

Riverside County Fair and Date Festival

Background

A harvest party in 1921 became the Riverside County Fair and Date Festival and has continued each February through 1998. The fair grounds encompass 110 acres with ample space for parking. There are exhibit buildings, a sports center with off-track betting, carnival rides, livestock exhibits, special areas for entertainment, including concerts, and an arena for ostrich and camel races.

A loss of \$1.6 million in fiscal year 1996 resulted in the transfer of management to the Economic Development Agency (EDA). In February 1997, the first year of management by EDA, a net profit of \$343,000 was attained. The number of exhibits and attendance were also increased substantially.

Findings

1. Due to inclement weather, fair attendance was 5 percent below the 1997 total. However, a record single day attendance of 45,581 was attained on February 21, 1998.
2. A screened patio for smoking has been added to the sports center.
3. All cigarette advertising was eliminated in 1998. This loss of revenue was offset by donations from the cities of Indio, Palm Desert, Rancho Mirage, LaQuinta and many smaller local sponsors. Total pledges of \$300,000 to this year's event was an increase over last year's \$264,000.
4. The number of RV hookups has been increased by seventy-two spots, and more are being planned. Added revenue is expected from RV shows during the non-fair season.
5. Installation of new lighting, replacement of worn electrical wiring and adding new paving have resulted in an expenditure of \$284,000. An additional \$13,000 has been spent this year on added security. This makes a total of \$60,000 for security of patrons this year.
6. Estimate for the work accomplished in repair and improvements during the past year was \$1 million. By using inmate labor, actual cost was reduced to less than half the estimate.
7. EDA made a payment of \$195,000 on a ten-year plan to repay a \$1.6 million loan incurred because of the losses of previous years.

8. An additional \$150,000 of Community Development Block Grant money was spent to improve accessibility for wheelchairs and motorized scooters used by disabled persons.

Both manual wheelchairs and motorized scooters are available at each fair entrance. Rental costs for both types are as follows:

Type of Equipment Amt. for Daily Rental

Manual Wheelchair \$7 per day

Motorized Scooter \$35 per day/\$5 per hour

For many persons, such costs would be prohibitive.

An identification card or credit card is required for the deposit on the equipment.

9. Newspaper articles, advertising, brochures, etc., make no mention of the equipment available for the disabled.

Recommendations

Economic Development Agency:

1. Where practical, list information in articles, advertisements, brochures, etc., regarding availability of wheelchairs and motorized scooters for patrons. Rental costs and a telephone number for information are to be included.
2. Seek sponsors for reducing rental cost or donating the use of scooters and wheelchairs.
3. Continue to use inmate labor for any repairs or improvements when applicable.