

Rally Organizing Demystified—An Approach

Gordie Davidson

This article is targeted at those folks who just might have a desire to organize a COAA sponsored event in their neck of the USA. The process is really not intimidating, especially if you get things right up front. Don't know where to start? Then grab yourself a cup of coffee and read on—what follows is an approach that has worked well for this author.

For simplicity, structure, and ease of referral, I have broken this narrative into four sequential phases – the first three are planning focused with the final phase being the actual execution of the event.

- I. Initial Planning Phase
- II. Support Planning Phase
- III. Final Planning Phase
- IV. Execution Phase

Up Front - one cannot over emphasize the need to **plan ahead**—a few expressions or words of wisdom come to mind reference planning:

- *Plan Your Work and Work Your Plan*
- *People Don't Plan to Fail, They just Fail to Plan*
- *Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance*

With this simple, yet most important emphasis on planning, let's examine each of the four phases of organizing a successful COAA event.

I. Initial Planning Phase (10-15 months out)

This is the most important phase of the four—you will expend most of your thinking, scheming and schmoozing energy here. This is where you design and lay the foundation for the remaining phases and event execution.

Determine Venue Potential

Physically walk the venue to visualize how large and small organs might integrate together—is there room for both categories of instruments? Should this be a combined event or small organ rally only? Is parking convenient? Restrooms? Food places? Electricity? Will there be audio competition from live bands or PA systems? These are a few of the questions usually easy to answer—the most important venue selection question is will there be hundreds or thousands of spectators in attendance? If the answer is no or maybe no spectators, stop the planning. We do not need another rally venue without people. Assuming positive venue potential, then move on to the validation process.

Validate Venue

Personally seek out the movers and shakers of the venue/community such as the Mayor, the City Manager, the Chamber President, or any other important personalities. Meet them face to face to determine if they want to co-sponsor an event with COAA. Do not send an impersonal introductory email but rather get on the calendars of the right folks and establish a relationship. This is the single most important step. Do your homework and be prepared to answer two questions, (1) what is a band organ rally? And, (2) why should we co-sponsor an event with COAA?

Both questions are easy to answer (a video is worth a thousand words); take your pre-loaded laptop or DVD player along with your well rehearsed presentation to view previous rally videos. Keep it short, maybe five minutes max. Show a couple of street organs featuring interaction with the public and one large organ with the public viewing. Be sure to pick lively tunes most will recognize. Co-sponsoring allows the chamber to (1) support the effort, and (2) exercise minimal control. Support refers mostly to providing dollars and publicity. Control is more a figurative thing, that is, the chamber has bought in, but really does not desire to run and manage another event—they're pleased you are doing all the organizing and work.

If you get a buy-in from the movers and shakers grease the skids with a follow-up presentation to the next monthly Chamber of Commerce and City Council meetings in that order. Remember, the chamber has the money. Focus accordingly, be brief, be bright, and be gone. I even took my busker organ to set the mood for what I was offering. All you're looking for from the city is approval to conduct the event and possible coordination support. The city, more than likely, will want to be named on the group's liability insurance policy. This is not an issue as the COAA is covered.

The chamber presentation is an extension of your first preparatory meeting with the president. Be prepared to answer the first two questions plus a third—what will the rally do for the community? The answer is twofold: (1) the rally will bring lots of folks to the venue, and (2) thousands of dollars in local, indirect spending by visitors and COAA members (food & beverage, motels, retail, etc). Recommend you prepare a brief talking points handout for each chamber member documenting everything you discuss. Bring up your group requirements at this first meeting, aka financial support. Tell them what you anticipate for expenses, your anticipated income and anticipated shortfall. This entire process requires the fine art of salesmanship and schmoozing. Be positive and emphasize the **fun** aspect of a rally.

Eventually there will be a motion to vote on your request for sponsorship and financial support. Word your request not as a “not-to-exceed support contribution of perhaps \$1,000,” but you really anticipate a need of perhaps \$400-\$700. You will only ask for one check 60-90 days out from event. Avoid a reimbursement scheme that requires submission of itemized receipts (a nightmare for you and unnecessary bookkeeping for them). It’s just easier to issue one check made out to COAA.

Finally, go through this process 10-12 months out—up front in the fiscal year and budgeting process with a recorded approval in the minutes. Approved minutes come in handy later in the year when new chamber members come on board/ New members tend to support previous approval actions. Getting approval and financial support early makes the next three phases a breeze to coordinate.

II. Support Planning Phase (8-10 months out)

Now that the Chamber and City have approved you, you can begin the detailed coordination required to make the rally happen. I’ll address some of the common actions to be coordinated. There will be other requirements unique to a particular venue, plan accordingly in this phase.

Publicity

There is an age old question in advertising that goes like this: you know what happens when you don’t advertise? Nothing! Now that you have your rally approved, get the word out. Fortunately there are several avenues to pursue:

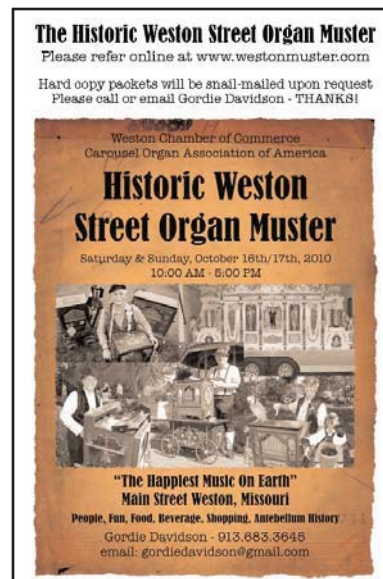
1. Dedicated Web Site: this is by far the most cost efficient, effective means to communicate with the COAA membership and general public. Everyone has access to the internet or knows someone that does. You can use one of several web authoring applications or online web creation sites—most are free or cost a few dollars. You can register a primary domain name for about \$10. I registered www.westonmuster.com and authored the site with Rapidweaver for Mac. Completely intimidated by computers? Perhaps the Chamber can assist or you have that proverbial geek grandson who can put together a web site with your content guidance. Finally, you can easily post notes of thanks, images and YouTube videos after the event.
2. COAA Web Site: the COAA web site will advertise your event with dates as well as host your downloadable documents. This is a “no brainer”—use it!
3. Posters: I recommend you design a poster stating that the Chamber and COAA are co-sponsoring a rally with the need-to-know facts. Creativity is welcome: you do not have to necessarily use the word

rally—I’ve seen terms like muster, recall, festival and others used with equal success. Pictures or illustrations always help to define what is coming to town. I designed the poster for Weston and convinced the Chamber to print 100 copies for distribution in town and to attendees. If you’re lucky, maybe the Chamber will have a graphic artist. Go for it—the only challenge will be maintaining your personal discipline to meet deadlines.



A poster collage used to illustrate what is coming to town.

4. The COAA Journal: for a small fee, you can purchase full page ads in the COAA Journal. I recommend two to three issues before your event. Communicate directly with the editor for actual deadlines and formatting instructions. I used the dedicated poster with supplemental instructions for direct mail requests: another “no brainer”—use it!



A rally poster used effectively as a pre-rally advertisement in the *Carousel Organ*.

5. Mechanical Music Digest: the online MMD forum is the Gold Standard for reaching worldwide mechanical music enthusiasts. Most rally attendees in the USA are subscribers. As a general rule, the

MMD editor will allow two postings announcing your rally. Backward plan accordingly: not too soon and not too late. I recommend the rally host/planner maintain control of announcement timing and communicate directly with the MMD editor.

6. **Direct Mail:** this method is the least effective and cost efficient. There is a core group of less than 100 COAA members who attend and support the rallies. Mailing an envelope to each of the nearly 500, worldwide COAA members is inexcusable. This is a waste of precious association funds and it costs hundreds of dollars annually. For Weston, I made it clear that anyone could call or email to request a direct mailing: one person did and I promptly supported. My postage, paper and envelope expense was \$1.22 (there was no printing, stuffing, labeling and envelope sealing party).

Lodging

Members and guests will be supporting you from all over the USA—locating a central lodging facility is paramount to your success. It becomes yours headquarters for housing, instrument storage, entertainment, dining, fellowship and reminiscing. I would look for walking access to restaurants; secure parking; user-friendly management; reasonable fees and quality meeting facilities.

Food & Beverage Snacks

Providing snacks and drinks during a rally weekend is another optional activity dependent upon the dynamics of the venue. Ask yourself: will everyone have convenient access to a vendor or store to purchase meals & drinks? If not, you may desire to provide basic cold drinks and munchies from a central location or perhaps rove with a cooler or distribute from a car or other vehicle—a cold bottle of water is always appreciated. Use your judgment and creativity here.

Entertainment

This is a judgment call only you can make. The tendency is to pack too many activities into one day, particularly Saturday. Remember, the event is an organ rally. People expect you to provide a **fun** environment with hundreds of spectators and that generally is an 8-hour day plus transit times. I recommend you allow some freshening-up time after the long grinding session. A Saturday evening meal is expected. No recommendation here other than to avoid sitting down in mass at a restaurant—try to find a private facility for the group. I recommend no activity after the meal. Let people sort themselves out: some will visit and some will retire for the evening. Again, no hard rules here: if you can feed and entertain simultaneously at a local collection or venue, go for it. Bottom line: do not commit folks to a 15-hour day and you'll have fewer no shows.

Scheduling

Try to publish a schedule up front that is 95% accurate with times and activities. Grinding times should reflect when the general public is expected to participate. There is no need to start too soon or run too late. Some venues will require staging of instruments by a certain time—coordinate this carefully with venue management and determine who will be the 'go to' person on the ground. Rehearse the staging process and have situational awareness of the entire venue area.

Communicating

This is easy with your dedicated web site, the COAA web site and email—use and update accordingly. Provide periodic updates to the Chamber President and/or key movers and shakers of your event. Get on monthly meeting calendars to provide periodic live updates as there will be new Chamber members who need to be updated on your event. Attending a meeting or two maintains your credibility; keeps the enthusiasm factor high; and makes it easy to ask for that support check in the spring.

Miscellaneous

I highly recommend you personally meet with the Chief of Police. Provide him the same overview you've provided everyone else. Do not assume he is in the knowledge loop on the details of your event. It is here you can anticipate and de-conflict any potential issues with parking, street closures, and the need for parking cones, etc. The Chief will be pleased you coordinated with him as most event planners miss this step. Make sure he knows you are the 'go to' person for all rally related issues.



Name tags for participants can even be made for special instruments (see inset).

III. Final Planning Phase (15-30 days out)

This phase is mostly administrative labor and can be fun to do in anticipation of the rally. Hopefully you have 90% of your registrations: now you can prepare rosters and name tags. I even prepared one for *Trudy*, David and Darlene Wasson’s magnificent concert band organ. Prepare a few blank kits for walk-on participants as they seem to appear at most events. You may consider pre-positioning band organs depending on the venue. This is a judgment call. Street organs seem to naturally sort themselves out.



Mayor Greg Hoffman (right) presenting a rally certificate.

and/or the Mayor. These add a personal touch of quality to your rally. I found it more efficient to publish the certificates then get them signed. Another judgment call based on the efficiency of those supporting you.

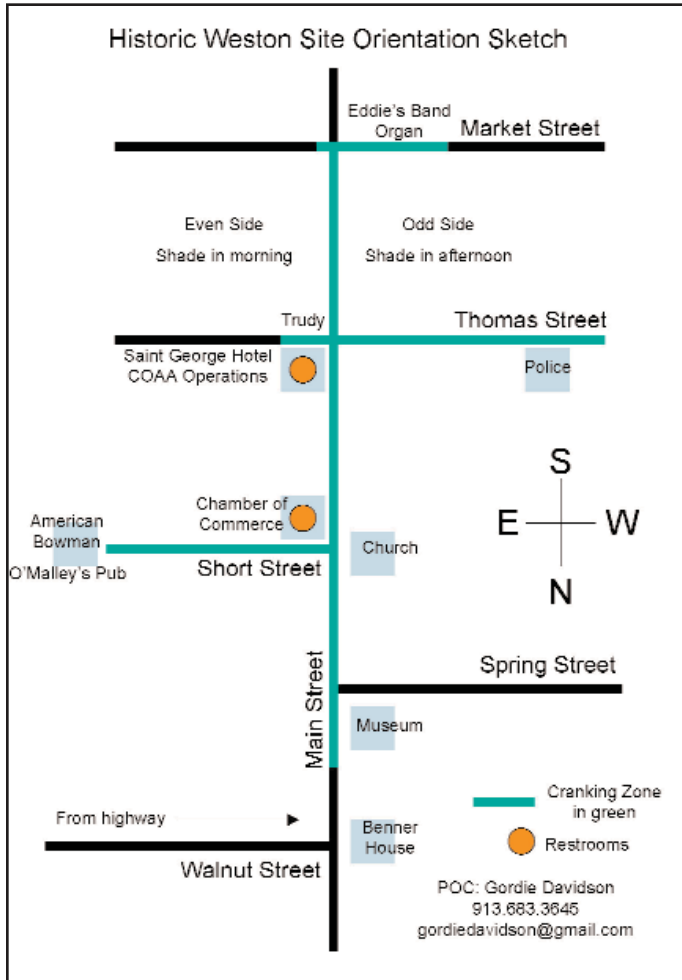
Finally, you might begin preparing your rally accounting ledger with all the figures fresh on your mind—this will make the final closeout easy.

IV. Execution Phase (the rally)

The easy part—”let the fun begin!” You’ve planned your work, now work your plan; tweak and trouble-shoot as needed during the weekend. Take lots of pictures and videos on the first day in particular as you may lose some folks on the second day. Do not forget a group shot as these images will come in handy for the annual *COAA Rally Edition* plus you’ll be able to post on your dedicated web site and/or YouTube.

Does rally organizing seem like a lot of work? You bet, but well worth the effort and super satisfying when all is done and the last musical note is sounded. The goal for any event is win—win—win! That is, **win** for attendees, **win** for COAA and **win** for community. The number of people managing an event is up to you, the host. I have found over the years that one guy gets it done in 30-minutes; two guys need 60-minutes; and three guys need 90-minutes. Organize to your personal comfort index and management style. Within the suggested guidance of this article, there will be periods of frustration and wheel spinning. That’s OK, just apply the wisdom of Marine Gunny Tom Highway: **Improvise, Adapt, and Overcome.**

This article has outlined an approach to rally organizing. There are others. I remain on call to anyone who desires to chat about planning and organizing a rally. Hopefully a reader or two has been inspired to make the leap and become a host; if so, go for it!



An orientation sketch with key locations for the rally.

Take the necessary time to double check most previous coordination activities, particularly lodging and the Saturday evening dinner. I prepared an orientation sketch or layout of the venue with key locations. The Chamber will likely provide you with welcome kits as needed. These are handy and sometimes include discount coupons.

Finally, coordinate Certificates of Achievement by name for all registered participants from the Chamber

Gordie Davidson is a retired army engineer officer and continues to serve as an army civilian at Fort Leavenworth. His interest in mechanical music began in 1981 with a 4-year assignment to the Berlin Brigade. He has organized rallies and written extensively on grinding for profit. His most recent COAA event was the Historic Weston Street Organ Muster. Readers can view pictures and videos of this event at www.westonmuster.com.

Roadmap To A Rally

Tim Wagner

*So, you wanna host an organ rally?
Whaddya mean no? Why not?
Ya like to attend rallies don't ya?
Well, they don't grow on trees ya know!*

Organ rallies are the public face of COAA and a primary reason for our formation. As a fundraiser to supplement our dues, which don't cover our publication and mailing expenses, they're also a necessity. Most importantly, though, they're fun! They provide an opportunity for us to share our passion, spread our enthusiasm and delight the public with the Happiest Music on Earth. They allow us an opportunity to gather, to travel and to explore the blessings of the U.S.A. You don't need to own an instrument to host a rally, just have an interest in organizing a fun event! With COAA members spread across this great country, there are endless possibilities for organ rally locations. All we need is some volunteers to step forward. Hosting an organ rally doesn't require the skills necessary to rebuild a valve chest, arrange music or paint a façade. A simple set of organizational and communication skills will do. Having hosted several rallies, I thought that writing an article may encourage some folks to host a rally. It's never too late, and you're never too old. While I have no personal aspiration to instruct someone else how to run an organ rally, I thought that sharing my thoughts and opinions on the subject may encourage and inform others to host a rally too. The more the merrier. Use or discard any information that you wish. There are, no doubt, as many ways to host a rally as there are to fall into this hobby!

Use your resources

Having attended several rallies before hosting my first, I had plenty of folks and examples to emulate. COAA folks are some of the friendliest bunch of people on the planet, so don't hesitate to take advantage of their knowledge and experience; they'll be happy to share it with you. While each venue may be unique and circumstances vary, the basic tenets of COAA rallies are the same, and a basic set of guidelines has been developed. Here they are:

- Saturday and Sunday event.
- Electric for organs (15 amps per organ trailer).
- Trailered organs should be on grass with possible shade (try to avoid blacktop sites).
- Crank organs should have shady areas to congregate.
- Motel within reasonable distance of rally site and able to offer a hospitality room for members.
- Map to motel and rally site.
- Rally host (the venue, not the COAA member) to provide Saturday night meal for all registrants (30 to 100+).
- Host (venue) to provide local advertising for rally weekend.

- These are the basic guidelines for getting a rally started. We encourage all COAA hosts to do what they think would be fun and interesting for our members.
- All rally agenda's are to be reviewed prior to the rally by the COAA Board.

These guidelines are occasionally revised and updated, and may be posted on our website, www.coaa.us/. Some rallies are loosely organized while others are highly structured, and while there are financial responsibilities that must be met, there is plenty of leeway in hosting a rally and putting your stamp on it. Variety is the spice of life! Interested in hosting a rally, but not ready to try it solo? Ask some of your COAA friends to co-host with you; there is strength in numbers. COAA member Angelo Rulli is our Rally Coordinator and is available to provide advice and assistance. Please contact Angelo to discuss your rally dates and locations.

Location, Location, Location

Whether you're buying a house or planning an organ rally, location is of prime consideration. COAA has hosted rallies in some ideal, beautiful locations with nary a soul in sight to enjoy the music we love to share. Don't let this happen to you! I judge the success of a rally by

the attendance and interest of the public. As an enthusiast who delights in the joy of band organ music (the “big-n-louds” are my favorite!), I don’t mind travelling to a rally where COAA members are the only audience. The music, friendship and conversation make the time pass all too quickly. However, as a COAA promoter, rally organizer and organ grinder, this is a missed opportunity. Our goal is to share “The Happiest Music on Earth” with the public. Thoughtful planning is the key to a well attended event. The best way to insure a good turnout is to plan a rally in conjunction with an event or location that will guarantee to draw a crowd. I’ll bet that the majority of Americans don’t know what a band organ is, so why would they go out of their way to attend a band organ rally? However, host a rally in conjunction with a favorite festival, and attendees will be delighted at the bonus sights and sounds of our colorful music machines.

And don’t think that the event sponsors/organizers won’t notice and invite us back. This has happened time and again. COAA rallies have had a positive financial impact on several communities. The first St. Joseph, Michigan rally was a resounding success attendance wise and financially for the community. Living History Farms in Iowa broke their single day attendance record during our rally last September. In 2008, our first rally at Olcott Beach, NY (on the shore of Lake Ontario) was held in conjunction with their annual “Old Olcott Days”. It was a resounding success, drawing 57 organs, 100+ members and lots of delighted visitors! At Saturday’s meal, the gratified hosts immediately invited us back the following year.

Historical and agricultural events are a natural. You want to have a rally in a setting where folks are there to stroll around, and see what there is to see. Astute event organizers should see an organ rally as an opportunity to enhance their event and raise its profile. Free admission locations are more likely to see increased attendance for any type of event, so keep this in mind when choosing a location for your rally. Historically appropriate settings can be an alluring location.

Amusement parks may seem a natural choice on the surface, but look a little deeper. Is it a free admission park that attracts a portion of visitors who are non-riders, and may take an interest in our instruments, or is it an expensive theme park where thrill seekers run from ride to ride? As a roller coaster and amusement park enthusiast I enjoy travelling and visiting parks as time and money allow. Upon visiting Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, TN I noticed how musically oriented the park is. They offer 30+ musical performances at indoor and outdoor venues all day throughout the park. The location is hilly, with attractive landscaping throughout and a full-sized steam train,

whose whistle is heard throughout the park. Heavenly! While not a viable location for trailered organs, I do think the park and its theme lend themselves well to a crank organ rally. While this is one of those expensive, gated attractions, my experience there has shown that a large percentage of their visitors are there to enjoy the musical entertainment. I have not yet contacted the park to gauge their interest in hosting a crank organ rally

In Shelburne, VT, the Shelburne Museum beckons visitors with 45 acres of Americana collections: paintings, folk art, carriages, buildings, railroad cars and a 220-foot steamboat! This is a gated attraction. However, it’s one where folks come to stroll and see what there is to see. They even have an Artizan band organ and carousel animals & paintings remaining from a Dentzel carousel. I’ve visited there specifically to assess its’ potential as a rally site. It is an ideal location, with enough room to absorb all the organs that we can throw at them. Their staff is interested, and their conservator has even attended a COAA rally to see what we’re all about. Only a matter of finance has prevented a rally so far.

Circumstance can play a role in finding rally locations. We’ve held four successful rallies at Knoebels as a result of a question. Several years ago, I asked Dick Knoebel if he’d bring one of their organs to a COAA rally. He replied, “Why not bring a rally here?” During a visit to Knoebels a couple years back, Dan Wilke and I ran into some friends from the roller coaster hobby that we hadn’t seen in many years. It turns out that one of them, Elysa, works at Living History Farms in Iowa. Upon speaking with her about the museum, I mentioned the COAA and our band organ rallies. The seed took root, and COAA held its first rally there last summer! Working at an annual film festival in Syracuse, NY, I happened to take a lunchtime walk along a nearby lake on a sunny March day. Onondaga Lake Park, a county-run facility, looked to make an ideal location for a rally, with a walking and jogging path, trees, lawn, benches and access road paralleling the lake for over a mile. Electric access was apparent.

There must be thousands of locations across our country that would make a great rally site. Though I haven’t yet visited Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, I think that would probably make a great rally location. Glen Echo Park, off the beltway near Washington, D.C. is another location waiting for a rally. A mostly defunct amusement park, the site retains the original trolley entrance, a vintage Dentzel carousel with a Wurlitzer 165 organ in a gorgeous vintage carousel building, and a dance hall that’s used for performing arts. The free admission park has many public events and draws a lot of people. The site is administered by the National Park Service and an Arts Council manages the

programming. I intend to contact them and promote a COAA rally. If a rally does occur, I'd like to get some folks from the Smithsonian Museum of American History there, and pitch the idea of an organ rally on the Mall in D.C. How's that for dreaming!

When considering the possibility of a rally, don't think you need to live near a venue to host a rally there. 90% of the work in organizing a rally occurs right in your own home. Most site work can be accomplished the day before a rally, though a location visit in advance is certainly advised. Potential rally locations are abundant, but hosts are few. Those of you who attend rallies know that it doesn't take a lot to make us happy; some shade, electricity, a meal and visitors. We provide the music and fun! Read on . . .

The Emerald City

An ideal host site will have a built-in audience, the capacity to advertise the event, an ability to feed us, overnight security for the instruments and large grounds, with shade trees and electricity, to accommodate multiple large, trailered organs and small cart-mounted crank organs. It's not unusual to have 15 to 20 large organs with as many or more crank organs at a rally. There needs to be enough real estate to place the organs apart to minimize organ "cross talk". Crank organs will be drowned out in the shadow of large instruments. As the THX film trailer states, "The audience is listening." Nothing will turn off visitors or enthusiasts more than a barrage of mechanical music coming from all directions. We don't need to give mechanical organ music a bad name. Organ placement is one of the most important elements of a rally, and I'll go further into detail later.

When communicating with a potential rally site, inform them of our requirements up front. If they can't provide a meal, they may be able to work with a local organization to provide a meal for us. In recent years, we've also been asking rally sites to cover the cost of the rally mailing, but this is negotiable. Some venues have been able to provide a secure, overnight location for cart-mounted crank organs. For one rally, a Boy Scout troop provided overnight security for the trailered organs. When organizing a rally, what may appear to be a challenge can be an opportunity in disguise. Working with more than one entity provides greater exposure for COAA. We realize that not every location is perfect. Favor a rally location that can only accommodate a limited number of trailered organs? No problem. Limit registration to X amount, on a first registered, first reserved basis. Workarounds can be found to overcome most obstacles.

Lodging

Once a rally location and date is approved by the COAA Board, book the hotel. If you're not familiar with the area ask the rally venue for recommendations, they often have relationships with one or more local hotels. Contacting COAA members from the area is another option, but nothing beats checking out places yourself. Remember, it's likely you'll be staying there too! Since members travel and lodge at their own expense, procure an affordable hotel, and negotiate a group rate. Secure a block of about 30 rooms. For a Saturday & Sunday rally, the group rate should be established for 3 to 4 nights. The hotel will provide you with a date by which the blocked rooms must be booked. Incorporate this into your planning and registration information. A hospitality room for members should be secured, if possible. This provides a great place to relax and socialize after a day of entertaining the masses. It may be the only opportunity for organ owners to socialize with fellow members. Large parking lots, for members with trailered organs, are a plus. Nearby restaurants are another plus. Keep in mind our camping members too, and see if there are campground facilities in the area. We do have several organ-toting members who travel by RV.

Timing is everything

Ideally, rally dates and hotel matters are taken care of nine months to a year in advance of a rally. For the biennial June rallies at Knoebels Amusement Resort in Pennsylvania, I begin contacting the park the preceding November to establish dates. To keep me organized and on track, I create a timeline list of tasks and dates. Here's an example from the 2010 Knoebels rally, scheduled for June 12th & 13th:

- November: Contact park to schedule rally dates and arrange picnic dinner.
- Mid-November: Deadline for January issue *Carousel Organ* first rally ad.
- Mid-February: Deadline for April issue *Carousel Organ* second rally ad.
- March: Contact park to arrange reserved parking for crank organ owners, request park maps/brochures for rally mailing, and obtain local/regional press contacts. Contact COAA Membership Chairman for mailing labels. Draft registration flyer, and assemble/purchase materials for mailing, including postage.
- April 10: Mail rally registration mailing.

- May 10: Hotel cut-off date. Contact park with estimated head count for meal.
- Mid-May: Email press releases.
- May 22: Registration deadline.
- Late May: Create name badges & registration envelopes, draft attendance sheet and rally agenda, schedule grind organ concerts and contact participants.
- June 2: Contact park with final head count for meal.
- June 7: Contact park security to touch base and park electrician to discuss electric specifics.
- June 11: at park to finalize details.
- June 12 & 13: Rally Time!
- Post rally: Complete Rally Accounting Sheet and submit to COAA Treasurer. Send “Thank You” correspondence to rally hosts (venue). Contact rally participants to thank them. Draft a write-up for the COAA *Rally Edition*.

Build It and They Will Come

Really? Not really. Just because you schedule a rally doesn't mean that folks are obliged to attend. You need to make it appealing! Granted, most members are happy to support a rally that fits within their budget and schedule. We appreciate the opportunity to share our enthusiasm and music with the public. Remember though, members are spending their finances, their time, and often traveling great distances to attend a rally. Make it worth their while. Let them know what else there is to see and do in the area. Your rally may provide the first opportunity for folks to travel to that region. Think about offering a group activity before or during the rally.

The day before the 2008 Olcott Beach, NY rally, host Dan Wilke coordinated a Canal Locks boat tour in the nearby town of Lockport, NY. About 30 of us gathered for this fun and relaxing opportunity, convening at a hot dog joint nearby for dinner afterwards, complete with an impromptu concert with *Trudy* in the parking lot. What a great way to kick off a weekend! At the Knoebels rallies, I pioneered the crank organ concerts, which are great fun for the participants and park guests. COAA band concerts with *Trudy* are a treat for members and the public alike at any rally. If Dave and Darlene Wasson are attending your rally, ask them about scheduling a session or two. The good folks at Lake Winnie provide ride passes for rally attendees, and the Knoebel family likewise provides complimentary ride tickets. Occasionally, nearby club members with collections offer open houses in conjunction

with a rally. This is a great opportunity to meet folks and socialize. One organ rally in Franklin, PA had the Saturday picnic dinner a couple towns away at a lovely homestead featuring a Wurlitzer theater pipe organ in the garage/music room. After a tasty picnic dinner outdoors, we assembled in the music room for a pipe organ concert. How cool is that? Our members will appreciate any extras you may think up to make a rally special.

Go Tell It On The Mountain

Once you have a great rally lined up, make sure and tell folks about it, beginning with COAA. Remember, we are the rally! Use the *Carousel Organ* journal, the COAA website (www.coaa.us) and the Yahoo Chat Group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CarouselOrganAssociation/>) to post your event as soon as you have information to share. The sooner the better; members need lead time to plan for travel and time off. We don't charge to advertise rally information in the journal. Hopefully, the organization or venue hosting the rally will have the capability to advertise the event in their locality. If they need photos which you don't have, let us know. There are plenty of COAA folks who can supply you with images. Contact Ron Bopp, myself or any of the folks whose names appear as contributors to the *Rally Edition of the Carousel Organ*.

You may be in a situation where you'll need to advertise the rally to the public. No problem! We have a template Press Release available, along with email pitches to send. Just customize them with the particulars of your rally. This is something I undertake for every Knoebels rally. In addition to contacting local media, I also contact media outlets within a 200 mile radius. To find these contacts, I use a reference website for newspapers. It's at <http://newslink.org/statnews.html> This is a very helpful site. You can search by state and find lots of newspaper websites.

Access the newspaper sites and navigate through them to find their contact info for event notices, travel & leisure editors, entertainment editors, etc. Most counties also have a travel & tourism bureau that will only be too happy to assist you in bringing visitors to their area. Take advantage of them! Advance publicity will benefit the rally far more than publicity during the event. For a copy of the Press Release template, contact Ted Guillaum or myself.

When organizing my first rally, I sought advice from the PR person where I work. She warned against mass emails for press releases. Email each person individually, even if there are several within one organization. Copy the press release into the body of the email; media outlets

won't open unsolicited attachments. However, don't just email them a press release; they get tons of them. Preface the press release with an email pitch, as follows:

(Subject line): *Historic Band Organ Rally*

(Text body - first paragraph):

Colorful music machines from around the world are gathering at one of the finest traditional amusement parks in North America. A century of self-playing mechanical pipe organs will serenade guests at Knoebels Amusement Resort in Elysburg, PA on June 12th and 13th. Among the organ grinders and brightly painted, historic fairground organs there will be several fascinating organs built from scratch by enthusiasts, offering great human interest. Enthusiastic experts for interviews are available to comment on this highly unique event.

(Press release below)

Paste Press Release here

Make sure to customize the email pitch and subject line for each media: newspaper, radio, television. The above example is written for newspaper. Highlight the visual aspect for TV—"Colorful Band Organ Rally" and the audio aspect for radio—"Musical Band Organ Rally". Indicate at the bottom of the press release that high-resolution images are available. Providing print media with everything they need enhances the likelihood of an article. Send out the press releases three to four weeks in advance of the rally, and include your contact info on the release. With any luck, you'll see your rally in print! Be prepared to promote the rally and COAA in the event you're contacted. Also, look through the attendance roster for your rally and think about a couple folks who may provide an enthusiastic interview during the rally, should the need arise.

The Devil is in the Details

- **Scheduling:** Saturday/Sunday rallies provide maximum exposure for our instruments. Members should be encouraged to present both full days. Time of year is important too. Rally locations in toasty parts of the country would best be held in spring or fall, when temperatures are more comfortable. Owners and

instruments need comfortable temperatures to look and sound their best!

- **Production:** Many hands make light work. Enlist your family and friends to help with the variety of tasks necessary to host a rally.
- **Registration Materials:** Until recently, members were notified of rallies via a mass mailing, containing all registration materials. Technology now offers cost effective, time saving alternatives. Last year, Ron Keisler had registration materials for the Lake Winnie rally sent along with a journal mailing. Gordie Davidson created a website to provide information and registration materials for the Weston, MO rally. I performed a mass mailing (the most time-consuming method) for the Knoebels rally. Whichever method appeals to you, make sure you include the following information: Rally location & dates, organ placement times, registration materials pick-up location and times, hotel / camping information (prices, contact info, deadline for booking), directions to rally & hotel / campground, meal info, if available and any other pertinent information.

Remember, this is also an opportunity to promote your rally, so take advantage of it! All this information should appear on a separate sheet from the Registration Form, which members will mail to the rally host. A generic Registration Form is available at the COAA website (www.coaa.us) or consult page 12 of this monograph. Use this as a template to customize for your rally. Make sure to include the rally registration deadline on your Registration Form, your name, address, telephone, email address and any information you'll need to assist you with planning. Once you have all your registration materials prepared, submit a copy to the COAA webmaster, for inclusion on the COAA website. Upon receipt of Registration Forms from members, it's a nice courtesy to contact them to let them know that you've received their materials. Name badges, an itinerary,

attendance roster, meal tickets, etc. should be prepared to hand out to members when they register at the rally site. One recommendation for name badges, keep the names large and readable. It's impolite to stare at someone's chest just to identify them! Attendees know when and where the rally is, so keep other info to a minimum.

- Financials: The \$15.00 per person charge for rallies is used to cover rally expenses and COAA publications. You will be reimbursed for rally expenses that you incur (materials, mailing, etc.), so save your receipts. Forward them to the Treasurer for reimbursement. COAA expects the host location to provide a Saturday meal for members at no charge. As mentioned earlier, we've also been asking host locations to pick up the cost for the rally mailing, if there is one. However, this is not a hard and fast rule, and should not be a deal breaker.
- Organ placement: This is such an important aspect of a rally, that it's best not to leave it up to chance. The very first COAA rally at Trolleyville, near Cleveland, Ohio had all the organs, large and small, located within the turnaround of the trolley line. All facing inward, the organs created quite a cacophony of sound! The more space between organs, the better. Remember that shade and electricity are essential for the large, trailered organs. Avoid having organs face each other. If you need to line them up, face them all in the same direction. This way, listeners will only hear the organ that they're in front of.

Organ owners prefer not to have direct sun on their instruments. Keep this in mind when placing trailered organs. Also

take into account the length of the trailer and which side the organ will face. Some trailers open on all four sides. Some, on two opposing sides. Some open on the back only. Contact the organ owner with any questions. They'll be glad to help! Work with the host location to determine safe load-in and load-out times for the trailered organs. Typically, Friday evening and Saturday morning are scheduled for load-in. Crank organ owners tend to find their own desired locations, but they too require shade. If shade is sparse, consider scheduling the rally at a time of year when the sun is less strong and temperatures are cooler. When hosting a rally in a location with many permanent obstacles (buildings, trees, attractions), the best way to plan organ placement is to visit the location in advance with trailer measurements and a tape measure in hand. This is important for electrical access too. A digital camera can help. Since I live 300+ miles from the Shelburne Museum in Vermont, I extensively photographed potential organ sites and nearby electrical outlets during my reconnaissance mission there.

- Security: The COAA expects the host location to provide overnight security for any organs remaining on location. If the venue cannot provide this, security arrangements should be made.
- Hospitality room: After a day of entertaining out in public, it's great to have an evening sanctuary where we can gather, relax and chew the fat. A well-stocked hospitality room is a plus. Arrange for someone to stop at a local supermarket to pick up snacks and beverages. Coolers and ice will keep liquids cool. Save receipts, you will be reimbursed.

Hosting a rally can be as involved as you wish to make it. As previously stated, most of the information here is my own opinion. My hope is to inform and inspire. COAA will benefit from geographic diversity. More rallies in new locations will keep the hobby fresh and exciting for all of us. "Step right up folks," and invite us to rally in your neck of the woods!