

A. INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTING NOMINATION INFORMATION:

Lisa McQuade
San Antonio Highland Games Association
PO Box 5526 San Antonio TX 78201
Phone 210-618-2148
Fax 210-579-1761
Email lisaztx@yahoo.com

B. NOMINATION INFORMATION:

Jennifer May-Dennis
5903 Babcock Rd #204
San Antonio, TX 78240
Phone 210-464-2545
Email jennilee_m@yahoo.com

C. NOMINATION QUESTIONS:

1. Explain your volunteer's significant depth of involvement. (20 points)

Jennifer May-Dennis is integral to the San Antonio Highland Games and Celtic Music Festival, an annual two-day festival that celebrates Scottish and Celtic heritage through dance, music, storytelling, and traditional Scottish athletic events. While working with the local Girl Scouts on a cultural education program in 2004, Jennifer was invited to attend a planning meeting for the San Antonio Highland Games Association (SAHGA). Based on her reputation for being very organized and taking good notes, she was immediately asked to fill an unexpired term on the Board of Directors as Secretary. Jennifer served as Secretary or Vice President of the San Antonio Highland Games Association (SAHGA) 2004 – 2010. Since 2011, Jennifer has held the position of President of the Association. Jennifer understands the goals and purposes of the organization better than most people. She is a guiding voice for the organization and has made numerous contributions in so many different areas. She came to the organization with excellent qualifications and a passion for service. Whether she is contributing as Secretary, Committee Chairperson to the Board of Directors, or President, Jennifer takes on the roles and responsibilities seamlessly. She has contributed to several enhancements for the organization including: improving the organization's budget process, attending training to file taxes annually, instituting a survey process to gather feedback necessary to improve each year, meeting with potential sponsors regularly, creating an inventory process for organization assets, and bringing innovative ideas year after year to take our festival to the next level.

After attending a Texas Festival & Events Association conference, she created the concept of a mascot for our festival. Jennifer designed the costume, created the story, and used a Facebook poll to get fans engaged in the naming of our new mascot, Bonnie Sue – The Loch Medina Monster of the San Antonio Highland Games and Celtic Music Festival. The Mascot has been featured at events throughout the year as well as at our festival to build excitement, greet guests, play with children and cheer on the athletes. Jennifer also created our annual Haggis Eating Contest. The event overflows with spectators and generates a lot of excitement in social media and for the attendees. Jennifer also works with our performers to help expand our educational opportunities by adding the following Music & Cultural Workshops: Scottish Cooking, Archery demonstrations, Irish Singing, Stage Presence, Irish Harp History & Technique, the Concertina, Poetry & Music of Robert Burns, and the Bouzouki.

2. Show specific examples of your volunteer's roles and responsibilities. (10 points)

Jennifer May-Dennis serves as President of the San Antonio Highland Games Association and committee chair of multiple committees. She has served on the Finance, Publicity, Grounds & Set Up, Hospitality, Merchandising, Safety, Dance, Scottish Activities, Living History, Volunteers, Athletics, Kid's Glen, Clans, Celtic Dogs, and Membership committees. As President, Jennifer is always available to represent the organization in the community and with potential sponsors. She contacted multiple media outlets for coverage, filmed teasers and stories for a local television station, and recruited multiple new sponsors. Under her direction, the organization implemented a Board of Directors education program and executed a very successful Strategic Planning Conference. Through Jennifer's role as the

Publicity & Marketing Committee Chair she has developed a relationship with the publicity agency for Disney Pixar's Brave. She included the Brave marketing team in the children's activity to promote a wonderful movie with like goals – celebrate Scottish history and traditions.

Through everything she does, Jennifer is 100% committed to fulfilling the San Antonio Highland Games mission of sharing the history and culture of Scottish Activities with the community at large. She uses her personal vacation time to attend workshops, conventions, seminars to improve games. "Hats off to Jennifer. It always amazes me that we are able to plan and put on such a great festival with only 20+ volunteers. I receive lots of great feedback from the musicians and the spectators that are amazed at how much we grow year after year," said John Wiesen, Entertainment Committee Chair.

3. Describe how your volunteer has provided significant enthusiasm, organizational assistance and specific expertise. (10 points)

Her passion for inspiring others through her commitment to service and community is evident in every interaction. She is great to work with and her enthusiasm is contagious. Jennifer is also a strong facilitator. She has been able to take our monthly meetings to a new level with planned activities, organized agendas and guest speakers. With a small group of very passionate and driven volunteers, it is easy for emotions to run high. Jennifer has a high degree of emotional intelligence and is able to intuitively recognize when the group needs a diversion. She jumps in with an on topic redirection and works offline with those who need some one on one time to express their feelings. This skill has improved our retention of skilled volunteers and committee chairs.

Jennifer is a highly capable, highly motivated volunteer. The organizational skills and ideas that she brings to SAHGA give new life to the Association providing focus for creating consistent procedures which save time and money. She created an extensive emergency action plan for the San Antonio Highland Games that she shared with the City of Helotes to be used as an example for all other festivals in the city. Mary Beth Klein, Board Member and volunteer with more than 20 years service at Highland Games across the country, says, "Jennifer has wonderful insight, patience, and guidance in putting on the Games. I have worked with other Games in the past and I have to say this is one of the most organized Games I have worked with!" Everyone that comes in contact with Jennifer admires her passion and her dedication to the community.

4. Explain how your volunteer has shown initiative and leadership in his or her efforts. (20 points)

Jennifer has provided a tremendous amount of knowledge, organizational skills, and abilities to SAHGA through her many years of work and experience in festivals, non-profit work, and volunteer work. Jennifer May-Dennis has been a key volunteer since 2004. Because of her work on behalf of the organization, we have seen each area of our festival grow year over year. As President, she has helped increase festival attendance by more than 40%. Jennifer wants to make every year's festival better than the last. Part of her focus comes from awareness that Highland Games shut down every year due to lack of interest and funding. To ensure our success Jennifer works tirelessly to show people the entertainment, cultural, and historic value of each component of our festival. She adds new events and activities to the festival to keep people coming year after year. Wilma Heberling, Founding Member and organizer of Highland Games across the world for the past 50 years, says, "Without Jennifer's amazing leadership this wouldn't have happened. We get ignored sometimes by the press, but we somehow keep growing...there IS a reason for that. Much love and gratitude to Jennifer who makes this such a successful festival."

As if that wasn't enough, Jennifer continues to recruit, motivate and develop other volunteers and leaders of the organization (4 directors, 2 officers and 5 committee chairs). She has initiated an annual summer planning conference and board of directors training so that individuals can learn and grow as well as work as a cohesive team to improve the annual festival year after year. In her position at the helm of the Highland Games, Jennifer has spent countless hours pursuing opportunities with the best and brightest leaders of festivals and events across the country to ensure that the SAHGA board of directors has every opportunity to make the Highland Games one of the greatest festivals of the year. She introduced Guest Speakers like Pete Van de Putte, Owner of Dixie Flag Company and IFEA Hall of Fame inductee, to present to the Board of Directors various options for utilizing banners and signage throughout the games, as well as

demonstrate examples of how other events evolved through use of sign and banner imagery. Her leadership and participation in many committees has not only encouraged the existing volunteers to become more engaged, but it has also encouraged additional people she comes in contact with to join the association and volunteer at the games. As the volunteer coordinator, she reached out to local corporations as well as the United Way to get hundreds of volunteers from corporate, school, and other non-profit groups during the Highland Games. Using her professional expertise in managing people, she created a volunteer appreciation program to include a volunteer hospitality section, a Chili Cook-off, and providing volunteer t-shirts to create a unique volunteer experience each year and ensure repeating volunteers.

5. Tell how your volunteer has exemplified his or her dependability. (10 points)

For the past two and a half years, Jennifer has been president of the San Antonio Highland Games and Celtic Music Festival. No one in the organization works as hard as Jennifer. If there is work to be done, she is the first there and the last to leave. She is truly “hands on”. Jennifer travels extensively to attend other festivals, seminars and workshops to continuously learn and grow the Association’s brand and presence in the community. She does not miss participating in monthly board meetings or committee meetings and she instated conference call capabilities so our other board members can still attend meetings when geographically separated. Jennifer can be counted on to help anyway she may be needed. She will organize supplies and equipment for promotional events, meets with potential sponsors, and will honestly volunteer to be anywhere and everywhere.

She works a full time job as a Director at USAA, has juggled part time school and continuing education for her job, and is a highly engaged volunteer for numerous non-profit groups both locally and nationally. They too have seen her organizational abilities, her passion, her leadership capabilities, and her dedication. In addition to hundreds of volunteer hours for the San Antonio Highland Games Association, she found time for an ongoing relationship with the Girl Scouts of San Antonio as a National Delegate, Association Chair, Council Trainer, Service Unit Director and Event Coordinator, Gold Award Mentor and Committee Chair. She was elected Vice President of the National Association of Scottish Games and Festivals, and has planned and hosted the national conference for festival coordinators and created a new series of quarterly webinars for members. She volunteers to assist with the Scottish Society of San Antonio’s annual Burns Night banquet and dance. She is an active member of Epsilon Sigma Alpha and has volunteered for multiple organizations to include ProjectMEND, St. Judes, Bulverde Public Library, SA Food Bank, Easter Seals, Children’s Bereavement Center, Salvation Army and many more. She also serves on the Way and Means Committee to create new fundraising ideas. She also serves as a Board Member for TFEA and was a proactive and dependable volunteer during the combined TFEA and TAFE Texas events summit. These numerous leadership positions do not come to new volunteers, they are offered to exceptional community leaders who have been part of the organization at all levels and for a long time. For any one of those roles, it would be an extraordinary accomplishment to stay organized. We joke and say that Jennifer has found a way to clone herself, or create more than 24 hours in a day in order to do so much for so many. Jennifer is the most organized, dependable person and has proved successful in taking care of every detail possible to make the San Antonio Highland Games and Celtic Festival better each growing year. In each of these organizations she has made a lasting impact on the community and more importantly on the individuals that she serves.

6. Describe your volunteer’s positive attitude. (10 points)

It is hard to imagine, but Jennifer’s real passion begins when she exits work every day. She always rises to the occasion and the challenge with a positive attitude and with excellence. In 2012 Jennifer spent 1400+ hours volunteering in the community. While we are recognizing Jennifer for 2013, we should also step back and realize that this is a way of life for her, not just an incredible year. Jennifer has been among the top of the list for volunteer hours at her Fortune 150 employer, USAA. She has a passion for serving in our community that is extraordinary. Jennifer is always excited about new efforts and increasing awareness of our mission to educate the people of South Texas about the Celtic culture that shaped our community. Perhaps the most important aspect of Jennifer’s commitment is that she manages to do all these voluntary activities with a cheerful and sunny disposition. She always has an “alternate route” when things go awry. Jennifer has become everyone’s sounding board. The San Antonio Highland Games Association as a group can be very passionate. Jennifer is supportive when members are fired up and then slowly introduce other’s point of view for consideration. She understands the problems and needs in working with an all volunteer organization. She looks for peaceful solutions and over the last 6 years the organization has realized a more harmonious board of directors.

Because of her outgoing personality, Jennifer has been able to reach out to other organizations in the San Antonio area and show them how we can work with them to get them more exposure in the community; while at the same time, she is helping SAHGA to grow because more organizations are getting involved with our games. The true extent of Jennifer's commitment to community can be seen in everything she does and through her accomplishments and awards. She was nominated for the San Antonio Business Journal's 40 under Forty for the work she has done to reorganize the governance of the San Antonio Highland Games Association. She was a semifinalist for the WEtv "Women on Their Way" - The Women on Their Way by Wyndham Worldwide Award recognizing her for making a measurable impact both in career and in her charitable efforts. Jennifer balances work, life and community. She was awarded as an Outstanding Volunteer in which Girl Scouts of Southwest Texas leaders presented this award for her work as the Garner Service Unit Director for 5 years. She has received the United States Presidential Call to Service Lifetime Achievement Award - The President's Council on Service and Civic Participation which honors volunteers with more than 4000 hours committed to local non-profit organizations. She has also been recognized as USAA's Volunteer of the Year in 2004, the USAA Federal Savings Bank Volunteer of the Year in 2005 and the USAA Member Experience Volunteer of the Year in 2011 for her significant hours of dedication to local community.

7. Describe how your volunteer has made a difference to the festival or event. What impact has your volunteer had on your festival/event? What void would there be without him or her as a volunteer? (20 points)

Two paragraphs is just not nearly enough space to explain the impact that Jennifer has had for our festival and organization. As president of SAHGA, Jennifer was instrumental in making 2013 the most successful year the organization has ever had. The games brought in a record number of attendants, up 35% from the previous year. Jennifer set up and ran Strategic Planning Conferences to maximize the Association's effectiveness in planning for the 2012 games. Jennifer's efforts have resulted in the largest number of attendees on record in 2013, consideration of the Highland Games as an official San Antonio Fiesta event, and a level of organization that is applauded by board members of SAHGA time after time. She encouraged SAHGA to join IFEA/TFEA and through her tireless efforts has also lead to recognition at from the Texas Association of Events and Festivals. SAHGA was awarded top honors in all three of the categories entered in 2011 and 9 categories in 2012, to include the Zenith Award - all enhancements made under Jennifer's direction. Jennifer served as point of contact between other affiliated organizations (Gaelic Athletic Club, Scottish Society of San Antonio, British Heritage Association, Harps and Shamrock Society, Irish Cultural Society and Association of Scottish Games & Festivals) to facilitate partnerships that were mutually beneficial at various events throughout the year. Jennifer has organized and ran fundraising events for the San Antonio Highland Games. She has expanded sponsorship by sharing the Festival's mission of education and entertainment through networking with local business owners. Jennifer's efforts have increased sponsorship donations by 400%.

Of all the possible nominees for the award, none strikes us as more deserving and qualified than Jennifer May-Dennis. Jennifer is a highly competent and skilled member of our organization. Jennifer is well known for her loyalty, dedication, and hard work, as well as being a tireless promoter of our organization. As mentioned earlier, Jennifer has been instrumental in the success and growth of our organization over the years. Initially, the Games were held in the parking lot of Retama Park Racetrack in Selma, Texas. With the hard work and dedication of volunteers like Jennifer, the crowds outgrew the available space and we moved to our current location at the Helotes Fairgrounds. Each year, Jennifer has outstanding ideas to top each prior year and expand membership, volunteers, and festival guests. As a result of Jennifer's vision for SAHGA, we are looking at long range plans to help us continue to grow and further expand the presence of the Highland Games in our culture rich city. Jennifer is truly irreplaceable. She has great knowledge, skills, and passion that can never be duplicated. In considering the future of the Highland Games, Jennifer has helped organize SAHGA so that our vision encompasses the growing interest of the San Antonio Community in the games. It has been a privilege to have Jennifer as a committed and exemplary volunteer for our organization, and without reservation, we feel that she would be extremely deserving of the IFEA Volunteer of the Year award.

D. Additional Information Required

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Media list

- **Express News**
301 Avenue E
San Antonio, TX 78205
news@mysanantonio.com
- **Helotes Echo**
14743 Old Bandera Rd.
Helotes, TX 78023
echopublisher@satx.rr.com
- **SA Business Journal**
8200 IH 10 W
Ste 820
San Antonio, TX 78230
sanantonio@bizjournals.com
- **NSIDE Business San Antonio**
18402 US Hwy 281 N, Ste. 201
San Antonio, TX 78259
kelly@getinside.com
- **San Antonio Magazine**
121 Interpark Blvd. Suite 407
San Antonio, TX 78216
becca@sanantoniomag.com
- **San Antonio Woman**
8603 Botts St
San Antonio, TX 78217
bpurcellguerra@sawoman.com
- **San Antonio Current**
915 Dallas St.
San Antonio, Texas 78215
cenlow@sacurrent.com
- **SA Communities**
301 Avenue E
San Antonio, TX 78205
hsaldana@express-news.net
- **Texas Public Radio**
8401 Datapoint Dr
Suite 800
San Antonio, TX 78229
dmdavies@tpr.org
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