

minnesota
meetings + events
BEST OF 2018

2018 HALL of FAME

Meet the dedicated professionals who the *Minnesota Meetings + Events* Editorial Advisory Board selected to induct into the magazine's Hall of Fame.

*As told to
Megan Gosch & Morgan Halaska*


Tate Carlson

LIFETIME
ACHIEVEMENT

Debbie Van Ravenhorst

REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENT; HELMSBRISCOE

1

ON RECEIVING THE LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD:

"It's such a privilege because in this industry so much of what we do is behind the scenes. When you're in your home office you have to give yourself the 'atta girls, so when you get recognized from the industry it's a real honor ... it's like, 'Wow, someone knows what I'm doing out there.'"

2

ON JOINING HELMSBRISCOE:

"I said, 'I'm in!' Because [Roger Helms and Bill Briscoe] were hotel salespeople that used to call on me when I was a meeting planner. ... We opened the Minneapolis office in 1994. I was No. 12 with HelmsBriscoe. There are now almost over 1,300 of us in 55 countries."

3

"I try to build relationships on all sides and in all different businesses in the industry, not just potential clients. It's so important because the industry is like a village. You know how they say it takes a village to raise a child? It can take a village to create a meeting or plan an event and pull it off successfully."

4

ON HOW SHE UNWINDS:

"I like to cook, read, do crossword puzzles. ... Give me a Bacardi and Diet and a video poker machine at the casino and I'm good for hours."

5

ON HER PLANS FOR THE FUTURE:

"Part of my role is recruiting and growing our team, so I'm going to put that at the forefront ... I really enjoy the training and mentoring with the new associates."



"I truly love what I do each day because there's such a variety. ... There are challenges and days I want to pull my hair out, but most of the time I'm excited to get to my computer to see what's coming through. I love pulling the rabbit out of the hat and making that magical moment happen."



BEST MEETING
PROFESSIONAL

Debbie Friedman-Hueller,

M.A., CMP, CSEP, CMM

**SENIOR MEETINGS AND EVENTS PLANNER;
LAND O'LAKES, INC.**

3

"A lot of the skills that I value most in this industry and that I think have served me well are those that I hope to pass onto my daughter: collaboration, strategic planning, creative problem solving, shared solutions, agility, creativity ... planning for the long term but really adapting and improvising in the short-term mentality."

2

"I led a speaker series for Walden University called Perspectives on the World. ... My favorite speaker was found while sitting on my couch watching Oprah's very last episode, where she named her all-time favorite guest: Dr. Tererai Trent. ... I thought she was brilliant and so inspiring ... I texted my speakers' bureau that night to start to track her down and we were one of the first groups that she spoke to publicly."

4

"Education has always been really important to me and my parents. ... Knowing that I wanted to spend my career in this industry, I wanted to make sure that I was as prepared as possible."

1

**ON THE VIRTUAL
EVENT SPACE SHE
HELPED CREATE AT
WALDEN UNIVER-**

SITY: "Through a lot of finessing we were able to create this virtual environment where we were having 1,200 students from 30 countries logged on at any given time. ... We made it look like they were walking into a conference center, or walking into a hotel. ... We created this brick-and-mortar experience, but virtually."

5

"I can't watch the Oscars without looking at their stage design and seeing how I can include a similar concept into our own celebrations ... my husband hates it that every time we go to a wedding I look at what my friends have done ... [and say], 'How can I change the scale of that and put it at our sales meeting?'"



UP-AND-COMING MEETING
PROFESSIONAL

Essa Nerenhausen

MEETINGS AND EVENTS PLANNER;
LAND O'LAKES, INC.

2

ON HER FIRST YEAR AT LAND

O'LAKES: "I really wanted to take it to heart and listen to what our internal client was saying. With the second go-around you can start to say, 'What can I change here? How can I make this a better experience?' You have to find a way to mix it up and that's the fun part."

3

ON CHOOSING HER CAREER PATH: "I was always the organizer of my family and planning came naturally to me. I was always the one planning family vacations. ... My dad is in the theater industry so I grew up going to industry events with him. When I got out of college, I had a little introduction to [planning] with my first job [as a personal assistant] and it felt like, 'Yes, this could work.'"

1

**ON HER EXPERIENCE
AT STARKEY HEARING
TECHNOLOGIES:**

"We created big events and worked with big names. When you're working with people like Desmond Tutu and Hillary Clinton, you have to be on your game ... it's an amazing opportunity to really learn how to do your best at every event and to stay on your A-game at all times."

4

MOST VALUABLE SKILL: "Really listening to the client and the company goals and being able to translate those goals into something tangible is one of the most important skills you can have [as a planner]. We're the experts and they have a vision. We need to find a way to express that."

5

**MOST MEMO-
RABLE MOMENT:**

"The first time you walk into a room of 5,000 people, the big speaker is up on stage and everyone's focused on the same goal, you just think, 'Wow, I did this!'"



BEST SPECIAL
EVENTS PLANNER

Lisa Marie Borchert, CSEP

MANAGER, CORPORATE EVENTS, EVENT PLANNING AND
RECOGNITION; THRIVENT FINANCIAL

2

**ON HER POSITION AS
DIRECTOR OF THE ILEA
MSP 2018 MINNESOTA STAR**

AWARDS: "I was asked to come back and do the Star Awards this year. I said yes for two reasons. One was because of the creative ... it's structured with a lot of collaboration from the community. It's very inspiring to me. ... And I think, too, because I've been a member of ILEA for 15 years, and ... having different generational voices on a board is important."

3

"My skill is that I'm detail oriented, so I can always tell you when the buses weren't staged right ... [an event] is never going to be perfect because people are involved. That's my saying."

4

**ON PLANNING A STELLAR
TRIP TO MEMPHIS FOR
THRIVENT EMPLOYEES
(INCLUDING THE CEO) AND
THEIR SPOUSES:**

"It was just, I think, what everyone in the industry strives for; it was a transformational experience. ... This [experience] had extra stickiness."

1

"I'm an intuitive gut operator, it's just how I work. ... I do have routine and I do have a process, but I have to give that creative side some freedom."



5

**ON GETTING HER
START:**

"I worked for a DMC here in town, and I started on the set-up crew. It's how I learned the magic of what happens before the doors open and how to think through how some things can be achieved. ... That was very foundational for me."

UP-AND-COMING
SPECIAL EVENTS PLANNER

Sarah Cash-Darvell, CSEP
SENIOR EVENT PLANNER; AUGSBURG UNIVERSITY

3

MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT: "Shiny fabric does not go well on a buffet. Definitely had a buffet fire once ... that was probably my worst experience. You're standing there, and you're thinking, 'Oh this is really happening right now. What do I do?' But you find a way to make it work."

2

ON JOINING ILEA MSP: "My husband was the one who said, 'You need to network.' I thought, 'That sounds horrible. Why would I do that?' The first meeting I attended was actually a networking meeting. ... The connections you form in this association are just life changing. After that I started attending regular meetings and really getting involved."

1

ON CHOOSING HER CAREER PATH: "I went to a career coach ... my skills just aligned with a majority of those typical for an event planner. ... Once I got started, it just felt right."



4

ON THE CLOWN COSTUME COMPANY SHE CO-OWNED WITH HER GRANDMOTHER: "I grew up on a mound of fabric and watching her sew, but really I grew up watching her be a businesswoman. I learned a lot of my business skills from watching her. ... We did business internationally and being able to talk to a customer over the phone and sell a design, a look, is so similar to events. You have to be able to get in their head, determine the client's needs and make it real for them."

5

ON EARNING HER CSEP: "For me, exams don't come easily. ... I did not think I had passed ... so it was a big accomplishment ... it's very well known in our industry, so I'm very proud to have it."

BEST SUPPLIER

Nicole French, CMP

VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES AND MARKETING;
PREMIER TRANSPORTATION

4

"My sales approach is different than some. I'm not that hard-core sales person. I'm the farmer, the cultivator of relationships ... that's exactly why I've joined organizations like MPI and ILEA ... to let these planners see me in action."

2

"I originally went to school pre-med as a chem major. My first corporate job was as an intern at 3M in their corporate research department. I worked for a fiber-optic satellite project and that entailed me being in a dark room by myself for eight hours a day ... I couldn't have music, I had to have my hair up, a lab coat on, lab glasses, no one to talk to ... I said, 'This isn't what I want to do.'"

3

ON HOW SHE UNWINDS: "I'm a certified yoga instructor ... it just wasn't necessarily to teach it—it was just to deepen my practice and understanding."

5

ON GETTING HER CMP: "If my No. 1 client is a meeting planner ... I need to be on their level and understand their needs and understand what's going on in the industry. And I'm a person who just likes to continue to challenge myself."

1

"There's this huge creative side in me that just wants to get out ... I've found a way to relay that through planning. ... I worked with a team that created an event called The Great Race, and we formed teams that did scavenger hunts one year all over St. Paul and the next year all over Minneapolis."



UP-AND-COMING
SUPPLIER

Heather Gasper

**SALES MANAGER; RENAISSANCE MINNEAPOLIS HOTEL,
THE DEPOT**

3

"My first job ever was a gymnastics coach. ... What I love about gymnastics is it taught me so many attributes that I have brought into the workforce: persistency, determination, how to be a good teammate and a good co-worker, and also gave me lifelong friends. I still coach gymnastics in the evenings because I want to make sure other girls, similar to me, grow up and take with them what I learned from gymnastics."

2

"I like to provide the client with some kind of creative home-made giveaway at the end of the visit from our head chef. ... I'll have him make mini apple pies or his macaroons ... and they're usually pretty delighted with that."

4

"I'm surrounded by really great mentors like Lisa [Schetinski] and our general manager, Michael Clark. I'm trying to soak up as much knowledge as I can while I'm working with them because they are so knowledgeable. I want to continue to grow as a person and as a hospitality professional and continue building relationships in the industry."

1

"We have 10 people on our team ... each of them comes from a different background and have different perspectives on the industry. Every day I learn something new from someone else on the team."

5

"I initially went to college to be in gymnastics at [University of Wisconsin-Stout], but I decided on hospitality as my major ... it fits perfectly with my personality." 

