

September 29, 2009

The In Crowd

For its second annual "In Party," Brigham and Women's Hospital used inventive tabletops, a digital auction system, and streamlined program to keep guests happy & reel in \$1 million.

A year after debuting the "In Party," Brigham and Women's Hospital faced a big challenge in staging the fund-raising gala's second outing at the [InterContinental Boston hotel](#) Saturday night: throwing a party for 420 donors that felt like the event of the year, while adjusting to the economic realities of 2009.

"Many of our volunteers had requested that we not do anything too elaborate or over-the-top this year," said the hospital's director of fund-raising events, Bill Florentino, who turned to Bryan Rafanelli of [Rafanelli Events](#) to produce the gala.

Rafanelli accomplished part of that goal by replacing floral arrangements with centerpieces that spelled out the party's theme while also informing dinner guests about where their money was going. Paper rectangles arranged across each long dinner table spelled out the party's "In" themes—innovation, inspiration, and incredible care—and in smaller bubbles detailed facts about the programs the fund-raiser would benefit. "It was really important to the hospital that it feel like a very special event but that it also be clear to the guests that the majority of the money was going to fund programs," Rafanelli said.

"We also made a real effort to keep the program short," Florentino said. "We wanted it to come off as a celebration, without too many drawn-out speeches or too much time fund-raising. We made sure to get to the entertainment quickly, and our guests really appreciated that respect of their time."

The hospital replaced a full live auction with a primarily digital bidding system using devices from [IML](#) that let guests bid on items like a New York vacation and a Patriots fantasy package without leaving their seats. All of the guests' information was registered beforehand and saved to a personalized card they received at the door. At their tables, guests swiped the cards through handheld electronic devices that recognized them and allowed them to bid on auction items.

As guests bid on items, a screen at the front of the room displayed the auction's progress, along with a thermometer that crawled up as the group moved towards the hospital's goal of raising \$1 million. "As the number rose towards that mark, you could feel the excitement building in the room," said Rafanelli. With the total about \$100,000 short of the goal as the auction ended, organizers held an appeal to put them over the top, and guests obliged until the thermometer hit the million mark. At that point the room broke out into applause, and many guests were immediately ready to take to the dance floor as Vonda Shepard and her band came out to perform.

—Brendan Spiegel

BRIGHAM & WOMEN'S HOSPITAL IN PARTY

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