

NCMCA Golden Anniversary Celebration Series – April 2024

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We're starting off the North Carolina Masonry Contractors Association Golden 50th Anniversary Year by highlighting some monumental events that have taken place throughout the existence of NCMCA. Each month throughout 2024 we will have articles that will showcase the history and folks that helped NCMCA get to where it is today. Please enjoy this yearlong series with our fourth article, "Convention Time!"

The success of the North Carolina Masonry Contractors Association can probably be attributed to several of the association's unique characteristics. But perhaps the most significant factor is the strong fraternal aspect of the association that NCMCA has somehow managed to nurture and maintain through all its years. NCMCA members, even those who are intense daily competitors, enjoy being together developing relationships and often creating long-term friendships. Indeed, in the few instances where NCMCA was unsuccessful in uniting a masonry community to sustain a local chapter, the problem seems to have been that generally, the folks in that community didn't particularly like one another.

The credit for this great fraternity within this association primarily goes to the members themselves. NCMCA members are simply good and congenial people, which is generally true of the masonry community at large.

Perhaps without initially realizing how important the fraternal aspect of the new association would eventually prove to be, from the start, NCMCA has been very good at providing opportunities for strong and cordial relationships to develop. With her extensive knowledge of, and her connection to the hospitality industry, Eleanor Upton provided members and their families with great events at first-rate venues that encouraged socializing and getting to know one another. The lady could throw a party!

In the months to come, these anniversary essays will explore the many ways NCMCA brings folks together, thus strengthening the bond between members. We play a lot of golf and occasionally shoot guns together. There are local chapter events. We eat. A

lot. And nowhere else on the planet is masonry the competition sport that it is here in North Carolina. However, with this issue, the topic will be the association's most important yearly get-together, the NCMCA Annual Convention and Business Meeting.

The Association bylaws call for an annual business meeting but only indirectly mandate an annual convention. Article VI, Section 1 reads, "The Annual Business Meeting of the Association shall be held at the Annual Convention. The time and place for the annual convention shall be determined by the Board of Directors." Otherwise, a convention is not mentioned. The bylaws provide a lot of details about the annual membership meeting and the business that is to be conducted at that meeting (including a requirement that members must be notified by mail not less than ten days prior to the meeting. 'Not much time to arrange for a sitter.)

NCMCA conventions usually take place in springtime but there have been exceptions.

In February 1998, the convention was held in downtown Charlotte in conjunction with the 1998 Annual Masonry Expo. NCMCA was headquartered at the Radisson. During the years before and after 1998, many national masonry-related organizations, including The Masonry Contractors Association of America (MCAA,) The National Concrete Masonry Association (NCMA,) The Masonry Society (TMS,) and others, held their respective annual meetings as part of the Masonry Expo, an industry-wide tradeshow managed by the National Concrete Masonry Association. The Annual North Carolina VICA (now "SkillsUSA") State and Regional High School Masonry Completion, usually held in April, was conducted on the 1998 Masonry Expo exhibit floor at the Charlotte Convention Center, bringing extra national attention to North Carolina's award-winning high school masonry training programs. The 1996 and 1999 conventions were held over the Independence Day Holidays at the Grove Park Inn in Asheville. In the early years, annual meetings were held at different times of the year, often in January and February, but for the most part, NCMCA conventions are a springtime event.

NCMCA conventions and annual business meetings have been held in Virginia and the Carolinas. And once, on a boat. Here is a list of convention venues gathered from the archives:

Colonial Williamsburg

Kingston Plantation

The Grove Park Inn

Pinehurst Hotel

Mid-Pines Inn, Southern Pines

Blockade Runner, Wrightsville Beach

Holiday Inn, Wrightsville Beach

The Homestead, Hot Springs, Virginia

Radisson Downtown Charlotte (with Masonry Expo/MCAA)

The Mills House, Charleston

Radisson Plaza, Raleigh

Sheraton New Bern

Crown Plaza, Hilton Head

The Grandover, Greensboro

Great Smokies Hilton, Asheville

Hyatt Regency Downtown, Greenville, SC

Sheraton, Atlantic Beach

Sheraton, Greenville, NC

The Hilton, Downtown Wilmington

Radisson, High Point

A Bahamas cruise

Several NCMCA conventions were conducted jointly with the now-defunct Southeastern Masonry Association (SEMA.) You recall from last month's anniversary article that SEMA had strong support from masonry contractors in the southeast in

the days before the Mason Contractors Association of America (MCAA) began welcoming “open shop” masonry contracting firms.

When asked, longtime members responded with their thoughts about NCMCA conventions and some of their convention experiences.

Bob Gates says, “I remember the very first convention I ever attended. Compliments of Ivey and Alan Griffin. It was a hotel in downtown High Point, a project that I believe Glenn Sipe did. I remember meeting Doug Burton. (In a hotel bar of course.) Maybe circa 1984.”

Several recalled the 1987 convention at the Great Smokies Hilton in Asheville. It snowed. The conventioners were “snowed in” and the traditional convention golf tournament was in jeopardy. But the tournament was “saved” when Eleanor Upton, with the assistance of the hotel staff, created a “mini” golf course in the hotel’s banquet hall. (Unfortunately, pictures were not to be found.) It’s reported that everyone had a great time! The records don’t record who won but everyone recalls that the hotel ran out of alcohol. Bob Gates remembered that the crew of the Concord was also snowed in at the hotel. The crew seemed to enjoy hanging out with the masonry contractors. (No explanation was offered as to why the Concord jet would have been at the Asheville airport...) Doug Burton says there was a snowball fight in the hotel bar.

Banquet entertainment over the years has included comedians, magicians, rock bands, bluegrass bands, deejays, and once, a forties-era big band at Kingston Plantation (that no one except Nash seems to have enjoyed.) Many recalled Doctor Holliday’s performances as an after-dinner entertainer. Doc Holliday managed to hypnotize a dozen-or-so dinner guests who proceeded to do some remarkable and outrageous stuff. And to a person, everyone who was hypnotized awoke with a sense of euphoria, just as Holliday had promised, including Bob Gates and Terry Ward who were on the verge of performing a striptease while under hypnosis.

Bob Gates and Larry Kirby remembered splitting a \$10,000 reverse truck raffle prize at the 1999 convention. Alan Griffin and later, Steve Bell would occasionally conduct the fund-raising raffles with the drawing held at the convention. In the early days of the raffles, \$10,000 would actually buy a new truck. With the last “truck” raffle held, the winner(s) took home enough to perhaps make a down payment.

Randy Terry recalls the \$10,000 raffle he won thanks to Red McAdams. Red sold Randy the ticket but Randy did not attend the convention. On the night of the drawing, it came down to the two tickets held by Shelly Joyner and Randy. Shelly was ready to split the winnings. “Call Randy and ask him what he wants to do.” Red replied that calling Randy wasn’t necessary because Red knew Randy “would want to hold for winning it all.” Randy later told everyone that Red didn’t know any such thing.

John Cramer recalls the 2017 Charleston convention “sitting in the bar at the Mills House watching all of Dank’s equipment that I was insuring burn up during a fire in downtown Raleigh that was televised.”

Some of the most memorable convention banquet moments have been after dinner remarks made by our own. Speeches made by recipients of various recognitions, such as the Eleanor Upton Award, and by outgoing and incoming NCMCA presidents, especially the outgoing presidents. Their reflections as their terms were ending have been insightful and poignant. Past presidents have set a high bar for future banquet remarks.

For many years, the annual convention also included an industry tradeshow. Citing difficulty in getting attendees to visit the vendors, given the distraction of the various resort venue attractions (like the beach,) and a lack of profitability, trade shows were eventually suspended. However, it appears the time has become ripe for convention tradeshow once again as a new generation of company owners seek every opportunity to learn about new construction and business technology exploding on the scene.

Annual Business Meetings are where elections take place and reports and updates are provided to the general membership. Bylaws changes are voted on at the annual meeting as well as a variety of proposals for new programs, new expenditures, and the policies of the association. Lynn Nash says, “It is remarkable that in my twenty-six years attending NCMCA annual meetings, there was never an issue that was seriously contentious or that caused division among the members.”

Convention education sessions have featured a “who-is-who” of the masonry industry including Texas architect Christopher Huckabee, a nationally recognized proponent and authority on all-masonry school construction; David Biggs, PE, who had just

completed leading forensic engineering investigations of the 2001 collapse of the World Trade Center; Mike Schuller, PE, of Colorado, a masonry specialist who consultants for preservation and restoration of historic sites around the globe including India's Taj Mahal and the Brooklyn Bridge; and on one special occasion, the executive directors of MCAA, The National Concrete Masonry Association (NCMA,) The Brick Industry Association (BIA,) and the Portland Cement Association (PCA) all came together for a Gary Joyner-led panel discussion at the 2016 Homestead Convention. Another very successful Joyner-led panel discussion featured a group of the most influential masonry contractors in the country. That session was so popular that it ran long and was resumed the next morning.

The NCMCA convention has always benefited from strong sponsor support, mostly from firms that sponsor the event year after year. Sponsorship provides exposure to some of the masonry industry's most influential decision makers and leaders. Sponsorship fees help keep registration fees affordable and support NCMCA in its mission to promote masonry as the building material of choice and a great career opportunity.

Damian Lang is a longtime convention attendee. His firm, EZG Manufacturing, has sponsored the convention golf tournament for more than two decades. Damian says, "The NCMCA convention is like no other convention I have attended. These folks compete with one another every day, but come together once a year to not only help one another, but to advance the masonry industry and the careers of those who work in it. It is such a pleasure to attend, as I feel like I am part of one big family of tremendous people all pulling together to help the masonry industry."

Folks who attend an NCMCA convention tend to return year after year. It's an annual visit with good friends. Often, friendships initiated because of convention participation.

Member participation in activities and events sustains NCMCA fraternity. And nothing tops the annual convention for maximizing the benefits of being a part of the North Carolina Masonry Contractors Association masonry community.

Article Written by Lynn Nash



An undated picture of shenanigans underway at an unidentified past NCMCA convention.



The Steve Sipe family enters President Danny Batten's 1991 convention banquet. That year, jeans, shorts and tee shirts were definitely discouraged as banquet attire.



Left to right, Steve Stout, Calvin Brodie, Danny Batten, Eddie Land, and Steve Sipe in an undated picture of NCMCA officers at the convention banquet.



President Freddy Koontz, left, and raffle master of ceremonies Alan Griffin, second from right, split the \$10,000 “truck raffle” prize between Bob Gates, second from left, and Larry Kirby, right, at the 1999 Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Convention at the Grove Park Inn.



Entertainer Doc Holliday amazed the 1999 convention with his hypnotism act. About ten banquet attendees were successfully hypnotized. The unidentified young lady had been hypnotized to believe she was stiff enough to support Holliday standing on her stomach while suspended between two stools. *And she was!*



Left to right, raffle master of ceremonies Alan Griffin announces a \$10,000 prize award split between Michael Rogers and Beverly Sipe at the 2001 Gandover Resort convention.



Mark Fairman shows off his catch after the deep sea fishing tournament that was part of the 2010 Atlantic Beach convention. Several participants were not up for dinner that evening.



Gary Joyner moderated the 2016 Homestead Convention panel discussion featuring, left to right, MCAA President Jeff Buczkiewicz; Ray Leonhard, President & CEO of the Brick Industry Association (BIA;) Robert “Bob” Thomas, President, National Concrete Masonry Association (NCMA;) and James G. Toscas, President & CEO, Portland Cement Association (PCA.)



Left to right, Hugh Townsend, George “Goober Pyle” Lindsey, and James “Red” McAdams. The 2002 convention had a “Mayberry” theme with Mr. Lindsey entertaining at the banquet and the “Mayberry Deputy” on patrol during convention functions.



Don Caldwell enjoying the scenery at the 2016 Homestead Convention.



The 2014 Homestead Convention Banquet was also outgoing President Gary Joyner's sixtieth-first birthday party. Incoming President Ashlee Moore provided Gary with a special hat to wear for the occasion.
