

It Just Gets Better and Better and Better

by Joe Sorbello RRT, M.Ed.



Uncle Sam strolling the exhibit hall



Partying with "Little Richard"



Miles of aisles and exhibits



Pictures with "Garth Brooks"



Student volunteers giving out Tennessee's famous Goo-Goo Candy Bars

I just had the pleasure of returning from the 8th annual FOCUS conference and all I can say is WOW! This conference continues to take leaps and bounds in quality, attendance, number of exhibitors and fun and I want to tell you that from the minute I arrived, to the minute I left, the people who produce the FOCUS conference, that is, Bob Miglino RRT, and roughly 30 of his RT, Nursing and Sleep friends who form the "crew" each year, saw to it that I had a great time. As I and 3000 others in respiratory care and sleep medicine (with a smattering of ICU nurses) can attest, this was a first-rate conference from A to Z, a conference that exemplifies the very best of our profession and one that is fast becoming the biggest and best conference in Respiratory Care.

Where to begin! First, let me say that springtime in Nashville is simply delightful. The flowers were in full bloom and the weather was perfect every day of the event. The Opryland Hotel, a 2000 room hotel encased in a gigantic greenhouse, was resplendent with the most beautiful gardens, waterfalls and fountains I've ever seen. That hotel, packaged with everything FOCUS provides, made it a great "get-away" affordable for most every budget. In fact, the FOCUS conference is so value-packed that many now make the conference a part, if not the centerpiece, of their annual vacation. Next, year at Disney World, this will definitely be the case (more about that in a moment).

What's really significant is the fee that attendees pay in relation to what is included in it – excellent lectures by some of the most famous speakers in the county, lots of gourmet food and drink (including free beer and wine) and a ton of fun. FOCUS also provides a "significant other" registration that's half the regular registration enabling attendees to bring spouses to enjoy the conference with them. Students also received a whopping 50% discount, a great deal for them, especially when considering that it included CEU's, four meals and a big night out.

Academically, this year's FOCUS conference featured 18-20 CEU's plus 5 early-bird breakfast workshops that were very well received. An asthma educator workshop was also presented the day before the conference and 125 people participated in that new aspect of the conference. Lectures then ran for three days in nine interesting tracks including a new track entitled, The Business of Sleep, that was packed. Prominent speakers such as Bob Kacmarek RRT PhD, Nicholas Hill MD, John Marini MD, Ira Cheifetz MD, William Dement MD and many more presented to packed rooms and were very much appreciated by attendees. One of the innovative things the FOCUS conference does is present every lecture, twice, so no one has to miss anything. Two critical care nursing tracks of lectures were also packed by nurses and therapists alike, and I, like many, feel that FOCUS' inclusion of nurses at their conference is an excellent idea that actually raises the status of our profession. Many nurses were impressed by the conference and the Masters and PhD prepared therapists who lectured to them and I heard numer-



Bluegrass musicians entertaining



Speaker Paul Nuccio RRT



Pictures with "Reba McEntire"



Attendees going to lectures



*Speaker William Dement MD
The "Father of Sleep Medicine"*



Networking, Networking, Networking



"Austin" picking the lucky winner



Student volunteers working the Store



Taking notes at one of 72 lectures



Attendees enjoying cocktails while they stroll around the exhibit hall

ous comments from nurses pertaining to their having a new respect for RT's as a result of the FOCUS conference.

The keynote event, this year, was something different as well, and it did not disappoint. Conference chairman Bob Miglino, feeling that one of the biggest issues facing Americans is the state of the American health care system, stimulated ideas and provided a forum for an exchange, by first showing Michael Moore's film SICKO and following it up with an open, town-hall discussion which was moderated by physician and attorney Dr. Frankie Roman. The film was interesting and the discussion that followed was lively and thought provoking. The six microphones in the audience all had lines of people at them and attendees heard many different opinions that lasted well into the lunch period.

Another new idea surfaced at this year's conference. FOCUS decided again, to utilize "the power of numbers" to raise money for a worthy cause. In 2007 that charity was the Alpha-1 Foundation. In 2008, it was The Smile Train Foundation a charity that sends teams of doctors to developing countries to train that country's physicians in how to perform cleft palate surgery on children. Attendees saw a brief film on the work of this charity and the "hat" was then passed. I'm happy to report that \$3,102 was raised in basically, 15 minutes. FOCUS then matched that amount so as to bring the total raised to a significant \$6,204! Since donations to the Smile Train Foundation are 100% given over to the work being done by the charity (no donations go to administration or fund raising) and since the repair of a child's cleft palate in a developing country averages only \$250, the \$6,204 raised means that 25 children will have their lives changed for the better from what was done at the FOCUS conference. "This was for a great cause, Miglino said. By everyone giving just an average of \$1 or so, 25 children will benefit and not have to deal with being ostracized and humiliated because of their cleft palates. I believe we will do this every year from now on, that is, pick a worthy charity and ask our attendees if they might like to help by contributing. FOCUS will then match the amount raised with everyone coming out the winner for it. Attendees of the FOCUS Conference are like a family and they proved it again this year as they did last year for the Alpha-1 Foundation, Miglino said." By the way, those interested in more information on the Smile Train Foundation can visit their website at www.smiletrain.org.

The exhibit hall was very busy and 160 exhibitors utilizing more exhibit space than ever before, said that they were very happy with the interest shown their products by the attendees. As I said earlier, FOCUS provides an incredible amount of food and drink in the exhibit hall and this year, "Captain Jack Sparrow" (a hilarious impersonator) cut the ribbon for the opening gala that was packed with people for over 3 hours. Dolly Parton, Reba MacIntyre and Garth Brooks impersonators were also on hand for picture taking and FOCUS provided strolling blue grass musicians, caricature artists, stilt walkers and the like. 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 with the addition of two big events. The first, was the picking of the winner of the 2008 Ford FOCUS automobile. Let me tell you, you could hear a pin drop as almost 3000 people assembled in the



Surprise performance by Josh Turner



Chairman Bob Miglino RRT, MPS welcoming attendees



You can learn a lot from a good sales rep



Travis Grasley (right) claiming his \$10,000



Focus staff adding to the festivities



*Top management speaker
Dennis Giannetti*



*A special thanks to the Sleepmate
Corporation for their support*



*Standing ovation for keynote event
moderator Frank Roman MD*



*The Focus bus - Eight trips - only one
flat tire and now retired*



Focus attendees heading to lunch

exhibit hall to watch "Austin Powers" (another talented impersonator) pick the lucky winner. Everyone was happy for the shocked winner, Travis Grasely RRT, (he took the \$10,000 cash) who stated that he had never won a thing in his life. \$10,000 CASH – now that's what I call a great souvenir!

The second big event of the night was the fantastic evening at the Grand Ole Opry. The Opry holds about 4000 people, so, with FOCUS providing over 3500 of those, (exhibitors were invited by FOCUS free of charge) just about the whole place was FOCUS attendees, all of whom were given orange glow-stick necklaces on the way in. What a show and what a night! Just about every act (I believe there were 10 different acts at the show) mentioned the FOCUS crowd and all had a slew of jokes that had everyone in stitches. Porter Wagner was the host, and the star of the evening was Marty Stewart who was fantastic. He sang all of his hits and remarked that he felt like he was singing to a bowl of cheerios (the orange glow-necklaces). FOCUS attendees were then blown away when the biggest star in country music right now, Josh Turner, showed up as a last-minute surprise. The Opry does that, but you have to be real lucky – and man, were we ever lucky! When Josh Turner came out over 200 people rushed the stage and FOCUS attendees were treated to a special night. He performed five songs and the place went wild with Josh telling the audience that he couldn't remember ever playing to a more "FOCUSED" group. Extra thanks has to go out to the Hill-Rom corporation, which sponsored the evening – one that FOCUS attendees will never forget.

Another full day of excellent lectures followed and the conference ended on Saturday afternoon. It was a superb show and Chairman Bob Miglino, who is absolutely everywhere checking things, ensuring the smooth running of events and literally busing tables when not introducing speakers, is again, to be commended on his incredible attention to detail.

The FOCUS conference is festive, fun, innovative and informative. Everything I'd been hearing for years about their 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 included in one's registration fee was amazing. The Focus crew can't do enough for you and one comes away feeling that they went to someone's home for a great party. The FOCUS conference is the antithesis of being the "same old thing" and each year FOCUS comes up with new, innovative ideas that leave 99% of the attendees WOW'ed. People don't like the FOCUS conference – they LOVE it! It was a great time as these pictures clearly show and next year FOCUS will be going to Disney World in Orlando! The dates are May 14-16, 2009. They'll be adding more lectures (an entire new track dedicated to PFT's will be added to the eight other tracks) and FOCUS will be adding a golf tournament and a race to the events. Next year's entertainment will be an evening at Epcot, so I encourage people to start saving NOW so as not to miss what is going to be another fantastic conference. Disney rooms will be only \$129 a night (at the Disney Coronado resort) and frankly, one would be hard-pressed to "do" Disney any more affordably than they will be able to, thru FOCUS.

My suggestion – Don't miss it. Save your money for next May 14-16, 2009 at Walt Disney's Coronado Resort in Orlando. Personally, I wouldn't miss it for the world.



Focus' fascinating medical antique exhibit



Busy exhibitors answering questions



Attendees purchasing the latest texts



*Special thanks to Hill-Rom for their
generous support of the Conference*



Exhibitors interacting with attendees