

text
photos

NEWS VIEWS

Midwest Vision Congress & Expo

It was all about camaraderie, Courses and New Products

By Christine Brophy

Associate Editor

ROSEMONT, Ill.—Last month, ECPs from all over the Midwest converged here in the windy city for courses, networking and to scope out new products and office equipment.

For many, the main attraction at this year's Midwest Vision Congress & Expo was the continuing education courses. Attendees were able to choose between 87 courses totaling 145 CE hours.

Kyle Brost, OD, of Brost & Associates Family Eye Care, PC, in Cape Girardeau, Mo., and president-elect of the North Central States Optometric Council said, "The continuing education courses are some of the best I've seen in years."

Others concurred. "I was really impressed with most of the instructors. The information is very useful and I'll be able to apply it to my practice," said Danielle Smith of 20/20 Eye Specialists in Chicago, who said this year was her first year at Expo.

Expo regular, Richard York, an optometrist at York Eyecare Associates in Mount Vernon, Ohio, was likewise impressed, "I've enjoyed the continuing education. They always have good speakers."

Over the course of three days, 33 eye care experts lectured on everything from disease diagnosis and treatment to dispensing techniques. The general session "Ocular Disease" was a huge hit with 405 ECPs in attendance. Other general sessions seemed more like play than work: Ocular Jeopardy and The New Family Feud educated people using game show questions as a forum.

Some opticians confessed that they use expo as an opportunity to educate their assistants. "I appreciated the Optical Boot Camp course for my new assistant," said John Hall of Dr. John E. Hall Optometry in Elkhorn, Wis. The six-hour course provided new optical employees with an overview of patient care and product selection.

Beth Whalen, optician and practice manager at Crusader Clinic in Rockford, Ill., also used the show as a tool for professional development. "My staff members are here attending continuing education. I'm also introducing staff to vendors to pass [that responsibility] along to them." Whalen said that this year she is scoping out new technology for computerizing the front office, looking for frames and seeking out new vendors.

Some show attendees scheduled back-to-back courses to get them out of the way, leaving little time to explore the exhibits. Heather Rheau, a non-certified optician from James Cutler OD said that even though the exhibits were set up nicely, she really didn't have enough time to visit all the booths. "We've been in classes all day. We have only one day to cram it all in," said Rheau. Despite this, she said that the conference appeared roomier and was more comfortable than other eyecare conferences she has attended in the Midwest.

Reports from the exhibit floor were mixed, based on comments from exhibitors and some attendees. Traffic was quiet, and several suggested that the Mother's Day weekend timing could have been part of the reason.

While some exhibitors admitted that the cost of the space to exhibit could



ECPs were scoping out trends and placing orders during the show.

exceed the business they do at the show, some expressed optimism, explaining that the contracts they make were too invaluable to miss out on. In addition, many new contracts tend to follow up after the show, according to some exhibitors.

Making connections and networking is extremely important for the ECPs as well, several told **Vision Monday**. "I haven't been here for four years. We were heavily affected by the hurricanes [like Katrina]. The entire Gulf Coast is rebuilding or running scared and things are slower," confessed Chuck Minnerman, optician at Cee'em Optics in Pensacola, Fla. He explained that the expo, for him, is more about networking for business in the future. "For me, it's all about relationship building," said Craig Carlen, optician, Lowell Vision Center, Lowell, Mich. "I've really enjoyed the Galleria. Contrary to my preconceived notions, the more boutique-style exhibitors care more about the small practices. They

are more focused on customer service, which I appreciate. With the big vendors, I feel like a really little fish in a big pond. I don't think the big fishes really care about us. They forget about the practices like ours."

All in all, it was a beneficial event for many Midwest ECPs for different reasons. Daniel Weaver, an optometrist at Weaver Optical in Niles, Ill. said, "I live in this area so it's convenient. I needed courses and they offered those here." He added, "The exhibit show is excellent. Many people come to see what's new in technology and frames."

Misty Schutterle, OD, of Primary Vision Center said that besides being educational, the expo is a way for her to check out new lens technology and designer fashions.

Artha Hyderi, OD, also from Primary Vision Center, said that one of the best things about expo for him is seeing old friends. ■

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING



"The continuing education courses are some of the best I've seen in years."

—Kyle Brost, OD,
Brost & Associates
Family Eye Care, PC,
Cape Girardeau, Mo.



"I live in this area so [the Midwest Vision Congress & Expo] is convenient. I needed courses and they offered those here."

—Daniel Weaver,
optometrist, Weaver Optical,
Niles, Ill.



"Contrary to my preconceived notions, the more boutique-style exhibitors care more about the small practices. They are more focused on customer service, which I appreciate."

—Craig Carlen, optician,
Lowell Vision Center,
Lowell, Mich.



We really didn't have enough time [for the exhibit hall]. We've been in classes all day. We have only one day to cram it all in. But, [the exhibit hall has] a nice set up."

—Heather Rheau, a non-certified optician,
James Cutler OD



"The classes are enlightening and educational. Although it doesn't seem as if there are as many vendors as last year."

—Desiree Watkins,
20/20 Eye Specialists,
Chicago, Ill.



"I love the show. I'm specifically looking for new technology for computerizing the front office, which they have a lot of here."

—Beth Whalen, optician
and practice manager,
Crusader Clinic,
Rockford, Ill.



"This is my first year. As far as classes, I was really impressed with most of the instructors."

—Danielle Smith,
20/20 Eye Specialists,
Chicago, Ill.