

Do Good Divas

Opening the gates to handbag heaven



Somewhere among the packed Caboto Club crowd at last October's inaugural Diva Delights fundraising event, as the familiar-looking auctioneer with the seasoned-TV voice battled to be heard above the raucous 750-plus in attendance, his wife and her co-founding partners of the deliciously-tongue-in-cheek-named Do Good Divas could have been excused for sitting back and simply smiling at all their little idea had become.

Gale Simko-Hatfield – the better half of the gent asking for those bids (also known as esteemed Ward 5 councillor Percy

Hatfield), along with co-founders Lucy Fanson and Barbara Holland would have had good reason to be pleased too: they and their fellow "Divas," barely four months registered as a not-for-profit service club, had pulled off their first major fundraiser with flying colours, all the while creating considerable momentum for a uniquely new charitable fundraising group whose time had clearly come.

Windsor and Essex County need never take a backseat to any community when it comes to its charitable fundraising efforts,

having proven time and time again – from its record United Way donations to the countless service organizations it supports – that its community heart is as big as it gets. And yet, amidst the numerous charity galas, festivals, events and golf tournaments, there seemed to be a missing ingredient to the likes of Simko-Hatfield, Fanson, Holland.

“Through our various personal and professional networks we’ve been fortunate to have met a lot of people,” explains Simko-Hatfield. “And we’ve all been to our fair share of fundraising galas, all of them very worthwhile and needed events. But we felt there was room for a service club made up primarily of women, who wanted to work together to do some good things for the community we live in.”

The idea for such an initiative first occurred to Simko-Hatfield while vacationing in Florida six years ago. It was there she came across an event where an auction of handbags supplied by celebrities was a feature of the evening’s proceedings. The concept seemed a natural for the Windsor area thought Simko-Hatfield, so upon returning home she contacted her friend Fanson about doing something similar for the local chapter of the Canadian Liver Foundation, of which the latter was a directing officer.

“We did our first ‘Hand Bag Heaven’ event three years ago and it was quite successful,” says Simko-Hatfield. “I think that’s when we realized there was a real interest in taking this to another level. Lucy, Barb and I began to think that we

could broaden this to a full-scale organization, with the thought being that we could attract women of talent from a wide variety of backgrounds, for the purpose of helping a number of different causes within a particular area of need. We saw local health care as the kind of benefactor we could really help.”

The trio blasted ahead with their plans in June, 2007, formally incorporating

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the Do Good Divas as a non-profit group supporting health-related causes in Windsor and Essex County. They quickly enlisted the support of about 25 charter members, and now count 100 ladies among their group. And the name? Perfectly ironic, say the founding members.

“We thought it was a neat and ironic twist (on the Diva name),” says Fanson. “When people think of the word ‘diva’ the first image that usually comes to mind is

maybe of a ‘Hollywood’ type star who is very demanding, very pampered. But we wanted to stage fundraising events that would allow women to get together in a really fun atmosphere and the Diva Delights evening is an opportunity for just that, while also raising money for these very worthwhile health causes.”

This year’s featured Do Good Divas event will once again be held at the Caboto Club, when Diva Delights 2008 takes place October 23. Charter divas Karen Hall of the Windsor Star and CBC Windsor’s Susan Pedler will again co-host the event, with Mr. Hatfield also back to preside over that take-no-prisoners live auction (Look out councillor!).

Fine foods and fresh flowers showcased by Janette Florists, and the most glamorous of apparel – courtesy of Windsor’s Diva Boutique - will be part of the evening’s billing; not to mention the eye-popping collection of quite often one-of-a-kind handbags, which will be available to guests via silent and live auctions. The Divas recently launched their “Handbags for Health Care” campaign, a four-month endeavour that will see the group gather handbags from more than 100 Windsor and Essex County retailers, as well as from world-renowned celebrities – such as Terri Hatcher, who last year sent the Divas a turquoise-jewelled Moo Roo bag by Mary Norton that went for more than \$800.

Last year’s event raised \$50,000, which was used to refurbish the waiting areas of Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital’s Adult Day Surgery unit. “We wanted to

Featured in
THE DRIVE
 m a g a z i n e



Issue 57

www.thedrivemagazine.com

provide a brighter and more welcoming presence for patients and their families while they await their surgical procedures," says Simko-Hatfield. "These are the kinds of things we are able to address for local health care. We prefer to identify specific needs that are quite often dismissed because of lack of funding. In this way, some much-needed improvements that may have gone by the way side, are addressed."

The benefactor of the Diva's efforts this year will be the Windsor Regional Cancer Centre, with \$30,000 having been pledged to provide a hand-held pager system which will allow patients the freedom to move around the hospital and grounds while waiting for appointments while ensuring their privacy by eliminating the need for names to be called out loud. The second project will be the provision of two patient information computer stations to provide access to validated information regarding diagnosis, treatment, and community support services. "We know there are so many requests out there that people get approached with all the time," says Simko-Hatfield. "But the level of service at our hospitals really means everything to our community. Projects like these are going to make a real difference in people's lives."

As they set the stage for their second "Girls Night Out" event, the Do Good Divas are also actively encouraging other women to join their fundraising effort. Qualifications? There are none; just a willingness to support the group's fundraising efforts, volunteer and have fun.

"We have professional women, business owners, homemakers, grandmothers and high school students who are involved with the Divas," says Fanson. "My sixteen-year old daughter got involved last year and just had a blast. I think at the heart of it all is just a group of people with a willingness to make a difference. And of course, maybe spoil ourselves a little while doing it!"

Girls night out indeed! For those ladies out there interested in getting involved with the Do Good Divas and their upcoming second annual "Diva Delights" fundraiser, call the Divas at 519-735-0211 or send them an e-mail at dogooddivas@mdirect.net. **TDM**