



Highlights of the 7th Annual Focus Conference in Nashville

Story and photos by Lori Ligon RRT

You simply *have* to jump on this bandwagon!



Uncle Sam strolling the exhibit hall



Bluegrass musicians entertaining



Partying with "Little Richard"



Keynote Speaker Robert F. Kennedy Jr.



Miles of aisles and exhibits

I just had the pleasure, and do I *mean* pleasure, of returning from the 7th annual FOCUS conference and all I can say is WOW! This conference continues to take leaps and bounds in quality and attendance every year and I want to tell you that from the minute I arrived in Nashville, to the minute I left, the people who produce the FOCUS conference, that is, Bob Miglino RRT, and roughly 40 of his RT/Sleep friends who help him as the "crew", saw to it that I had a great time. As I and almost 3000 others in respiratory care and sleep medicine (with a smattering of ICU nurses) can attest, this was a first-rate, well-organized conference from A to Z, a conference that exemplifies the very best of our profession.

Where to begin! First, let me say that Springtime in Nashville is simply delightful. The flowers were in full bloom and the weather was perfect every day of the event. The Opryland Hotel is a 2000 room hotel entirely encased in a gigantic greenhouse with the most beautiful gardens, waterfalls and fountains I've ever seen. Over 2000 species of plants are cared for by 90 full-time horticulturists and you would be hard-pressed to find a single leaf out of place.

FOCUS then packages the hotel with all *they* provide to make it affordable for *every* budget. In fact, the FOCUS conference is *so* affordable, *so* value-packed, that many now make the conference a part, if not **the** centerpiece, of their annual vacation. How FOCUS is able to get Opryland, a magnificent hotel that usually commands rates of \$190 a night for \$119 a night is beyond me, but it is much appreciated.



Pictures with "Reba McEntire"



Pictures with "Garth Brooks"

Then there's the registration fee, of \$295 per person. What's really important about this fee is all that's **included** in it – excellent lectures by some of the most famous speakers in the county, (we'll get to those in a minute), lots of gourmet food and drink (including free beer and wine) and a *ton* of fun, including a great night of entertainment that FOCUS provides each year. The value of what this conference provides, then, is simply outstanding! So outstanding in fact, that FOCUS receives inquiries from non-medical folk wanting to know if they can register for the conference because the "package" FOCUS provides is better than anything they can find on-line or from a travel agent! The conference also provides a "significant other" registration that's half the regular registration. This allows attendees to bring spouses to enjoy the conference and **all** that it offers **with** them, a novel idea. *Students* also receive a 50% discount all the way down to \$150, an economical fee for them when considering that it includes lectures, CEU's, 4 meals and a great night of entertainment.

Academically, this year's FOCUS conference featured 17-19 CEU's plus 4 early-bird breakfast workshops that



Filing into the exhibit hall



Your's truly with Speaker Coordinator Joseph Sorbello, RRT



Exhibitors enjoying the show



Networking, Networking, Networking



"Austin" picking the lucky winner



Student volunteers working the Store



Attendees obtaining up to date information at Focus' lectures



The hilarious singing cowboys

were very well received. Attendees at the workshops received, (in addition to two extra CEU's), a complimentary notebook and pen, as well as an expanded continental breakfast to go along with the in-depth treatment of the topic they had selected. Lectures continued all day long in eight interesting tracks and one of the innovative things the FOCUS conference has become "famous" for, is the fact that every lecture, is presented *twice*, so that no one has to miss anything. Prominent speakers such as Kent Christopher MD, Bob Kacmarek RRT PhD, Frankie Roman MD, John Downs MD, Herb Patrick MD and many more, presented to packed rooms and were very much appreciated by attendees. Two critical care nursing tracks of lectures, something started just last year, were also packed by therapists and nurses alike, and I for one, feel that FOCUS' including nurses at their conference is an excellent idea that actually raises the status of our profession. Many nurses were impressed by the conference and the Masters and PhD prepared therapists who lectured to them. Many hadn't realized that therapists even *had* such conferences and I, myself, heard numerous comments from nurses pertaining to their having a new respect for respiratory therapists as a result of the FOCUS conference.

The keynote speech by Robert F. Kennedy Jr. was packed with over 3000 people and was provocative, informative and eye-opening. His address, entitled, "Our Environmental Destiny" was very interesting, and Mr. Kennedy left the podium to a standing ovation. Thanks has to be extended to the Respironics corporation for sponsoring the keynote address at this year's conference. Mr. Kennedy also stayed for a "meet and greet" that satisfied everyone's desire to have a picture and an autograph of the famous activist. It was truly an excellent talk and a great choice for a keynote address.

The exhibit hall was very busy at all times and 132 exhibitors utilizing more exhibit space than ever before, said that they were very happy with the interest shown their products by the attendees. As I said earlier, FOCUS provides an incredible amount of food and drink in the exhibit hall and this year, "Little Richard" (actually a hilarious impersonator) cut the ribbon for the opening gala that was packed with people for over 3 hours. Reba MacIntyre, Garth Brooks and Elvis impersonators were also on hand for picture taking and FOCUS provided strolling blue grass musicians, caricature artists, stilt walkers and of course, incredible food, free beer and great wine for the duration. People literally didn't want to leave the hall when it was time to go, that's how much fun everyone was having.

The next day was more of the same. Excellent lectures in 8 different tracks all day long interspersed by a nice (and money-saving) free breakfast and free lunch in the hall. After the closing gala reception, which featured incredible food, free refreshments, and an assortment of mini-cheesecakes, the first of two big events took place. The first, was the picking of the winner of the 2007 Ford FOCUS automobile. Let me tell you, you could hear a pin drop as almost 3000 people assembled in the exhibit hall to watch "Austin Powers" pick the lucky winner from the tumbler. Everyone was happy for the shocked winner, Mary Chandler RRT, RPSGT (she took the \$10,000 cash) who stated that she had never won a thing in her life and who, on the spot, made a



Surprise performance by Alison Krauss and Union Station



Chairman Bob Miglino introducing RFK Jr.



You can learn a lot from a good sales rep



Mary Chandler claiming her \$10,000



Focus staff adding to the festivities



Top management speaker
Dennis Giannetti

half-dozen happy phone calls to her family back home. Everyone was very happy for her. \$10,000 CASH – now that's what I call a great souvenir, from a great conference.

The second big event of the night was the fantastic evening at the Grand Ole Opry. The Opry holds about 4000 people, so, with FOCUS providing over 3500 of those, (exhibitors were invited by FOCUS free of charge) just about the whole place was FOCUS attendees, all of whom were given orange glow-stick necklaces on the way in. What a show and what a night! First off, they really should call the Grand Ole Opry a *comedy* hall as much as they do a music hall. Just about every act (I believe there were 10 different acts at the show) had a slew of jokes that had everyone in stitches. Porter Wagner was the host, and the star of the evening was Pam Tillis who was fantastic. She sang all of her hits and remarked that she felt like she was singing to a bowl of cheerios (the orange glow-necklaces). FOCUS attendees were then blown away when Alison Kraus and her band *Union Station* showed up as a late-minute surprise. The Opry does that, but you have to be real lucky – and man, were we ever lucky! Alison Kraus is one of the nation's *top* Grammy-award winning stars and her band contains Tony Rice (considered by many to be *the* best guitarist in the world) and Jerry Douglas, (*absolutely* the finest dobro player in the world today). They performed three songs and the place went wild with Alison telling the audience that she couldn't remember ever playing to a more enthusiastic group. Extra thanks has to go out to the Hill-Rom corporation, which sponsored the evening – one that FOCUS attendees will never forget.



Focus' fascinating medical antique exhibit



John Weissleder RRT curator of the
Focus medical antique exhibit

Another full day of excellent lectures followed and the conference ended on Saturday afternoon. It was a superb show and chairman Bob Miglino, who is absolutely *everywhere* checking things, ensuring the smooth running of events and literally busing tables when not introducing speakers, is again, to be commended on his incredible attention to detail.



Busy exhibitors answering questions



Standing ovation for keynote speaker
Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

The FOCUS conference is festive, fun, innovative and very informative. Everything I'd been hearing for years about FOCUS' ability to combine strong academia with powerhouse fun is *true* – every word of it. You couldn't ask for a better slate of topics and speakers and again, what was *included* in one's registration fee was amazing. The Focus crew can't do enough *for* you and one comes away feeling that they went to someone's home for a great party. The FOCUS conference is the antiithesis of being stuffy or boring or the "same old thing" and each year FOCUS comes up with new, innovative ideas that leave 99% of the attendees WOW'ed. **People don't like the FOCUS conference – they LOVE it!** It was a great time as these pictures clearly show and FOCUS has decided to return to Nashville, again next year.



Attendees purchasing the latest texts



The Focus bus
Seven trips - only one flat tire

My suggestion – put the 8th annual FOCUS conference on your agenda. It will be held April 10-12, 2008 again at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville. Personally, I wouldn't miss it for the world. Hope you won't either.



Incredible desserts to go with the
incredible food and drink



Focus attendees heading to lunch

**Save your pennies for the 8th
Annual Focus Conference
April 10 - 12, 2008 at the
Opryland Hotel in Nashville**



Exhibitors interacting with attendees