

The *F-M* Extra

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Soo Asheim's
Behind the Scenes With...

The 2010 F-M Chamber of Commerce
Ambassador of the Year:

Larry Olson

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SA: Larry, according to the press releases I've read, you won this year's Ambassador of the Year Award by a unanimous vote! How does such an overwhelming vote of confidence from your peers make you feel?

LO: I'm humbled by the honor and grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the efforts of this excellent group of dedicated volunteers.

SA: Claudia Greenley, Chairperson of the Ambassadors, is quoted as saying, "Larry deserves this award and recognition, as he is truly the perfect Ambassador." Please explain to those who have not joined the Chamber yet or are not aware

of its many responsibilities what your part was in representing the Chamber as its Ambassador.

LO: The Ambassadors serve as the public relations arm of the Fargo Moorhead West Fargo Chamber. The committee is (composed) of more than 60 volunteers from the business community who conduct approximately 150 ribbon-cuttings per year. The Chamber of Commerce is a bi-state, regional federation of almost 2,000 private, public and nonprofit member firms that collectively employ more than 90,000 people. The Chamber advocates for a strong metropolitan community and supports the interests of its members, which are located in Fargo, Moorhead, West Fargo, Dilworth, Cass and Clay counties and beyond.

My personal goal as an ambassador is not only to assist businesses with their ribbon-cutting events, but to help share their message and acknowledge their achievements to others not in attendance, as well as connect them with resources or services in our region that they may not be knowledgeable about. On a broader scope, I try to enhance the quality of our whole business environment by "cheerleading" the positive efforts by all the wonderful companies and excellent individuals that comprise this exceptional community of ours.

SA: Larry, you are the soul and creative mind behind Talent Productions, a company that specializes in corporate and convention talent services. What sort of events have you been involved with?

LO: We provide event planning and talent services for all types of events, including: banquets, annual meet-

ings, community celebrations, fairs, festivals, trade shows, company picnics, promotional events, fundraisers, reunions, centennials, proms and graduation parties. We also have talent options for night-clubs, casinos, lounges, colleges and universities. We have some unique wedding options as well.

SA: Larry, as a younger man you were preparing for an engineering degree; when did you discover this was not what you wanted to do and that you needed a career switch? What led you to such a life-altering change?

LO: In college I was very involved in event programming as a chairperson for the concert, coffee-house and freshman-orientation committees. After attending college in pre-engineering and later graduating with a technical-school degree, I was employed for five years by a consulting engineering company, designing electrical systems for buildings. During that time period, I also served on the boards of directors of three regional arts groups and two dance companies. In 1978, three things happened that launched my current career. I made my first television appearance as an entertainer, I attended my first International Jugglers' Association Convention and I started performing with a regional touring theater troupe.

SA: Tell me about your involvement with the International Jugglers' Association. Didn't you chair one of their conventions here in Fargo and serve on their board of directors?

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LO: I was elected to the board of the International Jugglers' Association (IJA) and served on IJA's board of directors for four years, and was elected vice president twice. Three times I was named a judge for the IJA's U.S. Nationals competition. I chaired the Annual IJA Convention in 1980 and was the media coordinator for the 46th annual event, which were both held in Fargo. More recently, I served on the site selection committee for the 2008 festival.

SA: How many years did you perform with the touring theater troupe? Do you currently perform as a solo act or with an ensemble?

LO: I performed with the variety arts troupe full-time for 12 years and then later developed my solo entertainment act. After the first year with the troupe, because of my background in programming, I was asked to become the manager of the ensemble. Over a 20-year period, we averaged over 200 engagements a year. From 1979-1989, I also produced 285 summer art festivals partially sponsored by the North Dakota Council on the Arts, utilizing the troupe. For a short time during that same period, I was also the assistant arts curriculum coordinator for the state of North Dakota. In 1989, I also produced a centennial performance by the troupe that was presented 58 times in 52 cities.

Currently I perform the Larry O. Comedy Variety Show as a solo act mainly for corporate and conventions groups. There are numerous theme options available. I also have a value-added option that combines my performance with a live, five-piece band. As far as I know, it's the only show of its kind in the region. It's the type of show you might see in Branson or Las Vegas.

SA: Tell our readers about your company, Talent Productions. Do you hire talent for the events you plan? How do you discover "talent?"

LO: Talent Productions is a member of the North Chamber of Commerce, as well as numerous other chambers. We are also a charter member of the International Association of Talent Agents and Producers. We provide entertaining keynote speakers, comedians, comedy variety entertainers, musical acts and celebrity tribute acts nationwide. Talent Productions also offers numerous types of theme shows and more than 60 different keynote-speaker topics. Besides performance options, corporate-training presentations can be customized for your group and cover a variety of topics for half-day or multiple-day seminars. Many trade show options are also available. Regional entertainment options include live bands, DJs and on-site entertainment, such as GameShow Mania, keepsake-caricature artists, remote-controlled race cars and strolling entertainers. Social and dinner-hour entertainment can include jazz combos, string quartets, instrumental duos, keyboard artists and more.

We have more than a hundred different acts we work with on a regular basis. We have a few select acts featured on our website at www.talentproductions.com.

Usually we will be asked to hire the talent for the events we plan. Because we have more than 30 years of marketing knowledge, we can assist companies and individuals in making the best use of their event-planning budgets.

Talent Productions receives multiple calls just about every day from performers that wish to be represented by our company. Our business clients and our performers also share information about other talent options that may be of interest to our company. We develop relationships with acts that have professional credits suitable for our clientele.

SA: Do you offer event-planning seminars?

LO: On occasion I have been asked to share information with a specific group. I personalize the presentations, utilizing my years of experience producing events, managing artists and entertaining audiences.

SA: Have you or Talent Productions been awarded other honors?

LO: I was part of a trio named best entertainment at the Kansas City Renaissance Festival. Talent Productions was also named a 2009 Business Award finalist by The West Fargo Area Chamber of Commerce in the "One For All-Commitment to Community and/or Chamber" award.

SA: What is your goal for Talent Productions?

LO: Our goal is to assist event planners, businesses and artists in achieving greater success through reliable, knowledgeable and personable service.