



Conventions and Events



WCNA-29

Helping to make it happen: The little things

Okay, we all know that the Narcotics Anonymous World Convention is a big deal. In fact, the two largest productions that NA World Services engages in are the World Service Conference and the world convention. It is perfectly natural when attending a large function to make your reservations, indicate your choices from the options offered, send in your check, and then forget about it. But how do the details of these events actually get taken care of?

Picture a day in mid-June at NAWS headquarters. The World Service Office main conference room has been transformed into a complex assembly line of paper and people. Approximately 20 staff members will spend the next day-and-a-half affecting the lives of each and every person registered for WCNA-29!

Registration packets will be assembled for the approximately 8,000 people who pre-registered for WCNA-29. Everyone from Aaron A. Aardvark to Zelda Y. Zyzx will have a personalized registration packet containing just the items they have opted for when they registered.

The way that this came about is the modest tale of organization and attention to detail that is so easily overlooked in our frequent drive to cut to the chase and see the big picture. Sometimes the best way to appreciate the big picture is to look closely at one of the tiny parts.

The WCNA registration system has evolved over the years along with the evolution of technology and software. Today, with pre-registrations approaching 8,000, and multiple event tickets and options to be incorporated, our Information Services and WCNA support staff devised a method that would address our unique requirements and could be carried out without contracting any outside personnel.

If you look at the number of ticketed events at the convention and the options involved there were no fewer than 19 different possible combinations.

The way it went from this point onward resembled a very complex assembly line devised by a team composed of Henry Ford and Charlie Chaplin! Try to picture twenty people manning two sides of a series of long, thin tables. At one end of this line are huge stacks of registration-packet envelopes, and next to that are stacks of 5,310 labels to go on the envelopes. The labels have been printed in the order of registration date—that is, the first pre-registration received is the top label printed, and the bottom label is the last pre-registration received. Therefore, the first label put on an envelope is for the first person who pre-registered. Once this first step is accomplished everything else follows on its heels.

Now the envelope moves on to the next person, who is dispensing theme party tickets. If this label says “2 theme party tickets,” they are inserted by this person and then passed on to the next person, who inserts however many concert tickets were ordered. The concert tickets are stacked in priority seating order, with the top ones being the choicest seats, so that the first person pre-registered gets the closest seat, the second the next closest, and so on.

Next it's tickets for the jazz breakfast, the fish lunch, the comedy show, the coffee mug, the T-shirt, etc. ... Well, you get the idea.

After seven or eight hours of doing this, the line sounded like a “Saturday Night Live” skit.

“OK, what'll they have? One concert, one fish lunch, two comedy show, and two jazz breakfast! Next person—two concert, no fish, no comedy show, but two jazz breakfast. Next person—two jazz breakfast!”

WCNA-29 Atlanta

Almost 14,000 register, exceeding all advance estimates

We want to convey loudly and clearly our gratitude and thanks to all of the volunteers who helped make WCNA-29 in Atlanta on the Fourth of July weekend the huge success that it was. Almost 1,200 volunteers helped in merchandising, registration, providing convention information, pedestrian traffic control, and a variety of other services. We don't know what we would have done without you.

The idea that made it possible for us to reach enough NA members to sign up this many volunteers for the convention was to enable volunteering online. It was the host committee in Atlanta that came up with this brilliant idea. We fully intend to use it again, and next year in San Diego for WCNA-30 will be a perfect start. Next year look on our website, www.na.org, to volunteer for WCNA-30.

Although not without its challenges—and could any event of over 16,000 people not have a couple of challenges?—this convention was by all accounts a smashing success. All of the events in Atlanta were sold out. Over 4,000 people saw the comedy show and attended the concert. We had a sit-down dinner for 3,320 people at tables set up on the floor of the Georgia Dome prior to the Saturday Unity Day celebration. In order for this dinner to reach our standards and not be another instance of “rubber chicken,” our convention management staff engaged in five different samplings of possible menus and did extensive interviews with prospective master chefs seeking the contract. Twenty-three hundred people attended the Jazz Breakfast.

One of the pleasant surprises of the convention was the opening event, the Southern Fried Kickoff Luncheon, held at noon on Thursday. Musical entertainment was provided by the R&B sounds of Soul Central. Two thousand people attended this luncheon, frankly surprising us. Perhaps a Thursday afternoon opening event next year in San Diego might again prove very popular with our convention-goers.

The coffee houses were consistently packed, with the number of revelers topping 3,000 on Thursday, and Saturday with the number just a tad under 3,000 Friday night. Of course, on Friday night the Atlanta Rhythm Section at the coffee house had to compete with one of our consistently most popular convention events, the Comedy Show!

We don't want to overburden you with too many numbers, but we feel sure that you will be interested in some of the facts about WCNA-29. To stage a gathering as big as our world convention costs a surprising amount of money. It cost us \$250,000 for facility fees, including rent, labor, security, sound system, and video-related costs. It cost \$80,000 for shuttle-bus service, which far exceeds what many regional conventions cost, bottom line.

As a convention grows in size, costs increase, they do not decrease. As you are preparing to amass more and more thousands of people in one place, more and more city and state regulations and controls come into play, not to mention labor costs and mandatory hiring regulations in many venues.

