

The Payoff: My Experience at the 2006 CNAA National Gathering

By Peter Roose, StL '05

Aptos, CA — The attendance byline from this past November only captures a small part of the impact: over 90 attendees including staff, trainers, the Coro National Board of Governors (CNBoG), friends, and alumni from each decade from 1950 to 2000, representing all Coro Centers around the nation. The event's impact, however, was felt in individual conversations and relationship building throughout the weekend. From those connections, countless stories developed this past November and accounts are as varied as the generations represented. The following is my experience at the 2006 CNAA National Gathering—and the message here is that the payoff proved larger than expected.

Thursday, 11.16.06 – *Travel Day*

I departed for the St. Louis airport at 3:00pm local time full of anticipation and excitement. I was scheduled to take-off at 4:45pm, connect in Las Vegas, land in San Jose at 10:30pm, and then rendezvous with Andrew Butcher, a 2005 St. Louis classmate of mine, to drive to Aptos. The first sign of trouble came with a phone call from Andrew just before my plane left from the 'Lou—"My plane out of Pittsburgh is going to be delayed an hour because of bad weather in New York."

No big deal. I'll just wait a little in San Jose and we'll still make it out to Ray Roeder's well before midnight. Ten hours, a burrito and surprise at the Las Vegas gate later, Andrew and I met up for the second time in San Jose and picked up the rental car at about 1:30am local time. Driving alone through the dark, we pulled into Ray's at about 2:30am to a note on the door that read, "Welcome! Ring the bell! Wake me up!! Ray". Knowing that we were expected over 3 hours ago, we anxiously crept through the front door and proceeded to explore the first-floor on tippy-toe—and decided we couldn't wake our gracious host whom we had not yet met in person. Thankfully, we found a bathroom and a couple of couches.

What seemed like 15 minutes later, a hand grabs my shoulder and I hear a whisper, "Who is this?" I rub my eyes and answer, "Peter," hoping that I got it right. I hear, "Why didn't you wake me up?" I proceed to mumble an answer and then, after wising up, woke up Andrew to provide an answer. Ray showed us to our rooms, where we slept for another hour or so until it was morning.

Less than 24 hours into the journey, I already had a feeling that this was going to be a memorable weekend in so many ways. Little did I know how memorable it would be and how much I wish I owned a digital camera because no one will believe me.

Friday, 11.17.06 – *Day 1: Logic Study and Kick-Off Dinner*

I wake up, brush my shoulders off, and realize that there is still some serious preparation work that needs to be done. I quickly dress and walk down to find the other early arrivals. I step into a kitchen full of food and people hard at work. I feel the "Coroness" of the environment and am very thankful. The administrative work got done—thanks to Brian, Ray, Sabine, and many others—guests start arriving, and we head off to meet the Logic Study Bus.

Sitting on the bus heading for Fort Ord (the largest military base reuse project), Jim Schoning (LA '66) takes the mike and tries to take us back to Coroland. "What tools can we use today? What is 4wh? What is WIGO?"



What are examples of some questions we can ask?" I sit, jaw dropped, and witness alumni from several decades shouting out answers as a buzz develops among the participants—logic study, here we come! And logic study it is! Orchestrated beautifully by alumni Michael Houlemard (STL '79) and Mimi Rayl (LA '82), we spend a whirlwind six hours investigating affordable housing on the base and the current development challenges the Fort Ord Reuse Authority is experiencing.

As we wait for the bus to depart, Elliot Kadar (StL '05) and I talk with Hugh Davy (LA '65) for about 15-20 minutes. We hear stories of growing up and partying in Berkley, CA in the late '60s—beach houses, music, and adventures. For a Midwesterner like me, this is my first firsthand conversation with someone who lived the books I had read. I think to myself, what stories and adventures will I have to tell? And where can I get a pair of sunglasses like that?

During the bus ride back to camp (a.k.a. Ray Roeder's house), Andrew and I look at each other and say—wow, those conference calls and emails all paid off, big time.

More attendees had arrived throughout the day and as dinner progresses we have a strong group of about 50 folks. I see old friends reunited, new friendships developing, and a lot of faces put with names. Jill Hultin, chair of the Coro National Board of Governors, gives the address of the evening. She speaks candidly about where Coro is currently positioned and where it needs to go. We hear a call to action to overcome some of the current challenges Coro is facing nationally—and how we all have a critical role to play. This is not a rosy picture or a pep talk, but an honest assessment, a revealing WIGO. The conversations that follow are focused on the future and strengthening Coro. A dialogue develops and the backdrop for the weekend is set. This is not just a national gathering for the sake of having a party, but a way to develop relationships and a common experience among disparate stakeholders to facilitate the work that will need to be done in the coming months and years.

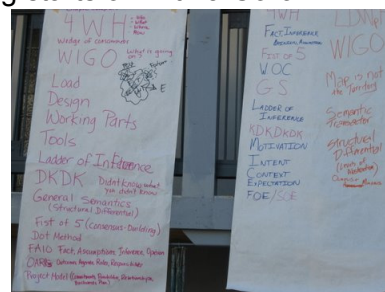


One conversation after dinner that is particularly meaningful for Elliot, Andrew, and me is one with Velma Fletcher and her son Tim. Being steeped in Coro history and development by our own trainer, Gerty O'Leary, we pepper Velma with questions about her experiences with Don and his writings. We hear confirmation of the promise and vision of Coro, and feel reinvigorated with the spirit of its original mission. The night concludes for us several hours after everyone else is fast asleep. Elliot, Andrew, and I reminisce around

the bonfire—each not wanting it to go out. We talk of the most memorable times from our time together. We catch up on current endeavors, from jobs to trips to significant others. We share a toast and watch the stars overhead. We finally check the time and go to sleep—for a couple hours.

Saturday, 11.18.06 – Day 2: The Full Day

I awake on the Full Day invigorated to be present and rearing to go. There are likely going to be logistical challenges regarding the timing of activities. The morning starts off with a Coro toolbox refresher led by Alan Gershman. We break up into groups and write down (or draw) all of the tools we could remember. Am I the only one who doesn't remember the fist of five? Does anyone else remember structural differential or the project model? We talk about what each group came up with and have a spirited conversation about the ones that were more



obscure. Wow, I really did gain a lot of practical tools in Coro; it wasn't just all secrets and philosophical mumbo-jumbo.



I move on into a conversation on religion and the public sphere facilitated by Matt Rosen (KC '99, STL '02). The dialogue continues to be lively and spirited. I am quickly reminded that these Coro alumni and friends have maintained their enthusiasm to dig deep into issues. I make a silent promise to myself to make sure that I keep seeking out opportunities to be active in public affairs and find ways to be involved in lively conversations about current topics. We spend hour and a half learning, reaching, and exploring, and could have easily spend another two hours sharing. Lunch and informal relationship building ensue. The Coro National Board of Governors is meeting concurrently with the other planned activities; the Governors had relocated their quarterly meeting in a remarkable showing of national unity and with great desire to interact with alumni.

About 1:30pm, we begin gathering everyone for some serious picture-taking. We take pictures of all alumni by Center, the Coro National Alumni Association, and CNBoG. Thank you gifts are distributed to key organizers and we disperse back to the outdoor patio for the afternoon session.

I feel like I would be committing a huge injustice by writing about David Sibbet's extravaganza of "Understanding Change," where he utilizes his talents for creating visuals to walk the audience through a huge mural. David takes us through a journey that draws connections between chemistry, physics, and organizational change. Suffice it to say, I am amazed and have to really push myself to follow the depth of the conversation at some points. I take some notes and jot down a few questions for follow-up. I walk away feeling a part of something much larger than myself and empowered to see the meta-action during the next organizational change. As a person committed to being a change agent, this presentation and conversation put me in a new, uncomfortable place because I come face-to-face with a whole topic that I didn't know I didn't know. I haven't felt this wonderfully unsettled in a while.



The freshly prepared Mexican feast—or *dinner*, as some may call it—is scrumptious and irresistible. I feel it is my Midwestern duty to never turn down fresh guacamole because it is rare indeed. This meal is moved into the bar room by many to share some laughs and watch the Cal-USC game. Cal is the crowd favorite, but unfortunately can't maintain its sparkling first-half performance.



Following dinner, and the highlight of the evening, is a time to remember individuals of the Coro family that had passed since 2001 (the last national alumni gathering) and to distribute a couple of distinguished awards. I am moved by the stories of Coro's past and the countless contributions and sacrifices that individuals had made. I am hearing from those in the room that had been there near the beginning and through many rough patches as Coro grew from its San Francisco founding. The Coro history is one of passionate individuals moved by big ideas, committed to making a big political and public impact. Money has come and gone, but the organization has persisted because of individual leaders. I am inspired by the impact that

individuals can make, and also challenged to be one of those individuals that sees possibilities and makes them happen.

After hearing from many of Coro's historical leaders, the post-dinner festivities are especially amazing. The bar opens up and the games progress. I still get goose bumps thinking of playing poker with Ray Roeder as the dealer alongside Jack Fine, John Greenwood, Don Kornblet, and David Sibbet—with Stephanie Stone, Elliot Kadar, and Fred Klaske mixing in. The laughs and jokes become louder, culminating in some impromptu singing along to the old-time jukebox—including a sparkling rendition of "Muskrat Love." The night again culminates fireside, although this time inside. The crackling conversation focuses on Coro's continued promise and some reflections on the day. I go to sleep not wanting the day to be over.



Sunday, 11.19.06 – Day 3: *The Wrap-Up*

Sunday morning comes quickly and provides a good close out of the weekend. The turnout remains strong, and I enjoy sharing breakfast with John and Caroline Robinson and some of the famed LA class of 1966. The final sessions of the weekend is a 2006 political breakdown given by Doug Johnson (LA-92) and closing conversation. The dialogue is as spirited now as it was the first day—full of challenging questions, factoids, opinions, and observations. We say our long goodbyes and end the 2006 National Gathering much as it kicked-off on Friday night—talking about action and the possibilities for the future.

The relationships developed during these three days in November will require maintenance, of course, but hold the promise of being long-lasting and meaningful. Although my time in California isn't quite over yet—I still have a ride in a '57 Impala to Santa Cruz and wonderful dinner—the official National Gathering had ended. The preparation of the previous 6+ months proved well worth it. A reinvigorating spirit was breathed into the Coro national system. The payoff came through for me and will be as long lasting as I make it.