

Atlanta Steeplechase's fundraising is strong

A new marketing and sales director has put some jump in the **Atlanta Steeplechase**.

Despite the downturn in the economy, the event has so far this year raised in the neighborhood of \$320,000, \$75,000 more than at the same point last year. And there are still six weeks to go before this year's April 25 running at Kingston Downs.

The new addition is India Watson, who joined the Atlanta Steeplechase last May. She formerly worked on the other end of the event with Bacardi U.S.A. Inc.

"It gives me an advantage," Watson said. "I know what sponsors are looking for."

AT&T Mobility has purchased a \$30,000 sponsorship and Pepsi Bottling Group has purchased a \$15,000 sponsorship this year.

"I hate to use the word 'surprisingly' because companies really see the value in what we have to offer in branding opportunities," Watson said of the success despite a moribund economy.

Said executive director Jean Bird: "Where we needed her was branding with Atlanta Steeplechase and actual sponsorship sales and to market the event to the masses."

Watson also attributed the brisk sales to a change in the event's date. The event's original date would have conflicted with the Masters golf tournament and many schools' spring breaks.

However, developer Hal Barry of **Barry Real Estate Cos.**, chairman of the event's board of stewards, noticed that another grade I steeplechase event on the circuit in North Carolina folded and was able to obtain that later date. Watson said many sponsors were excited about being able to attend the event when they formerly would not have been able to.

The steeplechase's main beneficiaries are **The University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine** and **Starlight Children's Foundation**. A secondary beneficiary is the Coosa Valley chapter of the American Red Cross.

Bird said the event hopes to give out a total of \$100,000. Eventually, she said, the board wants to double the event's size from 25,000 to 50,000, which would allow a greater donation.

QUALITY SUPPORT. Philanthropist

Stephanie Blank will host an April 23 event called El Dia de los Ninos, whose goal is to raise \$250,000 for **Quality Care for Children**.

The nonprofit's growth spiked between 2002 and 2005, in part fueled by a government grant to help provide child care for victims of Hurricane Katrina. In 2005, it expanded into 13 northwest Georgia counties, as well, according to director of development and marketing Theresa

restwood. Its mission is to ensure that Georgia's infants and young children are nurtured and educated, mainly by providing nutrition programs, grants for day care and training for day-care workers.

Fueled by events like the one Blank will host, the organization is working on stabilizing after its rapid growth.

A recent study by Quality Care for Children found that 86 percent of child-care

centers in a 36-county area in North and Central Georgia are reporting higher-than-usual vacancy rates, which it attributes to the recession.

"This event is to help raise money and help those families that are in crisis," Prestwood said.

BEEFING UP CURE. Since Kristen Connor took over as executive director of **Cure Childhood Cancer** in March 2006, the organization has taken a big step up in expansion. Its budget has increased from \$800,000 in 2005-06 to

\$1.9 million this year. About 65 percent of the nonprofit's fundraising goes to childhood cancer research at the Aflac Cancer Center and the rest goes to crisis-oriented family support.

Connor, a former business litigator at **Arnall Golden Gregory LLP**, has been able to add some high-profile members of the business community to the organization's board, as well as to its advisory board. Among her first acts was to adopt a policy that requires 100 percent board giving, which has resulted in about \$150,000 annually.

The board includes Lynne O'Brien, The Coca-Cola Co.'s director of corporate real estate, and the advisory board includes Atlanta Motor Speedway President Ed Clark and Braves pitcher Tom Glavine and his wife, Chris.

Cure's second-biggest fundraiser, Lauren's Walk, named in honor of a local victim of childhood cancer, is on May 3.

HEART ASSOCIATION CELEBRATES.

Just as the United Way of Metro Atlanta fell short of its fundraising goal on March 16 but celebrated nonetheless, the **Metro**

Atlanta American Heart Association too has a positive outlook despite falling short of a goal for its second-largest fundraiser.

On March 21 at The Ritz-Carlton Buckhead, the organization expects to raise \$1.1 million, \$100,000 shy of its goal, according to Brandi Broome, senior vice president for Atlanta.

"It's certainly something to be OK with and to celebrate," Broome said.

That night the heart association will hold an auction and make an appeal for personal gifts to make up that extra \$100,000.

"We can hit it out of the park," Broome said. "That can happen."

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