

Attending the ACS conference in 2013 gave me a better idea of what to expect in 2015. Like so many things in life, your first conference provides a giant learning curve and opportunity for growth. Applying that knowledge to your next experience makes it more enriching and valuable. This year, as a recipient of the John Crompton Memorial Scholarship, I would be able to create a memorable experience with lasting impact in Providence. Additionally, unlike in Madison in 2013, I would not be preparing for and taking the CCP exam. This gave me the ability to approach the conference with a focused, yet more relaxed, attitude.

I wrote the essay for this scholarship with attention on community, connecting and camaraderie. When I was in Madison these items struck me the most. Nearly everyone, despite role, position or level of competition, was willing to share information and establish friendships. I found it refreshing, but not that surprising, that “cheese people” would be so generous, forthcoming and willing to support each other for the health of the industry.

I also enjoyed the theme of this year’s conference as well. “Cheese Camp” really hit home with me and probably many other attendees. I grew up in Virginia going to Nature Camp for five summers. It was an educational and residential camp nestled in a valley in the Blue Ridge Mountains. We were there to have fun and hike, but also to learn about discipline, responsibility, conservation and forming bonds with nature and new friends. We thought of each other throughout the school year, but always looked forward to hugs and high fives when we reunited again for Camp. I reflect on these five summers, which really amounts to 10 weeks, as being pivotal for molding me as a student and adult. Even with how connected we are in today’s society, it is my guess that we cheese mongers, cheese makers and brokers eagerly anticipate the conference to exchange handshakes, hugs and information with our friends and colleagues.

The lectures and tastings I attended were great as expected. The educational platforms the ACS offers are always thoughtful, progressive and relevant to our industry. I particularly enjoyed the tasting to analyze how developed and sensitive our palates are in detecting sweet, salty, bitter and sour flavors. It taught me a lot about my own sense of taste and sparked my interest in creating a similar class for my students in Denver.

The cider tasting presented great information about a rapidly growing part of our industry. It provided not only a history of cider in the U.S., but also a chance to meet the makers and taste a broad spectrum of ciders. This knowledge is vital to improving my ability to offer customers advice on pairings and selecting the proper cheese.

Another part of the week that was a true highlight was the “Cheese, Wine and Mansion” tour I did on Wednesday. Because of the cost saving scholarship I received I was able to treat myself to a paid tour of three remarkable places. I immediately made new friends on the bus and was also reunited with a colleague from Madison. The tour offered total transparency of the cheese making operation at Great Hill Blue. This is a cheese that I sold many years ago, but no longer offer in my shop. Not only was it wonderful to taste this cheese again, but really significant to meet the maker and see the full operation and

production of the cheese. The winery was no different in providing great wines and a complete view of the production and vineyard. We enjoyed several pours and a catered lunch on the patio over great conversation and connections. We were learning as much about the wine and food as we were each other and our roles in the cheese industry. The spectacular finale of the trip was a visit to The Breakers, the Vanderbilt mansion in Newport. Built in 1896 it represented every luxury and detail of living in the “Gilded Age”. It has been wonderfully preserved and restored to offer an intimate experience of the time period and something I’m happy to have seen.