

LAGUNA BEACH
COASTLINE PILOT

Published Thursday, March 6, 2008 10:16 PM PST

Education

Auction shows power of the school

Items sold included cellar's worth of wine, behind-the-bench Lakers tickets, USC tailgate equipment.

By Candice Baker

It may have been the most expensive glass of water in Laguna Beach history.

Laguna Beach public schools received a fountain of support recently, following a highly successful SchoolPower Dinner Dance.

The first live auction item sold at the event was a glass of water sitting on one of the banquet tables; the auctioneer sold it as a warm-up to the evening.

A \$170 warm-up.

The auctioneer reminded attendees that the important takeaway of the evening was their children's future — not their auction winnings.

The winner was promised free refills for the remainder of the night, however.

Attendees raised about \$360,000 for SchoolPower — about \$20,000 more than last year — through live and silent auctions, and individual pledges for the district's Fund-a-Need request: technology upgrades to produce future 21st century leaders.

Hearts of Montage donated a total of \$45,000, \$10,000 of which was allotted for Fund-a-Need.

The "Simply Integrated" Fund-a-Need raised \$48,000, enough to complete funding for Phase 1 of the district's plan.

Guests pledged anywhere from \$100 to \$10,000 each toward the program.

Silent auction items included framed student photography of Thailand; the opportunity for six Thurston Middle School students to dine with Principal Joanne Culverhouse; and a wine cellar's worth of rare and coveted vintages.

Raffle prizes included a Rolex watch, a Hawaiian vacation home rental and a South Coast Plaza gift card.

Artist and Art Walk co-founder William DeBilzan auctioned one of his paintings for \$5,500; he then spontaneously offered a custom commission of anything a bidder would like, which also ended at \$5,500.

The auctioneer chided bidders that there is no spousal restraint allowed at an auction fundraiser in the city of Laguna Beach.

To that end, women bid on a custom men's wardrobe literally behind their husbands' backs; the winner paid \$9,500 for his wardrobe, bids for which began at \$3,500.

A USC football tailgate package included use of a vehicle that contained beer keg taps, a gas-powered margarita maker and a beef shaver; it went for \$2,500.

A bidding war ensued for six Lakers tickets located behind the bench; it ended at \$4,250.

Musician Lee Rocker of the Stray Cats successfully bid on a \$3,000 spa retreat package for his wife.

A bidding highlight for the evening was a private tasting with Montage Executive Chef James Boyce that began at \$4,000.

Following frantic bidding, the bid price stood at \$16,000; rather than letting one winner take the spoils, three bidders each ended up paying that amount for the privilege of tasting Boyce's creations.

A dozen bidders paid more than \$10,000 each for a set of group dinners by longtime philanthropist Claes Andersen.

At this kind of fundraiser, anything goes.

But bargains were also to be had; a BMW or MINI lease by Laguna Beach High School alumni Don Crevier went for \$7,500, compared to an estimated value of \$9,400.

Live music was played in a courtyard between the auction area and ballroom before the Blues Offenders filled up the dance floor.

The Endangered Planet Foundation arranged for murals created as part of the United Nations Art Miles Mural Project to be hung in the room.

Boyce paired up with acclaimed chef Michel Richard of Citrus in Los Angeles and Citronelle in Washington, D.C. to produce a true culinary experience.

But Boyce echoed the sentiments of organizers and parents.

"It's not really about the food," he said before the dinner began. "It's about supporting the school system. This is my first year of involvement. What really interested me was the passion — everybody was so into it. I had to be a part of it."

"It's wonderful to be involved," said volunteer Elizabeth Kelly, now in her fourth year donating her efforts to the foundation.

"I don't have children in this school system, but I was a kid, and I wish I went to a school system this great."

"This is all for our kids," SchoolPower President Jennifer Meiswinkel told guests. "And they are our future."