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From the Los Angeles Times

## In tough times, private schools take innovative approaches to fundraising

Independent schools in L.A. are using videos, auctions and home parties to emphasize the message that in these challenging economic times, giving is more important than ever.

By Carla Rivera

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Most solicitations don't begin with the words "don't give," but that's the approach being used this year by the private Oakwood School in a clever, celebrity-packed appeal timed to its annual fundraising drive.

In the 3 1/2-minute video, Danny DeVito, Jason Alexander, Steve Carell and other Hollywood stars voice such sentiments as "The economy is in the toilet, so don't give" and "You'd be stupid to give" before getting to the real point: "Unless you care about your children and their future," and "Unless you care about families who had a hard year and need some help with tuition."

Created by parent volunteers, the video is an example of the inventive methods private schools are using this spring to generate giving at a time when traditional benefactors may be hard-pressed themselves.

Oakwood's "Don't Give" campaign was a precursor to its major fundraiser, a star-studded event Saturday at The Lot in West Hollywood, featuring comedy, music and an auction. The video was meant to be an internal communication but was distributed on YouTube, said James Astman, Oakwood's head of school.

"The purpose was to communicate to our constituents a vital but easily misunderstood message: that in these challenging times, giving is more important than ever," Astman said. "In the short run to support financial aid and in the long run to build our endowment."

### Pricey tuition

Many independent schools in Los Angeles are sending the same message as they deal with a faltering economy that is forcing middle- and even upper-income families to think twice about whether they can afford to pay annual tuitions that top \$25,000 at some campuses.

As a result, the proceeds of many fundraising appeals this year are earmarked for financial aid budgets, and more schools say they will use the money to help families who may not have needed assistance in the past but are now struggling. Other schools are taking a more direct route, asking donors to fund tuition scholarships for a year or more.

And though schools are still holding gala fundraising dinners, many are cutting back on extravagances and trying to ensure that most of the proceeds are used to support student programs. Loyola High School's annual auction next weekend is being coordinated by two parents with backgrounds in accounting.

This year, a committee at the boys Catholic school was tasked with finding free auction items and merchandise and avoiding the past practice of purchasing such supplementary luxury items as trips, said event co-chair Barbara Collins.

Decorations and food are being scaled back (although the French-themed menu prepared by the campus chef still includes an elegant selection of hors d'oeuvres and entrees). Instead of hiring bartenders, 17 members of the school's Father's Guild have volunteered for duty.

"Especially this year, if people are going to come to an event and bid, they need to see that everything possible is done to see funds go back to the school and student body," said event co-chair Lorylle Ketterer.

Proceeds will support financial aid. This year, 30% of the freshman class received some assistance, compared with 18% two years ago, said Loyola's president, Father Gregory Goethals.

Other schools looking to expand their fundraising efforts are casting wider nets. The Webb Schools in Claremont are mounting a fundraising campaign that mirrors the international makeup of the institution's student body. Fundraising events were recently held in Seoul and Hong Kong to help attract donations from alumni and parents in those cities, said Joe Woodward, Webb's director of development.

The school's main fundraising event -- this year titled "Disco Fever" -- was held Saturday at South Hills Country Club and included live and silent auctions.

### Going off campus

Brentwood School is holding its annual auction at the Hollywood and Highland complex in May, featuring a disc jockey and food by Wolfgang Puck. The school estimates it will save about one-third of the costs by moving the event off campus and avoiding rent for lighting and heaters and kitchen facilities, said Mary Sidell, Brentwood's director of institutional advancement.

Proceeds this year will go toward financial aid.

"We're assuming not only will there be a need for new families, but we also want to try as best we can to address current families who may not have needed help before," Sidell said. "If a family has been here for four or five years, they are our first loyalty."

The Windward School in West Los Angeles is staging a Caribbean Casino-themed event on May 2 at the Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel. Tickets are \$150, but this year families have the option of paying a reduced price. The event will include the ubiquitous auction, with bids beginning at \$50 so that more families can participate.

### Bringing it home

For the first time this year, the school will hold 12 individual parties, most of them hosted by parents at their homes. Each will focus on a different activity, such as learning to play mah-jongg, making the perfect pie crust, arranging flowers, tasting at the Rosenthal Winery in Malibu and privately touring the Autry Museum.

The proceeds from these parties will also be used for financial aid, said Lach Reed, Windward's director of institutional advancement. "The school community," Reed said, "recognizes the need to support our efforts. There's a philosophical commitment to what the school stands for, and financial aid is a part of that."

A growing practice at many schools is to solicit direct donations to cover student tuition. Loyola, for example, has more than 200 scholarships that are permanently endowed, adding nearly 20 just in the last year, Goethals said.

Orange County's Sage Hill School created a scholarship program with the Tiger Woods Foundation that provides \$100,000 (\$25,000 annually for four years of tuition) for a needy student. Tuition at the campus this year is \$27,000.

"The core of our foundation is to provide educational support for disadvantaged kids and give them an opportunity at a high caliber education," said foundation President Greg

McLaughlin. "Especially now, support for financial aid scholarships is very important for most private schools."

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