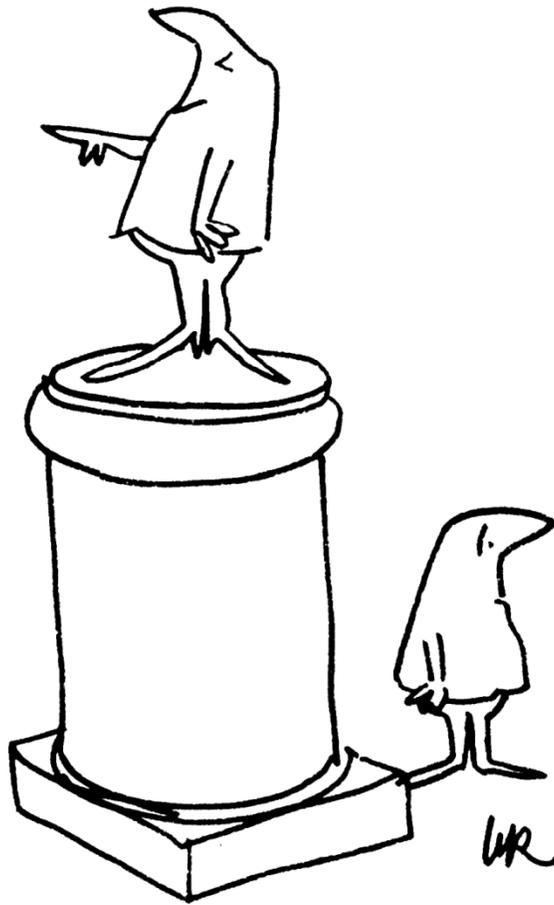


MIDFANZINE #5



Onward!

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MidFanzine 5: Onward! November 2010

Available for \$3 or the Usual to editor@midfan.org. Anne Gray, 2726 Sagebrush Circle Apt 203, Ann Arbor, MI 48103. Articles and art submissions welcome. *MidFanzine* is produced by Midwest Fannish Conventions (Midfan), which is a loosely associated group of like-minded Midwest smofs who want to encourage knowledge-sharing about convention running in the Midwest. It used to be a legal entity, has run a few conventions, and may do both of those things again.

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Editorial Comments

Greetings!

2010 has been a helluva year for me, including appendicitis, two moves, a wonderful Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund (TAFF) trip with my partner Brian Gray, getting married in May, and then on August 18th the birth of our daughter, Rosalind Jane Gray. I had originally planned for this issue of *MidFanzine* to come out in the Spring, to be followed by a Fall edition. I actually had it mostly gathered together, but then conditions associated with pregnancy made it hard for me to spend dedicated time at the computer in late Spring, and then of course I had this beautiful newborn to get to know and learn to take care of...



I think by this time I should accept the message of the universe that this is not meant to be a twice-yearly publication. Each time I try to make it come out twice a year, Life intervenes. So here we are with another Fall issue, and I will plan to have the next issue out in the Fall of next year. Which makes sense, really, since I am leading art programming and coordinating a visual arts festival night for Renovation in August, and will thus probably be too busy to give *MidFanzine* a lot of attention before September.

I do have big plans for the next issue, however. Steven Silver has promised me an article on Ad Swapping, fan artist Chris Jones has agreed to give us the history of the CONvergence android mascot, Connie, and I'm thinking the theme is branding and promoting your convention. I'd love to see articles on other convention mascots as well. The use of fan art for convention identity and promotion is an important topic that I'm excited we'll be addressing. Further, I plan to write an article on how we could better promote our conventions to reach and attract minority SF fans (with some further notes on how you might help them feel welcome once they arrive). I'm hoping to get an article from the folks running Diversicon about their efforts, too.

Articles and artwork on these and other conrunning topics are welcome, as well as commentary on this or any previous issue. The archive of *MidFanzine* is being mirrored on eFanzines.com so I'm hoping back issues will be easier for people to discover than by just having them on the Midfan website.

Cheers,

—Anne K Gray

LAFF: Latin American Fan Fund

Being a TAFF delegate was wonderful. We met lots of terrific people, saw places we wouldn't have seen otherwise, and I came home feeling invigorated about fannish pursuits and fandom in general. Shortly after the return home, I was reviewing the selection of fan funds at http://www.fanac.org/fan_funds/ and was saddened to realize there was nothing current that involved the fandom of Latin America. This reminded me of a napkin I saw on a flight last year. The airline was advertising new non-stop flights to Paris and other European cities under a headline like Opening the World to You. This is an airline that does not have service to Latin America at all. Is it not a large part of the world? Too often the southern Americas are overlooked and ignored. In the meantime, they are full of science fiction and fantasy fans and writers. I for one would like to meet some of them. And I feel our Worldcons are lacking without more participation from those corners.

Therefore, I have begun to assemble an international committee to create a Latin American Fan Fund, to bring fans from Latin America to Worldcon. We are raising seed funds right now—donations are welcome! Joe Siclari and Jack Weaver have helpfully given us web space at <http://www.fanac.org/LAFF>. You can find out more there or by contacting us at laff.ffl@gmail.com.

Tips on Dating Your Hotel, Part 2

By Jer Lance

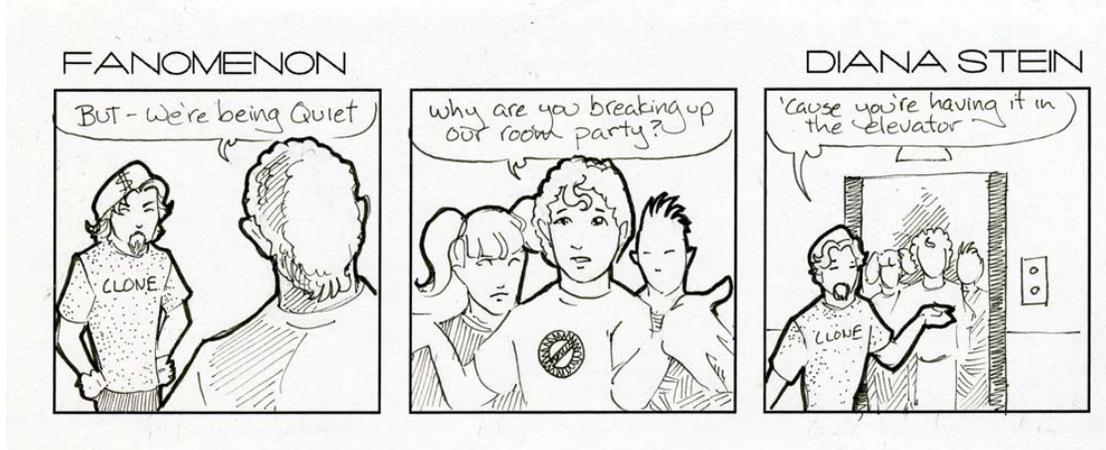
So, you find yourself stuck in the thankless and time-consuming position of coordinating the facilities for an event. As we discussed in the previous installment, **Facility Selection** (and if you haven't read that, it is probably a good idea to start there), you have already interviewed dozens of potential facilities, and now you have settled on a small group of possibilities. Now it is time to get the lowest possible price for the best selection of services from each, so that you can make the ultimate decision. It is time for...

Contract Negotiation

Contract negotiation is often referred to as a “dark art” simply because it is something that is as difficult to describe in process as would be “how to pick up a guy or gal”. Soft skills are always so difficult to pin down, and intricate sets of rules will never outperform the gut-feel that comes with experience when it comes down to starting any kind of relationship—but that does not mean that there is not a great deal you can learn to get started.

The single most important thing to remember is that everything you do as liaison is part of maintaining a relationship between your event and the hotel. It is imperative that both parties feel like they have come away with a win, or you will be forced to struggle with obstinate management, annoyed staff, and strict adherence to the letter of the contract. Rather than a confrontational experience, actively seeking to ensure that everyone's needs are met can transform the employees at your facility from ‘those guys and gals you ask things of’ to fellow members of your event team. At every stage of the process, remind yourself that you are negotiating with your convention committee on behalf of the hotel as much as you are negotiating with the hotel on behalf of your committee.

With that in mind, the first thing that you can do when you are readying to negotiate is to prepare. Before you ever walk in the door to start discussing money, you need to know what is important to your organization. I find it helpful to list every single facet of the event, then break that list into four smaller lists: “Essential” – things that you have to have, without which, there is no event; “Important” – things that are strongly desired, and you would be willing to sacrifice a great deal to get them; “Desired” – these are things that the organization really hopes to have, but would not end the event were they not to happen; and “Icing” – items that could be nice to have, but are not of any importance whatsoever, fodder for trading, as it were. As an example, our local convention ConFusion is a collection of panels that take place in the function space as much as 24-hours per day (making 24-hour access *essential* to the convention) and has a fairly large party scene that is *important* to both attendees and planners. Access to a swimming pool is a strongly *desired* option as well that has influenced hotel considerations to some degree, whereas having suites available for the parties and hospitality suite is generally considered to be *icing* in that it would be nice, but would not kill the event should it not happen. Once a tangible list is created, it makes the chore of determining a hierarchy of importance during discussions much easier, significantly greasing the wheels of progress. Preparing only for your event's needs, however, ensures that even if you manage to obtain a favorable contract, it will be at the



expense of the event-facility relationship.

Just as important as knowing your event, consider also what things are important to the hotel. Some factors can be extraordinarily simple, such as determining (and subsequently avoiding) periods of demand for the hotel. Others are far less obvious, such as balancing the food and beverage requirements against other cost factors. Recognize, however, that the ultimate goal for the facility is to *make money*; knowing *how* your hotel expects to make its money is key. For example, in most hotels around 70% of the rack rate (the 'standard' rate for guest rooms that can often be found behind the door of each room) is profit, whereas about 25% of the food and beverage rate is profit. Their space rental, however, tends to be very narrow margin—often less than 15%. Using this to your advantage, promising a sizable number of room rentals or a catered function could make it easier to reduce or eliminate floor-space rental fees. Likewise, a relatively small increase in a room rate can translate to a huge discount for food, function, or other services. Using the numbers above for the sake of example, you can see that for an event that books 100 rooms for two nights can potentially leverage a \$2 per night add-on to the room rate for attendees into \$280 of profit for the hotel (70% of the \$400 of increased income). Translated back into food and beverage profits, however, means that the hotel would have to sell \$1120 in catering to make that same amount of income; so charging \$2 more per night per guest could translate into a \$1000 discount on the F&B bill with the hotel actually managing to increase the amount of money it makes.

Armed with this knowledge about your hotel and about your event, it is time to sit down and negotiate. To get things started, you can ask the hotel for a contract quote based on the descriptions you have provided of the needs of the event. Given that launching pad, you can parlay in earnest. When you are in the midst of the give and take of working out a deal with your facility, remember the cardinal rule of any negotiation: **You won't get what you didn't ask for!** Do not let fear of rejection get in the way of you making requests that could be to the benefit of your event. Some things to think about asking for (and some detail to go with them):

Room Comps: Events often get cheaper rates for getting their patrons to book rooms on the host property rather than staying in cheaper, local hotels and traveling in. To sweeten the pot, hotels are accustomed to offering free rooms in exchange for a certain number of booked rooms. This number is somewhat fluid, but a good rule of thumb is that 1 free room night per 30 room nights paid is fairly standard, 1 for 15 is a fantastic rate, and 1 for 10 or better is unheard of for all but the largest events.

Rebates: If your event is cash-light but you book a lot of guest rooms, a rebate might be in order. The hotel can take a small portion of their room rate and apply it toward the convention's bill or—in exceedingly rare cases—pay it to the convention in cash. For example, if a convention that books 200 rooms for two nights negotiated a \$1 rebate, they would find a \$400 credit applied to their bill at the end of the weekend.

Free Services: Try to leverage room nights and other costs into obtaining ice deliveries, room changes, and other services for free. Keep in mind that some services that happen outside of the hotel normally *could* be provided gratis by the hotel on site, such as copy services, on-site storage, use of kitchen equipment, or advertising with local businesses.

Function Space Rental: Turn your room booking and catering bills into free function space; most hotels are willing to allow free use of their space in exchange for compensation in these other areas.

Comped Meals: It is sometimes possible to get free meals in exchange for meals sold, similar to the way that room comps are calculated above; like 1 meal free per 10 sold, for example.

Once you have everything you can possibly hope for in your contract and both parties are happy with the form of the final agreement, it is time to review it again. This time, ensure that the heads of the convention's departments get a chance to look for problems, missing verbiage, and troublesome or confusing language. This is important in three ways: it helps the convention leadership "buy in" to the contract, it helps the same leaders understand why some things can and cannot be done, and most importantly, it helps to make sure that there is nothing that you have agreed to that is not spelled out explicitly on this document. The sales people with whom you are working are not going to be the people executing the contract on behalf of the hotel, so it is important to have every aspect of your agreement written clearly into the contract.

Only when you are happy with the finished product should you sign the contract and prepare for the next stage in your relationship, as described in our next installment; the courtship between your event and your hotel as you mutually prepare for the event.

Promoting Cord Blood Donation

By Anne K Gray

In the last issue of MidFanzine, we carried an article about holding bone marrow donor registration drives at conventions. Many people know that there are public blood banks, and more are now aware that there are bone marrow registries. If you are spreading the word about those, I encourage you to also let people know about cord blood donation. They can find out more at the same website where they can learn about bone marrow donation: <http://www.marrows.org>.

I am aware of this now only because I am pregnant, and even in the first stages of being pregnant I only knew – through advertisements at doctors' offices and on web pages aimed at expecting mothers – about private cord blood banking. That's the option of paying huge amounts of money (an initial fee plus an annual charge) to bank your baby's umbilical cord blood for yourselves, especially for the use of the child or other family members should they develop certain diseases. But last month a friend who is a nurse asked if I had considered donating the cord blood to a public blood bank, and since then I've learned more about that option.

Donating your baby's cord blood to a public bank (or for research) is free. It is not reserved for your family's use. If a parent or sibling has been diagnosed with a disease treatable with cord blood, your family may alternatively be eligible to make a directed donation to that relative for little or no cost (it could be covered by insurance). As with bone marrow donation, there is a particular need for people from a wide variety of racial backgrounds to donate to the public blood bank, to increase the odds of a donor match when someone is in need of a donation.

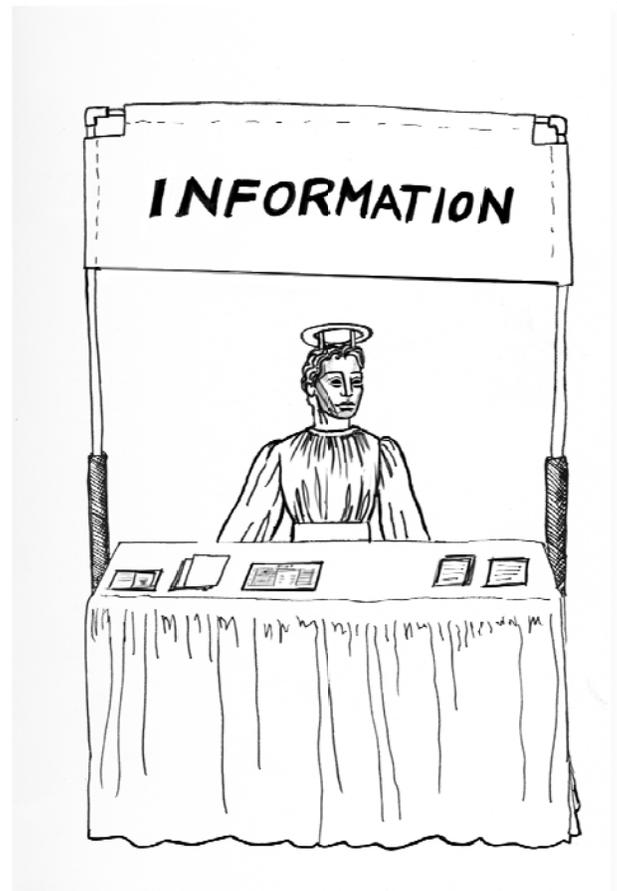
Umbilical cord blood is rich with blood-forming cells, which can be used to treat someone with a life-threatening disease like leukemia or lymphoma who needs a transplant to survive. The blood is not taken from the mother or the baby; the umbilical cord is clamped and cut normally during the birth process after the baby is delivered. After birth the blood from the umbilical cord and placenta is collected into a sterile bag, given an identification number and stored temporarily until it can be delivered to the cord blood bank. Some of the mother's blood is also tested for disease at the time of collection.

If you choose to donate your baby's umbilical cord blood, you should research and contact a blood donor center before you are 34 weeks pregnant, to find out where you can donate and whether or not you are eligible. Most types of cancer, diabetes, hepatitis B or C, having been the recipient of an organ or tissue transplant yourself, a recent history of STDs especially HIV, tattoos or piercings within the past year, and a number of other factors could disqualify you from donating cord blood. Not all hospitals provide public cord blood banking support; if you would like to donate, discuss that with your midwife or doctor well in advance.

If you find out the hospital or birth center you are planning to use does not provide public cord blood banking, I encourage you to let them know you have an interest in it anyway; public demand for such services is what will help them to spread, as will congressional support of the National Marrow Donor Program, which maintains the national cord blood matching registry.

For more information:

- National Marrow Donor Program: phone 800-627-7692. <http://www.marrows.org/cord>
- Guides: http://www.asbmt.org/guide_for_parents and <http://parentsguidecordblood.org>



Midfan Access #2 Making Your Con Wheelchair Accessible

by Jesse the K

Since 1992, in the U.S., wheelchair accessibility has been the law for almost all new construction and much remodeling, but compliance is all voluntary. With a few exceptions, no “access inspector” systematically reviews the plans or construction. Those cute blue on white wheelchair stickers? Anyone can buy them and post them at will, even at the bottom of a flight of steps. The following suggestions come out of my experience working on WisCon, a 1000-person annual convention in a recently remodeled hotel, as well as 17 years using a power wheelchair.

The con's hotel and access area chairs should work with someone who's well-versed in the technical needs of wheelchair and scooter users. Not all wheelchair users automatically have this knowledge, just as not all walking people know about sidewalk construction. Some non-wheelchair users also have these skills. If no clued-in fen are handy, contact the nearest “independent living center” for a referral. ILCs are community-based organizations that serve as information, referral, and gossip hubs for people with every sort of disability. Locate the center nearest you via the websites shown at the end of this article.

Dave Hingsburger is a long-time disability rights activist who's begun using a wheelchair in the last few years. This excerpt captures the frustration and hassle of requiring a last-minute change from an inaccessible venue to one that worked for him:

... while I appreciate everyone's understanding, I didn't want it. While I was thankful for the extra effort made to find a room immediately, I didn't want it. What I wanted was simple. ... Accessibility doesn't just mean I get easily into a building. Accessibility means anonymity. It reduces the need for compassion, understanding, special consideration, to Nil. It allows me to slip in unnoticed and set up quietly. This doesn't mean it masks my disability, it just makes it mean something very different.

(<http://davehingsburger.blogspot.com/2010/01/12-steps-me-id-rather-sit.html>)

Verify & Report

Never rely solely on the venue's assertion that they're wheelchair accessible. You must do an on-site inspection. Collate your answers and publish them in your promo material and on your website. Always provide a contact person who can address specific questions in more detail.

Describe any non-conforming areas in your publicity and program. While some concom folks may dislike this as “negative,” it demonstrates that you've actually checked the place out. Wheelchair users will deeply appreciate not having to telephone in advance and ask 10 questions to see if they can attend what's nominally an “open and public” event. Don't use the term “wheelchair-friendly,” which has no defined meaning. Do reference any standards the venue meets: “ADA compliant” in WisCon's case (the Americans with Disabilities Act is the same as the State of Wisconsin code).

Survey Elements

Check for level paths to every area. A single, unramped step is as significant a blockade as two flights of stairs. An access plan which relies on carrying someone in their wheelchair is as workable as a parking system which depends on humans lifting cars in and out of place. Yes, there are some exceptional cases where it can work, but as a rule it's a terrible idea.

Check for adequate room to move. Wheelchair users need at the very least 36” (1 m) for corridors and 60” (1.5 m) to turn around. Walking humans are accustomed to squiggling and swerving our bodies to get through tight spaces; wheelchair users can't turn sideways when there's an obstacle. A very effective way to test this is to make a 36” wide by 48” long cardboard box and put it on a four wheel dolly, and try moving it through the con. Creating adequate clear space can mean shifting decorative plant stands and moving easel-mounted signs to walls (or hanging from ceilings—see my article in *Midfanzine #4*). Freebie tables, huckster stalls, elevator lobbies and registration desks are often pinch points. We use blue tape to stripe off “no stopping or standing” alleys in the party floor hallways and Con Suite, which many members appreciate for safety and claustrophobia-reduction reasons.

Check public bathrooms: are all of them supplied with an adequate stall? If not, note which floors have usable bathrooms, so members can plan travel time between panels when the need arises. Is the accessible stall wide or long? Wide stalls permit the wheeler to park next to the toilet and slide sideways. The long ones work if you can stand up and swivel in place, which limits their usability: warn members about them. Is there a larger single toilet where a wheelchair user and a helper, whatever their gender, can work together on the task at hand?

Catalog floor surfaces: rolling through even short carpet pile is like walking through sand, and requires significantly more energy. Knowing this, some members may choose to rent a scooter instead of pushing a manual chair.

Make sure that stages are ramped. (Our venue can only ramp one stage at a time. This requires members to self-ID when they register and then programming, ops, and hotel must coordinate to ensure the ramped stage is in the same room with the panelists using wheelchairs. I know from experience it's easy to blow this one.)

Elevator dimensions are also useful. As one of the founding technologies that made modern buildings possible, they started small. Our hotel's elevators are not deep enough for a power scooter to drive straight in. Con elevators are famously crowded. We mount signage suggesting that folks who *can* walk a few flights take advantage of the stairways. When combined with “Secret Passageway” signs on the stairwell doors, this has improved access for all members who have difficulty walking.

Transportation

Check that all the transportation modes you recommend to members are indeed wheelchair-accessible. Don't assume they are just because a web site says so; call and get details. These may include

- Airport to hotel (and hotel to venue, if separate) —few hotel vans are wheelchair accessible. By law they should have a standing arrangement with an accessible transportation service, but may try to duck responsibility. The national airport van services (like Super Shuttle) provide accessible vans on demand, but usually take around two hours to show up even if one has made that arrangement.
- City buses—The ADA success story is U.S. city buses. If your area has a Federally-funded transportation system, it includes wheelchair accessible vehicles as well as “paratransit,” aka dial-a-ride or door-to-door transportation. Visitors with access to their local paratransit are automatically eligible for 21 days where ever they travel in the U.S.
- Taxis—very few cities provide wheelchair accessible taxis; contact the ILC or a dialysis center for referrals to “specialized medical transportation” (tall vans that can accomodate wheelchairs or scooters).
- Parking—accessible vans are often quite tall: note the height limit in hotel parking and the nearest public parking for vans.

Local Wheelchair Rentals

Air travel with a power wheelchair or scooter can be hazardous to one's equipment. Some wheelers may be able to use a rental once they arrive at the con. If (and only if) there's a local wheelchair user who can guide you, get them to identify good area wheelchair rental companies. Get rates and contact info and make this info available for members who need to rent locally. Otherwise, provide the contact info for the closest ILC.

Hotel contacts

These good people come in two flavors: Guest Services and Hotel Operations. So that members can discuss hotel details, identify the name, phone and email of a hotel staff member. (The folks who answer the hotel's 800 number are almost never able to leave their desks to get this info.) For example, “can you measure the bed height so I'll know if I can transfer from chair to bed independently?” Hotel bed heights have been moving up as our population ages and our knees get creaky. If the bed's too tall, a member may have to bring along someone to help them get in & out of bed. The operations contact will be available during the con 24/7. They will be the person you call when the lift breaks down or you need to move the stage ramp.

Defining Space at the Con

Wheelchair Parking aka Blue Zones

Providing designated wheelchair parking in all seating areas permits wheelchair users the same freedom to come and go as those using the seats. Well-meaning non-disabled people may think, “no need! of course I’ll move a chair out of the way if you just ask.” From their viewpoint, that’s a one-to-one personal issue. But from the perspective of us wheelchair users, it’s a one-to-many problem, since we must ask for seating rearrangement every time, every where we go in the con. The organizers knew we were coming; why not plan for our seating?

While leaving empty spaces seems like a solution, chairs inevitably migrate further apart, filling them in. The inexpensive and highly effective alternative are “blue zones,” 36 in (1 m) squares outlined with 1 in (2,54 mm) blue painters’ tape. It’s bright, stays down on carpet and comes up easily.

If you know how many wheelchair users are in attendance, be sure you make that many blue zones at the big get-togethers. (Otherwise, 1 for every 100 is a rough guideline.) Like all members, wheelchair users want to sit with their friends, so don’t create blue zones out on the corners: for optimal traffic flow place them off the wider central aisle. Always have at least one blue zone, especially in the smallest program rooms (where crowding is most an issue). When you have room for two, put one up front and one in the back. The former is great for the wheelchair user who may also have hearing or vision impairment; the latter works well for those of us who get claustrophobic and need to be able to leave right away. Tape blue zones at table events as well.

Party & Con Suites

These rooms are famously crowded and noisy, which ensures that wheelchair users will need to ask scores of people to move, and may not be heard. And when they arrive at the food, it may be above their eye level or reach ability. One way to get around this barrier is programmatic: Let members know what the Con Suite has to offer without having to actually enter it. You can do this in the program or using signs outside the room (we post the pantry list by Registration four floors below, as well.) Members who don’t want to brave the crowd in the Con Suite can tell companions exactly what to fetch. At a larger con, you could station a helper outside who advertises their ability to fetch food for wheelchair users, small children, and other folks who can’t access the serving table.

Summary

Do the investigative work to find out about the actual wheelchair accessibility of your hotel and venue and available support services and equipment rental, then get that information to your members through the website, PRs, program book, signage, and clearly marked access areas at the con. Consider extra support for helping members access services that are provided in spaces that are too tight or may be crowded. Let your concom know about accessibility issues and requirements and invite all departments to participate in the process of making sure the convention is welcoming and accessible to users of wheelchairs and power scooters.

For more information about how WisCon does accessibility:

<http://wiscon.info/access.php>

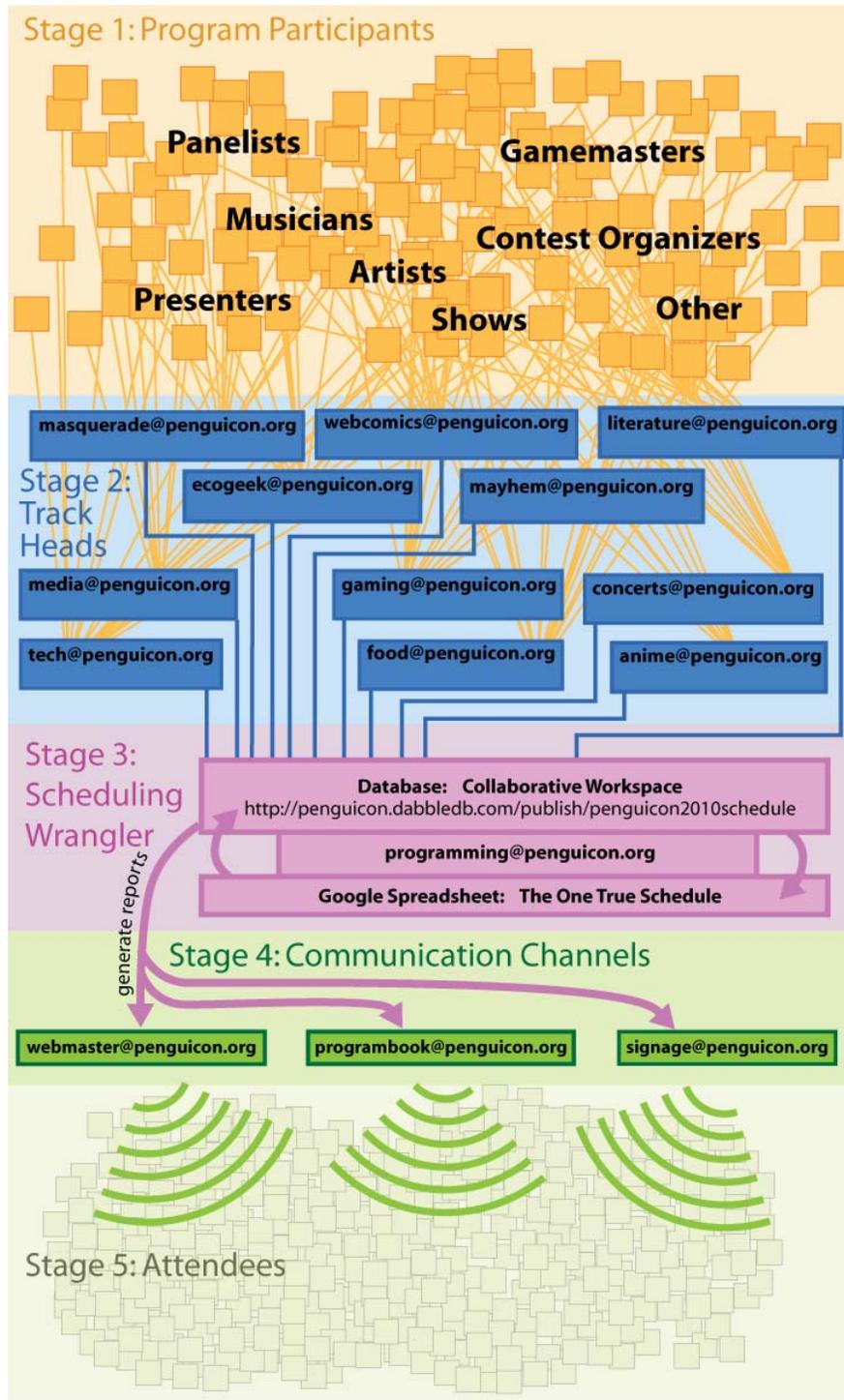
For locating Independent Living Centers:

Canada: <http://www.ilcanada.ca/> for Canadian ILC
U.S. <http://ilru.org/html/publications/directory/index.html>

Penguicon Communication Flow

By Matt Arnold

This diagram represents the flow of information at Penguicon.



In the first area you have Program Participants. These include panelists, concert musicians, game masters, contest organizers, artist presenters, slide show presenters, directors of stage performances, and so on. Anyone who is committed to be at a scheduled event. 100 program participants. 300 events on topics most of us have never heard of. Massive complexity. A typical Penguicon.

In the second area, all these people are funneled into the Track Heads. They must have (or form a team of those who together have) event ideas, specialized subject knowledge, and connections in their community. Because Penguicon is multiple conventions in one, there does not exist one person who can do that for all the topics Penguicon covers. Each Track Head acts like a Head of Programming for a smaller sub-convention. Track Heads manage all Program Participants (PPs) related to their topic, make sure the PPs know and consent to what they are scheduled for and when, and make sure all PPs register to attend. Track Heads deliver the event info to the database and label it tentative or confirmed.

In the third area, you have the Head of Programming. We often call this position Scheduling Wrangler because the Track Heads are taking care of part of the job a Head of Programming would have. The Scheduling Wrangler referees rooms and timeslots. We use a web database called DabbleDB for a collaborative workspace, and Google Spreadsheets for the One True Schedule. Unfortunately the database does not catch conflicts for us, which is why we need a spreadsheet. But the spreadsheet lacks details and cannot generate reports. The Scheduling Wrangler needs to keep these systems manually synchronized, which is a nightmare. I have been working on a web-based system that can do all of these functions, called CREM for Convention Resource Event Management, but progress is slow.

In the fourth area, you have signage, the website, the schedule book, and the closed-circuit TV channel. The DabbleDB generates reports that they can import.

In the fifth area, you have the attendees. The whole chain gets info from the PPs to the attendees.

Our greatest strength is being a crossover con. This is also our weakness: trying to get a sufficient number of reliable people to be Track Heads. It's hard enough to get one reliable head of programming, to say nothing of seven or eight. No matter which part one plays in this chart, everyone's job is to proactively move information in both directions. Ask questions from the previous stage, and deliver information to the next stage. Think "Who might need me to tell them the info I have?" Don't wait for them to ask. Think "Who might have information I need?" Don't wait for them to tell you. If you realize you can't do what you promised, step down immediately. Otherwise you're in the way of those who would do it.

Look for the CREM project at: <http://penguicon.net/projects/crem>

Different Types of Events at Penguicon

By Matt Arnold

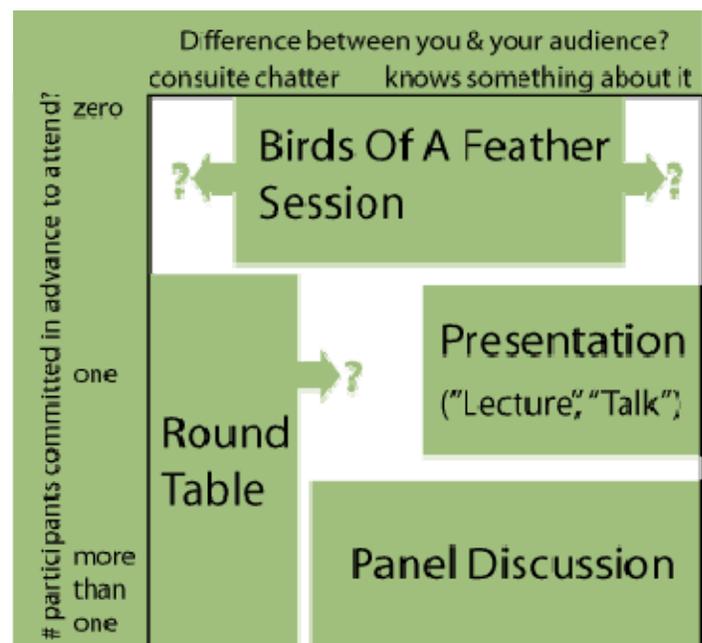
What's the difference between a panel, presentation, round table, and birds of a feather?

Some of these are events familiar to science fiction conventions, and others are more familiar to tech conferences, but both types often have all these to one degree or another. The difference between a panel, presentation, round table, and birds of a feather is:

1. The number of participants committed in advance to attend.
2. How much difference there is between speakers and audience.

A *panel* is any discussion with multiple participants who have committed to be there, get up in front of an audience, and discuss. It is preferable to have something to say about the topic, but not required, since committed participants are sometimes just moderators.

A *presentation* is a talk prepared and delivered by one person who has committed to be there



and do it. Because there is only one person, a presenter can prepare far more than can a panelist. Also, if the presenter doesn't have much to say on the topic ... that would be odd, wouldn't it? So they fall on the higher end of the expertise spectrum.

A *round table* is a small session in which every audience member is an active participant in the discussion. This usually results from a panel that attracts such a small audience that the audience is invited to join the panel on the other side of the table. These are often worthwhile and rewarding, but cannot be scheduled in advance as Round Tables per se. If no one is willing to commit to be there, there is no sense reserving a space and time for it, but if someone is willing to commit to be there, they constitute a panel.

A *birds of a feather* session is any discussion which was scheduled on an impromptu basis, in which no one present actually committed before Penguicon to attend it. If more than one person registers in advance of Penguicon to participate in a scheduled discussion, they constitute a panel.

On Being Niggled to Death by Fleas

By Deb Geisler

During the bidding process for Noreascon Four, the 69th World Science Fiction Convention in 2004, we created a lot of collateral materials, wrote a lot of stuff, and did a lot of things that were relatively innovative. It was a time of great personal growth for me, since a lot of those collateral materials were ones I created or had a hand in building.

I learned one very important lesson: **never** allow a large group of people to have editorial control over the work of one or two people. (A "large" group is anything over about 6 people.) When large groups of people look at something, they all want to tell you how it's not what they would create, that your phrasing should change, that you need to move this one pixel, and so on.

And then you want to hit them.

So we established a small editorial review group consisting of people who were fairly diverse in views, and that small group vetted the content and writing and so on of our collateral material. Only after that vetting did we send it to the larger group for review, asking for corrections of errors of fact.

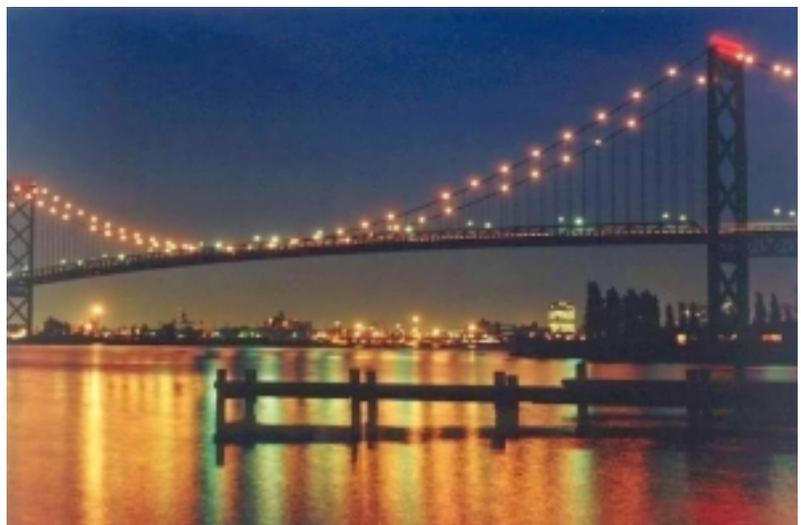
We didn't let them make choices of fonts. We didn't let them pick our colors. We only asked specific questions to which we wanted answers.

Nothing is more fun than a large group of people picking apart the work of a volunteer. This is why some of us opt for "nothing."

Originally posted May 4, 2010, at <http://debgeisler.livejournal.com/1796624.html>.

MidWest Construction: 2014

Alex von Thorn is happy to support the revival of Midwest Construction and plans to bid to host the convention in Windsor, Ontario in 2014 (which is the earliest year available in his conrunning schedule). Just across the St. Claire River from Detroit, Windsor is an easy drive for fans across the upper Midwest, and will also be convenient for Canadian conrunners to learn from and share ideas and practices with the wider circles of fandom. Windsor is a safe, clean, inexpensive city to visit with many interesting restaurants and tourist



amenities. Details like committee and hotel are obviously not settled this far out, though it is likely that a Midwest Construction in Windsor will include people currently involved in SFContario, ConFusion, and other regional conventions.

If you are interested in hosting a Midwest Construction between now and 2014, please let us know by email to info@midfan.org or bring it up on the Midfan discussion list.

Midwest Convention List

Upcoming events through early November 2011. (*Events with a (?) next to the title are listed at the same approximate time as they were held this year and are expected to return but have not been confirmed*). List kept current online at <http://www.midfan.org/consmw.html>. If you would like your convention or other sf-related event added to this list, email editor@midfan.org.

2010

November

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----------------|
| Nov 11-14 | IlluXCon 3 http://www.illuxcon.com/ | Altoona, PA |
| Nov 12-14 | WindyCon 37 http://www.windycon.org/windy37/ | Lombard, IL |
| Nov 12-14 | U*Con http://www.ucon-gaming.org/ | Ann Arbor, MI |
| Nov 12-14 | Contraception 22 http://www.contrakc.com/ | Kansas City, MO |
| Nov 19-21 | Midwest Furfest http://www.furfest.org/ | Rosemont, IL |
| Nov 26-28 | Chambanacon 40 http://www.chambanacon.org/ | Urbana, IL |

2011

January

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|-----------|--|-------------|
| Jan 21-23 | ConFusion 2011 http://cf2011.stilyagi.org/ | Detroit, MI |
|-----------|--|-------------|

February

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|-----------|--|-----------------|
| Feb 4-6 | SuperCon XVIII http://supercon.info/ | Hastings, MN |
| Feb 10-13 | Capricon XXXI: Escape! http://www.capricon.org/ | Chicago, IL |
| Feb 18-20 | Visioncon 2011 http://www.visioncon.net/ | Springfield, MO |
| Feb 25-27 | Kitsune Kon http://kitsunekon.com/ | Appleton, WI |

March

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|-----------|--|-------------------|
| Mar 18-20 | Millenicon 25 http://www.millennicon.org/ | Cincinnati, OH |
| Mar 26-27 | Planet Comicon http://www.planetcomicon.com/ | Overland Park, KS |

April

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|-----------|--|---------------------|
| Apr 1-3 | Filkontario 21 http://www.filkontario.ca/ | Toronto, ON, Canada |
| Apr 8-10 | Ad Astra www.ad-astra.org | Toronto, ON, Canada |
| Apr 22-24 | Minicon 46 http://www.mnstf.org/minicon46/ | Bloomington, MN |

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|------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Apr 29-May 1 | Penguicon http://www.penguicon.org/ | Troy, MI |
| Apr 29-May 1 | DemiCon 22 http://www.demicon.org/ | Des Moines, IA |
| May | | |
| May 13-15 | Motor City Comic Con http://www.motorcityconventions.com/motor_city_comic_con/ | Novi, MI |
| May 26-30 | Wiscon http://www.wiscon.info/ | Madison, WI |
| May 27-29 | ConQuest 42 http://www.conquestkc.org/ | Kansas City, MO |
| May 27-29 | Marcon 46 http://www.marcon.org/ | Columbus, OH |
| June | | |
| Jun 17-19 | Duckon 20 http://www.duckon.org/ | Schaumburg, IL |
| Jun 24-26 | Fourth Street Fantasy (?) http://www.4thstreetfantasy.com/ | Minneapolis, MN |
| Jun 24-26 | Midwestcon (?) www.cfg.org/midwestcon/ | Cincinnati, OH |
| Jun 30-Jul 3 | CONvergence 2011 http://www.convergence-con.org/ | Bloomington, MN |
| July | | |
| Jul 1-3 | InConJunction http://www.inconjunction.org/ | Indianapolis, IN |
| Jul 22-24 | Confluence 2011 http://www.parsec-sff.org/confluence/ | Pittsburgh, PA |
| Jul 29-31 | Diversicon http://www.diversicon.org/ | Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN |
| August | | |
| Aug 4-7 | Gen Con http://www.gencon.com/2011/indy/default.aspx | Indianapolis, IN |
| Aug 12-14 | Construct-a-Con (?) http://constructacon.org/ | Livonia, MI |
| Aug 26-28 | Context 24 (?) http://www.contextsf.org/ | Columbus, OH |
| September | | |
| Sept 30-Oct 2 | Archon 35 http://www.archonstl.org/35/ | St. Louis, MO |
| October | | |
| Oct 7-9 | Conclave XXXVI http://www.conclavesf.org/cc36/index.htm | Romulus, MI |
| Oct 21-23 | Star Trek Convention (?) http://www.creationent.com/cal/stchi.htm | Rosemont, IL |
| Oct 21-23 | Arcana 41 http://arcanacon.com/ | St. Paul, MN |
| Oct 27-29 | Youmacon 2011 (?) http://www.youmacon.com/ | Detroit, MI |
| November | | |
| Nov 4-6 | ICON 36 http://www.iowa-icon.com/ | Iowa City, IA |

Letters of Comment

Please!

–Send your letters of comment to editor@midfan.org.

Lloyd Penney sent us our only LOC for the last issue.

November 9, 2009

Dear Anne:

Many thanks for MidFanzine 4...it's good to see this zine rise again, especially with some Kurt Erichsen on the cover. We are still involved in con running after all these years, but we are out of the loop as far as senior positions go. Life has continued on for us, too.

Questions Yvonne and I ask ourselves, now that we are 30+-year veterans of running conventions...yes, we are experienced, but has that experience lost credibility? Does the experience we racked up in the 80s, 90s and 00s translate to running cons today? Have things changed so much that knowing how to do it back then means you don't really know how to do it now? Do changes in corporate and consumer law mean running a part of the con has changed partially or entirely? It's great to be thought of as experienced, but are we capable of doing it today, or are we just going to be the grandpa and grandma figures on the committee, asked for advice, but otherwise ignored?

In dealing with your hotels, I still think that touring the various hotels in the area you'd like to be in is the best thing to do. Check for the layout you'd prefer, and the amount of space to allow for other activities and displays, and especially for special events like the bone marrow clinic described later in the zine. I would also want a full inventory of what the hotel has in the way of chairs and assorted sizes of tables. We have had great success with any hotel that has a large divisible ballroom, at least three rooms, more would be great. We have also dealt with organizations like the local convention and visitors bureaus, who can be helpful with giving out contacts for the kind of hotel you're looking for. One book we've used, and it is still useful, is from MeetingsCanada.com, the annual Meetings & Incentive Travel Buyers' Guide, which lists all meeting and conference facilities in every location across Canada, plus also lists all auxiliary services, like registration companies, translation bureaus, customs brokers and equipment rentals, and much more. We try to make sure that each Ad Astra chairman has a copy to help them with location decisions.

Communications with committee and hotel salesmen and catering staff should be easy in this wired age, but even with e-mails, dedicated forums, bulletin boards and chatrooms, you can't make people respond when their responses are most needed. As always, the humans are the weak spot in the communications chain. When it comes to signage, we have found that while you can place huge, easy-to-read signs anywhere and everywhere, and people will still get lost. You can't make them read the signs, or the pre-con or at-con literature; all you can do is have patient people man the information desks to answer questions.

A lot of my experience not only comes from working Ad Astra for nearly 30 years, but also from five years of working for a professional client support company called BBW International. This company supplies registration staff to trade shows all over the greater Toronto area. As one of those registration staffers, I've found people usually walk past large signs rather than take a few seconds to read them. Signs like FILL OUT REGISTRATION FORMS HERE are usually ignored until registration sends them back to the table to fill out the form.

(We witnessed all of this this past weekend...we were at Astronomicon 11 in Rochester, NY. Had some fun, and made a few notes...)

It's easy to be positive about some aspects of con running, and as easy to negative about others. We all have them, and I hope further issues will keep the conversation going. I'm looking forward to more.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

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