

WEC Toronto, An MPINCC Experience

By Rose Stanton
Wine Country Destinations
WEC Scholarship Recipient

To me, there is a magic energy that comes with attending WEC. The power of the entire group, along with the education sessions, the opening general session and the get togethers strengthen my commitment to an organization that has been a big part of my life for almost 20 years.

As I remember, my first WEC was held in San Francisco in the early 2000s. It was magical to see the city and our chapter welcome our association. My friend and colleague Susan Dunn (we opened the Vineyard Creek Hotel together) went to the Giants' new Pacific Bell Park reception and met Mayor Willie Brown. I even went in the batting cages behind the scenes and, as a long time Giants fan, felt like a little kid who got her wish. I strategized with Paula Johnson of Sonoma County Tourism on how we should bring Wine Country to the next WEC. Fast forward to 2015 and to my delight in partnering with Visit Napa Valley as a silver co-sponsor for WEC back in San Francisco. This was one of my most memorable MPI experiences, or so I thought. I was in for a whole different experience and saw the event through a different lens during the WEC 2019 held in Toronto. You see, not only was I going on a scholarship, but I was accepting an award for our chapter.

Toronto is a stunning city with a great convention center. The city was buzzing as their Raptors had taken the NBA championship from our local heroes the Warriors. Since their founding in 1995 this was their first championship win. I was happy for them and happy to be in Toronto. Saturday evening the opening welcome reception was a beach-themed event, "Celebrate Canada," with stations from all regions of Canada, offering their favorite food and drink. The vibrant live entertainment set the stage for the event. Echo Beach is a large concert venue with a sand filled beach area. The planning committee passed out rain ponchos, as the weather was not cooperating, but that did not dampen our spirits. I actually ran into more NCC members that night than I have in a while. There is nothing like traveling to another country and seeing your colleagues and friends in the same place. It was a great bonding experience.

Maybe some of the planners out there will relate to feeling more comfortable behind the scenes than in front of a crowd. This is where I feel most at home, overseeing an event and looking on to ensure the guests are taken care of. Today was not that day as I, alongside Ryan Carroll of Giants Enterprises, accepted the Industry Advocate award for our chapter. The morning was a blur and making it on stage and off in front of over 2500 attendees Sunday was both an honor and crazy scary. I was excited to be there and happy when our part was over.

The next day our very own Gary Murakami took the stage to accept his award for Meeting Industry Leadership. Everyone knew MPINCC was in the house and we were all so proud! I always wondered who sat in the reserved seats up front; having the opportunity to sit there with current and past award winners and our very own Marta Hayden, the very first woman president of MPI International. I felt so honored and special.

Lucinda, at the time our president, Chelsea, our current president, Gary, our president-elect, Ryan and I were invited to the President's Dinner that evening. It was nothing short of Cinderella's ball. To be included in this group of MPI leaders was incredible. Held at the Hilton Toronto, Anne Hamilton, vice president of global travel for The Walt Company, was the

recipient of the Industry Leader Award. Her inspiring story and current strength and resilience in fighting cancer moved the entire ballroom.

The education session that stood out to me personally were Culinary Expert, Christine Couvelier sharing the newest food and beverage trends. We started the session making our very own Maple Old Fashions with bourbon from Louisville, and this was a 10am class! Some of the new trends discussed included canned wine (yes I have done my R&D on this option for groups and some are actually good), vegetarian charcuterie, oat milk (I gave it a try, no bueno for me), cooking with cannabis and, my favorite, mushroom powder.

A powerful session that hit home was “Accommodating People with Disabilities at Meetings and Events.” Producing events where it is essential to plan for guests that may have a disability and having a brother that has a disability, I found Rosemarie Rossetti, PhD’s presentation overviewing her experience at WEC insightful. Rosemarie is paralyzed from the waist down and uses a wheelchair. Her tips on inclusion were extremely helpful. Choosing the correct terms for people with disabilities is also important. She shared her website, rosemariespeaks.com and I encourage everyone to look at her great insight. I also had a chance to speak to her one-on-one at the closing reception.

Before the closing reception, many of us from MPINCC met up at the LGBTQA reception wearing rainbow hats provided by Giants Enterprises. The Hotel Fairmont Royal York Hotel is a circa-1929 building that retains many original features, such as hand-painted ceilings and travertine pillars. This was a fun place to start the night out with friends. If I am being honest, I was thinking of skipping the last night, but those same friends talked me into going. I am so glad I did! What a surprise Rebel Toronto was. Overlooking Toronto’s skyline and waterfront on the relaxing expansive deck, the bars, food and cabanas offered a perfect venue for our last night. There were food and drink stations inside the venue with music, too, but the outdoor setting was hard to leave.

Having been a MPINCC member since 2000, I sometimes preach on how being involved with the chapter creates recognition. From members saying hi at an educational or networking event to being chosen as the recipient of this year’s scholarship to attend WEC in Toronto. The energy you give to our chapter is given back to you in so many ways.

Thank you MPINCC for giving me this opportunity and for all you do.