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## Finding the Right Fit for Meetings & Incentives in **FLORIDA**

Top Destinations for Insurance  
and Financial Groups  
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Mickey and Minnie welcome the D+H event team  
to Disney's Yacht Club and Beach Club resorts.

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2014 Vol. 21 No. 6

Credit: Enchantment Resort



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Credit: Le Méridien Tampa



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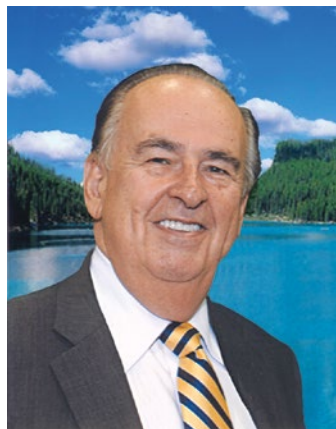
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# Publisher's Message

## Happy Days Are Here Again

These days a little fun and magic are welcome additions to most meetings and events. Post-recession, cloudy, gray days have been transformed into optimistic, sunny ones. Happy days are here again. And destinations throughout Florida and partners such as Walt Disney World are perfectly positioned to help you plan the ultimate meeting or event.



In our cover story in this issue, "Finding the Right Fit for Meetings & Incentives in Florida: How the Sunshine State Adds Up for Financial & Insurance Groups," we discover how committed these people and places are to boosting the meetings business. Notwithstanding the shift to a hot seller's market, hotels and resorts are expanding their facilities, improving their services and amenities, and making sure your attendees will have a memorable and magical event experience.

George Aguel, president and CEO of Visit Orlando, welcomes insurance and financial groups: "We regularly host a portfolio of groups from these industries. As one of the top destinations in the world, we create truly unique, one-of-a-kind experiences for groups, thanks to the imaginative settings at our theme parks and the many dining and entertainment centers close to our convention hotels and center."

Scott Hansen agrees wholeheartedly. As executive vice president of business development at D+H, he has planned numerous meetings and events for financial groups in Orlando and at Walt Disney World. "I think the imaginative fantasy element, I call it pixie dust, appeals to virtually any type of conference attendee, young and old, from all over the world," he says.

"Financial institutions deal with numbers and facts, and by virtue of their tightly regulated industry, they're accustomed to a high degree of discipline and order," he says. "So, in addition to the pixie dust, the thing that makes Disney an ideal venue for financial-industry executives is that everything works precisely the way it is supposed to. Everything is thought out. Everything happens on time. Disney's attention to detail is unrivaled. And the value received for the price is spot on. Those are all things that appeal to financial-industry attendees, and with a little pixie dust thrown in for good measure...it makes for the perfect venue."

Harvey Grotsky

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## SITE Recognizes Nine Outstanding Incentive Programs With Crystal Awards

CHICAGO, IL — Since 1980, the annual SITE Crystal Awards Recognition Program has provided industry acclaim for world-class organizations that excel in the design of unique, memorable group travel experiences that deliver measurable benefits for their clients.

“The Crystal Award is the most prestigious form of recognition in the global incentive travel industry,” said Paul Miller, SITE president 2014. “The award not only recognizes the outstanding organizations that win them, but also showcases the innovative ways planners can create extraordinary motivational experiences to maximize human potential and achieve tangible business results for their companies

During the SITE Global Conference 2014, companies were recognized for creativity in program design, marketing, corporate social responsibility and business results. Entries were evaluated by an independent panel of judges. The winners included tourism organizations, incentive agencies, destination management companies and their clients. This year’s winners are:

- Aimia, Minneapolis, Minnesota, *Most Effective Incentive Marketing Campaign*
- Mfactor Meetings, San Carlos, California, *Most Outstanding Single Motivational Event*
- Dragonfly Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa, *Most Impactful Effort Toward Corporate Social Responsibility*
- Dubai Business Events – the Official Convention Bureau, Dubai, UAE — *Best Destination-based Experiential Incentive Travel Program*
- Fourth Wall Events, New York, New York, *Exceptional Motivational Travel Program, North America*
- AV Business & Communications, Buenos Aires, Argentina, *Exceptional Motivational Travel Program, South America*
- PR Incentives DMC–Catania/Rome, Italy, *Exceptional Motivational Travel Program, Europe*
- Crystal Events & Incentives, Cape Town, South Africa, *Exceptional Motivational Travel Program, Africa/Middle East*
- China Star Ltd., Beijing, China, *Exceptional Motivational Travel Program, Asia/Pacific*

[www.siteglobal.com/crystals2014](http://www.siteglobal.com/crystals2014)



Dubai Business Events – the Official Convention Bureau captured the Distinctive Destination Crystal Award — Best Destination-based Experiential Incentive Travel Program for their “NuSkin 2014 Success Trip,” which was the single largest incentive group ever welcomed by Dubai in its history as 14,500 NuSkin employees participated.

## Incentive Travel Outlook Is Bright for 2015 and Beyond

CHICAGO, IL — Results from the SITE Index Annual Analysis and Forecast for the Motivational Events Industry confirms that 2014 has been a very good year for the incentive travel market, and the outlook for 2015 is positive. The report was released by the SITE Foundation during the SITE Global Conference 2014 in Rotterdam, Netherlands. For the second consecutive year, there is continued optimism about

the industry’s future, and the overall use of motivational travel experiences continues to increase. An ever-improving economy appears to be the major reason for this confidence as well as bookings for future business.

“Through research we are able to provide deeper insights into why incentives are a vital business tool to drive desired behavior and positive performance resulting in

definitive business results,” stated Tina Weede, vice president, research and education, SITE Foundation and president, US Motivation, Atlanta, Georgia. “The 2014 SITE Index demonstrates not only the business case and need but also provides valuable information into industry trends and forecasts predicting optimism for future growth and change in the incentive travel industry.” [www.siteglobal.com](http://www.siteglobal.com)

## IHG to Develop InterContinental Hotel in Downtown Los Angeles

ATLANTA, GA — InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) announced the signing of a new 900-room InterContinental Hotels & Resorts property in downtown Los Angeles, California. The luxury hotel will make its mark on the city’s skyline as part of Korean Air and Hanjin Group’s more than \$1.1 billion new-build Wilshire Grand project.

The 73-story development, set to be the tallest building in the Western United States, will boast unobstructed 360-degree views of Los Angeles. Currently under construction, the development will house the InterContinental hotel, offices and retail space. The hotel will be the first on

the West Coast to have a sky-lobby, which is located on the 70th floor.

Kirk Kinsell, president, the Americas at IHG, said: “InterContinental Hotels & Resorts is IHG’s luxury brand, which we have grown to be more than twice the size of any other luxury brand globally. We remain focused on building its presence in top-tier cities and resorts around the globe; and our partnership with Korean Air is very much in line with this strategy. We are pleased to be working with such highly experienced owners.”

Heather Cho, vice president of Hanjin International Corp., said, “We are delighted to have Inter-



A rendering of the sky deck at the InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown currently under construction.

Continental Hotels & Resorts join our Korean Air family of hotels. The InterContinental brand is well-respected by world travelers and embodies the luxury experience we intend to provide at the Wilshire Grand. They recognized the potential of this significant project and that was important in our decision.”

[www.ihg.com/intercontinental](http://www.ihg.com/intercontinental)

## Hyatt Regency Houston Galleria to Open in 2015

HOUSTON, TX — Hyatt Hotels Corporation announced that a Hyatt affiliate has entered into a franchise agreement with Songy HighRoads, a commercial real estate development firm based in Atlanta, Georgia, to develop Hyatt Regency Houston Galleria. The hotel will be managed by Aimbridge Hospitality and is scheduled to open in fall 2015.

Hyatt Regency Houston Galleria is being built near the Houston Galleria shopping mall and is part of the 7.6-acre, mixed use development, Galleria Plaza, which includes a Whole Foods Market, multiple high-end retail and specialty stores, luxury apartments and multiple office towers. The 325-room, 14-story hotel will feature more than 12,000 sf of meeting and conference space as well as a large fitness center overlooking the pool deck. [www.hyatt.com](http://www.hyatt.com)

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## Financial & Insurance Conference Planners 2015 Leadership Announced

CHICAGO, IL — Members of Financial & Insurance Conference Planners (FICP)

announced the leadership of the association at the 2014 FICP Annual Conference, held in November at the Hilton Waikoloa Village in Waikoloa, Hawaii.

By acclamation, Shelia Cleary, 2nd vice president, recognition and conferences, National Life Group, Montpelier, Vermont, became the 2015 Chair.

Joe Scully, senior director, John Hancock Financial Services – a division of Manulife Financial, Boston, Massachusetts, will serve a three-year term, effective January 1, 2015.

The board of directors elected Caryn Taylor Lucia, CMP, director, corporate events, SEI, Oaks, Pennsylvania, as the FICP Chair-elect. Taylor Lucia will automatically become FICP Chair in 2016.

Continuing on the board are:

- Immediate Past Chair and Annual Conference Chair: Jana

Stern, director, meetings & events, Voya Financial, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

- Education Forum Chair: Marla Hannigan, CMP, meeting and event manager, Mutual of Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska.
- Symposia Co-chair: Karin Pontelandolfo, CMP, senior meeting planner, Liberty Mutual, Boston, Massachusetts.
- Symposia Co-chair: Jeff Leggett, Kingston, Ontario.
- Membership Chair: Marcia Merando, LLIF, FLMI, LUTCF, director of marketing, Frankenmuth Insurance, Frankenmuth, Michigan
- Education Chair: Kathy Roche, Manager, Meeting & Conference Planning, Western & Southern Financial Group, Cincinnati, Ohio
- Executive Director: Steve Bova, CAE, Financial & Insurance Conference Planners, Chicago, Illinois.

Kelli Livers, CMP, CTE, assistant vice president, Global Atlantic Financial Group Limited, Houston, Texas, departs the board at the end of 2014.

The 2015 Hospitality Partner Advisory Council members include Kevin Regan, MBA, corporate and incentive sales director, Silversea Cruises Ltd., Fort Lauderdale, Florida, who was named Chair of the Hospitality Partner Advisory Council (HPAC) for 2015.

Also serving on the HPAC for 2015 are: Cosimo Bruzzese, vice president of business development, Briggs Inc., a DMC Network Company, New York, New York; Linda Burley, CMP, national sales manager, Red Rock Resort, Las Vegas, Nevada; Chris Gilbert, national sales manager, Charleston Place, Charleston, South Carolina; Pdraic Gilligan, MA, HDE, DMCP, chairman, Ovation Global DMC, Dublin, Ireland; Julie Holmen, director of sales, corporate and incentive, Tourism Toronto, Toronto, Ontario; and Isabel Mahon, director of sales, incentive/insurance, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts North America, Chicago, Illinois.

Clarence Day, CMP, The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua, Kapalua, Hawaii, departs the HPAC after serving as its chair in 2014. [www.ficpnet.com](http://www.ficpnet.com)

## Loews New Orleans Hotel Completes \$4 Million Renovation

NEW ORLEANS, LA — “New Orleans has experienced an incredible surge in visitors these past few years, which means everyone in the city wants to put their best face forward,” said Loris Menfi, general manager at the Loews New Orleans Hotel. “At just 10 years old, the hotel is in beautiful shape, but we wanted to give our guest rooms, corridors and restaurant, Café Adelaide, a complete revamp to keep each space looking fresh and

vibrant.” She added, “We are confident our guests will be as thrilled with the new look as we are.”

The new look layers historic New Orleans culture with modern lines in blue and gray tones reminiscent of the region’s waterways. New carpeting patterns emulate the historic wrought iron seen throughout the city, while sofas, chairs and fabrics inspired by men’s suiting provide a tailored appearance. New contemporary

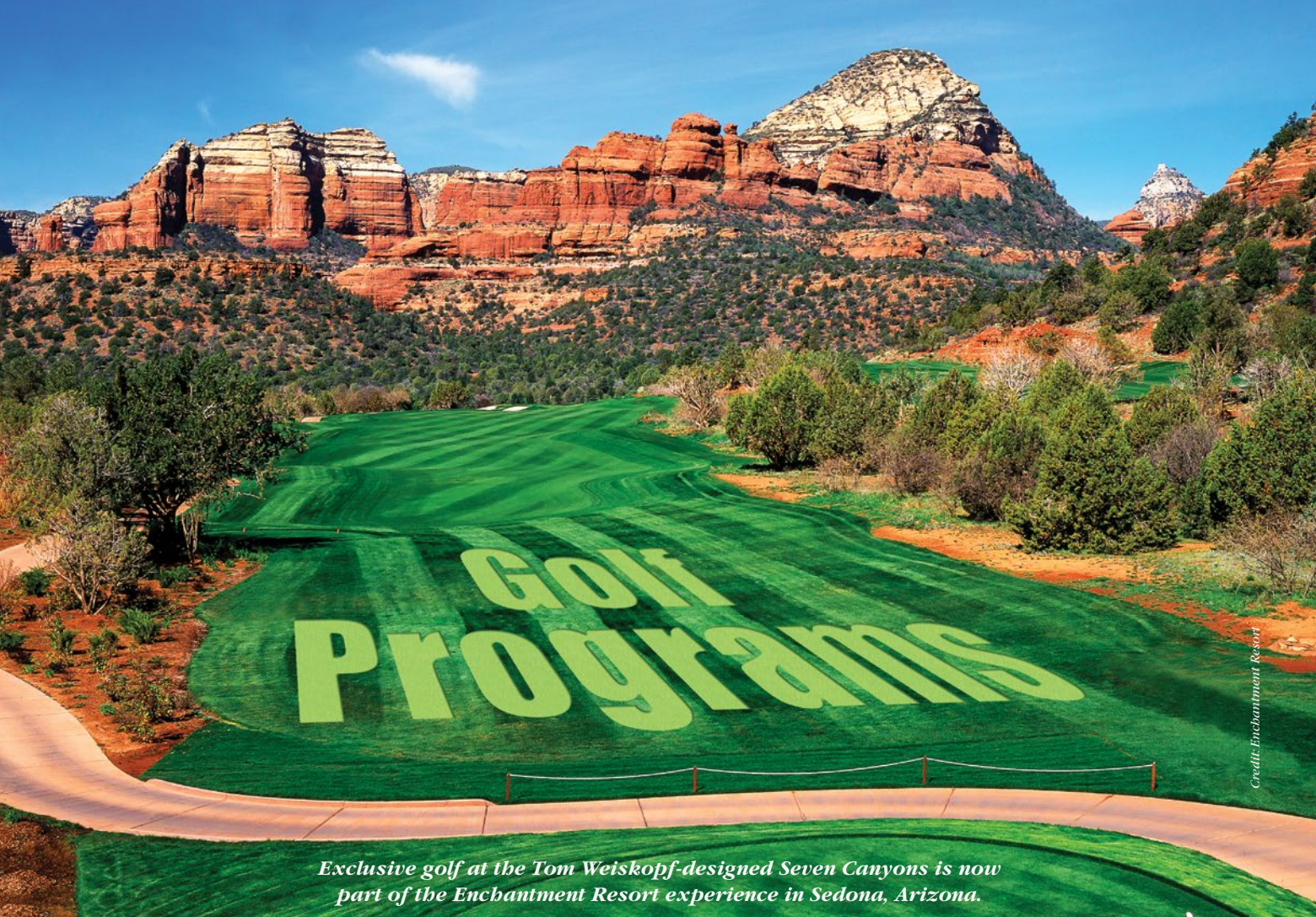
lamps and sconces throughout the guest rooms and bathrooms offer brighter lighting for late-night work sessions, and new art depicts popular New Orleans scenes including riverboats, musical instruments and architecture.

Situated adjacent to New Orleans’ Arts District, the 285-room Loews New Orleans Hotel features sweeping views of the Mississippi River or New Orleans skyline. [www.loewshotels.com/new-orleans](http://www.loewshotels.com/new-orleans)



**1–6** The successful 2014 FICP Annual Conference attracted nearly 600 attendees to Hilton Waikoloa Village in Waikoloa Hawaii, November 16–19. Attendees enhanced their knowledge through more than 30 education sessions, while networking with colleagues and partners created a memorable conference experience. Attendees also heard from an impressive array of keynote speakers and enjoyed several Hawaii-themed networking events, which allowed them to connect with peers while experiencing Hawaiian culture and traditions. Meeting planners and hospitality partners donated \$48,243 to Junior Achievement International and Junior Achievement of Hawaii. The funds were raised through the FICP Annual Conference Silent Auction. Students from the local chapter learned more about the industry in a panel discussion led by FICP planner members and hospitality partners, and also participated in a site inspection of the host hotel, Hilton Waikoloa Village. The 2015 FICP Annual Conference is set for Atlantis, Paradise Island, Bahamas, November 15–18.





Exclusive golf at the Tom Weiskopf-designed Seven Canyons is now part of the Enchantment Resort experience in Sedona, Arizona.

Credit: Enchantment Resort

# Good Old-Fashioned, Get-to-Know-You Time Is a Powerful Draw

By Gabi Logan

Despite their outward appearance as a luxury event or high-end amenity, golf programs and tournaments have not only weathered the financial crisis, but also grown and expanded their scope in recent years because they play a critical relationship-building role for insurance and financial firms.

“Golf is probably one of the best ways to network,” says Lawrence A. Weitzen, senior vice president for Newport Beach, California-based Alliant Insurance Services Inc. “You spend an afternoon with some very important people whether they’re your clients or company reps. Insurance is a people business, and there’s no better

way to find out about someone than on the golf course,” he explains. He would know. Weitzen is in his 10th year of organizing a now 144-golfer tournament in San Diego that draws agents both from his firm and other local insurance agencies and brokerages, as well as carriers and clients.

While the financial crisis affected many aspects of financial and insurance company meetings, planners are finding that with this crowd, golf springs eternal for the unique networking environment it provides.

## Meetings Change, Golf Remains

Optics aside, changes in the way

the financial and insurance industries conduct their business have had a marked effect on meetings. Employees are increasingly anxious about spending time outside of the office, either because they’re worried about job stability and internal optics or simply need the time to get deals done, so meetings are becoming highly focused and compact, and often moving closer to attendees so they have less time out of the office.

Roger Caldwell, owner, founder and golf entertainer of Kansas City-based Great Golf Events Inc., found that golf events mirror some larger trends, particularly in terms of size. He says he’s observing “trending to smaller, 40- to

52-player events where having the right guests — decision-makers — is the focus, along with pairing a specific employee, existing client and potential new client in the same group.” Many of his clients also use resort hotels with meeting space to incorporate a meeting into their event before or after the golf tournament to further maximize the time and expenditure of gathering together such a group of people.

The economy — dipping or rebounding — has not affected his clients’ golf events, because many have added a charity element to mix CSR (corporate social responsibility) with pleasure. “We added six new events in the insurance sector in 2014, and all of them had a charity spin to them,” he explains. “The economy has not been a factor, given the charity spin most of them incorporate. They simply offset the fees by charging their guests a nominal fee.

“The companies that hired us to organize and manage these events are taking advantage of the five hours of face time during play,” he continues. “You get to know someone pretty well after five hours of face time. The charity spin allows these groups to offset their costs and also give back to charity at the same time.”

## Talk About a Win-Win

Weitzen’s San Diego tournament has thrived with its charity undercurrent, and though he says that some attendees do come just because of that affiliation, it is, as Caldwell believes, the face time that keeps the tournament relevant.

“One reason we sell out so soon is that both the agents and insurance company reps recognize that golf is probably one of the best ways to network, and the feedback is just all positive,” he says. “Carriers love being able to be with a broker for a day. It improves their relationship, which will then improve that business flow. It’s a time for our agents to be with our carriers, and this includes both property and casualty.”

Not all golf meetings need to wrap

themselves with a CSR bow to be an easy sell to higher-ups, however. Maximizing the value of bringing together important internal and external stakeholders for some good old-fashioned, get-to-know-you time is a powerful draw, and bucket-list golf courses cinch the deal.

## The Game That Keeps on Giving

By focusing even more keenly on the relationship-building aspect of golf, many planners have been able to grow their golf-related events even in the light of cuts to other types of meetings.

“I think in the financial industry, a lot of clients are golfers, and it’s part of the way of the industry,” says a meeting planner with a major bank who prefers to remain anonymous. “The thing with golf, why it works so well, is that you have to force them to team up, and you pair up two internal bankers and two clients, and they’re stuck together for five hours, so you get so much face time. It’s harder to have a business conversation playing tennis. We like that time, we like to have our clients’ attention for four or five hours, so for us it’s a great option.

“Similarly, we used to actually host client ski events. You can’t take everyone because obviously not everyone skis, and when you’re going down

*“Golf is probably one of the best ways to network.*

*Insurance is a people business, and there’s no better way to find out about someone than on the golf course.”*



Lawrence A. Weitzen  
Senior Vice President  
Alliant Insurance Services Inc.  
Newport Beach, CA

the hill you don’t talk, but those lifts are not short, and like on the golf course, it gives you concentrated time to connect with clients. They were so beneficial, but it does knock out some attendees.”

At a recent meeting in South Carolina near Charleston at Kiawah Island Golf Resort, the planner brought a group of 170 together for a client event. “We brought them together for a couple of days to do meetings and presentations with a business component in the morning, and in the afternoon, they had the opportunity to choose between different activities: group kayaking, golf and tennis. Most people chose golf.”



The famed 18th hole on the Ocean Course at South Carolina’s Kiawah Island Golf Resort near Charleston.

Credit: Kiawah Island Golf Resort



And it's no surprise given the reputation of golf at Kiawah. Though the resort includes five courses, the best known is the Ocean Course, which was added in 1991 and has hosted the Ryder Cup, two World Cups, the PGA Championship, and the PGA Club Professional Championship.

Designed by Pete and Alice Dye, the Ocean Course offers views of the Atlantic Ocean throughout — a pleasant compensation for the strong winds that make the 7,873-yard course one of the toughest in America. In addition to the namesake ocean views, the course includes Kiawah's protected wildlife

at the Sanctuary, the Ocean Course is on a lot of golfers' bucket lists," says the planner. "It's hard, and people still want to have the option to play it. They think it's beautiful, and they all thought they got their butts kicked, but they loved it, and we were lucky with weather. I have probably done four or five events there, and it's a well-oiled machine."

Jami P. Forbes, director of events and sales promotions for Scottsdale, Arizona-based retirement advisor group Annexus, has even found using a resort with a premier golf course has the unexpected perk of encouraging

to catch up on other aspects of each other's lives," she explains. "And having some friendly competition thrown in doesn't hurt either. It gives the Annexus co-owners Ron Shurts and Don Dady a chance to spend some extra down time with our partners."

Forbes discovered Talking Stick in Scottsdale, Arizona, through an event the company sponsored and has held most of her meetings there ever since, in part because of the golf course next door. The resort spreads over 55.6 acres with its 98,000-sf casino, 13,000-sf spa and 496 guest rooms, including 30 suites in several configurations. But the meeting space is one of the biggest draws for planners. Talking Stick has more than 36 meeting rooms and 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor space between the resort and its dedicated conference center, including a 25,000-sf ballroom.

The adjacent Talking Stick Golf Club features two courses designed by Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw, which incorporate the rich scenery of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian lands to create a relaxing environment that feels worlds away from the resort's casino next door. Groups can book rounds at Scottsdale's top-rated golf club as part of a package with or without a spa treatment.

"These are guys who have had the chance to golf all over the world, who attend many financial summits, and some of them have even played in the Annexus ProAm with us, yet they still loved playing at Talking Stick, not only because of the course itself but also because of the staff there," says Forbes. "The service they received was impeccable."

### You Can Teach an Old Dog New Tricks

As golf tournaments follow a highly standardized format, it can be a challenge for planners to continue to top themselves every year. A change of venue is a quick way to shake things up, especially to a destination or bucket list course, and Caldwell says most of his clients change venues every two

to three years. There also are schedule updates planners can incorporate into events, if you don't already, that offer attendees different opportunities to interact with their peers outside of the basic foursome.

At his tournament, Weitzen has two individual contests in the morning between check-in and lunch, a long drive contest and a putting contest. By keeping two hours in the morning open to either compete or mingle, then serving lunch followed by tee-off and a dinner event, he also offers a variety of different times for people to interact and opportunities to change who you're interacting with — not always an easy option when you're in the same foursome for five hours on the course — to get quality face time with more attendees.

"For us, it's just become part of the event, but it's a little more individual," he explains. "You may have only one person in a group that wants to be in the long drive, but most people want to be in the putting contest. For the long drive, you get a group of people out on the driving range, but there might be three people rather than 144, so there's a lot of heckling going on, and it adds to the fun and creates more winners. It brings people together in a different way, like we've brought in trick shot artists."

Once you've hit the limit on how many contests and networking hours you can comfortably introduce, there are some new ways to spice things up thanks to, surprisingly, reality television. Caldwell has long recommended that his clients include a trick shot artist, particularly as an entertainment piece at the beginning or end of the day, but the meeting planner from the bank has found another interesting take.

"We always do the contest with the winning foursome, longest drive and closest to the hole, but now we're trying to be more strategic as planners," she says. "We're trying to incorporate cool things like having golfers out on a certain hole so people can get tips from a pro.

"I haven't done this yet, but I've vet-

***"Meeting planners should embrace it. Golf is a great chance for people in a very competitive industry to have some fun and catch up."***

**Jami P. Forbes**

Director, Events and Sales Promotions  
Annexus  
Scottsdale, AZ

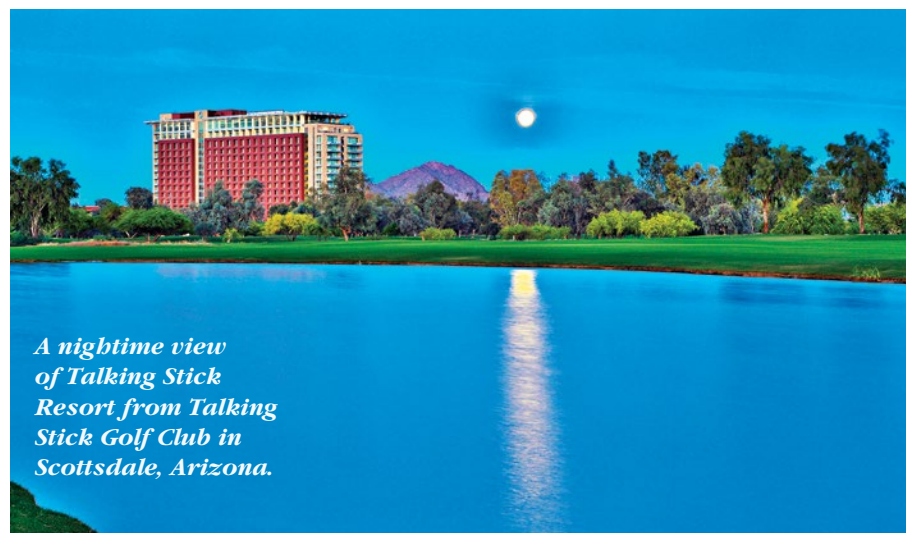
ted it. There's this (Golf Channel) show 'Big Break' with young golfers who are trying to make the PGA. As far as honorarium, they're pretty inexpensive, because they're not pro yet, and I've found a partner in the industry who works with golf talent, and he had the idea to get a few of the women golfers and have them on every other hole."

Another premier golf resort in Arizona boasting a bucket-list golf course and innovative teambuilding

programs is the Enchantment Resort in Sedona, which recently raised the bar for meetings, groups and events, by providing guests with exclusive access to Seven Canyons golf club — ranked among America's top golf retreats. Designed by golf champion Tom Weiskopf, Seven Canyons offers a beautiful setting spread across 200 acres that border the national forest and red rock canyons. The course, which is touted as a throwback to some of the great courses of the early 1900s, features classic-style bunkering, natural water features and frequent changes in elevation.

New for next spring is an amenity-rich clubhouse, which will include a restaurant, bar and grill with spacious outdoor seating and spectacular views of the red rock canyon; a full-service golf shop; and a fully equipped fitness center and locker facilities with showers and steam rooms.

In addition, the par-70, 6,746-yard championship course offers groups the



*A nighttime view of Talking Stick Resort from Talking Stick Golf Club in Scottsdale, Arizona.*

Credit: Talking Stick Resort

and has been certified as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary. Though the Ocean Course is the big draw, groups also love the 7,061-yard Turtle Point Golf Course designed by Jack Nicklaus, and the 6,932-yard Osprey Point Golf Club designed by Tom Fazio reopened on October 1 after renovations.

The resort includes six different buildings with event spaces, including the 255-room Sanctuary Hotel, a conference center, three clubhouses and an outdoor venue at Mingo Point. The meeting spaces feature fiber-optic videoconferencing technology and wireless and land-based, high-speed Internet access.

Like other companies that rely on golf events for their most important relationship-building, the planner has found that using a bucket-list course is a huge draw for attendees. "Specifically

valuable partners to extend their networking time past the original meeting dates. "I don't know that we have had an event at Talking Stick Resort that didn't result in having some of our partners or agents stay an extra day or two to go hit a couple of rounds," she says about her biannual event that gathers an exclusive group of around 10 attendees from Annexus' partners, the owners or heads of independent marketing organizations that have exclusive distribution rights.

"We bring our partners out twice a year for two half days of discussion about the state of our company, upcoming product launches, and general information and discussions on anything that is currently relevant, and we spend so much time talking numbers, the market, statistics and dollar signs that it's nice to have some down time

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*The award-winning course at Sandals Emerald Reef Golf Club in the Caribbean.*

Credit: Sandals Resort

opportunity for innovative teambuilding events designed by the resort's golf pro to strengthen group dynamics; customized golf tournaments or putting competitions complete with company-branded materials; professional instruction to improve skills; and a fun and productive way to spend face time with business associates.

Seven Canyons' Range House is located on a knoll overlooking the two-level Practice Park and offers an ideal setting for banquets. Outdoor space allows for a multitude of catering options including a cocktail terrace backed by an incredible view of Seven Canyons. Additionally, The Meeting Village at Enchantment Resort offers more than 13,000 sf of dedicated, flexible indoor meeting space, including a 24-person executive boardroom with a fireplace, ballrooms and breakout rooms.

Pre- and post-golf, attendees head to Mii amo, the award-winning destination spa at Enchantment Resort, to partake in Seven Treatments for Seven Canyons Golfers. Pre-game treatments include Yoga for Golfers to loosen the body, Mindful Golf Meditation to focus the mind, and Golf & the Law of Attraction to set intentions. To relax post-game, the spa offers the Seven Canyons Champion (a winning combo of hydrotherapy, massage and reflexology), the Competitor's Facial, Reflexology and the Herbal Detox Poulitice Treatment.

### Golf in the Caribbean

Most qualifiers would certainly agree that an incentive program held in the sunny and warm isles of the Caribbean is not complete without a

golf program. As such, planners should consider those properties that offer an all-inclusive arrangement. For example, Sandals Resorts offers all-inclusive Caribbean golf resorts on some of the most challenging and prestigious golf courses in Jamaica, St. Lucia and the Bahamas. Designed by golf legend Greg Norman, the award-winning course at Sandals Emerald Reef Golf Club is recognized as one of the most scenic oceanside golf courses in the Caribbean and renowned for its challenging fairways.

As one of the leaders in the all-inclusive segment, Sandals Resorts' Luxury Meetings & Incentives Collection offers groups a comprehensive, all-inclusive program called Luxury Included, which



*The first area glow-in-the-dark mini golf is a sure winner for groups at Blue Harbor Resort, Sheboygan, Wisconsin.*

Credit: Blue Harbor Resort

Nicklaus, the 7,189-yard TPC at Baha Mar blends beauty, challenge, playability and memorable aesthetics.

### Noteworthy

Attendees at Blue Harbor Resort, the No. 1 resort on Wisconsin's Lake Michigan Coast, will delight in playing The Bull golf course, Wisconsin's only Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course. Ranked as the No. 77 Public Golf Course in America (*Golf Digest* 2013-2014), The Bull has hosted numerous local, state and national events.

The first area glow-in-the-dark mini golf is a sure winner for groups seeking a fun time during downtime. Blue Harbor Resort also recently announced the opening of its new, expanded Reflections Spa.

The Sea Pines Resort, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, announced the redesign of the historic Ocean Course by Love Golf Design, founded and headed by PGA Tour star Davis Love III and his brother Mark. The Ocean Course is steeped in Hilton Head golf history as the first course built on the famed island in 1925. Love Golf Design will perform and oversee a total renovation of the entire layout. The course will close for play October 2015 and reopen in September 2016.

One of the newest golf options is Streamsong Resort in Central Florida. They recently opened a 216-room main Lodge, which includes a 14,000-sf conference center, bringing the property's total meeting space to 24,600 sf, as well as 40,000 sf of distinctive outdoor venues. Streamsong is home to two nationally ranked golf courses, Streamsong Red and Streamsong Blue, which have been named to *Golfweek's* list of Best Resort Courses for 2015. In only its second year of operation, Streamsong Red was ranked No. 12 and Streamsong Blue ranked No.14.

Golfers pressed for time can take advantage of the "partial loop" option

is comprised of 15 resort locations.

Another budget-friendly advantage of meeting at a Sandals Resort is that most activities also are included, such as unlimited golf (excluding Sandals Emerald Bay), waterskiing, wakeboarding and scuba diving.

Baha Mar, opening in the spring of 2015 in Nassau, The Bahamas, has partnered with the PGA Tour's TPC Network to announce TPC at Baha Mar. The Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course is the TPC Network's first Caribbean golf course and will be a complement to the resort's collection of hotel brands.

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and play just six or 12 holes. Scott Wilson, Streamsong's director of golf, says, "The 6- and 12-hole partial golf rounds at Streamsong are the perfect complement to a full day of traditional meetings. Walking and staying active throughout a day of seminars can provide a much-needed mental break for your audience. The 6- and 12-hole golf loops at Streamsong are a great option for beginners and avid golfers alike. It's a creative way to break up a full day of meetings and provide a fun, social activity for the group when time is limited."

Other Streamsong options include guided bass fishing excursions, a sporting clay shooting range, trails for hiking and bird watching, tennis and more.

Five more golf courses attendees will want to add to their bucket-list are all located at one magnificent golf resort: Trump National Doral in Miami, which was recently restored to its past grandeur by the new owner, Donald J. Trump, and the talented Gil Hanse design team.

The famous Blue Monster at Trump National Doral is tougher, significantly longer, and more dramatic than ever before. The truest test of golf for PGA Tour players for more than 50 years, the Blue Monster remains an exhilarating experience for those who relish a strong challenge.

Beyond the Blue Monster, golfers will delight in playing the spectacular



*The new Streamsong Resort in Central Florida is home to two nationally ranked golf courses — Streamsong Red and Streamsong Blue.*

Credit: Larry Lambrecht

Red Tiger golf course, the stunning Great White golf course — a Greg Norman Signature Course — and the Silver Fox, which is set to open soon, and is one of the most demanding tests of golf in the country. The Silver Fox is home to the Bermuda Triangle, the nickname for holes 6, 7 and 8 because so many balls go missing.

Currently under renovation, the new Golden Palm, named after the species of tree found throughout the golf course, will offer yet another challenging golf experience at Trump National Doral. It is set to open at the start of 2015. (See more about Trump National Doral on page 26.)

### The 18th Hole

Though in many cases the formats are shifting, either with smaller or larg-

er groups, a charity bottom line or new forms of entertainment, many parts of planning a golf tournament are still the same, particularly the expectation for a seamless, high-quality event on the part of planners.

When it comes to golf, bringing in outside help is more important than with many other types of events. "My most important piece of advice: ask the golf pro any and all questions. They've heard it all," says the bank planner. Consulting an expert is even more important if you are new to planning golf tournaments, or golf in general.

"I would recommend that you hire an outside consultant to help you," Weitzen agrees. "It's so important to get that input, especially if you've never put on a golf tournament. Most people who put them on have at least played, because you don't put one on without an understanding of the game and the way it works."

Whether you have personal experience with golf or not, the most crucial aspect is to maximize golf's unique relationship-building opportunities. "Golf is a perfect avenue for this demographic, says Forbes. "Meeting planners should embrace it. Golf is a great chance for people in a very competitive industry to have some fun and catch up, while still playing on the personality types of the attendees at their events. These are people who like to win but also want to have a good time. It's time for camaraderie and fun."

**I&FMM**



*One of five courses, the famous Blue Monster at Trump National Doral Miami is tougher, significantly longer and more dramatic than ever before.*

Credit: Trump National Doral Miami

# Sandals

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In a word, the casino resort industry is remaking its image: call it gaming, they say, not gambling, which helps to dispel those unfair, unseemly stereotypes: guests indulging in excesses such as late nights/early mornings on the casino floor. This marketing spin also has helped to protect the insurance and financial group clients of these resorts from negative perception. Even the term “gaming resort” is rather misleading, as it suggests that the main recreational option available

one of numerous, equally compelling diversions. Golf, spa, fine dining, shopping and even fishing are among the activities groups can select. The diversity of recreation beyond gaming is one reason why Richland, Mississippi-based Associated Risk Managers South has opted for Beau Rivage as “the home base for our meetings,” notes company president Dan Gleason, who oversees agents in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama as part of a 22-state operation.

# Beyond-Gaming Resorts

## Smart Design and Alternative Amenities Dispel Perception Problems

By Patrick Simms

to guests is the casino, when in fact most of today’s gaming resorts offer so much more.

### Beyond Gaming in Biloxi

The Beau Rivage Resort & Casino on the Gulf Coast in Biloxi, Mississippi, is a prime example of a “destination” gaming resort where the casino is just

“At least once a year we get together at the Beau; we have about 60 attendees the first night and about 40 stay the second night,” Gleason says. “Those who want to play golf enjoy Fallen Oak golf course in the morning, and the 19th hole out there is pretty wonderful.” At other times, Gleason says the group has chartered a fishing boat. The resort’s location effectively “shows off the Mississippi coast for attendees from other parts of the country,” Gleason adds. And it’s a “self-contained” resort, where attendees are not drawn to venture off-property, unlike hotels in New Orleans, where “you lose too many people,” he quips.

When it comes to meeting space, the 1,740-room, AAA Four Diamond Beau Rivage is well-stocked with 50,000 sf complemented by “a very good IT department,” says Gleason, whose group will take its meeting overseas in 2015 and return to Beau Rivage in 2016.

*At M Resort “the casino is not as much of a distraction as it is at other properties where you have to literally walk through the gaming space to get to the meeting space.”*



**Allison Forcier**  
Travel Program Manager  
Acendas, Meetings & Incentives  
Eden Prairie, MN



*With the Las Vegas Strip glittering in the distance, M Resort Spa Casino is just far enough removed from the action to minimize distractions, yet only a shuttle ride away.*





*Beau Rivage Resort & Casino on the Gulf Coast in Biloxi offers a wide variety of diversions beyond gaming, including water activities and golf at the Fallen Oak course.*

The Beau Rivage's meeting space is on a separate floor, with only escalator access to the casino or restaurants. In recent years, the property has undertaken piecemeal renovations and improvements so as not to interrupt the flow of business. More than \$3 million has been invested in upgrading the convention floor, wall coverings and AV, as well as the addition of new airwalls. The project will be complete within a year, according to Beau Rivage's Director of Sales Mike Davis. Earlier this year, new carpet was installed on the 77,000-sf casino floor, and at press time, the VIP service area was being enlarged.

Finally, Fallen Oak underwent a renovation this summer overseen by course architect Tom Fazio. Exclusive to the resort, Fallen Oak is located 15 miles away from Beau Rivage on the edge of DeSoto National Forest and was recently named 30th on the "Top 100 Courses You Can Play" by *Golf Magazine*.

But perhaps the most intriguing development is taking place right across from Beau Rivage, on a 15-acre parcel of land donated by MGM Resorts International. The State of Mississippi and the City of Biloxi are partnering to develop MGM Park at that location, where a 6,000-capacity stadium will be home to the minor-league Biloxi Baseball team. The stadium will have

a capacity of up to 18,000 for other types of events such as concerts, and groups meeting at Beau Rivage will have the option of visiting MGM Park to enjoy a baseball game (70 throughout the year) or for their own team-building events. It's just another example of the diversity of recreation that can be found at a gaming resort, such



*MGM Grand Las Vegas unveiled the Stay Well Meetings program in August.*

that many attendees will not even step onto the casino floor during their free time, or they will engage in gaming only as an afterthought. Gleason describes his attendees as merely "dabbling" in gaming. "They're not 'whales' (high rollers)," he assures.

### Distraction-free Draw in Las Vegas

Of course, there are many more examples of casino hotels that cater to meeting groups in Las Vegas. A particular standout is the M Resort Spa Casino. Drew Varga, vice president of



sales at the hotel, estimates that 35 percent to 40 percent of occupancy, on average, is comprised of meeting attendees, with about 10 percent in the insurance/financial sector. That's quite a significant proportion, and several factors may explain it.

First, the property boasts an unusually large amount of function space relative to its number of guest rooms, more than 92,000 sf complementing 390 guest rooms. Second, the convention space is on a level below the casino floor, minimizing distraction for attendees. Third, the property has a very open, Frank Lloyd Wright design with plenty of natural light and spaces for networking among attendees. And fourth, the M Resort is well removed from the heart of The Strip, which again minimizes distractions while still affording attendees a sense that they're in Las Vegas: The Strip is visible from guest-room windows and easily accessible via shuttle.

For insurance and financial meeting groups sensitive to perception when it comes to site choice (i.e., they do not want to be perceived as visiting properties that are mainly focused on gaming and recreation), the less-centralized location of properties such as the M Resort may be a plus.

The ambience is "a little more serious when it's removed from The Strip," notes Allison Forcier, travel program manager with Mission, Kansas-based travel management company Acendas. Forcier has been staging a meeting for about 200 representatives of a financial company at the M Resort annually since 2010, just about a year after the M Resort opened. With the resort's distance from the center of the Las Vegas

Strip, the financial institution would be less at risk to being seen as "promoting going to Vegas for the fun and glitz," she adds.

Several other features made the M Resort attractive to Forcier's client. "A huge factor is the flexibility of the meeting space, since we do a lot of breakout sessions and flipping rooms back and forth," she explains. And while attendees "definitely can make a stop on the casino floor (en route to the meeting space), the casino is not as much of a distraction as it is at other properties where you have to literally walk through the gaming space to get to the meeting space." The resort is also quite accommodating to the group from a service perspective. For the financial group's next meeting, "they're opening the fitness center early to let my attendees get their workouts in before their meeting starts," Forcier notes.

While the 390-room M Resort falls into the boutique category, Las Vegas is best known for its mammoth properties, the largest being the MGM Grand. The hotel's 602,000 sf of meeting space includes a 380,000-sf Grand Conference Center and the newer, 92,000-sf, pillarless Marquee Ballroom. Among its 5,044 guest rooms is the 14th floor comprised of 171 Stay Well rooms, completed in January of this year. The Stay Well guest rooms feature vitamin C-infused shower water, advanced room lighting tailored to sleep/wake cycles, air purification systems, EMF

protection and more. The resort has even developed a Stay Well mobile app that provides wellness recommendations such as techniques to reduce the effects of jetlag.

In August, Stay Well Meetings was officially unveiled. Created by Delos, the pioneer of Wellness Real Estate,

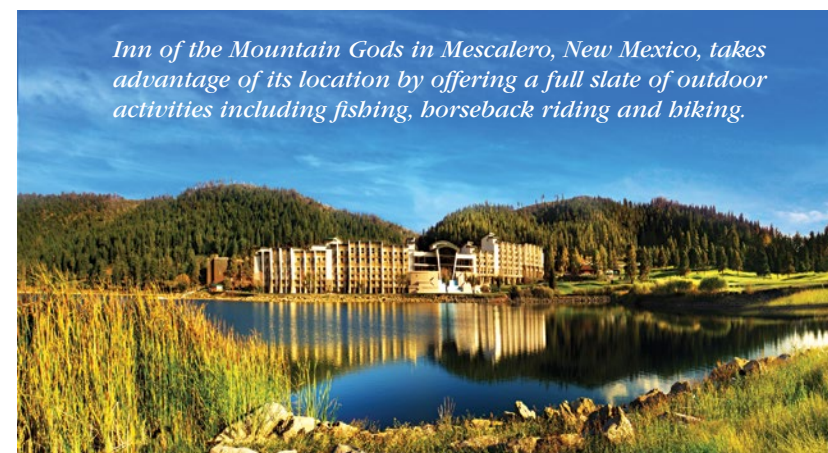
*The Inn is "up in the cool mountains, a very pretty location. ...Sometimes you wake up in the morning, and see elk."*



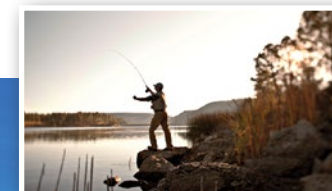
**Juanita Whiteside**  
CEO  
Otero Federal Credit Union  
Alamogordo, NM

whose advisory board includes alternative medicine guru Deepak Chopra, M.D., the program incorporates healthful environments in meeting rooms and spaces such as ergonomic seating, air purification, circadian lighting, virtual window lights, aromatherapy, healthful menu items and much more.

This development at the MGM Grand is a sign of how far gaming resorts have come in terms of the kind of guest experience they are promoting. A concern for health and wellness has not been traditionally associated with such resorts among the general public.



*Inn of the Mountain Gods in Mescalero, New Mexico, takes advantage of its location by offering a full slate of outdoor activities including fishing, horseback riding and biking.*



### Southwestern Winners

There is no denying that a casino does provide an exciting change of pace for the typical meeting attendee. In the course of their daily lives, many professionals will enjoy golf, fine dining, shopping and perhaps spa with some regularity, but gaming will be a relatively unusual experience.

Juanita Whiteside, CEO of Alamogordo, New Mexico-based Otero Federal Credit Union, sees the gaming offered at Inn of the Mountain Gods in Mescalero as an opportunity for her attendees to "let their hair down and relax a little after an intense planning session."

"We do our annual planning session there each year, and we have for nearly seven years," she says. "It includes our executive management and our board of directors, about 17 attendees."

With 270 rooms and 40,000 sf of meeting space, the resort can and has accommodated other meeting groups concurrently with Otero over those years, yet the 17-member group has received very attentive service, Whiteside reports.

Along with the casino, the Inn's natural environment is equally an escape for Otero's attendees, Whiteside notes. Her firm is based in the desert area of New Mexico, and the Inn is "up in the cool mountains, a very pretty location. They're very into health and fitness, and they like to walk the perimeter of the facility. It's a beautiful time of the year (November); sometimes you wake up

in the morning and look across the lake and see elk." The planning session was originally held either at Otero offices or a nearby hotel, but once the group began meeting at Inn of the Mountain Gods, "we stayed there ever since," she adds.

The AAA Four Diamond Talking Stick Resort, in Scottsdale, Arizona, offers a similar Southwestern climate as well as inviting outdoor activities such as hiking and horseback riding in the Sonoran Desert. Owned by the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, the



property offers 496 guest rooms, 11 restaurants and lounges, a 13,000-sf spa, a 650-seat show-room and more than 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space, including the 25,000-sf Grand Ballroom. The resort is part of the growing Talking Stick Cultural & Entertainment District, which also includes Talking Stick Golf Club, Salt River Fields, The Pavilions at Talking Stick, Butterfly Wonderland and Top Golf. (See page 12 for more on Talking Stick golf.)

New features at the resort include: The newly expanded casino-level lounge, Palo Verde, which has two multicolored LED staircases activated by motion, deejay booth for live entertainment, oversized couches and seating for more than 100 guests; and an outdoor programmable lighting system that can display 16.7 million different colors and display an infinite number of



Harrah's Atlantic City aims to debut its Waterfront Conference Center next August.

Atlantic City property on the Boardwalk, arguably resulted from the luxury resort's being poorly matched to its marketplace, rather than a stagnant local gaming industry. True, New Jersey's annual gaming revenue fell to about \$3 billion last year, a 41 percent decline from 2006, but many casinos have debuted in neighboring Northeastern and mid-Atlantic states during those years, thus heightening the competition.



Tropicana Atlantic City's renovation will encompass North Tower guest rooms and the Boardwalk facade, graced by a new light and sound show.

designs and messages on the building. In April, the resort debuted an outdoor concert venue with a 40-by-60-foot stage equipped with state-of-the-art AV. The 4,000-capacity venue is part of Talking Stick Resort's newly renovated and expanded pool complex.

### Betting on Atlantic City

Like any successful industry, the casino industry is not without its misfires. The recent bankruptcy and sale of Revel Casino Hotel, a \$2.4 billion

The vitality of the city's gaming resorts, despite any overall decrease in revenue, is evidenced by the investments hoteliers are making, and some of those investments will certainly benefit meeting groups. Most notably, Harrah's Atlantic City aims to debut its Waterfront Conference Center next August. Featuring two 50,000-sf ballrooms divisible into up to 29 sections, the facility will offer high-tech meeting space directly accessible from the hotel's 2,500 guest rooms.

Planners who instead choose the 1,144-room Caesars Atlantic City eventually will have the Gordon Ramsay Pub & Grill at their disposal thanks to a newly announced partnership between the celebrity chef and Caesars Entertainment.

In addition, the Tropicana Atlantic City is embarking on a \$35 million renovation that will include the hotel's Boardwalk facade (graced by a new light and sound show), a new fitness center on Brighton Avenue and North Tower hotel room renovations.

With 2,078 guest rooms, more than 122,000 sf of meeting space and CMPs on staff, the Tropicana is one of the bastions of both the gaming and meeting industries in Atlantic City. And with the opening of Harrah's Conference Center next year, the city will offer yet another example of how today's gaming resorts are generally very attuned to the needs of meeting groups.

### Loyalty Rewarded

M Resort's Drew Varga, a sales and management veteran in the Las Vegas resort industry who previously served as vice president of the Western region for Caesars/Harrah's Entertainment for 17 years, has observed that insurance group clients, and to some degree financial clients, tend to be very loyal to a resort once it wins their trust. The groups profiled in this feature are evidence of that trait: Forcier's client has met at the M Resort almost since its inception in 2009, and both Associated Risk Managers South and Otero Federal Credit Union have met at the Beau Rivage and Inn of the Mountain Gods, respectively, for multiple consecutive years.

That kind of loyalty is a great reason for gaming resorts to cater to that segment of the corporate meetings industry with the best rate flexibility, contract terms and service they can offer. The end result may well be a client relationship that lasts for many years, a group whose annual return is a "safe bet."

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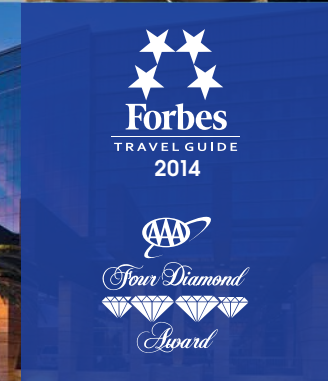
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# Finding the Right Fit for Meetings & Incentives in Florida

Members of the D+H event team get helping hands from Mickey and Minnie for a spring 2014 meeting at Disney's Yacht Club and Beach Club resorts.

Credit: D+H

## How the Sunshine State Adds Up for Financial & Insurance Groups

Florida is popular with meeting planners for many reasons, including warm weather that lures groups from the blustery north in winter. Florida also has excellent infrastructure, an abundance of hotels in all price points, ample convention centers, supportive CVBs, and sports and entertainment galore. It's no surprise that six cities from the Sunshine State made Cvent's Top 50 U.S. Meeting Destinations list, including Orlando at No. 2.

### Central Florida

#### Orlando

How does Orlando, so closely associated with magic and fantasy, meet the needs of bottom-line-oriented, highly disciplined groups from the financial and insurance sectors? With ease, it seems.

Scott Hansen, executive vice presi-

dent of business development at D+H, which provides technology solutions to financial institutions, has brought numerous groups to Orlando over many years, especially to Walt Disney World. He says Disney's renowned celebration of magic and fantasy is a huge draw for

folks in the financial sector, who have to be buttoned down most of the time.

"I think the imaginative fantasy element, I call it pixie dust, appeals to virtually any type of conference attendee, young and old, from all over the world," he says.

But Hansen knows that fantasy

alone won't cut it. "Financial institutions deal with numbers and facts, and by virtue of their tightly regulated industry, they're accustomed to a high degree of discipline and order," he says. "So, in addition to the pixie dust,

***"The thing that makes Disney an ideal venue for financial-industry executives is that everything works precisely the way it is supposed to. Everything is thought out. Everything happens on time."***

**Scott A. Hansen**  
Senior Vice President, Marketing  
D+H  
Lake Mary, FL



the thing that makes Disney an ideal venue for financial-industry executives is that everything works precisely the way it is supposed to. Everything is thought out. Everything happens on time. Disney's attention to detail is unrivaled. And the value received for the price is spot on. Those are all things that appeal to financial-industry attendees, and with a little pixie dust thrown in for good measure...it makes for the perfect venue."

Last spring Hansen brought 140 top banking executives from across the country to Orlando for Executive Perspectives, held at Disney's Yacht Club and Beach Club resorts.

"Holding an event on Disney property yields an extremely high level of client and guest satisfaction," Hansen says, "due to Disney's remarkable attention to quality in its properties, competence with regard to cast members — especially the convention services staff — culinary excellence, fantastic transportation options and nearly endless on-property special-event options. The phenomenon known as pixie dust is very real...and our clients feel it

and see it every time we host them in Orlando on Disney property."

Hansen knows the city's strengths play a part in meeting success, too. George Aguel, president and CEO of Visit Orlando, agrees, noting that the city's imaginative side is well complemented by sophistication and excellent infrastructure.

"Insurance and financial groups play an important role in Orlando's convention business," he says. "We regularly host a portfolio of groups from these industries. As one of the top destinations in the world, we create truly unique, one-of-a-kind experiences for groups, thanks to the imaginative settings at our theme parks and the many dining and entertainment centers close to our convention hotels and center."

Hansen adds another element to this recipe for success: consistency, something he can count on with Disney. When your group is staying and meeting on a Disney property, using Disney transportation, eating Disney food and playing on a Disney golf course, he says, "this results in a very positive guest experience due to the quality and consistency."

That kind of experience makes attendees feel good about a conference — and about the company putting it on.

"We've had large and small events in the parks, including Epcot, Disney's Hollywood Studios and Animal Kingdom," Hansen says. "Holding a client event in the parks is a surefire hit. ...The behind-the-scenes element and special access of an in-park event is really memorable for our attendees. The quality of the in-park event experience transfers directly to the way our clients and guests feel about our company."

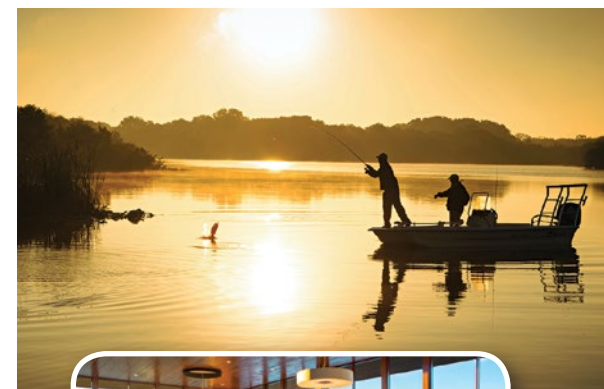
Bottom line: Disney makes planners look good. "If you're a company or a meeting planner," Hansen concludes, "and you want to maximize the probability of knocking it out of the park

for your employees, clients or guests, you should seriously consider holding your event on Disney property. They make your guests feel great, and they make you look magical. What more could you ask for? I think Walt Disney would be proud."

Indeed, the man who parlayed pixie dust into a multibillion-dollar organization would no doubt appreciate how successful his strategy of pairing magic and business continues to be.

### Streamsong

Sometimes what a meeting needs is a big sigh of relief — a place where attendees can take it down a notch and relax, a place where you can clear your head. Located on 16,000 acres between Orlando and Tampa, Streamsong Resort is truly a Central Florida sanctuary, integrated into a Florida landscape at its rarely seen, natural best. No theme parks or tropical kitschiness here, just miles and miles of indigenous flora, fauna and lakes tamed just enough to create two idyllic and nationally ranked golf courses — "the best new courses you can play" according to *Golf* magazine (see more about Streamsong golf on page 14).



*Streamsong Resort in Central Florida is a golf and nature-lover's sanctuary, with golf course views from this clubhouse venue and bass fishing excursions.*

Credit: Streamsong Resort



***“Insurance and financial groups play an important role in Orlando’s convention business. We regularly host a portfolio of groups from these industries.”***



**George Aguel**  
President and CEO  
Visit Orlando

Outdoor group activity options include guided bass fishing excursions, sporting clay shooting range, and trails for hiking and birdwatching. Casual observers of nature will enjoy the lakeside pool and stargazing terrace, enhanced by its location far from city light pollution. And bringing the serenity indoors is a unique 7,000-sf grotto-style spa featuring seven water treatments. For meetings, the resort offers a 216-room main Lodge, which includes a 14,000-sf conference center with an air-conditioned rooftop pavilion. There

is a total of 24,600 sf of indoor meeting space at Streamsong, including the property’s clubhouse with 4,500 sf of banquet space featuring stunning golf course views. And there’s an additional 40,000 sf of distinctive outdoor venues.

### **South Florida Miami**

At No. 13 on Cvent’s list, Miami has its own brand of magic, a heady blend of sun, sand, sophistication and an infusion of Latin sizzle that energizes the dining and entertainment scenes, among others. It’s also a place where Hollywood Golden Age glamour and today’s contemporary style intersect.

The 631-room Eden Roc Miami Beach exemplifies that with historic and contemporary towers set at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean. Eden Roc has 70,000 sf of meeting space and a variety of venues for functions, including the Cabana Beach Club Restaurant for informal dinners and in the gardens fronting the beach for group activities.

Miami is also the place for bucket-list golf incentives. One of the most

Trump National’s \$250 million resort-wide makeover encompassed more than 100,000 sf of meeting and event space including three new ballrooms: The stunning, 7,300-sf Crystal Ballroom, perched on the top level of the resort clubhouse with expansive views of the Blue Monster Golf Course from indoors and out on the 8,000-sf outdoor terrace; the Ivanka Trump Ballroom, comprised of 8,100 sf of elegant indoor space; and the new 9,500-sf White & Gold Ballroom. Legends, the largest ballroom (24,000 sf), was reintroduced in October as The Donald J. Trump Grand Ballroom. Also redone were the Majestic Ballroom (2,800 sf) and The Imperial Ballroom (7,500 sf). The 800-acre resort also offers abundant outdoor venues as well.

New restaurant and bar concepts have debuted at Trump National, including a BLT Prime restaurant, a highly touted restaurant from among the Trump global golf portfolio. With three private dining rooms encompassing indoor seating and an expansive veranda, BLT Prime seats nearly 350 guests. Other noteworthy updates include a new hotel lobby; a completely revamped pool complex; a 48,000-sf resort spa; and a redesigned state-of-the-art fitness center. The resort now offers 643 guest rooms, 49 resort suites and 48 deluxe spa suites.

### **Palm Beach County**

Forty-seven miles of coastline, designer-centric shopping, classic resorts, fine dining, history and an impeccable sense of style put Palm Beach on the short list for many meeting planners. Palm Beach is well-suited for insurance and financial groups that want to reward high performers via incentive programs.

Among the county’s lodging options is classic Boca Raton Resort & Club, A Waldorf Astoria Resort, just wrapping up a \$30 million renovation of its historic Cloister building. The famously opulent resort, which opened in 1926, has approximately 146,000 sf of function and meeting space, accommodating groups of 15 to 2,000 attendees.

storied golf courses in the country, the famed Blue Monster Golf Course, resides at the newly renovated Trump National Doral Miami. The Blue Monster — the official home of the PGA Tour for more than 50 years — was the most dramatically transformed of the five courses at the resort, courtesy of Gil Hanse, one of the world’s top golf architects. (For more on Trump National golf, see page 16.)



*Trump National Doral Miami’s resort-wide makeover encompassed more than 100,000 sf of meeting space including the stunning Crystal Ballroom.*

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At the northern end of the county and the other end of the historic timeline is the brand spanking new Wyndham Grand Jupiter at Harbourside Place, which opened in late October. Elegant yet decidedly modern and comfortable, the 176-room property has 15,000 sf of event space. Also at Harbourside Place will be Tiger Wood's first restaurant. The Woods Jupiter: Sports and Dining Club is scheduled to open in early 2015.

## Hollywood

Hollywood, Florida, right next to Fort Lauderdale, is another city on Cvent's Top 50 list, and one reason may be its ongoing evolution.

Set to open summer 2015 is the 349-room, 17-story Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort. Conference dates for 2015 are already open and staff is standing by to talk to planners and respond to RFPs. While the resort will embody the easy-going Margaritaville "lifestyle," the meeting side is all about



Rendering of Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort, set to open in summer 2015. The resort is currently taking group reservations for 2015 meetings.

utes east of the state capital of Tallahassee, is another option offering a more secluded setting, a good choice for groups that want to buy out a property for a very private conference. Accommodations at the Southern-style plantation are in a combination of cottages and lodges for around 168 guests, depending on the configuration. Some are

shared quarters — ideal for meetings that include families — and others private enough for C-suite executives.

Among the plantation's selling points is a robust teambuilding program. Denise Wilson, vice president and director of Star University for Capital City Bank Group, brought 16 market-service managers from the company's retail banking offices to Honey Lake Plantation in May to participate in the "Teamistry" program.

"We wanted to meet indoors and team-build outdoors," Wilson says. "Our intent was to create a stronger bond between the individual managers so they would feel more comfortable reaching out to one another for help with real-world banking challenges."

Ultimately, the program changed the work experience for the participants in critical ways. "These managers have high-stress jobs, and because they are the only person in their location with their specific job function, they can feel alone and overwhelmed," Wilson notes. "This reminded them that they are all in the same boat and that they are only a phone call away from having a lifeline."

The Plantation's Teamistry program includes such options as fishing tournaments, archery challenges, competitive cooking classes, sporting competitions and GPS-driven scavenger hunts, but two elements are common to all: teamwork — the tasks

can only be completed via group effort — and fun. Challenges faced by Wilson's group included crossing a swamp, answering quiz questions while a team member paddled a canoe and roasting marshmallows.

Wait. What? Marshmallows as a vehicle for team-building? Yes, when the roasting includes collectively building a fire with the minimal tools provided and making sure there is one roasted marshmallow for each team member at the end. It requires that the team work together, be resourceful, prioritize materials and steps, divide and fulfill roles and see the project through to completion.

For Wilson, the experience was a resounding success. "This is world-class teambuilding at a stunning location right in our backyard. The resort staff was professional, attentive,



Honey Lake Plantation Resort & Spa east of Tallahassee boasts a serene setting and the "Teamistry" teambuilding program, which includes fishing and sporting competitions.

fun and willing to make adjustments when needed to meet our needs."

She offers just one caveat: "The weather was beautiful, but warm. I wish we had planned it a little earlier in the season. On the positive side, the ability to go back and forth be-

tween the ballroom and the outdoors made it easier."

## Daytona Beach

The Daytona area has something no other place has: the Daytona 500, ranked in the top 10 of most highly



Jacksonville Landing on the St. Johns River in downtown Jacksonville features entertainment, waterfront dining and shopping.

successful, professional conferences in well-designed spaces. Not surprising, possibilities for creative teambuilding (eco-friendly and socially conscious) and post-work bonding and relaxation are many. The resort's 30,000 sf of meeting space includes a 10,000-sf ballroom accommodating up to 1,000 attendees, and an 8,800-sf waterfront venue with floor-to-ceiling windows. High-tech AV, custom lighting designs and children's programs

Jacksonville an ideal destination for insurance and financial groups, who visit and feel right at home."

The city has an active outdoor scene, a multitude of cultural attractions and many restaurants and other venues found only in "Jax," which gives attendees a sense of place.

## Greenville

Honey Lake Plantation Resort & Spa, located in Greenville, 45 min-

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Four Diamond Award





Credit: Tampa Convention Center

The 600,000-sf waterfront Tampa Convention Center is located along the Riverwalk in the heart of Tampa.

attended sporting events in the world. Book a meeting during race week and there's little need to budget for entertainment. The area also offers 13,000 hotel rooms and the Ocean Center Convention Complex with nearly 200,000 sf of meeting space.

Five miles south of the city, The Shores Resort & Spa sits between the Atlantic Ocean and Intracoastal Waterway. Groups can take advantage of Daytona Speedway action or simply benefit from all the resort offers — plenty for a multiday meeting. Buyout packages give groups all 212 guest rooms and all 20,000 sf of function space, which translates to optimal privacy.

The AAA Four Diamond Shores completed a multimillion-dollar refresh this fall that includes a new private dining facility and enhancements to indoor and outdoor function space as well as to guest rooms. Significant technology upgrades and eco-friendly improvements also were completed.

## Gulf Coast Tampa

Visit Tampa Bay President & CEO Santiago Corrada lists location, an international airport and the impressive waterfront Tampa Convention Center among the city's draws for business groups.

Another Cvent Top 50 destination, Tampa has a slew of new hotels and restaurants to further entice groups. The old Federal Courthouse building has been transformed into upscale Le Méridien, where the stylish contemporary lobby and adjacent cocktail bar occupy what was once the corridor walked by suspects and convicts. The

own brew house. It sits at the end of Tampa Riverwalk as part of the new Water Works Park, the perfect spot for attendees to stroll after productive business meetings.

### New and Noteworthy

The AAA Four Diamond, 315-room Westin Orlando Universal Boulevard, located across the street from Orlando's Orange County Convention Center,



Credit: The Westin Orlando Universal Boulevard

The Westin Orlando Universal Boulevard's new Lotus Ballroom is adjacent to the free-form pool.

opened its new meeting and special event center, the Lotus Ballroom, earlier this year. The new space, which is adjacent to the outdoor free-form pool, features floor-to-ceiling windows and provides an additional 5,394 sf including prefunction space, allowing the property to accommodate groups of up to 300 attendees for a banquet. The hotel now offers 13,506 sf of total meeting space.

New in downtown Orlando is the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, which held its grand opening in November.



Credit: Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek

The 100,000-sf Bonnet Creek Pavilion sits in front of the Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek.

The largest theater is the Disney Theater, which seats 2,700. Other spaces for group events include an in-the-round experience in the 300-seat Alexis & Jim Pugh Theater and an outdoor events lawn.

Two new hotels are tapping into the Walt Disney World success. To B or not to B? No Hamlet-type agonizing at the stylish 394-room B Resort, which opened in June and features the B-Indulged spa, B-Active fitness center, FreeB Wi-Fi and 25,000-plus sf of function space. Definitely to B.

The new Four Seasons Orlando offers its quintessential Four Seasons experience with a little, or a lot, of Disney. Either way, the upscale resort, complete with expansive spa and complimentary children's program, delivers. Features include 375 guest rooms, 32,750 sf of meeting space and a fantasy pool playground.

In July, Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek unveiled Bonnet Creek Pavilion, 10,000 sf of permanent, air-conditioned function space with billowy ceilings hung with chandeliers. Floor-to-ceiling windows overlook the resort's lush landscaping.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel, located in Orlando between Epcot and Disney's Hollywood Studios, is in the midst of the largest makeover in its history. The hotel launched

a multiphase, multiyear, \$125 million redesign project that will transform every guest room in the 758-room Swan Hotel and the 1,509-room Dolphin Hotel. The project started at

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Credit: Loews Hotels at Universal Orlando Resort

Rendering of the 1,000-room Loews Sapphire Falls Resort at Universal Orlando, which will open in the summer of 2016 with 131,000 sf of meeting space.

the Swan Hotel, with approximately 500 of the 756 rooms scheduled to be redesigned by the end of 2014. The first phase of the Dolphin Hotel rooms will begin in 2016 with the entire rooms project currently scheduled for completion by the end of 2017.

**Honey Lake Plantation offers “world-class teambuilding at a stunning location. ...The resort staff was professional, attentive, fun and willing to make adjustments when needed to meet our needs.”**



**Denise Wilson**  
Vice President  
Capital City Bank  
Tallahassee, FL

The transformation will occur without disruption of service.

In early 2014, Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin introduced the Causeway Party, a food festival for groups modeled on its annual Food & Wine Classic. Customizable components include food and drink booths,

live entertainment and lighting, all set along the causeway between the two hotels. Beverage experts can provide educational seminars on such topics as wine blending, beer and sake. Inside, a super-cool idea for private events is a cocktail reception for 60 in one of the hotels' giant freezers — think martini bar and caviar on ice — plus parkas for attendees.

Loews Sapphire Falls Resort at Universal Orlando will open summer 2016, but planners can book meetings now. The resort will have 131,000 sf of meeting space and 1,000 guest rooms. Also, Loews Royal Pacific Resort, which will be connected to the new hotel by an air-conditioned walkway, is expanding its meeting space from 85,000 to 141,330 sf, and planners can book now for fall 2015 dates.

In Miami, where 2,500 new hotel rooms are expected in 2015, the Shelborne Wyndham Grand South Beach opened in September following a \$90 million renovation. The 200-room resort with beachfront pool and chic cabanas melds old-style glamour with a contemporary aesthetic.

Ground broke in December 2013 on the Palm Beach County Convention Center Hilton Hotel, which will con-

nect to the 350,000-sf convention center when the hotel is completed in 2016.

The renamed Diplomat Resort & Spa in Hollywood, once a Westin, is now part of Curio — a Collection by Hilton, a new brand of four- and five-star hotels. The historic Diplomat will receive significant enhancements starting this year.

Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay put the finishing touches on a \$20 million makeover including all public spaces, the new 1823 Kitchen and Bar and a high-tech lobby lounge.

Two properties will soon open in the Florida Keys. Faro Blanco Resort and Yacht Club, debuting in December, will offer 125 Hyatt Place accommodations, an elegant bar and restaurant, and a combined 13,000-plus sf of indoor/outdoor function space. Set to open mid-2015, Playa Largo Resort, with 157 accommodations that include private bungalows, will offer more than 46,000 sf of meeting space and 14.5 acres where groups can meet and play — no need to leave the property.

Wherever planners meet in Florida, there's a good chance that a sense of magic and wonderment will enhance the proceedings, whether in the form of mesmerizing ocean views and lush vegetation or ingeniously inventive themed hotels and venues, pixie dust included.

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## Corporate Ladder



WALZAK

**Dawn Walzak** was named director of sales at The Hilton Orlando. She most recently was directly involved in sales, marketing and revenue strategy with Tishman Hotel Corporation.

**Jennifer Dahlberg** was promoted to group sales manager at One Ocean Resort & Spa, Atlantic Beach, Florida. She most recently served as corporate catering sales manager for the resort.

The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa, South Carolina, has named **Mike Reich** as director of group sales. He formerly was regional director of sales and marketing for The Westin Baltimore Washington Airport and Sheraton Baltimore Washington Airport Hotel.



DAHLBERG

**LauraLee Wren** was named assistant director of sales for Kalahari Resorts and Conventions' new Pocono Mountains, Pennsylvania, resort, opening in summer 2015. She was executive director of sales and marketing at Split Rock Resort & Golf Club in the Poconos.

The Meritage Resort and Spa, Napa Valley, California, has promoted **Ashley**

**Thomas** to group sales manager. She most recently served as catering sales manager.

Omni Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa, Rancho Mirage, California, has named **Colleen Pace** as director of sales and marketing. She formerly was director of sales and marketing at Cheyenne Mountain Resort in Colorado Springs.

**I&FMM**

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