



April 18-19, 2009 ♦ Houston, Texas

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InstaCon 8 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 8

The Original Texas Con Runner's Symposium

April 18-19, 2009 ♦ Houston, Texas

Sponsored by ALAMO, Inc.

www.alamo-sf.org

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Con Chair Introduction

By Bill Parker

Welcome to Houston and the latest in our series of the best little conventions about conrunning in Texas!

InstaCon is all about education, and strives to support the success of local cons, in part by facilitating communication among groups from all over Texas.

Along with a couple of long-running conventions, Texas boasts a number of relatively young conventions. All of these newer conventions have grown and prospered in their short existence, an excellent example of the growing strength of fandom in Texas. The strength of fandom in Texas is something we want to see continue to develop in the years to come, and the main goal of InstaCon.

Key to the long-term survival of any convention is how that event is structured and how this structure changes over time. For any convention to continue and prosper, they have to stay in touch with their audience and adjust to that audience as times change.

Internally, how the concom is structured will have an effect on how well the convention runs. These structures are the main focus of InstaCon 8.

I want to thank the InstaCon 8 concom for all their hard work to bring the event to fruition. This has been one of the smoothest run-ups to a convention that I have been involved with in quite a while. I also want to thank Brad W. Foster for the artwork on our Proceedings and the badge art and Friends of Fandom for sponsoring Breakfast in the Hospitality suite on Saturday. As well, a thank you goes out to ApolloCon for the loan of equipment and supplies for InstaCon 8.

InstaCon 8 is sponsored by the ALAMO, Inc., a Texas non-profit corporation. Currently ALAMO has been dedicating itself, among other things, to supporting fandom in Texas as well as working toward a bid for a Texas Worldcon in 2013.

InstaCon Programming

InstaCon 8 programming includes Panels, Presentations, Demonstrations, Round Tables (RT), and Birds of a Feather (BoF).

Why is this topic a Panel?

The majority of our programming for InstaCon 8 uses the panel structure (multiple speakers with 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 (RT) is a peer-to-peer discussion opportunity focused on a specific topic and moderated by a designated leader. The leader keeps the discussion moving and on topic.

The Round Tables are intended to be a kind of breakout 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 may have limited seating, 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 8 it means we have a boardroom 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.

Schedule at a Glance

FRIDAY EARLYBIRDS

8:00- 11:00pm	Hospitality	Mixer
9:00- 10:00pm	Hospitality	Icebreaker
11:00pm- 1:00am	Boardroom & Hospitality	Games A selection of social and card games available for those who would like to play on. Add to the fun and bring your own!

SATURDAY

9:30- 10:50am	Ballroom 1	Getting the Most Out Of Meetings Time is precious; face-time doubly so. How can we use meeting time most effectively? <i>Presentation by Mark Hall</i>
9:30- 10:50am	Ballroom 2	Comprehension Convention Engine (CCE) on Microsoft Live Brent Morgan provides an update on the recent changes to his Convention Comprehension Engine. <i>Presentation by Brent Morgan</i>
11:00am- 12:20pm	Ballroom 1	Y'all Ought to Move: The Search for a New Hotel When and why should you move? How to look for a hotel; what to look for in a hotel and what to look out for! <i>Panel with Tim Miller (M), Fred Duarte, Ben Yalow</i>
11:00am- 12:20pm	Ballroom 2	Technology: Threat or Menace :) From label printers to databases to downloadable program guides, technology both assists in conrunning and adds to our tasks. What can we do with technology to support our cons? What should we watch out for? What is working and how do we tell? <i>Panel with AT Campbell (M), Jonathon Guthrie, Brent Morgan</i>
12:30- 1:20pm		Lunch Break

SATURDAY

1:30- 2:50pm		<p>Round Tables Informal information-sharing sessions on specific topics</p>
	<p>Ballroom 1 Ballroom 2 Boardroom</p>	<p>Registration (<i>facilitated by Meredith Hines</i>) Logistics (<i>facilitated by Keith Irish</i>) Consuites (<i>facilitated by Chuck Coshow</i>)</p>
3:00- 4:20pm	Ballroom 1	<p>The Great Balancing Act: Programming for SFF Cons What considerations guide the development of a program? What influences the choices we make? What tactics and tools exist to help us with those choices? <i>Panel with AT Campbell (M), Katy Pace</i></p>
3:00- 4:20pm	Ballroom 2	<p>Art Show Database Demo Scott Zrubek demonstrates his online art show management database. <i>Presentation by Scott Zrubek</i></p>
4:30- 5:50pm	Ballroom 1	<p>Care and Feeding of Dealers How to increase the chances of a successful dealers room. What to consider in planning the room, arranging for load-in/out, and in recruiting dealers. <i>Presentation by Russ Ault & Lee Billings</i></p>
4:30- 5:50pm	Ballroom 2	<p>Bodycount: How Many Fans Does It Take to Run a Con? How many people do you need to make it work? How do you decide? Is there such a thing as too few? Too many? <i>Panel with Mark Hall (M), Ben Yalow</i></p>
6:00- 8:00pm		<p>Dinner Break</p>
8:00- 9:30pm	Ballroom 1	<p>Teamwork Exercise: SF Pictionary Austin's A.T. Campbell, III has prepared a special set of prompts for us in order that we can play SF Pictionary! Teams will be structured to mix people from different organizations. How quickly can you adapt to the way your new team members think? <i>Scorekeeper: A.T. Campbell, III ('cause he already knows the answers..)</i></p>
10:00- 1:00am	Ballroom 1 & 2	<p>Games A selection of social and card games available for those who would like to play on. Add to the fun and bring your own!</p>

SUNDAY

- 9:30-10:50am** **Ballroom 1** **Art Shows at SFF Cons**
What are the special challenges of running an art show at a con? What benefits do art shows bring us?
Panel with Scott Zrubek (M), Kimm Antell, Anita Haddock
- 9:30-10:50am** **Ballroom 2** **Getting It in Writing: Con Publications in the 21st Century**
How do programming *et al.* work with publications and website to get their information out where people can see it? How do we effectively disseminate information in multiple formats?
Panel with Pat Virzi (M), Roxanne Bogucka
- 11:00am-12:20pm** **Ballroom 1** **How Big is the Big Picture? Questions of Scale in Cons and Conrunning**
There's a whole big world of cons out there, some very local, some with international scope. What are the various types of SFF cons, and what are some of the similarities and differences among them?
Panel with Tim Miller (M), Ben Yalow, Karen Meschke
- 11:00am-12:20pm** **Ballroom 2** **High Water Floats All Boats: Cooperating for a Healthy Con Circuit in Texas**
What kinds of things can we do to help each other out? What kinds of things can a broad-based organization, like ALAMO, do to cooperatively support cons in Texas?
Panel with Clif Davis, Kim Kofmel (M)
- 12:30-2:00pm** **Ballroom 1** **501 Say What Now?: The Realities and Responsibilities of Status for Groups**
Non-Profit and Tax Exempt are not the same thing. How do they differ? What do we gain from the various types of status and what responsibilities, such as reporting, do we have in return?
Panel with Clif Davis, Russ Miller (M)
- 12:30-2:00pm** **Ballroom 2** **LiveFaceSpaceTweet!: What About Social Networking and What Can It Do for Cons?**
Social networks have moved from sociology theory to Internet hotspot. What are some of the social networking platforms and how can we use them to build or promote our cons?
Panel with Keri Bas, Roxanne Bogucka (M)

Programming and Presentations

Getting the Most Out Of Meetings

Presentation by Mark Hall

Time is precious; face-time doubly so. How can we use meeting time most effectively?

Introduction

Starting with the assumption that you're going to be running a meeting, and the meeting is necessary, how can you do it effectively, making the most of everyone's time and getting things accomplished?

Meetings for volunteer organizations should be run at least as effectively as business meetings, due to the fact that people are freely giving you their time, and much more sensitive to having their time wasted.

Agenda

No meeting is so small as to not need a written outline of what you mean to accomplish. Even if you're just meeting with one other person, you should at least have written notes on what you plan to accomplish, and it would help the other person if you shared your thoughts with them at the outset.

You can neither keep a meeting focused or on schedule without one. The agenda should include an order of the items to be addressed in the meeting, and should be distributed to the attendees at the beginning of the meeting. You should know ahead of time how much time to allow for each section. More about staying focused later.

Regular meetings – Scheduling

Regular meetings are essential, and I suggest you set up a regular schedule. For example, if you are planning a con, your group might agree to meet the third Tuesday of every month at 7:00 PM. Schedule the whole year's meetings in advance. You can spend an inordinate amount of time trying to schedule individual meetings. If you have regular meetings, every department head has a second- (and possibly a third-) in command, and key points are summarized and distributed after the meeting, it won't be disastrous if someone misses a meeting or two.

Locations of meetings – Good and Bad

Many volunteer organizations don't have a lot of resources to rent meeting space, so they often seek out meeting places that are “free”. These include individual's residences, restaurants, bars, coffee shops, libraries and community meeting rooms.

Some spaces that appear to be free, such as restaurants and bars, morally obligate the attendees to spend something on food and/or drink. Additionally, restaurants and bars can be noisy, with lots of distractions, and distractions will play hell with important things like meeting focus and schedule. Meetings at private residences also have the potential for distractions, such as kids, pets, phone calls, and the like.

Many library systems and other community centers have meeting rooms that are free, especially if your group is a registered non-profit. They generally provide nice, quiet meeting spaces with

sufficient tables and chairs with little potential for distraction. Meeting times will need to conform to the schedule of the library or community center, which in many cases means no late evening hours.

Time management

I believe that an effective meeting shouldn't last more than an hour and a half. If you're spending much more time than that, you're probably spending too much time on details that should be handled by sub-committees and breakout sessions. Details should be covered in written reports from key individuals submitted at least a day or so ahead of the meeting and distributed in a public forum.

Keep a watch or clock visible as you run the meeting, and if necessary ask someone else to give you reminders on the time remaining. Allow one and a half hours for the main meeting, and another hour for breakout sessions for people who need to coordinate with each other but don't need the whole group present.

Breakout Meetings

Scheduling time following the main meeting for breakout sessions serves a dual purpose in that you can “encourage” people you know need to coordinate with each other to actually do so, while you have them all in the same place. During the main meeting make note of any items that arise for which additional discussion is advisable and encourage the relevant parties to meet in a breakout session.

Staying Focused

Remember, you're running the meeting. Keep a short leash on non-relevant discussions and interruptions. Only you or people you designate should be addressing the group in order to stay on schedule and on topic. If people have comments or questions they should raise their hands to be recognized before speaking. If a question or comment goes too far afield or a discussion gets too bogged down in detail, suggest that the details be deferred to a separate smaller meeting or breakout session.

Seek a room arrangement that will facilitate an effective meeting. Arrange seating around tables in a board room style if possible, making sure everyone can see you, and everyone can see each other. Stick to the agenda.

Dealing with Strife - Keeping it Civil

Occasionally someone in a meeting will become upset and/or lose their temper. This can be an awkward situation, but you must deal with it immediately and without ambiguity. If voices are raised or people start to get upset, you should interrupt with a statement without singling out any one person along the lines of, “I know this is a sensitive issue, but I'd like us to all maintain our cool and be civil to one another.”

It may also be a good idea to get in touch later in private with the people who were most upset, and hear them out, while communicating that although their feelings of strong disagreement may have been legitimate, their behavior was not professional. Additionally it may be necessary to point out that you won't tolerate continued unprofessional behavior.

If someone has done a good job, it is a good idea to recognize their work publicly. For someone who needs correction or criticism, it is a bad idea to do this in a public forum; speak to them in private.

Action Lists – Nobody's Name is “Somebody”

To make sure the meeting is productive and you don't lose ground on all you've accomplished in the meeting, there are two documents you should generate after the meeting: Meeting Minutes and an Action List. A good idea may be brought forward in a meeting, and everybody may agree about the worth of the idea and agree that it should be done. If you don't find someone who will take ownership of implementing the idea, it won't happen.

Simply saying “Somebody take this and do it” means that nobody will do it, because Nobody is named “Somebody”.

Having an ongoing “action list” that has tasks, names and dates is an invaluable tool in getting things done. This should be updated and distributed after every meeting.

Comprehension Convention Engine (CCE) on Microsoft Live

Presentation by Brent Morgan

Comprehension Convention Engine is a massively integrated and centralized convention organization software system. It is a database and management tool to comprehend the known facets of convention program planning. It was created to address the problems of distributed event planning. For example: because different people may be working on them, the program grid might disagree with the text of the program description in the booklet. More seriously, guests may be mistakenly over-booked, material resources may over committed, and generally the plans may be out of sync.

CCE solves this problem by compiling all know data about the con into well-structured tables, and then rigorously performing the scheduling and usage analysis. It employs “*Type it once and forget it*” methodology. Never type the same information twice. From panelist names to equipment used, data flows from the centralized tables to the final publishable documents without human transcription errors. The entire package will be re-generated as needed to insure consistency. For example, if a guest is found to have their name spelled incorrectly, or just wishes to use a different alias, then the change is made in the master table, and it flows out to the grid, the booklet index, and anywhere else needed. When using the MS Word booklet templates, the participant descriptions and time-location cross-references are all dynamically updated with hot hyperlinks.

Additionally CCE now works with Microsoft Office Live Workspace. That collaborative environment allows a team to work sequentially on the same CCE dataset online. Each member could be granted read-only or full access to the data and be sure that they are seeing an up to the minute, whole, and internally consistent representation of their convention.

Y'all Ought to Move: The Search for a New Hotel

Change can be scary. For both you and your members. Small additions to your convention's programming can bring big rewards and a new con chair every year or two helps keep things fresh for everyone involved, as well as extending the energy and creativity of your staff and organizers. But changing hotels can be like a second marriage. Most cons that last more than a few years will have to go through this process at least once.

Need a Change?

Before a convention considers changing properties they need to make sure they have a good reason for doing so. Moving properties can be a lot of work for everyone involved and should not be done on a whim. Some good reasons for changing the location of you event:

- poor fit between the conventions space needs and what the hotel has (too much space or too little)
- price increases in function space rental or room rates
- unreasonable contract terms
- uncomfortable relationship with the staff and sales team
- declining condition/maintenance of the property

Identify What the Convention Needs

If moving is a must, the convention should first create a list of the convention's needs from a new home: number and size of function rooms, location, easy transportation, etc. Remember to include all those positive points of the current location, not just what is missing. Your convention may change over time, so if you already have a wish list from before, dust it off and update it. Some "must haves" may no longer be as important. Identify which of those needs are priority, and which ones are nice to have.

Searching For That Perfect Match

Once you have your list of needs you can start looking for your new partner.

- Ask for a Referral: If you are leaving your old property on good terms, ask for a booking history from them and see if they have any sister properties that might fit your needs. It is always easier to talk to a new property if you can demonstrate to them the business your event has done in the past.
- Work with previous contacts: Hotel sales people are notorious for moving between hotels, so there is a good chance that someone you worked with at an old location might be at a new location. It is always easier to deal with someone who knows your group is and how the convention benefited the property. Avoid burning bridges at all costs.
- Get a professional opinion: Most cities have some sort of Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) whose job is to bring events to that city. SF/F cons count as business. You can always contact your local CVB to get a list of hotels in the area that fit your general needs. This can save you a lot of legwork going to hotels that are WAY to big or not quite big enough.

Keep Your Options Open

When you approach a hotel, keep that list of convention needs in hand. You probably won't find a location that meets every one of your needs. That may include your shifting your preferred date to get the size or price on the facilities your convention needs. Remember that negotiations mean both sides working and compromising.

What Too Look Out For

That list of options probably has some 'no brainer' items, like room cost, availability on your preferred weekend and free rides to the nearest airport. But remember to consider the less obvious needs, too.

- When you are looking at a new property, consider what things will be like a few years down the road. If your convention has been growing every year, keep an eye out for a hotel that has some 'room to spare' so if your growth continues you won't be have to repeat this process again in a year or two.
- Take a serious look at the neighborhood where the hotel is located. Is it on the decline or is it undergoing new development? Older properties can be cheaper but are more likely to have maintenance issues. New properties might be have the best amenities and lots of nearby activates but they will probably cost more.
- Are there enough places nearby to keep your members happy and fed? You may get a great contract at that nice hotel in the office park outside of town, but what happens if the nearest restaurant open on Saturday night is 15 miles away?
- In these cost-conscious times, also think about grocery stores and office supply stores (quick supply runs for both attendees as well as con needs).
- Location relative to available travel. If folks fly in, are you close to the airport or public transport, or will they have to rent a car? Are you miles from the nearest major highway (appealing to those who prefer to drive to cons)?

The most important thing to look for in a new hotel is one that actually WANTS your business. If you have to give the sales person the hard sell about how your con will be great for them, you are probably not going to have a good relationship with that property. Your best move can be to walk away. It may even result in a better offer from the Hotel.

Technology: Threat or Menace :)

By A.T. Campbell, III

Introduction

Throughout the course of convention fandom, technology has been used to make certain tasks easier. As the use of computer technology in grown rapidly over the past 30 years, it now permeates most aspects of con-running.

Technology Used Pre-Con

Publications have generally been at the forefront of technology. Flyers, program books, pocket programs, and daily zines all make extensive use of desktop publishing. Most of the content for publications (art, ads, word-processing documents) is prepared and sent to the editor online, and often the work is sent to the commercial printer company digitally, leading to a near-paperless process. Other special-purpose printing is also done: badges, tent cards, individual program schedules, etc.

Email has revolutionized communication. Discussions within the committee and contacts with exterior people (guests, dealers, program participants, artists) are now much faster and clearer.

Advertising is a huge area. Program book ads and the aforementioned flyers are created digitally. Press releases are emailed to mailing lists, newspapers, magazines, and fannish websites with convention directories.

This brings us to the convention's website. These were unimaginable until about 15 years ago, and now essential. A modern con must have a website filled with extensive and current information about the con. It should allow visitors to contact the committee. And commonly, memberships to the con may be purchased directly online.

Other aspects of convention planning can be made easier with technology. Database software can be used to maintain member data and the program schedule. Sometimes CAD models are created to plan the setup of the dealer room or art show.

Technology Used At-Con

At-con registration often uses one or more notebook computers, hooked into the convention's membership database. Badges are often printed at the registration table.

Cell phones are often used for communication during the con, both within the concom and between the concom and various con members (dealers, guests, etc.)

Daily zines are marvels of desktop publishing, created during the con. Often they use incorporate photos of con events, taken with digital cameras.

Program schedules nearly always have one or more presentations done from a notebook computer. These invariably require the use of a computer projector and screen.

Precautions

We can't stress enough the importance of *backing up your data*. Notebook computers and cell phones can be broken or stolen. Back up to a physical medium (CD, hardcopy) or at the very least have copies of your data on another machine.

Be aware that not everyone uses technology to the same level. Some people don't have email or cell phones. Others may not check their email often or turn on their cell phone regularly.

Don't spend a lot of time on technology for its own sake. If building a web database or using a CAD program or whatever isn't going to save any time, improve your process, or benefit the con, don't bother. This is particularly important if the task starts to feel like drudgery to the concom. Fandom is supposed to be fun.

At the con, make sure your registration process could withstand a technology disaster. If the con's registration computer fails or the hotel has a power failure, make sure that you'll still be able to accept memberships. Have registration forms and pens ready.

Those making computerized presentations should take all precautions to make sure that their work is successful. Backup your work. If not supplying your own computer, let the con know what you need. Bring an electronic copy (flash drive, DVD, etc.) and let the con know what kind of computer you need to run your presentation. Don't assume the con will supply a computer with a specific operating system and expensive application software. And bring hardcopies of your slides just in case.

The Future

The sky is the limit. We expect Twitter and similar applications to play a larger role during cons. We would not be at all surprised to see cell phone applications for tracking GPS coordinates of convention members and guests (subject to privacy restrictions, of course). Conventions taking place entirely within cyberspace will probably be common soon.

Have fun!

The Great Balancing Act: Programming for SFF Cons

By A.T. Campbell, III & Kim Kofmel

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. Make sure that the programming chair has reliable contact information.

Invite additional guests, usually from the area near your convention, to round out your list program participants. Usually a convention will have several regulars. You can ask local writers for suggestions for new writers from the region. Local scientists can be a good resource.

Usually some of your guests will recommend friends as potential participants. Sometimes people will blindly contact the con website, asking to be a guest. Find out what these people can offer to the program. If they sound good and their story checks out, invite them. Remember that the final call is yours.

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. Solicit suggestions from participants. Look at the work of your major guests for inspiration. Hold a brainstorming session. No idea is bad!

Plan the Workflow

Take time outline what you need to do and when it needs to be done. Note what information you require and whom 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 concomm.

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 to find ones you like and think will work at your con. Then assign moderators and panelists. The exact method of assigning panelists and moderators varies. 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 highlight items first (Opening & Closing Ceremonies, Awards Ceremonies, etc.) Then fill in the rest of the grid with a mix of formats (panels, readings, demos, lectures, workshops, etc.). Pace your program so that no two highlight items are at the same time. Also try not to schedule program items with similar appeal at the same time. A good panel usually has 3 to 6 panelists.

Place program items in appropriate rooms. Make sure they're not too big or small. If several items have similar equipment needs (like a video projector), put them 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 sanity checks 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

Software used in 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. Larger conventions may use commercial database software.

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 send individual schedules or post it on the website and send out a quick note that it's there.

Handling change requests

There will be change requests! People's travel plans may change, or dinner plans may affect schedules. 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 specifies how you want furniture set up in each function room, and whether you need special equipment (microphones, video screens, etc.) for these rooms.

You will need to send the list of participants to Registration so that appropriate badges will be printed. Also tent cards must be printed for each participant, as well as their program itineraries and any general information you want them to have.

If the program schedule is to be printed in the program book, check with your program book editor about deadlines and preferred submission formats. Similarly, consult with your webmaster on what is needed to mount the schedule online.

You will likely also want to print a short pocket program. Print this as late as possible so that the most recent changes can be shown. Often these are printed on 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 hotel problem may cause an event to be moved. Notify members of changes as soon as possible.

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!

Art Show Database Demo

By Scott Zrubek

The demonstration of the Art Show Database will be a walk-through of the web-based application designed for artists and Art Show Directors (ASD) alike. It will highlight its current functionality and display the current deficiencies.

Discussion will center on the needs of the ASDs and the artists and how this website approaches them. What are the needs that it meets, needs it doesn't meet, and needs of which it has never heard? Can those needs be met? Should those needs be met? Are the needs applicable to most, some, or just a few Art Shows? How similar are various Art Shows? Do they all want, essentially, the same information?

The Art Show Database was inspired by a desire to have a one-stop shop for artists and Art Shows. To that end it stores information on artists (such as email, website, and other contact information) and art shows (how many panels, how many tables, mail-in art accepted, etc.).

From the Art Show Director's point of view, the planned use of it is as follows:

- Set up a convention entry
- Open the convention to requests for space
- Accept requests for space and assign artist numbers
- Close the convention to requests for space
- Check in the art work at the convention
- Sell pieces of art at the convention
- Do accounting and totalling

From the artist's point of view, the planned use of it is as follows:

- Enter in personal information
- Find conventions that are accepting requests for space
- Request space at one or multiple conventions
- *Decide on the artwork to send * (outside of the database)
- Enter in the information of the pieces being sent (Min. Bid, Quick Sale, etc)
- Print out Bid Sheets
- Print out Control Sheets

It is those last two items (printing out control sheets and bid sheets) that are to be the most time-saving pieces of the process. The accounting end of it, if it gets developed, will save the ASDs the most time.

Care and Feeding of Dealers

By Russ Ault & Lee Billings

The dealer room is an important part of the con experience for many fans. They expect to find more depth of specialty merchandise than local stores are likely to carry, as well as things that just qualify as “cool stuff”. Those who have been attending cons for a while may be looking for specific dealers, especially non-local ones. Having a good mix of dealers, and a well-laid-out room, will help both the convention and the dealers to prosper.

I. Planning the Dealer Room

A. Room and Table Size - Measure the room yourself! Make your map carefully; any mistake may bring significant grief when setup starts. *Hotels will lie about the type and size of tables they have.* The magic phrase to specify in your contract is “banquet tables”. There are several sizes.

B. Tables or booths? – Large conventions, and those whose dealer room is likely to include a lot of dealers who need substantial space, usually find that it's a good idea to offer both tables (with a fixed but usually fairly limited amount of space behind them) and booths (whose size is generally 8x8 feet or 10x10 feet).

C. Balance – Don't have too many dealers selling the same kind of merchandise.

D. Location – Don't stick the dealer room way off at the end of a hallway with nothing else nearby.

E. Access (dealers) – There needs to be a cart-accessible path from the vehicle loading/unloading area to the dealer room itself.

F. Access (customers) – Aisles between tables must be a minimum of 6 feet wide, and 8 or more is better for large cons.

G. Table Cost – Should also be proportional to expected attendance.

H. Including Memberships – There are two main schools of thought on this.

1. Membership and table cost are separate.

2. Membership(s) included with tables.

I. Charging extra for electricity – This is a bad move unless the venue is charging *you* extra to provide it.

J. Table covers – These can be omitted if the hotel or facility will charge more for tables with covers and/or drapes than for bare tables, but be sure to note their absence in both the Dealer Agreement and the pre-con e-mails.

K. Room layout requires special consideration.

1. Wall corners – If you have tables along both walls leading away from a corner, DON'T run the row of tables up to EITHER wall.

2. Entrance space – Never place a dealer table immediately next to the entrance of the room; allow an open space at the entrance so that you don't get a traffic jam.

3. Traffic Jams – Avoid placing two extremely popular dealers across from each other; the traffic jams that result will block the aisle.

4. Spaces Should Never Overlap – In practice, the space behind the tables on the corner of an island will end up getting shared by two dealers if you don't sell that whole space as a package.

5. Customer space and Dealer space MUST be clearly separated – Never place tables in isolation in the middle of the room; ALWAYS form them into islands with a clearly obvious interior and exterior, or make them into rows along the walls.

6. Allow enough aisle width, and ENFORCE IT – For a small or medium-size event, the aisles for customer access need to be at least 6 feet wide *everywhere*.

7. Don't place dealers with similar merchandise next to each other – There are several reasons for this.

II. Before the Con

A. Send out notifications of table availability 4-6 months in advance, the further the better

B. Have a dealer agreement; it should specify (at a minimum) things like setup/teardown and operating hours, table limits if applicable, prohibited types of merchandise and display, and refunds policy.

C. Answer e-mail queries in a timely fashion.

D. Deposit dealer payments in a timely fashion, preferably within 48 hours of receiving the check.

E. Always ensure that the space request form asks for both a phone number and an email address – That's in addition to the dealer name, mailing address, type of merchandise, and type of space required or preferred (wall vs. island, corner vs. row, with electric available or not, etc).

F. Have at least two rounds of pre-con e-mails for paid dealers – In addition to contacting them to confirm receipt of their application and payment, have an email that goes out about 30 days before the con to remind the dealers that they have space (yes, sometimes we forget) and to reiterate the setup times and basic rules.

G. If you have announced a date or schedule by which applicants will be informed as to whether or not they have tables, *stick with it*.

III. At the Con

A. Pre-Setup Setup – Before the room opens to the dealers for them to move in, have your own crew carefully measure the spaces and position the tables as you mapped them out.

B. Chairs – This seems like something that should be easy, but nearly every convention gets it wrong.

C. Arrival and Check-In – Have the dealer coordinator, or a designated assistant, in the room to check in dealers and direct them to their tables.

D. Setup – There should be at least 4 hours of setup time before the room opens to the public, even for a small con.

E. Operating hours – By and large, you'll get the most bang for your buck with the following schedule:

Thursday – Unless you're running a truly huge, long-established event like Dragon*Con or Worldcon, there is no need to have the Dealer Room open to the attendees on Thursday AT ALL, and not a lot of reason for setup unless the hotel will let you have the room on Thursday afternoon for early-arriving dealers

Friday – open at 3 or 4 PM, close at 7 or 8 PM.

Saturday – 10 AM to 6 PM. This is the main shopping day, but Saturday night is also when most of the major evening activities happen.

Sunday – 10 AM to 2 PM. Teardown takes time, and many dealers have day jobs; let them get back on the road at a reasonable hour. And by 2 PM, people are pretty much shopped out, and some are already leaving the con.

D. Breaks & food – Solo dealers can't easily leave their tables to visit the restroom or grab lunch.

E. Teardown – Give the dealers **at least 4 hours for teardown** and load-out.

F. Pre-selling next year's tables – Some cons do this and some don't.

IV. Other Notes

A. Big-Name Guests – Many dealers will tailor merchandise to cater to the opportunities presented by the presence of well-known guests, be they authors or actors or whatever.

B. Autograph tables – it is common for autograph tables to be placed at the back of the Dealer Room if space permits, but beware of building a convention around a famous celebrity guest whose autograph session will soak up the entire con attendance as everyone stands in line.

C. Should you have a Dealer Row instead of a Dealer Room? – This entire document has focused on the details of having a communal vendor space, but there is a competing concept which is used by a small number of conventions; the Dealer Row.

D. Get your dealers to promote your convention –Most dealers attend multiple conventions; ask them how many flyers they would be willing to place on the freebie tables at other events, and send them an adequate supply.

E. PROMOTE YOUR CONVENTION! – Yes, this is a discussion topic all by itself, but dealers both find your event and (in large part) evaluate its prospects on the basis of how well you're promoting it.

Bodycount: How Many Fans Does It Take to Run a Con?

Mark B. Hall

What determines how many fans it takes to run a con? Is it the size of the con? Is it the type of con? The number of tracks of programming? The size of the social circle of the people in the “core” group in charge of the con? The level of control desired by the core group? Is it related to the longevity of the con? Whether the con is dynamic or unchanging?

All of the above factors affect the number of people running the con—at least when discussing the minimum number required to successfully run a con. Discussing the minimums, however, begs the question: is it desirable to limit the con committee to the minimum that is absolutely necessary? Clearly it seems a good idea to have enough people to cover all the major tasks as well as having some “backup”. But what is a good number?

Obviously it takes more people to run a con with 5000 members than a con with 500; more to run a general interest con than one with a narrow focus; more to run a con that is constantly evolving than one that has settled into a niche.

I would argue that there is a two-way relationship that is not so obvious. A con may be larger partly because there are more people willing to work on it—and therefore there is a variety of new ideas; a larger pool of people for word-of-mouth promotion; an ability to expand the number of programming tracks; resources to plan additional events; access to a larger pool of talent; decreased chance of “burnout”. This also leads to increasing the number of social circles that intersect on the committee and within the con, feeding on the original growth and increasing diversity.

A large con committee has its own challenges. It can be difficult to stay focused; it can be difficult to maintain control; even the “mission” of the con can change over time. More people means more potential for conflict in the committee. Change can be the rule, rather than the exception, and some people may not feel comfortable in this type of environment. Strong leadership is essential to hold a large group together and pointed in the same direction.

In general, I think the advantages of a larger committee outweigh the disadvantages. I would argue that it would be better to determine the largest number of fans that should run a particular con without creating problems, rather than focusing on the number required.

Recruit good people who are willing to help. Don't worry about where you'll use them—that's the easy part.

Teamwork Exercise: SF Pictionary

Scorekeeper: A.T. Campbell, III ('cause he already knows the answers...)

Teamwork relies on people working together for a common goal, pooling skills and knowledge, and communicating clearly about needs, contributions, and progress.

Pictionary is a trivia game that relies not only on the knowledge base of the players, but their interpretation and communication skills as well. How to interpret the prompt into a visual clue; how to interpret the clue to arrive at the answer. The game is partly about word play, partly about trivial knowledge, and partly about visual communication.

Austin's A.T. Campbell, III has prepared a special set of prompts so we can play SF Pictionary!

The number of teams will be determined based on the number of players. Teams will be structured to mix people from different organizations. How quickly can you adapt to the way your new team members think?

Art Shows at SFF Cons

By Scott Zrubek

What are the challenges of running an art show at a con? What benefits do art shows bring?

Art Shows are a part of SFF conventions that require large amounts of labor at the beginning and at the end of the convention. Depending on the size of the convention, large amounts of volunteer time is needed throughout the convention, as well. That labor can be hard to find. How do we make Art Shows as efficient as they can be in respect to the labor needed?

Art Shows can bring money to that convention. Is that their purpose? Is their purpose to provide any or all of the following: money for the artist, art into the hands of the collectors, or an attraction for the convention attendees?

If the Art Show accepts mail-in art, how do you deal with that? How do you get the art to the convention, from the convention and back to the artists. Is it acceptable to add a fee to make up for this extra labor? What other fees can you charge or should you charge? At what point will artists stop coming to your show? At what point does the show no longer make financial sense? Is an Art Show such a vital part of a convention that it should be continued beyond the point that it no longer makes financial sense?

The nature of the art in SFF conventions can oftentimes be of a risqué nature. What are the ways of handling that? Do we need to protect the younger eyes at a con? Is art, whether genre or not, designed to shock and/or generate discussion? How is that done without alienating a substantial percentage of the attendees? Or, will it offend more attendees if the show is censored and cleansed?

Should the Art Show be juried? Open? Subject to the whims of the Art Show Director? How will this impact the number of artists interested in the show?

Do you have a live auction or just a silent one? How do you determine when to send an item to auction? How will that impact the Quick Sales? Will a "star" auctioneer generate more interest in the auction itself?

Is more Art Show traffic a good thing? Can you generate more traffic? If so, how do you do it?

Getting It in Writing: Con Publications in the 21st Century

By Pat Virzi

All concom divisions have important information they need to communicate to the convention membership as a whole -- before the convention, during the convention, and even afterwards. The Publications Division of any convention serves as its committee's official mass-communication mediator and publicity organ.

Progress reports, souvenir books, programs, signage and newsletters were traditional documents expected from Publications; convention-specific websites are also now essential. (Electronic "push" publishing methods, for up-to-the-minute news during the convention itself, could even include blogs, Twitter, RSS feeds, webcasts, chats, and onsite closed-circuit wall displays.)

To be effective, any mass communication must be both accurate and timely. To operate effectively, a convention committee's departmental and individual responsibilities and levels of authority must be well-defined and clearly enumerated. The first symptoms of an unhealthy, "seat-of-the-pants" concom structure are often felt in its Publications Division... especially in terms of schedules and deadlines. Hence, committee-wide systems and procedural policies are crucial to the overall functionality of the Publications Division -- as well as to the success and survival of the convention itself.

How Big is the Big Picture? Questions of Scale in Cons and Conrunning

By Karen Meschke

Most science fiction conventions begin as an idea of like-minded fans who wish to showcase their own interests and share them with others. Some are run with a non-profit and others are run with the intent of producing a profit.

Many science fiction conventions cross international borders such as Worldcon, World Fantasy Con, World Horror, and even SMOFcon. These conventions can have from a hundred to several thousand members.

Regional conventions play an important part of the convention going fans, these events are usually held on an annual basis and committee members can serve for multiple years for a more consistent con-running experience.

Texas has several regionals spread throughout the calendar year and each has their own unique focus and are attended by fans from Texas and other parts of the world.

- AggieCon-College Station
- ApolloCon-Houston
- Armadillocon-Austin
- ConDFW-Dallas
- FenCon-Dallas

Specialty conventions abound in the science fiction arena; there are

- Media conventions like Toronto Trek
- Comic conventions, such as ComicCon in San Diego and New York City (and soon to be in Chicago)
- Popular culture conventions like DragonCon in Atlanta
- Costume devotees have CostumeCon which changes location each year.

There are conventions devoted solely to one author such as:

- DiscWorld for Terry Pratchett fans
- JordanCon for Robert Jordan
- Annual Williamson Lectureship in honor of Jack Williamson at Eastern New Mexico University

In other words, if you enjoy any aspect of science fiction, there is an event or convention for you to indulge your appreciation of the genre almost every weekend of the year.

High Water Floats All Boats: Cooperating for a Healthy Con Circuit in Texas

By Kim G. Kofmel

What is cooperation?

According to Merriam-Webster online¹, the word “cooperate” dates to 1582, and is defined as follows:

- 1 : to act or work with another or others : act together or in compliance
- 2 : to associate with another or others for mutual benefit.

Wikipedia² notes that cooperation is “the alternative to working separately in competition.” While this is true, it is also true (as noted further in that article) that individuals may organize into a group and cooperate in order to form a stronger competitive unit. Collective bargaining is a common example of such cooperation.

The key elements are “working together” and “mutual benefit”: cooperation seeks to benefit all parties.

In a very real sense, a con is an example of cooperation, as a number of individuals work together (concom) towards a common goal (the con), to their mutual benefit and to the benefit of others.

In Texas, a large state with a number of SFF cons and similar events, it is also feasible for separate cons or organizations to cooperate for the common goal of a healthy con circuit.

¹ Merriam-Webster Online. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cooperate>. 2009/04/12

² Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cooperation> 2009/04/12

What does a healthy con circuit in Texas look like?

A circuit implies a continuous path that is repeatedly traveled over time.

From an SFF perspective, a healthy con circuit in Texas would have:

- multiple cons in multiple locations, distributed through the year, that draw the greater portion of attendees from their local area
- diversity in con foci, to cover a broader range of interests and to keep the cons distinct
- a substantial population of fans who travel frequently and regularly to some or all of the different events
- groups striving to improve their own con rather than becoming caught up in “competing” with other cons, particularly when competition is of the “apples and oranges” variety
- groups working in concert to promote and develop the community as a whole in hopes of increasing attendance overall: high water floats all boats

What can cooperation do?

Cooperation can:

- Share costs
- Reduce workloads
- Spread knowledge & share experience
- Reduce risk
- Help develop individual skills
- Reduce unnecessary duplication

What is cooperation NOT supposed to do?

Cooperation is NOT intended to:

- Make all cons look or operate the same
- Create a series of cons operated by the same group of people
- Make things harder
- Stifle diversity or new thinking

What are the possibilities for cooperation in Texas?

Possibilities for cooperation in Texas include, but are not limited to:

- Scheduling; this is basic: taking related events into consideration when selecting dates
- Developing standard equipment or other items that travel between cons; if transportation cost is not unduly high, the cost of acquiring and storing the equipment is spread amongst the sharing groups; a variation on this is rentals or loans between groups
- Shared mailings, for example FACT routinely offers the opportunity to other groups to piggyback on their major spring mailing
- Attending other cons, purchasing ads in program books, and providing promotional opportunities for other cons
- Sharing information as feasible and permitted
- Carrying promotional literature of another con to third party events

How does ALAMO support cooperation in Texas?

To date, aside from the InstaCons, ALAMO's recent cooperative initiatives have involved promoting the state as a whole and the cons within Texas by:

- transporting flyers for Texas cons to worldcons and the NASFiC
- using posters of the con flyers to decorate the ALAMO Friendly Texan parties
- distributing a list of cons in our region at similar events

With input from other organizations, ALAMO, Inc. hopes to take on other projects focused on conrunning within the state.

Say What Now? The Realities and Responsibilities of Status for Groups

By Russ Miller

Setting up and maintaining 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Corporations, and dealing with taxes for a convention organization are some of the most tedious tasks for those running a convention. Multiple steps are required to accomplish these tasks and they must be completed in the correct order for an error-free corporate creation. These items are complex, but they don't have to be complicated.

The Beginning

Non-Profit does not mean tax free. It is necessary for any corporation in Texas to pay state sales tax. There are also Corporate income taxes to be paid. These taxes can be minimized or eliminated once the IRS has recognized you as exempt, however until then it will be necessary for some taxes to be paid.

Once you've got a formal corporation name picked out (I.e., "Dallas Future Society"), you need to set up the corporation with the state. In Texas the form is "202 – Articles of Incorporation, Non-Profit", and it costs about \$25 to file. You'll get back an official stamped document for your records.

Important note: this initial filing should include language that is required by the IRS in later filings. We would be glad to share the exact wording necessary.

Next you will want to get a State Sales Tax ID. Once you do this, the convention will be subject to all sales tax until the IRS approves your Non Profit status. So keep good records and be prepared to file quarterly.

Following that, you need an EIN (Federal Employer Identification Number). It's easy and free to do on line

Now you are ready to start on your biggest job – writing up the IRS papers for submission. The primary document to work with is the IRS Form 1023 - "Application for Recognition of Exemption". This thing is a monster – nearly 30 pages of pure bureaucracy. But break it down into steps, and you can get through it fairly easily. You will need to make some decisions as you go, and come up with manuals such as bylaws, formal income/expense statements, and more. If possible, use someone else's form as a guide. In addition to the form there are a series of attachments necessary, which about doubles the number of submitted pages.

Allow some time to work on this, review it among the committee, and if possible have some outside experts look at it.

The Filing

Once you are happy with the forms, you can mail them in. That's right, hard copy. Signed. Plus \$750, non refundable. That's why you want to be sure you've done it right the first time.

Now you can wait. The books say 4 – 6 months. It all depends on which IRS clerk is in charge of your case, and how busy they are. And what mood they are in that week. They may come back and ask for further clarification on something. Which means a longer wait. Find a good book to read.

The State of things

While you are waiting, you have a con to run. And you still have to pay your taxes quarterly (or annually, if you ask).

Texas requires that you pay them sales tax (both state and local portions) for everything you sell. (This includes memberships). The State comptroller's website/office can give you a good idea of what is and isn't taxable. There is also the issue of local taxes – if you sell a membership during the year at the corporation's official address (your house) where one tax rate holds, do you pay that tax rate, or the rate at the hotel's address where the con takes place? The answer depends on who you ask at the comptroller's office, but is one example of the complexities involved.

The IRS also requires that a corporation file corporate income taxes each year. Once you are exempt, this won't be a problem, but until then there could be some money due.

Then one day, you will check the mailbox and find that the IRS has approved your submission. You are now an exempt organization. But you aren't quite through yet. You gotta tell the state.

Texas form AP-204/207 is the final step you need. This is the application for exemption in Texas, and you must send it in and get a file copy back before you are exempt from (most) state taxes.

Maintaining Status

There is still work to do, but it's much easier now. Once you have exempt status, you just need to file some forms each year and it is kept up to date.

IRS Form 990ez (Postcard) is sufficient for most of us.

Also you have to pay your state sales tax, either quarterly or annually. Finally, you'll need to have a board meeting each year and keep the minutes in case anyone asks for them.

Results

And what do you get for all of this work?

- No federal corporate taxes
- Much lower state sales tax. Only physical items that the con sells for profit are taxable.
- Protection for when the convention is dissolved. The officers are not personally responsible financially if anything bad happens.
- The ability to buy goods in the state without paying sales tax. This can save you a ton of cash.

Resources

The IRS has plenty of on line help for each of their documents. There are also lots of websites that give examples and descriptions. Strangely enough, not many of them actually answer questions about setting up a convention. We are a different niche, so we have different circumstances. Ask a SMOF or an existing con committee for help.

Crazy as it sounds – *Non-profits for Dummies*. This was recommended by a co-worker, and actually helped a lot. It contains a CD with sample forms.

Feel free to contact any of the officers of the Dallas Future Society. Have fun!

LiveFaceSpaceTweet! Social Networking and What It Can Do for Cons

Join us for an overview of the social networking phenomenon, followed by a look at several social networks (SNs), and open discussion of user and promoter experiences. Why do people use social networks? What aspects of their lives are well served by social networks? How can promoters determine whether use of SNs will enrich the experiences of their users, or annoy them? Are there guidelines and best practices for using SNs for promotion? Are SNs toys or tools? Can external (i.e., not user-driven) promotions succeed inside SNs? How do things “go viral”?

Resources to be discussed:

- Social Networking in Plain English (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6a_KF7TYKVC)
- List of Social Networking Sites (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites)
- Twitter
- Facebook
- LiveJournal
- MySpace
- Delicious
- Wikipedia
- Skype
- LinkedIn
- LibraryThing
- Ning
- Plaxo
- Ravelry
- Shelfari
- FriendFeed
- Flickr
- FlashMobs

ALAMO, Inc. in the 21st Century

By Kim Kofmel

ALAMO, Inc. is a Texas nonprofit literary corporation, organized to promote the understanding and appreciation of the literary fields of fantasy, science fiction and horror, and to provide a forum for the free discussion of the ideas and concepts associated with these literary fields. While ALAMO works to support these literary fields within the State of Texas, the organization also acts to further the interests of the international community of active science fiction fans and the field's professional writers, editors and artists.

To accomplish its purposes, the Corporation has sponsored regional, national and international fantasy, science fiction and horror conventions as well as conventions aiming to help develop the skills of volunteers working on such events. In addition, ALAMO, Inc. has occasionally provided financial grants to Texas organizations for various purposes, including but not limited to guest sponsorship.

Currently, ALAMO, Inc. is the sponsor of a recent series of InstaCons; a small convention traveling within the State of Texas, focused on the work of running SFF cons. InstaCon brings together individuals from various organizations running cons in Texas for a weekend of networking, information sharing, and knowledge building.

The dates of the InstaCons in this current series are:

InstaCon 5, Houston, May 2005

InstaCon 6, Fort Worth, April 2007

InstaCon 7, San Antonio, January 2008

InstaCon 8, Houston, April 2009

InstaCon 9, TBD

Other past and future ALAMO, Inc. events supporting the SFF mandate are the 55th annual World Science Fiction Convention (San Antonio, 1997), the 2008 Nebula Awards Weekend (Austin), and the upcoming, SMOFCon 27 (Austin, 2009).

ALAMO, Inc. is organized as something very different from a local club. It draws its board from around the state, and does not focus on any one city for its activities. While currently developing a bid for a future worldcon, ALAMO also works to promote cooperation among cons in Texas, with the goal of a strong, active Texas fandom. We celebrated 50 years of Texas cons in 2008 and look forward to celebrating 60, 75 and 100 years in turn.

If you would like to become involved in ALAMO, Inc., there are lots of opportunities. Volunteer to be part of one of our committees or activities, which range from the practical aspects of running an organization to the very public activity of hosting a party for hundreds of people at a worldcon, or talk to the chair of any current event, such as the upcoming SMOFCon or next InstaCon, about working as concom, staff or volunteer. Who knows... you might even end up on the board!

SMOFCon 27

Austin, TX

December 4-6, 2009

Time Management

Things to do in Austin

If you like bats, bars and beats,
you've come to the right city...

6th Street
Alamo Draffhouse
Austin History Center
Bob Bullock Texas History Museum
The Blanton Museum of Art
First Thursday on South Congress
Harry Ransom Center
LBJ Library & Museum
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower
O. Henry House
Paramount Theatre
Texas State Capitol
Texas Natural Science Center
University of Texas

Memberships to
SmofCon 27
are just \$60.00 until
November 1

Hilton Garden Inn on 5th Street
500 N I-35, Austin, TX 78701

Rates: \$139.00 single/double

The Hilton Garden Inn Austin Downtown hotel, located in the heart of downtown Austin, Texas, offers first-class Texas hospitality. The hotel is minutes away from the Alamo Draffhouse and the O. Henry House as well as other sights and sounds that give Austin distinction. Situated just blocks from the downtown business district and from Austin's legendary 6th Street/Warehouse Entertainment District, the hotel is nestled in the heart of the Texas State Capitol.

Register online at

alamo-sf.org/smofcon27

SMOFCon 27 is brought to you by

Alamo Literary Arts Maintenance Organization

Chair: Karen Meschke

Hotel: Kurt Baty

Program: Karen Meschke

Publicity: Cathy Beckwith

Publications: Pat Virzi & Kimm Antell

Registration: Laura Domitz

Treasurer: Bill Parker

Web Page: Clif Davis & Kimm Antell

Budget Boot Camp:

Vincent Docherty, Deb Geisler & Mark Olson

Upcoming Conventions of Interest

Conestoga 13 - Tulsa, Oklahoma
April 24-26, 2009
www.sftulsa.org

World Horror Convention 2009 -
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
April 30-May 3, 2009
www.whc2009.org

Texas Frightmare Weekend -
Irving, Texas (horror/media)
May 1-3, 2009
www.texasfrightmareweekend.com

ConQuest 40 -
Kansas City, Missouri
May 22-24, 2009
www.conquestkc.org

A-Kon 20 - Dallas, Texas (anime)
May 29-31, 2009
www.a-kon.com

SoonerCon 2009 - Oklahoma City,
Oklahoma
June 5-7, 2009
www.soonercon.com

ApolloCon 2009 - Houston, Texas
June 26-28, 2009
www.apollocon.org

Trek Expo 2009 - Tulsa, Oklahoma
June 26-28, 2009
www.trekexpo.net

FiestaCon - Tempe, Arizona
(Westercon 62)
July 2-5, 2009
www.fiestacon.org

Anticipation - Montreal, Quebec,
Canada (67th Worldcon)
August 6-10, 2009
www.anticipationsf.ca

ArmadilloCon 31 - Austin, Texas
August 14-16, 2009
www.armadillocon.org

San Japan 2.X - San Antonio,
Texas (Japanese culture/anime)
August 14-16, 2009
www.san-japan.org

Fear Fest - Dallas, Texas
August 28-30, 2009
www.txfearfest.com

Bubonicon 41 -
Albuquerque, New Mexico
August 28-30, 2009
www.bubonicon.com

Dallas Comic Con -
Richardson, Texas (media/toys)
August 29-30, 2009
www.scifiexpo.com

**North American Discworld
Convention** - Phoenix, Arizona
September 4-7, 2009
www.nadwcon.org

AnimeFest - Dallas, Texas
September 4-7, 2009
www.animefest.org

FenCon VI - Dallas, Texas
September 18-20, 2009
www.fencon.org

ProtoCon 11 -
College Station, Texas (gaming)
September, 2009
www.protocon.com

Realms Con - Corpus Christi, Texas
October 2-4, 2009
www.realmscon.com

TrickConTreat 2009 -
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
October 2-4, 2009
www.trickcontreat.com

Star Wars Fan Days III -
Plano, Texas (media/toys)
October 24-25, 2009
www.starwarsfandays.com

World Fantasy Convention 2009 -
San Jose, California
October 29-November 1, 2009
www.worldfantasy2009.org

MillenniumCon 12 -
Round Rock, Texas (gaming)
November 6-8, 2009
www.millenniumcon.com

Izumicon -
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (anime)
November 13-15, 2009
www.izumicon.com

Oni Con - Houston, Texas (anime)
November, 2009
www.oni-con.com

SMOFcon 27 - Austin, Texas
December 4-6, 2009
www.alamo-sf.org/smofcon27

Ikkicon - Austin, Texas (anime)
January 1-3, 2010
www.ikkicon.com

OwlCon XXIV - Houston, Texas
February 19-21, 2010
www.owlcon.com

ConDFW IX - Dallas, Texas
February 12-14, 2010
www.condfw.org

Furry Fiesta - Addison, Texas
February 19-21, 2010
www.furryfiesta.org

ChimaeraCon 2010 -
San Antonio, Texas (gaming)
March, 2010
www.chimaeracon.com

Staple! The Independent Media Expo
Austin, Texas
March, 2010
www.staple-austin.org

All-Con VI - Dallas, Texas
March 12-14, 2010
www.all-con.org

RevelCon 21 - Houston, Texas
March, 2010
www.severalunlimited.com/revelcon

AggieCon 41 -
College Station, Texas
March, 2010
aggiecon.tamu.edu

LepreCon 36 - Phoenix, Arizona
May 14-16, 2010
www.leprecon.org

Notes and Numbers

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