



First Impressions

By Chad Eberhardt

The moment I had been looking forward to was rapidly approaching. After some 8 hours of I-55 pavement pounding, Monroe and I were finally exiting onto I-10.

I-10 represented the final leg of an 18-hour journey to my first GCSAA Conference and Show. As we passed over this wooded bayou and marshland country, I continued to suppress my high expectations.

I refused to set myself up to be disappointed. It was going to be very difficult for the 8-day event to measure up to all the hype I had previously read and heard.

Upon our arrival to New Orleans, Monroe and I were greeted by a torrential rainfall. Traffic barely crept along. The Crescent City was not greeting us with a smile and open arms as advertised. By the time we reached the Sheraton, the rain came to an abrupt halt.

After a trouble free check in, we decided to get a feel for the city. We headed straight for Bourbon Street. As many of you know, Bourbon Street is the strip in more ways than one. The blare of country competes with traditional Dixieland jazz. A person can find just about anything and everything here.

The people of New Orleans are one of a kind. New Orleans is known as "The City that Care Forgot." The people here contend, "Care didn't forget, we chose to ignore it." That says it all!

The Opening Session's 5:15 p.m. start time was nearing. Monroe and I decided to head over to get a good seat. I'm glad we did. The place was packed!

Once the festivities got rolling, a strong sense of pride began to build up inside of me for our profession. We owe a lot to Chet Mendenhall, Tuck Tate, and George Kozelnicky for their outstanding contributions.

I can't even begin to put into words how proud I felt when "The Grass Roots" was awarded for Best Original Editorial Content. Congratulations to Monroe for another year of hard work to put out only the best!

By the time Terry Bradshaw came to the podium, I had enough pride penned up inside of me to go around the room. There was absolutely no room for inspiration. Not even from the most effective motivational speaker.

But, Bradshaw did it! He inspired me beyond belief. I wanted to jump out of my seat, run all the way home, and begin the best season Blackhawk C.C. has ever seen!

Everybody I talked to, later that evening, informed me that it only gets better. "Yeah right! I'd be satisfied if we left tonight," I'd respond.

Even though I was able to jot down some useful notes, I was disappointed with Friday's educational sessions. I find it much more educational to hear fewer speakers give longer presentations. Twenty minutes per speaker is only enough time to present an outline of a topic.

The disappointment that I felt earlier was heavily outweighed by the Environmental General Session. This session was another highlight of the week. Jay Feldman, John Stossell, and Victor Kimm effectively presented a highly entertaining, thought provoking, and educational performance.

Even after the Environmental Session, I was still being told that the best was yet to come ... The Trade Show.

The 9:00 a.m. Ribbon Cutting Ceremony came soon enough for me the next morning. Once that green duct tape dropped, the mass of people rushed to the center of the Convention Center. "For what?" I asked. "For a hat, you fool!" they responded. It was similar to what it must be like at the annual "Running of the Bulls" in Pamplona, Spain. Every person for themselves!

Once I got my hat, I felt lost. Where do you start? How can you see it all? How many millions of dollars is this worth? This is absolutely unbelievable!

After wandering aimlessly for hours, I decided to get organized. My goal was to see everything. Needless to say, the majority of remaining time was spent on

the trade show floor.

By Monday, I was thoroughly impressed and exhausted. It seemed like I had walked for over 100 miles.

The closing banquet was all that remained on the schedule. The evening was an enjoyable conclusion to a week packed with memories that I will forever remember.

I'm going back home prouder than ever to be a part of the best profession in the world. I can't wait for my next GCSAA Conference and Show!

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