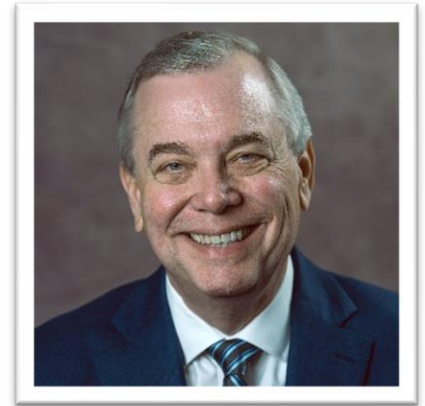


IFEA HALL OF FAME



**James L. Holt, CFEE
President & CEO
Memphis in May International Festival
Memphis, TN, USA**

Jim Holt's involvement in events began over 45 years ago while a college student at Ohio University, in Athens, Ohio. His love of music led him to apply for a position on the campus entertainment board, and he was selected for the Pop Concert Committee, where he worked on marketing, promotion, and production of concerts by Emerson, Lake and Palmer, comedian Steve Martin, southern rockers the Outlaws. In his junior year he was named Chair of the Pop Concert Committee where he booked and promoted concerts by the Doobie Brothers, Billy Joel, Eddie Money, Gary Wright, and Helen Reddy.



His involvement with festivals began in the fall of 1978 when he decided the campus needed an outdoor springtime event, foreshadowing a major move later in his career. He lobbied the Student Activities Committee for grant funding and solicited support from the Black Student Association. With funding in hand, a free one-day outdoor music festival, Spring Celebration 79, was launched on May 19, 1979. An estimated 7,000 students attended the event at the Mill Street Field which featured musicians Jay Ferguson, Cameo, and Ohio country rockers McGuffey Lane. The event became an annual affair at the university until funding issues developed in the late 1980's.

Following his junior year in college, having decided his future was in the concert industry, Holt left school to accept a position as Director of Promotion and Production with Mid-South Concerts in Memphis, TN, a regional concert promotion company. He worked promoting and producing many of the top Rock, Pop, Urban and Country stars of the 70's, 80's and 90's including Bruce Springsteen, Van Halen, The Police, U2, AC/DC, Prince, Bob Segar, Whitney Houston, and George Strait. While at the company he began booking artists at area colleges, regional events, and festivals in Memphis, Little Rock, Knoxville and Jackson, MS, as well for corporate clients like FedEx and Kroger. He developed touring concert properties for Procter and Gamble's Folgers Coffee with Tom Jones and country legend George Jones.

After working for several years with Contemporary Christian Music artists including Sandy Patty, the William Morris Agency asked him to help develop and promote a touring rendition of Handel's Messiah with an ensemble cast of top CCM artists for a nationwide tour during the Christmas Holiday season. He booked, promoted, and co-produced The Young Messiah Tour for four years notching sellout crowds in major market arenas from coast to coast, attracting an audience of over 450,000 patrons, and culminating in a national pay-per-view broadcast from Chicago's Rosemont Horizon.

In 1989 an official from Memphis in May contacted Holt seeking assistance with booking a major headline artist in Tom Lee Park on one night for their struggling Beale Street Music Festival, which was then held in the blues nightclubs on the famous street. Holt declined the offer but told festival officials that his firm would be interested in working together if the entire focus of the festival's programming was moved to the large riverfront park for the entire weekend. Based on his prior work with civic festivals in the region, Holt recognized the potential for a large-scale music festival in Memphis. A partnership was formed with Mid-

South Concerts supporting Memphis in May and the event was moved to the riverfront park in 1990 featuring headliners Stevie Ray Vaughn and Ray Charles. The festival was an instant success attracting 20,000 attendees in its first year.

The Beale Street Music Festival grew and expanded and by 1997 was attracting over 115,000 patrons, becoming the largest annual event in the city of Memphis.

In 1998 Memphis in May was in financial peril after sustaining a \$600,000 loss that year and was looking for new leadership. Holt, at the time working for a Nashville talent management agency, was asked to apply for the festival leadership position. The future of the financially troubled organization was in doubt, and there was uncertainty about whether a festival could be held in 1999.

On October 8, 1998, Holt was announced as the new Executive Director to lead Memphis May International Festival having been selected from more than 80 applicants. Holt worked with community leaders to resolve the festival's outstanding debts, rebuilt the organization's staff, and renegotiated vendor and supplier contracts. In May 1999, Memphis in May International Festival returned in full force with record attendance and generated a million-dollar surplus.

With the festival's return to financial stability, the board of directors promoted Holt to CEO in 2000 and to President and CEO in 2002.

While his background was formed in the concert and talent industry, Holt's scope of leadership at Memphis in May International Festival expands beyond the flagship music festival.

Over the course of his twenty-five-year tenure leading the Memphis in May International Festival, Holt has directed and managed 22 foreign country salute programs working with ambassadors of foreign embassies, political leaders, government officials, and ministries in countries around the world. Conducting comprehensive cultural, artistic, and educational programs and events, as well as economic development programs seminars has led to Holt traveling to foreign countries around the globe.

In addition to the music and international programs, Holt developed the festival's annual World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest into what USA Today's 10Best calls "the Most prestigious BBQ contest". Under his leadership, the contest grew to a record 265 teams traveling from across the country and around the world to compete for the title of World Champion. The event is now regularly featured on national television broadcasts by the Food Network, A & E, and the History Channel as well as network news broadcasts.

Over the course of his 25-year career, Holt has produced and developed a wide variety of festival programs including the Sunset Symphony, Great Southern Food Festival and Great American River Run. Paid attendance for events conducted during his tenure have topped 3.5 million and generated a significant economic impact for the City of Memphis, totaling 149 million dollars in 2019 alone.

Holt said that what brought him and has kept him in the event industry is his desire to contribute to activities that bring joy and happiness to others. There is a strong sense of satisfaction in playing a role in creating memorable experiences for others. Holt's festival and event career has brought him into contact with a broad spectrum of individuals from all walks of life, and he says his work is never dull and always interesting.

He cites the IFEA as being the most profound resource for his success in the industry, citing the knowledge of great leaders in the industry including Steve Schmader, Johann Moerman, Tom Bisignano, Kelven Tan, Chip Baker, Paul Jamieson, Jeff Curtis, Ted Baroody, Becky Genoways, Bob Bryant, and Colm Croffy, as individuals who have helped him along the way professionally and become great friends in the process. While he is proud of his accomplishments in the festival and events field, he draws his greatest sense of satisfaction from his four adult children and seven grandchildren.

Please join us in congratulating our 2023 IFEA Hall of Fame inductee, Jim Holt, CFEE.