

Interview



A Costume-Con Chair Learns the Ropes

Jennifer "Radar" Wylie

The newly-minted chair for Costume-Con 39 in San Jose reflects on her journey to this point and her path ahead to 2021.

When did you first begin thinking about making a bid for a Costume-Con, and why did you consider doing it?

I first began thinking about it between 2012 and 2013. There were very few shows in the Bay Area that had competitions related to costuming, and some had struck the competitions completely from the programming schedule or had simply moved their convention away from the Bay Area entirely (WonderCon, for example). I wanted to bring in a convention that catered to folks wanted not only to compete with what they made, but also to share their experiences and expertise...something that could feel 'lost' in the size and scope of a large all-encompassing convention.

Which past Costume-Cons have you attended?

I have attended 23, 26, 30, and 36.

Did you consult past Costume-Con chairs before deciding to do it? If so, what advice did they give you that encouraged you to move forward?

Yes, I spoke to several past Chairs and members of staff that held high ranking positions. My two biggest takeaways were a) Find a hotel that can handle the specialized needs of competition plus offer ease-of-access to guests (access to public transit, ample food options) and b) commit to massive outreach.

Costume-Con is a fairly small event that has a different committee and staff every year so one has to work super-extra-hard to get the word out...especially here in the Bay Area, where there are now *easily* two or three major convention or costuming-related events every month. And that doesn't even include training and workshops for

every-year events such as the Renaissance Faire and the Dickens Faire.

Did you hear anything that gave you second thoughts about it?

Nothing about Costume-Con itself has given me second thoughts about running it.

Tell us about your past experience in bidding to organize and run conventions.

In the past I have helped staff BayCon, SiliCon, Con-Volution, assisted with running the Masquerade at Gallifrey One and Fanime, and helped participate in many outreach parties and fan tables.

What are the requirements for bidding on a Costume-Con?

The [Costume-Con website](#) has a detailed set of requirements for a bid. A bid requires a submitting a letter of intent that includes:

- The name of the Conference Chair and Treasurer (these two offices can never be held by the same person);
- An organizing instrument (such as By-Laws, articles of incorporation or association, or a partnership agreement) which specifies how the committee is organized and the method of selection and removal of committee members; and,



- A letter of intent or option from a hotel or other facility declaring specific dates of your Costume-Con conference.

Two other items are helpful, but are not required:

- A sponsoring organization (such as one of the International Costumers' Guild chapters); and/or,
- Tax-exempt status (e.g. 501(c)(3)).

How was your bid selected?

Bids are voted on at the Costume-Con three years earlier. Attending and supporting members of that Costume-Con can vote by paying \$10 that applies to future membership. There were 48 votes total: 46 for the SF Bay Area bid, one for Baptistown, NJ, and one no preference. The bid was announced during the break in the Historical Masquerade at Costume-Con 36.

Besides the Chair and Treasurer, What are some of the other roles that are necessary for Costume-Con?

One of the roles is the program chair because a Costume-Con must have at least ten instructional/educational presentations. Another is the competition directors. There must be at least one staged competition at a Costume-Con. There are usually at least five different competitions (Science Fiction & Fantasy, Historical, Single Pattern, Doll, and Future Fashion Folio). Each one has a vastly different set of requirements, so it helps to have a competition director for each one.

How did you go about recruiting others to your bid team?

I told my friends about my plan and after they were done (lovingly) telling me I was crazy, I recruited for very few positions, for one very big reason- WorldCon 76 is going to be in San Jose in just a few months and practically everyone I know who works on conventions is working on WC76. This is not a bad thing! My convention is three years away so I have plenty of time to fill key positions after everyone has a chance to decompress from working on a WorldCon.

What were the roles that you made sure to recruit for first?

Treasurer and directors for the primary Masquerade competitions, though I still have a few more roles to fill.

What has been the greatest challenge for you in recruiting a team? Which functions were the hardest to recruit?

The greatest challenge is that the convention is three years away and that's a *really long time* to hold someone's attention simply because there's so much that can happen in such a long timespan! I suspect my hardest position to recruit (and I have discovered this is generally the case for other shows I've helped with) is having people to help load stuff in and load stuff out. It's sweaty, hard work with long hours and schlepping lots of stuff over a fair bit of distance.

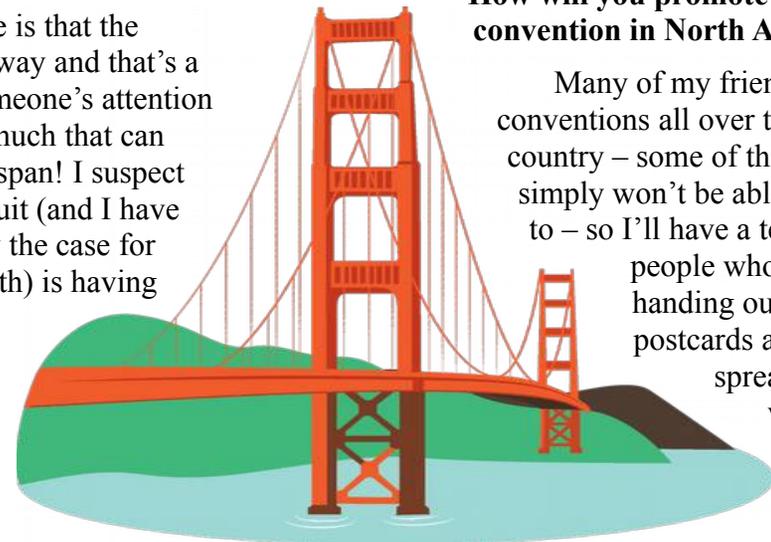
With the wealth of conventions that take place in the San Francisco Bay Area every year, how do you plan to reach out to the various costuming communities to promote it?

That's one of the plus sides of there being so many events: I have plenty of opportunities. Fan tables and outreach parties at conventions, putting out postcards and flyers, and asking people to spread the word at monthly local costuming events, such as dances put on by PEERS, and events put on by GBACG.

It's attractive for people here locally because attendees are likely to know one another and thus be able to participate in programming that we can tailor for their groups, such as acting workshops, dancing lessons, dances,, and the like.

Costume-Con draws participants most heavily from the US and Canada. How will you promote the convention in North America?

Many of my friends go to conventions all over the country – some of them I simply won't be able to get to – so I'll have a team of people who will be handing out our postcards and spreading the word.



With such an iconic convention location as the San Francisco Bay Area, do you have any plans to attract greater international attendance, especially from the Asia/Pacific region?

This is something that I'd really like help with. For example, I would like to offer memberships to winners of overseas competitions.

What role will social media play, and do you have a group of people on your team who will focus on using social media to promote it?

Social media is going to play a *huge* role as I would love for people to see pictures and content as to what Costume-Con is all about, and I am currently looking for (preferably local) folks who can help me run a Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram presence.

One of the challenges for past Costume-Cons has been the participation of young costumers. What are your plans for garnering a larger participation of young costumers, especially from the SF Bay area?

Fanime is one convention I'm planning to tap as far as outreach, especially as a lot of the attendees are local. Some other groups still plan events (NorCal Cosplay Gathering, for example) and



there are several other Cosplay conventions and events throughout the year. I'm hoping to have a dedicated outreach team.

Bid committees attend and host events at other conventions to promote the bid. What other conventions have you attended and how will you promote your bid for CC 39 at them?

So far, not many, simply because of the way the process works. I did, however, have a presence at Further Confusion in San Jose this year, plus a table at CC36. My one regret about having a table at 36 is I should have scheduled a later flight out on Monday.

How do you go about contacting hotels or other venues about the opportunity?

We're currently looking at four hotels...even though the convention is small (an average size is between 400-500 members), there's a lot of square footage involved in finding the right balance for a main ballroom, panel rooms, merchant gallery, and display areas for the doll competition pieces. Basically, my hotel liaison and I will be visiting all the sites and making sure we get the right amount of space for the right balance of what can be offered by the hotel.

Have there any surprises for you as you are going about selecting a hotel?

Yes!. My first choice wound up with a full rental the week before my con, leading up through that Saturday. That meant there would have been no hotel rooms or facility space until two days into the convention. In hindsight, it actually works better finding something else as parking would have been a royal pain.

When do you expect to make your final selection?

I hope to make an announcement by the end of June.

What characteristics about a venue are important in the selection?

A good price for the participants for their room nights, enough space for major events, displays, and panels, food choices that are plentiful and easily accessible, and if at all possible, a venue with a hotel shuttle service.

A frequent complaint from attendees is that it a "desert" outside the doors of the hotel, How does this work in to your thinking?

I'm going to try my very best to get all these bases covered. I might miss one, but I know firsthand how some of these things are frustrating and I want to make sure my attendees have as hassle-free of an experience as possible.

What kinds of tours before, during, and after the convention are you thinking about?

I haven't though too hard about this yet, but I'd like there to be excursions to fabric stores of well-repute, distillery, winery, and brewery trips, and maybe costumed excursions to specialty areas. The Bay Area has many historic offerings, from lovely rose gardens to funky architecture to the rich history and locations in and around San Francisco.

There are expenses involved in making and promoting a bid, and once the bid is approved. How do you handle things like hotel deposits, insurance, etc?

Initial expenses include the cost of a website, hosting and decorating for room parties, printing postcards and flyers, and traveling to local conventions (and other Costume-Cons). The \$10 fee for site selection plus early registrations help cover some of these initial fees once the bid is approved.



As for hotel deposit, that is dependent on the contract. Insurance is usually covered by the sponsoring organization. In the case of CC39, it is San Francisco Science Fiction Conventions Inc. (SFSFC).

Make no mistake, there are going to be financial chunks that come out of the pocket of the Chair that won't see reimbursement; I consider it a donation to the community.

What is your road-map as you move forward on planning the convention? What are some of our key milestones?

Getting our hotel contract is the first thing. We're having some hiccups getting our website and registration up (nobody's fault; tech glitches happen) so my main goal is to get those things up. I plan on being at WorldCon in San Jose in August with materials to hand out, plus I'm planning a casual staff meeting at some point in October so we can start organizing our ducks. After WorldCon, I'll also begin recruiting for other staff positions that I've been holding off on until that was over with.

Past chairs have noted the impact that organizing a CC has on their work and non-work lives. How has getting to this point impacted yours?

Right now there hasn't been too much of an impact simply because the bid process has been so long in coming and I ran unopposed. I'm really, really sure that as time goes on, I'll be doing a lot on my evenings and weekends to keep things running. I feel a bit like a runner at a starting gate, anticipating that gun going off.

How do you plan to cope with the increased demands on your time in the next three years?

I have an amazing team of people to help carry the load and I see that continuing onward as I hire more staff. Yes, it's going to be stressful at times, but I don't have to do it by myself, and I have a great Vice Chair (Christine Doyle). And if I need a little breather, I can spend a day at home chilling with my cats to refuel my Cope Tank™.

Have you discussed this with past CC chairs? If so, what advice have they given you about it?

I've spoken with several who, after lovingly telling me that I was nuts, have offered their advice and insight. Stuff that worked well, stuff that didn't, that sort of thing. Every convention varies with geographic locations and hotels, so everything is a learning experience.

One past CC chair famously appointed someone to make sure they ate and slept at regular intervals. Do you have someone to fill that role?

Not yet but I definitely will be finding someone like that.

Jennifer "Radar" Wylie is a sci-fi and fantasy costumer who is a fan of a number of genres, including NCIS, Stargate, and Pacific Rim. She has been masquerade director for Silicon, Con-Volution, was masquerade co-director for Gallifrey One in 2010 and 2011 and has participated in dozens of Masquerades. She is currently Chair of Costume-Con 39 in 2021.

