

## **IAFE Makes Good First Impressions in San Antonio**

The IAFE 128<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention was held Nov. 25-28 at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center in San Antonio, Texas. 2018 IAFE Chair Rick Vymlatil of the South Florida Fair & Palm Beach County Expositions in West Palm Beach chose the theme “First Impressions” as an homage to the Convention moving to a new city after nearly 50 years in Las Vegas.

“We are very pleased with our attendance, but more pleased with the comments we are receiving about the value of the Convention -- for professional education, networking, and doing business. Those are the key ingredients to a successful IAFE event of any type we conduct throughout the year,” stated IAFE President and CEO Marla Calico.

The event kicked off with a day full of education and networking on Sunday with all sessions packed with an unexpected surge in Sunday attendance. To get the attendees headed to their Zone (regional) meetings, a “Blast Off” event was held Monday morning. Soundsations, a choir from Reagan High School in San Antonio, beautifully sang National Anthem and selections from the film *The Greatest Show on Earth*. Vymlatil and IAFE Convention Programming Committee Chair Jeremy Parsons of the Clay County Fair in Spencer, Iowa, dressed in circus ringleader attire and directed attendees to their respective Zone meetings in style.

Engaging keynote speakers provided thought-provoking ideas during the three general sessions. On Monday, Clint Swindall of Verbalocity, Inc., presented “The Power of Personal Engagement.” On Tuesday, world-renowned animal behavior expert Dr. Temple Grandin addressed attendees, including dozens of FFA students from local schools. And on Wednesday, international expert on high-performing organizations Shawn Rhodes presented “Pivot Points: Leverage Change Without Sacrificing Results.”

Exhibitors in the IAFE Trade Show saw first hand how popular San Antonio is among fair buyers.

“Our Trade Show was sold out of available space in mid-October in yet another sign of success and one that indicated demand for participation from the segment of our membership providing goods and services to member fairs. The actual number of exhibitors utilizing those 385 maximum available spaces decreased as there was further pent-up demand for exhibitors to increase their number of spaces,” stated IAFE Director of Sales Steve Siever.

Educational opportunities covered a wide range of issues facing fairs today. Topics on marketing facilities, event safety guidelines from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security,

ADA compliance, community building, and strategic planning make up just a few of the educational opportunities. Format changes include Power Talk sessions, short 15-minute sessions packed full of information. Also new this year were Legend Led sessions, where well-respected “legends” of the fair industry led question-based sessions on their area of expertise.

Also new this year were two Happy Hour events. On Monday, the Happy Hour was sponsored by Kaliff Insurance and featured a performance by Brandon Lay, presented by Paradigm Talent Agency. On Tuesday, the Happy Hour was sponsored by the National Independent Concessionaires Association and included a performance by Tony Jackson, presented by The Kinkead Agency.

Numerous awards were presented during the Convention. The IAFE Hall of Fame Award, the association’s highest honor, was presented to Marlene Jolliffe of the State Fair of Virginia in Doswell. Mallory Hines of the San Antonio Livestock Exposition was awarded the YPI Rising Star Award. The IAFE Heritage Awards sponsored by Haas & Wilkerson Insurance were presented to five deserving individuals and the State and Provincial Associations of Fairs Executive of the Year Award was presented to Steven Patterson of the Indiana Association Fairs. The Institute of Fair Management recognized its 10th class of graduates with the largest number of graduates ever -- 37. The IAFE Agricultural Awards, sponsored by ShoWorks, and the North American Midway Entertainment Competitive Exhibits Awards were presented Tuesday morning. The Closing Party & Awards Reception was held on Wednesday evening to honor the K&K Insurance Communications Awards and Etix Innovation in Sponsorship Awards.

The 2019 IAFE Annual Convention will be held Dec. 1-4 at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center in San Antonio, Texas.