How to Get the Most out of your Conference

By Christine Bullock

As the school year winds down, many American homeschooling families look ahead to the upcoming year and plan to attend statewide conferences. The OCEANetwork conference has a great line up of national speakers and workshops: Rick and Marilyn Boyer of the Learning Parent, David Hazell from My Father’s World, Julie Hiramine of Generations of Virtue, Sarita Holzmann from Sonlight, T.J. Schmidt from HSLDA and Zan Tyler of Apologia, just to name a few. There is something for every stage of homeschooling! With so much to pick and choose from, it can seem a little overwhelming at first. Here is a list of suggestions to get the most out of this year’s conference.

Bring Backup – Sharing the experience with another is a sure way to keep enthusiasm and vision all year long. Nothing had a greater effect on my homeschooling than my husband and I getting on the same page after attending a conference. Spouse can’t come? Bring a friend! Divide and conquer by splitting up during the sessions so you can cover more territory and then exchange what you learned and how you think it can be implemented.

Look Ahead – Go online for the schedule, list of workshops and speakers. Consider what you need input on for the upcoming year or season. There are various tracks to follow covering everything from preschool to high school. Make a plan and jot it down so you don’t miss anything in the bustle.

Avoid Buyer’s Remorse – Do you know what your homeschool budget is this year? If not, sit down with your husband and make a realistic assessment. Knowing ahead of time will help you decide if your purchase is likely to fulfill the goals you have. Don’t forget to attend the Used Curriculum Exchange on Saturday to super-stretch your dollar.

Create an Attack Plan for the Exhibit Hall – Check the list of vendors online and mark those you most want to visit in numeric order. The Exhibit Hall can be overwhelming just by itself. Knowing the top 5 you want to see first will help you work through the rest. Don’t rush, there is plenty of time to look and shop. Take your time at those top five before you move to the others. Be ready with specific questions you might have about how the curriculum works with different learning styles, etc. Vendors are invaluable sources of information about the positives and negatives of their products.

Bring Inspiration Home – Was there a session that especially touched you? Get it on CD so when those tough times come later in the year you can pop it in and be refreshed. I often pick up one or two extras to hand out to friends that I know couldn’t make it, but would greatly benefit from the information. Or pick up sessions you wanted to hear, but couldn’t attend.

Savor the Fellowship – Take time to visit with the people around you. One of the most encouraging parts of conference for me is seeing more than a thousand committed parents who are doing the same thing I am. At conferences motherhood is honored, fatherhood is exalted, children are treasured, families are turned toward God and graduations are celebrated as a full family event. It is sweet fellowship indeed.

Got Questions? – Homeschooling comes with its own set of unique challenges and questions. Stop by the OCEANetwork booth for one-on-one counseling with veteran homeschoolers. From support group management to dealing with in-laws and ESD’s, OCEANetwork board members have a lot of advice to share. Our volunteer board is made up of families just like yours who have been where you are and understand your struggles. Come, be encouraged.

I recently read a report that indicated that more than 125,000 would attend annual homeschool conferences this year. Most conferences have been operating for a decade or more. They generally began with the desire of a handful of servant-leaders who sought to provide help in the form of curriculum choice and useful tips of the trade along with a healthy dose of vision. These pioneers faced daunting challenges to create what we now so easily enjoy. Over kitchen tables and in home offices they worked and sacrificed much to encourage the next generation. Conference is a good place to remember that we stand on the backs of giant killers and take our own place in the continuing story of Educating for Eternity.

For full conference information and to register online visit OregonHomeschoolConference.com
Oregon Christian Home Education Conference:
Educating for Eternity
June 25 & 26, Portland
Oregon Convention Center

New This Year! Parents of preschoolers (if your oldest is less than 6 years old) can register for their first homeschool conference for free! Tell your friends.

Work Scholarships We have arranged for a limited number of work scholarships to be available. You must call Joyce Padilla at 503-787-3512 to arrange.

Supporting Families Help support the work of OCEANetwork all year long—become an OCEANetwork Supporting family and receive an additional $10 discount to the conference. In addition, Supporting Families receive $20 off Home School Legal Defense Association membership. Those two discounts pay for your Supporting Family membership! Supporting Families receive OCEANetwork's newsletter for Oregon Christian home educators. Current Supporting Families whose membership expires after 6/23/10 may also take a $10 discount on this year's conference

Used Curriculum Exchange Sell last year's school books or find bargains for next year. The Exchange is an easy and efficient help to stretch the homeschool dollar. Complete information for buying and selling online at oceaneetwork.org.

Lodging is still available at special rates for June 24th through 26th at the Quality Inn & Suites Airport, the Rodeway Inn. Visit qualityinportlandairport.com or call (503) 255-1404.

Register online now! For full schedules, speaker biographies and session titles see the conference page: OregonHomeschoolConference.com.

Canby Area Used Curriculum and Book Sale
June 3, Canby
11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Held at New Life Foursquare Church Hospitality Tent, corner of 99E and Territorial Rd in Canby. For more info on times or selling procedures contact Carla Allemann at 503-829-8290 or carla.allemann@juno.com.

Salem Used Curriculum Sale
June 3, Salem
Clear off your school shelves and pass on the blessing. Held at Salem Evangelical Church 2-4pm. $1 donation per family requested. Contact Valerie Hochstetler to get more information for selling items at 503-585-1895 or valhoch@aol.com.

Discover Creation Family Seminar and Children’s Workshop
June 4-5, Eugene
Presented by the Nuttings of Alpha Omega Institute, this two-day, fast-paced program is designed for the whole family. The children’s workshop is full of hands-on activities while the Adult/Teen seminar instills biblical and scientific evidence via state-of-the-art visuals. Pre-registration cost: children’s workshop – $10/child or $25/family. At-the-door price: $15/child or $30/family. Fees include a hotdog lunch and snacks on Saturday for the children only. For more information: visit http://lighthomeschooling.org or contact Christine Bullock at chrisbullock@msn.com.

LIGHT’s Christian Home Education Fair
June 5, Eugene
9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. at Santa Clara Church of Christ. Bring the family and spend the day being encouraged and equipped. The Education Fair includes how-to workshops, a vendor hall, used curriculum sale, and the Discover Creation Family Seminar and Children's Workshop all offered in one location. It's a great event for the whole family. Visit their website at lighthomeschooling.org.

BUY THE BOOK Used Curriculum Sale
June 5, Beaverton
10 a.m.-12 p.m. This sale is sponsored by LIFE at Home, a homeschool group supporting Christian families in Washington County. For more info and to reserve a $5 sales table contact Paige Lindley at lifeathome@live.com or see buythebooksale.blogspot.com.

Homeschool Science Camp
June 7-11, Molalla
Located at Camp Adams, Science Camp is committed to teaching students about the wonders of natural things and events, in the context of a “hands-on” outdoor classroom with a biblical perspective. For pricing and more information visit the website homeschoolsciencencamp.com or contact: John Hungerford by phone at 503-824-4747.

Clark County Home Educators Used Curriculum Sale
June 18, Vancouver WA
Held at First Evangelical Church, 11 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. Several thousand items! This is a great opportunity for sellers/buyers. Only children age 10 & up allowed on sale floor, except newborns under 6 months in carrying pack. No strollers. Child care is available for a small fee. For more info see: www.ccsale.org or contact: Connie Zumstein at 360-887-4933 or czumstein@juno.com.

Jackson County Used Curriculum Sale
June 19, Medford
The sale runs from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the First Baptist Church, 649 Crater Lake Avenue, Medford. Materials are turned in on Friday. For information on how to sell, contact Tika Weeks at 541-778-215 or via email at therese@jchenews.org.