



# Using Your Community Resources to Build a Better Event

By Jennifer Byard

Being an Event Planner for a municipality has its advantages. If the Mayor supports the event for example, you can have the rest of the City departments practically at your disposal. What you may not realize though is that most City Departments and community organizations are more than happy to help with your event regardless of whether or not you are affiliated with the municipality. To get you started with "the ask," I have listed some organizations that are known to assist in festivals and events.

### **Fire Department**

Almost every community, in every country, has a Fire Response team, whether it is municipal or volunteer, most have an emergency awareness program for children. Our local Fire Department in Clarksville, Tennessee has a mobile "smoke trailer" that they take to events. The trailer's interior simulates a house filling up with smoke and children learn what to do in order to get out of their home safely during a fire.

### **Police Department/Law Enforcement**

Sure, those boys in blue are great at protecting and serving, but did you know they also have community projects that you can use in your event. In many communities D.A.R.E. (Drug Awareness Recognition Education) is a large part of the school system and they look for opportunities for their public outreach. D.A.R.E. officers come to the event with goodies for the kids including pencils, badges, coloring pages with the underlying message of avoiding drugs.

In an effort to drive down the number of drunk driving deaths, the State of Tennessee Governor's Highway Safety Grant awarded municipalities with tools to educate the public on the effects of alcohol. Participants at this activity put on "beer goggles" and are asked to perform simple tasks to demonstrate the effects of alcohol on the body. If room permits, you can even use a golf cart to simulate driving intoxicated as well. It's a sobering demonstration but one that shows how you and your beer sponsor care that your patrons get home safely.

In most communities the police department, as well as the Sheriff's Department, State Troopers and Military Police, have a K-9 Unit that they would love to show off to the public. Handlers train with their dogs a minimum of an hour each day and the attack dogs and drug detection dog demonstrations are both entertaining and educational for the public to watch.

Many, if not all, of the public safety organizations mentioned above have color guard units that can kick off your festival

or sporting event. You can also inquire about the many auxiliary programs that support the law enforcement organizations such as a Sheriff or Police Reserves program as they can many times serve as security for your event alongside your accredited officers or stand alone.

### **Military**

Clarksville is adjacent to Ft. Campbell Military Installation, home of the 101st Airborne Division. The army base is rich with opportunities ready for the asking. We have all been to an event where static displays of military equipment are available for little kids and big kids alike to climb on, but did you know the army also has very talented bands that can perform a wide variety of genres of music? Ft. Campbell alone has a rock, country and jazz band of excellent talent for the cost of time appropriate meals for their members.

A fly by or parachute drop can be an exciting addition to your event and most air force and army bases have the ability to perform them for you. Book them early if your event is around a holiday as they get many requests at those times. Keep in mind that the request may or may not be filled depending on the political climate and the mindset of the base command at the time.

### **Street or Highway Department**

One of the most popular static displays that I have ever witnessed for school age children (and some adults), are land moving equipment. Backhoes, skid steers, paving machines and dump trucks become a virtual Tonka Truck Toy box in an empty corner of your event. Children get to climb into the cab of the heavy equipment with the licensed operator and are allowed to raise and lower the buckets or in some cases move the equipment back and forth. It was hard to tell who was having more fun, the children or the operators.

Many Street Departments or Public works Departments allow approved City Special Event Permit holders the use of their road closure barricades and equipment, providing they are not being used for a road construction project, for refundable deposit. If the timing is right, they may also allow the use of their large portable directional traffic message boards to promote your event.

### **Emergency Management Agency**

Your county Emergency Management Agency is a wonderful resource for manning first aid stations. Often times they are volunteer run and can use the experience hours. With their advanced weather radar systems, they are also excellent to monitor the weather for those pop up showers or even bigger storms and notify

you when they are heading your way, giving you more valuable time to put your emergency plan into action if necessary. For water events, such as triathlons and boat races, they can serve as pick up boats for participants that need assistance.

### **Wildlife Resources Agency**

Your State's wildlife resource management agency can be a fantastic resource for your outdoor event. In the City of Clarksville, our Independence Day and our Riverfest Celebration are both held at McGregor Park alongside the Cumberland River. During both of these events, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency patrols the water ensuring that the boaters are complying with boating laws. At the Independence Day event they move hundreds of boats back out of the fireworks fall out zone. In exchange, we provide them with a booth at the event to promote their programs for boating and hunting safety. If you can book them early enough, some state agencies have a raptor exhibit that can travel to your event. In Clarksville Montgomery County we are fortunate in that TWRA has a newly built shooting complex in which we are able to utilize as a venue for our Paralympics and Warrior Week Events free of charge. Lastly, most state agencies have an excellent youth fishing rodeo event in the spring that we collaborate on to provide free fishing to kids 18 and under. We provide the pond and TWRA stocks it for us. Win-win!

### **Bi-County Solid Waste Disposal**

In most communities where a municipality provides a landfill, they will also have federal grant money to promote recycling. In our county for example this means that we not only get free dumpsters for our event, we get free recycling bins on loan and free pick up of our debris after the festival. The Rivers and Spires Festival, also held in Clarksville, uses Bi-County to weigh their trash to get an accurate count of their attendance. At Riverfest, Bi-County promotes recycling in our green zone by collecting plastic bottles from patrons in exchange for a ticket in the drawing for a flat screen TV at the conclusion of the event on stage.

Event planners in Georgia are privy to one of the best event recycling programs out there. The Recycle 4 Georgia program is a state-wide recycling campaign organized by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs Office of Environmental Management. The campaign has developed and distributed 35 Away From Home recycling trailers for use at special events. The trailers were awarded to local governments throughout the state for use in area festivals, fairs, and sporting events. Local governments use the trailers for

their own events as well as renting them out to other parties interested in recycling at their events. The trailers contain Clear Stream containers designed specifically for special event recycling and are stored on carts for easy set up. The trailers also come with promotional materials like posters, stickers, and temporary tattoos as well as a user manual to help event organizers develop a recycling program for their event. For more information go to <http://www.georgiarecycles.org/georgia-recycles/campaigns/recycle-4-georgia/>.

### Public Utilities

Sticking with the conservation theme, your local utility provider should have a water or electric conservation education program that they travel to schools with. Many times it is a hands on demonstration with displays that make a nice booth in your festival "green zone."

### Parks and Recreation

Your local Parks and Recreation Department has many fun and exciting programs for your children and adults alike and they love the opportunity to promote them. Last year for example, our Community Centers instructed children in their archer program on site during Riverfest (it's perfectly safe and no one lost an eye!) The activity was wildly popular and resulted in record sign ups the following month at their center as well as a talk about activity at your event.

### Regional Planning Commission

Need a large aerial photo of your event grounds pre-festival? Contact your local Regional Planning Commission. For the cost of the ink and paper they can pinpoint your event area and print the maps for you making it a cinch to plot your festival with real distance perspective.

### Voting Commission

Although it might be less cumbersome accomplished with an iPad these days, a few years ago, Riverfest conducted a survey of our festival goers using our local Austin Peay State University's Communications and Research Class. It just so happened that it was an election year and the Voting Commission had just purchased new voting machines and wanted to test them prior to the election. We gladly obliged and gave them our survey questions to format for their machines and our APSU students did all the work.

### Universities

While we are talking about the Universities, most provide a host of valuable resources, including volunteers, applicable for just about any event. Beyond the fraternities, sororities and service clubs, look into classes that would benefit from

spending time at your event. For example, if you have a half marathon, contact the Health and Human Performances Instructor. Many times the instructor will offer class credit for their work which ensures a high attendance rate by those volunteering. Last but not least, if you aren't taking advantage of Communications Majors as interns you are missing the boat.

### Trade Schools/High School Shop Classes

Trade Schools can be a great resource for fabricating props for your event, typically for the cost of materials. At Shelby Farms Conservatory in Memphis, Tennessee, they have a large array of amazingly complex holiday scenes for their drive through light display all crafted by a local trade school.

### HandsOn Network

The HandsOn Network is the largest volunteer network in the nation. The site acts as a match making website for volunteers looking for opportunities to serve and organizations needing help. HandsOn offers training, resource development and networking opportunities to their members and tracks service hours for both volunteers and organizations. With over 32 million volunteer hours logged through their network last year, it's definitely worth checking into for a location near you. <http://www.handsonnetwork.org/>

### Local Banks

If you haven't invested in a ticket scale yet, tap into a local bank for your ticket reconciliation for your food and beverage program. You would simply turn over the tickets, bundled in groups of a hundred, to the bank after the festival and the tellers count them and complete a reconciliation form. The bank notarizes the forms and returns them to the organization that in turn, sends checks to the food vendors. The entire process takes a few days however, so if your budget is tight, you can have your reconciliation done for the cost of a sponsorship.

As you can see, your community can be a wealth of resources for not only activities at your event but assistance in its production. While not every community will have every opportunity, I'm willing to bet there are similar entities near your event, and many more than what are mentioned here, that are more than willing to help. All you have to do is ask!

**Jennifer Byard** is the Special Events Supervisor for the City of Clarksville in Clarksville, TN. She can be reached at: Phone: 931-645-7476 or Email: [jennifer.byard@cityofclarksville.com](mailto:jennifer.byard@cityofclarksville.com)