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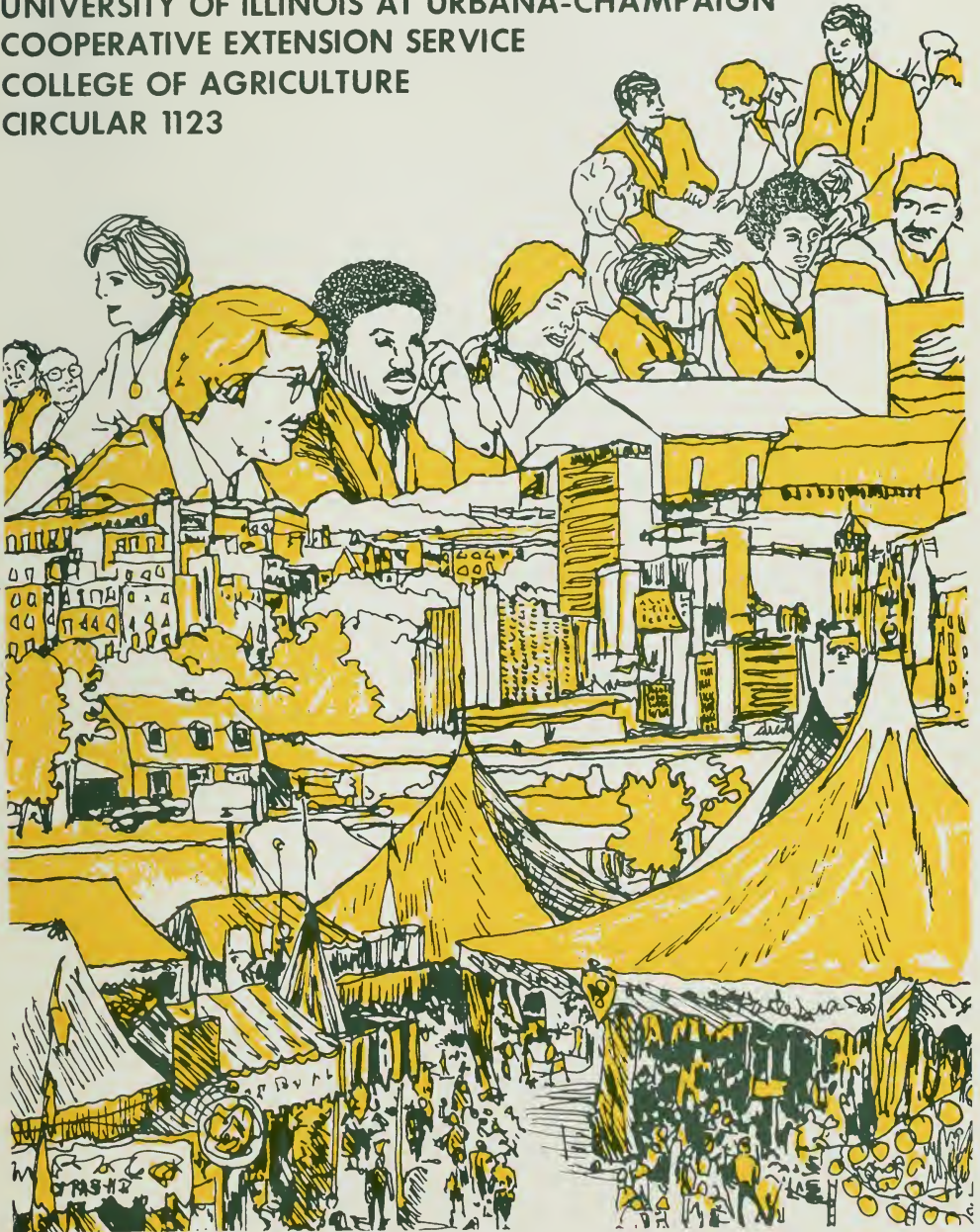
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# PLANNING COMMUNITY-WIDE SPECIAL EVENTS

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN  
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE  
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE  
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This circular was prepared by Robert P. Humke, community recreation specialist, Office of Recreation and Park Resources, Department of Leisure Studies, and Anne Murray Stenoien, undergraduate research assistant. It is designed especially for groups planning their first community-wide events; however, the material presented here will also be of value to those evaluating existing events in hopes of making them more successful in the future.

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**C**OMMUNITY-WIDE SPECIAL EVENTS are those unique, infrequent, short-term activities which depart from everyday life and involve the whole community. They range in size from the small children's art show in the park that draws a local crowd to the major festival which attracts thousands of visitors.

Community-wide special events are staged for a variety of reasons — to celebrate a holiday, season, or an historical event, to raise money, to provide a cultural or educational experience, or to provide fun and entertainment.

Such events involve many people — those who plan, those who prepare, and those who attend. For the people involved in planning and conducting the event, there are opportunities for social interaction, new experiences, recognition, and service.

The events may benefit individuals, groups, or the community as a whole by providing opportunities to: 1) widely publicize the event and the community; 2) unite church, social, civic, commercial, and governmental groups working toward a common goal; 3) share the unique location, history, skills and talents, or facilities of the community with others; and 4) gain needed income for worthy community projects or organizations.

Community-wide events don't just happen, although the better ones feature an air of spontaneity and a variety of activities. A successful event, particularly if it is to be staged on an annual basis, is likely to be the product of a well-conceived planning process that involves the best efforts of many people from the community.

The techniques and approaches to event planning described on the following pages are not guaranteed to insure maximum success for every event. However, experience and research indicate that these guidelines are adaptable to diverse community interests and that paying attention to planning detail is likely to produce a true community celebration in which all participants profit.

## CHOOSING AND NAMING THE EVENT

The following questions should be answered by community groups who have not yet chosen events. Discussion of the questions will also be helpful to groups evaluating existing events.

1. What is the main purpose for staging the event — to celebrate a holiday, season, or an historical event, to raise funds, to provide a cultural or educational experience, to provide fun and entertainment, or other?

2. What type of event would be most in keeping with the community's unique location, history, customs, facilities, and abilities?

3. Will the event meet a variety of needs and interests of community residents and perhaps of many visitors as well?

4. What time of year should the event be held to best meet the objectives and purposes for which it was organized? On what dates will the event least conflict with other local programs or those of nearby communities?

5. How long should the event last — several hours, one day, several days, or more?

6. What basic types of facilities, equipment, and supplies are needed to conduct the event?

7. How many people might attend the event?

8. How many planners and workers are needed?

9. How much money will be needed to get the event underway?

## Special Event Ideas

Themes, titles, and activities for community-wide special events are bounded only by the limits of the imagination and the ability of local groups to transform creative ideas into reality. However, events should be chosen with the needs and resources of the community uppermost in the minds of the planners.

The following event ideas may spark the imagination and give specific direction to planning. The events are listed according to the main purposes for which they may be staged.

### To celebrate holidays, seasons, and historical events:

Winter carnival

Fourth of July parade

Christmas decoration contest

May Day festival

Centennial or Founders Day

Halloween ghost walk

Harvest celebration

Veterans parade



Musket or cannon shoot  
Historical pageant  
Old-timers' reunion  
Rail-splitting contest

**To raise funds:**

Flea market  
Donkey softball game  
Rodeo  
Las Vegas night  
Distance walk  
Pork day  
Auto or horse race

Labor Day picnic  
Old-fashioned weekend  
Bell and flag day  
Historical home tour

Pancake breakfast  
Beer and bratwurst day  
Antique auction  
Circus  
Dance marathon  
Chicken fry  
Charity fair

**To provide cultural or educational experiences:**

Community art fair  
Children's theatre production  
Dance contest or show  
Talent show  
Film festival  
Flower show  
Ethnic exhibition  
Country music show  
Music-under-the-stars series

Barbershop quartet show  
Livestock show  
Native crafts demonstration  
Antique auto show  
Community sing  
Fashion show  
Gem and mineral show  
Madrigal dinner  
Science fair

**To provide fun and entertainment:**

Corn and pig roast  
Children's fishing event  
Community pet show  
Hot-air balloon race  
Softball tournament  
Frog-jumping contest  
Boat race

Easter egg hunt  
Beauty pageant  
Amateur carnival  
Car rally  
Mardi Gras  
Bicycle race  
Sky-diving show

Most community groups combine a number of separate activities into one major event. For example, a Christmas decoration contest may be but one activity in a total celebration which includes lighting of the community tree, a candlelight songfest for all ages, a Santa Claus parade, and a "Calls from Santa" program in which the town's older citizens telephone young children to ask them what they want for Christmas.

## **Special Event Names**

Naming the event can be an important factor in its success and popularity. The name ideally should not only give some idea of the activities to be enjoyed, but should invite interest and questions about details.

Thus, a Fourth of July festival could become “Heartland Heritage Days”; an environmental educational event, “Spring in the Woods”; and a pork roast, the “Pig-E-Que.”

The community’s unique location, ethnic interests, or special beautification efforts may lend themselves to titles such as “Old Man River Days,” “Illinois Valley Fair,” “Kirchenfest,” “Jordsbruksdagarna,” “Marigold Festival,” or “Better Living Show.” An Ohio community combines numerous parades, contests, pageants, and other special activities under the overall title of “Holiday at Home.”

## WRITING OBJECTIVES

An important step in planning a successful community-wide event is to write objectives or goals for the project. The list of objectives should basically outline *what* is going to be done, *who* is going to do it, *who* will benefit, and *what* specific results are desired.

Having a written list of objectives will aid planners in keeping within the boundaries of their goals and will help in recruiting individuals and groups who identify with the planners’ specific aims. The list of objectives also proves to be an important evaluation tool — a yardstick by which to measure the event’s success.

The following objectives were written for a Musket Days Festival but can be used as guidelines for writing objectives for other events. Objectives such as these provide a focus for the entire planning process and thus should be determined before moving ahead with the project.

### Aims of the Musket Days Festival:

1. To interpret the unique Civil War history of the community through pageantry, displays of craftsmanship, and serving of authentic food.
2. To utilize the full resources and cooperation of local governmental, civic, and church groups for voluntary help, facilities, and financial backing.
3. To provide fun and entertainment for children and adults of all ages.
4. To attract at least 3,000 visitors to the community from surrounding rural areas and towns.
5. To raise at least \$5,000 (net profit) for installation of a children’s playground and other equipment in the community park.

## INVOLVING THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

Special events should be planned not only *for* the whole community, but also *by* the whole community. For this reason, event planners should strive to interest and involve a large number and variety of people and to utilize their time and talents.

The planning group should consider the main tasks which need to be completed and then recruit those people who can best aid in getting the jobs done. A variety of individuals and groups can be approached to help with the planning and operation of the event—people with special skills, groups who have expressed interest in the activities to be held, and representatives of agencies which can contribute facilities or funds. All organizations in the area should be asked to help—4-H clubs, church groups, county Extension personnel, local service chapters, and others.

Workers can be recruited in many ways—personal phone calls, talks to various local clubs, discussions with elected officials, or appeals at public meetings.

People should be challenged with opportunities and tasks which best fit their interests and capabilities. For example, the newspaper editor could be asked to head publicity for the event, the fire and police benevolent associations could handle safety and parking, and the owner of a local restaurant could be asked to oversee refreshments.

Having clearly defined, written objectives will aid in the recruitment of willing workers; however, these objectives must be interpreted to people in terms of the roles they as individuals or groups might assume.

The most common way to organize event planning is to form committees with each group in charge of a specific function. An overall event chairperson should be appointed or elected to coordinate all planning and operations. This individual should be responsible for appointing committee chairpeople who in turn must recruit sufficient help to insure that their committees are successful in completing their assigned tasks.

The number of workers and committees needed will depend largely on the nature of the event; however, several committees are needed for almost every event—publicity, program, finances, facilities, clean-up, evaluation, and special activities. Some events might also require committees for refreshments, parking and safety, decorations and props, or other special functions.

Subcommittees may be needed for large events which include many different activities. For example, the finance committee may be responsible for soliciting pre-event donations, ticket sales, and the audit of all event receipts and may elect to divide the tasks among several smaller sub-

committees. The publicity committee may have one subcommittee which works on posters and banners and another one which schedules promotional talks in neighboring communities.

The number of committees and subcommittees formed will depend on the amount and variety of tasks that need to be accomplished. A skillful chairperson will designate enough committees so that a lot of people are involved in meaningful efforts and can realistically accomplish their goals in the time available.

Communication is important to the overall success of an event. All members of the planning team should be kept informed about what various committees are doing and should have a voice in overall planning. No individual or group should speak for the planning team as a whole unless a total group decision has been made regarding actions or directions to be taken.

Some efficient event-planning teams decide before the event or after one year's success to form on-going organizations to evaluate the past event and plan for future ones. Such organizations usually take the form of non-profit corporations, chartered by the state, with officers and standing committees who can raise funds and enter into formal agreements with other groups and agencies. Formation of non-profit corporations may be desirable, but with full citizen participation a main objective of community-wide events, care should be taken that a "closed corporation" does not result.

## **PLANNING FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS**

A community-wide event provides an opportunity for everyone to celebrate and become involved. Thoughtful consideration should be given to including those who may find it especially difficult to fully participate without assistance because of age or physical or mental handicaps. The overall aim of such assistance should be to enable each individual to enjoy the event with as much independence and self reliance as possible. Special provisions may need to be made for these people but not to the extent that they are likely to receive excessive visibility or attention.

Every community has other individuals with special needs — elderly persons who are homebound, residents of local care facilities, the blind and the deaf, and able-bodied persons who must remain at home to care for the ill and handicapped or for their own elderly parents or infant children. All of these people should be identified by the planning committee according to the degree of needed assistance, and specific plans should be made to include them in the event.

Special populations are often intentionally or unintentionally excluded from community recreational activities and events because event planners fail to give attention to their needs. The event planning team has an opportunity to make progress in this area. The following actions should be considered when planning a community-wide event.

1. Build ramps at curbs or steps to accommodate wheelchairs. Make restrooms accessible and equipped with extra-wide doorways.
2. Set up a reserved viewing area where people with special disabilities can view parades or other events.
3. Invite residents of care homes, day care centers, and other agencies and institutions to participate and inquire about their special needs.
4. Organize a volunteer service for the relief of individuals who must care for ill or handicapped persons so that they can participate in the event.
5. Provide a mini-bus or automobile transportation service to help individuals get to and from the event.
6. Set up a nursery program so that mothers with young children may take part in the festivities.

## **SECURING FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND PHYSICAL FACILITIES**

Among the many areas of concern for the special event planning team are securing enough funds to get the event underway and arranging for adequate space and physical facilities.

Regardless of the main purpose for the event, planners will need some finances to get started. Promotional efforts, rental or purchase of special equipment, contract agreements with entertainment groups, and acquisition of smaller supplies and prizes all require some funding prior to the event. Equipment and facilities, including buildings, parks, stages, concession stands, and others, may also have to be rented beforehand.

Fortunately, the “community” nature of most events makes the task of securing funds, equipment, and other donations easier than it would be if the planning group and event itself were narrower in focus. Many planners of successful community-wide special events indicate that the whole community is involved in financing the festivities. Thus, it is likely that community business people, club leaders, government officials, and other citizens *expect* to be asked to either contribute funds or services through direct donations of supplies, equipment, and other facilities, or through discount prices on items needed for the event. Many more people expect to be asked to help build floats or stages, set up bleachers or public

address systems, sell concessions, make and serve food, or any number of other tasks. This type of community expectation and desire to “pitch in” typifies successful event planning.

When direct appeals do not produce enough funds and facilities to stage the event, special-event planners must employ a number of other techniques for securing money. Some groups ask their local chambers of commerce for financial support. Others sell decals, booster buttons, or bumper stickers advertising the town and its event. Still other groups raise money by holding raffles (with prizes donated by local merchants), sell advertisements in the event’s printed program (with printing time and paper donated by a local company or newspaper), require financial backing for queen contestants, hold fund-raising dinners, or set fees for those selling crafts or other merchandise at the event. Other fund-raising ideas are listed on page 3 of this circular.

## **PLANNING FOR CROWD CONTROL, SAFETY, AND CONTINGENCIES**

Studies of typical community-wide special events show that groups often make insufficient plans for the control, safety, and comfort of those who attend the event. To insure the least amount of problems in this area, estimates of anticipated attendance should be high, a pessimistic outlook should be taken toward the weather, and consideration should be given to the unfortunate results which could occur because of the nature or location of event activities.

In planning for the safety and comfort of those who attend the event, as much professional help as possible should be obtained. Police and firemen, ambulance and hospital personnel, Boy and Girl Scouts, and other “service” people should be identified and recruited.

Consultants from the Illinois Department of Health are available to meet with local planning groups to discuss plans for the health and safety of event participants. For such assistance, contact: Department of Health, Office of Associate Director for Environmental Health, 535 W. Jefferson, Springfield, Illinois 62761.

The health, comfort, and safety of those attending the event can be enhanced by the creation of a rest area away from the mainstream of event activities but close enough to the action to be readily accessible. This area can be located in a vacant store, a park shelter, a large tent, or any other place where people tired of walking or in need of relief from the hot sun or noisy crowds could rest. If the rest area is outside, local garden center operators, garden club members, or park department personnel could create a decorative mini-park for this purpose.

Restrooms should be clean and easily accessible to event areas. Rental of portable units may be necessary if large crowds are expected.

Adequate parking lots should be made available and manned during the event. Wherever possible, paved areas around schools, churches, and other buildings should be used to avoid the mud problem that results when sudden showers soak grass or dirt parking lots.

Access to the event areas should be clearly marked and free of barriers or danger spots which may injure pedestrians. Activities should be placed close enough together for convenience, but not so close that event areas become overly crowded.

Special precautions need to be taken for the control and safety of crowds for many events including parades, auto races, and fireworks displays. Such precautions may include the provision of auxiliary police, barricades, public address systems, signs, and roped-off areas. A first-aid tent and stand-by ambulance crew should also be part of almost any community-wide special event.

If the event is to be held outside, planners must consider what will happen if it rains the day of the festivities. Will there be a rain date? If so, when will it be and how will the publicity be handled? Are there performers or supplies which may not be available at that time? Are there monetary guarantees to be concerned about? These and other contingencies must be considered early in the planning process.

## **PLANNING FOR REFRESHMENTS**

An important ingredient of most successful community events is food and drink, especially if the refreshments are made with a secret recipe, served in a unique way, given creative names, or served in a decorative setting.

Planners of successful events have used many special ways of making and serving refreshments. In many communities, secret recipes for stews, barbeque sauces, desserts, and other foods have been passed on from one year to the next. Other groups use unique serving styles such as selling beer in buckets engraved with the name of the event or serving beans in small crocks. Still other planners invent unusual names for the refreshments they serve; thus, a special drink at a corn roast is named "popcorn punch," and stewed hot dogs with sauerkraut become "pigs in the cabbage patch."

Decorations and names for the event's refreshment center can also be important. To provide decorative settings for eating and drinking, several Illinois towns have reproduced German beer gardens complete with

“oompah” bands. Special names can be used for refreshment centers, including “OK Corral” or “Cow Palace” for a rodeo and “Mrs. Claus’ Kitchen” for a Christmas celebration.

Many reference works are available to aid groups in planning food for a large crowd. “Food Purchasing Guide for Group Feeding” and “Recipes for Quantity Service” can be obtained by writing to the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. The following books may be found at most libraries: *Quantity Cookery*, N. Treat and L. Richards, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1951; and *Quantity Recipes*, M. Wood and K. Harris, Extension publication of New York State College of Home Economics, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, revised 1966.

## PROMOTING THE EVENT

Nothing is more important to the entire event-planning process than promotion. Obviously, all other well-laid plans have little effect if people aren’t told about the event and encouraged to attend it.

Publicity plans should be made early and carried out by individuals who best know how to reach their intended audience in the most creative ways possible. People who have a flair for writing, making posters, delivering speeches, or other aspects of promotion should be sought out and encouraged to help with the event’s publicity.

Promotion involves “selling” the event to the public and is part of the larger on-going process of public relations—helping to insure that the event obtains and keeps a favorable image throughout the area. In planning annual events, public relations should be a year-round effort which includes everything from showing slides or films about the event to local clubs, to making a special effort to thank those who helped make the past event a success.

Plans for publicity should include identifying the intended audience, deciding what media to use, and determining when to release specific publicity.

The list of objectives compiled at the start of the planning process should be kept in mind when trying to identify the intended audience for the event. If the planning group wishes to especially attract a certain age group, or families, or residents of other communities, then specific media must be used to best reach those potential event participants. For example, if the planning committee wants to encourage residents of other communities to attend the event, then the publicity committee should



promote the event in neighboring towns with posters, newspaper articles, and other promotional coverage.

In addition to identifying the intended audience, promotion plans must include specific ideas on what media to use and when to release publicity. Timing is extremely important. The ideal promotion campaign will include initial releases meant to create an early awareness of the event, followed by more detailed information which highlights specific activities to be offered. Promotion carried out during and after the event also greatly enhances the success of the event, especially if it is to be held annually.

Promotion ideas are almost limitless. Those suggested below are given to aid planning groups with their own publicity. The ideas are grouped according to when they might best be released to the public. In planning publicity, be creative and remember that a variety of promotion methods is most likely to attract the public's attention.

### **Before the event:**

- News releases and ads
- Posters, billboards, and signs
- Talks to local groups
- Mayor's proclamation
- Parades in neighboring towns
- Airplane banners
- Event name or slogan contests
- Reduced-price ticket sales
- Invitations
- Engraved pens, pencils, etc.
- Street banners and marquees

- Radio and television coverage
- Bumper stickers and buttons
- Fund drives
- Printing on shopping bags
- Fliers enclosed with bills
- Youth rallies or walkathons
- Beard-growing contests
- Endorsements by local firms
- Newspaper supplements
- Pennants on vehicles
- Signs in public transportation

### **During the event:**

- Appearances of famous persons
- Newspaper picture stories
- Searchlights
- Car-top announcements
- Lettered hats, pennants, etc.
- Sky-diving shows
- Prize drawings for early arrivals, children, senior citizens, etc.
- Television and radio coverage

- Balloon ascensions
- Fireworks shows
- Bumper stickers ("I've been to...")
- Parades through business district
- Staging of some activities in other towns
- Guessing contests (beans in a jar, etc.)

### **After the event:**

- News releases
- Speeches to civic groups
- Post-event parties
- Newspaper ads or letter of thanks

- Movies or slide shows
- Volunteer recognition banquets
- Announcement of contest winners
- Radio and television interviews

## EVALUATING THE EVENT

Evaluation is an important step in planning and conducting a community-wide special event. It is the means by which future planning committees can examine the success of each activity within a total event and discover the extent to which the original objectives were met.

Several points should be remembered when planning for and conducting an effective evaluation:

1. Planning for evaluation should be included with all other event-planning details.

2. Information and opinions gathered in the evaluation process should be as objective as possible. It is just as important to record minor failures of the event as it is to report major successes.

3. Input to the evaluation process should be made by planning and evaluation committee members and others involved in the event.

4. A variety of evaluation methods should be used with the results combined and compared.

5. The evaluation committee should suggest evaluation methods which fit the event and those which are within the feasible resources of the total planning group.

No specific method can be considered best for evaluating an event; however, it can be said that a simple headcount and financial accounting are not in themselves adequate means of evaluation. They are but a part of the process, as are the comments of committee members and perhaps the complaints of a few disgruntled participants. Questionnaires, personal interviews, and even reports on the weather may also be included in the evaluation.

Specific assignments for the various evaluation methods should be made well in advance of the event so that each committee member understands his or her responsibility. Forms and check-off sheets should be designed and printed as necessary.

If questionnaires are to be used, they should be designed with particular attention to the specific information and opinions desired. (For help with designing the questionnaire, contact a county Extension adviser or a staff member of a nearby college or university.) Members of the evaluation committee may wish to administer questionnaires by personal interviews as people leave the event or by mailing the forms to local residents.

The total planning committee should meet soon after the close of the event to discuss and record all of the information received, both in the form of written facts and opinions and informal comments by event

planners and participants. A complete report on all aspects of planning and conducting the event should be compiled following the evaluation meeting.

The following methods were used to evaluate the Musket Days Festival described on page 4 of this circular and may be helpful to groups planning evaluations for their own events.

**Objective 1. To interpret the unique Civil War history of the community through pageantry, displays of craftsmanship, and serving of authentic food.**

*Evaluation methods:* Record attendance at each pageant performance. Briefly interview audience members at random. Request an objective review by an experienced drama critic. Compare types of crafts displayed with all those sought for the exhibit. Record observations of interest in specific crafts. Interview a few event participants regarding the craft show. Record the effect of the location, weather, and crowd on various craft displays. Record the volume of food consumed by specific item and income. Record observations of food locations, crowdedness, service, and clean-up or litter problems. Randomly interview participants regarding food service.

**Objective 2. To utilize the full resources and cooperation of local governmental, civic, and church groups for voluntary help, facilities, and financial backing.**

*Evaluation methods:* Record names of groups requested to help and note response (refusal or type and amount of aid given). Compare total number of volunteers, number and types of facilities used, and funds donated against those needed or requested. List agencies or groups which were not solicited but may be in the future. Record suggestions for greater future involvement of community groups.

**Objective 3. To provide fun and entertainment for children and adults of all ages.**

*Evaluation methods:* Record numbers of participants at each children's activity. Record observations on enjoyment of various activities along with notes on possible safety concerns. Randomly interview participating children and their parents. Rank each activity according to its popularity.

**Objective 4. To attract at least 3,000 visitors to the community from surrounding rural areas and towns.**

*Evaluation methods:* Estimate and record the total number of participants at various events at various times. Randomly ask participants if

they are local residents or visitors. Ask all out-of-town visitors to raise their hands at a specific event and record the count. Compare estimates of visitors against that of total attendance.

**Objective 5. To raise at least \$5,000 (net profit) for installation of a children's playground and other equipment in the community park.**

*Evaluation methods:* Set up and maintain complete records on all expenditures and income for each separate money-making activity. Maintain a central record of one-day and total-event receipts. Record observations on reasons for the financial success or failure of each activity.

## **MAKING A PLANNING CHECKLIST**

All community-wide special events involve many details and tasks which must be accomplished to insure the success of the celebration. It is vital that the planning group not only recognize and list all of these tasks, but also set deadline dates for each job.

A master checklist should be compiled and used to record the completion of all main tasks and overall committee actions. Each committee may also have a checklist to aid in organizing and keeping their own work on schedule.

The entire planning group should be involved in compiling the master checklist so that all the jobs that need to be done, committee assignments, and realistic deadlines for completion of tasks are sure to be included.

Actual completion dates for various jobs should be recorded on the checklist as the event plans get underway so that planners of future events will best be able to set realistic deadlines for committee work.

The master checklist format suggested below is one which could be used by planning groups in most communities. It outlines the tasks to be completed for a three-day Fourth of July celebration which takes approximately one year to plan. Individual groups will need to insert their own tasks and deadlines, however the general organization will be basically the same for any event. The total amount of time needed for planning, conducting, and evaluating an event will depend on the nature and complexity of the activities to be held.

Notice the anticipated completion dates in the left-hand column of the following checklist. The event chairperson should always be looking ahead to see what tasks need to be accomplished before the next meeting.

DATE DUE	TASK	ASSIGNED TO	DATE COMPLETED
July 15	Hold first organizational meeting Discuss event objectives Determine type of event Suggest activities to be held Determine tentative date(s) Elect event chairperson	Total plan group	
Aug. 14	Clear date(s) with authorities	Event chairperson	
Aug. 15	Meet with total plan group Determine main tasks Name committee chairpersons Agree on objectives Discuss name of event Discuss site(s) and facilities needed Discuss financial, group, and individual resources Send release to local and area news media	Event chairperson Total plan group Event chairperson Total plan group Publicity committee	
Sept. 14	Recruit co-sponsoring groups Recruit committee members Meet with committees, list tasks Select sites and facilities Make up tentative budget Write objectives Plan promotional campaign Plan food and refreshments Plan for parking and safety Plan evaluation and clean-up	Total plan group Committee chairpersons Committee chairpersons Facilities committee Finance committee Event chairperson and secretary Publicity committee Refreshment committee Parking and safety committee Evaluation and clean-up committee	

DATE DUE	TASK	ASSIGNED TO	DATE COMPLETED
Sept. 15	Meet with total plan group Give committee reports  Adopt committee plans Discuss event timetable Send release to all news media	Event chairperson Committee chair-people Total plan group Total plan group Publicity committee	
Oct. 14	Order publicity materials Sign contracts and agree-ments for sites and facilities  Request appearance of special performers or announcers  Order special supplies, equipment, and awards	Publicity committee Event chairperson  Event chairperson  Facilities committee	
Oct. 15	Meet with total plan group Hear committee reports Send release to all news media	Event chairperson Total plan group Publicity committee	
Nov. 15	Meet with total plan group Hear committee reports Sign agreements and contracts with special performers  Adopt event timetable Send release to all news media	Event chairperson Total plan group Event chairperson  Total plan group Publicity committee	
Dec. 15, Jan. 15, and Feb. 15	Meet with total plan group Hear committee reports  Send release to all news media Speak at church and civic group meetings	Event chairperson Total plan group  Publicity committee Publicity committee	
Mar. 14	Print signs, flyers, posters, and banners	Publicity committee	
Mar. 15	Meet with total plan group Hear committee reports Send release to all news media	Event chairperson Total plan group Publicity committee	

DATE DUE	TASK	ASSIGNED TO	DATE COMPLETED
Apr. 14	Begin construction or acquisition of booths, props, etc. Invite special guests	Facilities committee Event chairperson	
Apr. 15, May 1, and May 15	Meet with total plan group Hear committee reports Send release to all news media	Event chairperson Total plan group Publicity committee	
May 16	Begin final promotional campaign	Publicity committee	
May 31	Order special food supplies Contact help for parking and safety Finalize evaluation process	Refreshment committee Parking and safety committee Evaluation committee	
June 1	Meet with total plan group Hear committee reports Set up event work schedule Send out timed promotion and publicity	Event chairperson Total plan group Total plan group Publicity committee	
Weekly through June	Meet with total plan group Hear committee reports Initiate final promotional events	Event chairperson Total plan group Publicity committee	
June 29- July 1	Finalize physical arrangements Stage dress rehearsals and dry runs	Facilities committee Total plan group	
July 2-4	<b>STAGE EVENT</b> Conduct evaluation	<b>Total plan group</b> Evaluation committee	
July 4-5	Clean up	Clean-up and evaluation committee	
July 14	Send thank-you letters to helpers	Event chairperson	

DATE DUE	TASK	ASSIGNED TO	DATE COMPLETED
July 15	Hold evaluation meeting Present evaluation report Present financial report Set tentative date for next year	Total plan group Evaluation committee Finance committee Total plan group	
Aug. 1	Compile evaluation report	Committee chair-people and event chair-person	

## SUCCESSFUL SPECIAL EVENTS IN ILLINOIS

The most successful community-wide special events held in Illinois during 1973-74 were identified in a Cooperative Extension survey conducted in 1975. The 24 events described on pages 20-24 of this circular were selected as most outstanding from a list of 121 community event ideas submitted by Extension advisers throughout the state. A summary of factors common to the successful planning of the events, along with specific highlights of each of the 24 celebrations, is given on the following pages.

All of the events except one (a centennial celebration) are held annually. More events are scheduled during the summer than during any other season. Most of the events are held over a period of three to six days. Most survey respondents rated "fun and enjoyment" as the most common purpose for staging their events, although money-raising, provision of educational and historical opportunities, and others were also listed. Most event planners indicated a combination of purposes.

The list of activities included in the 24 events is long and varied. Most event planners schedule numerous activities, some simultaneously and others (especially major programs) in various time slots to increase the interest and enjoyment of all those who attend. A count of activities listed by survey respondents ranged from two or three for some events to more than 35 for others; however, most events included from 8 to 16 different activities. Some of the most common activities include: parades, queen and beauty contests, carnivals and "feature" entertainment, lunches and



dinners, music and dancing, and a variety of children's games and contests. Many of the most unique activities were closely tied to the theme of the event. Some of these are mentioned in the individual event descriptions.

Eight of the community groups indicated that a nonprofit corporation takes major planning responsibility, while others are sponsored by community service clubs, local chambers of commerce, on-going committees, or the staffs of specific organizations (i.e., Cooperative Extension Service or State Conservation Department). Most of the sponsors receive aid from various clubs, individuals, youth organizations, churches, and farm groups. A few sponsors indicated that assistance from other groups is not sought.

The sponsoring groups work from one month to a year or more in planning their events. Sponsors form numerous committees and subcommittees to help plan and conduct the events, with reports of as few as one and as many as 25 separate committees. Most groups use from 5 to 11 committees. The number of people involved in conducting the events ranges from 12 to 350. Most of these workers are recruited through personal contacts, while many others volunteer when they hear about event plans. Some sponsoring organizations assign workers to various areas, while others send letters to community organizations and request help through the local news media.

A variety of means are used to publicize and promote the 24 events. All communities utilize newspaper, radio, and television coverage when available. Most planners use posters, fliers, and street banners, and send letters to various organizations to promote their events. Others speak at club meetings and a few utilize available billboards. Several groups print event programs, and all rely heavily on word-of-mouth publicity by persons pleased with previous events.

Most community groups seek donations prior to the events. Many rely heavily on public places — streets, town squares, parks and shelters, schools, athletic fields, and even local fire stations — as locations for their events. Other indoor facilities used include stores, abandoned buildings, and club houses, but the most common shelters are large tents rented for the occasion. Many planners find it necessary to rent portable toilets, sound systems, and flatbed trailers (for stages), while others build their own stages, dance floors, and concession stands.

Most groups hold evaluation meetings after their events. Information presented at these meetings includes attendance estimates, data from participant evaluation forms, reports of net income, and opinions from people who attended the event.

Specific information on each of the 24 most successful community-wide special events is given below. The events described are only a few of those staged in Illinois. Persons desiring information on other events should contact their county Extension adviser or obtain a copy of the *Illinois Calendar of Events*, distributed regularly by the Division of Tourism, Illinois Department of Business and Economic Development. Information on events held in state parks can be obtained from the State Department of Conservation.

### **Bond County Arts in the Street Fair**

An educational event held to stimulate art interest in the Greenville area, the activity features exhibits by painters and sculptors of the community along with folk music. Prizes are awarded by the sponsoring Bond County Art and Cultural Association, Inc. Many artists sell their works to visitors.

### **Barry Apple Festival (Pike County)**

This fall event is aimed at encouraging community spirit and togetherness and recognizing two large orchards in Barry. A large parade attracts about 7,000 people, while about 2,500 people enjoy other activities including fish and pork dinners. The fish dinner and direct donations by business leaders to the Festival committee help alleviate early financing problems.

### **Benson Centennial (Woodford County)**

A well-planned celebration by this community of 500 people involved virtually every citizen. Estimated attendance for the three-day event was 40,000. Activities included everything from showing of historical slides and crafts to sky diving. A large variety of centennial items were sold for six months prior to the event, and pre-event bingo parties, chicken suppers, dances, and a bake sale helped insure a good financial return.

### **Bradford Labor Day Celebration (Stark County)**

Barbecued pork chops are a prize feature of this event, which is held primarily for the enjoyment it brings to Bradford-area residents. Many tournaments and contests (including frog jumping and bicycle races), an art show, and a flea market attract more than 2,000 people each year.

## **Dixon Petunia Festival (Lee County)**

More than 25,000 people turn out each year to watch a mile-long parade along Dixon's petunia-lined streets. The celebration promotes the social, civic, and economic welfare of the community. A large carnival midway and serving of a variety of specialty foods also highlight activities which are planned by members and committees of the Petunia Festival Corporation. Promotion includes printing of 11,000 dinner placemats and 8,000 program schedules.

## **Gallatin County Popcorn Festival**

Ridgway and surrounding areas call attention to the importance of popcorn to the county by attracting 10,000 people with free popcorn, dance exhibitions, parades, and other entertainment. Police assistants and state troopers help with parking, and clean-up is handled by a combination of hired personnel and volunteers.

## **Golconda Deer Festival (Pope County)**

Held during the first Illinois deer season each fall, this celebration features barbecued pork and ham dinners, a large parade, and three nights of entertainment under a large tent. About 8,000 people help meet the event purposes of social enjoyment and fund raising. A local family holds the secret recipe for the barbecued meat.

## **Hillsboro Old Settlers (Montgomery County)**

A tradition of over 90 years marks this celebration which features a senior queen contest, recognition of the oldest person and couple present, and entertainment for all ages. About 5,000 to 6,000 people attend the event, with the sponsoring Old Settlers Association always able to count on plenty of help with parking, clean-up, crowd control, and financing.

## **Jerseyville Strassenfest (Jersey County)**

German music, dancers, and food (featuring special pastries) highlight this early-August celebration. Also included are a book fair and art show. Visitors from at least five other states have been included among the 15,000 people who attend the event each year. The Jerseyville Chamber of Commerce finds the event to be a good money raiser and an opportunity for socializing.

## **Marshall Beef Barbecue (Clark County)**

Held annually for almost 30 years, the 4-H leaders and members who organize and conduct this event now count on 3,000 people turning out to enjoy the 250 to 300 pounds of beef that is prepared. Ticket sales for the dinners insure a good income for county youth activities.

## **Monticello Fourth of July Celebration (Piatt County)**

A large crowd turns out for this two-day event which seeks betterment of the community in general, but features activities aimed mostly at children. Model derby and sack races, a bicycle parade, a swim meet, and a tug-o-war are highlights, along with a chicken fry and the annual fireworks show. Volunteers help alleviate the traffic problem by directing motorists to parking spots.

## **Mt. Sterling Fall Festival (Brown County)**

The local Jaycees sponsor this entertainment project, frying fish for the estimated 1,000 people who attend and arranging for a parade and big-name western band. Many prizes are given away, including a car full of groceries, a television set, and savings bonds.

## **Nashville Maifest (Washington County)**

An historical German theme dominates this celebration, with plenty of beer, food, and music on hand for the 5,000 to 10,000 visitors. The organizers have made good use of a picturesque wooded park and found that a "first class" approach to the event has paid off in financial gain and great enjoyment for all who participate.

## **Nauvoo Grape Festival (Hancock County)**

A crowd of 25,000 to 30,000 people has been estimated for this historical-entertainment celebration held since 1939 on the weekend before Labor Day. An historical pageant featuring the "Wedding of the Wine and Cheese" caps two days of parades, a carnival, country music shows, and picnicking in the nearby state park.

## **New Windsor Fair, Rodeo, and Horse Show (Mercer County)**

Said by its organizers to be the largest rodeo east of the Mississippi River, citizens of New Windsor annually welcome about 11,000 visitors for this event. The New Windsor Fair and Rodeo Association credits good planning for the success of this event over the years, along with a requirement that all people (including workers) pay an entrance fee.

## **Paxton Community Sale (Ford County)**

City-rural cooperation is the purpose for a unique auction of over 5,000 items on the main street of Paxton each spring. More than \$100,000 exchanges hands during the day as 30 auctioneers sell antiques, cars, farm equipment, and other goods to the 5,000 to 6,000 visitors. More than 15 annual sales have been held, with volumes increasing each year.

## **Petersburg Crafts Festival (Menard County)**

This fall event helps recognize 70 historical crafts that were practiced when New Salem was a thriving village. Utilizing the facilities of the New Salem Carriage Museum, the organizers also feature food of the New Salem period and a country store. A nearby country opera house and restaurant provide additional parking for the estimated crowd of 4,000 people.

## **Pittsfield Pig Day (Pike County)**

With a \$50 million pork industry in Pike County, this event fittingly promotes pork by offering free barbecued pork sandwiches to the more than 10,000 people who attend. Other pork-related activities include a men's cook-out, the Little Miss Piglet contest, hog calling, and pig weight-judging contests.

## **Pontiac Threshermen's Reunion (Livingston County)**

Pontiac welcomes 9,000 or more visitors to this celebration, organized for educational and social purposes. Activities include a parade and exhibits of old steam engines threshing grain and running a sawmill. Many local organizations cooperate with the Central States Threshermen Reunion, Inc. in planning the 30-year-old event.

## **Rock Cut Winter Carnival (Winnebago County)**

A unique event held at Rock Cut State Park, activities included here are ice and snow sculpturing, horse-drawn sleigh rides, ice fishing, and a winter camping demonstration. The carnival attracts more than 38,000 visitors and is sponsored by the Illinois Department of Conservation as one of its many special events planned annually for parks throughout the state. To insure full participation and enjoyment by all, a limit is set on the number of cars allowed in the park at one time.

## **Savanna River Days (Carroll County)**

Approximately 5,000 people enjoy this historical celebration which promotes fun and enjoyment through a pancake breakfast, chicken barbecue, beer garden, parade, and a variety of other activities. All community service organizations in Savanna aid the Chamber of Commerce in planning enthusiastically for the annual summer occasion.

## **Southern Illinois Folk Festival (Perry County)**

“Down home” foods such as ham and beans, chicken and dumplings, and others prepared in turn-of-the-century style help attract about 50,000 people to DuQuoin for this event. Activities reflect the historical nature of the celebration and include games, music, crafts, and various exhibits. Financing the event has continued to be a challenge for the Festival corporation, but past years’ profits have helped cover costs.

## **Stephenson County Dairy Days**

A bake-off, band competition, and milking contest are some of the features of this Freeport event aimed at promoting dairy farm activities. Approximately 10,000 people turn out for the celebration. Recipes for the foods entered in the bake-off contest are published after the event. The selling of event decals has helped to alleviate a recurring financial problem.

## **Virginia Bar-B-Q (Cass County)**

Profits from the money-making dinners and other activities of this event have been used to improve Virginia’s park, school, and other facilities. Approximately 4,000 people attend the event, which also includes stage shows, an antique auto display, a flea market, and a carnival.













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