



**The Calgary Burns Club
Minutes of the 2020 Dinner Debrief Meeting
held at The Danish Canadian Club, Calgary
Saturday February 1st, 2020**

Present were; Paul Armstrong; Trekker Armstrong; Ron Budd; Henry Cairney; Ken Carr; Brian Cumming; David Currie; Tony Grace; David Hood; Jim Hope-Ross; Merv Howitt; Don Humphreys; Jim Hutchens; Paul Kane; Bill Laing; Bill Lawson; Jim Little; Maurice McAtamney; Gordon McCulloch; Hugh McFadzean; Jim McLaughlin; Stephen Nichol; Jamie Osborne; Jim Osborne; and Gerry Wood.

The meeting was chaired by Henry Cairney. These minutes include Henry Cairney's report to the debrief meeting and include written and other feedback provided to him and others as well as comments made at the debrief session. Henry started by inviting Paul Armstrong to comment on the President's Reception.

President's Reception.

- Overall a very successful, enjoyable and worthwhile evening.
- Paul apologized for the mix-up over the drink selection as well as the problems with tickets but they were quickly sorted out.
- The food was good but a little limited in selection.
- Unfortunately due to other problems experienced by the hotel that evening the room we finished up with was not the one intended and not as pleasant – no windows.

Dinner

- Henry had received feed-back from a number of attendees and he read those out allowing for discussion as Members present at this meeting added their comments.
- There was a lot of comment about the Haggis covering the full spectrum from “the best ever” to “awful”. As always it is very much a matter of personal taste; however it is clear that the Westin did have trouble preparing the Haggis with quite a number bursting and the resultant beasts being served very sloppy. They did get some replacements from Bobby's Place but meanwhile we lost about 30 minutes of schedule.

- Later investigation showed as many as 15 Haggis were replaced by Bobby's Place during the evening. One of the problems appears to have been that some of the skins were over-stuffed not allowing for any expansion during cooking. Apparently the chef did remove some of the filling from several Haggis to prevent bursting.
- Questions were raised about the Haggis supplier (Bobby's Place) and suggestions were made that this should be looked at again next year. It was pointed out that preparing 1 Haggis for a taste testing was very different to preparing some 60 odd all at the same time for cooking, serving and eating!
- Overall people were pleased with the Salmon course, the cock-a-leekie and the beef – this latter being a definite improvement from past years.
- There was mixed feedback on the trifle where the balance between the ingredients needed to be improved with more fruit.
- Henry acknowledged that the Westin had not served the Scotch as requested with only a 1oz pour rather than 2ozs. Apart from everyone getting a short measure this has left us with an embarrassing number of bottles of Scotch under our licence.

Entertainment

- Overall the entertainment was well received and enjoyed by all but the evening did run too late.
- There was mixed feedback on the main Speaker with some people suggesting he did a great job while others only so-so. Like the Haggis this tends to a personal assessment – do the words relate to the individual listeners. However it was generally felt that the Speaker did not manage to connect strongly with the audience to the same extent that others have done in the past.
- There was a lot of feedback on the late finish which as stated was largely due to problems in the kitchen. However the Club does try to pack as much activity as possible into the evening and it is not possible to recover any time lost due to unforeseen problems, as happened this year. Accepting that we don't want to make changes around the delivery of the Immortal Memory there are two other items that take up significant time – the Pipe Band Performance and the Calgary Fiddlers. This latter group seems to be especially popular with the non-members present, and it should be pointed out that most of the music they play is not Scottish. Some tough decisions need to be made if we are to be serious about reducing the length of the evening.
- The Removes went well this year and are accepted as something special and different at our Dinner, but it is getting harder to prepare presentations that are fresh and on subject – have they served their time?
- There needs to be a presentation on stage to the Speaker after he has finished his Immortal Memory – this is tradition.
- It is unclear as to why there was a mix up over the concluding remarks and the singing of Auld Lang Syne.

Location and Facilities

- Using the Westin capped the number of attendees at 450 and this number really did fill the facility to the point that it was difficult to move around at times. During the first hour the Lobby was packed and there were long lines at the ticket sellers and the bars. How did a lady get into the Lobby and be seen drinking with some of the guests?
- With tables set for 450 attendees the main hall was also packed and the staff had a hard time making their way to serve the meal and clear the tables.

- Technically all the tables were closer to the podium than in the past and the sight-lines to the stage were good but the tables in the corners of the room were disconnected from what was going on and totally reliant on the screens. Tables under the overhang also had their own problems. The hall layout should be looked at again should we return to the Westin and re-assess the number of guests we can comfortably accommodate.

Other

- Could the CDs and DVDs from previous dinners be used to improve the flow and timing of the evening, particularly with the Speaker and the Westin?
- Does it make sense to have a full dress rehearsal (less the meal!) of the Entertainment and Speakers to help ensure a better flow and improved timing?
- The evening was a financial success with a significant surplus projected. This was largely due to Sponsorships and Donations.
- 10 Members showed up for the church service at Grace Presbyterian Church on Sunday January 26th 2020 as organized by Sandy Paterson. They were warmly received and sang eight songs during the morning.
- The Immortal Memory should be the highlight of the evening and bringing people in to deliver it always seems to result in mixed feedback. Should the Carnie Group (or other members) prepare an Immortal memory and have it delivered by one of the Club's best presenters? At the very least this would provide a contingency plan should there be last minute problem with the arranged Speaker.

Adjournment

Tony Grace moved the meeting be adjourned at 1:45pm