The 2021 Blessing of the Fleet

By Richard Lord, MPA

The last 7th District Optimist Club (Club) Blessing of the Fleet (BOF) for 2019 was a two-day event catastrophe in its dearth of live music and resultant unprecedented low attendance and income. The BOF is back for Saturday and Sunday October 2-3, 2021 with great uncertainty that its organizers learned the lessons of the 2019 failures with its paltry live music program. Thus, the 2021 BOF once again is fraught with financial risk and pending disaster especially in of an event cancellation most likely due to a rain-out.

For four years, I served as Chairman of the BOF for the Club. I first became Chairmen of the BOF when the then Chairman abruptly resigned due to a rift with Club leadership, and no one else stepped forward to serve as Chairman. The BOF of course was rained out in “Robert’s Revenge.” However, I was stuck with all the guaranteed contracts the BOF had with paid bands and entertainers resulting in financial losses. I resigned as Chairman when the Club president, prodded by a smutty Club member jealous of my Club accomplishments and public notoriety, improperly disparaged my service as BOF Chairman.

At that time as the Analyst-in-Charge of the Criminal Alien Division of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and my prior like position with the ICE Office of Professional Responsibility, I was proficient in the application of “Risk Management.” It was obvious to me that the Club had no concept and appreciation of Risk Management in the conduct of its fund-raising events involving endangering Club funds in the risk of event failure most likely due to a rain-out cancellation. Risk Management involves conducting a “Risk Assessment” of event costs in jeopardy with a resultant plan of “Risk Mitigation” of the possible losses.

Over my four years as Chairman of the BOF, I arranged non-guaranteed “no play no pay” contracts with all musical bands and entertainment company providers and individual performers. For example, to do so, I had to avoid hiring national and regional bands with guaranteed contracts, and instead use outstanding popular local bands with non-significant travel concerns and costs that would agree to non-binding non-guaranteed contracts. Examples are the bands HydraFX with Greg Barrick and Six Gun South with Pat Woodburn that generated large audience draws, and it was Pat who first supported “no play no pay” contracts as a matter of civic duty to the 7rh District.

The problem with small but active community-based organizations such as the 7th District Optimist Club that attempt to conduct substantial fund-raising events is that the organizers tend to get overly ambitious in event offerings such as hiring national and regional bands with substantial costs and guaranteed contracts. This results in “High Reward High Risk” contracts that such organizations should avoid and instead engage in “High to Moderate Reward Low to No Risk” contracts such as I arranged as BOF Chairman with HydraFX and Six Gun South. For this year, the main BOF band is the “Amish Outlaws” from Pennsylvania that likely comes at a relatively high cost with a guaranteed contract due to the expense of long-distance travel, and as entertaining as it is, the risk is not worth the moderate if any increased funds over popular local bands that can come at no risk and moderate to high reward for the Club. For example, the last BOF in 2019 hired an Osmond Band with a guaranteed contract, and fortunately was not rained out, but as outstanding as the band was, still did not generate an audience and profit greater than previous well-know local bands. Such guaranteed high-cost bands ego trips for the Club organizers are simply not worth the risk and cost.

The second problem is that the 2021 BOF, as was the 2019 event, is a two-day event as a departure from the 2018 one-day event. The problem with a two-day event is that the second day almost always has half or less the attendance and income of the first day. The second day of the 2019 BOF had far lower attendance and income than the first day and expect the same for the 2021 BOF. In fact, the sole musical event scheduled late in the second day of the 2019 BOF had no attendance. Two-day events for small organizations are not worth the cost, risk, and burden on members.

A third problem for the 2021 BOF is that it appears there shall be little live music other than the two main advertised acts on Saturday evening. The 2019 Sotterly event on the same days unlike the BOF had live music from beginning to end and thus was far more popular and successful than the BOF in attendance and income.

It appears the organizers of the 2021 BOF did not learn from the event failures of the 2019 BOF.

This is what I know of what little there is to know at this point about the 2021 BOF, and I shall provide more information when available. However, please read my tough but fair review of the 2019 BOF to better understand the 2019 BOF failures and the likelihood of a repeat 2021 event debacle given the repeat direction where the 2021 is heading.

Postscript: The 2021 Sotterley WineFest cancelled most likely due to Covid-19 Delta, and the BOF likely shall pick up much of that audience. It remains to be seen if the BOF becomes a Covid-19 Delta super spreader event. All attendees should be required to be fully vaccinated to enter and wear a mask as even as I have been fully vaccinated since March and I shall wear a mask.