

2017 AOG Chapter Presidents Conference

I was, once again, offered the opportunity to attend the AOG National Chapter President's Conference. The weather was perfect and the United States Air Force Academy was beautiful. I had a great time—it was a wonderfully nostalgic visit to the site of my long, long, ago (almost ancient) college experience.

In attendance were 28 Chapter/Affinity group representatives. Grads from classes 1965, yes I was the oldest grad there, through 2017 were in attendance, including a 1973 USMA grad who is the president of the Silver Falcons Affinity Group (ALO's and such). This conference was a joint AOG chapter and Parents' Club event.

Bill Preston and Karina Ross were in charge of the overall event and did an outstanding job. We, including the presidents of the attending Parents' Clubs were welcomed by a reception at the residence of the new superintendent, Lt Gen Jay Silveria, class of 1985. Gen Silveria had invited most of his senior staff, several members of the cadet wing staff and the falcon handlers along with some falcons.

The next morning found us at Doolittle Hall having briefings from the staff of the academy. Again we were joined by the Parents' Club presidents attending Parents' Weekend at the academy. The short briefings were good. The sup spoke to instilling a "warrior ethos" into cadets. He also said that the AF has given the Academy it's own budget line now. The new Commandant B Gen Kristin Goodwin spoke to efforts to assist, without coddling, the basic cadets during their first summer. She also gave us the statistics that they had 10200 applicants for the class of 2021, of which 2600 were fully qualified. 1400 were offered appointments and 1200 accepted. They allowed an extensive Q&A session which, in my opinion, was too long and descended into the weeds too deeply.

At this point, the two groups, AOG Chapter and Parents' Club groups separated with the AOG group attending a tour and briefing in the new Polaris Hall. We were fortunate to have a 2017 graduate who had been the chairman of the honor committee and was on casual status, join us to brief and answer questions on the honor code and honor rooms of Polaris Hall. After a lunch there, Col Jeff Collins briefed us on the Air Force Cyber Worx center at the academy. It was a very interesting briefing. He discussed the work they do and said that they have 40 cadets working in the program. He has been a speaker at one of the chapter's FDD and was very popular.

After Polaris Hall, we went back to Doolittle Hall where we attended the rest of our briefings and discussions. Marty Marcolongo, the new CEO of the AOG and Jennifer Bateman from the Endowment spoke on AOG/Endowment. A spirited discussion of the concept of a single CEO resulted. The majority of the attendees were upset with the way the vote was handled both before and especially after the vote was taken and did not receive a quorum. The real problem seemed to be on the Endowment side which has as many as 7 organizations gathering money for the academy with little or no coordination among them. There was no indication of the AOG and the Endowment having trouble working together.

Larry Jones spoke for the Director of Admissions. He spoke to the diversity goals set by the AF. He allowed that the problem with ALO workload is that most people in the government believe that the ALO is like the enlisted recruiters who have full time paid jobs recruiting. They are trying to overcome that misconception. He talked over his time and never finished

his slides. A couple of interesting statistics were: 16% of the class of 2021 were 1st generation college attendees and that 25.5% of the class were recruited athletes.

Beth Wade spoke on the career services offered grads by the AOG. There were many examples of great support to the grad community. Beth also announced that she was leaving for another job in Denver but would like to overlap with whatever successor is named. There seemed to be more to this story but no one wanted to discuss it.

The Distinguished Chapter Banquet was held in Doolittle Hall that evening with the announcement that the Twin Cities Chapter was the number one chapter. We had received more points on our Distinguished Chapter submission than any other chapter. While I knew that we scored well on the count, I was surprised that we had the most points.

Friday morning there was a Parents' Weekend Parade by the entire wing. I got there early and had a chance to step onto the parade grounds for the first time since 1965. The wing did a great job and it turned into a wonderful morning. The wing stayed on the Parade Grounds after the "Pass in review" and was dismissed from there. The parents were encouraged to go onto the field to meet their kids. It was very interesting and wild.

We spent organized, as well as break time, discussing "best practices" among the various chapters represented. Some of the ideas and thoughts that piqued my interest from these sessions and the AOG staff members follow:

- We can post announcements of our events on the national AOG calendar for all to see.
- The AOG has developed a program to send a chapter composed email to whatever grad list a chapter desires. They refer to this program as "Blast" emails. They will send "blast" emails out for us if we request. They can also provide statistics for these emails with numbers of readings, undeliverable address, etc.
- The Rampart Chapter (local to USAFA and the Colorado Springs area) supports many cadet requests directly as they are local to the academy. I suggested that they contact us when support is needed as we might very well be interested in helping specific cadet projects.
- The "Webguy" is now an all year, all classes, photo journal concept that is very popular with parents but is available to all.
- Many chapters complained about the availability of ALO's. Additionally, many concerns over ALO workload were expressed.
- The Rampart chapter has assisted various ALO's with support for candidate visits to USAFA. They would like this offer passed on.
- Most chapters conduct less formal Founders Day Dinners (FDD) than we do. Some FDD's are BBQ parties and even just hors d'oeuvres and drinks.
- It was suggested that we put our newsletters on our website. Our newsletters were cited as really good examples.
- Some chapters have had good luck inviting authors of interesting books as speakers.
- Our membership seems significantly different—most other chapters have active military bases within their purview. This creates both difficulties and advantages we

do not face. Chapters near bases have restricted contact with base personnel but, obviously, have recent graduates available to join.

- Mike Rose of the Charleston Chapter strongly recommended the West Point Ethics and Leadership program. The same program that Charlie Nelson has been working for us.
- The AOG will conduct online reservations for us for any event to include collecting the money and providing lists of respondees.
- The AOG will conduct surveys of our membership if we so request.
- We can contact the AOG for names and addresses of current cadets.

The conference was organized, well executed and informative. There are key take-aways that should help the TCA AOG strengthen its mission. I am very appreciative that our board gave me the opportunity to attend this conference.

Rick Knoll
USAFA '65 (612-518-3737)
Twin City Area Chapter
Association of Graduates, USAFA