

CHAPTER NETWORK

Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter Takes Top Honors

With a touch of pomp and circumstance, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter became APA's 2001 Chapter of the Year at the 19th Annual Congress. The lively presentation took place center stage in the expansive Congress Exhibit Hall with APA's Executive Director Dan Maddux on hand to make the presentation. This is the second year in a row that the SEPA Chapter has taken the top honor and their third consecutive first place in the Chapter Pictorial Contest. The chapter, led by Connie Connor, CPP, has been one of APA's shining stars for quite some time, consistently distinguishing itself not only in the Chapter of the Year Contest, but in National Payroll Week activities as well.

The Chapter of the Year Contest

What makes the Chapter of the Year competition so important? There are a number of elements that make the contest a vital part of the APA calendar and that of the local chapters. Participating in the contest allows chapters to focus on their accomplishments and their direction for the future. Forming a committee to tackle the questionnaire is also an excellent way to build teamwork and chapter pride. Using the information gleaned from the questionnaires, APA can develop programs to effectively address each chapter's needs. Plus, APA enjoys honoring and celebrating with chapter members during Congress.

The Questionnaire

The Chapter of the Year questionnaire is designed to help the Chapter Recognition Committee judge each chapter's contributions to its membership and National APA. Questions have been refined to neutralize any advantages that a large chapter may have over smaller ones. Most importantly, quality has been identified as the key component of an excellent chapter—not quantity—and while there are some sections of the questionnaire that refer to membership size, the answers to those questions are used for statistical information and are not awarded points.

Chapters that approach the questionnaire as a way to creatively relay their positive attributes are the most successful. Care must be taken to ensure that a balanced amount of information is provided. For instance, some chapters may not provide enough information for a judge to clearly visualize the effectiveness of a program. Others unintentionally overload the judges with minute details, which may cloud the intent or success of a program. The best way to ensure that an entry strikes the perfect balance is to form a committee to complete the questionnaire. In the case of SEPA, 15 chapter members worked on the entry.

Successful chapters are not created by one individual; instead, chapters find success by drawing on the talent and energy of a number of members. Therefore, a successful entry must include the views of more than one member regardless of how motivated or responsible that individual may be.

What Made SEPA Number One in 2001

Forming a chapter that wins Chapter of the Year two years in a row is not something that happens overnight. Success begins with the basics, which is where SEPA began 15 years ago. First, they identified their objective, which, Connie says, “Is to educate payroll professionals and spread the word about APA. This is easily achieved by holding chapter meetings, study groups, statewide conferences, and letting the community know you exist.”

Then they created a meeting calendar that focused on topics of importance to their members, such as Preventing Check Fraud, Promoting Direct Deposit, Payroll Question and Answer Forum, and Taxable Fringe Benefits. Over the years, their basic mission statement and formula have attracted more than 300 active members, and over 50% of the membership routinely attends the periodic meetings. Further, the chapter maintains an informative and entertaining Web site and a comprehensive newsletter.

Many individuals enjoy helping out in their community, and doing it with a group of fellow professionals can make it an even more positive experience. The SEPA Chapter is dedicated to community outreach through its contributions to Habitat for Humanity, the Adopt-a-Highway program, clothing and food drives, the Philly AIDS Walk, and the Marine Corps’ Toys for Tots program.

If you’re working hard, it makes sense to take time out occasionally to unwind. To do that, SEPA organizes social events such as trips to New York City to catch a Broadway show or even a dinner cruise. The chapter tries to have at least one of these functions each year where most of the costs are covered by the chapter.

Recognition of excellence is important whether you’re talking about employees or volunteers. In that respect, the SEPA Chapter makes it a priority to recognize members for a job well done. Member achievements are highlighted in the chapter’s newsletter, and the chapter presents each new CPP with a sterling silver CPP pin. Members who provide educational assistance as facilitators for the Payroll Professional Learning Series or the chapter study group are presented a citation of merit at chapter meetings.

On September 22, 2000, the SEPA Chapter hosted the Annual Pennsylvania Statewide Conference with the theme “Payroll at the Speed of Light.” Over 170 attendees were “teleported” from the far reaches of the state to catch the latest on payroll legislation and best practices. Also on hand were 21 vendors who showed off some of the latest in payroll industry technology. The conference was a huge success and set a standard for the optimal combination of education and entertainment.

Paytech July/August 2001

Copyright 2001 American Payroll Association

Fileja0115.pdf

The SEPA Chapter also actively supported the Payroll Professional Learning Series in its area. In 2000 the chapter assisted the Montgomery County Community College in promoting and facilitating each of the series' three phases.

Another high point for the SEPA Chapter was the NPW celebration it held in conjunction with the statewide meeting. And to publicize NPW further, two chapter members were featured on radio talk shows where NPW and the payroll profession were discussed, along with an NPW message that ran on the Philadelphia Electric Company building's electronic billboard.

The SEPA Chapter was successful in obtaining Local Payroll Week Proclamations from six states, two cities, two counties, and one township. To focus on community outreach, the chapter worked with Habitat for Humanity and spoke to high school students in Delaware and Montgomery counties about their paychecks and child labor laws. They also presented the local welfare office with clothing donated by chapter members to be used by welfare recipients returning to the workforce. And, as if they were not already busy enough, members visited an assisted living complex to bring some cheer to the elderly residents.

Striving for Excellence

A simple list cannot convey the scope of the SEPA Chapter's accomplishments. Members clearly spent a great deal of time on their entry to make sure that their answers were complete and concise. It is also obvious that they believe membership in the National APA and the local chapter is an investment in one's profession. After seeing members of the SEPA Chapter interact as a group during Congress, it is clear why they were selected as Chapter of the Year.