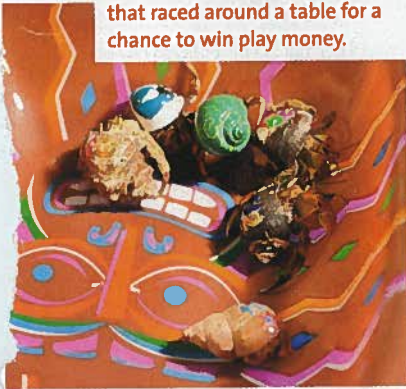




The Travelocity gnome traveled around the party, even making a stop at the casino tables.

Guests could bet on hermit crabs that raced around a table for a chance to win play money.



Special Olympics Florida offered five trips through a raffle set up at the entrance to the party.

Just the Ticket

Special Olympics Florida tripled revenue from a travel-focused auction.

ORLANDO Special Olympics Florida tripled its revenue by more than doubling the number of trips offered at its Island Hop party October 23 at the Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center. For the inaugural event in 2009, the nonprofit secured donations of 45 trips from 30 companies. This year that number jumped to 100 trips from 68 companies, including such industry heavyweights as Travelocity and Leading Hotels of the World, and brought in \$52,500.

The nonprofit's leaders developed the concept for a travel-focused fund-raiser when they realized the economic downturn was affecting the travel industry. "We saw an opportunity: Resorts had a lot of inventory, and they would benefit from the awareness we could provide. So our

event provides a platform to showcase resorts to people who have a propensity to travel and who have discretionary income to spend," said the organization's vice president of resource development, Matthew Levy.

Levy said the success of last year's event demonstrated to the travel companies that this type of auction could put "heads in beds," which helped the nonprofit secure vacations from many new partners, such as Travelocity.

"We look for causes where we can help the community and also inspire travel, and this really does both," said Travelocity's senior vice president of global partner services, Noreen Henry.

Special Olympics Florida's Island Hop Fund-Raiser

Catering, Design, Entertainment, Venue Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center
Entertainment Power C Company, The Party Corp.
Lighting, Production, Sound, Staging PSAV
Linens Kirby Rentals

From a South African safari to a cruise on Europe's Rhine River and dozens of more modest getaways, organizers tried to offer something that would appeal to each of the 350 guests. By the end of the night, guests had purchased all 100 trips. As an added benefit to the travel companies, the nonprofit will provide them with the email addresses of the event's attendees, so the companies can send future offers directly to them.

—Mitra Sorrells



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