



International Festivals & Events Association

**2018 IFEA Hall of Fame
William O'Toole, CFEE
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One of the most globally connected and influential professionals in the festivals and events industry today, Bill O'Toole's unusual career path could be titled 'The Accidental Tourist.' With events nowhere on his radar, Bill graduated with a Pure Mathematics degree in 1972 from the University of Sydney. He could see clearly his future as an accountant or statistician and, as a result, wisely decided to pursue music.



While at the University of Sydney, Bill used his still undefined event skills to organize treks for his fellow students through the Australian bush, while also forming numerous bands to play for campus dances. With music in his blood, he moved to England in 1977 to attend the London Guild Hall University and learn the art of instrument making, where he formed the dance band, Blowzabella. Looking for how to stand out from the crowd, literally, Bill reinvented the English bagpipe and put the band on stilts...a walking stage. Blowzabella performed successfully at numerous fairs and festivals around England. Bill proudly points out that the band is still going strong, touring Europe and celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2018, having now released over 14 albums.

In the early 1980's Bill moved back to Australia, where he met his future wife Ruth and started a family. Not veering far from his now musical roots, Bill formed the band Sirocco and toured the world, including some 30 countries, laying the foundations for his fascination with international cultures. During that time, he served not only as performer (playing the tin whistle or whatever was needed at the time), but as band management, logistics planner, tech roadie, and merchandise sales manager. Marketing a unique style and genre that were unusual in most musical circles, Bill started creating and producing their own gigs, concerts and events to ensure employment...his first official acknowledgement of events becoming a recognized focus in his career.

His signature event was a concert in the Wetlands of Australia, a nine-hour drive from the closest city, broadcast live to Asia and the Pacific from the middle of a swamp in the outback. The broadcast, CD and video of that event helped the local farmers save over 900 square miles of wetlands and bird habitats and brought attention to the problems of water supply in Australia. The power of events was now clear to Bill.

Expanding upon his now growing skill-set, in 1987 he formed a performing arts agency called the Larrikin Booking Agency and started pitching event and festival concepts to shopping malls, main street associations, government departments and the corporate world. He constantly looked for new opportunities and created work instead of waiting for it to come to him, developing a broad range of World Music festivals, Children's festivals, Jazz festivals, Magic festivals and several Arts and Heritage festivals.

His constant search for new event opportunities and his love of travel led to some unusual gigs in places such as Papua New Guinea; Vladivostok, Borneo; Urumqi in western China; Nepal; Northern India; and a 'Salute to Australia' festival in Houston, Texas. When his band, Sirocco, arrived in Houston their equipment had mistakenly gone to Hawaii, so at their first gig Bill thought to ask the audience to

help find musical instruments the band could use. The audience scattered and within half-an-hour all they needed (and more) arrived on stage!

In the jungle of central Borneo, Bill worked with the local Dayaks to create an event for the local mining company. The miners in these regions were being murdered by the locals and Bill suggested that a celebration in music and dance may help establish a new friendship between the locals and the company. He was right and recognized again the power of events to change people for the positive.

Bill likes to point out that, interestingly, and perhaps reflective of his career path, almost all of the places he toured were hidden by the binding in his old school atlas. Hidden gems in the most unexpected places.

In an effort to organize the exponentially increasing chaos in his life, Bill began learning the skills of project management and wrote his own software programs to meet his organizational needs. In 1996 he attended a course in event management at the University of Technology, Sydney. It was the first year of the course and they needed a person with direct event experience. Bill 'fit the bill' and he started the teaching and training part of his career.

In 1999 Bill returned to his alma mater at the University of Sydney and created a series of event management courses online as part of a Masters in Project Management program. Simultaneously, he gained his own Masters of Engineering in Project Management with a thesis on the application of project management as it relates to the delivery of events and festivals. As a result, he co-authored one of the global industry's first event textbooks, *Festival and Special Events Management*, adapting project management, logistics and risk management to the production of events and festivals.

Recognizing an increasing need to professionalize the now expanding and growing global festivals and events industry, Bill struck upon the idea of developing an Event Management Body of Knowledge (EMBOK), to collect and classify the knowledge and skills needed to create and manage events of all genres. In 2000 he wrote a paper on the topic, that was taken up by Julia Rutherford Silvers, an educator with the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and Janet Landey, with the Institute of Event Management in South Africa and now the President of IFEA Africa. Janet organized a number of professional conferences on the EMBOK project in South Africa. The EMBOK was codified by Rutherford Silvers and taken up by the Canadian government, the South African government and the worldwide conference industry. It is being tested today by IFEA Africa and the South African government, through the Skills Village 2030 project, for broader release by the IFEA and other professional, government and educational institutions in the future.

While all this was going on, Bill made time to travel to his first IFEA convention in Anaheim, California in 2003, where he met with the leadership of many top U.S. and other global festivals and events. This interaction inspired him to assist in establishing IFEA event training programs around the world.

Bill's second textbook on *Event Project Management*, released in 2001, catapulted him further overseas to consult with organizations and governments in the development of their events and the training of their event teams.

He started in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, working with the governments Tourism and Marketing Department to develop and build the potential for festivals and events as part of their 2020 World Expo vision. This created a centre in Dubai for people to come from all over Africa, Europe and the Middle East for training in events, project and risk management. Private companies such as Jack Morton, Deloitte, Hewlett Packard and thousands more sent their staff for training.

In all the many countries where he has worked (including Jordan; India; Pakistan; the United Arab Emirates; Kenya; Uganda; Malaysia; Singapore; Hong Kong; Taiwan; Laos; Vietnam; the Philippines;

Indonesia; Sri Lanka; and New Zealand, among others) developing event strategies and training event management professionals, Bill emphasised the need for their events and festival teams and government organizations to link to the IFEA. This resulted in the delivery of the IFEA's CFEA professional certification program in Dubai in 2011 for the Dubai government, and to the IFEA's involvement in the Middle East Event Awards and other regional training programs. Bill helped open the doors and advise on the provision of event conferences and/or professional training in many countries, with direct participation by IFEA leadership, at many of those.

Bill's career then took him to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for a long-term project to explore and develop the potential of events in that country. At the same time his previous efforts were resulting in recognition by the European Commission and the United Nations of the power of events to efficiently and effectively heal countries after war, while also assisting in their economic and social development. In partnership, they sent Bill to parts of the world he hadn't yet worked in, including Liberia (on the west coast of Africa), Sudan, Uganda and Jordan. His global industry awareness and influence were continuing to grow.

Bill's work in Saudi Arabia started in 2004 and culminated with a nationwide Tourism Events strategy, which became part of the exciting and dynamic opening and development of Saudi Arabian festivals and events that we are witnessing today and which the IFEA is playing a central training role in.

This work on event strategies resulted in his third textbook: *Events Feasibility; from Strategy to Operations*. His books have now been translated into five languages and provide the foundation for university and professional training courses around the world.

Since 2013 Bill has been a pivotal member of the teaching team for the IFEA/NRPA Event Management School at Oglebay National Training Center in West Virginia, where he oversees and directs the second-year event-city challenge experience and has worked closely with IFEA President & CEO Steve Schmader to create the new CFEA designation as a pathway to the full CFEA professional certification.

For the past few years Bill has limited his travelling primarily to working in Paris, France and the United States, allowing him time to revisit and rework the national handbook for the Australian Government on 'crowded places' and to co-author and edit an all-new textbook on **Crowd Management: Security, Risk and Health**.

Bill has served actively on the IFEA World Board of Directors, the IFEA President's Council and the IFEA Global Roundtable and continues to serve as one of the industry's top global advisors and conduits as we look to the future.

Please help us congratulate our 2018 IFEA Hall of Fame inductee, William O'Toole!