



**H**appy New Year! My name is Sam Lemheny and I am the 2018 Chair of the IFEA Foundation Board. I am honored to be in this position and excited to work with such a talented and dedicated team of people such as yourselves. This is a new position for me, but I am not new to IFEA, I have been a member for 20 years. It is mind blowing to me that it has been that long. I discovered this great organization when I was working at Walt Disney World as the Manager of the Epcot International Flower & Garden Festival. And as many IFEA-ers say, it changed my life, literally.

I was born and raised into a family that owned and operated landscaping, nursery and floral businesses. I was destined to work in horticulture. I had helped to create and decorate weddings and parties working for my father in his floral business and really enjoyed the adrenaline and transformation that occurred during the setup of these events. But I still always thought that I would have a career in the landscaping or floral business with my family. After my first IFEA convention in Phoenix, AZ, that all changed. I discovered an organization and a group of people that created events as a career. I was more than excited and knew this was the field I would be pursuing for the rest of my life.

Here is a quick story about an experience that happened to me during that first convention. I think all of you can remember your first convention as being a little scary. Not knowing many people, finding your way around, and trying to understand which session to attend. And of course, feeling a little uncomfortable at the evening social events when you are not part of a group yet. Now granted, all the folks were very friendly as most IFEA-ers are, but I still was feeling like the new kid starting a new school mid-semester sitting alone on the playground at recess. So there I was, sitting alone on the bus waiting to go to the rodeo event planned for that evening. I was sitting there looking out the window when a very distinguished woman leaned in and asked, "is anyone sitting here?". I said no, and she sat down. We did brief introductions, I said my name is Sam and she said her name is Jean. Remember, I knew very little about the industry and the top producers or rock stars of the industry. Jean began to ask me lots of questions about the flower show

that I produced, my background, and how I got involved in the floral business. After what seemed quite a long time talking about myself, I asked her what she did and where she worked. She described that she also produced a flower show and a little parade on Thanksgiving in NYC for Macy's. You can imagine my reaction on the inside, while on the outside I tried to keep calm and cool. I was sitting next to Jean McFadden, long-time producer and creative mastermind of a parade that I grew up watching with my family every Thanksgiving morning. I was dumbfounded that she was sitting next to me, but even more so that she actually took interest in what I did and the event that I produced. It was a life changing experience. Jean and I made a connection and a bond that day that has lasted for 20 years.

Over the years, I have made connections and bonds just like that with so many other IFEA-ers. This organization changes so many lives for the better and makes connections that better our industry every day. I know that I am preaching to the choir. Many of you have similar stories and experiences about IFEA and the impact it has had on your career and life. So now I have a request. Make a New Year's resolution to tell your story to someone who is not part of IFEA. We all run in event circles in our respective home towns and cities, and you all know someone in the events industry who is not a part of IFEA. Tell them your story. Tell them how IFEA has benefitted you. Tell them how IFEA has connected you to some of your best friends and favorite people. Tell them the impact that IFEA has had on your career. Tell them what you have learned and what you continue to learn through the resources at IFEA. Invite them to the next IFEA Convention in San Diego, CA. Membership is the key to the sustainable success of this organization. We need to continue to cultivate and recruit new members so that the life changing experiences that happen at IFEA continue well into the future. If IFEA was life changing for you, why wouldn't it be life changing for them?

**SAM LEMHENY, CFE**

2018 IFEA Foundation Board Chair

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