

DAILY NEWS

Web-savvy parents have art for raising money

BY ELIZABETH LAZAROWITZ

COBBLE HILL'S Public School 29 has gone viral — but it doesn't need a vaccine.

During the summer, parents launched an online viral marketing campaign that brought in \$40,000 in just a month and rescued the school's arts programs from the chopping block.

Thanks to a Web site, some videos and the Internet's rapid-fire transmission, donations poured in from as far away as South America and Eastern Europe.

"We were just blown away by the life of its own that it had," said Lisa Trollbeck, president of the Henry St. school's parent association.

Deep cuts to the school's budget had left almost nothing for pricey but prized instruction in activities like chess, band, chorus, African dance, ballroom dance and theater. If the association couldn't bear the full cost, much of it would have to go.

That news had PS 29 parent and freelance Web designer Sylvia Wehrle "super bummed out," so she decided to try out some of the same marketing and design techniques that



Neil and Sylvia Wehrle, with daughters Hannah (l.) and Ingrid. Photo by Pearl Gabel

she's used for clients like Conde Nast and Morgan Stanley.

With the end of school fast approaching, she registered the name 5days4arts.org and created a Web site using free blogging tool WordPress.

She and Elizabeth Kiem, a PS 29 mom and video pro, made 3-minute videos featuring kids in the school's arts programs as well as interviews with teachers and visiting artists. They posted one a day for the final five days of school, and then blasted parents with e-mails, asking them to pass them on.

"Somebody could e-mail their grandmother in Argentina and get them to watch the videos," Wehrle said. "You can't get that with a backpack flyer."

The site included a simple, eye-catching red button so that visitors could donate online from anywhere in the world. It also had one that let them easily share the videos through e-mail and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter.

And they did.

"We raised that amount of money in that amount of time in a recession, which is pretty unusual," Wehrle said.

The group is launching its second campaign this week on eatpieandshop.org to promote the school's upcoming holiday gift fair and plans another Web-only one soon.

While she's a pro, most of the tools Wehrle used don't require a high level of expertise, and there's a lot of bang for very minimal buck — as cheap as \$50, she said.

On the Internet, "the barriers are very low for getting the word out for your cause," she said. "It doesn't need to be super polished. It needs to be engaging and specific."

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and 3604 Quentin Road. Donations will be accepted Monday through Friday until Dec. 5. Call (718) 238-6044.

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The Brooklyn News is published by the Daily News L.P., 450 W. 33rd St., New York, N.Y. 10001.

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