

Event raises money for TAPS



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By Valari Hyatt
Pekin Daily Times
Mon May 04, 2009, 05:00 PM CDT

PEKIN, Ill. -

The seventh annual Wine & Dine with a Silent Auction Extravaganza at the Pekin Country Club Sunday night went down as smoothly as the wine that was served.

Those in attendance competed in a bidding frenzy during the auction to raise funds for the Tazewell County Animal Protective Society Animal Adoption Center, a nonprofit and no-kill shelter.

Vickie Brent, TAPS board president, welcomed guests and introduced the board of directors: Vice President Mark Fabry, Secretary Denise Berardi, Treasurer Brooke Miller, Past President Henry Cakora, Debbie Fischer, John Palmer, Charlie Hanley, Nancy Affolter and Bill Atkins.

"The timing for tonight's Wine & Dine is perfect because it's also the kickoff for the national Be Kind To Animals Week. That's when we celebrate the bond between animals and people," Brent said. "We are so grateful to all the donors here tonight. We are a nonprofit and only exist through the generosity of donors."

That said, Brent also acknowledged the Gimme Shelter Homes on each table.

"These little red dog houses are not just here for decoration. Hint, hint — feel free to drop some money in them tonight," she said. "The money raised from these little dog house banks help support TAPS year round. I want to thank Gale Young (chair), Brooke Miller (treasurer) and Harry Emerson ("repair guy") for making this ongoing fundraiser so successful."

Henry Cakora, the brain behind the Gimme Shelter Homes campaign, said it takes about \$315,700 a year to keep TAPS running and that the Gimme Shelter Homes raise approximately \$1,500 a month — about \$18,000 a year towards that whole.

TAPS Executive Director Angela Blackman expressed her appreciation: "Thank you for your time, support, donations and for making a difference in the lives of these animals by helping to find them a home."

Blackman also thanked this year's Wine & Dine & Silent Auction chairmen: Alice Cakora, fundraiser; Sherry Semonis, dinner; Peggy Collins, tickets; Linda Caudle, auction; Dick Barker, display; and Denise Berardi and Herget Helpers, cashiers. Other committee members were Dorothy Barker, Claire Maquet, Jill Peterson, Julie Walz, Lynn Ghelardini, Diane Lalone, Candy Lacasico and Sheila Borton.

After toasting Jan and Bob Saal for supplying the wine for the auction, Alice Cakora thanked everyone for

coming.

"This is so important," she said. "And I want to tell you a little story that shows how important it is. Someone dropped off four little silk Yorkies, cramped together in a tiny cage. Someone thought they saw something and stopped. They took the dogs to the county animal shelter, and the County brought them to TAPS, where they were adopted out almost immediately. That's what your money is doing for TAPS."

The numerous silent auction items offered something for everyone, including a Cuddler recliner, Weber cooker, freezer, paintings, prints, wine, Maui Jim sunglasses, handcrafted wood bowl, framed Hollyhock House print by Thomas Kinkade and much more.

One special item up for bid was directed toward pet owners; Carol Schultz, an animal communicator and founder of animalspiritnetwork.com, donated an interactive session.

The first item up for bid during the live auction was a Kate Spade bag. Auctioneer Greg Batton told the crowd that the bag was seeded with money.

"We put an undetermined amount of money in it, and we're going to pass the bag around this room and we'd like all of you to put more money in it, and then we'll auction it off to the highest bidder," he said.

The bag circulated around the dining room, where 350 people were seated, and one by one people shoved in more green bills. Cakora lugged around the bag — which she deemed "heavy" — so people could see its contents, and the bidding increased.

"I know nothing about Kate Spade bags," Batton told the crowd, "but I know you'll never buy a bag full of money again, so let's start the bidding at \$300."

The bidding frenzy went from \$300 to \$1,350 in less than a minute. And that's just how the evening got started.

A one-week stay at the Hilton Head Condo, donated by Julie Reynolds, went for \$1,900. Four Chicago Bears tickets (lower bowl for a Nov. 1 game against Cleveland) donated by Ron and Claire Maquet, went for \$2,100. And a party for 10 people with food and libation at Doug and Cathy Wilson's farm went for \$500.

It's a good day when you can raise \$5,850 for dogs and cats in less than 15 minutes. Add in \$240 for the Gimme Shelter Homes (dog house banks), and you have \$6,090 towards the goal.

"Last year we raised \$36,000. This year, as you know, the economy pretty much sucks," Cakora said. "All was hoping to raise at least \$30,000 in spite of the shrinking economy. But guess what? Tonight we raised a total of \$34,316."

After the cost of the dinners was taken into account, however, the event brought in closer to her original estimate of \$30,000, she said.

"We're grateful for the money, but it's just as important to be fun. I want everyone to leave with a good attitude about TAPS at the Wine & Dine, and I just love it when I see them having fun," Cakora said, adding, "We even picked up some new committee members for next year."

And in case you're wondering — The Kate Spade bag was a knockoff with \$100 seed money.

However, by the time it circled the room, it had accumulated an extra \$1,000. So the highest bidder got \$1,100 and a Kate Spade knockoff for \$1,350 — or \$250, depending on how you look at it.

Either way, TAPS got \$1,350. You do the math.

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