Making Friendships for a Lifetime

Houston Symphony League  Orchestra Size: Group 1  Metro Houston: 6.5 Million
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**Project Description:** To enhance membership experience and encourage concert attendance, we created new group activities aligned with a variety of hobbies and interests. For people interested in cooking, we planned luncheons at a high-end restaurant which included a cooking demonstration. For book lovers, we created a book club that focused on biographies of two great composers whose works would be heard during the symphony season. For all the single ladies, we planned a series of happy hours and symphony concerts that included socializing, traveling together to the concert, and valet parking. These activities were called, respectively: Social and Orchestrated Luncheons, Houston Symphony League Book Club, and Girls’ Night Out. Each of these activities took place two times during the season.

**The Need for the Project:** The need for the project was determined when the League President recognized that a successful organization does more than volunteer and fundraise – it is a source of friendships, camaraderie, and personal enrichment. This project offered an opportunity to learn, to strengthen bonds and to cultivate the collective experience. All of these are activities for a lifetime.

**Project Goals:** The goal of the overall project was to improve the membership experience by creating activities for people who share a common interest outside of classical music. By combining interests that people enjoy with Symphony-and-League-related activities, we gave people who were passionate about their hobbies or pastimes (cooking, reading, socializing with friends) an opportunity to explore those interests with symphony lovers. The Book Club had a specific set of goals unique to the reading experience: Through reading and lively discussion, the book club would enhance knowledge of composers’ lives and their music to make the concerts more meaningful to the concert-goers and encourage critical thinking.
**Timeline:**

Prior to the beginning of the League year: President appoints chairs of each activity
Summer: Dates for all activities selected and placed on calendar
September: Chairs promote activities at the Fall Membership Meeting
3 months before activity: Chairs secure venues; book club reading selections announced
1 month before activity: Chairs ensure that newsletter has information about activity; invitations and evites sent if necessary

**Financials:** These were Dutch Treat activities. Promotion of the activities was by evites and newsletter. Expenses were less than $200 for hospitality, and were paid for by in-kind contributions. This project was not intended to generate revenue.

**Volunteers:** Approximately six volunteers for the total project: each of the three activities had two co-chairs. In addition, the HSL Book Club had a moderator for the book club discussion.

**Staff Involvement:** The staff assisted with ticketing for the concerts associated with the Girls’ Night Out and providing valet passes for designated drivers. No staff involvement was required for planning or executing any aspects of this project.

**Successes:** Seats for the Social and Orchestrated Luncheons were sold out. The success of the HSL Book Club was measured by the overwhelming participation and quality of the meaningful, open, and compelling conversations that transpired. The success of the Girls’ Night Out was measured by the concert tickets sold and by enthusiasm expressed and camaraderie enjoyed by the participants.

**Suggested Improvements:** This project will be repeated, and perhaps different hobbies/interests will be highlighted (for example, film lovers at the symphony; art lovers combining a visit to a gallery and concert).

Submitted by:
Darlene Clark, President-Houston Symphony League 2016/17