

APRIL 20, 2014

» A Red Apple Shakes the Money Tree

15th Annual "Signs of Spring" Gala for The Learning Center for the Deaf in Framingham, MA
Sunday April 13, 2014
5PM - 9 PM
Waltham Westin-Boston Hotel, Waltham, MA
April 13, 2014

I was a guest of my good friend Christopher Huggins, one of the founders of the world class Learning Center for the Deaf in Framingham, MA, when I witnessed the coolest bit of auctioneering I've ever seen. When spending money becomes entertaining, Sherry Truhlar is in the house

Want a crackerjack auctioneer to jump start fund raising for your non-profit organization? Hire Sherry Truhlar. The engaging woman is a two-fer. She has the gift of gab and the gavel.

I realized a pro was working the house when I watched Sherry cap the bids for the silent auction that preceded the 15th annual "Signs of Spring" Gala dinner for The Learning Center for the Deaf, the most highly regarded school for the deaf in the country, perhaps the world. A robust, auburn-haired, 6' tall woman with an outsized presence and wearing a stunning teal-colored dress, she commands the attention of over 200 guests who are feasting on the tasty hors d'oeuvres in a reception area in the toney Waltham Westin-Boston in Waltham, MA.

Standing in front of the silent auction item she is about to close, her last-minute encouragement corrals several higher bids before she proclaims, "Going once...going twice...SOLD!" And thumps her palm on the table on which the item had been featured. After half hour of table thumping, Sherry has established her presence, gotten a sense of the room and primed the pump. We are ushered into the expansive dining room.

About three forkfuls after we begin eating our boneless chicken or arctic char, Sherry Truhlar, benefit auctioneer and head of Red Apple Auctions, introduces herself. Oh, did I mention this fund-raiser was for a school for the deaf? Everything that Sherry and every speaker said is communicated to the audience by interpreters using American Sign Language and projected onto screens behind the dais.



With disarmingly humorous patter, she makes it easy for you to part with your hard earned money, even if you're a guest with little attachment to the organization. "The purpose of a gala is for you to spend a chunk of money for a good cause for something you didn't think you really needed," Sherry cheerfully chirps as she's getting us warmed up to hoist our bid cards during dinner. This kind of fiscal foreplay sets the tone.

Money is a touchy subject. Baldly asking people to part with it and watching them enjoy doing it is a fine art and a smooth science. Sherry is part MC, part entertainer, who never loses sight of her goal. When she begins the bidding with rousing rat-a-tat auctioneer patter, we snap to attention. During the next hour, Sherry deftly controls the rate of her auctioneer patter, keeps the energy level in the room humming, and engages in comic repartee with the bidders. "It's only money, it'll grow back!" she playfully exhorts when a few bids reach four figures.

Why's this working? Because Sherry Truhlar connects. She's funny, engaging, has a trapeze artist's awareness of the space in which she's working and a keen sense of timing. If something's working, she hits it from different angles until she finds another hook. Like that trapeze artist, she's working hard and it looks like she's having fun. So are we.

Between entrée and dessert, I witness her raise \$135,000. "This exceeded our expectations. It was one of the top three Gala totals in our history, the other two being when a longtime executive director and a longstanding board chair were honored," says Shelley Reese, Chief Advancement Officer at The Learning Center for the Deaf.

When everyone leaves with a smiles on their faces and many of them with their credit cards slimmed down, you know you've been to a successful gala. You've had a grand evening being entertained by one consummate, confident, spark plug of an auctioneer. And you feel good about the money you just parted with.

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The Honoree this year is Dr. Robert Hoffmeister, the Director for the Center for Research and Training at The Learning Center for Deaf Children.

Fuzzy iPhone photo - Paul A. Tamburello, Jr.

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comments



at one time when i was working as an assistant director in a well known l.a. stage venue, we worked with Deaf West, a theater company that does fabulous productions with totally deaf, partially deaf and some hearing actors.....they did romeo and juliet set in a circus..... it is amazing, it's a whole other world. another society. deaf folks have a true society we know nothing about. i was blown away.

Posted by: M.M. | April 21, 2014 at 07:06 PM



Paul, this is an awesome post! I'm incredibly flattered that you took the time to write this. I must immediately share it with dear ol' Mom.

And to think that there I was -- at the auction talking to you -- thinking, "This guest is asking me all these questions about auctions and can't he see I've got WORK to do?!"

Ha!

Had I only known, I would have delayed the silent auction closing to chat with you further. (Well, not "really" .. but you get my drift.)

Anyway, thank you for this post, and much appreciation for making the trek out to support TLC. They are a great group of people, aren't they? I met several guests who have no personal connection with the school but have been exposed to various folks over the years and felt compelled to attend and support the cause just because -- as we say -- the school has "good people."

Should you need it, feel free to drop by www.RedAppleAuctions.com for any further benefit auction information. That's where I hang out. :)

Posted by: Sherry Truhlar | April 24, 2014 at 11:55 PM

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