



SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL FUND-RAISERS

By Lisa Hurley
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Combining philanthropy with fun is a great idea — but making it pay is problematic. Here, five fund-raising experts share their secrets:

Pam Atchison, director of the Shreveport Regional Arts Council in Shreveport, La., which produces the biennial Christmas in the Sky benefit.

Tony Conway, CMP, owner of Atlanta-based Legendary Events, which won a 2001 Gala Award for the Dining by Design event, produced for the Design Industry Foundation Fighting AIDS.

Anne Dunsmore, director of Medical Sciences Development at UCLA and president of the firm Capital Campaigns, both in Los Angeles. The UCLA School of Medicine's Millennium Ball in April raised approximately \$3 million.

Alison Silcoff, head of Alison Silcoff Marketing and Event Planning in Montreal. She won a 2000 Gala Award for the Canadian Cancer Society's Millennium Daffodil Ball, which raised \$1.4 million (Canadian).

Jan Weiner, CMP, university events coordinator for California State Polytechnic University Pomona in Pomona, Calif., which staged its Founders' Celebration 2002 in February.

SECRETS OF CHOOSING A VENUE

"Look for venues with attractive features — a magnificent view, a garden or courtyard, windows, a high ceiling. Too many rules regarding attaching and hanging decor can make for problems, as can limited time available for set-up."

Alison Silcoff

SECRETS OF GREAT DECOR ON A BUDGET

"Less is better. A few well-chosen items will have more impact than too many. Be creative with your centerpiece. Flowers are beautiful, but may be expensive. I did a Moroccan-themed event where we used fruits and nuts — which the guests later consumed — as the centerpiece. Lighting can be very dramatic without a lot of expense. For example, gobos in a pattern that carries out your theme can be used to make an impact on your guests the moment they walk in the door."

Jan Weiner

SECRETS OF GREAT FOOD ON A BUDGET

"Establish a good working relationship with the catering manager and the chef. Let them know your budget and be firm about staying within that limit, including the gratuity and tax. At receptions, have bite-sized hors d'oeuvre tray-passed to help you control the amount of food served while making your guests feel pampered."

J.W.

SECRETS OF SECURING DONATIONS

"Any fund-raising pro's time should be a lot like a waitress's — it takes X hours to make X number of dollars in X number of square feet. It may take 10 minutes to get wine donated, but if you could have gotten more money donated in 10 minutes, then it's time wasted. Sometimes it doesn't matter if an item is comped. What good is it to get free wine if you have to pay to ship it, along with a \$25 corkage fee? Spend \$28 a bottle for better stuff."

Anne Dunsmore

SECRETS OF WORKING WITH 'CHALLENGING' VOLUNTEERS

"Remind volunteers of the fact that they are the No. 1 ambassadors for the event. If they complain — outside of the inner circle of the planning team to which they belong — it will affect ticket sales, PR and the image of the event."

Pam Atchison

SECRETS OF WORKING WITH SPONSORS

"Too many fund-raisers are still in the habit of thinking the event is something so wonderful that the sponsor needs to pay and be a part of the event — and this is not true, as sponsorships are getting harder to obtain. Make sure sponsors are handled as your top VIPs at the event and any pre-event related parties. Also, always ask them again. Sponsors get angry when they notice next year that their competitor was asked."

Tony Conway, CMP

"Fund-raising is an open-ended mandate. The need to follow up on sponsorship requests ends only on the day of the event. Last-minute contributions can be acknowledged orally or in a computer-generated program insert."

A.S.

SECRETS OF KEEPING AN ANNUAL EVENT FRESH

"It's OK to put a nice twist on it, but don't make it too different. Especially in charity, people are creatures of habit. If guests know they had a great time last year, they will just write the check this year. So if it took me three hours to get 20 donors last year, now it takes me one hour. I can use the other two hours to get another round of people."

A.D.

SECRETS OF PRESENTING GALAS IN A POST-9/11 WORLD

"I think what 9/11 does is make people examine the true philanthropy of the charity. Charity should not be an excuse to have a social event. Raising \$1 million and giving \$200,000 to charity is criminal. I know what every \$50,000 and \$100,000 can do in medicine. The ethical fund-raising professional and ethical dinner committee will choose to find that balance."

A.D.

SECRETS OF MAXIMIZING REVENUE

"Create impulse buying opportunities throughout the event. The goal of a fund-raiser is to suspend reality until you have raised all the money. When you greet Mickey Mouse as you walk through the gate at Disney, you no longer care that a Coke costs \$5 because it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

P.A.

SECRETS OF HANDLING PRESSURE TO TOP THE FUNDS RAISED LAST YEAR

"Begin an advisory board. Let them help with suggestions on what to consider for next year's event. After hearing their thoughts and suggestions, I always ask, 'Will you or your company consider being a sponsor or volunteer next year?'"

T.C.

"You can affect the bottom line by saving money on the expense side without compromising quality."

P.A.