More than 500 members and associate members from 170 companies participated in the Retail Confectioners International (RCI) Convention in Seattle in June. In addition, 218 non-members considered the benefits of RCI membership during the gathering. Whether listening to experts in confectionery, fishing or golfing with associates in the industry, participants experienced a topnotch convention in a world-class city as retailers of confections came together to learn from one another.

After a day of plant tours to Boehm’s Chocolates, and the Seattle Chocolate Co. combined with sightseeing tours to Snoqualmie Falls and the Seattle Museum of Flight, the RCI gathering began in earnest on June 17 with a keynote breakfast. Bill Radke of KUOW, Seattle’s National Public Radio affiliate, spoke with humor about a variety of topics ranging from the Wizard of Oz to memory to dysfunctional family, weaving references to confections throughout.

Following this presentation, a general session focused on innovative ingredients and how to use them. Richard Gordon of Chocolate Potpourri gave some basic information about the chemistry of fats and oils in confections and some tips in using the newest options.

Breakout sessions included a review of the process of educating and training a good sales force, given by Adele Malley of Malley’s Chocolates. A panel discussion about candy production included Paul Hoffman of Hoffman’s Chocolates, Richard Gordon, Jay King of Marie’s Candies, and Tom Drew-Smith of Reid Candy & Nut Shop. For those interested in developing a Web page for business, Tim Fletcher of fine.com spoke to the confectioners.

Food and entertainment completed the RCI’s educational conference day by a visit to Tillicum Village. Participants dined at a salmon roast with traditional Native American flair.

Randi Freidig began the next day with a presentation on the hidden power of interpersonal relationship skills. Drawing from personal examples, common sense, audience participation and humorous stories, those who heard her realized the potential for courtesy and success one has with each interpersonal connection.

RCI members were able to view supplier exhibits during two afternoons of the conference.

On Friday of RCI’s conference week Elaine Gonzalez and Randy Hofberger of Peter’s Chocolates and Andreas Gallister of Albert Kookaburra Liquorice. At the RCI Candy Clinic there was a definite international flavor.