CONFEDERATION'S POCKET PROGRAM
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by John T. Sapienza, Jr. for Smofcon 1988 (Phoenix)

The pocket program for LONE STAR CON, the 1985 NASFiC, was the most effective I had ever seen. I suggested that it would be a great format for ConFederation with just a few changes, and discovered I'd volunteered to do the design. [Amazing how that works.] I'm glad I did, it was a lot of fun and educational, too.

What makes the folded map method so wonderful is that you have a large surface area to work with, yet it can be opened and refolded back to present a small bundle to hold while you read it. This means that you have a lot more flexibility in putting things where they need to go without being as constrained by page layout limitations as in a conventional booklet. Thus, you can think of the program in terms of "pages" defined by the fold lines of the map and yet can overlap those page lines when you need to for stringing together text or maps.

We wanted the pocket program to be easy to figure out and easy to use. I think we succeeded pretty well, as I heard only a few complaints and a lot of happy comments. Still, there's always room for improvement in future designs, so I'd like to tell you the thinking that went into the design for future reference. The basic idea was to put things people needed to read first, and present other items in order of importance, to the extent the physical layout permitted.

Thus, the first thing you see is the front cover telling you the name, time and location of the convention, and the names of the principal guests. When you turn the program over, you find the major events listed by time and place. This is something I always like to find in a program because it is a major help upon arrival to read where things are without having to search all over the book for basic information. Putting it on the back cover means that you don't even have to open the book to check on those things everyone wants to know 100 times during a convention. We listed here every continuing function, such as the art show and registration, and certain major activities such as the opening and closing ceremonies, the guest of honor speeches, the masquerade, and the play.

The two notes pages were put in both because several people asked for them and because the layout made it convenient to do it. They were put where they went because the map format allows you to turn the program book inside out by folding the front cover over to face the back cover and thus exposing the notes pages in a way that you can write on them and stick the program in your pocket as it is. This was very handy during party time.

The Quick Schedule took up five "pages" on the map, which fooled me as I'd planned for only four. No problem, they just folded over to the next piece of the front of the map. This was designed to be the part of the pocket program you see when you open the map the second time, after bypassing the notes pages. For most of the con, once you've decided what you want to see and checked off those items on the Quick Schedule, you needn't open the pocket program any more than to this point. So this was the most convenient place to put this.

The hotel maps went directly above the Quick Schedule to make it easy to open the program and compare the room listed for a program item with the map so you can find it if you need help. The maps were supplied to us by the hotels, and simply pasted up for printing.

The dealer map and guide were prepared by Steve Francis, who ran the dealers' room. I might have left them out of the pocket program if I had known that Steve planned to run them off as a handout in the room, but we had room enough in the program so it wasn't a problem. There was some controversy over how to list the dealers, with Steve opting for listing the dealers themselves alphabetically rather than by company name. I'd have done it by company, but it was his show. (There is something to be said for taking the dealers' guide and the restaurant guide and making them a separate handout, however. It would free up space enough to allow you to print the rest of the pocket program in a slightly larger type size.)

The back of the 21" X 30" sheet was devoted to detailed program listings. We ended up putting the autographs as a separate table by force of circumstance. They were originally included in both

the Quick Guide and the detailed program listings, but the Quick Guide overran its allotted space badly enough that we pulled out the autograph listings there. They looked so convenient as a table that we put them around on the back, despite the fact that they were also listed there within in the program. I liked the result, but whether someone will do it again is a matter of taste and the space available.

The film schedule was not included in the pocket program simply because we didn't receive it in time to try to fit it in. That was a good thing, actually, as the fi1m schedule would have pressed us badly for space, and the separate handout that was done was very attractive on its own. (possibly some thought could be given to consolidating the film schedule, dealers' guide, and restaurant guide as a separate booklet from the pocket program for future cons.)

I included a guide to using the pocket program at the bottom of the first notes page, and posted a longer explanation of the pocket program at the information booth, on Pat Mueller's advice. She had gotten considerable criticism of the LONE STAR CON pocket program from people expecting a conventional booklet. I agree with Pat's advice, as the format does take some getting used to. Any future con using the map format ought to try to offer some help to get fans over any initial puzzlement.

Aside from choosing the format, preparing a pocket program takes considerable preplanning. You need to estimate what material you need to include before you can choose from the resources available to you. When we opted for the map format, for example, we made an assumption that we wouldn't be using a significantly greater amount of lines than LONE STAR CON. This was not a good estimate, and we ended up both leaving out the movie listings and using smaller type to fit our program into the same amount of paper. This was not a serious problem, as we could always have left out the dealers guide and/or the restaurant guide to make space, but it does point out the need for thinking out what you plan to deliver.

You also need to think through the technology you plan to use in detail, and give it some experimental tries first. My plan was to use desktop publishing, with us entering the data into a minicomputer and running it off on a sophisticated laser printer available on the job for one of the people in our group. That was wonderful, until he changed jobs and the equipment ceased to be available to us. Then we had to scramble and ended up with a series of makeshift choices that in retrospect were not as good an example of good planning on my part as I would have preferred. We had the good fortune of having a friend of a friend turn out to be an Apple Macintosh software developer, wi th a Macintosh Plus and LaserWriter Plus outfit and all the software in the world. But we sti11 spent two evenings and one entire night transferring the program data from the IBM computers we'd entered it into over to the Mac, and formatting the output line by line unti1 it looked acceptable. Preplanning could have let us do that and still have more time for proofreading out some of the more creative typos.

LONE STAR CON entered their data into dBase II with printer codes done separately in a way I don't understand well enough to describe here, but which many readers probably can figure out from their own experience. Then it was sent by modem to the printer's computer and run off on that end. That method requires a dBase expert doing setup, however. In the future there will be many computers with desktop publishing capacity, as IBM has created an organization devoted to developing that for IBM products. I expect that DEC and other companies will have it on the job sites where they will be available to a lot of fans. And with the price of Macs dropping and the expected spread of that in lower price equipment such as the forthcoming Atari ST laser printer, we should see such capacity in the home as well as the office within a year or so. In short, what was difficult but possible for ConFederation's pocket program is likely to be widely available for future cons.

When making your plans to create a pocket program, check out what is currently actually available before trying it out. We had to get printed samples from two laser printer/computer combinations that were offered to us before we realized that they simply would not do the job that I had in mind for them. Similarly, don't accept someone's belief that a specific program is suitable for your needs without actually trying it out. We used Lotus 1-2-3 to enter the program because two people with computer experience assured us it would do the job. It was workable but a lot more effort to use than a good data base program would have been.

One thing that held us up in entering and then in manipulating program data was that we only had two computers that we could use at a time. Give some thought in choosing equipment as to how many people on your staff have access to that flavor of equipment and software. I will spare you the horror stories we went through carrying "data on disks from an IBM AT to allegedly compatible computers and back again, but the mention of the problem should be sufficient reminder that your computers need to be able to work with each other, without compatibility mess-ups. This whole subject needs to be thought through by people knowledgeable on computers to choose what will do the job, once the program head decides on the results that equipment is expected to produce.

One of the people who greatly affects what is possible is your printer. So it is important to find a printer as early as you can. Which means deciding on the size and format of the project, and then trying all the printers in your area to find out who can actually do that kind of printing and who will do it for the most reasonable combination of cost and service. The printer ought to be near enough so that a responsible person on the staff can go in and speak with the printer regularly. Access to the printer can be critical in the days when you got something typeset and had to go through proof copies and making corrections. With desktop publishing, you do your printing and corrections on your own, and hand the resulting ready copy in for pasteup and printing. But it is still better to use a local printer than take a chance on having your programs shipped off to the Twilight Zone.

We chose to do the preparation in the D.C. area, and then ship it by express mail down to Atlanta for pasteup and printing. When I mailed the pieces to Don Cook, I included the data on a Macintosh disk as well, to allow him a backup if necessary. Samanda Jeude used the disk to create the large print version of the pocket program for the benefit of the visually impaired, which is another example of the flexibility of doing this ourselves via desktop publishing techniques.

[After having seen and used the various versions of the map versions of Pocket Programs, single day-by-day sheets, and notepad versions, I've decided that I like the notepad version myself the best. No folding and refolding, things stay in the same place as you remember them as being, and things progress in a logical, linear fashion. This version needs no operating manual. However, I've rarely seen this version done - I most recently saw it done well at Nashville's 1987 World Fantasy Convention and was quite impressed. But I've never been smart enough to do that version myself when doing a pocket program, however.]