

Scores of volunteers man the ever-ringing auction phones

For viewers watching the annual Channel 56 Auction it's a finely-orchestrated fund-raising drive. Those who work behind the scenes tell a different story. For them the auction is an addiction that draws doctors, lawyers and others out of their offices to donate their time. They come to auction everything from snakes to burial plots.

## People are key to the channel 56 auction

By LAURA BERMAN

A woman stood at the cashier counter of the Channel 56 auction last week and waved two candlesticks she had just purchased.

"I love Channel 56," she said. "I just love it."

"I came to pick up the candlesticks but I'm also donating \$25 worth of auto repair service," she said. "Some women watch soap operas. I watch 56."

With such enthusiastic scenes being played and replayed throughout the Channel 56 studio last week, the Sixth Annual Auction had to be a success.

Thousands of items were donated during Auction Week (May 4 to May 11) as Channel 56 tried to overtake last year's total of \$410,000.

And, as in past years, auctioned items ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous. This year's oddities included a live boa constrictor, a ten-foot stuffed mouse and the chance to wreck a building.

One winner will have breakfast served by Dennis Wholey and will co-host this A.M. Detroit TV show. And another successful bidder now owns a twin gravestone in Flat Rock.

But it wasn't just prizes that made the auction a week-long spectacular. Behind the camera's eye were some 2,000 volunteers doing everything from answering phones to modeling clothes.

At least for the week of the auction, the Channel 56 studio was a showcase of involvement.

"This is a community effort," Honey Friedman, auction staff coordinator, said. "People from the entire metropolitan area are involved, people from every corner of the city."

Upstairs, her husband, Dr. Irving Friedman, was busily setting up auction tables in his capacity as warehouse supervisor. Dr. Friedman worked mornings last week in his dental practice—the warehouse took precedence in the afternoons and evenings.

"There is no rank and file here. Everybody does everything; no one considers a job beneath him," said Rosetta Gadsen, the station's public relations director.

The volunteers did seem to possess an unusually democratic spirit. One man who wore a supervisor tag and acknowledged that he was business executive on all other weeks, said he "worked his way up" at the auction.

"Two years ago I stuffed envelopes," he said. "Now look at me."

Ilene Christianson, wife of Channel 56's general manager Jim Christianson, filed receipts.

Douglas Whitehouse, who owns the company that makes Presto Whip, took the week off to be an auction supervisor.

"It's a sickness, an addiction, a disease I can't cure," he moaned. "I can't stay away from this crazy auction."

Local celebrities were employed as auctioneers and by week's end the definition of celebrity had been liberally stretched to include just about everyone connected with sports, politics or the media.

Professional models donated their time and fast-talking George Martin was again at the quickie board in the role that has won him considerable renown.

"It wouldn't be the quickie board if George Martin didn't do it," one auction veteran noted. "He has become so well-known that some people refuse to donate an item unless it goes on George's table."

The auction was started in 1969, at a time when station's finances were at an all-time low. The goal that year was \$56,000 and the auction took in \$86,000. Now the auction accounts for 40 per cent of Channel 56's funding.

"Channel 56 is not a large station," Jeanette Keramedjian, auction chairman, said. "But this auction has become the fourth largest in the country because of the people who have worked and volunteered their time for it."

At the cashier counter, Madelein Eberhardt, 17, agreed. She had just spent \$22 on bicycle patches ("You sew them on your clothes") and she was philosophical about the money she spent.

"I love bicycles and I like Channel 56. So you see," she said. "I'm killing two birds with one stone."

# GREEK FESTIVAL

MAY 18 and 19

(Coney Island Court)

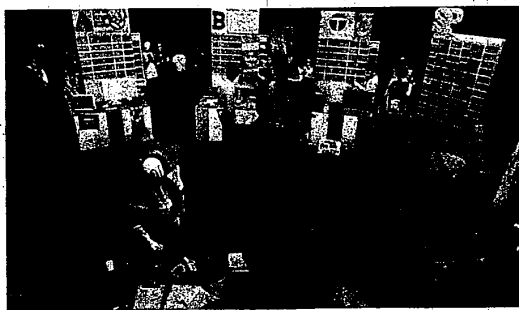
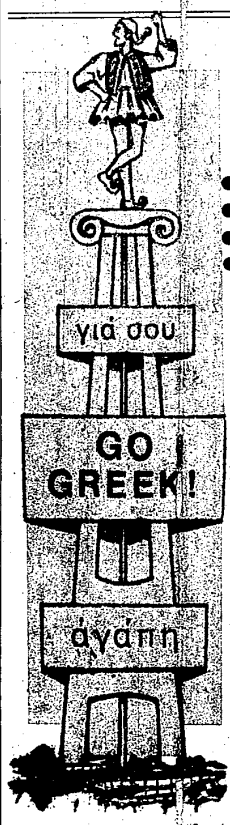
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Bozo the Clown (foreground) takes a break from the rush of auction-floor action

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