

PEOPLE

Alison Baringer

Founded in 1948, the North Carolina Azalea Festival has emerged as Wilmington's premier event and the largest of its kind in the state. Each April, a week of natural beauty, big-name entertainment, festive galas, fun family events and Southern hospitality come together to showcase the charms of the area.

The Azalea Festival is a great source of local pride, with the entire community involved in displaying Wilmington to the world in its finest colors. More than 1,000 volunteers are required to stage over 50 events. An independent economic impact study completed in 2011 estimates the Festival drives an economic impact of well over \$50 million annually.



IN CONVERSATION

How did you get into the events industry?

I am fortunate enough to have had my entire professional career in the events industry. I worked at a dance studio part-time in college, and a mother of two of our students was the upcoming President of the Festival. Their current Office Manager was leaving, so she encouraged me to apply. I landed the job of Office Manager as the only year-round employee of the Festival. Since then my position has grown to encompass so much more than office management; creating new Festival positions to include Festival Coordinator and now Executive Director. We have grown to now have four additional full-time team members in our office!

What has been your biggest professional challenge?

My biggest challenge has also been my biggest blessing, and that is working with such a large corps of volunteers. Our organization was built on the backs of these dedicated individuals, some whom have been serving for twenty, thirty, forty, even fifty years! Many of them have served in a time before there were any full-time staff, even before the Festival had an office. It is a delicate balance to keep that spirit of volunteerism, the pride and the love for the Festival alive, while also incorporating staff and a more business professional environment. As we've grown and with the changing times it has become imperative to do so – but it has always been my goal to face these changes with grace, with honor for our volunteers, and to work together so our growth is a by-product of everyone's dedication and commitment.

What do you do to relax?

I love spending quality time with friends, which usually means good food, good music, and good drinks. I also love to play beach volleyball, and am a regular in summer leagues. I can also get behind a good Netflix binge when I find a good show – most recently Westworld and Game of Thrones. Living at the beach, summers spent on the sand or in a boat are my absolute favorite!

Other background experience:

I served as the President of the Junior League of Wilmington in 2014-2015, where I led over 250 women in our mission to empower women to enrich

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FACTS ON FILE

Years in the Business:

12 years

Degree:

Double Major in Communication Studies and English, with a Certification in Professional Writing

Family:

Fiancé, Micah English (Wedding in September, 2017!), in addition to the blessing of so many friends and extended family – including my #festivalfamily!

Last book read:

Never Split the Difference by Chris Voss and Tahl Raz

Last business book read:

Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance by Angela Duckworth

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Since January, 2017.

and improve our community through leadership as trained volunteers. I am also a graduate of Leadership Wilmington 2013, and have attended many national trainings with both the Association of Junior Leagues International and the IFEA.

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

My father always tried to instill in me the importance of not worrying about things. Worrying won't change anything, and all it does is drive you crazy. As an event planner, this has become so crucial to my sanity! Thoughtful consideration and planning for multiple scenarios is important – but once this is done – let it go. If you can't control it, don't worry about it.

What is your personal philosophy?

My personal philosophy is to find gratefulness in your current situation, be happy, and make the most out of everything. I think life is better with lots of loved ones around, taking time out to celebrate. I guess that is what draws me to the events industry – the chance and opportunity to create situations where people can gather and just be together, celebrating a common interest.