

# ShagAtlanta

Good morning! My name is Lester Stokes and I served as ShagAtlanta's President for the past two years, 2012 & 2013. I want to thank Robin for giving me the opportunity to showcase ShagAtlanta this morning. Those of us who are speaking today do not have all the answers to success or any magic formulas. All we have to offer is a little experience, some wonderful stories, and our own perspective of The Road Once Traveled.

ShagAtlanta was established in 1989 with the merger of two metropolitan Atlanta shag clubs, the North Atlanta Beach Club and the Atlanta Beach Club. The Atlanta Beach Club was one of the original six shag clubs to sign the charter that formed the Association of Carolina Shag Clubs in 1984. Our current membership stands at 350 and our club membership runs from January to December of each year. Our dues are \$45 per year. ShagAtlanta dances every Saturday night, except the first weekend in December when we hold our Annual Christmas Party, and people come from five metro Atlanta counties to dance at Nemoe's Tavern & Grill located at 6025 Peachtree Parkway in Norcross just outside of I-285 northeast of Atlanta from 7-11 pm. We offer Free Shag dance lessons every Saturday night, advanced lessons at 5 pm and beginner lessons at 6 pm. The ShagAtlanta officers leading our club are; President, Membership Vice-President, Membership Vice-President/Newsletter, Communications Vice-President, Social Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Parliamentarian. We also have a 10 member Board of Directors to assist in making recommendations that consists of 2 Director Emeritus, 3 immediate past Presidents and 5 at large members elected by the general membership for 2 year terms. We also have several Standing

Committees and I will explain some of these throughout this presentation. ShagAtlanta involves a lot of people. You might ask; why? Like all shag clubs, ShagAtlanta welcomes anyone as a member who is interested in preserving and promoting beach and shag music and the dance known as the Carolina Shag. The Main reason for all of this organized body of people is F - U - N. Yep, (1)90-100 shag clubs and subscriber member clubs, (2)15,000 people or members, (3)ACSC, and (4)SOS all make up a Business of FUN. Shag club Presidents, you are in charge of leading or promoting FUN through this wonderfully awesome dance we call Shag! In the process of having FUN, you and your members will make stronger bonds with existing friends, establish new friendships, improve your towns and cities through community service projects (if you so desire), and really enjoy being a part of something that makes others happy. You will be pleasantly surprised as goals are met and people get on board as your shag club gains momentum. All of this will not however just happen. It will require Work. My high school physics teacher explained to me that work is a force applied through a distance. So, gather your team and prepare to go to work.

The ONE thing I would like to offer to each of you "New" Presidents to start your year is an expression - Carpe Diem. The definition according to Webster's New World Dictionary is "seize the day", or make the Most of Present Opportunities. This is your opportunity; make the most of it! When I was first elected to serve as President, three things came to mind that became my guide: (1)Try to make this year Fun, (2)Think outside of the Box, and (3)Lead, Follow, or get the Hell out of the way. We were somewhat lucky and partially prepared in Atlanta because several of our officers had been on the Executive Committee for the last

three or four years. But some of you are taking on the responsibility of President or Vice-President without any prior experience. Some of you may feel like this: "When You are up to your Ass in Alligators, it is hard to remember that Your primary objective was to drain the swamp." If this is you, remember how you feel right now and try Not to let this happen when you leave office next year or the year after. Sharing as much knowledge as possible and helping your successor be prepared for what lies ahead can either be a strength or weakness for your shag club. I did not do a good job in this area of leadership because the person elected to follow me and I were not always working in the same direction or have the same priorities or goals. But, the one thing we both agree on is; Try to make this year Fun. A great deal of time, money, and effort will be expended this year for this not to happen. I have never seen so many adults, and kids too, have this much fun without special equipment like balls, bats, gloves, rackets, sticks, pads, helmets, and other specialized sports equipment, playing fields, or expensive clothes and gadgets. Beach music, blues, or bop and a space to get up off of the back of your lap is all that is needed to enjoy this thing we call shag.

ShagAtlanta has worked very hard over the last few years to make sure all of our visitors and guests are not only greeted at the door, but many of our members and officers make it a priority to visit with, speak to, and get to know anyone not a member of our shag club. We have borrowed the idea of Free Shag Lessons from several of the shag clubs we have visited. This idea has been a very valuable recruiting tool. We offer Free Basic and Advanced Shag Lessons every Saturday night before we dance as a club. With the help of Jackie McGee and Charlie Womble we have established a Four week rotation of Basic and Advanced Shag Classes. Come early,

take Free lessons, and dance the rest of the evening as our guest. After four weeks of Free lessons, you can take more lessons for \$50 or join ShagAtlanta for \$45 and all lessons for the rest of the year are Free as a member. Jackie & Charlie have also offered ShagAtlanta their DVDs to sell during our shag lessons. One more idea that we have borrowed from other shag clubs is that of name tags that say; "Ask me to dance." Women outnumber men in most of our dance lessons; so we have volunteers wear ShagAtlanta name tags that say it's OK to ask me to dance. In the Saturday night dance immediately following the lessons we make sure that all of the ladies and men taking the dance lessons get asked to step out on the dance floor, relax, have fun, and practice what they have just learned in the Free lessons. It is important that everyone realize that we were all beginners at some time and then keep the dancing easy and fun. This is Not the time to "hot dog" or show how great a dancer you are or how many complicated steps you have mastered. This attitude expresses to our guests and visitors that we really do want them to come back, have fun, and become part of ShagAtlanta. One more way to make our club Fun for everyone is to have themes for our quarterly jams. ShagAtlanta has four, longer, quarterly jams that serve as a large dance with a general membership meeting that night when business is discussed and open to the general membership for input and keeping everyone abreast of the business in ShagAtlanta. Luaus with Hawaiian décor and bright colors, oldies parties with poodle skirts for the girls, greased down dove tails for the guys with a pack of cigarettes rolled up in a short sleeve t-shirt and blue jeans, hula hoop and yoyo contests, and spinning platters from the 50's and 60's are a couple of the themes for these jams. We also have food that afternoon or evening that is appropriate for the theme of the party.

During our Saturday night dances we have a split the kitty or half and half raffle. This is one the Chairmanships under the Social Vice-President's portfolio. However, we have added a small twist to the raffle to make it more fun for the members of ShagAtlanta.

One of our members, Stan Mislow, suggested that we take 50% of the club's share of the raffle and place it in a member lottery drawing to be given away by throwing dice to select a member's matching number from the ShagAtlanta member's roster. Since then we have substituted a drawing of ping pong balls from three paper bags to correspond to a member's number on the ShagAtlanta roster from 1-350. The first number drawn narrows the winner down to 100 eligible members, the second number narrows the winner down to 10 people, and we read those names from a member roster with corresponding numbers to see who might be the winner. Then we draw the third ball to find the winner of a pot that ranges from \$25 to \$1,000 depending on how long the pot has been growing and how many raffle tickets are sold each Saturday night. The Key factor is you have to be present to win the money or the pot rolls to the next week when we sell tickets and draw again. Your number on the ShagAtlanta member's roster can change if we add any new members ahead of you alphabetically and we constantly update the roster when new members are added to ShagAtlanta. Regardless of the reason people come out on Saturday night; whether it is to dance, listen to a special DJ, visit with other members, or win the member lottery when it grows to over \$500; we are just happy to see their smiling face. Some of you may not think that the member lottery has any effect on attendance, but I can tell you for a fact that as the member lottery grows so does the normal attendance on Saturday night. People who might not have attended are at Nemoe's dancing and having a good time with the rest of us.

There are many ways for you to encourage your members to get involved with the events of your shag club, but the most Fun I have seen in the my sixteen years as a shagger happened last summer. ShagAtlanta did what I had seen happen at Augusta with C. S. R. A. , at Hilton Head with Beaufort, at Clemson with Electric City and so many more shag clubs. We hosted a really good party! Betty Lou Stokes, My Lady, my wife, best friend, and so much more and I have met so many wonderful people and lifelong friends through shag parties, shag cruises, and shag events. A very wise Lady and friend once told me something at The Grand National Dance Championships in Atlanta that I will always remember: "Once You join a shag club, You have an Obligation to the members and to the shag club to be more than just a name on a list of members." When you join, you are saying I want to be part of this Awesome Group of people. Now, You as a leader, of your shag club need to find their "hot button." I know it is "different strokes for different folks"; but if you want to be successful, it is your job to find out whatever it is that will encourage them to act and get involved. Maybe it is nothing more than a personal invitation from you to please help me out of a tough situation; I or we need you. Some people need baby steps of voluntarism first. Lead them to crawl, then lead them to walk, and before you know it some of them will be running and you will be trying to keep up. Some things are contagious and success if one of these things. People will want to be part of something that is happening, fun, or really successful. Charles Purcell, ShagAtlanta's President before me, and I were sitting at a workshop business meeting when bids for the Summer Workshop for 2013 and eligible regions were announced. We looked at each other and said: "what do you think?" Well folks, the rest is history. First we pitched the event to ShagAtlanta's membership at a quarterly jam and asked not only for their support, but more importantly, that their support

signified their willingness to work. Some of the old hats told us that we did Not know what we were getting into because Anne Jernigan Henry had hosted an ACSC workshop many years before and that they were sure we would be disappointed by the amount of volunteers we were sure to get. Sometimes ignorance is bliss. Charles was not afraid of work and I was too excited to quit. We had just the right combination of skills for co-chairmen of a major event. Charles is a masterful planner and a great person to work with because his job as a chemist/salesman leads him to find answers when obstacles appear. When I get excited about something, I' m just like Tigger and begin to bounce faster and faster off of walls as we accomplish our goals and want to inspire others to get involved because the final event is going to be a really great happening and "that' s what Tiggers do best. " Charles kept me grounded and I kept him motivated. We did a great deal of planning, lots of leg work, met with hundreds of people and came up with a plan to present to the ACSC for a bid. Once approved by the ACSC, you folks out there, we realized that it was too late to quit. The only thing to do was to make it happen and "Puttin On The Glitz, A Posh Affair" was born. This event was exactly like a new born baby. It would require constant attention and a great deal of care. Certain things are givens when planning a large party. Many more things are uncertain and require constant revision until they become finalized. It is really important to find 10-15 people who are willing to chair the big parts of this mega event and make it successful. We were really blessed to find the key chairmen and get great support from the Coalition of Clubs and unexpected help from sister clubs. After a great deal of brainstorming, putting plans into action, and motivating many club members to get on board, the rest was work, work, work. The really good part of all of this activity was that ShagAtlanta put on an outstanding workshop. We accomplished all of our goals, had

a really good time doing it, and involved 75%–80% of our membership.

Most of us are elected as president and come into a situation where the shag club has a great deal of history. Some of you can put your year on automatic and do what has been done before. When elected president I realized that ShagAtlanta had much to be proud of with a lot of history. However, I recommend you always:

“Think outside of the box.” When you are green, you grow. New officers and new members always have fresh new ideas about how things can be done. I am not suggesting you scrap everything before you. However, it never hurts to look at things from a different perspective. We tried some new ideas and some of them worked and a few of them did not. Free shag lessons was the best, new idea we ever borrowed from other shag clubs. When you are ripe, you are rotten. This may be a shag club that seldom changes anything. Projects become old and boring. Members stop coming and prospective members do not want to join something that is not growing or at least a little bit exciting. Find ways to add excitement to what is happening in your shag club. If you need help, please ask. You have a wealth of knowledge and experience in this room.

Sometimes shag clubs do more than just dance. Many of you have community projects that are very important to you, your club, and your community. In 1993 a member of ShagAtlanta, Brenda Rice, was dealing with a patient through her family related business.

Brenda sent me this e-mail when I was trying to get information about ShagAtlanta’s relationship to Camp Sunshine, a camp for kids with cancer, for a news article. “About 1993, I think, I had a patient named Dixie Yandle that at age 17 had lost her leg

above the knee due to cancer. Dixie had been fighting cancer for six years. This family became part of mine. The family was going through some really rough times as Dixie was on chemo and had to have round the clock care. Vicky, George, and Dixie Yandle lived in Atlanta where her father worked as an Oldsmobile salesman making about \$80,000/year. Vicky Yandle worked as a receptionist at a furniture store making about \$20,000/year. Vicky lost her job when they found out Dixie had cancer at age 11 and Vicky asked for a leave of absence to be with her daughter. When Dixie lost her leg, George lost his job because he could not be at work full time. The family was devastated and at that time ShagAtlanta had been talking about doing some sort of fund raiser. I asked that we consider this family. We brought the family up to the Marriott where the fund-raiser was to be held. Most of ShagAtlanta visited with Dixie while she was in a wheelchair. I don't remember how much we raised, but I think it was more than \$5,000. Dixie died soon after this but many of the old time members remember her. Her parents were instrumental in getting The Family Medical Leave Act passed through Congress. Camp Sunshine just became our fund-raiser for the year. Soon after this, Mary Kay Ingalls came out and she was actually a volunteer for Camp Sunshine. By the way, I am extremely thankful to our club for continuing to do this as it is a great organization."

### ShagAtlanta Takes All The Right Steps For Camp

"If Carolina shag dancing is about keeping in step with the right partner, then Camp Sunshine and ShagAtlanta are meant to be. Thanks to a strong relationship between club members and leaders and longtime Camp Sunshine volunteer Kay Ingalls, camp has been the beneficiary of ShagAtlanta's fund-raising and community spirit for years.

Kay's relationship with camp began in the early 1990s. She also had prevailed in her own battle with cancer. Through friends and acquaintances, she became familiar with Camp Sunshine. She contacted Sally Hale and that summer served as a waterfront activities counselor, overseeing canoeing, kayaking, and other water sports. The next summer, Camp Sunshine's first summer at Camp Twin Lakes, Kay was a cabin counselor. For the next 22 years, Kay never missed camp. About the same time she began her camp commitment, Kay also discovered Carolina shag dancing. As with many shag dance clubs, Atlanta's group combines some fund-raising with fun-raising. The first fund-raiser was for a young girl named Dixie Yandle, who had cancer. Although Dixie died at age 17, ShagAtlanta's desire to help young children with cancer grew stronger. Initially, the group set a goal of \$500 for Camp Sunshine. Through the years, their fund-raising, including an annual silent auction, traditionally raises \$5,000 to \$10,000 for camp and in 2012 reached a record \$15,000. In addition to financial giving, ShagAtlanta has offered dance lessons at summer camp. In keeping with shag dancing's beach tie-in, Betty Lou helps campers make seashell keepsake ornaments. Kay serves as the official link between camp and ShagAtlanta, and club members have generously supported Kay's participation in the Keencheefoonee Road Race over the past several years. Kay has seen many of her former campers grow up to finish high school, go on to college, become adults, start careers, get married, and have children of their own. Many have gone on to become Camp Sunshine volunteers themselves. They are the future of Camp Sunshine - and it's in good hands, Kay said.

Remember: Try to make this year Fun. Think outside the box. Lead, follow, or get the hell out of the way.

I' ll close with one of my favorite poems called:

The Man Who Dares

The man who decides what he wants to achieve

And works till his dreams all come true,

The man who will alter his course when he must

And bravely begin something new,

The man who' s determined to make his world better,

Who' s willing to learn and to lead,

The man who keeps trying and doing his best

Is the man who knows how to succeed.

Ladies and Gentlemen - Dance As If There' s Nobody Watching!

Lester Stokes

ShagAtlanta