

PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Steven Wood Schmader, CFEA

During my site visit to the JW Marriott Tucson Starr Pass Resort, as we were considering the location for our IFEA 60th Anniversary Convention & Expo (to be held this September 21st-23rd) I was invited by my hosts at the property to participate in a centuries old, traditional Native American ceremony at sunrise of my final day in Tucson.

The ceremony, called Mitakuye Oyasin (Mee-tah-koo-yay Oh-yah-seen) is a Lakota Sioux term literally translated as "All My Relations." The meaning, however, extends beyond that of the English translation to include not only human family, but all of the animal, plant and mineral kingdoms, as well as the forces of nature (wind, thunder, lightning, et al.) plus the elements, in that we are all connected in the intricate web of existence, and that each is effected by the actions of any other. Everything is interrelated and interconnected with all creation; nothing exists in isolation.

As the sun began slowly climbing above the horizon, and the morning mist weaved its way through the majestic saguaro cactus standing guard across the Sonoran Desert that spread all around us, a handful of other guests and employees slowly gathered around a crackling fire pit on the Salud Terrace facing the now halo lit silhouette of the awakening city. People visited quietly with one another, almost reverently, in this beautiful setting.

Soon we were joined by a local tribal host whose very nature made us all feel welcome in this gathering of strangers. He shared photos and stories of his parents and grandparents with us and tales of the many generations of his own family that had led him to this moment and place in his life. He invited us to start our day with a peaceful moment simply reflect-

ing on our own lives and paths – our families, friends, careers, travels, homes, health and all those things that had led us to that moment and place. He asked us to take a rare moment to think about all those who have touched our lives along our journey and all the lives that we have touched in some way. And as we did so, he accompanied the moment – quite naturally - with the soft, wistful music of a Native American flute in the peacefulness of the morning.

Now, I have to admit here that I am not a religious individual by defined faith, but the combination of the setting and the music and the timbre of our host's voice as he described the importance of the Mitakuye Oyasin to so many of his people, created in me a new appreciation for our own industry and good fortunes. On that early morning I thought about all of you and the friendships, professional relationships and interconnectivity of the IFEA and our global industry that has supported so many of our careers, organizations, communities and successes. I thought about the critical and positive role that we all have the good fortune to play in bringing and holding our communities, cities, countries and the world together, juxtapositioned against often horrific alternatives that are far too prevalent all around us. I thought about my own mentors and peers (many of you among them) and the young students and leaders coming up through the ranks today, who have chosen their path, hopefully, because we have made it a desired one to follow and offered our hand to help.

I thought about the diverse families, friends and individuals of all ages and backgrounds who attend, enjoy and participate in our events; the volunteers and entertainers and vendors and

suppliers and venues and service providers and staffs and boards, as well as our own spouses and children who have supported our successes and whose lives have (hopefully) been positively impacted by our lives work. I thought about the vibrant international networks and friendships around the world that may not have existed today without the IFEA. I thought about the creativity and new ideas and passion that have been sparked by the foundations that we have collectively laid. I thought about the formalization of education in our field (including our IFEA Event Management School) that many of you and others in our industry have pioneered and continue to grow. And I have to admit, I had to think about the uncanny interconnectivity of events to the forces of nature and the elements! Most of us have certainly dealt firsthand with that relationship!

After leaving us with our thoughts for a short while, our host invited everyone to create a sage prayer tie (a small bundled cloth, filled with sage and tied at the top), which we then carefully placed in the fire. As we did so, we passed an eagle feather to fan the smoke, as we spoke, one at a time, the words "All My Relations," acknowledging and sending blessings and good fortune to all those people, places and things that we are interconnected with, past, present and future.

Now, there are many considerations that go into our selection of a convention site, but on that morning I felt that we were where we needed to be as we plan to celebrate the IFEA's 60th Anniversary Convention & Expo. I hope that you will all plan to join us this September in Tucson for that occasion, and that you will help us to invite and include "All Our Relations" for a very special gathering.