

# 2023 GTOAA Nationals

by Chris Winslow



For a number of years now, our July issue has always been a recap of the GTOAA National convention. This year, with Gateway hosting and all of our planned activities, including a live band at the parking lot party, there was going to be lots to cover. Unfortunately as we all now know, mother nature had different plans

The Nats started out perfectly. Dan Jackson did a great job organizing everyone so that we had all of the worker slots filled and everyone reported for their assigned duties. As a result, everything on Monday and Tuesday was going extremely smoothly.

In the evenings the social activities, as usual, revolved around Gateway with huge circles forming in the parking lot in the evening for socializing, snacking, and a some interesting beverages, many of them home made.

Thursday started very normally for a GTOAA convention Thursday. Concours judging was the order of the day. In my case, I was judging New Gen Stock cars along with fellow Gateway members Brian, Amy, and Andrew O’Sullivan and Tom Fox. There had been a light rain overnight and it was still pretty wet outside when we started. We had one outdoor car to judge. We had planned to judge it first, but since it was still pretty wet outside, and the weather predictions were for some dryer weather mid morning, we pressed on with indoor cars.

GTOAA Concours administration Bill Markowski took charge of helping get the outdoor



# GTOAA 2023



concoers cars ready by getting all of them moved into the tech tent for judging. In my case, we only had 1 car to judge outside, so as soon as Bill let me know he had it in the tent, we headed out and got that car judged. Judging that car mid morning like we did turned out to be the right move.

A little before noon, we took a break and headed up to the hospitality room for lunch. My team still had one more car to judge, but we would easily get that done after lunch. While we were eating lunch, we looked at the weather and saw that storms were on the way. This worried everyone a bit since there was a parking lot full of GTOs and storms in the Midwest can include hail. We were also talking about the strong storms that occurred during the Co-Venture several years ago and how some of the cars that had been under the tents had receive damage.

Out in the parking lot, everyone also knew that storms were coming. Randy Jones and Terry Schott both put their cars under the tech tent, hoping to avoid any storm damage.

My judging team returned to the concours show floor and began judging our final car. A few minutes into that activity, the storm sirens started to sound. From inside the convention hall, we really could not see or hear what was going on outside, but we could tell there was a lot of activity going on outside the hall. What we now know is that it was everyone running into the hotel lobby to get out of the storm.

About a minute later, the lights went out. For a few seconds, there was total darkness in the hall except for the flashlights we were using to judge the cars. Then the emergency generator kicked in and we had minimal lighting in the convention hall.

Those of us inside the convention hall were not initially aware of the extent of the storm damage. We continued on with our task and completed the judging of our final car. Once that was done and we turned in our judging sheets, we realized just how serious the situation was.

In the weeks following we now know that there was a Derecho at the hotel with straight line winds in the 80 to 100 MPH range. All of the power poles on the west side of the Crowne Plaza had snapped off and the wires were laying on the ground. Reports began to come in that a significant portion of Springfield was without power.

Once I heard how severe the storm had been, I wanted to make sure that everyone from Gateway was OK. After checking we found that nobody from Gateway was injured in the storm. Our meet photographer, Mike from Moto Lenz Photos, did get knocked over during the storm when he was hit with flying debris. Gateway's Annette Morton provided first aid for Mike. We later learned that Mike had fractured his wrist.

Once everything settled from the initial storm and we knew that other than Mike's wrist everyone was OK, we were able to assess where we were with the convention, and the situation was not good.

The tech tent had been destroyed in the storm. In many instances, the eye bolts that had been anchored to the parking lot to secure the tent had literally snapped off. The result was that the poles holding up the tent blew over, damaging cars under the tent, including the cars of Gail and Terry Schott and Randy Jones.

The hotel and all of the surrounding restaurants and other businesses were without power. The hotel had a backup generator that powered minimal lighting on the first three floors of the hotel and the elevators, but not much else. To make matters worse, the generator, which runs on diesel, only had a quarter of a tank of fuel.

Given the extent of the damage to the power system that we were seeing outside of the

# GTOAA 2023





# GTOAA 2023





# GTOAA 2023



hotel, it did not appear likely that power would be restored any time soon.

With no power, it would be impossible for us to continue on with the convention. We had no lights, no air conditioning and the rest rooms on the first 3 floors of the hotel were out of service. In addition, there was a real concern late in the day on Thursday that what little power we did have from the generator would be gone in a few hours if the hotel could not find someone to fill the tank on the generator. This would leave us with no lights and no elevators.

Faced with all of these challenges, the GTOAA Board met and decided that there was no option left but to cancel the balance of the convention and send everyone home. The decision was devastating considering all of the planning and effort that had gone into organizing the convention. It was, however the right decision to make as there was simply no way the convention could continue. (Editors Note: The power to the Crowne was not restored until Tuesday, July 11th - Just short of 2 weeks after the storm).

Despite all of this, Gateway GTO members, like we always do, stepped up to do what we could to help. This was recognized by GTOAA president (and fellow Gateway GTO member) Vic Schreck, who sent us the following message of thanks:

*Dear Gateway Members,*

*I want to personally thank those who volunteered to work the convention. An even bigger thank you for turning your attention to our membership tending to their needs during the crisis we were presented with. I have gotten many emails from our membership commending us for stepping up and taking charge. The convention went from everyone having a great time to crisis mode in a matter of minutes and because of the efforts of our staff and Gateway staff we weathered a very serious situation focusing on the needs of our membership.*

*Our concours team is working quickly to have awards ready for Norwalk. Bill Markowski will be contacting concours registrants regarding their awards.*

*We're now focusing on 2024 in Springfield, Missouri. See you there!*

*Thank You again, your efforts did not go unnoticed.*

*Vic*

I cannot say it any better. Gateway showed all of the GTOAA once again why Gateway is the best chapter in organization!