

Texas Hold 'Em Fundraiser for MS

It was always one of Connie Plier's dreams to someday hold a poker tournament. It took an MS diagnosis to make it happen.



Shawn Corbett and Connie Plier

Connie Plier met fellow poker enthusiast Shawn Corbett, not surprisingly, playing cards. Both have MS, so they decided to pool their resources and, shall we say, let the chips fall where they may.

Their Texas Hold 'Em Poker Tournament Fundraiser for MS has grown each year since it began in 2009. The 2012 event, held March 4 at the Washington County Fair Park building, raised \$20,000.22 – half of which came from the more than 80 people who took part in the fundraiser and half from Plier's employer, Schrieber Foods, which made a dollar-

for-dollar match. It was the highest total the event had raised to date, which Connie and Shawn attribute to doing more to promote the event; billing it as more of a family fun day of food, games and raffles rather than strictly a poker tournament; and having more donors who took advantage of their own employer match programs at <http://www1.matchinggifts.com/nationalmssociety/>.

The Set-up: The Texas Hold 'Em Fundraiser includes the poker tournament as well as a silent auction, raffle, food and beverages. The \$50 tournament fee was split, 50 percent going to the tournament pot with the other 50 percent being donated to the Wisconsin Chapter. In addition, they had raffles and games with loads of donated prizes to pick from. They also sold MS hats, bracelets and T-shirts. Games included a guessing game, toss game and spin the wheel.

The MS Connection: Connie and Shawn both give a short talk about their experiences having MS, and a National MS Society representative is on hand to talk about the latest in related research, programs and services. In 2012, local TV host Katrina Cravy was the emcee.

Their Tips for Success:

Remember that each year gets better. You'll gain efficiencies each year as you learn which businesses to go to or who to write letters to based on those who will give and those who won't.

Talk to friends who talk to friends. "We have huge support from family and friends who volunteer and donate items for raffles."

Collect prize items all year round. When stores such as Menards give promotional items away, shop there to get the items and use them as giveaways. Ask friends and neighbors to donate leftover rummage sale items.

Invite friends and family with home-based businesses such as Lia Sophia and Pampered Chef to sell products on site and donate a portion of their sales.

Remember that support includes asking corporations to cover the cost for building rental/fees and printing, or asking vendors to provide a break on pricing for items such as T-shirts. “Little things like that are a huge help.”

Set a goal. Connie and Shawn have a goal of 100 players each year. “You work harder and seem to have more incentive when you set a goal.”

Recruit volunteers. “With the help of others, you can do anything.”

Remember to thank the people and businesses who give. Connie and Shawn did a picture card (similar to the ones that are popular at Christmas) with photos from the event and a message of thanks for those who donated.

Find a good bank. Some will waive minimum limits if they know what they money will be used for.

Don't be afraid to try something new. On a whim Connie went to a small local radio station. They gave her a free 15-minute spot to talk on-air about MS and the tournament.

Don't get discouraged. “You will get turned down but don't let that hinder you. One may say no but the next will give you the moon.”