

GEORGIA ANNUAL VENDER CONFERENCE

By: Zachary Snow, RSVA Board Member

The state of Georgia held its annual training conference at the Sonesta Hotel in Duluth, GA on the weekend of October 17, 2013. The conference usually has a standard schedule of events that we had been following for several years, if not decades. Usually we would convene on Friday night for an opening ceremony followed by an open forum. Saturday, we would hold seminars on customer service, basic business practices, and have a trade show. Saturday evening, we would have a formal dinner and awards ceremony. On Sundays, vending machine training was provided.

However, as Vice Chairman of the Committee of Blind Vendors, it was my job to plan the conference this year. Needless to say we made a few changes.

Our Friday night open forum had become more of a complaint fest with individuals complaining about their own perceived injustices in the program. I left the open forum several years in a row wondering why we did this. As Vice Chair, I removed the open forum and replaced it with the candidates running for state-wide chairman.

We had four candidates running this year. Each candidate was given fifteen minutes to stand before the vendor body and explain what they intended to do if elected. They also had the option to have two people

speak on their behalf for two minutes each. It went great. We replaced a negative activity with a positive event that left me inspired.

On Saturday we still had two workshops and a trade show. However, instead of customer service and basic business practices, we held a class on how to write and present a business plan, bringing in a CPA. The business plan class was mandatory because we have a new interview process in which your business plan is 50% of your total score. The plan, combined with the ten oral questions (50%) make up your total score. The CPA answered questions about taxes and write offs. I was told by several vendors that this year's workshops were very informative and that they had learned more at this year's conference than years past.

On Saturday night, we received the election results. Wayne Dye is our newly elected statewide chairperson. Wayne is a member of RSVA®, has been a member of our committee of blind vendors for several years, and on top of that he is an excellent vendor. Wayne is a progressive thinker who works hard for the vendors of the state of Georgia. Dale King received the Vendor of the Year Award for 2013. Dale runs an excellent operation at the Twin Towers in Atlanta. Dale often goes the extra mile for vendors in our area.

On Sunday morning, we held our refresher course on vending machines. We had a repairman, Earl Carden, from our AMS distributor come and teach this class.

Although some vending classes are the same, Earl always teaches tips and tricks about vending machines.

Overall I would say we are moving in the right direction. We eliminated a negative event and replaced it with a positive activity. We replaced the usual classes on Saturday with informative classes to help you get a new location and save you money. We have a new chairman in place that will deal with issues instead of sweeping them under the rug. It is my opinion that we had an excellent event and that the Georgia BEP is continuing on the success journey.

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