



COMMENTS TO FLORIDA STATE WINNIE GATORS AT GNR THURSDAY 07-21-2011

I just want to take a moment and reflect on this year's GNR. Despite some very hot weather, the Florida State Winnie Gators can be very proud of our accomplishments.

Let's start by simply getting here. We brought 99 coaches to GNR this year. The only state which brought more coaches was nearby Minnesota. We collectively drove round trip 283,140 miles which was measured from Brooksville, Florida, the geographic center of our state. I don't even want to calculate the cost of fuel, but I think that 50 cents a mile would be a good guess. Of our group, 35 coaches were first timers and we are always gratified to have the first timers with us. Also we had 24 coaches come early and their owners worked hard. We participated in everything from laying out the parking fields to stuffing pre rally bags and rally bags to traffic control to working the gate to riding on the people movers.

Even before the rally started, on Monday night we took 84 people to Branding Iron in Thompson for their delicious prime rib dinner. Once again we noticed that a "10 ounce" steak evidently means something different in Iowa. On Wednesday night, we served 137 people a delicious pig dinner. We distributed all the arm bands we had allocated and then some. Next year maybe we will have to ask for a bigger pig!

Many of us participated in kayaking, the bike ride, factory tours and other activities too numerous to mention.

In the Puckerbrush Parade, even though they no longer give awards, I was told by several people that we had the best float of all. The decorations, the outhouse complete with satellite dish and the great music courtesy of Ken Perry and the South Florida Rowdy Bunch made us a hit. We threw out 10 dozen strings of beads and ran out half way through the parade, not to mention the pounds and pounds of candy we gave away. Since we are from Florida, one of our float riders wore a LARGE alligator hat which caused much merriment among the spectators along the parade route.

On opening night, we made our presence felt as many of our members walked with us in the parade of states. Also our Florida group was responsible for passing out 2,000 kazoos along with signs and banners to celebrate Bob Olson's 60th birthday. This was all done with great secrecy and, as far as we know, he did not suspect anything.

For the decorations judging on Tuesday, many hours and many dollars were spent in preparing our location and I want to extend a special thanks to all those who worked out in the hot sun getting us ready. Also thanks to the Rowdy Bunch hillybilly band for performing in the great heat to make our tent a standout. A special treat was provided by Charlie "Pig Man" Zucker. Through his many contacts with local area farmers, Charlie managed to borrow 3 small pigs for our display. We asked for names for the pigs and got over 70 entries! The winning entry was from Diane Cipolla. Her names for the pigs were Happy, Dopey and Sleepy.

At the row party on Tuesday night, we served some 300 people including 100 or so from other states. We also provided free beer and wine for all, ably served by the best bartenders in the business. And once again, despite the brutal heat, we were dancing in the street when Malek's polka band came by.

It was announced that our Florida State Winnie Gators web site is the best in the United States. I called Phil Halstead to congratulate him and thank him for the many hours of work he puts in on the web site.

Florida was in bean bag baseball contest, winning one and losing one under the leadership of our captain, Bill Schilp.

We also participated in the cook off contest with chefs Larry Bergsman and Frank Cipolla. Even though we did not win any awards in that contest, their special secret "JI" (Jewish-Italian) sauce won raves from the judges.

Carolyn Ledford and husband Ken participated in the WIT Singers who entertained throughout the rally, including at both the opening and closing ceremonies.

Nelson DiGenero won the driving rodeo, for the second year in a row.

Stan and Suzy Mills came in 3rd place in the Blue Ox competition, as well as winning second place in Bocce Ball.

In the Cross Stitch competition we had not one but two winners. Barbara Trad took first prize and Sharon Zopff took 3rd. By the way, Sharon is the first female member of our elite drinking group, the "Luuzers". She was inducted when it was rumored that she drinks more than her husband, Tom.

In the Handmade Jewelry, we again took two prizes. Carolyn Jouret took first place and Elaine Schilp took second place. In the Needlework category, Barbara Trad took another first place.

In the Woodwork competition, our very own Heineken man, David Nobert, took first place. David does absolutely great work. I treasure the closet he built for us in our coach. He has designed and built any number of great projects.

Certificates for free entry to the Florida State rally in 2012 were won by Harley Mays and Diane Cipolla. Marlene Scholtes won the fabulous griddler. Happy cooking on that baby! Jeanette Riley won the very nice welcome mat. Ed and Carole Gies won \$ 500 towards the cost of a WIT Caravan. Of our many volunteers, three were rewarded with prizes. They were Ed Tyndall, Sharon Zopff and Suzy Mills.

Throughout the week we were pleased and honored to be visited by several Winnebago executives, among them Bob and Kathy Olson, Randy and Pam Potts, Sarah and Wade Nielsen, Steve and Diane Evenson, Doug and Pat Formanek, and Butch and Becky Moore. Bob Olson is the Chairman of the Board of Winnebago Industries, Randy is the President and Chief Executive Officer, Sarah is the Vice President, Finance, and Steve is the head of Owner Relations and Service. Doug is the head of the Winnebago Itasca Travelers, and does a great job putting on the WIT rally each summer, while Butch and Becky Moore are our Eastern Area WIT reps.

So let me wrap up by saying I am so very proud of our Florida State Winnie Gators. As for this rally, may I paraphrase a famous quote:

"We came, we saw, we had fun!"

Jerry Miller
President, FSWG