



VISION AWARD WINNERS

In today's fast-changing economic environment, what worked in yesterday's hospitality climate may not produce the same results tomorrow. Market conditions change too quickly. To call something the best is meaningful only as a relative measure. Even comparing two similar hotels operating in the same market, for example, is akin to the proverbial apples-and-oranges measures. Success is best measured by how well you meet your own goals. To have vision is to set out on your own path, break new ground and achieve what was once only an idea on a PowerPoint presentation—the marketer who found a unique way to bring services and products to customers, the politician who behind the scenes rallied others to work for a worthy cause, or the respected industry leader who works to ensure others will follow in her path.

Last year, *Meetings: Minnesota's Hospitality Journal* created the Vision Awards, a celebration of the industry's best practices performed over the past year. This past summer, the magazine solicited nominations in seven categories. All of the nominees had great stories to tell, yet the editors chose the following winners who best exemplified what "best practices" is all about. Vision Award winners received recognition at an event held Sept. 30 at The Saint Paul Hotel. Congratulations to our winners and nominees for setting such high standards for Minnesota's hospitality industry.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Susan Breen
*Convention Services Coordinator
Bloomington Convention
& Visitors Bureau*

Susan Breen has spent her career serving visitors to Bloomington. For 22 years, Breen has been employed at the Bloomington Convention & Visitors Bureau, 18 of them as the convention services coordinator. In her position, "Susan has made a name for herself as the ultimate point person for groups, conventions and sporting events that stay in Bloomington," says Dan O'Neill, vice president of strategy and sales, and Breen's colleague at the Bloomington CVB. "She specializes in customer service and strives to make each delegate feel welcome when they arrive."

Prior to each delegate's visit to Bloomington, Breen instructs them on all of the services that Bloomington provides meeting planners, offering recommendations for brochures and other online services based on their needs. When the meeting arrives in Bloomington, Breen personally conducts a "meet and greet," ensuring that

all of the brochures were delivered and that other details have been attended to. During 2009, Breen serviced 122 meetings, and more than 50,000 attendees. At the time of her nomination for this award, she had serviced 81 meetings to date for 2010.

Even when the event is over, Susan takes the extra step of contacting each client with a follow-up survey to ensure all services were completed in an appropriate fashion and to rate Bloomington as a choice for meetings and events.

In addition, Breen makes it a point to visit area travel information centers to greet weary car travelers and talk about Bloomington with them as they stop during their journey. Often she brings them treats. Susan also spends many hours at MSP International Airport, where she makes an extra effort to greet volunteers and thank them for helping to promote Bloomington hotels, Mall of America and other area restaurants and hotels. It's these special touches that Susan adds, says O'Neill, which keeps visitors coming back to the area. Judy Praska, executive director of North County Region USA Volleyball, agrees.

"I have worked with Susan Breen



for many years in hosting our annual President's Day Festival," Praska says. "She does an amazing job and always does it with a smile. Susan truly works hard for the Bloomington Convention & Visitors Bureau. Any organization would be proud to have her on their staff."



LEADERSHIP

Julie Ann Schmidt
Owner, Lithium Logistics Group

Julie Ann Schmidt believes in helping others who want to join her industry. Her leadership has inspired many young professionals to begin their careers in hospitality.

For more than a decade, Schmidt has been an active mentor, delivering her presentation, "How the Industry Works," to audiences of students and professionals whenever she can. Just this past year, one young woman invited Schmidt to deliver her presentation to the Omaha Chapter of Meeting Professionals International. Years before, this same woman had heard the speech herself for the first time. By her admission, she credits Schmidt with helping her break into the industry, secure her first job and define her career path.

Schmidt belongs to the Minnesota MPI Chapter's Power of 2 mentorship program, maintaining between four and six long-term mentorship relationships each year. She has twice received a nomination as the MPI Mentor of the Year. "Yet, her mentoring efforts are only one way Julie Ann inspires new industry professionals," says

Kari Mueller, vice president of programming for Page Productions, who nominated Schmidt for the award.

Working to enhance programs through MPI, Schmidt recently launched the Emerging Leaders group within the Minnesota chapter, and is one of two people launching a Global Emerging Leaders group through the national chapter. "She has long advocated that the industry needs to make sure that 'falling into this role' is not the way of the future," says Mueller. "There need to be clear paths to all facets of the industry with existing leaders to show them the way. You just have to speak with Julie Ann for a few minutes to see how passionate she is about this topic."

Mentoring is such a priority for Schmidt she made it part of her business plan when she started Lithium Logistics Group in 2008. She has plans to launch a new website that will change how the industry captures and retains talent. "Julie Ann is visionary in her ability to see what the future needs," says Mueller, "but she is inspiring in her ability to inspire others."

PLANNER'S CHOICE— MY FAVORITE VENDOR

Tim McVean
Account Manager, AVEX

Last September, Tim McVean, account manager with audiovisual production services vendor AVEX, was asked to be the audiovisual chair for the sixth annual Minnesota STAR Awards, conducted by the Minneapolis-St. Paul Chapter of the International Special Events Society. "Without hesitation, he agreed," says Pete Nelson, a designer with Event Lab, who nominated McVean for the Vision Award, "and from that moment he was a crucial cog in a very large wheel."

Managing a group of 10 industry professionals, McVean led the group with a "smile on his face and a motivating personality," says Nelson, through a process that lasted seven months and required monthly and, as the event date neared, weekly meetings.

Stepping outside of his comfort zone of A/V, McVean produced timelines, managed the large committee, provided equipment and secured sponsorships. His operating budget was zero; every screen, projector and light had to be donated at no cost. "Tim's popularity within the industry, and the deep respect suppliers have for him, helped Tim collect more than \$47,000 of sponsored items," says Nelson.

"He also agreed to perform an opening musical number to start the show that was received with a standing ovation," says Nelson. All of his work for the STAR Awards was done on top of performing his regular job duties.

"If there is ever a problem, Tim has a solution," says Nelson. "Running down equipment to a venue at the last minute, providing pricing on a proposal within 24 hours, and going in as a team to pitch events is a daily routine for Tim. My job could not happen without his support, knowledge and vendor services."





EVENT OF THE YEAR

Steve Palmer

Senior Event Consultant
Mintáhoe Catering & Events

During the summer of 2009, Delta Air Lines conducted two of its first-ever “block parties,” one at its corporate headquarters in

Atlanta and another at the recently acquired corporate offices near Minneapolis. For its party in Minnesota, Delta executives called on an area planner to help: Steve Palmer, a senior event consultant with Mintáhoe Catering and Events, Picnics Plus division. It was important that the event go smoothly, since the merger with Northwest Airlines had just been completed and many staff members were new to the area and the company. The event went so well that Palmer was called upon to handle both the Atlanta and Minneapolis events for 2010.

Minneapolis’ 2010 Delta block party wasn’t your average picnic. Consider the scope. The previous year’s event drew 10,000 attendees. Delta’s budget was more than \$200,000—seemingly extravagant, but not when accounting for entertainment, food and beverage for such a large number of attendees. Palmer’s challenge was straightforward: “What’s the best we can do within this framework?”

The menu alone, complete with fun summer fare, required a plan of attack: 4,500 servings of pulled pork, 6,000 hamburgers and 15,000 fresh watermelon wedges to name only a few. All of the main entrees were grilled and prepared on-site—food was served for seven straight hours. Palmer also

helped select entertainment options, which were on a scale similar to the culinary offerings. Entertainment included large inflatable options for kids, a large climbing wall, caricaturists and even a NASCAR Micro Stock Car Race. For 2010, Delta wanted to up the musical entertainment, so Palmer helped them book the well-known group, Sister Hazel.

Steve’s trained eye also helped in the event logistics. The event itself was held at the Delta offices adjacent to their airplane hangers; Palmer helped reate an efficient layout with respect to parking, electricity accessibility, and crowd flow, dividing the area up into distinct spaces, each complete with access to beverages and restrooms.

The 2010 block party wasn’t a new event so attendees knew what to expect. Nevertheless attendance jumped from 10,000 to 15,000 guests for this past summer’s event. And while the event was not intended to increase revenue or generate leads, its goals of promoting community spirit amongst employees at such a large corporation were realized through positive feedback and praise. Palmer’s work assured that Mintáhoe will be called on to set attendance records at Delta block parties for years to come.

INSPIRATION

Pat Harris

Council Member,
St. Paul City Council

Over the past seven years, since the first deployment of Minnesota troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, St. Paul City Councilman Pat Harris has lead an organization called Serve our Troops, a team of hospitality professionals based in St. Paul providing meals for the troops and their families prior to deployment and during the holiday season.

The events, provided at no cost to the troops and their families, have ranged in size from 2,500 to more than 8,200 guests. Often these events have been conducted simultaneously at the Saint Paul RiverCentre with events at bases in Afghanistan and Iraq, with live video feeds connecting each location via satellite.

Each event requires much effort to make it run smoothly. Locally, more than 500 vol-

unteers each provide as much as 24 hours of time over a three-day period, while more than 30 volunteers spend as much as two weeks in Afghanistan and Iraq to serve each meal. Some events require every available inch of space in both the RiverCentre and Roy Wilkins Auditorium, requiring the assistance of more than two dozen dedicated hospitality vendors.

“Pat’s tireless support has made these events possible,” says Michael Meyer, executive director of sales and marketing at Wildside Caterers, who nominated Harris for the award. “Videos of these events are now used by the military to show the powerful positive effect this type of support has on both our brave soldiers and the families who sacrifice so much.”

“Pat’s leadership is that of quiet reserve,” says Meyer. “His passion for the cause in combination with his pleasant demeanor make it nearly impossible to say no. What is most impressive about the entire group is if it were not for this nomination, you would never know these events take place.”





INNOVATION
Geri Wolf
Owner, The Style Laboratory

Late last year, Geri Wolf, owner of The Style Laboratory, compiled top resources from throughout Minnesota's hospitality industry to bring event planning to life. She created a first-of-its-kind, computerized, interactive tool to aid planners in creating their best events: It's called Style Stations. Located in a retail space in Gavidae Common in downtown Minneapolis, a "style station" might best be characterized as an event planner's idea board.

Style Stations are 42-inch interactive multi-touch screens that allow potential clients, or curious passers-by, to explore, collect, arrange and organize thousands of images from nearly 60 Minnesota hospitality vendors, including florists, caterers, bakers,

venues, photographers and others. With just a few taps of the finger, planners can put together an enticing page of high-resolution pictures, choosing just the right vendors that will help them define the look of the event they wish to plan for their clients. Images can be sorted by vendor name, event type, element, item, color, style or cuisine.

"When it comes to innovation and a passion for the event industry, Geri Wolf is like no other," says Amanda Lange, director of business development for Parasole Restaurant Holdings. "[She] is leading the way for Minnesota to have a wide footprint on the event industry, regionally and nationally."

To be part of the Style Stations, vendors pay a flat annual fee. Users can use the Style Stations for free, but must pay \$5 if they want a printed, full-page, color version of their style board. The Style Laboratory will e-mail a PDF to a planner for free.

STEWARDSHIP

Jim Ibister
*Vice President of Administration,
Minnesota Wild/General Manager,
Saint Paul RiverCentre*

As the Saint Paul RiverCentre states in its own mission statement, "caring for the environment is not just good business; it's good for everyone." As a large facility for community events, the RiverCentre generates a substantial volume of waste. While recycling, energy efficiency and water conservation had already been priorities, the leaders wanted to do more.

In April 2009 the Saint Paul RiverCentre set out to become a regional leader in sustainability. After completing an initial three-month assessment, it quickly became apparent that all of the facilities on their campus—which not only includes the Saint Paul RiverCentre, but Xcel Energy Center and Roy Wilkins Auditorium as well—needed to work together if they were going to achieve their goals. Beginning in September 2009 they launched two major campuswide sustainability campaigns.

The first initiative, titled "50-50 in 2," aimed to reduce waste: increasing the amount of material recycled to 50 percent, and reducing the amount of trash produced

by 50 percent (or 1.2 million pounds) within two years. To reach the goals, the staff at the RiverCentre and Xcel Energy Center overhauled its waste infrastructure, by implementing a one-to-one trash can-recycling bin ratio throughout the facilities, and adding a trash composting program into all kitchens and concessions (among the first convention centers in the country to do so). The RiverCentre even began renovations underneath the building to accommodate its new strategy for recycling cans, glass, paper and cardboard as well as collect organic waste for composting.

They are just getting started, but by the end of March 2010, the trash rate had already been reduced by 46 percent; the recycling rate had reach 38 percent. During the second year, managers will focus on green purchasing—buying products that are high in recycled content, easily composted, or are highly efficient.

The RiverCentre campus' second initiative launched last year, called "80-20 in 3," aims to reduce the facilities' carbon footprint by 80 percent and make the buildings 20 percent more efficient in three years. Focusing on building operations, the initiative calls for greater use of renewable energy, more efficient technology and best practices for energy use. To reach these goals, new heating and cooling software



has been installed to optimize energy use across the venues. With the help of a federal grant, more than 900 light fixtures on the Saint Paul RiverCentre parking ramp were replaced with more energy efficient technology, which is expected to reduce the ramps electricity use by 47 percent.

"Their leadership in identifying and implementing sustainable practices will make a substantial difference to the environment and to their business model," writes Katie Laschen, marketing manager with Wildside Caterers, who made the nomination. "They have become a leader in their community."