

## ***Field Trip to Largo Cultural Center, June 9***

Present: Nancy Stearns, Kathy Sutton, Tom Aderhold, Jon Dyer, Evelyn Bless

Notes: Evelyn

Met 9:15 a.m. Kathy drove and provided introduction to Largo personnel. Arrived Largo Cultural Center 10:00 a.m. Tour and discussion with Ann (Executive Director) and Rob (Artistic Director). Points observed/ discussed:

**They are a performing arts center and rental place.** Largo Cultural Center is performances and rentals. The Largo Community Center, another building on Alt. Keene Ave., handles classes, other types of performances, meetings, etc.

Largo Cultural Center is owned by the City of Largo and is under Parks dept. Fifteen years old. They still deal with the public not knowing they exist, every day. Their mission is to serve “the people of Florida.”

The theatre has stadium seating for 333 people, retracts to the back wall for table seating. They seat 400 and are currently modifying the stage to allow more seats (and therefore revenue). They have a large, fully equipped theatre with sophisticated lighting and sound controls on side and in back.

There is also one large rental room and an additional old building “feed store” is used for summer kids camp, rentals and rehearsals.

**Lobby visual appeal.** Center lobby is cave-like but you see striking founders’ plaque, an exhibit of “stars” (literally stars with names on it of donors: the size star designates size of gift), a series of large, eye-catching posters advertising current shows, and a large-print listing of upcoming shows. The posters and list of shows are compelling and something we lack. No art, but there is a row of donated, unusual guitars owned and signed by famous people and bands on one wall. The guitars tie in to the performance theme and give a hand-crafted feel to it. They are also part of the silent auction at the Gala every year.

**Restrooms marketing touch.** In addition to posters above the restroom mirrors, inside each stall door is a posted list of coming events. Great idea.

**Liquor license.** They have full liquor license: serve beer, wine and limited mixed drinks at every event. Prices are posted. Volunteers staff the liquor booth. It makes a big difference in the draw and adds to their revenue.

They participated in a “**Culture Builds Florida Communities**” workshop put on by Florida League of Cities—it was attended by city mayors of Sarasota, Dunedin and other cities’ leaders; they spoke of what a difference culture makes to the sense of community and revenue draw of these cities. Ann said the support from local community leaders is huge and makes a big difference in getting the word out.

- We should make contact with this group and see if more workshops are being held. President of Florida League of Cities is Joy Cooper, Mayor of Hallandale Beach. Call her for more information. Website: [www.flcities.com](http://www.flcities.com).

**Arts in education:** Which programs are deemed most effective in terms of arts education enhancing cognitive development and learning for all subjects? Largo has programs but Rob didn't know much about actual standards or most effective classes. For further information:

- We need to research Sunshine State Standards.
- Other sources of information on programs and classes are Largo's team and our Play'N Around Traveling Children's Theatre. The programs at Largo are presented by STAGES productions (Rick and Terri), who are very familiar with the scholastic standards for presenting to schools because they tour the state doing productions for schools. Play' N Around Theatre was started by a couple that used to work for/with Rick & Terri.

**Revenue:** They receive yearly stipend from City of Largo. Their "recovery" rate, which is the percentage of support monies from the City of Largo that they return, is 69%, which is "phenomenal," says Ann. Most nonprofits, according to Ann, optimally return 42-58%. They are "in the red" because they are not financially self-supporting, but actually they are very successful financially. It may be unrealistic to expect to be completely financially independent.

They do not sell 'memberships.'

**Marketing budget** is 65K. They are careful how they spend it. Internet, direct email and mail, advertising, etc. They try to market/spend strategically. E.g.:

- They have a *yearly* program booklet that they mail out—if a program gets a lot of advance subscriptions, and many do, they limit the advertising on it.
- The ticket tracking system tells them how many tickets have been sold, demographics, so as the performance date approaches, they can tailor market strategies.
- They will try to bargain down marketing venues—you can often get a deal.
- They also work out ticket barter deals with the Tampa Tribune—when they have unsold seats, they give the Tribune the tickets in exchange for ad space.
- They send their entertainers to the local TV stations (Ch 10) and radio.

**Strategic use of resources.** They take advantage of their location and City of Largo resources.

- A City employee does their marketing layout and graphic design.
- They are in Largo Central Park, so they hang out at park activities to promote themselves. They go over to the Largo train and to festivals and hand out fans—you can't get a fan unless you give them your email, so in this way they expand their mailing list. Email addressees are key.
- Strategic decisions on when to schedule. They time shows to be after the festivals/kids events, so they can go over and say, "Hey, come to the show afterward!" this has made a huge difference.
- Snowbirds are an essential part of their audience.
- They draw from all over Pinellas and (Hillsborough) and when they have nationally known acts, get people from all over country and world who follow the acts.

**# employees.** Five full time employees, 14 counting all part-time employees, some of whom work only a few hours a week.

We also visited the Largo Community Center, which is a brand new building with a huge ballroom, two dance studios, an art studio, meeting rooms, a billiards room, a card room, and evidently also a full schedule. \$10/yr membership gives you reduced rates for classes, etc. \$35 membership if you live outside of Largo. Very impressive.

Returned to Center 2:20 p.m.