



Invest for Kids to top \$10 million raised

By Lynne Marek

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An investment management event that has arguably become one of Chicago's biggest is about to pass an important milestone: \$10 million raised for Chicago children's charities over eight years.

Invest for Kids, started by investment professionals Ron Levin and Ben Kovler in 2009, has become a not-to-be-missed event for many of their Chicago peers, and even some outside the city. With support from industry heavyweights like Equity Group Investments Chairman Sam Zell and GCM Grosvenor CEO Michael Sacks, that's not a huge surprise. The eighth annual gathering is tomorrow.

The four-hour program, modeled after the Ira Sohn Conference in New York, gathers about 10 top asset managers from across the country to provide one brief "investable idea" to an auditorium (the Harris Theater in recent years) full of eager, investment-minded listeners. Chicago billionaire and hedge fund mogul Ken Griffin presented the first year, and Zell and Sacks have been regulars.

"They come for the content," says Levin, a Goldman Sachs managing director in Chicago for the private wealth management group. "We spend 10 months planning for four hours."

The marquee managers this year include Blackstone's head of real estate investing, Jonathan Gray; Trian Fund Management Chief Investment Officer Ed Garden; Ventas Chairman and CEO Debra Cafaro; and Pentwater Capital Management founder and CEO Matt Halbower.

Each year, the event also taps lesser-known local "emerging managers" to take the stage, with Heard Capital's William Heard and Greenbriar Asset Management's Arthur Kaz stepping up this year. For the first time, the program will also include a venture capital investor in the lineup, with Lux Capital co-founder Josh Wolfe on the agenda.

EXPANDING ON 'INVESTABLE IDEA'

While the event started with presenters mainly providing stock picks, the "investable idea" notion has expanded now to include macroeconomic ideas and other asset classes.

Levin says 1,070 people have registered to attend this year so far, but that number will rise on the day of the event. Young professionals under age 28 can pay as little as \$600 per ticket, but most individuals pay at least \$1,200. He expects to raise a minimum \$1.6 million this year, and may top the record \$1.62 million raised in 2014. This year's event has already exceeded the \$1.49 million raised last year. Levin and Kovler, an entrepreneur who also invests on behalf of his family, pick up the event's expenses.

With support from the family of late money manager John Keeley, they're also expanding a related program to sponsor university students' attendance at the event. In addition to the

Keeleys, DRW Trading, Balyasny Asset Management and others will back 125 students from Chicago and regional universities this year, up from 75 last year.

Kovler and Levin started the nonprofit event to create a world-class investment conference in Chicago and support Chicago's underprivileged kids. "Eight years later, those objectives have not changed, but the needs of the city's children have increased substantially," Levin says. "What motivates us is the desire to do more."

Recipient organizations this year are Chicago Children's Advocacy Center, College Possible Chicago, North Chicago Community Partners, People's Music School, Perspectives Charter Schools, Posse Foundation and Urban Initiatives.