

All Star 1 Chairs Report for the Governance Council Meeting on Sept 21, 2024

All Star 1 (AS1) is a big conference full of intelligent, thoughtful, articulate, kind and generous people who brought their breadth of interests, depth of talents, and enthusiastic energies when helping us, the 2024 Chairs, to envision and deliver a week of programming with appeal to our diverse membership, whether young or old, individual or family, or new or seasoned Shoaler. We relied on the wisdom of those who came before us and were grateful for their guidance, reassurance, reminders and constructive criticism as we put our program together, the sum of which was greater than its parts (and there were a lot of great parts!). So many of our members brought their deep desire to help, contributed countless hours of effort, and provided generous financial support to promote and strengthen our intentional community. It takes a village.

During the on-island AS1 Governance Council meeting in July of 2023, it became clear that our conference numbers needed to increase by more than 20%, from 220 to 270 registrants, for us to remain on firm financial footing. The importance of repopulating our post-pandemic conference was reinforced at our subsequent monthly meetings with the AS1 Executive Council (Keith Knox [Convener], Katy Biron [Secretary], David Yermack [Treasurer], Susan O'Loughlin [Registrar -2024], Beth Corsa [Registrar 2024-], Andy Bristol, Joy Close, David Epstein, Ken Hallows, Shelley Powsner, Gabrielle Prochaska, and Scott Stewart), and again at the off-island AS1 Governance Council meeting in December of 2023.

In response, we worked with Annie Stewart to update our AS1 website (not to be confused with the AS1 program link on Star Island's website that each conference creates annually). We sent out customized letters to individuals, families, elementary schools and the local UU church promoting Star Island and AS1, which generated positive responses without commitment. Real results arrived after we met regularly with the Star Island Marketing Team (Joe Watts, Justina Maji and Chelsea Haskell) and our newly formed AS1 Marketing Team (April and Ray Castoldi, Bailey and Gabrielle Prochaska, Caroline Quijada, Dan Slothower, and Steve Skrovan) over several months beginning in January of 2024. Members of our Marketing Team reached out directly to lost Shoalers, former Pelicans and prospective new Shoalers to promote new discount programs created by the Star Island Marketing Team tailored to these groups. We sent an email describing the discounts to everyone on our All Star 1 distribution list and repeatedly promoted these discounts on our AS1 Facebook page.

Yet, after only a trickle of registrations were received in January and February of 2024, fewer than 150 conferees were registered for AS1 on March 4, 2024. Knowing that AS1 Shoalers like a challenge, we posted on Facebook images created by the Star Island Marketing Team of a thermometer superimposed on iconic island structures revealing that the number of AS1 registrants was well below our goal, which we updated regularly as our ranks increased. By March 13, 2024, registrations had risen to 263, subsequently surpassed our self-determined comfortable maximum of 280, and ultimately peaked at over 290 registrations. Much to our surprise, we even had to put people on a waiting list (all of whom were accommodated, eventually, after a few folks had to cancel their registrations). Many thanks to our Registrar,

Susan O'Loughlin, and Housing Coordinator, Deb Walton, for managing the tsunami of registrations and bed assignments, respectively.

In April of 2024, with the AS1 conference oversubscribed, our focus shifted from recruiting conferees to keeping them posted. Throughout the Spring, we shared updates and requests via emails and Facebook postings, all the while making a conscious effort to produce useful, clear and concise communications. We re-organized and aggressively edited AS1's "Porch News" (a.k.a. the All Star 1 Conference Handbook) and emailed it – along with the AS1 2024 schedule, volunteer list and conference contact list – 3 weeks before our arrival on-island.

In addition, having successfully recruited many New Shoalers and aware that their integration into an established community with unique customs could be difficult, we took extra care to ease their entry into AS1. Gabrielle Prochaska led our effort to welcome New Shoalers by sending them welcome notes and refrigerator magnets in the spring and pairing New Shoalers with Old Shoaler "buddies" who contacted them ahead of the conference and personally welcomed them at the dock. New Shoalers were offered a tour of the island immediately after the Fire and Water Safety talk on Sunday afternoon (which, in retrospect, might have helped them head in the right direction to Social Hour but prevented them from finding their luggage and rooms first – Oops!). New Shoalers were also invited to the traditional New Shoaler Tea on Monday afternoon for sweets, Lime Rickeys, and conversation, which was well-attended. New Shoalers universally appreciated the extra efforts we made to help them acclimate and offered suggestions for improvement. Many Old Shoaler buddies and other seasoned Shoalers remarked to us how nice it was to have these opportunities to meet the New Shoalers.

Our Speaker, Professor Rebecca Klaper, Dean of the School of Freshwater Sciences and Director of the Great Lakes Genomics Center at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Freshwater Sciences, delivered five well-organized lectures about "Freshwater: Facts, Follies, and Fights." Her presentations were factual, practical, understandable, sprinkled with humor, and often interrupted by questions or comments from the engaged audience (which she encouraged). Rebecca was down-to-earth and approachable, whether adjacent to the podium or on the porch. One of two grants to AS1 from the Isles of Shoals Association (Unitarian Universalist) (ISAUU) helped to cover the cost of our speaker's stay on Star.

We followed AS1's tradition of offering a full menu of optional activities (with the exception of the "Fire and Water" safety presentation and the Children's Program, both of which we repeatedly noted were mandatory). For the first time in years, we had a Barn Dance, thanks to the other ISAUU grant. Led by Jacqueline Laufman and Al MacIntyre, the event was everything that we had hoped it would be. On Monday evening, Brookfield was filled with folks of all ages having fun, smiling, laughing, moving, mixing, and getting mixed up to the music. Little did we know that our speaker and her husband Harris met contra dancing so thought that we had arranged this evening in their honor! The following morning, Jacqueline and Al picked up where they left off with barn dances for younger conferees in the Children's Program, before heading back to the mainland.

We were pleased that Shoalers volunteered for – and even created – jobs of their choosing. We were energized by New Shoalers who shared fresh ideas with us, including Hamish McKenzie, who gave a well-attended Talk on the Rocks on the “State of the Press,” and Michael Jenkins, who led two popular strength classes on the deck of Brookfield. We were grateful to those who stepped in to fill the shoes of our friends who had to leave Star Island abruptly and unexpectedly after testing positive for Covid-19, when possible. In the weeks leading up to AS1, in anticipation of confronting this recurring though evolving challenge, we were heartened to have pro-actively helped Star Island to clarify its Covid-19 policy, in particular, and its acute infectious disease policy, in general.

According to this year’s conference evaluations, Shoalers were happy with the array and quality of our offerings. The highlights most often mentioned were live music, spending time with friends on the porch, 15x20, variety shows, chapel, softball, and, of course, The Great People Hunt. Though no one suggested dropping any of the AS1 volunteer-led offerings, some folks thought that there were too many events. Yet, others thought that there were not enough (or, perhaps, certain kinds of) offerings. As it was impossible to schedule every event without overlap, we hoped that folks would be happy with their choices and suffer no more than slightly from fear of missing out. Ali Walton and Phil Quatrochi, AS1 2025 Chairs, have read each and every conference evaluation, the details within which will inform their planning of next year’s AS1 conference. On that note, we just edited the Month-by-Month Checklist found on the Star Island Leadership Page and seeded it with advice (things we did that were helpful) and wisdom (stuff we wished we had done or done differently, in retrospect!) to help Ali and Phil not only plan for next year but to stay on track.

In summary, we were thrilled to fill the conference, to introduce AS1 to new families, and to enjoy exceptionally fine weather for the week. We were disappointed that multiple members of our conference had to leave Star Island prematurely due to Covid-19 or other acute illness and were relieved to learn that, as far as we know, everyone recovered without complication. Chairing All Star 1 2024 was not only an honor but a reward because we had the pleasure of working with passionate people who wanted – once again – to do what they do best and with awesome adventurers who were willing to try something new. Star Island’s staff, AS1’s staff and AS1’s volunteers are awesome! Thank you one and all for making our job easy and contributing to All Star 1 2024’s success. We will come back! We will come back!

Respectfully submitted,

Michele and Matthew Cohen
September 2, 2024