



Charity Bingo: Fun, Healthy And Critical For Community Charities

By Joe Gomez, President
California Charity Bingo Association (CCBA)

In this economy, we are all looking for great values, especially when we're looking to have fun. It turns out an old friend, the great game of Bingo, offers just that — a night of fun with friends and the chance to take home a nice jackpot. Add in the fact that local charities also benefit from bingo games, and everyone wins!

Charity Bingo began in 1975 as a fundraising tool for California non-profits. Bingo halls must be staffed by volunteers with proceeds going to organizations recognized as charities under federal tax laws.

The California Charity Bingo Association (CCBA), has members throughout California offering charitable Bingo. The halls have developed different and fun formats for their players to enjoy in safe environments. Most offer a full evening of games and jackpot prizes up to \$500. Our halls are filled with seniors, many of whom bring family members with them to enjoy a full evening of chance.

I know Bingo is fun, I see the smiles and hear the laughter of Bingo players every day. But it turns out that Bingo may also offer health benefits as well. Research by **Dr. Aron Buchman** of Chicago's **Rush University Medical Center**, shows that games like Bingo and other social activities can reduce the risk of disability by 65% in people aged 60 to 90. Buchman's study showed that "increased cognitive and social activities in the elderly are associated with increased survival and a decreased risk of dementia."

Charities also benefit, something that's sorely needed now more than ever. In Sacramento County alone, charities netted over \$5 million last year, benefitting dozens of programs like Society for the Blind, Senior Gleaners, local marching bands and high school athletic programs. As a girls softball coach for Sacramento's **El Camino High School**, I recognize how critical this funding has become. In our case, it helps keep teenagers off the streets and engaged in meaningful activities.

Traditional paper-bingo is always entertaining, but some bingo halls also offer electronic games. The electronic bingo machines are extremely popular and helpful for people with certain disabilities. For some players, the machines are easier to operate than the traditional paper version.

The future of electronic bingo is now in jeopardy, due to a law passed last year by the California Legislature at the urging of Indian gaming tribes. The matter is currently tied up in the courts, but the courts have allowed many members to continue offering electronic games until a final ruling is announced.

I urge you to get back in touch with an old friend, Bingo, and bring your friends and family along. You'll be surprised how much fun you have, and you may also win a cash prize after you shout "Bingo" for all to hear. You win and charities win too!

CCBA is an organization of charities, vendors and volunteers dedicated to fun and safe Bingo that benefits charitable causes in California.