

WEBMASTER'S REPORT TO THE 2023 DISTRICT SIX CONVENTION:

1. Introduction:

My last report covered the goals and accomplishments made during the COVID lockdown blackouts from 2019 to 2022. The rebuild of Vasaorder.com was prompted by a desire at Grand Lodge to make the site responsive so that the pages would be rendered to fit the device on which they were being viewed, (smartphones as well as computer monitors).

The reports of 2019 and 2022 and this one for 2023 can be viewed at both our current site https://www.vasaorder.com/LodgeHomeVerify.cfm?lodge_num=806&page=newsletter

and our legacy site <https://vasaorder.net/newsletters.cfm?lodge=D6>

2. Redesign Status

During the early part of the term, we began to schedule events as open as the restrictions allowed and posted them along with flyers and contact links for reservations or more information. Most of our volunteer site administrators, both from district 6 as well as elsewhere concentrated on their officer lists. Several went a bit further and posted to the calendar of events, so those two areas enjoyed adequate testing, (and bug fixes). But within District six, the use of the site has diminished. Many of our local lodges have old contact and calendar information, or none at all.

We need to have our site data content maintained by the lodges and districts themselves. The process is not difficult and requires no programming skills. Volunteers receive complete instructions for sign in to the admin panels along with their credentials and help if needed is a phone call away.

3. Reported Issues from 2022:

Map generation:

It was reported last year that some of the map locations were wrong and there seems to be no way to fix this in any of the admin panels.

The action is executed by a Google map plugin. Updates are a rather complex process since the map presented along with the local site needs to be In sync with the global map presented on the search page for local or district lodges. The process requires access to the vasa account on the Google site. This task is done by the Grand Lodge administrator. If you relocate your meeting hall or find that the map is not correct contact me and I will fix it.

Event calendars: *[Event titles are currently restricted to prohibit the use of special characters such as “#” and “&”].* This has not yet been corrected because it involves the interface with the database which has been completely reprogrammed to upgrade from Microsoft Access to Oracle MySQL. Once I have sufficient time to obtain and study tech manuals for Oracle, I will address the issue.

Posting of assigned District Deputies and Grand Lodge Deputies.

The deputies are posted by the administrator at the level above since that's where they are assigned. The district administrator posts the deputies for each local lodge in their domain. The Grand Lodge deputies are posted by the Grand Lodge administrator (currently me). There is still a glitch in that process but there is a workaround so it's currently on the back burner.

4. New features during the term:

Early last year Vasaorder.com was attacked by a very determined and patient hacker who developed an elaborate scheme to try to get our district officers the purchase Amazon gift cards and forward them to him as he impersonated the district master. Our new contact page was too easy to use. To block this sort of attack in the future we designed a server driven contact process, (Like the 3-point sign in on your banking app). It was demonstrated it at the Grand Lodge executive board meeting in Philadelphia prior to convention where it was approved. It is currently in use for all contacts throughout the site.

Note that there are some officers who would prefer not to have their e-mail address or phone number or mailing address visible to the public. The administrator who enters the data can set a switch to block any or all three from public view.

5. Open issues:

e-mail hosting:

on the 19th of December GoDaddy terminated support for "LIVE MAIL". There had been some earlier warnings but simply pulling the plug and causing an e-mail blackout was unexpected. Calls to tech support resulted in a suggestion to choose another mail client, such as Microsoft mail or outlook.

"WORKSPACE", a tool that supported e-mail aliases and management of "catch all" accounts was taken down as well resulting in the loss of the ability to forward Park enquiries to specific trustees and similar actions. Our "opt in district groupmail" was lost as well.

As a result of the loss of the workspace feature, "vasaparknj.inquiry @ Vasaorder.org no longer works

GoDaddy tech support offered little or no help with the recovery of all that had been lost.

Website hosting:

In early January BMC hosting executed an emergency move of about 200 websites from a group of older servers to the cloud. Vasaorder.net was among them.

The site was created with ColdFusion release 3.5 about 18 years ago so it crashed immediately when it encountered release 18 (about 15 years newer).

It took nearly a month to find the depreciated tags to work around, but the site is back up and running. There remains an issue with photo management that disabled uploading and replacement of pictures in the photo galleries but all else is in working order. I've temporarily disabled the photo management buttons on the administrator's dashboard.

Upcoming events calendar:

Between the officer contact list and the calendar of upcoming events it's hard to tell which is more important. Please post your upcoming events with as much information as possible including opening time, cost, open to the public or members only, and a contact for reservations or more information, as well as a link to a flyer, or external website.

The district 6 calendar includes these features, so if no one else has stepped up to administer the data content for our district site, send the info to me, INCLUDING A FLYER IF POSSIBLE and I will then post it.

OFF-LINE DISTRICT SUPPORT:

1. District 6 Member Database

The District 6 full membership database still resides on my home network in a file maker database that has been restored to full operational stability. It is not connected to the web.

Unfortunately the contact e-mail name published in the Vasa home family for address updates as NJVHF@vasaorder.com is no longer valid due to the recent actions by GoDaddy described earlier.

The next issue of the vasa home family will temporarily specify RCA@vasaorder.com for address corrections, new subscriptions and drops.

The database continues to be the source of mailing labels for newsletters, district and park mailings, and mailings for other special events by request and with approval of the district 6 executive board.

A recent addition was the ability to generate a family list of residents of vasa park by street address as requested by Errol Ernstrom, president of the homeowner's association.

The database is also the source of the introduction list of District officers, (formerly known as the "blue card" many years ago).

2. Opt-in Groupmail

After being in place for many years, this process also fell victim to the GoDaddy action described earlier.

The list, currently about 180 addresses, will need to be recompiled under outlook. An unexpected benefit of the required move is that Outlook allows a group mail list of up to 500 members as opposed to the GoDaddy approach that was limited to 99. This will allow for the elimination of two unneeded e-mail accounts.

The OPT-IN EMAIL LIST is open to all members of district 6. Here is how it works:

Announcements distributed by the mailings are addressed to "Members, NJ Dist 6, VoA", and the group addresses are listed as "blind copies" to discourage harvesting by spammers.

Each message includes a disclaimer at its footer explaining why the recipient is on the list, with instructions for removal if desired.

One of the issues for which it is often used is to distribute announcements of the passing of a member. This would be done on request of a family member, as some wish more limited contact.

If you are not on the list, (Have not been receiving the announcements) and wish to be included, simply send me an email request to add you to the list. Include your name, and lodge name and number.

In Truth and Unity,
Bob Anderson
Webmaster, NJ District Six

908-852-4357 Voice, 908-619-6365 text, rca4357@Gmail.com

Contact me with questions if any