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Spring 2018: Growth & Retention Committee Report
by Chris Schrader

My apologies to the Board and SSA Members who've been waiting to see this report.

First, I'd like to begin by saying, GRC has been meeting and consulting with members of other committees (including JYC, Clubs & Chapters; and Planned-Giving), and volunteers on ad hoc basis for the past year or so. Essentially, we've all been working together on many of the projects you'll read about below, and others, while important, too inconsequential to bring up in this report.

Going forward however, GRC will need to do a better job coordinating with Denise Layton and the newly formed Development Committee (tasked with coordinating the SSA's efforts to raise money), which is a major reason why I scheduled a Joint Committee Meeting at the SSA Convention on Thursday, March 1, 2018, from 12:00 noon to 2:00 P.M, in meeting room A-14 (check and confirm with your printed schedules).

The agenda for the meeting will include discussion of restructuring the committee to make it nimbler, and the scheduling of regular committee meetings to be held via GotoMeeting.com. I would also like those in attendance to help us identify potential volunteers (what we really need is "do-ers" more than advisers), who could be assigned to various "working groups" based on their interests, experience, and professional backgrounds. Consequently, I placed an advertisement in the 2018 SSA Convention Program soliciting volunteer assistance from SSA members with a variety of professional backgrounds to help with the following projects (see below). Please note in some cases, the SSA may budget for and hire professionals on a contract basis to perform certain duties like graphic design, feature article writing, video production, and developing print and digital media marketing materials, including demographically targeted promotional videos. Similarly, I support Denise Layton's proposal to hire a part-time Digital Editor whose job will be to coordinate and oversee the efforts of the Digital Media Working Group and assist Denise, Eric Bick, Ken Sorenson, myself, and the Development Committee in tailoring the SSA's messaging online and shaping its social media presence.

Digital Media Working Group

One area I intend to focus on is revamping the Digital Media Working Group by recruiting future contributors, editors, freelance writers, photo/video journalists, video bloggers, college students (and Juniors) with any of the above skills, to assist Denise Layton and the GRC in creating and uploading fresh content to the SSA's various multi-media platforms, especially its website, Facebook page, Snapchat, and YouTube Channel. Both FB and YouTube offer live streaming services (you may have seen Sean Franke and others reporting live from various contests this year).

Just recently, David Lessnick offered to help the SSA coordinate, design, host and catalog a digital repository of monthly webinars on behalf of the SSA. I'm excited to announce that he's been working closely with Mitch Hudson (who's spearheading the creation of XC soaring curriculum for SSA to be used by its Chapters), and J.P. Stewart to develop a series of webinars focused on cross-country soaring. The idea partially came to him as a result of John Cochrane and Doug Jacobs efforts to catalog various articles and Power Point presentations related to cross-country soaring and sailplane racing over the years. David's leadership and past business experience in publishing should prove fruitful for the SSA. I look forward to reporting back to you on this new development in the Fall.

Marketing Campaign

In the coming months, GRC will develop a schedule and budget for the launching a new marketing campaign for the SSA. The campaign will be centered around the creation of a series of print (i.e.,

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brochures, posters, banners, trade show displays, and static cling wraps) and digital marketing materials (i.e., products designed for social media), that utilize QR codes to link such materials to high-production value, demographically targeted promotional videos. The SSA will then distribute these materials to clubs at cost so its membership, clubs (chapters), and Business Partners can cost-effectively promote soaring at local events, such as: fly-ins, airshows, community festivals, county fairs, presentations to public service groups (i.e., Rotary, Lions Club), EAA Chapters, public schools, and universities.

Posters and brochures will be designed with a designated space, so your local club can affix an SSA issued label to it that has your club's contact info and url printed on it, and designates whether the club participates on Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, or Twitter. Clubs will also have the option to insert their own custom rate sheets and new member applications into any tri-fold brochures they hand out.

The design of the both the digital and print marketing materials will be tailored to target people of various demographic profiles. We will look to attract both men and women, college students and teenagers to the sport, keeping in mind the values, desires and interests of different age groups from Millennials in their 20's up through Generation X, as well as those of the all-important Xennial group (ages 32-40). We'll also seek to target individuals in the 40-55 age bracket with growing net-worth's and disposable income to spend on our sport. From "Subaru driving green, outdoorsy adventurist types" to hard-working professionals and small business owners, to the "work-hard play-hard" types... we'll have messages that are carefully crafted for them. Other interest profiles include hang-glider pilots, tail-dragger pilots, and college age students building time as they work towards their ATP rating (these make great weekend CFI-G and tow pilots), airline pilots, and teenagers interested in aviation or STEM related fields. It's no coincidence either that many glider pilots come to the sport from sailing or are artists in their own right. The bottom line here is that GRC will explore the nexus of what motivates all these different types of people to want to come to this sport.

To assist with this, I've been consulting with Denise Layton, John Godfrey, and Frank Whiteley about conducting a comprehensive survey of the SSA's membership and updating/modernizing its database and CRM capabilities. These efforts are useful for any number of reasons and would benefit Development and Planned Giving just as much as GRC and the Clubs & Chapters committees. Moreover, it will help us identify potential volunteers, future board members at large, donors, and strong leaders we could tap in the future.

Family Friendly Soaring Sites

It's worth noting I think that soaring should be promoted as a family-friendly activity and clubs should seek to recruit people with families, especially those who have children who are interested in aviation too. Gone are the days when I can tell my wife, "hey honey can you watch our three kids for the day while I go soaring... oh, and by the way, I'm not exactly sure what time I'll be home so please don't plan on my being home in time for dinner." I can get away with that maybe 2-3 times a season. Any more than that, and I'm asking for a divorce. Family-friendly soaring sites with facilities that encourage greater social inclusion are a win-win for everyone. Traditionally, soaring has almost been a "Gentleman's Club" of sorts but this need not be the case anymore. Co-ed Junior organizations, like that at Harris Hill, have been successful in bringing both sexes into the sport and the club enjoys greater youth participation because of it. In some cases, these programs combined with a club's active social agenda foster multi-generational participation among club members (yes, the kids do return). When making decisions that effect the future of a club, I challenge club leadership to think of the benefits they might enjoy if they thought of the glider port as a vibrant Yacht Club (with playgrounds and swing sets, club houses with kitchens, clean bathroom and shower facilities, picnic pavilions, RV hookups, and god forbid a swimming pool), rather than a Men's only hide-out for the day. If the hide-out is what you seek, the Yacht Club still offers you a place to do that too... so you get the best of both worlds while your club benefits from the influx of revenue and economy of

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scale, especially as it relates to volunteerism and filling critical positions (e.g., CFI-G's, tow-pilots, maintenance directors, maintenance helpers, grounds keepers).

SSA Promotional Videos – A Pilot Project

It's with great pleasure that I invite you to watch the two promotional videos that will appear at the 2018 SSA Convention (you can also access them on the SSA's YouTube Channel). These were produced as part of a pilot project – a proof of concept – that the SSA could, on a contract basis, work with film professionals to successfully design, storyboard, and tailor a film's messaging to serve both broad and narrow marketing purposes. The videos were filmed at the 2017 U.S. Junior Camp Contest over the week of the 4th of July, at Harris Hill Soaring Corp. and the National Soaring Museum, located in Elmira, NY.

The first video you will come across is a generic promotional video that talks about why soaring is such a great sport to be a part of, and it encourages people to try it for themselves – you might fall in love with it. It's actors, if you will, include Juniors, and both men and women of different ethnic and racial backgrounds – of all ages – enjoying themselves, racing, learning, and having a good time. The enthusiasm permeates throughout the video and is intended to spark the viewer's interest, leading them to their computers, tablets, smart phones or electronic devices so they can learn more about “Soaring” and figure out “Where to Fly,” be it from a discovery ride or the sale of a FAST package. Likewise, it concludes with a trailer that also leads people to the SSA's website and Facebook page. Going forward these need to be regularly updated with fresh content, and stories should be cross-promoted and consist of feature articles, club news feeds, video-blogs, live streaming, webinars, and other promotional videos parked on the SSA's YouTube Channel and/or embedded on its Website or Facebook page.

The second video was produced with the specific intent of crafting a plea to members, clubs, and potential donors to support local Junior soaring initiatives and to help fund future U.S. Junior Soaring Contests and Development Camps. Interestingly enough, the video can be edited ever so slightly and/or built upon to promote other aspects of Junior soaring and to solicit donations from members and aviation enthusiasts to endow or annually contribute to (or match) the Purduski, Costello, Bultman, or Cadet Scholarship funds. And, if you tweak it another way, much of the video can be used to generally promote soaring in our local community and to recruit new families and youth members to join our glider clubs.

It should be noted, both videos were produced on relatively speaking a shoe-string budget. The SSA contracted Steven Shea, founder of Abyssmal Entertainment (a self-described “creative multi-media company”), to document the contest, film and produce two short videos for the SSA. Steven had previous experience working with NASA and Embraer, and I thought he would do a good job producing these videos.

In my opinion, the messaging in each of these videos was precisely on target with what we had hoped to achieve when producing them. Moreover, Steven acquired nearly 4 Tb of raw video and B-Roll footage (shot at 4K quality, much of it at 120fps), including interviews, scenes from the camp (documenting the social atmosphere during the event), aerial footage, and video of nearly a dozen gliders flying (or should I say “playing”), along the ridge top. Quite frankly, these were scenes we were very lucky to obtain. The point to take home from all of this, is that all of the footage he shot can be used and edited with video(s) from other sites, clubs, and events to produce future promotional videos for the SSA. My believe his work speaks for itself.

Summary

To sum up my report, GRC will continue to actively manage and coordinate with other committees on a number of active projects related to member retention and the future growth of our clubs. If you haven't read my report from the Fall 2017 Board Meeting, I suggest you do so, as many of those projects are in

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various stages of completion. GRC will continue to be involved in the Chapter SWOT Analysis Program and desperately needs a panel of volunteers and writers to take on drafting various portions of a Clubs & Chapters Best Practices Manual. Following the convention, GRC will resume its efforts to identify a lending facility that offers financing to established Chapters of the SSA with terms of 13-15 years, reasonable interest rates, and no requirement of a Personal Guarantor to finance the purchase of a new or used sailplane with up to 50% LTV. If such terms could be offered exclusively to SSA Chapters, it would bring a lot of added value to our members and clubs.

Finally, an effort to conceptually re-design and implement a top-to-bottom overhaul of the SSA's website is sorely needed but such a transition might require migrating the back-end in stages so that the current sites repository and user functions (i.e., contest registration, contest results, board meeting agenda and minutes archives, committee assignments, awards, trophies, magazine archives, Dick Johnson Reports, etc) are not effected but are accessible by members through a portal designed to take you to those areas of the old website upon request. GRC will work with ExCom and the Development Committee in any way necessary to see that we do our due diligence before embarking down this path. I suspect the Board will want us to consult with third parties (who've had no previous involvement with the design or maintenance of the current site), to get estimates for various phases of such a project. Truth be told, we know that statistically speaking, very few people other than contest pilots actively land on, let alone become engaged, with the present-day website. To put it nicely, it's the last place I would want to send someone who's wanting to know more about our sport and learning to fly sailplanes. Ask almost anyone from a Juniors up to age 55 what they think of our website, and they will almost certainly agree with me. The time to start engaging in the process and devising a strategic plan to replace the website is now.

Best regards,

Chris Schrader
SSA Director, Region 6
Chairperson of the Growth & Retention Committee