

Irene Bernards, Tourism Marketing and Public Relations Director and Assistant Director (aka Creative Genius)

Brief Position Description: Responsible for all phases of developing, implementing and evaluating the leisure tourism promotion for the Salem area. Responsible for the management and implementation of Travel Salem's public relations/community relations and image positioning. Responsible for oversight of all Association marketing.

BIO - Irene Bernards

Irene Bernards has worked as Tourism Marketing Director and Assistant Director for Travel Salem since 1987. As Tourism Marketing and Public Relations Director, she is responsible for creating, implementing and evaluating marketing and public relations programs promoting Salem to potential and repeat leisure visitors as well as Salem residents.

Under Irene's leadership, Salem's tourism program promotions and leveraged funds have dramatically increased including advertising, media and publications. Irene's management of Salem tourism related research projects including visitor profile and economic impact studies enabled Travel Salem to obtain the greatest return on investment. Irene spearheaded the creation of the Salem Area Visitors Guide, which is now in its' seventeen edition. The development of the Visitors Guide and creative approach to funding its' production enabled Travel Salem to redirect Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) funding to other marketing opportunities.

Irene has led Travel Salem through two branding initiatives during her tenure. The first, during FY 03-04 resulted in *Salem - Naturally Inspired!* and the second, during FY 2008-09 resulting in *Salem - Absolutely Oregon* with corresponding visual logo and communications. The *Absolutely Oregon* brand inspired over 35 Salem area businesses and organization to jump on the *Absolutely* brand wagon. Irene also led the Willamette Valley Visitors Association through a similar branding process which resulted in *Oregon Wine Country* and corresponding visual logo.

Irene has been called upon to assist the Oregon Tourism Commission/Travel Oregon Office numerous times throughout her tenure at Travel Salem. In fiscal year 1998-99 Irene was asked by Travel Oregon to participate in a job share with Julie Curtis, who was the Assistant Director of the Travel Oregon office. Irene managed statewide visitor attendance surveys, organized the 1999 Governor's Conference on Tourism and served as the State's Industry Relations Manager. She managed the 1994 *Official Group Travel Planner* for Oregon, which demonstrates her ability to work with organizations throughout the state. In 1992 she served on the Travel Oregon committee that developed the *Oh! In Oregon* hospitality training, and she is currently certified as an official "Q" *Service* trainer. She served on the first Group Tour Task Force formed by Travel Oregon.

Irene is currently the Vice President of the Willamette Valley Visitors Association and served as President in 1995, 1999 and 2009.. Irene was the youngest recipient of the Governor's Tourism Award for Oregon in 1997. This award is presented to one individual each year by Oregon's Governor. Irene's marketing leadership led to Travel Salem receipt of the 1991 & 1993 Governor's Regional Tourism Award, 1997 Governor's Award (presented to an individual) and the 2005 Governor's Cooperative Partnership Award.

Irene is well respected within Oregon's tourism industry and has forged important relationships throughout Salem, Marion County, Polk County and Oregon. These relationships are essential to building new partnerships and retaining current alliances that are beneficial to Salem. Irene is viewed as a tourism expert within the industry. She has been a presenter for many organizations such as the Salem Chamber (Leadership Salem and Leadership Youth classes), Rotary Club, Lions Club, Kiwanis Club, City Club, Chemeketa Community College Hospitality Tourism classes, local high school Hospitality Tourism classes and the Oregon Governor's Conference on Tourism.