

# 1,200 jam fund-raising conference

## Civic Auditorium event energizes nonprofit managers

BY BOB ORSER

In a year that has been downright stinky for Bay Area nonprofits, more than 1,200 fund developers inhaled a big breath of fresh air at Fundraising Day 2003 held June 10 at Bill Graham Civic Auditorium.

Nonprofits not only face the fact that the economy is tanking and state and local governments are running out of funds, but public confidence in the nonprofit sector is at an all-time low, especially locally, after some very negative nonprofit news recently:

The James Irvine Foundation's former CEO was paid a whopping \$717,000 even as the giant foundation lost a quarter of its assets, laid off 20% of its staff and reduced its annual grant-making by \$20 million.

Goodwill Industries of Santa Clara County's former president was indicted on federal charges, alleging he stole \$804,602 over eight years, wiring money intended for training disabled people into his own European pension accounts.

PipeVine, a San Francisco nonprofit set up by the United Way of the Bay Area, suddenly closed because it had siphoned off millions that it was supposed to pass on to designated charities.

The nonprofit sector may seem to be rotating from the top down, but Fundraising Day's co-sponsors, the Association of Fundraising Professionals Golden Gate chapter, the Bay Area's largest association of professional fundraisers, and Development Executives Roundtable, tried to bring the sweet smell of success back to local philanthropy.

"Faith is confidence in things unseen. The more they try to push us down, the harder we push back," opined Kim Klein, one of the speakers and founder of the Grassroots Fundraising Journal.

The Fundraising Day numbers were dazzling:

PHOTOS BY CARL ANGEL



**Michelle Forté** of the George Mark Children's House praised the research workshop.

The one-day event was sold out at 1,277 participants, ranking it among the largest fund-raising conferences in the country. It featured 88 workshops and 96 half-hour one-on-one appointments with fund-raising pros, who volunteered their time and expertise. There were 151 luncheon roundtable discussions on topics ranging from "working effectively with program staff" to "fundraising for animal groups."

A total of 289 people volunteered their time and expertise. Participants each paid \$125-\$250 to attend (though 150 went free on scholarships), and there were 36 exhibitors who paid to make their pitch. As planned, the event broke even.

The tone for the conference was set early by a panel at the opening session entitled "Redefining Philanthropy—There's Room for Everyone."

Michael Cortés, director of the Institute for Nonprofit Organization Management, University of San Francisco, talked about the importance of recognizing that cultural traditions differ regarding fund-raising. He cited two studies on multicultural philanthropy his group has produced. Among the findings:

► First-generation Koreans give primarily to Korean ethnic organizations and Korean Protestant churches.

► Japanese readily give money and time because of their strong sense of doing their share toward community survival.

► Filipinos often volunteer their time to help civic or regional associations.

► African Americans prefer to give knowledge and skills to help individuals.

► Guatemalans are distrustful of most organizations, including nongovernmental organizations.

"We'd be wise to pay attention to these cultural differences as we become more and more a nonmajority society," Cortés said.

For nonprofits with wealthy contributors, Susan Freundlich, vice president of Philanthropic Partnerships and Communications, a program of the Women's Foundation, urged them to consider establishing donor circles. She explained that a donor circle is a small group of people with similar interests who pool their funds to support some part or project of an agency; the circle acts like a mini-foundation. Freundlich said the Women's Foundation donor circle on economic justice and development ended up giving away \$1.5 million.

The ever-entertaining Klein's main message to the participants was to pay greater attention to the most neglected donors, those who can give \$100-\$1,500 annually.

"Eighty percent of the money that's given in America each year is from families with combined incomes of \$60,000 or less," she pointed out.

Then it was on to a dizzying array

of workshops, ask-the-experts sessions, exhibitions, lunches, roundtables and a great deal of one-on-one networking.

But what did the participants get out of it? A week or so after the conference, I asked several of them if they had done anything different in their professional life as a result of the conference.

"The day really made me think positively about fund-raising possibilities," said Michele Forté, executive director of the George Mark Children's House in San Leandro that is scheduled to open in the fall as the nation's first freestanding children's hospice. "At a wonderful workshop on research, we discussed how to look for and set up a contract with a professional research consultant." Forté was interviewing major gift consultants the week after the conference and felt she had learned the appropriate questions to ask.

"I was surprised to learn about the cultural philanthropic differences. That was really insightful," said Leianne Lamb, cultural tourism manager for the San Jose Convention and Visitors Center. "I learned that, as a board member, I can be an effective fundraiser."

Deborah Michelle Sanders, executive director of the Sapling Project, a new San Francisco nonprofit that helps mentally ill people get jobs in technology, attended Klein's "Raising Money When Your Work Serves Low-Income Communities" workshop and learned that a grassroots group should think in terms of how much money it needs a month as opposed to a year. Get people to get into the habit of giving \$5-\$10 a month and it will increase greatly over time, Sanders said, and "Donate Now" should be all over your Web site.

"To top it off, she gave me a great idea about how to plan a fund-raising raffle, and we launched our own a week after Fundraising Day," Sanders said. ■

*Bob Orser, a.k.a. the Nonprofit Doctor, for the sixth straight year provided half-hour individual counseling sessions to Fundraising Day attendees.*



**Leianne Lamb** of the San Jose Convention and Visitors Center got a new perspective on fundraising.

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