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Festival 2014 Final Report

General Chair, Wendy VanderMeulen

Opening Remarks

All in all, Festival 2014 was a great success from an organizational point of view. At the end of the event, I got so many congratulations on a job well done, and so many thanks for making the event so much fun that I was almost embarrassed. My usual response was “It wasn’t me, it was my Board and the volunteers they had working for them that made it so.” And that is a very true statement! However, I was finally convinced that my job as General Chair was just as important when one person said to me: “Wendy, we’re saying Thank You to YOU. Just accept it!”

I still say my job was the easiest one. I had my hand in a lot of different jobs, but the Board and their volunteers did the brunt of the work and the work they did was awesome. And they all have my most sincere thanks. The Board was:

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Secretary	Gay McMillen	g.mcmillen@rogers.com
Education Group Chairs	Ted & Freda Moore	gmoore@ripnet.com
Facilities Group Chair	Bob Pitruniak	krpitruniak@yahoo.com
Finance Group Chair	Wendy VanderMeulen	wendyv@sympatico.ca
Program Group Chair	Andy Himberg-Larsen	andy.himberglarsen@gmail.com
Publicity Group Co-Chair	Anne Graham	grahamanne56@bell.net
Publicity Group Co-Chair	Nancy Morgan	festival2014.publicity@gmail.com
Registration Group Chair	Barbara Dennison	ba.dennison@sympatico.ca

The Board worked exceedingly hard, and one thing that I am most proud of is that we are all still friends and we are all still actively dancing.

Planning for Festival 2014 started in April of 2009 with the approval from the EOSARDA Council of Dancers to go ahead. First, a Steering Committee was set up. That Committee arranged for the rental of the new Ottawa Convention Centre (OCC) with a planned dancer attendance of 2,000. The Committee also agreed on the Festival “outfit” of red and white with gold trim. Planning began for the “Invitation to Ottawa” at the 2010 Halifax Convention. The remainder of the work was done by the Festival Board.

Festival Website: www.Festival2014.ca or www.Festival2014.com

The structure of the Board was based on that used by the last time the Canadian convention was held in Ottawa in 1998. One thing that was glaringly different from 1998 was the use of the Internet, and it was clear right from the start that a Website would be required. A local dancer – Pat Gauthier – with a business in website development was approached and volunteered to be our webmaster. It was a good mix, and she was always very quick to respond to any changes to the website. Rather than have everyone contact Pat, however, we decided to also have a “Web Liaison” who would be the contact between the various members of the Board and the Webmaster. Geoff Clarke also managed a few other square dance websites, so he was familiar with what the look and feel of a square dance website should be. Pat and Geoff worked well, together. The biggest difficulty with the website was getting the

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material to them for addition..... It was a very good source of information and was referred to many times over the years. (See Appendix A for the Web Stats.)

We would recommend that any future Canadian Convention have a website and have it set up as soon as possible after the hosting of the Convention is confirmed. "A company without a website is a company not to be taken seriously" – I heard that comment on the radio and believe it full heartedly. You have to use the internet to get your information into the hands of the masses.

I have to add this report, as a way of apology: I would recommend that if you make notes to read from during the Ceremonies, you actually refer to them. I committed the biggest, *totally-unforgivable* blunder of missing the introduction of 2 members of my Board at the Closing Ceremonies simply because they were not beside the other Board members. Instead of reading from my notes, I called off the names of the Board members at the side of the stage. Our Education Chairs, Ted & Freda Moore, were on the other side of the stage, and so I missed introducing them. Thank goodness a friend of theirs got my attention and helped me correct the error. Unforgivable! And it wouldn't have happened if I'd stuck to my notes.

Board Reports

The Board was comprised of six Groups, as listed above. (Refer to Appendix B for detailed Group duties.) Below are a few comments referencing each group. Their reports, which follow, provide the details of their work and recommendations for future Festivals.

Education

Responsibilities:

1. Festival Dress
2. Discussion Groups
3. Heritage/Decorations
4. Sewing Room

Heritage and Decorations were originally two separate committees. We decided to combine them as volunteers were not rushing to come forward and this would make one committee out of two. The idea was that Clubs would be asked to make a display of their club that could include whatever they wanted in the display. We thought this was a way to get more Club participation in the Festival. The majority of Clubs participated and the result was a big hit.

Facility

Responsibilities:

1. Venue (Ottawa Convention Centre)
2. Hospitality
3. Flooring
4. Operations Centre (*with Program Group*)

The planned attendance of 2,000 was based on a number of criteria: (1) with a 4-year gap between Halifax in 2010 and Ottawa in 2014, it was thought dancers would be eager for another Canadian Festival; (2) with Ottawa being relatively central to the country, access would be easier than Halifax (for

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example) and should draw more people; (3) with Ottawa being the capital of Canada, it was thought that many people would take advantage of that fact and use Festival as an excuse to visit the city; and (4) with a local dancer population close to 1,000, we expected support from the local dance community, easily bringing up the number of registrations.

In order to accommodate 2,000 dancers, the OCC was the only place to consider. Also, they are the only facility with the number of meeting rooms we would need for the event (estimated minimum of 13 rooms, including dancing, sewing, and meeting rooms).

The Operations Centre was “shared” with the Program Group and it turned out that the majority of the work and planning fell within the Program Group responsibilities.

Finance

Responsibilities:

1. Treasurer
2. Grants & Sponsorships
3. Ways & Means

Although we wished for 2,000 dancers, we planned somewhat differently:

Wished for: 2,000

Accommodations for: 1,800-2,000

Expected: 1,500

Budgeted for: 1,200

Although we had two different volunteers begin to work as Finance Chairs, after a couple others who stepped in, it was regretful that we were still without a Finance Chair for the last year and a half of the planning. It was difficult to work without having someone to keep a close eye on the finances and to steer us in the right direction financially. It fell to me, the Festival Chair, to assume the position of Finance Chair, although each Group was directed to be very careful about their budgets. That turned out to be too many duties for the same people. Whether our final financial result would have been different if we had a dedicated person in the position is moot. What transpired is what transpired.

In the end, the major concern, in the Board’s eyes, was the lack of commitment from the local dance community. The number of members of EOSARDA in the dance year prior to Festival was over 1,000. The dancers registered for Festival from Eastern Ontario was only 450. The total attendance at Festival was only 1,044. Obviously, if everyone in EOSARDA had committed to attending Festival, our numbers would have been considerably higher. We are at a loss to explain such a lack of support.

Based on the considerable increase in numbers in Halifax (2010) by the offering of single day registrations, we decided to offer that option. The response was much less than we had anticipated (67), although it obviously helped our bottom line, in the end.

Program

Responsibilities:

1. Sound

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2. Square Dance Program
3. Round Dance Program
4. Other Dance Groups Programming
5. Outdoor Events
6. Trail In / Trail Out Dances
7. Operations Centre (*with Facilities Group*)

The Board was “pleased as punch” that so many Basic dancers were registered and in attendance: 54! This can be contributed to two different things: one local club had a large Basic class (21) of which 16 registered for Festival; and EOSARDA decided to provide a coupon of \$10 off the registration for any new Basic graduate within EOSARDA. Twenty-three dancers used that offer to attend Festival. This is something that should be considered by future Festival organizers – not just for Basic dancers, but for any group that might otherwise not be keen to register; for example: local contra dancers, line dancers, and/or clogging dancers.

Due to the poor registrations from the clogging community, we cancelled that part of the program about 4 months before the start of Festival. We had to make the decision on what to do about flooring and decided 13 dancers, of whom just 1 only danced clogging, could not justify the expense. We were very grateful that the registered leaders still decided to attend.

Even with our best efforts, we could not get cooperation from the local contra or line dance community. The contra community would not even consider attending if we did not have a live band to provide the music; and the line dance community had a conflict with a large line dance event being held in the city at another location on the same weekend. Hence, we decided to offer only a scaled down version of both these dance forms. Contra was restricted to 2 hours per day and the sessions were geared toward square dancers who wished to give contra a try; so each session was an introduction to contra. They were all relatively well attended. Line dancing was scheduled for a 3-hour session on Saturday afternoon. This was mostly to accommodate the one line dance club that is a member of EOSARDA and was sold to them as a separate event, i.e. they could attend for just that session. The session was included in the fee for dancers attending all 3 days of Festival. In hindsight, both modified programs were a success.

We would recommend that future organizing Boards consider carefully what kind of schedule they would offer these “other dance programs”. If there are not strong local, member clubs to support them, minimal dance time needs to be offered.

Publicity

Responsibilities:

1. Advertising and Promotion
2. Ambassador
3. Media Relations
4. Tourists and Spectators
5. Souvenir/Program Guide
6. Ceremonies

The majority of Publicity was done via the internet. (As mentioned in the Chair’s Opening Remarks, a web presence is *mandatory* in this day and age.) Regular advertisements were posted on Facebook and

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they were shared around the Facebook community to a very large extent. It was considered a very successful approach to advertising.

Advertisements were also published in various square dance publications across North America and once in a British publication. The majority were complimentary.

Advertisements in local newspapers were also published. These were mostly in an effort to bring people in to our “Vendors’ Village” and our Fashion Show. Both were geared to appeal to the public as well as the dancers. We had great expectations for both events that they would bring the public in. Although it did not work out that way, we do not regret the way they were organized and **we would recommend** that a similar model be followed for future Canadian conventions. We would certainly do it that way again.

Registration

Responsibilities

1. Registrar
2. Registration
3. Camping/RV
4. Hotels
5. Welcoming Committee
6. On-Site Angels

The Registration and Welcoming Committees worked very closely together and did an awesome job. I have never seen a registration area work so smoothly. Kudos to the committee for a job well done. And having welcome greeters and Ottawa Tourism people there for people to meet immediately upon arrival was a great touch.

Closing Remarks

There really is only one thing I would do differently if I could do it over again, and that is have no Spectator Fee. We implemented one based on an early recommendation from the Steering Committee. The cost was going to be \$10. The reasoning was two-fold: (1) 16 years ago, the cost was \$2; we figured we had to charge more and we thought people would not think twice about a \$10 fee; and (2) we figured we had to have a means of control, otherwise – having the event in a public facility – who knows who would be coming in, checking out the dancing, and leaving with dancers’ personal goods! It was when we decided to use colored wristbands as a method of identifying them that it became obvious that a fee was not needed. The wristbands were the means of control. However, by then it was too close to Festival time and we felt we couldn’t undo the advertising and word that had gone out. I believe that was to our detriment. Even though we got a lot of media exposure, it’s not the same as letting spectators in to watch.

We did get some rumbling about only having the dance program available in the Program Guide, which needed to be purchased. I have mixed feelings on that. We needed the funds to cover the cost of printing the book, and we also felt that if we were going to put the effort into making a memorable Souvenir Program Guide, we wanted everyone to have one. And what better way to ensure that than by making it something everyone would have to have. Whether I would do it that way again, I don’t know. I do know that we received very good feedback on the Guide.

