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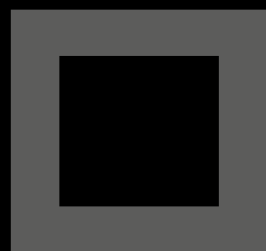
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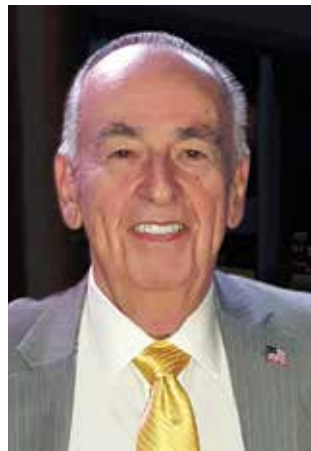
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## Making It Green & Serene

If you haven't considered golf and spa resorts in the past, you need to check out how they add value to your meetings. Our cover story in this issue, "Green & Serene" focuses on resorts that offer numerous benefits, including team-building opportunities and a chance for attendees to relax and recharge. If you think this kind of luxury and high-touch service is out of reach



for associations, think again; the resort you're considering may be attuned to association budgets. Also not a line item in your budget, attendees can play golf and enjoy the spa on their own.

Got a lot on your plate? DMOs to the rescue! The "Dynamic DMOs" article in this issue shows how they can provide a personal touch to your meeting. The local DMO can offer information and assistance different from individual properties. They provide the flavor of the destination and recommend off-property attractions for your group. DMOs don't need to help you design an event, but can provide input and resources that may have been overlooked or were previously not successful. Professional planners admit that

DMOs go above and beyond to contribute to a successful event.

High on the list of many planners today is volunteer involvement. While volunteers for association events vary, they can be the lifeblood of the event. Volunteers can be helpful working with operations, getting speakers, giving presentations, helping with registration and serving on the planning committee. Seasoned volunteers can be helpful addressing first-time attendees by giving them tips on how to get the most out of their attendance at the event.

Check out the destinations in this issue focusing on Nevada and Texas. Both popular and appealing destinations offer new and exciting meeting options to accommodate groups of all sizes. New and renovated properties throughout both destinations will appeal to any budget.

**Harvey Grotsky**  
Publisher

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## Tampa Marriott Water Street Completes 18-Month Transformation

TAMPA, FL — The Tampa Marriott Water Street recently announced the completion of its multiphase transformation following an 18-month restoration, renovation and expansion. The extensive enhancements include 727 newly renovated guest rooms and more than 40,000 sf of meeting space, a refreshed Great Room and the addition of two new restaurant concepts, among other updates.



A pivotal piece of the 56-acre, 9 million sf of mixed-use, Water Street Tampa neighborhood — the redesigned hotel anticipates the needs of today's business travelers and the desires of today's Tampanians — providing an upgraded experience and fresh look to

match. The grand unveiling of the Tampa Marriott Water Street comes on the heels of the hotel's first-ever AAA Four Diamond designation. Located adjacent to the Tampa Convention Center and steps from Amalie Arena, Tampa Marriott Water Street offers newly reimagined meeting and event space with views of the water and downtown Tampa. The venue includes the 17,169-sf Grand Ballroom, 8,432-sf Florida Ballroom, 12 meeting rooms and two executive boardrooms. With the help of the hotel's experienced planners and expert catering services, the flexible meeting and event spaces can host up to 2,500 people for galas, trade shows, corporate lunches and business meetings.

## Charlotte Convention Center Begins \$115 Million Expansion

CHARLOTTE, NC — Initial work on the massive, approximately \$115 million, Charlotte Convention Center expansion project is under way. The work will make the 22-year-old building a more appealing and competitive host for big-name events, while connecting the space to the Stonewall corridor, a booming hub undergoing \$2.7 billion in development. When the renovations are complete, look for a pedestrian bridge linking the new wing of the Convention Center to the neighboring Westin hotel on South College Street, a popular pick for convention attendees, plus the Stonewall Station LYNX Light Rail stop.

## Donald E. Stephens Convention Center Plans \$3 Million in Upgrades

ROSEMONT, IL — The Donald E. Stephens Convention Center in Rosemont will undergo nearly \$3 million worth of renovations to its South Ballroom this winter. Previously, the South Ballroom remained unchanged during the 2014 renovation of the 890,000-sf facility, which included the other ballrooms, and during the 2016 renewal when the Convention Center received \$2.1 million worth of upgrades to bathrooms and concession stands and a fresh coat of paint in exhibit halls. The South Ballroom will soon receive a refreshment that includes new lighting, carpeting, drywall, wall coverings and electrical work.

## Detroit's Cobo Center Unveils New Name, TCF Center

DETROIT, MI — Detroit's world-class convention center, formerly known as Cobo Center, has been officially renamed TCF Center. Announced by TCF National Bank, a subsidiary of TCF Financial Corporation and the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority (DRCFA), this unprecedented naming rights partnership is a 22-year deal. The new name and signage were revealed by Garry Torgow, TCF executive chairman; Craig Dahl, TCF president



and CEO; and Larry Alexander, DRCFA chairman, with the help of Gov. Gretchen

Whitmer, Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, and a host of the bank's and DRCFA's top leaders and other state, city and community dignitaries. Against the backdrop of 10 million visitors who come to greater downtown Detroit and the 1.5 million visitors to the Convention Center annually, TCF Center will continue to grow its book of meetings, conventions and event business as it has continued to set record-breaking numbers since its \$279 million renovation. In fact, the Center had an unprecedented year in 2018 with 244 events and a 564% increase in revenue since 2009. "TCF Bank is truly invested in our city and its people," Duggan says.

## Las Vegas Convention Center Expansion More Than 50 Percent Complete

LAS VEGAS, NV — The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority marked the Las Vegas Convention Center's significant construction milestone with completion of more than 50% of the 1.4 million-sf expansion. "We're excited to show off the unobstructed views of the new 600,000-sf West Hall," says Lori Nelson-Kraft, senior vice president of communications and government affairs. "When completed, this will feature the largest column-free

space in North America, cementing Las Vegas as the leader in the meetings and conventions industry." Construction is expected wrap up in December 2020. Renovation of the existing 3.2 million-sf Center will begin in summer 2021 and the entire \$1.52 billion development is expected to be done in 2024. Annually, meetings and conventions generate \$10.5 billion in economic impact in Southern Nevada.



## Mike Fiber to Lead PRA as CEO

CHICAGO, IL — PRA, a leader in the Business Events industry, recently announced that Mike Fiber, previously COO, has been appointed CEO. Tony Lorenz stepped down as CEO to pursue other opportunities. Fiber has served as COO of PRA since 2017, leading all business operations, including 28 office locations in North America. He has been instrumental in driving strategic alignment and consistency in PRA's growth over the last two years. Prior to joining PRA, Fiber served as vice president of operations for PSAV Presentation Services, a global provider of event technology services.



Fiber

## United Joins With Marriott International to Offer Industry's First Complimentary Baggage Delivery Service

CHICAGO, IL — United Airlines will begin offering Polaris customers on flights between New York/Newark and London Heathrow complimentary baggage delivery exclusively to five Marriott International properties, including JW Marriott Grosvenor House London, London Marriott Hotel Canary Wharf, London Marriott Hotel County Hall, Sheraton Grand London Park Lane and St. Pancras Renaissance Hotel London. This first-of-its-kind service will allow United Polaris customers to start their London journey the moment they clear customs and drop their bags.

## New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center Opens Transportation Facility

NEW ORLEANS, LA — The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center has recently opened its new Transportation Center for buses, shuttles, taxis and ride shares to rave reviews. The Convention Center made a significant investment to improve public safety and convenience of residents, local commuters and event attendees by eliminating shuttles, taxis and ride-shares on the boulevard that fronts the Center. The construction of the Transportation Center is part of a \$557 million, five-year modernization plan that will transform the planner and guest experience. It includes reimagined meeting rooms, restrooms and public spaces. Negotiations are under way to develop a 1,200-room, headquarters hotel connected to the Convention Center that will be surrounded by a 39-acre, mixed-use project with unique retail, dining and entertainment options. The next major milestone will be the opening of the Pedestrian Park, expected in late 2020. It will be a lushly landscaped park the length of the Convention Center that will include communal gathering areas, public art, water features and outdoor event space.



## Music City Center Releases Annual Sustainability Report

NASHVILLE, TN — The Music City Center composted over 130,000 pounds of material in fiscal year 2019, up from 66,000 pounds the previous year. The process of composting prevents the formation of greenhouse gas emissions due to the decomposition of organic material in a landfill. "We prioritize sustainability through systematic approaches in our daily operations," says Charles Starks, president and CEO of Music City Center. "We continue to explore innovative solutions for waste diversion and support environmental efforts in our community."



## Odessa Marriott Hotel & Conference Center Opens

ODESSA, TX — Recently opened, the Odessa Marriott Hotel & Conference Center, offers 215 rooms and 46,000 sf of meeting space. The project is a joint venture between the city and private owners Toby and Sondra Eoff of Eofficial Enterprises. Among the amenities are a 1,600-sf Presidential Suite, resort-style swimming pool, 24-hour fitness center, signature restaurant, a Starbucks and M Club lounge for Marriott's BonVoy Elite members and those on the concierge

levels. The highlight of the meeting space is the 18,000-sf ballroom and an outdoor garden venue. The three-meal restaurant, Barrel and Derrick, features West Texas cuisine sourced with ingredients from within the state. The Odessa Marriott is incorporating renewable energy sources into its landscape in the form of wind-powered sculptures and the 'Smart Flower,' a state-of-the-art solar monument that also is the single power source for the property's Starbucks.



## ASAE Announces New Diversity and Inclusion Award Added to Power of A Awards

WASHINGTON, DC — The Power of Diversity and Inclusion Award will be presented for the first time at the 2020 Summit Awards Dinner. The award is part of new D+I category within The Power of A Awards. "Developing a D+I award for organizations to illustrate the importance of D+I in the association community is important. The D+I committee included it in the strategic plan and we're pleased it's now coming to fruition," says Wendy-Jo Toyama, MBA, CAE, chair of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee, and executive director of the American Cleft Palate-Craniofacial Association. "D+I initiatives and programs have become a driving force across associations and now is the right time to introduce an award that shines a bright light on the work the community is doing."



Robertson

The Power of A Awards program ensures that the full range of activities and initiatives associations undertake to benefit society as a whole as well as the professions and industries they represent are recognized and awarded. Along with adding The Power of Diversity and Inclusion award category, all Power of A award categories are now under review. "D+I fluency is essential to organizational health and success. Associations' ability to create supportive environments and serve multiracial, multiethnic, generationally diverse members and staff will define their success today and well into the future. There is no better time for the association community to recognize and celebrate this commitment to diversity and inclusion," says Susan Robertson, CAE, interim ASAE president and CEO.

## VISIT Milwaukee Names Peggy Williams-Smith as New President and CEO

MILWAUKEE, WI — After a national search, VISIT Milwaukee has named Peggy Williams-Smith, senior vice president of Marcus Hotels & Resorts, as its new president and CEO, effective November 18. Williams-Smith replaces Paul Upchurch, who is leaving to pursue other opportunities. Williams-Smith was selected from a national field of candidates in a months-long search, headed by Omar Shaikh, chair of the VISIT Milwaukee Board of Directors. She is the first woman to lead the organization. "Peggy is well known in the Milwaukee community as a leader and as a woman who makes things happen, so she was a natural choice for the role," Shaikh says. "Ultimately, the search committee was impressed with her vision for VISIT Milwaukee and her passion for the destination."



Williams-Smith



## The Resort at Coco Beach Reveals Multimillion-Dollar Transformation

RIO GRANDE, PUERTO RICO — Situated on 72 acres of tropical gardens, the new Resort at Coco Beach, a Hyatt Affiliated Hotel, opened recently to reveal a sophisticated, oceanfront haven with more than 40,000 sf of total event and meeting facilities. Framed against the backdrop of the island's serene northeast coast and the magnificent El Yunque National Forest, the property is expected to rebrand as Hyatt Regency Coco Beach Resort later this year, following the completion of brand enhancements and updates.

## SNAPSHOTS



1) Attendees at the International Bar Association Annual Conference in Seoul, South Korea. 2-3) RSPCA Queensland at the Big Adopt Out help animals to find homes. 4) LEED Gold Certification plaque presented to Claude Molinari, general manager of TCF Center in Detroit by Mahesh Ramanujam, president and CEO at USGBC. 5) Amanda Auer, tourism and hospitality coordinator at Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau at Island Hopper event with songwriter Jason White and Dan Spears, vice president, Industry Relations of BMI.



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# Empower Your Employees

*How to Inspire Creativity and Leadership at Every Level*

BY SCOTT STEINBERG



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**R**ecently, I was invited by one of America's top military leaders to share my thoughts on how to make leadership a concept that scales across an organization, and make smarter decisions in an era of constant change. My answer was simple: Embolden and empower staffers to take action more frequently by giving them more opportunities to speak up and assume leadership roles — and put platforms in place that allow them to more rapidly ingest internal/external insights,

deploy complementing ideas, and adapt these ideas to be more successful in turn based on feedback they gain from these efforts. That said, getting workers to embrace the idea of intrapreneurial thinking — i.e. taking more ownership of various programs, and operating like entrepreneurs, or internal change agents — isn't a process that happens overnight. Which begs the question: How can you promote similar shifts in thinking among your organization, especially if the idea of change doesn't come easily to it?

A few concepts that I'd argue are important to teach your people are as follows:

Innovation isn't always about cutting-edge breakthroughs or game-changing technologies. Noting this, it pays to remind staff at every turn that simple shifts in business strategy or operating can be every bit as powerful at driving huge wins for your organization as new technology and groundbreaking scientific discoveries. In fact, as research shows, innovation can simply be a matter of perspective — and a process of constant reinvention. And enterprises of every size and background have the ability to leverage its core principles to succeed more frequently going forward. For example, one Fortune 500 company we work with has found ways to fast-track internal learning and growth by holding regular breakfast meetings and educational salons where senior leaders and junior hires are encouraged to sit down, share insights and collaborate in casual settings. Likewise, a government institution we've partnered with is using virtual reality and online gaming installations to better connect and resonate with younger, more tech-savvy recruits.

What's more, surveys repeatedly tell us that end-users and key stakeholders for our services and solutions are the No. 1 best source where organizations get successful and innovative new ideas. Likewise, frontline workers — i.e. salespeople and customer reps, who are often closest to these information sources — are often the most informed audience inside any given institution. Taking this into account, it's important to put platforms and programs in place at every turn that allow these individuals to surface, breaking insights and trends — and letting great ideas bubble

up from the bottom, not just flow down from an executive team at the top. From consumer giants like Starbucks and Elmer's Products to government organizations like the National Institutes of Health and U.S. Dept. of Defense, more and more firms are turning to the concept of open innovation — inviting feedback and contribution of ideas and input from outside sources, including private/public institutions and general citizens — as a means of scaling and accelerating innovation. In effect, they're realizing that the more radically you can multiply the number of resources and insights available to you, the more radically you can multiply the speed at which you can solve any given challenge.

**“Embolden and empower staffers to take action more frequently by giving them more opportunities to speak up and assume leadership roles.”**



Likewise, in addition to providing staffers with more opportunities to try new things going forward, and promoting the idea of grand-scale thought leadership, I'd argue that it's also important to champion concepts like fast deployment and learning amongst your workforce as well. After all, the more feedback from any given operating landscape that you can get, and the faster you can get it, the more rapidly

you can use this information to improve your business programs and strategies, and the better off your organization will be. In essence, flexibility and agility are the essence of future-proofing, and the ability to quickly learn and translate knowledge into practice is the ultimate source of competitive advantage. Worth noting: Most organizations can go from idea to execution in less than 90 days, and many run regular events and contests — e.g. freestyle hackathon design sessions — that invite contributors to invent working prototypes in less than 48 hours.

It's also important to teach your people that the perception that a plan or program has to be 100% perfect and flawless — because it stops us from moving forward — is often the enemy of completion. And that the concept of 'good enough' — because it forces us to hone our time and efforts, and allows us to quickly gain real-world feedback faster to help shape ideas for the better — is often the start of something great. The more you can get people to adopt a minimum viable product (MVP) mindset, where they routinely use the least time and resources possible to create working concepts, then learn from these concepts' deployment, the better off you'll be.

In effect, the more you ingrain these principles — and work to both create leaders at every level and facilitate smart, cost-effective learning and experimentation programs — the more effective your enterprise will be.

As today's most successful leaders are aware, change is far less difficult to deal with when you make a point to promote 'positive' disruption within your organization, and stay in tune with changing times and trends by revising your solutions and operating strategies as well.

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Hailed as the World's Leading Business Strategist, award-winning professional speaker **Scott Steinberg** is among today's best-known trends experts and futurists, and the bestselling author of "Lead with Your Heart," "Make Change Work for You: 10 Ways to Future-Proof Yourself, Fearlessly Innovate, and Succeed Despite Uncertainty," and "Millennial Marketing: Bridging the Generation Gap." The president and CEO of BIZDEV: The International Association for Business Development and Strategic Partnerships, his website is **AKeynoteSpeaker.com**.



# Keep Your Freedom of Choice With A/V

Carefully Evaluate  
Options to Avoid  
Overpaying

BY STEVE WILDEMAN

**A**udio-visual is a critical — albeit often overlooked — component of successful events. Depending on what the planner needs, an event's A/V may appear invisible or it can take the spotlight. Either way, every event needs some kind of A/V.

A/V providers come in as many shapes and sizes as there are kinds of events. There are large and small companies, and in-house and independent providers. Event planners should evaluate these options as carefully as they would a venue and caterer.

Each event you hold should fit into your organization's long-term strategy and mirror the brand's image. A good A/V company will take the next step and ensure your event will build your brand, achieve the company leadership's goals and align with audience expectations.

If you want your event's A/V done your way, you need to be proactive. Before you sign the venue contract, you need to maintain your freedom of choice between the in-house A/V company and an independent provider.

## START WITH THE RFP AND CONTRACT

Once you sign the venue contract, you've lost your negotiation power. At that point, you're stuck with the in-house A/V or a variety of additional fees if you opt to bring in your own A/V partner.

Start off early with the request for proposal (RFP), which should include the freedom to bring in

outside providers. Provide the venue with terms that maintain your freedom of choice with no additional fees. All fees are negotiable during the contract stage.

### SAMPLE LANGUAGE TO PROTECT YOU

Here is a sample clause you could use in the RFP:

Due to the unique nature of our meeting program format, [Company name] has a partnership with an A/V provider that is familiar with our needs. We will plan to utilize their services for much of our audio-visual meeting requirements. They in-turn may rent equipment and/or labor from the in-house provider to augment their needs while on-site. When replying to this RFP, please address our requirement to exclude any fees or charges or requirements to [Company name] or our A/V partner. It is incumbent upon the facility to remove clauses from any proposals prior to submission to [Company name]. [Company name] expects the facility to openly bring up and address these items for a detailed discussion and acceptance prior to including any of them within our final agreement.

Here is sample language you can use in the contract during venue negotiations:

[Company name] reserves the option to use our own A/V provider for all of our audio-visual needs with no additional charges, fees or penalty of any type to [Company name] or our A/V partner. Examples of these include, but are not limited to:

- Requirements for supervisory labor to move-in/out of the facility.
- Fees to prepare rooms for use.
- Charges for podiums, basic power, staging, heating, air conditioning or lights within the meeting room.
- Flat daily outside-vendor fees.
- Requirements to use floor or wall coverings when not practiced by the house A/V company.
- New labor/union contracts if there were none at the submission of the proposal or when signing the contract.
- Wi-Fi rates higher than if you used the in-house A/V company. Your choice of A/V provider should not impact the cost of your Wi-Fi service.

Your A/V partner can also assist with the contract language and provide sample terms and negotiating advice.

**"A good A/V company will take the next step and ensure your event will build your brand, achieve the company leadership's goals and align with audience expectations."**

## INDEPENDENT A/V IS OFTEN A BETTER VALUE

If preserving your freedom of choice seems difficult and going with the in-house option looks more convenient, there's a reason for that: It's in the venue's interest for you to use the in-house company.

In-house A/V vendors pay venues commissions for 'preferred vendor' status. Ultimately, as the event planner, you pay these commissions as in-house vendors set prices to cover the costs. Outsourced A/V partners don't have the burden of paying the facility, so they have greater flexibility to provide solutions with the most impact.

Whether or not you use an independent A/V company or go with the in-house provider, if you preserve your freedom in the contract

stage, you have options later. At the very least, you can have a competitive bidding process, with bids from the in-house provider and an independent A/V company to compare. **| AC&F**

**Steve Wildemann** is president of Rental and Staging Network (RSN), and president and owner of Advanced Staging Productions in Pennsylvania. With more than 30 years of experience in the event technology business, he leads RSN, a top-tier network of live event production companies throughout North America. The network allows event planners and producers to access the very best in live event production anywhere on the North American continent. For more information, visit **RentalandStaging.net**.





# Spread the Wealth

## *Four Ways to Balance Your Team's Workload*

BY REBECCA HAWK

**W**hen you're operating with a small team on a slew of deadlines, it's easy to default to delegating tasks to the same people over and over.

To prevent burnout in high performers and resentment from less efficient team members, take time to consider how you divvy up your staff's workload.

Many associations operate with lean teams, and on tight deadlines. When workloads are especially heavy, most leaders tend to rely on their highest-performing employees to shoulder the extra burden. Unfortunately, this approach can lead to burnout in those employees — and resentment among other staff members who may feel favoritism is at play.

To make sure your team's workload is as balanced and fair as possible, take a hard look at the

work that's on your staff members' plates and the goals on which you want them to focus.

### GET THE BIG PICTURE

Before you start delegating work, make sure you understand the projects that need to be divvied up. Often, managers try to delegate in short bursts or on an as-needed basis, but this reactive approach exacerbates the tendency to assign work to the same people repeatedly and can result in unintended impacts on other important projects, priorities and goals.

To divide up work effectively, set aside some time to get a full picture of the tasks your team needs to complete. Map out the various projects your employees are working on, and then assign priorities to each project and its associated tasks.



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### FOCUS ON STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Once you're clear on your team's current workload and the components that come with each project, it's time to delegate. To break the pattern of assigning the highest-priority tasks to your best performers, focus on which tasks align with individual team member's skills and development goals, rather than solely on your short-term objective of getting the work done.

For example, if one employee wants to develop his data analysis skills, you could assign him to a research project — even if he might not be the most obvious choice for the job. You can then consider what additional support you

may need to provide to ensure he completes the project successfully and on time. With the right structures in place, staff can rise to new challenges and opportunities in ways that far sur-



To avoid the inevitable crash from overworked, high-performing team members, managers must make sure each person on the team carries an equal share of the workload.

pass your expectations.

Shifting your focus from efficiency to staff development can also help you identify skill gaps within your team. From there, you can make more informed recruitment and professional development decisions.

### CLARIFY GOALS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As you shift your focus toward balance and staff development, be sure your employees understand the team's overarching goals, how the tasks and projects they're assigned contribute to those goals, and why they were given their respective assignments.

Additionally, try to praise high-quality work over speed and quantity. Staff members work at different paces and produce different amounts of work. By emphasizing that you place the most value on a high-caliber work, you set a common expectation and a level playing field.

### SCHEDULE REGULAR ONE-ON-ONE CHECKS

Chances are that your staff members differ in terms of performance, motivation and skill sets. As a manager, you know these differences require different management styles. To keep your team on track and check in on progress, try scheduling frequent, one-on-one meetings to touch base with your team members. Individual check-ins will allow you to confirm that team members understand their roles, and they will provide privacy for critical conversations, if needed.

These strategies can help you balance your team's workload and make you nimbler as your organization evolves. Focusing on staff development will also result in higher staff satisfaction and help boost performance. | **AC&F** |

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## Golf & Spa Resorts Bring Added Value to Meetings

# Green & Serene

DEPOSITPHOTOS.COM

By Christine Loomis

**G**olf courses, spas and business are by no means mutually exclusive. In fact, many of the resorts with top golf courses and sought-after spas also provide exemplary settings for meetings and business conferences.

Amenities such as golf courses and spas offer multiple opportunities for team building and may boost registration. They're ideal for meetings that include family. They're also places where attendees can relax and recharge, which ultimately leads to greater productivity as well as enhanced health. Can a bare-bones hotel with sterile meeting rooms do the same? Probably not.

Tara M. Morrison, CAE, CMP, president of Association Management Executives Inc., has worked with two association groups of physicians. Both have had successful meetings at Sea Island Resort's The Cloister, where business and upscale surroundings come together with excellent results. Earlier this year, the Georgia Neurological Society (GNS) brought in 45 members, while the Georgia Society of Interventional Pain Physicians (GSIPP) drew 125 attendees.

"Sea Island is like no other destination where I plan meetings," Morrison says of the resort on Georgia's east coast. "This a long-standing tradition for GNS and a brand new destination for GSIPP. It's luxurious and comfortable, all at once. The accommodations are beautiful and spacious."

Morrison calls Sea Island "an iconic resort" that many of her clients have on their bucket list — with good reason. "There is so much good service and flexibility. They strive to make the experiences personal and unique to each client."

With that kind of luxury and high-touch service, planners might think The Cloister and Sea Island are out of reach for associations. However, Morrison says, "They are attuned to association budgets."

Because the resort is quite spread out compared to some other places, Morrison says planners should understand



that extra walking may be required here. That said, she also points out, "You can't get a bad room at this resort, and the grounds are spectacular."

The Cloister is just one of the accommodation options within Sea Island. There's also The Lodge, The Inn at Sea Island and cottage rentals, as well as the rustic retreat, Broadfield. The Cloister and The Lodge, along with the restaurant Georgian Room at The Cloister, and the Sea Island Spa all have been Forbes Five Star recipients for an impressive 11 years in a row.

While Sea Island has enough of everything — including nine restaurants — many groups never leave the property during conferences, while some with only a few attendees may choose to have a function away from the

Sea Island Resort's Beach Club offers the 1,760-sf Ocean Room, which accommodates up to 200 attendees, who can also enjoy the spa and three golf courses.

500 guests, "the space is even more flexible and convenient."

This year's events didn't include a golf tournament, though Morrison says they've held tournaments in the past. But attendees do play golf at Sea Island on their own, she says, "or they're hosted for golf by one of our vendors."

Attendees also enjoy the spa on their own. "The Sea Island Spa is like none other I've seen or experienced," Morrison says.

It's hard to think of anything here as a real difficulty, though Morrison notes that it can be a challenge working with a different convention services manager (CSM) year to year. "However," she says, "all have been professional and learned our needs quickly."

Among the bonuses of booking Sea Island, Morrison notes, is that, "There are really three airports that attendees can fly into, which helps. And planners

should remember that the resort will be flexible and creative when needed."

Bottom line, she says, "You will not be disappointed. And if you want to 'wow' your attendees, this is the place to do it."

The Lodge at Sea Island recently debuted its nearly \$30 million enhancement, including six new guest cottages, a new 18-hole putting course — another

**"You will not be disappointed, and if you want to 'wow' your attendees, this is the place to do it."**

Tara M. Morrison, CAE, CMP  
President  
Association Management Executives Inc.



resort. That was the case with GSIPP, which held its leadership dinner at a local restaurant. As is true for the area in general, Morrison says, "The food and service were great."

Sea Island offers 42,000 sf of indoor meeting space and numerous outdoor venues. Morrison says that with the addition of the elegant Mizner Ballroom, which can accommodate up to





The Phoenician, which offers 160,000 sf of indoor and outdoor space, has been honored as “North America’s Leading Golf Resort” by the World Travel Awards and among the “Top 75 Golf Resorts in America” by Golf Digest.

team-building challenge option — and expanded driving range tee. There’s also a new oceanfront pool. The cottages provide 14 additional bedrooms, an option for small groups or executive boards. Also unveiled was the new 17,000-sf Golf Performance Center — and the Plantation Course underwent a full redesign.

#### AN ARIZONA FAVORITE

Bethany Jones, meeting planning consultant for the National Association of Surety Bond Producers (NASBP), brought her group to another renowned resort, The Phoenician, a Luxury Collection Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona.

About the area Jones says, “It was a major plus to be very close to a major airport and not have connections into a more remote airport or a long travel time from airport to resort. Many of the resorts we use are in more remote areas, so locations like Scottsdale are ideal for that ‘luxury resort’ setting with quick access to a major airport. There are also a lot of choices and competition in the area so you don’t feel pigeonholed into just one choice. We looked at four resorts in the Scottsdale area for this event.”

Jones says the Phoenician’s layout was a plus. “The meeting space, right off the main lobby entrance area down one escalator, is in good proximity to the sleeping rooms,” she notes. “Our attendees enjoyed not having to ‘go looking’ for the ballrooms, reg-

istration, etc.”

The Phoenician has multiple dining venues on property, but the NASBP group held one dinner in town. “The VIP dinner for the executive committee was held at Mastro’s Steakhouse in Scottsdale,” Jones says. “A great benefit of Scottsdale is that there are many high-end dining options for hosting VIP dinners off-site. That’s an important factor for our attendees since there are many networking VIP events.”

Although everything went smoothly, Jones says it was a bit of a challenge that the meeting was planned during a major renovation. To help, the resort let her go back to the property for a second planning trip to see renovations closer to completion.

Unfortunately, the renovations included the golf course, which wasn’t

**“Our attendees enjoyed not having to ‘go looking’ for the ballrooms, registration, etc.”**

Bethany Jones  
Meeting Planning Consultant, National Association of Surety Bond Producers



open for play at the time of the meeting. “The resort staff assisted with booking us at the neighboring Camelback course,” Jones says, “even covering round-trip transportation for the players.”

As for the spa, attendees went on their own, and Jones says she received positive feedback on the new facilities.

One thing planners should be aware of, Jones notes, is the differences in guest rooms. “Some of the guest rooms are pretty much underground. I had one of them by choice so an attendee wouldn’t have it. You’re looking out a

window at a cement wall, something to be aware of when assigning VIP rooms. But on the flip side,” she says, “The Canyon Suites, the boutique hotel on property with separate accommodations, is an amazing opportunity for people to upgrade not only the rooms but the whole experience, as it has a private lobby, pool and amenities. That type of option is popular with this group.”

In terms of when to book The Phoenician, considerations include the popularity of high season and what other options are available. “This type of destination is so seasonal that it gets really crowded in peak season — winter, or early spring — so rates and competition to book dates in those times are high. If you’re looking for peak season,” Jones advises, “book early, or consider shoulder season dates for better rates and availability.”

While the renovations posed some challenges, Jones says ultimately the recent renovations to the resort were a big draw. “They took an already great property and made it an amazing ‘destination experience’ with all the amenities that a warm-weather resort should feature, such as pool areas, outdoor dining and bar options, views, a spa and golf. The new pool area and poolside dining options are top-notch,” she says. “The new fitness facility is amazing — the best I’ve seen in a while.”

In addition, last year the new three-story spa and expanded athletic club saw major improvements to the resort’s golf course, pared down from three distinct nine-hole courses to one 18-hole course with continuous flow and eco-efficiency as well. The clubhouse was updated and two restaurants debuted — refreshed J&G Steakhouse late last year and the new Phoenician Tavern, which opened earlier this year.

#### A WEST COAST WINNER

For Margaret Stedt, LPRT, CSA, president of Stedt Insurance Service, president elect of California Association of Health Underwriters (CAHU) and Medicare chair for the Orange County Association of Health Underwriters (OCAHU), Pechanga Resort Casino in Temecula, California, was the perfect setting for a meeting that included a golf tournament, as well as for a meet-

ing of three associations — OCAHU and the San Diego and Inland Empire Health Underwriters associations.

This is the group’s second year at Pechanga. “The location is ideal for a combined meeting of our San Diego, Inland Empire and Orange County chapters and our members,” Stedt says. Although she describes the airports as being located “a bit away,” she says they’re still reachable, and in addition, “Closeness to the highway was helpful as it was easy for our members and guests to travel to the resort.”

Sizeable space and the variety of rooms and possible configurations also make Pechanga a good choice for this group. “The size was the first consideration as we had outgrown our previous venue,” Stedt says. “The flexibility for the meeting space to accommodate a number of meetings was important.



Attendees at Pechanga Resort Casino can relish the 25,000-sf Spa Pechanga or buy a Journey Golf Pass for 12 rounds.

opportunity for creative and memorable meetings. The resort offers a number of great options for planners and their events.”

Stedt calls the meeting facilities “professional and warm,” noting that there

are plenty of spots for people to sit and meet and greet and conduct business. What was especially important to them, she adds, “was the digital signage throughout the meeting spaces and the entry way to the meeting center.”

Stedt says members and guests “really enjoyed the facilities, including golfing, the spa, the selection of a number of restaurants and the casino — but they also appreciated that they didn’t have to go through the casino to get to meetings. Many attendees loved the use of the pool.

We required a large main meeting space and staging for 800+, certification classes that could hold 500, smaller rooms for classes for 50 to 125, plus an exhibit hall where a buffet could be held and a large registration area including storage as well.”

Pechanga delivered on multiple levels. “The room rates were reasonable, the food was great and the nonsmoking environment was an added bonus,” Stedt notes. “There’s also room to move around in a beautiful setting and lots of

## 10 Tips for Planning a Successful Golf Tournament From Rosen Shingle Creek’s Shingle Creek Golf Club

**1. Have fun!** The main objective of any golf tournament is for participants to have a great time. If you’re having fun, they will, too. Enlist golf staff to help; they’re pros at creating successful tournaments.

**2. Incorporate golf throughout your meeting or event.** At Rosen Shingle Creek, healthy meeting breaks are a favorite. A visit from the award-winning Brad Brewer Golf Academy pro can get guests up and moving during a coffee break.

**3. Choose the right format, such as scramble or best ball.** Golf staff can advise which format will work best based on the skill set of your players and timing of that day’s overall schedule of events.

**4. Tournament food and beverage options are important.** Choose options from on-course beverage cart service to boxed lunches. Go beyond standard fare by securing sponsors

to offer a beverage or ‘taste’ at each hole.

**5. Customize!** Most clubs, including Shingle Creek Golf Club, include an extensive list of services in your fee. But creative add-ons — trick-shot exhibitions, hole-in-one insurance, a pre-game warm-up, offer of individual lessons with an on-site pro — are available for a nominal fee.

**6. Ask the club pro for tips on playing the course.** Share these, along with a link to the club website’s course scorecard, as a pre-event email reminder or in-room

piece prior to the tournament. This will rev up excitement leading to the event.

**7. Know what rentals options are available.** Club rentals? Shoe rentals? These are important for attendees who don’t bring their own.

**8. Ask about shipping and storage for those who want to bring clubs.** At Shingle Creek Golf Club, we use BAGS, a turnkey service allowing guests to ship their clubs directly from home to the course — no need to schlep them to the airport and hassle with baggage claim.

**9. Provide players with clothing tips** based on potential weather on tournament day. This is useful information for your players prior to packing.

**10. Build a relationship with course staff as planning begins.** Tournament directors can offer insider tips unique to their course and ideas to help you create a truly memorable event. | **AC&F** |







Plus, the hotel is close to several wineries and other attractions in San Diego county. Last year, we had an event for 300 at one of the wineries near the resort.”

Sponsors, Stedt says, also make full use of the venue and amenities for special meetings after scheduled meeting times.

Then there’s the staff. “The front desk works hard to accommodate our members and guests. The professionalism of the event coordinators and food service staff were great. Our members and guest were very impressed with the wait staff, who don’t often get mentioned in surveys. They are the best we’ve seen on delivery of plates and beverages, fixing issues quickly and clearing quickly as well,” Stedt adds. “They really impressed our folks.”

That was especially notable because last year the only complaints were related to the food venues in the casinos. “They were not prepared for the number of guests our meeting brought in. The staffing in the various restaurants was not adequate to meet the number of attendees and wait times were long.”

Paying close attention to room sizes according to setup — theater, classroom, rounds — is important Stedt says, so she “appreciated the guidance the staff provided in room setup with an eye to the number of attendees and requirements for moving between meetings and for meals, and especially willingness to expand room space when needed.”

While the group had what Stedt calls a slow start with golf last year, this year was a different story. “Our

members and guests really enjoyed the golfing and were excited about the course. This is the first year we offered a tournament as last year was just a golfing outing. They love the course and amenities. For our golf committee, it was a slow start the first year to get to the right coordinators at the golf center. This year has gone much better.”

To planners thinking of meeting at Pechanga, Stedt advises, “Know your meeting requirements and review them in detail with the hotel event coordinators. Make sure you provide them with a minute-by-minute program to make the setup, digital and sound sup-

**“We chose to return for a second year as our members and guest loved the venue and service.”**

Margaret Stedt, LPRT, CSA  
President of Stedt Insurance Service  
President Elect of CAHU  
Medicare Chair for OCAHU



port plus staffing requirements work smoothly. Meeting planners need to make sure they also understand the hotel’s requirements, such as filing plans with the fire marshal and shipping and receiving and the timing needed to meet these requirements. View the event as a team effort,” she says. “Be realistic and honest with your needs and expectations.”

One last suggestion: “Good service should be rewarded and guaranteed by the event planners. We were firm with our exhibitors that we expect them to tip the bellmen/women that are hauling

Innisbrook, A Salamander Golf & Spa Resort, offers 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space, four championship-level golf courses and Salamander Spa, Tampa Bay.

their boxes and supplies.”

For Stedt’s group, Pechanga works well. “We chose to return for a second year as our members and guests loved the venue and service.”

Planners who haven’t visited Pechanga recently should take another look. Earlier this year the resort closed on a \$300 million expansion that made Pechanga the largest resort/casino on the West Coast. The expansion doubled the resort in size and added 568 guest rooms in a new tower; a stand-alone, two-story spa; two new restaurants; a moving walkway; a 4.5-acre pool complex; and provided an additional 68,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting space.

#### **MORE MEETING-FRIENDLY GOLF & SPA RESORTS**

Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in Tucson, Arizona, is refreshing its golf clubhouse this year and will debut a new fleet of golf carts. Food options have become more intriguing as well with the new culinary concept, Flavor, a partnership between Loews Hotels and local artisan F&B vendors, including Tucson Tamale Company, Barrio Bread and Dragoon Brewing Company.

Innisbrook, A Salamander Golf & Spa Resort in Palm Harbor, Florida, celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2020 with a complete renovation of guest accommodation interiors, to be completed by year’s end. Contemporary styling will feature new furniture and furnishings, flooring, stainless-steel appliances, quartz countertops, cabinets, lighting, drapes and more. The resort already completed renovations of its golf courses, clubhouse, spa and pools.

For its Rosen Hotels & Resorts 45th anniversary, their Rosen Shingle Creek resort in Orlando, Florida offers a meeting planner signing bonus starting at \$5,000 for new leads through the end of the year, plus other incentives. The AAA Four Diamond-property underwent a refresh of its 1,501 guest rooms and several dining outlets. | **AC&F** |

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# teaming up

## How Volunteer Involvement Can Streamline Your Next Event

By Sophia Bennett

**T**here are many good reasons to utilize volunteers at special events. Having people willing to lend a hand can help decrease a staffing budget and provide better service for participants. Peer-to-peer interactions on a planning committee or at a registration desk, allow association members to get to know each other better, which can help them forge lasting bonds.

"We just feel that engagement in the organization is really important, and one of the fastest ways to do that is to volunteer," says Kathleen Larmett, executive director of the National Council of University Research Administrators. "When you're engaged in your organization, you're going to stay around." Volunteering to do a simple task at a meeting may put folks on the first rung of a leadership ladder that will help them climb to more substantial positions.

That isn't to say that there are no downfalls to having volunteers at a conference or meeting, however. A poorly managed corps of volunteers can become a headache for planners, who already have plenty of personalities, and tasks to manage at a gathering. By utilizing some best practices and common-sense approaches to volunteer management, associations are much more likely to realize the benefits of volunteers without encountering as many of the pitfalls.

### HOW TO USE VOLUNTEERS

The level at which associations utilize volunteers for events varies widely. "Volunteers are the lifeblood of the American Camp Association (ACA),"



says Rich Garbinsky, the organization's volunteer engagement committee chairman. "While we have a world-class, knowledgeable, dedicated and passionate staff, the partnership they have with ACA volunteers is key to our success." Volunteers are utilized for all aspects of the association's annual conference and other events. Jobs include serving on the planning committees, working with operations, procuring speakers, giving presentations and managing hospitality.

The National Council of University Research Administrators works with about 350 volunteers for its annual meeting. Typical attendance is between 1,700 and 2,000, so a good percentage of the attendees there are either serving on a program committee, speaking at a workshop, working at the registra-

Barb Boggs, event manager at the Grant Professionals Association, primarily uses her cadre of volunteers to work at the registration desk, where they handle several tasks.

tion desk, helping to direct people or doing another job. "We also have a large cadre of volunteers who call members who are attending for the first time," Larmett says. "About two weeks before the meeting, they're given a list and they may call two or three new people. We have about 100 members who do that." At the event, seasoned members speak at a reception designed to give first-time attendees some tips on how to get the most out of the event.

Volunteer involvement doesn't have to be so extensive, however. The Grant Professionals Association (GPA) typi-





COURTESY KATHLEEN LARMETT

National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA) members on the NCURA President's Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion are recognized for their volunteerism.

cally recruits about 75 volunteers for its four-day annual conference, which draws between 800 and 1,000 people. “The primary way we use volunteers is at our registration booth,” says GPA events manager Barb Boggs. They check in attendees, hand out goody bags and speaker gifts, answer questions and otherwise assist the staff. Boggs typically has two volunteers at the desk at any given time.

“Our volunteers help with tasks such as handing out registration materials, delivering handouts to workshops, helping direct crowds and moving equipment throughout the day,” says Courtney Zirkle, CMP, event coordinator for the Association for Contextual Behavioral Science.

KEY COMPONENTS FOR SUCCESS

Good communication is critical to creating a volunteer experience that is beneficial for everyone involved. “We want to make sure that when somebody volunteers for us, the charge they’re given is very clear and understandable,” Larmett says. “If there’s a deadline involved, we want to make sure that’s very clear too and that they understand and accept that. We create a concise description of what the volunteer position is and an agreed-upon deadline. It’s important to do that upfront so they know what they’re doing and what’s expected of them.”

Proper training and support for volunteers will help the association and volunteers avoid problems at the event. “When we can, we use service descriptions for volunteer positions that help set those expectations,” Garbinsky says. “We try to make sure that all volunteers are prepared for their role and that both volunteer and staff support is available. Proper training and overviews are a must. Regular check-ins and communication are utilized with all volunteers, along with constant volunteer feedback to make sure that their needs and the needs of the association are being met.”

Boggs sends each volunteer a reminder email with the date and time of their shift before the conference. “Along with that email, we send them the responsibilities to give them an idea of what’s expected of them before they show up,” she says. “We’ve also done volunteer conference calls or

video calls to go over those responsibilities and go over any questions. We segment those calls by the area where they’re volunteering so we can focus on exactly what they’ll do be doing in their position. On-site, we always keep a list of the expectations for them at the desk, and a staff person walks through and trains each person as they come to the position to make sure they have any questions answered.”

Zirkle uses a similar system. “Before the event, I send them training videos for specific technical tasks such as A/V and a thorough volunteer guide,” she says. “Make yourself easily available if they have any questions, whether it be in person or online. For example, I use WhatsApp to connect with our international volunteers who may be unable to call/text me on-site.” Volunteers get an email with a reminder about each shift one day before they’re supposed to be working.

Having realistic expectations for volunteers will help create a more positive experience for everyone. Zirkle tries to match volunteers with tasks that are well-suited for their skill set. “It is key that you understand what their expectations, limitations and abilities are,” she says. “It is also important to be nice, flexible and patient with the volunteers.”

One of Boggs’ top volunteer management tips is

Courtney Zirkle, CMP, of the Association for Contextual Behavioral Science, sends her volunteers training videos and other material to help them prepare for their duties.



MARIE-LIESE BURKET

to make sure everyone stays busy when they’re on their shift. “Definitely be prepared with a list of things that you want them to do,” she says. “The worst thing I’ve seen with volunteers is they show up and they’re just there, and they don’t know what to do. They can have a great conversation with one of our staff members, but you can see that they’re also thinking, ‘I gave up an hour of my day and I’m not doing anything.’”

Boggs often puts people to work restocking or reorganizing the registration area when there’s a lull in activity. And if she really has nothing for them to do, she’s honest with them and gives them the option of abandoning their shift. Most of the time they choose to stay, but at least they know they have the option of leaving. “We’ve found that if they’re bored, they don’t enjoy their time as much and they’re less likely to volunteer again in the future,” she says.

It can be tempting to pass all kinds of tasks on to people who want to give their assistance for free. But it’s vital to make sure any task assigned to volunteers is one that makes sense, both for the organization and the person.

“We make sure we don’t put volunteers in any position of heavy responsibility and authority. Staff takes that on,” Larmett says.

“I think it’s important to always keep in mind that they are volunteers, and not paid staff,” Zirkle says. “They are choosing to spend their time helping us, and it is important to treat them with respect and gratitude. Identify which tasks need to be completed by staff, and which volunteers can han-

“Definitely be prepared with a list of things that you want them to do.”

Barb Boggs  
Events Manager  
Grant Professionals Association



dle. Some things are more integral to the success of the event and require a trained staff member.”

Zirkle adds, “I once had volunteers help translate workshop slides into different languages. For multiple reasons, it didn’t work out and ended up causing more stress for everyone involved. It

was a great lesson. It very quickly taught me that despite their willingness, not all jobs are appropriate for volunteers.”

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

The most common ways to recruit volunteers are through word-of-mouth and referrals. “Volunteer recruitment, for the most part, comes from current volunteers,” Garbinsky says. “We surely utilize self-nominations, but most of

our success stories come from current volunteers and staff identifying and recruiting new volunteers. The American Camp Association promotes a culture of giving back to the association. Many volunteers choose to do something because they have been served by others.”

“We send out calls electronically, but our board of directors and our standing committee chairs and our staff, ride the range all the time and act like talent scouts,” Larmett says.

When they need someone to fill a position, someone typically has a person in mind. Many annual meeting presenters respond to a call for proposals, but if there’s someone the association really wants to have speak, they will share their information with the program committee and have someone reach out to them directly.

Planners have varying opinions about the importance of retaining volunteers. “Volunteer retention is incredibly important to me,” Zirkle says. “Returning volunteers tend to have a better understanding of the event, are more comfortable with the staff and are typically willing to help with any task. Returning volunteers are also able to help train and mentor new volunteers, which saves me a lot of time on-site. Another added benefit to returning volunteers is the ability to tailor certain assignments to their strengths and being able to avoid their weaknesses. I try to retain volunteers year to year by building individual relationships with each person, staying in touch between conferences and inviting them to volunteer at future events.”

Garbinsky has a different view. “There needs to be a balance between keeping veteran volunteers and recruiting and utilizing new volunteers. Of course, we value the same

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c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation [Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), and (4)]		13,386	13,412
d1. Outside County Nonrequested Copies Stated on PS Form 3541		8,189	8,181
d2. In-County Nonrequested Copies Stated on PS Form 3541		—	—
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e. Total Nonrequested Distribution [Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3), and (4)]		8,189	8,181
f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)		21,575	21,593
g. Copies not Distributed		125	107
h. Total (Sum of 15f and 15g)		21,700	21,700
i. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (15c divided by 15f times 100)		62%	62.1%
16. Electronic Copies Circulation: N/A			
a. Requested and Paid Electronic Copies		—	—
b. Total Requested & Paid Print Copies (Line 15c) + Requested/Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a)		13,386	13,412
c. Total Requested Copy Distribution (Line 15f) + Requested/Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a)		21,575	21,593
d. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Both Print & Electronic Copies) (16b divided by 16c x 100)		62%	62.1%
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17. Publication of Statement of Ownership for a Requester Publication is required and will be printed in the Sept. 2018 issue of this publication.			
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I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties)			



volunteers coming back and being part of American Camp Association year in and year out. But our volunteers also realize that new blood, different perspectives and increased energy are needed for success. People keep coming back because they want to. They feel valued, they feel like their work is important and they feel — and know — that their volunteer work makes a difference.”

One goal of the National Council of University Research Administrators is to increase diversity and inclusion within the organization. Among other things, that means recruiting a lot of new people to give conference workshops. To make new presenters feel more comfortable, the association now offers a ‘first-time speakers’ program that pairs new folks with a seasoned mentor.

Larmett has had to turn away some seasoned volunteers in favor of new people in the past few years. “The hardest thing is when your volunteers are fabulous — you hate to lose them,” she says. “But we’re going through those growing pains because we need to bring new blood in. We’re in a time of transition.

Planners agree that volunteers are indispensable members of the team who help make everything run smoothly and are important to the success of every event.

The baby boomers — half of them are gone — so we’re trying to bring in the next generation.” She was concerned that there would be a backlash when the association changed its policies and had to limit some people’s involvement. But so far, members have been very understanding.

### VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION

Showing volunteers appreciation for their hard work is important. “Volunteers need to feel and be valued whether they are part of the group planning, the entire event or the group assembling

**“The hardest thing is when your volunteers are fabulous — you hate to lose them.”**

Kathleen Larmett  
Executive Director of the National  
Council of University Research  
Administrators



packets,” Garbinsky says. “Making someone feel like they belong and are part of the community is crucial.”

“At our annual meeting, the program committee members each receive a framed program cover of the meeting they’ve just done,” Larmett says. “We do that for our winter meetings as well. We hold a separate reception at the annual meeting for our program committee members and speakers. And each of our program committee members are reminded after the meeting

to go back to their speakers and make sure they understand how thankful we are that they came to the meeting and shared information with the attendees in the room.”

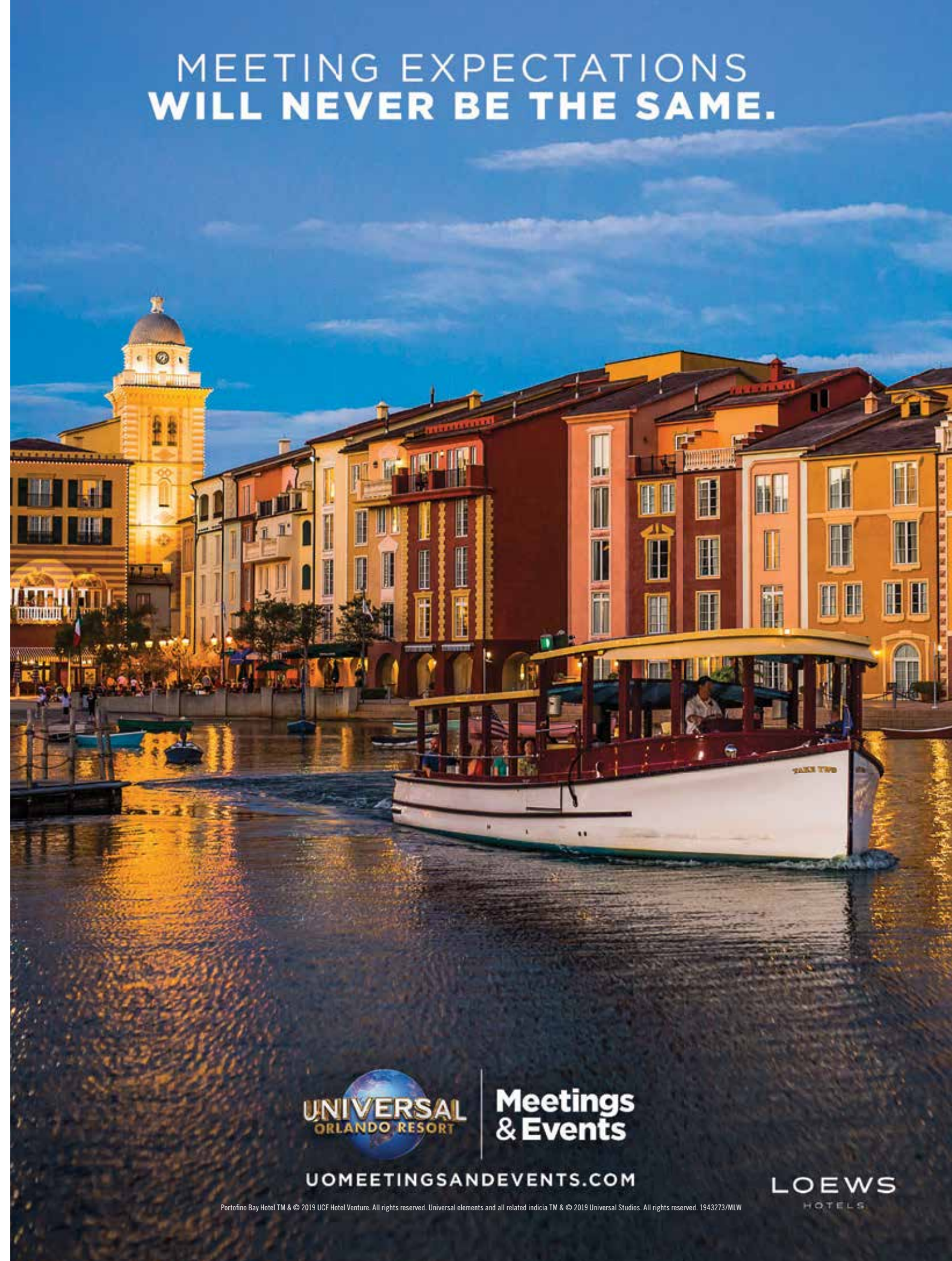
“I try to do small things throughout the entire event to show our appreciation for the volunteers,” Zirkle says. “We give out extra drink tickets at our evening events — these are especially appreciated by the graduate students — and allow them first dibs for conference swag. They get a personal ‘Thank you’ after their last shift. I’ve found that doing small things throughout the event helps keep volunteer morale at a high.”

“Every April, for National Volunteer Week, we send a handwritten note signed by each staff member,” Boggs says. The association has about 400 volunteers in total, so the staff will pass around cards for signatures during meetings for the months leading up to that time. “They also get a small gift to say ‘We appreciate you and what you do for us.’ At the conference, we always give them chocolate or candy just as a little ‘Thank you’ for being there. We always follow up again after the conference and send out another thank you to them for taking their time to help us out.”

Those types of personal contacts are often the most important acknowledgment for volunteers, Garbinsky says. “Quite frankly, a simple ‘Thank you’ or a personal note goes a long way.” |AC&F|



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Planners say VISIT DENVER showed a bit of added creativity with welcome banners from an event that were repurposed as souvenirs.

# DYNAMIC DMOs

## DMOs Can Provide a Personal Touch to Your Meeting

By  
Patrick  
Simms

SCOTT DRESSSELL MARTIN / VISIT DENVER

**C**utting-edge educational content and the prospect of networking with peers aren't the only means of drawing members to attend the annual convention. A more minor, but still significant, draw is the host city, especially when it promises attendees interesting encounters with local attractions and culture. And increasingly, group events are showcasing what the host city has to offer in lieu of utilizing another convention center or hotel space. A reception, for example, becomes all the more remarkable when held at a world-class art museum, a board of directors' luncheon becomes more engaging if booked at a trendy local restaurant, and so on. The key to these possibilities is often the local destination

marketing organization (DMO). If a planner wants a 'big picture' perspective on how the city can help to maximize attendance, as well as specific ideas for supplier partnerships, the local DMO is arguably the best first stop.

"The information that I'm looking for from the DMO is a little bit different than the information I'm looking for from individual properties," notes Kay Granath, CMP, CAE, IOM, founder and CEO of Granath Consulting. "The DMO is going to give me the flavor of the city and what the attraction is for my attendees. Why would they want to come to this city as opposed to another?"

Rosina Romano, director of meetings for the Entomological Society of America, also looks to DMOs,

particularly CVBs, when she wants to imbue her annual meeting with local character. "I primarily use CVBs to help us make our meetings feel like we're not just in any city," she explains. "So we do an off-site student reception where I want to bring the students out of the convention center and into the downtown area. I work with the CVB to send out requests for proposals (RFPs) to destination management companies (DMCs) in the area and to come up with ideas that will really be of interest to entomologists. They also help with organizing tours and suggest restaurants that handle groups well. I lean on them for all of it."

Granath, a self-professed 'champion' of CVBs for

her entire career, and Christopher Kirbabas, director of programs with the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH), think CVBs are somewhat underutilized by their peers, which is surprising given the value proposition of these organizations. "Planners that do not work with the CVB are missing out on a treasure trove of knowledge and resources that can be of critical value to you and your members — and to your budget's bottom line," Kirbabas says. He gets the DMO involved in the SAH's annual conference from the beginning of the planning period. "They don't necessarily need to help us design an event, but providing input and resources to help with cost-saving approaches is critical for us," he says. "They may



have resources at their fingertips that I don't know about, and if they can help provide a cost-saving approach or a different idea that works even better, then great." One of the resources at a CVB's fingertips is information on any incoming conventions over the client's dates, which can impact the booking decision or motivate date flexibility. That's also part of the 'big picture' that CVBs can provide.

When it comes to executing the convention, some CVBs go 'above and beyond' or 'the extra mile,' according to their planner clients. These popular phrases can mean different things to different planners. For Kirbabas, it means the CVB is a partner "every step of the way." He gives the Glasgow Convention Bureau, host of the SAH's 70th Annual International Conference, as a prime example. "The Glasgow CVB made SAH feel so welcome to its city from the moment the city was booked to past the time our attendees left Glasgow after a very successful and rewarding conference."

Helena Dean, SAH's director of communications, elaborates on the extent



of the CVB's assistance: They "met with staff face-to-face at the start of the conference, attended the Glasgow Seminar and tours, and shared photos on social media — always being there to provide assistance with PR, partnership contacts, connecting us with the Scotland CVB, images and anything else we needed. They continued to foster the relationship past the conference through social media as well." As a result of this attention, the group feels that their event is truly important, not only to individual venues and suppliers, but to the city itself. "When a CVB makes your organization and event feel important, by giving it the attention it deserves, it shows," she observes. "We've had the opposite — where we felt like we

Society of Architectural Historians' Christopher Kirbabas (below) credits the Glasgow Convention Bureau with executing a successful and rewarding conference.

weren't important enough because of our small size and the popularity of the host city — and it's no fun feeling like the small fish in a big pond."

The starting point of the partnership is often a visit to the CVB's website, which then becomes the planner's first brush with the organization's service quality. The information and functionality of the meetings section of the site is a kind of service to the user, and planners certainly have their preferred features. For Kirbabas, "The most valuable feature on a CVB's website is a listing of local vendors who provide services that I need to source. Vendors, from shuttle buses, audiovisual and printers to catering companies, help make the search process that much quicker and easier so I can then move on to other projects." Dean adds that the image galleries are also an important resource from a marketing perspective. "Having a large and diverse selection of high-quality images with captions and credits is always a huge help. You can never have too many images," she says. "The travel and transportation section is helpful as well." In particular, the ability to see potential off-site venues on a map or to sort venues based on distance from the convention center is an advantage.

Website information and tools only supplement an exploratory, initial conversation with the CVB, of course. The representative should be able to make a compelling case for bringing the convention to town and, ideally, raise points in the city's favor that are not immediately obvious. "When they come in to do a presentation for us, we always say, 'Tell us everything that's not on your website,'" Granath says. "I can go to the website and find out how

The Greater Palm Springs CVB made a convincing sales pitch to planners that a second-tier city can be an ideal destination, despite reservations about attendees having enough to do or travel would be difficult.

many guest rooms you have, what your weather looks like and how big your convention center is, and I can look up a list of all of your meetings. But tell me something that's unique about your city and something I'm not going to find on the site. Some of them have a difficult time delivering that kind of information, because they're used to doing a presentation with all of those facts and figures. They might talk about sustainability programs the city is doing or some of the socially responsible programs they have available. It's very helpful for our marketing people to dig deeper into what they have. If we're doing a specialty medicine group — are there any facilities in that area that they should be contacting for either attendance, or for tours or experts?"

Many second-tier city DMOs need to be especially good at spelling out their value proposition since planners may have reservations about selecting them. On several occasions, Granath and her team successfully partnered with the Greater Palm Springs CVB, an organization that both made a convincing case for that second-tier city and delivered on the promise. "People perceive that it's difficult to fly there or that there is not going to be enough to do, but we found that many of our groups were very happy with it," she says.

Just like the pitch for the business, the site visit should go beyond the generic 'best of the city' and showcase venues that uniquely fit the client's event and demographic. Part of the responsibility for creating an optimal site visit falls to the planner, who must communicate to the CVB representative the specs for potential venues. "I ask that when we go to places for off-site meals that it's always a place that can host a board of 50 in a private room, rather than just seeing the hot new restaurant that won't take reservations," Romano says. "I want to maximize my time and I'm always thinking, 'Will this be a fit for my board, my planning committee, my reception?' That saves a ton of extra time." Budget is always a factor, and some planners want the CVB rep who is guiding the site visit to display budget sensitivity. "Ask me what my budget is for off-site venues, and then don't show me venues that are too far out of my price range,"

Kirbabas advises. "Don't waste my time showing me venues we won't be able to afford, but also don't waste the time of the venue."

Romano's CVB rep for Portland, which hosted over 3,400 attendees for an entomology conference, was particularly effective during the site visit, she says. "When we came in for our site visit he showed us everything we

**"When a CVB makes your organization and event feel important, by giving it the attention it deserves, it shows."**

Helena Dean  
Director of Communications  
Society of Architectural Historians



needed to see as well as going down these extra rabbit holes of 'What if we explored this?'" she says. "With Portland, the convention center is across the water, but a lot of off-site event sites are in the downtown area. So, he was really great about helping people get from one area to the other." The CVB has a deep knowledge of the logistics of their city, and that can certainly make a CVB-guided site visit more time-efficient. "You don't always know how much time you need to leave between

the hotels and the convention center, so I love having them coordinate that for me," Romano adds.

The best DMOs are as logistically savvy as they are creative, and a major creative area is helping with promotion assistance. Compared to third-party event companies, CVBs can be underestimated in regards to their branding prowess. The Glasgow Convention Bureau's award-winning branding elements, for example, took the excitement at the SAH's meeting to another level, according to Kirbabas. "The branding of the city of Glasgow 'People Make Glasgow,' helped create a mood for our attendees, and we capitalized on their city branding. Branding and welcoming

elements that are always appreciated are digital signage and/or street banner signage around the city or at least in front of the conference location." The social media connection was an additional benefit. "People use those branding opportunities to take selfies and post

Travel Portland helped one planner work out transportation logistics for 3,400 attendees at an entomology conference.





The Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau was extremely helpful for a planner who needed information to keep attendees up to date during a winter storm.

to our social media, which generates eagerness and excitement of our attendees to be at the conference and can show to members not at the conference what they are missing," he explains.

VISIT DENVER showed a bit of added creativity when it comes to welcome banners, Romano says. "They took those banners and repurposed them as large shopping totes. Those from the planning committee got them as souvenirs, branded from the meeting. Our president really loved it."

On-site promotional ideas can emerge during pre-con meetings, and the most effective CVBs will have a presence at these meetings as well as subsequent stages of the convention. "If the CVB rep can be present at my pre-con meeting with the hotel, convention center and vendors, that is ideal," Kirbabas says. "I like to have all players in the same room at the same time." Once the meeting is under way, the CVB can serve as a backup to the assistance the group is already receiving from convention center and hotel convention services managers (CSMs). "During the event, we use them as a safety net if there's



something that comes up where we need to get information," Granath says. "We had two instances last year where we had weather issues. We were in Boston during a nor'easter and in Savannah

**"I primarily use CVBs to help us make our meetings feel like we're not just in any city."**

Rosina Romano  
Director of Meetings  
Entomological Society of America



when a hurricane threatened. And both of the planners that were in those situations were working with the CVB heavily to get the right information to our attendees." Post meeting, the CVB can also be an information resource, providing stats on the convention's economic

impact and attendee spending, which can be relevant to planning future conventions. "Many CVBs will send out a post-event survey, and I'm sure that's helpful to them in getting information.

But, I think the follow-up afterward to see where there are any issues they could improve on is more important," she says. "We try to have the relationships with the CVB people so we can do that. We're happy to act as a reference for them if things go well." Kirbabas also sees the follow-up as a mark of a very customer

service-oriented bureau. "I like to have them check in with me about a month or so afterward to see how everything went and if there is anything more they could have done," he says. "I would think that kind of constructive feedback is valuable to them to help attract more clients and welcome back returning clients."

One kind of experience that will surely result in some negative feedback is if the DMO sales representative had promised something that wasn't delivered. Apart from enthusiasm, energy and an extensive knowledge on the city, Romano prefers a representative who is "honest with me about what the city can provide, and upfront in the sales process. If they can't do something — then say that." Indeed, every planner appreciates a 'can do' attitude in their supplier partners, but only if it's coupled with integrity. **| AC&F |**

When a hurricane threatened Savannah, Georgia during a conference, a representative from Visit Savannah worked with planners there to keep attendees informed with the latest news and updates.



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Texas Offers Venues and Activities Sure to Please

# THE LONE STAR STATE IS FOR MEETINGS

BY CHRISTINE LOOMIS

**T**exas is a big state — the second largest in the country by size and population. Within its more than 268,000 square miles are some of the most popular meetings destinations in the country, each with its own distinct personality.

## IRVING

Irving may not have the same global recognition as Dallas and Fort Worth, but it's an economic powerhouse in the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area, which itself is among the top economies in the world. Sitting just northwest of Dallas and northeast of Fort Worth, Irving is less than 10 miles from DFW International Airport and has plenty of business infrastructure to meet the needs of associations of all kinds.

Teresa G. Alfaro, CMP, director, strategic meetings and events, with Volunteers of America, says the group has met in Irving multiple times. The national conference was held in Irving in April 2017, October 2018 and August 2019, bringing in approximately 650 attendees. Hilton Garden Inn Las Colinas has served as their base hotel.

"Volunteers of America has held several meetings in the Irving area since 2017, when the national conference was hosted by the Westin DFW Hotel. Unfamiliar with the destination until then, I can happily say it's a city I look forward to booking for more and more groups in the future," Alfaro says. "Irving has surpassed my expectations as a planner, as well as for all conference delegates. We have received VIP treatment at each event and attendance has been outstanding due to the meeting facilities chosen as well as for proximity to DFW Airport. All in all, our decision to hold meetings in Irving has proven to be the right one, and the monetary assistance provided by the convention bureau always puts a nice bow to each and every meeting."

Alfaro says planners should become familiar with Irving. "Irving is a city that



JOSEPH HAUBERT

The Dallas Arts District is home to restaurants, shopping, live events and performances, lodging, museums and activities.

should be on every planner's radar screen. Top-notch service is provided beginning to end with outstanding customer service and attention to detail by all involved. Whether it's an annual meeting for 600 or for a small board of directors, you will be 'wowed' and will be ready and eager to book your next meeting there."

The Hilton Garden Inn, notes Alfaro, was the perfect size for our 90-person meeting held in October 2018. "We were the big fish in the small pond and it worked out perfectly. From the meeting space to the lovely renovated guest rooms to the general areas of the hotel, everything contributed to outstanding attendance and a very successful meeting."

**"Irving has surpassed my expectations as a planner, as well as for all conference delegates."**

Teresa G. Alfaro, CMP  
Director, Strategic Meetings and Events  
Volunteers of America



She says the hotel is also a good choice for groups with a modest budget. "The staff will work with you to incorporate breakfast vouchers as part of the room rate, which in turn will aid your budget as you won't have to provide that meal as part of the meeting agenda. And, again, the staff was friendly, knowledgeable and incredibly easy and pleasant to work with."

In terms of meeting space, Alfaro says, "The meetings rooms are spacious, clean and comfortable. And if

your needs for audio-visual are modest and non-elaborate, you can work a daily package deal incorporated into your contract. And last but certainly not least, you will feed your attendees for half the price you would in another destination. Most importantly, they'll thank you for the excellent food they will enjoy."

My only challenge, she adds, "had to do with attendance being a bit bigger than anticipated. However, because of the amazing staff at the Hilton Garden Inn, they made the situation work and found a way for everyone to be comfortable in the meeting room. We received VIP treatment and the attention to detail was outstanding."

To planners considering Irving Alfaro says, "You will not be disappointed. You will plan your meeting for a fraction of the cost you would elsewhere. You will enjoy working with the staff. You will want to bring another group soon."

Irving is only getting better. The new Westin Irving Convention Center at Las Colinas is now open as part of the walkable, mixed-use visitor district serving both meetings and leisure travelers. In addition to the 150,000 sf convention center, there's also the Toyota Music Factory, an all-in-one dining and entertainment destination that includes an 8,000-seat Live Nation indoor/out-





door amphitheater, movie theaters and 20-plus restaurants and bars. The new hotel features 350 guest rooms and meeting space that accommodates nearly 4,900 attendees.

## FORT WORTH

Over in Fort Worth, hotel development in 2019-2020 is strong. Four budget-friendly hotels opened downtown including Aloft, with 180 rooms. Also scheduled to open in 2019 is the Sinclair Hotel, while coming soon is the AC Hotel Fort Worth with 252 rooms and the Marriott Autograph Hotel Drover with 200 rooms, both slated to open in 2020. A 232-room Kimpton Hotel will open in 2021. Also scheduled to open this year is the \$450 million Dickies Arena, a 14,000-seat facility that will host the annual stock show among other events. Perhaps best of all is the new 27-mile commuter rail line connecting DFW directly to downtown Fort Worth.

## ARLINGTON

Like Irving, Arlington sits between Dallas and Fort Worth, providing planners with still another destination in the metro area. Live! by Loews-Arlington, a luxury 300-room hotel, recently opened in the city's entertainment district with 35,000 sf of meeting space, a private rooftop terrace, a restaurant and banquet menus with a focus on local ingredients.

## DALLAS

The city of Dallas has a lot going on as well. This year four hotels opened, adding more than 700 rooms from downtown to the Design District, Arts District and North Dallas. Another 15 hotels are

slated for completion in 2020, which will add another 2,300-plus rooms. The new AT&T Discover District opens this fall with shops, outdoor event space, restaurants and more. Also opening is the Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum in the historic West End District. In addition to its compelling exhibits and dedication to combatting prejudice, hatred and indifference, the museum features impressive space for an event.

## HOUSTON

Houston has long been a thriving center for the oil industry, and that's where the Society of Petroleum Engineers

**"San Antonio offered a variety of unique meeting and event options."**

Dana Barton  
Director, National Events  
Ducks Unlimited



holds its Offshore Technology Conference (OTC) each May. In fact, the OTC, which has drawn some 59,000 attendees, has met there since its inception in 1969.

"Houston is the energy capitol of the world," says Hadley McClellan, senior manager for the OTC. "We have been at NRG Park, formerly Reliant Park and home of the NRG Astrodome, for 49 of those 51 years. Houston has ease of accessibility with two major airports, hotels all over the city in close proximity to the park and/or to the offices of the attendees."

Exhibitors and sponsors hold events throughout the city at different venues

The new Dickies Arena in Fort Worth has 14,000 seats. It will offer exclusive dining and refreshment services in the North Club and South Club for attendees.

and hotels the whole week of OTC, McClellan says.

In terms of assist from the city, McClellan has high praise for the staff at the Greater Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau. "The CVB is always available to assist. They provide introductions to people, places and vendors we may not know firsthand, which assist us with development, as well as the 'Show Your Badge' program, which enables our attendees to take advantage of discounts and offers all over the city with partner venues."

If you're considering a convention in Houston, McClellan's advice is simple. "Get involved with your CVB representatives. They have all the information you need when it comes to planning an event in Houston. And if they don't have it as soon as you call with the question, they will find it."

McClellan also points to Houston First, the arm of the CVB that owns and manages many of the convention venues in Houston, including the Hilton-Americas Hotel and George R. Brown Convention Center. "Their appreciation for meetings and meeting planners bringing shows to Houston is highly regarded."

One of the city's most famous facilities, Space Center Houston, is hardly resting on its historic laurels. Last year the \$3 million permanent exhibit Mission Mars opened, and this year was the well documented

restoring of the historic Mission Control Center back to its Apollo 11 look and feel. Downtown, the city's Railway Heights Market will soon open, a new food market similar to Reading Terminal Market in Philadelphia. New hotels this year include the 354-room InterContinental Houston-Medical Center and C Baldwin Hotel, both with 354 rooms, and the 185-room AC Hotel by Marriott.

## GALVESTON

Just about an hour southeast of Houston, the island of Galveston offers a very different vibe. Galveston has been

a popular seaside resort for more than a century, and that combined with business-friendly facilities and venues means there's much to offer groups.

"The location works well for our group because there are plenty of housing options near the convention center and entertainment options such as the Pleasure Pier and numerous restaurants," says Sammy Unberhagen, events and exhibits manager with the Texas Computer Education Association. "The location is easy to get to and there's free parking at the convention center as well as a complimentary shuttle that runs to each of the hotels in our block."

The association's Elementary Technology Conference convened in Galveston in June, drawing 1,000 attendees. The group used many of the island's properties, including the Hilton Galveston Island Resort, San Luis Resort, Spa & Conference Center and Holiday Inn Resort Galveston—On the Beach.

Galveston checks all the right boxes



Houston's Hermann Park with downtown skyline. The George R. Brown Convention Center offers 1.9 million sf of meeting space, with 88 meeting rooms and a ballroom.

Galveston is also a good fit in terms of size. "The destination is perfect for a mid-sized convention," Unberhagen adds. "The hotel package and walkability are

powerful solutions for planners and offer convenience for attendees. From a scenic standpoint, the view from the hotels and the convention center is hard to beat."

In terms of the business elements of the convention, the convention center works well. "Because of the size of our event, we use the Galveston Island Convention Center at The San Luis Resort," Unberhagen says. "The convention center has enough breakout rooms to accommodate our program and a large-sized pre-function space that works perfectly for our registra-

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tion area. Our general assembly is held in the exhibit hall. The only downside is there is not an in-house solution for carpeting, which can be a large expense for smaller groups.”

Budget and technology are among the group’s primary concerns and Galveston is a good choice in that regard as well. “The inclusive package with catering was a great price point and exceptional quality,” Unberhagen notes. “And the convention center’s recent technology upgrades puts it in an elite category of venues that can accommodate groups like ours, which utilize technology and rely on a robust infrastructure.”

Planners, Unberhagen says, should know that their groups will be well fed and well attended to. “Staff at the convention center are friendly, helpful and personally invested in the success of your event. Customer service extends also into their in-house providers.”

Although attendance has increased since the group’s first meeting here, Galveston’s hotels and CVB have worked hard to accommodate the conference. “In our first year, we expected to have a small conference with 200 people. The destination was more popular than we anticipated and we quickly outgrew the hotel space,” Unberhagen says. “The San Luis Resort worked with us to expand to the convention center with a seamless transition.”

Unberhagen’s best advice to planners considering Galveston is to utilize the Galveston Island CVB staff. “They are a great resource for everything Galveston-related.”

Of interest to attendees who are drawn to the island’s sandy shores, the beaches were replenished and widened this summer in a \$20.9 million project.

**“We promote and encourage them to experience the tours, history and features that make Galveston unique.”**

Sammy Unberhagen  
Events and Exhibits Manager  
Texas Computer Education Association



## SAN ANTONIO

Nearly 200 miles west of Houston, the city of San Antonio offers deep history, rich and diverse culture and a vibrant urban riverfront among its long list of attributes. “San Antonio has a rich history and provided numerous opportunities for our group to enjoy that history through a variety of tours. The ease of access and airlift were other factors that made the location ideal,” says Dana Barton, director, national events, for Ducks Unlimited, a national organization dedicated to the conservation of wetlands and associated upland habitats for waterfowl, other wildlife

and people. It has some 700,000 members and has been around since 1937.

The group of 1,075 attendees was based at the San Antonio Marriott Rivercenter for its 2017 meeting, but it was the city’s selection of compelling venues that made San Antonio a great place for the group to convene. “San Antonio offered a variety of unique meeting and event options,” Barton says. “Our group loved Tejas Rodeo.”

Tejas Rodeo Company, just north of San Antonio, is a complex with a live rodeo, steakhouse, saloon and venues offering an authentic sense of Texas heritage as a backdrop for meetings and events. “We wanted a venue that would ‘wow’ our group. Tejas Rodeo provided that venue,” Barton says. “We held our themed banquet, which was a plated dinner, in the rodeo arena. The Tejas team packed the ground to a solid surface. While enjoying fabulous desserts outside the arena as we listened and danced to a great band, the Tejas team turned the solid arena floor back into an arena fit for a rodeo in under 45 minutes.”

The group did a full buyout of the venue for its event and it was a total success. “Our goal was to hold our event at Tejas Rodeo because of the ‘wow’ factor and uniqueness the venue provided. The food was equally outstanding,” Barton adds. “No one on the Tejas Rodeo team knew the word ‘no’ and were confident they could back up their commitment to provide the event we discussed and planned. They didn’t just meet the challenge, they exceeded it.”

Barton says that event is still being talked about today. “Not many venues can provide a unique venue like Tejas Rodeo. Where else could you have a plated dinner in a rodeo arena and in less than 45 minutes be entertained at a rodeo in the same location? The venue, rodeo and food all get five stars!”

It goes without saying that Barton highly recommends San Antonio and especially Tejas Rodeo Company to any planner looking for a compelling function venue. “This venue knows how to create an exceptional event,” she says. “Bring your appetite to your tasting and get ready to be entertained at the rodeo. As with any venue, let your contacts know what your goals are so they are able to exceed your expectations.”

San Antonio has had several newsworthy updates in the past year. Mokara Hotel & Spa wrapped up its renovation of the lobby and meeting spaces late last year. Set in what was formerly the L. Frank Saddlery Building, the hotel melds compelling history with contemporary design, including a focus on indigenous materials throughout. There’s also a new 222-sf meeting space, the Tejas Boardroom. Also of interest to planners and attendees, the city’s international airport received the top award for customer service from the Airports Council International-World in March.

## AUSTIN

An hour and a half northeast of San Antonio, Austin, the Lone Star state’s capital, is proud of its offbeat nature, but also a superb choice for business conferences. On the news front, six hotels have opened this year, adding more than 18,000 sf of meeting space.

Austin, the music capital of Texas, offers attendees a seemingly endless number of live music venues centered around country, blues and rock. Meeting hotels include the new Hilton Austin, which connects via an overhead walkway to the fourth floor of the Austin Convention Center (ACC). The walkway construction project includes a new, 1,891-sf outdoor terrace on the sixth floor.

Other convention hotels include the new Fairmont Austin and the JW Marriott Austin, both located near the ACC. Austin will get another convention hotel when the 613-room Austin

San Jacinto Plaza sits in the heart of downtown El Paso and hosts several annual festivals and events.



Marriott Downtown opens next year with 64,000 sf of meeting space.

In addition, Kalahari Resorts & Conventions Round Rock opens next year in Round Rock, Texas, just outside Austin. The 350-acre resort will feature a 40,000-sf ballroom and a 22,000-sf ballroom.

## EL PASO

About 577 miles west of Austin sits El Paso, home of the venerable Hotel Paso del Norte, built in 1912 and famous for its iconic stained glass ceiling. In the downtown business district near the Judson F. Williams Convention Center (JFWCC), the hotel offers 36,000 sf of function space, a rooftop pool and a fitness center. For dining, there are three eateries, including 1700° Restaurant, and to unwind, visit Dome Bar, which offers a selection of domestic and imported beers.

Marriott El Paso, just minutes from the El Paso Airport, offers 13,000 sf of meeting space, two restaurants, Red Rim Bistro and The Great Room, and a connected indoor and outdoor pool.

Even closer to the airport, the Wyndham El Paso Airport Hotel and Waterpark offers 17,000 sf of meeting space.

San Antonio’s famed River Walk has long been a popular activity for planners and attendees.

Its on-site, seasonal waterpark is a big draw, and its also near the Robert E. Lee gate at Fort Bliss.

The JFWCC, also known as the El Paso Convention Center, offers 80,000 sf of exhibit space and can seat up to 8,000 people. Other special event venues include: the Abraham Chavez Theater, Plaza Theater, McKelligon Canyon Amphitheater, Philanthropy Theatre, the McKelligon Canyon Pavilion and Alcantar Sky Garden. The Arts Festival Plaza hosts all manner of events, including live music and festivals.

## GRAPEVINE

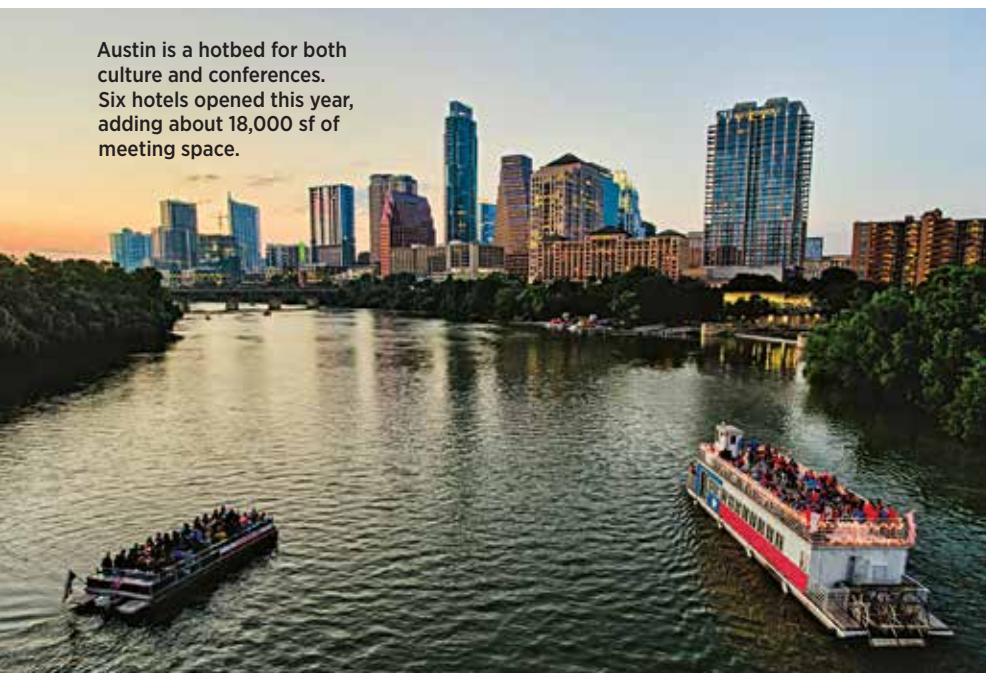
Just north of and about midway between both Dallas and Fort Worth, Grapevine is known for its historic 19th- and 20th-century buildings. Its convention hotels include Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center, which offers 490,000 sf of event space, 10 restaurants, a seasonal water park and two pools. Hyatt Regency DFW International Airport offers 92,000 sf of event space, two restaurants and more.

## PLANO

Just a few miles due north of Dallas, Plano also pays homage to its history. The Heritage Farmstead Museum is a restored 19th-century farm with original tools and furniture, plus a replica 1895 schoolroom. There, the Hilton Dallas/Plano Granite Park offers 30,000 sf of flexible indoor and outdoor meeting and event space.

Texas has an embarrassment of riches in terms of destinations that attract planners and attendees. And one thing is always true: Wherever in the state you meet, renowned Texas hospitality will be front and center. | **AC&F** |

Austin is a hotbed for both culture and conferences. Six hotels opened this year, adding about 18,000 sf of meeting space.





# Viva Nevada

*By David Swanson*



## Las Vegas and Reno Offer Exciting Meeting Options



**T**he numbers don't lie. With 950 flights arriving daily at McCarran International Airport, and more than 150,000 hotel rooms available — most of them dedicated to the meeting and convention market — it's not hard to understand the appeal of Las Vegas as one of the world's top conference and incentive destinations.

Research released by the Las Vegas Convention and Visitor's Authority (LVCVA) found that meeting attendance increased an average of 9% when shows rotated into Las Vegas, while attendance decreased 4% when shows rotated out of the city. Further, the LVCVA's research found that attendees actually spend more time on a show floor in Las Vegas — 11.3 hours versus an average of 8.6 hours in other cities. And with the city's McCarran International Airport evolving into one of the best-connected in the U.S., with scheduled service from Europe, Asia and South America, the sheer convenience of Las Vegas becomes inescapable when selecting a meeting location.

"Las Vegas is ideally situated for our domestic attendees, as well as those coming in from overseas," says Mitch Neuhauser, managing director of CinemaCon, the annual event of the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO), held in Las Vegas for the last nine years. "Also, as our show is dependent on the support of Hollywood film studios, close proximity to Los Angeles is a key factor." Since 2011, CinemaCon has been the largest annual gathering for the cinema industry — drawing 7,500 attendees from around the world earlier this year.

CinemaCon's base hotel is Caesars Palace Las Vegas Hotel & Casino, with overflow spilling into accommodations at Flamingo Las Vegas and Bally's Las Vegas Hotel & Casino. Caesars offers 300,000 sf of meeting space — sufficient to hold all of CinemaCon's events — plus, Caesars is home to the 4,100-seat Colosseum, which has proven ideal for star-studded special presentations at CinemaCon each year.

"CinemaCon incorporates a trade show, sponsored food events, seminars



Matt Damon and George Clooney addressing motion picture theater owners at CinemaCon. Attendees were thrilled with the choice to hold the National Association of Theatre Owners annual event at Caesars Palace.

and special presentations held in the Colosseum," Neuhauser says. "What makes Caesars Entertainment a great fit for our show is that everything we need is self-contained on its property. Attendees do not need to go outside. No outside transportation is needed. And, once attendees figure out the logistics of Caesars Palace — which as we all know is pretty large and expansive — well, then they can just jockey from one event and location to the next. This makes everything time efficient."

From the beginning of CinemaCon, Neuhauser said he knew that a state-of-the-art, working theater was essential for the success of the event.

**"As our show is dependent on the support of Hollywood film studios, close proximity to Los Angeles is a key factor."**

Mitch Neuhauser  
Managing Director, CinemaCon



"Aside from the trade show space, the lifeblood of our show is the special presentations and feature length screenings put on by Hollywood studios," Neuhauser adds. "We needed a place that would make not only top-level execs happy, but filmmakers and actors and actresses as well — when it came to showing their footage. The Colosseum is a perfect fit with its seating capacity, technical capabilities and staff, allowing us to showcase everything perfectly." Neuhauser says without Caesars committing the Colosseum to CinemaCon, the show wouldn't go

on. "So that's a unique requirement and accommodation."

Neuhauser continues: "We're a very visual type of show, with new movies needing to be showcased in so many ways. Caesars has always been open to us pushing the boundaries of what we can do within the hotel. Not only do we completely take over the conference center, but we have gotten approval to do things within public spaces that Caesars Entertainment never approved or did before. They are really good partners in this way."

CinemaCon attendees can look forward to an even better experience at the Colosseum, as technical and design upgrades were recently introduced. Upgrades include a new state-of-the-art sound system, new moving light fixtures and a high-definition LED video wall, and refurbished seating. The enhanced design preserves the integrity and celebrated character of the iconic theater, with no seat more than 145 feet from the stage.

Neuhauser says CinemaCon has a "very demanding and unforgiving clientele," and yet, the Caesars team delivers.

"The staff loves our show because we are fun," he adds. "We bring full-on show business and fun to the hotel, and every department loves it. We're a

great breath of fresh air for them and I think they go the extra mile for us. From the front of the house to housekeeping, to room service and catering — everything stands out."

Neuhauser says he does sometimes hear from attendees that the five towers at Caesars require too much walking or that locations are too far from one other. And F&B costs can be steep. "The hotel does work with us and it's always fun to get into the ring with the catering staff to duke it out, but in the end it all works out. The quality of the food is very good and the chef always works with us to create innovative, different and tasty menus for all of our events."

Neuhauser adds, "Aside from holding all of our events inside Caesars Palace, we do use OMNIA nightclub, which is fantastic," Neuhauser says. "The ambience is great, and I know you may not believe this, but their food is incredibly good. Many companies attending our show use all of the restaurants in house and as well in the Forum Shops for private events."

Finally, he says, "Oh, and let's not forget the Garden of the Gods Pool Oasis. This is huge, and it's a great place for parties and events for our company attendees. For our needs, Caesars Entertainment really has it all."

The company will have even more to offer with the debut of CAESARS FORUM, a \$375 million conference facility that will provide direct access to 8,500 hotel rooms at Harrah's Las Vegas Hotel & Casino, The LINQ Hotel + Experience and Flamingo Las Vegas. Adjacent to the High Roller observation wheel, the facility will offer more than 300,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including the two largest pillar-less ballrooms in the world, each 110,000 sf, and more than 100 breakout rooms. Caesars Entertainment reports that in the last 18 months more than 125 contracts for meetings and events have been signed, with 75 percent of those contracts representing new business.



MGM Resorts offers 4 million sf of meeting space in Las Vegas among its properties, which include Caesars Palace Las Vegas Hotel & Casino, top, ARIA Resort & Casino, middle, and the MGM Grand Conference Center.

With 4 million sf of meeting and convention space within a 2-mile stretch on the Las Vegas Strip, MGM Resorts remains the dominant player for the meetings market. Over the last two years, 850,000 sf of meeting space has been added at ARIA Resort & Casino, MGM Grand, Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino Las Vegas and Park MGM Las Vegas. With its increased flexibility, the new meeting space allows for more robust and creative meeting options to meet the ever-changing needs for collaborative and productive work spaces.

Last year, the MGM Grand expanded its conference center by 250,000 sf in a \$130 million expansion. Also last year, Park MGM debuted a new 77,000-sf conference space with a combination of innovative non-traditional spaces, an outdoor terrace and flexible design, filling an unmet need in Las Vegas for small groups, while also offering spaces to host up to 5,000 attendees in the Park Theater. The venue features Las Vegas' first executive Meeting Center, which includes The Conference Center, The Madison Meeting Center, and The Ideation Studio — high-touch, high-tech meeting venues designed to maximize productivity for small groups. While at Park MGM, don't miss the new Mama Rabbit bar, featuring the country's most extensive collection of tequila and mezcal, in collaboration with James Beard Award-winning mezcal pioneer, Bricia Lopez.

The former SLS Las Vegas is once again operating under the resort's original, iconic brand name, SAHARA Las Vegas. Since the property changed hands last year, the resort has been overhauled through a \$150 million renovation that includes an updated casino floor, the Infinity







premium gaming lounge, refurbished hotel rooms, suites and corridors, an upgraded spa, new hotel lobby, remodeled porte cochère and a full renovation of the resort's main pool.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the Strip, the venerable Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton is preparing for a soft renovation of its 100,000-sf convention center and all guest rooms, slated to begin in the first quarter of 2020. The resort, which offers points for meeting planners, has also added three new F&B options during the last two years.

The headliner is Robert Irvine's Public House, a partnership with the Food Network that gives the titular chef a chance to provide his spin on American pub cuisine. The 300-seat venue has a private room that holds up to 100 patrons, providing two options for groups to take over the space. Next door, the casual Red Lotus Asian Kitchen serves soups and noodle dishes with roots in the cuisine of China, Vietnam, Thailand and Korea. Earlier this year the Tropicana debuted Trago Lounge, a high-end redo of the former Tropicana Lounge, located off the Legends in Concert Theater, home to the longest running show in Las Vegas. Trago specializes in craft cocktails, a beautiful selection of bourbons and scotch whiskeys, and the venue is available for full or partial buyouts.

"The perfect size for us is 500 to 700 peak night rooms," says Gavin Mealiffe,

SAHARA Las Vegas is undergoing a \$150 million refresh encompassing every amenity.

vice president of sales for Tropicana. "It's a perfect fit, because it means almost a complete takeover of the 806-room Club Tower. That's a huge benefit for groups – it's away from the casino, the tower sits on top of meeting space, and they can take over that entire space."

Joseph F. Ferstl, DC, FACO, past

**"The hotel went out of their way to get us whatever we needed for the seminars."**

Joseph F. Ferstl, DC, FACO  
Past President, Illinois Chiropractic Society, Past President,  
American College of Chiropractic Orthopedics  
Fellow of the International College of Chiropractors



president of the Illinois Chiropractic Society, past president of the American College of Chiropractic Orthopedics and a Fellow of the International College of Chiropractors, said he originally chose the Tropicana for the organization's annual seminar because the hotel had been newly renovated.

"They're not too crowded, where you have to wait in long lines to check in or to eat," Ferstl says. "Also, the

room tower for the convention area is very close to the convention rooms so the walk to the seminar is short. The Tropicana has a great location with the airport being so close to the hotel, and the large airport handles a lot of non-stop flights so our attendees can fly there with ease."

#### RENO ALSO A GOOD CHOICE

Situated in the Truckee Valley, close to Lake Tahoe and the Sierra Nevada

for gambling," he explains. "The Tropicana countered that with very low room night charges which helped a lot. The hotel went out of their way to get us whatever we needed for the seminars, and we have returned for five seminars with two more under contract."

Ferstl says the biggest challenge he has had with booking rooms for the seminar was competitive pricing. "Some of our registered attendees could stay across the street if the rooms are cheaper, or at other hotels where they might be members

Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton's Trago Lounge specializes in craft cocktails, a selection of bourbons and scotch whiskeys, and is available for full or partial buyouts.

room tower for the convention area is very close to the convention rooms so the walk to the seminar is short. The Tropicana has a great location with the airport being so close to the hotel, and the large airport handles a lot of non-stop flights so our attendees can fly there with ease."

Ferstl adds: "We used the convention space at the Tropicana. It's very large, but they also have multiple dividers so we had the space we needed, and they also supplied a board room for our board to meet. The function spaces can be divided to fit any needs and they do have large and small rooms. Planners need to know the Tropicana will work with them on the space, dates and food – we have had no complaints."

Ferstl says the biggest challenge he has had with booking rooms for the seminar was competitive pricing. "Some of our registered attendees could stay across the street if the rooms are cheaper, or at other hotels where they might be members



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mountains, Reno is Nevada's second-largest city. And while Reno may not have quite the flash of the Las Vegas Strip, the destination still provides unexpected activities such as tackling the world's tallest outdoor rock-climbing wall at Whitney Peak Hotel or a beer tasting at Great Basin Brewing Co., the oldest brewery in Nevada.

Derek Piasecki, president of the American Association of Police Polygraphists (AAPP), says his group has a methodical process for choosing locations for its Annual Seminar Week, three years in advance.

"Every year we rotate between five different U.S. regions, and this year was the year for the Pacific Northwest," Piasecki says. "We have a company called NHS which does all our bids. They put out feelers for the areas — they look at the weather, and how easy it is to access from around the country, etc. We then narrow it to three different options for our members to vote on, and for this year, Reno was chosen over Portland and Seattle."

"One thing that stood out," Piasecki recalls, "weather-wise, Reno is beautiful in May." While almost as arid as Las Vegas, the higher elevation of Reno means milder temperatures year-round — it's a true, four-season destination, with average daily highs in summer edging just above 90 degrees and plenty of sunshine in winter.

For their event, the polygraphists chose the Atlantis Casino Resort Spa, the only Reno property directly connected to the Reno-Sparks Convention Center via skybridge. The newly refurbished convention center has five exhibit halls, 381,000 sf of contiguous exhibit space and 53 meeting rooms.

AAPP says the 450-attendee meeting had few unusual requirements, except for bringing in some of the trade show materials. "They needed to receive several palates of displays for vendors coming in," Piasecki says. "A lot of the stuff comes in Friday and they start setting up on Saturday. But the vendors couldn't have access until Saturday, so the staff had to sign for everything coming in."

While the bulk of the meeting took place at the convention center, there were also events at Atlantis. The resort's 50,000 sf meeting space is on the second floor and includes two ballrooms measuring up to 14,261 sf, with accompanying breakout rooms, an executive boardroom and a business center.



Nevada offers activities such as gaming in Las Vegas and in Reno, home to convention hotels such as Atlantis Casino Resort Spa, left, and skiing in winter at Diamond Peak Ski Resort at Lake Tahoe.



"There was a Sunday welcome reception with food and a cash bar," Piasecki says. "The food was excellent and they made more than we contracted for so we didn't run out. On Wednesday, we have an awards luncheon, and the food was excellent, again with no issues. As far as A/V, we have our own projectors and microphones, and we ship it in ahead. The hotel set up the projectors, sound board, power supplies and we just pay a patch fee. Atlantis was really good to work with."

"A lot of our members don't necessarily enjoy meeting in a casino," Piasecki adds. "But what I like is having a selection of different restaurants and things to do. The meeting space was all in one area, and centrally located — a great thing. A lot of our attendees were able to get out and see the downtown area, or go to Lake Tahoe."

One of Reno's key assets?

"No. 1 advantage of Reno is the airport. It's one of easiest airports I've ever been through in terms of arrivals and departures. And, at the airport's Wheel of Fortune slot machine I won \$600. I didn't want to leave at that point," he laughs.

Reno is also home to Grand Sierra Resort and Casino, which offers more than 200,000 sf of meeting space and can accommodate events with as few as 10 people to as many as 4,000. And their recreation staff is primed and ready to help plan on-site, team-building activities.

Also in Reno, Peppermill Resort Spa Casino has an 82,000-sf casino, 106,000 sf of meeting and entertainment space, two resort pools, 10 award-winning restaurants and a world-class spa and fitness center. | **AC&F** |

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BARNETT

VisitLEX has named **Stephen Barnett** the new destination sales manager. Barnett will work with leaders in Lexington, Kentucky and throughout the country via corporate, medical, religious and fraternal organizations to attract meetings and events to the city.

Westin Tampa Bay has appointed **Colleen Beck** as director of sales and marketing for Westin Tampa Bay. Beck brings more than 25 years of hospitality experience to the team. She will be responsible for driving the sales and marketing strategies for the hotel.

Club Med, the pioneer and global leader of the all-inclusive resort concept, has promoted **Sabrina Cendral** to senior vice president of marketing and sales. In her new role, Cendral will unite and oversee U.S. sales and marketing, while also driving marketing strategies for North America as a whole, including Canada and Mexico.

Atlantis, Paradise Island, the lush oceanside resort in The Bahamas, has appointed **Bryan Gay** as senior vice president of sales. Gay will oversee group and leisure sales, wedding and event planning and conference planning for the resort. He brings more than 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry to his new role.

The Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA) has named **Pattie Herman** vice president of marketing and product development. Herman will be responsible for supporting HTA programs to sustainably manage Hawaii tourism, branding strategy and planning, and the development of new products and experiences.

Visit Mesa, the regional destination marketing organization for Mesa, Arizona, has appointed **David Kolozar** as national sales director. Kolozar brings more than a decade of experience leading in national sales, representing both independent and branded hotels to conference services and operations.

Wisconsin's Hilton Milwaukee City Center has appointed **Christine Lunz** as director of events. Lunz brings more than 16 years of experience to the award-winning meetings and events team at Marcus Hotels & Resorts, which owns and manages the Hilton Milwaukee City Center.

Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau has welcomed **Brad Minton** as sales manager, national accounts. Minton is responsible for leveraging client relationships and promoting Atlanta as a premier destination to corporate groups, associations, trade shows and conventions requiring more than 1,200 rooms on peak.

The Saint Lucia Tourism Authority (SLTA) has promoted **Richard Moss** to senior sales manager. Formerly trade sales manager, Moss will now oversee the SLTA sales efforts in the island's lead market, the United States, with a targeted approach, exploring every opportunity available to increase the destination's profile.

The Oahu Visitors Bureau has appointed **Mathew "Manako" Kenichi Tanaka** as sales manager. In his new role, Tanaka will oversee sales activities in both leisure and meetings, conventions and incentives markets, and implement travel trade sales tactics and collaborate with industry partners on sales-related initiatives.

| AC&amp;F |



BECK



GAY



KOLOZAR



MINTON



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CENDRAL



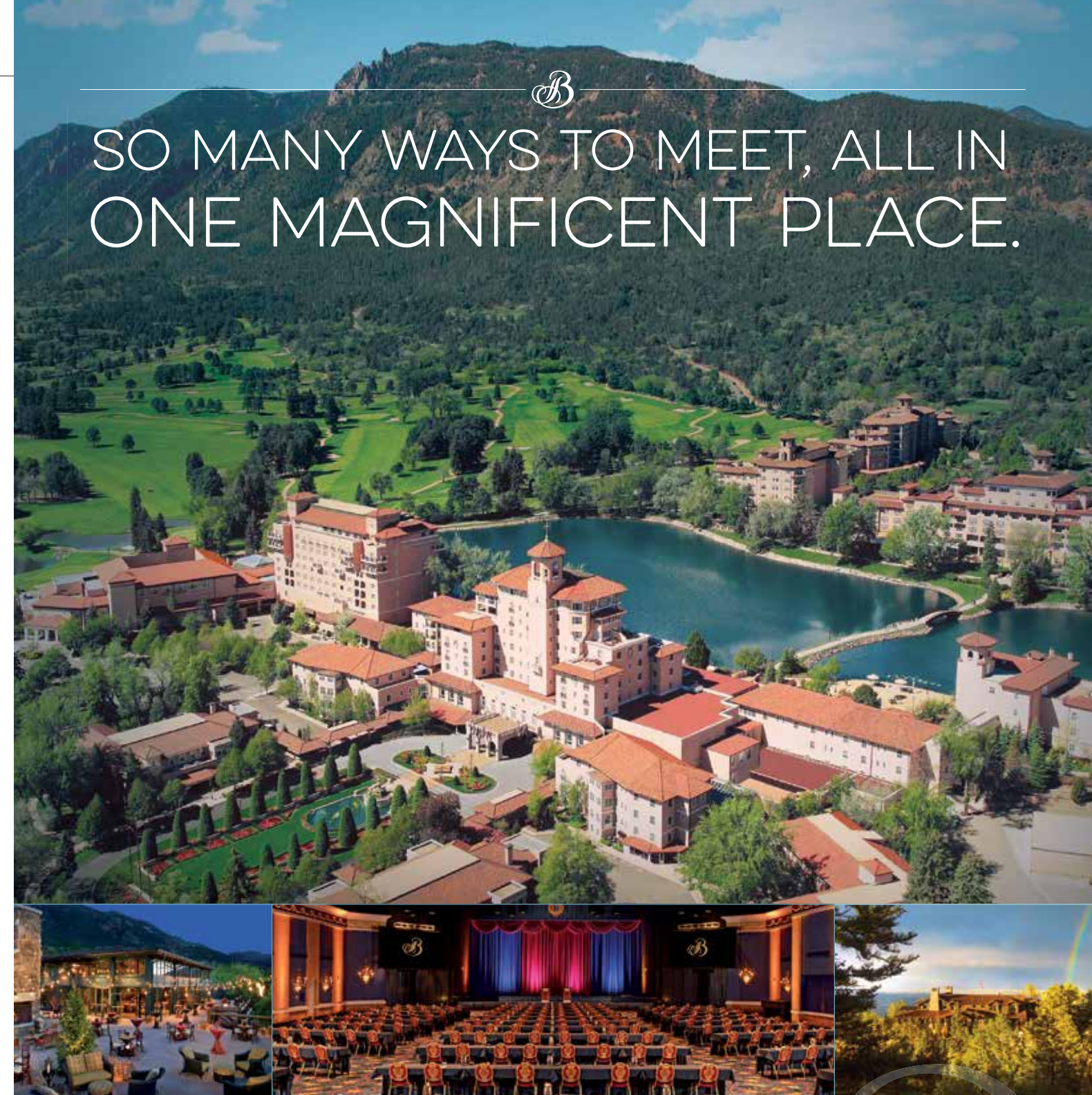
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