

# Location, Location, Location: What to Consider in Selecting Show Sites

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Reprint from Volume 16, Issue 1, Winter 2012

I have been to shows held **indoors** at convention centers, hotel banquet rooms, fairgrounds, basketball arenas, ice skating rinks, libraries, shopping malls, libraries, indoor horse arenas, ice skating rinks, World War II Quonset huts, working livestock barns (tidy with clean cement floor, and covered with manure and the mice living *everywhere*), at churches, schools gyms, large greenhouses, people's homes, dance studios, pet stores, feed stores, in empty stores, gambling casinos, a giant meat locker, etc. Yes, literally a meat locker. The whole building was formerly a meat packing facility, and it held in the cold very well...

I have been to shows held **outdoors** at parks under ramadas or trees, by the seashore, in and next to alfalfa fields, people's backyards, on the sidewalk outside a mall on fire, etc. Yes, the mall was truly on fire! A little more about that later in the article...

I have been to shows **held on** cement, asphalt, linoleum, tile, carpet, professional oak flooring, grass, dirt, straw mixed with animal droppings, plywood thrown over ice, etc. Yes, one of our conventions placed over five thousand animals on the hockey arena...

I have been to shows with **lighting** provided by the sun, cloudy skies, windows, tungsten light bulbs, fluorescent, mercury vapor, floodlights, stadium lighting, defusing glass, etc.

I have been to show sites where the **cost** was free of charge, or just a nominal cleaning fee, and all the way up to tens of thousands of dollars. For some sites, proof of million dollar liability insurance was required, others not. Some expected the club to sweep and mop the floors and spit shine the door knobs, others not.

What is the perfect place to hold a show? For every club the answer is probably different and depends on the climate and time of year. Great summer locations are impossible in winter. There is a lot to consider when selecting a show site, and no possibilities should be ruled out. But over the years, one constant has remained the same. Affordable show locations are becoming more and more difficult to find. Community centers and fairgrounds used to be for the community, and only cost a nominal cleaning fee. Tax dollars built the facilities and they were open to most every local group needing a place to hold their event. Then municipalities and other governmental agencies discovered they could make a profit off that same community building. Thus, the cost of renting skyrocketed to the point most every community group could not afford the community building. Those yet affordable, or free, require expensive insurance poli-

cies, driving the cost up too high. The result is many facilities sit empty day after day after day, week after week while local organizations like rabbit and cavy clubs go begging for a reasonable show site.

Here is some advice to help your club find and keep a good location.

## LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Nobody wants to attend a show way out of their way, or difficult to get to. Consider the kind and quality of roads. I have foregone some shows because the location was simply too much trouble to get to. Farmington, New Mexico, comes to mind. Farmington is literally in the middle of nowhere and many, many hours drive to attend a show expecting only thirty pigs. The time of year is chancy too, as the area is great at getting blizzards during the winter months.

When organizers of the Arizona State Convention consider show locations, they try to select a large facility that is easily reached by people coming from a wide geographic area. This show will see cavy exhibitors from six to eight states, and rabbit exhibitors from four or five more states. Arizona tried holding its convention in a little town seventy-five [miles] south of me called Douglas. This was a big mistake. After driving all day from a distant state, nobody wants to then drive another hundred miles on back highways away from any semblance of civilization to a dusty rundown fairground within sight of the Mexico border. After several dismal tries, yes, we finally learned this was a bad location, and have since chosen better facilities more centrally located and very close to inter-states, hotels, restaurants, etc. Show numbers exploded as a result.

## CLIMATE

No one wants to be cold or hot or wet or covered in dust or mud while half-inch hailstones are pounding their heads (yep, been there, done that—not fun). I've been to shows where it was too hot and animals died. At more than one out-of-state show, I've forfeited my entry and loaded up the car and hit the road, rather than risk losing my animals.

When considering a show site, think about what kind of heating and cooling system is in place. Will the club have access to turning on the heater or cooler, and change the setting? I've been to many shows where nobody could, or the promised systems were broken!

A roof overhead doesn't necessarily mean weather friendly. Many



Golden State Cavy Breeders Association's Pigs in the Park Show



River Falls Cavy Fanciers annual Barn Show at Alan and Rachel Boucher's

shows are held under ramadas, canopies, and tents. Bad weather and a cold wind can make for one miserable day, and be a risk to our animals' health too.

### ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL EXHIBITORS IS KEY

Don't forget, not all exhibitors have strong backs and two working legs. Accessibility for exhibitors to easily bring in heavy carriers on wheels is a must. Some exhibitors come with wheelchairs and motorized scooters. If the facility is wheelchair accessible, it will also have the needed ramps for carts to haul in supplies and carriers.

I've been to shows where people were required to carry everything up or down flights of stairs in order to get into the showroom. One place, the restrooms were only accessible by going down narrow flights of stairs into a basement. Those unable to navigate the stairs had to drive up the street to a restaurant and ask to use the restroom there.

### WILL EVERYTHING FIT, IF SO, WHERE?

When looking at prospective show sites, consider the expected entry and how much room is reasonably needed for your event. Does the facility have easy access for people and supplies? Where are you going to put show tables? Look at lighting. Is it bright enough? Does it give off a strange color? My suggestion is put the show tables where the lighting is best, then arrange the showroom around that. Where will exhibitors house their belongings and carriers? If room is tight, can you employ folding tables to double your cargo space? What kind of flooring is in the building? Will the facility require tarps to protect the floor, or demand no shavings in carriers? Will they expect the floor to be swept, and maybe mopped? Who is going to do this, and are the needed supplies available? Don't forget about toilets! They come in handy, sinks to wash hands too. Are restrooms readily accessible for all exhibitors? Who is expected to clean them afterward? Do port-a-potties need to be rented? When you hold a show in the middle of an alfalfa field...you need to consider these kinds of things.

### COST/INSURANCE

Very few places are free. For those that are, your club needs to do everything possible to keep it.

In Arizona we have a good show location in the back of a feed store. They have never charged us a dime. Our members return the favor by purchasing feed and supplies there, and cleaning up after ourselves. As a result, the store is more than happy to accommodate us. Before we arrive in the morning, they clear the space for us and cordon off areas where they don't want exhibitors to go. As willing as this store has been, we have almost lost the location a couple times. The reason? Wayward children. No store wants to run the risk of a child getting hurt and the family suing them. It is amazing how many good locations have been lost because of rowdy children (and messy exhibitors). Our club has put extreme restrictions on the behavior of children, and we are prepared to ask these families leave, rather than risk losing the show site.

Most locations will require a rental fee. This may be tens of dollars to thousands. More and more show locations are requiring signed contracts. These often have hidden fees and clauses. When signing a contract, *read the fine print*. You may find every table, chair, and even electrical outlets are all subject to surcharges. I've seen more than one club victimized by this, and they were greatly hurt by the additional fees.

Many public facilities such as schools and municipal locations will require proof of liability insurance too. There are companies out there specializing in one-day liability insurance for small organizations. Usually the required amount of the policy will be at least one million dollars. Even for a one-day event, liability insurance may run a lot more than the rental fee. For a couple years I hosted a show at my school. The fee—fifty dollars. The insurance jumped from one hundred to four hundred dollars! That was several years ago now and undoubtedly the price has gone up more. As a result, we can no longer afford to hold shows there.

### SHOW LOCATION SUCCESSES

**ARBA Conventions:** Some of the finest show facilities I've seen have been at national shows, both ARBA Conventions and ACBA Specialties. I will mention Minneapolis because it is recent. In 2010, Minneapolis had exceptional lighting, temperature, plenty of space, and ease of getting animals in and out. There were banquet rooms aplenty, food vendors and nearby restaurants, hotels, etc.

**Great use of a park setting:** The Golden State Cavy Breeders Association is known for their summertime Picnic in the Park theme shows. They also host a great lunch and lots of fun with their changing themes. The year I attended it was pirates, and the club barbecued up a mean chicken dinner with all the fixin's. Fun! Fun! Fun! This year's theme is Superheroes.

**Fresh air and natural lighting inside a building:** Washington State Convention hosts a great show at the fairgrounds in Ellensburg. The cavies are housed in one of the livestock buildings which is mostly protected from the elements, and by roof design, allows for very good lighting and a steady supply of fresh air. Now I've often seen cavies get the worst rooms at some large shows, 200 cavies shoved into a space the size of a shoebox while rabbit breeders are given luxury accommodations, but not at the Washington State Convention. Ironically, the rabbits there are held in a building with horrible ventilation which becomes hot and smelly late in the day. The lighting can't begin to compare with the cavy area either.

**Pretty:** It's hard to beat the old fashioned family farm setting of Alan and Rachel Boucher's homestead up in Minnesota. True, the hundred-year-old barn is gone now (fire three years ago), but the place still has its charm. They have your traditional horse pasture with all the farm animals, grapevine covered windmill, and a gurgling brook winding its way through the valley below. Goats prance about in the pasture. Yes, I've even seen several bald eagles nearby.

### SHOW LOCATION DISASTERS

**The Fire Show:** "Yes, Virginia, shopping malls do catch fire." Back in the 1990's, a Denver area shopping mall where I attended a show caught fire. As the hallways filled up with smoke (no fire alarm right away), we rushed to move our supplies, show carriers, and tables outside to finish judging on the sidewalk. The weather was fine, but sure enough, the local animal rights group happened by and threatened to sick the authorities on us for imprisoning our cavies, or some rot like that. We refused to be scared off and finished the show.

**Dust storms:** Arizona is well known for the occasional dust storm. One year a Phoenix area rabbit and cavy club chose to hold its show in a park. This was normal and many of the best wintertime shows I've attended were in Phoenix area parks. The problem was this park was still under construction. It had no ramadas or grass yet, only freshly plowed *dirt*, and lots of it! A cold front with high winds moved through right in the middle of the show. The park literally turned into a giant dust storm which threatened to rip apart the popups and tents, and covered the animals with muddy raindrops. Then it began to hail...and I went home.

**Judging by...** Flashlight? Yep, we've had shows go too long due to extra-large entries, and we lost our source of natural light. The ramrod held a flashlight over the table so the judge could finish. By car headlights? I'm told exhibitors at one show had to turn on their headlights, for the same reason.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

I wanted to mention a unique show the Ontario Cavy Club of Canada and the Michigan Cavy Breeders Association held in at Colasanti's Tropical Gardens, a greenhouse complex in Ruthven, Ontario, which is huge. Colasanti's doesn't just have its gardens under glass, but also has many activities and carnival atmosphere for the entire family. They day we were there, one room over was a theme birthday party—Alice in Wonderland. A couple of the members visited our show briefly and were kind enough to have their picture taken with Jim Hupp and myself (see page 3 of the Fall 2010 JACBA to look at the picture). I guess the point I am making is that clubs which are creative about where they host their shows tend to also be very successful.