



International Festivals & Events Association

**2015 IFEA Hall of Fame
Bruce L Erley, CFEE
Creative Strategies Group, Denver, CO**

If you were to run into Bruce Erley in the early 1970's at Glastonbury High School in Connecticut, you would not be surprised by the direction of his career. At the age of 16, as decoration chairman for his Junior Prom, Bruce lamented in a journal entry, "The biggest problem for me is not thinking of ideas or being able to make the decorations, but really is being able to keep the expenses down. If the class wants a half rate decorations job for the Prom I can give it to them. But nobody told me to do a half rate job so I'm going to go all-out on the decorations. I realize that may be a big problem, but that's the way I work!"

And indeed 45 years later, that continues to be the way he works...

After this freshman year in college, Bruce took a year away from his formal studies to travel with an international cast of *Up with People*, an experience he still today considers transformative in his life. "Not only did I learn about the role of entertainment in communicating messages and ideas, but I developed an attitude for community service and engagement as well as the importance of personal initiative to effect change in the world around you," Bruce reflected.



During that student year with *Up with People*, Bruce also was assigned to advance the tour, going into cities several weeks ahead of the cast to generate media interest, secure sponsors and sell tickets. It became clear to him that THIS was what he wanted to do as a career.

Bruce returned to school with a renewed excitement and vigor to complete a degree in Journalism with a minor in Public Relations from Colorado State University. During his time at CSU, he created the first "Marching Kazoo Band," helped found the student chapter of the Public Relations Society of America and served as president to the student chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists, receiving the honor of being selected as the Outstanding Graduate in Journalism in 1976.

Upon graduation, Bruce returned to *Up with People's* staff as an advance promotions representative working on the road about three to four weeks ahead of a cast heading up teams of staff and students who handled every operational and marketing detail of the cast's visit. During his time on the road with *Up with People*, Bruce got a taste for working with major festivals including the Indianapolis 500 Festival, the nation's bicentennial celebration performing with the Boston Pops, and dozens of special events in smaller markets.

In 1978, Bruce took an office position as the Promotions Manager. Over the next 17 years he moved through the ranks in such positions as Director of Promotion, Director of Marketing Services, Sponsorship Sales Director, Vice President of Corporate Communications and eventually Vice President of Marketing & Sales. Among his favorite experiences was helping to coordinate *Up with People's* PR for two Super Bowl halftime shows, instigating and supervising the organization's complete logo redesign and brand transformation and managing a staff of more than 50, including for several years, Steve Schmader.

Bruce continues to actively consult with *Up with People* booking special cast tours to Bermuda as well as selling and producing cast performances for opening of the Pasadena Rose Parade in 2008 and 2011.

After leaving Up with People, at the age of 40, Bruce branched out on his own. He founded Creative Strategies Group (CSG) exactly 20 years ago this month in September of 1995. From its humble beginnings in the study of his home, CSG quickly grew into the Rocky Mountain Region's leading event marketing and sponsorship agency.

CSG quickly developed a reputation first locally and then nationally for their unique understanding of the sponsorship opportunities associated with festivals and special events. Bruce has been often asked why CSG didn't go into more lucrative properties such as sports teams, to which Bruce explains that he has a heart for the impact festivals and events. "Festivals knit together the people of a community in a demonstration of shared interests and local pride like nothing else," Bruce mused. "I love seeing neighbors, friends and visitors come together in a spirit of celebration."

And what Bruce *really* excelled at was identifying and selling the marketing and communications value businesses receive when they sponsor festivals and special events. From wine tasting to football games, bike rides to parades, comic cons and the ballet, Bruce can sell sponsors to anything! Through his sales and marketing efforts, Bruce has generated millions of revenue dollars for events of all kinds and sizes, including the Cherry Creek Arts Festival, Denver Cow Parade and the 9NEWS Parade of Lights. He has consulted with more than 75 properties such as the Pasadena Tournament of Roses, the Philadelphia Flower Show, Kentucky State Fair and National Western Stock Show.

Bruce continues to be a leading thought leader in the event marketing and sponsorship arena. His inspired ideas as well as effective selling and marketing techniques are far reaching and literally have had a world-wide impact. The Chinese Government, through a connection with IFEA, brought Bruce in to teach them how to sell event sponsorship. Event producers in Dubai, Austria, Canada, Singapore and South Korea have engaged Bruce on various consulting projects.

Additionally, Bruce has always been willing to openly share his ideas to elevate the overall industry knowledge and relevance. He is a prolific and top-rated speaker and presenter, teaching at hundreds of regional, national and international conferences and webinars. His collective body of work has set the standard and defined how to sell sponsorship to festivals and events.

Bruce earned his CFEE in 2010 and is also Accredited in Public Relations by the Public Relations Society of America. He is the author of the CFEE sponsorship curriculum and a regular contributor to publications issued from IFEA, ICAS, Public Broadcasting and IEG among others. Bruce is a dedicated advocate of IFEA and the profession and looks for every opportunity to be actively involved and engaged with the world's festival and event's industry.

Volunteerism is important to Bruce and he has served on a multitude of community and professional boards, including the IFEA Foundation from 2000-2006 and the IFEA Board of Directors from 2004 to 2013. While he presided as IFEA Chairman in 2013 he played an integral role in bringing that year's IFEA Annual Convention to Denver, CO.

For the many who know Bruce, they can attest that the events industry would not be as much fun if Bruce were not in it. In every situation, Bruce's quick wit and sense of humor light up a room. He can make people laugh during a dry, boring meeting. He can bring a lightness to the most awkward, stressful of situations and find humor in almost any moment. Bruce works with a smile and positive can-do attitude that is contagious to all who meet him.

He is also a dedicated husband to Linda for 32 years and father of three sons, Christopher (and his wife Katie), a medical student at the University of Washington; Matthew, the regional manager of a mobile start-up based in Denver and Patrick, (and his wife Katherine) a Physician's Assistant in Red Lodge, Montana.

Simply put...Bruce Erley is an industry visionary. Bruce has shared his insight and natural passion to build an extraordinary career spanning more than 40 years that has changed the course of the event marketing and sponsorship for the festivals and events industry for the better.

Please help us congratulate our 2015 IFEA Hall of Fame Inductee, Bruce L Erley, CFEE.