

Need money? Call Randy Gordon, King of Auctioneers in Long Beach

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If you run a nonprofit and need an auctioneer to raise extra money at your next live auction, who you gonna call?

A good bet would be Randy Gordon, whose day job is president/CEO of the Long Beach Chamber of Commerce, but who, at night, becomes Long Beach's king of auctioneers.

Gordon is closing in on almost 300 gigs as an auctioneer since he started pulling dollars from dinner guests in 1993. In that time, he estimated, he has raised more than \$5 million for nonprofits in the Greater Long Beach area.

Gordon will set a personal monthly record when he serves as auctioneer at a whopping nine nonprofit events, in Long Beach, in October.

"I'm going to be busy, but it's worth it," Gordon told me. "Taking money from donors for the cause they have passion for just seems so natural for me. Plus, I really get a lot of satisfaction helping my fellow nonprofit CEOs at their fundraising events."

Gordon has many fans in the nonprofit world.

A typical testimonial came from Jerry Schubel, president/CEO of the Aquarium of the Pacific. Several years back, after Gordon did a live auction for the aquarium's Sea Fare event, which he now attends annually, Schubel sent him a message.

"Your ability to generate palpable energy and excitement in the Great Hall of the Pacific," Schubel said, "created one of the most exceptional live auctions in aquarium history."

Lisa Mais, fund developer for Pathways to Independence, said simply to Gordon, "You rock!" after he did a live auction for the nonprofit, which helps young women.

"He's got a huge heart," said Lou Anne Bynum, a Long Beach harbor commissioner and former executive vice president of college advancement and economic development at Long Beach City College.

Gordon got started as an auctioneer by accident.

He was president of the Covina Chamber of Commerce in 1993 when one of his board members, who owned several McDonald's, asked him to fill in for their auctioneer who got sick the day before.

"The event was called "Big Mac Under Glass," Gordon recalled. "I was so nervous, but afterwards I said to myself, 'Hey, I can do this.'"

He moved to Long Beach in 1994 as head of the Long Beach Chamber of Commerce and developed a flair for auctioneering.

"You pumped up the crowd and encouraged them to empty their pockets," Sara Myers, former executive director of the Long Beach Public Library Foundation, told him in a message — similar to Schubel's — after an event in 2014.

Other nonprofit executives have talked about Gordon's passion and ability to "work the crowd."

What are Gordon's secrets to having a successful auction?

"Being able to read the audience and how they respond to you when they are bidding," he said. "Calling out their names whenever possible is a big help. It's also important to have fun with the audience and get them to laugh."

Gordon said he enjoys watching a couple decide if they want to bid on an item.

"Sometimes," he said, "one of the spouses will try to hold the other's hand down to stop them from bidding."

He remembered another time when a couple really wanted to buy a puppy but had a budget to go only so high.

"Their friends at the table were throwing money at them and encouraging them to buy the puppy," Gordon said. "It was a sight to behold, and they got their dog!"

One of the most expensive items he has sold was a trip to the U.S. Ryder Cup competition in Ireland for four golfers. It included four days of golf and rooms at the same hotel as the team. Gordon sold it for \$45,000 for the Special Olympics.

For \$15,000, he also once sold a trip for four to stay in the home of former Los Angeles Lakers great Jerry West, in West Virginia and play golf at the Greenbrier Sporting Club.

A private yacht for 10 out of Miami, "which included everything you could imagine," for \$30,000 was another big-ticket item he sold. He actually sold this item twice, he said, because two couples wanted the yacht trip so badly. Money raised for the Jerry West trip and the Miami yacht trip also went to the Special Olympics.

Gordon has already announced that he will retire from the chamber next summer, on June 30 to be precise, but he won't stop working. Gordon wants to start a new business as an auctioneer and consultant, he said, working with small nonprofits to help them with their overall fundraising events.

But he doesn't want that work to interfere with more traveling, more golf and more time with his six grandchildren.

In the meantime, he is doing his prep work for the auctions in October. Here's what his schedule looks like: Oct. 5, Pathways; Oct. 10, Precious Lamb; Oct. 11, Museum of Latin American Art; Oct. 16, City of Hope; Oct. 17, Young Horizons; Oct. 19, Ability First (lunch) and Aquarium Sea Fare (dinner); Oct. 29, Ronald McDonald House Few Good Men; and Oct. 30, International City Theater.

Gordon plans on having some sort of surprise for the auction at the McDonald House Few Good Men gala.

Last year, Gordon was one of the recipients of the Few Good Men award, which calls for each man to perform on the catwalk of the Pacific Ballroom.

Gordon came out wearing thick, black glasses, a white sport coat, a curly wig, black-and-white shoes and banging away on a guitar with "Rave On" playing in the background. You would have almost thought that the late Buddy Holly had come to life on the catwalk.

Gordon has a sort of kinship to Holly. Gordon grew up and picked cotton in Lubbock, Texas, also Holly's hometown. Gordon and his parents were big fans of the singer, who died at 22 in a plane crash near Clear Lake, Iowa, on Feb. 3, 1959. Gordon was 9 at the time. Gordon, at last year's gala, brought the house down as he strutted and rocked like Buddy Holly.

This year, Gordon will be on that same catwalk — as the auctioneer, not an award recipient — in front of more than 1,000 people, the largest audience he has ever had as an auctioneer.

Will he pay homage once again to his idol, Buddy Holly?

"That'll be a surprise," he said mysteriously. Or, as Holly would have said, "That'll be the day."