

Start a Constitution Week In Your Town

Implementation of Constitution Week in Your Home Town

To all interested Patriots,

My name is Tom Goodfellow. I am the President and Founder of Grand Lake U. S. Constitution Week here in Colorado. (GLUSCW) I have had numerous requests over the years to write down how we at GLUSCW implemented this national commemoration observance of the United States Constitution. The event was not my idea, but was petitioned by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and enacted into law by President Eisenhower and Congress on August 2nd 1956. After a number of years, I have humbly (no claim to be a Constitution Week Guru) decided to comply with these requests. This document is merely an effort to encourage the reader to consider starting this observance in their home town. I hope you do and pass it on. The idea is to have these celebrations sweep across America similar to that of the 4th of July, but with emphasis on education of the United States Constitution. The United States Constitution changed the world! The question to ask yourself is: if we as a country would have followed in the footsteps as requested by President Eisenhower, DAR, and Congress on August 2 nd 1956 would our country be so divided today? I think we would not, so let's get started today! Please join Grand Lake U. S. Constitution Week in this effort.

Synopsis:

The idea behind Constitution Week is to promote, educate and celebrate our country's founding document, the United States Constitution. Typically, this is done surrounding the date of September 17th, the signing of our Constitution. If this week cannot work in your community than chose a different date. Do not let this discourage you!

The additional benefits include an economic boost to any community with family fun activities and community awareness and fellowship. It may resemble similar to that of a festival.

Activities can include, but not limited to guest speakers, patriotic parade, trivia contest, run for the republic 5k, political party booths, Non-profit and for-profit booth expo, music, kids' education fun booth, flyover, fireworks, food & beverage, patriotic ceremonies, etc.

The educational aspect is the heart or focal point of Constitution Week. It is imperative to not make this a political event! This must be understood. The event is for Patriotic Americans who love America's values and traditions. Under "no circumstances" should speakers be politicians or representatives promoting a candidate or any local, state or federal proposed ballot or amendment. This event is exclusive to the education of the United States Constitution by means of historic in nature of its founding, founders or interpretation of a particular component of its contents.

How to get started?

Organization/Volunteers

Start with a small group of volunteers. Three to five people. My suggestion would be to not start publicizing the event until you have an outline of what you would want to bring in the inaugural year. A premature announcement always turns into chaos and uncertainty, so zip the lip! Credibility is the key to the success of the event for future years and "buy in" becomes easier to assure returning participants. This will help grow the event. Volunteers with skill sets such as accounting, marketing, handyman or Macgyver kind of skills, and a leader who finds a way to get around the obstacles of the "no" word without damaging needed relationships. Quality of volunteers is paramount to the success of Constitution Week.

Funding

Obviously, you will have to solicit some individuals to get started. You may need to “ante up” your own money. You may also be able to sell the idea to potential speakers who may do it “pro bono” if the project interests them. Our first year we had 3 speakers and a few activities and spent only 200 dollars and donated 2 nights of lodging. We were not aggressive about funding our first year. We focus more on the idea of Constitution Week to see if it would go. After the first successful year then you could approach organizations suggested in this document. I’m certain you have your own ideas. The more funds you have the more dynamic speakers you will attract to the program.

Speaker Details & Search

Build activities around your speaker base. The focal point is the speakers. Try to find engaging speakers with great topics. Typically, the best speaker is those who may not simply stand at the lectern. Ones who use the entire stage in my experience appear to be more engaging. You will be exposed to both methods of delivery, so be aware and accommodate their individual needs. Ask them! Wireless microphone might be desirable.

I have identified 2 sources of speakers. The first is the academic speaker source that are found at Colleges, Universities and Public Policy Think Tanks. More specifically, Professors and Authors of Academic publications. The second category is what I call “Street Smart or from the “University of Hard Knocks” This could be sheriffs, attorneys, radio talk show hosts or people who have been in the line of fire on a daily basis over constitutional issues.

We have had success with both sources and ask the guest speaker to stay away from the political aspects as much as possible. Let the audience decide. He can give his position on the topic. This usually becomes realized during the Q&A portion of the presentation.

By far the best avenue to obtain these speakers has been generally through friend of a friend type relationships. We have written or made

cold calls and have been successful as well. It just takes longer. Stay away from speaker bureau if you can. They are expensive.

The diversity of your speaker base over the years is an important marketing tool as the event matures. Try to have a diverse representation of political parties, race, religions, etc. This will bring even more credibility to your program.

Keep a list of past speakers and display at all of your events as years go by. Keep in mind that if your guest speakers have a great experience, they will most likely tell their friends and other potential speakers. Make their experience memorable.

Honorarium

All speakers have different needs. Some want to be compensated. Others will focus more on the event and less on the money. We usually provide honorarium, lodging, transportation and anything else we could afford in the budget. We once paid for the speaker's house sitter. We always did what we could do to make it happen, if it was a worthy find. This will be your biggest expense.

Venue

Venue selection can be very important when getting started. We approached restaurant/bars to host our speaking engagements. Our attendees enjoyed the idea of sitting down, ordering a cocktail and have an appetizer. A short social hour before getting started. (15 minutes or so)

The nuts and bolts of how we approached Restaurants/bars was that we would promote their business on all advertising/literature, etc. in exchange for the venue space and free appetizers. The restaurant would provide a cash bar with the idea they could generate enough revenue to help defray some of the cost of hosting the event. The benefit for the business owner was pretty inexpensive advertising and the idea that they supported this patriotic program. We promoted their

business as much as we could. This also created some buzz with the general public since they were the hosting the event. For GLUSCW this arrangement was highly successful!

More specifically, GLUSCW for a majority of time did a different venue for every presentation. Many times, 2 venues per day, if we were doing a luncheon and dinner presentations. The biggest challenge was moving the “check in” and “merchandise booth” from venue to venue. The number of volunteers is key. In more recent years we have pulled away from business venues to a central conference center. This was done partially because our events grew too big or the ease of not having to move our booths. In retrospect, perhaps a little mix of the two types of venues would be best. Our guests enjoyed going to the Restaurant/Bar as well.

Merchandise

Merchandise has always been difficult with regards to what sells and at what price. What is appealing, the quality and what quantity to order is a challenge. It does require upfront funding. The marketing benefit/name recognition is a helpful piece. We did make some profit, but just not as much as you would think unless the merchandise was donated. If your merchandise is sized try to find uni-sex sizes. Most years we did not put dates on the merchandise, so if we had some left, we could sell them the next year. We took cash or check and recently started to use Venmo.

Selling Constitution Week

Pick speaker (s) and a few selected activities and assign tasks and visualize how it would come together. With tentative speaker(s) in mind activities can be considered and the volunteers needed can be assessed.

Put together a rough draft of a schedule of events. You now have something to sell and can solicit organizations such as veteran's groups (perhaps your best supporters) American Legion, chamber of

commerce, police & fire departments, Lions club, town council, and most important the business community.

You are now beginning the process of “buy in.” Schedule with these organizations a time to make a presentation. Ask them to come and “kick the tires” you might say. If you have an engaging speaker that is known someone might kick in a few bucks to help cover expenses. Most importantly you are looking for the “buy in!”

Keep your schedule flexible enough to make some changes. Produce a final draft about 60 days before the event. The sooner you start planning the better, but committing to soon to activities may also pass up an unrealized opportunity. This happens, but there is always next year and if the timing does not work retain the info and contact them immediately after the current year's event ends. There is always next year and you should always have this in the back of your mind as the role of an organizer. I cannot stress the importance of this enough. What about next year? Have a year-end meeting overview.

The first day is the hardest day of the GLUSCW. This is when you find out what you forgot. These are the steps we go through at a typical speaking engagement.

1. Setup sign in booth. Get info on attendees for future newsletters and such. Marketing and print material setup. Put out donation jars. More than one!
2. Setup merchandise booth.
3. Venue setup. Chairs, microphone, podium, lectern, American Flag, decorations
4. Person assigned to start with announcements to get things started. Start with welcome. Who are you and what is Constitution Week? Thank you's, go over schedule for next day perhaps, funding.....fyi kind of stuff. Invocation from spiritual leader? Pledge of allegiance, national anthem? (Typically, we only did the national anthem on our big day, which was Saturday.) Introduction of speaker.....you need a bio!

5. Speaker begins. Usually between 40 to 50 minutes (no longer!) followed with 20 minutes(ish) of Q&A or however long the speaker wants to go. Typically depends on how engaged the attendees are.
6. Thanks for coming and visit our merchandise booth. See you tomorrow!

The sound system should be a good one. How many times have you been to something like this and you cannot hear very well. Don't let that happen. Depending on the type of microphone (you probably borrowed and are unfamiliar with it.) many speakers do not keep the microphone close enough to their mouths. This is a very common mistake, so heads up!

Faith is essential that your Constitution Week venture will work. It will! People are curious and want to know, especially now. The timing could not be more perfect. This is a very evasive way for attendees to learn.

Startup funds for next year? It sure makes it a lot easier to generate enough revenue, so you have some startup funds for next year.

Review necessary permits, licenses and liability insurance requirements. Contact the local government office for direction.

Decide how you want to grow. Constitution Week three-year growth plan

Inaugural Year

1. Considerations such as annual date, how many days, (1-3 days) Same week every year and schedule conflicts with other town activities.
2. How many speakers. Keynote speaker on Saturday.
3. Venue considerations.
4. Activities.
5. Develop Web-site and Social Media page.

6. Apply for non-profit. What type 501c3 or 501c4. More about this below.
7. Bank Account? Register your name with Secretary of State.
8. Appoint or hire a Videographer/ Photographer

2nd Year

1. Increase days to 3-5 days. Wednesday thru Saturday or Sunday.
2. 501c3 consideration.
3. Activities, Parade, music, food & beverage.
4. Add a luncheon guest speaker. This increased our reach.
5. Booths on your big day. (Saturday) Profit and/or non-profit.
6. Merchandise?

3rd Year

1. Increase 5-7 days. Monday thru Saturday or Sunday
2. Completed 501c3 3.
3. Activities, parade, music, trivia contest, food & beverage. 5K
4. Add another luncheon speaker
5. Booths on your big day.
6. Merchandise
7. Flyover.
8. Fireworks.

Marketing Thoughts

As you already know marketing/advertising can be an elusive undertaking. For many of our years we did not have much funding available; however, some inexpensive choices can be very effective. Below I have stated some obvious items, but perhaps regard it as a reminder list.

Our parade is probably one of the most effective and simplest activities. It really engages the public and attracts people to come. We

always do a patriotic theme and even had prize money for best of, but certainly not necessary. People love parades!

Contact Chamber of Commerce, County Tourism Boards, public announcements programming on the radio, government agencies, local organizations and above all Veteran groups like American Legion.

Develop marketing materials on why Constitution Week is a great event to support. Past photos and videos are great. Put together a power point presentation.

Additional Info:

www.dar.org Daughters of the American Revolution

Merchandise supplier www.corporatetocasual.com Contact Bob File for non-profit 501c3 form 1023 www.pay.gov.com

www.grandlakeusconstitutionweek.com

Facebook Grand Lake U.S. Constitution Week

Feedback and questions: Tom

Goodfellow tgoodfellow@hotmail.com or Grandlakeusconstitutionweek@hotmail.com

You will have Naysayers! It hurts, but it goes away after a while. Thick skin! Simply stick together and tell the story of the American Founding and the greatest governing document, the United States Constitution.