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The Water Coolers are professional actors who sing, dance and make corporate audiences laugh.

Happily Ever Laughter

Inject Humor to Enliven the
Meeting and Ignite Motivation
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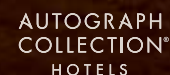
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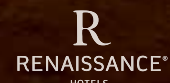
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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2016 Vol. 23 No. 5

Credit: The Woodlands Resort & Conference Center



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A welcome reception at Skyfall in Delano Hotel.

Publisher's Message

Laughter Is the Best Medicine

Scientific and anecdotal studies touting the benefits of laughter shed light on how laughter provides great benefits and affects us both mentally and physically. For example, according to the Mayo Clinic, laughter heightens the intake of oxygen-rich air, stimulates the heart, lungs and muscles, and releases endorphins — our natural pain and stress fighters. Short-term benefits include

a good, relaxed feeling, which is a welcome antidote for corporate attendees who spend countless hours in meetings.

And the long-term effects of laughter can act as a natural pain reliever, improve the immune system and help people connect with other people.

Thus, using laughter at your meetings and events, sales training and leadership sessions is always a good thing.

In our cover story on page 38, “Happily Ever Laughter — Inject Humor to Enliven the Meeting and Ignite Motivation,” planners testify that laughter works. “We usually have speakers but we wanted something different,” says Todd Zint, CMP, CMM, the owner and chief experience officer of Austin, Texas-based Ignite Event Solutions LLC. “One thing about insurance and financial meetings — although the content is important, it’s not the most exciting. When you inject comedy, it enlivens things.”

Zint was introduced to The Water Coolers, a professional comedy troupe specializing in the workplace, at a Financial & Insurance Conference Planners (FICP) conference, and hired them to entertain at his event. Zint says the audience was in stitches as attendees could identify with the comedic vignettes. Zint advises planners to make sure the comedy is “the right fit and right time for the right group and its meeting goals.”

Sally Allen, the producer of The Water Coolers, explains why laughter is so important to a meeting or event experience: “All the goals we want to accomplish at events — to connect people, break down barriers, get perspective, find new ideas — none of that can be done without opening your participants up with what’s coming next. Laughter is like a switch that changes the energy in a room and creates that openness.”

We salute on page 18 the hotels, resorts and convention and visitors bureaus that you selected as winners of the 2016 World Class Award.



Harvey Grotsky

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PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Harvey Grotsky

harvey.grotsky@themeetingmagazines.com

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Mitch D. Miller

mitch.miller@themeetingmagazines.com

MANAGING EDITORS

Susan W. Fell

susan.fell@themeetingmagazines.com

Susan S. Gregg

sue.gregg@themeetingmagazines.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Sophia Bennett

Ron Bernthal

John Buchanan

Sara Churchville

Cynthia Dial

Maura Keller

Christine Loomis

Diana Lambdin Meyer

Derek Reveron

Mark Rowh

Patrick Simms

PRESIDENT & CEO

Harvey Grotsky

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS

David A. Middlebrook

david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES

2700 N. Military Trail, Suite 120

Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394

561-989-0600 Fax: 561-989-9509

advertising@themeetingmagazines.com

WESTERN STATES/HAWAII

Marshall Rubin

818-888-2407 • Fax: 818-888-4907

marshall.rubin@themeetingmagazines.com

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Jamaica Named the Caribbean's Leading Destination at World Travel Awards



(L to r) Director of Tourism Paul Pennicook, Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Tourism Jennifer Griffith, Minister of Tourism Hon. Edmund Bartlett and Chairman of the Jamaica Tourist Board John Lynch pose with Miss Jamaica World 2016 Ashlie Barrett at the World Travel Awards Caribbean & North America Gala Ceremony.

KINGSTON, JAMAICA — For the 11th consecutive year, Jamaica was named the Caribbean's Leading Destination at the 2016 World Travel Awards. Jamaica brought home several awards including Caribbean's Leading Cruise Destination and Caribbean's Leading Tourist Board.

Jamaica's Minister of Tourism Hon. Edmund Bartlett received the Caribbean's Leading Personality for Outstanding Services to Tourism Award in recognition of his dedication to promoting Destination Jamaica during his 35 years of service in the senate and the house of representatives.

www.visitjamaica.com

Freddy I. Muller Named as Vice President, Corporate & Incentive Sales – Americas for Silversea Cruises

MIAMI, FL — Silversea Cruises announced that Freddy I. Muller has rejoined the company as vice president of corporate & incentive sales for the Americas. Muller will be responsible for overseeing the line's corporate and incentive



MULLER

business and strengthening relationships with meeting and incentive travel partners throughout the Americas. Muller held a previous position with Silversea as sales director for six years. He began his career in group sales at Celebrity Cruises, and brings more than 23 years of incentive sales and marketing experience within the global travel industry, most recently as director, charters, meetings & incentives at Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings.

Silversea Cruises is recognized as an innovator in the ultra-luxury cruise line industry, offering guests large-ship amenities aboard its intimate, all-suite vessels. Silversea's itineraries encompass all seven continents and feature worldwide luxury cruises to the Mediterranean, Caribbean, both Polar Regions and more. www.silversea.com

Harrah's Resort Atlantic City Announces \$30 Million Room Renovation Project

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Harrah's Resort Atlantic City announced plans for a \$30 million guest room and suite renovation, to be completed by summer 2017. The room and suite upgrades are part of Caesars Entertainment's total investment of \$200 million into its Atlantic City casino-resorts. Future enhancements to Harrah's premier nightlife destination, The Pool After Dark, the resort's fitness center and its upscale food court.

Harrah's Resort will redesign and enhance 450 guest rooms and suites in its Bayview Tower, partnering with Las Vegas-based design firm, Marnell Companies, to curate the in-room guest experience. Bayview rooms will offer fresh design elements, featuring rich hues of lavender and blue accent colors, contrasting white and gray tones, and contemporary furniture including a vanity dressing area. Freshly appointed, modern bathrooms will offer oversized showers, while select rooms will offer luxurious baths and signature amenities.

www.harrahsresort.com

San Francisco Travel Launches 'SFMeetCulture'

SAN FRANCISCO, CA — San Francisco Travel has launched a new initiative called SFMeetCulture, designed to connect meeting plan-



D'ALESSANDRO

ners more easily with San Francisco's most historically significant art and culture venues. This was developed to showcase the close geography and flexible capacity of the most relevant venues within the 49 square miles of the city.

"Our focus on bringing more meetings and events into San Francisco's cultural and historic venues is a natural," said Joe D'Alessandro, president and CEO of San Francisco Travel. "Our museums, galleries, performance spaces, architecture and landmark sites are a major part of what makes San Francisco such a unique and irresistible destination. These venues provide meeting attendees with unique, personalized and local experiences that no other city can offer — distinctively San Franciscan and immersive experiences in a rich environment."

For the planner, these venues offer the high service level from facilities that are already in the business of providing an outstanding guest experience. And they enable planners

to fulfill objectives and corporate programs such as supporting non-profit museums or partnering with sustainability-minded organizations. www.sftravel.com

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New 60,000 sq. ft. ballroom
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500,000 sq. ft. of renovated exhibit space

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The Naples Beach Hotel Golf Course Redesign Nears Completion

NAPLES, FL — The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club in Southwest Florida is nearing completion of the renovation of its championship golf course. The course at the AAA Four Diamond resort is being redesigned with input from golf icon and acclaimed course designer Jack Nicklaus, who has a historical tie to the resort.

The Jack Nicklaus redesign is being done in collaboration with noted course architect John Sanford. The total redesign of the 125-acre resort's course began in April, and the entire project will be complete

this November, with the course fully operational and reopening on November 17, 2016, according to the beachfront resort's General Manager Jason Parsons. According to Parsons, this is almost a month ahead of schedule.

Jack Nicklaus is helping to celebrate his past and that of The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club by reshaping the future of this iconic golf course. "Being back at The Naples Beach Hotel and Golf Club is like a walk down memory lane for me," Nicklaus said. "Returning to the same course where I broke 40,

with my father by my side, brings back a lot of very special and very fond memories. At the same time, I am enjoying the opportunity to work with John (Sanford) on this rebirth, if you will, of a wonderful layout. I think we have some great ideas, and people will be excited about the end product."

In addition to the new course, the resort has added a 300-yard practice and teaching range, and will have new golf carts with GPS tracking systems to aid golfers with yardages on each hole, thus helping pace of play. www.naplesbeachhotel.com

SeaWorld Announces New Attractions for 2017

ORLANDO, FL — SeaWorld Entertainment Inc., a leading theme park and entertainment company with 12 destination and regional theme parks, announced its extensive lineup of new attractions, shows and events for 2017. The company will invest approximately \$175 million in capital spending, one of the largest new attraction years in its more than 50-year history.

Wave Breaker: The Rescue Coaster, SeaWorld San Antonio. A new generation of coaster, the first of its kind in North America, combining the thrill of the sea, the adrenaline rush of a multi-launch roller coaster and the inspiration of animal rescue is coming to SeaWorld San Antonio.

New Orca Encounter, SeaWorld San Diego. SeaWorld San Diego will introduce new, inspiring, educational orca encounters, rather than theatrical shows. These live documentaries will focus on orca enrichment, exercise and overall health. This change will start in its San Diego park next year, followed by Orlando and then San Antonio by 2019.

Kraken Virtual Reality (VR) Roller Coaster, SeaWorld Orlando. SeaWorld will debut its first digitally enhanced ride experience as the legendary Kraken roller coaster is transformed into a virtual reality (VR) roller coaster experience. This thrill ride will be the only VR coaster experience in Florida.

For the complete list of new attractions and additional information, visit www.seaworldentertainment.com.

Historic NOPSI Building to Become New Orleans Luxury Hotel

NEW ORLEANS, LA — Located in the city's vibrant Central Business District, the former New Orleans Public Service headquarters building, which originally opened in 1927, will reopen as NOPSI Hotel in spring 2017 after a meticulous restoration.

The NOPSI Hotel will include some of the most refined accommodations in the city — including 74 suites — a lively and regionally inspired restaurant, 10,000 sf of architecturally significant indoor and outdoor meeting space, and a sophisticated rooftop pool and bar.

A high point of the building's transformation is a beautiful "Grand Hall" lobby entrance, featuring a 21-foot-high vaulted ceiling, graceful arches, ornamental columns, wood wall paneling, brass grills and terrazzo flooring.

The historic renovation also includes the conversion of the adjacent and former Dryades Building into the city's most unique meeting and event space. At 4,000 sf, this industrially elegant space will even include a preserved 24-foot-high crane and track as part of its décor.

NOPSI is the acronym of New Orleans' former utility company and transit operator. Thousands of manhole covers still bear the NOPSI name, adding a sense of nostalgia to many of The Crescent City's streets. On its rooftop NOPSI will feature an iconic pool and bar, providing a view of the city's diverse skyline. By day, it will offer a peaceful oasis for hotel guests, serving chilled drinks and creative, healthful fare. But, after 5 p.m., the bar will transform into one of New Orleans' most exclusive establishments. www.NOPSIHotel.com, www.salamanderhotels.com



SnapShots



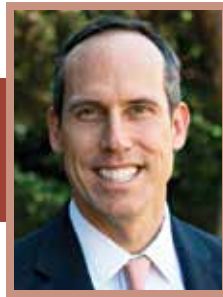
Credit: FICP



FICP's 2016 Summer Symposium was held in August at the InterContinental Toronto Centre for a weekend of education and networking. Attendees kicked off the event with an evening at Azure, the InterContinental's bar and restaurant. Day two began with a bang as attendees heard from renowned entrepreneur Michelle Romanow of CBC's "Dragons' Den," who shared how a degree in economics, sturgeon fishing and the willingness to "get scrappy" combined to create a business empire. Sessions focused on the global economy, regulatory environments, negotiation and the future of meeting professionals. The day concluded at the stunning Hart House, where guests enjoyed a bygone era at the historic venue. The final day included a lesson in emerging technology from James Spellos, and attendees tested virtual reality headsets. Finally, explorer Bruce Kirkby challenged attendees to break out of their comfort zones to achieve great things. "Fear," said Kirkby, "points towards danger — but it also points toward growth." www.FICPnet.com

Teambuilding

By Michael Murphy



How to Ensure a Memorable Experience for Your Attendees

Teambuilding activities are an important way to foster connections among meeting attendees. In today's world of instant entertainment and viral internet sensations, people are looking more for memorable experiences rather than the traditional meeting schedule. To break up the monotony of lectures and meeting sessions, fun and creative teambuilding activities can help to bring your attendees together, serve as a stress-relief tool, and most importantly create memories that they will never forget. It is important to truly engage your attendees with unique activities in order to keep your company meetings current, fresh and new. However, certain factors exist that you should keep in mind.

Know Your Audience

One of the main goals of hosting a meeting is to create an experience that your guests will be talking about until your next event. The easiest way to do that is to provide activities that pique the specific interests of your attendees. Do you have a group that likes to be outdoors and do something active? Does your group want to relax and spend leisurely time with one another?



Credit: Hyatt Regency Austin

Teambuilding activities such as yoga classes can help to bring your attendees together and serve as a stress-relief tool at a business meeting.



Are they more adventurous or reserved? These are all factors a meeting planner should consider when thinking of what will be an appropriate and successful activity for their group.

In my experience, I've seen a variety of unique teambuilding experiences, from 5K races and kayaking for more active groups to "Make Your Own BBQ/Salsa" competitions for food enthusiasts. It really depends on the interests of your group to determine what activities will have the most successful impact on your event.

Location, Location, Location

It is critical to find a venue that is able to accommodate the activities that reflect your guest's interests. The venue's team should be willing to help you to think outside of the box and be creative in organizing an event that

Active groups like to participate in teambuilding exercises such as 5K road races and kayaking in Austin, Texas.



Make Your Own BBQ/Salsa competitions for food enthusiasts are popular teambuilding programs at Hyatt Regency Austin.

is customized to your specific group, rather than offering cookie-cutter options.

Also, it is typically best if the location of your meeting venue is versatile and offers many different types of nearby attractions. For example, a property such as Hyatt Regency Austin is situated directly on a lake but is still located in downtown Austin. This allows the property to provide a variety of teambuilding activities from water sports and hiking, to scavenger hunts for all of downtown's iconic attractions. A

with a local food pantry to host a cooking competition among your employees in order to help feed the homeless, or host a trivia quiz with the winner's team being able to donate a set dollar amount to a charity of their choice.

By adding a philanthropic component, meeting planners can help to bring their teams closer all while boosting morale by doing something beneficial for the community.

Think Relaxation

Even if you are not planning a large teambuilding event, it can be beneficial to the overall success of your meeting to organize relaxation activities. Although your meeting may not be particularly stressful, relaxation sessions can help to mix up the event's schedule and help guests enjoy the overall experience. Activities

to relieve stress can be anything from yoga or meditation classes, to something more energetic such as sumo wrestling in padded suits. These small steps go a long way to keep things exciting, fun and memorable.

Stay True to Your Company

With all of the extravagant teambuilding events and activities out there, it is important to ensure that you are doing what is best for the overall success of your meeting. Know

Know what success looks like to you — whether that is building relationships among your team, fun or relaxation — and stay true to that overarching goal.

versatile location helps to offer more activity options to ensure you are meeting the interests of your guests.

Giving Back to Create Connections

Instead of a traditional teambuilding activity, meeting planners can work with philanthropic organizations to give back while creating connections within your team. For example, a "giving back" teambuilding event could include working with a local animal shelter to arrange for your group to take dogs on walks throughout the day. You also could work

what success looks like to you — whether that is building relationships among your team, fun or relaxation — and stay true to that overarching goal. You don't have to go big to create a memorable experience, and it is most important to arrange experiences that support the values of the organization and resonates with your guests.

I&FMM

Michael Murphy is the general manager of Hyatt Regency Austin, in Austin, Texas. He has worked with Hyatt Corporation for nearly 20 years. www.austin.regency.hyatt.com



The Conference Center Difference

Upping Their Game to Serve Smaller, Meetings-Focused Groups

By Christine Loomis

Credit: The Woodlands Resort & Conference Center

There's nothing wrong with convening in a traditional hotel ballroom or meeting space. It can be a rewarding experience. But is it the optimum experience, especially for small and medium-sized groups? The answer to that is probably no, and that's where dedicated conference centers come in.

Aimed squarely at the small to medium-sized meetings market, conference centers provide planners with venues uniquely designed and set up to meet the needs and support the goals of smaller groups, whether for full conferences, executive meeting, sales training or leadership coaching sessions.

Within the conference center mi-

lieu, IACC is the go-to organization providing standards and quality assurance in the physical design of meeting spaces as well as the food and beverage and service offered at its centers. Staff members at IACC are among the thought leaders in the industry, and not just in North America, but across the globe.

IACC recently rebranded and is no longer referring to itself as the International Association of Conference Centres — simply IACC, with the new tagline “Exceptional Meetings. Powerful Connections.” The rebranding was intended to better reflect the diversity of offerings of IACC's nearly 400 members in 21 countries in the Americas, Europe and Australasia that include

not just conference centers, but also seminar houses, day meeting venues, corporate universities, and meetings-focused hotels and resorts — giving planners plenty of choice no matter where they are headquartered or meet.

IACC's new identity is centered on the four pillars of its brand: exclusive meeting venues, by design; at the forefront of meetings innovation; globally connected network of passionate members; and curators of exceptional meeting experiences.

IACC also offers continuing education and training for conference-center professionals, including global-exchange programs, ensuring that staff is always top-notch at IACC centers. And every member center can see

how it stacks up against every other center, based on key benchmarks developed by IACC.

Up-to-Date Technology

Whether the conference centers are stand-alone centers at or near universities or within business or research complexes; attached or adjacent to hotels or inns; or within resorts, what they all have in common is dedication to providing smaller groups with the optimum meeting experience, and that includes making sure planners and attendees have access to the most up-to-date, relevant technology.

“All members must demonstrate that they have up-to-date technology that is well supported in their meet-

ing rooms,” says Mark Cooper, IACC's CEO. He notes that technology requirements have expanded considerably in the past two to three years, and that a variety of technology elements are among the most requested and desired by planners.

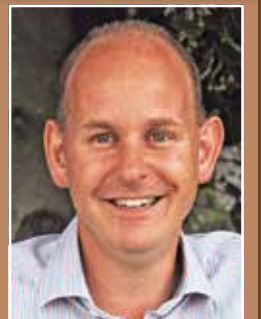
“The boundaries have moved in terms of requirements in the room (AV) and outside of the room (delegate communications before, during and after the event), as well as in terms of collaborative technologies to engage and manage delegate interactions and communication during an event. The last two,” Cooper says, “are no longer the requirements of early adopter meeting organizers; rather, they are now pivotal to the success of the event.”

Cooper says IACC conference venues are well placed to serve this changing landscape. “Given their focus on meetings, they saw this coming some time ago and invested in stable, high-bandwidth solutions that are easy to access for delegates. It is not unusual for IACC venues to offer in excess of 100MB speeds, which can satisfy the most sophisticated of meetings. That means clients do not need to invest in additional bandwidth provision at the venue, which can be very costly.

“Live streaming is a lot more affordable,” Cooper points out, “especially for smaller meetings and training courses, and provides inclusivity for those not able to attend a meeting in person — an added value to those running meetings. There are examples of IACC members who are currently investing in non-obtrusive, multipoint ceiling-mounted microphones to pick up audience comments without the need for table-mounted or handheld mics. These are available as extensions to the meeting package or even provided as part of the standard offering in some venues.”

“A meeting needs to do more now than deliver content to delegates. It needs to bring people together, help build relationships and foster collaboration.”

Mark Cooper, CEO
IACC





The family-owned Stoweflake Resort & Conference Center in Stowe, Vermont, offers IACC-certified meeting space as well as inspirational outdoor event spaces.



New Solutions for Meetings

IACC recently launched the IACC Meeting Room of the Future initiative. The program's goal is to annually predict and showcase a clear vision of what is new and what solutions need to be sought for tomorrow's meeting rooms, to deliver what clients want and need for maximum productivity. That's a tall order, but IACC brought together some of the brightest minds in the industry to create physical and virtual meeting environments. Contributors came from leading universities across the globe, meetings and technology companies and designers of office furnishings.

In another area of research, IACC found that customized meeting packages are becoming more the norm than the exception, with planners requesting customization in a variety of ways, from technology to F&B, and many conference centers are now able to provide that customization. Planners should no longer have to accept a standard package that doesn't fully meet a group's needs. If a venue isn't flexible, planners can turn to hundreds of IACC conference centers that are.

Cooper says sustainability is another important element. "Delegates want

to see the venue taking responsibility for the planet. It makes delegates feel good about being at the venue, it's important!" He gives examples of venues having such options as onsite beehives producing honey to serve to guests, electric-car charging points and even staff uniforms made from recycled cloth.

The concept of food and beverage at meetings has changed dramatically in recent years and conference centers are in step with the trends. "Imaginative and well-presented food is a focus of our members at this time," Cooper says, "along with the 'theater of cooking,' where chefs are on view and delegates use all their senses to experience food in meetings. Some of our venues have onsite food smokers and other ways of producing excellent dishes connected to the region."

Finally, Cooper notes, IACC venues are seeing an increase in planners wanting teambuilding options as part of the meeting package, but it's not just about a menu of activities. "We believe a reason for this is the current drive for planners to be more what I call an 'experience creator' rather than a planner. A meeting needs to do more now than deliver content to delegates. It needs to bring people together, help build relationships and foster collaboration."

An 'Exceptional' Vermont Resort Experience

One IACC member venue is family-owned Stoweflake Resort & Conference Center in Stowe, Vermont, a perfect example of a conference center focused squarely on the business

of meetings but within a full-service resort. Stoweflake offers a spa and a host of recreational activities, making it perfect for meetings at which family comes along or one for which attendees tack on relaxation time after business concludes.

Michael Mercer, vice president of business development with Transamerica Affinity Markets as well as president of the Professional Insurance Marketing Association, brought his daughters along to the group's four-day July meeting. They were able to enjoy Stoweflake's leisure amenities — especially the spa — while their dad and his colleagues accomplished their business goals at the conference center.

"The term of president is one year, and we get to choose the location of our two annual conferences," Mercer says. "I specifically chose the Stoweflake because I had stayed there as a guest several times and knew it would be a perfect fit for our organization. Its easy access from the Burlington airport made it very accessible, and the conference center was large enough for the 220 members who attended the event and our exhibitors."

Because Stoweflake has so much to offer, the group stayed almost exclusively on the grounds and used both indoor and outdoor venues. "Our opening cocktail reception was held on the great lawn in the middle of the resort, and the location was perfect for the attendees and their spouses and guests," Mercer says. "We left the resort on two occasions for dinner, but the rest of our meals and refreshments were served at the resort, and the food

and service were outstanding, as expected. The last night we also had our refreshments on the lawn with rides on Stoweflake's hot air balloon, which was a great photo opportunity and a terrific final event for the conference."

Mercer has high praise for the conference center staff. "The staff and IT crew did an exceptional job of meeting all our needs and providing seamless transitions from one speaker to the next and allowing our exhibitors ample time and space to present their services and products."

Business sessions were held each morning from 8:30 to noon and included four or five speakers per session or a panel discussion. "The tech support consisted of PowerPoint (two large screens on stage), lavalier mics, remote clickers to forward slides, a teleprompter, remote mics for questions from the crowd and various lighting schemes," Mercer notes. "We had about 18 exhibitors and they obviously had access to electricity, internet, curtains dividing the exhibit booths, and there was ample space to walk through the exhibit hall. There were snacks and refreshments during the breaks, and lunch was served at noon in the exhibit hall to encourage traffic from the attendees."

The group also enjoyed two of Stowe's restaurants Idle Time and Mi-

"We use The Woodlands Resort & Conference Center because of its staff and facilities. The recent investment into the property makes it one of the premier conference venues in the Texas market."

Laura Hetland, Senior Vice President
American Financial & Automotive Services Inc., The Woodlands, TX

Mercer says Stoweflake's variety of lodging worked well for his group. "The lodgings at the inn are varied and very comfortable. I was fortunate to have one of the houses on the property, which are well appointed and quite large. There are smaller lodges on property and guest rooms in the inn that are also very well furnished and very comfortable. I heard many positives comments on all aspects of the Stoweflake and not one complaint on any of the services or the lodging," he says.

The same holds true for the entire experience. "We were fortunate to have outstanding weather, but we had discussed the possibility of inclement weather, and the space and options available would have been outstanding for our group as well," Mercer says. "Our conference was a huge success and a great deal of the credit goes to Scot Baraw (one of the family owners of Stoweflake and V.P. of

'Premier Conference Venue' in the Texas Piney Woods

The Woodlands is a master-planned community in the Houston, Texas, metro area. It's home to businesses, dining and entertainment venues, a transportation system that includes trolleys as well as cruisers floating along the area's signature waterways and, of course, hotels and a resort.

The Woodlands Resort & Conference Center is an IACC-certified facility that sits near the community's waterways and within the Texas Piney Woods, giving it an away-from-it-all feel though it's just 30 minutes from Houston proper. The resort competed a \$75 million renovation at the end of 2014, which included upgrades to rooms, the addition of a 1,005-foot lazy river, a new high-end steakhouse restaurant and a total revitalization of the resort's 60,000 sf of meeting and function space. There's also a golf course and spa, and miles of biking and walking trails through the Piney Woods, giving attendees plenty to do once business concludes.

In February 2016, 100 attendees gathered at the resort for the annual sales and marketing conference of American Financial & Automotive Services Inc. The company, which helps auto dealers nationwide maximize profits, uses the resort for several of its conferences and meetings during the year. While the company is headquartered in The Woodlands, conferences bring in attendees from across the country.

Laura Hetland, senior vice president with the company, says the area works well for meetings in part because of its easy proximity to the Houston airport and all of the local amenities available.



"I specifically chose the Stoweflake because I had stayed there as a guest several times and knew it would be a perfect fit for our organization."

Michael Mercer, V.P., Business Development
Transamerica Affinity Markets, Baltimore, MD

chael's on the Hill. Although Idle Time is across the street from Stoweflake, conference staff offered to provide shuttle service if the weather was not good. Michael's on the Hill is about 10 minutes away, so the resort provided transportation, which was added to the master bill.

sales) and his exceptional team. This is the second time this group has been to the Stoweflake and I am sure it will not be the last."

It comes as no surprise that at Stoweflake's last IACC inspection, it scored a 99 percent — 345 out of a possible 350 points.



Credit: Luskin Conference Center



Credit: Hyatt Regency

Two new IACC members recently debuted: (above) the UCLA Meyer & Renee Luskin Conference Center opened in August on the UCLA campus; and (right) the Hyatt Regency Aurora-Denver Conference Center opened in March.

But a primary reason is the quality of the resort itself. “We use The Woodlands Resort & Conference Center because of its staff and facilities,” she says. “The recent investment into the property makes it one of the premier conference venues in the Texas market.”

“Our guests utilize the lodging at the resort. The conference/event team always works to make sure our guests can stay onsite. The resort’s staff is very helpful, responsive and friendly, making it a great experience for our guests.”

Hetland says that their meetings here often include the resort’s Complete Meeting Package program. “The package allows our guests to eat at their leisure for breakfast and dinner. The Woodlands Dining Room (one of

several options on the property) provides great buffet options as well as menu selections.

“We also utilize the banquet facilities quite often,” she adds. “The resort’s catering and event planning teams always do a great job. They are attentive to every detail. I find it very impressive that the catering manager who helps plan the event is always there to see it kicked off. In addition, the culinary team always pleases the guests. The food is always served warm, regardless of the number of guests, and we often receive compliments about how tasty the meal is.”

Hetland has no reservations about recommending The Woodlands Resort & Conference Center to other meet-

ing planners. “We have worked with several properties for our events, and this conference center is at the top of the list. From the contracting of the event to the final bill, every person you come in contact with is knowledgeable, helpful and does what’s required with a smile on his or her face. The conference and audio-visual teams are always quick to respond and to assist with changes, needs, etc. In addition, our guests enjoy the amenities offered by the resort and always have positive comments. The Woodlands Resort has always exceeded our expectations.”

New & Noteworthy

There are hundreds of excellent conference centers already in place



Lied Lodge & Conference Center at Arbor Day Farm in Nebraska City, Nebraska, is a model of environmental stewardship from its construction to group programs.



Credits: Lied Lodge & Conference Center

across North America and beyond, but new centers are also in the pipeline, facilities being built from the ground up with the latest in technology and design.

The new **UCLA Meyer & Renee Luskin Conference Center** opened in August on the UCLA campus. Designed with today’s ultimate technology in order to enable productive and inspiring conferences, the Luskin Conference Center is thoroughly modern yet evoking the university’s original Romanesque Revival buildings of 1929. In addition to smart technology throughout the IACC-certified 25,000 sf of meeting areas, public spaces and 254 guest rooms, the center will have a 162-seat restaurant and lounge. In answer to planners’ desire to book sustainable facilities, the Luskin Conference Center is working toward LEED Gold certification.

Debuting this past spring in the Denver metropolitan area is the IACC-certified **Hyatt Regency Aurora-Denver Conference Center**, directly

across from the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus and just 16 miles from Denver International Airport. In addition to more than 31,000 sf of conference and event space and 249 guest rooms, the new Hyatt offers a fitness center, pool, full-service restaurant, complimentary wireless internet, onsite car-rental desk, banquet space for up to 800 and in-room safes large enough to accommodate a laptop.

A distinctive meeting experience that’s integrated with environmental stewardship is front and center at **Lied Lodge & Conference Center at Arbor Day Farm** in Nebraska City, Nebraska. Meetings held in this Adirondack-styled property, constructed with plantation-grown Douglas fir timbers, support the Arbor Day Foundation through educational programs and group activities centering on tree planting and conservation practices. The 160-acre Arbor Day Farm yields produce used in the lodge’s Timber Dining Room, orchards producing 165

different varieties of apples, a hazelnut research field and more. The property subscribes to rigorous green lodging practices such as linen and towel reuse, Green Seal-certified detergents, comprehensive recycling, hybrid vehicles and non-toxic building materials. Even the coffee served is part of the Arbor Day Foundation’s Rain Forest Rescue program.

The Lied Lodge & Conference Center recently completed a \$9 million renovation of its 140 guest rooms, 14,000+ sf of meeting and banquet spaces, and the grand lobby.

There are many reasons to choose a dedicated conference center for your next meeting, not the least of which is that conference centers are likely to be nimble enough to accommodate customized meeting packages and to adapt as trends and meeting requirements change. They’re also focused on one market — small to medium-sized groups — and know exactly how to best service those clients. **I&FMM**



All across Lied Lodge & Conference Center’s 260-acre resort, you’ll find opportunities to engage and inspire. Redefine your next meeting with 14,000 square feet of amenity rich meeting space and fully-updated guest rooms. From world-class indoor spaces to leafy open-air vistas, discover outdoor activities that bring your team together at Arbor Day Farm.





2016 World Class Award Winners

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Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority
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Phoenix, AZ

Atlantis, Paradise Island
Paradise Island, Bahamas

Boca Raton Resort & Club
Boca Raton, FL

The Broadmoor
Colorado Springs, CO

Caesars Palace Las Vegas
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Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center
Nashville, TN

Hilton Anatole
Dallas, TX

Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista
Orlando, FL

Hyatt Regency Chicago
Chicago, IL

Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando
Orlando, FL

M Resort Spa Casino
Las Vegas, NV

Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina
San Diego, CA

MGM Grand Hotel & Casino
Las Vegas, NV

The Mirage
Las Vegas, NV

Omni Nashville Hotel
Nashville, TN

Ponte Vedra Inn & Club
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL

The Resort at Pelican Hill
Newport Coast, CA

Tropicana Las Vegas
Las Vegas, NV

Trump National Doral Miami
Miami, FL

Vdara Hotel & Spa
Las Vegas, NV

The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino
Las Vegas, NV

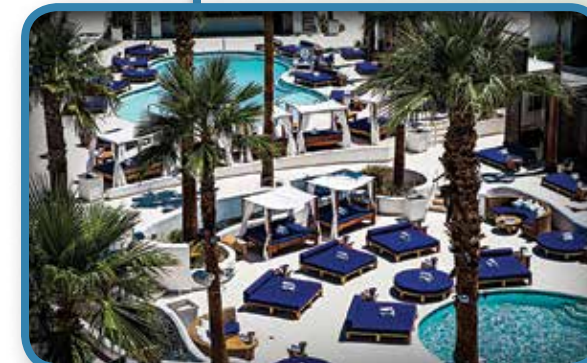
Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel
Lake Buena Vista, FL

The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa
Scottsdale, AZ

Wynn Las Vegas
Las Vegas, NV



M Resort
Spa Casino



Tropicana
Las Vegas



Walt Disney World
Swan and Dolphin Hotel



Wynn
Las Vegas



Long Beach
Convention & Visitors Bureau



New Orleans
Convention & Visitors Bureau



Arizona Biltmore
Resort & Spa



IRIS HIMERT
Executive Vice President

301 East Ocean Boulevard
Suite 1900
Long Beach, CA 90802
562-436-3645
irish@longbeachcvb.org
www.meetinlongbeach.com



Citywide Facts and Features

Guest Rooms: 4,688

Meeting Space: Hotels 219,000+ sf; offsite 500,000+sf

Convention Center FYI: 400,000 total sf; exhibit space, 224,000 sf; Pacific Room, 45,000 sf; Grand Ballroom, 20,456 sf; Promenade, 13,200 sf; Seaside, 6,317 sf; Terrace Theater, 3,000 seats; Center Theater, 800 seats; Long Beach Arena, 13,000 seats.

Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau

Nestled along the Pacific Ocean in the center of Southern California, Long Beach is a water-sport paradise. All of the attractions of Los Angeles and Orange County — downtown LA, Hollywood, Universal Studios and Disneyland — are just minutes from Long Beach's scenic downtown waterfront.

Attractions & Dining

Long Beach features its own world-class attractions: The Queen Mary and the Aquarium of the Pacific, Rainbow Harbor, The Outlet Center at the Pike, Shoreline Village, plus four distinctive museums, two historic ranchos and nearly 12 miles of scenic beachfront, inland waterways and bays.

Long Beach is pedestrian and bicycle-friendly and is ranked as one of the "Most Walkable Neighborhoods in America." Long Beach Transit also offers free Passport shuttle buses throughout the downtown area.

Long Beach boasts a vast world of great food, exotic dining and memorable restaurants. You will find more than 100 quality restaurants within an eight block radius in downtown, serving everything from hot wings to haute cuisine.

Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center

Located in the center of the city's downtown waterfront, the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center features more than 400,000 sf of modern, flexible exhibit and special event space. Within eight blocks surrounding the center, visitors discover attractions, shopping, entertainment, nightlife and

more than 125 quality restaurants serving cuisines from around the world. Well-lighted walkways and promenades provide stunning oceanfront vistas where visitors can enjoy the vibrant blending of big city amenities alongside the casual and welcoming atmosphere of a seaside resort.

A \$40 million modernization of the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center has created a new model for the contemporary convention center of the future. This dynamic repositioning is designed to give guests a warm, stylish and welcoming social experience. With the needs of today's convention attendees in mind, the center's lobbies and hallways have been enhanced to create mini meeting spots and networking pods where attendees can sit, talk and socialize. Free Wi-Fi in these public areas allows attendees to go online to work and connect with their offices.

Hot New Event Venue

The Pacific Room in the Long Beach Arena has become one of Southern California's hottest new meeting and special event venues. With 45,000 sf of floor space and a built-in professional LED stage lighting and sound system, the Pacific Room provides an intimate environment for dinners, concerts and special events for up to 5,500 people, and it is fully customizable to match any planner's imagination.

Getting There Is Easy

Getting to Long Beach has never been easier with service from three major airports. LAX and Orange County Airports are less than 30 minutes away, and Long Beach Airport, which underwent a \$140 million renovation, is 10 minutes from downtown. **I&FMM**



Long Beach
California Fresh, Urban Coast

Imagination realized.



The Pacific Room brings together dazzling light, sound, décor and atmosphere for an infinitely versatile experience. **A turnkey setting** with pre-wired, pre-rigged lighting and sound, and stylish furnishings — all of which is yours to utilize at no charge — **saving over half a million dollars in rental and labor costs.** Experience an atmosphere that invites connection and rocks the wow factor — **there's nothing like it** (on this planet anyway).

800.452.7829 | MeetInLongBeach.com MeetLBC MeetInLongBeach



CARA BANASCH, MBA
Senior Vice President of Business
Development & Strategy

2020 St. Charles Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70130
877-366-7425
cnvsales@neworleanscvb.com
www.neworleanscvb.com



Citywide Facts and Features

Guest Rooms/Suites: 24,185 in Orleans Parish; 38,400 in Metro

Meeting Space: 4 million+ sf including convention center

Convention Center FYI: MCCNO is the sixth largest convention facility in the nation, and consistently ranks in the country's top 10 facilities that hold the most conventions and trade shows annually.

New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau

New Orleans is a one-of-a-kind city with a rich culture nearly 300 years in the making. You will find world-class event spaces, unmatched Southern hospitality, award-winning cuisine and a community committed to successful meetings and events unlike anywhere else in the world.

Meeting Facilities

The Crescent City is home to one of the largest and most technologically advanced convention facilities in the country, the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center (MCCNO). Known for their outstanding service and ability to provide unforgettable, custom experiences for groups of all sizes, MCCNO features 1.1 million sf of contiguous exhibit space, 140 meeting rooms, two ballrooms and a 4,000-seat auditorium. The 60,000-sf Great Hall, a column-free divisible ballroom with a large outdoor pedestrian plaza, interior and exterior balconies, and energy-efficient LED display system, can be customized to meet every event need.

Unique Venues Abound

In addition to MCCNO, unique venues such as Blain Kern's Mardi Gras World, The National World War II Museum and several new and restored theaters, including the Orpheum, Civic and the People's Health New Orleans Jazz Market, provide an ideal backdrop to any event.

Be sure to capitalize on the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau's (NOCVB) newest partnerships with Basin Street Records and Idea

Village, which enable you to enhance attendee experience with memorable, unique, local entertainment and content that will open your mind to our spirit of creativity.

Serenade Your Senses

When the educational sessions have wrapped for the day and trade show hours have ended, attendees can indulge their taste buds in New Orleans' 1,400+ restaurants including the 2016 James Beard Award winner for Best New restaurant, Shaya, and 11 James Beard Award-winning chefs.

Then, serenade their senses with live music seven nights a week, or walk, bike, kayak, jog or hop on a bus to learn about the history and mystery of a nearly 300-year-old city through guided tours. From swamps to cities of the dead, culinary to cocktail, history to haunted, there's sure to be an adventure for everyone.

New Orleans is one of the most walkable cities in the country, and with the majority of our meetings infrastructure located in the downtown area, attendees have easy access to venues, restaurants, attractions and 22,000 hotel rooms in a two-mile radius.

The Birthplace of Jazz

New Orleans is the birthplace of jazz, one of America's oldest and most culturally rich destinations, and the perfect destination for your next meeting. As we like to say: "Let our way of life inspire your way of work." When you meet in New Orleans, your ideas loosen up along with the rest of you.

I&FMM

**Let our
way of life
inspire
your way
of work.**

Let our way of life inspire your way of work.
When you bring your meeting to New Orleans, your ideas loosen up along with the rest of you.

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2400 East Missouri Avenue
Phoenix, AZ 85016
602-954-2527

Fax: 602-954-2571

phxbm-salesadm@waldorfastoria.com
www.arizonabiltmore.com



Facts and Features

Guest Rooms/Suites: 720

Meeting Space: 200,000 sf of indoor and outdoor

Special Services & Amenities:

The resort celebrates its historic and architectural significance with year round offerings. History Tours are available three days a week, and Classic High Tea is served Thursdays through Sundays in the stunning Biltmore Lobby.

The Arizona Biltmore A Waldorf Astoria Resort

The Arizona Biltmore, A Waldorf Astoria Resort has been an Arizona landmark since opening in 1929, when it was crowned the “Jewel of the Desert.” The legendary Grand Dame remains one of the most recognized resorts in the world for its distinctive Frank Lloyd Wright architectural style, luxurious facilities, and storied history as a playground of the rich and famous.

Accommodations

Set on 39 acres at the foot of the Phoenix Mountain Preserve, the legendary resort offers 720 guest accommodations; the 22,000-sf Spa Biltmore, and six restaurants and lounges. The property is continuing to evolve and has invested more than \$35 million into a significant redesign of the majority of its guest rooms and meeting spaces; new state-of-the-art yet tranquil poolside cabanas; reimagined guest communication systems; and a remastered Mystery Room, the Prohibition-era “speakeasy” that is now used as a pop-up bar and event space.

Meeting Facilities

At the Arizona Biltmore, more than 200,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space is supported by a team of event, culinary and banquet service professionals who ensure every event is executed with precision and grace. The Biltmore offers unique historical event spaces such as the Gold Room, the resort’s original main dining room, or the Aztec Room, which served as a venue for movie premieres in the hotel’s early days. The two largest ballrooms, named after the architect and his mentor, both received

complete renovation and technical upgrades in the summer of 2014. The Arizona Biltmore’s outdoor function spaces include manicured lawns, lush gardens, sparkling fountains and ambient terraces for gatherings of all sizes and occasions.

Dining Options

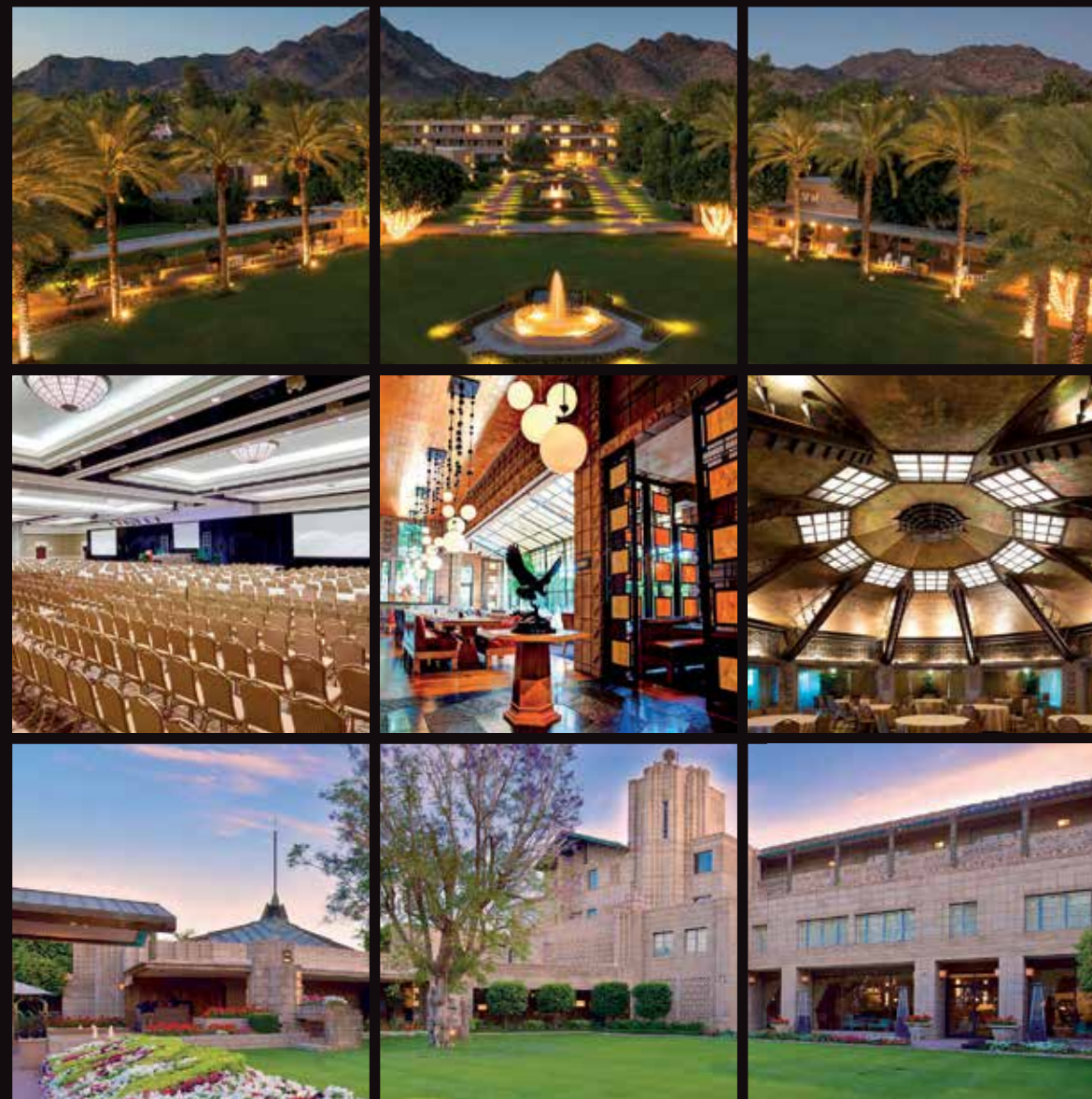
The award-winning culinary team at the historic Arizona Biltmore, led by Executive Chef Stephen Strickland, will create authentic moments in an inspirational environment. Frank & Albert’s artfully marries local cuisine with legendary architecture inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright and Albert Chase McArthur. Wright’s at the Biltmore is the signature dining venue offering fresh cuisine that reflects an innovative culinary style characterized by fresh, local ingredients that are hearty, yet simply elegant.

Amenities and Spa

With its 92-foot waterslide, eight pools, six tennis courts, two 18-hole golf courses and various hiking trails, the Biltmore offers recreation and exploration. Alternately, Spa Biltmore strives to inspire wellness with its restorative and hydrating treatments. This 22,000-sf European-style facility was designed to influence health and well-being through the power of touch and authentic engagement.

The Frank Lloyd Wright design-inspired showpiece continues to roll out the renovations with the fall 2016 unveiling of a reimagined historic main building boasting a fresh look that spans the lobby, social spaces and 90 original guest rooms, infusing more of today’s luxe and tech-forward touches while retaining the spirit of the resort’s distinctive design. **I&FMM**

A SUCCESSFUL MEETING STARTS WITH THE RIGHT SETTING.



Distinguished by its impeccable architectural landscape and prestigious gardens, the Arizona Biltmore, A Waldorf Astoria Resort is a scenic desert retreat nestled at the foot of the Phoenix Mountain Preserve. With a rich history of opulence and charm, the Biltmore has continued to provide its clientele with unparalleled service since its 1929 opening celebration. Over 200,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space, including three distinct ballrooms, is supported by a team of event, culinary and banquet service professionals that ensure every event is executed with precision and grace.

To book your next meeting, call 602.955.6600 or visit ArizonaBiltmore.com

“We found the staff at the Biltmore to be incredibly responsive to our needs, from the planning stages to the execution of our event. We enjoyed the beautiful property, were impressed by the quality of the food and beverage service and would recommend the property to anyone who wants to create a top notch atmosphere for a special group.”

— Jim Dwyer, Meeting Planner, Lockton Companies



A WALDORF ASTORIA RESORT

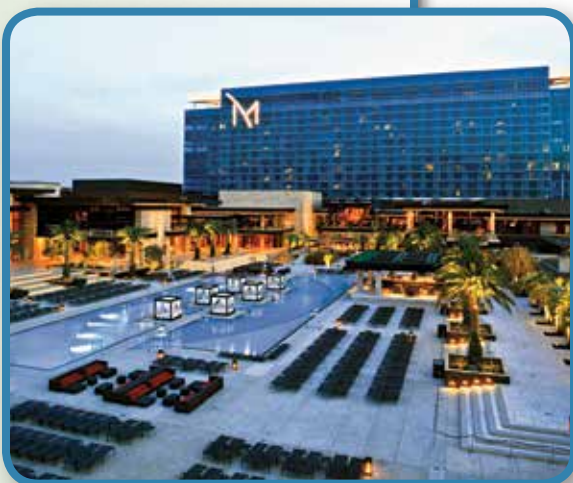


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GABE KUTI
Vice President of Sales

12300 Las Vegas Boulevard South
Henderson, NV 89044
866-551-1540
Fax: 702-797-3100
gkuti@themresort.com
www.theMresort.com



Facts and Features

Guest Rooms: 390

Meeting Space: More than 92,000 sf

Special Services & Amenities: Affordable luxury; Forbes Four Star accommodations, amenities and service; business-to-business environment; multiple opportunities for branding; in-house production team; no resort fees.

M Resort Spa Casino

Driven by personalized service, progressive architecture and luxurious offerings and amenities, the M Resort Spa Casino offers an unrivaled Las Vegas experience. The luxury boutique resort and casino is situated on South Las Vegas Boulevard, 400 feet higher in elevation than other resorts on the Strip, offering expansive views from 390 guest rooms and suites. Well-appointed guest rooms showcase floor-to-ceiling windows and rich amenities such as imported Italian marble and comfortable beds with pillow-top mattresses and luxurious linens. M Resort's 92,000-sf casino offers a variety of gaming entertainment including table games, slot and video poker machines, a high limit area and a Race & Sports Book operated by CG Technology. Hotel amenities also include Spa Mio, a world-class spa, salon and barber, and two sprawling pools, including DayDream, a high-energy pool club for guests 21 and over.

Meeting Facilities

For a truly unforgettable meeting planning experience, the Forbes Four Star award-winning property features more than 92,000 sf of open and dynamic meeting space along with multiple reception areas. For large-scale events, the 25,000-sf M Pavilion with its capacity of 2,300 attendees is an ideal venue for expositions, high-energy concerts and catered events, while the 100,000-sf Villaggio Del Sole is an outdoor pool and entertainment piazza showcasing a built-in stage, separate bar and restaurant, and can accommodate up to 6,000 guests. Additional meeting space comprises

the 17,000-sf Milan ballroom, a boardroom, separate breakout rooms and a convenient business center.

Spectacular Venues

Three spectacular venues include LUX, VUE and Signature Room, each offering unique interiors with scenic outdoor terraces for unforgettable special events.

Located on the 16th floor, the 7,200-sf LUX offers a customizable function space with stunning views of the Las Vegas Strip, perfect for hosting dinners and intimate receptions. VUE is another multifaceted space that can accommodate up to 240 dinner guests with indoor and outdoor terrace seating, and convenient escalator and elevator access to the spa/convention level.

Located right on the casino floor, Signature Room features 1,800 sf of space, ideal for events and gatherings of up to 70 guests.

Step outside the meeting and conference area and planners have the convenience of utilizing any of the resort's seven restaurants and five bars as alternative event space for unique gatherings. Anthony's Prime Steak & Seafood, Anthony's Gourmet Burgers & Brews and Jayde Fuzion each offer impressive views of the Las Vegas Strip and alfresco dining on multilevel terraces that surround the sparkling pools.

The 5,000-sf Hostile Grape wine cellar, bar and tasting room is another vibrant setting featuring more than 400 bottles and 160 wines by the glass using the unique Enomatic wine dispensing system.

For seamless event planning, M Resort's in-house production team offers services to optimize any event, which include strategic consultation through large-scale productions.

I&FMM

After a Productive Day, Enjoy the Fruits of Your Labor.



The M Resort service team is there from start to finish and creatively delivers the maximum experience on time and on budget, but there are more reasons why you'll choose this Forbes Four Star resort.

After the mixing, mingling, negotiating and hand-shaking, celebrate your day in a dynamic environment that works hard for you by day and lets you unwind by night.



Here are just a few reasons you'll be confident that M Resort is the right place to host your meeting AND impress your guests!

- More than 92,000 sf of dynamic and flexible spaces including a 25,000 sf pavilion
- Built with environmental sustainability
- Built-in business to business atmosphere
- Exceptionally appointed guest rooms
- Innovative dining choices
- Forbes Four Star Resort, Spa & Conference Facilities
- Non-exclusive in house audio visual offerings
- Shuttle transportation
- No resort fees



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GAVIN MEALIFFE
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3801 Las Vegas Boulevard South
Las Vegas, NV 89109
888-810-8767 or
702-739-2448
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www.TropLVMeetings.com



Facts and Features

Guest Rooms/Suites: 1,470

Meeting Space: 100,000 sf

Special Services & Amenities:
Conveniently located on the Las Vegas Strip minutes from the world's best entertainment, dozens of shopping centers and hundreds of dining options.

Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton

Prepare to be surprised. Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton is surprising meeting planners and their attendees after a \$200 million transformation. With a unique South Beach vibe and a convenient location just minutes from Las Vegas' McCarran International Airport, major convention centers and top entertainment stadiums, the resort provides a luxurious yet affordable experience on the Las Vegas Strip.

Each of the Tropicana Las Vegas' 1,470 residential-style guest rooms come with luxurious amenities such as Wi-Fi and 300-thread-count linens. For guests attending a meeting or convention, the Club Tower provides direct access to the conference space, making for the ultimate in convenience, and for those looking for a location close to our gaming floor the Paradise Tower is the perfect choice. Guests also can opt to stay in the Bungalows, which come with balconies; casino adjacent rooms in the Paradise Tower; or the Club Tower rooms near the conference center. For VIPs, the Villas offer an entirely new level of luxury. While the Pool Villas evoke oceanfront

beach houses, the 20th-floor Sky Villas feel like Miami Beach penthouses with their floor-to-ceiling views of the Las Vegas Strip.

Meeting Facilities

After a recent expansion, the conference center now offers more than 100,000 sf of flexible meeting space that can break down into 38 breakout rooms. The Trinidad Pavilion and Meeting Rooms provide 55,000 sf of meeting

and exhibition space with ground-level access ideal for large general sessions, exhibitions and other types of events; and the award-winning pool and gardens and the Tropicana Theater offer opulent spaces for upscale events. Other new venues for group functions include the Havana Room — an elite space with a magnificent chandelier, dark-wood dance floor, custom seating and premium audio-visual technology. And with its two pools, waterfalls, palm trees and cabanas, Sky Beach Club is ideal for outdoor events.

Entertainment and Dining

As for entertainment, the transformed 1,200-seat Tropicana Theater is home to Cherry Boom Boom, a new exciting revue set to open in September 2016. Other options include the world-famous Laugh Factory comedy club and live nightly entertainment in the Tropicana Lounge. As for dining, three on-property restaurants include Bacio Italian Cuisine, which was named "Top 10 New Restaurants in Las Vegas" by *Gayot.com*, and of course the award-winning Biscayne Steak Sea and Wine, offering perfectly prepared steaks, chops and seafood. Also, Biscayne offers an impressive wine selection and is a consistent Award of Excellence winner from *Wine Spectator* magazine. Food Network Celebrity Chef Robert Irvine will heat things up in the kitchen in 2017 with a brand new restaurant. The resort's 50,000-sf casino includes an assortment of slots and table games, and a race and sports book.

The Tropicana Las Vegas is the ideal venue to host any number of corporate meetings and events. An all-new, onsite FedEx Business Center is conveniently located next to the meeting space.

I&FMM

COMFORT

Luxurious, yet affordable guestrooms and suites.

CONVENIENCE

100,000 square feet of meeting space adjacent to the Club Tower.

CONNECTED

Powerful connections for planners and attendees with Hilton HHonors.

Tropicana
LAS VEGAS
A DOUBLETREE BY HILTON

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

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



GINO MARASCO
Director of Sales and Marketing

1500 Epcot Resorts Boulevard
Lake Buena Vista, Florida 32830
407-934-4290 or 800-524-4939
Fax: 407-934-4880
meetings@swandolphin.com
www.swandolphinmeetings.com



Facts and Features

Guest Rooms/Suites: 2,267

Meeting Space: More than 329,000 sf

Special Services & Amenities: Onsite DMC; Balinese-inspired Mandara Spa; 17 restaurants and lounges; within walking distance to Epcot and Disney's Hollywood Studios; special Disney benefits offered.

Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin is nestled in an exceptional location, among spectacular surroundings, where excellence in service and creativity combine to deliver a world-class meeting destination.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin was designed by world-renowned architect Michael Graves as a one-of-a-kind meeting facility where art and architecture combine to inspire creativity and collaboration. The resort offers more than 329,000 sf of meeting space and 2,267 guest rooms and suites.

Meetings

When it comes to the business of meetings, the award-winning team is highly regarded for their ability to exceed expectations. Successful meetings are created from environments and moments that blend to support content, resulting in greater ROI with your meeting objectives. It is in this meeting experience that the resort is truly distinctive by design.

Meetings are supported by an award-winning banquet, catering and culinary team that delivers customized solutions with a passion for each client. For the adventurous, nothing beats a private event in the parks to add that magical touch while supporting your meeting theme.

There are many reasons to choose the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin, and high among them are the exclusive benefits available to support your programming. The resort brings together resources to make planning both easy and memorable. From the Disney Institute learning and development op-

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Accommodations

The resort offers rooms and suites with the finest amenities in comfort and convenience with newly designed guest rooms featuring stylish furniture, chrome fixtures and all of the latest technology. Additional power outlets provide travelers more options for use of personal electronics. The guest rooms blend a beautiful combination of whites, blues and grays creating a tasteful ambience that is appealing. Accommodations also feature the Westin Heavenly Bed and Heavenly Bath.

Amenities & Dining

The resort is situated in the heart of the Walt Disney World Resort, within footsteps of Epcot, Disney's Hollywood Studios and the shopping, restaurants and nightlife of Disney's Boardwalk.

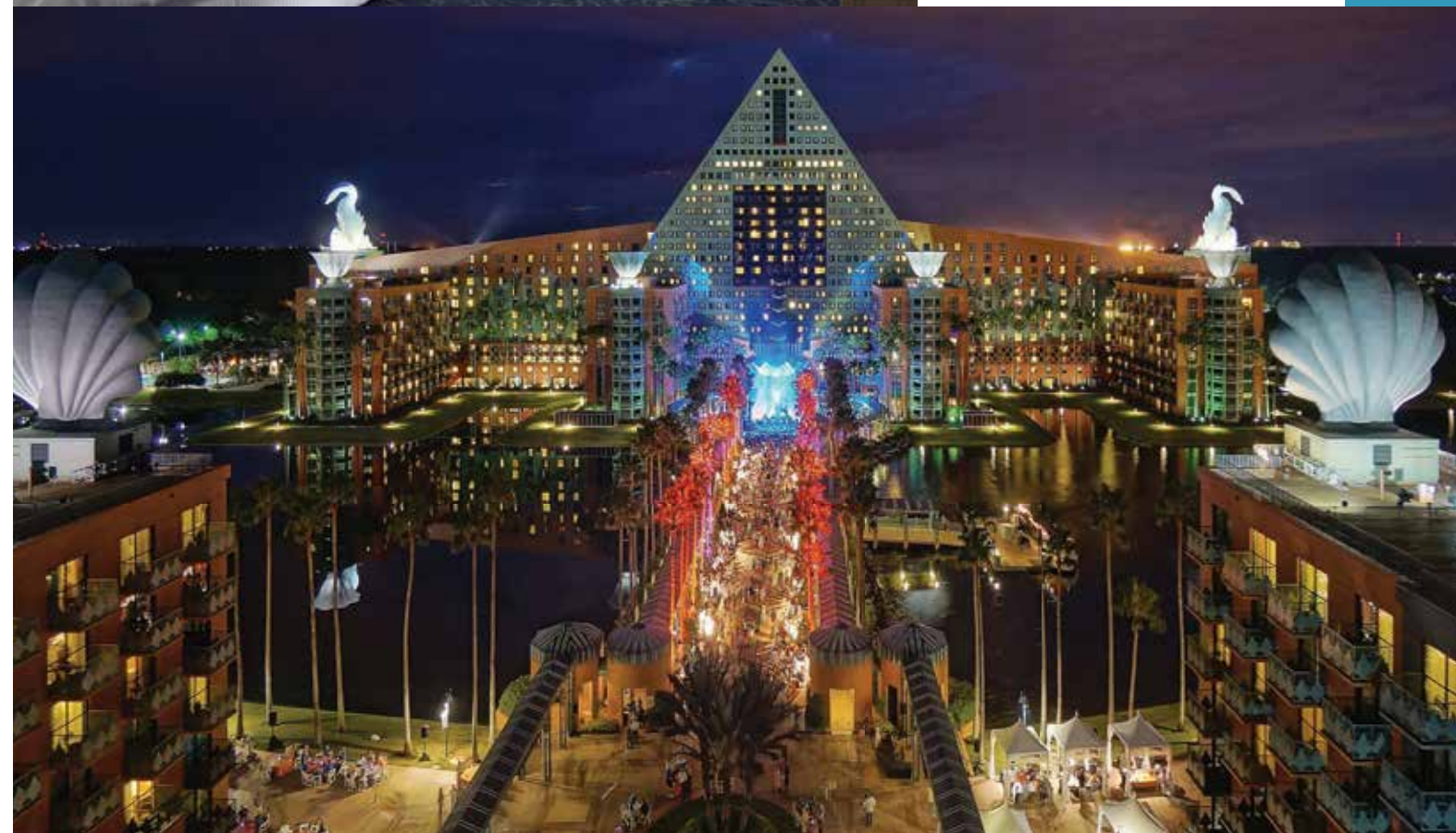
In addition to advance tee times at nearby Disney championship golf courses, guests can take advantage of Extra Magic Hours and experience select Disney attractions before or after the public as well as FastPass+ service to reserve select Disney attractions, entertainment and character greetings in advance. The resort boasts five pools, two health clubs, tennis courts and the luxurious Balinese-inspired Mandara Spa. Complimentary transportation is provided throughout the resort.

Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin is recognized as a top foodie destination in Orlando. Guests will discover 17 world-class restaurants and lounges, including the famed Todd English's bluezoo, Il Mulino New York Trattoria, Shula's Steak House and more. **IFMM**



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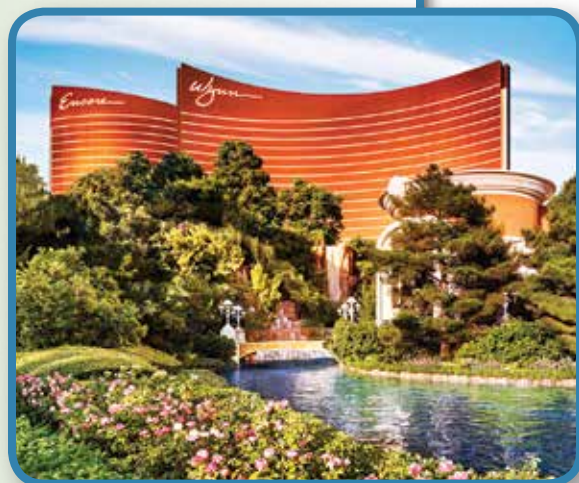
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STEVE BLANNER
Vice President of Sales

3131 Las Vegas Boulevard South
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Facts and Features

Guest Rooms/Suites: 2,716 at Wynn and 2,034 at Encore

Meeting Space: 260,000 sf

Special Services & Amenities: We offer high-tech support, a full-service business center, high-speed internet access, spacious sunlit meeting spaces, state-of-the-art audio-visual capabilities and two technically supported stages.

Wynn Las Vegas and Encore

Why have Wynn Las Vegas and Encore captured more *Forbes Travel Guide* Five Star Awards than any other independent hotel company in the world? An exceptional attention to detail is key, from the thoughtful amenities guests will discover in their rooms to that moment when chef Mark LoRusso stops by a diner's table at Costa di Mare to discuss his new tasting menu that offers a curated selection of the best in Italian seafood. Indeed, "new" is a word guests will find in regular use at Wynn and Encore, where Steve Wynn famously loves to tweak details in his unending quest for providing an unparalleled experience in luxury hospitality.

Imaginative Meeting Spaces

That personal care likewise extends to conference planning, of course. Wynn and his team have crafted 260,000 sf of imaginative meeting spaces, each embellished with sophisticated design and guest-friendly touches sure to delight even the most seasoned attendee.

Able to accommodate groups of any size, many meeting spaces are outfitted with dramatic, floor-to-ceiling windows and open-air terraces offering breathtaking views of the expansive pools of Wynn and Encore or the oasis-like serenity of the resort grounds. Wynn's in-house Production Services team is ready to assist with tech needs, from state-of-the-art Wi-Fi and audio-visual capabilities, to customized equipment and effects to maximize any presentation. Meanwhile, Wynn's outstanding Catering

Services team is devoted to designing personalized menus that combine restaurant-quality cuisine with guest-friendly attention to gluten-free, vegan or other dietary needs.

The Best of the Best

Once the day's business is complete, attendees are presented with a wealth of options that define Wynn and Encore's "best of the best" lifestyle. A wide range of dining options can be found in both cuisine and ambience, from luscious cuts of beef at SW Steakhouse to modern Asian fare at Andrea's at Encore. Wynn's Restaurant Services team also can assist with arranging group reservations and designing private parties in spaces that make the most of truly unforgettable evenings.

The resort's newest offerings are Jardin and Intrigue Nightclub. Perfect for a breakfast meeting, breezy lunch or sophisticated dinner, Jardin offers modern takes on classic American fare in a

Constantly Evolving and Always Excellent

garden-like environment that overlooks the Encore resort pools. Combining the thrill of a pulsating dance floor with an elegant ambience and the drama of a towering waterfall, Intrigue is Wynn's seductive new nightlife experience. And like the resort's other world-class nightlife venues — XS, Surrender and Encore Beach Club — Intrigue may be reserved for private events that are sure to leave lasting memories with all attendees. These are among the latest in Wynn Las Vegas and Encore's never-ending pursuit — not only of perfection, but also of inspiring that smile on each guest's face. **I&FMM**

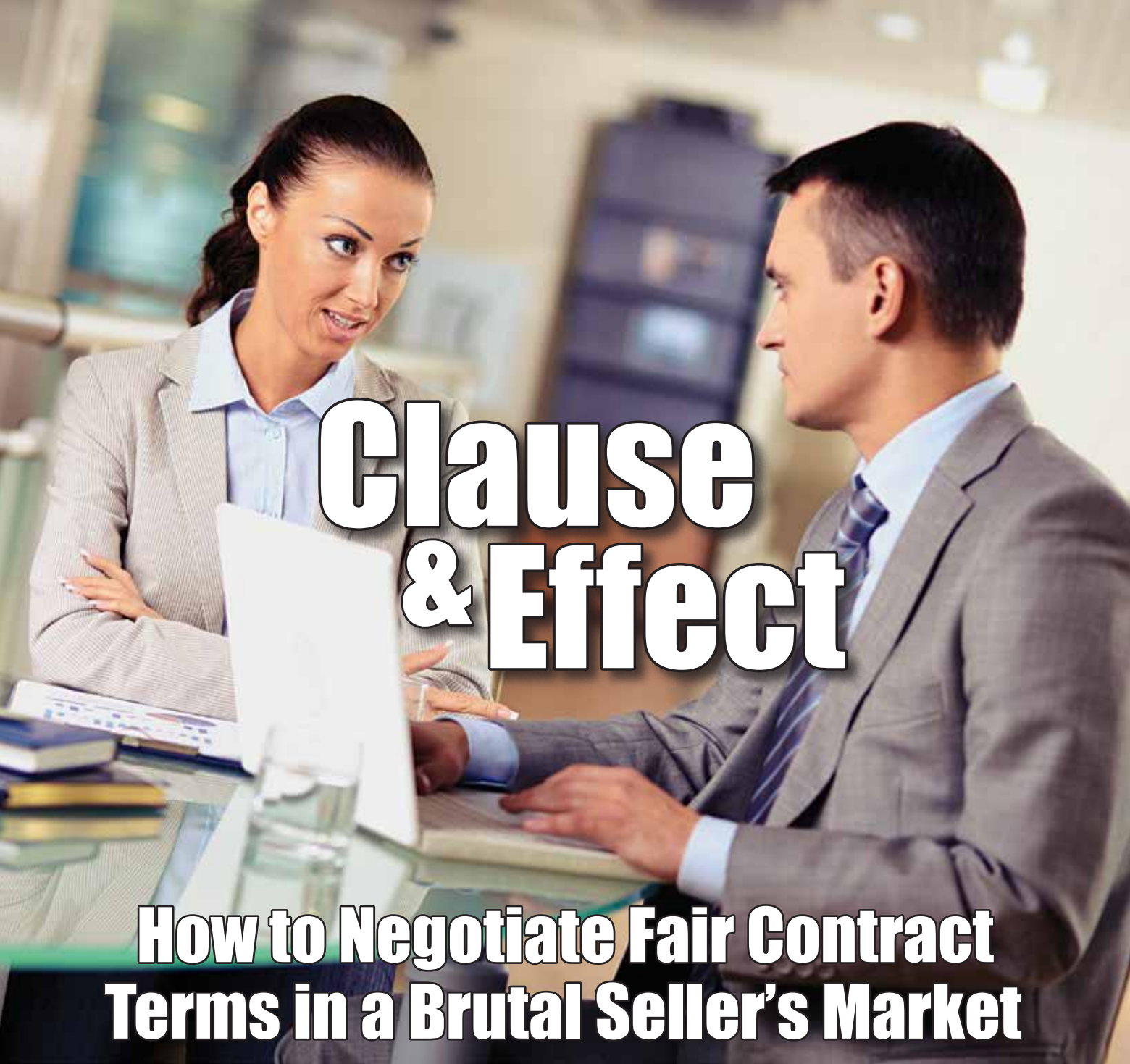


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Clause & Effect

How to Negotiate Fair Contract Terms in a Brutal Seller's Market

By Patrick Simms

Hotel contract negotiation naturally becomes a hot topic during a seller's market, and planners are currently facing the challenge of obtaining their preferred terms from in-demand hotels.

"Strong demand has surged due to a robust economy for most sectors," observes Donna Wikstrand, CMP, vice president at Conference Hotels Unlimited. "Globally, a movement up to

middle class from poverty in developing countries meant an expanding traveling public on the transient side." That influx from transients often makes hoteliers less willing to bend

on perhaps the most basic item of negotiation, the room rate. As Cindy Wheaton, CMP, manager, corporate meetings and events for Grange Insurance, notes, "It's very hard to ne-

gotiate a room rate now because they are selling on their transient business."

The high demand combines with a low supply that appears to have its roots in the recession of 2008–2009. "During the economic downturn, new hotel projects were scrapped and the lack of new hotel builds in the pipeline meant that demand would eventually exceed supply," in Wikstrand's assessment. Now that the industry is in the midst of that situation, planners must be astute in both negotiation and in adjusting the time and place of their meeting (to the extent possible) such that negotiating leverage is obtained.

One classic strategy is to focus on properties in second-tier cities, particularly outside of peak seasons. But the overall seller's market is so strong that many second-tier cities are seeing a demand that rivals their first-tier counterparts. "First-tier cities are enjoying the strongest seller's market I have witnessed in my career, and operating in it is brutal at times," Wikstrand observes.

"And certain cities are emerging as first-tier cities that not that long ago would have been considered second-tier cities," she says. "Those cities include Austin and Nashville, to name a couple, which have become extremely popular, and it can be very difficult to place a meeting there that does not match their formula for success. That could mean a program that peaks on a Tuesday night, which is the busiest night in most cities; or a program that requires a disproportionate amount of meeting space compared to the number of required guest rooms; or a program with a light food and beverage budget."

Concessions

More often in the current market, a planner's list of ideal concessions will not match the hotelier's "formula for success." Nancy Ryan, manager, corporate meetings and events, in Aon Service Corporation's global spend

management division, has found hoteliers offering less favorable concessions during high seasons. For example, "one per 40 comp rooms used to be the norm, even one per 35 or one per 30 sometimes. But now I'm seeing one per 50, one per 45," she says.

Wheaton has observed the one-per-50 trend as well, but that should not prevent a planner from requesting a better ratio: "My theory is that the answer is always no if you don't ask." She always asks for waived meeting room rental fees, for example, although that concession is sometimes not granted.

Given the rising costs

risk. "I personally feel that the most important aspect of the deal is the hotel contract terms and conditions. These can come back to bite much more than the impact of a few more comp rooms, suite upgrades or free easels," Wikstrand maintains.

And the terms and conditions are also being influenced by market conditions. "The seller's market is impacting not only pricing and concessions offered, but contract terms, which is disconcerting," she adds. "Everyone understands the principle of supply and demand and its impact on pricing and the overall deal. But when it comes to contract terms, fair is fair no matter what marketplace we are



Donna Wikstrand, CMP, Vice President
Conference Hotels Unlimited, Hull, MA

"The seller's market is impacting not only pricing and concessions offered, but contract terms, which is disconcerting. ...Hotels are less willing to share risk."

of audio-visual and Wi-Fi, negotiating for discounts on those charges is also wise. "In today's market, AV pricing for equipment and Wi-Fi in meeting spaces is on average way too high for our event budgets," says Kim Sky, CMP, manager, strategic corporate meetings and events with CNA Financial Corporation. "We want the hotel on board and leveraging their power with their onsite AV vendor prior to contract sign-off. If you wait to negotiate AV discounts after you sign the contract, then there is no incentive for the hotel to go to bat for you. It is unfortunate that we have to ask for the hotel's help on securing discounts on AV upfront, but onsite providers have the upper hand after the hotel contract is signed. We would rather not have to decide between feeding our guests or using an LCD projector."

While room rates and concessions offered (or not offered) clearly impact the bottom line, contract terms such as attrition, cancellation and force majeure policies are at least equally critical in that they manage financial

in. Contracts expose both parties to a degree of risk; that is unavoidable. But this risk should be shared equally and fairly between both parties. Hotels are less willing to share risk in this seller's market."

Attrition

One risk that many groups contend with is attrition, and fortunately the vast majority of hotels in this market are still agreeing to an attrition clause, typically for 20 percent. However, many hotels are not agreeing to the calculation of attrition that most benefits the group — namely, on a cumulative (not per night) basis, including pre and post non-contracted room nights, and reducing damages by rooms resold (the "resell clause").

"We're seeing that some hotels are doing attrition on a nightly basis vs. across the meeting. That can play havoc on a meeting. And some hotels are not including pre and post nights," Ryan observes. "But there's always a solution. You meet with the internal client and weigh the risks and rewards

of contracting less rooms at the hotel where attrition fees could mount in the thousands of dollars, and possibly considering rooms-only blocks at some surrounding hotels as well.”

Nonetheless, the trend toward the nightly calculation of attrition, which prevents overperformance on one night from compensating for under-

“Sometimes you bring up the group’s history, sometimes you don’t. It depends on that (rep) and how much they want to build a relationship with you.”

Cindy Wheaton, CMP, Manager, Corporate Meetings & Events
Grange Insurance, Columbus, OH

performance on another night, “is very troubling,” says Wikstrand. “It results in much higher attrition fees for groups, and I push back on this every time it is presented.”

In addition, she has found some hotels unwilling to calculate F&B attrition penalties based on lost profit instead of lost revenues. She explains the rationale for lost-profit calculation: “Let’s say your group ends up being fewer people. You provide lower guarantees to the hotel. They go out and purchase, prepare and serve the food for the lower numbers. They never had to incur the costs of the food that you never ordered. That is why I feel that food and beverage revenue minimum short-falls should be charged at 40 percent to represent lost profit. Some hotels push back on this while other brands include it in their standard contracts.”

On the rooms side, she adds, “I am not averse to attrition clauses based on revenue and not just on profit, due to the ancillary revenues that hotels lose out on with an empty room.”

Just as attrition is penalized, overperformance in rooms pickup should arguably be “rewarded” by extending the group rate to the new rooms. “We always request that if the contracted room block is exceeded prior to the

cutoff date, the hotel will continue to offer the group rate as long as rooms or group rooms are left to sell in the hotel, at least to a certain percentage,” says Wikstrand. “Revenue managers tend to push back on that, but it is possible to negotiate a fair clause to address this.”



Cancellation

Cancellation fees are increasing in many cases, plausibly another symptom of the seller’s market. The penalty is “up to 100 percent when you get closer (to the meeting dates) and I understand that. But when you’re looking at a year out they tend to be going higher,” Wheaton notes.

While the hotelier may not budge on the percentages of the sliding scale, planners may be successful in negotiating favorable payment plans for the penalty. Along with a rebooking clause, Sky asks hotels “to consider billing us for the cancellation fee on a monthly basis. This

is better for our cash flow, and then our credit built up with that hotel can be used toward that rebooking. It also works out for



“What I’m finding recently is that there are a lot of hidden fees, so the careful reading of a contract becomes even more important.”

Nancy Ryan, Manager, Corporate Meetings and Events
Aon Service Corporation, Chicago, IL

the hotel as they still collect monthly payments for the cancelled program so at the end of the rebooking term, if we did not book another event, the hotel already has all their money.”

The timing of the payment of dam-

ages can be a “bone of contention” in Wikstrand’s experience. “We request that any damages be paid after the dates have passed and a resell reconciliation has been conducted by the hotel to identify rooms and space resold,” she explains. “Many hotels want cancellation damages at the time of cancellation. But it seems fair to wait because no goods and services have been rendered, and in most cases, the hotel would not have been paid until the meeting’s conclusion anyway.”

As far as the rebooking clause (which relieves a group from paying damages if it rebooks the meeting within a certain time frame), Wikstrand understands the rationale for some hotels to refuse it; they aren’t simply throwing their weight around in this seller’s market. “If a group cancels their existing dates, that space has essentially ‘rotted on the shelf.’ And though the group might return in the future by a rebooking clause, the hotel has still lost the opportunity to sell the existing space, if the group canceled very close to the dates,” she explains.

Force Majeure

The content of this clause must be sensitive to the threats of today’s world — including terrorism and communicable diseases — that will compromise or prevent attendance. “I

have now updated our force majeure to include situations as a result of the Zika virus,” says Sky. “We host many programs in the Florida area and are in touch with the local officials on how they are managing this situation,

but we do need to include it into our agreements to cover ourselves.”

Of course, only contingencies that actually affect performance on the group’s part should make the force majeure clause take effect, and the contract language must make that clear. “Acts of terrorism are now a standard part of a force majeure clause, but getting much more specific is important; for example, an act of terrorism on the West Coast may not excuse performance of a meeting in Boston,” Wikstrand notes.

Miscellaneous Clauses

For insurance and financial groups, a particularly important clause tends to be the noncompete, which restricts competing companies from booking meetings at the same time and hotel. Wikstrand advises that getting the hotelier to accept this clause may be challenging in some situations. “Those clauses can be tough for hotels, and understandably so. A small 20-room group requiring a noncompete clause might find it difficult to get approval from a hotel who has 480 other rooms to sell. In this strong market, hotels are reluctant to limit their opportunities to sell to other groups,” she says.

The change of ownership clause, which allows the group to cancel penalty-free if the hotel comes under new ownership, also may meet a little resistance. “We have tried the change in ownership clause, and they kind of met us in the middle with that,” Wheaton relates. “We can only get out of (the contract) if there’s a decline in the status of the hotel. So they have to maintain their status (for example, remain a four-star hotel). Indeed, the change of ownership might be better (for the guest experience),” she says.

Fees and Surcharges

The high demand in today’s travel industry will encourage many hote-

liers to add on fees and surcharges without the reservation they might observe in a buyer’s market. “What I’m finding recently is that there are a lot of hidden fees, so the careful reading of a contract becomes even more important,” says Ryan.

“For example, there have been instances where on the very last page of a menu it will say that if you’re planning an outside event you will be charged a setup fee as noted in the group’s schedule of events, even if there is inclement weather and the hotel does not advise having the event outside. That is so easy to miss, and it could run a couple thousand dollars.”

Locating these “fine print” items can be more difficult than necessary. “I have found (stipulations) that are included in hotel banquet menus that I feel should be in the actual contract,” says Ryan. “Another example: When you’re re-



Kim Sky, CMP, Manager, Strategic Corporate Meetings & Events
CNA, Chicago, IL

“We want the hotel on board and leveraging their power with their onsite AV vendor prior to contract sign-off.”

viewing a 20-page contract, there will be a small sentence that will direct the reader to a website to review additional terms and conditions. That’s very easy to miss, but those terms are very critical to a meeting. And I think that rather than directing someone to a website, the terms should be an actual attachment.”

“A hotspot with a lot of us is the resort fee,” Wheaton adds, and unfortunately a planner may not be able to negotiate it away in the current climate. But Wheaton has a certain preference that aids her budgeting: “I always say, please don’t put that resort fee in the contract, just put it in the room rate. Because if say I need my room rate to be \$250 and they say, we got it for \$249 but you

have a \$30 resort fee, I really didn’t get the rate that I needed.”

Relationships Remain Key

Long-term relationships with hotel sales reps are invaluable in a seller’s market, but planners don’t always have the advantage of dealing with familiar individuals who will go to bat for them on contract terms. One may end up dealing with a new rep and the relationship must begin on square one. “Sometimes you bring up the group’s history (with the individual hotel or brand), sometimes you don’t,” says Wheaton. “It depends on that person and how much they want to build a relationship with you. I can spot right off the bat when I meet (a rep) whether I’m going to click with them.”

Rather than finalizing the contract with a rep who is being rather inflexible, a planner might try reaching out to a higher-level individual in the hotel company. “When I reach an impasse in a negotiation with a hotel salesper-

son, I typically request an ‘audience with the Queen’ to address my concerns,” Wikstrand relates. “I find that once I am able to speak with those empowered to make a decision, and I have the opportunity to present my rationales for what I am requesting, we are almost always able to get to where we need to be.

“It is always preferable to negotiate contract terms with hoteliers who are fully knowledgeable and understanding of the underlying principles of their contracts and are able to provide the logic and reason behind them,” she continues. “One of my pet peeves is when a hotel answers a ‘why do you’ question I have with ‘It is hotel policy.’” Be it a seller’s market or buyer’s market, “We need more rationale!” **I&FMM**

Happily Ever Laughter

Inject Humor to Enliven the Meeting and Ignite Motivation

By Derek Reveron



Magician Taylor Hughes is a popular guest speaker, entertainer and emcee for corporate organizations.

Credit: cleancomedians.com

Todd Zint attributes the success of his meeting to the customized entertainment and comedy performed by The Water Coolers.



Although hiring comedians to perform at corporate meetings isn't exactly commonplace, many planners find humor in various forms to be a potent motivational tool.

More planners turned to comedy as the economy improved, says comedian Adam Christing, president, *CleanComedians.com*, a Los Angeles-based event company that books comedians for corporate meetings. "There is the stereotype that financial and banking people are boring, but we find that is not the case. Planners who contact us often say they really need something to engage attendees," says Christing, who also performs at corporate meetings.

Humor, presented the right way, offers more than just mindless entertainment. Comedy makes attendees more receptive to information, reduces tension, boosts enthusiasm and generates goodwill among executives and employees, according to planners and comedians.

Most of all, meeting planners can use comedy to re-

inforce meeting goals by blending humor with key themes and topics. Laughter also reinforces a company's personal connection with attendees, builds attendance and creates a memorable experience. In addition, comedy helps attendees — from executives to rank-and-file employees — learn how to laugh at themselves.

Some planners turn to comedy simply for a change of pace. That was the case for a three-day sales meeting in Orlando for 300 salespeople for an insurance company. It was the first time that a comedian performed at the meeting. "We usually have speakers but we wanted something different," says Todd Zint, CMP, CMM, the owner and chief experience officer of Austin, Texas-based Ignite Event Solutions LLC. "One thing about insurance and financial meetings — although the content is important, it's not the most exciting. When you inject comedy, it enlivens things."

Zint hired the Water Coolers, a professional comedy troupe specializing in the workplace, after seeing them perform at a Financial & Insurance Conference Planners (FICP) conference. Water Coolers performers include Broadway and off-Broadway performers, professional comedy writers and entertainers.

Prior to the meeting, the Water Coolers staff learned all they could about the insurance company's meeting and its attendees. "They had phone conversations with the president of the division," says Zint. "They asked several questions: 'What are some successes?' 'Are there new products involved?' 'Are there key new initiatives underway?' We also talked about points to communicate to attendees. They came up with scripts and ran them by us before they performed."

Water Coolers performed four short vignettes between meal courses during a dinner that had the audience in stitches. Attendees laughed because it was something they could identify with either as part

of the business or personal experience, says Zint.

The meeting was a success. "Attendees appreciated that we thought outside the box and brought something unique to the program they hadn't seen before," says Zint. "Everyone in the room laughed at some point because at least one of the vignettes appealed to them."

Zint recently created Ignite Event Solutions, which delivers high-touch, high-impact events that align with one's organizational



Todd Zint, Owner, Chief Experience Officer Ignite Event Solutions LLC Austin, TX

vision, goals and culture to create a true sensory experience. As the chief experience officer, Zint's new company provides an array of services, including full-service event management, project-based initiatives and consultative management.

The veteran meeting planner offers the following advice to planners considering selling comedy to their executives for the first time. "It has to be the right fit and right time for the right group and its meeting goals," says Zint. "I positioned the Water Coolers as a good alternative to a regular dinner with a speaker or music. I pitched it as a group that offers light, enjoyable humor that makes everybody comfortable. That was our goal."

Comedy Works

According to Bob Korljan, CPA, president of Eaton-Cambridge Inc., a Scottsdale, Arizona, investment ad-

visory firm, comedy works. He has used comedy many times at some of the three or four financial education events his company holds annually.

In October, Eaton-Cambridge partnered with another firm to hold a tax, investment and real estate education event for more than 100 clients at a Scottsdale area country club, where a comedian performed and set the tone for the event. "He set people up to listen better," says Korljan, who planned the meeting. "He was

the master of ceremonies and introduced speak-

ers. He made jokes and worked the room, taking away some of the seriousness people feel as they prepare to hear speakers on serious topics."

In April, Korljan used a different approach at another meeting, offering humor solely as entertainment at a "Tax Relief Party" for 60 clients at the Squaw Peak

Inn in Scottsdale. "We decided to make it just a fun event for our clients," says Korljan. "We had no agenda other than offering comedy as entertainment. The performer weaved comedy with magic and engaged the audience with card tricks. Two people would come up to the stage, pick out a card, and somehow it would be in the shirt pocket of the person."

Another financial firm, Menefee, California-based Royal American Financial Advisors, has used comedy at more than eight meetings, says Scott Buchanan, managing member, who planned the event.

In August, a comedian/magician performed at Royal American's investor coaching event for about 40 attendees at the company's conference center. "We spoke with the comedian before the meeting to discuss our theme 'The Illusions of Investing,' and our goal of offering advice on financial markets and disciplined investing," he explains. The come-

"One thing about insurance and financial meetings — although the content is important, it's not the most exciting. When you inject comedy, it enlivens things."



Adam Christing

“The higher the authority figure, like a vice president or sales manager, the bigger the laughs we can get.”

Tailoring the Performance

Humor is most effective when planners provide comedians with information they can use to tailor a performance to attendees.

“Humor is best when it is customized around the key people, phrases and lingo of each group,” says comedian Adam Christing, president, *CleanComedians.com*, a Los Angeles-based event company that books comedians for corporate meetings. “For example, poking fun at a company’s addiction to acronyms can be funny,” says Christing, who performs at meetings and arranges bookings for about 50 other entertainers, comedians and speakers.

Christing and his comedians tailor their comedy with a pre-meeting questionnaire. “It has been very effective,” he says. “It helps us extract information from clients about people in the audience we can poke fun at. We generally find that the higher the authority figure, like a vice president or sales manager, the bigger the laughs we can get.”

Following are the items included on what Christing calls a “customized comedy form.”

- Does your company use certain “internal” slogans? Example: “Make the calls, make the money.”
- Tell us about your president/CEO/or top V.P. Does she/he repeat certain phrases? Does she/he have certain hobbies, habits or characteristics that would be fun (not hurtful) to joke about?
- Are there frustrations your attendees experience that we can have fun with? Examples: government regulations, competitors cutting prices, slow copy machines, you name it!

- Does your group have one “personality plus” man or woman who is known by everybody and who can take some fun during a “roasting?” Please describe this person.
- Tell us about key buzz words, special company language and acronyms most often used in your organization.
- Please share anything else about your employees, customers, staff or company culture that would be ideal for your entertainer to mention and incorporate into the presentation.
- Detail the messages the company wants communicated. What topics or issues — either within the company or its industry — are off limits.
- Is there anything you do not want mentioned during your event?
- Describe any concerns and challenges from previous meetings.

Christing and his comedians don’t use all of the information provided. “That would be impossible,” he says. “Usually the comedian does 30 minutes of a regular set while weaving in 10 minutes of customized material.”

A final tip from Christing: “The humor needs to be uplifting, not mean, sexual or racially based. You want to appeal to as many people as possible.” — DR



Comedian Adam Christing plays an entertaining game show host at a corporate meeting.

dian/magician connected the meeting’s theme with magic tricks that involved playing cards and dollar bills. “He joked that some investments and the way they are marketed can give a confusing or false impression about their potential for financial return,” says Buchanan. “He had peo-

ple laughing as they learned, which brought credibility to us.”

Professional Performers Get the Best Results

Planners find that they get the best results from comedy by using performers who engage attendees.

Comedians agree. “We tend to book comedians and performers who are interactive and engage the audience,” says Christing. “When the person is doing interactive standup comedy, magic or improvisation, it’s hard for people to be bored because they are participating. We try

to make the show about attendees, not the performers, because it makes great memories for them.”

The key to engaging attendees through comedy is customizing it. “In a comedy club setting, comedians just do their sets,” says Christing. “But when we bring comedy to an organization, we have to remember that we are part of a bigger picture of an awards program, training or sales meeting. We have to tune into what the meeting is trying to accomplish.”

One of the keys to customizing a comedy routine is the effective use of self-deprecating humor. Comedians can draw big guffaws when working onstage with executives who can laugh at their own quirks, habits and mannerisms. Such comedy humanizes top executives and connects them to employees. Christing cautions, however, never to embarrass guests and says, “Comedians don’t have to be filthy to be funny.”

Christing and his “clean” comedians engage attendees by zeroing in on a variety of individual and company topics. “It’s things like their habits, dress or golf game,” he says. “We also include company culture. One financial firm was addicted to acronyms with one for everything. Another was promised new computers long ago that hadn’t been delivered. A company had cubicles with funny shapes. Making fun of personalized stuff like that can rock them with laughter.”

Some comedy performed at meetings can be big productions. Last year, a large financial firm set up a stage for a ‘Tonight Show’-like format at its national sales meeting for about 400 attendees. “We helped them build a set like the ‘Tonight Show,’” says Christing. “A comedian was the host, and we also had Taylor Hughes, a magician/comedian, warm up the audience. We had funny bits written for each VIP who came onstage to be interviewed.”

One executive, who is short, sat on phone books. One had a psychic routine and played the harmonica.



These attendees are having fun and are very engaged — the goal of planners everywhere, says Adam Christing, president of cleancomedians.com.

Another said he had no entertainment, and announced that he would outsource it to the magician/comedian. “The executive walked over to pay the entertainer to perform, and it brought the house down. The company loved seeing its people as stars,” says Christing.

Comedy also can be effective for international meetings as long as most attendees understand English, and the performer engages people from various backgrounds.

Advice from meeting and incen-

tive planners and comedians includes these points to ponder when providing comedic entertainment.

- Don’t hire a comedian without being familiar with the performer’s style.
- Communicate with comedians before they perform so that they can tailor the humor to support the goal of meeting.
- Comedy may be most effective for educational and training meetings because attendees expect only serious content.

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- Beware of the meeting where attendees appeared bored and uncommunicative right from the start. That makes it difficult to capture attendees' full

attention during the remainder of the meeting. However, matching the right comedy act to a group can spark laughter, engage attendees, help them

absorb key themes and make for a memorable experience, all of which can help boost the meeting's return on investment. **I&FMM**



The Water Coolers are professional actors who sing, dance and make corporate audiences laugh.

Credit: The Water Coolers

The Amazing Power of Laughter

The Water Coolers, based in NYC, produces award-winning songs and sketch comedy about work for after-dinner entertainment, pop-up performances throughout the day, or a big kickoff. They customize their comedy, which speaks directly to the audience in their language, makes them laugh hard, inspires them and reinforces key messages.

Sally Allen, the producer of The Water Coolers, relates why laughter is so important to a meeting or event experience, sharing legendary sales guru and author Jeffrey Gitomer's explanation: "At the end of humor is the height of listening." Allen continues, "All the goals we want to accomplish at events — to connect people, break down barriers, get perspective, find new ideas — none of that can be done without opening your participants up with what's coming next. Laughter is like a switch that changes the energy in a room and creates that openness."

Allen, who witnesses this transformation often as the producer of The Water Coolers, also used to be an association conference planner, which is how she really learned the truth of it. She says, "Our primary goal was to create value for the attendees, but beyond that we wanted to connect with them and build their connection to each other. That connection strengthened the organization in important ways. We often used comedy to build that connection." Allen recalls standing in back of the ballroom watching it "literally roll across the room. It's got an amazing power."

Also, she says "we find those topics and challenges people share, and make people laugh about them really hard. Before you know it, total strangers are looking at someone across the table and they're laughing together at something they both understand." Then you know, you got 'em.

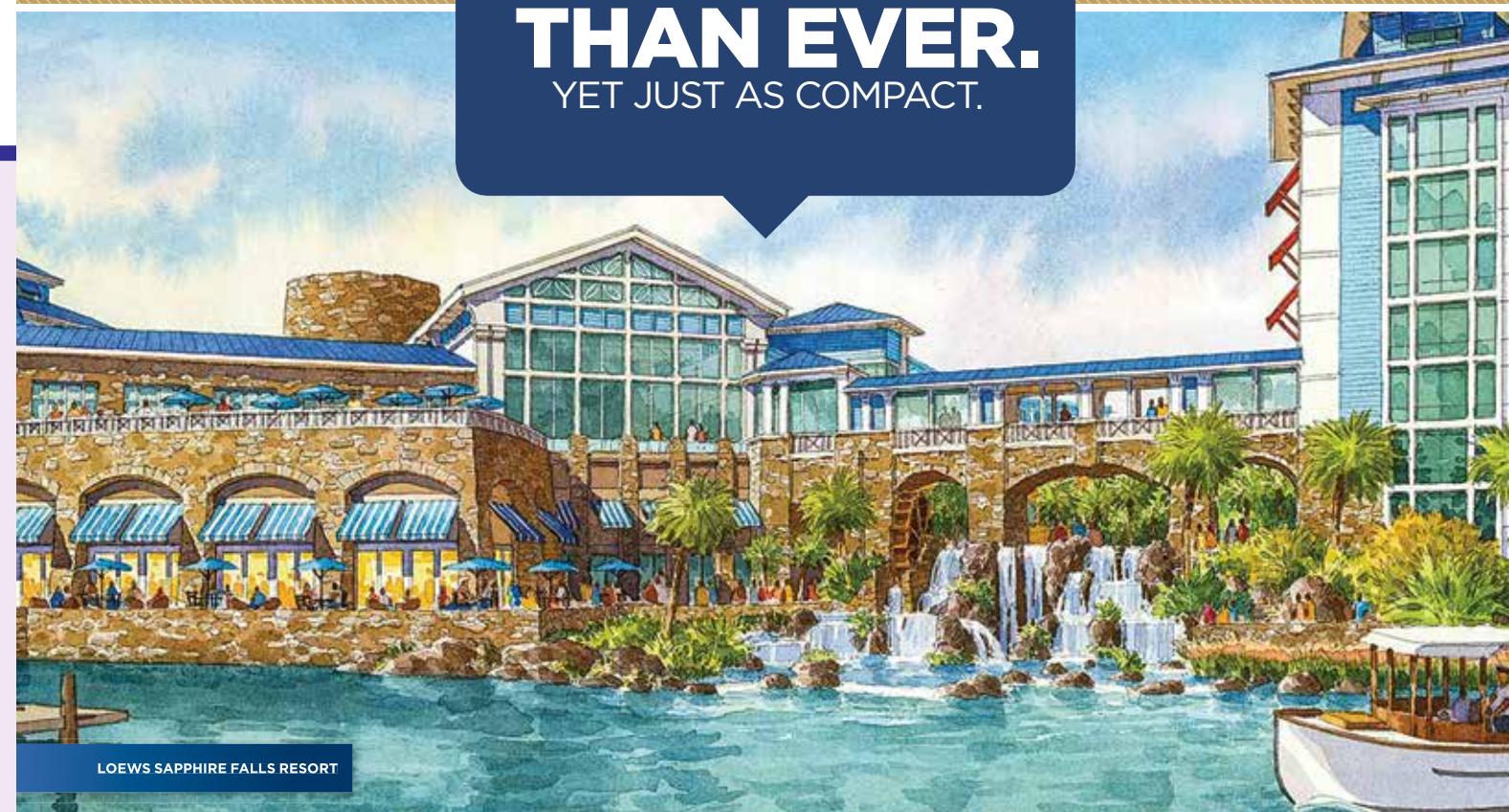
And you also know the event planner is that much closer to accomplishing everything he or she set out to do.

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— DR

"Laughter is like a switch that changes the energy in a room and creates that openness."

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Las Vegas

The King of Destination Reinvention

By Derek Reveron

Las Vegas is the king of destination reinvention. The city traditionally known as a gaming destination is aggressively transforming itself into a powerful draw for all types of visitors, groups and families by developing a variety of new entertainment, retail, resort and dining options.

According to Chris Meyer, vice president of global business sales at the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA), “New experiences of all kinds drive additional visits for leisure travelers. Las Vegas is known for continually reinventing itself to provide what our visitors want

to make their trip memorable. Whether it’s dining, shopping, nightlife or outdoor activities, Las Vegas is continually adding amenities to attract all demographics.”

Much of the reinvention centers on a total of more than \$7 billion in current and proposed development projects. The developments will help Las Vegas build on its record performance in 2015, when the destination hosted 42.3 million visitors, a 2.9 percent increase from 2014.

Convention and meeting attendance fueled the growth, according to the LVCVA-commissioned Economic

Impact Study by Applied Analysis. Las Vegas, which boasts 11 million sf of meeting space, attracted about 22,000 meetings, conventions and trade shows in 2015 and has ranked as the No. 1 trade show destination in North America for more than two decades.

Meeting at the Mirage

One of the groups that chose Las Vegas for a two-day meeting this year is a financial firm that plans to bring about 700 corporate staff, franchise owners and vendors to The Mirage Hotel & Casino this fall. The meeting has been held in Las Vegas previously,

but this event will be the first meeting at The Mirage.

According to Allison Piedmont, project manager at New York, New York-based First (formerly First Protocol), The Mirage’s Event Center is a major reason why the financial firm selected the property. The center offers 90,000 sf of pillarless space divisible into three 30,000-sf sections, one of which can further divide into three rooms of 6,500 to 10,000 sf. Other spaces include three ballrooms of different sizes and a boardroom.

Piedmont enthusiastically praises the center. “It is well designed,” she

The world-renowned Caesars Palace Las Vegas recently celebrated its golden anniversary with a weekend of exciting events highlighted by fireworks.

says. “The center can be broken up into multiple spaces to accommodate our general session with about 900 people and six breakouts as well. We were able to take over most of the meeting space whereas in a convention center this group might be a small fish in a large pond.”

The various sizes and configurations of the center’s breakout rooms were a big draw. “We weren’t stuck to meeting in theater or classroom setups because the room can’t accommodate anything else,” says Piedmont. “Normally, we set our general session in a theater. This year we have the option to set it in crescent rounds because we have the space to be more creative in breakouts. Little things like that make a meeting better.”

The financial group also was seeking meeting space that could accommodate a new general session format. “This year we will have one wide screen instead of screens on the left and right with the stage in the middle,” says Piedmont. “We are able to do that because of the space of the ballroom and it will enhance the meeting.”

Setup Convenience

In addition, the center offers easy access for meeting setups. “One of the walls of the center looks like a regular ballroom door, but it’s really a garage door,” Piedmont explains. “It opens so that a truck can back up to the ballroom. It doesn’t get any easier than that when loading and unloading. They also gave us early access to the ballroom to set up everything, and have been flexible with us as we finalize plans.”

After choosing The Mirage, Piedmont discovered that the resort was an understanding partner and flexible in dealing with every aspect of planning. “I’ve had great communication with my sales-

person from the beginning,” she says. “She is easily reachable and willing to talk on the phone instead of emailing to go back and forth on contract negotiations and concessions.”

One key issue has been guest room pickup and attrition. “Guest room pickups have been a little slower than I would have liked,” Piedmont says. “But I was able to call my salesperson and talk about our options. We were able to come up with solutions that worked for the hotel and the group. It makes planning more of a pleasure when you work with someone that makes you feel like an equal partner without worrying just about protecting the hotel.”

The Mirage also was flexible with guest room rates. According to Piedmont, “They gave us a very competitive room rate. We presented them with the rate that we usually receive, and they were able to meet that. They also offered concessions in food and beverage as well as AV discounts.”

Top Service for Small Meetings

While Las Vegas has always had a reputation for rolling out the red carpet for large meetings, the destination also has developed a knack for giving small meetings the royal treatment.

Earlier this year, a financial firm held a three-day, 15-member board

“Las Vegas is known for continually reinventing itself. Whether it’s

dining, shopping, nightlife or outdoor activities, Las Vegas is continually adding amenities to attract all demographics.”



Chris Meyer
Vice President of Global Business Sales
Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority
Las Vegas, NV

meeting at the Excalibur Hotel and Casino on The Strip. It was the group's second meeting in Las Vegas and its first at Excalibur.

The planner for the meeting at the Excalibur says that the service exceeded expectations. For a dinner in a private dining room, Excalibur provided two staffers dedicated for the small group. "When we asked for privacy they gave it to us, but seemed to knock on the door just when we needed something," says the planner. "This was a meal with a set menu and time for use of the room, but we went beyond the time frame, and there were never any questions asked. I felt like we received five-star service without paying for it."

Top service extended beyond the dinner by a staff that anticipated their needs. "The AV and technology people were available just across the hall if we needed help," says the planner. "But we didn't have to go to them because they constantly came to us to cordially check and see what we needed. That was outstanding."

The financial firm's planner also was impressed by the Excalibur's small touches. For example, "They put together some nicely themed snack breaks," he says. "One was called a movie break with popcorn and other movie-related snacks. Another was called a chocolate break with a chocolate bar. We enjoyed that."

A key to the popularity of Las Vegas among planners is the destination's increasing diversity of offsite entertainment, activity and restaurant options. That's a big reason why a large financial company holds one of its meetings in Las Vegas every other year.

This year, the financial company will hold a four-day meeting in December at the Aria Resort & Casino for 1,200 executives of the firm's various teams such as tax advisory and audit.

The group will experience a range of Las Vegas venues. "A lot of participants have never been to Las Vegas before," says Patty Kindness, national sales manager, AlliedPRA Las Vegas. "We have been searching for venues



Participants in the Las Vegas Revealed 2016 Reverse Sales event look over a car at Exotics Racing at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway — ideal for engaging attendees.

that are unique to the destination that they probably wouldn't experience on their own."

Choosing Offsite Venues

The venues include Top Golf, a spacious entertainment venue with several high-tech driving ranges, luxurious lounges, drinks and games. "It's a full buyout," says Kindness. "They made a decision about it within 24 hours after our presentation, which is unusual in this industry. What's great about it is that you don't have to be a golfer to enjoy it. They are doing food and beverage and entertainment."

Kindness also is considering options for a final-night gala celebration. "We might keep it onsite at Aria, maybe poolside," she says. "We are also looking at offsite options. But 1,200 people is a fairly large number so it limits the number of options we can present. We are also potentially looking at Linq Promenade. That is another interactive venue with a bowling alley, concert venue, restaurant, etc. Another option is the Las Vegas Motor Speedway, where we are able to engage the guests in different ridealongs and entertainment."

The goal in selecting offsite options is to balance the group's desire to experience Las Vegas while at the same time maximizing meeting atten-

dance. "A lot of our clients, especially the big corporate conglomerates with seasoned planners, have come to realize that attendance is more about trying to engage their guests as much as possible," says Kindness. "By sponsoring these events, they give guests a chance to experience the destination while maintaining their audience."

New and Improved

Monte Carlo Resort and Casino will undergo a \$450 million transformation that will provide two different hotel experiences — Park MGM, a new luxury property, as well as a Las Vegas version of Sydell's NoMad Hotel.

Each of the two properties will feature redesigned and renovated guest rooms as well as unique food and beverage experiences. These will include the award-winning NoMad restaurant and Eataly's Italian marketplace with cafés, restaurants and to-go counters featuring products from sustainable Italian and local providers.

The two new hotels are the final projects in MGM Resorts' redesign of the central Las Vegas Strip neighborhood that started in 2009 with the construction of City Center and includes the recent introduction of T-Mobile Arena and The Park, an outdoor dining and entertainment district.

Mandalay Bay Resort and Casi-

no Convention Center has opened its 70,000-sf Oceanside Ballroom, marking the completion of the facility's \$70 million expansion. The project includes 350,000 sf of new exhibit space, a 20,000-sf foyer and underground parking.

Mandalay Bay also finished the final phase of its remodeling of more than 3,000 guests and suites. This last phase concludes a \$100 million remodeling that began in 2015. The redesigned rooms include three new color combinations, glass desks, modern seating, task lighting and easy bedside recharging.

Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas plans to add about 18,000 sf of pillarless meeting and convention space to the artist ballroom as well as 2,000 sf of prefunction space by winter 2016.

The Hard Rock's plans also include contiguous meeting and event venues; a business center; exterior signage along Paradise Road; and 5,000 sf of storage and office space. Hard Rock Las Vegas also provides 16 breakout rooms ranging from 450 sf to 850 sf. When the project is completed, Hard Rock Hotel will offer about 110,000 sf of meeting and convention space.

Wynn Expansions

Steve Wynn is proposing to build a new entertainment destination — tentatively called Wynn Paradise Park — based on a recreational lake concept. The development, subject to approval by the company's board of directors, would include a 38-acre lagoon with a white sand beach and boardwalk; 260,000 sf of meeting space with unobstructed views of the waterfront; and a 1,000-room hotel tower. Plans also call for a small casino and several dining and nightlife options. The project would be built on 130 acres currently home to Wynn Golf Club.

Another Wynn development, **Wynn Plaza**, will feature 80,000 sf of luxury retail space that adds to existing luxury retail space at Wynn Las Vegas and Encore, and is expected to attract shoppers from far and wide.

Wynn Las Vegas and Encore offer a combined 260,000 sf of meeting space in many configurations for any size meeting or convention. Groups

can enjoy many amenities, including Steve Wynn's ShowStoppers, a music spectacular showcasing 66 singers, costumed dancers and a full orchestra offering a variety of songs and dances at the Encore Theater.

The **Tropicana Las Vegas** opened the Sky Beach Club featuring interactive experiences such as live music acts, music spun by a DJ and celebrity hosts. The venue showcases two luxury pools, a hot tub, two main bars and a large pool deck lined with lounge chairs, palm trees and tropical foliage.

The opening of the Sky Beach Club follows a \$200 million transformation that included 1,469 updated guest rooms and suites, the 55,000-sf Trinidad at Tropicana Las Vegas, and a new conference facility with more than 100,000 sf of meeting and exhibition space. The new space also offers a 25,000-sf ballroom divisible into 38 breakout rooms.

Caesars Entertainment is upgrading more than 4,800 hotel rooms



"Normally, we set our general session in a theater. This year we have the

option to set it in crescent rounds because we have the space to be more creative in breakouts. Little things like that make a meeting better."

Allison Piedmont
Project Manager
FIRST
New York, NY

at four of its Las Vegas resorts. The projects include transforming the original tower at Caesars Palace to create the Julius Tower and refurbishment of the Augustus Tower, Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino, Paris Las Vegas and Harrah's Las Vegas also will undergo room upgrades.

In other Caesars developments, **The Linq Hotel & Casino, Caesars Palace and Flamingo Las Vegas** premiered a new integrated self check-in program that includes text, email, web and mobile apps in addition to new check-in kiosks. Guests can use the ki-



A rendering of a meeting room at Aria Resort & Casino, which is adding 200,000 sf of space to its convention center, set for completion by February 2018.

“A lot of our clients, especially the big corporate conglomerates with seasoned planners, have come to realize that attendance is more about trying to engage their guests as much as possible.”

Patty Kindness
National Sales Manager
AlliedPRA Las Vegas
Las Vegas, NV



osks to process payment information and verify identifications. The kiosks provide a printed key if the room is ready, or an alert to return when the room is ready. Other Caesars resorts will soon use the system.

Aria Resort & Casino is adding 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space on four levels to its LEED Gold-certified convention center. The \$154 million project, set for completion by February 2018, includes indoor/open-air spaces and a glass-enclosed venue with views of T-Mobile Arena and The Park. The expansion will add 500,000 sf to Aria's existing meeting space.

The rooftop pool at the downtown Las Vegas **Plaza Hotel & Casino** has completed a multimillion-dollar renovation that includes new chaise lounge furnishings, a 12-person hot tub, wet deck and refurbished outdoor recreation space. The pool deck is about 70,000 sf and is one of the largest in Las Vegas.

Other Venue Expansions

Plans to expand and renovate the **Las Vegas Convention Center** (LVCC) moved ahead after the Southern Nevada Tourism Infrastructure Committee supported a funding proposal for the project. The proposal would also create a seven-member panel to oversee the recommended \$1.4 billion development. The LVCVA

has said it needs to expand convention facilities to meet demand for additional trade show space.

According to Meyer, “We need to move forward with our expansion and renovation of the Las Vegas Convention Center to provide the opportunity for our existing shows to grow and to have the space to attract new shows as well. The LVCC needs to update the facility to be on par with the world-class technology and service experienced by attendees staying at our destination resorts. We need to add space, technology, restaurants and other elements demanded by our building clients.”

Las Vegas Sands Corp. and **The Madison Square Garden Company** are spearheading the development of a 400,000-sf music, entertainment and event venue. Developers tout the facility as the world's largest venue designed specifically for music and entertainment. The structure features state-of-the-art technology and a unique seating design offering front-of-the-stage views for all 17,500 seats.

New Dining Options

The Linq Promenade, Caesars Entertainment's outdoor shopping, dining and entertainment district on the Las Vegas Strip, has opened several new restaurants and retail stores. The eight restaurants and retailers include In-N-Out Burger, Gordon Ramsay Fish & Chips, Canter's Deli, Virgil's Real BBQ, Amorino, Basin White, Purple Zebra and C&E Studio Tony Vegas.

The **Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas** will feature a new steakhouse concept run by the Morton family, which operates Morton's the Steakhouses. Brothers Michael Morton and David Morton plan to open a new 7,000-sf steakhouse at the resort in 2017.

The property also opened Nevada's first Goose Island Pub, operated by Goose Island Beer Company, a craft brewer. Guests can enjoy eight

of the company's craft beers on tap, bottles of Bourbon County and a range of wines, liquors and food. The Hard Rock Hotel also introduced its Breather Pool Ultra Lounge, a new nightlife concept.

Tropicana Las Vegas will be home to the first restaurant on The Strip run by celebrity chef Robert Irvine, host of Food Network's “Restaurant: Impossible.” The restaurant will debut on Tropicana's casino floor in 2017.

The **MGM Grand** will premiere the Japanese restaurant Morimoto in the fall of 2016. Japanese chef Masaharu Morimoto, star of Food Network's “Iron Chef America,” will feature dining options that include sushi cuisine and unique cocktails designed just for the restaurant.

Wynn Las Vegas introduced its latest dining concept, SW Veranda, an outdoor terrace above SW Steakhouse with views of the hotel's classic water feature, Lake of Dreams. The restaurant, ideal for pre-show gatherings and late evening nightcaps, features a wide selection of small plates and appetizers.

The **Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas** is opening the world-famous Japanese restaurant Zuma in late 2016. Chef Rainer Becker co-founded and created Zuma, which features contemporary Japanese cuisine and award-winning cocktails in a sophisticated informal environment. The menu is designed to be shared and offers dishes from the main kitchen, a robata grill and sushi counter.

Whether it's restaurants, entertainment venues or additional meeting and convention space, Las Vegas is determined to continue doing everything possible to attract even more first-time groups as well as repeat groups because they bolster meeting as well as leisure business.

According to Meyer, “Meeting and conventions are often the first experience travelers have with Las Vegas, and many of those visitors return for a leisure trip after their business experience here, so the continuous trade show calendar is important.” **IE&FMM**

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Melissa Robinson was appointed group sales manager at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort in Orlando, Florida. She was sales and catering manager at Hollywood Beach Marriott in Hollywood, Florida.

The Omni Homestead Resort in Hot Springs, Virginia, has named **Alex Gregory** as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing for Royal Palms Resort and Spa in Phoenix, and at Wild Dunes Resort on the Isle of Palms, South Carolina. **Chris Long** was named di-



GREGORY

rector of sales, with a focus on the incentive and financial/insurance meeting industries. He was director of Midwest sales for Kiawah Island Golf Resort in Charleston, South Carolina.

Shan Coleman was named sales and marketing director for Colonial Williamsburg's hospitality division. He was area director of sales and marketing at Interstate Hotels & Resorts.

The Omni Grove Park Inn in Asheville, North Carolina, has named **Christopher Levine** as director of sales. He was di-



LONG



BEEGAL

rector of sales and marketing at the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa and Marina in Cambridge, Maryland.

Lauren Beegal was named V.P. business development at United Incentives Inc. in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She previously worked in event operations and sales development for DMCs.

Christine Lawson was named senior vice president of the Loews Hotels Sales Organization. She was senior vice president of sales and catering for Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants. **I&FMM**



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