



ALAMO
May 14, MMV
Houston, Texas

InstaCon
The Original Texas ConRunners' Symposium



CONTENTS

Building Infrastructure for Your Con	1
Creating an Online Presence	3
Individualizing a Con	5
The Art of Budgeting	7
Special Programming	9
The Dance	10
Masquerades: Cultivating the Costuming Community	11
Exercise	12
Disastrous Hotel Contracts (and How to Avoid Them)	12
Recruiting Younger Fans	14
National Fannish Events in Texas	15
What is the World Fantasy Convention?	17
Notes and Networking	18

CREDITS

Hotel & Conference Coordination	Clif Davis
Registration	Kim G. Kofmel
Website	Bill Parker
Logo	Marla Buonodono
Hospitality	Friends of Fandom
	(coordinated by Candace Pulliene)
Proceedings	Kim G. Kofmel

Sponsored by ALAMO, Inc.
www.alamo-sf.org

InstaCon 5 is a conference organized by the Austin Literary Arts Maintenance Organization (ALAMO), a 501(c)3 corporation, in support of its literary purposes

INSTACON 5

THE ORIGINAL TEXAS CON-RUNNERS' SYMPOSIUM HOUSTON, TEXAS MAY 14, 2005

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR YOUR CON InstaCon Staff

Infrastructure is an ugly term for a lot of necessary things that aren't ugly at all. For a con, infrastructure can refer to your resources, your people, and your organization. Infrastructure means things as diverse as your advertising channels and the outside organizations that feed people into your con. The important thing about infrastructure is that very seldom does it just happen. Usually infrastructure must be built, a piece at a time, and even where you can use something already there, it must be encouraged and adopted. Another important thing about infrastructure is that frequently it isn't something you own, it's just something that will be available for you to use.

Infrastructure can be either tangible or intangible. An example of intangible infrastructure is the expectation and buzz which FenCon built a piece at a time, far in advance of their first con. The FenCon team went out to many surrounding cons, continually and methodically adding to a targeted image and reinforcing the expectation and growing knowledge of their con. By the time their first con took place they had built a targeted audience of frequent con-goers who had a very good idea of the flavor of con to expect. A sizable group of people who look forward to your con with enthusiasm is an asset that most cons take many years to develop, and sadly some cons *never* do. But once such a group exceeds a critical threshold, the existence of the group makes it easier to work grow that group. And this is another one of the important things about infrastructure. Having infrastructure makes it easier to build more infrastructure.

Building infrastructure usually requires a plan, and a long-term commitment to that plan, if not by the entire con committee, at least by a continuing core group of people. Unfortunately,

infrastructure often is built in a haphazard, catch-as-catch-can way. Almost always it will benefit from being well thought out, and a plan of building infrastructure can benefit from being reviewed every few years as situations change. Surprisingly, the process of planned building of infrastructure frequently results in unplanned benefits. Even in the absence of a complete plan, the act of thinking about things as infrastructure can help you improve things that might otherwise be ignored.

Let's look at a particular example. We mentioned outside organizations earlier. It is clear that our cons benefit from fan groups which have an interest in the material our cons celebrate. These fan groups act as channels for informing people about our cons and are a prime source of attendees. Frequently members of the fan groups make good program participants and, when approached properly, the groups are an excellent source of ideas. Frequently, members of the fan group may be willing to work on the con and become a source of growth for the con committee. Occasionally a fan group with a particular interest in a guest may be willing to split the cost of bringing in that guest. Moreover, aside from such specific details, putting on a successful con in a location that has a large, strong and diverse fan base is a far easier task than throwing a con in an area where such groups do not exist.

That these fan groups benefit our cons is easy to see, but unless we think of them as infrastructure it may never occur to us that encouraging and building up these groups is to our advantage.

In line with what we have said so far, we see we need a plan to build this type infrastructure, to help build up healthy organizations that we can then draw on. The details will depend on the details of our con and our existing relationships. Some limited things can be accomplished during the course of the con itself. We can help the fan

groups let others know of their existence. In some cases we may let appropriate organizations have a table for free or at a reduced rate. But most effective measures will probably have to take place outside the con.

To put an infrastructure-building plan together, we need to look at a number of factors and answer certain questions.

- What are the problems?
- What are the factors that limit the existence or natural growth of the infrastructure?
- What other types of infrastructure at our disposal can be used to solve or work around those problems?
- How should we use our resources in a coordinated way?
- What drawbacks or traps exist from using those resources to solve the problems?
- Can we avoid them?

Since we are in Houston, let's ask ourselves, "What are the problems and limitations which might prevent the growth of fan groups in Houston?" After spending some time and work finding the answer we might come up with two significant factors: the large sprawling geography of Houston discourages people from coming together, and people with shared interests aren't finding each other. What other kinds of infrastructure could be used to solve these problems, or can they be solved directly? The answer may differ for the different problems.

One way to deal with a large, widespread population base, if we are building from scratch, might be to create multiple local organizations that are loosely affiliated. We might plan on helping start a group in one local area and then as that group starts to grow, use some of those members who might be willing to jump start a second group in a second location, far enough away not to duplicate draw, but not so far away that there is no overlap. As we slowly build infrastructure, each additional group becomes easier to jump-start. Eventually our groups cover the entire area. This plan would not be appropriate if there was already a large, somewhat central umbrella group, but if such a group exists in spite of the spread-out nature of Houston, then we should be concentrating our resources on a different fan group anyway.

To solve the problem of people with common interests not knowing of each other's existence or knowing how to contact others with similar interests, we ask ourselves what other infrastructure could be brought to bear on the problem. The problem is basically a lack of communication and so we look at the available communication infrastructures.

The communication infrastructure that seems most readily usable is the Internet, although hardcopy channels such as newspapers might not be completely unusable for our purposes. Two communication channels available on the Internet that immediately draw our attention are special interest newsgroups and Meetup.com. The traditional newsgroups probably draw on too broad a geographic area to target our locations of interest, but mailing list groups, particularly those on large sites such as Yahoo, and Google, are more promising. For example, perusing Yahoo groups based in Houston we find groups for *Dr. Who*, *Star Trek*, *Farscape*, and various book groups. These reflect communities that already meet face-to-face on a regular basis, but we may find other groups that do not. Among those that do meet, we have a source of existing potential resources we may not have known about, an unplanned benefit of our structure building activities. For those that don't meet, we may want to explore interest within the group of getting together and getting acquainted in person, and from there explore the notion of getting together on a regular basis. If needed, we may provide the group with a location and impetus to meet and we should be prepared to occasionally move things along with suggestions of activities. Meetup.com was, at one time, even more promising as a catalyst for bringing people with shared interest together, but current changes to the service model may make it less valuable in practice. However there are similar resources out there that may grow to be a replacement.

What are the traps? One big trap we could fall into is trying to own and control the groups we are trying to start and help grow. A healthy and useful organization must be owned by its members rather than dictated to from outside. Trying to control these growing organizations is a waste of resources, chiefly time and energy, and may be a waste of goodwill besides. If someone working on the plan doesn't understand that, then that person

must be discouraged or otherwise dealt with. The con doesn't need to own the groups to benefit from the groups existence anymore than you need to own the road you drive your car on. It's infrastructure.

The very same process we used to handle this example, the same kind of thinking and answering the very same questions can help us build a plan to deal with almost any kind of infrastructure. With your con in mind, try to answer the following questions:

- What kinds of infrastructure does your con have that you never thought of in that way?
- What kinds of limited infrastructure is hurting your con or preventing it from growing?
- How many types of infrastructure for your con can you list?
- Are there new ways to use the infrastructures that you list to make your con better or easier to run?
- For each pair of infrastructure types on the list, how can they be used together?
- What are your cons problems? Can those problems be formulated in terms of missing or limited infrastructure?
- What are the factors that limit the existence or growth of missing or limited infrastructure?
- Can other types of infrastructure at our disposal be used to solve or work around limited or missing infrastructure?
- How can we use our different types of infrastructure and resources in a coordinated way to accomplish our goals?
- What drawbacks or traps exist in our resource building plans? Can they be avoided?

Important Points:

- Infrastructure must usually be built.
- Building infrastructure usually benefits from a flexible plan of action.
- Think ahead. Avoid traps and pitfalls in your infrastructure-building plans. Review those plans for needed changes every few years.

- The process of building infrastructure frequently has unplanned benefits.
- Intangible infrastructure can be as important as tangible infrastructure.
- You don't have to own your infrastructure.
- Having infrastructure makes it easier to build more infrastructure, although it may not always be the *same type* of infrastructure.
- Look for ways one type of infrastructure can replace or amplify another.
- Coordinate your use of different types of infrastructure.

CREATING AN ONLINE PRESENCE

InstaCon Staff

In the Internet age, the beginning of the 21st century, the most visible face your con presents to the world may be the one it presents over the Internet. Your web page will influence many people's first impressions of your con. The web page is where people are directed by "word of mouth" (or word of email). It's where people go to get answers to their questions or to discover how to contact you. It's where people return to find out what's new. A well designed con website should be more than an online flyer, it should have depth and reflect both the style and the many facets of your con.

An online presence is not merely a website. It includes the emails, either automatic or personal, that are sent out in response to questions. It includes the information that goes out to newsgroups and mailing lists and can include even the "tag-lines" that members of the con committee put on unrelated emails that go out to the world. It includes newsgroups and mailing lists that are available to the public. And whether you intend it or not, it includes such things as con reports on archived blogs and old web pages immortalized on the Internet Time Machine. Trying to blend all these factors into a single strategy for your online presence can be challenging, but there is little choice. You will have an online presence whether you intend it or not. The only question is whether you will create that online presence by choice and design.

It is an error to concentrate exclusively on the website and neglect the other components of your web presence, but in some sense it is a natural error. While an online presence is not merely a website, the fact remains that your website will (or should) be the center or core of your online presence. One of the primary pieces of information communicated by the rest of your online presence should be the URL of appropriate parts of your web site. Since the web site will be such an important part of your online presence, the “look and feel” of the website should complement the style of your con. There are many valid ways to structure and organization your website, but remember that the structure of your website will impact many things, from the way people find information to how easy the website is to update and maintain.

To view a well-designed con website, you would be hard put to do better than to look at the website Earl Cooley III designed and developed for LoneStarCon 2 (currently at <http://www.alamo-sf.org/lonestarcon2>).

There is a lot to learn from the LoneStarCon II site. If you follow the links you will see how repeated structure is used to tie the different parts of the website together. If you follow the navigation links you will find each page looks something like the others so that on each web page the visitor knows where to look. Some repeated graphics tie into the theme of a Texas con with the use of the Alamo, Space Armadillos, fences, small outlines of the state of Texas, and Chili Peppers. Other graphics, such as a mailbox, tie into recognized icons and easy to understand representations of function. Where standard graphics aren't useful, a rich variety of clear text links are used. A variety of font sizes pull the eye to chunks of information. White space is used strategically, though perhaps more white space would have left the pages with a more relaxed and less busy look. (This may have been intentional - using somewhat busy web pages to represent an eventful con.)

A main hierarchy of information is accessible through the left-hand navigation bar. The navigation bar makes major categories of information easy, but a wide range of contextual links embedded throughout also take the viewer directly to specific pieces of information. Such

direct contextual links are invaluable since the web site is both wide and deep. A search engine available at the top level gives further easy access to desired information.

Although the web site depends on visual impact, Cooley's site also uses a variety of techniques to remain friendly to the blind, as demonstrated by accessing the site with a text-based browser. Handicapped friendliness is something that many otherwise excellent sites lack.

The unified look and feel that is vital to holding the components of the web site together is intentionally violated for two purposes. The first is on strictly functional pages for stand-alone use, such as forms (ex. <http://alamo-sf.org/lonestarcon2/pics/housing.gif>), although wherever possible such forms were marginally tied into the existing web site design (ex. <http://alamo-sf.org/lonestarcon2/artshow/asform1.html>).

The second and more significant violation was the decision to place a completely different look and feel on the newszine pages (see <http://alamo-sf.org/lonestarcon2/newszine/>). These pages substantially duplicate the content of the con's newsletter. These web pages have their own unified look and feel, and standard navigation practices. By making such a drastic shift between the environments, almost forming an independent site, the extent of the difference in these pages was emphasized, echoing and enhancing the existing difference in purpose, function and intent between the two parts of the site.

As web standards and tools have evolved, the state of the art in web design has changed several times. There may come a time when Cooley's clean design looks dated. Even now, for certain purposes, a more interactive and intensely graphic design may be appropriate. But it would be difficult, even with today's new tools and technology, to drastically improve the design without degrading the experience of some users. Interactive flash, for example, can create a far more engrossing presentation of information, but a significant subset of potential visitors will then be unable to use the site in its intended manner.

It is essential that someone on the web-presence team have a design background, even if that background is more oriented towards print media. Someone with a background in information or communication is also helpful. Given a choice

between someone savvy with Internet and web tools and technologies and someone who understands design, go with the person with a design background every time. Learning the technology of the web is far easier than learning and successfully applying the principles of design.

INDIVIDUALIZING A CON

InstaCon Staff

Over a period of time, cons tend to blur and merge, one becoming indistinct from another, yet certain cons always stand out. These are the ones you look forward to. These are the ones with something special. Perhaps it's a unique piece of special programming. Perhaps it's the theme of the con. Maybe it's something that happens periodically during the con.

The thing (or things) that make(s) a con individual may vary enormously over the life of a con. At one time, ArmadilloCon was where you went to watch bad movies in good company. Nowadays, ArmadilloCon is where you go to meet a lot of authors and editors. This shifting of points of uniqueness is normal and is part of the natural evolution of a successful con, and the process of change should be planned as much as possible. A con may seek uniqueness through its emphasis on unusual elements of a con suite, its art show, dealers room or any other aspect of the con, but the usual place for uniqueness is in unusual, but dependable, program items that can be repeated. Again to use ArmadilloCon as an example, ArmadilloCon closes each year with a reading from Howard Waldrop, or when Howard is not there, finds another suitably eccentric and beloved writer to replace him.

The key to individualizing a con is, paradoxically, "Repetition of Experience". It's simply repetition of a "unique" experience. The repetition of unique experience is the same thing that brings SF readers back for book after book in a long series, or mystery readers back for book after book with the same detectives. It accounts for the longevity of the James Bond movie franchise and it's why you watch the same shows on TV week after week. The power of repetition of a pleasing unique experience is hard to overstate.

How, then are we to go about giving a con a pleasing and repeatable uniqueness that can be sustained over time? Simply put, we require a long-term plan that adds those components to our con that, taken together, will give it the desired qualities. If the plan is owned by a continuing subgroup of the committee, which normally includes the con chairmen and major department heads involved, then implementing the plan over time is usually easy. The difficult is finding good compatible ideas to put into the plan.

Uniqueness is simple in concept. We simply insure that that the things we add are not widely used at other cons. The task becomes more difficult when we add the "pleasing" criteria, since what is pleasing is subjective and depends on the attendees of a given con.

There are four basic sources for ideas to individualize a con. Some ideas flow naturally from what the con is and the elements of individuality it already has. Some ideas can be judiciously stolen. Some ideas can be adopted, which is just stealing with the serial numbers rubbed off. The final and most difficult source of ideas is brainstorming: thinking them up from scratch.

The con's own nature is the best source of ideas, in terms of quality if not quantity. REVELcon is a media-oriented fanzine con. Many of its members are fascinated with songtapes, videos which are created by editing elements of TV shows and setting them to music. Typically the raw TV footage is edited to tell a story that parallels the words of the songs, with the music and the visual components frequently changing the context in which the other is interpreted. A sizable minority of REVELcon's attendees have tried their hand at producing such songtapes, and others are interested in doing so. As a result, the idea of a songtape contest arises naturally from the type of con that REVELcon is. The resulting program item enhances REVELcon's individuality and has become a major draw in its own right.

Stealing ideas, under whatever euphemism, is a venerable tradition. Ideas of the type we are talking about seldom qualify as intellectual property and so may be stolen with impunity. However there is somewhat of a logical flaw in stealing unique ideas, as once they are stolen, they are no longer unique and are inherently devalued.

The only circumstance in which the uniqueness itself may be stolen along with the idea is when the source lies outside the experience of the attendees. Normally this means a displacement in time, space or domain. Stealing an idea from a con that died seven years ago is probably fair game. Frequently the motive for such a theft is recreating aspects of a con you enjoyed. Stealing from a con held across the continent may be fairly safe, though this differs in various fandoms and really depends on how far-traveled the con's attendees are. Finally, an idea stolen from a geology conference and used at a Science Fiction con is probably going to seem fairly unique to the Science Fiction attendees. An idea stolen from a related type of con, such as a gaming con, is a much dicier proposition than stealing from a completely alien type of con. Stealing from other cons, particularly cons safely past, can be a rich source of ideas for giving a con an individual flavor. The only point to keep in mind is that these cons past died for some reason. Just make sure that what you are stealing is not a contributing factor to or the outright cause of con's death.

Adopting ideas gives you access to a much wider range of cons to use as sources of ideas. Further, aspects of a unique idea can be adopted and form the basis of another unique idea. For example, if a con has a traditional badge games that depends on different colored stickers on the registration badges, you may be able to use colored stickers on your registration badges as markers for a different game relevant to your con's identity. AggieCon, in its early years, adopted the notion of badge games in several different ways and for a while, showing up and learning the badge game for that year was part of the AggieCon experience.

The final way of coming up with suitable ideas for individualizing your con is the hard way – to think of them from scratch yourselves. If this comes easy, then you are indeed fortunate. The rest of us may benefit from a formal brainstorming procedure.

In practice some ideas are clearly better than others. Some ideas for individualizing your con may be too costly to be practical. Some ideas may be incompatible with your con's identity or may require manpower and other resources you just don't have. Some ideas may involve direct risk or

lead to dangerous activities. Some ideas are just plain bad. Normally when we try to think of ideas, we try to think of *good* ideas, which can be hard because we must draw on two very different, almost mutually incompatible, skills at the same time. Coming up with new and interesting ideas is a creative act. Evaluating those ideas for sanity and deciding how (and if) they can be made to work is an analytical act. For many people it is difficult to perform both creative and analytical acts at once.

Formal brainstorming takes advantage of the fact that ideas can actually be easy and fun to come up with if you don't have to worry about whether the ideas are any good, particularly if you are in the company of a group of people who are enjoying doing the same thing. For formal brainstorming you get as large and diverse a group as you can reasonably manage. Sprinkle the group with artistic types, but first and foremost you want a diverse group which is *willing*. The rule is that every idea generated is written down and presented out loud (in either order). No-one may criticize any idea (not even their own). If someone suggests a flawed idea that you see how to fix, present your fix as completely separate alternative. Coming up with any number of alternative ideas is okay. Using someone else's ideas as a jumping off point is okay. Crazy ideas are okay. Bad ideas are okay. *Any* idea is okay. The purpose of the group is to generate as large a number of raw ideas for later use as possible.

The second part of the formal brainstorming process requires a much smaller group to go through the collected ideas. The smaller group sorts the ideas by quality and promise, combines ideas, examines ideas which are hard to evaluate, and investigates if unworkable ideas can be made to work with a change. The group also looks for ways to classify ideas, because classification will sometimes suggest holes in the ideas presented, which will in turn suggest new ideas. This smaller group's finished product is a graded list of recommendations.

The advantage to formal brainstorming is that it reliably produces usable results. These results generally would not all occur to an individual or a small group of people trying to put a plan together.

No matter how the ideas are developed, the subsequent process of creating and adopting a long-term plan to individualize your con is essentially a political process because the people who will carry out the plan must *own* the plan for it to have any chance of success. This is to be expected and should not be a source of dismay to those who have worked to generate the ideas. Since internal circumstances, politics, and even the surrounding environment of a con are in constant flux, you should expect at the outset that a con's long term plan will need to be evaluated and updated about every three to four years.

What's the true test of making a con a unique experience? Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. You will know you have succeeded when someone sets out to throw a con just like yours. When another con starts to "steal" your con's best ideas, you can react with anything from all-out-fury to tolerant-amusement, to pride in being the con that the others chase. Of these, pride is the most appropriate. It is true that you will once more face the problem of individualizing your con, but the little secret is that was going to happen anyway.

THE ART OF BUDGETING

InstaCon Staff

Budgeting is the process of planning your con in miniature. This statement is important enough that you will read it here several times. The idea that budgeting is planning in miniature has a number of implications. Chief among them is that if a con has insufficient planning, budgeting is impossible. If not enough of the con planning has already been done; the budget is meaningless, just numbers pulled out of the air. Ideally budget preparation will be the first or second pass at planning a given year's con, with everyone involved in planning taking part in the budgeting process. This may not always be feasible and it may not be a sufficiently productive use of people's time, but the results are usually better.

Budgeting is the process of planning your con in miniature. The budgeting process frequently makes or breaks the con in both the short and long term. There is invariably some uncertainty and lack of control over how much money comes in.

There is frequently more control, but there is still some uncertainty, in how much money goes out.

When money-in exceeds money-out, this is generally considered to be a good thing. There is seldom a problem finding something to do with the excess money. One popular option is to roll the excess money over into the next year's con, but this is far from the only option.

When money-out exceeds money-in, there is a pressing problem. The short version is that the money has to come from somewhere. That somewhere is frequently the pockets of the con committee. It is true that corporations can be set up to protect the pockets of individuals. The problem is that these corporations gather a certain intrinsic value as they become effective tools and the price to replace them frequently exceeds any probable loss. As a result, losses short of a complete catastrophe still wind up coming out of someone's pocket, unless the organization has built up a contingency fund.

The uncertainty about money-out and money-in creates a tension in producing a budget. An overly optimistic budget leaves a fair chance of a loss. On the other hand, an overly pessimistic budget hamstring the con, incurring costs in opportunity for future growth and restricting the con to being less than it should have been. These losses are no less real for not having a convenient dollar sign attached. Some risk is necessary to have any chance at all of creating a worthwhile con. Whether the question of uncertainty in the estimates is specifically addressed or not, the budget is the point where risk is managed.

Philosophies for handling risk vary widely. One strategy is to take risks and grow your con to a target size as fast as possible, and then take fewer risks once the target is reached. Another strategy is to plan for continual slow growth. All too often, there is no strategy at all, and the number of once-promising cons now dead is large. Typically, the con plans on having a good year, or at least an average year, right up until they have a bad year. If, by chance, it survives that bad year, the con becomes overly conservative and fails to plan for growth. A con that is not growing is dying. One reasonable strategy for a new con is to allow one or two years for some initial growth and then start rolling forward enough into a contingency fund to carry the con through a complete disaster. Once a

contingency fund sufficient in size to throw a second con is in place, the con can comfortably take much greater risks. As the con grows, and its budget grows, the contingency fund to duplicate the budget will grow too. If a con ever reaches the state where its contingency fund could survive three disastrous years in a row, the con is virtually unkillable. Few cons reach that state.

Budgeting is the process of planning your con in miniature. The con is not an amorphous blob, and the budget should not be either. Even a small con is too complicated to conveniently treat without dividing the budget into parts. One systematic approach to budgeting is to take each con activity and calculate the expected income and outgo associated with that activity. This approach works best when there are not large numbers of expenditures associated with multiple activities. There are certain to be some. For example, the cost of con space is normally spread across all the activities that use it, and the con membership fees are for the activities of the con as a whole. As a result, it may be more convenient to use departments instead of activities, provided that the department structure is broken down appropriately. For example, it works very well if there is an advertising department which is responsible for advertising costs, registration which is responsible for accepting memberships, a hotel liaison which is responsible for space expenditures, guest relations which are responsible for guest related expenses, and so forth.

The quality of a budget depends on the accuracy of the information that goes into it. One of the best sources of information for a budget are the financial records of previous years. The weakness of records of this type is that they frequently do not show the costs of supplies and services donated by committee members. Once these donations no longer take place, the revealed cost can be a nasty surprise. For this reason, we recommend tracking the donated use of equipment, supplies, and even donated time of specialists, along with an estimate of the likely cost of the donations if it was necessary to obtain them on the open market.

Depending solely on any records, no matter how complete, is probably a mistake. Things change. Verify that prices haven't gone up and that factors

affecting the numbers haven't changed. In particular, as your plans for your con change, don't blindly assume that numbers from previous years will stay the same. For example, changes in art show policy can affect the income expected from the art show. The cost of flying a guest in from England is different from the cost of bringing a guest from the next state. Changing program-book ad rates can have an effect on the number of ads purchased. These examples may sound dumb, but make sure that in simply accepting past numbers, you aren't doing something equally as dumb. Remember, budgeting is the process of planning your con in miniature.

In the absence of records, research can sometimes supply the answers. Usually though, you will come down to educated guesses, ideally from people that have some experience with the things they are guessing about. Will doubling the cost of your con halve the attendance and will halving the cost double the attendance? Someone making a guess on how attendance relates to price will rely on their experience with various categories of con attendees and how people in those groups they have known have reacted to con prices in the past. Seldom will they have actually made the experiment they are being called on to predict. In such a case, more experts are usually better. Not only can you average their predictions, you can also look at the amount by which the predictions vary. Not all experts are equal. But if you are going to give some expert's opinions more weight, decide this in advance rather than giving more weight to those experts with predictions you want to hear. If you make the decision after hearing the expert's opinions, it is an oddly easy trap to fall into.

A variety of budgeting rules of thumb have been proposed over the years. "The fees from the dealer's room should pay for the con space." "If your membership isn't growing by at least 10% each year, then you should plan for the con not to lose money with a 10% decrease in attendance." "The price of the expected program ads should just pay for the program book." The problem with all these rules of thumb is that while they may make sense for a particular con, there are also successful cons that violate them with impunity. It isn't bad to know some of these rules of thumb, but it may not make much sense to pay *too* much

attention to them. It makes more sense to simply make sure that the budget works the way the committee plans to run their con. Budgeting is the process of planning your con in miniature.

The really big thing in budgets is not to overlook something. Sources of income are seldom overlooked. It is always the expenses that are the unexpected surprise. We provide a short list of budget categories below, but a list of budget categories geared to your con is far more valuable and is one of the most important things you can do for future con committees.

Once the budget is in place, not all is guaranteed to be well or remain well. Someone needs to watch expenditures to make sure they actually stay within the budget. That someone is usually the committee treasurer. The assumptions underlying the budget can change (and so listing all the assumptions made in producing the budget is a good thing). Someone needs the authority to change the budget at the last minute (and that someone is usually the con chair) but generally speaking, increasing the budget in one place needs to be matched by tightening the budget in another place by an equal amount. Adjusting the budget by simply increasing the expected income is not a recommended procedure.

For some reason, people with X dollars in their budget feel obliged to spend X dollars. Once they have paid for the things they actually need, they then look for something else to spend the budgeted money on. People in positions of responsibility need to understand that a) it is better to not spend the budgeted money if they don't have to, b) saving money this year will probably not result in a decreased budget next year, and c) the budget is a maximum expenditure, not a target expenditure.

Possible Expense categories:

Space (program space, con suite)
 Advertising (flyers, parties, con program books, media ads, web presence)
 Guests (transportation, food, rooms, other benefits)
 Paid Entertainment (Bands, DJs, Speaker fees)
 Grease (tips, donations, flowers for handler)
 Registration supplies (badges, ribbons, bags)
 Art Supplies
 Sound and AV equipment (usually rental)

Decorations
 Special Displays
 Storage (Equipment, records, non-perishable supplies)
 Signs
 Prizes
 Publication costs (Program book, schedules, con newspaper)
 Sales to members (costs of T-shirts)
 Security (bonded agent for overnight dealers room, off duty police for late night events)
 Volunteer benefits
 Art Boards
 Dealers tables (not always free)
 Computers
 Communications (walkie-talkies, fax, phones)
 Con Suite supplies (food, equipment, corkage fees, ice)
 Recording the con (video cameras, special mikes, editing costs)
 Banquet costs
 Paperwork (copies of minutes, procedures, filksongs, budgets)
 Bank Fees
 Permits
 Insurance
 Legal Fees (consultation, vetting of contracts)
 Incidentals (sending committee to InstaCon)

Feel free to add committee masseuse or psychiatrist if it's appropriate for your con. There are most likely items on the list that won't apply to your con at all. There are equally likely to be major expenditures for your con that didn't make the list. This is fine. You simply need to make a list with your particular con and the way you plan it in mind. Remember! Budgeting is the process of planning your con in miniature.

SPECIAL PROGRAMMING

InstaCon Staff

Certain program items break the mold. They are different. They're special. They are candidates for individualizing your con. They can help pull in younger fans. They can give your con that something extra - without causing budgeting problems. Special Programming is an extremely useful tool.

Special Programming can be a special problem. The very things that make them special can be potential trouble. They have special requirements. They need special equipment. They can sometimes cause problems with hotels, or problems with mundanes, or even problems with some of your own con attendees. Sometimes they can be an attractive nuisance, they can be noisy, produce a mess, and they can also be a scheduling problem. In short, special programming can be a special pain.

Does that mean you should avoid them? Absolutely not! For any piece of special programming, you simply need to lay out the special needs and special problems associated with the item and address each in turn. Then you need to decide if the effort is worth the reward. Usually it is.

Our InstaCon 5 session concentrates on a number of special programming items, which include LARPs (Live Action Role Playing games) and even the original piece of special programming: the masquerade or costume contest. For the program book, we will take a brief look at a piece of special programming we won't be covering (the Dance) and a closer look at some issues around one we will cover (Masquerade).

THE DANCE

Clif Davis

Done correctly, sometimes in combination with a masquerade, the dance can be a center-point of the con. A successful dance pulls people in physically, in what is frequently a weekend of spectatorship. It's fun. Sometimes there are local bands involved in fandom that are really good, and the results can be spectacular.

Certainly the dance has special needs. Air conditioning must be able to handle a press of hot active bodies. Music, amps, and other pieces of a decent sound system are essential. The acoustics of the space shouldn't be completely unreasonable. The space where the dance is held requires a suitable surface for dancing - carpet typically does not work - and one that won't be damaged or scarred by the experience. Some the hotel have false flooring available to create the dance surface. Other special needs may not be as obvious. Dances have a tendency to produce

thirsty people and this should be addressed in some manner, such as water service, although question of alcohol arises here if not elsewhere.

Scheduling the dance can be tricky. If at all possible, it should be open ended. A large group of people who are enjoying themselves do not take kindly to being summarily shut down in the midst of their good time. The best time for the dance is usually Saturday night, which is typically the busy time of the con.

All other problems with the dance pale before the central problem. Music preference is an extremely individual matter and each generation and subgroup has their own music. As a result, those tastes can be divisive, particularly in fandom which spans age groups and easy categorization. The type of dance music needs to be clearly defined up front. Someone showing up planning on a country-western dance is not going to be amused with disco. Dance music can be used to reach out to certain segments of fandom, such as young fans, but only at the cost of leaving other segments disinterested. If the music is loud and impossible to avoid, infiltrating other activities available, or if no other activities are available, the disinterest can become alienation, or in extreme cases, anger.

At least one Texas con had a con chair who was in love with the Big Band sound. His con was going to have a dance with "real music" that people could dance too. With considerable effort, the person in charge of the dance created hours of large multiple tapes that could be shifted to match the mood of the crowd. Come the day, the music started. Predictably, the large ballroom emptied in record time.

The point is that the dance music must match the musical sensibilities of the audience in order to be successful. The situation is easier once you have a successful tradition of a dance and people know what to expect. Until then, you have to feel your way with experimentation, and you have to be prepared for the dance to fail until you get it right. Frequently this may mean keeping the dance a low-key affair until its success demands a more central role.

There should always be programming alternatives to a dance, as some people simply will not, or can not, dance, nor will they enjoy observing. The need for other options translates to

almost all special programming. There should always be an alternative.

MASQUERADES: CULTIVATING THE COSTUMING COMMUNITY WITHIN YOUR CON

Kim G. Kofmel

Masquerade is a single word that in fandom has many meanings. For some a masquerade is a costume ball, or at least a costume dance. For others it is a costume parade, or maybe a skit show. A masquerade may be a formal competition, with judges. A masquerade may be a stand-alone event, or it may be a segment in a larger framework or “show.” The one thing that a masquerade always means is costumes.

There is no one definite agreed place for costumes and masquerades at SF/F cons. Not all cons welcome costumes. Not all cons that welcome costumes provide significant costuming related programming. Not all cons that provide related programming actively cultivate the costuming community within their attendance pool. Each con makes its own decision about the inclusion and relevance of costuming to their community and goals, the same way they make similar decisions about gaming, media, film, literature, science, art, conrunning, fanfic, anime, comics, modeling, and all the other interest segments that make up our greater community of fandom.

To many people, costumes are unimportant. Too some they are almost embarrassing; one of the silly fringe bits of our common interest. Costumes are remnants of childhood, of play-acting, of (oh, the shame) dressing up and make-believe. But in really basic ways, isn't make-believe what fandom is about? What SF and Fantasy are about?

But I'm told SF isn't about make-believe. It's serious stuff. Well, so is costuming, sometimes.

Costumes, masks, the assumption and representation of identity, and the representation of the abstract in the body of the costume-wearer are deep and meaningful elements of culture, lifestyle, and ritual. Transformation, disguise, and embodiment are all coded in acts of costuming, whether transgressive or prescribed, whether culturally significant or “just for fun.” It is what makes costumes interesting. It is what makes costumes attractive.

In considering the place of costuming at a con, bear in mind that at the deeper/higher levels of involvement, costumers are essentially material artists, whether they work primarily in textiles or in plastics. Alternatively (or as well) they may be performance artists. The key thing is that they are artists, creators working in the talent area largely out of love of the process and the product. This is not to say that there are not many costumers who are fans who just find it fun, but it is like any other area of human activity: it sells us all short to deny that there is a component of art production in the activity community. In fandom we seem to have no problem remembering this detail with art, film, photography and writing, but costuming and theatrics seem to fall to the side.

There are four elements to the cultivation of a costuming community within a SF/F con:

1. Reconnecting with established costumers who have drifted away from the attendance pool or who no longer use SF cons as a costuming venue
2. Developing new costumers within the attendance pool
3. Attracting new costumers to the attendance pool
4. Situating costuming as an artistic element of fandom, similar to the art show, with elements directed at an audience as well as to the creators.

Bear in mind that the SF/F costuming community, like fandom itself, is actually a collection of sub-communities or of community intersections. “Costumers” include SCA folk, other historical re-creators/re-enactors, textile artists, people who like dressing up, Ren Faire folk, Anime fans, Goths, emerging or wannabe clothing designers and film and theatrical costume designers, people interested in costuming as a hobby in addition to their interest in fandom, performers, and people who want to extend their involvement with a work of literature, art, or media.

For cons that choose to cultivate a costuming community, the key is programming. Programming is generally aimed at the creators, although there are some items that may have a broader appeal. Programming draws on the pool of experienced costumers to share knowledge and techniques with peers and with novices, and has

two basic components: panels/demos and workshops. The primary distinction is the number of presenters involved and the degree of audience participation/hands-on activity, although the distinction is not necessarily hard and fast. Workshops such as mask making, instant costumes or even hat decoration, often appeal to non-costumer con members.

The masquerade is the core of costuming programming, and combines all four cultivation elements. A formal masquerade relies on experienced costumers for coordination and staffing, while providing an opportunity for costumers to share their creations with the general membership. Costume parades and hall costume awards, whether given by judges or by popular ballot, target emergent costumers and those who do not enjoy the formal masquerades. A static room, if properly presented and located, can provide a place for creator activity and community building, and for audience activity as well.

Clearly a con interested in cultivating the costuming community must be willing to invest resources (time, effort, programming slots, AV costs, etc.). The potential benefits may, however, be well worth the costs. Costumers will attend cons, they will participate in programming, they will volunteer, and they will work on concom.

SPECIAL PROGRAMMING EXERCISE

List your con's special programming. Then for each item, identify the special needs and problems involved. How are they being handled? Do the benefits of the special programming outweigh the costs involved?

DISASTROUS HOTEL CONTRACTS (AND HOW TO AVOID THEM)

InstaCon Staff

The remnants of the con lay in ruins, a few hardy fans picking their way through the maze of the destroyed hotel lobby, past nonfunctioning ice machines, skirting the "Under Construction" signs and the glares of the wedding guests, coughing on the airborne sawdust, and yelling hoarsely over the omnipresent hammers and the Mariachi band

playing for the wedding party. The hotel's new management had double-booked the weekend and much of the space was simply not available for the con. This was less of a problem than it might have been, simply because on arrival most fans had looked at the parking lot and decided the hotel was closed. Those from out of town, including the guests, who had been placed in nonsmoking rooms that reeked of tobacco, made mental notes never to return to this con again.

Could this happen to you? It could, unless you have a contract or letter of agreement that prevents it. Dealing with the hotel contract is only one aspect of selecting a con hotel, but it is a vital one.

A con has several defenses against a bad hotel experience. The strongest is that it is in the best long-term interest of the hotel to have happy clients. Unfortunately, unless your con is a giant, or unless you are extraordinarily influential, your con is relatively unimportant to the hotel. Your only strong defense, should a hotel decide after the fact that you really aren't worth it, is a good contract. A contract is not a magic bullet. It doesn't actually force the hotel to do anything. It simply provides a basis for collecting damages after the fact. But this has a way of getting the hotel's attention. And if you are relying on what the sales people say instead of what is written in the contract or letter of agreement, unless you can prove what they said, it effectively doesn't exist.

A hotel or other con facility will have a standard contract. Nothing prevents a con from having a standard contract. A standard contract is a starting point for negotiation. If a hotel is unwilling to deviate from their standard contract to address the issues that are important to you, this is not a good sign. Among other things, it means that you are not very important to the hotel to start with, and this is not a good place to start.

On the other hand, for a relatively small event, you cannot expect the hotel to agree to a contract that explicitly addresses each and every thing that could possibly go wrong. For something on the scale of a Worldcon it makes sense to keep a huge list of past problems and insure in each year's contract that it is unlikely they will ever happen again. This simply isn't practical for a local con and so model contracts put together for a Worldcon or major regional are of limited value.

The items that should be addressed are those that are important to the con and the committee, usually based on bad past experiences. At the least, you should be able to insure that the problems the hotel causes will be new ones, not the same old ones.

A clause saying that the hotel will do something or supply something may be of limited value unless there is a penalty clause. If it is really, really important that there be ice machines available, a clause saying that most of the con space is free if ice machines are not available and working on each floor will substantially motivate the hotel to make sure there are working ice machines. Without the penalty clause, most or all of the machines not working may not actually have any consequences in spite of being mentioned in the contract. Yes, the hotel may claim to have made a good faith effort to have working ice machines, but it is difficult to show losses based on no ice machines, so a lack of working ice machines may have no effect on the hotel at all. You can be sure there will be penalty clauses in the contract to protect the hotel where they feel this is important. The con should be equally protected for the things that are important to the event and the attendees.

There are two clauses in a contract that you should watch out for. Actually, there are more than two, but these specific two are somewhat common.

A clause that exempts the hotel from incidental or consequential damages may not sound that unreasonable. It is. The actual monetary value of the con space is the least of the con's investment in the space. If another event comes along at the last minute and pays the con facility more for the space, the con is suddenly without a home, has no way to advise people at the last minute of a change in venue if an acceptable new venue can be found. The con is out all money spent on advertising, and if it is necessary to cancel the con, then it is out money spent on airfare for guests, equipment, supplies, and other expenses that cannot be cancelled. There is the loss of income that would have been realized from the con, and worst of all there is the damage to the con's reputation. These are all consequential damages, damages that are consequence of the hotel breaking the contract. Waiving incidental or

consequential damages may leave the hotel with protection, but leaves the con in a completely untenable position. Don't do it.

The other clause that should be avoided is a clause committing the con to binding arbitration if there is a dispute. At one time this was something that made sense. If it went to court, both sides were out legal fees and the result was kind of a crapshoot anyway. Avoiding court costs by having a neutral third party sort through the disagreements was a useful alternative. Unfortunately, things have evolved to where it no longer makes sense. Today, arbitration for a small amount can be just about as costly as going to court. You still need a lawyer. You aren't guaranteed an arbiter who understands the situation or who understands the law. Under the legal system, you can appeal the ruling of a judge who makes an egregious error or who has an interest in the outcome. Your rights under binding arbitration can be curtailed. Further, the arbiter's paycheck is coming from an arbitration service which depends for its livelihood on hotels and other businesses specifying their arbitration service in their contracts. If these businesses usually lost, they would have no motivation to use that arbitration service. All too often, the binding arbitration is a "screw-you" clause.

Mediation is always good and should always be agreed to - a third party can be very useful and help people reach an agreement. The only reason to agree to binding arbitration is if basically you have no choice.

Sometimes a hotel or other business will act in a reasonable manner because it is in their best interest to do so, while routinely protecting themselves with a one-sided document their lawyers have run wild with. If they have the only suitable space and are unwilling to negotiate, you may have to take a calculated risk, but you should always remember that in such a circumstance you are at the complete mercy of the hotel, or whomever the hotel is sold to.

Item for discussion – Would a model contract or a set of model contracts of different types, available to Texas cons, be useful to your con?

RECRUITING YOUNGER FANS

InstaCon Staff

If our fandom is not to perish with the deaths of current fans, the arithmetic is simple. We must replace ourselves before we are gone. Any recruitment that is less than the steady state spells the eventual extinction of the fannish species and our type of cons. Fandom is graying and if we are to pass the torch to a new fannish generation, the time to start is now.

Recruiting younger fans into con committees is something that is easy to agree to in theory, but somewhat harder to handle in practice. Even those groups which have done the best job, the ones which periodically have new faces, are generally not happy with their own performance in this area.

Paradoxically, bringing children to cons too early may work against us in the long run. By being exposed to it as children, they may then think of it as a childish activity and grow out of it, or think of it as something of interest only to people much older than themselves – an activity their parents would have engaged in, and therefore something to be avoided. Alternately, someone who attended cons as a child may retain a soft spot in their heart for cons, but they may not be driven enough to be effective leaders. It may be better to have neo-fans discover us as mid-teens, when they are old enough to take full or almost full part and be caught up in the entire experience. The Golden Age of Science Fiction may be 12, but the Golden Age of Fandom is 16.

One mistake that cons lucky enough to attract young adult committee members may make is to place those members solely in marginal positions, rather than act to bring them along in positions of real responsibility. Yes, with more limited experience they may make mistakes. Unfortunately that is how we learn. Furthermore, their bad decisions, or what you think of as bad decisions, can sometimes surprise you with unexpected benefits. And once the young fans know what they are doing, they are likely to be around a lot longer than you are. It is important, then, to allow for imperfection, particularly in younger fans. Someone who fails to learn may need to be replaced, but this is true at any age.

Another advantage to placing young fans in positions of responsibility is that then they will recruit even more young fans. Entrance onto a con

committee is most frequently a matter of personal contact, and recruiting younger fans is easier through peer contacts than through trans-tier contacts. In other words, once you have recruited younger fans, recruiting younger fans becomes easier.

How do you start the process of recruiting younger fans if you don't have a group of younger fans to start with? One natural source is attendees and volunteers at the con. You will have their contact information and an invitation or a continuing series of invitations to attend con-planning meetings is like casting a seed that might or might not bear fruit. It can't hurt. If your attendees don't include a healthy helping of younger fans, you have a harder problem. Perhaps you need to include programming that will specifically appeal to a younger group, such as gaming and anime.

Perhaps you are looking for younger fans that share your con's core interests and don't want to widen those interests. That may be a mistake, but doesn't leave you in a hopeless position. Go to where the young fans you are interested in are. If you are interested in finding readers, the natural recruiting areas are bookstores and libraries. If you are looking for media areas then alter your strategy accordingly.

The main thing is that you have to get their attention where they are. Colleges are natural recruiting areas for younger fans. So are new clubs that spring up. So is the Internet. Blogs are common among the more literate young adults, and scanning blogs and discussion groups with suitable search tools may capture a gem of a prospect that would have otherwise remained invisible to you.

If you have identified a prospective younger fan who might make a good addition to your committee, then issue an invitation. Issue multiple invitations, not just one. If they have a conflict currently, check back in six months to a year to see if it is still there. Cast your mind back to remember what first interested you about organized fandom. Once you have them, make sure your top-level leadership is committed to placing young fans in some positions of responsibility to see how they do.

One day you'll look around and see that your thriving con is being run by young whipper-

snappers who are doing things their way. It means you succeeded.

NATIONAL FANNISH EVENTS IN TEXAS

Researched by Karen Meschke

Errors Added by Clif Davis

The first known or recorded SF fan group in Texas began in 1938 when Dale Hart formed a "tri-cities chapter" of the Science Fiction League in Texas. The cities were Baytown, Pelley and Goose Creek. According to Harry Warner's loving history of fandom, *All Our Yesterdays*, they sent delegations to the early Worldcons as well as publishing fanzines.

In 1951, the first proposal for a Texas Worldcon was made at a Worldcon business meeting. It was the work of two Texas writers, Walter M. Miller and Chad Oliver. Later they claimed that the Dripping Springs in '52 bid was only a joke. The 1952 Worldcon, Chicon II, was held in Chicago. The 1950s also saw a short-lived proposal for a Texas Worldcon bid based on putting flyers in boxes of fried chicken by a Northeast Texas fan who worked in the industry.

All of these proposals for a Texas Worldcon were before Texas even had its very first in-state SF con. The first recorded SF con in Texas was SoWestercon in Dallas in 1958. Both Al Jackson and brothers Greg and Jim Benford attended. In 1959, the following year, they were part of the first Dallas bid for a Worldcon, Dallas in '59. It failed, but the groundwork was laid for Dallas in '73.

In 1960, Lloyd D. Broyles of Waco, Texas co-founded with Al Andrews of Alabama the short-lived Southern Fandom Group. It was based on the National Fantasy Fan Federation (NFFF) and published a dittoed newsletter, *The Southern Fan*, until 1963. Though it died of inactivity, according to Richard Lynch's outline of fan history in the 1960s it set the stage for the Science Fiction Poetry Association (SFPA) in 1961 and the Southern Fan Confederation (SFC).

In the 1960s there were three big cons in the Texas and Oklahoma areas. One was held in Oklahoma, one in Dallas, and one in Houston. HoustonCon was started by a SF fan and a Comic fan. The SF fan was eliminated after the first year

and HoustonCon became the center of the Houston Comic Collectors Association (HCCA). Fans who loved both SF and comics, such as Bill Wallace, were rare in Houston.

Dallas had the somewhat larger con. Con fandom in Dallas was more eclectic and comic fans and SF fans coexisted peacefully, when they weren't the same people.

The three big cons reached an agreement. Instead of competing against each other they would rotate with each huge con being held every third year, causing a large influx of cash as dealers and fans congregated from across the US. The stage was set for Dallas in '73.

Dallas in '73 was the first serious bid from Texas for Worldcon with Joe Bob Williams as Chairman. Tom Reamy (editor of *Trumpet*, a slick professional looking fanzine that broke new ground) was publications coordinator. Rosemary Hickey was secretary/coordinator. Others involved included Larry Herndon and Howard Waldrop. From this bid came the infamous fanzine *D-Con Bulletin*, an offset fanzine mailed to 6,000 SF fans using various mailing lists, free. That's right free. The only other serious bid was Minneapolis in '73.

Then the con called D-Con'71 was held as a dress rehearsal for a Worldcon. Under the direction of Larry Herndon the con was also billed as raising money for the Dallas in '73 Worldcon bid. The con appeared to be a huge financial success.

In the critical months after the con, a number of things happened. The Houston comic fans were outraged by the D-Con '71 emphasis on Science Fiction instead of their beloved comics. They unilaterally abrogated the agreement and began to hold HoustonCon every year, beginning the Dallas-Houston feud (which the then insignificant Houston-SF fandom was never part of). Tom Reamy moved away to Kansas City. Minneapolis read the writing on the wall, bowed to the inevitable and dropped their Minneapolis in '73 bid.

Money was made at D-Con '71. Everyone knew this and everyone waited for a financial report, and waited. Then the officers stated that D-Con '71 was actually a private for-profit con thereby ending any possible public financial

announcement for D-Con '71. There was never a clear picture of where the money went and the fan wars began in earnest.

But it was not over yet. Howard Waldrop tried to save the bid. He first wrote what was left of the committee to send all the buttons and final pre-con issue of the D-Con Bulletin to Noreascon to hold for him. He also wrote to George R. R. Martin (who he had never met in person, at this time) and begged him to help with the Big D in '73 bid at Noreascon. When they arrived they discovered that three days previously the bid had been cancelled by a vote taken in Dallas (while they were both in route to Boston and could not be reached). Howard and George and the fans from Minneapolis then watched as a bid from Toronto won the 1973 Worldcon after entering the race only months before as a not very serious bid.

The odds for a successful Texas Worldcon bid never looked lower. Tom Reamy tried again later and this time worked on a successful Kansas City bid. Minneapolis still runs a Minneapolis in '73 hoax bid with occasional ads in program books and a web page (<http://worldcon.org/bids/bid1973mpls.html>).

[Most of this information I found in 1981 Texas Fandom, A Guide to Texas Science Fiction/Fantasy Fans, in the article "Big-D in '73" by Howard Waldrop – Karen. The rest of it came from Clif's failing memory. See the credits above – Clif]

The 4th Annual World Fantasy Convention was held in October of 1978 at the Sheraton Fort Worth Hotel, run by Michael Templin (Chair) and Bill Wallace (Co-Chairman). A pair of fans ran the Art Show: Bruce and Nancy Sterling. Texas fans including Bill Crider, Scott Cupp, Willie Siros, Joe Lansdale, and David Thayer attended, but not all met for the first time at this event.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s a number of unofficial late-night discussions were held on the second floor of the A&M student center during AggieCon, on the possibility of a Texas Worldcon bid with the combined support of all Texas fandom. These discussions usually foundered in debates between proponents of a Houston site and a Dallas site.

The first fan con-runner con (InstaCon) was held in December of 1983 on the campus of Texas

A&M. Several national con-running fans attended along with lot of Texans who had just won the 1985 NASFIC and needed to learn the fine art of running a large SF con. Some believe this is where the idea of SMOFcon began and that tradition continues to this day.

LoneStarCon 1, the 1985 NASFIC, was held in Austin over Labor Day weekend with Willie Siros as Chairman and Robert Taylor as Vice-Chairman. At that time LoneStarCon 1 was the largest ever event for SF fans in Texas. Over 2800 fans attended. More information can be had from Willie Siros, Robert Taylor, Fred Duarte and Kurt Baty.

Following the successful NASFIC more unofficial "discussions" of a possible Worldcon bid occurred at the usual second floor at A&M. Austin's successful NASFIC had done much to erase the bad taste of the '73 bid. There were the usual debates between proponents of a Houston site and a Dallas site, but this time fans checked into the sites available in both cities. As it turned out, neither city had sites that were really adequate.

Sercon II was held in Austin in 1988 at the Hyatt Hotel with Willie Siros as Chairman. This con was for the "serious" discussion of SF.

InstaCon returned in January (Austin) and April (Houston) of 1989 as fans began to gear up for another Texas Worldcon bid.

Sercon VI was held in Austin in 1992 at the Omni Hotel with Karen Meschke as Chair. More "serious" discussions of SF were indulged.

SMOFcon came to Austin in 1995 with Karen Meschke as Chair, held at the Red Lion Hotel on the first weekend in December. Fans from all over the US and the UK came and met fans from Texas who were again preparing to run a very large event (Worldcon in San Antonio). A day trip on Friday to San Antonio to review the facilities and an afternoon expedition to the Cellis Brewery were well attended.

In 1996 fans went west to El Paso as Richard Brandt & Fred Duarte, Jr. co-chaired the only Texas Westercon. The Locus Awards were presented at this event, along with the usual programming, art show, Regency dance, etc. It was a small Westercon, but not the smallest as of

this date and remains the furthest east of any city to hold a Westercon.

The year was 1997. Success at last. LoneStarCon 2, the first Texas Worldcon, was held over Labor Day weekend in San Antonio. Karen Meschke chaired. LoneStarCon 2 had over 4,800 fans attending and descending on the River Walk and Con Center.

In 2000 this success was followed by the first World Fantasy con of the new century or the last one of the old century, depending on how you counted. It was held in Corpus Christi and chaired by Fred Duarte, Jr. Held at the Omni Bayfront Hotel; the theme was "Day of the Dead."

Something new came to Texas in 2002. Bouchercon, The World Mystery Convention was held in Austin and co-chaired by Willie Siros and Karen Meschke at the Austin Renaissance Hotel. (The idea for a world mystery con began in a hotel bar after a Westercon with well-known SF fans, Len and June Moffatt along with Bruce Pelz, who also enjoyed reading mysteries). It had over 1800 attendees and has spawned a new annual mystery con (ConMisterio), which will be held annually in Austin beginning in 2005.

History never stops. Looking forward, in 2006 the 32nd World Fantasy Convention will be held

at the Austin Renaissance Hotel. Chaired by Fred Duarte, Jr. & Renee Babcock, it will be a tribute to Texas' own Robert E. Howard, creator of Conan, Kull, and other immortal characters.

WHAT IS THE WORLD FANTASY CONVENTION?

<http://www.worldfantasy.org/index.html>

The World Fantasy Convention is an annual gathering (almost a reunion) of professionals, collectors, and others interested in the field of Light and Dark Fantasy art and literature. The number of Attending memberships is limited to 850, and usually sell out in advance of the start of the convention. The convention program features many of the attending professionals. It's not unusual for members to include over 200 published authors, 80 artists, 35 editors, and many of the rare book dealers in the field. Members come from all over the world, and the convention site also travels around the world. Other features of the convention include the World Fantasy Awards, presented at a banquet on Sunday afternoon of each convention and the large Friday-evening autograph reception.

Special Thanks to

Friends of Fandom/Houston Science Fiction Association

for managing

the Hospitality Suite

NOTES & NETWORKING



Sponsored by ALAMO, Inc.
www.alamo-sf.org

InstaCon 5 is a conference organized by the Austin Literary Arts Maintenance Organization (ALAMO), a 501(c)3 corporation, in support of its literary purposes

© 2005