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# AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2013 ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

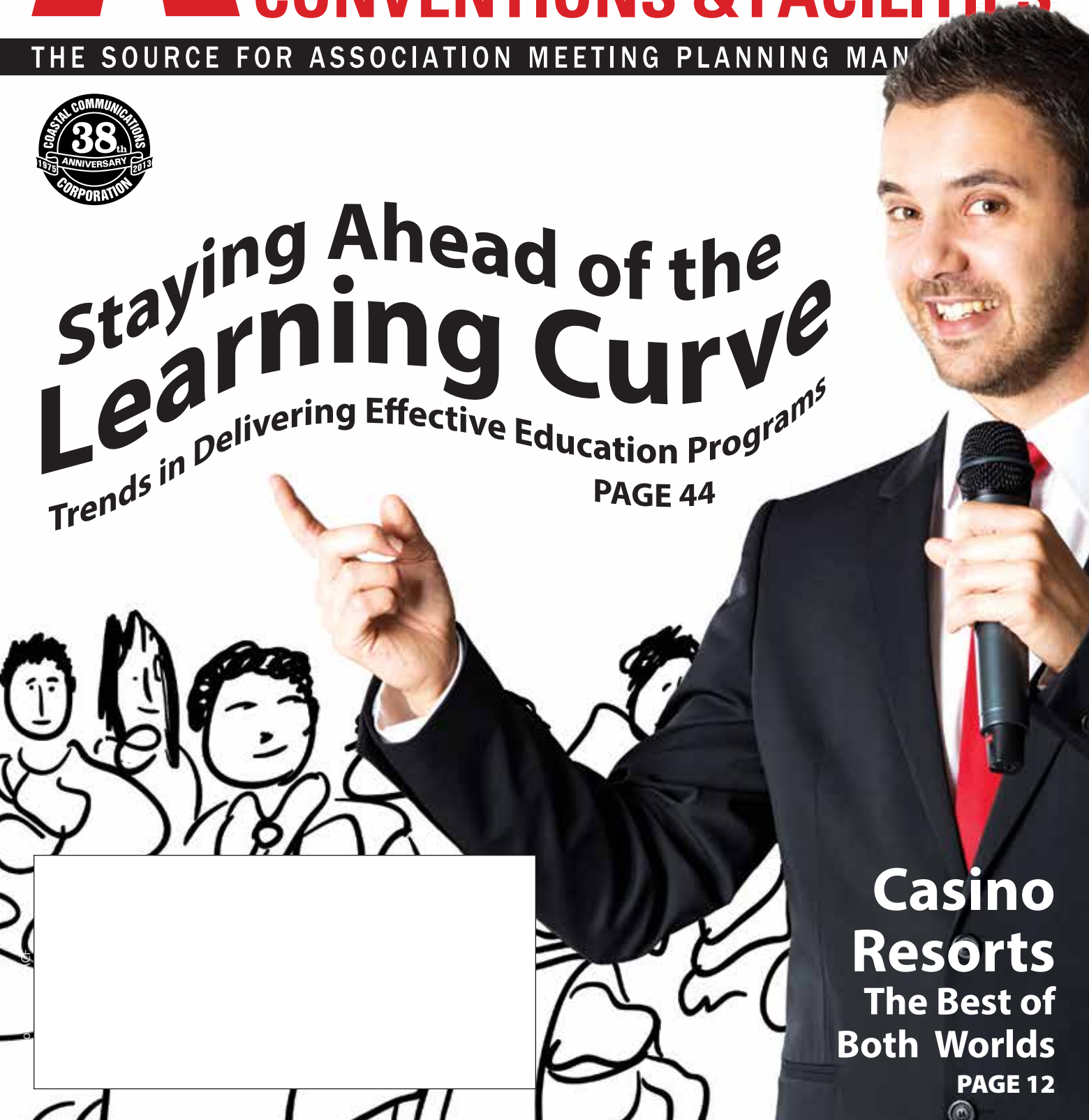
THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MAN



## Staying Ahead of the Learning Curve

Trends in Delivering Effective Education Programs

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**Casino  
Resorts**  
The Best of  
Both Worlds

PAGE 12



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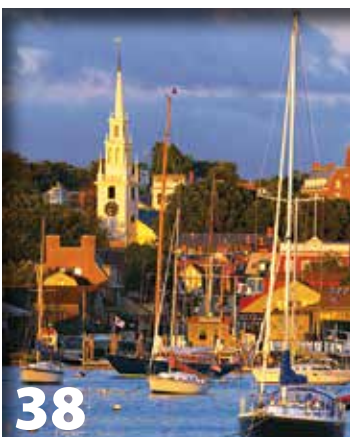
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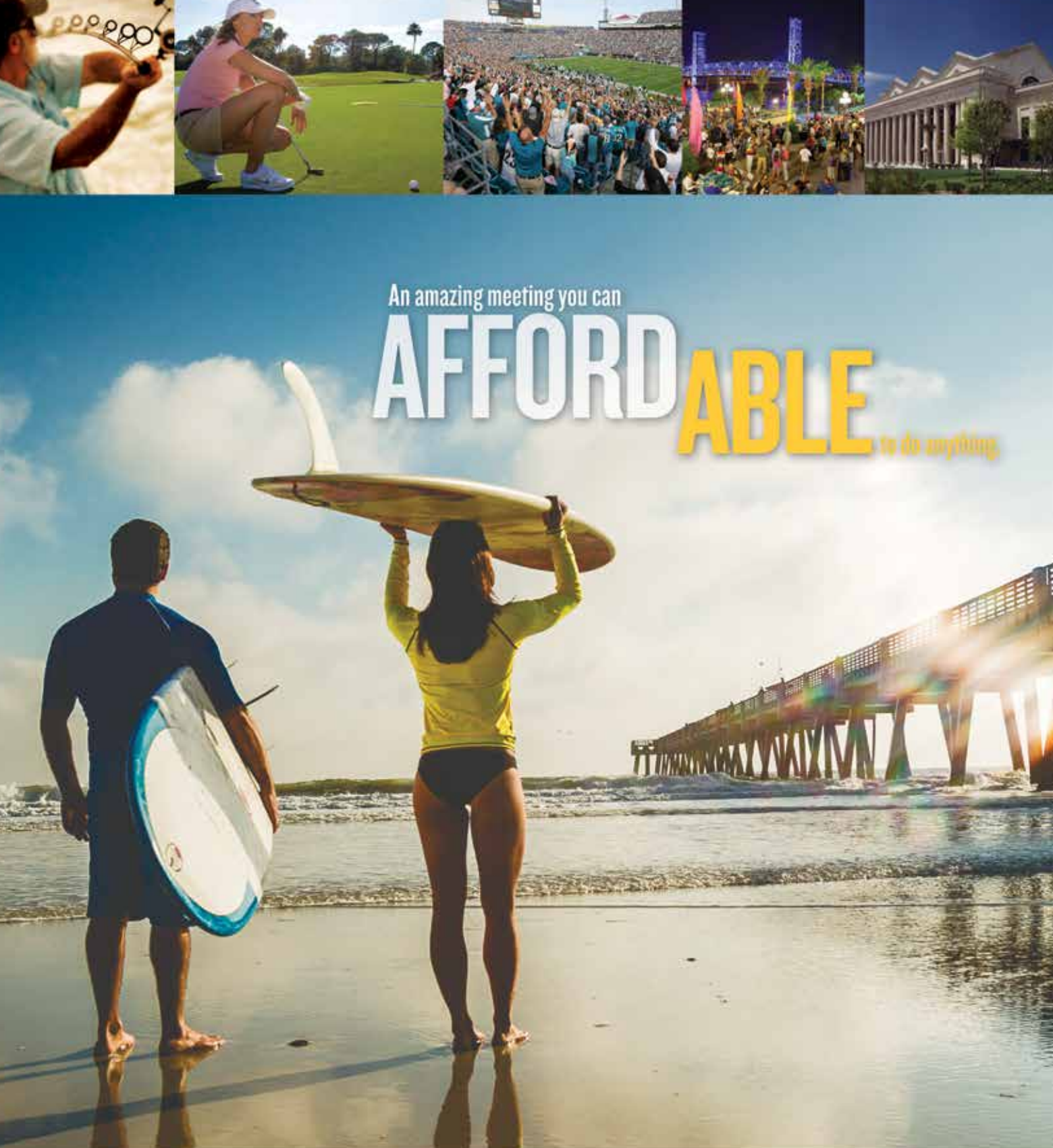
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## Never Stop Learning

"Education is one of the most valuable things an association can provide, and it is what their members tend to value the most," says Amy Ledoux, CMP, CAE, senior vice president, meetings and expositions for ASAE in our cover story. The high attendance recorded at ASAE's recent Annual Meeting and Exposition is proof of the power of live learning: More than 5,400 association professionals and industry partners traveled to Atlanta for the meeting, which featured 120 education sessions and executive-level courses offering cutting-edge solutions, trends and tactics. "We had our highest number of association executives in five years, which demonstrates the value of professional development and face-to-face meetings," said ASAE President and CEO John H. Graham IV, CAE, in a statement. "Throughout the conference, we had terrific speakers, a variety of high-quality content that members found valuable, and attendees that were raving about the entire experience." In this fast-changing world, nothing is more important to career and business success than staying ahead of the learning curve. As such, associations put their money where their ROI is: According to ASAE's 2012 Associations Matters report, "The average trade association spent nearly \$1.2 million on program activity in 2009 – which includes publications, conferences, seminars and other forms of education and \$66,400 on lobbying activity. ...In comparison, the average professional society spent \$1,498,150 on program activity and \$65,085 on lobbying activity."

In our feature "Staying Ahead of the Learning Curve" on page 44, association meeting professionals offer program advice from the field. Amy Ledoux relates that members are demanding "just-in-time" knowledge: "Just-in-time programming takes more time and research but it draws in attendees because it is information available nowhere else." Mary Pat Cornett, CAE, CMP, says, "Listen to people with crazy ideas. Some of them are a glimpse into the future." Heather Rhoderick, CMP, MBA, advises "reading industry publications, mining social media sites and talking to your members." Continue reading our story for more great insights on delivering the best education programs, a crucial revenue source for every association.

Speaking of "the best," learn which CVBs, convention centers, and hotels and resorts earned your vote as 2013 Distinctive Achievement Award-winners on page 18.

*Harvey Grotsky*

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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**PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
Harvey Grotsky  
cccpublisher@att.net

**GROUP PUBLISHER**  
Arthur Hyman  
cccgrouppublisher@att.net

**CREATIVE DIRECTOR**  
Mitch D. Miller  
cccartdirector@att.net

**MANAGING EDITORS**  
Susan W. Fell  
ccceditor1@att.net  
Susan S. Gregg  
ccceditor2@att.net

**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS**  
Michael Bassett  
Karen Brost  
John Buchanan  
Timothy Herrick  
Stella Johnson  
Derek Reveron  
Patrick Simms

**PRESIDENT & CEO**  
Harvey Grotsky

**VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS**  
David A. Middlebrook  
cccoperations@att.net

**ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES**  
2700 N. Military Trail, Suite 120  
Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394  
561-989-0600 Fax: 561-989-9509

**NORTHEAST**  
Jeffrey Posner  
516-594-2820 • Fax: 516-594-2826  
prijeff@aol.com

**FLORIDA/CARIBBEAN**  
Arthur Hyman  
561-989-0600, ext. 108 • Fax: 561-989-9509  
cccgrouppublisher@att.net

**MIDWEST/SOUTHWEST**  
561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509  
cccadvertising@att.net

**SOUTHEAST**  
561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509  
cccadvertising@att.net

**LOUISIANA**  
Arthur Hyman  
561-989-0600, ext. 108 • Fax: 561-989-9509  
cccgrouppublisher@att.net

**WEST**  
Marshall Rubin  
818-888-2407 • Fax: 818-888-4907  
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## DMAI Attracts a Record 1,325 Attendees



Michael D. Gehrisch, president and CEO of DMAI, welcomes a record number of attendees to the 2013 Annual Convention in Orlando, FL.

**WASHINGTON, DC** — Destination Marketing Association International's (DMAI) 2013 Annual Convention in Orlando, FL, attracted a record 1,325 attendees and generated more than \$2 million in direct spending to the Orlando economy. "We are delighted to have played a role in helping DMAI break their attendance record and host more attendees in 2013 than at any other time in the association's history," said George Aguel, Visit Orlando president and CEO. "It's always fun to welcome our industry peers to the most visited destination in the nation."

Michael D. Gehrisch, president and CEO of DMAI, said, "DMAI's Annual Convention demonstrates the real value of face-to-face meetings in terms of generating economic impact and jobs at the local level as well as inspiring more creative and productive professionals through education and networking."

During the convention, DMAI recognized the largest graduating class of Certified Destination Marketing Executives (CDME), with 23 professionals receiving their certification, along with 30 future leaders of the destination marketing industry selected to DMAI's 30 Under 30 program. Also, 19 destinations earned accreditation through the Destination Marketing Accreditation Program (DMAP), extending the global reach of the program with the accreditation of Guadalajara CVB and Leon CVB, Mexico; and Business Events Sydney, Australia.

"The record attendance and energy levels generated during the convention reflect the optimism within the DMO industry," said Gehrisch. "We had attendees from a record 336 destination marketing organizations at this year's convention. These organizations realized the value in being part of a community whose mission is to advocate for the professionalism, effectiveness and significance of destination marketing organizations worldwide." [www.destinationmarketing.org](http://www.destinationmarketing.org)

## Caesars Entertainment to Develop Horseshoe Baltimore

**LAS VEGAS, NV** — A groundbreaking ceremony was recently held to mark the start of construction on the \$400 million Horseshoe Baltimore by Caesars Entertainment. Completion of the full-service gaming and entertainment venue is expected in late 2014. Horseshoe Baltimore will feature an outward-facing urban casino design, three premier restaurants, several bars and restaurants, and a multipurpose entertainment space. The facility will offer approximately 7,670 sf of function space in addition to 4,615 sf of prefunction space. The venue will seat 500 guests for a reception or banquet, and 800 for a reception event. [www.cetmeetings.com](http://www.cetmeetings.com)

## Karolyn Kirchgesler Named Team San Jose CEO

**SAN JOSE, CA** — Team San Jose has named veteran industry executive Karolyn Kirchgesler as its new CEO, effective late September. Currently president and CEO of Visit Saint Paul, Kirchgesler recently completed a three-year term as board member for Destination



Kirchgesler

Marketing Association International. She will work closely with Team San Jose COO Dave Costain, a 30-year hospitality industry veteran, Team San Jose's board of directors and executive team, and City of San Jose administration to continue the organization's recent progress in business and economic development. [www.sanjose.org](http://www.sanjose.org)

## Sheridan Named Chair of DMAI

**WASHINGTON, DC** — Martha Sheridan, president and CEO of the Providence Warwick Convention and Visitors Bureau, has been



Sheridan

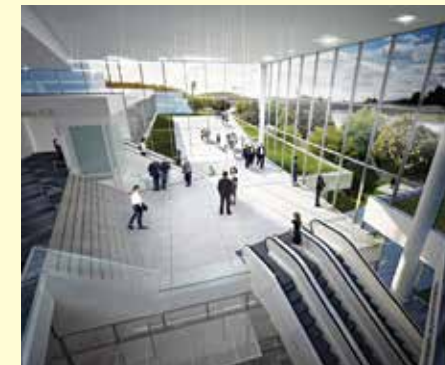
elected chair of the Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) board of directors. She has been a member of DMAI for nearly 20 years and held leadership positions with several local, regional and national organizations including the Rhode Island Hospitality and Tourism Association Education Foundation, Meeting Professionals International New England Chapter and the New England Society of Convention and Visitors Bureaus. [www.destinationmarketing.org](http://www.destinationmarketing.org)

## The New Tropicana Las Vegas Expanding Meeting Facilities

**LAS VEGAS, NV** — The new Tropicana Las Vegas - a DoubleTree by Hilton announced plans to expand its meeting and convention facilities from 60,000 sf to more than 100,000 sf. The hotel will build five 650-sf breakout rooms on the second floor of the Club Tower, adding to its three ballrooms. All of the new breakout rooms will have natural light and private his-and-her restrooms. The resort also will expand the Tropicana Pavilion, which is a wing of Tropicana Las Vegas' conference center. When combined with existing space in the Tropicana Pavilion, the venue will offer more than 55,000 sf that can be used for large exhibits and general sessions. All of the meeting facilities are complemented by customizable catering services, a dedicated audio-visual department, separate conference services registration desk, business center and easy parking access, among other benefits. [www.troplv.com](http://www.troplv.com)

## Convention Center Expansions

**Puerto Rico.** Puerto Rico is planning a \$36 million project to help expand and revitalize the main convention center in the capital of San Juan, according to an Associated Press report. Victor Suarez, head of the Puerto Rico Convention District Authority, says the project, to be named Puerto Rico World Trade Center Building, will include 250,000 sf of office and commercial space and a new Hyatt House hotel. The largest in the Caribbean, the Puerto Rico Convention Center is adjacent to the Sheraton Puerto Rico Hotel & Casino. [www.prconvention.com](http://www.prconvention.com)



Garco-LMN Architects

A rendering of the Spokane Convention Center expansion.

**Spokane Convention Center.** During the recent groundbreaking marking the expansion of the Spokane Convention Center, Cheryl Kilday, president and CEO of Visit Spokane, said the expansion of the center is evidence of the region's growth. "This is a great step for the convention center and the Spokane region," said Kilday. "The completion expands the exhibit hall and new meeting rooms in a highly functional and flexible

facility while capturing vistas of the Spokane River gorge. We are excited about the project and the opportunity to attract more meetings to our community with this great facility." In addition, the expansion will allow for two or three groups to use the facility simultaneously. The project, which will add 91,000 sf of meeting/exhibit space including a junior ballroom and 20,000 sf additional meeting space, is slated for completion in December 2014. [www.visitspokane.com](http://www.visitspokane.com)

**Sacramento Convention Center.** Sacramento's downtown convention center will add about 40,000 sf in exhibition and event space to the existing 158,000 sf in the first major renovation of the Sacramento Convention Center in nearly 20 years. According to a report in the *Modesto Bee*, Sacramento officials said they want to be competitive and attract more convention business such as meetings of medical and technology groups. The construction of a ballroom on top of the neighboring Community Center Theater that could be used by groups also is under consideration. Mike Testa, senior vice president, convention sales and business development of the SCVB, said the aim is to create a convention and theater district at the eastern end of K Street where restaurants have filled up several empty storefronts. A new sports arena is planned for the western end of K Street. [www.sacramentoconventioncenter.com](http://www.sacramentoconventioncenter.com), [www.discovergold.org](http://www.discovergold.org)

**Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center.** The \$325 million transformation of San Antonio's Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center (HBGCC) is moving forward with the release of schematic design plans and renderings. Set for completion during the spring of 2016, plans call for approximately 835,000 gross sf of new construction and approximately 78,000 sf of renovation to existing spaces. The center remains operational, with no disruptions to events and customers. The plans include approximately 260,000 sf of new exhibit space for a total of more than 500,000 sf of prime contiguous exhibit space; a new 54,000-sf ballroom; a wraparound balcony; improvements to circulation and wayfinding; new well-defined entrances; meeting, prefunction and back-of-house support space; kitchen expansion; and consolidated support offices. Nestled alongside the River Walk and Hemisfair Park, the center is immersed in the scenic charms of downtown San Antonio while also being within walking distance of thousands of hotel rooms as well as shops, restaurants, historic sites and the 65,000-seat Alamodome. Host to more than 350 events a year, the HBGCC is a versatile facility, which also offers the 2,400-seat Lila Cockrell Theatre. [www.meetings.visitsanantonio.com](http://www.meetings.visitsanantonio.com)



## Le Méridien New Orleans to Open in 2014

**NEW YORK, NY** — Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc. announced plans to debut Le Méridien New Orleans in 2014. Situated within walking distance from the city's world-famous French Quarter, the hotel, which currently operates under Starwood's W brand, was recently sold by the company to Chesapeake Lodging Trust. Le Méridien New Orleans will offer 410 fully renovated guest rooms and bathrooms as well as an upgraded fitness center, rooftop pool and more than 10,000 sf of state-of-the-art meeting facilities. The property also will feature the Le Méridien Hub experience — a social gathering place for people to converse, debate and exchange.

Le Méridien arrival consists of four elements: large-scale artwork in high-impact areas "to reset the mind and stimulate dialogue and curiosity"; the sensory experience, with Le Méridien signature scent, sound and use of light, creating a distinctive atmosphere; Unlock Art program featuring artist-designed key card collections that offer access to the guest room and Le Méridien-affiliated contemporary cultural centers in the city; and a 24-hour curated soundtrack. Le Méridien New Orleans is conveniently located near the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center and just a few blocks from the boutiques, art galleries and jazz clubs in the French Quarter. [www.lemeridien.com](http://www.lemeridien.com)

## Hyatt Regency McCormick Place Holds Ribbon Cutting



*A renovated conference room at Hyatt Regency McCormick Place.*

**CHICAGO, IL** — The multimillion-dollar expansion and renovation project at Hyatt Regency McCormick Place is now complete. The hotel's owner, Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority, invested \$110 million in the renovation, Hyatt's fourth largest hotel in the world and the fourth largest hotel in Chicago. The project began in December 2011 with the construction of a new 460-guest room tower, which includes 12 suites and two premium suites. The hotel's lobby was expanded and fully renovated, and the existing 800-guest room tower received a complete renovation. Larger in-house groups are now easily accommodated due to Hyatt's expanded guest room inventory and seamless connection with McCormick Place Convention Center and access to more than 2 million sf of state-of-the-art meeting space. The hotel offers 50,000 sf of in-house function space including the newly redesigned 4,000-sf Prairie Room. The 25,000-sf Hyatt Conference Center also underwent a complete renovation, and the hotel added three new boardrooms along with a new business center. [www.mccormickplace.hyatt.com](http://www.mccormickplace.hyatt.com)

## New Orleans Convention Center Project Wins Engineering Award



*New Orleans Convention Center.*

**NEW ORLEANS, LA** — The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center (NOMCC) renovation has earned Thornton Tomasetti, the international engineering firm that provided structural engineering work on the project, a 2013 Structural Engineering Association of Kansas and Missouri (SEAKM) Award. The firm used 3D Revit modeling throughout the design phase to identify potential conflicts and solutions. The first part of the project included the \$50 million expansion and renovation of Exhibit Hall A, increasing its size from 46,000 to 60,000 sf for use as a state-of-the-art ballroom space. The project also included the addition of 26,000 sf of prefunction space. The second half of the project consisted of the construction of a new grand entryway in the northwest corner of the existing building. Thornton Tomasetti demolished the existing structure and designed a 45-foot curtain wall separating the indoor and outdoor spaces of the entrance. A new vertical circulation capacity including elevators and stairs, and a cantilevered roof structure were also added to the convention center. The NOMCC is the sixth largest convention center in the nation and a consistent top-10 host of the largest number of conventions and trade shows annually.

[www.mccno.com](http://www.mccno.com)



**1-5** More than 5,400 association professionals and industry partners gathered in Atlanta to attend the 2013 ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition. "We had our highest number of association executives in five years, which demonstrates the value of professional development and face-to-face meetings," said ASAE President and CEO John H. Graham IV, CAE shown here in **1** with Marty Liggett, CEO of the American Society of Hematology. The 2014 ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition is set for August 9–12, 2014, in Nashville, TN. **6** Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter (*r*) welcomed to Philadelphia the attendees at the American Association of Diabetes Educators (AADE) Annual Meeting. He was joined by Ahemeenah Young, Pennsylvania Convention Center president and CEO (*l*) and Marian Long, AADE director of meeting services, at the opening session. **7** Knoxville Mayor Madeline Rogero (*c*) presents Knoxville Convention Center General Manager Mary Bogert (*l*) and Knoxville Convention Center Director of Operations Jason Bourgoyne with a plaque signifying the facility's LEED Silver certification for Existing Buildings by the U.S. Green Building Council. The facility is the first convention center in Tennessee to be LEED certified. **8** Association meeting pros and industry partners of the ASAE Convene Green Alliance (CGA) gathered this summer to learn about the benefits of vegetated roofs and toured the blooming 3,000-sf green roof of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) in downtown Washington, DC, guided by ASLA's green roof expert Keith Swann, who posed on the grounds with CGA Director Kristin Clarke.





# Win-Win Negotiations in a Seller's Market

## How to Get the Best Deal in Your Preferred Venue

One are the days of waiting by the phone for the hotel salesperson to call you back. In an up economy (or seller's market), they've got RFPs flowing onto their desks and into their email inbox and are able to cherry pick those that best benefit the hotel, and your lower-budgeted gathering is now at the bottom of the pile. It's a tough reality but far from hopeless. Sure, the corporate groups competing against you for the same sleeping rooms and meeting spaces have the money and are more likely to get the prime-time slots and locations — slots and locations that used to be reserved for you when times were tough. But you've got flexibility. You're able to think creatively on behalf of your association. Right now, it's all about how you approach the venue.

rooms you'll need. Think number of rooms with specific dates, Internet access needs in guest rooms versus the meeting space, AV needs, VIP ground transportation, suite upgrades, etc.

- Frame your RFP in a way that allows the venue to be a partner in success, rather than an adversary in negotiations. It's a seller's market, and you no longer have the luxury of playing hardball for better deals.

### BE FLEXIBLE

With that thinking in mind, remember that your list of needs should not be overly rigid. Go into negotiations expecting that you will have to make concessions at some

*Defer to the old adage that of the three major event details (dates, rates and space), your client association will get two and the venue gets one.*

To help kick-start your thought process, here are a few standard suggestions for how you can position your association to secure the best possible deal at the most suitable meeting venue.

### DEFINE YOUR NEEDS

A sweeping RFP won't help your cause in this environment. A well-defined request gives venues more direction and enhances their ability to fit your group into existing business. An RFP that leaves too much guesswork will turn off potential bidders. In an improving economy, they've got better things to do than to do your planning for you, so present them with an RFP that is concise, simple to understand, to the point and therefore appears to be worth their time.

- Present specific needs up front instead of waiting for the hotel to tell you what's available. Let them know the closest estimate for the number of sleeping and meeting

point, and know ahead of time what you're willing to concede before talks even begin. Do your homework and better understand the financial impact of each concession on your bottom line, versus the cost of paying for that concession. It also helps to understand what that concession might actually cost the venue. Deferred revenue is looked upon differently at a hotel than actually covering a hard cost. Defer to the old adage that of the three major event details (dates, rates and space), your client association will get two and the venue gets one.

- Remember that arrival and departure dates are good negotiating tools.
- Split room blocks (one rate for buyers vs. a slightly higher rate for sellers, for example) can help you reach an agreement that works for you and the venue while bringing down the average cost for attendees.
- Flexible multiple-year contracts can give you leverage when securing venues for immediate and upcoming



events. A venue is more likely to work with you today if future business is guaranteed.

### GET CREATIVE

To achieve the right amount of flexibility while keeping your client's needs intact, you'll need to get creative. Show the bidding venue that you're capable of shifting and prioritizing needs in a way that benefits both parties. This is also helpful when forced to make use of less space due to tighter budget restrictions.

- Be willing to turn rooms. If you need a meeting room for just a few hours in the morning each day, what else can you do with that space in the afternoons? Perhaps morning sessions or the general session room could be converted for meals later in the day.
- Consider consolidating individual breakout sessions into single-room larger sessions to reduce the overall number of meeting rooms. You'll reduce the space and support services required and perhaps better fit into the venue's schedule.
- Bring your offsite networking events back into the hotel itself. Your gathering will seem more attractive to the venue

Phelps R. Hope, CMP



if you hand them a lucrative piece of evening business. If you're worried about the networking event losing appeal with event attendees, try theming it. Engage the hotel into helping make it a memorable experience.

- Establish long-term arrangements within the same hotel chain with a multi-year contract. The actual location might change, but the hotel chain itself might see ongoing yearly business as very attractive.
- Co-locate with another like-minded group or association. You can share expenses and make an offering to the venue that's more in line with your corporate competitors.

### PRESENT A SOLID HISTORY

Corporate competition can be fierce during booking, so be prepared to show that you, too, are a serious contender. You must alleviate doubts right away by showing the venue that you will stand by your end of the deal. In an up economy, the venue has less to gain by taking a risk with a low-budget association, so you must demonstrate that you are able to hold up your end of the bargain.

- Assure the vendor that you'll fill the rooms you book. Show verified examples of past bookings vs. actual filled space.
- Be able to demonstrate that your client association will have a positive impact on business. Will your convention be good for room-service orders? Gift shop sales? Will attendees actually be a boon to the local economy as well — not just the host hotel, but the city itself? What is the overall economic impact of your conference?

In the end, be prepared to fight for the best venue and desired concessions that came so much easier during the recession. Frame your argument in a way that lets the venue know that your association is still serious about filling hotel rooms, yet willing to negotiate and make concessions as needed. Now is the time to show the bidder that you know what you're doing and establish long-term working relationships.

AC&F

Phelps R. Hope, CMP, is vice president of meetings and expositions for Kellen Meetings, a division of the Kellen Company, an association management company (AMC) with offices in Atlanta, Chicago, New York City, Washington, DC, Beijing and Brussels. He can be reached at [phope@kellencompany.com](mailto:phope@kellencompany.com) or 404-836-5050.



# Casino Resorts

## Deliver the Best of Both Worlds

By Michael Bassett

### From Non-Stop Action to Chilling Out at the Pool

**G**aming resorts offer meeting attendees the best of both worlds — the excitement of the casino action combined with the relaxation and recreational options afforded by resort hotels. And an attendee can choose to experience either, depending on his wishes and desires.

They also offer meeting planners a variety of options that are hard to find in other destinations. For example, gaming resorts provide planners with a host of built-in dining and entertainment options. If the planner chooses, his or her group will never have to leave the resort.

And they're springing up all over the country, giving the

planner multiple options, whether it's a drive-in venue such as Foxwoods or Mohegan Sun in Connecticut, or a fly-in destination such as Las Vegas. And the fact they've become so ubiquitous means any stigma attached to holding events at a casino resort is fading, making it easier for association planners to convince their boards that gaming resorts make for good meeting destinations.

The ongoing popularity of gaming resorts is evidenced by the numbers. According to the American Gaming Association, U.S. casinos earned \$37.3 billion in gross gaming revenue in 2012, a 4.8 percent increase over 2011 and the highest increase since the pre-recessionary days of 2007. And the three largest U.S. casino resort operators, Las Vegas Sands, MGM Resorts International, and Caesars Entertainment, all reported improved 2013 Q1 financial results over the year before.

In Las Vegas, the renewed confidence in the industry is suggested by the amount of money being poured into the city's hospitality structure. According to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, new projects and renovations announced recently represent a \$5 billion investment in Las Vegas.

Groups flying into Vegas can see some of this firsthand as soon as they arrive in the city. Last summer, McCarran International Airport opened its Terminal 3 expansion, which included a 1.9 million-sf new terminal building featuring 14 gates, seven of them available for international flights. The expansion increases McCarran's annual capacity up to 53 million passengers.

Situated on the southern part of the Las Vegas Strip, Mandalay Bay is undergoing a property-wide renovation — its first since it opened in 1999. Changes will include a complete renovation of the Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas on floors 35 through 39 of the property, and the opening of the Delano Las Vegas, an all-suite boutique hotel within the resort. Other news includes the opening of Cirque du Soleil's highly anticipated "Michael Jackson ONE," and the Daylight Beach Club, a 50,000-sf upscale pool.

Several iconic Las Vegas properties are undergoing transformations. The Sahara Casino, which closed in 2011 after 60 years in business, is being completely renovated and rebranded as SLS Las Vegas. The renovation has been billed as a \$750 million project and is expected to be completed by 2014. Also, the Downtown Grand (formerly Lady Luck) is being redeveloped and will feature 650 rooms in two towers, varying in size from 350 to 1,240 sf, as well as the addition of a pool and spa, 50,000 sf of casino floor space and 20,000 sf of retail space.

The Malaysia-based Genting Group has announced plans for a multibillion-dollar Asian-themed resort complex on The Strip, which will include more than 3,500 rooms, 300,000 feet of water and pool space, a replica of the Great Wall of China and 500,000 sf of convention space.

West of The Strip, MGM Resorts International and AEG have announced plans to build a 20,000-seat arena that will be located between the New York-New York and Monte Carlo resorts.

#### WHY LAS VEGAS?

Chris Dolnack, senior vice president and chief marketing officer of the National Shooting Sports Foundation, after years of rotating the annual Shot Show between Las Vegas and the eastern U.S., has now settled on Las Vegas as its destination through 2016.

The show, which, according to *Trade Show Executive*, is the 13th largest in the U.S., uses 625,000 sf of meeting and exhibition space and attracts 62,000 attendees. The Venetian/The Palazzo are the headquarter hotels, and the show is held in the Sands Expo & Convention Center every January.

Why Las Vegas? "It's the most exciting trade show city in the country," says Dolnack. "And the Venetian and Palazzo offer a unique venue in that you have enough convention space there, but you also have...another 40,000 hotel rooms within a 10-minute walk." Dolnack added that for a show like his that attracts people ranging from "mom and pop shop owners to CEOs from publicly traded companies," it's important to have

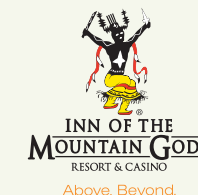
a wide range of culinary and entertainment options, which the Venetian and the Palazzo provide.

Dolnack says surveys of his attendees demonstrate a high degree of satisfaction with the two properties as a site for the trade show. "I think the reason is that it just gives the attendees a better overall experience," Dolnack says. "For our event there are so many post-show parties and receptions that take place on the property,



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Photo courtesy of Beau Rivage Resort & Casino





Michael F. Tannen, CSEP  
Executive Director  
Mid-Atlantic Tent Renters  
Association  
Wilmington, DE

***“And being a tent conference, we don’t necessarily need convention space, we need outside space — parking lots. So that’s what we have to look for, and that’s what Foxwoods was able to provide for us to utilize.”***

so you aren’t dealing with taxi lines and traffic, and the hassle factor is very low. And when you consider that you can eat in a four- or five-star restaurant every night and never leave the property, it adds up, and, accordingly, we’ve been increasing our room block.”

Dolnack adds that entertainment options within the Venetian and Palazzo — as well as in Las Vegas in general — are varied and affordable, which means that his attendees don’t have to hit the casino floor if they don’t want to. “I’ve gone out there a number of times, and I’ve never put a coin in a slot machine,” he says. “You can pretty much find whatever it is you want to do, whether it’s getting some peace and quiet by the pool, or enjoying a raucous time at the roulette table.”



The splendor of Lake Tahoe and snow-topped mountains beyond as seen from the Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort, Spa & Casino.

Photo courtesy of Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort, Spa & Casino

lounge WET features flair bartenders, live music and exclusive design features, and the resort has added a small-plate Mexican restaurant called Cantina. In addition, an indoor pool, nightclub, sports book and racquetball court are all planned for 2013, and its 200,000 sf of meeting space will be renovated as well.

Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort, Spa and Casino has completed a \$20 million renovation of its guest rooms, the Sierra Café and the Spa Terrace Conference Center. The property’s 398 guest rooms make up the bulk of the renovation project, with \$18 million worth of improvements; including oak furniture complementing new carpeting of dark gray mocha, back-lit mirrors, modern showers, locally themed artwork and “jack packs,” all-in-one media hubs that easily pair the television with laptops and media players.

According to the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority, any lingering bias on the part of groups toward gaming resorts as a meeting destination is diminishing as more and more of them spring up across the country.

Meeting attendees at gaming resorts don’t even have to set foot in a casino if they choose not to. “When groups come to our hotels they can check in, go to their rooms and meeting spaces, and then back to the rooms without ever having to go to the casino floor,” said an executive.

Price point also works in a gaming resort’s favor — particularly in a smaller city such as Reno, because casino resorts rely

more on gambling than accommodations and food and beverage to drive their profits.

#### BILOXI AND THE MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST

Along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, phase one of the former Isle of Capri’s transformation was completed in June, with the unveiling of the Golden Nugget Biloxi brand, along with a redesigned and renovated casino floor featuring 300 new slots, several new restaurants including a Morton’s Steakhouse, and newly renovated guest rooms and suites. The \$100 million transformation project is expected to be completed in 2014 and will include more restaurants, retail shops, a grand ballroom with new meeting rooms, a new 35,000-sf casino, a new high-limit gaming room, and H2O resort pool complemented by all-season hot tubs and fire pits.

The largest and most recognizable property along the Gulf Coast continues to be Beau Rivage Resort & Casino in Biloxi. It not only has the most meeting space and guest rooms on the Gulf Coast, but its 32 stories and 3.2 million sf make it the biggest and tallest building in the state of Mississippi.

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Las Vegas





The Mid-Atlantic Tent Renters Association annual meeting was held at Foxwoods Resort Casino. A welcome reception (right) was held in the Paragon Room — high atop the resort.



Debra Dixon Doss, executive director of the Southeastern Association of School Business Officials (SASBO), headquartered in Burlington, NC, has brought several meetings to Beau Rivage over the past several years, including its annual conference in April 2012 as well as smaller board meetings.

Doss says that the Beau Rivage appealed to her group because of the amount and type of meeting space it provided and because it — and the surrounding area — provided her attendees with plenty of culinary and entertainment options. The casino resort has 11 restaurants, “so there’s plenty of places to go if (an attendee) wants to stay in the hotel, but you can walk out of the door and there’s another 15 to 20 restaurants within walking distance.” She pointed out that the Casino Hopper also gives guests easy access to other Biloxi casinos.

The meeting spaced worked particularly well for her group, Doss says, in that she designs her annual conference so it provides maximum display time for her exhibitors. Thus, the exhibit hall was organized in such a way that as soon as you walked in you could see every exhibitor, but space also was available for business sessions as well. “So once the attendees got into that exhibit hall they never had to leave,” she says. “It was very interactive, and their space is perfect to allow that.”

Doss’ group also used the resort’s outside space — particularly an area by the pool overlooking the Gulf of Mexico — for a reception/dinner — that was, she says, “beautiful, and within our budget — which is important since we’re a non-profit.”

Other benefits of using the Beau Rivage, Doss says, include the fact that the hotel was willing to work with her on small budget board meetings, and that the facility’s convention area is away from the casino. “So you don’t hear any of the noise,” she points out. “In fact, once you get upstairs you wouldn’t even know you’re in a casino.”

## THE NORTHEAST

Connecticut’s Foxwoods Resort Casino and Mohegan Sun continue to dominate the gaming resort market in the

Northeast, although competition could soon be coming from neighboring Massachusetts, which is in the process of determining who will get the state’s three casino licenses.

In the meantime, Foxwoods, which is located in Mashantucket, CT, and attracts about one-third of its patrons from Massachusetts, is vying to maintain a hold on that clientele. The casino resort is upgrading its main concourse area with new retail space and restaurants, and also will be opening up a “premium outlet retail mall” with about 75 stores.

Mohegan Sun in nearby Uncasville, CT, has been busy renovating its night-life venues. Last summer the resort launched GLO at the Pool, transforming the pool and large outdoor terrace area in a late-night party area complete with swimming, full-service cabanas, fire pits and entertainment. Mohegan Sun also has turned what used to be Leffingwells Martine Bar into Vista Lounge at Wombi Rock, an “ultra-lounge” with a live-DJ booth and blackjack tables.

Michael F. Tannen, CSEP, executive director of the Mid-Atlantic Tent Renters Association (MATRA) has brought his organization’s annual meeting to both of these resorts. In fact, his group has been quite partial to casino resorts over the years, and this year’s conference will be held at Dover Downs Hotel and Casino in Dover, DE.

Casino resorts work well for his group for a variety of reasons says Tannen, including the fact that they are self-contained, which means his attendees don’t have to leave the property.

More important, a place such as Foxwoods, which has a huge drive-in business, has plenty of parking. “And being a tent conference, we don’t necessarily need convention space, we need outside space — parking lots,” says Tannen. “So that’s what we have to look for, and that’s what Foxwoods was able to provide for us to utilize.”

Last year’s MATRA conference — its 25th anniversary conference — was held in November, just after Hurricane Sandy hit. Tent layout and installation began on the first day of the conference and was completed the next day. Everything having to do with the event was to be held in the tents — educational sessions, vendor exhibits, and even the 25th anniversary dinner and follow-up awards brunch.

Unfortunately, the New England weather didn’t cooperate as an early winter storm hit the area. This forced Tannen and his team to move the dinner inside, a transition that Tannen says Foxwoods was able to easily accommodate.

So, whether it’s the excitement of the casino floor — or that provided by a winter nor’easter — gaming resorts can pretty much deal with anything that a meeting planner or attendee needs. AC&F



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## The Best of the Best



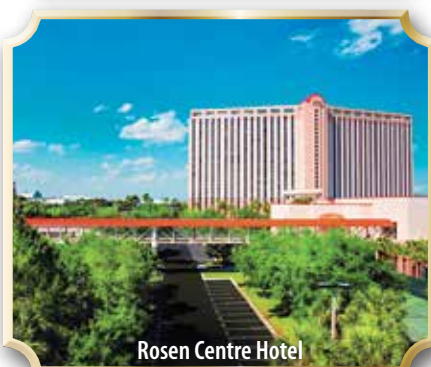
Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau



MGM Grand Las Vegas



New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center



Rosen Centre Hotel

The winners of the 2013 Distinctive Achievement Awards presented by *Association Conventions & Facilities* magazine have met or exceeded the high standards that association meeting planners demand today. Many of the more than 20,500 meeting professionals who read *Association Conventions & Facilities* seized this opportunity to cast their ballot for these deserving winners.

Judging criteria:

### CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAUS

- Superior Service and Support
- Top-Notch Assistance with Promotion, Accommodations and Site Inspections
- High Level of Assistance to Identify and Liaison with Suppliers, Vendors, Facilities, Venues and Local Government
- Outstanding Communication and First-Rate Website

### HOTELS AND RESORTS

- Superior Service Standards
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- Reasonable Room Rates and Labor Costs
- Advanced Technological Capabilities and First-Rate Website
- Environmentally Friendly Policies
- Paramount Safety and Security

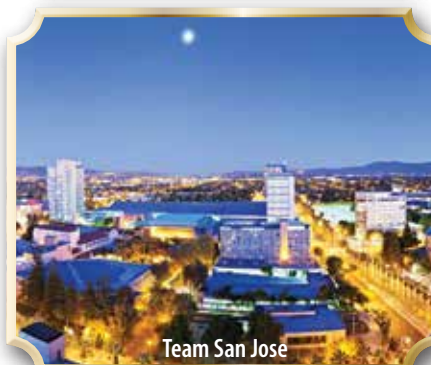
You will find profiles of several of the best of the best on the following pages. AC&F



Wynn Las Vegas



The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino



Team San Jose



Rosen Shingle Creek

## 2013 DISTINCTIVE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNERS

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Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Atlanta, GA

Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Austin, TX

Dallas Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Dallas, TX

Destination DC  
Washington, DC

Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Miami, FL

Greater Phoenix Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Phoenix, AZ

Hawaii Visitors & Convention Bureau  
Honolulu, HI

Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority  
Las Vegas, NV

Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Long Beach, CA — Page 20

Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Louisville, KY

Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp.  
Nashville, TN

New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau  
New Orleans, LA

Palm Beach County Convention & Visitors Bureau  
West Palm Beach, FL

San Diego Tourism Authority  
San Diego, CA

San Francisco Travel Association  
San Francisco, CA

Team San Jose  
San Jose, CA — Page 22

Visit Baltimore  
Baltimore, MD

VISIT DENVER  
Denver, CO

Visit Indy  
Indianapolis, IN

Visit Orlando  
Orlando, FL

Visit Savannah  
Savannah, GA

### CONVENTION CENTERS

Georgia World Congress Center  
Atlanta, GA

Hawaii Convention Center  
Honolulu, HI

The Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center  
Dallas, TX

Metro Toronto Convention Centre  
Toronto, ON

New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center  
New Orleans, LA — Page 24

Orange County Convention Center  
Orlando, FL

Phoenix Convention Center  
Phoenix, AZ

Walter E. Washington Convention Center  
Washington, DC

### HOTELS AND RESORTS

ARIA Resort & Casino  
Las Vegas, NV

Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa  
Atlantic City, NJ

Foxwoods Resort Casino  
Mashantucket, CT

Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center  
National Harbor, MD

Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center  
Nashville, TN

JW Marriott Indianapolis  
Indianapolis, IN

MGM Grand Las Vegas  
Las Vegas, NV — Page 26

Mohegan Sun  
Uncasville, CT

Omni Dallas Hotel  
Dallas, TX

The Peabody Orlando  
Orlando, FL

Rosen Centre Hotel  
Orlando, FL — Page 28

Rosen Plaza Hotel  
Orlando, FL — Page 30

Rosen Shingle Creek  
Orlando, FL — Page 32

South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa  
Las Vegas, NV

Town and Country Resort & Conference Center  
San Diego, CA

Talking Stick Resort  
Scottsdale, AZ

The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino  
Las Vegas, NV — Page 34

Wynn Las Vegas  
Las Vegas, NV — Page 36





## Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau

301 E. Ocean Boulevard, Suite 1900, Long Beach, CA 90802  
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irish@longbeachcvb.org • www.VisitLongBeach.com

**L**ong Beach has fast become an innovative leader in creating “a new essence of meeting style” as its \$35 million convention center renovation creates an open, comfortable environment where people can easily connect and collaborate.

This campus, which has been created around downtown Long Beach to encourage the development and sharing of ideas, includes newly renovated hotels that are just steps from the convention center and the surrounding downtown waterfront entertainment district — a vibrant area of shopping venues, entertainment, nightlife and more than 100 quality restaurants — many with spectacular oceanfront views.

### MEETING FACILITIES

The Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center offers more than 400,000 sf of modern, versatile meeting and exhibit space with new wiring for the latest technology as well as wireless capability. The campus boasts two recently renovated VIP lounges, a full-service concierge/restaurant reservation desk, hospitality catering and an onsite audio-visual supplier with free Wi-Fi. With 34 meeting rooms and a Grand Ballroom, three dynamic Exhibition Halls, Long Beach Arena, Center Theater and the Terrace Theater, the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center is ideal for all types of special events, conventions and trade shows.

As part of the \$35 million renovation, upgrades at the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center now offer new and versatile special event venues such as Bogart & Co. plus attractive outdoor plazas and patios — highlighting the best in lounge and innovative event space. The newly revamped Pacific Gallery includes chic pod-style seating with customized lighting. Now planners can match their event to their imagination.

The new Pacific Ballroom at the Long Beach Arena will take its place as one of the country's premier ballroom venues when it opens in October 2013, and will revolutionize the platform design for event spaces. The ballroom's 46,000 sf of customizable event space features a floating tension grid and moveable, floor-to-ceiling curtain walls to create the right environment for groups. The adaptable, electronic walls will accommodate groups of all types, ranging from an intimate gathering to a grandly lavish 5,500-person reception. Also, the Pacific Ballroom offers substantial cost savings, thanks to its all-inclusive \$1.6 million state-of-the-art lighting, sound and video system — all controlled with the simple touch of an iPad.

Long Beach is the center of Southern California, with all of the attractions in Los Angeles and Orange County just minutes from the downtown waterfront. In addition, Long Beach has world-class attractions of its own: The Queen Mary and the Aquarium of the Pacific, The Pike At Rainbow Harbor, Shoreline Village, plus four distinctive museums and two historic ranchos. Getting to Long Beach is a breeze with three major airports within 30 minutes of the city, including the newly renovated Long Beach Airport.

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### CITYWIDE FACTS & FEATURES

**Guest Rooms:** 4,688

**Hotels/Resorts:** 24

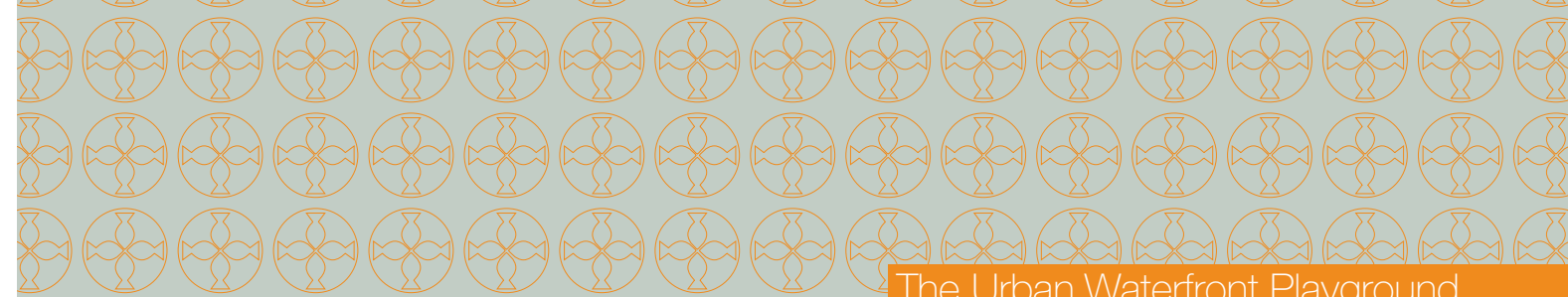
**Meeting Space:**

Hotel: 219,000+ sf

Offsite: 500,000+ sf

### CONVENTION CENTER FYI

Located in the center of the downtown waterfront with sweeping harbor views, the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center is designed to give guests a stylish and welcoming social experience offering flexible event choices.



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**D**owntown San Jose's revitalization efforts culminate this fall with the unveiling of the bigger, better San Jose McEnery Convention Center. In September 2013, the center will complete a \$130 million expansion and renovation, adding 125,000 sf of flexible ballroom and meeting space to the center's existing 425,000 sf. After the project concludes, the center will offer 550,000 sf of total usable space for meetings, conventions and events. The new center boasts a revamped lobby and event spaces to welcome visitors with beautiful bright California colors and styles including reclaimed redwood ceilings, a new open plaza entrance for networking and outdoor event space facing downtown San Jose.

The center offers a modern high-tech feel with a state-of-the-art Silicon Valley infrastructure to back it up — plus new networking spaces, more breakout rooms and additional flexible meeting space.

### INNOVATIVE ONE-STOP SERVICE MAKES MEETINGS EASIER

Team San Jose's (TSJ) pioneering one-stop-service and exciting, easy-to-manage destination has 98 percent of planners saying they'd return. Instead of handing planners off to other organizations once they book the meeting — as most cities do — TSJ does it all, from housing, convention center and facility event services, customized food and beverage menus to permits, marketing support and savvy special events.

### THEATERS AND UNIQUE VENUES

In addition to managing the San Jose Convention Center, TSJ operates a collection of stunning theaters boasting some of the region's top entertainment — all within a short stroll from the center. Any of these unique venues can enhance group meetings:

- **San Jose Civic.** Built in 1934, the 3,036-seat theater was recently revamped and has been at the core of San Jose's cultural activity and traditions.
- **Center for the Performing Arts.** The new kid on the block at 40 years old, the 2,677-seat elegant CPA is home to Broadway and ballet.
- **California Theatre.** The 1,122-seat theater is known as one of the best-preserved examples of late 1920s motion picture houses in the U.S.
- **Montgomery Theater.** Built in 1936, the 475-seat theater retains its historic charm and offers audiences an intimate experience for every performance or general sessions.

San Jose offers many alternative meeting and special event venues, such as the Tech Museum, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art and world-famous Winchester Mystery House.

### REVITALIZED DOWNTOWN

With a downtown laid out like a cultural campus, visitors will experience why Forbes.com ranked San Jose as the most diverse metro area. The downtown core offers everything from historic California landmarks, engaging museums, theaters and modern galleries to innovative events, parks, restaurants and nightclubs — all within walking distance from their hotel.

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### CITYWIDE FACTS & FEATURES

**Guest Rooms:** 8,900  
**Hotels/Resorts:** 89 hotels  
**Meeting Space:** 425,000 sf. After mid-September: 550,000 sf

### SPECIAL SERVICES & AMENITIES

To continue streamlining service and value, Team San Jose offers an in-house culinary team that serves up customized menus. Their unconventionally good cuisine features local, often organic ingredients.



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**T**he impressive 1.1-million-sf New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, which so perfectly complements the city's walkable hotel packages, is now more attractive than ever to groups large and small. In recent years, the center has undergone \$140 million in upgrades including a divisible 60,300-sf Great Hall ballroom, 25,400 sf of multi-use prefunction space, 4,660-sf junior ballroom, complete with a 3,420-sf rooftop terrace, a 980-sf indoor balcony and a 5,700-sf executive club lounge, and hotel-like appointments throughout. A new pedestrian plaza provides a grand sense of arrival.

The convention center's vast lobby features comfortable furniture groupings in more than 150,000 sf of space for registration, information kiosks and sponsor banners. The origins of unique New Orleans words are displayed via an interactive QR code on the "Word Wall." The lobby's decorative banners feature iconic New Orleans images of art, music, food, history and architecture, and purple-coated "Fleur de Lis Ambassadors" greet attendees at every entrance.

### STATE-OF-THE-ART TECHNOLOGY

The center – the sixth largest convention center in the nation – boasts a 1 gigabyte fiber optic Internet backbone that is 100 percent redundant, providing meeting planners with unlimited technological opportunities to extend programming to attendees and exhibitors.

Comfortable furniture groupings and digital,

flat-panel, audio-video information systems are strategically placed throughout the main lobby, meeting room levels and in prefunction areas. In addition, key card access and fully integrated, digital signage system with screens were implemented in all 140 meeting rooms and public space.

The highly qualified and experienced production team offers a full menu of integrated services for lighting, audio, video and rigging needs in-house or to support a selected contractor. The center offers a full suite of HD video equipment for a variety of satellite broadcast, presentation or recording formats and the trained personnel to design, capture and edit programs onsite.

The center's full-service UPS Store provides show management, attendees and exhibitors a full range of services including large-image, onsite printing of meter boards, directional signs and banners; in-bound and out-bound small package handling; and a satellite mobile kiosk for printing, packing and shipping.

Centerplate, the food-service contractor, is committed to providing the essence of the New Orleans food experience, operating three onsite restaurants, which feature live local music and menus of iconic Louisiana dishes by award-winning chef Donald Link.

Every amenity and service needed for a successful event at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center is conveniently located under one roof. And, in walking-friendly New Orleans, the center is literally just steps away from the Warehouse/Arts District and the historic French Quarter, where the old-world charm of fine restaurants, first-class hotel rooms and unique cultural experiences are around every corner.

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### CITYWIDE FACTS & FEATURES

**Guest Rooms:** 20,000 in walking distance from convention center, 32,000 in area

### SPECIAL SERVICES & AMENITIES

Every amenity at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center is conveniently located under one roof: 140 meeting rooms located directly above 1.1 million sf of exhibit space, a 4,000-seat theater, 60,300-sf column-free Great Hall, 30,000+ sf ballroom, onsite business center, three restaurants and a VIP dining area.





## MGM Grand Hotel & Casino

3799 Las Vegas Boulevard South, Las Vegas, NV 89109  
800-929-1112 • Fax: 702-891-1003 • Sharon Williamson, Business Development Manager  
meetings@lv.MGMGrand.com • www.MGMGrand.com/meetings

One of the most iconic resorts on the Las Vegas Strip, the AAA Four Diamond MGM Grand is home to A-list entertainment, award-winning restaurants by celebrity chefs, high-energy nightlife, one-of-a-kind amenities and impeccable service.

With 602,000 sf of flexible meeting and convention space including the 16,800-seat Grand Garden Arena, which is often utilized for special group events, MGM Grand's facilities integrate functionality and versatility with elegance and state-of-the-art technology. The stand-alone Marquee Ballroom provides 92,000 sf of pillarless multipurpose meeting space, accommodating up to 6,000 guests. Other venues include three ball-

rooms, 57 meeting rooms and two boardrooms. In all, MGM Grand's conference space can host gatherings of 20 guests to large trade shows of 10,000 attendees. MGM Grand's team of 15 certified meeting planners and the skilled convention services and catering team create unforgettable events.

Attendees can enjoy the company's new high-density Wi-Fi system, the highest performing, next-generation wireless LAN in the industry. Meeting groups, even large conventions, now have the support they need, and customized Wi-Fi networks can be created. Within a specially created, private Wi-Fi network, a meeting organizer can design targeted information, provide notes and reminders, update agendas, communicate last-minute changes and much more. This new system is poised to

define the future of wireless Internet experiences at resort destinations by addressing rapidly changing business demands through unique Wi-Fi services.

### THE GRAND RENOVATION

Committed to maintaining the highest level of accommodations, MGM Grand's newly redesigned guest rooms and suites feature vibrant décor, streamlined entertainment centers with media hubs, and environmentally responsible elements including LED lighting, solar shades, upgraded faucets and showers, and 100 percent biodegradable bath amenities.

A variety of one- and two-bedroom suites feature expansive outdoor terraces with sweeping views of the famed Las Vegas Strip. Designed for gathering and entertaining, the 1,500-sf Skyline Marquee Suite, with 180-degree views of The Strip, comes complete with an extended living area, billiard table, oversized bar and a grand foyer that separates two master suites.

MGM Grand recently opened Hakkasan Restaurant and Nightclub, a five-level culinary and nightlife mecca offering a variety of flexible environments including the restaurant, featuring modern Cantonese cuisine, a private dining room, Ling Ling level, main nightclub, pavilion and mezzanine. Emmy Award-winning comedian and actor Brad Garrett brings his comedy to MGM Grand's stellar entertainment lineup with the opening of his eponymous comedy club — Brad Garrett's Comedy Club.

With so many experiences conveniently located under one roof, MGM Grand not only captures the essence of Las Vegas, but creates a meeting or convention to remember.

AC&F



### FACTS & FEATURES

**Guest Rooms:** 5,044 guest rooms, including 751 suites  
**Meeting Space:** 602,000 sf

### SPECIAL SERVICES & AMENITIES

MGM Grand's new STAY WELL rooms and suites are the first of its kind and integrate the best of medical science and technology to promote health and wellness while traveling.

# This is WHY YOU LOVE your job.



THE MEETING AUTHORITY  
MGM GRAND  
LAS VEGAS



REDESIGNED ROOMS AND SUITES | OVER 602,000 SQUARE FEET OF FLEXIBLE MEETING SPACE | SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES  
UNPARALLELED SERVICE FROM OUR CERTIFIED MEETING PROFESSIONALS | WORLD-CLASS DINING AND ENTERTAINMENT



For more reasons to choose MGM Grand, call 1-800-929-1112 | [meetings@lv.mgmgrand.com](mailto:meetings@lv.mgmgrand.com) | [mgmgrand.com/meetings](http://mgmgrand.com/meetings)



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## Rosen Centre Hotel

9840 International Drive, Orlando, FL 32819  
800-204-7234 or 407-996-9840 • Fax: 407-996-2659 • Todd Frappier, Director of Sales & Marketing  
tfrappier@RosenCentre.com • www.RosenCentre.com

**R**osen Centre Hotel, known for skillfully balancing business and pleasure with elegance and professionalism, continues to impress even the most well-traveled guests and meeting attendees. In January, the hotel opened The Spa at Rosen Centre, which includes seven treatment rooms, a salon, health club, an Olympic-sized swimming pool and a gift shop. Ladies and gentlemen may enjoy separate eucalyptus steam rooms and private lounges, or "Relaxation Conservatories," outfitted with comfortable armchairs, flat-screen TVs, light refreshments, healthful snacks, reading materials and convenient backdoor access to the pool. In addition, the new 18,000-sf Executive Ballroom, which includes 4,500 sf of prefunction space, opened recently to rave reviews. And just last year, the hotel introduced complimentary Wi-Fi and hardwired Internet in all guest rooms and public areas; and the multimillion-dollar renovation of the Presidential Suites and three-bay hospitality suites was finalized — making this award-winning hotel even more attractive to meeting planners.

Convention Center. Rosen Centre offers more than 150,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including the 35,000-sf Grand Ballroom, the 14,375-sf Junior Ballroom, the new 18,000-sf Executive Ballroom, 33 distinctive meeting rooms and four permanent registration areas. High-tech meetings are easy to hold thanks to advanced technical support, teleconferencing equipment and simultaneous on-demand translation services.

### FIRST-CLASS FACILITY

Already a favored meeting destination, Rosen Centre Hotel remains a first-class business facility, which can accommodate groups of 10 to 4,000. Its prime location coupled with attractive amenities easily transform it into convention headquarters, as the Rosen Centre Skywalk connects the hotel with the West Building of the Orange County

Each of the 1,334 guest rooms features complimentary Wi-Fi and hardwired Internet, a 32-inch flat-screen TV, data ports, an in-room safe and video folio review/check-out. Eighty suites, which range in size from 500 to 2,500 sf are ideal for smaller conferences and events.

Attendees will enjoy unparalleled dining at Rosen Centre's nine restaurants and lounges. Stir, the hotel's newly renovated 150-seat lobby lounge, offers a comfortable setting where guests can enjoy TV entertainment or meet up for a favorite beverage, bar bite, fresh sushi and tapas. Surrounding the Grande Lobby, 98Forty Tapas & Tequila Bar offers sophisticated tapas-style dishes as well as an extensive selection of 40 premium tequilas, and guests also can pick and choose light bites, cocktails and coffee from Banshoo Sushi, Red's Deli or Smoooth Java. The intimate, upscale Everglades Restaurant or buffet-style Café Gauguin are but steps away.

Rosen Centre Hotel also features a tropical swimming pool with whirlpool and sundeck. Just minutes away is the Shingle Creek Golf Club and Orlando's favorite attractions including Universal Orlando, SeaWorld and Walt Disney World.

Whether it's business or pleasure, Rosen Centre is the place to be.

AC&F



## COME SEE WHAT'S NEW. HERE'S A HINT. ALMOST EVERYTHING.

With so many newly renovated spaces and exciting, updated features, the Rosen Centre Hotel is Orlando's newest award-winning meetings hotel that's been here for years. An elegant, new executive ballroom. Two incredible new restaurants. New guestrooms and suites with free in-room Internet. And our fabulously expanded tranquil sanctuary, The Spa at Rosen Centre, gives attendees the chance to completely unwind and relax at the end of the day.

To learn more about everything new and what it means to your next meeting, please call (407) 996-9840, or email [Sales@RosenCentre.com](mailto:Sales@RosenCentre.com).



## REST ASSURED.

Synonymous with exceptional service and guest satisfaction, Rosen Hotels & Resorts sets the standard for hospitality in Orlando and has for over 38 years. Free Internet in all guestrooms and public spaces. Robust planner perks. Unparalleled personal attention. Impeccable service. At Rosen Hotels & Resorts, your peace of mind is our highest priority.

*Rosen Planner Perks*







## Rosen Plaza Hotel

9700 International Drive, Orlando, FL 32819  
800-366-9700 or 407-996-9700 • Fax: 407-354-5774 • Victoria Hall, Director of Sales & Marketing  
sales@RosenPlaza.com • www.RosenPlaza.com

Much more than just a first-class meeting facility, the Rosen Plaza Hotel offers a highly respected professional staff, outstanding accommodations, is adjacent to the 2.1-million-sf Orange County Convention Center, and will be connected via the Gary Sain Memorial Bridge in August. Rosen Plaza recently completed a floor-to-ceiling renovation of all 800 guest rooms, as well as hallways and hospitality suites. Guest rooms received new 32-inch flat-screen TVs, new furnishings, carpet and Simmons Beauty Rest beds as well as a complete bathroom remodel designed to invoke the relaxing sensations of an upscale spa. The newest amenity is complimentary Wi-Fi

and hardwired Internet in all guest rooms and public spaces.

### MEETING FACILITIES

Located in the heart of the International Drive district, Rosen Plaza offers more than 60,000 sf of state-of-the-art, sophisticated meeting space that includes the Grand Ballroom with 26,000 sf of column-free space; the Foyer with 12,500 sf of space; the 4,500-sf Regency Salon; 22 well-appointed meeting rooms; and 16 hospitality suites. Advanced technical support, high-tech teleconferencing and simultaneous translation allow the Rosen Plaza Hotel to accommodate every need. The hotel is renowned for catering memorable corporate events for up to 2,740 attendees.

The popular Jack's Place restaurant, home to the world's largest collection of autographed caricatures, was named one of *Florida Trend's* top restaurants in Orlando, *Orlando* magazine's Best Restaurant on International Drive and was recently added to the Zagat listing of best restaurants in the Orlando area. In addition to its famous prime steaks and fresh seafood, the menu now includes more options, such as a hefty 16-oz. Veal Chop and mouthwatering Sesame Crusted Tuna. Cafe Matisse offers buffets and à la carte menus for breakfast, lunch and dinner; and Lite Bite is ideal for sandwiches and snacks. Smooth Java and the Lobby Bar are great places to gather. The newly renovated Backstage Nightclub & Sports Bar, which features a huge dance floor, live music on weekends, six 50-inch flat-screen TVs for the ultimate high-definition sports and an all-new recreation area with pool tables, darts and video games.

Other amenities include a tropical swimming pool area with a cascading waterfall and whirlpool, as well as a fitness center. Guests are granted privileges and complimentary transportation to the Shingle Creek Golf Club, which is located just minutes away. Complimentary scheduled transportation is available to Universal Orlando, SeaWorld and Wet 'n Wild. Walt Disney World theme parks are 10 minutes away, and the Pointe Orlando shopping/entertainment complex is across the street.

Our staff is empowered to create meetings of exceptional value while delivering the legendary service that Harris Rosen insists upon in all of his hotels. Our flexible and motivated staff members will do everything in their power to make your next meeting something to remember for years to come. AC&F



## LOCATION IS EVERYTHING. BUT NOT THE ONLY THING.

Impeccable service, luxurious accommodations, exceptional meeting facilities and impressive event capabilities are just some of the many reasons why the Rosen Plaza Hotel is a great place to meet. Being next to the Orange County Convention Center on International Drive, just steps from endless entertainment doesn't hurt either.

For more information, please call (407) 996-9700, or email [Sales@RosenPlaza.com](mailto:Sales@RosenPlaza.com).  
[www.RosenPlaza.com](http://www.RosenPlaza.com)



### FACTS & FEATURES

Guest Rooms: 800

Meeting Space: 60,000 sf

### SPECIAL SERVICES & AMENITIES

Opening this fall, the Gary Sain Memorial Bridge connects Rosen Plaza to the Orange County Convention Center West Building, completing the final link in connecting OCCC with adjacent International Drive hotels. The bridge provides a safe, weather-proof and traffic-free "commute" to the convention center. Rosen Plaza Hotel is a Florida DEP Two Palm Green Lodge.



## REST ASSURED.

Synonymous with exceptional service and guest satisfaction, Rosen Hotels & Resorts sets the standard for hospitality in Orlando and has for over 38 years. Free Internet in all guestrooms and public spaces. Robust planner perks. Unparalleled personal attention. Impeccable service. At Rosen Hotels & Resorts, your peace of mind is our highest priority.







## Rosen Shingle Creek

9939 Universal Boulevard, Orlando, FL 32819

866-996-9939 or 407-996-6338 • Fax: 407-996-9935 • Leslie Menichini, V.P. Sales & Marketing, Rosen Hotels  
sales@RosenShingleCreek.com • www.RosenShingleCreek.com

For a luxurious, upscale and naturally beautiful Florida experience, planners need look no further than Rosen Shingle Creek, a AAA Four Diamond premier meeting destination conveniently located 10 minutes from the Orlando International Airport and within one mile of the Orange County Convention Center North/South building. Rosen Shingle Creek is one of the largest full-service convention hotels in Central Florida, and offers 1,500 guest rooms and suites and 462,000 sf of dedicated, state-of-the-art meeting and event space, including three column-free ballrooms — the 95,000-sf Gatlin Grand Ballroom; the 60,000-sf Sebastian Ballroom and the 40,000-sf Panzacola Ballroom. In addition,

there are 99 meeting rooms, 55,000 sf of breakout meeting rooms, more than 100,000 sf of prefunction space, 50,000 sf of outdoor space, a 40,000-sf outdoor event lot and 250,000 sf of exhibition space. Meetings at Rosen Shingle Creek are a technological breeze: There is complimentary Wi-Fi and hardwired Internet service in all guest rooms and public spaces; and every guest room features two phones and NXTV technology.

### AWARD-WINNING GOLF AND MUCH MORE

Named a four-star “Best Places to Play” by *Golf Digest* magazine, the Shingle Creek Golf Club is a David Harman-designed, 18-hole, 7,149-yard championship golf course featuring undulating fairways and interconnecting waterways. Named as one of

the “Top 40 Best New Golf Courses in the U.S.” by *Golfweek* magazine, the club is home to the Brad Brewer Golf Academy, rated as one of the “Top 25 Golf Schools” in the nation by *Golf Magazine*. One of *Golf Magazine*’s “Top 100 Instructors,” Brewer and his PGA staff can orchestrate the ultimate golf program for meetings and events of all sizes.

The full-service, 13,000-sf Spa at Shingle Creek features nine treatment rooms and a fitness center. Amenities include lighted tennis courts, four swimming pools, several hot tubs and much more. The area’s major theme parks and attractions are nearby and easily accessible. The newly opened Mi Casa Tequila Tacqueria is a casual tequila bar and restaurant, which serves up authentic Mexican dishes with a creative spin. A popular draw — aside from the sipping tequilas and generous margaritas — is Lima guacamole, prepared tableside in a lava stone pestle. Other favorites include Banrai Sushi’s signature items, such as the Shingle Creek Roll with gator meat, along with more than a dozen traditional sushi dishes. At Tobias Flats, “old Florida” meets a new world of tastes in all forms of flatbreads, from appetizers and salads to sandwiches and pizzas. These options provide a quick and convenient complement to the hotel’s award-winning, fine dining restaurants, A Land Remembered, a classic steak house, and Cala Bella, an Italian bistro.

### THE ROSEN PROMISE

“At the end of the day, it’s all about service,” asserts owner/hotelier Harris Rosen, whose company celebrates its 39th anniversary this year. The staff will move mountains to satisfy the needs of every attendee, which is the hallmark of a Rosen property. AC&F

ROSEN  
SHINGLE CREEK  
Orlando, Florida

## URNS OUT, YOU CAN HAVE IT ALL. (ALL UNDER ONE ROOF!)

With nearly half a million sq. ft. of flexible meeting and event space, there are endless ways for guests to be inspired before, during and after your event. Rosen Shingle Creek is Orlando’s premier all-inclusive meetings destination. Featuring 1,500 guestrooms, award-winning restaurants, a championship golf course, spa and so much more, all backed by the unparalleled customer service that is a Rosen Hotels & Resorts hallmark.

For more information, please call (407) 996-9939, or email [Sales@RosenShingleCreek.com](mailto:Sales@RosenShingleCreek.com).

[www.RosenShingleCreek.com](http://www.RosenShingleCreek.com)



## REST ASSURED.

Synonymous with exceptional service and guest satisfaction, Rosen Hotels & Resorts sets the standard for hospitality in Orlando and has for over 38 years. Complimentary Internet in all guestrooms and public spaces. Robust planner perks. Unparalleled personal attention. Impeccable service. At Rosen Hotels & Resorts, your peace of mind is our highest priority.



ROSEN  
Planner Perks

Visit [RosenShingleCreek.com/ROI](http://RosenShingleCreek.com/ROI) for our current Planner Perks meeting and event offers.





## The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino

3355 Las Vegas Boulevard South, Las Vegas, NV 89109  
702-414-4202 • Fax: 702-414-4806 • Chandra Allison, Vice President of Sales  
Chandra.Allison@Venetian.com • www.VenetianPalazzoMeetings.com

**T**he comfort and productivity of attendees is front and center at The Venetian and The Palazzo, a Five Diamond resort respite in the heart of The Las Vegas Strip, where networking opportunities abound, and every guest room is a plush suite. Add the seemingly unlimited all-in-one-place resources of 7,100 guest suites and more than 2.25 million sf of convention space, and you've got the ultimate convention destination.

### MEETING FACILITIES

The Venetian convention space features one of the world's largest pillarless ballrooms at 85,000 sf, with an additional 298 meeting, conference and boardrooms. In addition, the adjacent Sands Expo features state-of-the-art convention facilities, with 1.9 million sf of newly renovated meeting and show space.

Together, the two hotels create the largest green-certified hotel property in the world. The hotels feature an unrivaled green meeting and convention program that offers a selection of environmentally responsible services.

### DINING AND MORE

To facilitate networking, attendees can enjoy delectable dining created by a host of James Beard Award-winning chefs in more than 30 onsite restaurants, outlets and lounges; more than 130 boutiques; dazzling entertainment and the calming retreat of Canyon Ranch SpaClub — renowned as the ideal place to relax, renew and re-energize.

From Emeril Lagasse's Delmonico to Thomas Keller's Bouchon, to Wolfgang Puck's Postrio, The Venetian's sumptuous Las Vegas fine-dining options promise to satisfy every palate, with new restaurants coming soon from Mario Batali, The Cake Boss Buddy Valastro and Daniel Boulud.

The experience begins the moment attendees enter The Venetian and The Palazzo as the most exquisite resort experience in Las Vegas unfolds. The Venetian, a must-see, gotta-share-a-picture-with-friends experience, overflows with the artful, authentic charm and romance of old-world Venice. Every painstaking detail has been recreated, from the beautiful frescoes of the Colonnade to the serenading gondoliers winding their way down the Grand Canal. At The Palazzo, visitors are comforted by modern Italian design, in a world where impeccable service and unforgettable ambience are at every turn. In fact, The resort was named in the Travel Channel list of "The Ultimate 10 Hotels in the World."

The breathtaking accommodations at The Venetian and The Palazzo offer a degree of luxury unavailable anywhere else. Suites average 700 sf — roughly twice the size of the typical Las Vegas hotel room — each designed to facilitate the business needs of meeting attendees.

Also new in 2013 is The Venetian and The Palazzo Premio Travel Rewards program, a new incentive program that leverages the most popular destination in the world — Las Vegas. The potential to experience Las Vegas as a winner is the ultimate travel incentive. The Venetian and The Palazzo offer the finest in meeting space, accommodations and amenities, all set in a luxurious resort.

AC&F

# IT'S ALL WITHIN REACH



Whether you're holding a conference, convention, trade show or meeting, let us transform your next event into a memorable experience at The Venetian, The Palazzo and Sands® Expo. It is our vision to redefine industry standards with dynamic meetings and convention spaces, breathtaking suites, sumptuous dining, exciting entertainment, and the finest retail.

2.25m+ square feet of flexible meetings and convention space  
65,000+ delegates  
7,000+ all-suite accommodations with The Venetian and The Palazzo  
4,900+ exhibition booths  
340 meeting rooms, 12 Junior Ballrooms, and 2 Grand Ballrooms

*...all under one roof, all within reach.*

THE VENETIAN® | THE PALAZZO®  
LAS VEGAS

3355 Las Vegas Boulevard South | Las Vegas, NV 89109 | 702.414.1000

### FACTS & FEATURES

Guest Suites: 7,100  
Meeting Space: 2.25 million sf

### SPECIAL SERVICES & AMENITIES

Business Center, Venetian Showroom, Canyon Ranch SpaClub, nightly entertainment, 30+ onsite restaurants, outlets and lounges. Located minutes from McCarran International Airport.





## Wynn Las Vegas

3131 Las Vegas Boulevard South, Las Vegas, NV 89109  
866-770-7268 • hotelsales@wynnlasvegas.com • www.WynnMeetings.com  
www.WynnLasVegas.com

There is an understanding at Wynn Las Vegas and Encore that their success lies in the complete satisfaction and success of every group that meets there. For planners who want to create an unforgettable meeting experience in the heart of one of the most exciting cities in the world, the industry-leading meeting facilities of Wynn and Encore await.

### FIVE-STAR SERVICE

With a staff dedicated to providing individualized service and support from initial contact to final departure, planners will experience firsthand the renowned service that has earned Wynn and Encore more Forbes Five Star Awards than any other casino resort in the world.

Groups large and small are brought together in beautiful, well-appointed spaces, customized and complemented with unexpected touches of elegance such as terraces and balconies that allow for that breath of fresh air and floor-to-ceiling windows, which afford gorgeous views of sparkling pools, gardens and the Wynn Golf Club.

Their catering department is renowned for creating unequaled culinary events or guests may enjoy the array of fine and casual dining experiences at any of the 20 restaurants at Wynn and Encore where master chefs prepare their signature cuisines for private dinners or luxurious receptions.

### WAYS TO ESCAPE

An abundance of recreational and relaxation op-


portunities allow attendees to discover experiences suited to their individual interests. The award-winning spas at Wynn and Encore offer a full menu of rejuvenating services, saunas and plunge pools.

The Wynn Golf Club is the only course attached to a resort on the Las Vegas Strip, offering a magnificent par 70 course with 18 beautiful holes of challenging golf.

For an exciting evening immersed in fantasy, danger and reverie, "Le Rêve – The Dream," set in the resort's intimate Aqua Theater, combines the awe-inspiring skills of aerialists and synchronized divers who take guests on a breathtaking dream-like journey. Or dance into the early hours of the morning at the hottest nightclubs on The Strip — Tryst, XS and Surrender — which offer some of the world's most celebrated nightlife experiences with internationally renowned deejays performing nightly. The clubs also can be used for private events.

### PERFECT ACCOMMODATIONS

At the end of the day, the rooms and suites at Wynn and Encore offer the perfect retreat for each member of your group with luxurious décor and amenities designed for ultimate comfort and convenience. Every room features breathtaking views courtesy of floor-to-ceiling windows, signature Wynn Dream Beds with fine European linens, touch-screen lighting, temperature and privacy controls, and an oversized marble bath with separate shower and soaking tub.

For meetings that produce more than just results, but result in something greater than you ever expected, Wynn Las Vegas and Encore await. 



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LAS VEGAS



# SMERFs

## Are Hooked on Being the Big Fish in a Small Pond

By Derek Reveron

**S**ocial, military, education, religious and fraternal (SMERF) meetings are all but unstoppable these days. While the SMERF segment isn't the largest, it is dependable, and continues to meet during the good times and the bad economic times with little attendee falloff. SMERF groups most often have loyal attendees who fill hotel vacancies by meeting on weekends and during off-peak times and shoulder seasons, says Sara Torrence, CMP, president of Torrence and Associates in Gaithersburg, MD, and a member of the Conference and Visitors Bureau of Montgomery County Maryland (CVBMCM). "If hotels and destinations want group business during those periods, they should look at SMERFs. Hotels don't have lots of group business over the weekends, and many corporations don't meet then. But many social, religious and fraternal organizations have to meet over weekends. They are very dependable in that regard," says Torrence.

While SMERFs are reliable, they tend to be mostly small groups with tight budgets and attendees who pay all or most of their meeting expenses. In part, that's why planners of SMERF

meetings tend to favor less expensive second- and third-tier destinations such as Virginia Beach, VA; Wilmington, NC; Louisville, KY; Springfield, MA; Oklahoma City, OK and Fort Myers, FL.

Many of these destinations, according to their CVBs, actively court SMERF groups. Still, SMERFs must work a little harder to obtain bargains due to the strengthening seller's market.

SMERF planners keep costs down by negotiating aggressively and focusing on the largest expenses. "A main challenge to controlling costs is working with hotel partners," says Torrence. "We try to keep hotel total charges within a person's budget. We focus on keeping room rates, and food and beverage costs as reasonable as possible, but you still want value. With food and beverage, I usually ask for tastings to make sure hotels aren't cutting too many corners. To get what you want, you have to start planning further out. Many SMERF planners don't do that," says Torrence.

Keeping costs reasonable also is a key factor in building attendance, which enhances negotiating clout with hotels. The Rev. Alice Kerr Laird, who plans meetings for Worcester, MA-based New England Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (New England Synod ELCA), says that cost control is crucial. "The congregations pay for voting members and pastors to attend. Some of our congregations have been struggling financially in recent years and have not sent their full complement of voting members," says Laird, associate to the bishop of the New England Synod ELCA.

The New England Synod ELCA also changed its meeting days to improve attendance and attract more young people. "We used to meet on Thursday, Friday and Saturday and attracted a lot of older and retired people," says Laird. "We moved it to the weekends so we can get more young working adults that don't have to take all that time off from work. We also try to have sessions and events like community work projects that appeal to younger people."



Sara Torrence, CMP  
President  
Torrence and Associates  
Gaithersburg, MD

***"We focus on keeping room rates, and food and beverage costs as reasonable as possible, but you still want value. ...To get what you want, you have to start planning further out."***



Attendees who meet in Virginia Beach marvel at the amazing exhibits and 800,000-gallon aquarium at Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center.

Such initiatives work best if they accompany efforts to get good deals, and Laird has a simple approach for that task. Just ask, she says. "We always do that. We don't really have any big strategy for keeping costs down. For instance, we might say we want something for \$25 per plate, and it must have a vegetarian option. We negotiate from there, and hotels usually work hard to make it work for us," says Laird.

Laird negotiated a series of one-year deals to meet in Springfield, MA, in June 2011, 2012 and 2013. The organization also plans to return to Springfield in 2014. Laird had some leverage in negotiating because the Greater Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau (GSCVB), which has targeted SMERFs for years, showed that it really wanted the group. "They recruited us very actively and gave us a good deal. The first year we were to go, a tornado hit a few days before we arrived (but did no significant damage). There were a lot of people using the MassMutual Center as a shelter. We debated if we should have our assembly that year but the city asked us to come. They really wanted us," says Laird.

The two-day New England Synod ELCA meeting, which represents the six New England states and two New York state counties, attracted more than 500 attendees including lay and clergy members as well as spouses and retired pastors. This year,

the 325-room Sheraton Springfield Monarch Place Hotel served as the group's headquarters property. Located just two blocks away, the group also met at the MassMutual Center, which boasts an elegant ballroom, five fully functional meeting rooms, 40,000 sf of exhibit space, plus a totally renovated 8,000-seat arena — all under one roof.

### ACCESSIBILITY AND CONVENIENCE

What planners avoid in a city such as Springfield is big-city traffic jams as well as lodging and pricing headaches. And access is convenient and simple. Easily driveable, Amtrak rail and national motorcoach service provide more transportation options, and the airport is less than 20 minutes from Springfield. What's more, exceptional dining options plus 1,000 first-class hotel rooms within easy walking distance make the center one of the finest venues of its kind in western New England.

Laird agrees that accessibility was a factor in choosing Springfield. "It works well geographically for us because it's easy for most of our New England members to get there. It's located at the intersection of Interstates 90 and 91 and a short drive from Bradley International Airport (Hartford, CT). It's a small city so you can walk around, and there are lots of things to do and places to eat," says Laird.





Photo by Michael Wolf

Activities in the Wilmington, NC, area include scenic riverboat tours and dinner cruises on the beautiful Cape Fear River onboard the Henrietta III.

Walking around is also easy in the Newport, RI, area. In nearby Middletown, about three miles from downtown Newport, transportation needs are minimal because so many venues are within walking distance of the hotels. Especially during shoulder and off-season, SMERF budgets are a good match for the properties in Middletown, which have suitable rooms and adequate meeting space (and cost considerably less than hotels in Newport).

SMERF groups also find meeting in Louisville, KY, attractive due to the value and easy access. "It's not only about affordability. Accessibility is big," notes Michael J. Kleine-Kracht, president of Louisville-based Visitours. "Being a driving destination is a wonderful advantage because we are within an eight-hour drive (or less) of three-fourths of the nation's population. Our convenience factor as far as getting around the city is through the roof. Everything is within a 15-minute drive."

#### SMERFS COME IN ALL SIZES

SMERF groups are typically thought of as small. But it would be a mistake to think of all SMERF groups in this way, including those in the social and special interest areas. "SMERF groups aren't necessarily categorized by size and aren't necessarily small," says Kleine-Kracht. "I think many national associations, especially when it comes to Louisville, would be classified as SMERF. Some of the groups can be citywides and serve as anchors for our meeting industry."

As an example, Kleine-Kracht cites the National Street Rod Association (NSRA), a group that meets to socialize and share their passionate interest. The NSRA held its annual Street Rod Nationals Plus in Louisville in August 2013 for the 16th consecutive year and 19th time overall. The group attracted more than 30,000 street rod enthusiasts who participated in an auto parts swap meet, an arts and crafts fair and trade show.

The four-day meeting was again held at the Kentucky Exposition Center (KEC), which features more than 1 million sf of exhibit and meeting space. More than 10,000 street rods and other vintage autos were displayed during the four-day meeting. The NSRA is contracted to meet in Louisville through 2020.

On the other end of the spectrum, Louisville attracts many

small SMERF groups including military meetings that typically have fewer than 100 attendees. There also are lots of religious groups that have a few hundred people or less, says Kleine-Kracht. "Louisville is a nice melting pot for different types of religious groups because of the faith-based organizations that are based here. We have the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Presbyterian Church USA. Some of the groups tend to fly under the radar because they don't use DMC and CVB services," he says.

#### CVBS TARGET SMERFS

More second- and third-tier destinations are reaching out to SMERF groups. For example, the CVBMCM in Maryland looks to attract SMERFs, says Torrence. "We have a large social, family and sports market good for meetings and sporting events like soccer and lacrosse. We target those markets by going to trade shows and engaging local citizens so they think of our destination. We also advertise in magazines that appeal to regional audiences and work hard to have a website that meets planners' needs and is easy to navigate," says Torrence.

The CVBMCM's website features Web pages aimed squarely at SMERF groups. The social event planning page touts Montgomery County as an ideal place for such meetings because it is within a one-day drive of two-thirds of the U.S. popu-

***"It's not only about affordability. Accessibility is big. Being a driving destination is a wonderful advantage. Our convenience factor as far as getting around the city is through the roof. Everything is within a 15-minute drive."***



Michael J. Kleine-Kracht  
President  
Visitours  
Louisville, KY

lation. The "sports Montgomery" page boasts that "the CVB has a close partnership with the sporting venues in Montgomery County and with the hotels that are located in Montgomery County, ensuring that all hotel rates offered through the CVB are the lowest available group rates." The site also invites groups to submit RFPs online and receive a response within 24 hours.

Destinations that depend on military SMERFs find their outreach efforts to be even more important due to recent federal budget cutbacks stemming from the congressional sequester. The reduction has impacted the number of military groups meeting in Virginia Beach, Newport and similar destinations. Military groups have been one of Newport's biggest-spending

SMERF segments and gravitate to the destination partly because it is home to the U.S. Naval War College.

The Virginia Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau (VBCVB) also focuses on growing other SMERF niches, especially the faith-based market. The VBCVB attends and helps to sponsor meetings of faith-based organizations, such as the Religious Conference Management Association.

#### TIME FOR GREEN

Popular SMERF destinations such as Virginia Beach offer several advantages for planners, including value, especially from October through May, which is when the hotel community can really use the business. The mid-sized Virginia Beach Convention Center also is a great attraction for SMERF planners because it is easy to navigate, and offers innovative opportunities for green meetings. The nation's first convention center to earn LEED Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, the center can hold any size meeting imaginable, with more than 525,125 gross sf, more than 150,000 sf of column-free exhibit space, nearly 29,000 sf of meeting space and a 31,000-sf ballroom — one of the largest on the East Coast.

From state-of-the-art lighting and HVAC systems to an extremely active recycling program, Virginia Beach's sustainability initiatives reflect their commitment to staying green and preserving the environment. Even the restaurants are into being green. Those establishments that carry the Virginia Green certification are committed to eco-friendly practices such as recycling, energy conservation and greater water efficiency. The opportunities to green SMERF meetings are endless in Virginia Beach.

#### FAMILY FUN, TOO

A family-friendly destination is important to SMERF groups as many members often combine the annual conference with a family vacation. In addition to sun, sand and beach activities that Virginia Beach is famous for, a trip to the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center is a

good choice, too. The center boasts an 800,000 gallon aquarium and live animal habitats as well as hundreds of hands-on exhibits, an outdoor aviary, nature trail and marshlands. The whole family also can revel in the 3-D Imax Theater with a huge screen six stories tall and eight stories wide. A 10-minute walk takes visitors through a salt marsh and a woodland preserve between the aquarium's buildings, and families can climb the 30-foot observa-



tion tower to get a view of Owls Creek from tree-top level. There also are 300 interactive exhibits to learn more about marshes, the bay and the Atlantic Ocean.

Oklahoma City, an ideal destination for SMERF groups and their families, is equipped to accommodate meetings of 25 to 20,000 delegates. One satisfied planner called it a “fun destination” that has some of the best steak houses in the country. Hotel options (there’s 16,000 hotel rooms) and budget-friendly price points also make Oklahoma City a great choice for SMERF groups.

The Renaissance Oklahoma City Convention Center Hotel makes a convenient headquarters property because it is connected to the Cox Convention Center via skywalk. Located at the heart of the downtown business district, the Cox Convention Center features 100,000 sf of exhibit space, 27,500 sf of meeting and event space, and a 25,000-sf ballroom. Surrounded by 1,600 hotel rooms, the center is also near bustling Bricktown, the popular entertainment and dining district along the Bricktown Canal.

Directly to the west of the Cox Convention Center is the Myriad Botanical Gardens and Crystal Bridge Tropical Conservatory, which features new adventures after a \$38 million transformation project including a restaurant, interactive water features, a new children’s garden, dog release area, grand event lawn and more. Coming in 2018, Oklahoma City will debut a new convention center. Construction is expected to start in 2016

### UNIQUE DESTINATION FOR MOVIE BUFFS

Attendees who always wanted to be an extra in a film may consider meeting in Wilmington NC, which has logged more than 400 film-related credits. Filmmakers and association planners are attracted to this historic town along the Cape Fear River for great weather, three nearby island beaches, varied landscapes

Photo courtesy of Oklahoma City CVB



The Oklahoma City skyline.

and architecture, and the Wilmington Convention Center. The largest and newest convention center on the North Carolina coast, the center is not only a popular destination for meetings and events, but also serves as a backdrop for Hollywood blockbusters, TV drama series and national commercials.

Wilmington has produced three No. 1 hits at the box office in one year with the release of “The Conjuring,” “Iron Man 3” and “Safe Haven.” The newly released “We’re the Millers,” a popular R-rated comedy starring Jennifer Aniston and Jason Sudeikis, was shot at the Wilmington Convention Center in the spring of 2012. “Revolution,” the hit NBC series, is filmed in the Wilmington area, including at the Wilmington Convention Center.

The venue boasts LEED Silver certification and 107,000 sf of function space with event capabilities for 25 to 2,000 people. Groups are keen on meeting in Wilmington due to its temperate coastal climate and the 12,000-sf waterfront event lawn. The area is also home to nearly 8,000 hotel rooms and suites with unique settings ranging from Wilmington’s downtown Riverwalk to the sea.

### WORKSHOPS FOR PLANNERS

Some destinations are reaching out directly to planners and others who plan SMERF meetings. The Lee County Convention & Visitors Bureau (LCCVB), which represents The Beaches of Fort Myers and Sanibel, sponsors complimentary planning workshops every April and October and attracts 40–60 attendees. The workshops feature planning experts who offer advice in several areas such as budgeting and creative activities for attendees. Also, the CVB offers information on such topics as the differences between full-service and limited-service hotels; how to talk to directors of sales and catering; how to set up a food and beverage budget; and how to put together a committee in charge of deciding activities and banquets.

The LCCVB also knows that SMERF groups want to feel like a big fish in a small pond. They want personalized attention and a special customized event. And the LCCVB aims to please. For example, the LCCVB’s SMERF outreach efforts focus primarily on military and other groups, but also include student and youth groups as well as law enforcement organizations such as the Tallahassee, FL-based Florida Police Chiefs Association (FPCA).

Amy Mercer, the FPCA’s executive director, says the

LCCVB recruited her through several emails and phone calls. The group’s 500 attendees met in Fort Myers for four days in June after a several year absence from the destination. The FPCA met at the 454-room Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa located in Lee County about 28 miles from Fort Myers. The Hyatt, with 70,000 sf of flexible function space, was a big draw for the FPCA, says Mercer. “We never go to convention centers because our members like a more intimate setting,” says Mercer. “The hotel is extremely meeting friendly. It is not so huge that you spend a lot of time trekking back and forth from the training sessions to the exposition. I’ve been doing this since 1999, and this is the only conference that has produced zero complaints afterwards,” says Mercer. The FPCA plans to return to the Fort Myers area, she adds.

Mercer says her group was the center of the hotel’s attention. “The Hyatt may have had a few smaller groups but we took up the vast majority of the hotel, and the staff made us feel special. Service and hospitality were spot-on. They even had people at the door to greet us when we arrived,” she says.

While Mercer got a good deal from the Hyatt, she finds it ironic that SMERFs must now fight to find good deals as hotel business is on the upswing. “What we see is that, because there is a bit of an upturn in the economy, hotels want to charge more as

*“The Hyatt may have had a few smaller groups but we took up the vast majority of the hotel, and the staff made us feel special. Service and hospitality were spot-on. They even had people at the door to greet us when we arrived.”*



Amy Mercer  
Executive Director  
Florida Police Chiefs Association  
Tallahassee, FL

far as room rates. They need to remember that groups like ours were there during the difficult times as well,” says Mercer.

All destinations can benefit from SMERF groups, which deliver a steady stream of meeting income even during downturns. Torrence reminds, “SMERFs bring value to any market.”

Truly, SMERF groups enjoy meeting in second- and third-tier destinations, especially when they are treated like the big fish in the little pond — a key reason why so many groups return to the same destination year after year. As CVBs and DMOs continue to fulfill the wishes and expectations of SMERF planners and their groups, their long-lasting relationships will continue to thrive. AC&F



An awards dinner at the Florida Police Chiefs Association meeting, which was held at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa in Florida.

Photo courtesy of Florida Police Chiefs Association



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# Staying Ahead of the Learning Curve

## Trends in Delivering Effective Education Programs

By Timothy Herrick

**A**s a leading revenue producer for associations and their events, education programs have never been more important. An education program is a key driver of association membership and event attendance, but in our ever-changing world, there is an increasing array of educational resources potentially competing with “live” educational experiences, and planners and association education program managers are under newly intensified pressure to ensure that the distinctiveness of that live experience is not diminished.

“Everyone in the association industry is working twice as hard to prove the value of their educational content, and to provide valuable content to their members and meeting attendees,” says Amy Ledoux, CMP, CAE, senior vice president, meetings and expositions, ASAE The Center for Association Leadership. “What we are seeing, within our (ASAE) members, is that there is so much change in organizational environments, but there is more pressure to make education relevant to members. Education is one of the most valuable things an association can provide, and it is what their members tend to value the most.”

Creating educational opportunities, according to Heather Rhoderick, CMP, MBA, director, events and education, American Composites Manufacturers Association, is one of the core components of her organization. For her profession’s largest annual conference, “Exhibits and networking are the top attendance drivers, followed by education,” she says, “However, over the



(Above) Attendees interact with their iPads during an American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery Foundation education program. (Below) AAO-HNSF simulation session.



past four years, education continues to gain in importance with attendees. It is becoming more of a reason they are attending our trade show.”

### CORE MISSION

Why this growing importance of education as enticement to attend an annual event? “Attendees are expected to come back with solutions and ideas, and companies spending travel and expense budgets to send attendees to events want to be sure that their employees are taking advantage of all the event has to offer,” says Rhoderick.

In many professions, life-long training not only sharpens your competitive edge in tight job markets, but is a requirement to actually work. “Education is one of our core reasons for existence,” agrees Mary Pat Cornett, CAE, CMP, senior director, education and meetings, American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery Foundation. “In addition to their constant learning to improve practice and patient care, otolaryngologists face increased need for education to keep up with changes in the business of medicine due to health care reform, medical technology, and requirements for measuring and reporting outcomes as well as changes in certification and licensing.”

“Engaging in professional development offered by experts in one’s field is one of the core reasons to participate in an association,” says Lydia Kamicar, manager, education and learning services, SmithBucklin. “In the medical profession, standards and requirements for licensure and board specialty practice have become much more defined in recent years as medical boards and state licensing entities have started to align their competencies in an effort to standardize continuing education requirements in professional practice. Non-medical education has followed suit, recognizing that defining core competencies and standards of practice lead to improved performance and job outcomes in any profession. This has led to an increased interest in formal certification even in non-medical fields.”

### AVOIDING CUTS

When education is the main reason for an association and its events, cutting that component seems not to be an issue. “We have cut nothing,” says Frank E. Gainer, MHS, OTR/L, FAOTA, CAE, director of conferences, American Occupational Therapy Association Inc. “We have to offer a breadth of sessions in order to meet the various needs of our attendees. If anything we are increasing our budget in the logistical support to put on our educational sessions. We are offering more educational sessions, including posters (pictured on page 46), so this takes more space.”

In the current belt-tightening climate, “Education has fared rather well, because even as budgets are being cut, the emphasis is being placed on investing in meaningful programs for the association membership,” says Ellie Hurley, senior manager, event ser-

**“Everyone in the association industry is working twice as hard to prove the value of their educational content, and to provide valuable content to their members and meeting attendees.”**



Amy Ledoux, CMP, CAE  
Senior Vice President  
Meetings and Expositions  
ASAE  
Washington, DC

vices, SmithBucklin. “Many times this means training opportunities. The justification to attend events is getting more competitive, so investing in building a strong education program could actually gain the association more membership/attendance revenue if they focus in on their core membership needs.”

### STAY FRESH

Even though most association education programs seemed to have dodged the blade of the budget-cutting knife, planners still feel the pressure to avoid a seminar rut. Education must evolve in order to continually attract attendees. “Don’t fall into the trap of ‘we did this event last year and it worked, so we’ll do it again,’” warns Rhoderick. “Work to set new goals and continue to refresh events and education so it is clear to the audience that the information is new. One of the biggest challenges in continuing to produce quality and timely education is identifying the topics and finding new — and good — speakers or content experts.”

What sort of homework assignments should planners complete to ensure professionals realize they must attend a convention for its education programs? Rhoderick recommends: “Reading industry publications, mining social media sites, working with your association magazine, and talking to your members are all important. Education managers and planners need to understand the industry and stay apprised of the issues.”

According to Cornett, the most effective method of keeping content fresh, thus consistently attractive to attendees, is to encourage participant feedback, stay abreast of trends and be open to new ideas. “Read evaluations to see what your attendees are telling you. Attend other meetings in your business, outside your business and within the meetings industry. Listen to the people with crazy ideas. Some of them are a glimpse into the future.”

In our wired, mobile computing world where the time span for relevant data seems to shrink every business quarter, new information and relevant data are vital. “Just in time” is the hot new phrase among planners, which refers to up-to-the minute training, with content that is exclusive and topical. Ledoux is hearing from association executives that members are demanding more



just-in-time programming. “Organizations are responding to the needs of members, and are working twice as hard to prove the value of their content,” she says. “Just-in-time programming takes more time and research, but it draws in attendees because it is information available nowhere else.”

In addition, attendees are attracted not just by the fresh content of seminars, workshops, classes and other educational programs, but by new and innovative formats delivering that content. “Some groups are offering more opportunities for different audiences at their events to maximize their time out of the office, including boot camps on the front or back ends, education on the show floor or hands-on learning labs,” says Kamicar.

## FACILITY EXPECTATIONS

With education being such a crucial revenue source, and becoming more intertwined with networking, the exhibition floor, general sessions and other event components, planners now have higher expectations of greater input by facility and destination personnel on education. When it comes to education, facility staff often had an attitude of benign neglect, but with so much riding on how effective the education program of a meeting is, planners are calling for more specific attention by facility personnel on those programs.

For starters, Gainer says, facility and destination personal must: “Ensure we have enough space for what we need to do. If there is another group using adjoining space, ensure that we both respect each others needs, for example, no loud music to disrupt the other meeting.”

Facilities are adept at making sure simultaneous events can coexist in terms of foot traffic and allocating meeting space, but often they overlook the exacting demands of education and optimizing the use of multiple meeting rooms for these training and



The American Occupational Therapy Association Inc. has increased its number of education offerings, including the poster session (left).

informational purposes. “If multiple groups are in close proximity, the CSM (Client Services Manager) is the one that can help them work together to ensure success,” says Hurley.

“For example, if one group is doing test-taking, and the other group has a comedian, the CSM can help coordinate/suggest different timing or moving the rooms so they don’t interfere with each other. The CSM also knows their facility best. They know if certain rooms have louder AC units, or you can hear the kitchen, etc.”

Hurley also recommends that from site selection to final planning, facility and destination staff should be well-informed specifically about the educational needs. Planners should encourage them to offer ideas as well as solutions and other assistance. “The destination can help suggest unique venues for education,” she continues. “For example, a medical group may want to go to a local lab. Or a technology group may want to take advantage of the local corporate office. Or there simply may be a unique venue that gets the audience out of the lecture-style format.”

“Destinations should consider ways to better connect local business to events, in terms of helping to identify education content that is specific and unique to the destination,” says Rhoderick. “While this certainly could not happen with every event, there are times when an association may be looking for a speaker from a business that may not be in the industry, but can still share insights

on a common business challenge. For example, there may be businesses in the area that have won local awards for marketing or management who could share their insights.”

What it comes down to is the level of communication between planners and facility and destination personnel about how to best accomplish the education mission of the event. “Don’t just order Internet, explain what you are doing,” says Hurley. “For example, will all 1,200 event attendees be trying to access or download a video at the same time? Or are you streaming a keynote session and need to ensure a flawless feed? Often the IT techs know details about bandwidth, etc. that the planner may not know.”

At the top of the planner’s list of facility expectations for their educational considerations is a dependable, wide-scale technological infrastructure in place to meet contemporary education demands, and not accompanied by exorbitant add-on costs. “With so many attendees and exhibitors on smartphones, social media is accessible and instant,” says Rhoderick. “Attendees want this access, and this can help to complement the program — through immediate response equipment or social sites — and having smartphones work on all carriers and having easy and cheap Web access allows this. It also keeps attendees at the venue and not back in their hotel room checking emails.”

“We network our session rooms and need to tap into a fast, reliable infrastructure,” says Cornett. “Our attendees, staff and vendors are dependent on reliable Wi-Fi. People expect to be able to

***“We have to offer a breadth of sessions in order to meet the various needs of our attendees. If anything we are increasing our budget in the logistical support to put on our educational sessions.”***



Frank E. Gainer, MHS, OTR/L, FAOTA, CAE  
Director of Conferences  
American Occupational Therapy Association Inc., Bethesda, MD

connect to their home and office anywhere, anytime. Wi-Fi is no longer a luxury and can no longer be priced as such. We are currently enamored with digital signage and video walls as new ways to communicate with attendees and enhance the meeting environment. We’d like facilities to treat these as basic needs rather than revenue opportunities.”

## TECHNOLOGY COMPETITION

As a main draw for a convention, education is a leading generator of revenue. But this position some feel may soon be threatened by other sources of education, such as new virtual technologies — webinars and other online training programs — which are often offered by the association.

Planners feel that any conflict between live and virtual education is minimal. “Our education program contributes positively to the bottom line of the association,” says Rhoderick. “There are very few times we will provide education that does not generate profit. However, we do struggle to find the correct balance of the education we provide to our members as part of their member dues versus the education we make available for a fee to the entire industry.”

Even so, Rhoderick emphasizes, “I don’t see technology as a competitor to education or face-to-face events.” She advises using online options as a marketing tool for the convention. “Technology can help you introduce a new audience to your content and value without asking them to spend a lot of time or money.”

The trend is toward utilizing the technology to enhance the actual live educational event. “The perception that your meetings will be negatively affected by adding virtual elements is just that — the perception,” says Hurley. “The reality is that companies who used to send several individuals to a conference might now only be able to send one or two. From what we’ve experienced, membership activity is increased when more avenues to experience the content are available. Streaming a keynote live from a conference, for instance, lets people still feel connected and excited about not missing out on the event next year.”

The recommended approach toward technology options, however, is less is more and to think about it in terms of marketing, not



Mary Pat Cornett, CAE, CMP  
Sr. Director, Education & Meetings  
American Academy of  
Otolaryngology-HNSF  
Alexandria, VA

***“Read evaluations to see what your attendees are telling you. Attend other meetings in your business, outside your business and within the meetings industry. Listen to the people with crazy ideas. Some of them are a glimpse into the future.”***





Ellie Hurley  
Senior Manager, Event Services  
SmithBucklin  
Chicago, IL

***“Membership activity is increased when more avenues to experience the content are available. Streaming a keynote live from a conference, for instance, lets people still feel connected and excited about not missing out on the event next year.”***

as a replacement for the live event experience. “The key is to pick and choose,” Hurley continues. “Offer one track out of 10 as a virtual offering, or stream one keynote instead of all events to show that there is much more to the onsite experience than a virtual attendee is receiving. We suggest to our clients that promotion of virtual events is saved until closer to the conference to maximize your promotion of the onsite experience above the virtual component.”

“By capturing content at the events, you are also ensuring that the program is expanding and enduring beyond the dates of the conference,” says Kamicar. “By recording great content already delivered as a conference session, the resources in your on-demand library begin to grow through this re-purposing.”

In 2013, ASAE will cease offering take-home audio CD sessions, which were part of some attendee packages. “The technology is older and is not that popular anymore,” says Anne Blouin, CAE, chief learning officer, ASAE, who added that the organization will replace these recordings with a more cutting-edge format, although, it is not ready to release that information publicly. Webinars and some educational seminars are available through streaming and other capture technology, “but not the all the sessions, which would be cost-prohibitive. You do not want to duplicate what you do live, but use that content to supplement and promote.”

#### EXPANDING OFFERINGS

Indeed, while technology can enhance and extend the live education experience, for an association it remains a key foundation to event organizing. Gainer says that the main driver for attendance at the organization’s annual conference (“three of the four largest annual conferences we have had have been in the last three years,” he says) has been education. “Our members value face-to-face,” he says. “Our attendees come to our annual conference for the educational sessions and to network.”

In order to accommodate more advanced professionals, some organizations created additional meetings that feature more exclusive — and specialized — content. “We are now offering three specialty conferences a year,” says Gainer. “We used to do one or two. We find that attendees are more experienced practitioners — and

prefer the in-depth knowledge of the specialty conferences. These attendees tend not to go to an annual conference.”

With the right content, customized for a targeted demographic within a profession, adding events creates more excitement within the profession and actually augments attendance at the main convention. “The specialty conferences have not hurt attendance at our annual conference,” says Gainer, adding that in 2007, the organization started a National Student Conclave, which is held each fall and features content that caters to younger professionals. “We have found that the student conclave has increased student participation at our annual conference,” Gainer explains.

While creating a separate event to accommodate increased demand for education, Kamicar warns that the mission of each event should be made distinct from the offerings identified with the annual meeting. “If separate events are created, it is key to have a clear direction for the event,” she says. “What are the goals for this meeting? What audience is this event going to attract? How will we know if this new event is a success?”

#### CELEBRITY DOWNSIZING

Cost-cutting may not be as drastic in educational programs as in other segments of a meeting, but ROI-conscious planners have implemented measures that have made an overall program leaner. The most common is getting the most out of speakers. “By working with speakers to deliver multiple workshops or sessions at your

***“Attendees are expected to come back with solutions and ideas, and companies spending travel and expense budgets to send attendees to events want to be sure that their employees are taking advantage of all the event has to offer.”***

Heather Rhoderick, CMP, MBA, Director, Events and Education  
American Composites Manufacturers Association, Arlington, VA

event, you may see some cost savings,” says Kamicar. “Sometimes associations feel as though they need a big name speaker to be a draw for attendees, and the investment in keynote speakers can be huge. But often a strong message or relevant content for the organization can be more meaningful to the people in the audience, so think about the themes most important to your membership and look at booking your keynotes according to content and delivery.”

In fact, speaker spending may be the one area of education most impacted. “The name speakers are not attracting attendees like they used to,” says Blouin. “People want speakers relevant to their professions, not just a famous celebrity. And, they want more access to these experts than just a general session.”



**“There is one thing we agree on —  
New Orleans is a great place to hold an event!”**

2013 New Orleans Super Bowl Host Committee Co-Chairs  
(and New Orleans locals), Mary Matalin and James Carville







CORBETS

The Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau has named **Kimberly Corbets** as convention sales manager. She most recently served as the sales manager at the Hilton Miami Airport, Miami, FL.

Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel, Lake Buena Vista, FL, has named **Jared McLachlan** as director of sales and marketing, replacing Eric Opron who has been promoted to hotel manager. McLachlan previously served as director of sales for the hotel.



MCLACHLAN

The Hyatt Regency Century Plaza, Los Angeles, CA, has named **Brian Morris** as director of sales and marketing. He formerly served as director of sales and marketing at Hyatt Regency St. Louis at the Arch, St. Louis, MO.

**John Washko** was named vice president of group marketing and sales for Atlantis, Paradise Island resort in the Bahamas. He most recently was vice president of sales and marketing for Elite Meetings International.



MORRIS



WASHKO

**Anna Gebert** was named director of national accounts for Visit Phoenix, based in the Washington, DC, office and responsible for the DC, Virginia, Maryland and Delaware territories. She was director, Washington, DC, regional sales, for Experience Columbus.

The Anaheim Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau has promoted **Colleen Cornett** to director of meeting solutions. She was previously the AOCVCB's director of convention housing.



GEBERT

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