

VOICE

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Members of NAPAMA: Pamela M. Green, recipient of the 2017 NAPAMA Liz Silverstein Award for Agent-Manager of the Year.

The service organization for agents and managers looks toward the next 40 years.

BY KRISTEN ANDRESEN

They say life begins at 40. If North American Performing Arts Managers and Agents is any indication, the same holds true for organizations.

As NAPAMA marks this milestone anniversary, its role in the field is stronger than ever.

"We're working to improve the whole field and make our relationships collegial and beneficial for everybody," says NAPAMA board president Mike Green of Mike Green Associates. "It's become part of our DNA now. We've created a sense of cooperation within the field and with each other."

Although it's still a competitive business, the stereotypical "tussle" among agents, managers and presenters is a thing of the past, Green says, and that extends to professional organizations and conferences such as APAP and

WAA. Today, NAPAMA and its members are in the room where the planning happens – not just the rooms where the showcases happen.

"The people who do what we do are our closest friends in a way," he says. "With conferences, our relationship used to consist of us advocating for what we needed, like more hours in the exhibit hall. Now, it's more a matter of really looking at how we make conferences better for everybody. If the presenters are happy, we're better off. It's a more holistic approach."

That holistic approach applies to NAPAMA's focus on professional development, as well. Just ask Kevin Spencer, a theatrical illusionist who left his stage career in 2015 to foster inclusion for those with disabilities through the arts. He became a member several years ago, and in that time, he has forged close relationships with agents, managers, presenters and artists whom he met through the organization.

"NAPAMA's influence in the industry is continuing to grow," Spencer says. "The organization provides professional

development and networking opportunities and we share best practices in professional development sessions at conferences, through webinars, and at our annual retreat. NAPAMA should be especially proud of its mentoring programs and the important research that has been conducted over the last few years. This will inform all of us and help produce effective leaders that will guide us in this evolving field."

APAP Leadership Fellow Heena Patel, of MELA Arts Connect, which specializes in South Asian performing arts, joined NAPAMA five years ago after attending its annual retreat. At the time, Patel was a world music agent, but the retreat and the relationships she developed with her colleagues opened her eyes to the possibilities beyond. Today, she wears many hats including membership on the



organization's all-volunteer board.

"As the only service organization focused on agents, managers, and self-represented artists, the organization has an important responsibility in shaping relationships and systems in the field that are equitable and cognizant of the vital role played by artist representatives," Patel says. "This can be done in many ways such as continued advocacy work; supporting and nurturing diverse voices and perspectives; helping improve communication systems; and providing training and resources so those working in these roles understand and adhere to ethical guidelines and respectful modes of operation, fostering greater respect."

While evergreen issues such as taxation and visa restrictions require continued advocacy and outreach, the evolution of the field presents emerging opportunities for growth including efforts to address issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. Green's immediate priority is to focus on the "NA" part of NAPAMA by increasing its reach in Canada. The organization will have a presence at CAPACOA's annual conference, and moving forward, Green sees similar opportunities in Mexico's burgeoning performing arts sector.

"We tend to be an ambitious bunch of people, so we tend to take on more projects than we have time for," Green says.

With a volunteer board of busy professionals, the challenge is finding the time to do it all. Looking forward, Green hopes NAPAMA can hire a full-time staffer to increase the organization's capacity for leadership and influence in the future.

According to Spencer, the foundation has already been laid for the next 40 years.

"When I first became involved with NAPAMA, the organization was focused on solidifying our place and purpose in the performing arts industry," Spencer says. "Today, we've become thought-leaders and influencers, advocating for our community of performing arts managers, agents and self-represented artists." **IFA**

Clockwise from left: NAPAMA members on retreat; members with APAP President and CEO Mario Garcia Durham at APAP | NYC; Kevin Spencer in the EXPO Hall; a NAPAMA event in Mexico.

