

## Bandana Ball Is Cowboy Cool, Cowgirl Chic

“This is not your ordinary gala,” reports Tina Snider, Director of Communications for Ronald McDonald House Charities of Central Texas (Austin, TX). She’s right. Guests don’t stroll up in their evening gowns and tuxes to an elegant hotel for an evening of champagne and charity. They mosey onto the Wild Onion Ranch wearing cowboy boots and jeans or a sundress. “We think of it as cowboy cool or cowgirl chic,” explains Snider. “With the western theme, we give the gala a casual flair, but it’s still a sophisticated event. The beautiful backdrop supports the whole essence of the event.”

Partnering with a couple hundred volunteers, the Ronald McDonald House charities team and an extensive committee plan and run a variety of activities to entertain folks throughout the evening. Guests are greeted with a signature cocktail and invited to enjoy hors d’oeuvres and cocktail music. They are free to explore the event’s activities, which incorporate the western theme:

- A Heads or Tails game allows guests to win prizes.
- A \$50 ring toss game offers winners the bottle of wine their ring lassoes.
- A stocked wine cooler is raffled.
- A silent auction, featuring hundreds of items, is set up indoors. Guests are provided information about the auction when they check in, and can bid using their phones.
- This year, a local jewelry designer and a whiskey distributor both donated items. Guests could purchase a set — a piece of jewelry and a bottle of whiskey — for a suggested donation.
- A photo booth is set up, and live longhorns attend the event, providing an opportunity for guest photo opps.

Finishing touches to the theme include centerpieces featuring the nonprofit’s logo on burlap, water bottles with customized labels, and bandanas tied to the backs of chairs. Next year’s event will feature a cigar bar, popcorn bar and a boot shine section.

After a couple of hours, guests are corralled into the big tent for dinner, a presentation and a live auction hosted by an authentic auctioneer. One year, planners used mobile-device bidding for this portion, but discovered guests prefer raising their paddles, so this format was reinstated. As part of the presentation, guests are told how they can support families through Ronald McDonald House. Stories are shared, and guests are given the opportunity to sponsor a family, at levels from \$100 to \$5,000. The final portion of the evening includes live music, dancing, and a coffee and dessert bar.

Total funds include ticket sales for 900 guests (\$250 each), auctions and other activities, and sponsorships from corporations, individuals and foundations. Last year, the event raised \$525,000. Yee-haw!

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### Make Space Fit Crowd Size

When planning an event, select a space just large enough for the anticipated crowd.

Too many empty chairs or too few people to fill a room conveys poor attendance. A slightly crowded room, on the other hand, heightens excitement.

For seated events, have slightly fewer chairs set up than expected attendees. Have extra chairs close by as additional individuals show up.

### Steps Help Guarantee Smooth Volunteer Transitions

If you hold events that require various shifts of volunteers showing up to work at different times, ensure a smooth transition from shift to shift by:

- Overlapping shifts by 15 minutes to be sure the job is covered.
- Giving all workers a schedule of who is working where and when.
- Being sure all volunteers know whom to contact if the unexpected arises.
- Instructing volunteers to share key information with their replacements.

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