

# Update On The Decline of the 7th District Optimist Club

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Updated 9/14/2019

## *Introduction*

In the section entitled the *7<sup>th</sup> District Yesteryear & Today* under the heading the “7<sup>th</sup> District Present”, I made the following statement, “There are only a very few individuals in the 7th I consider decidedly disagreeable and unworthy of association as a matter of character, and unfortunately all are affiliated with the 7<sup>th</sup> District Optimist Club (Club). As a matter of betrayal of trust, I resigned as Chairman of the Blessing of the Fleet and the Club; first due to the failure of Club leadership in all its negativity acting with unrighteous dominion to follow the tenets of its own organization primary among them being *Civility*, that upon which the 7<sup>th</sup> District was founded, and second but more fundamentally in its *Breach of Honor*.”

I hesitate to criticize Club leadership no matter how egregious its untoward behavior. However, based on rumor and innuendo, I have heard the most outrageous depictions for the reason(s) behind my Club departure including of all things being a member of an ISIS drug cartel. Being on the right side of this, acting to protect and defend the Blessing of the Fleet, these false misrepresentations assailing my character require a public response. Thus, I am using a small bit of this webpage space to provide my side of the matter to set the record straight. In so doing, I hold Club leadership to account for its wrongful and harmful actions against the Blessing of the Fleet, its Chairman, and the Club. I also trust this counsel may move the Club towards a reversal of the culture of Club leadership embedded in negativity acting with authoritarian arrogance.

It appears Club leadership has had some difficulty adjusting to my high standards of personal conduct.

I have great respect for the Club and its many fine members for the grand things they do for our community. This is not to besmirch the Club and its membership, but to defend myself, and inspire the Club to rededicate itself to the Optimist Creed. I may very well modify this post once new leadership takes office with the assurance of a change in Club Culture and disposition towards rectitude”.

I further said, “In the page section *Descriptions & Ratings of 7th District Community Service Organizations and Businesses*, in *Speaking Truth to Power*, given my disappointment in, disenchantment with, and disenfranchisement from the Club, you shall find a PDF attachment entitled *The Decline of the 7th District Optimist Club* with a *Tough but Fair* detailed explanation of the reasons I separated myself from the Club should you desire a more fuller explanation, and another PDF attachment that provides descriptions and ratings of 7th District Community Service Organizations”.

This is one of those forenamed sections where I present the reasons behind my resignation specifying the decline of the Club. The principle default of the Club leadership is the absence of generosity of spirit in an aging organization where too few have controlled too much for too long with duplicitous impunity. Additionally, I afford my assessment of the postulated 2019 Blessing of the Fleet (BOF) as to the associated high financial risk in its design and in so doing provide an examination of the deficiencies and fatal flaw in the Club leadership’s critical thinking and planning of major events as well as the Club’s future.

## *The Decline of the 7<sup>th</sup> District Optimist Club*

In 2015, I assumed responsibility as Chairman of the BOF when my predecessor abruptly resigned as Chairman due to a bitter dispute with the Club. In the transition, the former Chairman provided me with counsel including warnings. To paraphrase, the former Chairman first warned me not to expect Club appreciation for my service as Chairman; when I left, it would not end well for me, the BOF, and the Club; and the more successful the BOF the harder I would fall. He also said that everyone is a critic, everyone believes they know better and can do better, but they don’t’ and can’t.

The former Chairman primarily warned me that if the BOF is highly successful and acclaimed, one particular influential Club member shall resent that notoriety as eclipsing that of his Club endeavors, and shall seek to undermine me as Chairman and the BOF as a Club event. The 2018 BOF had significant attendance and the highest on a Saturday in the last ten years, and was highly renowned and acclaimed by sponsors and advertisers, elected public officials, senior Club members and others, and the public-at-large. Consequently, this smutty person surreptitiously worked against the 2019 BOF seeking its elimination, and in so doing acted as a “Handler” coopting a complacent and compliant Club leadership.

Because of this person’s subterfuge, Club leadership ensued to sideline me that it may act against the BOF at will. However, it could not silence me where I continued to voice my opposition to the elimination of the BOF. I also proceeded to continue to act on its behalf.

The breaking point came when Club leadership moved against me for communicating with the independent BOF Catholic Mass Committee, which the BOF Chairman serves. I did so to present the idea for a period costume pageant reenactment of the “First Landing” leading into the Catholic Mass on St. Clément’s Island to enhance the Mass and the BOF to wit many on the Committee agreed. To impeach the BOF, Club leadership had to oust me, and it used my contact with the Catholic Mass Committee as the excuse. The dishonorable manner in which Club leadership maltreated me was so egregious disregarding my service as BOF Chairman and personally disrespecting me, I resigned from the Club because of this and when I could no longer protect and defend the BOF. However, Charter Members and others then intervened and halted this misguided action to end the BOF.

#### *An Event Risk Assessment Weather-Related to the 2019 Blessing of the Fleet*

Failing to eliminate the BOF and painting itself into a corner, as a face-saving gesture this imperious and impetuous Club leadership abdicated its fiduciary oversight responsibility and gave a new BOF organizing group free-reign to swing in the opposite direction from event elimination and inadvisably go all-out with a high-reward high-risk program of expensive bands of multiple thousands of dollars for just one with guaranteed payment even in the event of a rainout. Without me as a counterbalance to the unbridled, the new BOF organizers succumbed to over exuberance and excessive enthusiasm. As good as having a nationally known band may appear on the surface; underneath it is fraught with peril. It was reckless for the BOF to engage such expensive bands with guaranteed high-cost contracts even in a rainout, and irresponsible for Club leadership to approve such foolishness. For outdoor events in St. Mary’s County given how crazy the weather has been over the past several years, the default position has to be to expect and plan for adverse weather worst-case scenarios, and contracting with a national band with guaranteed payment in a rainout should not be in the equation. It is not the 2019 BOF organizer’s fault, for they know not what they do, it is the fault of shortsighted Club leadership of the clueless leading the hapless.

In a BOF sized outdoor event with accompanying attendance, it is all about “Risk Assessment” and follow-on “Risk Management” and “Risk Mitigation” in the case of a rainout. The region has numerous quality bands with followings willing to play for “No Play No Pay” contracts, but national bands cannot. Thus, for 2018, I went with a medium-reward low-risk event with four moderate priced outstanding area bands totaling \$4,000 with No Play No Pay contracts where the Club had nothing at risk but now for 2019 it has everything at risk.

I don’t mean to rain on anyone’s parade, but given the construct of the 2019 BOF, if the weather holds, it succeeds and wins big; and if the weather does not hold, it fails and loses big in a weather dependent either/or situation. It is one thing for the County to risk government funds on an outdoor event and absorb a loss in a rainout. However, it is quite another thing altogether for a non-profit to play around with and gamble its funds and what it receives from the County (the County take care), on a high-risk outdoor event with high-cost bands with guaranteed payment even in a rainout where it can ill-afford such a loss. Easy comes grand(iose) ideas engaging nationally known bands of great expense of guaranteed financial obligation and payment even in a rainout. However, as BOF Chairman I had long dismissed such notions as too financially risky. The challenge to a conscientious BOF Promoter-in-Charge lies in tempering those lofty ideas with the reality of fiscal responsibility.

Being risk adverse with Club funds, I was not willing to subject the Club to that level of financial risk and potential loss, and neither should anyone else as that is irresponsible. The 2018 "Music Fest" is a case in point with the loss of \$22,000 as noted below. One would think after sustaining that degree of loss, Club leadership would be a bit more risk adverse, but that apparently is not in its DNA. Instead, it appears Club leadership has a gene defect in organizational rational thinking and decision-making where the very definition of "Insanity" is repeatedly making the same mistakes over and over again and expecting a different outcome.

When I took over from the former Chairman, the 2015 BOF rained out Saturday and Sunday. I called it "Robert's Revenge". To add injury to injury, the former Chairman previously signed guaranteed contracts with the youth entertainers, and the Club was obligated to pay them in the thousands of dollars. I was able to work it out that most did not accept payment, but Reptile World would not, and the Club had to pay it over \$1,500 where I did not book it for the following year. The Club was also on the hook for thousands to the bands, but with the support of Pat Woodburn of *Six Gun South* that was to play, I was able to reason with them to forego payment, and I scheduled them to play the next year. That was when I came up with the BOF No Play No Pay contract policy for youth entertainment and the bands. Unfortunately, the 2016 Saturday of the next year also was rained out, and again the youth entertainment and bands did not receive payment, but were to perform and play the next year, which they did. For the 2017 BOF, bad weather affected Sunday with the cancelation of the Catholic Mass on St. Clément's Island. For 2018, I went with a Saturday only BOF moving the parade from Sunday to Saturday and the weather was overcast, but held with great attendance. Sunday would have been a rainout makeup day. Thus, under the tenure of my BOF four-year stewardship with No Play No Pay entertainment and band contracts, I saved the BOF and Club thousands upon thousands of dollars in youth entertainment and band contracts that otherwise would have been lost to rainouts. Best hope for 2019 Robert's Revenge does not come back with a vengeance, but given climate change and the resultant unsettled and stormy weather these past four years in the 7th, it may very well.

#### *An Event Risk Assessment of the Proposed Two-Day 2019 Blessing of the Fleet*

The 2019 BOF also is going back to a two-day event where for 2018 I compacted two days of program essentials into one day beginning with the BOF parade and ending with the fireworks with a resultant cost savings and reduced burden on Club volunteers. I did this as according to extensive research and experience, the second day of a two-day event has half the attendance or less than the first day. The Potomac Jazz and Seafood Festival has about equal attendance each day for its two-day now three-day event, but that is because it limits daily attendance with even attendance each day. The BOF has most of its overall sizable attendance on Saturday with a packed crowd in the evening due to the extra draw of the fireworks, and the resultant far less attendance on Sunday.

This means the 2019 BOF second day almost surely shall have far less attendance than the first day, and once again shall be fortunate to break even, but may very well suffer a loss for the second day. The underlying reason for the BOF going back to a two-day event was not for the benefit of the BOF or Club. Rather, it was for the sake of the Sotterley Wine Fest of the same weekend of the BOF that for 2018 had reduced attendance on Saturday due to the BOF being a one-day Saturday event.

The 2018 Club Music Fest was an exceptionally fine musical event, and had it been a one-day event it would have shown a profit, but as a two-day event it lost \$22,000 due to higher cost bands and far less attendance on the second day than that of the first day. This is the classic case of "the operation was a success but the patient died". Had it been a rainout the financial loss would have been far worse.

The BOF never lost money on my watch.

It would appear Club leadership is incapable of learning from its own blunders and evoke smart planning in Risk Assessment, Risk Management, and Risk Mitigation properly considering and planning for (1) weather related risks, and (2) the attendance limitations of the second day of a two-day event. Thus, the Club has gone from irresponsibility in the ideation to eliminate the BOF to an even higher level of recklessness in the appeasement and acquiescence to a financially risky BOF.

Just goes to show once again, "You can lead a horse's ass to truth, but you can't make it think".

## **Conclusion**

Thus, the Music Fest is no more, although as great an event it was, to be successful, it could and should come back as a one-day event with regional bands and No Play No Pay contracts as long as the Club provides them with timely notice of a cancellation that they not have travel expenses. The Lawn Mower Races also are gone. These are two big fundraising events losses for the Club. With my departure from the Club, it disassociated itself from the *Bushwoodstock* fundraising music concert that BECA and I ran for the past two years. I shall be assisting in the production of *Bushwoodstock III* commemorating the 50th anniversary of *Woodstock* on Saturday September 7<sup>th</sup> at the Leonardtown Wharf as part of the Leonardtown Concert Series with the proceeds solely going to BECA where the Club received college scholarship proceeds from this event last year. The BOF also could be gone after 2019 if there is a rainout given that it is now a financially high-risk event.

We have a changing of the BOF guard despite the fact the 2018 BOF was highly regarded and acclaimed as one of the best ever. I have been subsequently advised this shortsighted callous disregard and disrespect for the hundreds upon hundreds of hours I have given to the BOF and 7th District Optimist Club each year for the past four years was largely personal in the resentment of the great success of the BOF surpassing and overshadowing that of another as previously cited.

One area of concern regards individuals who are not Club members with egos in and at play where their primary allegiance to an organization lies elsewhere and consequently their priorities and endeavors in BOF planning are not for the financial solvency of the Club. Thus, to them reducing BOF and Club financial risk to the lowest common denominator is not paramount. I put fault not on them but on Club leadership for its negligence in failing to carry out its financial oversight responsibility safeguarding the BOF and Club from the whims and wiles of others.

It is negligent and unconscionable for the Club to subject County funds, sponsor donations, and advertiser money to needless and unacceptable risk contracting with BOF bands for guaranteed money in the event of a rainout.

Additionally, the cardinal rule for non-profits in working with unpaid volunteers Club leadership does not understand is that it must treat them like gold; not dirt. Club leadership must cease its shortsightedness using bullying tactics treating volunteers with disregard, disrespect, and most especially, derision and instead treat Club volunteers with due dignity and respect. The Club must reverse the negativity of 7th District Optimist Club's current leadership under the controlling influence of one particular deleterious member with outsized influence in an organization with low member participation in Club activities, in part likely due to his presence, adversely affecting Club membership and the health and well-being of the Club.

I feel for the wonderful Charter Members of the 7th District Optimist Club whom I greatly admire and respect with the Club in such asunder, and I trust they shall use their moral authority to evoke a Club epiphany as to the declination of the spirit of Optimism resulting in proper corrective actions.

I am hopeful that the incoming Club President for 2020 shall revive the spirit of Optimism and positivity within the Club that has lost its way in the rise of arrogance and decline of decorum remaking it into the 7<sup>th</sup> District Obtuse Club. Otherwise, the very existence of the Club is bleak and in doubt. Given a small active membership that is rapidly aging, the next decade shall realize a greatly diminished Club membership among those who actively participate carrying out the Club's programs. How then can the Club survive, rebuild itself, and grow when public interest in Club membership may wane given an emerging reputation of Club leadership's penchant for negativity and hostility towards its own members in the performance of their service. If the Club is to survive and once again flourish, the Club must get back to the basics of its roots of benevolence and charity towards all grounded in Optimist principles that made the Club great where honor was everything.

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