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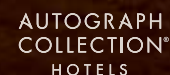
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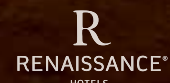
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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2016

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Credit: Choose Chicago

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Chicago's Soldier Field.

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Credit: Universal Orlando Resort

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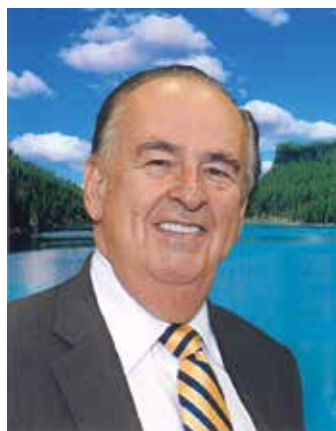
Increasingly Sophisticated Inside and Outside the Theme Parks
By Sara Churchville

A private street party at Universal Studios.

Publisher's Message

When You Come to a Fork in the Road...

...Take it. This was the sage advice from the legendary Yoga Berra. Berra, the iconic major league baseball catcher for the world-famous New York Yankees who died last year, kept sports fans and sports writers happy with his amazing "Yogisms." Remember these? "Nobody goes there anymore, it's too crowded" and "90 percent of baseball is mental, and the other half is physical."



After a bruising presidential election season, and a new administration gearing up for 2017, many organizations find themselves at a fork in the road, and are now in a "wait and see" holding pattern.

For example, in Outlook 2017 on page 12, Todd Zint, CMP, CMM, founder of Ignite Event Solutions, describes the quandry facing insurance and financial firms as they "evaluate the full scope and implications of the DOL's Fiduciary Ruling." Moreover, the recent injunction granted by U.S. District Court Judge Amos Mazzant, which enjoined the Department of Labor from implementing and enforcing the Overtime Final Rule on

December 1, 2016, also adds to more uncertainty.

Savvy professional planners and executives will continue to move forward and figure out the most effective way to manage the "fork in the road" by learning, sharing and networking with their peers and the experts at meetings and events such as those sponsored by Financial and Insurance Conference Planners. FICP hosts five events each year to provide opportunities for meetings and events professionals to learn and develop skills to leverage their positive impact and value in their companies and beyond. The 2016 FICP Annual Conference recently wrapped up in Nashville with record-breaking attendance. To learn more, see page 10 for "FICP Rocks Nashville," page 8 for great photos from the highly successful event, and visit www.ficpnet.com for additional information.

There's no fork in the road when it comes to Orlando, however, as all roads lead to Orlando — Cvent ranked Orlando the No. 1 meeting and convention destination in the nation. Visit Orlando, under the leadership of President and CEO George Aguel, recorded more than 66 million visitors in 2015 — a new record for the U.S. travel industry. What this means for planners is many more high-end choices in a destination that's increasingly sophisticated both inside and outside the theme parks. And don't worry, even if it is crowded, everybody still goes there!

Harvey Grotsky

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Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club Reopens Championship Course



New golf course at The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club in Naples, Florida.

NAPLES, FL — The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club in Southwest Florida has completed the renovation — almost reinvention — of its championship golf course. The redesign of the AAA Four Diamond beachfront resort's course was done with input from golf icon and acclaimed course designer Jack Nicklaus in collaboration with noted course architect John Sanford. The course is now open and fully operational. The new par-71 course features five tees, ranging from 4,800 yards to more than 6,900 yards. The course, which is open to the public, has been redesigned to challenge the best players but also be enjoyable for all golfers. In addition to the new course, the resort has added a 300-yard practice and teaching range and has new golf carts with GPS tracking systems to aid golfers with yardages on each hole, thus helping pace of play. This major \$9 million project follows \$50 million in impressive renovations and enhancements at the resort over the last few years. www.naplesbeachhotel.com

Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort Plans Redesign of Dolphin Resort Lobby

LAKE BUENA VISTA, FL — The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort's Dolphin lobby will undergo a \$12 million redesign as the final stage of the largest makeover in the resort's history. When finished in the fall of 2017, the new lobby will be completely transformed into a sleek contemporary space and feature new dining and beverage options. The centerpiece of the new lobby will be a dazzling custom crystal chandelier, which will sparkle above the fountain and use the latest in color-changing lighting technology. Other new features will include a new geometric ceiling, increased lighting, all new décor and furnishings and double the amount of seating. The Dolphin Resort lobby will remain open throughout the renovation with minimal impact to resort guests. The project is currently scheduled to begin in spring 2017 for completion by fall 2017. www.swandolphin.com

Lynn Lee Named to FICP Hospitality Partners Advisory Committee

SAN DIEGO, CA — AlliedPRA Inc., a global leader in the destination management company (DMC) sector, announced that Lynn Lee, global sales director, AlliedPRA Inc. was recently named to the Financial and Insurance Conference Planners (FICP) Hospitality Partners Advisory Committee (HPAC), effective January 1, 2017. In addition to this appointment she also is on the FICP Education Committee, as well as part of their Mentorship Program.



LEE

Lee serves in a global sales role for AlliedPRA generating new business leads and revenue streams while managing key accounts and building strong relationships with contacts to firmly establish AlliedPRA as the industry leader for DMC requirements. She brings in-depth global sales experience working with clients in various industries and has been the recipient of numerous awards for outstanding client services and exceptional sales results. In addition to Lee's FICP commitment, AlliedPRA also is represented by Global Sales Director Melanie Stevens who serves on the membership committee and AlliedPRA Las Vegas National Sales Manager Patty Kindness who is on the sponsorship committee.

FICP is a community of financial services and insurance industry meetings and events professionals dedicated to developing members, and advocating the positive impact and value of their work. www.alliedpra.com

Marriott International Targets Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Region to Reach 50 Hotels by End of 2020

BETHESDA, MD — Marriott International announced that its on track to hit a target of 50 hotels for its Australia, New Zealand and Pacific portfolio by the end of 2020. With 24 hotels currently in operation and a pipeline of signed and approved deals totaling an additional 18 properties, Marriott is on track to grow to 50 hotels over the next four years across the region, which includes Australia, New Zealand, Samoa, Fiji and New Caledonia. The current pipeline properties will add more than 4,500 rooms.

Marriott International is set to expand rapidly across Australia in particular over the next few years. The world's largest hotel company already has a strong market presence in the key gateway cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Brisbane, and will be entering emerging primary and secondary destinations, with the signings of Four Points by Sheraton Paramatta, The Westin Resort & Spa Cooloom, Aloft Adelaide and Sheraton Adelaide Hotel. Three additional brands, Aloft, W and The Ritz-Carlton, are expected to be introduced to the region by the end of 2020, with the W Brisbane, and Aloft Perth scheduled to open in 2017, followed by Aloft Melbourne South Yarra and Aloft Adelaide in 2019, and The Ritz-Carlton, Melbourne and The Ritz-Carlton, Perth slated for 2020. www.marriott.com

2016 SITE Crystal Award Winners Honored

PANAMA CITY, PANAMA — Since 1980, the annual Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Crystal Awards Recognition Program — sponsored by IMEX Group — has brought industry acclaim to incentive travel companies.

The 2016 awards were presented at the SITE Global Conference in Panama City, Panama. Seven companies were honored for creativity in program design, marketing, CSR and business results. The events showcase the destinations that have advanced client values and brands, and whose programs have given generously to local communities, while achieving important business goals such as increased sales, higher employee engagement and greater loyalty.

"The Crystal Awards not only recognize the outstanding organizations that win them," said Rajeev Kohli, CIS, SITE president and joint managing director, Creative Travel Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, India, "but also showcase innovative ways planners can make the ordinary extraordinary to maximize human potential and achieve tangible business results. Planning an incentive program is an art. These winning programs are great examples of how, through thoughtful planning and creative program design, you can connect with people emotionally and motivate higher levels of performance."

To view the winners, videos and case studies of the winning programs, go to: www.siteglobal.com/crystalawards



SITE President Rajeev Kohli (l) and SITE CEO Kevin Hinton (r) present a Crystal Award to Italy.

Monterey's Portola Hotel & Spa Announces Major Renovations

MONTEREY, CA — The AAA Four Diamond Portola Hotel & Spa, overlooking Monterey Bay and Fisherman's Wharf, announced plans for a complete renovation of its tree-lined atrium lobby, together with construction of a new \$3.5 million entrance plaza and the ongoing renovation of the adjacent 40,000-sf Monterey Conference Center. The San Francisco-based Puccini Group is the interior design partner for the Portola lobby enhancements. Skidmore, Owings & Merrill is the designer for the 35,000-sf entrance plaza and the \$60 million renovation of the Monterey Conference Center. Both the plaza and conference center are being constructed by the City of Monterey, through a longstanding private/public partnership with Portola.

These improvements include cutting-edge energy and water conservation fixtures, reinforcing the Portola's commitment to green practices and its U.S. Building Council's LEED Certified Status. The Conference Center also will seek LEED Certified Status upon completion. All three projects are scheduled for completion in April 2017. During the renovation process, Portola will remain open for business. www.portolahotel.com

FICPSnapShots



1 An awesome time was had by all at the 2016 FICP Annual Conference in Nashville. Attendees included Coastal Communications Corp.'s V.P. of Operations David Middlebrook and President Harvey Grotsky who flank FICP Executive Director Steve Bova. **2** Incoming FICP chair Joe Scully, John Hancock Financial Services, and Bova during a "talk-show" at the closing general session. **3** Attendees enjoy the music and dancing at Nashville's Wildhorse Saloon. **4** NASA astronaut Navy Captain Scott Kelly delights the audience with tales from his historic, record-breaking year in space. **5** Clarence Day of The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua, Deanna Leslie of the Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel and Goro Abe of AllianceBernstein pose at FICP as do **6** Sej Padya, CMP, V.P. Event Marketing for Capital One and Grotsky. **7** Middlebrook and Doug Thomas, Rosen Hotels & Resorts, share a light moment. **8** Engaged and happy groups at the conference included **9** many current and past leaders of FICP **10** Michael Shannon of Business Events Canada; incoming board member Wayne Robinson of FM Global; and Reggie Lang of WestJet Airlines share a laugh. **11** Grotsky, the publisher of Insurance & Financial Meetings Management, and Gus Vonderheide, V.P. Global Sales - Americas for Hyatt Hotels and Resorts renew their acquaintance. **12** Shawn Hanks and Jordan Smallwood of Premiere Speakers Bureau pose with Tom Koulopoulos, founder of the Delphi Group. **13** Polly Irving from The Westin New York at Times Square poses with Joanne Sykora, Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress Resort, and Tammy McDougal, Manchester Grand Hyatt. **14** FICP revelers enjoy the music of Nashville. **15** Middlebrook and Joe Landers, Shelter Insurance Companies, network. **16** Nicolas Gabillon, Radisson-Blu Aqua Hotel Chicago, and Ramel Kelly, Loews Hotels, go country.

FICP ROCKS NASHVILLE



Awesome Annual Conference Attracts Record Attendance

By Nicole Lewis

The FICP Annual Conference is a can't-miss event for anyone in the financial services or insurance event planning space. The 2016 conference took place in November with four days of education and networking in Nashville, Tennessee.

Nearly 700 people attended the record-breaking, sold-out event, which featured education from Delphi Group founder Tom Koulopoulos, U.S. Astronaut and retired Navy Captain Scott Kelly, as well as many industry leaders. Comedian Henry Cho served as emcee. Education sessions spanned risk management, the recent Department of Labor Fiduciary ruling, strategic thinking, global trends and much more.

Attendees found time to connect with one another during various networking events. The conference kicked off with an evening event at the new Music City Center in the heart of downtown Nashville. FICP's marketplace-style session, The Network – Live followed the next morning, with hundreds

of meetings between planners and hospitality partners from across North America and the globe. Attendees got a taste of real Nashville at the Wildhorse Saloon with line dancing lessons and traditional Music City fare. The final evening welcomed people back to the Omni Nashville Hotel with live music by Phil Vassar, former Journey lead singer Steve Augeri, and the nonstop party soundtrack by the Groove Merchants.

The 2016 FICP Annual Conference Event Team included Shelia Cleary, Chair, National Life Group; Kelli Livers, Forethought Financial Group; Lisa Ramsay, Protective Life Insurance; Carolee Weinstein, Omni Hotels & Resorts and Isabel Mahon, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts.

FICP's five events each year provide opportunities for meetings and events professionals to learn and develop skills to leverage their positive impact and value in their companies and beyond. Learn more at www.ficpnet.com.

Silent Auction Raises More Than \$50K for Junior Achievement



Meetings professionals and hospitality partners at the 2016 Financial & Insurance Conference Planners (FICP) Annual Conference donated \$51,616.59 to Junior Achievement Worldwide and Junior Achievement of Middle Tennessee. Contributions were raised through the 15th Annual FICP Annual Conference Silent Auction.

FICP Board of Directors Chair Caryn Taylor Lucia (*second from l*), FICP Executive Director Steve Bova (*far right*), Silent Auction Committee Co-chair Chris Gilbert (*l*) and Hospitality Partner Advisory Committee Chair Isabel Mahon presented the donation to Trent Klingensmith (*c*), president of Junior Achievement of Middle Tennessee.

Junior Achievement has been FICP's philanthropic partner since 2012. This year, in keeping with FICP's dedicated philanthropic efforts, proceeds of the Silent Auction benefited Junior Achievement Worldwide and Junior Achievement of Middle Tennessee. The auction provides a way for conference attendees and members and hospitality partners not in attendance, to take an active role in making a difference in the communities that support their businesses by donating and bidding on items. www.ficpnet.com, www.jaworldwide.org



SCULLY



MERANDO



LONGO



ROBINSON

New Leadership Announced

Members of Financial & Insurance Conference Planners (FICP) announced the association's leadership at the 2016 annual conference. By acclamation, Joe Scully, senior director, meeting and event management, John Hancock Financial Services, Boston, Massachusetts, was named the 2017 FICP Chair.

The board of directors appointed Marcia Merando, LLIF, FLMI, LUTCF, director of marketing, Frankenmuth Insurance, Frankenmuth, Michigan, as chair-elect. Merando will assume the FICP Chair role in 2018.

The board of directors appointed the following directors for three-year terms effective January 1, 2017:

- **Erin Longo, CMP**, director, conference and meeting services, Prudential, Newark, New Jersey
- **Wayne Robinson, CMP**, assistant vice president, FM Global, Johnston, Rhode Island
- **Lynn Schwandt, CMP**, senior event planner, Thrivent Financial, Appleton, Wisconsin



SCHWANDT



LUCIA



BURKE



LINDBERG



SENKOWSKI



BOVA

Also continuing on the board are:

- **Caryn Taylor Lucia**, vice president, Corporate Event Marketing, SEI, Oaks, Pennsylvania
- **Michael Burke, CMP**, director, conference and travel services, The Hanover Insurance Group, Worcester, Massachusetts
- **Sherri Lindenberg, CLU**, senior vice president, marketing, Crump, Roseland, New Jersey
- **Katie Senkowski, CMP**, manager, meetings and events, AIG Benefit Solutions, Neptune, New Jersey
- Executive Director **Steve Bova, CAE**, Financial & Insurance Conference Planners, Chicago, Illinois

Concluding their terms and departing the board at the end of 2016 are Shelia Cleary, AVP, recognition and conferences, National Life Group, Montpelier, Vermont; Karin Pontelandolfo, CMP, senior meeting



Save the Dates! FICP Events Calendar

2017 FICP Winter Symposium

January 29–31, 2017

Boston Park Plaza, Boston, Massachusetts

2017 FICP Education Forum

June 26–28, 2017

Montage Palmetto Bluff, Bluffton, South Carolina

2017 FICP Summer Symposium

August 24–25, 2017

Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

2017 FICP Fall Symposium

September 13–15, 2017

Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa

Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico



2017 FICP Annual Conference

November 12–15, 2017

Manchester Grand Hyatt, San Diego, California

planner, Liberty Mutual, Boston, Massachusetts; and Kathy Roche, director, meeting and conference planning, Western & Southern Financial Group, Cincinnati, Ohio.

To serve on the board of directors, one must be an FICP member in good standing for at least three consecutive years; be able to maintain their corporate and/or meeting planning responsibilities as well as their board responsibilities; have the full support of their company's management; and have at least five years of work experience as a meetings and events professional. **I&FMM**

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'Wait and See'



Outlook 2017

New Rules, New Administration and New Challenges Around the Corner

By Todd Zint, CMP, CMM

As we bid farewell to 2016 and look around the corner to 2017, the financial and Insurance meetings industry will continue to tread cautiously among economic pressures as well as domestic and global uncertainties. Event planners in the marketplace are experiencing unique challenges based on their company's business product and services portfolio, and ownership position.

According to Jeff Montgomery, president of Austin-based TCG Group Holdings, "Never before have the market drivers been as strong and diverse as they are now in financial services. Corporation executives will continue assessing product lines and services to determine opportunities for possible acquisitions, mergers, internal consolidation and 'right-sizing' to increase market share. Traditional methods don't work as well as they used to. Redefining product design and placement, regulatory requirements and the need for scale are forces that influence boardrooms around the country." With these influencers, along with low interest rates stunting organizational growth opportunities, event planning teams will continue to remain nimble with expenses and creative with program design to ensure high-touch attendee engagement experiences are not compromised.

Department of Labor 'Doubling Down'

The Department of Labor (DOL) has become a household name in the financial and insurance industry especially with organizations selling IRAs and retirement products within their product portfolio. The DOL Fiduciary Ruling has generated tremendous attention and is taxing internal resources within organizations to evaluate

Furthermore, as the new president and his administration ramp up to take office January 20, the industry will need to wait and see if a position shift is on the horizon.

Meanwhile, the financial and insurance companies with non-retirement specific products are keeping a close eye on the DOL Fiduciary Ruling due to the possibility of a ripple effect impacting other product lines. The Life Insurance



Jeff Montgomery, President
TCG Group Holdings, Austin, TX

"Never before have the market drivers been as strong and diverse as they are now in financial services."

the full scope and implications of the ruling. Companies are assessing retirement product design, selling practices, commission models and recognition programs, which include meetings and incentive trips for 2017 and beyond.

and Market Research Association (LIMRA) and the Association of Advanced Life Underwriters (AALU) are two organizations advocating on behalf of the financial and insurance industry including lobbying on the hill, speaking at industry confer-



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ences, surveying members and distributing case studies.

The DOL also issued a final rule governing overtime, which becomes effective December 1, 2016. (As of press time, U.S. District Court Judge Amos Mazzant granted an Emergency Motion for Preliminary Injunction and thereby enjoined the Department of Labor from implementing and enforcing the Overtime Final Rule on December 1, 2016.) The rule's intention is to put "more money in

"DMCs are particularly focused on how to manage the increased labor expenses without having to simply pass those costs on to our clients."

Laurie Sprouse, CITE, CMP, DMCP, President Ultimate Ventures, Dallas, TX

the pockets of middle class workers — or give them more free time."

The final rule will:

- Raise the salary threshold indicating eligibility from \$455/week to \$913 (\$47,476 per year), ensuring protections to 4.2 million workers.
- Automatically update the salary threshold every three years, based on wage growth over time, increasing predictability.
- Strengthen overtime protections for salaried workers already entitled to overtime.
- Provide greater clarity for workers and employers.

However, business owners and other critics say the rule won't necessarily work out this way, and that there will be unintended consequences that will be damaging to the economy. The threshold increase will specifically have a direct impact on several realms related to travel and meetings. For example, if a non-exempt employee attends an offsite training meeting requiring weekend travel and evening business activities or dinners, overtime pay will come into play. Therefore, conferences and meetings may see a drop in attendance due to companies not wanting to

pay time and a half for non-exempt employees to attend.

On the flipside, travel industry suppliers with non-exempt employees will need to assess program scheduling strategies to minimize overtime costs or risk reducing profit margins. Laurie Sprouse, CITE, CMP, DMCP, president of Dallas-based Ultimate Ventures, a DMC Network Company stated, "Like all businesses dealing



with this change, DMCs are particularly focused on how to manage the increased labor expenses without having to simply pass those costs on to our clients. We are particularly perplexed because all of the compensation strategies that we already employ — bonuses, incentives, profit sharing, benefits and even additional time off/comp time — do not count, according to the DOL's rule towards the required time and a half compensation for exceeding 40 hours in a week."

As the Department of Labor rules are rolled out and fully adopted, the financial and insurance industry along with the hospitality community will continue assessing, reinventing and evaluating opportunities to deliver stellar products and services,



Jeff Nelke, Destination Management Professional Access Florida, South Florida

while managing regulator expectations and remaining profitable.

Plan for the Unexpected

In 2016, the industry witnessed an

escalated threat to meetings and events with a rise in violent protest demonstrations and lone-wolf terrorists infiltrating popular meeting destinations around the United States and Europe. Unfortunately, these incidents will likely continue, and without having a crystal ball indicating where and when these incidents will occur, being vigilant and prepared will need to be "top of mind" for organizations and their event planning teams.

Financial and Insurance companies and hospitality suppliers alike have evolved their contingency planning strategies based on firsthand experiences including onsite accidents, unpredictable health issues and large-scale catastrophic events such as New York's 9/11. These events have sparked companies to develop well-designed contingency and emergency plans, employing a thoughtful communication hierarchy based on "what if" situational events.

Although having a plan is important, acting on the plan at a time of crisis is equally important and demands effective leadership, confidence and communication.

Planners beware, if an incident or crisis occurs, and there is no emergency response plan in place, the safety of participants may be at risk, the organization's brand could be exposed, and unfortunately, the event planner's credibility may go down the drain, too. Reviewing an existing plan regularly is extremely important, and for those organizations

"Planners are offering budget transparency and including past event successes in their request for proposals."

lacking a plan, start the conversation today with your risk management team and executive stakeholders. Taking a proactive role with this critical planning element will ensure confidence, provide

direction in a crisis situation and avoid potential repercussions.

There are several risk management articles available online to enable you to start the process. In addition, the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) published an extensive white paper in cooperation with Safehotels Alliance designed for association executives and meeting management companies to plan, prepare, manage and recover from crisis situations. Go to www.iccaworld.org for more information.



Rick Bissonett, CMP, CEM, CMM, Director of Business Development Infinity Events Group, Austin, TX

"Relationships with the venues are key, always be 100 percent transparent regarding the clause's objective."

language is especially important as the interpretation of some clauses is occasionally viewed as subjective when problems arise and each side defines the clause differently.

Rick Bissonett, CMP, CEM, CMM, director of business development with Austin-based Infinity Events Group,

says, "Legal clauses continue to evolve based on the changing world we live in. All clauses, specifically force majeure or rights of termination for cause, claims and disputes, and contingency clauses need to be discussed with the venue so both sides truly understand the intent of the written clause. Event planners should

always document the intent of a clause with a follow-up email and ask the venue to offer language that matches the planner's intent. Relationships with the venues are key, always be 100 percent transparent regarding the clause's objective, and understand no matter how memorable the site visit was, the salesperson has a responsibility to the property own-

ership to look out for their interests. If things do go south, the planner needs an understanding of the contractual financial liability based on the change action as a baseline in order to negotiate opportunities to resolve the issue."

The bottom-line — there always will be a "destination risk" once a contract is



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signed, however, having an understanding of contract clauses based on different scenarios will allow for an assessment of viable options and solutions if a situation arises.

Budgets

Hotel performance is projected to grow through 2017, and with supplier costs increasing including goods and

“When you bring the Revo Experience to your events as an onsite gift experience, \$10 per pair is automatically donated to Bono’s Vision Charity.”

services, financial and insurance planners’ 2017 budgets are growing as well. Or are they? Unfortunately, planners across the financial and insurance industry have indicated their 2017 budgets will vary by +/- 10 percent depending on their organization. The news should come as no surprise since organizations are reacting to internal and external economic conditions based on their market position.

The meetings and events budget line item will remain under the corporate microscope, and event departments will continue to be asked to “do more with less.” This is not a new concept — planners always are tasked with streamlining event costs especially during challenging economic times. However, event organizers continue to be resilient and are determined to identify creative ideas to ensure their events deliver on the vision and objectives within budget parameters.

Event planners are becoming more resourceful by collaborating with preferred supplier partners, such as destination management companies (DMC) to determine where budget dollars will have the greatest impact during a program.

According to Jeff Nelke, a destination management professional leading the Access Florida team in the South Florida region of the United States, “Planners are offering budget transparency and including past event successes in their request for proposals. Having this infor-

mation has enabled our creative team to develop and streamline proposals that align with the program vision, goals and budget, and without repeating concepts. Collaboration has been a key driver to our business success.”

Vendor partnerships and alliances are more important today than ever before driving experience consistency



Doug Chorpenning, CEO
wet paint group, Centennial, CO

and service performance, along with cost savings due to leveraging preferred pricing agreements.

CSR With a Twist

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is alive and well with meetings and events. The industry has seen new twists on the traditional CSR engagement activities including amenity experiences that align with sustainability or betterment of life initiatives such as Toms One for One project. Every time a Toms product is purchased, a person in need is helped. Toms helps provide shoes, sight, water, safe birth and bullying prevention services to people in need in more than 70 countries.

Along these lines, the wet paint group (wpg) based in Centennial, Colorado, has launched the Revo Sunglass amenity experience, which has aligned with Bono’s Charity “Buy Vision, Give Sight” to help

eliminate preventable blindness. Doug Chorpenning, CEO of the wet paint group, puts it this way: “wpg makes gifting with giveback a breeze and purposeful. When you bring the Revo Experience to your events as an onsite gift experience, \$10

per pair is automatically donated to Bono’s Vision Charity. Not only are you giving your guests a unique high-quality amenity, but also supporting a great cause with turnkey fulfillment.” The company also provides a pajama bar amenity experience featuring the Punjammies Lounge-wear collection. Manufactured by Sudara, an India-based company, the loungewear is made with hope by women who have escaped human trafficking.

Giving Back

FICP (Financial and Insurance Conference Planners) recently wrapped its 2016 Annual Conference in Nashville with record attendance — a solid indicator of continued success in 2017.

Once again, Junior Achievement was the recipient of FICP’s 15th Silent Auction. FICP supports local chapters to introduce students to the meeting planning and hospitality industries and provides volunteer opportunities for FICP members and hospitality partners.

As FICP’s dedicated philanthropic partner, all Silent Auction proceeds benefited JA National as well as the JA of Middle Tennessee. This year, a grand total of \$51,616 was raised for JA through the Silent Auction. For more information, go to www.ficpnet.com. **I&FMM**



Todd Zint CMP, CMM, is the founder and creative force behind Austin-based Ignite Event Solutions. He has built his career around managing and executing complex, high-touch meeting, incentive and exposition experiences. Prior to launching Ignite Event Solutions, Todd worked as a meeting professional and executive for several Fortune 500 companies. He has been an active member on several industry advisory boards and has held volunteer positions including trustee with the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) and a board member for the Financial & Insurance Conference Planners association (FICP), serving as its association chairman in 2011. He also is the co-founder of TeccSociety, an organization created to unite and engage event technology solution providers and buyers, including corporate meeting professionals, community managers and trade show organizers. Contact Zint at 512-573-1154, www.igniteeventsolutions.com, www.teccsociety.com.

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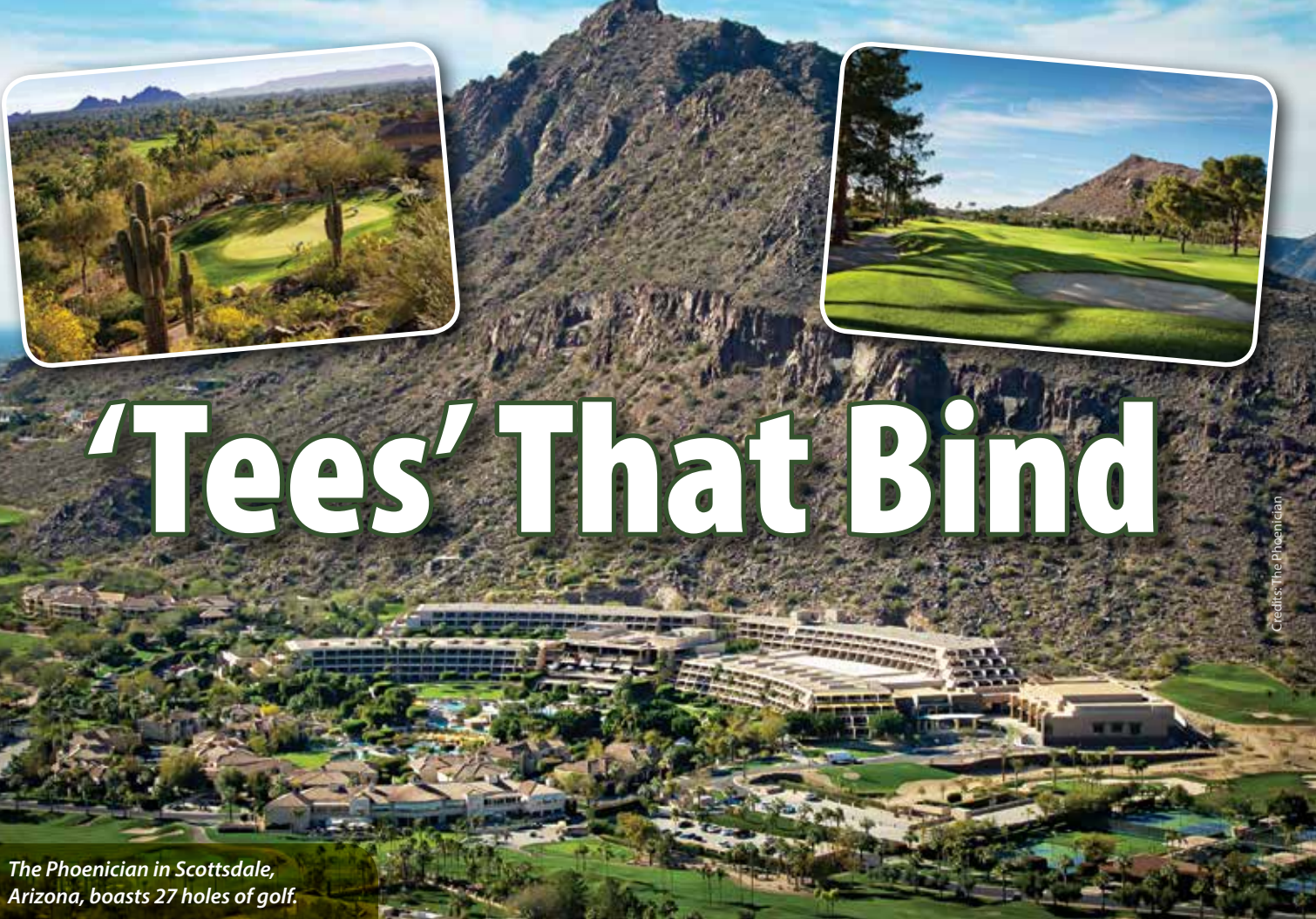
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'Tees' That Bind

The Phoenician in Scottsdale, Arizona, boasts 27 holes of golf.

Credit: The Phoenician

Planners With Good Business 'Fore'sight Develop the Best Golf Programs

By Maura Keller

From border to border, the United States offers golfers of all skill levels an array of inviting, challenging and breathtaking courses. From formidable courses that test the golfer's skill level at every hole to wide-open fairways designed for high-handicap players — golf is a part of many meeting and event programs. Cozy rather than commercial, many golf resorts offer unique accommodations and amenities aplenty — all while providing ideal locales for groups to work some and play some.

Business 'Fore'sight

For decades business professionals have recognized the need to connect

with each other outside of the conference room. While wining and dining is still a prevalent relationship-building tradition, more meeting attendees prefer to do business on the greens as part of a corporate insurance or financial group event. Moreover, a round of golf on a lush golf course is a far more healthful way to build a relationship than overindulging.

Every year, golfers from around the world travel to Florida, Arizona and many other areas in the U.S. to walk in the footsteps of the iconic, legendary men and women who made golf the great game it is today.

At issue for many meeting professionals looking to orchestrate a golf program

as part of a meeting or event is sourcing golf courses that meet the needs of young and old alike. When business professionals play golf together, each person is going to have different needs and want different challenges.

According to Barbara Schoenfeld, meetings coordinator for the Austin, Texas-based Insurance Council of Texas (ICT), golf is an important element in their meetings. Thus, the Board Year 2017 Planning Meeting held in August at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colorado, was an ideal setting for the board to meet with the executive director and management of ICT to discuss the direction and future goals of the organization.

"Because of the length of this meeting we encourage our board members and staff to bring their spouses, so we had a total of 39 attendees, not counting the children who came, too," Schoenfeld says. "Golf has been a part of this meeting long before I took over as meeting planner for this event. It is a welcome opportunity for our board members to build relationships and get to know each other in a more casual situation other than always sitting in board meetings and then leaving. We have golfers who have a two handicap, and we have golfers who say golf is their handicap. So don't worry so much about the expertise and encourage your players to go out and enjoy."

The ICT golf program is a key example of the way businesses and golf courses work hand-in-hand to make golf outings special for attendees. Amenities such as a personalized outing coordinator for group outings, group clinics from PGA professionals, prepaid food and beverage coupons to give to your attendees, pro shops with merchandise from a PGA Tour stop, catered meals and personalized prize packages are some of the unique attributes that often are incorporated into an event.

"Our board loves the opportunity to go out to the golf course after spending the morning in the planning meeting for ICT's upcoming year, laying out the goals and needs of the membership," Schoenfeld says. "There is nothing more inviting than the beautiful rolling courses offered at The Broadmoor. The mild temperatures are a real break since most of our attendees are from Texas, and you know how hot August can be in Texas."



The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs is home to three championship golf courses.

Schoenfeld says she simply wouldn't hesitate for a moment to do a golfing event, especially at The Broadmoor.

"The staff is so accommodating and knowledgeable," Schoenfeld says. "They pay attention to detail. Everything we need is always there waiting for us. Whether it's rental clubs, shoes or box lunches, it's all taken care of and ready to go."

The Broadmoor Golf Club is home to three 18-hole golf courses: East, West and Mountain. Designed by legends including Donald Ross, Robert Trent Jones Sr., Arnold Palmer and Nicklaus Design, the courses have hosted countless tournaments and challenged players of all skill levels.

New Is Better

And to meet the needs of today's golfers, resorts and clubs are offering a wealth of different course options. George Willard, head golf professional and director of golf at The Naples Beach

Hotel & Golf Club in Naples, Florida, says the club's new Jack Nicklaus-designed 18-hole championship golf course is great for groups and golfers of every skill level.

"The new course was designed by

"Tournaments don't have to be 18 holes. We could do nine-hole events as

well if time is restricted during the conference. It takes about 4½ hours to do 18 holes and a little over two hours to do nine holes."



Barry Ryder
Director of Golf
The Omni Homestead
Hot Springs, VA

the legendary Jack Nicklaus along with the very talented golf course architect John Sanford to challenge the best players but also to be enjoyable for all golfers," Willard says. "Plus, in addition to the new course, we also added a 300-yard practice and teaching range, and have

To celebrate the opening of the redesigned golf course, executives of The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club at the ceremonial ribbon-cutting are (l to r) Golf Course Grounds Superintendent Holden Jones, General Manager Jason Parsons, Co-Owner Henry B. Watkins III, Co-Owner and President Michael Watkins, V.P. Azi Azami and Head Golf Professional and Director of Golf George Willard.



Credit: The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club



Credit: The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa

Players have a choice of four courses at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa in Florida.

new golf carts with GPS tracking systems, which help golfers with yardages on each hole and which also helps the pace of play.”

The director of sales and marketing at The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club, Charles Mullins, says that meeting professionals often ask the facility about activities that can help them with their meeting objectives, while being mindful of time and cost constraints.

“Golf is a fun and effective activity that can help planners achieve their meeting’s goals,” Mullins says. “And, at our hotel, golf also is logistically very easy to conduct, since our course is onsite. By

having a full 18-hole championship golf course onsite, planners do not have to worry about the cost and coordination of transportation to and from an offsite golf course. If time is a concern, attendees can step right out of our main ballroom directly onto the golf course.”

The Naples resort team can work with the planner and have a tournament scheduled in the morning or in the afternoon, and have an 18-hole or nine-hole tournament. After golf, attendees can be back in the ballroom or out on the beach in minutes.

Mullins says, “You’ve probably heard the saying, ‘most business happens on

the golf course,’ well, that saying is not just for millionaires. As planners hold meetings, they seek venues and activities with the objective of bringing people together and minimizing distractions.

“Golf is a unique activity where attendees have the chance to engage face-to-face, uninterrupted,” he says. “With so many distractions surrounding us, few activities can match the focus and invaluable time together like the game of golf.”

Mullins believes that golf is great for events where planners are looking for teambuilding and networking opportunities. People of all ages and skill levels can enjoy a round of golf on the new course — you don’t have to be a golf pro, he says.

“For corporate events, when a planner chooses to bring golf into the program, they are combining quality time with a fun activity, and that is why golf is such an effective tool for meetings,” Mullins says. “A common mistake is not picking the right course. For most events, planners should consider a course like ours — one that is challenging enough for those who golf often, but not too difficult for newer players.”

Diverse Options

Also in Florida, for example, the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, a luxurious, full-service Destin resort and beachfront hotel in Miramar Beach, offers several options as they enjoy a



Walk or Ride?

As more and more businesses and organizations strive to help their employees improve their health, a golf game provides hours of activity as well as enjoyment of the great outdoors. While golf may not be the most efficient way to get fit, it does have its benefits. Walk or ride? It’s a perpetual fairway dilemma, right up there with whether you should permit mulligans. Healthwise, walking is far superior, where courses allow it. The number of calories burned ranges from 1,200

calories for walking a four-hour, 18-hole round of golf to a far greater number if one carries clubs. In any event, the four- or five-plus-mile walk will improve cardiovascular health. Even the United States Golf Association, the sport’s national governing body, views walking as integral to the game. By carrying your clubs, you’ll also burn more calories and build upper body strength.

What’s more, golf is a social sport. Between walking 18 holes and waiting for everyone to finish each hole, there is plenty of time to chat or bond with colleagues. —MK



Something for Everyone

Of course you don’t have to be a golfer to enjoy a golf resort during a meeting. While some colleagues are off hitting the links, others can enjoy a rejuvenating hike in the forest or canoeing the shores of nearby lake or lounging on a resort deck. And don’t forget the spa experience. Most golf resorts boast onsite spas with a multitude of treatments and exercise programs so all attendees and their guests are happy and engaged.

Many resorts offer something for everyone, including lake or ocean cruises, horse-drawn trolleys, abundant shopping excursions as well as family entertainment. And be sure to check out the region’s festivals for more fun. Many towns and neighborhoods have wonderful summer parades and fall festivals. Dates and locations vary, so check with your chosen resort for local festival information.

—MK

partnership with the Sandestin Resort and their four golf courses — allowing guests to experience challenging golf play at different levels due to the diversity of the different courses.

“Our guests get to choose from The Link course, with its game-changing challenges and views of the Choctawhatchee Bay; Baytowne course, excellent for all skill levels; Raven course, where you elevate your game playing through the marshes, wetlands and pines; or Burnt Pine course — recognized as one of the ‘Top 30 Courses in Florida’ by *Golf Digest* and *Golfweek*,” says Lisa Jones, director of sales at Hilton Sandestin.

Jones stresses that golf programs offer ample opportunity for meeting attendees to get out and have some fun.

“Whether it’s a scramble or bogey and par play for teambuilding, or a leisurely match play competition, the opportunities are many,” Jones says. “The most

common way to incorporate golf into a meeting is either in a teambuilding or a leadership-building atmosphere. There are several different tournament styles of play to accomplish both.”

She also notes that golf programs are an enthusiastic way to build rapport and cooperation among colleagues.

“Far too often competitions reward only one person,” Jones says. “There are several golf opportunities that focus more on the contribution of each player for the team to be successful and have fun in contributing.”

What About Non-Golfers?

Stephanie Bednar, vice president, executive administration at Richmond, Virginia-based Davenport & Company LLC, arranged a recent meeting at The

“The new course was designed by the legendary Jack Nicklaus along with the very talented golf course architect John Sanford to challenge the best players but also to be enjoyable for all golfers.”



George Willard

Head Golf Pro and Director of Golf The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club Naples, FL

Omni Homestead Resort, a historic Hot Springs, Virginia, resort in the heart of the Allegheny Mountains. She wanted to have one or two group activities for their attendees to participate in and

“We work closely with event planners to understand the group dynamic. The more knowledge we have, the better suited we are to create a collectible experience for every guest.”



Erik Broka
Director of Golf
The Phoenician
Scottsdale, AZ

spend time with their coworkers. To accommodate the non-golfers in the Dav-enport & Company group, the company provides each room with a \$600 credit that they can use for whatever activities they want (including golf).

“Everyone gets to decide how they want to spend that \$600,” Bednar says. “The only limitations are that they cannot use the \$600 to purchase merchandise, and the room credit expires upon checkout. If they don’t spend it, they lose it. But golf is one of the activities that covers a fair number — but not even close to all — of our event attendees.”

With 36 holes of championship golf, The Omni Homestead can handle any type of golf tournament. According to Barry Ryder, PGA, director of golf at The Omni Homestead, the resort offers daily golf clinics and has hosted several prior tournaments with groups this year.

“Clients seemed to enjoy them. I would suggest doing shotgun starts so everyone can finish in a timely manner,” Ryder says. “We meet with the planners and try to find when the groups have available time during their conference and determine if we can incorporate a tournament into their program.”

Ryder says planners should consider pitching the idea of a golf tournament to allow their participants to meet new people.

“It would give them the opportunity to spend time with different people in

their group that they might not even meet while they were here,” Ryder says. “And remember, tournaments don’t have to be 18 holes. We could do nine-hole events as well if time is restricted during the conference. It takes about 4½ hours to do 18 holes and a little over two hours to do nine holes.”

And whatever size golfing event you plan, make sure the proper tournament person is in charge of pairing the groups up.

“That person knows their clients and the areas they are from, so they could mix it up and consider it as a team-building event.”

Indeed, a group golf outing needs to be fun and relaxed. It is important to get everyone involved — including beginners.

Creative Award Options

Erik Broka, director of golf at The Phoenician in Scottsdale, Arizona, advises planners to do their homework and be aware of the level of skill of all

it a pure competition. Everyone typically has more fun when prizes are involved, such as for closest to the pin, longest drive and longest putt. However, it helps to think outside the box here. Get creative in your award competitions, developing on-course contests where everyone has a chance to win. In most cases, it is best to play a scramble format, due to your guests’ varying abilities.”

The Phoenician boasts 27 holes of golf, lessons from PGA-accredited staff, a full-service golf shop and 100 sets of rental clubs — the latest from the Callaway line. Program offerings include shotgun starts, clinics, glow-in-the-dark putting, launch monitor events and retail concept shops. The group experience is fully customizable.

Broka and his team at The Phoenician enjoy working with their clients to create a personalized experience that resonates with all their guests, whether they are golfers or not.

“We work closely with event planners to understand the group dynamic,” Broka says. “The more knowledge we have, the better suited we are to cre-



Golfers prepare for a shotgun start at The Omni Homestead, Hot Springs, Virginia.

their attendees who will participate in a golf program.

“Knowing the abilities of the majority of guests will help in planning a successful event,” says Broka. “Common mistakes occur when the play is more individual in nature, making

ate a collectible experience for each and every guest. It is very social, fun, a great way to network — and to get to know your colleagues outside of the office. Just think: When was the last time you spent four-plus hours with three other people in one day?” **I&FMM**



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The Stadium Effect

Primerica's convention in Atlanta's Georgia Dome rallied some 40,000 attendees.

Credit: Primerica

Pro Sports Venues Offer Winning Game Plans for Corporate Events

By Ron Bernthal

The National Football League generated an average impact of \$75 million on hotel room revenue during the past eight seasons, according to the hotel research firm STR. In 2015 the NFL had a net impact of \$77 million on hotel room revenue in U.S. cities with NFL stadiums.

Although the room revenue figures were not broken down in terms of leisure or corporate group business, the study confirms that hotels and professional sports arenas have a wonderful and profitable symbiotic relationship, whether it's NFL, MLB or NBA, and savvy insurance and financial planners understand the benefits of organizing meetings, conferences and incentive events in cities with major sports venues. They attract attention, engage participants in positive ways and help give corporate event attendees that out-of-the-box experience.

Some of the major advantages of organizing sports venue events include

accessible and adequate parking, professional onsite event catering services, great audio-visual and lighting opportunities, numerous flexible meeting spaces, the association with popular sports teams and the likelihood of having event participants go back in time to relive the pleasurable moments of their childhood.

Of course, with all the great advantages that sports venues bring to site selection, there are issues that meeting planners need to be aware of. Some sports venues are not allowed, by local regulations or ownership decisions, to generate non-sports-event-related revenue. It also is true that many sports venues do not adequately communicate to planners the availability of their corporate event spaces or fine dining options for game-day or year-round private functions.

However, for insurance and financial event planners looking to provide that special experience for employees or clients, using a sports venue instead

of a typical hotel ballroom will definitely impress participants. In addition to the physical advantages inherent in today's modern, high-tech stadiums, there also is the glamour involved when a team's current or former players are involved in your event.

Georgia Dome and Mercedes-Benz Stadium

In Atlanta, the Georgia World Congress Center Authority and Atlanta Falcons have agreed on a new, retractable roof stadium that is being constructed just south of the Georgia Dome. Scheduled to open for the 2017 NFL season, The \$1.4 billion Mercedes-Benz Stadium will serve as the home of the Atlanta Falcons and Major League Soccer's Atlanta United, in addition to the other sports, convention and entertainment events currently held at the Georgia Dome.

"We have used the Georgia Dome for conventions for the last 15 years," says

Mike Burroughs, executive vice president at Primerica's metropolitan Atlanta location. "Our most recent convention there was July, 2015, where we placed a stage in one end zone and had a crowd of 40,000-plus for our biennial convention. The Georgia Dome has worked perfectly for us for many years since the Primerica international headquarters is located just north of Atlanta in Duluth, Georgia, so we used the entire Georgia Dome and the entire Georgia World Congress Center for our conventions.

"Primerica has the best team of meeting planners in the world, and our team works closely with them. Our team's responsibility is the event production side of our meetings and conventions. Our team produces the event, so we are responsible for what happens inside the Dome, which includes all media, staging, lighting and sound."

Naturally, Primerica is thinking ahead about its future plans for Atlanta-based meetings. "We started talking to them (Mercedes-Benz Stadium officials) last year, and we are continuing to have discussions with the leadership team there," says Burroughs. For 2017, however, Primerica has chosen Indianapolis for its 40th anniversary convention, expecting to attract more than 50,000 attendees (out of 110,950 life insurance licensed representatives) in June to the Indiana Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium.

"We couldn't be more excited about Indy 2017. The city of Indianapolis has been amazing to work with, and they have an incredible stadium, awesome convention facilities and connectivity to hotels and restaurants like no place I have ever seen."

University of Phoenix Stadium

In Glendale, Arizona, the University of Phoenix Stadium is home to the NFL's Arizona Cardinals. The stadium, with its retractable roof and field, is a marvel of design, engineering and technology. The 63,400-seat stadium (expandable to 72,200) hosts the annual Fiesta Bowl and was the site of the 2015 Super Bowl.

With a variety of spaces that can accommodate small events as well as large-scale, multi-space exhibitions, the

technologically advanced facility is Wi-Fi capable throughout, and the scoreboard and ribbon boards are available for corporate announcements and advertisements. There is extensive parking, 20,000 sf of climate-controlled meeting spaces, and



Mike Burroughs
Executive Vice President
Primerica Inc.
Duluth, GA

"We placed a stage in one end zone (of the Georgia Dome) and had a crowd of 40,000-plus for our biennial convention."

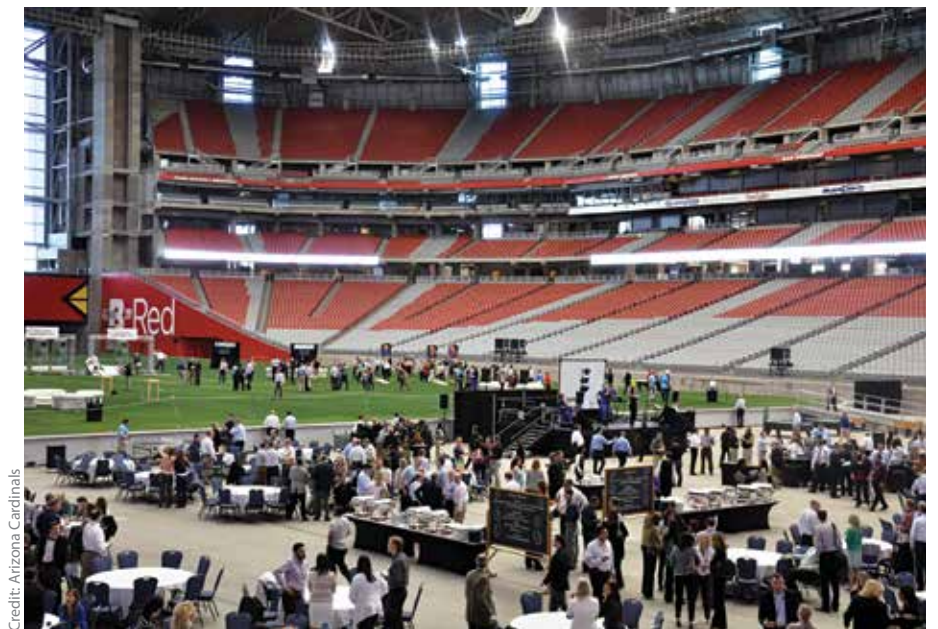
quite unique, as the grass football field is retractable and easily moves outside to transform the stadium's show floor into a multipurpose, column-free exhibition space. Direct drive-on access ensures easy move in and out for corporate exhibits. The show floor features a full utility grid and offers 160,000 sf.

"As for my experience with this event, it was fantastic, and the stadium was a great venue for us," says Clements. "The attendees all enjoyed themselves, the food and acoustics were great, and my planning process with stadium workers was wonderful. This financial client was looking for a large venue for a casual, fun event and the stadium proved to be the perfect fit."

Hard Rock Stadium

Opened originally in 1987 as Joe Robbie Stadium, and most recently called Sun Life Stadium, the newly remodeled home of the NFL's Miami Dolphins and college football's Miami Hurricanes, is now known as Hard Rock Stadium, which opened in 2016 following a \$500 million renovation.

The two major upgrades include a huge shade canopy, which protects 92 percent of the fans from the blistering sun or occasional downpours, and high-



A corporate event at University of Phoenix Stadium, home of the Arizona Cardinals. The grass field is retractable allowing for a 160,000-sf exhibition show floor.

definition screens, each 112 feet long and 50 feet high, providing 22,400 sf of video so clear that spectators may be tempted never to look at the actual field. There also have been deluxe upgrades to the unique facilities within the stadium that can be used for corporate events.

For non-game days the Dolphins Locker Room offers planners the opportunity to customize lockers with guest names and can accommodate up to 150 for a theater-style presentation or 200 for a reception. Another great space is called The Nine, a room located over the 50 yard line, that offers a great field view, a large lounge with bar and food service stations, and access to nine open-air suites for up to 200.

Other corporate facilities at Hard Rock Stadium include The 72 Club, a multifunctional space with two dining areas that can be used for presentations or receptions for up to 700 persons, a large center bar and easy access to the field. The Hyundai Club has high ceilings, video walls, eight illuminated wooden trees and rustic furniture. The largest of the new club spaces, with easy access to a platform overlooking the field, the facility can accommodate 400 theater style, and 2,000 reception capacity.

"I would definitely consider hosting an event at the Hard Rock Stadium," says Kayla Schwenk, CMP, director of meet-

ings and events at Paragon Events Inc., in Delray Beach, Florida. "The renovations that the stadium has completed are incredible. There are multiple spaces with a different feel to each one. The spaces can accommodate groups of 25–2,000, which makes it easy for us to sell to a variety of groups.

"This financial client was looking for a large venue for a casual, fun event and the stadium proved to be the perfect fit."



Hillary Clements
Account Executive
Southwest Conference Planners
Scottsdale, AZ

"Because Hard Rock Stadium can offer so much variety in space size, formality and access to watching the game, the venues at the stadium are ideal for larger conferences wanting to give their attendees a unique experience or will captivate a smaller group making them feel like a VIP," says Schwenk, who works with insurance and financial companies in the area. "Having a reception in the Dolphins locker room would be a great experience for any type of client!

"We find the best way to plan for a corporate group at a sports venue is to tie it

to a game. We look for spaces that allow the attendees to network while also providing them additional entertainment."

From Busch to Wrigley

"I am a big fan of hosting events at great sports venues," says Dan Meister, CMP, of Meister Meetings and Travel, who has organized many corporate events around the country. "At Busch Stadium, home of MLB's St. Louis Cardinals, we rented several large hospitality suites during a baseball game for an offsite event for 300 persons. We brought our own signage into the suites, which was great, and the stadium was within walking distance of our downtown headquarters hotel, making it very easy and convenient for guests to leave on their own time during or after the game, saving transfer expenses. Guests could see the stadium from the hotel every day, so we themed the entire meeting around baseball, culminating in the final night dinner at the stadium that was well received."

Meister tries to get creative when planning events at or near sports venues, including hosting a financial conference for 250 persons that was close to, but not actually in, one of the most popular sports venues in Chicago — home of the now World Series champion Chicago Cubs. "We took over one of the famous rooftop venues across the street from Wrigley Field," says Meister. "It was an optional fundraising event during the conference, and everyone loved the uniqueness and exclusivity of the venue. Even if they had to watch the game from the outfield, they could still see everything on all the TVs, and enjoyed the great bars and lounges on the roof."

"We have also used suites and club seats to entertain our client's customers for hospitality events from 10 to 400 persons at many of the nicer stadiums and sporting venues across the country," says Meister. "I am a big sports fan and personally feel the opportunity to see and experience a local sports game is a great way to get attendees out of the typical meeting rooms and have some local fun and network. Baseball, basketball and PGA events are easier to coordinate around firm convention and meeting



Rendering of the Mercedes-Benz Stadium, future home of the Atlanta Falcons. The stadium, which features a retractable roof, will open for the 2017 NFL season.

dates due to the frequency of games played, and football is always a big draw. These events are always fun, popular and memorable."

EverBank Field

At the Jacksonville Jaguars EverBank Field, the US Assure Club offers two specially designed spaces for hosting corporate meetings, conferences and incentive groups for 20–500 people. US Assure East is similar to an urban microbrewery or gastropub, with a somewhat raw and industrial look, using black, tan and gray design colors, with concrete accents. The US Assure Club West has a country club theme, with classic and polished black and white design finishes and marble accents. The patio areas of both clubs, with 17,827 sf, have great views of the field with soft seating couches or high-top tables. Both clubs also offer indoor/outdoor bar areas, 11-by-19-foot HD screens for sports action or corporate presentations.

Atlanta Motor Speedway

Hagerty, the world's largest global provider of collector vehicle insurance and products, has organized events at Chicago's Cellular One Field, Reliant Park in Houston, Texas, and Angel's Stadium in Anaheim, California, but they also like using the Atlanta Motor Speedway.

"As part of our advocacy efforts to help fuel the future of the collector vehicle community and engage the next generation of enthusiastic classic car owners, we organized the Hagerty Driving Experience at the Atlanta Motor Speedway," says Tabettha Hammer, the firm's advocacy and public relations manager. "This program is designed to teach

young drivers, ages 15-25, how to drive a manual transmission, all while behind the wheel of cool classic cars to provide them a unique experience of driving exciting cars they may not have had the chance to otherwise.

"Approximately 40 young drivers participated and a total of about 100 people were in attendance, including parents, car owners, media and guests," says Hammer.

Using the speedway as its venue for the event, Hagerty was able to provide an exciting experience for their participants. "We were very pleased with the overall outcome of the event. We hosted it in the infield of the paddock area and utilized the media building to host our classroom session and lunch. The visual of the speedway surrounding us provided a great atmosphere for our guests and further enhanced the car culture and en-



Tabetha Hammer
Advocacy and PR Manager
Hagerty
Traverse City, MI

thusiasm environment," Hammer says.

The Atlanta Motor Speedway offers planners various facilities, from the Legends Track and other road courses to the plush 4,000-sf Tara Ballroom and luxury VIP suites, which can be used for training and seminars. In-house cater-

"The visual of the speedway surrounding us provided a great atmosphere for our guests."

ing is provided by Levy Restaurants, offering everything from box lunches to five-star dining.

Soldier Field

In March 2016, Chicago's historic Soldier Field — home of the NFL's Chicago Bears — hosted the OnRamp Insurance Conference, organized by gener8tor, a firm that invests in high-growth startups. The conference, which highlighted innovations in the insurance industry, brought together 400 participants representing 25 of the insurance industry's leading corporations, investors and startups.

"This was a one-day conference; we blocked rooms at the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place for the out-of-town participants, but the entire conference was conducted at Soldier Field, where we set up a stage for speakers, served breakfast, lunch and happy hour through the venue's caterers, and used the box suites for one-on-one meetings and sponsor hospitality suites," says Sara K. Woldt, director of business development for gener8tor and co-founder and chief organizer of the OnRamp Conference Series.

"Things went so well at Soldier Field last year that we will be holding the next OnRamp Insurance Conference at the same venue in April 6, 2017," says Woldt. "I have used other sports venues in the Midwest as well, including Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Camp Randall Stadium in Madison, home of the Wisconsin Badgers, and the BMO Harris Bradley Center, where the Milwaukee Bucks play. I have found that insurance folks like stadium venues, especially when they know we will be utilizing the deluxe field-view suites for meetings and hospitality areas, even if it isn't a game day."

Soldier Field's first floor United Club, which can accommodate large private events for up to 1,500, features 20-foot vaulted ceilings, historic columns and lakeside windows. Some of the other design features of the space include two large video walls, a built-in sound system and fixed televisions throughout. There also is onsite parking with valet service available.

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Cabanas overlook the field at the Jacksonville Jaguars' EverBank Stadium



Orlando

Increasingly Sophisticated Inside and Outside the Theme Parks

By Sara Churchville

Most meeting planners probably already know that Cvent ranked Orlando the No. 1 meeting and convention destination in the nation. But incentive program planners also have their site-selection radar tuned in to the top leisure destinations as well. According to JD Power's inaugural rating this fall of the most popular vacation destinations in the U.S., Orlando ranked No. 3 in overall traveler satisfaction and also ranked high on the list of destinations with the best hotels and entertainment. Visit Orlando recorded more than 66 million visitors in 2015, setting a new record for the U.S. travel industry. What this means for planners is many more high-end choices in a destination that's increasingly sophisticated both inside and outside the theme parks.

Small Group Experience

For one financial company, Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando provided the perfect setting for a memorable event. The group played off of the theming of the hotel with an intimate reception on the hotel's Harbor Piazza featuring a "tour of Italy-inspired" cuisine. The menu featured items such as heirloom tomato caprese salad, made-from-scratch ricotta gnocchi and a decadent gelato station. Themed décor featured string lighting, opera singers performing from a balcony overlooking the piazza and centerpieces utilizing re-purposed wine bottles with grape vines and votive candles.

The meeting planner felt the hotel and venues were perfect for her small, intimate meetings, as they could uti-



An outdoor event at Loews Portofino Bay Hotel's Harbor Piazza and a red carpet character welcome for a group at Universal Orlando.

lize flexible breakout spaces that accommodate groups from 10–45 people. In addition, she found the Donatello Boardroom to be professionally elegant — perfect for intimate meetings and one-on-one peer coaching.

Haggling at the High End

Orlando and Portofino also have been on the A-list for Cheryl Rybka, registered principal, events director for Valmark Securities Inc., a national broker-dealer based in Akron, Ohio. She's been holding the same business conference every October for 15 years in Orlando. "We like the predictability of the weather and the competitive air pricing," she says.

The meeting, which satisfies FINRA's requirement for a live annual compliance meeting for registered broker-dealer representatives, has grown from 250 to 450 attendees. The conference often has been held at the Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando, using their entire meeting space: the lawn for an NFL party; the pool for an event; two large ballrooms — one for programming, one for meals; and several smaller spaces. "If you're creative, you can do a lot with their space," she says.

Easy access to CityWalk after hours is also a draw the group enjoys. Universal CityWalk features dining, shopping and entertainment including the Hard Rock Live concert and party venue and the Blue Man Group show.

For one dinner, she arranged a 13-restaurant dine-around; the group is partial to The Palm at Hard Rock Hotel. "Sometimes you can get a bait and switch in the group dining market, but they're fantastic in that you get good quality of meal and more intimacy in 13 smaller groups," she says.

After several years at The Ritz-Carlton Orlando and Loews, Rybka's next move was The Waldorf Astoria Orlando. The five-star property agreed to address her need to maintain a high-end experience even with budget constraints. "They were really willing to come to the table and figure out how it could work," she says. For example, the hotel agreed to a kind of à la carte arrangement wherein Rybka could use some of the resources of the adjacent Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek even as the group was based at the Waldorf. It also agreed to offer a grab-and-go breakfast option — which Rybka says attendees overwhelmingly prefer anyway — thus saving substantially on breakfast costs.

Spring Break, Meeting Style

Tom King, director of professional development for the Financial Managers Society, brought his group of 50 bankers and credit union professionals to the Hard Rock Hotel at Universal Orlando — perhaps not, at first mention, an obvi-

ous fit. He has been holding meetings at the hotel for three years, but it wasn't a no-brainer when he first considered it, despite its 6,000 sf of meeting space. He was pleasantly surprised by the atmosphere and environment. "You think it will just be loud — and it can be around the pool area. But the meeting space is silent. No one is walking through; it's a professional setting. And then you can have fun at 5 p.m.," he says.

The attendees, many of whom come from the Northeast or Midwest, love the venue, he notes. Since the meeting is held in March each year, they can bring their families for spring break. King cites the area's supreme walkability. "There's no need to bus people for activities; restaurants, parks, movies, all are a five-minute walk from the property. Ninety percent of the participants went to CityWalk or the parks."

Universal's Wizarding World of Harry Potter attraction garnered particular praise, as did The CowFish Sushi Burger Bar at Universal CityWalk.

The attendees were on their own for dinner, with breakfast and a plated

lunch King arranged through the hotel. "The (Hard Rock) convention service staff is awesome; all of them are there to greet you by name when you walk in. They remember you from previous years. I found them easy to work with on contractual issues; no hidden fees," he says of the meetings team. "It was a seamless process from start to finish. The banquet and convention services staff's personal service is unmatched."

Dining & Entertainment

There are many group dining options at Universal CityWalk, where groups of up to 60 people can enjoy private dinners in highly themed restaurants. High on the list are the NBC Sports Grill and Brew, Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville, the CowFish Sushi Burger Bar and, more recently, the 19th century-themed, Steampunk-inspired Toothsome Chocolate Emporium & Savory Feast Kitchen. Also in CityWalk is Emeril's Orlando — with a 10,000-bottle wine cellar.

Located in downtown Orlando is Two Chefs Seafood, started by a former corporate chef at Emeril's Orlando and a onetime chef at The Palm, features a



The 19th century-themed, Steampunk-inspired Toothsome Chocolate Emporium & Savory Feast Kitchen in Universal CityWalk offers group dining amidst whimsical décor.



Rosen Shingle Creek soon will unveil the newly redesigned 18-hole Shingle Creek Golf Course, in partnership with Arnold Palmer Design Company.

raw oyster bar and Southern-spiced seafood. Nearby is the North Quarter Tavern, a “chef-driven” tavern backed by the owners of trendy North Quarter District lunch spot Citrus Restaurant.

The new dining, entertainment and shopping complex **I-Drive 360** on International Drive offers a smorgasbord of options. Grab a craft beer at Tin Roof, a concept transplant from Nashville, which offers attendees live rock and country music after the convention day, along with Southern staples such as pulled pork and shrimp and grits. For discriminating drinkers, Yard House at I-Drive 360 offers a prodigious selection of beers from around the world as well as rotating seasonal drafts from its Chalkboard Series. There’s also a sampling of “beer cocktails” for the adventurous. Case in point, the Cocoa Hazelnut Stout, composed of Frangelico, creme de cacao, Rogue hazelnut brown nectar and Young’s double chocolate stout.

Nearby I-Drive 360 is Mangos Tropical Café, another out-of-town concept first begun in South Beach. The Orlando incarnation includes 50,000 sf of nightclub space, notably including sufficient room for a floor show of the house’s salsa, bachatta, reggae and pop dancers. Another 12,000 sf encompasses the restaurant, featuring Floribbean cuisine.

Pointe Orlando, also on International Drive, is a dining destination in itself with Tommy Bahamas, RA Sushi, Blue Martini, B.B. King’s Blues Club and Cuba Libre to name a few.

Near the Orange County Conven-

tion Center is **Restaurant Row** on Sand Lake Road featuring more than 24 dining options from casual to upscale including Rocco’s Tacos & Tequila Bar and The Whiskey, featuring more than 100 whiskeys, bourbons, scotches and ryes as well as gourmet burgers. The burger named for the restaurant features smoked Gouda, bourbon bacon, whiskey onions and dill aioli. Live music and chef showdowns round out the entertainment options.

Unique Venues and Places to Play

Attendees can pamper themselves at the 5,200-sf **Marilyn Monroe Spa** at the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress, designed to invite comparisons to the late star’s Hollywood home. Among the signature treatments is



A reception takes over SeaWorld’s Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin attraction.

the 240-minute My Day with Marilyn, which includes a massage, facial and manicure/pedicure.

A quirky but uniquely Florida experience is **Gator Spot** on International Drive, the latest draw at Fun Spot Orlando. The attraction, situated on 2.5 acres, houses more than 100 alligators including a rare white gator with blue eyes.

Group options at **Universal Orlando** include teambuilding activities, back-lot tours and private after-hours events in one of their theme parks — Universal Studios or Islands of Adventure — that can be kicked off with a red carpet entrance featuring select characters on hand to welcome attendees. For large groups, block parties can be arranged that combine a park buyout with a private event at a CityWalk restaurant. For example, planners can hold an event at The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Diagon Alley in Universal Studios, where attendees can experience a fire-breathing dragon, a ride that offers Escape from Gringotts, a Leaky Cauldron restaurant and assorted wizard novelty shops.

In early summer 2017, Universal Orlando will debut a third park, this time with a water theme: Volcano Bay, on 30 tropical acres, will offer after-hours corporate parties and events complete with fiery lava effects erupting from a 200-foot volcano.



Eclectic options in Winter Park include boat tours, the Tiffany Glass collection at Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of Art, the Alford Inn and Park Avenue.



Winter Park

A great stay — or day trip — for groups is just north of Orlando in charming Winter Park, known for its brick-lined streets, arts, culture and eclectic shopping and dining along Park Avenue. Home of historic Rollins College, a stunningly beautiful campus on the shores of Lake Virginia, and the Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of Art — claiming the largest collection of Tiffany Glass artwork in the world — Winter Park also boasts more than 70 parks as well as scenic boat tours on a chain of lakes. The Mead Botanical Garden hosts private events against a backdrop of Central Florida’s indigenous flora and fauna.

Notable dining establishments in Winter Park that offer group options include Boca, with a farm-to-table menu, and the family-owned Bosphorus Turkish Cuisine. Another local hideaway is Scratch Tapas & Craft, featuring small plate offerings crafted from locally sourced ingredients.

The chic boutique Alford Inn can host meetings and events in its Conservatory with 5,000-sf ballroom and private dining in Hamilton’s Kitchen. The AAA Four Diamond hotel’s net profits go to an endowment dedicated to Rollins College student scholarships.



Credits: Visit Orlando and Alford Inn

At **SeaWorld Orlando**, the Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin attraction can be reserved for groups of 500-1,000 for exclusive receptions and entertainment set within the frozen realm of a population of tuxedoed penguins. Coming in summer 2017 are two new experiences: the Electric Ocean, a nighttime light, music and entertainment spectacular, and a new Virtual Reality enhancement option on the popular Kraken roller coaster — the only VR coaster experience in Florida.

At **I-Drive 360**, the Coca Cola Orlando Eye, a 400-foot-tall observation wheel, is available for groups (each private capsule holds up to 15 attendees), and Madame Tussauds offers buyouts for receptions and dinners that can be catered by nearby Wyndham Orlando Resort International Drive.

Artegon Marketplace Orlando on International Drive promises attendees something a bit more than the average mall with The Village, a one-stop shop for the Etsy crowd. More than 150 shops

in this artisanal mall within a mall offer handmade artworks, crafts and foods.

In downtown Orlando, the **Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts** has two performance theaters, a 300-seat community theater, an outdoor plaza and a banquet room that are available for private events.

New & Noteworthy

Visit Orlando, the city’s CVB, has a new mobile app that allows attendees and others to explore and earn savings

during their stay in Orlando. The app utilizes artificial intelligence to understand conversational language from users and offer personalized recommendations of Orlando experiences that best fit an individual's needs and preferences. It's available to download through iTunes and Google Play. "This innovative technology is like having your own personal Orlando expert 24/7," says George Aguel, Visit Orlando president and CEO. "It ana-

star, four-diamond resort, which claims 1,500 acres in Lake Buena Vista, boasts 45 holes of Jack Nicklaus Signature-designed golf; a golf academy; an equestrian center with options for equestrian-themed shows to entertain reception or banquet guests; and the Nine 18 Restaurant, which doubles as a fully equipped meeting space for small groups.

The **Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel** began a \$5 million reno-

and refreshed meeting spaces totaling 92,000 sf. As the hotel is an official Walt Disney World Hotel, groups are offered entertainment and event production services through the Disney Event Group as well as the Disney Institute's educational programs.

The three **Rosen Hotels** convention properties — Rosen Plaza, Rosen Centre and Rosen Shingle Creek — are undergoing major renovations from guest rooms to restaurants. Rosen Plaza recently completed refurbishments in all 800 of its guest rooms and suites and now features expanded flexible indoor-outdoor event space with 3NINE, the hotel's 5,000-sf state-of-the-art entertainment venue. 3NINE can accommodate 500 people indoors or 1,500 guests when the event is extended to the patio and pool deck '39 Poolside Bar & Grill. The venue provides groups with a dedicated, onsite daytime or evening event space outfitted with all audio-visual needs and already fully decorated and themed.

Rosen Shingle Creek will soon be unveiling the newly redesigned 18-hole Shingle Creek Golf Course, in partnership with Arnold Palmer Design Company.

Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek recently completed a \$5 million renovation including the new 3,500-sf Bonnet Creek Ballroom accommodating up to 360 people and the 2,155-sf Expedition meeting room. The renovation also includes a new wrap-around balcony and terrace overlooking the 10-acre lake.

The **Four Seasons Resort Orlando** at Walt Disney World Resort, the only resort in Orlando with a AAA Five Diamond Award, has added 37,750 sf of meeting space to its eight meeting rooms, two event lawns, two ballrooms and multiple terraces.

The AAA Four Diamond, resort-style, **Hilton Orlando** added 13,000 sf of meeting space in the form of eight new rooms last spring. This is in addition to three ballrooms — 15,000 sf, 30,000 sf and 50,000 sf — and the 50,000-sf Promenade, a landscaped outdoor venue. The 1,470-room hotel is connected to the Orlando Orange County Convention Center.

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The four-star, four-diamond Villas of Grand Cypress offers 45 holes of golf.

lyzes numerous options, extensive data and insights from destination experts and fellow travelers to create a recommended experience that is just right for (each visitor)."

Loews Sapphire Falls Resort, which opened at Universal Orlando in July, added 115,000 sf of meeting space this fall that includes a 41,000-sf ballroom, 30,000-sf hall and 16,000-sf outdoor event area. The space connects by air-conditioned bridge to Loews Royal Pacific Resort, providing a combined 247,000 sf of meeting space in the Loews Meeting Complex at Universal Orlando, which officially opened in October.

Following a \$17 million renovation to its 146 guest rooms, the **Villas of Grand Cypress** has reconfigured its Mediterranean-style Executive Meeting Center, a standalone complex that houses 7,200 sf of flexible indoor-outdoor event space with four meeting rooms divisible into eight self-contained spaces. The four-

vation of its 329,000 sf of meeting space last summer to refresh all the meeting rooms at both the Swan and Dolphin hotels. The renovation includes updated carpet and paint, along with the installation of new technology in the meeting areas. The work will occur in phases with no impact to group programs, and completion is scheduled for December. The meeting space refresh is part of the hotel's multiphase, multiyear \$140 million redesign project, which also includes transformation of all 2,267 guest rooms. In 2015, the Swan guest room renovations will wrap up by the end of 2017.

The former Buena Vista Palace Resort & Spa was recently reflagged as the **Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace**, located in the Disney Springs area. The 1,011-room hotel completed a major makeover featuring newly designed guest rooms, a new outside terrace

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WHITLOCK



CARDIFF



DIAZ



BARAN



SIGUAW

The Hilton Anaheim in Anaheim, California, has named **Frost Williams** as senior sales manager responsible for the Midwest market. He was convention sales development manager at Visit Milwaukee.

Kiawah Island Golf Resort, Kiawah Island, South Carolina, has appointed **Claire Whitlock** as director of Midwest sales. Most recently, she was with Mansion on Forsyth Park and Bohemian Hotel Savannah Riverfront in Savannah, Georgia, where she held several sales management positions.

Yolanda Cardiff was named director of sales and marketing for the Hyatt Centric Waikiki Beach, Honolulu. She previously served as the global account executive for American Express Global Business Travel.

The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village in Cape Coral, Florida, has appointed **Will Cornwall** as group sales manager. He most recently served as an association sales manager for the Sheraton Pentagon City in Washington, DC.

The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa in South Carolina

has named **Vita Canizaro** as sales manager. She previously was sales manager for The Westin Maui Resort & Spa.

Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach, Florida, has named **Miguel Diaz** as director of sales and marketing for the new luxury resort slated to open in 2017. He previously was director of sales and marketing for The Westin Savannah Harbor Golf Resort & Spa in Savannah, Georgia.

Christopher Adam Baran was named vice president of sales and marketing for W Las Vegas. He most recently served as sales manager for Caesars Palace Las Vegas.

Kelly Commerford was named director of sales and marketing for Kona Kai Resort & Spa, San Diego, California. He was director of sales and marketing at The Commons Hotel in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

David Siguaw was appointed director of sales and marketing at The St. Anthony, a Luxury Hotel Collection Hotel in San Antonio, Texas. He previously was sales and marketing director at Eden Roc Renaissance Miami Beach.

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