**Gala Committee Meeting Minutes
April 6, 2017, 8:30a.m.**

**Attendees:** Erum Randhawa, Carol McCabe, Pam Verney, Kristen Marcroft, Meghan Freed, Ed Bryant, Barbara Aaron, Paige Abrams, Justine Rakich-Kelly, Deb Shulansky, Abby Woodhouse

**INTRODUCTIONS & HOUSEKEEPING**

* The meeting began with introductions from each committee member. We have several new committee members joining us, including Paige, Deb, Abby, Pam, Carol, Meghan, and Kristen.
* Committee members were provided binders for all of the gala information and handouts. Contact information is included. Any changes to contact information should be emailed to Paige.
* Paige shared with committee the addition of an Honorary Committee this year. Members include Sandra Gersten, Pam Magnano, Deb Ruel and Maureen Zavatone. She also announced this year’s event will not honor an individual(s).

**2016 GALA RECAP**

* Paige gave an overview of last year’s event for members who didn’t attend last year or needed a refresher on the event. The Gala was held at the Hartford Golf Club on a Friday night from 5:30-8:30 PM. Registration, silent auction, and the Teddy Bear Giving Tree were located in the lobby. We had dinner and dessert in addition to a beer, wine, and soda bar. The program included a live auction and paddle raise.
* General feedback from the committee about last year’s event:
	+ The program was too long.
	+ The paddle raise could have been more successful. The auctioneer went off-script and there was confusion on what guests were bidding on.

**VENUES AND DATES**

* The date for the gala is Thursday, November 30th. Barbara asked if we might be able to host it on Friday, December 1st. The general consensus among the committee was Fridays were better, as guests can relax a bit more because it falls on a weekend. Justine noted that we originally picked that date because it was the only one that worked for The Bushnell. However, since we’ve honed in on Delamar as a venue, we may be able to change the date.
* Paige announced that we have two venue prospects. The one we prefer is Delamar in West Hartford. They are willing to work with us, but waiting on clarity for some details from. We want rebrand the event by using a new venue. Committee members were excited about the prospect of the Delmar. The reception space is more spacious than The Bushnell’s reception space. Erum brought up past issues with parking for the event, and Paige said that she will work with the Delamar’s contracted valet service to get donated services or discounts. There is ample parking in Blue Back Square and the garages.
* Barbara loves the idea of people going into the theater at The Bushnell, maybe getting a kids choir, and not having any speeches. By going into a theater it will make people pay attention. Justine mentioned that a friend had gone to a gala there and had said that the theater atmosphere was great for paying attention, but that event had over 500 people. Our event would only fill up half the orchestra and would make it feel empty and not well-attended. Meghan said that she was at the same event, and although it was effective in getting attention, people fell asleep and were resentful of the restrictive atmosphere.

**TICKET PRICES**

* Last year, tickets were $140. This year the ticket price will increase to $150. Committee agrees that this sounds fair. There was a previous proposal to raise ticket to $175…too steep of an increase.
* Our goal is to have upwards of 325 people in attendance. Last year we dipped below 300. A question was raised about why attendance dipped? Justine said it might be because of the lack of food at the previous year’s event. Ed Bryant mentioned that it may be because a judge had been honored in 2014, which spiked attendance.

**NAME CHANGE**

* Paige noted that with our change in venue and revamp of the Gala, we’d like to change the name from “Imagine” to something else. We’re looking for something that grabs people’s attention and makes them want to attend. Ed noted that many people go to support CLC and don’t care about the name, so keeping the name might be okay.
* The committee brainstormed and came up with the following options:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Working on a Dream | Fill Our House With Love | Children Are Our Future |
| Celebrating Children | Inspire Children | Champions for Children |
| Empower | Celebrate Children | Elevate |
| Come Fly With Us | Reaching for the Stars | Make a Difference |

The most popular suggestions were: Celebrate Children and Champions for Children.

**AUCTION**

* There’s a tab in each binder that includes last year’s auction list, a list of details about the items, a draft auction letter, and a draft auction form.
* The committee noted that last year’s live auction didn’t do very well because the auctioneer went off-script. Meghan and Kristen suggested Floyd Green for this year and said that he’s a lot of fun. Barbara also suggested Gary Katz.
* Last year we had a tight live auction, a large silent auction, and the Teddy Bear Giving Tree. The Giving Tree did very well—do we want to keep it again this year or do something else?
* Paige brought up the idea of surprise boxes, where individuals would pay between $50 and $100 to get a “surprise” box of an auction item.
* The idea of a wine pull was brought up—the general consensus was very positive about the idea. Justine said that we had talked about doing one last year but it just didn’t come together in time. Paige suggested if we do a wine pull, we should have a few exciting bottles in the mix. She also cautioned not to saturate the event by having our hands out at every corner asking for money.
* Barbara mentioned having all of the auction items online ahead of time for viewing and/or bidding. Mobile bidding was also brought up, but isn’t cost-effective for smaller organizations like CLC.
* Paige noted that we will start soliciting auction items as soon as possible. Auction items will also be listed in the program book. It would be good to push out information on what will be up for auction ahead of time to the email addresses of attendees. Committee members should send a list of their prospects for auction items to Paige, who will create a master list so that one person is assigned to each prospect.

**SPONSORS**

* Justine announced that Hartford Evergreen Lodge 88 has committed $20,000 to be our lead sponsor. They are friends of the Gerstens. She noted that the video honoring the Gerstens last year gave CLC an opportunity to connect with their friends and family, leading to securing this sponsorship.
* Paige noted that our goal is to build our list of prospects and find new money. Sponsorships were down last year and we fell short by $30,000. If the Delamar is chosen as our venue, they’ll be our Venue Sponsor.
* There is a list in the binders of last year’s sponsors matched up with individuals we think could reach out to them again.
* A quick brainstorm of prospects included:
	+ Deb noted that organizations we already have (grant) support from often have separate event sponsorships. She will research these opportunities.
	+ Erum mentioned that Maureen Zavatone knows Beth Zapata, who may be able to get BNY to sponsor. Beth’s husband Mike also might be able to get UTC. Paige noted that she knows Beth d may be able to reach out to her.
	+ Barbara said that Family Law Software may be a prospect. She doesn’t know the person in charge there, Dan Cain, but probably knows someone who can reach out to him.
	+ Barbara asked if Justine could ask Scott, a former board member, to approach Travelers. Justine said that she’s tried before but he hasn’t been able to do anything.
	+ Erum asked about Robinson & Cole. Justine says that they “understand our position and will support CLC” but haven’t followed through.
	+ Pam asked if anyone had connections to any insurance companies. Paige may be able to reach out to Travelers. Pam said that many have foundations. Paige said she can reach out to Bank of America.
	+ Meghan mentioned Hartford Foundation for Public Giving’s donor-directed funds. Abby said that they’re already in that pool for program support and that she didn’t think they accepted event sponsorship requests
	+ Paige asked if anyone had connections with hospitals and said she could reach out to St. Francis. Barbara said that Paddi may be good for this type of outreach.
	+ Pam asked if board members help with this sponsor prospect process. Justine said that when they have a robust list of prospects, she’ll present it to the board to find connections.
	+ Erum said that Pullman & Comley has been growing their family law practice and may be a good prospect for a larger sponsorship, as they only gave $1,000 last year. Barbara suggested sending a letter from Justine to recognize their growth and ask if we can count on them for a $5,000 sponsorship. Meghan Sweeny Burns is back on the committee and may be able to help. Barbara noted that from any big firms we should not expect any less than $5,000. Barbara mentioned that Brian Woolf might be a sponsor prospect.

**INVITATIONS AND VIDEO**

* The *Save the Date* will go out by the end of May. Abby will start working on invitation designs once details are firm.
* Deb asked if we could solicit without knowing the location. Paige said we can rework the letter. Along with the minutes, she’ll send out auction forms, the auction letter, and sponsorship information.
* We’re looking to create a video for the Gala done pro-bono. Barbara suggested we talk to Laura Renfro—she knows someone who did a video for Barbara’s collaborative and was great. Deb suggested asking art school students for their pro bono services.

**CLOSING**

* The committee couldn’t come to a consensus on when to meet next, although Paige said it was important to meet at some point during the first two weeks of May. She will send out an email with a date or asking for more input.

**ACTION STEPS**

**ENTIRE COMMITTEE:**

* Review contact information. Email corrections to Paige.
* Review 2016 live and silent auction list for businesses not listed. Email Paige your auction solicitation list. These should be businesses you have a relationship with and/or a business that you believe may donate an item/service/experience.
* Review 2016 sponsor list. If you are assigned to renew a sponsor, confirm you will renew once sponsorship materials are final.
* Review 2017 corporate sponsorship prospect list. Email Paige your sponsor prospects along with who might be able to “open the door” and/or connect us.

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

* Paige to reach out to Bank of America.

• Deb to explore event sponsorship grant opportunities.

• Paige to follow up with Maureen regarding BNY sponsorship and UTC (thru Beth Zapata’s husband)

• Barbara to reach out to person who knows Dan Cain, re: Family Law Software.

• Paige to follow up with Paddi regarding hospitals as corporate sponsor prospects.

• Justine to ask Board of Directors to help with sponsor prospects.

• Barbara to reach out to Brian Woolf as a sponsor prospect.

• Justine? Meghan? Barbara? - determine who might reach out to Pullman & Comley.

**NEXT MEETING DATE**

* Tuesday, May 9, 2017, 4:30pm at Children’s Law Center