

Philanthropy Corner – 3-27-11
“Playing to Win for Charity”
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Are you a competitor, athlete, or gambler? Or perhaps you are a gamer, gaymer, or noob in the video gaming community? If you are, and you like to spend your leisure time playing games, exercising or competing, you can turn your competitive edge into philanthropy by helping a charity. A growing trend by many nonprofit organizations is to tap into our basic human need to play and compete in games as a way to engage people to raise money for their causes and the people they serve.

Games are present in all societies and cultures. The oldest known board games date back to ancient Mesopotamia, Africa, Asia and Egypt. Nefertiti is depicted playing a game in hieroglyphs and evidence of board games are found in the burials of ancient Egypt dating back to 3500 BC. The oldest set of board gaming equipment dating back to 2600 BC found in Iraq is similar to present day backgammon. And the ancient board games found in Africa and Asia are comparable to the game of chess.

Playing games is an important part of our lives and an integral part of society and human experience. Researchers claim that humans have an integral need to play as well as work. Games are defined as structured activities or any form of play or amusement undertaken for enjoyment that can also be used as an educational tool. In fact, games and play may be of greater value to adults because of the behaviors it fosters and its link to creativity and happiness.

Although gaming is not classified as a charitable activity, a charity may use the proceeds from gaming for the expenses associated with a charitable program. While nonprofit organizations can be well served by using games as a fun way to engage donors in fundraising for their mission, they should also understand there are federal and state rules that apply. Any type of bingo night, casino night or “opportunity drawings” are considered games. Organizations that engage in gaming activities should be aware of the special government reporting responsibilities.

Many nonprofits are using video and digital games as a tool for social change and educational purposes. There is a growing movement within the nonprofit sector to create mission-centric social impact games to further social causes. Nonprofit organizations utilize a variety of gaming platforms as a common fundraising technique to acquire additional money for their programs. These include games of chance such as board and card games, and raffles, as well as sporting events that involve exercise and physical stimulation such as races and tournaments. Businesses, clubs and associations host tournaments and sporting events where proceeds from the games are dedicated to charities. A significant number of postseason bowl games such as the Fiesta, Sugar and Orange Bowls are run by organizations with charity status.

There is a plethora of ways to engage in fun while supporting your favorite charity or causes here in the Keys. If you are an outdoor sportsman or woman, there are fishing and golf tournaments. Some examples of upcoming events include The Lodging Association and Key West Chamber of Commerce which both host golf tournaments to raise money for scholarships. The World Sailfish Championship provides over \$50,000 annually for charities here in the Keys and throughout Florida. Registration is also currently open for The American Cancer Society

Relay for Life in May. There are also card and board games to support charity such as the Metropolitan Community Church Hand and Foot card tournament which raises money for their Cooking with Love Program, and Bunko for Babies which supports the Healthy Start Coalition.

If you like to use your leisure time shopping rather than participating in any type of competitive activity, you can shop for a good deal at the numerous silent auctions held in conjunction with fundraising events by local charities. Plus, these events can add to your social life. Or you can purchase a raffle ticket. Currently, two organizations selling raffle tickets for an opportunity to win a car are St. Mary's Immaculate Star of the Sea School and Key West Historic Markers. By purchasing a raffle ticket, you will have the opportunity to win a 2011 Toyota Yaris or an "Art Car," a 2005 Nissan Sentra which features \$25,000 worth of artwork by 13 local noted artists.

Games are a universal part of our human experience and play is one of the many necessary habits of adulthood. Games and play can be used to promote, educate and engage people in social causes while engaging donors, volunteers, and clients. Not only can they serve as an effective way to raise money for charitable causes and promote good will, games and play can fulfill the psychological and social needs of clients, donors and volunteers as well. It's a win/win for all.

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