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## Do-Good Marketing

By BEVERLY SAVAGE (NYT) 2187 words

IT is tough to come up with fresh ideas for raising funds, even for the best of causes. But two New Jerseyans, working separately and in different ways, are helping to plow new ground. Their tack is casual get-togethers held in ordinary homes or in bars, with a decided emphasis on socializing, much like Tupperware or Mary Kay cosmetics parties. Yet they are raising real money, even as the sour economy and scandals in the industry have made fund-raising increasingly competitive.

On the face of it there are big differences between these two do-good entrepreneurs. Scott Delea, 32, is single and revels in the nightlife of Hoboken. Victoria Gonin, 42, a married suburbanite with three sons, relaxes at wine and cheese evenings in Mountain Lakes. What unites them is a natural instinct for marketing. Both founded their charity efforts on the principle that people want to do good as well as have fun but are constrained by a shortage of time. And both eschew many of the trappings of traditional fund-raising: tedious, self-congratulatory programs at the events themselves and unrelenting ego pampering of big donors.

Their organizations -- Party With Purpose for him and Womenade of Mountain Lakes for her -- have raised thousands of dollars through special events and e-mail promotion in the 18 months since they started up.

Party With Purpose (P.W.P.) sprang from a conversation Mr. Delea had with himself while driving to work on a Monday to his marketing job in Boonton. "That morning I was thinking that all I seemed to be doing was working and I asked myself what else I could do, how could I contribute in some way," he recounted in an interview.

He came up with the idea of raising money for various nonprofit groups by holding parties in bars and donating a generous percentage of the cover charge. Two weeks later, the brown-haired, broad-shouldered Mr. Delea stood at the door of the 10th and Willow Bar and Grill, greeting his guests and taking their money. That night Mr. Delea raised \$1,000 for the North Jersey Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, a charity selected in memory of his grandmother Marie Pisano.

His second event, last May, organized by a committee that he put together, was held at O'Donahue's in Hoboken and raised \$3,000 for the American Cancer Society. And the next, in September at the 10th and Willow Bar and Grill, raised almost \$7,000 for the Hoboken chapter of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

Hoboken has been described as a ghetto for young urban professionals who are often working in their first jobs in Manhattan and living in groups of three or more in renovated railroad flats or new condos. They are an untapped market for philanthropy, according to Mr. Delea, who estimates that the average young Hobokenite frequents bars two to four times a week, spending \$50 to \$120 each night.

"I want to get people involved in charitable causes without asking them to change their lifestyles," he said. "We all go out to have good times, but if that can be leveraged in some way to help others, that is phenomenal."

It is also a good deal for the bar owners. They receive a percentage of the cover charge, and the events, which run from 7 to 10 p.m., help draw customers at a time when most establishments are only starting to liven up.

Mrs. Gonin's target audience in the affluent, pastoral Mountain Lakes is mothers instead of young singles. Her scheme, equally as simple as Mr. Delea's, is to invite women to a potluck dinner and to ask each to bring a dish or a bottle of wine as well as a check for a designated charity. She had read about this concept in *Living Simple* magazine, which described the frustrations of a doctor who worked at a Washington homeless shelter and constantly wrote personal checks to bail her patients out of life's emergencies -- \$50 for help with rent or \$5 for a prescription co-payment. Someone suggested potluck dinners to raise money for these needs, and the Womenade concept was born.

Moved by her sister-in-law's recent diagnosis of breast cancer, Mrs. Gonin decided to create a series of Womenade events to benefit the North Jersey affiliate of the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. She began by inviting a group of 18 women to her house last November.

"I knew I was on to something when everyone had been seated in the living room and I went into the kitchen to get some wine," she said. "When I walked back into the room, all the women were crying."

What she was on to was the power of breast cancer as a terrible disease and as an incentive for fund-raising.

It took a little time to build momentum, but by the end of June a Womenade committee assembled by Mrs. Gonin had held 11 parties -- several potlucks, a tea party, a pizza party luncheon, a pink-theme book group meeting and a fancy-dress Valentine's Day dance.

The plan had been to hold just five events, with a goal of raising \$10,000 in all. In fact, \$35,000 was raised.

"Women have been begging me to schedule just one more event," Mrs. Gonin said with a tone of mock exasperation last summer. As a result, a sushi party was held last weekend, and a holiday gathering is planned in the coming weeks, marking the end of Womenade 2003's effort for the Komen foundation.

To a professional fund-raiser, both Womenade and Party With Purpose seem to be dreams come true. The efforts bring new blood, increased awareness and unexpected funds to organizations that normally work hard to achieve such results.

"I have never seen such an outpouring of support in my 28 years with the Boys and Girls Club," Gary Greenberg, the executive director of the club's county organization, said recently of the night of the benefit for the Hoboken chapter. "I swear to God I choked up as I made my way through that throng -- I never expected such a crowd."

The noise level that night at the 10th and Willow Bar and Grill, with ringing cellphones, background dance music and pockets of shrill chatter, prevented many from hearing Mr. Greenberg make similar remarks then, Mr. Delea said.

"At first it bothered me that a lot of people didn't know why they were there," Mr. Delea said. "But then I realized later how much good had come from that evening." For one thing, he said, a number of people are now volunteering at the Hoboken Boys and Girls Club.

The North Jersey affiliate of the Komen foundation says the efforts of Mountain Lakes Womenade were heaven sent. "We are very fortunate to have been selected as a beneficiary of Womenade's fund-raising events," said Deborah Belfatto, the executive director, "and are most grateful to the organization for helping us in our mission to eradicate breast cancer as a life-threatening disease."

Though Womenade and Party With Purpose seem like novel ideas, they reflect emerging trends in fund-raising at the national level, according to Stacy Palmer, editor of *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, the industry journal.

"There is a growing interest in new groups that are not affiliated with old institutions or established entities," she said. "And pollsters are finding that post-9/11, people are moving away from cocooning. They now want to be socially connected."

Still, pollsters also say that people feel overextended and suffer information overload. P.W.P. and Womenade cut through those barriers by making it easy for people to participate by merely showing up and contributing.

"We raised \$35,000 and had only one real organizational meeting," Mrs. Gonin said. The committee members relied heavily on e-mail promotion and did not need to meet because they saw each other frequently as a matter of neighborhood routine. They also allowed Mrs. Gonin to lead the way.

"I was surprised how much they trusted it to me," she said. "My biggest responsibilities were setting the vision and coaching on the entertaining part. We were so successful, I believe, because women could feel they were making a significant contribution without turning their lives upside down."

Both Mrs. Gonin and Mr. Delea work in marketing. She is program manager for corporate marketing operations at I.B.M. in Armonk, N.Y., and he is senior vice president and general manager of Digital Grit, an interactive Web marketing agency in Boonton.

For fun Mr. Delea zooms around on his Honda Magna, runs with the Hoboken Harriers and takes a share in a summer house in Sea Girt. His interest in philanthropy was piqued at age 15 when he made Christmas breakfast at a homeless shelter and thereafter found that all holidays felt different. At Guildford High School in Connecticut Mr. Delea played football and wrestled, gaining "critical exposure to the benefits of team dynamics," he said. It was there that he undertook his first group social initiative, an all-night-after-the-prom party, one of the first in the area.

At Syracuse University Mr. Delea tackled a complex and ugly social problem -- sexual assault. Bringing together the campus security force, the fraternity-sorority system as well as a feminist group, he organized a coalition that trained students to assist victims of assault and assigned them to nightlong shifts in the sorority and fraternity houses. The effort, the Blue Light Safe House Committee, was one of the toughest things he ever did, Mr. Delea said. "It was very hard to keep people motivated over a period of time," he said, "but we created phenomenal awareness and good feeling."

For Mrs. Gonin the path to philanthropy was not a straight one. She was born in Queens and graduated from Middlebury College. She met her husband at a Halloween costume party in San Francisco; he was dressed as a Chinese woman and she as Dolly Parton. Her organizational skills were honed on book groups and wine clubs, and it was not until her sister-in-law's diagnosis of breast cancer that she felt the need to give back.

"My brother is an oncologist at Mass General and so naturally his wife received the very best care, and they live in a wonderfully supportive community that rallied around her," she said. "But I just kept thinking what about all those other women, the ones who don't know how to pay for it all or don't have anyone to take them to chemo. What about them?"

She started Womenade with the notion that the group would select a new charity to benefit each year.

"I am drawn to global and national issues for our group because I think the local ones are covered so well by the people of Mountain Lakes," she said.

The focus, however, has changed slightly this year in the Gonin household as the youngest son, Sebastian, 7, learned that he had Type 1 diabetes and now joins his father, Xavier, in receiving daily injections of insulin.

"I have really wrestled with the selection of a cause for Womenade this year and while this should never be about me, so many people have encouraged the selection of diabetes," Mrs. Gonin said, "so that's what we will do." Part of the new effort will emphasize the connection between diabetes and good diet and exercise.

As for P.W.P., it is gearing up for its first party in Manhattan, planning a splashy event on Feb. 6 to benefit the Police Athletic League. In contrast to Womenade, the vision for P.W.P. remains raising money for initiatives in the metropolitan area rather than national causes.

"For young professionals who are quite transient, it's important to make a personal connection to a town," Mr. Delea said. "If we choose local charities, people may get involved and that would be great."

Whatever differences they have in approach or philosophy, both groups have learned one truth about fund-raising: do not be afraid to ask for help.

"I can get the idea started, but I can't keep it rolling without other people," Mr. Delea said. "If you reach out, people will help you."

For her part, Mrs. Gonin said: "I learned this year that all you must do is tell people a good idea. A lot of people don't have the ideas, but they are willing to help and get involved."

**CAPTIONS:** Photos: Victoria Gonin, seated right, with her Womenade committee in Mountain Lakes. They have held a number of get-togethers to benefit a breast cancer foundation. (Photo by Nancy Wegard for The New York Times)(pg. 1); Scott Delea with partygoers (contributors) at his benefit Sept. 19 at the 10th and Willow Bar and Grill in Hoboken. Nadja Madon, left, and Denise Fay, middle. (Photo by Norman Y. Lono for The New York Times)(pg. 8)

