



# Putting the Fun in Fundraising

Tired of the same old ways of making money for your child's school? Try thinking beyond the bake sale, the way these creative parents did.

by GENITA KOVACEVICH-COSTELLO

**Y**ou know the drill. A brochure comes home in your child's backpack. You dutifully order cookies or wrapping paper, ask relatives to do the same, and then hit up friends with a promise to return the favor when their kids come knocking on your door.

Fund-raising is bound to be a big part of your child's school experience. It makes up for budget shortfalls and supports enrichment programs such as music, athletics, and lunch clubs. But does it have to be such a burden? Kym Pharris and other parents at her son's school, Wilderness

Oak Elementary, in San Antonio, didn't think so. Their solution: Noodles and Doodles, a spaghetti dinner-cum-student artwork show that raised \$7,000. "People are more willing to purchase something their child made than items from a catalog," says Pharris.

If you're weary of bake and book sales (which typically clear between \$400 and \$900), you can adopt Pharris's idea—or come up with your own brilliant money maker. We tracked down four other school fund-raisers that have become annual hits in their community.



It took many hands to help this event take flight, but the smiles were a lofty payoff.

## Up Up And Away Hot-Air Balloon Festival

Tupelo Christian Preparatory School, Belden, Mississippi

**RAISED \$27,000**

Rachel Becker loves hot-air balloons, so when the headmaster at her children's school suggested hiring balloonists for a fund-raiser, she took over. Nearly 5,000 people attended last year's festival, which featured games, entertainment, food, an antique-car show—and, of course, lots of balloons. The highlight: Four pilots fired up their tethered crafts for a dazzling sunset display.

Besides the \$5 admission, the festival profited from T-shirt sales, tethered balloon rides (\$20 each), and vendors who paid up to \$200 for their booth spots. The event's expenses ran high, including liability insurance

(\$650) and balloon rentals (\$1,000 each). Becker and other parents rounded up sponsors, arranged PSAs from local cable companies, and applied for grants (the school received one from The Tupelo Convention and Visitor Bureau to pay for advertising costs).

The festival employed 400 volunteers to manage ticket sales, game booths, and other tasks. But it also netted a big profit and attracted a broad audience. "Instead of asking only parents to reach into their pockets, we raised money from people who traveled from as far away as Georgia and Kentucky," Becker says.

**Copy its success** If you're interested in holding a similar event, contact the Balloon Federation of America ([bfa.net](http://bfa.net)) for guidelines and cost information.

## Tellerpalooza Rock Concert

Teller Elementary School, Denver, Colorado

**RAISED \$18,000**

When budget cuts threatened to shutter Teller Elementary's physical-education and arts programs, parents decided to throw a rock concert to make up for the shortfall. Their reasoning: "If we were going to work that hard to raise money, at least we wanted to have a good time doing it," says the event chairperson Aimee Giese. The tenth edition of Tellerpalooza, held last May, attracted 800 people (who paid \$15 to \$20 apiece). The night kicked off with a performance by the student band, followed by four to five sets from area groups. Families who needed a break could head downstairs to play board games or watch a magician perform.

Giese kept expenses to a minimum. She recruited the talent to perform for free; the sound technician volunteered his time; parents donated baked goods to sell; and The Mercury Cafe, a Denver restaurant, charged nothing to host the event (its food and drink sales got a big boost that night).

**Copy its success** While performers line up to be a part of Tellerpalooza today, the first year got going when a parent volunteered his group's services and recruited bands he'd met while performing. Try a callout for rock stars in your school community. No luck? Google "local music scene" and reach out to musicians who might draw fans to your event.



Put simply, this annual fundraiser really rocks!

## Virtual money makers

These sites make it easier for schools to run events—and to cash in.

- **DonorsChoose** It's a simple idea: Teachers post requests for supplies (such as writing journals or band equipment), and parents decide which project they want to support. Once it's funded, the charity buys and ships the materials to the school ([DonorsChoose.org](http://DonorsChoose.org)).

- **GoodSearch** Your online activities can help earn money for your child's school in multiple ways: GoodSearch generates a penny each time you use its Yahoo-powered search engine; GoodShop, a virtual mall that has more than 2,800 participating stores,

sends as much as 20 percent of your total purchases back to the school; and GoodDining donates up to 6 percent of your bill when you eat at any of its 10,000 participating restaurants ([GoodSearch.com](http://GoodSearch.com); [GoodShop.com](http://GoodShop.com); [GoodDining.com](http://GoodDining.com)).

- **BiddingForGood** For \$595 plus a percentage of sales, this group organizes your online or mobile auction, including cataloging donated items and doing promotion. You can also open the bidding to the site's 380,000 members ([BiddingForGood.com](http://BiddingForGood.com)).



Team ADIDAS was a winner at this year's tech event.

## Tech Search Party Alvarado Elementary, San Francisco

**RAISED \$11,725**

Alvarado Elementary needed a revenue stream to pay for new computers, so Tim Smith, a parent and the technology-committee chair, conceived a scavenger hunt with a twist: Thirty teams of four to six people used their smartphones to decipher riddles, which led them to mystery locations around the neighborhood in an all-out race. Smith was careful not to make the clues too easy, since participants had the Internet at their disposal. Thus, "The gospel according to Goldberg" led contestants to a church where Whoopi Goldberg sang in Sister Act. Once there, teams had to e-mail a photo back to event organizers (who tracked everyone's progress). The top three finishers plus the one with the best name—at last February's event there was a tie between ADIDAS (All Day I Dream About Science) and Eject Floppy—won a

prize package of donated gift certificates to share.

Although teams paid \$50 to \$75 to enter, most of the profits came from corporate sponsors (which included Google and UrbanSitter) that were featured in flyers and on the event's website, techsearchparty.com. Smith invited two other schools to participate. "I was happy to include them, but in truth the incentive was self-serving: Asking companies for money is far easier when multiple schools are involved," he says. The shrewd move paid off: Proceeds from the past four years have enabled Alvarado to purchase 29 computers, as well as printers, flat-panel screens, cameras, and an electronic message board, with future plans to install a wireless network.

**Copy its success** Check out EdventureBuilder.com, a platform that helps you design and publish your own interactive scavenger hunt for mobile phones. The fee for an event of up to 200 participants starts at \$500.

## A Taste of Little Italy

The Montessori School at Holy Rosary, Cleveland, Ohio

**RAISED \$60,000**

What began a decade and a half ago as a wine tasting for parents has grown into one of Cleveland's noteworthy social events. Last September, 800 attendees paid \$70 each to sample food and wine under a circus-size tent in the parking lot and participate in live and silent auctions.

The Montessori School at Holy Rosary, which used the proceeds to help pay for scholarships, is located in the heart of Cleveland's Little Italy. Many restaurants in the nabe showed up and prepared samples, while distributors poured more than 200 wines (all of them donated). Parents solicited the auction donations, so the school's main expenses were the tent rental and the raffle prize: a trip to Italy.

For a school with a mere 120 students, this was an ambitious undertaking. But Diane Boylan, who has chaired A Taste of Little Italy for the past decade, says it was far more efficient than a typical fund-raiser: "I don't think we'd ever make \$60,000 in one day selling candy bars."

**Copy its success** Montessori's eatery-laden neighborhood is perfect for pulling off this type of event. Even if your school's location isn't, you can still connect with restaurants and retailers in your area. Visit PTO Today (ptotoday.com) for a host of helpful fundraising advice, including how to solicit donations from businesses in the area. 😊



Numerous local chefs showed up for the big night, which, natch, featured lots of pasta.

### tune in!

Check out videos of these amazing school fundraisers in our iPad edition at [parents.com/digitalextras](http://parents.com/digitalextras).