

EVENT MANAGEMENT EXAMPLE: FUNDRAISER

Although I've organized much larger events that spanned multiple days, had a staff of hundreds, a budget of hundreds of thousands, and an audience of thousands, what follows is the event I organized that was the most significant to me—for several reasons. It's a great example of how I work well under the pressure of tight deadlines. And, it's also significant as an example of how I leveraged resources and connections to organize an event in little more than four weeks, with expenses kept to \$100, and, that netted more than \$10,000! But, most significantly, the event illustrates how a diverse cross-section of our community can be brought together through the spirit of generosity to help those in need. In this case, the recipient of that generosity was [Reggie Houston](#), a luminary of New Orleans music, as well as my long-time client and friend.

In early October, 2011, I sat beside Reggie's hospital bed two days after he had undergone prostate cancer surgery. Because Reggie had lost many family members to prostate cancer, he truly did not believe he'd survive the ordeal and had asked me not to share his condition publicly. He had been forced to take an extended break from performing, and his bills were piling up. I was determined to organize a benefit for him, but Reggie is a humble man unaccustomed to accepting help. Finally, on October 12 when he knew his surgery had been successful, and that he was indeed going to live, he gave me permission to make the announcement.

The main challenge was that Reggie needed the money during October and November, when he had no income—and proper planning and promotion of an event takes time that we did not have. Still, I got to work on October 12, and on the morning of November 18 I watched Reggie's eyes fill with disbelief, love, gratitude, and tears as I told him we had raised more than \$10,000.

Process, Planning, and Strategy

DAY ONE: FIVE WEEKS TO EVENT

First, I created a PayPal donation link and drafted a posting for Reggie's website.

Next, I sent a group email to music industry contacts and Reggie's mailing list, informing them of Reggie's condition, and requesting assistance with the benefit. The outpouring of love and assistance was immediate.

Within five minutes, I received a call from saxophonist [Patrick Lamb](#). "Whatever you need, I'm there," he said.

Not only did I secure Patrick's agreement to perform at the benefit, but I knew he owned a ticketing agency (now called [Ticket Tomato](#)), and I was able to arrange for his company to sell the tickets online, and to waive their usual vendor fees. On the night of the event, Patrick Lamb, much to the delight of all, also ran the door when not on stage performing!

By the end of the day on October 12 I had announced publicly on Reggie's website and through a Facebook event posting that a benefit was in the works that would feature Patrick Lamb. I regularly updated the website and Facebook event as more details were solidified. [Click here to view one of the many social media posts promoting the event.](#)

WEEK ONE: FOUR WEEKS TO EVENT

Nailing down a preferred date was easy. Thanksgiving was just six weeks away, and I knew that if the event was to be successful:

- It needed to happen before people were busy with the holidays.
- It should be held on a Thursday evening because any talent or venue we'd want would already be booked on every weekend—and because, next to Fridays and Saturdays, Thursdays are the easiest nights to attract a crowd in Portland.
- I needed a minimum of three full weeks to get any media publicity at all—and preferably four weeks.

That left me with the optimal dates of Thursday November 10 or 17.

Securing a venue with less than a month's notice would prove to be a bit more difficult. There was no chance of a large club or traditional concert hall being available—but I wasn't interested in those venues because, having owned one, I knew that revenue from alcohol sales would be key to insuring the success of an event with such short lead-time. I also knew we'd need more than just a performance space. In order to raise a decent amount of money, we'd need multiple rooms to accommodate revenue streams other than ticket and alcohol sales, like food, merchandise, and a silent auction.

I called a friend who was an event coordinator for The Old Church in downtown Portland. The venue was available and I was able to negotiate booking the entire Church, for the entire day, for a mere \$100—a discount of more than \$1,000!

As soon as I had the venue confirmed:

- I updated Patrick Lamb, who immediately posted the tickets for sale.
- I updated Reggie's website and social media.

Within a week of putting out the call for assistance, I had:

- Secured barbecued ribs to feed 300 from Cannon's Rib Express.
- Secured wine and beer donations and sponsorships from my contacts at Eugene Wine Cellars and Ninkasi Brewing.
- Enlisted the help of [Mysti Krewe of Nimbus](#) (a group of New Orleans expats who organize Portland's Mardi Gras Ball each year and host a float in Portland Rose Festival's Starlight Parade) to manage the silent auction and handle decorations.
- Booked, and scheduled the lineup for much of the talent including [Tom Grant](#), [Mary Flower](#), Janice Scroggins, and [The Norman Sylvester Band](#).

WEEK TWO: THREE WEEKS TO EVENT

I now had enough details confirmed to write and distribute the press release, which I sent to all of the local news outlets, blues and jazz organizations, radio stations, and bloggers—as well as the performers and sponsors of the benefit. Because time was so short, I called Oregon Music News Editor in Chief Tom D'Antoni, who also hosted a radio show on KMHD, and Oregonian reporter Ryan White, both of whom had provided generous coverage to Reggie in the past. Both covered the event in advance, and we received ample free promotion online, on the air, and in print. Following this summary is Ryan White's article that appeared in The Oregonian on November 11.

Because Halloween is a big night for people to go out and hear live music, I set a deadline of Wednesday, October 26 for completing booking of the benefit's musical entertainment, so that the performers could promote the event.

I had a friend design and print handbills.

I updated the website and social media posts.

I enlisted the help of a contact to secure a special event permit from the OLCC and find licensed bartenders who would agree to work for tips.

I funneled all auction donation offers to Mysti Krewe of Nimbus.

I checked references for, and booked a sound tech who offered to provide gear and run sound free of charge.

WEEK THREE: TWO WEEKS TO EVENT

On Thursday, October 27 I had the flyers distributed to the benefit performers, along with wristbands and tickets (of which I had a back-stock) to give them access to the venue, complimentary food, and drinks. That weekend, all of the performers announced the benefit at their Halloween shows and distributed the flyers. The gospel musicians I booked took flyers to their churches—the perfect outlet for promoting our benefit!

Ticket sales spiked as a direct result.

By Tuesday, November 1, I had received three phone calls—one from a disabled veteran who knew Reggie through The VA. He was also a retired chef and offered to cook. The other two calls came from separate North Portland church members volunteering themselves and other women from their churches, to cook food and to staff the kitchen and buffet!

I called Carrie Ann Schubert, one of my clients and Reggie's friends, and also the owner of Beaverton Bakery. She readily agreed to donate desserts for our buffet. And, even though we were months away from Mardi Gras, had her bakers make Mardi Gras King Cakes and festive, frosted Mardi Gras cookies in the shapes of fleur-de-lis' and Mardi Gras masks. She also provided a host of other delicious desserts in single-serve portions.

The food was coming together beautifully, but required coordination beyond what I had time to do, so I placed one of the church members—a relative of one of our gospel singers—in charge of coordinating the kitchen, food donations, and buffet.

I placed coordination of the musical production in the capable hands of my business partner, with whom I had previously owned and operated a production company.

I followed up with media personnel and let them know they were on the guest list, should they wish to attend. (Some of those who did attend opted to purchase tickets at the door!)

WEEK FOUR: ONE WEEK TO EVENT

Throughout the planning, and right up to the day of the event, was a stream of constant phone calls and emails to answer, return, forward and stay on top of. I had offers for volunteer help that I hadn't yet placed. Finally, I was able to sit down with my partner, and together we walked through every aspect of setting up and running the event—something we had done many times in the past—and wrote down a detailed list of requirements still to be fulfilled and supplies to be gathered.

I assigned our volunteers to tasks.

I used the PayPal donations to secure cash banks for the bar, buffet, and any ticket sales at the door.

I checked in with my team leads for the bar, door, kitchen, production, and silent auction to disseminate important information (parking and load in times and info, etc.) that all performers and volunteers would need for the day of the benefit. I followed up with each to verify that all volunteers and performers had received the information, and to arrange a venue walk-through with them later in the week.

I made sure all important documents (venue contract, OLCC permit and signage, access list, etc.) were together with cash boxes, additional drink tickets, wrist bands, and any other supplies for which I would be responsible... including, as experience had taught me, extra 9V batteries and a couple rolls of duct tape which I donated to the cause!

I met with The Church's event planner, my team leads, and sound tech at the venue to familiarize all with the plan and facilities.

DAY OF THE EVENT

I met The Church's event planner at the venue at 2 PM, and we began setting up tables and chairs in Kinsman Hall.

Beginning at 2:30 PM the team leads and sound techs arrived and began to set up.

By 3 PM, The Old Church was a bustle of activity:

- The basement kitchen was filled with combat veterans, Baptist Church members, Katrina refugees, and children, all laughing as they prepped food, received donations from area restaurants, and ran hundreds of pounds of donated food up the stairs to set up in Kinsman Hall.
- Volunteers were setting up buffet tables with chafing dishes, cutlery, plates, napkins and serving utensils – all of which had been donated.
- Mysti Krewe of Nimbus was busy setting up the silent auction and decking out Kinsman Hall with Mardi Gras decorations.
- Patrick Lamb set up the door.
- Musicians arrived early to set up a backline.
- The bar manager arrived with donated beer, wine, ice, glasses, and bar supplies.
- A tarot card reader was setting up a table in the vestibule to read fortunes, the proceeds of which would be donated to the fundraiser.
- Volunteers helped musicians load in gear, while the sound tech finished setting up.

At 5 PM when Wayne Cannon arrived with an actual truck-load of barbecued ribs—so that they'd be fresh and hot for our 5:30 opening—we were ready.

I staged The Transcendental Brass Band, a traditional New Orleans marching band, outside the entrance where they entertained the line of guests waiting to enter.

When the doors opened, Patrick checked people in on his laptop and sold tickets while Reggie greeted the guests who arrived with hugs, cards, flowers and money.

I had arranged for The Transcendental Brass Band to join the pre-set break band on stage for their last song, after which The Brass Band second-lined the audience out of the auditorium and into Kinsman Hall where they continued to play—and where people purchased dinner, drinks and participated in the silent auction. ([Click here for a YouTube video of this portion of the benefit.](#))

At the end of the evening, the bar manager handed me a pile of cash, separate from the money brought in by alcohol sales. The bartenders, who had been unfamiliar with Reggie when they signed on to work the benefit for tips, were so moved by the event that they donated all of their tips to the cause!

There were tears and laughter, boundless generosity, joy, and gratitude. It was an event—truly built by love—that transcended religious, socio-economic and color barriers, and even musical genres, to bring together diverse and frequently disparate segments of our community.

[Click here for a YouTube video](#) of the Too Loose Cajun Band with special guests Patrick Lamb, Paul Brainard, Janice Scroggins, and Mac Potts performing at the benefit.

(Please scroll down to read The Oregonian article.)

Friends organize benefit for sax player Reggie Houston, recovering from cancer surgery

Ryan White, *The Oregonian* By Ryan White, *The Oregonian*

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on November 11, 2011 at 10:30 AM, updated November 11, 2011 at 10:59 AM



Brandy Kayzakian-Rowe

Reggie Houston

Reggie Houston needs to get out. That much is clear as the sax man on the other end of the phone buzzed with energy on Tuesday. "A forced man of leisure" is how he described himself.

In medical terms, that means he's recovering from prostate cancer surgery performed early last month. With a family history of the disease, he was checked out regularly, and it was caught early.

In musical terms, that means if you see him at the benefit that's been arranged for him next week, and his hands are behind his back, "that's because I asked someone to handcuff me," he said.

Whatever it takes to follow doctor's orders, and the doctor so far has cleared him only for a little soprano sax practice.

"But I am just so fortunate, blessed as it were, to be able to feel so good after such a serious surgery," Houston, 64, said.

Since news of the surgery was announced on his website, friends and fans have been sending food and books, and because everyone knew Houston would never ask for help, this benefit was arranged.

Sax player **Patrick Lamb** immediately volunteered his talents and his ticketing agency, **Tickets Oregon**. Jazz pianist **Tom Grant** signed up, as did **Mary Flower**,

Janice Scroggins, **Norman Sylvester**, **Peter Dammann**, the Transcendental Brass Band and many more. Wayne Cannon, owner of **Cannon's Rib Express**, where Houston plays on Sundays in the summer, has donated enough food for 300.

It's not surprising that words like blessed, fortunate and grateful flow from Houston like notes from his horn. Born in New Orleans, Houston has a résumé packed with that city's biggest

**REGGIE
HOUSTON
BENEFIT**

names -- the Nevilles, Dr. John, Irma Thomas and more than two decades with the Fats Domino Band.

Houston moved to Portland in 2004 and immediately made connections, teaching, playing and doing what musicians do -- bringing people together and helping out. He said he's asked that any food that isn't eaten on Thursday be donated to the campers at the Occupy Portland site*.

He warmly spoke of how he's been received throughout the state. A few years ago, he'd never heard of Tillamook. When he visited, they treated him "like a lodge brother."

All of this makes it hard to obey those orders and not jump up and start playing. He wants to say thanks, and he wants to show his gratitude. Also, given the amount of food -- a lot of it classic New Orleans fare -- he wouldn't mind the ability to get a little more exercise.

"I have to get out of this house or I'm going to be a 360-pound, saxophone-playing grease ball," he said, laughing.

(*This, obviously, was before the announcements of Thursday that the Occupy camp will be cleared out this weekend.)

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When: 6:30 p.m.
Thursday

Where: The Old Church, 1422 S.W. 11th Ave.; \$25 advance, \$30 door

Online:
reggiehouston.com