

State Parks at the Dixon May Fair



Sam and Danita "representing"

We did it! And we did it well...

Dixon May Fair was generous enough to provide us with 2,200 square feet of exhibit space to commemorate State Park's 150th. When I met Fair CEO Pat Conklin and saw the space however, I started to panic. How was I going to pull this off? I was pleasantly surprised to find out that Pat was an exhibit designer in another life. Once we got started on planning—which was about three weeks in advance of the Fair's opening—we came up a solid vision of how the space would be used. I decided to borrow bits of Angel Island's Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights (COBR) program to provide a child-friendly space. I also took advantage of Interpretation and Education's 150th Toolkit. I used its materials, mostly photographic images, to help Fair visitors generate fond memories of family outings to "their park". I then drew up a rough floor plan (see below).

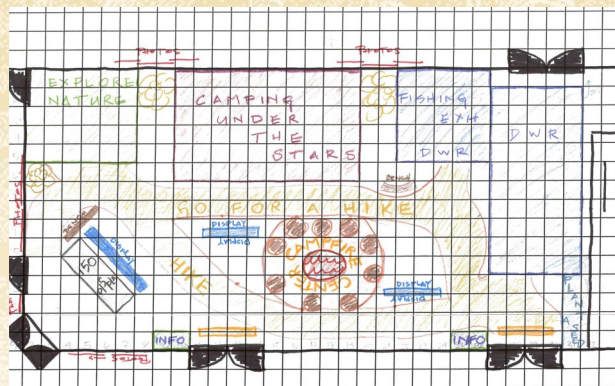
Pat was game for any type of challenge and did most of the "heavy lifting". She and her family designed trees, fish, clouds and other fun décor, and hung it all on the walls. She rolled in prize-winning "Cabin in the Woods" vignettes to fill some empty space. Then came the boat, fake rocks, benches and picnic tables. I drove over two Prius' worth of stuff to add to the mix including a photos, camping equipment, camp chairs and all array of interpretive props.

When opening day rolled around we were ready to have fun. We sang campfire songs, talked about the good-old-days, passed out 150th stickers and history brochures, and answered questions about anything and everything. We even got a few good games of Frisbee going. Some fair goers just came in to "chill" because our space was so cool. All kids entering the exhibit played and learned—even the teenagers!

What we planned...What we did.

I printed a number of photos both historic found in our Toolkit, and modern shots from the Marin/DVD collection. The photos were hung on the walls as well as on wooden kiosks provided by Pat. Albeit rough, we used my plan of the space so everyone understood "the vision". I did my best to stick to the vision but discovered that I could not get enough staff lined up to man all of the COBR activity stations. I had to rethink how many COBR activities we were going to do. In the end, we had just one table....

(continued on page 2)



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What we planned...

WHAT WE DID.

dedicated to COBR/hands-on activities that required staff guidance. I then put together a map table and a touch table (that could be supervised from afar) loaded with maps, rubber scat, animal puppets, skins, and handouts about "Leave-no-trace", Junior Rangers/Litter Getters and other "how-to's".

I was surprised to find that almost everyone was drawn to the map table. Many wanted to know where they had been; others wanted to know where to go next!

With help I constructed a funny little campfire center in the middle of the room and when people got a little too quiet I would sit at the campfire and start singing. Without fail, everyone in the room would join me. The campfire center was well

loved by all as a place to sit and hang out, to sing, or to pretend to roast marshmallows.

Exhibit space before (above) and after (left).



*Special Thank You's to
Danita Rodriguez, Karen
Barrett, Richard Barry, Buddy Bear,
Casey Dexter-Lee, Ben
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Jeff Patterson, and Roberto Walton
for offering to drive out to Dixon and
staff the exhibit.*

*An Extra Special Thank You to
Fair CEO Pat Conklin, and
family, for all of her
expertise and enthusiasm.*

More Fairs to Come?

ENJOY CONNECTING WITH FAIR
GOERS. IT'S VERY GRATIFYING.

The people coming through the exhibit went out of their way to express how much they loved State Parks. I heard very few comments about "the missing millions" or complaints about reserving campsites. I was deluged with questions about passes—especially those for seniors, active duty enlisted and veterans. Everyone wants to go to State Parks. Fairgoers eagerly shared fond memories about their favorite park.

I am very grateful to work for the department for so many reasons. We get to share our passion for parks with others. We do this while looking great in our park uniforms—complete with 150th pins. The County Fair CEOs and staff are very willing to work with us in whatever capacity. They are creative and flexible, and just as overwhelmed as we are when it comes to partnering. Together we can connect with so many people.



- Sam Toffoli, RIS