

# ***Comprehensive Review of the 2019 Blessing of the Fleet***

By Richard Lord, MPA, BOF Chairman 2015-2018

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## ***Introduction***

I was thrilled there was a 2019 *Blessing of the Fleet* (BOF). However, I was not pleased with the overall event. The live band music was the highlight of the BOF, but it was so sparse overall of just a few evening hours of a 16 hr. two dayslong event, that the lack of afternoon live band music was the major factor for the dissatisfaction and disappointment in the BOF. This, and other significant programmatic and structural deficiencies, represented a steep decline in the quality of the event from the excellence of the 2018 BOF and those that proceeded it.

This *Review* is not to denigrate the 2019 BOF and its organizers. As the former Chairman from 2015-2018, I fully appreciate the considerable time and effort that went into the production of the 2019 BOF by its now *five* new Chairmen, and to their great credit as BOF novices, I am surprised it only took the *five* of them to replace me. Rather, if there is to be a 2020 BOF, I seek to be instructive to restore the BOF to its former state of distinction.

As Chairman of the BOF for the last four years, no one knows the production and management challenges better than I. Further, no one knows better how to promote and manage this fine event. Thus, this *Review* is to provide guidance to the 2020 BOF organizers enabling them to return the event to its outstanding 2018 single-day Saturday production framework and programming constructing a BOF well worth attending and continuing.

However, BOF survival is still not secure. Given the 2019 BOF state of deterioration and lower level of expected attendance and profitability, there are those who again may seek its elimination. When the BOF faced abolition for 2019, being responsible for its guardianship, I fought long and hard to protect it, and became a casualty of the war to save it. Further, the personal animosity and hostility directed towards me out of resentment for the public recognition and appreciation of my stewardship of the BOF became unconscionable and irreconcilable.

A previous 7<sup>th</sup> District Optimist Club (Club) President told me I saved the BOF for the first time when I stepped forward when no one else would in 2015 to serve as Chairman when Robert Steele Pogue abruptly resigned in a dispute with the Club. In so doing, I was awed by the magnitude and impressed by the brilliance of the event. In my years as Chairman, I vowed and acted to carry on Robert's vision and now mine of the BOF where my major contributions were (1) broadening and enhancing the event particularly in maximizing live band music and family entertainment, and (2) safeguarding its financial integrity and security. The 2019 BOF was an unfortunate departure from that vision for the BOF, and a giant step backwards in the excellence of the event. This *Review* specifies the programmatic and structural strengths and flaws of the 2019 BOF as I viewed it over two days, and in so doing, provide guidance for 2020 restoring the BOF to its former brilliance.

With the evident programmatic and structural deficiencies of the 2019 BOF, I was continually asked if I felt "vindicated." I took these comments to mean vindication of the excellence of the BOF under my auspicious and me personally as its Chairman for the thousands of hours of my time I devoted to the BOF and Club. My response was, "Yes." However, while there are *Logical Consequences* for treachery applying *Due Diligence* of a *Measured Response to Just Deserts* as one is able such as this Website viewed by thousands, the diminution of the BOF was not a consequence I welcomed, and I took no solace or delight in the flaws and failures of the 2019 BOF.

Rather, I sorrowed over the deterioration of the BOF as dreadful as it was for 2019, and hope for its restitution and restoration back to the great event is has been for over 50 yrs. Unfortunately, BOF success shall be judged by the powers-that-be based on its profitability and not its programming excellence or lack thereof. Thus, resuscitating and resurrecting the BOF requires a change in the mindset of those-in-charge that likely shall prove difficult as; *You can lead a horse's ass to the waters of truth, but you can't make it drink and think.*

## ***2019 BOF Programmatic Strengths and Deficiencies***

### ***Program Strengths***

#### **1. The BOF Stage Bands**

For the entire two-day BOF *Program of Events*, the entertainment highlight was primarily the three bands with two on Saturday evening and one late Sunday afternoon. The bands were outstanding offering high quality live music. *Nathan Osmond* particularly impressed as an entertainer, and well beyond that as a person, but that is what one would expect of an *Osmond Family* member.

## 2. The BOF Kids Attractions

I continued most of the kids' entertainers and shows Robert Pogue used. At my urging, the 2019 BOF retained the *Balloon Nerd Balloon Twisting*, *Balloon Nerd Magic Show* (unfortunately performed on the *Main Stage*,) two *Moon Bounces*, *Kids' Tractor Pull*, and the *Pony Rides*. Worthwhile additions the BOF makes every year were the *Chesapeake Mermaid*, *Roving Ranger*, and some lowkey kids' activities such as sidewalk chalk art.

## 3. Arts & Crafts Vendors

Back was the *Arts & Crafts Vendors* tent that attracted some public interest; and opening the front of the tent as I suggested I am sure helped attendance, but it still could have used a sign indicating it is a crafts venue.

## 4. Noon Parade Grand Marshall and Eddie Bailey's Classic Cars

While the *Noon Parade* was absent numerous former entries and thus far shorter than previous years down to 20 minutes from 12:15 to 12:35, it was a most pleasing event. The highlight was Eddie's classic cars with *Charter Members* in them leading the *Parade*. In 2017, I instituted the 1<sup>st</sup> *Grand Marshall* with *Jimmie Banagan* as the 1<sup>st</sup> living Club President. In 2018, *Eddie Bailey* was the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Grand Marshall* as the 3<sup>rd</sup> living Club President. For 2019, *Russ Cullins* was the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Grand Marshall* as the 4<sup>th</sup> living Club President. I trust this wonderful tradition shall continue despite it being my creation and notable legacy to the BOF with Bob Kopel as the 4<sup>th</sup> *Grand Marshall* for 2020 as the 7<sup>th</sup> living Club President. I also delighted in the "Future Optimist Club Members" float of mostly girls in a Club of all men with its perceived irony, and I trust whomever was responsible for the float gained an appropriate measure of sinister satisfaction for her wily wickedness.

## Program Deficiencies

### 1. The BOF Stage Music Bands and Acts

The major BOF entertainment deficiency was that there were but three costly bands for 3½ hrs. of live music over the 16 hrs. of the two-day event. A *Cardinal Rule* in producing an outdoor event is to immediately and continually make the "*Highest and Best Use*" of the stage, which is almost always live band music. Dissimilarly, in understanding and following this concept, the *Sotterley Riverside WineFest* (Sotterley) covering the same days as the BOF, but from noon to 5pm. each day for a total of 10 hrs., had live band music for all 10 of those hrs. from event beginning to end. Also, by comparison, the 2017 two-day BOF of 16 hrs. had 10½ hrs. of live band music, and the one-day 2018 BOF of 11 hrs. had 6 hrs. of live band music.

The 2019 BOF started at noon on Saturday and 11am on Sunday, but on Saturday there was no live band music for five hrs. from start until 5pm, and on Sunday no live band music for five hrs. until 4pm. This represents ten hrs. of wasted high-profile stage attraction time. The result was far lower BOF attendance than past years on Saturday from noon to 5pm until the appearance of the first band, and all day on Sunday as there was no live band music to retain people at the conclusion of the *Noon Parade*. The fact the *Water Taxi* lines to *St. Clément's Island* were far shorter than past years and the *Hospitality Tent* was not packed with standing room only as in the past also evidenced this lower level of BOF attendance from prior years.

In contrast, the music-loving public well-attended the Sotterley WineFest enjoying its Saturday live band music from noon until 5pm when it closed, where the BOF with no band music had low attendance during those hours. There was very light BOF attendance on Sunday after the *Parade* for the entire afternoon, and again Sotterley with its entire day of live band music, had better Sunday attendance than the BOF.

As an incredulous coincidence, it would almost appear that Sotterley, or someone wittingly or unwittingly acting on its behalf, planned the daytime BOF *Schedule of Events* excluding bands from noon until 5pm on Saturday and from start until 4pm on Sunday such that Sotterley and not the BOF attracted those desirous of live band music. What venue would you choose – the BOF with no live band music all afternoon on Saturday and Sunday, or Sotterley with its live band music all day long both days? How very fortunate for Sotterley that it had live band music during its hours of the BOF while the BOF had none.

Prior to 2019, the BOF and Sotterley had almost identical *tried-and-true* programmatic formats of all-day live band music, kids' attractions, crafts show, wine tasting, and concessions. The main difference between them was that the BOF had its traditional *Noon Parade*, *St. Clément's Island* attractions, and evening *Fireworks*. It is most unfortunate Sotterley is on the same weekend as the BOF where they are competing against one another for audiences, but then for 2019, Sotterley had no live band music competition with the BOF that had none.

Even the BOF Sunday 4 pm Florida-based *Cabana Dogs* band had dismal attendance. There was virtually no one on the stage grounds when it started playing at 4pm., and it had to plead with people to come and listen. Finally, about half-dozen or so people came forward mostly bolstered by BOF volunteers so there would be someone in the audience. I felt very bad for the band and embarrassed for the BOF over this sad situation.

The two BOF Saturday bands had considerably smaller audiences than expected. In fact, the attendance appeared quite diminished in comparison with the 2018 BOF with the outstanding, crowd pleasing, and very popular local/regional *HydraFX* band with *Greg Barrick* as the headliner *Fireworks* band, and far fewer than for the 2017 BOF when the highly accomplished and renown local/regional *Six Gun South* band with *Pat Woodburn* was the headliner *Fireworks* band. Beyond the attraction of the bands, the main crowd draw for the Saturday evening BOF is the highly anticipated BOF *Fireworks*.

Instead, for these wasted 10 hrs., the 2019 BOF stage had pleasing but low-profile and low-draw attraction acts. For the *Daughters of Veda* act at the Saturday 1pm stage prime time, I counted its attendance as twelve persons for its production period. Best that this and other such acts appear during band intermissions.

There was similar low attendance for the other non-musical stage productions. In fairness to *Gracie's Dance Studio* and the *Balloon Nerd Magic Show*, it would have been more appropriate for them to appear on the *Kid's Stage* of last year as did the *Balloon Nerd* and as *Gracie* requested rather than the *Main Stage*. However, the 2019 BOF dispensed with the 2018 *Kid's Stage* and performers to save costs to pay for the expensive bands.

Exacerbating the problem of the far less than anticipated attendance for the 2019 BOF Saturday and Sunday bands in attracting and retaining an audience was that there was NO general public seating. Prior BOF events had ample public seating including seven sets of *Bleachers* packed with hundreds of spectators, but the 2019 BOF had no general public seating. I noted numerous persons looking around for seating, and in not finding any, when the discomfort factor became intolerable, lost patience and left the area with the music not worth the inconvenience and discomfort of standing for hours on end. I will comment further on the seating issues in the *Structural Review* section of this document.

My 2018 BOF budget was \$4,000 for four bands and \$1,000 for sound provided by my state-of-the-art digital 11,000w sound system for free and only had to pay for a sound engineer to professionally operate it. *Eddie Bailey* provided his mobile stage trailer for free that was larger than the 2019 stage. I expect the 2019 BOF paid upwards of \$20,000 for its three bands, sound system, stage, tent, and chairs for no increase in attendance over previous years. Just one 2019 BOF band cost more than my entire 2018 BOF music band and sound budget. The 2019 total band and music budget about doubled my entire 2018 budget for the bands, music, and kids' entertainment; and for this amount over its two days, could have had seven bands and extensive kids' entertainment acts and shows of prior years.

Following *Risk Management* principles of *Risk Assessment* and *Risk Mitigation*, my BOF bands played under "No Play No Pay" contracts in the event of a rainout, but to do so, I could not hire national bands with guaranteed payments. I could and would have brought in the *Grateful Dead (Dead & Company)*; but did not for this reason of eschewing guaranteed contracts along with no assurance of increased attendance sizable enough to justify the large cost of the *Dead*. Instead, I engaged reasonably priced talented and popular local/regional bands with large followings that agreed to *No Play No Pay* contracts with cancelation notice.

This, because the BOF for 2015 suffered a complete rainout and in 2016 experienced a Saturday rainout. I was able to convince the bands and most youth entertainment providers to wave payments saving the BOF thousands of dollars with the proviso I would bring them back the following year. Thus, I became rainout risk adverse and acted to protect the BOF from financial losses due to rainouts in enacting *No Play No Pay* contracts with all BOF bands and youth entertainment providers that waived guaranteed contracts. However, that meant I could not contract with national bands and entertainers that required guaranteed contracts. I also arranged Sunday as a "Rainout Day" following the Saturday *Schedule of Events* including the *Fireworks*.

The 2019 BOF was on the hook to pay its national bands, sound contractor, stage, tent, and chairs in a rainout. The VIP seating income helped defray some of the cost, but it would have been better had it secured non-current, never-before, NEW sponsors to underwrite the cost. Very fortunate the 2019 BOF was not rained out, but then if it had, I could not have written this *Comprehensive Review* revealing its deficiencies for proper *Corrective Actions* as I have specified in this *Review* for the 2020 BOF.

The best way to eliminate the 1<sup>st</sup> weekend in October competition for audiences between the 50-year-old BOF and the 15-year-old Sotterley, is for Sotterley to move to the 2<sup>nd</sup> weekend in October with no BOF competition if there is a concern about Sotterley's Saturday level of attendance and profitability vis-à-vis the BOF.

The 2019 BOF should have been a one-day Saturday only event as follows for the entertainment stage:

- Noon-1pm – Opening Ceremonies and *Parade*
- 1-3pm – *Robbie Booth Band*
- 3-4pm – Intermission between bands for band take-down & next band set-up – *Daughters of Veda* act
- 4-6pm – *Cabana Dogs Band*
- 6-7pm – Intermission between bands for band take-down & next band set-up – Kids' Bikes Drawing
- 7-8pm – *Nathan Osmond* (band plays or has guitar solo of *National Anthem* just prior to the *Fireworks*)
- 8-8:30pm – *Fireworks*
- 8:30-9pm – Announcements, Sponsor & Advertiser Acknowledgements - Raffle Drawing
- 9-10:pm – *Nathan Osmond*
- 10pm – Concluding BOF Farewell Remarks

Note: The BOF could add a fourth band by shortening band sets to 1½ hrs. and intermissions by 15 minutes.

## 2. The BOF Kids Attractions

The 2019 BOF eliminated most of the 2018 highly popular and well attended 2018 kids' attractions. Gone were seven major kids' acts - *Foundation Heroes* with Spiderman et al, *Blue Sky Puppet Theater*, *Chris Campbell Show*, *Trackless Train Ride*, *Rock Climbing Wall*, *Animal Display*, and *Face Painting*. The *Kids' Stage* was also eliminated with these shows. At my urging, the BOF retained the *Balloon Nerd Balloon Twisting*, *Balloon Nerd Magic Show* (unfortunately performed on the *Main Stage*,) two *Moon Bounces*, *Kids' Tractor Pull*, and the *Pony Rides*. The 2019 BOF also did not bring back the *Viking Ship* at the *Pier*.

The result was that the BOF eliminated most of the kids' attractions to its detriment; and reallocated those funds to expensive bands that underperformed in terms of attracting audiences compared to prior BOF's.

The 2018 cost of the kids' attractions was \$6,000 and well worth the money. The 2019 BOF eliminated much of this cost in eliminating most of the 2018 kids' attractions. This cost savings to pay for the expensive bands was not worth the cost of the bands or the loss of kids' attractions and family goodwill.

## 3. The Absence of a 2019 BOF *Program Guidebook*

For over 50 years, the BOF had a *Program Guidebook* (Book) of over 100 double-sided B&W and color pages. The 2,000 Books contained ads for the BOF of some 30 sponsors and 100+ advertisers totaling over \$50,000 of revenue. The BOF sponsor and advertiser payments once collected, along with the \$12,000 County grant I first obtained from the County for the BOF, are largely responsible for BOF profitability.

However, the Book was not just a vehicle and excuse to acknowledge sponsors and advertisers as it also contained crucial BOF information; Area, County, State, and BOF history and stories; and Club information including "In Memoriam" pages of fallen Club members the past year.

There was no 2019 Book.

The reasons likely include first the enormous amount of work to compile and produce the Book, which I well know as I produced the highly acclaimed 2018 Book; and second the cost of some \$14,000. Instead, to save effort and cost, the 2019 BOF had the expense of *Scrolling Billboards* that were easier to produce only listing sponsors and advertisers, but no other information. If I were a sponsor or advertiser, I would not continue to support the BOF with only the *Scrolling Billboards* given 2019 lower BOF attendance than previous years and without a *Program Guidebook* of widespread public distribution.

In 2019, the Club suffered the great losses of James "Duffy" Owens and Phil Bailey, and one would think the *Scrolling Billboards* at the very least could have acknowledged them and their passing. For their sake alone, had I still been Chairman, there would have been a Book to recognize them and record for posterity their significance to the Club and the 7<sup>th</sup> District. Without the Book, the public no longer is informed of the rich history of the 7<sup>th</sup> District, County, and State; and the Club has no BOF and Club history record for 2019.

This is a tremendous loss.

## 2019 BOF Structural Strengths and Deficiencies

### Structural Strengths

#### 1. There was a 2019 BOF

#### 2. It all came together – Sort of

The BOF is so complex with a myriad of *Critical Elements*, that if one is missing, the entire event is imperiled. The 2019 BOF had in place most *Critical Elements* although missing or misallocating some notable ones.

*St. Clément's Island* transport and tour went well, as did the *Hospitality Tent*, although the lines for the *Water Taxis* were shorter than prior years, and the *Hospitality Tent* was less attended than previous years.

#### 3. VIP Stage Tent and Scrolling Billboards of Sponsor and Advertiser Ads

The *VIP Tent* was a plus for the VIPs although likely insufficient in serious inclement weather, but not a plus for anyone else as it blocked public view and sound, and it came across negatively as elitist and snobbish.

The *Scrolling Billboards* were a nice touch, but only as an addition and enhancement to the BOF *Program Guidebook*, and not the pale replacement they were for the Book.

### Structural Deficiencies

#### 1. One-Day v Two-Day Events

Based on research and experience with two-day events, I long advised the Club that all events under its control should be one-day events. The reason being that the second day of a two-day event has half or less the attendance of the first day where it breaks even at best. That is why the 2017 Club *Music Fest* LOST \$22,000 due to the second day with much more costly bands and far less attendance than the first day.

For this reason, I constructed the 2018 BOF as a one-day Saturday event that was well attended consolidating all the *Critical Elements* of the previous year two-day event into the one-day BOF beginning with the *Noon Parade* and ending with the *Fireworks* and the *HyrdaFX Band*. The definition of insanity is repeatedly making the same mistakes over again and expecting a different outcome. Thus, the Club powers-that-be would not listen to reason and heed my admonition and advice, and instead reverted to a two-day truncated 2019 BOF that was poorly attended and likely unprofitable from noon until 5pm on Saturday and all-day Sunday. The second day also unnecessarily burdened Club volunteers.

Following the 2018 BOF, I was asked to revert the 2019 BOF back to a two-day event as the 2018 Saturday only BOF dampened Sotterley's 2018 Saturday attendance and profits. I expect the two-day 2019 BOF was a capitulation to this ideation, and it did restore Sotterley's Saturday attendance and profitability at the expense of the BOF and Club. One excuse for a two-day BOF was a proposed reciprocal BOF/Sotterly *Ticket* that would foster attendance for both events, but that did not seem to materialize likely due to the vast difference in event *Ticket* prices. Thus, there was no BOF live band music until 5pm on Saturday and 4pm on Sunday while Sotterley had live music on both days from start to finish. The result was that Sotterely had fine attendance on Saturday during daylight hours while the BOF did not, and better attendance on Sunday than the BOF.

#### 2. Late Sunday Music Start Time

I learned from the 2016 BOF Sunday experience, following the *Noon Parade*, to immediately have live band music to retain as many *Parade* participants and watchers as possible. The 2019 BOF did not have live band music until 4pm, and in so doing lost much of its *Parade* audience and did not attract a band music audience unlike that of Sotterley. The result was that the 2019 BOF lost most of its Sunday audience after the *Parade* where the 4pm band audience was almost non-existent except for a few BOF volunteers. Had the *Cabana Dogs Band* played immediately after the *Parade* as did prior BOF bands, it would have had an audience retaining much of the *Parade* attendance; and its appearance would not be a waste of its time and BOF Club money. Thus, the BOF was poorly attended all day Sunday for no purpose or profit.

### 3. No Public Seating for the Band Music

As previously cited, there was no BOF public seating as well as no *Dance Space* for the band watchers. Inexplicably, gone missing were the seven sets of public *Bleachers* of prior years that held hundreds of spectators. Venues such as the *Calvert Marine Museum* musical events have ample public seating. This was a hardship to the BOF public band watchers that likely negatively impacted audience retention.

### 4. Unfortunate *VIP Seating*

For the first time, for a price, the BOF had a VIP Saturday band watcher seating area taking up a vast space right in front of the stage. On the positive side, the VIP price income resulted in a new source of BOF revenue. However, the BOF paid a price in considerable general public audience dissatisfaction.

The entire band area in front of the stage of some 60 chairs covering about 50' from front to back and side to side was exclusive *VIP Seating*. The general public was left standing behind this seating area largely blocked out by that VIP expanse and no high-rise bleachers. This also took up and over what was the *Dance* area.

The general public response was one of disdain. First, of exclusion, and second how the *VIP Seating* was so poorly managed. There were no VIP area entry signs indicating this was *VIP Seating* only and not for the general public, and no one policed the *VIP Seating*. The result was the general public filled the *VIP Seating* area only to be kicked out time and again. The general public continually came in and got thrown out until finally someone sat at the entry to the *VIP Seating* area to keep out the general public.

The general public did not take well to the exclusionary *VIP Seating* and its mismanagement. Those who got expelled left the band area shaking their heads – it got very ugly – and reflected poorly upon the BOF and Club. The result was a very disgruntled general public audience and set a very bad tone for the 2019 BOF as being supercilious and unwelcoming to general public band attendees in comparison to the VIPs.

Also, for the first time, I felt embarrassed for the BOF that it was not equally welcoming to everyone. The snooty appearing *VIP Badges* also exacerbated the poor public perception of the BOF. This unfortunate VIP band seating experiment should be discontinued or redesigned with VIPs off in VIP stage wings to be less obstructive and offensive to the general public as it sucked the *Joy* right out of the BOF. Further, catering to VIPs and not the general public is inconsistent with the hospitable public ideals of the BOF and Club I knew and fostered.

### 5. Poor Location of the Food and Soda Vendor Area

The BOF food and soda vendor area was moved from the 2018 centrally located vendor area immediately adjacent to the *St. Clément's Island Museum* and entertainment stage to the *Museum* auxiliary building area well away from central public access. Another *Cardinal Rule* in devising an outdoor event is to locate the food & drink vendor area as close as possible to the main entertainment area for high visibility and ease of public access. The result was the public had to go well out of its way to access the vendor area where public access was particularly difficult after dark. This vendor area was last year's kids' entertainment area that closed after dark such that lighting that area was not at issue as it was this year. Consequently, vendor sales appeared significantly down from last year.

### 6. No *ATM Cash Dispenser*

For the first time, the BOF did not have an *ATM Cash Dispenser*, or at least I could not locate one, and if I could not, others likely had the same difficulty. Previous BOF events had an ATM near the *Information/Souvenir Booth*, *beer stand*, & food & drink concessions. This deficiency likely contributed to reduced concession sales.

### 7. The Dissolution and Dislocation of the Kids' Area

For 2018, the kids' area was centrally located with the *Kid's Stage* for the four kids' shows and acts; and for the *Balloon Nerd Balloon Twisting*, two *Moon Bounces*, *Rock Climbing Wall*, and *Pony Rides* and *Animal Display*. The 2019 BOF eliminated three of the four kid's shows inappropriately moving the *Balloon Nerd Magic Show* to the *Main Stage*, and therefore eliminated the *Kids' Stage*. The 2019 BOF also eliminated the *Rock-Climbing Wall* and *Animal Display*. The 2019 BOF further eliminated non-kid areas mobile kids' attractions; the *Trackless Train Ride* and *Foundation Heroes*.

The 2019 BOF then moved the *Pony Rides* and *Balloon Nerd Balloon Twisting* to different and non-adjacent areas. Added were low key and cost kids' activities but scattered hither and yon. This cheapening and disjointed approach to the kids' entertainment was a setback for the previous years' approach to making the BOF more youth and family friendly. That the 2019 BOF kids' area was less centrally located, and the BOF less oriented to kids and families, was not lost on the public.

## 8. No Trackless Train Ride

*Eliminating the Trackless Train Ride did not just* eliminate a kids' attraction, it eliminated valuable public transport for adults as well as kids. The Train transported people to and from the BOF school bus stops up the road from the main entry gate and around the entire BOF area. Eliminating the *Trackless Train Ride* detracted greatly from the BOF and public access and enjoyment.

## 9. No Band After the Fireworks

All prior BOF programs had the live music bands play before and after the *Fireworks*. The reason for a band playing after the *Fireworks* primarily were for an enhanced program, increased concessions sales, and to make for a more orderly departure such that not all participants are trying to leave the constricted *Coltons Point* area at the same time causing a massive departure disruption. For 2017, *Six Gun South*, and for 2018, *HydraFX*, played for an hour before and after the *Fireworks* where they both were outstanding with large followings and huge audiences. This band scheduling retained a sizable portion of the audience following the *Fireworks* and resulted in an orderly departure for those who wished to leave particularly families with young children.

The 2019 BOF did not schedule a band to play after the *Fireworks*. The *Fireworks* were appropriately cancelled due to adverse wind conditions (the 2018 BOF had a *Fireworks Permit* for a postponement to Sunday) and sure enough the ensuing mass departure was chaotic. Had *Nathan Osmond* who played prior to the *Fireworks* played after the cancelation of the *Fireworks*, the BOF would have retained much of its audience, and made for a more orderly and easier departure for all as well as a less disappointed and disgruntled public.

With the cancelation of the *Fireworks*, I was not able to provide a *Review* of the *Fireworks*. However, as past is prologue, I expect once again the *Fireworks* would not meet industry standards of having *Fireworks* in the air every second rather than considerable time gaps, and all-color-all-the-time rather than significant amounts of far less costly silver. For the same money, it is time for the BOF to upgrade to a professional *Fireworks* company rather than a homegrown *Fireworks* provider.

## Final Comments

In addition to just continuing to exist, what most pleased me about the 2019 BOF was the warm reception by 7<sup>th</sup> District Optimist Club members. What most displeased me about the 2019 BOF was that it was *Stale* and *Lifeless* and thus a *Dissatisfying and Disappointing* event with no *Heart and Soul*. The BOF was always a dayslong *Joyous Festival of Music and Entertainment* for adults, youth, and families celebrating the historic *St. Clément's Island First Landing*, the 7<sup>th</sup> District, County, and State; not primarily a Saturday evening band gig. Without live band music for five hrs. until 5pm on Saturday and 5 hrs. on Sunday, the BOF lacked its previous high levels of *Excitement, Appeal, and Attendance*; and most of all, its past *Festive Joyful Spirit* that unceasing music and festivities interject into an outdoor event such as the *Fresh and Vibrant* 2018 BOF. Half the challenge in promoting an event is attracting an audience and the other half is retaining it, and the 2019 BOF did neither. In its absence of *Joy*, the 2019 BOF was but a *Shallow, Hollow, and Unfulfilling Shadow and Shell of Itself*.

To paraphrase Robert Pogue, "Everyone is a BOF critic thinking they know better and can do better, but they don't, and they can't." Robert also said to expect grief not appreciation managing the BOF given the negativity and resentment of Club powers-that-be towards prominent BOF leadership. My condolences to the 2019 BOF, and Godspeed to the 2020 BOF, but beware guiding the BOF as indeed, "*No Good Deed Goes Unpunished.*"

Going forward, the question is shall the Club continue its *Events Insanity* making the same mistakes and expecting a different outcome; however, given the powers-that-be, do not expect a harmonious outcome.

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*Review by - Richard Lord, Master of Public Administration (MPA), Marriott School of Business, Romney Institute of Public Service and Ethics, Brigham Young University; and Analyst-in-Charge (AIC), US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Office of Professional Responsibility (Internal Affairs) and the Criminal Alien Division, Retired*

*Hell Hath No Fury Like a Volunteer Scorned/Doing What is Right Acting with Integrity and Honor Matters*

The following is the appropriate and ideal BOF Program *Schedule of Events* based on the 2018 BOF, that could have been for 2019, and should be for 2020.

### **One-Day Saturday Only BOF**

#### **BOF Main Grounds & Stage Area**

- 12:00 – Opening Ceremonies including Invocation, *National Anthem*, Presentation of Notables, Opening Remarks, & *Waterman of the Year Award*
- 12:30 – *Noon Parade w/Grand Marshall* Chosen from Past Club Presidents in Order of Secession
- 1-2:30 – Live Music Band (45-minute band equipment take down/set up occur after each band appearance)
- 3:15-4:45 – Live Music Band (band intermissions could have live acts such as the *Daughters of Veda*)
- 5:15 – Drawing for Boys & Girls Bikes
- 5:30-7 – Live Music Band (band intermissions could and should highlight sponsors and advertisers)
- 7:30 – Raffle Drawing
- 7:45-8:45 – Live Music Band (band plays or has guitar solo of National Anthem just prior to the fireworks)
- 8:45 – *Fireworks*
- 9-10:00 – Live Music Band
- 10pm – Concluding remarks

Note: The BOF could reduce bands from four to three by lengthening band sets to 2 hrs. and intermissions by 15 minutes.

#### **Kids' Areas**

- 12-5 – *Roving Ranger*
  - 1-4 – *Balloon Nerd Balloon Twisting with Brian Garner*
  - 1-5 – *Trackless Train Ride*
  - 1-5 – *Moon Bounces & Rock-Climbing Wall*
  - 1-5 – *4-H Club Pony Rides and & Animal Display*
  - 1:30-5 – *Face Painting*
  - 1-3 – *Chesapeake Mermaid*
  - 2-3 – *Kids Tractor Pull*
  - 2-5 – *Foundation Heroes*
- Other Adults and Kids Activities such as the *Viking Ship* at the Pier.

#### **Kids' Stage**

- 1-2 – *Blue Sky Puppet Theater Show*
- 2-3 – *Chris Campbell Show*
- 3-4 – *Blue Sky Puppet Theater Show*
- 4-5 – *Balloon Nerd Magic Show*
- 5-6 – *Gracie's Dance Studio*

#### **St. Clément's Island**

- 11-4:30 – *Water Taxis* and Tours of *St. Clément's Island* and *Blackistone Lighthouse* and *Maryland Dove*
- 3-4:30 – Reenactment of the *First Landing* in period costume with the following *Catholic Mass*

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Please see on the below pages my critique of the "Planned" 2019 BOF prior to the event



# Critique of the Planned 2019 Blessing of the Fleet

by Richard Lord, MPA  
Updated 9/21/2019

## *Introduction*

When I took over from Robert Steele Pogue as Chairman of the Blessing of the Fleet (BOF) for the 7<sup>th</sup> District Optimist Club (Club) when he resigned in a major dispute with the Club, I was awed by the magnitude and impressed by the brilliance of the event. In my four years as Chairman from 2015-2018, I vowed and acted to carry on his vision of the event where my major contribution was in broadening and enhancing it and safeguarding its financial integrity and security. The planned 2019 BOF is an unfortunate departure from Robert's vision as well as mine for the BOF, and a giant step backwards in the excellence of the event. This Critique specifies the structural and programmatic flaws of the 2019 planned BOF based on the Club's published *Schedule of Events* and entertainment offerings <https://www.blessingofthefleetsomd.net/event-info>, and in so doing provide guidance to the Club for next year 2020 restoring the BOF to its former excellence.

In the transition from Robert to me as Chairman, he shared words of warning and advice. I specified the words of warning in the adjoining document in the website entitled "*Update On The Decline of the 7th District Optimist Club*" and shall not repeat those admonitions except to say Robert told me to be wary of those in Club leadership who will work to undermine me as Chairman should the BOF become exceedingly successful and I become overly prominent in the community; jealous that I was stealing their thunder. It is clear to me that the Club Leadership forcing me out of the Club was not about the BOF program, using that as cover, but was personally about me and my ascension.

In terms of the BOF programmatically, Robert's words of advice to me primarily were that with the expectation that the BOF proceeds without issue, to discount any criticism of the BOF program, and me by extension, from Club leadership and members. He said words to the effect that "everyone is a critic, everyone thinks they know better and can do better, but they don't and can't." For 2019, the BOF leadership no longer has a single BOF Chairman so no one person can be in the spotlight and highlighted. Additionally, it took five people to replace me, and I was surprised it took so few.

When I became BOF Chairman, as experienced and capable as I was in event production, I was not prepared for some of the many challenges that lay ahead including those presented by Club some members. I got all the fundamentals right in that the BOF successfully carried out all critical elements, timely completed all the program *Schedule of Events*, and the bands and entertainment were highly successful and well received by the public. The excellence of the BOFs in large part was due to spouse Dr. Nancy Zearfoss for her expert assistance with an Emmy award credit to her resume as a Producer and Location Manager with her San Francisco and Los Angeles TV and movie experience and expertise [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0954043/?ref =nv\\_sr\\_1?ref =nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0954043/?ref =nv_sr_1?ref =nv_sr_1) As the only event production and management professional, past and present to the BOF, Nancy knows better than anyone involved with the BOF that for the past few years they were exceptional productions.

Those five individuals who replaced me as Chairman are fine and well-meaning individuals. As capable as the five may believe they are in putting together the BOF, they lack the necessary experience and expertise in producing and managing such an expansive, involved, and complicated event as the BOF. Concerns abound over questions surrounding the adherence to event production and management fundamentals in the construction of the 2019 BOF.

The following sections identify concerns in mastering event competencies for the 2019 BOF as to (1) event production and management fundamentals, and (2) in event programming. I discussed much of this in detail in the adjoining document in this website entitled "*Update in The Decline of the 7th District Optimist Club*" and shall not repeat those admonitions except to present the following abridged comments.

## **1. Risk Assessment, Risk Management, and Risk Mitigation**

In producing an outdoor event, one critical area is planning for a rainout event. This requires Risk Assessment, Risk Management, and Risk Mitigation for rainout scenarios. When I became Chairman, I found the BOF paid deposits to bands and the kid's entertainers and was obligated to pay them in full if the event was a rainout even where they did not perform. I changed that such the BOF paid almost no deposits and was not liable for payment to anyone in a rainout as long as I gave them advance notification before traveling to Coltons Point. In following this tenant, I could not engage bands of national renown as they required deposits and full payment in a rainout situation. This meant the BOF was a medium reward event with absolutely no financial risk as opposed to an event with national bands of high reward but also high financial risk.

The 2019 BOF has two national bands and one regional band. Guaranteed payment in the event of a rainout comes with such bands. There are two workarounds in booking national bands to ameliorate financial risk. One is "event insurance" but it is expensive and often comes with difficulties in collection.

The second is to secure a band "underwriter". The BOF has several event underwriters referred to as sponsors for the costly fireworks show and also for some kids' entertainment such as the pony rides. The BOF could do the same for bands in securing new band sponsors.

Some of us connected with the Club tried to obtain new sponsors to underwrite BOF expenses such as for the bands. I expect the five new BOF Chairmen to do the same and hopefully be successful in this endeavor. Over my four years as Chairman, the BOF averaged \$30,000 in sponsors and \$20,000 in advertisers for a total of \$50,000 per year. Given the increased competition among non-profits for sponsors, it is difficult to retain let alone obtain new sponsors.

Crediting existing BOF sponsors as band underwriters would be a "shell game" and not change the risk and math to the BOF in a rainout. Obtaining new sponsors to underwrite bands would eliminate the risk and change the math. It would be a great credit to the five BOF Chairmen if they are able to recruit new sponsors to underwrite and cover the risk of these national bands. Beyond 2019, if the BOF desires to book national bands, securing underwriters is a must to eliminate financial risk and forgo Club ruin.

## **2. Two-Day v One-Day Events**

Research on and experience with two-day events applicable to the BOF is that the attendance of the second day is half or less than that of the first day. With significantly reduced attendance comes a steep decline in income where the second day breaks even at best. The last Club "Music Fest" lost \$22,000 primarily because it had more expensive bands on the second day with less attendance to that of the first day.

If all BOF activities can occur in one day, best to have a one-day event rather than a two-day event. For this reason, and to reduce the burden on Club members, I made the 2018 BOF into a one-day event that was better attended and more successful than prior BOFs. The 2019 BOF is unfortunately back to a two-day event primarily for the sake of the Sotterley WineFest Saturday attendance that suffered in 2018 due the BOF being a one-day Saturday event. To boost attendance at both events, I understand there is to be some sort of BOF and Sotterley joint entry ticket, even though there is a vast difference in ticket prices, and neither the BOF nor the Sotterley websites even mention such a ticket.

The 2019 BOF assuredly shall have less attendance on the second day than that the first regardless of whatever the bands and entertainment. It is incumbent upon the BOF to reduce second day costs while keeping it relevant with appropriate event activities. While the second day appears less costly than the first except for the sole band of some national notoriety late in the day, there appears to be a dearth of music and entertainment attractions after the *Noon Parade*.

Regarding the *Noon Parade*, I added a "Grand Marshall" who is to be a past Club Chairmen beginning with the first, with a following *Parade* float of the Charter Members to also highlight their vision in creating the BOF. The Grand Marshall for 2017 was Jimmie Banagan and 2018 was Eddie Bailey. Russ Cullins should be the 2019 Grand Marshall.

The following section assesses the inadequacies and shortcomings of the 2019 BOF programming for the second day and that of the first.

### *Deficiencies in Event Programming Fundamentals*

#### 1. Adult Music Entertainment

One of the fundamentals in producing an all-day outdoor event is scheduling essential live music and keeping it going with as little down-time as possible so there is no avoidable dreaded "dead air" time. A *Cardinal Rule* in outdoor events is to make the "*Highest and Best*" use of the main stage, which is live music, and not local non-music acts of limited attraction. Such an event should have as many bands as possible playing at all time with diverse genre. This, not just to attract music lovers and those who follow these bands, but to keep them and other attendees in the food and drink concession areas for as long as possible from beginning to end.

I never had the same bands the following year and over the course of my stewardship engaged Classic Rock Bands, County Rock Bands, Blues Bands, Country Bands, and others. For the 2017 two-day BOF, I had seven bands, and for the one-day 2018 BOF, I booked four bands. A two-day BOF is approximately sixteen hours, and I filled that time with over 10 ½ hrs. of music. Contrast that with the 2019 BOF with three bands and 3 ½ hrs. of music.

The timing of the bands also is problematic. The first Saturday band does not begin until 5pm such that there is no music for five hours from noon until then. This is exacerbated by the fact the sole Sunday band does not even begin until late at 4pm when people are leaving.

The 2019 Sotterly WineFest is eleven hours long with five bands and 10 hrs. of music from start to finish. Sotterly and I have it right while the 2019 BOF has it wrong in the false notion the BOF should have less bands and music. Maybe this is because the 2019 BOF committed all its music budget to just three bands where it would have as good as if not better attendance with more bands. Thus, I expect the 2019 Saturday BOF to have lessor attendance up and until the first band at the late hour of 5pm but mostly due to the fireworks that shall be more responsible for attracting visitors than any band.

The below table compares the music offerings of the 2019 BOF with that of the 2019 Sotterly WineFest and the 2017 and 2018 BOF.

#### 2. Family Entertainment

##### A. Youth Entertainment.

Robert continually increased the number and variety of youth entertainment. When I took over from Robert, he had (1) the Balloon Nerd for balloon twisting, (2) Blue Sky Puppet Theater, (3) Reptile World, (4) Foundation for Heroes, (5) rock climbing wall, (6) kids tractor pull, (7) moon bounces, (8) trackless train ride, (9) face painting, and (10) 4-H pony rides. I kept them all except that I eliminated Reptile World as it required full payment even in a rainout. I replaced this act with the highly acclaimed Chris Campbell Show. Robert previously had the wonderful Reggie Rice Magic Show, but that was increasingly expensive, and I replaced him with the equally fine but less expensive Balloon Nerd Magic Show. I added the 4-H animal display. I also replaced the provider of the trackless train ride, rock climbing wall, and moon bounces with a contractor that agreed to no deposit and no payment in a rainout. I also tried to have Gracie's Dance Studio for 2018 for the Kids stage where that is the appropriate place and where Gracie wanted it to be, but Gracie had a prior commitment. Robert and I believed it necessary to have comprehensive attractions for kids. I received numerous public comments in appreciation the BOF had become a much more youth friendly family event.

## B. Fireworks

The BOF is renowned for its fireworks show. The fireworks show is commissioned to an inhouse Club member. It has been a satisfactory fireworks show especially in light of it being an amateur home-grown production.

While any competent fireworks production can hardly fail to satisfy the public, the BOF fireworks show needs improvement to meet current industry standards. The shortcoming of the past BOF fireworks are primarily twofold. First, the industry standard is fireworks in the air every second, and there are time gaps and lapses in the BOF fireworks. Second, the industry standard is all *color* all the time including *silver*, but never all *silver* in any one fireworks sequence. The likely reason for excessive *silver* in BOF fireworks is cost, where *silver* is less expensive than *color*, and professional fireworks contractors can provide all *color* all the time as a matter of “economy of scale” given that they buy and produce in large quantities for numerous fireworks shows.

Hopefully, the 2019 BOF fireworks shall have improved to be up to industry standards.

At some point sooner than later, the BOF shall have to switch to an established fireworks contractor, and the result shall be an even better fireworks show for the current cost.

The BOF appears to be a departure from Robert’s and my vision for the BOF as a comprehensive adult and family appropriate event.

I shall post on this website a 2019 BOF after action report event critique.

God speed the 7<sup>th</sup> District Optimist Club.

### COMPARISON OF 2019 BAND PERFORMANCE HRS. BETWEEN THE BOF AND THE SOTTERLEY WINEFEST AND THE 2017 & 2018 BLESSING OF THE FLEETS

2019 BOF BANDS (3 Bands)	TIME	2019 SOTTERLY WINEFEST BANDS (5 Bands)	TIME
Saturday 12pm – 10pm (10 Hrs.)		Saturday 12pm – 6pm (6 Hrs.)	
Robbie Booth Band	5-6pm	John Luskey Band	12:30 – 2pm
Nathan Osmond	7 - 8:30pm	Trilogy	2:30 - 5:30pm
Total Band Hrs.	2 ½ Hrs.	Total Band Hrs.	5 ½ Hrs.
Sunday 11pm – 5pm (6 Hrs.)		Sunday 12pm – 5pm (5 Hrs.)	5 Hrs.
Cabana Dogs Band	4 – 5pm	Phillip Michael Parsons	12:30 - 1:45pm
		Robbie Booth Band	2:15 - 3:30pm
		Wes Ryce & The Vice	4 – 5pm
Total Band Hrs.	1 hr.	Total Band Hrs.	4 ½ Hrs.
Total Event Hrs.	16 Hrs.	Total Event Hrs.	11 Hrs.
Total Event Band Hrs.	3 ½ Hrs.	Total Event Band Hrs.	10 Hrs.
2017 BOF BANDS (7 Bands)			
Saturday (11 Hrs.) (4 Bands)	6 Hrs.		
Sunday (7 Hrs.) (3 Bands)	4 ½ Hrs.		
Total Event Bands Hrs.	10 ½		
2018 BOF BANDS (4 Bands)			
Saturday (11 Hrs.)	6 Hrs.		
Total Band Hrs.	6 Hrs.		
Total Event Band Hrs.	6 Hrs.		