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Aflac's Heidi Carlisle (c) and her team on the 50-yard line at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans.

New Orleans

Making the Most of Meetings
in the Big Easy
Page 20

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Orlando Planner Guide
Page 27



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INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

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Vol. 24 No. 2



Page 10

FEATURES

10 Unethical or Acceptable?

'If it feels even a little uncomfortable,
you already have your answer'

By Christine Loomis

14 Conference Center Trends

Evolving to Meet Expanding
Needs and Expectations

By Sophia Bennett



Page 14

DEPARTMENTS

4 PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE

6 INDUSTRY NEWS

9 SNAPSHOTS

26 CRISIS MANAGEMENT
10 Tips You Can Use to
Get Through a Crisis
By Wendy Keller

52 BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS
How to Shine at Social
Business Events
By Gloria Petersen

74 CORPORATE LADDER

74 READER SERVICES

Credit: Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club



Page 54

Credit: Las Vegas News Bureau



Page 62

DESTINATIONS

20 New Orleans

Making the Most of Meetings in the Big Easy

By Maura Keller

27 Orlando Meeting & Incentive Planner Guide

By David Swanson

54 Florida

A Made-for-Meetings Paradise

By Cynthia Dial

62 Las Vegas

'Whatever they want,
whenever they want it'
By Maura Keller

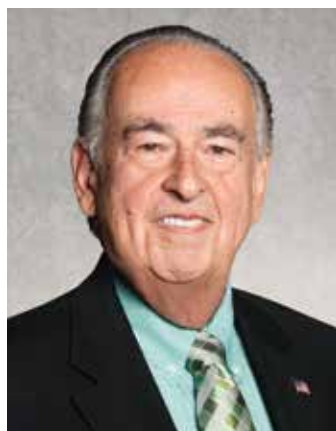


Page 27

Publisher's Message

Meeting in the Big Easy Is Easy

Insurance and financial firm meeting planners the world over know that New Orleans is a dream destination. Heidi Carlisle, who is pictured on our cover with her team on the 50-yard line at the Superdome, joined FICP the last time they met in New Orleans and knew right away it was time to return to the Big Easy for the next Aflac National Sales Convention. In our cover story on



page 20 "Making the Most of Meetings in the Big Easy," Carlisle, the second vice president of travel, meetings and incentives for Aflac, says, "The city has so much to offer — from food, music and history to museums, unique tours and Southern charm. The people I encountered on the planner's conference trip and the pre-planning visits my team did for our National Sales Convention were all so proud of their city. The pride they displayed made it so inviting for me, so I knew our sales members who qualified for this annual trip would enjoy it."

Carlisle also advises planners to team up with a local DMC and the CVB because "they are the experts of the city and have so much knowledge they can share. Their insight helps you shine when planning an event in New Orleans."

Stuart Ruff-Lyon, CMP, DES, vice president of events and education at Risk Management Society (RIMS), agrees. "There is a certain excitement about conferences in New Orleans. The city is renowned for its extraordinary culinary offerings and is home to some of the country's most popular celebrations." Ruff-Lyon orchestrated the RIMS 53rd Annual Conference & Exhibition in New Orleans, which brings approximately 10,000 to 15,000 attendees each year. He held the opening party at the iconic Mardi Gras World "to give guests the chance to explore New Orleans in a fun way that highlighted the city's rich culture."

New Orleans is one of the popular destinations that meeting planners frequently rotate among cities such as Las Vegas and Orlando. In this issue we cover them all. Check out each one of these award-winning cities that promise to deliver memorable experiences for your next event. Discover the enlightening and informative "Orlando Meeting & Incentive Planner Guide" on page 27. Explore all Las Vegas has to offer in the report on page 62 entitled 'Whatever they want, whenever they want it.' And for even more noteworthy meeting ideas, see page 54 for "Florida — a Made-for-Meetings Paradise."

Harvey Grotsky

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Silversea Previews Major Redesign for Silver Explorer

MIAMI, FL — Silversea's luxury expedition ship Silver Explorer will welcome guests to a stylishly elevated onboard experience starting with her May 20 voyage, sailing from Lisbon to Honfleur. A comprehensive stem-to-stern refurbishment will take place during a nearly three-week dry dock. Plans call for a complete renovation of Silver Explorer's interior decoration.

The ship's overall color scheme will shift to a new palette of blue and beige tones, which will be carried throughout the ship with the installation of new carpets and wall treatments in the corridors, staircases and all public spaces. The Observation Lounge, Panorama Lounge and Connoisseur's Corner will be updated with all-new furniture. The restaurant's buffet counters, ceiling and walls will get a makeover, and the furniture will be refashioned with



The Silver Explorer.

new upholstery. The theater's bar will be completely redesigned and its banquette seats refreshed with new upholstery.

The ship's all-suite accommodations will be completely renovated with new carpets, wall treatments, curtains and furniture including mattresses, headboards, wardrobes, bedside tables, vanity desks,

sofa beds, armchairs, flat-screen TVs and lighting fixtures. The eight Expedition Suites on Decks 3 and 4 will be converted into 16 Vista and View Suites.

The remodeled Silver Explorer will accommodate 144 guests in all-inclusive luxury as she sails to the world's most remote destinations. www.silversea.com

Hilton Unveils New Hotel in the Heart of Norfolk's Naval Hub

NORFOLK, VA and MCLEAN, VA — Doors have opened to Norfolk's highly anticipated Hilton Norfolk The Main in the center of the coastal Virginia destination. With unparalleled conference space and four sophisticated restaurants, Hilton's arrival is redefining meeting and gathering spaces in the region, cementing the hotel's status as a destination in its own right.

Standing 21 stories tall, Hilton Norfolk The Main joins downtown Norfolk's skyline of modern and historic buildings. With a glass curtain wall, Hilton Norfolk The Main features a 100-foot-tall ground floor atrium, seamlessly blending Norfolk's metropolitan core with a bright and contemporary interior. From the atrium, guests can explore everything the property has to offer including 300 upscale guest rooms, four signature dining experiences, as well as The Exchange, Norfolk's largest convention and meeting space.

The Exchange at Hilton Norfolk The Main boasts 50,000 sf of high-tech, high-design meeting space, and features 39 different meeting rooms. The hotel also includes an innovative collaboration room, a tiered meeting room, two boardrooms, as well as state-of-the-art technology from audio-visual equipment to soundproof rooms. The hotel also houses the largest hotel ballroom in Virginia with 18,500 sf of space and the ability to accommodate 2,200 seated guests. With the magnitude of space between The Exchange and Hilton Norfolk The Main's ballroom, the city's function offerings have multiplied, furthering Norfolk as a destination for both business and leisure. www.hilton.com



Hilton Norfolk The Main.

Wyndham Hotel Group's Geoff Ballotti Named U.S. Travel National Chair

WASHINGTON, DC — The U.S. Travel Association announced Geoff Ballotti, president and CEO of Wyndham Hotel Group, as its new national chair. He was elected in a member-wide vote. Ballotti succeeds Travel Oregon CEO Todd Davidson.

"We are thrilled to welcome Geoff as our new chair," said U.S. Travel Association President and CEO Roger Dow. "Who better to help us emphasize the tremendous power of travel in our lives and the U.S. economy than someone whose professional life is all about hospitality? Geoff's experience and expertise will help us continue to elevate our message to the highest levels of government leadership, and advocate for policies that keep America an attractive, welcoming destination for travelers around the world."

As national chair of U.S. Travel, Ballotti will guide the board and association's efforts to: increase travel to and within the United States; aggressively highlight the role of the U.S. travel industry in driving increased economic growth and opportunity; and advocate for policies that secure and facilitate travel, keeping the U.S. "open for business."

"Travel makes us culturally richer, while simultaneously fueling both the U.S. economy and economies around the world," Ballotti said. "Together we'll continue to drive an agenda that supports connectivity — not isolationism — and encourages safe and secure travel to and throughout the United States." www.ustravel.org



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New Oceanfront Venue Opens at The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa



The Grand Ocean Terrace at The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa.

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, SC — The Grand Ocean Terrace, the final piece of The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa's \$40 million renovation, is elevated above beach level and boasts more than 5,000 sf of space comfortably hosting up to 400 guests. Glass walls slide open to a full-length, covered balcony overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, while the interior boasts all-season climate comfort amid a chic coastal design. The adjacent stone patio with fireplace overlooks an expansive beachfront deck.

General Manager Tim Freisen, commented, "Though we recently completed a \$32 million renovation, the opening of The Grand Ocean Terrace is the next evolution in our world-class property. The island's newest venue not only stands to benefit The Westin, but also enhance Hilton Head's status among high-end planners throughout the nation. We are delighted to contribute to the island's notoriety and even more excited that we get to work with so many talented local artisans. This space is more than a venue — it's a game changer." To view the Grand Ocean Terrace in 360 degrees, visit <https://roundme.com/tour/78076/>. www.westinhiltonheadisland.com

Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort Completes \$5 Million Meeting Space Redesign

LAKE BUENA VISTA, FL — The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort has completed a \$5 million renovation of its 329,000 sf of meeting space, refreshing every meeting room at both the Swan and Dolphin resorts. The renovation included new technology and updating the carpeting and painting the meeting spaces.

The meeting space refresh is part of the resort's multiphase, multiyear \$140 million redesign project. The project also includes the transformation of all 2,267 guest rooms at the resort and the lobby in the Dolphin resort. In 2015, the Swan guest rooms were completed, and the Dolphin Resort guest rooms and lobby are scheduled for completion in fall of 2017. The new lobby will be a sleek contemporary space featuring new dining and beverage options including a bar and lounge. www.swandolphin.com

Hilton Los Angeles/Universal City Saves Water with Revolutionary Xeros Laundry System

LOS ANGELES, CA — The Hilton Los Angeles/Universal City announced that it has saved more than 2 million gallons annually by installing Xeros' bead-based laundry system. The laundry system is an addition to the hotel's growing sustainability features, including being certified Gold in Green Seal's stringent GS-33 certification standard for lodging properties. The hotel installed the Xeros polymer bead-based washing system in October 2014 that replaces hot water with stain-absorbing polymer beads, which reduce the amount of water used in each load by 80 percent. The hotel has seen an 83 percent reduction in total water consumption and a 100 percent reduction in hot water consumption. Using the system also decreases the carbon footprint and chemicals associated with traditional washing systems, along with ensuring lower utility bills (3 Xeros machines result in savings of \$6,600/month).

"Installing this system not only helps us conserve water and save money, it allows us to establish a positive response to saving water in this time of drought," said Mark Davis, general manager of the hotel.

To view an infographic of the Hilton Los Angeles/Universal City's green initiatives, visit <http://bit.ly/2IPC45u>.



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1-5 At the Atlantic City Convention Center April 6, Meet AC and Caesars Entertainment hosted a special event to commemorate the second annual Global Meetings Industry Day. They joined forces with the advocacy coalition Meetings Mean Business and meetings industry organizations worldwide to showcase the real impact that business meetings, conferences, conventions, incentive travel, trade shows and exhibitions have on people, businesses and communities. **6,7** At the IACC America's Connect in Southern California at the UCLA Meyer & Renee Luskin Conference Center, awards were presented in several categories. **6** The Global Distinguished Service Award was presented by IACC President Alex Cabanas to TJ Fimmano (c), general manager at Dolce Hotels and Resorts, in recognition of his many years of leadership and extraordinary service to IACC. Karen Fimmano is at TJ's side. **7** The IACC Pyramid Award, established in 2000 to recognize members who show a true and long-lasting commitment to IACC education, was presented to Cindy Novotny, managing partner at Master Connection Associates, by IACC V.P. Sean Anderson.

You see a colleague booking the same property meeting after meeting. He says this particular resort is absolutely the best destination for each of these meetings, and that it always provides the best value for the company. The hotel appreciates his business and rewards him with a lot of points — ultimately enough so that he and his family get a sweet weeklong vacation out of it.

Is this unethical? Is there something you should do about it?

Planners, perhaps especially those in the highly regulated and highly scrutinized insurance and financial industries, are likely to face multiple ethical dilemmas as they go through their careers, and at some point to see questionable ethics exhibited by colleagues, managers or even C-suite executives.

How a planner handles these situations, and how unwavering his or her own moral compass is, makes all the

“Also be honest with yourself as well as with the sponsor of the FAM or site inspection. Is this a destination you will use? If so, is it a property you would consider?”

Wayne W. Robinson, CMP, CMM
Assistant Vice President
FM Global, Johnston, RI

Unethical or Acceptable?

‘If it feels even a little uncomfortable, you already have your answer’

By Christine Loomis



difference. We asked a number of planners and industry insiders what they think. Here's what they said.

Steve Bova, executive director of FICP, the membership organization for financial and insurance conference planners, puts it this way: “The issue is not the potential ethical pitfalls that we face, as everyone faces a variety of challenges, pitfalls or temptations every day. It's more a question of how one chooses to respond or not respond that matters. At the end of the day, we are all accountable for the choices we make through our behaviors and actions.”

Higher Scrutiny and Expectations

Bova adds that meeting professionals have ethics to consider on more than one front. “They have their company's business ethics to be mindful of, as well as their personal reputations and the expectations of those who work in the meetings and events profession,” he says. “Table stakes include being professional, being honest and truthful, and using good judgment — not some of the time or most of the time but all of the time. Every one of us is constantly being evaluated on our behavior and the outcomes of the actions and reactions our behav-

iors cause. Meeting professionals in the financial and insurance arena are under perhaps more scrutiny because of the nature of what their companies do, serving as fiduciaries and stewards of other peoples' money.”

Bova notes that companies in these industries also “need to be cautious about the optics created by the meetings and events they produce and must be prepared to justify the business rationale for every element of each meeting.”

Wayne W. Robinson, CMP, CMM, assistant vice president with Rhode Island-based FM Global, agrees, pointing out

that there is often a perception problem rather than a true ethical problem related to meetings in the insurance and financial arenas.

“We have so many safeguards in place both internally and externally that I don't think it's as much of an ethical issue as it is an issue of perception,” he says. “Both publicly and privately held companies in the insurance and financial space still battle over the issue of perception when it comes to some incentive-based meetings as well as business meetings in general. I think we are charged with exceeding expectations and staying on the

cusps of new and different while being very cautious to take into consideration world events and perception of spend at the same time. Not easy.”

Choosing Between Right and Right

When it comes to ethical behavior, however, Bova believes there are no gray areas. “Either you are or you aren't. You aren't kinda-sorta ethical, or mostly ethical but with a few lapses. As humans,” he says, “we have a sense of what's right and wrong by the time we are eight years old. If we knew the difference between right and wrong when we were eight, we

certainly know when we are crossing the lines as adults. The trouble comes when there is no right vs. wrong and people need to choose between right and right.”

Bova recommends the book *Defining Moments: When Managers Must Choose between Right and Right* (Harvard Business Review Press, 1997) by Joseph L. Badaracco Jr.

“Consider this scenario,” he says. “You're standing in front of a burning building. You realize that you can run to one part of the building and save a single child, or you can run to another part and save three children. In neither case is

there any risk to you. But there is no way to save everyone. Now consider if one of those children is your son or daughter. This may not be an ethical dilemma, but I bring it up to illustrate that how we respond every day is not always a matter of right versus wrong, or what is ethically right. It's not always that easy."

Of course, most of the decisions we make in our everyday work lives do not involve life and death. But Bova's point is a valid one: Our challenges, and our responses to them, may not always be so straightforward.

Comp Site Visits and FAMs

Most planners agree that complimentary site visits and FAMs play a crucial role in planners being able to make accurate decisions about properties and destinations on behalf of their company or clients. But these trips do pose ethical questions if planners are not attending them for the right reasons.

"We have to be vigilant when it comes to the standard FAM trips and gifts," says Robinson. "We are all beholden to a code of conduct that defines ethical behavior within our companies. Even though it's imperative that we stay on top of current destinations and experiences, we have to always ask ourselves, 'Is this in the best interest of my company regardless of the opportunities that present themselves?' Not always black and white, as the saying goes."

Robinson says if planners are unsure whether it's okay to accept a comp trip

or attend a FAM, or under what circumstances they can do so, they should ask their boss. "Don't assume just because we plan meetings and events for a living that it's automatically acceptable without an explanation," he notes. "Also be honest with yourself as well as with the sponsor of the FAM or site inspection. Is this a destination you will use? If so, is it a property you would consider?"

"Remember the purpose of FAMs and comped site inspections is to generate business for the destination/resort. It's not just for planners to have a good time. This could be an opportunity for potential business for your hospitality partners elsewhere if we have that honest conversation up front," he says.

One Planner's Perspective

Chip L. (not his real name), a meeting planner with a global insurance company, says FAMs and sites are important, but that remaining impartial and "uninfluenced" when it comes to them is critical. "With 20 plus years in the industry, I feel it is very important to know if a potential property and destination will be a good choice for your event. In this respect, FAMs and sites are crucial. As your company's planner, you must speak with knowledge and experience when advising senior management and decision-makers. You represent that company, and how you present yourself and what you 'take' and take advantage of weighs heavy in the industry. There is a tremendous push and pull between hoteliers and planners," he notes.

"Hoteliers want your business; you represent revenue and partnership to them. This can put you in a very powerful position in reaping the benefits and kindness of hoteliers and venues. However, you also represent integrity and, in my mind, morality. You should be conducting yourself in a professional

manner at all times and not be taking advantage of a hotelier's or venue's hospitality. The whole point of a FAM," he says, "is to familiarize yourself with a property

and/or location. If you are continually going on FAM trips to the same location or to a destination you know your company is not going to approve, you are taking advantage."

In addition to going only on FAMs and site visits that are truly appropriate for your work and your company, Chip says planners can put transparency and hard work front and center when they go on these trips.

"When I'm looking at a possible venue to book. I try to remain transparent with all the hotels. When they ask what are the 'hot buttons,' I respond in the voice of my company, not in a way that would benefit me personally," he says. "And I try to maximize my time when traveling to a destination. I'll plan to see more than one property a day. I don't think you need to spend the night at each hotel to know a hotel. It's like being in an ice cream store; there are many flavors to choose from and it's nice to take a little taste and narrow down your choices."

He tries to stay and eat only at properties he knows his company is likely to contract with. "I do not ask for a comp night but rather for the best rate available. This is fair. And I never site over a weekend if at all possible, as this most certainly will be seen as taking advantage. Plus," he points out, "you need to respect the sales staff's time as well. They will not appreciate having to site over a weekend. Most companies I have worked for would not allow this conduct as it's likely to be misconstrued."

Not for Personal Benefit

To his fellow planners Chip says, "There are many people out there who want your revenue. Do not become easily influenced by 'golden dangling carrots.' Remember, you are representing a company; this is not for your personal benefit. Be respectful and honest in your negotiations."

Bova echoes many of the same beliefs. "On the one hand, the job of a meetings professional is to know the various types of properties and venues that have the potential of serving a purpose for their company in the future. Sometimes," he says, "this means experiencing the

When in Doubt

In addition to material specific to membership, FICP's Standards of Excellence and Professional Conduct has points all meeting planners should honor:

Membership/Affiliation: I will maintain eligibility by abiding by criteria for membership or hospitality partner affiliation. All information provided to FICP must be accurate and updated if changes in employment or other changes make the information inaccurate.

Honor: I will conduct myself with integrity, respect, honesty and credibility. I will do what is right and truthful even when there is great pressure to do otherwise. This includes, for example, not knowingly or recklessly making false or misleading statements about clients, colleagues and suppliers or their businesses.

Professionalism: I will participate in meetings in accordance with the highest ethical standards of professionalism and personal conduct.

Reputation and Morale: I will seek to build and protect my integrity by avoiding activities that will cause damage to or discredit my organization, the meetings and events industry, or myself.

Diversity/Inclusiveness: I will value diversity and treat people equally regardless of national origin, race, religion, gender, marital status, age, sexual orientation, physical or mental disabilities. I will provide and foster meetings and events that create an inclusive atmosphere that encourages and values diverse perspectives and views, while showing mutual respect. — CL

product. There is an added benefit when a personal relationship is developed between the planner and hospitality provider. On the other hand, it is not considered ethical for a meeting professional to attend a FAM or site inspection if they have no intention of booking a meeting at the property or with the company, or if the kind of business they represent does not fit. Additionally, if attending for business purposes only, I question the need to bring spouses or significant others. If it feels even a little uncomfortable," he concludes, "you already have your answer."

Hotel Points and Airline Upgrades

What of our example at the start of this article? Meeting planning points offered by hotel groups may be the quintessential double-edged sword. While a strong relationship between hotels and planners can be a benefit when it comes to negotiating contracts, there also can be abuse if planners or others make decisions based on getting more points vs. doing the best for the meeting and the company.

"Meeting planning points are a wonderful way to say thank you for a planner's partnership with a hotel or venue in negotiating a mutually agreeable contract," Chip says. "But they can be abused through the number of points awarded. Points should be a nice gesture, not a 'finance your spring break vacation' thank you." In one case Chip is aware of, an individual continues to influence upper management that a "certain chain/hotel had the best contract, venues, etc., which continues to benefit her person-

ally" — an illustration of why there must be checks and balances on both sides, Chip says. "There should always be more than one person checking a contract and making sure the company is seeing it in the best light."

Some would argue the morality of accepting points in exchange for doing one's job — especially if those points are used for personal reasons and do not benefit the company.

Airline upgrades are another area of potential abuse. "A boss," Chip notes, "is typically responsible for negotiating contracts with certain airlines. The airlines, as part of the contract, offer status upgrades for frequent travelers within the company, and that boss is in charge of which employees receive these." Abuses occur when favoritism influences who gets the upgrades — or the boss takes the advantage for him or herself.

Reporting Abuse

Deciding what to do when such situations arise is yet another ethical dilemma for planners and also a decision that could affect their livelihood and ability to remain employed. Chip's company has an ethics hotline, which allows employees to remain anonymous in reporting questionable dealings. In addition, most companies have a Code of Ethics statement that outlines standards of conduct and practices where there may be a risk of improper activities.

Robinson cautions planners to look at each issue on a case-by-case basis. "No question it needs to be addressed," he says, "however, we as planners may not

be in a position to address it, depending on the person in question. For example, it's perfectly fine to pull a colleague to the side, but it may not be appropriate to approach someone in a position of leadership within your company. Again, this is a perfect opportunity to ask for guidance from your manager. Nobody expects us to have all the answers."

He also recommends "finding a tenured mentor within our industry on the planner side. I guarantee you they've either faced the same or similar challenges or they may know someone who can provide guidance or at the very least become a resource for you. Remember: It's an honor when someone asks for your help."

On the other side of the equation, Bova says, "Maybe younger planners can teach some long-timers a thing or two because they have not been exposed to some of the temptations that arise."

In the end, when faced with having to choose how to act or respond to a temptation, planners must ask themselves if a particular action is worth it.

"I have seen a number of times when very respected people with long and distinguished careers exit in a very bad way with tarnished reputations because they made one ethical breach or poor decision," Bova says. "One can spend an entire career building a brand and a lifetime of work can be diminished by one wrong act. It's a shame, because at the end of the day all we have is our reputation. Is it really worth it to cross the line?"

"If you have a problem deciding," he says, "ask an eight-year-old!" **I&FMM**

"Meeting professionals in the financial and insurance arena are under perhaps more scrutiny because of the nature of what their companies do, serving as fiduciaries and stewards of other peoples' money."



Steve Bova

Executive Director
Financial & Insurance Conference Planners
Chicago, IL

Conference Center Trends

Evolving to Meet Expanding Needs and Expectations

By Sophia Bennett

It's the stuff of a planner's nightmares: Maryellen Blette, director of business development for events by Travel and Transport & Ultramar, had a financial services client call and ask her to pull together a 50-person meeting — in seven days. Her first call after that went to a corporate hotel and a conference center.

"Both of them came back with relatively similar pricing, but with the conference center, there was no work involved on my part," she says. "I know what would have happened with the hotel — I would've had to provide detailed specifications for everything I needed. While I had to do some of that with the conference center, it was so much easier because this is what they do."

"Seven days later the client had a great meeting, everything was perfect, and I looked like a star," Blette says.

That's one circumstance where a conference center offered a big advantage over other types of venues. There are many other occasions when they can shine. These smaller, meetings-focused venues have multiple tools and qualities that make meetings more affordable, educational, entertaining and memorable for firms in the financial and insurance sectors. Companies looking to create an experience as well as an event for their staff or partners will find conference centers offer just what they need.

Design and Configuration

Conference centers are distin-

guished by their focus on meetings above all else. "More than 50 percent of their business must be derived from meetings," says Mark Cooper, CEO of IACC, a nonprofit that promotes, supports and sets quality standards for conference centers across the globe. "Since they're smaller properties that concentrate on meetings and events, they're all focused on creating great conference experiences. Meeting planners can be sure they get the best facilities, service and customer approach that they could possibly hope for."

One thing that makes conference centers different is their design and configuration. To be IACC-certified,



Conference attendees network and get business done in the Magnolia Room at the IACC-certified Rizzo Conference Center. The historic DuBose House on the property has private dining rooms.



meeting spaces must include features such as natural lighting, good acoustics and hard walls between meeting rooms.

Another benefit of conference centers is the number of breakout rooms, says Julie Berry, director of sales and marketing for Eaglewood Resort & Spa — which features IACC-certified

meeting space — in Itasca, Illinois. "If you're showing videos or doing role-playing, there's lots of private space." They're also dedicated to creating a nurturing learning environment. The center has a no-noise policy that prohibits groups from presenting loud programs, especially if they're located next

to meetings that need a quiet place for people to focus.

"Our meeting and function space really was put together in a way where there's great flow and productivity for meetings," says Jeannene Glenn, interim director of sales and marketing at Chaminade Resort & Spa in Santa

Cruz, California. “Our rooms are all in the same area, so you don’t lose time with groups going to breakouts in other sections.”

“Conference centers provide some additional privacy in the sense that there isn’t the traditional foot traffic through property,” says Nancy Lindemer, director of sales and marketing for the IACC-certified Rizzo Conference Center in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. “There’s also an environment where people can spend quality time together. (Companies) aren’t going to lose them to the variety of distractions that are around a hotel. It keeps them really focused on the learning and agenda at hand.”

Looking to the future, Cooper expects flexibility and character will be at the top of the priority list for conference centers doing renovations. “No one wants to go to a boring venue and be in an uninspiring, dated space,” he says. “Everyone wants to be in a space that looks more like an art gallery. They want to have open spaces and meeting venues that help people have one-to-one discussions and network. They want to have spaces outside the meeting where you can go off and do business. There are a lot of meeting venues that don’t lend themselves to that, but



“Everyone wants to be in a space that looks more like an art gallery. ...Conference centers are thinking about design. We’re developing more inspiring meeting spaces.”

Mark Cooper, CEO
IACC, Chicago, IL

conference centers are thinking about design. We’re developing more inspiring meeting spaces.”

One trend Berry sees are more lactation rooms. “Moms are in the work force, and these companies are making it comfortable for them to come back to work,” she says. Conference centers are responding to that need by converting breakout rooms or the old private phone booths to clean, comfortable spaces for new moms.

Personalized Attention

Conference centers’ smaller size and laser-like focus on meetings means the staff can be more attentive to customer needs. “At Chaminade, every group has a dedicated conference planner from the time a contract is signed,” says Glenn. “The planner is their point of contact to help with the meeting, but they also help to coordinate any offsite events and teambuilding. We’re trying to take that from the meeting planner so they can focus on the content and not have to worry about anything from a planning standpoint.”

Berry says her staff spends a lot of time understanding the profile of each group, then delivering an experience that’s customized to their needs. “Some of the strong feedback we get is that the staff was really in touch with what the group needed.”

The customer service at the Eaglewood Resort & Spa is one of the things that’s most impressed Leah Miller who works in event planning at Aon, a multinational corporation that provides risk management, insurance and reinsurance brokerage,

and human resources and outsourcing solutions. The company has hosted two three-day meetings for top-tier company leaders at the facility and plans to do two more in the future. “Their staff does such a great job of knowing how to deal with high-level meetings like that,” Miller says. “They aren’t going in and out of the room and making a lot of noise.”

“We’ve worked with Eaglewood for many years, and we renewed our partnership with them last year,” she continues. “I feel like they’ve made a big effort to come up to speed with what we need. The sales team and the onsite team have stepped up their game to provide top service for us. They’ve made sure our experience is what we’re expecting rather than just dialing it in.” Miller also appreciates the room layout at Eaglewood — the floor-to-ceiling windows make all-day meetings feel more manageable to attendees, she says — and the variety of eating options, from quick and casual to more formal.

Lindemer recommends that planners talk early and often with their contact at the conference center about the group’s needs and personality. “I want to know what’s going to be important to a group to feel like they have the comforts of home,” she says. “Whether it’s special foods or amenities in the rooms, work with your partnering conference center to bring that to life. Talk about the personality of the group, tied in with the goals they’re looking to achieve while they’re here. That’s important for us to know because we can bring that through in our service elements as well as our food and beverage presentation.”

Budgeting Benefits

One of the biggest benefits of conference centers is their ability to offer complete meeting packages. CMPs, as they’re known, bundle all of the expenses associated with a meeting — sleeping room, meeting space, meals and breaks, and more — into one fixed price per person.

“What’s nice about working with a conference center like Eaglewood is there’s not a lot of hidden costs,” Miller says. “You’re AV is included, your breaks are included, everything is included in that one price. Sometimes when you’re working with a hotel you’re dealing with a lot of individual pricing, and that can inflate your budget far beyond what you were originally planning.”

Says Berry, “Having one price makes budgeting so much easier for meeting planners and their procurement people. It also takes less time, so instead of picking menus, the planner can focus on their agenda.”

For planners who might not have

“Both of them (corporate hotel and conference center) came back with relatively similar pricing, but with the conference center, there was no work involved on my part.”

Maryellen Blette, Director of Business Development for Events
Travel and Transport & Ultramar, New York, NY

used a conference center before, Berry recommends taking a close look at what’s included in CMP packages, and whether all of the elements must be in there. It’s possible certain groups don’t need some features and can have them removed, which will lower the price.

Amenities

Many conference centers also have amenities planners won’t find at other types of venues. Eaglewood has its own spa, fitness center, bowling alley, bocce ball and tennis courts, golf course, even snowshoeing and cross-country skiing in the winter.

“It’s important for some groups not to lose people during their meeting, but it’s also important for them to feel like



The high ropes challenge course at Chaminade Resort & Spa.

they’re getting off-property,” says Berry. Providing a range of entertainment options helps with that.

Chaminade Resort & Spa, featuring an IACC-approved conference center, is set on 300 partially wooded acres that overlook Monterey Bay. For groups looking for outdoor teambuilding activities, there are hiking trails, a high

ropes challenge course and a geocaching course. The facility also boasts an executive fitness center with a lounge and retail shop, full-service spa, outdoor heated pool with a sauna and whirlpool, and tennis and volleyball courts.

With its urban setting, Rizzo Conference Center gives guests good access to Chapel Hill’s restaurants and attractions. But those who choose to stay onsite have plenty to do. They can swim in the infinity lap pool, work out in the fitness center, sit around the outdoor firepit, have a drink at the UNC-themed sports bar, or just enjoy the views from the 30-acre hilltop campus.

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Technology

As technology becomes more in-

tegral to meetings, it’s also becoming a bigger part of the package offered by conference centers. “We continue to invest in technology and upgrades, particularly to our internet access and bandwidth,” Glenn says. “We do a lot of meetings for tech companies, so it’s important that we stay up-to-date and can meet the needs of those companies.”

In a recent survey that included a number of conference centers, IACC found that 89 percent of venues offer wireless internet services to guests free of charge. Many have their own onsite AV services to assist meeting planners, although Cooper finds that many meeting planners and participants prefer to bring their own technology. “We’ve had a lot of meeting technology that’s come into the industry,” he says. “We’ve seen meeting apps come of age and audience participation coming in really cool ways. As tech becomes a lot more mobile, the delegates are bringing their technology with them with their iPads.”



Outdoor dining at Eaglewood Resort & Spa, which features IACC-certified conference space.



Ballroom foyers at Ojai Valley Inn & Spa are warmed by fireplaces.

can offer it before you commit to it.” The last thing planners want, he points out, is for IT problems to distract attendees or interfere with their ability to learn.

Parting Advice

Blette encourages meeting planners to remember conference centers for overnight meetings, not just one-day gatherings. “Our natural way of doing things makes us point to hotels immediately if we hear ‘sleeping rooms,’” she says. “We may look at conference centers only for day meetings. My suggestion would be not to forget them when we have sleeping rooms included, because they do a great job.”

New and Noteworthy

The Rizzo Conference Center recently underwent a \$42 million renovation. The venue now has 183 guest rooms and 30,000 sf of meeting space that includes 43 breakout spaces and three amphitheaters. Sleeping rooms have new amenities such as showers with glass doors and more data ports. A 25,000-sf courtyard has an infinity lap pool, deck and firepit with soft seating. The expanded fitness center received brand new equipment. An onsite sports bar was renovated with a UNC-Chapel Hill theme, complete with a trophy from the school’s past Peach Bowl win.

Chaminade Resort & Spa did a complete guest room renovation valued at nearly \$8 million in 2016. The décor reflects the resort’s desire to create a

thoughtful, creative place for companies to gather, says Glenn. Each headboard has an abacus, and the room number on each guest room door is created by large dominos instead of numerals. Yard sticks serve as coat hangers, and the artwork includes reproductions of old photos showing the famous Santa Cruz boardwalk. The light fixtures have multiple data ports to accommodate a variety of devices.

“We’ve worked with Eaglewood for many years. ...The sales team and the onsite team have stepped up their game to provide top service for us.”

Leah Miller, Event Planning
Aon, Chicago, IL

Eaglewood Resort & Spa completed a \$7.5 million renovation of its main facilities in 2015, followed by a facelift of the spa in 2016. Renovated rooms have new beds and carpeting, full-length mirrors, and light fixtures with multiple data ports. The resort also renovated the fitness center, added a “grab-and-go market,” refurbished the bowling alley and resurfaced balconies and patios.

The spa now contains what director of sales and marketing Julie Berry calls “the Rolls-Royce of pedicure chairs.” Other updates to the spa include a new water features and updated carpeting, wallpaper and upholstery.

The Spanish colonial-inspired Ojai Valley Inn & Spa, located on 220 acres

an hour and a half north of Los Angeles, offers a tranquil, distraction-free option for business-focused meetings or incentives. The AAA Five Diamond “retreat within a resort” boasts a broad menu of meeting and event venues to keep attendee engagement and interest high, from the elegant Hacienda and Anacapa ballrooms (6,000 sf and 4,800 sf respectively) — whose foyers are warmed by fireplaces — to outside terraces and courtyards with views of the Topa Topa Mountains. For smaller gatherings, there are a variety of intimate rooms and the 3,600-sf Shangri-La Pavilion, which overlooks the Ojai Valley.

Two other inspiring venues are the Big Red Barn — complete with hayloft and saloon — for Western themes that can include bull riding and barbecues; and Casa Elar, a 10,000-sf private estate on the property that is ideal for an opening reception for 200 or small to mid-sized group of 120 for dining. The estate also has a one-acre event lawn.

Through its partnership with Destination 360, Ojai offers customized meeting and incentive itineraries,

which can include everything from welcome receptions to tours and activities, dine-arounds, CSR, final night dinners and more.

Alternatives to the traditional meeting room can work to facilitate business in different and sometimes more effective ways. Ojai’s unique group programs that keep engagement going strong include a ropes course, custom aromatherapy classes, guacamole and salsa challenge, interactive cooking classes, golf tournaments and executive golf challenges, scavenger hunts and offsite options such as Reagan Presidential Library events — including dining under Air Force One — and many more inspiring possibilities.

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Aflac's Heidi Carlisle (c) and her team on the 50-yard line at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome.

New Orleans

By Maura Keller



Credits: Aflac

Making the Most of Meetings in the Big Easy

With a rich history, exceptional entertainment, colorful attractions and festivals, extraordinary dining and abundant meeting space, New Orleans is the place for great meetings and events.

Always a popular destination, New Orleans welcomed a record-breaking 10.45 million visitors in 2016 — the highest since 2004 and an increase of 6.9 percent compared to 2015.

Stuart Ruff-Lyon, CMP, DES, vice president of events and education at the New York City-based Risk Management Society (RIMS), orchestrated the RIMS 53rd Annual Conference & Exhibition in New Orleans. Hosting more than 9,900 risk professionals, RIMS offered attendees

from 60 countries more than 160 education sessions and three keynote addresses, to gain strategic insight and practical application to further their organization's risk programs and advance their careers. The annual conference brings approximately 10,000 to 15,000 attendees and continues to grow each year.

"With nearly 400 exhibiting companies, the New Orleans Ernest J. Morial Convention Center's exhibit hall offered attendees new solutions and partners," Ruff-Lyon says. "There is a certain excitement about conferences in New Orleans. The city is renowned for its extraordinary culinary offerings and is home to some of the country's most popular celebrations.

Because of its popularity as a tourist

destination, hotel accommodations are plentiful and are not only within close proximity to the convention center but they are also in the heart of the action."

At the time of RIMS' 2015 Annual Conference & Exhibition, the Jazz Fest and the Zurich Classic golf tournament were both in full swing. According to Ruff-Lyon, the RIMS events team focused on developing a solid content component, and used world-class speakers to address the most current and thought-provoking challenges facing risk professionals.

"Additionally, we worked to energize our networking events, capturing risk professionals' undivided attention," Ruff-Lyon says. "We held our opening

party at the iconic Mardi Gras World to give guests the chance to explore New Orleans in a fun way that highlighted the city's rich culture."

Approximately 80 people from Lloyd's of London, known as Lloyd's, also took part in the annual RIMS Conference. Mac Castro, senior events manager of marketing and communications at Lloyd's — the world's specialist insurance market providing insurance services in more than 200 countries and territories — says New Orleans offered interesting cultural options for Lloyd's attendees. Plus, most of the venues were within walking distance of each other, which was highly beneficial.

A Walkable City

Also in attendance at the RIMS Conference was Megan Reeves, senior event manager at Swiss Re Management in Overland Park, Kansas. The Swiss Re Group is a leading wholesale provider of reinsurance, insurance and other insurance-based forms of risk transfer. Reeves says that New Orleans offers so much for attendees in the way of meeting space, entertainment offerings and venue space.

"It's also an extremely walkable city, so no matter where your group is placed, they are always able to walk to their destination or if they don't feel like walking, they are always a quick cab ride or pedicab ride away," Reeves says. "The other extreme benefit to the area is the noteworthy chefs in the area. You are always able to find a great meal. It's really easy to make your attendees happy, and that is something every planner enjoys."

Aflac made their attendees happy by returning to New Orleans for its 2016 National Sales Convention in October. A group of 1,600 attendees gathered in New Orleans from states all across the U.S.

"This event was not the first time Aflac used New Orleans as a destination, but it had been more than 20 years since the company used New Orleans as a destination for our National Sales Convention," says Heidi Carlisle, second vice president of travel, meetings and incen-

tives at Columbus, Georgia-based Aflac. "I attended the Financial and Insurance Conference Planners' educational conference in New Orleans a few years ago and felt it would be a very unique destination for Aflac attendees to experience."

"The city has so much to offer — from food, music and history to museums, unique tours and Southern charm. The people I encountered on the planner's conference trip and the preplanning visits my team did for our National Sales Convention were all so proud of their city. The pride they displayed made it

so inviting for me, so I knew our sales members who qualified for this annual trip would enjoy it."

All along the way Carlisle became more and more excited about the "experience" Aflac could create for their guests in New Orleans.

"Truthfully, we had several people reluctant about attending the event in New Orleans because they did not find the city as appealing as previous destinations — such as Hawaii and cruises," Carlisle says. "However, we had overwhelming success with the event once



Credit: World War II Museum

A conference at the World War II Museum.

attendees arrived and experienced all New Orleans has to offer.”

Embracing New Orleans

As part of their national sales convention, Aflac held a special luncheon for more than 200 guests on the stage at Saenger Theater. In addition, they held a full Mardi Gras-style parade where Aflac’s attendees rode floats and ended at Mardi Gras World and the River City Mansion House, which offered amazing food for a Fat Tuesday party.

“Rockin’ Doopsie played great Zydeco music and really ‘wowed’ our guests,” Carlisle says. “We hosted multiple tours — swamp boats tours, lunch on the Creole Queen, plantation tours and cemetery tours.

“People enjoyed visiting the World War II Museum, Jackson Square, Harrah’s Casino and especially all of the many restaurant options.

“We held our culminating event, an awards gala, on the turf at the New Orleans Mercedes-Benz Superdome — what an evening for our guests to have a gourmet meal on the turf with a fireworks finale.”

Aflac received incredibly positive feedback on the trip, including comments such as: “It was the best annual convention I have been to in 30 years” and “The trip exceeded all expectations.”

Aflac’s guests stayed at the Hilton

New Orleans Riverside, a convention hotel that met Aflac’s needs as a large group.

“It was in a great location with many eating and shopping choices, as well as a casino, nearby,” Carlisle says. “The hotel had a very friendly staff that made our guests feel welcome throughout their stay.”

Favored Culinary Destination

The 2016 NAIFA Career Conference and Annual Meeting hosted about 1,200 attendees for the National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors’ annual professional development meeting for educational



Heidi Carlisle, Second V.P. of Travel, Meetings and Incentives
Aflac, Columbus, GA

“I attended the Financial and Insurance Conference Planners’ educational conference in New Orleans a few years ago and felt it would be a very unique destination for Aflac attendees to experience.”

workshops and main stage speakers, a governance meeting to vote on association business and to elect officers as well as a networking event.

“New Orleans is a great location,” says Diane Ramos, CMP, director of meetings, professional development and education at NAIFA. “We were contracted to be in New Orleans for our 2006 annual conference. After Katrina,

the hotel we were supposed to be in could not hold our meeting as scheduled. We’ve had smaller meetings in New Orleans since Katrina, and everyone has a great time. Sometimes you contract these big meetings years in advance and 2015 was the perfect year for our schedule.”

Ramos says New Orleans offers a culture unlike anywhere else in the U.S. The food, fun, history — there is so much to see, do and eat here. Did I mention the food?” Ramos says. “Diet before you go and plan to eat your way through the city.”

Considered to be one of the top five culinary destinations in North America, New Orleans features plenty of res-

taurants with different price points throughout the various neighborhoods in the city. With the expansion of the streetcar line down Canal Street, the city is very accessible — whether heading uptown or to mid-city.

In addition, New Orleans celebrates a rich cultural heritage that attracts travelers from around the world. The unique melding of Spanish and French architecture throughout the French Quarter and surrounding areas provides visitors with the experience of a smaller old-world European city.

Venues Aplenty

New Orleans will celebrate its 300th birthday in 2018, and the city has never been in better shape to welcome visitors from around the globe, with iconic points of interest and more than 20,000 hotel rooms to choose from. In addition, the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center boasts one of the most robust digital backbones of any facility. In the past few years they have added a 60,000-sf, column-free ball-

room that is contiguous to 1 million sf of exhibit space.

“We offer over 1 million sf of exhibition space all on one level, all under one roof and have 140 meeting rooms, a 60,000-sf and a 30,000-sf ballroom and a 4,000-seat theater,” says Tim Hemphill, vice president of sales and marketing at New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center.

Located next to the iconic French Quarter, the 1,100-room Sheraton New Orleans boasts a AAA Four Diamond rating. The hotel is within walking distance of most of the top restaurants and attractions in New Orleans, yet far enough away Bourbon Street for some quiet time.

With 100,000 sf of meeting and event space, the Sheraton New Orleans provides planners with a multitude of options. A meeting space renovation was completed in 2013 and included new Destination Control Elevators.

According to the hotel, the meeting space was laid out with the meeting attendee in mind, as their primary event space is stacked on four main levels, conveniently accessible by both escalators and 10 elevators. The main lobby is the perfect gathering place for guests to meet up.

In addition, Sheraton New Orleans

“We held our opening party at the iconic Mardi Gras World to give guests the chance to explore New Orleans in a fun way that highlighted the city’s rich culture.”

Stuart Ruff-Lyon, CMP, DES, V.P. of Events and Education
Risk Management Society, New York, NY

offers a state-of-the-art Wi-Fi network that can provide multiple configurations of Wi-Fi or hard-wired network(s) with dedicated bandwidth per network, with a detailed report at the conclusion of the event to show actual bandwidth consumption for each network including peak times.

The Hyatt Regency New Orleans features 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space, with more than 80,000 sf of exhibition space. In addition the hotel features two 25,000-sf ballrooms, 70 ver-

satile meeting and banquet rooms, 19 executive level meeting rooms, seven boardrooms — all of which are located adjacent to the Mercedes-Benz Superdome, New Orleans Arena and the new Medical District.

The Ritz-Carlton’s “Meeting of the Senses” program is dedicated to hosting luxury meetings and events that create immersive experiences. Their meeting planners curate unique food and beverage experiences, develop wellness-inspired breaks and personalize itineraries that reflect the environment of each individual hotel and destination.

The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans participates in the program with their “Oyster Butler” and “Crawfish Concierge” events, where attendees learn how to properly shuck oysters and peel the local delicacy, immersing guests in the destination.

In addition, the Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans boasts more than 35,000 sf of total meeting space consisting of 26 unique meeting rooms, one grand ballroom and one junior ballroom, 23 breakout rooms including two boardrooms and outdoor event space, as well as a dedicated event concierge.

The 1,622 room Hilton New Orleans Riverside, located adjacent to the Ernest N. Morial Convention



The second-level Exhibition Center also has been fully renovated utilizing a soothing blue color palette. The refurbished space has been renamed “Churchill,” paying tribute to the Winston Churchill Statue donated to the city in 1977 and located in front of the hotel entrance.

With an increase in popularity of street food and food trucks in New Orleans, the hotel’s culinary team created an innovative way for guests to engage in the food preparation process with interactive cooking stations featuring 13 salsas that are made in-house. Public Belt, the hotel’s popular bar and lounge accommodating up to 85 people, offers live jazz music and craft cocktails inspired by the Storyville madams. They also introduced a hands-on mixology class for groups to craft the city’s signature Sazerac cocktail.

With more than 130,000 sf of available event space, the Hilton New Orleans Riverside also features an indoor connection to more than 75 retailers and restaurants at the Riverwalk Outlet Mall. In addition, the hotel boasts authentic dishes at Drago’s Seafood Restaurant, two outdoor pools and a 100,000-sf health and fitness center with tennis, basketball, and racquetball courts.

Newly reimagined and renovated, the Royal Sonesta New Orleans on Bourbon Street celebrates New Orleans’ classic architecture with wrought iron balconies, gabled windows and a delightful courtyard. The hotel offers 483 newly redesigned guest rooms, as well as several dining and entertainment venues. For meetings and events, the hotel showcases 20 function rooms, with 20,000 sf of meeting space and outdoor venue options.

Nearby, the historic Hotel Monteleone offers a luxurious experience for meetings and events of all sizes. Considered to be one of the most celebrated hotels in the French Quarter, the Hotel Monteleone features more than 24 meeting rooms, ranging in size from a 6,200-sf ballroom to a 270-sf breakout



New Orleans is synonymous with brass bands.



A new linear park for Convention Center Boulevard will include a tree-lined pedestrian plaza, bike lanes, moving walkways, fountains, green walls, water walls and shaded sitting areas.

room. In addition, the hotel hosts popular annual New Orleans events including Tales of the Cocktail and the Tennessee Williams New Orleans Literary Festival.

New Linear Park Coming

Plans for the exciting transformation of Convention Center Boulevard in New Orleans are becoming a reality. The boulevard will connect the bustling Warehouse/Arts District with the historic French Quarter and dramatically transform the guest experience at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center.

The new linear park will be a tree-lined pedestrian plaza with bike lanes, moving walkways, sleek overhangs, fountains, green walls, water walls and shaded sitting areas.

The staff of the convention center is working closely with the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau to identify which events will occur during construction so that accommodations will be made well in advance to avoid disruption.

Two key components of the transformation are a multimodal transportation hub where shuttles will more efficiently move attendees to and from the convention center, and improvements to several roads and intersections within the Warehouse District along the normal shuttle route.

What's New in New Orleans

According to the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau, New Orleans

has plenty to celebrate in new hotels, transportation options, and venues for meeting and events.

Centerplate Catering Company has launched "Creole, of Course," a multisensory, multicourse, historical jazz dinner theater show at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center to commemorate the city's upcoming Tricentennial. "Creole, of Course" was created for locals and visiting groups to learn New Orleans' rich history while experiencing all aspects of its culture.

The New Orleans Steamboat Company has purchased the former Rock Island Casino Sternwheeler Riverboat. The riverboat will undergo a complete renovation before hosting dinners, harbor cruises and private charters on the Mississippi River. The new vessel is licensed to hold 1,000 passengers to begin sailing in New Orleans in late 2017.

The Astor Crowne Plaza – New Orleans French Quarter has unveiled a \$13 million makeover to its 700 rooms, meeting spaces, lobby and more.

The Polo Club Lounge at the Windsor Court hotel has reopened after a summer expansion including the addition of nearly 1,000 sf.

DoubleTree by Hilton New Orleans has unveiled a \$25 million renovation to its guest rooms, lobby, pool and meeting space. The renovation features 367 guest rooms, an updated lobby and 16,000 sf of flexible meeting space overlooking the city.

The Wyndham Garden Hotel has opened in New Orleans East as the first

full-service hotel with a conference center and restaurant to open in New Orleans East since Hurricane Katrina. The hotel is home to 175 rooms with seven suites, a conference center and banquet space for meetings and events hosting up to 140 people and the Bistro Nouveau Restaurant and Lounge.

The Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport announced a new all-time record for the total number of passengers served in 2016. A total of 11,139,421 passengers were served in 2016, representing a 4.4 percent increase over the prior record set in 2015 when the airport exceeded 10 million passengers for the first time in its history.

Final Thoughts

When planning a meeting or event in New Orleans, remember that, depending on the time of year, the airfare to New Orleans can be costly and limited.

"Event professionals need to work closely with the convention visitors bureau to get a full picture of conflicting events that can potentially create challenges for your attendees to travel to the city or stay engaged at your event," Ruff-Lyons says.

Also, Carlisle stresses that meeting planners shouldn't let the stereotype of Bourbon Street make you or your business leaders think that is all New Orleans has to offer your attendees.

"There is so much culture, history and an unlimited number of unique experiences available to explore," Carlisle says. "I also recommend teaming up with a local destination management company and the local convention and visitors bureau — as they are the experts of the city and have so much knowledge they can share. Their insight helps you shine when planning an event in New Orleans. We found the DMC and CVB to be uniquely connected to the city and were able to provide options that truly allowed our guests to enjoy New Orleans in a way like never before. In fact, even the local sales members who attended said they had never experienced the city in the way we were able to showcase it." **I&FMM**



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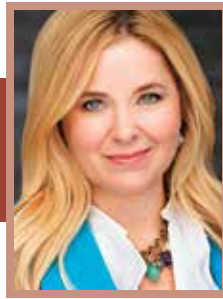
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Crisis Management

By Wendy Keller



10 Tips You Can Use to Get Through a Crisis

Editor's Note: This guest column was adapted from an open letter to the employees of United Airlines published April 11, 2017 by Wendy Keller after a number of incidents involving United Airlines went viral including the video of David Dao, a physician in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, being forcibly dragged off a United plane at Chicago's O'Hare Airport. United and other major carriers have modified some of their policies since the incident, and United Airlines CEO Oscar Munoz said in a statement: "I continue to be disturbed by what happened on this flight, and I deeply apologize to the customer forcibly removed and to all the customers aboard. No one should ever be mistreated this way."

It's safe to say that many of United's employees are experiencing low morale, even if they were not directly involved in the incidents. Wendy Keller knows firsthand about the struggle to overcome adversity and how to turn angst into an angle for success. In 1991, Keller was in a car accident that claimed the lives of her two young children and left her in critical condition. Following months of intense pain and physical therapy, she had an epiphany.

"I started an intense study into how people throughout history handled the bad things that happened to them. I started to see commonalities and patterns. I tested these strategies in my own life, and things started to get better."

It's a terrible feeling when a stranger does something completely wrong and it affects you. You may be feeling shame, shock, guilt, sorrow, anger, embarrassment or rage. Depending on how well your life was (or wasn't) going at the time of the United Airlines incident, you may be feeling depression or even PTSD.

If you feel you are "guilty by association" by dint of the fact that you were an employee at the time of the incident, you may hear extremely negative comments and have a strong urge to defend yourself. Worse, you may internalize the company's troubles and make them your own. You may be worried about whether or not your job will survive the crises.

Remember this: You are not the victim here! You are not powerless. In fact, here are 10 tips you (or anyone) can use to get through a crisis.

Tip No. 1. Allow yourself to feel this.

An emotional response to any crisis is normal. How you respond is a reflection of how you respond to other parts of your life. If you tend to be an angry person, that's how you'll feel now. If you tend to be shame-based, you'll feel ashamed. That's your pattern. Notice when you felt the same way at other times in your life and see if you can detect how you pulled yourself through before, because you certainly did.

Tip No. 2. Accept the hands that are offered.

It may be a hug, a call, an encouraging email from a friend, a shoulder to cry on. Now is not the time to be stoic.

As humans, we live in community with others. Some people (ignorant ones) may be unpleasant to you, but others are standing by ready to love, support, counsel, listen and comfort you through this time. Let them. Open yourself to receive. It is good for you, and it is good for them.

Tip No. 3. Be nice to yourself.

Right now, as you're going through this difficulty, take it easier on yourself than normal. Go to bed a little earlier. Indulge in something you love. Light a scented candle or take the time to set the table nicely. Take an extra long hot shower. Wear outfits that make you feel happy or confident. Spend more time with nice people.

Tip No. 4. Watch for fallout.

When something bad happens, some people decide to change everything they don't like about their lives all at once. While you're in the immediate aftermath of a crisis, you're not thinking so clearly. Now is probably not the time to start a strict diet and exercise routine, to sell the house, to quit your job or to get a divorce. Wait for your emotions to settle down a little. "Act in haste, and you'll repent in leisure."

Tip No. 5. Get professional help if you need it.

There's no shame in taking advantage of wise counsel, whether that's a clinical psychologist, a clergyperson or a life coach. You'd be amazed to know how many successful, famous people use coaches for every aspect of their lives. Talk this through with an unrelated third party.

Continued on page 51

Continued from page 26

Tip No. 6. Give yourself time to heal.

A blow like this can knock the energy right out of you. Even while your conscious mind is helping your kid with math homework or mowing the lawn, your unconscious mind is going to be processing this for a while. The length of time will depend on how you internalize the crisis and how it affects your life. There's no "should have shrugged it off by" date on a life crisis.

Tip No. 7. Find a way to help someone else.

One of the strangest phenomena about humans is that we work well together. Maybe it's that old hunter-gatherer thing still echoing, but even as you are accepting help, find ways to help someone else. Maybe it is encouraging a fellow employee instead of continuing to talk about how bad things are; maybe it is doing a favor for a friend; maybe it is formally volunteering to help the homeless or to become a Big Brother or to just independently clean up trash in an empty lot near your house. When we help others, it releases endorphins — the "feel good" chemicals we all love.

Tip No. 8. Beware of addictions.

Whether it is smoking, painkillers, drugs, drinking or anything else — even OCD-related behaviors — emotional stressors tend to cause us to seek those endorphins "the easy way." Beware, because you could create an increased dependence on such things. Better to take some time to go through this list and do what you can, and in between, spend a few minutes each day sitting in a quiet place and just taking some deep breaths, thinking about only your breath as it comes in and goes out of your lungs. (This is also a lot cheaper than indulging in most addictions!)

Tip No. 9. Learn from this.

Even if you had nothing directly to do with what happened or why, repeatedly ask yourself, "What can I learn from this experience?" Listen for the answers. They'll come softly. If you learn something, then the experience wasn't in vain. It wasn't a 100 percent waste of time, no matter how discouraging or painful it is to live through it. You may even decide to keep a journal and record the answers your heart comes up with when you ask yourself what the lesson is here.

Tip No. 10. Visualize your victory.

Start thinking about how you want the future to go, and

what you'd have to do to make that future a reality. Taking one simple step west will eventually get you to the Pacific Ocean. (In the USA, that is.) Spend some focused time pondering what you'd like as your ideal future. Maybe, to help yourself picture it, cut some pictures out of a magazine or print them from the internet. What do you want your work life to be like? What kind of work do you want to do? What kind of lifestyle do you truly want to live? What kind of people do you want to live with, work with, be friends with? And most important, what kind of person do you need to be to create that wonderful future for yourself? What would have to happen? What can you do to make it happen, and what steps can you take toward that goal?

It isn't about what happens to you, it's what you do next that counts.

Final Thoughts

These 10 steps will move anyone through any crisis, but this time are sent with special love to all United Airlines employees as you collectively suffer the mistakes of a few individuals.

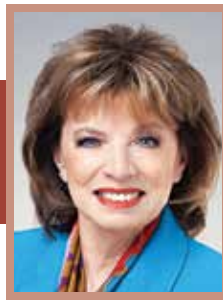
We all have the power to overcome the crises in our lives, and we all are faced with crises multiple times. It isn't about what happens to you, it's what you do next that counts.

I&FMM

Wendy Keller is an award-winning former journalist, a literary agent, author, speaker and book marketing consultant. She is the author of 31 published books under nine pseudonyms and 11 self-published books. Her newest book *The Ultimate Guide to Platform Building* (Entrepreneur Press), explains, "A platform is a large, growing group of people who know, like and trust you and your business. These are the people who want whatever you're selling because it speaks to them and meets their needs. Grow your platform, grow your business." www.wendykeller.com

Building Relationships

By
Gloria
Petersen



How to Shine and Make Connections at Social Business Events

Do you find yourself in an awkward or uncomfortable situation when asked to attend a business holiday party, celebration banquet or networking event? Or, do you see these events as an opportunity to party and let your hair down — so to speak! In either case, always be mindful of maintaining your reputation, and the reputation of the company or organization that you represent. Let's start by identifying the purpose and then defining the appropriate behavior to assure a successful experience.

Meetings, conferences and other business-related social activities are extensions of your business day. They are a necessary part of any organization's growth and should be treated with the same level of professionalism. They are as much about building relationships as they are about content and should not be misused. Keeping this in mind, remember that you are always being observed; you should maintain a professional demeanor at all social functions.

How to Shine at Events

The event soirée offers a wonderful opportunity to meet people outside the usual business environment in a fun and festive way. They bring everyone together and allow different facets of one's personality to shine. Sometimes these get-togethers allow you to reconnect with colleagues that you know but have not seen in a while, or with whom you have only shared e-mail or text dialogues. The delicate task of navigating the half-social, half-professional occasion offers an ideal opportunity to make connections that help your career. It also is a chance to show that you are a well-rounded person with interests other than work.

A badly executed party, however, risks alienating employees, tarnishing the company's reputation and worse yet — costing someone his or her job. Therefore, planning should include behavioral guidelines that are shared with employees. Realize that the responsibilities for the meeting planner and the event attendee are going to vary.

Meeting planners should make it clear from the beginning to everyone involved that they are there to stage a meeting or event. They are working, providing their services to the client (both external and internal customers and/or stakeholders). As a rule, they will not be partaking in the partying going on around them. However, there may be a time where you need to "get this party started" by being

an active participant. If you join in and socialize, stay in control and set the best example, always!

Companies hosting events should be sure to prepare their staff (especially new hires) by making sure everyone has a good understanding of the company's goals, leadership and event purpose. Also, include a segment on preparing their spouse, date or partner. Their behavior and comfort level are important to a successful experience.

Attendees need to carefully plan their activities and be mindful of their behavior at all times. Socializing (or partying) is a great way to create new bonds and expand networks.

These 11 tips will protect reputations for all involved.

- 1 Dress with good taste — always!** Attire should complement all aspects of the event. Evening socials might be a fun time to wear your more glamorous clothing or to display the more creative (fun) side of your personality; however, if what you are wearing is too revealing, you risk making others uncomfortable, being captured for others to share on social media (an embarrassment), or being viewed in a less professional manner when you return to your office.
- 2 Your spouse or date is your date!** Do not cross the relationship line by turning an event party into a controversial reality show or dating game. This is especially true for singles. Wives and husbands are present. Be respectful. Furthermore, what is a normal showing of affection to you may be offensive to others. (Be conservative about how and where you show affection.)
- 3 Protect your reputation.** Your behavior can demonstrate the social skills that will get you promoted or brand you as the social horror story. Worse yet, a poor display of behavior could end up on YouTube or be the topic of discussion in the company lounge.
- 4 Mingle and socialize.** This is your opportunity to meet a wide range of colleagues, vendors and prospects. This is how referrals happen and new doors open. Everyone knows someone, and that is the

foundation of all referrals. People like to refer people whom they know and like.

- 5 Upon arrival, mingle.** Do not cluster with the same group of people. You already know each other. Instead, be a people connector and make sure everyone is having fun! By taking the initiative and making sure that everyone is interacting, you will demonstrate impressive leadership skills and social prowess.
- 6 Keep the conversation positive and confidential.** Avoid controversial topics. Derail a topic (or joke) if it is heading in a damaging or uncomfortable direction. Also, avoid the temptation to disclose confidential information, which is easy to do if your gossip side surfaces and/or you have had too much alcohol. The competition (or the media) could be present in the person of a husband, wife or friend of a guest. Make sure that your conversations are lighthearted and your topics neutral.
- 7 Be discreet with your technology.** Make the people around you your priority; not your cellphone. If you must make or receive a call or text, do so privately. Turn off your cell phone to avoid rude temptations. And, if you plan on taking and posting photos, be sure you have permissions.
- 8 Be selective with your hors d'oeuvres choices.** Select items that make it easy for you to mingle and greet with a handshake. The food you select should be determined by how you are going to eat and work the room. Will you be walking around, standing at a high-top, or sitting at a cocktail table? For example, if you are walking around select only finger food — morsels that can be eaten in one or two bites. If you are standing at a high-top or at a cocktail table, you can select foods that are more challenging (e.g. vegetable dip).
- 9 Pool parties.** Hotel pools provide a refreshing way to close out the day after intense meetings. Not everyone will want to swim or don swimwear. If you choose to enjoy the pool, keep your pool attire selection in good taste. When out of the water, be sure to wear a beach wrap. Furthermore, be careful about splashing water. Chlorinated pool water can damage poolside electronics.

10 Drink alcohol responsibly. It can take more than an hour for your body to process one alcoholic beverage. Always drink alcoholic beverages in moderation. To control your body's alcohol intake, drink a glass of water between each alcoholic beverage — and eat food (never drink on an empty stomach). Stay in control of YOU. If you notice a colleague has had too much alcohol, get assistance in helping get this individual to another area or back to his or her hotel room or to a taxi.

11 Enjoy the music and dance the night away! Music and dance are popular ways to close an event. Respect everyone's dance space and dance partner. Again, it is best to err on the conservative side regarding displaying you and your partner's dance moves.

Make the people
around you your
priority; not your
cell phone.

Remember — It's Your Reputation

It's your reputation and the reputation of the company you represent. A good reputation takes years to build. However, it only takes one negative incident — especially at a social business event — to destroy a professional's stature in the business community with clients and with peers. Professionalism is paramount.

I&FMM

Gloria Petersen, CPP, is the founder and president of Global Protocol Inc. Gloria is an author, trainer and speaker on Professional Presence, Business Etiquette and Protocol. She is a graduate of the Protocol School of Washington and has received numerous certifications. Her four-book series, The Art of Professional Connections and SME training modules represent her 30-year legacy. Learn more at www.GlobalBusinessProtocol.com or email her at gpetersen@globalprotocol.com.

Punctuated by swaying palms, blooming bougainvillea, forests of foliage, the warmth of the sun, the salt of the sea, sugar white beaches, azure blue seas and more, Florida is a made-for-meetings paradise.

Like real estate, meeting success is linked to location, location, location. Kim Prouse, New York City-based Citi assistant vice president and senior event manager, agrees. When planning the international bank's March 2017 annual Global Property CEO Conference for 1,000 institutional investors and CEOs of 150 around-the-world property companies, prime considerations were finding a venue with large meeting space and proximity to the ocean. Answer: The Diplomat Beach Resort in Hollywood Beach, Florida.

Held at this Florida property since 2013, the conference objectives are twofold: offer networking and arrange one-on-one meetings between institutional investors and property company management teams. Prouse elaborates on the success of these matchups: "In 2016 we arranged 4,500 meetings — exceeding our expectations."

Labeled "one of the most memorable, highly anticipated components of the conference," Sunday evening's welcome event The Taste of Miami gives attendees the opportunity to sample signature dishes from the city's best restaurants. Prouse's description: "It's a night when Asian, American, Cuban and Latin American cuisines join to celebrate all that is right about Miami's food scene."

After a \$100 million transformation, such accolades as being named one of Florida's top resorts seems the norm for The Diplomat. Perks of particular appeal to planners include more than 200,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space for 10 to 5,000 attendees, two outdoor pools with poolside dining and cabana

Florida

A Made-for-Meetings Paradise

By Cynthia Dial



rental, six restaurants (including the AAA Four Diamond Diplomat Prime Steakhouse) and 10 all-new culinary concepts led by such celebrity chefs as Geoffrey Zakarian and Michael Scholson.

While Prouse deems The Diplomat's entire event management team "top notch," she describes group rooms coordinator Danielle Williams "exceptional" and adds that because of attendees' positive year-after-year feedback, the CEOs and investors have determined they cannot afford to miss this conference. Consequently, Citi plans to return to The Diplomat and Hollywood Beach for at least the next three years.

Beaches Lure Groups

Also attracted by Florida's Hollywood Beach setting, Karen Yergey Duncan, marketing manager for Fort Washington, Pennsylvania-based Lincoln Investment, explains her company's choice for its President's Club 2016 incentive trip: "We were initially drawn to the Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort because it is a beautiful new property (opened September 2015) and in a great location." Additional advantages include two airports (Miami and Fort Lauderdale) and an abundance of activities for attendees.

Though this AAA Four Diamond resort is luxuriously appointed, the 17-story, 349-room hotel and entertainment complex simultaneously reflects the relaxed, paradisiacal vibe captured in songwriter Jimmy Buffett's eponymous tune "Margaritaville." Perks for the planner include 30,000 sf of flexible function space, an onsite water recreation area with multiple pools and three live entertainment venues.

Destination selection is not a decision taken lightly for this majority family-owned company. Duncan explains: "Successful advisors and their guests look forward to and thoroughly enjoy the annual club events because of the carefully chosen

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort in Orlando.

locations, exciting and inspiring activities and presentation, as well as the opportunity to spend quality time with special colleagues and friends." Described as "a family reunion from across the country," one of the trip's most important events is the welcome reception — License to Chill — which once again served as a gathering place for friends to meet and catch up after possibly not seeing each other in a year.

Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort scored an A+ in the activities column. "Our group is very fond of a good pool and beach, and they make good use of the sun," says Duncan. She elaborates that added attractions include the FlowRider double surfing simulator and the boardwalk's shops and bars along the beach. "Having so many options for outdoor activities just at the hotel made sure everyone had something fun to do."

Explaining that the key objective for this incentive trip is to celebrate the success of Lincoln Investments' advisors and motivate them for the coming year, Duncan mentions how this goal is evaluated. "We measure the success of our trip through surveys, our leadership and personal feedback." Verdict: "It was one of the most positive incentive trips for this group of advisors."

In conclusion, Duncan gives much credit to resort director of sales David Margolis. "The trip was very cost effective for us. It is a balancing act wanting to make sure we have a memorable special event, but within a reasonable budget. We had such a great experience we have actually signed a contract to take our group back in 2019."

Sugar-White Sands Attract

It is a trio of reasons that will bring the May 2017 annual meeting of



Karen Yergey Duncan
Marketing Manager
Lincoln Investment
Fort Washington, PA

approximately 100 to The Henderson, a Salamander Beach & Spa Resort in Destin, Florida, states Kristin Harville, CRCM, CBAP, senior vice president, compliance, BSA officer, for the Anniston, Alabama-based Southern States Bank and meeting planner for the Jack Henry Southern User Group. The objectives: 1. a central location (with respect to attendees' expenditures and travel

"We measure the success of our trip through surveys, our leadership and personal feedback. It was one of the most positive incentive trips for this group of advisors."

time), 2. the property's beachfront location and 3. the resort's age (opened November, 2016).

Harville explains the purpose of the Jack Henry Southern User Group Annual Meeting. "It serves as a yearly resource for financial institutions in seven Southern states that utilize Jack Henry Silverlake as their core processor." Though prime emphasis is placed upon networking, education and training, downtime promises to be complemented by the resort's on-the-water location — a beach setup for one day of the stay, enhanced by two hours of a choice of amenities, such as bicycling or kayaking.

Though Destin began as a small fishing village, today's bustling beach town attracts such celebrity residents as Blake Shelton and Emeril Lagasse. Coastal-inspired, The Henderson is reminiscent of a grand, back-in-the-day seaside manor — complete with steep gable rooflines, striking wooden shingles and a nod to a nautical past. The resort sits along Destin's renowned Gulf Coast upon a white sand beach. Additionally adjacent to a 208-acre environmentally protected state park, this Northwest Florida property offers 170 guest rooms, Gulf-to-table cuisine, an octagonal bar with panoramic water views, an adults-only heated pool, private beach access and 30,000 sf of flexible indoor and outdoor event space (including several ballrooms, plush lawns, expansive pool decks and a rooftop terrace).

Describing The Henderson as easy to work with and more than accommodating, the Southern States representative feels that they really wanted their business and worked hard to get it by providing numerous value-added features, such as free valet parking. "The hotel has a boutique feel to it — not that of a large conference hotel — which additionally appeals to our group," says Harville.



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Breeze Ocean Kitchen,
Eau Palm Beach Resort
& Spa's latest eatery.

Credit: Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa

Orlando Is the Place for Perks

The premise of exclusivity persists throughout Florida. Known for its vast collection of theme parks and attractions, the Orlando-area's Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort offers a bounty of services for meeting planners seeking to reward attendees with over-the-top privileges. Among these amenities: more than 329,000 sf of indoor meeting space and close to 100,000 sf of outdoor space (courtyards and terraces); 2,267 guest rooms; 17 world-class restaurants and lounges; five swimming pools (including a grotto pool, water slide and waterfalls); and proximity to Epcot, Disney's Hollywood Studios, Disney's Animal Kingdom and Magic Kingdom Park (plus the "extended park hours benefit" to Disney's four theme parks).

Five-Star Prestige

In a league of its own, Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa is one of only six new hotels in the nation to be recog-

nized as one of Forbes Travel Guide's 2016 Five Star Hotels. Sitting on seven Atlantic-fronted acres, the resort's commitment to "new-fash-



Kristin Harville, CRCM, CBAP
Senior Vice President, Compliance,
BSA Officer,
Southern States Bank
Anniston, AL

"The hotel (The Henderson) has a boutique feel to it — not that of a large conference hotel — which additionally appeals to our group."

ties as 309 guest rooms "re-envisioned" by designer Jonathan Adler, Eau Club level (private concierge, separate check-in and checkout with champagne, daily pressing service, VIP pool service and access to the club lounge), more than 30,000 sf of meeting and event space (from traditional meeting and ballrooms to poolside cabanas and Eau Spa's "Self-Centered" garden with water features and private courtyard), Forbes Five Star Eau Spa (42,000 sf with 19 treatment rooms), two outdoor oceanfront swimming pools with luxury cabanas, four restaurants and three Hartru clay tennis courts (enhanced by an onsite pro).

Teambuilding and More

Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort, a Northwest Florida resort located in Miramar Beach (near Destin) serves up a bit of everything on its 2,400 lush acres. Among its enticements are 40,000 sf of indoor meeting space, 20,000 sf of outdoor event space, four championship golf courses, beach bonfires (complete with s'mores and a flame thrower) and such teambuilding activities as beach Olympics, standup paddleboard relays on Choctawhatchee Bay, charter boat fishing from Baytowne Marina, night

golf played on the newly renovated Dunes Putting Course and everything from a ropes course to ziplining at Baytowne Adventure Zone. Off-property is the exclusive, made-in-Florida opportunity to swim with dolphins at Gulf World Marine Park, which is located in Panama City Beach.

A trend observed in recent years by the Sandestin team best summates today's meetings scene. More and more groups seek 'destination location' venues — sites that showcase life in the Florida Panhandle, or on the Atlantic coast or elsewhere in the Sunshine State. So, whether it's booking Sandestin's newest outdoor venue, The Overlook, to take advantage of the area's open-air ambience and panoramic view of the Choctawhatchee Bay, taking an Everglades airboat tour or appreciating the state's overall welcoming Southern charm — look no further than Florida.

New and Noteworthy

Recent accolades for Florida's Paradise Coast: No. 1 Best Destination for Luxury Travel, No.1 Small Art Town, America's Best All-Around Beach, one of America's Best Food Cities and consistently named one of the Nation's Best Golf Destinations.

Hotel news on the Naples, Marco Island, Everglades radar is manifold. A new property, Hyatt House, opened in March, 2016, Hilton Marco Island Beach Resort reopened in December 2016, and ringing in the New Year is the rebranding of the Marco Island Marriott as a JW Marriott, which at its January 1, 2017, opening became the first JW Marriott beach resort in the continental U.S.

The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club has completed a full redesign of the resort's 18-hole golf course. The \$9 million project was the collaboration of noted course architect John Sanford and course designer/golfer Jack Nicklaus who has a historical connection to the course. It was on these links that in 1951 at age 11 he broke 40 over nine holes for the first time.



A banquet on the beach at Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club.

Credit: Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club



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**NAPLES
MARCO ISLAND
EVERGLADES**
FLORIDA'S PARADISE COAST

The Naples Grande Beach Resort debuted new enhancements to the Vista Ballroom and Lobby Lounge. The Vista Ballroom received a décor refresh, modern fixtures, updated drapery, plush carpet and modern furniture. The Lobby Lounge and Sprezzi Seating Area features new seating, lighting and a complete bar upgrade. The renovated areas further enhance the property's 83,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space.

Naples Grande Beach Resort also has developed creative meeting packages for corporate groups such as:

- **Summer Camp Meetings.** Groups can embark on a kayaking adventure through the mangroves, decompress during nature walks and sunset yoga, and indulge at the s'mores station.
- **Birdie Breaks.** Includes breakout golf session for groups of all sizes; full 18 holes or just a "Back Nine" Break.
- **Orange Sunset Session.** Outdoor "orange" breakout session, which includes Florida oranges and orange juice, along with a plethora of other orange-inspired items to satisfy any palate.

The curtains opened summer 2016 for the Southwest Florida Performing Arts Center (Bonita Springs) — a 27,000 sf dining and entertainment venue with access to comedy shows, vaudeville, tribute bands and just about any form of entertainment a group desires. Another unusual area venue is NGALA, a wildlife preserve in Naples that can provide fine dining under luxurious canvas tents, complete with wild animals and exotic entertainment.

Everglades Adventure Tours now offers Safari Glamping (customized wilderness camping experiences on deserted island beachfronts), as well as a one-of-a-kind overnight adventure in native Chickee cabins located within Big Cypress National Preserve.

A clay shooting aficionado from the U.K., Colin Burrows, opened Gulf Coast Clays, offering trap and skeet shooting along with a 15-station sporting clay course surrounded by Everglades wilderness. Situated on the site of the

former Port of the Islands Gun Club, it is located between Naples and Everglades City.

Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront installed digital reading boards throughout the hotel, with plans to incorporate these boards in all meeting rooms — an environmentally friendly move designed to reduce the hotel's paper usage.

Unveiled in spring 2016 is Breeze Ocean Kitchen, Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa's latest eatery. Its cuisine "reflects the sun-splashed Palm Beach lifestyle and celebrates the Atlantic's bounteous fruites de Mer" — all with a focus on Floridian



Kim Prouse
Assistant Vice President and
Senior Event Manager
Citi, New York, NY

flavors brought to life by spices, styles and preparations that infuse hints of the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia.

Offering more than 294,000 sf of meeting space and connected to the Palm Beach County Convention Center via a private entrance, Hilton West Palm Beach (opened January 2016) solicited advice from a panel of meeting and event experts to best appeal to this market. Outcomes: a Peppermint Bar (peppermint is known for its properties that help strengthen concentration), with such specialties as peppermint-infused tea, dark chocolate, mints, hot chocolate and aroma spray ensuring attendees remain focused. An additional perk is a menu of glow-in-the-dark lawn games, designed for teambuilding and networking activities that take advantage of Florida's into-the-night amenities and around-the-year warm weather.

Additional Hilton West Palm Beach teambuilding activities best showcase the hotel's creativity. Build-a-Break's ice sculpture challenge gives attendees the opportunity to divide into teams to create their own creations (note: no chainsaws allowed). Beat Building Exercises utilize the talent of music coordinator Adam Lipson and industry standard DJ gear and remix software — allowing attendees to create their own mashups, record their songs live and take home souvenir CDs. Breaking Barriers uses a one-inch-thick wooden board as "a metaphor for the obstacles and barriers that are in the way of achieving goals" that attendees break with their hand or foot under the guidance of a kickboxing instructor, thus breaking through their barriers.

Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort's recently debuted "Sprouting Project" consists of a state-of-the-art aquaponic greenhouse, an expansive organic garden, a collection of beehives and a barrel room — giving attendees a once-a-month opportunity to participate in an authentic farm-to-table experience.

Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin recently completed a \$5 million meeting space rejuvenation of its 329,000 sf of function space — only one part of the resort's multiphase, multi-year \$140 million redesign project.

Orlando's Rosen Plaza offers 3NINE entertainment — a fully loaded venue with AV capabilities, staging, video walls, the industry's most up-to-date lighting and full bars for special events up to 1,500 (when also incorporating the outside pool area). —

Opening April 2017, Universal Orlando Resort's newest ride "Race Through New York Starring Jimmy Fallon" offers a unique after-hours New York area themed event, giving attendees a "Tonight Show" experience best described as "a wild and action-packed race through New York City against Jimmy Fallon himself." **I&FMM**

"Sunday evening's welcome event The Taste of Miami gives attendees the opportunity to sample signature dishes from the city's best restaurants."

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By Maura Keller

For the third consecutive year, Las Vegas set a new all-time record of 42.9 million visitors in 2016 (more than last year's record-setting 42.3 million). Convention visitation in 2016 also welcomed a record number of more than 6.3 million business travelers.

And there is no stopping that forward motion now. For the 23rd consecutive year, Las Vegas was named the country's No. 1 trade show destination according to the *Trade Show News Network* "2016 TSNN Top 250 Trade Shows in the United States" list.

So it was an easy decision when meeting planner Julie Hommowun was charged with finding the best destination for her company's biennial Power of Gallagher meeting, an internal trade show. As a planner for Arthur J. Gallagher & Company, a global sales and marketing company providing risk management services with corporate headquarters in Rolling Meadows, Illinois, Hommowun knew she was on

the fast track to success by selecting Las Vegas as the site for the meeting. In fact, the company held this very important event at the Aria Resort & Casino again this year after hosting it there in 2011 and 2015.

The Power of Gallagher national conference brings together the cream of

"All of the Aria staff are a pleasure to work with. They are very customer service oriented, and we can trust them to take care of our attendees."

Julie Hommowun, Meeting Planner
Arthur J. Gallagher & Company, Rolling Meadows, IL

the crop from around the world — the top 10 percent of representatives for the weeklong networking and awards event, which highlights the capabilities, talents and resources that exist within the company.

"At the most recent Power of Gallagher that took place in February 2017,

we had about 1,900 attendees," Hommowun says. "We like to think of this meeting as a three-legged stool. The first leg is an exhibit hall where our employees network, understand the vast products and services that we can offer our clients worldwide and find opportunities to cross-sell different

products to existing clients. The second leg is to recognize and award our top sales producers." Finally, the company has general sessions to give their employees an update on the state of the company and the different divisions within the company.

In addition, while they have so many

employees as well as the leaders of the company in one place, they have several breakout meetings. This year the company had more than 70 breakout meetings ranging in size from eight people to 400 people.

As part of Arthur J. Gallagher's commitment to their employees, the company wanted a venue that was a fitting reward for all the hard work exhibited by their employees. They again chose the Aria Resort & Casino in Las Vegas.

"There are several things we love about the Aria hotel but first and foremost is their partnership. They are great to plan a meeting with and work really hard to make your meeting come to life," Hommowun says. "The meeting space being stacked on three floors is a huge benefit because attendees do not have to walk too far to get from one room to the next."

Aria Resort & Casino is a AAA Five Diamond resort on The Strip featuring

spectacular amenities, high-end service, premium meeting and convention space, striking architecture and sustainable design.

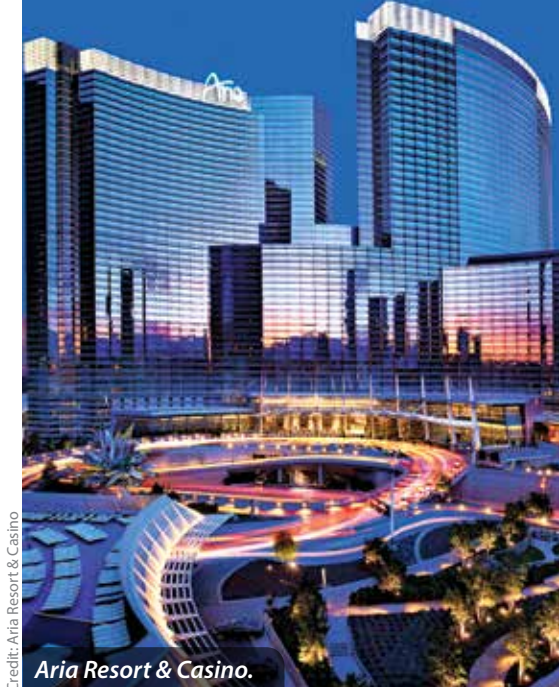
One of North America's premier destinations for large-scale meetings and events, Aria is currently undergoing a major expansion of its award-winning

LEED Gold-certified convention center. The \$154 million project will deliver an additional 200,000 sf of technologically advanced, flexible meeting space across four stories, highlighted by indoor/open-air spaces and a glass-enclosed venue. With the completion in 2018 of the expansion project, Aria will boast more than 500,000 sf of meeting space.

This expansion will meet the ever-growing needs of clients such as Arthur J. Gallagher & Co.

"We take advantage of having the three large meeting rooms to hold our whole group for meals, a general session and an exhibit hall.

The breakout space worked great also as it afforded us a lot of flexibility to accommodate all the meeting requests," Hommowun says. "The food at the Aria was wonderful. For a meeting this size, it is near impossible to please everyone's individual taste. But we received so many compliments on the food at this



The Difference is in the Details

Positioned at the south end of The Strip is M Resort Spa Casino, a boutique Forbes Four-star retreat, perfect to host your next meeting or conference. With over 92,000 square feet of open and dynamic conference space, state-of-the-art technology, impeccable service and breathtaking views, M Resort delivers a unique experience sure to impress your guests.

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meeting. People told us it was great for restaurant food, and the fact that we received that quality of food for almost 2,000 people is impressive."

Hommowun worked with Encore Event Technologies, Aria's preferred audio-visual provider, which is located on property. "They did a great job on our program and worked hard to accommodate a lot of last-minute requests," Hommowun says. "All of the Aria staff are a pleasure to work with. They are very customer service oriented, and we can trust them to take care of our attendees."

The first level of Aria's new convention space will feature an open ballroom with ample prefunction spaces and access to an exclusive loading dock for events that require sizable displays.

Versatile indoor-outdoor breakout rooms, which provide options to enjoy sunny Las Vegas weather while conducting business, will highlight the second level, and the third level will offer a large ballroom as well as naturally lit prefunction spaces connecting to Aria's existing convention center.

The facility's top floor is set to become one of Las Vegas' most unique meeting venues as it pairs a vast ballroom with an outdoor patio that will accommodate receptions for up to 2,000 guests. The patio overlooks The Park and T-Mobile Arena.

Lasting Impressions

"Many meeting and event attendees within the insurance and finance industry are well traveled, so venues need to be sure to go above and beyond. And oftentimes that starts with the first impression, ends with the last impression and everything in-between," says Amy McCollum, senior program manager, conferences and meetings, at metro-

Connections in Minneapolis, Minnesota. "Also, with more events popping up all the time, in our current economy, don't forget about the fundamentals and don't take for granted — good food and great service.

"Beyond the basics, add thoughtful touches and become educated on the guests and locale. Add custom industry-branded props to a step-and-repeat, or entertainment based on the locale. For larger groups especially, plan several events which take place in multiple areas during the same meeting. For instance, we'll start at the Cosmopolitan for the program and head to the Marquee nightclub at the same property for an impressive outdoor evening event," adds McCollum.

According to McCollum, everyone's definition of high end is different, so when finding the ideal location to host the next financial or insurance meeting or event in Las Vegas, the best place to start is with the senses — what can your guests physically see, smell, touch, taste and hear.

"As someone walks into the main lobby of a hotel — is it chaotic with other guests, or is it a tranquil, calming feeling when they walk in?"

Amy McCollum, Senior Program Manager, Conferences and Meetings, metroConnections, Minneapolis, MN

MetroConnections arranges many group meetings and events in Las Vegas including these at the Cosmopolitan and the Marquee Nightclub & Dayclub — a pool-club with more than 60,000 sf of space and a rooftop patio overlooking Las Vegas.



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Wynn Las Vegas and Encore.

Credit: Wynn Las Vegas

“As someone walks into the main lobby of a hotel — is it chaotic with other guests, or is it a tranquil, calming feeling when they walk in? Is there infused water and a cool towlette available after a day of traveling?” McCollum continues. “Are the aesthetics and the service provided to the guests being done, top to bottom, with special care and attention?”

First-Class Experiences

John DelMauro, senior vice president for conferences and events at SourceMedia in New York City, adds another element for planners to consider, too. Financial and insurance attendees enjoy venues that offer high-end amenities and exude continuous improvement initiatives through renovations and expansions of their facilities.

For example, DelMauro recently organized an event for Workplace Benefits Mania, a company that brings the top leaders in the benefits and insurance industry together and develops new relationships with people and organizations that will help them achieve new levels of success and service.

“From the combined resources of Employee Benefit Adviser and the Workplace Benefits Association, 600+ brokers, agents and advisors attend every year to discover the latest strategic approaches, tools and technologies to grow their practice,” DelMauro says.

This year the event took place at Wynn Las Vegas and Encore Resort.

“We have worked with the Wynn Las Vegas and Encore Resort on past events, and we continue to choose them as a

partner due to their service, venue, rooms, room rate and overall experience for our attendees,” DelMauro says. “This hotel and venue allows us to give a first-class experience for our attendees outside of our event.” Some of these experiences include private invitation dinners in their restaurants, cocktail and networking events, and discounts to attend the shows that are being hosted onsite.

“The service and overall experience at the Wynn is by far the best in Las Vegas and The Strip,” DelMauro says. “You get the feeling of a boutique hotel from the service while providing you all of the best experiences, including restaurants, shows, pool and spa facilities, workout facilities, shopping and golf, and of course gaming. Feedback from our audience has always been very posi-

tive on their experience due to all of the exceptional experiences that the Wynn has to offer.”

Wynn Las Vegas offers 200,000 sf of convention space including two column-free ballrooms, 18 meeting rooms and two beautifully appointed boardrooms. At Encore, there is 60,000 sf of additional meeting space including three private boardrooms, 17 meeting rooms and a 20,650-sf column-free ballroom.

New and Noteworthy

To meet the needs of their growing clientele, Mandalay Bay’s Convention Center recently expanded by 350,000 sf to a total of more than 2 million sf, enabling Mandalay Bay to accommodate existing customer growth needs as well as to attract new corporate and association business.

The expansion added new exhibit space, ballrooms and underground parking, and the project creates one of the most flexible, customer-focused convention facilities in North America.

At a cost of \$70 million, the expansion also included a bandwidth increase to accommodate more attendees and allow for the most advanced presentations, while allowing seamless connectivity from convention space to public spaces to guest rooms.

Located adjacent to Mandalay Bay, the new non-smoking, all-suite lux-



An aerial view of Mandalay Bay Resort and Mandalay Bay Convention Center.

Credit: Mandalay Bay Convention Center

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ury Delano Las Vegas hotel features 20,000 sf of indoor meeting space with 31 meeting rooms including four boardrooms plus engaging social locations. Blending signature elements of Delano South Beach with the distinct energy only found on the Las Vegas Strip, the hotel features dynamic social spaces such as 3940 Coffee + Tea and Della's Kitchen, where "historic farmhouse meets urban kitchen."

Just off the lobby is Franklin, a lounge that evolves throughout the day and offers a curated craft bar program, a menu of signature creations and a private group area.

The resort encourages groups to take their events outside to the new Delano Beach Club — the venue's South Beach-inspired experience. From booking one of 16 private cabanas during the day to buying out the entire club for an evening reception, the luxurious pool retreat is a new take on the Las Vegas pool scene with whimsical elements such as an oversized chessboard atop the pool's deck.

Delano's Sage Living room, located within the four separate floors of the hotel's meeting area, offers a chic and alternative space to gather with



Delano Las Vegas.

Credit: Delano Las Vegas

overstuffed couches, special chairs designed with lower-back support, end tables and coffee tables. The room, featuring two 52-inch, flat-screen TVs, can be used for presentations in a relaxed, comfortable environment.

The Mirage offers a dramatic setting for one-of-a-kind events at the hotel's pool and at Siegfried & Roy's Secret

Garden and Dolphin Habitat — both lush outdoor spaces. A facility fee allows guests full access and includes the services of the facility's tour guides. Dolphin and tiger trainers are available to mingle and teach guests about the attraction's creatures, for a fun and interactive experience. Guests may enjoy the creations of The Mirage's talented culinary staff for an additional fee.

Home to some of the world's most exotic animals including the Royal White Tigers of Nevada, the White Lions of the Timbavati and a family of bottlenose dolphins, Siegfried & Roy's Secret Garden is ideal for private functions. The spectacular setting of the facility, complete with towering palm trees, verdant foliage and sparkling waters, can comfortably accommodate cocktail receptions for up to 500 people.

When not engaging with wild creatures, planners also can consider The Mirage Events Center for trade shows, exhibits, concerts and galas. The center boasts 90,000 sf of pillar-less space that can be partitioned into various configurations. Fully carpeted, The Mirage Events Center features state-of-the-art fiber optic, power, lighting and rigging support to accommodate the most complex shows and events.

The Forbes Four Star award-winning

M Resort Spa Casino features more than 92,000 sf of open and dynamic meeting space along with multiple reception areas throughout the 90-acre resort. Venues include the 25,000-sf M Pavilion; 17,400-sf Milan ballroom; and a boardroom and convenient business center. Additional venues include Lux, set high atop the resort offering 7,200 sf of space; Villaggio Del Sole, the expansive outdoor pool and entertainment piazza; Vue, a multifaceted space with a private outdoor terrace; the Signature Room, as well as seven casino restaurants and five bars.

M Resort's conference center encompasses multiple meeting rooms that can be configured to suit any need, as well as an exquisite boardroom and sprawling ballroom with a built-in stage to deliver special events with state-of-the-art audio-visual capability, video-conferencing and more.

After a recent expansion, Tropicana Las Vegas' all-new conference facility is divisible into as many as 38 breakout rooms and includes a 25,000-sf ballroom, a 55,000-sf pavilion that is suitable for large general sessions and exhibits, and elaborate venues such as the Havana Room and Sky Beach Club.

The newly transformed Tropicana Theater is a modern-yet-classic venue featuring a magnificent crystal chandelier, custom banquette seating areas, dark wood flooring and premium audio-visual technology.

After a recent 30,000-sf expansion, the Trinidad Pavilion and meeting rooms boast 55,000 sf of space that works for



The M Resort.

Credit: The M Resort

general sessions, large-scale food and beverage functions, various attractions and sporting events. The venue can accommodate up to 4,800 attendees.

Overall, Tropicana Las Vegas offers more than 100,000 sf of flexible meeting and exhibition space in a convenient location on The Strip just minutes from the airport, major convention centers and top entertainment stadiums.

Both active and solitude-seeking attendees will appreciate The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa's lakeside location, about 20 minutes east of the Las Vegas Strip in Henderson, Nevada. For outdoor enthusiasts, there's standup paddleboarding (and SUP yoga), kayaking, boating, hiking and even a gondola adventure. The scenic Lake Mead National Recreation Area offering even more great outdoors activities is about 17 miles away. Area golf courses accessible to hotel guests include the Reflection Bay Golf Course, a half mile away. The resort's Moroccan-inspired Spa Moulay offers a full menu of spa



The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa.

Credit: The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa

treatments, and guests will find multiple dining and shopping options in the nearby village of Montelago. The property offers 493 guest rooms, more than 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space including gardens, terraces and more.

Dining, Entertainment Options and More

No meeting or event would be com-

plete without memorable dining options. Celebrity chef Robert Irvine, host of Food Network's "Restaurant: Impossible," is teaming up with Tropicana Las Vegas to open his first signature restaurant on the Las Vegas Strip. Slated to open in 2017, Irvine will bring his nothing-is-impossible attitude to the all-new modern American-inspired restaurant set to debut on Tropicana's casino floor.

W Las Vegas recently made its much

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Tropicana Las Vegas.

Credit: Tropicana Las Vegas

Concerts on the Beach series will run through September on the Mandalay Bay Beach stage, which rises over the resort's sand and surf wave pool. Performers include Florida Georgia Line, Jake Owen, Lee Brice, Cole Swindell, Dustin Lynch, Brothers Osborne, Big & Rich and Chris Lane, among others.

Attendees now have the opportunity to learn the six steps to pour the perfect pint of Guinness with the Perfect Pint Experience at the newly redesigned Guinness Store, located next to Rí Rá Las Vegas inside The Shoppes at Mandalay Bay. The bar, fully equipped with three Guinness bar taps, is where guests can take part in the only "official" Perfect Pint Experience in the world outside of the Guinness Storehouse in Dublin, Ireland. Packages are available for groups of 20 people or more. The "Guinness Store Exclusive" offers groups the option to rent out the entire store. For two hours, at-

anticipated debut by transforming a 289-room tower of SLS Las Vegas, to provide guests with an elevated hotel-within-a-hotel experience, located on the emerging North End of the Vegas Strip.

As such, W Las Vegas also offers three floors (and 15,000 sf) of brand new, state-of-the-art meeting and event space. The adjacent SLS Las Vegas hotel serves up an additional 80,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space, to play host to any size event.

The rooftop Wet Deck at W Las Vegas is an elite oasis for groups, providing an intimate escape to see and be seen in a private cabana or at the destination bar. Maximizing its North Strip location, the Wet Deck offers panoramic views of the Stratosphere and desert mountains, all from its discrete rooftop perch.

The hotel also provides meeting attendees with the ultimate insider access to Las Vegas, along with its renowned Whatever/Whenever service, offering guests whatever they want, whenever they want it. Guests can mix and mingle at world-class dining venues including Bazaar Meat by José Andrés; Katsuya; Cleo; Umami Burger; 800 Degrees Neapolitan Pizzeria; Northside Café & Chinese Kitchen; and The Perq; along with coveted nightlife and entertainment venues such as Foxtail, The Foundry and The Sayers Club, alongside the SLS Las Vegas casino space.

Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino's

tendees can take part in the Perfect Pint Experience, enjoy delicious appetizers with pints of Guinness, and receive a 10 percent discount on all Guinness merchandise within the store.

Chef Charlie Palmer's reimagined Aureole at the Mandalay Bay reopened in January. Chef Palmer renewed his commitment to preparing quality, local ingredients in a bold, American style. The transformed space offers three distinct dining experiences: an intimate bar and lounge area; a main dining room; and the fine dining Fountain Terrace, all highlighted with warm hues and wine-inspired design elements.

The Mob Museum, the National Museum of Organized Crime and Law

Enforcement, will debut new, immersive exhibits and experiences next year including multimedia displays, objects and artifacts, as well as a working distillery and speakeasy from the Prohibition Era. Guests will learn about bootlegging and rum running amid a working distillery producing a variety of spirits. In the speakeasy, guests will encounter exhibits documenting the culture of the 1920s while enjoying the ambience of a fully operational tavern. Thousands of these underground establishments operated in cities and towns across the country to satisfy the public's thirst for beer, whiskey and other distilled spirits.

Allied eSports, a leading network of electronic sports venues (to host competitive video gaming), and Esports Arena announced plans for a new dedicated esports venue to be developed at Luxor Hotel and Casino. The new Esports Arena Las Vegas, scheduled to open in early 2018, will become the first permanent esports venue on The Strip and will be the center of Allied eSports' growing global network of esports

properties spanning North America, Europe and China.

Esports Arena Las Vegas will combine the best of interactive entertainment and Las Vegas nightlife, and become the global epicenter for esports experiences. With design and programming contributions from Allied eSports' enterprises around the world, its North American arm Esports Arena will take the lead in bringing the Las Vegas concept to life.

Pop-up Space

To meet the growing trend of co-working pop-ups, The Venetian, The Palazzo and Sands Expo, in conjunction with Zappos, recently debuted a first-



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After more than \$200 million in South Beach-inspired transformations, Tropicana Las Vegas, a DoubleTree by Hilton, provides an entirely unique experience for conference attendees. From luxurious rooms and top-ranked restaurants to over 100,000 square feet of flexible meeting and exhibition space, including unconventional meeting settings such as

the Havana Room™ and Tropicana Theater, outdoor events surrounded by our lush pool gardens and a convenient location on the Strip just minutes from the airport, major convention centers and top entertainment stadiums, come see why so many meeting planners are rediscovering and choosing Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton!



The 1,170-sf pop-up lounge at The Venetian.

Credit: The Venetian

of-its-kind coworking space in the heart of The Venetian | The Palazzo Congress Center. The coworking space taps into a growing trend of creating collaborative workspaces that can be used on a temporary basis in addition to traditional offices.

The 1,170-sf pop-up lounge offers space to recharge, huddle areas for collaboration and a conference room for small meetings. The space is enclosed for noise management, but also is transparent to invite guests to come inside and take advantage of the amenities.

Comfort and functionality is at the backbone of this collaborative space, and amenities include Wi-Fi, charging stations, four private phone rooms and a private conference room that seats six.

Caesars Palace provides attendees the opportunity to satisfy their every craving with cuisine crafted by world-famous celebrity chefs at their award-winning restaurants that feature private dining rooms and are available for buy-outs. Restaurants include Restaurant Guy Savoy, Bobby Flay's Mesa Grill and Gordon Ramsay Pub & Grill.

The Villas at Caesars Palace is an ideal high-end venue, with units ranging in size from 9,500 to 11,200 sf. Amenities include 24-hour butler service, bar and billiard area, spacious living and dining areas, private pools, patios and a personal entrance to the Caesars Palace's Garden of the Gods pool. These suites are perfect for the best in luxury accommodations or for private events.

Caesars Entertainment is partnering with Three Square to donate surplus

food items from conferences and events through Three Square's Food Rescue program. As a contributor to the program, Caesars Entertainment is able to take further action towards their Code of Commitment with the ability to simultaneously help fight hunger and reduce waste in the community through their donations. The Food Rescue program is a safe and reliable donation outlet that sources edible food to feed hungry people in Southern Nevada. The Rio is the first Caesars Entertainment property to begin donating to Three Square with other Las Vegas properties to follow throughout 2017.

Reno Rendezvous

Called the "Biggest Little City in the World," Reno is located at the base of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, about one hour from Lake Tahoe. As the second largest tourist destination in Nevada, Reno

resort, offers a fun way for groups to gather for a team event. The Lex Lounge and Lex Nightclub are two additional venues for receptions, parties or other events where attendees can relax while networking and socializing, in a fun, unconventional location. For a change of pace, Grand Adventure Land lets adults be kids again with competitive go-kart racing, thrill rides and miniature golf.

For a more luxurious experience, Peppermill Reno prides itself on offering an exemplary balance of service, luxury and value. By combining sophisticated technology, amenities and personalized services, meetings and events are memorable affairs at Peppermill. The resort boasts 106,000 sf of flexible meeting space, with breakout capacity for 36 rooms. The resort features three ballrooms, including the Tuscany Ballroom with 62,000 sf of clearspan meeting space — the largest in northern Nevada.

Continuous improvement is the cornerstone of Peppermill. In 2016, several major projects were completed at the family-owned resort including the rede-



Credits: Caesars Entertainment

Caesars Entertainment donates surplus food items from conferences and events through Three Square's Food Rescue program.

offers an idyllic place to host meetings and events.

In fact, Grand Sierra Resort & Casino is a favorite option for hosting meetings and conventions thanks to its variety of unique meeting venues and recreational teambuilding activities.

The resort's 50-lane GSR Bowling Center, located on the main floor of the

sign of Edge Nightclub — where 1920s style meets 2020 technology, providing an intimate and vibrant nightlife experience. The nightclub saw the addition of \$150,000 in lighting, 440 sf of LED panels, custom-made damask wallpaper, original artwork from local artists, and handcrafted crystal chandeliers celebrate the art of nightlife. **I&FMM**

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CECHAK

Nick Cechak was named executive meetings manager for Destination DC. He was on the national meetings and events marketing team for Caesars Entertainment in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Christian Gonzalez was named regional director of sales and marketing, Mexico region, for Rosewood Hotels & Resorts. He was the director of sales and marketing at Four Seasons Resort The Biltmore Santa Barbara.



GONZALEZ



ARRIVILLAGA

Island Hotel Newport Beach has announced **Bob Arrivillaga** as director of sales and marketing. He was most recently with Montage Deer Valley in Park City, Utah, where he worked as associate director of group sales.

Beau Rivage Resort & Casino, Biloxi, Mississippi, has named **Randy Whiteside** as executive director of hotel sales. He was director of sales at Embassy Suites by Hilton Montgomery Hotel & Conference Center in Alabama.

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OS	Rosen Plaza Hotel	407-996-9700	www.rosenplaza.com	Victoria Hall	sales@rosenplaza.com
OS	Rosen Shingle Creek	407-996-9939	www.rosenshinglecreek.com	Leslie Menichini	sales@rosenshinglecreek.com
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