

There's No Place Like Home: Philadelphia Senior Center Celebrates 60 Years of Service

Philadelphia Senior Center by Kory Michael Aversa

Situation Analysis

Philadelphia Senior Center (PSC) has provided services and resources that have enabled tens of thousands of seniors to stay healthy, safe and independent in their homes and communities since 1949. As PSC entered its 60th year, it found that funding for senior community centers from the state and long-time organizational contributors has fallen flat, or even declined. PSC saw an opportunity and need to educate our core publics about our primary mission and services. PSC developed a campaign around the theme, "There's No Place Like Home," that would solicit new support, raise funds, and energize our internal audiences. Tactics would include special events, media outreach, fundraising initiatives, volunteer opportunities, and innovative collateral. "Wizard of Oz" influenced props and messages would be used to link together events and instill a sense of nostalgia into our main audience – seniors.

Research

- PSC development staff hosted meetings and focus groups with the Booster Club, Main Branch Advisory Council, Leadership Team, Stand-Up Group, Senior Staff, Board of Directors, and Development Committee.
- PSC held a donor breakfast and lunch focus group with seniors to provide us with a forum to acknowledge, re-engage and unveil plans for anniversary activities. Seniors provided input on a wide range of topics.
- PSC researched the costs of keeping seniors in their home and community, versus caring for them in a nursing home. Research found that Pennsylvania taxpayers currently spend approximately \$60,000 a year or more to put an older adult into a nursing home. At the same time, it costs \$20,000 or less to keep someone in their own home and their community. Research also showed that by 2020, over 20% of Pennsylvanians will be over 65 years old, and the over-85 population will have increased by 52%. (According to *My Life, My Choice: PA Seniors for Homecare*)
- PSC Composer-In-Residence Tom Lawton formally interviewed 12 seniors for creation of the 60th anniversary composition as part of the composer-in-residence program, and creation of a related compact disc. Staff also organized a question and answer session, and introductory concert, to kick-off this program.
- Student volunteers hosted two research groups to collect data for the digital storytelling project.
- PSC utilized existing research from a development audit and plan produced with the help of paid consultants. PSC used this data to identify donor messages and individuals appropriate for solicitation.
- PSC development committee members conducted prospect research using a prepared script and interview form.

Target Audiences

- Donors – Current donors with an emphasis on major donors (Secondary audience: Lapsed donors; potential donors)
- Members and clients – Current and potential members and clients, with low and high net worth, at all three branches
- Volunteers – Current and lapsed (within three years); current and past board members; advisory councils
- PSC Staff – Current staff members (Secondary audience: retired staff members)
- Arts Patrons Between Ages 45 – 54 – Baby boomers to attend music and drama programs, as well as gala
- Media outlets
- Elected officials

Objectives

- Encourage increased participation in center activities by members, donors, volunteers and staff members
- Recruit new members, volunteers and donors
- Increase general awareness of Philadelphia Senior Center and its core services and programs
- Develop 60th anniversary gala to provide a formal platform for PSC audiences to celebrate this milestone
- Develop, execute and promote 60th anniversary events for low and high end donors and clients
- Raise funds for current and existing programs

Planning

- PSC created a year-long campaign plan, campaign budget, and timeline
- PSC evaluated organizational collateral for campaign messaging opportunities
- PSC identified campaign opportunities for public relations volunteers and recruit volunteers
- PSC met with staff and client groups for research and evaluation of plan
- PSC applied for funding for campaign partnerships, including grant from American Composers Forum
- PSC organized research activities for composer-in-residence project and digital storytelling project
- PSC contacted corporate and community partners to establish, strengthen and expand partnerships
- PSC identified campaign events and opportunities to engage targeted audience
- PSC hosted donor focus group events for research and recruitment purposes

Strategies

- Launch a public relations campaign that focuses on stories about PSC members and clients
- Incorporate campaign themes into current center promotional materials
- Create new events to attract current and potential members and donors
- Link existing signature events into campaign theme to maintain or increase participation by current supporters
- Develop exceptional volunteer experiences that will increase participation by individuals
- Leverage corporate partnerships to promote services and programs

Tactics

- Compact Disc – “Seven Vignettes from Broad and Lombard” features music created with input from seniors.
- DVD – “60 Years of Stories,” featuring 14 members of the PSC community.
- Annual Garden Party – PSC linked this annual event into the campaign by premiering the digital story collection in its entirety. Seventy-five seniors and their guests attended. Volunteers from Vanguard coordinated the event.
- Newsletters, Website, E-mail – PSC placed campaign messages in the newsletter, e-newsletter and on the website.
- Media Releases – Media releases were issued to focus on campaign events and activities. The last quarter of the year PSC will change focus from event promotion to general media coverage, following the gala.
- 60th Anniversary Gala & Dance – More than 185 people turned out for this Wizard of Oz-inspired dinner dance that raised nearly \$10,000. Our Philadelphia-influenced Emerald City featured an emerald green liberty bell and love statue.
- Volunteer Breakfast – PSC turned this annual star-themed event into a movie-star upscale breakfast. Movie clapboards featured images of Judy Garland. A performer sang “Somewhere Over the Rainbow.” PSC previewed digital stories.
- Annual Spring Drama Performance – The Drama Club presented an original play set in Philadelphia, 60 years later, with Wizard of Oz characters. This story highlighted the work of PSC and the need to support PSC.
- Walk Against Hunger – Twenty-four volunteers created a new project to raise public awareness and generate funds.
- PSC Booster Club – PSC formed an on-going volunteer group to assist with public relations and fundraising.
- Beat the Heat Street Party – PSC raised \$2,272 at this two week outdoor celebration. Volunteers sold treats at “rolled back” prices in honor of our anniversary. Volunteers distributed campaign collateral.
- Cupcake Giveaway – PSC partnered with three local corporations (Buttercream, Independence Blue Cross and United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania) to put a unique spin on “cake and candles.” Three hundred cupcakes were distributed from a cake truck with the help of dozens of volunteers. The event was free and open to any senior.
- Fan Fair Program – Comcast-Spectacor and Exit Realty sponsored PSC’s 10,000th fan giveaway. PSC tied the giveaways together with the campaign by distributed \$500 in gift cards for home repairs and improvements. Corporate volunteers distributed the fans to seniors, with help from sports celebrities.

Evaluation/ Results

Philadelphia Senior Center successfully launched and met all objectives in our 60th anniversary campaign plan. PSC presented 18 events for 2,509 donors, clients, volunteers and staff members, from various economic backgrounds and all three branches of PSC. The roster of events included eight paid events and ten free events. Nine events were sold out or had a capacity crowd. PSC received support from the American Composers Forum, CBS3 Anchor Natasha Brown, Comcast-Spectacor, NBC10 Consumer Reporter Tracy Davidson, Exit Realty “The Tri-State Group,” LaSalle University, jazz pianist Tom Lawton, the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, and Vanguard.

PSC recruited 250 new volunteers during the campaign versus 156 volunteers in 2008. Volunteers performed 11,917 hours of service versus 10,237 hours during this period in 2008. The booster club increased its membership by 16 seniors. PSC recruited 533 members in 2009 versus 318 during this period in 2008.

PSC raised \$83,000 from new 190 new donors during the campaign period. The PSC “60th Anniversary Gala & Dance: There’s No Place Like Home” attracted 185 guests and raised nearly \$10,000 NET. At the gala, PSC successfully released 500 compact discs of original music to commemorate PSC’s anniversary and 500 DVD’s of digital stories. These will be sold and distributed in the final quarter of the year. Gala sponsors provided tickets for low-income clients. The Coffee Cup Exhibition raised \$ 36,063 NET. The Beat the Heat tent raised \$2,272 NET.

PSC’s anniversary campaign was covered by Philadelphia television channels NBC, CBS, FOX and ABC. Newspaper coverage included placements in the Philadelphia Inquirer, South Philadelphia Review, Philadelphia Tribune, and The Public Record. Newspaper. Coverage also included two front page stories in Milestones. PSC also received two feature stories in publications by Philadelphia Corporation for Aging and the Avenue of the Arts. Radio time included coverage on WKYW Newsradio. The American Composers Forum sponsored paid advertising in the South Philadelphia Review, the Philadelphia Inquirer, and Milestones. The PSC website experienced an average of 14,640 hits per month. In 2008, the website averaged 9,000 and 11,000 hits.