

Hosting a National Championship?

Take it to the next Level!

by Ray Seta

Preface:

The following topic of how to Plan, Promote, and Pull off a High Level Regatta has always been a subjective topic based on you, your people, and your desires of what you think a “Perfect Regatta” should be! Pulling off the Perfect Regatta is not Rocket Science, there is no Secret Recipe, no amount of Pixie dust will pull off the “Perfect Regatta”, and certainly not just reading some article from a Pirate in San Antonio. But what I have learned over the past 38 years of attending regattas and the last 18 years of organizing Regattas, is that the only thing that matters is that you have as much fun and pride organizing it as you would attending it! And the most important thing to be able to do, is look at your event as a Skipper from the outside! Think back on the time you attended a Regatta and you had a less than stellar time. The time and effort you will put forth is all about giving back to the Hobby that gives you so much throughout the years. Below you will read my ideas and thoughts that have worked for me in pulling off some of the best Regional, and National level Regattas for the Woodlawn Sailing Club, in San Antonio, TX. (At least that's what I've been told!)

My Reputation Made Easy:

Now I have been blessed with my home Club in San Antonio, known as the “Pirates of Woodlawn”, to be able to have a very deep talent pool with what is needed for a top-notch Regatta, even on a local level. I personally will put the pressure on (twist a few arms) to bring their best out of some one sometimes. I can proudly say I have not lost a friend yet, and I can depend on them every year! I am truly blessed to have great friends and members at WSC. Sometimes left out of the planning stages, but can be a very important part of this talent pool are other family members, the spouses and girlfriends. This is what will bring the club full circle with the full experience of the execution and especially the hospitality of a National's Regatta. This type of camaraderie within your club is created by the leadership and is something that needs to happen over the entire life of the club.

Finding Your Key People:

One thing that I must mention early on is that your personal Club's members will play the biggest role in the success of your event. This is why you must early on and over the year learn their strength and weaknesses and in how they can help you the best. Some members are better at helping with the “up-front” work and not necessarily the best worker bees during the regatta, because their mind wants to be on their own racing performance. Then on the other hand you will have some members that feel that a high

level competition event, like a National Championship, is not for them at this time and they may be better suited for work duty throughout the weekend for you. As the Regatta Organizer, your job early on will be to recognize these type of characteristics in your members and best utilize them for the best results and outcome of their respective duty. One great source of key people for a regatta may be with in your own club members that don't necessarily sail this Class of boat being raced that weekend. Most Clubs have multiple Classes and will have some folks that are available when asked. The key here is to ask and not assume they don't want to be involved based on the Class of boat they sail. You would be surprised how many times I have heard “but they never asked us or me to help!” On the same note there is nothing wrong with asking other Club's members from with in your Region to maybe come spend the weekend with your Club and help also.

Time to Commit:

One thing that I had learned with my years of working with the National Governing bodies, of the US Olympic Committees and US Sailing was that when it came to personnel and duties is this little cliché.....One person – one job! Give one person one job and encourage/help him do it 100%. Give him two jobs and chances are good he will do each one only 50%. This is just a very broad statement and not to be taken to literal, but can be taken with a bit of seriousness also. Ask and encourage each of your Club members that this Regatta being planned is a reflection of their Club and encourage each to want to perform their duties to the best they can. With your approval and allocation of duties always consider their time that they can commit and how much they will want to commit prior or during the event. This can sometimes be a sensitive and most difficult decision when some one wants to help in a certain duty but history with prior events dictate that his services may be better served doing something else.

First – The Commitment of Giving Back:

Here is the first tip I may have for a Regatta Organizer in his planning of personnel duties. Give it some thought of how much you want to “Step-it-up” a level with this Regatta. Do you want your Class Nationals to feel like a typical “Green” Chevron event, or do you want Skippers to go home feeling like they just attended something special....a prestigious “Gold” Chevron event? No Traveling Skippers want to travel across the country and leave feeling he just a attended a weekend local regatta. The goal should be to make Skipper feel that all the work was done for him, and he just attended something special. If it is a National Championship for example, “stepping it up” a level may mean that you as an organizer may have to set the Radio down yourself and not sail this event. This is a personal choice, but from my experience of traveling to many National Championships, I have seen too many regatta suffer because the only person who had all the answers, the keys, the phone # for contacts, extra anchors and lines, the batteries the CD player, the name of the caterer, or even the money to pay the pizza guy for lunch

was busy racing his heat and nobody wanted to disturb him. Most regatta delays or usually for this reason because you as an organizer is simply just to overwhelmed that morning with everything, not to mention your own personal routine of prepping for an opening heat race. Sometimes you may have to set the example of not racing this event for the good of the event!!! Again this is a personal choice that can have huge implications, good and bad, that are unseen by you, but seen and felt by the Skippers.

Personal Contact is Everything:

One of the best advice I can give to any Regatta Organizer is how important it is to actual go to meet people “face-to-face”, not an e-mail or phone call. Bring it down to a personal level, make a deal, shake their hand, and leave each other with that personal touch. To many deals are not to there best outcome when performed through a phone call or an e-mail with a Manager or Vendor. You will be surprised how many details and better your deal can be made in person. Always end an initial meeting with an invite to be a part of the event and a follow-up e-mail Thanking him for the meeting. Always talk with a bigger goal/picture in mind, like a long term relationship with this Hotel for future Regattas for example. Make the other person feel they are actually part of the Regatta. Look at it this way..... Everyone is a potential Sponsor with resources to contribute in some way!

Second - Let's Break it Down:

When it comes to a Nationals type regatta, every aspect of the event over a few days can be broken down into two categories: **Sport** or **Non-Sport**. Generally speaking this means that everything that has to do with the actual racing itself would be considered “**Sport**”, and everything else would be considered “**Non-Sport**”. Here are some example below **but not limited too**. Remembering that each line item can almost be considered a separate person or committee if your labor pool is deep enough. Many of these duties/responsibility can be performed by your Club's members that are top skippers that are racing because most of the duties will be performed before the Regatta even starts. Every skipper in your own Club should help pull some weight for their Club's event no matter how minor the duties are to help free your time. Again most folks want to help, they just need to be asked. Be creative with your thoughts when it comes to your Club's members and what they can contribute.

SPORT:

- Notice of Race – Up to Six(6) Month prior to event.
- Registration/Class Measurement/Check-in of skippers
- Racing – RD and assistants, including rescue boat personnel
- Scoring – Computer data input person and assistant
- Racing equipment – Marks, Anchors, CD player(w/fresh batteries)
- After Regatta actions – Scores posted via Internet or to Class Secretary

NON-SPORT:

- Initial Bid for event and approval by Class.
- Club Treasurer – Works very close w/Registration
- Venue/Date secure person – Permits and Insurance needs
- Venue “Look” - Flags and/or Sponsors Banners
- Skipper's Trophies and/or Commemorative items
- Hotel Accommodation – Group Rate and Liaison person.
- All Social events – Friday/Saturday/Sunday event
- Food committee – Catering and/or RSVP for on or off site dining.
- Registration committee – Including giveaways (shirts, hats, lanyards...)
- Internet Person – posting before/during/after event.
- Raffle Committee – acquiring Raffle prizes all year prior to event
- Promotion/Hype person – Monthly/Weekly info to Skippers via internet.
- Local Media/Photo Contact Person – After event report for “Model Yachting”
- After Action Reports – Thank You letters to Sponsors and help!
- And so on.....

Third - Monthly Timeline:

In this next section I will attempt to sketch out a typical 12 month Timeline that might be used to help spread out the planning to a more manageable level. This Timeline can be highly flexible and tuned to your own situation. Most Class Secretaries (CS) would love to have the problem of multiple Club's bidding for an event much less having them do so a year in advance. I believe all CS would also just like to be able to announce next year's “Gold” Chevron National Class Championship at the conclusion of the current's year's event. If this could be done in your case, then I think it might be safe to assume you might have at least Ten(10) months to plan your event. If so, then 10 months is ample time to plan and expand some great ideas. But if you wait till the last two months to pull off a memorable event, chances are you have an event that will show you planned it in the last two months. One cliché I learned in planning Special Events was....”Inch by Inch it's a sinch”- “Yard by yard it's hard!”. Having goals every month, every week, and everyday will assure that it won't pile up on you in the last two weeks.

10-12 Months out:

- Commitment/ Approval from Class (CS)
- Possible Dates and Venue secured
- Budget reviewed, based on Entrant's Fee
- Consider a Charity - (Great source of Resources and Manpower from the Charity organization)

- Consider a Charity – (Great way to get money donated for expenses!)
- Consider Sponsorship from Venders -(Great source of money and resources!)

10 Months out:

- Secure Insurance Policies – (AMYA Pond Insurance)
- Secure and check for any date conflict at Venue site.
- Find “Model Yachting's”(MY) publications deadlines dates for announcement!
- Promotion-Release dates of event to Class Skippers via Class Site
- Consider Hotel Accommodation – Acquire “Group Rate” if possible.
- Consider Raffle for event – Little output/high revenue return! 100% Profit

8-6 Months out:

- Secure Hotel “Group Rate” based on projected “out-of-towners”.
- Create all your needed Committee heads
- Release Raffle letters to possible donators – (Mention Charity if applies!)
- MY ad for Nationals Championship approved by Class Secretary and sent off.
- Start creating Notice of Race (NOR) with solid information.
- Start and/or release Club's website page for event for promotion of event.
- Register Event with AMYA Regatta Registration page for public release and “Gold” Chevrons

6 Months out:

- Start Monthly Committee Meetings
- Release NOR w/ secured Hotel Info and Website
- Start Monthly Promos on Class Forum site – Give only solid information!
- Consider Interested Skippers E-Mail address list for direct feedback.
- Research Food options – (Catered/non-Catered, Cook on/off site)
- Research Venue Infrastructure – (Shade, Electricity, Bathrooms, Parking....)
- Regatta Registration process- Info needed from skippers (Shirts, meals, special needs request, Raffle tickets....)
- Continue promos on Class Forums

4 Months out:

- Submit Sailing Instructions to CS for approval.
- Start Regatta Give-away item design process – (ie...t-shirt, hats, bags.....)
- Confirm again w/Hotel Manager all dates/rates/reservation process and any special codes as needed.
- Confirm with Venue Owners dates to avoid a double booking with other event.
- Acquire all needed Permits if needed for Venue/Venue owner.
- Start “On-Line” Registration process with directions for mailing fees to Club Treasure if required.

- Discuss and confirm dates with caterer and location of any off-site dining.
- Continue promos on Class Forums

3 Months out:

- Start updating Website with Pre-Registered Skippers – this starts the real build-up to the event! - Skipper's appreciate this one!
- Post to website after approval by CS the Sailing Instructions, Maps, Directions, GPS Coordinates, and General info about City and Airport.
- Nail down Skippers Trophy designs, cost, and process to acquire.
- Discuss with Printer/Suppliers of Give-aways! - ask about quantity discounts!
- Start Collecting Skippers Bags contents.
- Start compiling Skippers AMYA #'s List for approval by AMYA Membership Secretary and/or Class Secretary
- Continue promos on Class Forum

2 Months out:

- Finalize Trophy design – Order or Start manufacturing in house.
- Review Budget – adjust if needed!
- Confirm with Hotel Manager on dates and booking.
- Race Directors needs are taken care of – Forms, Marks, Rescue boat, scoring needs.....
- Personally invite to “UN-decided” unregistered Skippers to attend – this works, you'll be surprised!
- Continue updating Skipper's list on website or Forums
- Continue Promotions on Class Forum

1 Month out:

- Final Committee head meeting to confirm all duties and responsibilities.
- Final order for Printer/Suppliers/Vendors – Confirm delivery dates with each!...to include also Restrooms, Tents, Barricades/Cones for Parking.
- Confirm Caterer on dates and quantities
- Check with Hotel Management about extension (if needed) for rooms, booking or Group Rates Requirements
- Final Venue Check for any changes.
- Confirm Skippers AMYA #'s with Class and AMYA Membership Secretary.
- Trophies and AMYA Chevrons completed and stored
- Finalize Signage if needed.
- Update Skippers list on website or forums
- Continue Promos on Class Forum

1 Week out:

- Confirm all supplies stored and arranged for delivery to Venue – Water, RD

- Equipment, Ice, Chairs & Tables, Marker boards.....)
- Plan weeks Pick-up an/or delivery of equipment to Venue and by who.
 - Final Check with Hotel Manager if needed – Any arrangements for Friday evening reception at hotel.
 - Arrange with Race director about Rescue boat and delivery to Venue

Regatta Day:

- Arrive early, direct set-up, ice down water/drinks. Pray for wind!
- All Batteries charged and/or new – both equipment and you personally!
- Stay on time!...Have fun!

After Regatta:

- Send Results to Skipper with Thank You via e-mail!
- Send Class Results and Report within a week!
- Write-up any short story/results report for the AMYA Bulletin and/or Model Yachting Magazine
- After Action Report with Financial Report to Club

If you can image, this is just a tip of the iceberg when it actually comes to doing a time line schedule. I could not possible list everything in a perfect order or feasibility. As I have written, this may seem a bit overwhelming and over the top, but please keep in mind that most of this is basically common sense and just needs to be done at a steady pace. So please take the above with some flexibility to fit your personal style, expectations, and Regatta outcome. My goal as a Regatta Organizer is to try to give the Skippers the whole Regatta experience. Knowing that yes, the racing maybe the most important part of the trip to a National Championship, but it's the journey to the end results that will be remembered by the Skippers traveling from out-of -town. Don't make your Nationals just a regatta , make it an event to remember! Just by having every Skipper bring a State Flag to hang will make him feel more involved for example. It really does not take a lot more effort to pull off a special memorable event, just a little bit of imagination. Sometimes just 10% more effort in some area can result in a 100% return!

Thank You ! - Never Forget the Thank You's!

One of the most important things to also remember, is just because the Regatta is over on Sunday the work is still not done. Always, always, always follow up after a Regatta with all your Vendors/Suppliers/Hotels a personal letter, phone call or just a visit to say “Thank You” for everything they did. You would be surprised how far this will go for next years Annual Regatta. A free T-shirt, Hat, and a personal hand shake to say Thanks will go a long way in preserving a relationship for next years regular Regatta.

There is a saying I learned when I was with the Olympic Committee's, with respects to your Volunteers.....”The Athletes are the Stars, but the Volunteer's earn their

Stripes!” Never forget about the Wives, Girlfriend, Family , and Co-workers that helped with the event. Consider having an after event social with all your Committee heads within weeks of the event. It's a great time to discuss better ideas and then laugh with your war stories of the event. And remember it's never too early to start planning the next one!!!

Final Tack!

In closing let me convey these final bits of advice:

- Be **Pro-active** in your planning and execution of the event!
- Always **Start on time** and keep to the NOR schedule and posting!
- Put **Yourself** in the Skippers place when planning, deciding, and executing!
- Be **Creative, Informative, and Accurate** with all information prior to event!
- Always have a **Back-up plan** for people, equipment, and schedules!
- Hope for the best – **Plan** for the worst!....Bribe Mother Nature!
- **Promote and Advertise** your event when ever possible! Locally also!
- **Patronize** and plug your Sponsors (or Charities) at every opportunity!
- Say **Thank You, Thank You, Thank You!**
- **Thank** your wife again!

Submitted by Ray Seta

“Pirates of Woodlawn”- Woodlawn Sailing Club – AMYA #112 - San Antonio, Tx
Proud Host of the 2003, 2008, and future 2013 Victoria National Championship