

Celebrating

Member Service: Our Reason for Existence



Asian drummers welcomed World Credit Union Conference participants to Hong Kong.

By Lindsay Seabrook

On a warm Hong Kong Sunday evening, more than 1,300 attendees of the 2008 World Credit Union Conference received an equally warm welcome and inspiring challenge from World Council of Credit Unions (WOCCU) Chairman Melvin Edwards. That challenge summarized both the upcoming week's events and the purpose of credit unions everywhere.

"We are in a unique position to live our lives in ways that have meaning and with a commitment that unites us with the passion for service to our communities and for the benefit of the members we serve," said Edwards, who represents the Caribbean Confederation of Credit Unions. "For the next few days, let this be *la raison d'être*, our reason for existence."

Attendees embraced this mission over the course of the conference, keeping their combined focus on new ways to improve member service, increase cooperation and expand credit unions' reach, creating a new age of influence for the global credit union movement.

This year's World Credit Union Conference, held July 13-16 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, was the first time WOCCU held an event in Asia in nearly 30 years. Local co-hosts, the Credit Union League of Hong Kong and the Association of Asian Confederation of Credit Unions, helped greet credit union representatives from more than 46 countries.

Impressed by a Chinese-influenced opening ceremony, attendees enjoyed a traditional lion dance to the intense beat of an Asian drum troupe. The conference agenda sparkled with world-class keynote speakers, educational breakout sessions and networking events. In their free time, attendees and companions

chose from several sightseeing tours that featured everything cosmopolitan Hong Kong, neighboring mainland China and the island of Macau had to offer.

One of Monday's keynote speakers, former U.S. Senator Paul Sarbanes, shared his experiences co-authoring the Sarbanes-Oxley legislation, which requires corporate accounting transparency, and underlined the connections between good corporate governance and credit union principles. Later in the week, Dr. Anna Tibajuka, United Nations Under-Secretary General, described ways in which credit unions can support low income housing initiatives in developing countries around the globe. Finally, Khoa Do, a young Vietnamese expatriate who overcame a perilous struggle to emigrate to Australia as a young child and eventually became an award-winning film director, told his uplifting and courageous story of survival. His message seemed to resonate with many participants, and brought the crowd to its feet: "In your greatest obstacles often lie your greatest opportunities."

Preceding the opening ceremony, financial regulators from 18 countries exchanged experiences during the sixth annual Regulators' Roundtable. Concurrently, future credit union leaders held an interactive session focused on new ways of reaching and retaining the 18-35 year old market. This session for attendees under 35 was sponsored by WOCCU's Young Credit Union People (WYCUP) Program.

The final day's awards ceremony reminded attendees of their shared philosophical "common bond" and personal missions to help improve people's lives through credit unions.

WOCCU bestowed its highest honor, the Distinguished Service Award (DSA), upon Chris Baker and Karen Schwartz of the United States and the Credit Union Foundation of Australia in recognition of their outstanding achievements and contributions to credit unions worldwide. WOCCU also recognized 19 WYCUP nominees and awarded five winners full scholarships to next year's World Credit Union Conference in Barcelona, Spain, scheduled for July 26-29, 2009.

The closing event was a celebration infused with Asian flavors, exciting entertainment and camaraderie of both new and old friends. WOCCU President and CEO Pete Crear's words underscored the theme of service and left attendees with a poignant message: "It is, indeed, a new age for credit unions, one made possible by your commitment, and by our ability to move forward as a combined force in service to humankind." 🌐

Lindsay Seabrook is marketing and communications specialist for WOCCU. Contact her at lseabrook@woccu.org.

PHOTOS BY PATRICK LEUNG



WOCCU Chairman Melvin Edwards (left) and President & CEO Pete Crear (third from left) congratulate WYCUP winners (from left) Joe Agro, Anna Corona, Rafal Sokolowski, Nicholas May and Rachel Milan.



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1. Chinese "face dancers" changed identities with the flick of a wrist.
2. WOCCU Chairman Melvin Edwards welcomed participants.
3. WOCCU President & CEO Pete Crear offered his views on the state of the movement.
4. Former U.S. Senator Paul Sarbanes drew parallels between corporate transparency and the credit union movement.
5. Participants enjoyed social as well as educational opportunities.
6. WOCCU's Board of Directors presided over by Chairman Edwards (center.) Members include (back row, from left) John Gilbert, Australia; Dan Burns, Canada; Catherine Roberts, Secretary, USA; Alcenor Pagnussatt, Brazil; Barry Jolette, First Vice Chair, USA; Manuel Rabines, Second Vice Chair, Peru; Mark Bailey, Ireland; (front row, from left) Neil McDonald, New Zealand; Grzegorz Bierecki, Treasurer, Poland; Ron Hance, USA; Anne Cochran, USA; Penny Reeves, Canada; Sylvester Kadzola, Malawi.