

## ALL IN A GOOD CAUSE

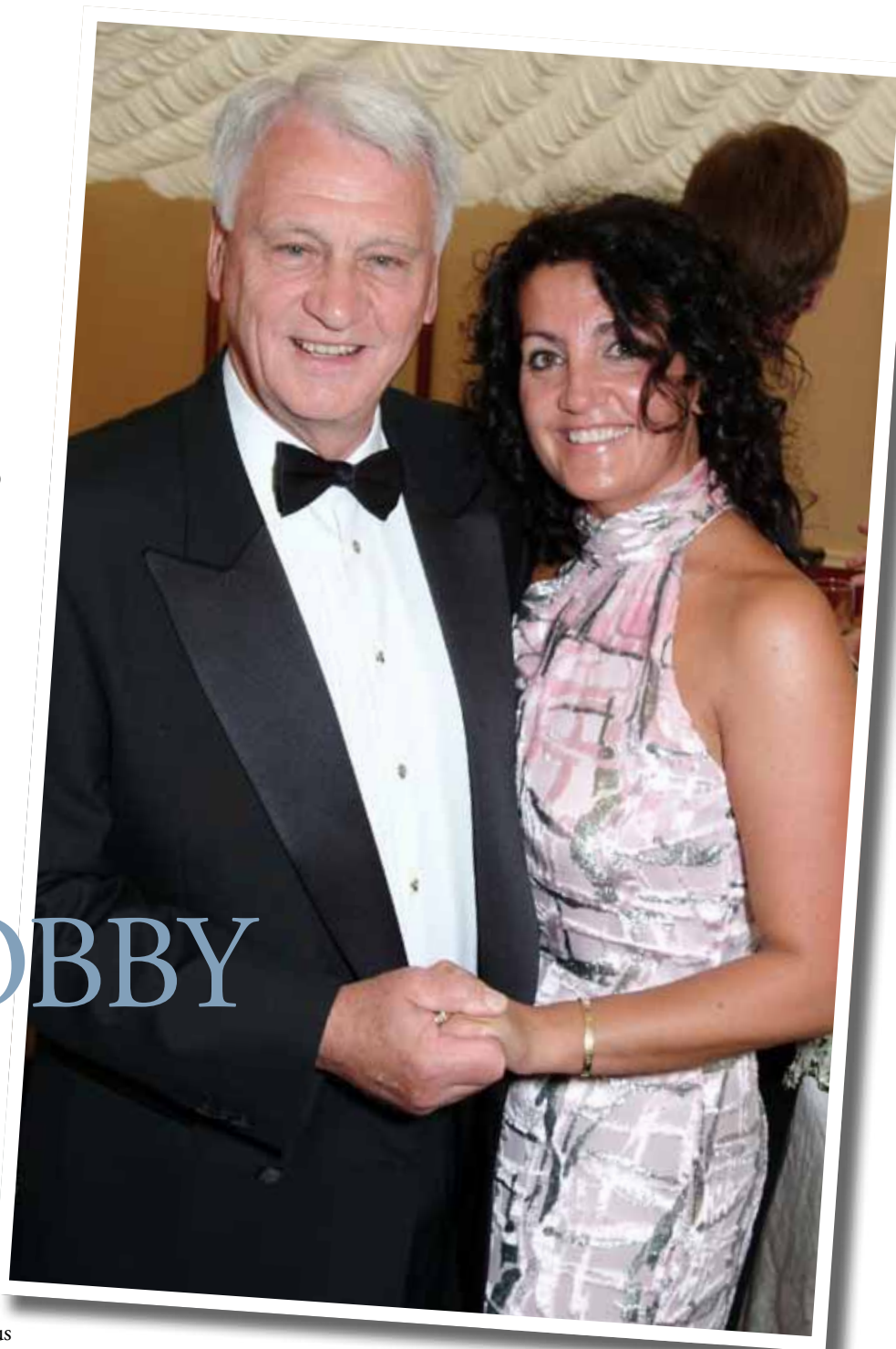
Veteran Suffolk fundraiser Gina Long has set herself the enormous task of raising £1million for Sir Bobby's Breakthrough Online Auction and Ball 2013. Jayne Lindill talked to her about how she plans to do it and why she's so inspired by the former Ipswich and England manager, Sir Bobby Robson

# Doing it for SIR BOBBY

**G**ina Long's list of connections is impressive. It needs to be. The veteran fundraiser is in the throes of organising Sir Bobby's Breakthrough Online Auction and Ball 2013 and has set herself an enormous target of £1million.

She needs plenty of big ticket prizes, so she's weaving her magic, working her connections and calling in a few favours. So far, so good – she has promises of "Akasha" a luxury catamaran in the British Virgin Islands, bowling sessions at Lords with Graeme Swann, tickets to the 2014 PFA Awards dinner, artist Ben Mosley's paintings of Sir Bobby, Andy Murray and David Beckham, and equestrian training with Mary King. There's also a world cruise from Fred Olsen, a chance to drive a £350,000 Claas combine harvester, incredible holiday homes and an opportunity to be guests of The FA watching the England team train, attend a game and be presented with a signed shirt. Oh, and the offer of lunch with Andre Villas Boas.

Suffolk September 2013



But more prizes are needed . . . so the phone is constantly busy.

Gina likes to think big. It was, she says, something her parents encouraged.

"Think big, they used to say, and then think bigger!"

She's been fundraising since she was 13, when she decided to do a sponsored swim at the now defunct St Matthews Baths in Ipswich and raised £300. Life took her off in the direction of journalism, public relations and heading corporate communications, notably for Hutchison Whampoa and BT Exact at Adastral Park, as well as marriage and motherhood. But always in the background over the past 35 years have been voluntary roles for various

charities – long hours after work spent organising events, chasing funds, recruiting supporters.

She was with The Prince's Trust for 12 years, three years as its Suffolk chair, and in 1999, Gina, along with Sally Balch, Ollie Hatcher, Helen Cook, Linda Grave, Pat Pipe and Bonk Tasker founded Breakthrough Breast Cancer Suffolk to raise money for breast cancer research.

Sally lost her battle with the disease in October 2004, but Gina's fight for funds to beat the disease goes on. To date Breakthrough Breast Cancer Suffolk's fundraising projects have raised more than £700,000. To say she's passionate about what she does is an understatement. >>



Right; Gina Long in her office at her home in Fornham St Martin. Above; with Lady Elsie, Sir Bobby's sons Mark and Andrew, Delia Smith and her husband Michael Wynn-Jones. Left; Gina with Mick Mills, Chris Hollins, Mark Robson, PFA CEO Gordon Taylor and Alan Brazil at the PFA awards dinner in London

Main photograph: Gregg Brown



>>“My mummy reminds me that every time I come up with an idea it seems to grow and grow and grow,” she says. She also recently became chair for East Anglia Children’s Hospices Special Events Committee.

She runs her fundraising activities from the office at her husband Andrew’s arable farm at Fornham St Martin with a willing team of very special volunteers.

“I’m lucky enough to be in a position, to do what I simply love doing, having worked all my life, to be able to do fundraising more or less full time, is my utopia.” I have my husband, our children, my family and the many others to thank who are all so supportive.” Indeed, together with Andrew she has also created the The Classic Sports Cars by the Lake, held annually at the farm to raise money for St Nicholas Hospice Care in Bury St

Edmunds taking place on September 1.

The idea for Sir Bobby’s Breakthrough Online Auction and Ball has its origins in the long friendship Gina’s family has shared with the Robsons.

“Bobby was a family friend for over 35 years. Lady Elsie and the family remain so and they often came to my family home, The Old Neptune Inn, and have supported my various fundraising projects in so many different ways. When Bobby became ill with mouth cancer he asked me if I would create something to raise funds for Huw Davies’ mouth cancer clinic at Ipswich Hospital, to buy a vital piece of equipment they needed.”

The ball at Adastral Park raised £58,000, half of which went to Breakthrough Breast Cancer and half to buy the equipment.

Gina then created Sir Bobby’s

Breakthrough Online Auction and Ball in 2011. Her innovative auction was followed in 168 countries and raised £248,000 for Sir Bobby Robson’s Foundation and Breakthrough Breast Cancer.

Sports stars, celebrities, companies and people from around the world donated such money-can’t-buy items as Jose Mourinho’s FIFA Ballon D’Or 2010 World Coach of the Year Award Trophy, and tickets to meet the players at FC Barcelona and watch them training.

It’s a hard act to follow but two years later, Gina’s hoping she and her committee can achieve their £1 million goal, raising funds for Sir Bobby Robson’s Foundation, Breakthrough Breast Cancer, Ipswich and West Suffolk Hospitals.

The considerable contacts she has built up over the years are invaluable to the





campaign's success – people she knew in her early career who are now in influential, decision making positions.

“I've met and got to know a lot of interesting people,” she says, “and I've nurtured those relationships so that I can still knock on doors 30 years later.”

She's constantly amazed by people's generosity and their unwavering support for anything connected with Sir Bobby Robson. The iconic former Ipswich and England football manager has a way of inspiring and motivating people like no other sporting figure can.

“And I was lucky enough to have him as a personal friend,” she says. She's witnessed his charisma first hand,

recalling an occasion when she was collecting him from the airport.

“We were going to discuss arrangements for the ball to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Ipswich's FA Cup win. It took an hour and a half to walk through Stansted terminal because people wanted to see him and talk to him – and he gave them all his time.”

It's this generosity of spirit that so inspires Gina. She's the first to acknowledge the huge support she has from the charities, as well as Adam Clark, their brilliant committee of volunteers, Enable IT and the saleroom.com who provide the platform and systems to run the online auction.

A major coup is BT Sport as five-year headline supporter, who will launch the 2013 campaign on October 9 from their studios in London.

Cancer now touches most people's lives – and that's what's at the heart of Gina's purpose and so many other people who want to help find a cure for the disease.

“I haven't been put on this planet to do nothing,” she says. “I've been able to put skills together, to raise funds for research to help find a cure for this wretched disease. Twenty years ago, the statistics for people surviving breast cancer weren't great. Today there's an 85% positive outlook. That has to be worth working for.”

■ For information on the ball or to donate a prize for the online auction visit: [www.sirbobbysbreakthrough.com](http://www.sirbobbysbreakthrough.com)

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