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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING PLANNERS

The Power of Women

Women Keynote Speakers Who
Inspire, Motivate and Drive
Change and Innovation

PAGE 20

Q&A with MPI

President & CEO Paul Van Deventer
Weighs in on Key Industry Issues

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Gabriella Schuster, Keynote Speaker and Corporate Vice
President, One Commercial Partner Team, Microsoft



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Credit: Black Cherry Photo

The after party at a Roaring '20s/speakeasy-themed event for HelmsBriscoe's Western Regional Meeting in Denver. **PAGE 26**



Credit: Hersheypark

Hersheypark in Hershey, Pennsylvania, is just one of many great theme park meeting options around the country. **PAGE 38**



Credit: LaQuinta Resort & Club

Spectacular outdoor spaces, such as The Top of the Plaza at LaQuinta Resort & Club near Palm Springs, abound in California. **PAGE 60**

Publisher's Message

Speak Out to Even the Playing Field

Corporations today are all about promoting diversity in the workplace, yet take a look at the list of keynote speakers at most corporate meetings and conventions and you'll see that women are woefully underrepresented. We're highlighting 10 top women speakers in this issue who can help even the playing field at your next meeting.

"Diversity is a critical factor in ensuring all perspectives are considered and represented," says Kati Quigley, CMP, senior director, partner marketing and recruiting for Microsoft, in our feature on page 20. "We always strive for a diverse set of speakers, not just in terms of gender but in terms of culture, geography and experience." The scarcity of women speakers is especially evident at scientific and technology conferences. A Yale-led study on this issue a few years ago revealed a simple solution: "Put at least one woman on the team that organizes a scientific symposium, and that team will be much more likely to invite female speakers," said the study co-author.

Women dominate the meeting planning profession, so when they have a seat at the table in the C-suite, they are in a unique position to effectively champion the selection of women speakers for their corporation's meetings. Quigley notes, "Given the statistics showing that women in the technology industry are not as well represented, we're doing everything we can to improve that, down to the speakers we choose." Featured on our cover is Gavriella Schuster, Microsoft's corporate vice president, One Commercial Partner Team, who speaks at Microsoft meetings and for other groups. She says, "It is so important to help other women understand how to find their voice, their passion and their confidence."

All of the women speakers we showcase have much to teach and inspire in their diverse audiences through their own remarkable success stories, including one of our industry's own — Deborah Gardner, CMP, who is considered one of the top five most requested speakers by MPI. Deborah, who inspires audiences to discover their competitive spirit for improved performance, speaks out to fellow planners in our feature: "To make a change, there is a lot that corporate meeting professionals can do. Be aware of your bias, gather data to set company guidelines, and educate others on why it's important to hire more women speakers."

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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News & Notes

Visit Sacramento Names New COO

SACRAMENTO, CA — Visit Sacramento has announced that John Reyes joins the destination marketing organization as chief operating officer this month. Reyes, who most recently served as the executive vice president and chief sales officer at San Francisco Travel, will assume the role previously held by Visit Sacramento's Mike Testa, who was promoted to president and CEO in July. At Visit Sacramento, Reyes will



REYES

be charged with overseeing day-to-day operations of the organization. Together with Testa and the leadership team, he will work to enhance Visit Sacramento's sales and marketing capabilities as the market continues to grow and the convention center expansion gets underway.

"John brings a wide range of experience and perspective to Visit Sacramento," said Testa. "He has the insight of working in four previous destinations, has overseen convention center expansions and influenced the betterment of the organizations that he's worked for. His credentials, coupled with his passion for destina-

tion marketing, make him the ideal fit for our team."

Reyes has been in the hospitality industry since 1982. In September 2011, he joined the San Francisco Travel Association as executive vice president and chief sales officer, overseeing the convention sales and services teams. Prior to San Francisco, he was president and CEO of the Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau. His previous work experience includes Jacksonville & the Beaches Convention & Visitors Bureau in Jacksonville, Florida, where he was chief executive officer. He also served for 18 years at the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau.

www.visitsacramento.com

MGM Resorts Unveils Plans for Meeting Complex at New Park MGM

LAS VEGAS, NV — MGM Resorts International and New York-based Sydell Group will debut a new meetings and conference space this fall as part of Monte Carlo Resort and Casino's transformation into the highly anticipated Park MGM. With a combination of innovative, nontraditional spaces and flexible design, Park MGM will fill an unmet need in Las Vegas for small groups, while also offering beautiful spaces to host up to 5,000 attendees.

The modern conference space will feature expansive ballrooms, flexible meeting places and an outdoor terrace. The space will be highlighted by the city's first Executive Meeting Center (EMC) and Ideation Labs — two meeting areas designed to maximize productivity for small groups. Additionally, Park MGM will include an installation of the Stay Well program, the industry's first and most comprehensive wellness meetings experience. Meeting planners also will be able to take advantage of Park MGM's other stunning amenities — including the 30,000-sf Park Theater, restaurants



Rendering of the new Park MGM where the main conference space will debut in October.

by celebrated chefs, a luxurious pool environment and more — to curate comprehensive experiences for attendees. The main conference space will be completed this October with the introduction of the Executive Meeting Center and Ideation Labs in the first quarter of 2018.

Spanning 77,000 sf with 43 meeting rooms, Park MGM's conference and event spaces will feature high-touch, high-tech meeting venues.

Second-level meeting rooms will be filled with natural light and overlook the resort's pool environment. The 4,345-sf Central Park Terrace will provide private outdoor meeting space.

Last spring, MGM Resorts and Sydell Group partnered to transform Monte Carlo Resort and Casino into two distinct new hotel experiences: Park MGM and a Las Vegas version of Sydell's widely acclaimed NoMad Hotel. www.montecarlo.com

Flamingo Las Vegas Completes \$6.5M Meeting Space Redesign

LAS VEGAS, NV — The Flamingo has reopened its newly renovated meeting space, offering a fresh, bright and modern look, along with an abundance of natural light from its windows. Each meeting room is named after a different Nevada city and features historic photos from the 1950s, creating a nostalgic feeling in the space.

The redesign includes updated walls, carpet, lighting fixtures and more. With Caesars Entertainment's Code GREEN initiatives in mind, all lighting has been converted to LED technology, which is expected to result in a 70 percent energy savings each year.

"The unveiling of our newly remodeled convention center is the first step of renovations at the Flamingo," says Sherri Pucci, general manager, Flamingo Las Vegas and The LINQ Hotel & Casino. "The Flamingo features a rich history as the place where the Strip began."

In May of this year, Caesars Entertainment announced the launch of a \$90 million renovation of 1,270 rooms at Flamingo Las Vegas. The renovation is anticipated to begin in late August, with final completion of all rooms expected in the second quarter of 2018. The fully renovated rooms will feature unique, contemporary and retro-chic designs with accents that celebrate Flamingo's rich history.

Located in the heart of the Las Vegas Strip, Flamingo Las Vegas helped define the Strip, and as the city grows, it continues to represent the authentic Vegas experience. The resort, which celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2016, features more than 3,500 guest rooms and suites, and is home to a sprawling 15-acre pool and wildlife habitat complete with waterfalls, mature island vegetation and tropical wildlife; three distinctive pools; and several outdoor wedding gardens. www.flamingolasvegas.com

Tips & Trends

5 Holiday Party Planning Tips

By Lizz Torgovnick, Chief Creative Officer, Sequence

We know, we know "It's August, why are you bothering us about the holidays?!" If you or someone you know plans your company holiday party this should already be on your mind. Don't worry, award-winning events agency Sequence has you covered with helpful tips that won't blow your budget:

- 1. Think about timing:** Book your space early (in fact, if you haven't booked your space yet, drop what you're doing and call us now! 646-336-6800 x101). There are only so many options for your ideal size/location/vibe. When you're thinking about dates consider the night of the week, not only for cost purposes but to send the right message to your employees. Mondays are typically more low key, Thursdays more festive (and carry their fair share of Friday "sick days"). Often Fridays can yield a better deal, as can holding off until January.
- 2. To "Plus 1" or not to "Plus 1"?** Consider the pros and cons for your group. Plus 1s means doubling your guest count and possibly leaving the uncoupled (or the "it's complicated") out in the cold. But including Plus 1s can lead to a deeper connection and bonding for the group, allowing them to get beyond the workday banter to engage others.
- 3. Strike the right balance:** Have enough entertainment and activity to make the conversation flow, but not to dominate the event. If you're on a limited budget, focusing on one or two main elements can be a great way to make an impact. When making these selections keep in mind elements which encourage interaction. And keep speeches brief.
- 4. Know your venue:** Does your dream venue have exclusive vendors who lock you into expensive AV, or is there an amazing architectural lighting and décor package already included? Is it close to the office and provide easy transportation options for your guests to get home? Are they flexible on menu selections, setup styles and guest minimums?
- 5. Consider décor that does double duty:** A colorful, branded or decorative décor item can be used as a visual display for the event and also serve as your gift at the end of the evening. Games, sustainable florals and branded merchandise of all sorts can be used in creative ways and check multiple needs off your list. This is a win-win for your budget, your guests and for your Corporate-Social Responsibility initiatives.

www.sequence-events.com



A corporate holiday party by Sequence at Cipriani Wall Street in NYC.

News & Notes

IRF Report: Mitigating Risk in Meetings

WASHINGTON, DC — The Incentive Research Foundation has released the white paper “Mitigating Risk in Modern Meetings and Incentives,” an analysis of critical findings reported in the 2016 Event Disruption Study. The white paper explores disruption mitigation strategies for meetings and incentives and provides insights on how partners prepare for and handle disruptions.



VAN DYKE

Meeting planners reported that disruptive incidents, happening with increasing frequency, include many weather-related phenomena, public enemy such as wars and terrorism, the business partner’s mistakes and the client’s lack of cooperation. Planners estimated they now spend up to 25 percent of their time planning for potential disruptions, and nearly 40 percent of the planners expect that their time and effort to plan for disruptions will increase somewhat in the next two years.

“The 2016 Event Disruption Study demonstrates that disruptions are very real part of doing business in the meeting and incentives industry,” said Melissa Van Dyke, IRF president. “With the white paper ‘Mitigating Risk in Modern Meetings and Incentives,’ we’ve highlighted the research and actionable insights that meeting planners and their partners can use to plan for and respond to disruptions.”

Critical findings on risk mitigation measures focus on effective planning, lessons learned during disruptions and the importance of vendor trust and cooperation.

To view the white paper “Mitigating Risk in Modern Meetings and Incentives,” visit www.theirf.org/research/mitigating-risk-in-modern-meetings-and-incentives/2211/. To view the 2016 Event Disruption Study, visit www.theirf.org/research/2016-event-disruption-study/2134/.

Caribe Hilton Debuts Revamped Meeting Spaces

SAN JUAN, PR — The Caribe Hilton in San Juan, Puerto Rico, recently debuted newly renovated meetings and event space. The hotel enlisted Hirsch Bender Associates (HBA) — an award-winning architectural and design firm known for creating and transforming spaces for today’s leading hospitality venues — to infuse the resort’s meeting space with a modern spirit by installing brand-new carpets, applying fresh paint, and updating the corridors and artwork throughout all spaces.

The 65,000 sf of meeting space enables the resort to comfortably accommodate up to 3,000 guests within four ballrooms, an auditorium and 24 meeting rooms — many with views of the ocean and historic San Geronimo Fort, a 17th century fort found on the National Register of Historic Places.

“We were determined to rethink the overall guest experience here at Caribe Hilton to offer top-of-the-line venues for events, meetings and weddings, and the renovations to our banquet and meeting spaces did just that,” said Pablo Torres, general manager, Caribe Hilton.

“The compelling new design now matches the exceptional service and hospitality that our experienced Team Members provide, and solidifies Caribe Hilton’s place as one of the top choices for meetings and events in Puerto Rico.” www.caribehilton.com/gather

Strength in Global Economy Means Higher 2018 Travel Prices

BOSTON, MA — According to the “2018 Global Travel Forecast,” travel prices are expected to rise sharply in the coming year, reaching nearly 4 percent increases in some sectors. Released in July, the fourth annual forecast by the GBTA Foundation in partnership with Carlson Wagonlit Travel, and with the support of the Carlson Family Foundation, shows global airfares are expected to rise 3.5 percent in 2018; hotel prices are expected to be 3.7 percent higher; and ground transportation such as taxis, trains and buses are expected to rise only 0.6 percent — significantly less than the 3 percent inflation forecast for 2018.

“Geopolitical risks, uncertainties in emerging markets and ever-changing political environments in Europe and the United States mean today’s travel professionals have more than ever to take into account when building their travel programs,” said Jeanne Liu, GBTA Foundation vice president of research. “The most successful programs will have to keep a watchful eye on both geopolitical risks and a rapidly-changing supplier landscape as they reevaluate strategy often and adapt as necessary.”

“The higher pricing is a reflection of the stronger economy and growing demand,” said Kurt Ekert, president and CEO, Carlson Wagonlit Travel. “The global numbers from this forecast should be considered strong leading indicators of what 2018 will mean for global businesses, as we anticipate higher spending.”

The report, “2018 Global Travel Forecast,” is available exclusively to GBTA members at <https://hub.gbta.org/home> and non-members may purchase the report through the GBTA Foundation by emailing pyachnes@gbtafoundation.org. Download the report at www3.gbta.org/v/5572/2017-07-13/574knd.

Snapshots



1



2



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4



5



6



7

Credits: 1. ALH, 2-6 GBTA, 7 MGM Resorts International

1 Associated Luxury Hotels International hosted 65 senior-level women in the meetings and hospitality industries at its 12th Annual Executive Women in Leadership Conference at the iconic Hotel del Coronado in Coronado/San Diego, California. **2-6** The Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) 2017 Convention on July 15–19 at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center enjoyed a record attendance of 6,752 with more than 1,300 buyers. Next year’s convention will be held August 11–15, 2018 in San Diego. **2** GBTA honored Dave Hilfman (center) with a prestigious ICON Award. He is flanked by (left) Michael W. McCormick, GBTA executive director and COO; and Scott Solombrino, GBTA allied leadership council president, and president & CEO, Dav El/Boston Coach Chauffeured Transportation Network. **7** MGM Resorts Chairman & CEO Jim Murren (next to Winston the Impersonating Turtle and Terry Fator) presents the company’s first Military & Veterans Program M life Rewards cards to active and retired military personnel and spouses at the program’s launch on July 20. Developed by MGM Resorts’ Veterans Employee Network Group, MVP provides special recognition, offers, discounts and benefits at MGM Resorts destinations throughout the U.S. to the country’s 24 million military members, veterans and spouses.

Destinations International Annual Convention Snapshots

Destinations International Chair Tammy Blount, FCDME, president and CEO of the Monterey County Convention and Visitors Bureau, and President and CEO Don Welsh announced final attendance numbers for the 2017 Annual Convention held July 11-14 in Montreal, Canada. More than 1,450 attendees engaged in general sessions, discipline-focused shirt-sleeves and networking.

Throughout the program, Destinations International Association and

Foundation leadership recognized and celebrated those whom have demonstrated commitment and promise toward the continued success of destination marketing worldwide. This year, 22 industry representatives received their CDME certification; 22 destination organizations were honored for their DMAP accreditation and reaccreditation; 10 industry leaders were inducted into the Hall of Fame; and the 2017 Class of 30 Under 30 was introduced.

Gary Sherwin, CDME, president and

CEO of Newport Beach & Company, turned over the association's board leadership role to Blount.

In her new role as Destinations International Board Chair, Blount will work alongside Welsh and the global trade association's executive team to continue the organization's work on education, certification and advocacy opportunities for destination organizations around the world.

The next Annual Convention will be held in Anaheim, California, July 10-13, 2018. **C&IT**



By Terri Woodin, CMP

The RFP Challenge: How Planners and Suppliers Can Get to 'Yes'

The planner submits a Request for Proposal, but is it enough to be accepted by a hotel? Conversely, is the product/service supplier being an effective advisor to ensure the planner responds "Yes" to their RFP? Let's take a closer look at how a lack of understanding of common business practices on both sides of the transaction affects how each views the RFP, and learn strategies for both sides to win in the RFP process.

THE KNOWLEDGE GAP

What is driving this knowledge gap? To start, the compressed business climate continues with May marking the 87th consecutive month of RevPAR (Revenue Per Available Room) growth. RevPAR is used in the hotel industry to make an assessment regarding a hotel's operations and its ability to fill its available rooms at an average rate. Increasing a property's RevPAR means that its average room rate and/or its occupancy rate are increasing. This continues to affect the Group segment with room rates projected to increase at a rate of 3.5 percent in the third quarter of 2017 combined with limited occupancy due to strong demand.

THE IMPACT

Given limited availability and high rates, planners are doing "high level" searches with limited information in the RFP and sending them to numerous properties to determine if there is availability and what the rates look like so they can advise stakeholders of which destinations might be an option. The problem is that a hotel declines their RFP due to having no rooms or space available without an explanation as to what that means, because revenue management says there is not enough information in the RFP to be able to bid on it.

THE RESULT

The planner accepts there is no availability and does not ask why there are no rooms or space available (citywide, rooms-to-space ratio, pattern, compression in hotel, definite business on the books, etc.) and proceeds to advise their stakeholder that there is no availability. Door closed.

The supplier misses out on the potential business because they have allowed transactional revenue manage-

ment procedures to drive the process instead of becoming advisors to the planner by sharing that there is room availability with rates in the mid \$200s and asking the planner for more information in order to provide a detailed proposal. Door left open.

The planner can then circle back to the supplier that advises and provides direction as to how to get to "Yes" on their RFP, and also learn along the way how the hotel evaluates its business. This provides a learning experience for both sides through communication that creates a win-win for both sides..

THE SOLUTION

Ensuring that planners and suppliers understand one another is what can help close the gaps in this process.

Planners:

Consider how hotels value their business and understand the variables that influence pricing and availability, so they can get to "Yes" on RFPs. Factors important to hotels include:

- Transient demand
- Arrival/departure patterns: flexibility
- Rooms-to-space ratio
- Group food & beverage spend
- Sleeping room spend
- Seasonality: demand over your dates
- History
- Lead time
- Value of total account business
- Repeat business potential
- Multiyear contracts
- Incremental/ancillary revenue
- Risk (contract clauses)
- Other groups contracted over same dates

Assess your leverage by understanding average industry profit margins and how your RFP contributes:

- Rooms: 77 percent
- Group F&B: 38 percent
- F&B outlets: 19 percent
- Recreation/spa: 15 percent
- Retail/misc. departments: 15 percent

Suppliers:

Consider how you administer the revenue management process to change your level of involvement from reacting to becoming an advisor.

- Be specific in your decline: No available rooms or no space is not a reason for a decline. Ask why there is no availability — is it citywide, definite business on the books, rooms-to-space ratio, patterns or something else.
- Offer solutions: What do they have to change to get a "Yes" on their requested dates rather than just asking if they have alternate dates?
- Be a trusted advisor: You know your hotel best so manage the process rather than letting the revenue management process manage you, and help your client get to "Yes" and your property to get the business (revenue).

- Assess total revenues/account value/variables over meeting dates.
- Emphasize overall goals and objectives, and determine flexibility points.
- Success requires open, honest communication at all stages of the RFP process.

4 STEPS TO VALUE-BASED COMMUNICATIONS

1. Utilize strategic RFP.
2. Leverage your history, revenue contributions and future potential.
3. Share your flexibility.
4. Have a conversation to learn what the hotel needs and convey what you need with understanding to move to "Yes" for your RFP

"The planner accepts there is no availability, and does not ask why...(then) proceeds to advise their stakeholder. **Door closed.**"

- Think outside the box: It's not what you book but what you move! Build a wall between groups and put the puzzle together by getting creative.
- Dates, rates and space: If you responded "Yes" to the RFP but changed the client's requested specifications, then be an advisor, rather than saying you can do it when you really can't. If the client finds out after you have been short-listed, they will ask you to map the space flow. Be ready to identify exactly what you changed in your response.

MANAGING THE GAP TO GET TO YES

When Strategic Meetings Management (SMM) meets Hotel Revenue Management (HRM):

- SMM delivers measureable value to meeting stakeholders.
- HRM maximizes revenues/profitability.
- Utilize strategic RFP process; break down all meeting components.

CONCLUSIONS

Education and training is so important in your position as well as in how the other side operates within their processes. If your company is not providing training that helps you do your job better, then seek avenues to learn and grow.

Planners need to understand both the purpose of the event and what it requires for success, and then communicate with the organization they work for and the venue they are partnering with, to execute the best outcome for attendees and stakeholders. Bridge the gap of communication, and understanding will be possible for both sides.

Suppliers need to move away from transactional RFP responses and be advisors and provide solutions to the planner's thought process of what's in it for me (WIFM) to design an experience that exceeds expectations throughout the RFP process. Be forward thinking and assist clients to understand the current environment and conditions that affect hotels, stakeholders and the industry.

C&IT



Terri Woodin, CMP

is Vice President of Marketing & Global Meeting Services for Meeting Sites Resource in Irvine, California, a strategic meetings management solutions organization with a 24-year track record of meeting excellence. Terri has 30 years of hotel catering, conference services and sales experience, plus five years of meeting planning experience. She is a guest lecturer at Michigan State University, The School of Hospitality Business, from which she graduated in 1988. Terri can be reached at twoodlin@meetingsites.net.



5th Annual HGA

Hosts Global, a strategic partner for destination management services worldwide, hosted more than 240 clients and hospitality industry professionals for the fifth annual Hosts Global Forum. The invitation-only event occurred June

26–29 at the Sheraton New Orleans, where attendees participated in on-trend industry discussions, a volunteerism program, educational sessions, networking events, the Hosts Honors awards, which recognized DMC members for exceeding expectations, and memorable destination-specific activi-

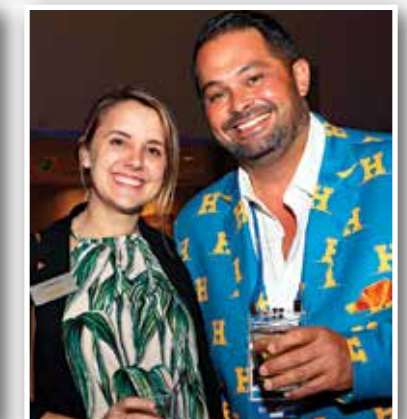
ties, including a Hero's Welcome event at the National WWII Museum. "The Hosts Global Forum is our annual opportunity to bring together our 50-plus Destination Management Company members, clients and colleagues from around the globe," says Marty MacKay, DMCP, president of

Global Forum Snapshots

Hosts Global Alliance. "Attendees travel to one of our key destinations for a firsthand experience while also participating in professional growth opportunities and one-on-one business meetings with our DMC members." "Hosts' differentiator is our H Factor," says Jennifer Patino, DMCP, chief ex-

ecutive officer of Hosts Global, noting, "We shared our Hearts and Hospitality during the welcoming night event when all attendees participated in a volunteerism program" to benefit the local Audubon Nature Institute and One Heart NOLA. The conference opened with the

Hosts & Heritage Festival, a nod to New Orleans' Jazz Fest, and closed with a progressive parade through Bourbon Street with stops at legendary venues. The unrivaled local knowledge and planning capabilities of Hosts New Orleans made the experience one all attendees will not soon forget. **C&IT**



Photos courtesy of Specialty Imaging

Q&A *with MPI*

MPI President & CEO Paul Van Deventer Weighs in on Issues of Importance to Planners

Editor's Note: Following this year's Meeting Professionals International World Education Congress, we asked MPI President and CEO Paul Van Deventer to reflect on a range of industry issues.

Q Explain how and why this year's WEC was different. Why did you select Las Vegas for this event? What are the key take-aways you hope planners experienced?

A The WEC 2017 program was designed to stimulate the senses and inspire attendees to think beyond the ballroom, with all of the content building on our theme "stop planning meetings and start designing experiences." It covered timely and relevant issues that matter to our industry, from security and crisis management, women in leadership, integration of technology, the sourcing of engaging content, to the latest engagement techniques that foster learning.

WEC provides numerous opportunities to gain the education needed to get certified as a meeting professional, refresh business relationships and gain important new friends and allies in the meeting and event industry. You won't find the same content or education anywhere else, with each breakout session filled with timely, actionable advice that can be immediately applied to your work. MPI looks for opportunities to try new concepts and take risks on behalf of our attendees, look-

ing for opportunities to create teaching moments. For example, when one of our keynote speakers unexpectedly cancelled at the "12th hour," we created a real-time learning workshop for attendees on how they could manage a similar situation.

For WEC, as well as other MPI signature events, locations are selected through a competitive request for proposal (RFP) process, which considers factors such as location benefits, meeting venue facilities, pricing, hotel offerings, destination accessibility, unique options and local MPI community support. Our host partners, the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority and MGM Resorts International, were wonderful to work with; their hospitality, accommodations and overall event support were superb.

Q What are the most timely and relevant issues meeting planners are most concerned about? How is MPI helping planners deal with these challenges?

A There are so many critical issues confronting meeting planners and our industry, including meeting design, risk management, travel restrictions, shorter planning times, budget constraints and the integration of technology. Specific to risk management and contingency planning, these have become a critical component of the DNA of meeting planning, including preparation, partner/venue coordination, response and recovery.

We recognize that MPI can play an integral role in helping the global meeting community in this area and thus, we are partnering with the National Center for Spectator Sports Safety and Security (NCS4) at the University of Southern Mississippi, an organization with a proven methodology and track record for creating safety and security best practices, on the development of educational courses that can immediately benefit our community. In addition we are partnering with NCS4 on a five-year, pan-industry initiative to create the first global gold standards for safety and security for meeting and event organizers.



Q How is the approach to risk management in the meetings industry changing in the face of increasing meeting disruptors, such as terror threats, major weather events, cyberthreats, active shooters?

A Contingency planning, disaster management and preparedness, and the safety and security of attendees have become a primary responsibility and expectation of planners. They need to educate themselves on best practices in risk management, contingency planning, partner coordination and communication.

Q What are you learning as co-chair of Meetings Mean Business? What are some of your immediate and long-range goals?

A As co-chair of Meetings Mean Business, I am reminded often that promoting and advocating for our industry cannot be achieved by a single company or organization. More than ever, we must band together as a community and share our story with a united voice.

This year our goals are to (1) generate greater awareness of the industry's value among policymakers, business leaders and the media; (2) create new proof points and engagement opportunities for coalition members and supporters; (3) broaden our base to include planners and to reach a more

global audience; and (4) strengthen our infrastructure for communications and advocacy.

Q How do you think the divided political landscape, rising nationalism and travel ban efforts are affecting the meetings industry? Which White House policies are affecting our industry for better or for worse?

A As I mentioned in my speech during the WEC 2017 Opening General Session, our industry is under attack — from discriminatory legislation, global terrorism and, ironically, by misplaced reaction by some to the threat of terrorism. These threats to the free flow of people limit the effectiveness of live events, and thereby stifle innovation and progress driven by our industry. As a community, each and every one of us has an obligation to advocate for this industry, to promote the value it brings to society and to bring awareness to the pressure it is under.

Q Are meeting budgets keeping pace with costs? Do you see any swing away from the seller's market? What about lead times?

A We are working to wrap up our next MPI Meetings Outlook report, which is scheduled to be released the first week of August. Without giving away too much, I can tell

you we are finding in our research that the industry is projected for a continued healthy market, with indications of anticipated increases in employment, business conditions, and both live and virtual attendance. Also, research respondents envision a seller's market continuing through next year, with continued pressure on planners' budgets.

Q Are there any new education and/or certificate or certification programs coming from the MPI Academy? Which of the existing programs are the most popular with meeting professionals? Are there any other new career development initiatives in the offing?

A I am proud of the enhancements we've made to our educational programming with the strategic focus achieved since the introduction of the MPI Academy. Our members continue to tell us that education is one of the most important and valued member benefits, so I am excited about the progress we have made in expanding the MPI Academy and our portfolio of educational offerings including webinars, streaming content, our popular Experiential Event Series, certificate courses, and more.

We recently issued a press release announcing a variety of new offerings as part of our new Executive Education Series. These include the Women in Leadership Program and a designation program for the MPI Experiential Event Series. We are also collaborating with the National Center for Spectator Sports Safety and Security (NCS4) at the University of Southern Mississippi to develop educational programming and resources, with the first course — Emergency Preparedness for Meetings and Events — which debuted at WEC 2017. We will soon launch online versions of Meeting Essentials2 and Going Local.

In addition, the academy is working to create e-learning modules of the Basics Bootcamp: Meeting Fundamentals certificate course launching in 2018, the addition of new webinars each week and the development of new education partnerships.

Q How has your restructured membership model been received?

A Our redesigned membership model is resonating well within the community. Last year, we gained 4,985 new members and in the months leading up to WEC 2017, we had 245 registered attendees become new members.

Q How has technology most changed the meetings industry and how challenging has it been for you to keep pace?

A Technology is transforming our industry; from behind-the-scenes logistics to in-person audience engagement, livestreaming and enhanced networking, it is creating a range of efficiencies and flexibility in the way we work and design events. In the 10 years since the launch of the first smartphone, it has exponentially increased the ways we engage with our audiences, and the ways those audiences engage with each other — from networking and business exchanges and educational delivery. It has encouraged innovation in eco-fying our events, reducing waste and energy use.

Based on our own experiences at MPI, we recommend meeting professionals make sure they take the time to fully understand (a) the challenge/opportunity they want a technology to address; (b) what tech solution best suits that need; (c) what the risks of implementation are (and how to reduce them); and (d) whether those risks are worth the decision to implement.

Q What encouraging signs do you see ahead for the U.S. and the global meetings industry?

A When the global economy is doing well, market conditions are certainly more favorable for our industry. The resulting investments in infrastructure and budget increases relieve some of the pressures experienced within the meeting and event industry. On the other hand, when economic development is lagging, meeting professionals have proven to be resilient

and creative in finding ways to conduct business despite the challenges faced with room demand, smaller budgets, shorter lead times, etc.

Q MPI is becoming more global in scope than ever before. Where do you envision the organization in the next 10 years?

A We have a very solid plan in place for strategic growth; though change is inevitable and anything can happen over the next 10 years. For now, I can tell you MPI's priorities are focused in five key areas:

- Help our volunteer leaders be successful.
- Provide the tools and resources to support our most important delivery channel — our chapters.
- Expand and leverage strategic partnerships.
- Provide relevant and timely educational offerings.
- Redesigning and updating our digital environment.

Q What in your opinion are the biggest areas of change meeting planners and the meetings industry will face in the coming year?

A Our industry is under attack because of threats to the free flow of travel. Face-to-face meetings drive innovation, political advancement and economic growth. But if we can't meet, we can't facilitate change, and we can't facilitate advancement. And with the tragic increase in terrorist occurrences, the responsibility for the safety and security of attendees has been moved to the forefront of planning efforts and planner accountability.

It is great to see more industry leaders speaking up and promoting the contributions of the industry to outside stakeholders, and with the Global Meetings Industry Day (GMID) campaign, meeting professionals around the world have rallied and used their voices to champion for our community. I believe we are starting to gain some traction with our advocacy efforts, but there is more work to be done this year and in the foreseeable future. **C&IT**



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Gavriella Schuster

Gavriella Schuster delivers the Vision Keynote "Turn Your Great Idea Into the Next Big Thing" for Microsoft's Inspire 2017 conference.

The Power of Women

Women Keynote Speakers Challenge, Inspire and Motivate Audiences, Driving Change and Innovation

By Christine Loomis

When it comes to keynote speakers, all top speakers bureaus offer highly rated orators gifted at weaving facts, anecdotes and personal histories into transformational speeches that motivate and inspire. The goal for planners is to find the exact right speaker with the exact right style, history, knowledge and message for a specific audience at a specific moment in time.

Often, the right keynote speaker at the right moment is a woman, not necessarily because of her gender but because of her unique history, expertise and message.

Kati Quigley, CMP, senior director, partner marketing and recruiting, for Microsoft Corporation, works on multiple conferences each year. She says the company uses internal as well as external keynote speakers. "Our primary focus when choosing speakers is their expertise, whether the topic is business, leadership or technology."

A speaker, Quigley says, also must have the ability to tell a story and an open, diverse point of view. "Diversity is a critical factor in ensuring all perspectives are considered and represented. We always strive for a diverse set of speakers, not just in terms of gender but in terms of culture, geography and experience."

Women speakers may be particularly relevant to diversity in the tech industry. "We have some robust programs for Women in Technology that are well represented at our events," Quigley says, "but given the statistics showing that women in the technology industry are not as well represented, we're doing everything we can to improve that, down to the speakers we choose."

That's not just good for women it's good for business in general. "There are so many studies showing that having women's voices heard improves the business outcome considerably," Quigley notes.

That said, women stand on their own as keynoters, experts in their fields who are able to inspire and motivate audiences comprised of women and men.

Here are 10 inspiring women who provide keynote addresses on diverse topics for a range of fees. Young, older, entrepreneurial, corporate, flyers, drivers, survivors, CEOs, innovators, philanthropists — many of these women boldly went where few (or no) women went before them. One may be just the right keynoter for your next event.

GAVRIELLA SCHUSTER
Corporate Vice President
One Commercial Partner Team
Microsoft

Gavriella Schuster speaks primarily



Anat Baron

ANAT BARON
Entrepreneur, former head of Mike's Hard Lemonade.
American Program Bureau Inc.

Currently the CEO of Stashwall Inc., an early-stage technology startup, Anat Baron is best known as the marketing wunderkind behind Mike's Hard Lemonade. Within three years, she grew Mike's into a \$200 million juggernaut — establishing a new product category in the ultra-competitive alcoholic beverage industry. Baron's eclectic and highly successful career has included working with well-known hotel brands including Four Seasons, Holiday Inn and Radisson, and as a Hollywood executive and producer. She wrote, produced and directed "Beer Wars," an award-winning documentary exploring the David and Goliath story of the \$100 billion U.S. beer industry. Driving Baron's success is her strong belief that organizations and individuals should thrive on change rather than fear it. She infuses this inspiring point of view into every presentation, motivating audiences to take charge and galvanizing them into action.

LISA COPELAND
Fiat Automotive Dealer Principle
Named among the Top 100 Women in the Automotive Industry.
Eagles Talent Speakers Bureau

Lisa Copeland has dedicated her career to revolutionizing the automotive

"It is so important to help other women understand how to find their voice, their passion and their confidence. Being a great leader is about having a point of view — a vision — and being able to bring people along. If you're afraid to state your opinion and point of view, it is very hard to be a leader. We need more women in leadership roles because I believe women are fundamentally more collaborative and have higher EQ than men. Women do not get as tied up in their egos and understand how to take another person's point of view. Women need to take their space and not shrink back from the attention they'll get when they state their opinions. I lead my life as an authentic person. I know my center and my true north, and I believe it is very important for me to mentor and help others to find their authentic voice."

Lisa Copeland



industry and, through her trailblazing example, empowering women to pursue their truest form of success. In 2016, she sold her award-winning dealership to pursue her passion for leading a team committed to transforming businesses and promoting corporate civility and winning cultures. Copeland joined the executive team of EBW2020 (Empowering a Billion Women by 2020) as CMO, where she continues her dedication to promoting the full economic potential of women across the globe through financial education and technology. She's also cofounder of Women Impacting the Nation, a nonprofit dedicated to advancing leadership roles for women.

"I believe as leaders we have a responsibility to mentor younger and less experienced women. Studies show that women who have a powerful mentor/role model are more likely to advance at a higher rate than those who don't. I personally mentor five women. I receive as much from them as I give. Celebrating their success and helping them navigate the corporate waters is an absolute win-win."

JANINE SHEPHERD

Australian national champion ski racer who survived a traumatic road accident, TED talk speaker with more than 1 million views. Eagles Talent Speakers Bureau

In training for the Winter Olympics, skier Janine Shepherd was hit by a truck on a bike ride, suffering multiple life-threatening injuries. Doctors warned



Janine Shepherd

her parents that, even if she lived, she would never walk again. After major spinal surgery, months of immobilization and struggling to rehabilitate with permanent disabilities, she rekindled her defiant spirit in a dramatically improbable way. Seeing a small plane fly overhead one day, she declared, "If I can't walk, I'll fly!" She went on to succeed not only as a commercial pilot and flight instructor but also to attain her university degree, raise three children and author the bestselling book *Never Tell Me Never* (Random House Australia, 2007), which was subsequently made into a feature-length film. Her latest book *Defiant* (Sounds True, 2016) offers hope and encouragement for anyone facing a life challenge. Her inspiring TED talk "A Broken Body Isn't a Broken Person" has garnered more than 1.5 million views. She also has been recognized with her country's highest honor, The Order of Australia.

"As women in business and life in general, we need to learn to love the hills. I developed this philosophy very early in life. Whenever I wanted training, I always took on the hills with a passion, and that was something that not only made me physically strong but also mentally tough. This is more than just a training philosophy; it's a particular way of looking at life. I look at all my challenges as another hill there to teach me and help me grow into a wiser, more compassionate person."

BERNICE A. KING

CEO of The King Center and youngest daughter of Coretta Scott King and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Macmillan Speakers Bureau

CEO of The King Center, founded by her mother in 1968, Bernice A. King is nationally and internationally known as one of the most powerful, motivating and life-changing orators and speakers on the circuit today. She began her oratorical journey when she spoke in her mother's stead at the United Nations at age 17. In 2013, she spearheaded the global events that took place in Washington, DC, to com-



Bernice King

memorate the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington and her father's famous "I Have A Dream" speech. King is a graduate of Spelman College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology and Masters of Divinity and Doctorate of Law degrees from Emory University. She is currently a member of the State Bar of Georgia, serves on the HOPE Southeastern Board of Directors of Operation HOPE, is a member of the International Women's Forum and serves as a mentor and advisor to the Coretta Scott King Young Women's Leadership Academy, grades 6-12.

MALLORY BROWN

Social entrepreneur, humanitarian, adventure traveler. Eagles Talent Speakers Bureau

At the age of 20, Mallory Brown strapped on a backpack and set out to discover new people and places, a journey on which she was deeply touched by the universality of basic human need. Today, she's a successful social entrepreneur, worldwide adventure traveler and humanitarian. She founded World Clothes Line, a "buy one, give one" apparel company with a mission to clothe the world, and is the first brand ambassador for CrowdRise, the largest crowdfunding platform for good. As director of the CrowdRise 24-Hour Impact Project, she runs flash fundraisers that engage donors in full-circle philanthropy.



Mallory Brown

She also serves as director of communication for global nonprofit Chefs-4Kids, and creates innovative strategies for giving and transforms the lives of children in need around the world. She has worked on the ground in 22 countries, representing dozens of companies and helping hundreds of generous donors help thousands in need. She has attracted corporate sponsorship from organizations such as Ford Motor Company, Zappos, Moosejaw Mountaineering, CreateMyTee and Meijer. She shared

Why the Best Man for the Job May Be a Woman

It's a fact! The world is still male-dominated. Women continue to be devalued and under-represented across industries, including in the meetings world. The irony is that men are just as disturbed by this as women. According to a BBC News report, many male conference speakers are criticizing meeting organizers for setting up "dude fests" and are pledging to boycott events that don't include women experts or speakers.

By Deborah Gardner, CMP

In the meetings industry, it's obvious that there is an unconscious and unintended process that happens when selecting speakers. And, yes, it's hard to find good women speakers especially on a topic like leadership. There are not many women who have experienced being a leader firsthand. However, women do have a perspective that



audiences can relate to. I have not experienced many leadership title positions, but I know what an audience of leaders can do to help their employees.

To make a change, there is a lot that corporate meeting professionals can do. Be aware of your bias, gather data to set company guidelines, and educate others on why it's important to hire more women speakers. Ask for recommendations from previ-

ous speakers you have hired. For other resources, contact speakers bureaus and solicit on social media outlets such as the Power Women of National Speakers Association (NSA) Facebook page, which has more than 700 amazing women speakers and, of course, the NSA website.

If speakers were chosen by a system that treated gender fairly and the focus was on "value added," women speakers would no longer be in the minority on the dais. We need to call out gender bias and be more confidently proactive in bringing brilliant and compelling women to the stage.

Deborah Gardner, CMP, is a swimming champion, sports broadcaster and hospitality veteran turned author of How to Sell to Men Without Wearing a Low-Cut Dress. A Meetings Mean Business advocate and competitive performance expert, Deborah helps audiences get to the "champion" level. As one of only six speakers to receive a CMP, she has presented to hundreds of companies and organizations worldwide. To reach her with your thoughts, visit www.DeborahGardner.com.

Deborah Gardner, CMP



How to Choose a Keynote Speaker

Sheldon Senek, executive vice president, speaker management, Eagles Talent Speakers Bureau and current president of the International Association of Speakers Bureaus, says finding the right speaker lies in planners clearly knowing their goals and audience.

"One of the primary questions a planner should answer is, 'What kind of impact or value do I want to provide for my attendees?' Is the speaker there to inspire, educate or entertain — or all three? The entire layout of the event must also be considered. Like any great movie, there's a beginning, middle and end," Senek says. "A conference needs to contain great content but should also have sessions that allow attendees to take a breath from all the incoming ideas from the content speakers. Sometimes, in order to get attendees in the right mindset, it's important to have a speaker with high energy or one who makes attendees laugh, enabling them to be more receptive to content."

When vetting speakers for an event, Senek puts himself in the shoes of the planner and considers these elements:

- **Likability:** Is the speaker someone with whom the attendees can find a connection?
 - **Credibility:** Does the speaker come from a place of expertise?
 - **Value:** Are there actionable items for attendees? "Attendees have to leave the session ready to embrace change," Senek notes. "Otherwise, what good is the content the speaker is providing?"
- Next, Senek says, "We have to dive into the topic the planner wants to address. And there may be other criteria important to the planner, such as where the speaker is

located, prior experience with similar groups/industries and testimonials."

As for gender, "It matters if it matters to the planner and attendees," Senek says. "We may make gender recommendations based on the planner's criteria or on our experience working with similar clients."

Then there's budget. "We have a database of over 20,000 speakers. Our job is to understand which ones will provide the right message at the right price. It's one thing to know the best speakers. But who is the best speaker for a budget of \$12,500?"

Even if a planner has the budget to go with a celebrity or big name, Senek says it's important to understand that not all high-profile speakers are equal. "Some are truly polished and fantastic on the platform," he says. "Some are not. Some may be too political for certain groups and push hot buttons. Some are good at holding down a 45-minute speech on their own while others do best with a moderator asking questions."

What high-profile speakers typically do deliver is credibility. "They ran an extremely successful company, they are a champion in a specific sport or they are a huge influencer, etc. Attendees are present to understand how/why these people have made an impact, caused disruption, achieved success, etc."

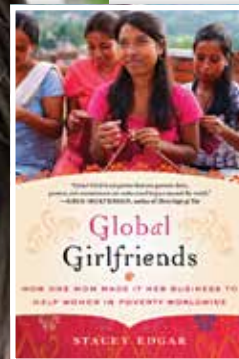
While it's true that high-profile speakers may increase attendance, positively impacting the meeting's ROI, it's also true that it's not necessary to pay for a celebrity or high-profile speaker unless doing so truly meets a planner's goals and budget. "Great speakers," Senek says, "come in many fee ranges."

— CL

her new approach to philanthropy at TEDx Detroit 2015 with a talk titled "How to Save the World Before You're 30."

"This is a wonderful time for career women as we are breaking so much new ground. ...Yet, there is still so much progress to be made. Did you know there are more CEOs with the first name John than total female CEOs? That's crazy!!! We're stepping up to change the game!"

To women striving for success in life and business she says, "Be fearless. Often, your own fear is the only thing holding you back. Use your femininity. Women think differently, often more creatively and in a well-rounded way. Use that to find your niche. Find bal-



Stacey Edgar

female entrepreneur for mentorship. Give back. The old adage stands true: 'The more you give, the more you get!'"

STACEY EDGAR
Social activist, founder of Global Girlfriend.
Macmillan Speakers Bureau

Stacey Edgar started Global Girlfriend in 2003 as a way to provide economic security for women in need by creating a sustainable market for their products. She has been honored by Microsoft Corporation as a recipient of the company's "Start Something Amazing" awards, and is a sought-after speaker on the topics of women in the global

ance with your personal life. Individual growth fosters career development...and vice versa! Join forces. Women are community-oriented and love to help. Ask a



Amelia Rose Earhart

economy, fair trade, sex trafficking, market and enterprise development, cause marketing, entrepreneurship and parlaying your passion into your career.

AMELIA ROSE EARHART
Around-the-world pilot, founder of the Fly With Amelia Foundation.
Eagles Talent Speakers Bureau

Named by the Jaycees as one of the Top 10 Young Americans, Amelia Rose Earhart recreated and symbolically completed the 1937 flight of her namesake, Amelia Mary Earhart. Her 28,000-mile flight around the world in a single-engine aircraft became a symbol of determination, courage and empowerment for anyone seeking new horizons. She is the president of the Fly With Amelia Foundation, a nonprofit providing flight training scholarships to young women across America. She can be seen each morning on Denver's NBC affiliate, KUSA-TV, reporting on breaking news and traffic. She is currently working toward her multi-engine aircraft rating.

"The world is filled with people who will support you, encourage you and give you a helping hand. The world is also full of people who are consumed with sadness, which will translate to criticism, mock-

ery and painful attacks of other's goals and actions. Remember this: The world is changed by our actions, not by our opinions. Turbulence often occurs when we are crossing mountains...and those who stay locked up in a hangar will never feel the bumps."

STEPHANIE DECKER
Lost both legs saving her children during a tornado, founder of the Stephanie Decker Foundation.
Eagles Talent Speakers Bureau

In March 2012, a tornado ripped

through Henryville, Indiana. As her house began to disintegrate around her, Stephanie Decker shielded her two young children with her body. Her dream home fell in, crushing her legs, but because of her heroic actions, Stephanie's children

were amazingly unscathed. It was a miracle that she even survived and made it to the hospital. At that point, doctors determined that parts of both legs would need to be amputated. Decker has become a symbol of survival and overcoming adversity. She has used her story to bring awareness to the Stephanie Decker Foundation, which supports children with prosthetics and accessibility to leading edge prosthetics.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing, is impossible. I lost both of my legs in a tornado saving my two young children. I became a different woman that day. I found my fight and challenged the impossible. I believed when no one else did. It's never too late to find your legacy, your 'why' in life. That's what separates the bad from the good and the good from the great. There are days that will beat you down until you feel you have nothing left to give, but it's how you take the sourest of those lemons and make some semblance of lemonade. Whatever that may look like, find the beautiful, strong, perfect woman in you and push the impossible."

C&IT



Stephanie Decker

Why Themes Matter

By Christine Loomis



Credit: Black Cherry Photo

Creating Unforgettable Moments That Resonate Long After the Event Is Over

Creating a theme for a corporate event is serious business. The right theme ties a meeting together and helps focus attendees on their organization's core objective for the meeting and often the coming year. Well conceived and executed, the right theme can move employees to innovate, ideate, change direction, energize, create, collaborate and tackle the challenges necessary to outshine the competition, raise the most funds or whatever else a company may desire.

Current Trends

One challenge for planners is creating something memorable and new each meeting, especially today when one-offs and extreme customization are the norm.

According to Valerie Meinen, president of Wyoming-based Unimaginable Wows, it's not only about a unique experience for the group; it's about making the experience "personal for each attendee."

For me, she states, "The goal is bringing normally introverted, intellectually brilliant individuals together without them realizing they're actually networking. Personalizing the experience is paramount."

Tiffany Eck, CMP, associate director, convention services, with Visit Denver, the city's convention and visitors bureau, says, "The most memorable events are those that are customized to the group, provide interactive options and have unique surprises and delights."

Adolfo Solórzano Z., senior creative



Credit: Black Cherry Photo



Credit: Black Cherry Photo

(Above and opposite) The Roaring '20s and a surprise speakeasy after-party were central themes for a reception at HelmsBriscoe's Western Regional Meeting in Denver.

manager with AlliedPRA South Florida, says interactivity is primary but notes that it's evolving. "Tech is one of the most popular themes I see with corporate groups," he says. "Adapting tech, tech and creativity, tech and social, tech and when it left us behind! Meetings and events have become much more interactive, from arts and crafts to graffiti painting to giant Lite-Brite walls to virtual reality simulations," he says.

"However," he adds, "live-feed walls, hashtags and such have almost become 'before and after' while 'during' has shifted toward interactive tech such as virtual reality, which has gotten pretty great, versus social tech, which has become a cliché of not living in the moment."

In addition to creating memorable

experiences for attendees, Eck says, interest in the local has definitely increased. "Meetings can take attendees away from their families and time in the office for days at a time; it is important to ensure that attendees find value in both the meeting agenda and the city to which they've traveled. Experiencing local flavor at events adds significant value to productive days."

Meinen sees an emphasis on the local as well, noting that, "opening visitors' eyes to the wonder of an area and helping them see the beauty of a region" can elevate a meeting.

Popular culture also continues to drive some themes, which can work in

concert with a local aspect as well. Rich Mergo, director of development for the Sunshine Foundation, a nonprofit corporation established to answer the dreams of chronically ill, physically challenged and abused children from limited-income families, went with a Galactic Gala theme for an event held at B Resort & Spa in Orlando, which also brought in members of the local community, who appeared in Star Wars costumes.

When all is said and done, notes Solórzano Z., today it's about providing attendees with "an emotional and experiential point of view."

The venue chosen is often key, along with menus, drinks, décor, lighting and activities.

The Roaring '20s

The Roaring '20s and a surprise speakeasy after-party were central themes for a reception at HelmsBriscoe's 2016 Western Regional Meeting in Denver. "As part of our bid, Visit Denver was responsible for hosting the Thursday night event," Eck says, "traditionally a two- to three-hour heavy appetizer/food station networking reception. HelmsBriscoe suggested changing the format to a seated dinner. I inquired what everyone typically did after the event and learned that many attendees find their way to a local bar. I asked if we could add an after-party to our dinner, and the clients loved the idea."

"We knew we wanted to use the Seawell Ballroom in the Denver Center for the Performing Arts."

We sent an RFP to our DMCs asking for theme ideas that included a cocktail reception, seated dinner and an after-party. Nine ideas were submitted. We narrowed those down to three, and HelmsBriscoe chose the Roaring '20s/speakeasy theme, which they felt would best resonate with attendees."

Eck says the 1920s art deco and speakeasy theme was incorporated into every aspect of the event, "from our amenity cards to the menus and the table décor. We were even able to get servers to wear fedoras, gloves and beads, and our band dressed the part as well."

During the cocktail reception, guests were able to take photos with a 1920s Rolls Royce positioned under a vintage marquee. Guests were escorted to the ballroom with a brass band. Upon entering, an aerialist was pouring champagne."

The room was set with three different table configurations — rectangle, square and circle — each shape with its own linen and floral styles. Each table also had "Did You Know" signs with fun facts from the 1920s. "There was a beaded drape separating the dinner from the speakeasy," Eck notes, "but it

simply appeared to be another elegant design element. As dinner finished, a voice over the loudspeaker directed attendees to turn their attention to the drape, which was lifted up to reveal the Denver Speakeasy and After-Party. The band started playing and attendees finished the evening dancing, playing casino-style games and creating lasting memories at the photo booth."

Attendees also were encouraged to wear cocktail attire, and many of the women went all out in flapper dresses. "While attendees were in their meetings, Visit Denver delivered custom amenities to their hotel rooms," Eck adds. "Women received either beads or boas, and the men received fedoras. It was fun to

option was available on request. Desert was served at the "speakeasy."

The event was a huge success. Ronnee Levin, coordinator, Western region, for HelmsBriscoe, says, "The biggest 'wow' of our three-day meeting was the spectacular 1920s-themed dinner and speakeasy after-party. Tiffany and her team's attention to detail were impeccable. Our group of 150

new spaces at the resort they may not be aware of from one year to the next. The game room, for example, helped attendees get off their devices and enjoy interactive time so they could get to know one another better."

An outdoor raptor demonstration did triple duty. Simply watching these magnificent birds fly and return to the naturalists was an amazing shared experience for the group. But the event was also an icebreaker, putting "everyone at ease and on equal footing for the rest of the week," Meinen notes. They added photo ops with the hawks and owls, which Meinen says was "super popular and again allowed bonding and shared memories to enhance these colleagues' future business interactions."

F&B provided a way to create a local experience and support the teambuilding objective. "No one wants to come to Park City and have a beer they can drink back home," Meinen notes. "They want to try the local brew masters' offerings. The same holds true for eats. Using a butter knife to cut into a steak at Edge Steakhouse is a must-do while in the area. Our dinner group of 18

elect to dine on the patio with two huge gas fireplaces roaring on either side of our table. I had no idea it would create such an organic networking environment! It was a touch chilly that evening, so between courses our guests got up, stretched their legs and gathered around these two fireplaces to swap stories."

While it's no surprise that branding was incorporated into the event, it was done here with an employee-centric twist. "Throughout the course of the year," Meinen says, "we track all customer feedback of our colleagues, and we get a boatload of praises and fist bumps.



"The most memorable events are those that are customized to the group, provide interactive options and have unique surprises and delights."

Tiffany Eck, CMP, Associate Director, Convention Services, Visit Denver

seasoned meeting planners raved with reviews of the evening, and their photos flooded our social media pages. Without a doubt, this night was the highlight of our meeting agenda!"

Park City Teambuilding

Last August, Meinen worked with GoEngineer, a 3-D printing and design and manufacturing software reseller on an event focused on teambuilding. "Our overriding theme with this annual event is to develop individual colleagues through collaborative interactions," Meinen says. Based at Westgate Resort & Spa Park City in Park City, Utah, the event drew 175 attendees. Every aspect of the meeting was designed to



"The goal is bringing normally introverted, intellectually brilliant individuals together without them realizing they're actually networking. Personalizing the experience is paramount."

Valerie Meinen, President, Unimaginable Wows, Alpine, WY

watch everyone walk up to the reception dressed as if it were 1920."

The biggest challenge, Eck says, was strategically trying to fit a reception, dinner and after-party in a three-hour window without feeling rushed. Dinner was expedited with pre-set salads and one menu option, though a vegetarian

support the teambuilding objective — not always in obvious ways.

"One of the coolest design elements of this event rests in the beauty of the Westgate Resort and its surrounding mountains," Meinen says. "It's important to balance consistency and routine for attendees while still revealing



An Old Florida-themed event in Miami included a final night Rat Pack reception at The Forge, a historic Miami Beach restaurant.

We took the best of these testimonials and created signage everywhere to showcase the talent in this company. Because the testimonials were personal, each was different. To say that we besieged the Westgate Park City with these branded pieces of awesomeness is an understatement. At the end of the week, the attendees got to take their own signage home with them, whether it was a tabletop tent card or a real estate-sized sign."

Going above and beyond traditional teambuilding and group activities was also paramount. "These folks take their jobs very seriously but themselves not so much," Meinen says. "Capturing their silly side and offering a release and decompression zone was key."

Mingling colleagues who didn't know each other, they combined "great aspects from different experiences and intertwined them" into one super afternoon of fun. The group rode the Red Pine gondola but with custom crossword puzzles to solve on the way. There were flying quad copters, archery, water balloons and other competitive events, and relay races in adult Big Wheels. "We took our competitive nature to the next level and raced these 'toys' with reckless hilarity," Meinen notes. "GoEngineer's owner, CEO and CFO even volunteered to pedal out on them, creating a huge reveal to a mob of 175 people."

Meinen believes creating a successful theme is dependent on a planner really knowing the client. "Get to know your client extremely well, recognize

what their core values and cultural nuances are and ignore no detail, no matter how small," she advises.

Old Florida

In January, Solórzano Z. worked with a New England-based technology and security company to create a leadership conference for 40. The theme they chose was "Old Florida," which provided a sense of place, a sense of history of the area and was appropriately high-end, classic, fun and inspiring — all of which resonated with this group.



"Your most successful themed events are those in which you invested the time and questions into your client. ...The more you've studied the subject the more precise your final product will be. We all know the devil's in the details."

Adolfo Solorzano Z., Senior Creative Manager, AlliedPRA South Florida

"The St. Regis Bal Harbor, where they were staying, is in an area that embodies the classic Miami Beach, Florida and modern-wealth aesthetic," Solórzano Z. says. "It's right on the water, across the street from one of our high-end malls in a quieter area and ideal for the demographic of this group."

The event featured classic Miami and Miami Beach activities, including an art deco tour and a final Rat Pack-themed reception at a historic venue, The Forge, a working forge in the 1930s and now one of Miami's high-end landmark restaurants. "The main dining room's chandelier is from the old Paris Opera House," Solórzano Z. notes. "There are

Tiffany stained-glass windows and the wine cellar houses more than 300,000 vintages." His personal favorite element? Napoleon's writing desk from the Revolutionary War.

The event began with classic cocktails in the courtyard of the East Room. "The men dressed in suits and fedoras, and the women were elegant in dresses and stoles," Solórzano Z. says. "They were then taken on a sommelier-guided tour of the famed cellar, where they met the bantering duo of Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin, who eventually led them

to the main dining area. Amber lighting, elegantly draped crystal centerpieces on distressed looking copper linens set the tone and tied the classic and old look together beautifully. Frank and Dean entertained the crowd with their improvised comedy routine and were backed by a five-piece band that supported them through their hits."

This event, Solórzano Z. says, was highly memorable. "It not only had the most history but it brought on nostalgia and humor."

The AlliedPRA team worked with The Forge to create a menu appropriate to the time period. "The dinner was not a typical modern menu of molecular





A Star Wars galactic theme delighted attendees of the Sunshine Foundation's fundraiser at B Resort & Spa.

Credit: Frank Conarazzo

cuisines or deconstructed who's it and what's it," Solórzano Z. says. "It was Colorado rack of lamb and purée, dry-aged prime New York strip with roasted potatoes and other delicious and elegantly simplistic food."

The fact that the client had a seasoned planner who "knew her ins and outs with precision," minimized challenges. One function was moved from outdoors to indoors, but Solórzano Z. says this team "with decades in the business" made that "a minor detour that was barely noticed."

He believes the most important

you've studied the subject the more precise your final product will be. We all know the devil's in the details."

Galactic Gala

Not all events can or should be constructed in the same way. For Mergo, it's important to set the galas in the Orlando area where the Sunshine Foundation's Dream Village, recipient of funds raised during this event, is located. "By keeping the event local, we are able to reach a larger number of our area corporate sponsors, supporters and donors, and keep our costs down by minimizing expenses for travel," he says.

For one event, a galactic theme made sense. "Our gala was scheduled to take place a little over a month prior to the release of 'Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens.' The film was generating a lot of media attention and fan interest, and we wanted to tie into that energy with a theme people could be excited to be a part of," he says. "We have a great relationship with the area chapter of the 501st Legion, whose members had expressed an interest in volunteering appearances. The Star Wars theme allowed a large number of 501st Legion volunteers to appear in costume for the occasion."

The existing décor of B Resort & Spa also lent itself to the theme. "From the blue-and-gray color scheme of the ballroom to the white,



Rich Mergo, Director of Development
Sunshine Foundation, Davenport, FL

thing a planner can do to create a successful event is to listen. "I can't stress listening enough," he says. "Your most successful themed events are those in which you invested the time and questions into your client. Research the company. Where have they been and where are they going? Did something great recently happen? Was there a new product or a change in the executive team? As with every creative process, the more

almost futuristic atmosphere of the lobby, it was easy to imagine the hotel's existing décor as part of our theming. We were especially delighted that the round prism chandeliers in the ballroom were perfect to enhance the galactic theme," Mergo says.

"We used digital projection to transform the ballroom walls into scenes reminiscent of Star Wars landscapes and ship interiors. Our centerpieces

were constructed in designs that focused on futuristic elements and incorporated the silver and crystal highlights of the room. Of course, it also helped to have Boba Fett, Stormtroopers, Darth Vader and other key characters from the films mingling with guests and posing for photos."

Additionally, Mergo says the B Resort & Spa catering team "did a wonderful job incorporating our theme with their existing menu items. Our guests were delighted to find appetizer choices such as Obi wan Kabob-ies or Chewbacon Candy, and entrée selections such as Boba Fettucine. Even custom cupcakes donated by a local vendor were adorned with likenesses of Stormtroopers and Darth Vader. The bar featured red and blue specialty cocktails, signifying the rebel or imperial side, as well as a green Yoda-themed non-alcoholic beverage for our under-age guests. Drinks were passed on lighted trays and featured glow sticks in the glasses matching the color of the drink."

Even some silent auction items were themed to the movie, including replica gowns and a custom dress inspired by the designer's love of the movie franchise.

Mergo's advice for planners creating a themed event is to immerse guests in the theme from the outset. "Start with the first piece of collateral they receive — save-the-dates or invitations — and follow up with reminders of the theme throughout the event," he advises. "Party favors, menu items, specialty drinks, table décor — these are all areas that can easily be themed.

Even if actual menu items cannot be themed, the names of the items on a menu card can be. Don't overlook opportunities to sneak the theme in where it's least expected, such as goody-bag gift items or specialty desserts."

In the end, a well-executed theme can provide a year's worth of inspiring moments and memories for those attending, which in turn can lead to positive results in a variety of expected and unexpected ways. **C&IT**



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Are You Upping Your Game?

By Patrick Simms

Planners Make the Shift From 'Memorable' to 'Return on Experience'



Credit: www.npsphotos.com | NPhoto/photography/SXSW



Credit: Amy E. Price/Getty Images for SXSW



Credit: Nicole Burton/SXSW



Credit: MPI



Credit: Ann Alva Wieding/SXSW



Credit: Danny Matson/SXSW

The 2017 South by Southwest (SXSW) Conference & Festivals, pictured on these pages, served as a learning lab on mega events for planners taking part in MPI's Experiential Event Series. Planner participants are shown in the inset photo on the opposite page.

While the phrase “memorable meeting” is surely cliché, it still denotes a goal that most planners have. Meetings must leave a lasting, positive impression on attendees, and that is best achieved when great content is combined with a hospitality experience that is both high quality and distinctive.

A planner may not be involved in the content, but the design of the surrounding event is certainly his or her province. And what has evolved is the way those elements are made memorable: The approach is now more strategic, carefully taking into account de-

sired outcomes, attendee demographics, corporate brand and more.

So it's no longer as simple as booking a popular band or city tour; these add-ons may help attendees remember the meeting a year later, but they won't necessarily engage attendees with the host company's goals and identity. Hence the terminological shift from “memorable” to “engaging.” It's the latter kind of experience that planners want to create today, specifically because it will lead to a better return (i.e., “return on experience”).

Fortunately, trade associations have been providing education that supports

planners in their quest for ROE. For example, MPI's three-day Event Design Certificate (EDC) course includes an EventCanvas, a visual tool that helps a planner develop an event by considering its “promise, how it helps stakeholders to get their jobs done, resolving pains and creating gains within a set framework of commitment and expected return.” A related tool is the Empathy-Map, which maps out what each type of participant should come away from the event knowing, doing and feeling.

Experiential Event Series

Renowned festivals, political con-

ventions, sporting events and trade shows also can educate on impactful event design, and MPI has capitalized on this resource for the benefit of its members. The MPI Experiential Event Series, launched two years ago, offers participants an immersive experience at these events to learn not only their design, but also their execution in terms of crisis management, marketing strategy and other aspects. This year's lineup includes South by Southwest (SXSW) Conference & Festivals, the Royal Caribbean Experience, C2 Montreal and the Indianapolis 500, with the Venice International Film Festival upcoming in Sep-

tember and the Hawaii Food and Wine Festival in November.

"We started with a wish list of which events really meet the criteria of what this brand is: high-profile events that our members wouldn't normally have behind-the-scenes access to, and that would give them good learning opportunities," explains Matthew Marcial, V.P., Education & Events, MPI. "The first event we did was the Miss America Pageant in

"We started with a wish list of...high-profile events that our members wouldn't normally have behind-the-scenes access to, and that would give them good learning opportunities."

**Matthew Marcial, V.P. Education and Events
Meeting Professionals International, Dallas, TX**

Atlantic City. We also did the Consumer Electronics Show and South by Southwest (SXSW) that inaugural year. SXSW is the only one that we've repeated thus far because it's been so popular."

The events in the series fall into four categories: entertainment events, culinary events, sporting events and "mega events" such as SXSW and the Democratic National Convention. "We've found that many of the planners will find segments they have a special interest in learning more about," says Marcial. "So the certificate program that we (tie) to each event tailors very specific education to each of those areas."

For example, the C2 Montreal program this past May conferred participants the EDC, the Indianapolis 500 program conferred the MPI Sports Event Management Certificate, and the Venice International Film Festival

will confer the MPI Festival Production Certificate with Entertainment Focus. Participants are able to meet with specific individuals from different areas of event production for Q&As; network among an intimate group of 30 or so other participants; and venture out and experience the event for themselves, Marcial adds. "We always build in time so they

can explore the event on their own from an attendee perspective."

Interestingly, the series has drawn a lot of interest from senior-level corporate planners, "who have kind of stepped away from traditional education," says Marcial. "They have found a lot more value in this type of learning than they have in programs they previously participated in. We've seen



a lot of repeat participation as well from those senior planners. We have several folks who've been to more than a couple of the experiential events, and a couple who have been to four or five."

Lennox Roadshow

Indeed, the value of learning how these highly successful events deliver ROE for attendees can't be overestimated. Most of them are not corporate meetings, but their organizers do face the same challenge of creating a compelling experience every year. Similarly, the planning team at Richardson, Texas-based Lennox Industries Inc. is tasked with delivering an engaging Lennox Roadshow annually. One year, for example, the team created a "Lennox-palooza" with a rock 'n' roll theme. "We do change it up every year with some



type of theme pertinent to what's happening that particular year, and they just get better and better every

"At last year's SXSW, we took a lead on how we can enhance our trade show...by giving mic time to our sponsors or vendors on the trade show floor, instead of just thanking them."

**Cecilia Daddio, CMP, Senior Manager, Events and Incentives
Lennox Industries Inc., Richardson, TX**

year," says Cecilia Daddio, CMP, senior manager, events and incentives. Echoing MPI's idea, she explains that Lennox has found value in sending their own staff to SXSW to obtain ideas. "We do utilize SXSW as a source of education. At last year's SXSW, we took a lead on how we can enhance our trade show aspect of the Roadshow by giving mic time to our sponsors or vendors on the trade show floor, instead of just thanking them. So we're going to incorporate that this year."

Local festivals and events are also a touchstone for the planning team. "On a local basis we go to food festivals and wine-tasting festivals — we take in as many of the local ones as we can. We partner closely with the CVB of the city we're going to, and they notify us of any upcoming events that might be a learning situation," Daddio adds.

Creating Buzz

Most companies that stage meetings have at least one event where experiential design is especially important, and Peoria, Illinois-based Caterpillar Inc. has several: its exhibitions at ConExpo and MINExpo, as well as its dealer meetings. "Those are the events where we really need to create that buzz and that excitement for our attendees. For our dealer meetings in particular, we pay attention to more enhancements than we would for just a normal conference," explains Angela Baer, CMP, corporate meeting planner at the company. While she has not yet been able to participate in the MPI Experiential Event Series, Baer says she "would have loved" to take advantage of the Indy 500 program. "I am personally interested in upping my game."

Like all great sporting events that in-



Credit: Lennox Industries Inc.
During a Berlin incentive trip, Lennox Industries qualifiers individually painted canvases to express themselves and their surroundings at each stop on a bus tour.

clude musical entertainment, the Indy 500 knows its audience. Last May's installment offered top-tier mainstream country, with Keith Urban and Dustin Lynch performing at the Firestone Legends Day Concert on the day before the race. A variety of up-and-coming acts representing hip-hop, EDM and other genres took the stage at the SnakePit on the first day. Similarly, Baer knows her audience well when it comes to selecting musical acts that will resonate with them. "For MINExpo we had Sara Evans and the Doobie Brothers, because our main audience for that was (middle-aged) mining guys and their wives. So that type of music hit the country and hit the rock. And everybody loved it; our CEO really loved it. Having done this a while, I know what will fly and what won't."

She also knows how to exercise a certain restraint in regards to another common approach to engagement: interactivity. Overall, meeting attendees do want more interaction with presenters as well as entertainment that is hands-on and immersive, such as the Brooklyn Bowl event Caterpillar hosted for its attendees at MINExpo in Las Vegas. "That went over very well; we're definitely doing it again. But I think that if you offer too much (interactive entertainment) it can be overwhelming, at least for our audience," she notes. "You've got machine testing and then you've got demos and then parties, and then

you're doing something at a racetrack... so I try to strive for something in-between driving a stock car and a boring cocktail reception." The takeaway is that planners should not be seduced by a

(at our meetings). Instead of going 20 minutes long we may go 15, but when you have five or six (presentations), that saves you 30-45 minutes to be able to do some type of (charity) event, such

"I think that if you offer too much (interactive entertainment) it can be overwhelming, at least for our audience."

**Angela Baer, CMP, Corporate Meeting Planner
Caterpillar Inc., Peoria, IL**

trendy form of entertainment without first considering that activity in the context of everything else their guests will be doing throughout the event.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Some trends are worth following, however, even if it means readjusting a meeting schedule. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities are increasingly part of annual sales meetings, incentive programs and other types of corporate events for several reasons: They are intrinsically worthwhile, they are important to the image of the host company, and they engage today's attendee with the company and its values, perhaps more so than entertainment or teambuilding that lacks a CSR dimension. "The biggest (factor) I would say truthfully to get customers engaged in any program is the giving back," Daddio asserts. Toward that end, "we really have minimized the onstage time

as building bicycles." So in lieu of holding the CSR event pre or post meeting, Lennox programs now blend that activity with the main program. "We started it last year and will keep it up because we've gotten rave reviews on our surveys," she adds.

Setting the Bar

Once a planner succeeds in creating an engaging experience around a meeting's content, the bar for the quality of the experience is set at a certain level. And some planners feel it is expected that the next installment of that meeting will raise the bar even higher. This expectation may be misguided, however: An even more engaging experience would be great, but all that is really needed is one that is just as engaging. "I don't know if I would say we need to 'top' last year," says Baer. Rather, "we need to give the same 'level' that we have in previous years. And for some of my meet-

ings we do have to be a little careful because we don't want to have a dealer meeting one year that is totally over the top, and then the next one where they're expecting that (level) and we don't do that. So if we do bring in a top-tier band, how are we going to be able to do that next year and the year after?"

Of course, maintaining the same quality of experience doesn't preclude variety. The meeting may not offer "something better," but should offer "something just as good, but different" in order to continue to spark interest. That is the traditional thinking behind incentive program design. Last year, Lennox took its 600-attendee incentive trip to a very unusual reward destination: Berlin. "It was about trying to get (qualifiers)

excited about Berlin when their thoughts may only be the (historical) negatives of the city. But it's a new generation and they've rebuilt the city, so we definitely wanted to encompass that flavor," Daddio relates. Toward showcasing the new Berlin, Daddio's team arranged a creative activity for participants where they individually painted canvases to express themselves and their surroundings at each stop on a bus tour. Then during an evening festival in the traditional Berlin style, their work was unexpectedly displayed. "With them creating that artwork and then displaying it as if they were at a gallery, it was just a phenomenal ending to that event," says Daddio. And the post-event survey replies bore out the quality of the experience and the site choice, e.g.: "I never would have gone there on my own, I'm so glad I did."

SMMP's Big-Picture Focus on Experiential

Participant experience is clearly critical to the overall ROI of an incentive trip, as that experience motivates attendees' future attempts to qualify. But the experiential aspect for many other types of meetings is also being increasingly recognized as important to ROI, as it furthers engagement in a way that mere content delivery cannot. Based on that

rationale, Global Business Travel Association has added "Participant Experience" to its SMM Wheel, along with more familiar elements of strategic meetings management such as Sourcing & Procurement and Data Analysis & Reporting.

Although it may not be obvious, a strategic meetings management program (SMMP) can support the success of meetings from an experiential standpoint. There is a tendency to focus on creating an engaging experience at the individual meeting, but an SMMP focuses on the big picture: Are all of a company's mission-critical meetings living up to certain standards, including the quality of the participant experience? "Companies worry about the experiential (aspect) for the one-off meeting, but an SMMP looks at ensuring the mission-critical ones have it and that they all connect to the



"Start from, what are we trying to accomplish? Why are we getting a big band? Do we want to reward the attendees?"

Victoria Johnson, CMP, CMM, Global Manager, Strategic Meetings Management Program, Global Meetings and Events, Northbrook, IL

greater company strategy," explains Victoria Johnson, CMP, CMM, global manager, strategic meetings management program, global meetings and events for Northbrook, Illinois-based Underwriters Laboratories LLC. Under a mature SMMP, not only will the experiential quality of a given meeting be sustained every year, but likewise for all other significant meetings, and especially any customer-facing programs.

Three Steps to Consistency

Johnson maintains there are three aspects to achieving that consistency across meetings: "The first piece that all of your meetings look and feel the same. The second piece is, are they brand consistent? For example, if a company is trying to say we're a thought leader in technology, and they're not using a meeting app, that's incongruent with who they say they are. And the third

piece is how you are designing the meetings," which includes gearing experiences toward desired outcomes for participants. And part of the protocols under an SMMP would be a careful assessment of those outcomes by anyone charged with planning a mission-critical meeting. For instance, instead of simply booking a band for the final-night event because the budget can accommodate it, "start from, what are we trying to accomplish? Why are we getting a big band? Do we want to reward the attendees?" says Johnson.

In addition, the records on past meetings spend and vendor usage maintained under an SMMP can assist planners in creating an engaging experience cost-effectively. That information allows one to channel spend when possible to preferred vendors not only in lodging and transportation, but also in AV, décor, entertainment, etc., in order

to obtain leverage on pricing.

The Freedom to 'Go for It'

When a meeting achieves ROE while respecting the cost-control priorities of procurement, the planning team ends up looking good in the eyes of upper management. As a result, planners often become more trusted in their area of expertise, and given more free rein to exercise their creativity for future events.

Daddio, who has planned meetings at Lennox for 17 years, recalls that "everything was so structured when I first started. As far as décor it was always the same, the starched linens with the flower centerpiece, and the meals were typically chicken. Now it's more free-style. It's no longer, 'let's sit down and discuss blow by blow what this agenda is going to entail.' You get more, 'I trust you, go for it. I can't wait to experience it myself.'" **C&IT**

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The Perfect Backdrop to Inspire, Engage and Entertain

When Gerald G. Longo, CMP, director, global congresses and events at medical products company Abbott considered hosting an event at Universal Orlando Resort in Orlando, Florida, he recognized the theme park's appeal to a wide and vast audience with a mix of demographics.

"Theme parks offer turnkey, built-in interactive and entertainment features to keep your group entirely engaged," Longo says. "We held a closing party of our national sales meeting with 1,300 attendees at Universal Orlando Resort." And it was a great success.

Theme parks appeal to planners for their "one stop shop" advantages for meeting venues and entertainment options.



(Above and top) TLN enjoyed several planned events at Universal's theme parks. (Left) A Universal CityWalk block party.

Exclusive Access

Recently, Bernadette Stark, vice president of conference and events for Travel Leaders Group, the parent company of Travel Leaders Network, held the company's 2017 Travel Leaders Network International Conference at Loews Royal Pacific Resort at Universal Orlando. Nearly 2,000 attendees enjoyed several planned events at Universal's theme parks. In fact, Universal closed Universal Studios Florida to the general public so that the Travel Leaders Network attendees had an exclusive night of dining, shopping and entertainment.

During the company's conference, Travel Leaders offered behind-the-scenes tours, allowing attendees to experience new attractions, as well as some pre- and post-conference activities.

"We have held other company events at theme park locations in previous years," Stark says. "This year is different because of our sheer size. We are a large company now and, in fact, our con-

ate culinary delights for large groups is a huge benefit for planners looking for an inclusive option."

The planner's Orlando events have included using sections of the park with thrill rides and animal encounters for her corporate group; and the entire park for

"Theme parks offer turnkey, built-in interactive and entertainment features to keep your group entirely engaged."

Gerald G. Longo, CMP, Director
Global Congresses and Events, Abbott, New York, NY



ference is sold out with a waitlist. With a higher number of attendees, we were able to negotiate more opportunities for our participants."

At SeaWorld Orlando, many companies rely on the theme park's variety of offerings that appeal to corporate meeting attendees.

Asking to remain anonymous, a corporate meeting planner who frequently turns to SeaWorld to accommodate various events for her large company, says theme parks provide a great deal of variety.

"Most theme parks provide activities that are great for all ages — allowing everyone in a group or family to find something they will enjoy," she says. "The built-in décor and capacity to cre-

ate family-friendly events that ended with a memorable show and fireworks.

"Know what your group is looking for from their experience, such as rides, education, fun, distance and exclusivity," she says. "Planners need to understand the size of the group may not lend itself to a buyout and, in fact, might be better (off) containing the group to a specific section of the park to make it feel full and festive. Ask what's going on that time of year. For example, will the park be decorated for a holiday or special event? These decorations can be an added benefit for the group and create a built-in theme for the food and fun."

Something for Everyone

Jennifer Olsen, CMP, senior manager,

event sales at SeaWorld, explains that SeaWorld offers something for every attendee — from thrilling roller coasters to inspiring animal encounters and shows, along with unique spaces for meetings and events.

"Theme parks are a great option because they offer experiences that most times attendees can't get anywhere else. They also offer efficiency as the backdrop is there, with no need for the additional expense of theming," Olsen says. "We have a wide range of group packages. Smaller groups love our plated dinner at Sharks Underwater Grill, and a favorite for mid- to large-size groups is our Thrill and Chill package featuring the backdrop of Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin, and our amazing coasters, Kraken Unleashed and Manta."

Forums Inc., a corporate event planning company that focuses on planning forums, conferences and other events for Fortune 500 corporations, is based out of Miami and has done several events at Orlando theme parks.

According to Crystal Fernandez, event coordinator at Forums, theme parks are a good option because they provide a relaxed, fun experience for attendees.

"When an organizer offers a free pass, it makes the attendee feel like they are being taken care of. In the case of a planned activity at the park, the experience is not only fun, it allows for networking," Fernandez says. "We normally

THEME PARK FYI

- Parks are sticklers for rules, and generally will not bend them.
- Parks are very aware that their primary revenue comes from "day guests" and their experience is paramount. They are cautious about having activities or events for private groups in areas where day guests may be present.
- Communicate early and often with your park liaison, and make sure the park is communicating your needs to their staff. Sharon Fisher, CEO of Play With A Purpose once organized a scavenger hunt and the teams wore bandannas. A security guard who had not gotten word that a group was in the park stopped a team because bandannas were considered a "gang symbol."
- Plan ahead for parking and communicate details to attendees regarding location, cost, etc.
- Always ask about seasonality and how many visitors will be in the park at the time you are planning to visit, as it affects wait times in line.
- There are generally long walks to wherever you want to go. Ask your salesperson about VIP parking, and definitely discuss accessibility concerns. — MK

THEME PARK meetings

By Maura Keller



Credit: SeaWorld Orlando

SeaWorld Orlando hosts private events at Sharks Underwater Grill, Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin, the Manta coaster and more.

suggest that clients pair at least one executive with each group of attendees so that they can get to know their partners, customers, etc. These types of activities create unforgettable memories, and clients want their attendees to associate their company with the experience. It also allows executives to create a bond with the partners, employees and customers."

Forums Inc. often allows attendees to enjoy the parks with their families at venues such as Universal Studios where there are plenty of roller coasters for the families to enjoy.

"We either provide the attendees with a complimentary ticket to enjoy with their family, or on other occasions we give the attendee an entrance and meal voucher that they can use during their day at the park," Fernandez says.

Forums Inc. also has organized team-building activities including scavenger hunts at theme parks, which have proven to be popular experiences for attendees of all ages.

"In this case, we would set it up similar to the 'Amazing Race' where attendees split up in teams, and we hide clues," Fernandez says. They have to search for the clues and then find certain items and take photos with them as proof. We provide them with cameras and selfie sticks. The winning team wins a prize."

Theme Parks as Learning Labs

When Sharon Fisher, CEO of Play With a Purpose, a meeting planning company that offers teambuilding events, orchestrates events in several theme parks in Orlando, she embraces the atmosphere of fun.

"While many of the events we do in the theme parks are teambuilding events, many are unique training and learning events using the parks as a backdrop," Fisher says. "One group we were working with was undergoing Six Sigma/Lean training, and we custom-designed an entire training program at a theme park that put their learning to use. We also do 'Experience Excursions' that benchmark great experiences and then facilitate discussions on how to incorporate that learning into businesses."

Recently, Fisher and her team created a customized learning excursion for a client advisory board meeting. Attendees visited various venues and theme parks in Orlando for an inside look at their approach to customer service, which helped to give the client a benchmark for their own services. Then

"Our conference is sold out with a waitlist. With a higher number of attendees, we were able to negotiate more opportunities for our participants."

Bernadette Stark, V.P. of Conference and Events
Travel Leaders Group, Plymouth, MN

Fisher facilitated an innovative thinking session around those examples, which translated the ideas they had gathered into practical services they could provide in their facilities.

"We have also held charity-based iPad hunts whereby teams explored the theme park while gathering items to be donated to a charity," Fisher says. "And a recent 'Lean Thinking' practicum included a client working on learning the principles and steps involved in implementing Lean Thinking/Six Sigma into their business. We created a six-step event that mimicked the process, and they visited specific areas in the theme park to practice the steps."

Fisher stresses that attendees love theme parks because they provide a novel and out-of-the-ordinary place for networking and learning. And even though attendees may be "working," it feels more like play, so it can spark creativity and innovative thinking.

"Theme Parks make great 'learning labs' — if topics for the conference include customer service, logistics, lean thinking, innovation, engagement or any myriad of topics, you can use what happens at theme parks to benchmark against and learn from," Fisher says.

"For incentives, most parks have behind-the-scenes tours and opportunities that give guests an exclusive and VIP experience they couldn't have on their own. Plus they offer after-hours events for privacy and group exclusivity."

Expert Event Planning

When meeting planners attempt to plan an event at an expansive theme park, it is vital that they take advantage of onsite event planning expertise, which large parks such as Universal Orlando and Disney have done to a science.

For example, at Universal Orlando

there are five hotels, three theme parks, and the CityWalk entertainment complex on a single, compact campus. Vincent LaRuffa, senior vice president resort sales and marketing at Universal Orlando Resort, says, "We provide experiences that connect organizations to their attendees in a way that is truly remarkable, taking every opportunity to engage, inspire and entertain attendees by finding ways to reinforce corporate messages in ways that are unforgettable and unbelievably immersive, creating excitement surrounding the event and message. Corporate meeting planners are working with the same team that brings our TV productions, ride openings, concerts and internal events to life, so they can rest assured we are dedicated to making their meeting the best it can be."



"Corporate meeting planners are working with the same team that brings our TV productions, ride openings, concerts and internal events to life."

Vince LaRuffa, S.V.P. Resort Sales and Marketing
Universal Orlando Resort

LaRuffa adds, "Because our destination is compact and easy to navigate, when attendee schedules call for free time, they'll enjoy convenient access to an outstanding collection of dining, nightlife and entertainment options by way of water taxi, shuttle bus or walking paths around the resort."

Universal Orlando's 5,200-room Loews Meeting Complex contains 295,000 sf of indoor meeting space and 97,000 sf of outdoor space. Plus, all five hotels in the complex are within walking distance or a quick shuttle ride to the Universal theme parks and Univer-

sal CityWalk, the resort's shopping, dining and entertainment district.

Going Small

If planners are looking for a smaller theme park experience, Hersheypark in Hershey, Pennsylvania, is a great fit. Kristin Maneval, director of sales at Hersheypark, says they can offer groups discounted admission tickets, a company picnic and a catered event in a private space; or a private, after-hours experience with rides and catering.

"The park includes private caterings, customized food and beverage offerings, entertainment options and exclusive VIP after-hours events," Maneval says. "We utilize six covered, outdoor catering locations to host groups to build team camaraderie."

Likewise, Busch Gardens in Williamsburg, Virginia, customizes events for groups according to their needs. The park is situated on the banks of the James River surrounded by the Historic Triangle of Colonial Williamsburg, Yorktown, and Jamestown.

"We don't have meeting spaces like you would find in a hotel, but we do have

theater space that might be open in between shows, and we also have a large outdoor picnic area," says Lynn Fisher, account executive at Busch Gardens.

"We offer three different types of picnic packages in spring, summer and fall where groups can choose from an array of food options," Fisher says, noting that teambuilding and awards ceremonies also can be accommodated in picnic area. "The best thing about having a meeting with us," she says, "is that once the meeting is over the group can enjoy everything our park has to offer."

Attendees can experience Busch

Gardens' nine villages centered on six countries, such as the Parisian streets of France and hamlets of Scotland; seven roller coasters including the new hybrid wooden coaster InvadR; Sesame Street-themed attractions; animal conservation education; and more

More Possibilities

The many theme parks across the country offer a range of unique experiences, from reliving American life during colonial times at historic Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, to basking in Bluegrass music and Southern-style dining at Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.

Considered to be the "Entertainment Capital of Los Angeles," Universal Studios Hollywood is the only theme park to offer guests access to a working movie and television studio, in addition to two hotels, turnkey event venues and



Hersheypark in Pennsylvania features seven world-class roller coasters.

Credit: Hersheypark

all over the world can experience," says Crystal Williams, manager, international publicity at Universal Studios Hollywood. "Depending on the type of event, we offer different options to make group events memorable. For example, our Globe Theatre is a great location for customizable meetings, luncheons,

consider when orchestrating an event at a theme park destination.

"These include cost, convenience, quality, value and ROI," Longo says.

According to Williams, when planning a meeting or event at a theme park, meeting planners need to be transparent in what the desired goals are for each event and/or meeting. "Be sure to communicate group and event specifications and allow for ample time to plan every detail of the event," Williams says. "And be flexible with dates and event start times."

Fernandez also recommends planners suggest to the client that attendees sign a liability waiver in case they become injured due to any accident caused by their behavior.

For planned activities in a park, event staff should be available to assist attendees. A "help" phone number should be given to the attendees as well as a predetermined meeting point where staff will be on hand to help. Attendees also should be provided with plenty of sunscreen and water.

Also, planners should be sure to compare apples to apples when it comes to proposals from theme parks. Different venues use different styles and standards when outlining the event inclusions and options.

"Details are everything. Think about the small stuff," Fernandez says. "What will make the experience unforgettable? Get as creative as possible so that the activity is fun. Also think about networking — you want the attendees to be able to make strong connections with each other."

C&IT

"For incentives, most parks have 'behind-the-scenes' tours and opportunities that give guests an exclusive and VIP experience they couldn't have on their own."

Sharon Fisher, CEO
Play With a Purpose, Orlando, FL

an immersive entertainment experience. They also offer partial or complete buyouts to groups of various sizes.

"It's a great place for anyone, particularly groups, to visit because we bring film and television shows to life with attractions and thrill rides guests from

dinners, receptions, award shows or charitable events."

Key Considerations

Longo at Abbott points out that there are some special planning requirements that meeting planners need to



"Streets of the World" at Universal Studios Hollywood.

Credit: Universal Studios Hollywood

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MEETINGS & EVENTS

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Greens of Distinction

2017 GREENS OF DISTINCTION AWARD WINNERS

The American Club

Kohler, WI

The Boulders, a Waldorf Astoria Resort

Carefree, AZ

The Broadmoor

Colorado Springs, CO

The Coeur d'Alene Resort

Coeur d'Alene, ID

French Lick Resort

French Lick, IN

Hammock Beach Resort, a Salamander Golf & Spa Resort

Palm Coast, FL

Innisbrook Resort, a Salamander Golf & Spa Resort

Palm Harbor, FL

JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa

San Antonio, TX

La Quinta Resort & Club

La Quinta, CA

Loews Ventana Canyon Resort

Tucson, AZ

Monarch Beach Resort

Dana Point, CA

Nemacolin Woodlands Resort

Farmington, PA

Omni Barton Creek Resort & Spa

Austin, TX

The Phoenician

Scottsdale, AZ

Pinehurst Resort

Pinehurst, NC

The Resort at Pelican Hill

Newport Coast, CA

The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain

Marana, AZ

Rosen Shingle Creek

Orlando, FL

The Sanctuary at Kiawah Island Golf Resort

Kiawah Island, SC

Sea Island Resort

Sea Island, GA

The Sea Pines Resort

Hilton Head Island, SC

Streamsong Resort

Streamsong, FL

Trump National Doral Miami

Miami, FL

Turnberry Isle Miami

Aventura, FL

The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa

Tucson, AZ

Wild Dunes Resort

Isle of Palms, SC

This, our 23rd annual Greens of Distinction Awards special section, recognizes the leaders who have demonstrated their excellence in designing and maintaining golf resorts that planners can count on. Consider these award-winning properties for your next golf program.



Sea Island

FIRST-TIME WINNER

Steeped in golf tradition, Sea Island is home to three championship golf courses, including Seaside and Plantation, site of the PGA TOUR's RSM Classic, hosted each fall by Davis Love III, Sea Island touring professional, two-time Ryder Cup Captain and 2017 inductee into the World Golf Hall of Fame.

Created in 1928 by Walter Travis, Plantation (par 72) was redesigned in 1998 by Rees Jones and features ocean views and plentiful lakes.

Created in 1929 by Colt & Alison, Seaside (par 70) was redesigned in 1999 by Tom Fazio. With 15 of its 18 holes flanked by views of the ocean, sound and marsh, Seaside is Sea Island's signature course.

Retreat Course, originally designed by Joe Lee, was renovated in 2001 by Davis and Mark Love and features a uniquely dramatic layout.

Golf Performance Center

With some of the top instructors in the country, the Sea Island Golf Performance Center teaches every aspect of the game to all skill levels, from juniors just getting started to Open and Masters Champions.

Since 1928, Sea Island has been known as an exceptional destination appealing to those who appreciate gracious service and heartfelt hospitality. With four Forbes Five Star expe-



riences — The Cloister at Sea Island, The Lodge at Sea Island, The Spa at Sea Island, and the Georgian Room restaurant — Sea Island entices conference attendees, families, outdoor and activity enthusiasts, and those simply wanting to refresh and recharge. It is the only resort in the world to have received four Forbes Five Star Awards for nine consecutive years. The only U.S. resort to host a G-8 Summit of world leaders, Sea Island provides exceptional settings and service for conferences and executive retreats.

Located on the Georgia coast midway between Jacksonville, Florida (JAX, 60 minutes) and Savannah, Georgia (SAV, 75 minutes), Sea Island is served by two additional airports, including Brunswick (BQK, 20 min-

utes) and the private McKinnon St. Simons Airport (SSI, 10 minutes).

A Range of Accommodations

Guest accommodations are available at The Cloister, a Mediterranean masterpiece; The Lodge, reminiscent of an English country manor; or The Inn at Sea Island. A cottage option is also available on Sea Island. Guests may also enjoy nearby Broadfield, a Sea Island Sporting Club and Lodge, offering a variety of seasonal hunting, fishing, sporting and organic culinary opportunities.

This fall, expanded meeting facilities and three new sleeping rooms will open at The Lodge, to be fol-



lowed in 2018 by six guest cabins and a waterfront pool. Recent expansions at The Cloister include a 5,000-sf ballroom, an adult pool and 63 sleeping rooms in the new Garden Wing.

C&IT

Facts and Features:

- Guest Rooms: 390
- Meeting Rooms: 27
- Meeting Space: 35,000 sf (indoor)
- Amenities: Sea Island features three championship golf courses, the country's finest Golf Performance Center, 5 miles of private beach, Beach Club, five pools, tennis, squash, Yacht Club, Shooting School, sailing, water sports and more.

100 Cloister Drive
Sea Island, GA 31561
www.seaisland.com
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Notes FROM THE COAST

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Mary,

A place that makes
the work worth it.

-Joshua



(Who do you want to tell?)

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The Broadmoor

TWENTY-THREE-TIME WINNER

Nestled into the scenic foothills of Colorado Springs, Colorado, The Broadmoor is more than a resort, it is a destination. Celebrating its Centennial in 2018, The Broadmoor has been called “the most unique resort in the world,” and takes great pride in being the longest consecutive winner of the Forbes Five Star and AAA Five Diamond awards for excellence.

Here, in a setting of remarkable natural beauty, guests can enjoy all the amenities and activities one would expect from a world-class property, from its Forbes Five Star spa, to its superlative dining options that include 10 restaurants plus 10 cafés and lounges, one of them being Colorado’s only Forbes Five Star and AAA Five Diamond restaurant, Penrose Room.

Breathtaking Experiences Abound

But what makes The Broadmoor truly a one-of-a-kind experience is the breadth and diversity of uniquely Colorado experiences. Here, guests can go exploring on mountain bikes or horseback, experience the ancient sport of falconry, take a breathtaking zip-line adventure over treetops, waterfalls and moun-



tain canyons that end in a controlled rappel into one of Colorado’s top attractions, Seven Falls. There is fly fishing, hiking, rock climbing and the chance to experience the top of Pikes Peak, known as “America’s Mountain,” via the highest altitude Cog Railway in the world.

Creating Legendary Moments on the Links

When it comes to golf, it’s all about the greens, fairways and bunkers. From the time The Broadmoor opened in 1918, golf’s great names have played the championship courses. The original was designed by Donald Ross then combined into two of the best in the country when Robert Trent Jones Sr. created the now legendary East and West

courses. The original South Course was designed by Arnold Palmer and reshaped by Nicklaus Design.

Over the years, new pages of golf history were written by the likes of Jack Nicklaus, who won his first major on the East Course in 1958, and by Annika Sorenstam with her first win of the U.S. Women’s Open in 1995. The resort courses have had the honor of hosting 23 major tournaments and eight major championships, including the USGA’s 2018 U.S. Senior Open, which occurs over the exact date that The Broadmoor opened its doors to visitors and groups from around the world.

Presidents, Royalty and Celebrities Play Here

From those who ventured onto The Broadmoor’s Donald Ross course in 1918 to the celebrated participants of the upcoming 2018 U.S. Senior Open, there is nothing quite like experiencing these legendary links. Presidents, politicians, royalty and celebrities have been awed by their beauty and challenged by their play. There are only a handful of resorts in the United States that are as rich in golf history as The Broadmoor. Each round of golf on these championship courses adds a new page to a rich heritage. *C&IT*



Facts and Features:

- Guest Rooms/Suites: 784
- Meeting Rooms: 62
- Meeting Space: 185,000 sf
- Amenities: The Broadmoor Wilderness Experience offers distinctive, one-of-a-kind venues and activities in an all-inclusive Colorado experience: The Ranch at Emerald Valley, Cloud Camp and The Broadmoor Fly Fishing Camp.



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THE
BROADMOOR





Streamsong Resort

THIRD-TIME WINNER

Situated amid stunning scenery and hushed seclusion in Central Florida, Streamsong is a new luxury meeting and incentive destination intentionally designed in harmony with its natural surroundings and intensely committed to the highest aspirations of today's corporate elite. Streamsong combines golf at its purest and a resort experience at its absolute finest. It's rare that one resort can offer so many authentic experiences.

A Renowned and Revered Golf Experience

Opened in January 2013, Streamsong Red, designed by Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw, and Streamsong Blue, designed by Renaissance Golf Design (Tom Doak), rank on some of golf's most prestigious lists including *Golf* magazine's "Top 100 Courses in the U.S.," Streamsong Red #10, Streamsong Blue #14 and *Golfweek*'s "Best Resort Courses."

On September 29, 2017 Streamsong will introduce a third course. Highly anticipated as one of the best new courses in the world, Streamsong Black designed by acclaimed architect Gil Hanse is a dazzling par-73 championship layout offering breathtaking views of the vast landscape, which includes flowing elevation, and rolls, tumbles and sand ridges akin to the Sand Belt Region of Melbourne,



Credit: © Nile Young

Australia. This exciting new addition features The Gauntlet, a two-acre putting course, and The Roundabout, a free-flowing practice area, each adding to the ultimate group experience. Adjacent to these, Streamsong Black also will christen its new architecturally advanced clubhouse, including Bone Valley Tavern restaurant, which showcases panoramic views of one of the newest and most exciting additions to the game of golf today.

Designed to be walked, Streamsong Blue, Streamsong Red and Streamsong Black can host small, intimate groups as well as those of up to 288 players for tournaments, events and outings with the support of its PGA-certified staff.

But Streamsong is about much more than golf. The resort offers a distraction-free environment with

25,000 sf of dedicated meeting space. Thirteen large and small meeting rooms can accommodate 10 to 500 in complete comfort and privacy. General session and breakout rooms are conveniently clustered for effective program flow.

Set on 16,000 acres, Streamsong invites groups to get immersed in the outdoors via onsite guided bass-fishing expeditions, sporting clays, archery, tennis and a nature trail. Guest favorites for relaxation and rejuvenation include a lakeside infinity-edge pool and the unique grotto-style AcquaPietra Spa. Six distinct dining options include P2O5, Restaurant Fifty-Nine, Fragmentary Blue, SottoTerra, Hemy's and the new Bone Valley Tavern. The resort boasts a variety of breathtaking outdoor venues from an intimate rooftop terrace, covered patios and pavilions to expansive lawns — all taking full advantage of the lush lakeside location.

Modern, sophisticated and meticulous in detail, the lodge at Streamsong offers 228 spacious guest rooms and suites thoughtfully situated on five levels and featuring floor-to-ceiling glass with custom louvers and striking sunrise or sunset lake views that extend to the natural Florida horizon. Rich linens, plush robes and boutique amenities throughout ensure no element of your stay is overlooked. **C&IT**



Facts and Features:

- Guest Rooms: 228
- Meeting Rooms: 13
- Meeting Space: 25,000 sf indoor; 60,000 sf outdoor
- Amenities: Golf, guided bass fishing, sporting clays, archery, AcquaPietra Spa, fitness center, lakeside pool, tennis, hiking trails and more.

1000 Streamsong Drive

Streamsong, Florida 33834

www.streamsongresort.com

Jim Bullock

Director of Sales and Marketing

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Destination

Atlantic City

Building a Future Beyond Gaming to Appeal to Diverse Groups From Across the Nation

By Derek Reveron

Atlantic City is undergoing several key transformations to resurrect its appeal to a wider leisure and business market. It's becoming a more family-friendly destination by diversifying activities and entertainment options, expanding core groups beyond Northeastern-based businesses and associations, and expanding meeting and convention spaces to host larger groups.

Meet AC, the destination's CVB, is spearheading the transformations with impressive results. In 2016, Meet AC booked 260 meetings and conventions representing 289,422 hotel room nights and more than 863,602 convention delegates.

The growth is continuing this year. "Meet AC had a record year in event bookings and a year in advancing Atlantic City's image in the meetings and convention market," says Jim Wood, president and CEO of Meet AC. "Meet AC looks forward to selling and marketing the destination to book future meetings, conventions and sporting events."

The Atlantic City Convention Center (ACCC) contributes to the growth by offering 486,600 sf of exhibit space, 45 meeting rooms and more than 32,000 sf of prefunction space.

The ACCC recently hosted a four-day meeting for 6,000 sales representatives, employees and customers of 5linx, a Rochester, New York-based multilevel marketing company. The company plans to meet in Atlantic City again in 2018 and 2019.

Incentives and Service

5linx chose Atlantic City in part because of the value. "There are great incentives both with the hotels and CVB to conduct meetings in Atlantic City," says Denise Nowak, vice president of marketing and meeting planner. "That helped to sway corporate's decision to consider having more events in town."

5linx was also impressed by Meet AC's extensive research of the group's needs. "They attended our event in other cities to get a good background as to what can be expected, and were proactive in addressing issues we had in other cities so that we did not face them in Atlantic City," says Nowak.

Atlantic City was one of two finalists for the meetings. "Corporate voted for Atlantic City. Corporate has always liked having events there since the convention and visitors bureau provides assistance with publicizing the event with welcome signage at the airport, along the streets, etc. It's also easy to get around Atlantic City with the jitneys. Our people like the activities and there is much to do at night."

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Harrah's Resort recently added the Waterfront Conference Center (left) and Veracruz restaurant offering ocean views.



The ACCC hosted most meetings and events, including a new product launch and a keynote speech by motivational speaker Tony Robbins. Service was outstanding, says Nowak. "The convention center went above and beyond to provide for our

group," Nowak says. "We hold numerous large conferences throughout the country each year, and the CVB (Meet AC) has always done more than other cities to welcome our event. Our attendance was larger than expected so we had to change our meeting space and they were able to accommodate us."

Meeting at Caesars

Functions also were held at 5linx's headquarters hotel Caesars Atlantic City, which features 28,000 sf of meeting and event space that can host groups of all sizes within its 17,135-sf Palladium Ballroom and 10 meeting rooms ranging in size from 490 sf to 1,262 sf.

"The Caesars property was utilized for our dinner for our 250 top leaders," says Nowak. "Space was also used at the location on Saturday morning, where over 1,000 attended a worship service prior to the event starting."

Planners such as Nowak are benefiting from the \$200 million that Caesars Entertainment is investing to upgrade its Atlantic City casino properties.

Bally's Atlantic City spent \$3 million to upgrade its Gold Rush-themed Wild Wild West area and remodel its luxury Jubilee guest rooms. Bally's, located in the middle of the Boardwalk, offers 1,760 guest rooms and 80,000 sf of versatile meeting space in 28 rooms, all on one floor.

Caesars Entertainment recently completed more than \$30 million in enhancements to Harrah's Resort. The hotel's upgrades include the addition of several new restaurants; a com-

plete restoration of its iconic pool and nightclub, The Pool After Dark; and a fresh redesign and enhancement of 450 guest rooms and suites in the Bayview Tower.

More Meeting Space

Harrah's also invested \$125 million in its new 100,000-sf Waterfront Conference Center, the biggest convention center-hotel facility between Boston and Baltimore. The facility boasts LEED Silver Certification and features two 50,000-sf ballrooms and 64,000 sf of meeting space.

The Claridge, a Radisson Hotel reopened in 2014 as a fully restored historic hotel with 483 renovated guest rooms. The property, home to the Holtzman Art Gallery, debuted additional conference space, adding 15,000 sf to meet the growing demand for conference space throughout Atlantic City. This brings Claridge's conference space to 100,000 sf, including a 6,400-sf room and four smaller conference and boardrooms. In addition, The Claridge boasts an elegantly renovated ballroom and recently opened Atlantic City's first rooftop bar, VUE, with expansive views.

The Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa's 18,000-sf Central Conference Center (CCC) is part of the \$50 million the property is spending on new projects. The CCC offers five customizable meeting rooms, a 6,500-sf ballroom as well as a boardroom and office. In addition, the facility boasts state-of-the-art internet access, HD digital projection and sound systems. The



The ACCC "went above and beyond to provide for our group. (Meet AC) has always done more than other cities to welcome" us.

Denise Nowak, V.P., Meeting Planner
5linx, Rochester, NY

2,000-room Borgata offers a total of more than 106,000 sf of meeting, event and convention space among its three main venues: The Event Center (70,000 sf), The Water Club (18,000 sf) and the new Central Conference Center (18,000 sf). Borgata's sister property, the Water Club at Borgata, offers 800 guest rooms and 36,000 sf of meeting space.

Resorts Casino Hotel's new 15,000-sf conference center is part of the property's \$100 million upgrade. Located at the northern end of the Boardwalk, the enhancements are helping the 942-room property to once again become an East Coast beachfront, boardwalk and tourism property. Resorts



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Harrah's
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ATLANTIC CITY



The new conference center at Resorts Casino Hotel attracts groups as does Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville Café and Landshark Bar & Grill.

also offers two theaters seating 300 and 1,350 people, respectively, and total meeting space of 64,000 sf.

Meeting at Resorts Casino Hotel

Resorts Casino Hotel recently hosted a four-day meeting for 525 medical personnel by the Philadelphia-based Jefferson Ultrasound Radiology Education Institute (JUREI). The group has met at Resorts the last three years and recently signed contracts through 2020 because of all the property offers.

"In sourcing other locations, there was no better offer in regards to room rate, amenities and other negotiated contract items," says Jodi Markizon, CMP, manager, JUREI. "The sleeping rooms have been recently renovated or are currently in the process. The hotel is in a central location on the Boardwalk. "There is good food at reasonable prices and an abundance of meeting space that matches our needs."

The new conference center played a key role in Markizon signing future meetings. "Prior to the conference center being built, we were a good fit for the meeting space," says Markizon. "Once the conference center was built, we had the opportunity to add concurrent sessions in a beautiful new setting with all the latest technology. We held our reception in the exhibit hall to let participants meet and mingle while enjoying food and beverage."

The top-notch service keeps Markizon returning. "This is where Resorts truly shines," she says. "We developed relationships with the staff, and they know our needs. For example, they know that one of our speakers likes a special chair, a spe-

.....

Resorts Hotel was "very attentive to our needs. Service isn't just a job for them. They really do want us to have a great time."

Jarrett Cummings, V.P. Sales
InContact Inc., Sandy, UT

.....

cial mouse and a specific water. They make sure that all that is available for her. We often have last-minute room reservation changes with arrivals, departures or type of room, and they always accommodate us."

InContact Inc., a Sandy, Utah-based provider of cloud-based customer communication systems, recently held its three-day annual regional sales meeting at Resorts Hotel for 16 attendees for the second consecutive year.



Jarrett Cummings, vice present sales for InContact, cites Resorts Hotel's service as a prime reason for returning.

"They are very attentive to our needs," says Cummings. "Service isn't just a job for them. They really do want us to have a great time. The feeling is echoed from the time you walk in until the time you leave by everyone from the bellman to the waiters to the event staff. One of our sales engineers said, 'You can really tell everyone wants our business and appreciates us.'"

The stellar service combined with the cost-effective "all-included" packages proved to be a good combination. "Everything is included in your room rate, or can be," Cummings says. "There is no nickel-and-diming for meeting rooms, internet, projectors, conferences, phones, etc."

Cummings describes the all-inclusive service: "We had a private cocktail party at the Landshark Bar on the beach with heavy appetizers and hors d'oeuvres with beer and wine included," says Cummings. "The food just kept coming. The second night we had dinner at Gallagher's Steak House. It was everything you expect from a steak house and more. The food was included and drinks were extra."

Cummings notes that breakfast, which was held every day at Breadsticks, was included in the room rate and allowed for attendees to order off the regular menu. "They just take the meal expenses off our room bill at the end of the stay. What a great way to do it."

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Tropicana Upgrades

Last year, Tropicana completed \$40 million in renovations that included 500 Havana Tower hotel rooms, the North Tower casino and five new shows that will be featured on Tropicana's Multimedia Light and Sound Show featured on the Boardwalk. The project also includes a re-designed hotel entrance at Pacific Avenue. The property's new multi-million-dollar AtlantiCare LifeCenter includes the most comprehensive gym facility in Atlantic City.

Earlier this year, Chef Jose Garces opened three new restaurants concepts. Olón, inspired by the Ecuadorian beach town of the same name, offers seafood cuisine and includes two private dining areas seating a total of 60 people. Okatshe features Japanese cuisine, 50 sakes, and seats 80 for private functions. Bar Olón is a 60-seat, double-sided bar and lounge located between the two restaurants.

As part of the Tropicana's efforts to offer more non-gaming activities, it introduced Escape AC, a 60-minute team game that challenges groups of two to 10 people to "escape" a room in 60 minutes using clues. The teambuilding game bonds participants by requiring them to communicate, use teamwork and think critically. Executives can assess a group's performance from a viewing room.

The Tropicana offers 122,000 sf of meeting space including an 18,000-sf column-free ballroom that accommodates up to 1,800 attendees for meetings. Meeting space also includes 50 function rooms and the Grand Exposition Center, which handles groups of 10 to 2,000 people and 113 8-by-10-foot exhibit booths.

Other Atlantic City Happenings

The landmark, 872-room Showboat Atlantic City, which reopened in July 2016 as a non-casino property, plans to add a \$40 million multi-use event center at its location on the Boardwalk, according to *The Press of Atlantic City*. Also it

Upgrades at the Borgata include the new Angeline and The Water Club chef-branded restaurants, and Premier nightclub for late-night partygoers..

remains unclear when TEN, formerly Revel, will reopen. Both properties will be without casinos for now, but there are plans to eventually use the gaming floors in some way.

Billionaire investor Carl Icahn recently closed a deal to sell the Trump Taj Mahal casino to Hard Rock International and two New Jersey investors. A sale price was not announced. Hard Rock International plans to invest \$300 million to renovate and rebrand the property.

Over the last several years, the 724-room Golden Nugget Casino, Hotel & Marina has undergone an extensive \$150 million propertywide renovation and expansion. Upgraded areas include The Showrooms, casino floor, Spa & Salon, pool deck and Landry's Signature Restaurants — the Chart House and Vic & Anthony's Steakhouse. Spaces available for group events include the 12,000-sf Haven Night Club.

Borgata opened a new Italian-American themed restaurant, Angeline, featuring celebrity chef Michael Symon. Borgata's other big-name chef-branded dining options include Wolfgang Puck American Grille, Bobby Flay Steak, Izakaya Modern Japanese Pub (Michael Schulson), The Water Club (Geoffrey Zakarian), as well as Old Homestead Steak House (restauranters Marc and Greg Sherry). Borgata also introduced a new 3,200-sf outdoor pool and beer garden that can be used as an entertainment gathering spot at night. The Borgata's projects also include the new 18,000-sf Premier nightclub, which opened May 2016. The space is designed as "a theatrical experience for partygoers" and competes against blockbuster clubs in Las Vegas, New York and Miami, according to the resort. Tiered booths tilt toward a DJ station, stage and "digital proscenium." Carved-stone bars 35 feet long flank the main room, with a horseshoe-shaped mezzanine and 25-foot-wide digitally programmable chandelier hanging overhead.

Upgrades at Resorts Casino Hotel include room renovations and a \$35 million enhancement to Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville Café and LandShark Bar & Grill located within Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville-themed entertainment complex.

Atlantic City has grown way beyond its roots as a prime East Coast gaming magnet. It is now a prime destination for leisure and business travelers from across the nation, with a growing range of not only entertainment and activities, but sophisticated facilities and service aimed at its growing meeting and convention market. **C&IT**



Credit: Borgata



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Destination

La Quinta Resort & Club near Palm Springs completed a multimillion-dollar renovation last year.

"California really sets itself apart. When you get there, you feel like you've left the United States. It's beautiful and picturesque. ...With each place you go, it's like you've stepped into a different location."

Stephanie Rosenstone, Exec. Asst. to the CEO, Paul Davis Restoration Inc., Jacksonville, FL



California

The Golden State's Diverse Destinations Offer an Escape From the Ordinary

It's been said that California is a state of mind. Which might be another way of saying, California isn't really a state at all. It is, after all, the sixth largest economy in the world.

But, so dominant is California's influence on American innovation and culture, so great is its agricultural bounty that feeds a nation, and so dynamic are its physical attributes — from the highest peaks in the Lower 48 to North America's greatest deserts — that California's collection of world-class destinations is positively catnip to meeting planners looking for a dose of fresh air on the meeting circuit.

"California really sets itself apart," suggests Stephanie Rosenstone, executive assistant to the CEO of Paul Davis Restoration Inc. "When you get there, you feel like you've left the United States. It's beautiful and picturesque, it's sunny, but not humid. With each place you go, it's like you've stepped into a different location. That's what attracts me to cities like San Diego, which has a nautical, adventurous feeling. You visit Hollywood and you feel like you're one of the elite. In Palm Springs, you go to downtown and it's laidback, with a lovely shopping district."

Hollywood Hideaway

For its annual franchisee conference, Paul Davis chose La Quinta Resort & Club near Palm Springs, one of the desert community's original Hollywood hideaways. In the 1930s and '40s, Greta Garbo luxuriated in the resort's privacy, Clark Gable played by the many pools and director Frank Capra wrote Gable's "It Happened One Night," "Lost Horizon" and "It's a Wonderful Life" while staying in one of the casitas. The 620-unit resort, now part of the Waldorf Astoria family, received a \$22 million facelift to celebrate its 90th anniversary last year, and features 190,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space, including three ballrooms.

"Our CEO fell in love with the La Quinta property years ago," explains Rosenstone, who planned the May 2016 event. "It just so happened we were celebrating our 50th anniversary, and I felt this complete sense of connection. Our founder, Paul Davis — this would have been his era, when he was at his best. You stroll the property and you're thrown back in time. I just felt like it was meant to be — these were his people, this was his time."

"One of things I noticed is the tenure of the people that

worked there. A lot of times in the hotel business there's a really big turnover. You'll have an event at a property, and you go back and you don't recognize anyone. But we met a lot of fathers and mothers at La Quinta that said, 'I've been here 40 years.' We talked about that a lot — finding out that the guy who took you on the golf cart is the grandfather of the guy who brought your luggage to you room the day before. The staff shines, they're all so polite; we never had a moment when we felt like we were coming up against a wall. You feel like you're there as a family because you brought your company there, and that's a family, and then you come there and they're a family, too."

Another of the standout features of La Quinta for Rosenstone was the physical layout of the property, which encouraged networking and socializing. "The pools bring people together," she adds. "You have these groups of casitas, and in the middle of each of them is a pool, over 40 pools on the property. You feel like you're in your own little complex, all spread out on the property. We could hang out at the pool with the people in your area, almost like a family reunion. The property is spread out, but they make it convenient with golf carts for anyone who doesn't like to walk a lot."

"The Top of the Plaza, right outside the Fiesta Ballroom, is a plaza on a hill with a water fountain and huge trees that you can tell have been there forever. Our franchisees are not there to work, they're there to be celebrated, and our staff is there to serve. But after a long day the staff can sit up on this plaza, talk and relax with a drink under the sky."

"One thing I was amazed at is the talent in California," she says. "We do this event every year, and we usually have to look for talent. But it was very easy to find talent in Palm Springs, which made it hard to choose what entertainment we were going to have. We hired a local marching band for our open-

ing event, with a Supremes act for a closing ceremony that can't be touched."

Rosenstone lauded the resort's many dining options and their varied price points, which meant the 800-attendee group did not need to leave the property for meals ("it's California, so a lot of healthier choices"). On a day outside the resort, the group did quad (ATV) and jeep adventures in the Coachella Valley, but Rosenstone took a small team on the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway for a special treat. All were stunned by the drastic change of temperature at the top, more than 8,000 feet above the city.

When asked if there was a caveat to her event, Rosenstone noted that airfares were a challenge. "But I will add that even though they were high, we're going back to La Quinta next May, so that shows you how much we liked it," she adds. "As the meeting planner, I found it to be a very easy property for our group."

Better Than Expected in San Diego

For Jim Young, CEO and cofounder of Realcomm, a conference covering enterprise solutions for commercial real estate, a location that allows attendees to experience the destination is key, but a setting close to "the tech center of the planet" was also important for his June 2017 event, which drew 1,600 attendees from as far away as South Africa and Singapore. The downtown waterfront ambience afforded by the Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina filled the bill. And it resulted in something unexpected.

"For first time in as long as I can remember, we had virtually no complaints," Young says. "Usually 10 percent will find something to complain about. We kept scratching our heads, we didn't think San Diego was going to be this good."

The non-scientific conclusion his team came to: "Waking up with the sun shining, a door opening onto the balcony with a





“For first time in as long as I can remember, we had virtually no complaints. Usually 10 percent will find something to complain about. We kept scratching our heads, we didn’t think San Diego was going to be this good.”

Jim Young, CEO and Cofounder, Realcomm, Carlsbad, CA

view of sailboats instead of scaffolding and parking lots and dirty rooftops. You come down into the hotel lobby, and wind was blowing through front doors into the lobby — natural, fresh air. Between sessions people went outdoors, they could throw on their running shoes and run along the harbor. For our 50 VIPs we did a harbor cruise on the Americas, a stunning, classic schooner.

“I am 99 percent convinced that this year, all of those conditions contributed to the temperament of the conference attendees,” adds Young. “Even though they’re working, the conditions contributed to the creativity, to their capacity to receive information. The energy levels were higher — they paid attention.”

Realcomm (and its co-located event, IBcon) was originally to be set up at the convention center, but Young says his team was tickled to be able to plug the entire event into one location on relatively short notice, using the Marriott Marquis and its conference facilities, which were expanded and upgraded in June 2016. Following a \$107 million investment, the facility now features 280,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space, including two 36,000-sf ballrooms, each the largest on the West Coast.

“I don’t usually give out compliments to hotel staff, but from Tim Cloonan, the convention services manager, all the way on down — they are just on-point. Tim was the (Energizer) bunny. He may be the top dog, but he was picking up napkins and wiping tables. In these days of no customer service, you’ve got to search hard to find real service. But Tim must have put that into the DNA of all his employees, because his team made us feel like they were enjoying themselves.”

Young called out Lynda Earnest, senior sales executive for the Marriott Marquis, for making the contract happen less than a year out. “The challenge was, when you’re in one of

the nicest cities, everyone wants to be there. Marriott knows they’re in a high-demand area, so maybe they don’t negotiate as hard as others, but ultimately they came to the table.” And Young also had high praise for both Patrick Sullivan with PSAV and the hotel’s staff for pushing the envelope on AV.

“We decided to go above and beyond, to change from analog to digital and get rid of all signs and posters,” explains Young. “We pushed the hotel, and they appreciated it. For our general session, we went with a 46-foot-wide by 10-foot-high LED high-resolution wall — it changed the mood of the whole general session, a grand slam over the fence. They had never done it, and Marriott brought all their staff and team down to see it, but everything was done correctly.”

Growing Cities

Among the other cities in California seeing meeting growth is Anaheim, where the Anaheim Convention Center is just completing its seventh expansion, adding 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space and cementing the facility as the largest convention center on the West Coast, with 1.8 million sf in total. The new building officially opens on September 26.

Last month, the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center celebrated the opening of its new event space, an indoor/outdoor mezzanine called The Cove. It’s part of \$50 million in renovations and ongoing improvements designed to create more customizable event spaces for meeting planners.

In San Francisco, the Moscone Center is undergoing a major expansion and improvement project that broke ground in 2015. Budgeted at \$500 million and expected to be completed in December 2018, portions of the complex will reopen this fall, in time to host big-draw Salesforce and Oracle conventions. Among the new elements, Moscone’s largest hall will increase its contiguous space from 260,000 sf currently to more



Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center recently debuted The Cove, a new indoor/outdoor event space.



Credits: Long Beach CVB

than 509,000 sf, and a new 50,000-sf column-free ballroom will be added. Once completed, the facility’s meeting space will total 1.5 million sf.

In downtown San Jose, the SoFA (South of First Area) district is host to an eclectic strip of cultural museums, galleries and nightlife venues. Attendees can enjoy live music, hand-crafted cocktails, and some of San Jose’s best food. It is also home to the newly opened Uproar Brewing Company and Forager taproom — part of the burgeoning craft brew scene in San Jose. Both establishments offer unique venue spaces with their rustic, modernized warehouse settings that complement additional event venues in the SoFA district.

San Jose’s City National Civic Courtyard and Montgomery Courtyard recently have been renovated. The picturesque lo-

cation includes newly built custom benches, gas inline heaters, outdoor lighting and a fire pit. The entire courtyard has been wired with sound and can be split into two courtyards or used as one with movable rustic gates. In the future, the courtyard will feature a live video feed of the theater’s interiors. It has a total of 5,407 sf and can fit up to 1,081 people.

And the Monterey Conference Center is currently putting the finishing touches on a \$60-plus million renovation, scheduled to be completed this fall. Next door, the Portola Hotel & Spa recently completed a \$10 million renovation of its 379 guest rooms and bathrooms. In all, the interconnected Monterey Conference Connection space — the Monterey Marriott, Portola and conference center combined — encompasses 85,000 sf.



Credits: Visit Anaheim



(Left) Anaheim Convention Center’s Grand Plaza. (Below) Rendering of Anaheim Convention Center’s 200,000-sf expansion.

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“Monterey...has a small-community feel. Everybody seems to care about the group having the best experience possible, and willingly recommend other businesses if it sounds more like what that group is looking for.”

Grace Pineda, Senior Travel & Events Representative, Cadence Design Systems, San Jose, CA

Value in Monterey

For an offsite meeting in April, Cadence Design Systems gathered a 12-member team at Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa, a location convenient to the company's San Jose offices, 90 minutes away. Cost and value were other factors in choosing the city as a meeting site, according to Grace Pineda, senior travel and events representative for the electronic design automation company.

“Monterey is far away without being too far away,” explains Pineda, adding that ocean views and plentiful activity and dining options were other draws for the Cadence team. “The city has a small-community feel. Everybody seems to care about the group having the best experience possible, and willingly recommend other businesses if it sounds more like what that group is looking for.”

Pineda suggests contacting the Monterey County Convention and Visitors Bureau during the initial planning stage. “Sammy Ramos helped make the planning so easy and seamless — it was like a one-stop shop. It saved me a lot of time, and it gave me confidence that I was contacting the right vendors.

“The Monterey Plaza Hotel has a great location along the waterfront, easy access to restaurants and activities, and the meeting space was perfect for our group's small size. They offered reasonably priced rates and concessions that were a great value, and they were able to accommodate all of our requests for food, Wi-Fi and room block. I really enjoyed

Rendering of the Monterey Conference Center's renovation, scheduled to debut this fall.



Credit: Monterey Conference Center

working with Angela Vickers and Magdalena Parker on their sales and catering team. They provided a lot of suggestions to help us make this event successful.” Instead of using the hotel's usual meeting room they used the Grand Bay Suite, which offered a more intimate atmosphere, ocean views and felt more comfortable.

Cadence did have one enjoyable offsite dinner at the Fish Hopper, within walking distance to the hotel. On another evening, the group wanted to do a bonfire on the beach, but found out Monterey County doesn't allow them any longer. The hotel arranged for the group to use its fire pit and have the event there.

Test-Driving the L.A. Area

In contrast to the gentle hum of Monterey, the Los Angeles area has a reputation for traffic issues, which Flavio Martinez was careful to take into account for a recent meeting by a global leader in sports footwear, apparel and accessories. “For

The Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa enjoys a beachfront location overlooking the Pacific Ocean.



Credits: Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa

“Natural daylight in the group's meeting rooms is very important to this group. And several of The Ritz-Carlton's spaces, including its Marina Vista ballroom, have great natural daylight.”

Flavio Martinez, Associate Regional Vice President, HelmsBriscoe, Scottsdale, AZ



The Ritz-Carlton, Marina del Rey offers views of the city and marina from meeting rooms and guest rooms.



Credits: The Ritz-Carlton, Marina del Rey

this client, we do quite a few meetings in California, but mostly concentrated in the L.A. area, where they have a regional office,” explains Martinez, associate regional vice president for meetings and event planner for HelmsBriscoe. The client's programs involve meetings and presentations in its regional office. “Having a variety of hotel options that would fit the client's quality and location requirements, in addition to ease of access and convenient airlift were also considerations.

“Given the travel distances in Los Angeles, and time required to navigate within the city, driving distance during morning and evening commute traffic to the regional office was also a key deciding factor. There were three final candidate properties for this program — one in West Hollywood, one in Santa Monica, and The Ritz-Carlton, Marina del Rey. We made several driving test runs between each hotel and the regional office and found Marina del Rey to consistently offer the shortest driving distance of all three.”

Marina del Rey Hits the Mark

Another advantage: The Marina del Rey Convention & Visitors Bureau had a promotion for groups, in the way of a credit to the master account. “The client was unaware that, oftentimes, CVBs have booking incentives like this one, so this came as a welcome ‘bonus’ to the client's budget,” Martinez says. “The Marina del Rey CVB promptly applied the credit to the client's final bill seamlessly and expeditiously.”

Both HelmsBriscoe and the client had prior experience with The Ritz-Carlton, Marina del Rey. “This was the second year in a row that the client chose this property to host this event,” says Martinez. “They had several functions within the hotel's function space for receptions, dinners, etc. The property is easy to navigate and offers a very good balance of

function space to guest rooms. The quality of the food and service were outstanding and this was an important factor in choosing the property — the client required consistency in the high standards that were set by the previous year's program.”

In addition to five-star accommodations and service, other requirements the group had were unique venues for private functions and flexibility in contracting terms (attrition, cutoff dates), which the property accommodated. “Natural daylight in the group's meeting rooms is very important to this group,” adds Martinez. “And several of The Ritz-Carlton's spaces, including its Marina Vista ballroom, have great natural daylight.”

Martinez notes that, although there are only a handful of hotels, Marina del Rey is often overlooked by meeting planners, despite its close proximity to LAX. “It isn't until you move up the coast to Santa Monica that you find comparable options in the upper-upscale category. So, if you're a planner and you're looking for an upscale, top-tier property not far from LAX, The Ritz-Carlton, Marina del Rey may be one of your top choices. Its location right next to the marina provides for an awesome backdrop for any outdoor functions. “The account manager and DOSM were both very involved and very responsive from the initial RFP response all the way through the contract negotiations process. The staff checked on the group constantly while they were in-house. The CSM did an outstanding job handling multiple master accounts, managing rooming lists and reacting to last-minute changes in F&B functions.”

He adds, “Just make sure, if you have any offsite activities, that you take time to study best travel routes, the time of day transportation will occur, and allow plenty of extra time for contingencies.”

C&IT

On The Move



STEFFENS



LABELLA



ROSA



WASHKO



KASSES

Eau Palm Beach Resort Spa in Palm Beach, Florida, has promoted **Paul Steffens** to associate director of group sales and appointed **Tori LaBella** as sales manager responsible for the Northeast (excluding NYC), mid-Atlantic and Canada markets. Steffens was sales manager at the resort. LaBella was senior sales manager at the Palm Beach Marriott Singer Island Beach Resort & Spa.

Chateau on the Lake Resort, Spa & Convention Center in Branson, Missouri, has named **Gayla Welsh** as corporate sales manager and **Jessica Wrenfrow** as event sales manager. Welsh, responsible for the Missouri, Kansas, Nebras-

ka, Iowa and Illinois markets, formerly served as director of group sales for The Lodge at Old Kinderhook in Camden-ton, Missouri. Wrenfrow most recently was hospitality services instructor at Arkansas State University-Newport in Jonesboro, Arkansas.

The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village in Cape Coral, Florida, has appointed **Kristen Goodnow** as group sales manager. She most recently served as senior sales manager at Sanibel Harbour Marriott Resort & Spa in Fort Myers, Florida.

Kevin Rosa was named director of sales and marketing for Villas of Grand

Cypress in Orlando, Florida. He most recently was director of sales and marketing for Loews Don Cesar Hotel and the Beach House Suites by Loews Don Cesar of St. Petersburg, Florida.

John Washko was named vice president of exhibitions and conventions sales for Mohegan Sun, Uncasville, Connecticut. He most recently served as V.P., group marketing and sales for Atlantis Paradise Island, Bahamas.

Amber Kasses was named director of sales and marketing at Sofitel New York. She was most recently director of sales and marketing for Fairmont Newport Beach in California. **C&IT**

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