

## **What's Up with the Bling?**

*A Newcomer's Guide to the FPP Degree Program*

~ Carol Walker, FSA, FED.  
FPP Delegate Chair  
TAPPA Past President

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 member, it can sometimes seem daunting to arrive at a convention, school, or seminar 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 peoples necks???* Contrary to belief, they are not just for gray-haired, older gentleman on the brink of retirement. 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 article 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 Tampa Area Professional Photographers Association (TAPPA) is a 'local' guild. TAPPA is a 'section' or an 'affiliate' of the Florida Professional Photographers (FPP). The FPP is our state professional association. They're like "the Mother ship". When you join the FPP, you are automatically given membership to the Southeastern Professional Photographers Association (SEPPA). There are no additional membership dues to be a member of SEPPA and their bi-annual convention is free. You read that right: *free!* The Professional Photographers of America (PPA) is our national organization. They are internationally known and have their own awards and degree programs. 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 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 print competition. 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, held during convention. The remaining 14 merits may be earned with additional print, or service. A print merit is earned by receiving a score of 80 or above in competition; an additional merit will be awarded for a print receiving a first place award. No more than 8 print merits may be earned in the same year. 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. 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. No more than 8 print merits may be earned in the same year. 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. A member must earn 30 service merits to be eligible. Service merit are awarded for working on or chairing an FPP committee, speaking and/or judging at the local guild level, state, regional, or national PPA affiliated level. 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. Points are awarded automatically, unless otherwise stated. Points may be earned by attending the following:

**Three Points:** Florida School (5 days attendance)

**Two Points:** FPP Convention (2 day minimum attendance)

**One Point:** FPP Fall or Winter Seminar; Attendance with FPP approved Mentor; Attendance at PPA Convention; Attendance at SEPPA Convention; Attendance at PPA PEC. The FED medal is worn on a red ribbon.

**"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:** Annual FPP Convention Chairman

**Four Merits:** FPP Vice President, Secretary/Treasurer and Board Director; FPP Magazine Editor; FPP Webmaster; Florida School Director; FPP Competition Manager; Annual Trade Show Manager

**Three Merits:** Section President; Convention Speaker Support Chairman; Convention Committee Chairman; Florida School Director Assistant; Florida School instructor; Fall/Winter Seminar Chairman; Section Delegate Chairmen

**Two Merits:** FPP Platform Speaker; FPP Salon Judge; Committee Chairman; 4th year Salon Committee worker; Section Newsletter Editor; Section Webmaster; Section Delegate; **\*\*Illustrated** article published in a recognized photographic publication (minimum 250 words – limit of 4 merits a year for articles)

**One Merit:** Convention committee worker (limit 1 per convention); **\*\*Speaker** at a Section meeting (limit 1 time per year at your own guild); **\*\*Judge** at a Section meeting (limit 1 per section per year; no merits for judging at your own); **\*\*Speaker** at an FPP accredited photographic school; **\*\*Article** published in a recognized photographic publication (minimum 250 words – limit 4 merits per year); Volunteer instructor for mentor program; Section Officer (total of 4 people per section); Councilor attending PPA National Council meetings.

**\*\*** A Merit Request Form must be completed in order to receive these merits. Forms are available on the FPP website (Membership>Organization) or by contacting the Executive Office. All other merits will be issued automatically, some pending written reports from committee chairmen or Section Presidents.

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 awards banquet at the annual FPP convention.

**“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!