



Quest for a Cure

Saks Fifth Avenue is on a mission to find a "Key to the Cure" for breast cancer. << By Jocelyn Anderson

After a decade of standing up against breast cancer with its "Key to the Cure" campaign, Saks Fifth Avenue shows no signs of slowing down its efforts.

To date, Saks, along with its vendors and partners, has raised more than \$28 million for the cause. The luxury department store will be honored as Retailer of the Year at the "FFANY Shoes on Sale" benefit on Wednesday. Ron Frasch, president and CMO of Saks Inc., is scheduled to accept the award.

"So many of us have unfortunately had a situation where a loved one has been attacked by this horrible disease," Frasch said. "We are so blessed to be in this industry because, as competitive as we all are, when it comes to something like this, everyone [is so] supportive."

This year, Saks' campaign features its annual charity shopping event — held Oct. 16-19 — during which a percentage of all sales (up to \$500,000) at Saks Fifth Avenue, the Off 5th outlet stores and Saks.com will be donated to fight breast and women's reproductive cancers. Other efforts include the sale of a T-shirt designed by Karl Lagerfeld, which will give \$35 of the \$40 sale price to the cause. Saks also expects to receive another \$1 million this year from its campaign partner Mercedes-Benz, which has produced 1,000 limited-edition S550 sedans for the Saks initiative.

"We also ask all our vendors to support us, and whatever donations they give us roll into the [amount raised]," said Kimberly Grabel, SVP of marketing for Saks. "[In footwear] so far this year, Jimmy Choo, Tod's and Donald J Pliner have made commitments."

Frasch said the vendor community continues to step up and lend its support. "Each year, they have become more participatory," he said. "They are putting their money where their mouths are in supporting the cure."

Key to the Cure helps fund national programs, including The Entertainment Industry Foundation's Women's Cancer Research Fund and the Breast Cancer Research



Clockwise from left: Ron Frasch; Gwyneth Paltrow, ambassador for the 2008 Key to the Cure campaign; and the limited-edition T-shirt designed by Karl Lagerfeld.

Foundation, as well as 53 local charities chosen by each individual Saks store.

"[This is a] very unique program because it is so national and also has such strong local components, which is very important to us," Grabel said. "We want to be an integral part of the communities we serve, and there's no better way to do that."

For the first time this year, Saks has also added an online

component to the program. In recognition of Key to the Cure's 10th anniversary, blogger Lori Raimondo is visiting 10 Saks stores across the country this fall, touring treatment centers that have benefited from Key to the Cure funds and meeting survivors, some of whom are Saks employees.

"We wanted the survivor stories to be a key element of the program this year," noted Grabel. "That is why we thought the blog was so important this year to start collecting those stories. We're proud of how much we've been able to impact this cause and bring awareness to something that's so important to our customers."

This triumph comes as the retailer faces a roller-coaster year. Saks Inc. saw an 8 percent increase in sales for the first quarter, but the second quarter experienced a 3.7 percent decline. Footwear, however, remains a strong focus for the company, Frasch said.

By the end of this year, Saks will have renovated five stores — in San Francisco; Beverly Hills, Calif.; Costa Mesa, Calif.; Phoenix; and Houston — installing the 10022-SHOE concept that took New York by storm last year.

"As tough as business is — and I would be remiss if I didn't say it was difficult — these [revamped] stores have outperformed the rest of our doors," said Frasch. "And we will continue to develop programs for additional stores with the 10022-SHOE concept. It's part of our long-term strategy."

Frasch added that men's footwear is another opportunity for future development. "We're going to continue pushing women's because it's such a growth vehicle for us, but now we've also got our eyes set on men's because we've underserved our customers and we have a tremendous team of sellers and merchants," said Frasch. "It's our new focus. We are going to make it an important part of our footwear business."

