



CORPORATE LAS VEGAS GIVES BACK TO THE ARTS COMMUNITY

BY CINDI R. MACIOLEK

This history of arts patronage is long and storied, dating back to pre-modern medieval and Renaissance Europe. From the ancient world onward, patronage of the arts was important in art history, and still is today. Although in current times, the nature of the benefactors has changed. Kings and popes no longer support, encourage, or finance an organization or individual. Now corporations have taken on the role.

And even through tough economic times like we've been experiencing for the last few years, good corporate citizens continue to share their good fortunes with others and in some pretty innovative ways. Whether it's holding art shows to showcase promising artists, giving grants to dance companies or donating musical instruments to high school students, several local corporations and entities have made it a mission to move the arts in our community forward.

PAINT THE TOWN

When Michael Stein was attending University of San Diego, he took art history courses that became the impetus for the Paint the Town event sponsored by his current law firm, Snell & Wilmer LLP.

"Not only did the courses instill in me an appreciation for art," Stein said, "but the professor also did a lot of generous things. When I had a chance to do something, I combined my love of art with the ability to give back to the community. We started the event in 2009 and it's been an amazing success."

With the support of his partners, Stein created Paint the Town, an annual spring event that supports both local artists and nonprofits. Up to seven artists are invited to show and sell their work at the firm's offices, with a percentage of the proceeds donated to the charities selected for that year. The 2009 charity recipients included Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southern Nevada, Boys & Girls Clubs of Las Vegas, and S.A.F.E. House. In 2010, Lance Armstrong Foundation (LIVESTRONG Foundation) and the American Cancer Society benefitted.

About 150 people attended the first event and 225 participated in the second. Stein hopes to expand that to 350 by 2012. "We have limited space and limited resources, but we want to make sure that each attendee has the means to share a portion of their disposable income with a charity," said Stein. "When you buy a piece of art at Paint the Town, you get exactly what you see, and the surety that your money has gone to a good cause. All the participants are professional artists who need to make a living. So, they receive a portion of the proceeds, and a percentage is donated. We get the best of their effort, yet pieces are generally priced below \$7,500."

The next event is slated for May 20, 2011. It's by invitation only, but if you're interested in participating contact Michael Stein at 702.784.5284 or Anita Beasley at 702.784.5315.

TAKING THE LEAD

If effervescence and passion could be bottled, you'd have the spirit of Bernard Gaddis, founder of the Las Vegas Contemporary Dance Theater (LVCDT). And, if this is how the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater began, Las Vegas is in for global prominence on the dance scene.

Gaddis spends five evenings a week performing in Cirque du Soleil's "Mystere," but the remainder of his time is filled with making plans for LVCDT.

"This is our fourth year and we're still trying to find money," said Gaddis. "IGT was the first grant we received. Now we're looking for more grants, and personal and corporate sponsors. Currently, the company is kept afloat by my paycheck and touring dates. We're a touring company. We want to take the name of Las Vegas around the world. We just sold out two theaters in Mexico. People were sleeping on the streets to get tickets for our performances."

IGT provided LVCDT with a \$10,000



Michael Stein and Jessica Lo are instrumental in organizing local art show Paint the Town, held every spring at the law offices of Snell & Wilmer. Photo - Dave Smith



Las Vegas Contemporary Dance Theater received a \$10,000 grant from IGT. Photo - Jason James Skinner

grant that was used to develop programming and to hire two apprentices. “Some of our employees were familiar with Bernard and his work,” said Chrissy Lane, IGT manager of legal administration and corporate contributions. “IGT is always looking for opportunities to contribute, especially when our employees are supporting something.”

Gaddis has big plans not only for his dance company, but for the Las Vegas arts community as well. He needs \$53 million to build his own facility housing a performance theater, a museum about dance and costume, and a library that rivals the Lincoln Center library for the performing arts.

“I want it to be downtown, right in the middle of Las Vegas. I believe in revitalizing downtown and connecting with all the communities. At some point, downtown will start to flourish. My dreams are bigger than just having a dance company. I want people to come to lectures and take master classes and know what’s going on in the performing arts.”

“This was a nice partnership,” said Lane. “His presentation was very professional and his numbers were in line. We were also impressed with his plans to involve the community.”

“We know the arts have been hard hit in this economy. But, Bernard is very passionate and committed. He eats, sleeps and breathes dance. If there’s anyone who can make this happen he can.”

“We have to get people to the theater to see us, to understand who we are and what we bring to the community,” said Gaddis. “I want it to be completely different that any other dance company. I want it to be bigger than Alvin Ailey. I want it to have its own voice, my voice.”

“In the next few years, I’m trying to raise enough money to keep the dancers that I have so they don’t have to work two or three jobs plus this. I want to make it possible that they can dedicate their lives to their dance and provide Las Vegas with the art the city deserves.”

In addition to arts programs, IGT also contributes to organizations that support education, children, and health and wellness. A contribution committee meets quarterly to determine where best to provide funds.

INSTRUMENTS OF CHANGE

When Ron Montoya saw the truck pull up in the parking lot of Valley High School, he knew one thing for sure: 100 more of



Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman joins Manilow as he donates a truckload of musical instruments to Valley High School. Photo - Denise Truscello, Wire Image



Legendary singer-songwriter Barry Manilow’s non-profit organization, the Manilow Music Project, put tens of thousands of dollars of musical instruments into the hands of 15 Clark County School District middle schools and high schools at a celebratory delivery and distribution event in October at Valley High School. Photo - Denise Truscello, Wire Image

his students would have their own musical instruments, thanks to entertainer Barry Manilow.

“The new schools get new instruments, but an older school like ours doesn’t,” said Montoya, principal at Valley High, built in 1965. “This donation was a first for the Clark County School District. We haven’t cut any music programs, but the budget for new instruments has been very limited. I now have 100 more students who can have their own for the school year. Another 500 instruments will be distributed to other schools in town.”

“Barry is a wonderful, regular guy who

just gave CCSD a \$500,000 donation,” continued Montoya. “I was really impressed with the way he talked to the kids and to me. He went above and beyond what he had to do. How many people like him give back to the community? Others don’t always give directly to the people in need. They give to a charity but not to the individuals. I think Barry ought to be given credit for that because that’s how to do it. He saw, met and shook hands with the people he gave the instruments to and I think that’s commendable.”

The Manilow Music Project (MMP) is part of the Manilow Fund for Health and Hope. It

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Our overall
philosophy
with charitable
contributions
is we want to give
where we see
results.
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In 2008, MGM Resorts Foundation donated all the Egyptian artifacts from the Luxor to the Las Vegas Natural History Museum. Valued at \$3 million dollars, it was the largest donation in the history of the museum, and they used the artifacts to create a wing featuring the cultures of Egypt.

began in the Coachella Valley, California area with a half million dollars in donations to 21 schools. Funds are raised through sponsorship, as well as through Platinum Experience ticket sales. Each Friday, 10 packages are sold for front row seats, a pre-show champagne reception, meet and greet, a photo with Manilow and an autographed program. All proceeds from the sale of those tickets go directly to the MMP.

New and gently used instruments are also accepted as donations. Manilow has run a special at Paris Las Vegas, where he is a headliner, which solicits instruments in exchange for a free ticket to his show.

“The Manilow Music Project was created a couple of years ago,” said John Adams of the Manilow Music Project. “Barry heard about the budget cuts and got some friends together to figure out what could be done. MMP was born.

“Barry has always wanted to give back because Las Vegas has been so kind,” added Adams. “With the economy and cuts in the school district, we wanted to make this happen. The first 600 instruments were just a start. We plan to continue to donate from here on.

“We encourage everyone to clean out their closets and garages and donate any instruments they can,” continued Adams. “People can also make a financial donation through the site www.manilowmusicproject.org. Right now our concentration is on getting instruments into students’ hands.”

LENDING A HELPING HAND

The largest presence on the Las Vegas Strip is also a big contributor to the communities across the country where it operates. Working from a three-pronged philosophy of giving that includes a corporate charitable giving program, the MGM Resorts Foundation which is a workplace giving program, and an employee volunteer program, MGM Resorts impacts a number of causes near and dear to our city, many relating to the arts.

The company is one of the founding sponsors of the Smith Center for the Performing Arts, which required a minimum \$1 million dollar donation. They also give regularly to the Las Vegas Natural History Museum. In 2008, all the Egyptian artifacts from the Luxor were donated to LVNHM, valued at \$3 million dollars. This was the largest donation in the history of the museum, and they used the artifacts to create a wing featuring the cultures of Egypt. MGM Resorts also supports the Nevada Ballet Theatre and the Lied Children’s Discovery Museum.

With regard to education, MGM Resorts currently supports seven CCSD empowerment schools, each school is provided with \$50,000 per year for a three-year commitment. In addition, MGM Resorts provides \$15,000 per school in in-kind donations annually.

“Our employees are involved in this program as well,” said Jocelyn Bluitt-Fisher, MGM Resorts director of corporate philanthropy and community affairs, of the empowerment schools. “They act as mentors, trainers and even

stuff backpacks. We host staff development days on our properties and bring in students on field trips to take advantage of our amenities. Some students have never even been out of their neighborhoods. The hands-on experience will stick with the student for a lifetime.”

MGM Resorts Foundation is a workplace giving program where each individual employee can donate via payroll deduction to any organization that he or she chooses. Employees can also make cash donations, and fundraisers such as basketball tournaments and employee talent shows are held year-round at the properties. As an example, the foundation’s annual employee walk-a-thon raised more than \$40,000 this year. About 800 to 900 community agencies benefit from the donations per month.

“We encourage our employees to give where their passion is, but the bigger goal is what we can do when we all come together,” said Bluitt-Fisher. “This year, 43 percent of our 62,000 employees are participating. Our employees understand the importance of giving back. It’s 100 percent employee-run and MGM Resorts picks up 100 percent of the administrative costs.” The foundation also supports the Community Grants Fund where nonprofits can apply for grants up to \$65,000.

“Our overall philosophy with charitable contributions is we want to give where we see results,” said Bluitt-Fisher. “We want to know that what we provide is truly making a difference in the community.” □