



International Festivals & Events Association

2014 IFEA Hall of Fame Karen Scherberger, CFEE Norfolk Festevents, Norfolk, VA

Influenced at a very young age by her parent's volunteer leadership in the community with organizing civic league, church and school festivals and events, Karen was raised early on to understand and appreciate the importance of public service and the value of "celebration" in her family's lives.

Karen continued her passion to support important social causes with event planning throughout her college years – not realizing that she was building a foundation for her future career path while also becoming involved with a wonderfully creative circle of friends that still to this day are involved in her projects.

By the time Karen finished undergraduate school in 1977, there was no such thing as an "event industry" nor degree programs in "event planning". Karen decided to pursue a Masters degree in Higher Education with an emphasis in Student Personnel Services—with an eye on a University President's position someday. Karen longed for the opportunity to create an environment that would make a difference in people's lives and community, by bringing individuals with different talents and skills, backgrounds and interests together to learn and grow from one another and with each other- to be part of a greater good, to be part of a lifelong learning experience.

At this same time, Karen also become involved in a new and life changing volunteer experience with Norfolk's new grassroots waterfront festival "Harborfest", planned to occur in one the most dilapidated sections of the city's downtown.

While working as an Admissions Counselor at Old Dominion University and volunteering for Harborfest, the City of Norfolk joined a very small and ambitious group of cities across the country that began major renovation projects to bring vitality back to their depressed downtowns, especially those located in waterfront settings. Key to Norfolk's redevelopment strategy was the inclusion of renovated public spaces combined with innovative event planning and marketing initiatives. Because of the demonstrated success with attracting the public via Harborfest to the waterfront, even in its depressed state, the all volunteer group was invited to bid on the management of this new multi-million dollar project.



When the City accepted their bid in 1982, Karen saw this as an opportunity to follow what was quickly becoming clear as her heightened interest in event planning and marketing combined with its impact on public administration and municipal planning. Karen was hired as the organization's first Executive Director and opened the doors for business in November 1982.

Close to 39 years later Karen is still inspired and encouraged to continue along this path because she knows the work makes a difference on so many levels - for the residents and visitors, for the artistic and creative community, for the local economy and for the city government in the continued development as one of most enjoyable and livable communities in the country. Norfolk's unwavering commitment to the quality of life for all who are involved and served by the city, and the city's continued support of Festevents has had a profound impact on her decision to dedicate her life's work to this cause.

Karen has watched and experienced firsthand the dynamic effect events can make on changing an image and culture of a once vibrant downtown but later considered unsafe and unappealing to visit. Soon after thousands began to throng to the newly renovated waterfront and a host of fresh new events in 1983, commercial office buildings, attractions, restaurants and shops, and new residential living began to develop downtown. Today, downtown Norfolk is a world class example of urban development and visitors to the events rate their impressions of Norfolk as "excellent", with top scores for safety, accessibility and friendliness. And the event planning strategy continues today to play a major role in the city's continued success and development.

A proud military and maritime heritage town, some of the most rewarding experiences include hosting the world's largest naval and tall ships as part of OpSail 2000 and 2012, commissioning the nation's first Arleigh Burke naval destroyer off the waterfront park in the city's first civilian based commissioning, hosting the first national tour of the Vietnam moving wall memorial, countless ceremonies that naturalized new citizens and celebrated the reenlistment of hundreds men and women into the armed forces.

Thousands of city celebrations, ground breakings, concerts, festivals, fireworks shows and more have created millions of moments in time that have changed the lifestyle and culture of the community.

Some of Karen's professional highlights include Festevents recognition by IFEA with multiple IFEA/Haas & Wilkerson Pinnacle Awards over the years, including the Grand Pinnacle Award for OpSail in 2012 and as one of the first IFEA World Festival and Event City Award recipients in 2010. Her work directing Sail Virginia 2007 earned Norfolk the prestigious title by the American Sail Training Association as Port of the Year in 2007.

"Motivated by decades of respected city leaders, guided by a thoughtful Board of Directors, supported by generous donors, sponsors and partners, moved by artists of every imaginable genre, and inspired by dedicated and loyal staff, volunteers, associates, family and friends, I am truly blessed and honored to have been given this wonderful opportunity in life," says Karen. "To be associated with Norfolk Festevents, the City of Norfolk and the IFEA for these many years has truly been an extraordinary and once in a life time gift!"

Please help us congratulate our 2014 IFEA Hall of Fame Inductee, Karen Scherberger, CFEE.