

STEPPING FORWARD WITH PURPOSE:

HONORING THE PAST WHILE LEADING IFEA'S FUTURE



It is both an honor and a responsibility to step into the role of Chair of the IFEA during this landmark 70th anniversary year. While none of us expected this transition to come under such circumstances, I am humbled to follow in the footsteps of such an extraordinary leader, visionary, mentor, and friend - our late IFEA World Board Chair, Joe Vera, CFEE. His impact on this association – and to so many of us personally and professionally – will continue to guide our work and spirit for years to come.

This moment is deeply personal for me. I grew up in this industry, attending conferences as a teenager and young adult, always wide-eyed and fascinated by the passion, creativity, and sheer brilliance of the people I met. My professional network exploded as hallway conversations and hospitality suite sing along songs turned into lifelong mentorships and international friendships. At IFEA conventions, I had the privilege to engage with many of the legends and greats – industry pioneers whose names are now part of our shared story – working, leading, and inspiring others to dream big and think even bigger.

As we mark 70 years of this association, we do so in a world that feels more uncertain and more divided than ever. I believe our work and network have never been more essential. Festivals and events are not luxuries; they are lifelines—sources of cultural identity, economic vitality, and emotional connection. In times of

challenge, we do not just endure—we show up, we innovate, and we bring people together.

This anniversary is not just a celebration of the past. It is a call to action for the future. It's a moment for us all to lean on each other and recommit to the values that built this community: inclusion, collaboration, creativity, and resilience.

Speaking of coming together, I hope you will join us at [IFEA's 70th Anniversary Convention and Expo](#) this fall in Palm Springs, CA. It promises to be more than just a professional gathering—it's a homecoming. A chance to connect with colleagues, spark new ideas, swap war stories, and recharge your inspiration among people who understand the true magic and mayhem of what we do.

Thank you for your continued support for communities, your tireless work, and your belief in the power of events to uplift and unite. I look forward to serving with gratitude, heart, and hope.

Here's to 70 years of unforgettable moments - and to many more ahead.

With appreciation,

Vanessa Van de Putte

IFEA World Board Chair

President & CEO

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San Antonio, Texas