

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

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FESTIVALS & EVENTS: Playing Our Role as the Public Squares of Our Communities

Nearly a decade ago, given the fallout and unanticipated reactions around the globe to the changing economic realities happening to us and around us, we began to, necessarily, revisit the hugely important partnerships that most had enjoyed, if not (unintentionally) taken for granted to that point in time, with our host cities. We watched as our once closest allies, balancing their own financial and resource challenges, seemed to forget about the common successes and good times that we had created and shared together, as we celebrated who we all were when we were at our best.

In proactive response to those changing times, the IFEA made a conscious decision to start rebuilding and reinforcing those all-important bridges between our events and cities. We created our IFEA World Festival & Event City Award, with the intent of clearly defining what makes a great festival and event city host, but also as a way to recognize and reward those who remembered and understood the importance and returns of those partnerships. Cities who had, in-fact, committed themselves even more deeply to protecting what we had built together. We flew their flag and encouraged others to emulate their successes and vision, as we continue to do today.

As a result of those efforts, we have, as an industry, successfully renewed and strengthened many partnerships; built many new friendships that had not existed before; and opened up many important (even if sensitive) new dialogues to show our good faith and continued commitment to the communities, publics and missions that we serve. As we continue expanding those mutual conversations (based upon a foundation of respect and understanding), welcoming new friends to the table along the way, I believe that we will discover new models and new possibilities, made possible by working together, that will exceed our imaginations in the years ahead.

At our IFEA 61st Annual Convention, Expo & Retreat this September 27th-29th,

in Tucson, Arizona, USA, we are excited to elevate our conversations and creativity to yet another level, beginning with our keynote opening speaker, Peter Kageyama, author of *For the Love of Cities* and the follow-up, *Love Where You Live*. Peter is an internationally sought-after community development consultant whose 'hierarchy of city aspirations' recognizes festivals and events (and other community 'love notes') at the top of the community needs pyramid, where quality of life becomes both interesting and meaningful. Together with Peter and many other talented and passionate speakers from across our industry, I believe that the IFEA Convention is truly an event and gathering that cannot be missed by any serious professional in our field.

Perhaps it is the focus of our last several years that continues to draw me toward urban planning metaphors, but I was also drawn to a recent NPR interview with writer Catie Marron, who has just released a new book, *City Squares*, featuring a collection of thoughts by well-known writers, on famous public squares (which, by the way, do not have to be square) around the globe. From small villages to the largest cities in the world; from the public market in Hobart, Tasmania (Australia) to the floral grandeur of the Grand Place in Brussels, Belgium; from the now politically infamous Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China and Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt, to the tourist hub of Times Square in New York City.

Squares are where you go to be with people; to gain a sense of community, a sense of shared values, a sense of creative possibilities, a sense of humanity (per writer Michael Kimmelman); to share ideas and moments; to gather for pleasure - to shop, to eat, to sit on the side of a fountain and talk with a friend (per writer Lynn Neary); to be renewed and energized; to feel a part of the city.

To me, the festivals and events that we produce are the public squares of our cities. They are that unique venue that includes, welcomes and bonds every component of the community together under one vision - friends and families; corporate citizens; government agencies; educational institutions; the media; social organizations; the arts; causes; tourism and hospitality; all genders, ages, sexual orientations, religions, cultural backgrounds and political viewpoints; et al. I believe that is our highest value...to bring our communities together and to inspire them to imagine even greater possibilities.

That is also the unique role that the IFEA plays in our industry. To provide a welcoming space to come together with your professional peers; to create new dialogues; to celebrate our accomplishments; to foster a sense of global community; and to inspire us to imagine even greater possibilities. I hope to see you all in the public square that is the IFEA 61st Annual Convention, Expo and Retreat in September!