

MidFanzine 4

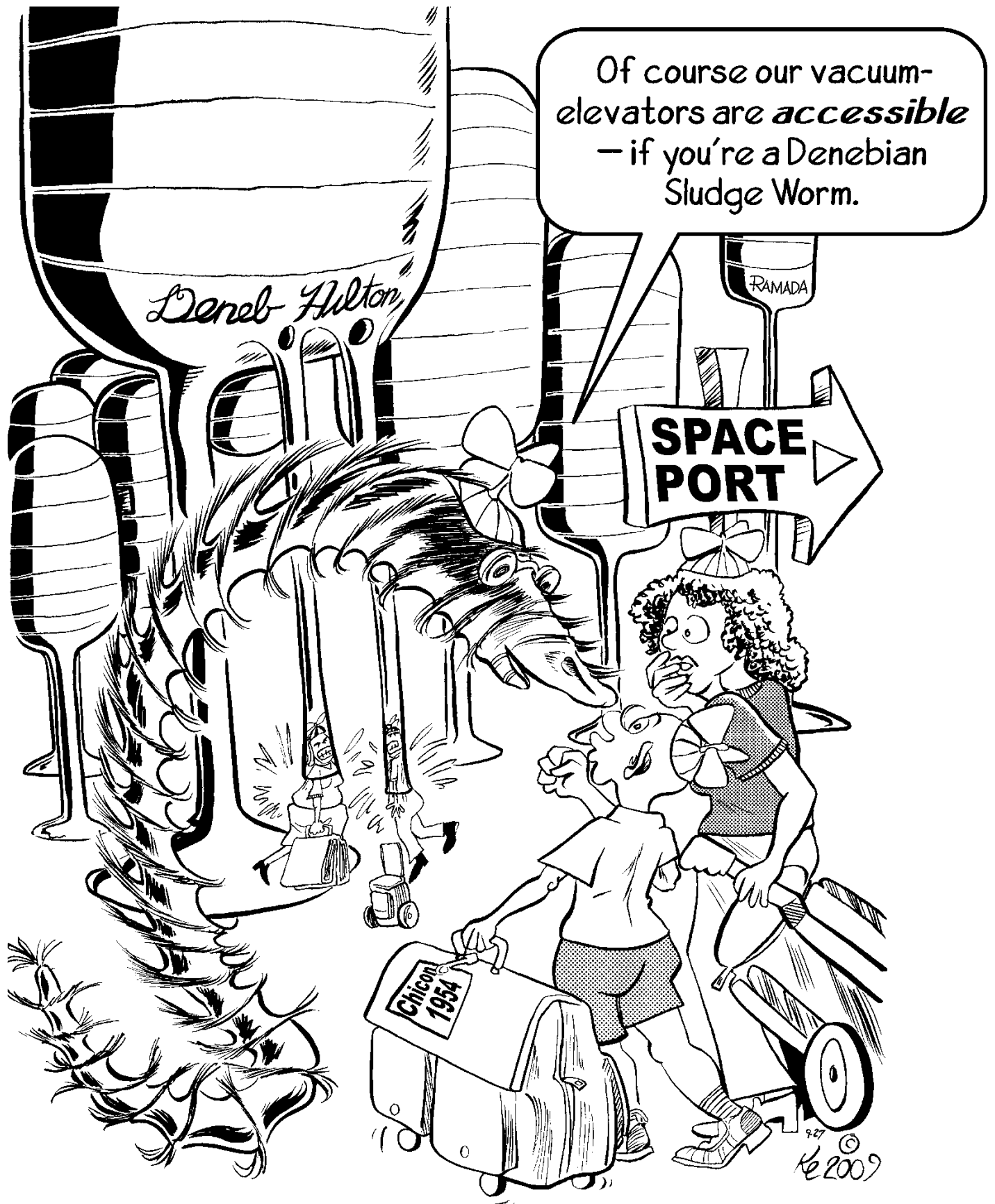


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial Comments _____	1
By Anne KG Murphy	
Tips on Dating Your Hotel _____	2
By Jer Lance	
Hotel Liaising for your ConCom: Information Flow _____	4
By Anne KG Murphy	
Top Ten Things Your Hotel Can Do For You _____	7
By Anne KG Murphy	
Midfan Access #1 Why We Do It & Signage _____	8
By Jesse the K	
Welcoming a Diverse Community to Your Con _____	11
By Anne KG Murphy	
U-Con's Smooth Moves _____	12
By Laura Hamel	
How to Run a Bone Marrow Registry Drive at Your Con _____	15
By Val Grimm	
Midwest Convention Calendar _____	17
Letters of Comment Request _____	18

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MidFanzine 4: Next Steps Fall, 2009

Available for \$3 or the Usual to editor@midfan.org. Anne KG Murphy, 120 S Walnut St, Yellow Springs, OH, 45387. 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. All rights remain with contributors.

Many thanks to Kim Kofmel and Gary Farber for proofing this issue.

Midfan

<http://www.midfan.org/> info@midfan.org

On Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=151273580660>

On Livejournal at <http://community.livejournal.com/midfan/>

Discussion List

Midfan-talk Yahoo Group, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/midfan-talk/> to sign up, email midfan-talk-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Editorial Comments

2005-2008 were years where a number of key Midfan executive members experienced a lot of Life (with a capital L). As Erik V. Olsen commented in June of this year, “From the KC MWC to now, I think we've had three divorces/separations, one birth, one cancer survivor, Ghugle knows how many funerals, and so forth. It's not been our best time, by and large.”

I think that was putting it mildly. Thankfully, not only does Life Happen, it also Goes On.

In 2008 Helen Montgomery approached the rest of us about having Chicago host another Midwest Construction (MWC). Midfan's Illinois incorporation had since lapsed and the group wasn't quite ready to coalesce around that idea, though we appreciated the initiative. But it did get us talking again, and in 2009 when Ann Totusek sent an inquiry about hosting an MWC in Iowa, we decided it was worth trying to get the group back under way.

Many things had changed since 2004, including that Facebook, LiveJournal and other social networking tools had really hit their stride. So I created a Yahoo Group (Midfan-talk) for discussion, a Facebook Group for networking and event announcements, and a LiveJournal community (midfan) in which to also post news and comments in case there are people who would use that but not the other two. Erik and I got the website back online and made sure the email aliases work, with help from Randy Kaempfen, who is hosting them. Once the discussion list was up and had a few members, I did a major update of the Midwest Convention Calendar I and some others have been maintaining on Google, asking the group for suggestions. That calendar is now embedded in the Midfan web page, and people can 'subscribe' to see it on their own Google calendar page.

When considering what to do to reboot Midfan, I wanted to go back to our core concepts. Founder Steven Silver wrote to me about that,

When I first came up with the idea of MidFan, I had two goals in mind. The first, based on a comment Tammy [Coxen] made, was to have a SMOF-con like convention that focused on running local and regional cons. After our first SMOFCon, Tammy had commented that it was good and she learned a lot from it, but all the discussion seemed to focus on running a Worldcon, since that was the one con everyone had in common. The idea for MidFan and Midwest Construction was to look at things being done in a smaller, more contained manner.

The second purpose was to help build ties among fans in the Midwest. If you look at East Coast fandom, aside from actual clubs that meet between conventions, people are more likely to travel to get to cons. In a large part, this is because the states are so small. Going from Boston to Philadelphia for a con may mean traveling across four states, but it can be done in a reasonable time. In the Midwest, people frequently only hit their local cons, and MidFan was meant to be a way of rectifying that.

Whatever form a resurgent Midfan takes, we will try to see it incorporate those original goals in some way. In the coming year, we hope Midwest conrunners will host Midfan events and conversations at your home conventions, bring issues and challenges to the discussion group and 'zine, post events you want to promote to the group and thus to the calendar, and consider whether or not you'd like to help hold another Midwest Construction or be more active in managing Midfan itself.

Before we host another MWC, we should probably become a legal entity again, and that's going to require bylaws and probably a board of directors. I hope if we provide ways to exchange ideas and come into contact, the appeal of membership will naturally follow, and more formal organization will rise from that. I believe *MidFanzine* is a key forum for the exchange of ideas and information. I hope you enjoy this issue and write to tell me what you think.

—Anne KG Murphy

Tips on Dating Your Hotel

By Jer Lance

Jer is going to do a series of articles describing the different phases of working with a hotel. Here is installment #1.

For several years now, I have undertaken to help others understand what it is that I do as facilities coordinator for local, volunteer-run events. I do this in response to a frequently asked question: “what should I do as hotel liaison?” Whether you call it facilities coordinator, hotel liaison, or give it the lofty (and almost entirely meaningless) professional title I once had embossed on my business cards—Logistical Facilities Management Coordinator—it all comes down to one rudimentary concept: managing the relationship between the event and the facility. Remembering always that relationship maintenance is job number one is what separates truly effective coordinators from those that merely obtain and enforce a contract.

I think it is fair to say, however, that this response does little to answer the underlying question, which could now be better expressed as, “how should I go about managing the relationship between my event and the facility?” That question can best be answered by walking through the lengthy process of managing that relationship from start to finish. It is a five-phase process that actually begins during facility selection, carries on in the contract negotiation, event planning and event execution phases, and ends with a final after-action review meeting once the event is done and paid for. Let us begin at the beginning with...

Facility Selection

The process begins with a rigorous routine of interviewing potential facilities, and you should interview EVERY possible facility in your target location. No interview is wasted, so never make the mistake of limiting your possibilities before you even start. Even the most ‘inappropriate’ seeming hotel might have surprising opportunities available, and each interview gives experience in what to ask, what to mention, and what options are available. When I first started, I was constantly worried that I would look stupid or that I would get taken advantage of if I seemed less than completely knowledgeable, but after a few meetings alongside a mentor I felt far more comfortable. If you schedule the facilities you feel are least likely up front, you get the added benefit of getting your nerves out of the way before you hit the ‘better’ choices.

I refer to these meetings as interviews on purpose, because you are interviewing potential facilities. This is really the first date between your event and the hotel, so take this opportunity to tell them about your event as much as possible while learning as much about the culture of the hotel as you can. This is an important part of the negotiation; no amount of monetary savings is worth having a hotel that is going to dislike or disapprove of elements of your event’s personality; it can even run into greater costs down the road. During the course of the interview, listen for indications as to what is important to the hotel. Often, you can retrieve valuable negotiation hints from these early conversations and employ them later to great effect.



Note that I mentioned negotiations coming later. You should never start negotiations until you have at least visited each hotel you have on your list. Only after you have seen what each hotel has to offer can you begin to organize what benefits—and more importantly, what trade-offs—each site has to offer; this list is essential to the negotiation process. Some things to consider include:

How many rooms are available?

Not owning the entire hotel limits what you are able to do in the public spaces and lessens your function-space cost bargaining power. Owning the whole hotel necessitates an overflow hotel, but provides far more leverage when negotiating.

How much function space is available?

This seems like a no-brainer, but remember that your event is going to have to fit here both in terms of floor space and in terms of room count. Just as important as the actual function space, however, is the lobby, hallway, and general assembly areas. Having a massive ballroom does you little good if you are going to have several panels happening at once, and perfect function space is useless if there are no public areas in which patrons can mingle and hang out.

What is the food/drink/alcohol policy in public and/or function areas?

Most importantly, make sure that these policies coincide with what your event wants to do this year or are mutable enough that you can work out some arrangement.

What is the schedule like for the engineers and maintenance persons?

Ensure that there is someone able to make maintenance and moderate engineering repairs on site during all of the hours that your convention is running or prepare for the unexpected to abuse your convention in painful and unforeseen ways.

How is the hotel staffed for room changes?

Often, smaller hotels can find ways to accommodate larger events by virtue of putting staff on-site that can switch the layout of a room quickly and efficiently between panels getting more effective use of the space. For example, the hotel staff working during Penguicon 7.0 in 2009 switched the configuration of half of the ballroom several times throughout the weekend making the space, at various times: a large 300 seat hall, a 200 seat hall and an 80 seat panel room, an 80 seat panel room and a dance floor with seating in the back, and three 80 seat panel rooms. What could have been entirely too small a space became just right.

With these questions in mind it is time to approach each potential site (after you have used the initial interview process to winnow out those that simply will not work culturally or from a size perspective) and undertake the most awe-inspiring, fear-inducing, and reputation-building part of the experience. It is time to negotiate the contract.

Tune in next time for the next phase in ~~dating~~ working with your facility!

Hotel Liaising for your ConCom: Information Flow

By Anne KG Murphy

This article might seem like it would be redundant with Jer's, but I am assuming your hotel is already selected and on contract and focusing on information flow between the committee and the hotel, through the liaison.

A hotel liaison can be a critical component of an effective convention committee. Your hotel is the environment where the entire convention occurs—from the huge public events to the private experiences convention members have in their guest rooms. As the convention's hotel liaison, you are there to try to optimize every aspect of convention attendees' experience at the con, including the experiences of the volunteers running the convention—your committee and staff, especially. Finally, you are the face of the convention to the hotel; the hotel liaison needs to develop a relationship with the hotel if they are going to be happy with you and give you what you need, not just during the current year but in future years through contract negotiations. In order to do this effectively you need to find out and satisfy the information needs of both the hotel and your convention: concom, staff, volunteers, and other members.

Before the Convention

Getting Familiar with the Hotel

Take a tour of the hotel as soon as you have the opportunity to do so. Look at all of the function rooms, and get a list from the hotel of how many people they can fit in the rooms in different configurations. Then go in and look at each type of guest room in the hotel, including all the suites if they are different. For each of these rooms you want to understand the layout of the room and also find out which pieces of furniture can and cannot be removed from the room (and find out if there are fees for removing things like beds from the room). Some hotels won't remove beds, or have conference tables in suites that cannot be moved or removed. This significantly impacts what rooms can be used for. If they have accessible rooms and entrances, find out what that means in detail.

Review the services the hotel offers, and take notes. Check out the pool, hot tub, fitness center, etc., so you can answer questions about that. How big are they? What equipment do they have? What are the hours? Is there a gift shop? What sort of things does it stock? Is there a bar? Does it serve food? (What food services are there in the hotel, in general?) Does the hotel offer a business center with printing? How about shipping services to and from the hotel? Does the hotel offer a shuttle service to the airport or to area businesses? If there are any fee schedules or hours of operation for these sorts of services, you should know what they are.

You also want to find out about policies that could affect the con. It could be important to them for people to wear shoes in the lobby because it is contiguous with a restaurant. They might have a thoroughly non-smoking property, or they might have smoking rooms and smoking areas. Find all of that out.

Working with the Concom

Let the convention committee know about any specific agreements with the hotel – either special items the hotel is giving you or special requirements or constraints they may have. Work with the committee to get things added if you need them. (See the next item, "Top Ten Things Your Hotel Can Do For You," for examples). Then write up any agreements relevant to the membership at large so they can get printed in the Convention Program or Souvenir Book and on the convention website.

Prepping the Hotel Staff: Letting Them Know What to Expect

Even if you have been in a hotel before, it is good to have a meeting with your sales contact to review the theme and general plan for this year's convention and to make sure they can communicate accurately with the rest of the staff about the event. Take a photo album with you with pictures from the previous year. Leave fliers. Make sure you set up expectations accurately.

Specifying Room Set-Ups and Changes

Your hotel should give you a list of all the equipment—tables, chairs, easels, microphones, microphone stands, podiums, stage pieces and stairs, etc.—the hotel has or can get for you. Tables come in a number of sizes and shapes. Find out which ones the hotel has and let your concom see the list. Find out exactly which sizes they need. Then make sure your hotel can fill that order!

Note that sometimes it is important to have a table of a certain size, and sometimes the overall surface area is important and it can be made with two or more tables pushed together.

The hotel should also have a chart that lists how many people fit theater-style in each room in the function space. Make sure a copy of this chart gets to your programming people. If they give you floor charts that diagram the suites, give these to your consuite, green room, and party coordination heads. Have your department heads copy the room layout charts and then draw in roughly where they want furniture to go in the room. Have them clearly specify what furniture, if any, they want removed from any rooms.

In the case of Huckster/Dealers, this is especially important and should be a pretty accurate drawing. Art show is less critical because you probably set up most of art show yourself and just use tables around the edges or for sales. But the hotel will set up all the tables for the dealers room, so you want to make sure they do it right, with space for people to walk and move wheelchairs and powered scooters through. This diagram should also indicate where power drops should go.

You will need Programming to specify how it wants each function space set up, and how and when rooms need to change during the day, if they do. Make sure programming schedules at least an hour for a major room change, if possible. Especially if it involves bringing in or taking away chairs.

Party Assignment and Coordination

Some conventions have the hotel liaison organize parties, but hopefully you have a separate party coordinator. In any case, parties are one of the biggest responsibilities for a hotel liaison, because usually the convention controls the suites and sometimes the assignment of other (non-suite) parties to places on the party floor. This means the liaison has to make sure the right party hosts get reserved into the correct rooms. You should also control the rooms to either side of your parties and put people in them who don't mind the noise. Taking volunteers for those sleeping locations is a good idea to avoid later problems.

Help your party coordinator make sure all party hosts know hotel rules and regulations as well as offered services. This includes what type of tape they can or cannot use on the walls or other surfaces, as well as whether or not they are allowed to plug in hot plates and such. Remind them to warn party guests that alcohol cannot be carried down into function space and that they must check IDs if serving.

Guest of Honor Rooms

If your hotel is good, it should be very easy for your guests of honor to check in—they need only show up and show ID. Some hotels insist on taking a credit card for room check-in. Whether or not the convention does this themselves depends in part on whether or not you are covering all expenses for your GoHs. Ideally, you will actually be able to check guests in in advance, and their guest liaisons can hand them their keys without their even having to stand in line at the counter. I also recommend having the hotel place gift baskets in the hotel rooms for the guests before they arrive.

Reviewing the Plan with the Hotel and the Committee

Plan to take time off work if necessary to have a meeting with the concom department heads and the head hotel staff at the hotel the week before the con to go over the banquet order (which is the big list of all the room set-ups, and all food and beverages ordered) and just generally to meet and exchange phone numbers. Get a list of all the names and positions of staff who will be working the weekend of the event. Note faces and names if possible. Facilitate the expression of requirements from the committee to the hotel. This should include lots of details like when the Consuite wants ice (before busy times) and when housekeeping should plan to clean it (during quiet times, like the early morning).

During the Convention

Signage

If your convention has any special arrangements with the hotel, such as free wireless internet, an available late check-out, or extended pool hours, ask the hotel if you can post a sign about that at the check-in desk. Another good sign to put up there is one that indicates which are the quiet floors and which are the party floors, encouraging people to make sure their room is located appropriately.

If people can use the stairs to access guest rooms and move from floor to floor, make sure the doors to the stairs are well marked with signs, and put signs by the elevators on all the major floors—party floors, the consuite floor, and the ground floor—showing the way to the nearest set of stairs. This will help extend the functionality of the elevators during the con, as will signs by or in the elevators encouraging people who can to ride up and walk down, to preserve the functionality of the elevators for people who really need them. If there are any difficult to navigate walkways, guide peoples through those with signs. Put signs on the doors of your function spaces indicating their function, and hours if relevant. Help con attendees know the hotel as well as you do.

Interacting with Banquet, Front of House, and Housekeeping Staff

First, give them chocolate! The front desk staff are some of the first people your convention members will interact with at your event. Make sure they are happy and excited to have you all there. Also give the staff tips, and encourage your members to tip them. Housekeeping and banquet staff are your allies in making everything run smoothly. Appreciate them!

If you are lucky and take up a sizeable proportion of your hotel, you will have an event liaison who will be present throughout most of your event and able to help you problem solve anything that comes up during the convention. Regardless, it is important to cultivate a good working relationship with the rest of the hotel staff, and to know which department to contact if something is needed. Your committee cannot foresee every eventuality in advance, so there are going to be unexpected requests for room changes and tables and such; be ready for those. Also be prepared to contact the staff if something that was in the banquet order is not done on time.

Assume a cordial relationship with your hotel, but have a copy of the banquet order *and* the contract with you on site in case there are any misunderstandings. Sometimes people will swap shifts and someone will be in charge of the front desk or banquets who has not been briefed on details of the agreement with your event. As soon as you hear a rumor that people are being told something incorrect, track down who is ill-informed and make sure it is rectified as soon as possible.

At ConFusion we have had to deal with front desk telling people the hotel was sold out when it wasn't, that the pool was closed for renovations when it wasn't (they couldn't do that—we had access to the pool in our contract!), and we have had banquet staff start trying to close down function spaces at night because they didn't understand that we were a 24-hour event and had scheduled a room change at night that needed to happen in the morning (yes, we made them send staff home and have them come back the next day!).

Answering Your Phone

Very important! One of the most exciting things we ever saw at a hotel was a sign on an easel in the back room behind the Front desk. On it were the name and cell phone number of the hotel liaison, the phone number for Ops, and instructions to call the liaison, then Ops if they had any issues! That was great! That's the way to have an informed hotel staff!

Encourage the hotel staff to call you, and also welcome calls and questions from your concom. Keep the information flowing!

Top Ten Things Your Hotel Can Do For You

By Anne KG Murphy

These are bonus agreements you can establish with your hotel: things your hotel can do for you. Make sure a printed copy of them is kept at the front desk and all hotel staff are informed about them.

1. Let you use their loading dock, dollies, and service elevator to load in your consuite, green room, and other equipment /supplies. (They will prefer to have you use the service elevator anyway: less inconvenience for other hotel guests.)
2. Deliver ice on a schedule to your consuite, green room, and parties. (This avoids having party hosts empty on-floor ice makers, which also inconveniences other guests.)
3. Block your rooms by type. Set the number of the hotel's King, Double, and Handicapped-Accessible rooms that are included in your room block (you might need to calibrate this over a few years). Request that they hold Accessible rooms for people who need and request them, instead of giving them to people who request that bed type but don't need an accessible room.
4. Assign rooms to block your convention members together. Especially, assign convention staff who will be quiet to the rooms around the rooms of your Guests of Honor, and con people who will not complain about noise around room parties. Put a sign on the hotel check-in counter indicating which floors are quiet or party rooms and reminding people to request the type they want.
5. Have the hotel staff call Ops to help them handle any complaint having to do with convention members. This includes complaints about noise as well as inappropriate costumes or behavior. (This makes life easier for both the hotel and the con. But you may have to train them to do it.)
6. Facilitate cheap food. Provide a cheap concession for lunch at the hotel, or lunch specials for convention members in the restaurant (this is especially important if the hotel restaurant is expensive). I've also seen hotels let cons use their restaurant space for the consuite or for special events, or permit the use of grills and roasters in the consuite or outside on a balcony or the lawn. And they let the consuite borrow storage space in the hotel fridge and/or freezer.
7. Waive fees for things like ice, easels, photocopies, mini fridges, power drops, internet access, microphones, and other AV equipment for the convention and party hosts. As a minimum, waive corkage fees for the con and party hosts in guest rooms. Note: your corkage waiver should cover all the guest room floors, and you can also negotiate for it to cover your kids programming so you can bring in affordable snacks and juice for the kids even if the kids program is in function space.
8. Give you free rooms. This is generally based on number of room-nights you fill, but it doesn't have to be. Also, that number is negotiable. Keep in mind also that the hotel is going to be less full on Thursday, so they might be willing to let you have green room, consuite, and storage rooms for free Thursday night. This avoids problems where guests in those rooms are late to check out on the Friday of the con and your load-in and set-up schedule gets delayed.
9. Give your staff and/or convention members a late checkout of 2 or 4 pm on Sunday on request. (If they plan ahead and schedule their housecleaning staff for it, they can do this.)
10. Set extended hours for the pool and hot tub and workout room for the convention. (ConFusion gets 24-hour access to these from Thursday through Sunday night!)

Midfan Access #1 Why We Do It & Signage

By Jesse the K

Jesse the K has worked on Access for WisCons 31, 32, & 33. You can reach her via jesse.the.k@gmail.com.

Access is first and foremost an attitude: understanding that there is no standard member configuration. Creating an accessible con doesn't mean addressing *special needs*. Members vary in our cognitive, emotional, and physical skills; we differ in age and experience. Creating a con that works for our infinite diversity means all of us can relax and contribute.

Some concom members may balk at whether there's "really a need" for access. There are already fans with disabilities attending your cons, but they're generally putting in extra effort, expense and energy to get there. There are many fans with disabilities who don't think of themselves "that way," since "disabled" is such a strongly stigmatized identity. For some services, attempting to canvass your existing membership won't accurately reflect accessibility needs. For example wheelchair users and people who need visual language (captioning or sign interpreters) won't show up until the access is there to make attending feasible.

Designing universal access into your cons improves the con experience for everyone.

Members are the true experts on what they need. It follows that the more information we provide in advance, the better equipped members are to judge whether a con will work for them. WisCon is honest about the access we can't provide, even if this requires "being negative" about our event. Honesty saves members from the infuriating experience of paying membership, travel, and hotel fees only to encounter barriers on arrival. In my experience, acknowledging these obstructions provided a chance for the concom to realize that some barriers are readily removable.

Concom members responsible for access should prepare to consider the possible barriers in every program area, as well as how the concom can redesign areas with the barriers removed. Implementing access does require both attention to detail and an overview of all the areas.

Access is not only about wheelchairs—in fact, providing basic wheelchair access in modern US hotels is relatively straightforward. Check WisCon's Access information at <http://wiscon.info/access.php> to see the various issues we address. In my first year working on Access, concom members wondered why I was always going on about signs. The Americans with Disabilities Act Standards for Accessible Design include extensive signage requirements because good signs remove barriers.

- For those of us with mobility impairments, knowing exactly where you're going saves steps, threading through crowds, and peering up at doors
- For those of us with cognitive impairments, obvious travel paths require less working memory, minimizing anxiety and frustration. Functional room signs eliminate translation, e.g. "what room number am I looking for?"
- For those of us with vision impairments, perceptible signs make independent travel possible

When the Access Team debuted signage at WisCon 31, it was wildly popular with all members, demonstrating how Access serves many needs. It made all members feel welcome and secure. It minimized cross-traffic and wasted steps (very important in our crowded hotel). It provided relevant info where and as it's needed (example: art show hours on the door as well as in the program book).

The Americans with Disability Act Standards for Accessible Design mandate copious signage that meets detailed legibility specifications (see links at end). WisCon's sign design is based on other high-traffic, high-stimulation environments, such as airports and hospitals. Here's the nitty gritty on how we do signs at WisCon:

Types of Signs and Their Placement

Wayfinding Signage

Wayfinding signs mark every space which a public member may need to know about:

- Programming rooms (panels, ballroom, speeches)
- Function rooms/spaces (reg desk, volunteer sign-up, bathrooms, art show, dealers' room)
- Limited-access rooms (green room, kids' programming)

Wayfinding signage should be:

1. Easy to find—at predictable locations, right angles to the path of travel, suspended above the heads of the crowd so always in view
2. Easy to read—super-legible high-contrast font, large font size and consistent layout
3. Easy to understand—when possible, sign shows WisCon-specific, functional room names (for example, “Con Suite” instead of “Room 638.”) and sign abbreviations are unique (for example, “C5” for conference room 5 is visually different than “CAP A” for Capital A.)

Wayfinding Sign Placement:

- At right angles to path of travel
- High enough to avoid heads with high hats (bottom of sign at 8 ft)
- Don’t mount inside alcove (would obscure distance reading)

Door Signage

Door signs explain activities that aren’t open 24/7. When the room is open for business, the door is opened to around 170°, so the sign posted on the “inside” of the door displays function and open hours. “Outside” door signs alert members that this is the function’s location and that it’s currently closed.

Door Signage should be:

1. As large as possible
2. As detailed as possible

For door signs, be expansive. In addition to “open” hours, list least-crowded hours.

Door Sign Placement:

- On face of door that’s visible during relevant hours.
- No higher than 5 feet.
- Post information that’s relevant when room is closed on outside of door, information relevant when it’s open on the inside.

Sign Content

The hotel’s own signage uses *their* room names. WisCon signs instead show our functional room labels. For overhead wayfinding, keep it short & unique, e.g.:

Hotel provided sign = WisCon’s sign

Capitol Ballroom A = Cap A

Assembly = Ass’y

University BCD (Art Show) = Art

Madison Ballroom (Dealer’s Room) = Deal

Conference 5 = C5

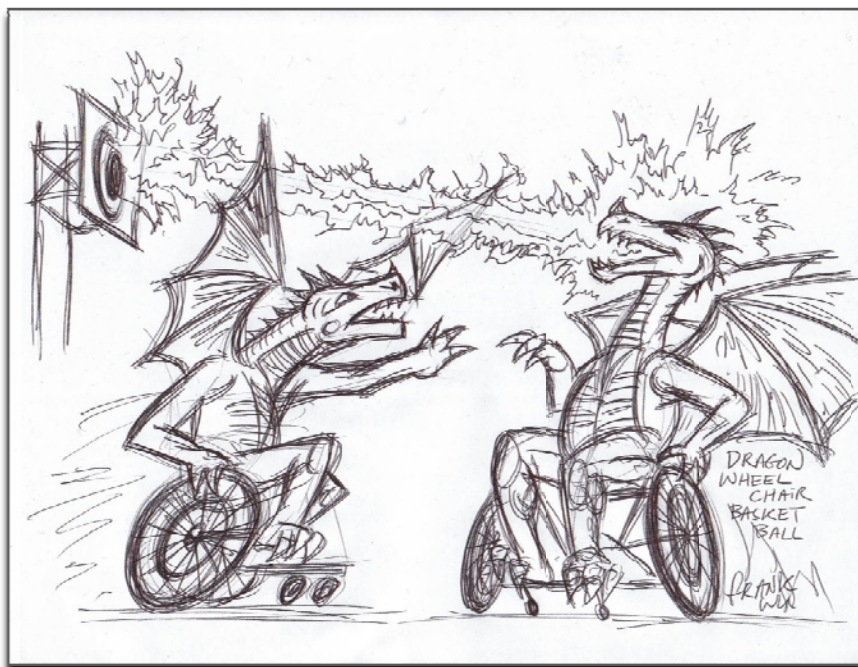
Reservations Manager (Quiet Place) = Quiet

Conference Room 638 = Con Suite

Overhead signs display the same information on both sides. Some door signs display the “open” info on one side and the closed info on the back.

Design Issues

Choose a font to balance super legibility vs more characters per line (which permits less cryptic abbreviations). Use a well-designed, traditional bold condensed sans serif, with even type color, a large x-height, and slight positive (4%) letterspacing.



Good font choices: Helvetica Neue Bold Condensed; Myriad SemiCondensed Semibold; Univers 67 Bold Condensed; Frutiger 67 Bold Condensed

Fonts to avoid: Helvetica Narrow (too spindly); Optima or others with variable strokes; Antique Olive or others with angular/prickly counters; any serif or slab-serif family.

Paper Size

- Balance cheap materials, easy manufacture and room to write things down
- Standard 20# bond paper, printed landscape 11" by 8.5", 9 x 6 inch live page

Color Coding

Type for adults is black. Color type for kids (pre-readers can still identify "sign with green letters"). Maintain legibility with low-intensity pastel paper colors (also the cheapest). Paper color indicates room type:

- **white:** Program rooms where activities change during the con
- **buff:** Constant-function spaces: con suite, dealers, art show, net access
- **salmon:** Restricted rooms: green room, children's programming, "closed" door signs
- **green:** "open" door signs

Mounting/Display

All signs are printed on 20# bond and slipped into a sheet protector. Products listed at end of article. The sheet protectors can handle repeated applications of masking tape, last for several cons, and are cheaper and lower-carbon-load than laminating.

Wayfinding signs: Same text back-to-back in sheet protector. Suspended from pair of ceiling grid clips (ours supplied by hotel, cost \$0.80/pair in 100 quantity). Concourse ceiling height is low enough we threaded the clip hooks directly into the two outer ring holes. For a taller ceiling, one could thread lightweight string through the 3-ring holes in sheet protector, then tie in loop. Suspend the loop in the ceiling clip hooks. The string path is trapezoidal to minimize sign spinning or twisting.

Door signs are affixed directly to door with masking tape. The open/closed signs are two sided in a sheet protector; the hours-open signs are single-sided in a sheet protector.

Production Calendar & Staff

Staffing & Skills

- *Sign prep/layout:* user skilled with word processor or light layout program. Use "keep next"/"keep lines together" styles to prevent endless futzing with page breaks.
- *Printing & fabrication:* output on correct paper color, slide into sheet protectors, sort by floor
- *Mounting:* 15 mins training: volunteer who can read, climb ladders, work with arms overhead

Timeline

One month before the con: 8 hours

- Get room names/functions/hours from hotel & programming staff
- Develop unique abbreviations, assign paper color codes
- Dry run with layout software, printer, construction

Two weeks before the con: 12 hours

- Confirm sign text drafts (doors with relevant area chairs; overheads with hotel & programming dept.), no later than weekend before con
- Print & fabricate. Slow inkjet ~5 signs/hour (10 sheets) due to heavy ink coverage; wiggling 20# bond into sheet protectors keeps one busy between print jobs.

Thursday evening at-con: 3 hours

- Start mounting signs at sixth (top) floor and work your way down to the ground floor.

Monday afternoon at-con: 1 hour

- Start unmounting at sixth floor.
- Collate wayfinding and door signs into separate boxes to make life easier next year

Accessibility Resources

- **ADA Signage Requirements (minimums only!)**
<http://www.access-board.gov/ada-aba/final.htm#marker-1009000>
- **Hardware for ceiling tile attachments**
Handi-Hooks, 1", \$36 for 100. – <http://www.hangups.com/TBarHooks.html>
- **Sheet protectors**
C-Line CLI62029 Recycled Top Load Reduced Glare Sheet Protectors - any office supply shop can order, \$12.00 for box of 100.

Welcoming a Diverse Community to Your Con

By Anne KG Murphy

There has been a great deal of discussion this year, online and at various conventions, about race, racism, and science fiction, and diversity in the sf fan community, or rather lack thereof. Fans of color (FOC) have been letting the community know that they exist in greater number than their attendance at cons suggest, and also that some of them don't feel that science fiction conventions are a safe space for them. Making science fiction conventions a safer, more welcoming space for people of all kinds and colors requires an open, listening, non-defensive stance on the part of the con, and a willingness to change your standard operating procedures to do outreach, which, as I've had pointed out to me, is something we fan rarely do well in the first place. I encourage other smofs to educate themselves on this issue and think about how to address it.

Midwest Comic-cons and Anime cons have a larger contingent of young people and more diversity than our science fiction conventions. Why? It may be that they advertise in different places, and put more images of people—including a diverse selection of people—in their ads, fliers, and websites. Television and film sf also have more prominent protagonists of different races than written sf at the moment, especially if you view written sf as reflected on book covers, which are often “whitewashed” to either misrepresent characters' skin colors or only show white characters. Awareness of these trends is on the rise. But how can we encourage diversity in our cons in the meantime? Here are just a few ideas, and I welcome more:

- Invite authors, artists and scientists of African, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, Arab and Indian descent to be guests at your con. Don't know the race of many authors? There is a list of sf authors of color at <http://matociquala.livejournal.com/1622391.html>
- Read this essay by Nalo Hopkinson: http://nalohopkinson.com/2009/18/05/looking_for_clues.html
- Organize programming to discuss sf works by people of color. Have a diversity of people on the panel. For a recent list of mind-blowing sf by women and people of color, check out http://www.tor.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=blog&id=52460
- Find fans and authors of non-European descent in your area and invite them to be on the program. Program them into a diverse selection of panels, not just panels on race issues. If you do have panels on race issues, make sure you put white people on them too. These are issues we all need to talk about.
- If you have art workshops at your con, see if they can include non-white models and artists.
- Reach out to fans of color in your community and invite them to be on the con.
- Support the Carl Brandon Society. Get brochures from them to put out on the freebie table, run charity auctions to donate to their scholarships and the Octavia E. Butler Award. Distribute and discuss their reading lists at your con and in online discussions. See <http://www.carlbrandon.org> for more details.
- Consider posting a diversity statement on your website along with a policy against harassment.
- Host mediated discussions on how to be good allies to people of all races.

Note that you can mingle discussions of how to make spaces safer for people of different sizes, genders, sexual orientations, and the differently abled, with discussions of supporting racial diversity. Many of the strategies for being a good ally, such as speaking up when offensive things are said and not leaving people to defend themselves, and making sure people know they can and should report harassment to Ops, are the same.

U-Con's Smooth Moves

By Laura Hamel

U-Con is an annual gaming convention that takes place in Ann Arbor each November. The convention attracts gamers not only from Southeast Michigan but from across the United States and several other countries as well. U-Con both keeps the convention affordable and hosts a wide variety of quality events. The convention opens on a Friday morning in November and runs through Sunday evening. It is held in the student union building on the University of Michigan campus. More than 500 people typically attend U-Con, including staff, gamemasters, exhibitors, and other attendees.

In 1988, the wargaming club at the University of Michigan put on a small gaming convention known as Michi-Mini-Con. By 1990 they knew they wanted to do it again. So, they started U-Con. Ever since, U-Con has been run by a combination of students and former students. Staff turnover has been a problem as with many volunteer organizations. Most of the organizational knowledge resided in just a few members of the convention committee (Concom) and transferring knowledge is a constant challenge.

The programming of the convention itself largely comes from the people who attend. Some of our attendees submit events ahead of time; we call those attendees gamemasters (or GMs). We usually have 200-250 events. We create a schedule for the events and produce a programming book listing all the individual events. Each attendee must purchase a badge to attend the convention as well as tickets for individual events. Volunteers and gamemasters are refunded their badge but still pay for individual events. All of the money we collect goes back into the convention, allowing us to rent the space, invite guests of honor, and provide other amenities.

We accept events from our gamemasters via a form on our website. Previously, events were transferred and managed locally on a staff member's computer (using a Filemaker database). However, now the events are saved directly to our online database. I developed an administrative website for U-Con which gives us the capability to edit event descriptions, schedule events, assign event numbers (which are unique identifiers), and assign a location for each event. It used to be highly labor intensive to transfer, transcribe, and schedule 250 events. We mailed out a preregistration book to provide the schedule to our attendees which was often retyped from scratch. Using our administrative website we can schedule the events as we receive them rather than losing several days for the process.

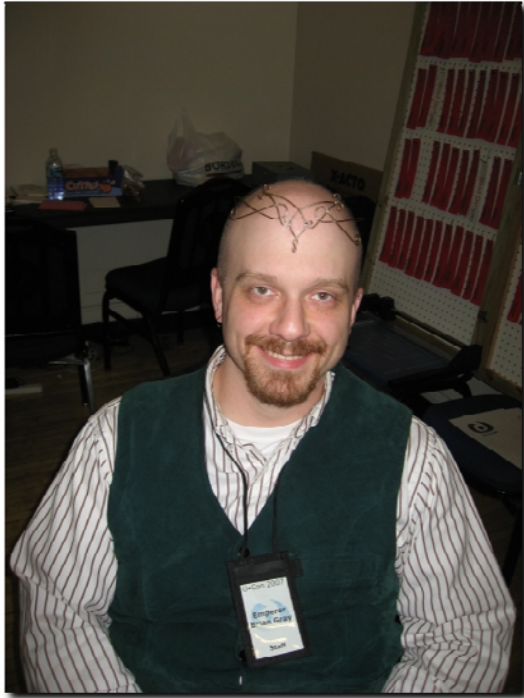
We publish the event list on our website, which allows anyone to browse and search for events they want. Our attendees can purchase tickets, badges, and even the convention t-shirt via our website. This might seem odd for a website which does not use encryption. In fact, we only take order information on the website. We take payments through alternate means, mostly by PayPal. We transcribe payments through the external system to our database where individual accounts are reconciled.

Lots of people ask if they need a badge to purchase event tickets. It is our policy to require a badge for purchasing tickets on site, but online we do not require it. There are gamemasters who are not directly registered, who get their badges through groups like RPGA or Amorphous Blob. We politely email and inquire when the attendee does not purchase a badge, in case it is someone unfamiliar with our convention, but almost always they indicate their group affiliation and we can verify it. Most issues are worked out before the convention, but we can check on site as a last resort.



All preregistration sales are kept in our database. We also track how many players purchase tickets for each event. We have had this database since 2001 so we've built up a long history of our events. That is a huge help in determining what types of events are interesting to our attendees, which helps inform us when we need to recruit events. We also can slice and dice our data by day, hours, or event type so we can figure out what sort of gamers attend our convention and look for trends.

Even though we have this fabulous computerized system, we do not trust it to run our convention. I've been to a few big name gaming conventions where the technology failed, the network jammed up, or the printers stopped working. We eliminate the risk by not relying on the computer during the convention, but instead on a slick paper system.



We print all our materials ahead of time. The convention programs are put together in a publisher program and the event schedule is transferred via copy and paste from specially formatted output. We keep all the tickets to our 200+ events on several large pegboards. We print stacks of blank badges. We print out envelopes and cards with all preregistration information ahead of time. Thus all the information about every individual preregistration is available in a small 4x6 card box. We print instructions on envelopes in which the gamemasters place all the tickets they collect for their events. When the gamemasters return the envelopes and tickets we enter the results into our database, but the convention does not depend on this, and no attendee is kept waiting because of a computer failure.

There is one place we do rely on computers. While we could add up the prices of badges and tickets by hand, it's much faster with our latest advancements: custom made cash register software and a barcode reader. The list of items available for purchase is kept in a local database and our simple java-based cash register reads the items from it. Further, all transactions are recorded so we can analyze our traffic in Ops and make

decisions about staffing.

Working the cash register is easy. The operator scans the barcode on each ticket and the barcode for the badge. We keep barcodes for frequently purchased items, like badges and tee-shirts, on a sheet of paper kept next to the cash register. As a last resort, the items are searchable. The register totals up the purchase and even gives the amount of change. This system would not work without the barcode reader. The original version of the cash register software was accepted with some annoyance by the staff, but with the barcode reader they found it easy to use and they were able to work very quickly.

The happiness of the staff is a major barometer for the health of a convention. When at the end of a convention the staff don't want to see each other for eight months, that is a bad sign. The barcode reader and administrative website were major improvements which helped morale. However, there are very simple things which can improve the experience of the staff. When I first started working as convention staff, the tables which make up the barrier between the customer and staff areas were set back against the wall. Staff only had a tiny walkway. We realized this was silly, since staff spend more time in the room than do the attendees. We moved the tables so that half of the Operations room was now designated for staff usage. We added a coat rack which added a place to store our coats and games. Suddenly our staff could breathe. It was such a simple improvement, but it had a visible effect.

The Operations room (Ops) has only a few major functions. First, it is our point of sale. The ticket pegboards line one wall and the computer with the cash register is placed on the table in front of it. Attendees line up

here to purchase tickets and badges. A volunteer assists the person at the cash register by fetching the requested tickets from the pegboard to be scanned and then purchased by attendees.

Second, it is our preregistration headquarters. All those who made arrangements with us online, for gamemaster events or preregistration, pick up their material in this room. This station is kept on the opposite side of the room from the point of sale, to reduce the clutter of foot traffic. We keep signs up to try to address confusion of where attendees should go, however we usually get the questions anyway unless we designate a greeter to direct people. We always ask for ID before handing out materials which were paid for online. GMs who complete their events return to this station with the tickets of those who played in their event. Most events qualify to have an event winner select a prize from the table, and the prize table is also the responsibility of the preregistration station. The prizes are generously donated by exhibitors or other game companies.

Finally, in the staff area behind the barrier tables we keep a workstation for the purpose of printing last minute announcements. We post these announcements on an easel outside the door. Ops is the location to which our attendees go with questions and problems. The building managers are told they can contact us in this room. The staff have a list of cell phone numbers in case a situation arises which they can't handle. This almost always involves working with the building managers or simply finding someone a table for their game.

We've made a lot of improvements to U-Con over the past 10 years. All of the changes were made to better serve the staff, our attendees, and the gaming community at large. We've disbursed much of the organizational knowledge to a tool, the website, which multiple people use. The good news is that the convention can still function if the chair comes down with food poisoning or the registration expert is held up at home. The website has converted what was once tedious work into... much, much less tedious work: scheduling and construction of the convention book. We've made it so that we are not dependent on any staff member staying up all night.



Anne Murphy, ready at the printer

If U-Con were truly desperate, the convention could be run by only three hardworking people and the website. However, like the cash register, the website only improves the organization and speed of processes which were in place long before it existed. It would not exist without the wealth of organizational and event planning knowledge built up by people who worked on the convention for years. The staff tell me how much they like it, mostly because it eliminated a lot of boring work and allowed us to get back to the reason we do this in the first place: putting on an awesome con.

We are fortunate that we do have a quality staff, and they do put on an awesome con. We've been told so by many of our Guests of Honor, industry personnel, exhibitors, and attendees. One recent Guest of Honor indicated that U-Con was the smoothest-running small convention which he'd ever attended. Yes occasionally (okay, frequently) we have issues and problems, but we also listen to our attendees and we try to do what is best for the gaming community. U-Con exists because of the gaming community. Playing games is what it's all about.

Laura Hamel is a Software Engineer who lives in Michigan. She is looking for people interested in buying, using, or improving her convention management software. More information at <http://www.gameconsuite.com>.

U-Con runs November 13-15, 2009. See <http://www.ucon-gaming.org> for further details.

How to Run a Bone Marrow Registry Drive at Your Con

By Val Grimm

You can find Val on twitter at <http://twitter.com/valgrimm>.

1. Why?

More than 35,000 patients per year, many of them children, are diagnosed with conditions treatable by marrow or stem cell transplant, including leukemia, other cancers, and genetic diseases. When someone needs a bone marrow transplant and none of their family members are a match, the registry searches for a donor whose tissue type profile is compatible. 70% of people requiring a transplant need an unrelated donor.

A person looking for a match may find one potential donor in a pool of 20,000, or 1,000,000, or more. The most likely match for someone is a person of the same or a similar ethnic background. No one is guaranteed a match, regardless of background, but ethnic minorities are especially underrepresented and have even less chance of finding a matching donor. Then they have to hope that person is on the registry.

You might be the match necessary to save a life.

Many people do not consider donating because they may not know they can help, but also because they have misconceptions about the donation process. Drives are a great venue for getting folks' questions answered. Sf cons bring lots of people together. The Heinlein Society and other organizations use this opportunity to replenish the country's blood supply (always in need of donors) and you can use this opportunity to spread the word about the bone marrow registry and even add new people to it!

2. How the Registration Process Works

- Individuals either go online or to a drive and make sure they are eligible to join the registry (although there are many registry organizations under many names, they share their data with one another). If they are eligible, a registration kit is acquired by mail or at a drive.
- The kit includes a form, labels, and two to four Q-Tips or cytology swabs (like Q-Tips, except brushy instead of cottony). Potential donors swab the insides of their cheeks, fill out the relevant forms, label their swabs and swab holder, and they're all set.

3. Convention Divisions or Division Heads Who May be Involved

- Conchair
- Whoever's handling fan tables
- Webmaster
- Publications
- Events
- Member services/Registration (if you want to use their card chargey machines)

4. What You Need

Somewhere to Be

A site to be at. Your best bet is high traffic areas, like lobbies. In the case of an sfcon, usually you want to be in the primary hotel or convention center.

Permission

Make sure the operators of the location as well as the convention committee understand what you are doing. Some of them may think the registration process is more involved than just doing a cheek swab, and balk.

Location, Location, Location

A table, preferably in a high traffic area (near registration is good) like a hotel lobby. If people are doing a blood drive on-site, it often makes sense to be near the blood drive or its donor intake table. Coordinating your efforts and cross-promoting with folks running blood drives at conventions is a Good Idea. Everyone wins!

A Registry Organization to Work With

You can look online for one in your area. Registries with offices across the U.S. include Be The Match (also known as the National Marrow Donor Program) and DKMS. Red Cross offices often have a relationship with the National Marrow Donor Program. There are also local blood services all around the country—in New York, for example, there's the New York Blood Center—and many of them have bone marrow registry offices. If you can't find info on their website, call them up (an out of date website doesn't necessarily mean a bad organization, they just may not have money for a redesign right now).

Once you decide what registry organization (whether local or national) you are going to work with—and it makes sense to make some phone calls and shop around before you make your decision—your liaison with that organization will be able to give you a lot of helpful pointers on getting together money or making sure you have what is needed to run the drive. Some registries will send people to staff the registration table (although even then you can still contribute work at-con promoting the drive, especially at a big convention). Others will just send you forms. You will always have some contact there, but make sure you understand how much support they will be giving you.

Some registries also may not register men who have had sex with men since 1977, citing their concerns about the statistical likelihood of those individuals having been infected with HIV. Caitlyn Raymond International Registry (which does drives in New England) accepts healthy donors regardless of sexual orientation, and there may be other registry organizations who do the same in your area. This is also something to consider when you decide what group to work with, although your region may not have a group of that kind, and if that is the case, you should **STILL** organize a drive with the organization you find to be the best fit anyway (lives get saved either way), but make sure to mention your concerns where appropriate, as nothing changes when people keep their mouths shut.

Working with Money

You may choose to raise money to defray or eliminate the cost of registration for potential donors. If you're going to be accepting any money from people registering, you'll need a way to take it (cashbox or access to the card chargey things at registration, for example, although the old-fashioned carbon-swipe things don't require an internet connection, heh, and neither does a cashbox). Some states require private insurance plans to cover the cost of tissue typing for the bone marrow registry, which varies from region to region (deductible and co-insurance do apply), so if you're running a drive in one of these states, you're home free (the registry organization will often cover the cost of a few out of state donors if you have them, although if folks can pay and are from out of state it is best that that they do pay, and make it easier for poorer folks to join the registry). It is worth investigating to see if you live in one of those states.

Often even if registries charge potential donors a registration fee to defray the cost of typing they will still be subsidizing some of the cost. You can raise money to defray registration costs for a drive the same way you would raise money for anything else—talking to local organizations and businesses. Make sure you speak with your drive liaison at the registry you work with to figure out how to best handle this element of the drive.

Promotions

Good ways to promote your drive:

- On the convention website, as well in as any other web presence for the con you can get onto—LiveJournal, Facebook, MyFace, Twitter, Ning, etc.
- Flyers and buttons and ribbons are your friend. Consuite may let you put flyers on some of the tables. Registered donors or members of the drive team (whether already on the registry or added at the convention) wearing buttons or t-shirts promoting bone marrow registration is excellent
- In the pocket or souvenir program

- Fun slogans. On the Heal Emru flyers, it is “You Can Be A Hero!” One of the registries has buttons that say “Will You Marrow Me?”
- Do a skit at Masquerade opening or halftime. Is there a big event (or are there a number of big events) at your convention? Those are good times to promote the drive. The events division is your friend. Talk to them **early** and **often**

5. Useful Bone Marrow Registration Resources

List of registries around the world
<http://healemru.com/registries.php>

Frequently Asked Questions
<http://healemru.com/faq.php>

Be the Match (NMDP)
<http://www.marrow.org/>

DKMS
<http://www.dkmsamericas.org/>

Search tool for listings of members of the American Association of Blood Banks
http://www.aabb.org/Content/Donate_Blood/Where_to_Donate/BloodBankLocator

How-to on running a drive from Be The Match (mostly to connect you with a drive liaison)
http://www.marrow.org/HELP/Recruit_Donors/index.html

How-to on running a drive from DKMS (again, connecting you with a drive liaison)
<http://www.dkmsamericas.org/category/learn-how-you-can-help/organize-bone-marrow-donor-drive>

Caitlyn Raymond International Registry (If you want to register online with them on your own, you can! This is that page)
<http://www.crir.org/registerdonor.php>

*Why not double it up? Have people register to be **organ donors** in their state as well as bone marrow donors! Check with your state’s department of transportation or secretary of state for details or go to <http://www.organdonor.gov/>.*

Midwest Convention List

Upcoming events through August 2010. 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.

2009

November		
Nov 13-15	WindyCon 36 http://www.windycon.org/windy36/	Lombard, IL
Nov 13-15	U*Con http://www.ucon-gaming.org/	Ann Arbor, MI
Nov 20-22	Contraception 21: Viva Las Vegas http://www.contrakc.com/	Kansas City, MO
Nov 20-22	Midwest Furfest: 10 Years of Furry Fun! http://www.furfest.org/	Wheeling, IL
Nov 27-29	Chambanacon 39 http://www.chambanacon.org/	Springfield, IL

2010

January

- Jan 22-24 **I See By My ConFusion** Detroit, MI
<http://stilyagi.org/index.php/confusion>
- Jan 22-24 **Visioncon** Springfield, MO
<http://www.visioncon.net/>

February

- Feb 5-7 **SuperCon XVII** Rochester, MN
<http://supercon.info/>
- Feb 11-14 **Capricon XXX: Celebration!** Chicago, IL
<http://www.capricon.org/capricon30/>

March

- Mar 19-21 **Millenicon 24** Cincinnati, OH
<http://www.millennicon.org/>
- Mar 27-28 **Planet Comicon** Overland Park, KS
<http://www.planetcomicon.com/>

April

- Apr 2-4 **Minicon** Bloomington, MN
<http://www.mnstf.org/minicon/>
- Apr 9-11 **Ad Astra** Toronto, ON, Canada
www.ad-astra.org
- Apr 9-11 **Filkontario** Toronto, ON, Canada
<http://www.filkontario.ca/>
- Apr 16-18 **Odessa Con X** Madison, WI
<http://www.oddcon.com/index.php>
- Apr 30-May 2 **Penguicon** Troy, MI
<http://www.penguicon.org/>

May

- May 15 **Genrecon** Sarnia, ON, Canada
genreconca@yahoo.ca
- May 28-31 **Wiscon** Madison, WI
<http://www.wiscon.info/>
- May 28-30 **ConQuest 41** Kansas City, MO
<http://www.conquestkc.org/>
- May 28-30 **Marcon: Necropolis** Columbus, OH
<http://www.marcon.org/>

June

- Jun 18-20 **Duckon 19** Naperville, IL
<http://www.duckon.org/>
- Jun 25-27 **Fourth Street Fantasy** Minneapolis, MN
<http://www.4thstreetfantasy.com/>
- Jun 25-27 **Midwestcon** Cincinnati, OH
www.cfg.org/midwestcon/

July

- Jul 1-4 **CONvergence 2010: Bring on the Bad Guys** Bloomington, MN
<http://www.convergence-con.org/>
- Jul 30-Aug 1 **Diversicon** Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN
<http://www.diversicon.org/>

August

- Aug 27-29 **Context 23** Columbus, OH
<http://www.contextsf.org/>

Letters of Comment

Please!

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