



Auction Results

RAISING FUNDS BY RAISING HANDS®

250,000 in 60 Minutes?

All in a Night's Work for Charity Auctioneer David Goodman

Meets Rising Demand for Pro Auctioneers on Charity Circuit

CHICAGO — For auctioneer David Goodman, nothing beats the pleasure of raising money for a good cause, whether it's a private school, a Ronald McDonald House, a group that fights child abuse, or a charity devoted to global habitat conservation. For that reason, the 41-year-old founder and president of Chicago-based Auction Results has become one of the few auctioneers to work exclusively with charitable organizations.

Goodman is tapping into a rich niche in the live auction business. In 2005, according to the National Auctioneers Association, charities accounted for \$14.6 billion of the \$240 billion in gross sales generated by live auctions in the U.S. That haul was larger than the proceeds from auctioning personal property (\$10 billion), art, antiques and collectibles (\$12.1 billion), and even residential real estate (\$14.2 billion).

"Many non-profit organizations used to hire a local celebrity to run their auctions. Now they're finding that professional auctioneers can usually raise more money and provide more entertainment," Goodman says. "In my case, I've been able to increase auction revenues for some clients as much as tenfold."

One Catholic high school that raised only \$5,000 the year before hiring Goodman raked in \$50,000 the first time he wielded the gavel. An organization that serves children with severe development disabilities increased its one-night take from \$11,000 to \$107,000 by bringing Goodman on board. Others have raised upwards of \$250,000 in just 60 minutes with Goodman working the crowd.

Bag of tricks: Goodman's high-roller results stem from a combination of experience, personality and preparation. He doesn't just show up on auction night. His fee includes consulting services that begin months before the event and range from supplying fresh ideas to training bid spotters. He also helps clients embellish their offerings to make supporters open their wallets wider.

At Goodman's urging, for example, a school that was planning to offer two movie walk-on roles as standalone items sweetened the pot with hotel rooms on location, chauffeured

limos to movie premieres, and after-parties at local restaurants. The resulting “Making of a Movie Star” packages sold for \$9,500 each — thousands of dollars more than anyone would have paid strictly for the privilege of being a movie extra.

Also contributing to Goodman’s success are the magic tricks he weaves into his spiel. When he asks people to reach into their wallets and “explode with generosity,” he pulls out his own billfold and sends flames shooting three feet into the air. If the bidding on an item is too low, he turns a regular \$1 bill into a giant \$100 greenback to show the kind of offer he’s looking for. When a winning bid soars into the five-figure stratosphere, he punctuates the achievement by producing colored streamers from his empty hand.

Happy customers: Goodman has taken his skills to organizations in 30 states, and his clients are effusive in their praise. “David doubled our live auction income the first year we used him. I never would have believed that was possible,” said Dennis Hills-Cooper, Director of Development for Thresholds, a Chicago-based not-for-profit psychiatric rehabilitation organization. “People were throwing their hands up to bid, and we were running out into the crowd and collecting money. It was a fundraiser’s dream.”

And no wonder. Goodman not only gets top dollar for glamour packages like a dinner for 12 prepared in the winning bidder’s home by acclaimed chef Charlie Trotter (\$23,000) and a two-day Super Bowl trip complete with private plane (\$28,000), but also has been able to reap big dividends from more humble fare. Case in point: \$7,750 for a bound book containing letters to God written by second graders approaching their First Holy Communion.

Then there’s his trademark “Paddle Raiser” appeal at the end of each auction. Once all of the merchandise has been sold, Goodman asks attendees to raise their bidding paddles to give directly to the organization. Within five minutes, he might add \$50,000 or \$150,000 to the night’s gross, thanks in large part to the persuasiveness of his patter.

Family business: Goodman stumbled on his trade as a byproduct of his family’s retail liquidation business. His father ran going-out-of-business sales for high-end jewelry stores, furniture stores and art galleries. When the inventory of a liquidating client got small enough, an auctioneer was hired to sell the remaining assets at auction.

The problem was that the auctioneers available for hire were accustomed to doing farm, estate or real estate auctions and didn’t know the value of the Goodmans’ goods. That meant great deals for buyers but poor returns for the liquidators. “The auctioneer might be selling a \$6,000 Henredon sofa and let it go out the door for \$200,” Goodman recalls. “We were lucky to wind up with 25 cents on the dollar overall.”

Goodman decided he could do a better job and headed off to the Missouri Auction School.

When he returned as a bona fide auctioneer, he started getting dollar for dollar on the wholesale cost of merchandise sold. That, he says, was practically unheard of.

Doing good: A year later, in 1989, Goodman left the family business and struck out on his own. He started out doing business auctions. Then he got a call to do a charity auction for a suburban church. As he took more charity jobs, he realized he had found his calling and shifted exclusively to not-for-profit groups.

“When I was involved in the auction liquidation business, I was dealing with people’s problems — somebody’s divorce, death, bad business decisions or bad luck. That’s not the case with charity auctions,” he notes. “I’m raising money for schools that need funds for their playgrounds, organizations that work with developmentally disabled children, and groups that campaign on behalf of issues ranging from epilepsy to civil liberties. If I’ve done my job well, people have a smile on their faces at the end of the night.”

Almost every weekend, Goodman and his clients take that feeling all the way to the bank.