
TEEING UP FOR A CAUSE

CHILDREN'S CHARITIES
OF THE BLUEGRASS
RAISES FUNDS TO BENEFIT
ORGANIZATIONS DEVOTED
TO THE BETTERMENT
OF KENTUCKY KIDS

*By Robin Roenker
Photos by Bill Straus*



The Children's Charity Classic pairs local golfers with celebrities such as UK basketball legend Jack Givens.





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CHILDREN'S CHARITIES
OF THE BLUEGRASS



The Children's Charity Golf Classic is the organization's main fundraiser.



Take a summery Friday and Saturday with 18 holes of golf, mix in some competitive camaraderie among friends and work colleagues, spice it up with the chance to meet local and national celebrities, and top it off with satisfied fulfillment, knowing it's all in support of Central Kentucky kids.

It's the recipe for a perfect weekend — and the secret behind what's made the Children's Charity Golf Classic a favorite local tradition for 38 years running.

Launched in 1981 to help provide needed funds for the Child Development Center of the Bluegrass, the Children's Charity Fund of the Bluegrass has long since expanded its reach to support dozens of agencies that serve children in need throughout the region.

Last year's Golf Classic raised \$355,055, with proceeds supporting projects and initiatives at an array of Central Kentucky children's charities, including CASA of the Bluegrass, Children's Advocacy Center of the Bluegrass, Child Development Center of the Bluegrass, The Nest, Lexington Hearing & Speech Center, and more.

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Actor Marc McClure and his wife, Carol, attend the 2018 bid party.

This year's Golf Classic is set for June 21-22 at Greenbrier Golf and Country Club and Griffin Gate Golf and Country Club.

"Each year since I've been involved, we've tried to impact more and more children, and more agencies," said Jeff Anderson, vice president and general manager at WKYT, who has served as president and chair of the Children's Charity Fund of the Bluegrass volunteer board of directors for the past two years.

"In 2018 we funded 37 agencies and were able to impact 18,000 children, up from 10,000 children the previous year," Anderson said. "This year we will give out just over \$363,000, and there will be 47 agencies — a record — receiving funding from last year's tournament."

Real connections

While the Children's Charity Fund of the Bluegrass does operate additional fundraisers at other times throughout the year — a raffle for a chance to win a car donated by Gates Auto Family in Richmond is underway through late June, for example — it's the annual Golf Classic that provides the charity's main source of funding.

The golf event itself offers fun that's "infectious," said golf committee member Chase Hall, who in his professional life works as an executive director at Baptist Health. "A lot of our participants build strong bonds. Teams and celebrities form relationships on the golf course," Hall said. "They keep in touch with one another throughout the year."



Baseball Hall of Famer Johnny Bench co-hosts the bid party.



The Lexington Hearing and Speech Center received funds this year for its cochlear implant program.

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Anderson agreed. "It's for the kids, but it becomes a family also. You build real friendships," he said.

Teams of four sign up, with a minimum donation of \$5,000 to participate (the cost is often sponsored by players' corporate or business employers).

Groups are randomly matched with a celebrity player — from former UK sports luminaries such as Tony Delk, Sam Bowie, and Tim Couch, to national figures like ESPN anchor Michael Eaves — for Friday's day of play.

Then, on Friday evening at the annual Bid Party, the teams offer additional bid donations to "win" their pick of a celebrity player to round out their group of five for Saturday's golf session.

Former Cincinnati Reds stars Johnny Bench and Doug Flynn are regular celebrity participants and avid supporters of the event — so much so that for many years they have served as co-hosts alongside UK Women's Basketball Coach Matthew Mitchell. (Mitchell, to the delight of attendees, typically makes quite a production of serenading guests at the annual Thursday-night Cabaret Show and Dinner, which precedes Friday's tee time and is open to all participants.)

"I just think seeing all the good that [the event] has done all these years is so rewarding. It's my hometown. You always like to contribute a little bit to your hometown," said Flynn, who has participated in the Classic for at least 28 years. "Every celebrity we've had here is someone we can call a friend. We don't go through agents to find names or pay people to come in. It's people of unbelievable talent who really want to be here."



Activities for children take place at the Kid's Jamboree.



Lynn Hudgins, center, of Junior Achievement of the Bluegrass, receives a grant from the Children's Charity Classic presented by co-hosts Doug Flynn, left, and Matthew Mitchell.

Learn more about the Children's Charity Golf Classic, and register to participate online, at **www.childrenscharityofthebluegrass.org**. Registrations will be accepted until mid-June. You can also make an online donation or purchase a car raffle ticket at the Children's Charity of the Bluegrass Fund website.

A helping hand

For the nonprofit agencies regularly supported by the Children's Charity Fund of the Bluegrass, the financial assistance means specialized programs and assistance — which might not otherwise be possible — can be offered to Central Kentucky children who most need it.

At The Nest, Children's Charity funds support free drop-in child care for parents in crisis situations, fund nutritious breakfasts and lunches for children in care there, and help cover the costs of needed materials and training for teachers, said Jenny Norman, the center's director of child care.

"Having someone that we know we can depend on [for financial support] year in and year out, that recognizes the value in what we do, is amazing — because in this day and time, that can be a real struggle for nonprofits," Norman said.

Children's Charity funds also support the cochlear implant program at Lexington Hearing & Speech Center, helping give the gift of hearing to children who might have never heard sound before.

The surgery and required follow-up speech and auditory therapy are often not covered by families' insurance or Medicaid, and the support from Children's Charity ensures that Lexington Hearing & Speech can "continue to provide access to quality hearing health care for all kids with all types of insurances or limited incomes," said executive director Marcey Ansley.

At Children's Advocacy Center of the Bluegrass, the Children's Charity funds enable the center to have board-certified child abuse pediatricians on site so required

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medical exams when child sexual abuse is suspected can be performed in a setting that is as comfortable and supportive as possible, rather than at an emergency room.

"Every kid receives a blanket and a stuffed animal, as well as snacks. We're just trying to make everybody as comfortable and calm in the situation as they can be," said Winn Stephens, Children's Advocacy Center of the Bluegrass executive director. The funds also help the center provide therapy assessments and caregiver consultations to support children's future mental health.

To receive funding, nonprofits submit grant applications to Children's Charity Fund of the Bluegrass, outlining their intended projects in the coming year.



Musicians Rick Seratte, foreground, and Dillon Dixon provide entertainment at the 2018 event.

"We're looking to support organizations that can make a real impact. And we want to make sure our funding is truly being used for children's services. We don't pay for agency staffing or overhead, for example," said Kara Heissenbuttel, a Children's Charity Fund of the Bluegrass board member and director of patron experience at Keeneland.

"We're run by an all-volunteer board, and it's a group of people who put their heart and soul into putting this golf tournament together every year," Heissenbuttel said.

"It's so rewarding to know that there are so many agencies in Central Kentucky here solely to support children. I've loved seeing the community come together to raise so much money to support them in their mission to help kids." **KM**



Grant recipients receive a total of \$355,055 at last year's golf classic.