

American Cheese Society

Post-conference Essay

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Well, first I need to extend another heartfelt thank you to the John Crompton Memorial Scholarship Selection Committee for enabling me to attend this year's conference, truly an unforgettable opportunity. I'm still waking in my sleep, rolling over and scribbling down thoughts and ideas to share with staff!

Arriving a day early allowed me to get the lay of the land and explore Madison on my own. Lucky for me – I was able to attend a smaller version of the Farmer's Market and talk with the locals about the area, the beautiful produce for sale and cheese, of course. Next stop – Fromagination! This was a dream come true – I had the pleasure of speaking with Ken a year or so ago when I called to "interview" him about the path he had taken to opening the shop. To be able to visit with his staff, see his shop and meet him personally was a big deal for me. Everywhere I went, there was a buzz in the air and folks were excited and honored that Madison was chosen as host city for the conference! I felt so welcomed and couldn't wait for the conference to kick-off the following day, ready to take it all in.

Feeling welcomed by and now a part of the ACS community is my biggest take away from the conference. The army of coordinators, board and committee members, volunteers, experts, presenters, cheesemakers, retailers and so on who converged on Madison with their collective energy and knowledge was beyond impressive. While I only knew a few people personally from having attended VIAC and cheesemakers I work with, it was so easy to connect with other folks. I felt comfortable talking about my issues and concerns as a new retailer, found everyone to be supportive, helpful and interested in what I had to say.

The conference ran like clockwork. There was so much to do, every single day! The sessions were incredibly informative and all the presenters were approachable and friendly. I felt comfortable addressing the group at the Town Hall Meeting, providing a few suggestions.

Prior to attending, I determined my three most important goals – learning what the biggest issues are for artisan and farmstead cheese makers; meeting folks and making great connections that will last a lifetime; and gaining the knowledge to become a successful retailer. I can confidently say that my goals and expectations were far exceeded at my first ACS Conference. My To Do list is long, my energy is high and I'm so proud to be a member of this wonderful organization. Thanks, everyone!