

Eastern Area Motorhome Association



April 20, 2020

The Day Everything Changed

Prior to March 13, Garnetta and I had an extremely busy Spring and Summer schedule planned related to our FMCA family. We were on our way to Tucson, Arizona, for FMCA's 101st International Convention. April: we had scheduled a 2020 GEAR Rally planning meeting. May, June, and July: we were looking forward to a half-dozen chapter visits, from Tennessee all the way to Delaware. Lincoln, Nebraska, was to be my last FMCA Convention as AVP for the Eastern Area. Without doing the actual math, this travel and time represented approximately ninety days of time and ten thousand miles of travel. You know the rest of the story.

As the situation with COVID-19 evolved, more signs pointed to the fact that it would be a mistake to attempt to follow through with the 101st FMCA Convention in Tucson. Lena, our daughter, had been calling daily, pleading with us not to go. The last call was to inform me that "Disney" had closed the park. That really got my attention. Let's face it; Mickey is a pretty wise little rodent. The Mallorys and the Schremps were into their third day of travel when EVERYTHING changed. I had sent an email to Jon Walker in the morning of March 13th, expressing my heartfelt reasons why we should not continue with the convention. George Schremp and I were moving out of the campground when I got an email from Jon Walker that I will not forget: "We are going to have to meet and discuss what we are going to do about Tucson."

I will not take time to detail all the emails that followed and the text messages; the late afternoon, March 13th, Board of Directors Zoom meeting officially cancelling the 101st convention; and the hard decisions related to what to do about registration money. The Board was dealing with all these decisions as the daily news of COVID-19 continued to worsen.

While dealing with decisions that no Executive Board of FMCA had ever faced, it became apparent that COVID-19 and its effect on our near future was not going away for a very long time. Concerns had been raised during the meeting about Tucson regarding what this could mean for the FMCA convention scheduled for Lincoln, Nebraska, in August. Gary Milner, AVP for the Midwest, called me and asked the tough question; "Is there any reason to continue plans for Lincoln, Nebraska, in August?" Again, what impact would this have on an already-strained budget? What would be best for our FMCA members? How far were we into the summer convention on planning, budget, and registration. Another electronic Board of Directors meeting was in order. Another vote to cancel the summer convention. Another history maker. FMCA had never cancelled a convention after registration began, and certainly had never cancelled two conventions in a row.

While decisions were being made impacting our FMCA family on a national level, the AVPs were having to think about their areas. Keep in mind that GEAR is one of the last Rallies to be held in the season. My concentration had been on our April planning meeting. Now all at once, I had to ask the big question “What do I do with 2020 GEAR?” I was one of the last to cancel.

Garnetta and I, plus a number of rally committee members, had been working on 2020 GEAR for over a year. We were getting excited. A lot of great things were happening. BUT reality set in. First, even if this pandemic were over, how much success would we have in people making commitments to attend; to purchase vendor booths; to commit to seminars, entertainment, etc. Also, there was a budget matter related to our million-dollar liability insurance policy attached to FMCA’s national liability insurance. Another tough decision. As I told the EAMA Board, I hope that by July, you can tell me that I made a horribly bad decision. If so, that means we are back to healing as a nation and world.

We are going to Lewisburg, WV, September 29 to October 3, 2021. The work that went into GEAR 2020 was not wasted time. Lewisburg offers a tremendous venue. Kelly and her staff are wonderful people to work with. The community loves us. Even though I will no longer be the Eastern Area AVP, I will offer support to the new AVP to make sure this is one of the best GEAR Rallies we have ever had.

Work Not Quiet as Usual

Near the end of March, the Ohio governor declared an order that all nonessential offices be closed. That included FMCA.

Fortunately, we have a great and talented FMCA staff. The IT department was already making preparation for FMCA staff to conduct business from their homes. The staff, officers, Executive Board, and committees are working daily to benefit our FMCA family. Jon Walker and Chris Smith have posted some pretty alarming statistics related to FMCA membership and finances. Yes, the budget is strained like never before, and we are showing a decline in membership renewal. Keep in mind we are not alone. My four-year-old granddaughter has learned to sign, “We will get through this together.”

Looking Ahead at A New Normal

Garnetta and I think about our friends we have made during our twenty years as FMCA members. The last four years have been especially rewarding. We feel humbled in having the honor of serving the membership of the Eastern Area. We feel your pain and frustration of not having socialization opportunities provided through participating with fellow chapter members and meeting with friends from all over the country that we see at FMCA conventions.

We will emerge from these hard times with a new normal. I feel this will be a better new normal. I have been listing lessons learned from these crazy times:

- The air we breathe is cleaner. There is less travel so there is less vehicle pollution.
- Look at the sky at night; it is more radiant, with fewer airplanes.

- We as Americans come together in crisis, putting aside unnecessary boundaries, to help each other.
- We will never look at medical personnel and a first responder of any kind the same way after this pandemic is over.
- We can eat in our homes with meals we have actually prepared.
- We will never again take a handshake or hug for granted.
- There are different ways of shopping without leaving our homes.
- There is a new normal when we walk through our neighborhoods, and folks stop what they are doing and wave and ask how you doing—and they really care.
- A new normal is “air huggies.”
- A time to take a new or refreshing look at our beliefs and faith.
- Since we cannot climb into our RVs and head out for a new adventure, we can pull out picture albums, travel journals, and other memorable and relive all those great adventures we have experienced.
- We will have campfire chat material to last us for years when we are all back together.

I hope many of you have been thinking or making a similar list. We would love to hear from you. Please share.

Anything is possible if a person believes. Mark 9:23

Until we can shake hands and share a hug in person, stay healthy.

Bill Mallory
National AVP for Eastern Area FMCA