

It's not a costume party," Matt Edwards, executive director of Mount Airy Museum of Regional History, was quick to point out as he spoke of the museum's replacement for their popular "Casino Royale" fundraising event.

To put it in old movie terms, the museum is going less James Bond and more Cary Grant and Grace Kelly.

Last year, Edwards said he learned that the Casino Royale event "operated in a very gray area legally. It was pretty much black."

After consulting with a number of lawyers and district attorneys, the museum board felt a casino event was not something with which they could move forward. It turns out, under North Carolina law, possession of the gaming tables and equipment used in casino nights are illegal to own, even if they are used for charity events.

Edwards said things looked up for a few minutes when a bill came before the NC legislature to allow non-profits to legally hold gaming fundraisers like the ones the museum has held in the past. But, just as it has done every two or three years for the past 25 years, said Edwards, it petered out and died in committee.

So the museum revamped its theme, and after considering a few things, decided on the classic dinner-dance model, and to tie in to the spirit of the season, made it a masked ball. Call it what you will, masquerade ball, masked ball, bal masque, it's a black-tie-optional dinner/dance where guests wear masks.

Guests can make or purchase masks as extravagant — or not — as they wish.

"And we are happy to provide masks" for guests who don't want to get into all that, Edwards said.

Will there be a grand unmasking at midnight? “No,” laughed Edwards. “Our crowd won’t make it to midnight.” And indeed the event is scheduled for 6:30 to 11 p.m.

Edwards said that when he came on board with the museum in 2009, the old-school black tie galas were starting to lose steam. The world had become a more casual place and there was less interest in dressing up than there had been before.

“The cost of putting them on exceeded profitability,” said Edwards. He is hoping this event will be heavily sponsored, with sponsorships still coming in.

The Casino Royale was a fresh angle for fundraising, but as it is no longer available, Edwards thought it was a good time to revisit the classic, especially with the added twist of a masquerade.

It’s an important decision, as the fall fundraising event funds about 15% of the museum’s overall budget for the year and is critical in funding day to day operations at the museum. Unlike most non-profits, the museum is on a calendar fiscal year and “this event is ‘make or break’ for us to end the year in a good place,” said Edwards. “And then we jump on that roller coaster all over again.”

Night For the Museum Masquerade Ball is Friday, from 6:30 – 11:30 p.m. at Cross Creek Country Club, 1129 Greenhill Road, Mount Airy. There will be food, music by Continental Divide featuring 2016 Carolina Beach Music Hall of Fame inductee Gene Pharr, a draw-down grand prize of \$6,000 cash, and five periodic prizes of \$100 and a silent/live auction featuring items such as vacation home rentals, sports equipment and artwork.

Tickets are \$65 per person and draw-down tickets are \$100. A couples package is available for \$200 which includes two event tickets and one draw-down ticket.

For tickets or further information, call the museum at 336-786-4478 or contact a museum board

member.