



July 22, 2014

Over 1,000 people converged in Houston for the annual summer convention of The Southern Federation of Syrian Lebanese American Clubs, which took place July 10-13 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. Tony Bikhazi, the State Vice President of the Federation, was there to represent the Metrolina Phoenician Club and our beautiful State of North Carolina. Tony was accompanied by his lovely wife Lak and club members Bruce and Mariette Andraos Goldstein.

Tony, who was reelected in June to serve a second term as State Vice President, sends our members this special message about his experience attending the convention for the first time:

I am very happy to have represented our club and take the oath as State VP in person this time. It was an exciting weekend filled with lots of activities. On the first night, there was a buffet dinner accompanied by a Casino night that was very successful. The next morning, I attended the State VPs meeting followed by the General Assembly, where each representative had to carry their state flag and wave it around. I am pleased to announce that during the General Assembly, the Metrolina Phoenician Club received a certificate for increasing our membership by 20% this year. Also at the General Assembly, a new board was elected and Luke Abrusley was nominated the new President of the Federation.

Everyone we met was incredibly passionate about the Federation and are dedicated to making it a success. I was impressed to learn that this year's President Sharon Abercia is following in the footsteps of her father and mother, both of whom served terms as President of the Federation. Sharon's sister is also actively involved with the Federation's scholarship arm. Sharon held a big reception in her private quarters and invited the four of us to attend. There was a lot of food and drinks and we got to know many interesting people. Like Sharon, the majority are third and fourth generation Lebanese and Syrian who speak with a thick Southern twang! The few Arabic words they know include *sitti*, *jiddi*, *kibbe* and *kousa mihshe*, yet they have great love and respect for the homelands.

We also attended a special breakfast where the Federation members performed and showed off their talents. Some sang, while others acted or performed comedy routines. It was a fun atmosphere that put everyone in a good mood. The highlight of the convention was the Gala on Saturday night and it was quite successful. Good food was served, two bands played – one American and the other Arabic – and the people danced, sang and drank until late into the night.

A total of 1,053 people attended the convention, ranging in age from teenagers to senior citizens, and everyone had a great time and is planning to attend the annual Mid-Winter Conference that's scheduled to take place in Atlanta during the Valentine weekend (February 13-14, 2015). Since Atlanta is just a four-hour drive from Charlotte, we encourage all of our members to attend. It is being held at the Westin hotel in the upscale Buckhead district and promises to be another exciting event for the community. We hope to see you there!

Sincerely,

*Tony Bikhazi*

State Vice President of the Southern Federation of Syrian Lebanese American Clubs