Become a PERENNIAL

Willem Blees, Economic Affairs Committee.

Another convention has come and gone. For Jan and me it was one of the best ones ever. Maybe it was the friendships made and renewed. Maybe it was the boat ride on Lake Washington we enjoyed so much. Maybe it was the beautiful days and cool evenings. And maybe it was the fun and relaxing time I had attending the meetings and classes. All of those reasons were the side benefits of going to a convention. The real reason the convention was a success for me were, of course, all the new things I learned.

That is why we go to a conventions. To learn new things and how to better perform the many jobs we do, like managing time, tuning unisons, or hanging a set of hammers. We also learn about things like what causes strings to break or go sharp or flat, what effects torque has on a tuning pin, or how partials work. We also refine some of the skills we already use. We can also buy tools and parts from the supply companies and talk in person to the representatives of the many companies we deal with on a regular basis.

The Economic Affairs Committee's responsibility is to write articles "on concerns which effects the economic well being of the piano technician". There is not one single more important event that effects the well being of piano technicians than the Annual Convention and Technical Institute. All the people that showed up to take advantage of Seattle's delightful weather were able to go to a multitude of classes, participate in hands on learning and attend invigorating lectures. These were the technicians and guests who understand the importance of attending classes and talking "shop" in the hallways in and around the convention hotel.

Next year the convention will be in Chicago, Illinois. I realize July of 2013 is still a long ways away, but it is never too late to start planning. I have heard that one of the reasons many technicians don't come to a convention is the cost. Not only does it cost money to attend, but there is also the cost of getting there, staying at the hotel, and of course, the money lost not working for a week. I will be the first one to say that all of that is true. I estimate that between the plane ticket, the hotel, meals and registration, the convention will set back about $3000. Add to that that I could have tuned 25 pianos, and the total "cost" for the convention comes to about $6000.

How do I justify spending $6000 on a convention, you ask? I justify the expense because maybe I won't tune one extra piano per week, or maybe I won't save an hour off the next pin block I have to fit, and maybe I won't be able to schedule my time better. But it is a combination of all of these things that is going to make me more money. It is the total learning experience that justifies the expense. I know I can make that money back in a couple of months. After that, it is all profit. Breaking it down, over the next 50 weeks, the convention cost me $120.00 per week. That's one tuning per week. Do I learn that much at the convention? The answer has to be a resounding YES.

Perhaps you have thought of attending, but, again, the money stands in your way. When compared to other industries, and even other conventions, the cost of going to a PTG convention is a bargain. For example, Jan and I are hand bell ringers. The American Guild of English Handbell Ringers (AGHER), has conventions and seminars like we do. A couple of years ago we attended the National Festival in Estes Park, Colorado. We spent 4 days learning about playing techniques, handbell music, and taking care of bells. We also attended 4 recitals and spent about 10 hours in rehearsal for a concert with 900 other bell ringers, The total "cost" of that festival, including transportation, hotel, meals and, of course, lost income, was about $4000. Can I justify that expense. YES and NO. No, because the skills I learned didn't help me make any money. The industry contacts I made won't help my business. The music, jewelry and I bought won't make tuning a piano any easier. But what I did learn was how much fun it is to ring handbells. We spent the money because we love ringing handbells. We went because we had a terrific time, see the scenery, and enjoy the cool mountain air. And last, we went because we renewed friendships and.made new friends. That is why we spent $4000.

The convention in Chicago won't have to "cost" you $6000. You can save you a lot of money by staying at a less expensive hotel, eating out of a cooler, and driving to Chicago. But the important thing is that you go. It is never too late to start planning. Put the dates on next year's calendar, and every week, put the cost of one tuning in a savings account. The next thing you know, the money is there, and you're on your way.

Several years ago I wrote an article for the PTG Auxiliary newsletter, of which Jan was the editor. I want to share that article with you. It explains my sentiments of why Jan and I attend conventions. I hope it will be the inspiration for you to come to Chicago next year, and every convention from then on.

You know what a perennial is: It is a flower that comes up year after year. It is a sign of spring. The perennial flower comes back without being invited, or planted. Best of all, it's a flower that ads beauty and grace to a garden for years on end.

Every year there is an event in the PTG that is like a perennial flower. It is the Annual PTG Convention. It is at the Convention where friends "spring up" year after year. They come because of their interest in the profession, and because of the friends they want to see. They come with love in their hearts, a song in their voices, and a smile for all to see. The friends you only see once a year are precious. Friends from around the country, and in some cases, around the world, share a common interest: the love of the piano.

When Jan and I went to our first PTG Convention in Cincinnati in 1978, Jan mostly stayed in our room or did things by herself, while I went to class. We didn't attend the opening ceremony or the banquet, because we hardly knew anybody. At that time, the primary purpose for me was to learn more about piano tuning and repairing.

Over the years, however, as we got to know more and more people, and made more and more friends, going to conventions has a whole different meaning. Now, the primary purpose of attending the convention has become socialization. Although I do learn something new every year, the best part of coming to a convention is the renewal of friendships and the making of new ones.

We have made every convention since 1978, (except Reno in 2001 when we moved to Alabama). often planning our family vacations around them. Now that the boys are grown and out of the house, we still plan our vacation around conventions and seminars. The PTG Convention is a commitment with us. We wouldn't miss one for the world. We want to see our friends. We have become perennials.

If you haven't already, I would like to encourage you to make plans now to attend the next PTG Convention in Chicago Illinois. The hotel is grand, the atmosphere is downright upright, and the friends you make will sustain you forever. If you haven't already become a perennial, start this year.