

AFG Area 22 – Convention Coordinator’s Report – Saturday, August 15, 2020

Directives

Panel 57’s Member Outreach Action Committee requested the following changes for the Convention.

- Make money or break even but stop losing money. The convention fund is low.
- Include members from as many locales as possible to server on the committee.
- Move workshops away from a lecture format and toward a participatory format.

Accomplishments

Initially, the greatest accomplishment by the Committee was being ready to host a convention by the time of the Assembly that was scheduled for March 28. This despite being formed only two months earlier. Remarkably, the Committee shaved \$3,500 in costs from the Convention, moved the hospitality suite beside the main speaker space, replaced one workshop with eight breakout sessions, streamlined the schedule so that attendees no longer needed to rush to and from the elevators, improved the banquet, and included artwork and skits from AFG members from across the area.

In time, the most significant accomplishment was the ability to adapt as circumstances changed (and kept changing) after COVID-19 arrived. As numerous authorities offered recommendations, the Committee continued its work. Even after it became apparent that a physical convention was no longer feasible, Committee members continued to serve in the hope of bringing a virtual (a/k/a remote) convention to members of our area. This devotion is reflected in the three (3) KBDMs that the Committee produced.

The crowning achievement of Committee members is their loving commitment to serving the fellowship. This was commented upon by numerous members from other areas who interacted with the Committee.

The Convention Coordinator hopes that the Assembly will allow the Convention Committee to fulfill its primary purpose of hosting a convention for members throughout our area and beyond.

Meetings

AFG Area 22’s Convention Committee met 10 times since the last Assembly (which was held January 18).

January 26. Committee members were introduced to the role of the Committee and its relationship to AFG Area 22’s Assembly. Major topics included (1) technology, (2) the theme, (3) speakers, (4) breakout sessions, (5) entertainment, (6) participation, and (7) Committee vacancies.

February 16. Invited guests were Sharon S (a group member considering Committee membership as part of her service work) and Jeff E (a group member reviewing the hotel contract). Progress reported included meetings with the Program Chair and Facilities Chair to reexamine the utilization of all meetings space, meetings with the Facilities Chair and hotel staff to further evaluate meeting space options, and meetings with the Technology Chair to explore greater participation from members from all locales in the area. Major topics included (1) technology, (2) the theme, (3) and budget and finance.

During the meeting, the theme was established as “Dreaming Big with 20/20 Vision”.

The focus of budget and finance was attendance and income for the previous six years. Though numbers were favorable for the first two years, numbers unfavorable for the following four years. The change was dramatic and coincided with the move to the DoubleTree. While costs were higher at the DoubleTree than the previous facility, the Committee quickly realized that a number of factors might be at play and that further research as to causes and solutions was needed. A summary of this data appears in the appendix.

AFG Area 22 – Convention Coordinator’s Report – Saturday, August 15, 2020

March 8. Concepts Four and Six were introduced. Major topics were (1) programming, (2) meeting space utilization, (3) raffle and decorations, (4) theme and flyer, (5) banquet entrées, and (6) COVID-19.

Given that meeting space costs are determined by banquet sales, and that banquet sales are driven by affordability to members, the Facilities Chair had researched the topic thoroughly (include a tasting of banquet entrées at the DoubleTree). A summary of her research appears in an appendix below.

The topic of COVID-19 was broached for the first time. Two days before the meeting, South by Southwest was jointly cancelled by the City of Austin and Travis County [Texas]. This despite an estimated economic impact of \$356 million. Three days after the meeting, AFG Area 20 (Arkansas) cancelled its convention. The Arkansas convention was scheduled to start March 13 but was cancelled the morning of March 11; that afternoon, the governor of Arkansas announced the first case of the novel coronavirus in the state.

March 29. Invited guests were (1) Marti P, AFG Arkansas Convention Chair (2) Irene F, AFG West Tennessee Convention Chair, (3) Jenny P, Summertime in the Ozarks Chair, and (4) Jerry A, AA Louisiana Convention Chair. It was noted that Summertime in the Ozarks is an AFG convention hosted by District 1, Area 20. Moreover, given our tradition of cooperating with AA, it seemed wise to learn if COVID-19 had any impact on convention planning for AA.

Note that this meeting was originally scheduled to occur during Assembly, at which time we had planned to distribute flyers and open registration (with the Registration Chair bringing a laptop for attendees who wished to register online during a break). However, these plans changed when Assembly was cancelled.

Much of the discussion focused on member safety. There were many unknowns, among which were the current and projected rate of infection in the state, the willingness of members to attend, the financial ramifications of members not registering (or requesting refunds), and contractual obligations to the hotel.

April 19. Invited guests were (1) Cyndi K, Trustee, AFG South-Central Region, (2) Marti P, Convention Chair, AFG Area 02 [AR], (3) Irene F, Convention Chair, AFG Area 52 [TN], (4) Jenny P, Convention Chair, AFG Summertime in the Ozarks [AR, District 1], and (5) Jerry A, Convention Chair, AA Area 27 [LA].

By this time, we had written our first KBDM which was to be an overview of our situation rather than an exhaustive compilation of facts. Moreover, there were additional convention cancellations, namely AFG Area 52 (TN), AFG Summertime in the Ozarks, and the International Convention of AA. Though the last wasn’t affiliated with AFG, it included AFG participation, had an expected attendance of 50,000 persons, and had been 12 years in the planning. So, despite being a separate entity, it caught our attention. Also, the governor of Louisiana had issued a “stay at home” order the previous week that instructed Louisiana residents to shelter at home and limit movements outside of their homes beyond essential needs. This was our first “all Zoom” meeting. Previous meetings had been hybrid meetings in which some members met in a conference room and connected to other members in their homes via Zoom.

Discussion was multi-faceted. The DoubleTree had furloughed all but eight (8) staff members. Even if we found a way to assure member safety at a convention, the DoubleTree was unable to promise the ability to host a convention given that the governor’s order might be extended. Thus, the DoubleTree offered to refund our deposit (in the amount of \$2,500) within 120 days if we wished to cancel. The Program Chair had gathered input from our speakers, as well, because travel was restricted in some locales and their needs were as important as attendees. Eventually, we unanimously decided to cancel the convention. Then, we decided by majority vote to begin exploration of a virtual (a/k/a remote) convention.

May 17. Invited guests were (1) Deana T, Workshop Chair, AFG Area 03, District 16, (2) Prema S, Workshop Co-Chair, AFG Area 03, District 16, (3) Fran C, AA Liaison, AFG Area 52 Convention, (4) Angelo M, GR, AFG Area 22, District 6 [Metairie], and (5) Marti P, Convention Chair, AFG Area 02 [AR].

AFG Area 22 – Convention Coordinator’s Report – Saturday, August 15, 2020

Despite the decision to cancel the physical convention, the situation was reviewed to determine if there were any major changes that might cause a reversal. Though there had been some changes, the key was that the DoubleTree had no way of knowing what future orders from the governor might be and how such orders might impact their ability to host a convention. Thus, they were steadfast in their commitment to refund our deposit as they couldn’t promise to be ready to host the convention.

Much of the discussion focused on what a virtual (a/k/a remote) convention might look like as none of us had seen one previously (at least, not an AFG convention, though some of us had some experience with non-AFG virtual events). By this time, we had started two new KBDMs: one to address program issues and another to explore technical issues. It was determined that more research and discussion was needed before it was possible to give feel comfortable with hosting a virtual convention.

May 31. The Convention Coordinator removed the planned Alateen panel from consideration for a virtual convention because AFG Area 22 has no Alateen Coordinator. Otherwise, discussion continued about the possibility of a virtual convention. In time, it was determined that guidance was needed from members. Given that the next Assembly was scheduled for August, a Question and Answer session was scheduled for members. Consequently, an email invitation with KBDMs went out to all area GRs, alt-GRs, and CMAs.

June 14. The Question & Answer session was attended by 17 members plus the committee. Anonymous polls allowed us to get some sense of the representation within the area (as seen in an appendix below).

Though the intention was to gather questions about the desirability and feasibility of a virtual convention, this quickly changed. AFG Area 22’s Delegate, Tammy M, delivered somber news: WSO had been working remotely with reduced operational capacity. The result was that guidance that she requested about virtual conventions was incomplete. Given that virtual conventions were new for AFG, it seemed prudent to gain greater clarity before proceeding in order to protect our area’s officers from potential legal issues. Many questions seemed to be attempts to understand the Fourth Tradition. Though the original intent was lost, it quickly became apparent that the convention needed to be suspended until the officers were assured that their exposure to legal risk was within acceptable levels.

July 12. While waiting for the various issues at play to be resolved in the upcoming Assembly, we hosted a Zoom training for AFG Tennessee. This came about when we realized that we had useful information that might help other areas determine if a virtual convention might meet their needs. The training was provided by a mix of committee members and non-committee members.

July 26. Again, while waiting for issues to be resolved at Assembly, we hosted a Zoom training. This time for AFG South Carolina. Again, training was provided by a mix of committee and non-committee members.

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Appendix – Convention Attendance and Income for the Years 2014 through 2019

	2014-2015	2016-2019
AVG Attendance	417	304
AVG Net Inc & Exp	\$4,134.95	(\$3,306.52)
TTL Net Inc & Exp	\$8,269.90	(\$13,226.07)
Amounts in parenthesis are losses.		

Appendix – Banquet Analysis (a review of net costs, costs with required markup, and menu options)

\$2,500 Minimum Base (no tax or tip)

- \$2,500 = 80 plates @ \$31.25 ea.
- \$2,500 = 90 plates @ \$27.75 ea.
- \$2,500 = 100 plates @ \$25.00 ea.
- \$2,500 = 110 plates @ \$22.75 ea.
- \$2,500 = 120 plates @ \$21.00 ea.

\$3,250 Minimum (after tax and tip)

- \$3,250 = 80 tickets @ \$40.50 ea.
- \$3,250 = 90 tickets @ \$36.00 ea.
- \$3,250 = 100 tickets @ \$32.50 ea.
- \$3,250 = 110 tickets @ \$29.25 ea.
- \$3,250 = 120 tickets @ \$27.00 ea.

Plate Costs (per person)

- Beef \$20 to \$58
- Chicken \$22 to \$28
- Pork \$22 to \$26
- Seafood \$21 to \$32
- Vegetarian \$20 to \$22

Dessert Options

- Apple Pie
- Pecan Pie
- Key Lime Pie
- Chocolate Mousse
- Praline Mousse
- Turtle Cheesecake

Dessert Options

- Carrot Cake
- Chocolate Cake
- Ultimate Chocolate Cake
- Cheesecake with Fruit Topping
- Double Fudge Mousse Brownies
- Strawberry Napoleon

Appendix – Q&A Polls

Which best describes you? [single choice]

- 9 – Group Representative
- 1 – District Representative
- 0 – AIS/Intergroup Liaison
- 1 – Active Past Delegate
- 1 – Assembly Coordinator
- 1 – Assembly Officer
- 4 – Other

Which KBDM(s) did you read? [multiple choice]

- 2 – KBDM 1
- 0 – KBDM 2
- 0 – KBDM 3
- 3 – KBDM 1 & KBDM 2
- 5 K– BDM 1 & KBDM 2 & KBDM 3
- 7 – None yet.