

APA Chapters Provide Real Value



Top: Conference attendees listen to the workshop, “How Politics Impacts Payroll.” Middle: The “Capitol Steps” perform for participants. Bottom: Conference attendees enjoy the luncheon workshop, “Payroll Customer Services.”

BY DERILENE MC CLOUD

“Payroll Politics” was the theme at the 2008 Tri-State Conference, held in McLean, Virginia. The experience was like attending a mini-political convention, and there was tremendous excitement, networking, and learning all going on simultaneously. The highly successful conference was sponsored by the Washington Metropolitan Area Chapter (WMAC) of the APA.

When you entered the conference’s main hall, it was like the world of payroll and politics were colliding. Everywhere you looked, you saw political signs from current and previous elections. Vendors were set up outside the main hall and included the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Payroll Network, US Bank, BNA, CyberShift, Ultimate Software, and many more.

Jim Bolek, CPP, APA Advisor for Region 7, began the opening session with a presentation about “What the APA Can Do for You.” While I sat there listening to his presentation, I thought about what exactly my local chapter was doing for me. I started making a mental list of things I had accomplished as a result of being an active member. Then I thought to myself, “Well Derilene, that’s good for you, but does it benefit others?”

I decided that the best way to find out was to ask as many people as possible: “What is the ‘real value’ you get from being a member of your local APA chapter and participating in the annual conference? Is this ‘real value’ something you can measure? I talked to at least 60 participants, including vendors. I was amazed at their responses.

I began with the most obvious group—software vendors. “This is an incredible opportunity to meet one-on-one in a non-threatening social situation and talk to key decision makers,” said George Whitehouse, Vice President of Payroll Network and first-time President Level Sponsor. “These are payroll professionals who work for large companies and can influence the purchasing of new products and services.”

Networking was the key value for other vendors as well. “Attending local APA chapter conferences provides an efficient way to meet members and interact with prospective clients,” Paul Samson, Sales Executive for Cyber-

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Shift replied. “This format allows us to quickly determine if CyberShift’s solutions can address the attendee’s business challenges.”

Face-to-face interaction was also the “real value” for Dave Higgins, an Economist with the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. Dave bears the responsibility of informing payroll professionals of the advantages of automating their Multiple-Worksite Report (MWR), and has participated in Tri-State for the past eight years.

“I have met many software companies through the Tri-State Conference that have incorporated the MWR feature into software,” he said. “The more people I can convince to automate their MWR, the easier it will be for payroll professionals to run and pull these reports.”

Members of the chapter point to education, leadership, and networking opportunities as the “real value” of the Tri-State conference.

“I have been a member of the WMAC-APA since 2001, and the real value I get is being able to network with my peers and hone my leadership skills,” said Michele Eure, Tri-State Committee Chair. “With the fantastic team of board members and volunteers, the 2008 Tri-State was a blast! I’ve already volunteered myself to be chair of 2009 Tri-State.” ■

My Certification Success Story: Dianne Gablenz, CPP

When I first started with ADP in 1999, I knew nothing about payroll, but had plenty of customer service skills. They took a chance on me, and this is where my payroll career began. I was with ADP New Accounts for seven years. During that time, I earned my Fundamental Payroll Certification (FPC). My life became very busy, but I always said some day I would get my Certified Payroll Professional certification (CPP).

“Some day” came and went. Years went by. I admired those initials—CPP—behind the names of fellow payroll professionals I would come across. Then came my turn. I now work mainly on the payroll tax side of the industry and I agreed to earn my CPP as part of my hire.

My manager provided me with a link to a CPP online chapter study group. The cost was very reasonable and made me focus. Raeann Hofkin, CPP, was the instructor in most of my classes. Kudos to the CPP instructors who care enough to take the time from their busy lives to be a part of so many people’s success. The study materials were exceptional! Raeann’s sense of humor and ability to make so much data accessible were refreshing and encouraging.

I began to feel nervous when it came to knowing it ALL for the test. Of course, I did not listen to the advice not to study the night before. But, I did listen to the advice of calming down and relaxing.

I arrived 45 minutes early, sat in my car,

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and reviewed my notes. “I can do this,” I thought.

The exam staff was very nice and professional. They took one look at me and asked if I was ready. I said, “Yes, do I look like some-

one who would be a CPP?” They called my name, we reviewed the rules, and I took the tutorial. It was time to push the begin button. After one last deep breath I told myself, “begin your success.”

My anxiety grew. The questions were heavy on the systems and management side. I became anxious again as I was waiting for the specific data questions; I was completely thrown off focus. With only 28 seconds left, I hung my head in shame; I just knew I failed—failed my CPP that I had worked so hard for, wanted so badly for so many years, and told everyone about. I actually started to cry a bit.

The staff came to dismiss me. We walked over to the desk and one staff member asked me my name again. They printed my score and handed it to me. I could not focus on it to find the score, so I asked, “Did I pass?” They smiled and said, “Apparently you did!”

My moment had come—I DID IT! All the hard work and study had paid off. Of course, as we payroll/tax people can sometimes be perfectionists, I thought I could have done better if the information I studied hardest on had been on the test; I could have had a higher score. Nevertheless, I am proud to have earned my CPP with the support of my instructor, friends, co-workers, and my own commitment to make it happen. ■

Learn more about APA’s payroll certification exams at www.americanpayroll.org (click on the Certification tab).