

The Pride of CASE V Awards Program

Title of entry: Gala 2007: License to Thrill

Category number and title: Category 46: Excellence in Special Events, Invitations and Collateral Materials

Institution: Western Illinois University

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History of the Organization

The Performing Arts Society (PAS) includes community and university volunteers who are both patrons of the arts and who are dedicated to advancing arts programming at Western Illinois University (WIU). PAS raises funds to support arts programming to include the Youth Performing Arts Series, the Bureau of Cultural Affairs events, and other arts centered programming at WIU. PAS raises funds thru both memberships and social functions (fundraising events).

PAS fully funds the Youth Performing Arts Series (YPAS). YPAS offers live performances on the WIU campus to area schoolchildren in grades K thru 8. All programs are offered at no cost to participating schools. This unique opportunity is only possible with the financing from PAS. Moreover, the cost to transport students to campus is partially subsidized by PAS. Since 1984, more than 95,000 area school children have participated in this program. For some children, YPAS performances represent their only opportunity to view a live arts performance.

PAS also provides financial support to guest artist programming at WIU as well as financial support to new arts initiatives proposed by faculty and students in the College of Fine Arts and Communication

General description of entry:

The Performing Arts Society Gala and Silent Auction is held every fall and constitutes the major fundraising event for the organization. The Gala also represents a significant social event for the university and the community. Our audience includes current members of PAS, other university donors, faculty and staff, and a diverse group of city and community attendees.

The gala grows in stature and reputation with each passing year. Our guests certainly understand the philanthropic nature of the Gala, but also expect a great culinary experience and expect to be thoroughly entertained.

The annual *PAS Gala and Silent Auction* seeks to raise funds to support the Performing Arts Society at Western Illinois University. This formal event includes a social period with silent auction, a served dinner, and entertainment reflecting the theme of the event.

We make this award recommendation based on the strength of the unique video presentation incorporated into the festivities. What set this event apart as unique was the use innovative of a video presentation shown immediately after guests were seated for dinner. The video reflected the theme of the event (007, James Bond), incorporated a fundraising story line familiar to our guests (new performing arts center), featured recognizable “actors” from the university and community, and was an extraordinarily well-produced feature (bias intended).

Note: The enclosed DVD includes almost an hour of film footage. The first 13 minutes of the video captures what our audience observed from their seats. The remaining 44 minutes of the video represent Gala highlights later added to the overall production video.

The Plan

The bulk of the planning for the event was conducted by a committee comprised of PAS Board members. They attended to the details of theme, food selection, room décor, entertainment, etc. In that regard, this fundraising special event was of the high caliber of so many similar events. Given the year of 2007, the planning committee selected a James Bond theme and “*Gala 2007: License to Thrill*” emerged.

What set this event apart as unique, was the secret planning to create an event themed video presentation of a greater scale than anything previously attempted on campus. A smaller planning committee was established in secret to create a video that “borrowed”

scene selections from the James Bond movie franchise to film a short movie that addressed the current (actual) planning for a new performing arts center at WIU.

While word of the production slowly filtered around campus, only a select few knew of the entire production plan. The majority of the PAS board was largely unaware of our intent to unveil a video presentation at the start of the Gala.

As guests moved from the silent auction area to their seats in the dining area, we began the video presentation. The presentation begins with a visual and audible warning to take seats: the video would begin in just 60 seconds. The urgency of that announcement served to heighten the anticipation of what was to come. The video then runs for approximately 13 minutes.

The mission of the Bond character was to retrieve the plans for the new performing arts center, deliver them to the dean of the college, and then host the gala event. As the video concludes, the Bond character traverses his way through the university student union (the actual gala venue) and dispatches several villains on his way to host the gala. The final filmed scene shows Bond opening a set of doors to enter the university grand ball room and the gala. At that moment, the viewers are transitioned from the video to a live shot of Bond entering the room. The switch from video to live action successfully caught most of the audience unaware.

Goals and objectives of the project

We established four particular goals for the event. First, we set out to raise \$20,000 in net proceeds. Accomplishing this goal would serve to almost entirely fund our youth shows for the coming season. Second, we wanted to provide an unforgettable and entertaining evening for our guests. Third, this event is critically important to steward our current PAS members. Many of them take advantage of the event to invite friends or business associates. Last, we wanted to cultivate new PAS members. The organization is dynamic and growing. What better venue to showcase the talents and professionalism of our organization?

Description of how project fits into overall institutional and/or advancement goals:

Cash gifts, pledges and gifts in kind raised on behalf of the Performing Arts Society constitute about 20% of all monies raised in the college. Moreover, many PAS members/donors also represent significant donors and prospective donors to the entire college and university.

Audience: 330 attendees...a maximum audience for the venue.

Total number of professional and support staff who worked on the program; please note the use of freelancers, outside agencies or volunteers:

We utilized the technical expertise of the entire university television production staff to include production writers, camera operators, special effects technicians, and production editors to script and film our movie. We used static as well as hand held cameras. We also incorporated “blue screen” technology in the filming process. College faculty and staff as well as select PAS board members were employed as actors. Because we selected so many recognizable faces in the movie as well as recognizable university locations, the audience easily related to the production. The (very recognizable) cast included:

James Bond college development officer
“M” college Dean
Money Penny college secretary
“Q” retired theater department chair
Gordfinger retired alumni director
Plenty O’Cash PAS Board member / local banker
Villians Staff or PAS Board members

Program budget and unit costs:

The entire video was produced at a cost of \$615.57.

Any special circumstances or challenges faced: N/A

Documented results, measurements of effectiveness:

The video greatly enhanced the overall quality and impact of the event. Judging by audience reaction and follow-on commentary from our guests, we achieved the “wow” factor several times over. Overall, the organization netted \$24,928 and undoubtedly elevated the stature of the organization in the community. Months after the event, the “Bond video” is still praised to our college staff and to our board members as they travel through the community. We also witnessed an increase in PAS memberships, something not normally associated with that time of year.

Following the event, we packaged all the production efforts into a DVD that includes the basic video, a scene selection capability, a special effects walkthrough, a blooper reel, and credits and acknowledgements. We offered the packaged DVD to all participants and to selected donors. The film also continues to play at various times during the month on the university’s cable access channel.