

Sagebrush 2009 – A Convention Report

By: Janet Wetmore, Publications Chair

The Annual Sagebrush Conference has now come and gone, and this year's theme "Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow" lives on. The 2009 Sagebrush Conference marked the second year that RSVA has presented the training conference exclusively. Even though we encountered a few learning experiences along the way, I believe we were able to avoid the proverbial "sophomore jinx". This year's efforts were apparent, given the overall success of the conference. We want to give special thanks to all who volunteered and made this conference so successful. This year, as in February 2007, we arrived a day early and were fortunate enough to watch the Super Bowl from Las Vegas. As in '07, the team we were all hoping to see win - lost.

Monday February 2nd began with a Board of Directors luncheon, followed by a warm "Welcome to Nevada" from Ms. Katherine Yonkers, BEP Manager, NV. RSVA President Mr. Charles Glaser, GA, also gave a "Welcome to Sagebrush" with Mr. Dan Sippl acting as the day's moderator. Dan had the distinct pleasure to introduce one of the true fathers of the Randolph-Sheppard Program, Mr. Robert Humphrey's, former RSA Commissioner and author of the 1974 RS Amendments. Mr. Humphrey's gave us an outstanding presentation of the Randolph-Sheppard program in its infancy through today and took many questions from an inquiring and eager audience.

Following Mr. Humphrey's presentation was the Vendors Report Card which is quickly becoming one of the most popular agenda items at the conference. The vendor's report card segment provides an opportunity for a representative from each state to speak about what's happening in their respective state's program. This gives everyone who attends a true and genuine feel for what is happening across the country. It also allows for an open forum to exchange ideas and offer meaningful support to states that may need some assistance.

Tuesday, February 3rd found Mr. Filo Tu, Hawaii, moderating after everyone again had a tasty and filling breakfast. On Tuesday mornings agenda were; Ms. Catriona Macdonald, President of Linchpin, LLC, Washington D.C., Mr. Terry Smith, Director Blind and Visually Impaired Services, TN, and Ms. Suzanne Mitchell, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist RSA, Washington D.C. This article does not provide all of the valuable information that was discussed in the speaker's individual presentations. I ask all of you to be patient until the next edition of the Vendorscope is released. There you will find additional reporting of the topics that were presented. Mr. Mike Barclay, Southern Food Services Management, and Mr. Jim Brown, Blackstone Consulting, Inc., two gracious perennial sponsors also presented to the audience as well. It is always very nice to hear about what our sponsors are doing, and we sure appreciate all of their support. Next up in the morning were Kurk Johnson, Lieberman Companies, and Mr. Dan Sippl, WI who talked about some tremendous opportunities regarding ATM machines in locations. Last but not least of the morning presenters was Mr. Rob Cancilla of the Chicago Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Mr. Cancilla gave a very informative presentation about an exciting facility development program being implemented in Illinois. Everyone will be eagerly awaiting the results of this opportunity producing endeavor.

The afternoon of the 3rd was reserved for the break-out sessions. Moderators were David Hanlon, CA and Terry Smith, TN. The break-out sessions were quite informative. Topics included "New Ethics Rules in Government Contracts a Code of Conduct" presented by Joan Gluys, Attorney Dulske & Gluys, TX, "Bookkeeping Tips for your Business" and "IRS and Audits, What You Should Know" presented by Jeanne M. Martin, IRS, NV. All break-outs were packed with new information.

In the evening, we were entertained by our friends from Hawaii with authentic Hawaiian music and a hilarious comic as well. All the guys from overseas did a great job and everyone had a wonderful time. Aloooooooha!

Wednesday, February 4th brought another great breakfast, as well as another day that will be remembered. Today's moderator was Mr. John Gordon, IL. The day's agenda found Ms. Lesley Swartz and Mr. David Ward from our generous sponsor PepsiCo, NC, speaking about "Emerging Trends in Food Service and Vending". Also on the agenda was a panel of Tech Vendors who each gave a short presentation on their individual products and services. These participants included the following:

- Sagebrush sponsor: Cantaloupe Systems, Brian Fisher, CA
- Ted Furkin, Pyramid Technologies, AZ
- Earle Harrison, Code Factory, MN
- Susan Kroha, Guiding Eyes, NY

After a break in the action, we were then thoroughly entertained by Ms. Emory Austin, Member of the Speaker Hall of Fame. Emory gave a very humorous presentation on "Maximizing Profits in a Difficult Economy". This presentation was sponsored by PepsiCo.

Then it was time for the Annual Sagebrush Exhibition including very informative and live exhibits, appetizers, a cash bar and an opportunity to network and mingle with colleagues from across the country. As always, this again was a highlight of the Sagebrush Conference.

This brings us to February 5th, the final day. Today's moderator was Ms. Ardis Bazyn, RSVA Secretary, CA. The first agenda topic today was Nontraditional Partnerships, which included a panel discussion by Mike Barclay, AL, Dan Sippl, WI, and Bob Matuszak, GA. This topic really gave everyone something to consider. We learned that there might just be more out there than vending locations. We were then treated to a presentation from our very well respected sponsor from Cantu Services. Mr. Mike Sweeney did an excellent job introducing everyone to the Cantu Services Corporation Executives and describing the various services they have to offer. Mr. Gary Goyke, Director of Public Relations and Marketing, Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired, WI, was up next to present "The Art and Necessity of Finding the Next Generation of Randolph-Sheppard. Mr. Goyke mentioned that the entire

presentation can be viewed on the website address www.wcblind.org. Please do not hesitate to check it out. You will be quite informed. Rounding out the morning presentations were Mr. John Gordon, IL, speaking about "How SSA works for Vendors", and ACB President, Mr. Mitch Pomerantz speaking about "ACB Radio and More".

The Luncheon on the 5th will certainly be a memorable one. A special tribute was paid to the late Gene Heisler, former President of the Randolph-Sheppard Vendors of America. Please be sure to read the article by Kim Venable. Immediately following the tribute to Gene was our keynote speaker, Dr. Thomas Finch, Acting Director, Training and Service Programs Division, Rehabilitation Services Administration, D.C. Dr. Finch spoke about "Randolph-Sheppard Tomorrow".

After the luncheon Janet Wetmore, RSVA Board Member, IL, acted as moderator to wrap things up. The final presentation was a panel speaking about "Working Positively with Committees". The panel included Ray Dennis, BEP Director, AL, Raj Gandy, BEP Director, GA, and Ron Eller, Vendor, NC. All gave very enlightening presentations and great examples of what can happen when there is positive teamwork between the SLA's and committee members. The "Open Forum Reports from the Round Tables" and a final wrap up brought the 2009 Sagebrush conference to a close.

Once again all attendees were treated to a first class conference where much was learned and taken away and will be reflected upon until the 2010 Sagebrush conference. May everyone have a productive and prosperous 2009 and we hope to see you and many new faces here next year.