

Professional Corner

It's hard to underestimate how important trips to conferences are to your chapter. It's also easy to see why some advisors find the prospect of group travel daunting. So here are some tips for traveling with members (especially to ICDC) that may help the reluctant get brave and the active traveler get organized.

Mary Ellen McCormick, advisor at **Marshall Academy** in Virginia, suggested that we create a bulleted list of tips for travelers, and she volunteered to start us off. So here is her list.

- First read over the DECA Year Roadmap Calendar, Nov. 8 and March 7, for great tips!
- Make sure you hold an informative parent/student meeting to review expectations before the trip departs .
- Practice patience: Large groups need to learn how to travel together.
- When you describe the ICDC sessions to your members, compare the hall to a large professional stadium packed with high school students. At first the sessions are overwhelming. They need to stay alert, be responsible and stick with the group. They will be impressed!
- Let students know that the general sessions may be long. Exhibiting courtesy and patience as they see students recognized onstage is a sign of their professional growth!
- Make sure all members pack a watch and wear it at all times.
- If students have cell phones, keep all their numbers with you at all times.
- If you carry a cell phone, give the number to every student. It is easy to get lost or separated from the group.
- Buy ribbon in one color and give each member a length to put on every piece of luggage. Pick a bright color that is easy to recognize at the hotel or the airport. This will help everyone recognize all of your group's luggage.
- Print the ICDC program from the Internet before the conference. Highlight each event students are participating in so they understand in advance their responsibilities and where they need to be at what time. Bring highlighters to ICDC so students can again highlight their event testing, judging times/locations in their own programs.
- Understand that check-in at the hotel will be time consuming. Be prepared.
- Plan group dinners. Research the area, the hotel and local restaurants on the Internet

prior to departure.

- If possible, take video. These records are a great PR tool when you return home.
- Take group photos, then make flyers with photos to congratulate students. Post flyers around the school when you return. Also send flyers to the local newspaper, the school paper and the parent-teacher association.

We also spoke with **Bob Nathan**, advisor at **Riverside H.S.** in Pennsylvania. Bob has been a DECA advisor in this rural community for 32 years. Taking his members to conferences and activities away from school is a central part of his DECA program. During his career he has taken groups of students to every single state, regional and international conference held and also to every DECA Sports and Entertainment Marketing Conference since its inception. Here are some of his tips.

- Traveling with a group on an overnight trip involves rules, and everyone must understand and accept the rules. To this end, parents must come to a meeting where they learn the agenda, the rules, how much spending money students should have and exactly what clothes to pack. If parents can't make the meeting, they must schedule an individual session. Parents must sign a copy of this information. With this preparation, if parents are required to come to take the students home, "there's not much of an argument."
- Seniors go over the rules with the younger members. This puts peer pressure to work.
- Set up a caravan of parents to drive to the airport and to pick the group up on their return.
- Collect money in advance for everything the group will do together on the trip. If you all go to dinner, include that cost in the price of the trip. This ensures that on "day 6" students will still have some cash. If the group goes to a theme park on the last day, it's as though members are going for free, and members have no excuse to stay behind.
- Bob takes 25 kids to the ICDC. A general rule: Carry around lists and do counts.
- One special technique relates to getting members onto airplanes. If the airline will let him, Bob holds the boarding passes at the gate. He hands a boarding pass to each member who goes through the gate. This way he knows everyone is on board and doesn't have to wait to count noses on the plane.

The Riverside H.S. DECA chapter operates in a largely rural community—but they don't stay put. They travel!

Because their community lacks much of the business activity of a larger, more urban setting, the Riverside chapter SELLS—cheesecakes, nuts, chocolates, candy bars and their largest fund-raiser, citrus.

Bob says that the members do a really good job of selling, because they know this is the only way they will be able to go on the trips. Each member's profits go into the chapter's treasury in that member's name.

Members are armed with product knowledge as they approach the fund-raiser, especially for the citrus. They will be asked quite a few questions and need to know their product.

The Riverside chapter achieved a bit of notoriety in the past when a member sold a cow to get to ICDC. The story was picked up on the news wires, and Riverside had a brief moment of fame.