

Debriefing Session for the 36th Annual Calgary Burns Supper

**Saturday February 11, 2012
Kensington Legion Board Room**

There were 22 members present. Those present wished to express satisfaction at the success of the event and extend congratulations to William Lawson. As is the nature of a debriefing, there were a number of criticisms and suggestions for next year's dinner. These fell into to a number of general categories.

The Meal

It was felt that the meal was better than last year but there were some inconsistencies. Some members found that their dinner did not arrive hot. While some felt that the meat was good others found that theirs was tough and that there was a lot of fat. There was also a difference in portion size.

There was also some concern expressed about the early arrival of the Haggis as there was quite a gap until the meat course was served.

It was fairly, generally agreed that that trifle was too large and there was a lot of cream and not enough custard and the presence of any Drambuie was questioned.

The Venue

The site for the dinner was discussed and those present felt that there was no reason to change the venue.

The Liquor

There was some discussion about the scotch and the table wine but it was felt that these were satisfactory. There was concern about the wine that was offered for sale at the tables. Despite efforts to try and find more reasonable cost wines than last year, many felt that the wines were still over-priced.

The Commemorative Glasses

Some members felt that the glasses were of inferior quality to those of previous years. They were, in fact, more expensive than last years'. There were a significant number left behind. They will also be offered for sale to members..

The question of the continued offering of glasses was discussed. Some members were in favour of scrapping the glasses all together but it was felt that this program should continue.

The Programme

There was considerable discussion around this topic. Although the event went off well there were some good suggestions made for improvement. It was suggested that the Master of Ceremonies should have an assistant (stage manager) whose job it would be to ensure that each participant in the entertainment is ready to take the stage. There was criticism that the Calgary Fiddlers' program was too long and that they should not have performed Auld Lang Syne. Similarly it was noted that the police pipe band were not ready to perform but this is not new to this years' event. It was suggested that the 2nd VP might be the appropriate person to assume the stage manager's job.

The DVD record of the dinner was also discussed. The history of recording the dinner was discussed as well as concerns regarding the privacy of those attending. To try and have something more professional was felt to be prohibitively expensive.

It was also mentioned that the Club's talent was demonstrated and that possibly it could be used even more.

Audio-Visual

The added screens at the back of the hall, though quite costly, were felt to be one of the reasons that the audience was so well behaved. They were concerns raised regarding the sound volume and ongoing monitoring of it particularly regarding the speaker. It was suggested that there was not enough visibility of the Club's logo.

The Speaker

There was also considerable discussion about this topic. Many were disappointed with John Haining's talk. Last year the speaker was felt to be too dry and not entertaining and this year there was thought to be too much humour and not enough Burns content. This may have been an over-reaction and possibly over-coaching.

The importance of attracting quality speakers for future dinners was stressed. Jim Hutchens and Tony Grace are currently researching a list of potential speakers. The need for bringing the speaker from Scotland was discussed and it was questioned whether we might be wise to look closer to home. The expectation of the audience was discussed. It was noted that the speaker's job at the Calgary supper was seen to be a "feather in the cap" of those doing the speaking circuit. The speaker is compensated for expenses but is not paid a fee for this role at our event. It was stressed that the speaker should be given some clear guidelines of what is expected of him. This issue was also discussed in last year's document.

The Event

The whole issue of attendance vs profit was discussed. It was pointed out that the costs of this event are huge and the club must pay up front and could be at considerable financial risk if there was a drop in attendance for any reason. The ticket cost was also discussed. It was thought that it should not rise and measures will need to be found to hold down costs.

The question of Canadian content was discussed but audience expectations were mentioned again particularly as the supper is to be an evening of entertainment and one of Scottish Culture.

The fact that there are a number of competing events was touched on. Our dinner falls on the same night as the Bill Brooks Prostate Cancer Benefit and next year the Ducks Unlimited Dinner will take place the night before. It was suggested that we try and get the information out to corporate Calgary as soon as possible. The members are given first opportunity of tickets, usually in September, with the release to the the general public in October.

Strategies to attract younger people both to the dinner and the club were discussed as well as the perception that more people may be leaving the dinner earlier. The possible reasons for this were speculated upon.

William Lawson thanked everyone for their thoughtful and valuable input and this information will be very helpful in the planning for next year's event.