

**Application for  
Event Professional  
of the Year**

**Tom Harrison,  
NC Black Bear Festivals**

**Judges' score - 9.0**

How many years has the nominee been in the industry?

8

What impact did they have on a community, organization or event?

Tom Harrison continues to out-do himself each year as Director of the NC Black Bear Festival with blistering creativity and amazing vision, execution, endurance, leadership and passion. 2022 was no exception. Following through with his commitment to change and grow the festival each year, Tom keeps raising his own bar. This year he added an air show component or what he titled a B' Air Show. Headlining the event was the US Army's Golden Knights elite skydiving performance team and his original idea to have a Bear Drop! This entailed dropping 300 parachuting plush black bears from a helicopter at the festival. Other examples of his creativity include the "Can You Outrun a Bear" Race, which is a 40 yard dash in which runners are clocked with a speed gun and get a sticker for whatever animal they outran. That list included a turtle, mouse, squirrel, rabbit, roadrunner and a bear. Tom came up with the idea to create Bear-icades which are life-size plywood bears painted black with the letters "Bear-icade" on each one to use instead of traditional barricades in the streets. He commissioned the festival's chainsaw carver to make a standing bear holding a giant peanut as a phone charging station with android and iPhone charging cords coming out of the peanut. He commissioned the world's first mechanical black bear ride, instead of a bull. Tom was even successful in creating National Black Bear Day which coincides with the Bear Festival. The list goes on! His creativity knows no bounds.

Statement of impact for nominee

Tom Harrison's commitment is not only to the North Carolina Black Bear festival, but to developing the rural area where he lives to a place where everyone who comes through will stop and be amazed and delighted by a memory from one of the events, festivals or experiences that has been implemented by this memory making magician! This gentle man, who is kind and thoughtful and soft spoken, somehow continues to set the festival world on fire with his creativity. Tom regularly gives back to the festival community through serving on the Board of the NC Festival & Events Assoc. and has been a featured several times as a presenter at the NCAF&E's ShowFest conferences. At ShowFest, Tom regularly draws a crowd between seminars seeking his ideas and advice. He has been invited to speak to students on the campus of High Point University last August about the Bear Festival and important transferable concepts. Tom Harrison is a successful entrepreneur with over 40 years' experience in the business world, having started over a dozen corporations in more than six states. Now he spends most of his time, talent and creative energy giving back to his community and the region. Back in 2015, Tom created the award-winning North Carolina Black Bear Festival and has been named "Director of the Year" three times by the North Carolina Association of Festival and Events. He was successful in creating "National Black Bear Day" in 2018. He was recognized in 2016 as the Governor's "Conservationist of the Year". Tom has served the community in the past as President of the Chamber of Commerce, The President of Downtown Development Association, and The Washington County Historical Society. With all the time he has remaining, he shares his knowledge with the Washington County Travel & Tourism as a Director and also serves on the Inner Banks Harbor Towns which consists of five ports of call on the Albemarle waterways in eastern North Carolina. Tom is the master mind behind numerous projects, events, and festivals that all have brought income to hundreds, sparked a growth in economic development and boosted opportunities to these rural areas in many ways! A few of his creations include but are not limited to a Christmas Laser Light Show in 2022 that mesmerized the crowds as they watched a light show matched with Christmas music, visiting by Christmas Characters, Santa and a Sleigh being pulled across "the sky" and all on a airport runway! The finale included firetrucks spraying water to create a glitter like effect while the lasers sparked and aligned with the music that played on the loudspeakers and on car radios! This incredible evening, brought in rave reviews from a survey that screamed we want more...and so the planning has started Christmas 2023! There is now, in what was a vacant building, a self-funded Bear-olina Welcome Center that serves to entice visitors to the area all year long, but it's a real treat for festival attendees during the NC Black Bear Festival, to see what Washington County has to offer and the tiny town of Plymouth! Last but certainly not the least of his numerous contributions is the brand new conceptualized Cypress of the Shallows – An Art Gallery Without Walls that consists of thousands of 3-dimensional sculptures standing in the waist-deep giant reflecting pool of the Albemarle Sound. You can't drive to it or walk to it. It is best experienced by the stroke of a paddle. With the Award Winning NC Black Bear Festival that is entering its' ninth year and continues to grow and serve this tiny rural community, it's creator and director is already pushing the limits to the highest of highs with a goal to make every child, mom, dad, uncle, aunt and grandparent that makes a trip to the edge of the water in Plymouth will leave with a heart full of memories that will last a lifetime crafted by this gentle soul that seems to always give with the biggest heart and never seeks anything in return. The one thing that sets Tom apart, is his deep desire to share his know ledge with every festival and event planner that he encounters. He continues to be a student of his craft in creating events, but enjoys watching other events and individuals grow, expand and love this industry with the same passion he has developed for it! One more little factoid: The results of these efforts will land Plymouth, North Carolina on the cover of the March 2023 issue of Our State Magazine! Honestly, I don't know where he gets all his ideas and energy. But regardless, he seems like an awesome candidate for Director of the Year!

Written with a deep appreciation for this dream-maker, Stephanie McIntyre, CFEE Staircase Events & Sponsorship Management



February 1, 2023

NC Black Bear Festival, founder and director, Tom Harrison, is a proven leader within the festival and event industry. Over the past six years, Tom has achieved incredible success. The award-winning NC Black Bear Festival in Plymouth, NC, has been named "Event of the Year" by the NC Association of Festivals and Events twice! That accolade is the association's highest honor and awards greatness within the industry.

Tom was named "Director of the Year" for leading the NC Black Bear Festival to new heights. Tom's extraordinary work to promote Plymouth, NC, and celebrate the black bear population in NC, is unmatched. His passion and drive to create and sustain the NC Black Bear Festival are extraordinary. Tom is continually "raising the bar" and weaving innovative ideas into the festival footprint. I enthusiastically and highly recommend Tom for any awards that recognize excellence within the industry. Tom is most deserving!

Stephanie Saintsing Naset, Director  
NC Association of Festivals & Events

An example of Tom Harrison's creativity was the "Can you Out Run a Bear" Race, which is a 40 yard dash and attendees get a free sticker with whatever animal they out ran. Runners with clocked with a speed gun.





Tom Harrison's creative idea for a Bear Drop. 300 free parachuting plush bears were dropped for the kids!



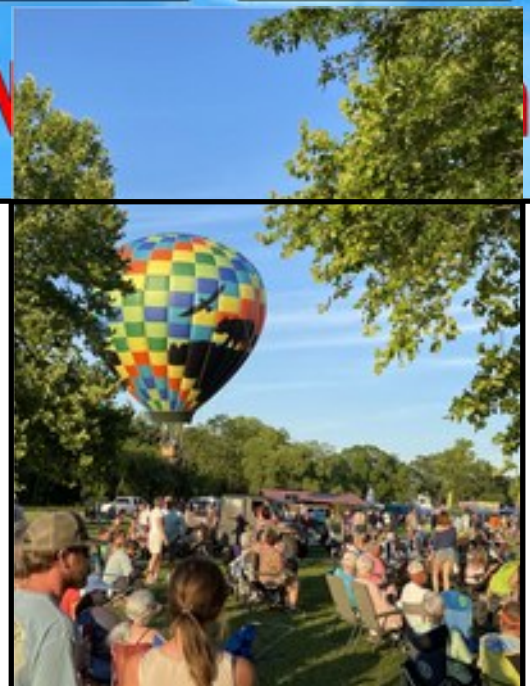


Tom Harrison's creative idea for a B'Air Show in 2022 that included, helicopter rides, biplane rides, hot air balloon rides, a flight formation team, the US Army Golden Knights elite skydiving performance team and the Bear Drop with 300 plush bears dropped from a helicopter. All of this is in addition to all the other activities we were already doing!

**Bear Fest + River Fest + Air Show = Best. Day. Ever.**



**June 4, 2022**  **www.NCBBF.com**



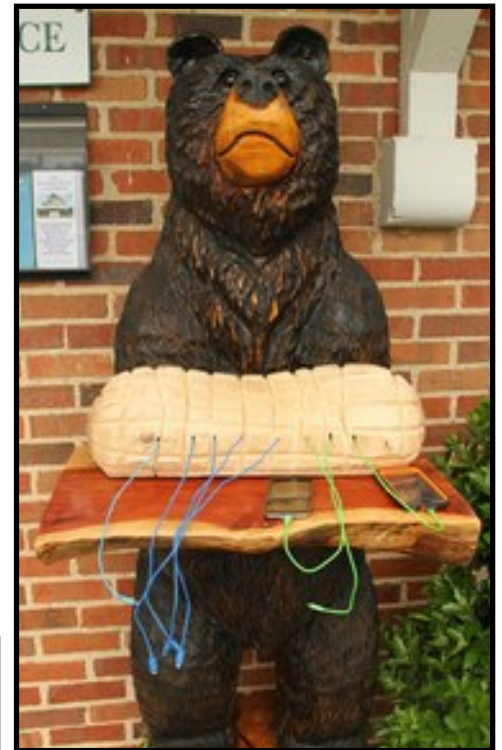


Example's of Tom Harrison's creativity, ingenuity and leadership.

Tom design and had custom made an inflatable bear entrance tunnel.



Tom was successful in creating a National Black Bear Day



Tom had our chainsaw carver make this charging station to go with our black bear theme.



Tom riding the mechanical bear he had custom made



Bear-icades Tom invented and had made.



Tom leading a Bear Tour