

JANUARY GUEST SPEAKER — JOSHUA NIDENBERG

Speaker for the January, 2011 meeting was Joshua Nidenberg, a New Orleans based professional photographer, who has lived and worked in that city for over 20 years. His photographic interests are broad, covering subjects ranging from candid street scenes in New Orleans to the bayous of southeast Louisiana and many other Louisiana areas as well. He carries a camera with him everywhere, even when not pursuing a specific project, and he stops often to photograph items of interest, both large and small.

Nidenberg likes to assemble photos or exhibitions that tell a story; in fact, his abiding interest is in “Photography as Storytelling,” and he believes that a good photograph is one that speaks for and explains itself. He demonstrates that interest in the 275,000 images (film and digital) that he possesses, and in a goal of shooting a prolific 1,000,000. Interestingly, for a work process for that storytelling, he tends to look at the styles and work of musicians and restaurants, rather than the procedures of other photographers.

Nidenberg was a financial advisor until the advent of Hurricane Katrina, after which he became a full-time photographer. He issued a word of caution, however, for budding professional photographers. He said that, in order to engage in full-time photography, one should ideally have either a liberal trust fund, a working spouse, a day job, or some combination of the three.

Nidenberg has just returned from Montbéliard, a medium-sized city (population 30,000) in eastern France, where he had been selected to participate in a month-long Christmas lights festival, called Les Lumières de Noël (www.lumieres-de-noel.fr/). His LPS program featured his photographs and experiences during that time.

He preceded his slide show, featuring various scenes from Montbéliard and vicinity, with a challenge to the audience to discern the theme of his presentation. The show, set to lively French music, included images of architecture, street scenes, including people, pets and children, restaurants and food, street-front shops, events, Christmas and Santa scenes, snow scenes and street musicians. Afterward, Nidenberg asked the audience about the theme, and some of their suggestions included take-home bread loaves, dogs wearing clothes, the resemblance to the New Orleans French Quarter, a cultural exchange between France and Louisiana, Santa Claus figures, and blue roofs and other architectural aspects of the city. He thought that several of those would qualify as themes as presented, but his intended theme was “A French story told through the eyes of a Louisianian” (while that Louisianian was selling photographs to the French).

Despite the vagaries of the French winter weather (16 days of snow, 8 of rain, and 2 clear days), he managed to shoot 20,000 images while there. He maintained a booth for exhibiting and selling his photographs, but his photographs of Louisiana, except for photos of musicians and Katrina scenes, did not sell as well as his photographs of France, especially the French countryside. As is typical virtually worldwide, the people of Montbéliard take their medieval city for granted, whether considering ancient landmarks or ordinary scenes of everyday life. He believes that the fresh eye of a visitor with a camera gave those scenes a new perspective for them.

Though the stay in France may not have been a particularly profitable one, Nidenberg is nevertheless pleased that the city of Montbéliard has licensed thirty of his photographs for use by the city in future tourism promotional work.

Article by Bob Connell