Elvis is Alive and Well, and Living in Las Vegas....a deep dive into the 2019 CFMA Annual Conference and Exhibition at the Cosmopolitan Las Vegas

By David James, CPA, CCIFP

Yes, all you nay-sayers, Elvis lives; I know because I saw him at the closing night party! Some of you may believe CASH IS KING, well having seen Elvis in person, HE IS STILL THE KING! And even MORE exciting to me (duh) is that Marilyn Monroe was hanging out there as well (no pun intended). I must say, Elvis has fared pretty well, he looked to have not aged a bit, and has actually lost about 60 pounds! Maybe he has been hanging with Marie Osmond, and sharing her Nutrisystem program? Marilyn actually appeared to have gained a bit of weight, but certainly in ALL the right places! But wait, this is reporting on the closing night party, which we should save for the conclusion of this report . . . . so, let's back up a few days in time . . . . to the beginning.

For those out there who see this conference as a 2 ½ day experience, you are way behind the times! CFMA has grown their educational offerings dramatically over the past 10+ years (yes, my first conference was in 1984, a year before the birth of VOS! And if you were not born by 1985, just know that I hate you . . . sorry, Donnie popped out!) This conference began in earnest on Saturday with a plethora of mini-conferences ranging from certification classes (CHRIS/CCIFP) to managing cash (yes, cash is really king, but Elvis is a close 2nd) to Rev Rec (yup, it's HERE!).
Lisa Sullivan, CCIFP - 2019 CFMA VoS Vice-President

Sunday is a bit less intense on class offerings as CFMA brought attendees together for some physical activities - the Amazing Chase Charity Run, and a Golf outing (is golf really a physical activity? . . . just askin’).
John Corcoran, CCIFP - CFMA VoS Founding Chapter Member and Initial President

The annual board meeting is Sunday afternoon, and this year the board was very transparent, providing all meeting attendees (and everyone later in the conference) a copy of the CFMA Annual Report. The Report provided a great overview of Association
achievements over the past year as well as financial data. The association is in a strong financial position, with $3,000,000 set aside in reserves for emergency operations, should they be needed. For those of us who have been around since the 'early days', you will remember when equity was in the red . . . . we've come a long way! The report reflected quotes from various CFMA'ers . . . including our very own Lynn Pace (currently chairing the National Membership Committee), who offered some great thoughts on volunteering with CFMA . . . yay, Lynn!!

Sunday also "officially" kicks off the conference with the Welcome Reception. This was held in the Exhibitor area; so good news was it spreads out the group without the loud band noise that limited communication with peers in past years. So nice to talk to friends from our local chapter as well as friends from chapters across the nation. Other good news was that guests to this reception (like my wife) got to see and collect some of the fun give away items from the exhibitors. However, it can get embarrassing when your spouse circulates among the exhibitors collecting all the "good" stuff . . . leaving only the pens and cozies for CFMA attendees in later days . . . but, I noticed that she was joined by Mary Lawless in this "scavenger hunt" . . . good company, like a band of thieves (sorry, Tom, to snitch on your wife)! Sidebar - CONGRATS to the Lawlesses - as they celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary at this conference!! And Mary had some really cool gifts to give Tom from the exhibitors for their special day - Tom, enjoy your new string bag from COINS filled with stress balls and key chains!
This reporter did a bit more investigation (that's what I do) on couples roaming the exhibitor hall, and ran across Lisa Autino and Randy Johnson (no Diamondback fans, not THAT Randy Johnson) making goo-goo eyes at one another; why, you ask? Cause they got hitched back in March; and newlyweds do that sort of thing (or so I am told)! Congrats to them as they begin their anniversary count; but please, watch that eye thing - yikes! While Vegas is known for its Chapels, it is not so much known for its Confessionals. However, Dave Miller, confided in Father Reporter (me) that he has been accused of being a gold digger; yes, I found out thru my interrogation skills that he married his amazing wife, Stephanie, shortly after her winning a jackpot at a casino! Two points here; Dave - shame on you; Stephanie - can you give lessons? Wait, are confessionals supposed to be confidential? Whoops . . .

But enough about weddings, anniversaries and such . . .

Monday comes; and here we go! Sessions begin at 7 a.m. for the early risers; followed by the first general session at 8:30 for the late night partiers among us! The opening session was great, leaving us with this thought . . . "What more can I do?" Think about this statement . . . applies to us all in our daily lives, community activities and with CFMA! Pretty 'deep' for this author, so I shall not challenge my brain further, and 'let it go' for now . . .
So on a lighter note, readers must remember the venue . . . We were in Vegas, baby! And having been in Vegas many times, I thought I had experienced it all; but on THIS trip, I found that the Cosmopolitan (who provided awesome service), brought the swimming pool INSIDE. No, not the water. Rather, the lack of clothing! Swim suits seemed to be the new
dress code; some with meager attempts to cover up, other with no attempt. I felt I was at the pool all the time, and got so easily distracted, until the elbow in my side by Melanie would bring me back to reality quickly. Passing John Corcoran and his wonderful wife, Barbara, in the hall one afternoon, he seemed to be in a stupor. Barbara explained that his eyes were frozen wide open, as he had gone into 'eye candy' overload. Oh, yeah . . . yup, we were in Vegas, baby.

Monday evening brought many VOS'ers to a speakeasy hidden deep within the bowels of the Cosmopolitan. Yes, you had to have a secret word, an escort into the inner room and an exit that discreetly let you reenter the casino by another route. And it was disguised as a barber shop! Obviously, with my hair style (ha), I would never have entered the barber shop had Karl Kortman not set up the little gathering - - thanks, Karl!!

But back to the conference, which was moving at full steam ahead! Tuesday began with Dawn Peer Groups, targeting the small, medium and large companies with great topics for peer to peer discussion. These are amazing sessions, which allow you to talk with your peers on best practices. These DPG's were also used to roll out the 3 Levels of Suicide Prevention Integration into your company, recently developed by the Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention! These will be provided to you in an upcoming CFMA newsletter . . . keep an eye out! The sessions offered throughout the conference are amazing, and range from HR to Legal to Hands On to Leadership to . . . well, ALL things critical to YOUR job as CFM in the construction industry. Whether you are in the industry, or provide services to our industry, this conference is a MUST. Reflecting back to the "what more can I do" (my brain has rested a bit); how about TEACHING at a national conference as an option (or maybe here at the local chapter level)! Or join a local/national committee! VOS was well represented in Vegas with instructors, as Michelle Walker, Gregg Gross, Dave Miller, Justin Martin and your humble reporter were all involved in edumacating our needy CFMA members . . . "may they leave more enlighten than they arrived" was our motto!! Marj
Weber should receive honorable mention as she was session liaison for 6 sessions . . .
certainly a record!!! But some said this was arranged to make sure she attended the classes,
rather than hanging out on the strip . . . . read on . . . .

So, we were in Vegas; so it is time to digress. Marj Weber, in between liaising, got to
practice her renowned negotiating skills. This skill was put to good use as she entered an
elevator along the strip (Las Vegas Boulevard for the non-Vegas folks reading this) with a
couple "'Vegas show girls" with the feathers flowing and minimal clothing not flowing,
along with an obnoxious 'gent'. He proceeded to negotiate 'terms' with the girls, and Marj
made sure the girls were properly represented with her financial and legal expertise learned
thru CFMA programs over the years! They finally kicked the guy off the elevator. Very good
Marj - hone those CFMA negotiation and extraction skills! Remember, Safety First! Oh, and
speaking of Safety First, during the course of the conference, Michelle Walker was informed
that OSHA was incorporating suicide prevention into their website as a result of her
meeting with Alexander Acosta, Secretary of Labor and the current acting director of
OSHA, during the CIASP strategic planning meeting in April! This will help move this
initiative to a higher, more visible level!

Of course, VOS received a boatload (better than a canoeload) of awards:

- Chairman's excellence award for a chapter with more than 125 members
- ICCIFP Leadership Award - Marj Weber - for her incredible service and leadership to
  the ICCIFP
- Danny Parish Leadership Award - David James --- OK, yeah, me .... An award for old
dudes
Most Tweeting Award - Dave Miller - how many tweets does it take to go into tweet overload? No, clue here . . . as this reporter does not tweet . . . but I heard Dave exceed Trump's record; YES!

Tuesday evening brought the Closing Night Party. Great band; tho way too loud (this is traditional); best time to talk without screaming is when they are on break! But when not on break, you can bet you'll find Carol Hagen out there cutting up the dance floor. Great moves, Carol! I also have it on good source that Marj Weber's salsa dance instructor from last year's conference in Miami followed her to Vegas and showed up at the party . . . . do I hear "stalker" among us?

But the highlight had to be the appearance of Elvis and Marilyn! To see them alive and in the flesh was truly a moving experience. Yeah, I found myself moving away from Elvis (a 150 lb Elvis was a bit creepy), and moving toward Marilyn for obvious reasons. Some of the seating was stadium style, which made for a rather unique "overview" of the band, dance floor and festivities below. The challenge was trying to hold your plate of food in your lap and eat!
Wednesday began the wind down, everyone knowing we were soon to depart the hallowed halls of the Cosmo . . . wiser for the experience; exhausted from the experience; sad to leave so many peers who we likely will not see for another year. But fear not and hold back those tears, because traditionally the last session is special and leaves everyone educated and entertained . . . yes, Anirban Basu provided his annual economic update; so informative and entertaining, that you cannot help but leave smiling. One caution, however, was that although he suggested continued strong construction activity thru 2019 and into 2020, watch for a slowdown later next year.

And speaking of next year, mark your calendars for May 30 - June 3 in Washington DC for the 2020 Annual Conference. Join in on the educational experience of a lifetime as you network with peers, join up with those CFMA friends from across the country, attend great educational offerings, and elevate your professional career. It don’t get much better than that . . . . . unless, of course, Marilyn happens to show up!
CFMA VoS Chapter of The Year!!

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