

# NASCOE National Convention Report

July 31<sup>st</sup> – Aug. 3, 2019

## Manhattan, Kansas

Having attended the last four NASCOE conventions and two from years ago, one could almost say I have gotten the “bug” to attend. So, this year, making plans to attend the convention in Manhattan, KS was becoming habit. But about a week before the convention, it took on a whole new meaning for me as I was asked to be a delegate to represent the great state of Wisconsin. Unfortunately, the other delegate I replaced had some health issues and was unable to attend. Attending the national convention as a “delegate” was a “first” for me. I was excited to represent Wisconsin and our WASCOE Association.

I arrived in Manhattan on Tuesday evening, via means of Topeka and Wamego, KS. Now, almost everyone has heard of Topeka, but if you ever get out close to that area of Kansas, I would encourage you to get off the beaten path and wonder down Hwy. 99 or 24 to the little town of Wamego, population 800. There is an Oz Museum that is incredible and not to be missed! You can learn all you wanted to know about the movie, the Wizard of Oz, the author, the characters and how the movie was made. Down the road from the museum is the Oz Winery, and if you follow the “yellow brick path”, it will lead you to a little restaurant called Friendship House. It serves breakfast and lunch and has a great little bakery case that sold some very tasty cookies. While visiting with the owner, he told the story of Wamego and the history of it. In my mind, it was a little bit of Americana at its finest!

On Wednesday, I participated in the historical tour of Abilene KS. Our first stop was at the Seelye Mansion. This was a 25-room mansion built in 1905 at a cost of \$55,000 by Mr. Seelye, who declared himself to be a “Doctor”, but really was a patent medicine entrepreneur. At one time, Mr. Seelye had over 500 salesmen selling his “lotions, potions, and cure-alls” by horse and buggies. The 11,000 square foot house with 11 bedrooms, third floor ballroom, and basement antique bowling alley, and had Thomas Edison designed chandeliers and lights. The majority of the homes furnishings came from the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis. The thing I will remember and treasure the most was being able to bowl on the wooden bowling alley with the 4-inch wooden walnut balls. My first attempt was a spare, but my second try “tipped up” the “5” pin. You’ll have to ask me to explain it in more detail, but very fascinating to say the least.

In the afternoon, we visited the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum. This tour started with a short video on his life. The tour continued with the boyhood home of President Eisenhower, the newly renovated museum, the presidential library, and ended with a visit to the chapel where Dwight and Mamie Eisenhower are laid to rest. I have to say, I have a much greater appreciation of this President and his family now.

On Wednesday evening, we had a delegates meeting outlining the general rules of order for the next two and a half days meetings.

On Thursday morning the 60<sup>th</sup> NASCOE Convention was called to order and roll call of attendees was taken. The Great State of Wisconsin had 8 in attendance. There was a total of 385.5 total attendance with 99 being from Kansas. The Kansas SED and KASCOE members welcomed us with a rendition of, “So God Made a County Office Employee”. There were other SED’s from the around the nation in attendance showing their support for our employee association.

As delegates from WI, Marilyn Lentz and myself represented WASCOE members at this convention. Marilyn did a great job writing up the general meeting information that we both attended, so I have cut out most of my report and will just fill in the break-out sessions that I attended.

On Thursday afternoon, I attended the Awards and Scholarship Breakout Meeting. National Committee Chair, Julie Goetzman lead this meeting and invited open discussion. She stressed the need for home e-mails on all scholarship applications and award nominations. This past year, especially with the furlough, it was impossible to reach several scholarship application candidates as they had listed either their parent or guardians e-mail with the work e-mail. This also reinforced the need for individual states and NASCOE to have an up-to-date data base for members to stay connected. The overall number of scholarships had increased, but the number of award nominations had declined. Work is being done to update and simplify the application process for both scholarships and awards. Ms. Goetzman was hopeful the new forms would be ready to use after the 1<sup>st</sup> of October. There will also be a limitation of 500 words for the DSA awards implemented as part of the revised application.

The Midwest Area break-out session was very well attended and conducted by Jackson Jones and Mary Roberts. A review of the years events was reported and introduction of the MWA Chairs. Several of the Chairs reported on their activities, while the rest concluded during the Friday breakout session.

Friday afternoon, I also attended a Workshop, "The New Changes Coming to TSP" and found it very interesting. It was presented by an employee of TSP. She informed us of the new withdrawal options and other changes coming. Another interesting point discussed was the requirement by each state to hold retirement training for ALL employees. Some states have yearly training, some have bi-yearly training, but many states have training only when mandated by the national office. This is very unfortunate as many felt very ill-informed of their retirements options until they were already "knocking on that door".

As delegates, both Marilyn and I represented WASCOE during the voting for the newly elected officers and for the proposed by-law changes during the Saturday morning session of the convention.

I enjoyed attending the NASCOE National Convention as it was an opportunity to connect with other fellow FSA workers that I have met over the years from other states. It is also heartwarming yet overwhelming at the same time to know the hours of work that are being done, mostly behind-the-scenes, for us as employees by our Association. Many of the benefits we have today came from many hours of our Associations' leadership and dedication to make this a better place to work. They have been, and continue to be, the advocates for us and carry our voices to Washington as employees on the front lines getting the job done. There were also members of the RACSOE (National Association of Retired ASCS/FSA Office Employees) and NAFEC (National Association of Farmer Elected Committees) attending the NASCOE Convention. These individuals also provide countless hours of leadership to promote and improve the COC system and help our rural communities become better places for all of us.

I would like to encourage all county office employees to become involved in this organization to help provide leadership so our benefits stay as strong as they are now and we continue to be the "Can do Agency".

Next year the NASCOE Convention will be in Savannah GA and the theme is, "Boot on the Beach" .... sounds like a good time to me!

Respectfully submitted,  
Teresa R. Zimmer  
2019 WI Delegate

## NASCOE National Convention Report

### July 31<sup>st</sup> - August 3, 2019, Manhattan. KS

After over 20 years working for FSA, I seriously considered attending a NASCOE convention. (Actually, I had considered it when it was held in WI in 2014, but I chose to take a trip to Germany instead!) When another delegate was unable to go, that was just the nudge I needed to finally make the commitment! I decided to go all-in, and experience everything that was offered.

Unfortunately, hubby & I were not able to take in any of the tours offered because we had a last-minute flight change & would not arrive until they were all out. I heard they were all good though. We wandered around a shopping district a few blocks away, and ate the best macaroni & cheese I have ever tasted at one of Manhattan's fine local establishments. Later that evening I attended a delegates meeting, where parliamentarian Brandon Wilson explained the general rules of order for the business meetings.

Thursday morning the meetings began, with 385.5 in attendance, 99 from Kansas. After the official welcome from KASCOE, Kansas SED David Schramm read "So God Made A County Office Employee" – with apologies to Paul Harvey. KASCOE has a video of it on their Facebook page. It was encouraging to see several SEDs in attendance, supporting those on the front lines of program service.

The agenda was rearranged a bit, due to travel issues for some of the folks coming in from WDC. Steve Peterson, from the administrator's office, reported that the Business Center was adjusting to their revised duties. The all-new budget people reassessed things in June, and adjusted travel & temp money. DMC enrollment was at 53%; 40,000 MFP applications had already been taken, & they were expecting a total of about 750,000 at an expected rate of 100 applications per hour! ARC/PLC sign-up is scheduled to begin September 1<sup>st</sup>, and a general CRP sign-up should start December 1<sup>st</sup>.

Peggy Browne from DAFO reported that they are revamping the COT program to be similar to the FLP FLOTrax, as well as hiring COTs for specific locations with openings. They are maintaining the role of the county committee, and will be providing workload analytics for CEDs. The IT Steering Committee will be reconvening, and they are looking at additional ways to automate some manual processes. Other things they are working on are updating performance standards, PT advancement, a shared management task force, and being able to hire temps within one week.

Brad Karmen of DAFP gave some numbers on what has been accomplished with the new farm bill so far. The process of developing & implementing a new farm bill is a lengthy one, with many meetings among all offices involved.

Darren Ash from IT reported that they are purchasing new computers beginning late fall, and are making progress on the backlog of computer access authorizations and bandwidth issues. The goal is to be able to be pro-active, and see/fix IT problems before they start.

I was impressed with the Q&A session, where anyone could ask any of the WDC folks a question. Everyone on both sides was respectful, and one gentleman stood up to say that he would not be asking the question he had been asking for years, and he was grateful that it had finally been resolved.

Darren Ash & Brad Karmen were also in the Programs breakout session I attended that afternoon, so we could ask further questions. Mr. Ash said they are trying to eliminate having to do something in one

program, then having to “swivel chair” to another program. They are also trying to eliminate the need to print forms. Dairy Production software should be available in August. There should be a back-up system installed so that the phones still work if the network is down. Mr. Karmen promoted the PT Fellows program, saying it was educational for PTs as well as the WDC personnel they worked with. They are hoping to have a “point & click” crop reporting system by the fall of 2020. He asked for feedback on the recent national MFP training, and the consensus was that the *method* was good, but the *content* needed some work. He also stressed that WDC needs to know about any issues we have with programs. We should contact our area program chairs, or submit via the form on the NASCOE website, but should always try to keep the tone positive, and offer suggestions for improvement, for best results.

Thursday night was “Denim Night,” with a delicious buffet supper, followed by three hilarious rounds of “FSA Family Feud.” Some folks assumed new identities, and even some of the WDC folks were involved. It was great to see some of them relaxed, drinking a beer, acting a little bit crazy, just like the rest of us!

Friday morning reconvened with Indiana putting in their bid for the 2021 convention, and announcements of candidates for the national officers. John Lohr of Dillard Financial Solutions gave a presentation on what they have available, as well as their new partnership with American Equity Insurance. Representatives of NACS, NADD, & NASE encouraged associate memberships with their groups, since we are all working together for the same things.

In the Programs break-out, Chris Hare stressed the importance of submitting program suggestions, and gave a brief demonstration of the submission form on the NASCOE website. Only the folks on the Programs committee see who submitted, and all suggestions that make it to WDC are anonymous, so nobody should be afraid to use it. Mr. Hare also said that not only are operator change letters required, but *owner* change letters are on the horizon too. He attempted to show some of the reports available in DataMarts that can help us in our duties, but the program didn’t work very well on the convention center’s Wi-Fi.

Teresa Holmquist, national publicity chair, stepped into the Midwest Area session, to let everyone know that any videos of the Q&A session, or the previous night’s festivities featuring WDC personnel should be taken off social media. We need to be careful to NOT ruin any of the relationships with WDC, because once those lines of communication are gone, they will be very hard to open up again. That goes not only for NASCOE as an organization, but also for us as individual FSA employees.

MWA reports included: On-line emblem sales are up, and there are some changes to TSP; they are trying to catch up on awards for members with milestone anniversaries; program submissions can be done at work; they will be re-vamping 848 forms for CRP, & each state is required to offer retirement training. Jackson Jones & Mary Roberts were re-elected as MWA executive & alternate, respectively.

Retirement training sessions were offered by Dillard’s, as well as other workshops on How the COC Protects You, the evolution of NASCOE, Growing Your Connection Tree, Starting Your TSP Right, & the PT Leadership/ Mentors/ Fellows programs.

After a Kansas barbecue buffet supper at the convention center, most folks went over to the nearby Flint Hills Discovery Center. People could view the exhibits there, shop at a number of local vendor booths, socialize on the rooftop patio, or dance to the DJ music.

Saturday morning's business meeting began with a moving tribute to NASCOE members who have passed on in the previous year. President Dennis Ray spoke about perseverance – we may not get everything we want right away, but eventually WDC sees how important our requests may be. Treasurer Curt Houk reminded all states to file taxes to maintain non-profit status. Secretary Marcinda Hester informed us that the theme for the 2020 convention in Savannah, GA will be “Boots on the Beach”, as voted on by all in attendance. The assorted program chairs and area executives each gave their reports.

The proposed by-law change to suspend any state who doesn't file their taxes was approved. Standard resolutions of appreciation & support were read & approved. Newly-elected officers include Brandon Wilson, president; Marcinda Kester, vice-president; Richard Csutoras, secretary; and Curt Houk, treasurer.

Saturday evening was “Diamond Night” and everyone dressed their best for the formal banquet & awards dinner, before a final night of socializing & dancing. Teresa Holmquist was one of those honored, for her tireless work of keeping us informed during our furlough. And not only NASCOE members – website analytics showed that there were WAY more unique visitors than members, which means that people from other agencies were getting information from our website!!!

Hunter Moorhead, NASCOE Legislative Consultant, also spoke on Friday about the crossroads we seem to be at. It is up to US to keep NASCOE strong, to increase our membership, to hold the lines of communication open with WDC. He encouraged each of us to bring a friend into the association, and to the next convention.

Finally, I have to tell you about another highlight of our trip - As faithful Packer fans, hubby & I just HAD to visit Nelson's Landing restaurant in nearby Leonardville, KS, which is owned by Jordy Nelson's mom. We knew we were in the right place when we saw all the memorabilia in a showcase & on the walls. As we were eating the biggest, best chicken-fried steak we had ever had, a man & his young son came in the back door & sat at the table next to us – *Jordy himself!!!* He was gracious enough to sign hubby's #87 jersey (which he had brought along just in case...) and let us take a photo, even though he was grubby from doing some work on the family farm. And he told us he would be in Green Bay the following Tuesday, to officially retire as a Green Bay Packer. Totally worth the trip!!!



Respectfully submitted,  
Marilyn Hintz Lentz, KeyPT, Manitowoc