

59th BACK MOUNTAIN MEMORIAL LIBRARY AUCTION

Bidder fee helps offset cost of antiques

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Post Correspondent

There will still be the antique curio cabinets, Victorian furniture and marble top tables. There will still be bargain books, gift basket raffles and potato pancakes. In fact, little will change this year at the Back Mountain Memorial Library Auction, except for the addition of a \$5 bidder's registration fee.

This is the first year the auction committee has charged a fee, an action prompted by changes in the way auctioned items are acquired. At one time many of the items were donated to the library, but that no longer is the case. Ernie Ashbridge, antiques co-chairman and member of the auction advisory committee, explained that of the 450 items acquired so far, only one or two were donated.

"In the past 20 years the library has had to front the money to buy the antiques," he says. "Years ago items were donated by people of the Back Mountain, but those people are gone. People are unable or

unwilling to donate."

The registration fee is an alternative to paying a buyer's premium — usually 10 percent — that almost all commercial auctions charge their buyers. Ashbridge, who handles buying along with fellow antiques chair Michael Klug, says these buyer's premiums have an impact on what they can afford to spend.

"If I bid \$200 for an item, I will pay \$220," he explains. "If we can increase our income by the registration fee, it will give us a little buying leeway." The registration fee system is the one used by most charity auctions.

Once a bidder registers and pays the \$5 fee, that person can bid throughout the auction. Ashbridge is hopeful that the fee won't turn prospective buyers away. "We're hoping people will consider it a \$5 donation to the library," he says. And with cuts to library funding, the money earned could be significant.

Roughly 800 to 1000 people attend the auction. "The fee should generate \$4,000 to \$5,000 additional for the library to help offset expenses," Ashbridge notes.

The auction is one of the library's major fundraisers, earning \$70,000 to \$80,000 each year. All the earnings go directly to the library's operations.

That's why volunteers like Ashbridge and Klug spend their time searching for antiques. Ashbridge estimates that some weeks he may spend as much as 40 hours on the project. "It's a year-long process of trying to get the best things at reasonable prices that we feel we can make a profit on," he says.

But that doesn't mean you won't find bargains at the auction. "Something I paid \$100 for might go for \$30 or \$40. You just take those chances."

Ashbridge has noted that buying for the auction has

become more competitive in recent years. "Sometimes you walk away with nothing," he says. "You're not only bidding against dealers but private individuals. People put unwanted items on Ebay and it makes it

harder to find things."

Ashbridge, who has spent 47 years working on the auction, knows it's all worth it in the end. "You do it as a community," he says.

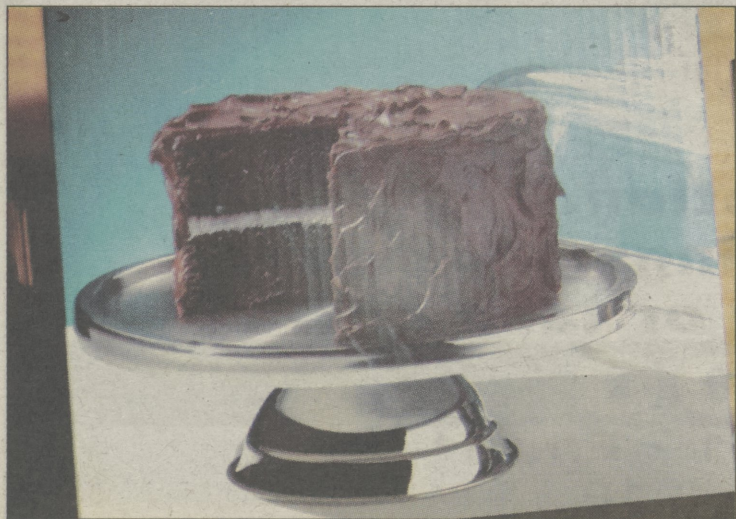
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