

It was a really
big show!



Highlights of the 6th annual Focus Conference in Nashville

Story and photos by Lori Ligon RRT



"Donald Trump" opening the exhibit hall



Th very busy exhibit hall



Miles of aisles and exhibits



"Reba" welcoming "Garth Brooks"



Your's truly, second from right with friends

All I can say is, we're a very lucky profession. We now have two, excellent national conferences to attend each year. The first is the FOCUS Conference put on each *Spring* by FOCUS Publications, the therapist-owned company that publishes this magazine. The second is the AARC congress put on each winter by our AARC.

I just had the pleasure, and do I mean *pleasure*, of attending the 6th annual FOCUS conference and all I can say is WOW and WOW again! From the minute I arrived in beautiful Nashville, to the minute I left, the people who put on the FOCUS conference; that is, Bob Miglino RRT, and roughly 30 of his RT/Sleep friends who help him as the "crew", saw to it that I had a great time. As I, and 2500 other people in respiratory care and sleep medicine (with a smattering of ICU nurses) can attest, this was a first-rate, extremely well-organized, superb conference from A to Z, a conference that exemplifies the very best of our profession. Kudos to Bob Miglino and his crew who have got to be the most motivated group I've ever seen in my many years of going to conferences; people going out of their way to ensure that you enjoyed yourself and were taking advantage of everything the conference had to offer.

Where to begin! First, let me say that FOCUS picks a very convenient time each year to hold their conference. Spring, when the weather warms up, the flowers blossom and we itch to leave behind the cabin-fever of the previous 3-4 months. They then package their conference in such a way as to make it affordable for every budget, and I do mean *every* budget, whether one is receiving reimbursement from their employer or not. In fact, the FOCUS conference is so affordable, so value-packed, that I would strongly recommend that people make the conference (and the great package Focus puts together), a part, if not the **centerpiece** of their annual vacation. How Bob Miglino is able to get Opryland, a magnificent hotel that usually commands rates of over \$200 a night, for \$119 is beyond me, but it is much appreciated as one can easily see that he and the FOCUS crew are doing everything they can to keep *affordability* the driving force of the conference.

Then there's the registration fee, which in Nashville was only \$275 per person. What's most important about this fee is what's **included** - excellent lectures by some of the most famous lecturers in the county, (we'll get to those in a minute), lots of gourmet food and drink (including free beer and wine) and a ton of fun, including the formal night of entertainment that FOCUS provides each year. The value of what this conference provides to those of us not making six figure salaries, then, is simply outstanding! **So** outstanding in fact, that conference chairman Bob Miglino, jokes that he gets inquiries from people who are not even medical wanting to know if they can register because the "package" FOCUS provides is better than anything they can find on-line or from a travel agent. The conference also generously provides a "significant other" registration rate that is about half what the regular registration rate is. This allows attendees to bring spouses to enjoy the conference with them, a novel idea. Students also receive a whopping discount - all the way down to \$100! This is a very reasonable student fee when considering that the \$100 includes all lectures and CEU's, as well as 4 meals and a great night of entertainment.



"Wayne" greating the attendees



Bluegrass musicians entertaining



Pictures with "Reba McEntire"



Filing into the exhibit hall



Exhibitors enjoying the show



A surprise appearance by "Austin Powers"



"Austin" picking the lucky winner



Janice Tollison informs husband that she just won a car at the Focus Conference



"Little" Jimmy Dickens hosting Grand Ole Opry



The hilarious singing cowboys

Academically, the FOCUS conference featured 17-20 CEU's and 5 early-bird breakfast workshops that were very well received. Attendees at the workshops received, (in addition to 3 extra CEU's), a nice complimentary notebook and pen, as well as an expanded continental breakfast to go along with the in-depth treatment of the topic they had selected. Lectures continued all day long in seven interesting tracks and one of the innovative things the FOCUS conference has become known for, is the fact that every single lecture presented, was actually presented twice, so that no one had to miss anything. Prominent speakers such as John Marini MD, Kent Christopher MD, Herb Patrick MD, Russ Acevedo MD, John Hodgkin MD, Bill Dement MD, Frankie Roman MD and more, presented to packed rooms and were very much appreciated by attendees. The critical care nursing track of lectures, something new at this year's conference, were also well attended by nurses and therapists alike, and I for one, feel that FOCUS' including nurses at their conference is an excellent idea that actually helps the status of our profession. Many nurses were impressed by the conference and the PhD prepared therapists who often lectured. Many hadn't realized that therapists even **had** such conferences and I, myself, heard numerous comments from nurses pertaining to their having a new respect for respiratory therapists as a result of the FOCUS conference.

The keynote address by Dr. Laura Gasparis Vonfrolio was packed with nearly 3,000 people and was hilarious, while poignant and eye-opening. Her address, entitled, "How to Make A Million in Healthcare" was very interesting, and presented many entrepreneurial ideas that allied health care professionals can consider to broaden their horizons by way of going into business for themselves. It was an excellent presentation, a great choice for a keynote address and when completed, Dr. Gasparis left the stage to a standing ovation. Conference chairman Bob Miglino, during his welcoming speech also honored Dr. Forrest Bird who was in the audience and who was asked to stand and be recognized for his lifetime of achievements. It was beautifully done, with Bob reading a 5 minute summary of Dr. Bird's life. Dr. Bird, as well as many of the RT veterans in the audience became choked up at the sentiment and Dr. Bird also received a standing ovation by the audience.

The exhibit hall was very busy at all times and 142 exhibitors said that they were very happy with the traffic their booths received and the interest shown their products. As I said earlier, FOCUS provides an incredible amount of food and drink in the exhibit hall and this year, "Donald Trump" (actually a talented impersonator) opened the hall for the opening gala that was packed with people for 3 hours. Reba MacIntyre and Garth Brooks impersonators were on hand for picture taking and FOCUS provided strolling blue grass musicians, caricature artists, stilt walkers and of course, free beer and wine for the duration. People literally didn't want to leave the hall when it was time to go, that's how much fun everyone was having. The next day was more of the same. Excellent lectures in 7 different tracks all day long and of course, a free breakfast and a free lunch in the hall. After the closing gala reception, which featured incredible food, free refreshments, and a Viennese dessert table I will never forget, the first of two big events took place. The first, was the picking of the winner



Hee-Haw legend Roy Clarke



Focus chairman Bob Miglino introducing the keynote speaker



"Austin" announcing the lucky winner



Focus chairman Bob Miglino presenting Janice Tollison with her \$10,000 prize



Exhibitors adding to the festivities



The incredible Grand Ole Opry

of the 2006 Ford FOCUS automobile that Focus gave away. You could hear a pin drop as over 2500 people assembled in the exhibit hall to watch "Austin Powers" pick the lucky winner from the tumbler. Everyone was happy for the shocked winner, Janice Tollison RRT, (she took the \$10,000 cash) who, crying thru her tears of joy, stated she had never won a thing in her life and who, on the spot, made a dozen hysterically happy phone calls on her cell phone to tell her whole family. She was sweet, everyone was very happy for her and all knew that a fine person had won when it was announced that Janice had also been named employee of the year at her hospital just a week earlier.



John Weissleder RRT curator of the antique exhibit

The second big event of the night was the very pleasant surprise decision that FOCUS had made only a week or so before the conference; that is, to arrange for a **private** Grand Ol' Opry show. Wow again! FOCUS, because of the onslaught of attendance, decided to rent the **entire** Grand Ol' Opry, and as a result we had the very best seats in the house. All the big stars from the early show stayed for the FOCUS show, including Marty Stuart, Terri Clarke, Roy Clarke and a dozen other fantastic acts. Host, "Little" Jimmie Dickens had the FOCUS attendees in stitches with his jokes and since it was a private show, there was time for more music, comedy and interaction with the audience. FOCUS crewmembers gave everyone a glow necklace as they entered the hall and the whole place glowed in the dark and looked surreal. Country Music star Terri Clarke asked what the glow was all about and then took and wore a necklace from a FOCUS crewmember. Over 3000 people, attendees and exhibitors alike, attended the show and the Hill-Rom corporation, which co-sponsored the evening, produced a welcoming video featuring Hill-Rom executives dressed in farm clothes and set to the "Green Acres" T.V. theme song. It was hilarious and enjoyed by all. It was a night many will never forget.



Opryland Ballroom packed for the keynote address

Another full day of lectures followed and the conference ended on Saturday afternoon. It was a superb show and chairman Bob Miglino, who is absolutely everywhere every minute of the conference, personally checking things, ensuring the smooth running of all events and literally busing tables when not introducing speakers, is again, to be commended.



Keynote speaker Dr Laura Gasparis Vonfrolio

The FOCUS conference is festive, fun, innovative and very informative. Everything I'd been hearing for years about FOCUS' ability to combine strong academia with powerhouse fun is true – every word of it. You couldn't ask for a better slate of topics and speakers and again, what was provided for one's registration fee was simply amazing. Because Bob is everywhere and because his motivated group of helpers can't do enough for you, one also comes away feeling that they went to someone's home for a great party. The conference is the antithesis of being stuffy or boring or the "same old thing". Each year FOCUS comes up with new, innovative ideas that leave 95% of the attendees WOW'ed. It was a great time as these pictures clearly show and FOCUS has decided to stay a second year in Nashville, again at the Grand Ol' Opry.



Focus attendees heading to lunch

My suggestion – put the 7th annual FOCUS conference on your agenda. It will be held April 19-21, 2007 again at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville. Personally, I wouldn't miss it for the world.



Focus' fascinating medical antique exhibit



Busy exhibitors answering questions



Attendees purchasing the latest texts



Incredible desserts to go with the incredible food and drink



Hani Jeris RRT with "Garth" and "The Donald" (He was hired)