

I recently attended my first NASCOE National Convention and all I can say is WOW!!! I had the time of my life!!

First things first. I had been told about the "First Timer's Award" and that I better get ready. For those of you that don't know, they give you a packet and you go around getting EVERYONE's signature. The more you get, the more points you get. Whoever has the most points, wins. They pay CASH MONEY to the top three. This "game" is a great incentive to get the new comers out meeting people. I would have never walked right up to the president of NASCOE, Dan Root, and many others and said hi if there wasn't an incentive involved!

We had meetings Thursday, Friday and Saturday. They ranged from the whole membership in a room to breakout sessions for the different programs and then sessions for the different areas. Each morning we got together and got to listen to different business issues and committee reports. There is so much more to this association than I ever dreamed. The people that we have serving are amazing people. They do what they do without getting paid, they do it on their own time and they don't complain. They give their all.

We got to listen to the Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Johanns and also the Administrator, Teresa Lassiter. Teresa stayed for basically the entire convention. She even came to some of the evening events. She visited personally with so many people. She was very honest, even though sometimes she didn't say what we "wanted" to hear. She spoke the truth. I think that was greatly appreciated.

Each night there was a dinner with a theme, and a band. It was an enjoyable time with a lot of time to visit and get to know others. I was meeting everyone I could by getting their signatures in my packet. Wednesday night was Ohio night, Thursday night was Gilligan's Island, and Friday night was M*A*S*H night.

Saturday evening, we had the banquet. They served us dinner and then started presenting awards. Finally it came to the "First Timers Award". Herb (the Awards Chair) gave out the awards starting with third place, which went to the lady that greeted us at the airport. A lady from Virginia won second place. So then he got to first place and he looked down at me and smiled and called out my name! I was so excited, I ran up there and got my money and had my picture taken with Dan Root (NASCOE President) and then I had to go to the podium and give Herb a big hug! I won by 7 points. It was a heck of a challenge but I made so many friends that I wouldn't have made otherwise.

All I can say is if you have never attended a National Convention, now is the time. It was one of the greatest experiences of my life. I always heard those people were like a family but I never expected it to be THAT true. We are members (and if you aren't, you should be) of a great group of people that I am proud to call my friends and my family. I was amazed at the amount of work that the national officers, national committee chairs and area execs put into the organization. I truly have a new appreciation for all of their efforts and the time they give to help our employee association and each of us as employees. I truly believe that NASCOE works hard for us as employees and also by working with our coalition partners, works just as hard for our producers. If it wasn't for NASCOE, we probably wouldn't have several of the benefits we have today, such as insurance, retirement and leave.

They never treated me like an outsider or a new comer. They treated me like...well...me. I heard that once you go, you're hooked. That is so true. I will be at Myrtle Beach next year. You should go too. You won't regret it.