

A fresh take on philanthropy

A CHARITY BALL IS NOTHING NEW – UNLESS IT'S RUN BY A GROUP OF WOMEN IN THEIR 20s

By LAURA OPPENHEIMER
THE OREGONIAN

From the moment you walk into the nightclub, sizing up concrete floors and shoulder-to-shoulder crowds, you know this isn't a typical fundraiser.

Good luck finding gray hair. The drink special is a "Hall Pass," made with ginger vodka and a hint of lime. Playful descriptions hawk auction prizes, from running gear to a Seattle getaway. "Spice up your wardrobe with these all-style accessories," one reads, "and get noticed by that bartender you've been eye-fetching every Friday night."

On this particular Friday night, the women of Levé — childhood friends from Portland — host their fifth annual Charity Ball for local nonprofits.

The tradition started as a college party for a good cause and evolved into a grown-up philanthropy that shatters expectations. Levé raised a record \$36,000 last weekend, despite the battered economy. A bunch of that money came from people younger than 40, a group notoriously hard to reach.



Juli Dobson (from left), Heather Schrock and Ryan Snyder peruse silent auction items at Friday's Charity Ball. Prizes included a Seattle getaway, wine and a painting by Levé board member Maddie Thies.

Photos by OLIVIA BUCK

"I loved the concept. A group of girlfriends gets together, and it morphs into this great thing. You don't always see people that young raising money for charity." **TERRI SORENSEN**, executive director, Friends of Friends

It doesn't hurt that the oldest board member just turned 28. Levé knows its target audience because it is the target audience. But the ball becomes more sophisticated each December as the women gain another year of professional experience, drawing on connections in banking and green building, beer and remodeling, a veritable Who's Who of Oregon industries.

"We go to a lot of nonprofit events. We go to a lot of parties and shows and concerts," says Kiernan Doherty, who works for a communications firm with social-purpose clients. "We have a unique perspective on how to combine those things."

Levé's 14-member board includes two Caitlins, two Maddies and two Courtney's, plus an Arley and a Carly. They were all born in the early 1980s, and all but one graduated from Lincoln or Jesuit high schools. Not everybody was close back then, but they at least knew each other. Then they scattered to colleges across the country.

In 2004, part of the group decided to throw a holiday party. They rented space and invited friends and family — who, they say, taught them the value of helping their community. So the women raised

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Courtney Francis, president of the Levé board, leads the organization's final meeting before its 2008 Charity Ball, which focuses on making philanthropists out of the under-40 set.

Hairstylist weaves in high drama

Mandy Zelinka transforms hairdos for two women with creative results

By VIVIAN McINERNEY
THE OREGONIAN

Mandy Zelinka is hard at play. "When I first met my stepson, he laughed and said, 'You play with hair for a living.'" the Portland hairstylist says. "I thought, yeah, I guess I do."

On a recent Sunday at her Pearl District salon, Salon 77, Zelinka glams up two longtime clients to demonstrate that dramatic looks don't necessarily require permanent commitment. Jennifer Hall, a singer, likes to change her stage look, and Megan Coughlin, a student, wants to dress up her style for holiday events. Zelinka uses clip-on hairpieces and stitch-styling techniques for temporary allure



Monks serene as fruitcake scribe bows to bad times

By ADELLE M. BANKS
RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

You know the economy is tough. Summers are reducing their purchases of a mass staple: the fruitcake.

Monasteries and abbeys across the U.S. where fruitcake baking is the traditional Trappist monks, are reporting a dip in some cases, the number of orders is the same, but the orders are smaller.

"We're right along with everybody else," Rev. Richard Layton, business manager

Levé: Professional young women direct charity

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money for prear, a mentoring program for homeless youth.

Organizers knew all 75 or so guests. They collected \$4,000, and agreed to try again the following December. Each year, they picked another nonprofit to introduce to their peers. If one cause didn't register with a partner, they reasoned, maybe next year's would. And in the process they'd marshal young adults to give money and time.

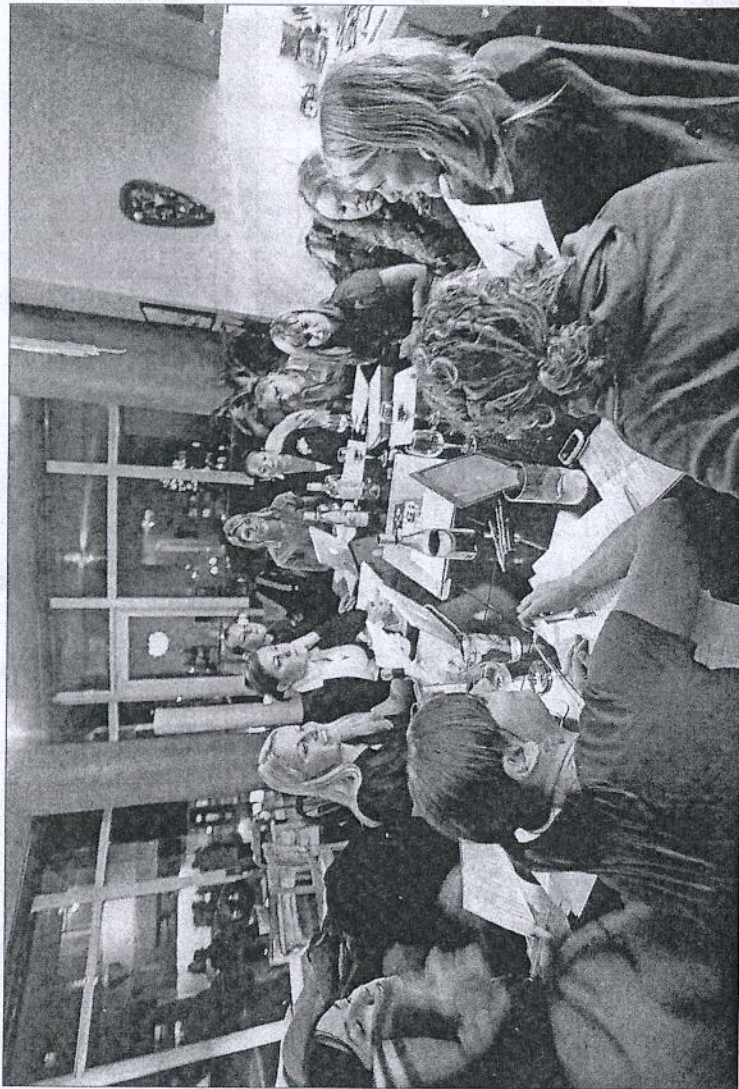
"Each year, we had more of us out of college and back in Portland," Courtney Francis, the president, says. "We've all grown up a little bit, and we're really passionate about this."

Instead of hosting the ball near Christmas, during college break, they moved the date to early December to avoid conflicts with office parties. They also chose a name: Levé, a play on the French verb "to lift."

More people came to each ball — co-workers, neighbors and strangers who spotted flyers. And each year, Levé brought in more money. Of \$30,000 raised last year, \$24,000 went to Friends of the Children, which hires mentors for at-risk children.

Two Levé leaders served on Friends' new ambassador board, formed to reach out to young donors. So the charity ball seemed a natural next step, says Terri Sorensen, executive director of Friends.

"I loved the concept," she says. "A group of girlfriends gets together, and it morphs into this great event. You don't always see people that young raising



The women of Levé meet every Tuesday night at the condo of their board president, Courtney Francis (bottom center, with ponytail). Laptops, wine and banter are staples.

OLIVIA BUCKS/THE OREGONIAN

Brothers Brewing Co.

Once in a while, you remember these are twentysomethin friends. When they discuss last-minute preparations, for example, Francis points out the could change clothes at Holocene. That's what event planners do.

"But we're going to look really cute," teases Lisa Blank, the venue chairwoman. "We're not going to wear all black and run around with fanny packs."

When the big night arrives: there are no fanny packs. The women of Levé wear dresses that sway and shimmer, set apart from the crowd by matching corsages on their wrists.

Chatter fills the Southeast Portland space, and the Latin funk band Toque Libre take the stage. Guests parade past auction tables to inspect jewelry, yoga gear and wine.

This year's beneficiary Schoolhouse Supplies, spread the word about its mission. The group runs a free store where teachers "shop" for classroom goods, from basics to art projects. Gayle Kellman, the executive director, says her staff literally just had to show up Friday.

"To have a team of professional, inspiring, energetic women speaking as brand ambassadors is a dream come true for a nonprofit," Kellman says.

About 500 people attend the Charity Ball — so many that some would-be partners had to be turned away. Last-minute donations will trickle in, but the ball raised at least \$36,000. After paying operating costs, the board will donate \$31,000 to Schoolhouse Supplies.

The women of Levé are already discussing the future. They'll probably need a bigger venue next year. And, someday a paid staff member.

But those are good problems

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package to the auction.

Courtney Mersereau is convinced Levé helped her score a full-time job at Umpqua Bank. The group now banks with Umpqua, and Mersereau gets a paid day off to set up for the ball. "It definitely fits in with the culture," she says.

Carly Terrall, who married into the gang (her husband grew up with them), posts flyers in properties owned by Gerding Edlen. And the development company donated a weekend at a Seattle condo for the auction.

"It's cool to see our friends step into these roles, to own it and make it important," says Ali BenBen, who works at Widmer

stuffy atmosphere, too).

Philanthropy can be intimidating, Maddie O'Neill says. "People feel like, 'I can't go to that event because I don't have enough money to give.' Our event is welcoming and inviting." For \$30, guests get in and get two glasses of wine.

Board members say their nonprofit experience makes them better employees — and their careers make them better philanthropists. Their bosses embrace Levé and, in many cases, contribute directly.

Erin Kuzma, the secretary, was featured in Neil Kelly's newsletter. And the remodeling company donated a renovation

show up one by one, in work clothes or workout clothes, and pull up chairs to a huge table. At a recent meeting, the women pass wine and Rice Krispies treats. After catching up on each other's days, they get down to business: donations, publicity, auction and raffle prizes, the industry economy. They talk about Holocene, the warehouse-style venue for this year's ball.

Make sure there are enough bartenders, all agree. If people wait in line for drinks all night, that's what they remember.

This firsthand insight helps Levé tailor the charity ball to a young crowd (though older guests have praised the non-

Fruitcake:

'We're a monastery first,'

hair into a low ponytail at the nape of her neck and twists, loops and stitches it into a messy chignon. She makes it look easy; she says anyone can achieve a similar look at home



Hairstyle:

Hair extensions create fullness