

Added benefits

Retailers increase client bases hosting nonprofit events

By BERNADETTE STARZEE

The Container Store opened in Westbury last month with near record-breaking hoopla.

The local franchise clocked in as the third-largest grand opening weekend ever for the Dallas-based storage and organization product retailer, which has 57 locations.

One secret to the successful launch was a partnership with the Jericho-based nonprofit organization, Women's Fund of Long Island, which took a portion of the proceeds from the first weekend's sales.

In the months leading up to the opening bash, The Container Store sent out a request for proposals to organizations in the area and chose Women's Fund in a competitive bidding process.

"We cross-promoted the event, and hundreds of our supporters came to the store's grand opening party and purchased products during the weekend to support us," said Stacey Scarpone, executive director of Women's Fund.

Partnering with a nonprofit organization on events can help a retailer get the word out to a broader range of customers while generating goodwill in the community.

"Any nonprofit that is chosen as a beneficiary will promote the event to the "nth" degree with e-blasts and other messages to its constituents," said Ann Marie Thigpen, director of the Long Island Center for Nonprofit Leadership at Adelphi University. "And it elevates businesses in the public eye while supporting the critical work of nonprofits."

Pick a cause, not just any cause

The first step is identifying the nonprofit you would like to support. Often a cause is chosen because owners of a business have a particular interest in it. Others choose one related to their business; for instance, companies that sell children's products are wise to give back to a children's organization.

Swirls and Twirls Frozen Yogurt, with locations in Massapequa Park, West Islip and Patchogue, targets families in the local communities. To promote its grand openings, the store teams with parent-teacher organizations and other local family-oriented organizations, distributing 50 percent of the proceeds from the day's sales among the organizations.

"We provide fliers to the PTAs, who send them home in the kids' backpacks," co-owner Joseph Sala said.

For the Patchogue opening, Swirls and Twirls hung fliers in St. Joseph's College and promoted the event through school clubs.

For its expected grand opening in Syosset later this year, Bounce! Trampoline Sports will look to partner with a few nonprofits with broad appeal. For its recent opening in Valley Cottage, N.Y., the indoor sports and fitness company donated a portion of the proceeds to several charities, and it regularly hosts fundraisers for school groups and other organizations, who promote the events.

"We're a community-minded company, and the fundraisers are successful because the kids all want to come here," owner Danny Fried said.

Cross marketing

The Retreat, an East Hampton-based domestic violence shelter, has been approached by yoga studios, art galleries and other businesses who offer to run events for its benefit. The Retreat's email list of close to 9,000 supporters are largely based in the Hamptons, which makes it a good fit



HILLARY NEEDLE: Retailers can raise money for a nonprofit without a cash donation.

Nonprofits: Partnering will guarantee a win-win

From 37A

for many local businesses.

"We cross-market the events with the businesses through e-blasts and social media, which exposes the retailer to new customers and us to potential new donors," said Jeffrey Friedman, executive director of The Retreat.

Each August The Retreat runs a "Shop at Sunset" event with area retailers, which give a percentage of their sales to the nonprofit. This year, the event grew to include 51 retailers in East Hampton and Sag Harbor.

Some businesses fall short by failing to market the event to their own customers.

"A lot of times the business expects the nonprofit to do all the marketing, but events are more successful when all the marketing tools available are used," said Donna Cariello, founder and president of The Long Is-

land Way, a Bethpage-based organization matching businesses with charities. "If a restaurant tells its own customers that it's giving back to a charity, the customers may come back more often and bring other people with them."

Think outside the percentage points

Retailers can promote and raise money for a nonprofit without shelling out a cash donation, said Hillary Needle, president of Hillary Needle Events in Dix Hills.

During 21 days in September at more than 75 of its stores in the region, Party City is asking customers at checkout if they would like to donate a dollar to Child Abuse Prevention Services of Roslyn, to help prevent child abuse and bullying.

"All the customers have to do is say 'Yes,' and their dollar will go to CAPS," said Needle, who noted that

Party City is an honoree of CAPS' upcoming gala. "The point-of-purchase promotion fosters Party City's reputation as a proactive, socially conscious business entity while providing CAPS with a significant revenue stream."

With creative thinking businesses can come up with other inexpensive win-win promotions. For instance, Needle noted, retailers often create and sell special items – such as restaurant menu items or pink products – during October's Breast Cancer Awareness Month and donate proceeds to breast cancer charities.

For 11 years, Panera Bread has run its "Pink Ribbon Bagels" campaign, donating a portion of sales of a bagel in the shape of a pink ribbon to local breast cancer charities. On Long Island, more than a 250,000 Pink Ribbon Bagels have been sold, raising nearly \$80,000 for local breast cancer charities.