

## IFEA Volunteer of the Year Nomination

### Nominated By:

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### Nominee:

**Mark Ballard**

**Cherry Blossom Festival**

**Macon, Georgia**

### ***Mark's significant depth of involvement***

Macon's Cherry Blossom Festival has many volunteers that have made an impact over the past 28 years, but no one can argue that **Mark Ballard** has left his mark literally and figuratively on our organization. Mark is a well known artist in the Central Georgia area and his shaped the festival's art program as well as marketing efforts for the entire span of the Cherry Blossom Festival's life.

Mark became involved with the Cherry Blossom Festival in **1984** when he created an original painting for Mr. Fickling Sr. that showcased the Fickling family home featuring the Yoshino cherry trees he is now famous for discovering in Macon, Georgia. The print was presented to him during his birthday party celebration in Third Street Park where Mark met the Festival's Founder Carolyn Crayton and the entire Fickling family.

Mark spoke to Carolyn about creating the commemorative art print for the festival and how he wanted to do something a little different with embossing. It was going to be a little more expensive than the prints that had been done in the past so Carolyn told him he would have to raise the money to get it done. Mark took it upon himself to go to Brown and Williamson for **sponsorship to cover the cost** and a partnership was formed that lasted almost two decades until the plant shut down in Macon.

### ***Specific Examples of Mark's roles and responsibilities***

From the initial meeting with Carolyn, Mark went on to create **three** more art prints, **eight** commemorative plate's which included the **first two plates** the festival sold as well as a set of four which sold completely out, too many t-shirts to count, **seven** commemorative pins, **two** Christmas ornaments, four commemorative mugs, and **numerous** marketing pieces for the festival's promotional campaigns! **Mark has essentially served as the Cherry Blossom Festival's Art Director for over 25 years!**

### ***Mark's Initiative and Leadership Efforts***

Mark has also served as a spokesperson for the festival during the 12 years he spent on the local CBS affiliate as well as the 2 years he spent on Cox Communications. He used multiple shows created specifically to promote the festival as well as performing live shows from festival events. Mark also spent time on other local shows promoting the art pieces he created for the festival to sell.

In addition to all of these reasons who Mark Ballard is the BEST VOLUNTEER any organization can ask for, there are also all the countless cooking contests he judged, art contests, wreath contests, parties he has donated as silent auction items to benefit the festival, not to mention coordinating other events to entertain visiting dignitaries and celebrities, participated in and **designing floats for the parade**, and the largest project he has taken on in recent years was **emceeding and coordinating the fashion show for the past 6 years**.

## **Mark's Dependability**

There aren't many other ways to describe a person's dependability than with the amount of years Mark has served with the Cherry Blossom Festival. For 25 years he has been with the staff and board to help with marketing campaigns throughout the summer as well as assist in making the art and merchandising programs the absolute best! He is there at a moments notice no matter how busy he might be with all of his other endeavors!

## **Mark's Positive Attitude**

To know Mark is to constantly be laughing. He never has a cross word to say about anyone and can make any stressful situation comical. In fact he is so good at comic relief Mark even has his own comedy show on a local channel in Macon. We love how he shows up at festival events smiling and ready to lend a helping hand! Every visiting dignitary or guest of the festival who has Mark as a host has gone out of their way to tell us what a great person, and family for that matter, we have associated with our event.

## **Mark's Impact**

Not only has Mark devoted countless hours to creating one-of-a-kind pieces and planning wonderful events for the festival, he has also done all of this work **AT NO COST!** We estimate the cost would literally run in the hundreds of thousands of dollars between the cost of donating the original pieces as well as the sales of the merchandise from the creations. Quite literally, there might have never been a Cherry Blossom Festival art and merchandising program if it weren't for Mark Ballard!

Below are some examples of Mark's involvement in the Fashion show and pins, ornaments and plates. There are countless pieces in the Cherry Blossom Festival's Headquarters building, but here are a few: