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IDEA DEVELOPMENT

BY

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ABSTRACT

The development of an event such as a world's fair is a complex process that depends upon the cooperation of the public and private sectors. It is important not to get caught up in the euphoria of planning but to keep a perspective of reality from the idea development to implementation.

IDEA DEVELOPMENT

The Louisiana World Exposition was an outgrowth of a concern by the Council for a Better Louisiana (CABL) about lack of job opportunities in the state. There was a need to promote more labor intensive industries. Tourism fits into that category, and a world fair is a major means of promoting that industry both from an immediate and a long time viewpoint.

To determine the potential for such an event, CABL authorized its Executive Director, Edward W. Stagg, to visit Seattle and Spokane to learn what those cities had done. Participating in this trip were Robert LeBlanc, State Director of Tourism, and Winston Lill, Public Relations Director for the City of New Orleans.

Based on findings of that trip, CABL recommended to the State Tourism Commission that a feasibility study be undertaken to determine the potential for such an event. Funds for this study were provided in December of 1974, and the study was undertaken by Economics Research Associates of California in conjunction with the Gulf South Research Institute of Louisiana.

This study indicated a potential for success for an event held in New Orleans. Findings were presented to business leaders of New Orleans in a meeting called by Governor Edwin Edwards. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Governor appointed a task force headed by then Lieutenant Governor James Fitzmorris to pursue the concept.

After several meetings, a conclusion was reached that the idea should be explored in depth by a non-profit corporation. Accordingly, the Louisiana World Exposition, Inc., was established in the summer of 1976 to explore the idea.

The state, City of New Orleans, and private citizens then funded a study on the specific possibilities for New Orleans. The contract was with Hilker-Dingwall Associates. These consultants concluded a World Fair was possible and proposed that it be held on a riverfront site.

This ensued an effort by Louisiana World Exposition (LWE) to secure approval from the federal government and from the Bureau of International Expositions.

Getting this approval with the availability of only part time staff and the complexities of the site proved a time consuming effort.

The chosen site was on the Mississippi River adjacent to the downtown area. Ownership included private parties, the city government, and the Port of New Orleans.

Because planning for the World Fair at Knoxville was taking place at the same time as the Louisiana World Exposition, and the possibility of such an event at Ontario near Los Angeles, the federal government was placed in a difficult role. Not until the Ontario Fair in California was cancelled could there be hope for the Louisiana and Knoxville events.

Preparations at Knoxville went faster than at New Orleans, and the U.S. Department of Commerce gave approval to it before giving assent to New Orleans.

The New Orleans planning went somewhat slower than might have been expected because federal officials were sensitive to the fact the Ontario fair in California had received presidential approval and then withdrew. Also, experiences with Knoxville indicated potential problems which the federal officials wished to avoid with New Orleans.

Advance financing was the major hurdle for Louisiana. This was achieved by seeking guarantees from the private sector for bank loans that would assure start up capital. Eventually, \$55,000,000 was raised including \$2,500,000 from each the City of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana and a line of credit from a consortium of banks for \$15,000,000.

SELLING OF AN IDEA

There must be a systematic plan and visits must be made to communities who have had a world's fair/exposition to determine the methods that they used to develop their initial proposal and how successful they had been. The community fathers must discuss the worthiness of the purpose of having a World's Fair. If the worthiness of the purpose is decided to be satisfactory, then a low-key sales approach must be used to raise money and to do an initial feasibility study of the chances of its success or failure. Upon completion of the feasibility

study, the essential element is to determine if, indeed, the community has the necessary resources to stage a world event, especially financially. The feasibility study is the key element because it is the cornerstone upon which the marketing and administrative structure for implementation of an exposition is built.

IMPLEMENTATION

The thrust for the Fair really started upon the employment of Petr L. Spurney in September of 1980 as the Executive Director and later as President of the Exposition. He came to New Orleans with experience as manager of the Spokane World Fair, the Freedom Train, and the Winter Olympics.

With his appointment, the major work for arranging the site, planning the construction, determining the physical design, and arranging entertainment began taking place.

Major problems involved the arrangements with the Port of New Orleans for using wharf areas, which entailed demolishing and rebuilding the wharves, the City of New Orleans which held some lands, private owners, and the New Orleans Exhibition Center.

Much of the site encompassed underdeveloped land, but there was also an adjacent old warehouse district which offered possibilities for utilization and did become a part of the site.

It was a monumental undertaking to get the site assembled and the construction completed by the deadline. It was accomplished even though the skeptics were plentiful.

Major public concerns were expressed about traffic, parking, crime, street repair--to name the most often mentioned.

On the basis of a loan from the state and the allocation of city funds, the streets were repaired, traffic plans adopted, parking facilities arranged, and police training accomplished.

Almost no advance concerns which drew attention finally materialized as problems.

Besides promoting tourism and the immediate economic impact from construction and visitors, a major reason for any world fair is the creation of physical facilities that will be important benefits for the city after the event. In this instance, the Louisiana World Exposition will be exemplary.

Old wharves have been replaced. The Rouse Company has plans for using some of the renovated wharves for a riverfront development on which perhaps \$55,000,000 will be spent. The Exhibition Center is a \$90,000,000 facility which will be used for major trade shows in the future. Its financing is due in part to the fact it would be used for the Fair. The gondola crossing the river, a \$10,000,000 project will continue. Renovations of the warehouse district have made these

buildings valuable for other purposes. Streets have been repaired. Greater tourism is expected for the future. The residual benefits will be substantial.

FACTORS TO A SUCCESSFUL OPERATION

There are many assumptions that are made about the holding of a world's fair/exposition in a community. These assumptions must be tested and explored in a systematic way so as to expose weaknesses in a rationale or philosophy. It is easy to get caught up in the euphoria of planning such an event and not see potential problems. The community, in planning a world's fair/exposition, must also be very certain of the market and know how to sell these essential products. The nature of a world's fair brings certain types of expectations and many of these expectations focus upon seeing innovative technology. Those world's fairs based on entertainment/education are in competition with many of the attractions for the vacation dollars throughout the United States. This type of competition makes it extremely important for a Fair to decide upon what it has to sell and how to market it. Another important factor is that for the Fair to be successful city government has to be cooperative and there must be a firm relationship between public and private efforts. This cooperative effort is essential to development of the proper atmosphere within the community to obtain the necessary support. Another essential ingredient is the initial opening period that will lend it status as a world's fair. Having the right guests, such as a President of the United States, is essential to obtaining the type of exposure and coverage in the media that will make good first impressions.

CONCLUSION

Any future planning for a world's fair should take into account all the problems and solutions involved in the Louisiana Exposition. While considered a major artistic and entertainment success, the lack of attendance may herald a shift of interest away from such events.