



INTERNATIONAL FESTIVALS & EVENTS ASSOCIATION  
FOUNDATION

# THE JOE VERA

# MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP



**A visionary leader and tireless advocate for excellence, Joe Vera, III, CFEE, devoted more than five decades to public service. Since joining the City of McAllen in 2014, he played a pivotal role in transforming the city into a vibrant hub of culture and community. He oversaw key departments including the McAllen Convention Center Facilities, Public Library, Palm View Golf Course, and Parks and Recreation.**

Under Joe's leadership, signature events such as the McAllen Holiday Parade flourished. First recognized as the Best New Event by the IFEA in 2014, the parade has since drawn hundreds of thousands of attendees and earned numerous accolades – including receiving the IFEA / Haas & Wilkerson Insurance Pinnacle Award for Best Parade eight times and the TFEA Best Parade in Texas Award nine times. His vision also helped McAllen earn the prestigious recognition of IFEA World Festival & Event City on three occasions.

Joe was a fierce champion of the IFEA/Haas & Wilkerson Insurance Pinnacle Awards competition where he

empowered his team at the City of McAllen to strive for excellence, resulting in hundreds of award-winning entries over the years – a testament to his belief in celebrating and elevating the work of event professionals around the world.

Before joining McAllen in 2014, Joe profoundly impacted the City of Hidalgo, leading its transformation from a small border town to a bustling cultural and entertainment destination. He was instrumental in launching BorderFest, overseeing the development of Dodge Arena (now Payne Arena), and securing historic retail and economic initiatives.

Joe's impact extended far beyond city borders through his long-standing involvement with the International Festivals & Events Association (IFEA) and the Texas Festivals & Events Association (TFEA). He served two terms on the IFEA World Board of Directors and was serving as the 2025 IFEA World Board Chair at the time of his passing. In 2005, Joe was inducted into the IFEA Hall of Fame, one of the highest honors in the industry. He was

*“The noblest art of all is making others happy.”*  
– P.T. Barnum



a past president of both the Texas Festivals & Events Association and the Texas Association of Fairs and Events and was inducted into the TFEA Hall of Honor.

Beyond his professional accomplishments, Joe was a devoted community servant who dedicated himself to crafting experiences that brought communities together, elevated civic pride, and created lasting memories for countless people. An Eagle Scout, he embodied the spirit of leadership, generosity, and service, giving back through organizations like the United Way, Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Lions Club, Boy Scouts, and 4-H.

Joe often quoted P.T. Barnum: *"The noblest art of all is making others happy."* By that measure, Joe was truly an artist – an incomparable spirit who brought joy, inspiration, and connection to all those around him.

Joe's introduction to the special events industry came at an early age. His dad was a dance/concert promoter and hosted a radio talk show every Sunday for some 30 years. From a 29-hour New Year's Eve Dane Marathon to onion clipping contests, to The Harry James and Glenn Miller orchestras, to weekly Tejano music dances, he promoted them all...Joe said *"I learned from the best. Dad always wanted me to make a career out of the special events industry and I guess I have."*

Joe's passion for education and giving back to others was evident in all that he did. He stated that he owed his success to the ability to fine-tune and further his spe-

cial event skills through programs and benefits offered by IFEA and other professional organizations. It was his belief that there is no other or better educational opportunity for the special events industry in the world, than the IFEA. He took what he learned, gleaned from everyone, and shared it back twofold. He walked the walk and talked the talk by making sure that educational opportunities were available for everyone that wanted to take advantage of them.

The establishment of the Joe Vera Memorial Scholarship honors not only a remarkable leader, but a truly great person – kind, visionary, generous, and full of heart. An example to be embraced and emulated by us all. One of his most cherished philosophies was, "There is no limit to what a man can do if he doesn't care about the credit," and true to this, Joe's humble spirit touched countless lives and left an indelible mark on everyone he met.

The scholarship will provide support to event professionals in the City of McAllen, Texas in honor of Joe's commitment to empowering his team to strive for excellence, as well as to members of our international industry in recognition of Joe's dedication to strengthening our global connections.

Joe believed that festivals are a celebration of our lives and our community. He lived by the following and hoped that others will to: don't be afraid to dream; don't ever believe you are too small to do anything; and don't ever quit learning – nothing new in, nothing new out.