

FALL FORUM REPORT
Chapter 67 – Orange County
September 24, 2009

Strengths of our Chapter:

The Chapter's commitment to providing educational and networking opportunities through its monthly luncheons remains very strong. By providing interesting and industry-relevant speakers/topics, combined with opportunities to earn MCLE, SR/WA recertification, and/or other credits whenever possible, luncheon attendance has been strong (by the modest standards of our Chapter, of course).

After a long vacancy, the Chapter has finally found three members willing to tackle the position of Education Chair on a committee basis. I am hopeful that, by having the responsibilities shared by three people, we can lessen the individual workload and lengthen the duration of their participation. Moreover, barring a mass resignation, the presence of three co-chairs should help us avoid repeating the ordeal of having no Chair and being unable to host any courses for two years. We have scheduled our first two courses in December 2009.

Weaknesses of our Chapter:

Likely due to the absence of any large public works projects within Orange County, the Chapter has experienced little growth over the past several years, and membership participation has been predominantly by a core group of individuals who attend the luncheons on a consistent basis. More recently, we have experienced a decline in participation/attendance from that core group, as well. Due to the economic downturn, employees of one of our more consistent agency participants, the County of Orange, are no longer reimbursed for their attendance at the monthly luncheons; as a result, few County employees attend. Also, some of our more consistent (and opportunistic) private industry/consultant members have moved on and now frequent the luncheons of our more prosperous neighbors, Chapters 1 and 57, instead. (Considering our current financial situation, however, perhaps the reduction in monthly attendance can be seen as a net benefit to the Chapter; as we take a loss on every lunch served, the fewer members who attend the luncheons, the less money that the Chapter loses.)

The Chapter has implemented a number of programs in an effort to gin up attendance and participation by public agency employees, including offering free or discounted lunches, coordinating topical luncheon speakers to appeal to those members' specific interests, and implementing a very proactive marketing approach by our current Public Liaison Chair. With the exception of the free lunch, however, I have not seen any positive impact upon agency participation at the luncheons.

With the new year upon us, barring a change of the by-laws to continue Board elections until June 2010, we now find ourselves in the position of having to conscript participants for next year's Board. It took some arm-twisting to put together our current Board last year, and I am hopeful that many of them will stay on for another year of service in the same or a similar capacity, but other positions and new vacancies will remain difficult to fill. Many of our members currently serve on the board(s) of one or more other chapters and/or other professional organizations, or already have served in some capacity for Chapter 67 in the past, and are unable to commit time and resources to the Chapter. Also, the tighter economy has impacted members' ability and/or willingness to devote additional time away from work. As a result, many of our current Board members hold multiple chairs and/or have held one or more of their positions for multiple terms.

Goals of Our Chapter for the Coming Year:

After a long vacancy, the Chapter finally found three members willing to tackle the position of Education Chair on a committee basis. We are scheduling our first two courses in a couple of years to run on consecutive days in December 2009. Next year, our goal is to hold at least one course every other month.

Last Spring, the Chapter held its first half-day seminar in several years. The seminar was a tremendous success, both in terms of participant satisfaction and in terms of actually earning the chapter a small profit. Considering that the Chapter has not held a class in some time and takes a loss on every lunch served at the monthly luncheons, the small infusion of cash was much needed. We hope to host at least one half-day seminar next year, around April/May.

We have talked in the past about planning some sort of social event for the Chapter but, to date, have never gone so far as to gauge member interest in such a venture. Perhaps the Board will revisit this goal in the coming year.

New Ideas, Successes, Recommendations to Share with Other Chapters:

None at this time.

Our Chapter Needs Assistance With...

We are surrounded by thriving chapters that offer numerous education courses on a monthly basis. Finding openings to begin scheduling classes that will attract sufficient interest to fill a classroom, and that were not recently held and/or are not scheduled to be held in the very near future by one of those three chapters, has proven very difficult. Moreover, the three-year plan put forth by our prior Education Chair is out-of-date (and was substantially worthless to begin with). We may need the assistance and/or cooperation of the local Chapters (Los Angeles, Inland Empire, and San Diego) in allowing us to schedule core courses that will help get our education program back off the ground.