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Small clubs pack big fundraising punch

By O.K. Carter
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While flipping through data about civic/service clubs in Arlington and their philanthropic and related fundraising activities recently, a fascinating nugget of information emerged: Every year, the little Pantego Lions Club, 34 members strong, typically makes about \$60,000 worth of grants and scholarships spread across perhaps 20 recipients.

That's a powerful investment not only in building social capital, but also as proof that that some civic groups, of which the Pantego Lions Club is clearly an example, are considerably more efficient at raising money for charitable activities than others.

This ability prompts curiosity. What fundraisers are some of the more efficient clubs using?

Civic/service clubs are not to be confused with social service, education, health or arts groups, though the latter organizations are often beneficiaries of civic club largesse. Civic clubs typically raise money two ways. They can ask their members to write checks, which is the easy way if the organization happens to be large, with a reasonably affluent membership. The Arlington Rotary Club is a dazzling example of this particular style; its members' personal contributions to various benevolent causes have reached many millions over more than a half century.

Or there's the alternative strategy: Go out and raise money through a variety of tactics.

But how? Good question. When it comes to consistently raising money to be invested in public service projects -- not counting member contributions -- here's what most regard as the local "Super Seven" civic club fund raisers, in alphabetic sequence.

Arlington Kiwanis: Back in 1959, while members were looking for a way to raise money for an ambitious series of youth and community service projects, somebody came up with a simple idea: Pancake Day. Members cook up all-you-can-eat pancakes and sausage, these days utilizing the First United Methodist Church kitchen. If a thousand or more people show up, a not uncommon occurrence, the profits roll in. And if people buy tickets and don't show up -- they're basically just making a contribution -- the day is even more profitable. So profitable that the Arlington Kiwanis Club has invested more than half a million dollars over the past half-century in an assortment of benevolent and educational causes. Information: 817-496-1535

Arlington Lions Club: Almost three decades ago, the club was looking for a fundraiser. A few members who were also heavy-duty anglers noted that their freezers were overflowing with fish, and they cooked up a simple idea: a fish fry fundraiser. Those freezers were soon emptied, but the event proved so popular that the fry continues, albeit these days featuring catfish filets of the farm-raised variety, served with hush puppies, french fries, coleslaw and pinto beans. The next fry will be Oct. 27 at Swift Elementary, 1101 S. Fielder Road. This particular club, incidentally, has been around for more than a half-century and has distributed an estimated half-million dollars or more in a wide assortment of community charities, with emphasis on youth services and programs. Information: 817-451-8259.

Junior League of Arlington: The club -- basically that's what J.L. is -- has easily distributed more than a million dollars worth of grants and contributions to nonprofits over the years. The main vehicle for this is Holiday Magic, this year scheduled for Nov. 2-4 at the Arlington Convention Center. The ever-growing event merges a 100-merchant marketplace, style show, luncheon and other activities. The formula, with a tweak here and there, has been working for close to three decades now. Information: 817-277-5751.

Pantego Lions Club: The previously mentioned civic club relies on a variety of fundraisers including an annual pancake event and a magic show, but the heart of its cash collection effort is bingo, which produces \$35,000 to \$40,000 of the \$60,000 the little club pours back into the community every year. Lions Club Bingo is four days a week at Pioneer Bingo, 1000 E. Pioneer Parkway, every Saturday, Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday at 7:30 p.m. The next pancake breakfast runs 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. on Nov. 4 at the club-owned Odis Pharr Community Center, 3535 Marathon Street.

Six Flags Sunrise Kiwanis: Every fall the club, collaborating with a Kiwanis club in Washington state, sells hundreds of crates of freshly picked Washington apples during what is billed as the Jack Ware Six Flags Sunrise Kiwanis Apple Sale. Members deliver the apples directly to homes or offices. The annual event this year kicks off Nov. 15. Information: 817-861-5807.

Arlington Sunrise Rotary Club: The club has about 700 customers who for \$25 a year subscribe to an annual flag service, flags being posted in front yards a half-dozen times a year for events like Independence Day, Veterans Day and -- the latest day added -- Sept. 11. Flags are removed 12 hours later. The club would like to expand its customer base to 1,000, but the smallish 40-member club is already at near max. All the profits go to local charities, the focus being on the Women's Shelter and Life Shelter. Information: 817-633-1645.

University Women, Arlington Chapter: The smallish organization conducts an annual Book Fair. Its 24th such event is scheduled for Oct. 26-28 at St. Stephen United Methodist Church, 1800 W. Randol Mill Road. Basically, members accept donations of used hardcover and paperback books, most collected in trademark red barrels at fire stations. Profits benefit various educational and literacy programs, such as Reading Is Fundamental, and local and national scholarship and fellowship programs that benefit women. Over the event's 23-year history, the fair has paid off big-time, pouring an estimated \$300,000 into the city in the form of grants, donations and scholarships. Information: 817-265-2565.

O.K. Carter's column appears Sundays, Mondays and Thursdays. Carter also co-hosts P3: People, Politics and Possibilities at 9:30 nightly on cable Channel 16. 817- 548-5428, okc@star-telegram.com

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