

Stepping Out in Style Raises \$125,000

By Kerry Nenn

What is this event's secret to success? "The biggest factor is the quality of the show itself," explains Heather Moorer, director of development. Now in its 41st year, the annual Stepping Out in Style Fashion Show offers big-city caliber for modest Pensacola, FL. Presented by the Women's Board of Baptist Health Care Foundation and Gulf Coast Health Care, this year's show attracted 450 guests and 80 sponsors.

"It's not like anything else in our area," Moorer notes. "It's high-profile and high-energy compared to other events. Area boutiques participate in the show as sponsors, and they say this is something they would see in a larger city. We have professional models, staging and lighting. Because it's done at that level, the event has a high-profile feel. We also use a pre-recorded voiceover for the show. Each sponsoring boutique gets its own scene, creating a five-scene show that is timed to pre-recorded music. Screens on either side of the stage feature the boutique's logo, and the voiceover describes the boutique. The result is a very strategic, professional production."

The evening event begins with heavy hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar running concurrently with a silent auction. Guests then take their seats for the live auction, paddle raise and main program. A local news anchor and a radio personality emcee the event together. The show in its entirety runs about three hours.

A majority of attendees are returning guests. "Once they attend, they love it, so they want to come back," explains Moorer. "They have a great time. They feel like they are taken care of. Our higher sponsors have assigned seats and receive VIP bags and extra special items. All sponsors also receive drink tickets. According to the dollar amount given, we provide prime seating."

Moorer continues, "Less than 10 percent of funds raised are from individual ticket sales, which are \$50 each. Most of what we raise is from sponsorships, making this a key part of the event. We offer sponsorships from \$250 to \$25,000. Many supporters are repeat sponsors we go back to each year. We utilize our Women's Board for their connections to help with new sponsors. We also look to board members within the organization to help with new sources of sponsorships."

The foundation handles sponsorship packages, sponsors and ticket sales, while the Women's Board volunteer group assists with finding new sponsors and silent auction items. The participating boutiques provide clothing for the models and the foundation hires a professional stylist to manage the models, clothing selection and fittings at the boutiques. Together, these pieces create a high-quality event that consistently attracts supporters to meet fundraising goals.

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Event Venue Too Big? Make It Feel More Intimate

Your annual volunteer recognition banquet will attract a respectable 200 guests, but the only available space for the event is the cavernous local armory. Here are some ways to create more intimate surroundings and keep the festive atmosphere befitting the occasion:

- **Centralize the action.** Arrange your stage and tables in the middle of the large space, surrounding the perimeter with tall lighted plants or palm trees. Consider using a round stage with all tables close to the presentations.
- **Make a tent with colorful draping.** It need not be a literal tent, but a frame that allows you to stream ribbons, garlands or other decorations from a center point to each edge of a "room" within the area.
- **Take advantage of your extra room.** Dance floors take up space, so bring in a band or disc jockey to entertain the crowd during cocktails and throughout the evening. Add an activity you normally would not be able to do in smaller rooms.
- **Roll out the red carpet.** Use your large space to arrange an approach to the event area with a carpet, spotlights or even LED rope lights. Guests will feel like they're attending a premier rather than walking through an empty, dark cavern to get to the festivities.
- **Use lighting to your advantage.** Spotlights, projection screens and backdrops can create the illusion of walls without closing people in, and create dazzling dramatic light and color that make people forget they're dining and dancing on a floor where the National Guard Reserves hold marching drills. Have fun experimenting with staging techniques that won't work in smaller venues.
- **Create food and beverage stations.** You have the room, so why not have a buffet dinner with salads, entrees, artisan breads, desserts and beverage fountains on their own festive themed tables? Guests will have time and space to make their selections at each stop.

