

Miamisburg resident's 'second' career benefits local charities

HEREABOUTS
BETH ANSPACH



Doug Sorrell of Miamisburg has auctioneering in his blood.

His family started in the auctioneer profession with his grandfather, who developed an interest and started a business in the 1930s.

"My dad became licensed as an auctioneer in the '60s," Sorrell said. "We were mostly involved with horse auctions and I've been going to them since I was a kid."

Sorrell worked as a bid spotter for his father at the auctions, and enjoyed the excitement of working with the quarter horses. But even with that background, Sorrell didn't set out to become a professional auctioneer.

"I always thought of it as a second job possibility mostly," Sorrell said. "I went my own route at first and worked in radio and TV." Sorrell was among the first graduating class at the International Broadcasting School in Dayton in 1969. "My instructors were Day-

ton legends, Lou Emm, Steve Kirk and Johnny Walker," Sorrell said.

Eventually Sorrell found himself drawn back to the family business and he became licensed as an auctioneer in 1979.

"Ohio is one of the more regulated states for auctioneers," Sorrell said. "You have to complete 80 hours at an approved school, then be apprenticed for a year with a sponsor."

When Sorrell was new in his career, he discovered there was a growing need among charities for professional auctioneers. "I wasn't any good, and they (the charities) didn't want to pay so we were a matched set," he said.

Soon, however, Sorrell developed a passion for charity auctions and today has become one of the best known event auctioneers in the region.

"I enjoy doing charity auctions, because they all have such great causes," Sorrell said. "There is always a lot of passion at these events, and they are grateful for anything they raise."

Sorrell said that charity galas and formal events have become the fastest

growing segment in the auction industry. "In the United States alone, 10,000 charity galas are held each year, and they are approaching \$17 billion in sales," Sorrell said. "It's big business."

In fact, the National Auctioneers Association has recognized this trend and, according to Sorrell, has created a "Licensed Benefit Auction Specialist," which requires attendance at a three day seminar. "Fewer than 125 individuals have gone through the process so far," Sorrell said.

Sorrell said that working a charity event is entirely different from typical auctions, because "you are asking people to support a cause." He said it's important therefore to connect with guests on a deeper level. "We need to convince them to become benevolent."

And with these auctions actually becoming more of a "performance," Sorrell recognized his need to work with charities from start to finish, by sitting on their committees, helping them get auction items and working on the minute details.

"The order that you put the items in is important

as is the grouping," Sorrell said. "I show up months in advance and find out first what the goal is, and then I work to help them get there."

Today Sorrell is in high demand, and locally acts as auctioneer for events for the Artemis Center, the American Cancer Society and the Leukemia/Lymphoma Society.

"I am also called upon for private school events and for events in other cities," he said. "The events that really touch your heart do very well — anything around children and animals."

Sorrell said that even with the foundering economy, the majority events in which he was involved over the past few years have not seen declines. "If you plan and put on a good gala, you can still hit your numbers," he said. "Crowds might be down by 25-30 percent but the people who show up care because they want to support the cause."

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