

## IFEA HALL of FAME

### 2014 Nomination for Ms. Karen Scherberger

Karen Scherberger  
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Nominee: Karen Scherberger, [scherbergerk@festevents.org](mailto:scherbergerk@festevents.org)

#### **Nomination submitted by:**

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## **1. Karen has made a difference in the festivals and events industry!**

It all began more than 35 years ago when the modern day leadership of Norfolk, Virginia rebuilt, re-branded and re-established the City of Norfolk through special events and downtown revitalization projects. It may have all begun with the simple passion to pick up trash at an event or paint an old building, but Karen and her work have always been at the center of the action when it comes to serving the greater good. Her work in special events work has turned into a complex operation that is now the city and region's greatest economic engine and most powerful marketing vehicle.

Karen's influence on the local Hampton Roads market can be summarized in one gesture – When Karen helped build the region's premiere waterfront destination, Town Point Park, (for the second time!) the city built a mermaid statue and fountain at the park's entrance and named the mermaid "Karen"! With Karen's influence, the City of Norfolk has built two parks that are designed exclusively for festivals and special events. Karen has been a part of thousands of events of her own over the years, but has also been gracious to consult and connect others in the region to become their own Festival entities. Karen has had a hand in the development and management of special event departments in Portsmouth, Virginia, Suffolk, Virginia and Virginia Beach, Virginia. She helped create the award-winning Virginia Arts Festival organization, created events for others cities in the region such as Hampton, Virginia and has been a part of countless event committees up and down the east coast.

Her greatest accomplishments thus far have come on the national and international level with her work with the Operational Sail initiatives that focus on the international tall ship community and sail training. Operation Sail, Inc. is a non-profit organization established in 1961 with the endorsement of President John F. Kennedy. Backed by a Joint Congressional Resolution, its mission is to advance sail training and promote goodwill among nations. To date, it has held six international sailing events—in 1964, 1976, 1986, 1992, 2000 and 2012 —each tied to a landmark historical event and each culminating in a traditional Parade of Sail in New York Harbor. Karen's work with "OpSail" has connected countries through special event celebrations. These events are now a part of our history representing how the United States recognized these defining moments in time.

Many of the standards, laws, staffing structures, safety procedures, protocol and creative ideas that are used throughout the country's special event community have been touched by Karen.

Karen has always shared that she does not have artistic talent of her own, but she feels her gift is the ability to bring other people with talent together and to create an environment to present that talent in.

## **2. Karen's General Career Overview**

Karen Scherberger's ambition was to be a university president. After graduating from Old Dominion University, she earned a master's degree in Higher Education Administration from the University of Georgia. But during her undergrad days at ODU, she discovered another love, and higher education's loss has been the special events industry's gain. She was invited to pick up trash at the then young, but extremely important and influential, Norfolk Harborfest. She proudly took on the role and was truly touched by the enthusiasm of the people working the event. It was a very loosely knit group in terms of organization, but she found herself locked in to the energy and vision these volunteers shared and she knew she wanted to be a part of it somehow.

As she became even more involved with Harborfest the city of Norfolk decided to go forward with the development of an interactive shopping and dining venue and waterfront park. The then-city manager Julian Hirst looked to the volunteer board of Harborfest for ideas. The group ended up with the contract to manage ongoing events there on the Norfolk waterfront, incorporating as Festevents. Norfolk Festevents doors opened on November 22, 1982 and the opening of Waterside Festival Marketplace and Town Point Park followed in June, 1983.

Karen Scherberger has played a major role in the resurgence of Norfolk over the last thirty years. She and Festevents first gave people a reason to come downtown and feel safe. The early events showed the business community the potential of a vibrant downtown. Norfolk Festevents, Ltd., serves as the event management agency responsible for producing hundreds of special events and promotions annually for the City of Norfolk, Virginia. Karen has also been the leader of Operational Sail projects including OpSail2000 Virginia celebration and the IFEA Pinnacle Award winning OpSail 2012 Virginia. Norfolk Festevents, Ltd. is in the midst of producing its 32 annual season of special events. Karen was the organization's first Executive Director and now serves as "Festevents" C E O.

Do not let this humble start in special events fool you – she is now known as the "Mayor of all Mayors" and the "Godmother of Festivals in the mid-Atlantic". Whether as a volunteer to leader of more than 20 employees, Karen's passion has not waivered after all of these years. Festevents remains the flagship for the region, and Karen plans to continue providing entertainment for the region for another 30-plus years to come.

She is a former board member for the IFEA, and professional activities include past and present officer positions and membership with several local and state festival and event associations in Virginia. She has been a professor as an adjunct faculty member at Old Dominion University in Event Management, a frequent event management consultant with municipalities and economic development firms; serves on several boards and commissions related to tourism and economic development for the city of Norfolk, surrounding region, and State of Virginia.

Under Karen's watch through her time at Festevents, Karen and Festevents have been recognized by receiving several awards including, but not limited to; City of Norfolk's Downtowner of the Year, Port of the Year and Woman of the Year. Festevents has been fortunate to win the IFEA World Festival & Event City Award and Grand Pinnacle Award.

### **3. Involvement with IFEA**

It is not a surprise that Karen's closest friends are from the IFEA family circle having given so much time and energy to the association over the years. She has attended just about every conference there has been and always been gracious with her time serving as a board member on multiple occasions.

Her real enjoyment with the IFEA has been behind the scenes working with the organization's leadership and committees. Karen has been a speaker, mentor, committee member, award recipient and so much more over the last 30-plus years.

Karen has recruited countless participants to participate at the state level and national level. She has always supported special projects, IFEA Foundation fundraisers and she is good about financially supporting the programs as well.

She has had a great influence on encouraging her staff to participate in IFEA. All of those that Karen touches quickly become attendees, speakers, article contributors or whatever IFEA needs at that time.

#### **4. The Void**

Though cliché, it would be immeasurable to think about the special event landscape without Karen Scherberger as one of the key faces of the industry. That said, there are some measurable details that would be seriously missed:

Millions of dollars would not have been raised for charitable causes,

Millions of people may never had the chance to experience Norfolk, VA and all the area has to offer,

One year without Karen would mean no income generated for the city of Norfolk ... an average year Generating \$1.8 million in Gross Sales; \$19.5 million in visitor spending, and \$1.7 million advertising value for City of Norfolk.

Millions of special memories would not have been created.

Some of the area businesses and attractions that have been established due to the “people traffic” produced by Festevents programs include: Nauticus Maritime Center, MacArthur Mall, Harbor Park AAA Baseball Stadium and Waterside Festival Marketplace. Hundreds of restaurants, retailers and service businesses have all been created because of the special events Karen started. Another several hundred part-time and full-time jobs have been created as well.

Without Karen the Hampton Roads region would not have the premiere festival parks we enjoy today and no annual season of special events to make Norfolk a great place to live, work and play.