

Charity at Heart

Company combines travel with fundraising.

By William Kay

Thinking outside the box? Mitch-Stuart, Inc. is one company that not only thinks outside the box, it creates new boxes and puts stylish, altruistic, ribbons on them.

Mitch-Stuart, Inc. is synonymous with luxurious travel packages for business incentives and fundraising solutions that have helped nonprofit organizations raise almost a billion dollars in revenue since 1994, demonstrating that you can do well by doing good.

The company is the premier provider of travel packages worldwide, with a reputation for offering unrivaled customer service. It has received the prestigious Freddie Award from the hospitality industry for distinguished achievement.

Stuart Paskow, the national director of communications for an international charity where he became the first fundraising executive to promote a philanthropic institute as a

commercial product via innovative television and print campaigns, and Michelle Cohen, the charity's national development consultant – as well as an active member of Temple Bat Yahm for 34 years – worked closely together to consistently find new ways to raise funds. They created the Frequent Funder Awards Program to reward the charity's best donors. "We negotiated discounts with hundreds of shops, restaurants, hotels, and car rental agencies that

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donors would find valuable and desirable,” says Cohen, who also set up the original gift shop at Heritage Pointe with Donna Van Slyke. In 14 months, the program raised \$1.4 million, and the average direct mail gift went from \$46 to \$126.

Then came the idea that would revolutionize the program and create a new market niche for airline miles. Cohen and Paskow were the first to use American Airline AAdvantage miles for a charitable cause, which increased their donations even more dramatically. The airline took note, asking them to develop and administer American’s division for charities in 1993.

“After a 10-minute caucus in the hallway, we came up with the name Mitch-Stuart, Inc. (for founders Michelle and Stuart) and we agreed to create and manage American Airline’s AAdvantage Fundraising Program™,” says Paskow.

AAdvantage miles have, since, helped thousands of nonprofit organizations raise over half a billion dollars. Cohen and Paskow, as Mitch-Stuart, Inc., continue as fundraising consultants to American Airlines. “The program is a winner for American Airlines,” says Cohen. “AAdvantage fundraising builds tremendous goodwill for the airline and it builds business, too.”

Soon afterwards, other airlines approached the colleagues to start similar projects to produce revenue and to capture loyal cus-

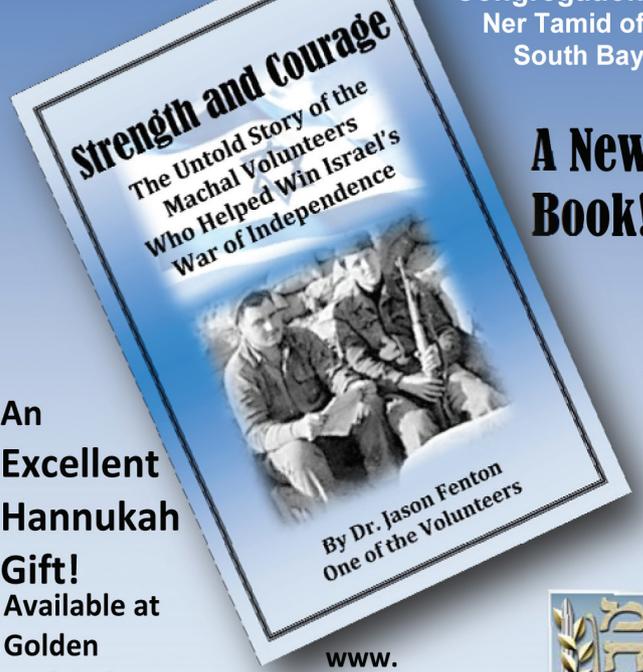
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“Riveting!”

Dalia Taft, Orange County Jewish Historical Society

“It is excellent! ... a very important project.”

Rabbi Isaac Jeret, Congregation Ner Tamid of South Bay



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Michelle Cohen and Stuart Paskow are the founders of Mitch-Stuart, Inc.

tomers through charitable giving. An arm of Mitch-Stuart, Inc. also provided direct marketing consulting and creative services to charities. “We became a full-service outfit,” says Cohen, whose volunteer involvement also includes the Jewish National Fund and Women of Reform Judaism.

Mitch-Stuart, Inc. became a pioneer in offering “trip a day” programs to radio stations. “We enjoy taking our knowledge and lending it to other industries,” says Paskow, who had also been the first to do broadcast ads for charities earlier in his career. That out-of-box thinking came in handy after 9-11.

A change was soon to come that would benefit charities in new ways and help the flailing tourism industry. Mitch-Stuart, Inc. was at the forefront. “Nine-11 happened, which hurt everyone in tourism,” says Paskow. Many hotel chains sold their hotels to investment groups and could no longer fulfill charities’ requests for free rooms. Airlines had contracted and

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Their business model, which is altruistic yet profitable, is the base for future ventures both here and abroad.

could no longer fulfill the requests for free tickets.

In response, Mitch-Stuart, Inc. created the Destinations of Excellence™ no-risk auction travel program, which opened up a new avenue for nonprofit fundraising. These auction packages, offered on consignment, feature luxurious worldwide travel/stay in association with United and American Airlines, Marriott and Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, Hyatt Hotels, The Ritz-Carlton, Disney, Celebrity Cruises, Sandals & Beaches, among many others. They also created unique European tours, Fantasy Sports Trips, and exciting lifestyle experiences.

“There’s no risk for the charity to offer the custom packages as auction items at their events and they receive every dollar over the base price. It’s a win-win for everyone involved,” says Cohen.

Nonprofit organizations contact Mitch-Stuart, Inc. and choose the trips they feel are most enticing to their donors. Bidders can get some great values on a fantasy sports trip to the Super Bowl or to see Tiger Woods in action at the Masters, a relaxing wine experience in the vineyards of Napa, a sizzling jazz excursion in New Orleans, a tasty culinary adventure in Paris or an exciting theater package in New York City. “Generosity also has its rewards,” says Cohen.

According to *The NonProfit Times*, “Travel is the ultimate incentive, and Mitch-Stuart, Inc. is the leader in the category.” The hospitality industry took note and honored the company with a Freddie Award in 2005.

In addition to charitable auctions and donor incentives, Mitch-Stuart’s travel packages are increasingly used by businesses to enhance customer loyalty and to reward and motivate employees. Mitch-Stuart offers both its business and nonprofit clients an in-house travel concierge service, at no cost, that ensures that the trips are handled professionally and efficiently from start to finish.

“It’s a rewarding business that helps save lives, feed the hungry, and shelter the homeless. We’ve been proud to be a part of it,” says Cohen.

Their business model, which is altruistic yet profitable, is the base for future ventures both here and abroad. Cohen and Paskow are the first to bring American-style fundraising to Great Britain, and they have established Mitch-Stuart, Ltd. “The British economy is hurting badly, and the charities are suffering,” says Paskow. In the past, the government freely funded charities. Funds have diminished greatly. “We are currently in talks, guiding charitable groups so that they can start making their own money. This will be a great change to societal standards and its ways of thinking about charities and giving,” he says.

Within the coming months, Mitch-Stuart, Inc. will launch a new program to help both businesses and charities, and another that will help to increase the dollar-value spent by charities.



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