Lucky Dog Poker: Truth about poker players - they're generous folks

by Russ_Scott

You know that poker players use skill and deception to take away their opponents' chips, but you may not realize they're also good at giving back â€” to charity.

Poker tournaments across the nation raise millions of dollars each year to help people in need, ranging from high-profile events in major markets to community organizations sponsoring local public tournaments to fund their charitable efforts.

The events draw tens of thousands of players wanting to help. For examples you need look no further than last weekend, when two big events on the West Coast attracted hundreds of players for worthy causes.

In Los Angeles on Sunday night, 2006 World Series champion Jamie Gold hosted a tournament after the Oscars to raise money for Children Uniting Nations, a non-profit group that provides mentoring to at-risk and foster kids. Expected to attend were other poker pros in town for the L.A. Poker Classic, celebrities and some Oscar nominees.

"These kids need our help," said Gold in a news release. Since winning the main event, Gold has hosted nearly 50 events, raising a reported $110 million to benefit such causes as the Muscular Dystrophy Association, Michael J. Fox Foundation, Sunflower Children and the Montel Williams Multiple Sclerosis Foundation.

Also Sunday night in Los Angeles was a benefit tournament at the Bicycle Casino for the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund. No cash awards were at stake, but prizes included a cruise, flat-screen televisions, full-size poker tables and more. Proceeds go to families of police officers and firefighters who died in the line of duty.

Another big upcoming event is the Jennifer Harman Charity Poker Tournament on March 11 at the Grand Sierra Resort in Reno, Nev.

Although Harman has hosted tournament fundraisers for other charities, including the Nevada Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, this event will benefit the National Kidney Foundation of Northern California and Northern Nevada.

It's a cause very close to Harman, one of the best known and respected players in the game. At age 17,

she lost her mother to kidney disease, then underwent a kidney transplant herself. In 2004, she received a second kidney transplant, with her niece as the organ donor.

Money raised will provide free patient programs, patient and family assistance, camps for children on dialysis and research. More than 200 players already have signed up for the open event, and that number should grow since it's happening during the $100,000-added World Poker Challenge running Feb. 26 to March 15 at the resort.

"I'm excited to be returning to my hometown of Reno in support of the local community and the National Kidney Foundation," said Harman. "The Grand Sierra Resort has been very supportive."

Other pros registered so far include Harman's husband, Marco Traniello, Howard Lederer, Linda Johnson, Andy Bloch, Todd Brunson, Lee Watkinson, Roy Winston and Brad Booth. A number of sports celebrities also will attend.

The two-day event features a sports and memorabilia silent auction on March 10, plus a party open to the public that evening. Full details are available at www.kidneynca.org.

Among many other examples of poker players' generosity is the recent formation of Poker Gives, a non-profit organization that will channel donations to charities including Special Olympics, American Cancer Society and Paralyzed Veterans of America.

Poker Gives has respected star-power at the top. Behind its formation are "Ambassador of Poker" Mike Sexton, "First Lady of Poker" Linda Johnson, Queens of Heart creator Lisa Tenner and noted poker instructor Jan Fisher. Check www.pokergives.org for details.

In a news release, Sexton said the organization "will act as a charitable vehicle to collect and redistribute donations from card rooms, fundraisers, poker players and special events."

"Poker players are a generous group," said Johnson. "There are so many people in need."

E-mail your poker questions and comments to russ@luckydogpoker.com for use in future columns.

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