

October 1998 - Rental Rag

Presidents Message

Communication - Friend or Foe

How will technology change the rental industry and how we do business? Suppliers, rental stores and businesses in general are gearing up for, not only the year 2000 computer problem, but to use the Internet more effectively to establish communication with each other. The operational elements of our businesses on ordering, shipping and supplying information can only improve.

Thus, ARA-NATIONAL presented to 150 state and local association presidents a means to better communicate with their memberships in the form of a guide book. Below I present the twelve programs suggested by National for monthly round table discussions at their upcoming meetings. Your input on which issues are important to you, the membership of the ARA-NJ, would be appreciated.

These are the suggested monthly program topics proposed by national for the upcoming year:

Buying Strategies and Group Buying Options.

Marketing/Advertising

Environmental Issues.

Customer Service/Weddings.

Security/Loss Prevention.

Safety

ARA Products and Services

Vendor Partnership, Employee Equipment Training & Holiday Planning.

Financial Management

New Technology in Rental

Legislative Issues

Holiday Party and Vendor Appreciation

In the guide, these topics are presented in a format which gives us some flexible guidelines as to how we can carry out some or all of these suggested programs. It is offered along with sources and ARA resources and advises how rental management issues tie in with the meetings and the questions for a roundtable discussions on these topics.

The securing of interesting speakers or other programs that the membership might also suggest for meetings will benefit us collectively only if we know your needs. Your Board will be using this guideline to plan our upcoming calendar year. The membership will receive a calendar for the upcoming year with suggested programs before the 1st of December, 1998. You will be asked at that time to rate our those programs. This will help us plan for topics the majority wishes to have presented.

Let's keep the communications channel open - we will find it to be our friend!

Thank you for your efforts to keep ARA-NJ the viable organization we can all be proud to participate in.

Your Prez,

Tony Perrotta

Megan's PARTY ANGLE

What's the first clue of the party season ending? The trees changing color - of course you noticed it.

Realization finally hit the other day when I was driving back to the warehouse from a job. Stuck in 5:30 traffic on 202 South, I thought, no, it's not over. We're still running and the date is the 9th of October. Talk with any party person this year and they will all say the same thing, "Party is booming." October is turning out to be even more profitable than May. We have surpassed our goal already for the 1997-98 season. We are in the position of turning away the bad accounts and concentrate on servicing the reliable ones. Party rental stores should now be able to charge a profitable fee instead of dropping prices and running here and there for pennies. We should talk with each other more now because the threat of stealing customers should no longer exist. There is enough business out there today . In fact, we had another store call us recently asking if Joe Smith Catering was our customer and did we give him free delivery. The answer was, NO! We rented to Joe smith one time. Joe Smith Catering will not get away with the, "Oh, well, So and So Rental does this for me." At a recent meeting we faced the enemy, a competitive rental store, who turned out to be a nice guy.

To top off the season, just when we thought good manners were dead, we received Thank You cards and notes. Of course we have had our share of rude customers. The lack of responsibility on the customers' part turns into threats, law suits and bad mouthing. We

are blamed for the weekend of June 13th. You can't forget the 5 inches of rain in 2 days. We were blamed for Aunt Rose falling on our flooring and we were bad mouthed by the caterer to whom we did not give a refund on chairs that "were not up to his standard."

Everyone has experienced in some way the "cost of doing business" more so this year than in the past. This is mainly due to increased volume. The more events you do the more problems experienced. In order to keep up with the high turn around we have to employ more people, and with low unemployment rates we are not always getting the best. Due to inexperience and careless personnel, not to mention ethics, we have had our share of accidents, theft and abuse. This year we went through three warehouse managers to get our current and, hopefully, last one. We had to fire some key people who have been with us for years because they were taking advantage of the employment problems. We had 6 workman compensation claims, with only one being serious. In fact, we thought he was not going to make it and as a result we are having the Red Cross come in to do basic CPR and First Aid training for key employees. We all heard about the fire at Miller's and the hoops they had to jump through. Now OSHA is on everybody's mind.

Party and Tool are both experiencing the same thing these days. The basic problems are alike. The customers are more demanding, we have a hell of a time getting employees to work, the politics of running a business are taking up more and more time and the days are getting shorter and shorter. No one ever said running a business was easy. Maybe we should be running the country, Bill obviously has a lot of time and public support.

Megan Jones Celebration Party

The Internet and our Lives:

Like most of you, I didn't have much of a life in September. It seemed that after a day at work, the only thing I had energy left for was to sleep, get up the next day and do it all over again. Hey, we're in the rental business and as the saying goes, "We have to make hay, when the sun shines". I'm sure we can all write an article on this subject, but that's not where I'm heading today. Just wanted to set the scene a little. Now on with the feature.....

Now that October is here, I managed to take a Sunday off and decided to spend some quality time with my family and do a little shopping for items we needed. Our destination, Quakerbridge Mall, Lawrenceville, NJ. (It could have been any mall, in any town, at any time) It's been a long time since I've shopped **manually!** Seemed like a great thing to do on a day off; right ! - WRONG!!

Here's my description of the mall in 25 words or less:

"Hot, crowded, long lines, poor service, high prices, not what I wanted, rude people, crying babies, smelly foods and a real drag!"

After we left the mall, while sitting in the car with my family, I pondered these questions: "Was this supposed to be fun?", "Why did we do this?" "What did we accomplish?" and "Couldn't our time be used more wisely?" and "Is this what I want to do with my limited time off?". I guess you can figure out the answers to these questions.

I went home, logged onto the computer, went on the internet and ordered the clothes I needed from **www.Eddiebauer.com**, the books I wanted from **www.Amazon.com**, a craftsman tool from **www.sears.com**, something for my son Tom from **www.Gap.com**, and a gift for my wife, Linda at **www.fashionmall.com** . I was relaxed in my own home (with a beer- try that in a mall), spent no more than 30 minutes, saved a ton of money, had a great time and when I was done felt a tremendous sense of accomplishment.

Question: Is the internet changing the way we live our lives. **YES, YES, YES!**

Friends, our lives have become more complicated every day. Even the **Welcome Wagon**, a thriving business for over 60 years is closing their doors for good this month, for the simple reason nobody is home when they knock on doors. We have become a fast paced society, that is constantly moving. The Internet has become a way for us to do more in the short time we have and it is doing that in leaps and bounds.

By the end of the year *E-commerce* which is the term used for business conducted over the internet will account for 25% of all retail sales. This figure is expected to double in the next 7 years. This figure doesn't take into account the amount of information people collect over the internet before they make their shopping decisions. Where does that leave us as individuals, families and rental stores? Hopefully, many of you are catching on to this and not only are learning how to use the web for yourselves and families but also for your businesses.

Whether it's a new car, a piece of furniture, a fine wine or a jar of hot salsa, people are learning to use the web to gather information, make purchases and send gifts. Should it be any different in choosing a rental store? Certainly not! Just look how much time our National Association (ARA) is devoting to technology. The entire October issue of Rental Management magazine focuses on this issue and how it can effect you and your companies. How many seminars have been held at regional and national events in the last two years? How many of our venders now sell on the web? And most important, check out how many ARA rental stores are listed under www.ararental.org!

Are the days of having fun at the mall over? Will Christmas shopping ever be the same? Will September in the party rental business ever be boring? Is Charlie Brown going to find your store on the Web? And will my new book arrive tomorrow?

YES - NO - BETTER NOT - MAYBE - I HOPE SO

Your truly,

Steve

Rent-a-Religion

I'm going to change my religion. It's not that the religion I was born with hasn't served me well these many years. And I do like the Pope, he's a nice man and you can tell he cares about people. If I had to choose a go between to be a go between between God and me - I wouldn't hesitate to choose him.

I will say, though, that Cardinal O'Connor of New York tries my patience. The man's a veritable fountain of "thou shalt nots." We don't see eye to eye on a number of things. For one thing, he makes his own rules. Nowhere in the bible does it say "Thou shalt not play Little League ball on Sunday." It's the Cardinal's rule, not the bible's. It wouldn't be wise to ask him to pray for your kid's team. Note, though, that he didn't make the same pronouncement about the baseball playoffs or the World Series.

I've decided that, if I qualify, I'm going to become a Southern Baptist. I'm not sure I'm eligible (the qualification question arises because I live in the north and I'm not aware of any sect that professes to be Northern Southern Baptists). I'd hate to miss out because of geography.

At their 1998 convention, the Southern Baptists decreed that - and I'm quoting directly, "A wife is to submit graciously to the servant leadership of her husband." This pronouncement reduces Betty Friedan to the status of St. Christopher - a non-entity. I've got to tell you, I was impressed. These are my kind of people.

This thought is not revolutionary, of course, but it is one that has fallen out a favor over the years. I seem to remember that Mom used to walk a couple of steps behind Pop. I thought then that Mom just walked slower but I see now it must have been a sign of respect just as you would have in any servant/master relationship. The practice was prevalent in the old country.

Of course, when we're out walking, my own wife is usually way behind me, too, but it has nothing to do with that servant/master thing. As it happens, she walks much slower than I do. If I get too far ahead she stops in her tracks and waits until I discover that she's out of sight. Then I trudge back to look for her. When I return she says, "Did you have a nice walk?" We drive a lot because we don't make much headway walking.

When I brought up the subject of my new found religion and its religious principles she said, "You're kidding, aren't you?" so I showed her a clipping on the Southern Baptist convention.

"You're not kidding, are you?" she exclaimed.

"Of course not, " I replied, "would I kid about our new religion?"

"**OUR** new religion?" she questioned.

"Of course. As head of the house I have selected a new religion for us, one that will put our relationship in the proper perspective. This will promote peace and harmony in our household."

"Well," she said, "I'm not ready to change my religion. In fact I may never be ready - my old religion suits me just fine."

"You don't have a choice," I explained, "Our new religion puts that choice in my hands and you are but to follow." Then, while I was on a roll, I added, "Now be a good woman and fetch me a nice hot cup of coffee."

It was gratifying to watch as she left to follow my instructions. She is a good woman - it was only a matter of time until she saw the error of her ways. When she returned with the coffee, she -- ----- . Well, I'd rather not go into it at this time - the memory is still painful. The burns, however, aren't serious and our dry cleaner thinks he can get the stains out of my trousers .

Lest I leave you with the impression that my wife dumped hot coffee on me - I must explain that, technically, it was I who caused the accident. Her approach with the coffee struck me as being menacing and, as she offered the cup, I raised my hands to protect myself but knocked the cup out of her hand and onto me instead.

I asked later if she did mean to dump that hot coffee on me. She said, "You'll never know now, will you, master?"

I wonder if Cardinal O'Connor will reinstate me.

Carl Sparacio

Minutes of September Meeting

In the absence of President, Tony Perrotta, Vice President Brian Higgins opened the meeting promptly at 8:00 PM.

He thanked Jeff Sheats and Vern Mott of Pioneer Rentals for hosting the meeting and introduced Dewey and Doris Sheats, well known in the rental business as founders of Pioneer Rentals. When Dewey was asked how he started the business he explained that he was driving by the location, saw a sign for a Sheriff's Sale on the building and, before he knew what hit him, he was in the rental business.

Jeff Sheats welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming.

Associate members were asked to report on new items and special deals they had to offer. Many took advantage of the opportunity.

In the absence of Secretary Megan Jones, Carl Sparacio read the minutes of the last meeting. The minutes were accepted as read and approved.

Treasurer, Tom Lade, read the Treasurer's Report. He reported a balance of \$10,826.67 in the treasury - \$2300.00 of which was seed money for Demo Day that would be passed on to the next host organization.

Joe Mihalko, Legislative Chairman, did not bring up Monica Lewinsky but recommended that members advise their congressmen how they felt about the issue. He reported that the bill on product liability in congress has been tabled in committee and noted, too, that the I.R.S. and OSHA are both being restructured to make them kinder and gentler. Joe also said that now is the time to push our agenda with legislators - before elections.

Education Chairman, Howard Heller, said that he will have a rep. from Bell Atlantic available for training regarding using the telephone properly as a business tool.

Social Chairman, John Fatcher, announced that our annual Holiday Dinner will be held on January 24th at the Woodbridge Hilton. The Nite at the Races is scheduled for April 14th and will be in the Pegasus.

Associate Chairman, Roy Peragallo, Thanked the vendors for their support of our association.

Under old business it was noted that our Web Site was up and running and an application fee would be required for a bigger Web presence. We need more vendors to post their logos.

Disappointment was expressed regarding Demo Day. VP Brian Higgins, kept discussion to a minimum by noting that "attendance was not good" and there was a strong possibility that it will be moved further away next year. He noted, too, that the matter will be covered at the next Board meeting.

Programs:

Brian Higgins of Inter/National Insurance spoke on General Liability Claim. He reported that the 10 top claims (accounting for 72% of money paid out) were, in order: Lifts & Hoists, Traffic, Scaffolding, Saws (excluding chain saws,) Ladders, Lawn & Garden, Compressed Gas, amusement devices, sewer augers, and fork lifts.

Brian also brought up the recent fire suffered at Miller's Rental and emphasized the danger of gasoline and smoking.

Brian James of Sanders Saw spoke on Diamond Blade Safety and his company's concern regarding the problem. He passed lists of do's and don'ts to those in attendance.

Mike Lacey of Pressure Washers demonstrated how to properly take apart and reassemble pressure washers to avoid injury. He noted that water through a pressure washer will give a more severe cut than a knife and gave safety tips on their use.

The membership retired to the yard where Bob Woods of New Jersey Bobcat gave a live demonstration on how to trailer heavy equipment.

The next meeting will be held at Curly Boelhouwer's warehouse and will feature roundtable discussions on a variety of subjects.

John Capece won \$80 on the 50/50

Door prizes were drawn for - T-shirts donated by Bob Woods, a Fault Protection Harness, and a collared shirt from Sanders Saws

Brian thanked David Hinck in absentia for putting together a fine program.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40

Respectfully submitted,

Carl Sparacio

SAFETY

It's Chipper and Shredder Season

As always the safety formula begins with the selection of well designed equipment with good safety features built into them. The lowest price is not necessarily the least costly in the long run and probably doesn't have room for safety features.

Your equipment knowledge is key to providing good maintenance of you chipper/shredder. A well maintained sharp clean tool is a safer tool. Knowledge of your equipment must be shared with all your staff so that they can properly inform your customers with the products capabilities.. We all know the difference when we use the "right tool for the job." It's better, safer faster, and often easier.

"ARDI" suggests chipper/shredders be recommended to customers as follows: 8 horsepower for material to 1/2 inch; 16 hp for material to 3 inches, 22 hp for material to 6 inches, 41 hp for material to 9 1/2 inches.

Training and instruction is what sets the professional rental dealer from the mass merchandiser and lesser competition. The significance of recommending the right chipper to the customer cannot be underestimated. Using an under powered unit can lead to clogs and damage to the machine. the delays and inefficiency causes reduced customer satisfaction and ties up equipment turnover and may lead to costly repairs. Most importantly, from a safety standpoint, is that a clogged machine tempts customers to clear the machine, sometimes dangerously.

"ARDI" recommends the following safety guidelines.

- * Chipper/Shredders with higher intakes and outputs help to reduce accidents with small children
- * Underpowered equipment jams more easily tempting operators to take dangerous action
- * Long sleeve pants and shirts can help prevent scrapes and cuts. eye and ear protective gear as well as gloves should be a standard requirement to operate these machines.
- * Loose clothing, Jewelry, watches or loose "gauntlet" type gloves are real hazards. Long hair must be confined.
- * Potential hazards should be identified to each renter of these machines. All employees handling these machines and their users (customers) must be familiar with approved instructions for equipment.
- * Safety instruction decals should be replaced when worn., illegible, or painted over. Keep in mind, each user potentially has never operated the tool and potentially needs even the most rudimentary safety direction to protect them from themselves.
- * Alert customers to safe equipment transportation and handling techniques.
- * When feeding the chipper always wear a full face shield.
- * Never reach or climb into a running machine. Any clogs or jams should be dealt with while the machine is off and disabled.
- * Rocks and other hard objects like knots can shoot out causing injury. Check material being put into the machine carefully to avoid jams and injuries.

Equipment is only as good as it is maintained. "ARDI" suggests the following maintenance routine to be followed on the return of every Chipper/Shredder rental.

- * Clear debris from the machine (both feeder & shoot).
- * Clean oil, and change filters and belts of equipment after rental. as needed.

* Sharpen and check blade gauge regularly.

* Test equipment before turning over to each customer while they are present.

This is not a comprehensive list of safety considerations but may help to avoid some of the more common accidents with these tools. Remember, each rental is an opportunity that carries a responsibility.

Dave Hinck

Safety Chairman

News & Notes

Celebration Party Rentals announced a new division, ***CPR Sales***. It will be representing ***California Portable Dance Floors*** and ***Palmer Snyder Furniture***. The merchandise will be stocked in their Flemington warehouse so as to insure their goal of assisting east coast rental stores beat the expense of high freight from the west coast and to insure, as well, the availability of these products in the middle of the June crunch.

Contact Matt or Megan for additional information about having the equipment you need available for pick up or delivery. The ***CPR Sales*** number is: 908-735-7368.

Something New on Our Website

A complimentary link has been added to our site for the New ***Jersey Wedding Directory*** - see preferred links. They will reciprocate with a link on their website to ours.

Speedy Gonzales

If you've ever worked with Steve Kohn of Miller's Rentals, you know the guy is a dynamo. Your editor comes away exhausted when he collaborates with him even though Steve does all the work.

Called him on a Wednesday afternoon and he had little time to talk - he was leaving early Thursday for Germany to comiserate with a tent manufacturer.

"I'll be back Monday morning, talk to you then!" he said.

I swear I could see his dust disappearing in the distance over the phone. I'll bet that tent manufacturer's head is still spinning.



ARA of NJ

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