



SUMMER FUND-RAISING IN THE VALLEY



ELAINE HONIG

Leading the Fund Raising Realm

By Fran Endicott Miller

Elaine Honig never planned to become a leader in the fund-raising field. The St. Helena resident and self-described 'serial entrepreneur' serendipitously fell into the role – one that she clearly was meant to play. After first earning her business stripes in the real estate game and spending two decades as creative director for Honig Winery and Vineyard, she found her true calling as founder and president of Wine Women & Shoes (WW&S), and now its parent company Studio 4forty. Over the past 12 years, Honig has helped non-profits nationally and internationally raise more than \$50 million.

Honig's philanthropic talents were revealed several years ago when she staged a novel and highly successful fund-raising event for a Napa non-profit for which she served as a board member. Rather than the traditional and rote pairing of wine and food, Honig added a twist that proved to be irresistible – the pairing of wine and fashion; specifically shoes. The engaging

and remarkably profitable event resulted in others clamoring for her successful recipe. Thus, WW&S became more than an unconventional affair with feminine flair; it became a brand.

To date, Honig and her talented WW&S team have staged more than 300 events featuring an inspired formula that doubles as a marketing opportunity for Napa Valley wines. "It's a total win-win," says Honig. Organizations that hire her receive how-to strategies and proven fund-raising formulas, a full suite of services to support and ensure success, graphic and web designers, fund-raising and event planning professionals, and wine procurement experts. WW&S also ensures exclusivity within a metro area. Assigned to each event is a project manager who provides management strategies, budget consultation, assists with venue selection and sponsorship development, and ultimately attends and helps manage the actual event.

The wine procurement facet of the WW&S collection of services is key. Clients receive up to 15 cases of donated wine from

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six wine brands, each underwriting their own travel expenses to pour at the events. One such partner is the charismatic Jean-Charles Boisset and his Boisset Collection. "We have been delighted to participate with WW&S and feel honored to bring more women and style into the wine world by creating the most amazing pairings of wine and fashion," says Boisset. "Elaine is an exceptional and visionary lady who has marvelously understood the essence of the wine world and brought excitement, energy, sophistication, and style to the causes that WW&S supports."

Lauren Blackketter, board president for the Midland Rape Crisis and Children's Advocacy Center in Midland, Texas, has utilized the expertise of WW&S for the past four years. "Since we've worked with WW&S, our event has grown so much that we now only hold one fundraiser each year instead of two or three," she says. "Beyond the increase in donations though, this event has helped us spread our mission and reach more people in our community, people who before may not have known who we were or what we did. Elaine and her team really strive to understand your mission, ask questions about your organization, and learn about your community and donor base to help make the best decisions for your market. And, the team cares deeply about the causes with which they partner."

"Elaine has something going for her that more people need," says good friend Congressman Mike Thompson. "She's very committed. When she signs-on to oversee an event, it's more than business; it's a commitment to helping people help other people. It speaks so highly of her that not only is she great at her job, she does it for the right reasons."

While WW&S certainly doesn't exclude male attendees, admittedly the focus is on women which is why Honig recently

introduced a new fund-raising event series, Farm to Table(aux) in hopes of appealing to a wider audience by playfully marrying the farm-to-table culinary movement with an edgy interpretation of Tableaux Vivants (living pictures) performance art. The first Farm to Table(aux) event, held in Bakersfield last fall, earned \$240,000 for the Boys and Girls Club of Kern County.

Despite her fund-raising successes and the increasing national notoriety of WW&S and Farm to Table(aux), Honig prefers to fly slightly under the radar. "I'm completely content swimming my laps and walking my scruffy rescue dogs," she laughs. Typically, she cares for two pups at a time, and has fostered more than 37 over the past five years. She has served on the boards of several Napa Valley agricultural and land trusts, is currently on the board of the di Rosa art center, and has been honored as an Outstanding Woman in Agriculture. She claims she's happiest when she's in a museum, and she hopes to one day take a European sabbatical in order to immerse herself in the study of art history.

But if her goal of taking WW&S from 65 events annually to 100 is realized, travel plans may have to wait. And for those who know and love Honig, that's fine with them, as her absence would clearly be missed. "She's just a great person," says Congressman Thompson. "And she's persuasive too! She once talked me into participating in a special auction lot where I cooked dinner for a small group. I gladly agreed, and of course it turned out to be great fun. Most everything Elaine touches turns to fun."

Adds Boisset, "Doing well for the community while tapping the dynamic energy of women, and galvanizing fun, fashion and wine...Elaine is living the ultimate dream." NVL