

Local Dance Finds Fundraising Solution

by Flora Chamlin

The Pioneer Valley in western Massachusetts is a mecca for English country and contra dancing, most probably because we have a wealth of very fine musicians and callers in our sphere. This, however, has its advantages and disadvantages for the committee members who organize the dances. The advantages are obvious, the disadvantages less so. We are in competition with other dance groups around the country, and even abroad, for the same wonderful musicians and callers. Locally, the dances are in competition with one another, competing for the folks who have found the world of dance whether it be English, contra, Scottish, ballroom, swing, etc.

As a committee member who handles the finances for the Second Saturday English Country Dance (a monthly dance, in its third year of existence, that is normally held at the Munson Library in South Amherst), I have tried to think of creative ways to sustain the dance in the face of keeping the admission fee down and paying the musicians and callers competitive wages, including adequate travel reimbursement. During the course of a year, many (if not most) of our monthly dances operate at a loss.

In 2013, our committee decided to hold a fundraiser, specifically a Silent/Chinese Auction. Our success in 2013 led to a second auction in 2014. We asked members of the dance community to donate items for the cause, to look in their attics, garages, etc., for things taking up space that they no longer wanted or used. The idea, of course, is that one person's junk is another person's treasure. Indeed, we received countless items both times and when all was said and done, people went away happy—happy to have gotten rid of things and happy to have acquired newfound treasures. (This is to say nothing about the value of recycling things with useful life still left.) The committee was happy too, with over \$900 raised the first year and over \$1,000 the second. This puts us in a much more secure place

financially and it allows us to continue to take losses as we build up our dance.

With the two experiences under our belt, I was asked to write about our fundraiser for the CDSS newsletter. My description will be relatively brief. If anyone would like to learn more about how we did things and what our problems were, please feel free to call me at 413-665-0484.

We split the items we received into basically three categories: items for the Silent Auction, items for the Chinese Auction and all the rest. For the Silent Auction, a minimum bid was written down next to the item and people had the opportunity to bid, or outbid the last offer. At a designated time, the last (highest) bid was accepted. For the Chinese Auction, a paper bag (lunch bag) was placed next to each item with the name of the item written on the

bag. Dancers bought raffle tickets (ten tickets for \$5, or twenty-five tickets for \$10) and placed their tickets in the lunch bags next to the items they wanted. If people were particularly keen on any one item, they could place all or most of their tickets in that one bag, increasing their chances of winning. A potluck dinner was held starting at 5:00 pm to encourage people to come early so they could view the auction items, bid on the Silent Auction items, buy raffle tickets for the Chinese Auction and put them in the lunch bags, and so that roughly half of the Chinese Auction items could be raffled off before the dance started at 7:30. The other half was raffled off during

the break. One ticket was drawn from each lunch bag and the winners were identified. For the third category (all the rest), people could more or less pay what they thought the items were worth using the "honor system money box."

Rather than getting lost in the countless details to describe our experience, suffice it to say that we played a lot by ear, used logic and figured

continued on page 16

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this!**



**Many thanks for your donation,
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Group Corner—Do You Know How-to...?

by Jeff Martell

Howdy, folks. So, are you thinking of starting a dance? Are you wondering how to make your dance better? Maybe you want to get more attendees, or more youth or better advertising? Maybe you just want to find a way to get it to run more smoothly. Well, we have something you might be interested in. When Ethan Hazzard-Watkins was the CDSS Youth Intern (2008-2009), he made up a series of Starter Kits, aimed at folks who want to start a group or a dance from scratch. The Starter Kits can be found at <http://www.cdss.org/advice-howto.html>. They are divided up by general information, genre and location (for instance, college campus, etc.) and they are all free.

You may be thinking, "Well, that is great for the newbies and all and I am glad someone is putting this information out there for them, but I have been organizing dances for twenty years, what does this matter to me?" The answer is, I think the Starter Kits can teach some old dogs some new tricks. Are you effectively using social networking sites to promote your events? How is your direct email marketing? Is your dance attracting new people? Is your dance attracting young people? Where would you even FIND new people? Is there anything you could improve about the nuts-and-bolts infrastructure of your events?

Group organizers know better than anyone how much work, from all sorts of disciplines, goes on long before anyone hits the floor (and if we do it really well, the folks hitting the floor never know!). I believe that even the most experienced of organizers will find some new ideas they can use in the Starter Kits. Ethan drew upon his extensive experience as a dancer, musician and promoter, then solicited genre and location specific input from some of the best in the business to put these together.

So, spend an hour or so looking through these online resources. I would be willing to bet you will come out of it with at least one new idea you can use; I certainly did. I guess you can teach an old dog new tricks after all!

When he's not running the CDSS Store, Jeff Martell is our go-to guy for group liability insurance, federal tax exemption and sound. When not slaving away here, he's a musician. Gets paid for it too.

(Fundraising, continued from page 11)

out things as we went along and, in reality, our two events were not as simple as my above description implies. We received so many items such as clothes, books, household items, etc., that we simply told people to pay what they wanted, or had a \$1 table, or put a price tag on particularly nice items of clothing. We also had the luxury of leaving out the leftover items to be viewed/purchased at more than one dance over the course of a month. Particularly nice Silent Auction items that did not sell were sold on Ebay (with delightful results). All other leftover items were taken to Goodwill or the Salvation Army. All the people who donated items were sent thank you notes signed by the five members of the Second Saturday Dance committee (the explanation for my above painting).

We doubt we will hold another auction this year, but should we feel the need again to pad our coffers, we would definitely consider holding auctions again in the future. The auctions were a lot of work, but the results were very rewarding. The fun, laughter, community spirit and of course the money, made it all very much worth our while.

Flora Chamlin is an English country dancer in the Amherst, MA area.

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