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Classy Ladies Who Bring on the Bling

Raise money and awareness for Harry Chapin Food Bank

By Mary Wozniak

THEY HAVE A LITTLE LUNCH. They sip a little wine. They browse a few stores. They take a little cruise.

They're smart, professional, proactive, positive. They are the Ladies Who Lunch, and so much more.

Every month, they meet for lunch in private country clubs throughout Lee and Collier counties. Their purpose is to network. Their mantra is: "Be a Force for the Good."

Ladies Who Lunch was created in August 2012 by Kyle Henderson, owner of Transitions Life & Business Coaching. A certified life coach, she has more than 20 years in consulting, sales and marketing.

"I created Ladies Who Lunch because I wanted to meet, socialize, and build relationships with smart, interesting, accomplished, and fun women," Henderson said

"The atmosphere I have created allows the ladies to get to know each other on a personal level," she added. "As their relationship grows, so does the opportunity to do business with each other."

And so does the opportunity to do good for others.

The group has been a big hit, so much so that it has grown to 130 members. It has also expanded way beyond Ladies Who Lunch. Now there is Ladies Who Shop (to support members who represent clothing and jewelry lines), Ladies Who Bake, and more. They just held their fourth Ladies who Cruise in November.

They have also become the Ladies Who Walk, supporting the Harry

Chapin Food Bank and its annual Hunger Walk, the food bank's biggest fundraiser of the year. The 2016 WINK News Feeds Families Hunger Walk is at 9:30 a.m. Saturday, January 16. The goal is \$330,000.

Henderson likes to put a creative spin on everything she does. That includes fundraising. How are the Ladies helping? Some of the group met recently at a cozy local bistro on Daniels Parkway, where they sipped wine, nibbled hors d'oeuvres - and brought their gently-used jewelry.

Yes, jewelry. The event was called, "Bring on the Bling." The donated bling will be "purchased" at the Ladies' January luncheon, just before the Hunger Walk.

Henderson was equally creative in raising funds for the 2015 Hunger Walk. The Ladies were asked to purge their closets of gently-used handbags. "Go deep, go wide," she urged them.

At the January luncheon, they put out a donation jar, and displayed all the purses. The women would choose a purse, and put a donation in the jar. "We raffled off a brand new Coach bag with matching wallet," Henderson said.

They result: The Ladies raised more than \$2,000

The Ladies have run out of gently used purses. So this year it's Bring on the Bling. They hope to surpass their previous total.

Linda Rand has been a part of the Ladies group for four years. "For me, it was the chance to meet smart, accomplished women," she said. Rand is retired from a 30-year corporate

career in the defense industry, ending as a partner with IBM.

"I've always been a big fan of Harry Chapin. I saw him in concert," she said. "I was devastated when he died. I know his passion was hunger. I'm just all in on that."

Rand has other nonprofit causes. She's also the United Way campaign chair in the Paseo gated community off Daniels Parkway.

Kathy Totterdale of Estero, a retired bank vice-president and current Mary Kay Beauty Consultant, is one of the original members of Ladies Who Lunch. She and her husband are also very active in supporting the Harry Chapin Food Bank.

"They feed people who are hungry and their kids - amazing people, people you wouldn't ever expect can't feed their kids," she said. They may have lost a job, or are dealing with other life changes, she said.

Christine Sherlock, owner of Image Matters, an image consulting firm, has been part of the group for about two years. "I believe what I learned from Kyle is that everything you give to the food bank is used to give the people," she said. (For every dollar donated to the food bank, 97 cents goes to programs).

"I think they really do help the people. It's a shame that people have to go hungry, said Sherlock, who lives in Fort Myers. "Why do you have to look any further? This is the place you can use the money. I'm just happy to give back - you know, be a force for the good."

Obviously there is a need, because if there wasn't a need the food bank wouldn't be here, Henderson said. Choosing the Harry Chapin Food Bank as her nonprofit to focus on was a no-brainer.

"It's personally my style to pick one thing, and give it my time and attention," she said. "I like what they do. I like how they do it. They don't focus on the problem. They focus on the solution."

That's how she teaches her 18-week transitions life coach course – "begin with the end in mind," she said. Henderson focuses on changing her clients' thinking process to be more positive, proactive, and focus on the solution to achieve their goals.

Ladies Who Walk fields a team that physically makes the two-mile trek. When they cross the finish line, they become the Ladies Who Brunch. "I believe in having fun while doing good," Henderson said.

The Hunger Walk will be held at the Miromar Outlets in Estero. Sponsorships are available, and supporters can also form teams to raise money and participate in the event. Information is available at www.harrychapinfoodbank.org or by contacting Marta Hodson at 239-334-7007 x132 or martahodson@harrychapinfoodbank.org.

The Harry Chapin Food Bank solicits, collects and distributes quality food to families in need through a network of more than 150 nonprofit agencies in Lee, Collier, Hendry, Charlotte and Glades counties. These partner agencies operate food pantries, soup kitchens and other feeding programs that serve 30,000 Southwest Floridians each month. For each donated dollar, the food bank can provide \$6 in food value to the community. This means

the Walk could provide nearly \$2 million in food by reaching the \$330,000 goal. ■

The 2016 WINK News Feeds Families Hunger Walk is at 9:30 a.m. Saturday, January 16. For more info visit: www.harrychapinfoodbank.org.



Necklace, earrings, ring among jewelry collected for "Bring on the Bling."



Ladies Who founder Kyle Henderson holding donated necklace.



Second row, standing, left to right: Pat Russell, Neida White, Kyle Henderson. Sitting, left to right: Holly Messinger, Debbie Howe, Cassie Rice.