

Crossing the Digital Divide Volume 22

“Kate Wolf”

by Joseph Feigon
for the Observer

*And it's gone away in yesterday
Now I find myself on the mountainside
Where the rivers change direction
Across the Great Divide*

I was behind the scenes at the Kate Wolf Music Festival this year. The music is, as always, amazing. I saw many friends, shared many smiles, all while dancing between Production, the Bowl and perimeter gates. I've often written about our lack of carrier (network) options up here, we had one option for the venue. Internet service is usually delivered close to the dish and pole pointing towards the sky through a 6 feet break in the tree line. Once the antenna and device are working, infrastructure remains the customer's responsibility, whether wires or wireless.

Bringing the only network option available to the venue was relatively a minor hurdle, distributing wifi through oak groves, a sea of Winnebagos, creekbeds and pathways made for many “how am I going to do this?” moments. It took some twisting and turning and precarious climbs up tall ladders, but we got it. We had Internet access at the entrances, the vendor court, as well as the management/production area behind the big stage.

Some workers/vendors/guests noticed the wireless beacons, and commented/questioned accordingly. Few noticed the decreased number of clipboards, shoulder-crpled radios, and lost tickets. Event management had near real-time access to entry information, as well as email, flight information, and more. Most of us know how scarce cellular coverage can be under the trees. Add a few thousand urban refugees, and watch all cellphone and cellular data scream to a HALT.

Black Oak Ranch now has infrastructure to carry them across the great divide, we hope Kate would be happy.

We learned a good deal this weekend about the addictive nature of social media, email housekeeping and confusion, e.g., “I thought it would be okay to upload a few videos from last night's show.” Right, and just after you agreed not to use your iThing for anything but email.

It's difficult explaining to City Folk that we pay for Internet access, and have access to “only so much” on a monthly basis. Explain satellite technology, and most people get “that look”. Having a finite amount of bandwidth **and** throughput, and needing it all to work without hiccups for three+ days, where 65-100 devices have one, critical job to do, the service to the Internet is more then adequate. Add a few users, despite clear

direction: no Facebook uploads, no YouTube, no ESPN, blah blah, and you're suddenly within Megabytes of quota and all Internet activity slows to a crawl. Next time, we'll use the technology to prioritize one kind of network traffic (business process related), and limit access to the Internet at large for everything else.

Speaking of "everything else", while tuning the wireless network, two weeks ago, there were no other signals at the venue. The week of the show, suddenly, there's wireless beacons from the cars, trucks, trailers, generators, light boards, sound boards, juice boards and floor boards. There's a sea of "things", the Internet of Things (IoT) I spoke of recently. To witness its appearance, growth and power was a visual maze of colors representing the wireless signals dancing to and forth. The sound and lighting engineers use wifi to control their equipment from remote locations. Different roles, similar jobs. The teamwork, on so many levels, to pull off a four day party for several thousand souls, was amazing to experience, and an honor to be a part of this year – Across the great divide.