

Summary of 2015 MPI WEC Experience

Peggy Anderson, CMP

Oh my goodness – I have been awarded the super scholarship to attend this year’s MPI WEC in San Francisco! What a thrill and a real treat to stay in the city for the entire time and walk everywhere. The WEC was a whirlwind of activity starting with the All California Chapters Reception at Pedro’s Cantina on Saturday and wrapping up with Tuesday’s closing event at City Hall. In between, there was education galore, networking, fabulous food and beverages.

On Saturday, I attended the Sustainable Meeting Professional Certificate Program. The general sessions on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday were inspirational and informative. Sunday’s session combined Brunch and Mimosas with James Curleigh, the president of 142 year-old Levi Strauss and Company. He stressed that engagement and relevance are crucial to the company’s (and a planner’s) success - find your edge and change moments into momentum.

On Monday and Tuesday, I enjoyed the Flash Sessions, which consisted of three 15-minute presentations rather than one speaker. Monday’s topic addressed the shared economy. Jeremiah Owyang spoke about a collaborative economy and the importance of peer-to-peer businesses – such as Maker Faire, Uber, Kickstarter and Airbnb. Evelyne White founded Bookalokal so people could share an authentic food experience with people around the world and learn about the local culture. Chip Conley spoke about Airbnb, which offers an alternative to the typical hotel stay. Guests can balance their budget and engage with locals.

Tuesday’s Flash Session presented three different speakers: Kai Kight, who uses the power of music to connect people; Pamela Meyer, who uses verbal and non-verbal cues to identify people who are lying and being deceptive and Liz Murray, who impressed me the most. Her parents passed away during her teen years, leaving her homeless. With determination, she decided to change her life - she completed high school in two years while living on the streets. A teacher encouraged her to apply for a scholarship – Liz was selected and graduated from Harvard! She has maintained a positive attitude in spite of the early hardships.

I participated in educational sessions that ranged from Meeting Design to Master Negotiation Skills, 8 Attributes of Successful Leaders to Women and Leadership in the Industry and Understanding Leverage to Pier to Pier: How to Successfully Navigate Meetings and Events at Sea. It was a challenge to pick the sessions from the variety of offerings. I also supported the Hosted Buyer program as a volunteer one day.

During the conference at Moscone West, breaks provided time to reflect and enjoy refreshments. Other activities included: Market Square, which featured many of the suppliers and sponsors that contributed to WEC. Puppy Cuddling was always packed - I had the opportunity to pet service dogs of all ages and breeds. Authors signed books at the MPI Bookstore, which also sold items with the MPI logo. Orange Photography took headshots. The Career and Learning Center provided an area for networking, checking e-mail and holding impromptu meetings.

The Opening Reception took place on Pier 48. A warehouse was transformed into the Barbary Coast with performers, dancers and musicians. In addition to the full bars, several California wineries offered tastings. The food was delicious and there were options for everyone.

The Closing Session had a distinct San Francisco vibe. Polk Street was closed in front of City Hall. Guests enjoyed goodies from food trucks and buffets - pizza, Indian and Mexican food, seafood and bacon-laden selections. Beverage service was available in the WEC sponsor cabanas, a “Bier Garten” and full bars scattered around the area. For a break, attendees could ride the Ferris wheel. Inside City Hall, there was more food and drink. The WEC ice carving was a nice touch and I loved the affogato choices, which satisfied my sweet tooth!

Throughout WEC, networking opportunities abounded. On Sunday, I enjoyed a reception hosted by CIC in celebration of their 30th anniversary. On Monday morning, I enjoyed the CMP breakfast at Moscone West. In the evening, I had the opportunity to attend three receptions – the Hyatt Hotels served delicious appetizers and drinks at their booth. Dina Mondavi talked about her family wines and offered three samples. Then, it was on to Novela for specialty drinks hosted by ALHI. Last of all, I went to a Happy Hour with Austin & Seattle at the Park Central. The short ribs, crab cakes, macaroni and cheese, dessert, Texas beer and Washington wines highlighted Austin and Seattle specialties.

It was a privilege to attend MPI WEC. The conference reinforced my passion for the hospitality industry. It allowed me to keep my professional edge by learning about industry trends and best practices, experiencing new room set ups and menu options, listening to powerful yet inspirational speakers, reconnecting with chapter members and meeting new planners and suppliers. Last of all, I had a chance to enjoy San Francisco, the City by the Bay!