



Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital

In 1922, the Happy Hills Convalescent Home for Children opened in Northwest Baltimore as a place where children could safely recover from illness and surgery. It has since evolved into the Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital, a leader in pediatric care, committed to improving the health and well-being of all children who are ill, injured, or in need of help. The hospital is a premier leader in quality of care and innovation, with a focus on families and taking a multidisciplinary approach.

Highlights

- Adopting a web-based event management software that manages registration, silent auction donations and execution by multiple users, lightened the workload for the auction team.
- Opening the event to online bidding prior to the event's start let guests pre-shop and get ready to bid.
- Greater Giving's simple method of collecting and processing credit cards with the software helped establish a new event with greater revenue potential.

Challenge

For years, the Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital held an annual fashion show and silent auction as their primary fundraising event. This Sunday afternoon event attracted primarily a female audience of approximately 200 guests, and raised \$20,000. The monies from the event helped to purchase equipment and services for the patients at the hospital that were not always covered in the budget.

Despite the popularity of the event, it was not the level of fundraiser that the hospital needed to truly make a difference for its patients. In 2013, a longtime volunteer and patient parent took an old fashioned idea, bringing back the hospital's Gala in hopes of attracting a broader audience and increasing the revenue from their fundraiser. The very same year, the hospital hired a new Director of Provider Relations and Special Events, Tammany Buckwalter, who arrived with a background in event planning. With Buckwalter on the team, changing up the annual event was now a possibility.

The plans for the first Storybook Gala to take place in May of 2014 ramped up quickly and started gaining momentum. Registration kicked off and sold the 400 seats within four days. As the process unfolded, it was clear to Tammany that the software she was using for that process was not robust enough to handle all the details and complexities at the Gala and the accounting after the event.

Additionally, the development department was understaffed and the committee volunteers had a limited time to spend on pre-event tasks and preparation.

Buckwalter knew there had to be a software solution to manage their workload, and save her volunteers from endless, tedious tasks

Solution

With persistence and an endless search, Tammany was directed to an organization that was using Greater Giving. After much intelligence gathering and interviewing other organizations, it became clearer that Greater Giving was worth looking at.

The first Storybook Gala was a huge success and provided a net profit of \$110,000. Clearly, the group was on to something special and there was no turning back.

Second Year—Advancements

The following year, the Gala committee agreed to move to more fully integrate the Greater Giving platform. The Gala goers are a very active online audience and using more of the tools within the Greater Giving arsenal provided to be invaluable in communicating with the guests—as no one could have foreseen what was to take place only a week before the event.

The hospital sends paper save-the-date invitations in November and couples that effort with promotion through eblasts from the Greater Giving platform as well as Facebook and Instagram posts.

Within 35 hours of opening registration, they sold out of tickets! With this group of guests, Buckwalter guessed that introducing Greater Giving Online Bidding would be a great way to get everyone involved early in the auction, and drive up those starting bids.

In February, the auction committee started posting to Instagram with photos of new auction items and thanking donors for their item donations—getting potential guests amped for what would be waiting for them in the silent auction.

Sponsorships were also used as a form of audience engagement. A local Mini Cooper dealership became the chair of the clothing donation for the infants in the NICU; “a MINI for the minis,” the slogan went. People dropped by the business with clothes to donate, which got the sponsors’ names and businesses out there and promoted the mission of the hospital and Gala.

In April 2015, just a week before the second Storybook Gala was to take place in downtown Baltimore civil unrest erupted. The committee was faced with a question of “go forward” or “cancel.” The group was not interested in cancelling and now had a serious challenge of how to safely host the event in a city with a curfew and National Guard on the street. After a few sleepless nights, the Gala team was able to regroup and pull the event from the city and move it to a county fairgrounds building outside of the city limits.

The move was done four days before the event and included a total transformation of a cinderblock building to a palace fit for a princess. With Online Bidding enabled, the committee launched the application mid-day allowing guests to start bidding early. Additionally, the email communications allowed them to keep guests informed of the change of venue and the steps needed to still attend. The ability to communicate and open mobile bidding saved the event, as the technology within the building was not ideal and the use of personal devices was relied upon heavily.

Although the move was costly, it was just what the people in the city needed. As part of the event, Tammany had purchased cancellation insurance months ago and it covered the extra expense of moving.

Results

The Greater Giving software lightened everyone's load during event preparation. Being web-based, it allowed auction staff and volunteers to log on from anywhere, at any time, to enter auction items. And because the software allowed multiple users access at the same time, multiple people could be entering new items while others were going back and editing descriptions.

Adding Online Bidding had a big impact. Buckwalter opened up mobile bidding on the day of the event, so people who started that morning could look at all the available packages and start planning their bidding strategy for the evening. Adopting Online Bidding also freed the auction group from getting hung up on making each bid sheet perfect, and eliminated the "hovering" bidder problem they'd had at past events. It took a big load off the staff's shoulders that sales information was shared in real time between the Online Bidding platform and the Greater Giving software.

Online Bidding also gave guests more time to enjoy the event, since they didn't have to hover over their bid sheets. Even better, as soon as the auction closed, everyone knew what they'd won. Because the software told guests how much they'd already spent, they could give more during the fund-a-need, and the hospital raised more money than ever.

Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital also loved Greater Giving Go Time, the event night interface. It was super easy for volunteers to learn and use, and made the event run flawlessly. People walked in, registered their credit cards, and walked right into the event. Check-out was so easy and stress-free that everyone commented on it.

Adopting Greater Giving helped the hospital take an event that averaged \$20,000 a year to over \$198,000 in only two years! Now they can help more patients than ever before.

Tips from Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital

- Communicate, often.
- Always have cancellation insurance, in case something unpredictable happens! (Because it might, and it has.)
- Always have a rainy day plan for when something goes wrong.
- For events that need wi-fi, get in writing the internet bandwidth that will be available to you, and be sure to sign a service level agreement.
- Empower your volunteers and staff to get to know the software, and embrace the new technology by giving them adequate training and preparation. A great software tool lightens volunteers' loads and saves them time.
- Work with event night staff and volunteers who will be running registration until they're up to speed and feel completely comfortable using the software.