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River Voices

Getting the Most out of Your Event

How to make a special event payoff for your organization

by Dave Bassage

Friends of the Cheat was less than a year old when we decided to draw attention to our group's cause (Acid mine-drainage-impacted streams) by hosting the first annual Cheat River Festival. In six intense months Friends of the Cheat set goals, organized, planned, delegated, researched, solicited sponsors, recruited volunteers, entertainers, and speakers, and promoted the event. With a lot of sweat and a little luck, the first Cheat Fest was a resounding success.

Sooner or later, most groups decide to hold a special event. It can be as simple as an evening benefit at a local watering hole or as complex as a multi-day festival. The event should be tailored to match the organization's special needs and resources. Organizing a successful event is a time-consuming task. Most events enjoy at least some degree of success, but good planning and careful execution will help ensure a generous return for the energy you invest.

Why hold an event?

Reasons for holding an event are as diverse as the problems and opportunities facing our watersheds. An important first step is to identify key goals. Is it primarily a fundraiser? (Be careful here—there may be more efficient ways to raise money.) Are you most interested in publicizing your efforts? How will you define success?

Your groups may hold an event to:

• *Convey your message.* Expose citizens and communities to your mission, and utilize press coverage to send your message to folks who don't attend. Attaching your message to an event gives the public something concrete to focus on, and publicizing your event provides a golden opportunity to promote your efforts.

• *Recruit new members.* Engage the public with an interesting event, enhance your mailing list, and promote membership.

• *Raise Funds.* Sell sponsorships, tables at banquets, hold an auction or raffle, charge admission—these are just a few ways an event can generate funds.

• *Accomplish a key task.* "Our river is full of trash, and we're doing something about it!" Tap into the power of numbers to tackle a task too daunting for your core leadership to handle alone.

• *Have fun!* Environmental causes are sometimes viewed as necessary but mundane, like Sunday dinner at Aunt Millie's. Show the world that doing good can be fun!

• *Inspire community involvement.* Events can raise awareness of your group's mission and the community in

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10 types of events

by Kathy Luscher and Pat Munoz

Just as there are many different types of river organizations, there are many possibilities for river events. On pages 12-14 are some suggestions for river events that your group might wish to organize. Keep in mind that the list is partial. Your organization should pick an event which is appropriate for your group and which meets your goals (raise money, build awareness, educate the public, etc.) If you do not have the necessary time, money or people-power to plan, hold, and follow-up on an event, consider co-sponsoring with another organization. Remember, although events require a lot of work, the rewards can be plentiful!

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photo: Jean Faust

At Cahaba River Society's RiverFest, children enjoyed their faces being painted to resemble endangered animals.

River Voices

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River Network is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to help people organize to protect and restore rivers and watersheds.

We support river and watershed advocates at the local, state and regional levels, help them build effective organizations, and promote our working together to build a nationwide movement for rivers and watersheds.

River Network also acquires and conserves riverlands that are critical to the services that rivers perform for human communities: drinking water supply, floodplain management, fish and wildlife habitat, recreation and open space.

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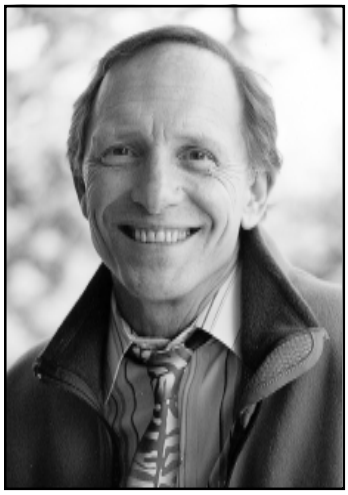

© photo by Linda Kliewer

This issue of *River Voices* focuses on some of the kinds of events that river groups can use to advance their programs, along with some tips for success.

We may look at events as one-of-a-kind activities, but in fact, most events are either periodic or cumulative in nature. In fact, by changing our perspective, we can view organizational programs as a series of events linked by progress toward an objective.

A good example of a "cumulative event" approach is River CPR (Connecting People with Rivers), a new program being developed by the Rivers Council of Washington and the Merrimack River Watershed Council, in collaboration with several other nonprofit groups and private companies. In a nutshell, River CPR is designed to provide a structure through which massive numbers of volunteers can come together to conserve and repair their neighborhood wetlands, streams, estuaries, and acquifers. The need is great, and the leadership can be found in the country's 3,000 river and watershed groups.

River CPR has three basic components:

1. A training program that will offer certified courses in monitoring, restoration and revegetation flood and spill response, and watershed education and advocacy.
2. A volunteer service program that will bring together trained volunteers and landowners needing restoration services.
3. An information services program that will provide environmental and program data management, facilitates communications within the program, and carry out public relations services.

One of the insights of the program's creators is that river monitoring and restoration is rapidly becoming recognized as socially valuable work for which an increasing number of private and public owners are willing to pay. This suggests that the program can become financially self-supporting. It suggests further that, along with bake sales and other traditional community fundraisers, church and civic groups can turn to river restoration as a way to raise funds for their other activities. The consequent growth in the understanding of and broad support for healthy rivers and watersheds could be phenomenal.

We may look at events as one-of-a-kind activities, but in fact, most events are either periodic or cumulative in nature.

River CPR is not yet an existing program; it is still in the early testing process. However, prospects for success seem good, and this is the kind of idea that could help transform the watershed movement.

The creators of the program call their process "management-by-events". The work is structured by recruitment meetings, training sessions, and work parties, so that many people can do "in parallel" work that was formerly done by few people "in series".

It is perhaps no accident that this "management-by events" idea was born at another periodic event designed to be cumulative in its results. Joy Huber of Rivers Council of Washington and Ralph Goodno of the Merrimack River Watershed Council came up with the idea when they were brought together at River Network's 1996 Leadership Forum.

Sincerely,

Ken Margolis
President

Getting the Most out of Your Event

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which they are held, providing an opportunity to foster community pride in your cause.

• *Energize your staff and volunteers.* The momentum of a successful event can energize your core people.

• *Enhance your organization's visibility.* Regular events can keep your group in the public eye.

• *Provide an opportunity for eager volunteers to contribute to your cause.* "I want to help, but I don't have any specific skills." Here's a chance to increase personal buy-in by supporters.

• *Celebrate your success.* "Look what we've done!" When Friends of the Cheat raised $21,000 in a few weeks to purchase our strategically located festival site, we threw a party at a local micro brewery. An informal jam session, door prize raffle, and dollar drafts packed the house and netted a mailing list of 200, as well as new memberships, an extra publicity boost, and additional funds for our efforts.

• *Build partnerships and coalitions.* Invite other organizations, local government, agencies, and businesses to become involved with the event. A teamwork approach can carry over into your other efforts.

• *Credibility for your cause.* Attract respected speakers to convey support for your organization's efforts.

Executive Director Dave Bassage addresses the crowd at the 1st Annual Cheat River Festival.

Can we do this?

Before committing to your event, examine your resources and priorities. Review your goals. Answer these key questions:

• Is this event the best way to achieve our goals?

• Do we have enough time to prepare?

• Do we have the material and human resources to do it?

• Are we willing to make this event a high enough priority to ensure its success?

• Do we have a person to take overall charge of the event?

If the answer is yes to each of the above, you're ready to start planning your event!

Keys for success

• *Start planning early.* Identify and prioritize your goals and ensure there's enough time to accomplish the essential tasks, allowing time for contingencies.

• *Set clear goals.* Pick from the list above or set your own. Everyone involved with the event should clearly understand the primary goals.

• *Pace yourself.* Giving 100% all of the time may sound noble, but it can easily lead to burn out. It's vital for core organizers to practice self care, take breaks, and maintain an energy reserve.

• *Establish a clear chain of command and identify one person to be in charge.* After our first Cheat Festival, we noted that every task with a clear leader was performed well. Jobs handled by committee, or proposed with the preface "somebody ought to" didn't fare nearly as well. A single leader can make decisions. A committee must first confer, and valuable time and opportunities can easily be lost.

• *Delegate bite-sized tasks.* Placing someone in charge does not mean they do the work. It means they make sure the work gets done. This person will spend much of the days leading up to an event deflecting calls to the leaders in charge of each area, who pass them on to their volunteers. By breaking large goals into smaller tasks, no one person is overwhelmed by their work load, and each task gets the attention it needs.

• *Stage a comprehensive PR effort.* Promote early and often. If you hold an event and nobody notices, was it really an event? Start your promotional campaign as soon as you pick a date. Utilize a variety of media and aim for maximum exposure in the final days before your event.

• *Develop and use a timeline with names assigned to each task.* Tape it on the wall of your event headquarters and refer to it often.

• *Keep detailed records.* These are invaluable for monitoring your progress, reporting on your success, and planning for subsequent events.

• *Create contingency plans.* There's no limit to the intangibles that can impact your success. At every step, ask yourself "what could go wrong, and how could we deal with it?"

• *Choose speakers or entertainment carefully.* If you have speakers, keep them short and entertaining. One group in the Midwest shelled out major dollars to bring in a prominent national figure to speak at their annual awards banquet. His presentation was long and unrelated to local issues. The following year they chose a local councilman known for his sense of humor. His short, focused presentation was entertaining and well received.

• *Debrief after the event.* Shortly after your event, when everything is still fresh, hold one last meeting to list everything you did well and everything you could improve.

• *Make it annual.* It really does get easier after the first event, especially if you've kept good records. An annual events allow participants to look forward to supporting your cause every year, and enables your group to establish an annual cycle of planning and activity.

Initial Planning

The number of tasks attached to organizing an event may seem daunting at first, however, if the tasks are placed in logical progression they can be handled one at a time and add up to success. With ample preparation time, you can minimize stress. Ask any group with event experience for advice, and the first words you'll hear are "Start Early!" Good planning means expecting the unexpected. Any number of pitfalls can interfere with your timeline. If there's no margin for error, problems go uncorrected, and chances for success diminish. A year is not too soon to start planning for a major event.

Choose a date. Choosing the right date for an event can greatly enhance its success. Besides allowing ample time to prepare, check for conflicts with other events that might dilute your participants. Is there a particular date that matches your goals, such as holding a trash pickup during National River Cleanup Week, or a date that celebrates a special anniversary. Avoid holidays, when family obligations can keep participants at home.

Establish clear goals. Work from the list above or create your own. While multiple goals may be achieved at a single event, too many can confuse your planning process. Pick two or three goals to focus on and structure your planning and priority-setting around them. If your ambitions extend past your resources, establish primary and secondary goal lists. Primary goals are those that cannot be compromised if the event is to be declared a success. Secondary goals are an added bonus if achieved, but should never dictate drastic planning changes.

Create a detailed timeline. Event planning often generates plenty of creative suggestions, but never let a proposal become a task until it has a name and date attached to it. Creating an area for children was an idea raised during planning our first festival. However, it wasn't until the third Fest that someone agreed to take charge and the concept became a reality. Place all tasks on a master timeline noting to whom the task is delegated and a due date. Then monitor the timeline and modify as needed. Some event planners tape their timeline on the wall for easy reference.

Develop a budget. Develop a detailed budget early in your planning process. Identify known expenses, and include a contingency fund for unexpected bills, especially for first time events. Be sure the people in charge of each aspect of the event know their budget and can stay within it.

Identify your assets. Incorporate your assets into all aspects of planning. Every watershed is special because of unique attributes and issues, and the people, businesses, and organizations that care about it. The Cheat Watershed is a whitewater destination, so the Cheat Festival is scheduled for the time of year that offers the best combination of optimal weather and river levels, and a large number of sponsors are manufacturers of whitewater equipment and outdoor clothing. Don't give up on exploring your special assets. Sara Johnson of River Alliance (WI) is still basking in the success of their first annual awards dinner and auction. She writes:

"The thing that contributed most to the success of our event was the establishment of an honorary committee. We got a highly respected national environmental leader who was originally from our state to serve as the honorary committee chair. His name went on a letter inviting others to join the honorary committee: legislators and key leaders in the environmental and conservation communities, the mayor and other elected officials, and major donors. That meant they made a special donation and their name went on the invitation to the event. These endorsements made it a "happenin' event" before it even started."

Establish a clear chain of command, with specific tasks delegated, so that each task and problem can be quickly assigned to the appropriate person. You may have an event committee set policy and goals, but between committee meetings some decisions will need to be made by individuals, and they'll do a better job if they know their areas of responsibility. A single event coordinator can track the progress of each event area and help everyone stay on task.

Identify sponsors and donors for every area. Each dollar saved is another dollar to apply to your mission, and every new sponsor expands your base of support. At the same time, don't scrimp on quality to capitalize on inferior freebies. Go back to your budget and look for areas where you could use the most help. Never assume you'll have to pay for any aspect of staging your event. Musicians often support a worthy cause for little more than gas money, T-shirts, or good publicity. Restaurants and grocery stores are good sources of food for volunteers. Businesses may donate or purchase TV and radio advertising. Be sure to recognize all your sponsors publicly and write a thank you note to each one.

Develop a strong publicity plan. This includes everything from flyers, posters, and banners, to radio, TV, newspaper, magazine, and even Internet promos. Public service announcements are free, as are listings on many cable television stations. Newspapers often have an entertainment or community events section. Paid advertising can take a big dent out of your budget, but offers a golden opportunity for businesses to help sponsor your event. Concentrate first on publications with early deadlines. Be sure that your best spokesperson is available to the media for interviews in the days leading up to and during the event. You might even get a

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local station to sponsor your event and do live remotes. "And now here's Susan with the weather for River Cleanup Weekend . . ." Don't wait for the media to come to you. Identify the contact person at each media source and set up interviews and promos. Remember to keep your message short and to the point.

Getting Ready

Now that you have your plan in place, the work begins. Remember the adage: "Caution: Dates on the calendar are closer than they appear!" Refer frequently to your timeline, keep all lines of communication open and if panic threatens, call for help! Periodic meetings or conference calls with your primary leadership team are important, but should be carefully spaced. If they are too far apart, you can become disjointed, yet frequent meetings can drain the energy from any group. Always work from and stick to an agenda, and be sure to take good notes.

Volunteer management is a critical area for many events. Most important is accurately identifying your volunteer needs well in advance. As your publicity increases, so will your volunteer pool, especially if you include a volunteer appeal in your press releases. Your general membership, as well as service fraternities, youth groups, and other organizations sympathetic to your cause are excellent volunteer sources. Make a list of any areas where you know you'll need help, and pad your numbers to account for "no shows" or last minute cancellations. One technique to help minimize attrition is to prepare a simple volunteer contract that includes blanks for specific tasks, expectations, and number of hours. Include a list of "floaters": volunteers with no specific or limited responsibilities who will stand ready to help when the inevitable last minute crises occur. When some kayaks were stolen from the parking lot at one of our Cheat Fests, we recognized the need for added security. The following year we tasked a dozen volunteers for a Fest security detail, complete with bright yellow "Cheat Fest Security" t-shirts. Their primary duty was to mingle with the crowd and look conspicuous. But whenever a need for help arose, whether changing a light bulb or shoveling wood chips into a wet spot, we just looked for a yellow shirt and had a ready volunteer.

This is the time when a strong event coordinator kicks into high gear. People whose names appear on the timeline should be contacted in advance of their due dates for progress updates. Adjustments are made, assistance located as needed. An effective coordinator will continue to delegate as many tasks as possible, and not let minor setbacks escalate. Remember the primary goals of the event, and prioritize new developments with attainment of those goals in mind. Try to anticipate all potential developments and prepare contingency plans for each, without dwelling too much on far fetched crises. Manage the people to whom you delegate in a style or manner that fits the individual. Calm the nervous, prod the lethargic, and remind everyone how wonderful a successful event will be. Keep detailed records. If you think of your event as the "first annual", you're more likely to record everything you'll want to remember next year.

> *If you think of your event as the "first annual", you're more likely to record everything you'll want to remember next year.*

Remember to keep everything in perspective. Shoot for the best, prepare for the worst, and make the most out of what you have. Remember to dictate your own state of mind, and not let others dictate it for you. Your event will happen and your life and cause will continue. Take breaks when you need them, schedule "no work" days and stick to them. Tap into the excitement leading up to your event as a source of energy, not stress.

On the day before your event, it is time for your final check list. Deal with any last-minute, unexpected developments. There may not be any, if you've prepared well enough. Take some time to prepare yourself mentally for the next day. Make a list of the most important tasks facing you and then put it away. By this time, everything is as ready as it can be. It's time to get a good night's sleep.

The Day of the Event

The first order of the day is an attitude check. Key leaders for the event need to be upbeat and positive, well fed and rested. This is the day your organization is presenting itself to the community, the press, and the public. An overall positive attitude and a good sense of humor can go a long way to smooth whatever bumps you encounter today.

Here are some tips to minimize those bumps and get the most out of the event day.

• Allow plenty of time for set up. Mark any borrowed items with their owner's names. Have "go-fers" standing by for last minute errands. (You don't want to be setting up tables when the senator walks in the door!)

• Have a clear line of communication and command. Most likely, your event coordinator will be managing the event, but if it's an all-day affair, you may need to have your leadership work in shifts to ensure there's always someone "fresh" in charge. If it's a large outdoor event, be sure the coordinator is easy to locate, either in a central location or via radio or cell phone.

• Have contingency plans ready to implement as needed.

• Document your event for posterity

and future publicity. Photograph and/or videotape the event. Keep track of concrete success indicators—bags of trash collected, number of attendees, dollars raised, or any other means of proving the event attained its goals.

• Keep all speeches and presentations short and to the point. The event should be connected by "sound-bites" and fun activities, not long deliveries. Unless the purpose of your event is to recognize select individuals, save the thank you's for the mail. If you start listing all the people who made this special event possible, you risk forgetting someone important.

• Collect names for your mailing list. If you have potential members attending, catch as many of them as you can at the door with a raffle, door prize, or some other method to encourage them to give you their address.

• Practice careful money management. If you're collecting funds at the event, you'll need a secure location to store and count your money, then deposit it at the bank as soon as possible. Don't let large sums accumulate in an unprotected location.

• Take good care of any VIP's in attendance. This is a good job for your spokesperson, president, executive director, or board chair.

• Manage the press wisely. Have your spokesperson prepared and standing by to give interviews and direct reporters to any VIP's or important photo opportunities.

• Manage your refuse effectively. Delegate a team of volunteers with the responsibility of recycling and trash management.

• Recruit help as needed. If you need help, ask for it. You've got a room, field, or a river full of potential volunteers. Don't allow any one person to get overwhelmed by their workload.

• Keep track of your volunteers, both to keep them on task and so you know who to thank afterwards.

• It ain't over 'till it's over. The end of your event should be as well organized as the beginning. Pick up trash, clean up, store important equipment. Be sure to schedule volunteers for the all important tear down duties.

The Morning After

So you pulled it off! Your event was a rousing success, and now everyone who worked so hard to make it all possible can relax until next year, right? Not just yet. Effective follow-through is vital. Remember, the last thing you did (or didn't do) may be the first thing people remember.

First, it's important to complete any cleanup duties, return borrowed items, and pay outstanding bills. As soon as possible, prepare a complete financial report. If one of your goals was fundraising, the press will want to know how you did, and you'll want the record to help plan for future events.

If you've done a good job of generating publicity for the event, reporters will call for wrap-up interviews. If not, a brief press release describing your success and its impact on your mission will be necessary.

Second, thank everyone involved in the event's success, including sponsors, volunteers and invited guests. Write thank you notes as quickly as possible. They don't have to be elaborate. A brief, hand-written note carries more weight than a lengthy form letter.

If you were able to generate a mailing list, it's most effective within the first week or so after the event. Send those appeal letters out as soon as you possibly can.

Hold a debriefing meeting or conference call with as many organizers as you can muster. This needn't be elaborate, but be sure to note any important successes, failures, or "aha!" moments. Many groups use this information, along with any pertinent statistics, to generate a final report of their event. Alternatively, you could simply make lists and file them away until you start planning your next event.

photo: Friends of the River

Special events can expose your organization to new audiences that you might not otherwise reach.

And last, celebrate your success! Throw a party for all the folks who devoted energy into making your event possible. No shop talk allowed. Just kick loose and have a good time.

The success of a special event is often determined by the planning, energy, and follow up invested in it. With the right combination, it's possible to start a tradition that can promote an organization's mission for years to come. "If there's one single key to success," says Sara Johnson, "it's to start organized and stay organized." Remember that and your event will indeed be special.

Dave Bassage is the executive director for Friends of the Cheat.

Willamette Riverkeeper

Floating Your Message

Paddling the river to report on its health

by Rita Haberman

The Willamette River, nestled between the Cascade Mountains and the Coast Range, was once a magnificent, healthy ecosystem with clear waters, riverside forests, complex channel networks, and abundant salmon. After 150 years of human impacts, the overall health of the Willamette River ecosystem is considered to be "marginal." Nonetheless, the Willamette River is truly "Oregon's River." It flows through the heart of Oregon's largest cities. Nearly 70 percent of Oregon's population lives within 20 miles of the mainstem. With growth projections for the basin anticipating a doubling of population within the next 25 to 30 years, the pressures on the Willamette will only intensify.

Reversing the declining health of the river will be difficult, to say the least. If we are to succeed, Willamette Riverkeeper (WRK) believes that we must inform, inspire, and involve Willamette Valley residents. We must change the way people think about and treat the river. We must educate watershed residents about reducing their personal impacts on the river, and we must build the collective political will to make the tough changes in resource management policy—riverland land uses, agricultural practices, flood management, and others. What can a small grassroots group working in a 12,000-square-mile basin do about it? A lot.

One approach Willamette Riverkeeper has taken for each of the last two summers (and we are planning our third), is a 180-mile-paddle trip down the length of the mainstem Willamette to hand-deliver our annual "State of the Willamette" report. Over the course of the river trip, we organize three community paddle events. We also stop in most riverside cities to hand-deliver our report and talk with community leaders, concerned citizens, and local media. While each of these projects, the trip and the report, has individual merit, WRK has taken advantage of the synergy created by combining the two projects.

Participants in WRK's community paddle event launch their kayaks and canoes for the last leg of the 1996 trip.

Coordinating a Trip and a Message

Many people love boats and are intrigued by the romantic notion of long, motorless river journeys, reminiscent of a bygone era and a notion of Huck Finn. The media cannot ignore a flotilla of dozens or hundreds of canoeists and kayakers on a 10-day river journey. The river trip alone will capture the attention of the news media, so why not make it more than a typical, public interest story? Why not also use the media attention to spread a message about river values, problems and solutions? The benefits of coordinating the trip and report are numerous:

- Highlight critical river health problems and solutions. In 1996, our report focused on riverlands and in 1997, it focused on floods and floodplains.
- Conduct an annual river reconnaissance. The trip gives WRK credibility as a living witness of the health of the river.
- Meet face-to-face, on-the-river, with watershed residents throughout the basin. The river trip gives our Portland-based organization a rare opportunity for greater watershed-wide presence and connections.
- Get folks out on the river. Community paddle events usually attract a number of experienced paddlers. To attract newcomers, WRK partners with a local paddling shop (Alder Creek Kayak & Canoe) to deal with the logistics of novice, boatless, but interested citizens.
- Showcase the river as a valuable community recreational resource. Protecting and restoring the Willamette will require a much broader and larger constituency. What better way to build river advocates than to facilitate getting people on the river.
- Have fun and enjoy the resource you work so hard all year to protect. There is nothing like a wonderful river trip to help remind us why we do this work.

Keys to Success

A multiple-day river trip requires attention to logistical details such as river safety, food, the weather, etc. And like any special event, good planning, scheduling and coordination is absolutely essential. Numerous books and how-to articles have been written about organizing events and river trips; here are some of the keys to success unique to WRK's annual trip and report:

- Keep the media informed before and during the trip. WRK sent a media advisory summarizing key points of the report and trip itinerary about four days prior to the launch date. After the launch, Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber confirmed his participation in our riverside press event in Salem (Oregon's capital). We sent out an additional media advisory the night before arriving in Salem. Four television stations covered the event (that's big-time in Oregon).
- Be accessible to the media. Take advantage of available technology. We carried a cellular phone on the river so that we could respond to calls from the media in a timely manner.
- Produce a quality report. It must be credible, scientifically sound, interesting, easy to read and bold. Make it short, and make it good.
- Stay on message. First, develop your message(s), then remain focused on them. With the potential to attract dozens of media hits, it is an opportunity to repeat your one, two or three key messages to tens of thousands of people.
- Identify your target audience. For WRK, our target audience is always Willamette Valley residents. That may sound too general, but our criteria is: would most folks in the watershed understand our message?" A second target audience was members of Gov. Kitzhaber's Willamette Basin Task Force, which is a basinwide, collaborative, stakeholder group, charged with developing recommendations. To increase their accountability, we repeatedly mentioned the task force in our reports and when talking with the media.
- Send thank you notes. Many key volunteers and news media reporters are absolutely essential to the success of our trip. By acknowledging their role, they will be more likely to help in future years.
- Start small, but think big. Build your event into an annual tradition, one that people will look forward to year after year.

The Results

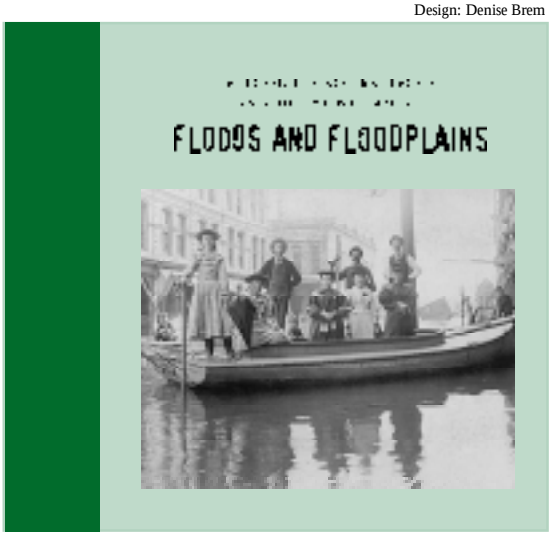
Willamette Riverkeeper is a two-year-old grassroots organization, working to protect and restore a major basin. Our annual trip and report

In 1997, Gov. Kitzhaber paddled with WRK's flotilla and joined WRK for a riverside news conference.

creates many benefits for the river and for our organization.

The media coverage we received—20+ hits in 1996 and 30+ hits in 1997—showcased the river, highlighted critical river issues, held decision-makers more accountable, and carved out WRK's niche as the "Voice for the River." Participant lists from our community paddle events have proven to be hot membership prospect lists. The Willamette Basin Task Force has taken notice of and adopted many of our report recommendations. Most importantly, WRK has broadened public discussions about the Willamette River from just water quality to comprehensive river health issues—riverland habitat, natural flows, fish populations, and water quality. Protecting and restoring the Willamette River will be a long and arduous journey, but for now, we are going with the current.

Design: Denise Brem



WRK's 1997 report focused on the need and benefits of letting the Willamette "act more like a river."

Rita Haberman is a co-director of Willamette Riverkeeper. Prior to that she was a program manager at River Network and an editor of River Voices.

For more information on WRK's "State of the Willamette" reports, see WRK's web site at:

www.willamette-riverkeeper.org.

Rio Grande Celebrates Day of the River

by Bess Metcalf

On the 3rd Saturday in October, thousands of volunteers gather in communities throughout the Rio Grande Basin to celebrate the river that is the lifeblood of this arid region. They plant trees, clean up streams and arroyos, build trails, create watercolors and poetry that express the importance of the river, and sponsor public lectures and events that educate the public on river issues. Known as Dia del Rio or the Day of the River, this annual event serves both to raise public awareness about river issues and to promote river stewardship among the general population. In addition, it is seen by local communities and grassroots organizations throughout the Basin as a way to celebrate the diversity of this bi-national, multi-cultural basin.

Dia del Rio is a citizen-led event organized by the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin Coalition, an organization whose mission is to facilitate and support the efforts of local communities to restore and sustain the environment, economies, and well-being of the Rio Grande Basin. The idea for the event emerged from a 1994 basin-wide conference as a way to reach a broad cross-section of the population with a message of river stewardship. Regional working groups coordinated local events while the Coalition raised funds to provide seed grants for events and provided publicity materials, a logo and commemorative caps that were distributed to volunteers basin-wide. In its first year more than 5,000 people participated in Dia del Rio. It was so well received that the Coalition decided to make it an annual event.

Through Dia del Rio, the Coalition aims to 1) promote awareness and a greater sense of stewardship among the basin's citizens; 2) make tangible improvements to the river through hands-on projects; and, 3) promote basin-wide unity. Locally driven, the event has the ancillary effect of building and strengthening local organizations in their river enhancement and protection efforts. In fact, Dia del Rio is a center-piece in the Coalition's work to support local organizations in their efforts to educate and involve local citizens in river protection and enhancement and in promoting a unified identity among all communities in the basin—an identity that transcends state and international boundaries and is defined by the rivers on which everyone in the region depends.

The variety of events that occurred during Dia del Rio 1997 reflect the diversity of interest and emphasis among the Coalition's constituents.

• Volunteers at six different sites planted more than 25,000 trees.

• Streamside clean-ups in other areas removed an estimated 35 tons of trash from riverbanks and arroyos.

• Hundreds of school children participated in essay and drawing contests that encouraged them to think about and express what the river means to them and their community.

• In Laredo, more than 700 people helped build nature trails for a new riverside nature center in their community.

• One unique event in Las Cruces brought about 60 people to the Rio Grande to pour water back into its channel, symbolizing the river's need for water during the non-irrigating season when dam releases are halted and the river all but dries up.

• Local communities also organized bike and foot races along the river, attempting to reach a different group of potential river stewards.

• The arts played an important part in many sites, with banners, sculpture,

Successful Volunteer Recruitment

by Elaine Lockhart, Valley Proud Environmental Center, Harlingen, Texas

No matter how important or special a project is, it cannot be a success if there are not volunteers to implement the program and see that it is successful. We have found volunteers are eager to participate if the following guidelines are followed:

1) Enough advance notice to make arrangement for transportation, etc.

2) No more than 20 miles of travel is expected (if holding a regional event, make sure it is centrally located);

3.) No more than three hours of their time is expected;

4.) Refreshments are provided;

5.) Incentives are given. It's amazing what people will do for a free t-shirt or cap. Schools are the key: Flyers announcing your event should be sent to all school districts in your area requesting that copies be sent to individual campuses. Valley Proud asks each participating community to assign a city coordinator and/or a school district coordinator. All information is channeled through the designated coordinator. College and university science classes are also good contact sources. Some professors even award extra credit for volunteering. Scout troops and service groups are other sources of volunteers.

poetry, and music that expressed the value people place upon the river.

Coordination

The key to organizing a successful river celebration of this magnitude is to find the right balance between the locally driven event and regional coordination; in other words focus on who does what best. In general, the Coalition supports local activities with seed money, a unifying logo, free give-aways (caps, decals) for volunteers and publicity (a standard press release and pre-printed posters and flyers). In addition, the Coalition publishes a calendar of events and a press release for broader media markets. Local groups recruit their own volunteers, design their own activities and find their own local sponsors.

This past year, the Coalition created an event organizing kit, which includes a press release, background information on the event, logos and other materials. The kit is designed to enhance the cohesiveness of the event, and educate folks that their local event is part of a larger, basin-wide effort. It also adds dimension to press appeal if a local event is part of a movement that involves several thousand people.

Recruiting Volunteers

There are two types of volunteers on which an event like Dia del Rio depends: 1) A local coordinator or coordinating group which organizes the local event; 2) volunteers recruited at the local level (see sidebar on page 10). Initially, the local coordinators for Dia del Rio were the same folks who helped form the Coalition. However, as Dia del Rio grew, the Coalition has involved a variety of new organizations in communities throughout the Basin.

School children in El Paso make seed balls.

Recruiting new organizations is actually easier than one might think. There are plenty of natural allies for the river— soil and water conservation districts, state and federal parks and refuges, local beautification programs, city parks and open space coordinators along with local conservation and environmental groups. Many of the groups recruited by the Coalition already hold clean-ups and tree-plantings, and rearranged their events to coincide. State and federal parks and preserves are natural partners for this type of event because they always have more projects than labor to complete them, and local residents like the idea of helping to improve these areas.

A blessing for the river.

Successful recruitment of volunteers depends on the type of activity. Events that give people something to do— plant trees, build trails, pick up trash— in combination with food, music and informational booths seem to be the most successful.

A river sculpture made of recycled materials.

Funding

The Coalition limits its financial support for local efforts, encouraging community groups to coordinate their own fundraising. We have learned the hard way that it is important not to become the "cash cow" for local events, and to find creative ways to support local efforts without writing big checks. The Coalition makes small seed matching grants to leverage local fundraising efforts, focusing resources on newer sites. The Coalition focuses its own Dia del Rio fundraising efforts on larger regional businesses, and encourages organizations to solicit local business support. Some organizations use Dia del Rio as a fundraising event. For example, the Rio Grande International Study Center in Laredo raised more than $7,000 through pledges, while at the same time building more than a mile of trail for their nature park. (see sidebar on page 22)

Publicity and Media

The Coalition provides local organizations with a blueprint press release that includes background on the event and a (continued on page 22)

10 types of events

Everything from competitions to nature walks

1 Festivals

Celebrate the uniqueness of your river and watershed by holding a river festival. Build your event around that special plant, animal or historical icon that plays an important role in your community. River festivals bring together residents and community members for fun while simultaneously increasing awareness for your river.

2 Parties

If you access to a restaurant, or a cruise ship, or a great site, a fancy annual dinner or party, is a good event. Build the evening around a theme such as Valentine's Day or Halloween, or a special kind of food, such as a “Cajun Feast.” An annual dinner can also be used as an occasion to give out awards, and can be combined with an auction or raffle to increase proceeds. Form several committees to take care of invitations, food, entertainment, etc., and be sure to charge enough!

3 Concerts

Concerts are feasible for small groups, particularly if you have a volunteer capable of handling most of the organizing and you can get a performer to donate his/her time. The most important activity involved is ticket sales, and this requires a lot of hard work by volunteers. Local radio stations will often advertise concerts at no charge to your organization.

4 Demonstrations

If the people lead, the leaders will follow. Since rivers have no voice, you may wish to rally your supporters for a peaceful demonstration. Provide local media with the date, time, place and nature of the demonstration. Make sure all spokespersons convey the same message using easy-to-understand language. Check your local noise and crowd ordinances to ensure that no laws are broken.

5 Cleanups

Cleanups may consist of a few friends cleaning up a shoreline or several hundred volunteers. Cleanups are great for increasing community pride, developing constituencies for restoration of compromised resources, identifying negative resource impacts and educating participants about the values of watersheds for recreation, and fish and wildlife habitat. You can plan your own, or

photos courtesy of Lori Charkey, Bergen SWAN

Bergen SWAN, NJ

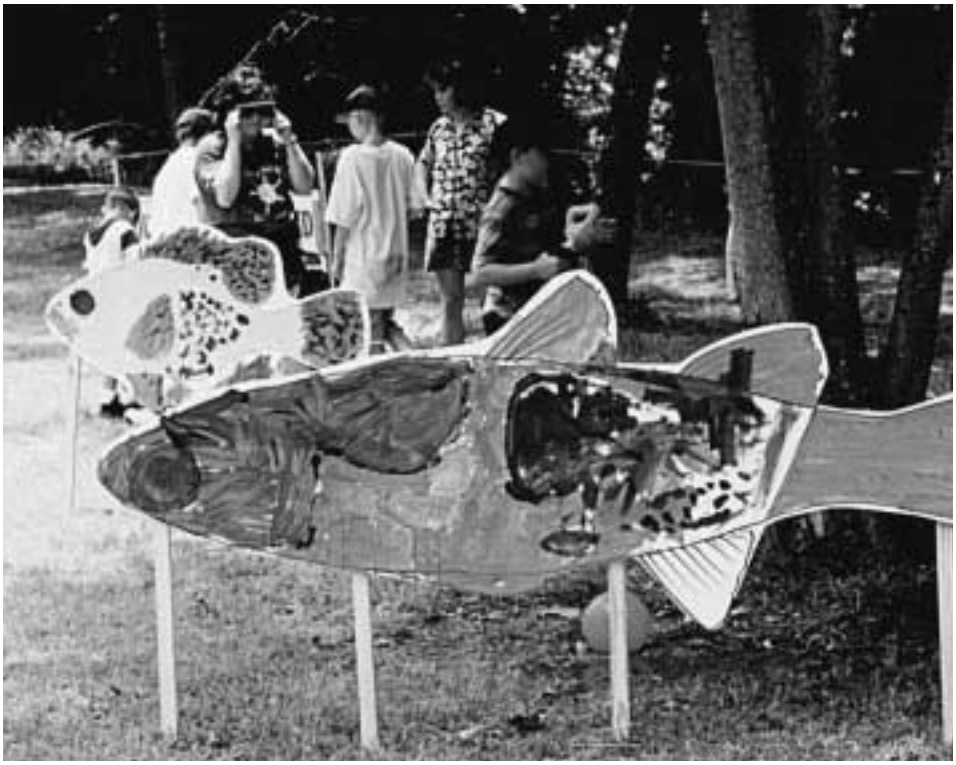
Walk for Watershed IV : In Fall of 1997, Bergen Save the Watershed Network held Walk for Watershed IV - a walkathon for the preservation of the Hackensack River Watershed. Walkers were encouraged to take a few moments at designated checkpoints, to read signs about the Hackensack’s human history. Yellow ribbons designated historic places while blue signs identified the Hackensack River and its reservoirs and feeder streams. After-walk festivities featured Bluegrass music, environmental presentations, a slide-show, speakers, a raffle and refreshments.

photo courtesy of Peg Jones, Save Our Rivers. Photo: Brian Hyder

Save Our Rivers, Inc. NC

River Cleanup: Members of Save Our Rivers, Inc. and the Little Tennessee Watershed Association team up to pick up trash in the Little Tennessee River during BIG SWEEP ‘96.

Photo: Paula Fancher



register as a part of the National River Cleanup Week, co-sponsored by America Outdoors and American Rivers. For more information call American Outdoors (423-558-3595) or visit their website (www.americaoutdoors.org).

6 Groundbreaking Ceremonies

Whether it's a new river museum, a community park or a river-access site, ground-breaking ceremonies allow you to reach a large audience with little effort. If possible, provide information about the steps being taken to minimize negative impacts on the river (ie, using recycled materials or landscaping with native plants). It is a time to praise not only the project, but also the citizens and public officials who made the project possible.

7 Competitions

Canoe and foot races are just the beginning. Competitions need not be athletic. Consider hosting a photo or poetry contest and involve your local schools and community centers. Or host a scavenger hunt where participants are asked to find various historical, cultural or educational sites located in your watershed. And don't forget cook-offs! Ask local businesses to donate prizes, food, and t-shirts—and then publicize, publicize, publicize.

8 Auctions

If the main purpose of your event is to raise money, consider an auction. Auctions are good events for river groups because many manufacturers of outdoor equipment will donate prizes. Auctions are best done in connection with a conference or dinner. ▶

Cahaba River Society (CRS), AL

RiverFest is an event started in 1996 to celebrate CRS' efforts to protect the Cahaba. Designed to be an event for the whole family, RiverFest is held on the banks of the river. Music, workshops, and plenty of kid's activities made the first year such a success, it is now an annual event.

Left: A Kid's Games area had a school of giant fish for painting , as well as many crafts and activities. Water balloon tosses and water pistol battles were very popular.

Lackawanna River Corridor Association, PA

Annual Canoe-a-thon: LRCA has hosted the Annual Canoe-a-thon since 1987. This 14 mile fun-fundraiser and river awareness-raiser is now a traditional community event. LRCA works closely with their county emergency services agency and several fire and rescue companies, as 5-6 novice canoeists learn new respect for the river during the first four miles of the race—which contains some Class II whitewater. To accommodate the less adventurous paddlers, LRCA selected a second launch site below the faster moving waters. Finish-line activities include a variety of musical entertainment, a raffle, food and beverages, educational and learning activities for adults and kids throughout the afternoon. Registration fees and a signed waiver-release are required by all canoeists participating in the event.

photos courtesy of Bernard McGurl, LRCA

Well-organized auctions can bring in $5,000 to $20,000 depending on the prizes and the audience, but count on spending weeks of staff or volunteer time getting ready.

9 River Trips

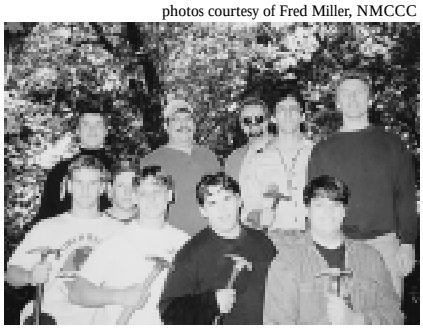
What better way to get people interested in your river and recruit new members, than to get them out on the water. Often, local outfitters will loan equipment and guides. Publicizing the trip is all-important—advertise in the "weekend" section of your local newspaper, get your board involved in recruiting, and anything else you can think of. Be sure to provide for liability insurance—usually a commercial outfitter can include you on his policy for a particular trip, or you may be able to get coverage for the event from your regular insurance carrier.

10 Hikes, Walks and Excursions

If your river is not floatable, consider hosting a hike, bike ride or watershed walk-a-thon along the banks. Make sure the route is clearly marked, with informational guides, water, first-aid, trashcans and bathrooms strategically placed along the way. Have different starting points (families with children may wish to participate in a 2-mile route, while others may prefer a longer one) and provide every participant with a map. Encourage participants to carry signs or banners in support of the protection of your watershed. You may wish to consider having participants gather pledge—with the proceeds going to your group. If possible, plan for music, food and entertainment at the end of the trek.

Kathy Luscher has worked in River Network's Watershed Program since 1995. Pat Munoz is a watershed program manager in the eastern office and has been planning events for 20 years.

photos courtesy of Fred Miller, NMCCC



Nine Mile Creek Conservation Council, NY

Canoe Launch: NMCCC, in collaboration with a local boy scouts troop and various community members, constructed a boat-launch to spearhead the creation of a watertrail on Nine-Mile Creek. The launch connects the community with the river by providing residents and visitors with an easy access site. Once completed, the watertrail will allow for educational trips and wildlife explorations; highlight historical points; and inform participants of existing water quality issues and pollution sources.

photos courtesy of FOR

Friends of the River (FOR), CA

Over the course of FOR's 2 1/2 day conference festival, 2 keynote speakers are invited. *Above*: Dave Foreman, founder of Earth First! addresses the Sunday audience.

Left: Festival members, agencies, wholesalers, and others are invited to display their wares. The conference festival also includes swapmeets and workshops.

FRIENDS OF THE RIVER

TWENTY FIVE YEARS

Sample Invitation: Artwork by Matt Mullin, a local graphic artist from CA.

Oftentimes, a local artist will donate his/her services or provide your group with a nonprofit discount.

Sample Event Checklist

At Least 6 Months Ahead

- ❑ Define your watershed
  Your watershed can be as small as your neighborhood or as large as any major river basin. The festival would be for everyone who shares your watershed.
- ❑ Organize planning committee
- ❑ Determine date, rain date, and location
  - ❑ Contact officials at site
  - ❑ Visit site

5 Months

- ❑ Call potential presenters, volunteer groups, and financial sponsors
- ❑ Contact groups/individuals who could present a fun, hands-on activity or provide a display/materials/volunteers
- ❑ Be sure to solicit sponsorship of a local TV station

4 Months

- ❑ Send confirmation letter to presenters and volunteers
  - ❑ Provide specific dates, times and locations
  - ❑ Reiterate goal and ask for activity in support
  - ❑ Set deadline for confirmation
  - ❑ Make follow-up calls if necessary
  - ❑ Send letter to sponsors

3 Months

- ❑ Begin materials development
- ❑ Develop flier with date, location, times, description, highlighting outstanding activities, special entertainment
- ❑ Create poster

2 Months

- ❑ Call presenters to confirm, verify information for program
- ❑ Recruit volunteers to fulfill tasks at the festival.

1 Month

- ❑ Publicize the event
  - ❑ Mail/distribute flier to major business, schools, churches, recreational centers, libraries, grocery stores
  - ❑ Distribute/display posters
  - ❑ Produce final program
  - ❑ Send news releases to media representatives
- ❑ Mail program to presenters

Two Weeks

- ❑ Publicize the event
  - ❑ Distribute posters
  - ❑ Follow-up with calls to media

Day of the Event

- ❑ Brief participants/assist set-up
- ❑ Establish "help" desk for program distribution, evaluation forms, and questions.
- ❑ Post signs/mark entrances

After the Event/Follow-up

- ❑ Send thank you letters, include media clips
- ❑ Evaluate responses
- ❑ Celebrate!
- ❑ Start planning for next year

From Walk Your Watershed Festival Organizing Kit. Reprinted with permission from the Water Environment Federation and Groundwater Foundation.

Hosting an Annual Dinner

by Jeff Skelding

Rivers Unlimited (RU) celebrated its 25th anniversary in grand style with an annual dinner and auction that did much more than just raise funds for the organization.

When a prominent political figure whispered into Board President Mike Fremont's ear, "Congratulations, you have arrived," we knew our annual dinner had achieved the goals we set for ourselves many months before.

Early Planning, Board and Volunteer Involvement

The most important thing the organization did to ensure the success of the 25th anniversary Annual Dinner and Auction was to start the planning process early and involve as many board members and volunteers as possible. Serious work began in March for the November 11th event. Staff and board members formed an annual dinner committee and each member was assigned specific tasks with strict deadlines. Committee members also developed a budget for the event and a workplan. A recruited team of volunteers was available throughout the eight-month period to respond to the miscellaneous tasks that inevitably arise when planning this type of event.

The Honorary Committee

One of the most important objectives of the workplan is the formation of an honorary committee. Our committee was comprised of 45 prominent individuals in Ohio's environmental community who are also strong supporters of Rivers Unlimited (RU). Honorary committee members—including RU board members—were each asked to donate $100 towards the event. In return, they received two free tickets to the dinner and had their names prominently featured in all print materials associated with the event. Many invitees decided to attend the event because they recognized a name or a friend from the honorary committee. The committee is a nice way to honor your organization's special supporters. It's also a great way to generate revenues in advance of the event.

Invitations

Once the honorary committee is in place, the invitations can be printed and mailed. More than 500 invitations were sent out to organization members and other names from mailing lists acquired over time. Ticket prices were set at $50.00 to make it affordable, cover the costs of the dinner, and maximize attendance. It is important to remember that many invitees won't respond until they hear from you again with a phone call. Approximately 110 people attended our event, and 90% confirmed their attendance only after a second telephone contact! This is labor intensive and should be done with the assistance of board members and other volunteers. In addition, each board member committed to selling 10 tickets to their friends, colleagues, and other contacts in their communities.

Setting Up

Make sure there are plenty of volunteers who can arrive early and help set up the room for the event. It is very important that you leave yourself enough time to set up the auction items in attractive displays. Early arrivals will spend most of their time wandering from table to table deciding on which items to bid on. This is also the time to get to know the facility staff who will be serving food and taking care of your guests needs throughout the evening.

The Silent Auction

We began soliciting auction items from businesses throughout Ohio (and neighboring states) eight months before the event was scheduled. Initial contact was made through the mail and a follow-up phone call was usually necessary to secure the item. Approximately 50 items were donated. This number struck a nice balance with the number of dinner guests (110). Many of the companies already had established relationships with the organization either through board contacts or as vendors who do business with the organization. Cold-calling resulted in some quality items, but at a much lower return-rate. Most items had an environmental theme. Artwork and canoe trips were particularly popular items.

Auction Logistics

Organizing the silent auction takes special preparations, and volunteer assistance is essential. Rivers Unlimited found that arranging auction items into packages by theme heightened interest and drove up bids. As dinner guests arrived, each person received a bid number which was recorded on a sign-in sheet. The cash bar was open, and guests socialized while making their bids. During the evening, a block of time was designated for final bids. As the auction was winding down, volunteers were standing close to the bid sheets. At a definitive moment, the auction ended and bid sheets were picked up immediately to avoid any last minute confusion (or sneaky bidders). It is critical that volunteers who assisted in setting up the auction were there at the end of the night to help package up the items. Auction winners were announced from the podium at the end of the evening, and a rush of people came to claim their items. A large group of volunteers verified bid numbers and brought the items to the winners.

The Written Program

The program is the road map that will guide you and your guests through-

out the evening. Our program included a brief historical depiction of Rivers Unlimited and some of the organization's major accomplishments. It outlined a schedule of time slots for each presentation. It also contained a brief biographical sketch on the keynote speaker. Each auction item was listed in the program with a brief "teaser" paragraph describing the item and listing its approximate value.

The Keynote Speaker

The keynote speaker should be inspirational, brief and entertaining. Although a keynote speaker is optional, we found that our speaker (a local environmental judge) attracted an additional 10-15 guests who had a specific interest in hearing his presentation. Make sure the Master of Ceremonies has been briefed on the background information of the speaker to avoid any embarrassing gaffes.

Entertainment

A classical guitarist donated his time and provided quiet background music throughout most of the evening. We received positive feedback from dinner guests who believed the music contributed to the ambiance, particularly during the interludes when guests visited the cash bar and mingled with one another.

Awards

The awards presentation is an important element of the event and a time to recognize individuals who have made a special contribution to river protection. Board members were sent a nominations ballot and asked to cast a vote for their favored candidate. The award categories included: Outstanding Legislator for River Protection, Outstanding Public Servant for River Protection, Outstanding Volunteer for River Protection, Outstanding Media Person on River Protection Issues, and two Lifetime Achievement Awards. Since engraved plaques were to be presented for each winner, votes needed to be tallied with enough time to order the awards.

Media

The annual dinner and auction is an important opportunity to attract media coverage for your organization. Our event generated a nice article in one of Ohio's major daily newspapers. It helped that the reporter from that newspaper received the award for outstanding media person! Each nominee from the media category should approve her nomination before the ballot is printed. Some reporters declined to accept the nomination due to perceived conflicts of interest.

Follow-Up

A final step is to send a letter recognizing the contribution each individual put forth to ensure the success of the event. These include guests, volunteers, board members, and businesses who donated auction items. This last step should actually be viewed as planting the seeds for future events.

Conclusion

In the end, we netted close to $5,000 from the event and garnered a tremendous amount of respect in the community for the organization. Organizing an annual dinner is a tremendous amount of work, but the benefits can be substantial in terms of prestige, name recognition, and respect for your organization.

Jeff Skelding is the executive director of Rivers Unlimited, the nation's oldest statewide river protection organization.

How to Get Media Sponsorship for Your Next Benefit Event

by Andy Robinson

When planning any type of community event, it's useful to enlist the news media. Remember your goal: get the maximum exposure for the minimum cost and effort.

Media sponsorship involves an exchange: you allow sponsors to attach their company names to your event. In exchange, you get promotional consideration. In the case of newspapers, it can also mean free or inexpensive printing of programs, etc. In the case of radio or television, sponsorship can involve live remote broadcasts, production and broadcast of public service announcements, etc.

Think creatively about how to develop partnerships with the news and entertainment business.

A few suggestions:

1. Do your homework first. Make sure your event fits within the format and demographics of the station or newspaper you're approaching. If you have questions, call in advance and ask.

2. Give yourself plenty of time. Approach the prospective sponsor at least 4-6 months before the event. Some major events start lining up sponsors 11 months in advance.

3. Make a specific request: how much air time or how many advertising inches, live remotes, Public Service Announcements (PSA) production, printing, promotional advice, etc. Put your proposal on paper, including your overall publicity plan. Make it simple and easy to read.

4. Joint sponsorship among TV, radio, and newspaper is appropriate, but don't involve more than one of each. They are competitors; most will want exclusive rights to the event within their respective medium.

5. Don't rely only on the station's promotions director: advertising sales staff can help, too. For example, if you plan to sell soft drinks, one of the ad sales staff at the station might be willing to approach a local beverage distributor and ask them to come in as an additional sponsor. The distributor then sells sodas at your event (gives you a percentage of sales), and promotes your event in their regular paid advertising.

Andy Robinson is a trainer and consultant in Tucson, Arizona. His book, Grassroots Grants: An Activist's Guide to Proposal writing, is available from Chardon Press (chardn@aol.com; 510-704-8714.

Reprinted with permission from the Grassroots Fundraising Journal *and Andy Robinson.*

Reducing the Risks of Special Events

by Leslie T. White

Almost every nonprofit organization relies on special events to achieve its mission. The special event may be a program activity such as a weekly educational tour along watershed or an activity to raise funds for the organization. Many organizations also hold advocacy events like a march or demonstration to draw public attention to the issues. All of these activities create unique situations that can expose an organization to a financial loss or claim including lawsuits. The unusual nature of special events require an organization to pay close attention to its activities and work to minimize the chance of harm.

Reprinted with permission: Oregon Historical Society No. cn001253

Many organizations also hold advocacy events like a march or demonstration to draw public attention to the issues.

Minimizing your risk

Risk management is one way to address the dangers of holding a special event. A risk is any uncertainty about a future event that threatens your organization's ability to accomplish its mission. All organizations have assets that they can not afford to lose. These assets include *people* (volunteers, employees, board members, donors, service recipients and the public), *property* (buildings, equipment, computers, copyrights and trademarks), *income* (sales, grants, contributions, and expenses) and *goodwill* — your reputation and stature in the community. The loss of any of these assets could have a devastating effect on your organization.

Risk management is a decision process whereby you address the possibility that some future event will cause harm. The first step is to identify and analyze what could go wrong. Next, establish priorities for the risks—which ones to address first. Then select the methods or techniques that will reduce the chance of loss. In this step, decide what actions or precautions will be taken to prevent a loss and how your organization will respond should an issue arise. Lastly, implement the plan and monitor its results. Revisions to the original plan may be necessary if the initial results were not what was expected.

There are four ways to address risk: The first choice is *avoidance* —do not undertake the proposed activity. Although avoidance is not the preferred course of action, sometimes the circumstances require the organization to avoid something that is too risky. Another option is *modification*—changing some aspect of the risk to make it acceptable. Examples are screening volunteers, ordering driver records for people driving on behalf of the organization, or developing emergency plans. A third option is to focus on *retention*—the organization retains the financial consequences of a risk, such as a deductible for automobile physical damage or not insuring your office equipment. Retention often occurs accidentally when the organization does not identify a risk. Lastly, *risk sharing or transfer* —the organization shares the risk with another organization or entity. Insurance is a form of risk sharing by exchanging a premium for the promise to pay future covered losses. Other examples are hold harmless or indemnification agreements within a contract. Each organization can incorporate all of these techniques in its special events risk management program.

Safety and Risk Management

What makes a special event special? Most special events extend beyond the normal scope of the organization's activities. Although a special event can be a part of the organization's program, the potential still exists for a catastrophic accident. Therefore, each organization must take special care in planning and executing the event. One suggestion is to appoint one person to be responsible for the safety and risk management aspects of the event.

Involve the "safety czar" in the planning process.

Special events create unique exposures or risks for an organization. Here are brief discussions of some of the issues to consider:

Facilities - Often an organization holds a special event on non-owned or leased property. Identify the event needs and then search for a facility to meet the criteria. Remember, the facility may have rules and regulations that may need to be modified in some way, such as accessibility for people with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act holds your organization responsible if the facility is not accessible.

The safety person should inspect the event site before, during and after the event for damages. If possible, video tape or photograph the site before and after the event, to document the condition of the facility should your organization be charged for damages.

Crowds - Many special events involve large numbers of people that your organization must keep safe while at the event. Crowd behavior adds another dimension to special events risk management. The nature of the activity will affect the way the crowd behaves. Consider the flow of people and traffic, the number of exits, the communications systems and security.

Security - Assess your needs for security and crowd control. Consider contracting the security function to an outside firm. If your organization decides to provide your its security personnel, establish screening procedures to identify appropriate personnel. Also, ensure that they are trained to respond to emergency situations.

Volunteers - Although your organization may be operated by volunteers, a special event increases the number of volunteers substantially. The special event volunteer can be a first-time worker without a serious commitment to the organization. The two major concerns are injuries to volunteers and a volunteer hurting someone else (another volunteer, participant, client, etc.). The key to volunteer risk management is to establish the procedures for selecting, training and supervising volunteers.

Food and beverage - Review the health department regulations and the proper handling and storage techniques for food. Food poisoning or contamination is the leading cause of claims within the food service industry. If the event includes alcoholic beverages, establish procedures to prevent service to minors and the intoxication of participants. Hiring a caterer or independent contractor to provide the food and beverage service is an effective way to transfer the risk. However, make sure that the vendor has adequate insurance and names your organization as an additional insured to its policy.

The key to volunteer risk management is to establish the procedures for selecting, training and supervising volunteers.

Entertainment - Celebrities, bands, amusement rides, games and a host of other activities increase the risk of injury. Many claims occur from the collapse of a stage or people falling off of it. Consider the sound and light systems, especially who is responsible for insuring the equipment. The organization can transfer most of these exposures to the vendors.

Transportation - Will the event require the transportation of participants or spectators? If so, who will provide the transportation services? This exposure can be transferred to a contract transportation company, but you must be careful in your selection. Injured passengers have filed claims of "negligent selection" when an organization chose a bus company that did not maintain its vehicles or select its drivers properly. Even if you are not providing transportation services, think about who is driving on your behalf. Sending a young, inexperienced driver on an errand can result in a bad accident.

Sponsors and partners - Sponsors and partners can be very demanding. Your organization must ensure that it can meet its contractual obligations. Your organization can be tainted by a sponsor's or partner's adverse publicity (a major lawsuit, labor difficulties, governmental fines, etc.). Therefore, choose your partners and sponsors carefully, and document all agreements in a contract or memorandum of understanding.

Fundraising - Many of the sponsors' and partners' risks apply to fundraising. Unfortunately, excessive revenue projections can lead to poor management decisions. Also, consider how the funds will handled before and during the event. If the event involves cash, plan for proper storage and accounting of the funds.

Vendors or independent contractors - An organization can transfer many special event exposures to a vendor or independent contractor. Carefully review contracts or agreements to ensure that the vendors assume their fair share of the responsibility for any mishaps. Also, review the insurance requirements and require a certificate of insurance

Reducing the Risks of Special Events

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from each vendor. An indemnification agreement is only as good as the party's ability to pay. Without insurance, most vendors would be unable to meet the contract's indemnification provisions.

Weather - Weather can effect a special event whether indoors or outside. Consider the need for shade and water on a hot afternoon or the ability to evacuate the site due to a thunderstorm, tornado, or blizzard.

Emergency plans - Create an emergency response team. The team and event organizers are responsible for developing an emergency plan, medical emergency, or a security situation, missing persons, evacuation, and other such incidents. Train the response team on how to handle various emergencies. If possible, "dry run" some of the more common situations (evacuation and a medical emergency) with the team. Ensure that people know how to contact the police, fire department, and ambulance service. Establish a crisis management plan that includes a contact person for the media.

Document plans and activities - Documentation ensures that people know their responsibilities. Documentation also assists in the defense of a claim, by recording the actions taken to refute an allegation of negligence.

Insurance and contractual agreements are the most common forms of risk sharing. A special event may require some special insurance coverages and involve many independent contractors. The first insurance to consider is a commercial general liability policy or special events policy. Most organizations commercial general liability (CGL) policy is not designed to cover the increased risks of a special event. The insurance company may want to make an additional premium charge to cover the increased exposures. Another option is to purchase a special event policy. One advantage to a separate policy is that it "protects" the organization's CGL policy from the possibility of a catastrophic loss.

Another exposure often not considered is the amount of borrowed or leased equipment (stages, sound systems, radios, golf carts, etc.) and the property brought from the organization's office. Most property policies provide a very limited amount of coverage for "off-premises" property. Although the policy may provide coverage for property of others, the policy limit may be inadequate to cover the total sum all of borrowed or leased equipment. Consider purchasing a short term policy or endorsement to cover this property exposure.

Train the response team on how to handle various emergencies. If possible, "dry run" some of the more common situations with the team.

Product Liability - If you are selling food, beverages or other merchandise the organization should examine products exposure. Review agreements with vendors to ensure that their policy protects your organization. If your organization is providing the food, make sure your policy includes products coverage.

Contracts are another form of risk sharing. Establish a process for the review and approval of all contracts by the appropriate personnel (include an attorney and your insurance agent). Negotiate to have all hold harmless agreements be mutual, wherein each party is responsible for its own negligence. Each party should support the indemnification agreements with insurance or some other financial guarantee. Waivers, properly written and executed, are useful; however, the requirements depend upon state laws and recent court decisions. Ensure an attorney is familiar with waivers reviews the waiver. Lastly, review the insurance requirements with an insurance agent to ensure that your organization is in compliance with provisions.

Special events are an integral part of most nonprofit organizations. A successful event will help the organization fulfill its mission. The effective use of risk management techniques will help ensure that the event is safe and successful. A little extra planning can help create a lasting impression of the quality of the organization and ensure that everyone involved has a positive experience.

Leslie White is risk management associate at the Nonprofit Risk Management Center in Washington, D.C.

The Nonprofit Risk Management Center is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to meeting the risk management and insurance needs of community-serving organizations through research, education and advocacy. The Center offers numerous publications on risk management, offers workshops and seminars on risk management, liability and insurance, and provides consulting services to nonprofit organizations. A recent publication, Managing Special Event Risks —10 Steps to Safety *is available from the Center. See page 21 for more information.*

References & Resources

Where to find help with events

VIDEOS

"How to Organize an Effective River or Lake Clean up"
This video takes you step-by-step through the organizational process. Bob Pierpoint, retired White House correspondent for CBS News, narrates.

The video:

- teaches the importance of healthy stream environments for water quality and habitat;
- shows you how to coordinate your clean up from the first organizational meeting through volunteer recruitment; and
- covers safety and logistics for your local cleanup.

Available from America Outdoors via phone (423-558-3595) or through the America Outdoors Web Site at http://www.americaoutdoors.org. Price: $10.95 per video.

PUBLICATIONS

How to Plan and Organize Successful Special Events for Nonprofit Organizations, available for $25.95 from Cause Effective (see organizations for more information).

Managing Special Event Risks: Ten Steps to Safety
Published by the Nonprofit Risk Management Center and Nonprofits' Insurance Alliance of California, this invaluable guide provides tips on controlling the risks associated with special events. Topics include goal setting, identification and evaluation of risks, risk sharing and transfer, emergency procedures, event documentation, and working with the media. Checklists and forms are included in the appendix. 1997 / 60 pages. Price: $12. Contact:
Nonprofit Risk Management Center
1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 900
Washington, DC 20036
(202)785-3891
http://www.nonprofitrisk.org/

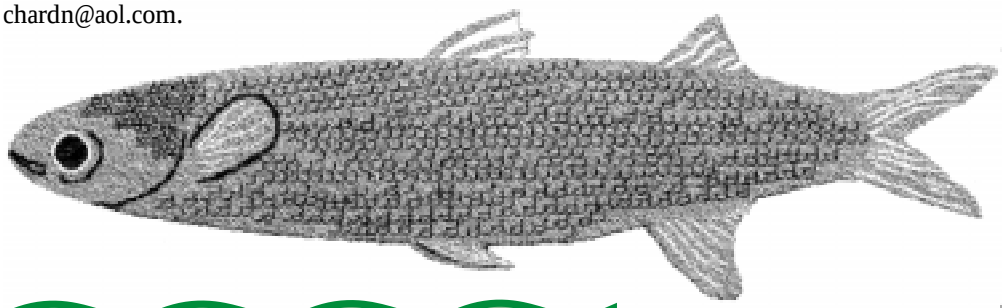
Producing Special Events: Using your creativity and good sense to make the most of your fundraising events.
River Fundraising Alert, Volume 2, Nos. 3&4/Fall-Winter 1995. By Pat Munoz, River Network. Price $6. Available from:
River Network
P.O. Box 8787
Portland, OR 97207-8787
503-241-3506
http://www.rivernetwork.org/

Special Events (part I): Are they right for you? Special Events (part II): Planning
The Grassroots Fundraising Journal (Volume 13, Nos. 2 and 3). $4.20 per issue. Available from:
Chardon Press
P.O. Box 11607
Berkeley, CA 94712
(510) 649-8714
chardn@aol.com.

Walk Your Watershed Festival Organizing Kit
Watershed festivals are gaining in popularity as an effective way to educate communities about watershed awareness and protection. This easy-to-use kit, developed by professionals who have sponsored these events, includes the information required to get started on the development of a watershed festival. Order No. ZS1603WW, Price: $8 each. Available from:
Water Environment Federation
601 Wythe Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-1994
800/666-0206
http://www.wef.org.

ORGANIZATIONS

Cause Effective
A nonprofit resource development center in New York, provides special events management assistance to nonprofits through publications, consulting and workshops. Contact:
Cause Effective
39 West 14th Street, Suite 408
New York, NY 10011
212-807-6896



Rio Grande Celebrates Day of the Rvier

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basin-wide perspective on scheduled activities. It also sent its own press releases to all major media markets in the region, along with a calendar of events. The angle the Coalition stresses is the basin-wide scope of Dia del Rio; thousands of people on both sides of the border are giving their time and attention to the river. The Coalition provides local organizations with a template poster on which they can add local event information, as well as customized flyers. These posters and flyers have received mixed reviews. In large cities, they have limited effectiveness, while organizations in small towns have found them very helpful for recruiting volunteers. Larger community organizations have more success with radio promotions.

Evaluation

After each Dia del Rio, Coalition staff contacts each coordinator by phone to debrief their event—what worked and what didn't. Each organization was also asked to fill out a one page post-event report, and include a few good photos of the event and any publicity received. This information is used in the Coalition newsletters and publications, and for recruiting new organizations.

Benefits

Dia del Rio offers many opportunities to further the goals of the Coalition and its partners. It provides an opportunity to collaborate with new groups, thereby expanding our networks. It also provides publicity for the river and therefore, serves as a platform to talk about issues effecting the health of the river. It tangibly improves the health of rivers and riparian areas and serves as a vehicle for engaging community residents with the river, promoting stewardship. It is often easy to undervalue the impact of these special events, but for broad impact and appeal nothing else comes close.

Bess Metcalf is the executive director of The Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin Coalition.

Volunteers Make the Difference

Techniques for Getting Volunteers and Raising Funds

Jim Earhart, The Rio Grande International Study Center, Laredo, TX

Celebration of the 1997 Dia del Rio in Laredo focused on constructing and dedicating the Paso del Indio Nature Trail.

To raise money the Coalition used a "Work-a-Thon" technique, issuing a special participation packet made available to potential participants. Each packet contained a letter explaining the importance of Dia del Rio, a pledge sheet, a schedule of the activities, and a map. Participants recorded the name, address, and gift of each donor. The names and addresses of these donors, numbering in the thousands, provided a list of potential members and conveyed the broadness of our support base. In return for obtaining pledges, each participant received a t-shirt donated by the city of Laredo and free food donated by a local grocery chain.

Volunteers were recruited through radio and TV public service announcements. Direct contact was made by visits and phone calls to schools, scout troops, civic organizations, clubs, and businesses. Teachers at the university, community college, and public school levels secured involvement by students. Between 660-700 citizens participated, compared to 300 in 1996. Nearly $9,500 was netted for implementing RGISC programs. The Coaltion will build on these same techniques next year and anticipate even greater growth.

By joining the River Network Partnership, we can help you navigate your river work

Since 1988 River Network has helped hundreds of river and watershed conservationists. Our vision is to have vigilant and effective citizen watershed organizations in each of America's 2,000 major watersheds. Helping river and watershed organizations through the Partnership is one strategy for making our vision a reality. Let us give you the tools you need to be effective in your watershed.

Here's some feedback from River Network Partners:

N W E S

"I could not have founded this organization without the technical assistance and wonderful encouragement I have received from River Network."

Nancy Jacques
Colorado Rivers Alliance

"Everything we have received from River Network—the Fundraising Alert, the special publications—have been extremely helpful, providing the kind of practical information we badly need and can put to use."

Kevin Bixby, SW Environmental Center, NM

N W E S

"River Network has saved me endless hours of research time."

Fred Miller, Nine Mile Creek Conservation Council, NY

"Having River Network available for advice and information on fundraising and other issues has made my job easier."

Sally Bethea, Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, GA

Partnership Dues

Joining the River Network Partnership is one of the best investments you can make in protecting your river and its watershed. You'll receive valuable publications (a $122 value), plus one-on-one advice and the opportunity to network with hundreds of like-minded river and watershed conservationists from across the country.

RIVER NETWORK

YES, we would like to be a River Network Partner

Citizen led, river and watershed conservation organizations are invited to join as River Network Partners. Dues is based on your organization's annual budget:*

Budget	Dues
$0 - $20,000	$60
$20,001 - $100,000	$100
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$200,001 +	$300

Budget:
$_____

Amount dues enclosed
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*Individuals and government agencies are invited to join as River Network Members. For more information on membership categories and benefits, contact River Network.

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ORGANIZATION _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____ PHONE (___) _____

For more information contact: River Network, P.O. Box 8787, Portland, OR 97207-8787 (503) 241-3506 rivernet@igc.apc.org

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Upper Sacramento River Exchange, CA
North Fork River Improvement Association, CO
Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association, Inc., FL
Portnuef Watershed Council, ID
Professional Paddlesports Association, KY
Connecticut River Watershed Council, MA
Friends of the Mystic River, MA
Friends of Mount Aventine, Inc., MD
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Renewed Partners

Friends of the Locust Fork River, AL
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Cannon River Watershed Partnership, MN
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New York Rivers United, NY
Cape Fear River Watch, NC
Haw River Assembly, NC
Pamlico-Tar River Foundation, NC
Association of Northwest Steelheaders, OR
Columbia River United, OR
Environmental Learning Center, OR
Friends of Buford Park & Mt Pisgah, OR
Friends of the Clackamas River, OR
Oregon Adopt-A-River, OR
Ten Mile Lakes Basin Partnership, OR
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