

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Strategic Plan for 2012: COLLABORATION



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I have had the unique opportunity during the first few weeks of the New Year to spearhead a strategic planning effort by several community leaders in our city that could lay the foundation cornerstones for tourism and events across our greater market area into the foreseeable future. Our city – not unlike many others in recent years – has found itself watching once close allies squabbling over dwindling resources that have been affected by the economy, corporate changes, political sparring, and lackluster leadership on many levels. The result, unfortunately, has been a diminishing/tarnishing of our overall brand and image that will take a concerted and focused effort to turn around.

I am pleased to say that I am beginning to again see a faint spark of that type of focus occurring in the early meetings that we have held. Community elements and individuals who remind me of best friends in an argument that neither remembers quite how it started, but are still unwilling to admit fault or apologize, are cautiously beginning new conversations with one another; relearning trust; re-establishing a few common visions; and reimagining who we all are/can be when we work together.

After two years of getting to know our new *IFEA World Festival & Event City Award* recipients, I (and many others in our industry) have seen the power of what can be accomplished when a community collaborates together at every level toward a common vision. We all saw a shining example of that in January as we (together with

the largest television audience in U.S. history) watched Indianapolis, Indiana (a *2011 IFEA World Festival & Event City*) host Super Bowl XLVI. But the real story was not who prevailed between two great football teams; rather, it was who reaped (and will continue to reap for some time) the rewards when the entire city of Indianapolis came together to ensure the very best Super Bowl experience ever produced.

Certainly the image and brand of Indianapolis spiked on every front through the impossible-to-miss global media coverage – from sports to business to entertainment and more. Tourism recognized impressive results as the City and State warmly welcomed visitors who may never have thought twice about Indianapolis or Indiana, but who now can't wait to return. The economic impact was certainly felt by lodgers, restaurateurs, retailers, gas stations and many others, who also collected tax revenues that will result in the addition of local jobs, infrastructure improvements, and support of education.

The local arts and not-for-profit causes benefitted from unique exposure and fund-raising opportunities, while the city gained a trained and enthusiastic volunteer force that will benefit those same causes many times over in the years ahead. And local residents basked in the limelight while rightfully boosting their combined pride in their community.

I would argue that the long-term 'community capital' gained by the City of Indianapolis may be more important than the short-term economic

impact from the game itself, and that the results of a city (any city) willing to invest in itself; to participate personally and financially; to freely share their creativity and vision toward the accomplishment of common goals; and to collaborate together to achieve new possibilities; will continue to fuel their own successes – despite any challenges – well into the future.

That said, if I could narrow down the strategic planning process – locally, nationally or globally – to one factor that will raise the likelihood of success for any organization, community or vision – I would focus on collaboration. We are only as strong as the team that we build. And I would encourage each of you, where possible, to strengthen your own team at every opportunity. Build and grow your collaborations with your cities; your vendors; your sponsors; your volunteers; your staff; your media; your visitor organizations; your corporate community; your professional industry; and anyone else that you can possibly include. Make sure that they know each other. Encourage them to work together on projects that are not (necessarily or directly) your own. Successful collaboration, it turns out, is a living organism that feeds on its own energy and grows exponentially over time. Untapped, it is powerless. Harnessed, its power is unstoppable.

The IFEA team looks forward to collaborating with each of you around the world in 2012 and hope that you will share your collaboration successes with your industry peers. Please let us know what your visions for the future are and let's see how, together, we can continue to grow our combined impact around the globe.