

Crosstown Grand Opening | Division A | Category 11A Special Events | Entry

Research/Situation Analysis:

The entire community was invited to celebrate the grand opening of the Crosstown Parkway on Saturday, September 28 and be among the first to experience Port St. Lucie's new bridge over the North Fork of the St. Lucie River. As the largest public infrastructure project in Port St. Lucie's history, the Crosstown Parkway bridge connects the City's growing, newer west side with the older east side providing much needed traffic relief, reduced emergency response times, and an alternate route to travel between U.S 1 and I-95. City leaders worked for more than 30 years to make it a reality, and 89% of City voters in 2006 agreed to tax themselves to pay for the bonds. The City planned a Community Celebration and Block Party at the site of the bridge that gave residents a chance to enjoy this massive municipal accomplishment, be entertained and take a trolley tour over the bridge and learn from our guides about some of its history, including the sculptures that feature a tile mosaic by artist Guy Harvey. The biggest challenge facing this special event was funding, as there was not any money budgeted to make this event happen. Other challenges included logistics of holding the event in an area never used for one before, and having the site cleared out in time for traffic to cross the bridge promptly at 4 p.m. the same day, as directed by City Council.

Informal, primary research: In early May, a survey was sent to local municipalities inquiring about sponsorship policies and procedures in order to understand how to best muster funds for this monumental event. Five agencies responded and the results were used to create a sponsorship packet. Additional informal, primary research occurred in the form of reaching out to other Cities that recently opened a bridge to better understand the turnout and expectations of residents. **Formal, primary research:** The results of the City's formal annual statistically valid National Citizen Survey guided the Communications Department with quantitative results about the best channels to reach residents to promote the event which included the website, social media and email notifications.

Planning:

This special event took more than a year of planning, and a committee made of 20 staff from every City department led the charge. The purpose of the Crosstown Community Celebration and Block Party was to give project champions and the community at large a festive chance to celebrate a special moment in time that was 30 years in the making. The City's mission statement, developed under the City's first Strategic Plan in 2013, is to provide exceptional municipal services that are responsive to our community while planning for smart and balanced growth that is managed in a financially responsible manner. The City's **goal** was to produce a special event, funded entirely by sponsors, for the community to learn about the bridge and celebrate the milestone of its grand opening. **Objective 1)** Acquire \$100,000 worth of sponsorships to cover the production, merchandise and promotional materials for the event in just six months' time. **Strategy 1A)** Create a sponsorship booklet, and merchandise items that will be promoted heavily through outreach and digital marketing. **Tactics:** Finalize sponsorship packet and start acquiring funds. Design T-shirts and a Crosstown booklet to sell as merchandise. **Objective 2)** Have 5,000 people in attendance the day of the event, Sept. 28, including a few prestigious dignitaries. **Strategy 2A)** Create awareness by heavily advertising the event through traditional marketing, like print and TV, as well as promoting heavily on social media up until the event. **Tactics:** Create branded promotional materials including tents, tablecloths, banners and directional flags. Send out invitations, press releases and promote the event on social media.

Target Audience: The City aimed to reach community leaders, past elected officials, nearby residents and community project champions to be a part of the ribbon cutting ceremony. Every resident in the City of Port St. Lucie was invited to participate

in the Community Celebration and Block Party that followed the ribbon cutting. Residents of Port St. Lucie are family-centric, with the majority of households being those of younger married-couples with children.

Implementation:

The committee of nearly 20 staff met monthly, then weekly, and as the event drew closer, they met daily to work out all the logistics of this monumental event. A sponsorship packet and form were designed and finalized by mid-July, just a little more than two months before the event. Staff worked tirelessly as they acquired more than 80 different companies and businesses sponsorships in either monetary or in-kind donations. A Crosstown booklet was created and printed in both soft and hard cover editions for purchase the day of the event. T-shirts, posters and tumblers were purchased with special permission from Guy Harvey to sell and distribute with his artwork. Sponsor banners were created and purchased, in addition to tents, tablecloths and directional feather flags for the day of the event. Banners for the posts hung around five highly visible intersections around the city were created and hung weeks before the event. Multiple invitations were sent out electronically as early mid-August to dignitaries and to residents, with print invitations being delivered as well. A press release was sent to local media on August 16, informing them of the event. The event was heavily promoted on social media with photos and status updates posted every day for two weeks leading to the event which shared relevant and interesting facts about the bridge's construction. The media, including radio and television stations were invited to attend and broadcast directly from the event. One week before the event, an idea to create engagement at every booth was born and so it was imperative that the graphic designer create the announcement and instructions as well as the game sheet. Participants would be asked to visit every booth and return the card for a chance to win a prize.

Evaluation:

Almost 10,000 people attended the Crosstown Grand Opening, exceeding our objective by 5,000, walking and pedaling over the bridge before it opened to traffic at 4 p.m. as directed. St. Lucie residents were clearly excited about the prospect of less traffic during their daily commutes. Here's a brief sampling of feedback: "This is going to be very convenient. It's going to ease up the traffic." "I voted for it. I had to see it. I want to be a part of it." The City's leadership asked for the bridge to open to traffic by 4 p.m. the day of the celebration and the logistics of breaking down an event for thousands of people within two hours after it ended was challenging but successful. The City met its objective of funding the entire event through sponsorships and staff time, and this allowed it to be free for the public to attend. The custom-made Guy Harvey commemorative merchandise also was very popular, generating more than \$30,000 in sales.

Budget:

Sponsorships were vital in the production of this event, having acquired \$102,345.79 worth in sponsorship revenue from more than 60 local organizations and businesses. The production of the event cost \$101,661.48 which includes entertainment, the ceremony tent, and merchandise items, placing this special event \$684.31 under budget, of strictly sponsorship raised funds. While expenses were \$684 less than revenues, statistically it was on budget. \$16,476.33 of the total production cost was used in printing marketing and promotional materials like feather flags, staff shirts, print materials like invitations, and Facebook advertising to name a few. Ten thousand people attended the event, in which 130 staff worked the day of, from video production to social media monitoring and traffic control to trolley tour guides. \$33,712.50 in net sales of merchandise was accounted for.