

# PRESIDENT'S LETTER

## *Keep the Energy Flowing*



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"It was the best of times. It was the worst of times."

When Charles Dickens wrote his classic opening lines from "A Tale of Two Cities," he could just as easily have been referencing our own historical challenges today. But rather than comparing the turmoil and life in London and Paris leading up to the French Revolution, he would perhaps have chosen to focus instead on the seemingly dual personas of many singular cities today, as they choose their paths and reactions to a wide-array of global and economic challenges threatening their financial health and quality of life at so many levels.

The new demands and stresses placed upon so many – in all industries and walks-of-life – by the global economic crisis of the past three years; the shifting of the world's cultural roots as diverse populations continue moving in search of jobs, lifestyles and safety for those they love; the challenges – real and perceived – presented by constantly changing new technologies; and the loss of human connections in a world where communication chan-

nels have never been more accessible; has and will continue to change our cities and communities – their personalities; their strengths; and their values.

I have seen this taking place in many locations around the world – but none so close to home as my own city, which I have chosen to view as a case study – an up-close "Tale of Two Cities" and a cautionary tale for us all.

Two decades ago, ours was a city of unlimited visions and opportunity, with corporate headquarters on every block, leaders who recognized the value of and readily supported events, the arts, local causes, educational institutions, and – perhaps most importantly – their role in perpetuating those elements that, working in partnership, create the brand and personality of a city and community.

Much like a child who is rewarded when they succeed and responds with further successes, a city that accomplishes great things and is recognized for those successes will respond by continuing to accomplish great things.

I can't say exactly when it occurred, as it is typically a culmination of things, whose impact – over time – erodes on the image and self-confidence of individuals, organizations and cities alike, but our city, like many others around the world, slowly began to lose the key pieces of its brand over the last ten years.

Business headquarters were lost to economic downturns and corporate takeovers by non-local companies; support for community events, organizations and causes waned as former leaders (with deep and entrenched buy-in to the community) retired, moved away, or passed away with no replacements in the wings and no clear passing of the 'com-

munity commitment' baton to future generations; uncertainty raised its head as once stable business giants laid off large numbers of employees affected by changing global markets; the quality of existing community activities and organizations declined as funders and audiences made difficult decisions to protect their more immediate and personal needs; long-term vision for most organizations became short-term survival plans; and, sadly, common sense seemed to go by the wayside as long-time partners in the community began working against one another to gain control of and access to far more limited revenues and opportunities.

But perhaps the worst loss of all, from my personal and professional perspective: the city's signature event – that served the critical role of keeping all the elements of the community fully connected on a single vision of what they had to celebrate – was allowed to disappear.

And to my dismay, I watch every day as other cities (perhaps your own) are making the same short-term decisions – to solve immediate problems – without thought or awareness or logical conversation of the long-term impact that their actions (or lack thereof) may have.

For our own industry, this changing relationship with a multiple-personality disorder, that for so long had been among our most trusted, reliable and stable partners, has taken many of us off-guard. Where we once enjoyed unparalleled support, we now receive invoices and new demands on our limited resources. Where we once walked among friends and allies, we now are witness to turf wars and resource or opportunity hoarding among city agencies, organizations and corporations. Where we once were recognized as irreplaceable assets, we are

now asked to justify and prove our worth. And where we once saw dreams and visions flourish, we now watch as walls and defenses are being erected.

But as we come to grips with these new realities, and move past the often-warranted tirades resulting from our disbelief, I would suggest that a new and critical role has risen for all of us, our events, and our industry. A role beyond those things that hold our singular daily focus. The role of keeping our communities, and our world, bonded together and focused on the possibilities that lie past the problems; the role of reminding them of who they are when they are at their best; and the role, by example, of succeeding despite the challenges.

I believe deeply that the world needs our industry today, more than ever; and that the festivals and events that we produce may very well be the most powerful tools available to our cities and communities to bring back the true vision of who they are and what they have to celebrate.

Now don't get me wrong, I am not suggesting that this role will be an easy one or that we are the lone 'silver bullet' solution. But (as author J.K. Rowling noted through her own novels), "There are moments in our lives that we must choose between what is right and what is easy," and being part of the solution is what is right.

There are defining moments in history, for every generation, that reflect the examples set by those who have come before and set the stage for tomorrow's successes. I believe that our moment is now, because when the future is most unclear, leadership, experience and vision are priceless.

The challenges of the past three years have tested all of us, globally, in ways that we could have never imagined only a decade ago. Our families, our communities, our countries; all have been affected. Global industries have been affected; governments have been affected; and the festivals and events that we are responsible for, or a part of, have been affected.

But we are fortunate, because those who came before us in the festivals and events industry provided us with guidance, leadership, creativity, and an unrelenting passion for our events and the power of celebration. They helped us to understand the irreplaceable value of events to communities small and large; the economic and social impact of events on individuals, organizations,

businesses and municipalities; and the unique ability of events to bond together families, friends and communities under a common denominator. Now it is our turn to set the stage for our own successes and the legacies that we will leave to future generations.

It has been said that creativity is at its peak when adversity is at its highest; that out of great challenges come great leaders. Today is our opportunity to prove those axioms true, as we set new directions for our events and our communities; new standards of creativity; new expectations of professionalism; new levels of stability; and new dreams to follow.

The IFEA has already begun down this new path, in this new role. IFEA World Board Chair Johan Moerman, Managing Director of Rotterdam Festivals in The Netherlands, and I were invited to visit the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai, China, immediately following our IFEA convention in Saint Louis, and the World Expo theme of "Better Life, Better City" drew a direct parallel to our own direction.

Much like the opportunity of a World Expo challenges the world to look to the future with a new set of eyes and new visions of what could be, the IFEA is asking what the value to our cities and communities, globally, would be if they were offered a tool that could:

Bond all the people, businesses, media, service organizations, educational institutions, neighborhoods and government entities together toward a common vision that would strengthen their individual pride and commitment to their common cities and communities;

Encourage and enable new creativity and direct opportunities for participation by every age group and segment of the population;

Develop a "how can we" vs. a "why we can't" attitude across every element of the community, fostering an environment of positive communication and cooperation at every level;

Highlight and celebrate the diversity of a city, bringing together many unique backgrounds, cultural heritages and demographics while fostering appreciation for them all;

Provide opportunities for family bonding, participation by all economic levels, and an all-inclusive atmosphere;

Build a positive regional, national or even global brand awareness for the city;

Provide a positive mechanism

through which to recruit new business, growth and tourism;

Drive economic impact that could translate into jobs, tax revenues, and enhanced infrastructure improvements;

Provide enhanced exposure opportunities for arts and cultural programs, institutions, and performers; not-for-profit causes; and selected global topics (i.e., the environment, health-related issues, or technology), in an open and non-threatening setting;

Provide year-round opportunities for public involvement, education, and improvement projects, while building a community-wide network of human relationships;

Train and facilitate legions of volunteers whose skills could be used by countless community agencies and programs throughout the year, while also encouraging the value of giving back by all age groups;

Build lasting legacies and memories that could be shared and fostered by multiple generations;

Reach out to include those who may no longer feel a part of their community, but who need those connections now more than ever (i.e., those in nursing homes, assisted-living facilities, or hospitals);

Develop or highlight underused venues or sections of a city, encouraging further community investment;

Provide highly visible public relations opportunities for city facilities and services (i.e., police, parks, fire, transportation services, paramedics, and venues), building a community-wide appreciation and understanding of their value to all.

It would be hard to put a price tag on such a tool; and yet that is exactly what our industry and events already provide (and more) in cities and countries around the world; we just haven't stopped to define that clearly to ourselves, or presented our case strongly enough in that role to many outside of our own industry. Now it is time to begin expanding the conversation.

Along that path, professional gatherings around the world, as provided and supported by the IFEA and our partners –to open up new discussions; provide opportunities for exchange and cooperation between festivals, events, governments, cities, countries and continents; and to lay the foundations for the seeds of new possibilities to take root - should be welcomed and embraced fully by every niche of our industry.

The IFEA has recently added and we are particularly proud of our new IFEA World Festival & Event City award program, which is designed specifically to highlight the irreplaceable value, at so many levels, of events to cities, while opening up new opportunities for positive conversations to occur, all geared toward creating and sustaining the most favorable environments possible for festivals and events. The recipients of our first IFEA World Festival & Event City awards were honored in September at our convention in Saint Louis, Missouri, as global cities, large and small (visit [www.ifea.com](http://www.ifea.com) to learn more about our 2010 recipients), were recognized for what they are doing right to further positive environments that allow festivals and events to succeed and prosper. I hope that you will all encourage your own cities to aspire to and apply for this very special award in the future.

Perhaps in reference to Charles Dickens' 'best of times' to offset the 'worst of times', we should be thankful that recent world challenges have caused us to stop and re-evaluate our own value, roles and approaches.

It is because of those challenges that we have had to begin drawing once again on our creativity more so than on our checkbooks; that we have recognized the need to protect ourselves from future downturns and challenges, by building and strengthening our reserves and relationships; that we have had the opportunity to see clearly where our strengths and weaknesses lie, so that we may focus our efforts on making them all strengths; that we have discovered new talents and commitments to our success from some and recognized the shallowness and lack of commitment from others; and that we have been given a new opportunity to realign ourselves, personally and professionally, with who and what we want to be.

In a constantly changing and complex world, our cities and communities, moving forward, will need everyone to feel a personal buy-in toward identifying creative new solutions to daunting new concerns – people who already feel like they are part of the community; part of the team; part of the solutions; and I am convinced that our industry can play a key role at the forefront of bonding our cities together to that end, providing that critically important personal buy-in and ownership by all.

Given our new goals and roles, the power of our industry to affect change, strengthen relationships, and create new visions and opportunities for our cities – whether it is in Norfolk, Virginia or Boryeong, South Korea; Taupo, New Zealand or Maribor, Slovenia - does not lie in a single person, event, institution or organization; it lies in the strength of the whole, working together. It lies in all of us: every event and every event professional, in every city, state, province, territory, country, continent or region around the world; working every day to produce the highest quality events possible, exemplifying the credibility of our peers, participating on behalf of something larger than ourselves and our own organizations, and sharing visions that can change communities, change people and change the world for the better.

Every day, in some way, we are each given the opportunity to improve our event(s), our organizations, our communities and our own professional legacies, but it is up to each individual to recognize and take advantage of those opportunities and resources that are placed in front of us.

Five to ten years from now, global festival and event industry leadership directories will be filled with the names of individuals you haven't met yet – start meeting them today; festival and event professionals will depend upon tools, products and resources that don't exist today – play a role in their creation; and the greatest success stories will be built upon ideas that haven't yet been thought of – why not be the one who does think of it?

The future will require us all to be prepared - professionally and personally - for tomorrow. To expand our conversations to those we have not yet visited with before. To step out of our comfort zones. And to be the leaders and partners that our cities will need to survive and to flourish.

I look forward to making that journey with each of you.