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New Crowdfunding Trend Expands in Lamorinda

By Sophie Braccini



Dana Ostomel and Diana Obrand fine tune the MEF crowdfunding campaign.

Photo Sophie Braccini

It is not surprising that the financing industry slated to raise more than \$5 billion this year is well represented in Lamorinda. Crowdfunding, a mechanism used to fund a project or venture by raising small amounts of money from a large number of people typically via the Internet, was first started in 1997 to fund a British rock band's reunion tour. It is now empowering local businesses and non-profit ventures as well.

For the first time in its history the Moraga Education Foundation is using crowdfunding to reach out to the extended community. "The idea is to ask for support from distant relatives or friends who want to make a 'gift of education' for a student this holiday season," explains MEF communications chair Diana Obrand. "It is a convenient way for friends and relatives who are far away, or for Campolindo alums, to contribute to the programs we fund."

In addition to funding the arts, MEF supports additional classes and after school tutoring at Campolindo High School, K-8 teachers, Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School electives, reading tutors, science aides and more. The foundation is using the crowdfunding platform, Deposit a Gift, created by 1995 Campolindo graduate Dana Ostomel, to raise \$10,000 – only a fraction of the \$2.2 million the foundation is seeking to raise this school year.

Deposit a Gift has handled all kinds of fundraising projects, from the Katrina relief effort to helping parents of premature babies, and Ostomel often gets comments from people regarding the marketing efforts they have to make to be successful. "One of the preemies' grandmothers told me she felt this is like a job; she has to think about when to post on Face-

book, when to send emails, and at what frequency," says Ostomel, whose company has been working in the fundraising field for four years. She recommends contacting people two to three times the first week via email and posting updates on social media.

"A gift is a possibility, but it is not mandatory. What is important to any fundraising project is to have a compelling story that is well told, and to think about the marketing campaign before the launch," Ostomel says. "People have to feel that they are part of the story, part of the journey." She also recommends circulating the site to the inner circle of supporters before the launch so the campaign does not start with a zero balance. "Giving begets giving," she adds.

A local campaign that finished with a bang and far surpassed its target was Acalanes High School junior Will Goldie's Eagle Scout project that sent computers to Afghanistan in partnership with Trust in Education and Raspberry Pi, the computer manufacturer.

The young man's success can be attributed to the multiple partnerships he set in place, with each group echoing his marketing efforts. "For my Eagle Scout project I wanted to work with the Raspberry Pi computers," says Goldie. "They have a neat concept for a computer – a simple small box that you connect to the keyboard, the screen, the memory, the drives and everything else you need. I also wanted to work with Trust in Education and saw a perfect opportunity to raise money, develop the software, buy all the components, assemble the computers and send them to the Afghan school Bud (McKenzie) is supporting."

The group, which had an initial goal of \$2,500, raised \$10,000 through an Indiegogo.com platform. The Raspberry Pi Foundation doubled the gift. Goldie has started shipping the computers and is using the additional money to build more units and improve the network access within the Afghan school.

Crowdfunding is also being used locally to launch business ventures. Orinda mom Stephanie Tomasco recently began using the crowdfunding platform Kickstarter to gain backers for her new business, Be Real Food, which produces kid-friendly, healthy, gluten-free bars. Because gluten sensitivity runs in her family, and because she wanted to control the amount of sugar her daughter was getting every day, Tomasco decided to create a bar that most kids would love, but that would incorporate only quality ingredients she wanted for her daughter. After she enrolled neighborhood kids to taste different formulas and decided what was appealing to young palates, she began to look for additional funds to ramp up her production. She lined up a co-packer to handle the production, a broker to put the bar in stores, and is using crowdfunding to gain backers for the product. "The idea is that people invest a certain amount of money with us and we will send bars to our backers in January as a thank you," explained Tomasco. So far, she has raised over half of her \$20,000 goal; her campaign will run until Dec. 21 and can be found at <http://kck.st/HRbmkK>.

The MEF crowdfunding campaign will run until the end of the year, it can be accessed at <http://mefgiftofeducation.mydagsite.com>. Goldie has set up a site to update his supporters at <http://educationpi.squarespace.com>.

Orinda Author Discusses Sequel at Orinda Books

By Lou Fancher



Tamara Ireland Stone Photo provided

Orinda author Tamara Ireland Stone catapulted onto the young adult fiction scene in 2012 with "Time Between Us," her debut novel about young romance set against a time-travel landscape. Scheduled to appear at Orinda Books Dec. 7, Stone will discuss and sign copies of the recently-released sequel companion book, "Time After Time" (Disney-Hyperion, Oct. 2013).

Stone's first book introduced readers to Anna, an Evanston, Ill., 16-year-old who chases her travel dreams by running track, hoping a college scholarship will be her magic carpet out of town. It's 1995 and Anna feels stuck, until one day when she meets Bennett, a boy she's fated to know but never supposed to meet. Sound edgy? Well, it almost is, be-

cause Bennett actually lives in San Francisco – in 2012. He time travels into Anna's life from the land of cell phones and Coldplay, long after pay phones and annual Michael Jackson hits have become mere memories.

As their chemistry swirls into a heady, young-love elixir, Bennett realizes time warps' impending complications and attempts to stay away. Unable to resist, he returns multiple times: looking for his sister, Brooke, who he lost in 1994, whisking Anna off to tiny islands in Thailand or to Paris, and getting "knocked back" to 2012 whenever he comes close to encountering his (1995) baby-self.

In one complicated "do over" – Bennett can bounce back hours or days within the 1995 frame – they avert a devastating car accident that threatens to end the life of Anna's best friend, Emma. Their traveling causes residual severe nausea and desperate thirst, but more, playing with fate leads both characters to wrestle with each other and the ethical consequences of time travel.

Stone handles the push of infatuation with skill, capturing the gush of a young teen's thoughts and words without derogatory, adult shadings. Anna's voice, as narrator, is convincing, especially in the mix of feelings she has for Emma, when her long-time friend becomes involved with Anna's almost-love-interest, Justin. The plot tangles slightly, and Stone

drops a major plot line (the sister) entirely, but her first book's crisp action and sweet romantic angle have translated into its being printed in over 20 countries and optioned for film by CBS Films.

"Time After Time" switches the narrative to Bennett's viewpoint, allowing readers to climb inside his thoughts as he and Anna fight to find consistency between their surreal calendars. Bennett engages in more "do overs" and Bay Area readers will recognize local stories. (A father and two children on bicycles, struck by a speeding driver parallels the tragic deaths of Soliaman Nuri and his daughters in Concord in 2012.) Bennett's headaches escalate into prolonged nose bleeds and near blackouts. ... continued on next page



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