

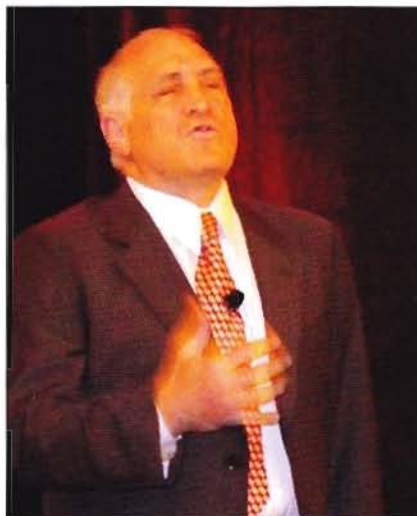
# FEC Central

## IAAPA Hosts Third Annual Conference for FEC Operators

**T**he International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions continued to expand its focus on the family entertainment sector with its third annual conference for operators. FEC Dallas, which took place at the Hilton Rockwall, about half an hour northeast of downtown Dallas, hosted close to 150 attendees including nearly 100 facility operators.

The operators gathered to hear suppliers and experts on a number of hot topics share their insights and encourage conversation both with and among audience members. After the first day of discussions, attendees were treated to dinner and some fun at the new Pinstack bowling FEC in Plano, Texas. And following two days of meetings, some of the operators stayed on for a third day that involved touring four local FECs in the Dallas Metroplex area, including Amazing Jakes in Plano, Speedzone in Dallas, iT'Z in Euless and Celebration Station in Mesquite.

Participants at FEC Dallas also had many chances during breaks in the action to meet with sponsoring suppliers, who set



**Brandon Steiner** of Steiner Sports gave the keynote address at FEC Dallas.

up tables just outside the conference room. Sponsors included: Amusement Insurance Resources (Platinum Sponsor), American Specialty Insurance & Risk Services, Art Attack, Benchmark Games, Betson Enterprises, Brady Distributing, Brunswick, Embed, Flagship Carpets, FEC Music, Fun Express, Haas &

Wilkerson Insurance, Intercard, J&J Amusements, Make Meaning, Moss Distributing, QubicaAMF, Redemption Plus, Rhode Island Novelty, Sacoa, Shaffer Distributing, Simuline, Sureshot Redemption, Triotech, and UNIS (Platinum Sponsor). *RePlay Magazine* also served as one of the event's media sponsors.

FEC Dallas kicked off with opening remarks from IAAPA chairman Gerardo Arteaga, whose Santiago, Chile-based business operates a major theme park as well as a chain of FECs. Arteaga spoke about his roots running FECs in Chile and other South American nations.

Sports memorabilia magnate Brandon Steiner, author of the book *You Gotta Have Balls*, followed, providing an inspiring keynote address. He discussed his upbringing in a single parent home in Brooklyn, noting that he took his first job at 10 years old working for a neighborhood fruit vendor. "Everybody decides at some point that they are credible, dependable and accountable," he said.

Steiner later began operating a paper route so that he would be free later in the



**The schedule** at FEC Dallas included plenty of breaks to meet with suppliers in the Sponsors Zone just outside the conference room.



**IAAPA FEC Specialist Leslie Hutcherson** visits with FEC Dallas moderator **Carla Clark**, a veteran trainer of amusement facility staff members.





**UNIS topper Steven Tan** (second from left) visits with a trio from the Argentina-based Happyland trio of FECs: Bernardo Stanke, Cedric Moller and Felipe Arteaga.



**Rich Long** of Benchmark Games welcomes John Seeker of Apex Parks in Dallas to his supplier display.

audience would hear from other speakers throughout the two-day event.

"The better trained your people are, the easier it will be to run your business," she said. "Communicate your vision in everything you do. You have to lead by example because your staff values everything you do, much more than what you say. Plus, if you lead by example, you won't have to worry as much about enforcing rules."

Ryan Curtis of Quarters in Baton Rouge, a relatively new FEC operator, joined Clark on stage for the session. Curtis, whose location grossed over \$2.5 million in its first year in business, said he jumpstarted his leadership approach by giving what he called a "vision speech" to his employees in the very early days of the facility's existence.

"If you don't lead your organization, somebody else will step up to give your people leadership. In fact, sects within your organization will fight for leadership," he

explained. "Specifics are easy to talk about, but it gets a little trickier teaching people how to convey your values to your guests. You've got to learn how to get what's in your heart out to your people."

### Recruiting Group Sales Stars

Beth Standlee, the party guru who runs Trainertainment and pens the regular Party Professor column in *RePlay*, tackled the topic of how best to hire sales staff for group events. She discussed the difference between hunters and farmers, the former being people who go out and aggressively try to close deals while the latter excel at sowing seeds and waiting for those relationships to grow. When it comes to group sales, she said, hunters are better suited to the task.

Standlee recommended the use of a personality evaluation model called DISC, which can help determine who is best suit-

ed for various sales roles. "I can't tell you how many times I've seen FECs hire nice, safe, supportive people, and they never close a sale because they don't want to rub anybody the wrong way," she related.

But, she continued, that doesn't mean that effective selling involves pushing people into something they don't want or need. "Great selling is really about helping people find what they need," she said. "And that means that everybody in your location, including your frontline, is always selling what you offer."

Group events, like corporate outings, can bring in as much as \$1,000 an event, especially if a facility offers alcohol sales. These figures represent a considerably higher average than most kids' birthday parties.

### Budget Tips

An open discussion of how to trim an FEC's operating budget generated dozens



**The Apex Parks** management team includes CEO AI Weber and Sr. VP of Operations Gregg Borman, who also serves as chairman of the IAAPA FEC Committee.



**Amusement Insurance Resources** provided a special drawing that could have netted an attendee \$25,000. Unfortunately the right number didn't turn up, but Ron Stillwell of Fun Brand Bounce still walked away with \$250.