MAURA ALLEN GAST, FCDME

Irving Convention and Visitors Bureau, Executive Director

A 33-year veteran of the Irving CVB, Maura was named Executive Director in October 2003. A leading business travel destination, Irving is home to the world headquarters of Avocados from Mexico, Kimberly-Clark, Flowserve and Fluor, among others. She led the team that delivered the on-time, under-budget and architecturally distinctive Irving Convention Center at Las Colinas, and has oversight of its day-to-day operations. The second anchor of Irving’s visitor district, the Toyota Music Factory, opened in 2017, and includes the Live Nation Pavilion and an Alamo Drafthouse Theater, as well as a dozen other restaurants and two corporate headquarters. The third and final anchor, the 350-room Westin Irving Convention Center Hotel, opened in March 2019.

Maura is a former chair of Destinations International, and recently completed a three-year term as the first chair of the Certified Destination Management Executive program board, where she championed and led the debut of the program’s first Elective in Economic Development. She continues to serve on that board and is part of its faculty. She also recently completed a second tour of duty on the Destination Marketing Accreditation Board, including chairing it from 2020-2022. She has served on DestinationNEXT task forces and is a DestinationNEXT facilitator. She has earned the designation of Fellow, Certified Destination Management Executive (FCDME). She has been a member of the Meetings Industry Fund Grant Review Committee since 2018, and has served on the Simpleview Advisory Board for a number of years.

On the industry’s behalf, she’s worked to weave economic development strategy with community planning tenets, along with solid destination sales and marketing, in order to enhance the standing of CVBs in their community. Maura’s “Building Blocks” have been used by many to build the case for support and investment in destination development, and the should-be-vital role of tourism in any community’s economic health strategies. *“Build a place where people want to visit, and you’ll build a place where people want to live.  Build a place where people want to live, and you’ll build a place where people want to work.  Build a place where people want to work, and you’ll build a place where business has to be.  Build a place where business has to be, and you’ll build a place where people have to visit. It all starts with the visit, and the visit starts with us.”*

In 2015, she was honored with the La Cima Legacy Award for her contributions to the Irving community. In 2016, she was recognized by the *Dallas Business Journal* in its inaugural Women In Tourism Awards. Maura also has been named as a “Meetings Trendsetter” by *MeetingsFocus* Magazine, and a “Top 25 Extraordinary Mind” by the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International. The Hotel Association of North Texas honored her as a “Friend to the Industry” in 2007 and 2008, and she is the recipient of an Irving Schools Foundation Fellow. In 2017, the NAACP Irving-Carrollton Branch recognized Gast with the Fletcher Yates Community Service Award. The Texas Association of CVBs recognized Maura with their Marion Szurek Leadership Award in August 2024, and *Smart Meetings* Magazine recognized her as an Amplitude Awardee in November 2024.

Back home in Irving, she is a key part of the Irving Economic Development Partnership. She serves on boards for the Heritage Society, Rotary, Irving Salvation Army and Chamber of Commerce. She is a past chair of the Dallas Advertising League/AAF-Dallas.

Before joining the hospitality industry, Gast spent time in the retail and newspaper worlds, in a variety of sales, marketing and event management roles; she is also a recovering meeting professional. She is a proud Air Force “brat” and a graduate of St. Mary’s University in San Antonio, Texas.