



EMAIL INTERVIEW – Maura Gast, FCDME, Executive Director, [Irving Convention and Visitors Bureau](#)

A 24-year veteran of the Irving CVB, Maura was named executive director in October 2003. A leading business travel destination, Irving welcomes 3.03 million visitors annually, who, in turn, invest \$1.8 billion in this town of 210,000. Irving is home to the world headquarters of ExxonMobil, Zale Jewelers, 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.



In 2015, she was honored with the La Cima Legacy Award, for her contributions to the Irving community. 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. She has earned the designation of Fellow, Certified Destination Management Executive, is a former chair of Destination Marketing Association International and the Dallas Advertising League.

In her spare time, Maura serves on the boards of the Texas Society of Association Executives and the Destination Marketing Accreditation Program, and the Ethics Committee of the American Society of Association Executives. Back home in Irving, she serves on boards for the Heritage Society, Rotary, La Cima Club, Salvation Army Advisory Council and the Greater Irving-Las Colinas Chamber of Commerce.

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.

IFCD 3: How does the relatively specialized service of IFCD 3 connect to your world of meetings and tourism?

Maura: Irving has had the benefit of very forward-thinking developers who worked diligently to turn the necessity of flood control into a system of aesthetically attractive amenities. A range of water features make Valley Ranch and Las Colinas very distinctive and allow both residents and commercial development to have access to waterfront settings and activities.

IFCD 3: What comments do visitors to Irving have about the canals, levee and waterways that are visible throughout Valley Ranch and elsewhere in Irving?

Maura: The waterways throughout Irving are just such a key distinctive feature, especially here in the Metroplex. While there are many larger lakes that surround the general area, our canals and levee and waterways are just so accessible. Water seems to sub-consciously heal and cool, and those are important for life.

IFCD 3: Aside from the obvious direct benefit of helping prevent flooding, are there other benefits that you see IFCD 3 as providing to the greater Irving community?

Maura: This past spring and early summer were difficult, hard living proof of why flood control matters to all of us. An efficient, effective well-run and well-maintained flood control district protected many Irving homes and businesses this spring, and the systems did what they were designed to do, when torrential rains kept coming and coming and coming.

IFCD 3: What are some of the most notable features that attract visitors to Valley Ranch and Irving?

Maura: When visitors talk to us about what they like about Irving and all its distinct neighborhoods and assets, one of the things that comes up most often is that it retains a “hometown” feeling, while providing all of the opportunities, accessibility and diversions of a big city. Features like Campión Trails, and the access to the Trinity River it provides – when you’re jogging on one of those paths throughout the city and you encounter those beautiful white cattle egrets or blue herons, you are transported. You forget that you’re just minutes from the world’s largest airport or the country’s largest transit network. Our visitors love our convenience and the safe, clean environment they encounter here. We have a great array of hotels and offsite venues that provide something for everyone and every budget. Our convention center has been a great success – even though the surrounding development that was expected hasn’t happened at the pace we hoped it would, the ICC is running at about 85% occupancy and accommodating more than 300 events annually.

IFCD 3: What’s on the horizon at the ICVB for Valley Ranch and Irving, in general, that will make the community even more attractive to visitors?

Maura: There are so many exciting things on the horizon for Irving and we’re thrilled about the things we’re getting ready to share with visitors. The first of these just opened this summer, the new Texas Musicians Museum, which features a distinct collection of music memorabilia and a great new live music venue, in the city’s Heritage District. Work is underway currently to wrap up details on the development agreement for a headquarter hotel to anchor the Irving Convention Center; they should break ground in the spring and be open for business by the fall of 2017. That timing should also coincide with the opening of the Irving Music Factory, and its collection of restaurants and a Live Nation music venue on the opposite end of the convention center site. Both DFW Airport and Love Field are booming – and Irving’s location in between both makes it so easy for visitors to get here and to explore everything Irving and the entire Metroplex have to offer. We’re excited to see “what’s next” for Valley Ranch – even though we will miss the Cowboys’ presence here, we know that location represents a new development opportunity – whether that turns out to be a residential development or something more oriented toward business or visitors – we know it will be impressive and we can’t wait to see how it plays out.