

The Birth of WSHNA

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Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in the Winter, 1994 Edition of the Open Line. Our organization has grown and there are many new members. This is how your WSHNA was started...

While attending recent training at the academy in Seattle, I was asked a number of times, "how did WSHNA start?" Since we have had such a large growth spurt in the last year or so, there are probably many of you who have no idea how WSHNA started. I would like to take this opportunity to fill you in.

Well, it was a dark and stormy night... Oh, wrong story. Actually, it was June of 1986. Jim Hoaglund, Spokane PD, and I had been selected to attend the two week negotiations course at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia. Jim and I met for the first time at Sea-Tac Airport. During our long journey east, Jim and I had an opportunity to consume a number of adult beverages and knock around a few ideas. One of these ideas was to form a state association for negotiators. This idea surfaced several times during our two weeks at Quantico. The problem was that it was just an idea, a concept. We had no idea how to get it started.

The association remained dormant the next couple of years. Each time Jim and I would cross paths, the idea resurfaced.

In 1988 I got a little help. I returned to Quantico for the advanced course. While there I met Fergus Corcoran, Chief Superintendent, Scotland Yard. Fergie and I shared the same interest, scotch whiskey. During our soirees we discussed the possibility of one of his members coming to Seattle. I was able to convince him that it would be just as easy for someone to return to the United Kingdom, via Seattle, as it would from the East Coast. Isn't scotch great? He agreed. In September of 1988, Superintendent Bob Hancock came to Seattle and made a hostage negotiation talk. I had set up a room at the academy to accommodate us. I also dispatched a Teletype advising of the training. The response was overwhelming. Sixty plus people attended, including Jim. Jim chided me during the day to announce that a state association is under consideration and who might be interested. Everyone Was. I gave Jim the list of the persons attending and we used this as a base to invite persons to later training. Jim and the Spokane team went to work.

In the winter of 1989, months after the suggestion was made at the previous training, Spokane announced dates for training in Spokane. The Spokane gang carried on with the original theme of having alcohol involved. The first meeting was held at their police club. Cops, being cops, and always looking for a good deal, graciously accepted Spokane's deal of cut-rate accommodations at a local motel. Jim and I knew that to be successful, you had to be affordable (a.k.a. cheap). Besides alcohol, railroading was secondary tactic. The cut-rate motel was next to the busiest train track in the city. You couldn't sleep at night, so yes; we had to consume adult beverages. To dull the sound of the trains, of course.

Speaking of railroading, that played an important part in the elections. Nominations were opened for President. I heard my name and a motion to close the nominations in the same breath. The rest of the executive board was elected in the same way.

Now, we were up and running. None of us had any experience in administering an association. We had to form a corporation and register with the state and pay some money. But, what money? Spokane charged a small registration fee and what was left over from that training, was our first treasury. Things were pretty slim that first year, but we all had a great desire to see our association succeed.

During the first few years, we met twice annually. Once on the West Side and once on the East Side. Our membership grew rapidly. It was during this first year that, besides sworn personnel, a lot of communications people and corrections people got involved.

Now, our name has changed to represent our membership from five western states. Nationally, even internationally, recognized speakers attend our training seminars and other older and larger negotiation associations recognize us. Things are really taking off.

Our association grew from an idle chat, to an idea, to the actual body of negotiators that we are today. We have a great number of resources available through our membership. I think I speak for Jim Hoaglund when I say that we simply acted as the facilitators, we claim no right to parenthood. We do expect this association to continue to grow and stay active in our field. This will take the efforts of all the members. If you have a suggestion or a training idea, let your representative know.

Your idea now, is just as important as our idea was then