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# Laughter is the best (cash) medicine

The Boston Globe



Business is booming, says comedian Jimmy Kimmel. (Photo by Michael O'Connell for the Globe)

By Julie Masis  
Globe Correspondent / March 29, 2009

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While the recession has left many local charities strapped for cash, some have found a new way to raise revenue: comedy shows.

The Greater Medford Visiting Nurses Association, which provides homecare for the gravely ill and dying, used to rely on mailings requesting donations. But when it found that proceeds from such mailings had fallen by some 30 percent over the past five years, it turned to comedy.

"I think people really come to have a good time - that's what draws people," said Marie Knasas, the association's executive director.

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She said her organization's comedy night this month raised about two times more than a similar fund-raiser event without comedy. The group will use the money raised to rent 20 telehealth monitors, which measure patients' pulse, blood pressure, and oxygen saturation.

The Queen Mary Peace Parish Church in Salem, N.H., has turned to laughter, too. For the first time, the Catholic church held a comedy show instead of a penny sale as its annual fund-raiser, timing it for Valentine's Day.

"It's much easier to organize the comedy show," said Carol Kater, the church's office manager. You "need more volunteers to do the penny sale."

And a comedy show is an effective fund-raising strategy, says Paul Morton, owner of the Claddagh Pub in Lawrence, which has been putting on a monthly show for a charitable cause since last spring. A show to raise funds for the Lazarus House, a homeless shelter in Lawrence, was sold out last month.

"People who normally wouldn't go to a charity event, will go to a comedy event," said Morton, "and people who normally wouldn't go to a comedy event, would go to a charity [event]. So it works both ways." At Claddagh, 50 percent of the proceeds from ticket sales go to the charity holding the event, which allows nonprofits to raise between \$2,000 and \$5,000 per show, he said.

Linda Howard, vice president of the Nashua Dog Owners Group, recently decided to switch to comedy to raise funds to build a dog park in the city. The group had held auctions and raffles in the past, but it would take months of preparation to gather the items and catalog them, Howard said. Comedy fund-raisers are simpler.

"All you have to do is sell tickets - a lot less work," she said. Her group's comedy fund-raiser is scheduled for May 9.

For comedians, meanwhile, charity shows have become an important source of income as corporate comedy functions become harder to come by.

Comedian Paul D'Angelo said he has told jokes at fund-raisers to fight every disease imaginable, and even for people who were dying - no easy job.

"They might have treatments that insurance doesn't cover, or they lost their job because of their illness and their family is in debt," he said. "It can be kind of tough. People are in tears, and the next thing they say is, 'Here's our comedian.'"  
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