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CAROUSEL OF POSSIBLE DREAMS CONTINUES TO SPIN GOLD FOR YOUTH-FOCUSED CHARITIES

***Festival of Children Foundation's innovative fundraising vehicle
has raised nearly \$2 million for more than 50 nonprofits nationwide***

Costa Mesa, Calif. --- An innovative fundraising vehicle for youth-focused charities continues to move around and around and around, spinning gold in life-changing ways for nonprofit organizations in 50 states.

The Carousel of Possible Dreams, launched five years ago by the Costa Mesa-based Festival of Children Foundation, has raised more than \$1.85 million for 50-plus charities involved in causes ranging from autism to the homeless to Down syndrome.

And all that money has been raised through one of childhood's joyful and magical activities: riding a carousel.

The latest fund-raiser, on the King Arthur Carrousel at the Disneyland Resort in Anaheim on Nov. 5, raised more than \$246,000 for 10 Orange County nonprofits that serve children. Riders got pledges before the event with the promise of completing 50 revolutions on the carousel. On the day of the event, they had a chance to make calls for more donations between rides.

"Today, we just ended homelessness for 32 kids --- just in time for the holidays," said Jennifer Friend, chief executive officer of Project Hope Alliance in Costa Mesa, as she watched riders take spins in Fantasyland before Disneyland opened to the public.

"This is really powerful," Friend said of the Carousel of Possible Dreams fundraiser.

The Nov. 5 event, the second to be held at Disneyland in as many years, raised about \$52,000 for Project Hope Alliance, whose mission is to end the cycle of homelessness through educating children in partnership with schools and by moving homeless families out of motels and shelters into affordable homes of their own.

For Sandy Segerstrom Daniels, a leading business professional and children's advocate in Orange County, the latest Carousel of Possible Dreams --- the 12th to be held since 2009, at such venues as Central Park in New York City and the Eden Palais, a spectacular 19th-Century European Salon Carousel housed at the private Sanfilippo Estate in Barrington Hills, Ill. --- underscored the success of the foundation she founded in 2003.

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“The Carousel of Possible Dreams has opened up a whole new donor base that has allowed charities to tap into donors who can’t afford tickets to fancy galas,” said Daniels, whose family developed the world-famous South Coast Plaza shopping destination and brought culture to central Orange County with the Segerstrom Center for the Arts and other acclaimed performance venues.

Daniels, who has a grown daughter, created Festival of Children Foundation after she recognized the need to bring together a variety of youth-focused nonprofits so they could better collaborate and achieve their different missions and goals.

The Foundation, whose logo is --- what else? A colorful carousel --- provides programs and services to its 500-plus member charities in 50 states, helping corporations and individuals find opportunities where their support can make the most impact in the areas of arts and culture, social services, health and wellness, education and development, and the environment.

“What’s been really rewarding is watching people get together every year and collaborate together,” said Eileen Daniher, director of programs for Festival of Children Foundation. “We didn’t know when we started back in 2003 what we’d become, but we are very gratified with what we’ve been able to achieve thus far.”

A longtime advocate for children, Daniels personally covers administrative costs of her registered 501(c)(3) organization so 100 percent of the charity’s proceeds directly benefit programs and services that improve the lives of children.

The recent Carousel of Possible Dreams fundraiser at Disneyland was the third and last such event this year.

On Aug. 23, at the Sanfilippo Estate outside of Chicago, riders raised \$201,421 for three organizations: Ronald McDonald House Charities Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana, St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, and Little Angels.

Daniels herself rode on the famous Eden Palais, smashing her fundraising goal of \$2,500 by raising \$11,596. Little Angels raised a total of \$62,416.

The Aug. 23 event was the third in which the Ronald McDonald House Charities Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana has been a recipient, CEO Doug Porter said. The carousel rides have raised a total of about \$400,000 in those three years, Porter said --- money that went toward a new Ronald McDonald House in downtown Chicago and toward a fifth house scheduled to open in January 2015.

“I think it’s a very unique fundraising vehicle, and the riders just love it,” Porter said. “For me, it provides one of the few opportunities I have to engage in peer-to-peer fundraising in which I reach out to my own network of friends who do not have to be physically present at some event to help support a very worthy cause.”

On Sept. 30, one charity --- Friends of Cathryn, in Laguna Beach --- was the sole recipient of more than \$600,000 raised by riders on the carousel inside South Coast Plaza.

Friends of Cathryn is named after neuroblastoma survivor Cathryn Giusto, 11, a fifth-grader at El Morro Elementary School in the Laguna Beach School District who was diagnosed with the cancer in November 2008.

Susan Giusto, Cathryn’s mother, launched the charity in 2009 with the mission of achieving new approaches to neuroblastoma treatment and broader support for kids who come down with the disease.

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Giusto met with Daniels in April 2014 and was shocked when Daniels told her that all of the proceeds from the Sept. 30 Carousel of Possible Dreams would benefit Friends of Cathryn.

"I was blown away," Giusto said. "Sandy gave us this amazing opportunity and we are forever grateful to her and Festival of Children Foundation," said Giusto, whose daughter's prognosis is good. "I felt incredible personal satisfaction at being able to raise this money and help bring some sanity to the world of childhood cancer."

Cassady Taylor, executive director of marketing and public relations for Festival of Children Foundation, recalls recruiting people on the day of the first Carousel of Possible Dreams in early 2009 to raise funds.

"In 90 minutes, we raised \$85,000," Taylor said, noting that the funds raised at that debut event were more than enough to cover a shortfall of \$80,000 in a \$300,000 campaign that began in the holiday season of 2008 for 10 charities that competed with many more to have their "possible dream" realized.

The Carousel of Possible Dreams has been successfully spinning success stories for children's charities ever since.

Moving forward, the plan is to hold two Carousel of Possible Dreams fundraisers each year, Daniels said.

At the Nov. 5 event at Disneyland, the wizard Merlin got the action going at 7 a.m. --- three hours before the theme park opened to the public.

"Can you feel the magic in the air?" Merlin said as he rallied the troops. "Stop staring at me. Move it. There's money to be raised."

One of the riders at the Disneyland fundraiser was actor John Schaech, whose big-screen credits include a leading role in "That Thing You Do!," the 1995 film that marked the writing and directing debut of beloved Hollywood actor Tom Hanks.

Said Schaech, who secured pledges totaling about \$3,000 for his carousel ride: "I love the 'dream' aspect of this fundraiser, and what better place to create magic and help children than the Happiest Place on Earth?"

For more information, visit festivalofchildren.org.

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