

Hospice of the East Bay

Hospice of the East Bay is committed to providing the hospice and palliative care services that support and comfort people and their loved ones through the final stages of life. The hospice emphasizes and enhances patients' quality of life, cares for all medically qualified patients regardless of their ability to pay for services, and strives to educate the community on the value of hospice and palliative care services.

Challenge

Hospice of the East Bay runs both an annual Tree of Lights event during the holiday season, as well as a bi-annual summer fundraising auction. About 300 tickets are sold each year for the bi-annual auction and between the silent and live section, the event features about 200 auction items. The event brings in about a third of the hospice's annual fundraising goal, placing some pressure on the auction team to meet the fundraising goal.

Highlights

- Hospice of the East Bay had good technology in place to run their event and keep things organized, which made it possible to go on when factors outside their control disrupted the event.
- Because the staff had done plenty of training and pre-event planning, they were able to stay calm in an emergency.
- With Greater Giving Online Auctions, the auction team was able to sell packages after the event that they weren't able to sell at the auction.

When Gloria Becha, the Foundation Development Associate, began to work on the Hospice of the East Bay Gala and auction, she discovered that Microsoft Access was used to run past events. Access wasn't robust enough for the upcoming auction, and combined with tracking their donors' overall giving with Donor Perfect, she found herself entering the same data in twenty different places. It was a lot of work that could only be done by one person at a time.

They needed a new solution—something that would track RSVPs, ticket purchases, and item donations for multiple events, all from the same database. Blecha knew her daughter's school was using software to run their own auction, so she decided to do some research and attended a Greater Giving auction training seminar. While attending the seminar, Blecha learned the Greater Giving software was web based, allowing multiple users to work on the auction at the same time. She also liked that it had built-in sponsor tracking and table seating—but most importantly, it included the ability to create an event website and sell tickets online. It had the potential to not only run the annual Tree of Lights event, but also their bi-annual auction and any other events they wanted to hold, as well as enable year-round donations.

Then, this year, the gala and auction presented a special challenge to Blecha and the auction committee that they conquered with the help of their new software solution.

Solution

Hospice of the East Bay purchased Greater Giving in 2011 and have been using it ever since. This past year, the bi-annual event was held at a country club. The theme was "Celebrating Our Stars," and each guest received a flashlight as a party favor.

The auction committee had worked hard in advance to be prepared, so check-in proceeded without a hitch and the silent auction went perfectly. Guests were seated

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in the dining room and dinner was served; the staff had entered the silent auction sales already and Blecha printed receipts to deliver to guests at their tables.

Blecha and her team were halfway through delivering receipts when the lights went out due to a power outage. The venue was not equipped with a back-up generator or emergency plan, so the wait staff borrowed the hospice's extra party favor flashlights in order to finish dinner service. The guests, particularly accommodating after the pleasant check-in and silent auction experience, made the best of it and put flashlights into wine glasses to illuminate the tables. No one panicked. Guests were gracious about the inconvenience and were concerned mostly with the hospice's fundraising.

Tips from Hospice of the East Bay

- Utilize Online Payments for more than just event registration. Hospice of the East Bay accepts year-round donations and conducted a special appeal purely online.
- Let guests know what they won in the Silent Auction so they know how much they can spend in the Live Auction.
- Have a contingency plan or two in case things go wrong.
- Have fun and don't try to do everything yourself. Whatever is going to happen will happen. Trust that you'll be all right even if the lights go out!

Unfortunately it was a hot day. With no power, there was no air conditioning, and the last thing Blecha and her team wanted to do was to ask guests to remain seated in the stifling heat. Instead of proceeding with the live auction and the Fund-A-Need portion of the program, they proceeded directly to check-out—which was only possible because they had used Greater Giving to enter sales and pre-print the silent auction receipts.

By cancelling the final portion of the evening's program, Hospice of the East Bay lost a significant amount of revenue. But, yet again, the quick thinking staff using Greater Giving solutions would save the day.

Results

With the help of Online Payments, the auction team was able to conduct the missed Fund-A-Need through their website. They sent out letters about online giving to everyone who had attended the event, promoted it via Facebook, and received good media attention after their event night ordeal.

Blecha also purchased Greater Giving Online Auctions, so she could sell the live auction packages that were left over when the event ended early—allowing the them to recoup much of the lost fundraising dollars.

It could have been a much different outcome had the staff not been prepared and on top of their technology with the help of Greater Giving. For the next event, Blecha said, they plan to have an emergency generator on-site!