

SAGEBRUSH 2008

By: Joe Wetmore

This year the Golden Nugget played host to the Inaugural 2008 RSVA Sagebrush Conference. This inaugural effort represents the first time that RSVA has exclusively provided the theme and related agenda for the Sagebrush Conference. This year's theme was "A New Beginning on an Old Theme." This week long event was packed with dynamic speakers, informative breakout sessions, impressive exhibitions, entertaining parties and productive fund raising, which all led to a great sense of camaraderie and fellowship. There was also an excellent showing of support as evidenced by the overwhelming turnout by vendors and SLA Staff from all over the country.

Without repeating the entire agenda, I will highlight and summarize some of the events that made up the conference. Beginning on Tuesday, we were all welcomed by the President of RSVA Mr. Charles Glaser. From this welcoming address we could all understand that this was going to be a very special conference and we knew that we were in for a great week of events.

The day's agenda primarily included subjects regarding the Blind Entrepreneurs Alliance And the Washington Senate Help Committee



Bob Humphreys, Attny.



Terry Smith, Tn & Catriona Macdonald, BEA Lobbyist

We heard reports from Mr. Robert Humphreys, Ms. Catriona Macdonald and Mr. Terry Smith. We also learned the necessity of making friends in Congress. Much of what was discussed included how vitally important it is to make our, (RSVA Vendors), presence known both locally and nationally. This can and must be accomplished with appropriate and genuine regard to other groups, yet forceful enough to get our strongest message across which includes enforcement of the Randolph-Sheppard Act. This objective was discussed at great length.

We also heard from Mr. Mitch Pomerantz, President of ACB, regarding the future of RSVA and ACB. Mitch provided some very enlightening dialogue and



**Joan Fiorino, Federal
Contracts Attorney**

was very receptive to all discussion. Ms. Joan Fiorino, Attorney, Dulske & Fiorino, discussed the many aspects of contracting with the Federal Government. She covered certain common legal requirements pertaining to small contracts, as well as requirements of contracts that

are quite large. Ms. Fiorino was sponsored by Cantu Services.

Tuesday ended with a Southwestern Style Mardi Gras reception. Thank you, Tom and Kim Venable.

On Wednesday, conference attendees experienced the dynamic speaking ability of Mr. Tom Flick. Mr. Flick gave a marvelous presentation regarding Strategies for Leadership and Success. Mr. Flick is a former Rose Bowl champion quarterback for the Washington Huskies, and later played professional football as the number two man backing up Joe Theisman for the Washington Redskins. His presentation was sponsored by PepsiCo.



**Charles Glaser Presenting Award to
Mr. Steve Leavy**

Following Tom Flick would certainly be difficult, yet Mr. Steve Leavy from the United States Post Office was up to the task. Steve spoke about taking the Texas Plan on the road to the other states across the country. This included nothing short of offering every eligible post office facility across the country to the RSA program. This was met with great acceptance; however, Steve also let everyone know that he was retiring. That was met with opposition.

Wednesday concluded with a reception and another successful fund raising auction. This year again found Hazel Harmon and me working the auction selling items from scented candles and jewelry to casino chips and exotic wines. Thanks to everyone who donated items and volunteered as well as all of the bidders.

Thursday brought us a presentation by Ms. Leslie Swartz from PepsiCo regarding emerging trends. Leslie dazzled us with sales figures reflecting what the hot items are in the beverage industry.



**Leslie Swartz Receives
Award**

We were also given a look into the future by Gary Van Camp who is the Vice President, Medical Services, Vuzix Corp. Gary's company is involved with the manufacturing of some pretty advanced viewing eyeglasses. They are truly on the cutting edge.

Thursday afternoon included the Sagebrush Exhibit Expo and Reception. This event was a huge success. There were many exhibitors including the teaming partners at Cantu Services, Blackstone Consulting, and Southern Food Services along with Concession Services Inc. from Chicago, Illinois, PepsiCo, and even a table from the national RSVA office.



Attendees Enjoy Humanware Demo

The exhibit EXPO was truly one of the highlights of the conference.

Friday morning included some wonderful presentations by the teaming partners of Cantu Services, Blackstone Consulting and Southern Food Services. All three companies expressed their deep commitments to the RSA vendors across the country and it is always a pleasure to listen to the successful endeavors that each has attained. This year each of the teaming partners expressed the need for more expansion, and provided ideas and suggestions regarding how to go about doing so.



Joe D'Costa, Bob Humphreys, Ray Hopkins, Suzanne Mitchell, Bettye Odam-Davis

Also, in the morning session was a panel discussion concerning the concept of nominee agencies. It was very uplifting to hear how the panel members were primarily open to the idea of utilizing nominees. Some of the panel members were BEP

administrators such as Joseph D'Costa, Wisconsin and Bettye Odem-Davis, Illinois. The state of Wisconsin utilizes a nominee to its fullest extent and Illinois is discussing nominee responsibilities for possible future facility development opportunities.



Suzanne Mitchell Leads Staff Orientation

Many State Licensing Agency personnel from across our nation attended this conference as well. Ms. Suzanne Mitchell, MS, VR Program Specialist in the U.S. Dept. of Education and Mr. Ray Hopkins, MA, Program Specialist also in the Department of Education, presented orientation for new State Licensing Agency

staff, as well as break-out sessions and roundtables regarding issues for Randolph-Sheppard vendors and the Department of Education.

Mr. John Wenkman, Chief, Field Acquisition Officer for the United States Bureau of Prisons, was extremely informative and supportive of the relationship between the BOP and Randolph-Sheppard vendors throughout our nation. It is hoped many RSA locations will be added within their program throughout the United States.



John Wenkman, Bureau of Prisons



Jay Randolph, Keynote Speaker

The annual awards luncheon perhaps provided one of the most anticipated keynote speakers we have had the opportunity to acquire in a long time. Mr. Jay Randolph, son of the late Senator Jennings Randolph, who co-authored the Randolph-Sheppard Act, spoke at the annual luncheon. Jay spoke about what it was like to grow up as the son of the senator, and how he remembered his father and his commitment toward helping the blind across the nation.

We thank Janet Wetmore for having the vision to go out and secure a speaker such as Mr. Randolph.

A conference wrap up then followed the luncheon with some discussion as to when and where the 2009 Sagebrush Conference would be held. I believe that the group consensus was to keep it in Las Vegas for at least another year. Bravo!

AWARDS LUNCHEON



**Rick Cantu Receives Award
From Charles Glaser**



Charles Glaser Welcoming Luncheon Guests



Jay Randolph, Pat & Larry Jones



Kae Poehle Receives Award From Charles Glaser