

I. INTRODUCTION

The Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) is a dynamic organization. It is dynamic because, like any organization, it experiences turnover in staff and in its volunteers. That fact, combined with the fact that, as an organization as a whole, it is growing, means there will always be a need to train both staff and volunteers. In order that such training is consistent, there is a need for a basic “training manual”. This document is intended to fill that need. However, to be successful it must be a “living” document that is constantly being updated by both RGS staff and volunteers.

There is, however, another need for a manual such as this. Good communication can help assure that we are successful in fulfilling RGS’ *Mission*:

Established in 1961, the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) is the one international wildlife conservation organization dedicated to promoting conditions suitable for ruffed grouse, American woodcock and related wildlife to sustain our sport hunting tradition and outdoor heritage.

The lack of it can prevent RGS from achieving its full potential. Therefore this effort at improving that communication should help us be successful – and we all know that we cannot afford to fail in achieving our *Mission*.

By improving communication within the organization, RGS will be able to spend more time focusing on that mission because we will all be on the same “page”. By having a clear understanding up-front of what is expected of a Regional Director, chapter volunteers and of RGS National, there should be fewer questions later on. It should be clear to all after reading this manual that without RGS National there would be no RGS – and without our volunteers there would be no RGS National. The Regional Directors serve as the “bridge” between the two. It is not a matter of “them versus us”, but rather a matter of “we” - for it is “we” that share a passion for the King of Game Birds and his sidekick, the timberdoodle. Let us work together to speak strongly on their behalf for, as you well know, they cannot speak for themselves.

WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE OUR BANQUETS

Mike Zagata & Mark Fouts

When Sam Pursglove was RGS’ Executive Director, he, like any leader, had his admirers and his detractors. However, most would agree that his strength was his ability to run a banquet and to maximize the revenue from an event. Sam has been gone for some time now and, over the years, for a number of reasons overall banquet revenue began to drop. Much of what he taught us has either been lost or the banquet environment has changed enough so that new ideas and approaches are needed.

However, when suggestions for change to the way a banquet is run are made to a committee the response is often “What’s wrong with the way we do it” or “If it ain’t broke don’t fix it”. That is a natural reaction, but let’s approach it another way. Tiger Woods and John Force are both champions in their respective sports. Tiger, who may have the best swing in golf, is constantly looking to improve his swing. John Force, a NHRA “funny car” champion several times over, is constantly seeking to improve his car. Why do they do that – because if they don’t the competition will pass them. Change is their ally, not their enemy. The same applies to our banquets. There is nothing wrong with the way they are being run, but they can be improved upon. By constantly seeking to improve, RGS will be in a better position to fulfill its mission and to fund local and statewide projects.

How do we work together to make that happen? First, we might want to consider identifying our strengths and then using them to our advantage. One of our strengths is the local knowledge possessed by each committee. How do we put that knowledge to work for us? One way is to have the committee sit down with the *Membership Directory* for the local Chamber-of-Commerce well in advance of their banquet and identify who on the committee does business with the businesses listed in the directory. Once that is done, those committee members might approach the businesses where they do business or have contacts and invite them to become a sponsor or make a donation. Before the meeting with a potential sponsor, it would be helpful to think about what a sponsor gets in return. For example, individuals who become banquet sponsors get a print or one or more tickets to participate in the national sponsor drawing for about \$30,000 in merchandise, a shoulder patch and pin, and the chance to win a gun at the banquet. A business owner may be interested in these things, but may be more interested in how becoming a banquet sponsor will help his/her business. At many events they are recognized with placards at the banquet and a “thank you” from the podium. They are also listed in the banquet program.

Why is it so important to have sponsors? The answer is really quite revealing. Consider a banquet for 100 people who spend an average of \$85 each (actually below our average). The revenue from that event, with zero sponsors, will be \$8,500. If we take that same event and simply meet the “Rule of One-Third” where one-third of the 100 attendees are \$250 sponsors and each person still spends just \$85 the net revenue would double to about \$17,000. This would be huge for our smaller banquets who are struggling to cover their costs. **They would actually have made money before they opened the doors to the banquet.**

This same principle applies to donated merchandise. When approaching people and businesses for sponsorships you might also ask if they are willing to donate merchandise or other things that can be sold at your event. It is very easy to make money on items where we have no cost. However, there is a danger in pricing that merchandise too far below what it would sell for because doing so might create a “bargain hunter” atmosphere and actually reduce your overall net from other items.

Another way to put that local knowledge to work is to ask the committee members to network with the people in their social circle to spread the word about RGS as that could lead to new Life Sponsors. If a chapter recruits a new life sponsor, that chapter gets to keep \$2,500 for statewide projects. They can also help spread the word about the the event, and to sell banquet tickets and/or raffle tickets if you have a raffle prior to your event. Based upon years of information for thousands of banquets we have learned that **flyers and other devices don’t sell tickets – people do**. Your committee members are the key to the success of your effort to sell tickets. The flyers, posters, radio announcements and placemats serve to alert and remind people about your event, but a phone call or conversation is what sells tickets. It is important that when people are asked to serve on a committee they understand what is expected of them – and selling tickets and working at the banquet are two things that are expected.

What is the role of your Regional Director (RD) in the success of your banquet? In the new business model adopted by the Board at its Oct. 2009 meeting, the RDs will play a greater role in helping the committees have an even more successful event by helping them plan for and manage their event, find and develop volunteers, communicating with them on issues that affect them, explaining the importance of sponsors and donations and how to go about getting them,

working with headquarters staff on mailings, e-mails and merchandise and the importance of saying “thank you”.

An RD’s job is to act as a communications bridge between RGS National and your chapter and to help you succeed with your banquet and other events. They are trained to do this, and they do it about 20 times a year with banquets and numerous times with shoots and hunts. Because your RD handles several banquets a year, he or she develops an awareness of what is working and what isn’t and what merchandise is selling and what isn’t. The RDs also meet as a group to discuss those same topics. Therefore, when he or she arrives to help you they are in a position to do that. Inviting your RD to share that information with you well in advance of your meeting will help when ordering your banquet package, guns and other merchandise. He or she will help with the purchase of guns by getting you a net price from RGS National as the goal is to buy as low as you can and sell as high as you can. Doing otherwise leaves money “on the table” and that affects the success of your event. Your RD will go over your accounting form following your event and explain where you did well and where there was room for improvement and then explain how to make that improvement during your next event.

Your RD can help with the way you market or sell your merchandise at your banquet. It is very important that the “right” items be placed on the write-in auction, in raffles, number-boards and the live auction. For example, an item that costs RGS \$500 is not likely to receive the maximum return if it is placed in the write-in or silent auction. People are looking for a bargain. If you start the item at \$500 you might not even get a bid. However, if you put, for example, the item on a 64-square number board with a sign explaining that it retails for \$1,500 and then sell \$20 chances you have the potential to generate \$1,280 or net revenue of \$780. If all the chances don’t sell at the table take the item and a ticket lady and sell them on the floor while people are eating. **The results will amaze you.** If, for some reason, you still don’t sell enough tickets to cover the cost of the item take the money from the sold tickets and do a 50-50 raffle where half the money goes to the lucky ticket holder and half to your banquet.

Your RD can also help you manage the banquet by helping coax people to your silent auction, serve as your MC and/or auctioneer and meet with potential Life Sponsors or Centurion members. By expecting your RD to man the Money Table you are short-changing yourself. That is a job for one or more volunteers who can readily be trained by your RD or by another person from RGS National (see following section on “Managing the Money Table”).

What role does RGS National play in assisting the committees? That question is certainly valid, and RGS National has previously not done a good job of explaining what goes on “behind the scenes” to assist the chapters. Details are found under FIRST ORGANIZATIONAL BANQUET COMMITTEE MEETING OUTLINE - section 2. That list should help answer that question, but it is far from complete.

Historically, RGS’ basic fund-raising tool has been the banquets. Each chapter is expected to hold a fund-raising banquet and, by policy, to send the net proceeds to RGS National. When funds were available, RGS National returned a portion of those funds for local projects. However, not all banquets raise enough money to cover the full cost of holding the event. That fact, combined with the need to fund our RDs, biologists and other staff reduced the amount left for local projects. In recognition of this situation, during 2006 a program was started that enables chapters that hold a successful banquet to hold additional fund-raisers (raffles, shoots/hunts, dog-training clinics, etc.) and keep up to \$2,500 of the proceeds from each such

event for local projects (habitat enhancement, youth shoot/hunt, “Under Broken Wings”, etc.) in concert with their Regional Biologist and/or RD. For a more complete list see ADDITIONAL FUND-RAISING OPPORTUNITIES. By taking advantage of this new opportunity chapters will be able to fund local projects without impacting the programs funded by RGS National and create local enthusiasm for RGS and what it does. This should result in increased banquet attendance.

In recognition of the need to grow RGS and to provide more funding to chapters for statewide habitat projects, your Board made some history-making decisions at its October, 2009 meeting in Grand Rapids, MN. They opted to make fundamental changes in the way RGS goes about its business. To accomplish that, RGS must move beyond its reliance on banquets as its primary source of revenue and build an improved network of volunteers and supporters. With that in mind, a comprehensive new business plan was discussed and adopted at the October, 2009 Board meeting. When fully implemented, that plan will fund our mission and enable RGS to allocate revenue to the chapters for statewide habitat projects. Money for these statewide projects will be held by RGS in a Drummer Fund for each state until viable projects for funding are identified.

APPROACH: The new Business Plan must lead to an overall increase in net revenue by expanding the network of people and organizations that can be mobilized to achieve the mission of RGS – to create young forest habitat to benefit all wildlife, both hunted and non-hunted, and secure our sport-hunting tradition. The new plan will consist of:

- Continued reliance on our tremendous cadre of volunteers to help with banquets and identify potential Life Sponsors and other donors. Traditional banquets and events that are tied to a chapter or group of volunteers who expect to retain some of the banquet/event proceeds to fund projects will continue. Eligible chapters will receive a portion of the revenue their event generates – the higher the net the more they will retain – to fund statewide or *Drummer Fund* projects.

In the new model, the RDs will play a greater role in helping the committees have an even more successful event by helping them plan for and manage their event, find and develop volunteers, communicating with them on issues that affect them, explaining the importance of sponsors and donations and how to go about getting them, working with headquarters staff on mailings and e-mails and the importance of saying “thank you”.

- Develop new contacts capable of helping the Society achieve its mission. New dinners, like the New York City dinner, that are strictly fund-raising events and are not necessarily tied to a chapter will be developed.
- Increased personal commitment by the Board. “Dine with a Sportsman” dinners will be hosted by Board members at their home or other venue. Board members and RDs will work together to identify individuals to invite to attend a small dinner party with the specific purpose of raising funds for RGS.
- Increased outreach by the RDs. RDs will develop more events like the Addieville or West Branch Angler Shoot or the Pawling Mt. Hunt where individuals will be invited to enjoy the event and support RGS. This option differs from the “Dine with a Sportsman” model because it may or may not involve a meal.
- Cocktail parties or social gatherings with attendees treated to a no-pressure evening, either with or without a Board member present, complete with an educational power point presentation highlighting project accomplishments. This approach brings the

biologists and President into the picture as they are equipped to discuss the mission and the need for young forests.

- Work with government bodies and corporations to accomplish the RGS mission and generate revenue. For example, RGS is renting one of its tree-removal machines on the Wayne National Forest to remove exotic species and create early succession. RGS is now working with two large corporations to assist them with revegetation of a right-of-way and in managing their forest land-holdings to create early succession. This is a relatively new endeavor for RGS and has a significant upside for both revenue and achieving the society's mission.

For this plan to be successful, everyone involved will need to be committed to making it work. That list includes our volunteers, present and past supporters, the field and HQ staff and the Board. The RDs are a vital link in the communication that needs to take place between RGS and its volunteers. They will play a key role in explaining some of the changes, including:

- The new *Family/ Household Membership* for \$40. This membership will enable two parents and their children to attend an event and fulfill the requirement that all attendees be members. It will not, however, cover the cost of their meals. **It is very important that the person collecting the tickets at the event checks to see that the information about the members in the household is filled in (names, address, phone number, e-mail address) so that RGS can send them their RGS magazines and membership materials.**
- All *guests* of sponsors will automatically become members (no extra charge to the sponsor or guest). **It is very important that the person collecting the tickets at the event checks to see that the information about the members is filled in (names, address, phone number, e-mail address) so that RGS can send them their RGS magazines and membership materials.**
- How the amount of banquet revenue a chapter gets to keep for its statewide *Drummer Fund* from its event is determined? RGS will use a Sliding Scale formula:
 - Net Revenue = or > \$50,000: 20% of their net would go to the state *Drummer Fund*
 - Net Revenue \$20,000 up to \$49,999: 15% of their net would go to the state *Drummer Fund*
 - Net Revenue \$7,001 up to \$19,999: 10% of their net would go to the state *Drummer Fund*
 - Net Revenue <= \$7,000 (the approximate amount needed to cover RGS' costs to support a banquet): chapter receives no money for the state's *Drummer Fund*, but is eligible to receive \$2,500 by recruiting a new Life Sponsor.
- When will the money raised at a banquet for the *Drummer Fund* be spent? RGS can not afford to spend money that its not earned. Thus it will budget money for statewide or *Drummer Fund* projects in one year but not spend it until the following year. By doing that RGS will know if the banquets actually produced the money that was budgeted before spending it.
- How projects to be funded via the *Drummer Fund* will be determined? In 2007, RGS asked its biologists to establish a mechanism for evaluating projects suitable for funding. That mechanism is in place and will be used to rank projects submitted for funding.
- How will the money retained by RGS for the chapters be accounted for? Each chapter will have its own account at RGS and may, at any time, ask for an accounting of its funds.

- How will revenue from Life Sponsors recruited by a chapter be shared? A chapter will be credited \$2,500 for each Life sponsor it recruits and that money will go into their state's *Drummer Fund*.
- How can chapters continue raising money for local projects? In 2007 RGS established a mechanism for chapters to raise money for local projects by having raffles and shoots following a successful banquet. A chapter electing to do that may keep up to \$2,500 from each raffle item. Thus, if the chapter had six items in a raffle they could keep up to \$15,000 for local projects.

Full implementation of this plan over the next few years is critical to RGS' mission. The Board recognizes the chapters' desire to fund projects that are visible and lead to improved habitat for not only grouse and woodcock but for all wildlife that depend upon the early stage of forest succession. As a volunteer for RGS you are in a unique position to help us achieve our mission and thus enjoy the fruits of your labors now and, at the same time, leave something for future generations.