

# *Profiles in* EXCELLENCE

Meet Dave O'Connor, CHME, CMP —  
your GaMPI Board Planner Director for Member Care

HALI COOPER, CMP • The Mulberry Inn



*D*ave O'Connor, CHME, CMP fell into the hospitality industry approximately 30 years ago as a “fluke.” He started as a fine-dining waiter in Williamsburg, Virginia at the five-star Colonial Williamsburg Inn while working his way through nearby Old Dominion University.

After O'Connor graduated, the general manager of the Inn was so pleased with his service that he was offered a full-time position as a conference manager, a job he almost did not take as his thinking at the time was more in line with joining the Peace Corps than being in the business world! Reason prevailed however, and he grabbed what turned out to be an opportunity of a lifetime; he fell in love with our industry from day one. Williamsburg had a unique hotel situation enabling him to service more than normal corporate and association events. Most people don't know that Colonial Williamsburg is known in some circles as the “Waiting Room of the White House,” hosting many heads of state before they meet with the President. Williamsburg enabled O'Connor to move from being a waiter to actually servicing many heads of state visits, including a fantastic experience serving the Emperor and Empress of Japan.

O'Connor counts this as his “post-graduate” training in the hospitality industry as his director of conference services, a legend herself with scores of international events behind her, became his first mentor. She focused him on the importance of attention to detail, the value of a strong work ethic and taught him how to anticipate the unexpected over the course of the next five years.

Eventually he figured out that the sales team was enjoying a slightly better life-style, and moved under the tutelage of his second mentor, the director of sales, Don Bruce, who was one of the original members of what was then a fairly new organization named Meeting “Planners” International. This was his first introduction to MPI and during this period in his life, as O'Connor traveled almost every other week, he utilized MPI as his networking tool. He never forgot the value of that network and has worked hard over the years to keep it strong.

O'Connor was then recruited to Innisbrook Golf & Tennis Resort in Tampa, Florida, a state he fell in love with and was successful in staying in as he held sales and management positions with The Key Biscayne Hotel and Villas and The Colony Beach & Tennis Resort, Longboat Key. Part of the original team opening Saddlebrook Resort in Tampa, O'Connor learned what bringing a project of that scope to fruition, from the ground up, was all about. He considers these 13 years working with the owner building the resort to what it is today as one of the greatest learning experiences of his career. The business and planning skill sets he learned at Saddlebrook enabled him to then launch his own company, Meeting Connections Inc., in 1996.

For the last ten years at Meeting Connections, O'Connor's days have been filled focusing his career on the long-built

network of contacts to bring value to his clients at corporations and associations scattered throughout the U.S. His extensive travels and unique business experiences enable him to put together a perfect match and negotiation for his clients' meetings in venues around the world. His clients see him as their right arm and depend upon him. He considers himself blessed to live in an age where his experiences have combined with technologies that enable him to fulfill their expectations while living a nice lifestyle in the North Carolina mountains.



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Not only has O'Connor had a full career, he has received superior recognition from his peers in the various cities and resorts he has worked in. O'Connor has been the recipient of "Salesperson of the Year," "Best Sales Rep of the Year," and GaMPI's recognition as a "Shining Star" twice.

The "Model GaMPI Volunteer," O'Connor started out with GaMPI seven years ago as part of what was then known as the registration/greeting committee. He next chaired the original Web site Design Committee and earned his first "Shining Star" for that work. In 2002, O'Connor became active on the Ambassador Committee and enjoyed introducing GaMPI to our new members. He makes the monthly trip for GaMPI luncheons and board meetings without fail and attends as many network connections and community action service events as possible.

Being on the GaMPI Board has been one of O'Connor's most rewarding experiences. He appreciates the disciplined and organized planning process the Board engages in and takes his responsibility seriously to grow the Chapter and ensure a great welcome experience for new GaMPI members. He is passionate about his work and doing it better each day is what keeps him getting up each morning engaged. We are the lucky recipients of that passion.

#### **O'CONNOR'S COMMITMENT TO GIVING BACK TO OUR INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY.**

O'Connor has been active in MPI and HSMIAI as well as serving as a board member for his hometown Hayesville Chamber of Commerce, as a member of the Hayesville Civitan Club, as board member for the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina and as Treasurer of his neighborhood property owners association for the last 10 years. He speaks at high school career days and participates in convention and visitor bureau (CVB) focus groups nationwide. With all his involvement, though, O'Connor believes that "no organization I have been involved with has been as dynamic an experience as working with the Georgia Chapter of Meeting Professionals International. It's an honor to be part of such an organization and working with such a dynamic board of directors as we now have is a tremendous learning experience."

Living in Brasstown, North Carolina, in the mountains two hours north of Atlanta, O'Connor's life is centered around his wife of 30 years, Mary, and his daughter, Josie. The family is rounded out by a very loud-for-her-size European, long-haired Chihuahua named Betsy. Betsy actually manages the house and office. O'Connor enjoys photography, hiking, rowing and being outdoors when he is not traveling or hammering away at the computer with a phone in his ear. ☺



O'Connor and office manager, Betsy