



THE BUSINESS OF

"Part of what's made Philanthro so successful," Jong says, "is that it's an all-volunteer organization. It's nights, weekends, Sunday-afternoon meetings. It's a big dedication of time."

PHOTOS BY WILLIAM VASTA

GIVING BACK

THROUGH PHILANTHRO PRODUCTIONS' PARTIES WITH PURPOSE, ANNEKE JONG '05 AND AUSTIN KIESSIG '06 ARE CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF PHILANTHROPIC LEADERS. BY LORI KOZLOWSKI '00

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ork and play—it's how we live. We spend hours at desks or out in the world, trying to direct income our way. Then there's social health: Added to career obligations, many of us spend the other part of our busy lives investing in the relationships that will help keep us healthy and happy; we develop friendships, loves, and families, and sometimes—if the clock allows—we pursue activities that benefit others and make us feel good, too.

So what happens when you combine the two, blending employment with enrichment? Or investing in humanity, doing good for others while satisfying a need to help, to build, to connect? That's exactly what Anneke Jong '05 and Austin Kiessig '06 have done. In addition to holding down full-time jobs as, respectively, a strategy consulting manager and a senior finance and sales analyst with Roll International Corporation (the parent company for brands such as POM Wonderful and FIJI Water), they're making a name for themselves throwing parties for nonprofits.

As co-presidents of Philanthro Productions, they have built an entire business around making charitable giving fun and affordable. And in turn, they're exposing their Generation Y peers to the work of nonprofits and to the value of supporting causes that invest in others. In fact, among their objectives, Jong and Kiessig say, is creating the next generation of philanthropic leaders. How? By convincing the young, upwardly mobile crowd that, for the same money they'd spend on a round of drinks after work, they could attend a Philanthro event

and help subsidize a charity.

"The traditional channels of philanthropy are not accessible to young adults like us," Jong explains. "The thousand-dollar-a-plate, black-tie dinners associated with fundraising and giving are out of range for our generation's budget. So there aren't many ways for young people to get involved in those kinds of causes."

Enter Philanthro. Three years after their launch in 2007, they've raised almost \$200,000 for various charities, with active chapters in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego, and expansion opportunities in New York and Washington, D.C.

The methodology seems simple: A nonprofit contacts the Philanthro team explaining the nature of their charity and their fundraising need. If the fit is right—efficiency, transparency, and creative problem-solving all are sought-after values for partner organizations—then the team plans and executes a fundraising party or event for the charity, charging a modest amount for guest admission. At the end of the night, Philanthro donates 100 percent of the profits back to the charity. Explained further,

“Long-term entrepreneurship always has been in the cards,” says Jong, who founded CMC’s first progressive political journal: *The Claremont Portside*. “Social entrepreneurship is the intersection of the public sector and the private sector. An econ-gov education really set me up well to understand those two things, not only from a knowledge perspective but also through opportunities to do entrepreneurial activities on campus.”



no one is on the Philanthro payroll; 97 percent of event revenues go to partner nonprofits, with the remaining three percent funding the event productions.

Last February, for instance, Philanthro raised more than \$5,000 for the nonprofit Invisible Children during a screening party at Cinespace in Hollywood. That night, for a cover charge of \$15, guests watched the nonprofit’s latest documentary, “The Rescue of Joseph Kony’s Child Soldiers”, while learning more about the plight of child soldiers in Uganda.

“We realized when we started Philanthro,” Jong adds, “that we weren’t going to be able to raise the millions of dollars that some organizations can. But what we can do is borrow from the Obama model: Get a little bit from a lot of people.”

This business acumen wasn’t born overnight, but rather evolved through conversations between friends. During the company’s untested beginnings in 2007, Jong and Kiessig were approached by Ian Lee and Drew Geisse, colleagues at Deloitte Consulting. Lee and Geisse wondered if they’d be interested in starting a business throwing parties.

“It was a pretty rough concept,” recalls Kiessig. “We talked about starting a business using a sort of

nightclub-promoter model, with a goal of carving out a niche market: Generation Y. Revenue would come from people going to nightlife venues, and portions of those proceeds would be given to charity. Another overarching goal,” he says, “was getting more young adults involved in charitable giving. But that was about all we had, with no name and no long-term business plan.”

The core team numbered less than 10, many of whom also were CMCers: Sean Cramer ’05, Caitlin Drulis ’06, and Josh Gould ’03. As its members began to meet, the venture took shape. And, not surprisingly, it was influenced by their educational experiences at Claremont McKenna.

“During my senior year, I started to learn about social entrepreneurship,” Kiessig says. “I had this great class, a psych course called Leadership, with Professor Jay Conger as part of the Leadership Sequence. He referred to students who had started a number of social entrepreneurial ventures—incredible stuff—so when Ian and Drew approached us, the concept tuned into that CMC instinct: Do good by doing well in business.”

Adds Jong, “Our friends at work were going out a lot at night in Hollywood, and they were starting to feel like ‘all we do when we are not working is

party, and that's an unfulfilling life to lead.”

With a general understanding between them, defining the mission of their newly formed organization was imperative. They asked themselves, Who exactly is our customer? How will we deliver on both the business and the giving back?

Their mission became defined in four parts: earning money for nonprofit partners, educating patrons on the partner nonprofit, organizing a volunteer activity after every event, and creating the next generation of philanthropic leaders.

“We want to create bonds and lasting relationships, so the patrons go forward and continue doing good things for that nonprofit,” Kiessig explains. “For example, at an event for the Susan G. Komen Foundation we signed up 92 people to do the Race for the Cure. It's about taking the next step of charitable sacrifice, actually volunteering your time and energy.”

Philanthro already has worked with a slew of nationally renowned service organizations, including the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, Kiva, and 826LA.

At present, they hold four to six annual events per chapter, each raising anywhere from \$3,000 to \$20,000 or more. And unlike many event planners or public relations firms, Philanthro doesn't skim from the top: all of their profits go directly to their partner nonprofit.

The hidden benefit? Nurturing young people's interests in philanthropy—the idea that giving back to the community is cool.

“We did an event for Dave Eggers' 826LA,” Jong says about her favorite function to date. “They do drop-in tutoring for kids after school, and it's all about the children's writing: getting books published. We really connected with a lot of people at that event; they walked away loving the organization.”

Kiessig was moved by the Invisible Children event last February: “The short documentary that was shown was a kick-off to a global campaign to unseat Joseph Kony, the leader of a rebel's army in Uganda,” he says. “Invisible Children was founded by three young guys from San Diego, people from Generation Y who came up with new tools to educate people about a cause: absolutely the model of our inspiration.”

“Because we grew up in the Information Age, and because of the technological innovations that have shaped our youth,” says Jong, “we really feel like there's no problem we can't solve. We want to see organizations that are being creative in teaching a man to fish, not just throwing money at a problem.”

GIVING BACK + GENERATION Y

They call themselves the 501(c)(3) that has generated a lot of excitement within Generation Y.

They are interested in the young, upwardly mobile set who work hard during the week but are looking to cut loose on the weekends.

A few hard numbers about Philanthro's patrons:

- 95 percent are college-educated
- 85 percent are under the age of 30 (Everyone is over 21.)
- 85 percent make less than \$60,000 per year

Even Philanthro's board of leadership has become more diverse since the company's fledgling days.

“It started out with a lot of management consultants,” Jong says. “We have subsequently brought on people who work in education, healthcare, and the arts: a really great cross-section of young people who otherwise may have not had the opportunity to take on a leadership role in a business.”

Kiessig adds, “We put a huge emphasis on keeping this run by young people.”



“I'm kind of a CMC poster boy,” Kiessig says, jokingly. “I was a government major, and an economics major, and did the D.C. Program, and took advantage of one of the international summer offerings. Everything about what I want to do in the world was shaped by the College.”