

Boskone Debrief

Instant Message 1007 • March 3, 2024

Boskone Debrief Attendance List (2024-03-03)

Albasi, Gloria Lucia	D'Antonio, David	London, Ken	Todd, Bill
Anderson, Dave	Dashoff, Joni	Luoma, Robert	Williams, Margo
Arthen, Inanna	Dennett, Gay Ellen	Mann, Laurie	Williams, Walt
Atwood, Bonnie	Dumas, Jan	Meltzer, Lori	Yalow, Ben
Atwood, Ted	Eskinazi, Maria	Morris, Skip	
Beach, Covert	Grubbs, David	Persons, Kelly	
Bemis, Judith Carol	Hobbit	Roberge, Tim	
Brodsky, Wes	Keller, Jeff	Sbarsky, Sharon	
Broomhead, Ann	Kerpan, Mike	Seibert, Kristin	
Brumberger, Rebecca	Kovalcik, Rick	Selkirk, Kylie	
Burns, Rodger	Kranzer, Ellen	Senchy, Andrea	
Childress, Sandra	Lieberman, Paula	Szczesuil, Tim	

[editor's note - Below is my summary of the Debrief meeting and the various area reports. Detailed reports for most areas are available on the Boskone Google drive]

[Boskone 61 Debrief meeting started at 1:09pm EDT]

INTRODUCTION AND EXPLANATION OF DEBRIEFING (DAVE GRUBBS)

CHAIR'S REMARKS (MICHAEL KERPAN):

Overall, Boskone went okay. There were some areas where it could have gone better. I should have appointed certain positions earlier than I did. Next year, people should do better on email communication. Some decisions were not well documented; better documentation would have helped.

SPACE ALLOCATION, CARTOGRAPHY (CHIP HITCHCOCK):

Space planning this year was unnecessarily difficult due to people not keeping track of the limits of their space, confusing old layouts with this year's layouts, insisting on late or pointless changes.

ACTION ITEM: For next year, we should find out ahead of time whether the hotel will have the Galleria back-of-house filled as it was this year.

A note on this year's changes: moving Readings to the back alcove of Galleria caused problems that IMO should not have happened. The sound interfered with Kaffeeklatsches badly enough that one of them moved to the raised area. Some chairs vanished from Kaffeeklatsch tables; if somebody working for Boskone did this: **DO NOT DO THIS!** Go to the Office and ask whoever is sitting in the Hotel seat to get the hotel to bring chairs.

Somebody responsible for space planning needs to be on-site earlier than 3pm, to make sure the hotel's inevitable errors don't cause problems as various convention area people arrive and want to start their setups.

Errors this year included:

- The electrical contractor was not given a copy of the floorplan and had put several outlets where they wouldn't be helpful (and none where they were needed) before I caught and corrected this.

ACTION ITEM: Hotel liaison should discuss this with next year's hotel rep.

- Excess furniture in Office.
- Cheap coat racks ("Z racks") in Office instead of a rack with a shelf on top (where people helping setup can leave personal property, instead of scattering it on work tables.
- Good new tables provided for the Art Show setup where old cheap tables were specified (so assembly of hangings doesn't damage the finish on new tables). The text resumé explicitly said to use cheap tables, but house staff appears to have been given only the floorplan graphic.

ACTION ITEM: make this clearer on the floor plan.

- Dragonslair wall and furniture not done. (Hotel did put down plastic as asked.) This was done on Friday, in time for Dragonslair to set up, but probably would not have been without repeated calls to the hotel as it's shown as permanent rather than new-for-Friday.
- Readings furniture was not complete on Thursday, when it was specified.

ACTION ITEM: discuss with next year's hotel liaison and hotel rep whether supplying blowups of certain parts of the Thursday layout would increase the chance that they're done right the first time; doing blowups would be a pain, but would save our ulcers (and maybe the hotel's) when we're busy with move-in.

The complete history of the layouts has been copied to the Boskone drive.

There was a discussion concerning certain areas, such as dealers, that had to make changes very close to the convention.

PROGRAM

DRAGONSLAIR (JAN DUMAS AND REBECCA BRUMBERGER):

Kids and Parents enjoyed our programming. Members of the staff had medical issues that caused problems with pre-con preparation and at-con set-up; others were needed to help with getting supplies. In future, Dragonslair should open earlier on Friday and close earlier on Friday (definitely before the party) and Saturday.

There was a discussion on having a sign specifically with the full schedule of Dragonslair programming.

PROGRAM (RODGER BURNS):

As noted by Tim Szczesuil, program started late; deadlines were unclear; communication with Guests was chaotic; there are still issues adjusting to Zambia; Kranzer and others had to step in to assemble the Program Participant packets on Thursday evening; tent cards need to be on card stock; giving participants only one tent card seem to work well and saved paper.

A program team had to be assembled from scratch; hopefully some of the team will continue to work on the next Boskone. While Zambia is better than the alternatives, it does have significant user-interface issues. While the hybrid/virtual programming does allow off-site participation, we do need to assess whether it is worth the people points.

There was a discussion on the Guests of Honor. People were delighted with this year's Guests and various related items, such as the Mad Scientist panel and the concerts. In general, the Guests seemed to be happy with Boskone.

There was a discussion about the lack of coffee for Kaffeeklatsches.

There was a discussion on noise bleed, both between different parts of the convention and from the Comedy Club at the hotel.

There was a discussion on problems with the readings.

There was a discussion on how to encourage more artists to participate in artist demos and other program items.

Autographing went according to expectations, though some of the big names had significant lines.

There was discussion on program ops. More staff is needed. The new location worked well. Better signage is needed for the pocket program distribution point since program ops ended up having to redirect many attendees looking for the pocket program.

There was a discussion on the Card-to-Culture program.

There was a discussion on the Book Launch party. It was well attended. Having the dealers' room open during the party was a good thing. Perhaps it might be moved to Friday night.

There were several discussions on memberships for participants.

There was a discussion on using the hotel's video screens instead of paper schedules.

FILK (ELLEN KRANZER):

I managed the music/filk track for the convention. There was a mix of panels, concerts, and song circles. There was a full track of music/filk activities with reasonable attendance numbers. People seemed to enjoy it.

I got off to a late start; the planning process should start earlier for the next Boskone. It would be nice to have an assistant.

EVENTS

EVENTS (DAVID D'ANTONIO):

I recruited and scheduled several performing groups. This included working with Programming and Zambia, Registration and Tech. I also recruited event liaisons to help with attending and trouble-shooting these groups at-con. I also managed the Guest Intro and Award Ceremonies.

Overall events went well including new events such as Sara Henya's harp concert and the Ig Nobel Readings. There were some issues with the Mrs. Hawking movies. There were issues with sound checks for musical events. Pre-con email communication also had problems.

DANCE AND MOVEMENT (KRISTIN SEIBERT):

Dance and Movement is a better area name since this Boskone included related activities such as yoga and juggling. Better coordination was needed with tech for sound checks and making it easier to swap laptops/phones. Noise from Scalzi's Dance bled into Harbor One. If Dance and Movement continues, consideration should be given to give it its own budget line.

FRIDAY EVENTS:

The Guests seemed happy with the Opening Ceremonies, but gathering information on the Guests proved to be difficult this year; additional research help would be useful. The Friday reception was timed poorly with respect to the closing of the Dealers' Room and the Opening Ceremonies. For the reception there should be signs requesting people limit themselves to one food item at a time.

It was suggested the interviews be changed to Guest Showcases.

AWARDS CEREMONY:

Award recipients seemed happy, but again gathering background information for the awards proved to be difficult; additional research help would be useful.

New judges are needed for the Gaughan Award. For the Short Story Contest, Steven Lee would have liked to have three judges (there were only two this year).

SHORT STORY CONTEST (STEVEN LEE):

Summary: 36 stories were submitted. All were read, reviewed, and graded by at least one "first-round" reader, more than half were read by two or more. From these I selected the top five, which were then sent to two Judges, who were Boskone guests. All finalists agreed to read a portion of their story, less than 10 minutes each, for a pre-recorded Program item. The winners were announced at the Awards ceremony, in the *Helmut*, on our website, and told to *File 770* and *Locust*.

FUNCTIONS

CON SUITE (MARIA ESKINAZI):

I created shopping lists, identified supplies from Club House, executed set up and maintained an environment for attendees to hang out.

The staff worked well. There was a good choice of snacks and beverages. It was good to have a kitchenette with clean water. The hours of operation worked. Tip money was important and well spent. There was confusion regarding ice. Plastic should have covered the area near coffee and soda. Con Suite ran movies curated by Movie Mike; many kids showed up for the Saturday morning cartoons. There were games and puzzles.

This year, Con Suite was on a different floor from Staff Den. In a discussion, this was regarded as a good thing.

ART SHOW (ANDREA SENCHY):

I sent out invites to artists, helped with physical set-up, helped run check-in and check-out of artists, reconciled all paperwork.

The special exhibit of Bob Eggleton's art got many compliments.

There was discussion of the timing of the closing art show bids and the opening of sales.

There was a suggestion to have signs directing people to the various stages of art show sales.

There were the usual late pick-ups of sold art pieces.

GAMING (BILL TODD):

The change to an earlier convention start was poorly communicated.

A game designer and a couple wanting to run an RPG showed up unscheduled; while game designer got some players, the RPG couple did not get players.

There was a request for the PS3; this would require additional tech support (another HDTV) and rearrangement of the room. There was a request for the board game *RoboRally*.

In video gaming, the xbox1 made its debut. While most video games were suitable for older kids, *Cyberpunk* was restricted to adults. The most popular game for the Wii was *MarioKart*. The PS2 was a tie between *Star Wars BattlefrontII* and *Kingdom Hearts*. The Xbox1's clear winner was *Star Wars Battlefront*. The video games kept the kids busy.

I should mention (and yes, I will remind certain individuals at the appropriate time) that all the controllers except the ones I brought from home (which went home with me), as well as the power strip, are now in the black video game bin.

There was a discussion about the poor communication of the decisions that masks must be worn in convention spaces (except in designated eating areas) and that gaming was not a designated eating area.

DEALER ROOM (MARGO & WALT WILLIAMS):

We assigned tables to dealers, helped the dealers know which tables were theirs, address their on-site needs and concerns, oversaw dealer load in and load out, opened and closed the dealer room. Dealers were happy with their locations. The extra lighting helped. The extended hour worked well.

The traffic was lighter this year than in the past. Online registration opened late; it needs to open earlier for the next Boskone.

There was a discussion on the problems with the Vonage phone line.

AUTHOR'S ALLEY (MARGO & WALT WILLIAMS):

We assigned tables to authors, helped the authors know which tables were theirs, and addressed their on-site needs and concerns. Authors made good connections with readers, sold books, and made a connection with a marketing organization designed to help authors get their books into conference dealer rooms.

We overbooked some time slots and had to re-arrange schedules during the conference. The online form needs to be redesigned so that authors can't reserve more than 2 time slots and can't reserve times already filled. Once filled, authors alley registration should be closed.

There was a discussion on the staff load-out dinner and possible future changes.

NARNIACON / COAT CHECK (KRISTIN SEIBERT):

We stashed coats and bags; we gave out pins. Other than that, I would say that I think the marble hunt also went pretty well.

Michael Kerpan is working on the flyer for the next Boskone.

SOUVENIR BOOK (INANNA ARTHEN):

Because content acquisition was running late, the Con Chair advised me that we would distribute the Souvenir Book post-con as a "memory book." I still have every intention of getting it done.

PUBLICATIONS & COMMUNICATIONS

POCKET PROGRAM (SKIP MORRIS):

Three sizes (including a large print version) were printed. Pickup was 69.5% (average for SF conventions). Most Pocket Programs were trimmed. The Pocket Program was full, eight-four pages. The restaurant guide was also printed separately.

Most content was automatically downloaded from sources (e.g. program schedule, committee list) allowing quick creation once the layout was set up; ConClar and webpages also feed off these sources. The program grid had very few changes from the Pocket Program. The proofreaders worked miracles. Art looked nice.

Content, including program data, was significantly later than normal. The number of pages made assembly difficult; sheet count needs to be reduced. The restaurant guide needs to be fact checked. Quality of reproduction on in-house printers was marginal (one of them really bad).

There was a discussion on making the Restaurant Guide a separate document.

There was also a discussion on trimming.

HELMUTH — NEWSLETTER (ANTHONY LEWIS):

I created online Helmuth and emailed it to Gay Ellen for reproduction and distribution.

More staff is needed. Artwork, party reports, program changes and other convention news would be useful.

SIGN SHOP (ROBERT LUOMA):

I made most of the posters requested in advance. At con, these posters were delivered in a timely fashion and a sufficient number of easels were provided. Grid wall for attendee signs was put up in the foyers for Harbor, Marina and Galleria. The Convention Office helped out by printing out at-con signs when I was otherwise occupied. I was able to produce the door-hanger signs.

Some sign requests never reached me and I was unable to get to some of the requests that I received just before the convention. I elected not to put the grid wall on the "party" floor since there did not seem to be a good place for the grid wall.

I had difficulty getting volunteers for grid-wall wrangling; next Boskone, a request for such volunteers should be made in advance of the convention.

BOSKONE WEB SITE:

We are waiting for some help in converting over to Boskone 62, so there is a delay this year.

REAL-WORLD INTERFACE

HOTEL LIAISON (GAY ELLEN DENNETT):

We had a few issues this year. We did not expect that the hotel was using the curtained-off area of the Galleria for active storage.

Confusion over different versions of our maps caused problems; we should also consider giving large (11"x17" or bigger) versions of our maps to the hotel workers. If hotel changes are needed at-con, please remember to request changes through the hotel liaison.

SUITE ALLOCATION:

We had multiple parties using the suites. We did not get any calls from security (a good thing)

GUEST LIAISON (JEFF KELLER):

I communicated with the various guests regarding logistics, programming, etc. to see that the various departments got the information they needed without overburdening the guests. Most things got resolved before it was too late, and I don't think any of the guests was upset about anything.

Suggestions for the future are a job description, a google sheet for tracking and sharing info, establishing a pattern of handing off conversations by email introduction and clarification of what level of service we're aiming to provide for our guests.

OUTREACH (MICHAEL KERPAN AND KRISTIN SEIBERT):

Kristin and I ran Boskone parties and fan tables at various places; the waffle brunches were popular. More outreach volunteers at other conventions would be good.

MEMBER PRICES:

Treasury asked that we try to avoid having future memberships at the same price as a membership sold at the current convention.

PRESS RELATIONS:

We need to be more proactive about the press and publicity.

SOCIAL MEDIA:

We put up the main announcement on Facebook but we should have done better. We should be more active on our Discord server.

CODE OF CONDUCT:

No calls were received during the convention.

MID-YEAR PLANNING:

Early planning went reasonably well, area head appointments happened late.

ACCESS:

We had some information in the pocket program, but we need to do better.

INSURANCE:

We have insurance.

AT-CON SALES (SUFORD LEWIS):

Integrated the efforts of pack in & pack out with set up equipment (cash register & credit charger), instructions, schedules & clerks. Sales were as good as last year but mistakes were made, even by experienced clerks.

(DAVE ANDERSON): Our income was \$1943.92 (after taking out \$97.16 for sales tax). We sold 13 NESFA memberships, 68 NESFA books, 6 ISFiC books, 4 CDs for the Music Guest and 5 books for our Special Guest. A bunch of things were entered incorrectly (mainly free books for volunteers).

FAN-WORLD INTERFACE

REGISTRATION (SHARON SBARSKY):

B61 was a hybrid convention. The total number of members was 1338, which includes the 972 physical attendees and the 30 online members, plus others who qualify as members in categories such as life member, former GoHs, rollovers, and even paid members.

We started with paper forms at B60, Miva until October 2023, Con-Troll & Square from October 23 through at-con. Con-Troll isn't perfect, but I've been reporting bugs and requesting features. Some things get fixed/updated immediately, some (non-critical) may wait for updates for B62. There are other conventions using this same system (Balticon, Philcon, Albacon, NASFiC (I believe), Seattle Worldcon). As other bug-fixes/features are found or requested, they will probably be added onto the Boskone branch of code. There are problems with how Con-Troll interfaces with Zambia. In general, it is a good system, despite the problems, and easy to use and add new memberships; at-con staff found it easier to use than previous systems.

Action items -

Include in the pick-list from Arisia storage the swivel bases for the chromebooks (to show the members their information in the Database.) Dealer tables & Memberships could have been available via Con-Troll, but we ran out of time to explain & train the new system to Dealer Staff, so we defaulted to using Miva for Tables, and Square (Con-Troll) for memberships. We should plan on more time to switch systems to be all Square. Art Show does not yet exist in Con-Troll, possibly after Balticon.

SBoF:

There were items that people brought in along with cold cuts. People went up in shifts.

PARTY BOARD:

This year, it was an easel pad zip-tied to one of the grid-wall kiosks. People wrote party information on it. It more-or-less worked. In future, this information should be fed to the newsletter.

BADGES:

Geri Sullivan designed the badges and Rick Kovalcik printed them.

FREEBIE TABLES:

We piled our excess books on tables in the Harbor foyer; people took books. The new location seemed to work okay.

FEEDBACK SESSION:

It was faster than usual and people did not have much to say. Everyone was tired.

VOLUNTEERS (WES BRODSKY):

Let the volunteer coordinator know in advance that a volunteer might be needed.

INTERNAL SERVICES

LOGISTICS (RICK KOVALCIK):

We moved stuff from Arisia and NESFA to the Westin and back. Nothing got damaged, but we needed two loads in each direction. We scrambled when we found it was going to snow Tuesday to get all the unloading done on Monday and the truck returned. This involved a load to the NESFA Clubhouse on Sunday night followed by loading on Monday the rest of the NESFA Stuff (mostly Consuite, Den, and Office) on the truck first, followed by Arisia stuff. The truck then went to Arisia from unloading followed by NESFA. We should consider using this plan for the future.

TREASURY (JUDY BEMIS):

Treasury involves budget design and tracking, bookkeeping including e-commerce, and planning for and running the at-con cash office. I had enough competent at-con staff to get the job done. Having a separate file box for records returning meant they were moved so they could be findable later for audit. We underbudgeted some areas (tips, bank fees) due to process changes.

Making sure everything we need from Clubhouse is packed. I now have a list for next year and will see that it gets typed and stored in the Boskone Treasury area on the Google drive.

Making sure the copier and printer are left set up in the office area Sunday night until the Treasurer is done.

OFFICE (GAY ELLEN DENNETT):

While Office was office as usual, I did not get the word out that office was the repository of ribbons. Office did pack a few unusual things that turned out to be needed. Office also became the printer and distributor of the newsletter. Office also had a laptop with InDesign so that office was able to print out signs at-con.

SHOPPING (DAVE ANDERSON):

Bought a bunch of stuff for Con Suite and Staff Den.

SETUP/TEARDOWN (CHIP HITCHCOCK):

Setup mostly went well. Having two designated assistants (and one undesignated) for Art Show setup worked well. Thursday evening ran late because crew leads were finishing electrical work. Setup of lighting in Dealers was delayed due to working out new tech; I heard much approval of this lighting. Setup of lighting in Dragonslair happened at usual time. I ended up building the flyer racks.

Teardown seemed to go smoothly.

For Boskone 62, plan electricity with crew chiefs BEFORE connecting trees; pile unused pegboard in a smooth stack on one pallet, so it doesn't have to be restacked during teardown; make sure wireless battery-powered credit-card machines are still OK; give the printer its own power distribution so that the major Office distribution (that runs under all the tables) can be packed while Treasury is still working; consider redesigning the show so that all the panels are lit by the house lighting.

TECH SERVICES (PAULA LIEBERMAN):

Responsibilities include:

- (pre-con) Arranging work session to check condition and repair (when repairable) equipment.
- (pre-con) Ensuring that appropriate people did the sound, lighting and video design for Main Tent and Dance & Movement.
- (at-con) Ensuring that arrangement were made for staffing, equipment and network connections where needed at various parts of the convention;
- (at-con) Arranging for troubleshooting issues.
- (at-con) Arranging for the recording and uploading of recording of Harbor I programming.

Livestreaming went out to online members for all events and programming in Harbor I.

Setup was done ahead of when the rooms opened. Teardown of the Harbor level was done well before 7pm.

Labelling of equipment helped to limit equipment going astray in setup and teardown.

New this year was adding the function of "rounds" where someone goes out to rooms equipped with microphones and loudspeakers, to check for the mixer and microphones being on and working.

Presenters who went to Independence as directed, were checked out to make sure their presentations would run as intended with convention equipment.

We were able to create and upload recordings with much higher quality audio for the available online events which had music, than the audio which had gone out live.

Harbor I should have had a “House Manager” and additional staffing in other areas would have helped.

No one had expected that the new Windows laptops would mistake non-speech sound (such as music) as “noise” and suppress it.

There were also issues with graphics and video intended for opening ceremonies. Someone should have been monitoring backchannel communications (Discord in this case) for streaming problems that remote viewers were reporting; similarly, Quality Control person (at Boskone) should have also been monitoring the streaming itself.

Action item: test out computers (as well as other equipment) in the configuration to be used at Boskone.

In general, have training sessions to pass along to others the knowledge of various aspects of tech support.

COMPUTERS, NETWORKS, SERVERS, PRINTERS (TIM ROBERGE):

Changes in physical layout and network needs resulted in a simpler configuration with fewer cables. That said, there were some areas where we could have done better.

Hotel in general:

With regards to outages and general setup, we might have been able to recover faster if we had direct communications with the Hotel’s networking team. I would like to propose that contact information and introductions between our networking people and the Hotel’s networking people be setup either via email exchanges in advance.

Network outage: The Hotel’s network connections dropping like a stone on Friday impacted Registration, Office, and Dealers significantly. A second outage on Saturday resulted in a shorter disruption in Galleria that healed itself. I will look at options regarding rapid mitigation and secondary networking option for future years.

The Galleria Network drop from the hotel was in an unusual place compared to previous years. In future years, a pack of couplers should be added to allow extension of the hotel drop to a better location, and better equipment placement. Also, Networking needs to confirm in the room resume that the location for the drop should be the column itself.

Harbor Foyer> Registration and Program Ops> Power Distribution:

It turned out that bringing in a couple of larger power distribution boxes helped reduce the daisy-chained power strips that have tended to be the norm in previous years. Assuming that Registration continues to use the common system used this year, I should be able to work with that team to come up with better power distro plans before the next Boskone.

PLAQUES & AWARDS:

Tony Lewis did the initial order. Gay Ellen Dennett did the pickups, check for accuracy, making sure where they were at the convention and packing appropriately for whichever ceremony they were going to.

PHOTOGRAPHER:

Michael Kerpan’s father did much photography; Skip Morris will also be providing some images.

DEN (JONI DASHOFF):

I supervised the layout of tables and chairs for buffet efficiency and consumption for SBOF, staff den and evening socials. I also supervised the food laid out for meals throughout the weekend. Food bought was consumed with minimal leftovers. It was difficult to tell which people in the den were eligible to be eating there. People did not collect or wear Staff ribbons, mainly because they did not know where to get them.

There was a discussion on possible different foods and how to get inexpensive ice for the Den.

STORAGE:

It was difficult to get carts into the Gallery storage room because it was so full.

RIBBONS:

We had the ribbons we needed, but not everyone knew where they were being stored. It was suggested to bring back the committee newsletter.

PRESENTATION OF A GIFT TO THE CHAIR:

Michael Kerpan display the t-shirts and computer that he received as gifts.

BOSKONE 62 (JONI DASHOFF):

Some of the B62 Guests are:

Jasper Fforde -- Guest of Honor

Theresa Mather -- Official Artist

Kelley Armstrong -- Special Guest

Madison Metricula Roberts -- Musical Guest

As far as staffing for next year, if you are interested in your job again, please talk to me.

[Boskone 61 Debrief meeting ended at 6:09pm EST]