April 2, 2020

Message from Marla

The month of March had to be one of the worst set of 31 days that most of us have experienced in our lifetime. The impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic to every aspect of our lives in every corner of the world is beyond comprehension.

Today your mind will be racing to find solutions to the immediate impact of this on your personal life; and you will also be working on plans for your fair and our associate members will be scrambling to keep their businesses afloat. We are all seeking the answer to the question of WHEN WILL THIS BE OVER, and no one has the answer.

I was reminded by the manager of one of our county fairs last week that this situation is a marathon, not a sprint. She used those terms because she knew as a runner I could immediately relate. My message to you today is to think like a marathon runner:

**Planning is Paramount** – you must carefully think through every scenario, every step of this race. Unlike a racecourse that we can drive and visualize where the hills and turns will be, we must plan for as many situations at the fair that we can identify, but be prepared for the unknown.

**One Step at a Time** – each step is important, and some will be easier than others. When it feels impossible to go forward, take just one more step.

**Stay Healthy** – none of us had time to “train” for this crisis and the stress is taking its toll on our health. Concentrate on doing what is important for your health.

**Build Your Support Team** – there is nothing like rounding the corner of a race and seeing someone you know cheering you on or shouting out your name. Your IAFE is built upon the network of folks who will support you in any way they can. Reach out to lend a hand; also, don’t forget to reach out when you need a hand. We are UNITED.

**Let’s Meet at the Finish Line** – fairs and the businesses that are so closely aligned and necessary for mutual success are resilient, creative and most importantly, built by people who are fueled by passion to produce these marvelous events which brings our communities together. At this time, we cannot know what each “finish line” will look like, but I know that we will be there for each other, to celebrate, to support, to plan for recovery.

A quick update on how the IAFE is working for you:

*Advocacy*: In the US, the CARES act became law and it will have some benefits for some of our members. For most associates, SBA loans or the Paycheck Protection Program may fit for you. These are also options for fairs which are incorporated as IRS 501(c)3. Go to the Resource page for two documents which explain this. The unemployment benefits of the Act may also be of some relief. We are already gearing up for another pitch as Congress inevitably must consider additional relief. We will reach out to you when we know more. We continue to support the Canadian Association of Fairs & Exhibitions and Agricultural Shows Australia in their respective work to secure aid for fairs in those countries by providing assistance as we can.
*PR: Our messaging to the media at this time is built upon (a) the devastating financial impact the disease has upon every member and (b) how members are stepping up to the plate – just like they always do – to help their community. To that end: we need your help!

- We must have data to back-up claims of financial loss. **Expect a survey to come to the primary contact at your organization within the next week to 10 days.**

- We will be making a pitch to get fairs recognized for all they are doing with facilities (hospitals, drive-through testing, quarantine housing, warehousing, etc.) and the #FairStrong campaign. In the April 2 e-newsletter, Network News, there is a link to a survey asking fairs to let us know the things you are doing to serve your community. PLEASE complete that survey by Monday, April 6.

*Resources and Communication*: the special resource page (opens without log-in) and its dedicated members-only portal has a lot of valuable information and is updated daily. Please be sure to sign up for the PAS (personalized alert service) and you’ll get an email each time the page is updated. The “Let’s Talk” sessions have been very well received and the comments we get back is that they are very helpful and worthwhile. If you cannot participate live, the recordings are available 24/7. In addition to the “Let’s Talk” open-to-all members sessions, all the IAFE Educational Committees are convening with topic-focused calls to share ideas on specific topics (i.e. agriculture, marketing, competitive exhibits, etc.). Additionally, we are engaging other small group conversations as are appropriate to the situation, sharing ideas.

Like so many of you, the IAFE team is working from their homes; and we are working diligently for you! Our phone is answered by Shereé during regular business hours and she will pass your message on to the appropriate staff member. Matt is processing orders for activity books and Read and Win ribbons. Kathy is doing database work to make sure our messages are getting sent out to you. Rebekah, Missy and Brian are working on a special edition of Fairs & Expos that will focus on the current situation as well as organizing Instagram concerts every Tuesday and Thursday, and keeping www.fairsandexpos.com updated. Brittney is not only working on launching the contests and new member communication but also running the social media #FairStrong program. Lori is organizing cutting edge education that you can use right now, building toolkits, and putting the final touches on our virtual IFM Summit to be held in early May. Steve and Kate are working on the Convention plans, analyzing every aspect and working through the various scenarios we may face come fall. Denise is keeping a close eye on the bank account and getting bills paid. And Rachel is the IT guru making it all possible for us to work from home.

Stay safe. Stay healthy. Stay strong. #FairStrong