EAA Relationship Committee
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The committee is happy to report on a successful Air Venture 2013. What began 4 years ago as a strategic initiative to enhance our relationship and presence with the EAA, finished out 2013 reintroducing the Soaring Society of America to mainstream Air Venture and thousands of pilots looking for their next aviation adventure. We would like to summarize some of the highlights, note where improvements can be made and layout the steps for its continuance. It is also worthy to note that we came in significantly under budget for the event.

There is no doubt for anyone familiar with the convention, the SSA needs to be present. We are one of the larger alphabet membership organizations in the industry and it only makes good sense to expose the SSA to the largest gathering of pilots in the world. I personally, had no idea how big a secret soaring is to the rest of the aviation community until we had a chance to talk with various pilots from other niche, sport flying. Secondly, one only needs to observe our overzealous government's actions (i.e., arresting a glider pilot for circling a power plant in a glider, ramp checks, TFR's, etc) to understand that we need to belong to a much bigger movement to be effective against such actions. Leadership going forward needs to enhance the momentum of what has been started.

Much of the acknowledgment for a job well done over the longer term, is owed to a small group. Scott Manley, Anne Mongiovi, Gene Franklin and Lee Murray have selflessly towed the banner of the SSA over the long term thick and the thin. It was an enhancement of what they were doing at Kid Venture that set the stage for this year's main exhibit. The EAA was very helpful to us throughout the effort, even though they have had their fair share of issues to deal with both internally and most recently with the FAA. The FAA in the eleventh hour levied a $400,000 fee for ATC services for the convention, the first time ever and to the dismay of everyone. This double dipping of expenses, especially when all the controllers in excess of the normal staff at Oshkosh are volunteers is alarming. The randomness of the charges is being litigated by the EAA.

There were a record number of youth participating at our booth at Kid Venture (the youth side of Oshkosh, which is run almost exclusively by Scott Manley). Kid Venture is courted by most all of the big name membership organizations as a way to influence our members of the future. It is and always has been an investment, but soaring will enable them in aviation the earliest of all significant activities. Franks's Cadet Membership idea shines in this environment. I would recommend that we continue to refine what they find and receive when becoming a Cadet Member. Impressions at this age will last a long time, so if for some reason it's not favorable, it may be a long time before they take a second look. So far it's excellent!

The membership reception continues to be very popular and growing. This year we sought more sponsors to keep this venue cost neutral. The sponsors again this year were Arizona Soaring, Costello Insurance and ClearNav stepped up after some arm twisting by Diane Black-Nixon. We had over 120 SSA members and soaring enthusiast from around the world at the event. Next year we will need to have a bit more food on hand, however the one keg of craft brew beer is still adequate. This year we were charged for the tent in the nature center where in past years it was comped. I think it would be possible to have a finger food / cocktail venue at the main exhibit tent to save on this expense. At the very least, it is something to keep in mind.

This past year when bidding for the exhibit location, the request was made to be near Pipistril to enhance the soaring / efficient flight theme. This proved to be a good plan as we worked well together and it literally gave us a good half acre of land to set up on. Our 40' by 60' exhibit space actually turned out to be 40' by 80'. Our 20' by 30' tent turned out to be perfect. It gave us enough room to set up tables, chairs and a small video section featuring continuous loop soaring clips. All was adequate for the first time, but here are some recommendations for an enhanced presence:
Merchandise - We sold everything the SSA sent quickly. We had 100 t-shirts made with the FUEL BLUES marketing design by Bob DeLeon. This shirt would actually cadre better to SSA members. the public likes the pretty design shirts better. We could easily triple the amount of merchandise if it were fashionable enough. The desert theme t/shirt of the SSA sold out first and this may be an indicator of which direction we need to head with this.

Literature - We ran out of magazines quickly and all the brochures we had were from past years, courtesy of Anne Mongiovi. Without her stock, we would have been unprepared in this area. The kind of brochures we need to have more of are from commercial operators and large clubs world wide where people can get plugged into soaring. The interest is there, but we need to direct them on how and where. I would also consider having a handout of what the requirements are for a glider rating add on. The solo at 14, license at 16 theme is well represented in our current graphics and with the LGG web site.

Static Display - We absolutely need a modern glider (or two) on display. They are the magnet for the SSA's exhibit. I had our LS-3a up there this year (it has a great finish). There were always people coming up and respectfully looking it over. Very easy to start a conversation with folks when they are looking. Most thought we were a dealer instead of a membership organization. That's how unknown we are to the rest of the industry!

I would recommend that the SSA talk with aircraft vendors at this year's SSA Convention in Reno to secure a modern 18M ship for display. They can talk sales, but they will have to do it on a direct basis without banners. Only one company is allowed per exhibit. A way around this would be to split our space in two and have the aircraft vendor be in the neighboring spot. This would also save us a little bit of money and it makes total sense to team up.

Graphics - We are pretty good right ow with our graphics. They are all designed to engrain the SSA logo and what it represents in the industry. The QC code on the LGG banners are great. That website makes a great first impression. We have the (2) SSA flags in the 10 foot length - I would consider one or two more in a bigger size as they are very eye catching and a popular exhibit marketing tool.

Volunteers - Even though we have plenty of SSA Member Volunteers available at Air Venture, there must be a couple of anchor workers to run the store. Anne, Jason Stephens and I did it this year. I would recommend that we have one full time employee of the SSA to help with merchandise, membership and credit card / cash operations. Volunteers and vendors can talk soaring. If this is not feasible, there are services available for a fee and then they would have to be trained in our processes. We were constantly out of cash to make change and I would recommend that merchandise be priced with this in mind. $20 is an easy figure to work with and is in the ball park with other vendors. Last two days or so, merchandise could be marked down to $15 or even $10 to move it.

SSA Headquarters - Even though our SSA office personnel were very helpful when asked, they had no ownership in the event. I would change this so they would be very much involved, if not in person, then in the planning and execution from afar. It is difficult to take on an effort such as this without that kind of understanding and support from headquarters. This is a major marketing effort for the SSA and it deserves the attention as such. Air Venture is not an air show, it is an aviation convention and the largest in the world at that. The air show is just that, a side show, which happens to mark the end of each long day of commerce.

Processes - I would recommend a total review of the processes, not only for the sales of merchandise and membership, etc, but also the preferred accounting of the event. Out of pocket and reimbursement later worked OK this time, but I wouldn't recommend it long term. There are better ways, but difficult to foresee without experiencing it first.
Continuance - There is a definite timeline and necessary tasks associated with key dates. I would be happy to help the Association and advise the next leader for 2014. I cannot run it for the week as this year due to other responsibilities. I will discuss this with Geoff Weck and help select a leader to run with the flag for this next year.

Motion for Consideration:

Where as, the SSA has been building a presence for the last 4 years at Air Venture, the largest gathering of aviation minded people in the world.

Where as, the SSA's presence at Oshkosh has been building a momentum that serves the association well for industry involvement and other worthwhile networking endeavors.

Where as, the SSA's involvement with Air Venture represents a strategic marketing effort to educate and funnel potential new members to our roster.

Where as, the exposing of youth to the opportunities that soaring provides through the Condor Flight Simulator exhibit at Kid Venture dovetails nicely to ongoing efforts by other organizations to encourage the young.

Where as, a momentum and pride through the Air Venture presence, Membership Reception and industry recognition must be maintained.

Therefore, be it resolved that the SSA Board of Directors supports the continuation of this marketing effort and appropriate a similar funding for 2014.