THE VALUE OF MPI

MPI DALLAS/ FORT WORTH CHAPTER



AND

THE PEOPLE BEHIND IT

FALL ISSUE Q4 2026

THE VALUE OF MPI

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

ZHANNA ATHERTON 2026 PRESIDENT

When I began this year as your President, I shared a theme that was deeply personal to me: *Every Story Matters.* At the time, I spoke about the people who had shaped my own journey, the opportunities that challenged me to grow, and my belief that each of us brings something uniquely valuable to this chapter.
As I write my final President's Message of the year, I find myself thinking about that theme a little differently.

I've learned that Every Story Matters is not simply about giving everyone an opportunity to tell their story. It is about taking the time to listen to one another. It is about recognizing the person who quietly volunteers behind the scenes, welcoming the member who walks into an event for the first time, encouraging someone to step into leadership before they are completely sure they are ready, and celebrating the people who continue to give their time and talents to our industry.

That is where the real strength of MPI DFW lives.
Throughout this year, I have had the privilege of watching our members connect, learn, volunteer, celebrate one another, and step forward in new ways. And while our programs and events are an important part of what we do, I believe the greatest measure of a chapter is the community we create around them. Leadership has taught me something similar. We often think leadership is about having the answers or setting the direction. This year has reminded me that some of the most meaningful moments of leadership come from creating space for other people to contribute, trusting them to lead, and recognizing that the story we are building together will always be greater than anything one person could create alone.

That feels especially meaningful as MPI DFW looks toward its next chapter. 49 years of leaders, volunteers, members, partners, friendships, ideas, and experiences have shaped the chapter we know today. We inherited an incredible story, and each of us has the opportunity to add something meaningful to it before passing it forward.

There is still more of our year ahead, and I am not ready to close this chapter just yet. Instead, I want to challenge each of us to be intentional about how we finish it.

Show up. Make the introduction. Invite someone to the table. Volunteer. Mentor someone. Ask for mentorship yourself. Share an idea. Take the opportunity that makes you a little uncomfortable. And perhaps most importantly, make space for someone else's story.

Because when we do that, *Every Story Matters* becomes more than the theme of a year. It becomes the kind of community we choose to build.



MPI | 2024 CHAPTER AWARD TOP PERFORMING

MARCOM 2026: A YEAR OF STEWARDSHIP, SERVICE, AND BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

LAURYN BROWN, VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS



Stewardship is about more than managing responsibilities; it is about honoring the trust placed in you, recognizing the value of what has been entrusted to your care, and making thoughtful decisions that strengthen an organization for those who follow. Throughout 2026, Marketing and Communications (MarCom) has embraced this philosophy by focusing on strengthening its foundation, preserving the chapter's identity, and establishing a framework for continued growth.

An important part of this responsibility has been the thoughtful stewardship of the MPI DFW brand. Maintaining a recognizable and consistent identity requires intention, strategy, and an understanding of the organization's mission and values. To support this effort, I developed a comprehensive, streamlined design and media plan to provide direction for communications, content development, promotional initiatives, and brand consistency. The goal is to ensure that our chapter's voice, accomplishments, and contributions are represented with purpose and integrity.

One of the most meaningful developments has been the evolution of the chapter newsletter into a magazine-style publication. This has been a personal goal and an opportunity to elevate how MPI DFW shares its story. A publication should be more than a collection of announcements; it should reflect the people, accomplishments, experiences, and contributions that define an organization. My hope is that this evolution creates something members value, something that represents the chapter with distinction, and something that can continue to grow as part of its legacy. We have also taken important steps toward establishing a dedicated MarCom organizational structure for 2027 and beyond. By defining committee responsibilities, clarifying roles, and establishing greater accountability, we are creating a structure that supports continuity and provides future leaders with a stronger foundation. Good stewardship means recognizing that leadership is temporary, but the systems, relationships, and resources we leave behind can have a lasting impact.

Having the opportunity to serve on the Executive Board of Directors and contribute to the chapter's publications, brand development, and communications strategy is something I do not take lightly. It has truly been an honor to serve you and to have been entrusted with this responsibility. I am humbled and grateful for the confidence placed in me and for the opportunity to contribute my experience, creativity, and perspective to an organization that brings together such an accomplished community of professionals.

As we look toward 2027, I believe the greatest measure of our work will not simply be what we accomplished during our time of service, but what we leave in place for those who come next. Stronger processes, clearer responsibilities, consistent communications, an elevated publication, and a more defined departmental structure are all part of that commitment.

Stewardship is not about leaving your mark; it is about leaving things better than you found them. This has has been a genuine goal, this year in this role as your VP of Marcom.

That has been the guiding principle behind MarCom's work in 2026: to serve with intention, protect and strengthen the chapter's identity, honor the trust placed in us, and build a foundation that future leaders can continue to grow. I am proud to have been part of that journey and grateful for the opportunity to serve MPI DFW.

MARCOM 2026: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR WHAT'S AHEAD

MARIEKE FRANZ, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS



Throughout 2026, MarCom has taken a notably behind-the-scenes approach, focusing less on visibility and more on building the structure, processes, and connections needed to support the organization moving forward. While much of this work may not have been immediately visible, several important developments have helped lay the groundwork for a more streamlined and coordinated department.

Our responsibility as leaders is not simply to manage what exists today, but to create something stronger for tomorrow.

Historically, and including this year, MarCom has operated primarily under the leadership of the Vice President and Director, without a formally established committee structure. Recognizing the importance of sustainability, shared responsibility, and continuity, one of our primary objectives has been to begin building a departmental framework that extends beyond individual leadership roles. Through process improvements, departmental liaisons, and the development of a formal organizational structure for 2027 and beyond, we are taking meaningful steps toward creating a more collaborative, accountable, and sustainable department. This year has also brought opportunities to strengthen our chapter's brand, expand our digital presence, develop a strategic media plan, and elevate our newsletter into a magazine-style publication that better reflects the accomplishments and professionalism of our membership.

As the 2026 Director, I view these efforts as an investment in more than the department itself. They are an investment in the chapter's identity, institutional continuity, and future leadership. Stewardship means recognizing what has been entrusted to us and leaving it more organized, defined, and prepared for those who follow.

As we look toward 2027, our focus shifts from establishing the foundation to building upon it. The work accomplished this year represents an important step toward a MarCom department with greater structure, shared ownership, and a clearer strategic direction.

It has been an honor to serve MPI DFW and to contribute to marketing, and communications to an organization so deeply connected to the meetings and events industry. I am grateful for the trust, collaboration, and opportunity to serve on the Executive Board of Directors.

COLLEEN RICKENBACHER LEADERSHIP AWARD NOMINATIONS

MPI DALLAS/FORT WORTH



Each year at this event the Chapter presents our highest leadership award to an outstanding meeting professional, The Colleen Rickenbacher Leadership Award. This legacy award, named after our own esteemed chapter member - Colleen A. Rickenbacher, CMP Fellow, CSEP, CPC, CSECP - recognizes leadership contributions of an MPI D/FW member who holds the CMM Certification, the CMP Credential, or both, and continues to hold industry education, volunteerism and leadership at an elevated level.

Earning a professional certification promotes industry standards, practices, and ethics, and establishes commitment as an industry leader. The MPI D/FW chapter has long honored its members who furthered their industry education with a special event, The CMM & CMP Breakfast.

As a model of ideas and impact, the individual receiving this award is recognized by peers who have advanced vision, knowledge, and involvement within the meetings industry.
Consider who should will nominate for this prestigious award and look for the announcement for the call for nominations soon.

DESIGN CONCEPT LAURYN BROWN, VP OF MARCOM

THE VALUE & IMPACT OF OUR

OUR 2026 IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

TIM ALTBAUM, CEO

VARIO PRODUCTIONS
DALLAS, TX



Legacy of Leadership: Recognizing Tim's Impact on MPI DFW

Leadership is not defined solely by a title or a term of service, but by the lasting impact one makes on the people and organization they serve. As Past President, Tim has demonstrated a genuine commitment to MPI DFW through his leadership, dedication, and continued investment in the chapter and its members.

One of the most meaningful aspects of Tim's leadership has been his willingness to create opportunities for others. He understands that strong leadership is not about standing at the forefront, but about making room for others to grow, develop, and succeed. Throughout his service, he has demonstrated a commitment to lifting others professionally, encouraging their development, and helping create opportunities for individuals to expand their skills, confidence, and leadership potential.

His contributions reflect the importance of mentorship, collaboration, and investing in the next generation of industry leaders. By recognizing the potential in others and providing opportunities for them to step forward, Tim has helped strengthen not only the chapter but also the professional community it represents.

Perhaps one of the greatest measures of his leadership is that service does not end when a presidential term concludes. His continued engagement and willingness to support others demonstrate that meaningful leadership extends well beyond a position or title.

On behalf of MPI Dallas/ Fort Worth, we recognize and appreciate Tim's contributions, his commitment to our organization, and the positive influence he continues to have on our chapter and our industry. His legacy is reflected not only in what he has accomplished, but also in the people he has encouraged, supported, and helped elevate along the way. We want to genuinely Thank you, Tim, for your leadership, your generosity and your continued commitment as servant leader.

JW MARRIOTT DALLAS ARTS DISTRICT: A SKYLINE STAY IN THE HEART OF CULTURE

MPI DALLAS/FORT WORTH



With its striking vertical design, elevated dining, and connection to Dallas' cultural heart, JW Marriott Dallas Arts District is more than a place to stay—it is a destination that captures the energy and sophistication of modern Dallas for meetings and events.

Rising 23 stories above downtown Dallas, the JW Marriott Dallas Arts District offers a fresh perspective on luxury hospitality, where contemporary architecture, elevated experiences, and the city's vibrant cultural scene converge. Built vertically above an existing parking structure, the hotel places its lobby, guest amenities, and dining experiences on the 11th floor and above, creating a distinctive arrival framed by sweeping skyline views.



A special thank you to Courtney White and the JW Marriott Dallas Arts District for their generous sponsorship and support for hosting recent board meeting. Your partnership helped make this experience possible, and we are truly grateful for your hospitality, generosity, and commitment to creating meaningful connections.

2027 BOARD RETREAT PARTNERSHIP FEATURE

VISIT WACO WACO,TX

INTRODUCTION



The MPI Dallas/Fort Worth Chapter would like to extend a sincere thank you to our sponsors, Visit Waco and Hilton, for their generous sponsorship and valued support of our October 2027 Incoming Board-Year Retreat. Their dedication to creating memorable experiences for industry leaders is greatly appreciated and makes a meaningful impact.

The evening offered our leadership team a wonderful opportunity to step away from the boardroom, build relationships, and enjoy time together in a relaxed setting. Through interactive team-building activities, our leaders engaged in friendly conversation, encouraged collaboration, and strengthened the connections that make our chapter special. The experience was a great reminder of the value of teamwork, community, and shared experiences.

We deeply appreciate Visit Waco's and Hilton's partnership and generosity in helping make this retreat memorable. Their commitment to fostering connections and delivering exceptional experiences embodies the welcoming spirit of hospitality and collaboration that makes our industry thrive.

Thank you, Visit Waco and Hilton, for your continued support of MPI D/FW.

CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF. THE FUTURE IS BOARDING NOW.

MPI DALLAS/FORT WORTH



This past August, the Education Department of the MPI DFW Chapter invited meeting and event professionals to gather at one of the world's most dynamic transportation hubs —DFW Airport—for an experience designed to inspire, connect, and prepare us for what's ahead. Aptly titled "Cleared for Takeoff: The Future Is Boarding Now," this signature event is more than a meeting; it's a launchpad for the future of our industry.

Airports symbolize movement, innovation, and endless possibilities. Every day, DFW Airport connects people, ideas, cultures, and commerce from around the globe. That spirit of connectivity makes it the perfect setting for conversations about the evolving meetings and events profession. As technology advances, attendee expectations shift, and new opportunities emerge, our industry continues to reinvent itself.

RECENT EVENT TOOK PLACE AT:
DFW AIRPORT & DALLAS FORT WORTH WESTIN HOTEL
ON: 20TH OF AUGUST 2026

The gate is open. The destination is opportunity. The future is boarding now—and the MPI DFW Chapter was happy to welcome all aboard for an unforgettable experience at DFW Airport.



VP OF EDUCATION
CINDY MASO



DIRECTIOR OF EDUCATION
KIM ZOULEK



OFF TO THE RACES AT GRAND PRAIRIE LONE STAR PARK

MPI DALLAS/FORT WORTH



RECENT EVENT: RACING TOWARD THE FUTURE

And they're off—and what a winning day it was! MPI D/FW members and guests traded the ballroom for the racetrack at **Lone Star Park in Grand Prairie** for *Fall Derby: MPI D/FW in the Winner's Circle*—an afternoon filled with quarterhorse racing, networking, great food and drinks, games, fashion, and plenty of fun.

Five specially sponsored **Winner's Circle races** kept everyone cheering from the rail, while the day provided a wonderful opportunity to gather with friends, colleagues, and fellow MPI members in a relaxed and lively setting.

And there was an especially meaningful connection happening beyond the track. **Emerging Leaders Hospitality students** joined us for the day, giving them the opportunity to meet MPI members, hear about their careers, and talk about what a future in the hospitality industry can look like. It was a wonderful way to connect tomorrow's industry professionals with those already making their mark.

The biggest win of the day, however, was the incredible support for MPI D/FW scholarships and the MPI Foundation. **Thanks to our generous race sponsors and the participation and generosity of our members, we raised more than $5,100!** These funds will help support MPI D/FW chapter scholarships and the MPI Foundation, investing in professional development and the future of our industry.



VP OF SPECIAL EVENTS
CHERYL BATZING



DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL EVENTS
SANDY DREGER

HORSE RACING FUNDRAISER EXPERIENCE
EVENT HAPPEND: ON THE 17TH OF OCTOBER, 2026
LONE STAR PARK, GRAND PRAIRIE

OFF TO THE RACES AT GRAND PRAIRIE LONE STAR PARK

MPI DALLAS/FORT WORTH



RECENT EVENT: RACING TOWARD THE FUTURE

A huge MPI D/FW thank-you goes to our Winner's Circle race sponsors:

- **AMS Andrews Media Services**
- **Arlington Convention & Visitors Bureau**
- **Diversified Media Production Group**
- **Foster + Fathom**
- **Visit Grand Prairie**

The fun continued off the track with bar games and a photo booth, generously donated by **Texas Entertainment Group**, while the Derby Style Bar, sponsored by the **Arlington Convention & Visitors Bureau**, gave guests the chance to embrace a little race-day glamour.

And thanks to Rana Floral, our tables were dressed to impress with amazing centerpieces.

Our **Raffle and Wine Pull** added even more excitement, with fabulous donated items up for grabs. A special thank-you to **AlphaGraphics-Irving** for sponsoring our raffle tickets and helping bring a little more fun to the fundraising. Add in wonderful food and drinks, enthusiastic cheering, meaningful networking, and plenty of laughs, and it was a FUNdraiser in every sense of the word.

The horses ran, the fascinators flew, the wine was pulled, new connections were made, and more than $5,100 was raised for a very good cause.

A heartfelt **thank you to everyone who attended, sponsored, donated, volunteered, participated, and helped make Fall Derby a winner!** Your support makes a difference—not only for MPI D/FW members pursuing professional development, but for the future of our industry.

Now that's something worth celebrating in the Winner's Circle!

THE VALUE & IMPACT OF OUR

OUR MEMBERS

KARA ADAMS
INNOVATX
DALLAS, TX



ABOUT KARA ADAMS

Kara Adams has more than 18 years of event management experience, including over 16 years specializing in corporate events, she brings a wealth of expertise in planning and executing successful meetings and events for major corporations around the world. Known for her attention to detail, project management skills, and business development background, she excels at creating memorable experiences that align with strategic goals. Thriving in fast-paced environments, she embraces challenges with creative solutions and a commitment to exceeding expectations through inspired events.

VALUE OF MPI THROUGH MEMBERSHIP

INNOVATX EVENTS

Kara Adams of Innovatx Events has built a career planning events around the world, adapting her path when COVID shifted her focus to the Dallas–Fort Worth market. Recognizing the importance of community, Kara joined MPI shortly after starting her new role and quickly discovered the value of connection. Through MPI, she has gained industry knowledge, trusted vendor and client relationships, and mentors who inspire her growth. Beyond the professional benefits, MPI has brought Kara lasting friendships, greater confidence, and new perspectives that continue to shape her both personally and professionally.

THE VALUE & IMPACT OF OUR

OUR MEMBERS

Donna Barrett Eyler
Engage Productions Inc.
DALLAS, TX



MEET DONNA BARRETT EYLER

Founded in 2019, Engage Productions Inc. was born from a time of unprecedented change, transforming decades of experience across events, entertainment, film, print, and photography into a dynamic video production company. Donna Barrett Eyler and her team help businesses tell their stories through engaging, purposeful visual content that builds brand recognition, strengthens customer connections, and brings their message to life. From corporate and promotional videos to event coverage and documentaries, Engage Productions helps clients connect with their audiences—one frame at a time.

VALUE OF MPI THROUGH MEMBERSHIP

Being a member of MPI DFW has been one of the most impactful decisions of Donna's career. Over the years, this organization has opened the door to countless business opportunities and meaningful partnerships that have helped her grow both professionally and personally.
The education offered through MPI DFW is unmatched—continually providing fresh insights, industry trends, and skill-building sessions that keep her inspired and ahead of the curve.
Most importantly, MPI DFW is truly a community of dedicated, passionate event professionals who support one another and elevate our industry. Donna is grateful for the connections she has made and the opportunities that have come from being part of such a wonderful organization.

THE VALUE & IMPACT OF OUR

OUR MEMBERS



JOYCE FLETCHER,
MERCH ENTHUSIAST LLC

DALLAS, TX

ABOUT JOYCE

With 32 years of experience in the printing and promotional marketing industry, Joyce Fletcher brings creativity, strategy, and a passion for branding to her leadership of Merch Enthusiast LLC. She specializes in custom merchandise, promotional strategies, and company eStores that elevate brand recognition, strengthen employee engagement, and foster lasting loyalty. Joyce believes great merchandise should be more than a giveaway—it should be memorable, meaningful, and worth keeping. Through thoughtful design and personalized solutions, she helps businesses bring their brands to life, one meaningful product at a time.

VALUE OF MPI THROUGH MEMBERSHIP

Joyce Fletcher's relationship with MPI DFW began in 2011 and has continued to shape her professional journey and personal connections within the events industry. After rejoining in November 2024, shortly after launching Merch Enthusiast LLC, she became active in the chapter's Membership Committee once again.

Through MPI DFW, Joyce has cultivated valuable relationships that have led to new clients, referrals, and business growth while gaining knowledge to better serve the events community. For Joyce, the true value of MPI DFW extends beyond professional opportunities—it's the welcoming community, lasting friendships, and meaningful connections that make her involvement so rewarding.

THE VALUE & IMPACT OF OUR

OUR MEMBERS

GISELLA KAENDLER
OWNER, PLANT & SIP

DALLAS, TX





PLANT&SIP

MEET GISELLA

Gisella Kaendler is passionate about creating elevated, interactive experiences that bring people together through creativity, wellness, and connection. Through Events GK LLC, she specializes in luxury corporate activations, team-building workshops, plant experiences, and custom events designed to inspire meaningful connections and lasting memories. Her signature experience, Plant and Sip, has earned media attention, featuring Gisella and her business on CW33 and Good Morning Texas with WFAA. Whether designing a corporate gathering or a hands-on plant experience, Gisella transforms ordinary events into memorable moments that bring people together.

The Value of MPI

For Gisella Kaendler of Events GK LLC, joining Meeting Professionals International has already made a meaningful impact. Though she has been a member for only a few months, Gisella has built valuable connections with inspiring industry professionals and gained new perspectives through educational seminars. Each experience has contributed to her personal and professional growth, reinforcing the value of community and continued learning. Gisella looks forward to strengthening relationships, expanding her knowledge, and making the most of all that the MPI community has to offer.

FORT WORTH'S STARRING ROLE IN THE FUTURE OF ENTERTAINMENT

MPI DALLAS/FORT WORTH

Fort Worth is no longer just a backdrop for great storytelling—it is becoming one of the most important production hubs in America. Thanks to Fort Worth native Taylor Sheridan and hit series such as 1883, Landman, Lioness and Frisco King the Dallas-Fort Worth region has emerged as a destination for film, television, and live entertainment production. Productions connected to Sheridan have generated jobs, attracted investment, and brought national attention to North Texas.

The impact extends far beyond the camera. Every production fuels opportunities for local event professionals, hospitality workers, caterers, venues, transportation providers, musicians, and creative talent. As more productions choose Dallas/ Fort Worth, the region's entertainment ecosystem continues to grow, creating a ripple effect that benefits businesses of every size.

Sheridan's commitment to filming in Texas has also helped showcase the unique character of Fort Worth to audiences around the world. From the historic Stockyards and downtown streets, to the region's western heritage and modern venues, DFW offers an authentic setting that cannot be replicated elsewhere. Productions like 1883, Landman, and Lioness have demonstrated that world-class content can be created right here at home.



Timeless Traditions, Bright Beginnings

HOLIDAY CELEBRATION & 2027 BOARD INDUCTION

MPI D/FW Chapter

UPCOMING EVENT:

Amid the sparkling décor, refined dining, and an atmosphere of festive grandeur, guests will celebrate the season while honoring the relationships and accomplishments that have shaped another remarkable year. The evening's centerpiece will be the induction of the 2027 MPI Dallas/Fort Worth Board of Directors—a distinguished tradition recognizing the visionary leaders who will guide the chapter into its next era of innovation, collaboration, and excellence.

The Holiday Induction Ball is a celebration of the moments that bring us together and the vision that propels us forward. As industry leaders, innovators, and emerging professionals gather for this distinguished evening, the event serves as a tribute to the collaboration, creativity, and excellence that have shaped our chapter throughout the year.

Against a backdrop of timeless elegance and festive sophistication, guests will enjoy an evening of inspired conversation, exceptional hospitality, and shared celebration—culminating in the induction of the 2027 Board of Directors and the beginning of an exciting new chapter for MPI Dallas/Fort Worth.



VP OF SPECIAL EVENTS
CHERYL BATZING



DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL EVENTS
SANDY DREGER

SAVE THE DATE

DECEMBER 8TH, 2026

THE GLASS CACTUS, GAYLORD TEXAN

REGISTRATION COMING SOON

SPONSORSHIP

HONORING OUR ANNUAL PARTNERS

A MESSAGE FROM SPONSORSHIP

THE VALUE & IMPACT OF SPONSORSHIP

Sponsorship with MPI offers more than logo placement—it creates a direct pathway to meaningful engagement within the meetings and events industry. Through sponsorship, businesses gain access to a network of decision-makers, planners, and industry leaders who are actively seeking trusted partners. It's an opportunity to move beyond traditional marketing and instead build authentic relationships—ones that often translate into long-term collaborations and repeat business.

Equally important is the credibility that comes with association. Being seen as a supporter of professional development and industry growth positions your organization as invested, reliable, and forward-thinking. It signals that you're not just participating in the market—you're helping shape it.

In an era where connections drive success, MPI sponsorship is not just a promotional tool—it's a strategic investment in visibility, reputation, and lasting business growth.