

IFEA HALL OF FAME



**Dr. Vern Biaett, CFEE
Retired Festival & Event Producer /
University Professor / Consultant / Expert Witness
Okatie, SC, USA**

Dr. Vern Biaett, CFEE was probably destined to be in the festival and events industry. Raised in a military family, living in 12 places over 16 years he met diverse people and constant packing and setting up became an art form. In high school he found time to decorate the gym for homecoming and as a college undergrad he organized fraternity socials and co-produced the Phi Sig A-Go-Go street party. Lifeguarding as a summer job taught him to manage and protect large crowds of unruly people. While earning his Master's degree in Commercial Recreation at Arizona State he was introduced to the five basic elements of program planning. In 1975 Vern became the recreation director at a retirement community and began programming special events. And when Vern went to prison in 1980 ... to work as one of the Arizona Department of Corrections' first recreation specialists, he acquired a sense of how leisure activities transform lives. Upon release in 1985 he became a park district recreation supervisor for the City of Phoenix, managing hundreds of full and part time staff. Vern's life to this point provided a remarkable skill set for his future success in the festivals and even industry.



When Phoenix started a new Office of Special Events in 1987 Vern transferred into a Special Events Coordinator position. The Office of Special Events permitted and provided assistance for national and community events such as the Grand Prix, ancillary Super Bowl events, and Matsuri, Irish and Cinco de Mayo festivals. It also produced dozens of its own major downtown festivals and parades, one of which was the Fabulous Phoenix 4th of July, which literally exploded when Vern became its chairman, attended by thousands and viewed by thousands more on a live TV special. The Office of Special Events was an important player in the revitalization of downtown Phoenix as a premier tourism and entertainment destination.

In 1997 Glendale Arizona's Marketing Department hired Vern as their Special Event Manager. By 2004 eight major annual events had been established, highlighted by the Glendale Glitters 50-day holiday light festival. Vern and his events team attracted large crowds to Glendale's redeveloping historic downtown, generated millions of dollars in positive publicity and enhanced its economic impact with sales taxes increasing fivefold. Vern was most proud of his Civic Pride volunteers, who over this time span received 50% of event alcohol sales and distributed \$500,000 in grants to local non-profits. Special events were a major factor in rebranding Glendale as it soon became the home of an NHL arena, NFL stadium and MLB spring training ballpark.

Ben Franklin said, "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I learn." Leaving active event management, Vern forged ahead into an impactful events industry academic role. For the next eight years at Arizona State he co-created and instructed classes in a Special Events Certificate Program which today continues to offer an exceptional base of event planning knowledge. Notably, he arranged for 100 students to participate in the 2008 Super Bowl half time show and dared to serve as advisor for the ASU Undie Run.

IFEA HALL OF FAME



Always a student, Vern completed his PhD, with a dissertation researching the onsite behavior of event participants. Relocating in 2014 to High Point University in North Carolina, the now Dr. Biaett accepted a position as Assistant Professor and Founding Chair of the Event Management Department. Vern designed courses, hired faculty, connected with local event professionals and quickly brought to life a BA degree in Event Management, that received multiple IFEA/Haas & Wilkerson Pinnacle Awards, but his real passion was interactive teaching, mentoring, and storytelling that instilled in students a passion for innovation, creativity, and critical thinking. Students especially loved his event operations class assignment of improving the porta-potty experience, with best projects receiving "Crappy Awards." Students were required to volunteer for and produce events – many as fundraisers for non-profits, conduct field research, complete internships and were encouraged to participate in professional event organizations. The 2020 High Point University graduating senior class awarded Dr. Biaett its faculty excellence award as best professor. As an academic, Vern was a prolific researcher and writer with 40 publications and attending international academic conferences to present his groundbreaking Organic Festivity Theory. He also volunteered as an editor/reviewer for a dozen academic journals.

Vern has retired now, but still occasionally consults with major events as well as assists small cities with policy and permitting procedures as he had done for many years, currently working with a new arts festival in Sarasota Florida. He continues to be a sought-after expert witness in event-related court cases.

Vern's industry involvement extended beyond event production and academics. Joining the Arizona Parks and Recreation Association as a student in 1972, he later became president and was its foundation board chair for 10 years. An original member of the Arizona Festivals and Events Association he was president on three occasions. In 1993 Vern attended his first IFEA Convention, immediately joining and quickly achieving CFEE status. He served on the President's Council for 25 years, the IFEA Foundation Board for 8 years, and as Event Educators Affinity co-chair for 10 years. He's written articles for "ie" magazine and regularly presented at IFEA Conventions and Webinars, as well as state and regional festival and event conferences embodying the spirit of industry knowledge sharing.

Recognized for his contributions through the years, Vern was bestowed city manager awards for exceptional public service in both Phoenix and Glendale, recognized as an Emeritus Professional by the Arizona Parks and Recreation Association, received a Big Kahuna from the Arizona Festivals and Events Association, and included in Strathmore's 2019 Who's Who.

Dr. Vern Biaett's multifaceted career as a self-described fun manager, his mentorship, community enhancement efforts, industry advocacy, transformative impact, and dedication to excellence make him a standout IFEA Hall of Fame recipient.

Please join us in congratulating our 2024 IFEA Hall of Fame inductee, Dr. Vern Biaett, CFEE