

Symposium Coordinators Report Oct-03

Symposium Status.

The 2003 Cleveland symposium is now in the books, Scott Bancroft and the Great Lakes section did a good job in providing some new ideas and a great educational program. Overall the symposium made money for the society, however it has shown a few areas that need improvement. We had a very difficult time making a quorum for the business meeting and the banquet numbers were very low. The attendance for the symposium was lower than expected, but of bigger concern we fell short on our room block – 430 room nights used when we blocked over 600. Due to Scott being very tight with the comp rooms and having more food functions than listed in our contract the Hotel decided not to charge us a very hefty fee for the our room block short fall. There are several reasons why we were short on the room block; we had a decreased number of attendees, several attendees did not stay at the hotel, and the hotel offered internet rates at a lower cost – however these rooms don't count towards our room block.

Dan Wilt is progressing very well with the 2004 symposium plans; we have had several conversations in regard to some new ideas and things to try. Dan is working with the schedule to keep more people at the hotel for the Banquet and business meeting. He is working on a creative rate structure to offer discounts to members that sign up for symposium, seminars, the night out, and the Banquet. I understand he could still use some volunteers for Posters, Papers, and Workshops.

Joe Gregar will be chairing the 2005 symposium at the Indian Lakes Resort located in the Chicago area. He has his Chairs selected and is starting to roll on his program.

Jim Merrit and I are working on the 2006 symposium to be held in So. Cal. We have run into problems finding a suitable hotel. We are now working with a company called Connections to help us locate a suitable site.

We need a host section for the 2007 symposium!

Work in process.

I am and have been adjusting our room block on future symposiums, however due to the smaller number of room nights we are having a more difficult time finding sites that are interested in hosting our group. We still use a large amount of meeting space for the exhibitors, and the numerous workshops and seminars. Getting attendees to stay at the hotel is becoming a big problem for other organizations as well as ours. We are looking at different incentives to encourage attendees to stay at the host hotel.

Due to the problems finding a site in So. Cal. we are experimenting by working with a meeting planning company, we have not received the list of potential hotels from this company yet.

We as a society have used several people in the past to help us find possible sites; these include hotel chain planners that we used for finding Marriott and Sheraton hotels. I have talked to three companies, The Green Group, Helms Brisco, and Connections. All these companies get paid by the hotel to steer business to their hotel, we don't pay a dime to these companies. They are able to get better rates due to the volume of business they handle. Jim and I are working with Connections to help us find a site in So. Cal. They stood out as they will handle the hotel reservations for us and assist in working with the hotel during our symposium. They also offer some additional services that should benefit our group. Since they handle the reservations, they also have access to rooms when people cancel, allowing late signups to get rooms at the group rate. They will also work with other area hotels in the event we overbook our block. These companies have very good buying power as they book many conferences a year, and are able to get better rates than we can on our own. Connections held a conference a few weeks later than our symposium at the Cleveland Sheraton at a much better rate than we were able to get. They are looking for our site in So. Cal. at no obligation or cost to us. If we don't like what they find we can go elsewhere, so I see no reason not to try them out.

Other work in process includes evaluating the every year symposium program and the possibility of shortening the program. Both of these have been back burned at this time until the So. Cal. Symposium is setup. As long as we have volunteer sections and the symposium is adding income and educational content to the members I am reluctant to consider a by-yearly symposium.

Ron Bihler
Symposium Coordinator