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The Innovation Awards celebrate innovative companies and people that show how new ideas can be developed into fuel for the Tri-State's economic engine. The winners were announced at an April 14 event at downtown Cincinnati's Duke Energy Convention Center.

The Spirit of Cincinnati: Innovation Awards Winner

Forget partying like a rock star. Now it's time to donate like a rock star.

OK, there is always an excellent shindig, too, at the charitable function called The Rusty Ball, according to Rusty Griswold's band member Steve Frisch. The event, which has become a premier annual fundraiser in Greater Cincinnati, is hosted by the local band's nonprofit organization, The Spirit of Cincinnati.

Frisch said the band employs a simple strategy to make this event a success: set the band up, play the music and give the money to charity. It has helped bring together individuals and businesses to support multiple charities to improve overall quality of life in Cincinnati.

"A lot of nonprofits would call asking for entertainment for their event, and we did a couple per year, but we couldn't do them all," said Frisch. "My thought was if we got all of these groups together, it'd be a good party and we could help them all out at one time."

Most of the nonprofit organizations that participate do not have the resources to conduct such a high-visibility event on their own, according to Joseph Jones, Internal Events Manager at The Spirit of Cincinnati. So in addition to raising funds, The Rusty Ball allows the beneficiaries to enhance community awareness about their causes, as well as share program and service information among other nonprofit organizations.

"A lot of the time it is about the exposure, because we do a good job of promoting organizations on our website to create awareness," said Jones. "It's a way to create awareness for groups, and for the smaller groups that don't have marketing and publicity budgets it's important that they get that aspect from the event."

Since its inception three years ago, The Rusty Ball has become the largest collaborative fundraising event in the city. With 3,300 guests in attendance and more than 100 charitable beneficiaries participating in 2010, it raised more than \$300,000.

Jones said the band created an effective collaborative fundraising model that attracts attention. Now convention and visitors bureaus and nonprofit organizations in other cities want to replicate the event.

Beneficiaries receive the net revenue of ticket sales based on their percentage of sales. The public can purchase tickets directly from the nonprofit organization or at the event website, where buyers can designate an organization to be credited for the sale. Nonprofits also can participate in live and silent auctions, a basket raffle and a split-the-pot game where 100 percent of the proceeds go to the beneficiaries. In 2010, corporate sponsors could nominate a favorite beneficiary for a chance to win one of three \$5,000 drawings.

“Our concept is innovative because we get more than 100 nonprofit organizations together in the same room, sharing the same resources,” said Jones. “And they also share how they are successful with their models. They are sharing their success stories and helping others in not having to re-create the wheel.”