

eBay helps local nonprofit to raise funds

People's Health Clinic looks beyond Summit County for money sources

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Of the Record staff

The People's Health Clinic (PHC) faces a problem that so many other nonprofits have: more demand on their services than money to pay for them.

Summit County residents are very generous, said Donna McAleer, executive director for PHC, but the clinic competes against more than 100 other nonprofits for a limited amount of available local money.

"We were looking for an alternate way to reach beyond the community [for funding]," she said.

One of their solutions was to do something very un-fundraising looking: auction off items on eBay, the popular Internet auction website.

eBay boasts 55 million avid users, or people who log on several times a week. By comparison, Summit County has 31,100 residents and Utah has only 2.27 million residents.

"What better way to reach out to the global community?" asked McAleer.

PHC's goal is to provide medical and health care to uninsured residents of Summit and Wasatch counties. For a \$5 patient donation, the clinic provides a medical exam, immunizations, laboratory, ultrasound and x-ray testing. PHC also provides well-patient care, preventative medicine and care of both chronic and acute diseases.

The organization will auction off four ski and lodging packages this winter, one at a time. All three local resorts donated lift tickets and Deer Valley Lodging,

R&R Properties and Snow Flower Condominiums have donated lodging. The only cost to PHC is the listing on the auction website.

"This is a very, very low cost way for us to do some fundraising," said McAleer.

Posting the vacation packages on the website is less time consuming than some local events, such as a dinner and silent auction. Although both begin with procuring donations from local businesses, the dinner/auction can involve creating fliers, organizing the event, hiring staff or volunteers and more.

Posting the same items on eBay currently involves a learning curve but has fewer details to work out.

The first vacation package was sold Christmas week to a guest already visiting Park City. The auctioned package will bring him back into town, according to McAleer.

The second vacation package closes Wednesday, Jan. 1 at 10:13 a.m. PHC started with a minimum bid of \$700 and the price has increased several hundred dollars. Most of the bidding occurs in the last hour or so, said McAleer, who saw the price of the first package nearly double towards the end. Inquiries into the new package have been steady, which gives her hope the price will continue to rise.

Fundraising on the Internet is not without its drawbacks. PHC is learning through trial and error how to manipulate the new fundraising medium to maximize the most of their sales. Timing, according to McAleer, is a major component. The ski package that just sold, for example, was virtually ignored when it was first posted in November. In December, however, people have skiing on their minds. Making the final hours of bidding during evening hours also helps

to boost the price.

The benefit of using eBay, in addition to the volume of people it reaches, is that it is not limited to people looking to help a charity. The target audience is simply people looking for a bargain vacation, said McAleer. Although People's Health Clinic is listed as the seller, the item is not segregated in any special way because it is a charity.

Shoppers typing in key words such as "ski tickets," "Deer Valley" or "lodging" will find the current package. The bidding page includes photographs of Park City during an Olympic moment, the rental unit and a map of Deer Valley. A description of the package, four nights of lodging in a three-bedroom condominium at Deer Valley and three days of ski lift tickets for six people at Deer Valley Resort, is accompanied by a passage on Deer Valley, Park City and the Olympics.

Including that information not only helps to sell the package but promotes Park City as well, said McAleer.



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Nonprofits such as PHC are looking to tap the global community to raise funds.

PHC also has an "About Me" page that shoppers can log on to.

Once the bidding has closed, PHC will

eBay aids fundraiser

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send the highest bidder a certificate for the lift tickets and lodging (airfare is not included in these packages), trail maps, information from the Chamber/Bureau on Park City, a newsletter on PHC and buyer's information.

Using eBay also allows PHC to offer items that might not be attractive to the local population. Beachfront property vacations could be an option, if donors are found, to continue fundraising year-round.

Despite the sexy image of fundraising on eBay, this effort will be a minimal part of fundraising for the organization, said McAleer. She estimated that the money from the sales is expected to cover only about one to three percent of the clinic's annual budget. Money from grants, private individuals and foundations would remain the main sources for the clinic's budget.

People's Health Clinic has reached out for donations through a campaign targeting past donors and the Park City Chamber/Bureau, a letter going out to local Delta pilots, and Advent collection of two local churches, sports events and a fundraiser with local businesses.

McAleer does not expect posting items for sale on the Internet to replace grant writing, but added that it may be an alterna-

tive to a mail campaign.

"There are 10,000 people without insurance in Wasatch and Summit counties," said McAleer of the need for fundraising. "There is a great demand for our service."

Among those without insurance in the area are the self-employed and small business owners. Many year-round and seasonal workers in the service industry also live without health insurance because they are not offered a plan through work or cannot afford the cost.

Across the county and the nation, the problem of fundraising has caused many charities and nonprofits to wonder how they will maintain, let alone expand, their services.

PHC may be one of the first nonprofits in the area to use eBay as a tool, but the website is no stranger to organizations around the country. Hundreds of charities are listed on eBay as well as instructions on how organizations can join in the future.

People's Health Clinic is not currently listed among them, something McAleer is still learning about, but their information is available on members.ebay.com/aboutme/peopleshealth/.

"It's a pretty addictive way of shopping," said McAleer. "Some people are even paying more than the retail value."