

Do What You Do Best to Give Back

It's good to be back! Not that I ever really left my duties writing for i.e. Magazine, but I took a year-long sabbatical from this column to serve as the Chair of the IFEA Foundation. Part of my duties in that position were to write a quarterly column about what's going on with the Foundation, while at the same time begging folks to donate items to benefit our Silent Auction at the Annual IFEA Convention. Now that those duties have been passed to Vanessa Van de Putte, I get to resume my writing about legal issues and whatever else comes to mind. So here goes.....

Part of my responsibilities at the Kentucky Derby Festival include serving as the President of the KDF Foundation. It's the 501(c)3 charitable arm of KDF. Its mission, in a nutshell, is to provide grants to deserving local charities and to support educational and academic programming on KDF's schedule of events. I've written in past columns about the challenge of raising money for a Foundation that doesn't directly support babies in incubators or is dedicated to curing cancer. Often times, people believe that the Foundation uses the money it raises to buy fireworks and build parade floats. Over the last eight years, I've worked with the Foundation's board to narrow its focus and mission into something that is relatable and understandable and tangible. What I found is that at the core of the Foundation and Festival's mission is the production of events. By focusing on educational and academic competitions, that mission has been brought into focus in a way that allows those considering sponsorships or gifts to focus those dollars in a productive and positive way. Educational outreach not only provides us with a way to extend our reach to different demographics and segments of our community; it also provides very positive PR about the Festival giving back.

The KDF Foundation supports and produces four educational events on KDF's schedule. They are the Academic Challenge, Spelling Bee, Student Art Contest, and the recently added RoboRumble STEM Robotics competition. These four events cover a cross section of educational areas such as problem solving, language, arts, science,

technology, engineering, and math.

The Academic Challenge is a fast paced question-answer style competition for elementary school students. Teams from each school compete in an elimination tournament with the first through third place team receiving a donation to their school's quiz bowl program. To say the competition is fierce is an understatement. The students involved in this event are as competitive as anything you'd see on a basketball court!

If you ever want to be humbled, attend the KDF Spelling Bee. Champion spellers from nearly every county in Kentucky (63 in 2016) gather to see who spells B-E-S-T. Last year's championship word was "Eponym" - (of a person) giving their name to something. The Foundation provides \$21,500 in scholarship bonds to the top five finishers of the Bee. First place receives a \$10,000 scholarship.

The Student Art Contest is one of the most inspiring events of the Festival's schedule. Students from across the region paint, draw or use computer graphics to depict their favorite Festival event. It is fascinating to see these young artist's interpretations of what you work to produce each year. To see the Festival through their eyes is simply awesome!

Finally, the newest and hottest event on the Festival's schedule is the RoboRumble STEM Robotics Competition. Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) has become a focus for schools and their students. Building robots and having those machines perform certain tasks is a perfect way for those students to engage in this curriculum while having fun doing it. Added to that, local companies and educational

institutions are eager to sponsor this type of competition! We engaged with Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) and made their RoboRumble one of our official events. Nearly 900 students will compete on March 4, 2017 to see who has the best robot building team. It should be fascinating!

The point of all of this is that these types of events can really help to build the brand and positive name recognition of your festival. They engage a younger demographic and their parents, while providing fun and competitive programming. Added to that, folks will see your festival as giving back and using sponsor resources for something other than buying fireworks. It buys your festival credibility city leaders and with those who want to see what your festival is doing to give back. Plus, there's nothing better than seeing a group of elementary schoolkids race up to the podium to get their medals. Each of them prouder than they've ever been because they won your competition!

Jeff English, CFEE is the Sr. Vice President of Administration/General Counsel of the Kentucky Derby Festival. After graduating from Washburn University School of Law (Topeka, KS) in 2004, Jeff worked in politics and practiced law before joining the KDF staff. He is charged with overseeing all of Festival's legal issues and serving as its risk management officer. He also manages the Merchandise Department and the 501(c)3 not-for-profit Kentucky Derby Festival Foundation.