™
A Wiley Brand

How to Plan a Profitable Radiothon

The Star 105.7 Think Outside Yourself Radiothon has raised funds for Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital (Grand Rapids, MI) for the past 15 years. Here Jim Steenbergen, development coordinator for the foundation, provides a blueprint for a highly profitable radiothon.

What is involved in planning a radiothon?

Radio partner — “The first and most important step is to find a radio partner that is passionate about your cause. Oftentimes they will be your biggest ally in moving the idea from paper to reality.”

Time — “It takes about a year to plan and execute a radiothon the first time and eight months in subsequent years.

Location — “The best place is within your nonprofit organization.”

Scheduling — “Take care not to schedule your event around holidays. People are more apt to be listening to the radio at work or on the way to work than at home during a long holiday weekend.”

Format — “Have compelling stories possibly pretaped and interviewed at the radio studio but also have folks who just drop in and share with the hosts.”

How is revenue generated?

“Sixty percent of revenue for my radio event is generated through sponsorships. The remaining 40 percent is through call-in gifts and pledges and in-kind gifts of service.”

What should you do to maximize profit?

Sponsorships — “Offer a variety of sponsorships at all different price points. For my events, I have sponsorships ranging from as large as \$50,000 to as little as \$250.”

Volunteers — “Make volunteer opportunities within the radiothon part of the sponsorship packages. That way you can show potential sponsors it’s not just about writing a check but also about their employees participating.”

Incentive gifts — “These are moments in the broadcast where a caller calls in and gets some sort of gift card for their gift. For example, we have a coffee chain in our area called Biggby. During ‘Biggby Moments’ the first 20 callers who made a gift of \$40 got a \$20 gift card. The coffee chain donated the gift cards.”

Air time donation — “The biggest expense for a radio event is air time. If possible, request that part — if not all — of the airtime be donated.”

In-kind gifts — “Try to get everything for the event donated. We’ve kept costs low because we created a catering sponsorship. With that sponsorship comes all the benefits of sponsorship, but the gifts are through in-kind food related to running the event.”

How long should a radiothon be?

“Endurance and length of an event have no bearing on success. Strong content and a compelling case for support are more important factors. The ideal event in my opinion would be 12 hours over the course of one day.”

“This is just the tip of the iceberg,” reports Steenbergen. “There is a lot to consider when planning a radiothon.”

Source: Jim Steenbergen, Development Coordinator II, Spectrum Health Foundation, Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital Foundation, Grand Rapids, MI. Phone (616) 391-5139. E-mail: Jim.Steenbergen@spectrumhealth.org. Website: <http://give.helendevoschildrens.org>

Increase Alum Attendance at Area Gatherings

Colleges and universities throughout the nation are committed to the same goal when it comes to their institution's alumni: developing and maintaining strong connections.

"It is extremely important to create a culture of caring and philanthropy among alumni," says Sara Rice, assistant director of the annual fund at Rice University (Houston, Texas). "And waiting for students to graduate is a mistake; it's crucial for us to involve our students in giving back and helping others so the transition to committed alumnus is almost effortless."

Rice says luring graduates to alumni gatherings at the university or in regional settings requires a multichannel and high-tech approach:

- Utilize every avenue of communication and invitation/notification available to get the word out, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, text messaging, e-mail and Pinterest. "Instagram and Twitter are great vehicles to reach our graduates under 30," notes Rice. "And they all love to text and e-mail."
- Go the extra mile to make certain the alumni events are fun and appeal to a multigenerational crowd. "Too often we hear complaints that the alumni events are boring, or geared toward an older crowd, or focused around sports-related events that appeal only to men, like golf outings," says Rice. "So spice things up a bit with comedy, cutting-edge music, a celebrity chef or an interactive multimedia presentation."
- Organize activities and events throughout the year for regional chapters. "By coordinating quarterly social mixers or holiday galas, for example, relationships and friendships can informally develop, and the uncomfortable awkwardness of an annual reunion can be avoided," says Rice.

At Suffolk University (Boston, MA), alumni gatherings have been given a jump start by the Young Alumni Leadership Giving Society. "Let's face it, we see a direct link between increased alumni participation at reunions and events and alumni donor levels," says Joe Ryan, assistant director of young alumni and student programs. "At one of our recent alumni events, well over half of the people in attendance had graduated within the last five years."

Ryan shares some recruitment strategies of the Young Alumni Leadership Giving Society at Suffolk University:

- Ask key alumni leaders to issue a challenge not just to attend a reunion or other event but also to match the leader's donation.
- Plan alumni events in conjunction with established university-sponsored activities, such as Senior Week, which focuses on preparing the soon-to-be graduates for post-student life.
- Hold alumni events at popular and trendy venues. "At Suffolk University we hold an annual alumni event in February at Harpoon Brewery in Boston, which is a very popular hangout for the under-35 crowd," says Ryan.
- Concentrate on personal contact by utilizing an alumni connection tree whereby key leaders are assigned a small group of alumni to connect with through social media, e-mail or the old-fashioned way (phone or face-to-face interaction).

Sources: Sara Rice, Assistant Director of the Rice Annual Fund, Rice University, Houston, Texas. Phone (713) 348-4600. E-mail: sarar@rice.edu. Website: www.giving.rice.edu

F. Joseph Ryan, Assistant Director, Young Alumni and Student Programs, Suffolk University, Boston, MA. Phone (617) 573-8441. E-mail: fjryan@suffolk.edu. Website: www.suffolk.edu

While no wave of a magic wand can guarantee special event success, the more work you put into planning, the more likely you'll find the success you seek.

One important element of a successful event is a creative, forward-thinking planning committee that can help identify the types of activities your community would be likely to enthusiastically support.

Together, you and your event planning committee should:

- **Invite community input.** Start by asking committee members and volunteers for their ideas of a perfect event. Expect diverse answers like golf, walking/running marathons, dressy dances, gourmet dinners, art auctions and celebrity appearances, but take note of preference patterns that may emerge, like swap meet or Sudoku tournament. Responses may reveal an activity that has a strong following in your city. Use your website to solicit as many ideas as possible, and list unique suggestions you've received. Add an online poll and see which ideas look like potential winners.
- **Evaluate popular existing events.** You don't want to reinvent the wheel, but make a list of galas, lectures, athletic competitions and other fundraisers that always draw crowds. Identify common elements that make these diverse activities successful including season, venue, chairmen, family-friendly attractions and ticket price.
- **Combine proven techniques with a new niche.** You know your venue, committee chairs and menu are winners. Fill a void in the community calendar with a benefit concert, end-of-summer picnic, mid-winter outdoor festival or motivational speaker to combat post-holiday doldrums. Time your event so it won't conflict with summer vacations, holiday parties and youth sports activities.
- **Enlist an experienced events consultant.** A professional can help you coordinate the creative activities of the chairperson and committee members. A professional can take their ideas and fully develop the event theme while also being able to anticipate potential difficulties and keep timelines on track.

Benefits of Hosting a Social Media Contest

Few people finish their average day without posting to Facebook, sending an Instagram photo or tweeting at least once. Why not use this to your advantage? Promote your cause or event with a social media contest.

Amy Veiders, assistant director of special events at the University of Buffalo (Buffalo, NY), saw an opportunity and seized it. When Comedian John Oliver visited the campus, he autographed several items for the university. After his visit, the special events staff held a social media contest to win these items. The goal was to get more followers on all sites for future event promotions.

How did the contest work? Veiders posted a promotional message on Facebook, tweeted and shared a photo on Instagram. Anyone who reposted or shared the information was entered into a drawing to win the signed John Oliver items. They could do this on any of the three platforms, allowing each person to enter up to three times. The share had to be public. As postings were made, Veiders collected names and entered them onto a spreadsheet. After two weeks, a random-number assignment was used to pick the winners from the spreadsheet, one per website.

Was it successful? The promotion got 154 shares on Facebook and received over 115 new likes. Twitter followers increased by 8 percent. As a newer participant on Instagram, the university saw its number of followers more than double.

The period leading up to the contest had been a down time for the university. This contest generated the excitement Veiders was hoping for and provided greater exposure on social media.

“Using a social media contest is especially helpful for us as a university campus because it draws in a younger crowd,” reports Veiders. “This demographic is harder to get with traditional advertising. It also provides a good connection with the students on campus.”

“The nice thing about utilizing social media for a contest and promotion is that it’s basically free,” Veiders adds. “It’s free advertising, with only a little bit of work to put into it. As we have promoted, we have seen an increase in people tweeting about events, especially during the events.”

Any tips? When using social media, Veiders suggests keeping your target audience in mind. “Twitter and Instagram are younger draws,” she says. “If you use Facebook, it’s worthwhile to spend a few dollars and boost your posts. The greater exposure is worth the small fee.”

“All three sites are beneficial to get people talking,” Veiders notes. “As fans and followers share, their friends see it as well, making it a great promotional tool.”

Source: Amy Veiders, Assistant Director, Office of Special Events, University of Buffalo, Buffalo, NY. Phone (716) 645-3414. E-mail: amybeard@buffalo.edu. Website: www.buffalo.edu

Accounting Essentials for Special Events

By Megan Venzin

Tax season can quickly become a nightmarish time for nonprofits that have failed to keep proper records of special event-related income and expenses throughout the year. While hiring a licensed CPA is a smart idea for any organization that raises significant funds by way of special events, even a professional will still need access to well-organized bookkeeping to ensure the nonprofit files correctly. Here Dan Weaver, vice president at Councilor, Buchanan and Mitchell, P.C. and nonprofit accounting expert, shares the most common mistakes regarding special events accounting and tips for avoiding a mess when it comes time to file taxes.

- 1. Identify the contribution portion of the payment received versus the direct benefit to the donor portion.** Weaver defines the direct benefit to the donor portion as the portion of the payment the donor is getting in return. “For example, if the event in question is a gala, a donor may purchase a ticket for \$200, while the actual dinner may be worth \$30,” Weaver says. “The \$30 is the direct benefit to the donor, and therefore, the additional \$170 should be considered tax-deductible.”
- 2. Keep separate records for fundraising expenses and individual events.** “Having separate expense accounts for direct benefit to the donor and fundraising is helpful, in addition to having a way to track the separate events,” Weaver says. “Whether it is by cost center or account number, make sure you have a way to separately track the events in your accounting system.”
- 3. Report the tax-deductible portion to the donor.** On the receipt back to the donor, clearly report the amount that is deductible and nondeductible to avoid any potential confusion. The same goes for in-kind donations, and donors should receive receipts with the total values of their donated goods and services.
- 4. Recommend donors contact their CPA with deductibility questions.** “It is always important to have this disclaimer for any decisions about what portion is deductible, because every donor’s tax situation is different,” Weaver says. The last thing anyone wants is for respected donors to find themselves in a situation with the IRS, feeling as though representatives from your organization misled them.
- 5. Report event details on the IRS Form 990 Schedule G.** This schedule requires more details than financial statements, according to Weaver, so review the requirements before tracking event-related details. IRS instructions on Schedule G can be found at <http://www.irs.gov>; <http://www.nonprofitaccountingbasics.org> is another resource for researching all types of nonprofit accounting topics.

Source: Dan Weaver, CPA, Vice President, Councilor, Buchanan and Mitchell, P.C., Bethesda, MD. Phone (301) 986-0600, ext. 116. E-mail: dweaver@cbmcpa.com. Website: www.cbmcpa.com

Market Your Events With a Stand-Alone Website

By Kerry Nenn

Add exposure and impact to your next event with a microsite. Distinct from your everyday page, a site devoted to your event is the essential tool to take it to the next level. “It is important to set up a website separate from the work of the organization,” says Karen Perry-Weinstat, president of Event Journal, Inc. “The dedicated microsite provides, with the click of a mouse, everything the viewer needs to know in one place.”

Perry-Weinstat, offers key strategies for getting the most out of your microsite:

1. **Unique domain name** — Give your stand-alone site a name that is very easy to roll off the tongue, for marketing and promoting traffic to the site. Integrate this into all printed materials.
2. **Up-to-date info** — The website must be kept current and fresh. If people come back to view it, and there’s nothing new, they will click away.
3. **Post-event photo gallery** — When you post photos, it gives people a chance to see the success of the event. Create an interactive photo gallery. Make photos available for downloading and printing. This creates excitement and community. Promote this tool at the event, including a message on table cards or the back of the program: “Visit (yourwebsite.org) to view event photos.” This can be an additional opportunity to promote sponsors as well.
4. **Corresponding e-mail campaign** — This should be planned in three waves: save the date, call to action and post-event follow-up. All e-mails should link to the site, taking supporters directly there to register, make purchases, donate and so on. The follow-up e-mail can express your thanks and encourage viewers to “Click here to view event photos.”
5. **Social media promotion** — Build social media interfaces into the website. Your event committee can help you reach exponentially more supporters by sending “viral” messages to their own friends and contacts. A mini-blast from all the members with a simple message, “I’m attending this event, please support ...,” including the website, can achieve viral marketing. Subsequent messages promoting highlights and saying why they support your mission will reinforce this campaign.

Source: Karen Perry-Weinstat, President, Event Journal, Inc., Bethpage, NY. Phone (516) 470-1811. E-mail: kperry@eventjournal.com. Website: www.eventjournal.com

What Will Your Microsite Cost?

Many options exist for creating your stand-alone site, including DIY and professional approaches. Karen Perry-Weinstat, president of Event Journal, Inc., recommends answering the question “What is the level of the event?” “If it is an elegant event raising important funds, you want to have a microsite created professionally, with proper graphics and smoothly operating tools.”

DIY options include DoJiggy (<http://www.dojiggy.com/>) and Eventbrite (<https://www.eventbrite.com/how-it-works/>). Full-service providers like EventJournal (<http://www.eventjournal.com/>) will set up everything for you and guide you through the process.

“The cost can range from under \$1,000 to upwards of \$5,000,” says Perry-Weinstat. “However, it is important to look at the event website as an investment rather than an out-of-pocket expense.”

“If you spend a little more, sponsors are incentivized to be showcased in a quality environment,” she continues. “A compelling event portal can give you the edge you need. If the look you created attracts an extra sponsor, guests or excitement for your cause, it can be well worth it.”

Maximize Media Coverage With Celebrity Guests

Celebrities can have a big impact on your event’s success. They can also provide tremendous opportunities for increasing media coverage for the event.

Use the following strategies to involve your celebrity guest and maximize exposure of your event:

- Some celebrities are willing to do radio interviews via telephone prior to the event. If this is the case, target appropriate markets and take advantage of this opportunity to create anticipation for the event and boost ticket sales.
- Once the celebrity arrives in town, schedule interviews on the stations of your radio or television sponsors.
- If the celebrity will be flying in for the event, have a group of constituents at the airport to greet him or her. If possible, include clients or people your organization serves, as well as your board president or chair, your CEO or executive director and some volunteers. The group should be large enough to make a visual impact, but small enough to be manageable.
- Hold a press conference before the event, inviting media to talk to the celebrity about the reason for his or her involvement. This works best if the celebrity actually has a personal connection to your cause.
- Hold a VIP pre-event party for major donors and event sponsors. This gives them the opportunity to meet the celebrity one-on-one for autographs and photo opportunities. It also provides a great opportunity for photo ops by print media.

Before you move forward with any of these strategies, check your contract. Most celebrities are very specific about how their name and likeness can be used in association with any contracted event. Involving the celebrity’s manager in the planning stages will ensure you are not violating your contract and are set up for even greater success.

Plan an Authentic, Southern Derby Day Celebration

Because they hold the only Derby Day event in the area, the Athens Regional Foundation and The 1919, its supporting young professionals committee, believe it's important to cultivate an authentic experience. "Our attendees love the sophisticated southern atmosphere, the festive attire and the opportunity to participate in the Derby in a way that simply watching at home doesn't allow," says Coordinator of Donor Stewardship and Special Events Katie Lawson. In its third year, Mint Jubilee expects to see around 250 attendees and has a goal to raise \$30,000 for the Athens Regional Medical Center's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Lawson attributes the success of the event to its unique Derby-themed activities, food and contests and its ability to appeal to a younger demographic.

Lawson offers her tips for making your attendees feel as though they are a part of the race-day action, sitting pretty on Millionaire's Row.

1. **Choose a venue with southern charm.** "Is this an event that would have as much appeal hosted in an urban ballroom? Probably not," Lawson says. Consider hosting a garden party if weather allows. Utilize tents and charming entertainment options such as lawn games or a live bluegrass band that allow the guests to celebrate a sunny day. Don't forget to secure a venue with AV capabilities and large screens so everyone has a chance to watch the big race.
2. **Be as authentic as possible.** "If you are creating a Churchill Downs atmosphere, be sure you have roses, bourbon and Derby pie," Lawson says. "Your guests need to feel as though they have an experience as close as possible to the actual race day in Louisville without the travel."
3. **Encourage festive attire through contests.** Each year women have the chance to compete in a Derby hat contest, while men can compete for the title of Best Bowtie. Guests feel more inclined to wear theme-appropriate clothing when a small prize is involved. It keeps the energy light, and pictures from your fundraiser will be colorful and fun.
4. **Use a raffle-ticket system for "placing bets."** "Our guests are allowed to buy raffle tickets for their chosen horse and the chance to take home experiential raffle prizes in the Win, Place and Show categories," Lawson says. Using a raffle-ticket and prize system alleviates the extra stress of handling money and supports compliance with city and state laws while still giving guests a chance to "bet" on their favorite horses.
5. **Serve Derby-inspired food and cocktails.** "We serve Mint Juleps and a variety of southern fare including pulled pork and Derby pie," Lawson says.

Source: Katie Lawson, Coordinator of Donor Stewardship and Special Events, Athens Regional Foundation, Athens, GA. Phone (706) 475-3301. E-mail: arf@armc.org. Website: www.athenshealth.org/foundation

Head-Shaving Events Help Youth Teams Raise Money to Fight Cancer

Over the past two years, Vs. Cancer Foundation has raised more than \$1.6 million toward cancer research and programs within local children's cancer treatment centers. With the help of Vs. Cancer's customizable peer-to-peer fundraising platform powered by Classy, youth sports teams have been a driving force behind many of these fundraising efforts by spreading the cause to their local communities and shaving their heads to raise awareness of those struggling with cancer.

"When a young person wants to help others who are the same age but who are in a hospital bed instead of playing baseball on the field, it can make a huge impact," says Director of Marketing and Team Relations Ashleigh Kincaid. Youth teams may choose to include a head-shaving event to increase awareness of their fundraising efforts. At the end of their campaign, 50 percent of the proceeds go toward national research, while the other half is given directly to a children's hospital in the youth team's surrounding community. "When the fundraising campaign is over, we let the team know exactly how the money was spent so they can understand the difference they made in the lives of others in their community," Kincaid says.

The staff at Vs. Cancer also helps facilitate the head-shaving events for team members who wish to participate. "If the teams don't have their own connection to a barber, we are more than happy to set that up," Kincaid says.

The North Wake County Baseball Association (NWCBA) has participated in several events to benefit Vs. Cancer. "The first events, which were head-shaving events, raised over \$10,000 when more than 30 kids and coaches shaved their heads to raise awareness of our fundraising efforts," says Robert Welton, NWCBA parent committee member. "One of the best parts of the weekend is watching the kids bond after shaving, because their baldness becomes a badge of honor they proudly wear with their new Vs. Cancer t-shirts," Welton says.

Last November NWCBA hosted the inaugural Vs. Cancer Benefit Tournament, during which 14 local travel teams, including two 13-year-old cancer patients, competed to raise more than \$10,000 to benefit kids fighting pediatric cancers. NWCBA will revisit this event in 2015, with a \$15,000 goal in sight. "Having two local kids participate in our tournament and benefit directly from our fundraising efforts was a very powerful reminder of how important it is for us to give back," Welton says. "NWCBA has raised approximately \$40,000 for the Vs. Cancer Foundation over the past couple of years, and we are excited that each tournament or event we host helps introduce new teams to the foundation."

Sources: Ashleigh Kincaid, Director of Marketing and Team Relations, Vs. Cancer Foundation, Raleigh, NC. Phone (336) 772-3111. E-mail: Ashleigh@vs-cancer.org. Website: www.vs-cancer.org

Robert Welton, Parent Committee Member, North Wake County Baseball Association, Wake Forest, NC. Phone (919) 801-0361. E-mail: rwelton@nwcba.org. Website: www.nwcba.org

How to Outdo Last Year's Event

By Shelley Hexom

Nonprofits that host annual events face the tough challenge of growing and outdoing such events each year. The Rome Hospital Foundation (Rome, NY), however, has not experienced those ups and downs since its inception 15 years ago.

Since 2000 the foundation's annual gala, its premier fundraising event, has continued to grow and surpass its fundraising goals. Development Coordinator Rachael Eggan says increased sponsorship support and a change in venue have been two key reasons for the black-tie event's continued growth. In 2000 the event raised \$3,500; and in subsequent years attendance and revenue grew. In 2012 the event was moved to Turning Stone Resort, and the gala has netted over \$90,000 each year since then. The net revenue in 2014 was \$96,000, the foundation's highest fundraising event total to date.

For its first 12 years the event was held at The Beeches Inn and Conference Center, but in 2012 it was moved to a luxurious resort setting. As a result, revenue skyrocketed. "We attempt to match each of our fundraising events to the most appropriate venue so as to provide our attendees with the best possible experience," says Eggan. "The upscale nature of our gala coincides beautifully with the elegant ballrooms and first-class experience at Turning Stone Resort. Moving to this venue continues to positively affect the event."

When it comes to outdoing previous years' events, Eggan offers these suggestions:

1. Establish a planning committee and identify key decision makers so all staff, volunteers and others are clear about whom to approach for final approval. Include community members and individuals tied to the mission of the organization who are willing to volunteer their time. They can bring a diverse skill set and interesting perspectives to the planning process. This is important for maximizing the reach and appeal of the organization and event. It is also a crucial component when the time comes to implement the vision of the event.
2. Set realistic goals. Be cognizant of the area and the people from which you are hoping to obtain community support. The economics of the area play a significant role in the feasibility of how much money you can raise.
3. Begin the planning early. It is easy to underestimate all of the time required to make an event successful, but no event is possible without addressing the small details and having a thorough plan. Meet regularly with your planning committee to make sure everyone is on task and see what areas need additional support. "Our gala is held in November," says Eggan, "but our planning committee begins meeting monthly in May."
4. Focus on keeping the event new, different and improved each year. For example, change the floor plan so attendees feel as if they are in a different ballroom, come up with different themes to provide inspiration for décor and menu items and add new experiences, such as a photo booth, for guests.
5. Be cautious of costs. Monitor the responses from attendees very closely to obtain the most accurate head count. This reduces food and beverage charges for guests who don't actually attend.
6. Evaluate your event's return. Remember you are asking people for their valuable time and are competing with other events. Constantly evaluate the value your event provides to supporters.
7. Remember what it's all about. "Believe that what you do makes a positive difference and have fun!" advises Eggan.

Source: Rachael Eggan, Development Coordinator, Rome Hospital Foundation, Rome, NY. Phone (315)338-7181. E-mail: reggan@romehospital.org. Website: www.romehospital.org/Foundation.aspx

Maximize Pre-Event Coverage To Boost Event Attendance

Your local newspaper may be agreeable to covering your special event on the day it occurs, but advance publicity that can help boost attendance may be harder to get. Following are several strategies for enlisting their help ahead of time.

- **Choose before or after.** Since news space and staff time are limited, ask for either advance publicity or event coverage rather than insisting on both. Follow up with one or two great photos of your event and a brief release outlining attendance, funds raised and how they will be used.
- **Set a realistic but unprecedented goal.** Contact the paper to tell them you hope to boost last year's fundraising total by a record-setting amount, explaining increased community needs for your programs and services with a local angle.
- **Let others tell your story.** Ask one or two people who have benefitted from your organization to give interviews about how funds raised from last year's event helped pay for their job training, holiday dinner or back-to-school supplies for their children. Newspapers like inspiring human-interest stories. Make the connection to your event clear by arranging the interviews and providing background.
- **Invite them to be a sponsor.** Like any business, newspapers seek ways to contribute to their communities. Ask them to become an event sponsor with full benefits, but with a combination of advertising and money. When they promote your event, they will be promoting themselves.
- **Create an advertising supplement.** Most newspapers have frequent inserts. A sponsor-funded flyer or brochure can be a highly cost-effective way to reach a broad audience.
- **Cultivate your contacts.** Develop a friendly bond with the staff most likely to cover your organization's events. Send positive notes or e-mails complimenting them on other articles and let them know you take an interest in their section and work in general. Stay in touch even when you don't want something.

Incorporate Different Teaching Techniques Into Training Events

Q. “What types of training do you use in an effort to make the experience more pleasant and enjoyable for participants?”

Independent consultant and RN Shari Black has been working in public health since 1969. Nowadays she finds herself leading training sessions for the nonprofit staff and volunteers of groups like Portland, Oregon’s Coalition of Community Health Clinics. “While training, it’s important to establish an environment where two things can happen: Participants can learn without too many barriers and truth telling can occur,” Black says. Black uses the following tools to ensure participants walk away from their training sessions energized and informed:

1. **Utilize “appreciative inquiry.”** The appreciative inquiry method asks participants to look for the best in themselves, their organizations and their experiences to date. Identifying these strengths allows staff to set benchmarks and improve customer service moving forward. “I utilize appreciative inquiry by requesting participants reflect on a time when they were treated exceptionally well as a patient or customer,” Black says. “That way, I can start the sessions by being informed with their personal stories rather than launching right into a lecture.”
2. **Implement a “world café” method.** The world café method refers to a flexible format for hosting large-group dialogue. “When you’re training a group of 100 people, it’s still best to break them up into groups of 8 to 10 where they can really engage with each other,” Black says. When engaging in a world café, small groups go through 15- to 20-minute rounds of discussions at designated tables. Once the time has elapsed, the groups move along to the next table to delve deeper into the topic being discussed. Sometimes a host or moderator remains consistent at each of the tables, filling in new groups as they arrive and leading discussions as needed.
3. **Complete workbook lessons during training sessions.** “So often session leaders hand out workbooks at conferences, and by the time participants get home, they’re too tired or too busy to complete the lessons,” Black says. If training requires the use of a concrete workbook or similar tool, Black recommends completing the lessons during the training session rather than relying on participants to complete them at home or in their hotel rooms.

Source: Sharon N. Black, Sharon N. Black Consultants LLC, Hillsboro, OR. Phone (503) 860-3184. E-mail: blacks@teleport.com. Website: www.snbconsultants.com

Give Guests a Full-Immersion Experience

It’s memorable. It’s interactive. It’s fun. Incorporating a theme into every facet of your event generates excitement and enhances enjoyment for your guests. The staff at Marklund (Geneva, IL) have seen this work again and again at their annual Top Hat Ball fundraiser.

Its biggest event each year, the Top Hat Ball generates funds for Marklund’s two Chicago area facilities, which serve infants, children and adults with severe and profound developmental disabilities. The evening’s events include a silent auction, raffle, a short promotional video, an announcement of Marklund’s Friend of the Year and a live auction during dinner, followed by live music and dancing, then a second, lighter round of food served at 11:30.

The event normally draws more than 500 guests. Net funds raised this year totaled \$540,000. “We don’t do any paid advertising,” says Dawn Lassiter-Brueske, director of marketing, communications and public relations. “It’s almost all word of mouth. Previous attendees bring new people each year.” So what helps generate this interest?

“People tend to like themed events,” says Lassiter-Brueske, “as long as they are not too childish. You can take an event and do it as elegantly as possible. Having done this event for 19 years has helped us fine-tune it.”

The Top Hat Ball has a different theme each year. This year Marklund chose an ancient Egyptian theme for An Evening Along the Nile, held at the Marriot Downtown Chicago Magnificent Mile Hotel. They carried the theme throughout, from large-scale components to fine details:

- **Décor** — “We go all out to really make the room feel like the theme. We work with a props company in the city and with Marriot to create the atmosphere to fit within the theme,” says Lassiter-Brueske. This year’s décor included faux-stone archways in the entry, sarcophaguses, an ice sculpture pyramid and a mummy’s tomb.
- **Actors** — Marklund hired actors to portray Cleopatra, Egyptian guards and a mummy to mingle with guests and Egyptian dancers to entertain in the dining room as guests found their seats.
- **Food** — Egyptian names were assigned to various hors d’oeuvres and entrees.
- **Activities** — Guests could have their names written in hieroglyphs.
- **Photo ops** — A photo corner was set up with a background to match the theme. “Guests loved getting their pictures right away,” reports Lassiter-Brueske.
- **Sponsorships** — Packages and sponsorship levels were created with the theme in mind, including Egypt, Pharaoh, the Great Sphinx and Cleopatra options.
- **Attire** — “Women get into it with their outfits,” Lassiter-Brueske notes. “It makes it fun. This year we saw a lot of jeweled headbands. Last year, with our African adventure theme, we saw a lot of animal prints.”

The key to utilizing a theme successfully is full immersion. Tacking a theme on haphazardly does not create a memorable experience, but integrating it fully will make your event stand out.

Source: Dawn Lassiter-Brueske, Director of Marketing, Communications and Public Relations, Marklund, Geneva, IL. Phone (630) 593-5467. E-mail: dlassiter@marklund.org. Website: www.marklund.org/tophatball