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SANTA CAUSE: A fundraiser based on the Festival of Trees

Businesses, non-profit groups, anybody interested, purchase a fresh wreath through the chamber decorate it and then donate it to the Santa Cause Event. Anything goes when it comes to decorating: the carwash has put air fresheners, carwash credit cards, and interior wipes, the banks use their business colors some are "themed", artsy or traditional, many have light strings (small battery operated), and the list goes on. These are auctioned off – Live!

Whole families are encouraged to attend the evening that begins with a buffet meal. The meal is not the focus of the night so it is usually quite simple at a nominal cost. Little people like to bid on these wreaths and baked goods (parents and grandparents telling them when to put up their hand), and a little rivalry can bring a good amount for an item.

The other donation items can be a cake, cookies or other baked goods. The fancier they look, or if they are a recipe that has been around for a long time (family secret), the more they will bring when auctioned off 'live'. A description of the recipe, or a little story about where the recipe came from should be included in order for the auctioneer to entice people to bid.

We also have a Silent Auction Table where other items have been donated; real pine tree, small giftware, business "Logo" items, electronics, even some giftwrapped items that are obviously bid on without knowing what it may be or the value of it. Some items directed toward children are great, as parents and grandparents like to purchase for their children that are in attendance.

The chamber advertises for non-profit groups to apply as beneficiaries of the event, and as part of being chosen, the group(s) help in the set-up and/or clean-up of the event.

We have had a small group of musicians/singers from the school perform for a short time, and also help by taking the wreaths amongst the people for a closer look. Santa has even shown up to help the auctioneer, and a have bit of fun with the bidders. For their help they receive an honorarium.

Up until I had attended the Roundtable Discussions, the Chamber had donated ALL of the money to the beneficiaries. This year, we held on to ½ of the proceeds. The total proceeds this year were just over **\$11,000**. We hope that people will still see the benefit of attending, knowing that the proceeds we keep, go to sustaining the Chamber and the events we sponsor.

Wreaths and cakes sell in the range of \$75-\$700.

What is needed is a good area where the wreaths and cakes can be displayed; a separate area for the silent auction items; a good auctioneer; Santa or an elf; some volunteers to accept payment for their purchases (some of the town employees do this for our chamber as we aren't able to write tax receipts-this only applies to the wreaths).

This event has gotten bigger each year, and by including the groups that will be benefiting, I believe they bring new people with them and return for the fun!

