

“NEW SPINS ON CAROUSELS”

The 2012 Technical Conference was held Wednesday September 19th, prior to the annual NCA Conference at The Silver Beach Center, St Joseph, Michigan. The operation workshop presentations were provided by the staff and Board of Directors of the Silver Beach Carousel Society along with Kate Blakley and Jim Jones from Carousel Works of Mansfield, Ohio.

Technical Conferences were started by the NCA as an opportunity for owners and operators to share carousel operation, mechanical and marketing information. They have traditionally taken place during the spring of each year and have included a very diverse agenda including the dismantling and repair of a carousel. Over the years many NCA Members, with a hunger to learn more about carousels, have attended the conferences, not just owners and operators. Beginning in 2010 and scheduled for alternating years, the 2010 and 2012 Operations Workshops have been conducted in coordination with the annual NCA Convention as a pre-convention event. With 40 in attendance at this year's event, it has become a popular option.

To better understand the 2012 presentations, we will provide background information on the new Silver Beach Carousel. The original Silver Beach Amusement Park operated on the southeast shores of Lake Michigan in St Joseph, from 1891 to 1971, including a Frederick Dolle- Carmel 1910 carousel and the Shadowland Ballroom. The old amusement park was torn down in 1974. A new group was formed in 1997, the Silver Beach Carousel Society, with the goal of returning a carousel and a ballroom to the shoreline attractions.

In 2003 the SBCS focused their efforts toward fundraising and the purchase of a new wooden carousel, and turned to Carousel Works to build a new carousel after their efforts to return the original machine failed. They also combined their efforts with two other local non-profits to build what would become the Silver Beach Center near the original site of the Silver Beach Amusement Park. The other two groups operate the Shadowland Ballroom and the Curious Kids Discovery Zone.

The three are separate, registered non-profits and operate their own businesses independently, yet share the same building in a cooperative manner through a joint operating committee and partnership arrangement. The Carousel Society and Discovery Zone pay rent to Shadowland each month and pay their own metered cost of utilities for their specific areas. The rent to Shadowland covers the Center's staff, including Executive Director, Events Manager, and Maintenance, along with the shared space of the boardwalk area, maintenance of the large bathrooms, kitchen, parking lot (including plowing) and landscaping around the building. The City of St. Joseph owns the land and building, along with the Whirlpool Centennial Park and the large fountain across the street. The Silver Beach Carousel Society owns the carousel, museum items, band organs, and the Brass Ring Gift Shop inventory, and the Discovery Zone owns their exhibits and materials in their children's museum.

The Silver Beach Carousel has one full time carousel operator, Ken Kaszubowski, 5 paid part time operators, one part time administrative assistant and a part time gift shop manager, and additionally they have 50 to 75 volunteers who are part of the Friends of the Carousel.

The Operations Workshop began with a welcome from the Silver Beach Carousel Society President, and the Conference Chairperson, Suz Schalon. The following is a summary of the six presentations:

“Gotta Love Those Volunteers”: Jonathan and Pat Fisk are SBCS Board Members and Co-Coordinator of the Friends of the Carousel presenting:

The Silver Beach Carousel is operated mainly with volunteer labor and here are a few numbers they shared with us:

- Their first full year of operations was 2010. They had 55 volunteers working through the off season with a total of 2673 hours. For the high season they had 72 volunteers with 2634 hours and for special events 27 volunteers and 210 hours for a total of 5517 during 2010. If the volunteers had been paid at minimum wage their operating costs would have been nearly \$40,000.
- During 2011 their total volunteer hours were 5813.
- Through the second week of September 2012 they had already reached 6204 volunteer hours.

The Fisk's also shared the following information on volunteers:

- Early on they discovered the need to maintain a volunteer scheduling calendar. They have been using a low cost internet based system called VolunteerUp, which allows most of their volunteers the ability to go online and sign up for shifts they would like to work.
- In the beginning most of the volunteers were SBCS Board members and their friends, but with time they have recruited new volunteers with use of a local Volunteer Center web site, articles in the local newspaper, plus this past April they held a volunteer recruitment party.
- In addition to the Fisk's, individual volunteers have developed an expertise in different areas of the carousel operations and now assist in the training of the new volunteers. The volunteers assist the carousel operators, operate their refreshment stand, and are the “Hosts” in the Silver Beach Amusement Park Museum area.
- Their volunteers, who have the time, fill most of their needs but this past summer they had six teens who volunteered.
- Each volunteer wears a vest with SBCS logo on it, which makes them easy for anyone to identify.
- They do provide various low cost benefits to the volunteers and at the end of the summer they do host a Volunteer Recognition Party.

The volunteer program has an on-line handbook which is an excellent tool for being a carousel volunteer. It is available in pdf printable format via the website:
www.silverbeachcarousel.com/volunteer.html

“To Market, To Market” – Marketing Your Carousel – Think “Outside the Box”
Kate Blakely, Carousel Works presented a three step plan for increasing your carousel’s revenues:

Carousels are enjoyed by a wide demographic range, which is a marketing dream and with creative thinking you can generate customers. Don’t just think of your carousel itself, think of your carousel as a location that offers cost effective fun for an entire family, so how can you market that concept? By thinking “outside the box” you can create new and innovative opportunities to draw patrons to your carousel.

Step 1: Maintenance and a little elbow grease-

- Keep your carousel bright and shining with a daily cleaning schedule
- Is the building spotless and void of debris?
- Is all the proper maintenance being done on your carousel?
- Create a daily checklist.
- This is not an expensive endeavor.

Step 2: Brainstorm-

Brainstorming is a great way to get creative juices flowing. Your marketing ideas should encompass two approaches, and each requires different strategies.

- Increase local attendance
- Attract attendance from people outside your local area.

Step 3: Develop ideas into a marketing plan –

- Create a marketing plan and implement the strategies.
- Pick a few basic ideas to start; don’t try to do everything at once.
- Put someone in charge of executing the various ideas and ensure follow-up.
- Track the success of each strategy so you will know what needs to be tweaked.
- Utilize your website and social media.

Ideas to increase local attendance by hosting community events:

- Events associated with holidays.
- Work with community groups
- Create events associated with food.
- Fundraisers.
- Offer birthday party packages
- Reading incentive programs.
- Offer promotions through doctors and dentists.
- Work with local businesses
- Cost effective advertising, work with your local media and create special promotions.
- Prom and Homecoming events and photos.

- Christmas card and wedding photos.

Attract crowds from other areas:

- Where in the community is your carousel located?
- Does your carousel building have a large party room?
- Do you have a large parking lot?
- The event does not have to be carousel related.
- Many carousels have experienced success hosting a wide variety of events.

**“Making Good Connections” – Social Media / Facebook / and Websites
Jill Stone, Perry Ballard Inc.**

Jill Stone has been person in charge of marketing and promotions for the Silver Beach Carousel Society. Her presentation focused on the growing importance of Social Media, Facebook and Websites. If you are not using all these marketing tools you are missing out on a relative low cost opportunity to promote your carousel. All three tools require constant updates and postings with a strong need to be accurate and current.

“It’s A Gift” – Retail Operations

Julie Smith, Connie Yore, and Jill Stone; The Brass Ring Gift Shop

Julie Smith and Connie Yore provided the presentation for the Silver Beach Carousel Brass Ring Gift Shop. They provided many good examples of what they feature in their gift shop and how they find and create many of the items in their inventory. They especially like to feature gift items representative of their carousel and the local community.

The January show allows them to obtain inventory for their beginning spring season and builds from then on which allows time to structure their buying. They carry items coordinated with the city’s art theme for the season which was a pirate theme for 2012. They try to keep quality merchandise in the shop which does have space limitations but also keep the price points affordable so the youngest buyer can pick out something that is affordable. The parents and grandparents will be more apt to spend at least a little something while at the Carousel. The displays and merchandise are changed frequently to keep the shop interesting for the local clientele as they often visit frequently.

Carousels items are featured that are specific to the Silver Beach Carousel or at least match its theme. Items include t-shirts, shot glasses, snow globes, cookbooks, a children’s book by local author and illustrator, mugs, puzzles and music boxes with playing cards being also planned. Key chains, magnets, and Christmas tree ornaments and 3-d horses feature the carousel but items are produced in China which often takes up to a year to arrive. Carousel themed jewelry is often hard to find.

The shop variety is filled out with stuffed animals by Ty themed to those on the carousel, local history books and state themed children’s books.

**“Up and Running” – Physical Machine and Building Maintenance
Ken Kaszubowski, Silver Beach Carousel and Jim Jones, Carousel Works
presented:**

Appearance is an important part of a year round carousel operation, and keeping it clean and in good repair is a constant challenge. Their location on a beach with lots of sand and rain presents special challenges and a need to immediately respond, including replacement of burnt out lights, regular greasing of gears, and they have a drip pan to catch grease before it falls to the floor. They do not allow riders on the carousel with wet bathing suits. Their carousel is handicapped accessible with the use of a portable ramp.

They have a number of other activities for visitors to the carousel to enjoy located around the outside of the carousel fence, including checkers, chess, hula hoops and various related displays. They also provide ear plugs or headphones for those who want a quiet ride on the carousel.

**“Hitting the Right Note” – Band Organs Old and New
Ken Kaszubowski and Jim Partrick.**

The Silver Beach Carousel has a Touch screen system that operates both the carousel and their two band organs, which enables their operators to control all three from one location. They include the 1911 Herschell - Spillman Musical Instrument Works #187 Military Band Organ that originally operated with the 1910 Carousel at Silver Beach, and a new band organ from the Stinson Company.

Each carousel group is unique and reflects the personalities of their communities, and as the conference presentations progressed it became apparent the Silver Beach Carousel Society is proud of their history, what they have accomplished, and is reflected in their attention to details. The rounding boards of the carousel are a unique collage of the original amusement park as well as the surrounding community and the museum displays feature other historical locations in the community as well.