

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Bake Sales

*Nonprofit groups take to raising funds via more creative – and successful – methods*

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The Texas Rangers didn't make the playoffs this year, but their 2000 season is still paying dividends for Nolan Catholic High School in Fort Worth.

Nolan booster club members spent the summer working various concession jobs at The Ballpark in Arlington and will donate their salaries to the school's athletic programs. Last year's earnings provided the Nolan Vikings swim team with full-length, insulated robes.

"[Nolan] just never had a lot of money in their budget for athletics, and going back to the late '80s, if they didn't have enough money to buy uniforms, then some kids just didn't have a complete uniform, and it bothered me," said Mary Ellen Byrnes, the booster club coordinator and the mother of four Nolan graduates.

Many nonprofit groups are using the same approach – trading traditional bake sales and car washes in favor of regular shifts at local retailers and sports and entertainment venues.

The arrangement works well for the nonprofit groups and their employers, said Tim Donigan, general manager of SportService Corp., which provides food and beverage service at the Ballpark.

"There are substantial benefits to using groups," Mr. Donigan said. "The biggest advantage is that you get very high-quality people that come work for us."

Jackie Davis, volunteer group coordinator for the Ballpark, said nonprofit workers are hard-working and dependable. "They're not as apt to call in and say they can't be here," he said. "They work harder because the incentive is there."

"We depend on our nonprofit groups."

Mr. Donigan estimates that the Ballpark pays out \$750,000 to \$800,000 each year to nonprofit groups who come to work at the stadium. "Both parties gain with the situation," he says. "It would be an extreme hardship to try to fill those positions without the volunteer groups."

The Nolan effort was organized by Ms. Byrnes and a band of about 200 Nolan parents and students have served up french fries, beer and hot dogs in booths throughout the Ballpark. This year's profits are expected to total about \$14,000. The figure is slightly less than the 1999 earnings partly because there were no playoff games to work this year.

Nolan's best year at the ballpark was in 1998, when volunteers raised \$17,000, including \$1,000 collected during a single rain-delayed playoff game against the New York Yankees.

"They had nothing else to do but eat and drink, and then we started up again at 12:30 [a.m.], cooking catfish

and french fries until 2 in the morning," Ms. Byrnes said.

Nonprofit groups have become an unexpected source of part-time workers for venues such as the Ballpark since the jobless rate shrank to historic lows.

"The people who participate in these programs really would not be available for this [otherwise]," said Tony Collette, who has researched nonprofit/business alliances and works as a go-between for the groups and potential employers. "They're people who already have jobs, or they're students or stay-home moms."

### Recent growth

Mr. Collette said the first nonprofit/business arrangements began about 25 years ago. But only recently has there been a concerted effort to marry nonprofits that need money to businesses that need employees.

"Basically, these programs create a workforce out of nothing, and they give back a huge amount of money to the community," Mr. Collette said. "It's happening everywhere. In every state I've looked in, I've found them – California, Oklahoma, Texas, Ohio, Georgia."

The Rangers aren't the only business taking advantage of this win-win situation in the Dallas area. Texas Stadium has a similar system in place.

George Wasai, director of concessions for the Dallas Cowboys, said it's satisfying to help local charities while maintaining a dependable and professional workforce.

"The nonprofit groups have a goal to meet, and we want to associate ourselves with them, to assist them and to enrich their goals, so we try to use as many nonprofit groups as we can find," he said.

One of the nonprofit groups that works Texas Stadium is the Mesquite chapter of the NAACP. "It's one of the fastest ways to raise funds," said branch president Denise Upchurch.

About 13 NAACP members work Cowboys games, high school games and other Texas Stadium events, selling food, soft drinks and beer and making up to \$600 a night, Ms. Upchurch said. That money covers administrative costs and pays for scholarships for underprivileged children.

Arlington's Six Flags Over Texas also hires nonprofit groups as backups for the regular staff during peak periods or special events such as concerts or Halloween Fright Fest.

More than 200 booster groups are registered with Six Flags, and they are critical in helping manage, feed and service the park's large crowds, said Linda Wilson, the park's human resources recruiter for the park.

"The booster group is paid \$6.25 per hour for each volunteer hour worked, and the check is sent to the group," Ms. Wilson said. "We also send out a complimentary pass for each volunteer who works, so they get a one-day pass to come in at a later date and have fun."

Barbara Spidman, vice president of fund-raising for the Martin High School drill team booster club in Arlington, said the work is fun and financially rewarding.

“They’ve fallen in love with our group, she said. “I don’t know if they’ve fallen in love with us as people or for the job we do, but we get called all the time.”

## Extra Hands

The Martin booster club, which also works for the Ballpark, has about 20 regular members who go to work whenever Six Flags calls.

“We have a lot of people who work, take it seriously and do a good job,” said Ms. Spidman, who estimates the club has raised \$3,000 to \$4,000 this year, far surpassing more traditional fund-raisers.

The Fossil Ridge High School band booster club in Keller splits its time between Six Flags and Kohl’s department stores and will make about \$36,000 this year alone, club president Richard Christie said. The money supports the 200-member band, bankrolls an annual spring break trip and pays for four college scholarships.

At Kohl’s, the booster club helps out during peak times such as the Christmas season and the recent sales-tax holiday. Volunteer workers, who get \$7 per hour, bag purchases, tidy up dressing rooms and perform other minor tasks.

“They’re looking for temporary work and, I think, groups that they can depend on,” Mr. Christie said. “It’s to their benefit to do that because they can’t hire staff employees to work sporadically like this. It benefits both organizations.”

Kohl’s district manager Roger Sheaves agrees.

“When I first joined the company I thought it was a fantastic idea and wondered, ‘Why didn’t I think about that at my last company and why didn’t anybody else think about that?’ It’s a great program.”

Kohl’s, which has more than 300 stores nationwide and 18 in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, has been using volunteer groups for about five years, Mr. Sheaves said.

He said Milwaukee-based Kohl’s had to advertise the program when it opened its first North Texas stores in October 1999.

“We had to go out there and sell it,” Mr. Sheaves said. “People don’t think of retailers doing that kind of stuff.”

## Word of mouth

Now, Mr. Sheaves said, nonprofit groups regularly contact him about work. They’ve usually heard about the program from other groups that are already working with Kohl’s, he said.

“I think the benefit is that it gives [nonprofit groups] something fun to do, and it helps them build a team spirit,” said Sharon Bailey, director of training for the Dallas-based Center for Non-Profit Management.

For the businesses, she added, “It’s a good way . . . to meet short-term needs, to save money and save benefits expenses, especially, and at the same time to connect with the community through the nonprofit organization.

“We hear so much about younger people in the workforce who have social concerns and environmental concerns, things that the nonprofit sector typically addresses, so it can only help a business’ esteem in the community to be seen as benefiting a nonprofit organization. It can only help them both with the morale of their staff and with their reputation in the community.”

Working for a local business to raise funds is an especially attractive option for smaller groups that may not have a very public profile, said Ms. Bailey.

Everyone knows about Girl Scout cookies, she said, but your child’s soccer team may have a harder time selling its own sweets.

And Ms. Bailey said that while sports and entertainment venues such as the Ballpark and Six Flags have been quick to see the advantages of hiring nonprofits, more retail outlets need to be made aware of these programs.

The potential is huge. In North Texas, about 3,500 groups are registered as nonprofit with Internal Revenue Service.

But those numbers include only official organizations such as arts, health and regional education groups.

When you add in local school booster clubs, PTAs and other small nonprofits that aren’t required to register with the IRS, the number grows “exponentially larger,” Ms. Bailey said.

“If I were to start a business from scratch, I would attempt to bring [nonprofits] in regardless of the labor situation because we do get such a high-quality person that works for us,” said Mr. Donigan of SportService.

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