Orthodontists greet the future in Seattle

American Association of Orthodontists’ Annual Session draws more than 15,000

by Kristine Colker, Ortho Tribune

more than 15,000 people, focused on providing orthodontists with a look at this ever-changing future, from lectures on groundbreaking research, to clinical seminars exploring the newest technology.

“The Annual Session offers orthodontists the rare opportunity to confer with colleagues from all over the world in an exchange of ideas that enhance our ability to create healthy and beautiful smiles for our patients,” said AAO President Dr. Donald R. Mathews and Dr. Frank Spear with the John Valentine Mershon Memorial Award luncheon.

The events got under way on Friday, May 18, with a few talks on topics such as maintaining a successful practice or limiting exposure to malpractice claims when starting out, but the real action began bright and early Saturday, when the session officially kicked off and the doors to the exhibit hall opened.

By 9 a.m., the registration hall was buzzing with attendees checking in and picking up their tote bags, flipping through their programs, heading into the lectures (which began an hour earlier), and getting their first look at the colorful displays of the more than 200 companies spread out in booths throughout the exhibit hall rooms.

A huge draw of the conference was the lectures, more than 150 over four days, many of which were focused on the profession’s hot topics, including the benefits and clinical applications of 3D imaging. Others spoke about mini-implants, adult versus child orthodontics, and working with patients who don’t want to comply with treatment.

A well-attended part of each day featured lectures given by the profession’s rising stars, “each of whom is involved in groundbreaking research,” said Joondeph. Topics covered included everything from treating impacted teeth in adults to the autotransplantation of teeth to the anterior region.

Another group of lectures was geared toward orthodontic staff members, with topics focused on scheduling, working with teenagers and marketing a practice in a way that will bring the most attention to it.

Two of the biggest lectures came on Sunday, as Dr. Peter Ng presented the Jacob A. Salzmann Lecture, addressing growth’s influence on orthodontic treatment, followed by Dr. Vince Kokich Sr., Dr. Dave Mathews and Dr. Frank Spear with the John Valentine Mershon Memorial Lecture on interdisciplinary treatment.

Of course, lectures weren’t the only draw of the conference. Over in the exhibit hall, more than 200 companies displayed their products and took the opportunity to interact with their potential customers, handing out brochures, toothbrushes or magnets, or offering free coffee along with a brief discussion about their newest items on the market.

Getting noticed was key for companies, and some went all out to accomplish this. Beyond the huge and colorful displays that couldn’t be missed, many attendees walking around the exhibit hall could be spotted adorned with pink buttons reading “I’m a Mac” (from topsXtreme) or carrying stuffed frogs with braces and “Seattle 2007” written across their chests (from OrthoTees). Then there was Forestadent, which drew crowds by way of the Porsche parked next to its booth and the chance to win—no, not the car—a Porsche driving experience in Arizona.

Other exhibitors relied on the products they came to sell. Imaging Sciences demonstrated its new i-CAT 3D imaging system; Masel set up lectures about the use of its Orlux mini-implant system; Opal showed off its new Opalescence TresWhite Ortho whitening tray; and TP Orthodontics promoted its OrthoScrape practice management system. Other companies displayed office furniture, teeth-cleaning products or orthodontic instruments.

Beyond the exhibits and the lectures, the AAO also offered moments strictly designed for fun and little tastes of Seattle. Saturday’s opening ceremonies was a good indicator of that. It started with the keynote speech by Hagerman and his partner-in-fun, Mick Luneer, but at night it turned into a party. Attendees—many cleaned up and changed after a long day—headed over to Seattle’s Benaroya Hall, where they started the evening with a cocktail reception. Guests mingled, sipped wine and beer, and met up with old friends. Soon the doors to the auditorium opened and guests were swept inside to enjoy a slide show of Seattle’s high points. They were greeted by AAO President Joondeph and finally were treated to a performance by instrumental recording artist Kenny G.

On Sunday, ambitious attendees participated in a fun run and walk at Seattle’s Myrtle Edwards Park, while Monday capped off with a “Celebrate Seattle” gala at the Experience Music Project in the city’s downtown area. There, attendees enjoyed a variety of appetizers, from pasta to seafood, and an open bar all while listening to music from Jerry and the PhilBillys.

Awards also had their moment during the AAO. Several were presented Sunday at the Excellence in Orthodontics luncheon. Among them, Dr. David Turpin of Federal Way, Wash., received the James E. Brophy AAO Distinguished Service Award. Dr. Bjorn Zachrisson of Oslo, Norway, was presented with the American Board of Orthodontics’ Albert H. Ketcham Memorial Award as well as the American Association of Orthodontists Foundation’s Louise Ada Jarabak Memorial Orthodontic Teachers and Research Award.

Like all good conferences, the conference had to come to an end. By Tuesday afternoon, the crowds were thinner, the Starbucks line was a lot shorter, and many attendees had begun packing up and heading for the airport.

They, and you, can return next year when the 2008 Annual Session takes place May 16-20 in Denver.