

Ivic's Report

Con Report – South Afrifur 2017

Introduction:

So the first South Afrifur Convention has come to an end. New things were tried and seemed to be successful overall. In this report I will attempt to outline some of the particulars of the convention and also evaluate to what extent they were successful.

Before I begin, I would like to start with a personal note of thanks to everyone who came to the convention. There were 28 attendees including myself as Chairman and Yukon as Vice-Chair and our con staff - Scratch, Power Cat, Yote Fox, Dan Leo and Valerion.

Our members of staff were the glue that kept this idea together. They were the ones that truly put up their paws and claws when things took unexpected turns and allowed us to move forward and make this convention a success. I am eternally grateful to the team.

Summary:

South Afrifur started as an ambitious idea. Its roots in the earlier successes of national furmeets held in 2008 and 2010, respectively. The staff members had thought about creating a platform that would incorporate many elements of more established furry conventions. These include: some form of artist alley, panel discussions, activities as well as having a cause to donate to through a charitable raffle. It made sense to keep it small (initial thoughts of a cap at 50 people) and have it located somewhere as central (within South Africa) as possible.

We also wanted to (at least for the first convention) keep the minimum age for attendance to 18. This is because we were unprepared and unwilling to have to deal with the legal ramifications that may crop up otherwise. South Africa is still a very conservative country with an aversion to anything new. We wanted to ensure that we could at least begin to achieve something before we considered something as potentially difficult as lowering the admissible age requirements.

Most of the points on this checklist were met. We are proud to announce that we have raised R2130, 00 from the community. Proceeds payable to the Garden Route Wolf Sanctuary <http://wolfsanctuary.co.za/>.

Wolves are not native to South Africa and the majority of their benefactors are abandoned exotic pets. In addition to wolves, the sanctuary also cares for other wild canines. Because of recent wildfires in the area, we thought it pertinent to donate funds to them. The amount will be matched by South Afrifur, bringing the total donation to R4260, 00

Decisions made:

Despite overall success, the convention had its fair share of challenges - even before getting off the ground. Initial planning for it had started in 2015 and the convention was meant to happen in 2016. This year presented many challenges, like arguments about where the con should be held, pricing, slow responses from venues and at times a fair amount of pushback from furs themselves. Due to these reasons the convention had to be postponed to 2017.

At a point where most planning was already done, the original venue (University of Free State Open Residences) cancelled. We had to find a new venue at just about the last minute. We chose another venue just outside of Gauteng for similar pricing to that of UFS. The venue that was decided on was Magalies Retreat. <http://www.magaliesretreat.co.za/>

Pricing and how the money was used:

The admission prices were as follows: R1500.00 for con-goers, R2000.00 for sponsors and R2500.00 for super sponsors. The first tier price included three nights' accommodation, three meals a day, hall area that could seat 50 people as well as payment for the venue's activities as well as a personalized badge from Electrocat Artworks. The sponsor tier price included a personalized t-shirt with the sponsor's furry name on it. The super sponsor tier price also included a set of personalized, furred ears done by one of our speakers (and resident fursuiter and fursuit maker) YoteFox.

Successes and Shortcomings:

It was important to find a balance between affordability, travel requirements and an environment that would attract more attendees. In hindsight, Magalies Retreat served this purpose far better than our original choice would have. Bloemfontein was initially considered because it is physically halfway between Cape Town and Johannesburg the two main areas of furry concentration. Camp Feral had been a personal inspiration in respect to vibe and the relative size of our active furry community. This was validated by some of the feedback already received from some of the attendees.

In respect to the venue, the food was good, the activity areas were somewhat unkempt and in varying states of disrepair, the obstacle course and the Gladiator Arena were, given these states still in relatively good working order nonetheless. Given a lot of our previous planning, changing the venue actually opened up many more options and it did come together quite well in the end and furs were kept busy throughout the convention.

There was some backlash in respect to our decision on age caps, relative distance to get to the convention, size of the convention, as well as what could be considered our "unpreparedness" for the entire event. Given these concerns I believe we allayed many of those voices but will endeavour, in future, to hear what the community wants from South Afrifur in 2018.

Venue and Activities:

The list of events were; an ad hoc artists alley (which was opened for anyone to join in at no cost), a scavenger hunt, an obstacle course, a gladiator arena (near-miss head injury to myself notwithstanding), a movie night as well as three panel discussions. One panel was on writing, one on fursuit making and fursuiting in general. The other on social media within the context of furies. Other activities include quiz night and the raffle. Ample time was given for socialization, which includes the playing of a variety of board games.

General consensus:

From those who attended, the majority response was positive. Attendees enjoyed the convention and its ability to bring the small group of furs together much like Camp Feral does. We had actually spoken quite a lot to Potaroo in our initial planning phase and this was exactly the kind of response we were aiming for as our first convention.

Closing Thoughts:

Going into this endeavour as far back as 2015, I was bright-eyed and bushy-tailed about it. I had the dream that furs would appreciate someone taking initiative and get something of the sort going. I for one would have been ecstatic had someone else come up with the idea and would have tried to be as supportive toward it as possible. This was not the case in many of the interactions I'd had. I however kept plugging, found people who were as keen as I to see this move forward. Those who helped me were very good at the specific tasks that were required of them. Our vice-chair Yukon, for organizing the events and activities as well as his ability to manage many other aspects that were necessary for the convention to be a success, Valerion for his experiences of the previous failures between the successes of 2008-2012, Scratch for his ability to manage funding down to the cent. Dan Leo for his ability to mediate and Power Cat for his experience in website building and Yote for his ability to create under pressure. Without these fine folk, South Afrifur Convention 2017 might not have happened, or not have been as successful.

On a Personal note:

I'd spent many days, even during the convention, just hoping that everything would go as planned and whenever a positive comment came my way, my inability to commit to the success showed in my responses. Much of this was an introspective journey for me and having this success behind me, I believe that we can do far better than this for next year. "Build it and they will come."

The acid test of success would be whether we can host an even better convention next year. To stimulate a larger turnout. To ensure that whatever issues within our control have been dealt with and succeed in ensuring that we can have good conventions. Perhaps even on a yearly basis. I believe that we as the South African Furry Community can pull this off. As for the South Afrifur team, I wish us all the best of luck. I think we may just need it.

South Afrifur Convention Chair
Ivic Wulfe