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### **2023 IAFE Convention and Trade Show Deemed Success**

The Salt Palace Convention Center in Salt Lake City, UT was host for the 2023 IAFE Convention and Trade Show, November 26-29. The theme was Fairs RISE (Reunite, Inspire, Support and Educate). That is exactly what happened during the four-day convention in Salt Lake.

To kick off the Convention was the opening ceremony, where attendees were both reunited and inspired by speakers Jennifer Giesike, IFMG, CFE, Washington Town and Country Fair, MO and Kelly Collins, IFMG, CFE, State Fair of West Virginia. Giesike served as the 2023 IAFE Board Chair, and Collins served as the 2023 Convention Program Chair.

Throughout the year, Giesike and Collins lead the convention programming committee and really focused on the "I" in RISE. In doing so, IAFE members were asked a simple question, "What Inspires You?".

Responses varied greatly, but all included a heartfelt answer to what keeps our fair staff, volunteers, board members, sponsors, exhibitors and guests motivated to continue moving forward. Answers included mention of mentorship, colleagues, the ability to create family fun experiences, community engagement, tradition, and more.

The IAFE also strives to inspire members within the industry throughout the year. Thus, the Fair Games challenge was born.

Throughout 2023, points were given within each respective geographical zone for participation in IAFE activities, including CyberSeminars, contests, committees, zone meetings, and convention attendance, just to name a few.

At the closing general session on Wednesday afternoon, the results were announced. First place and a check for \$4,000 went to Zone 8. Second place and a check for \$2,500 went to Zone 4. Third place and a check for \$1,000 went to Zone 2. These cash prizes will support future zone meetings and activities.

Many educational workshops, 58 to be exact, focused on several aspects of the fair industry and were organized in various formats, including panel discussions and presentation style. In addition to the workshops, the Convention included 37 networking circles, 27 Champion Circles, 4 Fairs RISE Sessions, 1 opening ceremony, and 2 general sessions.

The Trade Show aisles were packed, especially on Monday, and many reports from exhibitors indicated that they got bookings/deals done on the floor.

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“I thought this show was one of the best ever,” Robert Holmes, IFMG, Spectrum Weather and Specialty Insurance, recipient of the 2023 IAFE Associate of the Year Award, and returning exhibitor, said.

The 2023 IAFE Trade Show comprised of 295 booths and welcomed 21 showcasing acts within the two-day show.

According to initial survey responses, one of the most enjoyed portions of the 2023 IAFE Convention and Trade Show was the S’more Fair Fun event held Sunday evening at the Utah State Fairgrounds. Complimentary food, beverages, carnival games, strolling entertainment, fire pits with s’more supplies, and picture stations were available to attendees.

This event was scheduled immediately following the IAFE Education Foundation’s Raisin’ for a Reason Wagons and Whiskey fundraising event. A net of over \$40,000 was raised and dedicated to support the Institute of Fair Management, thanks to the live and virtual auctions, Young Professionals Medal Mania, and Cornhole Shootout. Wagons and Whiskey is organized each year by the IAFE Agriculture Committee in conjunction with the IAFE Education Foundation.

Other beloved activities included the Institute of Fair Management courses and graduation. Of all Convention attendees, 23% were either enrolled or graduates of the Institute of Fair Management program. The program continues to grow and develop, which was evident during the Wednesday general session. The IAFE recognized 26 Institute of Fair Management graduates and 12 individuals receiving their Facilities Management Grad Track certification.

The Young Professionals (YP) activities proved successful with a full house and positive reviews. Events included Ment-A-Minute, Connect and Cocktail, a workshop, and a social outing on Tuesday evening. The YP Steering Committee also supports the Rising Star Award.

IAFE Ambassadors were present throughout all the Convention, from social media, to hosting an IAFE benefits overview session, First Friends Reception, overseeing the first Jenga competition and serving as mentors to many IAFE members in attendance.

Four educational experiences were offered to Convention attendees, including: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Facilities & Operations Tour, Utah State Fairgrounds Tour, The University of Utah Football Stadium Facilities & Operations Tour, and Learning With Legends – Gaining Wisdom from Industry Titans.

These experiences were limited to a smaller quantity of participants to ensure a positive experience for all.

Although the IAFE knows the *Metrics That Matter* regarding the success of the IAFE Convention is in the numbers outlined above — educational content, funds raised for the Foundation, IFM participation,

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trade show success, and more, the question of attendance is always asked. Aligned with the budget approved by the IAFE Board of Directors, the 2023 IAFE Convention and Trade Show welcomed more than 2,000 guests to Salt Lake City.

“It’s always amazing to see so many different people from all over the world come together for a single mission – to strengthen our industry. I hope that each and every one of you left with new ideas and inspiration, but most importantly a few new members to add to your network!” Kelly Collins, IFMG, CFE, 2023 IAFE Convention program Chair, said.

The IAFE Board of Directors and staff want to thank everyone who attended the 2023 IAFE Convention and Trade Show. A sincere appreciation goes to the 39 sponsors who made the event possible.

“Wow! What a great convention! The smiles and positive comments I heard about the programming warmed my heart and made me so proud of the work we had all done! Seeing old friends and making new ones is always a highlight of my convention! When Marla, Jo, and I did our rounds to the Zone meetings, it was so great to see the rooms full and everyone engaged in their zones. Thanks to everyone for coming to Convention! You are all truly an inspiration!” Jennifer Giesike, IFMG, CFE, 2023 IAFE Board Chair, said.

Save the dates for 2024, December 1-4 in Phoenix, AZ, where IAFE members will Build On Strong Foundations.

The International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE), based in Springfield, Mo., is a voluntary, nonprofit corporation serving state, provincial, regional, and county agricultural fairs, shows, exhibitions, and expositions. Its associate members include state and provincial associations of fairs, non-agricultural expositions and festivals, associations, corporations, and individuals engaged in providing products and services to its members, all interested in improving fairs, shows, expositions, and allied fields. For more information, visit [www.fairsandexpos.com](http://www.fairsandexpos.com), follow the IAFE on Facebook or Instagram or call 800.516.0313.

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