



Auction Results

RAISING FUNDS BY RAISING HANDS®

Gala Raises \$300K for Scholarship Program

CBO offers college students more than financial support.

By Madelyn Herzog



Professional charity benefit fundraising auctioneer David Goodman of Auction Results gets everyone's attention at the start of the very successful live auction!

Credit: Philip Downie

Students, their families and over 300 other community members attended a gala last Thursday evening to honor the three founders of a local scholarship program, College Bound Opportunities (CBO).

The event, held at Briarwood Country Club in Deerfield, raised over \$300,000 for the organization, a non-profit funded entirely by private donations.

Emily Cushing, a CBO scholar who just finished her sophomore year at the University of Wisconsin- Platteville, said she felt fortunate to be a guest at the gala and a part of CBO.

“I probably wouldn’t be at college right now without CBO,” Cushing said. “I had no idea what to do [about college]. My mom had no idea what to do.”

Seven years ago, on the day after Christmas, Cliff Bregstone found a family stranded in a car on the side of the road. After helping them, he learned that the daughter, a talented high school senior in the Chicago Public Schools, would not be able to attend college, due to her family’s financial situation.

The encounter inspired Bregstone to found CBO, a School District 113 scholarship program.

Bregstone joined forces with Marybeth Kravets, Deerfield High School’s college counselor, and Jim Hanig, an active community member, and CBO was born.

Now in its fourth year, CBO has provided scholarships and support to over 90 economically disadvantaged students from Highland Park High School and Deerfield High School. Many are the first in their families to attend college.

This year, CBO selected 25 new CBO scholars from District 113 and expanded to include Lake Forest High School from School District 115.

Thursday evening’s event began with cocktails and warm greetings and segued into a three-course seated meal. Each of the 35 dinner tables represented one of the colleges that CBO scholars have attended or plan to attend.

Bonnie Shlensky, who serves on the CBO board and the District 113 School Board, explained how CBO differs from other scholarship programs. Students are accepted into CBO in the middle of their junior year and are immediately paired with a coach who assists them with everything from college applications to figuring out post-graduation career plans.

“The coaching is the crux,” Shlensky said. “Other organizations give a lot of financial aid. We give a lot of support-- emotional and financial, throughout the entire process.”

Aside from their personal coach, CBO scholars each receive \$8,000 toward their four-year tuitions, and other various college necessities, such as new laptops.

Harry Griffith, the superintendent of School District 115, gave the first presentation of the evening. He said he first became interested in CBO after learning that a “shocking number of Lake Forest students were eligible for the program.”

Griffith said he would like to continue District 115’s involvement with CBO. Ten students from his district applied, and five were selected.

The gala’s proceeds came primarily from a live auction, which boasted items such as a weeklong stay in Mexico and an “Instant Wine Cellar.”

Another live auction, dubbed “Fund-a-Student,” encouraged all guests to participate, no matter how small their donation.

Leslie Hyman, a former president of the District 113 School Board, has coached three CBO students since the organization’s birth. A couple years ago, she formed the CBO Coaching Committee, which serves as a support system for the coaches throughout their experience.

“Out of everything I do, [CBO coaching] is the thing I enjoy most,” Hyman said. “I feel like I’m making a direct and visible difference.”

Bregstone, Kravets and Hanig spoke toward the end of the evening and were each presented with an award.

“The night was a huge success,” Shlensky said. “The awareness of CBO and all that it does for the students in our communities was raised tremendously.”