



**The Calgary Burns Club
Minutes of the 2018 Dinner Debrief Meeting
at The Danish Canadian Club, Calgary
Saturday February 3rd, 2018**

Present were; Paul Armstrong; Trekker Armstrong; Ron Budd; Brian Cumming; Ian Denness; Vlad Dhillon; Tony Grace; Jim Hope-Ross; Don Humphries; Jim Hutchens; Bill Laing; Maurice McAtamney; Allan MacRae; Gordon McCulloch; Hugh McFadzean; Stephen Nichol; Bill Spiers and John Young.

The meeting was chaired by Jim Hutchens., and followed the format used in the survey.

Survey Results

Jim Hutchens started by going through the results of the survey, asking for any additional comments;

- Jim Hutchens highlighted the results of the survey which was responded to by 53 people – both Club Members and non-members. It was agreed to try and reset the survey results separately for Members and non-members (**Jim Hutchens & Trekker Armstrong**).
- In terms of “Value for Money” only 12% suggested it rated below *Good*.
- For “Length of the Evening”, 77% felt it was *Just Right* (the Dinner was over at 11.10pm)
- As regards to the “Meal” itself, over 90% were *Somewhat or Very Satisfied*. Congratulations are due to the Telus Convention Centre and some form of recognition for the chef was urged (**Jim Hutchens**).
- Rating of the “Entertainment” showed over 80% said *Excellent or Very Good*. Comments from the meeting suggested in future more emphasis should be placed on Robert Burns. The slides on the screen get better every year and also help reduce the background noise levels. However the words of the song Bring on the Whisky were mysteriously missing!
- For “Venue/Location/Staff & Service” – less than 2% rated them less than *Good*. The ‘front end’ was well received but we need to keep working with the ‘back end’ (Kitchen). A sound monitor for the head table in the second half would have helped those people hear the speeches and toasts better and should be provided in future (**Jim Hutchens**).
- Over 90% felt the evening had provided them with *some level* of “Greater Understanding for Robert Burns and Scottish Culture”.
- The “Overall” rating for the Burns Dinner resulted in an overwhelming 86% score of *Excellent or Very Good*, with only one respondent rating it as *Poor*.

Likes and Dislikes

Jim Hutchens went through all the Likes and Dislikes comments made in the survey returns and the following additional comments were made by the Members present.

- Some of the soups were cold when they reached the table – there is always a problem keeping things hot when serving over 500 people at the same time, but we will follow up with the Convention Centre (Jim Hutchens).
- The price of drinks at the lobby bar was very high – the bar prices are set by the Convention Centre and are not out of line with other high-end establishments in the city. We probably can't do much about this but will talk to the Convention Centre staff about the concern (**Jim Hutchens**).
- The intermission was too long at over half an hour – recommend it should be shortened to 15/20 minutes. It is always a problem getting people re-seated after the break and to get the Head Table organized and seated. It was agreed that some sort of clock count-down on the screens would help people stay aware of the time left in the intermission. We will try to organize something for next year (**Jim Hutchens**).
- Need to co-ordinate the President's closing remarks with the start of Auld Lang Syne. Perhaps an actual rehearsal would make this go smoother?
- The old issue was raised about limiting the total number of attendees. This comes down to a balance between the number of guests and the price of each ticket and the overall quality of the evening. At some point with lower numbers it might make sense to find an alternative (and cheaper) venue but this in turn could well affect the quality of the event. If we continue to sell 500/600 and more tickets, it makes sense to stay at the Convention Centre but we will have to work every step of the way with the Convention Centre to maintain the quality of the evening.
- The appointment of a "Stage Manager" would help the continuity of the evening and take some of the load off the Master of Ceremonies. This would likely help shorten up the length of the evening and probably help in stopping the level of background noise increasing when there are gaps in the program. A Position Description should be developed (**Jim Hutchens**).
- Need to keep the Entertainment fresh – be careful of the same acts year after year.
- In order to help the sale of tickets, Members were encouraged to bring their own sons and relatives along with friends of the latter. This would help with the numbers as well as bringing the average age down!
- There was much debate about the Haggis that was served, but at the end of the day it all comes down to personal taste. Some thought it was great but others not so much. The Club was urged to find a local supplier in future but stressed the need for good quality as well.
- It was agreed that having both the Pipe Band and the Calgary Fiddlers perform does lengthen the evening too much. Must it be one or the other? One of the problems with the Fiddlers is the time necessary to set up while nothing else is happening, as well as their reluctance to finish their performance. Can these issues be resolved? Could the setting up be done while something else is happening – during the meal perhaps or during the intermission? Obviously this would mean re-ordering other events to suit.
- The sound distribution in one part of the hall was poor and led to a lot of background noise in that area as people could not hear what was going on so continued talking. Apparently one of the issues was that the speakers were on stands and the sounds were being blocked out by staff etc. This should be an easy fix for next year (**Jim Hutchens**).

- There was a dislike for the way some staff were pushing the purchase of additional bottles of wine. This is not necessary and the Convention Centre should be made aware of the concern **(Jim Hutchens)**.
- There was a very positive response to the format for the 2018 Dinner program.
- Should Ladies be invited? This needs a lot more discussion, but at this meeting there was limited support for the idea. It was also pointed out that it would mean most Members having to purchase an extra ticket thus making it quite expensive!! We need to be careful.

Anything Else

Jim Hutchens reviewed the list of comments provided through the survey and asked for any further suggestions;

- Don't forget the thanks and recognition to the Sponsors and Donors **(Jim Hutchens)**.
- The quality of the beef could be improved (mixed feedback on this), and a better wine selection for purchase **(Jim Hutchens)**.
- There needs to be a strong focus on the Entertainment – it needs to be high quality and fresh.
- Do we need a clearer understanding on the Club's objectives for the evening – is it strictly an entertaining event; should it have a focus on Scottish Culture with an emphasis on Burns; is it a fundraiser for the Club to provide funds to help run the Club as well as to allow us to make the donations we do? In future this debrief session could then assess the success of the evening against those objectives. **(Jim Hutchens & Ian Denness)**.
- Should the Club run a separate annual event (a Ceilidh?) to raise money to help run the Club and provide for the donations we make? This would probably mean we could reduce the price of the Dinner tickets which in turn would likely increase the number of tickets sold. **(BoD and Club Members)**.
- Should there be an insert in the written program (or expand the existing program) with selections of Burns' works? **(Jim Hutchens)**
- Should there be an insert in the written program talking about sponsorship and donations and the opportunities the evening provides in this regard? **(Jim Hutchens)**.
- There was a suggestion that all cheques and ticket requests should be acknowledged so people know they have been received. This can be a problem as cheques may not be banked immediately, especially post-dated ones, and that is the only way people know whether their application has been received **(Jim Hutchens)**.

As the comments, suggestions and discussion came to an end, Jim thanked everybody for attending and for their input and adjourned the meeting at 2.25pm.