

34th Annual SWIFA Convention

The 34th annual SWIFA convention took place at the beautiful Capital Hotel in Little Rock April 8-10. This recently renovated historic hotel provided luxurious southern hospitality to all SWIFA members. Many thanks, to Jim Wilson of Little Rock's Maple Leaf Canvas for making these very special arrangements. The rooms were beautiful and comfortable (and at a great rate!). The gourmet food was thoughtfully prepared and positively delicious. Most members took advantage of a tour of the high-end gourmet kitchen and wine cellar, meeting the chefs and learning how the hotel only uses the highest quality, local products in their food preparation. They even cure their own bacon – best ever!

The golfers braved a rather cool morning start on Thursday at Rebsamen Golf Course – and all had a great time – followed by the opening of the Supplier's Hospitality Room on Thursday evening. On Friday, the annual meeting was opened with welcoming remarks by Julie Mowry (of Radar Awning), President.

Our first speaker was Ken Coon, a PHD with 30 years of experience as a licensed Psychologist and Executive Life Coach, addressed the group on the topic of "Team Building and Personal Development". This session offered real-life tips on how to deal with conflict and stress in the workplace and also on setting goals and meeting them. The second session, "Cutting Edge Technologies" was presented by Ryan Chism of the Chism Company and Thomas Carlson of Carlson Design. Ryan and Thomas helped fabricators understand how a cutting table can make them more efficient and how to best learn to use one.

The afternoon on Thursday began with a Graphics Seminar presented by Benji McKinney of Moxa Media. It was very useful and informative and everyone left knowing the difference between a vector and a raster (sorry - you had to be there to find out!). The rest of the day allowed for free time, trolley tours and exploration of busy downtown Little Rock.

Saturday started with our annual business meeting. Among other business it was decided by majority vote to join with WCPA in 2011 for a joint meeting in Phoenix. The meeting will be March 17-19 and will be held in Glendale, Arizona (outside of Phoenix) at the Renaissance Glendale Hotel and Spa. Tulsa and Austin were also considered and may be options for subsequent years.

The only change in the board of directors for 2010 was the election of Mike Matthews of Awning World of LA, Inc. in Baton Rouge. He will replace Rick Colson who recently resigned from the board.

Beth Hungville, Division Manager of IFAI, provided SWIFA member with an update of news from IFAI followed by a round table discussion titled, "Fabricator Best Practices". Ricky Fleming of The Chism Company facilitated this session which was very active and extremely useful. There was a lot to learn from each other as we discussed many topics including: doing business in a recession, ideas on hiring and training installers, and the value of marketing on the web and other methods.

After another great lunch in the Capital Bar and Grill, Market Day began. There were over different 30 suppliers who filled two large meeting rooms of the hotel. There was lots of conversation and activity in both rooms. Market Day ended with a drawing for two high definition TV's for the suppliers. The lucky winners were Laurie Merrell of J. Ennis Fabrics and Tim Koehler of Lawrence Fabrics.

The banquet on Saturday evening was another example of the amazing food and impeccable service provided by the Capital Hotel. Following our dinner, two long-time SWIFA members were honored for

their distinguished service to the industry and to SWIFA. The new Honored Life Members are Chuck Hendee of Hendee Enterprises in Houston and Gary Cozart of USA Canvas Shoppe in Dallas. Thanks and congratulations to both of you!

For the winners of the Scrap Contest and the Photo Achievement Awards they are posted on the website. The members of the winning golf team were Bob Razer (Marchem), Guy Gauthier (Texas Awning and Canvas), Don Williams (Bondcote) and John Dove (Eastern Metals). Longest drive (even though he wasn't the youngest golfer.....) was Don Williams. Congratulations to all!

The "Fickle Finger of Fate" award was reluctantly passed on by Terri Chism (2008 winner) to Sergio Santoy. Sergio appears to have been staying in a room at the hotel that was ***HAUNTED***...!! In spite of the "Ghost Go Away" and other "de-haunting" products provided by the hotel, the ghost remained with Sergio for his entire visit. He will be happy to provide details to anyone who wants to hear more.

If anyone wants a convention photo available on the website, please contact Gary Cozart at mox36nix@aol.com and he will email them to you.

The 2010 Convention was a great success! It was a great time to learn something new, network with peers, learn what new products are in the works with our suppliers, and to just have a great time with old and new friends. Thanks to all who attended and all those who contributed to such a great meeting.