

“This was a great Annual Conference.” That is the comments that I had members telling me throughout the conference. I would have to agree. We had a great subcommittee that put a good many hours in the planning and preparations for the conference. The members of the subcommittee were, Chair, Bob Moses, Crown Hill Burial Park, Dan Applegate, Arlington Memorial Gardens, John Ohnstad, Matthews International, Jan Burrowes, OCA Secretary/Treasurer, Mark Funke, Spring Grove Cemetery & Arboretum, Rufus Slade, Woodland Cemetery & Arboretum, Greg Villwock, Forest Lawn Cemetery, and myself, Green Lawn Cemetery & Arboretum.

This year, we held the second golf outing at Safari Golf Club, near the Columbus Zoo.

On Tuesday we started full force with the presentations, Grave Expectations: Trends in the Cemetery Trade, with Gail Rubin, The Doyenne of Death. Her knowledge of the business was very eye opening and enjoyable to hear. She had various slides and movies which made the information very interesting. She left information about her book and website.

Then we went into a panel discussion moderated by Bob Moses. The panel included; Ohio Senator, Richard H. Finan, Ted Hornyak, outgoing person with the Ohio Dispute Resolution Commission, Dave Shanteau, from the Ohio Cemetery Foundation, and Heidi Fought, Director Governmental Affairs/Ohio Township Association. Their discussion was very insightful. Some of the discussion was on Continuing Education legislation proposal for Township Trustee's, who lead the cemetery duties for a township, the continuing growth in cremations in the cemetery industry and how it affects cemeteries. There were comments being discussed about how a township follows the rules in the Ohio Revised Code, to properly assist residents in a township, as well as protecting the township in operations of a cemetery. Various cemeteries laws and individual cemetery rules and regulation will rule on how vaults and or cremation allowances are determined, not necessarily the Ohio Revised Code. Many rules and regulation determine how many cremation burials can occur on the number of lots. This is not outlined in the Ohio Revised Code as well.

At the end of this panel, we were introduced to the new contacts with the State of Ohio Department of Commerce. This is the department who oversees the Ohio Revised Code sections for cemeteries. The new contacts are Anne Petit, Superintendent, and Laura Monick, Staff Attorney. Anne's phone number is 614-466-3411, and Laura's is 614-466-5384.

To conclude, the Panel discussion was very informative, unfortunately, time expired for this session. We hope to continue the Panel format going into the future.

After the Panel, the conference moved to Field Day at Forest Lawn Memorial Park on the Eastside of Columbus. Greg Villwock, led us by introducing us to the suppliers who were in attendance with booths and demos. Then he led the group through a backhoe demonstration on how his cemetery reviews and determines correct burial spaces, prior to an interment. Then he cut the group loose to visit our suppliers and an actual hands on backhoe operation. There were a few brave souls who jumped on the backhoe to dig out shrubs.

Tuesday evening was our past Presidents' buffet dinner with suppliers. We had 19 past presidents' who were acknowledged. This was an interesting group of individuals to go around and talk with after our meal. It is truly amazing, the knowledge that was sitting in the room on that night. Great Group.

After talking with the past presidents', Let the Games Begin, "The Thrill of Victory", began. We had various games around the Embassy Suites. It was a great time to play and talk with all of our colleagues.

The next morning began with a Supplier Meeting. Then we rolled into "Trees & Shrubs for Your Cemetery", presented by Miles T. Penn, from Lexington Cemetery, Ky. He had great comments on the correct trees to use and why with various pictures from his cemetery. It was very helpful to actually see the tree in the setting to visualize how correct that tree was located.

Midmorning we moved our focus to a second Panel discussion with Dan Applegate, Arlington Memorial Park, as mediator. The rest of the panel was Gail Rubin, The Doyenne of Death, Dave Dahl, Milne Mausoleum, Tim Long, OCA Attorney, and Josh Slocum, Executive Director, Funeral Consumers Alliance. The panel discussion again was very alert to the group, very informative, great conversation. Topics discussed were on consumers, cremations, and the different forms of final disposition, different culture final disposition, Australia, Europe, Canada, and the USA.

After this Panel discussion, the next presentation was by Josh Slocum. He hit on a subject of consumer issues, which our association in the business, fear, at times. But everyone must accept that we all play nice to reach all parties goals of memorialization for a family member, neighbor, veteran, etc.

The last event of the conference was held by Tim Long, OCA Attorney, Bob Carr, Benefits Management, OCA Workers Comp. programs, and myself. We reviewed the direction of the Association's board, an upcoming survey being completed by the board and OCA Member, Bill Evens, Apex Payroll. The survey will be an online survey to give us better direction as how to best serve our membership, what types of knowledge, events, networking, etc. We will then share the survey to members once completed. Our time frame is to have the results for our board meeting in Dec 2012, to move forward. We had Tim review various legislation and bills that are working their way thru the process. Bob Carr shared what is going on at the State level of workers comp, so that membership can have a handle on future costs and savings. We discussed that Tim, Bob and myself are going to schedule a meeting with the new director at workers comp. to discuss the Sale Person rates, that were enacted four or five years ago. At the time, the rate was a burden of costs to many of our membership.

Overall, as I stated in the beginning, this was a great conference. Please, the next time you speak with one of our association suppliers, thank them for assisting us with the Annual Conference each year. Without their support, we might not be able to hold the conference each year. I would like to thank our membership as well. Without membership, we do not exist. We are here to share our knowledge and expertise, to move the business of cemeteries forward.

Jack