

MHVTA Members Trip Report from the IFGE Conference '07
Philadelphia, Pa.
April 12 – 15, 2007

Jan Brown commented:

Whenever I go to a TG conference, meeting or big group get together, I write a trip report to show the members of my support group, Mid-Hudson Valley Transgender Association (MHVTA), how it went. I, along with many others (I think there were 350+ attendees), joined together at the recent International Foundation for Gender Education Conference (IFGE) in Philadelphia so this is a report about that. I also asked the several members who attend MHVTA if they'd provide their views to flesh out the report from their own experiences (and even got a response from someone who knows of our group but isn't actively involved).

Name	Where you live	How do you identify	Group Involvement
Melissa	Dutchess Co., NY	CD	Current MHVTA chairperson; Conference staff
Tina	So. of Newburgh, NY	TBD	Hasn't attended MHVTA yet
Patti	Lower Hudson Valley	TS	MHVTA, MENTA, Westchester GLBT Advisory Board; presenter
Edie	Dutchess Co., NY	CD	Current MHVTA vice-chairperson
Rochelle	Orange Co., NY	CD	Past CDI pres., MHVTA attendee; presenter
Kathleen	Orange Co., NY	TS	1 st timer
Bev & Jean	Orange Co., NY	CD & SO	MHVTA couple; 1 st timers
Jan Brown	Dutchess Co., NY	CD	MHVTA cofounder & Renaissance rep; presenter & Conference staff

How would you rate the conference for you? Did it meet your expectations? Why? or Why Not?

Melissa: Yes, the conference met my expectations. In some ways, it exceeded them. The hotel staff was wonderful, they were the nicest, most helpful I have ever seen a hotel staff. I attended several very well presented workshops, Helen's "trans sex and identity", Mariette's "Images from the gender frontier and beyond", Dr. Miqui Gilbert's "Gendered relationships". I was interested to learn in Dr. Schott's "roots of crossdressing and transexualism..." presentation that while transexualism is considered biological (nature), his model asserts that crossdressing is a matter of nurture, the birth order of the CD and siblings, relationships with parents, those influences. I disagree, even if I do fit his statistical model.

Edie: 8 (out of 10). It met my expectations as expected as it was an educational, yet party-ous experience. I thought the color guard by TAVA was touching and Veronica Vera's speech was good.

Veronica Vera's Keynote Address



Tina: It was my first time going to a conference like this. It definitely met my expectations. The number of people who attended was very manageable, and the people in charge of running the conference were very approachable and easy to talk to. The conversations I had and the talks I went to were very relevant to me. And I made new friends, and met up with old ones as well.



Kathleen and Melissa in a party mood...

Bev & Jean: We'd rate this conference at 8.5.

Rochelle: This IFGE wasn't my first time nor will it be my last, Tucson here I come.

Kathleen: This was good. I established a lot of national network contacts and found a surgeon.

Jan: I thought the conference was good in some ways and unfulfilling in other ways since I had the opportunity to work as a staff person. It met my expectation as being a excellent place to get away and have a good time with friends and make new friends.

I emailed the group picture below to Carol (2nd from right standing) who commented “I don't have an awful lot to add. I enjoyed all of the relationship type workshops, meeting new friends and just being me for 3 days. I especially found the workshops on fetal development most interesting. The new research on what happens during pre-natal I found very fascinating.”



Sat. night banquet with lots of people and our friendly wait staff person.

1st time attending? Y/N Why did you attend this year?

Kathleen: First timer. I had the money and workshops sounded very interesting.

Jan: This is my 2nd (in a row) IFGE Conference and I really had a good time last year

so I geared myself up to attend this year.

Edie: I attended last year and enjoyed it.

Melissa: This was my first time attending a transgender event of this size and scope.

Bev & Jean: This was the first time we have attended. We went based on the comments of the conferences from members of our group in Poughkeepsie who had attended in the past. It sounded like fun as well as interesting! We were not disappointed!

Rochelle: This IFGE wasn't my first time nor will it be my last, Tucson here I come.

Tina: Yes; I could drive, and it happened at a fairly good time.

What were 2 or 3 things you liked?

Tina:

- 1) The people I met (Hi Melissa, Kathleen, Edie, Jan!) - what a fantastic group (and I'm fairly introverted, so I tend to stay with a small group of people, so it's nice to meet some good folks).



Tina, Tiana, Jan, Patti crusin'

- 2) There were some really good talks at the conference. I went to a talk by Dr. Richard Docter and Maureen Osborn on Wives of CD's, and another run by Maureen Osborn and Arlene Lev on Children of Transgendered Parents, which were both fantastic.
- 3) The hotel was fantastic and the staff was top-notch. We were treated with respect and dignity.

Kathleen: I liked meeting nationally known people, the lectures and having girl time to socialize.

Melissa: As I said above, there were several workshops which I feel I learned something important from. I also enjoyed the dinner cruise, I met a woman not related to our event, and had a very enjoyable conversation with her, which included some "trans 101". My dialogue with her even now continues via email. I also enjoyed the "pub crawl" Friday night.

Edie: I loved the dinner cruise. I enjoyed most of the workshops I attended, notably one on Native American traditions and two by Lady Ellen, who runs an MtF finishing school. Being at a major TG event with my home girls. By the way, from what I did learn, CDers are a product of family dynamics, transsexuals occur in utero from a mismatch between development of brain sexual identity and the development of the sex organs. These 2 events occur at different times during gestation, and a slight shift in the hormonal soup can result in a mismatch. I always enjoy a workshop on how TGs are represented in popular media as I've been to a few of those at First Event. I missed Mariette Pathy Allen's workshop, which would have been the closest to that, due to a schedule conflict and is something that Veronica Vera bravely touched upon in her keynote speech: erotic aspects of crossdressing. Perhaps Miss Vera could mentor a workshop on that!

Bev & Jean: I liked the workshops, some better than others. The one on voice was informative and has given us ideas. The one I attended about the proper way to dress by Lady Ellen was very interesting. It was great to be at a large gathering like this with the gals from MHVTA.

Jan: I liked meeting new and old friends, getting out as Jan 24 X 7 for 6 days, going on the cruise, and smoozing with others. There were some firsts like going swimming dressed but I didn't dunk under for fear of losing something on top. I also had an



awesome makeover with Kalina who was wonderful and really friendly.

Rochelle: I did like the Dinner Cruise, and meeting Frederikk Joy of Tenn. She's a Southern Belle like myself, another moment was seeing Dr Spiegel when he first arrived and I did go over say hello as we had met before. I had a consultation with him before he had a chance to talk. A wonderful Dr, warm and I feel trusting. Ms. Gilbert receiving the recognition of IFGE was wonderful; finally a true crossdresser breaks the

mold and speaks of unity within the community or get out and walk alone. I was able to get to Philadelphia to shop, dine, and clubbing. The hotel staff was super. I would like to say "Thanks to the MHVTA girls who attended the session Patti and I led" and your show of support for the MHVTA (family).



Rochelle is crusin'..

What 2 or 3 things could be improved or added? What didn't work for you?

Rochelle: My disappointments: the Hotel food, but then what did I expect. Dried Salmon with some red sauce and then Pork with a thick canned gravy which gave me heartburn for 2 days. Another was the cancellation of two seminars I wanted to hear and observe. I paid for the seminars for this sole purpose to again meet Ms. Frye and Ms. Beavers. I don't think having the Philadelphia Follies (amateurs) as entertainment justifies a Banquet expense. Would have loved to have seen Renaissance members visible then just an empty table. What are we paying a National Org for if they don't even respect themselves.

Edie commented that "Rochelle wanted to see a "Roots of Crossdressing" presentation, and a sharing of personal CD experiences? She got some of the "Roots of Crossdressing" at the psych workshops she went to, but you have to take a lot of other stuff with it, at present.

Tina:

- 1) I wonder if there is a way to make the environment a little more amenable to spouses of trans people (not that I have any hope of getting my wife to go).

This is a general observation of the trans community as a whole, not necessarily specific to the conference, and it's a very hard thing to come up with specifics.

- 2) The schedule was "feast or famine" - either most of the talks were interesting, or none of them were. I had two time periods in my two days that I had nothing of interest to me, and all the others had several talks. And it would help if the conference had talks in organized tracks that were clearly laid out in the schedule - the schedule was so hard to read and figure out.
- 3) It would also be good to have more intimate talks where people could discuss issues, and have more time than an hour and change to do it. We get precious little time to share our stories, and sometimes the limits of the conference format got in the way of helping people. Perhaps some of the evening time should be focused on stuff like "Birds of a Feather" get together to discuss issues like spouses and TG shopping, transitioning, etc. I think facilitating more conversation would give the conference a way to make it stand out from others even more, and do it in a way that is fairly inexpensive and takes advantage of our shared experiences.

Kathleen: What didn't work was I attended a couple of workshops and I couldn't ask a question because everyone was interrupting.

Jan: I didn't see a lot of presentations and presented in 2 sessions so I missed attending lots of things so I arranged to have 3 of the presenters visit my local group (MHVTA) in the future so I hope to recap. I don't care to attend presentations by TS Drs. I feel there isn't enough CD related presentations. I think the material presented tries to cover the TG Spectrum but each person has to figure out what they want to attend on their own. I would like to see "tracks" identified for the various categories like a CD track, a TS track, a political track, etc. Wonder if going out enmasse and enfemme might be possible when others are doing Dr. visits? Wonder if we might have the latest TG related videos or movies presented?

Edie: I consider it unpardonable that there was no makeup artist and hairdresser available in the hotel. We need more vendors who have stuff for sale at a reasonable price. There were no wigs for sale under \$200. A TG event with Glamour Boutique is like Christmas without Macy's. Vendors provide a source of revenue but also provide a valuable service needed by the TG community. Recall that last year Renaissance hosted the event, and held a casino night. I really enjoyed that.. no, not just because I won everything! Because it's something sophisticated to do while looking sophisticated. I would like to see a DJ playing tunes, in the hotel, until 1:00 am. I didn't like workshops starting at 9:00 in the morning, and workshops that end at 5:00 in the evening, especially when dinner is at 6:00! LOL. The awards luncheon got torturous when it seemed we were being read to from the Maryland Law Review (recipients should be brief/uplifting).

Melissa: I think the pub crawl could have been an hour longer. I thought some of the awards things were a bit long-winded, but then, they're supposed to be, aren't they??



No one needed to cue Bev and Melissa into the party...

Bev & Jean: Maybe we weren't at the right place at the right time but we were not aware of makeovers being offered at the hotel. Maybe more notification of this service being there. We also had really looked forward to the make up class that had to be cancelled. We would have enjoyed more vendors at the conference. Those that were there were very helpful but more should have been there. JUST a thought. Since this was our first time and was not sure of what to expect, it would have been nice if those of us who were "newbies" could have been introduced. Maybe on the registration form have a spot that asks if you are a newcomer and if you would like to be introduced at the dinner. That way if a person is not sure, they can say no!



Jean and Bev having a good time at the banquet

Would you consider attending other IFGE Conferences? What about Tucson '08?

Melissa: I intend to attend another IFGE conference, although I do not believe I will be able to attend the Tucson conference. That hinges on several personal things.

Bev & Jean: Yes! We have to check finances and availability! Sounds great! Are there any others coming up any sooner and closer to our area?

Patti: I enjoyed the boat cruise and look forward to next year.

Rochelle: This IFGE wasn't my first time nor will it be my last, Tucson here I come.



Meeting and hearing nationally recognized leaders like Donna Rose is awesome!!!

Tina: I would definitely go to another conference, but I don't know when. Tucson looks like fun, but it might be a little far for me to travel to.

Kathleen: Yes but Tucson is too far away & expensive so probably won't attend in '08.

Jan: I'd like to attend Tucson but it's a matter of cost and schelping all the stuff Jan does. When I brought it up to my spouse, she asked "When am I going to go somewhere?" Sore point right now! I offered to have her along.

Edie: Absolutely! Not sure about Tucson as it gets into the additional hassle and expense of shipping all my junk out there and flying. Or, take a few days and drive out there. Perhaps a few of us should rent a tour bus and make a real adventure out of it!



Erin from Tucson



Meeting new friends poolside

Write a sentence summing up your feelings about attending.

Edie: An educational, yet party-ous experience.

Melissa: I think every transgender person, wherever they find themselves on the "spectrum" should attend at least one conference like this. The opportunity to meet people, the things you can learn in the presentations and discussions are important, just to help you grow, to figure yourself out.

Bev & Jean: It would be hard for me to say just how much I enjoyed myself in just one or two lines. Both Jean and I agreed that it was one of the best weekends we've had! We both felt comfortable, accepted for who we were, completely at ease the entire time we were there. The hotel staff was most accomodating. We met great people, made new friends and had a blast with our friends from MHVTA!

Patti: After several years of attending IFGE, I dont know what I could say! IFGE presents a conference that I think tries to be a true reflection of the gender community. The presenters are experienced and know their subject matter. I think that I have arrived at the point in my journey where I want to give back and having presented I walked away with more then I ever could have expected.

Rochelle: My experience was a feeling of warmth as I got reacquainted with friends I only meet at these conferences. They are the life line of IFGE as presenter and guests continue to support and bring new medical and research findings on our community.

I would like to see more CD friendly sessions, not dressing for success, but the why aspect of it and meeting new people to discuss their dressing. At the conference there really is not meeting place for the CD only the Bar scene.

Tina: It was my first conference, and only my second time in public, so I was nervous and excited about attending IFGE. It was a whirlwind of good times, great people, and self discovery that I'll never forget. It was such a great time.

Kathleen: Everything was stated above. I had a good time.

Jan: It was a different experience for me. I had the opportunity to see how the conference runs which was interesting but I worked and missed some of the fun things. I also had a problem where I committed to this but my spouse had a medical situation and I was concerned I should have been home for her but also was part of 2 presentations. This is a matter of trying / wanting to be in 2 places at once. I would appreciate more CD presentations and some I've heard about are Reconciling Spirituality with respect to TG/CD behavior, Significant Others Care and Feeding and Loving, Employment Concerns, probably something on how to be politically active without having to compromise yourself and yes, some fun ones like makeup, deportment and appearance. Obviously since there were no people at the desserts presentations, CD's, TG's and TS's aren't too interested in that. We like to eat them but aren't interested in the creation when there are lots of other options. The problem is most CD's just want to have fun and are less likely to want to attend "quality of life threatening" topics.



Stephanie (will visit MHVTA in Sept) and closing of Philly Follies

Jan's note to MHVTA and others.. this was definitely a wonderful conference and neat experience. You ought to try attend a future TG conference like IFGE or one of the many others. Try it.. you'll like it as attested to by your MHVTA friends and family.