

ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

JUNE/JULY
2012

THE SOURCE FOR ASSO...ETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

**A Conversation
With John Graham**
PAGE 10

Where Value Lives
PAGE 26

A Leap of Faith
PAGE 16

The triennial National Plastics Expo, held in Orlando for the first time ever this spring at the Orange County Convention Center, hit new heights in numbers of exhibitors and attendees.

Orlando Stands Alone

The No. 1 Most Visited Destination Helps Associations Break Attendance Records
PAGE 40

Photo courtesy of SPI



MEETING PLANNERS REVEAL THE BEST KEPT SECRET ON LAS VEGAS BOULEVARD

It has been wonderful to work with a property that works with us to keep our costs in line. South Point definitely gives us value for our dollar.

Another value that can't be determined in dollars and cents is the fact that your hotel and convention staff has very little turnover.



Our confidence in using South Point is what led us to also recommend the property for the WaterSmart Innovations Conference which we manage and 2012 will be the fifth year for that conference at the South Point.

Lee Anne Short
Chief Operations Officer
Las Vegas Management

Open Systems, Inc. has used the South Point for our partner and customer conferences for the last three years. As a meeting planner who has worked with hundreds of venues, I find the staff at South Point to be a breath of fresh air. They are an experienced team that work together like a well-oiled machine. The meeting space is ideal for us because our attendees don't have to walk through the casino and we can have all our functions on the same floor. We also LOVE having the Showroom for our private parties. The hotel offers enough amenities so you feel like you're on the strip without the crowds and the high prices. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend South Point for a great meeting space.

Ms. Carla Alarcon
Director of Marketing
Open Systems, Inc.

Isuzu would highly recommend the South Point for any meeting you may plan in Las Vegas. We used the new hotel in January of 2007 for a launch event that took over the hotel. Since that meeting, we have used South Point more than 15 times for various events, and meetings, from events that have taken over the hotel to just a small group, the staff at South Point will treat you the same. From the sales office to the staff working on the event, they're all about making sure that you're having the best event possible.

Brian Tabel
Retail Marketing Manager
Isuzu Commercial Truck of America Inc.



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ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

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On the Cover: M.A.T.T., the 35-foot-tall inflatable mascot of SPI's 2012 National Plastics Expo, is an acronym for Machines And Tomorrow's Technologies. M.A.T.T. was positioned in front of Orlando's Orange County Convention Center.

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Standing Tall



The imposing figure on our cover, standing tall above it all at the Orange County Convention Center, is a metaphor for much more than the gargantuan attendance numbers generated by SPI: The Plastics Industry Trade Association's National Plastics Expo (NPE) this spring in Orlando. NPE's theme, "Breaking the Mold," also speaks to more than the fact that this was the first time the triennial NPE had been held in a city other than Chicago in 40 years. For one thing, Orlando has just posted its own mold-breaking numbers as the first destination to top 55 million visitors. But most important is the man who stood above the rest to help achieve those numbers, and to "help us create one of the best expos in the group's entire history," says Bill Carteaux, president and CEO of SPI. "The man" is the late Visit Orlando CEO, Gary Sain, a true giant of the industry who passed away unexpectedly in May. "He was a true visionary in the trade show and tourism industry," Carteaux adds, "and probably had the best marketing mind of anyone that I have known in my professional career." As such, Sain worked his Orlando magic and won the 2012 NPE for his city — and SPI reaped all the record-breaking results you'll find in our story on page 40. Consequently, SPI has decided to return for the next NPE in 2015.

SPI nicknamed the robot-like giant on our cover M.A.T.T., an acronym for Machines And Tomorrow's Technologies, which were showcased at the expo. "We used this to reinforce that there would be more machines at this show, much in part due to the cost structures we were able to put in place in Orlando," says Gene Sanders, SPI's senior vice president, trade shows. It's another testament to Orlando's competitive value proposition, which enabled SPI to bring a whopping 10 million more pounds of equipment to this show than they were able to bring to the previous one.

As the other features in this issue attest, destinations all across the country are working harder than ever to win convention business with their competitive rates, attentive and innovative service, and enticing new builds and renovations. The exemplar of such efforts, Gary Sain, was remembered by industry leaders who gathered recently at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center to pay tribute to his leadership and many accomplishments. To honor Gary's memory, proceeds from the event will benefit the Gary C. Sain Memorial Endowed Scholarship Fund at the University of Central Florida's Rosen College of Hospitality Management. It's good to know that one great man's work will continue to inspire others in their own quest to stand tall above the rest.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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WEBSITE

www.themeetingmagazines.com

PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Harvey Grotsky
cccpublisher@att.net

GROUP PUBLISHER

Arthur Hyman
cccgrouppublisher@att.net

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Mitch D. Miller
cccartdirector@att.net

MANAGING EDITORS

Susan W. Fell
ccceditor1@att.net

Susan S. Gregg
ccceditor2@att.net

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Karen Brost
John Buchanan
Stella Johnson
Derek Reveron
George Seli

PRESIDENT & CEO

Harvey Grotsky

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS

David A. Middlebrook
cccoperations@att.net

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES

2700 N. Military Trail, Suite 120
Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394
561-989-0600 Fax: 561-989-9509

NORTHEAST

561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509
cccadvertising@att.net

FLORIDA/CARIBBEAN

561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509
cccadvertising@att.net

SOUTHWEST

561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509
cccadvertising@att.net

SOUTHEAST

561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509
cccadvertising@att.net

MIDWEST

561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509
cccadvertising@att.net

WEST

Marshall Rubin
818-888-2407 • Fax: 818-888-4907
mrubin@westworld.com

HAWAII

561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509
cccadvertising@att.net



Conventions don't have to be conventional

A business trip to Madrid seems less like hard work than most.

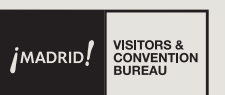
Sunny weather, conveniently located conference venues and gourmet lunches are just some of the bonuses for when you visit on business.

After a busy day, Madrid's famous museums and elegant stores are a great way to recharge before sampling the vibrant nightlife.

Relax over tapas in an outdoor café or dance until dawn. Whatever you do, Madrid is the business.

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CEIR Index: Exhibition Industry Shows Continued Growth

DALLAS, TX — Continued growth for 2012 is the outlook for the exhibition industry based on first-quarter survey results reported on June 12 by the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR). Data collected for the first-quarter CEIR Index reveals that the Total



Ducate

Index increased by 2.7 percent compared to the same period in 2011. The exhibition industry continued to outperform real GDP, which increased at a rate of 2 percent from a year ago. All four key metrics — attendance, net square feet, exhibitors and real revenues — showed positive results on a year-on-year basis with attendance as the leading, key driver for the period. “The CEIR Index, released in March, reported that the leading indicator to look for in the exhibition industry recovery is an increase in professional attendance, and attendance in the first quarter continues to lead improvement with 4.6 percent growth in the first quarter compared to 3.5 percent in the fourth quarter in 2011. This is a very good indicator that the exhibition industry is clearly emerging from the recession and may begin to see consistent growth for the foreseeable future,” said CEIR President and CEO Doug Ducate, CEM, CMP. Year-on-year growth of attendees accelerated to 4.6 percent compared to 3.5 percent in the fourth quarter. Net square feet followed with an increase of 3.4 percent but

was less than the growth of the fourth quarter, which reported 4.8 percent. Both exhibitors and real revenues each increased slightly by 1.5 percent during the first quarter following a 2.1 percent and 5.2 percent growth respectively in the preceding quarter. For more information, contact CEIR Executive Director Cathy Breden, CAE, CMP, at cbreden@ceir.org or 972-687-9201. www.ceir.org

Bruce MacMillan Leaves MPI Post

DALLAS, TX — Bruce MacMillan, CA, stepped down as Meeting Professionals International (MPI) president and CEO, effective June 30. COO Cindy D’Aoust serves as the association’s interim chief staff executive. MPI International Chairman Sebastien Tondeur said, “Bruce has been a visionary catalyst, guiding the organization through a time of intense economic challenges, all while helping to bring to life MPI’s strategic plans for robust growth and innovative, rich content and programs. We are thankful for his many years of dedicated service.” MacMillan stated, “I’ve been blessed to work directly with an inspired group of volunteer leaders, management colleagues and industry partners over the past six years. Without their close support and passionate commitment to all things MPI, our success would not have been possible. No industry organization anywhere harvests its members’ passion like MPI does. And that’s because MPI is...about the collective commitment to the success of the individual member.” www.mpiweb.org

Hyatt Regency Minneapolis Completes \$25 Million Renovation

MINNEAPOLIS, MN — Hyatt Regency Minneapolis, one of the largest properties in the Twin Cities, recently announced the completion of a \$25 million renovation of the hotel’s guest rooms, suites, public areas and restaurants. The biggest visual draw in the lobby is the expansive stone fireplace framed by rustic wooden logs, which was inspired by the historic timber milling industry of Minnesota. Surrounding the fireplace is a sunken-living room with split-timber walls and furniture, light fixtures and carpeting in relaxing earth tones. A giant log has been turned into a seating element with three seats carved into it with Scandinavian-style seatbacks. The Prairie Kitchen & Bar is a new 5,500-sf restaurant specializing in locally grown and seasonal items. The hotel’s 533 guest rooms and suites feature a color scheme with soothing indigos, cool grays and warm gold tones inspired by Minnesota’s 10,000 lakes. Each room includes leather headboards, luxurious linens and window coverings, and plush navy blue carpeting. “Jack packs” on the desks allow guests to connect a variety of media devices to the flat-screen TV. Located in downtown Minneapolis, the property features 74,000 sf of flexible function space, a full-service business center, Wi-Fi Internet access, dining outlets, an indoor heated pool and a new health club. www.minneapolis.hyatt.com



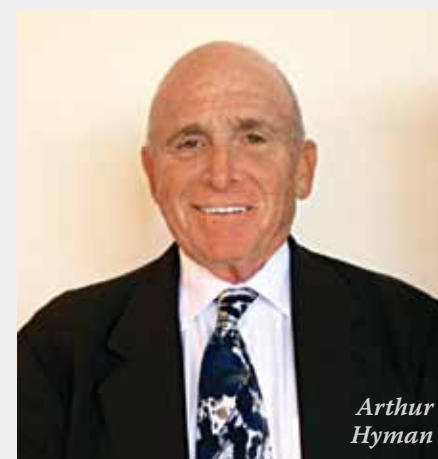
Photo courtesy of Meet Minneapolis

(L to r) Melvin Tennant, president and CEO, Meet Minneapolis; Marc Ellin, senior vice president field operations, Hyatt Hotels Corporation; Douglas Greene, managing director, Haberhill LLC; and Randy Thompson, general manager, Hyatt Regency Minneapolis, prepare to cut the ribbon marking the renovation of the Hyatt Regency Minneapolis.

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Hyman Appointed Group Publisher at Coastal Communications Corporation



Arthur Hyman

BOCA RATON, FL — Harvey Grotsky, president and CEO of Coastal Communications Corporation, announced the appointment of Arthur Hyman as group publisher, effective July 1, 2012. Hyman will direct the sales team for the company’s three meetings magazines — *Association Conventions & Facilities*, *Corporate & Incentive Travel* and *Insurance & Financial Meetings Management*. A veteran of more than 35 years of experience in the meetings magazine publishing industry, Hyman co-founded *Meeting News* in 1977. He joined *Successful Meetings* in 1991, and as associate publisher, opened an office in Boca Raton. Hyman, who will be based at Coastal Communications Corporation’s office in Boca Raton, can be reached at 561-989-0600, ext. 108, or by email at cccgrouppublisher@att.net.

AIBTM Will Rotate Sites

LONDON — AIBTM, the Americas Meetings & Events Exhibition, announced the show’s location will rotate between Chicago and Orlando. Choose Chicago will host AIBTM, June 11–13, 2013, at McCormick Place, and AIBTM will take place at Orlando’s Orange County Convention Center, June 10–12, 2014. www.aibtm.com

Jekyll Island Convention Center Officially Opens



Photo by Nancy J. Reynolds

(L to r) Robert Krueger, chair of the Jekyll Island Authority, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal, Stephen Croy, vice chair of the Jekyll Island Authority and guests at the official ribbon-cutting ceremony of the Jekyll Island Convention Center.

More than 300 people gathered recently to celebrate the official grand opening of the new Jekyll Island Convention Center. Georgia Governor Nathan Deal said, “The opening of the Jekyll Island Convention Center is reason for celebration for the state of Georgia. Jekyll Island is one of Georgia’s greatest gems, and its revitalization means jobs, economic development and tax dollars for the state. With this new convention center and the continued revitalization efforts, Jekyll is leading the way for a very bright future for all of Georgia.” More than 200 conventions are booked at the 128,000-sf Jekyll Island Convention Center through 2016. The only oceanside, beachfront convention center in the Southeast, the state-of-the-art facility features the 45,000-sf Atlantic Ballroom, divisible into two, three or four sections as well as 7,800 sf of oceanfront meeting space. The building earned silver-level LEED certification. Two new hotels as well as a Beach Village retail market will also be constructed adjacent to the convention center. www.jekyllisland.com

New Shuttle Connects San Diego Convention Center With Bayfront

In an effort to enhance public access along San Diego’s Embarcadero, a new bayfront shuttle service was launched. The Big Bay Bayfront Shuttle connects major attractions and businesses along the San Diego Bay including stops at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront, Marriott Marquis Hotel and Marina, Seaport Village, Broadway/Navy Pier, Maritime Museum of San Diego and Sheraton San Diego Hotel and Marina. “With our center located along the route, the shuttle allows our attendees to take a break from their meetings and conveniently experience everything our beautiful bay has to offer,” said the San Diego Convention Center Corporation’s President and CEO Carol Wallace. Rides on the shuttle will be included in the cost of parking at the convention center, the Hilton San Diego Bayfront and Navy Pier’s parking facilities, resulting in a \$1 increase in daily rates to fund the project. All other passengers can purchase tickets for \$1 per day at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront and Marriott Marquis and Marina’s concierge desks or Destination Travel in Seaport Village. www.visitsandiego.com

San Antonio Convention Center Set to Expand

San Antonio city officials presented plans to move forward with an expansion of the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center. Starting in late 2013, the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center (HBGCC) will undergo a \$325 million expansion to increase the amount of prime, contiguous exhibit space to more than 500,000 sf. Additionally, more flexible meeting and ballroom space will be added, including a new 50,000-sf ballroom — the largest in the state of Texas. The HBGCC will remain in full operation throughout the duration of the expansion, which is expected to be completed in the middle of 2016. Today, the HBGCC is a 1,300,000-sf state-of-the-art facility with four contiguous exhibit halls totaling more than 440,000 sf, 192,000 sf of meeting space, three ballrooms and 2,400-seat Lila Cockrell Theatre. www.visitsanantonio.com

New Fairmont Hotel Planned for Austin

TORONTO, CANADA — Fairmont Hotels & Resorts and Manchester Texas Financial Group LLC announced the signing of an agreement for Fairmont to manage a new city center hotel in Austin, TX. The Fairmont Austin, to be located directly east of the Austin Convention Center, is slated to open in 2015. The 50-story hotel, which features more than 70,000 sf of function space and approximately 1,000 guest rooms, will rise approximately 580 feet, making it the second largest structure on downtown Austin's skyline, which is currently dominated by the 56-story, 680-foot Austonian. The project will mark Fairmont's second hotel in Texas and join The Fairmont Dallas, located in the heart of Dallas' Downtown Arts District. Said Jennifer Fox, president, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, "Austin is currently seeing tremendous interest and growth in the convention market and, with its reputation as a dynamic, vibrant capital city, will be a great addition to our portfolio." The hotel's design encompasses a number of green building elements and will seek LEED certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, an environmentally progressive positioning that complements Fairmont's industry-leading philosophy of operational sustainability and responsible tourism. www.fairmont.com



Loews Hollywood Hotel to Remain Open During Renovations

NEW YORK, NY — Loews Hotels & Resorts has announced that it will acquire Renaissance Hollywood Hotel located adjacent to the Hollywood & Highland Center, Los Angeles, CA. The hotel features 632 guest rooms, including 32 suites as well as more than 48,000 sf of meeting space. The property will remain open while undergoing a \$26 million renovation beginning later this year. The Loews Hollywood Hotel is part of the Hollywood & Highland Center, giving guests direct access to the 460,000-sf center containing more than 80 shops, 26 restaurants and eateries, two night-clubs, seven movie screens, eight bars, 12 bowling lanes, the newly renamed Dolby Theatre, the site of the Academy Awards and IRIS, Cirque du Soleil's newest production and first resident show in Los Angeles. The property is also conveniently accessible to the Hollywood Bowl amphitheater and Universal Studios Hollywood theme park and movie studio. Wolfgang Puck Catering will continue to partner with Loews in the operation and catering of the 25,000-sf ballroom located in the Hollywood & Highland Center complex. www.loewshotels.com

Embassy Suites Washington D.C. Convention Center Completes Renovation

WASHINGTON, DC — The 384-suite Embassy Suites Washington D.C. Convention Center recently completed a \$7.5 million renovation of its guest rooms and public space. Located blocks from the Walter E. Washington Convention Center, the hotel's lobby and manager reception area also were upgraded and have fresh, new design features. The hotel redesigned guest room furniture, adding more work space with electrical plugs for connectivity. Guest suites are appointed with sleek sofas with pull-out beds flanked by sophisticated side chairs in the living area. Additional highlights include comfortable new bedding, cabinetry and furnishings with granite-topped counters. Energy-efficient lighting and thermostats as well as microwaves, new carpeting, wall coverings and flat-panel LCD televisions were added. The hotel features 8,000 sf of meeting space including five meeting rooms, as well as a business center, concierge services, a small gift shop and a fitness center. www.embassysuites.com

Largest Ballroom in New Orleans to Debut in January 2013

NEW ORLEANS, LA — The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center — the sixth largest convention center in the nation — held a topping out ceremony to celebrate the placement of the last beam in the construction of a \$50 million project that will result in the largest ballroom in New Orleans. The 60,300-sf column-free ballroom, slated to open in January 2013, will be named "The Great Hall" in reference to the convention center's first use as the Great Hall of the 1984 World's Fair. The event was held on the construction site of what was formerly Hall A and the La Louisiane ballroom, representing the oldest phase of the convention center. The Great Hall will feature 86,000 sf of function space; milled carpet, wall coverings and a décor reflective of New Orleans' unique style; advanced sound, lighting and technology capabilities; a 4,660-sf junior ballroom with a rooftop terrace; pedestrian plaza; multipurpose lounge, Internet café or art gallery; and divisions that allow for several concurrent but independent session rooms. www.mccno.com



1 The 12th annual digitalNow conference, co-produced by Disney Institute and Fusion Productions, welcomed more than 250 senior association executives to Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando. (L to r) Hugh Lee, president, Fusion Productions; Richard Yep, CAE, executive director and CEO, American Counseling Association; Don Dea, co-founder, Fusion Productions; George Aguel, S.V.P., The Walt Disney Company; Pamela Hemann, CAE, FASAE, president, Association Management Services Inc.; Bruce MacMillan, CA, former president/CEO, MPI; and Arlene Pietranton, Ph.D., CAE, executive director, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. 2 At the Exhibition & Convention Executives Forum 2012 in Washington, DC, are (l to r) Laurie Lutz, V.P., Consumer Electronics Association (CEA); Karen Chupka, S.V.P., CEA; and Judy Chambers, sales executive, Las Vegas CVA. 3 PCMA hosted the first of a series of educational Think Tanks for 2012 at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside. (L to r) Tim Hemphill, V.P. sales and marketing, New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center (MCCNO); Morlene Pena, CMP, principal, Alliance Meeting and Conference Management; Brenda Park, CMP, owner, Park-Way Meetings; Bob Johnson, G.M., MCCNO. 4 Greater Hartford (CT) CVB officials and National Association of Sports Commissions conventioners celebrate the first-ever Sports Event Symposium held in New England. 5 Lindsey Ketcham, sales manager, Visit Ogden, accepts the Best Marketing Booth Award from HSMIA's Director of Chapter Relations Margie Sheffer (r) at HSMIA's MEET West 2012 in Anaheim, CA. 6 Visit Newport Beach Inc. and the Hyatt Regency Newport Beach, CA, hosted CalSAE's "Elevate" 2012 Annual Conference, with 227 attendees.

Photo credits: 1. Disney; 2. Exhibition and Convention Executives Forum; 3. PCMA; 4. Greater Hartford CVB; 5. Ambience Photography; 6. Visit Newport Beach Inc.



A Conversation With John Graham

By Harvey Grotsky

At Springtime Expo '12, a premier meetings industry event held in April in Washington, DC, ASAE President and CEO John H. Graham IV, CAE, spoke with Harvey Grotsky, publisher and editor-in-chief of Association Conventions & Facilities. Excerpts from their conversation follow.

AC&F What lessons can be learned from the General Services Administration (GSA) incident?

Graham First of all, for any group, follow the rules! There are rules in place for the GSA, and people didn't follow the rules. So it's not like the government doesn't have rules. They have them, but they weren't followed. Secondly, it's going to depend on the meeting. No one agrees with excess. But there are some meetings such as our five-star meeting that is designed to be a client meeting for large association buyers who are being entertained by sponsors, and that's the purpose of the meeting. So we don't do things that are excessive but it is a very nice five-star experience. People who attend our meetings have an expectation that it will be a good, quality experience, so we try to provide that in a tasteful and appropriate fashion. Also, people want to give back and reduce their carbon footprint. We're going to see more of that as meetings evolve. Finally, I hope the government doesn't overreact and really stop their federal employees from attending because it isn't lobbying, it isn't anything other than what it is intended to be, which is education. Also, a lot of our federal workers are professionals, such as doctors, lawyers and accountants. And they need to get the education and continuing education that everyone

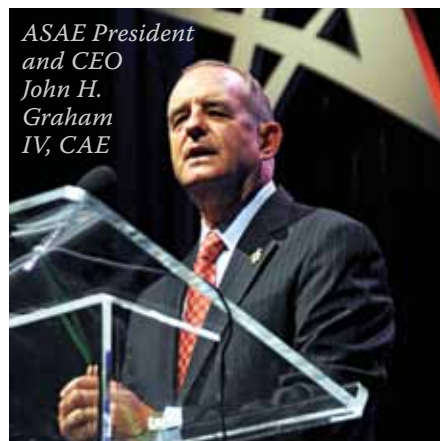
else gets. Just because you're a doctor for the federal government doesn't mean you should not get educated like any doctor in any other health system. To prevent these doctors from getting their education because of the GSA experience is a crime.

AC&F What was the No. 1 idea you gleaned from the ASAE Great Ideas Conference in March at The Broadmoor?

Graham From my perspective, the best was the Deep Dive session we did with John Kao who started a conversation tailored to how associations can learn to innovate. That is, using a disciplined approach of innovation by analyzing your product and trying to change an aspect of it but not the whole piece and then continue to experiment, experiment until you get it right. That way you don't jeopardize everything. You do take some risk. But it's really, again, about the discipline of innovation.

AC&F You have spoken a great deal about diversity and generational issues. How do you level the playing field among the generations?

Graham Well, if you look back at associations in general, there's this concern that the younger generation is not joining. I'm not sure the younger generation joined in previous years either as they are still trying to figure out what career they're going to be in. Professionals who require licensure are probably not going to join at a young age either. Those in their 30s and 40s are coming through now. Also, the birthrate declined by almost 50 percent. By the late 70s, the birthrate was half of what it was in 1957. Boomers are retiring so they are not coming in as



ASAE President and CEO John H. Graham IV, CAE

Photo courtesy of ASAE

fast. What hasn't changed is the value proposition. We still need to be relevant and provide people with what they want. And in an era where information is free, how we package that information and how we provide people with what they want is going to be the difference between being relevant and not, and whether a younger person is going to join your association.

AC&F What are some major initiatives ASAE is undertaking to support the success of association meetings and conventions?

Graham There are a couple of things we are trying out and testing such as learning formats such as Ignite, a format where people have five minutes to show 20 slides and tell a story. It's a very exciting format. We're also trying Deep Dives, which is a longer program within a program. It's a 1½-day session with one individual. Secondly, for our major meetings, attendees can use their own apps for social media and planning their own calendars. We're trying to make it attractive to young and old. We're also looking at how we can produce a virtual meeting in a cost-effective way and allow people to participate onsite or virtually and have a great experience around that. We're also promulgating green standards for meetings through the Convene Green Alliance, which is an organization within ASAE that helps meeting planners plan greener meetings and reduce the carbon footprint. Hopefully, we're a real laboratory for other associations to watch and do the things that work.

AC&F



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This year, more than 3,500 association executives and industry partners attended the 2012 Springtime Expo held on May 3 in Washington, DC, at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. **1** Peter Sheahan was so highly rated as the closing session speaker for the 2011 ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition that he was invited back as the general session speaker for 2012 Springtime. Sheahan spoke directly to the meetings industry and how innovation works the best on a small scale. **2, 3, 4** With more than 470 exhibiting companies featuring the best in products, services and destinations for the meeting industry, the expo hall was the place to find meeting destinations, try out some great new products, win prizes and connect with friends and colleagues. **5** Approximately 800 association professionals attended the 2012 Membership, Marketing & Communications Conference (MMCC), May 23-24, at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center, which featured more than 30 learning labs, two general sessions, half-day workshops and Ignite presentations. **6** Sarah Sladek kicked off the MMCC. Sladek, author of *The End of Membership As We Know It* (ASAE Association Management Press) and CEO of XYZ University, talked about the challenges associations face with membership and provided ideas on new revolutionary models that can help build a sustainable, prosperous organization.

Photos courtesy of ASAE



Innovation

Michelle Bruno



Why bxb Online's 'Network' Is a Blue Ocean Strategy for Associations

Although the breakout best-seller, *Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make Competition Irrelevant* by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne, was published in 2005 (Harvard Business Review Press), the principles of the book are as relevant today as they were throughout the 20th century when trade associations were born. The notion that companies should reorient their strategic focus from competitors to alternatives and from customers to noncustomers also applies to non-profit groups and closely aligns with the evolutionary idea of creating an online destination (Network) of aggregated live and on-demand content for the business-to-business marketplace.

The "Network" is the brainchild of Tony Lorenz, founder of bxb Online, a Chicago-based digital-event agency. It is a centralized online platform of digital content — keynotes, conference sessions, education and interviews, for example — organized around 14 industry channels that allows participating associations to leverage new and existing digital content originating primarily from face-to-face events. Professionals can join a community within their respective channel(s) to engage in discussions and access content that they would otherwise be unable to experience not having attended the live event or having missed a session even though they attended. Major event industry associations including ASAE, PCMA and IAEE support the idea.

It's pretty well understood in the association world that the traditional business models for associations are weakening. Jeff De Cagna, chief strategist and founder, Principled Innovation, has written, "Over the last decade, we have witnessed the creation of a robust social layer of interaction,

conversation and sharing in the form of blogs, wikis, near real-time information flows and global social networking sites. Today's relationships flourish in a fully digital form, a medium that makes them always accessible, highly portable, easily shared and thus more valuable." Hence, the alternatives to association membership — the engagement, shared purpose and access to information provided by social networks — are attractive at a time when revenue streams from live association meetings that only reach a fraction of potential buyers are limited.

Blue Ocean Strategy is a framework for allowing organizations to move away from "dividing up existing — often shrinking — demand and benchmarking competitors." The concept of "Value Innovation" is the cornerstone of Kim's and Mauborgne's model. Value innovation occurs when an organization can simultaneously increase buyer value and reduce costs. In addition, "Because buyer value comes from the utility and price that the company (organization) offers to buyers (association members) and because the value to the company is generated from price and its cost structure, value innovation is achieved only when the whole system of the company's utility, price and cost activities is properly aligned."

Blue Ocean Strategy is epitomized by bxb Online's Network in a number of ways. An aggregated multichannel platform of digital content that leverages face-to-face events and offers community-building resources lifts buyer value and reduces association costs. The value increase comes from the utility of access to compelling, centralized (no skipping around on Google to find the conference broadcasts) on-demand and hybrid content that was previ-

ously only available to individuals who physically traveled to a meeting (driving the price to access the content higher for the buyer). The reduction in costs to an association comes in the form of using less costly digital channels to market its content, meetings, memberships and services.

There are other Blue Ocean advantages to a shared digital platform for association content. As adoption of the Network

some adjustment. Convention centers will be mandated to upgrade in-house content-capture capabilities in order to stay competitive.

The success of the Network is not a referendum on the value of face-to-face meetings. Neither will it be a replacement for membership in a trade association. It is proof that the digital content generated by face-to-face meetings is

The Network is proof that the digital content generated by face-to-face meetings is valuable to an entirely new group of consumers and thus represents a previously untapped and uncontested market space — a blue ocean.

risks, economies of scale will drive costs down further for channel operators: trade groups and media companies. The byproducts of user data generated by the Network and the aggregated content that will drive engagement and enhance overall quality of the offerings from channel to channel stand to provide more value to associations at no additional cost.

The promise of a digital network as a game-changing Blue Ocean Strategy for associations is critical for meeting planners and facilities to understand. Both will have to manage the infrastructure for capturing digital content from live meetings. Planners will be required to think even more strategically about the meeting content that feeds the digital Network. Meeting architecture will no doubt require

valuable to an entirely new group of consumers and thus represents a previously untapped and uncontested market space — a blue ocean. This opening up of offerings to a wider community on a platform that is in sync with the shift in culture and behavior of the business consumer will bring growth, revenue and sustainability to the association community. One that is treading water in the red ocean of competition for their prospective members' attention.

ED. NOTE: The Industry Network launches at ASAE's Annual Meeting & Exposition in Dallas, August 11-14. AC&F

Michelle Bruno is a writer, blogger and content strategist for the meetings industry. She blogs at forkintheroadblog.com.

Risk Management

Linda E. Schwartz



What Happened? Don't Panic! Five Tips for Successful Onsite Crisis Mitigation

For many of us, 9/11 and Katrina were among the largest disasters to impact the association meetings industry during the past several years. These massive crises were also national tragedies that affected the country as a whole, far beyond the scope of any organizational meeting that might have been disrupted or canceled.

Most crises that affect association conferences are less catastrophic and have little to no impact beyond your event. However, every crisis has the potential to morph into a disaster that negatively impacts your meeting and may have long-lasting ramifications for your association. Here are five tips from Eric Johnson, CMP, CMM, senior manager, SmithBucklin Event Services, that you can use to make certain you are as prepared as possible to deal with onsite emergencies.

- 1. Develop a comprehensive crisis management plan.** Yes, it sounds obvious, but you might be surprised at the number of organizations that don't have a robust plan or don't keep their plan up-to-date. Put your plan in writing and distribute it to every member of the team working on the meeting. The plan won't be of any help if it exists solely in someone's head — or if staff can't locate a copy when they really need it.
- 2. Create a risk-management checklist to review with the facility.** Whether your event is taking place at a conference center, a hotel or a combination of facilities, review your crisis plan with facility staff members and customize it to include information relevant to that facility. Some

points to cover include, but are by no means limited to, the facility's written medical emergency plan; where the aid station(s) are located, how they are staffed and equipped, and what their hours of operation are; when the house physician is on call; which staff members have training in CPR and the Heimlich maneuver; the name, location and phone number of the nearest hospital and urgent-care center; the fire safety procedures (including actions to be taken when an alarm sounds); the phone number for the local police and fire departments (do not assume it is 911); the emergency telephone number for the facility's security office; etc.

- 3. Consider the risk for organized protest.** Is your group, by its nature, somewhat controversial? Will any presentations at the conference be likely to attract protesters? Do any of your exhibitors offer products or services that might be considered offensive or provocative to certain segments of the population? If so, consider engaging the services of a security consultant and additional security personnel to complement security services provided by the venue. Also, be sure to brief the organization's leaders, staff and facility officials regarding the potential for disruption.
- 4. Prepare for "acts of God."** We all have seen contracts disclaiming responsibility for anything that can be attributed to an "act of God." However, acts of God do occur, and your crisis plan should address dealing with the immediate aftermath, leaving the possible wrangling over financial

responsibility to others at a later date. What is your plan if bad weather causes serious delays or disruptions in travel to, from or within your locale? What is your (and the facility's) plan for a "Mass Care Facility Operation" in the event of a serious event (including possible biohazards)?

- 5. Assemble your Crisis Communications Team (CCT).** A crisis requires a swift response, and is not the time to

Distribute a CCT contact list that outlines the role and decision-making authority level of each team member and includes members' office, home and cell phone numbers. Because clear and effective communication is crucial to crisis management (remember the many botched communication attempts during the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico?), most organizations allow only the executive director to make statements about the crisis. This helps the

Every crisis has the potential to morph into a disaster that negatively impacts your meeting and may have long-lasting ramifications for your association.

decide who should weigh in on the situation. Decisions must be made quickly based on available information and resources. A small group (no more than seven) should be designated as the CCT and be ready to convene as necessary to assess a critical situation and execute the plan. The goals of the CCT are to:

- Minimize the number of logistical decisions that need to be made;
- Focus on gathering accurate information about the crisis;
- Initiate an effective communications response; and
- Gain early control of the information disseminated to key audiences.

organization to deliver one message, with one voice.

The overarching goal of any crisis communications plan is to manage through any critical situation with one focus: the primary care of attendees. While you cannot always avoid a disaster, you can control your response during an emergency so that, as much as possible, no harm comes to any attendee or to the organization as a whole. While you may never have to put your crisis plan into effect, you can't afford to be caught without it.

Linda E. Schwartz, senior director, marketing and communication services for SmithBucklin, an association management company headquartered in Chicago, has worked with associations and their members for more than 30 years to develop, implement and manage a broad range of membership programs.



Take a Leap of Faith

Reap the Rewards of Using New and Renovated Properties

By Derek Reveron

It's a calculated risk that many association planners take when booking meetings and conventions at hotels or resorts that are undergoing construction or renovations. Every planner makes the decision based on the unique needs of the group, carefully weighing the advantages and possible pitfalls. Large groups take a bigger chance because it may be more difficult to make alternative plans if construction isn't completed before the meeting date. Despite the risks, the advantages of holding a meeting at a brand new or freshly renovated venue are legion and often result in a very successful experience.

And that's what the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) expects when they meet in Nashville in 2015 — success. According to Frank Gainer, AOTA's director of conferences, they booked the Omni Nashville Hotel (to open in late 2013) as their headquarters hotel for the 2015 Annual Conference & Expo, which is expected to attract upwards of 6,000 attendees. "We are taking a leap of faith of sorts, but we expect it to work out because it's a known property brand. We prefer not to use a property under construction or renovation, but sometimes you have to because you are scheduled for a certain city and because of your

dates and space needs. They will also have the Music City Center, and it will be big enough to accommodate us. The important thing is to remain in constant communication with the property about the construction schedule," says Gainer.

PRIME CONSIDERATIONS

Meeting planners weigh several factors when deciding whether to hold a meeting at a property before it is built. A hotel's brand name and the length of time it will be open before the meeting date are among the concerns, says Jerome Bruce, CMP, CEM, director of meetings and expositions for Alexandria, VA-based Advancing Government Accountability (AGA), an association of government finance professionals. While working for another organization, Bruce booked an annual convention at a resort five years before construction was scheduled for completion. "It was a risk because you never know what happens with construction deadlines. But we wanted to be in that city that year, and it was a strong brand that's pretty much proven. They also had all the latest technology. We had used their other properties, so we knew this one would be the same or better. That's a main reason why we did it. I also don't think we would have booked the meeting if we would have been the first group there. We wanted to give them a

year or so to adjust before we arrived. Service was great, and the meeting went well," says Bruce.

Some associations strongly prefer not to book meetings at new hotels while they are under construction. Gregg Balko, executive director of the Society for the Advancement of Material and Process Engineering (SAMPE), says the group doesn't consider properties undergoing construction for its annual meeting, which attracts about 5,000 international attendees. "We plan meetings at new properties only after they are finished. You can't do it for a large group. There's so much at risk, and there can be delays that nobody can anticipate. You have to deliver an event in a facility that is ready to hold your event. If you have a smaller meeting, then you have some flexibility to relocate it if necessary. But when you're looking at 5,000 people, it's not a strategically smart move," says Balko.

As for arranging meetings at hotels undergoing renovation, it depends on the size and scope of the work, Balko observes. "If a property is doing major renovations like lobbies or meeting rooms, then I probably wouldn't hold a meeting there. If they are doing a guest room renovation, I need to know the total inventory, how many rooms they are taking out and for how long, and the number they have committed to other groups. I've never had a problem with hotels that have guest room renovations. Those are less invasive and for the most part you don't even know they are going on. They tend to be things that hotels have more control over as far as impacting meetings, even if construction doesn't go exactly on schedule. They tend to take a floor at a time, and we may not even know they aren't on schedule," says Balko.

HOTELS AIM TO PLEASE

While unsatisfactory meeting experiences due to incomplete renovations and delayed openings of new hotels are rare, they can happen. When it occurs, meeting planners should keep one thing in mind, says Balko: "Facilities have our best interests at heart. They don't want word getting out that you booked a meeting and they didn't complete renovations or construction. People have stories about holding meetings at hotels where work wasn't finished. But



Frank E. Gainer, MHS, OTR/L, FAOTA, Director of Conferences American Occupational Therapy Association Inc. Bethesda, MD

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Jerome Bruce, CMP, CEM Director of Meetings and Expositions Advancing Government Accountability Alexandria, VA

the hospitality community is our friend and does everything it can to mitigate bad experiences. They are an exception, but they are momentous whenever they happen," says Balko.

Delayed or incomplete construction can be even more impactful if it occurs in another country. John Folks, president of Chicago-based Minding Your Business Inc., a strategic meeting planning agency, had a less than perfect experience recently with a newly built hotel in Latin America. The hotel, owned by a U.S. brand, was scheduled to debut three months before the association's meeting, but opened less than a month before attendees arrived.

Onsite, the group's planners held a preconference meeting with the hotel leadership staff. There were also daily meetings to address issues that surfaced, and there were several. "With a new hotel, you have a new management team and staff, and they are trying to work out the bugs in service. That's where the challenge was. There was everything from some waiters and servers not knowing the menu to cooks not knowing how to prepare some dishes. The hours of the restaurant were inconsistent. Sometimes the meetings were set up incorrectly and we had to change it. The convention services person wasn't proactive. So much of a convention services person's job depends on the person's relationships within the hotel to get things done. Since everybody was new to each other, the relationships weren't clearly established, so it was harder to get things done. Our meeting staff had to work much harder than usual," says Folks. In the end, the association received financial consideration for the inconveniences.

NEW PROPERTIES SPUR ATTENDANCE

Such experiences are not typical and don't outweigh the benefits of holding a meeting at a new or renovated property. Attendees love the new design and furnishings as well as the latest technology, including high-speed Internet connections, greater bandwidth and sophisticated audio-visual equipment. But do new properties increase attendance? "It depends on a group's membership. Every group is different. If brand new, trendy and chic properties are important to the members — and they feel there are bragging rights to that — it will enhance registration numbers. I once worked for a group where that was a consideration for the board meetings," Balko notes. However, for most associations, a property's newness isn't the primary consideration, he adds.

Hotels strive to remain keenly aware of the needs of attendees



John Folks
President
Minding Your Business Inc.
Chicago, IL

“I’ve sat on a number of hotel advisory boards. And they’ve brought either new-build or renovation plans to the boards for client feedback. ...In all cases they took some of our advice.”

and meeting planners when building and renovating hotels and resorts. Folks says that some hotel chains solicit feedback from people in the meetings industry before and after construction work. “I’ve sat on a number of hotel advisory boards. And they’ve brought either new-build or renovation plans to the boards for client feedback. Each time there have been things the group brought up in the design of the renovation or new build, and the hotel later discovered better ways to design the space, attendee flow, technologies or other things. In one case, they rolled out three plans they were considering for the room product, the look and feel of the meeting rooms and the technology. In all cases they took some of our advice. In two cases, they brought us back and showed us what they had done and how they had taken our advice and actually changed the design of some things. We got to experience the finished product, and it was really exciting,” says Folks.

WHAT’S NEW

In Nashville, the **Omni Nashville Hotel** is scheduled to open in fall 2013. The hotel announced in April that it had secured more than 100,000 definite group room nights. The groups include the Society of Women Engineers (SWE). As part of the announcement, SWE conference manager Jeanne M. Elipani, CMP, said, “The timing of the convention center expansion is perfect as we could not have come back without the extra space, plus the addition of the Omni Nashville as our host hotel will provide a new, modern twist.”

The 800-room Omni Nashville will connect to the Country Music Hall of Fame and provide 80,000 sf of meeting and event space. An additional 1.2 million sf of meeting space will be available at the Music City Center, Nashville’s new convention center, which is scheduled to open in early 2013 across from the Omni Nashville.

Kalahari Resort and Convention Center, Sandusky, OH and **Kalahari Resort and Convention Center, Wisconsin Dells, WI** are African-themed resorts that feature indoor and outdoor water parks, attractions, slides and activities. Earlier this year, the 884-room Kalahari Resort in Sandusky opened its expanded convention center after completing a \$22 million renovation. The project doubled the total size of the center to 215,000 sf and more than doubled the number of attendees the facility can accommodate to 5,200. Kalahari also added a 38,000-sf grand ballroom/expo center and a 12,000-sf ballroom. There is also 30,000 sf of prefunction space and a 4,000-sf themed outdoor plaza. The convention center now includes features

such as HD-quality projectors and formatted screens, interactive whiteboards, digital signage and video conference options.

Kalahari Resort Wisconsin Dells offers 740 guest rooms and 125,000 of flexible meeting space that includes 42 meeting rooms and four ballrooms ranging in size from 4,000 sf to 21,000 sf. The resort also offers Trappers Turn, a 27-hole golf club and the Crystal Grand Music Theatre.

In Florida, the Mediterranean-style resort of **Turnberry Isle Miami** recently completed a \$2 million renovation of the Orchid Building — one of the hotel’s four towers. The Orchid Building’s 48 guest rooms were redesigned and refurbished and include iHome docking stations, 42-inch LGT flat-screen televisions and Wi-Fi access. The resort has a 40,000-sf convention center with 17 meeting rooms, a 12,080-sf Grand Ballroom, a 4,000-sf outdoor terrace and the latest technology. The resort’s amenities include two 18-hole championship golf courses, three pools, four clay HydroCourts, and a spa and fitness center.

In the Orlando area, the award-winning **Rosen Centre Hotel** recently renovated its Grande Lobby, 1,334 guest rooms, hospitality suites and one of three Presidential suites. Located a short drive from Walt Disney World Resort, Rosen Centre Hotel has a covered skywalk that connects to the Orange County Convention Center. The hotel provides more than 106,000 sf of meeting space, including 33 meeting rooms and two ballrooms of 14,375 sf and 35,000 sf.

Another Orlando property, the **Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center**, recently completed a \$50 million renovation. The project includes a makeover of the resort’s 1,406 guest rooms to include updates of amenities such as flat-screen TVs, furniture and bed linens. The renovation also includes the new Cypress Springs Family Fun Water Park, which features four water slides, hoop water basketball, an outdoor movie screen and an adults-only pool. The new Wreckers Sports Bar has 50 HD TVs and a 37-foot sports screen. Outdoor events can be held on the new 10,000-sf Coquina Lawn. Built in turn-of-the-century Florida style, the resort offers 400,000 sf of flexible meeting, exhibition, convention and prefunction space that includes a 178,500-sf exhibition hall.

The **Renaissance Phoenix Downtown’s** \$20 million renovation garnered the hotel a prestigious American Society for Interior Design award for hospitality design. The transformed Renaissance Phoenix Downtown offers a world of sleek style and customized comfort. The hotel provides more than 60,000 sf of total function space including a 10,000-sf Grand Ballroom, a 20,000-sf outdoor terrace and onsite exhibition space.

Columbus, OH is getting a new convention hotel. **The Hilton Columbus Downtown** is scheduled for completion in the fall. The 532-room hotel, connected via an enclosed walkway to the Greater Columbus Convention Center, will have 22,800 sf of meeting space, including a 12,000-sf ballroom.

For more news and information about new and renovated properties, see the special section on pages 19–25.

AC&F

Turnberry Isle Miami

The ideal location for association meetings or retreats, the 408-room Turnberry Isle Miami recently became an Autograph Collection Hotel, a portfolio of world-class, independent boutique and upscale hotels.

This premier 300-acre property features a 40,000-sf conference center with 17 versatile meeting rooms. A 12,080-sf Grand Ballroom divides into three sections and accommodates up to 1,700 guests. Two Garden Rooms combine to form a 7,020-sf space for plated dinners of up to 350 people. Electronic message boards outside each room make it easy for guest navigation, while a separate valet area and satellite check-in stations can be arranged for seamless arrivals.

Between South Florida's tropical weather and extensive exterior space, the hotel caters to outdoor functions year round. The popular Magnolia Courtyard, a 4,000-sf Mediterranean-style outdoor terrace, accommodates up to 300 guests and provides views of the signature 18-hole "Island Green" and 64-foot waterfall. Outdoor venues include the enchanting Cascata Pool, Laguna Pool, Beach Club, Banyan Tree and lush lawns lined with palm trees and vibrant colored foliage.

There is no shortage of recreational amenities for groups to enjoy, including two championship Raymond Floyd-

redesigned golf courses, the elite Cañas Tennis, three-story Spa & Fitness Center, private Beach Club, lagoon-style pool

with private cabanas, waterslide and lazy river, and acclaimed Chef Michael Mina's Bourbon Steak.

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Guest Rooms: 408

Meeting Space: 40,000 sf

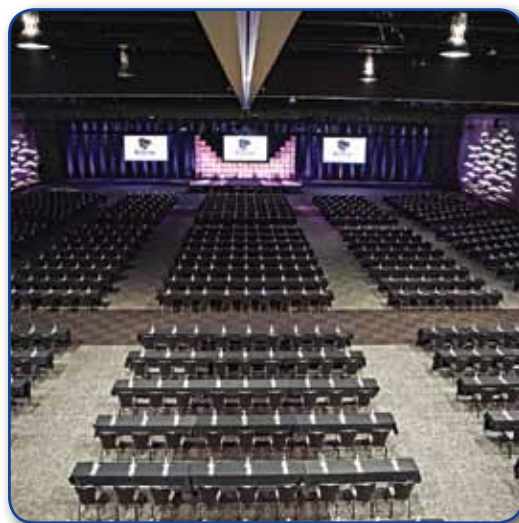
Special Amenities: Spa & Fitness Center; Beach Club; Laguna Pool with waterslide, lazy river; Aventura Mall.

Kalahari Resorts and Convention Centers

The authentically African-themed Kalahari Resorts and Convention Centers, located in Wisconsin Dells, WI, and Sandusky, OH, are home to America's largest indoor water parks and award-winning outdoor and indoor attractions. Both resorts boast more than 700 guest rooms, full-service spas, unique retail shops, a wide variety of dining options and state-of-the-art convention center facilities.

UNDER ONE ROOF

Located midway between Cleveland and Toledo, Kalahari Resort and Convention Center in Sandusky brings "a world away" experience to travelers in the Midwest with under-one-roof convenience. It unveiled last December a newly expanded convention center, marking the completion of a \$22 million, 10-month expansion. The 120,000-sf addition more than doubles the size of the previous convention center, bringing the total square footage to 215,000 and making the Kalahari Resort in Sandusky the only under-one-roof complex in the Midwest to offer a convention center and hotel of such a scope.



UNBELIEVABLE VALUE

Designed to host the best in regional and national conferences, conventions, consumer and industry trade shows, Kalahari provides a unique experience and proven ability to increase meeting attendance by more than 20 percent, leading to higher satisfaction at an unbelievable value.

Kalahari's newest space accommodates 5,200 conference attendees, as compared to 2,200 at the original convention center, which opened in 2006, and helped fill a void of hotel and meetings space in the region.

AUTHENTIC AFRICAN THEME

The resort's distinctive African theme is carried throughout the convention center, and guests will find authentic African art and artifacts that have been hand-selected by Kalahari staff in Africa alongside state-of-the-art meetings technology. Kalahari's use of earthy colors enhances the ability to focus and aid in productivity, too.

UPDATED TECHNOLOGY

Conference attendees will find the latest audio-visual technology available, including interactive whiteboards, videoconferencing options, high-end acoustical sound systems, HD-quality projectors and formatted screens, advanced lighting control systems and digital signage.

Meeting planners also will appreciate smart design elements, such as electronically lockable built-in-bars and registration areas, as well as

added warming kitchens in key areas to enhance food and beverage service options. The new addition includes a 38,000-sf ballroom, a 12,000-sf junior ballroom, 14 meeting rooms and 30,000 sf of prefunction space.

FAMILY FRIENDLY

For business travelers accompanied by their families, Kalahari Resorts boasts the nation's largest indoor water park, a 77,000-sf outdoor water park and the 115,000-sf Safari Outdoor Adventure Park. Providing the perfect meeting destination for a family getaway, Kalahari Resorts offers discounted group rates for conference attendees looking to extend their stay, water-park passes included in room rates, a variety of restaurants on-property and a family-friendly, all-under-one-roof location.

7000 Kalahari Drive, Sandusky, OH 44870
 1305 Kalahari Drive, Wisconsin Dells, WI 53965
 877-642-6847
 Fax: 419-433-7748
 OHgroups@KalahariResorts.com
 www.kalahariresorts.com/oh/conventions

Guest Rooms: 900 guest rooms including 262 one-to five-bedroom suites; six 4,100-sf stand-alone 5-bedroom (up to 22 guests) Entertainment Villas.
Meeting Space: 215,000 sf, 39 function rooms.
Special Services & Amenities: business center, audio-visual; complimentary high-speed wireless; nine restaurants, luxury spa, five retail shops; zip-line, ropes course, climbing wall and more.

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Omni Nashville Hotel

A NEW GEM IN MUSIC CITY

Looking for an exciting destination and a luxurious hotel experience all in one? Mark your calendar for the fall 2013 opening of a truly unique Omni property — the Omni Nashville Hotel.

Why Nashville? Other than being home to the Country Music Hall of Fame and being coined “Music City,” Nashville’s rich and dynamic character makes it a one-of-a-kind destination for all visitors. Soon, you’ll be able to enjoy the upbeat charm of Nashville with Omni Hotels & Resorts, located in the cultural heart of Music City.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

What will set the Omni Nashville Hotel apart from others? Its enviable downtown location. Its four shared levels with the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, which will offer a seamless experience with shared meeting and event space — plus easy access

to exhibits, retail, restaurants and entertainment venues along vibrant Broadway. The hotel also will be adjacent to the new Music City Center. This state-of-the-art convention center features 1.2 million sf of event space, including a 350,000-sf exhibit hall, 60 meeting rooms and two ballrooms.

Not only will staying at the Omni Nashville Hotel place you steps away from the excitement of Broadway, but the modern design will express the city’s distinct character, including the incorporation of natural materials, exposed steel and regional limestone. This 21-story hotel promises to bring Nashville to life from the inside out.

To top it all off, Omni Hotels & Resorts works hard to make it easier than ever for you to mix a little leisure with business by giving attendees everything they can expect from a four-

diamond hotel. Among many things, in Nashville, they’ll enjoy 800 richly appointed guest rooms, including 54 executive and luxury suites, each featuring ample space and exceptional in-room amenities, such as lushly comfortable beds, elegant marble bathrooms and in-room Wi-Fi access.

To make it even sweeter, the Omni Nashville Hotel will offer five culinary and entertainment venues, a signature Mokara Spa with a complete menu of rejuvenating treatments and services and a rooftop urban pool deck with breathtaking views of downtown Nashville. With everything the Omni Nashville Hotel is preparing for guests, holding your next event here will prove to be a huge hit.

MEETING SPACE

Business amenities at the Omni will be no less appealing. Some of our most notable will include all-over high-speed Internet access, 80,000 sf of meeting and event space, a full-service business center with leading-edge technology, award-winning banquet options with proven convention support delivered by a dedicated onsite staff, ample breakout rooms, state-of-the-art audio-visual equipment and flexible partitioning options.

Hungry for some adventure as well? The Omni Nashville Hotel will put you near countless attractions, such as the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Schermerhorn Symphony Center, The Johnny Cash Museum, Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art and the Adventure Science Center. Sports fans, come cheer on the Nashville Predators at Bridgestone Arena and root for the Tennessee Titans at LP Field.

So, next time you’re looking to add a little rock ‘n’ roll to your event or trip, try the Omni Nashville Hotel.



150 Third Avenue South, Suite 1150
Nashville, Tennessee 37201
Contact: Tod Roadarmel, Director of Sales & Marketing, 615-782-5300
Fax: 615-743-6002
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www.omniunderstands.com/nashville

Guest Rooms: 800 guest rooms and suites.
Meeting Space: 80,000 sf of meeting space
Special Services & Amenities: Adjacent to the Music City Center with 1.2 million sf of extra meeting space and connected to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum.

You want to meet
on Music City’s
center stage.



Omni understands

Introducing the new Omni Nashville Hotel, featuring 800 guest rooms and 80,000 square feet of meeting space. With a premier location adjacent to the new Music City Center and connected to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, this state-of-the-art hotel reflects the flavor of this one-of-a-kind destination. Opening in late 2013.

Call today for pre-opening offers.
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Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel

Stay in the heart of it all without missing a beat. A quick four-mile trip from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport leads you to the newly transformed Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel. Just steps away from the Phoenix Convention Center, and a light-rail ride away from the city's most unexpected gems, this sophisticated urban hotel is located in the heart of it all.

Stimulating meeting environments, creative and indigenous food and beverage, and personal REN Meeting Experts set this hotel apart from the rest. At the Renaissance Phoenix Downtown, meetings thrive in more than 60,000 sf of total function space including a 10,000-sf Grand Ballroom, a 20,000-sf outdoor terrace and onsite exhibition space. The moment you walk into a meeting, you feel the difference. From calm, soft lights, to engaging table elements, all aspects of the meeting rooms are designed to inspire creativity.



The Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel offers a world of crisp, sleek design and modern comfort. It is ideal for the savvy meeting planner looking for the ultimate in urban sophistication, contemporary appointments and the personalized service of an intimate downtown hotel.

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Meetings at the Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel are meant to spark new thinking and fresh ideas. And the best part — the hotel is offering a special introductory group offer called **Pick Three**. Simply book a meeting of 10 or more rooms on peak night by December 31, 2012, and actualize by March 31, 2013, and pick three of the following:**

- One complimentary guest room for every 40 rooms actualized.
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- 10 percent discount on in-house AV equipment.*
- Triple Marriott Rewarding Events bonus points (150,000 maximum).
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- 2 VIP round-trip airport transfers.
- 1 VIP suite upgrade.

Meeting must actualize a minimum of 10 paid guest rooms on peak night. Offer not valid with any other promotion or for previously booked business. Subject to availability. Must reference **Pick Three package prior to signing contract. *Discount taken off the standard AV retail price. Labor, rigging, meeting room Internet and service charges not included in discount. Discount only available when hotel is exclusive AV provider.

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 Contact: William Stratton, Destination Sales Executive
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 Fax: 602-333-5180
 William.Stratton@RenaissanceHotels.com
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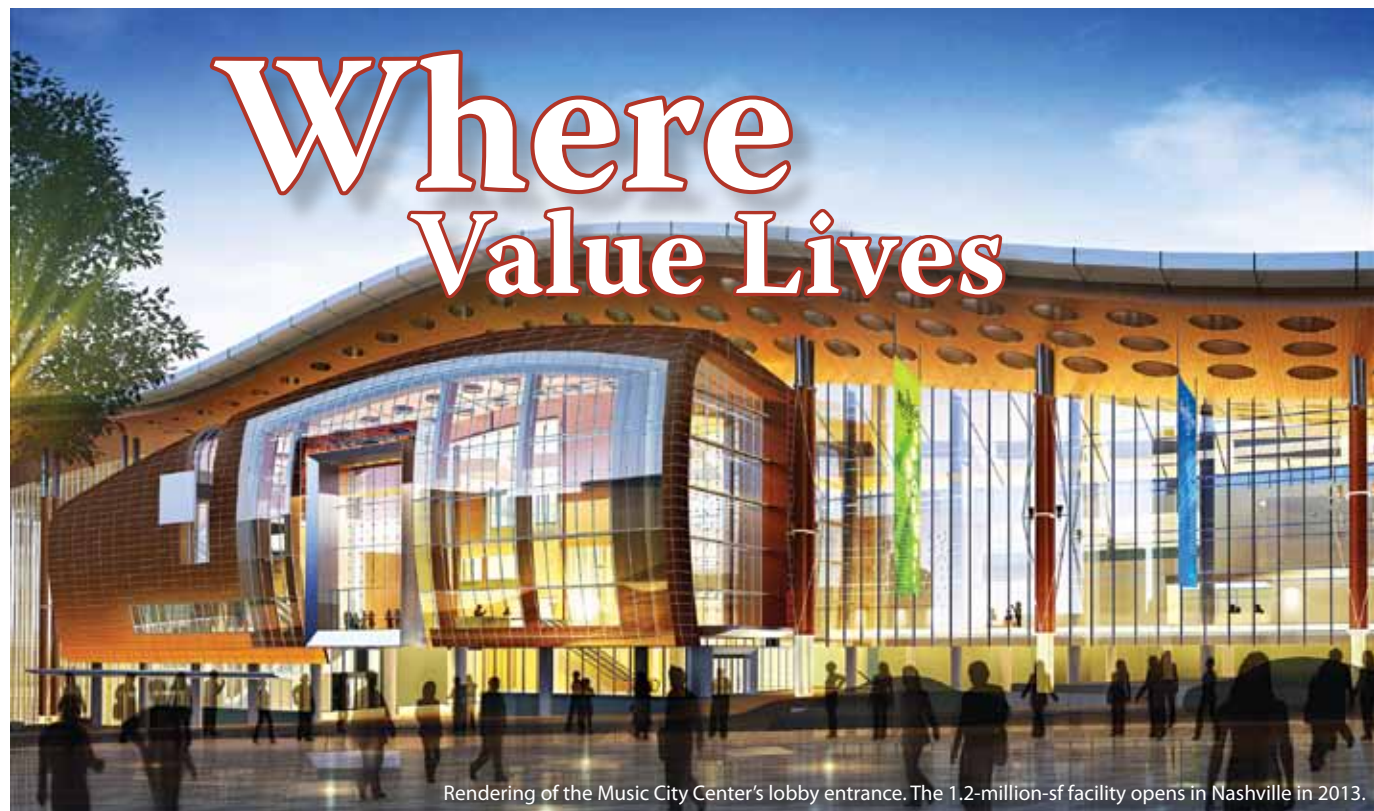
Surround your attendees with sophisticated technology, flawless service and endless inspiration. Our 18 meeting rooms hosted in over 60,000 sq.ft. of total function space — including a 10,000 sq.ft. Grand Ballroom, 20,000 sq.ft. outdoor terrace and on-site exhibition space, set the standard for innovation. After a high-powered day of meetings, your attendees will enjoy Marston's Café, ICON Lounge, a heated outdoor pool, fitness center and the comfort of our stylish guestrooms.

Set in the heart of the business and entertainment districts, the Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel is the ideal starting point for exploring the arts, local culture, sports and a myriad of dining and entertainment venues. Through expert, personalized concierge service, our Renaissance Navigators will ensure your attendees discover the best hidden treasures to savor, sip, shop and see.

Rediscover meetings excellence at the Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel. To book your next meeting visit renaissancephoenixdowntown.com

Discover our introductory group offer by contacting william.stratton@renaissancehotels.com.





Rendering of the Music City Center's lobby entrance. The 1.2-million-sf facility opens in Nashville in 2013. Photo courtesy of Nashville CVB

By Karen Brost

There are no official guidelines on what determines whether a meeting destination is considered to be "first tier" or "second tier." This designation can be based on the size of the city, the square footage of its convention center, the number of guest rooms it has within a certain radius or all of the above. But one thing is certain. Second tier does not mean second class. Not by a long shot.

Nashville, TN

Kathryn Chong, CMP, is associate director of meetings for the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) in Washington, DC. Her organization has held its annual conference, which attracts approximately 3,000 attendees, in first-tier as well as second-tier cities. One advantage she has found in working with second-tier cities is a lower cost. "Room rates are a little bit more affordable, and food and beverage prices are more affordable, too," she notes.

For its 2012 conference, AILA has chosen the 2,881-room Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center in Nashville, TN. Located just 10 minutes from Nashville International Airport, the hotel offers 600,000 sf of meeting space, including six ballrooms and 100 breakout rooms. The property's Ryman Exhibit Hall can accommodate 1,442 10-foot-by-10-foot booths. Surprisingly, giv-

Second-Tier Cities Are Tops in Savings and Service

en the hotel's massive size, 80 percent of its business comes from groups that book fewer than 200 room nights.

Chong noted another advantage of working with second-tier cities. "We get more attention from the CVBs. I've noticed that. And better service, overall. You feel more important, because when you go to big cities, they cater more to groups of 10,000."

She added that even though her organization is neither pro- nor anti-union, they also don't have to deal with unions in the second-tier cities they've used like they would have to in some big cities.

John Morgan, executive director for the Association of Coupon Professionals in Drexel Hill, PA, also chose Nashville as the site of his organization's 2012 annual meeting with 165 attendees. He described the decision process. "We want a place where most people can get a direct flight into, it's not too far from the airport, and it has the facilities that we need to run a conference. Our attendees like to be able to walk out the door to sightsee, to shop and to have their fun with bars and restaurants. Given all of these criteria, Nashville got on the radar screen."

He held his event at the 330-room Hilton Nashville Downtown, which offers 15,000 sf of meeting space and is adjacent to the Nashville Convention Center, with 118,000 sf of exhibit space and 25 meeting rooms. The Hilton is also conveniently located just one block from Nashville's downtown entertainment district.

Morgan explained why he likes working with second-tier cities such as Nashville. "Right off the top, the airport is not as big, so it's easier to navigate. It's closer to the downtown, so it's only a 10- or 15-minute car ride. Right off the bat, you've got convenience."

He noted another key advantage. "What I was really impressed with was that the Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau is very active. Everyone seemed to know I was coming. I had printers call me, I had event people call me, I had musicians calling me. They weren't badgering me, but they were on top of it. When you go to (a bigger city) with a small event like that, you're not going to get that kind of service."

His attendees enjoyed the destination. "I do hear from my guests that they had a fun time. Nashville is a great town if you love live music. It's there all day, every day. There's the honky-tonks, there's good restaurants, and the Ryman Auditorium, the cathedral of country music, is right across the street."

The Music City Center is slated to open in the city's downtown area in early 2013. The new 1.2-million-sf facility will include 350,000 sf of exhibit space and a 57,000-sf ballroom. The center, which is anticipated to be LEED certified, will triple the amount of exhibit space available at the current convention center. Its headquarters hotel will be the new Omni Nashville Hotel, which is also scheduled to open in early 2013 and will feature 800 guest rooms and more than 80,000 sf of meeting space. The Omni Nashville, adjacent to the Music City Center, shares four levels with the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum.

FYI *There are currently 2,987 hotel rooms within walking distance of the Nashville Convention Center; with an additional 1,055 rooms coming online in 2013 (including the Omni).*

Columbus, OH

Running one conference at a time keeps planners busy enough. But how about five societies meeting at the same time? That's the situation Mark Mecklenborg, director, technical publications and meetings for the American Ceramic Society, is in. His organization joins forces with four other societies (the Association for Iron & Steel Technology, ASM International, The Minerals, Metals & Materials Society and NACE International) to produce the Materials Science & Technology Conference & Exhibition each year. "We're all materials-related societies, and so about in 2005 we started having a joint meeting together, and the American Ceramic Society, which is my organization, decided to put its annual meeting as part of this group."

Last year, the event took place in Columbus, OH. "One of the reasons we were able to select it is that our meeting needs over 50 concurrent session rooms of a certain size. Columbus really fit that bill and was able to offer the appropriate size of convention center for us. The one really good thing about it was that the exhibit space is right near where the session rooms are. We need that to happen to have a good exhibit, because people need to be able to get to the exhibit back and forth quickly. In some facilities we've used, that's not the case."

"What I was really impressed with was that the Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau is very active. Everyone seemed to know I was coming."



John Morgan
Executive Director
Association of Coupon Professionals
Drexel Hill, PA

The Greater Columbus Convention Center offers more than 1.7 million sf of event space, including Battelle Grand, the largest, multipurpose ballroom in the state. It spans nearly 50,000 sf and includes a separate mezzanine that measures more than 24,000 sf. The new 532-room Hilton Columbus Downtown, which will connect to the convention center, is currently under construction and is slated to open this fall.

"We're located in Westerville, which is a suburb of Columbus," Mecklenborg explains, "and so we pushed the idea because we knew that Columbus was really becoming a vibrant downtown area that we wanted to showcase. I'll be quite honest. When we said Columbus, the other groups that are located in Cleveland and Pittsburgh weren't that excited, and our members had neither a good or bad opinion of Columbus. But we ended up promoting Columbus, and all the things that it offers, and we ended up having our biggest meeting to date."

"People were really surprised about Columbus," he continues. "They were really excited about how the Arena District has sprung up. Our attendees were just really excited about the fact that they could walk out of the convention center and go to all these restaurants and entertainment (venues) at night without catching a cab."

The exhibitors were happy, too. "Our exhibitors had such a good experience with the convention center and the staff of the convention center. I do think some of this has to do with the ease of getting in and out and also the costs that they incur. During an exhibitor meeting that we held, they basically said, 'We need to come back here again.' Another consideration is that Columbus really is a high-tech area, and that makes a difference for us," he adds.

Mecklenborg cited cost as an important factor when booking this event, which is another reason a second-tier city is a good fit. "Our members are very, very price sensitive and our exhibitors are very price sensitive, and we cannot charge rates to make up the extra amount of money that we would need to pay for some of these first-tier cities. A lot of our population would not come (to a first-tier city) because they couldn't afford the hotels."

FYI *There are 14 hotels within walking distance of the Greater Columbus Convention Center; four are directly connected to the center; with a fifth (the Hilton) opening this fall.*

Albuquerque, NM

The World History Association (WHA), headquartered in Honolulu, HI, rotates its annual conference between domestic



Photo by Kevin Cross/Greg Miller Photography

The Columbus Convention Center boasts the largest ballroom in the state of Ohio, the 50,000-sf Battelle Grand (center, blue windows).

and international destinations. Albuquerque will be the site of the organization's 2012 event. "When we choose a location it has to be appealing for our members, because otherwise they won't come," explains Winston Welch, WHA's executive director. "Our themes of the conference are indigenous peoples in world history, and frontiers and borders in world history, so it's very appropriate to have this conference in New Mexico."

WHA serves high-school teachers and scholars, and the meetings will be held at Albuquerque High School. The group is using two hotels. One is the 261-room Embassy Suites Albuquerque Hotel & Spa. "Embassy Suites is located within a very short walking distance to our venue," Welch notes. "That was one reason why we chose them. We will be having our closing reception and banquet there. And it's Embassy Suites, so there's name value associated with it. They've got the free breakfast and the Internet, so for people who don't necessarily want to rent a car while they're at the conference, they could get away with that at the Embassy Suites." The hotel offers more than 12,000 sf of meeting space.

"The other hotel is the Hotel Albuquerque," he continues.



Mark Mecklenborg
Director, Technical Publications
and Meetings
American Ceramic Society
Westerville, OH

"Our members are very, very price sensitive and our exhibitors are very price sensitive, and we cannot charge rates to make up the extra amount of money that we would need to pay for some of these first-tier cities."

"That's because it is the only hotel in Old Town. We will be having our opening reception down at the Museum of Albuquerque (also known as the Albuquerque Museum of Art and History), which is also adjacent to the hotel. I think that the Hotel Albuquerque offers just a really fantastic location as far as being able to take advantage of Old Town and the museum complex there." Albuquerque is home to more than 20 museums and cultural centers.

The Hotel Albuquerque, a Heritage Hotel and Resort, is an elegant Southwestern-style property with 188 guest rooms, 20

suites and more than 41,000 sf of indoor meeting space. There also is 21,000 sf of outdoor event space including a Victorian-style pavilion surrounded by lush lawns and gardens.

Optional pre- and post-program cultural tours are an important component of WHA's conference agenda. "We use an independent company...Destination Southwest. They were very responsive and eager for our business, which I appreciated. We're having a day trip up to the Taos pueblo, a day trip up to Santa Fe, a day trip to Acoma Sky City and a long day trip to Chaco Canyon. Those are the four places we chose that we thought would be the most popular tours given the background of our people, who are historians.

"We always do encourage people to bring their families or loved ones or friends and stay before and after the conference," he continues. "We do have some optional events. The Santa Fe Opera is happening during our conference, so there will be some dress rehearsals and then the actual opera that's taking place. We don't organize that, but we let people know it's happening. And then there's the tram ride up to the top of the Sandia Mountains. Albuquerque, and New Mexico especially, offer a real wealth of historical, cultural and recreational possibilities, and I think a lot of people don't realize that. It's (called) the Land of Enchantment, and it truly is. It's a magical place," says Welch, who should know — he hails from his own enchanted part of the world, Honolulu, Hawaii.

The Albuquerque Convention Center, which has 167,000 sf of meeting space, 27 meeting rooms and a 31,000-sf ballroom, is undertaking a major renovation project designed to help it more successfully compete for convention business. The design for the first phase of the multimillion-dollar project, which will update the west end of the facility, is expected to be completed by year's end.

FYI There are 16,000 hotel rooms in the Albuquerque area, with 900 hotel rooms within walking distance of the Albuquerque Convention Center.

More noteworthy value destinations:

Anaheim, CA

Spanning 1.6 million sf, the Anaheim Convention Center (ACC) is the largest convention facility on the West Coast. It's about to get even larger with the addition of the Grand Plaza, a 100,000-sf outdoor event venue that will provide space for meal functions, meetings, exhibits and other events. Expected to make its debut in January 2013, the new venue will have a maximum capacity of 10,000 and be able to seat up to 6,500 guests for dinner. Groups can reserve the venue now.

The ACC also was the first facility of its kind in the western U.S. to offer free Wi-Fi throughout the venue. The LEED-certified convention center also has much to offer eco-conscious groups, including a new 2,000-sf garden with an array of herbs on top of its

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Winston Welch
Executive Director
World History Association
Honolulu, HI

“Our themes of the conference are indigenous peoples in world history...so it’s very appropriate to have this conference in New Mexico.”

Arena Box Office. The roof garden’s harvest will supply Aramark, the Anaheim Convention Center’s food caterer, with fresh herbs to be used during the year for a variety of food functions.

Meanwhile, the city’s Honda Center is breaking ground this fall on a grand development of its own: a 12,000-sf Grand Terrace and a 250-seat full-service restaurant.

FYI There are 4,000 hotel rooms within walking distance of the Anaheim Convention Center.

Charlotte, NC

Charlotte will claim one of the highest profile conventions of the year when it hosts the Democratic National Convention in September. The convention proceedings will take place at the Time Warner Cable Arena, home of the NBA’s Charlotte Bobcats. Other DNC-related events will take place at Charlotte Motor Speedway and the Bank of America Stadium.

The Charlotte Convention Center, in the middle of the business district, offers 280,000 sf of exhibit space, more than 90,000 sf of flexible meeting space and the 35,000-sf Convention Center Ballroom with banquet seating for up to 1,800 attendees. A walkway connects the convention center with the NASCAR Hall of Fame where the 40,000-sf Crown Ballroom features a built-in stage.

FYI There are 16 hotels with 4,032 total rooms within walking distance of the Charlotte Convention Center.

Minneapolis, MN

Meet Minneapolis reported a boom in hotel bookings for the first quarter of this year, exceeding their forecast by a whopping 23 percent. Part of this boom was fueled by Railway Interchange, a combination of four railway industry events. The co-located event proved to be so successful that it has booked Minneapolis for two future events. Overall in Minneapolis, leisure and convention visitation was up by 6.1 percent in 2011 to 26.8 million compared to 25.3 million in 2010. Near the Minneapolis Convention Center, which has 475,000 sf of exhibit space, is the 533-room Hyatt Regency Minneapolis, with 74,000 sf of meeting space. The hotel recently completed a \$25 million renovation of its guest rooms, suites, public areas and restaurants.

FYI There are 22 hotels with 5,828 hotel rooms within one mile of the Minneapolis Convention Center.

Oklahoma City, OK

Preliminary plans are underway for the construction of a new convention center in downtown Oklahoma City. The design phase is scheduled to begin spring 2013 with construction beginning in 2016. The proposed plan includes approximately 200,000 sf of exhibit space, a 30,000-sf ballroom and 50,000 sf of meeting space. The new center will be built adjacent to the Chesapeake Energy Arena and the current Cox Convention Center. A new headquarters hotel is included in the plans.

The Cox Convention Center, with 100,000 sf of exhibit space, 21 meeting rooms, 25,000-sf ballroom and 15,000-seat arena, is connected by skybridge to the Renaissance Oklahoma City Convention Center Hotel. The convention center is within walking distance of the Bricktown Entertainment District.

FYI There are 1,600 hotel rooms in downtown Oklahoma City within a few blocks of the Cox Convention Center.

San Jose, CA

The City of San Jose recently decided to endorse Team San Jose instead of sending out RFPs for its meetings and convention and visitors bureau services. The City of San Jose and Team San Jose are also moving forward with a \$120 million expansion and renovation of the San Jose Convention Center that will add 125,000 sf of new space to the current 425,000 sf of meeting and ballroom space. The convention center will remain open during the renovations, which are expected to be completed in the fall of 2013. LEED Silver Certification is being pursued for the project.

FYI There are seven hotels with a total of 2,263 rooms within walking distance of the San Jose Convention Center.

Virginia Beach, VA

The Virginia Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau promotes the fact that it “brings people together like sand and surf” in a destination that blends coastal charm with big-city amenities. The 525,000-sf Virginia Beach Convention Center was the first convention center in the country to achieve LEED Gold certification. It also includes more than 150,000 sf of column-free exhibit space, nearly 29,000 sf of meeting space, and, reportedly, one of the largest ballrooms on the East Coast at 31,000 sf.

FYI There are 3,500 hotel rooms within two miles of the Virginia Beach Convention Center.

SECOND-TIER SUCCESS

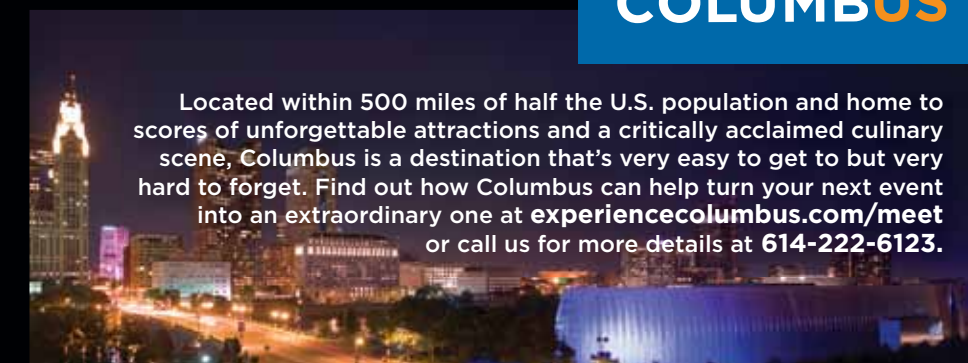
When it comes to second-tier cities, the best advice might be “try it, you’ll like it.” That’s what Mecklenborg’s group learned. Initially, his co-locating societies thought they might return to Columbus every 10 years or so, but now they’re returning as soon as 2015. “When they got there and really experienced Columbus again, they were very excited,” he said. “So now, as long as it keeps delivering, it’s probably going to be one of our rotating cities that we use for this convention.” AC&F



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The Southwest

Arizona and New Mexico Excel at How the West Is Done

By Karen Brost

While a meeting's content, of course, is key to boosting registration for the event, the destination chosen to host it can also go a long way toward increasing attendance numbers. Meeting destinations in Arizona and New Mexico offer the blend of spectacular scenery, culture and recreational amenities that attendees love. All planners need to do is pick the right one for their group to achieve meeting success, Southwest-style.

New Mexico

LOVING LAS CRUCES

For Colette Schobbens, CMP, CMM, meetings coordinator for the New Mexico Municipal League (NMML), Las Cruces was a natural choice for her organization's annual conference this coming August. Las Cruces is located less than one hour from El Paso International Airport, which is served by five major air carriers.

"We had it down there in 2007. It was our 50th anniversary, and we had a record attendance," she explains. "The people absolutely love going to Las Cruces, so we're going back this summer, and we expect to have a higher than usual attendance." Schobbens is anticipating 800 to 1,000 attendees.

Las Cruces offers more than 2,500 hotel rooms within a six-mile radius. "With about 1,000 people, we use about 15–20 hotels,"

Schobbens notes, "and the Hotel Encanto is our headquarters." The Hotel Encanto de Las Cruces, a Heritage Hotel & Resort, is a Spanish Colonial-style hotel offering 203 guest rooms and 10,000 sf of function space.

NMML's meetings will be held at the Las Cruces Convention Center (LCCC), which opened in December 2010. The facility is LEED Gold certified and uses electricity produced from solar, wind, geothermal, biogas, biomass and low-impact small hydroelectric sources. The LCCC contains a 9,000-sf ballroom, 14,500 sf of column-free exhibit space, 30,000 sf of meeting space and 5,000 sf of outdoor function space. "They have excellent food and services, and the CVB in Las Cruces has been extremely helpful," Schobbens notes.

"Las Cruces is a very friendly town," she continues. There is a fabulous venue called the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum that has meeting space and a great outdoor patio where we hold an evening event. Then we have another evening event at the Mesilla Plaza, where we take everybody. Mesilla is a little town nearby that has a charming old Western feel and lots of cute little shops, restaurants and historic buildings. The Mesilla Plaza was originally declared a State Monument of New Mexico in 1957 and a National Historic Landmark in 1982.

"We also have a golf tournament that we do every year the day prior to the conference," she adds. "That's always very well attended, and Las Cruces offers lots of excellent choices when it comes to playing golf.

"I have to give the Las Cruces CVB a real hand because they really make it very easy," Schobbens relates. "They gathered all the contracts for the hotels for us. They arranged for the transportation and all of the decorations. They make all the contacts that need to happen, with the city officials involved with the details of our conference. They really coordinate a lot of things and make it a lot easier on us. We don't have to chase after every different entity. They really work very, very hard, and they're just delightful to work with."

SANTA FE SIZZLES

For Marie Gutierrez, director of administrative services for the New Mexico Oil & Gas Association (NMOGA), Santa Fe is the site for success. For 16 years she has been planning her organization's annual conference in this culturally rich city located one hour north

of Albuquerque. With a fascinating history dating back more than 400 years, Santa Fe is the oldest capital city in North America and is well-known for its thriving arts scene. The city is set at the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains at an elevation of 7,200 sf. "We're in our 84th year of having this conference," Gutierrez describes. "It's one of the largest oil and gas association conferences in the U.S. The majority of our attendees come from Oklahoma, Texas, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico. Last year we had about 1,100 people."

Each year, NMOGA uses the AAA Four Diamond Eldorado Hotel & Spa as its headquarters hotel. The property features 219 newly renovated, deluxe rooms and suites, some containing Southwestern-style kiva fireplaces. The property also has more than 23,000 sf of meeting space, including Santa Fe's largest ballroom, and a spacious open courtyard that can be tented and heated for year-round use. The Eldorado, which is located just a short walk from Santa Fe's historic downtown plaza, also offers a fine-dining restaurant, rooftop pool and the full-service Nidah spa.

"The Eldorado works out well, because it can accommodate us," Gutierrez says. "It has the largest ballroom (in Santa Fe). We have all of our meetings there. They go out of their way to accommodate me."

Gutierrez also books room blocks with all of the major downtown hotels, and she uses La Fonda as the group's other big hotel. La Fonda on the Plaza, which is part of Historic Hotels of America, offers 172 artistically decorated guest rooms and 20,000 sf of meeting space.

The newly constructed 72,000-sf Santa Fe Convention Center (SFCC), located in the heart of Santa Fe, is not the typical "big box" convention center. With a total of 40,000 sf of meeting space, the center is designed in an inviting Southwestern adobe style based on input from the community. The SFCC features intricate wood-beamed ceilings and hand-carved furniture and art created by local artisans — and even fireplaces in some rooms. The main ballroom, which spans 17,836 sf, features 20-foot ceilings. The building, which also offers outdoor terraces and a courtyard, is LEED Gold certified. During

construction, nearly 90 percent of the materials left over from the demolition of the old building were recycled, and all exterior lumber used to build the new center was recycled from a New Mexico forest fire. Skylights are used extensively as light sources, and all meeting rooms contain recycling centers.

"Santa Fe is a big draw," Gutierrez states. "People love to come to Santa Fe. We're a top tourist destination."

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LAS CRUCES
STAY SUNNY.



Attendees with a little free time can connect with the natural beauty of the Southwest with a hike up the Pinnacle Peak trail in Scottsdale, AZ.

Photo courtesy of Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau



“Our attendance grew so much that we had to make some last-minute changes, and the hotel was ever-accommodating.”

Eric Johnson, CMP, CMM
Senior Manager, Event Services
Battery Council International
Chicago, IL

ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE ALBUQUERQUE

Because of its accessibility and size, Albuquerque is the one destination in New Mexico capable of handling large citywide conventions. The city has more than 16,000 hotel rooms. The Albuquerque Convention Center, which is undertaking a multimillion-dollar renovation project, has 167,000 sf of meeting space, including a 31,000-sf ballroom, a 2,350-seat auditorium, 27 meeting rooms and banquet space for up to 6,000 people. And it's located right in the middle of downtown Albuquerque, so it's easily accessible from several hotels within walking distance of the convention center.

The fact that Albuquerque has “multiple downtowns,” from Old Town to Nob Hill, also appeals to groups, says Dale Lockett, president and CEO of the Albuquerque Convention & Visitors Bureau. “We're talking about little downtown clusters no more than five or 10 minutes from one another, which makes Albuquerque a very walkable city,” Lockett adds, “We're a value destination, so planners looking for a place where they can find value come to Albuquerque. It's affordable, all the major airlines are represented here, and groups can get value without compromising the quality of the product.”

Noteworthy in New Mexico: Set on 587 acres of high desert land just 15 minutes north of Santa Fe, the Hilton Santa Fe Golf Resort & Spa at Buffalo Thunder offers 450 guest rooms and suites and 66,000 sf of meeting space. In addition to nine dining and entertainment venues, the resort offers a casino, heated swimming pools, a full-service spa and the 27-hole Towa Golf Club.

The 350-room Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa is located midway between Albuquerque and Santa Fe adjacent to the Sandia Mountains along the Rio Grande River. The resort features nearly 74,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting space, the Twin Warriors Golf Club and the Tamaya Cultural Learning Center.

South of Albuquerque, in Mescalero, the Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino has 273 luxury rooms and suites, 40,000 sf of meeting space, a 38,000-sf casino, an indoor swimming pool and an 18-hole championship golf course. The Inn recently opened the Elks Lodge at Ski Apache, a two-story building 10,000 feet up on the mountain.

Arizona

SCOTTSDALE SUCCESS

Talking Stick Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona, was the site of Battery Council International's (BCI) 124th Convention and Power Mart Trade Fair that was planned by Eric Johnson, CMP, CMM, senior manager, event services for BCI. The event had approximately 580 attendees with peak room nights of about 370.

“The group likes golf, so Arizona and the Southwest and Southeast are always a natural draw for the group, which traditionally meets over the last weekend of April or first weekend in May,” Johnson explains. The resort is adjacent to the 36-hole Talking Stick Golf Club, which is managed by Troon Golf.

Talking Stick Resort is located in the Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community and offers 497 guest rooms, multiple dining outlets and lounges, a showroom and a 240,000-sf casino. The AAA Four Diamond resort also includes more than 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space, including the 25,000-sf Salt River Grand Ballroom.

Battery Council International booked the property for this meeting before the resort opened in 2010. “The price point was what attracted us, as well as the features and benefits the resort had on paper. Everything that the hotel promised on paper translated really, really well as a finished product. The CAD drawings were as good as the final product is.

“The size of the sleeping rooms was very nice,” he continues. “It's possible to get from the sleeping-room wing to the meeting wing without having to go through the casino if you don't want to. The golf course had already been established and was doing really well, so the existing golf course in combination with all that the resort promises is the reason why we chose it. We fielded approximately 90 players (for the tournament). It was really successful, and having golf on property always helps.”

Johnson noted a few more highlights of his event at Talking Stick: “It was easy to get to from the airport. Once you got to the resort, the rooms were phenomenal. It was also close enough to some really fine dining opportunities off-property that were easy to get to. The food and beverage was really good. We were really satisfied with the quality of the product that came out of the kitchen.” He also appreciated the flexibility of the resort staff. “Our attendance grew so much that we had to make some last-minute changes, and the hotel was ever-accommodating.”

Noteworthy in Scottsdale: Set on 40 acres in the heart of Scottsdale, The Scottsdale Plaza Resort offers 404 guest rooms, including 180 suites. In addition to five swimming pools and lighted tennis courts, the resort offers a newly renovated fitness center. A total of 40,000 sf of meeting space is divided among 21 meeting rooms that can be further divided into 58 breakout spaces.

The AAA Four Diamond Scottsdale Resort & Conference

Center, managed by Benchmark Hospitality International, offers 326 guest rooms and suites as well as 50,000 sf of conference space allocated among 50 meeting rooms. As part of its green initiative, the resort donates leftover bath products to Clean the World, an organization that sanitizes these items, then donates them to impoverished countries and homeless shelters.

TUCSON TRENDS

Tucson recently lost the only downtown hotel with more than 50 rooms within walking distance of the Tucson Convention Center: The 308-room Hotel Arizona, adjacent to the convention center, closed its doors in April. According to a news release, the hotel is negotiating with the city government “options that will enable it to reopen as a fully renovated, nationally franchised hotel that will service the convention center and downtown Tucson.” A spokesman for the Tucson Convention Center says that right now, the two closest full-service hotels are the Hotel Tucson City Center InnSuites Resort with 267 rooms, and the Arizona Riverpark Inn with 174 rooms. Both are about 10 minutes away, and they offer shuttle service to the convention center.

Tucson is also building its first electric railway streetcar, the Sun Link Tucson Modern Streetcar system. When it's completed in late 2013, guests will be able to use it to travel to

the convention center from the Tucson Marriott University Park (233 rooms). The streetcar also will connect central Tucson's major activity areas, including downtown Tucson, the University of Arizona, Fourth Avenue, Main Gate Square and the Mercado District.

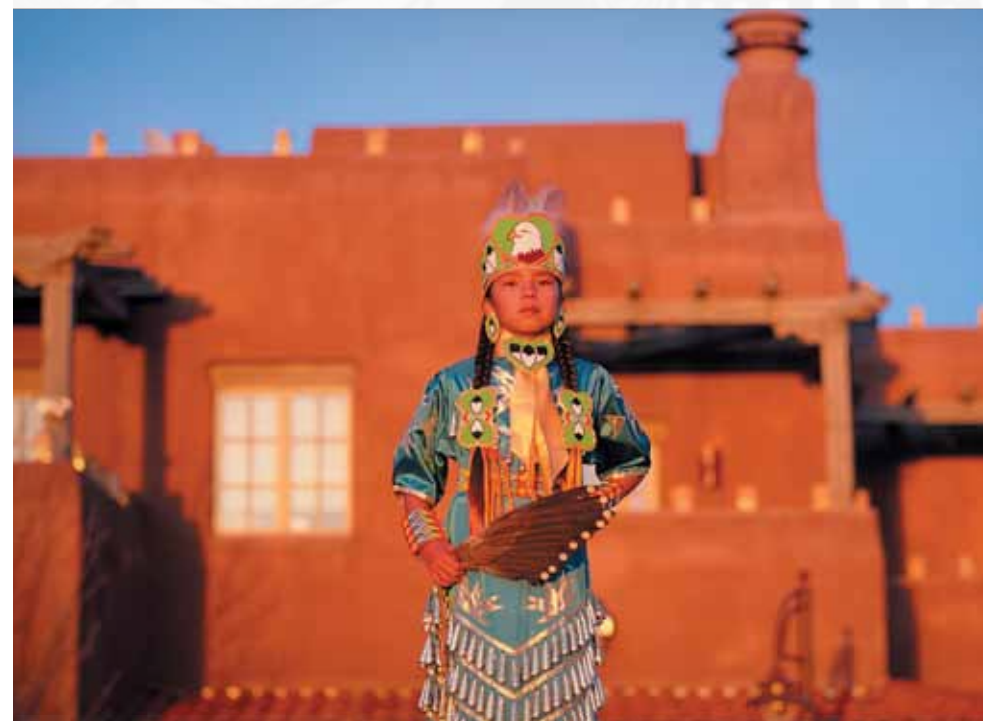
Noteworthy in Tucson: Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in Tucson recently achieved AAA Four Diamond status for the 27th consecutive year. The resort features 398 guest rooms, 37,000 sf of meeting space and two PGA golf courses designed by Tom Fazio.

The 428-room Hilton El Conquistador is getting ready to unveil a new Executive Conference Center that will offer eight meeting rooms, including a boardroom with a built-in 70-inch LED TV. The center was designed to accommodate groups ranging in size from 10 to 100, and is seeking certification from the International Association of Conference Centers (IAAC).

As the largest golf resort in southern Arizona, the Hilton El Conquistador offers 45 holes of championship golf, tennis, spa services and 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space.

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New Orleans

A Magnet for High-Energy Events

By Derek Reveron

Nothing stops groups from meeting in New Orleans. They are drawn to New Orleans like metal to a magnet. They keep coming back despite the effects from a struggling economy and the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Meetings and conventions in the Big Easy are like apple pie and ice cream — perfect together.

The American Bar Association (ABA) came back. According to Faye Foley Brooks, deputy director, meetings and travel department of the Chicago, IL-based ABA, the group, which was set to hold its annual mid-year meeting in New Orleans in early 2006, rescheduled it for February of this year. The three-day meeting attracted about 5,000 lawyers, law students, law professors, judges and ABA delegates and committee members, who were housed among seven New Orleans hotels. The ABA's house of delegates and board held their meetings at the Sheraton New Orleans Hotel, the group's headquarters hotel.

As a matter of fact, all of the ABA's meetings were held in hotels. "We need a lot of meeting rooms so we use a lot of hotels," says Brooks. "Our meetings are made up of several smaller meet-

ings because the ABA has different sections according to areas of law. We place certain sections in certain hotels, and that's where they meet. They like it that way because it's convenient."

The New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau played a lead role in helping the ABA line up room blocks and meeting space. "They served as our advocate going into the city. We conducted several site visits before the meeting, and they coordinated those. They put together the hotel package for us and let us know what each hotel had for room blocks and meeting space," says Brooks. "Whenever we had a hotel not willing to play ball, the bureau was very good about going back to the hotel and saying, 'You really don't want to lose it for the city. You have to work with us,'" adds Brooks. In addition, the CVB in concert with the ABA, arranged invitations to meetings for New Orleans officials.

The ABA's mid-year meeting, which has convened in New Orleans five times, is attracted to the city for the quality of the hotel service, among many other reasons. It is a key consideration because so many meetings are spread among so many hotels, says Brooks. "The hotels in New Orleans really know what they are doing. We like that we don't see a lot of turnover at the hotels in terms of staff, which is great because you wind up working with the same people you worked with before. They know your group, and you feel a lot more comfortable," says Brooks.

Like most groups, the ABA also chooses New Orleans because there is so much to do and see. "Our members love the location. It's just a fun city to visit. They are big restaurant and food people. We didn't have banquets or entertainment in the hotels. A lot of the entertainment consisted of people using private dining rooms in restaurants and other venues throughout the city," Brooks says. She also likes New Orleans because it boosts attendance. "It was one of our highest attended meetings of this type over the last 10 years," she adds.

THE BIGGER THE BETTER

Because of its Cajun culture, jazz and indefatigable spirit,

New Orleans continues to be a popular destination for association meetings and conventions of all sizes. The Big Easy's hotels and world-class meeting and convention facilities offer everything that meeting planners and attendees could want in a destination. That's why New Orleans attracts some of the world's largest meetings and conventions. For example, International CTIA Wireless 2012, the wireless communications industry trade show, attracted about 40,000 attendees and used more than 300,000 sf for exhibit space in the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center (MCCNO).

Located along the Mississippi River within easy walking distance of the French Quarter, the MCCNO consistently ranks among the nation's largest convention centers in size and the number of trade shows and conventions hosted. The MCCNO currently offers more than 1 million sf of exhibit space, 140 meeting rooms and a 4,000-seat auditorium. The MCCNO also features state-of-the-art technology, including lighting, video-conferencing, webcasting, satellite links, video and audio.

The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center is in the midst of a more than \$60 million renovation that will be completed just in the nick of time for the city to host Super Bowl XLVII on February 3, 2013 — the first time the championship game will be held in New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina destroyed parts of the Louisiana Superdome (now the Mercedes-Benz Superdome), home to the NFL's New Orleans Saints. It will be New Orleans' 10th time as a Super Bowl site. The convention center's renovation includes the Great Hall, a new 60,000-sf ballroom with 26,000 sf of new prefunction space, and an expanded, grander entrance featuring a new pedestrian plaza with an outdoor terrace.

The Great Hall's design incorporates a layered ceiling concept that cascades down the walls to provide transitions from an intimate to a more open room environment that accommodates banquets, meetings and exhibitions. There are also hotel-like ballroom features throughout the new venue. Also, the lighting design is an energy-efficient LED system with limitless color combinations that can be used to create a custom environment for events.

GROWING ROOM SUPPLY

New Orleans provides more than 40,000 hotel rooms, many of them located around the French Quarter and downtown. The city's supply of new and renovated hotel rooms continues to expand.

In May, the 570-room Hotel Monteleone, with 24,000 sf of space, completed a \$10 million renovation that included updated guest rooms and meeting space and the new Criollo Restaurant and Lounge. In March, the hotel celebrated the grand reopening of its famous rotating Carousel Bar, which added a second, new stationary bar.

Three new Hyatt hotels have debuted since late 2011. Earlier this year, the Hyatt French Quarter Hotel opened after an \$18 million renovation including the property's 254 guest rooms. The project also includes the redesign of Powdered Sugar, a bodega-style market, and Batch, an upscale lounge. Also, a Hard Rock Cafe is scheduled to open in the Hyatt French Quarter Hotel by early 2013. More than 10,000 sf of meeting space is available, including 10 meeting rooms. Another Hyatt property the Hyatt Place New Orleans Convention Center opened earlier this year with 170 rooms and 3,300 sf of state-of-the-art meeting space.

Located next to the Mercedes Benz Superdome, the Hyatt Regency New Orleans, devastated by Hurricane Katrina, reopened last fall. The 1,193-room hotel has the look and feel of a brand new property. The hotel provides 200,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space, about double the amount of the previous meeting space. The hotel also includes new rooms, the 8 Block Kitchen & Bar, a Starbucks and clear glass elevators.

The Hilton New Orleans Riverside plans to complete a \$20 refurbishment of 1,162 guest rooms and suites by the end of this year. The project includes new carpet, lighting and window treatments. The guest room makeover is part of a larger mul-

"The hotels in New Orleans really know what they are doing. They know your group, and you feel a lot more comfortable."

Faye Foley Brooks

Deputy Director, Meetings and Travel Department
American Bar Association, Chicago, IL

tiyear project that includes renovations to the grand ballroom, health club and banquet kitchen. The project also calls for new public-area furnishings and a second-floor marketplace that sells items such as foods, sandwiches and beverages. The hotel offers 130,000 sf of meeting and banquet space.

The ample meeting space at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside is a key reason why the American Society of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology (ASPHO) held a four-day meeting of education, a trade show and networking sessions at the property in May for approximately 900 attendees, according to Stephanie Dylkiewicz, CMP, senior meetings and registration manager for the Glenview, IL-based Association Management Center (AMC), a full-service association management company. "We looked at a few properties but chose this one because it could house the whole program under one roof and accommodate the entire room block," says Dylkiewicz. "There were also financial concessions that would benefit the



Photo courtesy of New Orleans CVB

A rendering of the new entrance to the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center that is on target for completion in early 2013.

association or attendees. There were discounts on food and beverage, audio-visual services and Internet use," she adds.

AFFORDABLE NEW ORLEANS

New Orleans is popular among groups such as ASPHO because the city offers a first-tier experience for second-tier prices. Affordability is a key consideration for many of the approximately 16 associations that AMC manages, with meetings that range in size from small board gatherings to more than 3,000 attendees,

"New Orleans is affordable with lots of attractions. It's centrally located...and the airlift is good."

Stephanie Dylkiewicz, CMP
Senior Meetings and Registration Manager
Association Management Center, Glenview, IL

says Dylkiewicz. "We rotate mostly between second-tier cities. We can't afford cities in the first tier, so we look at what's in our price range in the second tier. New Orleans is affordable with lots of attractions. It's centrally located for our members that come from around the hemisphere and the world. And the airlift is good. That's why the city comes up so often in the (destination) rotation of groups," adds Dylkiewicz.

New Orleans is a mainstay in the destination rotation of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineer IEEE Power and Energy Society Transmission and Distribution Conference and Exposition (IEE PES T&D). The group holds its conference every two years and met in New Orleans in 1989 and 1999. New Orleans was also on the schedule for 2005 before Hurricane Katrina struck. The event was rescheduled for 2010, and it attracted more than 14,000 attendees and 600 exhibitors. The IEE PES T&D hopes to meet again in New Orleans by the end of this decade, although there are no final plans yet, says the Louisiana-based director Tommy Mayne, an engineer who plans the IEE PES T&D every year as well as three other annual meetings ranging in size from 100 to 600 participants.

The IEEE PES T&D is attracted to New Orleans for several reasons, including the CVB's efficiency in coordinating hotel room blocks and dates. The CVB lined up several hotel options for the most recent conference. "Then we worked from there and selected 16 hotels that gave us the best spectrum of prices. We got some higher-end hotels for exhibitors and more affordable hotels for attendees. The hotels gave us good deals. It helps that we have a great history of good attendance and don't have to really worry about attrition. Hotels love to see that," says Mayne.

New Orleans always receives rave reviews from IEEE PES T&D attendees and exhibitors in post-conference surveys. Survey questions include the following: *What destination is*

best-suited for your exhibits? Did you see the customers you wanted to see? Did the conference provide value to you as an attendee? Can you sell your boss on the idea of attending again? Why or why not? New Orleans always gets glowing responses to such questions, says Mayne.

The surveys also show that attendees value the accessibility of New Orleans' hotels and venues. "They feel that everything is compact and within walking distance. The hotels and Morial center are close. You don't have to take buses across town. That's especially true for us. We rent our own transportation system that goes from hotel to hotel and to Morial. Everything we do is at the convention center. It's a short ride for our attendees," says Mayne.

He also points to a special intangible quality that New Orleans possesses. "It has a soul and a history. You get the feeling that people who live here really love this place. I think that helps build the enthusiasm of a conference. It raises the energy level and that carries through the entire convention," Mayne observes.

LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL

As Mayne put it, "If groups don't have a good time in New Orleans, it's their own fault." He had the French Quarter in mind. The district features one-of-a-kind meeting venues that showcase the city's singular music, cuisine and culture — all shaped by Creole, Cajun, African, Spanish and Italian influences.

High up on the list for attendees are New Orleans' world-famous restaurants, including Antoine's. The landmark restaurant dates back to 1840 and features 15 elegant private dining rooms. Brennan's, another legendary restaurant, features five event spaces that can accommodate 40–80 guests.

Groups seeking unique jazz venues have plenty of options. The House of Blues New Orleans is one of the city's premiere live music, restaurant and event spots. The facility offers seven venues, including a dining room, lounge, restaurant and music hall, which accommodates 10–200 people for banquets. Preservation Hall is a New Orleans musical treasure, dedicated to preserving New Orleans-style jazz. Preservation Hall can accommodate groups of 10–125 people for meetings, events and receptions. Onsite catering is also available.

Also located in the French Quarter, the Arts District features more than 25 galleries and the Contemporary Arts Center. In Jackson Square, artists display and sell their work. The square is bordered by historic buildings, including the St. Louis Cathedral, the oldest cathedral in the U.S. The Presbytere can host 500 guests for a reception and 100 for dinner.

Mayne calls New Orleans "a natural sell" because of its abundant convention and meeting space, updated hotels and charming venues. Also, the spirit and unique culture of the Big Easy put attendees at ease and primed for education and engagement. Undoubtedly, New Orleans will continue to be a powerful magnet for meetings and conventions.

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Orlando Stands Alone

The Most Visited Destination Helps Associations Break Attendance Records

By Stella Johnson

While the gears of progress ground to a halt in some cities over the past few years, Orlando, Florida, has accelerated full speed ahead with robust visitation and growth. For example, Visit Orlando just announced that in 2011, a record-breaking 55.1 million visitors from the United States and around the world vacationed, convened or conducted business in “The City Beautiful,” as it has been nicknamed — more than any other destination in the U.S. The new record represents a 7.2 percent increase over the city’s previous 2010 record of 51.4 million visitors, with domestic business and leisure visitation accounting for 51.3 million visitors, a 7.5 percent increase over 2010. International visitors made up 3.8 million of the total, a 3.5 percent increase from 2010. For 2012, a slight increase is also expected, which would also set another record.

The transportation industry has responded with added flights from British Airways and Monarch Airlines in the U.K. and GOL Airlines from Brazil, as well as Monarch and LAN airlines from Chile. Consequently, its international airport has become a model port in the U.S. with increased multilingual customer service, more efficient passenger processing systems and a more pleasant airport environment.

With \$4 billion in new projects over a two-year period alone in 2008–2010, Orlando’s hospitality, entertainment and facilities infrastructure is continually updating, expanding and improving. (See “More New and Noteworthy,” page 42.) No small wonder that Trade Show News Network (TSNN) named Orlando as the No. 2 trade show destination in the U.S. (right

M.A.T.T., the 35-foot-tall inflatable mascot of SPI’s 2012 National Plastics Expo, is an acronym for Machines And Tomorrow’s Technologies. Gene Sanders, SPI’s senior vice president, trade shows, explains, “M.A.T.T. was present everywhere in Orlando, on entrance units, billboards (and in front of the Orange County Convention Center). I dubbed him our Welcome M.A.T.T.” Sanders adds, “We used this to reinforce that there would be more machines at this show, much in part due to the cost structures we were able to put in place in Orlando.”

Photo courtesy of SPI

after Las Vegas) for having hosted 26 of the top 250 trade shows in 2011 rated by net square footage.

BREAKING THE MOLD

While the philosophy might be to “go with what you know,” SPI: The Plastics Industry Trade Association, did something different with their triennial National Plastics Expo (NPE) this year by holding it at the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC) in Orlando in April. The decision was groundbreaking considering that the triennial exposition has convened in Chicago for the past 40 years — but strategically sensible considering that Orlando has an extensive inventory of first-class hotel rooms, more than 116,000 and counting; the second-largest convention center in the U.S. at 2.1 million sf; and an international airport serving nearly every destination in the world.

Visit Orlando was instrumental in that decision, particularly the efforts of the late Visit Orlando CEO, Gary Sain, who “helped us create one of the best expos in the group’s entire history,” according to Bill Carteaux, president and CEO of SPI. “He (Sain) was a true visionary in the trade show and tourism industry and probably had the best marketing mind of anyone that I have known in my professional career.”

The triennial NPE for 2012 was a huge success, as the



The 2012 National Plastics Expo attracted more than 55,000 attendees to the Orlando, a 26 percent increase over the most recent show in 2009.

Washington, DC-based group cleverly tied in the new location with its convention theme “Breaking the Mold” — and that it did. According to Carteaux, measurable results included:

- The NPE 2012 plastics exposition in Orlando substantially exceeded NPE 2009 in size, the last triennial show held in Chicago, and it attracted more participants from outside the U.S. than any other NPE in history.
- NPE 2012 also attracted 1,933 exhibitors, more than in each of the three previous NPEs. The total exhibit space occupied at NPE 2012 was 939,972 sf or 23 percent greater than in 2009.

“We’ve already determined that we will return to Orlando and the OCCC for our next triennial show in 2015.”



Gene Sanders
Senior Vice President, Trade Shows
SPI: The Plastics Industry Trade
Association, Washington, DC

- There was a 26 percent increase in attendance, as 55,359 plastics professionals participated in NPE 2012. These visitors represented 19,283 unique companies, as against 18,600 at NPE 2009.
- Of total attendance in 2012, 26 percent came from outside the U.S., a substantial increase compared with any previous NPE.
- Fully one-third of international visitors came from Latin America, fulfilling SPI’s prediction that the new venue would attract more visitors from that region than ever before.
- Also setting a new record for international participation was the number of exhibiting companies from outside the U.S. — approximately 750 or 40 percent of the total. China sent the most international exhibitors by far: just over 300, or 16 percent of all exhibitors. Canada sent 72 exhibitors, the second-largest country total after China. The 28 exhibitors from Mexico and South America represented the largest contingent ever from Latin America.

“There was much greater attendance at the co-located conferences, and a larger and more exciting program of special events,” Carteaux observes. “In addition, both exhibitors and visitors gave SPI overwhelmingly positive feedback on the new venue in Orlando, supporting our decision to schedule both the 2012 and 2015 NPEs there.”

SPI’s Senior Vice President of Meetings and Trade Shows Gene Sanders, coordinated the expo and adds, “We chose Orlando to help reach our Latin American industry targets, as well as help reduce costs for our participants, exhibitors and attendees alike.

“Chosen for its size, cost efficiencies and amenities, the convention center was of the greatest value to the group because Orlando and the state’s work rules enabled them to best mimic the work environment that its exhibitors are used to at other global shows.”

NPE 2012 also included a wide range of other events for the first time. One was a pre-show Super Sunday for socializing and networking events, brand owner presentations and an evening gala at Rosen Shingle Creek, which included the Plastics Hall of Fame induction ceremony and a special appearance by Jon Huntsman Jr., formerly the governor of Utah, Ambassador to China and 2012 presidential candidate.

The entire show used nearly 40 hotels, setting up blocks based on percentages of exhibitors and attendees. “We established the

Rosen Shingle Creek property as our headquarters hotel; however, there appeared to be a nice blend of industry events at all of the hotels surrounding the OCCC," says Sanders, who enjoyed the fact that Rosen Shingle Creek was actually a bit removed from the convention center. "For me and my family," he added, "I relished the opportunity to get away and take a bit of a breather from the show's high energy." The AAA Four Diamond Rosen Shingle Creek, located one mile from the OCCC, has 1,500 guest rooms, 445,000 sf of meeting space, including a 95,000-sf ballroom, and the Shingle Creek Golf Club. Two other Rosen hotels are connected or adjacent to the OCCC (see box below).

Sanders' advice to other planners is to be sure to take advantage of everything Orlando has to offer. "Don't spend too much time worrying about the 'attraction distraction' but rather leverage the attractions as strength when marketing your event," he says.

"We actually encouraged people to come and bring their families, and we even try to make it easier for them to get tickets by offering discounts, just not during the show days. It all worked to our advantage. Our only downside was the cost of airline tickets

for last-minute travelers due to the timing of our event being close to Holy Week and spring break."

For the plastics group, offsite venues included Walt Disney World Resort, Universal Resort and SeaWorld. The association particularly encouraged exhibitors to have their own outings and events to entertain their clients and staff members at the parks, and many did. "We even had our own appreciation dinner at Mythos, a Greek-inspired restaurant at Universal," Sanders says.

"Our community was very satisfied with the entire Orlando experience, and we've already determined that we will return to Orlando and the OCCC for our next triennial show in 2015," concludes Sanders.

'IT DOESN'T HAPPEN IN EVERY CITY'

Debra Rosencrance, vice president of meetings and exhibits at the San Francisco-based American Academy of Ophthalmologists (AAO), recently went "East Coast" and booked their annual meeting in Orlando because, "Orlando is less expensive due to the fact that it's a right-to-work state, so a lot of the contractual services — freight, decorating and electri-



Photo courtesy of Rosen Hotels & Resorts
Rosen Centre Hotel's new covered pedestrian skywalk connects the hotel directly to the Orange County Convention Center.

cal — are cheaper," she states. "We worked closely with the CVB, and our sales representative at the bureau, Joseph Kempa, was extremely helpful in coordinating our rather large group. The entire city made us feel welcome from the mayor to the late bureau CEO, Gary Sain, who took time out of his busy schedule to check in frequently. It doesn't happen in every city."

And so, a group of 25,000 allied health professionals, spouses and exhibitors of the AAO descended upon Orlando last October. It was a real treat for the attendees, as the association had not been to the popular Southeast destination in 10 years.

To accommodate AAO members and guests was a tall order

that meant a block of 50 hotels with 12,000 rooms at peak, with The Peabody Orlando as headquarters hotel and the Orange County Convention Center as meeting central.

The 1,641-room Peabody, which is one of the largest Forbes Four Star, AAA Four Diamond hotels in the eastern half of the U.S., finished a major expansion nearly two years ago that ballooned its meeting space up to 300,000 sf and added a covered walkway to the convention center. Also part of the mix were two other hotels that also have convenient pedestrian walkways to the center: the newer Hilton Orlando (1,400 guest rooms and 175,000 sf of meeting space) and the Rosen Centre Hotel (1,334 guest rooms and 106,000 sf of meeting space).

"There were more than 500 booths in about 225,000 net sf of sold space plus more than 40 rooms running simultaneous educational programming for about 16,000 ophthalmologists and their staff," Rosencrance notes. "The convention center worked out very well for us, and the attendees liked its stacked, compact design and the natural light that filtered through."

Rosencrance noted that the meeting experienced an upswing in the number of international attendees: "We did do a lot of tar-

More New and Noteworthy

Cvent recently ranked the 100 "best of the best" U.S. meeting hotels, and 15 Orlando properties were included on the list. In the top 10 are **The Peabody Orlando** ranked No. 1 (see page 43), **Rosen Shingle Creek** No. 4 (see above) and the **Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel** No. 7 (see below). According to Cvent, these represent the "tried-and-true properties that have been favorites among our meeting and event planners."

Here are some highlights:

The Omni Orlando Resort at

ChampionsGate (No. 30) soon will be able to host larger groups with the January 2013 debut of an additional 46,000 sf of meeting space. In total, the 720-room hotel will offer more than 128,000 sf of event space, including three ballrooms and 46 meeting rooms.

The Rosen Centre Hotel (No. 83) with 106,000 sf of meeting space connected to the OCCC by covered skywalk, was recently refurbished, a project that included its 1,334 guest rooms, lobby, three large presidential suites and 14 hospital-

ity suites. **The Rosen Plaza Hotel** (No. 89), adjacent to the convention center, has renovated its 800 guest rooms, hospital-ity suites and hallways. Rosen Plaza offers 60,000 sf of meeting space.

The 1,406-room **Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center** (No. 27), 1½ miles from Walt Disney World Resort's Magic Kingdom, offers 400,000 sf of meeting and convention space. The resort just completed a \$50 million renovation that includes new meeting and event venues, including the new Coquina Lawn.

Another Orlando hotel with massive amounts of onsite event space is **Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Hotel** (No. 7), which offers 2,265 guest rooms and more than 329,000 sf of indoor meeting and function space.

Theme-park titans Walt Disney World Resort and Universal Orlando Resort report these additions:

The first two phases of **Disney's Art of Animation Resort** in Walt Disney World Resort opened recently with 320 "Finding Nemo" suites and 480 "Cars"-themed suites.

Photo courtesy of Gaylord Hotels



Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center's new 10,000-sf outdoor event venue, the Coquina Lawn, accommodates up to 1,000 people reception-style.

Other Disney Pixar films-inspired wings to come are "The Lion King" with 320 suites, which opens in August, and 864 rooms inspired by "The Little Mermaid," which opens in September.

Magic Kingdom's **Fantasyland at Walt Disney World Resort** will double in size after a major expansion is completed by year's end.

Downtown Disney's Splitsville, a 45,000-sf, 31-lane retro bowling alley, opens this fall with billiards, dining, dancing and an outdoor patio.

Walt Disney World Speedway's Exotic Driving Experience, where groups can experience the thrill of driving the world's fastest and most exotic supercars, opened in January.

Universal Studios' "Despicable Me" attraction, a high-tech, 3-D digital adventure with the complete cast of favorite characters from the film debuts this summer, while Universal's Islands of Adventure just relaunched "The Amazing Adventures of Spiderman" with new animation and

crystal-clear 4K High-Def visuals. Recent additions at Universal CityWalk include a newly enhanced **Blue Man Group Show** and **Hollywood Drive-In Golf**, with two 18-hole miniature golf courses based on classic drive-in era horror and sci-fi movies.

Coming to downtown Orlando in the fall of 2014 is the **Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts**, which will offer an outdoor event plaza accommodating up to 3,000 people; a 2,700-seat theater; and a 10,000-sf meeting and educational space.

After the new **Amway Center** opened downtown in 2010, a whole host of new

dining and entertainment options have mushroomed nearby, many offering private event spaces for up to 400 people. The 31,000-sf arena floor of the Amway Center, home of the Orlando Magic NBA basketball team, is available for exhibitions, meetings and events.

The newly developed \$1.3 billion **Medical City** complex in Lake Nona, one of only two medical city communities in the world, has helped Orlando attract a large share of domestic medical meetings, such as the Healthcare Convention & Exhibitors Association, which held its 2012 Annual Meeting in Orlando June 23-26. — SJ



Photo courtesy of Universal Orlando Resort

CityWalk at Universal Orlando Resort just debuted a new miniature golf mecca — Hollywood Drive-In Golf.



Andrew Darmohraj, CAE
Senior Vice President
American Pet Products Association
Greenwich, CT

“We see a clear connection between Orlando and the growth of the show.”

geted marketing ahead of time about the ‘new’ Orlando. Those of our U.S. members that came all agreed that Orlando had changed significantly since we were last there a decade ago. And so that perception is sure to change with the rest of our membership.”

One of the convention highlights was a special event held at Universal’s Islands of Adventure, which AAO bought out for an evening that was attended by as many as 15,000 people. “Universal’s Harry Potter attraction was a big hit, and attendees loved the chance to get out and have some fun,” says Rosencrance. “We have more than 2,000 ancillary events hosted by alumni groups, related societies and exhibitors in hotel meeting space so the proximity of the large hotels to the convention center worked out perfectly for us.”

FOUR-YEAR COMMITMENT

Also praising Orlando’s many merits is Andrew Darmohraj, CAE, senior vice president of the American Pet Products Association based in Greenwich, CT. He points to the fact that the city is always a good value for attendees because there are so many hotels at different price points. “And, not only can budget-conscious attendees get a great deal in Orlando,” he stresses, “but also attendees who are ‘brand-loyal’ and want to book at a particular hotel chain have those options available to them as well. There are also a large number of luxury hotels for that demographic as well.”

APPA’s Global Pet Expo is the group’s annual trade show, an event that generally reports a total attendance of approximately 12,000 people from all around the world.

“Since our trade show is large (ranked No. 72 on *Trade Show Executive* magazine’s List of Gold 100 Trade Shows), we need a convention center large enough to accommodate a 2,500-booth show, and I think there are only eight cities in the U.S. that can do

that,” Darmohraj says. “Then there’s the convenience of the destination for our attendees who fly in, which is very important.”

The Global Pet Expo is fully contained within the Orange County Convention Center. The exposition holds two major events: The 1,200-attendee Opening Night Reception, held in the public space just outside the exhibit hall; and the annual Pet Industry breakfast with 1,000 guests, which takes place in the Valencia Ballroom in the West Building of the convention center.

The big thing is, historically, the annual Global Pet Expo moves from city to city, with the show held in Orlando in 2000 and 2007. But, in 2009 APPA committed to Orlando through 2013. It was a good marriage, too, as it needed a facility that could hold its annual trade show in one contiguous space and still allow the show to grow over time.

“Allowing for growth is imperative to the success of our show. It was also important to have a lot of hotels close to the convention center. We contracted with 26 properties that ranged in price from \$75–\$250 per night and had no special headquarters hotel,” he notes. “We work very closely with Visit Orlando. They helped us on many levels.”

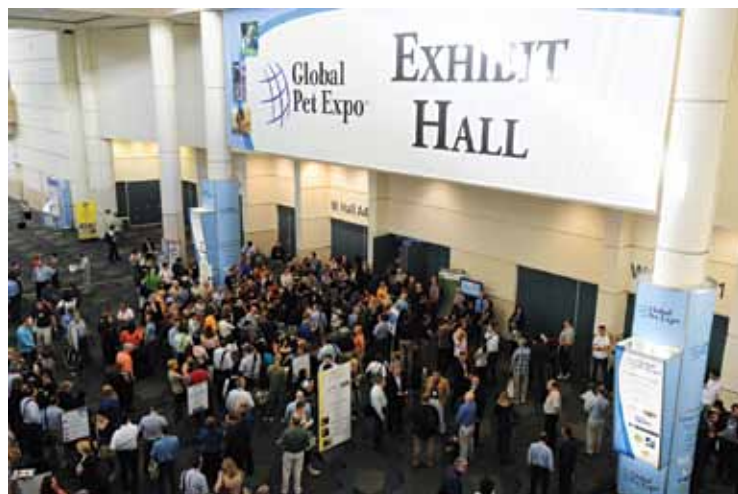
Also of tantamount significance is that while some of the people who were involved in the early site selection process felt that Orlando was more of a leisure destination and not the best place to conduct business, it was soon apparent that Orlando has the convention infrastructure in place to accommodate the Global Pet Expo’s continued growth in numbers of exhibitors, booths, buyers and attendees.

“With that, it didn’t take long for the ‘doubters’ to become ‘believers’ and realize that Orlando was a place where Global Pet Expo could flourish,” Darmohraj says.

“We just signed on for three additional years (2014–2016). We see a clear connection between Orlando and the growth of the show.”

Darmohraj says it best when he emphasizes how the area around the Orange County Convention Center has completely changed in

the last 10 years. He tells planners, “If you haven’t been there recently, go and see the changes in person. Not only are there are new, expanded and renovated hotels around the convention center, but many of the established properties have been upgraded as well. There are also many new restaurants and special events venues near the center. As we all know, having all these components close by makes life easier for the show organizer and more convenient for attendees.”



The annual American Pet Products Association Global Pet Expo recently extended its commitment to Orlando through 2016.

Photo courtesy of Global Pet Expo

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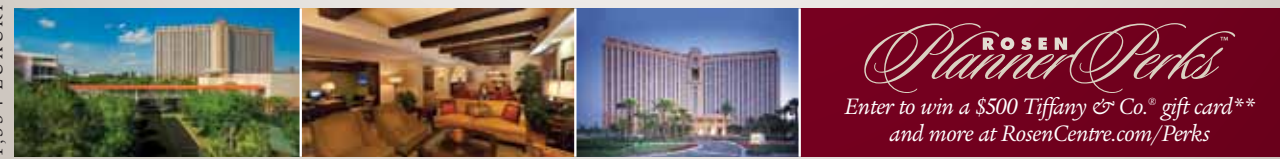


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Southern California

For One-of-a-Kind Experiences

By John Buchanan

Like Texas and Florida, California offers a number of top-tier destinations that are perennially popular with association meeting planners. And three of them — Los Angeles, Anaheim and San Diego — are located in close proximity to one another in Southern California.

Each offers a combination of delightful year-round climate, world-famous attractions, A-list rosters of hotels and offsite venues, and a dining and entertainment scene second to none.

LOS ANGELES

Known for its vast urban sprawl as well as its glitz and glamour, Los Angeles offers an almost endless list of venues and activities.

“There are a lot of options to choose from when you do a meeting in L.A.,” says Barbara Logan, vice president, meeting and events, at Washington, DC-based U.S. Travel Association, which staged its annual five-day International Pow Wow for 5,800 attendees in the City of Angels in April. “Accessibility is certainly another of the benefits of the destination. And the value proposition we got was great. It’s also true that there are only a limited number of destinations that have the hotel rooms and convention center space for a meeting the size of Pow Wow. And L.A. is one of them. It’s on our top-10 list of destinations.”

Logan also reserved praise for the Los Angeles Convention Center. “It’s one of the top convention centers in the country,” says Logan, who has been doing meetings in Los Angeles since the 1980s. “We need more than 375,000 gross sf of exhibit space, plus an additional 125,000 to 150,000 sf of pillarless space that we use as a huge lunch and production room where we feed and entertain with sponsored events.”

Logan also gives high marks to the city’s array of celebrated off-site venues. “We wanted to do events that really showcased what L.A. has to offer,” she says.

For U.S. Travel’s opening night gala, Logan used the fabled intersection of Hollywood and Highland, site of the Dolby Theatre — home to the Academy Awards — and also arranged a buyout of the Cirque du Soleil show “Iris.”

Logan also did a buyout of Universal Studios Hollywood for another evening. “It was great because the new Transformers attraction was just getting ready to open, and we could enjoy the new ride,” she says. “It was terrific. We filled up the entire park.”

The following night, with the logistical assistance of the Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board, Logan facilitated a citywide dine-around program that highlighted the city’s most acclaimed eateries. “We had shuttle buses taking people to Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, Pasadena and downtown L.A.,” she says. “The CVB did a great job of informing attendees about the best restaurants in the various parts of the city and helping them make reservations.”

On closing night, Logan’s original plans were negated by bad weather, so with the help of the CVB she relocated the party to L.A. Live, the spectacular entertainment and dining district located downtown, where in a 42,000-sf tent, attendees enjoyed a musical performance by Earth, Wind and Fire. Although not many associations take advantage of Los Angeles on the same scale as U.S. Travel, many want to capture the city’s celebrity glamour, says Steve McCleave, DMCP, senior sales manager at Access Destination Services Los Angeles. “They definitely want to bring a Hollywood VIP experience to their meeting,” he says.

For example, he says, for an upcoming meeting of 6,000 attendees, Access Destination Services will stage a red carpet experience at the JW Marriott Los Angeles, adjacent to L.A. Live, that will

feature a Joan Rivers impersonator who interviews attendees as paparazzi fire off commemorative photographs featuring celebrity look-alikes. Then the festivities will take over all three of the hotel’s ballrooms for a gourmet “Taste of L.A.” dining experience.

For more conservative groups still seeking a spectacular experience, McCleave recommends the exclusive event space at the top of the AT&T Tower downtown. “It has tremendous views of the downtown skyline and the Hollywood Hills,” he says. “You can stage a sit-down dinner for up to 300 attendees.”

ANAHEIM

For more than 30 years, the Sacramento-based California Dental Association (CDA) has been hosting its annual Southern California meeting in Anaheim. “It’s a very economical choice, and it’s easy to get to,” says Debi Irwin, CMP, CDA’s vice president of meetings and conventions. “The other big factor for us is consistently good weather. That makes it a very attractive destination, because you can do outdoor events year-round.”

Irwin also cites Anaheim’s evolution as a top-tier destination as another factor in CDA’s long-term loyalty. “They’ve continued to

“It’s also true that there are only a limited number of destinations that have the hotel rooms and convention center space for a meeting the size of Pow Wow. And L.A. is one of them. It’s on our top-10 list of destinations.”



Barbara Logan
Vice President, Meeting and Event Services
U.S. Travel Association
Washington, DC

upgrade the convention center and the area around it, so that’s another reason why it has just been easy for us to keep coming back,” says Irwin, who hosted her most recent meeting in May for 28,934 attendees — a new record.

She also has a long-standing relationship with her headquarters hotel, the Hilton Anaheim, located adjacent to the Anaheim

A Legacy of Growth

At the end of this year, Charles Ahlers will retire after a 20-year stint as president and CEO of the Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau, where he built a reputation as one of the country’s most innovative and successful destination marketing executives. Ahlers spoke recently with *Association Conventions & Facilities* about his accomplishments and legacy.

AC&F How is Anaheim different as an association meeting destination than it was in 1992?

Ahlers The product is much more elaborate. We expanded the (Anaheim Convention Center) in 2001. We opened a new lobby, a new meeting room complex, lots of plaza area. We also added 1,200 running feet of glass curtain wall on the front of the building. It’s a very, very attractive facility now — as attractive as any convention center in the country, if not more so.

AC&F What’s the latest news at the convention center?

Ahlers We’re doing a Grand Plaza, which broke ground in May. We have Hilton and

Marriott hotels that are adjacent to the facility; and the street, called Convention Way, which ran between the two hotels down to the entrance to the center is going away. The street is being ripped out and reconfigured as an open parkland kind of environment. And it will be used for all kinds of events as a very nice outdoor, mixed use venue that totals close to 250,000 sf. It will also depict the agricultural history of Anaheim and simulate the Santa Ana River. It will be great event space.

AC&F What has been the biggest or most significant change in the association meeting market during your 20-year tenure?

Ahlers As a destination, Anaheim has enjoyed continuous growth on a schedule that was pretty much predetermined. For example, the Grand Plaza project is the sixth “betterment” project that we’ve



Ahlers

undertaken at the convention center. Now we have another brick-and-mortar expansion in the works that will be started next year and completed in 2015 and add another 200,000 to 250,000 sf of flexible meeting space. So the thing that has really enabled Anaheim to change with the market is a very good pre-determined growth plan that we have stuck with over the years. And by doing that, we’ve been able to address all of the evolving needs and changes in the industry.

AC&F What do you hope will be your personal legacy when you retire?

Ahlers The organization will continue to be a customer-centric organization that truly cares about the industry and looks to provide great opportunities in the marketplace for our association clients and member partners. And I think we’ve been very good at doing that. Anaheim has continued to grow and develop nicely and to attract good business. And we continue to expand our ability to attract different kinds of meetings. We’ve become more diverse, and by doing that, we’ve become a better meeting destination. But all of that has been because we care deeply about the industry. — JB

“They’ve (Anaheim) continued to upgrade the convention center and the area around it, so that’s another reason why it has just been easy for us to keep coming back. ...It’s a very easy building to work in, with skilled labor that is exceptional.”

Debi Irwin, CMP

Vice President of Meetings and Conventions
California Dental Association, Sacramento, CA

Convention Center. “The hotel’s staff is just exceptional in terms of customer service,” Irwin says. “They also have a lot of meeting space and individual room options that make it easy for us to fit well into the property.”

Exhibits were staged at the convention center. “It’s a very easy building to work in, with skilled labor that is exceptional,” Irwin says. “They are very attentive to your needs.”

As an offsite venue for a social evening, Irwin returned to a time-tested attendee favorite, Disneyland. “It’s a big draw because our local attendees really enjoy that venue,” Irwin says.

“Our evening included a dine-around program at the restaurants located within Disneyland and then attendees had access to the park all evening long.” Because of its iconic status as a venue, Disneyland has always been successful for CDA, she says.

Like Los Angeles, Anaheim offers an impressive roster of offsite venues, says Robb Thornsberry, owner and president of Anaheim Hills, CA-based Infinity Events Inc.

One of his favorites is Seven Degrees, located in the world-famous art colony of Laguna Beach. “It’s a spectacular venue that is completely unique,” Thornsberry says. “And I say that as someone who has been doing meetings and events for a long time. It’s a turn-key venue that is extremely contemporary. It’s basically raw space, like a warehouse, so it’s a blank canvas. The setting is very exclusive, nestled in between the beautiful canyons of Laguna Beach. And the facility is also decked out, technologically speaking. It has truly state-of-the-art lighting, audio-visual and sound support. There are even cameras and live-video feeds from every point you can imagine. It’s just a phenomenal venue.”

As another key benefit of Anaheim, Thornsberry touts the dining and entertainment options in the Anaheim Resort District. “It has a lot of A-list national brand restaurants that are well known to planners, such as Morton’s The Steakhouse, Ruth’s Chris Steak House, PF Chang’s, Fleming’s and Cheesecake Factory,” he says. “

SAN DIEGO

Located south of Los Angeles and Anaheim, San Diego is another proven destination for association meetings of all sizes.

“We’ve always been successful when we’ve met in San Diego,” says Lucille Meinsler, administrative director at the American Association of Directors of Psychiatric Residency Training (AADPRT) in Lebanon, PA. “There are a lot of good restaurants

and a lot of activities, so it is a city that has just been very popular with our attendees.”

And just as weather plays a favorable role in Los Angeles and Anaheim, so it does in San Diego. “Because we meet in March, we like to choose destinations where we can predict fairly nice weather,” Meinsler says. “We want to go someplace warm, because a lot of our attendees are from the East Coast or other cold parts of the country.”

Add up all of those factors and San Diego has become a time-tested winner for AADPRT, which held its first meeting there back in 1993. Its most recent was a four-day event in March for 593 attendees staged at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront.

“One of the primary reasons for the selection of the Hilton Bayfront was its closeness to the airport,” Meinsler says. “It’s basically a five-minute drive, with no traffic along the way. We also liked the location because of its proximity to the Gaslamp dining and entertainment district. We liked the idea that people could leave the hotel and have a lot of options nearby that were very convenient.”

Yet another reason for Meinsler’s selection of the hotel was its innovation in the so-called “farm to table” movement that uses fresh, seasonal local fruits and vegetables in a property’s restaurants. “Our attendees really liked the fact that the hotel utilized local markets that bought from local farmers,” she says. “The food was extremely fresh, and they also offered a great variety. That turned out to be a really important issue. And I like that as a planner, because one of the things I try to do at meetings is serve food that is indicative of the area.”

When it comes to offsite venues, Claudia Wehrman, regional director of sales and marketing at destination management company Allied PRA San Diego, also promotes those that are uniquely indicative of the area.

“San Diego’s most popular venue and one that is really great for meetings is the USS Midway aircraft carrier in San Diego Bay,” Wehrman says. “You can do a group as small as 60 or up to 3,500. It’s like any other museum-type venue when it comes to doing events, and you can cater in food and beverage. And you can build a theme around the evening, from the time the carrier was in service, or you can do an ‘Americana’ theme. But it’s just a wonderful venue that is totally unique.”

Another venue unique to San Diego is the Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, the only active U.S. military base in the world that hosts events. “You do an event there by actually getting an air squadron to host you and once they decide to sponsor the event, they decide where to do it based on group size,” Wehrman says. “For smaller groups, of about 100 to 300, you can do it at the Officers Club. But if you have a group larger than 300, you can actually do your event on the flight line in an actual working aircraft hangar. And that is just an amazing thing to do, because you’re hanging out with the men and women who fly these incredible machines. It’s a once-in-a-lifetime event, and you get a \$300 million décor package for free.”



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JORDAN

The Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau has named **Debbie Jordan** as Eastern sales director for the meetings and conventions sales division. With more than 20 years of hospitality industry experience, she most recently served as regional director of sales for the Monterey County (CA) Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Juan J. Garcia was named area director of sales and marketing for Hiltons of Washington, DC, representing Capital



GARCIA

Hilton and Washington Hilton. He was director of sales and marketing for Hilton Orlando, Orlando, FL.

NYC & Company, New York City's marketing, tourism and partnership organization, has promoted **Lisa Lopez** to regional director of sales based in Minneapolis, MN, and responsible for the West/Southwest and Midwest markets. She most recently served as regional director, national accounts, West/Southwest.



LOPEZ



LOGSDON

The Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikiki Beach Resort, Oahu, HI, has named **Brad Logsdon** as director of sales and marketing. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing at the Hilton Anaheim, Anaheim, CA.

Seattle's Convention and Visitors Bureau has named **Marco Bloemendaal** as senior vice president, convention sales and services. He formerly served as director of convention sales at Experience Columbus, Columbus, OH.



BLOEMENDAAL

AC&F

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