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First Steps
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Presidential Thoughts

The successful completion of any complex task is usually both an art and a science, a mixture of learned skills and natural talents. Running a good convention is a prime example of what I mean. The depth of legal knowledge and attention to detail of a methodical contract writer matches well with the finesse and bartering skills of a hotel liaison. The pedantic and overly-organized logistics and operations staff support the charismatic figure who has you agreeing to a staff position well before she or he has even finished recruiting you. The dreamers and the builders, ideas and follow-through, as different as you can imagine, and as necessary as can be.

My hope for Midfan in general, and this fanzine in specific, is that the exchange of ideas and the cultivation of talent I saw at the first Midwest Construction continues, and grows, and that we pass on our wealth of knowledge and experience to the next generation of convention organizers, many of whom are already waiting for their chance to shine. On the other hand, the one thing I hope this does not become is some definitive statement on how conventions are run. I hope for a reference text, not a religious work. I do not believe that there is One True Way(tm) of doing or not doing anything, and even if there were, the spirit of innovation driving much of fandom would ignore it anyway.

So, on behalf of the dreamers and builders who have contributed to this work, I hope you enjoy it, gain something from it, and will think about contributing in the future.

Sincerely,

Joseph "Uncle Vlad" Stockman
President, Midwest Fannish Conventions, Inc.
<http://www.midfan.org/>



From Our Minds to Your Hands

Comments from the Editor

Publishing is one of the things I enjoy most in life - whether on the web or on paper, it has a sense of magic about it that few other things can match. Alex writes down his thoughts on how to get and keep volunteers, and next thing you know, we have our first article. I contact Glen Tenhoff about a possible cover and title concept, and in less time than I would have thought possible, we have this fabulous cover. It's like magic!

I want to thank everyone who helped out with this edition, and I also extend my appreciation in advance to anyone who feels inspired to give me stuff for the Spring 2003 edition. It's a buzz, it really is, to write or draw something out and share your mind with a hundred other fen. Try it! (You know you want to!)

-- Anne KG Murphy

Getting the People to Get the Job Done

By Alex von Thorn

At some point in the planning of every convention, a conrunner realizes that they can't do all the work. Some of the tasks will have to be performed by other people. This is where many conventions run into trouble. Lots of people don't have experience in organizing people, so it's easy to make mistakes. But fandom is about people, and people are the most important resource for any convention. Conrunning is a management task, and one definition of management is "getting work done through other people." Fortunately, the time frame is short and the number of variables is small, compared to a business environment; you only have to survive the weekend. I have a simple approach in organizing fannish volunteers:

- Find them.
- Keep them happy.
- Don't piss them off.

Finding People

This article is not about how to bring people into fandom. We'll just assume that future volunteers are current fans, the people you meet at your con or other conventions. The first point in getting people to work for you is to ask them. Some have trouble with this. One might assume that people will come forward, and a few will, but fans may be shy, or not sure they're welcome, or not sure the con needs more people. Others are reluctant to talk to people, thinking somehow it will just happen. It doesn't just happen. You have to get into the habit of asking people to volunteer. It helps to travel to nearby or related cons. After you've talked to a dozen people, it gets easier.

Another key is to answer email. Have a prominent page on your web site asking people to volunteer. If you respond within a week, people will think you're on the ball. If you respond within a month, they'll think you're a bit disorganized, but they'll still be happy to help. If it takes a year to respond (and this has happened with more than one Worldcon), people will be surprised when you contact them, likely committed elsewhere, and if they do volunteer, they'll feel like an afterthought, not part of the team, so if a crisis hits, they will have a "not my problem" attitude. The first email can be a "thanks for writing, we'll get back to you," though you should give people a time frame when to expect your next message.

The last key to bringing people onto the team is, when they offer to help, give them something to do. Don't leave people in limbo, don't make them "staff" without a more specific title. Once you give someone a title, they start to own it; the responsibility for success becomes theirs, and they start thinking of creative solutions.

Make People Happy

Here's a trick that I use: "This department is an elite team. We are specially chosen to complete this task, and the entire convention would fail without us. The work we do has been set up in such an optimized way that even if people watch us, they can't understand what we are getting done, or how much." Make it clear to the team that the department and task is important, and that the work they are doing will make a difference in the success or failure of the entire convention.

It's actually easy to make this true. There are a lot of critical teams within a convention, any one of which is necessary to the success of the event. Think of registration, programming, tech, facilities, everyone has a role to play. So all you have to do is explain how important the job they are doing is, and as much as you can, share any techniques or methods that can make your team more effective. But once you get this across, people will move with a lift in their step, they'll smile a bit more to external parties, they'll hustle when speed is important. Get them in the habit, and you can sustain an adrenaline level throughout the weekend. Not only will this help get a lot done, if your staff works twice as hard, it's as good as having twice as many people, and they'll also have more fun. That's essential. Because in the long run, the people who will end up working your con are not so much the

people that you talk to, it is the people that your team talks to.

You might be thinking that the con chair can't say that no department is more special than any other. But they can -every department has something special that it does.. It goes something like this: "This convention is a unique event in the history of our organization. We are going to have <some special event> <some new tradition> <some special outside attention> <something we've never done before>..." After all, if you're running a convention, it should be something special. Give it something that hasn't been done before. Not only will the special event probably be worthwhile, but the extra mileage you will get out of the committee will definitely make the convention memorable.

The next point in organizing people is to delegate work to them. Sounds obvious, but again this is something so many conrunners miss. Delegation has four components: trust, monitor, advise, and help. Trusting people may seem hard, but without it, they are just reluctant puppets, and it is as much work to supervise them as it is to do the work yourself. You have to set them to a task, and then let them do it. It may seem contradictory, but monitoring people is also key. That doesn't mean watching them work. It means that you give them a specified task, and then when they are supposed to be done, check on them and see how it went. For volunteers who need a lot of guidance, you would have a very short cycle of delegation and monitoring, but the basic principle applies. If someone does good work, you thank them and praise them; if they have a problem, you redirect them. Which brings up the next point. If someone doesn't know how to proceed, or if they aren't performing according to your expectations, give them suggestions as to how they might get things done more effectively. Finally, if someone is unable to complete a task you've given them, you help them. Maybe they need a computer, or someone to lift and carry, or transportation somewhere. You can assign extra people to the job, especially if the job actually does need more hands. If you have to, you can assign a person to a different task, or you can give them a break, or you can just show them how to do what you want. There is almost always a positive way to do this, and almost never a need or an advantage to having a negative approach to volunteers. In the end, remember, the con will be over soon, and while maybe you can fix problems that arise (and problems will always arise), you can't change the past. Even the most incompetent volunteer may have friends and contacts; if you let them exit while saving face, they'll at least talk about how nice you were, or how cool you were. Whereas if you fire someone at-con, they may go back to whatever club they're involved with and turn a lot of other people off your next con.

Another thing that is very important is communication, not just with the volunteers, but between them. The elements of communication are: listening, explaining, and maintaining open channels. Listening is a basic technique in any leadership, service, counseling, or sales job, so maybe you've had some training. An important point about listening is to try to talk for less than 20% of the conversation. Also, you need to be able to repeat what the other person is saying; summarize it back to them to make sure you've really heard and understood. The next technique is to explain things clearly. As best you can, outline in detail what you want them to do. Also, if there is doubt about the reason for an objective, one method of explanation that I use is something called "reverse empathy". All this means is that I explain my reasoning process for coming to a conclusion, leading them to the same result that I came to. Once they understand and agree that I have chosen the best option from what I have available, they are more likely to align their actions to my goals. The last element of communication is to have an open forum, where people can feel they have the opportunity to participate and contribute their ideas. Use a mailing list, a club meeting, whatever works. Don't try to dominate the discussion; the best ideas are the ones you haven't thought of yet.

Everyone remembers that knowledge is power. Some people use this to maintain a position within an organization, but in truth one of the worst approaches to leadership is to not share information you have. Some of the most effective leaders act like they know very little, that they rely completely on their team to know how to resolve a problem. That's a technique that can work well. Expertise can be a benefit, but this is a completely different thing from mere knowledge. Expertise is the ability to answer a hundred questions on a topic, to show people new skills and solutions over and over, and still be known to have more to offer. This does lend a person credibility and authority,

but only by sharing knowledge, not by hoarding it. Expertise can make a person reliable, even indispensable, in an organization, but even then, a specialized area of skill is almost always unrelated to the ability to manage people. Remember that management is getting work done through other people, so your knowledge of how to get things done doesn't help, except to the extent that you give that knowledge away. This is one of the main reasons that communication is essential; people need to know that they can ask questions and trust that they will be answered.

The last aspect in making people happy, and the most important thing, is to acknowledge the work they are doing. Get in the habit of saying thank you for every little thing, in person and in email. Singling out people in large gatherings works really well. One of the most effective ways of acknowledging people I ever saw was the way Tom Whitmore had teams of people stand up during the opening ceremonies at ConJosé, not just a few individuals. He ended this saying "everyone who doesn't know which division they're in, please stand up now," and that group was as numerous as any of the divisions. Nobody felt left out; everyone knew that they would be seen and recognized by those they'd worked with. Another very effective tool is any kind of personalized gift or written communication. Hand-written thank-you notes have a tremendous impact. At work, I gave department Christmas cards with a personal note and a \$5 gift certificate for books. Months later, I still saw those cards standing up on people's desks. Fans react the same way, only more so, because your gift or note isn't just a thank you, it is a memento of the event, an item of fannish memorabilia. Group acknowledgement only works if you have a large audience; something personal, one person to one person, always goes over well.

Don't Piss People Off

Observations as a result of things that have spectacularly not worked over the years:

- Don't ignore people. If you act like someone isn't there, they won't be around for long. This applies in person and in email.
- Don't expect anyone to do something you can't or won't. One of my frequent aphorisms is that I hold myself and people around me accountable for everything that is humanly possible, and nothing more. Too many people don't think through how a task might be accomplished, and then they lay blame for failing to accomplish the impossible. The volunteer knows they've done the right thing, so all that is accomplished by this kind of blame is to discredit the reputation of the leader.
- Try not to micromanage. The volunteer who is monitored too closely will wonder why they are needed at all. Leaders who micromanage are the ones that get talked about by the team, and not in a positive light. Remember that your relationship with one person can affect your relationship with the rest of the team.
- Don't disrespect people. Obvious things like sexist or racist remarks should be easy to avoid for civilized people in this century. But if you know someone is a gamer, an anime fan, or whatever, or even if you're simply not certain they are not, do not make fun of what might be someone else's special interest. Don't mock people's friends, clubs, favorite books or stars, because this has nothing to do with their ability to do what you want.
- Give people a break when real life interferes with them. If someone is fired from their paying job, if they have a family crisis or a personal problem, you are sure to fail to get them to do what you want by cracking down on them or questioning their priorities. A well-run team will have extra hands who can step in; even a team that is stretched thin should be motivated to help cover for a member who has to drop out for a while. Again this is a function of respect, which is the glue in social interactions.
- Don't assume that people are loyal to you personally. Some of your volunteers may not actually like you. Their reasons for working on the con may have to do with other volunteers, or they may be committed to the purpose of the convention but not the leadership. One of the hardest and most important things to learn is how to work with people you don't agree with. Any convention that gets larger than a dozen committee members will have some degree of politics and disagreement. If you

can find a modus vivendi to get along with people for the duration of the event, you can get the job done and sidestep the politics. The month after the convention is the best time to air everyone's grievances and pull out the dirty laundry, when the stakes are low and everyone will have forgotten by the time the next convention rolls around. Then you can find out who is aligned with whom, and who has what agenda (which is very useful to know before deciding on both the mission and the team of the next convention). If you can find a way to work with people who don't normally get along with you or with each other, your organization will be much stronger, with many more resources than you could possibly muster through mere loyalty and personal connection.

Final Thoughts

A good leader doesn't rely on their title, and doesn't just organize their subordinates. One can coach colleagues, superiors, even competitors. But if you're going to work with people and accomplish things through them, you will be much more effective if you care about them. This is a matter of worldview, not just technique; sincerity is essential. Similarly, to be able to do a job well, you have to be able to care about the job. You can't persuade anyone to believe in something you aren't committed to yourself.

The point of this entire piece is that you are planning how to run an event. People are a very important part of the plan, but not the only part. If you want to avoid a disaster, rehearse it. Having people around, having extra people around, is a very effective way to be able to react, proactively and reactively, to whatever situation may arise. The extra staff are "in training for next year," and you can always give them a sort of battlefield promotion if the need arises.

Have fun. Not just because that should be the objective, but also because nobody is going to want to follow you unless you're in a good place. Besides, you're in this for a reason; embrace your own motives. Share your enthusiasm. Remember that what you get from most people will be what you give them, so anything positive you contribute will be repaid many times over. If your organization or convention is worth doing, you won't be the only one doing it. Have a great con!

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Invitation and Maintenance of Guests of Honor

By Anne KG Murphy

September 21, at Midwest Construction, a group of us got together for a loosely structured panel/discussion about the care and feeding of Guests of Honor (GOHs), starting with their invitation. I took notes (a dirty habit that has landed me the secretary position on more than one Board of Directors) and now intend to share the highlights of that discussion.

Invitations

There are a couple stages to the invitation. First you send an introduction and invitation letter, and then later you send an actual contract. -In some cases it may be acceptable to call or email the person first, perhaps if someone on the concom knows them personally. Then send the invitation letter immediately afterwards. The purpose of the intro letter is to explain to the GOH who you are, why you are writing, and how nicely you intend to treat them should they accept your invitation. You also want to find out what it would take to bring them to your con. Some good things to include:

- “Planning has begun on (NAME OF CONVENTION)”
- to be held at (LOCATION) on (DATES)”
- position/title they are being invited under (_____ GOH)
- how much you really want them to come
- what being a GOH is like (Fun!) - both benefits and expectations
- details about the convention, and the group running it
- *that it is a fan run convention*
- the name and contact info for their response
- a preferred respond-by deadline (“please respond by _____”)

A contract letter on the other hand contains more explicit information about what they are going to get from you, and what you expect from them. It was noted that when you ask for a signed contract back, you are advised to accept only a contract signed by the guest, not their agent. We found that the benefits and expectations of a GOH varied a bit from con to con, so here are some options.

Benefits may include:

- Free membership for them and a guest (consider memberships for kids)
- Travel to and from the convention for them (and their guest)
- -includes being picked up at the airport (limousine optional)
- three to five room nights in the con hotel (varies)
- expenses: could be a (~\$35) per diem or, could cover all food expense
- free dealers room table(s)/art show hanging space
- a table for photo or book signing
- honorariums (think media guests)
- Reception or GOH Banquet/Breakfast

Expectations may include:

- Use of their name for convention promotion
- Participation in opening ceremonies (short speech)
- Participation in (at least 3) panels/programming activities
- Availability for autographing
- Program book signing for free (the con can do photo/signing pages)
- Reception or GOH Banquet/Breakfast

The minimum “given” for GOH benefits is membership, travel, room and board.

Special Care

A number of people suggested ways to facilitate and improve care of your GOH. A personal gift from your con chair can be a nice touch. A gift basket, with local goods and a con T-shirt, can be arranged to appear in their guest room. You can upgrade their guest room - ConFusion's GOHs, for instance, get jacuzzis. Marcon has a whole guest relations department, which not everybody does, but someone, possibly Programming, should coordinate your GOH Liaisons. These are people who communicate with your GOHs and in some cases act as liaisons between the GOHs and the programming department. During the convention, the liaison will be the person to make sure the GOH gets to all their scheduled activities, gets fed, and finds any necessary transportation away from the con.

To assist this process, you must ask useful questions of your GOH (a questionnaire is fine for this). When [and how] do they plan to arrive and depart? Are they allergic to anything? What kind of pillow do they like (feather/foam)? How many programming items do they prefer to participate in each day? At what time of day would they prefer to begin/end their participation? Are there any events [or other guests' programming] they don't want to miss, that you should not schedule them against? Are there any people that they would especially like (or dislike) being on a panel with? What else are they interested in that you may not know about? Be sure to follow-up with your GOH on any unresolved issue, and try to stay in touch with them. Once programming has a preliminary program list, it can be sent to each GOH to confirm which items they would like to participate in. Tell them about the green room, and what it's for.

So it sounds like inviting and caring for GOHs is not too difficult, but clear communication is key. Best of luck, and remember, GOHs are fun!

A Short History of Midfan: Midwest Construction 1

By Steven Silver

Perhaps it is a little strange, and self-serving, for the chairman of a convention to write a convention report, but it is something I feel like doing, so if you think it is wrong, just skip ahead to whatever article the editor has elected to place after this one.

Background

Midwest Construction got its start in December 2000 when Tammy Coxen, Erik V. Olson and I attended our first SMOFCon in Cocoa Beach. As has been reported, afterwards, Tammy commented on the SMOFS mailing list that she had been looking for a discussion which focused more on running a local or regional convention. In a fit of lunacy, I sent an e-mail to Erik Olson, asking what he thought of the idea and the next thing I knew, I was trying to get a convention up and running.

Over the course of the next year and a half, Erik, Tammy and I worked to sell the idea of a Midwest con-runners con to Midwestern con-runners, to many of whom the idea seemed new. When looking for a weekend to hold it, we discovered the sheer number of Midwest conventions caused difficulty if we wanted to avoid all of them and also avoid major non-Midwestern conventions. We also wanted to make sure we were far enough away from SMOFCon's traditional date that we wouldn't have a negative affect on SMOFCon's attendance. We conceived of Midwest Construction as a complement to SMOFCon and hoped that it would convince more Midwestern fans to attend it. In fact, one of the reasons we decided to hold the first Midwest Construction in 2002 was that we feared people would see it as a sort of NASFiC version of SMOFCon if we held it in a year (2001) when SMOFCon was held abroad (York, England).

The hotel we selected for Midwest Construction 1 was the Embassy Suites—Rosemont, in Rosemont, Illinois. It is located only five minutes from O'Hare, which meant that people coming in from out of town could either take the el or a free shuttle from the airport. Unfortunately, it also

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meant that the number of dining opportunities was somewhat limited. The hotel is eight stories tall and built around an atrium, which runs from the second floor to the eighth. The hospitality suite that would be the consuite was located at the front of the hotel on the second floor. It opened out to the hotel's dining area, where they host a buffet breakfast and cocktail hour which are included in the cost of the room nights. Although the \$109 basic rate seems a little steep, it not only included breakfast, but also gave the guest a large suite.

On the evening of September 19, 2002, I headed over to the Embassy Suites for a program book compilation party in the hospitality suite. I was joined by Mark Herrup, Elaine Brennan, Uncle Vlad and Gudi Stockman. Eventually, his flight delayed by weather, Erik Olson showed up with the program books. Before we made the books, we broke for dinner at the hotel's restaurant, which is extremely good. I had eaten with the family before heading down to the hotel, so I just snarfed up rolls while the others dined. The actual production of the program books (a total of 100) went very quickly. The program book was short, only four double-sided pages. Earlier in the week, we had sent out an invitation for advertising to current worldcon bids and Kansas City took out an ad on the back cover. The cover art, depicting a couple of fans building the Tucker Hotel out of beer kegs, was created in only three days by Ohio fan Kurt Erichsen.

While we were collating, I half-jokingly asked Mark if he would be my Vice Chair for Windycon. The person who had been my Vice Chair had resigned at the August meeting because family pressures of helping her sick mother meant she couldn't devote as much time to the con as she felt was necessary. At one point in the conversation, Mark said, "Yes," in front of witnesses. By the end of the con, several people who weren't there for the conversation were backing up my assertion that he had said yes.

Day One: Friday, September 20, 2002

The Friday morning the con was to start, I was speaking to my wife about it and we both commented on the difficulty in believing the convention had already arrived. For so long, it had been a future event. At the same time, I didn't feel like it had been consuming my entire life the way some other cons have, despite being the first con I would chair.

When I arrived at the hotel, I went to open the hospitality suite and discovered that my key wouldn't work. Erik and Elaine Brennan showed up, having taken a run to O'Hare Field in search of coffee, and watched my luggage while I went down to the front desk to ask about the key. They re-coded it and I let myself into the room, to discover that Pat Sayre McCoy, the consuite hostess, had already been in to drop off victuals. Apparently, when they coded her key, it superseded the key they gave me. Pat showed up again a few moments after we had entered the room and we set to work setting up.

We had a pretty good idea of our membership and Erik had made badges for some people who didn't have memberships but who sounded like they would be coming. Because of this, four of our at-the-door members had pre-printed badges and we only had to have five members write their names on blank badges.

Among the first to show up, was Halmer Haag. Hal had driven up from Maryland, bringing along numerous card games to inflict on the membership. I hadn't seen Hal since the SMOFCon that sparked off Midwest Construction when he had forced me to learn to play "Fluxx" and "Chrononauts" at 2:00 AM. This time, he promised, he would teach me to play "Plague and Pestilence" and "Apples to Apples." In fact, while waiting for the con to officially begin, we sat down at the table Erik and I had designated the night before as the Gaming area and he began to teach Pat and me to play P&P. Our first game lasted quite a while, with Hal being forced out first, and me a few hands later. Pat turned out to be in a much stronger position than either of us had realized. I excused myself to go to the front of the room and Pat and Hal played a second game with a few other people, Pat winning quite easily.

Erik, Jim Murray and Hal left on a trek to the local Dominick's and a Chicago fast food place

called Mr. Beef, Chicken and Rib, to bring back food for lunch. While they were gone, I took a quick look at the hotel résumé and realized that I had jumped the gun, we did not officially have the function space until 6:00. I ran down to the room and determined it was empty from 11 until 6 and called down to the sales manager's office. Dawn had the day off, but her assistant, Amanda, double checked the booking and let us know that it wouldn't be a problem for us to start using the room early, and she would make sure it was set up in time. A few days earlier we had run into a similar problem with Sunday's schedule, and the hotel kindly extended our stay in the room for a couple of hours at the end of the convention.

I had met most of the people coming to Midwest Construction, so if I did not recognize a face, there were only a limited number of people who it could have been, assuming a pre-registration. In fact, we only had two at-the-door registrations for people I didn't know, and neither did any of the other members. I later found out that they represented a for-profit con-running organization, which, while not our target audience, was certainly welcome.

The con officially began with a panel on Increasing at-Con Income at 5:00. The panelists were Bill Roper, who has not only run dealers' rooms and art shows, but also works as a huckster under the pseudonym of The Secret Empire, and Barb van Tilburg, who is part of OffWorld Designs, a company which provides T-Shirts to many conventions. In fact, Barb provided Midwest Construction with a fantastic T-shirt, depicting Streiberesque aliens working on a construction site in Chicago. She had agreed to subsidize the shirts and sell them for only \$10. The shirts were so nice that after Barb ran out, she took orders for several more, eventually selling the shirts to more than 75% of the convention.

Dinner saw people hanging out at the consuite wondering where the promised restaurant guide was. Earlier in the week, Erik had contacted Dick and Leah Smith and asked if they would be willing to provide the guide. They agreed, and showed up with it about halfway through the dinner break. I joined a largish group heading down to Frannie's, a small hot dog place I used to have an occasional lunch at when I worked in Rosemont. The group consisted of Pat, Tammy, Jeff Beeler, Eloise Beltz-Decker, Anne K.G. Murphy, Alex von Thorn, Marah Searle, and probably a couple of other people. Since Frannie's only holds about 15 people, it was a good thing it was completely empty when we got there.

I had been wrestling with an idea for a mixer for some time and had been coming up blank. My wife Elaine and I had discussed it several times and the best idea we had come up with was to have people make appointments to talk to other people and then have them talk, but it didn't seem right. On Thursday night, I brainstormed with the program book party and we came up with the idea of making the mixer a no-Smoffing zone. We liked this idea because while many of us would know each other, frequently our only discussions were on convention running. This would give us a chance to know more about each other as individuals. That night I mentioned the idea to Elaine, and she suggested that I structure it by forming two circles and after each topic having the outer circle shift one space. At the con, I further altered the plan by pausing after each discussion round to ask about the conversations held in the previous round. When Erik heard our plan, he expressed admiration for the idea

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of declaring a Smoffish gathering to have a no-Smoffing zone.

Of course, nobody likes taking part in mixers and there was a lot of grumbling, but people began moving their chairs into the circles and we began. The topics ranged from travel to favorite museums with people really getting into it when the announced topic was worst teachers in high school or college. Throughout the mixer, people kept coming back from dinner, with some choosing to participate and others heading up to the consuite. Afterwards, several people commented on how the questions about previous conversations were evil, but also made them pay more attention to the conversations once they realized what I was doing. If I were to do the mixer again, I would want to do it in a larger room in relation to the number of participants.

The final item officially scheduled for the evening was a panel on Registration. The panelists included Susette France, who runs registration at Windycon, Mark Herrup, who worked pre-reg at the recent ConJosé, and Randy Kaempfen & Sharon Sbarsky, who had worked together to run registration for Chicon 2000. Although these were the panelists, as in all cases, they were more discussion leaders than panelists in the traditional sense of the term, a procedure that would run throughout the convention.

Following the panel, Tammy was planning to give a talk on the history of chocolate in the consuite, which doubled as a chocolate tasting. She had written the topic up on a sign-up sheet which would also allow people to add panels in the 10 AM slot on either Saturday or Sunday.

Rather than attending the panel, I hung out in the consuite, where I was sucked into a game of Apples to Apples with Hal Haag, Anne Murphy, Marcy Lyn-Waitsman, Eloise Beltz-Decker, Pat Sayre McCoy, and Jeff Beeler. As the game progressed, we were joined at various times by Seth Breidbart, Bill Roper, Phoenix, Uncle Vlad, and quite possibly several other people. I decided that I would drop out of the ongoing game when I had amassed 20 cards, which occurred around 3:30 in the morning. During the early stages of the game, we kept looking at the cards people amassed and wondering what they were; Eloise declared herself a new soda pop, and I was obviously Lorenzo de Medici.

During the evening, the BidColumbus people, Lisa and Matthew Ragsdale, Rick Waterson, Kim Williams, and Susette and Richard France, threw a party in support of the bid. People kept wandering into the consuite with reports of the party, but given that it was being held in a smoking suite, and apparently many people were taking advantage of that fact to smoke, I decide not to attend.

Upon reaching my room, I remembered I wanted to go back to the consuite (next door to my room) to retrieve my laptop. While there, I made sure that both Tammy and Erik knew which room I was in, since the room registered to me was inhabited by Pat and I was in a room registered to Midwest Construction.

Day Two: Saturday, September 21, 2003

Saturday began much earlier than I wanted it to. At 5:00, the alarm clock in the room next door to me, opposite the consuite, began to go off, sounding like a truck backing up. Since I was pretty sure the room was empty, I called down to the front desk to ask them to turn the alarm off. They said it was occupied and they would call the room and arrange to have it turned off. The sound continued until 7:00, when I managed to fall back asleep until 9:00.

Although the program book announced that panels would begin at 11:00, a group had announced that they would use the unscheduled 10:00 period for a panel on Keeping It Fresh; how to bring new and interesting things into your convention without completely changing it each year.

The 11:00 Publications panel with Erik V. Olson, Richard France, James J. Murray and Anne K.G. Murphy was supposed to discuss what, if anything, could be done with a convention's website during the convention, but the panel agreed that there was little that could be done during the con and focused more on pre-con websites and linking them with the print portion of the publications division.

While that panel was taking place, Pat set out lunch for the attendees. Pat ran the green room for me at Windycon for two years and made sure that none of the con's panelists went hungry. At Chicon, she provided green room service for more than 600 panelists and the hospitality there has yet to be matched by a worldcon. For Midwest Construction, she provided a wide range of cold cuts and several types of bread to complement to more snack-ish consuite fare. With no restaurants very close, nearly the entire membership ate in the consuite. Although Pat overbought slightly, we would use the remainder to supplement Sunday's lunch.

During lunch, Tammy tried to convince me to have Elaine bring out my tuxedo, so I could look nice for the banquet. I borrowed Marcy Lyn-Waitsman's cell phone and gave her a call. She wasn't sure if she would be able to bring it out, but she would try. She would also try to put together some registration forms for Midwest Construction 2.

Kelley Higgins had to bow out of the first post-lunch panel on Honoring and Selecting Guests of Honor because of prior commitments, but kT Fitzsimmons and Lisa Ragsdale spent the hour discussing the manner in which their conventions work with guests of honor. It seems like each convention goes about selecting their guests in a different way

I chose the panelists for "What to do When Reality Intrudes on Your Con?" based on people who had experience with bad things happening at con. Hal Haag was involved with the infamous Driplave incident, Jim Mann was running Ops at the "Boskone from Hell" and "Uncle Vlad" was involved with Duckon in 2001 when a member accidentally committed suicide in the con suite bathroom. Later in the day, although it wouldn't affect Midwest Construction itself, reality would intrude in a particularly nasty way on my own MWC experience.

Helen Montgomery and Alex von Thorn led a discussion on how to go about finding new volunteers for a convention at all levels and the proper way to recognize those volunteers in order to keep them coming back and moving up the chain of command.

The only item I programmed myself to be on was on how to make old panel topics fresh again. I was joined by Jeff Beeler and Jim Mann, and I think we managed to stay relatively close to our topic. We certainly didn't stray off of programming and we managed to avoid programming philosophy battles.

We lost our function space at 5:00 because it was being given to a wedding, but the banquet wasn't scheduled to take place until 6:30. Because of this, I had scheduled a flyer critique for the con suite. I figured it would be an informal affair, but at the last minute, I asked Anne Murphy to lead it. Anne collected up a copy of each of the flyers on the sideboard of the con suite and proceeded to point out their strong points and their weaknesses before passing them around the room and inviting other people to comment on them. Not surprisingly, none of the flyers were perfect, and people compared them to each other. Most people found the session educational and nobody appeared to take offense at having their con's flyers deconstructed.

I had not heard anything from Elaine about my tuxedo, so I changed into a Midwest Construction T-shirt for the banquet. I later found out that Elaine had dropped off the tuxedo at the front desk. Major disconnect.

One of the big concerns we had going into the con was whether we would be able to sell the 44 banquet tickets we need to make the food sales we had promised the hotel. When we had only 28 reservations a week before the con, I arranged for some coffee services to be sent to the con suite on Saturday and Sunday morning. This resulted in our only needing to sell 37 banquet tickets to cover the cost of the banquet. As the banquet was about to start, we had sold 36 tickets plus a half-price ticket to Ron and Tara Oakes for their 6-year-old nephew. Matthew Heermann approached me and asked if he could still buy a ticket with the result that we sold 37½ tickets. The hotel had estimated food perfectly. There may have been enough food for 40 people, but I doubt it.

First Steps: MidFanZine #1 - Fall 2002

When I worked in Rosemont, my office was right next to the hotel, then called the Rosemont Suites. We occasionally came over for lunch, so I knew the food had been exceptional. A couple of years ago, Chicon held a meeting at the hotel, which confirmed that the food was fantastic. Erik, Mark and I had been telling everyone how good the food was, but nobody really believed us until they actually tasted the food. We had opted for a buffet, which meant people could take as much of whatever they wanted. The buffet line began with three salads: a green salad, a salad Nicoise with Ahi tuna, and a marinated artichoke and pepper salad. This was followed by garlic mashed potatoes, grilled vegetables, and rolls. The main course was sliced roast beef with shitake mushrooms and herbed roasted chicken with tomato salsa. At the end of the buffet line, a waiter was serving tomato Florentine soup. Lemon, berry and chocolate raspberry tarts served as dessert.

I opened the business meeting by welcoming everyone and explaining that, although we wanted to have an auction, the only things we could find to auction off were a Tuckerization in Tom Veal's next book on pension plan management and Torcon III, although Alex von Thorn wasn't sure he had the right to do that. I then announced that there had been a close race for Midwest Construction 2, but since this one had been held in Chicago, we decided the next would be held in Ann Arbor, Michigan, chaired by out-going President Tammy Coxen, instead of on the three-master "The Windy," to be chaired by Neil Rest. We promised that once Tammy knew what hotel MWC2 would take place in and which weekend, we would let everyone know, but they could buy a membership before leaving the convention if they desired.

Tammy proceeded to explain a little of what Midfan wants to do, in both the short term: Midwest Construction, Midfanzine, and a SMOFCon in the region, and in the long term: creating a traveling Midwestern regional convention and hosting a Midwestern Worldcon. She also explained what a Subscribing membership would get people and invited the members of Midfan to purchase subscribing memberships during the weekend. We expected to get perhaps six new members. One of the reasons we only invited people to become subscribing members at this point is that I had only written up a set of by-laws on Thursday. Although we had adopted them earlier in the day, we did so with the stipulation that we would revisit certain sections of the by-laws, notably those dealing with active members, before making those parts official.

Tammy turned the floor back over to me and we invited our members to make presentations about their various conventions. Beginning in October, Barb van Tilburg went through her calendar and called off the names of each convention in the Midwest. At first, people would speak about each one. If no representatives from a con were around, someone who had attended the con would say a few words about it. Eventually, we realized that we were taking way too long and said that only conventions with direct representation could speak. Despite that, we still had to postpone the planned fannish inquisition until lunch on Sunday.

Saturday night saw the appearance of two ghosts at the convention, hitting the various parties. The ghosts were married to two of our members, and I'll have to check, next time I attend a convention one of them is chairing, if my wife can ghost their con. I invited the ghosts to attend the final panel of the convention on Sunday, where the topic would be "Parties and Ghosts," but they chose not to attend.

I again did not attend the Columbus bid party. The stories of smoke in the room made me decide to steer clear. Instead, I bounced back and forth between the Midfan party and the KC in '06 party. Tammy was busy collecting memberships for both MWC2 and Midfan, and was pulling cash out of her bra for me every time I came into the room. The last time I counted the money, sometime late Saturday night, we had brought in nearly \$2300 since the start of the convention (in memberships for both MWC1 & 2, the banquet and Midfan memberships). Our bankroll prior to the con was only around \$1300. Perhaps not in the league of money Stephen Boucher collected for the nascent Australia in 2010 bid, but Erik, Tammy and I were rather crogged by the amount of money people were throwing at us.

I sat in the back room of the Midfan room talking to Anne Murphy about what I envisioned *Midfanzine* to be and we talked about content, advertising, and what should go on the website for the zine. Earlier in the day, Tammy had appointed Anne to be the editor of *Midfanzine*. We also discussed schedule and Anne's goal is to publish the first issue of the zine in time to be distributed to members at Windycon in seven weeks. We decided that the Fall issue of the zine each year would focus on con-running while the Spring issue would be more geared to building general fannish ties.

Around 1:00, Pat went to her room. She quickly came back out and mentioned that there were two messages for me from Elaine. The first was that Elaine had dropped off my tuxedo at the front desk (but not my shoes or socks), the second that I had received a couple of packages in the mail, one addressed to Midfan, the other including the galleys and coverflats for my second anthology, *Magical Beginnings*.

At some point during the evening, I was approached by Rick Waterson and Mike Bakula. For the past few years, they, along with some other fans representing the various Chicago cons, had been toiling away at the Chifan project. This would be a database accessible to all Chicago cons, although each con could only retrieve information they put in. The database would, however, compare addresses and update them so that the next time a convention retrieved their mailing list, all the addresses would be the most current without the fans having to inform each convention individually. Rick and Mike had begun to think that Chifan would be the perfect type of project to transfer over to Midfan. While I had thought the same thing when Midfan was being formed, I had been careful not to broach the subject because I didn't want the Chifan people to think we were trying to horn in on them. I told them that Midfan adoption of the Chifan project would need to be discussed at the next Midfan meeting and they should have a proposal ready for us.

Mark Herrup approached me to discuss whether or not he would be able to fill in as my vice-chair for Windycon. We agreed that he would if he could find someone to take his current position in Ops. We also noted that while lately the position of Vice-Chair has been seen as a stepping stone to the chairmanship, he wasn't interested in pursuing that promotion at this time, which is fine.

I went to bed about 1:30 on Sunday morning, intent on getting more sleep than the night before. About ten minutes later, the couple in the room next to me arrived at their room. I heard slamming doors, running, the non-creative use of a certain four-letter vulgarity, the sound of fist hitting flesh and screaming. At the time I didn't know if it was a couple or if there was a child involved, not that it really mattered. I tossed on my shirt and jeans and went down to the front desk to report the domestic dispute. The desk told me that they would send a security guard up and I decided that I really didn't want to be around when he arrived. Rather than go back to the room, I went up to the fourth floor to continue bouncing between the Midfan and KC parties.

In the KC party, I told Erik what had happened and the two of us walked out onto the hall/balcony. The hotel has a full height atrium, so we could look over the side and see my room. As we did so, we saw a woman walk out of the room next to mine and hurry across the second floor, which was the bottom of the atrium (where my room, and the consuite, were located). She was followed out of the room by the hotel security guard and another man who was buttoning up his shirt. Erik and I went down to the Midfan party for a while and when I stuck my head out again, I could see a Rosemont police officer talking to the man. A little later, there were four Rosemont cops talking to him.

If I were a Rosemont policeman, I would probably have spoken to the man either in his room, in the hotel's offices or in a function space. Instead, they sat with him outside his room (and mine) for nearly two hours, until they took him down to the lobby around 3:30. Some of the gamers in the con suite overheard the police talking to him and Jeff Beeler said that he heard the guy say that it was his wedding night, although when I asked Dawn about it the next day, she said that she did not recognize the name of the people. They may have attended the wedding, but they weren't the bride and groom.¹

Day Three: Sunday, September 22, 2002: Ghughle Revelation Day

I was awoken at 10:00 by Elaine called from the consuite. She had brought Robin and Melanie by the hotel so we could go swimming. They came over to my room, and fortunately Robin, the 4½-year-old, had thought to remind Elaine to bring my swimsuit. We swam for about 40 minutes before I had to get back to be ready to attend the first panel of the day. Robin really wanted to look around in the hotel gift shop, so Elaine took her in while Melanie (our 1-year-old) and I attended the panel. Melanie kept humming softly and Elaine eventually came with Robin to take the girls home.

Sunday's first panel was on hotel liaising, and in addition to putting two fans on the panel to lead the discussion, I also included Dawn Trandel, the hotel's assistant sales manager, to provide the hotel's point of view. The discussion was led by Seth Breidbart, Margene Bahm, and Dawn. As the hour progressed, more and more questions were targeted directly to Dawn. After the panel, many people commented that having Dawn on the panel was one of the most useful aspects of the entire convention. Dawn also found her experience useful. Following the panel, she met with Mark Herrup and told him that she was amazed at the knowledge of the industry our questions demonstrated. It also gave her more of an understanding of how groups work and what they look for.

For lunch, we put out the leftovers from Saturday and also ordered six pizzas. We planned to hold a fannish inquisition for the bids, which did not have a chance to present at the banquet, but I was suffering from too little sleep and the formation of a headache. I told Erik that I was going to lie down, and as he shepherded me out of the room, several people called to ask me questions. Erik turned around and told them that I was too tired and he pushed me down the hall to my room, where I took a couple of Advil™, snarfed some Pepperoni pizza (there was no Cheese pizza and the only non-meat pizza had fungus on it), and lay in bed, awake, hoping my headache would go away.

There were two post-lunch panels. The first, with Robert C. King, Eloise Beltz-Decker, and Matthew Ragsdale, was about how to incorporate special interest fandom into the convention, both by giving them space and by encouraging them to participate in the convention outside their own special interest. The final item, with Tammy Coxen and Bob Palmer was about the troubles at cons with parties and ghosting.

My "nap," in which I didn't get any sleep, lasted until around 1:00, when the post-lunch panels began. I wandered back into the consuite to see how things were going.

In the back room of the consuite, Kelley Higgins offered to provide me with a neck rub, which managed to get rid of the last remnants of my headache. While Kelley was rubbing my neck, Mike Bakula was talking to Bill Higgins in the room and happened to ask why some of us, notably Mark Herrup and I, were wearing pins with an asterisk on them. Rather than give him the long explanation, I grabbed a copy of *Argentus* that Erik had brought to the con and opened it to the article on Ghughle for him. September 22, of course, being the first anniversary of the Ghreat Revelation of Ghughle as a true ghod. Eloise Beltz-Decker, one of the original Ghughlytes, introduced a sign for Ghughlytes to make which depicts the holy asterisk and also symbolizes Ghughle's tentacles.

I checked at the front desk to see if Elaine had taken my tuxedo home with her and the clerk checked and saw that the message indicator had been deleted, so I figured Elaine must have taken it. When I got home, I discovered that Elaine hadn't. I called Mark Herrup, who was staying at the hotel an extra night and asked him to pick up my tux and bring it to the Windycon meeting on Friday.

Following the last panel, Erik declared a gripe session and closing ceremonies in the consuite.

¹ Several weeks after MWC1, I spoke to the hotel sales manager, who filled me in on part of the story. When the hotel security guard interrupted them, the woman told him something of what had happened (he was an off-duty Rosemont police officer, which she didn't know). By the time the on-duty cops arrived, she had changed her story to claim she had fallen. As happens in all too many of these cases, she has elected not to press charges against him.

The gripe session opened with Tracy Lunquist complaining about the quality of the dance, and when I broke into a little dance, she complained about the quality even more. She also wanted to know why, if the con was a sercon, we had so much gaming going on at night. However, as the convention had parties, ghosts, and hotel incidents, we determined it must have been an official convention. In fact, the convention itself went so well that I joked about gafiating, since I had obviously run a con which was as close as I would ever achieve to perfection.

On the other hand, if I had to do it over again, there are things I would have done differently. The suite design of the hotel would have given us the perfect opportunity to hold breakout sessions on a variety of topics, an idea which had been bandied about early in the planning of the convention, but which fell by the wayside at some point. I was lucky in having Anne K.G. Murphy to step in on the flyer critique because it would not have worked well as I had originally envisioned it. Because I planned for the panelists to be the discussion leaders, I didn't designate any individuals to be moderators, which probably would have been helpful. I would also open the program book up to more advertising, from locals and regionals and not just worldcon/NASFiC bids.

Midwest Construction 1 Statistics:

Full members at con: 55	Countries represented: 2
Day members at con: 3 (1 Friday, 2 Saturday)	Hours of programming: 14 (including 2-hour mixer)
Total members at con: 58	Banquet attendees: 37½
Full members not in attendance: 4	Parties: 4
Supporting members: 3	Members/party: 14.5
Total members: 65	T-shirts sold: 44 (76% sell rate)
Pre-registered members: 56	Ghosts: 2
At the door sales: 9	Pre-registrations for Midwest Construction 2: 8
States represented: 13	New members of Midfan: 19
Provinces represented: 1	

7 Hints For Throwing a Great Room Party

by Tammy Coxen

Room parties are one of my favorite things about conventions. And over my last few years in fandom, I've hosted a lot - at conventions large and small. Different kinds of parties will have different requirements - a party to promote a Worldcon or NASFiC bid will be very different from a party to promote a local convention, for example. I'm not going to talk about those specific requirements here. Instead, I'm going to list 7 key hints/ guidelines that I think apply to most every party, no matter what its goal.



1. Have enough help. It's hard to run a room party with one person. It's possible, but it's not nearly as much fun. I'd suggest two as a minimum, and more depending on the type of party you're throwing. For a large party (like at a Worldcon), you'll need four - one to greet people at the door, one to sell memberships/ pre-supports, one to bartend, and one to restock food and mingle.
2. Greet people at the door. As long as you've got enough people, always have someone actively working the door. Why? 1) Having someone talk to them as soon as they arrive makes your party attendees feel welcomed. If you walk into a room full of people talking only to each other, and no one even looks up and says hi, you're likely to walk right back out again. And it identifies someone of whom they can ask questions. 2)

Stickers! Everyone loves stickers (well, maybe not everyone). Besides being a neat badge accessory and way of welcoming people, stickers have an added bonus - they let you count how many people attended your party. If you know you started with 300 stickers, and you're left with 100 at the end of the night, then you know that 200 people passed through your party. Besides the egoboo inherent in this system, you can use this information to better plan your next party. 3) Badging. If you're throwing a room party to drum up memberships or pre-supports for your own convention, maybe you want to think twice about spending supplies and energy on people who couldn't be bothered to buy a membership at the convention they're at.

3. Do something different. Having some sort of schtick can really push a party to the next level. A theme - like the Minicon "everything-on-a-stick" parties. Decorations - like the elaborate Star Wars parties thrown by Chicago Force. My own personal favorite schtick was for a room party I held at Chicon 2000 to promote Mystery God ConFusion. Upon entering the party, people were greeted by myself (dressed as Athena) or my co-host (dressed as a priest of Cthulu) and offered "communion" - a Nilla wafer dipped ceremoniously in chocolate syrup. It was a fun little activity that immediately pulled people into the party and made them feel welcome.

4. Serve something different. It seems like everyone serves the same things at their room parties - corn chips with bad salsa, M&Ms, Oreos. Next time, try something more interesting. Weird Japanese treats. Pickled brussel sprouts. Unusual potato chip flavors. Homemade baked goods. Unnaturally colored sodas. Microbrew beer. Interesting alcoholic punch, like "Skip and Go Naked" or "Blog." While we're on the subject of food and drink - if you're going to serve regular sodas, then serve good brand name stuff - not random store brand cola.

5. Presentation matters. Don't just open up bags of chips and leave them on tables - use a bowl. Baskets make great serving items. Whole pieces of good cheese on a tray with a knife have a certain je ne sais quoi that pre-cubed cheese will never have.

6. Achieve critical mass. Have you ever noticed that the full parties get ever more crowded, and the quiet parties get quieter? It's all about critical mass - that magic number of people that makes something look interesting. It can be hard to achieve, especially in the early part of the evening, when one or two people drop in and then leave before the next one or two arrive. My recommendation? Cheat. Either have enough people working the party to create critical mass all on your own, or sweet talk a few friends into being there for the first hour or so of your party - once critical mass gets rolling, it's easy to maintain.

7. Think about traffic flow. Before the party starts, think about what you want people to do when they walk in, and make it easy for them to do that. If the beer and soda is in the bathtub, put up a sign to let people know that. Move lamps and furniture to create more open and welcoming spaces. Put food farther back in the room, so people aren't creating a log jam at the doorway. Create conversational clusters by arranging chairs and furniture to facilitate multiple conversations. If you're selling memberships, make it obvious where to go to pre-register.

Have a great party! And remember - if you're not having fun, then your guests probably aren't either.

Letter Of Comment

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Okay, so this is our first issue and we don't have any letters of comment. But the column is here anyway, because it's waiting for *your* input. So pick up your pens and keyboards, guys and gals, and tell us what you think!