

How AAZK chapters are changing the game and branching out with new events.

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We all know bowling and rhinos go together like peanut butter and jelly, but in some parts of the country, planning a bowling event can be difficult or costly. As bowling becomes a less popular hobby, many bowling alleys are closing their doors. The ones that remain can be difficult to book; they want to keep their lanes available to leagues and raise the price for non-league events. We've seen an increase in non-bowling events over the last decade and that trend was accelerated during the first two years of the pandemic. The Bowling for Rhinos team reached out to several chapters to find out what pushed them to look at other options, what inspired their creative departure, and how they accomplished it. We hope this overview will encourage experienced chapters to try something new and motivate new chapters to join BFR.

Bingo – Saint Louis Chapter, Courtesy of Jeremy Martin

The Saint Louis Chapter held their inaugural bingo event, which is possibly the first BFR bingo event. They were apprehensive about changing the format, but wanted to hold a COVID - friendly event that pushed their chapter in a new direction. It was important for the chapter to hold an event in an open air venue, so they partnered with the Saint Louis Zoo to hold the event in a large open tent and kept attendance lower than the tent's capacity.

They also moved their auction to an online format and utilized Eventgroove Fundraising to host it. The move created the “opportunity for people to participate from home if they didn't feel comfortable attending in person” and “helped push bids because there were text notifications if you were outbid”. The auction was very successful even though there were fewer items than they traditionally offer.

Saint Louis cautions that the most time-consuming aspect of event planning was getting a gambling license, which is required through the state of Missouri since bingo is a game of chance. They note that receiving the license required “background checks on the event planners, banking information from our chapter, and other paperwork.” Not all states require this type of license for bingo, so you'll want to check with your state's gambling authority at the start of your planning process. They decided to apply for their own license rather than go through a private company because it was cost effective and easy to re-apply for in the future.

Saint Louis adds that they had great reviews from attendees, people enjoyed the novelty, and believe that they attracted a different crowd because some people “get shy about not being good at bowling”.

Brewery Partnership – Badger Chapter, Courtesy of Ellen Vossekuil and Kristin Myers

The Badger Chapter of Wisconsin is a very new chapter, but jumped into the BFR community in only their third year of existence. Planning their first BFR event at the start of the pandemic “really cramped our style as far as large in-person gatherings. We knew we wanted to participate in BFR, but a traditional bowling event just wasn't going to be successful”. Through a chapter member, Badger AAZK had a connection to a seasonal outdoor beer garden which donated a portion of the night's sales to the chapter. Fortune was on Badger's side the night of the event “even though the event was held on a Wednesday, the Biergarten was at capacity. Only a very small number of patrons were there specifically for our event; the rest of the patrons were just regular customers. This was a fantastic opportunity to not only raise money for rhinos, but also introduce community members to our chapter!” Biergarten cashiers gave the chapter a big assist by asking patrons if they would like to make an additional donation to the BFR event.

In addition to a percentage of sales and donations, Badger was able to raise funds through merchandise and a raffle that included a behind the scenes tour at the rhino building and a specialty bike donated by a local brewery. They also sold handmade “rhino-specific stickers, coasters, buttons, bags, and art mandalas”. Badger says that aside from merchandise “the pre-event planning was relatively simple compared to the amount of money we were able to raise. Because of our established partnership with this business, we decided to hold another event in 2022 at the same location.”

Bowling Pin Decoration – Point Defiance Chapter, Courtesy of Russell Pharr

The Point Defiance Chapter has had great success by upcycling used bowling pins into art. The idea came to event chair Russell when he found an old pin painted to look like a bald eagle. The chapter learned that “pins don't have long life spans, and bowling alleys are usually happy to give away as many pins as you are willing to take”. Aspiring artists paid a small fee to decorate each pin and the pins were put on display at the zoo once completed. The chapter held a “community voting contest, which has been a great way to engage the whole zoo in BFR.” After the voting closed, the best pins were put into the chapters’ BFR silent auction, which “raises even more money for rhino conservation, and makes for some one-of-a-kind auction items!”

Point Defiance says “the results have been really phenomenal - we have seen bowling pins transformed into everything from mermaids and cartoon characters to fully functioning lamps and miniature race cars - along with, of course, a dazzling array of animal designs.” Point

Defiance had been planning on incorporating the pin decoration into their event prior to COVID, but it “ended up being a great solution to engage our community with a social distancing-appropriate celebration of BFR”. While particularly well suited for traditional bowling events, this inexpensive project compliments nearly any type of event you want to hold and as a stand alone fundraiser.

Concert Series – Nashville Chapter, Courtesy of Jason Faessler

Being located in “Music City”, the Nashville Chapter had the unique opportunity to create an event that reflected the city's connection to music. The chapter created Rockin’ for Rhinos after they “connected with a group of young professionals that contained several people with music business backgrounds. We also partnered with a popular local independent radio station for promotion and credibility.” The goal was to “gather passionate people from all aspects of the music industry and make this an annual event in Nashville.” After taking the time to learn the ins and outs of the music business, the chapter was able to hold their first “Rockin’ for Rhinos” event in 2016 and hosted four bands. The show was a success, but the crowd was mostly zoo staff and friends and family of the bands, the chapter “really wanted to market and promote the show to bring in the general public....to be truly successful, we wanted this event to be fun and also get the public excited about saving rhinos.”

In 2019 the chapter started an intimate acoustic event called “Writers for Rhinos”, held at the zoo amphitheater. At this event, four or five song writers would be on stage together, each would “play a song, talk a little bit about the song's origins, or the artist they wrote for”. The chapter “brought in lights, a professional sound system, banners, and bars with donated wine and beer ... everything you would want for a top-notch show. It was a resounding success! It turns out that when you have Grammy nominated talent, the show sells itself!” The next time they held Writers for Rhinos they moved the event from the zoo to a popular venue in downtown Nashville that had food service and a bar, while they “lost the charm of hosting at the zoo” they also cut “99% percent of the logistics and setup.” Nashville AAZK says that even though it was a lot of work in the beginning to build the knowledge and network, it was well worth it. After a few years they “had so many connections in the music industry who were passionate about our mission that the show was basically put together with very little footwork from AAZK members.” Nashville held their third Writers for Rhinos in April, will hold their fourth Rockin’ for Rhinos this summer, and are looking to add an additional Writers for Rhinos this fall.

Virtual 5K – Greater Houston Chapter, Courtesy of Kendall Thawley and Amie Bialo

Before COVID hit, the Greater Houston Chapter was already facing a problem many chapters have had to deal with, the local bowling alley that had hosted their events for years had shut down and the next closest one was a long drive away. Between looking for a new venue and “lockdowns, economic turmoil, and toilet paper hoarding we knew that we needed to drastically

alter our usual plans. A Virtual 5K seemed like a good fit for us.” Greater Houston held this event two years in a row. The first year they used RunSignUp, an events platform geared towards runners, and the second year they used Ticket Tailor, a general, but easy to use and low fee online ticket seller. They used Ticket Tailor the second year because it was not important to them if people actually ran the race, they just needed a way to process payments and organize participants.

Event registration included a shirt, but Greater Houston suggests giving participants the option to opt out of the shirt or charge more for those that do want a shirt. The first year of the event, they printed the shirts through Custom Ink, had them delivered to a chapter member’s house, then hand delivered shirts to locals and mailed the rest. This was extremely time consuming and not recommended. They tried Bonfire the second year, but ran into issues when Bonfire “changed shirt pricing during the middle of the campaign” which drastically altered the event's profit margin. Additionally, the chapter had a customer service issue that the support team was slow to respond to.

Greater Houston combined their virtual 5Ks with a virtual raffle, virtual silent auction, and a book sale. They recommend this event type because “everyone could participate in their own time and at their own pace, and allow for social distancing by doing an outdoor activity. It also didn’t rely on having an event space, so it drastically decreased our overhead costs and meant that people from all over could support our event, not just locals. Overall, we had a great response to the new event!”

Virtual 5K – Greater Orlando Chapter, Courtesy of Melaina Kincaid

Due to state restrictions caused by the pandemic, the Greater Orlando Chapter knew they would not be able to hold a bowling event and instead held a virtual 5K, believing people would want to get out in nature more and to encourage everyone to socially distance themselves. They advertised their event through social media as well as email.

Orlando was able to keep costs down in three unique ways:

First, they didn't use a race registration company, but instead had registration go through their website and created a google doc to organize registration. This is a great idea if your chapter has access to its own website and can process payments through it.

Second, they kept swag bags minimal as “a way to keep the event environmentally friendly” and keep costs to a minimum. A local member created and donated decals for the swag bags.

Third, the race medals were “created by an art professor, giving them a unique touch compared to other race medals. The medals were wooden which provided a more cost-friendly alternative to metal”. Greater Orlando highly recommends contacting local schools’ “art department or metals department to ask if a student would like to do this as a project”.

Greater Orlando warns that they did have some unexpected costs. They had many overseas registrants and mailing the swag bags to them got expensive. In 2022 they plan on charging a higher shipping rate for overseas participants and will seek out “sponsors for the event to cover the cost of the medals, lanyards, bags, etc. so that 100% of race registration could go to BFR.”

Sailing for Rhinos - Dallas AAZK Chapter, Courtesy of Linda King

The Dallas Chapter has been an active participant in Bowling for Rhinos from the very early days and since 2002 has been holding two fundraising events each year. In addition to the traditional bowling event, they also host the one-of-a-kind “Sailing for Rhinos”. It started when the zoo’s Deputy Director of Operations approached the chapter about unique ways to improve staff and volunteer involvement while increasing awareness of the chapter's fundraising efforts. “She asked if offering sailboat rides on our local White Rock Lake would be popular? The answer from the officers was a resounding “yes”!”

The chapter formed a relationship with the Corinthian’s Sailing Club. The event is held on a warm evening in May and, in addition to the picnic dinner and silent auction, attendees are treated to sunset sails generously donated to the event by the club's members. Sailing for Rhinos “became one of our most popular events. It has grown from ~100 participants to a high of 230”. The event is held at the sailing club's dock and clubhouse, which has a maximum capacity of 250 people.

After 2020, the Dallas Chapter began looking at fundraisers they could safely host. Sailing for Rhinos was “the first event our Dallas Zoo leadership felt comfortable supporting”. The chapter did have to make some adjustments. They scaled back the food from a full picnic to bite-sized appetizers and limited attendance to 125 people to comply with the sailing club’s requirements. But in 2022 the “event has returned to including a full cookout dinner, beverages, sailing, t-shirt sales and silent auction”. They keep the price of attendance reasonable: \$20 adults, \$10 kids, free for three years and under, and the price increases \$10 at the door to encourage presale. They also seek sponsors for the event, which range from \$500 to \$100 or the donation of an auction item. In return for their sponsorship, businesses get their information prominently displayed on the Dallas Chapter’s website, Facebook page, by auction items, as well as tickets to the event. 2022 is the 20th anniversary of Sailing For Rhinos and the Dallas Chapter looks forward to

“celebrating our ongoing partnership with the amazing members of the Corinthians Sailing Club, our sponsors, chapter members and Dallas Zoo family.”

Thank you from the BFR Team

As you can see from the preceding examples, necessity is the mother of invention. As the world changes, it is important that we learn from each other and adapt our events to flourish with new challenges. Whether it's because of chapter size, local economic conditions, or a worldwide pandemic, holding a large bowling event isn't feasible for every chapter. However, every chapter can still protect rhinos, their habitat, other species in their ecosystem and help support communities in Indonesia and Kenya by participating in BFR. We'd like to thank the Badger, Dallas, Greater Houston, Nashville, Greater Orlando, Point Defiance, and Saint Louis chapters for eagerly sharing details and images of their events so that all chapters can learn and be inspired by our communities efforts to protect wildlife.

As always, if you have any questions about Bowling For Rhinos, please reach out to the BFR team at BFR@AAZK.org.