

## Case Study

### Rwanda Girls Initiative

*Exceeding Expectations. Beating Goals.*



## Rwanda Girls Initiative Exceed Fundraising Goals at Spring Celebration Event

### Organization:

Rwanda Girls Initiative

### Industry:

Philanthropy

### Solution:

Event Coordination

### The Challenge:

- Create an event that would raise enough capital to close out the fundraising phase for the Rwanda Girls Initiative

### The Results:

- 200% of fundraising goal attained
- Actual attendance 150% of plan
- Complete transformation of lackluster venue
- Residual donations raised at the event fun scholarships

Shal Foster and Soozi Sinegal, co-founders of the Seattle-based Rwanda Girls Initiative, had a dilemma. Running a volunteer philanthropic organization with the financial obligations of a commercial enterprise, they wanted to close out the fundraising phase of their project – building The Gashora Girls Academy, a boarding school for girls in the Eastern Province of Rwanda.

“Our bandwidth is stretched and minimal at best. We need all the help we can get and all the expertise we can draw on”, is how Shal explained their situation.

The Rwanda Girls Initiative (RGI) needed an event that would showcase their story and mission. With seven young children between them, the two women also knew they didn’t have the time or work-force required to conduct an event that would result in the \$350,000 needed to meet their capital expenditure requirements.

To add to the financial pressure, the Spring fundraising season was quickly approaching. Knowing they would have better success earlier in the year, RGI sacrificed planning time for an attractive date on the calendar.

### Childs Play

It seems fitting the solution for RGI’s predicament came through the friendship of children. Michelle Taylor, Founder and CEO of The Zella Company, had been keeping a close eye on RGI. With a young family of her own, she received regular updates from Shal whenever their children played together. When Shal admitted they needed help with the RGI event, Michelle immediately said, “Let’s do it.”

Taking on the Spring Celebration for RGI less than 45 days before the scheduled event date, Michelle and The Zella Company quickly implemented an approach designed to exceed the goal of 200 attendees and \$350,000 in donations. With no time to ramp an awareness campaign for the fundraiser, Zella knew they would have to forgo the normal “Save This Date” planning and map out an aggressive strategy. There was a huge buzz around the event, without question”, Shal explains. “People came because they were curious and interested and excited to be part of this movement locally.”

## Planning the Work

Generating revenue for RGI was at the forefront of all planning activities. Enlisting multiple techniques including traditional marketing activities like PR and local media outreach, Zella also utilized modern methods including a strong web presence and social media networking.

At every point of contact, Zella anticipated ways to enhance potential contributions. In addition to payment on the RGI site, Zella provided a donation option on the RSVP card, established a payment plan to encourage large donations and researched corporate matching programs of the employers for every person invited. Company issued forms were provided where matching programs existed to alleviate any burden on the guests.

*"They are good at what they do—professional, creative and sophisticated. Everyone gave much more than they might have otherwise."*

**Shal Foster** on working with The Zella Company

## A Jaw Dropping Experience

While the goal was to encourage people to contribute money, Zella knew the way to maximize this was to create a relaxed, fun environment putting people at ease and taking the focus off of donations. Exceeding the attendance goal by 150%, the night started with a bang when over 300 guests arrived at the Spring Celebration event.

"It was incredibly beautiful, well thought out and orchestrated", said Shal Foster when asked to describe the evening. "We had a mediocre venue, at best, and I have never seen it look so beautiful. I don't think anyone else could have made it look the way Zella did. People walked in and their jaws dropped. "

## Working the Plan

Supporting the theme of the night, Zella created an experience to impart cultural nuance and celebrate the Rwandan spirit. The cocktail hour started with an "RGItini", a signature drink comprised of fruit juices common to Rwanda. The specially designed menu carried the flavors and scents of a traditional African meal. Smiling faces of Rwandan girls were displayed everywhere to remind guests of the real beneficiaries of the evening.

With Zella attending to every detail, Shal and Soozie were able to concentrate on their hosting duties. Zella's seasoned and dedicated team handled all aspects of lighting, AV, check-in, entertainment, catering, and program scheduling. "We weren't even really aware of all they were doing", says Shal. "We had complete peace of mind."

## The Gift of Giving

With over \$700,000 raised, the RGI Spring Celebration delivered more than double the amount required to close out the capital expenditure for the project. In a very short time, with a difficult venue, Zella produced an event surpassing every expectation.

"Most importantly for us, we exceeded our financial goals," was how Shal surmised the event. Explaining the Zella contribution further she relates, "The messaging they created and the look and feel of the event helped us immensely. They're good at what they do - professional, creative and sophisticated. Everyone gave much more than they might have otherwise."

The capital expenditure requirements for the Rwanda Girls Initiative have been met and the excess funds The Zella Company helped raise will be applied to scholarships. The Gashora Girls Academy is on schedule to open in January 2011. Shal Foster and Soozie Sinegal are now free to direct their energy on construction and operational issues. "Zella did a terrific job. I would not hesitate to ever use them again."

To donate to the Rwanda Girls Initiative, visit their website at [www.rwandagirlsinitiative.org](http://www.rwandagirlsinitiative.org)

## Exploring Event Management

If you would like help with an upcoming function, contact The Zella Company. Experts in developing effective fundraising occasions, corporate events and orchestrating fantastic parties, The Zella Company tailors comprehensive event management plans that exceed expectations and provide clients peace-of-mind.

Contact The Zella Company at [www.zellacompany.com](http://www.zellacompany.com), or by phone at 425.451.9500.

