



**Zambelli**  
FIREWORKS

**Mary Jo Sartain**  
**2010 IFEA/Zambelli Fireworks**  
**Volunteer of the Year Award Winner**  
**Nominated by Tulsa International Mayfest**  
**Tulsa, Oklahoma**



Tulsa International Mayfest began in 1973 and was produced exclusively by volunteers. Now, with only one full-time staff member and seasonal part-time staff, we still rely heavily on our hundreds of volunteers to produce this beloved Tulsa tradition. Mary Jo Sartain has been an integral part of the festival's success since 2002.

Mary Jo's husband, Gailard Sartain, was selected as the poster artist for the 2001 festival when they lived in Los Angeles, California. Through their involvement in Mayfest, they were convinced it was time to move back home, to Tulsa, Oklahoma. Upon moving to Tulsa, Mary Jo immediately wanted to volunteer for Mayfest. She helped in various aspects over the years, including headquarters, Co-Chair for visual artists, and currently Festival Chair, a position she has held since 2007. While in these roles, she has also served on the Board of Directors since 2003.

The festival chair is responsible for oversight of the steering committee, which is comprised of approximately 25 volunteers that are each responsible for a specific area of the festival. The festival chair serves on and reports to the board of directors. Before Mary Jo's tenure, those in the festival chair position had duties and time commitments that varied greatly given each individual's availability and talents. Mary Jo has truly made the position a full time year round effort.

In addition to this, Mary Jo handles our day-to-day bookkeeping efforts, coordinates insurance and tax needs, selects the poster artist, solicits sponsors, etc. She does not limit her responsibilities to those in her self-created job description. She's been seen scrubbing floors on her hands and knees (after knee replacement surgery, I might add) after the festival to leave our donated temporary space cleaner than it was when we received it. There is absolutely nothing that Mary Jo would not do to make Mayfest a success.

I am continuously surprised by the new talents that Mary Jo offers Mayfest. When our producing entity, Downtown Tulsa Unlimited, closed in the summer of 2009, Mary Jo made a huge committee to not only continue her previous duties as festival chair, but to add the duties of our full-time bookkeeper/officer manager as well. She's not only taken over these responsibilities, but she has streamlined and simplified our procedures, which has saved us both time and money.

Mary Jo is the cheerleader for the festival. She's there for our staff and volunteers not only professionally as it relates to the festival, but personally as well. I feel very blessed to have her in my life and consider her a great friend and mentor. If a volunteer is having a tough time accomplishing part of their goal, she's the first to step in to offer help.

When a festival has been around for 38 years, the first thing that people want to know is what will be new to keep people coming back. Mary Jo has made it a priority to feature several new aspects of the festival each year to keep it fresh and enjoyable while keeping Mayfest traditions alive. She has created three new indoor galleries, created a lasting art project in downtown by using portions of the poster artwork and turning it into a mural on a building next to our festival site and has reenergized our steering committee.

She has brought in new volunteers and helped to make all of the steering committee members feel like they have an equally important role in the festival. She takes charge and always has the best interest of the festival goers and volunteers at heart.

Mary Jo's family will be the first to tell you how loyal she is to the festival. She has rearranged their lives countless times to make it to important events and meetings for Mayfest throughout the year. When Mayfest finally arrives, she's on-site at 6:00 a.m (which is difficult for someone who is not an early riser) and doesn't leave until the last volunteer does around midnight. This goes on for four days! If a problem arises at anytime during the festival or in the planning phases, she's the first to take action to correct it. In fact, she's such a permanent fixture and integral part of the festival that I cannot envision what Mayfest will look like once she retires.

The past three years that Mary Jo has served as the festival chair, Mayfest has seen incredible growth and has benefited financially, even during these tough economic times. The board of directors did not hesitate to ask her to chair the event again. They know that with Mary Jo at the wheel, Mayfest will be smooth sailing.

Mary Jo has worked to build the morale of the steering committee and the board of directors since the beginning of her involvement. She truly loves Mayfest and wants everyone involved to have a blast, all while producing a quality festival. She constantly supports our key volunteers not only on their Mayfest projects, but in their other endeavors as well. She has brought this group of 25 very different personalities together so they work well collaboratively and think of each other as their extended family.

A few years ago several steering committee members and staff were overwhelmed, as can easily happen the closer it gets to the event, and Mary Jo shouted out in a meeting "Mayfest is FUN!" It really made everyone pause and look at the big picture. Everyone was so bogged down with the details. While there's a lot of hard work and times of stress involved in producing an event of this magnitude, Mayfest is fun and Mary Jo always does her part to make sure that's the case.

The impact Mary Jo has made on Mayfest is so great it is hard to put into words and will be felt for years to come. For the past several years, Mayfest had paid Downtown Tulsa Unlimited (DTU) to produce the festival. Mayfest used DTU's office and logistic/maintenance staff, office space, equipment, etc. to ensure the festival's success. In the summer of 2009, DTU lost its major funding source and closed its doors, just a month after a successful Mayfest. Mary Jo rallied the board of directors to put a plan in place so that Mayfest could continue. To say she has been instrumental in carrying the torch would be an understatement. Mary Jo volunteers so much time for Mayfest that she now has her own office in the Mayfest offices.

I not so jokingly tell Mary Jo that she has to serve as the festival chair forever. I know that one day, when she is replaced that the new chair will love the festival and serve it to the best of their ability, but I do not believe there will ever be a chair as dedicated and hardworking as Mary Jo.