

## ***Roadmap to a Rally***

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**I**n 2011, I drafted an article for our COAA journal: “Roadmap to a Rally,” to encourage members to host a band organ rally. Gordie Davidson also had the same idea, submitting his article, “Rally Organizing Demystified” to Ron Bopp for publication. These two articles were published together as a separate 12-page publication identified as *Carousel Organ*, “Organ Rally Supplement,” April, 2011. Mysteriously, my article has not appeared in the Index of Articles which is available from Ron Bopp. Upon bringing this to his attention, he suggested I update the article for publication in a journal issue, so here we are!

**“So, you wanna host an organ rally? Whaddya mean no? Why not?”**

**Ya like to attend rallies don’t ya? Well, they don’t grow on trees ya know!”**

Organ rallies are the public face of COAA and a primary reason for our formation. They provide an opportunity for us to travel, gather with friends, share our passion, spread our enthusiasm and delight the public with the Happiest Music on Earth. You don’t need to own an instrument to host a rally, just have an interest in hosting a fun event! With COAA members spread across this great country, there are endless possibilities for organ rally locations. All we need is some volunteers to step forward. Hosting an organ rally doesn’t require the skills necessary to rebuild a valve chest, arrange music or paint a façade. A simple set of organizational and communication skills will do. Having hosted several rallies, I drafted an article to encourage other members to host a rally. It’s never too late, and you’re never too old. I have no personal aspiration to instruct someone else how to run an organ rally; use or discard any information that you wish. There are, no doubt, as many ways to host a rally as there are to fall into this hobby!

### **Use your resources**

Having attended several rallies before hosting my first, I had plenty of folks and examples to emulate. COAA folks are some of the friendliest bunch of people on the planet, so don’t hesitate to take advantage of their knowledge and experience; they’ll be happy to share it with you. While each venue may be unique and circumstances vary, the basic tenets of COAA rallies are the same, and a basic set of guidelines has been developed. Here they are:

- Saturday and Sunday event.
- Electricity for organs (15 amps per organ for most trailered organs; a few require more).
- Shady locations are preferable for trailered organs. Placement on grass is ideal! Try to avoid blacktop sites.
- Shady areas for crank organs, away from the big-n-louds, are ideal.
- Motel within reasonable distance of rally site, with ample parking for organ trailers. A hospitality room for members is a plus!
- Map to motel and rally site.
- Ideally, the rally venue will provide a complimentary Saturday evening meal for all registrants (after all, we are providing entertainment for their guests at our expense). However, this is not a hard and fast rule, and should not be a deal breaker.
- Rally venue to provide local advertising for rally weekend.

These are basic guidelines for getting a rally started. We encourage all COAA hosts to do what they think would be fun and interesting for our members. Some rallies are loosely organized while others are highly structured, and while there are financial responsibilities that must be met, there is plenty of leeway in hosting a rally and putting your stamp on it. Variety is the spice of life!

Interested in hosting a rally, but not ready to try it solo? Ask some of your COAA friends to co-host with you; there is strength in numbers. COAA member Suzie Hendricks is our Rally Coordinator and is available to provide advice and assistance. Please contact Suzie (shhendricks@stkate.edu) to discuss your rally dates and locations before making any commitments. We try to avoid conflicts with AMICA, MBSI or other COAA events.

## Location, Location, Location

Whether you're buying a house or planning an organ rally, location is of prime consideration. COAA has hosted rallies in some ideal, beautiful locations with nary a soul in sight to enjoy the music we love to share. Don't let this happen to you! I judge the success of a rally by the attendance and interest of the public. As an enthusiast who delights in the joy of band organ music (the big-n-louds are my favorite!), I don't mind travelling to a rally where COAA members are the only audience. The music, friendship and conversation make the time pass all too quickly. However, as a COAA promoter, rally organizer and organ grinder, this is a missed opportunity. Our goal is to share **"The Happiest Music on Earth"** with the public. Thoughtful planning is key to a well attended event. The best way to insure a good turnout is to plan a rally in conjunction with an event, festival or location that will guarantee to draw a crowd. I'll bet that the majority of Americans don't know what a band organ is, so why would they go out of their way to attend a band organ rally? However, hosting a rally in conjunction with a favorite festival will delight attendees with the added sights and sounds of our colorful music machines. And don't think that the event/festival sponsors won't notice and invite us back. This has happened time and again. COAA rallies have had a positive financial impact on several communities. The first St. Joseph, Michigan rally was a resounding success attendance wise and financially for the community. Living History Farms in Iowa broke their single day attendance record during our September, 2010 rally. In 2008, our first rally at Olcott Beach, NY (on the shore of Lake Ontario) was held in conjunction with their annual "Old Olcott Days." It was a resounding success, drawing 57 organs, 100+ members and lots of delighted visitors! At Saturday's meal, the gratified hosts immediately invited us back the following year.

Historical and agricultural events are a natural. A good rally setting is one in which folks are there to explore and see what there is to see. Outdoor museums, where people stroll around and look at stuff, are ideal locations for a rally. That's why Carillon Historical Park in Dayton, OH is an ideal site for MBSI Mid-Am band organ rallies. It's a delightful location laid out along a grassy mall with plenty of trees, and folks visit there to stroll and look at stuff. Band organs and hand cranked organs are an extra added attraction.

Astute event organizers should see an organ rally as an opportunity to enhance their event and raise its profile. Free admission locations are more likely to see increased attendance for any type of event, so keep this in mind when choosing a location for your rally. Historically appropriate settings can be an alluring location. Amusement parks may seem a natural choice on the surface, but look a little deeper. Is it a free admission park that attracts a portion of visitors who are non-riders, and may take an interest in our instruments, or is it an expensive gated park where thrill seekers run from ride to ride?

As a roller coaster and amusement park enthusiast I enjoy travelling and visiting parks as time and money allow. Upon visiting Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, TN, I noticed how musically oriented the park is. They offer 30+ musical performances at indoor and outdoor venues all day throughout the park. The location is hilly, with attractive landscaping throughout and a full-sized steam train, whose whistle is heard throughout the park. Heavenly! While not a viable location for trailered organs, I do think the park and its theming lend themselves well to a crank organ rally. While this is one of those expensive, gated attractions, my experience there has shown that a large percentage of their visitors are there to enjoy the musical entertainment.



Crank Organ Concert (2010) at a Knoebels' Rally.

In Shelburne, VT, the Shelburne Museum beckons visitors with 45 acres of Americana collections: paintings, folk art, carriages, buildings, railroad cars and a 220-foot steamboat! This is a gated attraction. However, it's one where folks come to stroll and see what there is to see. They have an Artizan band organ and carousel animals and paintings remaining from a Dentzel carousel. I've visited there specifically to assess its' potential as a rally site. It is an ideal location, with enough room to absorb all the organs that we can throw at them. Their Chief Conservator even attended a COAA rally to see what we're all about.

Circumstance can play a role in finding rally locations. We've held many successful rallies at Knoebels Amusement Resort in Elysburg, PA as a result of a question. In 2002, I asked Dick Knoebel if he'd bring one of

their band organs to a COAA rally. He replied, “Why not bring a rally here?” Several years later, during a visit to Knoebels with fellow COAA member Dan Wilke, we came across some friends from the roller coaster hobby which we hadn’t seen in many years. We learned that one of them works at Living History Farms in Iowa. Upon speaking with her about the museum, I mentioned the COAA and our band organ rallies. The seed took root and COAA held its first rally there the following year. COAA member Marc Dannecker has coordinated several formal organ rallies and informal organ gatherings in conjunction with Milwaukee’s annual German Fest, which draws 70,000 people to Milwaukee’s waterfront over a 3-day weekend. While living in Bloomington, Indiana, I initiated a gathering of organs when COAA was invited to participate in Conner Prairie’s annual Festival of Machines in Fishers, Indiana.

There are thousands of locations/events/festivals across our country that would provide an ideal setting for a rally. Though I haven’t yet visited Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, I believe that would be a great rally location. For years, I thought that Glen Echo Park, near Washington, D.C. would be an historically appropriate location for a rally. This defunct amusement park has been repurposed as an arts center; the site retains the original trolley entrance, a beautifully restored Dentzel menagerie carousel with a fantastic sounding Wurlitzer Style 165 band organ (expertly maintained by Durward Center) in a gorgeous carousel building, along with the Spanish Ballroom which is regularly used. The free admission park has many events which draw people. In 2021, coordinating with the Arts Council which programs the site, COAA member Paul Senger hosted our first rally there to help celebrate the 100th anniversary of the carousel.

When considering the possibility of a rally, don’t think you need to live near a venue to host a rally there. 90% of the work in organizing a rally occurs right in your own home. Much of the site work can be accomplished through a visit in advance. Potential rally locations are abundant, but hosts are few. It doesn’t take a lot to make us happy; some shade, electricity, a meal, and visitors. We provide the music and fun! Read on.

### **The Emerald City**

An ideal host site will have a built-in audience, the capacity to advertise the event, an ability to feed us, overnight security for the instruments, and large grounds with shade trees and electricity. Having enough real estate to place the large organs apart to minimize organ “cross talk” is important. Hand-cranked organs will be drowned out if they’re in the proximity of the larger instruments. As the THX film trailer states, “The audience is listening.” Nothing will turn off visitors or enthusiasts more than a barrage of mechanical music coming from all directions. Organ placement is one of the most important on-site elements of a rally. When communicating with a potential rally site, inform them of our requirements up front. If they are unable to provide a meal for our registered members, they may be able to work with a local organization that can. Some venues have been able to provide a secure, overnight location for cart-mounted crank organs. For one rally, a Boy Scout troop provided overnight security for the trailered organs. Working with more than one entity provides greater exposure for COAA. We realize that not every location is perfect. Thinking about a rally location which can only accommodate a limited number of large trailered organs? No problem. Limit registration of large organs to a certain amount, on a first registered, first reserved basis. Workarounds can be found to overcome most obstacles.

### **Lodging**

Once you’ve discussed a rally location and date with the Rally Coordinator, book a host hotel if possible. If you’re not familiar with the area ask the rally venue for recommendations, they often have relationships with one or more local hotels. Contacting COAA members from the area is another option, but nothing beats checking out places yourself. Remember, it’s likely you’ll be staying there too! Since members travel and lodge at their own expense, procure an affordable hotel with ample parking space and negotiate a group rate. Secure a block of about 20 to 30 rooms depending on the nature and size of the rally. For a Saturday & Sunday rally, the group rate should be established for three (3) to four (4) nights. The hotel will provide you with a date by which the blocked rooms must be booked. Incorporate this into your planning and registration information. A hospitality room for members should be secured, if possible. This provides a great place to relax and socialize after a day of entertaining the masses. It may be the only opportunity for organ owners to socialize with fellow members. An on-site restaurant is convenient for breakfasts. Large parking lots, for members with trailered organs, are a plus. Nearby restaurants are another plus. Keep in mind our camping members too, and see if there are campground facilities in the area.

## Timing is everything

Ideally, rally dates and hotel matters are taken care of nine months to a year in advance of a rally. When I established and hosted biennial June rallies at Knoebels Amusement Resort in Pennsylvania, I began contacting the park the preceding November to establish dates. To keep me organized and on track, I created a timeline of tasks and dates. Here's an example from the 2010 Knoebels rally, scheduled for June 12th & 13th:

- November, 2009 – Contact Park to schedule rally dates and arrange picnic dinner.
- Mid-November – Deadline for January issue CAROUSEL ORGAN first rally ad.
- Mid-February – Deadline for April issue CAROUSEL ORGAN second rally ad.
- March – contact Park to arrange reserved parking for crank organ owners, request park maps/brochures for rally mailing, and obtain local/regional press contacts. Contact COAA Membership Chairman for mailing labels. Draft registration flyer, and purchase & assemble materials for mailing, including postage.
- April 10 – Mail rally registration mailing.
- May 10 – Hotel cut-off date. Contact park with estimated head count for meal.
- Mid-May – Email press releases.
- May 22 – Registration deadline.
- Late May – Create name badges & registration envelopes, draft attendance sheet and rally agenda, schedule grind organ concerts and contact participants.
- June 2 – Contact Park with final head count for meal.
- June 7 – Contact park security to touch base and park electrician to discuss electric specifics.
- June 11 – Arrive at park to finalize details.
- June 12, 13 – Rally Time!
- Post rally – Complete Rally Accounting Sheet and submit to COAA Treasurer. Send “Thank You” correspondence to rally venue. Contact rally participants to thank them. Draft a write-up for the COAA “Rally Edition.



On the left is a photo of the COAA Band Concert in 2010 in North Tonawanda, NY. On the right is a COAA Band Concert in 2014 at a Knoebels rally.

## Build it and they will come

Really? Not really. Just because you schedule a rally doesn't mean that folks are obliged to attend. You need to make it appealing! Granted, most members are happy to support a rally that fits within their budget and schedule. We appreciate the opportunity to share our enthusiasm and music with the public. Remember though, folks are spending their finances, their time, and often travelling great distances to attend a rally. Make it worth their while. Let them know what else there is to see and do in the area.

Your rally may provide the first opportunity for folks to travel to that region. Think about offering a group activity before or during the rally. The day before the 2008 Olcott Beach, NY rally, host Dan Wilke coordinated an Erie Canal Locks boat tour in the nearby town of Lockport, NY. About 30 of us gathered for this fun and relaxing opportunity, convening at a hot dog joint nearby for dinner afterwards, complete with an impromptu concert on David Wasson's 98-keyless concert band organ *Trudy* in the parking lot. What a great way to kick off a weekend!



Lockport Locks and Erie Canal Cruise in 2011 at the second Olcott Beach Rally.

At the Knoebels rallies, I pioneered the crank organ concerts, which are great fun for the participants and park guests. COAA band concerts with *Trudy*, where talented COAA members bring and play actual music instruments along with *Trudy*, are a treat for members and the public alike at any rally. David Wasson provides sheet music for most instruments. The good folks at Lake Winnie Amusement Park in Rossville, Georgia provide ride passes for rally attendees and the Knoebel family likewise provides complimentary ride tickets. Occasionally, nearby club members with collections offer open houses in conjunction with a rally. This is a great opportunity to meet folks and socialize. One organ rally in Franklin, PA had a Saturday picnic dinner a couple towns away at a lovely homestead featuring a Wurlitzer theater pipe organ in the garage/music room. After a tasty picnic dinner outdoors, we assembled in the music room for a pipe organ concert. How cool is that! Our members will appreciate any extras you may think up to make a rally special.

### Go Tell It on the Mountain

Once you have a great rally lined up, make sure and tell folks about it, beginning with COAA. Remember, we are the rally! Use the CAROUSEL ORGAN journal, the COAA website ([www.coaa.us](http://www.coaa.us)),



The author collating rally mailing materials in 2010.

the COAA Chat Group (<https://groups.io/g/CarouselOrganAssociation>), the COAA Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/COAA2016/>) and COAA Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/carouselorgancoaa/>). COAA member Spencer Meachum can help you with the COAA website, Wally Venable ([Wallace.venable@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:Wallace.venable@mail.wvu.edu)) can help you with the Chat Group and Sam Harris ([samharris@suddenlink.net](mailto:samharris@suddenlink.net)) can help you with Social Media. Post your event as soon as you have information to share, as folks need lead time to plan for travel and time off. Post rally information on the Mechanical Music Digest website (<https://www.mmdigest.com/>). Contact AMICA and

MBSI chapters in the region of the rally site and let them know about the fantastic rally you're planning. Hopefully, the organization or venue hosting the rally will have the capability to advertise the event in their locality. If they need photos which you don't have, let us know. There are plenty of COAA folks who can supply you with images. Contact Ron Bopp, myself or any of the folks whose names appear as contributors to the "Rally Edition" of CAROUSEL ORGAN.

You can also help spread the word about the rally by sending press releases to newspapers in the region of the rally. This is something I undertook for every Knoebels rally I hosted. In addition to contacting local media, I also contact media outlets within a 200 mile radius. <http://newslink.org/stat-news.html> is a helpful reference website for newspaper contacts. You can search by state and find many newspaper websites. Access the websites and navigate through them to find their contact info for event notices, travel & leisure editors, entertainment editors, etc. Most counties also have a travel & tourism bureau that will only be too happy to assist you in bringing visitors to their area. Take advantage of them! Advance publicity will benefit the rally far more than publicity during the event.

When organizing my first rally, I sought advice from the PR person where I work. She warned against mass emails for press releases. Email each person individually, even if there are several within one organization. Copy the press release into the body of the email; media outlets won't open unsolicited attachments. However, don't just email them a press release; they get tons of 'em. Preface the press release with an email pitch, as follows:

(Subject line) *Historic Band Organ Rally*

*Colorful music machines from around the world are gathering at one of the finest traditional amusement parks in North America. A century of self-playing mechanical pipe organs will serenade guests at Knoebels Amusement Resort in Elysburg, PA on June 12th and 13th. Among the organ grinders and brightly painted, historic fairground organs there will be several fascinating organs built from scratch by enthusiasts, offering great human interest. Enthusiastic experts for interviews are available to comment on this highly unique event.*

- PRESS RELEASE BELOW -  
(Paste the press release here.)

Make sure to customize the email pitch and subject line for each media: newspaper, radio, television. The above example is written for newspaper. Highlight the visual aspect for TV: "**Colorful** Band Organ Rally;" and the audio aspect for radio; "**Musical** Band Organ Rally". Indicate at the bottom of the press release that high-resolution images are available. Providing print media with everything they need enhances the likelihood of an article. Send out the press releases three to four weeks in advance of the rally, and include your contact info on the release. With any luck, you'll see your rally in print! Be prepared to promote the rally and COAA in the event you're contacted. Also, look through the attendance



Above is a photo of prepping rally mailing envelopes (2010).

Below reveals the 2010 rally mailing envelopes ready for mailing.



roster for your rally and think about a couple folks who may provide an enthusiastic interview during the rally, should the need arise.

### The Devil is in the Details

- **Scheduling:** Saturday/Sunday rallies provide maximum exposure for our instruments. Members should be encouraged to present both full days. Time of year is important too. Rally locations in toasty parts of the country would best be held in spring or fall, when temperatures are more comfortable. Owners and instruments need comfortable temperatures to look and sound their best!
- **Production:** Many hands make light work. Enlist your family and friends to help with the variety of tasks necessary to host a rally.
- **Registration Materials:** Twenty years ago our members were notified of rallies via mass mailings. Considerable time and effort were necessary to draft the rally registration materials, purchase envelopes, postage and copy paper, make copies, receive and apply address labels, fold flyers, stuff and seal envelopes and mail 300 + flyers for every rally. Today, this process has been made much easier thanks to CAROUSEL ORGAN publisher Ron Bopp and fellow COAA members Marie Beemish and Spencer Meachum (Rally Webmaster). Marie has created a rally registration flyer template which she'll kindly populate for you and Spencer will kindly create a rally website for you. Once your rally information is set, email Marie (mbeemish@gmail.com) and Spencer (farmdoesminecraft@gmail.com) with the following information:
  - \* Rally name
  - \* Rally dates
  - \* Informational paragraphs (including registration material pick-up location and times, meal info.)
  - \* Host name
  - \* Street address, phone and email address to mail registrations
  - \* Cutoff date for registrations
  - \* Host hotel name
  - \* Hotel address, phone number and cost
  - \* Code to mention while making reservations and cutoff date
  - \* Will there be a crank organ concert(s)? Days and times, if yes.
  - \* Organ Placement and Removal days/hours

Remember, this is also an opportunity to promote your rally, so take advantage of it! Ask Marie to forward the rally flyer to *Carousel Organ* publisher Ron Bopp and email Ron (rbopp1@tampabay.rr.com) and ask him to have the flyer printed and included with a journal mailing. Easy peasy!

Upon receiving Registration Forms from members, it's a nice courtesy to contact them to let them know that you've received their materials. Name badges, a rally itinerary, attendance roster, meal tickets, etc. should be prepared to hand out to members when they register at the rally site. One recommendation for name badges: keep the names large and readable. It's impolite to stare at someone's chest just to identify them! Attendees know when and where the rally is, so keep other info to a minimum.

- **Financials:** Personal checks received for rally registrations should be forwarded to the COAA Treasurer for deposit. As I receive rally registrations, I jot down the check #, amount, and date received on the registration form. Touch base with the Treasurer regarding their preference for when to receive registration checks. Save receipts for any rally expenses you incur (name badges, etc.) to forward to the Treasurer for reimbursement following the rally.

• **Organ placement:** This is such an important aspect of a rally, that it's best not to leave it up to chance. The very first COAA rally at Trolleyville, near Cleveland, Ohio had all the organs, large and small, located within the turn around of the trolley line. All facing inward, the organs created quite an unpleasant cacophony of sound! The more space between organs, the better. Avoid having organs face each other. If you need to line 'em up, face them alternately in opposite directions. This way, listeners will only hear the organ that they're in front of. Remember that shade and electricity are essential for the large, trailered



An example of an easy-to-read name badge.

organs. Organ owners prefer not to have direct sun on their instruments. Keep this in mind when placing trailered organs. Also take into account the length of the trailer and which side of the trailer the organ will face. Some trailers open on all four sides. Some, on two opposing sides. Some open on the back only. Contact the organ owner with any questions. They'll be glad to help! Work with the host location to determine safe load-in and load-out times for the trailered organs. Typically, Friday evening and Saturday morning are scheduled for load-in. Crank organ owners tend to find their own desired locations, but they too require shade. If shade is sparse, consider scheduling the rally at a time of year when the sun is less strong and temperatures are cooler. When hosting a rally in a location with many permanent obstacles (buildings, trees, attractions), the best way to plan organ placement is to visit the location in advance with trailer measurements and a tape measure in hand. This is important for electrical access too. A digital camera can help.

- **Security:** COAA expects the host location to provide overnight security for any organs remaining on location. If the venue cannot provide this, security arrangements should be made.
- **Hospitality Room:** After a day of entertaining out in public, it's great to have an evening sanctuary where we can gather, relax and chew the fat. A well-stocked hospitality room is a plus. Arrange for someone to stop at a local supermarket to pick up snacks and beverages. Coolers and ice will keep liquids cool. Save receipts, you will be reimbursed.

Hosting a rally can be as involved as you wish to make it. My hope is to inform and inspire. COAA will benefit from geographic diversity. More rallies in new locations will keep the hobby fresh and exciting for all of us. "Step right up folks," and invite us to rally in your neck of the woods!

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