



## IFEA PRESIDENT'S LETTER



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# BOLD CHOICES

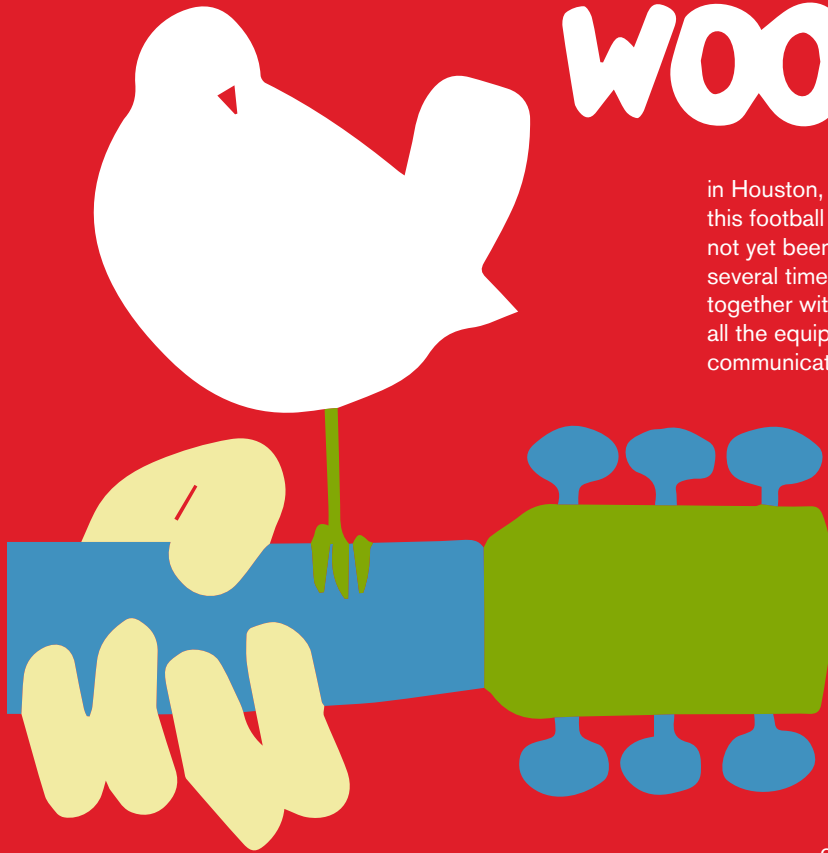
“May your choices reflect your hopes and not your fears.”

- Nelson Mandela

I'd like to start this article by remembering our friends and professional colleagues with the Gilroy Garlic Festival. Executive Director of the festival, Brian Bowe, sent his appreciation to all of us in the IFEA family for our thoughts and support in the wake of the tragic mass shooting at his event on July 28th. And while it has only been 3 1/2 months since that horrible occurrence, the number of additional shootings and tragedies, at other soft-target venues and locations, since that time, can make it feel like an eternity has passed. But to so quickly allow ourselves and others to become accepting of that, as an almost expected and natural occurrence, while waiting for the next unthinkable headline, is unacceptable. We continued to hold multiple sessions at this year's IFEA Convention, which is also becoming almost the norm each year, to address what we may all do to protect our events and our stakeholders moving forward; and while we will ask everyone in our industry to continue working closely with your law enforcement officials, insurance carriers, professional peers and city management to take every step possible to protect against future tragedies, please remember to let your government and political representatives – at every level - know that *this is unacceptable* and that we expect them to take common-sense action to help stem, slow and stop this long-running and expanding pattern that runs in direct conflict with what our events are created to do – to provide safe, welcoming and inclusive participation by all attendees, while celebrating who we are when we are at our best. With your help, and all of your professional peers around the globe, we will continue to provide those events to our communities, cities, and countries – better than ever before - as we have done for so many decades and millennia.

To do that, may require that we adjust our visions, our operational realities, and our professional preparedness, to effectively serve this new and changing world. But we must never limit our visions of what is possible; nor our creativity; nor our

# WOODSTOCK



in Houston, a giant rocket more than 300 feet tall, the length of this football field, made of new metal alloys, some of which have not yet been invented, capable of standing heat and stresses several times more than have ever been experienced, fitted together with a precision better than the finest watch, carrying all the equipment needed for propulsion, guidance, control, communications, food and survival, on an untried mission, to an unknown celestial body, and then return it safely to earth, re-entering the atmosphere at speeds of over 25,000 miles per hour, causing heat about half that of the temperature of the sun, and do all this, and do it right, and do it first before this decade is out--then we must be bold."

He clearly laid out the challenges and our implied acceptance of meeting them by emphatically stating that, "We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing

to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too."

As a result of that bold choice, fifty years ago, in July of 1969, a Saturn V rocket successfully launched Apollo 11 and its crew from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, as hundreds of thousands watched live, camping out for days to get a good spot. A full 1/6th of the planet at that time – 600 million people – (before the internet and media access of today) watched the lunar landing and the celebratory ticker-tape parade in New York City that followed their return.

expectation of producing the highest quality events possible. In fact, we should be challenging ourselves and our stakeholders to continually raise the bars that visionaries in our industry continue to re-set for all of us, every day.

**"What limits us most in life is the picture in our head of how it is supposed to be vs. what could it be. Be willing to make a few bold choices."**

– Keli O'Neill Wenzel, CFEE

While tempting, in a profession of seemingly endless deadlines and demands, we should never choose the 'easy route;' or a fearful route. We must be confident and prepared to make a few bold choices to ensure the legacies of what we build and to set the example for future generations of event professionals who will follow us.

On September 12th, 1962, President John F. Kennedy (who would have been a great event producer) addressed a crowd at Rice Stadium in Houston, Texas, as he envisioned one of the greatest events of the last century - a manned-space launch and landing on the moon before the end of that decade - beginning his speech by noting that "We meet in an hour of change and challenge; in a decade of hope and fear," (much as we find ourselves in today) adding that "...if I were to say, that we shall send to the moon, 240,000 miles away from the control station

**3 DAYS  
& PEACE  
& MUSIC**



*Woodstock Music and Arts Festival, August 1969, Bethel, New York*

A month later, in August of 1969 (a big year, historically, for events), on a 600 acre dairy farm owned by Max Yasgur – son of Russian-Jewish immigrants – in Bethel, New York, another iconic event was also launched, as the original Woodstock Music and Art Fair drew some 450,000 young members of the then counterculture movement, whose voices of protest over the Vietnam war inspired a generation and set the bar for all music festivals that followed.

Much like President Kennedy challenged the country with our bold choice to go to the moon, Max Yasgur, a conservative republican, boldly stood up to the Bethel town board (who was considering rejecting the festival, as other area villages had done) saying:

"I hear you are considering changing the zoning law to prevent the festival. I hear you don't like the look of the kids who are working at the site. I hear you don't like their lifestyle. I hear you don't like they are against the war and that they say so very loudly. . . I don't particularly like the looks of some of those kids either. I don't particularly like their lifestyle, especially the drugs and free love. And I don't like what some of them are saying about our government. However, if I know my American history, tens of thousands of Americans in uniform gave their lives in war after war just so those kids would have the freedom to do exactly what they are doing. That's what this country is all about and I am not going to let you throw them out of our town just because you don't like their dress or their hair or the way they live or what they believe. This is America and they are going to have their festival!"

Two events, through very different lenses, both born out of politics, passion and a vision for peace and a better world. Both with bold leadership, unafraid to push the boundaries of new ideas. One inspired the world; the other defined a generation.

Both had to overcome multiple hurdles – financial, operational, political, weather, infrastructure, staffing, security, portable toilets (harder to provide in space), medical support and building a team of trusted people around them, many of whom had little experience with what they were attempting. Much as we still do today with our own events. But, like the timeless lyrics of Bob Dylan's music, we must realize that "the times, they were a-changin'," as they continued to change for the next 50 years and will continue to change for the next 50 years that lie ahead.

As event professionals, can you imagine piecing together the original Woodstock, where tickets (before they were declared a free festival, to avoid potential security concerns, allowing them to aim limited resources at completing construction of their single stage (far from a Tomorrowland design), and effectively ensuring a substantial loss for the event), were going for \$6-to-\$8, far from today's music festivals and other major events where ticket pricing begins in the hundreds of dollars and climbs from there?

On the other-hand, given the often-perceptual, if not real, oversaturation of festivals and events today (especially music festivals), the unique stand-alone positioning of the original Woodstock certainly played in their favor, where a 50th Anniversary attempt in 2019, led by Michael Lang (the co-creator of the original festival), could not succeed.

In 1969, Max Yasgur rented his 600 acre farm to the event organizers for \$5,000; Jimi Hendrix – the highest paid performer at Woodstock – was paid a remarkable \$18,000 (compared to the hundreds-of-thousands or millions of dollars, to secure today's 'A-List' performers); The Grateful Dead got \$2,500 and Carlos Santana was paid a whopping \$750! (I paid four times

that much to buy a guitar signed by him at an IFEA Foundation auction several years ago!). The total spent on all 32 performers at Woodstock totaled \$140,700!

On the food & beverage side of things, no appropriate plans had been made. Food for Love, who was hired to provide food services, listed their complete inventory as 30,000 loaves of bread, 1500 lbs. of peanut butter, 5000 lbs. of cheese, 10,000 packages of marshmallows, 2000 lbs. of coffee and 20,000 gallons of milk from Max Yasgur's farm. Max notably began filling milk bottles with water, as he couldn't believe that his neighbors were trying to sell water to the kid's attending!

Having only planned on an attendance of 60,000, the 450,000-plus attendees at Woodstock made-do with 540 individual toilets (one for every 833 people), 200 urinals and a common pond for bathing.

Because parking had been intended to center around the use of shuttles, attendees, stuck in long lines of traffic, simply pulled to the side (as best as possible) and abandoned their vehicles in the roadways leading into Bethel.

And as far as volunteers were needed, the early-arrivers and all 450,000 attendees at Woodstock seemed to fill that role naturally, bonding together to support one another and whatever needed to be done.

The weather didn't exactly help them out either, noted by some attendees as 'three days of consistent rain.' Max Yasgur's farm may have beaten out the South Korean's as the first mud festival, but those attending hung in there.

And while you would expect, in the era of sex, drugs and rock n' roll, to have serious security problems, with only 80 arrests (largely for drugs other than marijuana) out of the some 450,000-plus attending over the three-day event and two deaths (one from a drug overdose and the other from being run over by a tractor, whose driver did not realize someone was sleeping under it...one more thing to add to our insurance coverage!). For an event that size, in incredibly close-quarters (something they shared with the Apollo astronauts), violence was virtually non-existent. It really was a festival of music and peace, minus (that we know of) the serious drug and sexual misconduct concerns that we are dealing with today.

And, of course, we have witnessed massive changes in technology with our events in the last 50 years – in performance technology, event management, ticketing, security, cash transactions, communications, marketing, media coverage, and much more – none as easy to point to as the fact that our modern smartphones contain millions of times more computing power than the technology that took NASA's first astronauts to the moon 50 years ago. So, you can imagine the comparison to the technology power used to produce the 'Apollo 50 Go for the Moon' celebration of that event in Washington, D.C. in July of this year. If you haven't seen that video on-line, or weren't there to experience it in person, I encourage you to watch it, paying particular attention to the emotions – fifty years later – of those attending. It is those emotions that remain the bottom line with all great, legacy events.

**“It always seems impossible until it is done.”**

**- Nelson Mandela**

Two events, both based upon bold choices. Choices that ultimately resulted in life-changing legacies. Legacies that fifty years later carry just as much passion and inspiration; that are held with

perhaps even more reverence by those who were there; and that still have the ability to evoke positive memories, across multiple generations and the grand mosaic that our world represents. Memories, that despite truthful problems and less-than-perfect execution along the way, superseded any negatives and bonded the world closer together, at a time when it needed it the most.

That is the power of events. One, which everyone in our industry has the unique ability to harness and direct. A power that is more important today than ever before. Like our counterparts fifty years ago, “we meet here today in an hour of change and challenge; in a decade of hope and fear;” in a world increasingly divided; facing concerns that we could never have imagined.

**“The noblest art is that of making others happy.”**

**- P.T. Barnum**

And just as our peers, five decades ago, chose to embrace the power of events to respond to those challenges, it is up to all of us and our global counterparts, to use our events – large and small – to do the same today. To make our own bold choices...

- To dream new dreams that have yet to be imagined, for our events, our communities, our industry and our world;
- To build events that are welcoming, diverse, creative, expansive, and that showcase our communities and world when we are at our best;
- To provide 'safe havens' where friends and families can come together without fear of becoming another statistic or headline;
- To continue bringing together legions of volunteers – across multiple generations – to help ensure the 'community' in our community events;
- To ensure the sustainability of our events, becoming important pillars of the brands and images of our cities, states & provinces, countries and markets;
- To recruit, train and educate those who will follow in our footsteps; many of them represented with us here today;
- And to inspire, motivate and unleash new possibilities that will raise the bar for all of our professional peers around the globe.

Be it a forest stadium in Austria, or a light spectacular in Australia; a historical tribute in South Africa, or an experience design in the United States; an art installation in Rotterdam or remarkable snow sculptures in China; a carnival parade in Brazil or an Olympic opening anywhere around the globe; a camel festival in the Middle East or a flower & garden event in Philadelphia; a holiday tradition or a sporting event; cultural traditions or art fusion; theme parks or music festivals; fireworks and hot-air balloons.

Together, we choose to embrace the power of festivals & events. We choose to embrace the power of festivals & events, not because they are easy, but because they are critical to our world and the generations to follow.

Adapted from the opening comments of the 64th Annual IFEA Convention, Expo & Retreat