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THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

Leading the Way

Meetings and Conventions Spark a 2011 Turnaround in Las Vegas

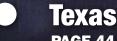
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Cover photo: Las Vegas Sands Corp. President and COO Mike Leven (left) and Chairman and CEO Sheldon Adelson.

Destinations:

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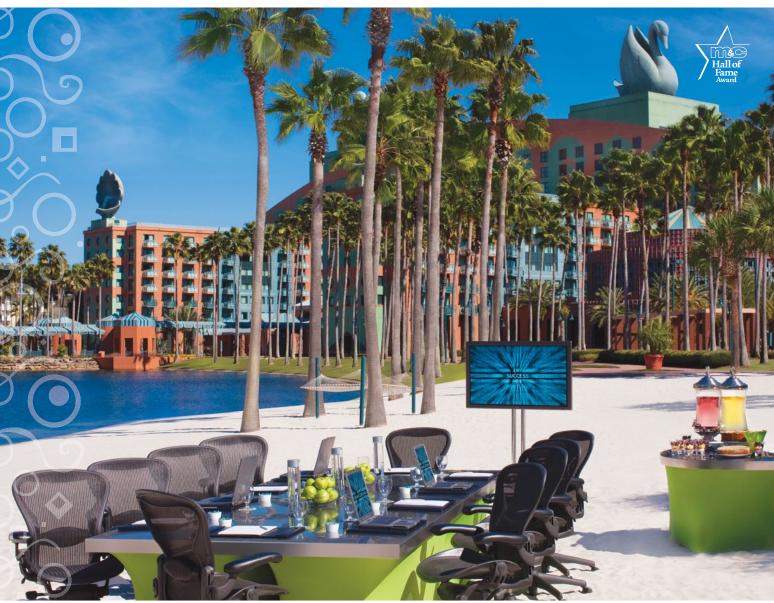
Florida
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Las Vegas Sands' Venetian (above), The Palazzo and the Sands Expo offer a combined 2.2 million square feet of meeting space.

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Outlook 2011: Positive Change

At this time of the year our industry eagerly awaits the influx of annual forecasts, especially FutureWatch — the study issued by Meeting Professionals International (MPI). FutureWatch 2011 succinctly spells out that meeting volume, number of attendees and overall spend is ex-

pected to increase, albeit moderately.

FutureWatch, which gathered information from more than 450 industry professionals in 20 different countries and from 67 MPI chapters, projects an 8 percent increase in the number of meetings planned for 2011 and a 5 percent increase in the average spend.

"After two challenging years for the

"After two challenging years for the business of our industry, we're back with FutureWatch 2011 responses indicating material real growth in activity of 8 percent," said Bruce MacMillan, president and chief executive officer of MPI.

"FutureWatch 2011 also indicates that this is the year where recent industry forays into virtual events and collaboration through social media will become increasingly mainstream. Thinking outside the room to drive performance through connectivity is becoming entrenched."

In addition to covering the top five technological trends affecting the industy, FutureWatch devotes a full section to strategic meetings management (SMM) and much more. The globally relevant report includes interview excerpts, links to on-demand webinars, case study profiles and trend summaries. (Download at *mpiweb.org*.)

This year, we tapped five of the premier meeting planners in the nation to tell us where they think our industry is headed in 2011. See their enlightening and insightful comments on page 18 in Outlook 2011. Destinations are flourishing: Australia (page 22), Florida (page 26) and Texas (page 44) are gearing up to make 2011 one very upbeat year.

And in the entertainment capital of the world (page 36), Las Vegas Sands Corp. chairman, CEO and visionary Sheldon Adelson and President and COO Mike Leven, the two highly respected hospitality industry gentlemen who grace our cover and whom I have had the pleasure of knowing for quite some time, persevered despite dismal economic conditions and perception issues and helped Las Vegas return to its rightful place as a respected international business destination.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher



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a pleasant one.





Two Fiesta Americana Resorts Go All-Inclusive

MEXICO CITY, MEXICO — Two Grupo Posadas properties Fiesta Americana Condesa Cancún and Fiesta Americana Cozumel recently converted to an all-inclusive, one set price format. "Both properties will allow guests to customize their all-inclusive vacation to create an unforgettable Mexican adventure tailored to their personal interests," said Federico Rubido, Fiesta Americana all-inclusive director. Located near the town of San Miguel, the Fiesta Americana Cozumel is surrounded by the largest coral reef in the Western Hemisphere. The resort has 168



Fiesta Americana Condesa Cancún.

rooms including 56 exotic jungle villas. Fiesta Americana Condesa Cancún has received the AAA Four Diamond award for 20 consecutive years, promising the highest quality and standards for their guests. Grupo Posadas operates 113 properties and more than 20,000 guest rooms in 50 beach and city destinations in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Chile. fiestaamericana.com

MEETING VALUES

Ocean Reef Club, Key Largo, FL. The Choice Is Yours Package allows planners to choose three of the following options for qualified meeting groups with a minimum of 10 rooms for at least two consecutive nights on select dates Sunday-Thursday: daily Continental breakfast; morning and afternoon breaks; one one-hour welcome cocktail reception; one basic audio-visual package; daily club fee of \$20 per night discounted to \$10 per night; and 30 percent off road-cart rental. For more information, call 800-843-2730 or e-mail orcsales@oceanreef.com.

- The Westin Casuarina Las Vegas Hotel, Casino & Spa, Las Vegas, NV. The Starwood Hotels & Resorts and American Airlines Group & Meeting Travel Experience offer, which is valid for groups that book a minimum of 25 room nights by March 31, 2011 and arrive through December 31, 2011, includes 3 percent credit to master; up to 100,000 Starpoints signing bonus; and special group rates with American Airlines when the group travels by May 31, 2011. Hotel and airfare bookings are handled separately. 702-836-5934, westin.com/lasvegas
- The Venetian/The Palazzo, Las Vegas, NV. The Choose Our Property/Choose Your Rewards offer, over select hot dates, includes these automatic rewards: 1/45 comp suite; 1/25 comp suite upgrade; 25 percent discount on in-house audiovisual equipment usage. Groups are eligible for up to six bonus rewards depending upon number of suites booked. Bonus rewards include 1/40 comp VIP business amenity refresh; 10 percent off shipping over 10,000 lbs.; 10 percent off SES services; one comp coffee break; 10 percent off F&B; and more. 702-414-4020, venetianpalazzomeetings.com
- Hudson New York, New York City. Group meetings held from now through March 31, 2011 are offered rates from \$179; April 1, 2011 through June 30, 2011 from \$209. Rates include late checkout; one drink voucher per guest per stay; complimentary wireless high-speed Internet access in all guest rooms; two VIPs receive complimentary upgrades. Call Grace Duncan at 212-554-6106 or grace.duncan@morganshotelgroup.com.

Disney Dream Arrives at Home Port in Florida

LAKE BUENA VISTA, FL — The Disney Dream, Disney Cruise Line's newest ship, arrived at her home port of Port Canaveral, FL, on January 4 for the first time after traveling approximately 6,500 miles across the Atlantic Ocean. The 4,000-passenger Disney Dream will welcome guests on her maiden voyage on January 26. 2011, and is scheduled to sail three-, four- and five-night cruises to the Bahamas and Disney's private island



Disney Dream arrives at Port Canaveral, FL.

Castaway Cay, from Port Canaveral. Disney Dream will introduce more unique experiences for meetings and incentives, including "magical" portholes for inside staterooms, a sophisticated lounge where the sun sets over the skyline of a different city each night, and AquaDuck, a first-of-its kind water coaster, disneymeetings.com

Welsh to Head Chicago CTB

CHICAGO, IL — The Chicago Convention & Tourism Bureau's (CCTB) board named Donald P. Welsh as its new president and chief executive officer, effective in early February. Welsh arrives in Chicago at an



opportune time: Recently, a new law designed to reform labor rules, establish exhibitor rights and realign McCormick Place operations with its major competitors in the convention and trade show industry was passed. In an interview with the Chicago Tribune, Welsh said he intends to ramp up the corporate meetings business and large trade shows. "I think the first thing we have to do...is make sure we have the best and most productive sales people in the convention market," he said. Welsh, the CEO

of the Indianapolis Convention & Visitors Association since 2008, oversaw the development of Lucas Oil Stadium, the new airport terminal, the Indiana Convention Center expansion and the Marriott Place Indianapolis hotel complex. Previously, Welsh was the chief executive of Seattle's Convention and Visitors Bureau. visitindy.com, choosechicago.com

Freeman Taps Sargent as V.P. National Sales



CHICAGO, IL — Industry veteran David Sargent resigned as senior vice president for the Chicago Convention & Tourism Bureau to accept the position of vice president of national sales and exposition services for Freeman, a leading integrated services provider for face-to-face marketing events. Sargent, who is based in Freeman's Chicago office, joined CCTB in 2009, and previously served as senior vice president, convention sales and marketing for Visit Orlando, freemanco.com

Events Calendar

FEBRUARY 17-19, 2011

ASSOCIATION OF DESTINATION MANAGEMENT EXECUTIVES ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Red Rock Casino, Resort & Spa Las Vegas, NV Contact: 937-586-3727 www.adme.org

FEBRUARY 24, 2011

DMAI DESTINATIONS SHOWCASE

Walter E. Washington Convention Center Washington, DC Contact: 202-296-7888 www.destinationsshowcase.com

MARCH 23-25, 2011

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONFERENCE CENTERS AMERICAS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The National Conference Center Leesburg, VA Contact: 314-993-8575 www.iacconline.org

MARCH 27-30, 2011

ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGIATE CONFERENCE AND EVENTS DIRECTORS. INTERNATIONAL **ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

Hilton, Located in the Walt Disney World Resort Orlando, FL Contact: 877-50-ACCED www.acced-i.org

APRIL 13-14, 2011

HOSPITALITY SALES AND MARKETING ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL AFFORDABLE MEETINGS MID-AMERICA

Navy Pier Chicago, IL Contact: 914-421-3270 www.affordablemeetings.com

APRIL 27-MAY 1, 2011 INCENTIVE RESEARCH FOUNDATION INCENTIVE INVITATIONAL

Aria Resort & Casino Las Vegas, NV Contact: 314-473-5601 www.theirf.org

MAY 24-26, 2011

IMEX — THE WORLDWIDE **EXHIBITION FOR INCENTIVE TRAVEL. MEETINGS AND EVENTS**

Messe Frankfurt Contact: (011) 44-1273-227311 www.imex-frankfurt.com

Risk vs. Reward

How to Avoid the Pitfalls and Get the Best Value

Professional meeting planners are faced with momentous decisions day in and day out. Deciding whether or not to take a chance on booking a new or renovated hotel or resort is high up on the list of risky decisions that can pay off in rich rewards, such as tremendous value and the use of the latest cool tools. Furthermore, while there might be strong pros and cons to meeting in a new or renovated hotel, that doesn't mean those arguments are the determining factor for every planner. The following stories as told by planners for the benefit of planners run the gamut from delightful to dismal.

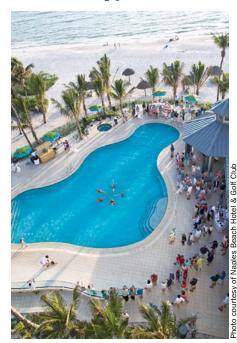
Sharon Marsh, meetings group manager for Santa Rosa, CA-based Medtronic Inc., said, "I don't specifically seek them (new and renovated properties) out. I start looking for the destination that is preferred and/or mandated by the client's needs. Then I consider all options: old properties, new properties, newly remodeled and everything in between. I then weigh the pros and cons of each property."

Nor does Marsh avoid new and renovated hotels though she does "worry" that a property will not open as scheduled. And, she said, "I prefer not to be the first, second or even third group in-house. I prefer to book at a time to allow for delays and then to let everything be tested by other groups so that any kinks can be worked out. I don't want to break in the new place. I am not a risk-taker."

Karla Bunger, director of customer relations for San Jose, CA-based Cadence, a technology company, said she prefers not to work with a hotel "until they have nine to 12 months under their belt after their soft opening so the staff is trained and broken in. Brand new hotels have too

many kinks that need to be worked out, adding to the stress of operating large events." On the positive side, Bunger said, new hotels "are better on the technology front most of the time."

Charlene Young, president of Redondo



Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club recently celebrated the opening of its allnew \$5 million beachfront pool complex, as well as the completion of the multimillion dollar renovation and remodeling of its guest rooms and suites.

Beach, CA-based Pinnacle Productions, which plans meetings for many corporations, said her decisions on booking a new or renovated hotel "really depend on a variety of things, including: who my client is and what their branding specifications are; what the options are in the destination; the quality and overall look and feel of the property."

dustry contacts to see what is being said about a new or renovated property. In addition, conducting a site inspection "is another way to assess whether service levels are where they need to be."

Like many of her counterparts, Young said she "absolutely" avoids booking a hotel prior to its grand opening. She said, "I've had the experience of having to find a new property close to a program operation date — during the holidays no less. If I have the option, I will definitely wait until a break-in time is over."

New Can Mean Great Savings and Better Attendance

Because new hotel operators are aware of planner wariness, they sometimes offer rate concessions. Marsh said that some hotels offer good deals on new space. She said, "I just used a hotel undergoing a major addition, the Peabody Orlando. I was worried about disturbances and we were able to come to a great agreement that worked wonderfully. We negotiated well."

Young said in certain instances, new space might work better because of those lower rates. She explained, "This can be the case if you have a client with budget constraints and understands the risk involved. If the client's requirements for the group are not complicated, this can be a win-win situation."

Bunger said she has not seen much in the way of rate concessions — "maybe a little bit but not enough to make me want to run the gauntlet."

As to whether a new or redone hotel helps attendance, said, "It depends on if the property has been highly promoted. For instance, the Wynn Las Vegas was Young said she always checks with inhighly promoted, not just to the meetings industry but to the general public prior to its opening and that drove attendance. I think another new property in a major city would not draw that much attention."

A new or renovated hotel might boost attendance, said Young, adding, "It depends on the cachet of the hotel. The reopening of The Plaza hotel in New York is a good example. The name carried a lot of cachet so attendees were excited to see it. An example of a new hotel that generated excitement was the Mandarin Oriental (overlooking) Central Park. When it was brand new, everyone was excited to stay there. At that point there was no other new hotel of that caliber near Central Park."

An experience Young had proved that it's difficult to generalize about new vs. old. As she recalled. "I did an incentive trip to Europe some years ago. The trip included two destinations. The first property was beautiful and historic (dating back to the 15th century) and one could easily assume there would be challenges with technology, but it was not the case. To the contrary, every modern amenity and service was available at a finger's touch...from the phone to the TV to the bathroom. It was amazing and truly the best of both worlds.

"The second property," Young contin-



Stick Resort in Scottsdale, AZ, which opened last spring, features plentiful meeting space and a wide variety of entertainment. dining, gaming, spa and recreational options.

ued, "would have seemed more advanced simply because of its outward appearance and age. The hotel rooms in this property varied to a large extent within the same

room category. This, of course, was not something we knew about during the site inspection. They only showed us the best rooms in each category. We recognized the difference, and we asked to see the worst possible room in the ROH category

that a guest may get. What they showed us was definitely not the worst. We found out the hard way what the worst was. This hotel also did not come close to having the same technology that the 15th century property had.

On every level except the exterior, the newer property seemed more outdated. While the outward appearance was very exclusive and grand, it was very much like a facade in my opinion."

Bunger's own experience did not go well. She went against her own rule and booked a newly built property on the West Coast for a meeting. Unfortunately, the hotel suffered an explosion that delayed the soft opening by a couple of months. The hotel's official opening was on time but Bunger's event was the first large group in-house on week two.

"It was difficult at best," recalled

Bunger. "Problems included fire drills in the middle of the night where everyone had to evacuate the 30-story structure and no one on staff had any idea how to handle it. Lighting in the ballroom was not working so the group had to have its production company bring in special equipment at a cost that the hotel eventually covered."

Most of what Bunger had to deal with was behind the scenes and not visible to the attendees. While Bunger's situation was dramatic, it is not unusual for planners to have

to decide whether they want to hold an event in a new or recently renovated hotel with all the potential benefits and disadvantages involved.

ip planned by Pinnacle oductions found an egant home at New York

> three-year, lobby-to-roof renovation and restoration Of course, many meetings go off smoothly in new and recently renovated hotels, but most planners simply

believe that caution is the best approach

City's Plaza hotel, which has

undergone a \$450 million,

GMs Call New Hotel Kinks a Myth

in those situations.

While planners are leery of being first into a new or redone space, general managers said that kind of caution is unwarranted. Ed Netzhammer, a regional vice president for Omni Hotels & Resorts and the general manager of the Omni Dallas Hotel, which will open early in 2012, said, "The only con to booking a new hotel is whether the opening schedule will be affected. There have been instances where hotels have not opened on time. We bring in our general manager two years before opening to insure that does not happen. I opened San Diego and Fort Worth and there were no problems."

And while, as Netzhammer said, there are planners who want to wait until all the kinks are worked out, "I tell them that is a myth. Our training program insures that all the new uniforms, new equipment and everything else is ready on opening day. At Omni, since we mostly own our hotels, our trainers might be on-property for as long as 90 days prior to opening.

"I don't want a soft opening," Netzhammer asserted: "I want the hotel

By Harvey Chipkin

to be full because it adds to the excitement and enthusiasm of the opening."

In Dallas, he said, the American Library Association has booked 900 rooms and all meeting space for the third week of January, right after the hotel opens.

In Fort Worth, where Omni is located adjacent to the convention center, the company built two model rooms — one in the hotel and one in the convention center.

than competing luxury hotels. We had 20,000 applications for 250 jobs and we selected the cream of the crop. They feel very special being here and having the opportunity to launch a brand that is new to Atlanta."

In addition, said Spivak, the hotel brought in 40 task-force members to make sure the opening went well.

And, like Netzhammer, he relied

"I just used a hotel undergoing a major addition, the Peabody Orlando. I was worried about disturbances and we were able to come to a great agreement that worked wonderfully. We negotiated well.'

> Sharon Marsh, CMP, CMM, Meetings Group Manager Medtronic Inc., Santa Rosa, CA

That worked so well, said Netzhammer, on strong input from customers, includthat in Dallas there will only be a set of model rooms in the convention center. "It's so much more convenient for a site inspection," said Netzhammer.

vantages to a new hotel. As meeting needs change, hotels need to change. As Netzhammer said, "We realized that putting two ballrooms on the same floor with prefunction space in between really works for planners; and all new Omnis are designed that way. That way major groups can meet and eat on the same floor."

The most dramatic difference with a new hotel is the technology. As Netzhammer said, "Our IT guys don't want to spec out stuff that might change. There are things that you can't do in an existing hotel even with substantial renovations. But it's also crucial to make it easy on planners. Technology not only has to be up to date but has to be easy to work with for the client and what they need."

Steve Spivak, director of sales and marketing at the new Loews Atlanta, also gets the "work out the kinks" comment regularly. But as he pointed out, "In every one of the first six months of operations, we had the highest guest scores in the Loews chain — and higher scores

ing meeting planners in designing the hotel. All meeting space is on one level and all of it has floor-to-ceiling windows. "Some of the simpler things are a result Of course there are also many ad- of that consultation, like a separate bank of four elevators just go to the conference level."

> And even having the largest spa in Atlanta (23,000 square feet), said Spivak, is appealing to planners. "Everyone," said Spivak, "has a couple of hours to get a massage."

Not All Renovations Are Alike

Sometimes a hotel that has been redone is in effect an entirely different hotel. That's the case with The Peabody Orlando, which not only redid all of its existing rooms, but added a new tower that doubled the size of the property. Gregg Herning, vice president of sales and marketing, said, "The important thing for planners to know is that there is total consistency throughout the two buildings with one exception: ceilings are a foot higher in the new tower.

"We are now competing against an entirely different competitive set," said Herning; "Our biggest job is to educate planners to the fact that we are not the

Peabody they have long known. However, as veteran partners with planners around the country we've built a solid reputation of trust and respect."

It's not unusual for a hotel to be renovated and then rebranded. In the case of what had been the Ritz-Carlton at Lake Las Vegas, the move to becoming a Dolce hotel is somewhat more dramatic than most. Dolce, well known for its con-

> ference hotels, will do an "update" rather than a major renovation, according to Barry Goldstein, Dolce's chief revenue officer.

The work on the newly named Ravella at Lake Las Vegas, a Dolce Hotel & Resort, which is set to open February 11, will include common areas, and F&B outlets. Goldstein added,

"We're trying to create a more modern, upbeat place for meetings. We will have a more open lobby where people can gather. And we are creating food and beverage outlets that provide more of a community feel.

In fact, Ritz's fine-dining restaurant will be converted into a group dining space. "We're leveraging the Lake Las Vegas community," said Goldstein. "There are many restaurants outside our door and we will work with them to become, in effect, part of our hotel. A few may even be branded and marketed that way because they are within walking distance."

And it's an interesting challenge when a hotel is iconic and very well known for the way it looked originally. That is the case with Hyatt Regency Atlanta. According to General Manager Joe Hindsley, "We will not be changing the atrium and glass elevators for which we are known, but we have had an unfinished look. Even being a large convention hotel box, we want people to come in and feel that the hotel is special and has the ability to deliver a high quality level of products and services."

Toward that end, according to Hindsley, new front desk pods were created out of black walnut by an artist; the front desk

The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club

et on 125 tropical acres, this Southwest ational pool and a more intimate "quiet" pool Florida resort is Naples' only beachfront — plus two whirlpools, locker rooms and a full meeting hotel with golf, tennis and spa — all onsite. Following a recent \$40 million renovation, the resort also boasts newly remodeled rooms and suites, a new beachside pool complex, and a beautifully restored championship golf course.

Meeting Facilities

Add 34,000 square feet of exceptional meeting space, dramatic outdoor venues and the state's elite Green Lodging certification, and The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club is the perfect ing, the hotel's numerous onsite dining opdestination for Florida meetings and events.

Newly renovated rooms feature fresh tropical décor and furnishings, flat-screen TVs, and enlarged bathrooms with new showers, double sinks and vanities. The new beachside pool complex includes two pools — a large recre-

bar with food service.

Golf and Tennis

The hotel's PGA-championship course was named Southwest Florida's Best Public Golf Course, while the award-winning Tennis Center is managed by a former USTA No. 1 Professional. And the world-class spa offers a complete menu of re-energizing treatments, as well as a beauty salon.

Along with brilliant banquet and catertions include HB's On the Gulf — Naples' only beachfront restaurant and winner of Wine Spectator's Award of Excellence since 2004. And its Sunset Beach Bar was named the "Best Beachfront Bar in Naples" by the Travel Channel. C&IT

851 Gulf Shore Blvd. N. Naples. FL 34102 Michele Marsee **Director of Sales &** Marketing m.marsee@ naplesbeachhotel.com 800-866-1946 239-261-2222 Fax: 239-261-8019 naplesbeachhotel.com

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is actually the shape of the outside of a tree. To refresh the hotel, said Hindsley, "We have added a level of finishes that will be a 'wow' factor for planners who don't expect that here."

Hindsley used a work-in-progress website and testimonials from planners to help maintain interest and is now moving to selling the redone product — initially through e-mails.

numerous guests staring at The Nebula for minutes at a time."

New and Like New

Following is a roundup of new and renovated hotels:

Hilton Anatole, Dallas, TX. Redoing all 1,600 rooms; refurbishing 600,000 square feet of event space; upgraded Internet service: introduced an ex-

"It depends on the cachet of the botel. The reopening of The Plaza botel in New York is a good example. The name carried a lot of cachet so attendees were excited to see it."

> Charlene Young, Principal Pinnacle Productions Inc., Redondo Beach, CA

At bottom, said Hindsley, "We've always seen the hotel as an attraction in itself. When people come for meetings they become infatuated, and we try to continue our story and not just reflect on the past. It's always been a hotel where people want to meet."

Another iconic hotel, the Hilton Anatole in Dallas recently completed a \$125 million transformation and according to Kavin Schieferdecker, director of sales, the latest work involved building a designated conference registration center and meeting planner offices.

According to Schieferdecker, "It's important for planners to have their own space where they can take care of all the details and work with one of our meeting services professionals."

Schieferdecker said that while hotels can't sell themselves solely on being recently opened or renovated, "there are compelling reasons; guests do anticipate new and improved amenities, accommodations and accessibility." And while art might not typically be part of that appeal, Schieferdecker said The Nebula, a huge sculpture that hangs in an atrium, will create a definite wow factor that enhances the hotel's look and feel, but without the overdone theme feel of many new hotels. Said Schieferdecker, "We've seen

ecutive lounge and concierge services on the 27th floor and updated the 80,000-square-foot fitness center. There is a new conference registration area along with designated meeting planner office. Prefunction areas, ballrooms, corridors and other spaces have been redone with new décor, carpets, wall treatments and updated audio-visual wiring, lighting and technology. The hotel also added three new restaurants.

The Peabody Orlando, Orlando, **FL**. A \$450 million project has added a 32-story tower to the 25-year-old hotel. It has added square footage, three new swimming pools and new functionality. The hotel now offers 1,641 rooms, including 193 suites — all featuring 42-inch LCD TVs, including LCD TVs in bathrooms. With the addition, the hotel now offers 300,000 square feet of meeting space, which includes an additional 220,000 square feet on three levels, anchored by the pillar-free 55,000-squarefoot Peabody Grand Ballroom. The new Napa restaurant offers a "farm to fork" concept, and a new lobby bar overlooks a recreation area and pool. A 22,000-footspa and fitness center has been added.

The 1.000-room **Omni Dallas Hotel** is scheduled to open in 2012 and will work in concert with the Dallas Convention Center, one of the country's largest. The hotel features more than 110,000 square feet of meeting space, multiple regionally authentic restaurants, a signature spa and a Starbucks — all in the heart of downtown Dallas

The JW Marriott Chicago hotel opened in the historic Burnham building; it is the first JW Marriott in Chicago.

> The \$396 million restoration of the building has resulted in a 610-room property and more than 44,000 square feet of meeting space, 40 meetings rooms, an 8,000-square-foot Grand Ballroom and the 6,000-square-foot Burnham ballroom featuring the building's original domed ceiling. The hotel offers Valeo, a 20,000-square-

The Hyatt Regency Atlanta is un-

dergoing a \$60 million renovation encompassing its lobby and guest rooms. The 1,260-room property offers 180,000 square feet of meeting space, including Georgia's largest ballroom. The transformation will create a new front desk, full services restaurant and bar, and "grab and go" market.

Loews Atlanta Hotel opened in 2010 with 414 rooms; 11 restaurants; more than 25,000 square feet of flexible function space for up to 1,580 meeting attendees; and a spa.

The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas, located at the heart of the Las Vegas Strip, is a new 2,995-room resort with a multi-tower design. It features a 100,000-square-foot casino; spa; three pools; and 150,000 square feet of convention and meeting space. There are also a few celebrity-chef restaurants.

The 607-room InterContinental New York Times Square opened for business. The 36-story property is the largest in the city to have LEED certification. Rooms average 350 square feet and have walk-in rain showers and 42-inch flat panel televisions. Restaurants include Todd English's Ça Va. C&IT

Talking Stick Resort

doors in Scottsdale, Arizona. Talking Stick Resort offers the luxuries of a resort, while providing guests with exceptional service and a wide array of options for unmatched entertainment.

After dining in any of eight world-class restaurants, guests can choose from an array of entertainment choices, including a 650-seat showroom offering live entertainment. Other entertainment hot spots include Players Sports Bar and Shadows, a martini and cigar bar. However, the resort's most exciting amenity is probably their 240,000-square-foot gaming floor.

Meeting Facilities

Arizona is a popular destination for conferences and corporate events. Talking Stick Resort features a functional, state-of-the-art conference center for those purposes. The resort's

arly last year, the most distinct resort and 25,000-square-foot grand ballroom can be dientertainment destination opened its vided into eight separate rooms or used for one spectacular occasion. It also offers 21 meeting rooms, full-service catering services and plenty of entertainment for attendees.

Spa and Recreation

The stress of making the big business deal or winning the big hand can quickly be eased with a visit to The Spa at Talking Stick. The 14th floor spa has 11 treatment rooms with services inspired by the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community's Native American culture. Other rooms at the spa include a steam room, sauna and gym.

Many a deal is made over golf, and Talking Stick Resort guests have access to 36 holes of championship golf at the adjacent world-renowned Talking Stick Golf Club, managed by Troon Golf.

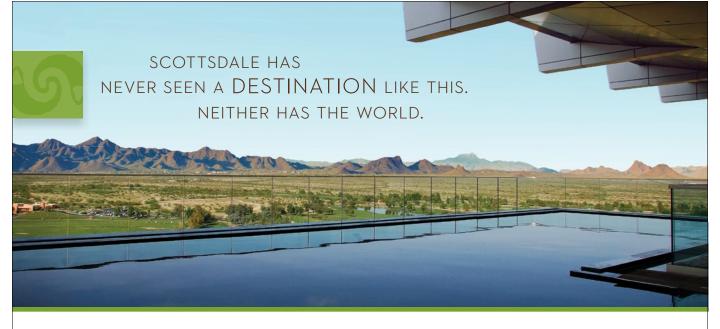
9800 E. Indian Bend Rd. Scottsdale, AZ 85260 **Steven Horowitz Director of Sales** steven.horowitz@ talkingstickresort.com 480-850-7703 Fax: 480-302-6438 talkingstickresort.com

Guest Rooms: 497 Meeting Space:

100,000 sq. ft.; 21 meeting rooms; 25,000 sq. ft. grand ballroom.

Special Services & Amenities: A

rejuvenating openair spa; eight worldclass restaurants: 10 entertainment lounges including a 650-seat showroom; 36 holes of championship golf; a lively gaming floor; two pools; and generous conference space.



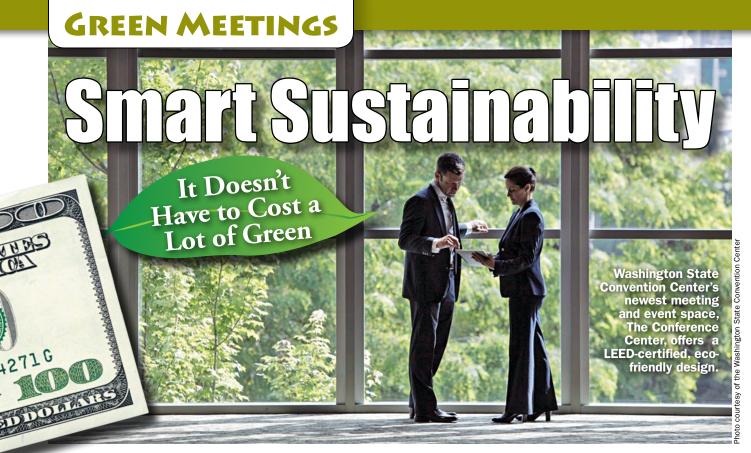


Take your meeting or event to the next level with the most distinct resort in Arizona. Now open.

Entertainment Elevated.

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'When it comes to the environment, everybody wants to do the right thing," said Derek Jenks, president and CEO of Event Planning Concepts headquartered in Herndon, VA. But, like everything else, planners have to decide where green initiatives fit into their meeting's list of priorities. "Green is definitely working its way into that equation more," he said, "but it's not a 'go green no matter what the cost' type of attitude (that I'm seeing)."

While it's true that some planners have been discouraged by the higher cost of eco-friendly items such as organic produce or biodegradable utensils and paper products, the question remains, "Do green meetings have to cost more?"

"That really is a myth," stated Tamara Kennedy-Hill, CMP, executive director of the Green Meeting Industry Council (GMIC). "A lot of times, people will pick one element and say, 'Well, that's more expensive,' but it really takes a strategic approach to meeting design. It really is about rethinking how you manage your resources. First and foremost, we always say you shouldn't do (a green

meeting) if you're not going to at least break even or save money."

She gave the example of taking the money saved by eliminating water bottles and investing it in another area of the meeting such as food. "It's having the tools to know how to save money. We actually have cases showing where planners and corporate organizations have saved up to millions of dollars putting these strategies into place.

"It's all about balancing all of those different areas: the economic piece and the environmental piece," she added. "There's also the social piece. How do you engage your delegates and be responsible to the locations in which you meet?

"People keep asking," Kennedy-Hill continued, 'What is a green meeting? How do we know what that looks like? How do we design and develop one? How do we measure it?"

Those questions and others will be answered at GMIC's fifth annual Sustainable Meetings Conference, which will take place at the DoubleTree Hotel in Portland on February 20-23. The 476-room DoubleTree is the first lodging property in Oregon to achieve certifica-

tion from Green Seal, an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the environment.

The DoubleTree, which offers 38,000 square feet of meeting space along with an 8,500-square-foot Executive Meeting Center, has launched a wide variety of environmental initiatives, including composting, reduced water use, property-wide recycling and a biodiesel shuttle. The hotel also has placed a carbon calculator on its website, doubletreegreen.com, to help planners determine how to make their meetings carbon neutral.

The Sustainable Meetings Conference's theme of GAME ON! is a nod to online gaming where people get fully engaged by taking on different roles. Planners and suppliers who attend the conference will be divided into teams, given a case study and challenged to create a sustainable solution by engaging in a little friendly competition.

"We're making this an interactive experience so that these (sustainable) standards come alive," Kennedy-Hill explained. "We want to make it strategic to show that there is ROI for creating a sustainable event. We're going to do some

fun things, as well, like yoga breaks, a sustainable dine-around so they can really see the destination, and a 'Junk to Funk' recycled trash fashion show.

"This conference is where you can practice, ask your questions and test things out," she summarized. "You can walk away with an action plan of what you're going to do." Conference details are available at sustainablemeetingsconference.com.

The Gold Standards

Even more help is on the way to answer the big question of what a green meeting looks like. The industry's first comprehensive standards for environmentally sustainable meetings are scheduled to be released early this year. The project is a partnership between the Convention Industry Council (CIC) APEX initiative and ASTM International

The new standards will address nine

had a zero discharge policy for

the last 10 years, so nothing

international conventions.

categories: Accommodations, A/V and Production, Communications & Marketing, Destinations, Exhibits, Food and Beverage, Meeting Venues, Onsite Offices and Transportation.

"The standards will give planners resources that will be applicable across the entire planning cycle," explained Lawrence Leonard, CMP, APEX director for CIC. "A few examples include the selection process (destination, venue, accommodations), logistics planning (environmental performance actions and measurements for vendors and for the planner), marketing and communications, and key performance indicators (KPIs) for the meeting's environmental sustainability initiatives.

"In addition to the nine formal standards, we plan to produce additional supporting documents that will dig into strategies and tactics for planners to in-

troduce the standards inside their organizations and implement them for their meetings," he added.

The new standards will address the needs of organizations with well-established green practices as well as those just beginning to explore their options. "The standards will present four levels of attainment (simply called Level 1-4)," Leonard stated. "Planners and organizations just starting to get involved with sustainability should look at all four levels to get a sense of the scope of the standards, but probably want to focus on Level 1. Level 1 has been carefully designed and calibrated to be accessible for all organizations, even those just getting started."

The new standards will be published on the CIC website, conventionindustry.org. "We also plan to have a comprehensive launch of the standards that may include (items such as) webinars, industry presen-

Green Meetings at Sea



NCL recently was awarded the Gold 2010 William M. Benkert Marine **Environmental Protection** Award by the U.S. Coast Guard. "It's considered the most significant national award for environmental protection," said Myrtidis pictured right). "This is the first time a major cruise line has been awarded the gold award, so we are very proud of it."

water and sludge. "In the past two years alone we have reduced our solid waste volume by 25 percent," Myrtidis said. "In 2009 alone, we recycled 174 tons of cardboard, 915 tons of scrap metal and 1,362 tons of glass." He added that NCL managed nearly 1,400 tons of trash and food waste at Waste-to-Energy facilities for conversion into electricity; and cooking oil is delivered ashore

for conversion into biodiesel fuel for vehicles.

According to the "2010 Cruise Lines International Association Environmental Report: Steering a Sustainable Course," CLIA's 24-member lines (including NCL) "...recycle approximately 80,000 tons annually, comprised largely of paper, plastic, aluminum cans and glass."

Myrtidis said NCL advises planners on how to offset the carbon footprint of their meetings and offers customized programs to engage attendees in sustainability efforts. Shore programs while in port can include beach cleanups, reef cleanup dives, eco-tours, community park beautification tours and more. Also customized for groups onboard are behind-the-scenes "green" tours of recycling systems, and the onboard environmental officer is available to speak to groups.

By Karen Brost

goes overboard with the exception of food waste, which is

discharged in accordance with MARPOL, the international

convention that regulates marine pollution, and there is no

environmental impact." Notably, every ship in NCL's fleet —

from the oldest Sun and Star to the newest Epic — boasts a

zero discharge record: The older ships have been retrofitted

The NCL Corporation, the third largest cruise operator

Myrtidis said that a typical itinerary on a 2,570-passenger

in the world, states that its environmental policies and

stringent in the industry and exceed existing laws and

ship generates a total of more than 6,300 cubic feet of

plastics, paper, cans, glass and food waste, as well as oily

technologies onboard its ships are among the most

with the latest waste-water treatment systems.

tations and articles," Leonard stated. "CIC member organizations will certainly play a key role in getting the information into the hands of planners and suppliers."

CVB Assistance

Jenks advocated starting with the CVB to get a good overview of the green initiatives a city has to offer. "Portland has a pretty strong initiative and Seattle does, too, from start to finish," he commented, offering a few examples. "When it's the city itself, they're not only pushing the properties, but giving ideas on how you can go green, and it's not going to cost your clients a lot extra. We're in Seattle for a couple of events each year, and it's a selling point of the city itself."

The Washington State Convention Center in downtown Seattle recently unveiled The Conference Center, a 71,000-square-foot meeting and event space designed and furnished to exceed LEED Silver certification standards. Nearly 90 percent of all construction cess was reclaimed and recycled.

Nearly 9,000 guest rooms are located within walking distance of the center, which reduces the cost and environmental impact of transporting attendees.

Setting a Green Example

As with convention centers, selecting a hotel property that already has wellestablished green practices can make it easier to plan a sustainable meeting.

According to the Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina, lodging is the fourth most intensive user of energy in the commercial sector, so it is doing its part to reduce energy consumption. The 1,053-room property was the first hotel in North America to be powered by fuel cell technology. The heat generated as a byproduct of this clean energy source is also captured and used to heat the hotel's water and swimming pools.

The Sheraton recently became the largest hotel to receive Gold Level certification from Green Seal. The property has

implemented a long list of green initiatives, including electronic thermostats with motion sensors, the use of low VOC paints, recycling, composting and sustainable food and beverage options.

More than 100 sales and services managers at all eight properties owned by Las Vegas Meetings by Caesars Entertainment have been certified as Green Meeting Professionals by the consulting firm Esty Environmental Partners. Under the umbrella of its CodeGreen program, Caesars Entertainment has invested more than \$60 million in sustainability initiatives over the past seven years. For example, all refuse from each property is sorted and recycled, lighting and ventilation in the meeting rooms are regulated based on occupancy, and used vegetable oil is repurposed for fuel. In addition, the recent 263,000-square-foot expansion of the convention space at Caesars Palace has achieved LEED Silver certification.

The 493-room Hyatt Regency Scottsdale Resort and Spa at Gainey Ranch rewaste generated during the building procently introduced it's "Meet and Be Green" program. The property, asks groups to commit to a list of 13 initiatives, such as an agreement to only use electronic communications for planning, the elimination of plastic throwaway water bottles, the use of set meeting room temperatures, and the donation of all unused food to a local charity. In return, the Hyatt will commit to providing a 10 percent rebate on all audio-visual, and food and beverage related to the meeting or event.

NY-based Arrow Electronics will participate in the "Meet and Be Green" program during a leadership meeting the company will hold at the Hyatt this winter. The event will attract more than 100 guests from around the world. "We really try our utmost to be as green as possible," stated John Hourigan, Arrow's director, corporate communications. He commented that since Arrow already has a number of green initiatives in place, Hyatt's program seemed to be a good match.

One of Arrow's initiatives involves go- just makes sense to do it."

ing paperless. "We have a Web-based registration system where they can do anything they need to do (including travel reservations) without printing a piece of paper. It's a one-stop shop," he said.

Arrow also arranges centralized transportation to and from the airport instead of having attendees take cabs individually. Also, if the layout of the meeting city allows for it, Arrow arranges what Hourigan called a "walk-around dine-around" where attendees can walk to their restaurant, thereby eliminating the need for any kind of group transportation. He noted that a side benefit of walking is that it gives attendees more opportunities to network.

Greening Up the Giveaways

Another area where planners can make a big impact involves giveaways, including handouts, pens and other materials. Supplier USFI/Green Meetings offers an online catalog of products designed for green meetings, including biodegradable cups and pens made of corn products, eco-friendly flash drives with wood covers, lanyards made from recycled soda and water bottles, and hotel key cards made with recycled plastic and soy inks. A full list of products can be found at greenmeetings.usfi.com.

Spread the Word

It's important that attendees be brought into the loop. "If you don't have attendee buy-in," said Kennedy-Hill, "you're going to get a lot of resistance. It's part of that stakeholder engagement that is both internal and external. It's making sure that your organization's event is aligned with the values of your company."

Hourigan gave an example of how those values can be aligned. "We're a global distributor of electronics as well as computing solutions where there are aspects of our business where we're involved in the recycling of electronics. Having that (green) initiative also apply to our meetings fits within the components of our business model, as well. It C&IT



Face-to-Face

For the last few years, the recession and even the drawn-out "recovery" period have been a reason for many companies to pare down their off-site meetings, both in terms of number of events and the spend on lodging, F&B and other aspects for meetings that are approved.

But the general consensus in the meeting industry is that now, and even more so next year, meeting budgets are expanding. And ironically enough, the recession again factors into this decision: the strain it has brought on employees has created a need for the kind of engagement with company and coworkers that only face-to-face meetings can foster.

Looking for Talent Again

That's the compelling argument made by Alisa Peters, CMP, CMM, president of the Chicago Area Chapter of Meeting Professionals International and national account manager for Experient's Chicago location. She pointed out that corporations are "recognizing that they've been asking the same talent to work the jobs of two or three people for two years, oftentimes without raises."

Among the results, Peters noted, are that "employees in general are starting to call in sick more when they're not really sick" and "wear and tear is starting to show within teams," both of which harm a company's productivity and ultimately its bottom line. Many managers are thus looking to teambuilding events, incentive trips and other types of meetings to motivate employees and realign them with the company's mission. That also promotes retention. "We're finding that some companies are starting to look for talent again, and the first place they're pulling from are people that already have jobs because those people survived all layers of cuts and are the true talent," Peters explained. "So companies need to do things that are going to keep their top talent motivated so that their competitors don't come along and scoop them up."

Those things include meetings that incentivize employees to continue to deliver for the company, personally connect them with the organization and their coworkers,

and train them in ways that support their professional development.

Rate Increases Predicted

But whatever the exact reason for the resurgence in offsite meetings, hotels are expected to react to the increased occupancy — from groups as well as individual business travelers and the leisure segment — with escalated rates. American Express Business Travel's latest Global Business Travel Forecast, released in October, predicts increases in corporate negotiated rates of 1 percent to 5 percent for mid-range properties and 2 percent to 6 percent for upper-range hotels. What may temper overall occupancy levels and rate hikes in major meeting hubs such as Orlando and Las Vegas is the sheer amount of rooms inventory that's available, with new developments such as Bonnet Creek and CityCenter, respectively. So a shift to a full-blown seller's market in these cities isn't likely to happen even by next fall, many planners feel.

On the other hand, cities where supply is more in line with demand, such as New York, Washington and Chicago, are approaching a seller's market much more quickly. "We're seeing very significant increases in rates and definitely less concessions than we've seen in past meetings," noted Dahlton A. Bennington, CMP, CMM, director of business meeting services with the Fort Lauderdale-based SFN Group. "In looking at meetings in 2013 and 2014, it's truly the seller's market. We're having a lot less room to negotiate on the programs that are much further out, and I'm seeing it even in some of our short-term bookings for 2011."

Greater Travel Demand

Modest increases in domestic airfares are also predicted, but that's only because there have already been significant hikes this year: 39 percent for business class and 21 percent for economy short-haul, according the Global Business Travel Forecast. With the greater travel demand in the first quarter of this year, airfares were approaching pre-recession levels in June, the study reported. "Airlines have carefully calibrated ca-

Meets the New Normal

pacity to ensure fuller planes and better profitability," said Christa Degnan Manning, director, eXpert insights research, Global Advisory Services, American Express Business Travel, in a statement. "This translates to higher pricing for available seats and fewer promotional discounts as travel demand increases."

According to Peters, airlines are making "record profit without adding additional legs of travel or additional planes. So even if you have a destination with an amazing amount of capacity, when the amount of flights to that destination from different locations has been cut in half, the inconvenience of travel still remains an issue for a planner that has a lot of attendees coming whose schedules are extremely valuable.

"Attendees don't have the flexibility that if a flight gets missed or delayed, they can jump on another one." She argued that the current inconvenience of air travel will motivate companies to avoid air travel for meetings when they can, which in turn affects hotels' group business. "I think it's going remain a buyer's market to some extent until the airlines get back on track again," she concluded.

Incentive Programs Returning

Of course, companies can't get around air travel for incentive trips, but here the focus has been on domestic destinations in order to save travel costs. Whether overseas or not, incentive trips are expected to increase along with meetings in general in 2011. For example, 62 percent of respondents to the Site International Foundation's "Site Index: Annual Survey," released in September, expect an increase in motivational travel use in the next six to 12 months, with 84 percent predicting improvement in a one- to three-year span.

And meetings at high-end resorts, which are oftentimes reward programs, also will proliferate in 2011, predicted Publicis Meetings USA, which reports growing interest in luxury venues from its clients. One case in point is Madison, WI-based TDS Telecom, which has added two incentive trips to Las Vegas for next year, according to Lynette Resch, CMP, senior administrator-conference services. "We're moving forward, going

pacity to ensure fuller planes and better profitability," said Christa Degnan Manning, direcfollowing suit," she said.

In fact, other companies are. Bennington indicated that during the recession, SFN Group didn't cut its incentive trips to the U.S. and even to destinations such as Canada and Mexico, and "we actually increased our incentive budget for the 2010 program, and 2011 is also increasing."

In 2009, Richardson, TX-based Lennox Industries Inc. decreased its number of lowerend incentives, but maintained its higher-end incentive trips and recognition programs, noted Julie Martinez, CMP, CMM, director, events and incentives. The company also still does at least one international program per year, "but we do have to be mindful of the currency exchange more so now than before," said Martinez. "I am not seeing any great values out there. We still have to be astute with our pencils and negotiations. Mexico is the only country where I see great values and major discounting."

Hybrid Meetings

While incentive trips — those that survived the cuts — generally saw a restriction to domestic destinations during the last couple years, many other programs shifted to a virtual medium to save costs.

But companies are now realizing that for many events, the drawbacks to that approach outweigh the cost savings. "I think a lot of companies during the recession started trying to take many of their meetings completely online, and what many have found is that you don't want one extreme or the other, but a mixture of the two," Peters said. "You need a face-to-face meeting that gets people excited, engaged and immersed again, and then you need an electronic platform where attendees can continue that conversation in a relevant way." Hybrid meetings, Peters contends, are "the wave of the future."

A meeting with a virtual platform where attendees and presenters can exchange ideas before, during and after the face-to-face event promises more ROI than a meeting that is "100 percent onsite and then noth-

"We're moving forward, going full force, and I'm boping other companies are following suit."

Lynette Resch, CMP Senior Administrator Conference Services TDS Telecom Madison, WI



By George Seli



"You need a face-to-

gets people excited,

immersed again, and

electronic platform

then you need an

where attendees

can continue that

conversation in a

Alisa Peters CMP, CMM

National Account Manage

relevant way."

Experient

Chicago, IL

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engaged and

ing happens afterward," said Peters. That is borne out by MPI's meetings. "The World Education Congress '10 has an active Twitter feed; it's conversations based on an event that ended in Vancouver last July. So the fact that those conversations are still happening now I think is fantastic," Peters added. Such activity also provides another basis for measuring ROI, as attendees will invariably comment on the value of the program or what aspects they'd like improved. And a stronger ROI focus is really the centerpiece of the "new normal" in the meetings industry.

The Perpetual Environment

Redmond, WA-based Microsoft is certainly doing its part to herald in the age of the hybrid meeting. Said General Manager of Events and Studios Jeff Singsaas, "In the old days we would hold a conference, show a lot of content, people would come, go away and then we'd go dark and did not have any contact with them. Especially in the technology field, it's about information, and content can

Jeff Singsaas General Manager of **Events and Studios** Microsoft Redmond, WA



"Maintaining a perpetual environment where people can reach in, connect on their time...is very powerful and very much a part of bow it's going to be going forward."

get stale very quickly. But maintaining a perpetual environment where people can reach in, connect on their time and in the way they want to connect with you, is very powerful and very much a part of how it's going to be going forward."

For many of Microsoft's meetings, that "perpetual environment" takes the form of a proprietary platform, "a fairly sophisticated emulation of an actual event attendance experience. You log in and it looked like you were going into a conference

hall, you could pick up collateral material if you wanted, from the various vendors or from us, you could log in to a recorded keynote or breakout session, and there was a primitive level of social networking available early on [around 2008]."

The social networking component of hybrid meetings, whether through Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and so on, has "hit critical mass," Singsaas believes. "It's part of the landscape now, so if you're not thinking in terms of digital capability in the event space, you're going to be rapidly left behind. Audiences by and large expect a digital element to any event of significance."

In terms of client-facing events, a digital component "keeps people really in-

volved in a community, and maintaining these communities is really a new way for businesses to stay really focused on what customers want." It can also be a smart way to reach out to an internal audience. 'We are using Facebook to promote our incentive programs and post peer-to-peer comments about the program to kind of keep the momentum and expectation up," said

Bennington, adding that the company will eventually adopt a Twitter feed for some of its meetings.

While Microsoft deploys a proprietary platform for many of its virtual meetings, Singsaas predicts such platforms are "going to become commodities. Many groups are making substantial investments in offering generic platforms that are customizable to various customers' needs. There are some really exciting products being offered, and I don't think companies will have to think about, 'How am I going to set aside the IT dollars to



Julie Martinez. CMP, CMM Director, Events & Incentives Lennox Industries Inc. Richardson, TX

"I am not seeing any great values out there. We still bave to be astute with our pencils and negotiations. Mexico is the only country where I see great values and major discounting."

get this developed?' It's going to end up being a relatively inexpensive thing for companies to be able to implement.'

Arguably, the essence of the hybrid meeting is not simply virtual interaction along with the meeting, but the fact that some its attendees are participating "entirely" through the virtual space, getting session content through live broadcasts and video streaming, for example. That not only reduces travel and lodging costs for the event, but also its environmental footprint, a priority that seems to grow every year in the meetings industry.

Sustainability Practices

Indeed, green practices by groups and facilities are another part of the new normal. "People look at you in a strange way now if they see bottled water out in the beverage station. It is a lot more normal to have the water coolers with the refillable, reusable water bottles," said Peters.

According to Publicis Meetings USA, such a practice only scratches the surface of the "comprehensive green meetings" we'll see next year. As Publicis Managing Director and Vice President of Meeting Services Karen Young explained in a statement, "It's not enough to simply select LEED-certified destinations and use recyclable products. Increasingly, clients are expecting every aspect of a meeting to include an environmental

component, from biodiesel vehicles and biodegradable materials to the use of locally sourced food and reusable plants for centerpieces in lieu of cut flowers." (See related story on page 14.)

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) ideas can get creative, as well. Some of the most interesting ideas come from the nonprofit sector. Clean The World, for example, is a nonprofit founded in 2009 that collects and recycles gently used soap and shampoo products discarded by hotels and distributes them to impoverished people worldwide, preventing the millions of deaths caused by hygienerelated illnesses every day. The organization, which offers corporate teambuilding events, was featured at MPI's latest World Education Congress in Vancouver.

"Meetings are evolving into being much more meaningful, and that's requiring planners to be creative and resourceful in incorporating CSR into all elements of a program, not just teambuilding," Bennington maintained. At SFN Group's franchise-license meeting, for instance, is a "vendor showcase," and to drive traffic through that trade show each attendee is given a backpack to collect school supplies at every table. The supplies are then donated to a local school that is in need. "So it's not a teambuilding activity at all, it is truly a vendor showcase where they're learning about services, but it's done in a meaningful way that's good for the local community," she explained. While she has noted a stronger focus on CSR among the millennials (Generation Y), "at the same time it is something that our attendees are now used to seeing and are demanding it." It also pays to bear in mind that the millennials will form a major part of the demographic companies will be recruiting from as the economy improves.

Strategic Meetings Management

In practice, of course, many companies will fall shy of the "comprehensive green meetings" Young described, and may not be able to incorporate CSR activaccurately identify where they stand in

ities into their meetings across the board. Similarly, the strategic meetings management program (SMMP) is an ideal that many companies have yet to adopt. They may not have the need (or haven't seen the need) to consolidate meeting planning functions and establish companywide standards and best practices. "There are still many companies out there that are using administrative assistants to organize their meetings ad hoc because they just don't have the continual need for large meetings," Peters observed. "But I will say that SMMPs will only increase as more regulation gets heaped on additional industries, like IT. From a self-education standpoint, I think many planners will follow the SMMP tracks at PCMA (Professional Convention Management Association) or MPI

Dahlton Bennington CMP. CMM **Director Business** Meeting Services SFN Group Fort Lauderdale, FL



"Meetings are evolving into being much more meaningful, and that's requiring planners to be creative and resourceful in incorporating CSR into all elements of a program, not just teambuilding"

(Meeting Professionals International) conferences and be educated on the benefits, take that back to their company and become instigators."

The National Business Travel Association (NBTA) certainly sees SMMP adoption in corporate America as a work in progress, and developed a new model this summer "to help companies

the SMMP implementation process and how to progress successfully to the next level," according to NBTA. Developed in conjunction with StarCite, the new SMM Maturity Model gauges progress in meetings policy, strategy, registration, sourcing, planning, payment, technology, reporting and other key SMMP areas. The NBTA plans to incorporate the tool into its recently launched Strategic Meetings Management Certification (SMMC) program.

The Good News

While social media, CSR and SMM are on continual upward paths in the meetings industry, meetings themselves are recovering from a big dip due to the recession and, in some cases, perception issues brought on by the AIG incident. But

> the good news is that recovery in meeting budgets going into 2011 looks quite promising, albeit with a more critical attitude toward ROI for each event. Negotiation and budgeting skills will accordingly be at a premium among planners, as high airfares and a predicted spike in hotel room rates will make it more chal-

lenging to keep the investment part of ROI in check. Of course, one must also try to improve the quotient by ramping up the return.

Bennington said that one of the timeliest skills for planners is the ability to create highly "collaborative" meetings. "The nature of business today has become very collaborative, meaning that people want to work together to reach specific goals and have a voice. So in the planning process, it's not just developing a business session with a presenter; it's being able to shift that session on a dime and let everyone have a voice and say in what they're learning and doing, and creating exercises that are conducive to that. In terms of a skillset, if you yourself can't adapt to that collaborative environment, C&IT it's hard to create one."



Esplanade Lagoon in Cairns, in Tropical North Queensland, is a popular swimming destination that overlooks the Great Barrier Reef.

Australia may be down under geographically but it's heading for the top of the meetings world. Australia's going after the U.S. meetings market in a big way, with a massive effort to build new meeting and hotel-meeting facilities and to improve existing ones. You can't ask for much more in a meeting destination: Australia is a continent of contrasts, with modern, bustling cities; friendly folks, ranging from newcomers to Aboriginal people; a distinct foreign culture in which the language is nonetheless English; millions of square miles of magnificent countryside ranging from desert to lush semi-tropical; world-famous natural attractions; and a growing number of great meeting facilities.

In addition, Australia's not quite as far as you might think. In fact, for meeting attendees coming from the western U.S., it's not much farther than much of Europe. And it's a country with a warm, welcoming attitude towards Americans.

"Australia is just an incredible experience," said Jim Ruszala, director of marketing for Fenton, MO-based Maritz Travel, which produces meetings, events and incentive programs for large corporations. "It really offers something special for every meeting planner...and for every attendee."

A Growing Meetings Infrastructure

"In addition to our larger cities, many of our more rural regional areas are becoming important meeting destinations

as well," said Tourism Australia's Regional General Manager for the Americas Daryl Hudson. "For the American meetings market, the three most popular destinations are Sydney, Melbourne and the Cairns/Great Barrier Reef area."

Sydney, of course, is the cosmopolitan crossroads of Australia, the main international gateway, the biggest city (4.4 million population), and the host of the most international gatherings, including the 2000 Summer Olympics.

"I first went there for the Dreamtime Conference in October, '09, to learn about Australia as a meeting destination," Ruszala said. "We spent time in Sydney, but also in other destinations — even the outback. We've brought a dozen groups there since then. And all of them say the same things: Australia has a definite 'wow' factor, as far as generating attendance. The CVBs and the meetings infrastructure there are experienced and professional. And the atmosphere is very conducive to productive meetings."

Sydney bulked up its tourism infrastructure a decade ago, for the hundreds of thousands of visitors who came here for the 2000 Olympics, and now it's doing it again for its meetings infrastructure. Currently, the city has 32,000 hotel rooms, 5,000 of which are within walking distance of the Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre, which has 323,000 square feet of meeting space, including a 3,500-seat auditorium and 100,000 square feet of exhibit space.

Sydney Olympic Park, which was televised every night in September 2000, is now a "business precinct," with more than 100 meeting venues and some 237,000 square feet of exhibit space. Situated on the Sydney waterfront is Darling Island Wharf, which has event space for 800 people as well as meeting rooms. In addition, the Grand Pavilion at the Rosehill Gardens Event Centre, has 68,000 square feet of flexible meeting and exhibit space.

Like any great meeting city, Sydney has several unusual meeting venues as well. The Sergeants Mess, a converted old army barracks located on the harbor, can host meetings for up to 350 attendees. The Ivy, an entertainment/dining development opened in 2008, has a variety of indoor and outdoor meeting venues.

The Sebel Parramatta Hotel, just outside the city, has 194 guest rooms, and 11 meeting and function rooms with a total of 21,000 square feet. The Quay Grand Suites Sydney is an apartment-style hotel with meeting rooms accommodating up to 140 attendees. And the Fraser Suites has similar accommodations and meeting space.

"Sydney is one of those cities that strikes you with a sense of awe," said Ruszala. "It's got a magnificent skyline. It's got that incredible Opera House sticking out into the

The Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre offers 52 meeting rooms and more than 322,000 square feet of exhibition space.





"Australia...is so vast and so diverse that it's actually many great destinations. We were surprised, in fact, at the number of great meeting facilities in out-of-the-way places such as the outback and in Cairns, near the Great Barrier Reef."

Jim Ruszala, Director of Marketing Martiz Travel, Fenton, MO

harbor. It's got the Harbour Bridge, which we've all seen in so many photos. And the Sydney Harbour Bridge Climb is a great activity for teambuilding; you actually trek up to the top of the bridge. It's not for the faint of heart. But it's a trek you'll never forget."

On the southern coast of Australia, the striking skyline of Melbourne has become an international destination in its own right. This city of 3.9 million people, sitting on the shores of Port Phillip Bay, is considered Australia's capital of major events.

Accordingly, it boasts 25,000 hotel rooms, along with the award-winning Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre (MCEC). Located on the Yarra River in the heart of downtown, the convention center is the only Six-Star Green Star environmentally rated convention center in the world. The MCEC offers 52 meeting rooms, a banquet hall, a spectacu-

lar entry level foyer, and a 6,000-seat state-ofthe-art plenary that can be divided into three self-contained theaters.

Sitting right next door, and internally linked to the convention center, is the Melbourne Exhibition Centre, with 322,917 square feet of exhibition space, including a 466-seat auditorium, as well as spectacular views over the Yarra River. This facility is the site of the annual Asia-Pacific Incentives & Meetings Expo. Hundreds of national and international exhibitors come for seminars, workshops and networking events. Last year's event brought the largest number of hosted buyers in the event's history, setting

By Steve Winston

records with more than 15,000 pre-scheduled appointments and roughly 1,000 attendees taking part in the professional education program. This year's event, set for February 15–16, 2011, will feature more than 3,600 international suppliers and buyers, along with 850 exhibitors from 50 countries across the globe.

New hotels are popping up here all the time. Scheduled for completion soon is the Citadines Melbourne on Bourke, a 398-room hotel/residence with conference space. And Crown Melbourne just opened its third hotel in the prestigious Crown Entertainment District, the 658-room Crown Metropol, with meeting space for 200 and a boardroom. Next door is the newly renovated Crown Conference Centre, Australia's only purposebuilt hotel convention facility, which can now accommodate meetings for 840 attendees.

The big cities, however, are only one slice of the pie for meeting planners. Many companies, in fact, choose to meet outside the cities. "You can't really talk about Australia as a 'destina-



Crowds gather at Sydney Harbour to celebrate the new year with a colorful fireworks display at the Sydney Opera House — a world-class performing arts center and symbol of the Australian nation.

tion," said Ruszala. "It's so vast and so diverse that it's actually many great destinations. We were surprised, in fact, at the number of great meeting facilities in out-of-the-way places such as the outback and in Cairns, near the Great Barrier Reef. The Uluru area has Technology Park, with a modern exhibition hall and meeting spaces. Even in the out-of-the-way places, the meeting facilities are technologically advanced."

Shana Pereira, international director Americas, Tourism Queensland, reminded planners that another benefit of holding a meeting or incentive outside of a major city is to give the group an unique angle or new perspective to the event: "The Great Barrier Reef is a place that people want to see — it could be on their 'bucket list.' Being that Cairns is the main gateway to the Reef, the city is able to offer an experiential meeting that takes place alongside the natural wonder of the world, and will guarantee a meeting that attendees will remember forever."

Cairns, a city of 150,000 people on Australia's northeastern coast, is surrounded by an abundance of natural wonders, including the World Heritage Listed Daintree Rainforest.

The award-winning Cairns Convention Centre has 135,000 square feet of flexible meeting space. The Sebel Cairns Hotel has 18,000 square feet of meeting and boardroom space.

A Country — a Continent — of Wonders

"Tourism Australia highlights the great value and incentive power of Australia as a M&I destination with compelling itineraries that are competitively priced," said Hudson. "We do this through our trade development work with DMCs in the USA, including trade shows, familiarization programs and road shows that bring Australia to U.S. planners."

Foreign meeting destinations such as Australia can prove surprisingly cost-effective. These destinations often generate higher attendance, because they add an exotic "wow" factor to the mix. And attendees may leave these meetings with higher levels of excitement and enthusiasm for their work than ever before because they may bring back memories of a lifetime. Australia — especially in terms of location — is about as "foreign" as you can get. Yet, it's blessed with a friendly people whose language is English, and who possess a great understanding of the American meetings market.

"The sight of Ayers Rock — this magnificent mesa glowing orange in the middle of the outback — is one I'll never forget. We even got to play Australian football with the Aboriginal natives. And that, too, was an experience that will stay with me forever," related Ruszala.

One of the best places to start researching The Land Down Under is *australia.com*. Another helpful site is *businessevents.australia.com*. Information on how to access the free services of the convention bureaus across the country is at *aacb.org.au*.





lorida has a long history of hosting large meetings...from presidential conventions to Super Bowls to international business events. From Jacksonville to Key West, this state is 600 miles long.

And it offers meeting planners an incredible diversity of choices in facilities and settings.

MIAMI

In November, Office Depot held its 2011 Vendor Partnership Meeting at the Doral Golf Resort & Spa, a Marriott Resort west of the city, bringing 500 attendees and 100 exhibitors. In conjunction with the meeting, the company's independent, non-profit charitable arm, the Office Depot Foundation, held a fund-raising event.

"Miami's perfect for us," said Kelly Curry, director of corporate events at Office Depot, which is headquartered in Boca Raton, FL. "It's accessible from anywhere in the world. The weather's great. The meetings infrastructure is extremely efficient. And there are hotels — like the Doral — that have the facilities necessary to host our corporate meetings as well as our special events, such as the Office Depot Foundation's event that took place here at the same time."

The fund-raising event, in fact, was actually three events, with a golf tournament, fishing tournament and activities at Doral's state-of-the-art spa. The golf tournament was especially exciting, as it was played on the world-famous Blue Monster,

from Coast to Coast

"Doral is a true partner, as far as we're concerned. They're creative. They're flexible. They're proactive. And they have vast experience with big groups.



Kelly Curry, Director, Corporate Events Office Depot, Boca Raton, FL

one of five championship courses at the Doral. In addition, there was a silent auction. And, although the final figures were not in as of this writing, the Office Depot Foundation already knows that the event was a huge success.

So was the guest speaker at the first General Session. It was former college and pro football coach Lou Holtz, now an ESPN commentator, and a man widely known for his acerbic observations and quick wit.

"He was funny and poignant and insightful and right on tar-

get for a business audience," Curry said. "And he provided valuable insights on productivity in business and on living a fulfilling life. Our survey feedback on his presentation was phenomenal."

The survey, in fact, indicated that 98 percent of the attendees thought the meeting was extremely productive (and 99 percent loved Lou Holtz).

"Doral is a true partner, as far as we're concerned," Curry said. "They're creative. They're flexible. They're proactive. And they have vast experience with big groups."

Mary Wong, president of the Office Depot Foundation, believes that no one does better meetings than Florida.

"Florida's always understood the meetings business," Wong said. "They understand what's important to planners. They understand that they have to offer value. And they understand that they have to anticipate any potential problems before they happen. The surveys from our November meeting indicated — over and over again — that this was one of the best-executed meetings that any of our people had ever attended.

"And that's why," Wong added, "we'll be back soon. We're bringing 250 non-profit and government officials — including the director of HUD — here for a meeting on how to strengthen non-profits around the country."

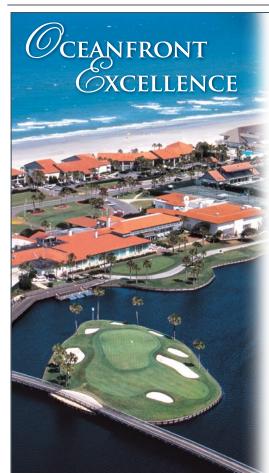
Another corporate heavyweight has Miami in its sights: Accenture, a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company, just booked its 2011 Senior Executive Meeting in Miami, choosing the Magic City from among 25 bidders worldwide.

Miami's appeal as a meetings destination goes beyond borders. In fact, the city just hosted the celebrated Art Basel in December, in which tens of thousands of art-business visitors flew in from all over the world to buy, sell and admire some of the world's greatest art. The event took place in the Miami Beach Convention Center — the area's largest — with 500,000 square feet of exhibit space. The convention center is planning an expansion project that will add 300,000 square feet of meeting and exhibition space.

Citywide, there are 47,000 hotel guest rooms, and many are also major meeting centers. The legendary Fontainebleau on Miami Beach, for example, is fresh off a \$1 billion renovation, and now has 107,000 square feet of meeting space to go with its 1,500 rooms and five restaurants. The Hyatt Regency has long been a cornerstone of downtown, with 612 guest

rooms and 100,000 square feet of meeting space. And a JW Marriott Marquis just opened downtown with 313 rooms and 80,000 square feet of meeting space. Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc. announced the opening of Sheraton Miami Airport Hotel & Executive Meeting Center, located less than a quarter mile from Miami International Airport. Also near the airport and adjacent to the newly renovated DoubleTree Hotel, is the Miami Airport Convention Center (formerly known as the Miami Mart Exhibition Center), which recently finalized an extensive modernization project featuring 172,000 square feet of meeting and exhibit space. The Epic hotel, which opened in 2009, added a new 32,500-square-foot lawn event area on Biscayne Bay, and the Epic Marina offers group yacht charters.

The Ice Palace, in the arts and entertainment district, is an old ice factory that's now a movie studio that also can be used for meetings and events. Vizcaya, the stunning Italian-Renaissance mansion of early 20th century industrialist John Deering, has long been a favored spot of meeting planners. The Adrienne Arsht Center is a new, state-of-the-art performing arts center in downtown Miami with group event space. And coming soon to Miami Beach is the new Frank Gehry-designed home of Miami's New World Symphony.



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"Fort Lauderdale's not a bard sell to senior management, because attendees always love coming here. It's a place that's conducive to serious meetings because of the great facilities and the strong meetings infrastructure."



Mona Meretsky, President COMCOR Event & Meeting Production, Fort Lauderdale, FL

Part of Miami's lure lies in its colorful neighborhoods, such as South Beach and the art deco district; artsy Coconut Grove; the hot new midtown district; the arts and entertainment district; and ethnic enclaves such as Little Havana and Little Haiti, each with wonderful restaurants.

FORT LAUDERDALE

Fort Lauderdale's approach to the meetings market is "Meetings With a View," which promotes, as well, its style, its substance and its savings.

million square feet of meeting space including the Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center with 600,000 square feet of meeting and exhibition space. The Harbor Beach

Marriott Resort & Spa has 647 guest rooms and 100,000 square feet of indoor/outdoor space. The W Fort Lauderdale opened in 2009 with 517 guest rooms and 12,000 square feet of meeting space. The 433-room Westin Beach Resort, Fort Lauderdale completed a multimillion-dollar renovation in 2010, including its 32,000 square feet of meeting space. And sitting on the oceanfront in nearby Hollywood is the renowned beachfront Westin Diplomat & Spa, which earlier this year merged with the Diplomat Golf Resort & Spa, a member of the Starwood Luxury Collection. The Westin Diplomat offers 952 guest rooms, 106 suites and There are 34,000 hotel guest rooms here, and more than 2 220,000 square feet of meeting and ballroom space. Also in Hollywood is the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, which offers 500 guest rooms and 40,000 square feet of meeting space, an indoor arena theater, retail shops, nightclubs, a spa and dining



venues, including singing celebrity Gloria Estefan's newly opened Bongo's Cuban Café.

The Broward Center for the Performing Arts also does meetings...and can even, in some cases, place tables onstage. The International Game Fishing Association Hall of Fame & Museum is surrounded by a "living Everglades," and has interesting meeting space. BankAtlantic Center, home of the National Hockey League's Florida Panthers, offers 21,000 seats.

Mona Meretsky is president of Fort Lauderdale-based COMCOR Event & Meeting Production, and she holds major corporate meetings all over the country. She's finding, however, that more and more clients are inquiring about holding their meetings in Fort Lauderdale.

"I recently had a large corporation from Germany bring a couple of hundred senior executives here for their meeting," Meretsky said. "They had their choice of convention cities. But they chose Fort Lauderdale. And they chose it for a variety of factors: the great weather, the easy access, the competitive rates and the incredible list of things to see and do here.

"Fort Lauderdale's not a hard sell to senior management," she added, "because attendees always love coming here. It's a place that's conducive to serious meetings because of the great facilities and the strong meetings infrastructure. And it doesn't hurt to be fronted by the Atlantic and backed by the Everglades, either."

THE PALM BEACHES

Palm Beach County offers meeting planners a wide variety of facilities and environments, ranging from the swanky island of Palm Beach to the urban core of West Palm Beach.

The county has 16,000 hotel rooms, and more than 1 million square feet of meeting space. About a third of that space is found in the Palm Beach County Convention Center, directly across from the shops and bistros of CityPlace. A 400-room Hilton-branded convention hotel is in the planning stages for a 2014 debut. The county's great meeting hotels have spruced up with massive renovations. The oceanfront Ritz-Carlton (310 guest rooms; three ballrooms, eight meeting rooms, two outdoor function areas) has spent more than \$100 million on upgrades. The nearby elegant Four Seasons Resort has 230 guest rooms and 22,000 square feet of meeting space. PGA National Resort & Spa — adjacent to the headquarters of the Professional Golfers Association — has five championship golf courses, 379 rooms and 39,000 square feet for meetings. And no description of local meeting facilities would be complete without mentioning the county's two historic hotels: The Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach (540; 65,000 indoor/ outdoor), and The Boca Raton Resort & Club (1,043; 146,000 indoor/outdoor).

Groups of up to 150 can meet at the Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens in Delray Beach, a living legacy of the Japanese agricultural colony that thrived here a century ago. The Norton Museum of Art, in West Palm Beach, can host up to 800 attendees. And the Museum at Ragtops Motorcars, also in West Palm, can host 1,500 people in a three-city-block facility that brings back the days of convertibles, diners and drive-ins.

ORLANDO

Orlando claims more than 115,000 hotel guest rooms and the second largest convention center in the U.S., the Orange County Convention Center, with 2.1 million square feet. According to Visit Orlando — the new moniker for the Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau — in just two years the city has invested more than \$4 billion in new projects. These include new hotels such as the 1,400-room Hilton Orlando (175,000 square feet of meeting space), the 1,000-room Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek and 497-room Waldorf Astoria Orlando, which share 150,000 square feet



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of meeting space; and the newly renovated and expanded 1,640-room Peabody Orlando (300,000 square feet). Across from SeaWorld's new Aquatica water park is the newly branded DoubleTree Resort Orlando, International Drive. The DoubleTree underwent a \$35 million renovation, and is now the brand's largest hotel with 1,092 guest rooms. Meeting space totals 60,000 indoor/outdoor square feet including two ballrooms and a tropical outdoor venue.

For golf-centered meetings and events, the five-star Reunion Resort is unmatched. The 2,300-acre property features three signature golf courses by Jack Nicklaus, Tom Watson and Arnold Palmer. Also featured is women's golf great Annika Sorenstam's Annika Academy. Accommodations include villas and colonial-style homes. Spacious meeting accommodations range from the Reunion Grande Conference Center to the Grande Event Lawn.

In other property news: Rosen Hotels & Resorts, Florida's largest independent hotel chain, recently added the newly renovated and rebranded Rosen Inn at Pointe Orlando to the brand's collection of four convention hotels, which represent the greatest number of rooms and meeting space in clos-



The Wizarding World of Harry Potter opened last June at Universal Orlando Resort to rave reviews and record-breaking crowds.

est proximity to the Orange County Convention Center and attractions on International Drive.

Major new projects include the \$1.3 billion "medical city" complex in Lake Nona, one of only two medical city communities in the world, opening in phases; the recently opened \$380 million Amway Center arena; and the \$383 million Dr. Phillips Performing Arts Center, scheduled for a 2013 completion. A high-speed railway from

Orlando to Tampa will become a reality in 2015.

Orlando's noted theme parks are on the move as well. The economy notwithstanding, if theme parks build it, they will come. The most recent example is the debut last June of Universal Orlando Resort's Wizarding World of Harry Potter, which is credited with boosting occupancy at the three Loews hotels inside Universal Orlando Resort to 97 percent.

In nearby Winter Garden, the former site of the Cypress Gardens theme park will become the new \$100 million Legoland Florida in fall 2011, featuring 50 rides, shows and attractions.

Downtown Disney is renovating and expanding its offerings through 2013. The most noteworthy is the addition of









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"We look at our relationship with Disney as a true partnership. ... There's no problem too big for them. And that's why we've been going there for the past 20 years."

Jody Wolf, Director of Group, Business & Incentive Travel Kay Jewelers, Akron, OH

Hyperion Wharf, which will resemble an early 20th century port city and amusement pier featuring boutiques, restaurants and entertainment. Disney's Art of Animation Resort, coming in 2012, will also have meeting facilities as well as 2,000 guest rooms. And Walt Disney World Resort has embarked on the Magic Kingdom's largest expansion to date with Fantasyland opening in 2013.

Jody Wolf, director of group, business and incentive travel for nationwide retailer Kay Jewelers, brought 2,000 managers to Disney's Coronado Springs Resort in September, for the company's Annual Managers' Meeting.

"We look at our relationship with Disney as a true partnership," said Wolf. "We work collaboratively to make each year better. Each year requires a nine-month period of very intense preparation, and collaboration between the Disney people and us. They understand the business of meetings better than anyone else; and they understand, as well, that sometimes meetings of this size require last-minute adjustments. There's no problem too big for them. And that's why we've been going there for the past 20 years."

She said that these meetings have very packed schedules, with general sessions often taking place at night — and that the Disney people understand the attendees are there to do business.

"Meeting at Disney helps us achieve our strategic objectives and goals," said Wolf. "They know our expectations, and they understand our requirements. And we know that, because of the flawless execution of the Disney people, our own people always emerge from these meetings excited and enthused about their plans for the upcoming holiday season."

Wolf called the relationship with Disney a long-term strategic partnership. And she added that the Coronado Springs Resort — one of six Walt Disney World Resort meeting/convention properties — is perfect for her meeting, because, in addition to being large enough to house all the attendees, the meeting space is well-suited for Kay's training and general sessions.

"If your relationship with the venue evolves into a true partnership, rather than just a pure business transaction, you're very fortunate," Wolf said. "It has an ongoing positive effect on your attendees and on your training programs. And if you're lucky enough to find such a partner, you stay with them!"

DAYTONA BEACH

Twenty-three miles of world-famous beach. Great weather. And good facilities. All of these make Daytona Beach a rising star in the meetings industry.

There are 12,000 hotel rooms here, many within walking distance of the Ocean Center. Newly renovated and expanded, the Ocean Center now has a 200,000 square feet for meetings and exhibitions. Right across the street is the The Hilton Daytona



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"(The Emerald Coast CVB) saw our anxiety, but they didn't sugarcoat the situation. ... We were very happy with our decision to keep our meeting there. And we never saw a drop of oil on the beaches."

> Joe Huffine, Manager of Corporate and Member Services Tennessee Farmers Cooperative, Lavergne, TN

Beach Oceanfront Resort (744 rooms; 60,000). Five miles south of Daytona Beach in Daytona Shores is the upscale oceanfront Shores Resort & Spa, which offers attendees a four-star, four-diamond experience. The resort has 212 guest rooms and 20,000 square feet of meeting space, including oceanside executive boardrooms, panoramic oceanview meeting rooms, a grand ballroom and a private beachfront terrace.

Daytona is home, of course, to Daytona International Speedway, where the Daytona 500 Club can seat 500 attendees, and the Bill France Room can handle 170. And the Historic Bandshell (on the beach), where Elvis played, can also host events.

RPM Services is a Wisconsin company that publishes a monthly trade newsletter for the 1,000 operators of local au-



tomobile racetracks in the U.S. The company stages conventions every February here for these operators, coinciding with Daytona International Speedway's "Speed Week."

"This year we brought about 575 people down to Daytona, and about 50 exhibitors," said Stewart Doty, editor of RPM's "Racing Promotion Monthly." "We held our meetings and stayed at the Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanwalk Village. Our people really look forward to coming here every year. A few years ago, we had to hold our meeting at an inland location in Florida, because of hurricane damage to Daytona. But we came back the very next year. Being from Wisconsin, we're very happy to be here every February!" Doty added.

JACKSONVILLE

Jacksonville's location on the St. Johns River endows it with both a thriving urban environment and a scenic setting. The area, which includes historic St. Augustine, Amelia Island and Ponte Vedra Beach, has 22,500 hotel rooms and several newly renovated properties. Jacksonville's Prime F. Osborne III Convention Center has 160,000 square feet for meetings, and the 966-room Hyatt Regency Jacksonville has 110,000 square feet of meeting space with outdoor venues overlooking the St. Johns River. Unique venues in Jacksonville include The Ribault Club, established in 1928 as a playground for the affluent set and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, has space for 400. The Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts has theaters that can seat up to 3,000.

The legendary Amelia Island Plantation was acquired by Omni Hotels & Resorts just a few months ago. The company plans to add 125 guest rooms and 16,000 square feet of meeting space to the current total of 600 rooms and 49,000 square feet. And the renovated Ritz-Carlton, also on Amelia Island, now boasts 444 rooms and 35,000 square feet for meetings.

The five-diamond Ponte Vedra Inn & Club in Ponte Vedra Beach, midway between Jacksonville and St. Augustine, has been hosting groups in its elegant spaces since 1928. There are 250 accommodations, most of which are oceanfront, two links-style golf courses and more than 25,000 square feet of meeting space with 17 meeting rooms, an executive boardroom and two ornate ballrooms.

THE EMERALD COAST

Tucked away in the Florida Panhandle are the white-sand beaches and the fishing towns of the Destin-Fort Walton Beach area. This area has been voted "Best Beach Town in the South" by the readers of Southern Living for 14 consecutive years. The region offers 16,000 guest rooms and 117,000 square feet of meeting space.

The largest meeting facility is the 35,000-square-foot Emerald Coast Convention Center. The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa has 600 guest rooms and more than 32,000 square feet of meeting space. Planners also use the Gulfarium (the oldest marine park in America), as well as the Air Force Armament Museum. And Henderson State Park has meeting facilities overlooking the Gulf of Mexico.

The region's laidback ambience and beach location are just perfect for the Tennessee Farmers Cooperative (TFC), which services 70,000 customers with equipment and

supplies ranging from huge machines to animal feed.

"Our customers feel very much at home here," said Joe Huffine, manager of corporate and member services for the TFC. "And that's the reason why many of them bring their families, and make a week out of it."

Huffine brought 540 attendees to the 353-room Ramada Plaza Beach Resort on Okaloosa Island (14,000 square feet meeting space) in July for the TFC Summer Managers' Meeting — the 17th time in the past 20 years that the company has met here. He was actually in the midst of planning for the meeting when the Gulf oil spill hit. And he praised the Emerald Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau for their forthright approach to the problem.

"They saw our anxiety, but they didn't sugarcoat the situation," Huffine said. "They said that they were, so far, free of any oil on the beaches, but that they couldn't make any promises for when we got there. We appreciated their candor and their determination to make it work. We were very happy with our deci-

sion to keep our meeting there. And we never saw a drop of oil on the beaches."

TAMPA BAY

The Tennessee Farmers

Managers' Meeting in Fort

Walton Beach included a

Cooperative Summer

deep-sea fishing trip.

Tampa Bay promotes itself as a destination with "real" experiences, such as colorful neighborhoods, unique meeting spaces and a vibrant downtown waterfront. The area has 21,000 hotel rooms, and the Tampa Convention Center, on the water, has 200,000 square feet of exhibit space and 43,000 for meetings. The 800-room Saddlebrook Resort has 95,000 square feet for meetings (and some of the best golf in Florida). In addition, there's more than 1 million square feet of additional meeting space in the region.

The Italian Club and the Centro Asturiano, both in the original Cuban district of Ybor City, are beautifully restored old social clubs that now host meetings. The Busch Gardens theme park also has excellent meeting facilities. And the new Florida Aquarium offers meeting space in the heart of downtown.



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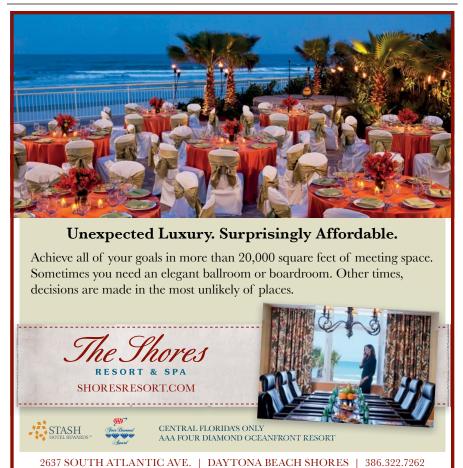
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"We were very impressed with...the hotel. One day we had an outdoor event scheduled. But it was a bit chilly outside. In only a couple of hours, hotel staff set up the event for 850 people indoors, without missing a beat."

> Pat Schneider, Program Director Florida Venture Forum Inc., Tampa, FL

A number of meeting hotels have undergone extensive renovations lately, among them the DoubleTree Hotel Tampa Westshore Airport and the Sheraton Suites Tampa Airport Westshore.

"Tampa has so much to offer a meeting planner," said Hillary Bessiere, director of business development for Bishop-McCann, a Kansas City, MO, firm that produces meetings, incentives and live events worldwide. "I brought 450 people from Symantec Corporation down to the Westin Tampa Bay in October. Tampa's easy to get to. And it's an up-and-coming

The Naples
Grande
Beach Resort
recently hosted
the Florida
Venure Capital
Conference,
with 850
attendees and
30 exhibitors.



meetings destination, with colorful neighborhoods and interesting meeting spaces." The Westin Tampa Bay has 7,800 square feet of meeting space and the new 3,800-square-foot BluVu rooftop venue overlooking Tampa Bay.

NAPLES

The popular 5th avenue district in downtown Naples is filled with shops, galleries and restaurants, and the funky shops of "Tin City" are nearby on the docks. Collier County has more than 8,000 hotel rooms, ranging from luxurious in-town elegance to easygoing beachfront, and more than 260,000 square feet of meeting space.

The Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort, Golf Club & Spa provides 727 rooms and 65,000 square feet of meeting space. The Ritz-Carlton Beach Resort has 450 rooms and 48,000 square feet for meetings. Three miles inland is the Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples, which was named the No. 1 golf resort in Florida by *Condé Nast Traveler* readers. And the Naples Grande Beach Resort, a Waldorf Astoria Resort, offers 474 accommodations and 50,000 square feet for meetings.



One of the best places to view dramatic sunsets over the Gulf is at HB's on the Gulf (the city of Naples' only beachfront restaurant) at the Watkins family-owned Naples Beach Hotel and Golf Club (317 rooms, 34,000 square feet of meeting space). The oceanfront hotel also features a new pool event area, newly renovated guest rooms and a newly enhanced championship golf course on-property.

Unique venues in Naples include the Philharmonic Center for the Arts; Naples Botanical Garden, which can accommodate 125 meeting attendees; and Ngala, a private wildlife preserve, which hosts groups in a tented facility.

Pat Schneider is program director of Florida Venture Forum Inc., a company that assists Florida-based entrepreneurs in obtaining funding. She brought 850 people and 30 exhibitors to the Naples Grande Beach Resort recently for the Florida Venture Capital Conference.

"We were very impressed with Naples as a meeting destination," Schneider said, "and very impressed with the hotel, as well. One day we had an outdoor event scheduled. But it was a bit chilly outside. In only a couple of hours, hotel staff set up the event for 850 people indoors, without missing a beat. And Naples is a place that's conducive to productive meetings...without the crowds, and without the high prices."

KEY LARGO

Probably the ultimate laidback Florida destination is the Florida Keys island chain an hour south of Miami. The first stop is Key Largo, where the 2,000-acre private retreat of The Ocean Reef Club awaits — not only boasting a private setting, but its own private airport for meetings requiring the ultimate in confidentiality. There are 300 accommodations, 30,000 square feet of meeting space that includes 15 breakout rooms, a modern meeting facility, two ballrooms, teambuilding programs and conference planning services. Recreational opportunities abound, with three championship golf courses, a private beach with saltwater lagoon, two infinity pools, marinas, shops in the fishing village and the Salon & Spa.

No matter where a meeting lands — from old-Florida Panhandle to über-cool Miami — the Sunshine State's business-casual spirit reinvigorates attendees for the serious business back home.

C&IT





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Better Than Ever

Who would have ever thought that a Las Vegas hotel would convert its room inventory to a meetings option? Well, it happened recently, which is part of the good news that is permeating the Las Vegas meetings industry after many months of hard times. Sandy Kitrell, a senior buyer/meeting planner with Minneapolis-based Carlson Marketing, said that groups are showing more interest in Las Vegas. Kitrell heads a team that plans meetings and conventions in Las Vegas: "We're starting to get more activity. More people are booking, and they are booking closer in (to the event date). So you get more demand right now for the same time periods. I was talking to a hotel recently about gaming versus meetings and where the activity was. One hotel said they took some suite inventory for gaming (which they usually protect for high rollers) and put it into inventory for meetings because they thought they would have better activity there. I thought that was telling," said Kitrell.

2009, Las Vegas is poised for a 2011 comeback in corporate meetings. As the economy recovers, companies are investing in customer-facing events again, said Chuck Bowling, an executive vice president of MGM Resorts International. "Annual trade shows are starting to see bigger numbers coming back than ever before," Bowling recently told the Las Vegas Sun. "Instead of in the past, they may have sent only 10 people; they're now sending 20 people." According to the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority (LVCVA), through October 2010, room demand was up 3.3 percent compared with 2009. But hotel room inventory also increased by 4.6 percent due to new and expanded properties in this city that never sleeps.

Optimism Reigns

Michael Massari, vice president of sales and operations for Las Vegas Meetings by Caesars Entertainment, is optimistic about continued growth in meetings and conven-



Chairman and CEO Sheldon G. Adelson (left) and President and COO Michael A. Leven are committed to restoring Las Vegas' reputation as a respected international business destination.

Las Vegas Sands Corp. Duo Leads The Way

Las Vegas Sands Corp. Chairman and CEO Sheldon G. Adelson, entrepreneur extraordinaire, never backed down from his vision to restore Las Vegas as a respected place do to serious business. And, today, despite unprecedented economic conditions and a morass of public relations issues, Adelson and Mike Leven, his president and COO since March 2009, are making a difference in the continued success of Las Vegas as an international business destination.

From his poor childhood in Boston to No. 3 on the Forbes magazine list of most wealthy Americans behind only Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, Adelson learned valuable lessons of how to thrive in tough times. According to published reports, when the recession hit, Adelson and his family poured approximately \$1 billion into the corporation to keep it viable. Concerned, but never fearful, Adelson's plan worked. Today, he is moving up Forbes' list once more, and his many projects here and in Asia such as the new Marina Bay Sands integrated resort in Singapore, are thriving.

Leven, also a native Bostonian, is a hospitality icon with a reputation as one of franchising's most innovative leaders. Adelson appreciates what decades of experience is worth, and once described Leven as "one of the most well-known and wellliked operations guys in the entire industry." For his part, Leven says 2011 will be a big year for convention business in Las Vegas, especially for overall attendance. Though he sees continued modest growth in room rates due to added inventory around town, Leven says that convention business at Las Vegas Sands properties is healthy. As Adelson and Leven emphasize, and savvy planners know, groups that meet in Las Vegas can bet on an attendance boost every time. C&IT tions. "2010 has shaped up to be a pretty good year. It was a great year compared to 2009, but still behind what we had achieved previously. 2011 is looking to be an even better year than 2010. The last two years have been difficult, but it appears we are turning the corner. Confidence is returning to the meetings industry and the demand is increasing," Massari said.

In October 2011, the Sands Expo and Convention Center will host the first IMEX America convention and trade show. The show is a spinoff of the IMEX shows held in Europe, which attract thousands of attendees and exhibitors worldwide in the meetings, incentive, travel and hotel industries.

Grand Meeting Spaces

Las Vegas features hotel convention and conference venues that provide more meeting space than entire convention centers in some cities. For example, 1.8 million square feet of show floor, and meeting and event space is available at the Sands Expo and Convention Center adjacent to the Venetian Congress Center at the 4,000-suite Venetian Resort Hotel Casino.

MEET, a new three-story, high-tech meeting facility

opened last year. The venue provides 30,000 square feet of meeting space, an outdoor pavilion that accommodates 475 guests and a multimedia training center. MEET offers exterior lighting technology that allows groups to brand their meetings by bathing the building in colors of their choice.

The city's largest venue, the Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC), provides 2 million square feet of exhibit space and 144 meeting rooms. Plans to expand the LVCC remain on hold, said Jeremy Handel, spokesperson for the LVCVA. Citywide, Las Vegas now offers more than 10.5 million square feet of meeting and exhibit space.

With 1.7 million gross square feet of meeting space, Mandalay Bay is the fifth largest convention facility in the U.S., and the largest meeting facility located on The Las Vegas Strip. Some of its features include four pillarless, highceiling ballrooms ranging from 31,000 to 100,000 square feet; the largest pillarless hotel ballroom in the nation a 100,000-square-foot mega-ballroom; and sufficient breakout space to handle more than 75 simultaneous meetings.

Negotiating for Value

When it comes to negotiating meeting and convention packages, some meeting planners view Las Vegas as more of a buyer's than a seller's market. "There are so many deals available in Las Vegas right now, that it's really cost-effective to be there versus many other locations," said Marie Botvinick, CMP, CMM, founder of D'or Solutions, a fullservice meeting planning company based in Oceanside, CA.

Massari said he doesn't think in terms of a buyer's or seller's market, but in terms of value and service. "We typically don't look at those types of things. We just focus on our product and services and how we can best achieve the goals of our customers. We know that there are a number of properties in this city that could meet the basic requirements for any meeting or event. However, we are here to assist our customers in finding out how we can best utilize our services to exceed their expectations," said Massari, who added, "Las Vegas has never been a better value."

Botvinick found value when she planned a corporate meeting to be held in Las Vegas in October 2011 for about 800 executives and managers of a financial services corporation. It will be the first meeting in Las Vegas for this



Appearing exclusively at sea onboard

By Derek Reveron

After a dismal 2008-

particular group. "We got some amazing concessions and everything we wanted. It just took a little more negotiating than a year ago. They're definitely still trying to please planners and trying to bring in business, and it's still a buyer's market. But it's starting to turn a little for the sellers," said Botvinick.

Las Vegas also provided value for Caytie Pohlen-

LaClare, president of the LaClare Group Inc., a full-service meeting and event planning company based in Minnetonka, MN. She planned a six-day incentive in Las Vegas for 80 food-service company sales executives and their customers. Attendees stayed at the Encore Las Vegas in March 2009. Las Vegas Meetings by Caesars Entertainment, don't charge The group held a dine-around, receptions, dinners and a banquet on-property, and still had plenty of free time to enjoy



Caesars Palace's Garden of the Gods Pool Oasis features 40 cabanas and 832 deck chairs among its six pools.

Laclare started planning the meeting in the fall of 2008 and received a good deal on room rates. Part of it was picking a time (during the week) that was Groups tend to be more flexible these days in selecting dates in order to

Las Vegas. Pohlen-

The 4,004-unit Aria Resort & Casino is the centerpiece of

CityCenter, which celebrated its first anniversary in December.

maximize savings. There are still deals to be had, especially when hotels are trying to fill slower or shoulder time periods," she said.

Meeting planners seeking the best value for their groups must increasingly take into account resort fees. More Las Vegas properties are instituting or increasing resort fees extra charges that every guest must pay for hotel amenities and services such as fitness club and pool access, Internet use, phone calls and newspapers. Resort fees may vary from around \$2 to more than \$20 per night.

Meeting planners would rather not pay resort fees, but see the charges as additional contract negotiating items. "I understand where the hotel is coming from, but a lot of planners will not want to pay resort fees," said Botvinick. "Depending on how large a program is, how it's structured and when it meets, all or part of a fee can get waived. If the hotel loses money in that area, sometimes they will negotiate something else like food and beverage so they can still get the revenue they think they need and it's not called a resort fee," she said.

Kitrell noted that meeting planners may need to take different approaches to negotiating resort fees with different properties. "We look at it as a point of negotiation which, on a case by case basis, can be successful.

But each hotel has to be looked at individually. They can be defined differently depending on the property and what they are trying to accomplish," said Kitrell.

Some Las Vegas properties, such as those operated by resort fees. Their website promotes "No Resort Fees. The Smart Travel Choice" and provides links to comparison information about resort fees. Massari explained the company's philosophy about resort fees: "At Las Vegas Meetings by Caesars Entertainment we really listen to our customers and in this case they told us that they don't want to pay for services that they may or may not use. We believe in transparency, and mandatory resort fees just didn't fit into who we are as a business. Now, customers are only required to pay for those services they choose to use," said Massari.

not high demand. The Place for Top Entertainment

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VEGAS VALUE BACK











Group shows at The Venetian, other new entertainment options include:

- Comedy-magic duo Penn & Teller announced that they will extend their show at the Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino through 2013. Penn & Teller recently celebrated their 10th anniversary of performing at the hotel.
- "The Lion King," Disney's award-winning Broadway phenomenon, has extended its engagement at Mandalay Bay.
- Two new Cirque du Soleil Michael Jackson shows are coming to Las Vegas: A rock concert-type show will tour worldwide for four years, and is scheduled to hold its first date at the 8,000-seat arena at Mandalay Bay on December 15, 2011. The second will be a permanent residency Michael Jackson show, which will arrive in 2013 — hotel to be announced.
- The Tropicana Las Vegas Hotel & Casino is introducing "Yesterday: A Tribute to the Beatles." The show appeared for three years at the Tropicana Casino & Resort Atlantic City.
- Celine Dion will be "coming back home" to Las Vegas in March 2011 to begin a three-year residency at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace. The brand new show will feature 31 musicians, consisting of a full orchestra and band.

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Las Vegas' meeting space and number of hotel rooms continues to grow as more properties open, renovate and expand. Here's a roundup of some recent developments:

In 2010, two of the most recognizable resort companies in Las Vegas changed their names to reflect their diverse property holdings. MGM Mirage changed its name to MGM Resorts International. MGM operates the Mandalay Bay, MGM Grand, Bellagio (which recently earned its second

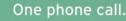
> consecutive AAA Five Diamond Award), Monte Carlo, Excalibur, The Mirage, New York-New York, Luxor and Circus Circus.

> MGM, in partnership with Dubai World, also operates properties in CityCenter, the hotel, shopping and entertainment complex that premiered in December 2010. CityCenter's Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas provides 392 rooms and more than 12,000 square feet of function space. Aria Resort & Casino offers 4,004 rooms, a 150,000-squarefoot casino and 300,000 square feet of meeting space. Aria Resort & Casino and Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas both received the AAA Five Diamond Award for 2011. Vdara Hotel & Spa provides 1,495 rooms and 10,000 square feet of meeting space, and Veer Towers offers 335 residences. Crystals is a shopping destination featuring luxury-brand retailers.

> Harrah's Entertainment Inc. changed its name to Caesars Entertainment Corporation. As part of the change, Las Vegas Meetings by Harrah's Entertainment became Las Vegas Meetings by Caesars Entertainment. Under the new name, the company will continue its "8-Stop Strategy," which







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provides one contact person who can provide information to groups on all Caesars properties, and mix and match the most appropriate hotel and meeting spaces. Caesars Entertainment properties include Imperial Palace, Bally's Las Vegas, Harrah's Las Vegas, Flamingo Las Vegas, Paris Las Vegas, Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino,

Imperial Palace, Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino and Caesars Palace. Caesars Palace has increased its number of pools on property to eight by introducing six "Garden of the Gods" pools. Attendees can now enjoy poolside "swim-up" gaming. Caesars provides about 3,348 guest rooms and more

than 300,000 square feet of meeting space. All of Caesars Entertainment properties combined provide more than 25,000 guest rooms and suites, and more than 1 million square feet of meeting space.

The Tropicana Casino & Resort has completed renovation of the property's 1,658 rooms and 140 luxury suites, pool and 50,000-square-foot casino. The \$180 million renovation also included the hotel's conference center. The Tropicana provides more than 100,000 square feet of flexible meeting space.

Elsewhere on The Strip, the 2,995-room Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas opened on December 15. The property is part of Marriott International's Autograph Collection of upper-upscale and luxury independent resorts and hotels, and is the Collection's first Last

Vegas resort property. The Cosmopolitan, which consists of two 50-story towers, offers 150,000 square feet of meeting space and seven banquet rooms.

Wynn Las Vegas has renovated some of its guest rooms and is scheduled to renovate all 2,716 rooms by the end of 2011. Rooms will feature new carpet, wallpaper, furniture



The 716-unit Tuscany Casino & Suites offers more than 37,000 square feet of meeting space including the Florentine Ballroom.



The 2,163-unit South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa recently expanded its casino.

and finishes. Wynn Las Vegas recently received its fifth consecutive AAA Five Diamond Award. The property is located next to Wynn's Encore Las Vegas. Together, the two hotels provide 4,750 rooms and 260,000 square feet of meeting space. Wynn also offers an 18-hole golf course.

South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa has expanded its casino to 55,000 square feet and now offers one of the largest gaming floors in the nation. The property offers 2,163 guest rooms and 170,000 square feet of flexible meeting space.

The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino and Palazzo Las Vegas became part of the InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) after it reached an agreement with Las Vegas Sands Corp. to operate the two properties. The two hotels offer 7,100 guest rooms and, together with the nearby Sands Expo and Convention Center, provide more than 2.2 million square feet of meeting space. The Venetian's 1,760-seat theater features shows by the Blue Man Group.

The former Ritz-Carlton Lake Las Vegas, which closed in May 2010, will reopen next

month as the newly branded Ravella at Lake Las Vegas, a Dolce Hotel & Resort. The property is part of a master-planned development and offers 349 rooms and 39,000 square feet of meeting space.

For a very affordable meeting option in Las Vegas, planners turn to the 716-unit Tuscany Suites & Casino on E. Flamingo Road. Tuscany features 40,000 square feet of meeting and convention space, including the 27,000-square-foot Florentine Ballroom. Some of Tuscany's meeting rooms have a beautiful Italian balcony with a view of the pool and exotic gardens. State-of-the-art, audio-visual equipment is available for business presentations, and free wireless Internet access is available in several areas of the property.

Due to its wide range of hotel, and meeting and convention space options, Las Vegas remains a unique and dependable destination in the minds of meeting planners. "I still always think of Las Vegas as a place where I can always get that very large meeting under one roof. There are only so many places in the U.S. that can do that," said Kitrell.





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DESTINATION REPORT

Planners Love the Value, Service

and Easy Access Vickie Wissman, vice president,

travel and conventions at Earth City, MO-based CCA Global Partners, plans about 40 meetings each year, in addition to incentive programs. Every year, Texas earns some of that business, and Wissman works her magic in destinations that include Dallas, Houston and San Antonio. In fact, she has been enthusiastically booking Texas meetings for 15 years. Why such loyalty?



"Location is definitely the No. 1 factor," she said. "We have attendees coming from all over the U.S., and airports in Dallas and Houston are both very accessible." That's especially important for Wissman's attendees — floor-covering retailers and related suppliers. "Accessibility is an issue that impacts a number of our attendees," she said. "If they have to spend a whole day traveling, they really start to re-think the opportunity to come."

The bottom line for Wissman, based on long experience: Texas consistently draws good attendance and generates positive feedback from attendees.

Charlie Coleman, director of events planning at Pitney Bowes in Stamford, CT, is another planner who regularly uses Texas as a destination and counts accessibility and airlift as key benefits.

"If we're doing a product kickoff meeting or a sales meeting, I use Texas because of its central location in the middle of the country," Coleman said. "That means that people coming east and west can all get there at the same time, and I can start my meeting in the afternoon and we don't lose a day getting there." For the last 18 months, as scrutiny of meeting budgets has increased, that has been a particularly important benefit, Coleman said.

"And because Dallas-Fort Worth airport is a major hub," he said, "you have all the major carriers going in, so I know I can get the best possible pricing on airfare. And with that airlift, I know attendees can easily get there from anywhere in the U.S."

Just as important, said Coleman and other planners, Texas offers excellent value, whether it's room rates, F&B or meeting

wake of the 2009 meeting industry downturn, that's a timely and important benefit that truly sets Texas apart from most other major U.S. destinations.

A key related benefit in the current meetings market as it relates to PR perceptions, is that the Lone Star State is a safe choice, said Judy Johnson, CMP, president and CEO of Plano, TX-based Rx Worldwide Meetings Inc., which specializes in global pharmaceutical meetings. "Texas is not going to raise any red flags," she noted.

However, she added, the importance of accessibility and attendee convenience holds true for most U.S. corporate meeting planners, so that's why Texas is on a meetings roll since 2008. "Our airlift is the most important benefit that Texas offers," Johnson said. "It's very easy to get into and out of both Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston."

Lisa Bonsignore, corporate director at medical educator Mammography Education Inc. in Cave Creek, AZ, is another loyal Texas enthusiast. She's used Dallas, Austin, San Antonio and Fort Worth.

"I like Texas because it offers a lot of variety for attendees," said Bonsignore, who plans an average of 10 major meetings a year across the U.S. and internationally. "In the major cities like Dallas, Austin and San Antonio, there are things for people to do right outside the door of the hotel — things attendees can do after the day's meeting is over. And that's one thing we really look for. We look at dining, shopping, entertainment and sightseeing. And Texas, as a whole, offers all of those things in all of its major cities. services such as transportation. And in the budget-challenged That's why we choose to come to Texas and to keep coming back."

Dallas

Like its fictionalized reputation on the legendary "Dallas" TV series, the city of Dallas is big, brash and bold. But it has another dimension that many first-timers find surprising, said Johnson, who has the advantage of local perspective measured against her global meetings experience. "Planners are usually shocked to find out how sophisticated Dallas is," Johnson said. "We also have amazing restaurants. And those two things still come as a big surprise to many meeting planners."

For his still uninitiated peers, Coleman is an unabashed cheerleader for Texas in general and Dallas in particular. Last February, he held a four-day, three-night meeting for 320 field sales managers and salespeople at the 811-room Hyatt Regency DFW. Located at the airport and offering full convention services, the hotel has completed a \$43 million update. "It's an excellent meeting hotel," said Coleman, who plans five major meetings plus incentive programs each year for the largest division of Pitney Bowes. "I got great value and service there, so I would recommend it highly."

He backs up that recommendation with the fact that based on the success he had at the Hyatt Regency DFW in 2010, he's going back with the same meeting in early 2011.

Another thing Coleman likes about Texas is its eclectic offsite venues. A highlight of his meetings is a single evening outing and recognition event for 300-plus attendees. In 2010, he took them to The Main Event, a meeting venue located in nearby Grapevine. "It's a completely selfcontained venue that has a bowling alley with about three dozen lanes, a dozen pool tables, all kinds of virtual rides and games, a laser-tag room and big-screen TVs for sporting events or entertainment," Coleman said. "The event catered the food and everybody had a great time."

In 2009, Coleman hosted the group at legendary Texas honky-tonk Gilley's, made famous in the movie "Urban Cowboy." "Our people loved the line dancing and the country bands," Coleman said. "The whole atmosphere was just cool."

As a destination, Dallas itself will get a lot cooler for meeting planners in late 2011, when the much-anticipated new, 1,000-room Omni Dallas Hotel, with more than 110,000 square feet of meeting space, makes its debut adjacent to the Dallas Convention Center. "The opening of a new Dallas convention center hotel is huge for the city because over the years, we've lost many citywide conventions and other major meetings because we didn't have one," Johnson said.

In the meantime, Dallas can take pride in the opening last year of the 193-room aloft Dallas, located near the convention center and site of the new Omni. And the landmark Hilton Anatole, with 1,606 rooms and 600,000 square feet of meeting space, has completed a five-year renovation.

Plano and Irving

Dallas offers two excellent options within its sprawling suburbs.

Located 20 miles north of downtown Dallas, Plano is an upscale, exclusive enclave that combines the panache of a major American city with small-town charm.

Monica Shome, office manager and meeting planner at Plano-based True Automation, holds all of the company's meetings in her corporate hometown. True Automations provides software services to county governments across Texas.

In December, Shome hosted a three-day, two-night meeting for 275 attendees at the 404-room Marriott Dallas/Plano at Legacy Town Center. For her attendees, most of whom are from small towns in rural Texas counties, Plano has a special appeal. "A lot of them don't have access to great shopping at home," Shome said. "They also like to eat in nice restaurants, and Plano has excellent shopping and restaurants."

It also offers a logistical advantage, Shome said. It's located equidistant between Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport (DFW) and Dallas Love Field, headquarters for Southwest Airlines. That makes it convenient for attendees from anywhere.



"I like Texas because it offers a lot of variety. That's why we choose to come to Texas and to keep coming back."

Lisa Bonsignore, Corporate Director Mammography Education Inc., Cave Creek, AZ

But the biggest advantage for Shome as a planner, she said, is the exceptional support services she gets from the Plano Convention & Visitors Bureau. For example, the CVB helped her select a hotel for her December meeting based on her exact needs for breakout meeting space. "They also provided a person to help with onsite registration," Shome said. "In terms of service, they are extremely competitive with any CVB anywhere. They really want the business here in Plano, and they will do whatever it takes to get it."

Plano's key meeting facilities include the 33,000-square-foot Plano Convention Centre, a beautifully landscaped facility popular for corporate trade shows, conferences and product launches.

By the same token, Irving also markets itself aggressively, based on exemplary service and support, in order to attract business to its environs. An independent municipality located adjacent to DFW Airport northwest of Dallas, Irving offers 13 full-service hotels. Total hotel meeting space inventory is more than 200,000 square feet with another 100,000 square feet at offsite venues.

Irving's meeting industry profile will get a boost when the In addition to its downtown metropolitan area, greater \$133 million Irving Convention Center at Las Colinas makes

By John Buchanan



Fort Worth's Sundance Square entertainment and business district boasts 35 square blocks of shopping, restaurants, theaters, art galleries and more,

its debut this month. Featuring 275,000 square feet of meeting and event space, including a 50,000-square-foot, column-free exhibit hall, a 20,000-square-foot ballroom and 20,000 square feet of breakout space, the new facility will focus on groups of 800-4,000 attendees.

The 431-room Four Seasons Resort and Club Las Colinas — Texas's only AAA Five Diamond property — has completed a \$30 million renovation that included an overhaul of the popular golf course, Tournament Players Club (TPC) Las Colinas.

Fort Worth

Located west of Dallas and 17 miles from DFW airport, Fort Worth offers some iconic Texas experiences, such as its famous Fort Worth Stockyards National Historic District.

Last November, Bonsignore held her first meeting in Fort Worth after successfully using other Texas destinations. She hosted 122 radiologists, surgeons and pathologists for a threewhich has completed an extensive renovation.

Like Shome, Bonsignore got exceptional service and support from a Texas CVB and that first impression was a key factor in her selection of Fort Worth as a destination. "They were extremely helpful and very professional," Bonsignore said. "They helped with everything from site selection to transportation."

Once she got there for the meeting, Bonsignore and her high-end attendees loved Fort Worth. "It was a wonderful destination," Bonsignore said. "For example, a number of attendees went to see the stockyards. And not only can you see a historic landmark, but you can also get a great steak or great barbecue down there. So it was a very popular attraction."

She also praised Fort Worth for its many amenities. "There were plenty of options right out the door of the hotel for attendees after the meeting sessions and in the evenings," Bonsignore said. "And if you did have to take a cab somewhere, like to a popular restaurant, it was only a 10-minute ride away. That kind of convenience for attendees is very important to us."

Bonsignore is not alone as a planner who has newly discovered the allure of Fort Worth. "Fort Worth has absolutely reinvented itself over the last several years," Johnson said. "It's a very cool destination. And Fort Worth has some very nice meeting hotels, including the new Omni."

Doubling its bet on Texas convention center hotels, Omni opened the new 614-room Omni Fort Worth Hotel adjacent

to the Fort Worth Convention Center in 2010. As the hotel was being developed, the convention center underwent a \$75 million renovation and expansion. In other local news, the 504-room Renaissance Worthington Hotel has also completed a renovation.

Galveston

Located about an hour east of Houston by car, charming Galveston Island combines the natural appeal of a barrier island resort community on the Gulf of Mexico with the energy and fascination of a working port that supports the Texas oil industry as well as a vibrant local fishery. Ranking as one of the wealthiest cities in the U.S. at the turn of the 20th century, thanks to its booming port economy, today Galveston showcases the mansions and other grand structures the barons created more than 100 years ago, including the finest stand of Victorian architecture outside New England.

Last October, Jaime Conway, corporate meeting planner at the Bartlesville, OK, outpost of Houston-headquartered oil giant ConocoPhillips, hosted a two-day, two-night conference for 150 geoscientists and engineers at the 700-room San Luis Resort, Spa & Conference Center, which offers 200,000 square feet for meetings.

Why Galveston? "We do more than 60 percent of all of our day breast cancer seminar at the 294-room Hilton Fort Worth, meetings in Texas because the company is based in Houston," said Conway, who plans about 60 meetings a year, with most of them in Houston.

"We just wanted to take this meeting out of Houston and

give attendees something different," Conway said "But it's also very convenient, since it's only an hour from Houston. But in terms of value for hotel rooms and food-and-beverage, Galveston is just a great destination.

Conway has also hosted meetings at the 428-room Moody Gardens Hotel, Spa & Convention Center, Galveston's other major



Attendees meeting in San Antonio. TX. always remember The Alamo. a must-see attraction, which is just a short distance from the River Walk.

meeting property and a unique historical landmark that features the most modern amenities.

Galveston also offers some unique after-meeting activities. For example, for her most recent meeting Conway booked a murder mystery dinner cruise in Galveston Harbor with Star Fleet Yachts. "Everyone loved it," she said. "It was just something really different and fun."

New Galveston hotels opened in 2010 include the 125-room

Four Points by Sheraton and 60-room Galveston Country Inn & Suites. In preparation for its 100th anniversary in 2011, the 224-room Hotel Galvez & Spa, a Wyndham Grand Hotel, another historic landmark and unique meeting property, is undergoing a renovation of all guest rooms.

One of the country's most unique offsite venues, Menard Hall at the 1838 Michel B. Menard House — the oldest home

on Galveston Island — has opened in Galveston. It offers a unique, historic backdrop for luncheons, dinners and receptions. The backyard features a gazebo.

San Antonio

Located in southwest Texas, San Antonio features the granddaddy of all Texas attractions — The Alamo. But the thriving city famous for classic Texas hospitality doesn't rest on historic laurels either. It's also home to River Walk. one of the biggest and most acclaimed riverside dining-shopping-entertainment attractions in the world, as well as SeaWorld San Antonio.

In between those polar extremes are related sites such as old Spanish missions and a Hill Country region that delivers a unique, timeless Texas ambience now adorned with modern resorts.

"San Antonio just bowls people over," Johnson said.

Bonsignore has also used San Antonio to great result, as have Wissman and Coleman, who prefers the Hill Country, but also has high praise for the city as a truly singular destination.

Brand new in San Antonio is the 1,002-room JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa, which opened last January with more than 140,000 square feet of meeting space, two TPC PGA championship golf courses and a 26,000-square-foot spa.

Nearby, also in Hill Country, the 508-room Westin La Cantera Resort celebrated its 10-year anniversary in 2009 with a \$12 million renovation. In 2010, the celebrated resort and meeting property completed an outdoor renovation of its exclusive Casita Village, which offers 11 individual "little houses" that range from an 1,800-square-foot main house to smaller structures that are perfect for executive retreats or teambuilding. La Cantera also features two championship golf courses.

Cool new offsite venues in San Antonio include the Lonesome Dove Room, a shrine to Western history and culture, the Lila Cockrell Theatre on River Walk, and the Illusions Theater at the Alamodome meeting and conference facility.



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CONNOLLY

The Charles Hotel, Cambridge, MA, has named Gina Rodigou, CMP, as director of sales and marketing. She was director of hotel sales and event and destination services for Mohegan Sun, Uncasville, CT.

MGM Resorts International, Las Vegas, NV, has named Gary Murakami as director of regional sales, based in San Francisco. He formerly served as director of sales for The Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco.

Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel, Santa Monica Beach, FL, has promoted Sarah Best to director of sales. She formerly served as director of corporate and leisure sales.

The Hilton Anatole, Dallas, TX, has named Tim O'Brien as senior sales manager based in Chicago. He was senior sales manager for the Hyatt Regency Phoenix.

Visit Baltimore has added two new national sales managers. Sheila Provenzano was named national sales manager for the Midwest region, based in Chicago. She was

group sales manager for Hilton Hotels in San Juan, PR. Jennifer Lutz was named national sales manager for the mid-Atlantic region. She was opening senior sales manager for the Hotel Monaco in Baltimore.

New York City's Flatotel has named John P. Connolly as director of sales. A 20-year hospitality veteran, he was the hotel's director of business development.

The Minneapolis (MN) Convention Center (MCC) has named Katie Smith as director of sales and marketing. She most recently served as sales manager at MCC.

The Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau has named Catherine Pleva as sales manager for medical, pharmaceutical, agriculture and manufacturing segments. She was sales and marketing manager for Boi Na Braza Churrascaria, Cincinnati, OH. Jennifer Green was named senior sales manager for national associations, scientific, engineering and environmental meetings. She was director of special events for the Cincinnati Reds. *C&IT*



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