

Facilitator — April/May 2016



Chairman’s Award of Excellence

Sherleen Mahoney

The best-kept secret at this year’s annual conference in Nashville was the presentation of the Award of Excellence to Tracy Tomson, Executive Director of RFMA.

For the past 11 years, Tomson has leveraged her skills in marketing, event planning and organization to help grow RFMA from a galvanized start-up association to a prominent organization that is a hallmark of the industry.

RFMA’s success is inextricably linked to Tomson’s leadership and talents.

Championed by dedicated and engaged members and guided by Tomson, RFMA has indelibly changed the restaurant facility management profession. The association has promoted and elevated the role of restaurant facility professionals. It has connected them with trusted vendor partners who work together to achieve shared goals. And it has invited the franchisee community into the fold.

Over its 11 years, RFMA has amassed nearly 1,300 members; established RFMA Gives; created a certification program; hosted educational programs; and provided many platforms for members to connect, share ideas and trade best practices.

“Tracy is the marketing genius behind most everything we did as an upstart organization and continues to apply these skills on our members’ behalf,” said Jack McNertney, CRFP, Vice President of Development, Facilities and Asset Management at Red Lobster. “She’s also a recruiting guru; the team she has built is diverse in skills and an asset to the organization. And she is a risk-taker who steered us through the early days and kept the Board grounded when success came our way.”

Tomson is a consummate leader with an impeccable work ethic, a high level of integrity and excellent communication skills. She’s passionate about the organization, and it shows.

“She is involved in all things, but also far enough away to let people fulfill their roles and succeed,” added Danny Koontz, Vice President/Director of Operations at VMC Facilities. “She has a style that makes her very comfortable to talk—discuss, disagree, agree, support, challenge—with.”

“Tracy is creative and always thinking outside the box for ways to get our members excited and engaged,” said Maria Johnson, CRFP, Facilities Director at Cotton Patch Café. “She’s positive and motivated to always do more to achieve our goals. She’s a very thoughtful person when it comes to interacting with others. You can always count on her. I am a previous Chair, and she was a great partner when it came to guiding and encouraging me through the duties and responsibilities. I couldn’t have asked for a better person to work along side during my time on the Board.”

Tomson also has a remarkable ability to bring people together, an essential quality to lead an influential association.

“She can relate to and connect with all the different types of personalities you find in the facilities world,” said Tim Corcoran, Corporate Projects Department at Jack in the Box. “I am extremely thankful to have the opportunity to get to know and continue to learn from her.”

“She has taken a very diverse group of people—vendors, restaurant facilities leaders, board and staff—and united them in a common goal; that is very difficult to do,” Koontz said. “All of the former and current Board Chairs are very different in style and leadership. It speaks to Tracy’s ability to find the connection, adapt and continue to provide great leadership.”

It is clear Tomson is RFMA’s heart and soul. The members and staff look to her as the association’s guiding light.

“As a RFMA restaurant member, Board member and former Board Chair, my experience with Tracy has been exceptional from the start,” said Roger Goldstein, CRFP, Executive Director Facilities at Panda Restaurant Group. “Her professionalism and team leadership result in smooth operations for RFMA and the sustained catalyst for the organizations growth. Tracy is an intuitive and forward-thinking administrator working with the RFMA staff and the volunteer Board to accomplish the fantastic growth and outstanding service that our organization is meant to be for all of the members.”

For her unwavering dedication and efforts, several members of the RFMA team and Kevin Carringer, the 2015 RFMA Board Chair and Ruby Tuesday’s Director of Facilities, had wanted to do something extra special for Tomson.

“We wanted to praise her publicly and give her credit for a job well done,” Carringer said. “She’s a selfless leader who puts the

organization and its members before herself. For that, RFMA has benefited greatly. We are blessed to have her at the helm.”

During the awards ceremony, Carringer presented a surprised Tomson with the Award of Excellence.

“I thought Tim was calling Kevin up to the stage to pull a prank on him,” Tomson said. “When Kevin started talking I thought, ‘Uh-oh; Kevin is going rogue. This is not in the script!’”

When Tomson realized what was happening, she felt very touched and a little embarrassed.

“I have a great relationship with our Board of Directors, and they are always very good about acknowledging our staff and showing their appreciation for the work we do,” she said. “But I certainly didn’t expect to receive that kind of public recognition, and I was caught completely off-guard. It was quite emotional. The staff was in on the secret, and they loved having pulled it off without my knowing.”

The award is very special to Tomson. It reinforces why she loves being a part of RFMA.

“It is such a warm and supportive culture, and we are all about recognizing and rewarding our members and volunteers for their commitment,” she said. “That is why we created the RFMy awards. It was a true honor to be on the receiving end of that myself.”

Tomson has earned a high degree of trust with the Board of Directors, which gives her and her team the creative freedom to continue exceeding expectations.

“I want the Board to know how much the staff and I appreciate them and the support they provide that allows us to do our jobs and serve our members,” Tomson said. “They trust us to do what’s best for RFMA and let us know how much they value our contributions, which makes for a wonderful work atmosphere.”

Under Tomson’s prolific leadership, RFMA can expect many more years of continued success and growth.