

# THE BEGINNING OF A BEAUTIFUL PARTNERSHIP

PARTNERSHIPS OFTEN EVOLVE OUT OF NECESSITY. SOMETIMES, THOUGH, RELATIONSHIPS PROVIDE FERTILE GROUND FOR PARTNERSHIPS TO GROW AND THRIVE. GSAE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JIM MOODY, CAE, REMEMBERS HOW THIS MEETING OF THE MINDS LED TO THE ORGANIZATIONS CO-SPONSORING AN ASSOCIATION LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM.

Linda Chreno, CAE, was hired as Executive Director of the Florida Society of Association Executives, Tallahassee, not long after I took over as Executive Director of the Georgia Society of Association Executives, Tucker. We met at an ASAE meeting and realized we had much in common. We were new in our jobs, our societies were of similar size, we shared many associate members, and our commitment to raise the standard of professionalism in association management was strong.

After a few months of sharing successes and setbacks, our personal relationship was cemented. Then Linda mentioned that we should try to plan a program together to take advantage of our geographical proximity. I was a little hesitant because business sometimes gets in the way of relationships, and my friendship with Linda was one I wasn't willing to lose. Nevertheless, I saw value for GSAE in the proposition, and I agreed to move forward.

We thought it was important to do something significant that would attract leaders from both associations, and we settled on a programme that would help association executives and their elected officers form their own partnerships. While ASAE offers an excellent symposium for chief staff and chief elected officers, the expense puts it out of reach for many of our members. We decided

to conduct a programme similar to ASAE's but focused more on state and regional associations. We called it the Association Leadership Symposium.

We forged our plans at ASAE's Management and Technology Conferences in 2001. We agreed on a speaker and developed a 'wish list' of places to hold the meeting. Since we share many members of the hospitality community as corporate members, it was important to hold the meeting in a location that had supported both of us in the past. We also wanted to hold the meeting in a location easily accessible to both groups of members.

But perhaps the most important decision we made was to share the profit or loss evenly. We deliberately chose not to credit each society for members in attendance when calculating profit. All registration and sponsorship money would flow into one pot and all expenses would be paid from that same pot. We did not fully load the cost of staff and other indirect expenses - we presumed from the beginning that the work would be evenly divided between the two societies. We kept it simple, and it worked well.

When we divided the responsibilities, Linda agreed to conduct negotiations with the hotel and work with the speaker on

the curriculum. I agreed to develop the registration materials and marketing copy. GSAE would accept all the registration money, supply the badges, pay the bills, and provide a detailed accounting to FSAE. We agreed to market the meeting to our own members and to seek sponsors from among our corporate members. And we promised to keep each other informed at every step of the way.

**Partnerships often evolve out of necessity. Sometimes, though, relationships provide fertile ground for partnerships to grow and thrive**

We settled on a speaker, Bob Harris, CAE, who is well known in Georgia and Florida. The meeting would be held at Marriott's Bay Point Resort in Panama City Beach, Florida. Both the property and the CVB actively support FSAE and GSAE. We were not successful, however, in seeking other corporate support. Because of the significant support

we received from the resort and the CVB, we were uncomfortable asking others in the hospitality industry to sponsor the meeting. And since the attendees were from two states, sponsorship would only make sense to those who served both the Georgia and Florida markets. These factors, coupled with the post-September 11 downturn, left us without other corporate support.

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The economic slowdown also cut into our attendance. Despite considerable marketing efforts and the presence of a well-respected speaker at a desirable location, we were able to attract only about 30 attendees. Fortunately, the registration fees and the help from the resort and CVB allowed us to break even. In retrospect, if either of us had conducted this meeting alone, we would have lost money.

Despite the financial difficulties, our efforts were justified when we reviewed the evaluations. The comments were overwhelmingly positive. Many of the association executives in attendance begged us to conduct the programme annually. That's exactly what we did afterwards.

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