

Event Snapshot: WFFC Woman of the Year

Organization honors Joanne Kennedy for her service and commitment to the industry

“We’re big, but we’re small,” says Joanne Kennedy, senior account manager at FONA International and recipient of this year’s Women in Flavor and Fragrance Commerce (WFFC) Woman of the Year Award. “As big as this business is ... after a few years you get to know everybody.” The event, held at the Chart House in Weehawken, New Jersey, paid tribute to Kennedy’s commitment and service to the industry.

A decade-plus of involvement: Kennedy’s involvement with the organization began in the early 1990s, when she worked for a supplier of medium-chain triglycerides for flavor companies making oil-soluble flavors. “It was a good way to meet people in the flavor industry,” she says. Later, selling colors to flavor customers at Warner-Jenkinson (now Sensient), she found that WFFC events provided a good forum for seeing customers in a different context.

It was during Maria Parenti’s tenure on WFFC’s board that Kennedy’s involvement expanded. “I really like being with an organization that’s run by women,” says Kennedy, adding, “they get a lot done.” Kennedy notes that her bosses have always been supportive of her involvement in the organization, citing its leadership and teamwork skill building. “There’s a little bit of a halo effect of ‘wow, one of our people is involved with a prestigious organization.’”

The future of WFFC: Over the years, the group has become so large and diverse, covering such an array of job descriptions, that Kennedy doesn’t always recognize all of the faces at WFFC events. And she admits that further expanding the organization’s reach is on her agenda. “We have so many people involved in the back end of the business—the suppliers—that I would like to see some of the users of flavors getting more involved.” The majority of industry organizations, particularly on the food side, are very specialized and may not be exposed to the supply base. “Any food company that uses flavors needs to understand the whole gamut of what the flavor industry is about,” says Kennedy. As part of her outreach, Kennedy encourages her customers to attend meetings. “The programs that we offer can help so many different kinds of people.”

Getting involved: Kennedy explains that the WFFC’s activities are the result of a dedicated membership, and

that her own involvement has given her a sense of accomplishment. “I’ve always been so impressed at how people [within WFFC] take on an action plan and make a promise to do something, and [then] do it,” she says, noting that this level of commitment is not always the norm in industry organizations.

For example, she points out that the planning for the organization’s fall seminar scheduled for November 13 (details at wffc.org) began last summer.

Working in the flavor industry: What does Kennedy love most about her career? “Flavors are something that everyone understands,” she says. “You go to a cocktail party and someone asks you what you do. If you name a company they won’t know who that is. But if you say ‘I make products that make your food [taste good],’ it becomes very tangible.”

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“People love to eat,” she continues. “Food is love and comfort and evokes so many memories from childhood. That makes it exciting. When I watch other people’s eyes light up when I explain what I do, it recommit me to my career and how much fun it is.”

Woman of the Year: “I’m very humbled,” Kennedy says of her award, “because I look at the cast of women out there that went before me and how much they accomplished. I’m very honored to be recognized and hope my past and future work with the WFFC will be an inspiration to other people who may want to get involved, but don’t know how to go about it.” Her advice? “If someone calls and asks you, just step up and contribute, even in the smallest way you think you can. Even that is always helpful.”

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Joanne Kennedy

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