

IFEA FOUNDATION BOARD BY KELI O'NEILL WENZEL, CFEE

WE DON'T HAVE TO DO WHAT WE DO...

WE GET TO!



Happy New Year! I am very excited about 2019 and my position as Chair of the IFEA Foundation Board. My name is Keli O'Neill Wenzel, CFEE and I own a company called O'Neill Events and Marketing in the great city of Kansas City. A family company, O'Neill (company name has evolved over the years) was started by my grandfather over sixty years ago and provided professional publicity and promotion services for many of the big shows, concerts, celebrity appearances and civic campaigns. In 1984, my father came into the business and earned his stripes, reputation, gray hair and wrinkles as a consultant, publicist and media spokes person for entertainment venues, casinos, religious organizations and important civic issues in KC and throughout the region before retiring in 2018.

In 1998, I stepped into the business thinking I would just "help out" over the summer and 20 years later I find myself running the boutique business that now focuses on some of the largest festivals in the city. From Boulevardia to the Kansas City Irish Fest and even the Royals World Series victory parade where 800,000 fans took over the downtown, O'Neill Events & Marketing is proud to be the puppeteer behind the curtain of Kansas City's most exciting, influential and memorable events.

My major in college was public relations, not event management. So naturally when I fell into the festival planning business, I began looking for resources to make me feel like what I was doing was not completely wrong from industry practice (although I know now that we do have to make up a lot of what we do on the fly). I also found myself wanting to see if there were others that I could learn or even steal ideas from to grow our existing events. That is when I found IFEA. I went to my first IFEA conference in 2011 in Fort Worth, Texas and was instantly hooked. I was very intimidated at first, feeling like I was so far behind everyone else. I soon found myself surrounded by people wired just like me. I went to as many speaking sessions as I could and found people I could learn from, people that were in the same place I was, and even found myself giving advice to others. After a few days, I knew this was the group for me to grow my profession and most importantly the events that I served.

A few years ago, I was approached to join the IFEA Foundation Board and I was energized to be a part of a group with a mission of raising money so that others could afford the opportunity to be a part of IFEA. Out of the many industry organizations, I feel that IFEA works hard to provide best practices for the leaders of our industry. I think we can all think of an event in our community that lacks good leadership or had done such a poor job of planning, that it actually hurts all of the events in the community. It is our job to introduce them to IFEA!

The IFEA Foundation Board is an independent 501c3 organization managed by an elected board of directors. As a primary partner of the IFEA's, the organization primary mission is to continue raising the level of professionalism in our industry, along with the level of recognition and awareness for the industry and those who work in it. To be completely blunt – we raise money so that we can do the following:

- **Provide Legacy Scholarships to future leaders to attend the annual IFEA Conference.** Did you know in 2018 we provided 14 scholarships! REMINDER – Applications are due much earlier this year – APRIL 12th!
- **Assist with funding the Certified Festival & Event Executive (CFEE and CFEA) Program.** We had 10 CFEE graduates in 2018 and I was one of them (even though it took me about five years because of my schedule)!
- **Assist with the funding of top-quality speakers, educational publications, technology and electronic training services, and translation services and more.** The IFEA Foundation Board raised just over \$43,000 in 2018!

Throughout the year, I will share with you the many ways you can help with the IFEA Foundation. I encourage you to send me an email and introduce yourself. I look forward to getting to know as many of you as possible. If you have received a scholarship from IFEA Foundation, I want to hear from you and your experience at the IFEA Annual Convention and more importantly what you are doing now. Join me this year in trying to be our best professional self. Take advantage of all the resources that IFEA offers, from reading this publication, the IFEA Event Insider and Update emails; to using the endless list of benefits on the IFEA website, signing up for IFEA's online Webinars and especially attending the 64th Annual IFEA Convention, Expo & Retreat in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia on September 25-27, 2019! Remember WE GET TO plan some of the best events in the world, we don't HAVE TO.

IFEA Foundation Board Chair
President/CEO
O'Neill Events and Marketing
Kansas City, MO
keli@oneillevents.com