Moab nonprofits raised beaucoup bucks in 2018

by Jenna Whetzel Moab Sun News
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Zoe Huston was volunteering at the fundraiser table for Moab Solutions on Dec. 18 outside City Market when Chad Mattison from Durango, Colorado, made a donation. Moab Solutions partners with local agencies to assist people in with emergency needs. December and January are an especially busy time for the nonprofit.

[Photo by Murice D. Miller / Moab Sun News]

The time of year for giving is here, and in 2018, Grand County citizens have given generously.
For a small region with a population of just under 10,000 people, Grand County is home to copious nonprofits that serve the diverse needs of the community. There are fundraisers throughout the year where locals give back to these organizations, which in turn provide benefits to those in need. In the past year, fundraising efforts have garnered hundreds of thousands of dollars for these organizations.

WabiSabi is a nonprofit whose mission is to receive, revalue and redistribute needed resources to strengthen the Moab community. It’s much more than “Moab’s beloved thrift store.” All money made at the shop goes back into the community.

“One of the beautiful things about our thrift store is that it’s not just WabiSabi’s fundraiser — it also raises funds for 12 other nonprofits,” said WabiSabi Executive Director Liz Dana.

There are 12 nonprofit partners (NPPs) that benefit from WabiSabi’s generosity: Arches Education Center, BEACON After School programs, Community Rebuilds, Grand County Family Support Center, KZMU Community Radio, Moab Free Health Clinic, Moab Valley Multicultural Center, Native American Club, Youth Garden Project, Grand Area Mentoring, Moab Solutions and Rim to Rim Restoration.

WabiSabi shoppers are given a token after paying for their thrift store finds, which they use to vote for the NPP of their choice. Funds are awarded twice per year based on this voting system. “This may be revised in 2019 to give the community a better way of seeing how their shopping and voting impacts the NPPs,” Dana said.

“The thrift store also supports our Make A Difference (MAD) funds, which provide grants to special nonprofit projects and scholarships to an array of nonprofits,” Dana said.

Numbers are still being finalized for 2018, but in 2017, WabiSabi gave $20,000 to its NPPs, $5,200 to MAD grants, $7,245 in community donations
to multiple nonprofits and $14,875 in vouchers which subsidizes the costs of thrift store goods for citizens in need of financial support.

“Each time you shop at WabiSabi, you’re helping a local nonprofit — so remember to ‘Check Wabi first,’” Dana said.

The annual WabiSabi Thanksgiving Meal, though not technically a fundraiser, received $12,000 in donations from the community.

“It is an event we host to give our wonderful community a chance to come together for the holidays,” Dana said. The Thanksgiving dinner has become a tradition in Moab.

“We are looking at ways we can use it to help other nonprofits in our area — stay posted for 2019,” Dana added.

Puttin’ on the Ritz, hosted by Seekhaven Family Crisis and Resource Center, is another yearly tradition in the community where patrons rub elbows with fellow Moabites (or visitors) in their fanciest black-tie attire.

“Each year, Seekhaven raises between $30,000 and $40,000 at the Ritz,” said Maddy Fisk, Seekhaven’s executive director. “This includes ticket sales, sponsorships, the silent auction, bar tabs and additional donations.”

Funds raised by the Ritz go into the organization’s unrestricted funds pot.

“Unrestricted funds are especially valuable to Seekhaven because they allow us to be more creative in our service delivery,” Fisk said. “State grants keep the lights on and the doors open but can also be quite restrictive.”

Unrestricted funds “increase Seekhaven’s ability to meet our community’s needs through creative emergency service delivery and prevention work,” added Fisk.
The Moab Valley Multicultural Center (MVMC) also hosts events through the year that educate the community about diverse cultures and raise funds for its general operating budget. Dancing with the Moab Stars, a dance competition where local “celebrities” are paired with instructors to choreograph three-minute dance numbers, raised $11,885.82 for MVMC in 2018.

MVMC also hosts a celebration for Dia de los Muertos, the Mexican holiday also known as the Day of the Dead. In addition to monetary contributions, volunteers also give their time and individual skills to MVMC and many other nonprofits in Moab. In 2018, the MVMC counted over 3,500 volunteer hours from those that contribute to ongoing programming, as well as those who come out to support MVMC events.

“On average, a volunteer’s time is worth $22 per hour,” said MVMC Volunteer Coordinator Haley Austin. “So, while we always appreciate financial donations, please consider volunteering to give back and meet some new people.”

No matter what you are into, there are countless ways you can volunteer your time for Moab nonprofits. If you enjoy gardening, you can volunteer for the Youth Garden Project (YGP).

“This year, we had 449 volunteers engage in YGP programs,” said Julie Zender, YGP’s youth programs director. “The biggest event that we recruit volunteers for are our Weed ‘N’ Feeds, which is not one of our fundraisers but a classic community event.”

During the year, YGP raises funds with its online auction, plant sale and garden dinners. In 2018, after expenses, YGP made a net profit of $27,443 from these three events.

“Money from fundraisers supports the Youth Garden Project general operating of our youth and community programs,” Zender said. “Funds help pay for staff, [the] internship program, transportation for students, classroom upkeep, et cetera.”
In 2019, YGP will host three new fundraisers which include garden and culinary trivia nights, garden brunches and a harvest celebration.

KZMU Community Radio raises a large chunk of its budget from its spring and fall radiothons. The goal is to raise $70,000 annually.

“Ever since we were defunded by the Corporation of Public Broadcasting in 2016, who funded $90,000, we increased our goal to $35,000 for each radiothon,” said KZMU General Manager Serah Mead.

“It is no minor token of gratitude, from people who give 5 bucks to the people who give $100, that is a major gift,” Mead said. In 2018, these two radiothons raised $54,781.11.

During KZMU’s birthday party in April of this year, there was a live auction to benefit the station.

“We started with Tobasco sauce,” Mead said. Mead also learned how to be an auctioneer for the event. “My favorite ideas [for fundraising] are the silliest that we usually think of the day before.”

KZMU also puts on an annual live radio drama presented at Star Hall. This year’s show, “Beautiful Radiant Things,” made the station $3,650.

In addition to fundraising, KZMU relies on volunteer DJs for most of its programming.

“Our DJs are extremely eclectic,” said Mead. “Their sets are human-powered, not created by an algorithm.”

Another human-powered nonprofit is Moab Solutions, founded in 2004 by Sara Melnicoff to help individuals in Grand County who are homeless or in dire need of financial assistance.
“We continuously reach out to the homeless population to make sure they have warm clothing, sleeping bags and tarps, so they can survive the cold nights,” said Moab Solutions Executive Director Sara Melnicoff.

If you’ve been to City Market in December, you have probably noticed the bell-ringers at a table out in front. These volunteers have helped raise $18,181.71 since Nov. 23 for Moab Solutions’ Emergency Needs Fund.

This fund helps individuals and families in need pay for medicines, rent, utilities, food, gasoline, bus and train tickets, and repairs to vital items, like heaters and swamp coolers.

“Since February of 2012, we have received 1,356 requests for assistance, which resulted in 1,224 assists,” said Melnicoff. “We are very careful with the hard-earned money the community donates to us, so we do everything we can to be sure that the need is real and valid. We spend close to $25,000 per year, which averages out to $2,083 per month given to those in need.”

As of Dec. 15, Moab Solutions has raised $73,451.92 in donations and grant funding. Occasionally, large blocks of funding will go towards one individual or family. For example, when a home was lost to a fire this year, Moab Solutions was able to raise over $20,000 in community donations to help the family to recover.

This is by no means a comprehensive list of all nonprofits and fundraising efforts in Grand County. There are endless ways to volunteer time and give back, and the Moab-area community has demonstrated how to step up to the challenge.

“Together, we work to cobble together responses to needs,” Melnicoff said. “Our community is not resource-rich, but we have heart and we try our best to help ease suffering whenever possible.”

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