



TENNESSEE COLLISION REPAIRERS ASSOCIATION  
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Dear TCRA Sponsors:

The following article has been written as a special feature of the regular TCRA update to appear in the November issue of *Automotive Report*. The article offers an analysis of what was behind the failure of the recent 2011 TCRA Trade Show & Conference. In addition to the article, a message from Tony Nethery, TCRA Executive Director, to our Sponsors is included, thanking them for their support and outlining a path forward. Please review both the article and Tony's message, and let us know if you have any questions, comments, or suggestions. We look forward to hearing from you.

## **TCRA Gave a Party and No One Came** *By Georgia Thorson*

The Tennessee Collision Repairers Association held their annual TCRA Trade Show & Conference on Fri. 9/23 & Sat. 9/24. Based on attendance at the 2010 event, 25-30 vendors and about 250-300 attendees were expected. The sad fact is that practically no one attended the 2011 event, and many of the sponsors didn't even show up. The venue at the Embassy Suites Conference Center in Murfreesboro was top notch; the food and entertainment were really great; and the agenda was packed with a variety of classes, speakers, and demos – some of which were cancelled due to the extremely low attendance. So what happened?

Based on the history of the event, there was no indication that this wouldn't be the biggest one yet. The 1<sup>st</sup> annual event in 2009 was held at the Renaissance Center in Dickson, TN. The guest speaker was Aaron Schulenburg of SCRS. Approximately 80 people attended. The 2<sup>nd</sup> annual event in 2010 was held at the Hotel Preston in Nashville. Over 200 excited attendees showed up to hear Aaron Schulenburg, acting as moderator, and George Avery, Estimatics Consultant from State Farm, participate in an interesting and pertinent Q&A session. Both the 2009 and the 2010 events were held during the week, for a few hours in the evening.

So what was different in 2011? For starters, the event was held further east, and extended 2 days over a weekend. 1.) Was that too far for the existing ground roots supporters to travel, as most of the TCRA base is in Middle Tennessee? 2.) Or did individuals not want to sacrifice a weekend for something business related? Typically, we work from Monday to Friday, seriously looking forward to our Fridays nights and the quick weekend respite we get from the pressures of work. 3.) Or was it a timing conflict? I-CAR scheduled a training Blitz in Knoxville on the same day, and people can't be in 2 places at once. Also, unbeknownst to TCRA planners, it was the first weekend of Bow Season. This could certainly be construed as a valid reason not to attend, since anyone who understands a hunter's passion knows better than to come up against it. 4.) Some said that people weren't interested because of the speakers. But how could this be, since the 3 scheduled speakers, attorney Erica Eversman, Patricia Roberts from *Ask Patty*, and biz guru Clifton Lambreth are all nationally recognized industry experts? 5.) Others said that people didn't attend out of fear of insurer reprisals, which was attested by several body shops. It seems that rumors were abounding about how some shops might have been dropped from programs due to their affiliation with

TCRA; and that representatives of one insurer even suggested attendance at the event wouldn't be wise. Since TCRA is non-confrontational and focuses on advancing the automotive collision/refinish industry in Tennessee through communication, excellence, and business ethics, any fearfulness passed from insurers to shops has no foundation in reality, and is ultimately counterproductive.

Possibly all these reasons affected the disappointing outcome of this event, and a few things may have been learned the hard way. TCRA will reconsider the way future events are planned and presented, and will continue to seek ways to reassure the insurance industry and promote body shops in the State of Tennessee. This may have been a major set-back, but it is not the end of anything. TCRA Executive Director, Tony Nethery, had this comment, "The last 2 annual TCRA events were extremely successful, and one failed event doesn't define what the association represents. We will take a step back to assimilate things, and then continue forward. Real success is a process, not an event."

#### **A Message to our Sponsors from Tony Nethery, Executive Director of the TCRA:**

This message is a special thank you and recognition to our corporate and event sponsors, who are the backbone of the TCRA. It is also a sincere apology to our sponsors for the recent failure of the 2011 TCRA Trade Show & Conference, which did not generate the anticipated traffic to make our exhibitors' efforts worthwhile.

We understand from the appearance of the event that it may look like the TCRA has failed and should pack up and go home. Truthfully, from an attendance and financial standpoint, the event was disappointing at best. However, TCRA is not defeated! The W. Tennessee Chapter met this week, and attendance was strong with representatives from several counties. We discussed what we could have done better to make the event successful, and how we can move forward past the recent disappointment.

The consensus from the meeting is that the TCRA is far from dead and will get its second wind. While it might seem like time to throw in the towel as a sponsor, the TCRA needs your support more now than ever. As time goes on, the members will not forget the sponsors who stand by them now. As a testament to the grit of the officers and members, we have already begun to discuss what we need to do differently for next year's event. We are confident that as this coming year progresses, you will see a return on your investment and will continue to have a mutually beneficial relationship with the TCRA.

We have waited a couple of weeks to send out this message for a few reasons: Firstly, after working countless hours to put an event with so much potential together, we were more disappointed than anyone, and needed time to re-focus on the positives. Secondly, we were waiting for the financials to come in to see where we stood. Thanks again to those sponsors who did come through, we will financially survive. Lastly, we have spoken to many of those involved to get feedback on how to move forward; and what we heard is: *We truly need to move forward.*

Since TCRA sponsorship is not exclusively for a one-time effort, but for supporting the Tennessee Collision Industry as a whole, a few benefits and plans for the coming year are listed below:

#### TCRA benefit to sponsors

- Recognition on website through December 2012.
- Access to contact information for all TCRA members.
- Recognition on recorded sessions on Collision Hub and ABRN.
- Recognition at all TCRA meetings and events until next year's show.
- Opportunity to provide content for local meetings.
- Discount for next year's show.

Plans for next year's meetings & event(s)

- The W. TN Chapter will be bimonthly instead of monthly.
- Promotional efforts for membership and sponsors will increase.
- Preregistration will be mandatory for all events.
- Event prepayment will be required for non-members.
- Annual event will be a one day event held during the week.
- Solicit insurance industry speakers.

Again, we sincerely thank you for your financial support, but TCRA is now calling on you to be active sponsors through meeting planning relating to the promotion of your products, services, and ideas. Please contact us about participating in future local meetings across the state. We also encourage you to let us know what you think.

We'd also like to take this opportunity to thank all of the many TCRA volunteers who helped with the 2011 Trade Show & Conference, as well as those members, volunteers, and corporate sponsors who make the regular meetings possible through their dedication and commitment.

Sincerely,

TENNESSEE COLLISION REPAIRERS ASSOCIATION

Tony Nethery, Executive Director