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Glorietta Auction Goes Online

By T.R. Audley



Photo provided

January marks the home stretch for grade schools that are planning spring auctions. In years past, funds raised might have transformed playground structures or upgraded computer labs. This year, however, with state education budget cuts looming, there may be more fundamental demands for auction dollars.

With these higher stakes and potentially less dispensable income in the pockets of school families, auction committees are pressed to try new approaches. One school has turned to technology for help. On January 21st, Orinda's Glorietta School began their auction online and they're already reaping a reward. "In the first 5 days, we closed bidding on items," reports Catherine Pines, Glorietta's auction chair. Prior to event planning last year, Pines stumbled upon a New York Times article about BiddingForGood.com, an online auction site for non-profits. "You go on the website, browse for a charity and then see what they have for sale," says Pines.

Online presales have thus far included "time sensitive" and "buy now" items. Also posted are out-of-state items such as tickets to the US Open in New York. "Our family has emailed friends in New York so they can bid as well," says Pines.

cMarket, the company that operates BiddingForGood.com, offers charities a downloadable kit to start their auction. The site also offers specific tips for K-12 schools on how to market an online auction. "It's a good fit for schools because it easily brings together alumnae, extended family and the community who want to support their local school," says Gina Porcaro of cMarket. So why aren't more schools doing it?

"It's new," says Sandy Preto, a parent at Los Perales School in Moraga, who used the site for their auction last year, "and it's hard to judge the impact, I just know it was necessary." Last year's physical auction site for Los Perales School was too small to display all the items for sale. The story is similar for Glorietta School this year. Out of the over 300 families at Glorietta School, only 170 can attend the auction night due to space limitations. "It's first come, first served," says Pines

about ticket sales. "So the online auction is even more important this year to give everyone a chance to participate."

While hopefully allowing for wider family participation, local auction chairs have discovered another perk of auctioning online. "It creates a sense of community at school and a buzz before the auction night," Preto and Pines agree. Since the site allows bidders to see the email user names of those bidding against them, Pines reports "parents are talking and joking with each other at school about who is winning items. It's fun!" Glorietta School's online auction will run through February 18, 2009 at BiddingForGood.com.

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