Aboard Norwegian, we make it our business to take your incentive program or corporate event to exciting new places, going far beyond your expectations. No matter how high you set your goals, Norwegian’s exclusive Freestyle Cruising® will inspire with unforgettable destinations, first-class entertainment, state-of-the-art meeting spaces, mouthwatering dining options and innovative, spacious accommodations — all included in one great price. So feel free to set your sights on a successful corporate event and an extraordinary vacation for a value far better than any land-based resort can offer.

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 destined to set an ambitious agenda.

An Old West cattle drive is depicted in a bronze sculpture at Pioneer Plaza, a park that marks the entrance to the Dallas Convention Center.

A large green sea turtle and his pals — all threatened and endangered sea turtles — call Turtle Reef their new home. The new 300,000-gallon aquarium at SeaWorld San Diego opened last month.
The Real Thing

Since Coca Cola was founded in 1886, many of its advertising jingles stick with us years after they’re retired: ‘The pause that refreshes. Things go better with Coke!’ It’s the real thing. Perhaps Reed Exhibitions should consider adopting one of Coke’s catchy slogans because the first-ever AIBTM held in Baltimore June 21-23 was truly the real thing.

The thousands of participants and 11,000 appointments between U.S. and international hosted buyers and suppliers put a real face on reports of growth in travel budgets and face-to-face meetings.

What’s more, the idea of co-locating events also got a real boost as the CIC Hall of Leaders Gala, PCMA Education Conference, launch of MPI Value of Meetings research and several networking functions seamlessly took place at Americas Meeting Week.

This month’s cover story, “Value Destinations: Where Planners and Their Meetings ‘Own the City,’” tells the story of AIBTM host city Baltimore and those of other top-notch destinations in smaller markets such as Baton Rouge, Charlotte, Indianapolis, Memphis and San Diego that are easy to get to, easy to get around, offer superior service, amenities and excellent value.

Tom Noonan, president and CEO of Visit Baltimore, rightly boasts, “If you could design a convention city from scratch, Baltimore would be it. We’re on the water with a sports stadium and a rail station.” In the midst of a major renaissance, Baltimore’s growing accommodations (will soon have 9,000 downtown hotel rooms), meeting facilities, nightlife and attractions are a short walk from the Baltimore Convention Center. And Baltimore will host AIBTM in 2012 and 2013.

Make no mistake, even though these destinations may fit a second- or third-tier definition, there is nothing second-class about them. Noonan jokes, “We are a tier 1½ market because we’re at the top of the tier 2 destinations.” Moreover, meeting planners who strive to avoid being the “small fish in a big pond,” set their sites on a value destination in a smaller market. “When an event comes to Charlotte,” says Bill Millikan, senior director of sales for the Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority, “they own the city.” I look forward to returning next year to Baltimore for AIBTM 2012.
**NEWS WATCH**

**Omni Nashville Hotel Breaks Ground**

Omni Hotels & Resorts executives joined with Nashville leaders at the groundbreaking for the Omni Nashville Hotel, which will open in 2013. Left to right: Larry Arana, senior project manager; Music City Center; Mike Smith, SVP and General Counsel;_CFG Mike Garcia, SVP, Acquisitions & Development; Omni Hotels & Resorts; Kyle Young, executive director, Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum; Jim Caldwell, CEO, Omni Hotels & Resorts; Nashville Mayor Karl Dean; Butch Spyridon, president, Nashville CVB; Marty Dickens, chairman, Convention Center Authority; Vice Mayor Diane Neighbors; Bob Patterson, chair, Nashville CVB; Charles Starks, executive director, Nashville Convention Center; and pyl Ryan, executive director, Metropolitan Development and Housing Authority.

**MEETING VALUES**

**Hotel Valencia Riverwalk, San Antonio, TX**

Planners who hold meetings at Hotel Valencia Riverwalk during July or August receive special group rates from $99 (applicable for Sunday through Thursday). The special includes complimentary high-speed Internet access throughout the hotel; complimentary use of fitness center; and 20 percent attrition. Contact Jasmin Hernandez at 210-220-3011 or jhernandez@valenciagroup.com.

**JNTK New York Welcomes New Executive Director**

**The Japan National Tourism Organization’s New York office has a new executive director: Yukana Tanaka was sworn in June 20. She replaces Shuichi Kanno, who is returning to his former employer in Tokyo, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism.**

Tanaka arrives in the JNTK New York office from the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism, where she gained extensive experience in Japan’s transportation management field. www.jntknycinfo.com

**Gaylord Hotel and Conference Center Planned for Colorado**

Rendering of Gaylord Hotel and Conference Center in Aurora, CO.

NASHVILLE, TN — Gaylord Entertainment Company will develop a hotel and conference center on 85 acres in Aurora, CO, located 10 minutes from Denver International Airport. The proposed 1,500-unit convention resort is expected to be open for business in 2015 and feature 400,000 sf of exhibition and meeting space. Colin V. Reed, the CEO of Gaylord Entertainment, said in a statement, “We are thrilled by the prospect of a Gaylord property in the Denver Market, which has fast become one of the most desirable tourist and business travel destinations in the United States and a destination of choice for meeting planners and conventions.” www.gaylordentertainment.com

**America Meetings Week a Big Success**

Baltimore, MD — On June 22 in Baltimore, the first Americas Meetings & Events Exhibition (ABMT) was opened by Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, the mayor of Baltimore, who spoke about the positive economic impact of ABMT on the city. More than 1,000 appointments were scheduled between U.S. and international hosted buyers and suppliers. The show increased by 40 percent over the original floor plan due to 789 exhibitors from 52 countries. The total number of registered participants was 3,872, and while the total official attendance was not available until the independent audit is completed, end-of-show stats indicated a total of 740 registered hosted buyers and 806 registered trade buyers.

Gary Musich, vice president of sales, Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority, commented, “The format is excellent. For a first-time show it’s awesome. We have seen a lot of new faces, that’s the biggest deal. The industry needed a new format and this is it. We couldn’t be more pleased.”

America Meetings Week included a number of co-located events such as the CIC Hall of Leaders Gala, PCMA Education Conference, the launch of MPI’s Value of Meetings research and several networking functions. www.abmt.com

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**Events Calendar**

**AUGUST 4-6, 2011**

**ISES EVENTWORLD 2011**

St. Louis Union Station Marriott
St. Louis, MO
Contact: 312-321-6853
http://www.ises.com

**SEPTEMBER 7-8, 2011**

**HOSPITALITY SALES & MARKETING ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL (HSMAI)**

**MEET NATIONAL**

Walter E. Washington Convention Center
Washington, DC
800-564-4220
www.hsmaimeet.com

**OCTOBER 4-6, 2011**

**THE MOTIVATION SHOW (IT&mE)**

McCormick West
Chicago, IL
630-434-1777
www.motivationshow.com

**OCTOBER 11-13, 2011**

**IMEX, AMERICA**

Sands Expo at the Venetian/Palazzo Hotel
Las Vegas, NV
Contact: +1-4723 227311
www.imexamerica.com

**OCTOBER 13-15, 2011**

**SITE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

Bilbao
Las Vegas, NV
Contact: 312-321-6148
www.siteglobalmeeting.org

**NOVEMBER 13-16, 2011**

**2011 FINANCIAL & INSURANCE CONFERENCES PLANNERS (FIPC)**

ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Grand Hyatt San Antonio
San Antonio, TX
312-245-1023

**DECEMBER 6-8, 2011**

**INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS (IAEE)**

EXPO EXPO: IAEE’S ANNUAL MEETING & EXHIBITION
Las Vegas Convention Center
Las Vegas, NV
972-458-8002
www.iaee.com
Practically no profession stands to benefit more from the emerging enterprise engagement movement than meeting planners. The growing organizational focus on achieving financial results by engaging key customers, channel partners, employees, vendors and communities provides a significant opportunity for meeting planners to exit the world of commoditization and enter into one that can be tied to a company’s bottom line.

Enterprise engagement is a strategy being employed by some of the nation’s best known companies, including McDonalds, Hewlett-Packard, New York Stock Exchange, Eurocentx, Coca Cola and more, seeking to improve performance by building more powerful relationships with the people key to their business. This movement is based on extensive research from organizations as diverse as Gallup, Sirota, Corporate Leadership Council—Genesee that have all found a direct link among financial results, share price performance, and the ability of an organization to engage its customers and employees.

Opportunities for Planners

Many meeting planners will immediately understand the implications for their profession. There is no question that meetings play a critical role in addressing a number of “engagement” factors, including communication, capability, support, task value and emotion. And, through the extensive work on return on investment spearheaded by Jack Phillips of the ROI Institute and others, the meetings field can help address the measurement issue as well. Creating an effective meeting goes way beyond the management of “heads and beds” — it involves a complex combination of art and science. While the “media” of meetings, such as hotels, transportation, events and experiences, can be analyzed and compared by purchasing departments, the art and science of the process involves expertise that cannot be easily analyzed by purchasing departments alone. This focus on engagement is having a profound effect on meeting planning. For example, New York-based EGR International, a 41-year-old company, has had full-service meeting management capabilities as one of its product offerings. EGR President Jeffrey Grisamore now positions EGR as a full-service engagement agency. “We saw the shift happen seven or eight years ago, when clients began to focus more on what they were trying to accomplish with their events than on the process itself,” says Grisamore. “They began asking for solutions oriented to meeting-specific engagement goals, and that required us to continually diversify our offerings so that we could apply a zero-based solution to their unique challenges. Calling ourselves a performance improvement and meetings management company doesn’t describe what we do anymore. Our objective is to help clients engage their key audiences to achieve measurable results, and that requires a far broader toolkit than that required to address the real heart of the matter: What business goal(s) is the organization trying to achieve and how will the event be choreographed and organized to achieve that goal.”

Tools for Success

A new formal curriculum on Enterprise Engagement is being created by the Enterprise Engagement Alliance (EEA), a coalition of leading practitioners and suppliers involved with this emerging business arena. The curriculum is based on extensive research into the critical factors involved with engagement such as an understanding of the nature and interrelationships of an organization’s various audiences, as well as a grasp of the critical elements involved with engagement and the tactics used to address them. It draws from the classic survey conducted by the Incentive Research Foundation, “Incentives, Rewards and Workplace Motivation.” This survey defined the critical elements of engagement to include: leadership, communications, capability, support, task value, emotion and measurement.

The link between meetings and engagement was also underlined recently in a major longitudinal study of a health insurance company’s engagement strategy undertaken in 2010. The study, “ROI of Channel Partners Program,” tracked a meetings program designed to improve the engagement and sales of its independent health insurance brokers over a nine-month period. It found that the program generated a return of investment of 190 percent based on weighing the increased sales against the fully loaded cost of the program.

The Proof

The meetings industry has done a great job of developing measurement tools. What it has yet to accomplish is proving its value in helping organizations achieve concrete business goals. Now that more and more organizations have begun to place a greater value on engagement, the meetings profession has an opportunity to reassert the strategic value of meetings as an engagement tool. Engagement goes far beyond social networking and often culminates in the process of people getting together in one place to engage on a specific mission or topic. It’s time for the meetings profession to embrace its contribution to engagement and provide education programs that strategically focus not only on measurement, but on the art and science of engaging people through meetings and events.

Allan Schweyer is chairman of the Enterprise Engagement Alliance (www.enterpriseengagement.org), an outreach, research and education organization focused on the emerging business of Enterprise Engagement.
Kathy Artuso, travel buyer for BCD Meetings & Incentives in Chicago, recently proposed an incentive trip to one of the major meeting destinations in the country. Her executives shot it down, saying they could not get excited about it. Artuso then proposed a resort outside San Diego that takes up an entire island. She is hoping to take over the entire property for the event.

“We don’t want to be a small fish in a big pond,” says Artuso. “If you have a 500-person meeting, you can own a hotel in a smaller market.”

**Smaller, Not Small**

Artuso is among the many corporate planners who are big fans of smaller markets. And we’re not talking about nanos — simply those not in the mega-category. These are markets that tend to be compact, easy to get to, easy to get around in — but with all the world-class amenities and services a contemporary meeting needs.

What they offer in a word is: value.

“IT’s up to a planner, especially an independent like myself,” says Pickover, “to ask the client, ‘Have you ever thought about such and such a place?’ You put together some information about a place like that and see if it works.”

Geraldine Bordelon, director of destination sales for Visit Baton Rouge, says, “Almost all of our clients are familiar with New Orleans but not with Baton Rouge. Our success comes when we can bring them in and show them the product we have.

“When we go to trade shows,” she says, “we always hear, ‘I’m tired of this large city or that large city.’ As a result, we will provide significant incentives to do a site inspection with us.”

A recent StarCite survey found that customers wishing to have events in the top 10 convention markets rose by about 50 percent in the third quarter from 2010 a year earlier. But such requests were higher for cities that ranked 26 to 50, up 58 percent; and cities ranked 51–75 saw an 83 percent increase.

One factor that might have spurred interest in smaller markets was the stigma attached in the last few years to meeting in upscale, high-profile settings. While that perception is fading, it has given those smaller destinations a chance to get their messages across.

In addition, large corporations are often headquartered or have a significant presence in smaller markets — sometimes giving those locations a step up.

Eclipse of the major meeting destinations in the country,” says Noonan: “Here we have to spend more money, for instance, on signage to carve out their identity.”

“We joke,” says Tom Noonan, president and CEO of Visit Baltimore, “that we are a tier 1/5 market because we’re at the top of the tier 2 destinations.” One major reason, says Noonan: ease of getting to the city by air or by train.

Getting in and Getting Around

There’s no question that a huge plus for smaller markets is ease of getting around. But many of these locations can also boast significant lift in and out. According to Bordelon, “We have the eighth busiest airport in the country, with direct service from their hubs. And fares in here are frequently a bit cheaper.”

Being a smaller city, says Bordelon, “our hotels offer complimentary airport shuttle service for the visitors of the hotels and downtown. And within our downtown, there is complimentary bus service five days a week.”

Typical of many of these cities, says Baton Rouge’s Bordelon, “Everything is within walking distance downtown. Our convention center is right across from a casino. Also right there are a planetarium, an art and science museum, and the Old State Capitol.”

In addition to being compact, easy to get to, you can see a lot here in a day. According to Pickover, “We always hear, ‘I’m tired of this large city.’ As a result, we will provide significant incentives to do a site inspection with us.”

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**Getting In and Getting Around**

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**Call Them Affordable**

Price, clearly, has a lot to do with choosing a smaller market destination. While destinations such as Las Vegas are still depressed and can deal with lower rates, the total cost of going somewhere smaller
might still be less because of other costs such as transportation. Crook says that some larger markets — New York, Washington, DC, and to some extent Chicago — “are getting tougher on rate, though there are still great deals in Las Vegas and Florida.”

“They have to go back to their board Vegas and Florida.”

Air Station Miramar, an awesome location in July 2011 • TheMeetingMagazines.com

Memphis means music. Craig Smith, director of sales and marketing at The Peabody Memphis notes, “The city offers a cool factor, and a lot of that is based in the history of music. There are groups that plan their events around Memphis music festivals. A musical event can be a real highlight to a meeting.”

And there’s certainly no place other than Memphis where a planner can create an event at Graceland.

CVBs: Smaller Can Be Better

Many planners say that convention and visitors bureaus in markets that don’t have the highest profile are eager to do whatever needs to be done to accommodate them. Artuso says, “We work with the CVB on initial sourcing. And they are excellent at helping us find those unusual venues.” Avbrey says she has held a number of meetings in Charlotte and that “the CVB has been a great help in getting me information.” CVBs in smaller markets have become adept at selling meetings in destinations that are not top-of-mind for planners or potential attendees. “You do have to have a lot of knowledge about some of these places to sell them to the client,” Pickover says, adding, “A colleague of mine who has events all over the country met somebody from a state that has a terrible time marketing to meetings because they’re considered a vacation destination. I would love to bring a meeting there. A good planner with the right information can make it work.”

“Some of the smaller destinations,” says Crook “do have very helpful CVBs because the city as a whole is more eager for the business since they are having to compete with the big-time destinations such as Las Vegas, New York City and Orlando.”

“When a planner comes to town for a site inspection,” says San Diego’s Sitton, “we assign one person to them. They are picked up at the airport, and we ensure that everything runs on time. If they say, ‘I’ve never stuck my feet in the Pacific Ocean, we’ll make that happen.’”

Baltimore, says Noonan, has a full-time marketing executive in its sales department who helps planners promote their conferences

“There are a number of planners who flirt with Indy,” says Gahl, “and we are flirting right back. We tout our first-tier amenities packaged as second-tier affordability. We are stepping up the number of site inspection tours because we know that seeing is believing. We often design FAMs around the Indy 500 or NCAA basketball or other events.”

Indianapolis is proactive in supporting planners’ marketing efforts. Says Gahl, “We have to have every competitive edge. The microsites specific to attendees provide video podcasts. We see it as our job to be an extension of a planner’s team to elicit attendee awareness. We place a barrage of tools at their disposal.”

Getting the Word Out

Education is often the biggest challenge for these markets. To help get its message out, Baton Rouge has teamed up with similar sized cities — Providence, Raleigh and St. Paul — in a cross market effort called the Capital Cities Collection, which is going into its third year. The group is looking to expand.

With its broad appeal, says Sitton, “We are looking for international opportunities. Planners from abroad know about Las Vegas and Orlando, now it’s our turn to tell them our story.”

“I would love to bring a meeting there. A good planner with the right information can make it work.”

“They have to go back to their board Vegas and Florida.”

Air Station Miramar, an awesome location...
Everybody loves to feel like a kid again — about 300 million of us, in fact. That's how many people visit the more than 400 parks and attractions in the U.S. each year. So it's no surprise that planners can count on theme parks to deliver a satisfaction guarantee for attendees and stakeholders alike. Besides giving the group memorable and motivating experiences, theme parks offer great value, with most offering expert event services teams to attend to all the details of planning a successful event, from themed galas and F&B to entertainment and teambuilding, to high-tech presentation services and even keynote speakers.

Most planners understand, especially after the past few years, that attendees now want “experiences” at their meetings. And they understand, as well, that attendees actually need experiences, so they’ll return home excited and enthusiastic about the meeting, and eager to help the company meet its goals.

An entertaining environment keeps everyone engaged with the venue, enhancing networking opportunities even after the meetings are over. For example, the Walt Disney brand. The attraction of Disney World’s Magic Kingdom, Epcot and Animal Kingdom is obvious. But for customized event planning from props to presentations; teambuilding to tours; and themed and networking events to creative catering.

All of these benefits have one thing in common — they all result in better ROI for meetings. “Planners are looking for ways — despite their limited budgets — to create new experiences for their attendees,” says George Aguel, senior vice president, meeting planners are attracted by much more: six convention resorts with a combined total of 5,000 guest rooms and more than 700,000 sf of meeting space; the Disney Institute with its leadership workshops and multi-day programs; and the Disney Event Group, a one-stop shop for attendees feel that they’re valued by the company — it resonates with them. And they go back home energized by the experience, precisely because it was just that — an experience.”

Coming to Walt Disney World in 2012 is Disney’s Art of Animation Resort, with 2,000 guest rooms and suites themed from Disney favorites such as “The Lion King,” “Cars,” “Finding Nemo” and “The Little Mermaid.”

“How can you compete with a theme park, of course, you’ve got to start with the Walt Disney brand. The attraction of Disney World’s Magic Kingdom, Epcot and Animal Kingdom is obvious. But for customized event planning from props to presentations; teambuilding to tours; and themed and networking events to creative catering.

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The Kingdom of Disney

When at all possible, planners want to make their attendees feel that they’re valued by the company — it resonates with them. And they go back home energized by the experience, precisely because it was just that — an experience.”

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Developement of Hyperion Wharf, a new waterfront district within the Downtown Disney dining and entertainment area, will continue through 2013. Designed as an early 20th century port city and amusement pier, the wharf will expand dining options at Downtown Disney by more than 25 percent.

The Magic Kingdom’s largest expansion to date is currently underway in Fantasyland. Scheduled for completion in 2013, the expansion will feature a new ride-through Little Mermaid attraction, plus new private event venues and entertainment options for large groups.

You can’t talk about Disney without talking about the original Disney park — Disneyland in Anaheim, CA. Disneyland has 2,400 hotel rooms on-property, and 180,000 sf for meetings. And, like its younger Orlando cousin, it has more types of props, special effects, themes and setups for meet-ings than you could possibly use if you met there every year for a lifetime. Disneyland is more compact, so everything’s within walking distance. The Disneyland Hotel recently unveiled the Frontier Lawn, a scenic outdoor event space next to the hotel’s 136,000-sf convention center. A second lawn will open in the fall of 2011 and will feature 12,500 sf of flexible space and a permanent stage. And more than a billion dollars will be spent next year on Disney’s California Adventure park, which will be the site of a new park called “Cars Land,” after the Disney movie “Cars.” The park just debuted its Little Mermaid attraction in June. It is available for private events, accommodating up to 4,000 attendees.

Janet Graff, CMP President JLG Event Management Solutions, Northridgeville, OH. Her thoughts are echoed by Melinda Hanzlik of Chicago, an independent consultant in employee engagement and change management. She staged a salesforce incentive event for a food-service company last October at Disneyland for 70 salespeople and their spouses. She emphasizes that this was a business event in which attendees were taken to the headquarters plant and shown new manufacturing facilities.

“We looked at meeting venues all over Southern California,” she says. “Beach properties, Beverly Hills, Hollywood. But we realized that a theme park offered the most bang for the buck. Disneyland just offered so much in terms of variety, of activities, restaurants, dinner options, shopping. And they offered us the opportunity to keep all our people together. Many attendees told me that the best networking sessions they experienced were just talking with their colleagues in the park at night.”

Universal Orlando

Universal Studios Orlando boasts three full-service meeting hotels: Loews Portofino Bay (750 guest rooms; 42,000 sf of meeting space); the Hard Rock Hotel (650, 6,000); and Loews Royal Pacific (1,000; 85,000). And it has the newest star at-


By Steve Winston

Energizing and Engaging

Entertaining,
This is our big fund-raising event,” Jordan says. “And we only get one crack at it. If we don’t meet our financial goals with this event, we don’t meet our financial goals, period. So it has to be something memorable, and it has to be something magical.”

Jordan holds the event in the Universal Globe Theater, which has every type of prop and a staff that excels at making swift and seamless changes during the event.

“Like everybody else,” says Jordan, “we’ve done some events in ballrooms. But no matter how you dress them up, they’re still ballrooms. The Globe Theater can transform right in front of your eyes, with a thousand different props, décor, lighting, etc. It helps draw more people to the event, and it makes the experience magical for them. And that’s why we exceed our goals for the event every year.”

Busch Gardens

Attendees will have a wild time at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay in more ways than one. This 335-acre family adventure park is roller-coaster heaven for thrill-seekers and one of the country’s premier zoos with more than 2,000 animals. The newest attraction, Cheetah Hunt, just opened in May and can be bought out for larger events. To give an idea how this coaster rates on the thrill meter, it lent to 5 percent of the group’s total room charges donated to the SeaWorld Conservation Fund in support and rehabilitation for threatened or endangered sea turtles. The “Save Our Turtles” package, available for groups booked by August 31, 2011 and consumed by December 31, 2011, includes: an amount equivalent to 5 percent of the group’s total room charges donated to the SeaWorld & Busch Gardens Conservation Fund in the group’s name; a group teambuilding day at SeaWorld San Diego; and a turtle plush toy and turtle pen presented to each attendee in recognition of the group’s donation.

SeaWorld

SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment owns 6 theme parks — SeaWorld San Diego, Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, Busch Gardens Williamsburg, and SeaWorld Orlando and SeaWorld San Diego.

SeaWorld Orlando includes two water parks, Aquatica and Discovery Cove. The flying roller coaster Manta at SeaWorld Orlando provides a themed event option, which can include strolling entertainers, dancing Sea Divas, Manta-inspired furnishings and lighting — even a signature cocktail, a Manta Rita, served from a manta ray-shaped ice bar. Another special event venue is the Penguino Plaza — home to more than 200 penguins and penguins. The Ports of Call banquet facility, with its 12,000 sq. ballroom, accommodates groups of up to 750 attendees. Shamu Stadium seats up to 5,000 attendees and features state-of-the-art audio-visual technology. SeaWorld also offers expert speakers who can customize presentations to complement the meeting objective. A variety of hands-on teambuilding and tour options are also available.

Within walking distance of SeaWorld is the 1001-room DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld, which also is across the street from the Aquatica water park. The hotel has 60,000 sq. of meeting facilities for indoor or outdoor events.

SeaWorld San Diego recently opened its new Turtle Reef exhibit — a 300,000-gallon aquarium with massive underwater viewing window — with more than 60 threatened and endangered sea turtles. The Montu attraction at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay. Busch Gardens Williamsburg in Virginia was just voted the “World’s Most Beautiful Amusement Park” by National Amusement Park Historical Association for the 21st consecutive year. The Kingsmill Resort lies just outside the gates of the theme park and just minutes from Colonial Williamsburg, where 18th-century America is recreated every day. The Kingsmill Resort has 422 guest rooms and 16,000 sq. of meeting space, in an IACC-certified conference center with windows and outdoor decks in every room, all overlooking the James River. A new marina on the river offers recreational and teambuilding options.

The only feeding frenzy going on at SeaWorld Orlando is at Sharks Underwater Grill, where once-daring guests can enjoy surf ’n’ turf with denizens of the deep looking on.

Meetings & Events

Busch Gardens Tampa & SeaWorld Orlando are uniquely equipped to do that. They allow your attendees the opportunity to step away for a few hours and decompess.”

Universal Studios Hollywood

Before there was a Universal Orlando, though, there was a Universal Studios Hollywood in California. And there are few places more skilled at meetings production and management.

Jaquline Jordan wouldn’t hold her fund-raising events anywhere else, in fact. As special events manager for Providence Health & Services Foundation, based in Los Angeles, she stages an annual gala every November at Universal Hollywood.

“The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando Resort offers Harry Potter-themed events including specialized menus and entertainment, "TheMeetingMagazines.com • Corporate & Incentive Travel • July 2011 "theme parks are a way to keep your employees at a safe, self-contained site, while still affording them the opportunity to have a great time," says Trevor Hanks. Hanks is principal of TMM-The Theme Park Pluses

Groups can reserve the new Cheetah Hunt attraction at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay.

Meeting Manager, an Irvine, CA destination management company that often holds meetings at Universal Studios Hollywood. “We use theme parks eight to 10 times a year, for events as large as 4,000 attendees and as small as 50. We have to show value to our clients’ senior executives. And most theme parks offer real value.”

Hanks also points out that most theme parks can accommodate large meetings and that you don’t need to bring in outside vendors, because they do it all.

“Even through the recession, we’ve been doing more meetings at these parks,” Hanks says. “And our clients always want to go back. Theme parks offer a turnkey operation. They are very flexible if plans change suddenly. They have everything you need onsite. They’re often located near cities with good air access and convenience. And, especially these days, senior executives really like the value proposition.”

Hanks adds, “We’re still seeing fewer meetings than we did a few years ago. But we’re not seeing fewer theme park meetings.”

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Meeting at the Beach

Atlantic City and Virginia Beach
Make It Look Easy

King Neptune, a majestic 34-foot tall statue, towers over the Virginia Beach Boardwalk at Neptune Park (left). The world famous Boardwalk of Atlantic City stretches for four miles along the beach.

Corporate group meetings and events staged at premiere beachfront resort cities take on special significance. A meeting in Atlantic City or Virginia Beach is sure to evoke fond memories of endless summer days filled with great food and fun and adventures. Both these popular and easily accessible meeting destinations retain the history and glory of a bygone era coupled with the allure of the salt air and sandy beaches. What’s more, each city is wholly committed to attracting meetings and conventions year round and provides the infrastructure, amenities and value to prove it.

For example, Atlantic City offers a modern, “green” convention facility, 11 full-service resorts, 20,000 first-class hotel rooms, a variety of special event venues and 24-hour casinos. In addition, the region offers spectacular golf, great dining and top-notch, built-in entertainment. Atlantic City International Airport is minutes away.

Virginia Beach has the best of both worlds: the coastal charm of the oceanfront and big-city amenities of Town Center and the inviting Virginia Beach Convention Center. More than 3,500 committable rooms are located with 2.5 miles of the convention center. The region features spectacular golf, historical sites such as Williamsburg and much more.

Atlantic City

In May, Denise M. Nowak, the director of marketing for Rochester, NY-based 5LINX Enterprises, was pleasantly surprised when the company’s International Training Event in Atlantic City attracted nearly 5,000 independent representatives — the highest attendance in the company’s history. The 10-year-old network marketing company, which provides telecommunications, Internet and other services in the U.S., Canada and Nigeria, holds three of these events each year and needed an East Coast destination to accommodate many of the reps located in the region. Nowak says, “Atlantic City was a choice given the wide variety of things the attendees could do when not at the event. We always choose locations based on what the city has to offer as well as the venue itself. The property was able to accommodate our large group for both general session and breakout training purposes. This is often difficult for the company to accomplish because of the space requirements. Also the venue facilitated the ability to have the general session, registration and store all in one location, which made it easy for staff to manage.” In addition to the training sessions, 5LINX held a company-wide party at House of Blues at Showboat Atlantic City. Many of the teams of reps held their own events on other nights in Atlantic City.

One of the highlights of the event was the arrival of The National 9/11 Flag (www.national911flag.org). The New York Says Thank You Foundation sponsors the flag at leading national venues and arranges for local service heroes in all 50 states to stitch the flag back to its original 13-stripe format. The completed flag will become a part of the permanent collection of the National September 11 Memorial Museum at the World Trade Center.

In May, the National 9/11 Flag Tour made its way to Atlantic City. Joined by local heroes from the city’s fire and police departments, the tribute was a moving experience for 5LINX attendees. Nowak says the Atlantic City Convention Center and the Atlantic City Fire Department, Atlantic City Police Department and EMTs “really helped to make it special by being there in uniform, helping to facilitate having the flag brought in and displayed. I heard from many attendees that if they didn’t experience anything else at the event, but only that, then it would have been a success.”

Moreover, Nowak says she would like to have “one in every city” like Anne Bergen, CMP, national sales manager at the Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority who went “above and beyond” to make 5LINX’s first event in Atlantic City a rousing success. Nowak says Bergen anticipated all their needs by attending a prior event and learning firsthand what the organization needed and what to avoid, such as long lines for food for their large group. Nowak, whose organization is growing in leaps and bounds, will seriously consider booking Atlantic City in the future, especially since the city’s room inventory is expanding.

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As part of our green initiative, here’s an idea for all those sales materials from other destinations:

Recycle Bin.

We didn’t go green because it’s trendy. Sustaining the environment has been a founding principle here, one that led the Virginia Beach Convention Center to LEED® Gold Certification in the existing building category, the first of its kind in the country. That means responsible practices, extra efficiency and superior management that helps you bottom line.
Revel is slated to open May 15, 2012 with more than 1,090 rooms, 160,000 sf of convention space, a 5,500-seat event center, 700-seat performance venue and more than a dozen restaurants. Hard Rock International has submitted plans to Atlantic City for a casino hotel now that a new state law permits smaller casinos with a minimum of 200 rooms. Previously, the law required at least 500 hotel rooms.

The Trump Marina Hotel Casino is now owned by Landry’s, owner of several restaurant brands and Las Vegas’ Golden Nugget. They plan to convert the Trump Marina Hotel & Casino into a Golden Nugget and add new restaurants and entertainment concepts.

At the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, a renovation is underway. The posh hotel is reportedly investing $50 million to refurbish 1,600 guest rooms, residences and hotel corridors. The work is slated for completion this time next year. Borgata, which opened in July 2003, and its sister property, The Water Club, an 800-room hotel that opened in 2008, together have more rooms than any other Atlantic City casino hotel.

Virginia Beach
Charming Virginia Beach is within a day’s drive of nearly two-thirds of America’s population, and Norfolk International Airport, which offers 200 flights daily, is but 20 minutes from the oceanfront. Conveniently located, easily affordable and replete with unique venues such as the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center, Virginia Beach is ready made for all sizes and types of meetings.

Virginia Beach is environmentally friendly to the max. Everyone works together to preserve and sustain the health and beauty of this coastal city. The modern Virginia Beach Convention Center, America’s first LEED Gold-certified convention center in the Existing Building category, sets the green tone for all meetings and events. Virginia Beach is expanding, too: Oceanfront developments are scheduled for completion next year. In addition to 31Ocean, a mixed-use project, the Oceanaire Resort Hotel & Conference Center will add 200 rooms and 10,000 sf of meeting space.

From the three-mile long boardwalk where nightlife, dining and people-watching go hand-in-hand, to Virginia Beach’s Town Center where eclectic restaurants, exciting nightlife and shopping reign, to water sports and spectacular golf, there’s plenty of exciting activity.

Meeting planners truly appreciate the Virginia Beach CVB and convention center staff. As vice president of convention sales and marketing Al Hutchinson blogs: The staff strives to go the extra mile. One meeting planner said, “I consider the Virginia Beach CVB an extension of my office. They took the time to thoroughly understand my event. In every area, they exceeded my expectations. I believe they added value to my event, brought quality and professionalism to my team and helped me take my event to a level higher than it could have obtained without their involvement.”
Colorado

A Pristine Path to Matchless Meetings

When meeting planners think about the unique charms of Colorado as a destination, their associations naturally drift to the great outdoors and some kind of adventure — set against the majestic canvas of the Rocky Mountains. That’s largely because the state has long been a treasured haven for upscale domestic incentive travel programs, whether that means skiing exclusive slopes in winter or hiking them in summer.

Now, however, Colorado is emerging as a new and different meeting destination with lots to offer — from the urban sophistication of Denver, to the rustic mountain retreats of Colorado Springs and Estes Park, and chic, celebrity-studded ski resorts such as Vail, Keystone, Steamboat Springs, Breckenridge and Snowmass.

That value comes as a pleasant surprise to planners who consider Colorado for the first time, says Meyers, who has planned meetings throughout her home state for a decade. “I wish we could do all of our clients’ meetings and events in Colorado,” she says. “It’s just a fantastic destination. And what really surprises planners who discover it, is the range of options. What I generally hear from planners outside Colorado is, ‘I didn’t know there was so much to do.’ And that includes the fine dining options and the activities, whether you’re in Denver or the mountains.”

Denver

The Mile High City is one of America’s most beautiful and sophisticated urban centers, with an often-recognized advantage over most U.S. cities when it comes to general quality of life. Denver today boasts world-renowned dining, and arts and entertainment scenes. The ever-growing list of local amenities helped the city put up its second-best meeting and convention numbers ever in 2010.

“Denver is a modern urban hub that has everything you could possibly want or need as far as a meeting is concerned,” says Meyers. ’Denver has great hotels, from boutique hotels to major meeting properties, and a state-of-the-art convention center.”

“Denver is big enough to offer all of those things, yet small enough to be very manageable from an attendee perspective,” Meyers says. “For example, you can walk from one end of downtown to the other. It’s one mile long, and it’s absolutely designed for tourists. ‘There’s great dining and a great arts and entertainment culture.”

Another unique advantage, she says, is that “planners and attendees can have a ‘big city’ experience in Denver, but be just minutes away from experiencing the Rocky Mountains, whether that’s a glass of wine on a patio or hiking or white-water rafting.”

Yet another factor in Denver’s favor is Denver International Airport, which serves as a major hub for both United Airlines and Frontier. In addition, based on demand trends, Southwest has also added a number of flights into Denver, says Meyers. “And then once you’re here, it’s easy to get to the mountain destinations if that’s where you’re headed.”

Cindy Beeman, executive assistant to the chief operating officer at Sidney, NE-based outdoor outfitter Cabela’s, has used Denver for the past four years for the company’s annual meeting. In February, she hosted 520 attendees at the 628-room Denver Marriott Tech Center. “It’s a particularly convenient destination for us,” says Beeman, “because it’s a three-hour drive from our corporate headquarters. Denver is also the airport we use for corporate travel. And it’s also convenient for our attendees, who come from across the country.”

In fact, Beeman, her management and her attendees all like Denver so much that the company has signed a four-year agreement with the hotel for next year’s meeting, which will include the fine dining options and the activities, whether you’re in Denver or the mountains.”

Denver also offers an eclectic menu of offsite venues and activities. Popular venues include the Denver Art Museum, Denver Museum of Nature & Science and Denver Golf Courses.

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For example, notes Meyers, at about the same time the Hyatt Regency Denver convention center hotel made its debut five years ago, the AAA Five Diamond Ritz-Carlton, Denver, with 299,1,105-room, AAA Four Diamond Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center, which opened five years ago as an official convention center hotel — a major benchmark in the city’s evolution as a truly competitive national destination.

The hotel complements the acclaimed Colorado Convention Center, which features 584,000 sf of contiguous exhibit space divided into six halls. The complex also includes 63 meeting rooms, totaling 100,000 sf — all on one level. Two ballrooms, measuring 50,000 sf and 35,000 sf, offer state-of-the-art lighting and sound.

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Colorado Springs

Located 60 miles of south of Denver — and at a slightly higher elevation — Colorado Springs features a trio of world-famous attractions: 14,000-foot Pikes Peak, the most visited mountain in North America; the U.S. Air Force Academy; and

By John Buchanan

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the U.S. Olympic Training Center. Colorado Springs also is home to two renowned meeting properties: The Broadmoor and nearby Cheyenne Mountain.

Colorado Springs Airport is served by nine major airlines, including Allegiant Air, American, Continental, Delta, Frontier, Northwest, United and US Airways, which provide more than 115 flights daily. Fifty-six non-stop flights are available daily from Denver, Salt Lake City, San Francisco, Sacramento, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, San Diego, Phoenix, Houston, Dallas/Fort Worth, Atlanta, Cincinnati, Chicago and Minneapolis/St. Paul.

““We think that Colorado Springs is among the best-kept secrets in the country when it comes to meeting destinations,” says Chelsey Murphy, a spokesperson for the Colorado Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau. “And we find that when planners learn about us, they want to come here.”

Meeting planners who experience the destination tend to agree.

“Colorado Springs is just beautiful,” says Meyers. “If you’re looking for an experience away from a big urban environment — if you want a very ‘Colorado’ experience, tucked up against the mountains but having access to all the good things a city offers — then Colorado Springs is a unique and fantastic destination.”

Andrea Pennington, controller at Bonham, TX-based lawn and garden manufacturer VPG, chose Colorado Springs for the company’s annual stockholders meeting in July 2010 for 435 attendees at the 316-room Cheyenne Mountain Resort.

The newly renovated resort features a 40,000-sf, IACC-certified conference center, which includes 38 meeting rooms and a tiered amphitheater, as well as a new state-of-the-art boardroom. The hotel features an 18-hole, Pete Dye-designed golf course and clubhouse facility.

“We had researched the property and heard good reports,” says Pennington, who hosted her meeting prior to the start of the renovation. “We had heard that the staff was very courteous and hospitable to meeting planners and attendees. And our people like that extra little touch. That’s what Cheyenne Mountain Resort promised us. And that’s exactly what they delivered.”

In general, Pennington says, VPG got excellent service across the board. She also gives high marks to its F&B department. “The F&B services were excellent,” she says. “It was set at the base of Pikes Peak. So you feel like you’re tucked away from the world. And the property is just so beautiful, with its lake and traditional buildings. And it has great golf courses.” And all of that is supported by a legendary standard of service.

Opened in 1918, The Broadmoor set the architectural and design standards for an opulent, elegant resort, featuring a spectacular curved marble staircase, dramatic chandeliers, Dell Robbia-style tile, hand-painted beams and ceilings, a carved marble fountain and a striking pink stucco façade.

Set on 3,000 acres, the 744-unit resort complex includes 593 guest rooms, 107 suites and 44 new cottage bedrooms added in 2009. The hotel also features 185,000 sf of meeting space, including the 60,000-sf Broadmoor Hall completed in 2005. In addition, the resort offers a five-star spa and fitness center, a salon, 18 restaurants, cafes and lounges, and 25 specialty and boutique retail shops.

But The Broadmoor is much more than a list of its features and amenities, says Meyers, who hosted a meeting there in June: “What makes it so unique and spectacular? The first thing that comes to our minds is the resort’s Meeting Center. It sits at the base of Pikes Peak. And that’s why we chose it.”

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Another local landmark is the U.S. Olympic Training Center, which represents a penultimate opportunity for teambuilding and motivation. The 32-acre facility features the 4,114-sf West Wing Conference Center, suitable for up to 200 attendees, as well as 19 other meeting rooms. Receptions for up to 350 can be staged in the Visitor Center’s Hall of Fame Rotunda, as well as in actual gym locations. Olympic biathlete Eli Bremer, who also holds an MBA and operates Colorado Springs-based Five Ring Insight, currently works with corporate meeting clients to arrange custom-tailored and powerful motivational and team-building programs at the Olympic complex.

This fall, Colorado Springs also will have a new hotel, the 117-room The Mining Exchange, a Wyndham Grand Hotel housed in four exquisitely restored buildings that date back to the days of local gold and silver mining.

Exclusive Enclaves

In addition to Denver and Colorado Springs, Colorado offers a diverse roster of charming small-town destinations that dot the Rockies.

Estes Park is located 90 minutes north of Denver. Known as “the gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park,” it was named the No. 2 outdoor and adventure destination in the world last year with a Traveler’s Choice Award from TripAdvisor.

Estes Park also can claim a manmade landmark, The Stanley Hotel, opened in 1909 by F.O. Stanley, creator of the Stanley Steamer automobile. A lovingly preserved example of the car adorns the lobby. The Stanley was used in the TV remake of Stephen King’s “The Shining” — and is famous for its ghosts. It has been featured on The Travel Channel’s “Ghost Hunters.”

Featuring 135 rooms and 16,000 sf of meeting space — much of it housed in historic structures with natural light — The Stanley is also acclaimed for its extraordinary F&B.

Another local meeting property is the 150-room Rocky Mountain Park Inn, which operates the adjoining 12,000-sf Estes Park Conference Center in partnership with the city. A little-known but spectacular resort property that also delivers excellent value is the Estes Park Center operated by YMCA of the Rockies. The sprawling, secluded complex, which offers a conference center and practically every outdoor activity known to man, can accommodate groups of up to 4,000 people.

For small incentive groups or meetings, a popular choice is the charming Mary’s Lake Lodge, which features new rustic condo units and a superb restaurant, Chalet Room. The hotel is designated as a “green” facility.

Other popular Colorado destinations include the marquee name ski resorts of Vail, Keystone and Steamboat Springs. For meetings, they are popular year-round. “They’re each very unique in terms of the environment and feel that they offer,” Meyers says. “But Vail is a little more high-end.”

That might be an understatement. The celebrity hideaway is among the most exclusive luxury brands in the world and offers a sophisticated range of activities in winter and summer seasons.

Popular summer activities include tours of Vail Valley via horseback or Jeep with Adventure Ridge, which also features a rock-climbing wall, disc golf and traditional lawn sports such as booches and horseshoes. In winter, groups can rent a ski slope and stage their own race, then enjoy an après ski reception in a rustic lodge with breathtaking views.

Vail’s major meeting properties include the 344-room, AAA Four Diamond Vail Marriott Resort and Spa; the 186-room, AAA Four Diamond Westin Riverfront Vail Resort & Spa; and the 121-room AAA Four Seasons Resort Vail, with 45,000 sf of meeting space.

The town’s newest hotel is the 121-room Four Seasons Resort Vail, which opened last December and features 35,000 sf of meeting space.

Keystone, located east of Vail, is famous for its ski slopes as well as its mountain biking, white-water rafting and golf.

Despite the town’s small size, it’s home to the largest conference venue in the Colorado Rockies — the 1,200-room Keystone Resort and Conference Center, spread across five individual villages, including the AAA Four Diamond Keystone Lodge & Spa and the Ski Tip Lodge, an 1880s stagecoach stop turned bed and breakfast. The resort complex also includes modern, secluded condominiums and features more than 100,000 sf of meeting and event space. Summer activities include four-wheel drive tours and ATV tours, as well as balloon rides, mountain biking, fly fishing, horseback riding, white-water rafting and housing on Keystone Lake. In addition to skiing, other popular group activities include full moon snowshoe tours, a “peak to peak” snowshoe tour, a scenic sleigh ride and snowmobile tours. Keystone Resort also features a state-of-the-art spa and two 18-hole golf courses.

Steamboat Springs, known for both its skiing and its ranching, has a colorful, fascinating history that is preserved in its downtown area, defined by historic buildings, businesses that date back a century and quaint neighborhoods all complemented by modern restaurants, bars and shops. Steamboat Springs also hosts a year-round array of art festivals, rodeos, farmer’s markets and other events.

Like its sister destinations in Colorado, the Steamboat Springs experience is built around exhilarating outdoor activities and adventure. And it offers a long list of options year-round.

One of its most charming amenities is its walking tour, which showcases buildings that date back to 1880s. The local Tread of Pioneers Museum and Heritage Center in downtown Steamboat on Friday of each month, there’s a free evening art walk. The nearby Yampa River offers superb fishing, and Steamboat Springs also features two mineral hot springs.

There are two major meeting hotels in town. One is the 188-room Sheraton Steamboat Springs, which completed a $20 million renovation in 2008. The property, which also offers full-service ski-in/ski-out resort and conference center in Steamboat, features the 26,000-sf Convention Center and the Sundial Lounge restaurants feature executive chef Jon Demel’s unique take on Colorado cuisine. The hotel’s Rollingstone Ranch Golf Course, designed by Robert Trent Jones II, has been named one of the state’s best for 2011 by Colorado Arid Golfer.

The other Steamboat Springs hotel is the 328-room Steamboat Grand, featuring 17,000 sf of meeting space and offering both hotel rooms and condominiums.

So which manner of meeting planners take from rustic adventure to AAA-rated conference space. Steamboat’s new $60 million renovation offers plenty of recommendations that won’t break the meeting’s budget.
The Denver Blue Bear Presents:

1. Destination Appeal
300 days of sunshine make it easy to enjoy our safe, walkable downtown, award-winning dining, world-class museums and Rocky Mountain backdrop.

2. Affordability
Denver was named one of the most affordable destinations for business travelers by Corporate Travel Index.

3. Accessibility
Denver International Airport (DEN) serves the third most destinations of U.S. airports.

4. Hotels
8,400 hotel rooms within walking distance of the Convention Center, including a new Four Seasons and Embassy Suites.

5. Meeting Facilities
From our two-million square-foot Colorado Convention Center to unique off-site venues, Denver has the meeting space for you.

6. Service
We’ve won all major convention industry service awards for the past 18 years, proof positive of our commitment to planners.

7. Green City
Rail service from the airport to downtown. COMING SOON! rtd-fastracks.com

Selected by Lonely Planet as a Top 10 U.S. Destination for 2011
Rated World’s #1 Convention City

One City, Seven Reasons.
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From our two-million square-foot Colorado Convention Center to unique off-site venues, Denver has the meeting space for you.

With a full-time sustainable programs manager, an award-winning Greenprint program and our unique, online carbon calculators, Denver is the premier green meetings destination.

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What’s New & Notable in the Lone Star State

It’s certainly no secret that Texas is a pretty darn big state.

In fact, the person who coined this phrase while driving through the Lone Star state probably said it best: “Sun is risen, sun is set, and we ain’t out of Texas yet!”

When you’re a meeting planner, though, big is good, because it means that you have a big list of properties and venues to choose from when planning a meeting, from the Dallas metro area in the north all the way down to Houston and Galveston in the south. Here’s an update on what’s new and notable:

Dallas

November 11, 2011 will mark the grand opening of the city’s newest convention center hotel, the $1,001-room Omni Dallas Hotel. Connected to the Dallas Convention Center via skybridge, the new hotel is being built to meet the U.S. Green Building Council’s standards for LEED Silver certification. It will feature 110,000 sf of function space comprising 39 meeting rooms, including two ballrooms. Other amenities will include a heated infinity swimming pool and sauna, the Mokara Spa, and four dining outlets, including Texas Spice, which will feature fresh farm-to-fork cuisine.

The event services company Freeman, which is headquartered in Dallas, will be the first major group to hold an event at the Omni. “Freeman is extraordinarily excited,” says Bob Moore, the company’s chief sales officer. “We just wanted to support the fact that Dallas has re-entered the marketplace as a major destination for organizations that have not been able to consider downtown for a lack of hotel rooms.”

“I know he has experience in opening large hotels, and when he says it’s going to be open on a certain day, it’s going to be open.”

Nethhammer is Omni’s regional vice president and will serve as general manager of the new hotel.

Following on the heels of its $125 million renovation project, the 1,006-room Hilton Anatole recently completed construction of the $2.3 million Trinity Corridor, an enclosed, air-conditioned passageway that connects the hotel to the Trinity Ballroom and Exhibit Hall. As meeting attendees travel through the corridor, they will be able to enjoy views of the seven-acre Anatole Sculpture Park located on the hotel’s 45-acre campus. The Hilton Anatole offers more than 600,000 sf of event space.

Plano

Located just minutes north of Dallas, Plano is home to a popular attraction: the Southfork Ranch Event & Conference Center, known worldwide as the site where the television series “Dallas” was filmed. Today, the facility hosts groups from 10 to 10,000 in its more than 63,000 sf of indoor event space set on a sprawling 300-acre ranch. Among its event spaces are the 26,500-sf Oil Baron’s Ballroom, the 16,500-sf Lone Star Atrium and the 6,300-sf Ewing Ballroom. Attendees might also enjoy grabbing a snack at Miss Ellie’s Porch Deli.

Irving

After 12 years of planning, the 275,000-sf Irving Convention Center at Las Colinas made its debut in late January. The $233 million multiuse facility includes a 50,000-sf, column-free exhibit hall, a 20,000-sf ballroom, and 20,000 sf of meeting space for breakout sessions. It is located in Las Colinas, a 12,000-acre master planned community where more than $2 billion is being invested in hotel, retail, entertainment, office, meeting facility and residential development.

Grapevine

Located between Dallas and Fort Worth, Grapevine is known for its historic downtown area. It is also home to the 1,511-room Gaylord Texan Hotel & Convention Center, which offers more than 400,000 sf of flexible meeting space and a 25,000 sf day spa and fitness center. The resort recently celebrated the grand opening of its 10-acre Paradise Springs outdoor pool complex, which also has been constructed to host private catered functions. According to a spokesperson for Gaylord Texan, “The pool has four private event areas that have audio-visual capabilities at each where live music, staging, presentations, etc. can be set up. For large group events, all four private event areas can be combined to host up to 3,200 attendees.”

Arlington

The Arlington Convention Center is located just 15 minutes south of DFW, but that’s not all that’s convenient about this event facility, which offers 50,000 sf of exhibit space, a 30,000-sf Grand Hall and 8,500 sf of meeting space. It’s set right in the heart of Arlington’s entertainment district, which includes such major attractions as the $1.2 billion Cowboys Stadium (home of the Dallas Cowboys), Rangers Ballpark (home of the Texas Rangers), Six Flags Over Texas and Six Flags Hurricane Harbor, the largest water park in north Texas. Groups staying at selected hotels in Arlington may qualify for free transportation on the Arlington Trolley Service, which runs between the area’s hotels, attractions and the convention center.

Austin

One of the newest meeting properties in Austin, also known as “The Live Music Capital of the World,” is the 297-room AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center at The University of Texas, Accredited by the International Association of Conference Centers, the hotel has views of the state Capitol and 40,000 sf of meeting space, including a multimedia amphitheater.

The new W Hotel Austin features 251 guest rooms and 10,000 sf of event space. An outdoor terrace connects the W’s meeting space to a spectacular new venue, Austin City Limits Live at Moody Theater, where the popular PBS program is...
There are certainly a lot of properties around the Gulf Coast, but I just keep coming back to Moody Gardens.

Bob Kibler, President, Gulf Coast Conference, Tomball, TX

1,003-room Marriott Marquis Hotel three blocks from the Austin Convention Center; and plans are in the works for a 53,000 sf of outdoor event space. Amenities include two golf courses, six pools, five dining venues, and a health club and spa. Today, the new hotel is connected to Memorial City Mall via its doors in March in the city’s Memorial City District, which contains numerous shops, restaurants and entertainment venues. The new hotel is connected to Memorial City Mall via a skybridge. The Westin offers more than 30,000 sf of meeting and banquet space, an infinity pool on the 18th floor featuring panoramic views of the city’s skyline, and shuttle service to nearby shopping. Another property that benefits from a convenient location is Hotel Sorella, which is the centerpiece of Houston’s CityCentre development with its elegant dining, sophisticated kitchens, Tuscan architecture, brick ceilings and walls, and the fact that there’s a good place to go back to. First of all, it’s a beautiful property. The hotel currently offers 10,000 sf of meeting space including a 4,000-sf ballroom and two VIP boardrooms. New construction is well underway on the 8,500-sf Hotel Sorella Meetings and Events Centre, which is scheduled for completion late this summer to coincide with the hotel’s second anniversary. More meeting space is accessible via a glass skywalk linking the hotel to the Norris Conference Center, which offers 18,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space.

Galveston

The Gulf Coast Conference (GCC), which takes place annually in Galveston, brings petrochemical refining and environmental experts together for education and networking. “We usually bring in about 1,500 to 2,000 people,” says Bob Kibler, president of the GCC. “Last year, we drew from all 50 states and 23 different countries.” Each year, the GCC meets at the Moody Gardens Hotel, Spa and Convention Center. “There are certainly a lot of properties around the Gulf Coast, but I just keep coming back to Moody Gardens,” Kibler explains. “The property is fabulous, but it’s the people that keep me coming back. Everyone there, from maid service all the way up to the management of the hotel is just really in tune with customer service and what we want to accomplish.” Moody Gardens offers 428 guest rooms and more than 100,000 sf of meeting space. The complex has a golf course, aquarium, science exhibits, water park, paddlewheel boat, 4D and 3D theaters and an 18-passenger ride surrounded by a wrecks and coral reef. Moody Gardens also recently opened its newly redesigned Rainforest Pyramid after a $25 million enhancement project featuring a tree-top canopy walkway that gives guests a bird’s-eye view of more than 1,000 exotic plants and animals. "We do a golf tournament at the Moody golf course on Monday of the program,” Kibler adds. “We also sometimes do things at the Lone Star Flight Museum.” The 60,000-sf museum, which boasts one of the finest collections of restored aircraft in the nation, can be booked for corporate events.

So in the end, it’s OK to say “we ain’t out of Texas yet.” As Abramson found with his experience at The Westin La Cantera, it’s good to find a destination that attendees are more than happy to spend time in. “It keeps me popular here,” he laughs.

Gulf Coast Conference (GCC)
Carol Queen was named director of sales for Gastonia Conference Center, Gastonia, NC. She formerly served as director of catering with Sheraton Hotels & Resorts and Embassy Suites Hotels in Charlotte, NC.

DoubleTree by Hilton Grand Hotel Biscayne Bay, Miami, FL, has named Josel Palleschi as director of sales and marketing. He formerly served as sales manager for the hotel. Saul Fonseca was named sales manager. He most recently served as account executive for national accounts at Royal Caribbean International.

The Napa Valley Destination Council, Napa Valley, CA, has named Kathleen Fitzgerald as vice president of sales. She formerly served as director of sales at the Ventura Visitors & Convention Bureau, Ventura, CA.

Andrea M. Powers was named director of sales for Richmond Hill City Center, Richmond Hill, GA. Most recently, she was catering sales manager at the Mansion on Forsyth Park, Savannah, GA.

Fantasy Springs Resort Casino, Indio, CA, has named Shawn Sande as director of sales. He was sales manager at Agua Caliente in Rancho Mirage, CA.

Tod Roadarmel was named director of sales and marketing for the Omni Nashville Hotel, which is scheduled to open in late 2013. He joins the Omni Nashville Hotel from RevSource, a Nashville-based hospitality sales and marketing firm, which he founded in 2002.

Mark Theis was named director of group sales - North America, for Starwood Hotels & Resorts. Theis, who has more than 20 years of hospitality sales experience, most recently served as executive vice president of the Chicago Convention & Tourism Bureau.

DoubleTree Atlanta-Northlake, Atlanta, GA, has named Ciaran Daly as area director of sales and marketing. Formerly, he directed sales and marketing for two Sage hotels in the Atlanta market.

Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces has appointed Lisa Iaquez director of corporate and group sales - the Americas, based in New York and responsible for the Eastern U.S. She was most recently global director of corporate sales with Jumeirah Hotels.

Frances Maxwell was named director of corporate, group and incentive sales - the Americas, based in Chicago. She most recently served as director of regional accounts, Midwest, for Wynn and Encore Las Vegas.

Kathy Van Vechten was named vice president of sales and marketing for the Hilton Carlsbad Oceanfront Resort and Spa, opening in spring 2012 in Carlsbad, CA. She most recently served as vice president of marketing and sales at Terranea Resort, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA.

The Hilton Orlando, Orlando, FL, has named Bill McKay as director of sales. He most recently oversaw citywide bookings for the Savannah Convention and Visitors Bureau, Savannah, GA.

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Atlanta, Georgia & Vicinity | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A
Blue Mountain Ski Resort (Ontario) | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A
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Tom Wood
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David Meek
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Sylvana Ibay
General Manager-Anaheim White House
Shaun Robinson
General Manager-Hilton Anaheim
Chris Peña
Sergeant-Anaheim Police Department

Kevin Johnstone
Customer Director of Trade Shows
National Association of Music Merchants

Rochanda Chamois
Front Office Supervisor-Peacock Suites

Lisa Patton
Marketing Administrative Assistant
Simon Property Group (The Block at Orange)

Erin Rhodes
Marketing Manager-Discovery Science Center

Christina Dawson
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