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The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando Resort, the site of a recent McDonald's event for more than 9,000 attendees.
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The Beat Goes On...

At a tribute last month in Washington, DC, more than 225 travel industry professionals came together to remember Gary Sain's life and legacy — a man who tirelessly promoted travel during his career. The event raised about $250,000 for the Gary C. Sain Memorial Endowed Scholarship for the University of Central Florida’s Rosen College of Hospitality Management.

Sain, who died suddenly on May 4 of a heart attack, spent more than three decades in the travel industry, most recently as president and CEO of Visit Orlando. Sain’s visionary leadership resulted in Orlando becoming the first destination to top 55 million visitors. The tribute was organized and led by a steering committee including Bill Carteaux, SPI: The Plastics Industry Trade Association; Danielle Courtenay, Visit Orlando; Roger Dow, U.S. Travel Association; James Evans; Elliott Ferguson, Destination D.C.; Michael Gehrisch, DMAI; Bob Gilbert, HSMAI; John Graham, ASAE; Steven Hacker, IARE; Bruce MacMillan, MPI; Rossi Ralenkotter, LVCVA; Pam Sain; and Deborah Sexton, PCMA. (The committee members in attendance at the June 26 event are pictured with Pam Sain on page 11.)

But the beat goes on, and Sain’s influence, hard work and perseverance are paying off in a major way. As Tammi Runzler, senior vice president of convention sales and services for Visit Orlando, tells us in our cover story on Orlando in this issue: “We have seen a lot of positive numbers come in this year in things we look at every day as far as the different levels of convention center use, occupancy, etc. Attendance numbers for individual groups are exceeding projections across all market segments — corporations, incentives, associations.”

Record-breaking attendance is another good reason to consider Orlando for your next meeting or event. For example, Jennifer Hoejnacki, the training and communication events supervisor for Oak Brook, IL-based McDonald’s Corporation, was truly impressed with all that Orlando had to offer her company: “I believe McDonald’s exceeded their expectations with the highest attendance we have ever had for a U.S. event. With over 16,000 people total at the convention and over 9,000 (9,317) people deciding to spend the evening with us at Universal Orlando, I would say we went beyond what we ever thought was imaginable.”
Las Vegas, McCarran International Airport Opens 14 New Gates

Las Vegas, NV — On June 27, Nevada’s Clark County Department of Aviation celebrated the opening of McCarran International Airport’s new Terminal 3—a 1.9-million-sf expansion. “T3,” the first unit terminal to be constructed in the U.S. in the post-9/11 era, includes 14 gates, seven of which can be used for international arrivals; an expansive ticketing lobby space for two Transportation Security Administration checkpoints with up to 31 lanes; an eight-story garage; and 31 lanes; an eight-story garage; and an automated tram system that enables Terminal 3 to handle the check-in, security and baggage claim needs of up to 26 gates at McCarran’s nearby D Concourse. Coupled with the airport’s existing infrastructure, Terminal 3 increases McCarran’s annual capacity to approximately 53 million passengers. “Las Vegas expects to welcome a record 40 million visitors in 2012, and the new terminal will help us achieve that goal,” said Rossi Ralenkotter, president/CEO of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. “The visitor experience in Terminal 3 is unlike any other in the country and delivers on our brand promise. Visitors will immediately have a unique sense of place and receive the type of exceptional value and service to its business and leisure guests. The costs will not be reflected in a resort fee, said President and COO Harris Rosen. “It gives them the freedom to connect on their own terms, in the privacy of their guest rooms, without worrying about financial constraints or additional charges.” www.mccarran.com

Rosen Convention Hotels Offer Free Wireless

ORLANDO, FL — The three Rosen Hotels & Resorts convention hotels, the award-winning AAA Four Diamond 1,500-room Rosen Shingle Creek, 1,334-room Rosen Centre and 800-room Rosen Plaza, now offer free Internet service — wireless or hardwired — in guest rooms and public areas. Rosen Hotels & Resorts has implemented this change as part of its ongoing commitment to providing exceptional value and service to its business and leisure guests. The costs will not be reflected in a resort fee, said President and COO Harris Rosen. “It gives them the freedom to connect on their own terms, in the privacy of their guest rooms, without worrying about financial constraints or additional charges.” www.rosenhotels.com/ROI

Hilton Carlsbad Oceanfront Resort & Spa Welcomes First Guests

CARLSBAD, CA — Hilton Carlsbad Oceanfront Resort & Spa celebrated its ribbon-cutting and the arrival of first guests recently. Located across from Ponte Beach in north San Diego County, Hilton Carlsbad Oceanfront Resort & Spa was designed to offer spectacular views of the Pacific, not only from many of its 215 guest rooms but also from its 25,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space. The resort’s stylish Chandler’s Restaurant & Lounge presents the coastal regional cuisine of acclaimed international chef Pascal Vignau,

MEETING VALUES

Eden Roc Renaissance, Miami Beach. Meetings over select value dates receive ROC incentives based on number of rooms booked (50-150 peak room nights receive four incentives; 151-250 peak room nights receive seven incentives; 251+ peak room nights receive all 11 incentives): one complimentary continental breakfast; welcome signature beverage upon arrival; 1/35 comp room; complimentary wireless Internet in general session (up to five users); 15 percent off AV; two complimentary WP round-trip airport transfers; 25 percent off catering F&B; 25 percent off Internet service — wireless or hardwired; complimentary spa services (up to five users); 15 percent off AV. Call 305-674-5524 and mention the ROC Incentives promotion. www.edenrocmiami.com

JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa, San Antonio, TX. Groups that hold meetings between August 1 and December 31, 2012 and spend between $10,000 and $100,000 can choose four of the following perks: 10 percent off catered F&B; 10 percent off in-house AV; 50 percent off one Internet line in meeting room; upgrade to one hot food item on a continental breakfast; complimentary Wi-Fi and complimentary wireless Internet in general session (up to five users); complimentary mini-refrigerators, 42-inch flat-panel televisions, complimentary spa services (up to five users); complimentary breakfast; complimentary Internet in general session (up to five users); complimentary wireless Internet in general session (up to five users). J.W. Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa is designed to offer spectacular views of the Pacific, not only from many of its 215 guest rooms but also from its 25,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space. The resort’s stylish Chandler’s Restaurant & Lounge presents the coastal regional cuisine of acclaimed international chef Pascal Vignau, among others. www.marriott.com/satjw

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The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel, Dana Point, CA. Planners earn triple rewards points, as well as Silver Elite status for meetings contracted prior to October 31, 2012 with a minimum of 10 rooms per night and held at the resort before December 31, 2012. With triple rewards, planners earn nine points for each U.S. dollar spent with a maximum of 150,000. 949-240-2000, www.ritzcarlton.com/lagunaniguel

Arthur Hyman Appointed Group Publisher at Coastal Communications Corporation

BOCA RATON, FL — Harvey Grotsky, president and CEO of Coastal Communications Corporation, announced the appointment of Arthur Hyman as group publisher, effective July 1, 2012. Hyman will direct the sales team for the company’s three meetings magazines — Corporate & Incentive Travel, Association Conventions & Facilities and Insurance & Financial Meetings Management. A veteran of more than 35 years of experience in the meetings magazine publishing industry, Hyman co-founded Meeting News in 1977. He joined Successful Meetings in 1991, and as associate publisher, opened an office in Boca Raton. Hyman, who will be based at Coastal Communications Corporation’s office in Boca Raton, can be reached at 561-989-6000, ext. 108, or by email at cccgrouppublisher@att.net.

SEE US ON THE WEB

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Riviera-Marín to Lead Puerto Rico Tourism Company

PUERTO RICO — The government of Puerto Rico recently appointed Luis G. Rivera-Marín, Esq., as the new executive director to lead the Puerto Rico Tourism Company (PRTC). Rivera-Marín was selected by Puerto Rico Governor G. Rivera-Marín, Esq., as the new executive director to lead the Puerto Rico Tourism Company.

Rivera-Marín to Lead Puerto Rico Tourism Company

Rivera-Marín, who will be at the helm of a public corporation with more than 500 employees and a budget of $100 million, expressed his commitment to further the goals, objectives and initiatives of PRTC. “My mission as executive director of PRTC is to provide continuity to the strategic plan geared towards the growth and development of the tourism industry and to position Puerto Rico as the most vibrant and diverse travel destination in the Caribbean,” said Rivera-Marín. Before joining PRTC in January 2009, Rivera-Marín was secretary of the department of consumer affairs. His prior experience includes tenures as attorney and notary at law firms Lespier & Muñoz Noya, García Arregui & Fullana and Rivera-Marín & Fortuño.

Minneapolis Posts Higher Visitor Numbers

MINNEAPOLIS, MN — Meet Minneapolis, Convention and Visitors Association, announced that a study conducted by D.K. Shifflet & Associates Ltd., shows that visitors and visitor spending increased in 2011. Minneapolis St. Paul saw 28.8 million visitors in 2011, an increase of 6.1 percent over the previous year’s 25.3 million convention and leisure travel visitors. Spending was up 10.2 percent over 2010. “Minneapolis is a destination on the move,” said Melvin Tennant, president and CEO, Meet Minneapolis. “The efforts to make the city clean, eco-focused and welcoming to visitors by providing an excellent mix of entertainment, sports, music, outdoor activities and more are clearly making a difference, and visitors are coming to see for themselves.”

Arlington CVB Rebrands as Experience Arlington

ARLINGTON, TX — The Arlington Convention & Visitors Bureau, which builds and markets Arlington, TX, as a destination to leisure, business and convention travelers, unveiled its new name of Experience Arlington and a new brand recently at the Batter’s Eye Club at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington. According to the non-profit, the new logo and Experience Arlington name have a retro style that is reminiscent of the rich past of Arlington. “Tourism and CVBs are evolving. We want to make sure we’re evolving with them,” said Jay Burress, president & CEO of Experience Arlington. “Tourism is about the experience. We want visitors to have great ones when they are here, so we’re involved in every aspect of their experience, from the marketing of it, to the delivery of it, to looking at the future of what experiences we can add for the leisure visitor or a convention delegate coming to town.”

The Scottsdale Plaza Resort Unveils Renovations

SCOTTSDALE, AZ — The Scottsdale Plaza Resort, located in the heart of Scottsdale and Paradise Valley, AZ, announced the completion of its $3 million propertywide renovation, including updates to all 404 rooms and suites. The guest rooms are appointed with burgundy fabrics, custom window treatments, taupe carpeting, new mahogany-toned case goods, new seating and flat-screen televisions. The rooms also have new lighting, bathroom accents and decor. Facilities also were updated with a newly remodeled fitness center, complete with new equipment and a studio for group classes. Remington’s Restaurant and Lounge was refreshed with new furnishings throughout; the Terraza tent received new carpeting; the tennis court was refreshed with new furnishings; and facilities also were updated with a newly remodeled fitness center, complete with new equipment and a studio for group classes. Remington’s Restaurant and Lounge was refreshed with new furnishings throughout; the Terraza tent received new carpeting; the tennis court was refreshed with new furnishings; and facilities also were updated with a newly remodeled fitness center, complete with new equipment and a studio for group classes.

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Meliá Hotels International’s Paradisus Cancun Resort to Debut in November

PALMA DE MALLORCA, SPAIN — Meliá Hotels International announced the transformation of the Gran Meliá Cancun property into a luxury all-inclusive Paradisus resort, to be completed by November 15, 2012. Paradisus Cancun will feature all the attributes of the ‘luxeclusive’ Paradisus brand, featuring 136 Royal Service Suites and 97 Family Concierge Suites. Resort amenities will include signature adult-only Royal Service program, Family Concierge program, four pools with swim-up bars, eight restaurants featuring a variety of international cuisines, full-service YHI Spa and Health Club, more than 10,000 sf of meeting and convention space, and a nine-hole, par-3 golf course. The multi-pyramid architecture of Gran Meliá Cancun will remain, while a series of renovations and beautifications are planned to elevate the property to the design standards of Paradisus resorts.

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Paradisus Cancun Resort
Sheraton Lake Buena Vista Resort to Debut New Ballroom and More This Fall

LAKE BUENA VISTA, FL — As part of the recent $25 million transformation of Sheraton Lake Buena Vista Resort in Orlando, the resort will offer approximately 20,000 sqf of new and completely reinvented meeting space to include: the all-new 7,000 sqf Majestic Palm Ballroom, an updated 6,000 sqf of Royal Palm Ballroom; multiple breakout spaces; an expansive outdoor area in the new pool courtyard and flexible spaces for 10–800 guests. All spaces were upgraded with modern technology features, new finishes, fixtures, furnishings and names incorporating the hues and vibe of the resort’s sprawling twin-pool courtyard. Outdoor event spaces in the courtyard include an elegant fire pit, pool bar and outdoor kitchen with wrap-around bar that can be used for private events under the palms. The resort also boasts 490 new guest rooms, new restaurants, updated public spaces, a new spa and more. www.sheratonlakebuenavistaresort.com

IT’S SO MIAMI

So someone tried to tell you why meeting in Miami is so inspiring, so exciting and so productive. Know this. No tweet, snapshot or posting will ever communicate this. You so have to meet here to get it. MiamiMeetings.com

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Palms Casino Resort Begins Transformation

LAS VEGAS, NV — Palms Casino Resort in Las Vegas is investing $50 million in the first phase of a transformation that will encompass a redesign of the Palms Tower rooms and suites, new culinary options, reimagined gaming spaces and new nightlife experiences. Beginning in July, all 428 rooms and suites in the Palms Tower will be remodeled in an ultra-chic and modern style. Each space will highlight custom artwork that complements the overall atmosphere. In addition to the updated rooms, the entire casino layout will be reconfigured to maximize flow and ambiance. The property’s Center Bar will be remodeled by the end of the year. Heraea, a new sports-themed restaurant and lounge, opens for guests by the end of the year. The property renovations also will elevate the Palms’ signature nightlife outlets. Renovations are expected to be completed by year’s end. The boutique property boasts three distinct towers and a diverse mix of bars and restaurants across a 95,000 sqf casino and more than 60,000 sqf of meeting space. www.palms.com

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SNAPSHOTS

1 More than 225 travel industry professionals gathered on June 26 in Washington, DC, for a tribute event to remember the life and legacy of the late Gary Sain, president and CEO of Visit Orlando (also see page 4). Pictured (l to r) are members of the tribute’s steering committee: John Graham, ASAE; Deborah Sexton, PCMA; Dr. Holsenbeck, Rosen College of Hospitality Management; Pam Sain; Bill Carteaux, SPI; Danielle Courtenay, Visit Orlando; and Roger Dow, U.S. Travel.

2 DMAI’s Destinations Showcase Chicago took place June 27 at the Donald E. Stephens Convention Center in Rosemont, IL.

3 Guadalajara hosted Meeting Place Mexico June 3–6.

4 AIBTM recorded a record number of attendees and exhibiting companies June 19–21 at the Baltimore Convention Center.


6 Erica Westmyer, sales executive, Anaheim Marriott, accepts the Best Overall Booth Award from HSMAI’s Director of Chapter Relations Margie Sheffer (r) at HSMAI’s MEET West May 30–31 in Anaheim.

7 The CMP Conclave convened at the Tampa Marriott Waterside Hotel & Marina June 9–11.

8 Attendees at the IRF’s Annual Incentive Invitational enjoyed the San Antonio History Quest event at the JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa May 30–June 3.

9

10 Sheraton Lake Buena Vista Resort to Debut New Ballroom and More This Fall

LAKE BUENA VISTA, FL — As part of the recent $25 million transformation of Sheraton Lake Buena Vista Resort in Orlando, the resort will offer approxi-
Let’s face it: In our always-on world, it isn’t easy to turn off. But no meeting planner wants to invest in a speaker or programming for an event when the audience’s attention is more focused on smartphone screens, Web surfing and whispered discussions. At a professional meeting or convention, these back-channel interactions can seem to be disruptive and even rude.

But instead of fighting against them, why not turn these many means of communication to your advantage? With the right technology and tools, plus a little foresight, meeting planners can turn rudeness and distractions into effective ways to engage audiences, forge meaningful connections and even raise the profile of an event.

Consider these tactics:

• **Expect and plan for back-channel communication.** Smart meeting planners and organizers know that side conversations of both the in-person and virtual kind stop for nothing—not even for the keynote.

• **Take time to plan out and create virtual and in-person parallel sessions, gathering spaces and conversation areas for those wishing to share feedback, more closely explore specific ideas and create groups for further collaboration.** Almost any conversation that can be created in a physical space can also be taken online via any number of means, including using a dedicated hashtag on Twitter, developing a Facebook page or creating a wiki or blog.

• **Think in terms of more, not less, room collaboration.** Think that these “distractions” decrease the potential for collaboration? Think again! Giving people the space—literally and figuratively—to fully communicate before, during and even during an event allows them to collaborate in ways that go far beyond an email, a raised hand or a follow-up note. Using technologies such as collaborative workspaces and interactive learning management systems (LMS), event organizers can create communities of interaction and communities of practice through event-themed discussions, chats and even tweets.

• **Remove the temptation for distraction by shifting to online environments for increased engagement and interaction.** Many training events and presentations do not actually demand face-to-face interaction. Why not switch up the location and mode of delivery of your events? Shifting to online environments allows people to engage from their own offices or homes, and it’s much more cost-effective as well.

• **In addition, time shifting and making the sessions asynchronous allows participants to get involved whenever and wherever they are most interested and excited.** This flexibility removes some of the sense of obligation of sitting in a room and watching a presentation while distracted. Depending on the nature of the event, there may also be opportunities for creating and disseminating audio-video downloads, smartphone apps and/or mobile-friendly websites.

• **Be flexible and ready for change in real time.** With the right input before, during and after an event, you can tailor content and focus on what your attendees want, even if what they want is always evolving.

• **Prior to an event, communication can be...**
started and encouraged via a variety of technology channels, such as a website poll, a well-timed email sequence or a dedicated event page on a website. Through any of these interactive pathways — and by informing audience members that their input will actually help build the event content — organizers can gain insight into which topics attendees would like covered, what moves them and how to best speak to them in a way that will encourage engagement and action.

- During the actual event, get a real-time measure of what’s getting through — and what’s not. Presenters can make on-the-fly changes to content in direct response to their monitoring of real-time interactions, such as in a participant-only forum or through following a specific hashtag on Twitter. What’s more, instead of discouraging the use of smartphones during the program, encouraging tweeting, Facebook status updates or check-ins and other public declarations of presence and interest will go a long way toward the presentation of more relevant content. Encouraging social networking during your event also raises its online visibility and can draw others not present at the event into the conversation, too, enriching the discussion even further.

- After the event, the opportunities for ongoing connection, valuable feedback and targeted follow-up are endless. Monitoring online spaces and being sure to respond to comments, questions and issues as quickly as possible are musts. And, while you have the attention and interest of participants, start promoting your next event…with their input, of course.

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“Don’t ignore the whispers in your audience — make them work for you.”

Drew Ross, Ph.D.

Since 2009, New York City-based Drew Ross, Ph.D. has served as the dean of the School of Graduate Education at Chicago-headquartered Kaplan University, where he first started three years earlier as a part-time teacher. Ross’ research in online learning focuses on online communities of adults, organizational theory and qualitative data analysis. He earned his doctorate at Oxford University in England and returned to New York City in 2004, where he founded an online learning consulting firm. drewross@kaplan.edu
site selection

jewels on favorites

Gaming Resorts That Improve Your Chances of a Successful Meeting

By George Seli

Beau Rivage Resort & Casino

Like a poker player who recovers from being dealt a bad hand, Beau Rivage Resort & Casino’s corporate group business has been challenged by Katrina, followed by the recession and then the Gulf oil spill, but is now on the upswing. One sign is the $3 million the property invested into renovating its convention floor, a project completed at the end of last year.

The Biloxi, MS, resort has also thrived despite being in a destination that does not immediately come to mind for planners interested in a gaming locale, rather, they’ll think of the usual suspects: Las Vegas, Atlantic City and Connecticut. “The location is not within the general area that you would consider for a casino or resort, but more planners should consider this property because of its affordability, elegance, customer service, food and grand style of presentation,” remarks Jeannie Van Hoesen, sourcing specialist for Maxavantage, a strategic alliance between Maritz Travel and American Express Business Travel that provides global strategic meetings management services.

“It’s a ‘mini Bellagio’ and a bit of Las Vegas in the South,” she says. Van Hoesen was recently onsite to experience the property’s first full convention-level renovation since it opened in 2006. Her impressions were positive, to say the least: “With any renovations, you always have the ‘clean and new’ sensation, and that is the case with Beau Rivage. The renovations were well thought out in that the meeting space is located on one level (second floor) that is accessible to the casino by escalator/el- evator. One nice aspect is that the sound from the casino does not travel up to the meeting space. The layout includes boardrooms, ballrooms, registration desks, a business center and bathrooms all within proximity for attendees. There was a meeting in progress when I went on the site visit, and everyone was organized with plenty of space for movement. The colors of the carpet, walls and lighting all reflect the grandeur of this sophisticated venue.”

Part of MGM Resorts International, the 1,740-room, AAA Four Diamond Beau Rivage has much to offer corporate groups besides gaming, including 10 restaurants, a retail promenade with 11 upscale shops, a Tom Fazio golf course and a spa that has been ranked by Travel+Leisure as one of the top 20 hotel spas in the U.S. Planners can make use of 50,000 sf of convention space as well as a state-of-the-art theater. Groups that do want to emphasize the gaming aspect can run a tournament with the assistance of the hotel, pending Mississippi Gaming Commission approval (which is generally not a difficult process). For example, some of the slot department’s latest games can be turned to tournament mode. At the very least, attendees can enjoy relaxing Gulf views (with occasional speedboat races) from their guest rooms or the veranda.

Reno/Tahoe, Nevada

Another gaming destination that is sometimes overshadowed by Las Vegas in the meetings market is Reno/Tahoe, billed as America’s Adventure Place. Its attractions are on display across five LCD, flat-screen TVs that are part of the Grand Sierra Resort and Casino’s new lobby, courtesy of an ongoing $25 million improvement project. The resort has also debuted new carpeting and check-in counters, a new ultra lounge called WET and a tequila bar. Still to come are upgrades to the convention center, health club and spa. Redondo Beach, CA-based STN Media Group, a marketing services firm and publisher of School Transportation News, realized the virtues of the property long before these improvements: The company has held its School Bus Expo at the Grand Sierra for 15 years, drawing around 1,500 bus operators in the public and private sectors, nationally and internationally. Travel logistics are smooth, thanks to the Reno-Tahoe Airport’s free, three-minute shuttle access to Grand Sierra.

The event, which runs July 21–25 this year, includes education, networking and a trade show, which is entirely contained at the Grand Sierra. Unlike gaming resorts on the Las Vegas Strip, there isn’t a great deal of motivation for attendees to venture outside of the nearly 2,000-room Grand Sierra, which offers more than 200,000 sf of meeting space. “We’re huge on networking and social events, and the Grand Sierra provides a great environment for that,” says Tony Corpin, president. “Attendees tend to stay on property, so whether they’re in the elevator or the hotel bar, they see everyone they know. And we have a captive audience for our vendors.” STN hosts its welcome reception at the hotel bar, which features glass walls and waterfalls. The concluding STN Industry Social is held at both the grand ballroom and out by the pool, “where we do more of a Hawaiian exotic theme, and the hotel has been able to provide us with everything from fire-breeders to craps and blackjack tables for a casino-based party.” Janna Smeltzer, account executive with STN, who has been planning the expo for the last four years, notes that she “personally wanted to change the casino-themed party because we’re already at a casino.” She expects to be bringing the Grand Sierra and other Reno hotels back to experience the latest renovations and “see if there’s a new spot for our welcome party.” The resort sources all entertainment for the socials, and the staff, says Smeltzer, has offered very personalized service over the years: “One of our CSMs knew what temperature all of our staff likes their rooms and would personally go to all of our rooms before we arrived to make sure that it was comfortable for us. They even know kind of wine we all drink.” STN provides its attendees “ample downtime” during the event so that they can enjoy the casino and other amenities, Corpin notes.

Another great option in Reno is the AAA Four Diamond Peppermill Resort Spa Casino, which offers a broad range of meeting facilities totaling 106,000 sf, including 62,000 sf of clear-span space, which can handle up to 340 exhibit booths or 3,400 for dinner. A recent $15.8 million renovation updated meeting space and 395 guest rooms in the Peppermill Tower, and added a two-story, 4,000-sf high-tech executive boardroom. The resort can accommodate any size group, with a total of 1,635 guest rooms, including the 600-room all-suite Tuscany Tower. Amenities include the 43,000-sf Spa & Salon Toscana, which features a caldarium with indoor pool, a 100,000-sf casino, 16 bars and lounges, and 10 award-winning restaurants. On a sustainability note, geothermal energy now provides 100 percent of resort’s heating needs.

Las Vegas, Nevada

In a gaming destination of Las Vegas’ magnitude, there is always something new for attendees to experience. Las Vegas is long past pushing the envelope on the casino front and is now becoming a top culinary destination. Some of the Entertainment’s hotels are no exception to this trend, with two top steak houses recently opening: Gordon Ramsay Steak

The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino

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Gaming 101

While gaming is a surefire attraction for many attendees, there will be those who are still unsure about stepping onto the casino floor. Caesars Entertainment is developing a kind of gaming primer in a removed section of the casino where neophytes can learn about gaming in a comfortable, social atmosphere. “We can replicate it for groups as well,” says Amy Allen, director of marketing for Caesars Entertainment, adding that the concept will likely be tested at Flamingo Las Vegas. The original motivation for the initiative was to “try to get more females to play table games,” Allen explains. “When we look at our gaming customer database, which has about 40 million people, it’s about 50/50 men and women. But when we look at the people that play table games, it’s only about 20 percent women, a disproportionately low number.”

Meanwhile, the 3,460-room Flamingo Las Vegas will complete the refurbishment of 2,307 of its standard guest rooms, now dubbed FAB Rooms for their fabulous contemporary style, at the end of this year. The Flamingo offers 73,000 sf of meeting space. From the Flamingo, the oldest hotel on The Strip, to one of the newest, MGM Grand claims the No. 2 spot as the most expansive in the city with 602,000 sf of meeting and convention space. Aria has 4,004 guest rooms and suites, 300,000 sf of meeting space including four ballrooms, and 150,000 sf of gaming. When it comes to sheer size of meeting facilities in one hotel property, MGM Grand claims the No. 2 spot as most expansive in the city with 602,000 sf of meeting and convention space. (According to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino is No. 1 at 1.6 million sf.) The 5,044-room MGM Grand is cur- rently undergoing a $160 million makeover of 3,570 guest rooms and 642 suites in the main tower that will be completed early this fall. Coming in December is the new nightclub Hakkasan, which replaces Studio 54.

But Las Vegas Sands Corporation wins the overall meeting space race with its complex comprising the AAA Five Diamond Venetian and Palazzo resorts, and the Sands Expo and Convention Center, totaling 2.25 gross million sf. The complex is the largest LEED-certified building in the world. The 4,000-room Venetian Resort Hotel Casino chips in 510,000 sf of the total meeting space including the 85,000 sf Venetian Ballroom. Features include gondola rides along the Grand Canal Shoppes, the Canyon Ranch SpaClub, and headline and production shows, including Blue Man Group and Phantom.

Dining

at the Paris Las Vegas and Center Cut Steakhouse at Flamingo Las Vegas. The former establishment, which celebrates both Chef Ramsay’s English heritage and his French culinary training, offers 274 seats, a private dining room and a “behind the scenes” tour of the exclusive beef-aging program created under the direction of Chef Ramsay. The latter features beef sourced from Aspen Ridge Farms in Colorado and accommodates up to 172 guests in the bar, lounge, restaurant and private dining room.

Dining hasn’t exactly receded into the background as an attraction for Las Vegas-bound groups, but its entertain- ment proposition is now seen more holistically, encompassing the latest in dining, shows and resort experiences. Next year, among Caesars’ offerings will be The Ling, a $550 million outdoor re- tail, dining and entertainment district at the heart of the Strip that includes a 550-foot high-observation wheel.

Amy Allen, director of marketing for Caesars Entertainment, notes, “Many people come here to gamble, but I think just as many people come here that don’t, and we certainly see with our meeting groups that they’re not choosing the destination because of the gambling in and of itself, but because of the collect- 19 ing of offerings.”

According to Allen, meeting busi- ness is “definitely up” across Caesars’ 38 properties ‘despite some of the challenges we’ve had over the last couple of years, particularly with re-sort-type destinations like Las Vegas.” Corporate clients, she says, have re- discovered the importance of offsite meetings as well as the value of Las Vegas as a meeting destination.

Last fall Caesars reorganized its meetings businesses into a single de- partment under one leadership team, also offering benefits to planners originally introduced under the Las Vegas Meetings by Caesars Entertainment brand, such as the Meeting Diamond program, to meetings at all 38 proper- ties, as well as providing the ability to mix-and-match properties and venues within a destination with a single con- tact, contract and minimum.

Caesars’ top hotel for both Las Vegas meetings and incentives is the 3,960- room Caesars Palace. “For incentives you’re looking at more luxury end of the spectrum, so a property like Caesars Palace certainly is appealing not only because it’s luxurious but also because it has such a recognizable name,” Allen says. “It almost has to be our property that has the most meeting space (300,000 sf), so it’s also the property where we do the most business meetings.” Speaking of luxury, the new 660-room Octavian Tower opened in January at Caesars Palace. Later this year, the Nobu Hotel at Caesars Palace, and Nobu Restaurant and Lounge at Caesars Palace debut.

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Arizona, at 240,000 sf, and ample resources for serious business: a total of 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space, including a 25,000-sf grand ballroom. Cultural education is also available at the resort, which has a collection of Pima and Maricopa tribal art.

The Pacific Northwest

Indeed, gaming resorts can serve as a fascinating introduction to a particular Native American tribe’s heritage, and the Tulalip Resort Casino, located in Tulalip, WA, near Seattle, is no exception. Artworks of the Coast Salish people (which include the Tulalip tribe), such as sculpture and traditional cedar baskets, decorate the 370-room hotel, which houses 30,000 sf of meeting space, including a 15,000-sf grand ballroom. Adjacent to the meeting areas is the Indoor Oasis Pool, which can also be transformed into 30,000 sf of outdoor meeting space. Foxwoods, located in Mashantucket, CT, on the Mashantucket Pequot Indian Reservation, also features renovations across the 317 guest rooms in its Great Cedar Hotel. The upgrades were completed earlier this year, and a complete renovation is planned for Foxwoods’ signature hotel, the Grand Pequot Tower. Also, Foxwoods and the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation have joined with the Gordon Group to develop a 300,000-sf retail outlet shopping complex. Construction is expected to begin late in 2012. Foxwoods Resort Casino and MGM Grand at Foxwoods house a total of 150,000 sf of meeting space.

The Northeast

The Northeast is of course much more identified with gaming than the Northwest, thanks to the Atlantic City, New Jersey market. Cultural education is also visible into 10 separate meeting rooms, including a 150,000-sf exhibition space; a 17,500-sf outdoor terrace; the 350-seat Cabaret Theatre; the 300-seat Wolf Den; and the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Resort, which opened in March. The 486-room resort features 100,000 sf of function space.

In 2009, the Sands Casino Resort Bethlehem debuted on the site of the historic Bethlehem Steel plant located approximately an hour from Philadelphia. Among its highlights are a 150,000-sf casino and restaurants by celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse. The 302-room hotel offers 5,000 sf of meeting space and 3,000 sf of pre-function and exhibit space. Future plans include the construction of an additional 50,000 sf of meeting and function space. Newly opened are the Sands Bethlehem Events Center, featuring live entertainment, and the Luxury Shoppes at Sands.

In the Southeast, the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino near Fort Lauderdale in Hollywood, FL, recently completed a $7.8 million renovation of its 481 guest rooms and suites. The property offers approximately 40,000 sf of meeting space, including a 16,000-sf grand ballroom divisible into eight sections and several smaller rooms for breakout or board meetings. A 7,000-sf poolside function area is also available. During free time, attendees can immerse themselves in the resort’s 130,000-sf casino, the Rock Spa, and a lush tropical pool area with a theme-park-style water slide and authentic Seminole Chieftee cabanas, which certainly makes for a Florida-style gaming experience.

A group will doubtless have a pleasurable and productive time at any of today’s upscale gaming resorts. With all of their diversions, amenities and top-notch meeting space, they are resorts first and foremost, and gaming destinations second.
Minneapolis and even Wyandotte, OK, July 2012

the economic meltdown of 2008–2009. returning to its pre-recession glory —

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with stylish finishes, 642 suites redesigned

Marquee Suite is among the

Part of MGM Grand’s $160 million remodel, the Skyline Marquee Suite is among the 542 suites redesigned with stylish finishes, fabrics and features.

Located just minutes from Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport, the new property will be the second outpost of the Radisson Blu brand, hailed for its innovative design and modern comfort. The property, which will become the first hotel to be connected by skyway to the landmark Mall of America, will feature 26,300 sf of meeting space, including two ballrooms, and a FireLake Grill House & Cocktail Bar showcasing American cuisine.

A new $300 million, 1,012-room JW Marriott Austin will open in Texas in March 2015. Located two blocks from the Austin Convention Center, the new hotel will feature more than $100,000 sf of meeting space. Designed to be on the cutting edge of green initiatives, the JW Marriott Austin will seek LEED Silver certification, as well as a two-star Austin Energy Green Building rating.

In Baton Rouge, the new $308 million, 575-acre, 206-room L’Auberge Casino & Hotel, scheduled to open this summer with 12,580 sf of meeting and event space that includes concert seating for up to 1,600 attendees, will be the cornerstone of a state-of-the-art casino entertainment complex that will include a 74,000 sf casino. The hotel, designed by Las Vegas-based Marnell Architecture, creators of such fabled properties as Bellagio, Caesars Palace and Wynn Las Vegas, as well as Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa in Atlantic City, is modeled after a Southern river lodge.

L’Auberge Casino & Hotel will feature a rooftop pool with sweeping views of the Mississippi River. Its dining and entertainment amenities will embrace Louisiana’s unique culture and heritage. Competing for smaller groups that want some ca- sino action will be the new, 1,210-room DoubleTree by Hilton Phoenix-Gilbert, located in an eastern suburb of the Valley of the Sun just 15 minutes from downtown Phoenix.

Now that the meeting industry is returning to its pre-recession glory — and growth — a wave of new hotel construction and high-profile renovations of well-known properties is sweeping across the country.

One significant sea change: Some of the most acclaimed new entries are sprouting up in destinations that were considered second-tier before the economic meltdown of 2008–2009. Now, places such as Baton Rouge, Minneapolis and even Wyandotte, OK, are planning to go head to head with their better known and larger competitors, while established destinations such as Nashville and Austin jockey for enhanced market share.

New and Noteworthy Debuts

Hyatt Hotels will debut its first luxury hotel in New York City later this year with the highly anticipated opening of the Park Hyatt Hotel New York. Designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Christian de Portzamparc, the $375 million, 210-room property will be located on West 57th Street, across from Carnegie Hall. The hotel, which will become the U.S. flagship of the acclaimed Park Hyatt brand and include a trendy restaurant and bar, will be part of a 50-story mixed-use project that will include 5,000 sf of retail space.

In late 2013, Omni Hotels & Resorts will debut its new, $250 million, 800-room Omni Nashville Hotel, which will serve as the headquarters hotel for the new, 1.2-million sf Music City Center convention center complex also opening next year. The Omni Nashville, which also will be connected to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, will feature more than 80,000 sf of meeting and event space, including 25,000- and 15,000-sf ballrooms. As a result of booming demand for Nashville as a destination, the property has already booked more than 55 major meetings and conventions totaling more than 100,000 room nights.

Formerly a Radisson property, the new DoubleTree by Hilton Phoenix-Gilbert features 15,000 sf of meeting space, including the 9,963 sf San Tan Elegant ballroom. The hotel’s locally popular Brock’s Restaurant and Bar has been re-designed and features hand-crafted bisto-stylish American comfort food with a Mediterranean twist, based on locally sourced seasonal ingredients.

The newly renovated 563-unit Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort, Phoenix, AZ, features nearly 50,000 sf of meeting space. Located just minutes from Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport, the new property will be the second outpost of the Radisson Blu brand, hailed for its innovative design and modern comfort. The property, which will become the first hotel to be connected by skyway to the landmark Mall of America, will feature 26,300 sf of meeting space, including two ballrooms, and a FireLake Grill House & Cocktail Bar showcasing American cuisine.

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The Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort also features the 10,000-sf Tocasierra as a 3,000-sf Rodeo Drive retail center.

Another local area landmark, the 649-room Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, will debut a new, 50-million, 52,331-sf conference center that will bring the property’s total meeting space to 150,000 sf. The addition will include a new 23,000-sf Palomino Ballroom. The facilities will feature the latest meeting technology, including state-of-the-art audio-visual capabilities.

One of the most revered meeting resorts in the U.S., the Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond Tropicana in Colorado Springs, is in the first phase of a $60 million, multiyear renovation that recently included the re-opening of its Southlake Ballroom meeting rooms and suites, as well as a new exterior for Cheyenne Lodge, one of the property’s premier meeting and event facilities. Opened in 1918, The Broadmoor features 744 rooms and 185,000 sf of space. The ongoing renovations include a facelift for all guest rooms and suites, as well as extensive updates to its meeting and event facilities and F&B operations.

The 2,000-room Gaylord National Resort & Spa, located near National Harbor, MD, with 470,000 sf of space, debuted a new 15,000-sf RiverView Terrace outdoor special event space along the Potomac River in May. The 1,406-room Gaylord Palms, with 400,000 sf of meeting and convention space, has completed a $30 million renovation that included upgrades to all guest rooms, as well as new event venues such as the 10,000-sf Coquina Lawn outdoor space and a new adults-only South Beach Pool lined with tropical palm trees and featuring fully stocked private cabanas, white couches, oversized chairs and an acrylic stage over pool. The on-site meeting and event planners include two new planner offices located just steps away from the resort’s ballrooms.

The 2,000-room Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa in Atlantic City, with 700,000 sf of meeting and event space, completed a $50 million renovation of its 1,566 “classic” guest rooms. Billed as one of Atlantic City’s premier meeting properties, Borgata features a 161,000-sf casino, six restaurants from acclaimed chefs, a 54,000-sf spa and four nightlife venues. The complex also includes The Water Club at Borgata, DC Central Kitchen, the Godfrey and The Octavius Tower, the sixth hotel tower at Caesars Palace, added for a total of 25.

As a 3,000-sf Rodeo Drive retail center.

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Not far away is the swanky, 19-stor- ry, 52,000-sf Rennaissance Phoenix Downtown, which earned a prestigious American Society for Interior Design (ASID) Award for hospitality design. Conveniently located near Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport and the Phoenix Convention Center, the property features more than 60,000 sf of meeting space, a full-service business center and fitness center.

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The Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort also features the 10,000-sf Tocasierra, Spa, Salon & Fitness center.

Not far away is the swanky, 19-stor- ry, 52,000-sf Rennaissance Phoenix Downtown, which earned a prestigious American Society for Interior Design (ASID) Award for hospitality design. Conveniently located near Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport and the Phoenix Convention Center, the property features more than 60,000 sf of meeting space, a full-service business center and fitness center.

Another local area landmark, the 649-room Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, will debut a new, 50-million, 52,331-sf conference center that will bring the property’s total meeting space to 150,000 sf. The addition will include a new 23,000-sf Palomino Ballroom. The facilities will feature the latest meeting technology, including state-of-the-art audio-visual capabilities.

One of the most revered meeting resorts in the U.S., the Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond Tropicana in Colorado Springs, is in the first phase of a $60 million, multiyear renovation that recently included the re-opening of its Southlake Ballroom meeting rooms and suites, as well as a new exterior for Cheyenne Lodge, one of the property’s premier meeting and event facilities. Opened in 1918, The Broadmoor features 744 rooms and 185,000 sf of space. The ongoing renovations include a facelift for all guest rooms and suites, as well as extensive updates to its meeting and event facilities and F&B operations.

The 2,000-room Gaylord National Resort & Spa, located near National Harbor, MD, with 470,000 sf of space, debuted a new 15,000-sf RiverView Terrace outdoor special event space along the Potomac River in May. The 1,406-room Gaylord Palms, with 400,000 sf of meeting and convention space, has completed a $30 million renovation that included upgrades to all guest rooms, as well as new event venues such as the 10,000-sf Coquina Lawn outdoor space and a new adults-only South Beach Pool lined with tropical palm trees and featuring fully stocked private cabanas, white couches, oversized chairs and an acrylic stage over pool. The on-site meeting and event planners include two new planner offices located just steps away from the resort’s ballrooms.

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cha, modern showers, locally themed artwork and jack packs — all-in-one media hubs that pair the television with laptops and media players. A $500,000 upgrade of Hyatt’s meeting space, featuring seven rooms and 3,000 sf was completed at the end of 2011. The meeting facilities stay true to the resort’s contemporary “Grand Lodge” look, and now feature state-of-the-art audio-visual capabilities and drop-down screens. The all-day dining restaurant, Sierra Café, also received a facelift including contemporary oak tables and leather seating.

Southern Charm

The 1,260-room Hyatt Regency Atlanta, located on Peachtree Street in the heart of downtown Atlanta, has completed a $65 million, property-wide renovation of its guest rooms, meeting space and restaurants. Opened in 1967, the local landmark features 180,000 sf of meeting space. Its new eateries include Sway, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner and offering tried-and-true Southern favorites such as pimiento cheese sandwiches and buttermilk fried chicken. Storys features beer-based creations, such as beer-battered fish and chips and steamed brats and kraut using locally and Georgia-brewed beers and ales.

In New Orleans, the 1,193-room Hyatt Regency New Orleans, adjacent to the Mercedes Superdome and often cited as the city’s premier meeting and convention hotel, reopened last October after being closed since Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The $275 million redesign and revitalization project that carefully restored the property to its pre-Katrina prominence doubled its meeting and exhibition space to 200,000 sf. Facilities include two 25,000-sf ballrooms, as well as 70 meeting and banquet rooms, and 19 executive level meeting rooms, seven permanent boardrooms and more than 80,000 sf of dedicated exhibition space, highlighted by a new 50,000-sf exhibit hall.

The hotel’s flagship restaurant is Borgne, from James Beard Award-winning local chef John Besh, which features casual coastal Louisiana cuisine including fresh local seafood. The hotel also includes the 8 Block Kitchen & Bar, a Starbucks and clear glass elevators.

Located in the French Quarter, the 254-room Hyatt French Quarter, with 10,660 sf of meeting space, has completed an $18 million renovation of its exterior and interior, including new flooring and carpet and a facelift for each of its rooms.

In Florida, 30 minutes north of Tampa International Airport, the Saddlesbrook Resort features 90,000 sf of flexible meeting and banquet space, 10 outdoor banquet private dining areas, a teambuilding course, two 18-hole golf courses and 45 tennis courts.

In South Florida, the legendary Forbes Four Star, 408-room Turnberry Isle Miami, located just north of Miami Beach and tony Aventura, has completed a $2 million renovation of its Orchid building, one of four guest towers on the upscale 300-acre tropical resort, which is renowned for its two championship golf courses redesigned by Raymond Floyd, Celebrity Chef Michael Mina’s award-winning Bourbon Steak restaurant, three-story Spa & Fitness Center, the elite Cañas Tennis, three relaxing pools, 40,000 sf of meeting space and private beach club.

For more information about new and renovated properties, see the following pages.
The ideal location for corporate meetings or retreats, the 408-room Turnberry Isle Miami recently became an Autograph Collection Hotel, a portfolio of world-class, independent boutique and upscale hotels.

This premier 300-acre property features a 40,000-sf conference center with 17 versatile meeting rooms. A 12,080-sf Grand Ballroom divides into three sections and accommodates up to 1,700 guests. Two Garden Rooms combine to form a 7,020-sf space for plated dinners of up to 350 people. Electronic message boards outside each room make it easy for guest navigation, while a separate valet area and satellite check-in stations can be arranged for seamless arrivals.

Between South Florida’s tropical weather and extensive exterior space, the hotel caters to outdoor functions year round. The popular Magnolia Courtyard, a 4,000-sf Mediterranean-style outdoor terrace, accommodates up to 300 guests and provides views of the signature 18-hole “Island Green” and 64-foot waterfall. Outdoor venues include the enchanting Cascata Pool, Laguna Pool, Beach Club, Banyan Tree and lush lawns lined with palm trees and vibrant colored foliage.

There is no shortage of recreational amenities for groups to enjoy, including two championship Raymond Floyd-redesigned golf courses, the elite Cañas Tennis, three-story Spa & Fitness Center, private Beach Club, lagoon-style pool with private cabanas, waterslide and lazy river, and acclaimed Chef Michael Mina’s Bourbon Steak.
Furthering its position as the leading resort destination in the region, Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa in July completed its $50 million room project that saw a complete redesign of 1,566 of their “classic” guest rooms and corridors. “This redesign will ensure that we continue to deliver the world-class, luxury resort experience our guests have come to expect from Borgata,” said Bob Boughner, COO of Borgata. “Our guest rooms represent a progressive departure from other hotels in the region, with impeccable attention to detail that combines feelings of established hospitality, original touches, and smart amenities to exude absolute comfort.”

Refreshed Guest Rooms

Dedicated to a full-service guest experience that blends genuine friendliness with efficient luxury, Borgata’s redesign provides guests with a variety of in-room amenities coupled with personalized care that results in rooms that are as smart as they are stylish.

Each element of the redesigned room complements the others, with cut-out floral details in the metal lamp echoed in the dark wooden headboards, and magenta ribbon swirls in the carpet reimagined in the wall art. The furniture is skillfully mismatched with English Sycamore bedside tables and desks paired with dark wooden dresser sets featuring jewel-like knobs.

A commitment to excellence is apparent in all aspects of the hotel, allowing guests to feel at home throughout the entirety of their stay. Covered by sumptuous 300 thread count Egyptian cotton sheets with Filod’oro linens and hypoallergenic poly-filled pillows, Borgata’s signature beds welcome guests into a peaceful sleep sanctuary.

Every switch, power source and light fixture was meticulously placed for maximum accessibility. The oversized, glass-enclosed showers and ample counter space in the guest room bathrooms deliver a spa-like atmosphere.

Providing the right technology support for guests is essential, and the redesigned Borgata room delivers. Each redesigned guest room is outfitted with a 46-inch flat-screen TV, equipped with an interactive ITV solution by All-In that provides the ability to check My Borgata Rewards balances and existing reservations, explore all aspects of the property via imagery and menus, review room folios and check out without visiting the front desk. Guests will also have access to wireless, high-speed Internet access and a Bittel integrated phone unit offering multimedia functionality, including speakers, clock radio and alarm, iPod charger and player, and a USB charge port.

Fine Amenities

Located at Renaissance Pointe in Atlantic City, Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa features 2,000 guest rooms and suites; 161,000 sf of gaming; 182 gaming tables; 3,475 slot machines; the largest poker room in Atlantic City with 80+ tables; 11 retail boutiques; six acclaimed fine-dining restaurants by world-renowned chefs; six casual dining options; a 54,000-sf spa; 70,000 sf of event space; four signature nightlife experiences; and parking for 7,100 cars.

The Water Club

The resort also features Atlantic City’s first cosmopolitan hotel experience, The Water Club at Borgata, with 800 guest rooms and suites; a 54,000-sf spa; 18,000 sf of meeting space; six designer retail boutiques; and five heated indoor and outdoor pools.

For groups of 30 to 3,000, Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa in Atlantic City is an exceptional destination for meetings and events. Atlantic City’s premier entertainment resort features thousands of square feet of flexible meeting space, two distinct hotels with splendid rooms and the area’s most inviting dining and spa facilities. To take your next event to a higher level, you belong at Borgata.
Grand Sierra Resort and Casino

Grand Sierra Resort’s $25 million renovation in 2012 includes a more luxurious, contemporary look with sleek finishes, vivid colors, trendy fixtures, upgrades to the hotel’s guest rooms, the grand entrance and the front lobby. In addition, several new outlets were added including Cantina — an authentic Mexican restaurant that boasts one of the largest selections of tequila in the area.

The new décor offers a more modern and relaxing ambiance with a color pallet of vivid orange, cream and blue hues to brighten public areas as well as guest suites. Welcoming guests is an elegant front entrance accented in white marble accompanied by playful light fixtures. Contemporary furnishings that offer comfortable gathering spaces are located just above the casino floor. A dynamic, multi-dimensional art installation of five 60-inch high-definition video screens greets hotel guests in the registration area.

The lobby has upgraded carpet, which not only complements the new check-in counters but also provides a more spacious “welcome home” feel for visitors. The Summit Suites were also updated to reflect the casino’s new colorful and modern feel, and soon each guest room in the Grand Sierra Resort will follow suit.

New Entertainment and Dining Venues

The resort also opened WET Ultra Lounge, a chic, relaxing and private atmosphere that provides an intimate setting to wind down from the day.

Known as the best steak house in Reno, Charlie Palmer Steak upgraded their CP Lounge, providing a great atmosphere for groups to congregate and dine on some of the most exquisite appetizers and entrees that Reno has to offer. From the ever-popular Lobster Corn Dogs to Ahi Tuna Sashimi, dining in Reno does not get any better than this.

Other fine-dining experiences at Grand Sierra include Briscola — a family-style Italian eatery also led by Master Chef Charlie Palmer, and Rim — a Pan-Asian bistro and all-you-can-eat sushi bar. Guests are also invited to enjoy The Lodge Buffet, Café Sierra and 2nd Street Express, as well as convenient dining options such as Johnny Rockets, Starbucks, Port of Sub and Round Table Pizza.

The Health Club at Grand Sierra recently received fresh paint, new flooring and all-new daily group fitness classes such as kick-boxing and Zumba. Still to come is an upgrade and expansion to The Spa.

More exciting changes at Grand Sierra Resort and Casino are on the drawing board. In the meantime, maximize your Reno convention planning by experiencing all that Grand Sierra Resort has to offer. For groups of any size, we will create an intimate atmosphere that your crowd will truly enjoy.

Grand Sierra Resort and Casino (GSR) is in the heart of Reno/Tahoe — America’s Adventure Place. Conveniently located next to the airport, GSR is northern Nevada’s most complete resort destination with 1,990 guest rooms and suites. The property offers a wide variety of accommodations for the everyday business traveler with amenities that include 200,000 sf of meeting and convention space, banquet halls, and accommodations for up to 4,000 attendees.

Grand Sierra also features 10 restaurants, bars and lounges, headline entertainment, two-screen cinema, a 50-lane championship bowling center, aqua golf driving range and much more.

For complete details, please call 866-473-6672 or visit sales.grandsierraresort.com

$25 million in renovations + staff with 25+ years of convention experience. We’re investing in you.
MGM Grand Hotel & Casino

From A-list entertainment and award-winning restaurants to high-energy nightlife and rejuvenating amenities, the AAA Four Diamond MGM Grand provides meeting planners and attendees with the ultimate Las Vegas experience.

To maintain its high level of quality offerings, MGM Grand is undergoing a $160 million remodel of 3,570 guest rooms and 642 suites in the hotel’s main tower, scheduled for completion by September 2012. In keeping with MGM Grand’s commitment to sustainability, the newly remodeled rooms incorporate environmentally responsible elements including LED lighting, improved thermostats and solar shades, and bath amenities that are 100 percent biodegradable. Visit www.TheGrandRenovation.com for renovation information and updates.

For the VIPs of the group, the rare and private sanctuary of Skylofts, a Forbes Five Star Award winner, provides elegant two-story accommodations high above the Strip while The Signature at MGM Grand offers an indulgent all-suite, non-gaming experience in a separate world of calm and tranquility.

Award-Winning Restaurants and Nightlife

With more AAA Diamond Award-winning restaurants under one roof than any other hotel in the world, MGM Grand offers attendees delectable dining choices to satisfy any palate. Legendary chef Joel Robuchon opened his first fine-dining restaurant in the United States at MGM Grand, Joel Robuchon, and a more casual eatery, L’Atelier de Joel Robuchon. Since opening, his eponymous restaurant has received the Michelin Three Star, Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond and Wine Spectator “Grand” awards — the only restaurant in Las Vegas to hold all of these top honors.

After dinner, attendees are invited to experience the incredible acrobatics, thrills and action of KA by Cirque du Soleil or enjoy some laughs at the new Brad Garrett Comedy Club, which appropriately opened April Fools weekend. To spice up the night, MGM Grand redefines the legendary Vegas nightlife scene with Tabú, Rouge, Centrifuge, Zuri and West Wing Bar.

Opening December 2012, combining the best of dining and nightlife, is Hakkasan, an innovative concept certain to revolutionize Las Vegas nightlife and dining experiences. The transformation will expand the size of the former Studio 54, creating an indoor/outdoor space with unparalleled views of the famed Las Vegas Strip.

Meeting Facilities

Completely self-contained and smoke-free, MGM Grand’s 602,000 sf of flexible meeting and convention space combines functionality and versatility with elegance and state-of-the-art technology. The multipurpose, stand-alone Marquee Ballroom provides 92,000 sf of meeting space that can accommodate up to 6,000 guests. Other highlights include three additional ballrooms (the largest is 61,388 sf); 50,000 sf of prefunction space; 57 meeting rooms; and two boardrooms. In all, MGM Grand’s expansive conference space can accommodate groups of 20 to 10,000 people. Two fully staffed business centers ensure planners never find themselves without a helping hand when it comes to packages, faxes, equipment rentals and copy services. A skilled team of 15 Certified Meeting Planners is also available to assist in crafting the perfect event.

Experience MGM Grand’s new rooms and suites. MGM Grand presents GRANDer experiences thanks to an exciting makeover. Energy meets relaxation in these beautifully redesigned rooms. Each room invites with lavish linens, striking artwork and modern furnishings. Combine all that with MGM Grands impeccable meeting facilities, dedicated staff of Certified Meeting Professionals and a wide variety of entertainment and dining options. You have the best of Las Vegas under one roof.

For more reasons to choose MGM Grand, call 1-800-278-6003  |  TheGrandRenovation.com

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Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel

A quick four-mile trip from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport leads you to the newly transformed Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel. Just steps away from the Phoenix Convention Center, and a light-rail ride away from the city’s most unexpected gems, this sophisticated urban hotel is located in the heart of it all.

Stimulating meeting environments, creative and indigenous food and beverage, and personal REN Meeting Experts set this hotel apart from the rest. Meetings thrive at the Renaissance Phoenix Downtown, with more than 60,000 sf of total function space including a 10,000-sf Grand Ballroom, a 20,000-sf outdoor terrace and onsite exhibition space. The moment you walk into a meeting, you feel the difference. From calm, soft lights, to engaging table elements, all aspects of the meeting rooms are designed to inspire creativity.

Local Inspiration

When you check-in to the Renaissance, you are greeted by a host of amenities, unexpected luxuries and local inspiration. Enjoy a rustic flatbread in Marston’s Café, a Signature Martini in ICON Lounge, a swim in the heated outdoor pool, an invigorating workout in the fitness center or relax in the comfort of our stylish guestrooms.

For a bit of excitement outside the hotel, look to the Navigators for tips on great local spots to discover in the area. Through expert, personalized concierge service, the Navigators will ensure your attendees discover the best hidden treasures to savor, sip, shop and see. These in-the-know guides can even create tailored experiences for your group and offer a turnkey solution for discovering the vibrancy and excitement of downtown Phoenix.

The Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel offers a world of crisp, sleek design and modern comfort. It is ideal for the savvy meeting planner looking for the ultimate in urban sophistication, contemporary appointments and the personalized service of an intimate downtown hotel.

Reimagine Meetings and Be Rewarded

Meetings at the Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel are meant to spark new thinking and fresh ideas. And the best part — the hotel is offering a special introductory group offer called Pick Three. Simply book a meeting of 10 or more rooms on peak night by December 31, 2012, and actualize by March 31, 2013, and pick three of the following:**

- One complimentary guest room for every 40 rooms actualized.
- Free high-speed Internet access in each attendee’s guest room.
- 10 percent discount on in-house AV equipment.*
- Triple Marriott Rewarding Events bonus points (150,000 maximum).
- 70 percent allowable attrition.
- 2 VIP welcome amenities.
- 2 VIP round-trip airport transfers.
- 1 VIP suite upgrade.

**Meeting must actualize a minimum of 10 paid guest rooms on peak night. Offer not valid with any other promotion or for previously booked business. Subject to availability. Must reference Pick Three package prior to signing contract. Discount taken off the standard AV retail price. Labor, rigging, meeting room Internet and service charges not included in discount. Discount only available when hotel is exclusive AV provider. C&IT

IN THE CENTER OF THE CITY, ON THE EDGE OF SOPHISTICATION.

Introducing the newly transformed Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel. Just steps from the Phoenix Convention Center and only four miles from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, our intriguing urban retreat is ideal for savvy convention and business travelers.

Surround your attendees with sophisticated technology, flawless service and endless inspiration. Our 18 meeting rooms hosted in over 60,000 sq. ft. of total function space — including a 10,000 sq. ft. Grand Ballroom, 20,000 sq. ft. outdoor terrace and on-site exhibition space — set the standard for innovation. After a high-powered day of meetings, your attendees will enjoy Marston’s Café, ICON Lounge, a heated outdoor pool, fitness center and the comfort of our stylish guestrooms.

Set in the heart of the business and entertainment districts, the Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel is the ideal starting point for exploring the arts, local culture, sports and a myriad of dining and entertainment venues. Through expert, personalized concierge service, our Renaissance Navigators will ensure your attendees discover the best hidden treasures to savor, sip, shop and see.

Rediscover meetings excellence at the Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel. To book your next meeting visit renaissancephoenixdowntown.com

Discover our introductory group offer by contacting william.stratton@renaissancehotels.com.
The great debate over what would become known as strategic meetings management (SMMC) began more than a decade ago as a conversation about cost savings and a theoretical best practice then called “meetings consolidation.”

Since then, SMMC has become a cause célèbre — and gone on to become a genuine conundrum for many organizations and meeting planners trying to wrestle it into submission. The reason: the actual implementation of a strategic meetings management program (SMMC) is nowhere near as simple as it was at first thought to be. At the same time, however, no one disputes the critical importance of SMMC’s underlying intent. The issue now is simply one of the will and resources required for real success.

“We’ve been working on this for more than five years,” says Christine Gorham, CMP, CGMP, SMMC, senior manager, meeting services, at global consultancy Booz Allen Hamilton in Herndon, VA. She and her seven-person team plan 75–100 meetings each year. “And I always say we’re moving in the right direction because we’re moving forward.”

That said, Gorham quickly adds that the SMMC process has been more challenging — and at times frustratingly daunting — than she or anyone else at Booz Allen Hamilton ever foresaw going in. “We spend so much time trying to make sure that we’re researching all possible avenues and making the right decisions and that everything is perfect, rather than just saying, ‘we’re going to move forward in whatever ways we can,’ Gorham says.

“Otherwise, you spend a lot of time just to get people onboard and your plan lapses. You just have to push forward, even if you don’t have a perfect solution. You just have to forge ahead,” she adds.

Gorham holds one of the first Strategic Meetings Management Certifications (SMMC), the professional development certification program from the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA). (Note: The GBTA recently discontinued the SMMC as a separate designation. Nowadays, the SMMC, along with the CCE and CGTE designations, is equivalent to the “Manager” certificate program level of the newly created GBTA Academy.)

Such relative inefficiencies and potential frustrations as outlined by Gorham are a natural result of the way SMMC expanded onto the scene as a hot topic more than five years ago.

“What we’ve done as an industry is create a business model, a best practice model,” says Mike Malinchok, an SMMC pioneer whose work dates back a decade to the top executive that’s inception at what’s now the GBTA and his role as an early member of the former National Business Travel Association’s (NBTA) Groups and Meetings Committee — for whom Malinchok co-authored its first white paper on the subject. “And we’ve created a lot of publicity around SMMC that has created a lot of misperception, a lot of confusion and a lot of complexity.”

As a result, a few years ago Malinchok launched Newtown, PA-based S2K Consulting, which advises corporate clients on the implementation of SMMC. “One of the first things I talk to a client about is the fact that you have to break this down,” says Malinchok, who taught the inaugural GBTA SMMC course in 2010. “It’s not rocket science. But for most companies, implementing SMMC is not one of the core competencies of the organization.”

SMMC 101

Despite its genesis as a cost-cutting discipline, SMMC today offers three additional important benefits, says Malinchok. They are visibility into meeting activity, risk mitigation and the driving of compliance. “And,” says Malinchok, “there is no company out there that doesn’t want cost savings, visibility into the category, risk mitigation and the driving of compliance.”

Every company wants all four of those things today. But the key is the prioritization of those benefits for your individual organization.” Only then can the expected benefits be realized really just as the theoretical, Malinchok says.

Given the mere promise of such clear-cut benefits, more and more companies of all sizes and shapes are now beginning to move SMMC from the talking stage to the action stage.

“Our implementation of SMMC is finally starting to take place,” says Linda McNairy, vice president, strategic partner management at StarCite, part of Active Network, in Indianapolis, IN.

Like Malinchok, McNairy was on the SMMC train from day one. She is a past chair of the GBTA Groups and Meetings Committee and headed the committee addressing the development of an SMMC maturity model. “We’re seeing more and more corporate organizations starting to get going and implement it at some level. But that said, our data tells us that less than 20 percent of all meetings within the average organization are currently being managed within the basic parameters of SMMC.”

Meanwhile, no one knows for sure what percentage of companies have begun adoption of SMMC. Research from GBTA suggests that only about one-third are actually engaged with SMMC — at any stage. However, says McNairy, the financial crisis and unprecedented scrutiny of the meetings industry over the past few years have been catalysts for more interest in SMMC. “When planners were asked to account for and report on what meetings were taking place and what they were costing, many organizations realized they had no method to do that,” McNairy says.

“So that gave a lot of organizations the impetus to say, ‘We’re going to have to do something about that.’”

On top of that, she says, additional regulatory requirements in certain categories have forced many companies to face reality that they needed a formal process for accounting, payment/expense reconciliation, and other compliance. “For meeting planners,” says McNairy, “the days of just doing what you want are gone.”

Challenges and Obstacles

As a now-famous — if not infamous — element of the high-profile rollout of the SMMC concept to the meetings industry, GBTA created an “SMMC wheel” that included seven essential components of a fully realized SMMC initiative — regulation of the meeting or event, approval, sourcing/procurement, planning/execution, payment/expense reconciliation, data analysis/reporting and technology.

Instead of inspiring enthusiasm and participation, however, to a large extent the daunting requirements and complex tasks lurking beneath the surface of the simple language of the steps required caused many organizations and planners to fold their SMMC tent before it was even pitched. “Everybody wanted to be able to just flip a switch, or have just one kind of initiative, and put that model perfectly in place,” says McNairy.

“But the reality,” she concludes, “is that trying to boil the ocean. You just can’t do it in a short amount of time. So people became intimidated. They saw what they thought was perfection, but they couldn’t see a path for how to get there. That’s often the ultimate point of perfection.”

As a result, hoped-for compliance fell to an unanticipated resistance — from both meeting hosts and planners at many companies.

“I think the biggest challenge for most companies is the whole concept of change management,” says Wendy Dell, CMP, MCM, director, business development, strategic meetings management, in the Atlanta office of Chicago-based BCD Meetings & Incentives, an inde-
The Myths of SMMP

One of the key reasons why SMMP has turned out to be so hard to implement has been the mythology that swirls around it. A spokesperson from technology provider Cvent, VA, has identified misperceptions that often stall forward motion:

SMMP is too complex and hard to implement. Although SMMP does contain many different components, it is not complex. The secret to keeping SMMP simple is to approach it one step at a time — by following a defined path and dividing the project into phases. Another essential truth is that there is “one” SMMP solution. Each organization’s journey toward and through SMMP will be unique to that organization’s overall goals, structure, culture and capacity for change.

SMMP is too expensive. Although considerable upfront investments are often common, today there are options that allow for the adoption of SMMP practices with minimal initial investment. In addition, although SMMP technology may require an initial investment, the efficiencies and business automation advantages provided will quickly justify the expenditure. The bottom-line fact is that with an average savings of 10–15 percent actually realized in the first two years of SMMP implementation, the savings opportunities cannot be overstated.

SMMP only works for large organizations. The core principles of SMMP such as centralization, each meeting registration and data consolidation, deliver real value to organizations of all sizes. In fact, smaller, less diverse companies may see quicker success and incur fewer roadblocks due to their size. Smaller companies can capitalize on the research, best practices and resources from sources such as GBTA, the Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE) or Meeting Planners International (MPI).

Technology is the silver bullet. Despite the fact that a range of SMMP solutions have cropped up in response to ever-increasing demand, not one of them can effortlessly and painlessly implement SMMP Technology alone cannot decide the overarching strategy and goals for an SMMP initiative. Nor can it define an organization’s meeting policy or create meeting management processes, decide what data should be tracked or define reports and validate return on investment. What SMMP Technology can do is create a framework for achieving organizational SMMP strategy and goals, and facilitate adoption of the organization’s meeting policy and procedures.

Defining Best Practices

Given the sometimes rocky road to a designation organization once thought easily accessible, it’s not surprising that any realistic idea of what’s actually possible in the near term has been downsized considerably after all the early hoopla about SMMP.

One current trend, says Dell — another of the first recipients of the SMMC designation — is that more companies are focusing on a preferred-supplier program that limits expenditures to certain hotel brands or types of properties, as well as other formal partners such as venues, rental and catering providers. While retroactively tracking costs is very difficult if not impossible, implementing and enforcing a preferred-supplier program is advantageous.

She and two other meeting planners, as well as a trade show manager, execute approximately 50 meetings a year.

Like countless other companies and planners, She and her colleagues have learned that tracking meeting expenditures is much more complex and difficult than it seems at first. That’s because what are loosely called “meeting budgets” are, in reality, dispersed throughout virtually every department, from the specific one for that meeting to a special events budget that covers the opening night reception or charity golf tournament, or expenses incurred per person by a meeting planner or attendee, then reimbursed as a T&E expense.

Therefore, the once quaint notion of accounting for every penny of annual meeting spend has given way to the bruising reality that such accuracy might be virtually impossible.

Last year, to solve that riddle, Hunter, her colleagues worked with Mentor’s procurement department on tech applications that would allow them to track and monitor planned expenses before they actually occurred. They also deployed the Cvent SMMP technology platform. In addition, as part of the overall effort to rein in and account for all meeting costs, Hunt and Mentor’s other meeting planners use a captive meeting credit card. Such cards are now available under the auspices of American Express, Visa and MasterCard.

One key best practice is represent-
“Disney” has you thinking “theme park,” think again. Disney has Hawaiian sense of place. All of the artwork throughout the re-
tural design, landscaping, art and music, convey an authentic
the authors of the story. Instead, they’re helping the Hawaiian
telling expertise to create a gathering place that authentically
honors and embraces the Hawaiian culture. For once, they’re not
people tell their own story of their history and culture.

Say Aloha to Aulani
Hawaii’s newest meeting and incentive property is Aulani, a
Disney Resort & Spa, which opened last year on 21 acres of
oceanfront property in the Ko Olina area on Oahu. If the name
Disney” has you thinking “theme park,” think again. Disney has
done something truly unique here by using its extensive story-
telling expertise to create a gathering place that authentically
honors and embraces the Hawaiian culture. For once, they’re not
the authors of the story. Instead, they’re helping the Hawaiian
people tell their own story of their history and culture.

To accomplish this, Disney “Imagineers” worked closely with
Hawaiian cultural advisors and other local experts to ensure that
every element, from how the buildings are sited to the architec-
tural design, landscaping, art and music, convey an authentic
Hawaiian sense of place. All of the artwork throughout the re-
sort was created by Hawaiian artists, and guests are immersed in
Hawaiian culture at virtually every turn.

The resort offers 359 guest rooms and suites along with 481
vacation villas, all housed in two 16-story towers. Nestled be-
tween the towers is a recreation area called Waikolohoe Valley
which is lushly landscaped and contains pools, whirlpools and
water play areas that include a lazy river. It was inspired by the
boyhood experiences of Joe Rohde, senior vice president and
creative executive for Walt Disney Imagineering, who grew up
near Waikiki. Aulani also features 50,000 sf of meeting space
and the full-service Laniwai Spa.

Justin Ball, who is in operations with a Colorado-based IT
consulting firm, planned his company’s annual general meet-
ing at Aulani. The event drew more than 950 attendees, in-
cluding spouses, significant others and immediate family.
Approximately 300 of the guests, including the majority of the
company’s VIPs, stayed at Aulani, while the remaining guests
stayed at an adjacent property.

The group used Aulani’s facilities for multiple events. “From
the pool area, to the conference event center and beach, our
events at Aulani ranged from 100 to 1,000 guests,” Ball explains.

“Aulani’s proximity to Honolulu International Airport (17 miles)
and all the resources on Oahu are a meeting planner’s dream,” he
notes. “The resorts of Ko Olina gave us everything we wanted in
a Hawaiian destination that we thought was only available on
the outer islands: Lush gardens, quiet sandy beaches, amazing
wildlife and picturesque mountains all surrounded us, but with all the conveniences of staying on Oahu.

“Our attendees had a phenomenal time during the annual
general meeting and raved about the service they received from
the staff at Aulani,” he continues. “They showed us what it meant
to be a part of their ohana (family) and bask in their aloha spirit.
Their banquet team is one of the most innovative I have worked
with in the world, and for being a new resort, Disney has worked
its magic to present a very established property.”

Oahu’s North Shore a Natural Choice
Victoria Brumfield, executive director of the NYC-based
sports marketing and events firm Korff Enterprises Inc., has
found that Turtle Bay resort on Oahu’s North Shore is the
ideal site for an event that she plans for the grocery retailer
Foodland. It’s the Give Aloha Golf Program that raises funds
for Hawaii non-profit organizations. The event attracted 400
attendees this year.

Located on 840 oceanfront acres on Oahu’s legendary North
Shore, Turtle Bay offers 375 guest rooms, 26 suites and 42 beach
cottages. The resort’s Pacific Rim Conference Center has 31,000
sf of flexible event space, including two ballrooms.

The recreational amenities at Turtle Bay are extensive. Guests
have unlimited access to two golf courses that form the island’s
only 36-hole championship facility. The Arnold Palmer Course
surrounds a 100-acre wetland preserve, and the George Fazio
Course offers generous fairways combined with deep bunkers.
Turtle Bay also offers a golf academy and surfing school
along with a host of other outdoor activities that include 12
miles of oceanfront hiking trails, kayaking, moped rentals and
Segway tours. It is also the only resort that offers helicopter
tours that depart and return onsite. Guests can also opt to
indulge in spa treatments at Spa Lurana.

“Our program is a combination of island-based and main-
land food vendors and manufacturers,” Brumfield explains.

“Turtle Bay resort is you get a captive small island experience with the convenience of Honolulu being an
hour’s drive away. It’s close enough for the locals that they can have their kids come up after soccer on Saturday. It’s conve-
ient enough that a mainland person can fly in from California for the weekend.”

Another popular meeting property on Oahu is the 2,860-
room Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikiki Beach Resort, which re-
cently completed a $45 million renovation of its Rainbow Tower.
All 800 rooms in the iconic tower, known for its colorful mosaic
mural, received a total makeover, including furnishings, carpet-
gr, draperies and bathrooms. The beachfront resort offers more
than 150,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space.

Kicking Back on Kauai
The Kauai Marriott Resort was the site of a highly success-
ful incentive program planned by Margaret Grobisen, director,
recognition and inspiration for Kforce Service Corporation
based in Tampa, FL.

The luxury resort, which recently completed a $50 million
renovation of its guest rooms, restaurants and pool area, is lo-
cated on Kalapaki Beach just three miles from Lihue Airport in
Kauai. The hotel features 345 guest rooms, 11 suites and more
than 27,500 sf of meeting space, along with 18 holes of Jack
Nicklaus-designed golf.

“We have about 250 employees who attend, and they are all

Our favorite space was the restaurant outlet ‘Ama ‘Ama. Its open-air concept and Hawaiian oceanfront views gave
life to professional breakfast meetings, casual lunches and
formal celebration dinners. The outlet’s design tells the sto-
ry of a family fishing house (house) that has grown through
the generations, so you can enjoy a unique ambiance in
each of its four seating areas. Of course, the primary venue
we used daily was the amazing white sand beach and la-
goo. This flat-water (read: family friendly) lagoon was the
hub for VIP cabana experiences, beach recreation, a live concert
venue and our many attempts at standing up on a paddleboard!”

Ball’s group took advantage of the children’s amenities at Aulani, which include Aunty’s Beach House, a state-of-the-art
5,200 sf venue where kids ages 3 to 12 can have fun learning
about Hawaiian culture, art and music. “The idea of a traditional
kids club is turned on its head with Aunty’s Beach House,” Ball
notes. “Parents had the perfect excuse to make the most of the
property while kids enjoyed this free amenity.”

Ball also appreciated the resort’s convenient location.

For once, they’re not

Time and time again, planners have found that offering
attendees their own piece of paradise in the Aloha State is a
surefire way to get them to sit up and take notice, meet their
sales goals or do whatever else it takes to make the trip. After
all, what’s not to love about stunning tropical landscapes, a wide
range of adventures and attractions, and a rich cultural heri-
tage that can’t be experienced anywhere else? It’s those qualities,
along with the islands’ famous welcoming spirit of aloha that
makes attendees want to keep coming back.

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Kauai “feels like the most Hawaiian of the islands that I looked at. It’s the way you want Hawaii to be.”

Margaret Grobisen
Director, Recognition & Inspiration
Kforce Service Corporation, Tampa, FL

invited to bring guests, and then many people brought additional guests,” Grobisen explains. “Based on previous destinations that we’ve gone to, this is the highest we’ve ever had in terms of people bringing additional guests. We actually had 91 children with us. In my opinion, that really speaks to how family-oriented the destination is.”

The resort’s bayfront location added to its appeal. “There’s no such thing as a private beach in Hawaii, but this just felt intimate, which is what we were looking for,” she states. “We were looking for a property where people could all be together, where they’re not going to be lost on the property.” She noted that it also certainly didn’t hurt that the Kauai Marriott has the largest single-level outdoor pool in the state.

A company named Kauai Beach Boys operates a business on-site that offers equipment rentals and lessons for water sports that include surfing, paddleboarding and snorkeling. They even offer something called the SUPsquatch, which is a seven-person paddleboard. “We bought them out for the whole time that we were there,” Grobisen explains, “and we had them bring in extra boards so our people could do unlimited beach activities, including lessons. They had more than enough equipment for us.” She added that this arrangement encouraged many people to try activities that they may not have booked on their own. “Their children were able to try these activities, too,” she adds. “There was no cost to them.”

Kforce will return to the Kauai Marriott in 2013. “Our people just loved it. They prefer beach destinations, and they want to be relaxed and comfortable. One thing I would say about that particular property is that the staff genuinely has that Hawaiian friendliness and spirit,” she continues. “Following on the heels of the successful beach activity program, Grobisen is lining up different excursions for the group to enjoy next year. These include rafting, tubing, horseback riding and kayaking. "I think we had to narrow it down to seven excursions," she explains. "There were so many to choose from that were really unique.”

Also located on Kauai, the Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort & Spa completed a major revamp of all 802 of its guest rooms last year, including new furniture, décor and bathrooms, and is now re-doing its 37 suites. The resort offers 20,000 sf of indoor event space and an additional 45,000 sf of function space outdoors. It is also home to the 45,000 sf Anara Spa and is located adjacent to the 18-hole Puipu Bay Golf Course, which was renovated in 2010 (four closing holes play atop a 150-foot sea cliff).

Grobisen summed up her successful experience on Kauai. “To me, it feels like the most Hawaiian of the islands that I looked at. It’s the way you want Hawaii to be.” Her program produced the exact results she was looking for: “Our employees are really happy.” And, they can’t wait to return to Kauai next April.

New and Notable
Cruising: You might call it a Hawaiian Sampler Package, but what better way for a group to get a taste of all four of the Hawaiian Islands than by cruising the sapphire sea that links them? Norwegian Cruise Line’s Pride of America ship offers a seven-day round trip out of Honolulu every Saturday with ports of call in Maui (overnight), Hilo and Kona on the Big Island of Hawaii, and Kauai (overnight). Pride of America accommodates 1,138 guests double occupancy, and offers 38,000 sf of meeting space. Norwegian’s Freestyle Cruising concept allows dining at any time — no set reservation times required — so guests are free to sample the nightlife during overnights on Maui and Kauai.

Mai: Several Maui properties have recently completed renovation projects. The Sheraton Maui Resort and Spa invested $6.5 million to enhance all 508 of its guest rooms. The Makena Beach and Golf Resort wrapped up a multimillion-dollar upgrade of its 320 rooms and suites. The $500 million renewal project at The Westin Maui Resort and Spa focused on revitalizing its meeting experience by adding eco-friendly elements such as linen-free cocktail tables.

The Big Island: The Hapuna Beach Prince Hotel has invested $500 million to upgrade 96 of its luxury suites and oceanfront guest rooms. The upscale oceanfront hotel is located on the island’s sunny Kohala Coast and offers 350 guest rooms, more than 85,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space and 18 holes of golf designed by Arnold Palmer and Ed Seay. Transportation: GreenCar Hawaii is expanding its offerings of self-serve, electric vehicle rentals on the islands of Oahu and Kauai. The company also offers a green airport shuttle service for guests staying at the Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort and Spa.

Help for planners: The Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau’s website for meeting planners, www.businessaloha.com, includes an Added Value Resource Center. It lists hot rates and hot dates, special offers from DMCs, descriptions of complimentary services the bureau offers and special savings for groups. The site also includes details on corporate social responsibility projects that are available in Hawaii and on Hawaii-based speakers who can be booked for events.

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some of the best in the country. There are hotels at every price point for our people.
The space and amenities offered by the OCCC was another big reason for meeting in Orlando. Most of the meeting’s functions were held in the OCCC, which provided the technology the company needed. “Internet connectivity and bandwidth are growing issues for everybody,” says Katz. “Our needs are great. We have some online ordering processes that take a lot of connectivity. We also set up a closed-loop link back to our headquarters. The convention center is always easy to work with on those things.”

True Value looks forward to holding more meetings in Orlando. Says Katz, “It’s easy for us to go to Orlando, because our members know what it offers, and they are always anxious to go back.”

**Multiyear Meetings in Orlando**

Some companies like Orlando and its properties so much that they sign multiyear meeting deals to obtain even more value. Lawrenceville, GA-based TRIB Group Ltd., a buying cooperative for companies in the rent-to-own industry, negotiated a contract to meet for five consecutive years in Orlando from 2011 through 2015. The 2011 meeting was the TRIB Group’s first in Orlando. The company chose the Orlando World Center Marriott for its annual three-day, 400-attendee meeting and convention for store owners, employees, vendors and board members.

The TRIB Group selected the Orlando World Center because they could hold the entire event under one roof and take advantage of all the hotels’ space, amenities and services. The 200-acre property provides more than 2,000 guest rooms and suites, 450,000 sf of event space and the 18-hole Hawk’s Landing Golf Course. It’s a challenge to find a property that meets all of the meeting’s needs, says Rebecca Hinton, MSA, CMP, public relations and communications director for the TRIB Group. “We have a rather large golf course, and we have a property with a course or one nearby. Otherwise we have to bus them offsite and that drags the day. They also had the square footage to accommodate our space as well as the breakout space for our meetings and enough guest rooms. The AV staff and F&B staff are wonderful. This will be our second year, everything went even more smoothly because they know our group and were more attentive to what we need,” says Hinton.

**New, Renovated and Noteworthy**

Walt Disney World plans to open a new Four Seasons resort in 2014. The 444-room resort will feature about 38,000 sf of meeting and event space, a 14,000-sf spa, three pools and a fitness center. Another property, Disney’s new Art of Animation Resort, is opening its guest rooms in four phases this year. The resort and its guest rooms and suites feature themes, characters, sketches and iconic footage from the movies “Finding Nemo,” “The Lion King,” “Cars” and “The Little Mermaid.”

The first phase, “Finding Nemo,” opened in May with 320 suites. The 480 “Cars” suites opened in June, followed by 320...
“The Lion King” suites in August and 864 “The Little Mermaid” rooms in September. The resort’s 11,859-sf “Big Blue” pool is the largest at Walt Disney World Resort. Meanwhile, in Downtown Disney, a two-story, 50,000-sf bowling alley named Splitsville will open this fall. Splitsville will combine hip and retro design elements and offer live entertainment, billiard tables and outdoor seating. Splitsville is available for corporate events.

Universal Parks & Resorts and Loews Hotels & Resorts will build the Cabana Bay Beach Resort on a 37-acre site within Universal Orlando Resort and adjacent to Universal’s Islands of Adventure. Site work will begin soon on the development’s multiple buildings, which will include 900 standard guest rooms and 900 family suites. The new resort is scheduled to open in 2014.

Earlier this year, the Sheraton Safari Hotel and suites announced a $24 million makeover and name change. The name of the renovated property will be Sheraton Lake Buena Vista Resort. The project includes the property’s 490 guest rooms, restaurant and 20,000 sf of event and meeting space. The project also includes a new ballroom, spa and fitness center.

Hilton offers a number of choices for groups. Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek and the adjacent Waldorf Astoria Orlando provide a total of 1,500 guest rooms and 150,000 sf of meeting space, including ballrooms. The Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek alone offers 1,000 guest rooms and 122,000 sf of meeting space, including two grand ballrooms and the Tropical Terrace, which overlooks native palm trees. Meeting space also includes the 13,000-sf Lakes Conference Center and the 20,000-sf Oceans Conference Center.

Both groups seeking traditional elegance may consider The Peabody Orlando. The property has been a mainstay of Orlando’s meeting and convention industry since opening in 1986. Connected to the OCCC via covered walkway, the Peabody Orlando includes 364 guest rooms and 30,000 sf of modern meeting space. There also is a 22,000-sf spa, a fitness center and 10 dining and entertainment choices. The Peabody is now accepting reservations for the Lofts at The Peabody — its brand new boutique experience. The Lofts comprises 52 rooms located within three private-access floors in the Mallard Tower. Each guest room is luxuriously appointed with premium comfort items such as plush blankets, robes and slippers, and upgraded bath amenities featuring spa-inspired and aromatherapy products.

The Loft also features a private lounge furnished with spacious seating and contemporary décor, and a daily wine reception.

The Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Resort is a premiere meeting facility that offers 2,265 guest rooms and more than 529,000 sf of meeting space, including 150,500 sf of contiguous convention/exhibit space and four ballrooms. Amenities include 17 restaurants and lounges, the new Mandara Spa, golf and five pools. Groups also have the option to break out into the meeting edge of Disney Event Productions. Florida’s largest independent hotel chain, Rosen Hotels & Resorts, operates three convention Orlando properties. Their meeting with the Rosen Centre Hotel, Rosen Centre Hotel and Rosen Plaza Hotel. The Rosen Plaza recently reno- vated its 800 guest rooms, hallways and hospitality suites. Located next to the Orlando Convention Center, the Rosen Plaza offers 60,000 sf of meeting space, including 22 meeting rooms and a 26,000 sf ballroom. The Rosen Centre Hotel renovated its 1,354 guest rooms, Grand Lobby, hospitality suites and more. Located just minutes from Walt Disney World Resort, the Rosen Centre Hotel offers more than 105,000 sf of meeting space, including two ballrooms and 33 meeting rooms. The 1,500-room Rosen Shingle Creek boasts 445,000 sf of meeting space, including 99 meeting rooms, 100,000 sf of prefunction space and three ballrooms.

The Rosen Shingle Creek’s meeting space appealed to Navistar International Corporation, a Lafe, IL-based manufacturer with every turn our focus on the brand and the customer. The 2012 Rosen Shingle Creek hosted 2,000 Navistar employees, executi- ees, managers and dealers for education sessions, meetings and an exposition as part of the company’s three-day annual Navistar Parts Expo. Attendees hailed from about 40 countries.

Navistar selected the Rosen Shingle Creek primarily because it could comfortably contain every single function of the meeting. The size and layout of the meeting space perfectly matched the meeting’s needs, says Kathy Miller, president and chief cre- ative officer of Total Event Resources, a meeting and event plan- ning company based in Chicago. “Breakout space is a huge need for education sessions about parts and services. We needed a space that wasn’t a small room that ranged between 30 and 150 people. We worked in tandem with the Rosen, giving them our needs, times and dates. They helped us make sure that each breakout space was the best one for that particular session,” says Miller.

The stores of Seven Seas Lagoon frame Disney’s Grand Floridian Resort & Spa, the Victorian-style flagship hotel of Walt Disney World Resort.

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Continued from previous page

had for a U.S. event. With over 16,000 people total at the convention and over 9,000 (9,317) people deciding to spend the evening with us at Universal Orlando, I would say we went beyond what we even thought was imaginable.

C&IT What about food and beverage? Anything ex-

Continued on page 48
Value and service were also considerations. “Rosen was will- ing to provide concessions in F&B, Internet access and attrition. They showed that they really valued the business. And they cer- tainly have a great team, from the salesperson to the meeting and convention A services person who was with us from the begin- ning. They are very solution-oriented,” says Miller.

She cites an example of the Rosen staff’s on-the-spot at- tention to detail: “We had a lot of buses providing transporta-

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**C&IT** Did you face challenges while at the destina- tion? More specifically related to crisis management?

**Miller** McDonald’s and Universal Orlando worked collaboratively to put safety and security plans in place months before the event, and luckily we did not have to use any of them.

**C&IT** What was the overall attendee reaction and feedback about the event and location?

**Miller** Our guests were so excited when they found out that they were going to Universal’s Islands of Adventure again and that they would get an exclusive experience in the island, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter. We were getting calls months before the event was even announced, voicing hopes that Mc- Donald’s would take them back to this fabulous Orlando venue so we listened to our audience, weighed all our venue options and in the end made the perfect decision. The decision was the right one, because our guests left that evening with smiles on their faces and amazing memories in their hearts.

**C&IT** How well do you think meeting at this venue helped to train/motivate/reward your attendees?

**Miller** Universal Orlando, in partnership with the planning team at McDonald’s, I believe developed an evening that made our guests feel proud and motivated to work at McDonald’s and to go back home and try even harder to make McDonald’s customers feel as valued and happy as they were that enchanted April 25th night.

**C&IT** What advice would you offer to other planners who may be considering this destination?

**Miller** The advice I would give to other planners working with this property and this staff is that if you set goals, challenge the team on anything and appreciate their wealth of knowledge and expertise they have to offer, there is no reason why someone else’s event could not be as wonderfully successful as ours was.

**C&IT** Would you plan an event at this site again?

**Miller** I would most definitely plan another event at Universal Orlando. Our guests love these theme parks and what they have to offer. They have a wonderful, professional staff working in a great venue that makes you leave there with nothing less than a smile from cheek to cheek. **C&IT** What venues are more unique than Orlando’s wide assort- ment of theme parks? Attractions such as Universal Orlando Resort, Walt Disney World Resort and SeaWorld provide truly unique meeting spaces and jaw-dropping entertainment for small and large groups.

Universal Orlando Resort is home to two theme parks — Universal Studios and Universal’s Islands of Adventure — the Universal CityWalk entertainment complex, and three AAA Four Diamond on-site hotels: Loews Portofino Bay Hotel, the Hard Rock Hotel and the Loews Royal Pacific Resort. These three world-class hotels offer more than 133,000 sf of combined meeting space, dining and diverse venues. Attendees staying onsite will enjoy an exclusive package of theme park benefits and perks. Planners can choose from incredible backdrops such as the pre- historic jungles of Jurassic Park, Marvel’s biggest superheroes, and the shops of Hogmeade in The Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Universal Studios, real, working film and TV produc- tion facility with an array of rides, shows, movie sets and at- tractions as well as themed dining options and unique meeting spaces such as the Universal Music Plaza and stage. Universal CityWalk features one-of-a-kind themed venues with unique menus, live entertainment and all night excitement. Planners can buy out a restaurant for an evening reception or the whole complex for a massive block party.

Walt Disney World Resort offers a stunning array of options. These include the Magic Kingdom, Pleasure Island and Epcot, Disney’s Hollywood Studios, Typhoon Lagoon and Disney’s Animal Kingdom. Groups also can enjoy pampering spa ser- vices at Disney’s Saratoga Springs Resort and Disney’s Grand Floridian Resort & Spa. Walt Disney World Resort also has golf, fishing, tennis and horseback riding, and the new Exotic Driving Experience at Walt Disney World Speedway.

Islands of Adventure and Universal Studios are the two popular theme parks at Universal Orlando Resort (see page 45). Visitors also have a choice of more than 60 retail outlets, some of which are located at the 30-acre Universal CityWalk.

SeaWorld captivates visitors with marine animals, shows, exhibits and attractions. Opportunities include Ports of Call, a ban- quet venue that accommodates groups of 100 to 750 people. Ports of Call also has a 12,000-sf ballroom divisible into three segments. SeaWorld also provides a teambuilding program that accommodates up to 250 people.

One of the highlights of the TRIB Group’s meeting was the fi- nal-night cocktail hour, dinner and entertainment at SeaWorld.

“We bused the group to SeaWorld. We had music throughout the reception from SeaWorld’s bands. We pretty much had the run of an area of the park, where we utilized the different attrac- tions and had access to the aquarium area and saw a Dolphin show,” says Hinton.

Hinton chose SeaWorld after considering several options with their Rosen representative. “The CVB helped with the RFP process and with finding a venue close to the hotel that fit my group and budget. They followed me through the process to answer questions and intermediate any is- sues. We considered about 20 venues before whittling it down to maybe five. We chose SeaWorld primarily because of its proximity to the hotel and the variety of entertainment options,” says Hinton.

Visit Orlando recently launched a new marketing campaign to showcase the area’s diverse dining, entertainment and other “after meeting” options for the national meetings and conventions market. Fine dining in Orlando was put on the Orlando culinary scene. The Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex, just a short drive from Orlando, offers exciting programs for groups. The center, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this month, has two rare tour opportunities on tap: For the first time in more than 30 years, NASA is allowing guests inside the Launch Control Center and inside the 525-foot-tall Vehicle Assembly Building. In addition, the space shuttle Atlantis will be featured in a mul- timillion-dollar exhibit expected to open in July 2013.

Corporate meeting attendees looking to hit the greens will find about 200 options in Orlando. Options include Walt Disney World Resort’s golf courses including the Palm Golf Course, the Osprey Ridge Golf Course, Lake Buena Vista Golf Course and the Oak Trail Golf Course. The Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate offers 36 holes of Greg Norman-designed golf – the International Course and the National Course. World-class golf is just one of many reasons why Orlando continues to be a magnet for meetings and conventions world- wide. Never a destination to rest on its laurels, Orlando con- stantly seeks to increase its appeal. That’s why the city continues to invest in new attractions, hotels and more, says Ruzier. It’s a strategy that appeals to meeting planners. “The city is constant- ly changing and adding new opportunities. It is a great place to take people and then return because they always experience a new Orlando,” says Kats.
The Omni Bedford Springs Resort & Spa, Bedford Springs, PA, has named Jeffery Rudder as director of sales and marketing. He previously served as director of sales at Turning Stone Resort & Casino in Verona, NY.

The Broadmoor has named Maureen Carter as sales manager responsible for the Western region including Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Nevada, Alaska and Hawaii. She most recently served as The Broadmoor’s executive meeting manager.

Michael J. Mustafa was named director of sales and marketing for The Hilton Anaheim, Anaheim, CA. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing at the Hilton Orange County/Costa Mesa, Costa Mesa, CA.

Steven DeFelice was named director of sales and marketing for Hotel Contessa, San Antonio, TX. He was previously director of sales and marketing for Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa near Albuquerque, NM.

John G. Oakley was named director of sales and marketing for Swissôtel Chicago. He most recently served as director of sales at The Westin Galleria & Westin Oaks in Houston, TX.

The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club, Naples, FL, has named Megan Wells as sales manager, responsible for the New Jersey, Pennsylvania and South Central regions. She previously served as sales manager at Embassy Suites in Grapevine, TX.
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