

More than 400 GHSA Members, Associate Members and partners gathered in Oklahoma City, OK September 16-20 for the 2006 GHSA Annual Meeting. Appropriately titled, *New Frontiers in Highway Safety*, the meeting focused on “New Programs, New Rules and New Partners” since the passage of SAFETEA-LU.

The opening reception at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art provided a stunning backdrop for conference attendees to network in a relaxed setting before getting down to work on Monday morning. Those who visited the 3-story museum were able to tour 15 exhibition galleries, including the largest displayed collection of Chihuly glass in the world.

At Monday’s opening general session, well-known author of *Commuting in America* and transportation consultant Alan Pisarski laid the groundwork for the challenges ahead. He discussed the current role of ground transportation in our society and how we can make safety a major part of that society. He also touched on the new demographics of commuting in America, from the face of new immigrant workers traveling to and from jobs, to the soccer moms who are taking more and more social trips every day. All of this, says Pisarki, is adding to more and more vehicles on the road throughout the day, not just at the typical rush hour times. According to Pisarski, “We add the population of Canada each decade, 30 million people, yet we don’t add the equivalent measures to our transportation system.” According to Pisarski, safety costs to our society are three to four times the cost of congestion to our society.

Rounding out the Monday general session was Dr. Priya Prasad, Ford Motor Company Technical Fellow who discussed driver modifications to improve roadway safety as well as the safety implications of planned changes in motor vehicle technologies. According to Prasad, “The future of highway safety is based on the very young and the very old.” He discussed the issue of teen driving and mentioned the joint Ford/GHSA *Driving Skills for Life* teen driving education program and that he would like to see, and has discussed with others at Ford, an evaluation component added to the program. On the issue of new automotive technologies versus public policy, Prasad stated that because new technologies take a long time to reach the entire fleet of vehicles on our highways, a policy based on enforcement and education will have a greater effect in the near future.

After a day full of informative and engaging workshops on topics such as underage drinking, impaired drivers, older and younger drivers, safety belt use and pedestrian safety and a buffet lunch in the exhibit hall, attendees had the evening off to enjoy in downtown Oklahoma City. Many participants took advantage of the opportunity to tour the Oklahoma National Memorial and Museum, a stunning tribute to the victims of the 1995 terrorist bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

On Tuesday morning, Rick Capka, the newly named Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration kicked off the day’s events. Capka stated that although Norman

Mineta had left as Secretary of Transportation, safety remained the top priority at the department and spoke of the need for partnerships to reach the Department's goal of 1.0 fatalities per vehicle mile traveled, or 30,000 highway deaths a year. Capka delivered a message from newly appointed NHTSA Administrator Nicole Nason that, although she couldn't be there due to a trip to China, she plans to work closely with GHSA and its partners in highway safety.

Richard Pain of the Transportation Research Board (TRB) then told those in the audience about TRB and how to get the best use out of the services and products they offer such as their various committees and sub-committees, numerous research reports and annual meeting.

The first-ever male MADD President Glynn Birch was the third and final speaker at Tuesday's opening general session. Birch told attendees his personal story of grief and how he first came to be involved with MADD when his 21 month-old son Courtney was struck and killed by a drunk driver. Birch spoke of MADD's new campaign for a country without drunk driving. He stated that while we've talked of the three Es in the past: Education, Engineering and Enforcement, Congress, as part of SAFETEA-LU has now given us the three Fs: Funding, Foundation and Friends and it is up to us to put them to good use.

A clear conference highlight was Tuesday's Awards Luncheon when participants heard from Miss America, Jennifer Berry whose platform issue is "Building Intolerance to Drunk Driving and Underage Drinking." Berry, a native of Oklahoma told her personal story of losing a high school friend to drunk driving. Since becoming involved with MADD, even long before being crowned Miss America, Berry has been extremely involved in the fight against drunk driving. While at the conference, Berry filmed several public service announcements for the OK Highway Safety Office and the spots were unveiled at the luncheon. Berry also attended the State Night Dinner on Tuesday at the Western Heritage Museum and posed for photographs with dinner attendees.

The conference concluded on Wednesday with luncheon speaker Susan Ferguson, Senior Vice President of Research for the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety who spoke about what research tells us regarding highway safety problems and programs.