Florida Reconnects Art & Science with Occupational Therapy

Over 300 registered occupational therapy practitioners and students gathered in Orlando, Florida. February 7-8, during the 2009 Florida Occupational Therapy Association (FOTA) Spring Conference in three venues. All educational sessions and conference events celebrated the conference theme, Reconnecting Art and Science with Occupational Therapy, Orlando Health, with Carlos Carrasco and Michael Taylor as coordinators hosted preconference institutes, a first in FOTA conferences during which knowledgeable speakers presented a variety of topics handwriting, evidenced based practice, fieldwork education, school based assistive technology, documentation, burns, and splinting.

Later in the day, Sara Jane Crowley, FOTA President, hosted the presidential reception which highlighted 24 student poster presentations at the Embassy Suites San Juan Ballroom, complete with a sumptuous buffet and refreshments. Posters came from professional and associate programs in Florida, and other out of state schools. Under the supervision of VP & Education Chair Betsy B. Burgos, Cathy Peirce coordinated the poster presentations. The Lowfield Jazz Ensemble band composed of students from the Florida College of Health Sciences delighted us with their music during the presidential reception.

A distinguished panel of judges selected the best poster presentations from both occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant programs. Jenna Rogers, Melissa Smith, Tyler Wallen and advisor, Dr. Linda Martin, all from Florida Gulf Coast University, Fort Myers received the OT trophy with their poster entitled, "Mothers in Recovery". The OTA trophy went to the Florida Hospital College Health Sciences students Amanda Zaklukiewicz, Lindsey Sisson, Gilou St. Fort and advisor Prof. Vicki Case with their poster “Creating Cognitively Appropriate Group Activities for Alzheimer’s Patients in a Day Treatment Setting.”

Prior to the Keynote Address, Ricardo C. Carrasco, Conference Convener, announced two conference icebreaker activities: the Gnome Hunt and the Scavenger Summit Bingo Hunt, which had conference attendees searching for FOTA Board members, exhibitors, sponsors, and honored guests. The gnome hunt grand prize was a FOTA membership, while the scavenger hunt prize, donated by Summit Professional Education was a package of 6 transferrable continuing education course vouchers worth approximately $1,000.
Shortly after President Crowley officially opened the ceremony, and read Mayor Buddy Dyer’s proclamation stating that February 7 & 8 were occupational therapy days in Orlando, the Association presented its annual awards. The David Clark Award of Excellence went to Melissa Morgan from Keiser University, the Louise Samson Leadership Award to Jim Hammond. Dr. Catherine Peirce from Nova Southeastern University received the Award of Recognition and Custom Mobility, Inc. the Award of Appreciation. The Myra McDaniel Student Leadership Fund, named in honor of a former Treasurer of the American Occupational Therapy Association and a former active FOTA member went to Julie O’Leary, student from Florida Gulf Coast University. The Florida Occupational Therapy Education Consortium presented also to Kelleen Ison the Fieldwork Educator Award.
Wendy Stoker, an occupational therapist delivered her keynote address entitled "Doing is Everything" and was inspiring and informative. Born without arms, Wendy’s life has been filled with challenges, forced to figure out how to accomplish many things despite expectations otherwise. Ms. Stoker completed her occupational therapy degree with high honors. She has been active in sports such as swimming, diving, water skiing and bowling. In addition, she drives and lives by herself. She shared many examples of how she figured out to accomplish a myriad of activities. Her positive attitude filled the audience with a "can-do" for everyone.

After the keynote address, students, FOTA Board members and other invited guests mingled during a “chocolate fountain” event, fully sponsored by the Florida Occupational Therapy Education Consortium, and coordinated by Susan Skees-Hermes.

Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences, with Tia Hughes serving as coordinator, was the venue for vendor exhibits, annual business meeting, educational sessions, silent auction, webroom, and food and beverages. The educational sessions were coordinated by Betsy B. Burgos, FOTA VP and Education Chair. They began with a plenary session, followed by workshops, papers, and special interest roundtables. A total of 34 exhibitors supported the conference, with FLOTEC sponsoring the Student Social and HCA West sponsoring the nametags and lanyards. The plenary session entitled "The Power of Doing," presented by Drs. Ricardo Carrasco and Patricia Scott was a scholarly and thought provoking session during which the speakers related their near death experiences and related their recovery processes to lifespan development, psychosocial, transition, occupation, and chaos theories, while proposing the use of a lifeline charting and narratives as proposed by the model of human occupation. Session participants had the opportunity to share their life stories through an exercise during the session using provided activity sheets.

To cap the session Dr. Carrasco donned traditional Japanese ceremonial attire and demonstrated the Power of Doing by creating a formal Ikebana (living flower) design to the tune of Koto music, assisted by his students and two grandsons who carried his wooden certificates attesting to the public of his recent installation as Iemoto (Headmaster of Banmi Shofu School of Ikebana).
FOTA annual business meeting had a full agenda. Sara-Jane Crowley, President, Betsy B. Burgos, Vice President and Timothy Finlan, Treasurer, and Barbara Ingram-Rice, Governor Affairs Chair, and Larry Gonzalez, Lobbyist, presented their annual reports. Emily Pugh, AOTA representative presented also her report and encouraged everyone to attend the 2009 AOTA Conference. The new Strategic Plan was presented and approved by members.

The attendees then had the option of attending 10 papers, 7 SIS roundtable discussions and 21 workshops. The topics for the papers were in the areas of education in urinary incontinence with cognitive impairment, the occupational therapy practice framework, pediatric pelvic floor rehabilitation, wellness model, occupational therapy education, hot issues for AOTA, learning while moving, evaluation methods for unilateral spatial neglect, volunteerism and Orlando sensory smart attractions. The Roundtable Discussions included SIS Health and Wellness, SIS Home Health, SIS Sensory Integration, Legislative Issues in Florida, SIS Education and the Centennial Vision, SIS School Systems, and SIS Education Fieldwork. The workshops included courses in the area of evidenced based practice, medical errors, OT laws & rules, fieldwork supervision, Car Fit program, hand function, OT in oncology, home health programs, and shoulder pain among other topics.

There was also an opportunity to engage in a Silent Action, coordinated by Bonnie Decker & Susan Skees Hermes, where over 60 donated items were up for bid. The money generated by the Auction was designated for the Myra McDaniel Student Leadership fund. Over 30 exhibits from different companies from Florida an out of state displayed their products and services.

To say that the 2009 Florida Annual Conference was a success doesn’t begin to describe the volunteer work that went into the event. Vice President Betsy B. Burgos, who has the Conference as one of her duties and Dr. Ricardo C. Carrasco have been working a full year to pull off this event. Many innovative happenings occurred and the details and management of such an event are too countless to mention.