

A&A

ASKED & ANSWERED

Tom Whitman

L.A.'s top gay event producer is doing his part to make charity as fun as a night on the town.

BY CHRISTOPHER LISOTTA

Tom Whitman, the mastermind behind Lucky Devil and Popular, is also the brain behind The Gang of 100, a new social organization designed to get younger LGBT people excited about fundraising. This year The Gang raised \$115,000 for the 2007 AIDS Project Los Angeles AIDS Walk, an all-time single team fundraising record. But if Whitman's goals are realized, that accomplishment is only the beginning.

FRONTIERS: Where did the idea for Gang of 100 come from?

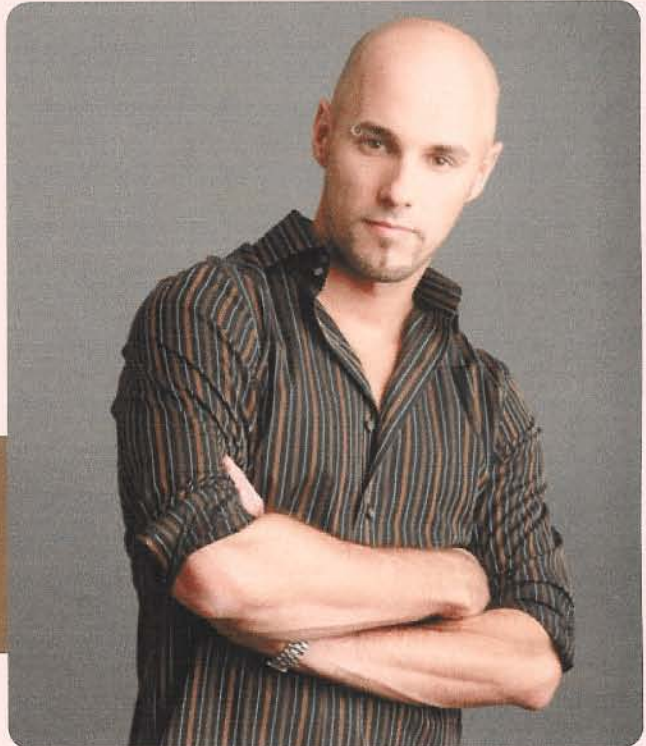
TOM WHITMAN: It originally came from our experience at AIDS Walk 2006. I had just joined the board of APLA, and I had never done a team. I had walked once, I think, years ago, but hadn't really been involved heavily, and since that's our biggest fundraising event, I thought it would be a good thing to get my friends involved. Part of my purpose in joining the board was to get younger people involved in APLA and other charity stuff. So I thought doing a team would be a good way to do that. We didn't decide to do it until a month before the AIDS walk. We raised over \$65,000 the first year, and had a great time. There was a real sense of camaraderie, and everyone realizing what fun it was hanging out and making a difference at the same time. So Gang of 100 was the way to capitalize on that ability to do that year round.

Are you involving people who are already giving anyway? Is the goal to get new people involved?

Absolutely. The vast majority of our group doesn't necessarily raise that much money during the course of the calendar year. Most of them are pledging to do much more than they have in the past. I gave money in the past, but it was kind of haphazard. I never really kept track of what I had given. I may have given \$250, but I definitely didn't raise \$2,000 every year or more. Sometimes we ask certain people who are involved in other groups to come in because they also bring knowledge of those groups to us. With APLA, I'm on the board, so yes, I'm already giving more than that, but I can get other guys involved and be excited about raising money because of my knowledge. But the vast majority of our guys are guys without affiliations.

It seems like a fun way to meet cute guys.

That's where it really came from. I kind of realized if me and all these friends enjoy spending time together, why not spend time together doing something good? For the AIDS Walk both years we stopped at a house along the walk and actually had an awards ceremony, a very funny, sarcastic, off-the-cuff awards ceremony. We recognized people and had a good time, and had cocktails at noon. It was very fun but there was this whole other angle to it. In our



group people commit to being involved in planning an event during the year. It could be very small. If it's your birthday party, and you say instead of giving gifts everyone donates to the charity of your choice, even if it's only 50-60 people. When someone joins the Gang of 100 they get a big packet of stuff with ideas for events they can do to raise money to hit their goals. Theoretically each gang member is involved in planning an event for the year.

Do you require volunteer time as well?

I don't want to add another level of bureaucracy. I'm not trying to recreate anything so we have extra meetings. The goal is to get guys involved in our beneficiary groups. We don't have volunteer hour requirements. We wanted to make it really simple and that is why we have a dollar amount on it.

You are the second generation of out fundraisers. Do you think there are different expectations? How is giving different now from before?

A lot of the guys who are now between the ages of 25-45, they haven't been, in the past five years, a big presence in all the LGBT groups. All the groups lament to the guys who are in that age group and who are involved, how come you guys are not involved in a bigger way? How do we get the younger people involved in our charity? That has always been the challenge. There are ways to re-involve those people. There are a lot of reasons—the guys in the first generation got tired and did it for so many years, and some of the groups have done better jobs than others about engaging young guys. Especially engaging young guys who may not be able to give you a thousand-dollar check, but they will at some point in their lives. Once we do have someone reach out to us I think we are excited, and want to get invested, and want to do more.

For more information, visit www.gangof100.com.