

# TALKING POINTS - A PERSPECTIVE

By J.R. Batesole, ASOB Texas Ambassador

## *PART I*

Several years ago while attending a TASOB mid winter in Dallas; I had opportunity to listen to our Happy Hobo and past ASOB president, Jim Whitehouse of San Antonio, give a presentation on ASOB and the Ladder of Smiles. For me, this was just about a Blues Brothers moment as Jim connected a lot of dots I began to feel like Jake Blues. I began to see the light and started a quest to gain a personal understanding of what ASOB and the Ladder of Smiles was all about and what I could do to support the organization and the cause. Recently, I have found a number of people who still really do not understand the organization and the cause and contacted Jim about bringing his talking points back to life to share with our Texas bandsmen. What Jim provided is a little dated and a little lengthier than I remembered. So I have done some updates and will begin with the first segment in this ASOB update with more to follow in later updates.

What does the A.S.O.B. do for its members and what is done with my dues? The Association Shrine Oriental Bands of North America is an organization that focuses on sharing information and news about Oriental Bands, regional/state Oriental Band organizations and associations and ASOB in general. This is accomplished through the publication of the Na Khabar magazine, and by word of mouth from the officers of the Association as they travel to various regional jamborees and mid-winter meetings. The house organ Na Khabar is published 3 times a year. The Na Khabar is published once a year in hard copy and twice a year on line located at the ASOB web site at [www.asob.org](http://www.asob.org). According to Imperial Representatives the Na Khabar is the best Shrine Association publication available. Not only is it the largest publication offering with the most coverage, it is also the most professional publication in Shrinedom. A large share of your dues is invested in the publication of the Na Khabar which consumes almost half of the ASOB budget. The second function of the A.S.O.B. for its members is to plan and implement the Fantasy at the Annual Imperial Conference that occurs in early July. Due to the size of our organization, we usually have our competition in the A.S.O.B. Headquarters Hotel, and all the arrangement, and cost of meeting spaces, and the competition trophies and fees for competition judges are the responsibility of the A.S.O.B. Your dues also pay for these expenses and the administrative costs of the ASOB organization and supplement the Ladder of Smiles. Your dues are not used to cover officer expenses. ASOB officers on the line receive no compensation during the time they are on the line so when they travel to various associations for jamborees and mid-winter meeting the entire travel expense, uniform shirts and other apparel is paid for out of the pocket of the line officer. . Last, but not least, the A.S.O.B. manages the Ladder of Smiles which we will address in the next segment of ASOB update.

## *PART II*

This is part two of the Jim Whitehouse's Talking points on ASOB and the Ladder of Smiles or "How I had a Blues Brothers moment and saw the light". I have updated Jim's work, edited where necessary and abridged where possible. The first part dealt almost entirely with what defines ASOB and how your dues are used. This part is devoted to the philanthropy of ASOB which is the Ladder of Smiles. Only two national organizations within the Shrine contribute directly to the Shrine Endowment Fund. They are the A.S.O.B. Ladder of Smiles and the Clowns Sneaker Fund. Jim's original work drew a financial comparison between the two funds. However, access to current information on the Clown Sneakers fund is somewhat limited at this time therefore I will not attempt a performance comparison.

ASOB Ladder of Smiles contributions are posted on the ASOB web page located at [www.asob.org](http://www.asob.org). Under the Ladder of Smiles tab. Extensive current and historical data is routinely published in the Na Khabar. The September issue recaps the year and provides summary data back to 1961. The presentation of funds collected to Imperial is normally accomplished at the Annual Imperial Convention held each year in July. Mike Hartup, our ASOB Ladder of Smiles Chairman performs those honors as pictured on the ASOB face book page.

From 1961 to present A.S.O.B. Ladder of Smiles has contributed over \$2.4 million dollars to the hospital endowment fund. Over \$600,000 of that money has been collected in the last five years. The check for 2011 alone was \$151,230. These are pretty good numbers considering the state of our economy over the last several years. Jim makes the statement that it is clear that the Imperial officer accepting the check is always amazed that we raise so much money. Obviously our support of the Shrine Endowment Fund is greatly appreciated by Imperial.

A term you won't hear associated with the Ladder of Smiles is "Net Proceeds". What that means, when you hear it, is that after all overhead, administrative and other costs have been deducted, the Net Proceeds are sent off to the endowment fund, specific hospital or whatever. The real secret of the Ladder of Smiles is that all funds contributed are "Net Proceeds". There is no deduction for all of those other things because there aren't any. What limited administrative costs we do have, stationary, postage, etc. are covered by a portion of your dues. Everything is accomplished by your officers and appointees without charge. Therefore every dollar donated to the Ladder of Smiles goes where you expect and it is supposed to go, straight to the endowment fund. This completes the basic Ladder of Smiles segment. The last segment dealing primarily with the 100% participation program is in work and should be ready for the next ASOB update.

### *PART III*

And so we begin with the final part of the Jim Whitehouse talking points on ASOB and the Ladder of Smiles (LOS). This segment discusses how the LOS participation performance is measured or what is the 100 % Participation Program. Jim, as the ASOB 2004-2005 president, developed and implemented the 100% participation program. His idea was to have a donation from every Oriental Band Member. The amount did not matter. The concept was that if every member made a contribution, then every Oriental Band would make a contribution, therefore every regional association would make a contribution. This was important to Jim because prior to the implementation of this program only about 30% of the bands were contributing to the LOS. Jim, simple man that he is, offered a basic plan that proposed that each band, at least one stated band meeting each year, pass the fez and collect something from everyone to contribute to the LOS. This is perhaps the simplest approach I know of, but there are many other ways to accomplish the goal. Any of which would give us the 100 percent participation. Each unit should find their own approach or set of approaches that best suits their situation. After all, it may just well be it is one of those pesky times when a unit finds there is just too much money in the unit treasury. In that case a simple vote will cure the problem sending those pesky excess funds on their way to the LOS.

So, with the method of measure and the mechanics of collection set forth, the next step was to educate bandsmen throughout North America about A.S.O.B. membership and the LOS. Hopefully, once educated, each bandsman would want to be an ASOB member and make a LOS donation. Jim then went on to set the 2004-2005 L.O.S. goal at \$65,000, which was never mentioned. He then set out to educate and personalize the LOS. Jim started with his version of why donate to the L.O.S. Jim explained it this way. At that time the Shrine of North America was spending about \$600 million a year on the hospitals. That broke down to around \$1.6 million a day for child care. Jim also found out that according to the Houston Shrine Hospital it cost \$20 to provide tennis shoes for the children. With some help, he finally figured out that if he reached the \$65k goal you could put 3,250 children in new shoes. Jim said he liked to look at the problem in this manner because the \$600 million number seemed to be beyond his comprehension. He later confessed that even the \$1.6 million was difficult to envision, but he could comprehend how important it was to put shoes on 3,250 children. Thus, we now know that Jim finds it easier to count shoes than dollars or that he has a thing for shoes. Take your pick.

Once the plan was fully developed the Ambassadors were sent periodic information on the frequency and level of band contributions. The Ambassadors used that information to increase membership and further educate units on the need to pass the hat and make a LOS contribution. Jim also went forth and gave presentations at association meetings around North America. I had the good fortune to be in attendance for one of those presentations at the 2005 TASOB mid-winter in Dallas. That is where I, in the footsteps of Jake Blues, began to see the light. Now here we are six years later and what has happened? Well first of all total operating costs at the hospital has gone up. The latest news release I could find shows an annual hospital budget of \$826M or \$2.2M per day (Note: That annual number probably includes total operating costs of patient serves, administrative, building and R&D costs). So now that the need has increased we need to be more proactive towards being more effective in our efforts. Thus, we ask the question, how well has the 100% participation program worked out for us? If you look at the level of participation number, Jim's original measurement, it has increased from an

average of around 30% to the current average of 40%. A 25% improvement. We in Texas have been doing pretty well in this regard. For the 2010-11 year, Texas bands achieved 75 % participation. There are also several other interesting indicators of program progress and health. They include the annual dollars contributed, the total dollars generated by the LOS program, and the amount contributed over the last five years as a percentage of the total contributed since the inception of the program. Since 1961, the LOS has amassed over \$2.4M in donations. Over \$600K or 25% of that total amount has been generated in the last five years since the full implementation of the 100% participation program. Even the casual observer would have to say that a 25% increase in participation, and the significant increase in dollars contributed indicate that something positive has occurred over the last five years and the program is going in the right direction. Review of the available data has revealed that there are far too many variables to say that all of these gains can all be attributed to one event or program. There have a number of very generous bequests, some very special efforts on the part of Jim's successors and some truly great one time efforts on the part of some individual bands. However, one can say that Whitehouse 100% participation program has been a direct and positive contributor and a leader in LOS program performance improvement. This completes the series on the Whitehouse talking points on ASOB, the LOS and the 100% participation program or "How I found a Blues Brothers moment in the middle of a TASOB mid-winter". I want to thank our Happy Hobo from San Antonio, Jim Whitehouse, for reconstructing his notes and allowing me to bring them up to date and present them to you. I also want to thank Joe Brewton, Ralph Jubb, Mike Hartup and David McCarthy, past and current ASOB officers for answering my tedious questions in gaining a better understanding of the mechanics of the process.

One thing to remember is that the heart of the ASOB and the LOS success lies with unit leadership taking an active role in ASOB education and membership and providing the vehicles for the generation of LOS donations.

Hopefully, this series has been both enlightening and beneficial.