

HOSPITALITY

General Considerations. Hospitality in all its components reflects the overall tenor of the National Specialty. Long after people have forgotten how their dog did, their overall impression and final memories are mostly based on things dealing with hospitality. This is the place to concentrate a lot of time, energy and personnel. Don't skip or skimp on hospitality--not everything you do has to be expensive, but all the little niceties add up.

- **Overall Hospitality Chair.** This person coordinates all the hospitality functions of national Specialty Events Week—
- **On-site Hospitality Chair.** This person is concerned with the care and feeding of judges, stewards, and other workers at the show site. The overall Hospitality Chair should select this person. The NSEC needs to decide in advance if this individual shall be eligible to exhibit a dog in regular conformation and obedience classes.

Hotel Relations. The choice and the manner in which the Specialty Headquarters Hotel operates can be very important. Exhibitors will understand rotten weather, and may be philosophical about not winning, but they will neither forgive nor forget poor hotel accommodations and food service. The services of a conference hotel and the attendant food service are not inexpensive, but they will save hours of aggravation and gain rave reviews of appreciation. Remember, the National is not intended to be a fund-raiser; money spent with the hotel and on food service will be repaid a thousand-fold in good will. However, when negotiating a contract, make sure you understand exactly what you will be charged for. This is the time to state your required services since the hotel wants your business. It is also important to have either an attorney or an experienced travel agent review the hotel contract before it is sent to the Secretary for a signature. Clubs have been threatened with lawsuits

due to contract provisions they did not understand or review carefully.

- **Choosing a hotel.** Selection of a Headquarters Hotel should be among the first tasks when making arrangements for facilities. There are many factors to consider in this selection:

- a. Location and proximity to the show site.
- b. Location and proximity to Tracking, the Hun Test, and WC/CC events. It is desirable to use the same hotel for all events, but this is not always possible. A rule of thumb to use is that all events should be no more than one hour's driving distance from each other. This requirement becomes increasingly difficult as available land for hunt test and tracking events becomes harder to obtain and are removed from population centers.
- c. Ability to provide sleeping rooms for approximately 500-800 people and a banquet facility for 200.
- d. Experience in dealing with large groups who will check in and out simultaneously.
- e. Experience in dealing with dog groups. This may not be possible, or previous experience with other dog groups may have been negative. If this is the case and you really wish to use this hotel, you will have to persuade them that LRC members are different and better than previous groups. It will be helpful to have them contact previous Headquarters Hotels for an endorsement of LRC. Provide them with the names of contact persons at hotels that previously served as headquarters for the National Specialty.
- f. Cost of sleeping rooms. Is it a flat rate or per person rate? Is the rate competitive for your area? Will all rooms be at that rate? What are the beginning and ending dates the rate will apply? Will there be the ability

for people to transfer rooms from one name to another? If they need to change their plans, will their deposit be refundable? Is the first night only deposit non-refundable? Is there a fee for dogs in the room? Make sure that this type of information is agreed upon and that it is communicated via the web site and the premium list. The day that the hotel is open for reservations is always a frantic one. Review with the hotel staff the type of questions they will be getting and make certain they understand that their phone lines will be bombarded on opening day.

g. How many free rooms per room nights will be given to the club? One per 50 is a standard ratio. These free rooms can be used to house judges or as hospitality rooms.

h. Cost of food service and willingness to try new approaches and new ways of serving if necessary or desired.

i. Parking availability.

j. Provision for exercise areas. These can be either a piece of lawn or ground, or an area of the parking lot set up with rented chain link fencing and sod, sawdust or wood shavings. Be careful about what you use here because it will probably be tracked into the hotel. Be sure that the facilities understand the need to have dog pickup containers emptied on a frequent basis.

k. The hotel staff. Most hotel sales people, the people who will take you on a tour of the hotel and will sell you on their facilities, are friendly and easy to talk with. That is what they're paid to do. You should also ask to meet the people you will be actually working with after you've made a commitment to the hotel. These include the food service, housekeeping, grounds, and maintenance staffs. These are the individuals who will determine what actually goes on during National Specialty week. Keep in

mind that the sales staff has a high turnover rate; so don't expect the person you dealt with three years ago to still be in the same job the week of the National Specialty.

• **Your responsibility to the hotel.** Hotels are in the business of renting rooms and selling food. To ensure that the hotel also has a pleasant experience with a dog group, be certain that they understand that you will not tolerate any abuse of their rooms, grounds, or property. LRC has an excellent reputation as a considerate dog show group. Hotels check with previous sites, so provide them with the names of the hotels used for the past three years' Nationals. It is your responsibility to ensure that next year's hotel will receive a favorable report from yours. In keeping with this goal, here are some suggestions that have proven successful in the past:

- a. Provide plastic sheeting free of charge to each exhibitor for each crate in the room. This will protect the carpet, can be purchased inexpensively in large rolls, and can be given out at check-in.
- b. Limit the number of crates in each room to four. This means two dogs per person in a double room. If an exhibitor has more dogs than this, they should book another room or have the dogs stay in a vehicle.
- c. Dogs left unattended in rooms must be crated.
- d. Dogs must be on lead in all hallways, elevators, and hotel grounds.
- e. If the weather is good, a bathing area can also be set up outside at the hotel and/or the show site.
- f. Designate exercise and non-exercise areas. Make sure they are big enough (not a narrow strip along a fence). Provide numerous, heavy-duty, plastic lined trash containers and scoopers. Police the exercise areas and the other grounds once or twice a day. Off-duty hotel employees can often be hired for this-- they are usually glad for the extra money.

Labrador retriever owners have a good reputation for cleaning up after their dogs and wanting to leave the property in good condition. It is your responsibility to provide them with the means to do so. If you receive reports that people are not cleaning up after their dogs, send someone out with a video camera.

g. Hotels usually have extra sheets that are too worn for current guest use. Ask if they will provide them to put over bedspreads to keep them unsoiled. They usually welcome this suggestion and are happy to comply. The bedspreads can also be removed and stored prior to check-in.

h. Have the hotel charge each guest a damage deposit to be refunded if no damage is incurred. This serves as a good faith gesture on your part demonstrating how committed you are to protecting their property. Consider forming a committee to inspect rooms before guests are allowed to check out of the hotel. Hold those not conforming to the rules responsible for any damage.

i. Accidents will still happen. Make sure the guests feel comfortable enough to report them and get clean-up help, rather than trying to hide the evidence until it is impossible (or very expensive) to clean up.

j. Make sure that the exhibitors understand that the hotel is part of the show grounds and that hotel abuse can fall under purview of the Show Committee. If you do have such an incident, use the power of the Show Committee to deal with the individual. Both AKC and LRC will stand behind you. Print a notice to this effect in the Premium List so that all exhibitors are aware of it.

k. Check daily with the heads of housekeeping, grounds, and maintenance to see if any problems have arisen. In this way you can deal with them immediately and effectively.

• **Other hotel assistance.** Hotel personnel can be invaluable in handling odd requests such as baby sitters. They deal with these sorts of things all the time, so make use of their knowledge and expertise. If possible, arrange to have the LRC trophies shipped directly to the hotel and stored there. This can save a lot of work. The hotel may also be willing to store dog food for pickup, items to be sold, LRC items, centerpieces for the banquet, etc. Space can be limited however, so make arrangements prior to shipping these items. The hotel can also provide you with a printout of who has registered, which can be very helpful in locating exhibitors.

The hotel will probably designate a ground floor room as a staging area for your merchandise, banquet favors, and other things you need to store or assemble.

• **Room reservations.** There is no perfect way to handle this. If there is one issue guaranteed to get people riled up it is hotel reservations. The two methods which have been generally used with varying degrees of success are:

1) As soon as the host hotel is selected people are free to make reservations, and—

2) There is a date before which no reservations will be accepted. There will always be gripes about hotel reservations--it comes with the territory. What you don't want are a few individuals reserving numerous rooms, only to release them at the last moment. This results in very unhappy exhibitors who were turned away a year before the event, as well as unhappy hotel managers who may be stuck with unsold rooms. In addition to the above, publicize all the hotels on your list as well as the "headquarters" hotel. The National Specialty has grown large enough that few hotels can accommodate everyone; additional hotels have become a fact of life in putting on a National Specialty Event Week.

- **Room Assignments.** Individuals will make their own room reservations. However, you will need to make reservations for the judges and any other special guests. Judges can be housed in either the headquarters hotel or at another location. The LRC Board of Directors and the NSEC will require a block of 25 rooms; the exact names will be supplied to you about two months out. Included in this block are rooms for the Trophy Chair, speakers for the educational programs, and members of the Judges' Education Committee. If the majority of the Show Committee, i.e. the ones doing the bulk of the work, is staying at the Headquarters Hotel, they need to be given special consideration, such as being placed next to an elevator or on the ground floor for ease in carrying things in and out every day. They may also wish to have adjacent rooms for ease in communication. If more than one hotel is being used, you may want to place a Show Committee member in each one for on-the-spot assistance and information.

Many exhibitors will request ground floor rooms. Obviously a hotel has many more non-ground floor rooms. You should have some input with the hotel in how these are given out. Committee members, handicapped status, or other criteria can be determining factors. Remember that ground floor guests are much more visible to the general public than those on other floors, so try to make sure that they set a good example. There have been reports of individuals claiming handicapped status just to get a ground floor room. Unfortunately, you may have to become involved in verifying the necessity of such requests.

- **Registration/Check-in.** The day before the conformation and obedience competition begins is the day the majority of exhibitors arrive. The show committee (hospitality) needs to schedule several people to be on duty during the entire day. A hospitality table should be set up in close proximity to

the hotel registration desk-- most hotels are used to handling conferences and have a regular place designated for this. At this hospitality table exhibitors can be given their hospitality bags, their meal function tickets, special event tickets, etc. This is also a good place to distribute the plastic sheeting for putting underneath crates and the old sheets for protecting bedspreads.

Many hotels, while allowing dogs in some of the rooms, will not allow dogs in the hotel lobby. Most exhibitors will leave their dogs in their cars in the parking lot while they check in. It is also helpful to have extra assistance available for lugging crates and baggage to the rooms. This will also prevent people from taking inappropriate items such as grooming tables and blow dryers to their rooms; these should be left in their vehicles or taken to the grooming area. The hotel can also provide additional assistance with bellmen and carts; do not forget to tip these individuals.

It is helpful to have a big bulletin board near the registration desk so messages can be left for participants and visitors. Having the names of those registered at the hotel and their room numbers is also helpful. Most hotels will not give out room numbers of their guests, but you can get a printout of those registered to which exhibitors may add their room number if they wish. If a printout is not available, exhibitors can sign their own names. Just make sure that separate pages are provided for each letter of the alphabet for ease of use.

The people at the Hospitality Table should also be prepared to answer questions and render assistance with a multitude of problems—anything from *"I forgot my show shoes, where can I buy some?"* to *"Where is the nearest grocery or drug store?"* to *"I know there's a vet at the show site, but I need one now."*

Above all, remain calm, cheerful, and helpful. And get some sleep, because the fun's just beginning.

Hospitality Room. A hospitality room should be provided at the Headquarters Hotel for exhibitors to meet, greet, and socialize. The room does not have to be open at all hours, but should be available for the most popular times, which seem to be later afternoon to early evening.

If possible, this room should also be open early in the morning to provide a quick cup of coffee, juice, rolls, etc. Food and drink should be available free of charge, but there is nothing wrong with providing a donations jar for those who wish to help offset the cost. Soft drinks, punch, iced tea, and juices are all perfectly acceptable. This room should be non-smoking.

Hotels frequently require that they provide any food consumed on their premises, which thus precludes members' contributions. Hotel prices can be high, but things like popcorn, pretzels, and fresh vegetables are relatively inexpensive. No one expects fresh shrimp and caviar in the hospitality room!

Hours for the hospitality room should be widely publicized. The Hospitality Committee is responsible for staffing this room. This is an easy additional assignment for club members who may be heavily involved in other aspects of the National. It is also nice if it can be arranged for host clubs of upcoming Nationals or nearby regional LRC clubs to volunteer for a stint in the hospitality room.

If possible, a separate hospitality room should be provided at the Hunt Test Headquarters, if it is different from the general headquarters hotel. The hunt test people often do not feel a part of the National Specialty and this gives them a place to go and socialize either before or after the conformation and obedience events.

The Hospitality Room becomes a central information point. A bulletin board should be provided for people to leave messages along with any other general information pertinent to National specialty Event Week. The results of

completed competitions may be posted here in addition to being posted at the show site. The people staffing the Hospitality Room should be prepared to provide information about any aspect of the National, or at least be able to refer the questioner to the appropriate Specialty Committee or hotel person.

Hospitality Bags. Hospitality bags have become increasingly popular at National Specialties, to the point that they are now an expected item. The bags themselves are available through our corporate sponsor--Purina. How many should you get? This is always a guess, but a rough estimate is 1.25 times the number of dogs entered. There are dogs with two owners, single owners with several dogs, handlers who may not want one, Labrador people without an entered dog who will, and participants in the Judges' Education Seminar. Thus an exact number is hard to determine. The hospitality bags should be available primarily at the hospitality table at the Headquarters Hotel. They should also be available at the various outdoor events and at the show site (don't forget Tracking!). If you can make them available at the hunt test and the tracking test, you will be a big hit! If you have bags left over, offer them to the hotel staff.

The bags should be stuffed with whatever goodies you can find. This may depend in part in how good you are at soliciting free items. If your budget permits, you may purchase small items for the bags, but the majority of the items should be free. Dog food companies are usually willing to supply free samples of their lines. Be sure this does not interfere with any corporate sponsors. Used tennis balls can frequently be obtained free from local tennis clubs. Local products are also welcome. Major companies in your area are used to being asked for this sort of assistance and may provide you with pens, key rings, etc. (with their logo, of course). Local tourist information is useful for those looking for things to do in your area other than attending the National. A very helpful item is a booklet that contains the following sorts of things: event

maps, schedules for judging, schedules of LRC and social events, Headquarters Hotel(s) information (such as dog rules and exercise areas), hospitality room number, addresses and phone numbers of nearby restaurants, phone numbers of all Specialty affiliated hotels, auto and RV tow and repair phone numbers, veterinarians on call for each event location and in the vicinity of the Headquarters Hotel (including an after-hours emergency phone number), human medical and dental emergency phone numbers, locations of local pet supply stores, grocery stores, pharmacies, one-hour photo service, and shopping malls. Have a brainstorming session and see what Committee members have wanted available at conferences or other dog shows. Even after this list is prepared and stuffed in hospitality bags, Committee members should have extra copies on hand to answer questions and provide assistance.

On-site Hospitality/Concessions. On-site hospitality generally means having food and drink available during the day for exhibitors and spectators. There are a number of options available, but easiest is to have this job commissioned elsewhere. There are a variety of ways to do this. Many indoor sites have kitchen facilities and staff that can be engaged as part of the contract. Indeed, some sites will require that you use their concession facilities. If this is the case, be glad of it.

The second method is to hire an independent concessionaire. These are listed in the yellow pages, or often the show site management can recommend one. Grocery stores are also a good source for catering services. If the site has a kitchen, a group can be hired to do the cooking. Many local clubs do this type of activity to raise money. Dog clubs, senior citizens, scouts, and service clubs have all done this as a fund-raiser. If there is no kitchen at the site, a mobile vendor will have to be engaged. Generally they do not charge the club; their fee

is whatever they make. While the food is generally fairly acceptable from these vendors, the lines tend to be long. Having several concessionaires of various types will enable the exhibitors to avoid standing in long, hot lines.

If the site prohibits outside vendors or none can be found, a list of nearby restaurants and fast food places will have to do. The host club should then at least provide water and cups on the show grounds. **Include a statement in the premium list as to the availability of food at the grounds.**