

Volunteer of the Year 2018 Award



Jean A. Lawler
Nominated by the
North Carolina Azalea Festival
Wilmington, NC, U.S.A.

Jean A. Lawler has served the North Carolina Azalea Festival in almost every way imaginable. She began her Festival journey in 1960- and has since given over fifty years of continual service to the Azalea Festival. For many years she served as committee chair for the Festival's Souvenir Book, and thereafter served as Concerts Ushers chair for numerous years. In 2014 Jean stepped onto the Board of Directors, where she eventually held the role of Azalea Festival President in 2017. Jean continues sharing her legacy by staying involved in the Festival, even as a Past President. We continue to see Jean at every event... she's always up-front smiling and cheering everyone on! Not only that, after her presidency Jean has volunteered as chauffeur for our Princess, driving her in various regional Parades. Additionally, Jean continues to support the Festival financially as a Patron.

In her life Jean has made an impact throughout Wilmington, not only within the Azalea Festival. Jean was one of the first female sales representative in Wilmington. She is the Vice President of Wilmington WWII Home Front Coalition. Always

The International Festivals & Events Association is pleased to announce Jean A. Lawler from the North Carolina Azalea Festival as the recipient of the 2018 IFEA Volunteer of the Year Award.

As this year's winner, Jean was the guest of the IFEA at the IFEA's 63rd Annual Convention, Expo & Retreat, October 1-3, 2018 in San Diego, CA. She was recognized and presented with her award during the IFEA Awards Luncheon on Monday, October 1, 2018.

Please help us congratulate our 2018 IFEA Volunteer of the Year Award Winner, Jean A Lawler.

helping others, she was the volunteer coordinator for 4 WWII Honor Flights from Wilmington, NC to the WWII Memorial in Washington, DC. Jean also is a proud Seahawk Club Member and former president of the Seahawk Club for the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She was awarded the William J. Brooks Distinguished Service Award by UNCW. The Daughters of the American Revolution awarded her an "Excellence in Community Service" award. She was also inducted into the "Order of the Vikings" for her volunteerism at John T. Hoggard High School. She is also an American Red Cross VIP Blood Donor. She has served on numerous boards with Bradley Creek Marina, Hanover Seaside Club, and Cape Fear Museum to name a few. Jean was a founding organizer and chair of the inaugural "Enchanted Airlie," a holiday light show at historic Airlie Gardens, now in its 14th year. Jean also supports the Parrot Head Club, Step up for Soldiers, Toys for Tots, and is a mean shagger!

Within the Azalea Festival, Jean served as committee chair of two of our larger committees. She first began as Souvenir Book chair. In this role she was tasked with selling advertising and the creation of a bound, commemorative souvenir book. She had to work under very tight deadlines and with many people whose

financial support was crucial to the Festival. The Azalea Festival Souvenir Book later grew to become an IFEA Pinnacle Award winner. Jean also worked for many years as the chair of the Concerts Ushers committee. This committee has seen many transformations throughout the years. With the dawn of online ticketing in the 2000's, Jean had to retrain her front entrance volunteers to use ticketing scanners and new technology. In 2013, Jean and her team had another huge transition when the Azalea Festival moved the Concerts from an inside, reserved seating coliseum to an outdoor, general admission standing room venue. Additionally, at this outdoor venue we introduced alcohol sales for the first time. Jean and her team, again, had to re-configure their roles to include managing more attendees (3x more attendance) and dealing with all the pleasantries that go into managing an outdoor, open-standing venue with alcohol present.

In 2014 Jean stepped in to fill a vacancy on our Board of Directors, and continued on the board until 2017 when she became the 70th President of the North Carolina Azalea Festival. During this time on the board she was an avid supporter of all volunteers and staff, always offering to stop by the office or show up to any event early to help setup. It was during this time we really saw Jean as a servant leader

– she always puts the needs of others first and encourages us all to perform as highly as possible. Jean makes it a point to welcome everyone she can to our events. As Board President, she stood at the front entrance of our Volunteer Appreciation party and literally thanked every person who entered. Jean doesn't care if a person gives 100 hours or 1 hour to the Festival; all deserve to be thanked and appreciated.

Jean's lasting impact on the Festival is most easily seen through this love and support of her fellow volunteers. During her Presidential year, the Azalea Festival established an Emeritus Chair Program, in large part due to Jean's calling to thank the hardest workers of the Festival. This was the Festival's way to honor volunteers who served 10 or more years in a chair or co-chair capacity on an Azalea Festival committee. To date we have 22 Emeritus volunteers who will forever be honored... not to mention the many more Emeritus members to come in future years. Immediately after Jean gave up her presidency, we named the Emeritus Program the Jean A. Lawler Emeritus Program in her honor not only as a volunteer herself, but for

her inspiration in creating this program. A few months after Jean's presidency, the Azalea Festival won the North Carolina Governor's Medallion Award for Volunteer Service, another nod to all the efforts Jean led to honor our volunteers.

After 50+ years of volunteering, it is safe to say Jean excels in dependability! She has served under 50+ Presidents, under 50+ Boards, with multiple staff and team members, and alongside 50+ years of committee chairs and co-chairs. Jean's dependability comes with her easy, care-free attitude. She truly will work with anyone who wants to see the Azalea Festival be a success.

Jean's dependability is most shown through her un-wavering support of others. The first Festival with a full-time staff (a major change for our volunteers) was also the same year the Festival hosted Carrie Underwood's first concert outside of American Idol. This was a sold-out reserved seating show was daunting to say the least. Jean, as Concerts Ushers chair, helped and encouraged staff throughout that whole night. She was

right there when any issue with seating came up, and staff and volunteers worked together to solve all issues. She and her team were such a big support system... helping a young, fresh staff team succeed. #jeantakethewheel

Jean has an infectious laugh and eternal positivity. Jean did not enjoy the accolades that came from being Festival President; she was quick to always give her team (volunteers and staff) the credit they deserved for the work they put in – and let them share the stage. By the time Jean joined the Board of Directors, she had volunteered in a committee role on the Festival for over 50 years. Many who served on the Board with Jean were many years her junior. As a "finale" prank for her Festival year, the Board members and staff donned gray wigs and hobbled on canes ...as a tribute to her many, many years serving the Festival. Jean's infectious laugh could be heard all around North Carolina that day; she was crying she was laughing so hard. She even begged us to show video of this prank to all her Festival volunteer friends and family. This spirit epitomizes Jean A. Lawler!