

**World Education Conference Orlando:  
A New-Comer's Welcome**

**Samantha Shaw  
MPINCC Scholarship Winner**

Hockey star Wayne Gretzki was once quoted saying, "you miss every shot you don't take." And I can't think of anything more true as I sit here, reflecting on my first experience at WEC due to a scholarship from my new MPI Northern California Chapter. You'll have to excuse the hockey quote – as a Canadian, it runs in my blood, and it wonderfully sums up my WEC experience. Having just moved to San Francisco this Spring from Toronto, I was more than a little hesitant to apply for a WEC scholarship with a chapter that didn't know me from Adam. But at this time of re-adjustment in my life, I decided to listen to The Great One (Gretzki) and take control of my own professional development and apply for the scholarship...and it paid off. One month later – I was sitting on my first-ever Virgin America flight (wow!) and making connections that would last a lifetime.

My main goals at WEC were to meet people and obtain the education I needed to further my career; so from the moment I landed, I hit the ground running. If I was not at an education session, I was volunteering or attending an evening function, constantly on my feet and taking advantage of every opportunity to learn and get to know people. One of the best ways I found to do this was to volunteer, where I met people from all walks of life – supplier, planners, emerging and seasoned professionals, etc. My selected CSR activity was with *Heavenly Hoofs*, where about 15 of us sweated profusely in the unrelenting Orlando sun to clean up horses that helped children with disabilities and life-threatening illnesses. Not only was it incredibly rewarding, but you know you have bonded when you can give a stranger a sincere sweaty hug and laugh over it! On the cleaner side of things, I also volunteered at *The Big Deal*, seating guests at their poker tables and subsequently getting to enjoy the night for free afterwards! Word to the wise - volunteering is the way to go when you are on a budget.

I had always heard that MPI knew how to throw a party, but I was truly "wowed" by how many connections I was able to make on the dance floor. Who knew that poor dance moves and a terrible voice could unite people like that? Perhaps it was the fact that the evening events were at venues that knew how to make memories – such as the Opening at Epcot, or the Closing at Universal Studios. I would need a couple of pages to describe the magic put into those events. But if you are not the type to bust-it-out on the dance floor, or sing *Journey* at the top of your lungs, there were plenty of other opportunities to connect. Almost every education session I attended was interactive, with plenty of opportunity to share your opinion or relate to the people sitting beside you. It was incredible to chat with people from all over the world, and hear their perspectives on the same issues. I left those sessions feeling rejuvenated and with friends around the globe.

On a personal note, the biggest take-away for me was building relationships with those from my new Northern California Chapter. Anytime you are new, it takes guts to go out on your own and make a place for yourself. I do it by taking every "shot" made available to me, which can often be uncomfortable. But with this group of people, it is like being welcomed with open arms. I am so fortunate to continue my

MPI experience with the Northern California Chapter, and I am eager to pay it forward in the years to come. Thank you to the Board of Directors and the Awards & Recognition Committee for taking a chance on this new member.