

AN AUCTION FOR THE BLIND

By Valerie Grimm

Have you experienced the pleasure of truly accommodating someone at an auction? Not just reserving a seat or putting up a lot by request, but slightly adjusting how you would normally conduct an auction to ensure the inclusion of everyone?

Recently Jim Sample was contacted by an organization to conduct a benefit auction at their state convention, and he realized he would have to figure out how to do just that. The benefit auction was for the Blind. The question of accommodation no longer was a mere courtesy, but crucial to the understanding, participation and enjoyment of the guests and client organization.

Oversized bid cards were donated with extra-large numbers for those with low vision and the auction staff. The corresponding bidder numbers were also added to the bid cards in Braille.

Guests who had not already registered were invited to signify their desire to participate by raising their hands. Event organizers went to their tables to assign their bidder numbers.

Late-arriving guests were escorted into the room by personal assistants, guide dogs or ringmen. Questions and requests ranged from concerns about

the layout of the room, front and back; occupancy of the tables; and the location of certain individuals.

Auction items varied and were available for preview and inspection, as you would normally expect. Event organizers filled in the details about items as requested one-on-one. A few items were geared toward convenience and included audible functions. Other items were meant specifically for the service dogs and their health and well-being. Many guide dogs were there, politely lying under the elegant tables with barely a nose peeking out from under the long white tablecloths.

The auction begins as any other. Jim's wit and charm sends laughter through the crowd as he sets the tone for an enjoyable evening and sets the bar for the other auctioneers that will follow. Those of us that have heard Jim's chant notice an additional layer, a new set of numbers added into the rhythm, corresponding to the current high bidder's number. It was determined early on that the bid card numbers would need to be utilized in the chant in order for the guests to know where the bid was taken, and Jim's good-natured ribbing and self-deprecating humor is appreciated as the late bidder bids again amid another round of laughs.

Meanwhile, auctioneers not currently selling were standing in as ringmen. They were catching bids, lending a bit of clarity for a bidder who was

suddenly out and encouraging them to try again, reassuring the current high bidder that their bid was still in, and assisting with the usual first-time bidder confusions innocently compounded by the inability to see the visual clues usually offered by auctioneers. Additional details about auction lots are added in during the selling as auctioneers and ringmen fielded questions from the guests regarding size, shape, color and patterns.

As Jim concludes selling a portion of the night's auction items in a classic benefit auction style, Robb Burley picks up the pace a bit with an equally enjoyable cadence of his own and begins selling. A different rhythm, a bit more speed and another round of laughter as Robb acquired yet another "girlfriend" who has just outbid his last one!

It then becomes my turn to demonstrate "The Sound That Sells," with a decidedly feminine touch. I try to give my best rendition of a gala event auction night. The auction items click by one by one as the evening's end draws closer.

I wouldn't feel completely honest in sharing this experience with you if I don't come clean here. I must admit that somewhere between describing patterns and colors of a beautiful handmade afghan and repeating the amount bid while repeating the high bidder's three-digit number; and requesting the next increment from the back-up bidder by their three-digit number and

encouraging them to bid again; and - and - “Where was I?” (Sorry! A little inside joke for Trey. P.S. Thanks, Trey!!) Needless to say, I got a bit confused a time or two adding in the additional numbers!

And speaking of Trey, Trey Gallaway then treated the crowd to a wonderful, if not slower, version of his championship chant as he sells the remaining items of the evening.

As I continue to ring while Trey is selling, I can't help but notice that the guests are smiling, attentive, and a couple of the guests are rocking and swaying in time to the music that is Trey's chant. The look on their faces is pure enjoyment, and I realize that they are having as much fun as anyone else. Mission accomplished!

As the final item sells, the evening comes to an end. The attendees were all incredibly gracious and very complimentary. The organizers presented each of us with a certificate of appreciation and heart-felt thanks. A couple minor adjustments equaled a major good time!!