

# FOUNDATION

## The Value of My IFEA Membership

As I sit and contemplate my membership to IFEA, I am overwhelmed with gratitude at all the benefits and opportunities this organization has provided to me. IFEA is the single thing that has made the most impact on my career. Isn't that a powerful statement?

After the second year of my event, I began contract negotiations for my continued employment with the organization. As we discussed the options, concerns and opportunity, I felt one resounding criteria was needed over and over -- education. One of the board of directors mentioned he attended a convention while at the Fiesta Bowl that proved to be a wealth of information. The convention was for the organization named International Festivals and Events Association (IFEA). Within two weeks, I became a member and was attending my first convention.

I still remember how nervous I was. My goal was to meet every attendee and learn everything about the festivals they produced. A little aggressive, but are we surprised? My game plan was Mardi Gras beads. Why? Well, my intern who placed the order that year added an extra zero to the end of the quantity number. The beads had a medallion with our logo and website and, of course, the year. By the end of the first night, everyone at the party including the band, was wearing beads from my little festival. I had so many business cards by the end of my stay, yet I had taken the time to jot down the type of event each person produced on the back of each and every card. Through the years, I have continued this approach so when I was in my office in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin I could pick up the phone and contact the a jazz festival looking for the best jazz band to hire, or the expert I met from a music festival with the best process on booking bands. I knew with IFEA, I had the festival world at my fingertips at a moment's notice. The

festival breed is unique; not only are we willing to answer any questions and share any ideas, we offer our designs and our builders to be on your site for the project. We are a sharing industry, as we all say, "If you *steal* one idea its plagiarism; if you *steal* from *many*, its *research*."

IFEA Conventions are a huge resource for enhancing my events. Where does someone go if you are the big event in your area to learn about food and beverage, sponsorship, risk management, marketing, etc.? IFEA caters to every aspect of the events process through the classes they offer, whether you are from a large event and your position is one specific role or responsibility, or if you are from a small event and you are responsible for absolutely everything.

At my first conference, I received two invitations to experience two IFEA members' events the following week. Five days later I was off to Illinois and three days after that I landed in California. Experiencing other event producers' festivals is one of the best forms of education and the knowledge and experience I obtained through this process was priceless.

My second year, we entered some of our marketing creations, including our media kit and a commercial for one of our events into the Pinnacle Awards. I still remember sitting in the Grand Ballroom and feeling the thrill and pride of seeing our commercial on the jumbotron. We had worked with a cable company to produce our commercial. It entailed tossing various foods in the air such as salad, shrimp, oranges, lemons, limes and more to classical music. I remember turning to one of my IFEA friends and colleagues, who was from one of the largest organizations with one of the largest budgets, and saying the expense to produce our commercial was the cost of the groceries! I tell you this to remind you the size and budget doesn't matter when it comes to winning a Pinnacle Award. What does matter is bringing that award to your board, community, partners and volunteers. It validates the quality of the events you produce, which I only could have bettered by being a member



of IFEA, and gives all a sense of pride to be affiliated with your organization.

The Webinars offered through IFEA have also been instrumental to both myself and my team. The topics inspire dialog on how our event addresses the same topics and challenge us to think outside of the box. They are a great way to start creative dialog and camaraderie.

The connections IFEA has made on behalf of all of us has also been extremely beneficial. Many of the companies that have participated in the Expo are now currently at my event adding components that were needed to enhance it. I have used everything from gaming companies to cash register devices, even my insurance carrier. On a personal level, the insurance partners even sponsored my Certified Festival and Event Executive (CFEE) classes. Some even offer discounts to IFEA members only.

The CFEE experience enhances the knowledge you have obtained and takes it to a new level, but more importantly, having the letters behind your name can add many elements. Having a CFEE shows sponsors not only do you see value in being invested in yourself and your career, but also the event they are sponsoring. It can help your proposals to stand out since they are coming from a professional in the field. By signing a proposal with your organization, they are signing on with an expert to market their brand and business. The conversation those proposal letters start can open doors to many different opportunities, not to mention it can elevate your resume to the top of the pile.

Although I cannot address everything IFEA membership has provided me, I have saved the best for last. The relationships I have obtained through the years have developed into some of the best in my life. Some, I call if I see they have worked with a company I am prospecting or booking a band

they had at their event. Then there are others I talk with almost every day. They help me with the struggles and challenges that come to all of us. They understand, because they have been there. They have all been asked if this is a volunteer position and what they do the rest of the year. They have had the wrong logo, or wrong sponsor, or wrong date on something and had to do a rerun. They have experienced the loss of support from a municipality or Mother Nature rearing her ugly head during the event. They are the first to help celebrate when we land that big sponsor we've worked on for months. They know not to call the week leading

up to the event, but to text and send well wishes for great weather and a safe event.

Looking back, I am sure you have your own stories of how the IFEA has made a difference both professionally and personally. While soliciting sponsors for your upcoming event, I hope you will keep these positive experiences in mind and consider adding an item for the IFEA Auction held at the IFEA Foundation Night at this year's 60th Anniversary Convention & Expo this September in Tucson, Arizona to your sponsorship agreements.

The money from the auction will continue to raise the standard

of excellence in our industry, supporting scholarships and opportunities for the upcoming leaders in the events industry.

**Mary Ann Dilling, CFEE**  
2015 IFEA Foundation  
Board Chair  
Director of Business  
Development  
Experimental Aircraft  
Association (EAA)  
Oshkosh, WI  
Email: [mdilling@eaa.org](mailto:mdilling@eaa.org)