

Lake Arrowhead Retreat Report October 18-19, 2012

Present: R. Brown, Conway, E. Dieterich, G. Dieterich, Dobbertin, Hanson, James, Jury, Kohlmeier, Lansden, Moreland, Pennington, Shefchik, Shelffo,

Financial and Membership Trends

President Shelffo opened the meeting at 3:00 and went over the agenda with the participants. He also pointed out that since a quorum of Board members was present, regular business with motions and binding votes could be conducted as needed. It was agreed to keep the discussions informal and to encourage participation by all those present. Shelffo then reviewed the membership report prepared by Brad Easter, who was unable to attend. Membership has been stable the last five years, and currently stands at 87 active or reserve members. Over the past two years we have added seven new members (Butler, Figueroa, Hanson, Imbert, Lunderville, Sillers, Snodgrass) and had two others return (Cannon and Madsen). Although this number is smaller than we would like, the new additions are actively participating and becoming integrated into club functions. The issue of member retention was deferred to a later part of the retreat.

Shelffo then presented a financial summary of the last five years, which prompted significant discussion. Total income has nearly doubled during this time period, largely as a result of revenue produced by managing Oktoberfest for Hangar 24. Although this new funding source has been a boon for the club, it will probably not last indefinitely, and could cease to be available at short notice. However, the club is well equipped to survive this possibility, since much of the additional revenue has been used to increase the size of the Foundation. Should it become necessary, the interest from the foundation could be used together with our other income sources to provide sufficient funding for the club to prosper in the future.

Discussion of the issue of reserve membership, wherein a member pays only base dues and purchases meals as needed on Thursday, consumed the remainder of the financial session. Originally created during the financial crunch of 2008, reserve status has grown to include many in the club. Moreover, enforcement of meal payment has been lax, causing the club to lose considerable revenue. Two solutions were proposed and adopted. First, the price of an individual Thursday lunch for a reserve member was raised from \$11 to \$15, so as to make it financially disadvantageous to assume reserve status and still eat all meals at the club. Second, a person has been appointed to make sure that all dining reserve members are identified and billed for each meal. President Shelffo will be announcing this policy shortly in a letter to the membership.

At the close of the Retreat, the participants went through the list of all members who are on reserve but are not active in the club. A number were identified as potentially returning to the fold and individuals were assigned the job of contacting them and urging them to come to a meeting. Five individuals were identified as not meeting the criteria for reserve membership. They will be contacted and informed that they must resume regular membership or be dropped from the club.

Recruiting and Retention Issues

Jury presented his report to the group. He felt that, if we could retain most of those we recruit who join the club, we would be growing significantly. Club members could be more active in making guests feel welcome. We could talk more about the club's achievements and activities at the time of the visit, and the President should alert the guest about the Creed's location in the Bulletin before the recitation begins. Although the new member orientation is effective, we need additional steps to ensure that new members find a role to play in the club's activities. Many never participate in social events, perhaps because insufficient effort is made to invite them.

Four strategies were suggested to enhance a new member's experience after joining:

- Assign each new member a mentor to help him learn about the club's activities and make him feel welcome
- Throw a social event specifically for new members and their spouses/SO's to meet club members at least once a year;
- With the new member's assistance, select a club activity he is interested in, and have him assist the person in charge
- Contact those who have dropped out and try to learn why they left.

The Membership Committee seemed to be the logical entity to select mentors for the incoming new members. The mentor might be the sponsor who brought the member in, or someone with whom the new member has developed a rapport.

There was a general feeling expressed that we need to do more self promotion at our functions. We should always have a booth at every event, and that we should make up cards to hand out. Richard Pennington has agreed to design and create a set for us. We will also try to identify any new businesses in town and send them a letter inviting them to stop by a meeting at the club.

Self Critique

A session was held to identify what is not working in the club and why. It produced a number of items for discussion and solution:

- Improving the information content of the Bulletin. Some time was spent updating the committee information on the first page of the Bulletin. Sentiment was also expressed that we need more basic information on activities for members who don't come to the meeting. We also thought we might encourage the Editor to create a milk carton section to shame former active members into stopping by more often. Further discussion was deferred to the publicity session on Friday
- In the future we will add our student reporters to Youth Appreciation Day
- Civics day has turned into a nightmare to organize, largely because organizations that used to produce many volunteers to be shadowed are now declining to participate. We decided to try to put pressure on the City this year to increase its numbers, and to look into making it a more general Career Day in the future so that we can draw from a larger pool of volunteers

- We need to have a continuously updated Events Calendar available for the members. Jury will create one that will be stored on the web site.
- We continue to face problems with member participation and uneven workload for our many labor-intensive events
- Members need to learn more about the club functions. We need to make more use of the new Optimist Booklet, have reports of major functions written up in the Bulletin, and make more effort to explain how an activity works when it is coming up.

Leadership Training and Mentorship Strategies

Jury presented his report to the group, first describing the problems as he saw them. He felt that most members who haven't served on the Board don't know how the club works. As a result, people get put in charge of things without knowing how to run them, and the quality of our programs varies greatly from year to year. His first year running the Essay Contest we had four applicants. The next year when he knew what he was doing we had 42. We rarely brainstorm about how to make activities better, except for the Car Show. A few people are doing the bulk of running activities in the club. If they leave or burn out, we will have a leadership vacuum.

The following strategies were suggested for improving the situation:

- Every major activity should have a senior and junior member, with the understanding that the junior member will eventually run the activity in the future
- The leader of every major activity should give a report to the membership after it is concluded
- The Optimist Booklet should be updated yearly by the most recent person in charge of the activity
- The person running the activity should keep a book with contacts, deadlines, etc. and pass it on to the successor

Social Activities

Brown led an evening discussion of the status of our club's social activities. The perception is that the same group of Optimists frequents most social events, and that we rarely see newer members at social functions. The newer members at the retreat thought it might be largely a communication problem, and that we don't advertise a specific function enough, or explain what will happen at it. They felt that signup sheets don't work well, and that more needs to be done. Having a new member social event once a year was viewed as a very good idea that will be looked into further. It was also felt that the new member mentor could play a positive role in getting the new person to a given social event.

Several suggestions for new functions or solutions to problems were made. Having traditional events such as the wine tasting in alternate years might produce a better turnout. The progressive dinner and the past president's picnic, which used to be very popular, might be reintroduced. More cultural outings such as a trip to the Reagan Library will be looked into.

Overall, it was felt that we are not sure what many of the members would want to see us offer, and that a survey of the membership would be useful. This idea is discussed later in the report.

Discussion of Major Fundraisers

Hangar 24 Oktoberfest: Oktoberfest is the most cost effective of our fundraisers, generating significant revenue for the manpower investment. There was a general feeling that this activity may not last much longer, but that we would be able to adapt easily to its loss. It is important not to program the majority of the new funding into permanent projects, and to use the excess in a given year to increase the size of the Foundation, which will be able to generate substantial interest revenue as it grows.

Redlands Bowl Concession: We had a difficult year at the Bowl, generating only about \$5000 in profits in exchange for a huge labor investment. A variety of factors were thought to have caused the lower turnout at Bowl events, including weather, the Olympics, and perhaps some of the programs themselves. It was also thought that the concession operation had become more labor intensive the past few years due to the additional offerings and the use of a remote site. Although no action was taken, a number of suggestions were made about ways to improve efficiency and profitability, which would decrease our labor requirements.

- Quit selling Kettle Corn, which lowers the sales of our own popcorn and affords us only a modest profit per bag because we buy it from an outside vendor.
- Streamline the operation of the remote facility or eliminate it entirely. It currently requires two people to run and necessitates hauling materials a great distance.
- Consider eliminating the sale of labor-intensive items such as nachos and pretzels
- Hand out hot water, a stirrer, and a packet when hot chocolate is ordered, since preparation is time-consuming and labor intensive

Car Show: The car show has become an unreasonable burden for the person running it, primarily because of outside calls during the month before the show. Evan says he manned the phone and processed applications virtually full time for a month, and cannot afford the loss of that much work time again, so we must design a way to relieve him of that responsibility. Most calls ask for the status of their application, so whoever mans the phone must have access to the current registration list. A number of Board members volunteered to assume this duty for a day or two in the future. One solution would be to come to Evan's office on that day and answer his phone while in possession of the registration list. Another possibility involves using a device called OOMA, which has the capability of instantly transferring a call to a remote outlet. That would allow Evan's substitute to take calls at his phone rather than having to monitor Evan's line. We could also create a real-time read-only copy of the registration list that would be accessible from our Optimist web site. Follow-up action on these ideas was recommended.

New Ideas for Publicity

Jury presented his report to the group, and outlined the problems as he saw them. We get very little publicity for our achievements, neither locally nor with Optimist International. Our web site and Facebook pages are not widely viewed. Our bulletin varies in quality and content from year to year. All of these problems potentially limit our recruiting and retention success. A number of strategies were identified.

- Publicity should be a committee, not one individual.
- This committee should have a writer, a web-savvy person, and a photographer at a minimum
- Every event should be photographed and reported on our web site
- Major events should be written up and submitted to the FACTS
- Our major achievements should be written up for Optimist International

A number of the Board members were reluctant to expand our Facebook activities, chiefly because of the possibility of receiving written posts that are critical of the club. It was felt, at least in the short run, to limit our social media activity to the web site. Jury and Pennington agreed to develop a plan for enhancing the publicity in the club and present a report to the membership.

New Project Ideas

Three ideas were introduced and discussed:

1. Bringing in the food trucks and combining with beer sales. The food trucks were used very successfully recently to advertise the downtown. The vendors do their own setup and take only the revenue they generate from their sales. We would be able to keep the gate and beverage sales ourselves. We could also combine it with a microbrew event
2. Reviving the Redlands Air Show: this was a popular event that was cancelled when the City pulled the plug on it. We have the capability of managing it, and it also could emerge as an evolution of the car show that would feature both air and cars at the event.
3. Fixing the benches at Sylvan Park: These have fallen into disrepair and could be taken on as a club project. Brad and Evan will investigate further and report to the Board

New Ideas for Youth Activities

Concern was expressed that we spend much more time on fundraising than with the youth of the community. Several suggestions were made for enhancing our presence:

- Mentoring our Cub Scout troop. We founded this troop and it is struggling at the present time. There are many ways we could help build it up
- Assisting the Compact Club. This is a school activity that conducts mock interviews, etc. It was heavily involved with the Kiwanis but no longer, and probably needs mentors. We should find out what happened between them.

- Run a basketball tournament. Evidently the schools could use more of these around holiday time and it wouldn't be difficult to initiate

Follow-Up Actions

To ensure that action is taken in the items that met with group approval at the Retreat, the following will occur.

1. Membership Poll: A committee made up of Jury, Kohlmeier, Shefchik, and E. Dieterich will create a comprehensive survey for the membership on a wide-ranging set of issues. This will be reviewed by the Board and then sent out to everyone.
2. The new policy on reserve membership will be initiated at the next billing cycle. Accurate accounting and billing of reserve members dining at the club has already begun.
3. A new publicity committee will be created, with the bulletin editor, a Webmaster, a writer, and a photographer as members. Jury and Pennington are charged with bringing it into existence and serving as members.
4. Membership will expand into a committee, with responsibility for administering the mentor program in addition to existing duties. Easter is charged with recruiting additional members as needed
5. Events Calendar: Jury is charged with creating and updating an Optimist Calendar that lists all upcoming events. It will be located on the Optimist web site where it can be viewed by all members
6. John Miechowicz will be invited to an upcoming Board meeting to discuss options for streamlining the operation of the concession stand at the Bowl
7. We will purchase an OOMA device for relaying phone calls. Pennington will investigate how to maintain a real-time copy of the Car Show registration status on the web site. A procedure for relieving Evan of responsibility for advance registration and phone monitoring will then be designed and put in place for the next Car Show. Shelffo is charged with making sure that this does not fall through the cracks.

**REDLANDS OPTIMIST CLUB RETREAT
LAKE ARROWHEAD OCT. 18-19, 2012**

AGENDA

Thursday PM

- 3:00-3:15 Opening remarks and purpose. Overview of agenda (ROD)
- 3:15-3:45 Presentation of financial and membership trends over the last 5 years (ROD and BRAD)
- 3:45-4:15 Strategies for recruiting and retaining new members. (BILL)
- 4:15-4:45 What's not working in the club and why (ALL)
- 4:45-5:00 Internal leadership training and mentorship strategies (BILL)
- 5:00-6:00 Social hour
- 6:00-7:00 Dinner
- 7:30-8:00 Optimist social activities: review, discussion, and ideas (DICK)
- 8:00-10:00 informal social evening with brainstorming about anything having to do with the club. Have ideas recorded.

Friday Oct. 19

- 8:00-8:30 Breakfast
- 8:30-9:00 Packing and checkout
- 9:00-10:00 Discussion and review of brainstorming ideas (ALL)
- 10:00-10:30 Future of Car Show, Oktoberfest, and Bowl discussion (R, J, E)
- 10:30-11:00 New ideas for publicity and maintaining social media (BILL)
- 11:00-11:30 New project ideas (ROD)
- 11:30-12:00 Summary and follow up commitments (ROD)
- 12:00-1:00 Lunch
- 1:00 Depart