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THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

## Sports Incentives Bouncing Back

How Popular Bucket-List Events  
Reward and Motivate  
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World No. 1 ranked golfer Tiger Woods with fellow PGA pro Mark O'Meara at a past Masters — the granddaddy of all sports incentives.

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Meeting Planner Guide  
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**The Health Care Act** Page 12

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JULY/AUGUST 2013

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Photo courtesy of Four Seasons Hotels

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Rendering of the Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World Resort, which opens in 2014.

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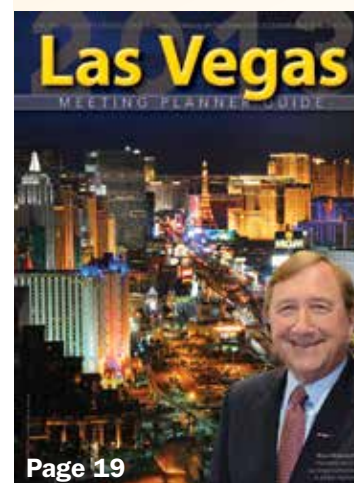
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Follow the Crowd to This Record-Setting Meetings Destination

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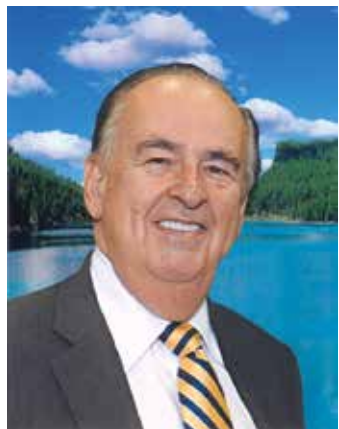
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## Publisher's Message

### What Money Can't Buy

An up-close-and-personal incentive program at the Masters golf tournament is a memorable experience that many insurance and financial industry salespeople have at the very top of their bucket lists. In fact, the Masters — the granddaddy of all sports incentives — is such a draw that even witnessing practice rounds in person and watching the final rounds at home on TV are



worth the hard work and sacrifices to earn the trip. Fred Rodgers, vice president, corporate group, Premiere Global Sports, a Libertyville, IL-based provider of sports incentives, has over the years taken several groups to the Masters, held every April in Augusta, Georgia. This year, he arranged a program for 80 incentive winners and customers. The top winners stayed for the final round, others had a two-day program during the practice rounds — a treat nonetheless. “A lot of people feel that watching practice rounds are some of the best days because you can do more as a spectator. It's more laidback, you can take pictures, and golfers interact and

joke with people a little. People tell me there is nothing like going to the practice rounds at the Masters and then flying home and watching the tournament on TV because you've been there,” says Rodgers.

Incentives are certainly on the rebound, especially sports incentives say the experts in “Sports Incentives Bouncing Back,” our cover story on page 60. Why do these once-in-a-lifetime rewards work so well? “Sports adds another layer of excitement around incentives. Not only do they go to a great destination but they add a bucket-list item that most people want to do,” says Brian Learst, CEO of QuintEvents LLC and QuintLoyalty, a Charlotte, NC-based full-service provider of sports and other incentives. Learst claims sports incentives are more popular now than they were in the pre-TARP days. “We are seeing more financial institutions coming back into the market after years of not doing any kind of incentive,” he says. “They realize they have to motivate top people just like other companies.”

Another surefire way to motivate top people is to reward them with an incentive program in a premier destination such as Las Vegas (see our special 36-page supplement on page 19) or Orlando (see our destination report on page 64), two of the most popular destinations in the world.

Harvey Grotsky

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NCL's  
Breakaway Plus  
will launch in 2017.

## Norwegian Cruise Line Orders Second 'Breakaway Plus' Ship

MIAMI, FL — Norwegian Cruise Line announced July 16 that it has confirmed an order for a second "Breakaway Plus" cruise ship with Meyer Werft GMBH of Papenburg, Germany for delivery in 2017. Along with the first Breakaway Plus ship, which is scheduled for delivery in October 2015, these two new vessels will be the largest in the line's fleet at approximately 163,000 gross tons and 4,200 passenger berths each. Norwegian Breakaway, the first of Norwegian's new Breakaway class vessels launched in May 2013, and Norwegian Getaway will be delivered in mid-January 2014. Known as New York's ship, Norwegian Breakaway is the largest vessel to homeport year-round in the city, sailing to Bermuda for the summer. Norwegian Breakaway's features include hull art by legendary artist Peter Max, seafood restaurant Ocean Blue by famed New York Iron Chef Geoffrey Zakarian, bakery by Buddy Valastro, star of the TLC series "Cake Boss," and fitness classes and a retrospective display from the Rockettes, the ship's iconic "godmothers." Sister ship Norwegian Getaway, currently under construction at Meyer Werft will be the largest ship to homeport year-round in Miami and will sail Eastern Caribbean voyages beginning in February 2014. [www.ncl.com](http://www.ncl.com)

## New Rooms and Check-In at Washington Marriott at Metro Center

BETHESDA, MD — The Washington Marriott at Metro Center, situated in the heart of downtown DC, has announced the completion of the renovation of its 459 guest rooms and suites, a multimillion-dollar investment by its owners Host Hotels & Resorts Inc. The hotel is also an early adopter of Marriott Hotels' new mobile check-in, allowing smartphone users a convenient, easier and faster way to check in. The newly renovated guest rooms feature upgraded Wi-Fi, an iPod docking station, Bath&Body Works Energizing Aromatherapy products and HDTVs. All Marriott Rewards members can check-in after 4 p.m. the day before their arrival with the Marriott Mobile App and receive an automatic notification when their room is ready. Because credit card information is stored within their Marriott Rewards profiles, members simply walk up to the mobile check-in desk where their pre-programmed key card will be waiting for them. The mobile check-in feature is available in the free Marriott mobile app in the Apple iTunes Store and Google Play. The 459-room hotel features two concierge levels, 12,451 sf of meeting space and 16 breakout rooms. [www.marriottmetrocenter.com](http://www.marriottmetrocenter.com)

## The Westin Diplomat Rewards Planners With Greek Vacation



The Westin Diplomat Resort & Spa, Hollywood, FL.

HOLLYWOOD, FL — The Westin Diplomat Resort & Spa, a 998-room ocean-front resort located in Hollywood, FL, is offering planners a chance to win a vacation in Greece. Planners who book and host a meeting at The Westin Diplomat Resort & Spa by the end of 2013 are eligible to win a five-night stay at The Westin Costa Navarino Greece including round-trip airfare for two, valued at \$7,500. The winner will be selected by January 15, 2014, and will have until December 31, 2014 to redeem their grand prize. Additional prizes include Westin Heavenly Beds. The Westin Diplomat's convention center provides more than 200,000 sf of flexible meeting and catering space including four ballrooms, a 50,000-sf unobstructed Great Hall and 39 individual meeting rooms. The resort offers several dining options, water sports and two marinas, an 18-hole championship golf course managed by Troon Golf and the new 14,000-sf Heavenly Spa by Westin. For details, call 954-602-8607 or e-mail [diplomatinfo@westin.com](mailto:diplomatinfo@westin.com).



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**1** Attendees and emcee James Cunningham, comedian and host of "Eat St." on The cooking Channel, show off FICP's logo at the 2013 FICP Education Forum where nearly 200 planners and hospitality partners gathered in Park City, Utah. In addition to content-rich education sessions and peer-to-peer networking, the highlights included keynote addresses from Jean Chatzky, Juliet Funt, Ken Schmidt and Chris Waddell as well as events that showcased the best of Park City such as a progressive evening at the Stein Eriksen Lodge and The St. Regis Deer Valley, with beautiful views from a chair lift transfer and an artistic evening at the Montage Deer Valley. **2** FICP attendees at the Stein Eriksen Lodge. **3** Las Vegas was well represented at the conference by Linda Barley, Nicole Greber, Debby Jacobs Felker and Jennifer Cheung. **4** Shelia Cleary, Pam Ferguson and Kelli Livers enjoy the spectacular Utah scenery from the chair lift as do **5** Bob Beach, Peggy Rupprecht, Alison Hall and Dan Tavrytzky. **6** The Park City sun is shining on Lindsay Goodson, Heidi Carlisle, Sara Justice and Nicole Quattlebaum. **7** Tamara MacDougal, FICP Executive Director Steve Bova and Lynn Lee are all smiles at the well-attended education conference. **8** Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa's General Manager Joe Murgalo (center) with Randy and Paula Greenfield and Hoss & Honey Bear — the resort's new canine greeters. Owner/handler Paula Greenfield and her husband, Randy, who have worked with the Hyatt Corporation for a combined total of 21 years, recently moved to Southwest Florida. Randy works in the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa's engineering department, and Paula and the dogs work in recreation as animal concierge. The gentle, trained Newfoundlands can be found at the front desk of the Bonita Springs, FL, resort or walking the grounds with Paula during the day.



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# Work-Life Balance

By Lea Green



## Coping With Work-cations: When You're Not Really Ever 'Out of Office'

**F**inding time for a vacation in this era of ultimate connectivity can be a challenge — we are surrounded and incessantly summoned by smartphones, laptops and tablets. In many ways, the proliferation of integrated technology has made the lives of corporate meeting planners easier and more convenient, as we now have the freedom to work from anywhere in the world. This freedom, though, is not without its price. For some, technology car-

ries the burden that they are always connected and reachable, regardless of where they are and what time it is.

Meeting and conference planning has many moving parts. Major shifts can occur at any moment — including inopportune ones — and require quick thinking and action, even while away from the office. The pace of conducting business is faster than ever, thanks to our 24/7 connectivity. In fact, according to a 2011 study by Regus, more than 75 percent of Americans say they stay connected to the office while on vacation, and more than 66 percent regularly check email while they're away. As a result, many vacations are transformed into a hybrid work-cation.

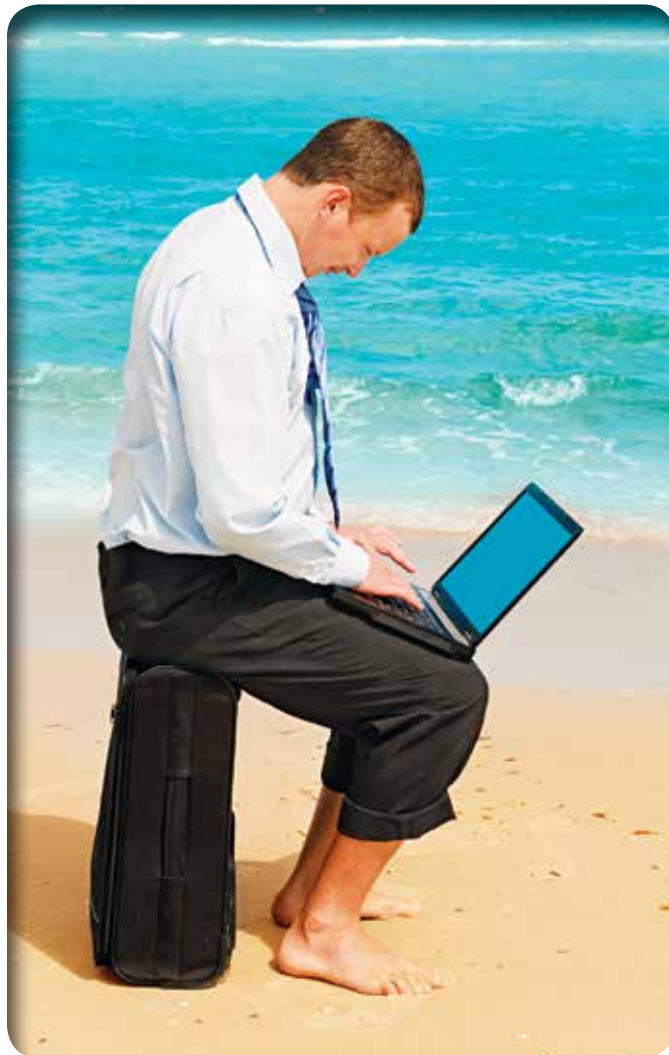
Regardless of the industry, it can be difficult to navigate between the responsibilities to your employer and the much-needed respite from these responsibilities. The challenge of striking a work-life balance is universal among knowledge workers; however, by asking a few questions and planning in advance, you can manage the inevitable work-related requests that will occur while you are on vacation.

### Is a Work-cation Necessary?

Although working on vacation is becoming an increasingly common practice in today's connected world, we all, eventually, need a break from the daily grind. The first question you should ask yourself before considering a work-cation is whether it is absolutely necessary to work while away from the office. A few more follow-up questions can help to determine if you actually need to boot up from the beach:

- Do you absolutely need to work while on vacation? Or can you delegate your responsibilities temporarily?
- How much work will you actually get done while working on vacation? (Remember to be realistic.)
- How will working affect your vacation time?
- How will working affect the other people on vacation with you?

Finding a true balance between work and relaxation while on vacation is critical if you hope to enjoy your time off. Don't be afraid to trust your coworkers and hand someone else the reins in your absence, assuming they have the know-how to complete the assignments while you're away.



### How to Balance Work and Vacation

If you answered "yes" to the first question and absolutely need to spend at least some time working while on vacation, here are five tips to help you strike a balance and still have fun on your time off:

- 1. Plan your vacation.** If possible, plan your vacation early and compartmentalize. Balancing the responsibility between personal time and work will always be a challenge, but by allotting a specific time to be online and available for work, you won't spend the whole day checking your phone, wondering how things are going back at the office.
- 2. Get work done early.** Schedule the morning hours

More than 75 percent of Americans say they stay connected to the office while on vacation.

to complete assignments or hold meetings. Then, but only if necessary, you can check in later during the day without having requests hanging over your head. Once you have finished your morning work, stop thinking about it and spend the rest of the day having fun and relaxing with family or friends.

- 3. Make connectivity a priority.** If you will need to get online (and cellular networks won't cut it), make doing so as easy as possible. Choose a hotel with high-speed Internet access so that you can quickly get online, complete your work and get back to your vacation time. If your hotel doesn't provide high-speed Internet, ask the concierge for a nearby coffee shop with Wi-Fi and combine your morning "pick-me-up" with your morning productivity.
- 4. Set clear expectations with colleagues and clients.** Be upfront with colleagues and clients well in advance of your planned time away, communicating that you will be out of town with limited availability, and be sure your automatic out-of-office email states this clearly as



well. Attending some meetings may be unavoidable, so if you must participate, use a collaboration tool with integrated mobile apps that allow you to access the meeting from anywhere on your tablet or smartphone.

- 5. Set clear expectations with your travel companions.** If you are traveling with others, let them know when you plan to "plug in" so they can plan accordingly. Communicating clear expectations with friends and family and sharing when you will (and will not) work also allows them to hold you accountable to disconnect and actually enjoy your vacation.

### Take That Vacation

As we head into the heart of the summer travel season, employees around the U.S. will pack up for some much needed rest and relaxation. And yes, the majority of these individuals will bring their mobile devices along with their beach towels so that their electronic tether to work remains intact. The question in our hyper-connected lives has now become: How will you choose to spend your work-cation? By taking a critical look at what you need to do and how to effectively compartmentalize your time, you can remain connected to the office without sacrificing your vacation, as well as continue to build connections with those who travel by your side.

**I&FMM**

**Lea Green**, who telecommutes regularly, is content director, strategy and communications, for Premiere Global Services Inc. PGi has been a global leader in virtual meetings for more than 20 years. PGi's cloud-based solutions deliver multi-point, real-time virtual collaboration using video, voice and file sharing technologies. [Lea.Green@pgi.com](mailto:Lea.Green@pgi.com), [www.pgi.com](http://www.pgi.com)



# The Health Care Act AND THE Meetings Industry

## The Time Is Here to Educate, Inform and Explain

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) is causing acute upheaval in the insurance industry as anxiety and uncertainty prompted by its long rollout continue to mount. In turn, those realities — along with the need for insurance companies to find strategies that deliver profits from a changing marketplace — are motivating insurance companies to hold more educational and training meetings.

“The first issue that companies are really having to deal with now is that because the Supreme Court upheld the ACA, it is now the law of the land,” says Kimberly Stansell, an independent strategic planning consultant and event producer at Los Angeles-based Kimberly Stansell Events LLC, which serves a number of health care and insurance clients. “And that means insurance companies are having to deal with it, whether they want to or not. And the first thing that means is that companies are having to educate their workers about what the law means to their businesses in general. Then you have to

look at what it means to your particular company and to you and your job as an individual. So the focus of the ACA-related meetings now is to educate, inform and explain things like organizational strategy.”

Lisa Keilty, CMP, vice president at Noank, CT-based pmc<sup>2</sup>, a consult-

ing firm that specializes in compliance and innovation-related issues for pharmaceutical and insurance clients, agrees that the ongoing implementation of ACA is driving a need for more meetings and seminars.

“The ACA has forced insurance companies to all look at each other and say, ‘How are we going to do this? How are we going to get paid less, but be expected to do more?’” says Keilty,

By John Buchanan

who hosted a well-received session at Meeting Professionals International’s World Education Conference last summer on how global health care regulations are impacting meetings and events. “And in insurance companies and health care companies and pharmaceutical companies, everyone is now asking, ‘How is this going to affect my business?’ So that’s why we have seen and continue to see an increase in the number of meetings. And the increase in meetings includes both face-to-face meetings and virtual meetings and webinars, because everyone is addressing those kinds of questions now. And it’s not just about sales or customer service. It’s about everything, including strategy and things like data mining so an organization can gather the information it needs to determine its strategy in the market.”

And the meetings are not only about what a company is going to do, Keilty notes. They are also about how they’re going to do it.

### A Changing Industry

Mike Owens, senior vice president at Chicago-based GoHealth, an intermediary organization that represents 18 top-rated U.S. insurance companies and employs 4,000 independent agents, explains how ACA is changing the insurance industry.

“The Affordable Care Act,” he says, “will change both the major medical insurance products that are distributed to consumers under age 65 and the ways in which they are distributed.”

For example, Owens says, “Until now, the typical major medical insurance product sold to someone under 65 years old has had a fair amount of underwriting so that the insurance carrier understands the risks of the person they are insuring and can charge them the appropriate premium. The ACA eliminates underwriting and pre-existing condition exclusions, and therefore makes insurance available to every consumer in the U.S. — but

not based on their health or medical history, as in the past. So instead, insurance will now essentially be priced in ‘age bands,’ at various levels of coverage known as ‘metallic plans,’ which today are platinum, gold, silver and bronze. And the second piece of it is that the distribution of those products is likely to occur during an open enrollment period. This year, that period will be from October 1 to December 31. And during that 90-day window, consumers will be asked to choose their coverage option and will be assisted in that process by what is referred to as a ‘navigator.’”

One of the key issues that remains unclear at the moment is whether insurance agents, as they are known today, will be allowed to become navigators. “There are thousands of pages of legislation and tens of thousands of pages of analysis involved in understanding these issues,” Owens says. “I have read all of it, for example, and it’s still reasonably unclear to me what it will mean.”

As a result, he says, there is enormous confusion, and also different interpretations, of how the ACA will impact the business operations of U.S. insurance providers and their agents and brokers.

That underlying reality, he says, is the real issue driving the need for more education and sales training meetings.

And for the individual agents who work for insurance companies, the issue is — in effect — survival and a continued ability to make a living.

“If their vocation is entirely based on selling insurance and some of their current income derives from the sale of major medical products — agents need to know how to plan their futures,” Owens says. “And they also need to understand if they are going to be paid for a particular kind of product and what they are going to be paid as they do indeed ‘navigate’ through the various new forms of insurance

exchanges, whether those be national or state-run. And concerns about those things among agents is causing anxiety and a certain amount of disruption in the marketplace. And those are the kinds of things that companies have to deal with now.”

For example, Owens says, many agents are currently pivoting and focusing more on the

**“Everyone is now asking, ‘How is this going to affect my business?’ So that’s why we have seen and continue to see an increase in the number of meetings.”**



Lisa Keilty, CMP  
Vice President  
pmc<sup>2</sup>  
Noank, CT

sale of senior-care products and ancillary plans that represent the best opportunity in a changing marketplace.

But that means they are facing even more uncertainty and risk than the corporate entities that are simply trying to figure out what ACA means to their long-term business interests and profitability.

“And all of that together,” Owens says, “also means there’s a need for more meetings with Medicare carriers, for example, so that companies and agents can figure all of that out and find a way to take advantage of the changes.”

### The Need for Emergency Education

Although the impact of ACA on a changing insurance industry is far-reaching, no aspect is more important today than the need for education, Owens says.

“That is also the topic that is most time-consuming,” he says. “And that’s because the products themselves are changing. Most successful insurance agents are well-versed and very good



at selling major medical products and have been for their entire careers. But now, they need to spend time and learn all of the new products and how they work in relation to the new ‘exchange’ products that are the only ones that can be sold after the final implementation of ACA.”

Stated in plain English, Owens says, that means that there will be an ongoing need in the future for a lot more training and sales meetings, because for the most part, the things that will be driven by the final phase of ACA implementation haven’t even started to happen yet.

“And that’s partly because the carriers haven’t even finalized their products yet,” he says. “But once they do, they will all start setting up meetings designed just to train their agents about how they are adapting to the new marketplace.”

Major intermediaries such as GoHealth will be a major source of those critically important meetings held on behalf of client carriers, Owens says. “That means that now, my colleagues and I are attending more meetings hosted by carriers. But in turn, we will start holding more meetings to educate and train agents in how to survive and flourish in the new environment of a fully implemented ACA.” That intensive activity, he says, will begin in the fall and continue into next year.

Richard Newman, managing member of Boca Raton, FL-based insurance agency Life Audit Professionals LLC, agrees with Owens’ assessment.

“In a sense,” Newman says, “I don’t think the situation with ACA is any different from any other training that you have to do when something new happens. Before agents can make sales presentations, they have to understand how what they’re doing fits into the new situation. And in this case, that means a new law that’s out there. But that also means that in the current situation, part of the need is based around understanding the law itself, in addition to how it will impact your particular position in the industry.”

Newman’s personal perspective is more geared around long-term care and life insurance. “One related issue for my business that I do not really understand yet is how (ACA)affects the care that in the past was really not included under Medicare, in terms of things like convalescent care for somebody who was not getting better,” he says. “Currently under Medicare, you

***“The urgency of the situation is causing companies to be open to different types of meeting venues. ...they have to be open to more kinds of meeting venues and spaces.”***

**Kimberly Stansell**  
Strategic Planning Consultant and  
Event Producer  
Kimberly Stansell Events LLC  
Los Angeles, CA

get services if you are getting better, but if you’re not getting better there is a cap. So that is one example of the ways in which implementation of ACA could impact my long-term care business. But that is also something that I do not fully understand yet.”

The point, he says, is that insurance professionals now need to analyze and understand how ACA will impact their particular product niche and livelihood, then educate their employees.

“At the moment, I’m concerned on two levels,” he says. “The first is as a business owner, how does this affect my business and my employees? And I have a growing business. We virtually doubled our staff in 2012. And if everything goes according to plan, we will double our staff again in 2013. So as an employer, my concern is what are the answers to all of these unanswered questions.”

However, he says, there is also a certain irony in his situation. “And that,” he says, “is that one of the

things that has made my company so successful over the last few years is that I am someone who embraces change, because with change comes opportunity. So I believe that those of us who end up at the forefront of understanding how the ACA will affect our businesses — and are best at communicating that to our employees — will be the ones who benefit from the change, as opposed to being hurt by it.”

In turn, Newman says, that requires being nimble enough to concentrate on education and training, as opposed to resting on past accomplishments. “And if you do that, change will definitely become an opportunity rather than an obstacle,” he says. “And to me, the difference will then be between the companies that will devote sufficient time and resources to education and sales training and those that will not. So that said, I intend to push information out to my staff and the people I do business with as rapidly as I can, so they can take that information and use it to their advantage going forward. I see education and training as a way to set myself apart out there. And I believe that by doing that, people will flock to us because there are so many questions and concerns about ACA.”

### Meeting Mechanics

Just as ACA is creating a need for more meetings, it is also requiring some changes in how companies conduct their meetings.

“The urgency of the situation,” Stansell says, “is causing companies to be open to different types of meeting venues, because if they need to have meetings sooner rather than later, instead of booking the traditional places they’ve always met in, they have to be open to more kinds of meeting venues and spaces to be able to hold the meeting now.”

For example, she says, the immediacy of many ACA-related meetings is having an impact on destination selection. “And that includes hold-

ing more meetings closer to home, as opposed to the destinations the company has traditionally used,” she says. “But the other big issue is that companies are also being more flexible, in general, about the way they are staging these meetings. And in some cases, that means companies that historically have not done webinars are doing them now because they meet a specific kind of need. So more webinars is one definite trend I’m seeing now.”

Another trend Stansell cites is how meeting agendas and content are being handled. “Because the implementation of ACA is a complex subject, the engagement element of meetings is being focused on differently,” she says. “For example, instead of someone just getting up and making a PowerPoint presentation, companies are now looking for activities that help them keep attendees more engaged on the specific topic at hand. And that involves finding ways to

help them absorb complex subject matter in a more fun, lively and stimulating way.”

One example: more live tweeting during the meeting to make sure all questions and issues raised by attendees are addressed as part of the session. “The issue,” Stansell says, “is making sure that people are getting immediate feedback, right now, so that their questions and concerns can be dealt with face to face at the meeting.”

She sees more companies also using onsite, real-time polling tools to get feedback and make sure the content is being mastered. “And again,” she says, “that has to do with the complexity of the information and the need to make sure that people are fully absorbing it.”

Given the complexity of the subject matter, Keilty says, ACA-related meetings are also requiring more external resources, such as particular kinds of specialized expertise that can help companies assess the risks and benefits of any particular strategy or action.

“In fact,” Keilty says, “my business has increased significantly just because I get more calls from people saying, ‘I heard this, or I heard that. What’s really going on?’ We tell people what they need to know and what they need to be doing to protect themselves.”

Because ACA will continue to evolve and be implemented into next year and even beyond, its inherent uncertainties and challenges will continue to require specific kinds of meetings and seminars, Stansell says.

“The situation is fluid,” she says. “It’s like any other major piece of legislation that has ever been passed in this country through the years. It passes Congress, then it’s implemented and that is a fluid process. And the impact of the law is going to evolve. So the need for interpretation and education and training will continue. That is going to take a while. It’s not going to happen overnight. So that means there will be a need for these kinds of meetings well into the future.” **I&FMM**



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Photo by Spiffire/courtesy of Primera

# The Big Welcome

## CVBs at Your Service for Successful Events

Primera meeting attendees arrive at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta.

By Karen Brost

**J**im Sharpton has a big job. As vice president, meetings and conventions for Primera Life Insurance Company in Duluth, GA, his responsibilities include a bi-annual citywide meeting that is held in Atlanta. This year, the event drew more than 35,000 attendees and required 42 separate hotel contracts.

### Welcome to Atlanta

“We used the Georgia Dome for general sessions, and we had the entire (Georgia World) Congress Center for workshops, breakouts, exhibits and two company stores,” he explains. He called upon the Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau (ACVB) for assistance. “For us, they’re a strong communication component as it relates to our hotels. They also help us a lot with facilitation on a number of aspects.

From the moment our attendees hit the airport, we have signage that the ACVB helps us put together, like large banners and things like that. Then we work with them to put together the street pole banners during our event. They also work with the various hotels and restaurants throughout the city, making sure that they are aware of our agenda peak times, again as a major communications component. (It helps us) communicate with the restaurants, in particular, that once our attendees get back to the areas where the hotels are, the dining outlets can expect some pretty heavy use.”

The Primera team also works with the ACVB to create several hundred buttons that restaurant and hotel employees wear to welcome attendees to the city. “They also help coordinate all of our pre-cons with the hotels,”

Sharpton states. “We’ve also used the CVB website a good bit. There’s a lot of good information there as it relates to hotels’ capacities. Since it is a city-wide, we can also help steer some of our hierarchies who want to do some of their own events, and actually put them in touch with appropriate hotels, ballroom-wise.

“Atlanta just works really well for us,” he continues, explaining that one advantage is the city’s proximity to Primera’s corporate headquarters in Duluth. “The other thing is transportation. It’s a major hub on just about every level.” He explains that a large number of Primera’s independent contractors are located in the Southeast, Northeast and Southern California. “Everybody is obviously scattered across the country, but those are our major three hubs of business.

All three have good access to Atlanta, and our Puerto Rico component can fly easily into the Atlanta airport, also.”

Soon, there will be even more reasons to hold meetings in Atlanta. “In

CVB that’s honest enough with me to say, ‘Listen, that’s a good choice, but this may be a better choice,’ Sharpton notes. “They’re going to have the working knowl-

**“From the moment our attendees hit the airport, we have signage that the ACVB helps us put together. ...They also work with hotels and restaurants throughout the city, making sure that they are aware of our agenda peak times.”**

**Jim Sharpton, V.P., Meetings and Conventions**  
Primera Life Insurance Company, Duluth, GA



2014, more than \$1.4 billion worth of hospitality product will come online in Atlanta,” explains ACVB president and CEO William Pate. “Part of this new wave of development is world-class attractions such as the National Center for Civil and Human Rights and the College Football Hall of Fame. Located just steps from Centennial Olympic Park and featuring flexible event space, these venues were built with the meeting planner in mind.” [www.atlanta.net/meetings](http://www.atlanta.net/meetings)

edge that I’m not going to have of restaurants, hotels, the locality and things that are going on in the city.”

### Support Services

CVBs offer more than assistance when selecting a destination for a meeting. Once the meeting is booked, they can provide a wide range of support services. Owens comments, “I’ve probably gone back to (Visit Seattle) with questions no less than 10 times in the last year while I’m working on this big group. (For example) we’re repurposing our flower arrangements in Seattle. We decided we don’t want flowers, so we’re getting succulents that are going to live, and we’re donating them to the children’s hospital there. I wouldn’t have found that if it hadn’t been for calling the CVB. I said ‘Help me out here!’ and they

gave me three or four places, and between them and the florist, we were able to get that handled. I rely on them heavily.

“The other thing that’s huge that CVBs can give you are the visuals for all of your collateral. They’re a great source for that kind of thing, as well,” Owens adds. Sharpton commented on another feature many CVBs offer. “I appreciate the calendar that most of them have because I don’t live there, and I want to make sure I’m not putting a major event into a city where they’re going to have another major event where there’s a conflict.”

### Hawaii’s in the Zone

Owens also works with the Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau (HVCB), and she noted a significant advantage they offer. “I think that one of the really key points, especially for Hawaii, is that they do have a local time-zone rep like Joan Palmtag that I can reach at any time. You know how it is when you’re working late or really early and they’re not in yet. You can call her and she either has the information readily available or will get it to you right away. Joan and her team have been invaluable to me. It’s helpful to have a rep in your time zone. I use Joan because I’ve known her forever and she knows the hotel side. She was director of sales at Mauna Lani, so she knows that

property inside and out and probably all of her competitors on the Big Island. She’s very well-versed on Hawaii. She knows the good DMCs, she knows the venues and locations that are good for off-property tours, etc.” The HVCB operates sales offices in various regions throughout the U.S.

Several major hotel renovation projects have been launched in Hawaii. Earlier this year, the Hilton

### The Inside Scoop

Lynette Owens, president of Lynette Owens & Associates, has been planning meetings and incentive programs for clients in the insurance industry for more than 20 years. “When I’m looking for a site, CVBs are invaluable, and not just for hotels — for everything,” she says.

Owens explains that back in 2011, when she began planning a huge program in Seattle for 900 attendees, with the top tier going on to an Alaska cruise, she called Visit Seattle first. “The CVBs are going to represent everybody, and they’re going to be honest about the space and what a hotel can handle. They’re going to tell you, ‘This one probably wouldn’t work for you.’”

“I actually appreciate a



The service from the Hawaii VCB is topped only by its iconic island vistas like this one of Diamond Head on Oahu.

Photo courtesy of the Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau





Photo courtesy of Tampa Convention Center

*Tampa's TECO Line Streetcar service is offered free of charge to meeting and convention planners and attendees.*

Hawaiian Village Waikiki Beach Resort on Oahu completed a \$25.5 million refurbishment of its Ali'i Tower. Also on Oahu, on the island's North Shore, Turtle Bay Resort is expected to complete a multimillion-dollar renovation of its 397 guest rooms, spa and fitness center and two restaurants later this year. On the Big Island, the Mauna Lani Bay Hotel & Bungalows is undergoing a \$30 million renovation. Upgrades to the resort's five bungalows are already complete and renovations to the hotel are expected to be wrapped up by the end of the year. [www.meethawaii.com](http://www.meethawaii.com)

## Super Phoenix

The Greater Phoenix hotel industry is counting on an "off the charts" boost from Super Bowl XLIX, which will take place in Phoenix in 2015. The last Super Bowl held in Arizona, in February 2008, attracted more than 91,000 visitors from out of state who spent \$218 million.

The 2015 Super Bowl offers excellent opportunities to plan meetings and incentive programs that incorporate the big game as well as pre-event festivities, and the Greater Phoenix CVB is ready to help. "Visit Phoenix offers a stellar convention services

team that offers innovative, creative and valuable insights for planners in the insurance and financial services industries," comments Doug MacKenzie, communications director for the Greater Phoenix CVB. [www.visitphoenix.com/meeting-planners/index.aspx](http://www.visitphoenix.com/meeting-planners/index.aspx)

## 'Free Yourself' in Tucson

Visit Tucson has launched a new branding campaign to promote the laidback, free-spirited nature of the city, which also is known as the "Old Pueblo." The campaign, which utilizes the slogan "Free yourself," was created by the global tourism marketing firm MMGY Global.

The city also is offering a "Tucson on Us" promotion, which offers a credit of \$500 to \$5,000 to a group's master account based on the number of peak rooms during a minimum two-night stay. Groups booking a meeting for three consecutive years can triple their savings, which would represent a credit of up to \$15,000. Complete details are available at [www.tucsononus.com](http://www.tucsononus.com).

## Record-Setting Orlando

Visit Orlando recently announced that the city welcomed 57 million visitors in 2012, which set a new record and reinforced the city's image as the most visited destination in America. To prepare for future growth, Orlando International Airport (OIA) is planning to invest \$2.1 billion in expansion projects through 2018. The improvements will include a new 16-gate terminal complex and extension of the airport's people mover system. OIA also will become the first airport in the U.S. to test a self-service kiosk to expedite international arrivals.

Orlando's hotels continue to gear up for more business, as well. The Sheraton Lake Buena Vista Resort completed a \$26 million renovation project last year that included revamped guest rooms, dining outlets and meeting space. It also included the new 27 Palms Pool Club, which features a 79-foot water slide, a waterfall and The

Beach, a zero-entry pool. The Hilton Orlando recently broke ground on the Promenade, a 50,000-sf outdoor meeting space. The new venue, which will accommodate up to 3,000 guests, is scheduled to be completed in the fall. (Also see Orlando story on page 64.) [www.orlandomeeting.com](http://www.orlandomeeting.com)

## A Free Ride in Tampa

Groups meeting in Tampa will benefit from the significant technology improvements that were made to prepare for the Republican National Convention, which was held there in August 2012. A \$15 million upgrade installed by AT&T 4G LTE covers the Tampa Bay Times Forum, Tampa Convention Center (TCC) and nine area hotels. The project expanded the area's mobile Internet service and added more than 200 Wi-Fi hotspots and three new permanent cell towers.

The TCC, located downtown, has partnered with the TECO Line Streetcar System to offer meeting planners and conference attendees free access to the service. Registered conference attendees can use their official confer-

***"I think that one of the really key points, especially for Hawaii, is that they do have a local time-zone rep...that I can reach at any time."***

**Lynette Owens, President  
Lynette Owens & Associates,  
Rancho Santa Fe, CA**

ence badge for unlimited use of the streetcar system during their conference at the 600,000-sf riverfront venue.

The TCC recently was approved as an Energy Star Partner. Energy Star is a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U. S. Department of Energy. It is designed to protect the environment through energy-efficient products and practices.

***Continued on page 55***



SUPPLEMENT TO CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL, INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT, ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

# Las Vegas

MEETING PLANNER GUIDE

[Click here to view/download the Las Vegas Meeting Planner Guide](#)



Photos courtesy of Las Vegas News Bureau

*Rossi Ralenkotter*  
President and CEO  
Las Vegas Convention  
& Visitors Authority



### Continued from page 18

Downtown Tampa has put a lock (so to speak) on a unique private event space. The Vault, which was built in 1923 as The Exchange National Bank, has now been restored to accommodate up to 600 guests. It features a soaring ornamental ceiling and a versatile, open main floor. The venue is located in the heart of Tampa's Downtown Arts District. In addition, Tampa's Classic Federal Courthouse is currently being transformed into a 130-room Le Meridien hotel, slated to open in 2014.

In other Tampa news, the Hilton Tampa Downtown (formerly the Hyatt Regency Tampa) is undergoing renovations to transform it into a four-star luxury hotel. The Floridian Hotel, built in 1926, underwent seven years of renovations and reopened last summer. It is one of the few hotels in the Tampa Bay area to earn a spot on the National Register of Historic Places. [www.visittampabay.com](http://www.visittampabay.com)

### Set Your 'Sites' on Scottsdale

The Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau (SCVB) is offering a "Site See and Fly Free" promotion that includes a customized site inspection for planners submitting a RFP for a group program that includes a minimum of 100 rooms on peak night. The offer includes complimentary airfare for one meeting planner, transportation, site inspections of properties and venues, and overnight accommodations.

Planners who want to add a bit of an adrenaline rush to the choice of leisure activities they offer their attendees can check out their options on a new website launched by the SCVB. The site, [www.adventurein-scottsdale.com](http://www.adventurein-scottsdale.com), lists outfitters that offer activities such as rock climbing, mountain biking, backpacking and canyoneering. The SCVB also has released a downloadable guide highlighting more than 40 activities that showcase Scottsdale's image as the "West's Most Western Town."

The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess

recently wrapped up a five-year \$60 million enhancement of the resort. The most recent additions include the new 52,331-sf Palomino Conference Center and the opening of

***"In 2014, more than \$1.4 billion worth of hospitality product will come online in Atlanta."***



**William Pate, President and CEO Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau**

Well & Being at Willow Stream Spa, which offers an à la carte menu of spa services, and health and wellness programs. [www.meetinscottsdale.com](http://www.meetinscottsdale.com)

### Viva Las Vegas

Meetings are big business in Las Vegas. In fact, meetings and conventions had an economic impact of \$6.3 billion in the city in 2011 alone. Never known for being a city that rests on its laurels, Las Vegas will benefit from more than \$5 billion in new projects in the next several years, according to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA).

One of the new projects is a multibillion-dollar Asian-themed resort complex on the Las Vegas Strip. Expected to open in 2016, Resorts World Las Vegas will feature 3,500 rooms and 500,000 sf of meeting space on the 87-acre site. Not to be outdone by the Eiffel Tower at Paris Las Vegas or the "skyscrapers" of New York-New York Hotel and Casino, the new property will include a replica of the Great Wall of China.

MGM Resorts International is investing more than \$300 million in its Las Vegas resorts in 2013. It is rebranding THEhotel at Mandalay Bay into Delano Las Vegas, which is expected to open in early 2014. The company also is renovating several of its prop-

erties, including Mandalay Bay, MGM Grand, The Mirage and Bellagio.

Caesars Entertainment is investing more than \$500 million in an open-air dining, shopping and entertainment district called The Linq. Scheduled to open in late 2013, the new complex will be anchored by the world's largest observation wheel, the 550-foot high Las Vegas High Roller, which will be larger than the London Eye and the Singapore Flyer. It will contain 28 glass-enclosed cabins that can accommodate up to 40 people each and the attraction will be available for group events.

In February, the LVCVA unveiled plans for the Las Vegas Global Business District, a \$2.5 billion project that will include major renovations of the Las Vegas Convention Center. This will be the first major expansion of the 54-year-old Las Vegas Convention Center in more



*Outdoor adventures in Scottsdale abound, including hiking, canyoneering, rock climbing, mountain biking, backpacking and more.*

than a decade. (Also see *Las Vegas Meeting Planner Guide* on page 19). [www.vegasmmeansbusiness.com](http://www.vegasmmeansbusiness.com)

### Insider's Knowledge

As they say, knowledge is power, and Primerica's Jim Sharpton summed up one of the key values that CVBs bring to the table. "They live there, they know the area. They're a great informational resource." **I&FMM**



# Training Meetings



**W**ith the economy slowly, but surely, expanding, corporate executives seem to be putting more emphasis on sales and training meetings in 2013.

For example, one survey found that this year about a quarter of surveyed executives planned on increasing budgets for sales and training meetings, and that one-third expected their sales meetings to have an increasing number of attendees.

## Site Selection

Conference centers and hotels continue to be prime venues for sales and training meetings.

NorthPointe Hotel & Conference Center in Lewis Center, OH, used to be a facility dedicated totally to Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company's training programs. While it is owned by Nationwide and still serves as Nationwide's primary training center, the campus is now open for other meeting and event business when not being utilized by Nationwide.

According to Kathryn Burton, general manager of the NorthPointe Hotel and Conference Center, the advantage of a place like NorthPointe is its isolation, which minimizes distractions and helps to facilitate learning. "It's centrally located in Ohio, but it sits off the road to create a private retreat, so it feels like you are a million miles away," she says.

Another advantage is that it is a facility dedicated to hosting meetings and events, particularly those related to training and sales meetings. Consequently, Burton says, NorthPointe is up to date technologically and provides planners with an environment in which attention is focused squarely on their, and their attendees' needs.

While hotels make obvious choic-

*NorthPointe Hotel and Conference Center in Lewis Center, OH, functions as Nationwide's primary training center.*

es for these kinds of meetings as well, they do create a bit of a challenge for one senior meeting planner from a large national financial services company who is still concerned about perception issues.

"Our budgets go through a lot of scrutiny," she says. "And there are certainly concerns about perception for our internal events that we are not spending too lavishly or going on boondoggles. And that's especially true for sales and training — we want to make sure there's no perception that we're taking our people out just to party."

So while her budgets haven't changed, she says, she prefers to bring those events to mid-level hotels, particularly if it is away from corporate headquarters, "because we don't want it to look like we're spending more money, whether or not we actually are."

While holding sales and training meetings onsite at a company's headquarters is always a possibility, that presents the problem of having to grab an attendee's undivided attention. For most planners, offsite is better.

For any kind of sales strategy meeting that requires a lengthier period of

time, "where you can really role-play and build skills, getting offsite is great, because you do get rid of all distractions" says Randy Schwantz, an insur-



***"It's important to get that right balance between getting our message out, and knowing what they want to hear."***

**Jennifer Dela-Cruz, CMP**  
Associate Director, Meetings & Events  
RBC  
Toronto, ON

ance trainer and owner of The Wedge Group in Frisco, TX.

Anita Carlyle, CMP, CMM, managing partner at Moore Carlyle Consulting in Toronto, and a member of the membership committee of Financial and Insurance Conference Planners, points out that smaller boutique properties and unique venue spaces make good sales and training meeting destinations, particularly for companies that simply want to get out of their downtown location for the day so that their people can't run back to their offices.

The financial services senior planner says that she always goes offsite for sales and training meetings simply because "we don't want (the attendees) running back to the office or going home in the evening.

"The biggest key is taking them out of the office and out of their home environment so we get their undivided attention," she says, pointing out that it also helps to get her salespeople together as a group. "It's already a close-knit sales team and the more they bond, the better they seem to do."

## Meeting Formats

Jennifer Dela-Cruz, CMP, associate director, meetings



Photos courtesy of NorthPointe Hotel and Conference Center



and events, brand marketing for RBC in Toronto, says that for sales meetings, her groups typically have about 125 attendees, so it's fairly intimate and allows for breakouts. For larger groups, she says, they may try to get a little more interactive — "something that will get people off their chairs and get them more awake and alive."

She has found that the length of her sales meetings has been shrinking: now they last 1½ days or two at the most, rather than the three days they were in the past.

"People just want to get back to their business," she says. "Branch managers want to get back to their offices, or they have clients

looking for them. A day and a half, or two days is about the most people are looking to sacrifice to do any kind of professional development, sales or high-level strategy event. As much as everybody says networking and face-to-face interactions are important, they are still worried about their day-to-day business."

The financial services senior planner says that in her case, the best kind of learning environment is one in which she has her group together. If she's at a hotel, she wants it to essentially be as close to a buy-out situation as possible so that her attendees have more privacy and fewer distractions, and she's able to get better service.

She says that for her sales meetings, sessions usually last between 30 minutes and one hour, and that attendees will usually go to two or three sessions before a break, although she does provide continuous coffee service so that her people can go in and out of sessions if needed.

"You can tell when a session has gone on too long," she says. "(Attendees) will start to wander, go to the restrooms and check their



***"To learn how to use a new skill you need to role play. You need practice, and you need feedback, and you need it on a continual basis so that you can actually use (the new skill)."***

**Randy Schwantz, CEO**  
The Wedge Group, Frisco, TX

phones. If you see a crowd in the foyer, then you can tell you've hit a breaking point."

So there is the challenge of maintaining the engagement level at these kinds of meetings. Getting the right kind of speaker/trainer can help, says Dela-Cruz, pointing out that the term "edutainer" has become fashionable.

"But, you want to make sure that what these speakers and trainers are talking about relates to the content," she says. "Do you want a humorous or motivational speaker if they aren't going to tap into why your people are all meeting together? A speaker or trainer has to understand what the end goal is, and then relate it to content."

### **Technological Advances — and Challenges**

"Technology is definitely the most challenging item we have to deal with as far as staying ahead of the curve," says NorthPointe's Burton. She notes that NorthPointe constantly brings in consultants from companies in the audio-visual and furnishings realm to assess the facility in order to ensure

"our facilities remain world class."

NorthPointe has to "constantly re-evaluate" its facilities, Burton says. "You have to, because the tools the students are using out in the field — like Microsoft Surface — are very different than they were even two years ago."

One such change has been the trend towards providing attendees with iPads pre-loaded with event content, particularly as meeting planners try to move away from print. Dela-Cruz points out that electronic security issues complicate things technologically for companies like hers.

"Since we're a financial institution, there are still a lot of challenges out there for us when it comes to using those devices," she says. "And it has to do more with internal security challenges, rather than actually using the devices themselves. If I'm an attendee at an industry conference, they are great — a lot of fun. But when it comes to our group, if our attendees don't all have them, then there's no point in putting an agenda on an iPad."

For planners looking to take their sales/training meetings offsite, Internet access remains a challenge, simply because it's very difficult to find a venue that's going to provide the free Internet that all planners crave.

"It's at the point now that we don't expect Internet to be free at any venue," says the financial services senior planner. "It costs us a lot of money, and we all think it should be free, so it's one of the concessions I always ask for." Not that she always gets what she asks for — hotels tend to give her free Internet in the guest rooms, but not in the meeting rooms, she says.

Fortunately, this planner seldom wants to provide general Internet access to her groups during sales meetings anyway, since her attendees will "probably end up just playing on their Blackberries all day and not listen to the sessions. So I only tend to buy five or 10 connections per meeting."

There are occasions however, when a meeting will have an interactive component, which does require attendees to have full Internet access. "We can expect to see more and more of these events that have interactive content where people will be using their iPads or iPhones," she says. "It's just a question of keeping them engaged so they're not wandering off and doing other things on their iPads other than the things we want them to do."

Carlyle points out that the cost of providing Internet access to sales and training meeting attendees isn't the only challenge facing planners — there's also the question of available bandwidth. "So you might get free Internet," she points out, "but have a situation where your people get back to their rooms at 5 p.m., and they're fighting with other users at the hotel for limited bandwidth."

### **Holding an Effective Meeting**

According to Randy Schwantz, sales meetings tend to fall into different categories, such as a "spreadsheet buyer's club meeting," where there's talk about numbers, "but you never really learn anything." Or there's a town hall kind of meeting, where "Mr. Big gets up and talks about the firm's state of affairs, and then lets the underwriter talk and discuss what's happening."

It's important to remember, Schwantz says, that there should be a difference between a sales meeting and, for example, a training meeting or meeting designed to impart some information from leadership to staff. A sales meeting should help a salesperson find a better way of winning business, make more money and grow the firm. One of the keys to a suc-

cessful sales meeting, he says, is participation. They can tend to be lifeless if the meeting is dominated by one or two people who tend to drone on. Instead staff should be encouraged to participate, and the meetings should be planned with that in mind.

On the other hand, a training meeting is something that should be designed to develop a skill and, Schwantz says, role-playing exercises should be a key component in this kind of a meeting.

For example, if he's trying to introduce a team to some kind of brand new sales concept he might take them offsite for a "solid" two days, and "roll out the concept, create a lot of discovery and a little bit of angst, so that they become open to learning, and then start to break down the process," he says. "And then we'll role play, role play, role play, then add another piece, then more role play, so that we're building it from beginning to end, so that when your team leaves

that meeting, you're not just getting (the new concept) conceptually."

He compares it to learning how to drive or to play golf: A golf pro can explain the mechanics of a good golf swing, but it won't really take until the pupil goes out on the course and practices. "To learn how to use a new skill you need to role play," he explains. "You need practice, and you need feedback, and you need it on a continual basis so that you can actually use (the new skill). You can get something conceptually, but never get it pragmatically. I can tell you how to drive, but if I never put you in a car, you'll never learn how to drive."

In the end, says Dela-Cruz, she finds that it's useful to understand not only what the company wants to tell its salesforce or other staff, but also what the employees want to hear. "It's important to get that right balance between getting our message out, and knowing what they want to hear," she says.

**IE&FMM**

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(Clockwise from top): Tiger Woods at a past Masters; meet-and-greets with Mario Andretti at Circuit of The Americas; Darryl Dawkins at the NBA All-Star Game; clients at the 2013 Super Bowl in New Orleans' Superdome.

# Sports Incentives Bouncing Back

## How Popular Bucket-List Events Reward and Motivate

By Derek Reveron

Corporate sports incentives are bouncing back, rebounding and coming on strong say the experts. The need to reward top employees and customers along with a growing variety of budget-friendly sports incentive packages are fueling a resurgence.

What's more, sports incentive groups are becoming smaller and more individualized as well, according to Bruce Rickert, president of Jamison, PA-based Peak Performance Travel Incentives. "Companies are sending fewer people and sending them to their preferred sport versus sending a whole group to the same sport. Not everyone is doing a big

president's club-type incentive anymore," he says. Rickert wisely encourages companies to set the budget first, and then his firm creates trips to fit the prescribed amount.

Although the overall size of sports incentive groups is diminishing, the number of companies participating is edging higher. Sports incentive providers say the increase comes as financial and insurance companies remain mindful of controlling costs and flying below the public radar due to the residual effect of the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) guidelines on incentives, meetings and events.

However, Brian Learst, CEO of

QuintEvents LLC and QuintLoyalty, a Charlotte, NC-based full-service provider of sports and other incentives, claims sports incentives are more popular now than they were in the pre-TARP days. "We are seeing more financial institutions coming back into the market after years of not doing any kind of incentive," he says. "They realize they have to motivate top people just like other companies. Sports adds another layer of excitement around incentives. Not only do they go to a great destination but they add a bucket-list item that most people want to do," adds Learst.

Tighter corporate budgets are, ironically, contributing to a strength-

ening sports incentive market, says Adam Rauch, president of One Line Sports Agency, a Bayside, NY, firm, which offers sports packages for corporate groups. "We are hearing from meeting planners and others who are doing the jobs of a few people and have less time and resources. They are turning to organizations to manage these programs turnkey. We have had about a dozen calls like that so far this year," Rauch says.

### The Granddaddy of All Sports Incentives

One of the most popular sports incentive events of all time is the **Masters**, the iconic golf tournament held every April since 1934 in Georgia at The Augusta National Golf Club, which was founded in 1931 by golf legend Bobby Jones and businessman Clifford Roberts. There is high demand for tickets to the four-day popular tournament because of its mystique and tradition, and because many corporate executives and managers play the game of golf.

A national financial firm sent incentive groups to the Masters in 2010, 2012 and 2013. About 80 top salespeople and customers attended this year's tournament in groups of six with each group staying for two days. Each group stayed in a rented house complete with

private chefs, cigar rollers and other luxuries.

The top performers and customers attended the final days of the event. However, people who left before the final round of play still got a very special golfing treat by watching the practice rounds, says Fred Rodgers, vice president, corporate group, Premiere Global Sports, a Libertyville, IL-based provider of sports incentives. "A lot of people feel that watching practice rounds are some of the best days because you can do more as a spectator. It's more laidback, you can take pictures, and golfers interact and joke with people a little. People tell me there is nothing like going to the practice rounds at the Masters and then flying home and watching the tournament on TV because you've been there," says Rodgers.

The **Super Bowl** is another top draw for incentives. During this year's Super Bowl in New Orleans, more than 224 sales agents for a large insurance company enjoyed the top tier of several incentive packages available. The group had a choice of several pre-Super Bowl activities including golf, sightseeing, dining and tours of areas such as the French Quarter. On Friday and Saturday nights, they had a choice of several Super Bowl parties, including those hosted by *Maxim*, *Sports Illustrated* and ESPN. On game day, they attended a pre-game hospitality

*"Although we don't get a ton of requests for the America's Cup, it is very special. They will watch the races from rented private yachts with a Cup expert who will greet them and explain the contest."*



Robert Tuchman  
Founder  
Goviva Enterprises Inc.  
New York, NY

party in the stadium with live entertainment, NFL players and cheerleaders. After the game, they were on the field for the trophy presentations.

Another highly popular sports incentive event is the **United States Open Tennis Championships** — the fourth and final tennis major comprising the Grand Slam each year. (The other three are the Australian Open, French Open and Wimbledon.) The U.S. Open is



*"We did a tailgate party program aboard a luxury RV. ...This was something we were able to do for them because it wasn't a budget-breaker."*

Adam Rauch  
President  
One Line Sports Agency  
Bayside, NY

held annually in late August and early September over a two-week period at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center at Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens, NY. The Open is a high-demand incentive, especially among companies in the New York financial industry world.

The **Kentucky Derby**, because of its many accompanying high-society social events, is also a favorite event among insurance and financial firms hosting incentive programs that include spouses. Other popular sports events include the **Indianapolis 500**, Major League Baseball's **World Series** contests and annual **All-Star Game** as well as college basketball's **NCAA Final Four**.

Among international sports events, the modern **Olympic Games** remain the star with soccer's **World Cup**, which starts in Brazil in June 2014 not far behind. Corporations, including financial and insurance companies, are already lining up packages, says Robert Tuchman, founder of Goviva Enterprises Inc., a New York City-based company specializing in sports incentive packages worldwide. "It will be the most popular sports event I've done in over 15 years in the business. More than 12 companies have signed up, and we could wind up with over 100. Packages include hotel rooms, tickets, a limousine bus to matches, dinners and meet-and-greets with players," says Tuchman.

Tuchman notes there is also growing interest in the **UEFA Champions**



***“Sports adds another layer of excitement around incentives. Not only do they go to a great destination but they add a bucket-list item that most people want to do.”***



**Brian Learst**  
CEO  
QuintEvents LLC & Quint Loyalty  
Charlotte, NC

**League**, a prestigious tournament of European soccer teams held every four years.

Planners also find the **BCS National Championship**, the final bowl game of the annual Bowl Championship Series (BCS) of the NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision, attractive for corporate groups. “People usually care about which teams play, as opposed to the Super Bowl, which is an event unto itself regardless of who plays. This year’s BCS game between Notre Dame and Alabama was very strong,” says Rodgers.

Other popular events include the National Hockey League’s **Winter Hockey Classic**. Launched in 2008, the contest is a regular-season game between two marquee teams, which takes place at an outdoor stadium on New Year’s Day. Also, one of the newest events is the **Austin Grand Prix**, Formula One auto racing at the Circuit of the Americas, near Austin, TX.

The **America’s Cup** yacht sailing races offer an unusual and unique seagoing sports experience. A major financial company is sending a group of broker-dealers to the yacht races set to sail off the coast of San Francisco in September, says Tuchman. “Although we don’t get a ton of requests for the America’s Cup, it is very special. During their four days, they will watch the races from rented private yachts with a Cup expert who will greet them and explain the contest. They will have private dinners at top res-

taurants with top chefs we work with. They will also take in a pro football or baseball game,” says Tuchman.

### **The Benefits Last a Lifetime**

Sports incentives, especially the big-name events, are powerful motivators with unique advantages. Learst cites the

following benefits.

- The incentives have short- and long-term bragging rights and “trophy value” that last a lifetime. “Every time somebody sees a Super Bowl, for the next 30 years they will remember the experience,” says Learst. “They will also come back to the office and say, ‘I saw the game and Beyoncé. I was at a party and met Emmitt Smith (Dallas Cowboys Hall of Fame running back).’ They will have pictures of it and share it with everybody in the office, which makes everybody else want to perform better and take the trip.”
- The media mania and buzz that surround major sports events provide significant value for planners and corporations. “It’s like getting free promotional dollars. Every time the salesforce watches or reads the news, they see something about the event, which motivates them even more. You don’t have to spend as much to communicate the value of the incentive,” says Learst.
- It’s relatively simple to create a theme that ties in with a sports incentive. “Sports offer a natural promotional connection because, like incentives, it’s also a contest, and you always have a winner. We have done programs with banks that use brackets like those in the NCAA men’s basketball tournament to represent each branch and its accomplishments as they compete for goals,” says Learst.

In another example, a financial firm conducted a one-month sales incentive program in February 2012 prior to the start of the NCAA tour-

nament in March. District managers conducted presentations for sales staff and gave them posters depicting the theme “Shoot for the Final Four” in New Orleans in 2012. Employees also received miniature basketballs and hoops. At the Final Four, winners did meet-and-greets with famous coaches and celebrities, and enjoyed the sights and sounds of New Orleans, says Rickert.

### **The Future Is Bright Despite Tight Budgets**

The outlook for sports incentives is positive in part because firms offering the programs have reshaped their packages to fit slimmer corporate budgets. As a result, planners have a growing menu of individual, small-group and tiered programs, some of which come in the form of certificates that corporations can award to top salespeople and clients to spend on incentives of their choice.

A growing portion of Peak Performance’s incentives involves smaller groups and individuals who select their own sporting event within various price ranges. “We see a lot of that. We as a company have gone after the idea of budget what you want, and we will create trips around it,” says Rickert.

He offers an example. “One (financial) company awarded winners \$3,000 to \$5,000 each to spend on an incentive. They pick the package they want, and we build an incentive around it, book it and bill the client. If the winners want to spend more than \$3,000 to \$5,000, they have to pay the difference. We do it for sports like golf, football, baseball, the Final Four, Kentucky Derby and NASCAR,” says Rickert.

Another financial firm planned a budget-conscious sports incentive for 24 salespeople and brokers. They attended the MLB American League Championship Series last year between the St. Louis Cardinals and San Francisco Giants. “We did a tailgate party program aboard a luxury RV,” says Rauch. “We had typical tailgate

food like hot dogs and hamburgers. The RV had televisions, and we watched the pregame show. Former player Jack Clark, an all-star who played for both teams, came by to sign autographs. We got them lower-level tickets. This was something we were able to do for them because it wasn’t a budget-breaker,” says Rauch.

Corporate Sports Incentives (CSI), based in Fairfax, VA has also increased its number of incentive program choices for individuals and small groups, according to President and CEO Marc Matthews.

“We changed the business model in 2006–2007 when the economy started to go. We went from group to more tiered and individual programs. We changed the model to where companies had no upfront group costs, unlike a traditional group incentive where you have to sign a contract and pay for everything upfront,” says Matthews. CSI now offers several incentive programs and major sports packages with a wide variety of prices for groups and individuals. These include the Just Rewards Experiential Collection, Just Rewards Sport Collection, Just Rewards Travel Collection, Group Incentive Travel Sample Programs, and more.

Each program offers numerous options. For example, the company’s

***“Companies are sending fewer people and sending them to their preferred sport versus sending a whole group to the same sport. Not everyone is doing a big...incentive anymore.”***



**Bruce Rickert**  
President  
Peak Performance Travel Incentives  
Jamison, PA

Just Rewards Sport Collection offers three levels of ticket-only programs; three levels with or without hotel-stay options; and five top-level packages: Iron Collection, Bronze Collection, Silver Collection, Gold Collection and Platinum Collection Sports Options.

New York-based Inside Sports & Entertainment Group (ISEG) also illustrates the variety of incentives available to planners. “We started getting more small group business,” says senior vice president Jim Zissler. “We started noticing that a lot of bankers, traders and Wall Street guys couldn’t do as much spending, but they still needed to take clients out. Some decided not to invite a group of, say, 25 people to the Super Bowl but do it personally and take fewer top clients,” said Zissler.

Thus, ISEG introduced more options. He notes that individuals and groups of 10 people or fewer, including many insurance and financial firms, now account for more than 40 percent of the company’s business. For example, the company now offers three different packages for groups of four to the Masters Golf Tournament. The packages range from three to seven nights at a private home and have optional add-ons, including meet-and-greets with golf legends. ISEG also offers individual packages for events such as the Super Bowl, Daytona 500, World Series and BCS National Championship.

Offering more incentive package options also makes it easier for corporations to deal with public perception about incentives. “When you move away from group travel, you no longer have signage and you no longer take over 400 rooms in a hotel, so it kind of flows under the radar,” says Matthews.

Some companies awarding incentives to large and small select the

same sports experiences every year while others alternate events. It all depends on the objectives of each company, says Rodgers. “Every company is different. They change objectives going into every New Year, and they may want to target certain regions or

***“We changed the model to where companies had no upfront group costs, unlike a traditional group incentive where you have to sign a contract and pay for everything upfront.”***



**Marc Matthews**  
President and CEO  
Corporate Sports Incentives  
Chantilly, VA

goals. You have companies that do the Masters for years and years and even rent the same houses. Others create events around different sports,” says Rodgers.

### **Final Thoughts**

Sports incentives ignite passion in employees, many of whom carry a lifelong allegiance to certain teams and sports. The passion combines with the competition of incentives to motivate employees to perform their best to win repeatedly. That’s why sports incentives will continue to be an indispensable part of rewarding customers and clients.

As Zissler puts it, sports incentives offer a unique “money can’t buy it” experience. “Anybody can go to a place like the French Riviera or get a ticket to something if they have enough money. But can they get on the field right after the Super Bowl or visit the winner’s circle at the Kentucky Derby? What makes it memorable is that you can do something special that other people can’t do,” said Zissler. **I&FMM**





The Music Plaza at Universal Studios at Universal Orlando Resort is a permanent outdoor concert venue available for buyouts.

Orlando's reputation as one of the nation's preeminent meetings destinations is borne out by some impressive, record-setting numbers: More than 55 million visitors flocked to Orlando in the past year, including 3 million meeting and convention attendees, and 2013 is looking as strong or stronger. Major meeting and incentive industry conferences also are flocking to Orlando: For example, this December, Site's Global Conference will be held for the first time in Orlando at Loews Portofino Bay at Universal Orlando; the Destination Marketing Association International's Annual Convention was July 15–17 at The Peabody Orlando. AIBTM, the Americas Incentive, Business Travel & Meetings Exhibition, announced that it will rotate to Orlando every other year beginning in 2014. The Event Service Professionals Association and Professional Convention Manage-

ment Association held their annual meetings in Orlando in January.

"Orlando is widely recognized as the most visited destination in the nation," says George Aguel, president and CEO of Visit Orlando, "however, it's important to us that planners are kept up-to-date on the growing appeal of Orlando. By hosting a series of important industry shows in Orlando, we have had the opportunity to showcase the breadth and scope of what our destination has to offer for incentive programs, as well as meetings, conferences and trade shows."

Many planners are already well aware of Orlando's appeal.

"Honestly, it's probably the best of any destination we use," says Johnetta Riley, meeting planner at the Washington, DC-based Reinsurance Association of America (RAA), which has used Orlando for one of its most important annual meetings, a global

conference for 350 to 400 attendees, for the past four years. "On the 1 to 10 scale, it's a 10. And people also like to go there because it's warm and beautiful in February. It's also a big draw for our international attendees."

#### Incomparable Airlift

Another thing Riley and many other planners praise about Orlando is its incomparable airlift, based on its status as the No. 1 family vacation destination in the world. The Orlando International Airport is the third busiest in the U.S., welcoming 35 million passengers each year and serving 84 U.S. destinations and 33 international cities. "The airlift is one of the most important reasons we use Orlando," Riley says. "It's very easy to get to, especially for our international attendees, who can get direct flights from almost anywhere in the world. It's also easy to get from the airport to the

hotels. For most of the hotels, it doesn't take longer than 20 minutes to get there. And that's very important to our attendees, too."

Cynthia Tomei, CMP, CMM, meeting manager at the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association (BCBSA) in Chicago, also cites the city's airlift as a key reason why she has been using the destination for the past 20 years. "The airlift into Orlando is just amazing," says Tomei, who already had been using Orlando for a decade before joining BCBSA 11 years ago. "And that's important because we not only have folks coming from major cities across the country, but also from smaller cities. So we try to use destinations that they can fly to without having to connect multiple times. There are so many nonstop flights in and out that you can get attendees here from anywhere. And relatively speaking, for the most part, the airfares are very inexpensive compared to other major meeting destinations. So, the combination of airlift and cost has always made Orlando a desirable destination for us."

#### An Expanding Universe of Hotel Options

Shelly Wolfson, president of third-party intermediary DG Elite Network Inc. in North Merrick, NY, has also used Orlando for the past 20 years. In addition to formidable airlift, she hails it's 116,000 hotel guest rooms, which include several thousand new rooms added during and since the 2008 recession.

"My clients, including insurance and financial services companies, like Orlando because of the high-quality hotels available at a fair price-value ratio," Wolfson says. "There's a large selection of clean, stylish properties with updated technology. The weather is moderate and enjoyable for most of the year, conducive to outdoor events."

Another factor in Orlando's favor, Wolfson says, "is that like Las Vegas, it has a vast and solid infrastructure for supporting meetings of all types and

sizes. In terms of a long list of good options," she says, "Orlando likely has the most of any destination in the U.S."

Tomei agrees that the city's broad and sophisticated roster of meeting and resort hotels is another critical factor in its popularity with planners. "And a big part of that is the size of the major hotels and the amount of meeting space available," she says. "And the layout of the meeting space is important to us. We don't like for it to be spread out or on different floors. In Orlando, we've always been lucky at finding the exact amount of meeting space we need and having it be contiguous and very convenient, so our attendees aren't running all over the place between sessions. And the number of hotels in Orlando that can offer that amount of space and that kind of convenience is just tremendous."



***"By hosting a series of important industry shows in Orlando, we have had the opportunity to showcase the breadth and scope of what our destination has to offer for incentive programs..."***

**George Aguel, President and CEO  
Visit Orlando**

Add everything up and Orlando delivers an almost unbeatable value proposition, says Kim Sky, CMP, meeting planning team lead at Chicago-based property and casualty insurance company CNA, which has used the destination multiple times in recent years. "We hold meetings in places like Orlando, Tampa, Chicago, New York, Phoenix, Las Vegas, Los Angeles and San Francisco," Sky says. "And if you keep the conversa-

Brio in Winter Park and a boat excursion. "Both were recommended by Visit Orlando," she says.

#### Unique Offsite Venues

High on the list of attractions is Orlando's vast array of offsite venues, let by the mighty trio of Walt Disney World Resort, Universal Orlando Resort and SeaWorld Orlando. "Orlando has a unique portfolio of options when



Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate features the new 48,000-sf Osceola County Conference Center.



Photos courtesy of Omni Orlando Resort



it comes to venues to host events,” Aguel says. “From the Orange County Convention Center, which was recently rated the No. 1 meeting facility in the country by *Business Review USA*, to one-of-a-kind settings inside any one of our world-famous theme parks that call Orlando home, our destination has the ability to transform a meeting into a more productive and memorable experience.”

Greg Kaul, vice president of sales at Hello! Florida Destination Management, agrees. “In terms of offsite venue selection, Orlando is a great destination,” he says. “There are just so many options to choose from.”

Despite an almost unparalleled menu of choices, the three major theme parks continue to play a role in many major meetings that come to town. “Most events we’re seeing now use one night for an off-property evening,” Kaul says. “And the theme parks are a big part of those evenings.”

The venue that has continued to be the top choice since its debut three years ago is The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando Resort. “It seems like every planner who comes to Orlando for a site visit



Universal's Diagon Alley, a re-creation of London opening in 2014, is adjacent to The Wizarding World of Harry Potter.

Margaritaville, Pat O'Brien's Orlando, the long-running and celebrated Blue Man Group performances, and the Latin Quarter restaurant and nightclub.

Kaul is particularly fond of Hard Rock Live. “A lot of planners think it's Hard Rock Cafe, and I've been there, done that,” he says. “But Hard Rock Live is a separate venue with a separate kitchen. It's actually a concert and entertainment venue. And you can theme it out for a great meeting event, and they are very flexible in terms of the kinds of things you can do there. We've done some amazing events there. It's also right on CityWalk, so after the event, at-

*“In Orlando, we've always been lucky at finding the exact amount of meeting space we need and having it be contiguous and very convenient, so our attendees aren't running all over the place between sessions.”*

**Cynthia Tomei, CMP, CMM, Meeting Manager**  
Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, Chicago, IL

ends up wanting to do an event there,” Kaul says. “It is the No. 1 offsite venue in the city.” Buyouts are available for groups as small as 250 attendees and as large as 6,000.

Another popular option is Universal CityWalk. The expansive complex, adjacent to Universal's theme park attractions, includes a diverse selection of dining and entertainment options, including Emeril's Orlando, Jimmy Buffet's

tendees can just go out the door and enjoy the rest of CityWalk for the evening.”

Sky has used Universal Orlando as an offsite venue. “We did a competition at the ‘Fear Factor Live’ venue,” she says. Based on the popular TV show, the venue bills itself as “the most extreme audience participation event ever.”

“It was really great,” says Sky. “And it worked well as a very creative team-building event.”

In May of last year, Sky returned to Orlando for a meeting that included an offsite excursion to The Amazing Adventures of Spiderman attraction at Universal, after it completed a renovation that includes all-new 4K digital high-definition animation, 3-D “Spider Vision” glasses and a new musical score.

### Great Finds in Fine Dining

Although Orlando is now home to a number of restaurants from celebrity chefs such as Emeril Lagasse, Todd English and Wolfgang Puck, it still comes as news to many planners that the city is now touted for its fine-dining scene. Visit Orlando points out that over the past five years, the city has doubled or tripled the number of high-end culinary experiences available.

“The growing diversity and sophistication of our dining scene is sometimes overshadowed by the excitement of our attractions,” Aguel says. “And if you haven't been here in a few years, you would be surprised by how many more culinary experiences we now offer. At the end of the day, attendees want to enjoy time together in a dining environment and be entertained. Orlando delivers on all of that and more thanks to award-winning restaurants and unlimited nighttime entertainment inside and outside of the theme parks.”

A prime example of out-of-the-park options is the Pointe Orlando dining-and-entertainment complex near the Orange County Convention Center.

“It's a large facility that also has good access for motorcoaches,” Kaul says. “It offers a lot of good dining options under one roof, like a Capital Grille and Oceanaire Seafood Room. They recently opened up The Pub, a British pub that has become very popular, and there's also a great Cuban restaurant, Cuba Libre, which is also very popular with groups. B.B. King's is another great venue, which offers Southern comfort-style food and a great band. And Taverna Opa is a fantastic Greek restaurant that is very famous with locals for being very lively and entertaining, but also serving really great Greek food.”

The Pointe offers so many options

in a single facility that it can host a convenient dine-around program in one location, making logistics much less of a consideration.

“And after dinner, attendees can go to The Improv comedy club to be entertained,” Kaul says. “There are a

*“The quality of the local restaurants has really matured in recent years, and there are quite a few high-end options now. We've been quite impressed.”*

**Kim Sky, CMP, Meeting Planning Team Lead**  
CNA, Chicago, IL



number of options for creating a really fun evening.”

“The dining scene in Orlando, including the better restaurants at Disney and Universal, is critical for some of our meetings,” Sky says. “The quality of the local restaurants has really matured in recent years, and there are quite a few high-end options now. We've been quite impressed.”

For a meeting that drew lawyers and accountants who wanted to entertain during the event, Sky left an evening open and provided a list of fine-dining options provided by Visit Orlando and posted on the meeting's Web portal. “That allowed our high-end attendees to plan in advance, and it was a great success, and they were very pleased,” Sky says. “It was also very convenient, because the restaurants were located within two or three miles of the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress hotel, where we stayed.”

### Great Golf

Orlando also leverages a distinct advantage when it comes to golf — with some of the most acclaimed courses to be found anywhere. With an improving economy, golf is once again a must-have in an incentive program agenda, as it has always traditionally been, for networking and getting business done.

“It may come as a surprise to some that we are a significant golf destina-

tion,” Aguel says. “In addition to being named recently as the North American Golf Destination of the Year by the International Association of Golf Tour Operators, Orlando is home to more than 175 golf courses, The Golf Channel and dozens of professional golfers and

high-profile instructors of the game.”

Sky has made good use of Orlando's golf facilities. “For some meetings, we take 50 or 75 people out for an afternoon of golf,” she says. “And there are a lot of great options in Orlando. And the DMCs and transportation companies are very good at getting people there and back.”

### Hotel News

The competition among Orlando's hotels and theme parks keeps the offerings fresh and exciting, making every visit virtually a new visit. Here's some of the area's latest news:

The big hotel opening on the horizon is the \$360 million **Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World Resort**, which is scheduled to debut in 2014. The 444-room hotel will feature 37,000 sf of function and meeting space, including a 14,000-sf main ballroom and a 6,000-sf junior ballroom, as well as a full-service business center. Resort amenities include the existing Tom Fazio-designed Osprey Ridge championship golf course, three swimming pools and a lazy river, and basketball and tennis courts, as well as a complete fitness center.

The new resort also will feature a 14,000-sf spa with 18 treatment rooms, and dining options that will include a main restaurant overlooking the lawn and lake, and a rooftop restaurant

designed to give diners a view of the nightly fireworks displays coming out of the Magic Kingdom.

B Hotels & Resorts will reflag and renovate the 394-room Royal Plaza in the Downtown Disney resort area in fall 2013. **The B resort in Lake Buena Vista**, which will remain operational during a complete renovation and repositioning, offers 20,000 sf of function space.

**The Hilton Orlando** has broken ground on a \$2.1 million expansion project that will add a 50,000-sf Promenade outdoor space that can accommodate up to 3,000 attendees. The 1,417-room hotel, with 175,000 sf of meeting and function space, is connected to the Orange County Convention center by an elevated pedestrian bridge.

The 1,500-acre luxury **Villas of Grand Cypress Resort** recently completed the first phase of a resort-wide renovation that included all 146 villas.

The newly named **Wyndham Orlando Resort**, will complete a renovation of its lobby and 613 guest rooms and suites by the end of this year.

Rosen Hotels and Resorts' convention hotels now offer free wired and wireless Internet in all guest rooms and public areas. **Rosen Centre Hotel** recently completed a multimillion-dollar



Rosen Shingle Creek's Shingle Creek Golf Club hosts golf-related group programs including teambuilding, customized outings, clinics and meeting parties.





*Disney Springs will debut in 2016 with more than 150 shopping, dining and entertainment offerings as well as private-event options.*

renovation of all 1,334 guest rooms as well as the presidential and hospital-ity suites. Rosen Centre's 124,000 sf of meeting space includes a new 18,000-sf Executive Ballroom. **Rosen Plaza Hotel** recently completed a floor-to-ceiling renovation of all 800 guest rooms as well as hallways and hospitality suites. **Rosen Shingle Creek's** mega-sized 445,000 sf of meeting space includes 66,000 sf of outdoor space, thanks to a recent 16,000-sf expansion. Shingle Creek Golf Club is home to the Brad Brewer Golf Academy.

The 720-room, four-diamond **Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate** earlier this year opened the 48,000-sf Osceola County Conference Center. With a 28,800-sf ballroom and accom-panying indoor meeting space, the new conference center gives the Omni a to-tal of 128,000 sf of indoor event space and an additional 70,000 sf of outdoor space. The hotel also boasts two cham-pionship golf courses and the world headquarters of the David Leadbetter Golf Academy. There's a full-service Mokara spa, two heated outdooz pools and an 850-foot lazy river.

**Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando** (42,000 sf of meet-ing space) completed a \$14 million renovation of all 750 guest rooms in April. Renovations to the meeting space and ballrooms at Universal Orlando's **Loews Royal Pacific** (1,000 guest rooms; 85,000 sf of meeting space) and **Hard Rock** (650 guest rooms; 6,000 sf) hotels were finished last September. Guest room renovations at Loews Royal Pacific will be completed in stages with the first half scheduled for a 2014 and the rest in 2015.

The 2,000-room **Orlando World Center Marriott** has just completed its five-year multimillion-dollar renovation project. The North Tower's 514 guest rooms, including 10 suites, have been refurbished, as well as another 110 guest suites, the Hall of Cities meeting rooms and Falls Pool Oasis.

#### Other News

Along **International Drive** — nick-named I-Drive — which runs through the heart of theme-park country and past the convention center, a \$250 mil-lion redevelopment of the Mercado site will debut in the summer of 2014. Dubbed I-Drive Live, the new area will

to enhance both face-to-face and de-vice-to-device connectivity.

Orlando's theme parks continue to expand their offerings, and all of them provide a multitude of special group options within their parks for ready-made themed events. **SeaWorld Orlando** just opened the Antarctica: Empire of the Penguins attraction. And in June **Universal Orlando Resort** unveiled Transformers: The Ride-3D at Universal Orlando Resort. Harry Potter fans will flock to Universal's newest of-fering upcoming in 2014: the all-new Diagon Alley, located in Universal Studios, will complement the adjacent Hogwarts & Hogsmeade attraction in Islands of Adventure with recreations of London sights and experiences as described in the Harry Potter books.

**Walt Disney World Resort** recent-ly opened The Little Mermaid phase of the all-new Fantasyland at the Magic Kingdom Park, the largest expansion in Magic Kingdom history to open in phases through 2014. Downtown Disney will undergo a multiyear trans-formation and morph into Disney Springs by 2016. The destination will

***"Honestly, (Orlando is) probably the best of any destination we use. On the 1 to 10 scale, it's a 10. ...It's also a big draw for our international attendees."***

**Johnetta Riley, Meeting Planner**  
Reinsurance Association of America, Washington, DC

include more than 75 shops, restaurants and attractions, including a 25,000-sf Madame Tussauds wax museum, a 25,000-sf Sea Life Aquarium and a 425-foot Orlando Eye observation wheel.

The **Orange County Convention Center** has just begun a five-year, \$187 million capital improvements project. The West Building is undergoing a major renovation, which includes aes-thetic enhancements, life safety update, and retrofitting to provide flexible space for groups. And new furniture groupings and an upgraded system for wireless communications are designed

feature more than 150 establishments for shopping, dining and entertain-ment as well as new private-event op-tions for groups.

Planners also should keep an eye on what's happening in downtown Orlando: Currently under construction, with a scheduled completion in fall 2014, is **The Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts**, which will be the latest of Orlando's up-and-coming entertainment venues, providing two theaters, a public performance space, outdoor plaza and separate educa-tional facilities.

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Corporate Ladder

Fontainebleau Miami Beach, FL, has promoted **Kevin Bryant** to director of sales and revenue management. He was director of revenue management.

**Maureen O'Brien** was appointed director of sales and marketing at The Westin New York Grand Central in New York City. She formerly served as vice president of business development of Accommodations International.

The Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau, Honolulu, HI, has named **Karen Hughes** as vice president of Meet Hawaii and travel industry partnerships. She was vice president of



BRYANT

global leisure sales and distribution for Starwood Hotels & Resorts.

**Leslie A. Pchola** was named area vice president, Southeast, for Hilton Worldwide hotels and resorts in Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, western Florida and South Carolina. She most



O'BRIEN

recently was general manager of the Hilton Austin in Texas.

**Jennifer Tucker** was named group sales manager for Hawks Cay Resort in the Florida Keys. She was national sales manager at Gaylord Palms Resort, Kissimmee, FL.



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