

# THE MEETING MANAGER

Meeting Professionals International's Award-Winning Publication

November 1995 / U.S.\$6



**Visionary Venues  
Expand Meeting  
Options** 22

**Techno-Savvy  
Traveling Tools** 28

**Ross Perot's United  
We Stand America  
Conference** 39



**Don't Let Your Sales Crash and Burn** 19



**Meeting Challenges in China**

32

---

## IN THE NEWS

---

Steve Wynn Named Gaming's  
Powerhouse Leader

---

CMPs Lend Expertise for  
Future Testing

---

PEC-North America Offers  
Adult-Learning Innovations

---

## CASE STUDY

*The Challenge of a Lifetime*

# Anatomy of Perot's 1995 'United We Stand' Conference

*Editor's Note: Dallas meeting planner Sherri Cook was selected to execute the UWSA National Conference on May 24, just two and a half months prior to the event that drew 8,000 people, three dozen high-profile politicians and the world's attention to Dallas.*

**A**s meeting professionals, we always have challenges in planning and executing an event. However, seldom are there as many challenges as those encountered in "Preparing Our Country for the 21st Century," the mega-meeting orchestrated by Ross Perot this summer in Dallas.

Perot had a clear goal: Provide a forum for all Americans to be educated in-depth on the issues that are important—Social Security, health care and Medicare, welfare and Medicaid, balancing the federal budget, reforming the federal tax system, reforming the political system, term limits, trade and creating jobs.

The United We Stand America (UWSA) staff had operated numerous one-day free rallies during the 1992 presidential campaign. However, no one had experience in executing a three-day paid conference. It was Ross Perot, himself, who recognized the need for a meeting professional.

### Getting Started

Understanding that this event would require all of my time, I prepared for a round-the-clock schedule, seven days a week. The end result was 750 hours in less than three months.

From a logistical standpoint, the most appropriate facility was the Dallas Convention Center (DCC) due to location, arena size, meeting space and down-

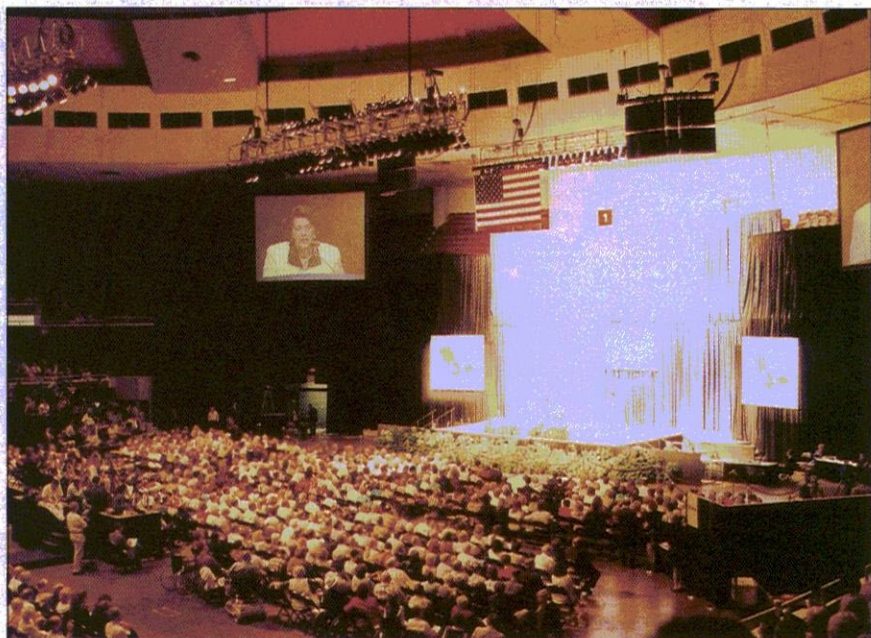


Photo courtesy of UWSA.

town hotels. The *only* obstacles in our way were six groups who had tentative or contracted holds on the space. It took countless hours to work out the contractual details for our dates, since this was the only time the U.S. Senate would be out of session. We initiated direct contact with the groups with the consent of the DCC. Being sensitive to the facility's position while pursuing all possible avenues, we accomplished our mission.

We prepared for the highest numbers, estimating up to 10,000 persons, and planned to be ready for anything.

Media specialists (Bob Newman of Newman & Associates) and an independent planner who is a technical expert (Mark Thomas) were hired.

National contacts were sought for expertise in the political arena and

by  
**Sherri A. Cook, CMP**

*Continued on page 44.*

Continued from page 39.

knowledge of the media's logistical needs for this type of event.

We created a budget using our best knowledge and updated it as proposals were secured. A 10-15 percent contingency for unknown events was added.

The first order of business was to develop a project and tasks list. Next, we assigned teams and leaders. We met as teams and I met with each leader to learn their strengths and weaknesses. Understanding the organizational structure and how volunteers work was necessary. All staff and volunteers (more than 500), including myself, took part in efforts such as distributing fliers at local events which made us feel like a true team.

Nearly 200 security professionals were hired and we felt we were as prepared as possible with plain-clothes police, uniformed police and guards, and police on horseback herding protesters outside.

### Marketing

We used UWSA newsletters. UWSA Regional Managers and State Directors took responsibility for marketing within their states. UWSA staff and media consultants created, distributed and followed up newspaper feature stories (Op Eds), press releases and radio public service announcements. Local promotion was done daily by distribution of fliers citywide by staff and volunteers to businesses, events, organizations, colleagues, family and friends.

We scheduled media coverage such as Perot on "Larry King Live" and "Good Morning America." Staff and volunteers manned UWSA phone banks, taking registrations even at 11 p.m. and 5 a.m.

### Registration, Exhibits and Hotels

Due to costs, staffing, capability and convenience, we designed our own registration software and registration materials. There were 41 registration booths with nearly 100 personnel to accommodate processing within three hours before the opening session.

Developing and adhering to a strict policy for visibility seekers and exhibitors who would enhance our event was enforced by exhibit purchases. The event was sponsored by UWSA, so additional

sponsorships were not going to be secured as a revenue source. Our exhibit was sold out with 68 exhibits. We combined our main food and beverage venue with the show for increased attendance. Rules and regulations proved crucial. (One exhibitor who had promised to obey the rules, reneged on that promise, led protests outside the DCC and had to be removed.)

Hotels were advised of our needs: a very low room rate and the nicest properties desired. We tried to create a "win-win" situation by having the hotels call us before the cut-off date if other business came their way. We monitored our room pick-ups weekly.

### Speakers

Thirty-six prominent political and policy speakers agreed to attend. Our goal was to provide professional handling of these VIPs with constant, polite, clear communication of arrangements documented in writing. Juggling of the speakers' schedules with outside fund-raising activities and other commitments was challenging, especially when speakers desired media coverage. Perot oversaw the coordination of speakers and the agenda personally. Nearly every speaker obeyed the rules: 22 minutes each, address the issues, and no sales pitch or "slamming" other speakers.

### Audiovisuals

We used two screens with image magnification for our arena to let attendees see and hear the speakers with ease. The first two days of sessions contained 11 hours of speaking with breaks and eight hours of interactive workshops on the third day. We reserved areas for the physically challenged close to the entrances and hired signers to interpret the speeches.

In order to provide speakers with direct feedback, evaluation booklets with one page per speaker were distributed to attendees and collected daily. After the conference, staff and volunteers forwarded the unedited comments to the speakers.

### Vendors

It was essential to be prepared with vendor contacts (home, beeper and mobile numbers) during planning and on-site for immediate communication. Any

supplier whose service was required immediately was on site for the entire event.

We planned for the "what ifs." When one speaker was late, we played the tape of another speaker. If a speaker had no-showed, Perot was prepared to speak. We had experienced problems with phones, so we took a strong stand on the installation and operation of our 150 media, exhibit and organization telephones.

### True Learning Experience

Working with a billionaire, who has dedicated his life to keeping the American dream alive, I realized that if he can take time to call me after the event for a job well done, I have no excuse for not doing the same. This is a man who met with us in the planning of this program immediately upon his return from Beirut in an attempt to free American hostages. So, as soon as I was coherent after sleeping for 16 hours after the event, I wrote thank you notes to the 18 MPI volunteers as well as submitting my list of suppliers to UWSA for joint thank you letters.

### Evaluation

With every event, you learn how you could have improved it. We know that: 1) Advance lead time for planning saves costs and increases participation; 2) With the right team, hard work, long hours, flexibility, clear communication, proper direction and positive attitudes, anything can be accomplished; 3) You can create a spectacular event at a minimal cost; and 4) Something will *always* go wrong. Even when your AV is set properly with the cordless mic turned on, your singer may flip the switch off and start singing at the opening session. So, go out on stage, fix it and have her start all over again, just like Perot did. A little humor is always best. **MM**



Sherri A. Cook, CMP, is owner of Sherri Cook & Associates. She plans meetings, conventions, trade shows and incentive trips. She was recently named one of "Tomorrow's Leaders of MPI" and is serving her third year on the D/FW Board of Directors.