

Fun . . . d Raising

by Mary Van Den Heuvel

In the early 1980's, Green Bay Day Nursery, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to provide child care for needy families, was strongly affected by government cutbacks in child care funding. An enterprising and concerned board president, Candy Gilmore, brought together a group of community leaders to lay out a financial plan for the long term support of the Nursery—thus was born the Green Bay Day Nursery Endowment Fund. A variety of ways have been used to build the Endowment, currently at \$94,000; but the most exciting and fun way has been the **Big Event for Little Kids**.

Carol Bush, a member of the board of trustees, never failed to come up with interesting fundraising ideas—how about a giant tinker toy fair? Other trustees looked at more traditional fundraisers—an annual mailer, a fund drive. But Carol was not to be denied, she wanted a children's event and was willing to chair it with energy and enthusiasm.

Laying the Groundwork

Key people with experience in successful community fundraising events were invited to a one time

meeting to give us advice. Based on the meeting, a concept paper was drafted.

The Big Event will be a one day festival designed to raise funds for the Green Bay Day Nursery Endowment Fund with:

- Participatory events (can-do)
- Entertainers of children
- Vendors selling toys, records, books, children's clothing, and food
- Health and safety exhibits
- Educational projects

The secondary purpose shall be to provide a family/child experience not already provided for children ten years of age and under from northeastern Wisconsin.

Costs shall be covered by underwriters.

Criteria

1. The event should be compatible with our mission to serve young children and their families.
2. The event should result in a high level of satisfaction and enjoyment for volunteers—increasing

the dedication of old and new Green Bay Day Nursery friends.

3. The event should give visibility to Green Bay Day Nursery and its needs, thus enhancing our fundraising ability in other areas.

Sponsorship

Because Green Bay Day Nursery did not have a high level of visibility throughout northeastern Wisconsin, it was suggested that we obtain a sponsor(s). As television is an important media for getting the word out, Channel WFRV, an NBC affiliate, was approached and agreed to co-sponsor the event. They suggested that Hardee's fast food restaurants co-sponsor, which they did. This was an important step in getting both credibility and affordable marketing. Hardee's underwrote some of the printing costs and WFRV estimated the donation of air time for promotion at \$10,000.

Treasures in House

Barb Halron, a teacher in Green Bay Day Nursery's Mother's Day Out program, also happened to be a talented graphic artist. She designed the logo for the Big Event. The little

clown, Huggles, was named in a contest at the first annual Big Event for Little Kids. The winner received a large stuffed Huggles doll designed by Anne Watzka, one of our Day Nursery moms and also a board member. Huggles has since been trademarked. Anne has made a Huggles costume for an adult to wear and a small costume for a preschool child to wear. Often the tiny clown keeps little children from becoming afraid of the big clown.

Brainstorming

One of the most exciting parts of planning for the Big Event was our brainstorming parties with **big thinkers**. Wonderful people came together to share ideas. Many of them got caught up in the excitement and stayed for the implementation. The great ideas kept coming. As time progressed, we realized that the Big Event was becoming the Bigger Event or maybe the Biggest Event ever. Today as we plan for the second annual Big Event, we joke about having to rent Packer Stadium to hold all the events. From the beginning, under Carol's leadership, the committee believed in itself and in moving mountains.

City Involvement

One of the major mountains to be tackled was city government—we needed to close off a city street; park our school bus, ambulance, squad car, antique fire engine, and Oscar Meyer Wiener Mobile; blow giant bubbles; paint a car; make a tiny trikes path; and put up tents to serve food. Police and fire department officials all asked, "Who is Green Bay Day Nursery?" The opportunity for education was underway. From the beginning, city government was cooperative, but there were lots of rules and regulations to be waded through by Helina Alford, who tactfully and ably undertook the job.

Designing the Space

Because we were aiming to attract several thousand children and adults to the downtown Convention Center, we were concerned with safety. Traffic patterns were set up so that people would move in one direction with hands-on events set up for younger children (the baby maze) and moving to areas for older kids (the computer corner). Extra wide aisles were designed.

Susan Dumbleton developed the imaginative vision for decorating the space. In place of the traditional draping of vendor and exhibit booths, Susan secured a thousand sheets of cardboard, hot glue guns, tape, poster paints, glitter, and other glitzy items. These were used to build and decorate colorful booths. Snoopy's doghouse was designed for a pet care agency who taught pet grooming; barber shop poles were part of the booth for a barber who offered to do free hairstyling for children. Red, blue, and yellow (favorites of the early childhood field) were part of the color scheme. Many hands were involved in the decorations, including those of children from the local Boys and Girls Club.

Highlights

Children entering the magical world of the Big Event were given a helium balloon and greeted by a variety of roving characters and entertainers. The can-do events really demonstrated that children are active learners. They got involved right away in sand and water play, the construction area, the dress-up area, button and puppet making, the mazes and obstacle courses. Amidst all the activity, an amazing storyteller had gathered children and parents on carpet squares under a cardboard tree to catch them up in the yarns he was spinning. The

children's hospital exhibit, put together and staffed by the Bellin School of Nursing, was a runaway hit. Children stood in line to get hospital bracelets with their names and disposable surgeon gowns and masks. They tried out the hospital beds and examined x-rays. Tom Pease, a children's musician, enthralled children and parents alike. Oops!—the sticker wall became the sticker floor as well. A major surprise was the appearance of Mickey Mouse—brought in from Disney World by Gold Bond Ice Cream, a local company.

The Underwriters and Other Friends

Our advisors told us that first time events generally don't make money. We would have to establish ourselves first. The possibility of maybe even losing money was a horror we didn't want to contemplate. Getting companies to underwrite costs was a necessity. The special fundraising team of chairperson Carol Bush and George Cawman, a marketing vice president from a local company, was wonderfully successful.

Built-in sources of revenue (ticket and food sales and vendor space rent), a grant from the Wisconsin Arts Council, and in-kind gifts and funds from the underwriters assured us of a profit of \$28,000 for the Green Bay Day Nursery Endowment Fund.

In-kind gifts included all paper products used by food vendors, cardboard for the environment, hot dogs, hamburgers, ice cream treats, art supplies, and disposable diapers.

Special Events

Not only did over 200 tireless volunteers work on the main event that attracted 3,000 children and adults, but we also had a pre-event

breakfast with Mickey Mouse and characters from the Land of Oz. A post-event for adults was held in the evening so we could unwind and relive the many happy experiences that took place during the day. The joy of the children and the proud faces of their parents turned out to be an unexpected and moving gift that made all the hard work worthwhile.

Before the event was over, Carol Bush had her whole family involved—her daughter co-chaired the exhibit areas; her husband, also a prominent community leader, built the black light tunnel; and the grandchildren worked on scenery. For her leadership, Green Bay Day Nursery instituted the Carol Bush Award. Carol and her impressive team of volunteers put on a major community event. Everyone had fun, and we made money as well!

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