

It s a MUST

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MARIETTA - MUST Ministries, one of Marietta's best known and supported faith-based charities, knows you can't put a price tag on the comforts of home.

But as part of their annual Non-Event Gala they've challenged local residents to bid on what would make them most comfortable.

"We have a very generous community. When we have a need we're able to reach out," Brooke Cowen, MUST special events coordinator said.

To refresh participants, the Non-Event Gala, one of its annual events fundraising events, Ms. Cowen said MUST's administrative board came up with the online auction to spice things up a little bit.

Some of the items and services up for auction include vacation getaways like a four day, three night trip to New York City; a massage session at Healing Harbour Skin and Body Clinique in Acworth; a round of golf at Barnsley Gardens in Adairsville; and lunch with Cobb's local music celebrities, Third Day.

While in the long run some of the items up for auction might fetch more than their retail value Annette Lee, MUST resource development coordinator, said that doesn't alter the immeasurable ways the nonprofit organization benefits.

"(People) have to keep in mind this is for charity," Ms. Lee said. "We're able to do what we do because of their generosity."

All money from the fundraiser will go back to the walk-in homeless shelter that serves over 300,000 Cobb County residents a year who don't have a roof over their heads or a hot meal to eat.

"A lot of people who eat lunch here every day, it's their only meal of

the day. We're a beacon of hope," Ms. Lee said.

MUST volunteer Fran Duggan helped rally together many of the auction pieces. Using her stack of business cards, the retired Cobb County Schools media specialist said she just went through the pile of retailers she's done business with for years and asked them if they'd like to make a donation.

Ms. Duggan said they tried to appeal to a variety of age groups so that there was a little something for everyone on the online auction.

"In this busy world people can sit at their computer and with a couple of mouse clicks, they can help someone in need," she said.

The auction has been online since March 15 and based on current bids, Ms. Cowen estimates they'll surpass the fundraising of previous Non-Event Galas.

"So far we've had \$5,200 in bids and it hasn't even been a week so that's huge," she said.

MUST Executive Director John Moeller said the idea for the non-event originally stemmed from giving folks a way to support the charity organization without having to go through all the hassle of renting a tux and getting dolled up for a fancy dinner.

"We kind of looked at it from both sides," Moeller said. "One, we felt we didn't know how to put on a big gala. And two, we just felt there was a large group of people who would just as soon stay home."

Last year they raised \$14,719, from the mailings, but this year Ms. Cowen said it was time to try something different to give back to the community that has supported them so much.

"I think people trust us. We have a good track record. Their money goes where we say it goes and their food goes where we say it goes," Ms. Cowen said.

The Thanksgiving Day Gobble Jog is still their biggest fundraiser, bringing in over \$70,000, but she is confident the new online auction has the potential to be a successful addition to their annual fundraising.

The auction will continue until 11:59 p.m. April 6.

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