

CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE: A REFLECTION ON MY EXPERIENCE THEN AND NOW

An APCO executive committee member continues to learn from peers and other public safety professionals.

By Margie Moulin

As a first time attendee to an APCO conference many years ago, I was excited and a bit overwhelmed. Overwhelmed because I had not been to a conference as large as the APCO conference, but excited because of a vendor show filled with products I hadn't seen, numerous training tracks offering new opportunities to learn and grow. And people, lots of people, all members of APCO willing to help mentor a "newbie" like me.

Meeting so many different people with knowledge in the 9-1-1 profession, looking for solutions to the same issues I had, made me realize I was not alone. It also gave me a much larger view of our profession and a chance to see the work of centers across the nation, allowing me the opportunity to bring improvements to my home emergency communications center.

I had no idea how much attending conference would positively impact my own career and, subsequently, my own center. Over the years I have learned of products that would later improve processes at my agency, and experienced personal growth and leadership opportunities I would not have felt confident pursuing without the training I was able to attend through APCO. I have toured other centers, sometimes giving me ideas to improve my center, and sometimes learning to better appreciate the tools I already had.

I was asked how my conference experience differs now that I am on the executive committee. As I thought about this, I realized how amazingly similar it feels. I am still excited, and at times overwhelmed, but for different reasons. During conference the executive committee has numerous meetings and events to attend, at times with tight timelines, meaning we are running between

commitments from early morning until late at night.

However, some things never change. APCO members continue to teach me and give me opportunities to grow. As I run from one place to the next, I see so many faces that have mentored and inspired me through the years and cherished friends from across the nation.

I am amazed by the depth and breadth of knowledge and experience I see at conference, as well as the passion and commitment to public service. There is never an issue I face that I can't find someone with the knowledge

and experience to help me work through it. There is never a shortage of friendship and willingness to help each other.

Conference is a place to connect, or reconnect, with people I may only see once or twice a year. It's a reminder that there are thousands like me who never stop working to improve this profession. It is a reminder that we never have to struggle alone, and that even though our jobs involve dealing with difficult calls, callers and negativity, there are still amazing people in this profession with a passion for service that I admire beyond words.

Overall, my experience attending conference as a member of the executive committee remains a place for me to be inspired, to make new connections and renew old ones, and to share ideas that ultimately help all of us succeed. ●

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