

2008 Savvy Award Entry Letter



The purpose of the Foothills Fall Festival is to provide an event for our residents, right here in our own hometown that is both fun and affordable. (Read the background of the event located on the first page of the nomination booklet for a history how the Festival got started.)

PROBLEM: Festival concert ticket sales did not defray costs for the free children's activities and free arts and crafts portion of the weekend long festival.

At the onset, the City of Maryville stepped up first by providing all the City services for the event such as police, fire, water, electricity, trash pickup, setup, etc. Next, Ruby Tuesday whose corporate headquarters is located in downtown Maryville agreed to be the major sponsor along side of the City. During the first year of the event in 2000, a number of local businesses and industry also jumped on board with sponsorships.

Our residents enjoyed the first festival and things went well, but the City was an amateur in many important areas. Financially, we lost money, but not a huge amount that we couldn't absorb it from our budget. In reviewing the first year, it was decided that the overall spending would have to be reduced so that the event would not put us in the red each year but allow us to break even. We did not want to compromise the quality by reducing our costs.

Solution #1. After just three years, the event was a proven favorite of our community, but the City was still finding it very difficult to break even. *There was a need to hire a person with experience in marketing, planning, and budgeting an event this size* if we wanted to continue the event. Our current event coordinator, Jane Groff, has 15 years of experience from Dollywood (owned by Dolly Parton), a very successful venue located in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. The park holds seven or eight festivals per year in addition to the other amenities offered on the grounds. Their attendance continues to grow each year.

Jane immediately reviewed our existing budget along with sponsorships and past ticket revenues. She developed a plan to implement changes over a period that would reduce operating costs but not reduce the quality of the product.

Solution #2. *Treating the festival as a business product helped the committees to see what they were spending in a much different light.* Each area (committee) now has their own budget and committee members are held accountable for their spending. With more ownership and responsibility for their particular area, many members came up with very practical as well as creative ways to cut their costs. For example, in ticket sales, a price comparison of concerts offered in the Knoxville area showed that a show with only one headliner costs anywhere from \$45-\$85.00. Our weekend pass usually includes at least 3-5 headliners along with as many as 20 concerts during the three days. A small increase of \$10 for each type of ticket was implemented. Another change was implementation of reserved seating. In the past, those attending brought their own chairs and those who entered the gates first, got the best seats. There was definitely a market for those people who didn't want to spend all night in line to get a good seat and would be willing to pay \$75.00 per ticket. Reserved seating sold out the first year it was implemented (2006).

Solution #3. Marketing and advertising the product is important to ticket sales. October is a very popular month for organizations and businesses to hold events because of the beautiful fall weather. Having the nationally known country station, WIVK, as a sponsor helps us to get the word out and has been very successful for us since many of our headliners are country singers or bands. WVLT-TV, Channel 8, was added in 2006 as our television sponsor and they announce our entertainers and promote our ticket sales kickoff. In addition, our daily newspaper and sponsor, the Daily Times, places ads and articles from July through October regarding all areas of the festival. In 2007, our marketing evolved to include the Internet which is a tool that requires little work or minimal money on our part. Entertainers place their concert schedule on the Web and fan clubs keep up with posting where their favorite band will be performing. It seems to take on a world of its own without our involvement which can be both positive and negative. When tickets sold out, many people searched the Web via Google and e-bay, and other sources to buy tickets, sometimes at a much higher price! In 2007, we sold all our tickets in August (5 weeks) for the first time in the history of the event which allowed us to not only break even but come out **+\$2,000.**

LONG TERM GOALS: After managing to keep the event out of the red, the next major goal for us as a City is to *provide small business opportunities for local*

artists and food vendors as well as increase the traffic for existing downtown businesses during the event. We continue to increase the quality and craftsmanship of the arts and crafts area by using a jury method of selection. Now that we are an established event, we can be more selective of the products. Those artists and crafters that have participated in the past are absolutely jubilant with the amount of merchandise they sell along with the people they meet. (For testimonies from our vendor, see “Comments from our participating artists.”).

We want to utilize our residents who are looking for opportunities to volunteer their time. This again helps to reduce our costs. By becoming a volunteer, members of our community meet their neighbors, foster better relationships with the City and enjoy entertainment that might not be possible for many economically disadvantaged individuals here in Maryville. (See “Volunteers” and read what a volunteer receives in exchange for their time.) Being a volunteer is great fun, too, and many have volunteered every year since our first festival.

A new focus on managing the Internet PR will be part of this year’s discussion by the Public Relations and Marketing Committee. The newest of the Festival committees is the Public Relations and Marketing Committee. Members include local individuals from media, marketing, graphic/website design, and private industry public relations. Their goal is to tap into the Internet including U-tube, My Space, Facebook, blogs, entertainers’ websites and the Foothills Fall Festival website as the arenas for advertising/marketing and social media continue to grow and develop.

BUDGET/MEASUREMENT: Our budget numbers are included in the nomination packet. They reflect the 2007 Festival numbers with an available budget of \$500,000. The City of Maryville has taken a business approach to the operation including careful budget analysis in order to achieve its financial goals with the success of 2007 unsurpassed in previous years. Heading into our ninth season in October 2008, there will once again be challenges to face, but we believe we need to continue to refine our business strategy in order to keep ahead of the curve and to be ready to respond to the ever-changing environment. (Economy, growing competition, changing demographics, and industry trends)