

## **Jolene de Verges: Distinguished Service Award Presentation**

Each year VRA honors an individual who has made an outstanding career contribution to the field of visual resources and image management. Nominees must have achieved a level of distinction in the field either through leadership, research, or service to the profession. Tonight we are pleased to present to you a fellow member who has excelled as a leader and practitioner in our profession, a model collaborator in resource-sharing projects, and a generous mentor to students and young professionals: Jolene de Verges.

As Macie Hall recalls, "I don't remember exactly when I first met Jolene, but I do remember that Dolly Parton's classic country music song by the same name immediately started through my head. And while the lyrics had absolutely nothing to do with the lovely woman I had just met, I knew I wouldn't forget her or her name. Indeed, Jolene de Verges quickly proved to be a VRA member well worth remembering."

Cindy Abel Morris continues, "There are many among our organization who've stepped up to serve, collaborate, contribute, reach out, and put in committee time, but few who have done so as consistently, cheerfully, professionally and with such deep kindness as Jolene."

Billy Kwan adds, "When I attended my first VRA annual conference, Jolene was among the most welcoming and friendly faces I met . . . Throughout the years . . . , I always learnt something from her, either as a manager or an information professional, through stories and episodes we shared about work and life. . . . developing this kind of friendship and professional bond is one of the core values of being a VRA member."

Jolene has impressed many colleagues with her skill as collaborator and communicator. Former Smith College colleague Elisa Lanzi makes special note of Jolene's enthusiasm for working across communities. "At both Smith and MIT she helped [promote] awareness of visual resources and formed alliances with IT, museum, and multiple library organizations. She did this by moving into . . . newly-emerging fields of scholarly [endeavor such as] digital humanities. Jolene is a super generous and delightful colleague – she was able to convince staff and faculty that metadata is not so scary!"

She has also brought that spirit of positive collegiality to her numerous leadership roles in VRA, where she has served as Secretary, President, and Co-Chair of the 2017 Strategic Plan Task Force, in which she was a strong advocate for increasing the Association's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusivity.

Andrea Schuler, another former MIT colleague, notes that in all of these roles she served with good humor and thoughtful leadership. “I still remember watching Jolene, as secretary, tirelessly put together hundreds of registration packets for the San Diego conference in 2008, my first clue to the vast scope of the work she contributes to VRA.”

Jackie Spafford appreciated her “calm and reasonable presence in her role as President,” marked by “a reassuring authority while remaining very approachable.”

Steven Kowalik recounts that, in addition to being among the most welcoming of the VRA’s members, “she is also fun to be around, as I witnessed after a grueling day-long mid-year Board meeting in a very humid Providence, Rhode Island in August during a horrible heat wave.” Marcia Focht continues: “After sitting through two full days of meetings in the stuffy hotel, Jolene surprised us all with a trip to the beach. We piled into a zip car that was really too small, drove 30 miles to Cape Cod, waded into the misty waves, ate at a nearby seafood shack, and enjoyed ourselves immensely. It helped us laugh, relax, and bond, making our work that much easier the next day and beyond.”

Today, managing the Hamon Arts Library at Southern Methodist University since 2013, Jolene oversees a staff of subject librarians, special collections, and access and operations staff. Director of Libraries Russell Martin calls her “one of the best hires we have ever made (*with an exclamation point!*). She has reinvigorated the Hamon Library during her tenure, bringing out its latent potential and serving the needs of students, faculty, and the community in exciting and innovative ways.” He also commends “. . . another of her strengths: diplomacy, and the ability to work with various constituencies,” noting that “. . . she’s even carved out space in the Hamon Library for our Business Library, which will be relocating temporarily as their building is renovated. This kind of selflessness is not always in evidence in academia, where turf wars can be intense. But Jolene is always thinking of the good of the whole, not just of narrow parochial interests.”

Numerous colleagues described Jolene’s generosity as a mentor to emerging professionals and students. Andrea Schuler writes, “Much of what I do today in my role supporting copyright, repositories, and open scholarship has its roots in what I learned from working with Jolene. [It’s not] an exaggeration to say that I wouldn’t be where I am in my career without the support and guidance that Jolene offered me.”

Elizabeth Killingsworth, Director of SMU's Fondren Library, states that "she has a wonderful knack for seeing opportunities for students and eagerly shares her expertise with them ... I'm certain her impact on students has changed the course of their careers and inspired them in innumerable ways." Darby Linn describes her own experience as a new SMU art history graduate student: "Jolene was enthusiastic to hear about my academic interests and recommended helpful...campus resources. [She also] contacted her colleagues and recommended me for work. I now hold a position in Special Collections, which has been crucial to my research and future thesis."

Macie Hall concluded her letter of support saying "I want to take back what I said at the beginning of this letter. Dolly Parton's *Jolene* and Jolene de Verges do have something in common! Oxford Languages defines classic as "judged over a period of time to be of the highest quality and outstanding of its kind." Jolene de Verges is a classic example of a leader, a professional, a colleague. She embodies the criteria for the Distinguished Services Award, and well deserves this honor."

Cindy Abel Morris added "I find it ... extraordinary that while achieving all that she has, Jolene has found a way to be thoughtful, caring, [and] kind. Let's hear it for nice folk[s] who finish first!"