

How An Innovative Publicity Strategy Increased Revenue for a Church's Annual Festival

Challenge

The St. Anthony's Italian Feast is an annual festival and fundraiser put on by the Church of the Assumption, a Roman Catholic parish in Roselle Park, NJ. It is 4 days of family oriented fun with rides, food, and games held on the church's grounds. The "Feast" is a mix of religious worship honoring St. Anthony whose feast day occurs in June and a carnival with its rides and games. Over its 10 years the Feast's revenue and attendance had seen a slow decline. The newly installed pastor was eager to expand the Feast in new directions and turn it into an event that not only raised money but also could draw parishioners together.

The Feast was well known in Roselle Park but PR, getting the word out about its offerings to other towns, had been almost non-existent during the previous years. Except for some flyers, there was no involvement with the press or with the surrounding communities.

Solution

Leona Seufert, a parishioner and the president of the Roselle Park business, Beyond Words Communications, offered her services pro bono as PR and Marketing Strategist.

As part of the Feast planning team, she worked with the coordinators to craft an innovative PR strategy. With a minimal budget she turned to brainstorming unique ways in order to promote the Feast. She started out by creating two press releases that were sent to nine newspapers four weeks apart. The first press release was to create anticipatory "buzz" for the upcoming Feast, the second provided more details as to entertainment, food, and special events. Photographs taken at last year's Feast were included, showing delighted children on the rides and adults packing the vendor's booths. These newspapers are sold in surrounding communities and the publishing of the press release was a free way to promote the Feast.

Since the Feast occurs at the beginning of June, school is still in session. The most successful of the strategies was to utilize the Board of Education's "Backpack" program. Colorful flyers announcing the Feast were Xeroxed at the parish office and then delivered to the Board of Education, who then distributed them to every child in the Roselle Park school system. Thus the main customer, children, were targeted for this PR at no cost except for the paper used.

Another unique idea was to utilize the movie marquee of the town's now closed movie theatre. Contacting the owner, Seufert got permission to put a message up on the marquee announcing the Feast and the days in operation. This marquee could be seen by any driver going down the main street in town!

Results

Revenue increased by 60%. Although attendance couldn't be tracked due to the open layout of the grounds, all departments commented that they were "mobbed" by the number of people on the three days of good weather. Parents commented how their children had begged to go due to the flyer they'd received in school. The parish kitchen's new food booth sold out each night thanks to all the hungry families having fun!

"Leona got results from the free ideas she implemented. She did an excellent job with our publicity. It was a stress-free pleasure working with her. I'd be happy to have her back on the team again for 2012."
Ann Marie Peterson, St. Anthony's Italian Feast Coordinator, Roselle Park, NJ.