

SECURING SPONSORSHIP

The costs of entering and participating in the World Series of Birding are considerable from the standpoint of a typical WSB team budget. Corporate sponsorship is a way of defraying these costs and of widening participation in birdings most spirited, annual event.

First things first

First and foremost, have your act together before knocking on someone's door. Have the endorsement of a local organization or bird club. Know the members of your team. Know your budget and stick to it. Beginnings are tough and nothing makes a corporate mind more skittish than uncertainty. In any business venture, a company wants a positive result. **Show them that you are serious, organized, and well grounded in the event. Birding in general, and Big Days in particular, are fields that they will probably know nothing about and where they will be relying on your expertise.**

Make the pot sweet

At the very least, a company will want recognition and publicity from sponsorship. Give it to them. There are many benefits in being part of this event, but most importantly, your sponsor will have the satisfaction of knowing they have done something positive for the environment by supporting conservation.

Many Corporate sponsors assume the expenses of their team. These expenses may include travel expenses including car rental or mileage, hotel expenses, meals and incidental expenses. The cost of sponsorship will vary from team to team depending largely upon the size of the team and the expenses associated with scouting, accommodations, and whether team members are local or must fly or drive in from distant areas. Total sponsorship costs for a regional team are about \$3,500. Expenses for teams further from New Jersey and out of the country, will of course, be considerably higher. Make sure you have your figures intact before you approach a potential sponsor – including registration fees and whatever other expenses you would like the sponsor to consider. They will need this in order to work it into their budget.

This is not to say that local businesses like a car dealership, or any business that could support your team by either providing equipment or making a contribution to offset your expenses. But unless your sponsor pays the Corporate Registration fee to **New Jersey Audubon**, they are not a World Series of Birding **Corporate Sponsor** and will not be recognized as such.

Corporations who might offer sponsorship to teams are motivated by several things: favorable publicity, increased sales of goods or services among birders, competition with companies who also sponsor teams, personal association, or a genuine interest in supporting the environment. All of these things can work in your favor when approaching a corporation for sponsorship.

A Corporate Sponsor:

- Is invited to join Corporate Sponsors activities during the weekend
- Is invited to welcome in your team at the Finish Line
- Is invited to the Awards Brunch with the teams and sponsors
- Sponsor's recognition at the Awards Brunch and official program
- Sponsor's name included in the World Series of Birding packet
- Sponsor's name on the official World Series of Birding shirt
- Sponsor's name included in the World Series of Birding Web site
- The right to use the official World Series of Birding Corporate Sponsor logo for the year of sponsorship for sponsor's marketing and publicity
- Sponsor's name in the New Jersey Audubon Magazine and Annual Report
- Sponsor's name in the Cape May Bird Observatory's "The Peregrine Observer"
- The opportunity of media coverage

But you can, and should offer more. Pre-arrange for the press to cover you on the event. This can mean having a writer, or TV, or radio crew go with you on the Big Day. They can go with you on a dry run or scouting. At the very least, get the local major news-

paper (the paper widely circulated in the community where your prospective sponsor is located) and a local radio station to cover you. Better still sell the idea of the World Series to a travel magazine, an airline magazine, a newspaper's Sunday magazine. You can do this by going to the magazine directly. But a better route is to latch onto a freelance writer whom you know and let them tell the story. You don't know any freelance writers? Pick one you like from a magazine; call the magazine and get their e-mail address or telephone number. The WSB is such a zany thing that most writers would kill to cover it. The event has been featured on "The Daily Show" as well as National Geographic Explorer, and the Martha Stewart Show! Don't forget to suggest having the corporate team featured in the company's in-house magazine, newsletter, or stockholders magazine – with over 81 million people interested in birds, corporations are bound to find a favorable regard within the ranks of stockholders. Get the company's public relations people involved in the promotion. You might also want to invite a company representative to share in the fun.

When your ducks are all in a row...when your publicity is all arranged...**then** knock on the door.

When to approach a sponsor

How about now! You need to lay the groundwork. The amount we are talking about is not a major line budget item for most corporations but is still an expense to budget for. It will take time – often weeks – sometimes longer. Be prepared, and be patient.

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SECURING SPONSORSHIP Continued



Who to approach

The corporation that is most easily approached is one that you or someone you know is associated with – a product you use or a business you patronize. If you or members of your team belong to a major corporation, they are prime candidates for sponsorship – because they already know you and they trust you.

A corporation doesn't have to have a special stake in the birding community to be a sponsor. Everyone is concerned with being "green" and most companies know that it is important to consider the environment. You can offer them the opportunity to be involved in something eminently environmental that is fun, exciting, and newsworthy.

Consider companies that would love to spruce up their "green" image or who have an environmentally friendly product to promote – food companies, coffee companies, automobile manufacturers, household goods. Consider companies that court an outdoor image – Gatorade, Nike, even landscapers. Consider companies that produce goods that are related to birding – optic companies, clothing companies, sporting goods, bird seed and feeder companies (or stores that sell them), publishers. The opportunities are endless.

How to approach

Most companies have a public relations or marketing department. If you know the individual or belong to the corporation, make an appointment to see them. If not, call the corporation and get the name and title of the person who is in charge of public relations. If you are bold, ask to speak with him or her directly and make your pitch. If you are timid, announce yourself and intentions with a short letter and information package (Express Mail gets their attention) and then call at a pre-arranged time. Your information package should include cover letter, article(s) about the World Series, your budget, a biographic sketch of the team, any supporting documentation, including the media list showing just some of the venues that have covered this event.

Anticipate a busy individual. Anticipate initial skepticism. But never forget this person's job is finding inventive ways of promoting their company and winning public favor. Your biggest difficulty will not be lack of interest, it will be over commitment (on his/her part) on other projects. You will be fortunate to get the interest of a corporation the very first time.

Don't just go to one sponsor – Go to several.

Companies are used to dealing with business partners. When walking out onto strange terrain (like birding and conservation), it will help a corporate executive to know that he or she is not alone. Make sure they know that you have the support of a local conservation group and New Jersey Audubon. Tell them what the money you intend to raise (via pledges) is going to accomplish. If you can get another company to donate equipment (like clothing, or use of a vehicle), that helps too. Most auto manufacturers /dealerships have loaner fleets. They put these cars at the disposal of the press in return for ink in some magazine. If you can secure one of these cars, you are saving your sponsor money, and building legitimacy for your case.

If you cannot find a company that can assume the full cost of sponsorship, you can get two or more companies to fund your efforts and share the registration fee. However, only those **individual sponsors** who pay the \$1,500 registration fee to New Jersey Audubon will be recognized as Corporate Sponsors and receive all the benefits of Corporate Sponsorship.

Remember, you are offering something every company wants – a chance for a great environmental image associated with an event that has been keeping conservation at the forefront for the past 25 years. You're not begging. You are trading something that they need for something you need. It's just plain business....

Businesses are growing more and more conscious of the environment, and more and more businesses are rallying themselves to

causes that only tacitly benefit the company. Many corporate people are sincerely interested in getting their company to engage in projects that do good. The World Series of Birding, an event that raises thousands of dollars for and focuses public attention on the environment, is one of them. When you find the right corporate sponsor, you will also discover that they will be grateful to you for bringing them to a pretty special event.

Follow-up

Plan to do most of the work yourself. The company is just funding you, not organizing your team. You will, of course, take the name of the company as your own for your team. Maybe even adapt your team name to go along with their name or product (Nike Nightjars). You (and they) will certainly want some visible means of allying you and the company – clothing, magnetic signs (for the car) with the company name and/or logo. Cooperate with the company in their efforts to promote their participation via press releases or radio and TV interviews. If they don't take the lead, you should.

After the event

Send a letter summarizing your day, a copy of your check list, awards program, and any press clippings – especially those that mention your team and your sponsor. Discuss your plans for next year – how you will change your route, refine your strategy, get more publicity, and raise more \$\$\$ than ever before. Tell them that you will be honored to carry their support next year – and most important, don't forget to say – **Thank You**.

Feel free to call if you need advice or think that our direct contact would aid in your cause. And, don't forget to check out our website including our discussion group at www.worldseriesofbirding.org.

What better way to get suggestions and feedback than from the people who are part of the event. ■