

Submitted by:

Mark Demko

ArtsQuest, Director of Editorial Services

25. W. Third St.

Bethlehem, PA 18015

610-332-1342

mdemko@artsquest.org

If the nominee is selected, will you help ensure he or she will attend? YES

If the nominee is selected, will you help gather materials for induction video? YES

Nominee Information:

Jeffrey Parks

Founder and President, ArtsQuest

(Retiring in January 2015 after 31 years as a Festivals & Events Professional)

25. W. Third St.

Bethlehem, PA 18015

610-332-1368

jring@artsquest.org

(Please Note: The number and email above are for his assistant, Joann Ring, as we would like this submission to remain confidential for now)

Explain how your nominee has made a difference to the festivals & events industry.

Three decades ago, Bethlehem, PA was seen as a tiny town on its way down, with a Main Street that featured more shuttered shops than thriving businesses, and an industrial giant, The Bethlehem Steel, that was on its way to becoming a name known only in the history books.

At the time, Jeff Parks, a young lawyer and member of the city's small tourism council, came up with the idea of starting a free music festival for the community, an event that would bring everyone together in celebration in a time when the city needed it most. While the idea initially received little support, thanks to Jeff's hard work and determination, and the support of a few key individuals including the Mayor, one of the most unique music events in the nation, Musikfest, was born.

Today, Musikfest is the largest *free* music festival in the nation, with 500 free performances on 13 stages spread throughout the city. Each year, the festival welcomes some of the biggest names in music (Keith Urban, The Avett Brothers, ZZ Top, Steely Dan & Jason Derulo, to name a few this year), as well as attracts artists from as far away as Australia, Japan, Russia, The Netherlands, Thailand and more. Up to one million people visit the city and region annually for this event, with the festival having an economic impact of \$40 million annually in a region that's home to only 650,000 people.

Bethlehem has been known as the Christmas City since the late 1930s, but by the early 1990s, its holiday tourism season program was on the decline. Jeff, after visiting the Christkindlmarkts held in Germany, worked with the city to establish a Christkindlmarkt holiday market in Bethlehem, an event that features 100 artisans, live holiday music, the region's most beloved Santa (a German St. Nicholas) and more. Today, the event is celebrating its 21st year and attracts more than 60,000 annually to a city that's home to only 70,000 people.

In 1995, the inevitable came true, as the city's iconic steel plant finally closed. For more than a decade, the plant sat idle as its furnaces and buildings began to decay. After several attempts by various groups to jumpstart development on site, ArtsQuest, along with the City of Bethlehem, its redevelopment authority and the local public television station, developed a plan to transform the western end of the plant into a new destination for music and arts called "SteelStacks," with the hopes that the new arts and cultural campus would attract people from near and far to the former steel town. Using a development model that involved creative partnerships, creative tax financing and support from some of the region's top businesses including Fortune 500 Company Air Products, a new arts and entertainment district was born at the base of the site's former blast furnaces. Opened in 2011, SteelStacks is home to the 65,000-square-foot ArtsQuest Center performing arts center; the Musikfest Cafe presented by Yuengling, which presents more than 125 concerts annually; the outdoor Levit Pavilion, which offers 50 free concerts each summer; and the city's new Visitor Center, located in the oldest building on the site.

In addition to Musikfest and Christkindlmarkt, ArtsQuest presents nine other arts, cultural and sports-themed festivals on the site, helping to attract more than 800,000 people annually. They include:

FIFA World Cup SoccerFest

Oktoberfest presented by Yuengling

PEEPSFEST- highlighted by a giant PEEPS Chick drop & fireworks on New Year's Eve

Sabor Latin Festival

Blast Furnace Blues Festival presented by Highmark Blue Shield

RiverJazz presented by Concannon Miller

Olympus InVision Photo Festival

Lehigh Valley Filmmaker Festival – showcasing the work of outstanding local filmmakers

ImprovFest (comedy)

General Career Overview

Starting out as the volunteer founder of ArtsQuest, then known as the Bethlehem Musikfest Association, Jeff Parks has led ArtsQuest's growth and evolution into the largest arts and cultural organization in Pennsylvania outside of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. In recent years, he has also been active in the development of the city's emerging arts districts through creative placemaking and innovative arts programming.

ArtsQuest's mission is providing access to exceptional arts and cultural experiences, as well as aiding in economic revitalization through arts programming. In addition to the festivals and special events it presents, ArtsQuest also owns and operates the Banana Factory community arts center. Located in a former banana distribution warehouse, the Banana Factory features studios for 35 visual artists, three exhibit spaces and offers more than 300 art classes and camps for the community, as well as scholarships for students in-need.

Jeff is a frequent speaker on the topics of arts and community revitalization, economic development and leadership. In 1995, he represented the Lehigh Valley region of Pennsylvania at the official White House Conference on Tourism.

Board of Directors

Association of Performing Arts Presenters
Discover Lehigh Valley (region's tourism promotion agency)
Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce
Bethlehem Historic District Association

Member

Americans for the Arts
Association of Fundraising Professionals
Association of Performing Arts Presenters
Citizens for the Arts in PA
International Festivals and Events Association

Notable Recent Speaking Engagements:

- April 2014: Citizens for the Arts in PA, Bethlehem, PA
- Jan. 2014: Assoc. of Performing Arts Presenters Arts Districts: Challenges & Opportunities, New York, NY
- Nov. 2013: Keynote Speaker: Arts United Bravo Celebration, Ft. Wayne, IN
- June 2013: Keynote Speaker: Americans for the Arts Conference, Pittsburgh, PA
- June 2013: Community Arts Colloquium Developing Urban Arts and Culture Districts, Ball State University, Hanover, IN
- Oct. 2012: Panelist: PA Economic Development Association Conference, Bethlehem, PA
- March 2012: Panelist: Urban Land Institute, Washington, DC

Recent Awards of Note:

- 2010 PA Governor's Award for the Arts: "Outstanding Leadership & Service in the Arts for Youth"
- American Institute of Architects Pennsylvania 2012 Silver Medal – ArtsQuest Center
- 2014 Urban Land Institute Philadelphia Award for Excellence - Steelstacks
- 2014 ULI Global Awards for Excellence - SteelStacks (one of only 23 projects around the globe nominated for this prestigious honor)

Involvement in IFEA

ArtsQuest and Jeff Parks have long been members of the International Festivals and Events Association, with the organization joining and winning its first two IFEA (then IFA) honors in 1985.

Jeff, as well as other senior management of ArtsQuest, have spoken or presented at several of IFEA's annual conferences and events. In 2012, Jeff also served as a member of the IFEA President's Council. Since 1985, ArtsQuest has been honored with dozens of IFEA Awards including most recently:

2013 Gold – Best Festival/Event Mobile Applications for Musikfest

Budget: Over \$1.5 million

Walt Keiper, ArtsQuest's Senior Vice President of Administration, served on the President's Council from 2000-'02 and as a program presenter from 1994-'99, while other staff such as Ray Neeb, ArtsQuest Vice President of Operations, and Steve Ott, ArtsQuest Events Manager, are working toward their CFEE certification.

What void would there be if your nominee was not an events professional?

Festivals and events come in all shapes and sizes, but very few are able to sustain themselves for three decades based on the economic model known as ‘free.’

Over the past 30 years, ArtsQuest has developed a reputation for making the impossible a reality through its unique model of innovativeness, creativity and extensive partnering within the community. Thanks to Jeff Parks’ vision, leadership and hard work, Bethlehem, a city of 70,000 people, and Pennsylvania are home to:

Musikfest - the largest free music festival in the nation, which has presented *10,000 free concerts* over the past 30 years.

Christkindlmarkt – named one of the top holiday markets in the world by *Travel + Leisure* and one of the most popular holiday markets in the U.S.

SteelStacks - a major art, cultural and festivals destination crafted from a former steel mill. The campus was made possible through a unique public-private partnership involving local and regional government, nonprofits and members of the business community.

Nine Other Major Festivals – these events, focusing on film, comedy, photography, culture and more, drawing more than 70,000 people annually to SteelStacks and Eastern Pennsylvania.

After more than three decades, and with a budget that now exceeds \$18 million, perhaps the most important aspect of ArtsQuest’s festivals and events programming is that more than 65 percent of its offerings still remain absolutely free. How is this possible? Innovativeness, creativity and the power of partnerships!

In developing SteelStacks, ArtsQuest partnered with the Bethlehem Redevelopment Authority, City of Bethlehem, the local Bethlehem Area School District, its county (Northampton County) and local PBS station PBS39 to save an old steel mill from fading into history. In growing Musikfest from a small community festival into one of the largest music events in the nation, the nonprofit has developed the support of 125 corporate partners, 2,000 supporting members and an amazing 1,9000 volunteers who donate time and talent, providing other cities and urban areas with a model on how they might start similar events in their communities.

Since SteelStacks opened in 2011, the site has received major recognition for the unique way it’s using arts, festivals and culture to revitalize the community and aid in economic development in the region. SteelStacks has been featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, while cities such as Waterbury, CT and Scranton, PA, as well as Carlisle, PA; Reading, PA, and most recently Pittsburgh are looking to ArtsQuest and SteelStacks for assistance and advice on how they can transform their communities and former industrial sites into destinations for festivals, music and arts & cultural events.

In January 2015, Jeff Parks will retire after a 31-year career as a festivals and events industry professional. While ArtsQuest may be best known for its work as a nonprofit arts and educational organization in its region, Mr. Parks’ legacy may very well be the unique special events and public spaces that ArtsQuest has helped develop, enhancing the quality of life for all in the region while putting tiny Bethlehem, PA on the map as a world-class destination for festivals and unique experiences.

Perhaps guitar legend Steve Miller, the first artist to ever perform at SteelStacks, said it best:

“Thank you very much for creating such a cool new venue. This is a wonderful opportunity for your community to create new music and art and produce wonderful festivals and concerts. What was once the industrial heart of the community is now the performing arts heart of the community.”

