

# FUNDRAISING WITH HEART: The Inspiration Behind San José Clinic's Annual Fundraisers

By Grace Conroy

People have come together to discuss important ideas and shared interests since the ancient Greeks and Romans. While these original assemblies centered around politics, the modern assembly might call for deliberation, entertainment, education, or worship.<sup>1</sup> When considering ideas for fundraisers, the San José Clinic's leadership understood that creating an open environment for conversation about the clinic would attract donors and potential volunteers. They hoped to design events that would draw Houstonians to the San José Clinic through shared interests and then introduce them to the clinic and its mission.

The idea for Art with Heart came about one afternoon in 2006 during a lunch date between two friends. Barb Holman, a San José Clinic board member, knew that the clinic needed to place a stronger focus on fundraising. Holman quickly thought of her friend Larry Massey, a devout Catholic with almost forty years of banking experience, as someone who could help the clinic conceive new, innovative approaches to fundraising. Massey always knew he wanted to leave the world a better place than he found it, but he was a busy man, and Holman had difficulty convincing him to visit the clinic. She eventually succeeded and Massey, after viewing the facility and learning about the organization's purpose, did indeed introduce an idea.<sup>2</sup>

Massey recognized that other people might also feel overwhelmed by taking time out of their busy schedules to participate in fundraising. To overcome this, a fundraising event would have to provide ample opportunity for participants to

escape the monotony of day-to-day life. His idea was to create a formal gala that would draw potential donors to the San José Clinic with a silent auction of art created by local artists.

Art with Heart's debut in 2007 grossed approximately \$50,000 for the clinic.<sup>3</sup> The overall response to the gala was one of enthusiasm – with guests amazed by the art and glad to learn their donations were helping a good cause. Following this initial success, Art with Heart became an annual spring fundraising event that utilizes live and silent auctions to showcase artwork and jewelry by artists.

Each year, the gala celebrates one of the clinic's supporters with the Portrait of Compassion, an honor given to those who have shown exceptional commitment to the clinic and its patients. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, the 2020 Art with Heart was canceled, but it celebrated its fourteenth anniversary on May 8, 2021, with a gala at the George Ranch Historical Park. Jill Reese, San José Clinic's senior events and communications coordinator, pointed out that the venue allowed guests to gather in a socially distanced outdoor space, "wearing boots and cowboy hats underneath the Texas sky."<sup>4</sup>

Another clinic board member, Philip Morabito, loved the notion of Art with Heart and wished to create an annual fall fundraiser to bring further awareness to the clinic. Morabito believes people should only participate on charity boards if they genuinely plan on making a difference by devoting their time, resources, and talents. When he joined the board of the San José Clinic, he resolved to do

*Over 300 people attended the Art with Heart event in 2018, which raised \$215,000 from the sale of artwork, some of which is shown here.*

*All photos courtesy of the San José Clinic.*





*Philip Morabito specializes in public relations, public affairs, investor relations, and marketing – skills that served him well as a member of the clinic’s board of directors and inspired his idea for the annual Fall Speaker Series.*

just that. He introduced a luncheon speaker series where medical professionals could present on current healthcare issues. Morabito felt that an easy-going environment, such as a luncheon, would bring interest to the clinic without placing pressure on the attendants. The goal of the Fall Speaker Series was to invite guests and doctors alike to learn more about San José Clinic and become affiliated with the organization as volunteers or donors. Morabito also hoped that the series would inspire the luncheon attendees to participate in Art with Heart, or vice versa. Although Morabito’s primary motivation for the Fall Speaker Series was drawing attention to current healthcare issues, he found himself pleasantly surprised by the monetary benefits to the clinic.<sup>5</sup>

On average, approximately 300 people attend the Fall Speaker Series that raises about \$70,000 annually. Over the years, the series has brought awareness to several important healthcare issues. For example, from 2016 to 2021 topics have included the value of community health and expanding healthcare access, Houston’s model for medical growth, bridging gaps and cultural barriers in healthcare, the uninsured during Hurricane Harvey, healthcare during a crisis, and the nexus of science, healthcare, and policy.<sup>6</sup>

In 2019, the series introduced the Groundbreaker Award to recognize exemplary acts of generosity by an individual or organization to benefit the clinic. Memorial Hermann received the first award for donating the modular building for the Ft. Bend clinic. In 2020, Bank of America was recognized for donating PPE, hand sanitizer, masks, and grant funds at the height of the pandemic. And, in 2021, Philip Morabito was honored for his idea to create the San José Clinic Advisory Board, which offers former board members a way to stay involved at the end of their terms and prospective members an opportunity to learn more about the organization, creating an added layer of support for the clinic.<sup>7</sup>

The success of the San José Clinic’s annual fundraising events is astonishing. In the six years prior to the 2020 pause for the pandemic, Art with Heart and the Fall Speaker

*Larry Massey, founder of Art with Heart, at left, joins advisory board member John Hernandez at the charity event. Massey received the Portrait of Compassion award in 2017 in recognition of his advocacy for the San José Clinic.*



Series amassed approximately \$1.5 million for the clinic.<sup>8</sup> To accommodate patients’ finances during the pandemic, San José Clinic revised fees for visits and medication refills, which meant reduced revenues coming into the clinic. Despite this setback, the community showed support through continued fundraising during these trying times.

It is inspiring to see how these fundraising events have contributed to the general operating fund and enabled the clinic to fulfill its mission on a daily basis. It is equally inspiring to see how they have fostered relationships between the community and the clinic. The annual fundraisers provide the perfect opportunity for individuals with shared interests to assemble and establish further connections. Art with Heart and the Fall Speaker Series are merely two examples of how the San José Clinic has brought life-long participants, donors, and volunteers to their cause. ○

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*At the 2017 Fall Speaker Series, William F. McKeon, Texas Medical Center president and chief executive officer, spoke with Houston Business Journal president Bob Charlet about building innovative healthcare communities.*