

You can't go back, and why would you want to?

By Wendy Parker Barsell, FSPA Executive Director

At the conclusion of this year's Orlando Pool & Spa Show I started thinking about Shows of the past. And I don't mean recent past; I mean when I was a kid and my parents loaded me and my three sisters up to go to Miami, Ft. Lauderdale or Tampa for what was once called the Spring Show. As a kid going to the Show was an adventure; the big city, lots of people and cool stuff. We would come home with the latest pool toys – I remember being the only kid in town with a pool noodle one summer.

Eventually, the annual event found its home in February at the "Twin Towers" hotel. Many of you (pool pros and exhibitors alike) have fond memories of these past events because a Show doesn't go by that someone asks why we can't go back to a hotel. I've answered that question many times, including an article in this newsletter in 2009 which explained how logistically it isn't possible ... and why would we want to go back?

Let's put in perspective what our Show now offers. The four largest exhibitors, AquaCal, Hayward, Pentair and Zodiac, now take up enough space to fill one of the ballrooms at the old facility (remember how there were two different exhibit halls?). These companies bring in exhibits which we could not set up at a hotel. The products and information now available from those manufacturers is as much or more than what they bring to other Shows – including Las Vegas! Along with what they are showing, we have 200 other companies exhibiting and bringing you the latest and greatest for the swimming pool industry. There really is no need for you to travel outside of Florida for a trade show because manufacturers consider the Orlando Show a must-stop on their schedule.

So what about having everyone stay at the same facility for after hours camaraderie? Based on data from this year's event, 70% of people staying in Orlando for the Show did not stay at a host hotel. One hotel does not meet everyone's needs – be it the price or personal preference - these days everyone makes their hotel choice for specific reasons. But, the Friday night event at Howl at the Moon had record attendance – 872 people. That is more than ever hung out in a hotel lobby! This inexpensive night of fun provides a place for everyone to be together with great entertainment. If that isn't camaraderie then what is?

As the Show manager for a Show I've watched go from a small tabletop to big trade show, I still find each year an adventure. I get to watch an empty convention hall be built into a mini-city for two days. It gets filled with the latest products and thousands of people – all who are making new friendships and new memories. I see familiar faces each year and enjoy watching kids growing up doing what my family did. We are an industry of families and this annual event is the time to come together and learn from each other – no matter the location!

As you mark next year's calendar for the Show, think how the people of Florida (and now 40 states and 19 countries) have made the Orlando Pool & Spa Show what is considered by some, the BEST trade show in the Country! Why would we ever want to go back?