

# PEOPLE

## Mary Ann Dilling, CFEE

Mary Ann Dilling, CFEE, is the Executive Director of Fond du Lac Festivals, Inc., located in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, USA. Fond du Lac Festivals is a non-profit organization founded in 1983 with a mission to direct, promote and support festivals and special events that showcase the Fond du Lac Community. The organization is responsible for events including Light Up the City, Taste of Fond du Lac, and Fond du Lac's premier event Walleye Weekend. Fond du Lac Festivals has received international awards for aspects of its events and festivals. The organization also assists with various community businesses throughout the year on projects and events.



### IN CONVERSATION

#### How did you get into events?

Planning events and festivals was something that I had never even thought about before, but when I was approached by the president of the Association of Commerce with the job, I figured why not? I had been planning parties all my life that were basically events in their own right. The president of the AC thought I would be great for the position so I thought I would give it a shot. Little did I know that it would become my life and passion over the next 10 years.

#### What has been your biggest professional challenge?

The biggest challenge is maintaining the unique structure of our largest festival. The festival takes place in a 400 acre park and we get more than 100,000 guests each year. What is unique about it is everything in the festival is free to our guests, with the exception of food, beverage and alcohol I.D. wristbands, and even though our organization is a non-profit itself, the mission of the festival is also to benefit non-profit organizations (Currently through our efforts, almost 200 organizations benefit). Each event within the festival is run by a non-profit organization and we make a donation to those organizations for their efforts, and each of our concessions is a non-profit organization as well. Guests can come and enjoy more than 40 live local, regional and national music acts, all at no charge. The festival also boasts more than 90 activities and events; everything from inflatable's, children's entertainment, mazes, fishing tournaments, Dodgeball, Strongman, Softball, 3 on 3 Basketball, Volleyball, and much more! The challenge for our organization is to maintain and grow our sponsorship each year, since the only revenue Fond du Lac Festivals receives after the festival begins is a percentage of all drink sales. Because of this structure, we rely heavily on sponsorship to keep the festival afloat. It requires constant brainstorming and creativeness to come up with new and innovative ideas.

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#### Years in the Business:

10 Years

#### Degree:

Communications, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, CFEE, IFEA

#### Family:

Married to husband Al, three children, Alexandra Lillian, 21, Devin Lucey, 18 and Joshua Allen, 9.

#### Last book read:

*The Lost Choice*  
by Andy Andrews

#### Last business book read:

*One Minute Manager*  
by Kenneth Blanchard

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**What do you do to relax?**

Since we all know that these are part time jobs and we start planning our festivals a month before, I don't need to relax...right?

I enjoy my kids immensely and their sporting events and activities. They amaze me every day. I also love the Packers, Super Bowl XLV Champions; I have season tickets which would make me a cheesehead to anyone outside of the state of Wisconsin. I attend numerous Bucks, Badgers and Brewer games during their respective season. I enjoy traveling, fishing, bow and gun hunting, and experiencing any event/ festival.

**What's the best advice you've ever received?**

People will forget what you say, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

**What is your personal philosophy?**

Be kind and compassionate. Give 110% percent every day, work hard, play hard and thank often. Be passionate about all you do and when you make a mistake, own it, and apologize. When you say you're sorry, do not add a "but" with the excuse. Be thankful for all you have, and realize what you wish for, when not granted, may be best. And lastly, be memorable!