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SEPTEMBER 2016 • \$4

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VCLF's Virtual Gala—an Experiment with Resoundingly Successful Results

LAURENCE N.
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President



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TOO MANY MONTHS BACK TO MENTION, THE directors of the Valley Community Legal Foundation found themselves faced with a real dilemma. Ever increasing overhead costs were reducing the effectiveness of one of the most popular fundraising tools in the Foundation's toolbox, the Annual Gala.

For years, the Gala had been a tent-pole event for the group, raising a significant portion of the yearly funds required for deserving programs like the Domestic Abuse Center, CASA of Los Angeles, Comfort for Court Kids, the K.E.N. Project of Calabasas, Safe Passage and so many more. The Gala also served the important function of raising much needed visibility for the Foundation. But given rising expenses, funds were becoming increasingly meager for these important programs. The question of how to do better became almost existential for a group whose primary purpose is to raise funds.

They say that some great ideas start as a whisper. When the idea of a 'non-event, event' was floated, it seemed creative but unrealistic. Who would pay to be part of an event that didn't have a physical location and date? How would it even work?

But the genius of the idea slowly emerged. If it were possible to execute such an event, an unheard of percentage of all monies raised could be used for the charities rather than expensive rental fees and other costs. The event could have a much broader reach because "attendees" would not be bound by the limitations of their schedules. In fact, the event could take place over several months rather than just one evening. It might work, but it seemed that the only possible way to make it work would be to take the vast majority of the event online.

Thus was born "The Virtual Gala." The Foundation's marketing partners Newman & Grace quickly found the tag

line for what promised to be a much less formal affair—"No Jacket Required!" The Virtual Gala would transfer most of the actual fundraising activities associated with the Gala to online platforms, while maintaining a few of the important "real world" traditions. "The whole experience was an exercise in problem solving," remembers Board member, Shawn Burkley. "There was this regular discourse of 'OK. We've done it this way in the past. How do we do it virtually?'"

Because fundraising remains core to the Foundation's mission, methods of fundraising were addressed first. Foundation President Laurence Kaldor found an online auction service BiddingForGood.com, which specializes in charitable work. Kaldor notes that, "An advantage to using Bidding For Good that we hadn't really anticipated was their reach. During a traditional 'live' auction, we were limited to the people in the room. Online, we had people bidding that were just learning about our organization."

Auction items arrived from an amazing variety of sources. "A special 'thank you' must go to Liz Post and the other editors at *Valley Lawyer*, who donated the cover of the December issue," says Kaldor. "This incredibly gracious gift generated some very competitive bids and revenue for the cause." The ever-generous Bill and Judge Susan Speer donated some of their well-regarded 'Law and Order' wines. Another judge, and recent addition to the VCLF Board, Shirley Watkins donated electronics that sparked serious interest among bidders. Also, radio celebrity Bill Handel was good enough to donate backstage tickets to a show taping.

Kaldor also understood that working with sponsors was key to the success of the Virtual Gala. Stalwart sponsor David Nadel CPAs rose to sponsor the event at the gold level, as did Southwestern Law School. Lewitt, Hackmann,

About the VCLF of the SFVBA

The Valley Community Legal Foundation is the charitable arm of the San Fernando Valley Bar Association. The Foundation's mission is to support the legal needs of the youth, victims of domestic violence, and veterans of the San Fernando Valley. The Foundation also provides educational grants to qualified youths pursuing legal careers. The Foundation relies on donations to fund its work. To donate to the Valley Community Legal Foundation of the SFVBA or to learn more, visit www.thevclf.org and help us make a difference in our community.

Shapiro, Marshall & Harlan maintained their steady support of the Foundation by sponsoring at the silver level; Greenberg & Bass rounded out the sponsorship list at the bronze level.


The tradition of honoring certain key members of the San Fernando Valley legal community deserved a more personal touch. In recognition of retiring Judge Michelle Rosenblatt's immense service to the VCLF, an intimate event was held at El Patrón Restaurant where Judge Rosenblatt received the Pearl S. Vogel President's Award.

Impressively, Judge Rosenblatt served for 23 years on the Los Angeles Superior Court and still found the time to take on innumerable tasks and projects, such as chairing the Dinner Committee for the 2008 Law Day Gala, chairing a successful theater event in 2012 at the CSUN Performing Arts Center, regularly serving on the Grants and/or Scholarship Committees, and forming a committee in 2014 to create a new member board manual. In short, Judge Rosenblatt was tireless in her efforts for the VCLF and the Foundation was honored to have the opportunity to express its appreciation.

So now that the results are in, one big question remains: "Was the 2016 Virtual Gala a success?" The Foundation can report with pride that it was. "We quickly achieved a position where 100% of nearly all of our auction profits and sponsorship dollars went to the general fund

from which we make our donations," according to Kaldor. "That's not been the case for several years."

The Virtual Gala has decidedly proved itself to be a viable form of fundraising, bringing in the donation levels required to keep the Foundation active. "An additional benefit is the amount of exposure the Foundation gets by using an online platform," says Burkley. "We sent at least half a dozen emails to over 1,800 legal professionals in and around the San Fernando Valley. That's the kind of awareness raising that can translate in the future into even greater giving."

So, what started as a whisper of an idea seems to have grown into a roaring success. Currently, the Grants and Scholarships Committee is working on recommendations on how the funds will be allocated—the hope being to have most of the money disbursed by September. And the Foundation is already looking for ways to improve next year's Gala. Not too bad for a "non-event, event!" 

This article has been graciously sponsored by:

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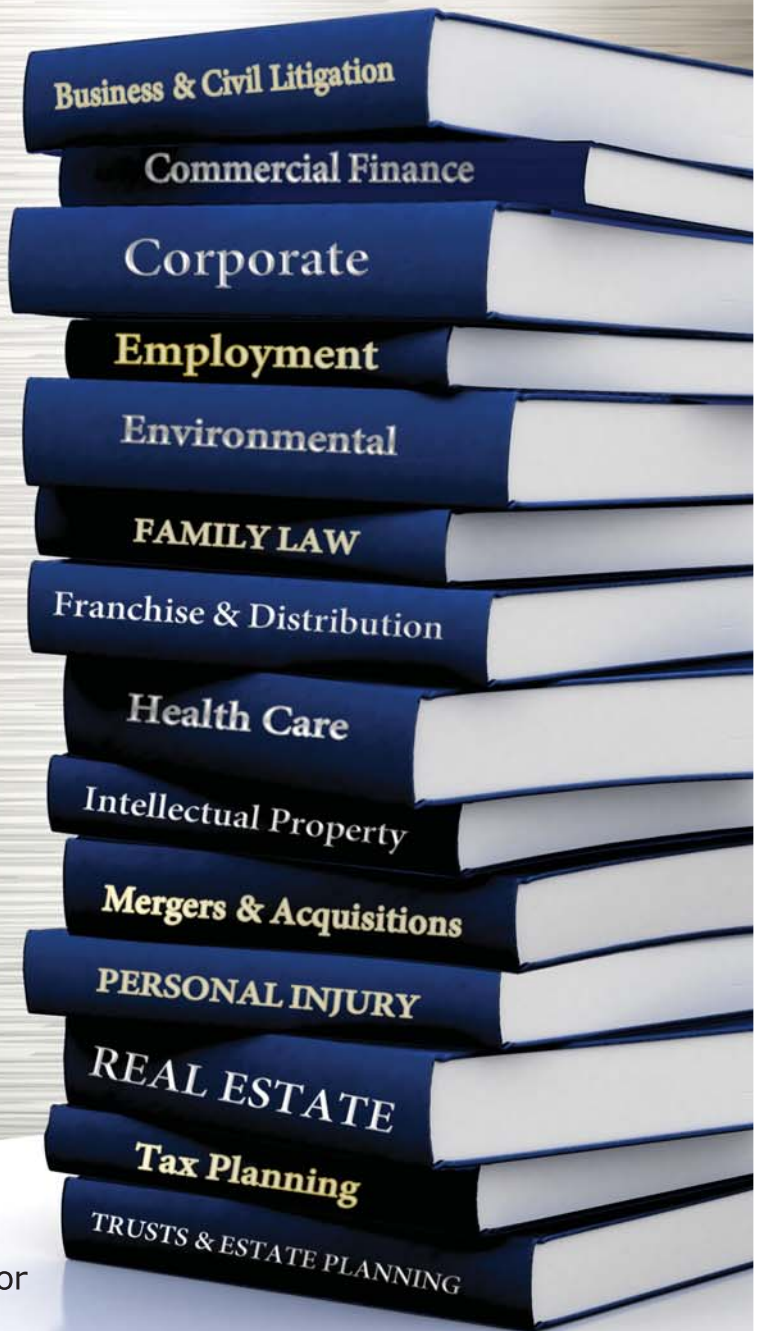
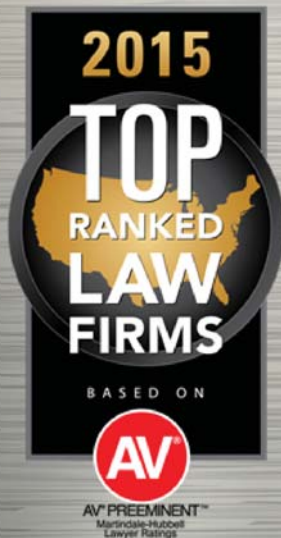
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