

Thea Award for Lifetime Achievement Jack Rouse

producer extraordinaire



by Bob Harness

With his feet firmly planted on the stage, his mind engaged with thought leaders across multiple industries, and his heart pledged to each of the countless audiences he's touched, Jack Rouse embodies the evolution of our industry, its actualization and coming of age. In a multi-faceted career spanning more than 30 years, Jack has been an entertainer, an academician, an executive and an entrepreneur. Now, he's a "lifetime achiever."

Jack: "All of these worlds and our clients within them share one common element. They all want to connect with an audience. Jack Rouse Associates is generally regarded as a design and production shop, but I prefer to think of it as a firm that specializes in connecting with the emotions of audiences. Yes, we design and create spaces, and certainly we tell stories. But what we really do is unlock the inherent drama contained within our

client's vision and mission. And when we do it right, we create powerful memories and forge lasting relationships between brands and audiences."

For years, Jack has described this orientation as "advocating for the audience."

Jack: "In planning most projects, the end-user – the audience – is not at the table. Among our staff at JRA are individuals with backgrounds in theater, in marketing, in operations and guest services. Building on this, we think we have developed some sensitivity, maybe a little intuition, about audiences and what it takes to engage and satisfy them. That's what we try to bring to each challenge, whether we're dealing with developers, scholars, corporate managers, owners of intellectual property...you name it."

Building on a management philosophy that stresses honest concern for the lives of each of the firm's clients and associates, Jack has guided development of one of the most highly respected and well-liked creative firms in the world.

Jack: "Probably my greatest satisfaction over the years has been the number of

business relationships that have grown into friendships. I can't tell you how many times I've been taken aside by project partners, vendors, and clients, even the most hard-nosed, and told how fond they are of one or another of the JRA team."

Which circles right back to Jack and his particular gift.

Jack: "I'm the first to admit that there are many who write better than I do, and probably produce better than I do. And since I've never had any design talent, virtually everyone designs better than I do. Wherever I've worked and for a long time, I've been involved with forming and creating groups: theatrical groups at the University of Michigan, a music theatre and opera department at the University of Cincinnati's College Conservatory of Music. And, of course, teams of gifted creative people, from Taft to KECO to JRA. I guess my real talent has been about bringing the right people together."

At JRA, that starts with Jack's partners: Amy Merrell and Keith James. Long-time friends and business colleagues, the trio forms the company's senior management team. Under



The Green Bay Packers Hall of Fame



National Underground Railroad Freedom Center



The NEW World of Coca-Cola



Bob Harness is Senior Director, Concept and Story, Jack Rouse Associates. For 17 years at JRA, he has led the concept development and writing functions, conceptualizing, writing and managing projects in all of the categories in which JRA does business. His recent work includes the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, the Green Bay Packers Hall of Fame, the new World of Coca-Cola, Restless Planet in Dubai, "Mythica" The Center for World Mythology and Human Journey, and the Ferrari Theme Park, Abu Dhabi.

their tutelage, JRA has evolved into a unique entity, one capable of straddling a wide variety of markets: museums, zoos, sports facilities, theme parks, entertainment complexes, cultural venues, community developments, and corporate initiatives.

It is perhaps in the corporate environment that Jack and his team have done their most groundbreaking work. In addition to scores of projects for the likes of Chevron, Hewlett-Packard, Procter and Gamble and Intel, JRA has designed and executive produced several landmark corporate brand-lands including Kellogg's Cereal City USA, Autostadt for Volkswagen, and the re-imagined World of Coca-Cola that opened in Atlanta last spring.

Currently, JRA is filling the same role on behalf of ALDAR Properties' Ferrari Theme Park in Abu Dhabi, UAE. More than half of JRA's work is international. Having always believed in a multi-disciplinary team approach to the development of creative projects, Jack has fostered an international network of artists, designers, producers, managers and other specialists to extend his firm's depth and diversity. JRA is living testimony to Tom Friedman's assertion that "the world is flat." This embracing philosophy is key to JRA's ability to deliver superior creative, project management and customer service to clients the world over.

Jack: "It's always been clear to me that we are in a service industry. The creative stuff is the price of entry in this business. When you see yourself as serving clients rather than just conceiving and realizing great ideas, then I think you build loyalty and a much more sustainable business model. But you do it because it is inherently the right thing to do. For JRA it has been as much about work ethic, integrity, honesty and commitment to the client as it has about the Grand Idea."

Refreshing philosophy? You bet. But philosophy will only take you so far. You have to produce. Above all else, Jack Rouse has been a consistent producer.

He produced high-achieving, lifelong-learning students as a university professor. He produced the environments and entertainment that helped Kings Island and the Taft Broadcasting Company parks set the

standard for excellence in the regional theme park industry. He helped produce the leveraged buyout of the theme park division from Taft and the establishment of the Kings Entertainment Company. And then he produced Jack Rouse Associates, which, from Cincinnati, Ohio of all places, has become a world leader in experience design and production, with clients ranging from Universal Studios to the Green Bay Packers, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center to the Singapore Science Center.

And that's while he was on the clock.

On his own time and in his hometown, Jack produced a development plan for the Cincinnati riverfront and a Port Authority to get it done. He produced dollars and decisions for the Symphony, the Opera, the Playhouse, the Zoo and just about every other arts and civic board in town. He produced words and deeds in support of his beliefs and his fellows.

He (co)produced a loving marriage and lively household.

He produced a life chronicle that reads like everyone else's wish list.

He produced lots of black ink for Harley Davidson.

He produced creatively and commercially, solo and ensemble, young man and old hand.

He produced the fondest hopes, wildest dreams and biggest ideas you can imagine.

Along the way, he produced a circle of friendships that literally girdles the globe. He produced opportunity and commitment, loyalty and love.

Jack Rouse is a Producer. And in our business, there's no higher praise.

Congratulations, Jack, on a lifetime of achievement. Now let's get back to work.



Volkswagen's Autostadt

