



THE WORLD FOOD PRIZE®

January 12, 2017

To: Forty Under 40 Selection Committee

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I am writing to provide my strongest possible recommendation for Arren Wetzel, the founder and CEO of the event production company CLE, to be named as a member of the Business Record Forty Under 40 Class of 2017.

From the more than 15 years that I have known him, I have come to understand that Arren and his tenacious determination and skill has led to several great successes and stories. First, it is the story of the firm that he leads and how it works quietly behind the scenes to transform events from ordinary to spectacular.

Beginning in 2001, Arren has been my partner in putting the "wow" factors into our annual World Food Prize events, including: our highly praised Laureate Award Ceremony at the Iowa State Capitol; our Borlaug Dialogue International Symposium, which draws over 1,500 people from more than 60 countries, and the Iowa Hunger Summit. Arren is not just a vendor for that week of events; he is an invaluable partner with us throughout the year providing the creative impact that ensures our events have the setting and the impression we desire. From set design, to sophisticated lighting to the structuring the sound system, Arren is my collaborator, advisor. During World Food Prize Week, Arren is always behind the scenes making sure everything looks perfect, sounds perfect, and *is* perfect. As a result, the World Food Prize has become a signature event not only on the Des Moines calendar, but for thousands of international guests who have attended.

While he was alive, Dr. Norman Borlaug said that the World Food Prize ceremony at the Iowa State Capitol surpassed the one at which he received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo in terms of pomp and grandeur. It was Arren Wetzel and CLE that put those words on his lips.

Arren is the visionary, creative spirit and executor who has played that same role through their event production, staging, and lighting at many of the highest profile events in Iowa, including: the annual Bravo Gala; Governor Branstad's Inaugural Ceremonies; the Des Moines Marathon; the Festival of Trees & Light; the Variety Club Telethon; the Iowa Caucuses Media Center; and the State Dinner Governor Branstad hosted for Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping in Iowa State Capitol in 2012. I recall sitting with a senior Chinese diplomat at that dinner who was blown away by the herald trumpeters who played as Vice President Xi ascended the stage Arren and his team had created, with a stunning, dramatic backdrop. The diplomat turned to me in awe and said, "We might have expected something like this Washington, but never in Iowa." It's hard to find a major organization or key event that has not benefitted from Arren's creativity and hard work. As an event producer, Arren works tirelessly to make other people and groups succeed. Most of the most significant events that happen in Iowa are a great success because of the vision, the initiative, the leadership, and the team that Arren provides.

The second story about Arren Wetzel is that of incredible hard work and perseverance in building a business from scratch to a national leader in his field.

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In a time when over 90% of new start-up businesses fail within ten years, Arren grew his company from \$60,000 that first year into what is a more than \$3 million dollars a year thriving enterprise. He did this in just 15 years. During this amazing journey, Arren has bought out two companies that were at risk of leaving the market and merged them into a leading national live event production company.

Currently, Arren employs and manages 14 full time staff and hires local labor and contract employees regularly. His commitment to people goes beyond hiring them. Arren is an active company owner who takes time to mentor his staff and other professionals in the AV industry.

As a business leader, Arren shows a savvy that comes with natural talent, years of experience, and an incredible amount of hard work. His business is a success story for all in Des Moines to admire and emulate —Arren is truly proof that with grit, determination and a commitment to excellence, you can succeed here.

There is also a third great story about how Arren is directly involved in the community by assisting and donating to extremely worthy causes, especially those pertaining to law enforcement.

Arren has supported the Des Moines Police Department (DMPD) by donating 100% of his company's production for the "Run with the Police" event that benefits Special Olympics Iowa. In addition, he also supported several local police departments last year when the tragic shootings of two officers occurred. Arren provided production at no cost for the DMPD candlelight vigil downtown, and at the memorial service for the Urbandale police officer. He further supported the Guardian Project by donating production for their fundraiser, which benefited the DMPD by raising private funds to supplement the regular police department budget. Finally, Arren is supporting the community by being a five-figure donor to the Festival of Trees & Lights, the five-day event which is the main fundraiser for Blank Children's Hospital.

From all of the above, I hope it is clear that Arren Wetzel is a successful business leader and a creative visionary who is playing a key role in the transformation of the image of the Greater Des Moines Community. His company, CLE Productions, is the premiere event production company in this market and growing a national reputation for exceptional work. Arren's path as a community leader may look different than most, but his impact on our economy, growth and culture are undeniable and need to be recognized.

It is, therefore, my great honor to nominate Arren Wetzel to be a Business Record Forty Under 40 candidate for 2017.

Sincerely,



Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn (ret.)
President