AfroTech Conference 2024 in Houston, planned by Austin-based Red Velvet

LEADING THE WAY

PLANNING PROS IN TEXAS HAVE CARVED PATHS TO SUCCESS BY CREATING ONE-OF-A-KIND EVENTS AND EXPERIENCES FOR CLIENTS

BY KAMALA KIRK

When planning memorable meetings and events, it's almost always a goal to make a great impression on attendees. And in a sea of talented event planners and professionals, it takes a lot to stand out from the rest. Beyond putting on stellar gatherings, successful planners need to have a strong network of relationships, a deep understanding of regional culture and traditions, effective organizational and problem-solving skills, a knack for details, and the ability to bring clients' visions to life with fresh ideas.

Texas Meetings + Events highlights five such planners from diverse backgrounds who have all built successful careers through their talent, passion, creativity, and hard work. They each followed a distinctive path to get to where they are now, with some of them knowing from the start that they were destined for the industry, while others pursued different careers prior to transitioning to event planning.

Several of these featured professionals are entrepreneurs who took the leap and started their own agencies, while others oversee and lead events teams at major organizations. Regardless of their journeys, each of them has found fulfillment in their chosen role. It goes to show that success isn't one size fits all, and it can look different for everyone.

From intimate corporate gatherings to hosting larger-scale events for dignitaries and public figures, these industry pros across the Lone Star State share their secrets to success, memorable events they have produced, inspiring personal stories, and more.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Prior to founding Austin-based Red Velvet, a full-service experience agency, in 2002, Cindy Lo worked as a technical project manager for a tech company and regularly traveled between her homebase of Austin to New York and New Jersey, where her client was based. Following the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001, her project immediately ceased until the city could recover and rebuild, so she was assigned to another client and hunkered down in Austin for several months, which gave her time to reassess her career. A year later, she made the decision to start her own business.

"I was making great money, but I wasn't in love with my job," says Lo. "Many friends encouraged me to look at doing events, as I was a natural at it. I applied for three different jobs to pivot my career, but no one would hire me since I did not have formal experience in this industry, so I essentially started Red Velvet to show I had experience, and the plan was to reapply for the jobs a year later. Some 23 years later, I never reapplied."

PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT) Black Sky Creative, Bryan Chatlien Photography, Austin Event Media, Bart McLendon

Event tablescape at Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) of Texas Fur Ball 2025, organized by Dallas' Steve Kemble

Red Velvet has produced many gatherings with high-profile guests, including an event with an appearance by then-President Barack Obama in May 2013, as well as a party featuring Lionel Richie as the headlining act at a private residence, also in 2013. Red Velvet organized an event with former first lady Michelle Obama in October 2017, and, in that same year, Lo co-authored "Behind the Red Velvet Curtain," a book for planners looking to start their own agency or event-planning firm. "Since I had to pivot and teach myself, I used the book to answer the most common questions I wish I had known before starting Red Velvet," says Lo.

Lo also owns Strong Events, a custom fabrication and specialty supplier company providing various event decor items, which she acquired in 2023. Four to six times a year, she speaks at events and conferences on starting a small business and pivoting careers. She spoke at Rotary Club of Austin's Camp Enterprise 2026 event that introduced high school students to business leaders and entrepreneurs, as well as the CEMA Summit 2025 held at the Fairmont Austin for corporate event marketing professionals, among others.

When it comes to success secrets, Lo has several to share. "Under-promise and over-deliver," she says. "It starts with strategy, then identifying who the target audience is and asking myself what we can do that is unexpected but still within the brand, brief, and budget. I love that no two days are ever alike. I like to problem-solve and come up with new, creative ideas on how to activate a city or [an] event's brand, so it still feels personalized."

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–CINDY LO
Founder, Red Velvet

A TOUCH OF FLAIR

Dallas-based planner Steve Kemble opened his boutique agency, Steve Kemble Event Design, in 1984 with the goal of creating highly personalized, visually stunning meetings and events that reflect each client's desired vision.

"From the beginning, the philosophy has been simple: Every event should feel unique, immersive, and memorable," says Kemble. "I'm proudly based in Dallas, a city that truly understands the power of big ideas and even bigger celebrations. It's an incredible hub for meetings and events, and provides the perfect launching pad for national and international projects."

Kemble's services include event design, strategic planning, production, logistics, and creative direction. His approach blends design, emotion, and theatrics to create experiences that attendees remember. In 2012, Kemble produced an event for Armenia's president to promote the opening of a new school and the first

Pop-up drive-in movie theater event last year at BJ's Restaurant & Brewhouse in Pearland, produced by Red Velvet

Cindy Lo, Founder, Red Velvet

"WE WANT PEOPLE TO FEEL CONNECTED TO THE PLACES THEY ARE VISITING; TO BENEFIT AREA COMPANIES; AND TO CREATE SOMETHING THAT FEELS ROOTED, THOUGHTFUL, AND MEMORABLE."

–ALYSSA HART
Director of Sales for the West, Fifth Street DMC

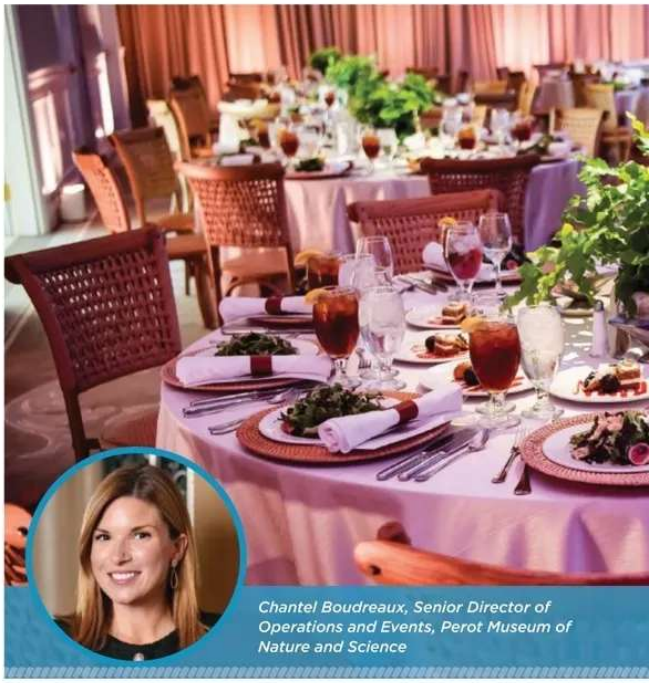
of its kind in the country, the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies in Yerevan, Armenia. The free educational center puts teenagers in charge of their own learning. The festival-style, three-day event was held in the middle of a field and, due to the limited resources available in Armenia at that time, it required collaboration with vendors from Russia, Germany, and Turkey. "This was one of the most memorable experiences in my career and was an incredible reminder of the unique ability events [have to] unite cultures and create meaningful connections," says Kemble.

Kemble has received some 30 industry awards and recognitions throughout his career, including Meeting Professionals International's Planner of the Year in 2003 and the Special Event Industry Lifetime Achievement Award in 2001. Most recently, he was named the 2026 Icon Award recipient from the National Association for Catering and Events (NACE) in mid-April.

"Innovation comes from looking beyond traditional event formats and asking, 'How will guests feel when they walk into the room?'" says Kemble. "Whether it's immersive environments, unexpected entertainment moments, or design elements that transform a space, the goal is to create a sense of discovery and delight."

The Family Place's ReuNight 2024 event at Dallas' Hôtel Swexan, planned by Steve Kemble

Steve Kemble, Owner, Steve Kemble Event Design



Chantel Boudreaux, Senior Director of Operations and Events, Perot Museum of Nature and Science

COLLABORATION & CREATIVITY

As senior director of operations and events for the Perot Museum of Nature and Science in Dallas, Chantel Boudreaux leads the events team in producing both intimate gatherings and large-scale, citywide moments. She also is involved with the NACE Dallas-Fort Worth Chapter, where she has served as director of fundraising, secretary, president-elect, and now chapter president. "Throughout my journey, my focus has remained consistent: creating exceptional event experiences, building strong relationships, and contributing to a vibrant and ever-evolving hospitality industry," says Boudreaux.

The Perot Museum hosts over 135 meetings and events annually for gatherings of 25 to 1,500 attendees amid its flexible spaces across five levels. The museum displays eye-catching architecture, immersive exhibit experiences, and full-service event capabilities in the heart of Dallas.

"What sets Perot Museum apart is the ability for attendees to explore, interact, and engage throughout the event," says Boudreaux. "Whether dining among dinosaurs, networking in innovation halls, or enjoying a private film screening, [groups find that] each space offers built-in entertainment and a natural sense of discovery that elevates the attendee experience."

In April 2024, Boudreaux and her team put together a series of weekend events in collaboration with Dallas-based Valvidia Ventures (an event-design company) for attendees

PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW LEFT) Atali Samuel Photography, Bryan Chatlien Photography, Tracy Autem Photography, Kelly Alexander, Greg Blomberg (2)

Luncheon event last September at the Perot Museum of Nature and Science in Dallas

to celebrate and observe the total solar eclipse (known as the Great North American Eclipse) that moved across the continent that spring. Over five days, they hosted nine events, partnering with area food trucks, live musicians, and the NHL's' Dallas Stars and WNBA's Dallas Wings for activations. Wolfgang Puck Catering of West Hollywood, California, created innovative food and beverages to complement the experience.

"This was a once-in-a-lifetime moment, and we approached it as more than just a single event," says Boudreaux. "We began planning years in advance, and it required meticulous planning, coordination, and organization across multiple teams to successfully execute at such a large scale."

LISTENING TO CLIENTS

Dallas native Delaney Lovelace has been in the events industry for nearly 10 years. She joined Ultimate Ventures in Addison in 2016 as sales manager, later becoming director of sales in 2021, creating and executing galas, conferences, and team-building events for the larger Dallas-Fort Worth market. That same year, she earned her certification as a Destination Management Certified Professional from the Association of Destination Management Executives International (ADMEI).

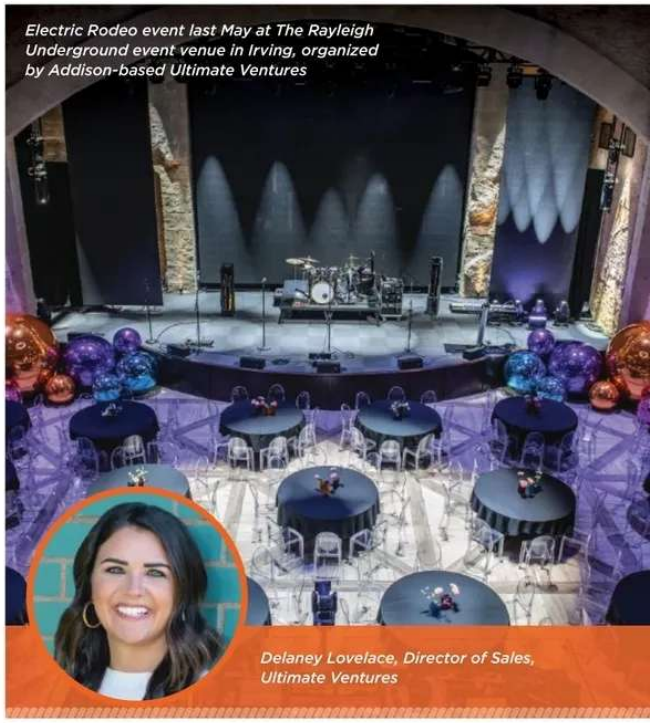
"I work closely with clients to understand their goals and vision, then bring those to life, starting with a proposal and carrying it all the way through to a fully executed program," says Lovelace. "We design and deliver highly customized experiences for corporate events, overseeing everything from logistics to event design."

One of Lovelace's favorite events was for a pharmaceutical client who challenged her team to transform the underground Enterprise Ballroom at Hyatt Regency DFW International Airport into a field of wildflowers. "The space had limitations, so we had to get creative," says Lovelace. "We turned the entire ballroom into this immersive environment with greenery, hanging floral installations, custom flooring, and mirrored elements, so the design felt like it was growing around you. Since we couldn't flip the room between daytime sessions and evening events, we used lighting to completely shift the atmosphere. Our client won an award for most unique meeting of the year [for that event]."

Lovelace always listens to clients in order to understand their goals, audience, and what success looks like for them."From there, it's all about collaboration—both with the client and our team—plus staying flexible and solution-focused," says Lovelace. "No matter what comes up, we find a way to make it work and deliver something thoughtful and elevated."

DESTINATION EXPERIENCES

Alyssa Hart has been with Fifth Street DMC since 2021, and she is currently the company's director of sales for the West, specifically covering its Austin and Montana markets for a variety of events. Fifth Street DMC is the sole Austin-only destination management company in market, and Fifth Street DMC also operates statewide in Montana.



Electric Rodeo event last May at The Rayleigh Underground event venue in Irving, organized by Addison-based Ultimate Ventures

Delaney Lovelace, Director of Sales, Ultimate Ventures

Perot Museum of Nature and Science's 2024 "Night at the Museum" annual fundraising gala

"THROUGHOUT MY JOURNEY, MY FOCUS HAS REMAINED CONSISTENT: CREATING EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCES, BUILDING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS, AND CONTRIBUTING TO A VIBRANT AND EVER-EVOLVING HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY."

–CHANTEL BOUDREAUX
Senior Director of Operations and Events, Perot Museum of Nature and Science

The company's primary marketed destinations in Montana are Bozeman and the larger regions of Big Sky and Paradise Valley.

"DMCs are truly your local experts and boots on the ground in those markets," says Hart. "Our expertise includes event design and production, activities and excursions, curated city tours, entertainment and talent, transportation management, and restaurant and venue sourcing."

A big part of her team's approach is supporting people to make meetings and events a true destination experience. "We want people to feel connected to the places they are visiting; to benefit area companies; and to create something that feels rooted, thoughtful, and memorable," says Hart.

The company was a 2026 finalist for Best Destination Marketing at the ADMEI Awards, announced in early March, for its work on CEMA Summit 2025 last July, a 700-person event produced alongside Visit Austin and Fairmont Austin, showcasing the city to hundreds of event-marketing professionals and industry peers.

"The event included a welcome lounge at Fairmont Austin, partnering with the [hotel] to lean into the summer heat with a 'Keep Austin Cool' theme—frozen drinks and an outdoor activation with 'cool' facts about Austin," says Hart. "A welcome reception at ACL Live was a dive bar/honky-tonk theme of 'Welcome Watering Hole' with a pool table and shuffleboard on the concert floor, line dancing instruction, and more." **m+e**

- fifthstreetdmc.com
- perotmuseum.org
- stevekemble.com
- uvdmc.com
- weareredvelvet.com

CEMA Summit 2025 in Austin by Austin-based Fifth Street DMC

Alyssa Hart, Director of Sales for the West, Fifth Street DMC

PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT) Tamytha Cameron, Charles Quinn, Cassandra Klopac