

A SHARK SWIMMING THROUGH SAN DIEGO



I'm always excited when it's time to board a plane and head to wherever the IFEA Convention & Expo is being held. This year my ticket said sunny San Diego and it didn't disappoint when I arrived and it was 75 perfect degrees outside. I caught a cab and fought rush hour to the Town & Country Resort. I knew I was in the right place when the ever-present giant inflatables greeted me when I walked in the door. They have become the staples of IFEA decorations at the conventions!

And then it began! "Hi! How have you been?!?! How was your festival this year? Abigail (my daughter) is really good.....she's 8 year's old now!" The networking and connecting with friends I've made since the 2007 Convention in Atlanta took hold. Never far from a handshake or a hug, the best part of IFEA for me is the people. Folks I've become friends and professional colleagues with who have a shared interest in this world of events we call a career.

After dinner with Zach Fisher from KDF, it was time to hit the *dfest*[®] hospitality suite. Vanessa and Pete Van de Putte were of course holding court and plying everyone with free cocktails. Best hospitality suite ever! Held outside on the patio and down on the grass, there was plenty of room to move around and chat without feeling cramped. Thanks, *dfest*[®], for the open bar tab!

The next morning brought the convention opening. Always a favorite of mine because I use it as a reset button on my festival year. It energizes me. Reminds me of the good our industry does in our communities by bringing people together. Steve Schmader, CFE, IFEA President & CEO, always gives a great speech, which this year centered on "Changing Perspectives." The pictures on screen combined with Steve's words, paint a vivid picture of what we'll expect in the coming days.

After an education session it was time for the awards luncheon. Great to see so many cities being recognized as an IFEA World Festival & Event City. Hall of Famer, William O'Toole, CFE has got to be the coolest event guy I know. Is there a place in this world where he hasn't planned an event? In the afternoon it was time to break out the pink jackets and pick up some awards. KDF took home 46 Pinnacle awards, including the bronze Grand Pinnacle! Our staff works on the award entries just after our festival ends, so most are written in the haze of event exhaustion.

On Monday evening our KDF crew went to La Jolla beach for dinner. Toes in the water. Picture of a perfect sunset. Check and check. Off to the *dfest*[®] hospitality suite again. Hi, Vanessa!

OK, that was a late night. Coffee ASAP at the Connections

Café. Sessions all morning and then lunch at the Expo. Greasy chicken wings are just what being at the hospitality suite until 1:00 a.m. ordered! I was able to chat with a few vendors and take some business cards. Also reconnected with a several folks who we already do business with.

The main event of the Convention for me was serving as a roundtable host for the IFEA Safety and Security Tabletop Exercise hosted by the Department of Homeland Security. This was a four-hour session where we tackled different scenarios that ranged from severe weather to active shooters. Our table talked through each situation and shared insights and perspectives on how they would address each issue. Those perspectives were then shared with the rest of the group. About 100 people attended the session and it was fascinating to hear some of the best security experts in the industry work through their action steps. A real treat for a risk management nerd like me!

Time to suit up! Shark suit that is. The IFEA Foundation 'Surf's Up' Party & Auction party kicked off and our KDF crew arrived in style! We all wore shark costumes and swam through the sea of people. There was even a giant shark inflatable that I swear we didn't know was going to be there! Great job to Sam Lemheney, CFE and the entire IFEA Foundation Board on a great event. YES!!! Harry Denney, a KDF Board member, bought an Ultimate Experience Raffle Ticket from me and he won! He's now headed off to Memphis in May to gorge on BBQ and blues. After chomping through dinner and sipping a glass of blood red vino, this shark headed off to.....of course.....the *dfest*[®] hospitality suite in full costume! Another evening of sipping libations and chatting with old and new friends alike. I think four different people ended up wearing the shark outfit by the end of the night!

Wednesday morning. Woah. Back to Connections Café STAT! More sessions; this one was very useful about Cyber Security (thanks Haas & Wilkerson!). Fajitas for lunch and then meeting up with friends during the afternoon at the Café. Had a drink with Cassie Roberts and Stephen King before calling it a Convention and heading off to the airport.

Another year, another IFEA Convention. Networking and renewing friendships combined with learning a lot along the way. Congrats to Steve and the entire IFEA team on a job well done!

The only question that remains is where will my plane ticket tell me to go next year?

Jeff English, CFE 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.