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News - Friday, March 6, 2009

Doodling for dollars

Palo Alto woman rounds up oodles of doodles to benefit nonprofit that she says saved her daughter's life

by Jocelyn Dong

It's not easy gathering 100 doodles from 100 celebrities, but Catherine O'Brien is hoping her hard work will pay off.

The Palo Alto resident is using the doodles she collected over the past six months as a draw to a March 21 fundraiser for Shakti Rising, a San Diego nonprofit that she credits with saving her daughter from a heroin addiction. *(See sidebar)*

The doodles — some complex, some simple — were drawn by celebrities in sports, politics, movies, news, business, music, publishing and more.

Tom Hanks doodled, as did Tom Friedman. TV producer David E. Kelley sat down and sketched; U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein, too.

There are also local doodlers, such as former Palo Alto City Council member and Superior Court judge LaDoris Cordell and HP CEO Mark Hurd.

It all started last September, when O'Brien decided to give back to the nonprofit organization.

O'Brien, an award-winning video producer and director of Stanford Video, thought she would host an art-oriented fundraiser. But a friend suggested she throw a celebrity-doodle fundraiser instead.

No problem, O'Brien thought, "I know the Village People." (She does, having gone to college with David "Scar" Hodo, aka the musical group's "construction worker.")

"I was so arrogant," she said this week, laughing.

Six doodles later, she faced the daunting task of collecting 94 more.

But what O'Brien might not have been able to accomplish single-handedly, her network of friends and family could. Armed with an informational packet containing official 5-by-5-inch squares of Bristol paper, she asked everyone she knew to get a doodle from any celebrity they knew.

In every case but three, she said, the celebrities agreed.

Getting former San Francisco 49er Steve Young's doodle was easy. He uses the same television studio as O'Brien. California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger proved "quite a challenge," however, she said.

She relishes one tale of doodle-chasing. At a literary fundraiser for Barack Obama, she was explaining to a fellow guest her quest to get celebrity drawings. A woman nearby piped up, asking how famous the celebrity had to be.

"Someone with pretty good name recognition," O'Brien replied. "I'm hoping to get (Pulitzer Prize-winning author) Jane Smiley, but I'm pretty nervous."

She needn't have been.

"I *am* Jane Smiley," the woman said.

O'Brien considers her greatest "catch" to be actor Fred Willard of "Fernwood 2 Night," "Waiting for Guffman" and "Best in Show" fame. A big fan of his, she was thrilled when he replied to her solicitation in less than a week with a doodle.

"It's been really fun to open the mail," she said.

At the upcoming fundraiser, attendees will view sketches of a grinning elephant, swooshing skirt, lingering landscapes and a hand making a "peace" sign, among other images. Some of the famous favored color; others doodled dandily in black and white.

O'Brien is hoping to raise at least \$10,000 from the event, which will be held at Smith Anderson Editions in Palo Alto and for which she is charging \$100 a ticket. Each guest will choose a framed doodle — without knowing which celebrity doodled what. At the end of the night, O'Brien said, guests will turn the frames over for "the big reveal."

She knows that some people may be tempted to sell the sketches, but she hopes they don't. O'Brien will also be publishing and selling a book of the doodles.

O'Brien's daughter, Allie Foster, and the executive director of Shakti Rising will speak at the event, which O'Brien hopes will draw new supporters for the organization.

But the event is not only a fundraiser, it is a celebration of the second chance at life Shakti's given her daughter, O'Brien said.

"It's really exciting to see. ... She's vibrant and healthy and happy," she said.

The website for the event is www.100doodles.com.

Managing Editor Jocelyn Dong can be reached at jdong@paweekly.com.

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