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Trends, Fads & Realities

in the Financial &
Insurance Industry

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Steve Bova, CAE
Executive Director
Financial & Insurance
Conference Planners
Association

Adventure Teambuilding

How Physical Challenges Help Teams

Finish Strong on the Job

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MARCH/APRIL 2016

Vol. 23 No. 2

Credit: AlliedPRA Las Vegas



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AlliedPRA Las Vegas arranged for this spectacular event for 3,000 guests at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

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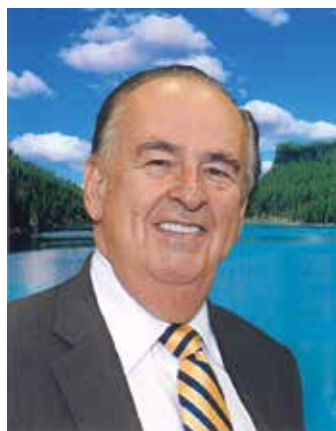
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An aerial view of the greater Miami area.

Publisher's Message

Focus on FICP

This month we invited Steve Bova, CAE, to put a reporter's hat on and brief us about the Financial & Insurance Conference Planners' Winter Symposium, held at the Omni Parker House in Boston in late January — just one of the many events this association provides to its community of 1,500 planner members and hospitality partners. With a history spanning nearly 60 years, FICP provides access to education, experience and resources targeting the needs of financial services and insurance meeting planners.



The able executive director of FICP since 2004, Steve enthusiastically keeps up with the “Trends, Fads & Realities” of the financial and insurance industry. His “elevator speech” is: “Budgets are tight, planners need to do more with less, there are increasing expectations to produce better events, there is an increased focus on technology, but at the end of the day it's all about making sure to deliver a memorable and rewarding customer experience.”

Here's a sampling of Steve's insights:

F&B Trends: “Serving food from farm to table looks to be a keeper. Healthier lifestyles are important to all generations. It's not only the rock star chefs who are stepping out of the kitchen and into the spotlight; more chefs are becoming involved with food service by speaking to attendees about what they have prepared for them.”

Airbnb: Steve considers Airbnb “a fad until it proves itself in a down market. There was no question to the FICP group that Airbnb is impacting group blocks. Session participants discussed liability concerns related to the service, and loss of control regarding blocks and where attendees stay. Others felt that Airbnb is actually a good alternative to the tight space and seller's market they are experiencing.”

Transportation: Steve says Uber seems to be more than a fad and many attendees said their clients are using Uber for their airport to hotel transfers.

Social Media: “This is no fad, folks. Social media is here to stay,” says Steve. “Nobody attending the FICP session thought that social media was a fad. While it will never replace face-to-face meetings, social media is a quick and easy way to stay connected.” For more relevant and impactful information, see our cover story beginning on page 14.

Harvey Grotsky

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IRF Study Explores DMC-Meeting Planner Relationship

MCLEAN, VA — A new study published by the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF), analyzes the current state of destination management companies (DMCs) and offers specific guidelines to help them reposition themselves to better meet new market challenges. The study, *Developing a New Business Model for DMCs by Redesigning Their Value Propositions*, was conducted using a mixture of multiple focus groups along with an online survey, which garnered more than 200 responses.



VAN DYKE

“The valuable information acquired from this research allows us to examine how similarly or differently DMC and meeting planner organizations react to the external business conditions and how well they’re prepared to take advantage of future opportunities,” says IRF President Melissa Van Dyke. Overall, trust emerged as a key concept. “The research showed us how building a long-term commitment between a DMC and a meeting planner radiated around trust,” said Van Dyke. “Each party’s opportunistic behavior, their engagement in communications and their mutual financial dependence were key determinants of that trust.” Based on this data, the study offers a number of important suggestions to help DMCs better position themselves with U.S. meeting planners. To view/download a copy of the study, go to <http://theirf.org/research/developing-a-new-business-model-for-dmcs-by-redesigning-their-value-propositions-executive-summary/1110/>

Caesars Entertainment Plans 5,700-Room Upgrade

LAS VEGAS, NV — Caesars Entertainment Corporation announced plans to upgrade more than 4,800 hotel rooms this year at four of its Las Vegas resorts, and more than 900 rooms at three regional casinos totaling more than 5,700 owned or managed rooms across the enterprise. At the end of 2016, following the completion of this series of room renovations, Caesars Entertainment will have updated more than 10,000 hotel rooms in the last three years.

These resort upgrades include the transformation of the original tower at Caesars Palace to create the Julius Tower as well as the refurbishment of the resort’s Augustus Tower. Additional room upgrades will include Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino, Paris Las Vegas and Harrah’s Las Vegas. In the regional markets, Harrah’s Gulf Coast, Caesars Atlantic City and Horseshoe Tunica will complete room upgrades. This year of room renovations and upgrades began with the already underway transformation of the roughly 586-room original tower at Caesars Palace, newly branded as the Julius Tower, and the planned full refresh of the approximately 948-room Augustus Tower. Planet Hollywood will reimagine more than 1,294 rooms and suites; Harrah’s Las Vegas plans to overhaul approximately 672 rooms of the hotel’s south tower, and Paris Las Vegas plans to transform approximately 1,320 rooms and suites. Caesars Atlantic City is expected to renovate nearly 274 rooms; Harrah’s Gulf Coast plans to renovate 499 rooms, and Horseshoe Tunica will refresh 193 rooms. www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com

FICP Calling Upon Planners to Speak at Future Events

CHICAGO, IL — The Financial & Insurance Conference Planners association issued their 2016 Call for Speakers to members and their company executives as well as hospitality partners. According to FICP, members indicate that they learn best from each other’s experiences. For example, FICP’s Planner Showcase sessions at their live events put planners and hospitality partners in the spotlight to share their stories. The types of case studies are available at www.ficpnet.com/call-speakers.

FICP speakers receive one complimentary hotel night at the event hotel and gain recognition in FICP marketing materials as a subject matter expert. Those members who are unable to attend a 2016 event may share their stories on TheNetwork. The deadline is April 15, 2016. Email Lydia Kamicar at lkamicar@ficpnet.com with questions. www.ficpnet.com

The Broadmoor Opens The Overlook at Cloud Camp

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO — The Broadmoor, a Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond resort, announced the opening of The Overlook, a 1,500-sf meeting space at The Broadmoor’s Cloud Camp. Accommodating groups of 10 to 70 people, the new space is ideal for small meetings.

Cloud Camp can sleep small groups of up to 60 guests total, between 12 one- and two-bedroom guest cabins, as well as seven accommodations in the lodge and an adjacent suite. A unique, two-story Fire Tower suite features 360-degree views. Each cabin features a private porch, beautifully appointed furnishings and modern amenities along with spectacular views. www.broadmoor.com/cloud-camp



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Financial & Insurance Conference Planners (FICP) in late January held a successful 2016 Winter Symposium, where more than 125 planners and hospitality partners gathered at the Omni Parker House in Boston. Kicking off the educational program was keynote speaker Ingrid Lindberg, who shared her insights into customer experience, stemming from 20 years as a business disrupter. Other education sessions focused on engagement marketing, meeting technology and professional confidence. Panel sessions took a deep dive into upcoming event trends and a financial services and insurance industry update. Networking opportunities were in full swing throughout the event, beginning with Sunday evening’s welcome reception at the Omni Parker House. Monday also brought ample opportunity to connect during the evening event at Coppersmith. Here, guests experienced a dynamic new neighborhood restaurant. Built-in food trucks and the venue’s vintage feel complimented the winter lodge theme to create a memorable evening. Participants at the symposium included **1** Joe Scully, John Hancock, flanked by two guests. **2** (L to r) Linda Quental, CMP, Voya Financial; Pam Ferguson, The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company; Karen Richardson, Voya Financial; Lynn Lee, AlliedPRA. **3** Jamie Lee Tiffany, L’Auberge Del Mar, Destination Hotels; Meghan Barucci, Silicon Valley Bank. **4** Laura Baukan Shane, John Hancock; Krystina Enquist, John Hancock. **5** Santiago Carmona, FRHI Hotels & Resorts; Jane Schultdt, World Marketing Group Ltd. **6** Michael Burke, CMP, The Hanover Insurance Company and Allyson O’Connor, NXtevent. See page 14 for more on FICP’s Winter Symposium.



Adventure Teambuilding

How Physical Challenges Help Teams Finish Strong on the Job



Working as a team, rafters navigate the rapids in New River Gorge in West Virginia.

Credits: Adventures on the Gorge



Tools of the successful corporate meeting planners and teambuilders in the 21st century often include several cans of bug spray, sun screen and possibly a few tubes of Bengay.

While traditional, indoor activities still serve a purpose in bringing co-workers together for better understanding and productivity, more and more companies are recognizing the benefits of getting outdoors and getting physical to motivate their employees.

Indeed, in some circles, the term “teambuilding” is passé, reflecting a corporate culture that may be out-

By Diana Lambdin Meyer

dated and out of touch with its employees. As more millennials enter the workplace, it is more important than ever to develop activities and events that make the concept of teambuilding about something else entirely.

A number of recent studies and reports indicate that millennials are not the self-absorbed, technology-addicted generation as many had originally identified them. They are individuals who appreciate interpersonal relationships in the workplace and beyond, who recognize the value of their community.

Combined with a continued em-

phasis on wellness in the workplace, an event that combines components of teambuilding, community service and energetic activities can serve multiple purposes for employees and their supervisors.

Teambuilding With a Purpose

That’s one reason Harry Moseley, chief information officer at the New York office of KPMG, an international audit, tax and financial advisory firm, pushed for a greater company presence in the 100-mile America’s Most Beautiful Bike Ride in Lake Tahoe for the Leukemia and Lymphoma

Society (LLS). Although quite scenic, it’s equally challenging both mentally and physically.

The cycling team has 15 members based in the New York and New Jersey offices who train together on a regular basis throughout the year. In the winter months they take indoor spin classes together. When the weather is appropriate, they are out and about all over the tri-state area.

Team members’ ages range from about 30 years old to 60 years old. Some are training for their first endurance cycling event and others have years of training and experience. More teams represent other KPMG officers

around the country. The cycling teams raised \$52,000 in 2015.

“Cycling for LLS is all about mental and physical endurance, and our regular training sessions allow that endurance to become a part of us,” says Moseley. “We are then able to bring that to work and apply it when we encounter a project, a challenge or a large task at hand. It also helps us be goal-oriented and work better as a team.”

That cycling is both an individual and team sport translates well to the teambuilding aspect of this charitable event. Pacelining, a common technique in competitive cycling, requires the team to ride in a line so that the

front person encounters the most wind resistance and therefore saves energy for the rest of the team riding behind him. Pacelining can increase a rider’s efficiency by as much as 30 percent, meaning the team, when working together properly, can go that much farther and faster.

“During the ride, we rotate who is in front of the paceline, each sacrificing a little bit of our individual energy for the benefit of the rest of the team,” Moseley says. “It helps us finish faster and stronger, and helps us realize that sometimes a little individual sacrifice can go a long way in helping a team accomplish its goals.”

Riding alongside the KPMG team are cancer survivors, family members of those affected by cancer, people who know and fully understand their purpose in participating in this event. It becomes an emotional experience for everyone involved that lasts long after the ride each June.

Such experiences easily translate to the workplace: goalsetting, teamwork to approach a challenge at hand, individual sacrifice for the greater good.

And here's a story that Moseley likes to share about a conversation he overheard between a coworker in the office and a rather young employee who had participated on the ride. "It was amazing. I was riding next to one of our partners up this nasty hill, and guess what, he was panting and sweating just like me."

Moseley likes that the cycling event bonds people in the company and makes everyone just a little more approachable. "This makes people realize we are all the same, and whether you are a senior or a junior at a company, we are all human."

Most employees pay for their travel to the Lake Tahoe event and combine it with a family getaway, therefore no one at KPMG is responsible for coordinating travel or other details for this important corporate function. The LLS

organization assists in shipping bicycles and other arrangements on the ground in Nevada.

Multiple Choice Activities

For a number of years, employees at Numeric Investors in Boston were treated to a pleasant, but passive activity like a day-long cruise in the waters around Boston as a reward for their hard work. But looking to offer more invigorating activities, this past August, Numeric's President Shanta Puchtler suggested that office manager Sophie Lakew reach out to Jeanne Rummel at Great Freedom Adventures for fresh ideas on teambuilding and rewarding employees.

The result was a choice of cycling, kayaking, walking and sailing in the scenic coastal community of Newburyport, about an hour north of Boston. In order to keep the office open during the week, the 74-person staff chose one of two days to participate. They also were permitted to choose their activity.

"From my perspective, getting staff to decide what they wanted to do and

then have them change their minds was the biggest challenge, but everyone was quite excited at the opportunities, so it really wasn't that much of a problem," says Lakew, who is assistant to the president.

During the hour-long bus ride from Numeric's office in the Financial District of Boston to Newburyport, employees participated in get-to-know-you type activities where

"Cycling for LLS is all about mental and physical endurance. ...We are then able to bring that to work and apply it when we encounter a project, a challenge or a large task at hand."



Harry Moseley
CIO
KPMG
New York, NY

everyone opened up about hobbies, favorite vacation destinations and quirky family habits. Although such activities are common low-tech teambuilding techniques, it had been several years since these staff members had taken part in such an experience. The anticipated bonding and mutual understanding were almost automatic and readily apparent.

Once in Newburyport, the bus dropped participants at various locations to begin their adventure. Great Freedom Adventures made all the arrangements for bikes, kayaks, guides, maps, etc., and a predetermined rendezvous point for lunch.

Although some chose a strenuous day, such as the 23-mile bike ride, others walked, talked and rested on the beach. After lunch on the waterfront, the group then boarded a sailboat for an afternoon of relaxation, conversation and snacks. Everyone was back home in Boston by 7 p.m. so that evening family time was not interrupted.

When planning an event as physically active as Numeric's outing — es-



KPMG's cycling team participates in the 100-mile America's Most Beautiful Bike Ride in Lake Tahoe to benefit the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.



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Credit: Great Freedom Adventures



Numeric Investors employees chose to participate in a variety of activities including cycling in the scenic coastal community of Newburyport, Mass.

pecially when employees go in different directions — it's important to bring everyone together in the end: Continue to have a little fun with an informal awards ceremony or an activity that continues sharing between the various entities. It's important to end on a high note.

"We had such a stressful year that we wanted to allow everyone to have some fun and relieve the stress," says Lakew, and according to her boss, Shanta Puchtler, the schedule worked well.

"It was perfect for fostering camaraderie and team bonds and for giving everyone a chance to have fun doing these outdoor activities," says Puchtler.

The summer outing was so successful that Numeric's Boston office has hosted smaller events throughout the year. A monthly Trivia Night with food catered in the office at the end of the day or a FAB outing — Friday Afternoon Beer — continues to solidify the bonds that developed in a kayak or on a bicycle last August.

"It opened everyone up to the idea

that the people they work with can be a lot of fun," says Lakew.

Similar activities could be well-received for company family days, but for an effective teambuilding experience, the event should be during the week and with employees only. Spending time with colleagues out of the office is the goal.

"When planning a meeting like this, you have to plan for a range of ability levels based on the physical condition of those you're working with,"

says Rummel at Great Freedom Adventures. "We always have at least two guides with

"We wanted to allow everyone to have some fun and relieve the stress. ...It opened everyone up to the idea that the people they work with can be a lot of fun."



Sophie Lakew
Assistant to the President
Numeric Investors LLC
Boston, MA

each cycling or kayaking group so that one person can move ahead with the more energetic participants and another stays with the more leisurely participants."

A "sag" wagon or support vehicle is always nearby to connect with anyone who needs assistance or just tires out. And with any outdoor activity, a back-up plan in case of inclement weather is a necessity. Keeping it energetic at an indoor fitness facility is a must.

Connecting With Nature

The New River Gorge in West Virginia is one of the most scenic and adventurous destinations in the eastern half of the United States. More than 50 miles of the New River are protected as a National River, one that carves the deepest and longest canyon in the Appalachian Mountains. At more than 875 feet above the river, the New River Gorge Bridge is one of the highest bridges in the world, from which people rappel and base-jump. And, not for the faint-hearted, there are guided Bridge Walk tours on a narrow catwalk 851 feet above the river.

Adventures on the Gorge is the company that makes these daring activities happen for individuals and corporate groups. Among the adventures are white-water rafting, fishing, hiking, mountain biking, caving, zip lining and stand-up paddleboarding.

A financial advisor in Cincinnati has been bringing his coworkers to this part of southern West Virginia, just four hours away, for nearly 40 years. He likes the wilderness experience here and the comparisons that can be made to their work investing other people's money.

"When we're rafting, everyone gets a paddle and everyone is responsible for

Green Exercise

For more than a decade, researchers at the University of Essex in England have studied the effects of exercising outdoors on mental health, physical well-being and overall quality of life. One particular study of 1,250 participants showed that just five minutes of exercise such as walking, cycling, fishing, boating or horseback riding in a park, garden or nature trail can boost mood and self-esteem. The results were even more positive when people exercised in an area with a body of water, such as a lake or river.

Additional studies on the effects of green exercise and workplace productivity show that attention fatigue, an anomaly of the modern workplace, can be redirected with time spent exercising outdoors. A renewed ability to concentrate and focus can enhance productivity as well as the quality of work completed.

Earlier studies show that another important benefit of time spent in nature is that it enhances creativity, leads to greater idea generation and more flexible solutions to problems. Providing opportunities for employees to exercise or experience nature together has been shown to increase civility in the workplace while reducing anger and frustration — always a good thing!

— DLM

Adventures on the Gorge in the mountains of West Virginia offers a broad range of outdoor activities including mountain biking, horseback riding, white-water rafting, fishing, hiking, caving, zip lining and stand-up paddleboarding.



Credit: Adventures on the Gorge

helping the guide get us through the rapids," he says. "It's the same thing with investing. We are the guides, but we need to make sure our clients have a paddle in the water and help us go where they need to go."

These are concepts the financial group discusses when they gather for dinner at the Paddle House, one of several lodging options in this national park community. Plenty of meeting rooms and gathering spaces, indoors and out, can accommodate any degree of formality the company requires.

A new 5,000-sf conference center is expected to open in August 2016. With a variety of small group meeting spaces, the conference center's design reflects the architecture of many national park structures with a woodsy interior, timber-frame elements and accordion win-

dows that will allow meeting attendees to feel like they are a part of nature even when they are meeting inside.

Not every visit this financial advisor makes with his team members is as high energy as white-water rafting. He finds a great deal of benefit in separating the group into smaller groups of just two or three individuals and finding a quiet spot for fishing.

"Cell phones don't work here, and sometimes we don't even talk to each other," he says. "We watch deer come to the river for a drink of water; we hear birds that we've never heard before; and just listen to the sound of the leaves blowing in the trees. It's magical."

The Cincinnati financial advisor chooses Adventures on the Gorge because one phone call results in the planning for all activities, meals, lodg-

ing and other needs, coordinated under one bill. He also recognizes that West Virginia as a destination is less expensive than destinations within a similar driving distance from their home base.

"Even when the economy was tight, we didn't cut this activity, because I believe it is some of the best money we can spend all year," he says. "When people have time to spend with each other, when they connect with common experiences and Mother Nature, it manifests itself in decency and respect."

Not every company will see immediate changes, but this financial advisor has been participating in outdoor teambuilding for so many years, he knows that it works. "It's a gradual process for some individuals and some offices, but I always note that we function better after we've been out together." **I&FMM**

Trends, Fads & Realities

By Steve Bova, CAE

At the beginning of every year the industry trade organizations are asked to weigh in about upcoming trends for the year — what's new and different, and what planners should be doing to hone their skills.

As I reflect on answering this question for the past dozen years, I sometimes feel like a broken record (apologies to readers who have never seen a record let alone a broken one). It is sometimes said that the more things change, the more they stay the same. There is some truth to this statement, but we wouldn't be doing our jobs if we didn't keep up with what is happening in the industry — if simply to remain as informed and credible professionals.

My elevator speech has been, "Budgets are tight, planners need to do more with less, there are increasing expectations to produce better events, there is an increased focus on technology, but at the end of the day it's all about making sure to deliver a memorable and rewarding customer experience."

With that said, the remainder of

this article focuses on conversations that occurred during two sessions at Financial & Insurance Conference

Trends vs. Fads — What is Here to Stay in the New Year

This session included panelists: Luann Edwards, strategic communications consultant, social media marketing, marketing division, FM Global;

Planners' Winter Symposium, January 24–26, 2016 at the Omni Parker House in Boston, Massachusetts.

David Reiderman, CAE, director, global accounts, Hyatt Hotels Corporation; Scott Eames, SMMC, global sales director, AlliedPRA; and was moderated by



Trends vs. Fads panelists (left to right): Scott Eames, SMMC, global sales director, AlliedPRA; Jennifer Squeglia, CMP, (moderator) independent contractor, Boston Private; David Reiderman, CAE, director, global accounts, Hyatt Hotels Corporation; and Luann Edwards, strategic communications consultant, social media marketing, marketing division, FM Global.

Jennifer Squeglia, CMP, independent contractor, Boston Private.

It's important to distinguish between a trend and a fad. A trend is something that extends in a general direction, follows a general course, veers in a new direction or shows a tendency, while a fad is something that is very popular for a short time. The challenge is determining if something that is currently popular will eventually turn into something more sustaining over a period of time.

Mood rings, Rubik's Cube and Beanie Babies were fads. Lifestyle trends include healthier eating, an aging population, etc. What trends will transform meetings in 2016 and beyond? Fads are cool now but will soon pass. It's important to be both trendy and fashionable in our business, if anything, to keep things fresh and different for those attending the meetings and events.

The trends vs. fads session started by experimenting with a technology called CrowdMics. This is an app whereby attendees use their smartphones as microphones. It worked great, but human nature prevailed. People are inclined to ask their questions the old fashioned way — by blurt-ing out during the session. Whether a trend or fad, using technology often requires changing one's behavior, which is hard to accomplish in a single session. We're not giving up on the idea. Some things take time to take hold.

TWO TRENDS

Food & Beverage. Serving food from farm to table looks to be a keeper. Healthier lifestyles are important to all generations. It's not only the rock star chefs who are stepping out of the kitchen and into the spotlight; more chefs are becoming involved with food service by speaking to attendees about what they have prepared for them. As a result, attendees are more educated about the food they are eating. At the same time, there is an increasing awareness of food sensitivities, such as allergies, staying healthy, keeping menus simple and comfortable, pay-

ing attention to pairings and ensuring the offering has a local, regional or seasonal flavor.

Infographics. Data is growing increasingly important, especially big data. But all the data and information needs to be simplified into a digestible, understandable and relevant manner. The increased use of infographics speaks to people's need to see things visually. They are simple, clean, understandable and sometimes even fun!

A FEW FADS

The Seller's Market. At industry events there is always plenty of discussion about selling cycles and who currently has leverage. Although the current hotel seller's market has a rela-

tively long run, and has been trending for the past few years, markets will always change. Like the stock market or the economy, what goes up must come down. Nothing lasts forever. Clients are realizing that hotel inventory really is limited. Planners need to reach out farther ahead to secure the space they need. Booking windows are tighter; there are tight turnarounds. A tip to planners is to let your suppliers know up front if you have date, pattern or rate flexibility.

Airbnb. I consider this a fad until it proves itself in a down market. There was no question to the FICP group that Airbnb is impacting group blocks. Some found it positive; others not. Session participants discussed li-

"In the end, whether a trend, fad or way of life, it's all about the customer experience. That is the focus of the planner."

Steve Bova, CAE
Executive Director
Financial & Insurance
Conference Planners
Association



Build Your Executive Presence

Meeting professionals who earn a seat at the executive table get there by playing the part. They dress for success and demonstrate a level of professionalism that earns them the trust and respect of their higher-ups. In other words, they demonstrate executive presence. Here are a few thoughts to consider:

- **Be genuine.** open, straightforward, approachable, and feel comfortable in your skin.
- **Show passion.** Show conviction that you feel strongly about what you do and how you do it.
- **Seek clarity.** Seek to be understood. Communicate your thoughts, feelings and insights simply and clearly.
- **Demonstrate intelligence.** Be deliberate and articulate in your thoughts, communications and actions.
- **Provide insight.** Be able to find the simplicity out of complexity. Break down the complex factors into simple to understand conclusions.
- **Have determination.** Be purposeful with a drive to achieve and succeed.
- **Exude confidence but don't be overconfident.** Never let them see you sweat!
- **Be humble.** Admit when you're wrong, accept accountability, admit fear and own your mistakes.
- **Show courage.** Take calculated risks; go against the grain when it feels right to do so.
- **Have a sense of humor.** Use it strategically to bring down others' defenses and create a safe harbor. This goes along with being genuine and humble.

— SB

ability concerns related to the service, and loss of control regarding blocks and where attendees stay. It was mentioned that condo associations are not allowing people to rent out for less than six months. Others felt that Airbnb is actually a good alternative to the tight space and seller's market they are experiencing.

Transportation. Discussion transitioned from Airbnb to Uber, which seems to be more than a fad. Many attendees said their clients are using Uber for their airport to hotel transfers.

Décor. Themes and colors are constantly changing, which puts them into the fad category. Nonetheless, one needs to pay attention to these changing patterns in order to remain current and relevant in the delivery of events.

WAY OF LIFE

Some things are neither trends nor fads, but are a way of life in our industry that must be considered.

Social Media. This is no fad, folks. Social media is here to stay. Nobody attending the FICP session thought that social media was a fad. While it will never replace face-to-face meetings, social media is a quick and easy way to stay connected. Of course, they

reminded that etiquette is important. It's getting better, but there's still a way to go. The group discussed that there are negative consequences for planners who fail to use social media as a marketing tool. With so many different platforms available, it is important to identify your goals for social media.

Along the same lines, mobile app adoption continues to grow in financial and insurance company meetings despite security concerns about downloading the apps. It's important for planners to know what works best for the size and scope of their meeting.

Wearables. A healthier lifestyle has become a way of life, although many of us (author included!) have a way to go. The Fitbit and other wearable technologies are here to stay, according to our attendee experts. Having information at our fingertips (almost literally) is a convenience that makes it easier to monitor progress in many of life's important areas. One planner from Travelers said her company has a program that rewards people for fitness and exercise.

Sustainability. Corporate social responsibility is neither trend nor fad. Companies have embraced this as something they do. It has become

part of nearly every meeting, event or program in one way or another.

Crisis Planning. With all the safety concerns in today's dangerous society, disaster preparedness will never be a trend or fad. The concern is not just over the threat of terrorism, but also includes natural disasters and other unexpected occurrences such as strikes and labor disputes. It's essential for planners to have a communication plan and include a social media component to it.

In the end, whether a trend, fad or way of life, it's all about the customer experience. That is the focus of the planner. Those that provide a good customer experience lead the market 4-to-1. Ask yourself: What is the result of my efforts? Do I know why my meeting or event exists? Can I define its purpose in less than 15 words? Are we easy to do business with? Do our attendees see us as being helpful and the event to be enjoyable?

Trends and fads will come and go, and planners will always need to adapt to them. At the same time, it's equally as important to realize what's most important, and focus time and attention on ensuring events have the essentials mastered.

Financial Services & Insurance Executive Panel — Industry Update

Another relevant session at the FICP Winter Symposium was a panel discussion that included two senior financial and insurance company executives and an industry expert sharing their perspective on the role and value meetings play in the financial services and insurance industry.

Attendees gained valuable tips on how to build relationships with senior management and how to highlight the value meeting planners bring to their organization.

Scott R. Kallenbach, FLMI, director, senior research, LIMRA, spoke about the impact that shifting demographics and people getting married later in life have on the life insurance market. He said that 18.7 million people are "stuck shoppers," and 28 million people are not prepared for retirement. The problem, he says, is that financials are complicated and people are afraid of the language. What are companies doing to make insurance and financial conversations easier and less intimidating?

One possible solution is that robots could be taking the place of humans. Robo advisor platforms are emerging where people can get investment advice from a computer. Other companies are implementing programs. He cited AXA advisor shield and the Sun Life program, and concluded that advice still matters. People are more likely to save and plan when they work with someone they know and trust. According to LIMRA data, 97 percent of LIMRA respondents say they receive good advice from their advisors.

Donna Marzo, vice president, marketing support, Prudential International Insurance, encouraged planners to take the time to really learn about the business, what drives it and what's important to leadership. Meeting planners can leverage meeting resources to help improve company inefficiencies, encourage professionalism, and produce top-notch meetings and events. It's a partnership atmosphere to leverage collective

knowledge of producing other meetings to advance new meetings. Planners bring a lot of value to the table.

She reiterated the importance of the customer focus. She said that it's all about the experience. That means being in tune with the details, such as cultural differences. She was not referring to the few days that represent the experience. She was referring to all year long: what attendees bring back from the conference and implement, the stories they tell to inspire

tween meeting planners and company executives to the point where planners in the company are included in the company's overall strategy. Duckworth emphasized that event planning is a big part of the company's brand. "People are not coming to meetings, they are coming to an event that characterizes the brand," he said.

When asked what executives have learned the most from meeting planners, Duckworth said teamwork. "What it takes to pull off an event re-



Opening general session of the 2016 Winter Symposium at Boston's Omni Parker House.

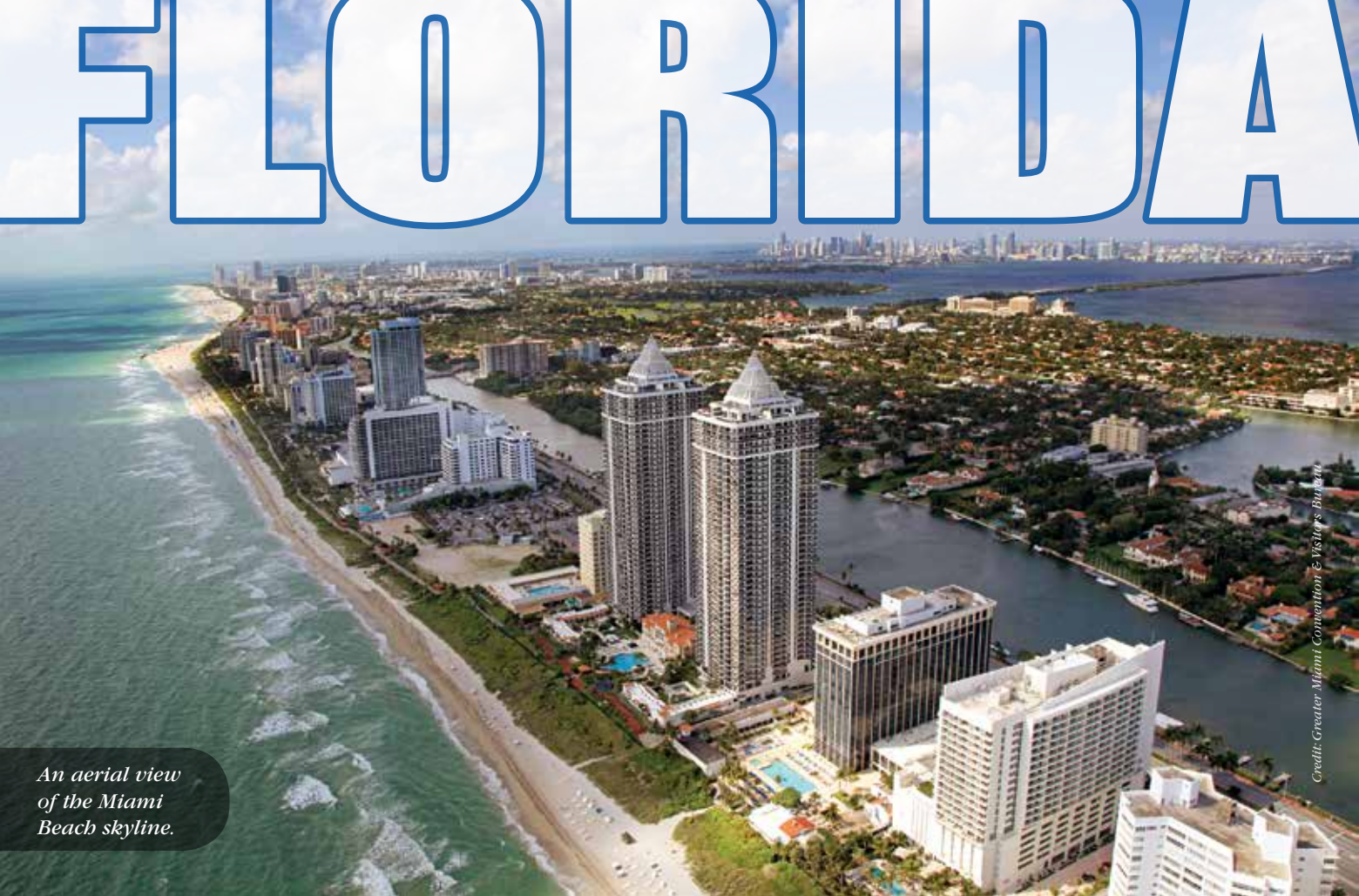
others to perform and using your network to your advantage.

Jeff Duckworth, president of retail distribution for John Hancock Investments, said that salespeople are brutally direct to meeting planners about their experiences at their meetings, which is great for feedback but sometimes they can be a rough crowd. He offered that being siloed in an individual business unit could inhibit career growth, and he encouraged planners to extend within their companies and demonstrate their value throughout. Planners sometimes become pigeonholed, which creates the wrong perception of their immense talents and importance.

Companies such as John Hancock have embraced the partnership be-

quires amazing teamwork," he said. "Planners within our company are seen as part of the overall sales effort. It's a cultural thing here where planners and sales are one in the same." Achieving this mindset doesn't happen overnight. It takes time, and everyone has to be all in. **I&FMM**

Steve Bova, CAE, is executive director of Financial & Insurance Conference Planners (FICP), an association that exists to strengthen its members through education, outreach and partnerships so that the positive impact and value of their work is recognized by both their organizations as well as the meetings and events industry. He may be reached at 312-245-1023 or sbova@ficpnet.com. www.ficpnet.com



An aerial view of the Miami Beach skyline.

Credit: Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau

Where Trendy, Tropical Meeting Settings Flourish From Coast to Coast

By Derek Reveron

Florida boasts eight cities in the Cvent top 50 meeting destinations in the United States including the No. 1 Orlando. These top 50 cities were ranked as the most popular among planners by Cvent, which evaluated more than 1,000 cities.

Miami was No. 4 and Kissimmee ranked No. 20. Hollywood (28), Fort Lauderdale (30), Tampa (32), Boca Raton (43), Jacksonville (47) and Naples (49) round out the favored Florida destinations.

From among these and many other Florida destinations, planning pros can choose from an array of diverse world-class meeting destinations ranging from Orlando's theme parks and Miami's nightlife to the

Panhandle's white sand beaches and the laidback Southwest Coast.

Collectively, the Sunshine State's destinations offer meeting experiences that include sophisticated cities, small coastal towns, the Florida Keys and coastal islands. Properties range from five-star oceanfront resorts to downtown meeting hotels and small beachfront properties.

Central Florida

A standout for incentive retreats includes the 229-room Streamsong Resort, located about 85 miles south of Orlando on 16,000 acres of lakes, lagoons and dunes. The resort's two championship golf courses, Streamsong Red and Streamsong Blue,

will be joined by a third course, Streamsong Black, scheduled to open in fall 2017.

Streamsong is one of several properties that Milwaukee, Wisconsin-based Baird, a wealth and asset management firm, has chosen over the years.

Ruben Rivas, event coordinator for Baird, says weather is the main reason why Baird has held meetings at Streamsong and other Florida destinations. "We have also hosted groups in Miami Beach, Bal Harbour and Palm Beach," he says. "Being based out of the Midwest with a vast majority of our clients being East Coast-based, Florida is a natural draw for us and our clients looking to find some

sun and warm temperatures as winter wears on our parts of the country."

In addition, everything that comprises the "Streamsong experience" is why Rivas scheduled the recent event for its executives and clients at the resort. "Streamsong is on our go-to list for great client events," says Rivas. "This is the fourth time that we have met there in recent memory. We are very familiar with the quality of experiences at Streamsong, starting with the world renowned golf and ending with fantastic guest amenities."

Baird's status as a loyal customer of Streamsong enables the company to obtain good value and concessions. "With an established relationship, we are fortunate to have some flexibility in pricing and the scheduling for our group to fit our often very specific time frames," says Rivas.

Streamsong's amenities also are a good fit for the group. "We love hosting dinner in the Wine Room at Restaurant 59," says Rivas. "Our industry demands private dining and dinner, and that room has become a must. We typically do a light-hearted 'roast' of clients at dinner, and the staff is always accommodating," he says.

Orlando

Central Florida, notably No. 1 Orlando, continues to increase its variety of meeting experiences. In fact, Cvent's annual list of the top meeting hotels in the United States includes 13 Orlando hotels, which is the most of any city. (Chicago boasts 10, and Las Vegas claims 9 hotels in the top 100.)

Theme Parks in Orlando contribute greatly to the popularity of the destination, and there is always something new to report. For example, Universal Orlando Resort is opening a new attraction this summer at its Universal Islands of Adventure. The King Kong-themed attraction, "Skull Island: Reign of Kong," will honor the legendary giant gorilla. Guests aboard vehicles will fend off threats while exploring ancient temple structures.

This summer, Universal Orlando Resort will open its fifth onsite ho-

tel — the Loews Sapphire Falls Resort. The 1,000-room property, which is built around a lagoon and towering waterfall, will feature more than 115,000 sf of meeting space. The Caribbean-themed property will connect to Loews Royal Pacific Resort. The two properties combined will feature 247,000 sf of meeting space.

Meanwhile, Universal Orlando Resort's CityWalk opened the first-ever NBC Sports Grill & Brew. The restaurant offers private dining rooms, about 100 HDTV screens, an inclusive menu and more than 100 beer brands. In addition, The Loews Royal Pacific Resort has expanded its meeting and event space from 85,000 sf to 132,000 sf.

At SeaWorld, the DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld plans to complete a multimillion-dollar renovation by the end of this year. The project includes a new 20,000-sf ballroom, new pool decks and 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space.

SeaWorld also plans to open Mako, a new 200-foot-tall roller coaster premiering this summer that will be Orlando's tallest, fastest and longest coaster, going up to 73 miles per hour.

This year, Walt Disney World will complete the transformation of Downtown Disney into Disney Springs. The project will double the number of restaurants, shops and other venues to more than 150 with a high-quality, diverse mix of retailers, entertainment, upscale restaurants and casual dining options.

Planners may wish to check out the seven Disney Springs Resort Area Hotels, formerly known as the Downtown Disney Resort Area Hotels. These seven Official Walt Disney World Hotels are ideally located within an easy walk to more than 75 themed and immersive shopping, dining and entertainment venues at Disney Springs.

The Disney Springs Resort Area Hotels include B Resort & Spa with 394

new rooms and suites, and 25,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space; the 325-room Best Western Lake Buena Vista Resort Hotel, overlooking scenic Lake Buena Vista and catering to the small meetings market, for events from 10–120; the 1,014-room Buena Vista Palace, offering 90,000 sf of convention and meeting space, a business center, and five restaurants and lounges; DoubleTree Suites by Hilton – Orlando Lake Buena Vista, newly renovated, featuring 229 two-room suites, and accommodating groups up to 125 guests in 3,500 sf of meeting space; the 814-room Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista, providing 78,000 sf of contemporary meeting space, with 22 breakout rooms, an Executive Boardroom and outdoor patios; the 323-room Holiday Inn located in the Walt Disney World Resort, offering 11,000 sf of meeting and event space, including a ballroom that can seat 500; the 626-room Wyndham Lake Buena Vista, featuring 19,000 sf of meeting and banquet space serving groups of 10 to 1,200 guests.



The Streamsong Resort in Central Florida.

Credit: The Streamsong Resort

The seven hotels also provide groups with many enticing Disney Meeting Advantages through their unique status as Official Walt Disney World Hotels. The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel recently redesigned the Swan hotel's 758 guest rooms and plans to do the same for the Dolphin hotel's 1,509 rooms. The Swan and Dolphin also upgraded the Wi-Fi technology in its conven-

tion space to offer reliable and fast Internet service that can accommodate the bandwidth needs of groups of more than 15,000 attendees. The resort offers more than 329,000 sf of meeting space.

Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek is expanding its meet-

the planner. "At the time our space requirements were two to three consecutive general sessions and 30 smaller sized breakout rooms. The meeting space at the Sawgrass fit perfectly."

Room rates also were favorable. "We were looking for a Florida destination hotel that was equal to the

rates we were getting," says the planner. "The opportunity for a property buyout was the main reason we booked Sawgrass. The contract concessions were generous for our needs, and due to the fact that we had a property buyout, the service level exceeded expectations."

Sawgrass' golf courses also influenced the planner's choice. "It has numer-

ous options for a golf tournament, and our program included one for a small number of executives who were excited about the courses available in the area," says the planner. "Executives raved about the Lagoon Course at the Ponte Vedra Inn & Club."

The Sawgrass Marriott features several onsite venues for dinners and receptions, and the planner took full advantage. "We held a welcome reception in the Island Green Pavilion, the perfect size and setting for the event," says the planner. "We set up a golf simulator outside on the deck overlooking the lake along with a person who rolled Cuban cigars."

The meeting also included two "nightcap" events in the hotel lobby bar and Alice & Pete's Pub. "The expansive and relaxed setting with the decks overlooking the water were very popular with attendees, not to mention the convenience of proximity to guest rooms."

Post-meeting feedback was glowing for several reasons. "The size and ease of getting to and from the Jacksonville airport was mentioned, along with the atmosphere of the property

for a business meeting," says the planner. "They said that the close proximity of general sessions to breakout rooms was a key along with very good food and amazing service levels."

Jacksonville

Jacksonville is home to the largest convention hotel between Atlanta and Orlando — The Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront, which provides 951 newly renovated guest rooms and more than 116,000 sf of meeting space. The property recently introduced its "Recharge Your Meetings" program offering healthful meeting breaks including yoga, Zumba and stretching instructions on the outdoor terrace; fitness lessons in the fitness center; and healthful food and beverage options.

Among other Jacksonville properties, The DoubleTree by Hilton Jacksonville Riverfront has opened following a \$12 million renovation that included the lobby, meeting spaces, guest rooms and restaurant. The 293-room property features 12,000 sf of meeting space.

About 30 miles north of the Jacksonville airport, the Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort offers 80,000 sf of meeting space, including a new 16,825-sf ballroom. The conference center provides more than 13,000 sf of prefunction space and an 11,000-sf event lawn.

About 20 miles southeast of Jacksonville, the AAA Five Diamond Ponte Vedra Inn & Club will complete a multimillion-dollar renovation of its Ocean House accommodations in fall 2017. The property recently renovated its Peyton House accommodations, and oceanfront Surf Club, opened the new Tavern Lounge and upgraded its complementary Wi-Fi system.

South of Jacksonville, the 212-room Shores Resort and Spa in Daytona Beach Shores offers 20,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space including a 6,800-sf grand ballroom that can be divided into five meeting rooms. The property also offers more than 8,000 sf of rooftop meeting space

with floor-to-ceiling glass windows that provide grand views.

Also in Daytona Beach, Westin Hotels & Resorts will open its first-ever property in the destination when The Westin Daytona Beach Resort & Spa opens by the end of 2016 after a \$20 million renovation. The 200-room property, located close to the Ocean Center, has 25,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space.

Southeast Florida

Palm Beach County is home to the only property in South Florida that is directly connected to a convention center. The new 21-story, 400-room Hilton West Palm Beach opened in January with 24,000 sf of meeting space and is connected to The Palm Beach County Convention Center.

The Boca Raton Resort & Club, a Waldorf Astoria Resort in Palm Beach County, was an ideal fit for her group who met in Palm Beach County for the first time, says Kendra Murray, CMM, CIS, program manager for Bishop-McCann, a strategic meetings management company in Kansas City. "The overall value was great, and we had a favorable rate, which balanced out the food and beverage pricing," says Murray. "The venue is spread out, but the meeting space was awesome and perfectly fit our agenda event pattern. The size of our group pretty much maxed out the space. The hotel also provided extra ground transportation to the beach and main resort buildings to ensure that attendees didn't need to wait."

The beach location and meeting spaces also were a good fit for the several on-property events. "We had a yacht club-themed welcome reception and awards dinner, a beach pool party and games with a deejay, and a 'Love Boat' theme celebration dinner with a band," says Murray. "The agenda also included a general session with five keynote speakers, meetings and other events."

Also in Palm Beach County, Eau Palm Beach was recognized as one of only six new hotels in the U.S. to

be named one of *Forbes Travel Guide's* 2016 Five Star Hotels. Launched in mid-2013, the re-envisioned Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa has quickly established itself as the preeminent authority on the modern Palm Beach lifestyle.

The resort boasts more than 30,000 sf of flexible space in 20 stylish locations. With group rates beginning at \$159, planners can



The new Hilton West Palm Beach in Palm Beach County.



Credit: Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa

The Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa.

ing space by 7,000 sf. The project will offer larger and more flexible spaces adjacent to the resort building. Completion is set for May 2016.

The Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort and Spa, Bonita Springs recently completed a two-stage renovation of all 36,000 sf of indoor meeting spaces.

Northeast Florida

This region of Florida, headlined by Daytona Beach and Jacksonville, offers a growing range of property options, including some of the state's most popular resorts.

A planner in the financial securities industry who chose to remain anonymous held a meeting for 1,000 executives, employees and investors at the 511-room Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa in Ponte Vedra, which is undergoing a resort-wide refreshment of the front desk area, hotel façade, pool area and the Sawgrass Spa and Cabana Beach Club.

The planner chose the Sawgrass Marriott because of the group's increasing number of attendees. "They had outgrown the hotel venue used in previous years in (another city)," says

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Credit: Casa Marina, a Waldorf Astoria Resort

Attendees enjoy the "Sculpting Unique Experiences" teambuilding promotion at Casa Marina, a Waldorf Astoria Resort in Key West.

book a minimum of 10 guest rooms per night and receive the following: one hour complimentary beer and wine reception, including dry snacks; complimentary basic meeting space Wi-Fi; 10 percent off Eau Spa services; one per 50 complimentary room policy; two upgrades to Ocean Front Suites over the peak nights; two complimentary welcome amenities — chef's selection. These perks are applicable to contracts signed by August 31, 2016 for travel until December 20, 2016.

Sophisticated Miami

Miami offers Latino-flavored urban chic, lively beaches, a throbbing nightlife and plenty of entertainment. No wonder the number of overnight visitors to Miami and the Beaches increased 5.4 percent during the 12 months from September 2014 to August 2015, according to the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Miami also offers plenty of meeting space, led by the Miami Beach Convention Center (MBCC), which is undergoing a \$500 million renovation and expansion. The project is scheduled for completion in 2018. The \$615 million project includes plans for an adjacent headquarters hotel. Upon completion, the MBCC will have 505,000 sf of contiguous exhibit space, a newly added 60,000 sf Grand Ballroom and 59,000 sf of breakout space.

Among Miami's properties, Turnberry Isle Miami, a 408-room Medi-

terranean-style resort with 40,000 sf of meeting space, recently premiered 241 renovated guest rooms and suites in the resort's Magnolia and Jasmine buildings.

Florida Keys

Just south of Miami, the Florida Keys, a 125-mile-long island chain featuring an array of venues from large corporate spaces to more intimate settings, is a great option for meeting and corporate retreat organizers. Planners will discover a variety of new activities to keep their groups comfortable and entertained throughout their island getaway including:

Groups at Key Largo's private Ocean Reef Club can enjoy field trips and eco-kayak tours through their Nature Center and group activities at the property's all-new cooking school, which accommodates cooking demonstrations, private parties and tasting events for up to 150 people. Meeting-goers also can participate in teambuilding events such as bingo night, bungee run, cardboard boat regatta, sand castle competitions and more.

The Ocean Reef Club features 36 holes of golf, a salon and spa, more

and Lagoon Beach, which can accommodate up to 400 people. In addition, the property opened Carysfort Hall, a beautiful, modern meeting and function space designed to accommodate groups of up to 300 guests. The new space features a 5,688-sf ballroom, five additional meeting rooms and covered patios along the marina that are ideal for outside functions.

Scheduled to open in April 2016, Key Largo's Playa Largo Resort will feature 167 luxury guest rooms, 10 private bungalows and a private beach house.

Additionally, the 14.5-acre property will feature more than 39,000 sf of meeting space with multiple inside and outside venues.

Gulf Coast

On the Southwest Coast, Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort, Golf Club & Spa is phasing in enhancements. Phase one, already completed, includes a redesigned and enhanced lobby and grand front entrance, removal of the Islands Ballroom to make way for the new adult-only 94-room Lanai Tower. Upon completion of all three phases in 2017, the Marriott beachfront resort will offer 810 guest rooms and suites across three towers, and 100,000 sf of event space. The property also will include a 12,000-sf indoor entertainment zone.

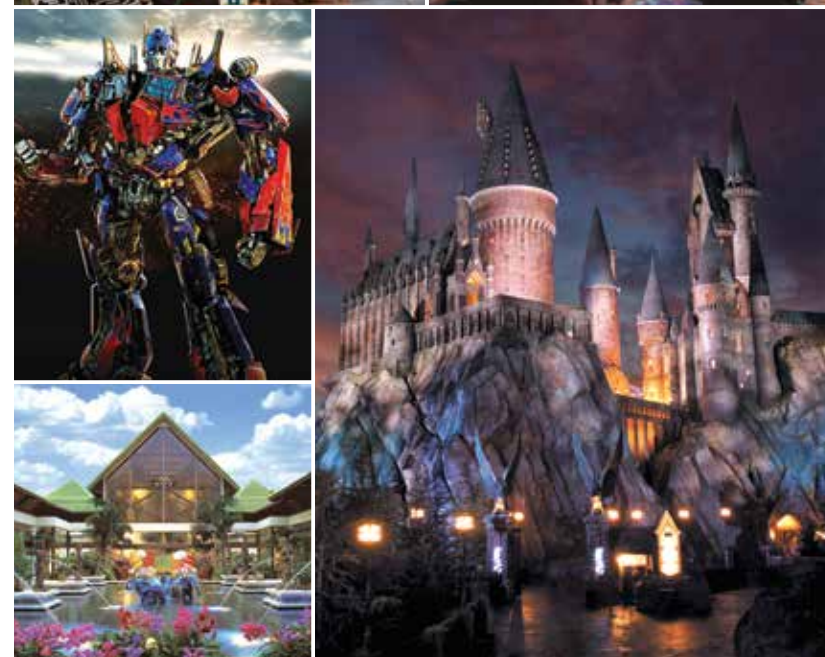
The Northwest Gulf Coast is home to this region's largest full-service beachfront resort hotel — The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, which offers privileges at four championship Sandestin golf courses — Burnt Pine Golf Club, Baytowne Golf Club, The Links Course and Raven Golf club.

Mega-states such as Florida offer a greater variety of meeting destinations, which is why planners can bring the same group to the Sunshine State time after time and get totally different experiences. The options are endless for all types of groups.

I&FMM



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♥ing Las Vegas

The Fabulous Meeting Experience Keeps Groups Dreaming About Next Time

By Mark Rowh

Everybody knows about the glamour offered by Las Vegas. While it's obviously a hotspot for visitors, it's hard to top the world-famous Nevada location as a meeting destination.

With more than 150,000 hotel rooms and a plethora of resorts, casinos and nightspots, Las Vegas hosts more than 22,000 conventions a year that are attended by more than 5 million delegates. With so many options available, it can be a meeting planner's dream destination.



Credit: MGM Resorts International

The Nassau Boardroom at The Mirage seats 24 and provides state-of-the-art audio-visual technology.



Credit: Las Vegas News Bureau

The 2015 Vegas Uncork'd grand tasting event at Garden of the Gods pool at Caesars Palace. The 2016 event is April 27–28.

In fact, the city surpassed 2014 visitation records, according to a just-released report commissioned by the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA). Visitors topped 42.3 million in 2015, a 2.9 percent increase from 2014. The primary driver, the report revealed, was convention attendance, which increased more than 13 percent.

Rossi Ralenkotter, president and CEO of the LVCVA, stated, “We are encouraged by the continued strength and growth of the tourism industry particularly in the meetings and convention sector. As a destination, we look forward to building on this momentum in the coming years. We need to ensure that we continue to provide the world-class experience and facilities our visitors have come to expect.”

Offering a mind-blowing total of 11 million sf of meeting space, Las Vegas has been ranked as the No. 1 trade show destination in North America over the past two decades. And it offers much more than just meeting space.

Las Vegas is a great option for meeting planners because they don't have to schedule every minute of every day, says Chris Meyer, vice president of global business sales for the LVCVA. “Meetings in Las Vegas in particular are better attended because attendees know that restaurants, shows and the casinos are still going to be there when they finish their business,” he says. “So they are able to get their business done without fear of missing out on all the excitement the city has to offer.”

While of course Las Vegas has earned an unsurpassed reputation as a premier gaming destination, that's not all that it offers, Meyer adds.

“What meeting planners might be surprised to find is that gaming resorts now offer a wide array of world-class dining, shopping, entertainment and outdoor experiences that expand beyond the casino floor,” he says. “Las Vegas makes a planner's job easier because there is such

a diverse collection of amenities that are available to every demographic.”

Meyer notes that the town was built to host visitors and has decades of experience when it comes to customer service.

“Las Vegas resorts continually evolve to meet the needs of the visitors — both leisure and business,” he says. “It is a destination that is about the overall experience and not one specific amenity.” Meyer encourages planners to reach out to the LVCVA when beginning the process of planning a meeting.

“We are the destination experts, and no meeting size is too big or too small,” he says.

Great Match for Financial & Insurance Groups

That sentiment is echoed by Deannie Wirtjes, who serves as controller, commission/payroll manager and conference coordinator at Financial West Group (FWG), a securities and investment firm in Westlake Village, California. In planning meetings for brokers from around the country, she has found Las Vegas to be an ideal location.

“There are so many things to do after hours,” she says. “From the meeting planner's viewpoint, you don't need to spend time organizing entertainment. That makes the job a little easier.”

Wirtjes says the city's excitement level is balanced by the serious approach taken to accommodate business guests.

“The city is a great place itself, and the hotels work well with businesses,” she says. “The prices are good, too.”

Her next meeting will be held at The Mirage Hotel & Casino in April. “Every hotel has something different to offer,” she says. “But we definitely like this one.

A positive factor, she notes, is the consistency in service enjoyed by smaller groups as well as larger ones. She says that for her own meeting with about 200 attendees, she has received the same level of attention as larger groups. “You get treated the same whether it's five or five thousand,” she says.

Transportation is another positive factor. Many of the company's brokers hail from Southern California, and the trip to Las Vegas is convenient.

“And connections are also great for those from elsewhere in the U.S.,” Wirtjes adds.

Patty Kindness, national sales manager, AlliedPRA Las Vegas, points to the variety of resources available to planners, including tiered accommodations and facility choices, and abundant convention and meeting services. She notes that in her experience, the area has been a great match for groups from the financial and insurance sector.



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One of the special events that Kindness recently planned was a program for 3,000 attendees at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway. “We bought out the Neon Garage, and had a concert stage, driving and karting opportunities, games, food and beverage and more. It was like a custom carnival for the guests.

Only in Las Vegas

“Increasingly, we work with insurance and financial clients in Vegas and find that their meetings are so successful that they commit to the city for multiple years in advance,” she says. She is currently assisting a financial client who is following up a previous successful meeting in Las Vegas with preparations for another meeting later in 2016. The plans include a dine-around for 4,500 guests.

“This is a popular trend we’re seeing,” Kindness says, noting that a recent 1,500-person insurance meeting used this format with great success.

“Dine-arounds on this scale are something that can only logistically be accomplished in Las Vegas,” she says. She cites the buying power her organization has with restaurant groups and hotels, along with the close proximity of a variety of top-tier restaurants, as important factors in making such events successful.

“The results can be a memorable and interactive experience for participants in lieu of the standard and tired ballroom networking reception,” she says. “It’s a win-win scenario for all parties.”

Entertainment

Built-in entertainment is the name of the game in Las Vegas, and there is plenty of it, too.

Here’s a sampling: Caesars Palace boasts two huge shows at The Colosseum: Celine Dion performs her repertoire of hits mixed with timeless classics in her residency show; and the popular “Reba, Brooks & Dunn Together in Vegas” show is still packing them in.

Other entertainers on the Las Vegas scene include Billy



Superstar entertainers Reba, Kix Brooks and Ronnie Dunn join forces at the Colosseum at Caesars Palace.



A meeting room at the Trinidad Pavilion at Tropicana Las Vegas, a DoubleTree by Hilton.

Idol, who recently began his first-ever multirate residency at the House of Blues Las Vegas at Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino.

Even though he won’t be a fixture in Las Vegas, the biggest-selling solo artist in American history is bringing the biggest selling tour to Las Vegas. Garth Brooks recently announced that he will return to Las Vegas for exclusive performances at the new Las Vegas Arena scheduled to open soon. Brooks sold more tickets in 2015 than any other artist in the world. He will create a live music experience unique to Las Vegas when he performs multiple shows July 2–4.

New and Noteworthy

Nothing stands still in Las Vegas, or so it seems. Hotels are constantly upgrading facilities or services, and the city as a whole keeps adding attractions for visitors.

After a recent expansion, **Tropicana Las Vegas, a DoubleTree by Hilton** features the 55,000-sf Trinidad Pavilion at Tropicana Las Vegas, a new conference facility that’s divisible into as many as 38 breakout rooms. It includes a 25,000-sf ballroom, and the pavilion is suitable for exhibits or large general sessions. All told, more than 100,000 sf of meeting and exhibition space is available.

With the resort’s \$200 million transformation, some 1,469 guest rooms and suites now feature updated furnishings and amenities. Complementing the traditional rooms are villas styled after oceanside beach houses and Miami penthouses. Other attractions include an expansive spa and fitness center, as well as a 50,000-sf casino with an assortment of slots and table games, and a new race and sports book.

In April, Tropicana plans to open a new pool club, Sky Beach Club. Inspired by the South Beach party atmosphere, it will feature two luxury pools, VIP cabanas, a deejay booth and two bars, along with bottle service. Celebrity hosts, live music acts, beer pong and table games will be part of the picture.

The Poker Room will open in May at **Wynn Las Vegas** and will offer an elevated experience in a roomy environment. The 8,600-sf facility will include 28 tables, a sports book window and 35 big-screen televisions.

Wynn Plaza also is underway. Slated to open in fall

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ROADHOUSE



Credit: Wynn Las Vegas

ballrooms include a 36,260-sf choice and a 28,592-sf facility with a roomy prefunction area, service hallways on three sides and direct access to freight elevators.

A 4,100-seat coliseum features a huge LED screen, while the 4.5-acre Garden of the Gods pool oasis is another attractive venue.

Caesars also announced plans to upgrade more than 4,800 hotel rooms at four of its Las Vegas resorts. These resort upgrades include the transformation of the original tower at Caesars Palace to create the 586-room Julius Tower as well as the refurbishment of the resort's 948-room Augustus Tower. Additional room upgrades will include **Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino, Paris Las Vegas** and **Harrah's Las Vegas**.

Planet Hollywood will reimagine more than 1,294 rooms and suites; Harrah's Las Vegas plans to overhaul approximately 672 rooms of the hotel's south tower and Paris Las Vegas plans to transform approximately 1,320 rooms and suites.

At **The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort and Spa**, a strong point is the recently restored Reflection Bay golf course.

The patio view of The Country Club at Wynn Las Vegas.

2017, the large complex will boast more than 75,000 sf of luxury retail space.

Wynn features a design that "brings the outdoors in" with terraces from each meeting room offering a poolside or golf course view. Overall meeting space totals 200,000 sf, with two ballrooms ranging from 25,000 sf to 50,000 sf along with 34 meeting rooms. Two technically supported stages also are available.

Wynn's sister property **Encore** features spacious terraces looking out from many of its highly configurable meeting spaces. The 60,000 sf of flexible meeting space includes 12 meeting rooms.

Designed with sports lovers in mind, The Still is a new 8,000-sf man cave with 22 televisions at **The Mirage Hotel & Casino**. It features a refurbished Airstream trailer that has been converted into a fully functioning kitchen for production of upscale bar food.

At The Mirage, which boasts 170,000 sf of event space, the centerpiece is the Mirage Events Center. With 90,000 sf of pillar-less space, it can be partitioned into three 30,000-sf sections. One section, in turn, can break down into three rooms of 6,500 to 10,000 sf. The 40,000-sf ballroom is complemented by a number of other rooms of varying configurations.

Guests at **Caesars Palace, The Linq Hotel & Casino** and **Flamingo Las Vegas** (and at other Caesars properties in the near future) now can take advantage of a fully integrated self check-in program incorporating email, text, Web and mobile apps along with the new kiosks.

Upon arrival, guests can proceed immediately to the check-in kiosk to begin the check-in process. This includes verifying IDs and taking payment information at the machine. The kiosk then provides either a printed key if the room is ready, or an alert to return when the room becomes available.

The expansive Caesars Palace offers an impressive 300,000 sf of meeting space. Two 51,000-sf ballrooms each accommodate more than 5,500 guests and can be reconfigured into as many as 25 separate breakout rooms. Other



"What meeting planners might be surprised to find is that gaming resorts now offer a wide array of world-class dining, shopping, entertainment and outdoor experiences that expand beyond the casino floor."

Chris Meyer, Vice President of Global Sales
Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority

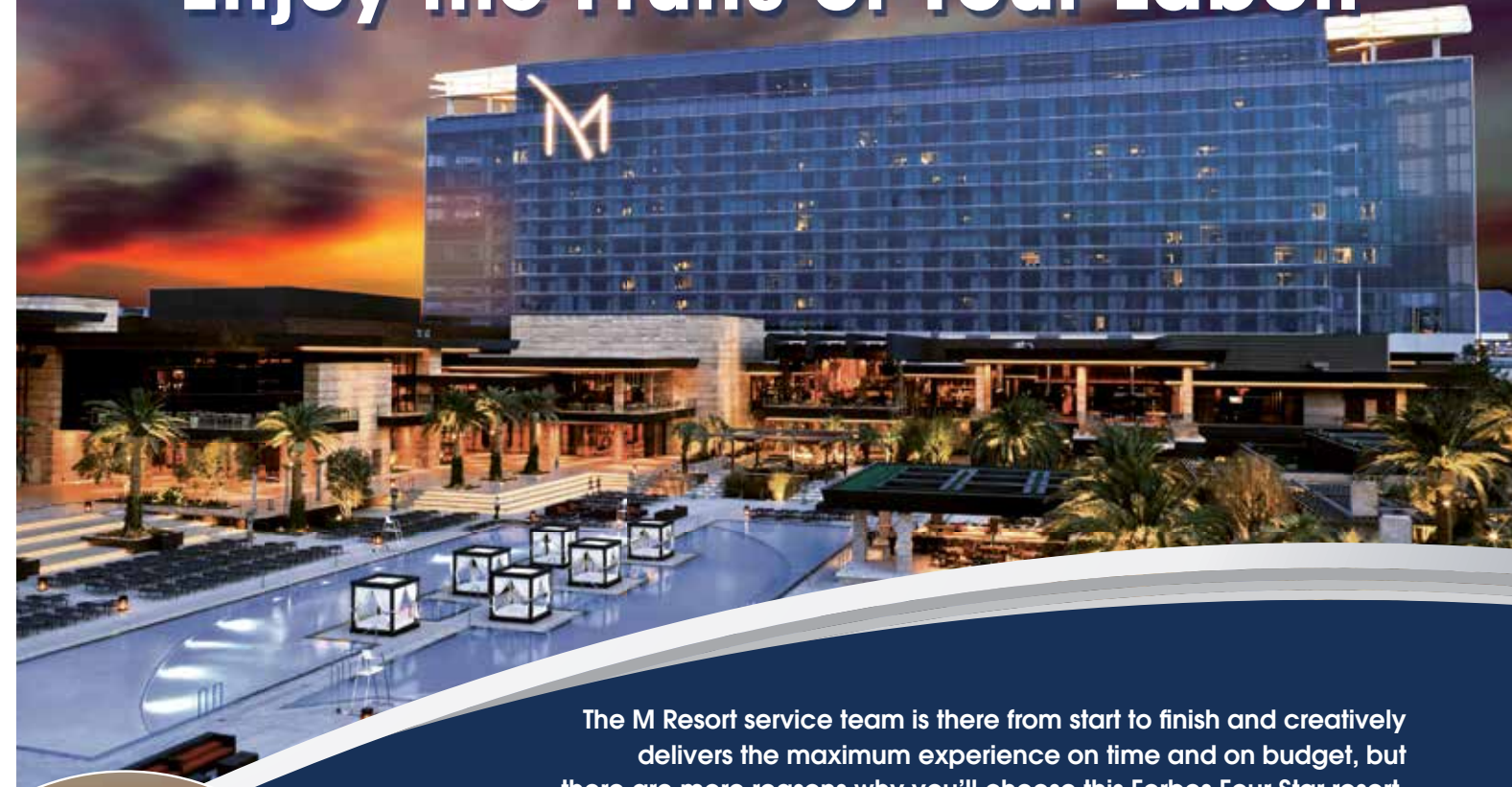
The upgrade was guided by none other than golfing legend Jack Nicklaus, the original course designer. The design combines mountain vistas with attractive views of the lake.

Located about 30 minutes from The Strip in Henderson, Nevada, The Westin Lake Las Vegas accommodates up to 2,100 guests. The 3,600-acre resort has more than 90,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space. One 20,580-sf ballroom has a capacity of 1,200, and a smaller ballroom holding 400 guests has 6,078 sf of space. The resort overlooks a 300-plus acre lake where guests can enjoy kayaking, paddleboarding or pedalboat riding around the lake.

This year a major expansion of the convention center at **Aria Resort & Casino** will get underway. The \$154 million project, scheduled to begin in May with a February 2018 completion date, will bring an additional 200,000 sf of meeting space across four stories. It will include glass-enclosed spaces with views that include the new Las Vegas Arena. Once complete, the expansion will push Aria's total meeting space over the 500,000 sf level.

Currently Aria, a 61-story, 4,004-guest room resort, offers four ballrooms and 38 meeting rooms. One ballroom,

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totaling 51,000 sf, can be divided into 10 separate meeting rooms. Two other ballrooms, divisible into eight smaller rooms, offer 38,000 sf of space each, while another has 20,000 sf of space.

At **M Resort Spa Casino**, the 92,000 sf of event space includes a 17,400-sf ballroom, multiple reception areas and the 25,000-sf M Pavilion.

Only seven years old, the highly rated resort offers 390 guest rooms, 4,000 parking spaces and expansive casino and entertainment space.

Of course it doesn't get much grander than the **MGM Grand Hotel & Casino**, which offers more than 600,000 sf of meeting space. The huge conference center has more than 380,000 sf of event space spread over three levels, with choices ranging from a 92,000-sf ballroom to a host of rooms coming in every size and configuration. And the 100,000-sf Grand Garden Arena seats up to 17,000 guests, with flexibility to serve as a dinner setting or exhibit hall.

Set to open this spring is **The Park**, an "oasis" mirroring the surrounding desert landscape from its location between **Monte Carlo Resort and Casino** and **New York-New**



"Increasingly, we work with insurance and financial clients in Vegas and find that their meetings are so successful that they commit to the city for multiple years in advance."

Patty Kindness, National Sales Manager
AlliedPRA Las Vegas

exclusive, invitation-only events, this partnership signifies the beginning of an unprecedented customer experience that will entice car enthusiasts from around the world.

The **Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority** recently launched a Virtual Reality Companion app that helps transport meeting attendees and trade show delegates to popular attractions in the Entertainment Capital of the World. During the ITB travel trade show in Berlin, Germany, the LVCVA showcased virtual reality through Oculus Rift.

The Virtual Reality Companion app allows consumers to download the Vegas VR experience to their Apple or Android smartphone. The app includes 12 immersive Las Vegas VR experiences that can be viewed directly on a smartphone, or used with a VR Viewer such as a Google Cardboard or Oculus.

Also attractive to conference attendees are discounted multiday passes to the **Las Vegas Monorail**, which provides convenient transportation to the Las Vegas Convention Center and eight different city properties. The monorail system includes nine climate-controlled trains, each with four cars and 72 seats. Traveling at speeds of up to 50 miles per hour, the trains arrive at each of seven stations every four to eight minutes.

Final Thoughts

An added consideration is that the glitz of the city is complemented by the area's natural beauty and other features, ranging from striking rock formations and panoramic desert views to the modern marvel that is Hoover Dam.

In fact, beginning April 1, adventure enthusiasts who want to see a remote part of the Grand Canyon or go on a thrilling, 10-mile ATV ride to the edge of the canyon can check out the popular Bar 10 Ranch tour by Papillon Group's Grand Canyon Scenic Airlines. Known as the Grand Canyon North Air/Ground Tour, guests are shuttled to the Boulder City Aerocenter where they board an airplane and enjoy a bird's-eye view of Hoover Dam, Lake Mead and the Colorado River — the heart of the Grand Canyon. The tour concludes with a homemade Dutch oven barbecue lunch.

"Las Vegas has outstanding natural beauty that first-time participants generally don't expect," Kindness says.

I&FMM



Credit: M Resort Spa Casino

The Lux Bar at M Resort Spa Casino.

York Hotel & Casino. While serving as the pathway to the new T-Mobile Arena, the park also will offer a respite from the area's hustle and bustle.

The Mob Museum, which bills itself as the national museum of organized crime and law enforcement, has extended its operating hours for 2016 to include "museum after dark" programs. Each evening, visitors can view behind-the-scenes objects, photos and documents not on regular display at the museum. A new feature is the ability to make a virtual visit to the museum. Thanks to the development of "Moe-Bot," a telepresence robot, guests will be able to check out the various exhibits from a desktop computer or mobile device. Interactive guided tours will be available to anyone, anywhere.

When **Speedvegas** opens its motorsports complex this summer, one notable partner will be Gaudin Porsche of Las Vegas. From the ability to drive a Porsche right off of the Speedvegas track and onto the streets of Las Vegas to

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SISKIE

Sharon Siskie was promoted to senior vice president of sales for Walt Disney Parks and Resorts, U.S. She was V.P., marketing and sales, international.

Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Resort & Spa, Rio Grande, Puerto Rico, has named **Willie Chin** as director of sales and marketing. He most recently served as regional director of sales and marketing for IHG's Caribbean hotels.

Erica Schlatter was named group sales manager for Lansdowne Resort, Leesburg, Virginia. She previously was event sales manager at Hyatt Dulles in Washington, DC.



CHIN

Elbow Beach, Bermuda, has named **Randolph Wilcott** as director of sales and marketing, under his sales and marketing consulting company RKW Group in Scottsdale, Arizona. He was with Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas.

Jodi Graham was named senior sales manager for Miramonte Resort & Spa in Indian Wells, California. She most recently was senior sales manager with Saguaro in Palm Springs, California.

Nobu Hotel Eden Roc, Miami Beach, Florida, has named **Rachael Palumbo** as director of sales and marketing and **Tina Gerson** as director of sales.



GRAHAM



COHEN

Palumbo was executive director of sales and marketing at One&Only Ocean Club in Nassau, Bahamas. Gerson was sales director at The Diplomat Resort & Spa in Hollywood, Florida.

Karin Cohen was named regional group sales director for Rancho Valencia Resort & Spa in San Diego, California. She was regional director of sales at Regent Hotels & Resorts.

Rosewood Hotel Group has appointed **Caroline MacDonald** as vice president of sales and marketing, Americas and Europe. She was chief marketing officer for Auberge Resorts. *I&FMM*



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