



INSTACON 7

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

JANUARY 25-27, 2008

JUST ADD PLANNING!

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- A. T. Campbell, III • Programming Chair
- Kim Kofmel • Programming Adviser
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- Kimm Carrillo • Registration
- Jennifer Juday • Badges
- Ed Dravecky • Proceedings Book
- Sara Cooper • Hospitality Suite
- Kurt Baty • General Help
- Dan Tolliver & Wendy Snyder • FACT Breakfast

Holiday Inn – Downtown (Market Square) • 318 West Durango • San Antonio, TX 78204
The official hotel of InstaCon 7
<http://www.ichotelsgroup.com/>

InstaCon 7 is a conference organized by the Austin Literary Arts Maintenance Organization (ALAMO), a 501(c)(3) corporation, in support of its literary purposes.

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InstaCon 7

**The Original Texas Con Runner's Symposium
January 25-27, 2008 • San Antonio, Texas**

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

Table of Contents

- 4** Con Chair Introduction *by Fred Duarte*
- 5** InstaCon Programming
- 6** Welcome to InstaCon *by Clif Davis*
- 7** Schedule at a Glance

Programming and Presentations

- 9** Starting a Convention from the Ground Up *by Tim Miller*
- 9** Building an Effective Web Presence *by Kimm Antell Carrillo*
- 9** Programming a Convention *by A.T. Campbell III & Kim Kofmel*
- 13** Media Conventions *by David Henkin*
- 13** Dealing With Hotels *by Fred Duarte*
- 14** Marketing and Publicity *by A.T. Campbell, III*
- 15** Round Tables: Masquerade *by Kim G. Kofmel*
- 16** Round Tables: Art Shows *by Kimm Antell Carrillo*
- 16** Round Tables: Parties *by Kurt Baty*
- 16** Round Tables: Program Books *by Pat Virzi*
- 17** Conventions and Computers *by Clif Davis*
- 18** Challenges of Large Conventions *by Karen Meschke*
- 20** Feedback Session/Planning for InstaCon 8 *by Bill Parker*

ALAMO Reports

- 21** ALAMO Chairman's Report *by Kurt Baty*
- 23** Upcoming Conventions of Interest

Fan Reports

- 24** ApolloCon • Houston *by Mark Hall*
- 25** ArmadilloCon • Austin *by Kurt Baty*
- 26** ConDFW • Dallas *by Amie Gantt*
- 27** FenCon • Dallas *by Russ Miller*
- 28** Copyright Notice

Con Chair Introduction

by Fred Duarte

Here we are again, putting on InstaCon, a convention runner's convention. This is the second in a series of three InstaCons that ALAMO has planned. The first was InstaCon 6, held April 13-15, 2007, in Fort Worth. . The third InstaCon will be held in Houston at a to-be-determined date and time. We now come to InstaCon 7, here in San Antonio, the site of Lone Star Con 2, the only Worldcon held in the state of Texas.

As we meet again, ALAMO, the sponsoring organization of the 1997 Worldcon, is touring the three major markets of Texas to gauge the readiness of each city to possibly host another Texas Worldcon. So we return to San Antonio to see what changes have been made in the eleven years since LSC2.

The city's convention center has undergone an expansion; we will tour the facility Saturday afternoon to make note of the changes that have been made since 1997.

Other changes have been made to downtown San Antonio, the most notable besides the convention center expansion is the addition of the Grand Hyatt, a 1000 room hotel scheduled to open in February 2008 adjacent to the convention center.

But these are just material things; the best change is that we have discovered several new fan groups that weren't around a decade ago, including two different anime groups that are each hosting their own convention, as well as a gaming group that is also hosting its own convention and working to get non profit status.

I would also like to mention Ursa Major, a fan group that was in charge of the Con Suite for LSC2, they are also in charge of the Con Suite here at InstaCon, and they are also working to get their non profit status.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first science fiction convention in Texas in 2008, let's remember to welcome those fans who are new to the field and try to help them along.

I would like to recognize some people that really helped me out on this InstaCon:

- A T Campbell III, for programming and a place to have meeting
- Kurt Baty, for general all around help
- Dan Tolliver and Wendy Snyder, and FACT, for Sunday Breakfast
- Sara Felix, for the bottlecap art
- Bill Parker and Kimm Carrillo, for web help
- Sara Cooper, Lynn Ward and Ursa Major, for the Con Suite and Saturday breakfast
- Jennifer Juday, for registration and badges

Many Thanks!

InstaCon Programming

InstaCon 7 programming includes Panels, Presentations, Demonstrations, Round Tables, and Birds of a Feather.

Why is this topic a Panel?

The majority of our programming for InstaCon 7 uses the panel structure (two or more speakers including a moderator) to explore topics from different perspectives or different backgrounds. The speakers may present different sides of a topic, differing viewpoints on a topic, or simply different experiences of a topic. The form of the panel is largely left up to the moderator, but all should entertain questions from the audience at some point.

Why is this topic a Presentation?

Some topics are structured as a solo presentation because the topic is so specialized and the speaker so knowledgeable that we felt going solo is the best use of the time and the speaker. The form of the presentation is largely left up to the speaker, but all should entertain questions from the audience at some point.

We have Demonstrations?

Yes, when pertinent and possible. Demonstrations may take the form of presentations or hands-on opportunities, depending on the nature of the topic.

What's a Round Table?

An InstaCon Round Table is a peer-to-peer discussion opportunity focused on a specific topic and moderated by a designated leader. The leader's job is to keep the discussion moving and on topic. The Round Tables are intended to be a kind of break-out session: four tables, four topics. At each table, people interested in the specific topic all sit down and share recent experience, questions, concerns, and information.

The exact direction and content of the discussion will be determined by the issues raised by the participants. Round Tables have limited seating (5 + the leader), so we advise you sign up in advance. Sign-up sheets will be available at the door.

What are Birds of a Feather?

Generally, Birds of a Feather (BoF) is an informal meet-up at a conference, where the attendees group together for discussion based on a shared interest.

For InstaCon 7 it means we have space available during most programming hours for attendees to use for discussing topics not on the main schedule. Gaming coordinators want to get together and compare recent experiences? Birds of a Feather! Masquerade runners? Birds of a Feather!

Teams, organizations, and concons with members drawn from a wide geographic area might also want to reserve a BoF session for a face-to-face meeting. Our only request is that you turn in a completed sign-in sheet after your session so we can see how useful the BoF room was and what topics we should consider for future InstaCons.

Sign-up sheets will be posted at the door and sign-in sheets will be available on the tables.

Welcome to InstaCon

an introduction by Clif Davis

Welcome to InstaCon, the original Texas con-runners' symposium. InstaCon is a convention for convention planners who happen to be fans. It is a place to share ideas, pick each others brains, to seek solutions to common problems, to learn, to teach, to make connections. As at any fan convention it is a place to have fun, make new friends and visit with old ones.

InstaCon is a uniquely Texas institution. It reflects a Texas friendliness as a coming together of people from different, technically competing, conventions (frequently the people who make things happen). The different cons in Texas come from different areas, but they have also developed different approaches and different cultures. InstaCon can be a place where cultures are bridged and where cross-fertilization occurs. InstaCon has been a place where people who run some area of their local con come back with renewed energy, new enthusiasm, new approaches, and the benefits that follow from thinking about what they have always taken for granted.

InstaCon is not held on any regular schedule, but rather held as needed. It has been held at widely scattered locations across the state – College Station, Austin, Houston, Fort Worth, and now San Antonio. But this has not been the first time San Antonio has been a topic of interest at InstaCon. San Antonio was the site of Lone Star Con 2, the first Texas Worldcon in 1997. InstaCon has been sponsored by a number of different Texas non-profit fan organizations. FACT, the Fannish Association of Central Texas, has sponsored more than any other, but beginning in 2005 with InstaCon 5, ALAMO has sponsored a series of InstaCons with at least one more planned, to be held in Houston and chaired by Bill Parker.

InstaCon can be a place to make deals, to trade program ads, to reach agreements. InstaCon can be a place to brag on your convention and promote it to a group of people who are uniquely knowledgeable about what makes a good convention.

InstaCon has also been a place where the host area has showcased the facilities their area has to offer for large conventions. Indeed, InstaCons have often been inspired by the possibility of holding large activities or conventions in Texas – events of the scale of a NASFIC or Worldcon – events too large for a local group and that require fans from across the state to pull off. And many of the same concerns that help the participants hone their ability to improve their local conventions, also apply to the larger scale events as well.

It's no secret that Texas is exploring the possibility of a second Texas Worldcon and no secret that San Antonio is a possible location for that Worldcon. But in spite of the heady possibility of a Texas Worldcon, with InstaCon programming in the capable hands of A.T. Campbell, you should come from InstaCon 7 with plenty of food for thought, new ideas and approaches for your local convention.

Once again, welcome to InstaCon.

Schedule at a Glance

FRIDAY

8:00pm	Hospitality	Social/Icebreaker
10:00pm	Hospitality	Open Gaming

SATURDAY

8-10:00am	Hospitality	BREAKFAST <i>courtesy of Ursa Major</i>
10:00am	Azalea	Starting a Convention from the Ground Up <i>Mark B. Hall, Dave Henkin, Tim Miller (M)</i>
	Jasmine	Building an Effective Web Presence <i>Kimm Carrillo (M), Clif Davis</i>
11:00am	Azalea	Programming a Convention <i>A.T. Campbell III, John K. Gibbons, Kim Kofmel (M), Tim Miller</i>
	Jasmine	Media Conventions <i>Christopher Carson, Sara Cooper, Dave Henkin (M)</i>
12:00pm	Azalea	Dealing with Hotels <i>Fred Duarte (M), Mark B. Hall, Dan Tolliver</i>
	Jasmine	Marketing and Publicity <i>Sara Felix (M), Jennifer Juday, Gilder McCarroll</i>
1:00pm	Azalea	Round Tables: Art Shows, Masquerade <i>Kimm Carrillo, Kim Kofmel</i>
	Jasmine	Round Tables: Parties, Program Books <i>Kurt Baty, Pat Virzi</i>
2:00pm	Azalea	San Antonio Convention and Visitors' Bureau <i>San Antonio VCB</i>
3-6:00pm	Azalea	Tour of San Antonio Convention Center
6:00-8:00pm		DINNER
8:00pm	Hospitality	Welcome to ALAMO <i>ALAMO Board</i>
8:30pm	Hospitality	Texas Con Presentations <i>Convention Representatives</i>
9:30pm	Hospitality	Open Gaming

Just Add Planning!

SUNDAY

8-10:00am	Hospitality	BREAKFAST <i>courtesy of FACT</i>
10:00am	Azalea	ALAMO Board Meeting <i>ALAMO Board</i> Open to the public.
12:00pm	Azalea	Conventions and Computers <i>A. T. Campbell III, Clif Davis (M)</i>
1:00pm	Azalea	Challenges of Large Conventions <i>Christopher Carson, Karen Meschke (M), Bill Parker, Willie Siros</i>
2:00pm	Azalea	Feedback Session/Planning for InstaCon 8 <i>Bill Parker (M)</i>

Programming and Presentations

Starting a Convention from the Ground Up

by Mark B. Hall, Dave Henkin, Tim Miller

Saturday, 10am, Azalea

(Please see the separate handout by Tim Miller.)

Building an Effective Web Presence

by Kimm Antell Carrillo

Saturday, 10am, Jasmine

With the importance of the internet in today's world, effectively building a web presence can make or break a convention or SF/F group. How do you reach the new people to the area? What about people who live 2,000 miles away and have no more veterans around to tell them about your society? Kimm Antell Carrillo and Clif Davis will discuss the tactics that they have used in the past to combat this issue and will also tell you about the items that are necessary to make a website be a functional tool for your group.

Programming a Convention

by A.T. Campbell III & Kim Kofmel

Saturday, 11am, Azalea

Introduction

Programming a convention can be one of the most time-consuming yet rewarding tasks on a committee. Below is an outline of the relevant tasks.

Program Participants

Choose and invite the Guest of Honor, etc. Usually this is done by the Con Chair, Guest Liaison, or Programming Chair. For Guests with specific responsibilities for the con, mention them explicitly in the invitation (e.g., the Opening Ceremonies for Toastmaster, and amount of Art Show space and shipping terms for Artist Guest). The invitation should include what amount of time is involved, and what expenses the con is covering. Usually this includes travel, hotel costs, and a per diem for meals, but this varies with the con. Also let them know whether you are offering to pay for free memberships and/or travel expenses for the guest's family members or another designated traveling companion. Once you get acceptances, make sure that the programming chair has reliable contact information. Usually email is a good choice, but some guests either do not have email, don't check it often, or simply get too much email to respond quickly. If this is so, find alternate contact information like a phone number, mailing address, or possibly the mailing address of the guest's significant other.

Just Add Planning!

Invite additional guests, usually from the area near your convention, to round out your list program participants. Usually a convention will have several regulars who are invited every year. If you're looking for more people or more variety, think about what types of additional people you might want. You can ask local writers for suggestions for new writers from the region. Local scientists from nearby universities can be a good choice. As with major guests, make sure to spell out what the convention is offering. Usually this includes at least a full-con membership, but some cons provide free or reduced-price spouse memberships or even hotel rooms.

Your convention may also maintain a list of good potential participants who are not actually guests of the convention. Some of these folks will participate for the chance to earn volunteer hours, some will participate merely for the love of the topic, and some (as we have been assured) can count their participation as "professional activities" on their CV, depending on the topic and their professional field.

Usually some of your guests will recommend friends and acquaintances to you as potential participants. Sometimes unknown people will just find your email address and blindly submit a request to be a guest. Consider all these suggestions and volunteers, since sometimes you can find wonderful new participants. But you need to find out what these people think they can offer to the program. If they sound good, check with an independent source. People will exaggerate and even lie about their accomplishments. Remember that the final call is yours. If you need to reject someone, it often helps to have some objective criteria. For example you could require that writers have published a book available on Amazon.com. The bottom line is that you are not required to put someone on programming simply because they ask.

Create a program questionnaire and send it out to all your participants early. This will be an invaluable tool in program development.

Programming Ideas

Gather ideas from as many sources as possible. Go to other conventions and see what works and what doesn't. Request suggestions from your participants. Look at the work of your major guests for inspiration. Hold a brainstorming session where local fans and pros suggest ideas. Remember that no idea is bad!

Plan the Work Flow

Take time early in the process to outline what you need to do and when it needs to be done. Note what information you require and who you need it from. Determine to whom *you* need to feed information, when they need it, and what format they expect. Share this timeline with your chair, your staff, anyone from whom you require information, and anyone to whom you will deliver information.

Assemble the Preliminary schedule

You'll probably want to work on a room/time grid. You can either draw the grid on a piece of paper or poster board, or use software.

Sort through the program ideas. Discard ones you don't like, that would be expensive to pull off, or that you don't have the personnel to staff adequately. Once you find items that you like, assign moderators and panelists. The exact method of assigning panelists and moderators varies, and a full discussion of the possible methods deserves its own essay at another time. No matter which method you use, pay attention to the "do not program me with/against" desires of your participants; ignoring these requests is almost guaranteed to result in changes.

Schedule all your must-have items first (Opening & Closing Ceremonies, Awards Ceremonies, Guest of Honor items, Dances, etc.) Then fill in the rest of the grid with program items. Use a mix of formats (panels, readings, demos, lectures, workshops, etc.) that is appropriate to the goals of your convention. Try to pace your program so that no two highlight items of the con are at the same time. Also try not to schedule program items with strongly similar appeal at the same time. A good panel usually has at least 3 panelists and no more than 6.

Try to put program items in appropriate rooms. Make sure they're not too big or small. Lighting must be sufficient. If several items have similar equipment needs (like a video projector), put them all in the same room and preferably on the same day. This saves effort and expense.

Once you have a complete schedule, print out the grid. Also generate an index by participant, preferably with software assistance. Perform a sanity check for a room used twice at the same time, a participant being used on simultaneous program items or on too many items in a row, etc.

Software

There is no perfect software solution that works for everyone. The software used in the programming, and the amount to which it is used, depends largely on the size of the convention and style of the programming chair.

For small conventions, often the schedule is composed on paper and the finished version is just typed into a word processor. Others will develop the schedule grid in a spreadsheet and then type the program descriptions in a word processor. Both approaches make it difficult to make changes and develop reports for individual participants, etc.

Some sort of database and sophisticated reporting system work best. They maintain consistency and produce all the reports you need for your website and publications. Choices include flat or XML files with scripts, a GUI-oriented database like Microsoft Access or Open Office Base, or a web-based solution built on MySQL. All of these require specialized programming, so make sure you have sufficient tech support from your committee.

Publish a preliminary schedule

After you've completed a schedule and made some adjustments, send it out for comments. Usually two to four weeks before the con, the schedule should be sent to the participants. You can either send individual schedules, or post it on the website and send out a quick note that it's there.

Just Add Planning!

Handling change requests

There will be change requests! People's travel plans may change, or they may have made plans to meet a friend for a meal that conflicts with the programming, or something. Or sometimes their interests just change. Wait a few days to gather all the change requests.

Consider each change request carefully. If a participant needs to drop off a panel and that would kill the panel, consider moving it. You'll need to contact any other participants on that panel to make sure the change is OK. If the change is too disruptive, drop the panel. Use your best judgment.

Leading Up To the Con

A couple of weeks before the con, you will need to prepare a banquet order for the hotel. This tells how you want chairs and furniture set up in each function room, and whether you need special equipment (microphones, video projectors and screens, etc.) for these rooms.

You will need to send the list of participants to Registration so that appropriate participants badges will be made if the registration process makes this necessary. Also tent cards will need to be printed for each participant, as well as their program itineraries and any general information you want them to have in hand at the beginning of the convention.

If the program schedule is to be printed in the program book, check with your program book editor about deadlines and preferred submission formats. Usually the program book needs to go to the printer about a week before the con. Similarly, consult with your webmaster on what is needed to mount the schedule online. If mounting the schedule online, consider different formats to make available. The newest and most interesting way to post a schedule online may not work for all potential attendees, and a surprising number of folks like to either plan their at-convention schedule ahead of time, or make their final decision about attending based on the advertised programming.

You will likely also want to print a short pocket program that members can carry around during the con. Print this as late as possible so that the most recent changes can be shown. Often these are printed on the morning of the first day of the con.

Changes during the con

Designate a place to post changes. A whiteboard works fine. If there is an at-convention newsletter, try to get changes included in relevant editions. Usually a participant or two will not show up, sometimes without notice. Or a function room may be flooded and an event may need to be moved. In any case, just notify members of changes as soon as possible. If the changes are extensive, revise and reprint pocket programs as needed.

Conclusion

Programming a convention can be a lot of work. The one perk is that you are in control of the schedule. You can fill the schedule with events you want to see, and make sure that no two of them are at the same time.

Good luck!

Media Conventions

by David Henkin

Saturday, 11am, Jasmine

Some conventions are focused on "media", that is, science fiction on film and television. This will be a discussion about the different types which focus on conventions which focus on a broad range of work such everything there is in Science Fiction and one which focus on a specific type of work like Transformers and Star Wars.

A discussion will go into the following:

What exactly is a media convention? How are they different from pop culture, comic or special interest conventions? What are some of the more popular media conventions out there? What do these what these entail and encompass? A discussion will go into the popularity of different types of media in media conventions.

A for-profit versus a non-profit convention: Media conventions are generally run by for-profit organizations. What are the benefits and expectations in running a for-profit convention and why a group might consider starting a media convention?

Dealing with Hotels

by Fred Duarte

Saturday, 12pm, Azalea

This is a very broad topic, but I'd like to start out by concentrating on contracts since I'm on the ArmadilloCon hotel committee, and for me negotiating contracts can be fun!

I first started out negotiating contracts in 1986, after I had found a hotel for ArmadilloCon for that same year, the Wyndham Southpark, now the Omni Southpark. That time was during the good old days of the oil bust and very cheap gas prices. The economy was sluggish, and hotels were very hungry for business. Because of that we were able to get a good deal for us for that year and the rest of that decade.

However, I soon found out that boom and bust cycles applied to contract negotiations as well. We had to pay for function space and were required to have a food function as well for the first few years of the '90s.

Long story short, when you're dealing with hotel contracts, you have to keep your eye on the economy and the possible impact on your convention in the near future. Four years ago, we were able to sign our first multi year deal with our convention hotel, the Austin Doubletree. We were only recently able to get a 2 year extension to that expired contract after protracted negotiations (from April to December 2007).

To me, contracts are the most important part of hotel relations, and hope I can pass on any relevant information to anyone willing to listen.

Marketing and Publicity

by A.T. Campbell, III

Saturday, 12pm, Jasmine

Postal Mail

If your group has held a convention before, mail out flyers for the upcoming convention to members from prior years. You might be able to buy a mailing list from either the Science Fiction Book Club or a specialized magazine like *Analog*, *Asimov's*, or *F&SF*. You could also participate in a group mailing with another con. Here, an established con with a large membership database will include your flyer with theirs if you share in the mailing costs.

Email

Same concept as above, but electronic.

Convention Listings

Many magazines and websites maintain lists of upcoming conventions. Once you get all your guests lined up and set up a website, send information about your con to as many listings as possible. Good magazines include *Locus* and *Asimov's*. Good websites include Locus Online (www.locusmag.com), SF Site (www.sfsite.com), and SF-Lovers (www.sflovers.org). A website with Texas-centric regional listings is Cam-Info (www.cam-info.net/concalendar.html).

Other Cons

Opportunities abound at other conventions. Bring flyers and leave them on freebie tables. Buy an ad in their program book. Throw a room party.

Local Businesses

Many stores will let you distribute flyers if you ask. Try to target bookstores, comic shops, gaming stores, and hobby stores.

Local Media

Send a press release about your con to the local newspapers. Sometimes a reporter will get interested enough to write a story about your con. Give the reporter whatever help and information they need. Try extra hard to get the story to appear before the con; stories printed afterward will not help your event. You could also try buying an advertisement in the newspaper, but these are quite expensive and ineffective unless the ad is huge and you have famous guests.

Send press releases to the local radio stations, and they might be read as public service announcements. If you have famous and interesting guests who will arrive early in town early, you might be able to arrange an appearance at a bookstore, or possibly an interview on the radio or local television. These can dramatically raise the visibility of your con.

Conclusion

These are many ways to publicize a con. Be creative.

Round Tables: Masquerade

by Kim G. Kofmel

Saturday, 1pm, Azalea

The Masquerade is the central component of a convention's costume-related programming. It is the costuming item most likely to attract the largest number of participants and the largest audience, and in many cases involves the most support personnel and the largest resource load. Like hall costuming, the masquerade is a forum for costumers, as artists, to share their work (whether solely *material art*, *performance art*, or both) with the broader community.

The Masquerade Round Table will focus on sharing information and experiences related to types of Masquerades, promotions, resource loads, and relating the Masquerade to general programming. A summary of likely related topics follows below. This summary may be a useful starting tool for discussions about Masquerades at conventions and related events.

Types of Masquerades

Masquerade Ball or Masquerade Dance • General Costume Competition • Formal Classed Masquerade • Skit-only Contests • Secret Judging

Promotions

Advance Promotion to Participants • Advance Promotion to Audience • On-site Promotion to Participants • On-site Promotion to Audience • Inclusion in general promotions (including website, progress reports, flyers, etc.) • Inclusion of results in on-site newsletters, wrap-up websites, etc.

Resource Loads

Staff (Lead, support staff, judges, MC, house staff, tech, photographer) • Facilities (for show and for backstage or muster) • Equipment (technical, photographic, and support) • Development of a Workable Process (for registration, for the show itself, for judging) • Support Materials (including forms) • Awards & Prizes • Logistics • Questions of Scale

Relating the Masquerade to General Programming

The Masquerade as Core • Masquerade Orientation • Masquerade Post-Mortem • Instant Costuming • How-to for Costumers (varying levels and types) • About Costuming for Interested Non-Costumers • Use of Costumers on General Topics • Inclusion of Costume-related General/Cultural Topics • Costuming for Kids

Costuming is a vivid and vital part of fandom, encompassing a variety of sub-communities and community intersections. “Costumers” include SCA folk, other historical re-creators, textile artists, people who like dressing up, Renn Faire folk, 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. While not all costumers will participate in a Masquerade, a Masquerade encourages costuming in general, and is a strong statement of a convention's welcoming attitude towards costumes and costumers.

Just Add Planning!

Round Tables: Art Shows

by Kimm Antell Carrillo

Saturday, 1pm, Azalea

Kimm will discuss running an art show for a small convention, medium-sized convention and large convention. She will talk about timelines and some important items that an art show coordinator cannot be without.

Round Tables: Parties

by Kurt Baty

Saturday, 1pm, Jasmine

Despite having partied at Worldcons for the past 31 years (including 10 years as an "official" party reviewer), I have learned something new at each party. So what makes a good party? (Hey, what's the spice of life?) Variety! Some of the most memorable parties I've seen offered variety, ranging from selection of food to decoration to entertainment. Also, add a pinch of unique. The most-noticed parties are those that are different — flavor and flair, you might say. Toss in a level of comfort. Are the hosts welcoming and gracious? Is the party imbued with an exuberance that isn't obnoxious? Do you feel like you want to stay and meet some really interesting fans? Tie all these elements together with a theme, preferably one emphasizing the hosts' regional attractions. Mix in tasty food and drink, add a touch of entertainment, and—*voilà!*—you have a memorable party.

Round Tables: Program Books

by Pat Virzi

Saturday, 1pm, Jasmine

So, did you hear the joke about the gamer, the filker, and the media fan at the dead dog party? They're sitting on the big comfy sofa in the con suite, there's a lull in the conversation, and the filker spots a program book buried in the kipple on the coffee table. "Haven't read mine yet," the gamer confesses. "Me neither," say both the filker and media fan. A fanzine fan leans forward from the opposite couch, gesturing towards the program book with a can of Diet Pepsi, and says, "I haven't read it yet either, but there's a typo on page 14."

So, what can you do to make sure your program book is a true souvenir of a memorable convention *and* a valuable guide to making that convention experience memorable?

From initial planning to design and layout — from selling ads to soliciting contributions, from budgeting to scheduling, dependencies and deadlines — from printing to packaging and distribution — we'll try to talk through the whole Program Book process during this one-hour roundtable discussion.

Conventions and Computers

by Clif Davis

Sunday, 12pm, Azalea

Try to imagine putting on a medium size Science Fiction convention without using a computer.

At all.

For anything.

You wouldn't be able to use the computer to keep records of who registered. Badges would be printed on a typewriter or by hand. There would be no electronic spreadsheet to use in planning and setting a budget. Laying out a program book would be done by hand with human spell-checks and lots of correction fluid. Coordination and communication within the con committee would be performed in person or at the speed of snail mail. Advertising a con, without email or web pages would require paying postage costs for large numbers of flyers, individually addressed and sent through the mail. Developing a schedule for a con, checking for conflicts and feasibility would be done by moving index cards around on a table.

Computers are so much a part of the fabric of our lives that putting on a convention without the use of a computer is unthinkable. Yet not more than a generation ago, every convention, large or small, was put on that way.

The use of the computer for record keeping, communications, and planning is straightforward and common. Less common is the use of the computer for analysis, to assist in changing data to information, information to knowledge, and if we're very lucky, from knowledge to wisdom.

The relationship between conventions and computers is far from static. As elsewhere, the available technology is driving change at an ever increasing pace. Projecting the technology into the future takes us rapidly into the realm of science fiction. But today's conventions have to deal with the opportunities and pitfalls of today's changes in technology. These changes include developments in integration, analysis, scheduling, advertising opportunities, computer communication options, and the SF sounding options for integrating the convention with the world inside the computer. We will have specific advice for dealing with some of these areas of change.

Integration The people doing con advertising, in order to target that advertising, may need information from other departments in past cons. The person managing the dealer's room uses some of the same information that registration needs on those same dealers. Registration may use duplicate information on the guests and panelists used by programming. Information used for budgeting may duplicate book-keeping operations. Instead of duplication of the information used by different applications and different parts of the committee, there is a tendency to seek "one ring to rule them all," a single application or linked set of applications that will eliminate duplication of work and do everything.

Just Add Planning!

Our advice is to watch out for "Swiss army knife syndrome." Avoid locking your data into proprietary formats. Make sure there is always a migration path, ideally into delimited text.

Analysis Start by keeping it simple. If you can, link with other data sources that give you other kinds of information. Consider geographic information. Membership information from past conventions is critical, and we will tell you why.

Scheduling Scheduling a moderate size, three day, multi-track convention is actually a significant intellectual challenge. There are both hard and soft constraints -- limits on the use of space, time, people, and equipment. Software to do this is not ready for prime time. Existing software can help with this, and there are some approaches that can be useful.

Advertising Opportunities Viral marketing is the gold standard. Use social networks and social networking tools. Consider YouTube.

Computer Communications Options While the mailing list or reflector remains the workhorse for distributed working groups, there are other useful options to consider. Both Wikis and multi user conferencing (from Skype to Gmail chat) are worth thinking about.

Integrating Reality and Virtuality This somewhat SF-sounding idea ranges from simply making data tied into events available online at the con, at the low end, to throwing a science fiction convention complete with big name guests and parties in Second Life at the high end. The middle level may be appropriate for expansion for many cons, such as making near-real-time photos and podcasts of the con available to a class of supporting members.

Challenges of Large Conventions

by Karen Meschke

Sunday, 1pm, Azalea

When planning a larger convention, many factors are amplified both in scope and in complexity. The larger events can offer more services and more options to your attendees, but the larger the event the higher the expectations of your attendees.

When planning your convention/event, realize that your time will include before, during and after the event. The planning period is the major foundation. Determine the focus and how it can be implemented with your current committee, how many have worked on an like event previously and do we know what we are really getting into.

Most cities in the US do not have many options on hotels with enough function space, hotel rooms, and services to host an event over 1000 attendees. Some do, and those can be a blessing or curse depending on which one you contract with. Keep everything in writing, with the heavy turnover at both hotels and convention centers, records by all parties can be invaluable with your "new" person when they step in.

A larger convention can include the addition of a municipal convention center. Most all convention centers are owned and operated by a governmental agency. With these facilities you will have additional requirements such as insurance, decorators, fire marshal requirements and union rules.

Insurance is a good idea no matter how large or small your event is. Insurance for a one time or annual event are available if you do your research, ask around to other fan groups. Liability is a big issue in the real world; it can be devastating to a small fan group.

Decorators can be dictated by your convention center or you have a choice from their master list. This entity is full of hidden service charges and can include union requirements from your area. Texas is blessed to be a right-to-work state but we still have to work with unions, just not to the extent of other states. Treat union members as a necessary part of your event, they are part of the package.

Fire Marshall rules are meant to serve as safety issues. How many feet as hallways in the dealers room and art show, possible overcrowding issues during large events; masquerade and award shows are all part of the big picture of your event.

Also, most municipal convention centers are attached (or very near) to a hotel which have specific requirements for your group to meet. The equation for the hotel will include hotel rooms, function space availability, food & beverage. You will can be required to fulfill their part of the hotel equation along with the requirements given by the convention center if you wish to use both of only one.

Space Requirements for Conventions: Per attendee you'll need about 15 square feet per person. Dealer's room (for a six foot table) you'll need about 72 square feet per table. There is usually one dealer's table for every 25-30 attendees. Art show about the same size at the dealer's room. Program space needs to hold about 15% of the attendees for an average program time. Theater seating is about 8 square foot per person.

Remember that a convention works better with more space as compared with too little, so plan accordingly.

How your sponsoring organization dictates their involvement determines the committee's structure and makeup. Larger conventions usually have a much larger committee, so better communication skills are required. The distribution of information is critical to the entire committee.

The Executive Committee should very early on agree on what are the job duties and requirements of each person assigned. Making this is priority will save time and headaches.

Communicating on-line with mailing lists (keep to the point without emotion); works up to a point, face to face works best. Keep a time line, which can and will change. I prior years you can possibly shadow the person who is currently doing your job for the future. Keep a master list of phone numbers before and during the event. Let committee members know when is a good time for a telephone conversation and when is not, especially those with young children or folks who work varying hours.

Just Add Planning!

Plan to have several meetings at your event site (as part of your hotel contract) to familiarize your committee with both the facilities and the staff before your actual event. Have a non-staff person take notes and keep everyone focused, publish these meeting minutes as soon after the meeting as possible. They will remind everyone what is expected and give time requirement.

Large events are often more complicated due to size and logistics than smaller more focused events. However, both serve a purpose and need for all those involved. Treat everyone with dignity and respect, and have a great time.

Feedback Session/Planning for InstaCon 8

by Bill Parker

Sunday, 2pm, Azalea

We are already planning for the next Texas convention planning convention, InstaCon 8. Tentatively we are planning on a date around mid April 2009. InstaCon 8 will be in Houston, Texas, hopefully at the Crowne Plaza hotel in South West Houston. The Crown plaza was formerly an Embassy Suites hotel with the function space on the ground floor surrounding a very beautiful atrium space.

We are hoping that by InstaCon 8, we will have most of the Texas city search process completed and be that much closer to settling on a city for a possible future Texas Worldcon bid. For now we are still in the early planning stages of InstaCon 8, so this is the best time to let us know what you would like to see at a future InstaCon. Some of the areas that we are most interested in hearing about from you are:

- What did you like about InstaCon 7
- What needed improvement
- What types of activities would you like to see covered in the future
- What subject areas they would like to see covered in more depth next year

For now, we are working on a theme for InstaCon 8. Have you got any great ideas? Let us know.

ALAMO Reports

ALAMO Chairman's Report: What is ALAMO about?

by Kurt Baty

I welcome you to InstaCon7! InstaCon is brought to you by ALAMO. We are proud that InstaCon7 kicks off the 2008 Texas convention year! As you may or may not know, 2008 marks the 50th anniversary of the first science fiction convention in Texas: Southwestern Con held in July, 1958, in Dallas.

As you may or many not be aware, ALAMO is a nonprofit literary organization which exists in large measure to run science fiction and other literary conventions.

MISSION STATEMENT

AUSTIN LITERARY ARTS MAINTENANCE ORGANIZATION, INC., is a nonprofit corporation organized under the Texas Non-Profit Corporation Act. The Corporation is organized for the purposes of promoting the understanding and appreciation of the literary fields of fantasy, science fiction and horror within the State of Texas.

In accomplishment of such purposes, the Corporation will promote, develop, and maintain interest in literacy and such literary fields by putting on regional, national and international fantasy, science fiction and horror conventions and providing a forum for the free discussion of ideas and concepts associated with the literary fields of fantasy, science fiction and horror.

ALAMO as a corporation meets the requirements set forth in the WSFS constitution in Section 4.6.1(3), as an organization eligible to run a World Science Fiction convention (Worldcon) (see <http://www.Worldcon.org>), which ALAMO did do in 1997.

ALAMO has also run a Bouchercon, a number of InstaCons, 2 ConMysterios, and I'm sure I'm forgetting one or two others. The uptick in ALAMO activity corresponds to the desire - at least on my part - to see Texas, bid for, win and hold another World Science Fiction Convention. This activity currently is represented in the Texas in 2013 Worldcon bid exploratory committee.

Although ALAMO is about having fun in some sense, it is principally for science fiction convention runners, i.e. it's not trying to be a local club. The representation on the ALAMO board is scrupulously split among the centers of active science fiction fandom in the state of Texas.

ALAMO has been actively encouraging Texas SF convention running fans to go to the last three SMOFcons, Alamo really made a push to get people to the SMOFcon in Kansas City the closest (to Texas) in some time.

Just Add Planning!

We are currently bidding for a SMOFcon to be held in Austin 2009 and ALAMO will be hosting the Nebulas in 2008.

Since 2004, ALAMO has thrown a Texas fandom party suite at each Worldcon. This did not happen this last year in Japan 2007 - we will probably return to hosting one at Denver Worldcon in 2008.

So, you're interested in ALAMO. What is there to do? Working toward the bid is something we're all going to be asking for help for - helping throw parties at the Worldcon, and helping host the SMOFcon in 2009. Also ALAMO will also be hosting one more InstaCon next year in the Houston area.

Kurt Baty
President, ALAMO

Upcoming Conventions of Interest

OwlCon XXVII - Houston, Texas
February 8-10, 2008 (gaming)
<http://www.owlcon.com/>

Ikkicon - Austin, Texas (anime)
February 8-10, 2008
<http://www.ikkicon.com/>

ConDFW VII - Richardson, Texas
February, 2008
<http://www.condfw.org/>

Staple! - Austin, Texas
March 1, 2008
<http://www.staple-austin.org/>

All-Con 2008 - Dallas, Texas
March 7-9, 2008
<http://www.all-con.org/>

ChimaeraCon (gaming)
San Antonio, Texas
March 14-16, 2008
<http://www.chimaeracon.com/>

RevelCon 19 (relaxacon/zinecon)
Houston, Texas
March 14-16, 2008
<http://www.severalunlimited.com/>

Anime Matsuri - Houston, Texas
March 21-23, 2007
<http://www.animematsuri.com/>

AggieCon 39
College Station, Texas
March 27-30, 2008
<http://aggiecon.tamu.edu/>

World Horror Convention 2008
Salt Lake City, Utah
March 27-30, 2008
<http://www.whc2008.org/>

Sci-Fi Expo – Richardson, Texas
April 5-6, 2008
<http://www.scifiexpo.com/dcc/>

Nebula Awards Weekend 2008
Austin, Texas
April 25-27, 2008
<http://www.sfwawards.org/awards/2008/>

LepreCon 34 - Phoenix, Arizona
May 9-11, 2008
<http://www.leprecon.org/>

A-Kon 19 - Dallas, Texas (anime)
May 30-June 1, 2008
<http://www.a-kon.com/>

SoonerCon 2008
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
June 6-8, 2008
<http://www.soonercon.com/>

ApolloCon - Houston, Texas
June 27-29, 2008
<http://www.apollocon.org/>

Sci-Fi Expo - Richardson, Texas
June 27-29, 2008
<http://www.scifiexpo.com/>

Westercon 61
Las Vegas, Nevada
July 3-6, 2008
<http://www.westercon61.org/>

Portus - Dallas, Texas
July 10-13, 2008
<http://www.portus2008.org/>

Lazy Dragon Con (relaxacon)
McKinney, Texas
July 18-20, 2008
<http://www.lazydragon.com/con/>

Conestoga 11 - Tulsa, Oklahoma
July 25-27, 2008
<http://www.sftulsa.org/>

Denvention 3 – Denver, Colorado
August 6-10, 2008 (66th
Worldcon)
<http://www.denvention3.org/>

San Japan - San Antonio, Texas
August 8-10, 2008
<http://www.san-japan.org/>

ArmadilloCon 30
Austin, Texas
August 15-17, 2008
<http://www.armadillocon.org/>

Realms Con (anime/gaming)
Corpus Christi, Texas
August, 2008
<http://www.realmscon.com/>

AnimeFest - Dallas, Texas
August 29-September 1, 2008
<http://www.animefest.org/>

CopperCon 28
Tempe, Arizona
September, 2008
<http://www.casfs.org/cucon/>

ProtoCon 10
College Station, Texas
September, 2008
<http://www.protocon.com/>

FenCon V
Dallas, Texas
October 3-5, 2008
<http://www.fencon.org/>

Shimakon (anime)
South Padre Island, Texas
October 3-5, 2008
<http://www.shimakon.org/>

Oni Con - Houston, Texas
October, 2008 (anime)
<http://www.oni-con.com/>

Star Wars Fan Days II
Plano, Texas
October 25-26, 2008
<http://www.scifiexpo.com/>

World Fantasy Convention
Calgary, Alberta, Canada
October 30-November 2, 2008
<http://www.worldfantasy2007.org/>

MillenniumCon XI (gaming)
Round Rock, Texas
November, 2008
<http://www.millenniumcon.com/>

SMOFcon 26 – Columbus, Ohio
December 5-7, 2008
<http://www.smofcon.org/>

Fan Reports

ApolloCon • Houston

by Mark Hall

ApolloCon is Houston's science fiction, fantasy and horror con. It is an event where members of Houston's diverse population of fans can gather under one roof to meet one another and experience the rich variety of science fiction, fantasy and horror fandom. Members of the ApolloCon Committee are typically active in one or more local fan groups, and we draw on these groups for programming ideas, guests and volunteers.

Planning ApolloCon is very much a democratic process; we pride ourselves on giving power and influence to the average fan. Anybody in the community can nominate a person for Chair. Anybody can nominate persons for Honored guests. The Chair and Honored guests are all selected by a democratic vote. We typically have at least two brainstorming meetings every year in which anybody can forward ideas for panels and events. All of our committee meetings are announced publicly and are open to the public.

Programming at ApolloCon tends to be as inclusive as possible of different fans and viewpoints. It is common to see authors, artists, gamers and musicians on a panel, each bringing their own perspective to the subject being discussed. ApolloCon programming also typically includes items that may not be specifically genre-related, but are of interest to local fans, such as chocolate tastings, Scotch tastings, kilt appreciation, and 101 uses for duct tape. Since ApolloCon is based in Houston, Texas—Space City—several programming items each year focus on the space program and astronomy.

Guests are typically writers and editors, artists, scientists, musicians, actors and fans in the fields of science fiction, fantasy and horror. Our 2008 Guest of Honor is Allen Steele. Our Editor Guest is Lou Anders, our Artist Guest is Brad Foster, and our Fan Guest is Anne K. G. Murphy.

We love books, we love media, we love anime, we love comics, we love music, we love costuming, we love gaming, we love LARPing, we love art—we're fans. If you're a fan, we want to see you at ApolloCon, June 27-29, 2008.

For more information, see www.apollocon.org.

ArmadilloCon • Austin

by Kurt Baty

ArmadilloCon is the second oldest continuously running SF/F convention in Texas, and is organized by members of the Fandom Association of Central Texas, Inc. (FACT). Many of FACT's members are active in fannish activities throughout the state and country, and have worked on and chaired several Worldcons, World Fantasy Conventions, and Bouchercon.

ArmadilloCon 30 • August 15-17 2008 Austin TX

I would like to extend to you a personal invitation to come to ArmadilloCon 30 this year. This year also marks the 50th anniversary of the first science fiction convention in Texas, Southwestern Con, held in July, 1958, in Dallas. While ArmadilloCon is not that old, ArmadilloCon I was held in the spring of 1979!

We have a great guest line-up this year:

Our Guest of Honor continues the ArmadilloCon tradition of catching an "up-and-coming writer": we are proud to have John Scalzi as our Guest of Honor. John's Hugo Award-nominated science fiction novel, *Old Man's War*, was released in January 2005. In August 2006, John was awarded the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer for best new science fiction writer of 2005.

Our Artist Guest of Honor is the amazing Dean Morrissey who doesn't often make public appearances.

Our Fan Guest of Honor is the delightful Kelly Persons.

Our Toastmaster will be the wonderfully dry-witted Bill Crider.

And we have as Special Guests Joe & Gay Haldeman.

The primary focus of ArmadilloCon is literary science fiction, but that's not all we do -- we also pay attention to art, animation, science, media, and gaming. Every year, dozens of professional writers, artists and editors attend the convention. Sometimes they come to make deals, but more often they come to have fun!

3-Day memberships are \$30 each until April 25, 2008.

Make checks payable to:

ArmadilloCon 30
PO Box 26442,
Austin, TX 78755

For more information about FACT and ArmadilloCon, please visit our website at <http://www.fact.org>

ConDFW • Dallas

by Amie Gantt

ConDFW is a science fiction literature convention normally held the last weekend (or so) of February in the DFW area. ConDFW celebrates its seventh annual convention in 2008. The con has an attendance of approximately 500 total people, including attendees, guests, staff, dealers, gamers, and others.

This year's convention will take place February 22-24, 2008 at the Radisson Hotel Dallas North. Featured Guest of Honor is Peter S. Beagle (The Last Unicorn), and our Artist Guest of Honor is Donato Giancola (2007 Hugo for Best Professional Artist). Pre-registration and Room Block deadline is February 7th.

ConDFW includes a slate of the 'usual' activities: dealer's room with about 30-40 tables; an art show and auction with around 25 panels, several display tables, and a print shop; a con suite with free munchies and light meal items for con attendees, which sometimes also gets utilized as an additional Reading or Panel room; and programming including panel discussions, readings, autographs, and the like. We also feature a good schedule of general gaming activities.

We are also proud to support the unusual, and have created a few fun activities that are unique to ConDFW: the Sci-Fi Spelling Bee, which we have hosted for three years. Some of the winning words have included Myxzptlk and Kashyyyk. Study up and try your luck! In 2007, we introduced a Pictionary-like artist face off where teams of guest artists worked together to win audience votes on several quick creations. The resulting one-of-a-kind artwork was auctioned off after the Art Auction and proceeds benefited our 2007 charity.

And speaking of the charity, we host a Charity Book Swap where folks are encouraged to bring their old books to trade in or donate, and to purchase or swap out books to help raise money to benefit a non-profit educational group. For 2008, we will be selecting our group from www.DonorsChoose.org, where teachers can list their needs for classroom projects that would otherwise go un-funded. We always choose a beneficiary that works toward promoting science, literacy, or writing activities for kids in our area. Last year, we designated the Sam Houston Middle School Science Team from the Garland ISD.

Additionally, ConDFW has worked to include a variety of hard science panels to our schedule. We've discussed the Mission to Mars initiative, space stations, lunar bases, and had guests with ties to NASA and other space agencies. An area we are still working to expand upon, the hard science panels have been very well-attended.

ConDFW is always looking for a few good souls to add to our ConCom. Our existing staff heads have many years of convention operating experience; cumulatively, we have staffed AggieCon, A-Kon, ItzaCon, Stellar Occasion, Lazy Dragon Con, and several other local shows. A few of us have even ventured out to other locations and worked in various capacities at Worldcon, DragonCon, and the San Diego Comic Con International.

For updates, please visit our website at <http://www.condfw.org/>

FenCon • Dallas

by Russ Miller

The FenCon story begins in 1999 when a few fans agreed that what the Metroplex needed was to bring back the fannish science fiction convention. Dallas has a proud history of such gatherings stretching back to the very first SF convention in Texas back in 1958. But by 1999, all that remained were toy shows and actor-centric autograph festivals.

After a couple of years of hard work and research, FenCon was officially announced as the new fan-based convention in the Dallas area. The focus was to be on literature, filk, and fan-friendly activities.

FenCon I was held in September of 2004, and drew over 250 members. Our premiere convention's guest of honor was Larry Niven, accompanied by Michael Longcor, Jim Murray, Elizabeth Moon, Joe Lansdale, and Ardath Mayhar.

After the success of the first year, we decided to do it again, and FenCon II in 2005 saw the continuation of our stellar guest list, welcoming guest of honor S. M. Stirling, along with Leslie Fish, Randy Farran, Larry Dixon, David Gerrold, and Mike Resnick. FenCon II grew to 347 members in its second year, and it would have been more if we hadn't been competing against Hurricane Rita, which had just closed most of Texas the same weekend.

Continuing in our tradition of seeking the highest caliber guests, FenCon III in 2006 brought Alan Dean Foster, Heather Alexander, Darrell K. Sweet, Jim Butcher, and Lawrence Watt-Evans to the Dallas area. Our Fan Guest of Honor was to be Judith Ward, who, sadly, passed away a few weeks before the event. In her memory, our Hospitality Suite will forever be named the Admiral's Club. FenCon III attracted over 500 members, not including guests and dealers.

FenCon IV in 2007 saw us moving to a new, larger hotel as we continued providing a high-quality, fan-friendly convention to the North Texas region. Our guest of honor in 2007 was Hugo and Nebula winning author Connie Willis, along with music guest Tom Smith, fan guest Kathleen Sloan, artist guest David Mattingly, plus Steve Perry, Toni Weisskopf, and Jarrod Davis. We hosted the Lone Star Shindig for *Firefly* fans and posted a new high of over 600 members. We raised \$2000 for the North Texas Food Bank.

FenCon V this October will celebrate 50 years of science fiction conventions in Texas. Who better to represent this proud history than one of the organizers of the original Southwestern Con in 1958—Dr. Gregory Benford! We're also assembling Three Weird Sisters as our music guest, honoring Gerald Burton as our fan guest, and bringing in Jay Lake to run our writers workshop. Local SF club ORAC is bringing in writer Doris Egan (aka Jane Emerson) as a special guest. With our hotel location secure through 2010, we look forward to a bright future for fandom in North Texas even as we celebrate our history.

For more information about FenCon, please visit our website at <http://www.fencon.org/>

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