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MOLLY MARSH
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND
ENGAGEMENT DESIGN
AMR MANAGEMENT SERVICES



AUSTIN



CONVENTION CENTER

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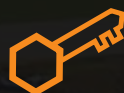
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EDITOR'S NOTE



MORE CERTIFICATES, MORE OVERALL COMPETENCE

Thanks in part to the efforts of **Karen Kotowski**, who recently resigned as CEO of the **Events Industry Council**, the EIC's **Certified Meeting Professional (CMP)** program has achieved remarkable growth as a benchmark in planner education. The EIC is currently seeking to build on that foundation and expand the CMP program globally with a new CEO. The prominence of the CMP means that planners should not be concerned that its value will be diluted by new certificate offerings in "Meeting Planning 101."

A couple of years ago, MPI stirred up a bit of controversy among planners by introducing a **Meeting Fundamentals** certificate program geared toward "nontraditional planners" such as executive assistants who happen to have planning duties. Some professional planners felt that conferring a certificate for a mere six hours of education in planning basics diminishes the significance of a "real" planning certificate like the CMP or CMM – at least in the eyes of those who are unfamiliar with the program requirements. The worry was that an uninformed hiring manager or company stakeholder would perceive the CMP holder and the Meeting Fundamentals certificate holder as "certified planners" who are equally qualified, which is far from the case.

The controversy has not deterred MPI from continuing to meet the market demand for basic-level certification. Early this year, MPI announced a partnership with the **International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP)** that includes a meeting planning certificate for administrative professionals that will be offered at IAAP's annual **CAPstone Conference**. In addition, the **MPI Academy** continues to offer certificates in a variety of planning niches, from emergency preparedness to event design to sustainability.

The likelihood that Meeting Fundamentals-type programs, or the array of certifications in niche areas, will obscure the value of the CMP is arguably quite small. Launched in 1985, the CMP is well entrenched and increasingly recognized as the hallmark of the professional planner. And on the plus side, MPI is incentivizing more planners – and administrative professionals – to seek education in the field by offering more accessible certificates. Whether it's a board meeting planned by an executive assistant with a Meeting Fundamentals certificate or a cruise meeting planned by a Meetings & Events at Sea certificate holder, the end result should be what the industry wants: better-planned meetings.

- **George Seli**

Editorial Director, **Facilities Media Group**
gseli@facilitiesonline.com



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FACILITIES & DESTINATIONS

SPRING

For Association & Corporate Meeting Planners & Tradeshow Professionals

2019

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ON THE COVER

Among the best practices that Molly Marsh of AMR Management Services advocates in dealing with convention volunteers is to give them well-defined roles with clear expectations. She has also found that not dedicating enough staff time to volunteer supervision is a common pitfall. Glean more tips for getting the most out of your volunteers in this issue's Planner Roundtable, which includes Marsh and two of her convention industry peers.

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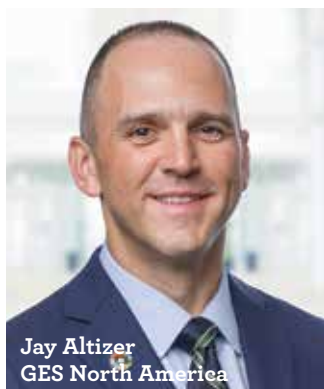
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IN BRIEF

INDUSTRY PULSE



Roberta Tisdul
Visit Indy



Jay Altizer
GES North America



Jerad Bohmer
VisitPittsburgh



Angie Teel
Cox Business Center

CHICAGO, IL — PRA Business Events, Inc. has acquired **Koncept Events**, a sector leader in South Florida, Mexico and the Caribbean. Koncept Events leadership, **Hillary Smith**, CMP, CSEP and **Angie Nelson**, will continue in leadership roles within the PRA system. Smith will serve in the newly created role of Executive Creative Director, while Nelson will serve as General Manager of PRA South Florida. Koncept Events will now operate as **PRA South Florida**.

DALLAS, TX — In early December, the **Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR)** reported that the exhibition industry continued to grow during the third quarter of 2018. According to the **CEIR Total Index**, the industry posted a modest year-over-year gain of 1 percent, while underperforming the macro-economy. The third-quarter performance was weaker than the first two quarters of the year; nonetheless, it was a significant improvement over the same quarter in 2017 when the industry registered a year-over-year decline of 0.2 percent. CEIR Economist **Allen Shaw**, Ph.D., Chief Economist for **Global Economic Consulting Associates, Inc.**, noted that “The growth of the exhibition industry should pick up the pace during the fourth quarter of the year and, at least, through the first half of [2019] as the economy remains strong despite

uncertainties surrounding the trade negotiation with China, volatile stock market and slowing world economic growth.”

DALLAS, TX — In December, **Freeman** acquired event marketing agency **mdg** in order to enhance Freeman’s spectrum of services from pre-event marketing and onsite user experience to post-show communications based on data-informed insights. “What we’ve seen and heard from our clients is that they are looking for fully integrated event solutions. Our acquisition of **mdg** continues our initiative to create the seamless experience they crave,” said **Bob Priest-Heck**, President and CEO, Freeman. “With **mdg**’s ability to infuse attendee acquisition and marketing insights directly into the onsite experience, we can now leverage data from both digital marketing and live experiences to deliver more robust and integrated offerings for our clients.”

INDIANAPOLIS, IN — **Visit Indy** has promoted **Roberta Tisdul** to the position of Director of Convention Services. Tisdul joined Visit Indy over a decade ago as an assistant. According to Visit Indy, her dedication and talents within the industry, along with achieving the CMP designation, earned her four internal promotions from Event Manager to Senior Manager of Convention Services,

before accepting her new role as Director.

LAKE BUENA VISTA, FL — The **Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort** has promoted **Dan Herman** to Executive Chef from his previous role as Executive Sous Chef. Herman will oversee all culinary operations at the resort’s 17 food and beverage outlets. Beginning his career at the resort nearly 20 years ago, Herman was instrumental in creating the resort’s **Food & Wine Classic**, and has overseen the openings of critically acclaimed restaurants such as **Il Mulino** and **Todd English’s bluezoo**.

LAS VEGAS, NV — On Jan. 1, **Steve Zanella** began serving as President & Chief Operating Officer of **MGM Resorts International’s CityCenter**. Zanella now oversees daily operations of **ARIA Resort and Casino** and **Vdara Hotel & Spa**. He has more than 25 years of experience with MGM Resorts. Most recently, he served as President of Core Properties in Las Vegas, where he oversaw operations at **Park MGM, New York-New York Hotel & Casino, Luxor Hotel and Casino, Excalibur Hotel & Casino** and **Circus Circus Las Vegas**.

LAS VEGAS, NV — **GES North America** President **Jay Altizer** has expanded his leadership role and the company has promoted

Continued on page 6



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IN BRIEF



INDUSTRY PULSE

Continued from page 4



Elliott L. Ferguson II
Destination DC

Jason Popp to President of **GES EMEA**. Altizer joined GES in May of 2018 as President of GES North America. His expanded role includes responsibility for GES Events, Marketing, GES event accommodations

company **onPeak**, and GES audiovisual company **ON Services**. Popp's promotion to President of GES EMEA follows his service as GES Executive Vice President of International since 2011 and in various global leadership roles since 2004.

PITTSBURGH, PA — Jerad Bachar, CDME, began serving as **VisitPittsburgh's** Executive Vice President on Jan. 14. Bachar was most recently Executive Director of Investment Development at the **Bahrain Economic Development Board**. He previously worked for VisitPittsburgh as a

National Sales Director from 2004-2008. In his new role, he oversees convention sales, destination services, partnership development, research and **SportsPittsburgh**, which promotes the city as a sports destination.

TULSA, OK — The **SMG**-managed **Cox Business Center** recently appointed **Angie Teel**, CMP, Assistant General Manager. Teel joins the venue from the **St. Charles Convention Center**, where she has acted as a Director since 2011. "We are looking forward to having Angie and her convention industry experience join Tulsa," said **Ray Hoyt**, President, **Tulsa CVB & Tulsa Sports Commission**. "As we get ready to open the new expansion and greet new guests, she will be a strong asset to our industry part-

ners." The \$55 million project is expected to be complete by June 2020.

WASHINGTON, DC — Elliott L. Ferguson II, President and CEO of **Destination DC**, is the newly elected National Chair of the **U.S. Travel Association (USTA)**. He succeeds **Wyndham Hotels and Resorts' President and CEO Geoff Ballotti** in the position. "Elliott's track record as a guardian of the travel industry in the nation's capital, and the thousands of workers it supports every year, reflects his deep expertise and understanding of travel's importance to the economy," said USTA President and CEO **Roger Dow**. "I look forward to working alongside him in continued pursuit of policies that grow travel to and within the U.S."



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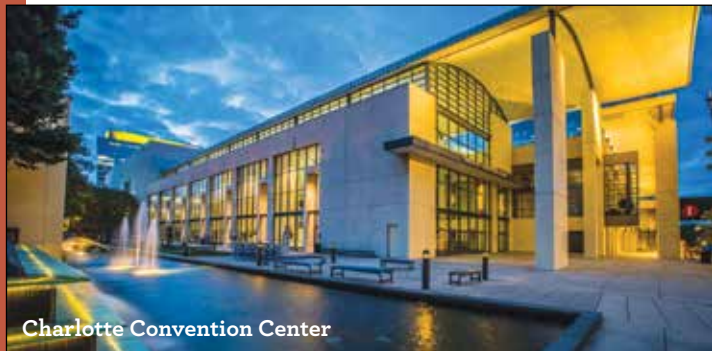
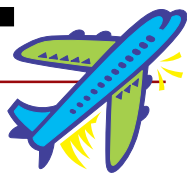
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Shopping for almost anything is either one click or one call away. In the world of conventions, exhibitions and special events, how can you effectively shop for convention centers and destinations with only one click or call? The answer is simple. The answer is SMG. With exhibition venues in the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, and China, we can shorten the site selection process from months to days, or even hours.



IN BRIEF

CONVENTION CENTER WATCH



Charlotte Convention Center

CHARLOTTE, NC — In late November, the **Charlotte City Council** unanimously approved a \$110 million plan to expand and renovate the **Charlotte Convention Center**. Construction is expected to commence this spring and would run through December 2020. The 550,000-sq.-ft. Charlotte Convention Center is located across the street from a 700-room **Westin Charlotte** and is also connected to the **NASCAR Hall of Fame** via an elevated walkway. The project will increase the capacity of the meeting level by 50,000 sq. ft., adding 26,000 sq. ft. of breakout space and 24,000 sq. ft. of pre-function space. Other new features include the ability to configure the Richardson Ballroom into four meeting rooms, and a pedestrian bridge linking the new wing to the Westin.

INDIANAPOLIS, IN — Indianapolis' **Capital Improvement Board** has announced plans for a 235,000-sq.-ft. expansion of the **Indiana Convention Center** that includes a 50,000-sq.-ft. ballroom. In addition, 1,400 hotel rooms,

connected in two **Hilton-affiliated hotels**, will redevelop **Pan Am Plaza**. Completion is expected by 2022.

MEMPHIS, TN — The **Memphis Cook Convention Center** is renovating through fall 2020. The \$175 million project will add floor-to-ceiling windows, create enclosed access to the 600-room **Sheraton Memphis Downtown Hotel**, add locally inspired artistic elements and more. The convention center features a column-free Main Exhibit Hall spanning more than 125,000 sq. ft., a 36,000-sq.-ft. special exhibit hall, 31 meeting rooms and the 2,100-seat **Cannon Center for the Performing Arts**.



MIAMI BEACH, FL — A Dec. 4 ribbon-cutting ceremony marked the completion of the **Miami Beach Convention Center's** \$620 million renovation and expansion. The **Spectra**-managed MBCC includes a new 60,000-sq.-ft. Grand Ballroom, almost 500,000 sq. ft. of exhibition space, an expanded Grand Lobby and pre-function areas, and up to 84 breakout rooms. Other highlights of the project include enhanced lighting and IT infrastructure, \$7.1 million worth of art curated by the **City of Miami Beach Art in Public Places** program, and a new six-acre public green space that can serve as event space.

ROCHESTER, NY — The **City of Rochester** recently initiated a \$4 million rehabilitation project of the **Joseph A. Floreano Rochester Riverside Convention Center's** Terrace and Patio overlooking the Genesee River. The project,

which ties into Governor **Andrew Cuomo's** transformative "**ROC The Riverway Program**" for Downtown Rochester, will give greater access to the riverway, as well as address ADA compliance and include updated lighting, furniture and landscaping. Work is expected to be complete this fall.

TAMPA, FL — Last year, the **Tampa Bay Convention Center** began a \$30 million expansion plan that will add 18 waterfront meeting rooms spanning 16,000 sq. ft. Existing meeting rooms will also be refurbished. Completion is expected between May 2020 and February 2021. In April of this year, the **Sail Plaza** will debut at the waterfront along with **Big Ray's Fish Camp**, a popular Tampa seafood restaurant. And in May of this year, **Datz Restaurant**, another local favorite, opens at the convention center.



*The Miami Beach Convention Center completes its renovation and expansion. (Above, l-r): **Jimmy L. Morales**, City Manager, City of Miami Beach; **William D. Talbert III**, President and CEO, Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau; **Micky Steinberg**, Miami Beach Commissioner; **John Elizabeth Aleman**, Miami Beach Commissioner; **Bernardo Fort-Brescia**, Principal, Arquitectonica; **Carlos Gimenez**, Miami-Dade County Mayor; **Dan Gelber**, Miami Beach Mayor; **Kristen Rosen Gonzalez**, Miami Beach Commissioner; **Mark Samuelian**, Miami Beach Commissioner; and **Ricky Arriola**, Miami Beach Commissioner.*



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VIEW FROM THE SAVANNAH CONVENTION CENTER

IN BRIEF



HOTEL HIGHLIGHTS

ANAHEIM, CA — Radisson Blu Anaheim, the brand's fourth U.S. location, broke ground Nov. 30 and is expected to open in mid 2020. The 326-room property will be located within walking distance to **Disneyland's** east entrance and the **Star Wars** themed land opening this summer.

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Harrah's Resort Atlantic City is planning a \$56 million guestroom and suite renovation in its 507-room **Coastal Tower**. The first phase of the project is scheduled to debut this summer. The 450-sq.-ft. Coastal rooms will feature a design similar to the resort's Bayview rooms.

BLOOMINGTON, MN — The **Renaissance Minneapolis Bloomington Hotel** recently unveiled a multimillion-dollar redesign described as "minimalist with mid-century nuances." The project included the 253 guestrooms, lobby and 4,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. Additional elements include a new Club Lounge, an expanded fitness center and a new restaurant, LARS (Local, Authentic, Relaxed, Social).

CANCUN, MEXICO — The **JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa** recently completed an extensive transformation of all 447 ocean-facing guestrooms



Rendering of the 800-room Signia Hilton that will connect to an expanded Indianapolis Convention Center

and suites that reflects a Mayan aesthetic. In addition, the hotel has updated the 14th-floor Club 91.

DENVER, CO — DoubleTree by Hilton Denver has completed the first phase of a \$17 million transformation project. The hotel has renovated its lobby, which now features a new restaurant, **Knife & Board**, a new urban market; and a central bar, **The HUB**. Renovations to DoubleTree by Hilton Denver's 561 guestrooms will constitute the next phase. The DoubleTree features 32,000 sq. ft. of meeting space.

MCLEAN, VA — In February, **Hilton** launched **Signia Hilton**, its new, meetings-and-events-focused brand. "Signia Hilton grew from feedback from top meeting professionals, owners, developers and guests," said **David Marr**, Senior Vice President and Global Head, Full Service Brands, Hilton. The brand "will resonate with travelers, 'wow' meeting professionals and set a new, elevated standard for the meetings and events industry." Each Signia property will have a minimum

of 500 guestrooms and 75 sq. ft. per key of flexible, high-tech meetings and events space. Signia Hilton will be a global brand. In the United States, development agreements are currently in place with meeting destinations such as Atlanta, Indianapolis and Orlando.

MT. TREMPER, NY — The **Emerson Resort & Spa** recently completed a \$500,000 renovation of the Catamount, one of the property's three event spaces. The Catamount is a 2,500-sq.-ft. venue with a 200-sq.-ft. outdoor deck with landscape artwork reflected throughout the space. The hotel features 53 guestrooms and suites; a luxury spa; and the Woodnotes Grille, which serves a Catskills-themed menu.

WILLEMSTAD, CURAÇAO — The **Renaissance Curaçao Resort & Casino** celebrates its 10-year anniversary by embarking on a phased renovation April 1. The restaurant, lobby area, and casino are scheduled to be finalized by August. For phase two, all guestrooms are set for a December completion.

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The screenshot displays the homepage of FACILITIESONLINE.COM. At the top, it features a navigation bar with categories like HOME, NEWS, INDUSTRY COLLEGE, BUSINESS, ARTS, and SPORTS. Below the navigation, there are several featured articles and sections. On the left, there's a '600k' article. In the center, there are articles titled 'FACILITIES MEDIA GROUP', 'FACILITIES DESTINATIONS', and 'FACILITIES EVENT MANAGEMENT'. On the right, there's a 'THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE!' article and a 'HOT NEWS' section. At the bottom, there's a 'RECENT DEVELOPMENTS' section with a 'LAS VEGAS, NV' article. The website also includes social media links for Facebook and Twitter.

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IN BRIEF

MEETING DEALS



LITCHFIELD PARK, AZ — In celebration of 90 years as a Southwestern oasis resort, **The Wigwam** is offering groups and meeting planners **9 Ways to Save from April 1 through Dec. 31, 2019.** Savings include \$9.00 rebate per full price group rate credit to the master; \$9.00 resort fee (normally \$30.00); 90 percent retail

pricing on audiovisual; 90 percent retail pricing on standard banquet menus; nine upgrades to suites per 100 rooms; nine complimentary VIP amenities per 100 rooms; \$90 staff room rates — 1:90 ratio; 90 percent retail pricing on contracted golf; and 90 percent retail pricing on spa block treatments. Offer cannot be combined with any additional offers and concessions. Existing contracts may not be amended. For further details, call (833) 721-5047 or email WigwamSalesOnline@wigwamarizona.com.



MARCO ISLAND, FL — Hilton Marco Island Beach Resort and Spa recently underwent a \$40 million transformation and is offering **2019-2020 Introductory Rates.** For more information, contact **Andrew Neubauer** at (239) 564-6777 or andrew.neubauer@hilton.com.



MIAMI BEACH, FL — The Confidante Miami Beach's Pick the Confidante offer allows planners to both save money and customize the experience for their attendees. Based on number of room nights booked, planners will receive a choice of perks in three different categories: Stay (e.g., 50 percent discount on resort fee); Meet (e.g., waived meeting room rental fee); and Enjoy (e.g., complimentary private yoga class from Miami Beach yoga studio greenmonkey). The offer is valid for new leads received **through June 30, 2019, with travel by Dec. 20** (blackout dates: Dec. 1-8). For more information, contact sales.inquiries@theconfidante-hotel.com or call (786) 605-1074.



NEWTON, MA — Sonesta is offering planners a **choice of four concessions** for

programs that generate a minimum of \$30,000 in room revenue, with 90 percent of pickup of contracted room nights. The concessions include: 5 percent off master bill, or donate that 5 percent to the charity of your choice; 1:30 comp, based on per night pick up; three suite upgrades at the group rate; one-hour welcome reception; welcome amenity for every booked suite; free upgraded Wi-Fi in general session or in guestrooms; complimentary handling of packages; and 20 percent discount at hotel restaurants. Visit sonesta.com/meetings/group-offers for more information.



WAIMEA, HI — The Fairmont Orchid, located on Hawaii's Kohala Coast, extends the **Aloha Offer** to planners **booking by Sept. 30, 2019.** Add-ons include: Daily Resort Fee waived, up to 5 percent room revenue credit, one-hour complimentary premium banquet bar package, one Ocean Front Suite upgrade per 50 at group rate, and 10 percent discount on spa treatments, banquet menus and AV equipment. For more information, contact Tony Aslanian, Vice President of Sales and Membership, at (407) 490-4989 or tony.aslanian@teneohg.com.

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ON THE AGENDA: CREATING A SUCCESSFUL VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Association meeting specialists discuss best practices

Elizabeth B. Armstrong, MAM, CAE, President, Association & Society Management International

Molly Marsh, Director of Education and Engagement Design, AMR Management Services

Alexa Newman, Event Director, SmithBucklin

By George Seli

Volunteers can be a major resource for convention operations, filling multiple logistical roles. But for a volunteer program to be maximally popular among members, it will need to create a convenient, enjoyable experience for participants. That means offering a variety of opportunities that cater to members' skills and interests, flexible schedules whenever possible, clearly defined roles and onsite guidance, and opportunities for feedback, among many other best practices. A well conceived and executed program paves the way for volunteers to attain their most common goals: helping their association and networking in the process. The following discussion contains insights from meeting management experts on designing a state-of-the-art volunteer program.



“Volunteer staff offer unique perspectives from having ‘inside insight’ supporting the event, and as association customers.”
—Elizabeth B. Armstrong

its clients to make the most of scarce association resources and to deliver a range of engagement options for members.

Marsh: I've seen a lot of [associations] trying to develop a skillset in volunteers to help them support peer-to-peer learning, because you can't pay for really high-quality facilitators for every interactive session that you want to do. But if you want to make your education really valuable, you do have to have that really good discussion and activity-based approach to

things, so [it's important] to broaden the pool of volunteers who have at least some ability to serve in that capacity. When you get to know your members well and you're working with volunteers on a regular basis, I think you do get a sense of who might be able to pull off that kind of engagement. So you work on building that competence in

people who you think might have it, but who don't necessarily have a lot of experience.

TRENDS IN VOLUNTEER ROLES

Armstrong: We have seen divergent trends related to the use of volunteers for association operations. Today's association members tend to be less involved in administrative activities, investing their limited volunteer time on the most meaningful experiences and focusing on industry issues and enrichment. That being said, Association and Society Management International (ASMI) shepherds conference volunteer programs for several of

UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS

Newman: The most common reason for volunteering is that conferences are a way to create new connections and increased networking opportunities within one's field. This camaraderie can lead to lifelong bonds and future

Continued on page 16

AN **ALL-NEW** PERSPECTIVE ON MEETINGS AND EVENTS



All-New Walt Disney World Dolphin Lobby

The Walt Disney World Dolphin lobby has undergone a \$12 million re-design, the final stage of a \$150 million renovation project, the largest makeover in the resort's history. It has completely transformed into a sleek, contemporary space featuring new food and beverage options and offer an inviting area for guests to relax or network. A recipient of the prestigious Meetings & Conventions Hall of Fame Award, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin is a nationally respected and recognized leader in the convention resort arena. The resort offers more than 331,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, 86 meeting rooms, and 2,270 guest rooms and suites which feature the Westin Heavenly® Bed. Attendees can also relax in the luxurious Mandara Spa, indulge in one of our 17 world-class restaurants and lounges or enjoy our unique Disney Differences.



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connections. Many individuals want to get more involved from a content perspective, sharing their expertise in the field. They might deliver an educational session or sit on a committee that vets the content to ensure their peers are receiving the most up-to-date education and trends in their space.

Marsh: In my experience working with our members, being called upon to do this is kind of an honor. It's recognized that you're bringing something of value to the association, and so a lot of them tend to jump on that and get excited. I think those that are looking for leadership opportunities in the organization kind of crave those opportunities to engage with a wider range of members and be a face that people recognize. That way, when it comes time for board elections, for example, they've got a little bit more familiarity [among the members]. They become a resource for other members to advance their own involvement. And I also think the members have this sense of "This is our association, we all contribute to make the experience what we want it to be," and so this is their small way to help out and contribute to the overall health of the association.



"Many times when volunteers don't do things effectively, it's probably because you didn't give them enough information, as opposed to a deficiency in the person." —Molly Marsh

Newman: Student volunteers are there for networking and finding future job opportunities — and education, of course. Experiencing conferences firsthand is a great way to help narrow one's career focus, especially if there are specialties within their particular field. In general, volunteering is an excellent resume builder to demonstrate volunteer work experience and commitment to a profession.

PROMOTING OPPORTUNITIES

Newman: Social media and email campaigns are useful for promoting volunteer opportunities, but there is nothing like recruiting people in person at the conference. Identifying key stakeholders in the community (existing board members and star volunteers) to talk about their experiences and the benefits of volunteering is the best way to spread the word. Their stories are the most powerful vehicles for driving volunteer recruitment.

Armstrong: We use typical promotional tools including solicitations via email blasts, social media channels and web posts.

Marsh: Many of our clients use Higher Logic [online community management software] to post the volunteer opportunities, where people are going regularly for information about the association.

SCHEDULING AND ASSIGNMENTS

Newman: Scheduling planning meetings with volunteers can be tricky at times. You need to be cognizant of their day jobs and balance schedules while keeping the association's event on track. I find that using a tool like Doodle to collaborate on people's schedules in advance helps to ensure the most participation possible. And if something comes up in their schedule that prevents attendance at a meeting or on a call, request that your volunteers give as much notice as possible so that the meeting can be rescheduled.

Armstrong: Offer as much flexibility as possible, including creative opportunities such as pre-meeting jobs including generating certificates, mailing badges and stuffing registration packets. Use of an online volunteer management program allows our Conference Staff Manager, Chelsea Firth, to define a huge range of volunteer options, vet qualifications and make assignments, communicate, check in and out personnel, calculate hours worked (typical shift duration for onsite roles is two hours at a time) and adjust registration records accordingly.

Platforms such as Sign-up Genius and VolunteerLocal are available to association meeting planners.

ENSURING A REWARDING EXPERIENCE

Newman: Taking care of your volunteers is an important part of the process, as you want to ensure they feel rewarded for their time, energy and shared expertise. Having clear roles and responsibilities, in addition to predetermined planning meeting times, frequency, etc., ensure a well-oiled machine and the satisfaction of your volunteers.

Marsh: One mistake is just not having a lot of role clarity. What are they actually being asked to do, and what is a realistic expectation of how much time that's going to take? Many times when volunteers don't do things effectively, it's probably because you didn't give them enough information, as opposed to a deficiency in the person.

Armstrong: The biggest mistakes are not clearly defining roles and responsibilities, not adequately communicating and not entrusting volunteers. ASMI provides frequent pre-conference and onsite communications, detailed written instructions and job descriptions, preparatory webinars and onsite briefings.

Marsh: Another mistake is assuming that having volunteers means you don't have to dedicate any staff time to that [task]. Investing a little bit of time means that you can be much

Continued on page 18



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more successful across the board. You have to take the time to walk them through their expectations and [ensure] that they're set and ready to go, and account for that in your overall planning process.

Armstrong: The more engagement of longtime volunteers in the training (with permanent staff oversight), the more enriching opportunities can be provided to a wide range of association members.

Newman: This should go without saying, but make sure you thank your volunteers both publicly and privately for their hard work. This can be done in a variety of ways: the onsite guide, email, signage and slides with pictures during the event, calling them up on stage, etc. If the association can afford it, host a reception in honor of your volunteers or find other small ways to acknowledge their contributions (e.g., discounted registrations, hotel room amenities, thank-you gifts, etc.).

Marsh: [As a thank-you gift] we try to offset some kind of cost — a discounted registration, a free meal. We have become huge fans of Starbucks gift cards: Everybody at some point wants a cup of coffee or tea.

Armstrong: ASMI clients send their conference volunteers a thank-you letter and participation certificate to recognize their contributions to the success of the event, in addition to



“Identifying key stakeholders in the community (existing board members and star volunteers) to talk about their experiences and the benefits of volunteering is the best way to spread the word.”

—Alexa Newman

the reduced registration fees.

WHEN UTILIZING EMPLOYEES IS PREFERABLE

Newman: I have found that some support functions (registration, for example) require more extensive training and are best

handled by paid professionals who are experienced with the technology or process. It is more effective to assign volunteers to specific tasks with a set window of time such as stuffing conference bags, passing out giveaways or working in the association booth. Then, volunteers are able to enjoy the conference for the rest of the duration.

Marsh: I think anything related to external communication, beyond “welcome to registration,” anything talking about the identity of the association [should not be a volunteer duty]. I also really hesitate to have volunteers handling money. There is no financial way to hold that person accountable, so I think you open yourself up to a lot of risk.

GETTING THE VOLUNTEER PERSPECTIVE

Armstrong: Learn from every experience! We conduct a 360-degree evaluation and produce after-action reports for each event. ASMI’s headquarters staff note improvements to be made after each meeting, even after 30 years of convention production. Volunteer staff offer unique perspectives from having “inside insight” supporting the event, and as association customers.

Newman: It is key to request volunteers’ feedback following the event. This will ensure they know their voices are being heard, and you are involving them in the process to deliver the most successful event for everyone. Volunteers know the members better than anyone, and also tend to have a pulse on the attendee feedback that may not be given during the survey process. After all, they themselves are experiencing the event through the lens of an attendee. Each event has its own set of demographics, preferences and expectations, and asking your volunteers to seek out and report back on feedback is a helpful way to ensure satisfied customers and achieve your goal of customer retention.

Marsh: I’ve got a really good example of [volunteer input]. In 2017, I did a series of regional conferences, and for each one we had these interactive exercises with a volunteer facilitating it. The volunteers were able to help us refine the questions that were asked and the timing, so we devoted the right amount of time to each question. They were observing how the participants were interacting with each other and shared that feedback with us. The activity has grown and evolved, and become even more valuable for people.

4 VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT TAKE-AWAYS

ASMI Conference Staff Manager Chelsea Firth, QAS, offers the following recommendations:

1. Invest in a volunteer management software program. It will up your game.
2. Do not under-utilize the volunteer members. Most of them are very competent and want to do more than just sit and count tickets.
3. Be flexible to allow onsite staff to have a good experience, and trust them.
4. Extend the volunteer experience beyond the work shift: Help them find mentors, answer questions about specific conference sessions, make connections within the association and the industry.





Major convention center upgrades mean more group business for the Golden State

By George Seli

With a much publicized convention center enhancement in San Francisco and both Los Angeles and Sacramento pursuing similar projects, California is becoming an even more viable destination for groups. Following is a review of what attendees can expect to find at these new and improved centers and the vibrant cities surrounding them. San Jose, Pasadena and Long Beach, while not currently enhancing their convention centers, remain strong players in the meetings market thanks to their well-developed hospitality infrastructures. All in all, California will continue to represent a golden opportunity for planners in the coming years.

SAN FRANCISCO

San Francisco's meeting industry got off to a great start this year with the completion of the \$551 million **Moscone Expansion Project**. Adding more than 305,000 sq. ft. of function space to the facility, the development will have more groups "going to San Francisco," in the words famously sung by '60s vocalist Scott McKenzie. And while the counterculture movement is long gone, its environmentalist ethic is reflected in the Moscone Center, which is designed to meet **LEED**

Platinum certification. The building boasts the largest rooftop solar panel array in San Francisco, reportedly has the lowest carbon footprint per delegate of any major convention center in North America, and will recover 15 million gallons of water annually for reuse in landscaping, street cleaning and more.

And thanks to the **San Francisco Arts Commission**, the new Moscone Center is enhanced by the work of local artists, including a large outdoor sculpture on the north side of Howard Street by artist Christine Corday and a large-scale mural on the Paseo Gallery wall by Brendan Monroe. "We love the fact that they've evolved the sustainability aspect of the building. And the art installations are just the icing on the cake; it elevates the experience for the guests," comments **Bill Lynch**, Vice President of Engagement & Events for the New York, NY-based **Specialty Food Association**. Lynch planned the **2019 Winter Fancy Food Show**, which has the distinction of being the first client event in Moscone Center's new space. But the Association is by no means new to the convention center.

"We've been a customer of Moscone for over 40 years," says Lynch. At the 2019 show, "we had the largest participation we've ever had on the West Coast, so it



(Left): The Specialty Food Association was the first group to meet in the expanded Moscone Center. (Below): The ribbon-cutting ceremony for the expansion.



continues to grow every year. The expansion was very welcome as far as allowing us to expand our footprint.” Lynch explains that his group particularly values “multifunctional” exhibit space “that can be used in a variety of ways, whether you want to do traditional exhibits or experiential feature areas where we have tastings and things of that nature.” The group used some of the new 50,000-sq.-ft. ballroom for educational programming and for its “Future of Food” area. Moscone Center’s own F&B satisfied attendees’ discerning palates, Lynch notes. “They have the same passion for food that our community has, so they get really creative and help us come up with some unique concepts,” he explains. “It’s hard to wow a crowd like ours as far as food goes, but they somehow manage to do it every year.”

A couple of years ago, Moscone Center F&B staff helped create a food truck experience for attendees. “We wanted to put together an exhibitor appreciation party, and we wanted to do something really different and unique. So we collaborated with Savor and we came up with this food truck concept,” Lynch relates. “They helped us identify the hottest food trucks in San Francisco at the time. Many of our show participants are not able to get out into the city as much as they’d like to, so for us to be able to bring these unique flavors from the city into the Moscone Center turned out to be a really cool experience for them.”

The **San Francisco Travel Association** has also provided assistance in a variety of ways, Lynch adds. “They’ve helped connect us with the local buying community and engaged us with Mayor Lee, prior to his passing, for his involvement in a ribbon cutting. They’ve also helped us [connect] with organizations like the **San Francisco Giants**. We had their mascot come to the show.”

SACRAMENTO

By winter of 2020, Sacramento will also boast an enhanced convention center. Work has begun on the **Sacramento Convention Center**’s redesign and the addition of 160,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space and 40,000 sq. ft. of new ballroom space. The Convention Center is scheduled to close for construction in mid-July 2019 and will reopen in November 2020.

The expansion will mean more group business for

“It’s hard to wow a crowd like ours as far as food goes, but [Moscone Center] somehow manages to do it every year.”

—**Bill Lynch**, Vice President of Engagement & Events, Specialty Food Association



Sacramento, and some planners may in turn find it more difficult to secure their desired dates and space. “The renovation of the Sacramento Convention Center will absolutely create compression within the destination,” notes **Ron Johnson**, Founder of **Mosaic Event Management, Inc.**, which produces the annual **Almond Conference** and various legal meetings in Sacramento. However, he has found the city to be very proactive in ensuring his clients’ events are not disrupted by that compression. “I’m happy to say that before the Convention Center went under renovation, the mayor called, the CEO of Visit Sacramento called, the general manager of the Convention Center called, as did the general managers of the hotels we use,” Johnson relates. “This is a perfect example of how the destination engages clients. These calls were made not only to educate me on the renovation plans, but to listen to my concerns and help me identify ways to maintain historic partnerships. The fact that the Center and hotels will extend long-term contracts with first rights of refusal shows me they want to keep historic business, not simply chase new opportunities.”

Helping to accommodate the increased influx of meeting groups is a hotel portfolio that “is getting better every year,” Johnson observes. He cites the new **Kimpton Sawyer Hotel**, which “brings a fresh and modern approach to housing and is perfectly situated adjacent to the new

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**Sacramento's Golden 1 Center
and iconic Tower Bridge (below)**



Sacramento remains financially competitive and with full infrastructure to support large conferences. It's a value-add for our clients' budget."

—Ron Johnson, Founder, Mosaic Event Management,

Sacramento Kings' Golden 1 Center. The 250-room property opened in October 2017 as part of a 16-story, mixed-use building. In January 2018, the **Murieta Inn & Spa** opened just 20 miles east of downtown Sacramento. The 83-room hotel is adjacent to the **Murieta Equestrian Center**. The following month saw the debut of the 116-room **Hampton Inn & Suites Sacramento** near **Sacramento State University** and minutes from downtown.

Johnson points to a couple distinguishing features of Sacramento as a meeting destination, the first being its affordability. "Unlike many California destinations, Sacramento remains financially competitive and with full infrastructure to support large conferences. It's a value-add for our clients' budget," he explains. Second, Sacramento is a healthy eater's paradise. "Positioned in the middle of the country's largest agriculture growing area, Sacramento is California's Farm to Fork capitol," he asserts.

Given that nearly 90 percent of the global almond crop originates in California, the destination "lends itself perfectly" to the Almond Conference, says Johnson,

who has produced the event for the last 14 years. And Sacramento will continue to host the conference, thanks in part to the efforts of the CVB. "Visit Sacramento President and CEO **Mike Testa** and his team are outstanding, and along with Mayor [**Darrell**] **Steinberg**, quickly stepped up to the plate to offer considerable concessions for the Almond Conference to remain in Sacramento during renovations. This meant a sizeable investment to cover expenses we would not otherwise incur."

Another of Johnson's clients "desperately wanted to use the new Golden 1 Center for their general session during March Madness," he relates. "After repeated rejections from the Golden 1 Center, Visit Sacramento and their stakeholders worked together to find a way to make this happen. They were able to work on our behalf with Golden 1 to set aside the arena for a week, so the group could use the basketball arena for this session. In doing so, they also negotiated the rental rates with considerable concessions and tangible benefits." It's that kind of effort on the part of group clients that keeps Sacramento among California's most viable meeting destinations.



San Jose's Santana Row, a picturesque shopping and dining locale

SAN JOSE

The Capital of Silicon Valley is sure to inspire attendees with its innovative spirit, particularly when a planner hosts an offsite event at **The Tech Museum of Innovation**. The Tech, which recently celebrated its 20th anniversary, is a 132,000-sq.-ft. venue that offers groups a 3,600-sq.-ft. indoor reception space, 3,000-sq.-ft. outdoor reception space and the **Hackworth IMAX Dome Theater**. After an immersive experience at the museum, attendees can walk to the **San Jose McEnery Convention Center** as well as the city's convention hotels.

Renovated and expanded in 2013, the Convention Center houses 520,000 sq. ft. of total event space, 367,526 sq. ft. of total convention center space, 165,000 sq. ft. of contiguous exhibit space and 43 breakout meeting rooms. The facility's campus includes four rentable theaters: the **California Theatre**, the **Center for the Performing Arts**, **Montgomery Theater** and **City National Civic**. **Team San Jose** manages the convention center along with all theaters, affording planners a one-stop shop in coordinating an event on the campus.

With 4,000 committable hotel rooms citywide, planners also have a variety of brands and price points in lodging to choose from. Two properties are connected to the convention center: the 353-room **Hilton San Jose**, offering 19,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, and the 510-room **San Jose Marriott**, featuring 21,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. The 805-room **Fairmont San Jose**, with 65,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, sits less than a mile from the convention center.

The Tech Museum of Innovation is certainly not the only intriguing offsite venue in the city. San Jose is also home to **Vietnamese Heritage Garden and Historical Museum**; the **San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles**, the first museum of its kind in the United States; and the **Winchester Mystery House**, one of the country's largest Victorian homes.

LOS ANGELES

The City of Angels' popularity in the tourism industry continues unabated. Last year, Los Angeles welcomed a record 50 million visitors,

representing a 3.1 percent increase over 2017 and marking the eighth-consecutive year of tourism growth for the city. According to **L.A. Tourism**, the growth can be attributed to factors such as a 3.6 percent increase in international seat capacity at **Los Angeles International Airport** and nearly 2,000 new rooms added to the destination's hotel inventory.

That inventory will see an 850-room jump in the near future when a \$700 million expansion of the **J.W. Marriott L.A. LIVE** is completed. The new hotel tower will offer 110,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, including a 51,000-sq.-ft. ballroom, the largest in the city. The project is part of the **Convention Center at L.A. LIVE transformation**, approved by the **Los Angeles City Council** in December. Developed by **AEG**, the estimated \$1.25 billion project will transform the Convention Center and adjacent L.A. LIVE campus in Downtown Los Angeles into an integrated, 100-acre meetings and conventions destination with over two



million sq. ft. of total event space, 2,240 onsite hotel rooms, 20 restaurants, unique venues and more. The **Los Angeles Convention Center** will increase its total useable space to over 1.2 million sq. ft. (including 900,000 sq. ft. of total exhibition space). Contiguous exhibition space between existing South and West Halls will increase to 750,000 sq. ft. Total meeting space will increase to over 250,000 sq. ft., with more than 80 total meeting rooms and a new column-free multipurpose hall. The project will also add 140,000 sq. ft. of event space to **Gilbert Lindsay Plaza** in front of the Convention Center. The new hotel tower will be connected to the existing JW Marriott and West Hall of the Convention Center via new pedestrian bridges. Both the Convention Center at L.A. LIVE transformation and the new J.W. Marriott hotel tower are expected to begin construction in winter 2020 and reach completion in the first quarter of 2022.

Apart from this major hotel development, several smaller ones may be advantageous to incoming groups, including the following:

- **AC Hotel Los Angeles El Segundo.** Opening in this spring, this 180-room property is located in an up-and-coming neighborhood.
- **NoMad Los Angeles.** In January of 2018, this 250-room hotel opened in a historic 1923 building.
- **Hotel Figueroa.** Following a \$30 million renovation, the 268-room Hotel Figueroa reopened in January 2018.
- **The Sheraton Gateway Los Angeles Hotel.** The Hub Conference Center is a newly renovated 7,523-sq.-ft. meeting center that features an auditorium, executive boardroom and 17 meeting rooms.

The Sheraton offers a complimentary shuttle to and from LAX, where visitors will find major upgrades. A \$516 million

overhaul of Terminal 1 was recently completed, and a \$1.6 billion modernization project that will reinvent Terminals 4 and 5 recently broke ground.

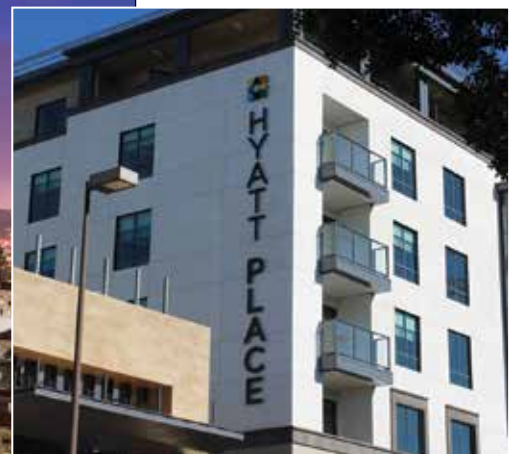
On the cultural side, Los Angeles will be home to two new museums where groups can hold offsite functions. The **Academy Museum** is scheduled to open late this year in the heart of the city. The movie museum will feature state-of-the-art galleries, exhibition spaces, movie theaters and special event spaces. *Star Wars* enthusiasts will delight in **The Lucas Museum of Narrative Art**, a \$1 billion new museum from George Lucas' personal collection of art that opens downtown in 2021.

PASADENA

Just 10 miles from downtown Los Angeles lies Pasadena, a pedestrian-friendly city where attendees can explore 22 blocks of shopping and entertainment in **Old Pasadena**. An icon of local entertainment is the **Rose Parade**, typically held on New Year's Day and followed by the equally iconic **Rose Bowl**. Meeting planners looking for a unique offsite event venue can consider the **Brookside Golf Club** at the Rose Bowl, which accommodates up to 300 guests. Six different rooms can be rented in the clubhouse, the largest being the Mediterranean Ballroom & Patio.

The hub of Pasadena meetings is the **Pasadena Convention Center**, which offers a variety of spaces to host events of different types. They include a 55,000-sq.-ft. Exhibition Hall, 17,000-sq.-ft. historic grand ballroom, 25,000-sq.-ft. Grand Ballroom, 28,000-sq.-ft. Conference Center housing 18 well-appointed meeting rooms, and the 3,000-seat **Pasadena Civic Auditorium**.

In December, the 189-room **Hyatt Place Pasadena** opened across from the center. The property offers more



The Pasadena City Hall (left) and new Hyatt Place (above), located across from the convention center



Long Beach (above) is known for its nautical history and culture. Among the distinctive lodging choices for groups is the Queen Mary (right), which has its own 347-stateroom hotel along with extensive meeting space.

than 3,000 sq. ft. of meeting space and a location that is “ideal for those looking to experience all that the city has to offer, while remaining within reach of Old Pasadena and the convention center,” said **Jeanne O’Grady Goldschmidt**, Executive Director of the **Pasadena Convention & Visitors Bureau**.

Several of the city’s hotels have recently undergone multimillion-dollar renovations. “In 2018, Pasadena saw tremendous investment in our hospitality offerings, making it an exciting time for our community,” said Goldschmidt. “With over 2,600 rooms, new meeting spaces and renovated hotels, Pasadena can accommodate a variety of conferences, meetings and events.” Highlights include a \$20 million renovation at the **Sheraton Pasadena**, a \$25 million renovation at the **Hilton Pasadena** and an \$11 million renovation at the **Westin Pasadena**.

LONG BEACH

A seaside destination that is steeped in the fine arts, Long Beach is home to venues such as the **Queen Mary** and **Aquarium of the Pacific** along with institutions such as the **Long Beach Museum of Art**, **Museum of Latin American Art** and **Long Beach Performing Arts Center**. The cinematically inclined can explore **Universal Studios Hollywood**, which includes a theme park, **CityWalk** shopping and dining complex and **Gibson Amphitheatre**.

Groups can visit all these points of interest when they meet at the **Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center**, which has recently invested \$50 million in modernizing its event spaces. The complex features over



400,000 sq. ft. of exhibit and meeting space, including 34 high-tech meeting rooms, two theaters and a 13,000-seat arena.

The Center is adjacent to the 528-room **Hyatt Regency Long Beach**, which offers its own 10,000 sq. ft. of function space. Other major properties include the 469-room **Westin Long Beach**, which sits across from the Center, and the 299-room **Hilton Long Beach**. The latter two hotels offer 34,000 and 30,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, respectively. A unique lodging choice is the 347-stateroom **Queen Mary Hotel**, which boasts more than 80,000 sq. ft. of meeting and exhibit space in 14 Art Deco salons, complemented by event planning services.

Nautical meeting experiences can also be created by partnering with **Hornblower Cruises & Events**. Planners can charter a vintage wooden vessel or modern yacht to afford their attendees a seafarer’s view of Long Beach.



From Orlando to Miami, the Sunshine State readies to accommodate more group clients

By Anthony Bilden

When Florida is a logistically viable destination, meeting planners seldom need to be sold on it. Relative affordability, warm weather and a slew of renowned convention centers and resorts have made the state a meetings powerhouse. As a result, many cities are reporting increased group business, and developers are making the investments necessary to effectively host more delegates. Examples range from convention center expansions in Orlando, Fort Lauderdale and Miami to new meetings-ready hotels in Daytona Beach and Palm Beach County. So whether a planner selects first-tier Florida or second-tier Florida, forward-thinking supplier partners await.

ORLANDO

The **Orange County Convention Center (OCCC)**, a competitor for some of the country's largest and most high-profile meetings and tradeshows, is upping the ante with a \$605 million campus upgrade expected to be completed by the fall of 2023. The project includes the new **Convention Way Grand Concourse**, an enclosed connection between the North and South concourses that features additional meeting space and an 80,000-sq.-ft. ballroom. Another new addition will be the 200,000-sq.-ft. **Multipurpose Venue**, a divisible, column-free space with a combination of retractable and floor seating to accommodate between 18,000-20,000

"Many of our citywide tradeshows have a percentage of international attendance, and many of them were up in attendance from exhibitors and attendees. I attribute [the increase] to a strong economy."

—**Yulita Osuba**, CMP, Deputy Director,
Orange County Convention Center



guests. This project will also add connectivity between the North and South concourses.

The OCCC's recent level of business certainly justifies the investment. "Last fiscal year we hosted 186 events total with 1.5 million in total attendance; we average between 1.2 million and 1.4 million," says **Yulita Osuba**, CMP, Deputy Director of the OCCC. "Many of our citywide tradeshows have a percentage of international attendance, and many of them were up in

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Orange County Convention Center

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attendance from exhibitors and attendees. I attribute [the increase] to a strong economy.” And the future looks bright for the facility, with a total (at press time) of about 800 events on the books through 2040 with an estimated 12 million in attendees, Osuba notes. New citywide clients include the **World Discipleship Summit** in 2020, the **U.S. Chess SuperNationals** in 2025 and the **International Society for Technology and Education** in 2026. (A new South terminal at the **Orlando International Airport**, to be completed in 2021, will help to accommodate the influx of delegates with 19 new gates.)

In addition, the OCCC expansion will help to meet the space needs of existing clients. “There are 14 events that have outgrown the existing space,” she says. “The Multipurpose Venue will include seating for 18,000 to 20,000 guests. That will give us an opportunity to expand these 14 groups that need the additional square footage for exhibits. And some of these groups that don’t need it will be able to book more events independently of that 200,000-sq.-ft. venue. What we found out is that many of the groups need the ballroom for general sessions. With the expansion, we’ll be adding a ballroom of 80,000 sq. ft. and an additional 60,000 sq. ft. of meeting rooms.”

It is now even easier for delegates to navigate the country’s second-largest convention center thanks to 14 recently installed wayfinding kiosks in both the West and North/South Buildings. In addition, the **OCCC Campus Wayfinding App** was launched last month. Available for download in the App Store for iPhone and iPad as well as on Google Play, the app includes campus maps, transportation information and the all-new OCCC Alerts section, which curates important announcements shared through the Convention Center’s Twitter account. “Almost all of our clients have an event app, and we can provide our clients a link to the Wayfinding App that they can embed into their event app,” Osuba adds. A relatively new tech feature is the **OCCC Portal**, developed in partnership with **USI Ungerboeck**. “It’s an opportunity to share documents with our clients,” Osuba explains. “So when the event manager is working with the client, the event manager can upload information on the convention center, the event planning guide, etc., and then the client planner can also upload their floorplans or documents, rather than send emails with attachments.”

Recently, the OCCC renewed its contract with **Centerplate**, a company that Osuba appreciates due to “the longevity and expertise of their staff.” The expertise was demonstrated when Centerplate serviced the **North American Association of Food Equipment Manufacturers (NAFEM)**. “These are food people so their expectations are very high,” she says. “Their comment [to Centerplate] was ‘You knocked it out

of the park.’” The company started working with the client over a year out, learning about the F&B expectations of their attendees and exhibitors.

Many of the hotels surrounding the OCCC also excel in food service, a prime example being the **Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort**, which appointed a new executive chef (see *In Brief*, page 4). Home to outstanding eateries such as Il Mulino and Todd English’s bluezoo, the Swan and Dolphin is today a more compelling site choice than ever due to a \$150 million transformation completed in December. The project redesigned the lobby, renovated all 2,270 guestrooms and made upgrades to the resort’s more than 331,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. Even more meeting space will be available to groups when the resort debuts **The Cove**, a new 14-story tower, in the fall of 2020. Located next to the Swan Resort, the 349-room tower will house more than 22,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, including two ballrooms, 12 meeting rooms and a rooftop reception space with views of Walt Disney World fireworks, a 16,800-sq.-ft. elevated deck with a fire pit and pool, and a 90-seat restaurant.

Overall, Orlando has more guestrooms to offer every year, increasing its inventory to 128,600 from 122,000 by the end of this year. New hotels include the 175-room **Margaritaville Resort Orlando** (opened in February with 40,000 sq. ft. of function space); the 750-room **Universal’s Endless Summer Resort – Surfside Inn and Suites** (opening this summer) and 2,050-room **Universal’s Endless Summer Resort – Dockside Inn and Suites** (opening in 2020); and the 516-room **JW Marriott Bonnet Creek** (opening in 2020 with 50,000 sq. ft. of meeting space).



DAYTONA BEACH

From the tranquility of 23 miles of white-sand beaches to the thrill of annual events such as the **Daytona 500**, **Bike Week** and **Biketoberfest**, Daytona Beach offers a range of activities

for conventioners' free time. In addition, the boutiques and restaurants of the **Ocean Walk Shoppes** are located just 400 feet from the **Ocean Center**, the city's convention center. The Ocean Center offers 94,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space, a divisible 14,000-sq.-ft. ballroom, 32 meeting rooms and a 9,300-seat arena.

The city's expanding hotel portfolio is adding new options for groups meeting at the Ocean Center. Last year, the 200-room **Hard Rock Hotel Daytona Beach** debuted with 20,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, and the 133-room **Delta by Marriott Daytona Beach** opened as well. This April, Marriott is introducing a hotel that is optimally convenient for experiencing the "World Center of Racing." **The Daytona, Autograph Collection** opens directly across from the **Daytona International Speedway** as the area's first and only "track side" full-service hotel. The property offers 144 guestrooms with views of **Victory Circle** and the Speedway, an outdoor bar and terrace, heated swimming pool and spa, 2,400 sq. ft. of meeting space, and more than 10,000 sq. ft. of indoor/outdoor event space. Along with the 105-room **Fairfield Inn & Suites Daytona Beach Speedway/Airport**, The Daytona will be part of **ONE DAYTONA**, a dining and entertainment complex across from the Speedway. New oceanfront hotels planned for the Daytona Beach

images of 230 inductees.

Just a mile from the Speedway is the **Daytona Beach International Airport**, which introduced new flights in December. Canadian carrier **Sunwing Airlines** now offers direct flights from Toronto, **Silver Airways** is offering direct flights from Fort Lauderdale, and **American Airlines** has added a direct flight from New York City (LaGuardia).

PALM BEACH COUNTY

More groups are discovering The Palm Beaches, due in part the efforts of the local DMO. **Discover The Palm Beaches** recently announced a 98 percent increase in room nights booked by its Group Sales team from 2014 to 2018. The 231,000 hotel room nights booked last year was record setting. "We have made great inroads in positioning our destination in the meetings market, and the best is yet to come," reported **Jorge Pesquera**, Discover The Palm Beaches President and CEO. "Meetings and convention visitors expose The Palm Beaches to corporate and association leaders who have the power to influence company relocations and entrepreneurial investments in our area. This supports the Business Development Board's and municipal economic development efforts. Groups are a win-win proposition for any community, and we're ready to capitalize on it."



Palm Beach (left) has made its mark on the fine arts with the Norton Museum of Art and the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts (above)

Boardwalk and Pier area including a **Marriott Renaissance, a Courtyard by Marriott** and a **Springhill Suites by Marriott**.

In addition to these new properties, several hotels have recently undergone renovations, including the **Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanfront Resort**, a 744-room property adjacent to the Ocean Center complex; the **Four Diamond Shores Resort & Spa**; and the **Plaza Resort & Spa**, renovating this year.

Attendees who haven't been to Daytona in a few years will experience a transformed Speedway, which underwent a \$400 million overhaul in 2016. A variety of lounges and suites can accommodate group functions. Motorsports enthusiasts will also appreciate the **Motorsports Hall of Fame of America**, which houses a 10,000-sq.-ft. hall adorned with sculpted

Key to the CVB's efforts is the **Palm Beach County Convention Center**, which includes a 100,000-sq.-ft. exhibit hall, 22,000-sq.-ft. ballroom and 21,000 sq. ft. of flexible breakout space divisible into 19 rooms. Several hotel openings are offering delegates new lodging options near the convention center, including the 150-room **Canopy by Hilton** (opened last year), 200-room **Marriott Autograph Collection** property (opening this fall) and 140-room **Aloft West Palm Beach** (opened this year).

Just outside downtown West Palm Beach, **Banyan Cay Resort & Golf, A Noble House Resort** is set to open in late 2019. The 150-room resort will offer over 15,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, a Jack Nicklaus Signature Course, a 5,000-sq.-ft. spa and fitness center, tennis pavilion, pool and more. In Palm Beach, the Five Star, Five Diamond **Four Seasons**

Resort Palm Beach reopened in December after a multi-million-dollar renovation. The 196-room property houses over 21,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. In nearby Manalapan, the Five Star **Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa** recently introduced redesigned ballrooms and meeting spaces spanning more than 30,000 sq. ft. in the resort's north tower.

Two world-class cultural institutions can be found in West Palm Beach: the **Kravis Center for the Performing Arts** and the **Norton Museum of Art**. The former broke ground on a \$50 million expansion last May, while the latter recently completed a \$100 million expansion. The Kravis's project, scheduled to be completed by the summer of 2020, will increase the size of the lobby by 6,000 sq. ft., create a new pedestrian-friendly plaza and add a new valet parking garage. The Norton's expansion added 12,000 sq. ft. of gallery space for exhibitions, an education center, the 210-seat Stiller Family Foundation Auditorium, the Leonard and Evelyn Lauder Restaurant, an adjoining 9,000-sq.-ft. sculpture garden and a 4,000-sq.-ft. Great Hall.

FORT LAUDERDALE

As the entrance waterscape and blue carpeting of the **Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center** suggest, the water is never far away in this city. Fort Lauderdale is home to 23 miles of beaches and over 300 miles of inland waterways. It's also one of Florida's best cities to enjoy dining, shopping and cultural activities.

A convention center expansion, scheduled to take place from early 2020 through late 2023, will make it easier for large groups to experience Fort Lauderdale. The **Convention Center Expansion and Headquarters Hotel Projects** will add over 525,000 sq. ft. of indoor and outdoor space to the convention center, as well as an 800-room, **Omni**-flagged headquarters hotel with its own 73,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. Both projects will be **LEED Gold** certified.

Large groups who would prefer to meet exclusively at a hotel have a viable option in Fort Lauderdale. The 1,000-room **Diplomat Beach Resort, Curio Collection by Hilton** houses an impressive 200,000-plus sq. ft. of function space, including a 50,000-sq.-ft. Great Hall, 20,000-sq.-ft. Grand Ballroom overlooking the Atlantic, three additional ballrooms and 39 breakout rooms. Located just 10 minutes from the **Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport**, the Diplomat was the ideal host for the December 2017 **United States Tour Operators Association (USTOA) Annual Conference & Marketplace**, planned by **Michael J. Pierson Associates, Inc.** According to Pierson, the layout of the meeting space worked exceptionally well for the event. "The meeting space is in a separate building that's attached by a walkway to the hotel, so it's very convenient," he says. "And most importantly, the top level of the conference center can be opened up entirely

The Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center will be complemented by an Omni headquarters hotel (rendering below)



"The top level of the [Diplomat Beach Resort] conference center can be opened up entirely to about 50,000 sq. ft., and there's not a lot of ballrooms in the United States, short of Orlando and Las Vegas, that can be opened up to that square footage."



*—Michael J. Pierson, President,
Michael J. Pierson Associates, Inc.*

to about 50,000 sq. ft., and there's not a lot of ballrooms in the United States, short of Orlando and Las Vegas, that can be opened up to that square footage." Once the meeting in the ballroom is finished, "you can walk through the interior hallway and you end up in the main lobby area, where they've got a bar that holds 250-300 people," he notes. "And that is wonderful

because virtually every conference is about networking.”

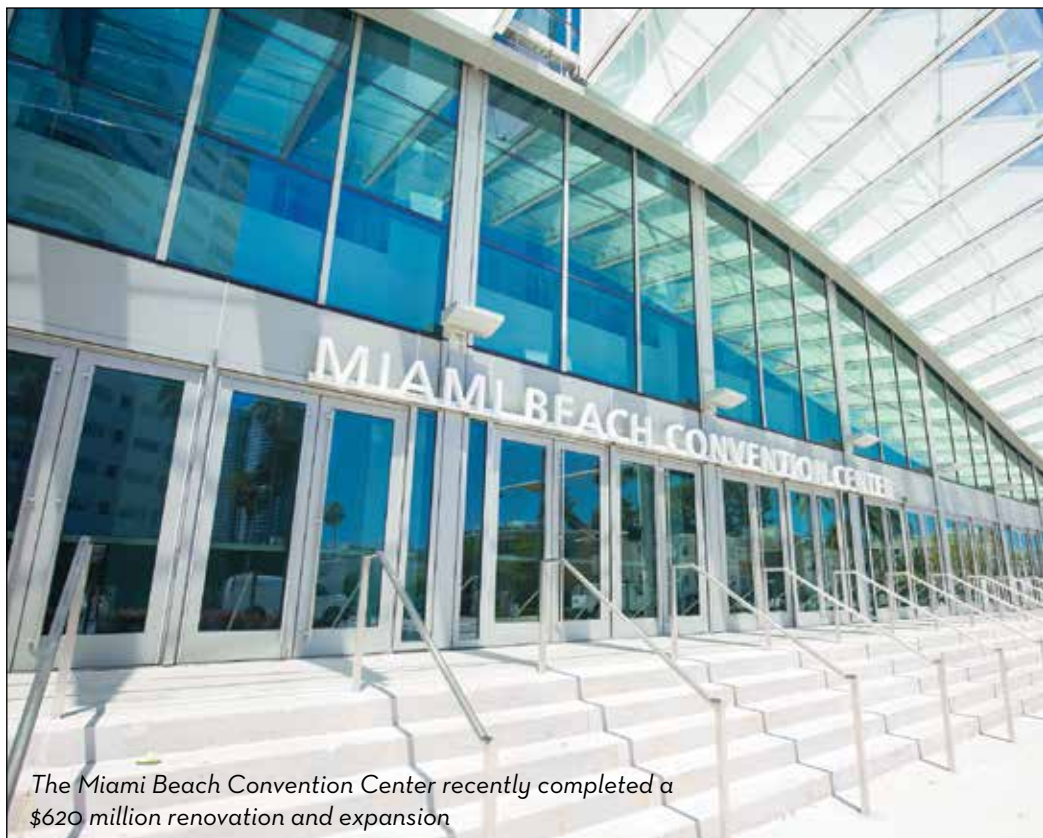
Pierson also commends the **Greater Fort Lauderdale CVB** as one of the greatest he’s ever worked with. “I’ve had three major programs that I’ve operated in Lauderdale, always with the support of the CVB. They’ve supported us in negotiations with the convention center, worked with us on events and speakers, and just constantly come up with new ways of doing things,” he relates. “This year, we had a challenge with USTOA because the president wanted a very special type of a welcome party at the hotel, and we went to the CVB and told them what his idea was and they helped us pull it off. They worked with some of the local vendors and got them to support the event with their products and services in a way that we could have never done.”

Beyond the Diplomat, there are many fine resort options in Fort Lauderdale, and several have undergone multimillion-dollar renovations. Properties that completed renovations last year include **B Ocean Resort Fort Lauderdale**, **Bahia Mar Fort Lauderdale Beach Resort – A DoubleTree by Hilton** and **Pelican Grand Beach Resort**. New resorts include the 209-room **Dalmar**, part of Marriott’s Tribute Portfolio; a 150-room **Four Seasons**, anticipated to open in 2020; and a dual-branded, 218-room **Tru by Hilton** and **Home2 Suites by Hilton**, also expected to open in 2020.

MIAMI

Like Fort Lauderdale, Miami also plans to build an 800-room headquarters hotel to complement its convention center. But while Fort Lauderdale’s convention center expansion is on the horizon, Miami has recently completed a \$620 million transformation of the **Miami Beach Convention Center (MBCC)**, which now offers 500,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space, a new 60,000-sq.-ft. grand ballroom, 84 breakout rooms and a new six-acre public park. The **American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA)** and **The International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS)** held the first citywide conventions to utilize the transformed MBCC.

“We were fortunate to have early adopters like AHIMA who believed in the destination and booked the reimagined MBCC without a headquarter hotel,” said **William D. Talbert, III, CDME, Greater Miami CVB President & CEO**. “We knew they and others like them would not book again without a connected convention hotel. We have a world-class destination and now a world-class convention center package to offer meeting planners and clients.”



The Miami Beach Convention Center recently completed a \$620 million renovation and expansion

Groups can look forward to an even larger new hotel in 2021. The 1,723-room **Marriott Marquis Miami World Center** will be Miami’s largest hotel, and the meeting space will match that status. The Marriott will house over 600,000 sq. ft. of function space, including 110,000 sq. ft. of dedicated exhibit space, a 65,000-sq.-ft. Grand Ballroom, 42,000-sq.-ft. Junior Ballroom, 80,000 sq. ft. of outdoor event space and even a 1,500-seat theater.

Boutique to midsize hotels are proliferating in the city, bringing 6,770 new guestrooms online by the end of 2020. All the new hotels are under 300 rooms and represent brands such as **AC Hotels, Autograph Collection, Doubletree, Hilton, Radisson, Kimpton, Tru by Hilton** and **Wyndham**. A freshly renovated property of note is **The Palms Hotel & Spa**, situated between Collins Avenue and Miami Beach. The Palms has restyled all of its 247 guestrooms and suites and renovated its 8,000 sq. ft. of meeting space.

For the meeting attendee who wants to get a “taste” of Miami beyond convention center and/or hotel cuisine, there are new and intriguing free time possibilities. One is a three-hour walking food tour offered by **Miami Culinary Tours** and **The Coconut Grove Business Improvement District**. Cuisines in the Grove range from Indian and Thai to Cuban, Latin-American fusion and locally sourced seasonal fare. Another option is **International Smoke**, which debuted in Miami this year. Developed by famed chef **Michael Mina** and bestselling cookbook author **Ayesha Curry**, the 200-seat restaurant is inspired by barbecue around the world, as its name suggests. Miami is indeed an global city, both in terms of its culinary culture and the international attendance at the conventions it hosts.

LOUISVILLE

*Newly expanded
convention center
benefits Kentucky's
cultural capital*



On a sunny morning last summer at the **Louisville Visitor Center** in the heart of the city's downtown, *F&D* staff joined **Louisville Tourism's** President & CEO **Karen Williams** to toast the reopening of the **Kentucky International Convention Center** (KICC) after a two-year closure. Later that morning, at an inaugural ceremony dubbed the venue's #kiccoff (the hashtag was utilized on social media), Kentucky Secretary of the Finance and Administration Cabinet **William Landrum** thanked everyone involved in the project. Their teamwork, he said, ensured the KICC was completed "on time and on budget" — not a small task with so many parties involved. The result was not only a great building, but also a structure that would impact the city for decades to come.

In addition to state and local elected officials, event industry elite partook in the momentous occasion. **San Diego Convention Center** President & CEO **Clifford "Rip" Rippetoe** and his Nashville counterpart, **Music City Center** President & CEO **Charles Starks**, were on hand to check out the \$207 million expansion project. Rippetoe was involved in the initial stages of the project during his tenure with the **Kentucky State Fair Board**, while Starks was consulted for guidance regarding modern convention center design, something he is quite familiar with since his downtown Nashville venue opened its doors in 2013. Starks told *F&D* that he was quite impressed with the final product and expressed his happiness to offer advice, citing his gratitude to others in venue management that did the same

for him while his venue was being developed.

The new KICC offers more than 300,000 sq. ft. of space, including over 200,000 sq. ft. of contiguous exhibition space; a 40,000-sq.-ft., column-free ballroom (which hosted a multimedia presentation and live entertainment during the KICCOff); a 175-seat theater; and 52 meeting/breakout rooms. Its lobby and stairways contain expansive pre-function space with floor-to-ceiling windows — the walls are simply panes of glass — that provide an abundance of natural lighting. Through those windows one can peer out to the **Fourth Street Live!** dining and entertainment district. Footsteps from KICC, it is an ideal location for afterhours events.

OMNI AND HYATT PROJECTS

Louisville prepared for the impending opening of the KICC with enhancements to existing hotels and construction of new properties. Much fanfare surrounded the debut of the 612-room **Omni Louisville Hotel**. Joining the existing convention center headquarter hotels, the Omni continues the brand's tradition of incorporating local flavor into its architecture and design. One such example that would be of interest to smaller groups is **Pin + Proof**. Accessible via a "hidden" entrance from the lobby, the space has the look and feel of a Prohibition-era speakeasy, with bartenders and wait staff donning garb from the period. The venue also contains a four-lane bowling alley, which was a popular activity within the secret lounges. On a grander scale, the hotel has 70,000 sq. ft. of meeting space as well as a rooftop pool around which events could be staged.



(Left): The expanded Kentucky International Convention Center. (Right): The iconic Churchill Downs, home of the Kentucky Derby.

The 393-room **Hyatt Regency Louisville**, also steps from the convention center, has undergone a series of renovations to its rooms and public areas. The property houses the 9,300-sq.-ft. Regency Ballroom and a tiered conference center with a maximum capacity of 110 participants. Dining venues at the property that can host functions include the **Sway**, an outdoor patio space that pushes out into Fourth Street, and the **Spire**, a private, revolving rooftop space with views of downtown and the Ohio River.

BOURBON, BASEBALL AND THOROUGHBREDS

Louisville's free local public transportation is an option that planners should be aware of. Utilizing the two **Lou Lift** routes that reach as far as **Churchill Downs** and revitalized areas such as **NuLu** (New Louisville), downtown is easily accessible from neighborhoods just beyond walking distance. NuLu's vibrant dining scene features restaurants such as the celebrated **Pan-Latin Mayan Café** and celebrity chef **Bobby Benjamin's Butchertown Grocery**. In addition, hotels are rising in the area, including the new 156-room **AC Hotel Louisville Downtown**. Craft breweries and a brandy distillery — **Copper & Kings** — have recently opened, ready to host groups. Copper & Kings' has over 21,000 sq. ft. of event spaces, its largest a 16,000-sq.-ft. outdoor courtyard with an amphitheater and firepit that complements an indoor gallery and rooftop space.

The city's main distilleries, of course, are those that produce bourbon. Two old-time producers on **Whiskey Row** provide comprehensive experiences within the city's

downtown. **Old Forester Distillery**, home to the bourbon of the same name that was produced by **Brown-Forman** since 1870, is located in its recently refurbished former headquarters building. An informative tour of the historic facility allows visitors to witness the entire production process, including distilling, cooperage (barrel-making), bottling and tasting. There is also an area designated for private events, with function spaces, a boardroom and an outdoor terrace that catches views of the nearby **Yum Center** and Ohio River. The **Evan Williams Experience** celebrates the city's first licensed distiller and the role spirits played in the city's development. The highly lauded, award-winning tour includes interactive exhibits and opportunities for tastings. Multiple spaces at the Whiskey Row location can be utilized for group functions.

Lincoln Henderson was a master distiller who crafted famous brands of whiskey such as **Woodford Reserve** and **Gentleman Jack** for Brown-Forman. Years after his proposal to management to age bourbon in port wine casks — as is done with many fine scotches — was rejected, his son helped build an independent distillery to realize his father's idea. To the east of downtown, a new distillery was created to produce the bourbon — **Angel's Envy** — and the rest is history. Tours, tastings and events can be hosted at the distillery, located across the street from another piece of Louisville's heritage, **Louisville Slugger Field**. Indeed, while the **Urban Bourbon Trail** plays a central role in the city's history, there is much more to Louisville than its legacy of liquor production.

Once home to a **Major League Baseball** team,



Both Old Forester Distillery (above) and the Louisville Slugger Museum and Factory (right) offer tours and private event spaces.

Louisville by chance became home to one of the largest producers of sporting merchandise in the country. A furniture manufacturer's son who was present at a game when a slumping **Louisville Eclipse** player broke his bat produced a replacement for the hitter. The new bat's use coincided with the end of the player's streak of bad luck at the plate, and demand for baseball bats soared to the point that bats took the place of furniture as the manufacturer's primary product. The **Louisville Slugger Museum and Factory** offers tours and can host a variety of events.

Predating the production of the baseball bats that are synonymous with the city, Churchill Downs has been another major piece of the city's history. The racetrack has been home to the **Kentucky Derby** and other major horse racing events since 1875. Filled with artifacts that date back over a century, the adjacent **Kentucky Derby Museum** offers a historical view of the event, with a sprinkling of myth: The region's calcium rich water supply was believed to produce stronger bones for its equine population. The experience is enjoyed by all, and visitors find watching videos of races from their birth year particularly entertaining. Both venues have multiple spaces that can be utilized to host groups large and small.

One of the city's hidden gems is the **Speed Art Museum**.

The Speed Art Museum presents an intelligently curated selection of works from throughout history, from Egyptian archaeology through modern art. Event spaces include a patio that extends outdoors from the museum's Grand Hall




The Speed's galleries are comprised of older and newer wings. The latter's modern design has created several event spaces, including a patio that extends outdoors from its Grand Hall. The seasoned museum visitor will enjoy the Speed's intelligently curated selection of works from throughout history, from Egyptian archaeology through modern art. Of note, the museum has created programming that **Steven Bowling**, Chief Marketing Officer for the Speed Art Museum, describes as "making art contemporary by highlighting social issues surrounding the artists."

Louisville's expanded convention center means that more conventioners will be able to experience the city's multifaceted culture. Whether or not they are keen on placing bets at Churchill Downs, a memorable meeting in Louisville is a "sure thing." —David Korn



DESTINATION

OHIO



Deer sculpture overlooking
Scioto River in downtown Columbus

RANDALL L. SCHIEBER

Raising its profile in the national meetings industry by hosting ASAE, PCMA and ConferenceDirect

By George Seli

ASAE is strengthening its ties with Ohio, which bodes well for convention planner members who have their eye on the Buckeye State. Last year, **Destination Cleveland** became a Corporate Partner of the association. According to ASAE President and CEO **John H. Graham IV**, FASAE, CAE, “Destination Cleveland is a dedicated supporter of our community, and this partnership will provide our members a great opportunity to learn more about how Cleveland has expanded its facilities and overall infrastructure to better serve and host association meetings and conventions.” In addition, ASAE is holding its **Annual Meeting & Exposition** in Ohio’s capital this August. More than 5,000 attendees are expected to congregate at the **Greater Columbus Convention Center** (GCCC). Many delegates will get their first look at an enhanced GCCC that symbolizes how much the state values its convention industry.

COLUMBUS

Having completed a \$140 million renovation and expansion in July 2017, the GCCC continues to improve with the addition of a 650-space parking garage in February. A skybridge will connect the garage to the **Hilton Columbus Downtown’s** 470-room expansion tower. Expected to open in 2022, the tower will bring the Hilton to 1,002 guestrooms; total meeting space will be expanded to 75,000 sq. ft. Columbus’s lodging

choices are also expanding with several small hotels opening next year, including a 168-room **Canopy by Hilton**, 118-room **Moxy Columbus Short North** and 171-room **Graduate Hotel**. The Canopy by Hilton is located across from the GCCC and offers 3,000 sq. ft. of function space, including a rooftop bar and outdoor patio.

“There’s a lot of momentum in our local tourism economy, which underscores the importance of investing in strategic development opportunities and capitalizing on ASAE in 2019,” said **Brian Ross**, President and CEO of **Experience Columbus**, in a press statement. “Hosting ASAE will give us the ability to book larger groups into the future, which will help positively impact occupancy, ADR and RevPAR throughout the city.”

During the third quarter of this year, Columbus hosted 161 conventions, sporting events and other groups, including nine citywides. Among the convention clients were **AmericanHort**, welcoming 10,000 attendees to **2018 Cultivate**; **Thirty-One Gifts**, bringing in 10,000 for its **2018 Annual Convention**; **Avon**, drawing 5,000 to its **2018 Avon Repfest**; and the **National Urban League**, hosting 4,500 attendees at its annual conference.

ASAE delegates and other groups arriving in Columbus in 2019 will be able to experience the recently opened **National Veterans Memorial and Museum**. The 50,000-sq.-ft. facility offers space for group functions. Several other offsite

venues are now available for groups, including: **Topgolf**, accommodating up to 1,000 guests; **The Candle Lab**, located directly across from the GCCC and featuring event space for up to 150 guests; **Wolf's Ridge Brewing's** new 3,700-sq.-ft. Hickory Room; and a four-season event venue on the roof of **Smith Bros. Hardware Building**, offering groups approximately 5,200 sq. ft. of space inside, and 2,000 sq. ft. outside.

On the transportation front, self-driving shuttles recently began passenger service along Scioto Mile in December, servicing **COSI**, the **Smart Columbus Experience Center**, **Bicentennial Park** and the National Veterans Memorial and Museum. In addition, **John Glenn Columbus International Airport**, located six miles east of downtown, now offers nonstop connections to both Seattle and Salt Lake City.

CLEVELAND



While Columbus prepares to host ASAE, Cleveland wraps up a successful 2018 convention calendar that included two meeting industry events: the **PCMA Education Conference** in June and **ConferenceDirect's CDX** in August. "CDX is a biannual event ConferenceDirect hosts for our top association customers, partners and associates to gather for two and a half days of education and networking opportunities," explains **JJ Wills**, Vice President, Marketing Programs & Business Development for ConferenceDirect.

Destination Cleveland, **Hilton Cleveland Downtown** and **Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland** hosted CDX, which drew 150 attendees. "Destination Cleveland and [Senior Vice President of Convention Sales and Services] **Mike Burns** played an integral part in securing the event for the city of Cleveland," says Wills. "From start to finish, they were amazing partners that helped coordinate and plan one of our most successful CDX events to date. The teams at Destination Cleveland, Hilton Cleveland and Huntington Convention Center were terrific in providing our attendees a well-rounded experience of what Cleveland has to offer for conventions and meetings."

That experience included a unique evening reception at the **Rock & Roll Hall of Fame**. "Attendees were treated to a private reception, dinner and presentation from **Greg Harris**, CEO of Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, where they learned the ins and outs of the museum," Wills relates. The venue recently opened the **Hall of Fame Experience** on the third floor, which takes visitors on an induction-themed voyage from the 2018 Inductees Exhibit to a memorial section dedicated to inductees that have passed away.

"The teams at Destination Cleveland, Hilton Cleveland and Huntington Convention Center were terrific in providing our attendees a well-rounded experience of what Cleveland has to offer for conventions and meetings."

—JJ Wills, Vice President, Marketing Programs & Business Development, ConferenceDirect



Naturally, the focal point for CDX attendees was the convention center. "Our attendees had a great opportunity to experience many features of the Huntington Convention Center. Onsite, they have a sustainability farm to help produce food in-house for catering events, which was a unique experience to offer," Wills comments. The Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland, along with the **Global Center for Health Innovation**, offer groups 390,000 total sq. ft. of function space, including a 225,000-sq.-ft. exhibit hall, 32,200-sq.-ft. ballroom and 34 meeting rooms. The facility is connected to the 600-room **Hilton Cleveland Downtown**, which offers its own 50,000-plus sq. ft. of meeting space. An additional 5,000 hotel rooms are located within walking distance.

Within that hotel portfolio, two properties completed renovations in spring 2018. As part of its renovation, the 385-room **Cleveland Marriott Downtown at Key Center** added the 300-capacity St. Clair Ballroom, with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking Lake Erie. The **Crowne Plaza Cleveland at Playhouse Square's** \$6 million renovation created 205 WorkLife guestrooms complete with curvy angled beds for increased noise cancellation and large desks.

A four-star, 243-room hotel opens in 2020 as part of the **Pro Football Hall of Fame's** new **Johnson Controls Hall of Fame Village**. The \$600 million development will include a virtual-reality, amusement-park experience, along with retail and restaurants. On the historic side, planners may consider booking a private event at the **Agora Theatre and Ballroom**, which originally opened in 1913 as the Metropolitan Theatre. The 1,800-capacity theater and 500-capacity ballroom underwent a \$3 million renovation in summer 2018.

CINCINNATI

Groups meeting in Cincinnati in 2019 will not only be able to partake in the festivities associated with the **Cincinnati Reds' 150th Anniversary**, but they can also experience several new and renovated venues. For example, the **Cincinnati Museum Center**, one of three museums housed in the iconic **Union Terminal**, reopened in November. The **Holocaust and Humanity Center** relocated to Union Terminal in January



View of the Ohio River and Cincinnati skyline from the Roebling Bridge

2019. The Art Deco Union Terminal completed a \$233.5 million renovation in 2018.

Cincinnati's **Spectra**-managed **Duke Energy Convention Center** offers over 750,000 sq. ft. of exhibit, meeting and entertainment space, complemented by more than 3,200 hotel rooms within three blocks. **The Cincinnati**, which originally opened in 1882, reopened in October as Ohio's first **Curio Collection by Hilton** property following a 10-month, \$6 million renovation. The 148-room hotel is located just two blocks from the Duke Energy Convention Center. In addition, the 94-room **Kinley Humanist Boutique Hotel** debuts in late 2019, also two blocks from the convention center. And in summer 2019, **The Lytle Park Hotel, An Autograph Collection** opens in the **Historic Anna Louise Inn** building, which dates back to 1909. The 106-room hotel will offer more than 10,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, including a 6,000-sq.-ft. rooftop terrace.

For intense training and educational meetings, Cincinnati Uptown has an ideal option in the 206-room **Kingsgate Marriott Conference Hotel**, owned by the **University of Cincinnati**. The conference center offers 23 meeting rooms totaling 20,000 sq. ft., including a 5,355-sq.-ft. Grand Ballroom. In Cincinnati North, groups can utilize the **Sharonville Convention Center**, which offers 19 meeting rooms spanning 65,000 sq. ft., including a 20,000-sq.-ft. Exhibit Hall and 14,000-sq.-ft. ballroom.

Among the city's trove of cultural highlights are the **Cincinnati Art Museum**, **Cincinnati Fire Museum**, **Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden**, **William Howard Taft National Historic Site** and **Krohn Conservatory**. The latter's rainforest-under-glass exhibit features more than 5,000 plants from all over the world.

AKRON

Greater Akron boasts urban sophistication together with scenic natural vistas. "Additionally, our area's affordability, accessibility and flexibility are attractive incentives for planners to choose our destination," says **Gregg Mervis**, President & CEO of the **Akron/Summit CVB**. "Most importantly, we know — because our clients tell us — that our special brand of hospitality makes an ordinary event experience extraordinary for those planning and attending."

FACILITIES & DESTINATIONS 2019 SPRING

The big news in Akron's hospitality industry is a new hotel opening this summer. Located one block from the **John S. Knight Convention Center**, the 71-room **BLU-tique Hotel** is an extension of Akron developer Tony Troppe's BLU brand, which also includes **BLU Plate** restaurant and **BLU Jazz+** live music venue.

"We celebrate having Ohio's only national park, which consistently ranks in the Top 15 most-visited parks in the U.S."



—Gregg Mervis,
President & CEO, Akron/Summit CVB

Along with these dining and entertainment venues, Mervis suggests a variety of offsite venues and experiences that may interest planners, including:

- **Cuyahoga Valley National Park.** "We celebrate having Ohio's only national park, which consistently ranks in the Top 15 most-visited parks in the U.S.," Mervis says. "As an 'urban' national park, its 33,000 undisturbed acres provide an oasis from the vibrant bustle of the cities that surround its perimeter. This makes it incredibly easy for meeting/convention attendees to escape and explore."
- **The Designer's Barn & Gardens.** The home of the late **Robert L. Hunker**, known for preserving and restoring the Village of Peninsula and founding Cuyahoga Valley National Park, can be rented for daytime retreats and meetings.
- **Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad**, which runs through the heart of Ohio's only national park, Cuyahoga Valley National Park.
- **Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens.** The former estate of Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company co-founder **F. A. Seiberling** is the sixth-largest private home open to



the public in the United States.

- **Hale Farm & Village.** This reconstructed village on the edge of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park dates from 1850 and features costumed interpreters.
- **Akron Art Museum,** which features rentable venues ranging from an auditorium to a terrace and garden.

DAYTON

The birthplace of the **Wright brothers** and home to **Wright-Patterson Air Force Base**, Dayton has certainly earned the moniker “The Birthplace of Aviation.” “We host a lot of military reunion groups because of our location here at the birthplace of aviation,” notes **Jacquelyn Powell**, President & CEO of the **Dayton/Montgomery County CVB**. Dayton is also a popular site for corporate meetings (especially for companies in the aviation industry), state association meetings, religious conferences and government meetings, she adds.

The planners for these meetings benefit from the CVB’s wide variety of services, most of which are complimentary, according to Powell. “We offer everything from registration assistance, where we pay the staff but do not pass the cost along to the meeting planner, to assistance in getting publicity about the event,” she says. “With certain restrictions, we will fly a meeting planner in for a site visit. We will do attendance builders such as presentations at the prior-year event. So there’s little we won’t do to work with meeting planners to make their event fantastic.”

The city boasts strong air accessibility via **Dayton International Airport**, which is served by all major carriers. A very short commute brings attendees downtown to the **Dayton Convention Center**, a 150,000-sq.-ft. facility offering 77,000 sq. ft. of column-free exhibition space and 22 meeting rooms, including a 672-seat theater. The Center is connected via skywalk to the 287-room **Crowne Plaza Dayton**, which houses its own 12,000 sq. ft. of flexible meeting and event space

Among the new hotel developments in the city is the 98-room **Dayton Inn & Suites**, which opened downtown in October. In addition, the 389-room **Marriott at the University of Dayton** recently underwent a \$23 million renovation. The property offers 15,415 sq. ft. of total meeting space across 19 meeting rooms.

When meetings are concluded, groups may wish to get more acquainted with The Birthplace of Aviation with a tour of the **National Museum of the U.S. Air Force** or **Hawthorn Hill**, Orville Wright’s mansion. Enthusiasts of the arts can visit the various **Victoria Theatre Association** venues, including the **Schuster Center**, **Victoria Theatre**, **Loft Theatre** and newly opened **PNC Arts Annex**. At the **Dayton Art**

“We offer everything from registration assistance, where we pay the staff but do not pass the cost along to the meeting planner, to assistance in getting publicity about the event. ... There’s little we won’t do to work with meeting planners ...”

—Jacquelyn Powell, President & CEO, Dayton/Montgomery County CVB



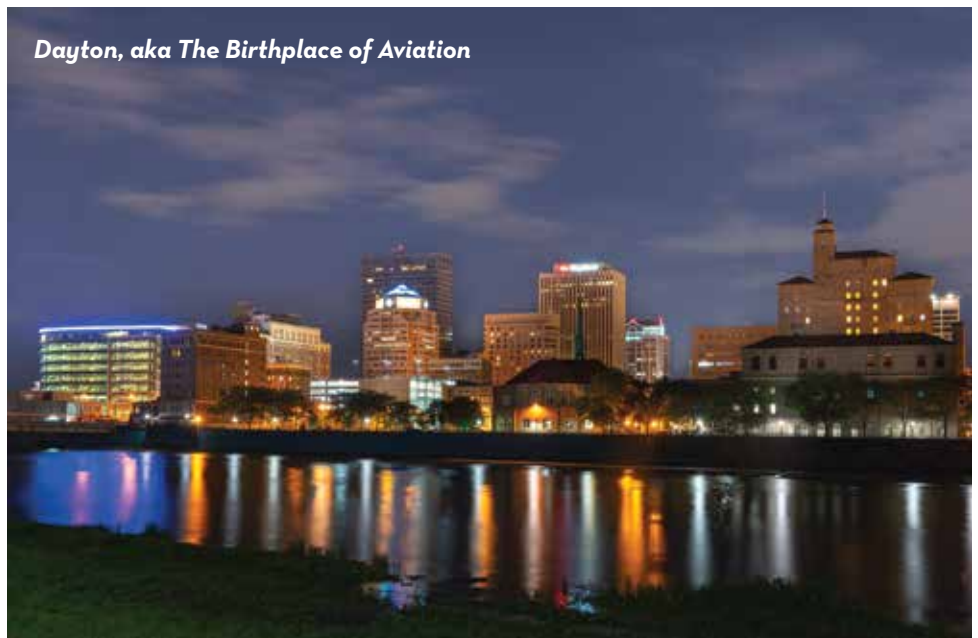
ANDY SNOW

Institute, 17th-century Baroque, 18th- and 19th-century American, Asian and contemporary artworks are on display.

A newly renovated event venue is **The Steam Plant**. The former power plant features arched windows, 30-ft.-high ceilings, a state-of-the-art sound system, accent lighting, onsite catering prep kitchen, luxury VIP suite with a balcony, and a handcrafted, two-story built-in bar. The Grand Hall can accommodate 350 seated guests or 500 for a reception.

Groups can also experience the great outdoors in Dayton. **Montgomery County Fairgrounds**, for example, offers a variety of venues accommodating from 100 to 2,000 banquet guests. The 65-acre **Carillon Historical Park** is often used for car shows, festivals and corporate events. A new 32,000-sq.-ft. **Heritage Center of Regional Leadership** at the park will include classrooms and function spaces that can accommodate about 700 banquet guests. “It will definitely add to the inventory of unique meeting spaces here in the community,” says Powell.

Dayton, aka The Birthplace of Aviation



TEXAS



Meetings in the Lone Star State take on a new shine with facility enhancements

By Anthony Bilden

Texas commemorates the 300-year anniversary of the original construction of the **Alamo** in 2024. By that time, the Alamo will have undergone a \$450 million restoration and enhancement that includes recreating sections that have been lost over time, expanding the grounds to include the mission compound's original footprint, and adding a museum of the **Texas Revolution**.

While this national icon is being enhanced, many of the state's major cities are upgrading their meetings product, bringing Texan hospitality to the next level. Projects include improvements to Houston's **George R. Brown Convention Center** and a freshly opened **Westin** convention center hotel in Irving. And in San Antonio, home of the Alamo, a variety of hotel renovations are sure to catch the eye of planners.

SAN ANTONIO

Like the Alamo, the **Grand Hyatt San Antonio** is marking

an anniversary with a renovation. One of the city's major convention hotels, the Grand Hyatt celebrated its 10th anniversary this year with the completion of a \$19 million renovation to its guestrooms, meeting spaces, bar, corridors and lobby. The property offers 1,003 redesigned guestrooms and 115,000 sq. ft. of indoor and outdoor function space. Groups staying at the hotel will enjoy a prime location on the famed **River Walk**, next to the **Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center** and connected to the **Alamodome** via a pedestrian bridge.

More recently, both the **Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa** and the **Mokara Hotel & Spa** have completed renovations. The former property, located about 20 minutes from downtown San Antonio, has renovated its **Rogers-Wiseman Pavilion**, outfitting it with floor-to-ceiling windows and updating the flooring. The Mokara Hotel & Spa has renovated its lobby and 4,500 sq. ft. of meeting space.

San Antonio



CASANDRA MATEJ

PRESIDENT & CEO, VISIT SAN ANTONIO

By Anthony Bilden

San Antonio's meetings industry has been going strong following the transformation of the Henry B. González Convention Center in 2016. Visit San Antonio leader Casandra Matej gives an overview of major groups that have recently partnered with the city, as well as her recommendations for planners who want to create a meeting with a distinctly San Antonio flair.



Q How is San Antonio's meetings business trending as far as performance last year and future bookings?

A 2018 was an exceptional year for San Antonio as we welcomed meetings and conventions of all sizes in addition to huge events including the **NCAA Men's Final Four**, the **NAACP's 109th Annual Convention** and the **RIMS 2018 Annual Conference**. Bookings have been soft around the state for 2019, but we're starting to see some movement to fill some holes for this year, and we have a short-term focus on opportunities and customers for 2020. Looking beyond 2020, we're seeing strong booking numbers that we're excited about.

Q Has the city secured any major new or returning conventions of note?

A After an extremely successful 2018 NCAA Men's Final Four, we're thrilled that San Antonio will have the opportunity to once again host both the NCAA Women's (2021) and Men's (2025) Final Four matchups. **Commodity Classic**, **Tyler Technologies, Inc.**, **School Nutrition Association**, **American Fuels & Petrochemical Manufacturers** and **Church of God** will also be returning. Additionally, we'll be welcoming the **American Wind Energy Association** in 2022, **U.S. Travel Association's IPW** in 2023 and **Ellucian** in 2024 and 2028.

Q On the corporate meetings front, are any industry verticals prominent among your clientele?

A San Antonio is a hub for some of today's most promising industries including technology, biosciences, healthcare and new energy. We've added a strong focus on San Antonio's progressive

business climate by positioning the city as a strategic meetings destination within these key industry sectors, and we facilitate meaningful connections between local industry leaders and our visiting meeting groups and associations. As a result, we're seeing increased interest from customers in these sectors as evidenced by some of the groups that we will have meeting in San Antonio for the first time in 2019, including the **Society for Simulation in Healthcare**, **Texas Computer Education Association**, **CentralSquare Technologies** and **Oracle's Collaborate**.

Q What is your business plan for developing the city's meetings business over the next five years or so?

A San Antonio's meeting landscape was transformed in 2016 with the completion of the \$325 million renovation and expansion of the **Henry B. González Convention Center**. We're continuing to highlight this incredible, modern facility to help increase our base of citywide meetings. Additionally, **Visit San Antonio** is continuing its **Synchronicities** partnership with **Visit Anaheim** and **Visit Baltimore**, which offers planners a unique opportunity to execute successful meetings while maximizing ROI.

Q Which offsite venues or activities would you recommend to planners seeking to express the local culture through their event?

A San Antonio is a culturally rich destination with more than 300 years of storied history, making it easy to experience the city's culture. Groups can coordinate private events on the grounds of The Alamo or tour San Antonio's four additional Spanish Colonial missions located just south of the downtown area. Together, these historic structures form the largest concentration of Spanish Colonial architecture in North America and are the only **UNESCO World Heritage Site** in Texas. Planners can invite the **Guadalupe Dance Company**, which performs Mexican Folklorico and Flamenco dancing, for performances or interactive classes for their groups. The **Witte Museum** is also a superb attraction and meeting venue where attendees can explore interactive exhibits about the nature, science and culture of South Texas.

A cruise on the San Antonio River affords memorable downtown views



Some of the specific locations include **Brazos Hall, Moonshine Grill, Speakeasy** and upstairs at **Caroline Restaurant.** **Visit Austin** assisted the ACC by providing hotel maps and creating a microsite for the event. In addition, “the city worked with us to have flagpole signs, digital signage outside of the center and a great digital welcome sign at the airport,” says Volpe-Viles.

The meeting’s headquarters hotel was the 1,012-room **JW Marriott Austin**, which offers its own 120,000 sq. ft. of function space. Austin is adding roughly 1,000 new hotel rooms this year, and nearly another 2,000 in 2020. While many of the rooms are in new boutique properties, the overall inventory growth is good news for large convention groups that need a breadth of lodging options.

Following are some of the larger properties debuting:

Hotels that opened this year include the 203-room **Embassy Suites by Hilton Landmark** and the 123-room **Woodspring Suites** in north San Antonio, as well as the 94-room **Tru by Hilton** and 125-room **Hilton Garden Inn** downtown. Approximately 700 new guestrooms are anticipated to come online in downtown San Antonio in the next few years, including a 200-room **Curio by Hilton**.

While not a first-tier city, San Antonio boasts robust air accessibility. Its international airport offers year-round and seasonal routes to 53 destinations in the United States, Mexico and Canada. **Frontier Airlines** recently added service to Albuquerque, NM; Charlotte, NC; Cleveland; Columbus, OH; Jacksonville, FL; Memphis, TN; Oklahoma City; Omaha, NE; and Tulsa, OK. Additionally, **United Airlines** has added more daily nonstop flights on its existing routes from San Antonio to **Newark Liberty International Airport**, and **American Airlines** added new daily nonstop service to New York’s **John F. Kennedy International Airport**.

AUSTIN

With each satisfied group client, Texas’s capital further demonstrates why it is one of the most in-demand second-tier cities in the national meetings industry. Last October, the **Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC)** held its annual meeting at the **Austin Convention Center**, bringing in about 4,000 attendees. “Austin is a great walking city with accessible hotels, restaurants and attractions for members to reach without renting a car,” says **Maria Volpe-Viles**, Program Operations Consultant for the ACC. “Also [it has] a really nice downtown that is growing and has many of the amenities our audience is accustomed to.” She adds that “A number of our sponsors and chapters organized offsite events during the meeting and made great use of the local culture. There was, of course, lots of music, incredible food, great local band performances, pictures with a longhorn, and armadillo races.

- The **Austin Proper Hotel**, opening March 2019. This 244-room hotel will include 9,500 sq. ft. of meeting space, a spa, gym and pool overlooking Lady Bird Lake.

- The **Otis /AC Hotel by Marriott**, opening fall 2019. Totalling 347 rooms, this dual-branded property will be located on the southwest corner of the **University of Texas** campus. The Autograph hotel will include 191 rooms, 6,000 sq. ft. of event space, restaurant, and a rooftop bar and pool. The 156-room AC Hotel will be the first of its kind in the Austin area.

- **Marriott Downtown**, opening summer 2020. This full-service property will be situated across from the Austin Convention Center and will include 613 guestrooms, 65,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, an underground parking garage, outdoor pool, three bars and a full-service restaurant.

- **Kalahari Resorts & Conventions**, opening late 2020. The family-friendly African-themed water park and convention center is slated to open in Round Rock, TX, slightly north of Austin. This 350-acre resort will feature 990 guestrooms, a 40,000-sq.-ft. ballroom, 22,000-sq.-ft. junior ballroom, indoor and outdoor water park, theme park, spa, fitness centers, restaurants and more.



Houston



HOUSTON

Texas's largest city has been undergoing large-scale infrastructural enhancements. Just a couple years ago, Houston completed improvements to the **George R. Brown Convention Center (GRB)** and debuted the connected 1,000-room **Marriott Marquis**. The GRB's façade was renovated with a new concourse and ground-level restaurants. Together with an art-inspired pedestrian plaza, the area was rebranded **Avenida Houston**. A recent addition to Avenida Houston is **The Rustic**, a 25,000-sq.-ft. restaurant and music venue next to the GRB.

Speaking of live entertainment, **Houston First Corporation** is redeveloping **Jones Plaza**, located in the heart of downtown's **Theater District**. Slated for completion in November 2020, the project will transform Jones Plaza into a vibrant public square with artwork, a performance space and a 4,000-sq.-ft. dining facility. Also in 2020, Houston's **Farmer's Market** will transform into an 18-acre destination that includes programming and events. And in 2022, the **Houston Zoo** celebrates its 100th anniversary by beginning Phase I of a \$150 million redevelopment of nearly half its acreage.

Next year will see the introduction of **Railway Heights**, Houston's answer to Reading Terminal Market in Philadelphia and Chelsea Market in New York City. In addition, the \$450 million expansion of the **Museum of Fine Arts, Houston** and the \$33.5 million expansion of the **Holocaust Museum Houston** will be completed in 2020.

The opening of the Marriott Marquis was certainly the most significant meeting hotel development in the city in recent years. The property is not only connected to the GRB, but houses its own 150,000-plus sq. ft. of meeting space. Yet there are several other hotel projects in the city that groups can take advantage of, such as the reopened **Omni Hotel Houston**. The 378-room hotel has 32,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. Newly opened is the 353-room **Intercontinental Houston Medical Center**, which offers 11,800 sq. ft. of meeting space, and the 250-room **Post Oak Hotel at Uptown Houston**, featuring a 35,000-sq.-ft. conference facility.

IRVING

Located a short drive from both **Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport** and **Dallas Love Field Airport**, Irving is raising its profile in the second-tier meetings market with the opening of the **Westin Irving Convention Center at Las Colinas** in January. The 350-room property is located adjacent to the **Irving Convention Center** and has its own 47,000-plus sq. ft. of function space. The new hotel marks the completion of Irving's new visitors district, which also includes the new **Texican Court**. Ideal for small groups, the 152-room Texican Court is a retro-inspired hotel that features over 3,500 sq. ft. of indoor and outdoor function space.

Attendees have top-tier entertainment options in the visitors district with the **Toyota Music Factory**, home to the **Live Nation Pavilion** as well as the **Alamo Drafthouse** movie theater. More than 20 bars and restaurants round out the offerings. The 8,000-capacity Pavilion amphitheater, which also includes 100,000 sq. ft. of private event areas, can be rented by groups for a general session or other function.

Within walking distance of the Toyota Music Factory and the **DART Rail System** is **Gables Water Street**, a

The architecturally unique Irving Convention Center at Las Colinas



pedestrian-friendly mixed-use development with 60,000 sq. ft. of shops and restaurants along the shores of **Lake Carolyn**. Here, attendees can enjoy everything from waterfront dining to activities such as outdoor yoga, stand-up paddle boarding and spa treatments.

DALLAS

Austin may be the “Live Music Capital of the World,” but Dallas has its own live music culture for attendees to explore. A historical highlight is the **Deep Ellum** neighborhood, a blues mecca in the early 1900s that is seeing a revival. In late 2019, **The Epic**, an eight-acre mixed-use development, opens in Deep Ellum. The project includes the 164-room **Pittman Hotel**, housed in the **Knights of Pythias Temple**, a Dallas landmark.

Speaking of boutique hotels, Dallas is home to 23 recently



Dallas's Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center

opened properties and over 30 hotel projects ranging from 50-251 guestrooms. Among the larger properties are the 200-room **Virgin Hotel Dallas**, opening in August 2019; the 220-room **Marriott Dallas Uptown**, opening in 2020; and a 250-room **JW Marriott**, opening in North Dallas in 2021.

The centerpiece of Dallas's meetings industry is the **Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center**, complemented by the adjacent 1,100-room **Omni Dallas Hotel**. The two million-sq.-ft. center offers one million sq. ft. of exhibit space, over 65,000 sq. ft. of ballroom space, 88 meeting rooms, a 9,816-seat arena and a 1,750-seat theater.

Planners looking for intriguing offsite venues have quite a variety in Dallas. Following is a selection:

- The **Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza**. Dedicated to the legacy of JFK, the museum offers event spaces with exclusive access to the core exhibit.

- The **Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden**. A professional planning team helps groups stage functions at venues such as the 5,000-sq.-ft. Rosine Hall; the 21,000-sq.-ft. DeGolyer Hall, built in 1940; a new glass-walled culinary venue called A Tasteful Place; and the Alex Camp House, a fully furnished, two-story home overlooking White Rock Lake.

- **The Star in Frisco**. The **Dallas Cowboys** headquarters welcomes groups of up to 12,000 to its numerous event

venues, such as the Grand Atrium, Team Dining Hall and Dallas Cowboys War Room. The **National Soccer Hall of Fame** is another option for planners interested in a sports-themed venue.

- The **AT&T Discovery District**. This \$100 million shopping, dining and entertainment hub in the heart of downtown Dallas will offer a slew of options for group gatherings, including outdoor event space.

GALVESTON ISLAND

For groups who want to add a beach experience to their Texas meeting, Galveston Island is a fine option. Thirty-two miles of beaches are complemented by 300,000 sq. ft. of island-wide meeting space, accommodating groups of up to 2,000 attendees. A good portion of that meeting space is found at the **Galveston Island Convention Center**, located at the 243-room **San Luis Resort, Spa & Conference Center**. Affording views of the Gulf of Mexico, the convention center features a 43,100-sq.-ft. exhibition hall, 15,500-sq.-ft. grand ballroom, 12,000 sq. ft. of breakout space and 29,000 sq. ft. of prefunction space.

The 700 guestrooms adjacent to the center also include the 239-room **Hilton Galveston Island Resort**, which has its own 15,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. Another 1,400 rooms lie within two miles. Galveston Island's total of 5,000 hotel rooms includes the 224-room **Hotel Galvez & Spa**, a **Wyndham Grand Hotel** (13,321 sq. ft. of meeting space) and the 418-room **Moody Gardens Hotel, Spa & Convention Center** (30,000 sq. ft.). Shuttle service between contracted hotels and the convention center is free to groups.

In their free time, attendees can explore the **Historic Downtown Strand District**, consisting of 36 blocks of shops, restaurants, attractions and art galleries. The historic atmosphere includes Greek- and Victorian-style buildings and even horse-drawn carriages. Among Galveston's distinctive offsite group venues are the **1877 Tall Ship Elissa & Texas Seaport Museum**, **Colonel Paddlewheel**, **Seawolf Park**, **Galveston Island Brewing**, **Galveston Railroad Museum** and **Grand 1894 Opera House**.

Galveston Island is located 50 miles from Houston, home to **Bush Intercontinental Airport** and **William P. Hobby Airport**.



Galveston's Historic Pleasure Pier



Two resorts that showcase the best of one of Arizona's trendiest cities

By Laura Janelle Downey

Scottsdale is a popular place. More than nine million people visit the beautiful city each year, and that number is expected to grow. With an average of 314 sunshine-filled days and more than enough outdoor and indoor activities to keep visitors entertained, it's easy to see why this city was named one of the "hippest and most happening" places in the country and was also listed as a "desert version of Miami's South Beach" by *The New York Times*.

While Scottsdale's success in the leisure tourism market bodes well for meeting attendees' free time, the city is also well prepared to host business sessions with hotel meeting spaces that range from 200 to 200,000 sq. ft. More than 50 resorts and hotels totaling about 14,000 hotel rooms can be found in Scottsdale and its neighboring area. Two major players in the local meetings industry are the 643-room Phoenician and the 453-room Westin Kierland Resort & Spa.

THE PHOENICIAN, A LUXURY COLLECTION RESORT

Once meeting groups fall in love with a destination and find a property that fits their needs, they often go back year after year. Experiencing the newly renovated Phoenician may yield that result. The property, which sits at the base of Camelback Mountain, offers 160,000 sq. ft. of indoor and

The weather was not in our favor during our time there this year, so *The Phoenician* team worked tirelessly... to bring what we developed outdoors back indoors with the same level of delivery."

—**Cindi Newell-Timmons**,
Senior Director of Events and Marketing,
Jeffrey M Consulting



outdoor function space. "We have held our Microsoft Retail Stores Annual Meeting event at The Phoenician for the last seven years. I have been with the team for the last five, and The Phoenician offers our team everything we are looking for," says **Cindi Newell-Timmons**, Senior Director of Events and Marketing at Jeffrey M Consulting. "The goals and



buildings themselves make this a wonderful venue for our Annual Business & Technology Conference,” says Dixon-Williams. “It is big enough to cater to the needs of our group, but small enough to feel like home to us. The amenities available — the spa, the workout facility, the golf facility, the evening bagpipes — are all important facets as to why this venue stands out to our attendees. The service and staff have always been top notch, and we are always made to feel as though we are the most important

guests they’ve ever had.”

The NCPDP group use the 14,337-sq.-ft. Herberger Ballroom, the 5,391-sq.-ft. Trailblazers Ballroom, the 24,573-sq.-ft. Kierland Grand Ballroom and several other smaller meeting spaces on property. “We have a black-tie dinner and foundation fundraiser in the Herberger, which lends an elegant, intimate air to both of these events,” Dixon-Williams explains. “Our exhibit hall is located in the Trailblazers Ballroom on the upper level on three days of the conference. This location allows our exhibitors and attendees to mingle in a great space and have plenty of room for booths and networking. Our general sessions and group meals are held in the Kierland Ballroom, and with a large crowd in such a large room, it still feels comfortable and spacious.”

NCPDP has been visiting the property since 2007. “My organization has been using The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa to host our annual conference ever since we were in our 30th year of operation. We are now in our 42nd year, and plans are in place to continue at the resort through 2025,” she says.

EXPLORING SCOTTSDALE

When it’s time to explore Scottsdale, groups should take advantage of all the offsite activities available. The city is known for hiking and horseback riding, golf (51 courses, with over 200 in the surrounding area), historic sites, art galleries, museums, nightclubs and a thriving culinary scene. Specific possibilities include teambuilding with **Pink Jeep Tours**, riding a hot-air balloon over the Sonoran Desert with **Rainbow Ryders**, touring Old Town Scottsdale on an open-air golf cart with **JoyRidesAZ**, and experiencing the Private Collections Tour or the Night Lights Tour at **Frank Lloyd Wright’s Taliesin West**.

All of Scottsdale’s diversions and group-friendly resorts are very accessible to out-of-state groups via **Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport**, which offers nonstop service to and from more than 100 cities all over the world. Plus, the airport is located just 10 miles west of downtown. Overall, Scottsdale is as easy to visit as it is to enjoy.

The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa “is big enough to cater to the needs of our group, but small enough to feel like home to us.”



—**Kimberly Dixon-Williams**,
CMP, Manager of Meeting Planning,
National Council for Prescription Drug Programs

expectations of the event and our senior leaders are always exceeded. The service and support are superior.”

The 700-attendee group used many of The Phoenician’s spaces, including the 14,344-sq.-ft. Camelback Ballroom and the 20,533-sq.-ft. Phoenician Grand Ballroom. “Our guests also brought business to The Thirsty Camel Lounge, Mowry & Cotton, and some used The Phoenician Spa,” says Newell-Timmons. “Two of our senior leaders/executives stayed at the boutique hotel on property, The Canyon Suites, too.”

Newell-Timmons did not just want to use The Phoenician’s indoor spaces. “The ability to show our worldwide attendees the Scottsdale weather and outdoor appeal ... stood out to us,” she says. “But the weather was not in our favor during our time there this year, so The Phoenician team worked tirelessly with myself and the events planning team to bring what we developed outdoors back indoors with the same level of delivery.”

WESTIN KIERLAND RESORT & SPA

For **Kimberly Dixon-Williams**, CMP, Manager of Meeting Planning for the **National Council for Prescription Drug Programs** (NCPDP), this resort offers the total package. “The beauty of the Westin Kierland Resort & Spa and the physical

Conrad New York

Perfecting the art of group services in lower Manhattan

By Laura Janelle Downey

The Conrad New York has the three most important things in real estate: location, location, location. The 6-year-old property sits in the center of Lower Manhattan, just steps from must-visit sites such as the **World Trade Center**, **Battery Park** and **South Street Seaport**. The Conrad is also near the 350,000-sq.-ft. shopping mecca that is **Westfield World Trade Center**, where visitors have access to the **One World Observatory** and architect **Santiago Calatrava's** all-white **Oculus** structure, which serves as a major transportation hub. The Conrad is situated 45 minutes from **LaGuardia Airport** and an hour away from **John F. Kennedy International Airport**.

Upon entering the hotel's 15-story contemporary atrium lobby, guests are captivated by a 10-story mural entitled *Loopy Doopy (Blue and Purple)*, by the renowned American artist **Sol LeWitt**. More than 2,000 artworks are featured throughout the hotel. Among the highlights are paintings by **Elizabeth Peyton**, who uses layered strokes to depict luminaries such as Prince Harry and John F. Kennedy Jr.

The hotel's 463 guest suites come with two high-definition televisions, 24-hour in-room dining, rainfall showers, complimentary high-speed wireless Internet access and daily turndown service. Property amenities include a 24-hour business center, round-the-clock fitness center, complimentary shoeshine service and the **Salvatore Barber Salon** (located in the atrium lobby). Standout dining locales include the **Loopy Doopy Rooftop Bar** and **ATRIO Wine Bar & Restaurant**. According to Executive Chef **Gerron Douglas**, "The cuisine is labeled New American, but I would describe it as bold, slightly ambitious and soulful without being soul food."

Meeting planners turn to the Conrad New York for its 30,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. "When scouting venues for my client's annual marketing conference, comprised of 450 C-suite and VP-level prospects and clients, we required an ambiance that was impressive and upscale," says **Meghan**



The Conrad's atrium lobby features a 10-story mural entitled "Loopy Doopy (Blue and Purple)," by American artist Sol LeWitt

Q. Brown, Principal at **cue B**, a New York, NY-based corporate events company. "Our attendees participate in several events each year, and it was imperative that we partner with a venue that matched our brand: innovative, collaborative and exceeding all expectations."

For this particular client, Brown selected the North East Gallery prefunction space that comes with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking Battery Park City. She also chose the 6,200-sq.-ft. Gallery Ballroom that can be divided into three sections if need be. "These were ideal spaces for us to host our large group while fusing education and thought leadership with a creative and modern atmosphere," Brown says. "Our program required a combination of rooms including smaller meeting spaces, a prefunction

area for meals [the hotel partners with **Danny Meyer** of **Union Square Hospitality Group** for its catering needs] and networking, and a large ballroom for all-day sessions."

Brown made sure her client utilized every inch of the selected spaces. "We needed the ability to welcome speakers and offer them a greenroom to prep and relax before taking the stage," she explains. "We also needed to host several rotating sales meetings in a more private atmosphere, away from the general session. These sales meetings were an extension of the overall conference — a highly customized experience with our sales team. Our prefunction space needed to accommodate high-volume networking, all meals, and a cocktail reception that featured a book signing and DJ booth."

The hotel met all these needs, and the staff delivered top-notch service. "The Conrad New York team was in lockstep not only with our vision for the event, but also with our passion to deliver excellence through every stage of planning and execution," Brown says. "They worked hand in hand with us to coordinate and deliver a seamless, high-end event — even leaving the premises during the conference to buy a specific drink requested by one of our speakers." That kind of service, together with highly varied and flexible event spaces, keeps planners like Brown returning to the Conrad.



Park MGM

This new Las Vegas property combines the latest in meeting technology with inspired art and cuisine

By Laura Janelle Downey

Gone are the days of the 20-year-old **Monte Carlo Resort and Casino**. The 32-story hotel, which sits at the intersection of Las Vegas Boulevard and Park Avenue on the Las Vegas Strip, underwent a \$550 million transformation beginning in 2016. And after a two-year renovation, visitors will now find the new Park MGM in its place. Just a 10-minute ride from **McCarran International Airport**, the 27-acre property is fairly easy to get to and is adjacent to **The Park**, a walkable outdoor dining and entertainment district neighboring **T-Mobile Arena**.

Park MGM makes the check-in process easy for visitors upon arrival thanks to the **MGM Resorts** mobile app. **M life Rewards** members can utilize the app to retrieve a digital key, and get squared away with everything from room reservations to dining and entertainment options. The European-inspired resort offers a variety of room types, from the 406-sq.-ft. Park MGM King Strip View to the 700-sq.-ft. Nightingale Suite, which comes with two queen beds. Guests also have the luxury of checking out the new **NoMad Las Vegas**, which is located on the top four floors of Park MGM.

What makes Park MGM such a gem for planners is its 77,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. **BCD Meetings & Events**, a

full-service meeting and events agency, utilized the **Griffith Ballroom** for its leadership conference. **Ashlynn Dohman**, the BCD's Program Manager, notes that the 7,498-sq.-ft. ballroom is "centrally located, just steps from both Park MGM and the NoMad hotel. Additionally, the interior walkway connector to multiple other properties added value to our program." She notes that "load in and load out was seamless," and "the natural lighting and air purifiers in the meeting room made Park MGM stand out."

As one of MGM Resorts' **Stay Well** properties, Park MGM offers that signature experience in its meeting space. Attendees can expect air purification systems, specially designed lighting and aromatherapy in all meeting rooms. On the technology front, Park MGM is the first hotel in the world to offer **Cisco Webex**. Available within the **Ideation Studio**, the tool enables everything from video meetings to writing on the whiteboard from one's cellphone.

The hotel's indoor meeting space, which spans three floors, isn't the only star. Its outdoor space is stellar too. The **Association of International Certified Professional Accountants (AICPA)** hosted a reception for 300 people on the 4,345-sq.-ft. **Central Park Terrace**. "The Central Park

Continued on page 49



Art Ovation Hotel

Expressing the creative side of Sarasota, Florida

By Debi Lander

Sarasota's downtown bursts with new development. A construction boom in high-rise condominiums and hotels is creating a new skyline for one of Florida's centers of arts and culture. **John Ringling** brought the arts to the city in 1912, making it his winter home and building a mansion to resemble a Venetian place. Today, Sarasota preserves his vast collection in the **Ringling Museum of Art**, aka the **State Art Museum of Florida**. On display you'll find priceless historical European art, Asian antiquities as well as modern art. An exquisite Italian-style courtyard within displays a full-size replica of **Michelangelo's David**. Another local institution is the **Sarasota Opera**, now in its 60th season. Performances take place in what many consider one of the best opera houses in the country. In addition to opera, the city offers 10 theaters, a professional symphony, ballet and over 30 art galleries.

Given the prominence of the arts in Sarasota, it should be no surprise that the newest downtown hotel, the **Art Ovation**, part of the **Marriott Autograph Collection**, blooms with paintings and sculptures. In fact, tours of the artworks within the hotel are offered to guests daily. The theme and curated exhibit change seasonally, bringing a fresh face for return guests.

The motif of creativity continues throughout the guestrooms, restaurant and lobby. The 162 guestrooms and

suites feel upbeat and airy, and each includes a sketchpad and drawing pencils. The vibrantly decorated **Overture Restaurant** salutes musical terminology by offering *Prelude*, *Composition*, *Interlude* and *Encore* selections. And the lobby's energetic focal point, the **Gallery Lounge**, lets guests enjoy their libations while taking in the art gallery exhibitions and scoping out the action in the hotel's working artist's studio. The main lobby itself is artistically designed with rainbow-themed wallpaper and large windows bringing in the Florida sunshine. The outdoor pool and rooftop bar also afford uplifting vistas.

The Art Ovation Hotel offers meeting groups more than 30,000 sq. ft. of function space, including a boardroom that seats up to 24 and first-floor ballroom that can accommodate 520 banquet guests. The ballroom can be divided into multiple rooms for smaller gatherings. "The property immerses guests in the creative process, providing unique creative experiences and conference environments," says Director of Sales **Asa Thomas**. "The event space serves as a blank canvas ready to be designed for the perfect celebration or group gathering."

The hotel stands in the heart of the **Arts & Cultural District**, placing guests within a stone's throw of the **Opera House** and **Florida Studio Theatre**, and a short walk to the **Marie Selby Botanical Gardens**.

OFFSITE OPTIONS

The Ringling Museum of Art, Ca' D'Zan and the Circus Museum lie within 66 acres of **Bayfront Gardens** on Sarasota Bay. Private events can be staged at any of these venues.

- **Ringling Museum of Art:** Let your attendees roam the pink, Renaissance-style palace, browsing the Rubens Galleries and the modern Turrell Skyspace. Hosting a courtyard dinner among the classical sculptures is also an option.
- **Ca' d'Zan** ("House of John"): This mansion was built for circus owner John Ringling and his wife, Mabel. Groups learn the history of Sarasota on guided tours through the palatial home on the waterfront. The Belvedere Tower provides Sarasota's most spectacular view.
- **Circus Museum:** For fun and photo ops, planners can arrange a tour through circus history that showcases fascinating props, costumes, photography and video through the ages.
- **Marie Selby Botanical Gardens:** This horticultural haven of rare tropical plants, especially orchids and bromeliads, includes a living museum and children's rainforest garden on Sarasota Bay. The Gardens present splendid outdoor and indoor event facilities.
- **Mote Aquarium:** Attendees can explore the secrets of the sea through touch pools, viewable working labs and high-tech interactive exhibits. Attendees can dine while learning about sharks, manatees and sea turtles, as well as more than 100 other species of marine life.

- **St. Armands Circle:** No visit to Sarasota is complete without a stop at St. Armands. Here, visitors can explore a variety of upscale shops and restaurants, and the **Clyde Butcher Photography Gallery**.
- Golf is big in Florida, and Sarasota is home to 60 golf courses. Planners will have no problem planning a tournament or golf outings for their attendees.
- Saltwater fishing is another popular local sport. Anglers can snag groupers, snook, king mackerel, red snapper, flounder, Florida pompano, cobia and tarpon.
- The area's 35 miles of beaches rank in the top tier for the entire country. In 2017, Dr. Beach's annual review rated **Siesta Beach** No. 1 (drbeach.org). Groups can enjoy the soft white sands of Siesta Key, Lido and Venice beaches.
- **St. Petersburg** lies less than 40 miles away, attracting groups to its famed **Dali Museum**. **Tampa** (an hour's drive) offers those big-city activities to fill any schedule.

Sarasota–Bradenton International Airport (SRQ) makes arrivals and departures easy. More connections are available at nearby **Tampa International Airport** and **St. Pete–Clearwater International Airport**. While not as accessible as first-tier Florida cities such as Orlando and Miami, Sarasota is nonetheless worth considering — particularly as a destination for art-loving attendees.

Park MGM

Continued from page 47

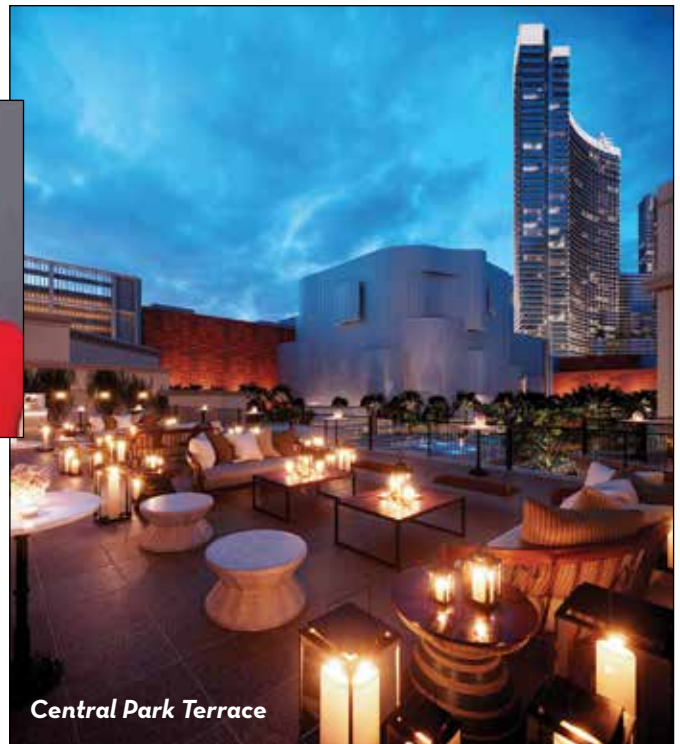
"My attendees, and myself for that matter, were blown away by the gorgeous skyline view that the Central Park Terrace offered."



—**Abigail Campbell, CMP**,
Manager of Conference Production, Association of
International Certified Professional Accountants

Terrace was an absolutely ideal location for our evening reception for my conference. My attendees, and myself for that matter, were blown away by the gorgeous skyline view that the Central Park Terrace offered," says **Abigail Campbell, CMP**, Manager of Conference Production for the AICPA.

Another Park MGM highlight is the cuisine. Breakfast items at the South of France-inspired **Primrose** include fluffy buttermilk pancakes with almond cream and maple syrup. For dinner options, the low-lit **Bavette's Steakhouse & Bar** is the perfect combination of flair (think red leather



Central Park Terrace

banquettes), flavor (try the 42-day dry-aged, bone-in ribeye) and fun (savor a cocktail in its elegant lounge).

Guests will also love being immersed in Park MGM's arts program. Paintings, illustrations and photography, including the work of British artist **David Hockney**, can be found in the meeting spaces, rooms and suites.



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In the **F&D 2018 Spring** issue, **Cate Banfield**, Senior Director, Solution Design & Strategy with **BCD Meetings and Events**, discussed the advantages of booking mid-tier cities in her column “Rethinking Sourcing: David vs. Goliath” (p. 55). By partnering with a “David” such as Boise instead of a “Goliath” such as Chicago, groups will typically enjoy more flexibility in venue usage, savings that can be reinvested in other aspects of the event, the convenience of a compact downtown, and a cultural experience that is more likely novel to the well-traveled attendee. Banfield also noted that, in virtue of being a “big fish in a small pond,” many groups will enjoy more leverage in these cities. But she observed that some of the “ponds” have become rather crowded: Austin and Nashville, for instance, are extremely popular second-tier cities, and planners do well to book them with plenty of lead time.

Austin, one of the three cities profiled in this edition of the **Mid-Market Review**, has both a LEED-certified convention center and a well-publicized entertainment culture, thanks in part to **South by Southwest** and the promotional efforts of actor **Matthew McConaughey** (recently appointed Minister of Culture for the new **University of Texas** basketball arena).

But many second-tier cities, while not as trendy among groups as Austin, have a compelling character and culture, and combine those attributes with a state-of-the-art convention center. Learn about the offerings of **Austin**, **Boise** and **Savannah** in the following pages.



AUSTIN, TX

LOCATED IN THE HEART OF THE CAPITAL CITY'S DOWNTOWN, THE LEED® GOLD CERTIFIED CONVENTION CENTER SPANS SIX CITY BLOCKS.



A winner of the **Prime Site Award** every year since 1995, the **Austin Convention Center**, a LEED® Gold-certified building, has emerged as a leader in the convention and meeting industry. A premier facility located in the heart of the capital city's downtown business district, the Center spans six city blocks with 374,278 sq. ft. of exhibit and meeting space. The five column-free exhibit halls total 247,052 sq. ft. and accommodate 1,289 10 ft.-by-10 ft. exhibit booths. Seven ballrooms ranging from 3,896 sq. ft. to 43,400 sq. ft. in size, and 54 meeting rooms and show offices totaling over 63,000 sq. ft., complete the four-story convention center. Ample parking is provided in two parking garages with a total of 1,700 spaces.

Technological Features

Rated one of the most technologically advanced convention centers in the country, this gigabit-rated facility moves voice, video and data at over one billion bits per second. The Center's high-tech capabilities help to create the perfect Technology Partner for the annual SXSW international multimedia festival. It offers a variety of in-house services including complimentary Wireless Internet access, redundant high-speed Internet II access, plug-and-play capabilities, and an onsite technical staff to help with networking needs.

Hotels

Austin offers more than 36,000 hotel rooms, with 10,000 located downtown, including the 800-room **Hilton Austin** adjacent to the Austin Convention Center and connected by the new **Hilton Overhead Walkway** at 4th. Additional nearby hotels include: **Four Seasons Hotel Austin, JW Marriott, Courtyard by Marriott, Residence Inn by Marriott, Hilton Garden**

Inn Austin Downtown, Radisson Hotel & Suites, Hampton Inn & Suites Downtown, Driskill Hotel, Omni Austin Hotel Downtown, Intercontinental Stephen F. Austin Hotel, W Austin, Hyatt Place Downtown Austin, Westin Austin Downtown and the **Fairmont Austin**.

North America's largest Fairmont property, the Fairmont Austin is connected directly to the Austin Convention Center via the Fairmont Canopy Walk.

Austin by Night

After conventions and meetings wrap up each night, attendees may choose to enjoy Austin's entertainment districts – **Second Street**, the **Warehouse District, Rainey Street** and world-famous **Sixth Street**. The Austin Convention Center is just down the street from the city's vibrant nightlife, where visitors can also enjoy everything from fine dining in four-star restaurants to down-home barbecue and authentic Tex-Mex. As the Live Music Capital of the World, Austin echoes with the sound of country, rock 'n' roll, blues, jazz and Tejano. On any given evening, one can find live music playing in nearly 250 different venues.

Austin by Day

During the day, visitors can enjoy the capital city's many historical attractions, including the **State Capitol**, the **LBJ Presidential Library**, the **Texas State History Museum**, the **Blanton Museum of Art**, and many more museums and art galleries. Or, one can experience the beauty of central Texas, captured by downtown's **Lady Bird Lake**, bordered by 10 miles of trails enjoyed by runners, walkers and cyclists. Surrounded by three lakes and a network of parks, Austin offers the perfect environment for enjoying the best of nature.

FAST FACTS:

Facility

Location: Downtown Austin
Total Area: six city blocks
374,278 sq. ft. of exhibit and meeting space
Exhibit Space: 247,052 contiguous sq. ft., column free
Ballrooms: 43,400 sq. ft. level 4; 23,418 sq. ft. level 1
Meeting Space: 54 meeting rooms totaling over 63,000 sq. ft.
Technology: Gigabit-rated facility, wireless Internet access, plug-and-play capabilities

Austin

Hotels: 10,000 downtown hotel rooms; connected to Hilton Austin and Fairmont Austin via Hilton Overhead Walkway and Fairmont Canopy Walk, respectively
Airport: Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, eight miles from facility
Nearby Attractions: State Capitol, Sixth Street Entertainment District, Warehouse Entertainment District, University of Texas, LBJ Presidential Library, more than 20 museums including The Texas State History Museum, dozens of art galleries and historical attractions, Lady Bird Lake

Contact Information

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Paul Barnes, ACCD Deputy Director/Chief Operating Officer
Amy Harris, Director of Sales

500 East Cesar Chavez Street • Austin, TX 78701 • (512) 404-4200 (Sales); Fax: (512) 404-4220

austinconventioncenter.com



BOISE, ID

Discover Boise

This city on the rise offers meeting planners the perfect combination of urban lifestyle and outdoor adventure. In fact, *USA Today* recently named Boise the “Best-kept secret in the Pacific Northwest.” With nonstop air service from 20 major cities in the United States, getting to Boise is a breeze, and the airport is just seven minutes from the downtown convention center.

Newly Expanded Convention Center

Boise Centre, Idaho’s premier convention center, recently completed a \$47.5 million expansion and now offers 31 flexible meeting rooms and 86,000 sq. ft. of event space, complete with the latest in technology, to accommodate groups from 20 to 2,000. Locally inspired menu selections are proudly prepared by Boise Centre’s experienced inhouse culinary team. Boise Centre’s professional event team is highly experienced in hosting a variety of events, from conventions and tradeshow to corporate meetings and special events. Best of all, the convention center is in the middle of a vibrant downtown surrounded by hotels, restaurants and nightlife.

Growing Number of Hotels

As the convention center has grown, so has the number of hotels to accommodate an increasing number of visitors. In the past two years, four new hotels have opened within walking distance of Boise Centre. From upscale boutique to all suite and Four Diamond properties, planners now have 1,200 hotel rooms within a few blocks. Thousands more hotel rooms are within a short shuttle ride from the



convention center.

Thriving City

Boise’s compact, energetic and walkable downtown invites visitors to discover one-of-a-kind eateries, more than 100 shops, live music venues and a growing number of breweries and wine-tasting rooms within a 10-block radius. The city’s 8th Street is a lively hub of activity, with outdoor dining options, nightlife and a weekly farmer’s market (seasonal) all centered here. In the summer months, free outdoor concerts are held weekly on **The Grove Plaza** adjacent to Boise Centre. The historic **Basque Block** offers a museum and cultural center, restaurants and annual festival held in late July. Numerous art galleries, opera, philharmonic orchestra and the **Idaho Shakespeare Festival** outdoor amphitheater add to Boise’s urban appeal.

Just four blocks from downtown is the **Boise Greenbelt**, a 25-mile walking and biking path that follows the **Boise River** through the city. The nearby **Boise Foothills** boast hundreds of miles of hiking trails with options for all abilities. Golf, skiing, whitewater rafting and wineries are all available within an hour.

FAST FACTS:

Facility

Location: Downtown Boise

Total Sq. Ft.: 86,000

Meeting Space: 31 meeting rooms including an Executive Boardroom with videoconferencing

Largest Room: 24,426 sq. ft., seats 2,400

Technology: Complimentary shared Wi-Fi throughout with dedicated Internet bandwidth up to 500 mbps available to purchase and plug-and-play capabilities

Boise

Hotels: 1,200 downtown hotel rooms and thousands more within a short shuttle ride

Airport: Boise Airport, seven minutes from facility

Nearby Attractions: State Capitol, Historic Basque Block, Boise State University, over 100 shops, 80 restaurants and 20 breweries, live music venues, 25-mile Boise Greenbelt walking and biking path along the Boise River, many museums, whitewater rafting, hiking and golf close by

Contact Information

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850 West Front St., Boise, ID 83702 • (208) 336-8900; Fax: (208) 336-8803 • boisecentre.com



SAVANNAH, GA

Bring Your Convention Attendees to a Bucket List Destination

With ample meeting venues of all sizes in a city steeped in history, and with an amazing food culture and charming places to stay, you'll please your convention crowd by making Savannah the spot for your next meeting.

Savannah's unique venues are ready to accommodate events of all sizes. The **Savannah Convention Center** is situated on the Savannah River and offers fantastic waterfront views as well as plenty of space, including a 100,000-sq.-ft. exhibit hall, a 25,000-sq.-ft. ballroom, a 376-seat auditorium and 21 customizable breakout rooms. When combined with other facilities like the **Savannah Civic Center** and the **Coastal Georgia Center**, as well as all of Savannah's restaurants and offsite offerings, the whole city is your group's playground. All of the venues and meeting spaces, from the riverside terraces to the rooftop ballrooms, feature the technology you need to have a remarkable event.

There are a variety of convention hotels throughout the city, including **The Westin Savannah Harbor Golf Resort & Spa** (403 rooms), **Savannah Marriott Riverfront** (383 rooms), **Hyatt Regency Savannah** (347 rooms) and **The DeSoto Hotel** (246 rooms). Nearly 5,000 rooms are available at various hotels in the **Historic District**, and there are more than 15,000 total hotel rooms in the greater Savannah area. All hotels and meeting spaces in the Historic District are located within walking distance of numerous boutiques, galleries, restaurants and more.

Savannah's many award-winning restaurants are ready to host your networking breakfast events, executive lunches and reward dinners in style. This city is famous for its unique coastal cuisine, with restaurants serving fresh crab legs and oysters as well as peel-and-eat shrimp and succulent lobster tails. Whatever your group is craving, these places have you

covered, with restaurants specializing in everything from traditional Southern favorites to some of the finest international cuisine available. Many restaurants can also accom-

moderate large groups: **The Olde Pink House** can seat up to 400, and **Moon River Brewing Company** has enough room for large-scale events as well as live entertainment.

No matter where you're coming from or how you arrive, you and your guests will find it's easy to get to Savannah. The **Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport** is located only 15 miles from the city center and is served by many major airlines, including Delta, Jet Blue, United Airlines and Air Canada. Frontier Airlines recently introduced new routes from Denver and Philadelphia. And if your guests are traveling from South Florida, they can hop on one of American Airlines' new daily flights from Miami. The city is also easily accessible via major highways like Interstates 95 and 16, and has direct daily rail connections to New York and Miami. Once you and your attendees arrive, you'll find that Savannah is easy to navigate on foot and with local transportation. Of course, the **Visit Savannah** team is also happy to help arrange bus and car transfers to restaurants and offsite activities for you.

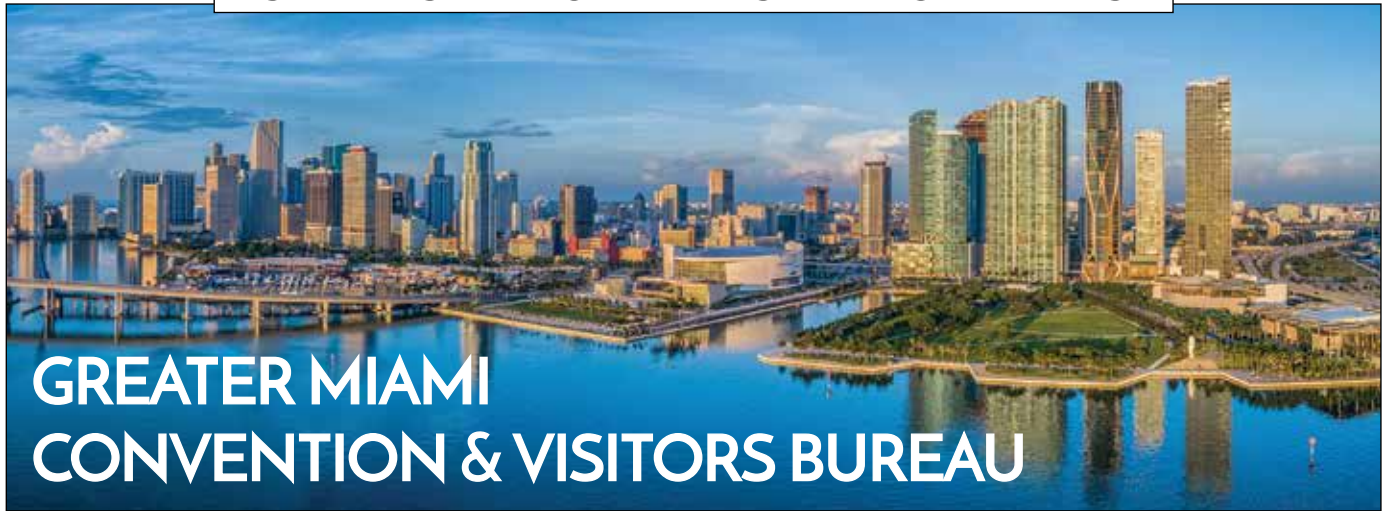
Start planning your meeting today and **VisitSavannah.com**.

Meetings Contact: **Jeff Hewitt**, Senior VP of Sales & Services, JHewitt@VisitSavannah.com, (912) 644-6416



101 East Bay Street, Savannah, GA 31401 • (877) SAVANNAH; (912) 644-6424 • savannahmeetings.com; savannahvisit.com

SITES & CITIES PROFILES



Conveniently close to the airport and a myriad of award-winning hotels, Downtown Miami has everything you need to make the meeting of your dreams a breeze.

A vibrant and dynamic global hub, Miami offers a stunning array of creative venue options for even the largest meeting needs, including the new Miami Beach Convention Center, opened in the fall of 2018.

Located in the heart of South Beach, the new Miami Beach Convention Center is a bright, glass-encased facility as innovative and tech-rich as it is beautiful. In addition to the 500,000 sq. ft. of versatile exhibition space and more than 180,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, the new Miami Beach Convention Center also includes a 60,000-sq.-ft. grand ballroom, a 20,000-sq.-ft. junior ballroom and 84 breakout rooms.

The space features a terrace where attendees can step out, mingle and soak up the city's signature sunshine and ocean breeze. The new Miami Beach Convention Center is also environmentally friendly and LEED Silver certified.

WHAT'S NEW

Along with the new Miami Beach Convention Center, Miami continues to reinvent itself with new hotels, meeting spaces and enhanced infrastructure. Some of the recent additions to the city include:

• BRICKELL CITY CENTRE

Spanning 9.1 acres, Brickell City Centre includes a 352-room hotel, an open-air shopping center, two luxury condo towers, two office buildings and an entertainment center.



With amazing weather and beaches, top hotels and attractions, Miami has everything you need to host the meeting of your dreams.

• BRIGHTLINE

The new express train provides intercity travel in Florida. Brightline currently connects Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach, with service between Miami and Orlando to follow soon.

• FROST SCIENCE MUSEUM

The new Phillip and Patricia Frost Museum of Science has made its home in Downtown Miami's Museum Park. The 250,000-sq.-ft. facility combines a planetarium, aquarium and science museum on one campus, and has the ability to host spectacular events in a variety of venues.

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

Along with its world-famous weather and beaches, the city also offers nearly endless possibilities for entertainment and exploration. From unique hotel and dining experiences to culturally diverse neighborhoods and a thriving arts scene, Miami seamlessly blends the benefits of a sophisticated international destination with the natural beauty of the tropics. And it's easy to get to, with Miami International Airport (MIA) offering more than 400 flights from around the globe daily and serving more airlines than any other airport in the United States.

These are just a few of the memorable and magical highlights awaiting any meeting planner thinking of Miami. Visit MiamiMeetings.com to learn more.

CITYWIDE FACTS & FEATURES

Guestrooms: 55,394 • Hotels/Resorts: 426
Meeting Space: 1.2 million sq. ft.

CONTACT: BARRY MOSKOWITZ, VICE PRESIDENT, SALES
(305) 539-3042 • Fax: (305) 530-4276 • barry@gmcbv.com • MiamiMeetings.com

MONTEGO BAY CONVENTION CENTRE

A STANDOUT FACILITY IN THE HEART OF THE CARIBBEAN

The award-winning Montego Bay Convention Centre (MBCC), the largest convention facility of its kind in the English-speaking Caribbean, has won the World Travel Award for the “Caribbean’s Leading Meeting and Conference Centre” for the last nine consecutive years, from 2011 to 2019.

Throughout 2016 and 2017, the MBCC hosted several significant international events across various industries, including FOROMIC 2016, Jamaica Classic 2017, IOSCO 2017 and the UNWTO Global Conference on Jobs and Inclusive Growth: Partnerships for Sustainable Tourism.

Opened in 2011, the SMG-managed facility is one of a select few in the Caribbean to offer both comprehensive meeting spaces and modern amenities. The center’s more than 139,00 sq. ft. of space has been designed to accommodate exhibitions, conventions and galas. Technological capabilities were recently boosted with the acquisition of the best audiovisual equipment to further improve the overall conference experience.

Besides its intelligent design, the MBCC is also visually striking. The open-air layout of the facility – the meeting, exhibition and ballroom spaces are housed in three separate buildings and connected via outdoor walkways – gives attendees the chance to get outside more than the typical convention center might allow. Many of the MBCC’s indoor spaces feature plenty of natural light, and the property offers a number of outdoor event spaces, like the 17,000-sq.-ft. Ocean View Terrace – which accommodates up to 1,500 guests for banquet-style functions – and the 25,000-sq.-ft. courtyard, capable of accommodating up to 2,600 guests for receptions.

The MBCC’s largest space, the 57,525-sq.-ft. Exhibition Hall, spans two buildings and offers room for 282 booths as well as 4,700 guests seated banquet style or 6,200 seated theater style. For special events, the 18,684-sq.-ft. Grand

Ballroom can seat up to 1,580 for banquets. For meetings, nine meeting rooms offer 10,161 sq. ft., with the largest accommodating up to 600 attendees. The center’s entire pre-function lobby areas come outfitted with built-in reception desks and comfortable seating.

Supporting these spaces are the MBCC’s well-equipped catering facilities. A 15,000-sq.-ft. kitchen, along with additional prep spaces, means that everything from tea breaks to five-course banquets run seamlessly. Ample parking, coach bays, and freight access in the Exhibition Hall offer added convenience for larger events.

As for onsite technology, all of the MBCC’s meeting, exhibit and ballroom spaces come equipped with videoconferencing capabilities and high-speed Internet. A full-service business center, a fully integrated broadcast and teleconference system, and an onsite team of audiovisual technicians all help ensure that meetings and events run smoothly while groups are in house.

Sangster International Airport, the Caribbean’s leading airport, is a mere 15 minutes away and offers worldwide airlift from over 30 cities. Surrounding the center are more than 6,000 hotel rooms, including the world-renowned Half Moon Hotel, Jewel Grande, Sandals Resorts, RIU Hotels and Hyatt Ziva and Zilara Hotels, restaurants, bars, shopping centers and three championship 18-hole golf courses.

Montego Bay, the tourism capital and second-largest city in Jamaica, also offers groups conveniences such as duty-free shopping – as well as plenty to do and see. Groups can cruise the bioluminescent Luminous Lagoon, snorkel or swim in the pale aqua waters of Doctor’s Cave Beach, enjoy excursions with CHUKKA or Island Routes, or hit the nightclubs that line the “Hip Strip.” In addition, meeting-related expenses incurred in Jamaica by U.S.-based groups qualify as tax-deductible.

Half Moon P.O. Box 4058, Rose Hall, St. James, Jamaica, West Indies
(876) 622-9330; Fax: (876) 622-9360 • mbconventioncentre.com

ORANGE COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER



EXPERIENCE THE NEW ORANGE

The world-class Orange County Convention Center (OCCC) provides a multitude of event options in two beautiful buildings – the West and North/South. After more than 35 years in business, the Center of Hospitality continues to find new ways to showcase the leadership and quality of service that has made the destination one of the most popular in the world, not only for tourism but also for conventions and tradeshows.

Exhibitors, attendees and meeting professionals alike acclaim the attention to detail provided by the OCCC, with a variety of facilities and services including over seven million sq. ft. of combined meeting space, sophisticated amenities and world-class onsite providers. The OCCC is consistently rated a top-tier convention center with incredible spaces, such as the multipurpose Tangerine Ballroom, the Valencia Ballroom, the network space in the Destination Lounge, the Sunburst signature meeting room with outdoor terrace, along with the Honeybell and Hamlin boardrooms.

West Concourse – 9800 International Drive
South Concourse – 9899 International Drive
North Concourse – 9400 Universal Boulevard,
Orlando, FL 32819
(407) 685-9800, (800) 345-9845 • www.occc.net

FACILITY FEATURES

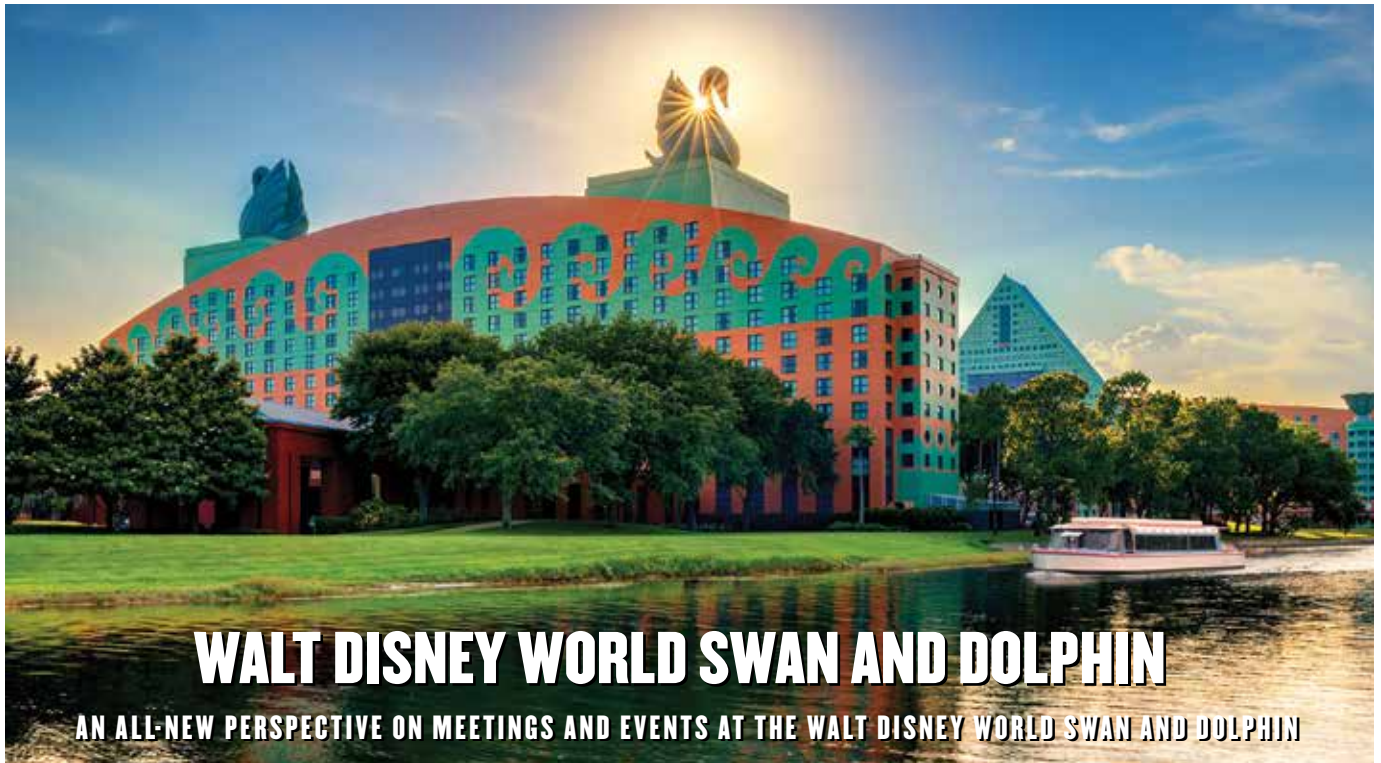
The OCCC's West Concourse boasts 1.1 million sq. ft. of exhibition space, all on one level, supported by 97 covered loading docks. This beautiful facility includes a total of 49 meeting rooms/141 breakouts, the 2,643-seat Chapin Theater, 160-seat lecture hall, 62,182-sq.-ft. multipurpose Valencia Room, a full-service restaurant, four food courts, one business center and 1,450 onsite parking spaces.

The North/South building is connected by the Oversight Bridge and provides 950,282 sq. ft. of exhibition space, including two 92,000-sq.-ft. acoustically engineered general assembly areas. With its distinctive architecture and tropical ambiance, this facility includes 25 meeting rooms/94 breakout rooms, two full-service restaurants, four food courts, two business centers and 76 covered loading docks.

ONSITE SERVICE PARTNERS

The OCCC offers first-rate assistance through its partnerships with the following providers:

- **Centerplate** – Catering and Specialty Services
- **Smart City** – Internet, Telecommunications and Digital Advertising
- **FedEx Office** – Business Centers and Mobility Solutions
- **LMG** – Audiovisual Services
- **Bags** – Remote Skycap, Valet, Bag and Coat Check
- **SeaWorld® Orlando** – Unique and innovative opportunity for offsite meetings and entertainment
- **Universal Orlando® Resort** – Unique and innovative opportunity for offsite meetings and entertainment



WALT DISNEY WORLD SWAN AND DOLPHIN

AN ALL-NEW PERSPECTIVE ON MEETINGS AND EVENTS AT THE WALT DISNEY WORLD SWAN AND DOLPHIN

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin is continuing to make improvements to its facilities and guest amenities. Currently, the Walt Disney World Swan is receiving a complete makeover of its lobby and public spaces as well as adding a new grab-n-go style coffee shop and a newly renovated gift/sundry store. New furniture and décor makes the public spaces more inviting and allows attendees improved networking with clients and colleagues. The completion in 2017 of the brand-new Walt Disney World Dolphin lobby competently transformed the space into a sleek contemporary area that features new dining and beverage options as well as more space for attendees to socialize.

“This lobby marked the final piece of an exciting transformation for the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort,” said General Manager Fred Sawyers. “This space is designed specifically to cater to today’s guests and offer an inviting place where they can come together to relax, network and grab something to eat or drink.”

The centerpiece of the new lobby is a dazzling custom crystal chandelier that sparkles above the fountain. Other new features include an exciting new geometric ceiling, increased lighting and all-new contemporary décor and furnishings, with more than double the amount of seating.

The lobby redesign is the final stage of a \$150 million project that also included the transformation of all 2,270 guestrooms, along with upgrades to the hotel’s meeting space. The renovated guestrooms feature all of the latest technology, including large HD TVs and all-new upgraded furniture centered on the famous Westin Heavenly Bed®. The design continues into a completely new bathroom, featuring residential style vanities and a backlit mirror on iridescent glass tiles.

A recipient of the many prestigious meeting and other awards, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort is a nationally respected and recognized leader in the convention resort arena. The resort offers more than 333,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, 87 breakout rooms, and 2,270 guestrooms and suites.

When it comes to the business of meetings, the award-winning team is highly regarded for their ability to exceed expectations. Meetings are supported by an award-winning banquet, catering and culinary team that delivers customized solutions with a passion for each customer. Whether your event is in the ballroom, on the beach, on the causeway or in one of the signature restaurants, the creative opportunities abound. For the adventurous, nothing beats a private event in the theme parks to add that magical touch while supporting the meeting theme.

The resort is recognized as a top “foodie” destination in Orlando, featuring 18 world-class restaurants and lounges including the famed celebrity Chef Todd English’s bluezoo, Il Mulino New York Trattoria, and Shula’s Steak House, which serves the best beef money can buy.

The resort is situated in the heart of the Walt Disney World Resort, within footsteps of both Epcot®, Disney’s Hollywood Studios and Disney’s Boardwalk. Complimentary transportation is provided throughout the resort and guests enjoy the Extra Magic Hours Benefit, and FASTPASS+ access. On property, guests can enjoy one of the resort’s five pools, two health clubs and tennis courts, or indulge at the luxurious Balinese-inspired Mandara Spa.

Contact:

Gino Marasco, Director of Sales and Marketing;
(800) 524-4939 or (407) 934-4290; meetings@swandolphin.com

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SUCCESSFUL SITE VISITS

Collaboration between planner and host is key

By Deborah Borak, CMM, SMMC



Think about the best and worst hotel site visits you have participated in or hosted. What made them stand out as best and worst? Whose job is it to make sure a site visit goes well, the planner or supplier? Let's review what planners and suppliers can both do to make each site visit successful.

information on the destination, offsite venues, and businesses and educational institutions to potentially collaborate with.

SALES KITS

Planner – Be specific with the details you want, such as menus, AV pricing, suite diagrams, etc. Don't assume the sales manager will have all of the information you need during the tour.

Supplier – Prepare floorplans, capacity charts and menus, and have the space outlined to show how the conference will flow. *Helpful hint: Ask if the planner prefers paper copies or a flash drive.*

DETERMINE A TIME TO VISIT

Planner – Ask about potential dates and provide the number of people attending. Don't assume a weekend will work or that the sales manager can provide multiple complimentary rooms.

Supplier – Keep in mind that even though the hotel is busy, the planner might want to see it during that time to assess attendee flow and experience how the staff handles large groups.

CLIENT PROFILE

Planner – Always provide your profile or complete the hotel's form to help the sales manager customize the visit. Consider providing photos of people attending along with a company logo.

Supplier – Have a standard form that includes, at a minimum, likes, dislikes and allergies to help customize the visit and stand out. *Helpful hint: If the planner is a member of your hotel chain rewards program, you can see if he or she is familiar with your brand or if the planner needs to be shown what separates you from the competition.*

ITINERARY

Planner and Supplier – Some planners set everything up themselves, while others depend on the sales manager. Regardless of who compiles the itinerary, it is important to include dates, times, people, location names, addresses, phone numbers, flight details, airport transfer details, parking instructions and confirmation numbers. Don't schedule too many visits in one day, and plan for breaks and potential delays. *Helpful hint: Utilize the CVB or DMO on the site visit and include them in the RFP process. They have a wealth of*

BE PREPARED

Planner – Be specific on why you chose the venue and what is important during your visit. Let the sales manager know what you want to see on the tour, documents you require, whom you want to visit with and, just as important, what you *don't* need to see during your visit.

Supplier – Review the RFP details and your bid prior to the site visit to familiarize yourself with the meeting. This is especially important if you were not the one that responded to the RFP or are the "Destination Expert" for all site visits. Certainly, ask questions about missing information or details that need clarification. But do your homework first to avoid asking basic questions that make you appear as if you don't know anything about the meeting. *Helpful hint: If the planner asks a question and you don't have an answer, say you will check and get back to him or her. Nothing is more frustrating than providing a random answer that may not be correct, or telling the planner you don't know because you didn't respond to the RFP.*

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE EXPERIENCE

Planner – Some planners love having a car provided, while others prefer to experience airport transfers the same way their attendees will. Let the host know ahead of time whether you would like transportation set up or prefer to take a cab, Uber or use the rail system one way or round trip.

Supplier – Consider meeting the planner upon arrival to welcome him or her to the property. Upon arrival or at departure, consider having the general manager or director of sales thank the planner for visiting. Be careful about having an entourage of staff at arrival or departure. Some planners appreciate the attention, and some do not.

LET THE SALES MANAGER KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE ON THE TOUR, DOCUMENTS YOU REQUIRE, WHOM YOU WANT TO VISIT WITH AND, JUST AS IMPORTANT, WHAT YOU *DON'T* NEED TO SEE DURING YOUR VISIT.

AMENITY

Planner – An amenity should never be expected. Oftentimes planners are given a complimentary room (upgraded and/or with lounge access) and a hosting meal. Do you really need anything else?

Supplier – The purpose of an amenity is to welcome the planner and make him or her feel at home. A note and gift based on the planner’s likes or a remembrance of the hotel is appropriate. Providing a huge meat and cheese platter and wine after you hosted dinner is probably not necessary. Plus, the wine may be difficult to transport if the planner only brought a carry-on. *Helpful hint: Be aware of company rules on gifts before you provide anything to the planner.*

DURING THE TOUR

Planner – Stay off your phone! A lot of preparation went into the visit and you are missing out on several details, not to mention it is just rude. Be upfront about what you want to see. If you don’t want to visit the gym, let your host know.

Supplier – Bring your enthusiasm! Don’t just check the boxes and show every square inch of the hotel. Showcase the areas the planner wants and needs to see. *Helpful hint: Be creative and consider incorporating different learning styles (auditory, visual, kinesthetic and reading/writing activities) into the tour. This could help the planner retain the information you have provided.*

MEALS

Planner – Some planners love a fancy meal, while others prefer to sample the same menu their attendees would experience on property. Make sure to indicate your preference.

Supplier – You might inquire about the above preference when setting up the site visit to make sure the planner doesn’t leave wishing he or she had sampled the banquet food.

POST VISIT

Planner – Thank your hosts. Mail a card or send an e-mail to show appreciation for everyone’s time. Return calls and e-mails with honest feedback. If you know a hotel or venue is not a good fit, communicate that. Good or bad, everyone involved appreciate updates, especially if the decision date is delayed.

Supplier – Circle back with any outstanding information you promised to provide. Refrain from contacting the planner daily for any updates. Respect the timeline they provided and exercise the right amount of communication.

Bottom line: Sales managers should not provide a cookie-cutter experience. They need to personalize the visit in order to stand out among their competitors. Planners need to provide details and set clear expectations for the experience. A great site visit doesn’t always mean the hotel will earn the business. However, a stellar experience does put the planner in the position to make the most informed decision.

*Deborah Borak, CMM, SMMC, is Vice President/Team Director at **ConferenceDirect**, which she joined in 2002. Recognized as a ConferenceDirect Top Producer multiple times, Borak works with a variety of clients including corporate, association, fraternal and nonprofit groups. She is an active member of **PCMA, GBTA, ASAE and MPI**, and earned her Strategic Meetings Management Certification in 2010. She currently serves on the GBTA Meetings Committee.*

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ACCOMODATING SERVICE ANIMALS

When disabled attendees bring in these companions, it's important to know the ADA regulations

By Vanessa Kane, CMP, CMM



I serve as the National Manager of Meetings, Events and Exhibits for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. The VFW is the nation's oldest veteran's service organization. Our membership of over 1.6 million includes the VFW and Auxiliary to the VFW with members in over 6,200 VFW Posts worldwide. My main responsibility is

logistical coordination of the annual convention, which attracts between 8,000 and 10,000 attendees each year.

Over the past few years, I have noticed an increasing number of service animals at our conventions and meetings, where previously I had seen very few, if any. The increase is due in part to younger attendee veterans coming back from Iraq/Afghanistan, although there are a number of Vietnam veterans who also have the assistance animals. These combat veterans may have a variety of physical disabilities, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

As meeting professionals, it is our responsibility to be aware of the regulations regarding service animals in order to assist these attendees as best we can, and make them feel welcome and comfortable at our events.

HOW "SERVICE ANIMAL" IS DEFINED

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines service animals as dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. Work or tasks include guiding people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling a wheelchair, alerting or protecting a person who is having a seizure, reminding a person with a mental illness to take prescribed medications, calming a person with PTSD during an anxiety attack, or performing other duties. Service animals are working animals, not pets. Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service animals under the ADA. However, some state and local governments have laws that allow people to take emotional support animals into public places. Check with state and local government agencies about these laws.

MINIATURE HORSES

In addition to the provisions concerning service dogs, revised

ADA regulations contain a new, separate provision about miniature horses that have been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. (Miniature horses range in height from 24-34 inches measured to the shoulders, and weigh between 70-100 pounds.)

Some state and local laws define service animals more broadly than the ADA does. Information about such laws can be obtained from a state's attorney general's office.

WHERE SERVICE ANIMALS ARE ALLOWED

The ADA prescribes that state and local governments, businesses and nonprofit organizations that serve the public generally must allow service animals to accompany people with disabilities in all areas of the facility where the public is normally allowed to go.

Under the ADA, service animals must be harnessed, leashed or tethered, unless these devices interfere with the service animal's work or the individual's disability prevents using these devices.

WHAT CAN BE ASKED

When it is not obvious what service an animal provides, limited inquiries are allowed. Convention staff may ask only two questions: (1) Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability? (2) What work or task has the dog been trained to perform? Staff may not ask about the individual's disability, require medical documentation, require a special identification card or training document for the dog, or ask that the dog demonstrate its ability to perform the work or task.

Under the ADA, Title II covers state and local government services while Title III incorporates public accommodations and commercial facilities. Both titles are relevant to service animals.

For commonly asked questions about service animals in businesses, visit www.ada.gov. For additional, detailed information, visit www.ada.gov/regs2010/service_animal_qa.html.

Vanessa Kane, CMP, CMM has worked for the **Veterans of Foreign Wars of the US** since 1998 as Manager of Meetings/Events & Exhibits. Kane received her CMP in 1996 and her CMM in 2008. She currently sits on the Ex-Officio Meeting Planner Board of the **ESPA** (Event Service Professionals Association) and is also a member of the Heartland Chapter of **PCMA**.

*A version of this article appeared in ESPA's Event*ure Newsletter, May 2014.*

DESIGNING THE ATTENDEE EXPERIENCE

7 ways to drive engagement at conventions

By Nicole O’Leary



Delegates expect to be engaged by the meetings they attend. With *design thinking*, planners reflect on how each element of the event will impact individual and group experiences. In turn, they can create conventions that compel attendees to transform their work, improve themselves and crave the next event.

Event designers are specialists in this approach. They are used to questioning the status quo and can help your team rethink the convention experience from start to finish. They are also well versed in how to incorporate technology, stay on budget and meet the generational needs of your attendees. From the start, consider bringing event designers into your team. However, every team member should have some familiarity with design thinking, and in particular these seven ways to drive engagement:

1 Facilitate Connections. Attendees and exhibitors naturally want to connect with each other, but at times there may be barriers that planners can help to break down. For example, consider creating a space to align first-time attendees with longtime exhibitors.

2 Casual Interactions. When attendees network multiple times in smaller settings, it leads to more meaningful and longer-lasting relationships. Plus, with the human aversion to the hard sell, business conversations increasingly are happening in more casual atmospheres. Sprinkle small lounge areas and small-group activities throughout the convention. (*For more connection-fostering ideas, see the sidebar, “Tactical Ideas for Convention Connections.”*)

3 Show Purpose. Engagement areas that have the “why” infused in them — such as giving back to the community or a common bigger problem to solve — help people come together in small-group discussions and also as a larger community. Humans need to be part of something bigger than themselves.

4 The Unexpected. People are fascinated with discovery and simple, positive surprises — particularly when they earn them. Create paths or mechanisms that draw attendees into a mystery they need to solve. Don’t spoon feed. Imagine

if attendees were challenged to find a lost lecture, or a VIP speaker hidden away.

5 Entertainment Matters. Creating a fun atmosphere that mimics where and how people seek entertainment is an entrenched concept for business events. Think live music, colored lightning, motion and digital displays. When people have fun together they tend to mirror one another’s behaviors, leading to stronger connections.

6 Be Instaworthy. When it comes to physical design, bringing in authentic details, unique vignettes and natural elements is key to creating environments that give attendees a reason to share their live experience with their vast social network. This drives their own connectivity up and grants you access to their community of followers.

7 Less Is More. Edit the event. From education sessions to printed signage to networking opportunities, do fewer things really well to drive up quality experiences. When you are designing a series of experiences, it’s easy to overwhelm, so stick to what really matters.

Continued on page 63

TACTICAL IDEAS FOR CONVENTION CONNECTIONS

- **Table Topics.** Think about ways to group people based on what they may be interested in personally. For example, provide preset topic tables that give them a reason to start connecting.
- **Food Alleys.** Millennials spend 30 percent of their income on food — it’s important! Consider how this is reflected in the F&B budget. Healthy options are way past trendy and now mandatory. Try an international food tasting, and think about heading outside the walls to gourmet food trucks.
- **Movie Night.** Repurpose all that AV! After a general session, could you transform to casual seating, wheel in the popcorn and have attendees watch a popular movie? Or try a series of cult movies that get to the heart of your attendees’ personal preferences.
- **Challenge Them.** People crave adventure and competition. Bring people together to solve a common challenge, whether it is a *Guinness Book of World Records* attempt or a simple step challenge. Memories are built through joint effort.

A “RELATIONSHIP BUILDING”

Creative partnerships with convention center staff yield great attendee experiences

By Katie Smith



There’s a sense of excitement when you are scouting locations for your next big event – and a lot of questions to be answered. First, there’s the city itself. Is it vibrant? Will it wow your attendees? Will they want to come? The next big consideration is the venue. The nuts and bolts of the place

are quickly figured out on paper. However, bringing your event to life requires working with staff to ensure the venue will not just meet your logistical needs, but also reflect your organization at every turn.

Consider the venue a blank slate for you to create your own world, where attendees will understand the vision and mission of that event as they enter the space.

By its nature, hospitality is all about relationships, and that’s why every convention center should strive to be a “relationship building.” Your first relationship is with the venue’s national account executive, who will find the perfect space within the building that fits your vision.

The second and more enduring relationship is with the event coordinator. This is where the finer details of your event come alive. The event coordinator can help you understand the assets in your venue’s toolkit to create a memorable and meaningful event. Conference room AV is one example. With proper sound and video, you can change a lecture into an experience. Stumble on either, and you could lose your audience. Digital signage and F&B service present further opportunities to partner with the convention center to engage delegates.

THE POWER OF DIGITAL SIGNAGE

The Minneapolis Convention Center is having enormous success with digital signage installed just prior to the 2018 Super Bowl. The fan-frenzy known as the “Super Bowl

Experience” utilized every corner of the convention center, with digital signage taking center stage to extend NFL branding throughout the facility, direct patrons and provide updated messaging.

The digital overhead monitors feature transport technology that enables discreet messaging to each individual display. Planners use digital signage to reflect their brand, communicate with attendees, engage patrons on social media and create independent zones for every part of their meeting, with a flexibility that foam core signs and banners just can’t replicate.

Technology Coordinator Ted Arbeiter recommends planners consider movement in digital signage to draw the eye toward the message. “Subtle and simple videos are

the big things,” says Arbeiter, who cautions that too much movement can overwhelm, while static signage becomes wallpaper once the message is absorbed.

Arbeiter believes digital signage gives planners the tools to deliver meaningful content in addition to branding. It can also create another revenue stream if the venue allows

planners to purchase the space, and then resell it to vendors.

Here’s one more reason digital signage is a win for many organizations: sustainability. Traditional foam core is generally not recycled. Digital signage uses power, but it doesn’t use paper, inks, solvents or landfills. Once the message is no longer needed, you simply delete it.

THOUGHTFULLY DESIGNED F&B

Food can help you extend your message, and create positive memories of your event. The convention center caterer can help you personalize menus, highlight regional cuisines, implement sustainable practices or create a theme. Even the largest of F&B functions should be able to accommodate most dietary restrictions, from gluten-free and nut-free to vegan or vegetarian. This is a relationship that offers you yet another chance to create a memorable event that will draw your attendees back next year.

THE CONVENTION CENTER CATERER CAN HELP YOU PERSONALIZE MENUS, HIGHLIGHT REGIONAL CUISINES, IMPLEMENT SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES OR CREATE A THEME.

THE DUE DILIGENCE BEHIND THE EXPERIENCE

Any event can be comprised if the basics of technology and security are not in place, and here again, working closely with the onsite staff is vital. One key relationship is with your network provider. It's a good bet your attendees will want to use their devices, so Wi-Fi is a given. Will you be using a web-based program that requires live streaming? Will attendees need to pull video content from the Internet? Your venue should help you work through these considerations with the networking contractor to make sure you don't come up short on this important asset.

In this day and age, security is a major consideration. A guest services team member can help you develop a security plan specific to the needs of your organization. That plan might include ushers, door guards, EMT staff, and coat and baggage check, in addition to the security typically onsite at the venue. Every meeting is different, and having a well-constructed plan will help you focus on the content you are trying to deliver. The visible elements of that plan will also

help your attendees feel safe, which puts them in the right mindset for engagement.

Depending on the event, it can take as short as a week or as long as two years to fill out the convention center's "blank slate" with your event plan. Along the way, you will need strong relationships with the account executive and onsite coordinators to create the successful event that is all your own.

*Katie Smith is the Director of Sales and Marketing at the **Minneapolis Convention Center**, overseeing the Minneapolis Convention Center Sales and Marketing team. Smith and her team collaborate with the **Meet Minneapolis** sales team to bring great conventions, events and meetings to the city of Minneapolis. Her favorite part of her job is building relationships with clients, staff and the local community.*

DESIGNING THE ATTENDEE EXPERIENCE

Continued from page 61

Conventions are in a state of change, and it can be hard to keep up, but the only wrong decision is to stagnate. Challenge your team and vendor partners to become design thinkers and add new elements to your event. Beta test a few things and let go of a few things at each convention. About 20 percent to 30 percent of the elements within the overall experience should be in beta each time around.

Measurement is also critical to understanding what types of engagement are working. Collect quantitative and qualitative data on engagement elements event after event, building data resources that will allow you to identify which experiences and ideas deserve resources to grow and which ones should be discontinued.

Always think, if you were describing your convention to a friend or family member over coffee or a glass of wine, would you say, "Oh my, you had to be there!"? Design your event to be a must-attend experience.

*Nicole O'Leary is Vice President, Creative, at **The Expo Group**, headquartered in Irving, TX. She oversees creative and strategic teams to deliver attendee experiences that attract, engage, immerse and reward. O'Leary has led experience design and creative efforts for large associations, corporate events and global brands in her 17-year career.*



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CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU EXECUTIVES

We are pleased to announce the **20 CVB executives** who received the **Facilities & Destinations 2019 ELITE Award**, an accolade that recognizes professionals making a difference in the meetings and events industry. Nominated by readers via a ballot appearing in **F&D** issues and on **Facilitiesonline.com**, these leaders are instrumental to generating invaluable convention business for their cities. They maintain fruitful relationships with convention centers, hoteliers, civic organizations and local businesses. They have a long track record of career successes, stay active in industry associations and, most importantly for **F&D** readers, ensure their staffs excel in customer service.

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