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Safeway eScrip Changes Spark School Fundraising Concerns

Oscar night party planned to drum up donations

By Laurie Snyder

Miramonte Parents Club presents
Ladies Night at the Oscars
J. Colleen Boutique
Sunday March 2, 2014
5:00 - 8:30 pm

Normally the purview of acclaimed actors during Academy Awards season, nausea and nail biting have also become habits du jour for members of the Miramonte High School Parent Club (MHSPC). It all started in October when the normally upbeat group learned that actions by a local corporation had the potential to rip through MHSPC's unsinkable fundraising machine faster than James Cameron's CGI-generated iceberg chewed through the Titanic.

Historically, MHSPC has relied on revenues generated from Safeway's involvement with Electronic Script Incorporated, the California corporation which launched eScrip in 1999 to help businesses support kid-focused community groups. Today, schools typically earn from 1 to 4 percent of qualifying Safeway purchases.

The 2013-14 take for MHSPC was expected to be \$25,000. But on Nov. 1, Safeway changed the rules.

Credit card purchases no longer earn eScrip. Only items bought with cash, debit card, check, SmartCheck, WIC, SNAP/CalFresh, or Safeway Gift Cards still qualify.

"We were notified of this change Oct. 3, 2013 after our budget was set for the school year," said Miramonte High School Parent Club member Sharon Hillstrom. "For many parents, buying groceries with a credit card was a two-for-one benefit, helping their child's school and earning airline miles."

Safeway clearly believes it has taken a positive step. In the Nov. 18 San Francisco Business Times, Safeway spokesperson Teena Massingill said the grocery giant made the change while also lifting its \$25,000 per school donation cap – a decision she said would be popular with active school supporters. "Ours is a business with razor-thin profit margins. It is difficult to make a donation from a sale when we also incur a high credit-

card-transaction fee on that sale."

According to figures provided by MHSPC, the impact is clear. Purchases plummeted from \$676,470 in October to \$344,240 in November – after Safeway's new policy took effect. Hillstrom worries MHSPC won't meet its goal, as does MHSPC fundraising vice president, Jackie Moreau. "Parent and school groups in Lamorinda, the East Bay and San Francisco all have similar concerns as eScrip has been their biggest source of income."

"Because I want to help the school and continue to earn airline miles, I'm now buying gift cards with my credit card, then paying for my groceries with the gift cards," said Sharon Noble. And MHSPC is also planning an exciting event to head off any shortfall from the eScrip shift.

"Ladies Night at the Oscars" will give Bay Area film fans a chance "to walk the red carpet and enjoy an evening of delicious catered appetizers, wine and champagne while the Oscars live stream on a huge screen," said Hillstrom. Fabulous raffle prizes will also be up for grabs.

Start helping your best gal pal squeeze into her Spanx now. The event will be held Sunday, March 2 from 5 to 8:30 p.m. at the J Colleen Boutique, 261 Lafayette Circle, Lafayette. Tickets are available for purchase through: <https://miramonte.revtrak.net/ek9.asp>.

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“The Monuments Men”

By Derek Zembrak

Photos provided

“The Monuments Men” is the latest directing project by Oscar recipient George Clooney, and his frequent collaborator and co-writer, Oscar winner Grant Heslov (“Argo,” “The Ides of March,” “Good Night, and Good Luck”). They adapted the screenplay from the novel written by Robert M. Edsel and Bret Witter, which is based on the true story of servicemen and women assigned to locate and recover works of art stolen from museums, universities and personal collections by Adolf Hitler, Herman Göring and the Nazis during World War II.

The ensemble cast includes George Clooney, Matt Damon, Bill Murray, John Goodman and soon to be Oscar winner Cate Blanchett. The entire cast delivers outstanding performances but it is Blanchett who shines on the big screen as the assistant curator from the Jeu de Paume museum in Paris and who is reluctant to cooperate. It is her character's detailed notes and logs that lead to many of the recoveries.

“The Monuments Men” is no “Schindler's List.” It is an interesting movie with flaws. It lacks character development and Clooney never truly brings out the tension of what one would expect from a World War II period piece. Plus the musical

score sets the tone for humor that diverts the story away from the seriousness of the subject matter. I commend Clooney for bringing to light the story of these courageous individuals as an educational vehicle and addressing the question: What's the price we're willing to pay for art? The movie made me want to learn more about the Monument Men, the stolen art and the recovery. If a film can educate as well as entertain, it is worth the price of admission.

The amazing part of attending the San Francisco press screening of “The Monuments Men” was meeting Bernard Taper, a real Monument Man and retired UC Berkeley journalism professor. It was a wonderful experience to shake his hand and say “thank you.” A moment in my film history I will never forget.

“The Monuments Men” is rated PG-13 for a few war scenes and smoking. It has a running time of 1 hour and 58 minutes. I highly recommend school field trips for this film.

Derek Zembrak is a film critic, film producer and founder of the California Independent Film Festival. You can follow Derek on Twitter @zemrak for the latest Hollywood news. Derek can be heard every Friday on KAHN 950AM on the Poppoff Show.

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