

YOU MISSED IT!?

by Madeleine Franco

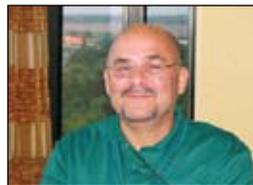
HAVE TO ADMIT that amidst the buzz that “no one” was going, I was a bit skeptical about this year’s AFA Convention, which was held in St. Louis July 30 – August 2. I was aware that several people whom I had planned to see at the Convention were staying home this year, so I was a bit discouraged. The economy and gas prices . . . you know. On several occasions, I even found myself staring into the mirror wondering if indeed I were no one, as surely they would see me in St. Louis.

If you were among the “someones” who stayed home, you missed a good one. I describe this Convention, my third, and the second one at which I have presented, as having been attended by a “less numerous, but highly engaged” crowd.

By and large, the presentations were excellent; more than once I was conflicted about which to attend. The hotel accommodations were quite pleasant, with moderate to cool temperatures, and moving from place to place was relatively easy. And, the food in the hotel restaurant was actually quite good!

The Convention got under way in earnest on Thursday, after many had taken Wednesday’s trip to the St. Louis Zoo. While I understand that was a winner, my own personal field trip included a visit to the top of the St. Louis Gateway Arch.

This was no small feat for a claustrophobic Type A personality who’s afraid of heights, but I’m glad I did it. Life is about pushing the envelope, after all, though I’m not quite so enthusiastic about that concept when the envelope is made of steel, with only two small windows overlooking steel guts and



cable. I only regret that I didn’t see the film about all the particulars of the arch’s construction. Surely my father’s daughter, I love the dramatization of things like “630-ft. span, 900 tons of ¼-inch stainless steel, 1/64-inch of tolerance in the construction measurements so the legs would meet, 1 degree of sway in a 20 mph wind, but 9” each way in a 150 mph wind.” I’ll skip the latter!

As much as I wanted to see the film, the clock ran out on us, and the next day’s weather did not cooperate; however, even the summer rain was a welcome change for this Las Vegas aviculturist.

After President Jim Hawley welcomed us, Walt Frey’s keynote address was one of the most informal I’ve encountered, and I thank the good doctor for that. Dr. Darrel Styles gave an update on avian influenza, and who knows better than he?

Highlighting my own track, Thomas Edling, DVM debunked some myths about the retail pet industry, followed by Linda Rubin on line breeding of psittacines. Never has this compelling subject been made so understandable. Thank you, Linda, for making that easy listening.

One of my own personal favorites was “Flocking Birds,” or what to do with breeders in the “off-season,” again with Walter Frey. I’ve been doing the communal thing for years on a small scale with my own pet flock. Obviously, though I’m just doing what comes naturally, I’m glad to know that there are others out there doing the same.

Genny Wall’s presentations on the politics, nature and shape of the animal rights movement are always a



must-see to remind us that we have power in the struggle.

The conservation, disease control and rehabilitation presentations, such a vital part of the Conventions, were sometimes rather technical but always informative and oftentimes heartwarming. We love what you do!

The update on PDD was certainly center stage and most appreciated. You give us facts and hope. Adrienne Mock, “ordinary folk” like you and me—though I’m not so sure about you—taught us how to enrich our birds’ lives with inexpensive, homemade toys, while horticulturist April Blazich was there to give bird owners an attitude adjustment about the weeds in our yards. I needed that. You rock, April!

There were informal get-togethers for conure people, caique people, and people just wanting to meet with other people and talk birds, though grandchildren did come up in the conversation on rare, forgivable occasions. We all know that “normal” is a function of the company you keep. All in all, these gatherings were wonderful ways to remind yourself that your “over-the-

top” interest in birds is absolutely normal for this group. Presentations by and for scientists, breeders, pet owners, rehabbers and rehomers reminded us that we’re all in this together.

Both the International Conure Association and The Bird Endowment provided us with opportunities for social interaction—and what bird owner can’t use more of those! We thank them! Several attendees, myself included, found unique nightlife in taking (and passing) the Fundamentals of Aviculture for Level I certification. Now, don’t ever say we’re not a wild bunch!

But, when we weren’t studying, we did a lot of networking. It’s amazing how many similarities there are among us, though our diversity seems every bit as fascinating. And, when we weren’t networking, we were visiting with some really great vendors, to whom we shall remain eternally grateful for showing us what’s new and helping us decide how to allocate our mad money. My wish list runneth over.

The closing banquet was a fitting and congenial end to things, with lots of photo taking and business card exchange. The Super



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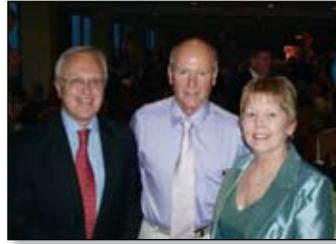
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8 didn't disappoint, except that yet again I didn't win. However, long-time member and convention attendee Wanda Elder did win for the first time in history, so I'm thinking that maybe my tickets just politely stepped aside. Perhaps as my reward for such deference, I did come home with a silent auction treasure, which is already on proud display in my office. "A little bit of something for everyone," as they say. And, at the risk of sounding trite, a good time was had by all.



The point is that, while we missed you, quite unfortunately, you missed it! Notwithstanding you probably had a schedule conflict or otherwise had rationalized your absence much to your own satisfaction, please don't let that happen again. Pencil it in, August 5-8, 2009. Houston. Be there!

Madeleine Franco is president of the Southern Nevada Parrot Education, Rescue & Rehoming Society. She is an award-winning business writer and a dedicated avian hobbyist/aviculturist with a homogeneous and platonic flock of more than two dozen exotic pet parrots.



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