

BY SHEILLA BRASHIER

**MULTIPLE**



**VENUE**



**EVENTS**



MORE SIGHTS = MORE WORK = MORE GUESTS = MORE FUN

Your event is gaining in popularity and crowds are getting larger each year. Feedback from attendees suggests adding some more activities for specific groups, maybe children, senior citizens, or just more and varied music groups. Once the decision is made to expand your event, you will likely face your first big challenge – Real Estate.

Your current venue simply does not have enough physical space to add even one more event. You could move the entire event to a new location large enough to accommodate all the desired events, but the current location is already fixed in people's minds and routines. It could even be that the current venue only makes sense in its current location because of the nature of the event itself. For instance, if the original reason for creating a geographically named event was to help the economy of the surrounding area, it may create resentment to move it. One common example is an event which occurs on the main part of a town's business district.

Often the original purpose of the event was to attract new potential customers to an area so that they would shop at the businesses there, or at least learn what is available in the immediate area. At first, area civic organizations or school groups are encouraged to set up food and beverage booths and arts and crafts vendors are charged for booth spaces marked off in lines on the street. A few small inflatable devices may be rented for children and the host event organization may even sell souvenirs and concessions to pay for marketing and the rented portable toilets and miscellaneous supplies. But within three years, your small downtown event has grown in popularity to the point where the crowds can no longer be safely managed according to the local public safety officials. Volunteers can no longer handle all the duties of safety and security, crowd control, as well as trash collection and removal. This dilemma is faced often by event planners working with events growing in popularity.

### **Chickasaw Nation's Expanding Success**

The Chickasaw Nation faced a similar success which resulted in a logistical problem in the small town of Tishomingo, Oklahoma. This town of a little more than three thousand folks on the banks of Pennington Creek is a sportsman's destination and the historic capital city of the Native American tribal government of the Chickasaw people. What began as an informal gathering with a traditional cultural lunch in the late nineteenth century had grown to a business meeting and festival one hundred years later. The event had bounced between church pavilions and school auditoriums as its popularity grew, then finally returned to the historic capitol grounds in the heart of Tishomingo.

A large tent was rented to shade the Chickasaw people attending the annual fall meeting and brush arbors were constructed as culturally aesthetic shelters for the invited vendors making and selling Native American crafts. One shaded area of the capitol lawn was reserved for cooking the traditional meal of Pashofa, a corn dish, as well as pork and grape dumplings. The kids would play stick

ball in the open part of the grounds and native stomp dances would be performed throughout the day on the remaining open part of the capitol lawn.

Eventually, the crowd attending the annual meeting grew too large for a tent and it was moved to the performance theatre of the local community college. Attendees wanted more than just Native American vendors, so others were allowed to rent booth space in a nearby city park. In order to meet the desires of the elder citizens, an art show of their peers was added as well as gospel singing.

All of these additional activities created new challenges and logistics which had to be considered.

The only way to keep all these various events operating successfully and meet the demands of the ever-growing crowds at the Chickasaw Festival and Annual Meeting was to move each category of the event to its own venue in a different part of Tishomingo. Since some of the events were not comfortable walking distances apart, a transportation system had to be devised. Shuttle vans with volunteer drivers were added as well as dozens of rented golf carts. Some events even had to be moved to other communities based on the

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nature of the activities. The majority of the activities still occur on the final Saturday of the event in Tishomingo, Oklahoma, but with an estimated attendance of more than ten thousand, multiple venues are still scattered across the town.

### How Can You Benefit from These Lessons Learned?

#### Logistics

So how can your multi-venue event benefit from the lessons we've learned from the Chickasaw Festival and Annual Meeting? First, let's look at the number one challenge you'll likely face. Bigger than funding or human resources, it is logistics. Accurate maps of the areas you intend to utilize are very helpful in planning strategies to meet these logistical issues.

Once you've identified which activities need to be added to your event, you must consider variables affecting possible venues to accommodate these activities. If you're utilizing several outdoor venues, weather obviously may be a factor. You need to check with local officials to see if the area is subject to flash flooding. Many events have been not only postponed or canceled, but forever blemished because of harm caused to attendees by weather related tragedies which may have been preventable.

Attendance at many outdoor festivals in Oklahoma and Texas was down in 2011 due to the drought and heat wave. Some planners put out cooling tents which sprayed a fog of water to cool the surrounding air and provide a place to escape the heat. Folks with winter events often have to erect barriers of various materials to protect guests from bitterly cold winds. The common aspect of these extreme measures is proper prior planning.

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#### Transportation

When using large passenger vans, remember to check your state's laws on how many passengers may be transported without a driver being required to have a commercial drivers license. In Oklahoma, that magic number is fifteen. The obvious solution to this problem is more drivers with none having more than fifteen

passengers in a van at a time. We have discovered that renting golf carts which hold from three to seven passengers is much less expensive than vans, and any adult driver can operate them.

Utilizing golf carts or pulled flatbed trailers with multiple seating obviously requires close coordination with your local law enforcement and public safety officials. One compromise is to have designated routes for vehicles not normally licensed for street use, and designated portions of those road ways to be used by these vehicles. You will need to ensure your volunteers and staff know these routes and resist the temptation or requests to drive on unapproved thoroughfares. Not only is this a safety concern, you're credibility with the public safety agencies depends on your team members following the rules. They may not get traffic citations, but you and your event may suffer from negative attitudes by drivers and officials.

Even though some events have the appearance of being in one single venue, the organizers soon realize the flow of people, infrastructure, (electricity, water, sewer,) and resources, (supply vehicles, vendor trailers, and carnival set ups,) divide the space into multiple venues. You will still need to designate pathways to keep people and vehicles separated or at least crossing paths safely.

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## Infrastructure

Now that infrastructure has been mentioned, let's take a look at how important that aspect of your event can be. If you've ever tried to have multiple food vendors in one geographic area without knowing the combined electrical demand from their electric deep fryers and refrigeration, you've no doubt experienced the wrath of someone who just dunked his potato curls in a vat of lukewarm grease. Even worse is the dripping water coming from the ice trailer when the day's supply begins to melt.

Just remember, a detailed plan for electrical demand and supply must be calculated for every grouping of electricity users in your event. One solution often used is a separate generator. These still must be carefully engineered to ensure enough electricity is available for all users.

## Water Resources

The next part of your event infrastructure you must consider even before choosing a venue is water. Merely having your city water department install a pressure regulator and a multiple tap for half inch garden hoses will usually not do the trick. For one thing, you again must consider safety of pedestrians and maintaining the integrity of the hoses and connections from vehicle traffic. With a multiple venue event, this can be much more difficult to plan than the electrical issue.

Since water that is used by vendors and guests doesn't merely evaporate, you now must plan for a way for the water to exit, in other words, a sewer system. Some governments allow faucet water to drain back into the storm sewers. Water from toilets almost always must be piped into the "sanitary sewer," which is actually not sanitary at all, but refers to waste which is ultimately treated at a sanitation facility. Another option is renting holding tanks which are pumped out later by a contracted waste disposal company.

Experienced professional vendors are accustomed to these types of restrictions and should actually be able to help you design and plan a proper infrastructure layout in advance. Often the problems arise from volunteer organizations that are just using their food booth as a fund raiser. Make sure you have all the water, sewer and electrical requirements of all vendors specified in the vendor agreement. You will also need to specify the rules which they must follow.

One technique which makes a multiple venue event work well with volunteers is the committee structure.

## Internet Access

A relatively new infrastructure request from vendors is access to the Internet. For a single venue event, the easiest solution is a wireless hotspot. This is a central location where a computer network is connected to the Internet, and then broadcast wirelessly for people to access with computers and smart phones.

In multiple venue events, it may require several wireless access points of internet. If there are costs to your organization for this connectivity, you may be able to pass that on to your vendors as an additional part of their fee. Your local telephone or cable television provider may even be willing to provide Internet access as part of their sponsorship of the event.

## Human Resources

Once you've identified solutions to the infrastructure issues of your new additional venues, you must consider the human resources factor. It seems that most community events are managed by one or two paid professionals with dozens or even hundreds of volunteers. One technique which makes a multiple venue event work well with volunteers is the committee structure. You may not need a committee for each site if they are just varying activities, but if each venue has its own line item in the budget, then creating a formal way to track responsibility may be forming a committee and selecting a chair person to be accountable. This also helps greatly with volunteer coordination. If a site has a committee and a chair, the volunteers know exactly to whom they report and where. Some communities utilize civic organizations to sponsor each venue and handle their own budgets. This can work well for human and financial resource allocation, but may present problems in marketing and promotion if each group doesn't

agree to the main purpose and image of the over all event.

We have learned that our multiple venue event runs much more smoothly each year when staff and volunteers work together to address all the above mentioned aspects together. This begins with inviting all the potential players to the table before the final decision is even made to add venues. Police and fire officials, code enforcement officers, city planners, neighborhood association officers and representatives from organizations you believe may want to be involved in helping the event grow successfully. The most important activity you will have each year regarding your multiple venue event is the assessment meeting with the same people you invited before the event, as well as each committee chair and staff member.

Remember, not all events can or even should be expanded into multiple venues. Sometimes, you may have to just add another event. But hey, isn't that why we're here?

**Sheilla Brashier** is the Director of the Office of Special Services for the Chickasaw Nation. In this role, she leads a staff of twelve which coordinates and implements all aspects for the Chickasaw Annual Meeting and Festival, the Chickasaw Hall of Fame Banquet, all ribbon cuttings, ground breakings, receptions, luncheons, and other special event activities for this Indian Tribal Government. Her department also oversees the operation of the McSwain Theatre in Ada, Oklahoma, which is a venue utilized for movies, play productions, national touring acts, and a regular monthly musical showcase of local talent, as well as other internal functions for the organization. She also serves on local community organizations and one foundation's board of directors. Sheilla can be contacted at: sheilla.brashier@chickasaw.net.