

Critique of the Planned 2019 Blessing of the Fleet

by Richard Lord
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Introduction

When I took over from Robert Steele Pogue as Chairman of the Blessing of the Fleet (BOF) for the 7th District Optimist Club (Club) when he abruptly resigned in a major dispute with the Club, I was awed by the magnitude and impressed by the magnificence 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 brilliance 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. This is evidenced by my picture appearing on the cover of the *County Times* newspaper in my capacity as Chairman as shown in the previous section of this website entitled "7th District Community" that was highly resented and disdained by Club leadership.

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 some Club 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> Specifically, Nancy produced a weekly ABC TV series that won an Emmy. 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 thanks in part to her guidance.

Those five individuals who replaced me as Chairman are fine and well-meaning individuals. As capable as some may believe them to be in putting together the BOF, they lack the necessary experience and expertise in developing such an expansive, involved, and complicated event as the BOF. Concerns abound over questions surrounding their adherence to event production, management, and program design 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 with the exception of the sole band of some national notoriety late in the day, there appears to be a dearth of music and entertainment attractions after the parade.

In regard to the 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 times 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 added more music, bands, to the BOF and never had the same bands the following year. Over the course of my stewardship, I engaged Classic Rock Bands, Southern 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 3½ 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. The fact is that the BOF would have its best attendance with as much music as possible. Maybe this error in judgement is because the BOF committed its music budget to three bands or the clueless convinced the benighted to have less music. Thus, I expect the 2019 Saturday BOF to have less 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 fine 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 *color* fireworks 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 professional fireworks contractor. The result shall be an even better fireworks show for the current cost.

There also is a public safety issue in crowd departure following the 2019 fireworks. Robert and I had the last Saturday band play for one hour after the fireworks retaining a sizable number of people such that not all of the tremendous crowd that is at full capacity for the grounds are trying to depart at the same time also overwhelming public transport capacity. The 2019 BOF has all people leaving Coltons Point immediately following the fireworks creating a serious public safety hazard.

The BOF is a departure from Robert’s and my vision for the BOF as a comprehensive adult and family appropriate event with extensive music and children’s offerings throughout. I shall post on this website a 2019 BOF after action report event critique. God speed the 7th 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.		