

Fall Magazine 2020

Washington Wire by Lea McCullough

Association Life in the Midst of a Pandemic

After nearly 20 years as the Executive Director of WOMA, it feels as if my work life has been on repeat year after year with the same fun, meaningful, and workable routine. It looks something like this: WPMA in February, PMAA in May, WPMA & WOMA Convention in June, State Executives Convention in August, PMAA again in October, and Holiday Party in December. Each and every year, it's pleasingly the same. Until 2020.

2020 was not on my Association Vision Board: The only travel outing that was normal this year was our WPMA Convention in Las Vegas, and I remember listening to the news breaking in Seattle about an outbreak of the Corona Virus. I did wonder to myself if it was safe to fly. We didn't know what it was, how much of an effect it would have, or how our world would come to a screeching halt. But it certainly did.

Fuel volumes dropped anywhere from 40-90% at our gas stations in Washington State, new social distancing protocols were put into place in convenience stores, and travel ANYWHERE outside of your backyard became a figment of our imagination.

Governor Inslee locked the state down with his "Stay Home, Stay Safe" order, mandated how large of gatherings we could have, put the counties in Phases, then made exceptions and modifications to the Phases, and ultimately mandated masks in public. Whether his actions were correct or incorrect, his leadership has squashed the economy in Washington State – all in the name of science. While Walmarts, Home Depots, Lowe's, and Targets remained packed, small businesses across the state are suffocated with regulations, putting a huge portion of mom and pops out of business. One station owner near the Canadian Border saw a 90% reduction in volume, forcing him to shut the doors on his store and leave the pumps running for his occasional fuel customer.

As a result of the Phases, WOMA was forced to reschedule our Convention from June to August, and then ultimately cancel the event all together. I was personally truly saddened to see us wave goodbye to the WOMA Convention in 2020, but I believe in my heart it was the right thing to do for the health of our members. A single case of COVID-19 coming from our event, and ultimately spreading to the families at home, could have been devastating and heartbreaking. While my business and political brain wants to push through and prove the world wrong, my empathic and logical side understands it is not a risk worth taking.

So Now What?

The Executive Committee is working on a Plan B for WOMA. While it does not look like we will be able to gather like we have in the past until a vaccine is available and tested, we still do want to keep our Association contributing to our industry. We are working through the details now of an Association Virtual Series that can connect Members with Vendors and promote education, product releases, networking connections, etc. It is important that we still continue to be seen as contributing to the economy. Be a part of the solution, not the problem. Stay tuned for more details.

2020 Election:

While most of the major congressional races seem to be leaning towards incumbents, District 10 is the exception. The previous Mayor of Tacoma, Marilyn Strickland, is leading the race for the vacancy of Denny Heck. She will run against Beth Doglio in the fall.

The Gubernatorial Race ought to be a fun one to watch! Candidate and Police Chief Loren Culp took the majority of the Republican votes in a sea of 34 candidates! It seems as if his grassroots efforts, his Freedom Rallies, and his strong stance on upholding the Constitutional Rights of the People of Washington has carried him to the ballot in

November. Within a few hours of announcing his primary win, Tim Eyman and Phil Fortunato endorsed him for Governor, throwing all their support votes to Culp. I hope we can trust on our Secretary of State Kim Wyman to pull off an ethical election that isn't riddled in fraudulent votes, incarcerated voters, and our favorite pets voting in this election. If that is possible, I think the state has a chance of rolling Red. It would be the first time since a Republican Governor (John Spellman) was elected in 1980. 40 years ... I feel like the time for change has come.

Sayonara 2020 Party!

If I could visualize a perfect future, it would be hosting a “*Sayonara 2020 Party*” with all of you. Getting us all back together, under more normal circumstances, exchanging handshakes, business cards, and hugs for old times’ sake. Social distancing and isolation have not been good for the human soul or our Association. I’m deeply reminded that the power of our Association lies in connection, networking, friendships and if we are being honest – a great round of golf and libations. Zoom just doesn’t feel the same. I hope the next time I see you is face-to-face, connecting authentically, with a cold one in our hands!