

Early Bird Specials

SSA offers great learning opportunities at Hot Coffee/Hot Topics sessions.

By Tom Comi

Just like there are many hidden gems when looking for things to do when visiting Las Vegas, the Self Storage Association has a couple of events happening at our Fall Conference & Trade Show you might not have discovered.

One of those gems is our Hot Topics/Hot Coffee discussions that take place every morning for the early risers looking to get a jump on the day.

“These sessions are facilitated discussions on issues that owners and managers are currently facing in their day-to-day operations,” said Ginny Stengel, the SSA’s vice president of education and state programs. “Attendees will get to hear ideas from industry experts as well as their colleagues.”

Stengel said this is the first meeting where the SSA asked for speaking proposals from those interested in running discussions. The Education Committee then reviewed each of them and selected their top choices for concurrent sessions and Hot Coffee/Hot Topic sessions.

“This year we have HC/HT sessions on everything from employment issues to online marketing to self storage conversions to public relations to valuation of properties to the benefits of cost segregation,” she explained. “It’s probably the most diverse and interesting set of HC/HT sessions in recent years.”

One misconception people make is assuming that they can skip the Hot Coffee/Hot Topic discussions and simply attend the roundtable discussions later in the day, but these are two completely different events. For one, the morning sessions devote more time to each conversation.

“There is more time to delve into a topic than a 20-minute roundtable,” Stengel said. “The facilitators probably do a bit more research and some will give an overview of the topic, while roundtables are generally more of a Q&A.”

John Dunlap, president of Decidedly Dunlap Public Relations and a freelance writer for *SSA Globe* magazine, has presented at both formats and said there is a stark difference in what attendees get in return.

“We have more time to make our presentations at Hot Topics and can thus get into more details,” he said. “You have to hit the ground running in the roundtable discussions, because your time is limited until the next group arrives at your table. Both sessions are incredibly worthwhile. I’ve attended roundtable discussions and learned so much and I’ve also been a presenter a couple of times and enjoyed throwing some ideas out to the people at my table.”



The Presenters

Dunlap presented last year and talked about handling public relations during and after an emergency. He said he was really impressed with the turnout and enthusiasm.

“We had around 50 to 60 people on hand, and they were not only attentive but came up with some great questions and suggestions based on their own experiences,” he recalled. “It was a really engaging gathering.”

This year, Dunlap will be holding a discussion Wednesday morning entitled “Public Relations/Marketing: Do the Right Things the Right Way,” and he said the last thing he wants to do is do all the talking. In fact, he urges attendees to get involved.

“The great part about the discussions is that everyone is encouraged to interact,” he said. “The speakers can get their points across, then encourage everyone on hand to join in with their thoughts. Each speaker has around 30 minutes for their presentation, so we have plenty of time to cover our subject while still leaving time for audience participation.”

Stephen Bourne, of the company Site+Plan+Mix LLC, will be leading the way Thursday morning on the topic called “Self Storage in Adaptive Reuse & Conversions.” He said he will be exploring the what, how and why of storage conversions, including: building, options for design and construction methods, entitlements and permits, and construction process and phasing options.

Bourne said he will allow attendees to take the conversation where they want within the confines of his topic.

“Every conversion is unique,” he said. “I expect to have a wide range of ideas and challenges from the participants and will allow the discussion to cover the items the group selects. If they wish to know how to start, I will offer them a range of possible building types and the various advantages and disadvantages of each. There is not just one single formula that works, and this is an important concept that I would like for them to take away.”

Starting Early

The last thing people visiting Vegas want to do is get up early, but the Hot Coffee/Hot Topics event can go a long way toward making sure you maximize your time and education.

See Hot Coffee page 18

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“These sessions increase the total learning time at the conference,” Stengel said, “and there’s also a networking element in these sessions, because they are less formal than the concurrent or general sessions.”

Bourne points out that what storage operators learn in the morning can determine the companies they speak to later in conversations or while walking the trade show floor.

“It could lead many participants to connect with other vendors that they would not otherwise have considered,” he said. “Once they grasp the how, they will need suppliers and vendors to meet their newly recognized needs. Thus, they could follow up on these items throughout the remainder of the show.”

Dunlap has attended the conference as a presenter and former SSA employee, so he is well versed on the advantages of getting a good jump on the day.

“So often people kind of drag into the breakfast area and sit quietly while waiting for the first major gathering,” he said. “This way, in a nice, informal setting, they can get their motors running for what is to follow. And hopefully they learn a few things along the way. Ginny has done a great job putting this together and should be commended for coming up with the concept.” ❖

Coffee Conversations

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

**Public Relations/Marketing:
Do the Right Things the Right Way**
John Dunlap, Decidedly Dunlap Public Relations

**Connecting the Pieces of the Puzzle:
Determining Factors that Affect Property Value**
Michael Mele, Marcus & Millichap

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

Self Storage in Adaptive Reuse & Conversions
Stephen Bourne, Site+Plan+Mix LLC

**How to Measure and Prioritize
Your Online Marketing Efforts**
Jason Barrett, GoLocal Interactive

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

**Hiring, Counseling & Firing:
Critical Employment Practices at Your Facility**
Mark Saxon, Gordon & Rees LLP

Significant Income Tax Savings
Jim Shreve, Cost Segregation Services, Inc.