



Mt. Washington  
Pediatric Hospital

*Where Children Go to Heal and Grow*

An affiliate of University of Maryland Medical System and Johns Hopkins Medicine

# 10 Tips for Organizing a Successful Event *from MWP Foundation Board Member and Holiday Toy Shop Chair Beth Armacost*



*The daughter of two Baltimore natives, Beth Armacost grew up in Bucks County, PA. After completing her undergraduate and graduate degrees in education at the University of Delaware, she started her teaching career there before moving to Baltimore, where she taught middle school math. Today, Beth is director of client relations for Offit & Roth, PA and devotes countless hours to MWPH as a foundation board member, a former gala chair who continues to serve on the gala executive committee each year, and this year's Holiday Toy Shop chair. She and her husband have two sons, ages 12 and 13.*

## **How did you get involved with Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital (MWPH)?**

When our boys were little, I stayed home with them full time, but when my younger son went off to kindergarten, I was at a crossroads and looking for a way to contribute. MWPH came into my life at the perfect time, because I am used to being very busy.

Lauren Perlin introduced me to MWPH initially. We were neighbors, and she reached out to say she was starting up this gala for MWPH. I had

never heard of the hospital, but I went to the first gala committee meeting back in 2013 and never looked back.

## **What kinds of things did you do in connection with MWPH's Storybook Gala?**

For the first three years, I was the logistics chair. I worked closely with Lauren and MWPH's development team, particularly the first year, since this event was a new endeavor. I helped outline how the event would work, from how we'd handle the auction pieces, to guest check-in, ►

to the evening's timeline and order of events. I helped take care of the nitty-gritty, minute details that make an event run smoothly.

### What stands out to you about MWPH's gala?

One part of my responsibilities connected with the gala was handling all of the volunteers, and that experience stands out to me because I got to see just how dedicated MWPH's staff is to the hospital's mission. The gala volunteers have always been MWPH staff, and it speaks volumes that they are so willing to come out and donate their time on a Saturday night to assist with the check-in process, the auction setup, the check-out, and many other things. Each year, we'd put out a call for volunteers, and each year, we'd get more than we'd need.

Another thing that's really special is that I have gotten to know a lot of the staff in the hospital, because I was in charge of organizing their tasks for the gala. Eventually, I became a patient parent as well as an MWPH supporter, as one of my sons receives some outpatient services. Knowing so many of the staff beforehand made it even easier for us.

### What drives you to continue contributing and deepening your commitment to MWPH?

MWPH has had my heart since the first time I walked into the board room for the first gala committee meeting. Whatever I can do for this hospital, to make it even better for everyone in the community, that's what I'm all about.

I have been part of things since 2013, and MWPH has grown into such a fixture in my life. It's very special to me. In 2017, I had the honor of chairing the gala—the theme was Willy Wonka, which was much fun. It was truly a magical evening. When I chaired the event, I wanted our gala committee to get a firsthand connection to the hospital. So, at each committee meeting, I asked someone from the hospital to come and talk about MWPH. I wanted the committee members to understand the range of small, unique things

that MWPH is doing, expanding the awareness of the hospital's important work.

Joining the foundation board has been a huge honor. I was so moved to be asked. I joined the program committee, and I have enjoyed evaluating the staff grant proposals and funding so many of their wonderful ideas.

### How do you stay organized while juggling millions of tiny details for these events?

Staying organized is a must when you're putting on large events with many contributors. Here are some of the practices that I find most helpful:

1. Always respond in a timely manner when someone reaches out.
2. Maintain a strong attention to detail by tracking everything. I take notes on every meeting or interaction I have, so that things don't fall through the cracks.
3. Review your to-dos and notes thoroughly and often. I have a good review system, and I review my lists often, so that I am familiar with where everything is and can cross-check details easily.
4. Never settle for your current organization method—continually search for a better, more efficient way to do things. Ask others who have experience to share their best tips.
5. Talk out procedures with others to come up with the best plan of action.
6. Loop people in on communications throughout the process, so that no question is left unanswered, and no one is left out.
7. Make sure those you are working with feel appreciated. It's important for others to feel heard.
8. Ask questions—it's the best way to learn.
9. Be positive, be polite, and be able to expect the unexpected. A little flexibility will go a long way.
10. When in doubt, write it down—I prefer to write things down on paper. Plus, it's fun to cross tasks out when they're complete! ▶



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**Speaking of events, you just wrapped up this year's Holiday Toy Shop. Can you tell us about that?**

MWPH has provided a Holiday Toy Shop for patient families for seven years. Before this year, it had been completely run by two of MWPH's staff members, Rachana Patani and Michelle Hanover. Each year, they'd asked for volunteers to help, and I'd always encourage the gala committee and board members to come and volunteer with me.

Each year, I was just blown away by what they put together for the inpatient families. Parents shop for holiday gifts for their children, all from donations. There are musicians providing festive music, a craft area, a wrapping paper station, hot chocolate and other treats, and even people waiting to help the families to their cars with their gifts.

I've had the pleasure of volunteering for this event several times, and it's always so moving and wonderful. This year, I was delighted to partner with Rachana and Michelle to expand the Holiday Toy Shop, increasing our reach to encompass more families in the community. My goal as chair

was to expand our donor outreach so that more people can see what makes MWPH so special.

Last year, we reached 309 families. This year, our goal was to double that mark. I'm delighted to say that we reached 246 families at MWPH's first-ever Community Toy Shop, held on November 6 at Arlington Elementary School in Baltimore City. Despite the current pandemic, the hospital was committed to continuing to bring holiday joy to its patients and also held a Holiday Drive-Through Toy Shop on December 19, and we served 388 families, for a grand total of 634 families.

**What role does community support play in the success of MWPH's Holiday Toy Shop?**

The Holiday Toy Shop would not be possible without strong community partnerships. In anticipation of the November Community Toy Shop, we started a summer toy drive called "Christmas in July." We reached out to local businesses, country clubs, pools, foundations, and other organizations, creating relationships with new MWPH supporters who generously donated toys for the November event. In the fall, we conducted additional toy drives to stock our December Holiday Drive-Through Toy Shop. Local partners included Ruth's Chris, Sammy's Trattoria, Charm City Run, and Brown Advisory, to name a few.

Thanks to generous support from across our community, families got toys, filled stockings, wrapping paper, baby supplies, and even a box of candy canes. This year, an astounding number of toys—in excess of 25,000—were donated, making the holidays brighter for 1,552 children. I'm so grateful to be a part of MWPH's success. It's truly a wonderful hospital.

Visit [mwph.org](http://mwph.org) to learn more about the Mt. Washington Pediatric Foundation Board and the hospital's mission.

