



# HPA 2015 TECH RETREAT: A BRIEF RECAP

By John Maizels

*We've all been to conferences, but as John Maizels discovered...*

## **This one is different.**

Start with the name: "The HPA Tech Retreat." If that sounds like getting away from normality, then it's with a reason: the HPA Tech Retreat is distinguished from its conference brethren by a plethora of little and big differences, which Leon Silverman, President of HPA\*, calls the "Secret Sauce."

The location is sublime: Palm Springs literally is an oasis in the desert. After three hours of fighting freeways to get out of Los Angeles, you arrive at a place with a natural air of calm; close enough to get to, but far enough away that you wouldn't drive home—so even the Hollywood locals hang around. You stay in a resort-class hotel, and amble to the event. Wear what you like; pajamas would fit right in. After all, it's a retreat.

It's not hard to see why delegates come from far and wide, with many traveling from overseas. It's worth the trip. "The conference attracts so many of the top practitioners in so many disciplines that comprise such a large tent," says Silverman, "Whilst we're surrounded by more golf and resort activities than nearly anywhere else on the planet, the overwhelming majority of attendees are up in time to attend breakfast round-tables, are in non-stop sessions until 6 p.m. plus a host of evening activities." Attendees can un-

\*Hollywood Professional Alliance (Formerly Hollywood Post Alliance)



John Pallet and Bruce Devlin take on timecode.

ashamedly play the "nerd" card and enjoy. Everyone learns a new trick or two.

The program is carefully curated; there is a packed agenda from which you can partake of as much or as little as you like. Mark Schubin has been session-meister since the early days, pulling together a program of balance, interest, and thought-provocation. Schubin injects daily quizzes, and a unique style of timekeeping that ensures that elements unashamedly run to the second. Presenters back-time their last words with the precision of a disc jockey talking up to a vocal; they must or risk being chopped off mid-word. Delegates tell you it's a valued element of the secret sauce. Programming is a mix of panels, threaded topics and expositions on everything from broadcast law to high technology to practical exposition to conjecture. Presenters can't buy their way in, and attendees know that.

There are "oohh" moments: This year, jaws dropped during a discussion on security (a high-value topic added only two weeks

out), extended color gamut and high dynamic range were vividly demonstrated along with spectacular laser projection, and workflow got a lot of attention. This was practical, useful, take-home stuff.

It's not all Sessions. The demo room is also another unique feature. Quite distinct from a trade show, it's again curated and invitation-only—a space packed with new, developing, just delivered, or tell-us-what-you-think technologies that inevitably lead to further discussion and development. It's cool, and engaging, and different.

The Tech Retreat format encourages making connections. Breakfast round-tables are a chance to eat and chat informally with an expert. Some, like the "Annual Steve Lampen, Asks Questions of Merrill Weiss" table, add degree-of-difficulty and a wry smile. Lunch breaks (outdoors, overlooking the golf course) provide comfortable time to catch up with old acquaintances, make new ones, and visit the demo room. Tuesday's dinner is a stand-up reception among the demos, Wednesday night's formal dinner is onsite, and there's a Thursday night after-dinner reception. Plenty of "well, if you want to ask, the global expert is that person standing over there" opportunities, and everyone is happy to talk social or talk shop.



This year's HPA Tech Retreat was a sellout, and that tells you something. According to Leon Silverman, "This is just one of those very special events. First time attendees invariably return. Long-time attendees make the event seem like a family reunion. Oh, I almost forgot the *food*—the food is good.

"Techies" like food and they like technology and we get that—and more at the Tech Retreat."

Bringing HPA into the SMPTE fold neatly adds "use it now" to the traditional "here's what's developing," and that's a special sauce with dynamite value.



Merrill Weiss (R) answers Steve Lampen (L).



Mark Schubin



Wendy Aylsworth and Barbara Lange simultaneously channel Tina&Amy and Patsy&Edina.

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