

How Coleman Management Stole Christmas

Last year, there was a proposed change to the procedures in using the Training Center Facility whereby alcohol would no longer be allowed to be served there at anytime. I sent a long, detailed memo to all the Coleman Wardens on March 27, 2009 explaining that:

- 1) While the serving of alcohol has inherit risks, I believe most of these concerns have always been dealt with in a diligent and professional manner by those of us who sponsor and run these adult gatherings. We have always had a full paid taxi service for any patron who needed it and advertise this service at every point where alcohol is served as well as in the e-mails and flyers announcing the event. To my knowledge, we have not had one incident in the eight (8) years we have held the event at the Training Center.
- 2) The Union Christmas Party has become the most popular event at FCC Coleman. The party is a great deal even for non-members, who pay a relatively small fee to get unlimited food and beverage, a live DJ, and chances to win prizes. On the day of the Christmas Party, Local 506 delivers Pizza to the entire complex for all the employees who are working and can not attend. In short, the party is a big staff morale booster.
- 3) Adult drinks are a tradition at this event; most who attend wish to enjoy an alcoholic beverage with their co-workers in a more relaxed social setting. Without the ability to serve alcohol, the Union will not hold the event at the Training Center. Holding it off property would probably result in less people attending and would cost the local a lot more money to provide the same accommodations.

At that time, the Union had already agreed to give the Employee's Club money for Correctional Workers Week (CWW) as they had for the last several years. Management was told that once word of the agency's denial got out, it would probably result in the money pledged to CWW being rescinded at the next union meeting.

Management caved in & they did NOT implement the change; we were allowed to have our Christmas party as usual, and the Employees Club got their money so they could hold a Family Day celebration.

A new e-board took office in January 2010, the next years budget was approved, and the decision was made by a majority of the members in attendance that it might not be legal to give union dues money to all these management sponsored events. By law, union money is to be used only for the sole benefit of the members and to promote the organization. Even arguing against a strict interpretation, many still thought that giving \$5,000 dollars a year to Correctional Workers Week was excessive and very unfair to our members; union members shouldn't have to foot the bill for the agency.

Anticipating that the issue of alcohol use at the Training Center would re-surface again, I contacted the Human Resource Manager (HRM) around April about whether the union would have to hold its event off property this year—we were fully prepared to do this and wanted to know in advance so arraignments could be made.

In planning these large events, you must give plenty of notice to book a hall, coordinate with the DJ, bar tenders, food preparers, decorating, and clean up crews. The Christmas budget itself must be altered if we were to hold the event off property: We would have to cut down the portion allotted for prizes to make money available for the added expense of renting a hall, some places make you hire off duty police to run security, there are added expenses to purchase liquor from the hall (instead of us buying directly from the store) etc. If we needed to increase our budget, we would have to do so at a meeting with the vote of body. All this was explained to HRM and to all the wardens in the 2009 memo.

To my surprise, the HRM advised that he didn't see that having the party at the Training Center would be a problem. I forwarded the request through him; this is the proper procedure because he must sign off on it first. This is how we did it the year before.

The HRM called me a little later, and we had to alter some dates due to a possible conflict in schedule. I advised the HRM he could change the dates on the form and submit it to the wardens. During a later phone call, I remember being told that everything was ok—I reported to the entire e-board that there wasn't going to be a problem with having the Christmas Party at the Training Center this year. I chose Dec 10th as the date.

As time passed and I never received a copy of the signed off approval, I called around again; I couldn't get a hold of the HRM but talked with Training Center Staff, and I was told my dates for the party were on the board and approved

On November 8th, 2010 I was advised by the HRM I had chose the wrong date for the event—we discussed the issue and discovered that it really wasn't a conflict—but then I asked him why I hadn't received signatures from the wardens yet. He advised that he thought I would send up a new sheet when the dates were changed (I remember telling him he could changed the date on the original sheet and sent it through). The HRM advised that he would run the sheet up himself, and again stated that he didn't think there would be an issue with the alcohol.

I sent an e-mail to the HRM on Nov 12th, asking for status on the Training Center. I advised that any problem at this late date would result in us cancelling the Union Christmas Party. I received no reply. On Nov 17th, I e-mailed the flyer to all staff because I had many people asking me for dates so they could take leave

On Nov 18th, I was notified that my request to use the Training Center while serving alcohol was disapproved.

I suppose the classy thing to do now would be to give all involved the benefit of the doubt that it was simply a mistake in communication; a professional would refrain from openly question people's motives

Right now, I am not in the mood to be professional or classy.

My "gut" tells me this was a set up from the very beginning. The HRM does not strike me as an individual who would forget about a request and yet still have the form in his possession seven months later. The issue about whether the Training Center should allow the use of alcohol has been around for over a year and a half.

Any attempt by the HRM to say that when he told me it was "approved," he was only speaking of the use of the training center and that it was NOT about the serving of alcohol is not true, and he knows it. By holding the request for months, I believe he (and perhaps one of the Wardens too) was attempting to sabotage the Union Christmas Party so we wouldn't have enough time to hold it outside property.

Strange enough, I was approached by an individual from the Employees Club this year about whether the local would sponsor a union picnic during Correctional Workers Week, I was told by this individual that we didn't have to worry about the agency not allowing alcohol on property—we could set up a keg of beer if we wanted to. Most of the e-board were scheduled to be at a region conference during Correctional Workers Week, so the decision was made to decline to sponsor a picnic this year. SO...

It appears the agency's concerns with having alcohol at the Training Center may have more to do with whether the Union will give them money or not. Perhaps instead of denying the request when I made it (seven months ago) the plan was to stall it as long as possible to use as a weapon against the union.

This e-board has also been particularly tough during negotiations to protect the rights of bargaining unit staff. I think all this has angered some individuals in management and this is their sad and childish retribution.

Am I doing a lot of speculating here ? Of course, but this not a court of law, it's the court of public opinion.

For my part, I shouldn't have trusted anyone in management without them putting it in writing. Their word is NOT their bond. I'll take the hit for that mistake.

Not to get too sappy here, but I have repeatedly invited executive staff to come to the Christmas party and enjoy the one time of year we can put aside our differences and just have fun. None of the AW's or Wardens have taken me up on the offer. If they had attended, maybe they would have understood the value in it. Perhaps they would have noticed the comradeship and unity that is often missing from our everyday work life. If they had attended, somehow I don't think they would have been so crass as to use this particular event as a bargaining chip.

A few years back, ALL the wardens & AW's used to show up to the party as a show of support and respect. Apparently, those days are long gone; replaced by a new batch of executive staff & their hand picked toadies who have a much more cynical way of doing things.

It's unfortunate, because the cynic knows the price of everything and the value of nothing."