

IFEA FOUNDATION BOARD



We may have met. If you have attended an IFEA Convention in the last 15 years, there is a very good chance that we have crossed paths. Perhaps I have served you an adult beverage in the IFEA Hospitality Suite or chatted you up from inside a tradeshow booth at the Expo. Hopefully, I might have even encouraged you to support IFEA scholarships by purchasing a 50/50 raffle ticket at the Foundation Night and Auction.

If we haven't formally met, maybe you know my father, Pete Van de Putte. He's been hanging around International Festival and Event professionals since 1988, the year he joined the IFEA. He is a founding member and past Chair of the IFEA Foundation, and is a past Chair of the IFEA World Board. Though his resume is impressive, it's not what comes to mind when you think of Pete Van de Putte. Anyone who really knows my father, knows at least these three things: 1) He likes to tell jokes, 2) He loves to tell stories, and 3) He is incredibly passionate and devoted to the festival and event industry, or as he likes to call it "those who are in the business of celebration."

I write today to share with you a little about my experience with the International Festival and Events Association. I attended my first IFEA Convention in New Orleans in 2000, but my experience with the network began long before that. One could say I grew up in the festival and event industry. My family owns a flag business in San Antonio, TX. Our company was founded almost 60 years ago by my grandfather. Our first order was hanging flag lines and custom decorations at the 1958 Poteet Strawberry Festival in Poteet, TX. Now, I cannot continue without at least mentioning that the Poteet Strawberry Festival is an active member of the IFEA and almost sixty years later, they are still a very good customer of ours. I have decorated the Strawberry Festival, as has my father, and my father's father – and that's pretty special. But, what is amazing to me is that this very special relationship is just one of probably tens of thousands of special relationships in the IFEA network.

My first memory of IFEA has nothing to do with flags or work. I was just a child and I did what any child would do with a "VIP connection" to the festivals and

events world – I rode carnival rides, and as many as I could! Unlimited carnival wristbands were probably my first exposure to the IFEA network, and was thanks to the IFEA Foundation. Every year at the IFEA Convention, my father would bid on auction packages and festival experiences, and our family vacations would be planned before he even packed up the trade show booth and made it home. Some of these auction packages took us just across the city to the Texas Folklife Festival courtesy of a package donated by JoAnn Andera. Some were a bit more of an adventure. Thanks to a package donated by Pat Corda, my parents rented an RV and took all six Van de Putte kids over a thousand miles to the Gatorbowl in Jacksonville, Florida.

I remember meeting both JoAnn Andera and Pat Corda when I went to their events and I specifically remember my dad introducing them both as "dear friends." They were not colleagues or acquaintances to him, but real friends.

As a businessperson, I attend plenty of meetings, conferences, and tradeshows. Very rarely do the people that I meet have much of an impact on my life. However, that is not the case with the IFEA. For some reason, it seems like every single person who I meet through the IFEA has a purpose in my life. I can and will learn something from every story and each personality. Kelven Tan from Singapore is my dear friend. Ed Bautista from San Jose, Stephen King from Des Moines, and Kay Wolf from McAllen are all dear friends who have already taught me so much. The list goes on and on, and I wonder, why is this group so special to me? Why does the IFEA have more of an impact than my other business associations?

Well, other than the fact that IFEA folks are truly exceptional and by far the absolute

best people in the entire world, if I had to choose a second reason for this phenomenon, I think I would have to say the key is involvement. When my father received a letter from the IFEA back in 1989 asking for him to get more involved through an exciting sponsorship opportunity, he answered the call and became the sponsor for the IFEA Hospitality Suite. Exciting? Yes, it has been. Twenty seven years (and at least eighty to ninety hospitality nights) later, *dfest*[®] is still encouraging conversations within the IFEA network. I know Kelven, Ed, Stephen, and Kay, because they are each highly involved in this network. Like my dad, they are incredibly passionate and devoted to the festival and event industry. They have volunteered at Conventions, presented as speakers, been published in this magazine, served on committees, hosted IFEA events in their home cities, and taken the time to have those meaningful conversations that develop into real relationships with others within our association. They are each important to me because they have shared their talents and time with our network.

So, I leave you with this. If you want to get the most out of your membership, get more involved so that you can take advantage of the IFEA network. Find a mentor or become a mentee. Donate to the IFEA Foundation, bid on an auction package, take your family to a festival, or come to a Convention and hear a joke, share a story, and make "dear friends" of your own.

VANESSA VAN DE PUTTE

2017 IFEA Foundation Board Chair
Vice President of Sales & Marketing
dfest[®] (Dixie Flag Event Services Team)
San Antonio, TX