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Fast talker finds true calling

By Carol Sorgen

Combine the gift of gab with a flair for the theatrical and you've got the makings of a first-class auctioneer.

Apparently, the National Auctioneers Association (NAA) agrees, and this past July NAA judges recognized the talents of Joppa resident Lynne Zink, 50, awarding her top honors in the women's division of the International Auctioneer Championship held in Spokane, Wash.

Zink, a former high school English and drama teacher, outshone a field of 23 other women in her fifth attempt at the title. Women, by the way, represent only 8 percent of all auctioneers in the country.

"It was such an honor," said Zink, who attributes this year's winning ways to personal growth, overcoming nerves, putting her skills to the test and, ultimately, becoming a better auctioneer during the competition's 25th year.

Zink had made the International Auctioneer Championship finals each of the past three years. But this year, she walked away with the trophy, a ring, \$5,000, and the opportunity to serve as ambassador for the NAA, representing the association and industry at events across the country.

Picking up the gavel

Zink's husband, Bill, long encouraged her to pursue the profession. "He grew up on a farm and had gone to auctions all his life," Zink explained, "and thought I had what it took to be a good auctioneer."

Sure, fast talking is a common — and not altogether inaccurate — stereotype of an auctioneer, said Zink, "but that's only about 5 percent of the job." Attention to detail, a strong business foundation, good interpersonal skills, creativity and salesmanship are part of the package as well.

When the program Zink was teaching in was at risk of losing its funding in 2001, Zink finally heeded her husband's advice and attended an educational program for budding auctioneers in North Carolina. (Similar programs are available throughout the country. You can learn more at www.auctioneers.org or www.mdauctioneers.org.)

She then joined the Auctioneers Association of Maryland (of which she currently serves as president), where other mem-



Auctioneer Lynne Zink won the top prize in the women's division of the International Auctioneer Championship in July. The former teacher put her skills in salesmanship, creativity, business — and fast talking — to work building a career as an auctioneer 11 years ago.

bers gave her the opportunity to hone her skills at the podium. Soon she began developing her own business.

Zink went full-time in 2003, and now does about 110 auctions a year on a contract basis, selling real estate, personal property and building supplies. She also conducts benefit auctions under LynneZink.com for about 29 clients, such as schools and nonprofit associations.

Old industry, renewed interest

Auctions aren't a new phenomenon. According to the NAA, they have been taking place for more than 2,000 years and are one of the best ways to sell assets.

Every year, reports the NAA, profes-

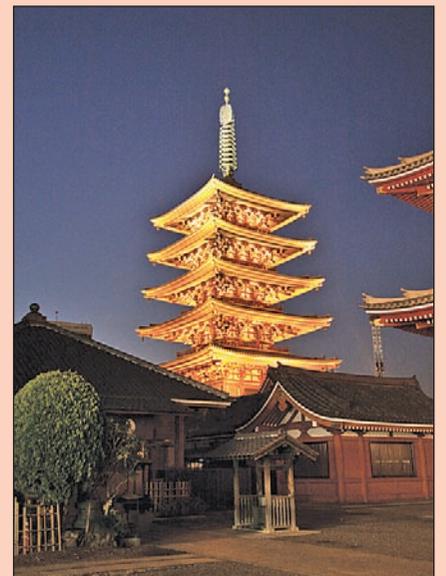
sional auctioneers in the United States alone sell approximately a quarter-trillion dollars in property, representing a range of markets, such as art, antiques, automobiles, business liquidations, real estate, collectibles and intellectual property.

What is new, though, said Zink, is the growing public interest in auctions, spurred on by the popularity of reality TV shows such as "Auction Hunters," "Storage Wars," and "Auction Kings." A&E, the channel that hosts "Storage Wars," claims that it's the most watched program since A&E went on the air in 1984.

"It's the chance for that great find that

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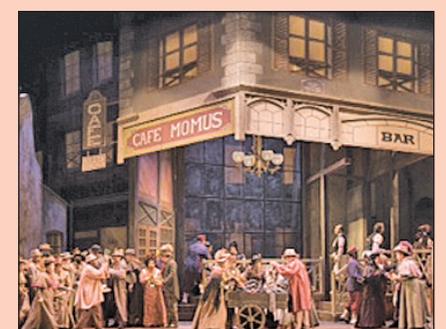
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Auctioneer

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draws people to auctions," said Zink, and the reality shows, which often focus on storage unit auctions, give viewers hope that their next treasure is just waiting for them, too.

That may or may not be the case, said Zink, who admits to occasionally being surprised by what can bring in a lot of money.

"You just never know what item is going to really take off," Zink said. "If you have two or more people who really want something, an item can go through the roof."

To a casual observer, that lone figurine or china cup and saucer may not look like much, but to a collector who wants to round out his or her collection, it can be a find worth a fortune.

Even if you don't think you're in the market to buy or sell, you may change your mind after attending a few auctions. "Auctions are very addicting," said Zink. "You can get hooked on the energy, excitement and the sense of the unknown."

Through the years, she's developed a sixth sense of when bidders are going to make a move just by looking at subtle changes in their facial expression or body language.

And if, by some chance, there's a lull in the proceedings or not much interest in a particular object, Zink uses her improvisational skills from her days as a drama teacher to get the crowd going again. "It's just a matter of making them look at something in a new light," she said.

Helping to downsize

An aspect of her business that Zink finds

particularly gratifying is helping people downsize and sell their property — from the contents of their home to the home itself.

With the real estate woes of the past few years, sellers have found that auctions are a quick, easy way to sell their house, said Zink. But sometimes she has to remind sellers that the days of over-inflated home prices are gone.

"What they may be 'losing' — in their mind — in what they get for their home, they're making up by the fact that they're not spending as much where they're going," she said.

In addition to real estate sales, the economy has had some effect on auctions of personal property as well. Furniture, for example, is not fetching as much as it once did, nor is Depression era glassware, once a hot collectible.

On the other hand, antique bronzes are still popular, and baby boomers are wildly enthusiastic about toys and games from their childhood. (Some of these can be found in general estate auctions; others are sold through specialty auctions. You can find a list of those online at www.mdauctions.org.)

For others who may be interested in learning the auctioneer's trade, Zink suggests starting off, as she did, by attending an auctioneer training program and then working part-time to develop your skills. Like Zink, you may find that this was indeed your calling all along.

"I just love what I do," Zink said. So much so, in fact, that sometimes even the auctioneer has to take a breath and slow down.

"I get so enthusiastic, I can end up talking so fast nobody can understand me!"

Breast cancer

From page 20

million through Making Strides events. Last year alone, over \$60 million was raised through more than 270 walks.

Funds raised through Making Strides Against Breast Cancer are used specifically to help people take steps to reduce their risk of breast cancer or find it early when it is most treatable.

They are also used to invest in research to find, prevent, treat and cure the disease;

provide free information and services to help people facing breast cancer today, including transportation, lodging, wigs, support programs and financial assistance; ensure access to mammograms for women who need them; and encourage lawmakers to pass laws to defeat breast cancer.

This year's Baltimore Making Strides Against Breast Cancer event starts at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Oct. 14 at the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Family Center Y at Stadium Place. Anyone can participate.

Friends, families, neighbors, classmates

and co-workers can form teams. Organizations or businesses can also sponsor teams of walkers. Or you can walk as an individual. Participants in wheelchairs should contact the American Cancer Society office prior to the event for additional information.

For more information, contact Gail

Molinari at baltimore.strides@cancer.org or call (410) 933-5223.

Volunteers are also needed for a variety of positions: water stops, registration, set up, route marshal, etc. To volunteer, contact Molly Schreiber at (410) 933-5208 or Molly.Schreiber@cancer.org.

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