

# RSVA/ACB Convention 2009

By: Joe Wetmore

The 2009 RSVA/ACB Convention took place in Orlando, Florida; and it again appears to have been a great success. The hospitality at the Rosen Center was second to none. It was very obvious that all of the staff were very well prepared to handle the large number of blind and visually impaired attendees. The Rosen Center was a very beautiful resort hotel that was well kept and quite large in scale. The restaurants were of great quality, especially the Banshoo (meaning 'sunset') Sushi Bar operated by the one and only Yoshi Kohazame himself. Yoshi was trained in Okinawa, Japan and brought 20+ years as a Sushi Chef to the Rosen Center. If you enjoy sushi, then Yoshi's creative culinary specialties are highly recommended. Many of the attendees were also enamored by the expansive pool and beverage facilities just outside the hotel concourse. The meeting rooms were also very accessible and well manned for those needing extra assistance with directions.

I wanted to take this opportunity to mention that two members who are perennial attendees to the convention could not make it this year due to health related issues. Larry (and Pat) Jones, Illinois and Hazel (and Roy) Harmon, California are friends who are very near and dear to all of us and we wish both of them a speedy recovery with their related battles. Also absent this year was Kim (and Tommy) Venable who were coping with the loss of Kim's brother. The conventions are never the same when people with whom we are very close are not present.

The convention program agenda contained many highlights, some of which I will summarize in this article. Saturday, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, kicked off the agenda with the usual RSVA Board meeting. A wide variety of issues (too numerous to mention here) were brought to the table which yielded spirited discussions. Motions were made and recorded in minutes to be addressed in the near future.

On Sunday, July 5<sup>th</sup>, the day began with the RSVA/ACB breakfast. The theme of the breakfast was the Sharing of Information about the RS Program with ACB members whom were attending. After the breakfast was over, Charlie Glaser provided some opening comments and we were on our way to a day filled with presentations and hospitality. Sunday's first presentation was a panel discussion regarding the Roadside Rest Area Issues with Janet Wetmore (substituting for Roy Harmon), moderating. This discussion is further detailed in an article that follows.

Next on the agenda was a panel report format on "What's Happening in the Florida BEP Program". Tom Spiliotis, who is the Florida Committee Chairman,

began by saying that the blind vendors in Florida have a wonderful relationship with their SLA. The Director of the Florida BEP is Michael Elliott. Tom pointed out that while he believes Florida's BEP is on the cutting edge of new technologies, he also recognizes that there continues to be challenges present in Florida, (as well as most programs nationwide), with recruiting individuals. Director Elliott, who himself is visually impaired, wishes for persons coming into the Florida program to be hard workers and to put forth a genuine effort to become successful. With the Florida Committee's input, he has developed a policy and procedures manual and a training program consisting of different modules that apply to the various concepts of the BEP program. Florida is made up of mostly vending machine locations, (over 90 of which approx. 50 are rest area locations), and is experiencing a decrease in desire for cafeterias and snack bars. Unless there is a golden opportunity for foodservice, Florida will not pursue it.

Panel member and 6 year veteran Jim Warth presented the process for which Florida blind vendors are chosen to operate their respective locations. This selection process consists of a committee of three members each of whom serves a three year term. Charles Hackney told us of the initiative in Florida to place signage in all of the Florida BEP locations to let the general public know that the blind vendors are business operators earning a living. This helps eliminate the misconceptions and myths such as the blind vendors not paying taxes or being given their inventories for free. Overall, the Florida panel truly gave everyone a great presentation of what is going on in Florida.

Next on the agenda was none other than Mr. Bob Humphrey's. Bob's topic today was Arbitrations and Rendered Decisions. Bob detailed the process by which the various personnel who serve on the panels are chosen and the overwhelming amount of time it usually takes to come to a decision once the process is initiated. Words and phrases describing the process as smooth, quick, expedient and a within a few days were purposely left out and substituted with delays, vacations, alternates and several years. It sounds like those who must arbitrate better have some time on their hands.

Mr. Bill Lewis from National Vending, an affiliate of the Wittern Group then gave an informative presentation on "Post Office Contracting". National Vending was awarded a contract from the United States Post Office to provide food service operations at postal facilities. To summarize key points in a very broad topic, Mr. Lewis mentioned his company was awarded 140 cafeteria contracts in postal facilities; many of which Randolph-Sheppard had turned down. He then described how it was his company's desire to contact the blind vendors to ask them if they were indeed interested or not in these postal opportunities. He also mentioned possibly partnering with the Randolph-Sheppard Vendors to develop business opportunities in these postal facilities

and eventually in private sector businesses such as Costco and Sam's Club in the future. He emphasized that his company is 'here to help and not to hurt'. Mr. Lewis also mentioned that in the pursuit of this goal, one challenge that has presented itself is that there is a definite breakdown in the lines of communication regarding the desires of state licensing agencies and those of the various blind vendors and their respective committees across the country. When Mr. Lewis asked the vendors in attendance their thoughts, one vendor from Oklahoma replied that an ongoing issue with the cafeterias in post offices is that they demand three full meals per day and food services 24/7. That is fine as long as volume warrants the hours of service; however, this is usually not the case. If there is a postal facility population of only 300 employees, the post office is not interested in compromising. Mr. Lewis contends that in these instances, there are alternative solutions for providing food service such as Vend-a-terias and he is doing his best to educate the postal facilities regarding these alternatives. Randolph-Sheppard vendors have repeatedly suggested similar vending alternatives to post offices for a long time only to hear that the post offices were not interested. Hopefully, in the next issue of the Vendorscope, there will be a positive report regarding this endeavor.

The nominating committee then met; and later that evening, many attendees shared in the hospitality at the RSVA suite. Many thanks to Jimmy & Savanna for assisting with the beverage service!

On Monday, July 6<sup>th</sup>, the RSVA awards luncheon kicked off the day's events and those who were present enjoyed listening to featured speaker Mr. David Ward from Frito Lay. Mr. Ward spoke about a wonderful new program designed to save RSVA blind vendors nationwide money on the purchases of their Frito Lay brand merchandise. Mr. Ward detailed a 5 step plan consisting of opportunity, recommendation, benefits, implementation and the timeline. When the program is in place, blind vendors can expect a .02¢ per bag allowance on both LSS and Single Serve Frito Lay products taken as a line item discount off of their respective invoices at the distributor level. This eliminates having to wait for a specified period of time in order to receive rebates. It is David's goal to have this program implemented nationwide by January 1, 2010.

Next on the agenda was the presentation of the 2009 RSVA Awards. RSVA wishes to congratulate to following award recipients.

Don Cameron Award - Mr. Ron Eller

Jennings Randolph Award - Mr. Joseph Wetmore

The Vendor of the Year Award - Mr. Myles Tamashiro

After the awards luncheon was completed, the Business Meeting was then held which included the election of the first vice president, the treasurer, and four board positions. Congratulations to the candidates and their election to the following positions.

First Vice President - Mr. John Gordon

Treasurer - Mr. Terry Camardelle

Board Position - Mr. Charlie Carroll

Board Position - Mr. Dan Sippl

Board Position - Mr. Myles Tamashiro

Board Position - Mr. Ron Eller

Later that evening, the annual RSVA Auction was held. It provided everyone in attendance with opportunities to bid on some very nice items. Mr. David Hanlon chaired the event and Joe Wetmore was the auctioneer along with the assistance of Sue Sippl, Kathy Stepp, Rachel Brown, Jeana Hanlon, Janet Wetmore, Jimmy and Savanna. After the auction was Karaoke night. We again discovered many hidden talents that evening and everyone who sang was awarded with a free drink.

Tuesday, July 7<sup>th</sup>, began with the President's luncheon in the RSVA suite. Catriona Macdonald provided all in attendance with an Update on Legislation and Regulations. This luncheon was an informal gathering and provided everyone opportunities to comment on a variety of topics from BEA, DOD, commercialization of the rest areas, facility development and others.

Tuesday evening found everyone at the blackjack tables for another round of casino night. Janet Wetmore chaired this event with Joe Wetmore as Host and a great number of volunteers who provided check in, banking, cocktail and dealer services. Many thanks to Dave and Jeana, Rex, Kathy, Rachel, Kevin, Patsy, Ed, Jimmy, Savanna, and all of the other volunteers and players who help make this a truly exciting evening! We hope to see everyone next year in Arizona!