Orthodontists greet the future in Seattle
American Association of Orthodontists’ Annual Session draws more than 18,000

By Kristine Colker
Ortho Tribune

“Play. Be there. Choose your attitude.”

So said Carr Hagerman, a workplace philosopher, a professional street performer and one half of the American Association of Orthodontists’ 107th Annual Session’s opening keynote speakers. His address drew a standing-room only crowd of many of the more than 18,000 attendees who came to Seattle for five days of presentations, educational opportunities and a firsthand look at some of the newest products on the market.

Hagerman may have been speaking about the philosophy of the fish throwers down the road at Seattle’s Pike Place Market, but his words of wisdom were taken to heart by the orthodontists, office staff, students and guests in the audience. Many could be seen nodding along to his comments about using energy in the office to attract clients in this day and age when research and technology are changing the face of orthodontics on a continual basis.

Centering around the theme, “A Window to the Future,” this year’s AAO, held from May 18-22 at the Washington State Convention & Trade Center in Seattle, focused on providing orthodontists with a look at this ever-changing future, from lectures on groundbreaking research to clinical seminars exploring the latest technology.

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 on Saturday, when the session officially kicked off and the doors to the exhibit hall opened.

“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. Joondeph.

Throughout the next four days, more than 150 lecturers spoke on a variety of topics, from mini-implants to 3-D imaging to adult vs. child orthodontics. Other topics included the role of orthodontics in facial growth, the best age to start treatment 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.

Other lectures were geared toward orthodontic staff members, with topics focused on scheduling, working with teenagers and marketing your practice in a way that will bring you the most attention.

Over in the exhibit hall, more than 200 companies displayed their products and took the opportunity to interact with their potential customers.

Getting noticed was key for many companies, and some went all out to accomplish this. Many attendees walking around the exhibit hall could be spotted adorned with pink buttons reading “I am a Mac” (from topsXtreme) or carrying stuffed frogs with braces and “Seattle 2007” written across their chests (from OrthoTrees). 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.

Other exhibitors relied solely on the products they came to sell. Imaging Sciences demonstrated its new iCAT 5-D imaging system, Masel set up lectures about the use of its Orlus mini-implant system, Opal showed off its new Opalescence TresWhite Ortho whitening tray and TP Orthodontics promoted its OrthoScape 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 of fun and little tastes of Seattle (beyond the long lines that formed every morning at Starbucks).

Saturday’s Opening Ceremonies was a good indicator of the fun side of the show. Held at Seattle’s Benaroya Hall, the event began with a cocktail reception where guests mingled, sipped wine and beer and met up with old friends. Once the doors to the auditorium opened, guests were swept inside where they enjoyed a slide show of Seattle’s high points, were greeted by AAO President Joondeph and finally treated to a performance by Kenny G, the No. 1 instrumental recording artist of all time.

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.

During the AAO, several awards were presented Sunday at the Excelience 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.

By Tuesday afternoon, as many conference attendees began packing up and heading for the airport, some took the time out to reflect on what the AAO meant to them this year.

“There’s always a few tips that you pick up,” Dr. Barry White of Canada said. “Actually it’s more talking to other people … little tricks, pearls, whatnot.”

For Dr. Lindsay Brehm of San Diego, Calif., it was the new products and the lectures. “There are a lot of good educational programs that the booths have. It’s really nice.”

The next AAO Annual Session will be held May 16-20, 2008 in Denver. Photos by Kristine Colker