

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Over 1,400,000 square feet (over 130,060 square meters)

Charities cooperate at South Coast Plaza

South Coast Plaza's home is in Orange County, Calif. Poverty exists even in that wealthy area. In 2002, 18.9 percent of children up to 4 years old and 19.6 percent of those 5 to 17 lived below the poverty level. Only 11 percent of county households could afford the county's median-priced home (costing \$662,290 that year).

Many local children's charities exist, but they lacked an efficient way to reach families and form collaborations. And although the area offers many arts and cultural institutions, many children don't have access to creative arts due to income level, transportation problems or cuts to school arts programs.

South Coast Plaza wanted to improve connections between families, children's charities and arts programs.

Implementation

South Coast Plaza teamed up with Festival of Children Foundation, which works with over 100 youth charities, to create a monthlong Festival of Children at the mall during September 2005.

Over 100 family-friendly activities and performances were booked, mostly for weekends. Performances included six classical music concerts and 14 dance and eight theater performances. Fifty-five performances included children in their casts. All events were free to the public.

The center ran a contest to encourage visitors to stop by the booths; after visiting a certain number of them, visitors could enter a drawing for a \$250 mall gift certificate.

To lower costs, South Coast Plaza and the foundation recruit-

Celebrating Children, Connecting Charities

South Coast Plaza

Costa Mesa, Calif.

Expenses: \$17,044.20 (center's expenditures)

Owned/Managed by: C.J. Segerstrom & Sons

Professional Recognition: Sandra Segerstrom Daniels, managing partner/executive director, South Coast Plaza/Festival of Children Foundation, Debra Gunn-Downing, director of marketing, Vince Vasil, director of security, Kevin Holcomb, director of facilities, Eileen Daniher, director of security, Festival of Children Foundation

ed and trained 32 people as volunteers, including South Coast staff, local business people and students. Fifty-five South Coast retailers offered discounts or gifts throughout the festival. Print ads offered coupons for a free children's carousel ride at the center's two carousels. The foundation secured 12 corporate sponsorships, with a total cash value of \$99,000 and in-kind services valued at \$54,570. South Coast Plaza contributed the month's proceeds from its main carousel rides, \$19,917, to the foundation.

The center planned other events, too, such as Dine with the Ducks, when underprivileged children enjoyed lunch at Rainforest Café with members of the Mighty Ducks professional hockey team, followed by hockey lessons; Coffee, Tea, Mommy & Me, creative activities for kids and educational seminars for parents, plus coffee provided by Starbucks; a toy drive for children affected by Hurricane Katrina; and teen tryouts for the television show "Jeopardy!"

Results

Fifty-four children's organizations staffed booths at the center for the month; 12 more displayed on a rotating, one-weekend basis. Charities distributed 15,782 brochures, 1,255 fliers, 340 newsletters, 794 postcards and 6,797 other items during the month.

In a follow-up survey, all the organizations reported that the festival raised awareness of their existence; 95 percent said it raised awareness of their services; and 80 percent said it promoted collaborations with other groups. Sixty-seven percent recruited new volunteers; 52 percent gained new donors; 43 percent found new clients; and 5 percent made contact with potential board members.

A total of over 400 people attended four Mommy & Me events; 70 kids enjoyed the hockey event; and over 500 toys were collected. The festival will continue as an annual event. ■

