

File
Strategic Planning
(outside office)

Dear Lynn,

Thanks for the email. I wanted to clarify my position on the "new" and "old" program as referred to in your last email. Although getting away from venue, I think this is a valuable discussion and I hope Alun might pass some of it along to his planning committee so I am cc'ing him as well.

I am not suggesting that the four day event should be seen as a thing of the past or that it should take a back seat to new programming. In fact, I strongly support the gymanfa as being central to the event. I think the continuing vitality of the traditional program (gymanfa ganu, ect.), however, depends on our ability to go beyond the core membership and bring in wider and more diverse participation. In that way, we actually introduce people to traditional events like the gymanfa and consequently build support for them. In the best of circumstances, what I am terming the "festival" and "convention" program should not be in opposition but should have a symbiotic relationship.

To attract wider and increased participation, I think we need basic structural changes to:

- 1) Centralize planning and programming. I think this is well under way.
- 2) Offer more diverse programming to address different interests and different audiences (in addition to traditional programming and our core supporters). I think Richmond was a step in the right direction, but we still have a long way to go towards this end.
- 3) Lower the costs of participation by building a basic package of programming accessible for a low admission charge. "Premium" events (like the Grand Concert, banquet) and multiple day participation would cost extra. Member registration would include discounted package on all events. I think we are just beginning to think about this.

While I believe that these structural changes will increase and broaden participation, I am not sure that centralization and improved programming alone (ie., Richmond) will. I think we need more development in diverse programming (an attractive youth and children's program fits here) and an inexpensive day package before we see a significant change. Hence, until the structural changes to attract wider audiences are more developed, I am wary of venues too far removed from geographic regions with high membership and more dependent on local public participation.

In terms of the hotel location and Labor Day weekend date, my comments were not necessarily prescriptive. I meant that we need to keep those things on the table as we review our goals and the best means to accomplish them. If we want to keep the festival hotel based, we should be looking for models of successful hotel based public events to emulate. Right now, I think our model largely remains that of a convention, which is for the most part limited to participation by members.

I also agree that sponsorship is critical, but I think developing good sponsorship depends on increasing the size and range of our audience (asking how big we want and can get is certainly a question we should consider). In my opinion, sponsorship needs to be developed in tandem with the continued development of the structural changes above to be effective and lasting.

JE

-----Original Message-----

From: Lynn Owens-Whalen [mailto:lowens-wha [REDACTED]]
Sent: Monday, September 29, 2003 12:34 PM
To: Ellis, John
Subject: Re: locatiions

"Ellis, John" <ellis [REDACTED]> writes:

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>I think the solution, and indeed the most probable outcome, during
>this period of transition is a mixed "convention" and "festival"
>program.

>Utilizing the traditional hotel location, Labor Day dates
>and "Welsh area" venues, the "convention" program can draw the core
>membership while subsidizing the extension of "festival" programming
>and community outreach. The first step is probably to establish a
>basic program for casual visitors with a single low admission fee that
>would include such things as the marketplace, seminars, youth events,
>eisteddfod and running entertainment. As the number of casual
>visitors begins to rise from year to year and the basic low fare
>"festival" package begins to turn a profit, we can wean ourselves away
>from dependence on core member attendance and the traditional "Welsh
>area" venues and turn our focus more on venues with greater casual
>visitor potential and review the effectiveness of the hotel location
>and Labor Day dates. Thus, the event of the future may be a very
>large, public "festival" held in a field or campus location while a
>smaller WNGGA "convention" runs parrallel to it at a nearby hotel, the
>two events being integrated and mutually supportive. As we make this
>transition, we must carry our core membership with us as they are the
>ones making the contributions to the annual fund which in the short
>run at least may be more critical to the WNGGA than profits realized
>by the NAFOW itself.

I am confused by the notion of the festival and the convention and it is not something that has been contemplated by the BOT or even thought of. The North American Festival of Wales has been defined by the BOT as the 'convention' as you describe but held in a way that reaches out to the community. Your description redefines the Festival as something like what has been described as happening in Virginia. I do not see this at all. I guess that this is why I don't see the notion of transittion in the same way as you have described. We are having enough trouble figuring out how the WNGGA can logistically take responsibility for the NAFOW as it is. Long distance organization is very difficult. I know that because much of what we did here was due to exceptionally good relationships with those at the sites. What I envision is that there will be more than the NAFOW and that other activities are not held on the Labour Day week end. I just emailed Kara and one of the things that I said was that I hoped that the Youth Initiative Committee would think outside the box and have initiate youth activities wherever and whenever. That does not mean that the NAFOW should not include 'youth'. To reflect Wales of today, we must.

Cheers for what Mabon represented.

The bottom line, John, is that we have only just created the notion of a NAFOW and we haven't mastered that yet. What you are suggesting is the old on one side (which will eventually disappear) and a new version of a festival on the other side.

I do not believe that we have the mandate to do this. Personally I agree that it is important to reach out to the community regardless of age. However, I do not agree that the four day event should be seen as a thing of the past at all and nor should it take a back seat. The NAFOW which is what this 'convention' is (I have never thought of it this way) can and must be modified to reflect Wales of today and appeal to all generations. This means stretching beyond what we know. However, this does not mean that we cannot add other activities like what you suggest at other times and in other places.

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