

Tales from the Hearth
January 13, 2018
Storytelling House Party/Fundraiser

STAGEBRIDGE

Presented by: Gerry Keenan

Tales from the Hearth 2018

Overview

Stagebridge is near and dear to my heart. Many years ago I worked with its founder, Stu Kandell, doing some minor fundraising, and particularly enjoyed working with an organization that **respected the creative needs and talents of 'older adults.'** While surprised to now be in that age group (how can this possibly be?) I delight in having the time to participate in Stagebridge classes where I am learning the art of storytelling from an outstanding staff.

The majority of my professional life has been spent in the non-profit sector. This work included Director of Development for the San Francisco Legal Aid Society and Bay Area Community Services and as Executive Director of a countywide (Horizon Services) and a national (Aid to Adoption of Special Kids) organization...plus many years of consulting to the non-profit sector in all areas of capacity building. It was my great privilege to serve as consultant of record for the 1987 visit of Pope John Paul II to San Francisco.

What have I learned about fundraising? Very simply...you can do marketing without raising funds, however, raising **significant funds** without marketing (telling your story as widely as possible) is impossible. Knowing Stagebridge had lost some funding sources I decided to see if I could do a small event that would bring **new people** into the fold, and at the

same time generate a bit of money for the EPIC program. **Tales from the Hearth 2018** happened on Saturday, Jan. 13th, 2018.

Table of Contents

Goals.....	1
Were Goals Met?.....	1
Steps Along the Way.....	2
Unfolding the Script.....	2
Event Considerations.....	2
Tellers.....	3
Date and Time.....	3
Audience.....	4
Invitation... Importance Of.....	5
Venue, Stairs, Chairs and Parking.....	6
Setting and Decorations.....	7
Food and Beverages.....	7
Personal Financial Consideration.....	8
Team Work.....	9
Follow-up.....	10

Conclusion.....10

Goals

P. 1

- Identify storytellers, enlist Kirk to 'headline'
- Raise a **minimum** of \$500
- Have 20 audience members who were **new** to Stagebridge
- Have storytellers reflect the ethnicity, age and vibrancy of Stagebridge...as a reflection of the City of Oakland and its surrounds
- Set the stage...lighting, decorations, food and particularly tellers that would present Stagebridge as an organization worth supporting
- Have a fun party

Were Goals Met?

- Four very strong E.P.I.C. storytellers were identified, okayed by Kirk and asked to participate. All said yes, as did Kirk
- As a team we raised **\$1,000**
- This was a **first introduction to Stagebridge for 24** of the 40 people present at event
- The tellers were a true representation of the internal and external communities Stagebridge serves. Two were African American males, one in his seventies and one, early fifties, there was an East Indian male in his 70's, a Caucasian male in his 70's and an 84 year-old Caucasian female. Their ages and ethnicities also reflected the audience make up.
- I can only say that I have been asked by half a dozen people when the next event will be. Guests talked about

the joy they experienced...and commented that everyone seemed to leave smiling.

Steps Along the Way

P. 2

The first step was to run the initial idea past Kirk, who then presented it to Stagebridge's Executive Director. Jose was skeptical, sighting the small amount that would be raised...fearing, I believe, that too much staff time would be used. The fear was valid and I tried, in every way possible, to minimize staff involvement.

Unfolding the Script:

Kirk and I met a second time. At this meeting we talked about prospective tellers and he committed to 'headline' the event. He agreed on the tellers and proposed the order in which tellers should present for maximum impact. We talked about length and type of stories and he okayed the physical layout (where tellers would perform) for the event.

Event Considerations:

- Tellers
- Date and Time of Event
- Audience (who to invite)
- Invitation (importance of)
- Cost of Tickets
- Venue, chairs, stairs and parking
- Food
- Personal financial commitment
- Setting and decorations
- Team work

- Follow-up

P. 3

Tellers...when first thinking about this I hoped that Kirk would be willing to headline the event...he was, he was wonderful and he was key to its success. With the exception of Kirk, tellers were asked to speak from 15-20 minutes max. Five tellers were, perhaps, one too many...however, the timing was good as Kirk finished at about 9:35. People stayed a bit longer to socialize with the last guests leaving at 10:00. If I were to do this again there would be another woman teller

Storytellers in order of appearance:

- Brother Ben (Tucker)...‘Spare the Air Day’
- Kiran Rana...‘Uncle Nasruddin Visits the U.S.’
- Bill Zarchy...‘Evelyn’s Story’
-BREAK.....
- Claire Wahrhaftig...‘Me and Danny Kay’
- Kirk Waller...‘Stager Lee’ (with banjo) AKA ‘Stagolee’

Kirk asked that Ben be the first teller in order to ‘set the tone’ for the program, meaning make them laugh, and that Claire precede his story. Kiran’s story added an international dimension to the event and Bill’s story of long lost family spoke to what it means to be family. Claire, the after break ‘warm up’ is an 84 year old dynamo storyteller with flaming red hair, an infectious laugh and amazing story telling skills who told and sang a medley of Danny Kay songs. Kirk then blew us all away with his performance (tale, song and banjo) of Stager Lee.

Date and time...I tentatively scheduled the event for the evening of January 13, 2018 with some concern that this was the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday weekend... the tellers and other Stagebridge folk didn't think the date was a problem. They did, however, feel that starting at 7 was a bit late so event time was changed to a 6:30 p.m. meet, eat and mingle with a 7p.m. program start. Two of the tellers (driving together) got lost and didn't make it here until 7:35 (giving party goers more time to enjoy one another.) We did not start until all tellers were here.

Audience...my original idea was to invite only people I thought would be new to the work Stagebridge does and to limit the party to 20 paying guests (this number was dictated by seating as I had planned to use my living and dining rooms.) That didn't last long as the response to the invitation was more than I anticipated and Stagebridge folks were also eager to be included. **What to do??? and still insure new people to the fold.** The answer was to rethink seating. I cleared out my studio (opens into my living room) and was able to set up 40 chairs. I also explained to Stagebridge folks that I had to close the invitations because the intention was to introduce new people to our organization and 40 chairs was all I could accommodate. Stagebridgers were limited to tellers, two EPIC women storytellers who had put on a wonderful party for us last year and to two others, plus their partners, who had approached me early on. I didn't realize that members of my church, who were attending, were also Stagebridge people. The audience was a true reflection of the Oakland/Berkeley

community...we were black, brown, white, straight, gay and lesbian. There were also members of the audience

P. 5

who had been born in the Philippines, Japan, Germany, Ireland, India and Colombia and for whom English was a second language.

Invitation...I cannot stress **the importance of the invitation.** It should be sent to people **that you KNOW will appreciate the type of event you are putting on** AND they should know you well enough that they open your email. **The invitation should be personalized...NOT sent out to a random list.** This means addressing by name, as in Dear John and Sue. Here is a copy of the invite I sent. It was mailed on December 14, 2017...four weeks before the party. By December 17th I had 22 yes responses.

Hi Alaine and Harujo...I do hope you can come.

On January 13th I'm doing a storytelling fundraiser here at my place for Stagebridge. I've been taking storytelling classes from Stagebridge for the past four years and can guarantee the quality of the tellers who will be here.

It should be a lot of fun. Award winning, nationally known teller, Kirk Waller, headlines the group. The other wonderful tellers are: Brother Ben Tucker, Bill Zarchy, Kiran Rana and Claire Wahrhaftig.

There will be lots of good cheer in the form of wonderful stories, sweet and savory goodies to eat and all kinds of libations.

The cost is \$25/person with all proceeds going to Stagebridge. I do hope you will consider coming and helping me support this wonderful organization. Love, Gerry

Saturday, January 13, 2018...6:30-10:00

I followed the invitation up with two more email, spaced a week apart. The first was a “great...I’m looking forward to seeing you” and the second, closer to the event, was “thought you might like to know the titles of our terrific teller’s stories. Kirk made a very nice flyer that I was going to take to church however I came down with the flu on Dec. 19th and was pretty much knocked out of the box for two weeks. By the time I was back on my feet there were enough people coming that I didn’t need the flyer.

Tickets... I had no idea what to charge so charged the same thing as some of the house music parties I attend (\$20-\$25/person.) The difference was that our party had a cheerful and festive ambience, wonderful food and beverages and people knew it was a fundraiser for an organization I was involved with. In retrospect I think \$30/person would have been more reasonable but wonder if \$60 a couple would have seemed too expensive, while there seemed to be no problem with \$25/person and \$50/couple? The only people who were not required to buy a ticket were the tellers. LaVonne Taft was the ‘lady with the basket.’ She did a masterful job of greeting everyone in attendance while at the same time asking, with a smile, for his or her check.

Venue, stairs, chairs and parking...my home was the venue for the party and with **43 stairs down to the house** is not wheelchair accessible. Several guests, and one teller, who have mobility issues knew about the stairs and were either aided by other helping hands or took the stairs ‘one at a time.’ **Chairs** are very expensive to rent. Fortunately I have a neighbor, who

was also a guest, from whom I could borrow 40 chairs. **An aside about chair placement**...after placement I sat in each

P. 7

chair, to make sure there was an adequate line of sight to tellers. **Parking** is never easy here. I emailed neighbors letting them know about the party and asking if they would leave the parking areas around my home free for guests.

Setting and decorations...a festive atmosphere rubs off on people, and doesn't have to be expensive. A 5 foot tall stuffed jester holding a welcome sign greeted guests (he was a neighbor's cast off.) Hanging over his head was a large lighted star with another star in the studio window and white Christmas lights lining areas of the studio. The stars cost \$9 each at IKEA several years ago and strands of white lights go for about \$4 each...all to be used year after year. The food table was covered with a colorful oil-cloth, the paper plates (50 for \$2.99 at Rockridge Safeway) were colorful as were the napkins. One concession I make is that **glasses**, wine and water need to be glass...it's just feels NICER and a bit more elegant to drink out of glass rather than paper or plastic. I have 45 wine glasses.

Food and Beverages... food is important, particularly when an event starts early and many haven't had a chance to eat dinner. There were so many comments about how good the food was that I have included it in this report ...and, because we had some lost tellers who didn't arrive until 7:30 it was especially good to have adequate food and beverages for late comers and to keep people engaged while waiting for the program to start.

The first requirement for me was that all foods were 'finger foods' in order to keep plates, utensils and clean-up to a

minimum. The second was that dietary restrictions be kept in mind so that there was something for everyone: vegetarians,

P. 8

non-beef or pork eaters and for those who prefer gluten free. Here is what was served:

Hearty

- ...chicken meatballs (toothpicks)
- ...crab dip
- ...deviled eggs
- ...vegetarian lumpia and dipping sauces
- ...small ham sandwiches
- ...skewers with olive, cheese and small tomatoes
- ...gluten free crackers and pretzels

Desserts

- ...fruit (strawberries and orange slices)
- ...dates
- ...lemon and pumpkin breads
- ...ginger cake
- ...Trader Joes cocoa truffles
- ...chocolate chip cookies

Drinks

- ...wine
- ...non-alcoholic beverages
- ...fruit water (tap water with ice and sliced fruit)
- ...hot cider

There was not enough fruit water, the hot cider went untouched and the olive/cheese/tomato skewers were not a hit ...lessons learned for another time.

P. 9

Personal Financial Commitment...I had a budget of \$100, which would have worked if I hadn't gotten the flu and had been able to do more food preparation. I made the majority of the dessert items and sent out a request asking people to bring wine and non-alcoholic beverages. As the date got closer and I was still not well I sent an email to close friends asking for **specific food items**. I learned a valuable lesson...**ask for help and be specific about what you need**. Not my MO but will certainly do so from now on as the response was terrific.

I stayed within my budget with the most expensive item being the lumpia (\$60.00 for five dozen). Had I not gotten sick I had planned to solicit food donations from restaurants in my neighborhood, and from the Whole Foods Store across the street from Stagebridge.

Team work...while I wouldn't wish the flu on anyone it forced me to do something I'm not good at...asking others for help. The response was wonderful, and even though people were paying to participate they were eager to help by bringing wine, non-alcoholic drinks and food.

The other part of the team that deserves my undying gratitude were the women who 'took over the kitchen.' They served wine, refreshed the food table, mopped up the floor when a pipe under the sink began spewing out water, kept the fireplace going, set up bags for recyclables, cleared the table, answered the phone, made sure people were being

greeted...and, ALLOWED me to meet and greet without guilt.
Their names are:

- Kerry Blackwell (my daughter)
- Noni Fanfa (my sister) P. 10
- Tangee Miles
- Sandra Wolter
- Claire Evasco
- LaVonne Taft
- and, Tomye who also took many wonderful candid photos

Follow-up...I sent an immediate thank you to the tellers. Without them there would not have been an event. A week after the event I sent an email to all participants (guests and tellers) thanking them for their part in making the event a success, outlining all the people who contributed to making the event a success and telling them about our fund raising success...at that time \$810. Last week I emailed the group again telling them of a new, anonymous \$100 donation, plus the generosity of storytelling classmates who, when asked during class, dug out \$5 and \$10 bills in order to bring our total to \$1,000.

Conclusion...The party was fun. We made money. People have asked to be notified of 'another story party.' And, staff involvement was kept to a minimum (although the checks were given to Stagebridge staff with a guarantee that thank you letters would be sent from their office.)

I will continue to send information to attendees with news of Stagebridge doings and am contemplating making the event an annual one. I am also very willing to work with anyone who would like to do a similar event. Ten smaller house parties (20 people at \$25/person) would bring in \$5,000. It's doable and

would spread the word about the wonderful work that Stagebridge does.

Submitted by: Gerry Keenan
7038 Buckingham Blvd.,
Berkeley, CA 94705
510-843-0577
Gerrykeen01@gmail.com

Cover Photos by Bill Zarchy