

Planning for Families

The primary focus of the presentation was that programs for families can be successful and enjoyable for both adults and children. Highlights included:

- Programs should encompass learning opportunities for adults and children.
- Mix high energy and low energy activities into an event.
- Work with outside groups and try to get local sponsors.
- Volunteers are the basis for all programs.
- Think about who is actually using your park before going ahead with programs.
- Provide activities for a variety of ages and levels.



Targeting the Family

Jim Willaert
Conner Prairie Museum
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Conner Prairie Museum

- A Living History Museum
- Located 6 miles north of Indianapolis, IN
- Feature immersive, engaging experiences for individuals, families, schools, and tour groups



The Competition



The Competition

- In this day and age, we are all competing for our guests leisure time and dollars.
- Even fast food restaurants have become destinations for entertaining our families

Who Are Our Users?

- In order to create programming that will attract our customers/users, first we need to determine who they are.



Guest Research

- Given:
- Most park systems are supported at least in part by tax funding
- Therefore, all taxpayers are your potential clients.
- The bigger question is: who are our your actual users and how do we find out what they want?

Guest Research

- Guest Surveys
- Can be conducted by volunteers, staff, email or internet
- SurveyMonkey.com – survey website that allows the user to conduct a limited survey free of charge

Guest Research

- Guest Motivations – why do they come to your site?
- The results might surprise you – social time and family time are often higher motivations than the program being attended
- Can help you determine the best times to offer programs for your target audience

Year Round Programs

- Offer programs during times people don't usually think of coming to your park
- Set up areas for active play or simple crafts



Parent and Child Programs



Prairietown Tykes

- Parents and children participate in activities together
- Ages 2 to 5
- Theme changes weekly – many families attend multiple sessions
- Themes include: clay play, baby animals, holidays, etc
- Variety of activities to keep children's interest during course of program

Holidays and Special Days

A Great Time for Family Interaction

Parent and Child Programs

- Gifts for Mom/Gifts for Dad
- Parent/Child cooking classes
 - Simple dishes
 - Parent/child interaction
 - Skills to take home
 - Food

Holiday Programming

- Use work holidays as an opportunity to bring families to your site
- Make use of the winter holidays: MLK, President's Day, etc



Holiday Programming

- Martin Luther King Jr Day
- Conner Prairie opened Museum Center for the day and offered crafts, active play, historic games, the chance for families to make valentines for troops overseas and presented videos about Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement.

Holiday Programming

- MLK (continued)
- Program was free to the public
- Announced one week before date, over 500 people attended the program

Holiday Programming

- Fourth of July
 - Encourage families to hold their picnics at your park
 - Offer related crafts
 - Musical performances

Headless Horseman

- Our most popular program
- Our biggest draw for teenagers
- Program is based on "Legend of Sleepy Hollow"
- Includes hay ride, music, puppet show, storytelling, crafts, dancing, movies, and food

Special Days

- Create Special Theme days at your park
- Create self guided sheets related to day (use your log cabin to discuss Abe Lincoln)
- Science Saturdays
 - New for 2009
 - One Saturday/month
 - Theme changes monthly
 - Interactive science activities

Camp Programs for Families

A new twist on an old favorite

Involve Everyone



Family Day Camp

- CP has offered day camp for over 20 years
- Based on the Adventure Camp model
- Parents and children participate in camp activities such as canoeing, archery, crafts, hiking, cooking, challenge courses, s'mores, geocaching

Family Day Camp

- Helps build family memories
- Brings families together for fun outdoor activities
- Make connections between generations: parents share their camp experiences with their kids
- Parents and kids select their camp activities/schedule together

Family Day Camp

- Offer program during Fall Break, Spring Break or other school holidays
- Can appeal to a wide range of ages – you can literally have something for everyone in the family

Animal Programs

You can't beat warm and furry



Animal Programs

- Animal Encounters opened as daily experience in 2007
- Utilizes barn that was basically empty
- Features baby animals
- Allows children and adults an opportunity to get close to farm animals, touch them and learn in an informal setting

Animal Programs

- Challenges:
 - Space
 - Staff to care for animals
 - Cost of feed
 - Source for animals (many borrowed from local farms, returned as they grow)
 - Constantly having baby animals

Festivals and Fairs



If you are looking to attract families

Do something completely out of the ordinary for your park or site

Festivals and Fairs

- Can be expensive
- Work with outside groups – tractor collectors, re-enactors, etc love to share their collections and knowledge with people

Festivals and Fairs

- Provide an opportunity for programming for all ages:
 - Musical performances with a variety of styles
 - Crafts
 - Workshops
 - Hay rides
 - And of course.....

Food!

- Is part of all cultures
- People love food. It is often one of the most important elements to an event.
- Bring in outside food vendors to sell food
- Can be themed to event
- Charge and vendor fee and bring in some funding for the event

Festivals and Fairs

- Conner Prairie's 3 biggest family weekends:
 - Civil War Reenactment
 - Indiana Festival
 - Country Fair



Festivals – Kid's Elements

- Mascots – Dora the Explorer and Diego
- Carnival games with prizes (historic games)
- Interactive Music
- Join the Union!/Join the Militia
- Tug of War
- Mural painting

Keep It Up to Date

Geocaching

Geocaching

- Guests use GPS units to find hidden caches which contain:
 - Messages
 - Directions to other caches
 - Items to trade
 - Discount coupons

Geocaching

- Low cost to establish
- Internet based cache listings on geocaching.com
- Guests provide their own GPS units
- Park can offer workshops on GPS use, geocaching hobby

Geocaching

- Setting up sites can be inexpensive:
 - Need plastic boxes with content
 - Time required to establish coordinates on website
 - Outside volunteer groups might be willing to take this on (i.e. Scout Groups, Rotary, etc)

Some Challenges

- Budgets can be tight
- Many park systems have limited staff available for programming
- Limited indoor space
- Getting guests to remember us in the colder months
- Tailoring our programs to our customers

A Little Help

- Establish or work with volunteer groups to help staff programs
- Try to offer a daily "Guest Menu" that provides for varied age and activity levels
- Get the word out that you are open/available during the off season or for holidays/special days

Targeting the Family

