

ChicoryLane Foundation Symposium

May 15 - 17, 2026

FINAL REPORT, by Lauren Smith

Note: This report focuses on the elements that I was responsible for and/or contributed to in a major fashion.

MATERIALS - ELECTRONIC

Communications: Constant Contact campaigns

Constant Contact (CC) campaigns were the sole source of our Symposium 'Schedule' (the term used for the main promotional doc). [Here is the original version](#). It was edited throughout the season as sessions were filled to capacity and no longer available to registrants. [The many versions developed throughout the season are logged on this Google Sheet](#).

These campaigns were used as both mass electronic communications to our ChicoryLane basic (CLB) list as well as the electronic schedule posted on the website. The original version was sent en masse on February 3 and was accompanied by an active registration form (detailed below).

MATERIALS - PRINT

After the Saturday & Sunday events were full and registration closed for those days, our focus moved to the Friday Tallamy talk. Lauren developed 2-sided postcards and posters ([seen here](#)). The board and committee worked to distribute them throughout the central PA region. [The second tab of this spreadsheet](#) attempted to keep track of those locations.

We also had a small need to develop a printed document that could be shared with the Amish. Lauren developed this [quick & dirty 2-pager](#), using data from the CC campaign

REGISTRATION SYSTEM

Registration & Confirmation Systems: Google Forms

Lauren & John trialed both Constant Contact (CC) and Google Forms for the potential registration system. Constant Contact would have had more appeal if the backend had linked a contact's registration with their record. But more importantly, we decided its proprietary design using a 'ticket structure' was more cumbersome than we required. A benefit we would have utilized, was their system allowed us to alter the form with 'sell out' tickets throughout the season.

Google Forms were ultimately chosen, providing benefits such as: ease of design for us; ease of use and familiarity for the registrants, automatic confirmation to the user, data stored automatically in our Google Drive, allowing John some custom coding to manage our data, and manageable downloads for Lauren to manage and manipulate the data as needed. One tip we got from trialing CC was the use of a 'splash page' which we then incorporated in our system.

Google Forms:

First Version (w/Saturday sessions) FORM:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfeASUbS12MQspIXSJA6VQL4ViOYXUo9rQNpXRPxJd9kCkb6A/viewform?usp=publish-editor>

First Version DATA:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1AwhKlp0xm9AOHqJ0HJf-_0hK8643w4eO/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=116686350299588307419&rtpof=true&sd=true

Keynote Only FORM:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe6yFTsepQJyz9Pk3mnHljhKp5neJv54syRg6bJnyqeu5zS0Q/viewform?usp=dialog>

Keynote Only DATA:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Lcpml1f1awNO9pUkXrbWgAy_DURkdTfU/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=116686350299588307419&rtpof=true&sd=true

Splash Page

We developed a 'Splash Page' which is essentially a 'tips page' the registrant encounters prior to the actual registration form. This is advantageous to give last pointers on what they need to know and consider prior to completing the form. [Here is the original Splash page](#) - [and all subsequent are on the full communications chart here.](#)

System 'Goes Live'

We 'launched' the season on **February 3** by publishing the CC campaign to the CLB. Simultaneously Lauren & Catherine began an aggressive promotion with or like-minded organizations, asking for their support two-fold: 1) please do not reschedule any major event on our weekend and 2) help promote the Symposium. What we ultimately saw was the majority of early registrations were not from those in the CLB but most likely through the promotion of those orgs. With concern about "our own people" – we published a 'friendly reminder' on Feb. 5, to the CLB, informing them things were filling up quickly and they should not delay in registering if they intended to attend. [Here is that CC campaign.](#)

By **March 3**, the Saturday & Sunday events were filled to capacity and a revised Schedule was posted on the website indicating that only Friday was available for registration. [Here is that revised Schedule.](#) At that point Lauren & Catherine reached out to the above-mentioned organizations from whom we asked for promotional help, with updated information asking them to help spread the word that only Friday was available.

Lessons Learned

- Reexamine the date to launch registration. Our 14.5 week period was too long.
- Reconsider a better registration system than Google Forms. Issues: their confirmation response was potentially unreliable; the ability to alter the sold-out events through the season was not efficient, requiring an entirely new form.
- It could be advantageous to require the mailing address of registrants to learn where they were coming from and understand our reach (or ask only zip code?)
- Considering asking "how did you hear about the event"

NUMBERS REVIEW

Event Capacities:

Friday Keynote at Wyndham: 350

Saturday: Bird Walk / 50

Saturday: Shrub Walk / 75

Saturday: Insect Walk / 75

Saturday: Foundation Q&A / no cap

Saturday: Herbaceous Plant Walk / 50

Saturday: Woodcock Walk / 50

Sunday: Engagement / 50

As the committee continued organization and event design, it was helpful to look at the hard numbers the registration system offered. Lauren developed mid-March and mid-April Numbers Reports to inform our planning. It was extremely helpful to begin to absorb the total numbers of people that would be on the property Saturday, to guide our need for developing the food program, designing parking systems, table & chair needs, etc. [Those reports are filed here in Google.](#)

As the event drew near and sufficient parking became a focus, on 4/30 Lauren developed another numbers report trying to estimate the number of automobiles that would require parking. [That report can be seen here.](#) *Note: With the amount of cancellations in the week leading up to the event, plus the no-shows, there was considerably less pressure on parking.*

Lesson Learned

- Although our registration Splash Page encouraged guests to not register for concurrent Saturday events (insect & FQA; Plants & Woodcock) our registration form did not preclude folks from doing just that - which skewed our numbers and gave us false 'sell-out' issues that affected best planning. Those overlap figures can be seen in the reports.

ACTUAL NUMBERS

Friday

- The Wyndham room was set for 375 chairs. We estimated attendance at 325.

Saturday

- Number of Walk Teams / leaders & volunteers: 13
- Number of other Volunteers: 10
- Number of expected registrants on Saturday (including Walk teams & Vols): 124
- Number of attendance on Saturday: 91 (33 no-shows)
- Number of Walk-Ins: 6 (3 new to us, 3 pre-registrants who wanted access to a walk for which they had not originally registered)

Sunday

- Number of expected registrants: 40
- Number of attendance: 11
- Number of support/docents: 8

MANAGING DATA

During the planning season, Lauren would often download the data from the Google Forms to extrapolate helpful data (as was reported in the previous "Numbers Review" section) and also archive the data on file.

- [Here is a document of the processes Lauren handled in the days leading up to the Symposium to have clear and accurate data for use at check-in.](#)
- [Here is the Master Spreadsheet used for ALL data management:](#) Saturday & Sunday check in charts, name tags, targeted communications prior to the SYM, etc.

COMMUNICATIONS TO REGISTRANTS PRE-EVENT

We planned to communicate to registrants inside the 2-weeks leading up to the Symposium with reminders.

- [Here is the 1st General Information we sent registrants](#)
 - Audience: all combinations of registrants other than Friday only
- [Here are the Updates we sent earlier this week](#)

- Audience: all combinations of registrants other than Friday only
- [Here is the reminder to the Keynote only registrants](#)
- On top of those communications, In the days leading up to the weekend John did a mail-merge from the registration forms to communicate to each registrant exactly what they had registered for.

Lesson Learned

- The separate communications were the best that we could arrange, however the mail-merge document was sparse in what it offered and that process should be re-evaluated

ON-SITE CHECK-IN & HOSPITALITY (Saturday)

The Hospitality Tent was positioned alongside the Session Tent on the main lawn. It contained: registration check-in & name badge distribution, a literature table, food distribution, a water station, and tables & chairs for resting & lunch.

Registration Check-In

It was decided in the weeks leading up to the event that having registration check-in close to the Session Tent would be more advantageous than the original plan to use the lower barn. We felt that location did indeed work out well. Here is the outline of the system used:

3 registration volunteers were instructed to arrive & park to be at our Hospitality Tent by 7AM to help with last minute set up & training. The tables had been arranged and the materials, data charts, ect. printed and ready to go. Pre-registered folks (and volunteers) were instructed by the parking attendants to go to the Hospitality Tent to Check-In. The clerks role & set-up:

1. They were each equipped with the complete list of ALL EXPECTED ATTENDEES, alphabetized by last name, on a clipboard.
2. As they checked their name off the chart they instructed everyone to sign our waiver (standard at all our events) which was on a clipboard in front of each of them.
3. They then instructed the guest: pick up their name tag at the side table; go to the Session Tent 5 minutes before the Walk start time; and return back to hospitality before they departed for the day to complete a comment card.

Lauren handled "walk-ins" -- of which we predicted there would be few, and was prepared to handle any Q's.

Name Badge & Display:

It was decided to develop name tags for all Saturday folks, and pre-printing would be required. We chose the Avery Name Tag (#5395). It took some research & practice on how to format (it doesn't make sense to explain the system here) but Lauren developed the template with the best font, how to make the first name larger, how to edit names that were longer than the badge allowed, how to mail-merge in Word, etc. [Here is a sample sheet.](#) We decided against, as it was not practical, to identify walk leaders on the badge (as that would open the door to outer 'audiences or classes' we should identify). Being outside with weather, we purchased [badge holder trays to keep the badges safe](#) throughout the day.

Comment Cards:

A Feedback/Comment card was developed late in the week leading up to the event. John designed the simple set of questions and Lauren developed and printed the doc in house. It was distributed to the best of our ability on Saturday & Sunday. [Here is the compilation of completed cards \(not for public distribution\).](#)

Lessons Learned

- It would have been advantageous for the walk leaders to encourage folks to complete the card at the conclusion of their walks
- Electronic distribution should be considered in the future.

PROPERTIES

Friday Keynote / Wyndham Gardens

With a goal of acquiring a property in close proximity to ChicoryLane for the Friday Keynote that could seat roughly 400 people and provide AV, we approached the PV High School as a possible venue. Meets were held and the property seemed likely, however the deal fell through. We then approached the Wyndham Gardens in Boalsburg which offered what we needed, along with providing lodging (and meals) for the Tallamys, helpful. [Here is the contract.](#)

The Garden Room (off the main hotel lobby) was set up to seat 375. We planned to close registration at 350 - which happened that same day. It was open seating and we required no check-in at the hotel. We had an enlarged WELCOME poster promoting the Tallamy talk in the lobby ([seen here](#)) to greet folks, and the activities committee members milled about welcoming folks. We set up a simple CLF display table and Lauren Smith helped guide late-comers into the room after the doors were closed. Jim Pierce counted the empty seats to be 50, so we estimate the crowd to be 325.

ChicoryLane Reserve

ChicoryLane was the site for the Saturday & Sunday events. The Saturday walk courses were designed by John Smith. Advance property maintenance and design, focusing on those specific walk trails, but also considering the complete property and trails, was overseen and managed by James Leshner and crew in the many weeks leading up to the event. The Sunday visitors were given open reign of the property so additional focus was given to popular spots for contemplation along with bench placement.

ChicoryLane – Saturday Layout & Set-Up

- Parking: Saturday's entrance & exit used the Green Grove lane. The upper field used for parking was designed to accommodate 130 vehicles.
- Two large tents (30 X 45 each) were erected on the main lawn for:
 - Session Tent - where walks convened for an introduction and to organize into the walk groups. The tent layout included 2 head tables and rows of chairs, 100 total.
 - Hospitality Tent - to house check-in (detail above), food, visitor resting.
- 3 portajohns were ordered and installed by [Brannon's](#). Placement was opposite the lower barn.

ChicoryLane – Sunday Layout & Set-Up

- Entrance & Parking: Visitors were instructed to enter the main lane and park at the barn lot. With the minimal crowd this lower lot was sufficient.
- Sunday truly focused on the reserve itself - open to visitors to explore. The simple 'layout' needs consisted of the lower barn as the HUB: registration check in, refreshments, literature table, resting. After parking, visitors were led to check-in and greeted by a guide who provided a map showing trails, water bodies, eco areas and bench locations, etc. They also offered to direct them toward places they would prefer for their day of reflection and craft.
- The 2 tents remained set up for Sunday (tables and chairs broken down), but had no specific purpose. Some visitors chose to use the shade provided and set up beneath for plein air painting..