



The 2025 SFEA Annual Conference

Chattanooga, TN
February 23-26, 2025

Recap booklet



Join today for this and more!!





The Southeast Festivals and Events Association (SFEA) is a professional organization dedicated to supporting and celebrating the work of event planners, tourism professionals, vendors, and volunteers across the southeastern United States. Each year, the association hosts a dynamic conference that brings together industry leaders, innovators, and community champions for a few days of learning, networking, and inspiration. This annual gathering offers workshops, keynote presentations, and roundtable discussions covering everything from event logistics and sponsorship strategies to marketing trends and community engagement.



Attending the SFEA Conference is more than just professional development—it's an opportunity to celebrate creativity and excellence in the festival and events industry. One of the highlights is the Kaleidoscope Awards, which recognize standout events, marketing efforts, and partnerships that make a lasting impact on their communities. For cities and organizations, being honored by SFEA is a powerful endorsement of their work and a valuable boost to their visibility and reputation.



The conference is also a hub for idea exchange, where attendees can learn from both small-town festivals and large-scale productions. It's a place to discover new approaches, build regional collaborations, and recharge with the energy of others who share a passion for bringing people together through events. Whether you're a seasoned pro or just starting out, SFEA provides tools, inspiration, and a sense of community that makes it an essential stop on the calendar for anyone involved in festivals and events across the Southeast.





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Speakers and Sessions



Chief Gary West Fire Marshall Support Services

Gary L. West, President of Chief West Strategies, Inc., Tennessee State Fire Marshal and Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Commerce & Insurance (Retired). Former Fire & Emergency Management Consultant for The University of Tennessee advising city leaders in 330+ cities across the state on matters of safety, codes, and emergency operations. Former Fire Chief of Gatlinburg, TN with significant experience in tourism and event operations. Chief West has worked as a crowd manager and supervisor for the past 35 years at hundreds of events including contract work to oversee and coordinate safety operations.

- **Crowd Management Certification Training (Breakout)**

Attention all venue operators, event organizers, and safety personnel! Did you know that crowd manager training is required by national fire code standards for public assemblies such as nightclubs, auditoriums, ballrooms, arenas, and outdoor gatherings with a certain number of attendees? This requirement is enforced through state and local regulations, and event operators must comply. Local and state fire marshals are responsible for enforcement, and have liability for failure to enforce. Event operators also bear the risk of liability for failure to offer Crowd Managers when needed.

In response to this vital training need, we are pleased to offer a comprehensive 2-hour, in-person course developed by fire safety code experts. This course aligns with key standards, including the NFPA 101 Life Safety Code, NFPA 1 Fire Code, and the International Fire Code (IFC). The course will be instructed by a qualified and experienced instructor who can answer questions and provide real-life scenarios. Join us for an interactive classroom session where you'll learn essential emergency response protocols to manage crowds and ensure the safety of all attendees effectively.

Don't wait for a crisis to strike - equip yourself with the knowledge and skills to handle emergencies proactively. Secure your spot now and be prepared to take on the role of a proficient Crowd Manager with confidence and competence. Attendees will receive certification for attending and successfully passing. Attendees will learn how to bring the Crowd Manager programs into their event planning and to their venues. This includes information on how to get others certified for future events, examples of liability issues, specific operations, the importance of communications, and evacuating large crowds in emergency, non-emergency, and weather-related situations. Furthermore, instructions on how to use this program to benefit future events with easy access will be provided.

Link to session recording: <https://youtu.be/UBJwfX7tR24>



Anthony Russo Double Down Strategy

Anthony Russo is a Texas based, highly sought-after professional emcee and the host of Fox's Big Noon Kickoff, where his dynamic presence and engaging style captivate audiences nationwide. A celebrated keynote speaker, Russo is known for delivering powerful messages that inspire individuals to transform setbacks into opportunities, double down on their personal and professional goals, and maintain a strong sense of purpose in the face of challenges. In addition to his work on overcoming failure, Russo is a dedicated speaking coach who empowers others to refine their presentation skills, develop their unique voice, and amplify their impact with the art of storytelling and communication.

Whether working with aspiring speakers or seasoned professionals, he combines his expertise with a passion for helping others communicate with confidence and purpose. As the author of *The Art of Doubling Down*, Russo provides actionable insights and strategies for overcoming adversity and achieving success. He is also the founder of the #BeTheChange movement, encouraging communities to take meaningful action toward creating positive societal change. Beyond the stage, Russo is a sought-after speaking coach, empowering aspiring speakers to refine their craft and amplify their impact.

- **Speaking with Intention: A guide to SUCCESS (Keynote)**

Exploring the importance of purposeful speaking and how it can amplify the impact of your events and experiences. Whether you're crafting a festival, coordinating a community initiative, or building an immersive brand activation, the way you communicate your vision can move hearts and minds. This also starts with proper communication within your team and organization. Planning takes communication, logic and interpersonal connection.

**Link to session recording: <https://youtu.be/BG00Jlqu-Pw>

- **Intentional Speaking: How to be a success with communication skills (Workshop)**

In this session Anthony will help enhance the audience's ability to use their voice and hone communication skills to deliver intentional and impactful messages tailored to their audiences. This session focuses on refining the art of speaking with clarity, building rapport, and successfully navigating the unique challenges of event-based communication. Participants will leave with sharpened communication skills to foster stronger relationships, improve event outcomes, and confidently handle the fast-paced, dynamic environment of the event world.

**Link to session recording: <https://youtu.be/8IF489mfKmo>

Speakers and Sessions



Scarlett Mayfield Oak Grove Tourism Commission

A proud mom of two boys, Scarlett entered the event planning industry just four years ago and quickly made her mark. Her natural talent and dedication led her to assume the role of Event PR Manager for the Oak Grove Tourism Commission, where she plays a key role in organizing major festivals each year. With a strong background in management and a passion for creating memorable experiences, Scarlett brings both expertise and enthusiasm to her work.

Her interest in service animals stems from her mother, who spent over eight years training them. Through her career in the events industry, Scarlett has continued to expand her knowledge in this field, further enriching her professional journey.

- **Services Animals: Dos & Don'ts (Breakout)**

Join us for an informative session on handling service animals at your events. Discover the appropriate questions to ask when approaching someone with a service animal, understand the behaviors to expect from these working animals, and learn best practices for managing attendees with service animals. We'll also cover crucial don'ts to ensure a respectful and inclusive environment at your festival or event. Don't miss this opportunity to enhance your knowledge and create a welcoming space for all!

Link to session recording: <https://youtu.be/6v8NCHXQqQI>



Greg Fuson ChandlerThinks, LLC

Greg has been helping clients understand their markets using research for more than 25 years. He has developed extensive skills in survey design and management for both quantitative and qualitative areas of research. Greg has managed studies for a number of national-branded clients, including a stint as the director of research for the Country Music Association. But his passion is in marketing research for tourism destinations and municipalities, and he has worked with more than 160 communities around the country.

Some of his clients within this industry include: Pigeon Forge Department of Tourism; Tennessee Department of Tourist Development; Franklin-Williamson County Convention and Visitors Bureau; Cedarburg, Wisconsin; Jefferson, Wisconsin; Stillwater, Oklahoma; Macon, Georgia; Ascension Parrish, Louisiana; Louisiana's Cajun Coast; Saint Charles, Missouri; Bowling Green, Kentucky; Columbus, Georgia; Kentucky Lake, Kentucky; and Currituck Outer Banks just to name a few.

Greg is also deeply involved in helping determine the economic impact of festivals and events. He leads this effort for Chandlerthinks, directing many cities towards their goal of measuring the true economic impact of a festival or event. In fact, Greg is a past Chairman of the Southeast Festivals and Events Association and speaks frequently on this topic.

- **Turning Numbers into Influence: Proving Event Value to Leaders (Breakout)**

Festivals and events generate valuable data that can drive meaningful community and economic growth—but how do we ensure city leaders, residents and partners see its potential? This session will focus on strategies for effectively sharing festival and event data to secure buy-in and support from key stakeholders. Join us to discover best practices for translating insights into actionable plans that demonstrate the value of festivals and events.

**Link to session recording: <https://youtu.be/V-hNWM6E0xA>



Jason Zinser Romeo Entertainment Group/Grayscale Marketing

Jason G. Zinser brings over 13 years of expertise in communications and strategic marketing to this presentation. As the VP of Strategic Operations and Communications at Romeo Entertainment Group, Jason showcases a passion for communication and behavioral sciences to tackle AI applications in the event industry. His unique blend of experience in both traditional marketing and technology makes him ideally suited to guide you through the exciting possibilities AI offers in live event marketing.

- **AI in Live Event Marketing (Breakout)**

Join us for a fun and informative exploration of AI in the marketing of live events! Whether you're new to AI or seeking to deepen your knowledge, this introductory session will provide clarity on core concepts, terminology and frameworks that will help you understand AI and its potential applications for events of all sizes.

Link to session recording: <https://youtu.be/87L5gtY4oTM>

Speakers and Sessions



Stephen Moore RCS Productions

Stephen Moore is a leader at delivering & producing entertainment for community concerts, festivals and civic celebrations in the southeast. He works with over a hundred clients a year in all aspects of talent selection and acquisition through day of show production solutions and concert related logistics. RCS is known for producing music in non-traditional venues such as The Atlanta Botanical Garden, Stone Mountain Park, the Historical Oakland Cemetery to name a few. From the Goose Creek Concert Series near Charleston SC to the Woodstock summer concert series, Mr. Moore enjoys bringing outstanding concert experiences to large and small markets alike. Stephen has lent his extensive knowledge of concert/touring logistics to help design build teams on several community concert and event projects in Woodstock, Peachtree City, LaGrange, Stockbridge, Powder Springs, Douglasville, Gainesville and is currently consulting on a new outdoor event space at Holly Springs new downtown Development.



Wright Tilley Explore Boone

Wright Tilley is the Executive Director of Explore Boone in Boone, North Carolina. He is also an adjunct instructor in the Hospitality Management program at Appalachian State University. Wright has 35+ years of work experience in the tourism, concert, and festival & events industries. Prior to Explore Boone, he worked for the Macon GA International Cherry Blossom Festival, the Jekyll Island Authority, and RCS Productions. Wright has been a featured speaker for the event and tourism industry in the United States, Korea, and Trinidad & Tobago.

Wright is a past Chairman of the International Festivals & Events Association (IFEA) World Board of Directors and a past Chairman of the IFEA Foundation Board. He is also a past Chairman of the Blue Ridge Parkway Association and currently serves on the Southeast Tourism Society Board of Directors. Wright also volunteers on the High Country Host board, the Appalachian Summer Festival Advisory Board in Boone, North Carolina and serves as the Chairman of the Boone Area Sports Commission.

Wright has a bachelor's degree in public relations and a master's degree in recreation and tourism management from the University of Florida. He also earned the Certified Festival and Event Executive (CFEE) designation from the IFEA & Purdue University.

- **Event Safety & Security (2 Parts) (Breakout)**

This session is designed to equip participants with essential knowledge and best practices for ensuring security and safety at events. We will cover key topics, including: Risk assessments, crowd management and communication, emergency preparedness and response, weather incidents, security and collaboration with authorities . We will round out the session with real world incidents and an interactive discussion and Q&A.

Pt 1 Overview, Types of Event Emergencies, Risk Assessment, Planning

Pt 2 From Weather To Parades to Crowd Control and Crowd Psychology we will explore and discuss real event incidents and leave time for plenty of Q&A.

**Link to session recording: <https://youtu.be/R7G83CNM07A>



Stephanie McIntyre Staircase Event and Sponsorship Management

Stephanie McIntyre has been transforming events and building communities across North Carolina for decades. A proud native of the Tar Heel State, Stephanie brings an infectious energy and heartfelt passion to every project she touches. With over 22 years of experience leading the North Carolina Seafood Festival to award-winning success, she has a proven track record of turning events into vibrant, economic drivers that inspire connection and celebration. s the founder of Staircase Event & Sponsorship Consulting, Stephanie blends her expertise with her love of serving and helping others succeed. She's passionate about empowering festivals and nonprofits to grow, thrive, and build lasting partnerships with sponsors.

Having been in business for only three years, Stephanie has helped numerous organizations increase their sponsorships significantly with her thoughtful step-by-step approach, ensuring every detail is designed to elevate your event while creating meaningful experiences for attendees and stakeholders alike.

Stephanie has served as president of Southeast Festivals and Events Association and been a three time president of NC Association of Festivals and Events, along with serving on State and Regional committees and boards, she is committed to helping organizations with their sponsorship struggles by conducting speaking engagements, serving clients and sharing tips and tricks on her short but impactful emails.

An Award-Winning Certified Event Planner, Stephanie's goal is simple: to make your sponsorships a success story—one step at a time.

Speakers and Sessions

- **Infuse & Elevate: How to Seamlessly Integrate Sponsors into Your Festival (Workshop)**

Join us for a fun and informative exploration of AI in the marketing of live events! Whether you're new to AI or seeking to deepen your knowledge, this introductory session will provide clarity on core concepts, terminology and frameworks that will help you understand AI and its potential applications for events of all sizes

- **Sponsorship Made Simple: A Step-by-Step Guide to Securing More Revenue (Breakout)**

Struggling to sell your sponsorships? Not sure how to approach a sponsor for funding? Need a clear roadmap to secure more revenue? Then this session is for YOU!

Join Stephanie McIntyre, CFEE, for an energizing, hands-on session designed for new and emerging festival and event planners. Learn how to identify your event's true value and structure your sponsorship introduction deck to position your event at the front of the line. Walk away with actionable insights that will empower you to sell your event confidently for maximum impact.

Your event's financial success starts with the right approach, don't leave money on the table! Join us and take the first step toward securing bigger, better sponsorships!



Tonja Ray-Smith The Southeast Tourism Society

Tonja Ray-Smith is the Vice President of Marketing & Communications at the Southeast Tourism Society (STS), a nonprofit membership organization focused on advancing the development of travel and tourism professionals and organizations throughout the Southeast region. In this role, she oversees brand management, communications, and creative services. With 20 years of experience in the tourism industry, Tonja has held various leadership positions, including Executive Director of the Grenada (MS) Tourism Commission, Yazoo County Convention & Visitors Bureau, Greenwood Convention & Visitors Bureau, and the Grenada Area Chamber of Commerce. All of these roles were based in Mississippi. Tonja is a certified Travel Marketing Professional (TMP) and a certified Festival & Event Planner (FEP). Outside of her professional career, she is a dedicated music and festival enthusiast.

- **How to Start a Podcast: The Mic, the Mission, and the Message (Breakout)**

Curious about starting a podcast but not sure where to begin? I've got you covered! Join me as I share my journey into podcasting and the practical tools and tips that turned my idea into reality. Whether you're a total beginner or just need a nudge to get started, this session will inspire and equip you to launch your own podcast with confidence.

Link to session recording: <https://youtu.be/lyx2TWGxT25E>



Dakota Romine Fairs.com

Dakota is the Director of Sales and Strategy for Fairs.com, as a dedicated professional in the ticketing and event management industry for the past nine years, he brings expertise in streamlining operations and enhancing attendee experiences. As a member of the INAF Board of Directors and the IAFE Ticketing Committee, Dakota plays a key role in shaping industry best practices and fostering innovation within the field. Passionate about creating seamless event solutions, Dakota continues to drive efficiency and excellence in the ever-evolving world of live events.

- **Big Strategies for Tight Budgets (Breakout)**

Discover how your festival can achieve big-time results without breaking the bank! In this session, we'll dive into proven strategies used by major festivals and show you how to apply them on a smaller scale. From maximizing your social media reach to streamlining gate operations and crafting flexible ticketing packages, you'll learn how to elevate your festival's presence and efficiency—no matter the budget. Whether you're looking to boost attendance, enhance your online presence, or simplify daily operations, this talk is for festivals just like yours!

Link to session recording: <https://youtu.be/8fs7jh4gq04>

Speakers and Sessions



Michael Bleau EventHub

As the CEO of EventHub, Michael has presented dozens of educational sessions at conferences including at SFEA, IFEA, FFEA, CalFest, WFEA, Western Fairs, RMAF, IAFE, Washington Association of Fairs, and others. He shares both insights and relevant data from working with dozens of city special events teams, and hundreds of festivals, fairs, expos, and sports properties across the US and Canada, in addition to his own direct experiences as a former festival and sponsorship director. EventHub is the leading fair and festival vendor software and mapping platform in the United States.

- **Growing Vendor and Sponsor Programs -- and Revenue -- to Self-Fund City Events (Workshop)**

This session will go in-depth on the best ways to develop vendor and sponsor programs for city special events, and also discuss strategies to maximize revenue from the programs to cover or exceed production budgets. This will be relevant especially to city special events teams, and also private and non-profit organizers of non-ticketed as well as ticketed events.

Topics discussed include:

- Understanding trending vendor and sponsor categories and how to capitalize on them
- Supporting onsite vendor and sponsor programs with digital directories and sponsorship assets
- Identifying ways to generate more revenue from premium vendor packages and sponsorships- in order to keep community vendors at a minimal fee while still raising revenues
- Curating vendor placements to optimize the attendee experience, shop time, and revenue spent per vendor
- Best practices for year-over-year vendor retention
- Best practices for streamlining vendor registration and management workflows
- Cultivating in-bound sponsorship interest and increasing demand and urgency for sponsorship opportunities



Brian Ostrovsky Locable

Brian is a passionate advocate for thriving local communities who grew up in the charming Gold Rush town of Placerville, CA. As an MBA research project at the University of Washington's Foster School of Business, he sought to tackle "the local marketing problem".

As the founder and CEO of Locable, he is also the author of "Marketing 3-4-5™: The Business Owner's Guide to Effective Local Marketing in 15-Minutes or Less."

Locable's software powers nearly 200 local media websites, over a hundred Main Street Programs, and thousands of small businesses across the US.

Brian and his family recently concluded a multi-year cross-country tour in which he taught Marketing 3-4-5™ to small businesses through workshops nationwide and now resides with his family of 7 in Middle Tennessee.

- **Calendars, Directories, and Email Newsletters That Don't Suck (or Suck the Life Out of You) (Breakout)**

Let's face it—managing community calendars, business directories, and email newsletters can feel like a never-ending chore. Join us for a practical session where we'll tackle the biggest headaches with real-world examples and easy-to-follow tips. You'll learn how to keep things organized, engage your audience, and enjoy the process—without letting these tasks suck the life out of you. Walk away with simple, effective strategies you can start using right away!

**Link to session recording: <https://youtu.be/AgzoeniEMBk>

Panel Sessions



Keys to City Activation through Music

Panelists

- Ariel Omarzu, SoundCorps
- Dylan Rivera, City of Chattanooga, TN
- Shay McGowan, Business Elite & Black Excellence Awards
- Maggie O'Connor, Highland Park Porch Fest
- Allison Wolfe, Chattanooga Tourism Co.

Moderator: Kristy Graves, SoundCorps

Engaging and working with local and national artists to activate public spaces, build community, and elevate your city.

**Link to session recording: <https://youtu.be/2aEhVntPvnM>

Recording for this session by Joshua Allen of Jam Sessions Productions
www.jamsessionspro.com



Bridging Cultures & Communities: The Power of Local Partnerships

Panelists

- Hilary Jew, Atlanta International Night Market
- Jasmine Billings, City of Lawrenceville, GA
- Josh Duarte, City of Chamblee, GA

Moderator: Amy Doherty, City of Suwanee, GA

Join us for an engaging panel discussion on the impact of strategic community partnerships in fostering cultural diversity, economic growth, and inclusive engagement. Featuring key representatives from the Atlanta International Night Market, City of Chamblee, City of Lawrenceville, and City of Suwanee, this conversation will explore successful collaborations that have enhanced community events, strengthened local economies, and created meaningful cultural experiences. Panelists will share insights on best practices, challenges, and the future of community-driven initiatives. Whether you're an event organizer, city official, or community advocate, this discussion will provide valuable takeaways on building impactful and sustainable partnerships.

**Link to session recording: <https://youtu.be/fjnHlc8dXPu>



How to Design Award Winning Events and Applications

Panelists

- Emily Thompson, Visit Kingsport, TN
- Madison Chucci, Explore Gwinnett, GA
- Jessica Gross, City of Duluth, GA
- Milo Sathers, City of Lawrenceville, GA
- Maddie Ewing, Christmasville Rock Hill, SC

Moderator: Amy Doherty, City of Suwanee, GA

Panel discussion featuring winners from the previous evening discussion writing better applications and creating better events

**Link to session recording: <https://youtu.be/VZxclkzqdW4>



Exhibitors

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Magnolia Displays

<http://www.magnoliadisplays.com>



<http://neonrose.productions/>



<http://www.notyouraverageband.com>



Exhibitors



Live Sound, Lights and Staging

<https://www.facebook.com/ptproductions.us>



Pacific Traffic Control

<http://lafilmpermits.com>



<http://www.pyroshows.com>



<https://pyrotecnico.com/>



<http://www.rcsproductions.com>



<https://rickhubbardentertainment.com>



<http://RoyalRestrooms.com>



SHATTERPROOF MEDIA

<https://shatterproofmedia.com>



roger@tournamenteventlogistics.com

The 2025 SFEA Tradeshow Awards

- Most Excellent Element: Classic Tents and Events
- Most Interactive Booth: Shatterproof Media
- Fan Favorite: Royal Restrooms

Opening Night Party!!

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We kicked off the conference with a big party featuring musical acts of several genres, a photo booth, a caricature booth, a projection art display, and the Chair's Challenge bocce tournament.

The Granfalloon



Athena Rock Band

athenamusic.rocks



Snap Caricatures
snap-caricatures.com/



SHATTERPROOF MEDIA
Shatterproof Media
shatterproofmedia.com



Sweet Megg



SweetMegg.com



Citron

citron.bandzoogle.com/



Neon Rose
neonrose productions/

Da Track Addict

datrackaddict.square.site



Other entertainment

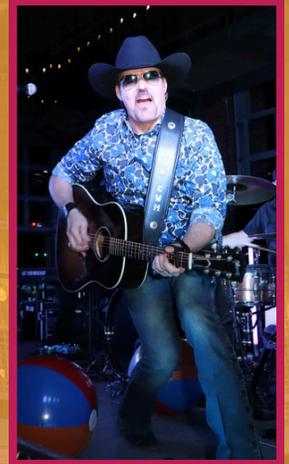
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Showcase Event Waterhouse Pavilion

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Guardians of the Jukebox
<https://www.guardiansofthejukebox.com/>



Ariel Omarzu
arielvocals.com



Ryan Perry
ryanperryofficial.com/contact



Mocking Jean
mockingjean.com



Great American Kazoo Kart
greatamericankidsshows.com



Not Your Average Party Band
notyouraverageband.com/

Other showcase acts



The Prize!



Experience Snellville



The SFEA Event Planner Games

The SFEA Event Planner Games saw the best of the best competing to do those things we all hate to do - untangling extension cords, setting up signage, changing trash bags, and folding t-shirts - and to do them faster than anyone else. The competition was stiff. The stakes were high. And one team came out on top.

Congrats to Experience Snellville!!!



MC Stephen Moore

**Go Big or Go Home
Visit Kingsport, TN**



**Lawrenceville's Lit
Lawrenceville, GA**

**The Dream Team
Experience Snellville, GA**



**Do-luth
Duluth, GA**



**Shenanigan Coordinators
Gwinnett County, GA**



Participating Teams

Sponsored by:



Kaleidoscope Awards Gala and Afterparty

The Kaleidoscope Awards recognize the incredible achievements of folks all through the region and in every aspect of the events industry, and they just keep growing. This year saw a record number of applications and organizations. We received 206 applications in 21 categories from 35 organizations – 16 of whom were first time applicants – representing 8 states, and we celebrated 26 winning organizations. Then, of course, we sang karaoke.

A note from the Sponsor:

“The Kaleidoscope Awards celebrate the incredible dedication and creativity our members pour into events that uplift and enrich their communities year after year. Classic Tents & Events is proud to support this inspiring evening—one that honors some of the hardest working, most passionate professionals in the industry. It’s a privilege to stand alongside those with such talent, heart, and commitment to making a difference through events.”

- Camile Fox, Classic Tents and Events



Decor from Installing the Holidays
InstallingTheHolidays.com



Mocking Jean
mockingjean.com



Karoke with
Not Your Average Party Band
notyouraverageband.com/

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<http://www.rcsproductions.com>



Live Sound, Lights and Staging

<https://www.facebook.com/ptproductions.us>



<http://www.eventeny.com>



<http://neonrose productions/>



eventhub

<https://eventhub.net>



<https://secondstorytravel.com/>



<http://www.fairs.com>

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UP GRADE



David Sauers,
Royal Restrooms Co-founder
SFEA Board Member

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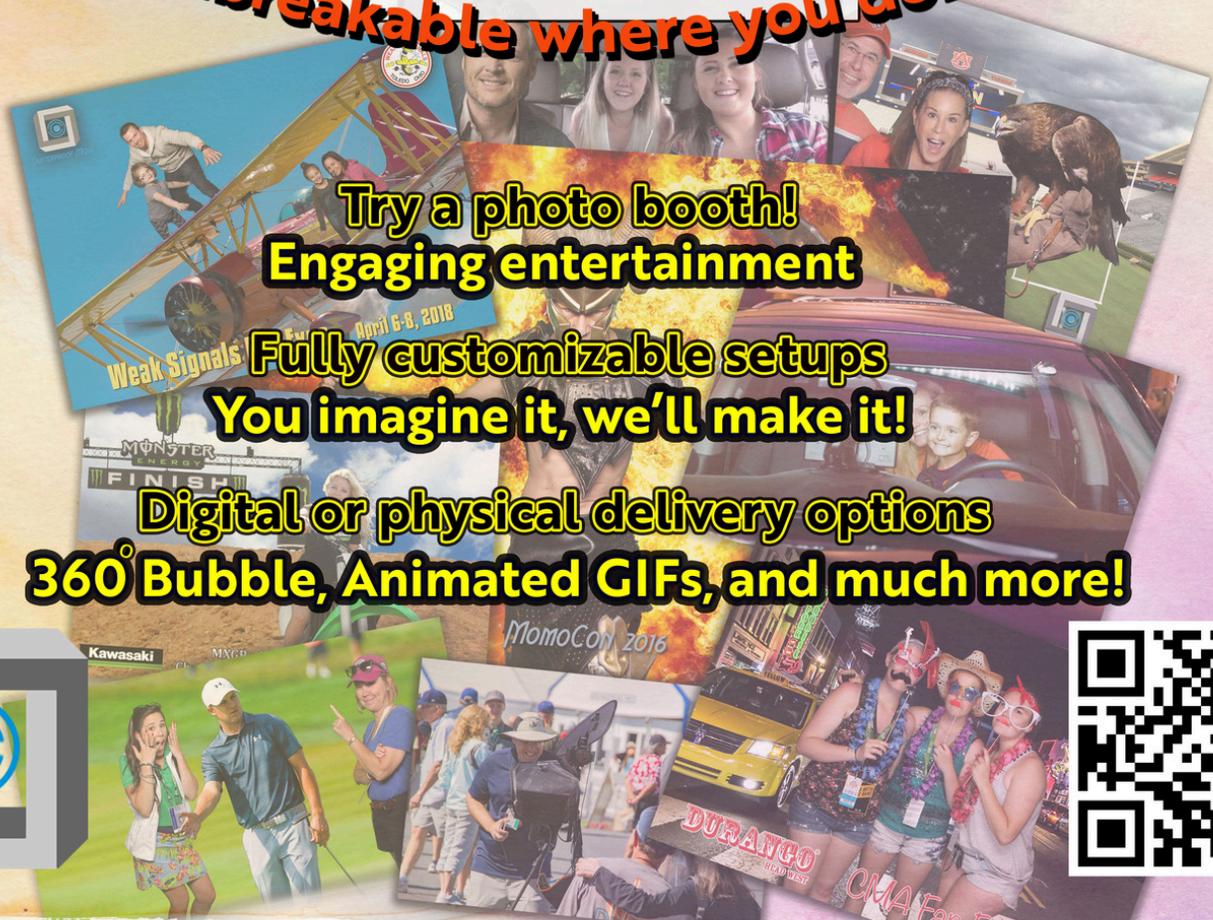
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Thank You

Thank you for joining us at this year's SFEA Conference! We're proud to support you year-round as you create impactful events that bring communities together. Stay connected, keep innovating, and we'll see you at the next one!

Contact Information :

-  423-316-2969
-  www.southeastfestivals.org
-  info@southeastfestivals.org

See you next year
in Tupelo, MS
2/22-2/25/2026