



## The Omaha Zoo Foundation

The Omaha Zoo Foundation, established in 1984, supports the mission, research, and programs benefiting Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo. Omaha's Zoo is not just a place to see animals—it's a part of the worldwide conservation community that offers award winning exhibits, education and volunteer opportunities, and conservation programs. Supporters not only help fund the beautiful facility and animal care; their contributions enable cutting edge amphibian conservation, conservation medicine, molecular genetics, animal nutrition, rare plant research, reproductive physiology and technology transfer. Conservation leaders worldwide use the scientific research and knowledge base these programs produce.

### Highlights

- Staff can now easily evaluate what areas of the auction need to be improved using the data provided by the Greater Giving Event Software reporting tool.
- An overwhelming volume of details is made manageable and useful in a single database that can be shared online.
- Event night volunteers can be quickly trained on the Greater Giving equipment, creating a smoother and more professional check-in and check-out.

### Challenge

The Omaha Zoo Foundation held their first bi-annual auction fundraiser in 1975. The event started out as a small activity put together by the Zoo's women's guild. Today's event, however, is a different story. With over 1400 attendees and still growing, the Zoofari event has blossomed into the largest fundraising event for Omaha's Zoo. Managing the event is now a huge undertaking and requires year-round planning. The Zoofari team is made up of community volunteers and overseen by the Director of The Omaha Zoo

Foundation, Calvin Sisson. The overwhelming amount of event information was originally organized in a Microsoft® Access® database. "There was no real way to track information except to build sheets or lists," said Sisson. "It was crazy how we were trying to manage an event of this scale out of spreadsheets."

Also, due to the sheer number of guests, coupled with an inefficient system, there were often long lines at check-out. Some attendees became so frustrated, that they simply walked out without picking up or paying for their items. This created weeks of post-event reconciliation while the team struggled to tie up loose ends.

### Solution

Sisson came across Greater Giving while looking for a Web-based software solution for his children's 450-guest school auction. Using Event Software as the auction chair for the school, he saw first hand the power of the Greater Giving solution. And, after seeing Event Software and Auctionpay used to streamline and speed check-in and check-out, he felt the products were a must-have for the Omaha Zoo.

Right from the start, Sisson says the Zoofari team found the Greater Giving system easy to use. He personally appreciated the ease of training—he could quickly show volunteers how to do data entry, check-in and check-out without a lengthy training class. And, the fact that the Event Software was able to sync with information in the Zoo's Raiser's Edge/Blackbaud donor management software gave Greater Giving added value. "From a cost perspective, Event Software is really competitive as well," said Sisson.

### Tips from The Omaha Zoo Foundation

- To improve upon previous events and target your procurement efforts, use the Event Software reporting tool to evaluate what items sold and did not sell.

- Limit your items to drive up bidding and increase winning bid totals—Zoofari has about 75 silent items and 15 live auction items for their 1400 attendees.

### Results

The Board and Zoofari team were pleasantly surprised at how convenient it was to manage their event using Event Software and Auctionpay. Sisson said it was a confirmation that he chose the right product for an extremely large event like Zoofari. “The biggest concern was getting people out in a good amount of time, and check-out was the most-redeemed event feature that everyone commented about.”

The end result was that Zoofari 2008 had happy guests who did not wait in long check out lines, and the foundation raised \$70,000 more than the previous year. When asked if they planned to use Greater Giving Products again, Sisson’s answer was, “Oh yeah! We’ll use this at every event.”

In 2009, Sisson and his team plan to use Greater Giving Online Payments to capture online event registration information. Sisson is anticipating saving a large amount of time by not having to manually enter all the guest information. That time can be spent on more creative improvements to the ever-growing Zoofari event, and raising more funds for Omaha Zoo’s mission.