

Benefit Auctioneer Pivots to Facilitate Giving in a Virtual New World

By Pamela Bieri



“March 7, 2020 at The Living Desert’s Fiftieth Anniversary — that was the last time I stepped on a stage,” said Karen Sorbo, nationally renowned benefit auctioneer who moved to the Coachella Valley two years ago bringing her lively, engaging talent to local charities.

Between mid-March and mid-Nov., 2020, Sorbo had been contracted to work with 29 other events, helping raise funds via live auctions.

Instead, COVID-19 hit and the events were all cancelled.

Suddenly, live streaming virtual events were at the forefront with many event companies turning to innovative new formats. But not only are virtual fundraisers new and scary to nonprofits, it was a profoundly new experience for Sorbo.

However, she does not easily give up, even though at first felt trepidation about doing any event virtually.

“Suddenly I was looking into a black box at thousands of viewers at home in their living rooms, bidding from their smart phones,” she said. “After 28 years and some 2800 live events, this was a Virtual New World and it was terrifying to say the least.”

She pushed forward like the pro she is and made it her goal to convince clients that “we can do this together.”

This past fall, she live streamed with organizations such as Dancing Classrooms, from New York, NY; Krabbe Connect, in Minneapolis, Minn.; and Operation Underground Railroad, Salt Lake City, Utah. All events brought in record donations and she moves ahead with six more scheduled this year.

On Feb. 13 she will be auctioneer for the Palm Springs Animal Shelter’s “Film Festival Presents LOVE AT THE DRIVE IN,” a live drive-in event at the Palm Springs Air Museum.

“I will be on an outdoor stage where people will park drive-in movie style,” she explained.

“Participants can tune in to hear and watch the entire LIVE SHOW from the comfort of their own cars while adhering to COVID guidelines and protocols.”

Sorbo discovered that regardless if hundreds of people are in a room or following a live stream event, her ability to connect with the audience, generate enthusiasm and excitement is very much intact.

“Live streaming auctions are the real solution,” she said. “I’ve had the good fortune to get in front of the Coachella Valley’s very generous audiences who give, and give and give. Going forward, I hope our local nonprofits will embrace this new virtual technology so they can continue to thrive. I look forward to assist non-profits to **‘Pivot for Profit’**”

For more information, contact Karen at (612) 868-4929 or visit www.karensorbo.com