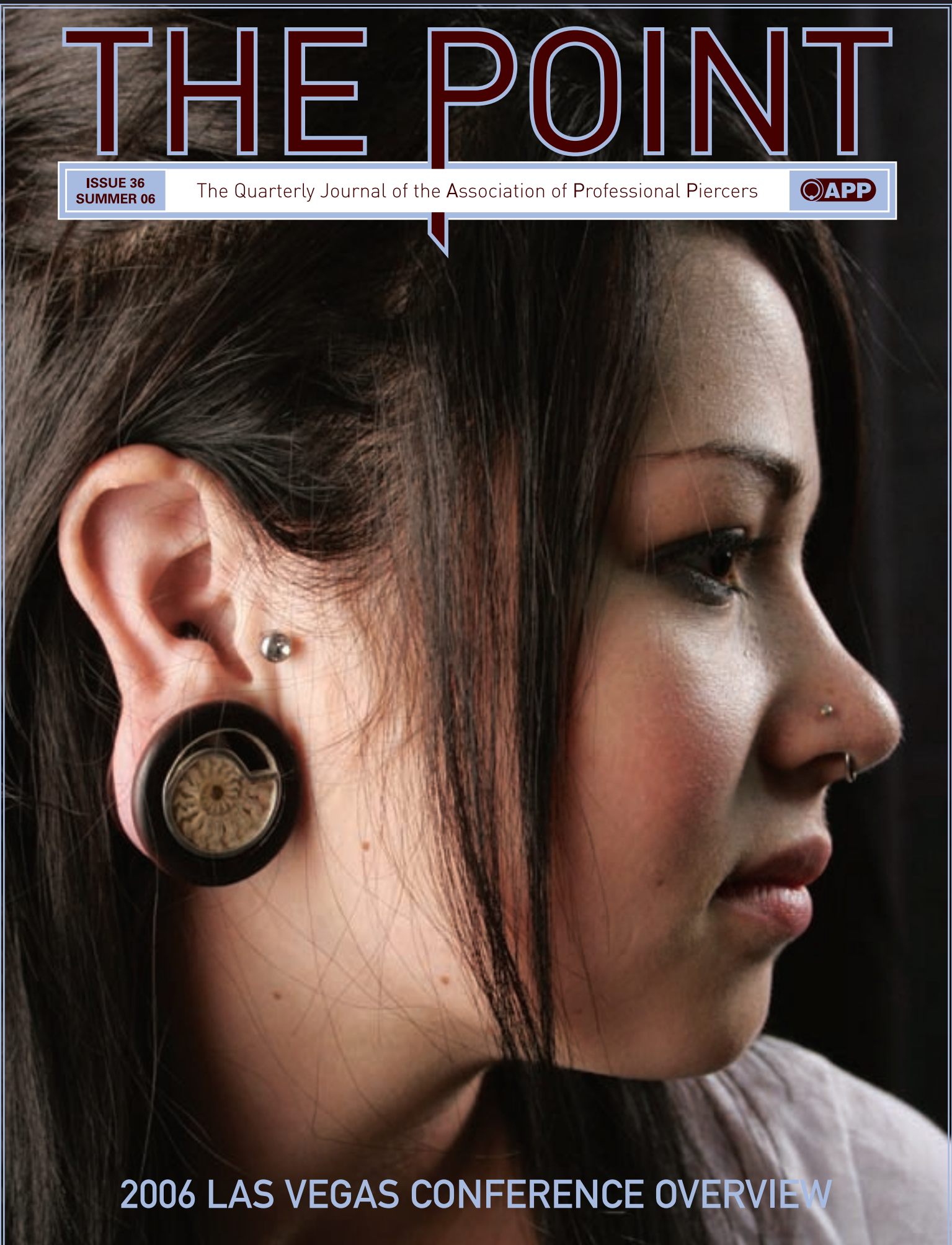


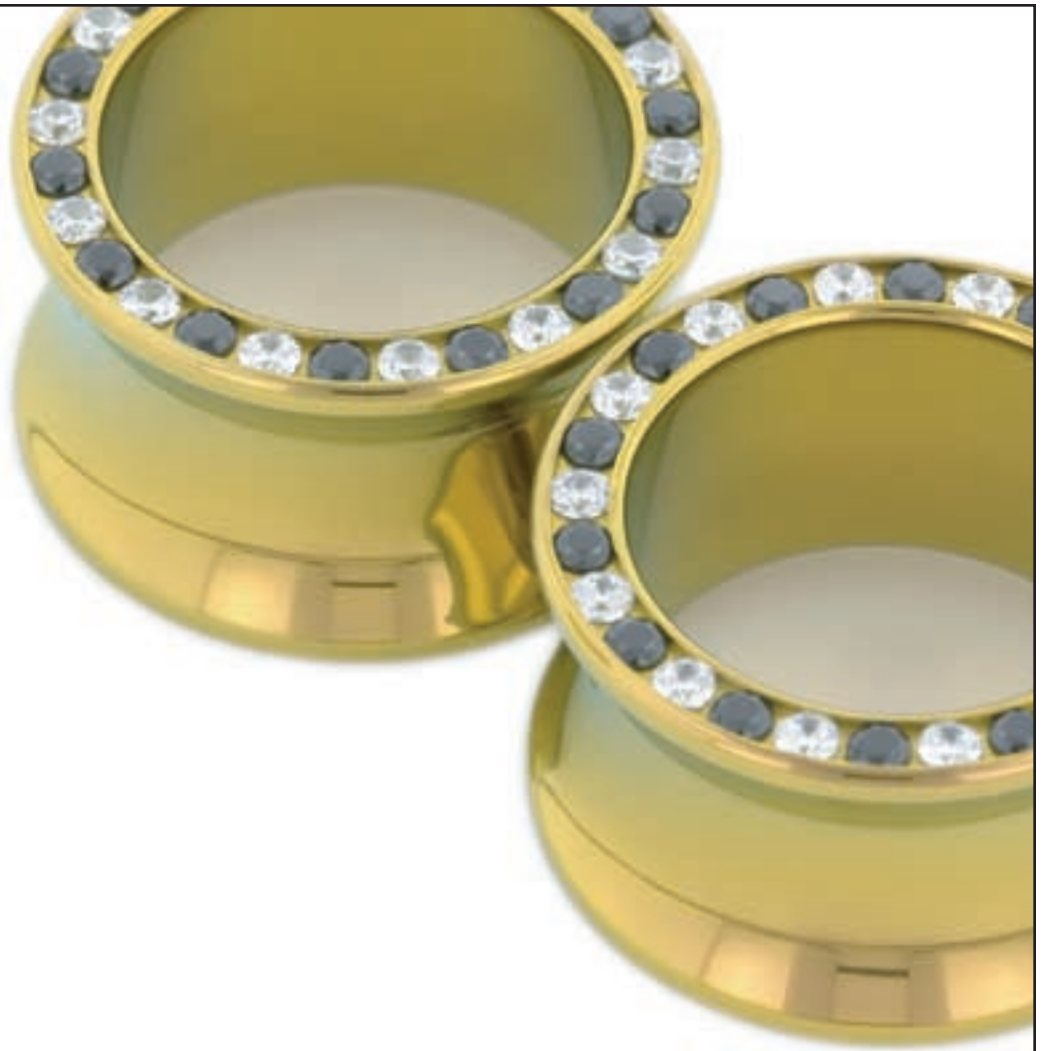
THE POINT

ISSUE 36
SUMMER 06

The Quarterly Journal of the Association of Professional Piercers



2006 LAS VEGAS CONFERENCE OVERVIEW



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FROM THE EDITOR



James Weber
Medical Liaison

Welcome to issue #36 of *The Point*. As the first issue after our 2006 annual Conference in Las Vegas, the majority of the content is devoted to that event, the largest of the year for us as an organization.

The APP Conference has something for everyone: a plethora of classes, from technique, marketing, and legislation, to round tables on suspension and piercing ethics. The Expo floor contains the best in body jewelry and related products that the industry has to offer. There are social events: the Pajama Party, the opening party Carnival, and the formal dinner.

Conference draws all kinds of people, at all stages of their careers and levels of community and industry involvement. Some attendees are very serious about the classes, waiting outside the rooms before classes start, furiously scribbling notes in the first row of the lectures, or so undecided about which class is most important that they leave a tape recorder or video camera in one class while attending another.

Then there are those that attend Conference every year but never make it to a single class, those that come to Conference simply to socialize and party. They come to hang out with friends and peers that they haven't seen since the year before, and to catch up on all the gossip of the industry, maybe contribute some of their own. They hang out downstairs at the Splash bar until all hours of the morning, and spend class time sleeping off the previous night's activities. This year, ever on the lookout for *more* fun, many rented electric scooters and sped around the Casino and the Expo floor (if you were there, then you know what I'm talking about...).

Some of the folks who attend classes religiously to improve their skills and knowledge feel insulted by those that don't seem to take Conference seriously, but come for the big party. Some of the Splash bar regulars wish the others would remember they're in Vegas. While this may be a valid gripe, I think it ignores the bigger point: *all those people still attend Conference*. In an industry that almost exclusively employs people from the cultural, social, and political fringe, to create an event that is attended by such a broad spectrum of people in our industry is truly amazing. So while the "students" complain that the "partiers" need to take Conference more seriously, and the "partiers" think that the "students" need to lighten up a bit, the important thing is that, no matter what the motivation is for attending, that everyone is, in the end, still attending.

Most of the long-term Conference attendees fall somewhere between these two extremes, with some years of more strident class attendance, and others of more dedicated networking. These are all important opportunities offered by the mere fact of so many of us being in one place at one time. I think we need to acknowledge the ability of this event to bring together such diverse parts of our industry. That is one of the largest successes of Conference.

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THE POINT

The Quarterly Journal of the
Association of Professional Piercers

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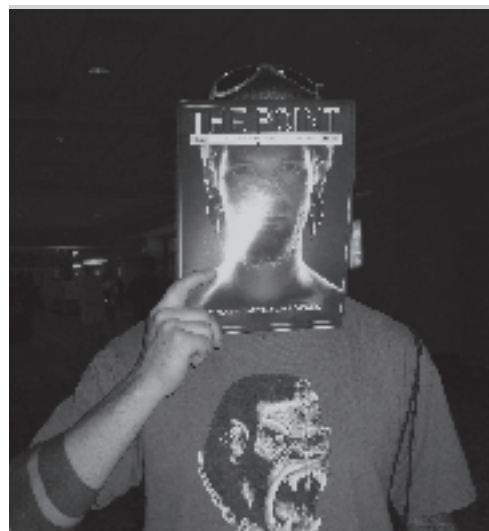
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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

EMAIL, ONLINE FORUMS AND GENERAL COMPUTER MADNESS



Alicia Cardenas
APP President

*“The Internet is so big, so powerful and pointless that for some people it is a complete substitute for life.” — **unknown journalist***

*“Human beings are human beings. They say what they want, don’t they? They used to say it across the fence while they were hanging wash. Now they just say it on the Internet.” — **Dennis Miller***

For many of us, the Internet is a valuable forum for professional networking, one of the most valuable tools available to help us conduct our businesses. It has evolved as not only a great finder of resources, but as way to spend leisure time (and work time) connecting with others both in and outside of the industry. But in the last five years, as it has become a mainstay for many businesses, it has also come to dominate many individuals’ personal lives. This creates a problem: When conducting either business or personal relationships online, emotions frequently flow unchecked by normal social limits; damaging comments can easily be sent around the world at the click of a button. As a result, what should be a constructive tool becomes a destructive force, wreaking unintended havoc on relationships, businesses and communities.

As in other professions, more than one piercing shop owner has already tried to minimize fallout by instituting “responsible posting guidelines” for employees, including barring piercers from participating in industry forums while under the influence or in a salty mood. Many shops designate which employees can – and can’t – answer shop email. Even among qualified piercers, savvy owners know that some personalities come off well online; some do not. That fact can make a difference in whether emailing customers become clients of yours – or your competition’s. But what about outside of work?

A few members of our community seem completely swallowed up by their online personalities. We sometimes poke fun at people in our industry for their shameless self-promotion, but for some it is the key to their success. For the efforts put forward by those few, I salute them; this is not the issue I speak of.

The problem I see arises when people utilize the Internet for all of their interactions with others, and gauge their understanding of another person on what is in his/her online blog, rather than on direct human interaction. Many relationships are conducted almost 100% online, leading to some serious misunderstandings that can ultimately be the death of friendships (*or end up in disastrous marriages – ed*). Since the APP Board of Directors and I have fallen prey to this type of problem, I would like to take this opportunity to address it. Historically, our community

has been heavily and intimately impacted by Internet groups, such as BME, rec.arts.bodyart, Tribalectic and others. We have largely embraced these as a way of communicating, advertising, learning, and connecting with each other, even if we’re geographically isolated. But this dependence also makes us very vulnerable to the dangers of the medium – emotional, misspoken or dishonest words spread and sometimes twisted in a heartbeat to damage the painstakingly built reputations and connections we’re lucky to have made.

As important as our MySpace “friends” may be, there is a very real difference between the written and the spoken word. On the phone or in person, tone of voice, facial expression and other cues reveal a joke when words do not, and questionable comments can be addressed right away. The same comments written in an email can easily send that dialog in a completely unintended direction. Like most of you, I have both written and received emails and online jokes whose intentions were misunderstood. There is a distance and coldness when something is written that can leave the recipient feeling confused and frustrated, trying to figure out what was *really* intended by a few hastily typed phrases. People have different ideas of what is amusing, and have comfort levels with certain topics that others don’t.

In my opinion, there is nothing more important than direct human interaction. Online you can write whatever you want without seeing or caring how that may affect the other person, or really thinking about whether it was the best way to get your point across. Often what you might view as a joke can truly offend another; do it online and you would never know that you hurt them. It’s like road rage; people use the safety of their car to yell and scream whatever they want at someone else, but when forced to stop, get out of their cars and approach one another, the scenario quickly changes. That faceless object they were screaming at becomes a person with a life, a story, a personality.

The true challenge will always be – and has always been – telling someone what you think face-to-face. It goes back to mom’s old adage: If you have something to say to someone, say it to their face – and not behind their back or to their email address.

The Internet provides instant gratification. It allows messages to be written and sent instantly, often while the corresponding emotions are still being experienced, and before they can be sorted out and dealt with rationally. Perhaps time should be allowed for things to settle down, until a more clear-minded and well-thought-out message can be composed.

ACHA CONFERENCE 2006



James Weber
Medical Liaison

Miscommunications and misunderstandings -- or a general inability to gauge the seriousness or lack of in an email -- can develop into real anger and frustration. Below are a few ways to keep these types of things from happening. These are just ideas I use myself, because I am very often guilty of quick emotional responses.

1. When someone has written something that upsets you, read it more than once (slowly) to try and gauge the intent or tone of the message. I often leave it and wait to respond after opening it a day later. Ask a friend to read it and see what they think it means.
2. Write a response in a text file instead of an email format. This gives you time to construct a reasoned response instead of an impulsive one. Again, have a friend read it.
3. Write a reply asking for clarification.
4. MAKE A PHONE CALL. It is *not* that expensive, and it can save the day, the issue, the relationship, your face.
5. For many people BOLD letters means you are yelling at them. Changing the color or font can also make certain insinuations. Use it only if you mean it.
6. Jokes can be coupled up with a LOL (Laugh Out Loud!) (*or other obvious tags: tee hee, snort, chuckle, or the ever-catchy 'snark.'* -- ed.) to make sure your intended humor is not lost in transit.
7. Whatever your first reaction would be otherwise, Stop. Take a breath. Give the other person the benefit of the doubt and consider what else they could have meant before assuming the worst. A grain of salt. First. Every time.

All the different ways things can go awry in an email can be easily cured with a little common sense. I encourage people to take a break from their computer lives and set aside a night to make some phone calls. The community we all have built over the past twenty-odd years is too important to gamble on thoughtless computer chatting. Our industry needs all the solidarity we can get, and that is built on consideration and communication -- both of which happen best between two *real* people.

Although the list of Internet friendships I have made is large, I still think the true test of a friendship is your ability to bring it to a human level, to just have a real live conversation. Let's not let technology kill our friendships or our community. Instead, let it help spread the love. LOL.

On May 31st through June 2nd, the APP manned a booth at the annual ACHA conference, held this year in Times Square in New York City.

Originally it was to be Luis Garcia (International Liaison) accompanying me to New York, but sudden illness on his part meant that I had the opportunity to bring Jen, one of the piercers at my shop, along for the ride. While she doesn't often do this sort of outreach, Jen is no stranger to the APP mission. Until recently, she was an employee of Elayne Angel at Rings of Desire in New Orleans, and saw everything Elayne did in her position as the previous Medical Coordinator. Elayne manned the booth at last year's ACHA conference (The Point #33).

While a lot smaller than the American Public Health Association (APHA) conference (article in last issue), this conference was attended almost exclusively by university nurses and nursing staff, college health administrators and directors, and anyone else involved in student health on or off college campuses.

While I was told that we usually received a favorable response at this event, I wasn't prepared for how supportive people were of our presence. Those unfamiliar with the APP were excited to find out about us, as they saw body piercing every day in the student population (usually when there is a problem, unfortunately). Attendees snatched up our promotional material, and vowed to order more.

Those that were already familiar with our organization were no less appreciative. They complimented us on our materials, and we were told again and again how much they referenced them and how often they gave them out to students. It showed that the APP has a large presence on many campuses. The nurses know who we are, the health educators use our materials, and the program directors know where to go to get their piercing questions answered.

The whole event was incredibly encouraging. Our materials were getting out there, and we educated the health care providers that see our customers every day. Coming home, I felt extremely gratified. The only discouraging remark we heard (and Jen and I did hear it a *lot*) was "Where is the lady with the short hair that dresses all in purple? The one that was here last year--she was so wonderful!" It's hard to follow an act like Elayne Angel...

FLORIDA

MOVING FORWARD AT FULL SPEED



Alicia Cardenas
APP President

From May 31 to June 2, I was invited to attend and speak at the Florida Department of Health, Bio-Medical Waste/ Body Piercing Training Conference in Orlando, Florida. This was an incredibly educational experience consisting of three full days of lectures and classes by various officers of the Florida Department of Health. While the information I received was very specific to that area, it gave me an inside look at Departments of Health, their Boards and how they work.

As those of you who have worked on legislation know, most Departments of Health do not have the budget to give body piercing its own section of the health code. In Florida, the people in charge of inspecting the body piercing studios have other sections of community health that they oversee as well, such as bio-terrorism, rabies control, TB programs, STD recording, child care licensing, epidemiology and other non related community concerns. The Florida Department of Health oversees two sections that inspect body piercing studios in Florida: Nursing and Environmental Health.

The first day in Orlando, the training sessions for these two sections were scheduled at the same time. I had to choose one, so I chose to attend the Nursing section. This was a four hour course headed up by Sara Straub, RN MPH, CIC, a public health nurse, whose experience lies mainly in correctional facilities, but who has lectured to nurses several times on body piercing. There were fifty or more nurse inspectors in attendance, at least 75% of whom were new to the body piercing inspections section of their program. Although this was initially a concern for me, it turned out to be a benefit. The newly assigned nurse inspectors had great enthusiasm about being educated and getting the most current and accurate information.

The Statute that was referred to throughout the lecture was Florida Statute 381.0075: Regulations of Body Piercing Salons, and the Florida Administrative Code 64E-19, which consists of the rules and regulations that interpret the statute. Many of the nurse inspectors had a great understanding of the codes and statute, but others misunderstood them and had been educating based off their own interpretation of the codes. There were many times throughout the session when the actual law needed to be pulled out and referred to in order to get the group to agree. This was an effective process that cleared up many misconceptions and inconsistencies amongst the group. On a whole, the class was very similar to a BBP/ Aseptic Technique class offered by the APP, focusing on hand washing and basics of studio practices.

A few things were pointed out in the statute that could be updated

and changed, such as the use of the word “sanitize,” which has virtually been worked out of any medical setting and is used mostly in restaurant scenarios. The following are things specific to Florida that I thought were progressive. The Florida statute does require body piercers to wear sterile gloves for the piercing procedure and work off a sterile field. They also require that the expiration date be listed on the sterile packages, not the date of sterilization – the expiration date must be 30 days after sterilization. They require county-by-county training for body piercers annually, usually offered by the nurse inspector. Each county varies in the quality and time invested into these classes.

There were many times
throughout the session
when the actual law
needed to be pulled out
and referred to in order
to get the group to agree.

There were some aspects of the statute that could use some adjustments. A rather lenient underage law states that those younger than 16 years require a parent present with written consent, but if the child is 16-17 they can utilize a notarized consent form that does not require parents to be present. This has caused problems because some studios have taken it upon themselves to have pre-notarized consent forms on file at the shop.

Also a big topic of concern for the piercing community in Florida is that suspension is completely outlawed unless done with a doctor overseeing and participating in the event. This is an issue that came up several times throughout the week. The problem developed because, when suspension was first brought to the Florida State Department of Health, they knew so little about it that they handed it off to the Medical Board to decide under whose governance it needed to fall. Of course it was deemed to be “practicing medicine” and led to the current legislation. This is a concern because instead of piercers involving doctors, whose collaboration can be hard to attain, it forces the practice of suspension into the underground.

This essentially means no oversight from local health boards, and possible jail time for offenders.

Overall, the class for nurses was a good educational starting point for nurse inspectors before entering a studio for evaluation. It was clear they benefited from having a piercer on hand to offer specific information and address concerns that many of them had. I presented a basic PowerPoint presentation on what the APP is, what we do, and what we require for membership, specifically touching on studio set-up and the Health and Safety Agreement we all sign. I was enthusiastically received with many great questions and comments about the educational seminars the Florida representatives attended in Las Vegas.

My lecture was followed up by a presentation from Environmental Health Specialist David Valleri from Hillsborough County Health Department. He has developed a presentation for middle school nurses to present to their classes about the dangers of getting pierced in a home setting, at piercing parties, or by any other non-professionals such as other students. David produced the



Alicia out with representatives from the Florida State Board of Health.

I was excited to see this type of proactive presentation –

one designed not to scare the kids away from piercing entirely, but to educate them on safe practices and give information on how to get work done professionally.



Alicia Cardenas

presentation with help from a few of his local piercers, so it was filled with many funny photos and commentaries about “non-ideal” scenarios. He then contacted the public school system and asked to have a chance to address the entire school nurse program in order to offer his presentation to them. Many were addressing problems stemming from piercing in their schools and utilized his tool to educate the middle schoolers on the safe practice of piercing. His program was a great success, and I was excited to see this type of proactive presentation -- one designed not to scare the kids away from piercing entirely, but to educate them on safe practices and give information on how to get work done professionally.

Shelly Personette and Brenda Currie from the Pinellas County Health Department introduced work they are doing to establish education for mall kiosks that utilize ear piercing guns. This project was made possible by a grant from Florida Association of Public Health Nurses. The purpose is to decrease the incidence of infections associated with ear piercing -- specifically *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* -- by offering those who own the businesses, their employees and clients, educational resources. With such widely publicized problems as the 2000 outbreak of *Pseudomonas* among piercing gun clients in Oregon, there is a growing concern among health boards that these businesses engage in practices that can increase the clients’ risk of infection. Since ear piercing gun businesses are routinely exempted from health board regulations, they do not receive an independent evaluation of their infection control programs. They also lack standardization of training, so employees are often taught to administer ear piercing either

by another employee or by the ear piercing gun manufacturer’s instructions.

The target audience for this educational information was the shop owners, employees and managers who provide such services throughout Pinellas County, although a portion of the information in the materials was intended for the customers as well. Unfortunately, the presenters got essentially no response from the businesses they contacted about receiving the information. Because Personette and Currie were from the Department of Health, businesses and/or employees may have been intimidated to contact, or even approach them. The educators were thus unable to collect any data or make contacts with business owners interested in utilizing their assembled materials. Not discouraged by the poor response, however, Personette and Currie felt they had made progress and invested their time wisely, and will continue moving forward on the project.

On the final day of the Conference, over 400 licensed body piercing establishments were invited to participate in a discussion amongst the Health Inspectors and local body piercers. Unfortunately, only about 40 of them attended -- four of them were APP members. It was great to see and talk with those in attendance, as they were the cream of the crop of Florida piercers. I gave them a similar presentation about who the APP is, giving special emphasis on the Annual Conference in Las Vegas as an educational opportunity for all piercers, regardless of membership. I cleared up many misconceptions about what the APP requires for membership and answered questions about the Association’s inner workings.

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Afterwards, we opened the floor to the piercers to address specific concerns they had with their current legislation and inspectors. I spent the night prior to the meeting with several local piercers, so I was able to get an idea of some of the subjects they would like to see addressed, such as their criticism of classes they are required to take that they felt are often sub-standard, and regulations against suspensions. These questions lead to some serious communication and understandings by each group. What became clear during the discussion is that the legislation will need to be updated in the near future, and that the piercers in Florida will have to come together and do some foot work to get it started. The small group of piercers in attendance agreed that forming an of alliance, to propose new updated legislation, needed to be on their current agenda.

It was very clear that everyone benefited from the support and knowledge that the APP had to offer the state of Florida. Many great contacts were made, and new members may come out of the week's effort. But more importantly, the piercer and inspectors realized that they were on the same team and working towards the same goals, and they are willing to work together to get the changes needed put in place.

I would like to thank, Edith Coulter and Ed Golding for inviting me to participate, and for taking the time to get to know the APP by attending our conference in 2005. I would again like to thank the inspectors for answering all my questions and being open to my input, and to the piercers who attended and put the effort forward to communicate with their inspectors. And, of course, a special shout out to the APP members who attended and participated.

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In bloodborne pathogen education we focus on all the bloodborne diseases. While we recognize the danger of a needle stick, we often forget that direct contact with certain bacteria can cause the transmission of diseases that are as serious as a hepatic infection. The latest strain that is getting much attention for its effect on the body modification industry, sports teams, and the general public is MRSA. What is it? How is it treated? And how do you stop its spread?

What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. *Staphylococcus aureus* is a type of bacterium commonly found on the skin and/or in the noses of healthy people. Although it is usually harmless at these sites, it may occasionally get into the body and cause infections through breaks in the skin, such as abrasions, cuts, wounds, tattooing, body piercing, or surgical incisions. These infections may be mild, such as pimples or boils, or serious, such as an infection of the blood stream, bones, or joints.

MRSA skin infections can present in a number of forms:

- *Cellulitis* – Inflammation of the skin
- *Impetigo* – Blistered lesions or abraded skin with honey-colored crust
- *Folliculitis* – Infection of the hair follicle (like a pimple)
- *Furunculosis* – Deeper infection below the hair line Carbuncle
 - Multiple adjacent hair follicles and substructures are affected
- *Abscess* – Pus-filled mass below skin structures
- *Infected laceration* – Pre-existing cut that has become infected
- *Severe lung infections*

The treatment of infections due to *Staphylococcus aureus* was revolutionized in the 1940s by the introduction of the antibiotic penicillin. Unfortunately, most strains of *Staphylococcus aureus* are now resistant to penicillin. This is because *Staphylococcus aureus* has learned to make a substance called B-lactamase (pronounced beta-lactamase), that degrades penicillin, destroying its antibacterial activity.

Some related antibiotics, such as methicillin, are not affected by B-lactamase and can still be used to treat many infections due to B-lactamase-producing strains of *Staphylococcus aureus*. Unfortunately, however, certain strains of *Staphylococcus aureus*, known as MRSA, have now also become resistant to treatment with methicillin, thus resulting in Methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*.

Although other types of antibiotics can still be used to treat infections caused by MRSA, these alternative drugs are usually not available in pill form and must be administered instead through a vein.

Who gets MRSA infection?

Skin infections with MRSA are transmitted by close skin-to-skin contact with an infected person or by contact with objects or surfaces contaminated with MRSA. Most often MRSA infections occur in hospital patients; however, reports of MRSA infections acquired outside of a hospital setting (community-acquired) are becoming more common.

As with ordinary strains of *Staphylococcus aureus*, some people harbor MRSA on their skin or in their nose without harm, whereas other people may develop infections.

People with an increased risk of developing infection include those with breaks in their skin due to abrasions, cuts, wounds, tattooing, body piercing, or surgical incisions; those with certain types of immune system deficiency, such as low number of white cells in their blood; athletes participating in contact sports; IV drug users; and those living in crowded, unsanitary conditions with poor hygiene (i.e., prisoners).

When MRSA spread from a site where they are harmless to a site where they cause infection - this results in an infection described as “endogenous.” In addition to causing endogenous infections, MRSA can spread between people, usually by direct or indirect physical contact. For example, a tattoo artist performing a procedure on an infected client may become contaminated with MRSA themselves. They may then spread the bacteria to other clients with whom they subsequently have contact. These clients may then become infected. The spread of MRSA (as well as other bacteria) from client-to-client is called cross-infection.

MRSA can also survive on inanimate objects or surfaces such as tables, sinks, floors, and even mops.

Can the spread of MRSA be controlled?

There are several steps that can be taken to minimize the spread of MRSA.

- Body modification practitioners should wash their hands scrupulously, preferably using an antibacterial soap and disposable towels;
- Disposable gloves should be worn for every instance of client contact;
- The skin of the area where the tattoo or body piercing procedure will be performed should be prepped using a broad spectrum topical microbicide (i.e., Technicare).
- Carefully dispose of materials that come in contact with blood or other potentially infectious material;
- Personal protective equipment should be worn (gloves, aprons, sleeves) whenever handling contaminated instruments post-procedure and during equipment decontamination and sterilization;

- All work surfaces and other potentially contaminated surfaces and objects should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected as soon as possible using an EPA registered, hospital level disinfectant.

How is MRSA treated?

Individuals colonized with MRSA

Individuals simply colonized with MRSA may have a special antibiotic, such as Bactroban, applied onto their skin or inside of their nose. This helps eliminate MRSA and reduces the risk of the bacteria spreading to other sites on the body where they may cause infections, or to other people. However, some strains of MRSA are resistant to Bactroban. Individuals colonized with MRSA may also wash their skin and hair with suitable antiseptics, such as chlorhexidine.

Individuals infected with MRSA

Individuals with infections due to Staphylococcus aureus often need antibiotics. Infections due to normal strains of Staphylococcus aureus are often treated with methicillin or an equivalent antibiotic, but these drugs are ineffective against MRSA.

Although MRSA are resistant to many drugs, most remain susceptible to glycopeptide antibiotics, such as vancomycin. Infections due to MRSA are therefore often treated with this drug. Vancomycin must be administered by infusion or injection, and for this reason, they are used for treatment only in hospitalized patients. In addition, injection of vancomycin into muscle is painful and thus not used, while rapid administration into a vein may produce an allergic-type reaction. To overcome these problems, vancomycin must be given by slow infusion into a vein.

A very rare MRSA resistant to vancomycin has been found (6 or 7 to date, all from the United States) and there is concern that they may become more common in the future.

Conclusion

To minimize the risk of MRSA transmission, stringent cleaning guidelines should be adhered to, and all shops should have written protocol in place. EPA registered disinfectants must be used according to the manufacturer's instructions; not using these disinfectants correctly is tantamount to not using them at all. How they are used, when, and how often are the questions that must be asked with every procedure.

MRSA has also been reported to live on the outside of a sterile package and be transmitted for upwards of thirty days. Do you handle your packages with gloved hands? If not, it is a good time to start. Storage of these packages between sterilization and use must also be considered.

We must continue to advance in our education: Remember, a master is one who is never done learning, not one who knows it all!

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SCHOOL HOUSE ROCKS! LIED TO ME

IT ISN'T THAT EASY



Troy Amundson
Apocalypse Tattoo
Seattle, WA

Here is another in our series of articles by piercers working on legislation around the country. Hopefully this article, like the others, will demonstrate that legislation is not a great mystical process attempted by "someone else" with more qualifications than you have. Advocating for piercing regulations is a job for which we are all uniquely qualified. We are the experts here, after all. But they will not be a reality unless we each take responsibility for them in our own city, county and state, and keep working at them until we win – and we will eventually win.

The particular circumstances that kept Washington's bills from passing also raise important issues about what we're really fighting for and against. Please see the editor's note following the article for more discussion. As always, we encourage submissions by anyone working on legislative issues.

Despite the best efforts of a lot of people, body piercing remains unregulated in Washington State. I had the pleasure to represent the piercing industry during the 2005 and 2006 legislative sessions, and want to share some of our strategies and their results with others who are fighting the good fight.

Prior to taking on this issue, I'd never been politically active. How did I find myself lobbying for legislation in the state capitol? In November 2004, Sandy Lorentzen contacted Public Health – Seattle & King County (PHSKC) to file a complaint that her fourteen-year-old had been pierced without parental consent in a "professional" shop. Unfortunately, under current Washington law, this technically was – and remains -- a legal procedure. She was a concerned mother, and irate to learn that the total lack of regulations meant absolutely no consequences for the piercer.

I work with PHSKC on a regular basis. Sandy is a retired professional lobbyist of more than 15 years. When she angrily exclaimed that she knew how to get laws passed, my contact at the Health Department suggested that a number of professional studios would support legislation and referred her to me.

Initially, I only wanted to ensure that our industry was represented in the process. I was under the impression that the lobbyist would be doing all of the negotiations and I would merely be acting as an advisor. I was wrong to believe that I wouldn't spend much time in the Capitol. But it turned out that Sandy felt I would express the needs of our industry more effectively than she could.

We organized our strategy for January. Washington State passed reasonable tattoo laws in 2002, so we drafted the piercing regulations in the same format as the existing tattoo statutes. At the time, we believed that our task would be relatively easy based on the success of the tattoo legislation. Sandy organized our team from her past professional contacts. We found tremendous

support from an eighty year-old Republican who has worked in the capitol for over 40 years. Though body piercing was never a part of his life prior to the 2005 session, he has continued to offer his support simply based on the merit of our issue. I set out to contact all the piercers in Washington willing to participate in or advocate for legislative reform. I created a massive email list of not only WA piercers, but also anyone else here or elsewhere who was interested in the issue and/or willing to help. We used this email list to get thorough information out to everyone quickly, so we were all on the same page as to what meeting were happening when, who should speak to the press and how, and what was the current status of our pitch.

Unfortunately, Washington State was facing a budget crunch in 2005. While many of us wanted to see shops with vented biohazard rooms, licensing programs, inspection requirements, training for health investigators, internally threaded jewelry, and other professional standards to help legitimize our industry, legislators made it very clear that it would be very difficult to pass any legislation with much cost involved. Body piercing regulations are not a high priority in our capitol.

We decided to pursue a basic foundation of regulations for piercing and scarification. This would include appropriate equipment processing, sterilization requirements for tools and materials, hygienic requirements during procedures, age limits for certain procedures, and parental consent for procedures on minors. Health, safety, and protecting children: Easy, right?

We prepared to defend our position. We anticipated that public performance, suspensions, and scarification would be the most objectionable to legislators. No one denied that these procedures should be both legal and regulated. Surprisingly, our biggest issue became the age limits and parental consent.

In Washington State, the Democrats hold the House, the Senate, and the Governor's office. We also have very strongly supported reproductive rights laws for minors. Although many states' no-squeal laws fell during the Reagan Era, here a minor can still have an abortion without parental notification or consent. As we all know, abortion is a subject that raises emotional, theological, and ethical questions across the political spectrum. Regarding our bill, there was concern among legislators and health advocates that regulations requiring parental consent for a minor invasive procedure like body piercing could set legal precedents for eroding existing reproductive rights. This created a tough situation, in which protecting what we piercers see as the health and safety of one group of minors might sacrifice the health and safety of another group of minors, who also have a right to decide what to

do with their own bodies.

As these issues went on the table, several local newspapers ran articles detailing the lack of regulations in the Washington piercing industry and the procedures that were easily available to minors. Yep, we're talking about kids' nipples and genitals. You just haven't lived until you've talked genital piercings with legislators. The media coverage was largely fueled by multiple complaints against one specific shop in Seattle that offers piercings to minors without parental consent. The articles were well intended and could have been helpful. Overall, the media was very respectful of our industry and made it quite clear that many shops voluntarily operate with strict age policies, even considering the absence of state regulations. But it wasn't enough.

Body piercing continued to grow as a hot issue. Several competing piercing-related bills were introduced during the 2005 and 2006 sessions. Initially, this caused some confusion in the media and the piercing community. It became very important to keep everyone informed on the differences between the bills, a task made far easier by that email group.

While we failed to get legislation passed this year, we are already planning our strategy for next year. It is important to remember that it is very rare for any bill to pass the first session it is introduced. Often, it takes multiple attempts to pass legislation under the best of circumstances.

Hopefully, some of the lessons I learned this session may help you.

- A proactive approach will give your cause much more credibility than a reactionary position.
- Be patient. It can take repeated annual attempts to pass legislation.
- Organize your allies. This may include other artists, competition, health officials, piercing-friendly health care workers, parent groups, etc.
- "The press will press what the press will press." The media will print whatever they want. Have prepared press releases, statements, and answers to questions about your issue to reduce the chance of being misquoted.
- Avoid taking positions on any other issues. Expressing your political views is an easy way to doom your own cause.

Editor's note: *The Washington state case underscores the extent to which our legislative efforts cannot be separated from current social and political issues in the area and around the country. Two main factors contributed to the death of these piercing bills: conflict with a larger coalition, and lack of funding. Both factors show that working on our own piercing regulations is not enough to get them passed. We must cooperate with others on their issues, and we must advocate for increased political awareness and activism throughout our industry and communities.*

One of the primary reasons the proposed bill did not pass was its inclusion of parental notification and consent for minors. Washington

has one of the few abortion rights laws remaining in the country that allows minors to get abortions without parental involvement. In the current political climate, with anti-choice lobbyists and the Far Right seeking every way to overturn the law, any bill requiring parental consent for bodily procedures on minors could be used as a legal precedent to gut abortion rights.

While the APP clearly supports age requirements for all piercings on minors and limits which piercings can be performed on minors, we also recognize the contradiction of privileging our own immediate interests above the larger issues involved. If we truly value the rights of all people to make decisions about what is best for their own bodies, stand firm in our commitment to safest practice, and against prohibition of desired practices because that forces them underground, then we cannot in good conscience say these values apply to piercing and not to other procedures. It would be short-sighted to jeopardize the existing Washington abortion rights laws by placing the safety of a smaller part of the population (minors who choose to get pierced) above that of a larger (minors seeking abortions).

In this situation, it is crucial to recognize how interconnected our own legislative struggles are to larger legal and social issues. Our bills do not fail or pass solely on their own merits or our efforts, but because they represent current issues of concern. When we are able to link our issues to larger ones, we increase our chance of success. When we cannot see the big picture, or when our regulations interfere with another stronger agenda, we lose. Clearly then, the wider our coalitions, the more people involved, the more informed we are likely to be about other issues on the table, and the more able we are to work out compromises that will allow the combined group to support both bills. It is likely that getting good regulations in Washington will mean removing age of consent clauses. In that case, it would not be a defeat to choose the greater good of strong environmental and procedural regulations that apply equally to everyone, particularly when we can help protect the rights and safety of even more minors in the process.

As Troy also mentions, many Health Departments around the country have been hard hit by cuts in domestic spending. The vast majority of piercing legislation proposed in the past five years has not passed, or has passed and not been enacted, as a direct result of funding problems at local, state and federal levels. If you want informed (or any) legislation and adequate follow-up from inspectors, remember that who your appointed and elected officials are makes all the difference. Research candidates' priorities and VOTE. Explain to your clients and staff that good regulations will not be a reality without politicians who support – and allocate money for – health and social spending. Register clients to vote in your shop and help educate them about candidates. Stress how important all the minor local elections are for our cause.

No matter how much dedication you have – and Troy and his group have demonstrated plenty – one piercer alone cannot change laws. We can only change laws by building coalitions among piercers, shops, parents, educators, reporters, allies, and politicians. And stacking the odds in our favor means being aware of larger political issues, and voting for the politicians who support our issues and our values, whatever they may be.





LAS VEGAS
CONFERENCE
2006





CONFERENCE 2006



James Weber
Medical Liaison

— 2006 Conference portraits by Sean Hartgrove (www.seanhartgrove.com)
All other Conference images by Barry Blanchard and James Weber

Right up until it took place this past May, the tremendous success of the most recent annual APP Conference was not a foregone conclusion.

The past year was a difficult one for the Board of Directors. The resignation of Board Member and Treasurer Schane Gross came at a difficult time; the Board had been together less than a year, and we needed the cooperative efforts of a full Board to function efficiently. Many of Schane's duties quickly fell on other Board Members, who were already overloaded with APP work in addition to their full-time jobs piercing and running shops.

After the Mexico Conference (see last issue), relations within the remaining Board became strained, and a bit of dirty laundry was inappropriately aired on web sites and online blogs. Those who were following the situation wondered if Conference would become a fireworks show, complete with a massive public meltdown. Some folks booked their tickets in anticipation...

And Conference went off without a hitch; some said it was the best ever.

Conference opened with a PJ Party in the Penthouse of the

hosting Riviera Hotel. Throwing dignity aside, returning and new attendees got to start their Vegas experience a little more intimately – in their sleepwear. Registration also started Sunday, and April Johnson and her crew miraculously handled it all smoothly without hiring outside professional staff, as is usual. (See April's article later in this issue.)

The jewelry exposition this year was like no other. The piercing industry's top vendors showcased an amazing selection of merchandise, and several introduced new products specifically for this event. This expo is the premier marketplace for body piercing manufacturers, distributors, and other related sellers, and is a huge draw for many who attend Conference. The venter exposition was also in line for a few changes this year, which are detailed in Luis Garcia's article in this issue.

It would take another entire article to talk about the classes offered this year. Honestly, if you weren't there these small descriptions don't do them justice. However, here are some highlights:

Jewelry 1 and 2 – Jason King expounded on jewelry styles and metallurgical specifications. Essential for all piercers.



Jon George entertains at this year's opening party.

Female Genital Piercings – Elayne Angel presented on techniques she has refined in her over two decades in the industry.

Aseptic Technique and Equipment Management – David Vidra and Luis Garcia talked about Surgical and Medical Asepsis and the current OSHA ruling on freehand piercing technique (see issues #34 and #35).

And...many, many more. All this, and Yoga classes every morning for the early risers. It was a good year to attend Conference, a bad year to miss it, even without the fireworks.

Obviously, classes are not the only attraction at Conference. In addition to the Opening Party, a second Welcome Party took place on Monday night. The Carnival event featured games and prizes, clowns (*lots* of clowns) and the busiest kissing booth *ever*.

Tuesday night was *Modify: The Movie* – a free screening was offered to all attendees, who saw some of the biggest names in the industry talk about what they do and why.

The Conference Banquet (on Thursday) is traditionally the place to dress to impress, and this year was no exception. In addition to the generous buffet and speeches by the current Board, guests were treated to a celebrity roast of Elayne Angel. Elayne's contributions to not only the APP (she was a two term Board member and editor of *The Point*), but also the industry as a whole have been immeasurable. It was a sad day for the industry when Elayne's shop, *Rings of Desire*, closed its doors in New Orleans this past year. This dinner was time for us as an industry to give a little something back to someone that has been such a huge influence on us all.

Roast Masters on hand were Bethra Szumski (former APP President), Sean Christian (former manufacturer and sales rep, and all around industry insider), Paul King (former APP Treasurer), and Jim Ward (founder of Gauntlet, Inc.). After trying unsuccessfully to embarrass the unflappable Elayne with stories and old 80's news footage, a surprise appearance was made by former APP President Pat McCarthy doing his best Elayne impersonation, complete with bald cap, signature purple dress, dog in arm (stuffed), water bottle in hand (full), and purple tattooed eyebrows (marker) with more scribbled up his arms. It was a sight that made everyone -- but Elayne -- quickly lose his/her composure.

Elayne Angel was then presented with the 2006 APP President's Award for her contribution to the industry. She received it to a standing ovation.

After the dinner was the highly anticipated raffle! This year's raffle ticket sales were the highest in the APP's history, thanks to the generous prizes offered by jewelry vendors, and in no small part because of the impressive grand prize offered by Anatometal. (For the raffle write-up, see page 21.)

Next year's APP Conference will again be held at the Riviera, April 29th – May 4th, 2007. Those who attended this year's event will undoubtedly be there next year, and those that missed it will want to make sure to be there. Remember, this is the piercing industry's only conference devoted exclusively to piercing. It is not to be missed, as next year promises to be even better. But someone else had better bring the fireworks.

Freehand vs. Forceps – Alicia Cardenas and the ever-entertaining Ron Garza verbally sparred over different piercing techniques.

Suspension Roundtable – Originally intended to be members only, after much debate, this roundtable was made open to all. Allen Falkner assembled some of the top suspension artists in the industry to speak on the state of suspension today.

Advanced Studio Set-up – Steve Joyner, Brian Skellie, and Joel Burgess spoke on piercing with all disposable equipment and the proper way to work out of a StatIm autoclave cassette.

Woods Roundtable – Michael Sims shared his extensive knowledge with all who attended.

Women in the Piercing Industry Roundtable – What does it take to survive as a woman in an industry whose clientele is predominantly female, but whose practitioners are overwhelmingly male? A Conference first.

Piercing Techniques of the Americas – APP President Alicia Cardenas talked about procedures and techniques of the Incans, Mayans, and Inuit.

Oral Piercing and Speech Effects – Details from a research study conducted at the University of Colorado's Department of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences on oral piercings and their effect on speech. Fascinating!

APP CONFERENCE VOLUNTEERS

MANY THANKS



Caitlin McDiarmid
APP Administrator

It's been just a short time since Conference ended, and I am having trouble getting back into full gear. The pre-planning, planning, and execution of Conference are exhausting. While Conference is an exciting time for everyone involved, for the Board of Directors and myself the "beginning" and "end" of Conference is not the same as it is for the attendees or even the vendors.

Just about the time Conference ends...it is already beginning again. I begin while still working Conference to make a long detailed list of suggestions and changes for the next year. This list is typically a compilation of input from the attendees, vendors, speakers, and volunteers; along with my own insights. It is added to the Boards' own thoughts and ideas. And on the last day of Conference during the meeting of the Board...the next year's Conference planning is started and continues...well, right up to when it is in full swing again.

One of my many duties for Conference is to "coordinate" the volunteers so it seems only fitting that I be the one to discuss how volunteerism affects the annual Conference. Each year that I have been with the APP, the volunteers seem to get better. More than likely it isn't that this team of people have somehow increased in their "goodness" or abilities—it is far more likely that all of us have learned to appreciate their efforts more, and have become better at preparing, training, and supporting them during the long week that is Conference.

Each year I go into Conference feeling as though I don't have enough people, but every year when they walk in the door on Sunday for our first meeting, I am overwhelmed by their numbers. Our volunteers include more than just our Al D. Scholarship recipients (see Point #35 for more information on the scholarship). We have volunteers from Board Members' shops, volunteers from vendors, volunteer APP members, and people who volunteer because at one time a volunteer helped them out, or because they want to give back to an industry which gives to them all year.

Volunteers do the following (and probably lots of other stuff I don't even know about):

1. Stuff vendor and attendee packets
2. Roll and sort t-shirts
3. Carry many, many boxes
4. Unload and load vehicles
5. Run random errands for supplies, including coffee and food – on foot and by vehicle
6. Work Registration doing crowd control and assisting with filling out forms

7. Meet and greet attendees
 8. Work the APP booth doing sales and providing basic information
 9. Help with translation (in Spanish, French, Dutch, ASL, etc.)
 10. Provide backrubs, spankings, cigarettes, tampons, foot rubs, food & drink, tissues and counseling
 11. Work the classroom doors, control crowds, stamp class cards, obtain additional handouts, "run" if there is a need, video tape, etc.
 12. Work the expo doors, provide security for our vendors and materials immediately before and after closing (until paid security is onsite, and during open hours)
 13. Answer questions throughout the Conference
 14. Put up with difficult, sometimes angry, occasionally unpleasant, even at times teary-eyed people (and I am not just referring to myself)
 15. Work the Opening Party
 16. Assist with the Raffle draw (if they are not participating in the raffle itself)
 17. Work the Banquet Dinner and raffle claim process
 18. Help the Administrator "after hours" with financial reconciliation, paperwork, runs to Kinkos, data entry, moral support, etc.
-

Plain and simple,
**we couldn't do
it without the
volunteers,**
not just "as well" – but at all.

Our volunteers are often working when other attendees are buying at the Exposition or listening to speakers in class. They are also working when other attendees are having fun, visiting with friends, sleeping or eating.

I find it hard to fully express how important and crucial volunteerism is to the APP and its annual Conference. Plain and simple, we couldn't do it without the volunteers, not just "as well" – but at all.

This year I would like to personally, on behalf of the Board of Directors, and the APP as a whole, thank the following volunteers (and anyone I forgot) for their work and support during the 2006 Conference:

Sonya Adams • Tod Almighty • Sque3z Anderson • Troy Amundson • Taylor Bailey • Nicole Brown • Ed Chavarria • Gus Diamond • Jon George • Eric Houchin • Dave Kelso • Ruben Lew • Jill Martin • Tyler Nelson • Anne Ott • Josh Prentice • James Raimar • Brenda Reyes • Henry Rubin • Thorsten Sekira • Cherie Stewart-Funk • Stephan Strestik • Marcus Strohner • Cour Vest • Jennifer Yopez • Danny Yerna

Special thanks to:

Johannes Nota – for his hard work, amazing attitude, forcing me to eat, sit down, establish boundaries, and wake up.

Tiana McGuire – for coming back to help, fabulous customer service/work ethic, the warmest smile on the planet, and her delightful kookiness

Paul King – for his willingness to help long after he paid his dues, his grounding and love, doing all the stuff I can't, being our moral center, not being perfect, and making me take time off

Sean Christian – for always being there when I need an extra set of hands, and never saying he's too busy and *Azaliab*, for keeping it light, happy, and real...ly fun!

In closing, I want to remind everyone that the APP is largely a volunteer-run organization – including every Board of Directors – and so my (and your) very, very special thanks goes to the hardest working volunteers of all this year: *Alicia Cardenas, April Johnson, Christina Shull, Luis Garcia, Phish Goldblatt, and James Weber.*

VENDOR EXPOSITION



Luis Garcia
International Liaison

People who attended Conference in May probably noticed a different feel to our Exposition space this year. It was a much more intimate affair than in years past, with higher quality jewelry represented, and fewer sellers overall. In part this happened because some good vendors unfortunately could not make it, and a few others simply decided not to come. But this also represents a new direction for the Expo, aimed at meeting the needs of vendors and attendees alike.

In previous years, there have been brewing issues among the vendors and the membership concerning the Exposition policies, which the Board attempted to address this year. One of the things instituted was a meeting between vendor representatives and the current Board. Never before had there been a proper forum for the vendors to bring up their issues to the Board and their peers all at once. Anyone renting a booth on the exposition floor was invited to put their ideas or concerns to the whole group, keeping everyone in the loop as to what's going on with everyone else and creating the opportunity for finding solutions. The meeting was well attended, and everyone seemed fairly satisfied with the ideas put forth. The decision was made to have this become a permanent part of the Conference from now on.

Although some shoppers might have expected its smaller size to be a downside of the Expo this year, the majority of the feedback received was positive. There was a noticeable difference in the overall quality of the products displayed, and many felt that this

was what the APP should work towards with the vendor spaces

I will continue to be in charge of the vendor Exposition for the next two years and look forward to further improving its quality and accessibility to all our needs. There have already been some great suggestions from members and vendors alike that I hope to implement in the coming years to make the exposition even better. Any concerns, questions, suggestions, criticism, or notes of encouragement can be directed to me at international@safepiercing.org.





Tania and Jennifer from Anatometal.



Snuggling up to Sky Renfro (right)

2006 CONFERENCE REGISTRATION



April Johnson
APP Vice President

As those attending this past Conference may have noticed, the registration process changed quite a bit this year. Last year the decision was made to do registration in-house (ourselves), instead of outsourcing for this service as the APP has done in the past. In-house registration was abandoned several years ago, as Conference attendance swelled and the job got unmanageable. But the registration company the APP has hired since 2002 restructured recently, and was unfortunately unable to continue their services for us any longer. This, in addition to the consistently increasing cost of this service from year to year, helped us decide to do registration ourselves in May. I volunteered to undertake what I knew was a huge and daunting project. After much research, we purchased new software, four laptop computers with wireless capabilities, a color printer, and a wireless router, and I was in business! (If that shopping list scares you, please realize the end result is that doing it this way actually saved the APP money, and will continue to do so for years to come. So we can spend your dues on things that matter more to you.)

With this new software I was able to design the website interface, manage online registration, print and organize all the class tickets, banquet dinner tickets and pre-registered badges, organize claim vouchers for the free shoulder bags for the first 200 registrants, train three employees for onsite registration, and fix anyone's registration who may have registered six people under one name, or sneakily registered themselves as a member set to receive an additional discount which they did not qualify for -- all the while working my full-time piercing position and trying not to lose my sanity! Even after all that, I still felt onsite registration was a breeze compared to the workload I saw taken on by the rest of the Board.

Overall, I really enjoyed the opportunity to speak to so many people who I may have not had the chance to talk with if I had not been behind the registration desk so much. Although I missed hearing all the great speakers and seeing all the new and old vendors we had this year, it was worth it to me to be able to put a face with a name with every new registration I processed. I was almost jealous I couldn't do it all by myself so I could meet absolutely everyone!

A few issues that I hope to address before next year are: getting website registration up and running sooner; more clarity to the online registration process; and a barcode system for badges. I also hope to garner a less hostile reaction from those that feel they don't need their industry affiliation questioned when buying an expo pass. In order to protect our vendor floor from those outside the industry buying wholesale jewelry (and price gouging the rest of us all year long), we insist upon documentation of industry credentials before admittance, as we have every year. This gets a lot of attendees agitated, but is essential for the nature of the vendor Exposition and the protection of all our businesses. The resulting altercations at the registration booth were some of the only speed bumps in the smooth road at the desk this year.

I would like to thank all the Conference attendees for their patience throughout the fine-tuning of this project and the year as a whole. As a new Board, we have been challenged with much already, but I believe we finished our first year with lessons learned (some the hard way), positive outlooks, and a successful Conference. I look forward to the next several years.

If anyone has any suggestions for next year's registration, feel free to email me directly at vicepresident@safepiercing.org. We can keep on making it better.

2006 RAFFLE



Luis Garcia
International Liaison

The annual raffle at Conference is always one of our biggest attractions, and this year topped all others as the biggest money-making raffle the APP has *ever* had. Of course, this could not have happened if not for the generosity of the vendors at the Exposition and that of a few who could not attend. The APP would like to extend a very warm thanks to all those that donated to the raffle this year.

This year's raffle was like no other in part due to a very generous donation from **Anatometal** – *All the jewelry in their display cases at the Exposition!* Coming close to a \$30,000 wholesale value, this was the biggest prize ever donated at the raffle! Other top donators were: **Industrial Strength Body Jewelry**, contributing a hefty \$10,000 worth of prizes, and **Custom Steel** generously donating close to \$4,500 in prizes.

While the big jackpots were the most widely coveted, they

were not the only substantial prizes. **Pain Magazine** and **Safe Products** both donated close to \$3000. **Kaos Softwear** and **Steel Skin** prize packages weighed in along the \$2000 range. **Industrial Strength LLC**, **Spiritstone**, **Integrity**, **Diablo Rojo**, and **Body Circle** all donated in excess of \$1000.

These are only the top dozen. There were many, many other vendors whose contributions made the raffle possible and spread the winning joy around. They are the ones most individual winners are thanking for the extra goodies in their luggage going home. The APP would like to thank everyone that participated in this year's raffle; without these donations, the annual Conference could not happen, and the organization could not make the great the great strides it has. Thank you for allowing the APP to make a difference in the body piercing industry, and being a part of that difference.

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AFTERWORD



Christina Shull
APP Secretary

I was at the Banquet Dinner, listening to Jim Ward reminisce about working at The Gauntlet with Elayne Angel. He was telling wonderful stories and entertaining the crowd with funny and sometimes embarrassing moments. As I looked around the room at familiar faces and many new ones, I was brought back to the first APP Conference I attended. Listening to the crowd laugh at Jim's tales and watching video footage from interviews over a decade old reminded me of what initially inspired me to get educated about piercing and yearn to become an APP Board Member.

I showed up in Vegas in for the first time, seventeen years old, intimidated by unfamiliar faces and terminology, but eager to learn. Since I'd come from a small town where information was considered classified and only shared within individual studios, it was only natural to assume that the education I received would be limited. Within the first hour of Sunday night registration, I had seen enough beautifully healed piercings and high quality jewelry to understand that I was way out of my league.

Overwhelmed by the many classes available, I found the closest Board Member and pulled my program out of my bag to ask what classes would be best for a piercer in my position. I had left my apprenticeship realizing that it was not good, but not yet knowing how bad it truly was. With a little Advice, the first class I attended was Equipment Management and Business Documentation. I left almost in tears.

An autoclave is arguably the most important piece of equipment in a piercing studio, and I had been piercing for six months without ever using one. As I listened to Derek Lowe discuss the sterilization process and the importance of doing it correctly, I was in awe. Piercing was so much more than making a hole and inserting jewelry – it was an intimately involved process. I wanted to know everything about it. Furthermore, I knew I wanted to eventually be in a position where I could share that information with others like myself.

After a few more classes, and a restless night of excitement about the future and embarrassment about the past, I attended a Jewelry Size and Style roundtable the next day. Wow. Professional piercers who knew the names of the jewelry thicknesses and lengths, and that jewelry should be selected based on the client's anatomy, not one size fits all. I would have gone back to my hotel room and cried from frustration, except that, I ran into the APP member who initially suggested that I attend Conference.

Thankfully, he took me under his wing and into a small group discussion. I was so glad to be able to spend time with a handful of experienced and accomplished piercers. I learned a lot: clamping a vertical clitoral hood is *very* uncomfortable for the client, gloves should be changed during a procedure, a septum piercing is not intended to go through the cartilage...the list goes

on and on. But the most important thing I learned from the folks in that hotel room was not a technique or a solution for one of the many things that I was not doing right; it was that there was a professional piercing community.

Until that Conference, I had no idea that there were so many piercers who had an overwhelming desire to learn as much as possible about body piercing, and enjoyed sharing their information and experience with anyone who wanted to listen. It was amazing to feel like part of a family, and unlike any family I had ever encountered. This community was welcoming to anyone who shared their values and integrity. Even though I did not do the same quality of work, or have the same amount of knowledge and experience as the other piercers I met at Conference, I had the same common goal: to know as much as possible about piercing and provide my clients with the best and safest piercing possible.

Since then, this community has consistently reached out to me, nurturing me as part of the family. As I have grown in the piercing industry, I have been very fortunate for those who have enabled me to learn from them as they openly shared their information and experience. I am so thankful for everyone who has contributed their time, energy, ideas and experience to Conference, both directly and indirectly, as these piercers create both the demand for Conference and the attendance to make it a success. As I have learned more about piercing, I have tried to give back to the community through teaching, writing articles, and answering questions from anyone who wants to know more about body piercing.

The Annual APP Conference has always been an amazing event for body piercers, from apprentices to master piercers, and everyone in between. Besides classes --- ranging from basic to advanced -- Conference is an open forum for the exchange of information and ideas. Once a year, everyone in the piercing community has the opportunity to meet others who want to learn and share what they know. With the piercing industry constantly evolving, it is wonderful spending time and exchanging information with other piercers who care about piercing as much as I do. This year, I was vividly reminded of how much this community means to me and how fortunate we all are to be part of it.

Thank you to everyone who attended this year's conference! It is the attendees that inspire the Board of Directors to devote volunteered time and energy to providing an amazing Conference. Without you, the need for an annual conference would not exist, and no Board could do it without your love and support. Now that I have seen Conference as a Board Member, I realize how much your support made the countless hours of work worthwhile. I look forward to seeing all of you next year!

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Sarai and Pat Tidwell pose with Barry Blanchard (center) at the APP Conference, Las Vegas 2006.

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