

President's Car September, 2007

A great convention in Detroit

I just got home from two weeks in downtown Detroit, and I had a great time! Like many of you, I had heard all the stories about how dangerous, depressing, run-down, etc. the Motor City is, but you couldn't prove it by our convention. I really enjoyed being in the city center during our stay.

The hotel was a wonder, rising 72 stories into the sky in the center of the city, along the Detroit River and just north of Windsor, Ontario. Those of us staying at the hotel were afforded a magnificent view in every direction.

The weather was perfect most of the time, with sunny skies and temperatures in the 70s and low 80s (that's Fahrenheit, of course). Mother Nature had the courtesy to keep the occasional rain mostly to the night-time hours, although one afternoon we were treated to the sight of an approaching rainstorm from above the clouds – very impressive, indeed.

The Great Lakes Express folks put together a killer combination of clinics, layout tours, and other activities that rivaled the best I've seen in my 41 years of attending national conventions. The local crew and the National convention crew worked seamlessly together most of the time, and I heard nothing but compliments about the bus tours and other notoriously difficult parts of the convention to run.

The silent auction staff, run by a group from the Pacific Coast Region led by Bob Ferguson, did yeoman work in conducting as smooth-running an auction as I've ever seen. The only problem I witnessed came about because the hotel provided phone lines for credit card verification that were the slowest I've ever seen, but people seemed to understand that was a problem beyond our control and suffered in good humor.

The banquet dinner provided by the staff at the Henry Ford Museum was excellent, probably the best I've had at any banquet. The setting, the recently enlarged Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, was wonderful. One of the few snafus in the entire seven days of the convention came when we were required to leave the museum earlier than expected due to bus contracts, so many of us didn't get to prowl around the buildings to our satisfaction.

I did enjoy eating dinner under a Douglas DC3 passenger plane, although I couldn't get my tablemates to help me spin the propellers and get it going. It looked as if it could have taken off right from the middle of the museum! (Most of my group were willing to try, but John Roberts was afraid of the liability.)

As I told the assembled diners at the banquet, Detroit was the second-best convention I've ever attended, run by the second-best convention committee I've ever seen. (I was vice chair of the 2005 Cincinnati convention, so guess what convention I said was best.) Thanks to everyone – and it really is a cast of hundreds, if not thousands – who made such a memorable week possible.

Administration changes

We had three changes in administrative responsibilities during the convention.

First, Vice President Dave Liesse found it necessary to step down due to the pressures of other commitments and an unanticipated workload. Dave has been a tireless volunteer and a long-time advocate of the NMRA, and has served as National Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Midwest Region Trustee, regional convention chair, and in a host of other capacities over the years. I'm sure he'll be back when his schedule allows him to do so.

Faced with a need to select a new Vice President, the Board of Directors turned to the only man too old and slow to run away in time. Allen Pollock, HLM, former President and Vice President and holder of many other positions in the NMRA over the last 30 years and more, has agreed to step back into harness as Vice President while we need him. While I question his sanity, I am grateful for his willingness to step behind the eight-ball once again. You'd think he'd know better, but fortunately some folks just never seem to learn.

Second, Dick Flock resigned as Education Department Manager, effective with the end of the convention. Dick is a friend of some 35 years, has been a super-volunteer at every level of the NMRA, worked with the Junior Clinics Program and the Boy Scouts as an Education Department volunteer, and was an enthusiastic advocate for the Education Department as its Manager. Former Department Manager Jan Wescott has agreed to accept an appointment as Interim Manager while we conduct a search for Dick's permanent replacement.

Last, Eric Dervinis stepped down as National Nominating Committee Chair after four years in the position. As a former Nominating Chair myself, I can only agree with him when he says that four years in that job is enough! Eric has been another NMRA super volunteer, serving in the past as Mid-East Region Trustee, Assistant National Secretary, member of the Long-Range Planning Committee, and in a number of division and region posts. He will be replaced by former President John Roberts, HLM, who was too stunned to say no when I asked him.

Honors report

Due to the vagaries of magazine deadlines and convention dates, I'm nearly a week late in getting this column to the saintly and long-suffering Stephen Priest. Before I wrap up, I do want to give you a quick report on the well-deserved honors presented at this year's convention.

Honorary Life Member
(presented for service to the NMRA)

Debbie Draper
Pat Loesch
John Roberts
Bob Sherlock

Distinguished Service Award
(presented for service to the hobby)

Craig Brown
Tom Draper
Fred Hill

Fellow of the NMRA
(a new award for those who work tirelessly to promote excellence and camaraderie throughout the NMRA, nationally and internationally)

Gil Freitag
W. Allen McClelland

President's Award
(presented by the President for recognition of extraordinary service)

William M. (Marty) Vaughn

Congratulations to this year's honorees. See you next month!

Mike