

What's Up with the Bling?

A Newcomer's Guide to the Florida Professional Photographers Degree Program

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Professional Photography Degrees: the mark of perseverance in keeping up and expanding our minds through continuing education. Here we'll examine just what it all means and what they can do for you.

As a new FPP or affiliate guild member, it can sometimes seem daunting to arrive at the monthly meetings or FPP seminars, FOCUS convention or the Florida Photography Workshops and see so many unfamiliar faces. Who's new/who's experienced, who's storefront/who's home-based, who's full-time/who's part-time and *what the heck are all those colored ribbons and medals hanging around some people's necks???* They are the badges of courage from print competition battles, the mark of perseverance in expanding our minds through continuing education, and the thank you for hours of personal time and dedication spent giving back to an association that has helped sustain our businesses and introduced us to life-long friends. They are the mark of hard work and excellence in our field and with them come a responsibility to 'pay it forward'. No, they are not easily attained, and they shouldn't be. And that's why a certain amount of respect is earned along with them. But no matter how long the path, you can't get to the end until you get on it. This month is Part One in understanding and navigating your way through the highest awards and degrees that we can all aspire to from both the Florida Professional Photographers and the Professional Photographers of America.

Associations 101: "What Do All the Letters Stand For?"

Let's start with the basics. The Florida Professional Photographers (FPP) is our state association. They are like "the Mother Ship" to seven 'affiliates' or smaller guilds located throughout the state. The Professional Photographers of America (PPA), is the largest professional photography association in the world and the FPP is an 'affiliate' of PPA. They are internationally known and have their own awards and degree programs. More on that later. To begin, let's take a look at the FPP's degree program and the merits it takes to earn them....

"What the Heck is a 'Merit', Anyway?"

Simply put, a merit is a "point"; when the points add up to the required amount, one earns a Degree. There are four different Florida Degrees, and three different kinds of merits: service merits, print competition merits and education *points*. Confused? Stay with me....

"What Are the Four Florida Degrees?"

The Florida Degree of Photographic Excellence, the Florida Degree of Artistic Excellence, the Florida Service Award, and the Florida Education Degree. Let's break this down...

Florida Degree of Photographic Excellence (FDPE): Florida's highest degree is awarded for just that; photographic excellence in image competition. A member must earn 30 FPP merits to be eligible. A minimum of 16 must be merits earned by competing in the annual FPP photographic competition, held during FOCUS. The remaining 14 merits may be earned with additional competition or service merits. An image competition merit is earned by receiving a score of 80 or above in competition; an additional merit will be awarded for an image receiving a First Place award. On a local level, print competition (also referred to as "salon"), images may be worthy of a merit and score as such, but merits earned at a Section print competition are not counted toward FPP degrees. The FDPE medal is worn on a light blue ribbon.

Florida Degree of Artistic Excellence (FDAE): Florida's highest degree for retouching, digital imaging, colorists, and technicians, this degree has soared since the advent of PhotoShop! A member must earn 30 merits to be eligible. A minimum of 16 must be merits earned by competing in the annual FPP photographic competition. The remaining 14 merits may be earned with additional print or service merits. A merit is earned by receiving a score of 80 or above; an additional merit will be awarded for a print receiving a First Place award. Images are judged solely for the quality of workmanship on the print. And again, merits earned at a Section print competition are not counted toward FPP degrees. The FDAE medal is worn on a gold ribbon.

Florida Service Award (FSA): this Degree is awarded for hard work, volunteerism and dedication to the FPP and/or your local affiliate guild. A member must earn 30 merits to be eligible. Print merits are NOT eligible to be counted towards the FSA. The FSA medal is worn on a green ribbon.

Florida Education Degree (FED): this Degree is designed to encourage members to achieve a high level of professionalism through continuing education. A member must earn 35 "points" --not merits-- to be eligible for this degree. The FED medal is worn on a red ribbon. Points are awarded automatically, unless otherwise stated. Points may be earned by attending the following:

Three Points: Florida Photography Workshops (4 days attendance)

Two Points: FOCUS, FPP Convention (2 day minimum attendance)

One Point: Florida Photography Workshops (2 days attendance); FPP Fall or Spring Seminar; Attendance with FPP approved Mentor; Attendance at PPA Convention; Attendance at PPA PEC.

"So, How Do I Earn Merits"?

Two words: GET INVOLVED! There are dozens of ways to earn a merit, and variable amounts depending on your level of involvement:

Six Merits: President of the FPP

Five Merits: FPP Vice President; FPP Secretary/Treasurer; Florida Photography Workshops Director; Competition Manager.

Four Merits: FPP Board Director; FPP Event Manager; FPP Talent Manager; FPP Executive Director; FPP Webmaster.

Three Merits: Affiliate President; Florida Photography Workshops Director Assistant; Florida Photography Workshops instructor; FPP Salon/Judge/Moderator at annual Convention.

Two Merits: Affiliate Delegate Chairman; FPP Platform Speaker (Convention or Seminar); Committee Chairman for Convention/School/Seminar; FOCUS Webmaster; 4th year Salon Committee worker; Illustrated article published in a recognized photographic publication (minimum 500 words - limit of 4 merits a year for articles).

One Merit: FPP Committee worker for Convention/School/Seminar (limit 2 per convention); FPP Mentor (per student); FPP President appointed committee worker; Guest Speaker/Judge at an FPP accredited photographic/post-secondary school; Article published in a recognized photographic publication (minimum 500 words-limit 4 merits per year); Affiliate Speaker (limit 1 time per year at your own); Affiliate Judge (limit 1 per Affiliate per year; no merits for judging at your own); Affiliate Mini-Seminar instructor; Affiliate Officer (total of 5 people per Affiliate); Affiliate Outstanding Service Award Recipient; Affiliate Webmaster (may receive up to 2 merits); Affiliate Newsletter Editor (may receive up to 2 merits); Affiliate Delegate (must attend 1 meeting, can't combine 2 Affiliates; Seminar Event Manager/Talent Manager (1 merit each per Seminar); PPA Super Monday instructor; PPA Councilor attending PPA Nat'l Council meetings.

Once you have accumulated the appropriate number of merits or points needed for a degree, you will be notified by the Executive Directors office and given an application to be submitted to the Board of Directors for formal approval. Recipients are asked to provide the name of their "sponsor", or person they would like to have present their degree to them. The recipient will receive a certificate and the appropriate medal(s) at the annual FPP convention- FOCUS.

"What Are All Those Little Gold Bars About?" Occasionally you'll see a row of little gold bars that run up the degree ribbon. In some cases, the member can barely pull the ribbon over their head. Salute them. That designates a whole lot of time, effort and --in print competition-- money; each of those gold bars represents *another 20 merits* that person has earned towards that same degree! And a few, well-respected competitors actually sport a *50 print merit* bar!

I hope that clears up part of the mystery. To take a closer look at PPA Degrees, including the Master of Photography Degree, the Master of Electronic Imaging Degree, the Craftsman Degree, and the coveted Certified Professional Photographer Degree, [click here](#).

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