

# Sponsored Grounds Acts Round Table

WFA Convention January 28, 2010

Moderator - Ernie Guderjahn - Theater-16, Inc.

## Opening Remarks

As the moderator of this table topic my position is to facilitate the discussion among those attending the table. Through the use of questions common to the topic and the members' relevant comments and open discussion, we will increase our understanding and explore ideas. To aid in our efforts, I am presenting some basic definitions, and the position from which I view the topic.

## A Grounds Acts Primer

**All entertainment can be placed in one of four categories!**

This four level classification system is based on the physical requirements needed to present the act, not the size of the audience or cost of the production.

**Stage Act** - Performances that must take place on a stage or stationary platform. Whether the entertainment is, "Mrs. Turner's Tap Dancing Two Year Olds" or the "Clint Black Tour", both need a physical stage on the grounds. The "Clint Black Tour" is an example of why stage acts are the most sponsored level of grounds entertainment. Everyone want to be associated with a star.

**Self-Contained Act** - For these performers the fair needs to provide only minimal assistance; electrical power, water and an open space. These acts such as pig races, petting zoo, high-dive show, flea circus, are often sponsored by enterprising fairs. The butcher shop sponsors the pig races, the swim school sponsors the high dive and the pest control company sponsors the flea circus. Tying a business to a particular type of act is fun, provides name recognition, and reinforces their product brand. Sponsorship usually results in a banner, perhaps their name announced at the show, and program recognition. Much more could be done!

**Found Space Act** - These entertainers make almost no demands on the fair facility. All they need is a suitable open space to set up their equipment and begin performing. These popular nomadic entertainers are seldom sponsored, and yet can be very successful at promoting a sponsor's concerns. A magician performing in the midway can use the sponsor's name as the "magic word", the juggler surrounded by the crowd can get them to use the sponsor's name in a chant! These entertainers are imaginative and can come up with several ways to focus on their sponsor. (If they know about it.)

**Strolling Acts** - These acts do their show as they walk about. To see the performer is to see the act. These entertainers, like a stilt-walker, clown, walking puppet stage or Smokey Bear, are right in the midst of the fair-going public, which is a powerful position for a sponsor that knows how to benefit from it.

## Sponsors for Grounds Acts

**Can grounds acts be sponsored?** I don't think they can, I know they can. Over the last 30 years I have seen several successful small programs across the USA and Canada that prove the effectiveness of this greatly overlooked resource that can be drawn upon when needed.

**Is it worth the effort?** Absolutely! Once you acquire the proper frame of mind to realize their true value as members of the production team.

**How much money can we make?** First, that is the wrong question. If all you want is \$\$\$\$; then Pepsi and Coors are your goal; they may be interested in your headliner talent. They are not motivated by "participation", they want to keep out the competition and maintain brand recognition. Local sponsors can't afford the headliner "buy in", but they want to participate in your fair. There are many ways they can sponsor grounds acts; cost offset for the act's fee, trade outs for goods, services, rooms, in-kind promotion swaps, donations for auctions, and foundations. I know of one case where a fair manager got his show barn painted this way. The Boy Scouts wanted to sponsor a magic show but had no cash reserves, so the manager got Ace Hardware to provide paint, as a sponsor, and the Boy Scouts provided the labor, as a sponsor. Of course you can charge money to sponsor a grounds act, but keep it affordable. (Think of it as an additional processing fee). Remember; a small local sponsor at fair time that is treated well can become a good friend all year long.

**Why are small local sponsors good for the fair?** Think of the small local sponsor as a new category of fair participant, just like those who exhibit flowers, baked goods, quilts or photography. You are creating a new form of community participation by creating these affordable levels of sponsorship.

**What does the sponsor get?** Personal attention! This is where grounds acts can really shine. Maximize this by letting the acts know they are sponsored, by whom, what the business does and explore how the act can get the sponsor's message across. Prepare methods by which the sponsor can easily gauge the value of their sponsorship. In addition to meeting the act they are sponsoring, explore ideas such as; distribution of bounce back coupons, special one-time only discounts available at performances, live prize drawings, texting contests, information distribution and e-mail lists.

**What makes "Grounds Acts" special?** Simply stated; they live there. They don't appear for only one day, or two evening shows, they work the entire run of the fair, and are as committed to the event's success as the food vendors, commercial exhibitors and the carnival. Sponsor them, you'll be glad you did.