

# Raise Funds and Friends

## with a Priceless Treasures Auction



By Karen K. Martin, MBA, CFRE

Most everyone knows that times are tough for charitable organizations, and the ever-increasing number of nonprofits asking for donations from families who are also feeling the pinch on their wallet does not help. Many PTA units may be encountering “compassion fatigue” from even their most dedicated donors. How can PTAs compete for donations in such a climate? The key is to conduct fundraisers that are unique, fun, and purposeful.

As someone who has observed fundraising practices over the past 30 years, I have noted that the ways associations raise funds do not always match up with their causes. Take the arts group’s fun run, or a health fair benefiting a clothing bank; “A Night at the Museum” and “XYZ Clothing Bank Project Runway” would be suitable, mission-aligned events at which those charities could raise both funds and friends.

PTA’s mission is to advocate for education, child welfare, family engagement, and community involvement. The case study below and menu of fundraising ideas provided are examples of “do it yourself” ways to translate our mission into dollars.

### Priceless treasures silent auction

Using an advertising slogan calling the time spent with children and family “priceless” as a promotional tool, a PTA unit requests that school personnel become the objects of a silent auction. Families bid on time with a teacher or staff member at a schoolwide evening meal.

Community building and bonding between families, students, and staff are a direct outcome from a fundraiser requiring no contracts, shipping, or sorting, and that aligns with the goals and mission of PTA. Students and their families gain from viewing educators as just people with hobbies, interests, and talents beyond the school walls, and teachers get to build relationships in a relaxed setting.

### Preparing for the auction

To boost revenues and eliminate expenses, PTAs should ask for the meal and space to be donated. Because parents are not afraid of work, they often work harder, not smarter when fundraising for PTA. The first rule of fundraising is “people give when they are asked.” A closely related rule is called the Five Rights: The right person at the right time in the right place asking for the right amount on behalf of the right project.

Determine where and how the best relationship to a restaurant or caterer exists, for example, their children attend your school, and present a win-win business proposition to the owners or manager. For instance, in exchange for underwriting the event, determine how much media exposure the business will receive. Suggest that the auction be held at their location, guaranteeing them a packed restaurant.

The Five Rights also apply to creating a priceless treasures auction event. Ask your principal and school leaders, joined by the PTA president and/or auction chair, to deliver “the pitch” at a staff meeting. Find out what special talents staff and teachers possess that can show them in a different light to student and parents.

Examples of events or items teachers and staff can attend or provide include:

- Movies in the media room
- Gym sleepover
- Bedside story session
- Manicure
- Lunch
- Portrait photography session
- Handmade quilts and other crafts
- Pizza or tea parties
- Music, art, or cooking lessons
- Theater or sports outing
- Pet grooming

**Mission-focused friend raising**

Ultimately, the secret to resource development is linked to strong relationships. Your PTA can improve its standing in the community or with teachers when fundraisers are mission-focused. As with any campaign, set a target and communicate the use of the funds. Dollars raised will vary from PTA to PTA, but a priceless treasures auction works equally well in rural, urban, and suburban settings. The benefits are tangible, yet priceless!

*Karen K. Martin, MBA, CFRE, is a member of National PTA's Resource Development Committee. Martin is a certified fundraising executive and principal of K. Martin & Associates, Irving, Texas, which provides organizational design and training.*

According to Beth Ward a parent of middle and high-school students in Irving, Texas, "The priceless treasures auction at our children's school was truly a priceless event. The children's excitement was palpable at the thought of winning special, out-of-school time with their teachers. Teachers donated everything from after-school tea parties to movie-watching events. Our parents and school community rallied to support such a unique event." An elementary student commented, "I had no idea my math teacher could give such good manicures!"

**Other Funding Sources and Ideas**

- Auctions (silent, live, priceless, basket, mystery centerpiece)
- Box Tops for Education
- Campbell's Labels for Education
- Carnival/festival
- Celebrity waiters, chefs, fashion show, car wash
- Cookbook/directory
- Craft fair/scrapbook crop
- Corporate grants and sponsorships
- Direct donation
- Fun walk/run, cycling, jump, bowl-a-thons
- Gently used book sale
- Golf tournament (9-hole, 18-hole, or putt-putt)
- Grocery club card proceeds
- "Jam the Gym" staff vs. student/parent basketball
- Pancake breakfast/chili, pizza, international, spaghetti supper raffle
- Restaurant/movie theater grand openings and nights
- Talent show

**On PTA.org**

For more information and tips on fundraising, visit [PTA.org/fundraising.asp](http://PTA.org/fundraising.asp). While you are there, be sure to check out our PTA Fundraising Marketplace and the vendors that offer products and services uniquely tailored to your fundraising needs.



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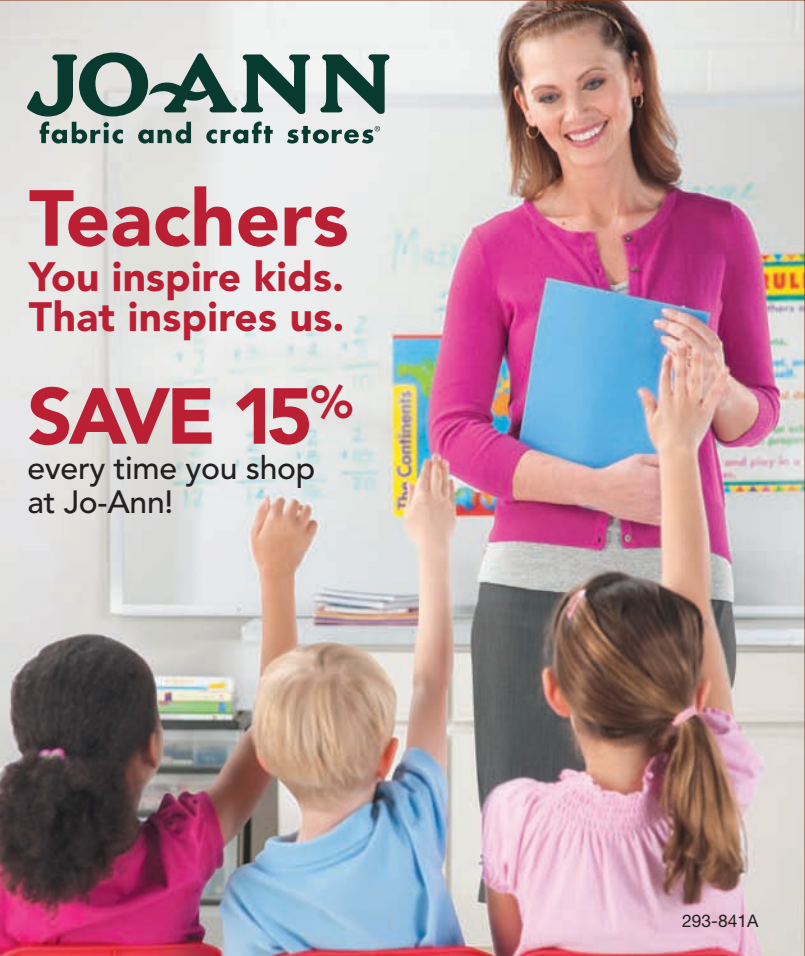
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