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Heather Martin, Classic Wines Auction executive director, says event donors now help more children.

Classic Wines grows from informal swap to big deal

Wine auction now generates \$2.8 million for four charities

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With roots as an informal wine swap to raise money for a social service agency, the Classic Wines Auction has blossomed into a fundraising juggernaut.

The 25-year-old event spun out into a stand-alone nonprofit in summer 2004, after operating for years under the purview of social service agency Metropolitan Family Services. The transition appears to have been a shrewd move. In March, it raised \$2.8 million for four local children's charities.

Given that the Portland market is saturated with charity fundraising events, it is notable that the Classic Wines Auction has more than doubled the money it has raised since 2004. Even more surprising: The event boosted ticket prices to \$750 in 2007 from \$250 in 2004 while attendance continued to increase.

The Classic Wines Auction has been listed among the nation's top 10 charity wine events by *Wine Spectator* magazine for each of the past five years.

"It's a high-profile see-and-be-seen event," said Lori Flexer, senior vice president at Portland-based Ferguson Wellman Capital Management Inc., a sponsor of the auction.

The annual event, which has raised \$16.5 million since 1982, continues to be an important part of Metropolitan Family Services' budget. But longtime event volunteers believed they could more successfully grow the event if it became a stand-alone nonprofit. The event had raised about \$1 million in 2000 and again in 2001.

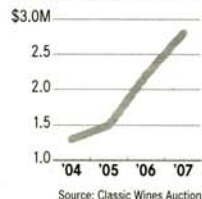
"The new model gave broader reach into the donor population," said Jana Richardson, development director for Metropolitan Family Services.

When it broke off as a separate charity, Classic Wines Auction Inc.'s bylaws spelled out that it would continue to support Metropolitan Family Services, giving the social service agency at least \$400,000 a year. The Classic Wines Auction board selects the other three children's charities to benefit from the event, and chooses how much money will go to each.

"The fact that we support four charities

CLASSIC WINES AUCTION

A four-year history of funds raised for Classic Wines Auction



Source: Classic Wines Auction

is attractive to donors, because they can help more children," said Heather Martin, executive director of Classic Wines Auction.

Martin credits the fundraiser's broad reach and its historic success as reasons its board is

populated by dignitaries from the Portland business community, including familiar names such as Fred Jubitz, co-president of Jubitz Corp.; Bill Stoller, president of The Stoller Group; and Wally Rhines, CEO of Mentor Graphics.

Charities selected to share proceeds also help shoulder responsibility for the event, using their own donor databases to sell sponsorships and tickets, and by furnishing volunteers. Sponsorships for the event cost between \$7,500 and \$50,000.

Although the event's growth has tracked the boom in Oregon's wine industry, the event reaches well beyond Oregon's appellations. Each year, four wine "ambassadors" are selected for the event, one from an Oregon vineyard, one from Washington, one from California and one from abroad. Each donates about 23 cases of wine to the event, and is asked to create an auction offering that may include an exclusive vineyard tour or dinner with a winemaker.

As for the auction items, wine remains the overarching theme, but big-ticket items such as cars and overseas vacations are also scattered among wines and wine equipment.

In recent years, the nonprofit has added a series of winemaker dinners that take place the week before the auction. Tickets cost \$150 for these events, and the goal is to expand the agency's reach and garner additional funds, said Martin.

Classic Wines Auction's annual budget is \$200,000, and it employs two full-time staff.