

Charity showcase is a cause for success

THEY say the best mission statements are often the simplest.

"We saw a need and sought to fill it," said Lauren Roe when asked about the "Gifts of the Heart" charity showcase sponsored by Blackhawk Women last month.

In a world of increasing noise, she explained, it has become more and more difficult for charities to appear on the radar screen, and not so many years ago there arose a great fuss about how to continue fundraising for worthy causes. Who will do the decorations? Who will entice the corporate sponsors? Who will address the endless envelopes?

"Many people want to help, but aren't aware of the different charities and their needs," said Sarah Williams, who co-chaired the event with Roe. "Our thought was that gathering several local charities under one roof would be a good way to receive this information and to learn how to give back to the community."

Actually, there were more than several charities represented at the event. There were 34 to be exact.

Among them were the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, ARF, Assistance League of Diablo Valley, Blackhawk Women's Scholarship Fund, California Transplant Donor Network, Children of Grace, Children's Skin Disease Foundation, Children's Water Foundation, Christmas for Everyone, Diablo Ballet, Community Violence Solutions, East Bay Stand Down, Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, GlobalSojourns African Giving Circle, Good News Jail & Prison Ministries, Homeless Veterans, Kid Save, Lindsay Wildlife Museum, Macedonian Outreach, Moment By Moment, San Francisco City Academy for Inner City Children and Bay Area Rescue Mission, Sisters In Service, Special Olympics, Tri-Valley Animal Rescue, Volunteer & Emergency Services, We Care Services for Children, Wheelchair Foundation, **Women's Initiative for Self Employment** and Young Life Capernaum.

All of them had literature and brochures for the attendees, and many even gave away freebies with their organization logos.

"The positive energy was contagious, and it was something people took home with them to remember," said Peggy Hernandez, events coordinator of the Hospice Foundation of the East Bay.

Most of the guests loved the networking aspects of the event and many showed expressions of support for the charities that participated.

"In fact, we met a couple of ladies who want to join us, and several others who want to be added to our invitation lists," said Angela Ciccone, Children's Hospital and Research Center Rowan Branch board member.

"We were looking for homes and gardens for our fundraising tours, and now we have two more, thanks to Blackhawk Women," said Tena Gallagher, president of the Danville-Alamo branch of the American Association of University Women.

"The event was great exposure for us and we received a lot of interest in our ministry," said Carla McRee, associate director of Shepherd's Gate.

Attendees also were thrilled to find more about organizations that they or their families and friends might have turned to in the past. So it was a two-way street with everyone benefiting.

"I personally loved the event," Roe said. "I was surrounded by the kindest and most compassionate group of people I have ever met — the kind of people who step outside of themselves with an active desire to be a conduit to a better life for someone else."

Simply put, they're gifts of the heart.

Mary Ann Cruz's column appears on Sundays in the Tri-Valley Herald.