

Lessons Learned

WWALS River Revue 2023

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Positives:

We Did It!

- We pulled it off, despite numerous adverse circumstances.
- Committee members and others helped before and during the event.
- Most of the WWALS board showed up. One bought a table and got a sponsor. Another was the largest sponsor.
- Sound worked well; better than outside at the art park. Thanks, David Rodock.
- Projection on the screen worked well, both for the speaker's slides and for the remote finalist's video, as well as for the videos from past events. Thanks, Scotti.
- Running over the entire agenda with the M.C. helped a lot, and Chuck Roberts did great.

Good Feedback

- Everybody loved it. All parts of it. The food, the speakers, the judges, the headliner, the finalists, the silent auction, the kayak raffles, the M.C., and the WWALS speaking parts.
- Several people have said this event increased the credibility of WWALS, as well as visibility.
- We are getting some volunteers because of this event.

Venue and Food

- Several people complimented the venue. Need to thank Turner Art Center.
- Many people complimented the food and the bar was good. Need to thank Jesse's.
- The compostable utensils were a hit, thanks to Gretchen. We need to play that up more.

Attendees and Sponsors

- It was sold out, which indicates interest.
- People and organizations who have never attended any previous WWALS function came, and some bought tables or were sponsors, or both.
- We had a record number of finalists, all good, although a few could not attend.

Finances

- We had twice as many sponsors as last year, and more than one at the \$1,000 or higher level (of course, expenses were also much higher than last year due to the food).
- We did make a financial surplus, most of which was due to the generous contribution of \$2,500 by Dr. Bret Wagenhorst.

Room for improvement:

Committee

- **Start a year early. For September, start in October.** Cultivating sponsors takes time.
- We need more committee members, with some dedicated to specific tasks. Some tasks did not get done this year, and too many others fell onto a very few people, some of whom were not even on the committee, taking time away from other projects.
- **Each committee member needs to be on board with the goal of fundraising** (not just meeting expenses).
- Need to have a committee chair ensuring things get done, but not trying to do everything.
- What would have happened if one of the “key” organizers wasn’t there? Need to have a plan B or backup for every role.
- Have a person whose only job is to run errands.
- We promised VIP parking but didn’t pull it off.
- It’s not all done as soon as the event wraps on that evening. There’s teardown, thank-you letters to be sent, finances to reconcile, winner PR, other PR, planning for next year, etc.
- **This event is a huge amount of work. For it to be worthwhile, it needs to make money.**

WWALS Booth

- Must have for FAQs, memberships, notecards, water trail brochures, stickers, etc.
- Need to have someone dedicated to setting up the booth.
- Need two volunteers to handle it during the event. Jan did GREAT but could have used help.

Venue

- We were at capacity for Turner Center.
 - a. If we want a bigger event, we need a bigger venue.
 - b. Do we want a bigger event, or exclusive limited capacity?
- Table decorations need to be pre-planned. Gretchen had to get centerpiece items and clipboards during setup.
- Tables were a bit crowded together. More people for setup could have helped with that.
- Need to reserve 2024 venue and date in October 2023.

M.C.

- Sitting down with the M.C. beforehand to go over the agenda helped a lot.
- Still have to have someone (Suwannee Riverkeeper this time) watching and communicating with M.C. during the entire event, especially if there are additions or changes to the agenda.
- Need to avoid diverting the agenda (see awards under Songwriters), and if it happens, help M.C. get back on track.
- Same M.C. next time, or cycle to another? Either way, get someone signed up early.

Finances

- Approximate revenue sources: 60% sponsors, 30% tickets, 10% silent auction, so sponsors are the key to making it a fundraising event.
- Have the treasurer there to write the checks, or better yet have them written in advance. E.D. didn't write them in advance because there were too many other things she was doing.

Sponsors

- Need to identify sponsor candidates, contact them, cultivate them, convince them that what WWALS does helps them, and get them to donate. That takes time and many people.
- We need the income all year long so they can become a sponsor in the spring and be listed all year long.
- While we encourage board members and committee members to donate, to raise significant funds most of the sponsors need to be other organizations and people.
- Yes, enough \$100 sponsors could fund it. But we will never get enough of those, so we also need bigger sponsors: corporations (Georgia Power and all the other utilities), interested nonprofits (OSFR, UU Church, etc.), individuals (Michael Smith) including riverine landowners.
- Could use 9.9hp outboard for the jon boat for river tours for potential sponsors.

Tickets

- Ticket sales mostly happen after the entire event is organized and announced: venue, MC, speakers, headliner, judges, finalists, and some sponsors.
- Be sure to set individual and table ticket prices high enough for surplus after expenses.
- Have the \$35 musician tickets ready earlier: they don't cost us and they make the finalists happy.
- It was OK having Bret check people in but in the future it would be good to have a committee member and let sponsors enjoy the evening.

Silent Auction

- Silent auction high dollar items did not go for anywhere near their intended price.
- Recognize that the donor's suggested price may not be what it goes for.
- Do PR on big silent auction donations as they come in.
- Get items well in advance. The September 1 deadline was too late for good exposure.
- Need to have a person dedicated to this area to answer questions and handle settling the winners at the end. This person can't be doing something else.

Raffles

- For a 50-50 raffle to work, somebody needs to be working the crowd to get people to donate.
- The \$100 ticket kayak raffle may raise almost as much as the surplus of the rest of the Gala.
- We for sure should have a kayak to raffle that night and have it announced well in advance.

Food

- The main menu was very well received, but need to negotiate price early.
- Be sure to have beverage tickets before people start arriving.
- Having a separate menu for the finalists was weird.
 - a. We charged them \$25 to submit songs so their food would be covered. Sure, we had an issue with the food cost, but Gretchen fixed that by renegotiating the menu.
 - b. Let's let finalists eat the same as everybody else, although maybe set up tables in the green room for those who want to eat in there to be ready.
 - c. Since we had a food surplus due to some paid tickets being no-shows, jsq gave tickets to several finalists, including one who did not find the musician menu to be vegetarian enough (it had pasta in it).

Speakers

- While packing in three main speakers went well, maybe we should have fewer speakers so each can speak longer.
- We should follow up with individual events (perhaps webinars) for each speaker and others.
 - a. Need somebody to be in charge of such webinars, perhaps on the events committee.
 - b. Don't charge for webinars, but do suggest donations.
 - c. Consider in-person events, maybe with an entry fee.
- Get a preview of speaker slides and try to get them to format for screen viewing, i.e., not too much squinchy type crammed into each slide.
- For WWALS speakers, have some visuals to project on the screen behind while they're speaking.
 - a. Doesn't have to be slides: pictures of testing, cleanups, etc. would work.
 - b. Need a committee member to be in charge of assembling these things and getting them presented.
- Need more WWALS speakers, preferably one for each committee featured.
- Especially have the gala organizing committee chair speak early as well as at the end.

Headliner

- A good contrast with the one-song and mostly one-person Finalists.

Songwriters

- We need a committee member dedicated to communicating with songwriters.
 - a. We need to make sure they know they are finalists (maybe they didn't get the email),
 - b. We need to know who is coming and who isn't, when they will arrive, how many in their band, etc.
 - c. Terry Pinder's daughter invited him to be on a cruise ship at that time, and we didn't know because nobody called him to confirm.
- Make sure finalists understand they have to arrive for sound check or they don't play.
 - a. Except of course for special exceptions like those permitted to perform via pre-recorded video or zoom.
- The straw drawing probably should be moved back into the main schedule in front of everybody so it will have a fixed time so it will happen then.
- Hand the awards to the winners on the same stage as everything else.
 - a. Taking them off to the side looked good for pictures, but derailed the rest of the agenda.
 - b. The big side backdrop was actually mostly intended for attendees to get pictures of themselves.
 - c. If we're going to use the big backdrop for the winner pictures, we need to put it behind or right next to the stage.
 - d. Otherwise, pose them in front of the sponsor banner.
 - e. Maybe even project the sponsor banner on the big screen.
- Be sure to have the First Prize winner play again, and the other ending items in the agenda need to happen.

Videos

- A committee member needs to ensure videos: get people agreed to do them far in advance, make sure they show up, are positioned, have resources they need, etc.
- Make sure the main video camera has a direct feed from the sound board.
 - a. Get this sorted **BEFORE** the event starts, as part of sound check.
 - b. At sound check, and at breaks, play back some samples from the videos to see how they look and sound.
 - c. Sound through the bluetooth microphones this time is very muddy. Maybe we can get sound from videos other people took. Otherwise we're going to have to ask finalists to re-record videos of their performances.
- Make sure there are two other video cameras working at all times so we have fallback in case the main camera has problems.
- Make sure all video cameras have operators who are stopping and restarting for each segment: speaker, finalist, etc.
 - a. **No unattended video cameras:** that just gets us very long videos that have to be chopped up and cameras pointing in the wrong direction.
- Remember the videos are not just for the finalists. We can use videos of the main speakers, the WWALS speakers, and other segments to promote future events and WWALS and its projects.

Still Pictures

- A committee member needs to ensure still pictures: find photographers and make sure they are doing it.
- Don't wait until the week before to try to find somebody to take still pictures.
- The only still we have of the songwriting winners is not very high resolution. The person we thought would take stills did not actually attend.
- Preferably have more than one person taking still pictures so we have fallback.

WWALS RIVER REVUE



September 22, 2023, 6-10 PM
Valdosta, Georgia



- Food & Drinks
- Songwriting Contest
- Silent Auction

Tickets Advance Only
By September 18th:
bit.ly/wwalsriverrevue2023
Become a Sponsor
Donate to Silent Auction



Chuck Roberts
M.C.



Chris Adams
Wiregrass Country
Artifacts



Fannie Marie Jackson Gibbs
Juneteenth,
African and
Native
American
history,
and Our
Rivers



Kenneth Sulak
Paddling into the Past:
Finding Florida
in the 1800s,
Trails from
Georgia, and
Early Border
Ferries



Ten Songwriting Finalists
in the

Suwannee RIVERKEEPER
Songwriting Contest



Cindy Bear,
Jacksonville,
FL



Bird Chamberlain,
Lake Park, GA



Jane Fallon,
Dunedin, FL



Peter B. Gallagher,
St. Petersburg, FL



Bacon James,
Gainesville, FL



Anthony Melendez,
Lake City, FL



Terry Pinder,
DeLeon Springs, FL



David Rodock,
Adel, GA



Kevin Stephenson,
Valdosta, GA



Robert Thatcher,
Signal Mt., TN



Judge Joe Smothers
Valdosta, Lowndes Co., GA



Judge Anna Stange
Madison, Madison Co., FL



Judge Tony Buzzella
Lake City, Columbia Co., FL



Headliner
Katherine Ball



Sponsors:

