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THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

Phil Aldax, Director of  
Food & Beverage at  
Anaheim Marriott

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Credit: Chicago's McCormick Convention Campus with new Marriott/Gensler



Credit: Atlantic City's Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa/STEVEFRIDON.com



Credit: Caesars Forum/Sean Markle

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## Balancing the Buzz



Association meeting planners have to perform a critical balancing act for every program — finding ways to create positive buzz around an event while preventing potential negative buzz from tripping them up. This issue offers tips and advice for managing both parts of the act that will lead to taking a bow at the end — beginning with learning the quickest way to an attendee's heart. In "Eat, Drink and Be Merry," Anaheim Marriott Director of Food & Beverage Phil Aldax, who graces our cover, tells us, "Meeting planners are constantly being judged by attendees by where they stay and what is being served or what options they have offered. If you can make something memorable and it creates buzz, attendees are often scoring in a positive (way), which in turn makes meeting planners want to come back." A host of hospitality and convention center F&B experts weigh in on the latest food trends that are spicing up meetings, on page 26. These partners want planners to know they are all in, as noted by Purvill Chaney, executive chef for the Duke Energy Convention Center in Cincinnati: "Our goal is to create an exciting food experience for guests that matches or amplifies the entire event experience during their time at our venue."

More positive buzz can be created by being one of the first groups to experience a new or renovated convention center. In "Convention Centers on the Move" on page 14, read how Las Vegas, Chicago and Orlando are keeping their collective foot on the gas with new expansions and improvements, as well as how destinations beyond the big three are staying hot on their heels, competing for meeting and convention business. Our destination reports keep the buzz going with "Atlantic City's Renewal" on page 36 and "Nevada Meetings," on page 42, both of which are winning over planners with much more than gaming.

Preventing negative buzz is addressed in two features, beginning with "The Cybersecurity Challenge." Vivian Marinelli, senior director of crisis management services at FEI Behavioral Health warns, "It's really a personal responsibility of meeting planners and their attendees to stay informed and prepared. ...Hackers will continue to get better and better at what they do. Therefore, the only real protection is constant vigilance." Learn how to become cyber-savvy and beat hackers at their own game on page 20. Then turn to page 32, "Debates, Disputes and Adjudications — Avoiding the New Legal Minefields in Site Selection and Attendee Safety," which explores how safety issues and a changing political and environmental climate impact site selection and legal liability.

We hope this issue will help planners successfully manage both kinds of buzz for the best of outcomes.

*Harvey Grotsky*

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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## Omni Louisville Celebrates Grand Opening



Cutting the ribbon are (l to r) Scott Stuckey, Omni Louisville general manager, Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer, Bob Rowling, founder of TRT Holdings, Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin and Jim Caldwell, president at TRT Holdings, which owns Omni Hotels.

**LOUISVILLE, KY** — The Omni Louisville Hotel opened the doors to their 30-story property in downtown Louisville with a ribbon-cutting and grand opening celebrating the early completion of the \$300 million development. The hotel features 612 guest rooms, 226 apartments along with 70,000 sf of flexible meeting space. In a nod to the significance of Louisville's bourbon history and culture, the hotel features Pin + Proof, a speakeasy-style bar with bowling lanes, the equestrian and bourbon themed Library Bar, signature Mokara Salon & Spa, and a rooftop pool and bar. The Omni's opening is bolstered by the renovation and expansion of the adjacent Kentucky International Convention Center, which is slated to be completed and reopened August 1, 2018. [www.gotolouisville.com](http://www.gotolouisville.com)

## Omni Hotels & Resorts Promotes Peter Strebel to President

**DALLAS, TX** — Omni Hotels & Resorts has promoted Peter Strebel, a 30-year-plus veteran of the hospitality industry, to president. Strebel has been appointed to the role after providing 20 years of senior leadership to the brand, most recently as CMO and S.V.P. sales.

As president, Strebel will continue to elevate the vision of Omni while ensuring all operational areas within the company align with the long-term goals and objectives for the brand. He will work with teams to continue to enhance the existing high-level of guest service as well as oversee the growth and expansion plans the brand has in the pipeline. With various new developments breaking ground and opening across the U.S., Strebel will continue to position Omni as a leader in the luxury hospitality marketplace. [www.omnihotels.com](http://www.omnihotels.com)



Strebel

## ASAE Hosts Dynamic 2018 Great Ideas Conference

**WASHINGTON, DC** — From March 11-13, close to 600 association executives and industry partners convened in Colorado Springs for ASAE's 2018 Great Ideas Conference at The Broadmoor. ASAE had five 25-minute Main Stage speakers, hosted by Choose Chicago, and introduced new design features including: Learning Circles, Braindates and an offsite Leadership Intensive. ASAE had a total of 593 in attendance.

"Great Ideas aims to create, inspire and support innovators in the association community through case studies, competency building, peer-to-peer and group learning," said ASAE President and CEO John H. Graham IV, FASAE, CAE. "All the Main Stage speakers focused on customization, innovation, brand management and building the right mindset, which are essential elements required to expand one's association."

Braindates, an online matchmaking platform powered by E-180, gave attendees the opportunity to engage in informal peer learning with one-on-



Informal peer learning opportunities called "Braindates" were arranged for attendees at the Great Ideas Conference through an online matchmaking platform.

one and group meetings around different topics.

The Leadership Intensive, held offsite at the Ivywild School, home of Bristol Brewing, focused on how small changes can make a difference.

ASAE also held two Executive Leadership Workshops before the conference and a Women's Executive Forum, and ASAE Foundation Pour, hosted by The Broadmoor, on Monday night. [www.asaecenter.org](http://www.asaecenter.org)

## Aria Resort & Casino Opens Convention Center Expansion

**LAS VEGAS, NV** — Aria Resort & Casino has opened an additional 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space across four stories. The approximately \$170 million expansion is highlighted by stunning indoor/open-air verandas with retractable windows and dramatic views of The Park and T-Mobile Arena.

The new space, seamlessly integrated with Aria's existing convention center, incorporates features such as outdoor offerings, views, additional natural light and non-traditional meeting areas. Also within the 200,000-sf expansion are ballrooms with built-in stages, an exclusive loading dock with megavator for events requiring sizable displays, versatile indoor-outdoor breakout rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows and ample prefunction spaces. The top floor houses a vast ballroom with two impressive open-air verandas that can accommodate receptions for up to 2,000 attendees. Now with a total of 500,000 sf of convention space and diverse options within the neighborhood, Aria can accommodate larger convention groups and attract new business. [www.aria.com](http://www.aria.com)



The new Primrose Ballroom.

## Moscone Center 'Topping Out' Signals Final Phase of Expansion

**SAN FRANCISCO, CA** — The last major beam of steel was erected at San Francisco's Moscone Center on March 12, reaching a major milestone in this \$551 million expansion project that will create an exciting urban landscape while bringing the center's total exhibit space to more than 504,000 sf.

San Francisco Travel, the destination marketing organization, is actively booking the new space for 2019 and beyond, with more than 1.1 million definite room nights on the books in 2019, more than any other year in history. Moscone Center is just a few minutes' walk from 22,000 of the city's 33,000-plus hotel rooms, world-class dining, shopping and cultural venues. The expansion will add more than 157,000 gross sf of flexible meeting space to Moscone North and South on Howard Street, between Third and Fourth Streets. The addition creates more than 504,000 gross sf to be used as contiguous exhibition space or flexible meeting space. There will be the ability to have over 80 meeting rooms.

Expanded lobbies in Moscone's North and South buildings



will total approximately 60,000 sf. The project also includes two new pedestrian bridges across Howard Street, the East Bridge and West Bridge. [www.sfrtravel.com/meeting-planners](http://www.sfrtravel.com/meeting-planners)





Destinations International's annual Destination Showcase was held on February 13, 2018 in the Grand Ballroom of the Walter E. Washington Convention Center and hosted more than 1,000 attendees. The dynamic one-day event offered convention and visitors bureau (CVB) professionals the opportunity to connect with the top meeting planners in the industry to better understand how CVBs can drive more successful meetings. José Andrés was the event's keynote speaker. He is an internationally recognized culinary innovator, passionate advocate for food and hunger issues, author, television personality and chef/owner of ThinkFoodGroup.



Credit: David Keith Photography





# Disrupting With Purpose

Michael Schaiman



## How Association Planners Can Maximize Tech ROI

When it comes to event technology, it can be easy for association meeting and convention planners to feel like they're being swept up in a giant wave of innovation. The field is undergoing a major disruption, with new technology covering everything from the first strategy meeting to the final analytics.

It's a lot to process. Planners want to stay on the cutting edge so they don't miss out on the benefits these new technologies can bring, but they also need to deploy new tech strategically, instead of just picking the hottest new trend. How do they avoid missteps and get the solid return on investment (ROI) they need for success?

### THE BIGGEST MISTAKE PLANNERS MAKE WITH TECH

A planner might want a virtual reality (VR) experience at an event, or they might be enamored by the idea of second-screen technology. Both are excellent tools, but planners need to remember that when it comes to events, technology is there to tell your story and must serve a specific purpose. By approaching events with their hearts set on specific technologies, planners run the risk of making the story fit the tactic instead of the other way around.

To ensure the right tech fit, several steps need to come first:

- Look at the broad view to determine the message. What can attendees learn at the event? What action can they take?
- Once the message has been determined, look at the audience. What's the best way to reach them, and how much time do they have for you? A younger, tech-savvy audience might be eager to try out VR. In the medical event space, the audience might prefer briefer demos that still let them envision how a product would work.
- Next, ask how many visitors the event wishes to engage at any one time. At a 40,000-person gaming event, it may not be financially viable to offer VR — not unless huge lineups and bottlenecks are part of the event plan.

By uncovering information such as who will be at the event, what they can get out of it and a basic overview of logistics, planners will have a solid foundation on which to base their tech decisions.

From there, it's time to add flavor by building out the attendee experience with specific tools. To select tools that will provide the best ROI, consider building a foundation on the four strategic pillars below:

1. **Innovation:** This is the medium through which the story will be told. Tablets, touchscreens, video walls, individual mobile devices, VR or any other tool. What will be attention-grabbing and make people want to try out the experience?
2. **Personalization:** The overarching message may be the same for every visitor, but how the story is told might vary from person to person. For example, at a marketing industry show, copywriters will have different interests from agency owners. Whatever technology is chosen should help make the overarching message relevant to each group.
3. **Shareable:** To get an ROI that extends beyond the event, planners need to select tech tools that are compelling, provocative and even fun. Whether it's a mobile app with elements that can be shared on social media or second-screen technology that gets a team talking after the event is over, the right tools will have a large ripple effect.
4. **Data Analytics:** The importance of data can't be understated. By knowing what worked and what didn't for each audience, planners can make next year's tech more targeted and more effective. Choosing event technology that provides useable and comprehensive data is a golden ticket into the inner workings of attendees' minds.

This may seem like a large amount of legwork, but to deliver a solid ROI, strategic thinking is essential.

### WHAT TRENDS ARE WORTH IT

Once planners have their event foundation and a short-list of potential tech options, they can dive deeper into

tactics by selecting the right technological fit for their event's needs. There are some trending technologies out there that are worth a closer look:

**Virtual Reality (VR):** VR is hot right now, but it can be hard to implement well — especially at large events. One option is to create group experiences, where spectators can see on a large screen what the person in the headset is seeing. They can then use their mobile devices to give this person information or instructions, turning the headset wearer into the game's character and the audience into the gamers. Within the virtual setting, there also can be the opportunity for sponsorships, helping organizers recoup the costs of their VR investment.

and exhibitors can learn who's showing up, what they're looking at and where they're spending their time — essentially tracking their activity from pre-registration all the way to follow-up. The data that can be gathered with this new tech will completely transform how trade shows are designed.

**Artificial Intelligence (AI):** AI is already having a significant impact on our society, and it also will transform the event space. Some events are already using it to craft custom agendas for individuals based on submitted data and past behaviors. This technology will allow planners to use the data gathered from attendee tracking to personalize events on a granular level.

*By approaching events with their hearts set on specific technologies, planners run the risk of making the story fit the tactic instead of the other way around.*

**Augmented Reality (AR):** AR is a fast-growing trend with a huge amount of potential. By providing devices and peripherals to attendees, exhibitors can create product demonstrations, models, entire virtual cities or anything they can imagine — which the attendees can then view through the lens of their device. This is a game-changing technology in industries that sell large equipment. Imagine if a mining equipment manufacturer could create an AR version of a new conveyor system instead of having to rely on 2-D images, scale models or video.

**Virtual Events:** Virtual events of the past have been met with mixed results in online spaces. However, the technology is becoming more realistic, which will result in more powerful virtual events within the next few years. This will offer great value for people who can't physically attend, allowing them to virtually walk the show floor, browsing and examining like they would in person.

**Attendee Tracking:** At events, exhibitors generally only get whatever information is listed on attendees' business cards. With today's exceptional technology, planners

**Second-Screen Technology:** This technology boosts engagement at presentations, allowing the audience to give feedback, ask questions, obtain further information and receive presentation slides that can be shared via social media. Besides amping up engagement, this technology has an added benefit of providing powerful analytics.

There has never been a more exciting time to be in the event industry, especially with the many amazing technological tools at our fingertips today. By taking a breath, developing a solid strategy and finding the technology that best conveys overall messages, event planners can get the best return on their high-tech investments. AC&F

Michael Schaiman is S.V.P. Digital Experience, Helios Interactive, a Freeman Company. He has been involved in delivering digital experiences to brands in the experiential space for more than 15 years. He has worked on a wide variety of projects across a broad spectrum of industries — from Super Bowls to Olympics, auto shows, and biotech and pharma events. When he's not running around the country evangelizing the adoption of new experiential technologies, he can probably be found chasing his kids around the house.



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MELBOURNE CONVENTION AND EXHIBITION CENTRE

## AUSTRALIA'S CENTRES OF SUSTAINABILITY

*From the largest bank of solar panels in any Australian capital city to donating partially used batteries to the Royal Children's Hospital to be used in toys, Australia's convention centres are leading the way with their environmental practices. While a lot of what they are doing is 'invisible' to delegates, the impact is significant.*

Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC), built in 2009, is a 6-star green rated building with sensor lighting and air conditioning that isolates to cool or heat, based on where people are in the centre.

From an operational point of view, the MCEC donates all of its partially used batteries from lapel microphones to the Royal Children's Hospital which are used in toys, recycles all of its 50,000 Nespresso pods a year and is switching to biodegradable coffee cups despite the much higher cost per unit.

**The centre has also removed plastic water bottles in preference for chilled, filtered water served in carafes. This alone has saved 235,000 bottles from going into the waste system. With each 600ml plastic bottle taking 1.8 litres of water and 125mls of oil to make, this equates to a big energy saving every year.**

The centre's focus on H2O doesn't stop with drinking water. There is also a rainwater recycling system that supplies the cooling towers, the toilets and the garden beds, and an 'e-water' system in the kitchen, which means it doesn't need to be treated again after it goes down the drain.

MCEC also recently invested AUD2.5 million on an energy management system that tells the centre's engineers where electricity is being used so that they can fine-tune the building's systems to reduce energy input. An example of this is adding variable speed drives on the air-conditioning fans so that they can be turned down during low peak periods and ramped up when it's busy, and the recent installation of new air-conditioning chillers that are 91 per cent more efficient than the old ones.

While in Sydney, the new International Convention Centre Sydney (ICC Sydney), now open for 10 months, was not only designed to be sustainable in the long-term; it was also built in an environmentally friendly way.

Ninety-one per cent of waste during the break down of the old centre and construction of the new centre was diverted from land fill by recycling both on and offsite. Twenty-five per cent of the demolition waste was recycled on site through the use of mobile concrete crushers that turned the waste into materials that can be used to build roads.

Beyond ICC Sydney's rainwater harvesting that is used for garden irrigation, the centre also has the largest bank of solar panels in any Australian capital city. The 520kW photovoltaic (PV) solar array on the roof produces enough energy to power 100 homes per year and provides 5 per cent of the baseline energy for ICC Sydney.

In Brisbane, not only does Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre (BCEC) have energy conservation techniques and a smart building design, it has implemented an innovative food recycling program.

**The centre now puts its fruit, vegetable, meat and other food products (that cannot be safely donated to a local food bank) into the dehydrator which turns 100kgs of food waste into 15kg of dry, sterile biomass.**

In the past, the centre would compost its organic kitchen waste but the sheer volume of material was becoming a problem. Enter the Gaia food dehydrator.

This product is then sent on to Brisbane City Parkland Services who use it to enhance soil destined for Roma Street and South Bank Parklands, both located in the city.

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# Convention Centers on the Move

Cities Compete  
for Conferences, Ramping Up  
Expansions and Renovations

City business and political leaders around the country are figuring out how to best spend their allotted budgets to expand their local convention centers as the business climate improves and revenue from conventions, conferences and events becomes more competitive among convention center cities. Many cities look at the expansion plans for the Las Vegas, Chicago and Orlando convention centers and roll their eyes, as if to say “how can we ever compete with these cities if they keep getting bigger?” Orlando, Chicago and Las Vegas are considered the top meeting destinations in the country, often jockeying for a No. 1 spot. Las Vegas received its fifth straight No. 1 ranking as a meeting and convention destination by the World Travel Awards.

Trade-show organizers and meeting planners have not only been praising a nearly \$500 million proposal to expand Orlando’s Orange County Convention Center (OCCC), but also have asked local officials to speed up what could be a 4½-year construction timeline. Convention center officials announced plans to build two new additions at the convention center’s North-South Building that would add up to 800,000 total square feet, paid for with proceeds from the tourist development tax.

Last year the OCCC launched a VR-enabled 3-D interactive map, a system that allows meeting planners to virtually explore OCCC’s total of 7 million sf through 360-degree panoramic images, which makes it easy for meeting and event planners to search for ideal meeting spaces and breakout rooms.

By Ron Bernthal

In Las Vegas, the Southern Nevada Tourism Infrastructure Committee approved a plan that would breathe new life into the Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC) and create a district around it. That project would add 600,000 sf of exhibit space, a landscaped public space and long-term plans for a transportation hub. In January 2018, work began on the second phase of the expansion and renovation plans. The project, when fully completed, is expected to draw an additional 600,000 visitors a year, drive \$2.1 billion in economic activity during construction and have an annual incremental economic impact of \$810 million. Phase two of the project is expected to be completed in 2020. After that, workers will move on to renovating the existing 3.2-million-sf facility, an approach that allows the convention center to not displace any conventions due to construction.

There are similar projects up and down The Strip, including major investments by MGM Resorts International with convention center expansions at Aria (\$150 million), Manda-

The Anaheim Convention Center’s expansion — to 1.8 million sf — makes it the largest convention center on the West Coast.

lay Bay (\$70 million) and the MGM Grand (\$130 million). The upgrades will help Vegas hold off such competitors as New York City (\$1.5 billion expansion of the Javits Center) and San Francisco (\$500 million upgrade of the Moscone Center).

One goal of the Las Vegas Convention Center District expansion is to keep the big trade shows in town, like the huge Automotive Aftermarket Industry and Consumer Electronics shows. These big events can bring more than 140,000 attendees each to town. Six other regular shows bring more than 50,000 to town each year. It all adds up to millions, in terms of visitor numbers and entertainment spending.

Caesars Entertainment Corporation is planning its own \$375 million, 550,000-sf conference center in Las Vegas, named Caesars Forum. When completed, the new venue will include 300,000 sf of flexible meeting space, equivalent to over five football fields, two 108,000-sf ballrooms, two 40,000-sf ballrooms, state-of-the-art boardrooms and a 100,000-sf outdoor plaza. Scheduled to officially open in 2020, Caesars expects to break ground in mid-2018.

In October 2017, Chicago’s McCormick Place, the largest convention center in the country, opened the 10,387-seat Wintrust Arena at McCormick Square specifically for sporting events. A new Marriott Marquis Chicago, which opened on the McCormick Place campus in August 2017 with 1,205 guest rooms and, 90,000 sf of meeting space, is 40 stories tall and offers amazing views over the lakefront and booming South Loop neighborhood. The Marriott is connected via sky bridges to the McCormick Place convention center and the new arena.

Association planners love the size of the McCormick campus and the presence of nearby hotels, restaurants and

cultural amenities, especially when organizing large events. “We celebrated the centennial of our association from June 30–July 4, 2017, in Chicago,” says Gloria Geske, CMP, manager, convention division for Lions Clubs International. “We attracted over 30,000 delegates from 150 countries and used close to 10,000 hotel rooms in the official block. Chicago is the place that Lions was founded in 1917.

“McCormick Place is so large, we were able to contain our entire convention in one venue, which was a big plus,” Geske continues. “People could go across the hall from the general sessions to the exhibit hall. So nice not to have to bus them! We had our general sessions with seating for about 20,000 people in Hall B and our Exhibit Hall and Centennial Exhibit were located in the expansive Hall A. We used all of the North and South Buildings. We also used Lakeside Center/Arie Crown Theater for smaller general sessions,” says Geske. “We had two concert events, Chicago and the Beach Boys, and keynote speakers included former U.S. Vice President Al Gore and former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, all in Hall B.”

At the convention centers on our list below, in both large and second-tier cities, expansion plans are underway or just completed, all in an attempt to grow their corporate and association event revenue and compete with their sister cities across the U.S., as well internationally.

## ANAHEIM CONVENTION CENTER

The Anaheim Convention Center’s new North building officially opened last September after adding 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space and a 10,000-sf terrace, making the entire Anaheim Convention Center (ACC) complex the largest convention center on the West Coast. Visit Anaheim said



The 10,387-seat Wintrust Arena at McCormick Square opened on the McCormick Place campus in October.

Credit: Visit Anaheim

Credit: Gensler



that 75 meetings and conventions have already booked the recently expanded North building. With the addition of the new building, the ACC join the “1-million-sf club,” becoming the 11th largest convention center in the U.S. The latest expansion now gives the entire complex a total of 1.8 million sf.

The convention center campus also includes three hotels and 200,000 sf of outdoor plaza space, with 9,109 hotel rooms within a half-mile of the ACC, as well as venues such as Disneyland Resort, Honda Center and Angel Stadium. In 2018 and beyond, several new large hotels will open in Anaheim, including a 466-room JW Marriott, and a 634 room luxury hotel that will replace the Anabella Hotel adjacent to the convention center. A 580-room luxury hotel also is expected to open across from Anaheim Garden Walk.

### DENVER'S COLORADO CONVENTION CENTER

Denver city officials recently announced plans for a \$233 million expansion of the Colorado Convention Center (CCC), located within walking distance of 10,000 hotel rooms. The expansion will include an additional 80,000 sf of ballroom and meeting space; and 100,000 sf of prefunction and service space that also will include a 50,000-sf outdoor rooftop terrace featuring views of the Rocky Mountains. Lots of floor-to-ceiling windows promise to take advantage of the 300 days of sunshine Denver enjoys. Video-streaming and increased Wi-Fi capacity also are part of the planned renovation. The CCC currently offers 100,000 sf of meeting space on one level and 584,000 sf of exhibit space. Lobby renovations in the existing convention center also are planned. Construction is projected to begin in late 2019.

### GREATER FORT LAUDERDALE/BROWARD COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER

The Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center expansion project will add an additional 400,000 sf of meeting space and an upscale 800-room headquarters hotel. The total cost of the project is estimated to be approximately \$550 million, with construction expected to begin this year, with a soft opening in 2021.

Presently, the Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center offers a 600,000-sf venue offering flexible space consisting of four exhibit halls, two ballrooms and 31 meeting rooms. It is located on 17 acres of land adjacent to Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport and the Intracoastal Waterway.

“We organized the Seatrade Cruise Global industry trade show at the Greater Fort Lauderdale/ Broward County Con-

vention Center in March, and our attendance at the venue was about 10,000,” says Scott Dominguez, executive director, event operations, for the San Francisco office of UBM Americas, a firm that organizes over 300 market-leading B2B events every year. The firm’s head office is in London, with regional offices in New York and Hong Kong.

“It was important for us to meet at a location that was convenient to the cruise industry leaders, that had a professional catering team capable of servicing critically important exhibitor in-booth hospitality orders, and provided outstanding customer service from convention service staff,” says Dominguez, adding that the staff at the convention center were very suitable hosts, “going beyond expectations to ensure success for all involved.”

### HOUSTON'S GEORGE R. BROWN CONVENTION CENTER

An ambitious project to remake Houston’s convention center and the surrounding streets was completed at the beginning of 2017 with the Houston First Corporation wrapping up construction on the \$175 million initiative that included the renovation of the George R. Brown Convention Center (GRBCC), now offering more than 2 million sf of meeting space, the new Partnership Tower office building, a 1,900-space garage and a 97,000-sf pedestrian plaza in front

Rendering of the Colorado Convention Center's \$233 million expansion.



Credit: Visit Denver

of the convention center called Avenida Houston, with new restaurants, public art and entertainment.

Meeting planners like the proximity of the GRBCC to the Marriott and to the Hilton Americas-Houston hotel, as it is situated between both. “We held our annual conference in Houston in April 2017, with 1,400 attendees,” says Reagan J. Alexander, CMP, manager, event strategy, for the Tampa-based Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) — Business Education. “Houston was a good option for us as it was held between our annual conference in Boston the year prior and Honolulu in 2018. Houston of-



George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston, Texas, recently completed a \$175 million expansion and renovation.

Credit: Visit Houston

fered great accessibility for our global membership, with a wonderful downtown atmosphere that hosted many dining options and was easy to navigate, in addition to the great weather in April. The GRBCC and the Hilton Americas-Houston hotel were combined to accommodate our conference and ancillary meetings.

“The Hilton-Americas was our HQ hotel and a great host this event,” says Alexander. “As a seasoned meeting planner, I found the hotel staff were more than accommodating and provided five-star hospitality. A few months after our Houston event a colleague and I attended a conference at the same property and the hotel banquet staff remembered us! It was like ‘going home again.’”

### KANSAS CITY CONVENTION CENTER

In 2017 the city council in Kansas City passed the last remaining measure necessary for construction of a \$310 million convention center hotel that broke ground last year. The Loews Kansas City Convention Center Hotel will offer 800 guest rooms, several restaurants, indoor lap pool, 60,000 sf of meeting and event space, and will connect directly to the Kansas City Convention Center via pedestrian bridge. The new property is expected to open in early 2020.

Many planners like to organize events in Kansas City both for its affordability and its convenient mid-America location. “We worked with a large fast food chain on their annual franchisee meeting and trade show,” says Sarah Williams of BCD Meetings & Events, headquartered in Chicago. “We had about 2,800-3,000 participants so we used the KC Convention Center for all of our exhibitors’ show booths, all the venue’s meeting rooms, breakout sessions and for the final night dinner. It was a three-day event, so everyone was happy with nearby hotels for the multi-night accommodations, which included the KC Marriott Downtown, the Hilton President, the Hotel Philips and others.

“I definitely would recommend that planners use second-tier cities, like Kansas City, not only for its budget-friendly prices, but

the KC Convention Center is within walking distance of several great neighborhoods,” says Williams. “And of course for a national company, flying folks in to Kansas City (International) Airport’s mid-America location from all over the country makes perfect sense.”

### MIAMI BEACH CONVENTION CENTER

The Miami Beach Convention Center will be undergoing a \$615 million renovation and expansion.

The expanded 1.4-million-sf, LEED-certified facility will include a state-of-the-art, 60,000-sf grand ballroom, additional meeting rooms with flexible arrangements, a 20,000-sf glass rooftop junior ballroom, advanced technology and new versatile indoor/outdoor public spaces. For added convenience, 800 parking spaces located across the street from the center will be relocated to within the footprint of the building, thus allowing the 5.8-acre parking lot to be converted into a public park surrounded by canopy trees, a flexible lawn area, a food pavilion and a public plaza to honor the city’s veterans.

The redesigned and renovated Miami Beach Convention Center will be fully completed in 2018, but is open for business now.

### MONTEREY CONFERENCE CENTER

Monterey County opened its newly renovated \$60 million Monterey Conference Center in January. It is expected that the new venue will spur the revitalization of the city and bring additional business to all the hotels in the area.

The Monterey Conference Center is a LEED-certified meeting facility, having added solar panels and other sustainability amenities to the venue, and provides 40,000 sf of flexible meeting space, with a capacity of 3,200. The facility is adjacent to the newly renovated Portola Hotel & Spa and connected to the Monterey Marriott. Combined, these properties offer 85,000 sf of flexible meeting space, 19,150 sf of exhibition space and 700 hotel rooms. “What better way

The Miami Beach Convention Center is undergoing a \$615 million transformation.



Credit: Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau



to kick off a new year than by welcoming visitors to the new Monterey Conference Center and our destination,” says Tammy Blount, president and CEO of the Monterey County Convention and Visitors Bureau. “We see the facility as a regional hub of innovation that will capitalize on our destination’s natural allure, and together, help drive new thinking for group attendees.”

#### NEW YORK’S JACOB K. JAVITS CONVENTION CENTER

Construction officially kicked off in March 2017 for the \$1.5 billion overhaul of New York’s iconic meetings and trade show venue. The renovations, which should be complete in 2021, will see the convention center’s space increase by 50 percent and will result in a 500,000-sf exhibition hall, a 55,000-sf ballroom, the largest in the New York area, 27 new loading docks, a pavilion and a 6.75-acre green rooftop terrace that has already become a sanctuary for area birds.

The updated venue is expected to create a \$393 million boon for the city’s economy and generate 3,100 construction jobs. “The Javits Center is one of New York State’s greatest economic assets, and this project will turn this building into a 21st century marvel, a convention center of the caliber that New York deserves,” said Empire State Development president, CEO and commissioner Howard Zemsky. “With these new state-of-the-art facilities, we will be able to attract the world’s best conferences and events and drive economic activity throughout the region for decades to come.”

The expansion and renovations also will help the neighborhood around the building with a new onsite truck marshaling, loading and storage facility that will relocate 20,000 event-related trucks off area streets each year, improving neighborhood traffic flow and pedestrian safety. As a re-



New York’s Jacob K. Javits Convention Center began a \$1.5 billion expansion in March 2017.

Credit: Jacob K. Javits Convention Center

sult, the move-in and move-out process for events will be reduced by 30 percent, leading to an additional 20 days for new events and additional economic activity.

#### SAN ANTONIO’S HENRY B. GONZÁLEZ CONVENTION CENTER

In 2016 San Antonio’s Henry B. González Convention Center unveiled its \$325 million expansion. The facility is now 1.6 million sf, with 514,000 sf of contiguous exhibit space. There are 70 meeting rooms and a 54,000-sf ballroom.

The expanded center is set on the River Walk in historic downtown, placing attendees within steps of the city’s historic sites, including the Alamo, as well as local restaurants, museums, theaters, shops and thousands of hotel rooms. Walls of windows bring in downtown views, including the 750-foot-tall Tower of the Americas.

“The 40th anniversary of the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium held on December 5-9, was held at the Henry B. González Convention Center, and was a major success,” says Richard Markow, director symposia, at the UT Health San Antonio Cancer Center. “We had about 7,400 attendees and chose the venue not only because it is located in the city where our institution is located, but the size of the venue, costs and the quality of the space fit in nicely with our needs.”

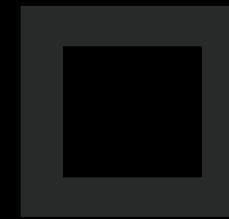
Markow says that his organization also needed to contract with 28 nearby hotels for attendee rooms, with the San Antonio Marriott Rivercenter as the HQ property. The annual San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium has become one of the largest breast cancer meetings in the world, with approximately half of attendees coming from more than 90 countries outside of the U.S. More than 7,000 oncologists, cancer researchers and patient advocates attend, generating \$19 million for the city.

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The Henry B. González Convention Center in San Antonio, Texas, is 1.6 million sf, and has 514,000 sf of contiguous exhibit space.



Credit: visit-sanantonio.com



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# The Cybersecurity Challenge

Vigilant, Cyber-savvy Planners Can Beat Hackers at Their Own Game

By John Buchanan

**W**hile associations pay careful attention to virtually every aspect of their meetings when it comes to planning, promotion, content and travel arrangements, one area that is often neglected is cybersecurity and safety. And that simple fact is rendered more ominous by the reality that cyberattacks are becoming more and more frequent and ever more damaging to their victims. And by no means are associations exempt from the danger.

"Every association that is hosting large meetings needs to realize that they are a target," says Alan Brill, the Se-caucus, New Jersey-based senior managing director of the cybersecurity and investigations practice at the global security firm Kroll. "And that reality is based simply on the fact that a large number of people are going to be using a huge number of mobile devices while traveling. And that makes you a target, no matter what industry you're involved with. Anybody who thinks they are not a target is being of tremendous help to the bad guys."

Vivian Marinelli, senior director, crisis management services, at Milwaukee-based cybersecurity consultants FEI Behavioral Health, agrees that cyberthreats are universal today and that no organization is immune to risk. "And the risk grows constantly," she says, "as hacking becomes more widespread and sophisticated."

The primary risks faced by associations, just as they are for private and public companies, are financial and personal information, such as the Social Security numbers or credit card information, of staff members or meeting attendees, says Jason Paganessi, vice president of information technology at PCMA. "When it comes to associations,

one of the big issues is the protection of personal data," says Paganessi, who notes that the views he is expressing are his own and not official communication from PCMA. "And that responsibility is driven by factors like the data security standards from PCI, which must be adhered to." Any association that stores any personally identifiable information and collects credit card payments, must comply with the PCI (Payment Card Industry) data security standard.

## THE WIRELESS CONUNDRUM

When it comes to association meetings and conventions, a large risk facing planners and attendees is the ill-advised use of free or "public" Wi-Fi networks in the destination, Paganessi says. "A large number of destinations have taken measures to prevent rogue Wi-Fi networks tricking attendees into connecting to them where they can see the traffic going through them, however it's still a common threat to take into consideration."

By now, Marinelli says, all associations and their meeting attendees should be aware of the severe vulnerability — and the lure — of free Wi-Fi networks.

Says Brill, "It is a relatively straightforward task for bad guys to generate a



# SECURITY

Wi-Fi signal that is going to look equal to or better than a real one. And they might even tailor it to your meeting and say, 'Attention medical convention attendees — free Wi-Fi available to you.' Such a hoax is called a "man in the middle" attack. It means the bad guys now have unfettered access to your computer.

And the risk is ubiquitous, Marinelli says. "The chances are good that if a free Wi-Fi hot spot has materialized at your meeting, it was created for a nefarious purpose that is disguised."

She advises clients to inform meeting attendees they should never use the free Wi-Fi networks in a Starbucks or any other public place. "It could easily be coming from a hacker who put it out there to lure you in," she says.

The fundamental factor that underlies the broader risks of Wi-Fi, Brill says, is that "we've gotten people to the point that when they are at a hotel or convention center, they expect free wireless internet. That is what has created the vulnerability that everybody now faces."

The shocker, according to Brill: The typical meeting attendee is not aware of the risk, nor are they prepared for one. "And a big part of the problem," he says, "is that meeting attendees don't read their program or background material. Or the association people running the meeting don't make announcements telling attendees not to use the free Wi-Fi networks they'll be offered. They don't make attendees aware of the risks and the things they should be looking for. So if I create a fake Wi-Fi network that sounds like it's related to your meeting, I have a pretty good chance of getting you to sign onto it."

Not even the safety of the Wi-Fi network at a hotel or convention center should be taken for granted, Brill says. The impetus is on the association to make sure that such networks are secure. "You must make sure that the provider is using secure equipment and that it has secure connection from its technology to the internet. You also need to make sure that the people involved in running it have been backgrounded and vetted." And again, he says, few associations take such measures by asking such questions.

The good news is that Brill offers a simple recommendation for risk mitigation. "Before attendees head out to

your meeting, send them an email that is about just one thing," he says. "And that one thing is online security. And what it's going to say is, 'We know that many people today experience spoofed Wi-Fi being operated by criminals. We do not want you to be a victim, so we are informing you that the official Wi-Fi network for the meeting is named XYZ. That is the only network you should connect to. If you connect to anything else, we cannot promise that you are secure.'"

Somewhat incredibly, he says that in his experience and observation, almost no associations undertake such a simple and obvious action. "There are just so many things going on before a meeting that something as simple as the action I'm suggesting does not get taken."

Therefore, he offers a backup measure: Make formal announcements at the meeting. "For example, do it at the beginning of an opening general session," he says. "The real point is that you have already gone to the

**"It is a relatively straightforward task for bad guys to generate a Wi-Fi signal that is going to look equal to or better than a real one. And they might even tailor it to your meeting."**



Alan Brill  
Senior Managing Director  
Kroll  
Secaucus, NJ

trouble and expense of providing a secure network at the meeting. Why not go that last step and make it easy for people to connect to the right network and avoid the risky ones?"

## TWO SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

Given the enormity and inevitability of the risk, the other good news is that two well-established best practices — the use of a virtual private network, or VPN, and two-factor authentication — can eradicate much of the exposure. "A VPN is a very easy measure to take, and it works," Paganessi says.

A VPN is, in effect, a computer program that creates encrypted connections. "And because of that, it's much

harder for someone to intercept your signal," Brill says. And the technology is widely available and inexpensive today. It can be acquired for just a month to cover the meeting dates, then canceled.

Brill suggests that associations use VPNs at all of their major meetings as a fundamental best practice.

Attendees also should be encouraged to use two-factor authentication to protect their personal information, including information related to the meeting, Brill says.

Two-factor authentication requires an additional piece of information to log in and visit an exterior website. The second factor can include anything from an extra PIN to a fingerprint.

Marinelli notes that despite the overwhelming evidence of their effectiveness as security tools, not all associations are using VPNs and two-factor authentication at their meetings. Her advice: if your association is not doing so, start now or risk the consequences.

Her caution even extends to the use of the official Wi-Fi networks at hotels, convention centers and other meeting venues. She advises associations to still deploy a VPN and two-factor authentication as insurance.

## 'SOCIAL ENGINEERING'

A relatively new threat, which Paganessi calls "social engineering," uses technology — including one as basic and old school as the telephone — to manipulate behaviors of unsuspecting victims.

"An important element of cybersecurity is the 'social' part of it," Paganessi says. "And what I mean by that is that a large part of security concerns, with any IT department, is not so much systems and software. It's more about the people."

So-called social engineering is probably the biggest risk that any IT department has to deal with today, he says.

As an example, he says a nefarious individual will call an organization on the phone and (trick) an employee into giving them the information they need to get access to its IT system. "Or an employee will get an email that looks like it comes from your CEO or treasurer. And it will say, 'Hey, can you please make sure this bill gets paid? Here's the invoicing and bank transfer information.' I have heard, and this is third-party information, that people have fallen for that and paid large sums of money to a 'vendor' that is not really a vendor."

In the most sophisticated executions of the scam, Paganessi says, the email appears to be a legitimate communication from the CEO to the organization's chief fi-

nancial officer. "And what you see is a pretty convincing invoice that the CEO asks to be paid."

The great irony of the internet age, Paganessi says, is that too often, when confronted with such an online scheme, the victim does not bother to pick up the phone and call the CEO's office to ask whether the request for

**"An important element of cybersecurity is the 'social' part of it. And what I mean by that is that a large part of security concerns, with any IT department, is not so much systems and software. It's more about the people."**



Jason Paganessi  
V.P. Information Technology  
PCMA  
Chicago, IL

such a payment is legitimate. "All you have to do," he says, "is ask a question about whether the message is legitimate."

How does an organization protect against such acts of clever social engineering? "Training and awareness," Paganessi says. "At PCMA, we do updated internal training at least twice a month. And as part of those training sessions, we cover a range of topics including security. And we explain these different scenarios of how outsiders are getting access to systems. In the end, the most important thing is to make people in your organization aware that these things happen and what you need to do if they happen to you."

Brill also cites social engineering as a key vulnerability. "For example, you might get a phone call from someone who tells you they are from your banking institution," he says. "And they will tell you they are investigating a possible breach of your account. And they will often trick you into giving them your credit card number — and the PIN number and the expiration date."

## RANSOMWARE

Another growing threat is the deployment of ransomware, which takes control of and, in effect, locks up your computer, then demands a payment to restore access.

Marinelli calls it one of the most serious current risks at meetings and events. And the most obvious consequence is the cost of removing it from your computer.



# SECURITY

"The basic reason why ransomware is such a serious threat is that at a meeting, you are making yourself accessible to a lot of communication and information," Marinelli says. "And often, quite a bit of that is from people you don't know prior to the event. And even when you're dealing with people you know, you don't know how good the cybersecurity measures are at the organization or company they work for. For example, you have no way of knowing how up-to-date their systems are and whether they're using all of the current



Vivian Marinelli  
Senior Director  
Crisis Management Services  
FEI Behavioral Health  
Milwaukee, WI

**"Planners and attendees must be aware that giving you a malware-based free USB at a meeting is one of the easiest ways to access your network — or even to take control of it and hold it hostage."**

security patches that are available. And those things make almost everyone vulnerable to a random attack."

And, as Brill noted in a broader context, the reason why meeting planners and attendees are particularly vulnerable is that they are bringing multiple personal devices to the event and likely not taking all of the security precautions and measures that they should, Marinelli says. "And they are receiving a lot of information and a lot of emails while they're at the meeting. And making just one mistake by clicking on an email or a link is all it takes to become infected. So the risk is that something will get through to them that does the damage, and they are not even aware of it until later."

In the event of what appears to be a ransomware attack, the simplest solution is to turn the laptop off without doing anything else, she says. "And leave it off.

Then contact your IT department and tell them what has happened."

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Yet another cybersecurity threat that is not well understood by meeting planners and attendees is the ever-widening distribution of free USB devices (flash drives) as promotional tools used by meeting sponsors or exhibitors. They can include everything from new product information to a presentation given in a general session or breakout.

Unfortunately, Marinelli says, they also can include malware designed to infiltrate your organization's IT system. So Marinelli's counsel is to be acutely aware of the risk involved in ever using them. "And do not accept and use one from an unknown or questionable source. Planners and attendees must be aware that giving you a malware-based free USB at a meeting is one of the easiest ways to access your network — or even to take control of it and hold it hostage."

Marinelli also recommends that meeting planners and attendees routinely ask their IT departments for an up-to-date list of the measures that should be taken to protect themselves from an onsite breach. "Of course, the issue there is that so many IT departments have so much going on, they might not be able to help you," Marinelli says. "So it's really a personal responsibility of meeting planners and their attendees to stay informed and prepared."

By the same token, when a planner or attendee returns from a meeting, he or she should ask their IT department to make sure their devices are secure and that they have not been infected with a virus or malware during the meeting.

The open question, she says, is how many associations or companies will go that far to protect themselves.

"You have to think about it this way," Paganessi says. "Technology has created a lot of convenience for us. But it has also created a lot of susceptibility. So you have to be smart in the way you use the technology."

Even with all recommended precautions, however, the risks remain serious and universal, Marinelli says. "There is no such thing, and there never will be, any such thing as absolute cybersecurity. And meanwhile, hackers will continue to get better and better at what they do. Therefore, the only real protection is constant vigilance."

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# Eat, Drink and Be Merry

## Fresh Food and Beverage Trends Are Spicing Up Meetings

**T**here's a myriad of things that need to be perfected for any meeting or conference, but time after time, the food and beverage offerings are one of the biggest scorecards kept at any event.

"Meeting planners are constantly being judged by attendees by where they stay and what is being served or what options they have offered," says Phil Aldax, director of food and beverage for the Anaheim Marriott in California. "If you can

By Keith Loria

make something memorable and it creates buzz, attendees are often scoring in a positive (way), which in turn makes meeting planners want to come back."

Current food trends are important for meeting planners to understand so they know what people are looking for and more important, what can create a creative and innovative experience. Successful planners can take the current "in" and then drive the innovation around it to make it memorable.

James Gambardella, director of operations for Doral Ar-

rowwood in Rye Brook, New York, says the food and beverage category is most exciting for meeting attendees when it's interactive — including action stations with chefs preparing and educating, guest involvement, build-your-own entrees, specialty cocktails with local spirits, and farm-to-table items with explanations on the origin of the local item.

"We are seeing a rise in international-themed food stations with wine pairings to match," he says. "For the wine pairings, it's imperative for the property or venue to provide staff that is knowledgeable to assist at the tasting table so the attendees feel they are taking away knowledge from the experience."

Jana Thompson, owner of On Point Hospitality & Site Selection, an independent planner in Dallas, Texas, says conferences are becoming "foodie fests."

"Most attendees want an experience with their dining. It's more about where the food comes from and what it looks like in the presentation," she says. "It's also about what's going on around them. One example was a dinner while Cirque performers were dangling around you or perhaps a fashion show pairing each course with fashion."

David Grace, a managing agent with the Used Truck Association, recently planned the organization's annual conference at the Paris Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. A survey taken after the event showed that the majority of its 850 attendees were impressed with the food and beverage service.

"The facility is staffed with professionals who know how to help you create a fantastic meeting for your guests, and the true test is how they reacted to those unexpected situations that always come up, and they came through with excellence," he says. "Offering food and beverage options that went above and beyond was a big hit with our members."

### ON THE MENU

Michele Polci, director of citywide catering sales for Caesars Entertainment in Las Vegas, says spices and herbs are becoming more of a focus on menus, as they add so much flavor and interest. For example, lavender-infused crème brûlée is a big favorite now.

"Middle Eastern spices such as cardamom and sumac are becoming commonplace," she says. "Hand-held foods are making a splash as well. Fun, colorful foods and textures are playing a role. Planners want to know where their foods are sourced and coming from."

Foods that are popular in 2018 include Moroccan kofta, ramen noodles, hawker pork noodles, agave tequila shredded beef, pickled cabbage, avocado cream, queso fresco, pico de gallo, and ancho cumin crostini.

Purvill Chaney, executive chef for Spectra Food Services and Hospitality at the Duke Energy Convention Center, Cin-

cinnati, Ohio, notes one of the biggest trends for conventions and meetings is the presentation of comfort foods in lighter or healthier ways.

"People want the comfort foods that they know and love but without the heaviness that comes with massive portions," Chaney says. "Our culinary team crafts unique takes on timeless favorites. Pretzel-crusted chicken paired with whipped cauliflower mash and roasted chicken with tomato Brussels sprout salad and quinoa wild rice introduce

**"If you can make something memorable and it creates buzz, attendees are often scoring in a positive (way), which in turn makes meeting planners want to come back."**



Phil Aldax  
Director of Food & Beverage  
Anaheim Marriott  
Anaheim, CA

exceptional flavors that cater to a variety of diners."

Along these lines, farm-to-table foods and locally sourced foods are currently trending in the industry and the concept is growing.

"People want to know where their food is coming from, and they want it to pass through the least amount of channels as possible before it reaches their plate," Chaney says. "This has grown from requests for locally grown fruits and vegetables to locally sourced meats, homemade ingredients and foods, and locally sourced craft beer and spirits. More chefs are embracing farm-to-table, and this concept has become a selling point."

Chefs also are accommodating dietary restrictions in their menus by offering vegan and gluten-free options, for example, and avoiding cooking with ingredients commonly associated with food allergies, such as peanut oil.

John Billings, executive chef and assistant director of food and beverage for Eaglewood Resort & Spa, Itasca, Illinois, describes one current craze as "iconic food," such as favorites from the past. "Today, society is in a rapid growth with technology and the ideology of 'not enough time' in which we often tend to compromise our ability to cook a great meal," he says. "Bringing back iconic foods can re-teach society how much fun cooking can be and establish the feeling of accomplishment from scratch and homemade cookery."

Mike Schugt, president of the Teneo Hospitality Group,





Todd Goldian  
Executive Chef, The National Conference Center, Leesburg, Virginia

**“CEA Farms here in Loudoun County produces enough lettuces, tomatoes and greens for us to feed 1,200 people at a time.”**

Orlando, Florida, notes curated and organic meals that feature bison, elk and other more exotic meats are more frequently being seen in banquets and conferences.

“A big trend is that you are seeing cooking that was typically reserved for tables of four in fine restaurants being done for 4,000 people,” he says.

Executive chef Todd Goldian with The National Conference Center in Leesburg, Virginia, says there continues to be a demand for farm-to-table cuisine, but the venue is taking things one step further and going “hyperlocal,” working with local farmers to source the food.

“CEA Farms here in Loudoun County produces enough lettuces, tomatoes and greens for us to feed 1,200 people at a time,” he says. “We are also using Silcott Springs Farm for all of our ground beef, and we also just started purchasing Italian sausage from Spring House Farms.”

#### THINKING ABOUT THE GROUP

One popular group activity is something called “Bar Wars” where groups work together to create, name and build a signature cocktail using local products, then feature the beverage during the dinner.

“We’ve also seen Iron Chef competitions with tradi-

tional dishes or grilling competitions in warmer weather,” Gambardella says. “At Doral, we are set on 114 acres so groups like to use the outdoor space when in-season, and the outdoor grilling Iron Chef really took off over the summer months.”

Ashleigh Dellinger, a spokesperson for the Mansion on Forsyth Park, Savannah, Georgia, says the venue is seeing requests for additional interactive food and drink demos for breaks and receptions, and not just a typical carving station.

“Interactive demos where the guests have contests with each other for teambuilding, or organizing a pay-it-forward event for food shelters with a culinary demonstration have proven popular,” she says. “This is why we built a purposeful demo-kitchen on location to host events and activities. It is a very popular way to fill a 60- to 90-minute time block for a group or conference.”

Mark Rome, owner of the Maui Wowi Hawaiian Coffees & Smoothies franchises, takes pride in providing a unique and fun vendor experience and specializes in corporate events and conventions. “I’m currently seeing that smoothie socials have become more mainstream for groups at these events,” he says. “Smoothies incorporate the ‘better for you’ component that is continuously trending in the food and beverage world.”

Billings notes that expo kitchens and action stations are kicking “food theater” up a notch or two for groups. “Exhibition kitchens have been around in some form since the invention of brunch. But today, we’re talking full-blown food theater, driven by Food TV in all its incarnations and the prevalence of social media outlets that are ideal for everything food and beverage,” he says. “Restaurant kitchens today offer a front row seat at a dining performance, and guests are crowding around to take in the aromas, flavors,

cooking tips and high energy of the stars of the show — the chefs. It’s a visual and sensual spectacle that entertains, nourishes and satisfies everyone in the entire dining room.”

Build-your-own stations with toppings also are popular. Examples include a grits station with toppings, customized grilled cheese station, or biscuit bar with several flavors of biscuits and toppings.

Tim Fannin, corporate vice president of food and beverage for The Kessler Collection, has brainstormed with small groups on ways to combine jewelry trunk shows, as well as art exhibits in its galleries, with wine tastings. That is something that groups are taking more of an interest in.

Courtney Skoog, who was conference and meetings coordinator for metroConnections, Bloomington, Minnesota, at the time of the interview, says many organizations are seeing increased demand from attendees to have healthy options at meals and breaks, including an increasing number of attendees who require gluten free, dairy free or other dietary-specific items.

“Recently we had a client bring their attendees to an off-site gym for an early morning group exercise. They needed a light meal, but also something that would fuel them for their workout,” she says. “We couldn’t send them off with the typical loaded breakfast buffet that usually includes scrambled eggs, sausage links, pancakes, bagels, etc. So, we offered healthy grab-and-go items: hard boiled eggs, individual Greek yogurts, steel cut oats with berries, and whole fruit. We provided the transportation and sent protein and energy bars on the buses, so they could have a post-workout snack for the ride back to the hotel.”

#### WINE AND BEER!

Aldax feels that beverage trends are actually outpacing food trends in conventions today.

“The beverage evolution is just blowing up constantly and continues to grow,” he says. “When a few years ago it was all about fresh juices, now it’s truly about how to drive simple creative fresh cocktails.”

In Southern California, he adds, it’s all about micro-breweries and craft beer. “In the convention world, it’s about how you can get a great beer in an event setting,” Aldax says. “We have worked hard to create a great presentation and overall draft beer in a catering setting. Customers love it, and they can choose from local craft beers.”

Gambardella recommends bringing in local breweries to lecture to groups and provide tastings of their beers with some light food pairing and having the head brewmaster onsite is a must. “Similar to breweries, local spirits lectures are also hot,” he says. “We have brought in the head spirits-maker to the event, and they stay and answer questions.”



Culinary demonstration at the Jumeirah Vittaveli hotel in the Maldives.

Mocktails, Schugt says, also are popular at conferences, as not everyone drinks alcohol, and they want something more than typical soft drinks and coffees. “Today, you are seeing many exotic-crafted cocktails made without alcohol that are very interesting for attendees,” he says.

Goldian has seen food and wine/beer dinners becoming quite popular at the National Conference Center, so the venue partners with local vineyards and breweries for the products that it selects for those dinners.

#### WORKING TOGETHER

Meeting planners would be wise to talk to the facilities hosting the conference or corporate meeting because they are often on the pulse of the latest food and beverage trends.

“I think success comes from planners meeting with our

**“Attendees want a certain level of personalization for their banquet experience and planners must deliver it. ...Keeping up with the trends is important to stay one step ahead of what attendees are seeking so that they can be pleasantly surprised.”**



Mike Schugt  
President  
Teneo Hospitality Group  
Orlando, FL

own sales team, onsite planners and including our chef and food and beverage teams to brainstorm unique ways to incorporate some of these upcoming trends along with their mission and keeping it within their budget,” Gambardella says. “This could include tastings, preconference meetings and connecting after the meeting to brainstorm ideas for next year.”

Besides, getting together beforehand is an opportunity for chefs to be creative and build face-to-face relationships

## Setting Up

When it comes to preparing a meeting or conference room for food and drink, those in the industry say it’s important to think about the feel of the room. “We create a visually stimulating environment with various ways to set rooms,” says Phil Aldax, director of food and beverage for Anaheim Marriott. “Lego rooms, tables made of links with glass, rather than old linen-covered tables with skirts.”

And there are plenty of ways to be budget conscious and still bring

innovation and the “wow” factor to a meeting. “The earlier that planners can begin the process of planning their menus, the more they can get for their budget,” says Duke Energy Convention Center executive chef Purvill Chaney. “We can find better deals earlier in the process than last minute. Planners should always request tastings with their own choices along with requests from the chef so that they can see his creativity.”

Planners always should feel that they’ve gotten more than they expected, and the earlier the planning process begins the better.

— KL



This Lego display provides a “wow factor” for attendees during a meeting coffee break.





Purvill Chaney  
Executive Chef  
Duke Energy Convention Center  
Cincinnati, OH

**“People want to know where their food is coming from, and they want it to pass through the least amount of channels as possible before it reaches their plate.”**

with a planner. “As planners, it’s important to know fads versus trends. You always want to make sure you know your attendees and review past surveys about their satisfaction, with the menus you previously selected,” Polci says. “At Caesars Entertainment, our menus are a priority and get updated twice a year. We have a very talented chef pool, many award-winning. They are happy to sit down with you, to custom-design menus for your event and prefer this as it assures that menus are unique and well received.”

At the Duke Energy Convention Center, the catering sales team works with planners to understand the demographics of the group or event so they can make on-trend suggestions that can also fit the palates of the meeting and convention: “With more than 80 percent of planners choosing to create their own menus, our team helps them to create the exceptional food experience they want to provide for their guests,” Chaney says. “Tastings and client events allow us to demonstrate our creativity and bring an understanding of how food is being used in various ways. It also gives planners an idea on what is trending in the industry and how they can present these concepts to their attendees.”

#### KEEPING UP

Planners know if they want to satisfy stakeholders and attendees, they have to keep up with what’s trending. “People are demanding, not asking for trendy foods, ideas and concepts,” Chaney says. “Knowing food trends helps food and beverage sales managers offer the best menus and suggestions to planners. Our goal is to create an exciting food experience for guests that matches or amplifies the entire event experience during their time at our venue.”

A savvy meeting planner will be reading food magazines, visiting foodie websites and watching the cooking channel to see what the current trends are, but that’s just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to what they should be doing. Travel is another factor that is changing people’s tastes.

“A planner needs to experience everything through site visits,” Aldax says. “If they are excited, it usually creates a small buzz, which in turn creates a bigger buzz when the meeting finally arrives.”

Schugt says that planners must realize that 2018 brings a “Starbucks mentality,” where everyone wants exactly what they want. “Attendees want a certain level of personalization for their banquet experience and planners must deliver it,” he says. “If not, it can become the object of social media and an overall group’s level of satisfaction. Keeping up with the trends is important to stay one step ahead of what attendees are seeking so that they can be pleasantly surprised.”

Polci notes that planners should keep an eye on the major markets like New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago and Las Vegas. “Be curious and try new, exciting options before it becomes overdone,” she says. “Experience the newest and hottest restaurants to understand the new hot food trends. Guy Fieri, one of our celebrity chefs, is the host of “Diners, Drive-ins and Dives,” which is a great show for ideas. Some of the smaller chef-run restaurants have the trendiest new dishes. They’re often menu items that have been around but are presented in a unique way or with a twist.”

It’s important to remember when planning for a large group that what you have seen and tasted in a restaurant may need some adaptation, so talk with the chef and they will work with you to adapt that menu item. “It’s extremely important to keep up because you want to stay relevant to the consumer,” Rome says. “Even if flavors stay the same, the desired experience may differ. For example, right now healthier alternatives are trending, meaning customers are more health-conscious. By understanding this, I can direct each customer to the product that is a best fit for them.”

Food is one of the most important components when planning a meeting. It weighs heavily when attendees are evaluating their experience, so be sure that it’s something that is at the top of your list.

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Fresh and colorful salad selection at the Duke Energy Convention Center.

Credit: Duke Energy Convention Center



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# Debates, Disputes and Adjudications

## Avoiding the New Legal Minefields in Site Selection and Attendee Safety

By John Buchanan

**F**or more than two decades, a trio of legal issues — attrition, cancellation and force majeure — have been the most commonly debated, disputed and adjudicated. And while they remain perennial sources of friction between hotels and their association clients, only force majeure, in a new and unprecedented way, has maintained its conversational dominance. Meanwhile, two new legal concerns — the impact of heated political disputes on destination selection, and the legal ramifications of measures intended to protect the safety of attendees — have risen to prominence.

### POLITICAL HEAT

Over the last several years, and particularly since the inauguration of Donald Trump as president, political controversies have inserted themselves into the meeting destination selection process to an unprecedented extent, legal experts say.

“The political climate in the country has become more and more divisive in the last year,” says Phoenix-based Lisa M. Sommer Devlin, a well-known and highly respected attorney who specializes in hospitality law. “Although politics is not a new issue in the meeting industry, it’s really starting to come to a head now. So associations are becoming more concerned about politics at the state level, and they now have political concerns about meeting destinations such as Arizona, Indiana, North Carolina and Texas because of their immigration, or LGBT discrimination or transgender bathroom laws. They also have concerns about other states that may or may not be doing things that associations have political problems with. So more and more associations are concerned that their at-



Protesting the North Carolina “bathroom bill.”

tendees may not want to go to places where there are political positions they disagree with.”

In fact, she says, some association bylaws now formalize concerns about specific political issues that challenge or violate their views.

Devlin has had direct interactions with associations that have removed entire states such as Arizona from consideration as a destination because of their objections to the state’s controversial immigration policies. And Arizona is not alone. “The associations,” Devlin says, “say ‘we cannot come to your state because we have decided your state discriminates’ against whatever group it is they are concerned about.”

As a result, in booking meetings years into the future, Devlin explains, associations are now trying to protect themselves legally from a political controversy that they believe could make it unpopular or impractical for them to honor a contract signed today. Consequently, they are attempting to insert clauses into their contracts that shield them from future political developments they deem controversial or unpopular with their members.

“There have been some suggested types of clauses along those lines that have been noted by industry organizations,” Devlin says. “But they have a lot of (negative) issues from the hotel’s perspective. So the hotels are pushing back against them.”

For example, she says, “I have counseled hotel clients in instances where an association has requested a clause that says that if after the date the meeting contract is signed, if a state or local government passes a law or policy that the association believes discriminates against a class of people, such as transgender people, or by religion or race, the association wants the right to cancel without payment. And of course, hotels are very reluctant to accept any of those contract clauses.”

John Foster, Esq., CHME, an Atlanta-based attorney who has represented association clients for more than two decades, has had clients raise such an issue. “But I’d say that only about 10 percent of my clients have expressed any concerns like that,” he says. “So I’d call it a minor issue. I do hear it talked about a lot within the industry, but in my experience it’s not that big of a deal.”

Tyra Hilliard, Esq., CMP, another highly respected veteran attorney who represents associations from her offices in St. Simons Island, Georgia, says the complication of meeting contract negotiations based on political positions is a new and still unclarified issue of law. “But I have been able to get clauses into contracts that say that the group can cancel without liability if one of these issues come up,” says Hilliard, who also teaches at College of Coastal Georgia. “But it needs to be specific. For example, if the La Raza organization that represents Hispanics objected to the passage of an objectionable provision related to immigration, that’s specific. That’s a much stronger case than the Chocolate Lovers Association saying ‘oh, there’s this immigration law we don’t like, and we don’t want to meet there.’”

She also points out that associations and meeting planners should understand and respect the fact that “it’s not the hotel’s fault that a state or local government passed a law that you find objectionable. And if meeting planners say I’m not bringing a meeting to your hotel because of this issue, then I do think we’re hurting our hotel partners.”

Foster believes that in an era of political correctness, “organizations are becoming a little too sensitive for their own good. You can hold a meeting in one of these places without saying your group supports whatever their law says. So in that sense, this controversy can get out of hand. And I also see that sometimes organizations get involved in these issues without really understanding what the issue really is. For example, the North Carolina transgender bathroom law, which has since been repealed, only applied to state government buildings. It had nothing to do with transgender meeting attendees not being able to use the bathroom of their choice.”

Devlin concurs that associations can sometimes misinterpret or misunderstand the actual implications of the laws

**“The political climate in the country has become more and more divisive in the last year. Although politics is not a new issue in the meeting industry, it’s really starting to come to a head now.”**



Lisa M. Sommer Devlin  
Attorney  
Devlin Law Firm P.C.  
Phoenix, AZ

they profess to oppose. However, Hilliard thinks the controversies and disputes will get worse before they get better.

“Under the Trump administration, we’re seeing things that are more extreme than they used to be,” she says. “So I am worried that under this administration, we’re going to see more of these controversies. But it’s not unique to this administration, either. We’re always going to see these issues to some extent.”

As a result of that reality, Foster counsels his association clients to keep their meetings separate from their politics. “In the long run,” he says, “it just doesn’t make much sense to mix the two.”

### THE SAFETY DEBATE

In the wake of last year’s shooting at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas and ever-increasing fears about terrorism, the enhanced safety of meeting attendees and the legal implications related to it are also becoming a topic of inquiry and review.

“Safety is one of the biggest legal issues we’re seeing right now,” Hilliard says. “And increasingly, the issue is a hotel’s liability in the case of a shooting or bombing.”

The impetus is clearly on hotels to maintain high standards of security and procedures, she says. “But on the other hand, do we want to get to the point where we have to go through metal detectors to enter a hotel? And how do you answer that question after an event like the Las Vegas shooting?”

And, she says, she does not believe that even the Las Vegas shooting will have any real impact on hotel security procedures. Like all shootings, it will fade away and the status quo will prevail.

“I just don’t think that in the name of greater safety,” she says, “we are prepared to accept the kind of police state measures you routinely see at hotels elsewhere in the world.”

Devlin agrees that safety is becoming a more hotly discussed legal issue as a result of the Las Vegas shooting. “For example,” she says, “some hotels are changing their policies when it comes to issues like ‘Do Not Disturb’ signs, meaning they can enter your room any time they choose to. And a



lot of meeting planners are raising questions about whether the hotels really have the right to do that.” Among the core rationales for the right is protecting against legal liability in the face of inaction, Devlin says. “For example, the guest could be ill or incapacitated and the hotel needs to go in to make sure they are all right.”

Furthermore, she says, “it has always been the hotel’s right to enter your room if they believe there is something going on in there that poses a risk either to other guests or the property itself. It’s just that in light of things like the Las Vegas shooting, meeting planners are becoming more aware of that issue because hotels are making their policies more clear.”

In general, there is also a broader concern today among associations about the safety of meeting attendees. “And that’s a good thing,” Devlin says. “But I also see instances now where the association wants to get actively involved in the safety and security issues. In that case, if they take on that responsibility and do it wrong, they could face liability if there’s a problem. If they leave it to the hotel, they do not face that kind of liability.”

For example, she says, more associations now want to insert liquor responsibility clauses into contracts. “That should be up to the hotel and not the association,” she says. “The association should not be getting involved in that. That’s the hotel’s job.”

Foster says, “According to most state laws, if you are a seller or server of alcohol, like a hotel or restaurant, you have two duties. One is to not serve someone under age. The other is to not serve someone who is noticeably intoxicated. And most companies train their bartenders how to recognize that. So there is case law and tort law based on that. But I also want my association clients to have contractual provisions that are related to that responsibility. So I put in my contracts that the hotel will follow the law and not serve any attendees that are either under age or noticeably intoxicated. And I want that in the contract to show that my association client raised the issue and will hold the hotel responsible.”



John Foster, Esq., CHME  
Attorney  
Foster, Jensen & Gulley  
Atlanta, GA

**“My force majeure clause says that if anything happens, in any location from where attendees are traveling, and more than 30-40 percent of attendees are affected, then the meeting can be cancelled under force majeure.”**



Planners must plan for the safety and well-being of every attendee.

He also agrees with Devlin’s assertion that “meeting planners should not try to tell the hotel how to do its job when it comes to safety. And the issue should be clarified with language in the contract that indemnifies the association by agreeing to cover any liability or legal fees that could arise.”

The overarching issue for associations, when it comes to safety, Foster says, is to meet a four-part standard that is now widely supported by existing case law.

“With regard to attendee safety, meeting planners have four key legal responsibilities,” Foster says. “The first is to investigate all aspects of the event and to take appropriate action if they see any risks or danger. The second is that they must warn their attendees of any known risks or hazards. For example, if you know there is a high-crime area of your meeting destination, you have a duty to warn your attendees. The third is to plan for the safety and well-being of every attendee. For example, you must have adequate security in place. And number four is to take precautions not to expose your attendees to unreasonable risk of harm.”

The well-established legal standard, if litigation against the association ensues, he says, “is whether you met the generally established industry standard for attendee safety. In other words, did you do what a professional meeting planner at a typical association would have done?”

#### NEW FACE OF FORCE MAJEURE?

The third legal issue that has become a topic of spirited controversy, based on new arguments from associations, is force majeure.

“Force majeure is now becoming more of an issue because some associations and planners are worried about the impact of things like climate change,” Devlin says. “By that, I mean things like wildfires in California and more serious storms in certain places. The question becomes at what point is an association excused from a meeting contract because of one of these potential threats? And that is an unresolved issue. It’s new.”

As a practical matter, Devlin says, the hotly debated question now is “at what point can a group go to the hotel and say

we are not coming to the meeting next week because of the wildfires that are five miles away or 10 miles away? That’s an open question right now, and there is no good answer. But meeting planners are now looking at those issues and asking how these things might affect them in the future. They’re asking if they should be doing something differently in terms of force majeure.”

The key issue, Devlin says, is reality versus perception. If a hurricane destroys your hotel before a scheduled meeting, there is no disputing the fact that force majeure applies. But a claim that a wildfire that is currently 10 miles away might, or could, impact the hotel is a subjective, or speculative, claim that might or might not prove to have any merit.

“There is no such thing as the potential threat of a force majeure,” Devlin says. “Either there is one or there isn’t. Either the hotel is open for business on your dates or it’s not. That’s what planners need to understand. But what we’re seeing now is that more associations and more planners are trying to redraw those lines and say we’re not coming to the meeting if this or that happens. And we don’t have to pay.”

In what she cited as a good example, an association group from Texas wanted to cancel a meeting in Chicago scheduled to take place days after Hurricane Harvey devastated the Houston area last August. “The hotel said ‘the hurricane was in Texas, not Chicago, so that is not a force majeure issue.’ I see that as an example of how there are some associations and planners who want to misuse force majeure in a way that has nothing to do with what’s going on in the meeting destination.”

In Foster’s view, such a claim is entirely legitimate. “I have dealt with that sort of thing in the past,” he says. “And my force majeure clause says that if anything happens, in any location from where attendees are traveling, and more than



Hurricane Harvey wreaked havoc in Houston last year.

**“Safety is one of the biggest legal issues we’re seeing right now. And increasingly, the issue is a hotel’s liability in the case of a shooting or bombing.”**



Tyra Hilliard, Esq., CMP  
Attorney  
St. Simons Island, GA

30-40 percent of attendees are affected, then the meeting can be cancelled under force majeure. And I’ve been putting that in contracts for 20 years.”

Hilliard leans toward Foster’s argument. “Hotels like to say that if something happens to the hotel or the destination, then force majeure applies,” she says. “But the Texas hurricane is a perfect example of another kind of situation. If 40 or 50 percent of your attendees are living in Houston and they’ve been through what they’ve been through, how many of them are going to want to go to a convention?”

Foster cites yet another example that he says is very plausible and not unprecedented. “Let’s say an association has a meeting scheduled in Miami,” he says. “And on the meeting dates, it’s warm in Miami and the weather is beautiful, but a big snowstorm has closed down some of the major airports attendees would be flying out of for the last two or three days, so 20 or 30 percent of attendees can’t get to the meeting. That’s a legitimate force majeure claim that has nothing to do with the destination or the hotel.”

Foster believes that in such a situation, the contract’s attrition clause and force majeure clause overlap, and that the hotel must take a broad view of the practical reality the association faces. In such an instance, he says, the force majeure provision should override the attrition clause, which means that both the association and the hotel win in the sense that the meeting can still take place, but with reduced attendance — that goes unpenalized because the attrition clause has been waived under extraordinary circumstances.

Far trickier, the three lawyers agree, is the notion that an association can cancel a meeting because of concerns about a wildfire that is burning five or 10 miles from the hotel, but it not currently moving toward the hotel that will host the meeting in a few days.

“That example gets more tough, because if the hotel says we’re open and operating, the planner can say, yeah, but what if the wind shifts?” Hilliard says. “These fires move quickly and 10 miles is not much distance. On other hand, what I tell my clients is that fear is not a force majeure issue. If the fires are not right now preventing you from holding your meeting, my opinion is you pretty much have to go through with it.” AC&F



# Atlantic City's Renewal

## Groups Return Year After Year as the City Rebuilds, Rebrands and Renovates

By Christine Loomis

**A**tlantic City is a destination in forward motion. Rebuilding, rebranding and renovating are key elements of the city's dynamic change, and though much has already been accomplished, there is still more to come.

"The future for Atlantic City is on an upward trend," says Jim Wood, president and CEO, Meet AC, the sales and marketing force that supports the Atlantic City Convention Center. "Currently, properties are being reinvested in and purchased, which will ultimately open additional hotel rooms, unique attractions, entertainment and dining options. This will make the attendee experience in Atlantic City that much better. Our casino/hotel partners have added additional meeting space to their properties because they see how important the meeting and convention industry is to the destination. Atlantic City's convention and meeting industry is consistently growing, while booking new and repeat business."

Meet AC reported that 2017 was a record year in booking future meeting and convention business with a total of 255 meetings and conventions booked representing 313,451 future hotel room nights. "By exceeding our room night goals

for the fourth consecutive year, this allows us to continue to grow our meetings footprint," says Wood.

Add to that ample meeting space, including the convention center's 600,000 sf, stellar dining, more than 25 golf courses and a mix of hotels that include gaming and non-gaming properties. And, of course, there's the ideal location. "Atlantic City is 60 miles from Philadelphia, 125 miles from New York and 175 miles from Washington, DC," Wood points out, "which makes train and bus transportation easy access into the destination for attendees."

Considering all the positives, it's no surprise that many groups come back year after year.

### A TRUE FAN OF ATLANTIC CITY

The New Jersey Apartment Association brought its annual Conference & Expo to the city in May 2017. The event drew 1,600 attendees and was based at The Water Club at Borgata. Nichole LoPresti, senior vice president of the association, notes that her group has been hosting this conference in Atlantic City for decades.

"We love hosting our conference in Atlantic City because it provides us with a multitude of options — world-class restaurants to host events, more than ample meeting spaces and an amazing support team with our partners at Meet AC," she says. "Our Conference & Expo is a three-day convention executed by our events team, which is small. We rely heavily on Meet AC, which supports our team in every way imaginable. Their staff assists with providing support at our registration desk, works with us on our audio-visual needs, works with our budget on food and beverage and keeps us on track throughout the year. Our event runs seamlessly due in large part to the support we receive from the team at Meet AC."

A true fan of Atlantic City, LoPresti thinks the city has been judged unfairly in the past. "I think other meeting planners should know that Atlantic City is open and ready to do business. There has been some negative media in the past regarding Atlantic City, and I believe this coverage was unfair and untrue," she says. "The convention center and its team have done an amazing job attracting new business and retaining shows like ours that have been loyal for decades. It's not by accident that more people want to go to Atlantic City and do business there. There are world-class accommodations at the Borgata, and the convention center is constantly reinvesting to improve."

The group holds events in two locations. "Our educational offerings and our expo take place at the convention center, while our host hotel, The Water Club at the Borgata, hosts our evening receptions and events," LoPresti says. "We pro-

**"Currently, properties are being reinvested in and purchased, which will ultimately open additional hotel rooms, unique attractions, entertainment and dining options. This will make the attendee experience in Atlantic City that much better."**



Jim Wood  
President and CEO  
Meet AC

vide a shuttle for attendees between both locations and it works exceptionally well. Our attendees have door-to-door dropoffs, and it requires no effort on their part to get from one place to another.

"By hosting our events in two different locations, it allows us to offer larger events and meeting rooms that are equipped with our needs and space to spread out. We could host all our events in one place, but by splitting the activities between two locations, it keeps our attendees moving, provides a change of scenery and allows us to have the space we need to host educational sessions and our expo."

LoPresti adds that she receives "rave reviews from attendees about the quality of the food and beverage at both locations year after year."

Association members also host their own private events throughout the city at various restaurants, LoPresti notes, including The Palm, Chart House and Dock's Oyster House (in continuous operation by the Dougherty family since 1897), and all "have an amazing experience and look forward to returning to Atlantic City each year."

As for The Water Club at Borgata, LoPresti says, "It gives our guests the feeling of staying at an exclusive spa and resort. Our attendees are spending three full days working and learning — and this hotel gives them the opportunity to relax and enjoy themselves during their free time. The service is second to none, and the accommodations never disappoint."

LoPresti also points to the fact that, "Everything is customizable to fit your group's needs. Though we have stayed at the same place for several years, each year it feels different because the staff is willing to work

The Atlantic City Convention Center will help to host the city's reported record number of future meeting and convention bookings.



Credit: Meet AC





Nichole LoPresti  
Senior Vice President  
New Jersey Apartment Association  
Monroe Township, NJ

**“The convention center and its team have done an amazing job attracting new business and retaining shows like ours that have been loyal for decades. It’s not by accident that more people want to go to Atlantic City and do business there.”**

with us on the overall guest experience. It never gets redundant because the Borgata team is always wonderful about trying new things with our groups and working to make our experience a pleasurable one.”

The last day of the show takes place at The Water Club’s conference space. “We have a significantly smaller group that convenes and the space meets our needs. Our attendees are able to take the elevator from their rooms directly to the space and enjoy a gourmet breakfast and spend the morning learning in a comfortable space. The audio-visual team at the Water Club is on point, works with our budget and ensures that everything is set up properly.”

Planners should know, LoPresti adds, “that the Water Club at the Borgata is an amazing experience for all groups. This world-class facility will wow your guests, and the team at the Water Club and Borgata will do everything possible to make sure you and your guests are impressed and fully satisfied.”

When it comes down to it, LoPresti can’t even think of any challenges to holding a meeting in Atlantic City. “With the top-notch team at Meet AC assisting us, we had absolutely no challenges. They took the guesswork out of planning a complicated meeting and made my job a million times easier!”

That said, she advises planners to be as open as possible with the team at Meet AC and whichever hotel they are working with. “If you have budget constraints or specific issues that may be relevant to your group, speak to the folks in Atlantic City and see what suggestions they have. There’s no challenge they can’t overcome but it’s best to have an open line of communication from the beginning.”

The Superstar Theater at Resorts Casino Hotel.



Credit: Resorts Casino Hotel

## RECORD-BREAKING ATTENDANCE

Other associations that have met in the city many times include the Professional Insurance Agents Association of New Jersey and New York (PIA) and the New Jersey Society of Certified Public Accountants (NJCPA).

Kimberly Zielinski, conference manager with the insurance agents group, says, “Atlantic City is, and always has been, a fantastic destination for our joint annual conference of insurance agents. Atlantic City is a great place to mix business with pleasure, and every year we enjoy record-breaking attendance.”

The 2018 annual conference in June will be the group’s third consecutive year at Harrah’s Resort Atlantic City. Zielinski calls the staff at Harrah’s “professional, friendly and easy to work with throughout the planning process,” and notes that a highlight of the conference has been a reception at the resort’s pool — a huge hit with attendees.

Ralph Thomas, CEO and executive director of the New Jersey Society of Certified Public Accountants, says it’s imperative that NJCPA hold its annual convention in a “convenient, cost-effective and enjoyable location for our members. Atlantic City checks all the boxes. The city is just a two-hour drive or less for the majority of our attendees and offers an ideal combination of affordable accommodations and entertainment.”

Thomas says of last June’s event at the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, “Our members truly enjoy visiting the Borgata for our annual convention,” Thomas says. “The hotel offers wonderful accommodations, attentive staff and an excellent meeting experience.”

Perhaps most important, Thomas and his staff have de-

veloped a strong relationship with the hotel. “Our event staff have developed an excellent rapport with the Borgata staff, and it shows in the level of attention and responsiveness that we receive during the event.”

## DRIVABLE DESTINATION

Region Three of the American Podiatric Medical Association also has met in Atlantic City multiple times. In May, the group held its 68th Annual Region Three Scientific Meeting with 500 doctors of podiatric medicine, 100 podiatric medical assistants and more than 100 exhibitors. The meeting was based at Resorts Casino Hotel.

“Region Three of the American Podiatric Medical Association is comprised of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware,” says Dr. Leonard Portnoy, DPM, chairman of the meeting. “The conference has traditionally been held in Atlantic City. It’s a convenient venue for the component societies in that some of the registrants can commute, and is easily accessible to registrants from other states via the Atlantic City and Philadelphia airports. We encourage our registrants to bring their families to enjoy the plethora of activities Atlantic City has to offer.”

Portnoy says most of the lectures are held at the hotel’s 1,350-seat Superstar Theater. “It’s a world-class venue with world-class audio-visual technicians. At this past year’s meeting, we posted a live session on Facebook with participation from those on Facebook. We also had an audience-response session with the registrants using their cellphones to respond. Incidentally, there was no additional charge for Wi-Fi service. This was all accomplished with the expertise of the audio-visual staff.”

In addition, the group typically entertains VIPs at dinners within and outside of the hotel. “We often entertain at Gallagher’s Steak House and Capriccio Italian Restaurant in the hotel,” Portnoy says. Capriccio was honored for its outstanding wine program in *Wine Spectator’s* 2017 Restaurant Awards, announced last August. “Dock’s Oyster House and Café 2825 on Atlantic Avenue in Atlantic City are also on our return list. We have enjoyed all these eateries and return year after year. They are very accommodating, (the) food is excellent and the service is superb.”

It’s not just the meeting space and restaurants that garner high praise from Portnoy. “I have served on the Region Three Committee for over 30 years, and have had the opportuni-



Harrah’s Waterfront Conference Center, which opened in 2015, is the largest convention center-hotel complex from Baltimore to Boston with its two 50,000-sf ballrooms.

ty to negotiate with various hotels and sales staff,” he says. “When my committee met with the personnel at Resorts, we knew we had found a new home. They were professional, thorough and were able to work with us on our budgetary requirements. I have found the employees at the hotel from housekeeping to upper management to be extremely helpful. I didn’t have one complaint from my membership regarding the hotel. The two people I had the most contact with were Pam James, senior sales manager, and Ed McAvin-

**“If you are searching for a venue for your next meeting, I can unequivocally recommend Resorts Casino Hotel.”**

Dr. Leonard Portnoy, DPM, Chairman, Region Three Scientific Meeting  
American Podiatric Medical Association, Warminster, PA

ey, catering and banquets manager. Everything I requested from both of these people was done instantaneously and efficiently, which sure makes my life easier.”

But Portnoy notes that there’s one thing that matters over all others, and Resorts delivered on that, too. “Over the past 30 years or so, I have found that there are three things one must have in the staff at your convention site. They are: accountability, accountability and accountability. If I didn’t mention it, the staff at Resorts Casino Hotel was accountable. If you are searching for a venue for your next meeting, I can unequivocally recommend Resorts Casino Hotel.”

## WHAT’S NEW

By the time Region Three of the American Podiatric Medical Association returns to Atlantic City, **Resorts Casino Ho-**





Kimberly Zielinski,  
Conference Manager  
Professional Insurance Agents  
Association of New Jersey  
and New York  
Glenmont, NY

**“Atlantic City is, and always has been, a fantastic destination for our joint annual conference of insurance agents. Atlantic City is a great place to mix business with pleasure, and every year we enjoy record-breaking attendance.”**

tel will be even better. Mohegan Sun, which owns Resorts Casino Hotel, has earmarked \$100 million for expansion and renovation of the hotel, including the recently completed renovation of all 480 rooms in the Ocean Tower. The onsite Jimmy Buffett-themed Margaritaville entertainment complex has received a \$35 million makeover, and a state-of-the-art conference center opened in 2015.

**Caesars**, too, is engaged in an ongoing reimagining of its Atlantic City properties. The \$125 million Waterfront Conference Center at Harrah's Resort opened in 2015, as did the Wild Wild West bar at Bally's. Also part of the master plan for Harrah's and open as of last summer are the upgraded 450 guest rooms and suites in the hotel's Bayview Tower, new dining venues and the completion of the multimillion-dollar overhaul of the hotel's nightclub, The Pool After Dark.

**Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa** spent \$50 million on projects in 2016, including an outdoor pool, beer garden and eatery. A new nightclub also debuted in 2016, and in 2017 the hotel's new 18,000-sf Central Conference Center opened, giving the resort a total of more than 106,000 sf of meeting and event space, which also includes the Event Center and The Water Club's 36,000 sf of meeting space.

One of the most anticipated recent openings was the 200-foot-high observation wheel at **Steel Pier**, which debuted in October, giving riders panoramic views of the Atlantic City skyline and ocean from inside climate-controlled gondolas.

AC Ocean Walk has acquired the former Revel Casino Hotel and plans to open the property this summer as **Ocean Resort Casino**. Located along the Boardwalk, the 1,399-room Revel, first opened in April 2012 encompassing 6.4 million sf. Plans call for the Ocean Resort to retain its 165,000 sf of meet-

ing and convention space, 138,000 sf of gaming space and 7,700-space parking facility.

**Hard Rock International** purchased the Trump Taj Mahal and expects to open the newly renovated and upgraded property over Memorial Day in 2018. Guest rooms and suites will be completely renovated, along with the indoor pool, exterior, meeting and convention spaces, and performance venues. New will be a Hard Rock Casino, Hard Rock Cafe, check-in experience and lobby lounge, and new and upgraded dining venues throughout the property.

Also expected for completion in 2018 is Tropicana's skyway bridge connecting its recently purchased Chelsea Hotel to the main hotel. With the addition of what will be called **The Chelsea Tower at Tropicana Atlantic City**, the resort will have 2,730 guest rooms.

And in 2019, a 350-foot-high vertical **Polercoaster** will debut in Atlantic City. The state agreed to pay 27.8 percent of the total projected project cost of \$138 million, voting to provide a \$38.4 million state grant. The Polercoaster will rise on the site of the former Sands Casino, which was imploded in 2007. Future plans for other attractions near the coaster site include a zip line, extreme ninja course, an XD theater,



The New Jersey Apartment Association's annual Conference & Expo used the convention center for their expo and The Water Club at Borgata for receptions and events.

a skydiving simulator, a bar and retail space. The coaster is expected to open in time for the summer season in 2019.

All of that serves to underscore what Wood sees as one of Atlantic City's greatest assets. "When meeting planners select Atlantic City," he concludes, "they are also getting a resort destination with endless nightlife, world-class dining options, pristine beaches and the historic Boardwalk, championship golf courses and multiple gaming options. It's a one-stop shop for groups."

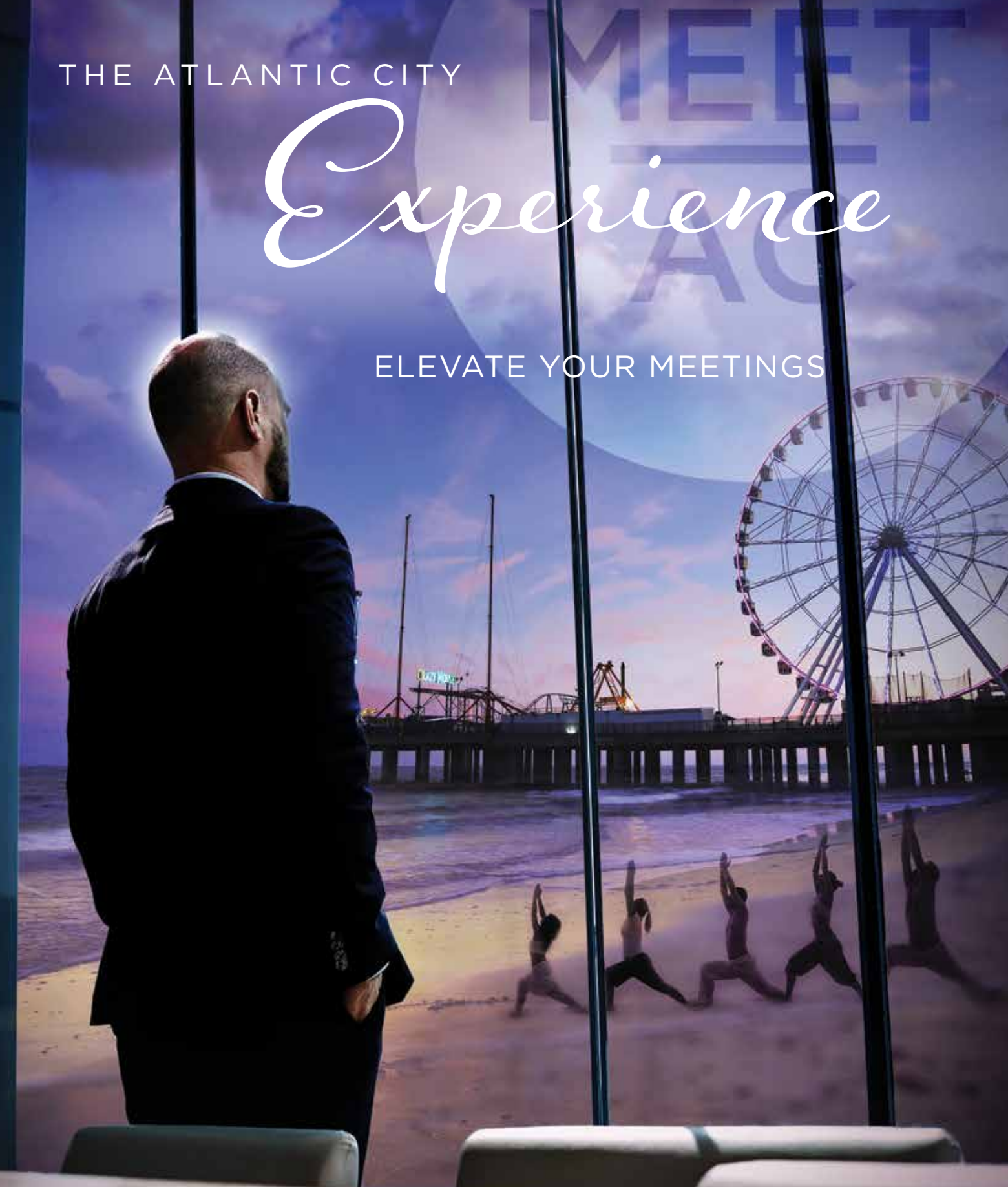
Credit: NJAA

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# Nevada Meetings

## Las Vegas and Reno Win Over Planners With Much More Than Gaming

**S**ome planners may think Nevada has just one meetings destination. But there's more to the state than its most famous city. Reno is also an excellent meetings destination, and like Las Vegas, Reno has more to offer groups and associations than gaming alone.

Whether you want the glitz, options and accessibility of Las Vegas or the stunning setting of Reno with its Sierra backdrop, Nevada delivers business opportunity.

### Las Vegas

No matter how often you meet in Las Vegas, it's almost certain that something will have changed. It's a destination that reinvents itself over and over, a destination that arguably more than any other moves in rapid pace with the times. And in spite of its somewhat naughty reputation, the city possesses a formidable ability to drive meeting success.

Case in point is the new \$375 million Caesars Forum, set to break ground on The Strip in the second quarter of 2018. The 550,000-sf, LEED Silver-certified conference center, scheduled to open in 2020, features 300,000 sf of flexible meeting space, with two 108,000-sf ballrooms, two 40,000-sf ballrooms and

By Christine Loomis

four boardrooms. The 100,000-sf outdoor Forum Plaza will be connected to the Linq Promenade, offering world-class dining, live entertainment and shopping, and is anchored by the High Roller observation wheel. The Forum Sky Bridge directly connects Caesars Forum to the Linq and Harrah's hotels, as well as to the monorail for easy access to all that the Las Vegas Strip has to offer.

And speaking of easy access, among Las Vegas' many impressive attributes is its airlift. In December, the city celebrated its one-year anniversary of nonstop flights from mainland China, and announced the first nonstop flight from Brazil beginning June 2018, which will be seasonal service. All told, the city welcomes more than 200 weekly nonstop flights from 21 foreign cities in 11 countries. That's a definite boon to association groups with global membership.

No wonder Las Vegas was named the World's Leading Meetings & Conference Destination for 2017 in the World Travel Awards, the fifth consecutive year it has been recognized as such by the London-based organization.

And it's not just industry organizations that heap praise on Las Vegas. Plenty of planners see it that way, too.

### FINDING A GOOD FIT IN RIO

"The Las Vegas area has always been a positive venue for our organization's annual training conference," says David R. Sneed, chair, seminar site selection and planning committee, the International Association of Arson Investigators. "The city is easily accessible by both air and ground. The Vegas area offers multiple competitive venues from large to small, from The Strip to off-Strip, and easy access to all areas with good transportation options."

The group of 725 met in Las Vegas in April 2017, based at Rio All-Suite Las Vegas Hotel & Casino, part of the Caesars collection of hotels.

Sneed says all meeting functions were held at the Rio and calls the hotel a good choice for his group because of its location, rates and history. "The Rio Hotel is a good fit as it provides us with sufficient conference space and affordable, competitive rates with a good staff. The Rio has hosted our conference for a number of years now, and each year it gets better."

Standouts for Sneed include the conference management staff and catering. "We utilized approximately 20 percent of the conference space for our week-long conference. We used extensive AV throughout the week and had no problems with Wi-Fi. The Rio staff continually met or exceeded our expectations and were always open to negotiation."

Sneed says he faced no real challenges in planning or ex-

The 550,000-sf, LEED Silver-certified Caesars Forum conference center is scheduled to open on the Las Vegas Strip in 2020.

ecuting the 2017 meeting. He advises planners to do their homework and compare venues. "Vegas hotels are competitive. Contact the hotel with sufficient lead time to facilitate site visits, evaluation and comparisons. Be prepared to negotiate all items of a contract."

### A LONG LIST OF BENEFITS

Jennifer Mamer-Bohn, manager, meetings and events for CHS Inc., a cooperative owned by farmers, ranchers and co-ops across the United States, also booked a Caesars property, Caesars Palace, for her group's February 2017 Cooperative Leadership Conference. It had 600 in attendance.

She offers a long list of reasons that the city and hotel meet this group's needs. First, she says, "There's ease of air access from 40 states, and airfares are a bit cheaper to Las Vegas. Entertainment is also readily accessible. You don't have to fly in entertainers or bands, and you can take your group to a great show, buy out a nightclub or just set attendees loose to find their own entertainment. The weather is also a factor for our group. Our meeting is in February and about 75 percent of our attendees are from the Northern states. They want a destination with warm, nice weather at this time of year."

In terms of the hotel, Mamer-Bohn notes that, "Cost was definitely a consideration. Caesars sales staff worked with me to come up with the best arrival/departure pattern for the lowest room rates. Caesars Palace was very generous, adding concessions into a contract. We were able to choose in which tower our hotel rooms would be located, and we were placed close to our meeting space. Since Caesars Palace is such a large facility, this is very important. Finally, Caesars Palace is

**"The Las Vegas area has always been a positive venue for our organization's annual training conference."**

David R. Sneed, Chair, Seminar Site Selection & Planning Committee  
International Association of Arson Investigators, Crofton, MD

constantly updating its facilities. The tower where our sleeping rooms were located was newly renovated, so the rooms were very nice."

Mamer-Bohn says that her group loves to dance and that drove the decision to buy out Drai's Nightclub, owned by Caesars Entertainment. "It's located right across the street from Caesars Palace, so our attendees walked over, no bus-ing required. In my 30+ years of planning, this was one of the most fun events to plan and was a true hit with our group."



She calls the venue “spectacular,” adding that it offers a lot more than a dance floor. “The nightclub has delicious food, and the event staff will help you pick the food menu that’s best suited to your group. They listen and work with planners. The staff also gets excellent training and knows how to treat a large group.”

Staff also suggested a DJ for Mamer-Bohn to book, another success. “He really got the party going. We met with him prior to the event and discussed the type of music our group likes and he asked for song suggestions. Everyone was dancing, even the older attendees.”

Mamer-Bohn says that a percentage of the F&B for that event was applied to her contract F&B minimum, which was a positive, and all of the attendees also received complimentary admission tickets to ride the High Roller observation wheel. All in all, she adds, the group received great service from the initial planning down to the staff that worked the event.

All meeting functions were held at Caesars Palace; however, Mamer-Bohn notes that there are so many venues to choose from that planners need to do research and contact other planners for recommendations because venue location is important. She took her own advice.

“I asked for the names of other planners who have had meetings there so I could contact them to see what was good and what was bad. I received all positive comments for Caesars Palace. The meeting space is state-of-the-art and well

maintained. The location on the Las Vegas Strip is perfect for walking to other destinations.”

The group’s planning team and the Caesars Palace sales team worked well together. Mamer-Bohn liked that she had a dedicated reservation staffer. “There is a reservation staff person assigned to your meeting, so you are working with one person who oversees the rooming list and makes any changes needed. If I needed a certain room for an executive or some other request, this person could manipulate the room assignments to accommodate all of our needs.”

In addition, there were two conference coordinators for the group. “During the planning process, they responded to emails and phone calls immediately. Onsite, they were with us constantly, always checking to see if we needed anything and taking care of all of our requests. They communicated



Rendering of the Las Vegas Convention Center’s makeover, which will add 1.4 million sf of space.

Credit: Las Vegas Convention Center



Credit: South Point Hotel, Casino and Spa

In April 2018, South Point Hotel, Casino and Spa will kick off a \$40 million remodel of its guest rooms throughout the property’s three towers.



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**“Cost was definitely a consideration. Caesars sales staff worked with me to come up with the best arrival/departure pattern for the lowest room rates.”**

Jennifer Mamer-Bohn, Manager, Meetings & Events  
CHS Inc., Inver Grove Heights, MN

with each other so either one could take care of us. We had some pop-up meetings and the staff would get a room set up for us very fast. Wi-Fi was fast and reliable.”

She also gives kudos to the catering staff for flexibility. “The food was excellent and always ready on time. If our meeting was going to adjourn earlier than expected, I could call catering and they would move our meal start time up. Breaks were always set up well in advance and replenished as needed.”

For those who worry about meeting in Las Vegas because of the gambling aspect, Mamer-Bohn has an answer. “Some of our management staff were not keen on taking a group to Las Vegas because of the distraction of being in a gambling destination. But the elevators from our guest rooms came right to the meeting room floors, so attendees did not have to walk through the casino to get to meetings.”

Her advice to other planners? “Make sure your meeting space is close to your sleeping rooms. Take advantage of the venues owned by Caesars Entertainment so you can leverage your F&B minimum. Look at all of the properties owned by Caesars Entertainment. Each one is unique and has many options to offer groups.”

Beyond that, she says, “You will receive excellent service from the initial contract signing to receiving your invoice at the end of your meeting. We received all positive comments from our attendees.”

## UPGRADES AND EXPANSIONS

One thing is for certain, Las Vegas is always upgrading and expanding properties, so it’s a good bet that any inconsistencies or issues will soon be addressed. The start of the city’s most ambitious project came in November with the announcement that a design team has been decided upon for phase two of the **Las Vegas Convention Center District** expansion project, which will see \$860 million put toward an additional 1.4 million sf of convention center space, including 600,000 sf of new exhibit space.

In April 2018, **South Point Hotel, Casino and Spa** will kick off a \$40 million remodel of its guest rooms throughout the property’s three towers, which includes 2,049 rooms and 84 suites. The first phase begins in Tower 1 in April, with a completion date of September 2018. Upgrades include new furniture, luxury flooring, crown molding, mini-refrigerator and bathroom upgrades. The three-year project will refurbish one hotel tower each year and is scheduled to be completed by September 2020. By the end of 2018, more than 630 newly designed rooms will be available. Other property-wide improvements that have taken place over the past five years include major upgrades to the Costa del Sur Spa; a new multimillion-dollar professional bowling tournament plaza; and the Priefert Pavilion expansion project, featuring two new indoor equestrian arenas. South Point offers 75,000 sf of conference space with ballroom and 80,000 sf of column-free exhibit space.

The planned \$1.5 billion **Wynn Paradise Park** has begun phase one construction. The project will encompass a 1,000–2,000-room hotel tower and 260,000 sf of beachfront meeting and ballroom space overlooking a 20-acre lagoon with water sports activities, a 4,000-foot boardwalk and a white sand beach. The project is expected to take two years to complete.

In 2016, **Caesars Entertainment** upgraded more than 4,800 rooms at four of its Las Vegas resorts, including Caesars Palace, Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino, Paris Las Vegas and



Aria Resort & Casino recently debuted a 200,000-sf meeting and event space expansion.



The MGM Grand Conference Center will unveil a 250,000-sf expansion this fall.

Harrah’s Las Vegas. Last year, Caesars invested more than \$100 million in renovating its 1,181-room Palace Tower, including the exclusive 29th floor with its luxurious villas. Through the second quarter of this year, the company continues its \$90 million renovation of 1,270 rooms at the 3,460-room Flamingo Las Vegas, a project that began in August. The property’s 70-year history is being celebrated in the “retro-chic” redesign.

By the end of 2018, MGM Resorts will complete a \$450 million project to transform the 21-year-old Monte Carlo Resort and Casino into **Park MGM**, replete with a brand new 77,000-sf conference facility. Offering both non-traditional spaces and flexible design, Park MGM is designed to fill an unmet need in Las Vegas for small groups, while also offering beautiful spaces for groups of up to 5,000 attendees.

**Aria Resort & Casino** recently opened an additional 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space across four stories, and now boasts a total of 500,000 sf of convention space. The \$170 million expansion is highlighted by stunning indoor/open-air verandas with retractable windows and dramatic views of The Park and T-Mobile Arena. There’s an exclusive loading dock with megavator for events requiring sizable displays, versatile indoor-outdoor breakout rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows and ample prefunction spaces. A top-floor ballroom with open-air verandas accommodates up to 2,000 for receptions.

**MGM Resorts** announced in November that it has invested significantly in new technology across its properties, giving planners access to an in-house system that not only provides exceptional service but should also save groups money. The convention Wi-Fi network can support more than 350,000 devices and offers up to 40 times more guaranteed bandwidth per user, almost 50 percent faster download, upload time up to 40 percent faster and upgraded, high-performance equipment with more than 2,600 next-generation Cisco Aironet Access Points, nearly doubling the previous amount.

**MGM Grand** will debut a 250,000-sf conference center expansion this fall that will connect to the existing conference center on all three levels. Featured will be two expansive ballrooms of 49,000 sf and 32,000 sf as well as three smaller ballrooms and an outdoor event space. The expansion brings the total convention space to 850,000 sf.

MGM also announced the start of renovations of **Luxor’s** guest rooms, which will continue to roll out throughout Q1 2018. It in-

cludes a reimagining of more than 1,700 hotel rooms.

Caesars, owner of The Linq Promenade, announced the addition of the \$20 million **Fly Linq**, 10 side-by-side zip lines that can launch simultaneously. The ride should be ready for adventure seekers by spring of 2018.

And in case you were wondering how far off the future is, in Las Vegas it’s here as of November 2017: A partnership between AAA Northern California, Nevada and Utah; the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada; and Keolis North America is bringing the first **self-driving shuttle** to be fully integrated with a city’s traffic infrastructure to residents and visitors of Las Vegas. A limited version of the shuttle launched in downtown earlier in the year.

## Reno

Located more than 400 miles north of Las Vegas, Reno offers a very different side of Nevada, one wrapped up in the stunning beauty of the Sierra and nearby Lake Tahoe. There’s still gaming action for those who want it, but many attendees appreciate this area for the outdoor activities and scenic backdrop.

Reno’s public convention facility is the 500,000-sf Reno Sparks Convention Center, which features 380,000 sf of exhibit space and 120,000 sf of meeting space. Plans are now underway, subject to approval by Nevada state legislature, to add another 300,000 sf of space.

The destination also features a trio of unique offsite venues: the Reno Event Center, located downtown with 60,000 sf of event space and a seating capacity of 6,500; the National Bowling Stadium, which features 72 lanes and onsite catering; and the Reno Livestock Event Center, which hosts equestrian events such as the Reno Rodeo.

Several Reno hotels offer excellent meeting facilities for groups, including family-owned Peppermill Resort Spa Casino, which celebrated 45 years in 2016. The hotel features





The Air Force Sergeants Association, brought more than 500 attendees with the AFSA International Convention and Professional Airmen's Conference to Peppermill in July 2017.

1,623 guest rooms, a 33,000-sf spa, 15 bars and lounges, 10 restaurants and 106,000 sf of meeting and function space.

Best of all for ecoconscious meeting-goers, in 2010 Peppermill invested in and committed to geothermal energy. Today, 100 percent of its mechanical and domestic heat is supplied by geothermal wells. The resort also cut its water use



Keith A. Reed  
Executive Director  
Air Force Sergeants Association  
Suitland, MD

**“Attention to detail was tops. Sales staff wanted to do business and it showed. Service after the sale was outstanding. The Peppermill proved to be a true mission partner.”**

by nearly 4.7 million gallons per year and replaced all of its 1,000-watt metal halide lighting fixtures with 183-watt LED fixtures that provide the same amount of light while reducing energy costs by \$131,000 per year.

Keith A. Reed, executive director of the Air Force Sergeants Association, brought more than 500 attendees with the AFSA International Convention and Professional Airmen's Conference to the resort in July 2017.

Reed says that airlift, ease of access, cost, quality of lodging, city attractions and increased attendance based on the conference location all played into the choice to meet at Pepper-

mill. In addition, he says, “The Peppermill’s willingness to provide concessions such as suites, discounts, donations and rebates to the master account stood out the most.”

Noting that his group “loves a great experience,” Reed also points to the city’s flair and Peppermill’s quality of food and prices as positives. “The food and prices at the Peppermill were awesome,” he says. And because of the multiple venues available within Peppermill, Reed says there was no need for the group to go outside of the resort for any functions.

But just in case some attendees chose to — and some did — “the biggest little city was equally prepared for each and ev-

ery one of them.”

The service and the staff were also a plus. “Unlike at many gaming properties, the Peppermill convention services are excellent,” Reed says. “Attention to detail was tops. Sales staff wanted to do business and it showed. Service after the sale was outstanding. The Peppermill proved to be a true mission partner.”

Reed adds that flexibility also made a difference. “The hotel and staff showed a willingness to do whatever was needed to help the make the event a success. The hotel staff treated our event as if they were the meeting planner — they were all in.” And the hotel was flexible in terms of the pattern of the conference, which Reed says was Saturday to Wednesday.

The one challenge came because multiple groups were meeting at the same time, with attendees from all groups navigating and sharing some of the same space. That said, it was a very positive experience.

To planners considering Reno and Peppermill Resort, he says, “Establish a partnership with the city’s CVB and the hotel’s sales and convention services. They are willing to provide a win-win. And get to know the area. The hotel is close to many outside restaurants and the mall, and it’s close to downtown Reno as well. Spend time to get to know the city.”

After all, Reed says, “As meeting planners we plan and present an experience — good or bad—and it’s the experience that our attendees will remember the most. One thing I found out very quickly over 17 years of executing this for and with the Air Force Sergeants Association: Success is a Team Sport!”

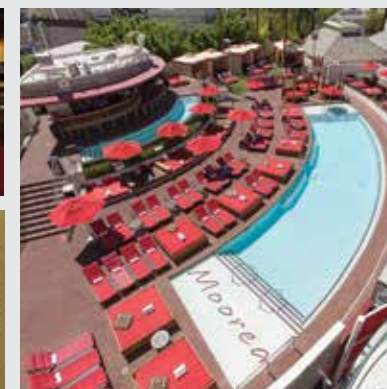
Choose Reno or choose Las Vegas. Both cities are big on entertainment and value, but perhaps more than anything, both are also big on providing the infrastructure, venues, services, flexibility, expertise, activities and ambience that facilitate business successes and goals. What more could a meeting planner want?

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MESSINA



ORBAIZ



SAHAKIANS



EDWARDS



GOMEZ

The Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau has named **Ed Simon** as senior vice president of convention sales and services. Prior to joining the bureau, he created and launched the Association Meeting Buyers Collective, a first-of-its-kind membership-based organization to enhance the buying power for the association industry.

The Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau has promoted **Allison Joyce** to national sales manager in the convention development department. She was executive meeting manager at the Louisville Marriott Downtown.

**Danielle Babilino** was named senior vice president of global sales and marketing for Hard Rock Hotels & Casinos. She was most recently executive vice president of sales and marketing for Alon Las Vegas, the proposed luxury hotel and casino planned for the Las Vegas Strip.

Omni Louisville Hotel has named **Eamon O'Brien** as director of sales and marketing. He previously was director of sales and marketing for the Louisville Marriott Downtown as well as for the Hyatt Regency Louisville.

Caesars Entertainment has named **Lisa Gray Messina** as vice president of sales, responsible for leading the Caesars Entertainment sales strategy for meetings and events globally. She was most recently executive director, intermediary group sales with Hilton Worldwide in Las Vegas.

Fontainebleau Miami Beach has appointed **Luz Orbaiz** and **Christine Sahakians** as directors of national accounts, **Nerissa Edwards** as national sales manager

and **Jacqueline Gomez** as executive meetings manager. **Orbaiz**, responsible for Florida, Georgia and Latin America markets, formerly served as senior sales manager at Hyatt Regency Miami. **Sahakians**, responsible for Ohio, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan and Indiana markets, was most recently group account director at the W Fort Lauderdale. **Edwards**, who manages the Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Vermont, Delaware and Rhode Island markets, was national sales manager at Hyatt Regency Pier Sixty Six in Fort Lauderdale. **Gomez**, responsible for groups of 10 to 79 rooms from Midwest, Florida, Georgia, Canada and Latin America, most recently served as catering and conference services manager at Atton Brickell Hotel in Miami.

The Greater Madison Convention & Visitors Bureau in Madison, Wisconsin, has promoted **Danielle Ziegler** to senior convention sales manager, **Eric Reichert** to senior Alliant Energy Center account manager and **Sarah Lemmers** as convention sales manager. Ziegler and Reichert have been with GMCVB since 2013, and Lemmers since 2016.

**Tory Enriquez** was named director of sales and marketing for Texas A&M Hotel and Conference Center, currently under construction in College Station, Texas. The Benchmark Resorts & Hotels property is expected to open this fall. Enriquez was most recently area director of sales and marketing for Howard Hughes Hospitality properties in The Woodlands, Texas.

JW Marriott Nashville has named **Silvia San Martin** as director of sales and marketing. She most recently was director of sales at the Omni Nashville Hotel.

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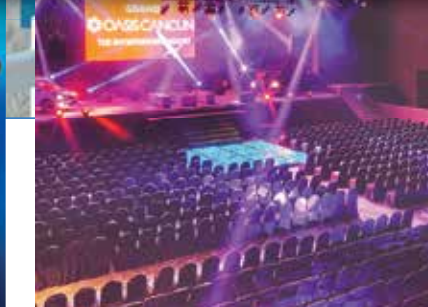
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