

TO NEW POSSIBILITIES



If you follow our *IFEA Event Insider*, you were likely as shocked as I was to read and learn that California's beloved Gilroy Garlic Festival is shutting down "for the foreseeable future." The festival is one of the most famous food festivals in the United States; a massive, three-day event in the northern California city of Gilroy that celebrates all things garlic; and an industry icon that for 42 years has raised millions of dollars for local charities, while also providing a local tradition embraced by those who call Gilroy home and countless thousands of visitors from across the country and around the globe. According to organizers, the event is no longer feasible because of increased insurance costs and lingering financial uncertainties from COVID-19. The event had also battled the fallout from an active shooter incident in 2019 that left three people dead and 17 others injured.

When I think back on my own time in our industry, I have many fond memories of then [Executive Director of the Garlic Festival and 1996 IFEA Hall of Fame Inductee, Dick Nicholls](#). Dick served as Chair of the IFEA World Board in 1994; helped to found the IFEA Foundation; and was a friend and mentor to many in our industry – myself included – before passing away far too early in 2005. Throughout their 42 year history, the Gilroy Garlic Festival went through many happy, exciting, and rewarding years, creating countless memories for generations of attendees, volunteers, suppliers, and staff. They also went through more than their fair share of unexpected and uncontrolled challenges. I am sure that Dick would never have imagined what the future might hold for his festival.

Evolution and change and challenges are a part of our world. Some we embrace, while others we do our best to just get through the ride and hope that we come out whole on the other end. Such has been the last several years for our global industry. We have all struggled to adapt and respond to the Covid-19 pandemic; others (including Gilroy) have had to respond to unimaginable tragedies such as mass shootings; vehicle attacks; crowd surges; even war. Many have and continue to struggle with the long term impact of financial loss; staff changes; volunteer challenges; increased pricing across multiple budget lines; labor and supply chain shortages; changing city relationships; and more.

But evolution, change and challenges can also make us more resilient, more creative, stronger and better. The *IFEA Event Insider* has also covered many stories reflecting changes by festivals and events with the end result of expanding community audience reach; embracing new diversity and inclusion programs; creating new events and festivals to serve a world that needs our industry now more than ever to keep us all bonded together; supporting local, national, and international health and humanitarian efforts; and sharing lessons learned from past tragedies, so that they may become a thing of the past in the future.

We have seen the resiliency of runners in the Boston Marathon, injured and/or in memory of loved ones lost during the unthinkable bombings of that event in 2013; the addition of new events to highlight, serve and welcome those with disabilities; the coming

together of the world to safely and peacefully celebrate the future at the Dubai World Expo 2020 in the United Arab Emirates; new appreciation and support by cities and countries, recognizing the importance that events play in their respective communities and our world; the flexibility and creativity of our peers as they have had to move and reimagine their events to new venues, routes and dates; new focuses on and salutes to the plights and important roles of refugees and immigrants around our world; support from professional peers to ensure the success of everyone in our industry; and much, much more.

While challenges will always exist, our evolution and focus as an industry will always be there to meet those challenges and create new opportunities where it sometimes feels like none exist. The organizers of the Gilroy Garlic Festival have said that, while the Festival may no longer exist as we have all come to know it, there are already discussions taking place about new possibilities of how they might reimagine and evolve their event, providing something just as important and magical to their community; paying tribute to the traditions and memories that they have built over so many years. And I have no doubt that they will succeed, nor the support that they will receive from all of their professional IFEA peers around the world.

That change, that evolution, that transformation, that 'Metamorphosis' into something new, stronger, better, more creative, more resilient, more aware, and better connected, will be the focus at our 65th Annual IFEA Convention, Expo and Retreat, presented by Haas & Wilkerson Insurance, this September 19th-21st in McAllen, Texas, USA. After a long, not of our choosing, break from getting together in-person, we promise an unforgettable and valuable time together with friends and peers. A family reunion. A celebration. A leadership summit. An educational conference. And a united new reset for our global industry.

A metamorphosis that will change us all for the better.

We look forward to seeing you all there and wish you nothing but success and positive new possibilities in the interim.

Steven Wood Schmader, CFE

President & CEO