

WMPI Newsletter

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### **Institute Newcomers: First Time Recruits**

If Camp Pendleton looked as good in their offering of basic training, new recruits would be lined up waiting to board trains, planes and buses to get the “basics” in a four star location. This year’s MPI Institute took place on the oceanfront in Hollywood, Florida at the Westin Diplomat Resort & Spa. Six core learning segments, five days, four nights, three spectacular special events, two electives and one certificate at its completion was the drill until graduation day.

With over two hundred and thirty registrants coming from across the nation and international guests from around the globe as well, a good cross section of attendees were comprised of vendors, planners, production houses, associations and more. It’s not only the core elements of learning the basics, but the information gleaned from other attendee’s that enhanced the entire learning process. Being able to ask industry leaders questions about specifics dealing with events and meetings in the planning phases was dovetailed with attendee contributions about how they handled similar situations “in the trenches”. Post-experience feedback with questions posed to the group were also vital in take-home value.

An opening general session and welcome by Carol Krugman with an interactive segment got the recruits fired up for the following days of education with each three hour learning core. Segments for Institute I attendees included:

- Meeting Objectives & Design
- Fundamentals of Food and Beverage Planning
- Contracts, Legal Liabilities and Negotiation
- Property Operations
- Fundamentals of A/V
- Site Selection

And elective breakouts on the final day of Institutes allowed attendees to choose two of the following:

- “Brand You” Forum
- Hot Technology Trends for Meeting Professionals
- Legal Issues Forum
- Security for Meetings & Events

When asked about the most meaningful aspects gleaned from the educational forums, Lana Frank says, “The realization that the meeting planning industry is, as Carol

Krugman stated in her welcome, a “professional” industry. To see the variety and caliber of individuals carrying out the meeting planning responsibilities is of such high standards, that it simply can no longer be deemed an administrative position, but rather a position of high responsibility, organization and talent. It was inspiring to see and meet so many who ventured out and became successful business owners of meeting and event companies. The MPI institute offers a great opportunity for members to propel themselves onward and upward in each of their own careers.”

Adds Nelson, “So much of our experience in Northeastern Wisconsin focuses on special events that it was dynamic, energizing and incredibly informative to learn and participate in the elements of planning on the meeting side. The handouts were worth the price of admission alone”!

The educational learning process not only employed the latest and greatest in learning techniques from some of our industry’s best instructors, but there was also fun at hand that helped to develop an appreciation for what hotels and sites provide in stellar service, amenities and last minute special requests. Westin’s are noted for their *Heavenly Beds*, and they are indeed heavenly. The swiftest housekeeper came in and was timed stripping and remaking a bed. In turn, one of the group’s participants had to attempt to *beat the clock*. When understanding that housekeepers turn about twenty rooms each day at this 1002 bed property, it allowed participants to gain a deeper understanding of the daily mission at hand. Additionally, the executive chef led an exercise in last minute substitutions on menu. Groups were given the *mission* as a team to whip up one full pint of fresh whipped cream. In ten second intervals, the bowl and whisk went down the line as each team member took their turn at making fresh whipped cream. We toured the *back of the house* and saw the hum behind the scenes of what miraculously appears as ballroom doors are opened at day’s end when everyone reports to the *mess hall*.

After the first day’s learning concluded, a behind the scenes fam tour was available to view the *front of the house* and all the Westin Diplomat had to offer. Following the tour, a hosted poolside reception was held with an iced raw bar, chef’s carving stations, buffets of mouthwatering hot seafood dishes and a sumptuous dessert bar, all against the backdrop of the rolling surf in the background bathed in soft candlelight. A jazz trio provided the perfect musical backdrop that allowed guests to meet and mingle.

On Tuesday evening, attendees boarded luxury buses and headed south. In tandem with the Bal Harbor Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Bal Harbor Sheraton hosted a poolside reception on yet another perfect balmy evening providing an opportunity for planners and other attendees who wished to take a tour of the property as well as significant grazing opportunities. The mountains of stone crab and seafood ceviche were only the prelude to the remaining food stations set around the pool with musical notes drifting in the air provided by an accomplished Flaminco guitarist. Attendees then had the choice of either re-boarding buses and heading south to tour Lincoln Road in South Beach, or bounding across the boulevard to a hosted champagne reception at Saks at the Bal Harbor Shops. Set in the fur section, petits fours and goodie bags were in plenty, along with a 10% shopping discount that evening for all attendees. We know more than a few recruits headed out to other shops such as

Chanel, Salvatore Ferragamo, Hermes, Tiffany's and more while on *leave* that evening.

Since special events are such an integral part of our industry, the final evening celebration prior to graduation from *basic training* included a reception with butler passed appetizers of sushi and more. The doors opened, drawing breath from attendees, to see the ballroom washed in gobo lighting with ferns projected on the walls, lush foliage surrounding service bars and specialty lighting elements, and guest tables covered in black basic cloths with alternating zebra and leopard print overlays and Sculpchairs covering the seating with sash ties complimenting the overlays. Talent was high energy with a DJ, interactive dancers and a harpist that played a harp with an intense rhythm never heard by most. Lazy Susan's graced the middle of each table with a tropical centerpiece providing just the right touch to be able to speak comfortably across the table to other guests. Institutes taught the drill and showed us first-hand what it looked like.

After attending the final two electives, the closing session, again led by Carol Krugman rounded out the learning sessions with **Navigating the Minefield: A Question of Ethics**. This interactive format allowed poignant questions to be posed with audience involvement by accessing microphones strategically placed throughout the ballroom. It helped attendees to engage in meaningful dialogue about the increased challenges that our industry continues to be faced with in these challenging economic times and how the envelope can or cannot be pushed.

Much akin to going off to camp, the final day was filled with the longing for the experience not to be over. Friendships forged in the trenches concluded with many warm hugs, promises to keep in touch and most importantly, the promise to see one another at Institutes in 2003. So mark your calendars for October 26 – 30, 2003 at the new Bachelors Gulch in Colorado. Your recruiting papers will arrive in a timely manner, but be sure to save the date now!