

“The Traveling Apprentice” Works for the United Way of Calvert County

My Traveling Apprentice experience this month was in support of United Way’s major annual fundraising event, Mardi Gras: Glitz and Glam, to be held at the Show Place Arena on Saturday, March 5. Kelly Chambers, President & CEO, indicated that United Way, in partnerships with 29 county partner agencies, uses proceeds from the event to be a moving force in the County by improving lives and building a stronger community.

This assignment would be unusual in that I won’t be an “apprentice”, per se, because I already had experience and a modicum of skill in the task I was to perform.

A major component of Mardi Gras is the Silent Auction, a way to raise money while adding another layer of festivity when party-goers get into friendly bidding competition to secure that perfect auction item. Items for the silent auction are secured through donations from individuals and business. Most items can be placed directly on the bidding table. Others have too many parts and pieces to be placed, as is, on the table, and still others just need an additional dose of glitz and glam. These items often benefit from being placed in an attractive gift basket. My assignment: Assemble gift baskets for the Silent Auction.

The project came with built in challenges. A professional gift basket maker has a menu of themed baskets for which she uses standard baskets, standard contents, and standard bows. Assembly is fast and efficient because the professional knows exactly which container to use and where its contents will be placed: Guesswork is taken out of the process. Not so, here. Here I worked with disparate items from the donation table and assorted sizes of baskets collected from thrift shops, friends and family.

Through a time consuming process of trial and error I matched items with baskets and began assembly. Using a trick of the trade to make the contents easier to see and give the illusion of a fuller basket, I filled the bottoms of each basket with whatever filler materials were available --packing peanuts, crumbled paper, etc. Over the fillers I placed thick layers of

colored shredded paper or tissue paper. I positioned bigger and taller items toward the middles or backs of the containers and strategically placed other objects around them, striving each time for balance in weight and arrangement. I secured items in place by discretely taping items to each other, or by tying items to the container itself or to the basket handle. Next came the cellophane wraps and bows.

Hours later I cleaned the work area and arranged the baskets down the center of a conference table where they strutted their stuff like beauty contestants on a runway. Saucy baskets sporting riotous cascades of curly ribbon mixed it up with tall, stately baskets wearing elegantly sculptured wired-ribbon bows. And everywhere the baskets’ contents seemed to implore, “Look at me. I’m the most beautiful. Pick me.”

I hope Mardi Gras bidders will heed their Siren calls and bid vigorously and generously: It is for a worthy cause.

The Traveling Apprentice is a monthly column written by Carolyn McHugh, President/CEO of the Calvert County Chamber of Commerce. Each month Carolyn spends a day working for a Chamber member, then writes a column for a local newspaper about the experience. The article is later inserted into Chamber’s newsletter and posted on the Chamber’s web-site in order to give the maximum exposure to the Chamber member. Her commitment to Chamber members and to the readers is that she’s there for Chamber members and that whatever they do in their daily job, she’ll do, too.

