

Celebrating Making a Difference for 40 Years: The History of FPA NorCal

Over the next 48 hours, more than 600 financial advisors, speakers, and sponsors will gather at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco for the 2012 FPA NorCal Conference. The FPA NorCal Conference has been a sell out to attendees in recent years and has earned a reputation for being one of the best conferences in the industry.

The Formative Years

Forty years earlier, in **1972**, a group of men gathered at the Cabana Hotel in Palo Alto to share their thoughts about financial planning. Needless to say, none of the attendees at the first gathering could have imagined what the next 40 years would have in store for the financial planning profession or our “little conference.”

Ken Nitzberg served as the president of the East Bay Chapter of the International Association for Financial Planning in 1970. As the first IAFP chapter in the Bay Area, the East Bay Chapter was at ground zero of the financial planning movement in Northern California. In the early '70s the East Bay Chapter met in a conference room at the MacArthur/Broadway Shopping Center in Oakland. George Coughlin started working in Nitzberg's Equitec office and joined the IAFP right away. Richard Stone, Jerry Ball, and John Cahill were both the leaders and the “worker bees” in the group.

Although the details seem to be fuzzy, as the IAFP chapters opened around the Bay Area, the leaders thought it would be a good idea to gather from around the region on an annual basis to share ideas. The first “regional conference” was held in 1972. John Cahill and Jerry Ball are credited with organizing these annual gatherings that grew to include members from eight IAFP chapters.

Over the next 40 years, the leaders, locations, and names of the event would change. But one enduring idea prevailed—the best and the brightest financial advisors in Northern California found value in coming together and collaborating on a regular basis.

When the conference committee started planning last year for our 40th anniversary, we started asking questions and uncovering pieces of information. Some pieces fit together nicely and others left us with gaping holes we hope to continue to fill in. As best as we can surmise, here are some of the highlights of what has transpired over the last four decades.

The earliest documents we found refer to the “Sixth Annual Financial Planning Seminar” held in **1977**, chaired by Vern Hayden. The theme for the meeting was “Future Directions in Financial Planning.” The conference was held at the SF Airport Hilton Hotel. The next year, **1978**, the conference moved to the San Jose Convention Center and Gilman Robinson served as chair.

The Growth Phase

In **1980**, the ninth annual conference was led by the East Bay Chapter and held at St. Mary's College in Moraga. The event was co-chaired by Ken Coit and Mike Markey. Markey recalls they “sold 105 booths that year.” At that point, the conference leadership was rotated between chapters. In **1981** Bill Tanner chaired the conference for the San Francisco Chapter and the event was held at the Jack Tar Hotel. Bob Hewitt served as the “exposition chairman” that year.

Ida Lyons served on the conference committee for the first time in **1982** and then stepped into her role as conference coordinator in 1983. This was a pivotal development for the conference as Ida's professionalism and continuity would allow the conference to grow in stature over the years. Ida served as conference coordinator for the next 11 years—through the 1993 conference.

In **1984**, the East Bay's conference co-chairs Fred DeVinney and Tom Green lead the conference to the Oakland Convention Center. Art Laffer was one of the keynote speakers. **1985** was Kent Noard's first year on the committee and he stepped up to serve as co-chair with Bob Sullivan in **1986** representing the “Santa Clara Chapter,” the precursor to the “Silicon Valley” chapter.

Brenda Herrington joined the conference committee in 1986 and she served as the binder coordinator for three years. She was the program co-chair with Kent Noard in **1990** and then sponsor co-chair in 1991. In 1992, Brenda served as the conference chair. When Ida Lyons retired after the 1993 conference, Brenda took over as executive director in 1994. Not too many people could fill the shoes of Ida Lyons. But

once again, the professional management of Brenda Herrington proved to be a significant asset to the continued growth of the conference over the next 17 years.

During our research process, we stumbled upon an interesting trivia question. Somewhere along the way, the math didn't add up. For years, we had been referring to the 32nd annual conference, 33rd annual, and so on. Well, if the first conference occurred in 1972, then the 40th should have occurred in 2011...but we were one year off in our counting...the 2011 conference was only the 39th. What happened? How did we lose a conference?

It turns out that our friends Jim King (East Bay Chapter), Bob Hewitt (Monterey Bay Chapter), and Carl Reinhardt (Santa Clara Chapter) were to blame! These men were serving on the IAFP National Board and the IAFP decided to hold its 1989 Annual Convention at the Moscone Center in San Francisco. The decision was made by the NorCal leaders that the NorCal chapters would serve as the hosts of the National Convention and there would not be a separate NorCal Conference that year. In addition to King, Hewitt, and Reinhardt, the 1989 IAFP Board of Directors included Ross Levin, Mark Tibergien, and Lou Stanasolovich. The headline speakers at the IAFP National Convention that year included Louis Rukeyser and Milton Friedman!

The next year, **1990**, the conference moved back to Santa Clara. The first women to lead the conference were Kim Galatolo and Jan Schneider, who served as conference co-chairs and represented the North Bay Chapter.

For three years, from **1991** through 1993, the conference was held at the Oakland Convention Center as that location was thought to be a central point in Northern California. However, after the Tax Reform Act of 1986, numerous real estate syndicators went out of business and the number of sponsors at industry events shrunk dramatically.

In the mid-1990s the conference and the industry were changing. Following the **1992** regional conference, the committee charged with the task of planning the subsequent conference in 1993 recognized the event was at a crossroad.

A meeting was held in which the presidents of the eight Bay Area IAFP chapters (Alameda County, Central California, East

Bay, North Bay, Monterey Bay, Sacramento, San Francisco, and Silicon Valley) met at Mary Sullivan's office in Emeryville. At that meeting it was decided that it was beneficial for the chapter presidents to know each other, communicate, and work together within the region. This meeting resulted in the formation of the "Presidents' Council."

It was determined that the purpose of the Presidents' Council would be to meet quarterly to discuss items of interest or concern to each chapter. It would be to share ideas, thoughts, suggestions, successes, and failures—i.e., news of each chapter. It would also be to coordinate the activities at a regional level. In hindsight, the Presidents' Council has been an integral factor in the success of the IAFP and FPA chapters in Northern California.

In **1993**, Norm Boone became the first "chair" of the Presidents' Council. Tradition later dictated that the chair would be "elected" from among the outgoing class of chapter presidents and the chair would then remain on the council for one additional year. Traditionally, representatives from each of the Northern California FPA Chapters are invited to attend. In addition, the council invites the chair of the conference and the newsletter editor to attend as well.

Virginia Gerhardt served as conference chair in **1994** when the committee decided it was time to focus on the education delivered to our members. That year the committee cut the number of sponsorships available by 50 percent and moved the conference to San Francisco. The "1994 Northern California Regional Financial Planning Conference" was phenomenally successful in terms of the number and quality of sponsors, better educational sessions, attendance from members, and importantly, the event was very successful financially.

Hitting Its Stride

In **1995**, the conference committee held its first brainstorming meeting to launch the planning for the next conference. This turned out to be a critical element in the planning process. Leaders from the industry are invited to talk about the cutting edge issues facing the profession and suggest topics and speakers that are compelling.

Over the years the committee has been told that San Francisco is a destination to which our members enjoy

returning each year. The conference tried the Hotel Nikko, Miyako Hotel, and the Park Hyatt before setting into the Palace Hotel in **1998** at the urging of Brenda Herrington. The feedback from our members has consistently said that the Palace Hotel is the perfect combination of location, size, and layout for our meeting.

The FPA NorCal Conference recorded our first “sell out” in **2008**. Over the past few years, attendance grew to a point that attendees were not able to get seats in meeting rooms and the event was too crowded. Again the committee felt a priority should be placed upon our members' conference experience and it was determined that once the attendance reached a certain point, registration would be closed. The conference has sold out three of the last four years.

The **2012** FPA NorCal Conference marks the 14th time in the past 15 years we have met at the Palace Hotel. Because of a large city-wide convention in 2003 we were forced to relocate for that one year.

Making A Difference

From our inception in 1972, financial planners in Northern California have held an annual conference for the purposes

of education and networking. Over the years, the event has grown, the name has changed, but the ideals remain the same. Today, we call it the FPA NorCal Conference. This year, the conference objectives are fivefold:

- To provide advanced educational sessions for our members
- To provide networking opportunities for our members
- To strengthen the conference as an entity and ensure we possess adequate financial reserves to mitigate the impact of unforeseen events
- To distribute the excess proceeds from the conference to our affiliated FPA chapters who participate in the organization of the conference.
- To promote the financial planning profession and increase the awareness of the Financial Planning Association.

To better celebrate our successes, we need to understand our history and pay tribute to the men and women upon whose shoulders we stand today. To those of you on the list on the next page and those of you who have served on committees and in leadership positions we have not mentioned, we want to thank you for making a difference—in our communities and our profession—over the past forty years. ***Here's to you!***



2011 FPA NorCal Conference Committee