

THE NATIONAL STANDARD



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The Newsletter of the National Federation of Tourist Guide Associations

WINTER 2016

DC CONFERENCE THRIVES IN THE SHADOW OF EPIC SNOWSTORM

by Matthew Baker

The 2016 NFTGA conference in Washington, DC went swimmingly in spite of the devastating weather reports that had many attendees re-booking their planes, trains, and buses, and leaving early. The blizzard that followed broke lots of records, but could not dampen the collective enthusiasm for the quality programs that the host committee had arranged.

The festivities began on Tuesday morning, January 19, with a fam tour around the Washington Mall. The vicious cold had already caused public transit delays, stalling the tour's beginning. But Mary Beth Lane of the Guild of Professional Tour Guides of Washington DC quickly reclaimed the mirth, giving a highly engaging tour, making well known monuments feel fresh as the members saw them through her eyes. At the beautifully ornate Library of Congress, Boughton Barry served as docent and made the 19th century come alive in his passionate

presentation. Later, at the Air and Space Museum, docent Mark Goldberg perfectly condensed half a day's information into a one-hour tour, providing a narration as perfectly streamlined as any of the institution's splendidly designed airplanes.

The opening night dinner reception at Tony and Joe's in Georgetown was marked by a generous dusting of snow. NFTGA Vice President Ellen Malasky informed everyone, on the subsequent Monuments By Night tour, that Washingtonians always prepare

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Cold gathering on the steps of the U.S. Capitol

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If you have issues you wish the NFTGA Board or any of the federation's committees to address, here is a list of the appropriate parties to whom you should go. Each officer and committee chair has his/her contact information posted in the Members List section of the federation's website, www.NFTGA.COM.

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SUBMISSION GUIDELINES: Featured articles must be 1,000 words or fewer. Recurring columns must be 500 words or fewer. Deadline for the Spring 2016 issue of *The National Standard* is 5:00 pm, Thursday, April 21, 2016.

SUBMIT MATERIAL TO: baker.tours@yahoo.com.

The editor strongly encourages contributors to submit their work via email. Mailed submissions may be sent, if necessary, to the following address:

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MANY THANKS TO THE INTREPID BARBARA FOOS!

As many of our readers may know, Barbara Foos of the Rocky Mountain Tour Guides Assn. served as NFTGA President in the 2014-2015 term. During easy times and hard times, in waters both calm and rough, Barbara's solid leadership and insight were relied upon. All of us among the NFTGA membership, the Board, and *The National Standard* want to give our heartiest congratulations and our warmest thanks to Barbara for all she has done for the Federation.



FROM THE PRESIDENT



Wow, what a conference! If you did not make the 2016 NFTGA conference in Washington, DC, then you missed a great one. Ellen Malasky and her fantastic host team did a wonderful job of providing informative sessions, excellent hotel accommodations, and rewarding tours.

Your board of directors met for a day and a half, resulting in some productive decisions and excellent camaraderie. I am excited about working with them to take on some issues that need to be addressed. The major goals your board has set for 2016 are:

A) Facilitating and improving communications between board and membership associations, upgrading the website, using Facebook and other social media to our advantage, and launching this newsletter. Every year, each board member will act as a liaison to 3-4 associations to whom they will make personal phone calls. Each association is requested to appoint a representative to the NFTGA.

B) Reviewing and revising current NFTGA bylaws / policies and procedures to see if changes are needed. The board has appointed a committee, chaired by Secretary Bob Skiba, to handle this.

C) Increasing member associations. Cities tagged for this include: El Paso, Gettysburg, Los Angeles, Memphis, Minneapolis, Orlando, Phoenix, and Seattle.

I am honored to serve as your president and I assure you — you will again have a hard working board to improve the tourism industry and *you*, the all-important member.

Gene Reyes
NFTGA President

FROM THE EDITOR



Many thanks to the new NFTGA board for entrusting me with the task of editing the federation's newsletter. The five years I spent editing *Guidelines* for the Guides Association of New York City were the happiest years I have yet spent in that organization. The fascinating challenges

of adapting that experience to a national scale are what drew me to volunteer for this duty. As a full-time career guide, any opportunity to tell a story is welcome, whether vocally or in print.

As Velma sings in the Broadway musical, *Chicago*, "but I can't do it alone!" A newsletter needs articles, and articles need authors. That is where you come in, my fellow guides. Each one of us is an individual and we each have local attractions we love and would like to highlight. We each have war stories about interesting and difficult tours from which we feel our colleagues would benefit. We each have perspectives on our industry and our professional community we would like to share. All of the above (and more) would make great contributions to this newsletter. After all, a publication is only as good as its contributors. And in a volunteer organization like NFTGA, *you* are the contributors.

For this issue, we have contributions from our colleagues in Chicago, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, and St. Louis. We sincerely hope to soon see articles from all of the other areas represented by our member associations.

If you have an idea that you think would make a good column or article, please contact me at baker.tours@yahoo.com or 718-249-5253 and we will print great stories together. In the meantime, let's all go give great tours!

Matthew Baker
Editor-in Chief

DC CONFERENCE THRIVES

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for a blizzard by stocking up on milk and toilet paper. Neither was to be found in any of the stores, she assured us. By the time the business of the conference began in earnest, Thursday morning, everyone was perfectly content to remain within the confines of the Hyatt Place Hotel.



Ibrahima Diallo of New York and Mary Beth Lane of Washington compare photos at the Botanical Garden.

Thursday morning sessions opened with Theresa Belpulsi, VP of Tourism for Destination DC, discussing the growing trends in domestic and international tourism and their effect on the local economy. She touched on the familiar themes of advocacy for bus parking and respect from law enforcement. Following her was Jamie Faulkner Mageau, Director of Research Products at the US Travel Association, whose magnificent presentation of statistics included the fact that the travel industry generates over \$2.1 trillion and 1 out of every 9 US jobs. Mageau also noted that travel is impactful and meaningful, encouraging the federation's members to join the Power of Travel Coalition (www.travelcoalition.org) and Project Time Off (www.projecttimeoff.com).

Congressman Moody rhapsodizes about the importance of the Magna Carta.



Technology has changed the way people travel, just as it has changed every other facet of modern life.

To discuss technology for booking and guiding tours, DC Guild member Karen Miller moderated a panel of our fellow guides; Emma Guest-Consales of the Guides Association of New York City, Donna Primas of the Chicago Tour-Guide Professionals Association, and Mike Pearl of the Rocky Mountain Guides Association. Ms. Consales noted that booking software facilitates timed payment, offering peace of mind for both the guide and the client. Ms. Primas provided a handout of many guide listing websites, observing “the more kinds of tours you give, the more visible you are.” Mr. Pearl encouraged everyone to think outside the tour guiding box and embrace the jobs available in virtual tours, both recorded and livestreamed.

Guild President Dianne Wallace moderated the afternoon panel, which featured Federation members Len Holmes of the San Francisco Tour Guide Guild, Gilbert Noriega of the Professional Tour Guides Association of San Antonio, and Bob Skiba of the Association of Philadelphia Tour Guides, as well as legal analyst Richard Hermann. All four gentlemen advocated for self-regulation, promoting association-sponsored certification, rather than government-issued licensing. The subsequent discussion was divided, as many of the guides whose cities do license seemed quite devoted to that concept, while those whose cities do not were equally fond of their situation. Little consensus was found between the two. But even those who favor governmental licensing were highly impressed with the self-regulating associations' progress with their certification training courses and manuals, recognizing the value and legitimacy of such programs.

Thursday night was the highlight of the conference, as the guides embarked on a private after-hours tour of the interior of the US Capitol, arranged by Steve Livengood of the US Capitol Historical Society. Our host was retired Wisconsin Congressman Jim Moody, a gregarious and engaging guide, who brought a unique sense of perspective to this historic architectural treasure. While displays of the Magna Carta and the Rotunda were wonderful, the crowning moment of the tour was the chance to enter the House Chamber,



The Safe Guiding and Dealing with Emergencies panel: Peter Pantuso of the American Bus Association, Morgan Maravich of the National Tour Association, and Lt. Jeffrey Jarboe of the US Parks Police.

not from the visitors' gallery, but on the actual House Floor. Alas, no photos were permitted at this location. The tour was followed by an elegant dinner at the exclusive Capitol Hill Club.

By the end of Thursday night, worry about the coming storm had reached a fever pitch and most attendees had rearranged travel plans for redeye flights or crack-of-dawn buses and trains. Friday morning's sessions saw a diminished crowd, which was a shame, as these were surely the most beneficial sessions for those who stayed. The morning opened with Guild member Tracy Hale moderating a round table on the subject of working together in sticky situations. Each table was treated to a question, which was then discussed and debated, followed by one guide announcing the discussion's results to the room. An example question was: "On a student tour, a teacher who is very familiar with the area wants to be in control. Instead of taking the microphone, they continue to nag the guide by asking, 'Aren't you going to tell them about...?' What can the guide do? What should the guide not do?"

Guild Member Christen Eliason moderated the following panel on safe guiding and dealing with emergencies. Morgan Maravich, Manager of Industry and Member Engagement of the National Tour Association, and Peter Pantuso, President and CEO of the American Bus Association were on the panel. But the star of the show was Lieutenant Jeffrey Jarboe, Operations Commander, of the US Parks Police. Lt. Jarboe is a decorated veteran of the Navy Yard incident and no stranger to threat and crisis in high tourism areas. Acknowledging that safety procedures have changed in the era of pandemic mass shootings, he recommended

that everyone view the Department of Homeland Security video, *Run, Hide, Fight* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VcSwejU2D0) for how to survive an active shooter incident. He went on to note that "common sense isn't all that common," and described how people often freeze in confusion when taken out of their traditional routines and comfort zones. He added "Tour guides, bless you, deal with people in that situation every day."

The final speaker of the conference was Nicole Krakora, President of Global Protocol and Event Strategies, Inc. Offering an extremely insightful presentation on multicultural (not just multinational) communication and to be wary of cultural assumptions. She spoke in detail about the difference between familial, societal, and individualist cultures, and the importance of effective communication. The great takeaway slogan was: "Meet people where *they* are, not where *we* are."

By the end of the conference, the snow had begun to fall. And many attendees were off to outrun it. Certain post-conference tours were cancelled and refunded and those who were stuck in DC through the weekend were shown good hospitality and friendship by their host colleagues. All in all, it was a glorious conference, with intrepid troopers braving the elements to experience good education and development in one of our nation's grandest cities. We look forward to 2018!

Matthew Baker is the editor of *The National Standard* and past president of the *Guides Association of New York City*. To tour with Matt, contact baker.tours@yahoo.com.



Registrars, signing everyone in on opening day.

MEET THE BOARD



Gene Reyes (*President*) is an industrial engineering graduate of LSU and retired in 1999 from Entergy Corp. after 30 years. He has served on the NFTGA board of director's for the past five years. For over 13 years, he has been a licensed New Orleans tour guide. He is a past president of the Tour Guides Association of Greater New Orleans and a 48-year member of Toastmasters International. Gene enjoys meeting visitors from throughout the world, and loves the unique and beautiful City of New Orleans. He is honored and privileged to serve as your president and excited about having a dynamic team of board of directors.



Ellen Malasky (*Vice President*) is a Certified Master Guide with the Guild of Professional Tour Guides of Washington DC, where she serves on the board, and is a recipient of one of the 2015 Service Awards. Her tours integrate American history, DC history and US government operations. For over 35 years she worked for Ernst & Young, before retiring in 2008 as associate director. A former board member of the Washington DC Jewish Community Center, Ellen is an avid theatregoer and served as co-chair of the Theatre J Council and chair of the Arena Stage Guild. She is on the board of The Welders Theatre Company.



Lisa Puccio (*Treasurer*) was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. Upon graduating from college, she pursued a career as a CPA. Lisa started guiding student tours eight years ago and is currently self-employed, offering private and public tours to individuals and groups of all ages. She is a proud member of the Guides Association of New York City, where she has served as parliamentarian, and on the Education Committee. Lisa looks forward to performing her duties as treasurer, working with her fellow board members and becoming acquainted with all of our member associations throughout the term.



Bob Skiba (*Secretary*) is a founding member of the Association of Philadelphia Tour Guides and served 5 terms as President. He designed and edited their 250 page Tour Guides Handbook and helped put together

their Certification exam. He also works as Curator at the LGBT Archive in Philadelphia. Last year, he curated "Speaking Out for Equality", a major national exhibit on gay rights, the Constitution, and the Supreme Court. He's the co-author of two recent books on Philadelphia history, *Lost Philadelphia* and *Philadelphia Then and Now*. Bob also directs a vintage dance company and teaches ballroom dance.



Babs Daitch (*Director-at-Large*) has more than three decades in the tourism industry and served on numerous tourism and hospitality boards. Currently the President of the Las Vegas Tourist Guides Guild, she is a member of the Las Vegas Host Committee as an Ambassador for Travel and Tourism campaigns. She served as the chairwoman of the Las Vegas Territory and was on the Nevada Commission on Tourism's rural task force. A "think-out-of-the-box" type, Babs would like to continue with efforts to increase membership and communication within the western region of the USA and widen the dialogue with member association concerning regional events and training partnerships.



Joe DeGregorio (*Director-at-Large*) is from the "Hill", St. Louis, MO, childhood home of Yogi Berra, and has been a tour guide for 10 years of several St. Louis neighborhoods. He has also been a Federal Agent and Regional Director with the Defense Security Service, specializing in counter-intelligence, counter-espionage and other National Security disciplines, and has a Broadcast Journalism degree from University of Missouri, Columbia, and an MPA from Cal State, Long Beach. Joe is an Army veteran with DAV, AMVETS and American Legion memberships. He serves on the PR Committee of the Professional Tour Guides Association of St. Louis, and has memberships in six Italian-American organizations.



Katie Otten (*Director-at-Large*) was a travel agent for 22 years and has been a tour guide for 20. She has been active in the Professional Tour Guide Association of San Antonio since 1994, serving as Recording Secretary and President, among other offices. Other organizations to which she has devoted time and effort include the San Antonio Founders Day Alliance, Centro San Antonio, and the First Repertory Theatre.

NEWS YOU CAN USE

St. Louis Arch Grounds Undergoes Major Renovation
by Joe DeGregorio

Construction started early last year to completely remake the area surrounding the Arch, and despite the recent major flooding on the Mississippi, construction is in full swing. Officially called “The City Arch River Project”, the goals are to extend the grounds over the depressed section of the highway fronting the Arch to allow for easier walking access from downtown hotels, create bicycle and running trails and a location for major concerts.

Also ongoing is a complete overhaul and enlargement of the Museum of Westward Expansion positioned underneath the Arch. The construction recently entered a phase whereby trips up the symbol of “Gateway to the West” have been halted as well as access to the museum, until sometime this spring. Visitors can still access the Arch (south leg only) by traversing through construction fences that begin at the nearby Old Cathedral. Once a “Grand Reopening” date is set, it will be placed on the NFTGA website.

BREAKING NEWS: The National Blues Museum, located just west of downtown St. Louis, is scheduled to open this April. My next column will give you “News You Can Use” on this exciting project.

Joe DeGregorio is a member of the Professional Tour Guides Association of St. Louis. To tour with Joe, contact joe.dehillboy@gmail.com.



Before

After

“BISCUIT”: A CAUTIONARY TALE by Wayne Galasek

Tour guides routinely face a variety of challenging situations: weather, traffic, educational, medicinal, personal and mechanical, but the most important consideration is safety of our passengers and guests.

Before I became a tour guide, I drove passenger buses/mini coaches on a part time basis. On one particular winter day, I was tasked to pick up a group of senior citizens from their retirement home and drive them to a well-known local bakery for breakfast and paczki (aka “poonchkis” or chocolate doughnuts) the traditional Polish pastry. This particular bakery was known for their chocolate glazed paczkis, as well as other delicious delights. It was February and Fat Tuesday, just before Ash Wednesday, sunny, about 20 degrees with 6 inches of snow on the ground – a beautiful winter day.

At the pickup point, I met the group and escorted the crowd, mostly women, to the bus for boarding. Everybody was having a good time and looking forward to something different from their typical



Everyone loved Biscuit!

breakfast fare. As the group lined up, I was drawn to the laughter of one particular resident, nicknamed by the housing staff “Biscuit” because she literally weighed about one biscuit short of a quarter ton. She was a very large, pink, gregarious woman - loved by all.

Now, I was taught driving courtesy and safety by an old-fashioned driver, the kind that required that we should always aid with boarding and unloading, offering our hand to anyone who needs it, and standing near the door should somebody accidentally slip, trip or fall. As a tour guide, I follow those very professional standards to this day.

Well, for some reason on this cold winter day, Biscuit decided to wear a fur coat and flip flops for the trip to the bakery, after first painting her toenails and fingernails dark green. You can only imagine what someone of that size looks like in a big, furry black fur coat, pink flip-flops, and green nails, padding her way across the

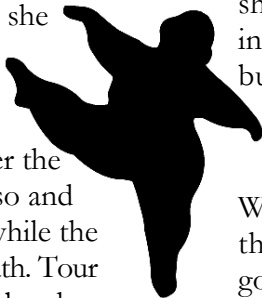
slippery driveway and gingerly climbing the steps of my mini-bus. Fortunately, she got on the bus without incident and her merry voice carried over all, saying: "I just can't wait to get my hands on some of those delicious chocolate doughnuts!"



Chocolate Paczki

We arrived at the location and I began the process of disembarkation. One by one, the group exited without incident, until there, standing at the top of the steps, was Biscuit, quivering in delight and telling everyone not to take all the chocolate doughnuts! Many older folks correctly back down steps, especially on buses, as it is generally safer, and Biscuit followed the suggestion, turning her ample rear to me, slowly backed down the bus steps, into my waiting arms. I still remember those porcine feet and green toenails coming toward me.

To this day I'm not really sure how it happened, but as Biscuit put her leading flip-flopped foot on the icy pavement and shifted her weight to her second foot, she stumbled. Falling backward onto me, she somehow got her feet to move forward under the bus, and before I could do anything, Biscuit had slipped out of my arms and managed to wedge herself under the vehicle. Well, not entirely. Her upper torso and head were on the outside of the vehicle while the rest of her ampleness was wedged underneath. Tour guides and drivers all know that the mini-bus has a higher frame than a coach, and it is entirely possible for this to happen.



Nowhere in my first aid training as a driver, Boy Scout, parent, or sports coach prepared me for this scenario, and I was fiercely determined to make sure she was safe. No worries – Biscuit, the sweet dear, was laughing! Apparently, it was relatively warm so close to the engine and exhaust system, and her only concern was getting at those delicious chocolate pastries. She was actually giggling!

So, I quickly got the rest of the people off the bus, and they quickly went into the bakery and told everyone about the goofy tableau taking place in the parking lot. Within minutes, the group was back outside, having fun and feeding Biscuit her cherished doughnuts.

After determining that she was safe and warm, I looked up to see the crowd looking to me for a solution – how to get Biscuit out from under the bus. It was apparent that I'd have to grab her discretely and gently pull her out from under the bus. Sounds simple, but not so fast. I'm not a little guy. At the time of this event, I weighed somewhere upwards of 275 lbs, but she was pushing somewhere over 400 and in an extremely challenging position.

So, I put my arms around her shoulders, gallantly asked if she was ready to be saved, and gave a tug. But, to my and everybody's, surprise – when I pulled, only the fur coat moved, bunching up around her ample bosom.

It was only at this moment that Biscuit gamely informed me that she was not wearing any clothes under her fur garment. She was completely naked underneath, except for the fur coat which now was being pulled off her body... by me.

I stopped immediately, much to her dismay. Of course, we all asked *why* she wasn't wearing any clothes, especially when leaving the senior center in the middle of winter. She gamely responded that she's often unclothed in her apartment, and never intended to disrobe in the bakery. She was there to buy doughnuts and get back on the bus. Needless to say, the crowd was howling with glee, while Biscuit joyfully munched on her paczki.

We were all standing around when it occurred to me that I needed help. There was no way I alone was going to get her out of this predicament. I called an ambulance. It took only minutes for them to arrive, siren wailing, while everybody enjoyed the situation.

Two young medics showed up and determined that she was safe and warm and in no immediate danger, other than exposure to the cold ground on her naked flesh. But, big and strong as they were, they, too ended up disrobing her further without having any success.

Picture this in your mind: she's lying on the ground, half under the bus, most of her fur coat bunched around her waist, while her feet and pink flip-flops were being warmed by the engine heat – and she's happily eating a chocolate doughnut.

Everybody was grinning, but the problem remained. So, we decided to call the Fire Department. Again, sirens wailing, they arrived very quickly. The engine

company arrived with 5 very large and amused firemen. Finally, I said there's only one way to get her out safely – somebody has to go to the other side of the bus and press their feet against hers, while the rest of us try to lift the bus slightly and pull her out – all while keeping her clothed. “Frankly, fellas,” I said, “... I'm not licensed to do that.” It must also be noted that, being gentlemen, nobody had walked around to the other side of the bus, to, ahem, analyze the situation. Until now.

So it was that the tallest and youngest of the firemen went to the bus side opposite Biscuit, arranged himself to align with her feet and with her help and effort, pushed his feet against hers. Meanwhile, the rest of us (two medics, 4 firemen and me) gently lifted the bus and pulled Biscuit to safety - fully clothed with dignity and doughnuts intact!

The crowd cheered while the firemen and medics smiled sweetly and packed up their gear. I got everybody back on the bus and I dropped them off at the senior center, much to the joy and happiness of all involved.

Of course, we reported the event to the senior center staff and my office. No one could have anticipated the situation, and when asked, nobody had any other workable solutions, either. One can only imagine how the ambulance and firemen described it in their reports.

In another time, this could have spelled disaster: injuries, lawsuits, suspensions... God knows what



else. But, by keeping safety first, discretion second, and humor above all, this story lives on.

Footnote: This is a true story. My wife reminded me that she remembered it ironically happened on Fat Tuesday! The senior citizen center has changed ownership, the bus company I worked for went out of business, Biscuit has passed into immortality, and I am now a Certified Tour Guide in Chicago.

But, I'm guessing that everyone involved still tells this heartwarming story around the family and firehouse dinner table. I know I do.

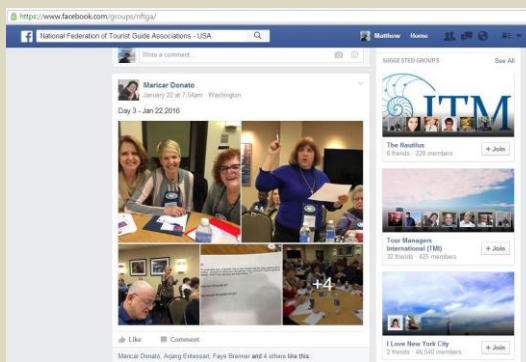
Wayne Galasek is a Chicago Certified Guide and member of the Chicago Tour-Guide Professionals Association. To tour with Wayne, contact wgalasek@aol.com.

JOIN THE NFTGA FACEBOOK GROUP

by Bob Skiba

The National Federation of Tourist Guide Associations Facebook Group, www.facebook.com/groups/nftga/, is one of the best ways for you to stay connected to guide associations and guides all across the country. The group is open to any individual who pays dues to an organization on our member list: www.nftga.com/members.html#mem-list. It's private, fun, and friendly. Only group members can see posts, so join today to begin sharing ideas and information with guides from all across NFTGA's network of member associations!

Bob Skiba is a past president of the Association of Philadelphia Tour Guides and serves on the Board of Directors of the NFTGA. To tour with Bob, contact bobskiba@verizon.net.



Our Facebook group offers opportunities for networking, comparing notes, and shop talk with guided touring colleagues throughout the US.

TOURING WITH THE “BAD GUYS”

By Esther Banike

“Keep your head on swivel,” advised Lieutenant Jeffrey Jarboe of the US Parks Police during the 2016 NFTGA conference in Washington, DC. In other words: tour guides need to be ever vigilant - on the lookout for “bad guys”.

The lieutenant was referring to the kind of “bad guy” everyone wants to elude. But are there “bad guys” (and girls), or bad times, that tour guides should track down instead of avoid? These questions were on my mind last September during an official visit to Medellin, Colombia, as representative for World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (WFTGA).

WFTGA is an Affiliate Member of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), whose biennial General Assembly was in Medellin. Hundreds of Heads of State, Tourism Ministers and tourism authorities from around the globe, as well as hundreds more of Affiliate Members from the private sector, made up the assemblage. The event is not unlike our WFTGA biennial conference, with many Delegates in native dress for after-meeting socials and tour events.

ID’s included one’s photograph, name and city/country - but mine listed only my name and World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations, for as the Secretary of the WFTGA Executive Board, I represent all 80+ member-countries, and at such events am, figuratively, a woman without a country. Actually, it was kind of fun to have people constantly guess about my “accent” before asking outright where I was from. But an incident about “bad guys,” while on tour with a number of fellow-attendees, forever impressed my city of residence on that group.

I won’t deny that I had major concerns when asked to go to Colombia in place of WFTGA President Felicitas Wressnig who had committed to a different event. Colombia has an enduring reputation for brutal drug cartels, uncontrolled street violence, kidnapping of Westerners, and lots of “bad guys”. But after doing some research on current conditions in Medellin, I



*House of Memory Museum
in Medellin, Colombia.*

decided to go to the land that had produced “bad guy” Pablo Escobar.

Little did I know that long-dead Pablo Escobar still draws a crowd in Colombia. There are pilgrimages to his place of birth, visitors to his death site, and tours that highlight his life events between those two. Though the violence level of yesteryear Colombia has subsided, the memory of the country’s most notorious gangster lives on, and he is the subject matter for many documentaries as well as urban myths.

Many cities prefer to downplay the existence of their historical “bad guys”. Not Medellin. An annual Memory Week commemorates victims of the armed conflict that plagued Colombia for decades. One of the stops on a city tour offered to UNWTO participants included Casa de la Memoria (House of Memory). The museum, dedicated to creating a historic memory of Colombia’s conflicts, was an idea suggested by victims’ families. The starkly modern building houses photographs, videos and interactive displays that reconstruct a history steeped in violence. “Remember not to repeat” is the message.

As African delegates in colorful robes examined photos of various armed gangsters, I asked our museum guide, “Which of these is Pablo Escobar?”

His face went white with anger as he replied, “Why does anyone ask that question? There is more to Medellin than Pablo Escobar!”

With this, one of our startled Africans asked, “Who is Pablo Escobar?” and as our colleagues gathered ‘round, all eyes alternated between me and the guide.

It was not my place to answer unless he refused to. Then, I would have offered only a brief comment about Pablo being one of the baddest of Colombian “bad guys”. (In case you don’t know who Pablo Escobar was, think El Chappo on steroids!)

Instead, I commiserated with the guide, “I am a tour guide from a beautiful city with extraordinary architecture and it’s disappointing when some visitors are more concerned with where Al Capone hung out. But we can’t deny our notorious characters.

People ask out of curiosity, not disrespect - and isn't it better if they hear it from a tour guide who can give reliable commentary?"

The guide relaxed and led us to Señor Escobar's photograph, where he offered up a brief account of the life and times of Pablo. Now the people on our tour know true things about "bad guy" Pablo Escobar - and who knows, maybe they took a post-tour of his hangouts to learn more. But they also guessed where I hail from - for *everyone* knew that Al Capone was *Chicago's* uber "bad guy".

There are guides who specialize in Gangster Tours, for every major urban area has their share of "bad guys" who evolved into pseudo folk heroes - or despised despots who reaped a place in history. Depending on the audience, the same "bad guy" could be treated as either!

It is a guide's choice whether to include "the dark side" into his or her commentary, but a visitor's inquiry should always be addressed. This means reading-up on people or places you'd rather not - especially if a blockbuster film or best seller hits the charts. Take my advice: bedtime is not a good time to read up on murder and mayhem. But I was forced to in 2003, upon publication of *Devil In the White City* by Erik Larson. Fortunately, the author is able to lead readers into gruesome murders and dissection of a couple-hundred innocent victims without freaking everyone out. The book is set at the time of the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago and includes fascinating details on "the Fair that changed

America" – must-read material for Chicago tour guides – and architect Daniel Burnham. Fascinating, but not exactly a formula for a bestseller. But... there's The Devil – this "bad guy" serial killer that appeals to a wider audience.

Caution: You know not to talk about gangsters when working with student groups, right?

As for Medellin, I would return without hesitation. The heavy security setup for UNWTO participants is common for VIPs and was reassuring for this first-time visitor, but I am convinced that Medellin is as safe as most other urban areas around the world.

These days the country is known more for its beauties than its "bad guys"... an almost-Miss-Universe and actress Sofia Vergara are just two. Recent news of peace agreements between warring Colombian tribes (brokered in Cuba) gives hope to locals. Food is plentiful, luscious, and cheap. A bottle of amazing high-end Colombian red wine set me back just \$6.00 US at a supermarket.

And then there is Botero! He is just one local "good guy" who did well and gives back to his homeland. Look him up, tour guide!

Esther Banike is a *Chicago Certified Guide*, member of the *Chicago Tour-Guide Professionals Association*, and *Secretary on the Board of Directors of the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations*. To tour with Esther, contact GoChicagirl@aol.com.



(Above) A popular image of Pablo Escobar in Medellin souvenir shops.

(Below) A 1920's gangster themed dinner show in Chicago.



the *World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations*. To tour with Esther, contact GoChicagirl@aol.com.

GET INVOLVED! JOIN THE NFTGA PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Now is an exciting time in the life and growth of the National Federation of Tourist Guide Associations. More members are stepping up to make this organization a thriving force in our industry and the true face of the American tourism trade. To that end, the Board of Directors has created a PR Committee to help with outreach. If you are available/interested, please contact our secretary, Bob Skiba, at secretary@nftga.com.

TECH TALK

*Technology and Technique
for Tour Guides*

by Donna Primas

Welcome to *Tech Talk!*

Those attending the recent conference in Washington, DC had the pleasure of meeting tour guides from all over the United States (and even one from Sweden). One of the sessions started a dialogue about Technology that might be helpful to tour guides. In this column, we look to continue that conversation.

Do you have a personal website?

A personal website can give you absolute control over your website “look” and content and provide you with a direct connection to potential customers. It is the ultimate way to self-market your services.

When building your site, make yourself appear as an authority and present yourself by including compelling copy and more than just key words (tour guide, tourist guide). Inclusion of videos and photos and links with other web sites help your site earn higher ratings with Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Higher SEO means when people “google”, your information will be closer to the top of the results.

Authenticity and customization are two current trends in tourism marketing. Think about how you can add value to future or past tour participants by providing unique content, such as a blog. Photos of you and of things people may see on your tour, insider tips, tour participant group photos, and positive post-tour comments or endorsements of your services make you appear genuine and dependable.

If there are articles written about you in local newspapers or magazines, be sure to include links to those as well. Be sure to change things up from time to time to keep people coming back to your site.

Guide & Tour Listing Sites

If you do not have the time, money, and expertise to put up a personal website, then consider being included and enhancing your listing on your own association’s guide listing (if one exists). If that is not an option, look



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into being listed on one or more of the independently owned and operated guide and tour listing sites.

There are *many* guide and tour listing sites! The NFTGA does not endorse any particular

site(s), rather they want to help NFTGA member associations know what is out there and encourage members to share their experiences with the independent listing sites. One facet of the technology presentation in DC was a hand-out showing tour and guide listing websites, which included some notes about the sites and/or pros or cons about each.

The NFTGA will try to keep updating and periodically sharing a listing of these sites, but we need your help! If you are listed on a guide finding website, we want to know why you find it valuable and if it has helped you to secure paid jobs. If you know of any drawbacks to a guide listing website, please let us know that, too. If you want to assign “star ratings”—five stars is best, zero stars is worst—that information may prove helpful.

More Tech...Technology & Technique!

Here are some articles that may provide valuable information about how to improve your commentary, personal website or blog.

- **Infographic: 5 Weak Words to Avoid & What to Use Instead**
www.pinterest.com/pin/226587424979980646/
- **11 Reasons Your Website Isn't Making Money**
www.inc.com/jayson-demers/11-reasons-your-website-isn-t-making-money.html
- **10 Ways to Boost Your Blog Traffic This Week**
Season 6, Episode 12: Blow Up Your Blog!
[Podcast] by Michael Hyatt (30 minute Podcast)
<http://michaelhyatt.com/season-6-episode-13-blow-up-your-blog-podcast.html>
Transcript of the podcast: http://this-is-your-life.s3.amazonaws.com/tiyl_s6_ep_12_102815.pdf

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