



Zambelli
FIREWORKS

Alex Freeman
2011 IFEA/Zambelli Fireworks
Volunteer of the Year Award Winner
Nominated by the Kentucky Derby Festival
Louisville, Kentucky



The length and depth of Alex Freeman's involvement with the Kentucky Derby Festival can best be described in three words: forty one years. As a member of its board of directors for 18 years and as a "civilian" volunteer serving on event committees and helping with event production; Alex Freeman is and has been, a dedicated and dependable volunteer and she shows no signs of slowing down!

Alex first became involved with the Derby Festival when The Derby Festival's Great Balloon Race was first held; the same year Alex and her husband John started their balloon company, Air 'n' Mania. Together they have participated in the Balloon race a number of times and even won the event in 1980! Working on the inaugural Great Balloon Race was Alex's first foray as a Derby Festival volunteer and she hasn't looked back since.

The Derby Festival is very fortunate to have a network of approximately 4,000 volunteers who help produce nearly 70 events over a two-week period. Some volunteers are involved for several hours on a single day; others take part in event planning and throughout the entire year. Alex Freeman falls into the latter category and her depth of involvement is unmatched in the 56-year history of the Kentucky Derby Festival. She stands alone amongst an "army" of volunteers that have helped the Derby Festival grow from one event – produced on a budget of \$640 – to one of the largest and more celebrated festivals in the country.

Alex Freeman has been involved with virtually every aspect of the Derby Festival over the past 40 years. As a board member, she headed numerous event committees, organizing meetings and working closely with full-time Derby Festival staff members. She fulfilled a similar role as a KDF volunteer, never turning down an assignment and providing leadership and vision for less experienced colleagues. One of her current roles is working a security check-point for the Second Street Bridge during the Thunder Over Louisville fireworks and air show. This is an esteemed position, as the bridge serves as the launching point for thousands of fireworks shells during the internationally known Thunder show and is strictly off-limits but for a handful of event personnel.

Alex is well known for her willingness to tackle any project, no matter how large or small. Derby Festival event team members use her as a reference source on many projects. Over the course of the Derby Festival, Alex seems to be everywhere at once, yet she tends to stay in the background. If asked to perform any task, it is a certainty that it will be carried out. She is not

reluctant to speak up and address any issue that may be negatively affecting the Festival. She is highly respected by board members and volunteers all across the spectrum of participants.

Volunteers who have later been elected to the Derby Festival's board of directors speak of Alex Freeman's willingness to share her experience and to help foster positive attitudes and an optimistic outlook. One newly-elected board member cited her as a role model for her dependability, years of service, infectious attitude, recruitment of volunteers, depth of involvement and dedication. She has been described as the "ideal ambassador for the Derby Festival and its place in the community."

There are certain people in everyone's life who are just plain fun to be around. Without a doubt, Alex Freeman is one of those people. Her smile is genuine, her demeanor is contagious and she is never heard to complain. There are no such things as problems for Alex – only opportunities to grow and learn.

Many people would become jaded or bored volunteering for the same organization year after year, but Alex brings renewed enthusiasm to each season's event planning. Her positive attitude can quickly turn around the pessimism of others and her can-do attitude is absolutely infectious.

It's hard to know where to start when it comes to describing the difference that Alex Freeman has had on the growth and success of the Kentucky Derby Festival over the past 41 years. Her impact and influence cannot be limited to a single event, or even a series of events. One would be hard pressed to imagine what the Festival would be like without her leadership – both as a volunteer and a board member. The Derby Festival is an infinitely better and stronger organization with the involvement of Alex Freeman and all the volunteers she has helped to recruit. Forty-one years is a mighty long run for any endeavor, but it's particularly remarkable that Alex remains as enthusiastic and supportive as ever.

To quote a current Derby Festival staff member: *"You can see Alex's love for this organization in everything she does. She is truly an ambassador for the Kentucky Derby Festival, always referencing the Festival within the community with pride. Most of all, I love that she always does it with a smile."*