

# IT'S NOT JUST A REGATTA ANYMORE

## Tips on how to transform your regatta into a charity event.

By  
Scott Haas US2232 - Toledo, OH  
Tech Rep Ambassador for Windwing Designs  
1992 TABA Race Committee Chairman

I believe each of the USWA geographic region's events schedule has room for two or three combined windsurfing and charity events each season. No doubt you are all familiar with local marathons, bikeathons and walkathons that raise money for charities. In June of 1992 the Toledo Area BoardSailing Association(TABA) held it's 3rd Annual Toledo Windsurfing Championships combined with the 1st annual American Heart Association Windduro race. Competitors competed in a Windduro race early Sunday afternoon after the normal racing concluded. In 1992 the first year of this event wind surfers alone raised an unbelievable \$2800 for the American Heart Association! As things turned out the weather did not cooperate and public attendance was low however the competitor turn out and support was very impressive. In fact so impressive that Mistral representatives added Toledo to their 1993 Grand Slam event schedule and local sponsors could not wait to start organizing the 1993 event.



The basic format of TABA's charity drive is sponsor forms are sent out with the notice of race flyers. Racers can contribute themselves or go door to door to raise moneys. Furthermore TABA club members are also encouraged to raise moneys. The reward is for a minimum of twenty dollars in pledges you qualify to compete in the Windduro race and you receive one extra drawing ticket. At fifty dollars and each multiple of fifty you get another drawing ticket in the hat. I won't tell what the hat was worth except to say that TABA has been very successful in soliciting for prizes to stuff the hat with. Additionally there are other charity revenue faucets such as a percentage from beverages sold at the event.

By now you are probably saying "Why bother?",

adding a charity drive will only add paper work, create additional expenses and complicate matters. My experience is just the opposite and I found the work load on the race committee was reduced. Combining a windsurfing regatta with a charity event has a multitude of hidden benefits including getting those elusive sponsors to jump on board. During this article I'll relate some experiences and hopefully pass along a few ideas and pointers on how a non-profit windsurfing club can organize a charity event.

### The Tasks

**Task 1:** The first race committee task is to conduct a brief feasibility study to investigate what's happening in the region. Wind surfers can't be asked to solicit or dig in their pockets much more than twice during the season. If another organizer has beaten your group to the line find out what the other event is about and formulate some ideas that will make your local event different and unique. A major concern is how will money be raised and what are the projected income and expense figures. Another important concern is an estimate of the number of public spectators possible and how they will be enticed to attend the event. Sponsors usually have one thing in mind and that is an advertising return for their investment. Windsurfing events can be great spectator draws however to increase public attendance you should plan to include or combine with other public activities like an outdoor boat show, free concert, a volleyball tournament or a fishing derby. One last word and that is radio spots, TV and or newspaper ads are a must if you want a crowd. Advertising is the largest expense item your committee is faced with but likely the easiest to find a sponsor for.

**Task 2:** The second task is to choose the charity group. Take the time to do some more research. For example look at the flyers for local charity events and note what businesses are listed as sponsors and what charitable agencies and organizing groups are behind these events. Next you are going to have to put on the suits and ties and conduct a few interviews and scope

out a few charity agencies. Keep everything low key at first and remember you are interviewing them. What you should be looking for initially and comparing is the size of staff and general office environment. Note the number of full time employees, do they seem professional, who covers your territory and so forth. Note the status of their office automation, that is do they have word processors, letter folding machines, copiers and a bulk mailing permit. Check what other major events they support and if there is a date conflict with your event. Conclude your interview by indicating you would like to get back with them in the near future to discuss in more detail the event you have planned.

**Task 3:** The third task is to find at least two creditable sponsor/business references to get you started. You need a commitment from them of a few hundred dollars. Hopefully you can twist the arm of your local windsurfing shop owner. It is very important to have support from a couple businesses with representatives willing to commit to attend meetings and help get things started. Tell them about the charity event plan and that you are ready to make a proposal to a couple of charity groups.

**Task 4:** The fourth task is to prepare your team sales pitch to the charity agency. Your team needs to ready no later than July first as most businesses(including charities) plan and budget for next years events during the months of September and October and normally have everything finalized by November fifteenth. Finally you are at the point where the race committee is being interviewed. The interview should not be an individual effort as at least two or three race committee members should attend the first few meetings. You'll likely need to explain what a windsurfing regatta is so bring photos and magazines. Also bring supporting documents for business references, a club membership list, the event date, location and everything else you can think of. Be prepared to answer questions on attendance, expenses, projected income and insurance coverage. After your team has given it's sales pitch it may take awhile for them to approve your event. However if they seem interested offer to schedule a second meeting as soon as possible and include your business/sponsors to start things rolling.

Assuming you did your job and the charity agreed to support your idea now what can you expect. You'll likely find you have a highly skilled and trained staff of communication professionals available to assist you. Charity agencies are experts in getting things done for free and they should have lots of ideas for

you. It is likely that one individual from the charity will be assigned to your event and if your lucky they may even have some sponsors waiting in line to help out, however don't hold your breathe. The race committee still has to pull it off! You are the ones that need to go out and make the initial contacts and find additional business sponsors. However you need to realized the race is NOT JUST A REGATTA ANYMORE it is a charity event and that sales pitch unlocks doors. Unfortunately you'll have to do your sales pitch again a few times however remember the goals in order of importance are: sponsor advertising, raising money for the charity, and putting on a successful windsurfing event. Show them where their name will be at on the sample T-shirts, race flyers, posters and sail logos. Record a sample 15 second radio spot on tape and show them how it can sound. Appeal for their support of a good cause. Initially don't ask them for any particular amounts or type of support as you will find they will likely offer more than you had ever hoped for if they agree to help out.

The time to put them on the line is at your first Event Committee meeting that puts all your sponsors in one room. More than likely one of the businesses will step forward (the one with the



biggest contribution) and offer a conference room to hold meetings in. You'll likely just need two or three meetings starting 6 months before the event with everyone together in the same room to get things rolling. I'd call these money meetings as this is where people will indicate what and how much they are willing to contribute. Make the meeting a round table discussion session and let them do the talking. All you need is a simple list of the major expense items you have to get the meeting rolling. It may feel like your not in control and your right as the event is now a group effort. You are still in charge of the regatta part but remember your sponsors don't care about windsurfing - they do care about advertising and looking good via helping to raise funds for a charity.

Don't ask for or expect cash from sponsors. Instead work on getting them to put up for T-shirts, trophies, printing expenses, radio advertisements, parity room rental, food, beverages and so forth. However if you see a good opening in a private conversation don't be afraid to ask for a cash donation from a sponsor paid directly to the charity. The charity can pay for or reimburse you for any type of event expenses however work that arrangement

out with your charity representative beforehand. What's important for your club is the bottom line and if the income from registrations fees will result in the profit you need to finance next years event plus add a little extra to the club treasury.

Last you'll likely find at least the first year the charity group will not want to invest a lot of time or dollars. However you should be able to depend on them for any type of communications like: press releases, notice of race mailings and thank you letters and you can ask that they pick up the mailing cost of these items. Remember the person from the charity assigned to your event wants your event to be successful. Count on them to be at meetings with potential sponsors however remember they are there mainly for morale support reasons. Include and invite your representative to important race/regatta committee meetings however avoid assigning them any tasks. If your event is a success and you raise some dollars you'll find the charity wanting to be involved next season. Imagine that - a group of people wanting to help you out, a full office staff at your beckoning and sponsors pounding at your door. It doesn't get any better than this! OK so maybe I exaggerated a little in the previous sentence but do a little investigation of the charity events in your area. For example a local Toledo bicycle event requires a \$130 dollar minimum in pledges plus a registration fee to ride in what is basically a long distance fun event. I was totally surprised when I found out that over a quarter of a million **dollars** is raised annually by this one event! The event is aggressively advertised and supported by several high profile businesses. Boy if I could only think of a way to combine the Toledo Windsurfing Championships with that bicycle event and get those 2000 bikers windsurfing.