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# Corporate & Incentive Travel

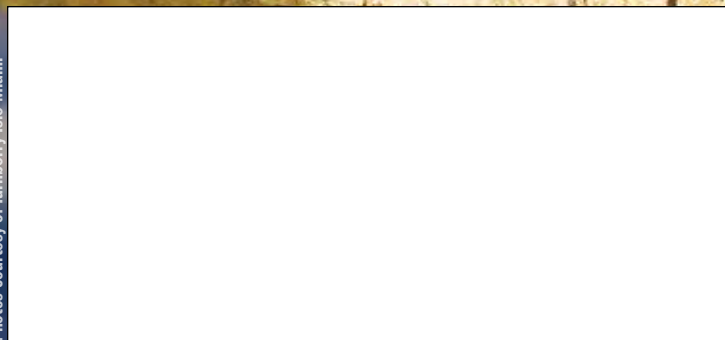
THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

## Golf and Spa Resorts

An Unbeatable Combination  
for Building Relationships and  
Rewarding Champions PAGE 14



Marketing Director Dan Williford of San Antonio-based Aftermarket Auto Parts Alliance chose the Turnberry Isle Miami for his company's golf event. (Background) The famous 18th green and waterfall of the Soffer Course.



Destinations: Las Vegas ● New Mexico

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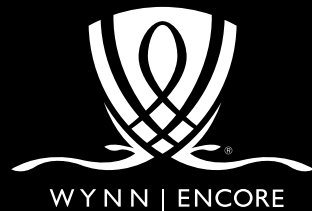
Photos courtesy of Turnberry Isle Miami



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Photo courtesy of La Quinta Resort & Club

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### COVER STORY

## Golf and Spa Resorts

An Unbeatable Combination  
for Building Relationships  
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By Mike Bassett

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Photo courtesy of NFL On Location

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Photo courtesy of MGM Resorts International

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Bellagio's 30,000-sf Tower Ballroom  
features built-in staging suitable  
for any form of entertainment.

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# PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE

## Get on the Bus

The U.S. Travel Association's nationwide 20,000-mile 2012 Vote Travel bus tour is on its way to a city near you (see Snapshots on page 9). "Travel contributes \$1.9 trillion to our economy and supports more than 14.4 million U.S. jobs, and the Vote Travel campaign aims to highlight the strength of our industry and engage its employees nationwide," said Roger Dow, president and CEO of U.S. Travel. The tour will hold rallies in selected cities, as well as meetings with



local elected officials and travel industry leaders to inform them about the power of the industry.

And powerful it is. This time around, the meetings industry has, for the most part, been able to mitigate potential perception problems brought on by the scandal involving the 2010 GSA conference in Las Vegas. All the hard work by the 14 leading membership organizations that formed the research alliance for the Meetings Mean Business movement paid off. In 2011, when the study "The Economic Significance of Meetings to the U.S. Economy" revealed the full impact of the U.S. meetings industry, people listened and responded. Among other initiatives, Congress and the administration are moving

forward on visa reform and promoting the country to international travelers. There's still much more to accomplish, so get on the bus and help get the word out that travel and meetings mean business *and* a robust U.S. economy.

We Are Golf, a coalition of the game's leading associations and industry partners, are on the same page as the meetings biz. Recently, the group met with members of Congress to share stories of golf's economic contributions to the U.S. economy and supplant long-standing perceptions of the game with the facts. Golf supports nearly 2 million U.S. jobs, provides untold health and wellness benefits, unparalleled charitable giving as well as environmental sustainability initiatives.

Aftermarket Auto Parts Alliance's Dan Williford, who graces our cover this month, does not suffer from misperceptions. Williford, the marketing director, and his boss, CEO John Washbish, know firsthand that meetings mean business and that a solid golf program at a first-class golf and spa resort (page 14) is the best way for their San Antonio, TX-based company to surpass their sales goals and keep their customers happy. They are counting the months until next year's annual golf and spa meeting in sunny South Florida.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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## Michael Dominguez Appointed MPI Chair-Elect

NEW YORK, NY — Loews Hotels announced the appointment of Michael Dominguez, vice president of global sales, as chair-elect of Meeting Professionals International (MPI) for the 2012-2013 term. In this elevated role on the board



DOMINGUEZ

of directors at MPI, Dominguez will help guide the organization's strategy while monitoring its overall performance, as well as setting the overall direction of its 21,000 members and 71 chapters worldwide. "Michael brings a wealth of experience to his new position as chair-elect," said Bruce MacMillan, CA, MPI president and CEO. "We're pleased to welcome him to the executive committee and chairmanship and look forward to his role in helping MPI deliver its members the very best in professional development, business opportunities and a vibrant industry community." In his current role as vice president of global sales, Dominguez oversees Loews' national sales offices and third-party relations, acting as the "face of Loews Hotels" to ensure that the company maintains its leadership role and visibility within the meetings industry. Dominguez, who joined Loews Hotels as the director of marketing at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in 2005, has spent his career leading successful sales and marketing teams across the Southwest and California.

[www.loewshotels.com](http://www.loewshotels.com), [www.mpiweb.org](http://www.mpiweb.org)

## Segura to Head Los Cabos CVB

LOS CABOS, MEXICO — The Los Cabos Convention & Visitors Bureau has appointed Eduardo Segura as



SEGURA

executive director for FITURCA, an acronym for Fideicomiso de Turismo de Los Cabos, the official name of the CVB. A 30-year hotel and tourism veteran, Segura is responsible for all promotional activities related to the destination, including management of a team focused on the sales, marketing and promotion of Los Cabos. "After many years of experience in the hotel and tourism industry, I am very proud to represent the destination with the most potential growth in Mexico," said Segura. Los Cabos is home to award-winning hotels and resorts, championship golf courses, spas, world-class sport fishing and more. [www.time2cabo.com](http://www.time2cabo.com)

## Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa's 'Go Green' Effort Pays Off

DESTIN, FL — More than \$9 million in "Go Green" capital improvements made at Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa included property-wide recycling efforts and planting of 30,000 new sea oats along the dunes, \$250,000 in turtle-friendly lighting, state-of-the-art heating and cooling chillers and more. As a result, Gulf Power Company presented a \$50,000 rebate check to the hotel's board of directors, the company's first rebate on their commercial customized incentive program for their customers who undertake environmentally friendly improvements. (Left to right) Gulf Power Company's Hospitality Segment Specialist Bob Mantovani; R. Larry Johnson, president, board of directors, Sandestin Beach Hilton Limited; and Leonard Martin, director of engineering for the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa.

[www.hiltonsandestinbeach.com](http://www.hiltonsandestinbeach.com)



## 2012 IRF Incentive Invitational Announces Education Program

ST. LOUIS, MO — The 19th Annual Incentive Invitational May 30–June 3, 2012, in San Antonio will feature the latest trends and key research in the meeting, incentive and recognition fields. End-user buyers of loyalty and motivation services will demonstrate how to use cutting-edge research to more effectively create, manage and deliver incentive and recognition programs. President & CEO of the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau J. Stephen Perry will speak about his work with the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board. As an executive committee member of the board of the U.S. Travel Association, Perry also will describe his work helping guide policy on revitalizing international visitation to the USA and fast tracking visa procedures and policy for corporate and incentive travel groups inbound to the U.S. For more information on the 2012 IRF Incentive Invitational, go to [invitational.theirf.org](http://invitational.theirf.org).

## MEETING VALUES



### Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, Destin, FL.

The VIP Meeting Planner Package includes 1/50 comp room; complimentary transportation to Silver Sands outlet center; luxury airport transportation for up to five VIPs. Plus, planners can choose one of the following: beach bonfire event; Hilton Signature Welcome Gift delivered to room; \$500 credit to teambuilding program; \$500 credit to a Kids Krew evening program; one-hour wine-tasting; one-day Internet Café Package; \$500 gift certificate to the Sea Turtle Conservancy in the group's name. Offer valid for new meetings contracted now to June 28, 2012 and held now through December 27, 2012. For details and planner perks, visit [www.sandestinbeachhilton.com/meeting-meeting-package](http://www.sandestinbeachhilton.com/meeting-meeting-package), 850-267-9600

■ **Palm Beach County Convention and Visitors Bureau, The Palm Beaches, FL.** The Exclusive Seasonal Meetings Offer, which is available May 2012 through September 2012, and for the same time frame in 2013, includes free meeting and exhibit space at the Palm Beach County Convention Center and free wireless Internet. The CVB also offers best available hotel, rates; discounted F&B packages; free transportation to and from hotels to convention center; and complimentary marketing assistance. Contact Doug McLain, [dmclain@palmbeachfl.com](mailto:dmclain@palmbeachfl.com), 561-233-3026.

■ **Visit Winston-Salem, Winston-Salem, NC.** Planners who book meetings with 500 or more total sleeping room nights receive a \$3,000 credit to spend on meeting expenses; 300–499 total sleeping room nights receive a \$1,500 credit; and 150–299 total sleeping room nights receive a \$500 credit. Total sleeping room nights are based on consumption as credit will be applied after the meeting or convention takes place. Contact Christian Schroeder, [christian@visitwinstonsalem.com](mailto:christian@visitwinstonsalem.com), 336-728-4218, [www.visitwinstonsalem.com](http://www.visitwinstonsalem.com).

## Burt Cabañas Receives IACC Global Distinguished Service Award

HOUSTON, TX — Benchmark Hospitality International Founder, Chairman and CEO Burt Cabañas received the Global Distinguished Service Award at the annual meeting of the International Association of Conference Centers (IACC), the leading professional organization governing the multibillion-dollar conference center industry on five continents. "I can't think of anyone more deserving of the Global Distinguished Service Award than Burt Cabañas," said Peter Stewart, global president of IACC. "He was here at our inception, led us through the challenging early years, and helped set the standards that have made us develop into a global leader within the conference industry. Importantly, Burt never lost sight of the critical nature of face-to-face meetings and the human need to connect," added Stewart

who presented the award to Cabañas in March in Montgomery, TX.

A founding member of IACC 30 years ago, Cabañas has been a tireless promoter of the professional association and the conference center industry, including serving for eight years on the IACC Americas board of directors and for two years as its president. He is also a previous recipient of IACC's Mel Hosansky Award for Distinguished Service. Cabañas is the founder of Benchmark Hospitality International, a leading privately held hospitality management company with a portfolio of 35 properties coast to coast, offshore, in Asia and with future development in Latin America. [www.benchmarkhospitality.com](http://www.benchmarkhospitality.com), [www.iaconline.org](http://www.iaconline.org)



At the podium, Burt Cabañas accepts the IACC Global Distinguished Service Award at the annual meeting of the International Association of Conference Centers as Peter Stewart, global president of IACC, looks on.

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## Hard Rock Brand Debuts in Mexico

MIAMI, FL — The All Inclusive Collection, based in Miami, will reflag the Cancun Palace and Vallarta Palace resorts to Hard Rock Hotel Cancun and Hard Rock Hotel Vallarta, effective

August 1. Both properties will offer Hard Rock's signature Rock Star Suites and showcase an extensive collection of memorabilia. Additionally, each hotel will host an ongoing schedule of live con-

## Golden Nugget Celebrates Grand Opening

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — The Golden Nugget Atlantic City marked its grand opening in the Marina District of Atlantic City at the end of April. New owner Tilman J. Fertitta, the founder, chairman of the board, president, CEO and primary shareholder of Landry's Restaurants Inc., transformed Trump Marina into a premier resort destination to fulfill his promise to revitalize the Marina District. The entire 740-room property is currently finishing a \$150 million renovation and is taking on a fresh, modern look to include a high-energy casino featuring the most popular slot and video poker machines, table games and poker room; nightly entertainment, new bars and lounges; stylish retail offerings; Landry's signature world-class restaurants such as Chart House and Vic & Anthony's Steakhouse; a luxury spa and salon; and H2O poolside lounge. The Golden Nugget has locations in Las Vegas and Laughlin, NV. [www.goldennugget.com](http://www.goldennugget.com)

certs, celebrity-driven events and other onsite activities. The Hard Rock Hotel Cancun will offer 601 guest rooms, all featuring private balconies and water views; five restaurants, including a new Brazilian steak house; five bars and lounges; a spa with outdoor palapa-style massage areas; an expansive pool-scape; and meeting facilities including a 16,408-sf convention center. Hard Rock Hotel Vallarta, located on the beaches of Bahia de Banderas, near Puerto Vallarta in the heart of Riviera Nayarit, has 348 guest rooms, four restaurants, four bars, two swimming pools, and 6,300 sf of meeting facilities. Also, the All Inclusive Collection will debut another all-inclusive Hard Rock Hotel when its Aventura Palace rebrands to Hard Rock Hotel Riviera Maya in early 2013. [www.hardrockhotels.com](http://www.hardrockhotels.com)

## Omni Nashville Hotel Books More Than 100,000 Room Nights

NASHVILLE, TN — Expected to open in late 2013, the Omni Nashville Hotel has secured more than 100,000 definite group room nights. Sales efforts are now underway for business beginning November 1, 2013. With more than 80,000 sf of meeting space, including 25,000-sf and 15,000-sf ballrooms, the Omni Nashville Hotel is conveniently located adjacent to the new, state-of-the-art 1.2-million-sf Music City Center and seamlessly connected on four levels to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Construction crews are now pouring concrete on the third level of the hotel tower footprint and preparing to extend to the fourth floor, both of which are comprised primarily of meeting space. "We are creating a Nashville meeting and events destination that is alive with the spirit of Music City," said Tod Roadarmel, director of sales and marketing for the Omni Nashville Hotel. "We look forward to welcoming the varying organizations and groups that are looking to make Nashville a part of their meeting experiences." [www.omnihotels.com](http://www.omnihotels.com)



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The Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) CEO Forum was held April 16–18 in Miami. Shown here visiting the city's new Marlins Park, home of Major League Baseball's Miami Marlins, are (l to r) Kevin Kane, DMAI board chair, and president and CEO of the Memphis CVB; David Samson, president of the Miami Marlins; William D. Talbert III, CDME, president and CEO of the Greater Miami CVB; Michael Gehrisch, DMAI CEO and president; Greg Edwards, president and CEO, Greater Des Moines CVB. Seventy DMO CEOs and executive directors attended the forum.

Roger Dow, president and CEO of U.S. Travel Association, steps onto the Vote Travel bus at the Las Vegas kickoff rally. The nationwide Vote Travel bus tour is highlighting the economic benefit that conventions and meetings bring to local communities. The Visit Denver staff and Blue Bear met the Vote Travel bus on April 7 in Larimer Square. More than 300 industry professionals from México and Latin America were in attendance at GBTA's Mexico Conference March 28–30. Peter Stewart, president of IACC Global, presents the Copper Skillet award to Chef Johan Heibert of Sweden. A TEEM Up at HSMIA's MEET Mid-America in Chicago April 4–5. (L to r) Jim Petrus, COO, Trump Hotel Collection, Alex Shnaider, chairman, Talon International Development Inc. Donald Trump, Ivanka Trump, Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump cut the ribbon to signify the opening of the new Trump International Hotel & Tower Toronto.



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Photo credits: 1. Greater Miami CVB, 2. U.S. Travel, 3. U.S. Travel, 4. Global Business Travel Association, 5. International Association of Conference Centers, 6. Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International, 7. Trump Hotel Collection

# EVENTS CALENDAR

**JUNE 5–6, 2012**

### DMAI FOUNDATION DINNER

Walter E. Washington Convention Center  
Washington, DC  
Contact: 202-296-7888  
[www.destinationmarketing.org](http://www.destinationmarketing.org)

**JUNE 18–20, 2012**

### INCENTIVE TRAVEL EXCHANGE

THEhotel at Mandalay Bay  
Las Vegas, NV  
Contact: 312-321-5148  
[www.siteglobal.com](http://www.siteglobal.com)

**JUNE 19–21, 2012**

### THE AMERICAS MEETINGS & EVENTS EXHIBITION (AIBTM)

Baltimore Convention Center  
Baltimore, MD  
Contact: 203-840-5975  
[www.aibtm.com](http://www.aibtm.com)

**JULY 16–18, 2012**

### DMAI 98TH ANNUAL CONVENTION

Sheraton Seattle  
Seattle, WA  
Contact: 202-296-7888  
[www.destinationmarketing.org](http://www.destinationmarketing.org)

**JULY 22–25, 2012**

### 2012 GBTA CONVENTION

Boston Convention Center  
Boston, MA  
Contact: 703-684-0836  
[www.gbta.org](http://www.gbta.org)

**SEPTEMBER 5–6, 2012**

### HSMIA'S MEET NATIONAL

Walter E. Washington Convention Center  
Washington, DC  
Contact: 914-421-3270  
[www.hsmiameet.com](http://www.hsmiameet.com)

**OCTOBER 9–11, 2012**

### IMEX AMERICA

Sands Expo at the Venetian/Palazzo Hotel  
Las Vegas, NV  
Contact: +44 1273 227311  
[www.imexamerica.com](http://www.imexamerica.com)

**NOVEMBER 11–14, 2012**

### FICP ANNUAL CONFERENCE

JW Marriott Los Angeles  
Los Angeles, CA  
Contact: 312-245-1023  
[www.ficpnet.com](http://www.ficpnet.com)



By Miranda van Brück

## BVOM: Meaningful Measures, and Analysis and Reporting

*Editor's note: The following is the third of three articles on Meeting Professionals International's Business Value of Meetings (BVOM) initiative. The BVOM Thought Leadership Initiative is an ongoing research project from MPI created to provide resources for members who are facing increasing scrutiny of their events. The BVOM toolbox that accompanies the research is designed to help professionals measure and communicate the business value of their meetings. The first three of five white papers on BVOM were explored in our February and March issues. The following describes key points in the fourth and fifth white papers: "Meaningful Measures" and "Analysis and Reporting."*

The fourth BVOM white paper is on "Meaningful Measures," the next step after "Defining Objectives," gaining "Stakeholder Commitment" and determining "Perceptions and Realities" related to a measurement program. Meeting Professionals International (MPI) developed all these white-paper topics as part of an industry exploration of implementing event portfolio measurement programs as best practice.

There are a variety of tools and types of measures that can be applied to events. The variety can relate to price and complexity. The most common practice is to gauge attendee satisfaction based on a five-point scale, which does not fully provide relevant data. Determining the right method of measurement as it relates to specific outcomes is an important aspect of gaining reliable results.

Because measurement is scientific, it may require some trial and error before you have the right measurements in place for your programs. As with determining objectives, this will require clear communication with stakeholders in two areas: exist-

ing resources within the organization and various measurement types. Existing resources within an organization can be internal, such as reports, or external, such as consultants, and can give insight as part of the BVOM measurement process.

To supplement resources, professionals need to implement either or both of these types of measurements: quantitative and qualitative. Qualitative measurement consists of the comments and conversations, from the aforementioned surveys and other tools, that professionals have with various audiences. The white paper gives tips for creating strong questions that will elicit responses that can then be analyzed, categorized and included in reports. Quantitative measures are based on numbers and give an overview of amounts, differences and degrees. Examples of quantitative values are given, which guide how to methodize based on your measurement needs.

As you gain further understanding of the how and when of qualitative and quantitative measurement, you will be able to determine best practices and create reports. Along with this white paper on the subject of measurement, you can expect an article, as well as an in-depth tutorial. The objective is to ensure that meeting professionals have a working knowledge of available data resources, measurement types, as well as data collection methods and common tools.

### Analysis and Reporting

The final stage is essentially the most valuable: "Analysis and Reporting." Coupled with the effort taken in the previous steps, the analysis and reporting of results is what will ultimately lead to actions that will save the company money and resources in the future. Professionals have noted, however,

that the copious amount of data that comes from qualitative and quantitative measurement can be overwhelming and lead to ineffective examination of results and communication to stakeholders. The fifth and final white paper addresses this challenge and provides the road map for transforming an intimidating amount of information and data into easily digestible and actionable formats.

Parsing through data can take several forms, including visual, subjective and statistical. Each has its advantages and disadvantages, and suggestions for best use, as outlined in the paper.

**Visual:** The most popular format, visual analysis is a representation of the quantitative measurements. Professionals commonly use charts and graphs. Visual analysis has the inherent weakness of subjectivity, because readers must draw a conclusion based on isolated information.

**Subjective:** Professionals using this analysis type are looking at existing patterns in both qualitative and quantitative data. Although more time-consuming than visual, subjective analysis draws a more thorough picture for reporting.

**Statistical:** For professionals who have previous experience in measuring the business value of their event portfolios, this is the preferred method of analysis. Statistical analysis requires the use of mathematical models and formulae, and can be

intimidating. However, the output is a powerful means of understanding value.

Depending upon need, resources and expertise you will apply a mix of visual, subjective or statistical analysis to accumulated information.

The next, and final, step is reporting results to the various stakeholders. First, consider the ways in which stakeholders will consume the information. Rich textual descriptions complement visual representations; use both effectively. In addition, a clearly communicated call to action supported by data will help the audience understand the necessary next steps. Finally, with the advent of technology and the variety of ways that people learn, you will need multiple channels through which to deliver the results of your BVOM measurements.

Once you begin on the path of effective measurement, you will see how each step flows into the next. You will begin to speak the language of BVOM, and you will bring your stakeholders into the conversation as a leader in your organization. The resources in the BVOM measurement toolbox will empower you to be the best event professional yet. Begin the process by downloading these resources from [www.mpiweb.org/BVOM](http://www.mpiweb.org/BVOM), and telling your peers about the power of telling the story of event value. Resources are free for members, and non-members can purchase from the site. **C&IT**

“The resources in the BVOM measurement toolbox **will empower you** to be the best event professional yet.”



### Miranda van Brück

is Knowledge Manager, Meeting Professionals International, Dallas, TX. Miranda, who focuses on knowledge management for MPI globally, is responsible for the overall development, design and aggregation of MPI content for use in various delivery channels, to include live events, online learning and others. [www.mpiweb.org](http://www.mpiweb.org)



By Kevin Iwamoto

## Asia-Pacific Region Ripe for Strategic Meetings Management

Expect to notice change every time you visit the Asia-Pacific region — especially in emerging markets. Whenever you go, you'll notice the sheer growth of everything — new buildings popping up seemingly overnight on already crowded skylines, heavier traffic on the roads, and hotels bursting with more and more business travelers.

Change is also sweeping the meetings industry in Asia-Pacific. Companies there are ramping up business events, yet maintaining vigilance for controlling costs and growing in their awareness of managing risk. And like their counterparts in the West, meeting managers are seeking added value in contracts with hoteliers and other meetings suppliers. At the same time, meeting managers are looking to increase engagement of attendees and event participants in order to build stronger long-term relationships and promote their organization's brand and products.

As a result, from China to Australia and elsewhere in this rich, diverse market, the demand for comprehensive event management solutions, including both strategic meetings management and engagement technology, is growing.

### Need for SMM Grows Across All Asia-Pacific Markets

The growth of meetings and meetings management is confirmed in a 2011 report by travel industry researchers PhoCusWright. The report says the Asia-Pacific travel market surged 17 percent, surpassing the U.S. to become the second largest regional travel market worldwide, after Europe. The region's growth was fueled by a recovering economic climate and especially vigorous growth in key, emerging markets.

In China, the appeal of stronger meetings man-

agement will be front and center. According to the 5th China-Asia Meetings Industry Research Report, China is experiencing growth not only for the meetings market within China, but also for meetings and events inbound to China from international points. Particularly noticeable is the growth in meetings and events going outbound from China.

The report also states that pressure to reduce costs was the issue most buyers and suppliers mentioned as likely to influence events in the next 12 months. Nearly three-quarters of buyers and just over half of suppliers forecast that they will organize an increased number of events over the next 12 months. At the same time, cost control remains a hot issue: Only 34 percent of buyers and 27 percent of suppliers predicted that budgets for individual events will increase for the year ahead.

In Australia, which has been one of the few developed countries to escape a prolonged slip into an economic recession, business events are one of the highest yielding sectors in the country's visitor economy. In addition the Australian meetings industry has somewhat been at the forefront when it comes to meetings ROI. At the Asia-Pacific Incentive & Meetings Expo, it was evident that the marketplace for meetings and events is growing at an equally rapid pace.

### Prices Add Pressure for Meetings Management Reform

The rising need for comprehensive and system-wide management of meeting spend and planning processes comes as prices for everything from food and fuel to travel services spike in the region. With costs increasing, more and more companies in Asia are creating strategic meetings management programs that include:

- Creating a separate meetings policy (from transient T&E) that spells out which preferred suppliers to use.
- Combining transient travel spend with meetings spend for improved negotiating with hotels and other meeting suppliers.
- Creating standardized corporate contracts that spell out a company's own terms and conditions and ensuring that all planners use those contracts when dealing with hotels.
- Companies are also choosing technology that automates and supports every key element of the meeting planning and procurement process — planning, budgeting, buying, attendee management, payment and results measurement.

### Trends to Watch

Just as in the West, Asian companies are seeking added value in their contracts with suppliers. To win business, many hotels are negotiating added-value options, for example, free Web access, flexibility with cancellation and attrition fees, and forgiving resort fees.

Many firms in Asia-Pacific are also turning to virtual technology to extend the life — and return on investment — of meetings. For example, many companies are posting events on YouTube so that attendees can review key points made in the meeting, as well as share the event with colleagues back in the office.

Because relationships are so important to meeting managers in the region, more Asia-Pacific companies also want event technology solutions that combine logistics and spend management with new ways to create and measure community engagement. Specifically, companies are looking to engage audiences and build relationships with key stakeholders. They want to pair their meetings management technology with automation that helps them do things like get more attendees registered for events, establish long-term relationships with their audiences and measure return on investment.

The result of combining SMM and engagement technology is unprecedented cost savings, organizational efficiencies, and enhanced engagement with employees, customers and business partners. *C&IT*

“With costs increasing, more and more companies in Asia are creating **strategic meetings management** programs.”



**Kevin Iwamoto, GLP**

The vice president of Enterprise Strategy at StarCite, part of Active Network, Iwamoto guides StarCite's overall global strategy for engaging with buyers and suppliers and next generation technology development. He also works globally with key influencers across industries to raise awareness of the benefits of strategic meetings management. An industry spokesperson, Iwamoto is also a former president & CEO of the board of directors of the Global Business Travel Association and has been honored with every major business travel industry accolade. [kiwamoto@starcite.com](mailto:kiwamoto@starcite.com)

# Golf and Spa Resorts



(Left) Two massage therapists are better than one as seen at the 2011 International Spa Association Conference & Expo. (Right) With 15 years of successful golf programs under their belt, Willow Run Foods' employees and customers can't wait until the next event.

## An Unbeatable Combination for Building Relationships and Rewarding Champions

By Mike Bassett

The more things change, the more they stay the same — at least when it comes to the use of golf courses and spas by corporate incentive and meeting groups.

While trips to the course and spa took a nosedive when the recession hit in 2008-09, those activities still remain a critical component of the corporate event as we near the mid-point of 2012.

For the past decade, the Aftermarket Auto Parts Alliance, a large auto parts and distribution and marketing organization headquartered in San Antonio, TX, has met in South Florida for a couple of days in December for a general business/strategy session. "We also manage to incorporate some fun into the event,"



***"Turnberry Isle Miami is a nice, intimate property. Which means that with our numbers we pretty much fill up the place. And it has two beautiful golf courses."***

**Dan Williford**, Marketing Director  
Aftermarket Auto Parts Alliance, San Antonio, TX

says Marketing Director Dan Williford, "And this includes golf."

It's a large event incorporating more than 500 alliance shareholders, executives and vendor channel partners says Williford, which has created some problems when organizing golf tournaments.

With a group that size, attendees who want to play golf at a resort with just one 18-hole course may get shut out or

be inconvenienced. "We used to go to a very nice property, but they just had one course onsite," says Alliance President and CEO John Washbish. "So we had fivesomes and two groups hitting off the same tee at a time, so it made it slow, slow, slow."

To make matters worse, the event's closing night banquet/awards dinner always follows the golf tournament, which usually lasted so long that golfers who were delayed on the golf course never

had enough time to get back to their rooms, clean up and attend the pre-banquet cocktail party.

Last year, Williford and Washbish recognized that they needed to change the venue and decided to bring the group to Turnberry Isle Miami. "It's a nice, intimate property," says Williford. "Which means that with our numbers we pretty much fill up the place. And it has two beautiful golf courses."

The two courses — the Miller and Soffer courses — are "manicured beautifully and visually appealing," says Washbish, but, most important, "we were able to get our golfers out on the course in foursomes, nice and neat, and never had more than one foursome on a tee."

"The first group teed off at 12:30 and was off the course by 4 p.m.," says Washbish. "So everyone was thrilled to be able to get back to their rooms and get cleaned up before the night's event. It was really the most successful golf tournament we've had."

So successful that Washbish has signed contracts committing the Alliance to Turnberry Isle Miami for the next six years.

Which is music to the ears of Turnberry Isle Golf Director Bob Coman, PGA, considering how important group business is to Turnberry Isle.

The Turnberry Isle Resort & Golf Club's 423 members play about half of the 35,000 rounds played at Turnberry Isle's two courses. The resort guests play the other half. And of those 17,500, about 10,000 or 60 percent come from groups. "So we've certainly built up that business," says Coman.

What makes Turnberry so attractive to groups? Coman says a huge factor is the South Florida weather, which certainly enhances the playability of the two courses.

As for the courses, the Miller is a little more forgiving, while the Soffer is longer and puts a premium on shot-making. "It's one of the more difficult courses you will find in South Florida," says Coman. What appeals to groups, he says, is that the quality of each course is the same, even if each is different from a "feel standpoint" and degree of difficulty.

In the case of the Aftermarket Auto Parts Alliance, Coman adjusted the tee boxes on each of the courses to level out the degree of difficulty. Washbish also says that he took Coman's advice and used forecaddies. "It really improved the speed of play," he says. "So if you have a large group, we recommend you follow the golf shop's instructions and use forecaddies."

That ability to play quickly has ben-

efits both for the golfers and the club. According to Williford, the Alliance ended up getting 175 golfers out on the two golf courses, which was well above average.

"In the past, because golfers didn't like playing in fivesomes our tournament numbers had dropped down to about 140," says Washbish. "When everyone learned we were going to have just foursomes we got a big increase in participation."



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One thing that Coman notices about planners who bring groups to Turnberry Isle for golf events is that they aren't necessarily satisfied with the old tried-and-true golf formats.

For example, he says, he recently had a planner bring in professional golfer Fred Funk for a small corporate group of

golfers from the Ladies Professional Golf Association Tour for a similar event.

"So I see a lot of groups just trying to get out of the mold of 'let's just hold a scramble,' says Coman. "Anyone can go out and play golf. They're trying to enhance the whole experience and make it more memorable."

***"We were able to get our golfers out on the course in foursomes, nice and neat, and never had more than one foursome on a tee. ...It was really the most successful golf tournament we've had."***

**John Washbish, President and CEO**  
Aftermarket Auto Parts Alliance, San Antonio, TX



20 people. The event started with Funk holding a golf clinic for the group, then going out and playing three or four holes with each of the group's foursomes. The event concluded with a dinner, which Funk also attended.

That kind of corporate event isn't unique, Coman says, pointing out that another group recently brought in two

The major architectural feature of the Soffer Course is a 64-foot waterfall sitting on the south side of the course's 18th green. When the ADT Skills Challenge was played at Turnberry Isle in 2008 and 2009, a tee was created to the right of the waterfall allowing the competing professionals to hit 75-yard pitch shots into the green for that particular skills challenge.

Several years later, the tee is still there, and Coman and his crew take advantage of that configuration to schedule "neon golf" for groups. During these night golf events participants use neon golf balls and hit into the island green, which has been encircled with neon glow sticks. Turnberry Isle's Magnolia Courtyard (a 4,800-ft space with decorative columns and a covered loggia area) overlooks the green, which gives groups an attractive venue to schedule cocktail parties while incorporating a little bit of night golf. "It's something that's a little out of the ordinary," says Coman.

**Golf Winds Them Up and Spa Winds Them Down**

While budget considerations may force corporate groups to decide between golf and spa events, it's not unusual for the larger groups to schedule both, says Kirstie Bolitho, spa director at the Spa & Fitness Center at Turnberry Isle Miami.

"Generally we'll try to follow a golf day with a spa day," Bolitho says. "We let Bob (Coman) wind them up, and we wind them down."

At the Turnberry Day Spa, a 25,000-sf facility featuring 22 treatment rooms, the number of treatment possibilities can be overwhelming, says Bolitho. So, she will often simplify the service menu for groups so that attendees have the choice of two kinds of massages, facials and body treatments.

"That way they (planners) don't have to deal with the vast number of choices, and it helps planners stay within their budgets as well," Bolitho says.

Bolitho says the spa also tailors treatments for athletes and golfers. With a golfer's massage, therapists will concentrate on his or her core, because "golfers generally don't work on their core enough." The act of hitting a golf ball requires body rotation and a lot of force, which can be hard on the body, manifesting itself in conditions like sciatica.



***"Almost every program we are doing has spa and golf in it. And spa is really, really heavy."***

**Bill Boyd, CMP, CMM, CITE, President and CEO**  
Sunbelt Motivation & Travel, Irving, TX

"Our therapists will work on those issues and perhaps recommend that they spend some time with a trainer in our gym," Bolitho says. "It can help them strengthen their core and reduce their score on the course."

Bolitho's therapists also will meet groups out on the course. For example, if a large group is having a shotgun start, they'll set up on the driving range and help golfers do some stretches.

And it's important to note that not all meeting participants are golfers. Tennis, too, can be an important component, and Turnberry Isle Miami recently partnered with Cañas Tennis, a top-notch company that provides tennis instruction by players ranking in the top 10 for doubles and singles as well as group clinics and competitions.

**How Important Is the Spa?**

"Almost every program we are doing has spa and golf in it," says Bill Boyd, CMP, CMM, CITE, president and CEO of Sunbelt Motivation & Travel, Irving, TX. "And spa is really, really heavy," even though, he adds, spa can be substantially more expensive unless a group plans on staying at a resort with Pebble Beach-type greens fees.

There has been one big change when it comes to spa, says Boyd. More and more men are taking advantage of it.

"We see a lot of guys have given up playing golf on these trips and are going to the spa," says Boyd, adding that the feedback he gets from many male attendees is that they can easily play golf at home, but would never budget the time for a spa treatment.



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# New Golf eEtiquette

It is said that Steve DeFelice, director of sales and marketing for the Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa, Pueblo of Santa Ana, NM, opens and closes more deals in



DEFELICE

a golf cart than in his office. So who better to address the new etiquette on the golf course in this age of instant electronic communication? DeFelice describes in his own words one of the newest rules in golf: *A player may be subject to disqualification for listening to music or news, etc. for prolonged periods or while making a stroke, but it is permissible to briefly listen, for example, checking sports scores. (Decision 14-3/17)*

DeFelice says, "It has become more commonplace than ever before that golfers, be they on the course for business or pleasure, carry with them all forms of electronic hand-held devices, from smartphones to iPads. This has not only sparked new etiquette issues, but has also affected the way business is conducted on the golf course. Still, as much as things change, some remain the same."

DeFelice reminds us that even though "we know there is no talking while a player is teeing-off, hitting or putting. This now includes the ringing and chirping of mobile phones and other electronic devices. A player's lost ball is not an opportunity for others to make phone calls or check emails and texts. Help a partner or opponent look for the ball."

## Connect to a Person Not a 'Cloud'

DeFelice says he is hard-pressed to think of another

sport, other than golf, where partners or competitors spend four-plus leisure hours together in a contest that each wants to win, yet provides the ability to bond players personally and professionally.

And, by the way, he adds, "There is a difference between doing business and building business on the golf course.

"If I'm going to be talking business during a round, it's because the client or potential client wants to. We've agreed beforehand that while we're playing we will exchange business information. In that context, we may very well need to refer to our respective electronic devices to pull up relevant and key information. But not at the detriment of the pace or play of the game or to the exclusion or disrespect of other players. The sport requires a fair amount of concentration and any kind of conversation can be a distraction if ill-timed," DeFelice says.

## The Great Equalizer

DeFelice also finds that a game of golf erases cultural references due to age differences. He says, "I can play golf with a potential client half my age and enjoy a more level playing field in the process, regardless of who is the better player. That's less likely to be the case in racquet sports or skiing, for example. And as golf continues to be one of the fastest growing sports in the country, it's likely that more work will be done out from behind desks."

Finally, DeFelice cautions, "Just make sure you keep your smartphones on vibrate and keep up with the pace of play and your stock will remain high for the next four hours, at least."

C&IT

"We have a client that we've had for the last 10 years, and we've seen, out of a group of 250 people, their golf event drop from 100 people to a hard-core group of 20 golfers," says Boyd. "And they're all going to spa."

Boyd suggests that some of this added interest in spa stems from the attraction double spa treatments has for partners, particularly when they are attending an incentive. "So they're telling each other 'we don't have to separate, let's book a spa treatment at the same time.' And that has become very popular."

Numbers from the Lexington, KY-based International Spa Association (ISPA) illustrate the rise in spa's popularity. According to ISPA, total industry revenues increased by 4.3 percent in 2010. And from May 2010 to May 2011, the



The Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort, Phoenix, AZ, has more than 48,000 sf of function space including three ballrooms and 46 meeting rooms.

number of full-time employees working at spa facilities increased by eight percent.

In addition, according to ISPA, 70 percent of resort/hotel spas experienced an increase in the number of spa visits during the six-month period after September 2010, compared to the same time the year before.

"Spa-goers recognize the value of investing in their overall health and wellness now more than ever in today's fast-paced world," says ISPA President Lynne McNees. "In turn, spa visits and revenue are showing positive signs of growth as the industry emerges from the recession."

"Spa treatments offer the perfect break between meeting sessions," McNees adds. "Chair massages and foot reflexology can be done anywhere and can take as little as 10 minutes. Longer bouts of time spent at the spa are ideal ways to help attendees relax and clear their minds."

## Golf Holds Its Own

While the popularity of spa among corporate and incentive groups has increased dramatically over the last sev-

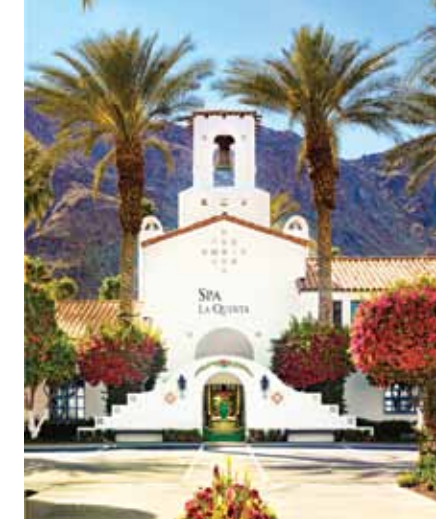
eral years, golf still holds its own with many groups.

Lynn Lasky, vice president of sales and marketing for Willow Run Foods of Binghamton, NY, has been planning a customer/employee event at the Woodloch Resort in Hawley, PA, for the last 15 years running.

Willow Run is a fast-food distributor serving much of the Northeast, and its customers include franchise owners representing companies such as Arby's, Wendy's, Popeye's and Quiznos.

Since Lasky has been planning the same event at the same place for the past 15 years, these franchise operators and the Willow Run employees they deal with tend to look at the annual event held in the beginning of June as a family get together. "Everyone knows each other, and they're all buddies," says Lasky. "It is like family."

According to Lasky, the usual size of the group is about 40, all but two of whom spend much of the three-day, two-night event playing golf.



The award-winning 23,000-sf Spa La Quinta has 38 treatment rooms.

Photo courtesy of La Quinta Resort & Club

hole, 6,579-yard, par-72 course "is very challenging," she adds, "but they love it, and that's one of the reasons we've been coming back for 15 years."

## New and Noteworthy

Troon, the world's largest golf management company, began a partnership with Lookout Mountain Golf Club at **Pointe Hilton Tapatio Cliffs Resort** in Phoenix, a par-71 golf course named by *Golf Digest* as one of the 450 best public courses in the country. Consistently voted one of the top 25 golf courses in the state of Arizona, Lookout Mountain combines spectacular scenery with challenging play. It's one of the only golf courses in the Phoenix-Scottsdale area to have golf holes winding through a desert preserve without adjacent holes. The 584-suite Pointe Hilton Tapatio Cliffs Resort features more than 65,000 sf of event and garden function space. The full-service Tocaloma Spa & Salon infuses treatments with natural ingredients indigenous to the Southwest. Sister resort, the

The attendees usually arrive on a Wednesday, grab a boxed lunch and head for the golf course, Lasky says. Thursday, it's a little more formal with a sit-down lunch, followed by a best-ball tournament and a dinner.

As for Lasky herself, she and one other participant spend their free time at the spa. "I don't play golf, but I'm told by my boss that the course is always in great shape," she says. The 18-



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**Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort**, is also in Phoenix and has more than 48,000 sf of function space including three spacious ballrooms, 46 choices of conference rooms, high-speed Internet access and a business center. Both Pointe Hilton resorts completed a three-



*“Spa treatments offer the perfect break between meeting sessions. Chair massages and foot reflexology can be done anywhere and can take as little as 10 minutes...and help attendees relax and clear their minds.”*

Lynne McNeese, President  
International Spa Association, Lexington, KY

year renovation that included expanded spa and fitness facilities. Squaw Peak also recently renovated its lobby and its free-standing, 6,300-sf Palacio event venue.

A world-renowned golf destination, **La Quinta Resort & Club** offers 90 holes of golf at the resort and at PGA WEST — a master-planned 2,200-acre country club community and the site of numerous high-profile tournaments. La Quinta is home to award-winning golf courses designed by legends Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Pete Dye, Greg Norman and Tom Weiskopf. The resort’s official golf ambassador, pro Al Geiberger, and his two sons participate in special programs and speaking engagements for corporate groups.

The 23,000-sf Spa La Quinta has 38 treatment rooms, including indoor and outdoor massage, facial and wet treatment rooms. The spa boasts four signature open-air La Quinta Celestial Showers, men’s and women’s treatment wings with locker rooms and a newly renovated salon with state-of-the-art equipment and services such as custom manicures and pedicures for

ter a treatment and features an outdoor wading fountain, a fireplace and a cooling mist system.

News from the **Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate** includes the addition of Mokara Spa to the 720-room



After conducting business on the two 18-hole golf courses, attendees finalize the details in this well-appointed meeting room at Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate.

golf and spa resort. Replacing The Spa at Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate, the new Mokara Spa offers signature treatments and products of the spa brand, which is a part of the Omni Hotels & Resorts family, currently operating seven spas throughout the U.S. The Mokara

drenches the skin in a treatment of exotic oils high in vitamins A, B, C and E, leaving the skin nourished and replenished. The award-winning golf courses include the Greg Norman-designed International — a 7,363-yard, authentic links-style course and the National — a traditional American-style layout cut from 200 acres of woodlands, wetlands and orange groves.

Last year, **Salamander Hotels & Resorts** formed the Grand Golf Resorts of Florida collection, which includes **Innisbrook Resort** near Tampa, **Reunion Resort** in Orlando and **Hammock Beach Resort** in Palm Coast. To showcase the collection’s nine championship golf courses, Salamander unveiled its Legends of Golf Trail, which traverses 200 miles between the resorts (90 minutes apart) and across the Sunshine State. The collection totals 1,250 suite accommodations, 200,000 sf of meeting space, 25 swimming pools and three spas.

At the 275-room **Island Resort & Casino**, located in the Upper Peninsula of Harris, MI, there’s a new 13,000-sf conference center with a new patio and flexible outdoor space. The resort features an indoor pool and a 24/7 gaming facility with 1,300 slots and full table games and The Island Showroom, which can seat up to 1200. The Sweetgrass Golf Club, recognized as a top course in Michigan by *Golfweek*, features tournament services, food and beverage, and corporate group planning including teambuilding, clinics, games and matches. Groups staying at the Island Resort and Casino also can play golf at two regional courses — Greywalls and TimberStone. **C&IT**

*“I don’t play golf, but I’m told by my boss that the course is always in great shape.” The course “is very challenging but they love it, and that’s one of the reasons we’ve been coming back for 15 years.”*

Lynn Lasky, Vice President Sales and Marketing  
Willow Run Foods, Binghamton, NY



men and women. The adjacent 4,000-sf fitness center and movement studio is equipped with Life Cycle, Life Step, Life Stride and Paramount ETX equipment. The central Sanctuary Courtyard offers a tranquil place to unwind before or af-

Spa features the eponymous Mokara massage, which combines a variety of massage techniques and specialty oils designed to help guests re-energize, detoxify and simply relax. The Hydrating Wrap, a service unique to Omni Orlando Resort,



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## Meeting Well

### How to Make Health Part of Every Agenda

By John Buchanan

Colleen Doyle, director of nutrition and physical activity for the American Cancer Society (ACS), vividly remembers the day more than a decade ago when the idea for ACS' acclaimed "Meeting Well" program was born.

"I was at one of our meetings and found myself on one side of the lunch buffet, with the doctor who at the time headed up the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Chronic Diseases Division on the other side," Doyle says with a laugh. "Between us was pepperoni pizza. And 'Meeting Well' was born."

Today, as health and wellness become ever more important issues for U.S. corporations as diet-related conditions such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes soar and health-care costs skyrocket accordingly, "Meeting Well" is the gold standard of comprehensive, proactive initiatives. And little by little, pizza and other unhealthful foods are disappearing from lunch buffets, in lieu of more responsible, life-enhancing choices.

"The interest in health and wellness at meetings is becoming broader and broader now," Doyle says. "More and more meeting planners are aware of the issue, as are more and more people who attend meetings. More and more attendees are interested in eating well

Fitness is part of the corporate culture — including meetings — at Meredith Corporation, according to Tim O'Neil (third from left), manager of employee health and financial wellness.



Photo courtesy of Meredith Corporation

while they're at a meeting. And they want to be able to be physically active as part of the meeting."

As a result, she says, meeting industry organizations such as Meeting Professionals International (MPI) are embracing the notion of health and wellness as important pillars of 21st century events. "And that is a good thing, because this issue is extremely important to improving the health of this country," Doyle says.

From a corporate perspective, there is another critical factor in the equation, says Jenny Dodson, executive congress manager of the Royal Palm Beach, FL-based Employer Healthcare and Benefits Congress, a major annual conference focused on best practices in health and wellness.

"From a business point of view, the No. 1 issue is the corporate bottom line," Dodson says. "Companies see an unhealthy population that stresses the bottom line due to illness, chronic weight issues and people not taking care of themselves. And companies now understand that illness, or even just lack of wellness, is a real bottom-line cost. And they also understand the cost now in terms of

human capital and that a healthier employee is a happier employee."

As a result, Dodson says, she has observed a trend toward health and wellness initiatives being extended into meetings and events for the past several years. But, she adds, there is also a practical meeting-related issue, as well. "More and more companies are realizing today that investing in a healthier meeting menu is going to help people listen better and have more energy and focus, particularly in the afternoon," she says.

#### Fundamental Principles

It probably doesn't come as a surprise to many meeting planners that traditional food and beverage at meetings is antithetical to well-being.

"A good example of the biggest mistake many companies still make is doughnuts in the morning and huge lunch buffets and heavy desserts," Dodson says. "Or mid-afternoon breaks with items like chips and salsa instead of something healthier like fruit. The lesson that planners are learning today is that a heavy breakfast, then a heavy lunch and a high-calorie mid-afternoon break just cause fatigue and a lack of concentration. If attendees are eating

## F&B Basics

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Dietary Guidelines for Americans" promotes health and helps prevent the effects of diet-related diseases:

**Offer a variety of grains, especially whole-grain foods, and fruits and vegetables.** Examples include fresh fruit and salads; fresh and cooked vegetables; and whole-grain breads, pasta, muffins and granola bars.

**Provide fat-free, low-fat or low-calorie foods and beverages.** Include fat-free or low-fat dressings and toppings such as salsa, yogurt dressing; sweet mus-

tard; desserts such as angel-food cake; skim milk; yogurt and cheeses; beans, pea or lentils; and lean meats, poultry or fish.

**Offer foods and beverages low in added sugars.** Serve unsweetened cereals, fruit spreads, cereal bars; 100 percent fruit juices, tea and coffee, and water.

**Serve foods that are low in salt and sodium.** Offer unsalted pretzels, popcorn or baked chips; grilled or roasted entrées cooked with herbs and spices, not salt.

**Include smaller portions.** Serve mini-muffins and mini-bagels and one-inch low-fat cheese squares.

[www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines).

— JB

unhealthy food, their brains aren't functioning properly, so they're not retaining the information they're there to get."

A planner's standard today should be high-protein, low-fat meals that don't include a lot of sugar, Dodson says. That formula is corroborated by ACS and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "A trend we're seeing today is toward choosing more locally grown food that is in season," says Issa Jouaneh, vice president and general manager of American Express Meetings and Events in New York.

#### Setting a Standard

Just such attention to healthful eating at meetings is being set by Des Moines, IA-based media conglomerate Meredith Corporation, which is setting a national standard with its widely hailed WELCOA program.

"We always focus on healthy options when it comes to planning a meeting," says manager of corporate communications Lauren Burt, whose department plans meetings for the publisher of *Better Homes & Gardens* and other well-known magazines. "And those include planning meals. And to do that, we go to some of our magazines for recipes, because that is an expertise we have as a company based on our publications, which include topics like healthy diets and healthy living. So we're able to incorporate those things very easily because we have so many resources and options."

Planners interested in a state-of-the-art menu for a healthy meeting, both in terms of diet and exercise, need look no further than the extensive "Meeting

Well" guidelines from ACS. To download a copy, visit [www.acsworkplacesolutions.com/meetingwell.asp](http://www.acsworkplacesolutions.com/meetingwell.asp).

Planners with a genuine understanding of what constitutes a healthful meeting know that the issue stretches beyond just what's on the table for meals or breaks. "It's not just your menus that have to be considered," says Dodson. "It's also about the program or agenda. If you have hour-long presentations, with no questions and answers and no other kind of interaction, that's also a brain-related issue. You have to give your attendees a good menu and a good program for optimum results. And the key is creating an agenda that is interactive and that has multiple, shorter components and fewer long presentations. For example, you should break up presentations with short, interactive workshops or spirited panel discussions that engage and stimulate attendees rather than putting them to sleep."

A related foundational element of healthful meetings is physical activity that is a formal part of the agenda, says Tim O'Neil, manager of employee health and financial wellness at trend-setting Meredith Corporation. "A focus on physical activity is part of a larger focus on healthy options as a part of your meeting," O'Neil says. "But the important consideration is doing it as a team and focusing on everyone. It's a great way to get employees to work together, and it's really an extension of the classic team-building that we've seen as part of meetings for many, many years."

Jouaneh also has seen an accelerating trend toward including physical activity, whether that's a hike, a yoga or tai chi

class, or a meditation session, as a core component of meetings.

"You have to be creative," says Dodson. "Organize a meet-and-walk session and also some kind of relaxation time, whether that's an evening spa package or a yoga class or afternoon golf outing. But fun outdoor activities that are also interactive should be part of the agenda today."

Meredith has led the way with so-called "walking meetings."

"If we're going to have an offsite meeting and a particular presentation, we say why don't we all walk along a trail outside as someone makes this presentation?" O'Neil says. "And then everybody can count that toward their physical activity minutes in our 'Live Healthy' program."

ACS has also been a practitioner of walking meetings. "We've been doing it for years as part of our 'Active for Life' program," Doyle says. "And it's definitely one of the things that more planners should be doing."

#### A Novice Case History

Jessica Albert, event planner at San Diego, CA-based ResMed, which serves the medical industry, had her first experience with a more healthful meeting in February when she hosted a four-day meeting for 30 road-warrior regional clinical specialists at the Four Seasons Westlake Village in Los Angeles.

"One of the focal points of this particular meeting was rejuvenation and refocusing their efforts from a business standpoint," says Albert, who incorporated health and wellness activities into her agenda with the help of the California Health and Longevity Institute (CHLI).

## Health Tips for Planners

“Being a meeting planner is a high-stress job,” says Jenny Dodson, executive congress manager at the Employer Healthcare and Benefits Congress in Royal Palm Beach, FL. “It’s easy to give advice like ‘eat better, stay healthy.’ The only advice I can offer is to get involved in the activities you’re offering as part of the meeting. And when you’re on the road for a site inspection, practice the same things you’re preaching to your attendees at your meetings. Eat right. Get daily exercise. Take time to relax and reduce your stress level. The only thing that keeps me sane is being in a workout.”

“I also tell people that if you do it right for 30 days, then you’ve made a habit out of it,” she says. “That’s the other key to success. You have to really challenge yourself for 30 days. Then you will have healthy habits and find it hard to get away from them because you feel better and your body is now used to a healthier lifestyle.”

Lauren Burt, manager of corporate communications at Meredith Corporation, one of the country’s most

progressive practitioners of employee health and wellness, agrees that it’s difficult to make and sustain the commitment. “We have so much information available to us today on how to live a healthy, well-balanced life,” she says. “So it really is just a matter of having the discipline to take those extra steps in your life and get it done. But once you do that, you’re on your way.”

Jessica Albert, event planner at ResMed in San Diego, says, “I think that everything I learned about healthy choices when I’m out at a restaurant or in an airport are just very valuable tips,” she says. “And I’m definitely going to follow them in the future, because I also travel a lot as an event planner. And you never really know what’s going to be available in any given place. So having an expert opinion from someone like the California Health and Longevity Institute, which created our wellness meeting content, is very valuable. And I think that information will be extremely helpful to me in trying to lead a healthier lifestyle. It just helps me realize it’s something that I really should be incorporating into my own life. And that, in turn, then helps me manage our meetings more productively and do a better job.” — **JB**

“We wanted to re-focus and re-energize them after some recent changes in the company, so we thought that those types of goals just naturally went along with a health and wellness theme, since they are on the road so much.”

Consequently, Albert says, the innovative programs offered by CLHI tied in perfectly with her most important meeting goal. Activities included a group hike that featured healthful snacks, a “Healthy Eating on the Road” seminar, a games competition and a “Fitness for the Conference Call Culture” workshop.

Both Albert and her attendees dubbed the effort a smashing success. “It was very well received by our attendees,” Albert says. “I’ve gotten numerous emails with feedback telling me they just thought it was a great thing to do. Our people definitely recognized the need for this kind of information and that it has definite benefits for them in terms of their health and productivity. But it was also fun — and everybody had a great time. Based on the reaction we’ve gotten, this is definitely something that we want to include in some way in more of our meetings.”

Precisely because meeting attendees are increasingly interested in wellness, Doyle sees a related trend in proactive meeting planning. “It’s something I’m

just starting to see and also something that we’re trying to do,” she says. “And that is sending logistical materials out before the meeting. I’ve heard of a number of companies that will put in information about whether the hotel has a fitness center and what’s in it. Are there walking or running trails nearby? If so, they advise you to bring your running shoes. So, they’re giving people a heads-up on what’s available and the kinds of things they should be taking advantage of.”

### Vendor Buy-in

In response, hoteliers are taking note, too. So far, Omni Hotels & Resorts has led the way — with options such as running maps for each local destination to trans fat-free menus, state-of-the-art fitness facilities and Get Fit Rooms with treadmills — but more and more hotel companies are perceiving health and wellness initiatives as a branding opportunity.

“Health and wellness is a growing trend, so hotels, restaurants and other vendors such as caterers are responding to it,” says Jouaneh. “But it’s still being driven today by meeting planners or the company holding the meeting. However, based on that, I think we can expect a more proactive approach from hotels and other suppliers in the future.”

At the same time, Jouaneh says, a focus on wellness is increasingly becoming a formal element in corporate travel policies. “Our research shows that innovative companies are doing that, with specific health and wellness initiatives,” he says, adding that will continue to accelerate such a focus within meetings and events.

However, notes O’Neil, success must be driven from the bottom up, not the top down. “One of the things we’ve done at Meredith Corporation,” he says, “is try to make these things a very positive kind of experience and a very important part of our culture. But one thing we don’t do is issue a lot of mandates or guidelines. Instead, we try to foster a sense of teamwork and friendly competition, with various kinds of challenges and incentives throughout the year.”

However the goal is accomplished, it’s a vital undertaking, says Doyle. “What’s really important to recognize is that this is a growing movement and that more and more meeting participants want these kinds of opportunities to be healthier and more active,” she says. “So it’s important for the entire meeting industry to focus on growing these kinds of efforts, because it’s very important to the country’s public health.” — **C&IT**

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# Sports Rewards



NFL On Location guests enjoying exclusive "On Field Experience" at Super Bowl XLVI. Played for the first time at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, the New York Giants bested the New England Patriots, 21-17.

Photo courtesy of NFL On Location



The staff of Dallas Fan Fares and executive chef Richard Chamberlain prepare to serve breakfast to incentive group clients at the popular Masters Golf Tournament, Augusta National Golf Club.

Photo courtesy of Dallas Fan Fares, Inc.

## From the Super Bowl to the Masters, It's the Experience That Counts

By Mike Bassett

A little more than 30 years ago Kaye Burkhardt, the owner and president of Fan Fares Inc., a Dallas destination management company, started bringing corporate groups to NFL football games to see her hometown Cowboys. That experience, she says, "proved to me what sports can do" as part of a meeting/incentive mix. It also helps,

she adds, that she's a sports fan herself, which means that a sports incentive is an idea that's easy for her to sell. Fan Fares has just finished its 25th year of booking corporate incentives at the Super Bowl and organizes a number of other sports-related incentives, as well. "It's totally motivating for our cus-

tomers — and for us — to create an incentive program around a major sporting event," Burkhardt says. "What I have observed, particularly in this economy, is how hard people will work to win something that is on their bucket list." And in many cases that is what a sports incentive involves: The chance for a salesperson or other employee to

attend a major sports event he ordinarily wouldn't be able to attend on his own. Burkhardt believes the incentive to attend this kind of event is so great that it has a profound effect on business performance. "I'll look over a crowd of successful salespeople who've won a trip to a Super Bowl, and I'll wonder how many jobs these people have actually saved, particularly with the economy the way it is," she says. "I keep on coming back to the saying that 'nothing happens until the sale is made,' then everything else happens, production increases and jobs are saved and created."

Burkhardt also believes that a sports-related incentive is an ideal format for business purposes. "They don't have to be a week-long," she points out, which means companies don't have to have their top salespeople out of the field for prolonged periods. "These events are short, but they are highly impactful," she says. "The atmosphere is just heightened. It's a fast hit with a lot compressed in a very short amount of time so that it gives your guests a lifetime of memories. I think they are very motivational." Burkhardt says she plans around 15 sports-related incentives a year, about five to eight involving the Super Bowl. Business has also been particularly

has created quite a bit of interest in sports-related events. Her groups range in size from as small as 10 persons to as large as 400. She took her largest group — 724 attendees — to the Super



Kaye Burkhardt, President  
Fan Fares Inc., Dallas, TX

*"What I have observed, particularly in this economy, is how hard people will work to win something that is on their bucket list."*

Bowl 25 years ago, the first time she ever operated a program for that event. "It was cheaper then," she says, "but a lot harder to do. It was the event that really catapulted us into believing that planning sports incentives was something that could really work."

### Experiential Rewards

Inside Sports & Entertainment Group was established in 2004 and, although it now organizes corporate events involving the entertainment world (the Emmy Awards, for example), it also focuses on providing sports incentives for groups of 20 to 200 persons at events ranging from the Super Bowl and U.S. Open tennis to the Kentucky Derby and Formula 1 Grand Prix racing.

*"Their employees get that it's more important to go to one of these once-in-a-lifetime events rather than get another big-screen television."*



Jim Zissler, Executive Vice President  
Inside Sports & Entertainment Group, New York, NY

brisk in her neck of the woods over the last couple of years since the success of local teams (The Dallas Mavericks won the championship of the National Basketball Association, the NBA Finals, in 2011; and the Texas Rangers have played in the Major League Baseball World Series each of the last two years)

Like most business travel and meeting-related businesses, Inside Sports & Entertainment Group saw a dip in fortunes in the period immediately following the 2008 financial crisis. "I remember the Masters (the annual major PGA golf championship played every April in Augusta, GA)," says Jim Zissler, the

company's executive vice president. "I had to call friends in Charlotte (NC) and tell them to get down to Augusta and get the deal of their lives. That year no one was going to the Masters, and we had lots of available inventory." Now, that's all changed and business

has picked up dramatically over the last three years. This year's Super Bowl was the best ever for the company, Zissler says, while the Masters was also on track to be the company's biggest in the history of Inside Sports. Zissler says that he believes the continuing — and increasing — popularity of these types of incentives can be traced to a rejection of those kinds of point-based incentive programs that, for example, reward employees with their choice of a big-screen television or some other consumer good. Instead, companies would rather provide "experiential" rewards.

"They are gravitating towards these experiential packages," says Zissler. "Their employees get that it's more important to go to one of these once-in-a-lifetime events rather than get another big-screen television." And that's what Inside Sports sells: The chance to reward employees with once-in-a-lifetime experiences. When he first started in the business, Zissler says, he had "no idea you could even do some of this stuff." The Super Bowl seemed to be beyond the reach of most fans, while attending something as exclusive as the Masters was deemed to be an absolute impossibility. But Zissler learned that getting access to these events wasn't so impossible, after all, and he also discovered

that this accessibility spurred interest in these kinds of events as incentives.

Now, the challenge isn't necessarily arranging trips to Super Bowls and golf tournaments, but, instead, making them as exclusive as possible. "Lots of people can go to these events now," he says. "But if you can treat an attendee like he's an insider by giving him access that is normally unavailable for

*"Each year we are challenged with the fact we have groups coming back and we have to make sure that every year we top the previous year."*

**Dave Wintergrass, Senior Director, Events  
National Football League, NFL On Location, New York, NY**



most people, that's going to be different and exciting."

In the case of Inside Sports, that involves leveraging a relationship with the National Football League (Inside Sports & Entertainment Group is one of the sales partners of NFL On Location, through which Inside Sports can access hospitality packages to the Super Bowl) to provide clients with on-the-field access at the Super Bowl. Or, while at the Masters, Inside Sports can organize an after-round dinner attended by a golfer or a sportscaster such as Jim Nantz of CBS Sports.

"That's the kind of thing we try to emphasize," says Zissler, "Because for the attendee, it's getting that kind of access that implies status and makes the event memorable."



Photo courtesy of Las Vegas Sands Corp.  
Lagasse's Stadium at The Palazzo Las Vegas is the next best thing to being there.

Stephen Siegel, chairman of global brokerage for CB Richard Ellis, an international commercial real estate services company, frequently uses Inside Sports to both plan sports-related events and to acquire tickets to sports events for customer and employee events.

Siegel says he's brought groups to "just about any major sporting event" rang-

ing from the Super Bowl to the Final Four in college basketball.

### Why Sports?

"Sports events are consistent — there's always something going on, even something like a (New York) Knicks game, and it's not that difficult to arrange," says Siegel. "But, take for example, a show on Broadway. You might need 20 seats in a theater, and a banquet afterwards and a cocktail hour beforehand. It's not the kind of entertainment vehicle we'll be seeking."

Siegel believes the value of sports events in motivating employees is self-evident, particularly when you're talking about attending some of the sporting world's premier events. "Everyone likes a pat on the back and nothing says that we think an employee is doing a great job like inviting him to be just one of a few people from the company attending the Heisman Trophy Award ceremony."

What are the big events he brings customers and employees to? The Super Bowl is No. 1 — "everyone wants to go" — although he thinks the one that's the best to attend is the NCAA Final Four.

The city can be just as important as the venue. Miami is a popular sports city and has hosted the greatest number of Super Bowls ever (10). Now that the city has a new baseball park, it won't be long before a Major League Baseball

All-Star Game is on the schedule, too, enhancing Miami as a great place for sports incentives. The Miami Marlins' new home is a LEED Silver, state-of-the-art facility with notable features such as The Cleveland at Marlins Park — a private venue located beyond the left

field fence, which includes a full bar, dining menu and swimming pool as well as more than 40 luxury suites and premium seating areas with F&B service. The private 2,600-sf Diamond Club can accommodate about 175 people seated and 200 people for a reception. The chic venue is ideal for hosting panel presentations and conferences as it is equipped with eight flat-screen TVs and can be set up with an audio-visual system and projector with speakers as well as wireless or wired microphone capabilities.

### The NFL Gets in on the Action

The National Football League (NFL) has seen how successful the corporate sports event market has become — particularly as it relates to its own signature event, the Super Bowl — and has begun offering its own hospitality packages.

According to Dave Wintergrass, senior director, events, National Football League, NFL On Location, the NFL had long been involved with providing Pro Bowl packages to Hawaii, but only got involved in providing packages to the Super Bowl with Super Bowl XL in 2006.

"It's obviously built up quite a bit since then," he says, adding that its NFL On Location now offers packages to a number of other signature events, such as the NFL draft and its International Series game held in London every year.

Wintergrass says that NFL On Location works closely with authorized sales agents such as Fan Fares in Dallas to provide full-service packages to corporate incentive groups. "We'll generally work with the individual fan," he says, "while corporate groups usually want a lot of full service, and we'll work hand-in-hand with our sales agents because they have their fingers on the pulse of the incentive market."

Depending on the size of the Super Bowl venue, NFL On Location offers about 3,000 hospitality packages a year to groups that contain on average between 12 and 20 people.

But they certainly range in size. The Super Bowl will be held in New Orleans in 2013 and is traditionally an extremely popular destination. Next year will be no different: Wintergrass says NFL On Location already has contracted for 1,400 packages and has one corporate incentive group that wants to host more than 300 people.

The number of corporate groups that come back year after year, Wintergrass says, indicates the success of NFL On Location.

"One of the hallmarks of our particular package is our day-of-game hospitality that not only includes the game ticket, but the venues we build out for entertainment that might last for three hours pre-game and two hours post-game," Wintergrass says. "Each year we are challenged with the fact we have groups coming back and we have to make sure that every year we top the previous year."

"And I think we're pretty successful," he says, pointing out that upon his return to his office after this year's Super Bowl in Indianapolis he was inundated with renewal requests for next year's game in New Orleans.

New Orleans will obviously be a big ticket in 2013, so what do you do if you can't get your group to the big game? Individual fans like to go to their local sports pub to watch a big game with their fellow fanatics. In Las Vegas, planners can bring their groups to Lagasse's Stadium at The Palazzo Las Vegas.

The venue contains just about everything you could expect to find in a luxury box at any major sports venue in the U.S., with the added benefit of food inspired by Emeril Lagasse. The venue has more than 125 flat-screen televisions, plush stadium seating and private luxury boxes for small group viewing, and is available for group buyouts.

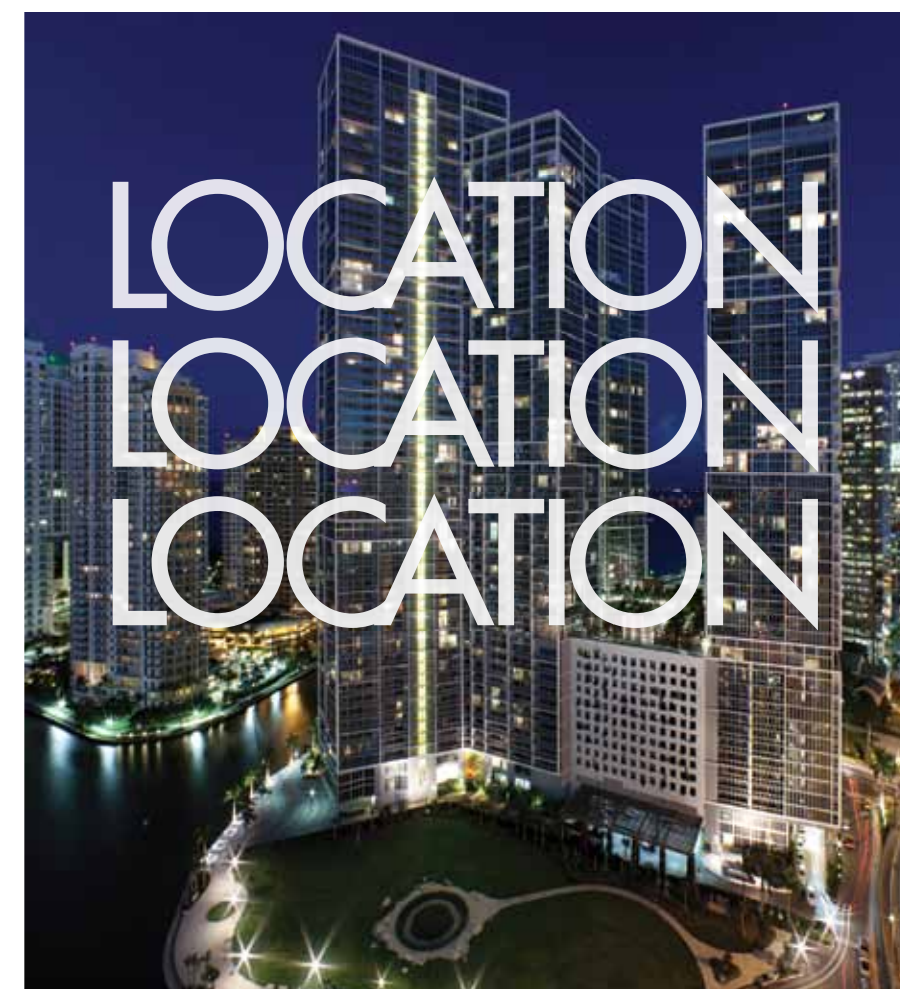
Tera Landavazo, an account manager at the destination management company Hello Las Vegas!, booked the

lower section of Lagasse's Stadium during this year's Super Bowl for a group of about 100 executives from The Fox Broadcasting Company.

These executives will normally attend the game — and use a luxury box or lounge at the Super Bowl venue — if the network is broadcasting it, so Landavazo tried to recreate the experience at Lagasse's. "They wanted that sport's atmosphere, but they also want-

ed to feel associated with Las Vegas," says Landavazo.

Hello Las Vegas! has used Lagasse's for corporate groups for other sports-themed events, but booking the stadium for the Super Bowl is a little more complicated. In this case Landavazo had to book the space eight months before the Super Bowl, "and we were still a little bit lucky to get our spot," she says. **C&IT**



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# DESTINATION



Photo courtesy of Robert Bosch LLC

Michael Lippman, marketing manager at automotive aftermarket supplier Robert Bosch, knows Las Vegas has much more to offer than just gaming. He says the opportunities are endless like this fun teambuilding activity — dune-buggy driving in the desert.

Las Vegas is back — and it's bigger, bolder and better than ever. But the most important news for corporate meeting planners is that their events — even smaller ones — are more welcome than ever before in a destination dominated by large association conventions before the Great Recession. As a result, a new generation of first-time users is discovering a unique oasis of opportunity long appreciated by old fans.

“The biggest thing executives and meeting planners should remember is that Las Vegas is not just about gambling,” says Michael Lippman, marketing manager at Broadview, IL-based automotive aftermarket supplier Robert Bosch LLC, which has used Las Vegas for a half-dozen meetings over the last few years. “That’s what it’s known for, but it has become an entertainment mecca, where you and your attendees can do just about anything anyone could want to do when you’re there. It gives you so many options. In addition to the business opportunities for hosting a major meeting, there also are pleasure opportunities as well. So you can combine elements for a successful event. There are a lot of other activities you can participate in, so that people can enjoy themselves as part of the meeting.”

Lorie Thomas, CMP, CMM, senior event marketing manag-

er at Concur Technologies in Redmond, WA, has hosted a Las Vegas meeting about once a year for the past four years, most recently a four-day annual client conference for 1,400 attendees last February. One key reason she finds the city so appealing is the variety of its hotel product. Another is its airlift. “Las Vegas



*“There are lots of places with great conference space. And that’s important to us because we do a lot of breakouts for our major meetings.”*

**Suzanne Gallagher**, Senior Vice President of Marketing, Datalink, Broomfield, CO

has really great airlift from all over the world, and it’s also relatively inexpensive,” she says.

Suzanne Gallagher, senior vice president of marketing at Datalink in Broomfield, CO, agrees. “The airlift makes it really easy to get into and out of Las Vegas, especially in January with weather considerations,” says Gallagher, who has been



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The outdoor patio at Lagasse's Stadium at The Palazzo is the place for Emeril Lagasse's signature cuisine and game-day fare. More than 100 HD TVs, stadium-style seating, billiard tables and much more are inside at the "Best Sports Lounge" in Las Vegas.

using Las Vegas regularly for 15 years, most recently in January for a five-day technical summit for 400 attendees from across the U.S. Gallagher also praises the city's extraordinary inventory of meeting space. "There are lots of places with great conference space," says Gallagher, who returned to fabled Bellagio for this year's event. "And that's important to us because we do a lot of breakouts for our major meetings."

All of that said, however, perhaps the most important factor in the resurgence of Las Vegas since the recession has been that it never rests on its laurels as a premier meeting destination.

"Las Vegas reinvents itself every few years," notes Todd Thrall, director of meetings and events at Best Western International in Phoenix. "So, if you're there for a meeting and you come back two or three years later, you see a whole new selection of hotels and entertainment venues." As a result, Thrall has used Las Vegas with great success since 1998, and it has never lost its appeal for attendees.

One reason: the world-renowned, one-of-a-kind hotels that Las Vegas offers in abundance. In 2010 and last year, Thrall hosted meetings at The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino, one of the city's most acclaimed meeting and incentive properties and foundational pillar of a complex that includes the newer Palazzo Las Vegas and Sands Expo and Convention Center. "The big reason we like it is the tremendous amount of meeting space and the dining options they have, from very inexpensive to ultra-high-end," says Thrall, who will return for a major meeting with 3,000 attendees later this year, "There's enough variety that attendees can find themselves staying in the Venetian/Palazzo complex without having to venture out."

Patty Amos, corporate meeting and event planner at Tessco Technologies in Hunt Valley, MD, is another longtime user who hails the diversity and constant evolution of the destination. "There's much more to do than just The Strip," says Amos, who hosted 160 attendees for a customer appreciation event at the MGM Grand Las Vegas in February. "You have things like the Richard Petty Driving School and you can do helicopter rides. There's just so much fun stuff to do."

Lippman also finds unique value in the range of recreational opportunities Las Vegas offers. "For example," he says, "at our

meeting last October, we were able to do things that complemented the regular meeting agenda. We were able to do some side trips where some of our people went indoor skydiving. Other people went dune buggy driving out in the desert. So it let us combine fun with our business objectives. And that combination is very important to us and our attendees."

### The Value Proposition

For more than a decade, Las Vegas has relentlessly sold itself based on bottom-line value relative to all that it has to offer. At its peak, however, prior to the start of the recession in 2008, rates began to climb and that claim began to suffer. Today, with 150,827 hotel rooms, which include new inventory from a pre-downturn building boom, the value proposition is back — and stronger than ever.

"The law of supply and demand has taken hold and the hotels really have to compete for business now," Thrall says.

Lori Kolker, CMP, president of Rockville, MD-based hotel



*"Las Vegas has the largest base of hotel rooms anywhere now, so the competition is stiff. The rates at the moment are incredible, because all of the hotels are competing."*

Lori Kolker, CMP, President  
Elle K Associates, Rockville, MD

broker Elle K Associates, agrees that Las Vegas has never offered better rates or deals. "In the corporate market, it amazes me what the hotels are offering in terms of rates," she says. "Las Vegas has the largest base of hotel rooms anywhere now, so the competition is stiff. So the rates at the moment are incredible, because all of the hotels are competing with one another to get the corporate business."

Better yet, she adds, she expects the exceptional rates to extend well into the future. And, she says, the current nego-



Desert Fire, a student percussion ensemble from John S. Park-Edison Elementary School in Las Vegas, provided a rousing performance at EdisonLearning's West ILC meeting.

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*“Hotels are being more responsive. They are showing people now that we are truly committed to providing value and exemplary service, especially in the corporate market.”*



Stephanie Arone, DMCP, Owner  
Activity Planners, Las Vegas, NV

tiating leverage reaches beyond just rates. “For example,” she says, “it’s fairly easy to resist demands for food and beverage minimums or payments for meeting space. My clients prefer to have everything packed into the room rate. That’s how I can deliver maximum value.”

Most surprising to Kolker is the fact that once-shunned small meetings — even as tiny as 10 rooms — are now welcomed with open arms. “They used to laugh at that kind of business and want 500 room nights at peak,” she says. “Now they want that smaller meeting business, and they’re competing for that, too.”

Even attrition and cancellation clauses are on the table today. “If they come back now with a 90 percent attrition clause, I’ll say ‘no’ and they say ‘fine,’” says Kolker. “The only question they’re really interested in is ‘what will it take to get the business?’”

Jennifer Borth, CCTE, director of travel services at educational provider, NY-based EdisonLearning, has consistently found good value in Las Vegas over the past 10 years. But it has never been more important than it is today. “Value is not just important to us since the recession,” says Borth, who hosted her most recent meeting in Las Vegas for 100 attendees this spring at JW Marriott Las Vegas Resort & Spa, which is off The Strip. “That has always been important to education companies. But it’s even more important today, since education budgets are even worse than they were before. And they weren’t great before.”

Facing such fiscal constraints, she says, the net rates she gets in Las Vegas are more appealing than ever.

At the same time it has held tight on value, Las Vegas



Monte Carlo offers 30,000 sf of meeting space and expert assistance from MGM Resorts Events for memorable functions.

also has upped the ante in terms of service, says Stephanie Arone, DMCP, owner of 35-year-old destination management company Activity Planners. “Hotels are being more responsive than they may have been in years past,” she says. “They are showing people now that we are truly committed to providing value and exemplary service, especially in the corporate market.”

The city’s market adjustments have been carefully calculated, Arone says. “There are two things you can do in down markets,” she says. “You can reduce prices and increase service. And Las Vegas has done both of those things to really attract the corporate market. So the question for planners now should not be why to have a meeting in Las Vegas, but why wouldn’t you? There are very few destinations west of the Mississippi that can offer the value and amenities that we do.”

### Potpourri

As key elements of its most recent reinvention, Las Vegas also has unveiled a number of new venues ideally suited to meeting groups.

“One of the most exciting things that has happened recently is the opening of the **Smith Center for the Performing Arts**, which opened in downtown Las Vegas in March,” says Arone. “It’s our version of Lincoln Center. It’s absolutely magnificent. And it’s the crown jewel in the long effort by our former mayor, Oscar Goodman, to revitalize the downtown area and make it as exciting as The Strip. It will now be a cultural hub.”

Another of the projects shepherded to completion by Goodman is the National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement, popularly known as the **Mob Museum**. It made its highly anticipated debut on St. Valentine’s Day to commemorate the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre.

Another unique new venue Arone likes is **Dream Racing**, which opened in March and is located at Las Vegas Motor Speedway. “It’s a new take on the racing experience,” she says. “What’s different is that the cars are modified European Ferrari F4-30 GTs. They are racing Ferraris, and they are absolutely beautiful. And the program and venue they offer are first-class. They have a European-style road course and also an ultra lounge-style facility for hosting events.”

Lorie Thomas, who has used a number of landmark offsite venues over the years, used **The Joint** concert venue at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino earlier this year to present a rock ‘n’ roll band for a spirited reception and party for 1,000 attendees. “The Joint is an awesome venue,” she says.

For an event during her customer appreciation event, Amos used **Diablo’s Cantina**, which is connected to the Monte Carlo hotel and managed by The Light Group, for 160 attendees. “The location is perfect,” she says. “It offers central access to The Strip for after the event, and you also get a spectacular night view of The Strip from the veranda that we used.”



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Photo courtesy of South Point  
South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa offers unique amenities such as a 64-lane bowling center and a 16-screen movie theater.

Planners seeking an equestrian arena and all the trappings that go with it need look no further than South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa. The property offers 71,000 sf of conference space, an 80,000-sf column-free pavilion and 22,000-sf ballroom. There are 2,163 accommodations, with spacious standard guest rooms measuring 500 sf. South Point also has a 64-lane bowling center and a 16-screen movie theater. Most important for certain groups such as the Utah-headquartered Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) are South Point's 4,600-seat **Equestrian Arena** and 1,200 climate-controlled horse stalls. South Point is affordable, too, say meeting planners. "On top of that, we were very pleased with the rates South Point offers — with its rooms, food and diverse in-house entertainment," says Lynn Thomas, executive director of EAGALA. "Not only is South Point affordable, but it's beautiful. The rooms are very spacious, nice and clean. The equestrian center and conference center are beautiful. We have had the opportunity to eat at most of the restaurants in the casino and all have had good food at good prices. South Point is also very easy to get to — within 15 minutes of the airport and right off the I-15 exit. Its location alone makes it one of the most convenient facilities we have used."



*"There's something that will satisfy every kind of taste and budget. One of the great things about Las Vegas is that it offers something for everybody."*

Jennifer Borth, CCTE, Director of Travel Services  
EdisonLearning, New York, NY

**Guns & Ammo Garage** is a new, unique state-of-the-art indoor shooting range for high-powered rifles, handguns and machine guns. It's located just off The Strip and includes a 12-lane shooting range as well as meeting space in both classroom and conference room settings. Guns & Ammo Garage offers more than a dozen different types of guns, including an authentic Tommy Gun, AK-47, P90 (the newest gun being used by the Secret Service), Uzi, and more. They also create thrilling teambuilding challenges for groups such as closest to the bullseye competitions.

Expected to open in Las Vegas on July 4, 2013, **SkyVue** will be one of the largest observation wheels in the Western Hemisphere. Located directly across from Mandalay Bay, it will tower 500 feet above The Strip and feature 32 24-person gondolas and two HD LED multimedia displays at the center of the wheel, each measuring 50,000 sf.



The 7,042-yard, par-70 Wynn Golf Course is located on The Strip adjacent to Wynn Las Vegas and Encore.

Photo courtesy of Wynn Las Vegas

I do," Lippman says. "But the meetings I do plan are very important to the success of the company. So the fact that I have the ability to use the services of the LVCVA, which knows the city and its options very well, and who will handle the bidding process on the hotel and so on, is invaluable to someone like me."

Based on his most recent experiences, Lippman singled out LVCVA sales executive Jennifer Martin for praise. "I tell her my price point for the meeting and exactly what I need, and she will lay out a host of options for me because she knows the city so well," Lippman says. "And that kind of service is very important to me for one of the most important meetings that we do each year."

Meanwhile, long-satisfied planners agree, LVCVA has a spectacular product to sell. "A big part of the picture is still just the façade of Las Vegas," says Kolker. "I mean, you're talking about Las Vegas, and planners and attendees understand what that means in terms of what you can do with your meeting. The glamour, the excitement. A lot of people like to go to Las Vegas just to see the

Sizing up to the length of two football fields, the distinctive signs will be the world's largest displays offering spectacular visuals for The Strip's three-mile stretch and beyond.

The climate-controlled gondolas will offer views of the city skyline during a 30-minute ride. Groups can buyout gondolas complete with catering services. In addition, the project will offer 20,000 sf of space for meetings and more than 200,000 sf of retail space.

### Support Services

As if Las Vegas needed anything else to sell itself, it also can boast a powerful resource in its Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority (LVCVA), one of the largest and most sophisticated destination marketing organizations in the country. Its support is especially important to planners not familiar with the destination or senior corporate executives who plan only a few meetings a year.

"In my position, meeting planning is not the majority of what

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*“Las Vegas has really great airlift from all over the world, and it’s also relatively inexpensive.”*



Lorie Thomas, CMP, CMM, Senior Event Marketing Manager, Concur Technologies, Redmond, WA

hotels. They don’t even have to go sightseeing since properties like The Venetian or Bellagio or Caesars Palace are so incredible. Then you have the restaurants and the shows. People just want to go there.”

### New & Noteworthy

The **Las Vegas Convention Center** is expanding free Wi-Fi service to include all public areas; and a permanent digital signage network was installed in January. The convention center’s \$890 million expansion plan, put on hold during the recession, may soon be back on track. “We are anticipating going back to our board of directors later this spring or early this summer to review our options to reconsider our expansion plan,” says Terry Jicinsky, senior vice president of operations for the LVCVA.



Fabulous views are the order of the day at LUX, the new event suite at M Resort Spa and Casino, which offers a total of more than 92,000 sf of meeting space.

**M Resort Spa and Casino** recently introduced an additional 25,000 sf of meeting space known as the “M Pavilion,” bringing the property’s total meeting space to 92,000 sf. M Resort also recently debuted LUX, a 7,200-sf special event suite on the 16th floor with an outdoor terrace featuring a fireplace and views of the Las Vegas Valley.

The Spas at **Wynn Las Vegas** and **Encore** offer experiences to help attendees relax and enjoy a better night’s rest while meeting in Las Vegas. The Spa at Wynn Las Vegas offers the new Tibetan Blissful Sleep Ritual, which incorporates a traditional blend of Tibetan oils and healing techniques to balance the body’s energy and produce a better quality of sleep, and the Moroccan Mud Wrap treatment, available at The Spa at Encore, uses the highest quality

## Something for Everybody

Another essential factor in the Las Vegas equation, along with airlift, hotel product, meeting space and net value, is the city’s unparalleled dining and entertainment scene. Given the roster of celebrity chefs who operate restaurants and the perpetually evolving lineup of big-name shows and concerts, it’s fair to say that no other city comes close to matching its global allure.

“Our dining, entertainment and nightlife scene is enormous,” says Stephanie Arone, DMCP, owner of 35-year-old destination management company Activity Planners. “We have more five-star chefs in one place than any other city in the U.S. or anywhere else in the world. And because of the scope of our destination in terms of meetings, nearly all of our major restaurants are open to groups and

having private dining facilities. That is not true anywhere else to the extent it is here. That is really one of the things that sets us apart. Attendees can have dining experiences they can’t enjoy anywhere else.”

Michael Lippman, marketing manager at Broadview, IL-based automotive aftermarket supplier Robert Bosch, concurs in that assessment. “The food choices in Las Vegas are amazing,” Lippman says. “You can get any kind of food at any price point. And food is very important at a major meeting. Sometimes people remember the food as well as they remember anything else about the rest of the meeting.”

Jennifer Borth, CCTE, director of travel services at educational provider NY-based EdisonLearning, shares her culinary enthusiasm for the city.

“There’s something that will satisfy every kind of taste and budget, whether that’s a restaurant run by a famous chef or a buffet that is very affordable,” she says. “So that works well for us, because our attendees are a diverse crowd with diverse tastes. One of the great things about Las Vegas is that it offers something for everybody.”

The same is true of the city’s entertainment roster, whether that’s a long-running hot show such as “Jersey Boys,” yet another new show from Cirque du Soleil or touring companies of Broadway productions. And just when you might have thought there were no big names left who had not already played Vegas, Caesars Palace announced a new stand from legendary country superstar Shania Twain.

*Continued on next page*



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**Caesars Palace** recently opened its 668-room Octavius Tower, for a new total of 3,960 guest rooms. Debuting in 2013 across from Caesars Palace will be Caesars Entertainment's The Linq, a 200,000-sf retail, dining, entertainment and hospitality district featuring the world's tallest observation wheel at 550 feet — The Las Vegas High Roller — with cabins that offer service and food for up to 40 people.

**Flamingo Las Vegas** is currently remodeling two-thirds of its 3,500 hotel rooms as part of a \$10 million rebranding and renovation project expected to be completed this spring.

**MGM Grand Las Vegas** is remodeling all 3,570 guest rooms and 642 suites in its main tower, which is expected to be completed by September. The AAA Four Diamond MGM Grand is incorporating smart sustainability into its renovation project with LED lighting; improved thermostats and solar shades; upgraded faucets and showers; and 100 percent biodegradable bath amenities. In all, MGM Grand offers 5,044 guest rooms and 600,000 sf of meeting space



Photo courtesy of MGM Resorts International

MGM Grand Las Vegas' main tower guest room remodeling project incorporates sustainability improvements such as solar shades, LED lighting; upgraded thermostats, faucets and showers.

including the 92,000-sf Marquee Ballroom and the 16,800-seat Grand Garden Arena.

Groups seeking a respite from the gaming action, need only look to MGM Resorts International's **Vdara Hotel & Spa** at CityCenter. A non-gaming, smoke-free, eco-friendly, all-suite hotel situated between Aria Resort & Casino and Bellagio, Vdara is ideal for conducting business. The unique hospitality suites accommodate meetings for up to 12 guests with existing setup and feature high-speed wired and wireless Internet access, a media hub, cordless multiline telephone, Sub Zero full-size refrigerator, Bosch full-size oven and microwave, wine refrigerator, custom wood and glass dining table, 42-inch digital LCD flat-screen television in living and bedroom areas, laptop-size electronic safe, two bedrooms and a guest powder room.

**The Riviera Hotel & Casino** has more than 160,000

*Continued from previous page*

**What's New**

The new **Smith Center for the Performing Arts** opened in downtown Las Vegas in March with three theaters, including the 2,050-seat Reynolds Hall.

Emmy Award-winning comedian and actor Brad Garrett opened his **Brad Garrett's Comedy Club** at the **MGM Grand** over April Fools Weekend. The intimate 288-seat comedy club will provide Garrett, as well as legendary comedians and the next generation of comics, a place to call "home" in Las Vegas.

Set to open in December 2012 at MGM Grand is the new nightclub **Hakkasan Las Vegas**, which replaces Studio 54.

A new lobby interactive video wall, the first of its kind in a Las Vegas hotel, was recently unveiled at MGM Grand. Located behind the front

desk in the hotel's grand lobby, the center screen streams a live Twitter feed for any guests, on- or off-property, who use the **@MGMVideoWall** handle. The stream allows guests to provide direct feedback to the hotel and participate in real-time polls, contests and chatter, creating a fun, interactive experience. The screens on either side of the Twitter wall showcase music videos from top artists, adding to the energy of the lobby. The wall is made up of three 16-screen sections each measuring 16 x 9 feet, totaling nearly 100 million pixels, allowing for incredible HD content.

The hit show **Blue Man Group** is moving to the Monte Carlo hotel in the fall. It currently runs at The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino.

**Aria Resort & Casino** announced that a new Cirque du Soleil show "**Zarkana**" will preview this October

and open at the resort in November, replacing the "Viva Elvis" show, which ends in August.

Music legend **Carlos Santana** has signed on for a two-year run at the **House of Blues** at **Mandalay Bay**. His performances at the newly reconfigured venue will begin in May.

The Laugh Factory and the new **Tropicana Las Vegas** are launching a multivenue comedy experience: **Laugh Factory Las Vegas**, a comedy showroom starring the hottest comedians in the business.

**Flamingo Las Vegas** recently debuted **Center Cut Steakhouse** offering favorites such as the 20-ounce ribeye and the 24-ounce porterhouse, made with all natural premium beef. The beef will be provided by cows that are born and raised solely in the United States and are 100 percent hormone- and steroid-free. In

*Continued on next page*



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sf of meeting and convention space. The iconic property, which opened on the Las Vegas Strip in 1955, has undergone some major property-wide renovations. The meeting space includes twin ballrooms of 45,000 sf each, including one with skyboxes that are perfect for VIP events or for headlining concerts. The Top of the Riv ballroom is nearly 11,000 sf and offers spectacular views of The Strip.



Spa & Salon Vdara, a two-level spa, salon and fitness center located inside the Vdara Hotel & Spa at CityCenter, Las Vegas offers 11 private treatment rooms, a Smoothie Bar and more.

Las Vegas (39,000 sf of meeting space) debuted in February last year. Also, the former Loews Lake Las Vegas Resort was converted to **The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort and Spa** and reopened in March after a \$4 million renovation. The Westin has 493 accommodations, and more than 94,000 sf of meeting and banquet space. The property offers

lake and mountain views, as well as two pools, white sand beaches, cabanas, and a choice of water activities. The resort is just five minutes from the Jack Nicklaus-designed SouthShore Golf Club and 15 minutes from The Strip. Dining options including Marssa Restaurant headed by Master Sushi Chef Osama Fujita, Rick's Café and cocktails at the hotel's Moroccan-style Arabesque Lounge.

More signs of downtown Las Vegas' resurgence will be the opening in 2013 of Fifth Street Gaming's 650-room **Downtown Grand Casino and Hotel** on the site of the former Lady Luck Hotel & Casino, next to the **Mob Museum**. The hotel is part of Fifth Street Gaming's Downtown3rd redevelopment project, which also will comprise four blocks of meeting space, retail, a lifestyle center and more. Also debuting downtown will be the expansion of Las Vegas' original casino founded in 1906, **The Golden Gate Hotel & Casino**, which is adding a five-story luxury tower to be completed in July.

Fitzgeralds Casino & Hotel in downtown Las Vegas is undergoing a dramatic transformation to become the **D Las Vegas Casino Hotel**, scheduled for completion in fall 2012. Renovations will include 638 remodeled contemporary rooms and suites, a two-level casino featuring both a modern and vintage gaming floor and two high-energy bars. **C&IT**



The Sky Suites — a hotel within a hotel at Aria Resort & Casino — include 442 deluxe rooms, suites and villas, all located on the 25th through 59th floors of the South Tower.

*Continued from previous page* addition, the menu has a wide variety of seafood dishes and more.

**Aria Resort & Casino** will debut **Javier's** this summer. A favorite hot spot in Southern California and Los Cabos, Mexico, Javier's will introduce regionally influenced Mexican cooking and will feature grilled seafood, steaks, chicken and a selection of vegetarian dishes.

Internationally renowned chef Gordon Ramsay opens **Gordon**

**Ramsay Steak**, his first restaurant in Las Vegas, this month at **Paris Las Vegas**. Gordon Ramsay Steak's menu will change seasonally. Main courses offer a wide selection of grilled items such as a large range of Wagyu beef, various cuts of dry-aged steaks, veal, Kurobuta double pork chop and an assortment of seafood choices. The menu also will offer selections inspired by Ramsay's restaurants in England: fish and chips from The Narrow in London and pork

belly accented with candied kumquat and braised Swiss chard from Bread Street Kitchen in London. Gordon Ramsay Steak seats 200 guests throughout the two-story dining room, chef's table, private dining rooms, bar and lounge. Separated from the main dining room by the Euro-tunnel design, the lounge has its own food menu offering smaller plates.

Performing in the 1,477-seat Paris Theatre is the award-winning musical "**Jersey Boys**." — **JB**



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# New Mexico



The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts in Santa Fe offers tours and a variety of event spaces for corporate groups.

Sometimes people just need to be educated about New Mexico, says independent meeting planner Melissa Rael of Melissa G. Rael & Associates in Albuquerque.

“Lots of people have this preconceived notion that we’re just desert out here,” she says. “But when they get here they see the mountains and everything they can do like white-water rafting and skiing, and things they can experience like the art, restaurants, wineries and different cultures. So when they get out here, they see that we have plenty to offer,” Rael says.

## Albuquerque

Albuquerque is the largest city in New Mexico and is certainly the transportation gateway for the state. The airport handles about 6 million passengers a year, is served by seven

# The Land of Enchantment Keeps Groups Coming Back

By Michael Bassett

major commercial carriers and offers direct service to 29 different cities in the U.S.

Because of its accessibility and size, it is the one destination in New Mexico capable of handling large citywide conventions. The city has more than 16,000 hotel rooms and the Albuquerque Convention Center, which is now undergoing a \$20 million facelift, 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.”

And affordable, too, says Mark Holland, associate director of the Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation, an organization that provides continuing education for professionals in mining, oil and gas, water and other related areas. The foun-



*“Planners looking for a place where they can find value come to Albuquerque.”*

**Dale Lockett**, President and CEO Albuquerque CVB



Albuquerque, known as the ballooning capital of the world, features the week-long International Balloon Fiesta every October.

dation holds an annual meeting every year, as well as smaller meetings throughout the western United States (as well as a couple outside the U.S.).

“Albuquerque is really a lovely city,” says Holland, “But what makes it really appealing is its incredibly reasonable prices.” Over the years, the city has appeared on a number of lists of the country’s most affordable destinations.

“We’re a value destination, so planners looking for a place where they can find value come to Albuquerque,” says Lockett. “It’s affordable, all the major airlines are represented here, and groups can get value without compromising the quality of the product.”

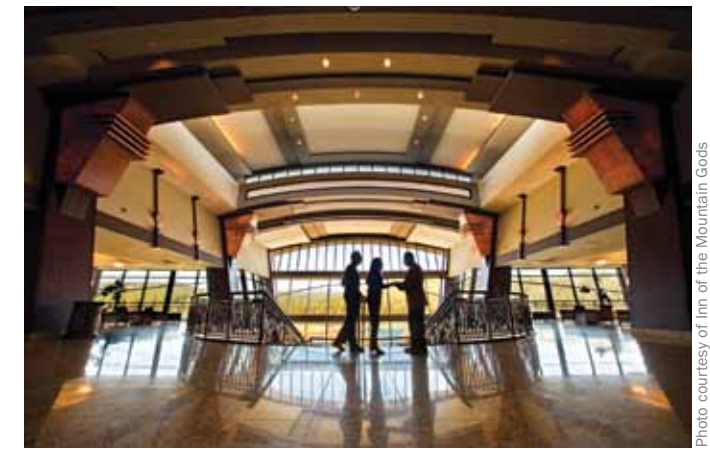
The city is also pouring money into its meeting/tourist infrastructure, says Lockett. “In the past few years we estimate we’ve spent or earmarked upwards of \$200 million to change the feel of the destination.”

For example, in addition to the convention center renovation, the Albuquerque Hilton has been reflagged as the Crowne Plaza Albuquerque and reopened last year after a \$14 million renovation, while both the Albuquerque Hyatt Regency and Albuquerque Marriott completed renovations.

While accessibility and infrastructure are important parts of Albuquerque’s appeal as a meeting destination, there are countless other reasons why meeting planners bring corporate groups to the city.

“It’s just a very unique destination,” says Lockett. “And that uniqueness is tied into the terrain, the look and the feel of the destination, plus the hundreds of years of culture diversity as it relates to cuisine and the arts. It’s just not your typical destination.”

Lockett says weather is also a major advantage for Albuquerque, as it is for the rest of New Mexico.



The scenic Inn of the Mountain Gods offers golf, gaming and the new Mountaintop venue Elks Lodge at Ski Apache.

“With 310 days of sunshine a year, you really can’t go wrong any time of the year,” he says. “Our winters aren’t too harsh, and summers are fairly mild.”

The number of activities available to groups is a major selling point as well. The self-described “ballooning capital of the world,” Albuquerque is home to many hot air balloon companies that provide rides for individuals and groups. For groups visiting the city in the fall, The International Balloon Fiesta takes place in Albuquerque for a week every October.

The city is also the site of the Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum, dedicated to the art, culture, science, history and sport of hot air ballooning. The museum is available for group rental and has been the location of many an opening reception, says Lockett.

Another popular attraction is the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, “gateway to the 19 pueblos of New Mexico.” The museum has a permanent exhibit that leads visitors through the history and background of the state’s 19 pueblos, while featuring their original artwork and craftsmanship. The center is also available for meeting and event rental.

There are plenty of outdoor activities available within 30 minutes of the city, Lockett says, pointing out that groups — if inclined — could golf one day and ski the next, in locations just 30 minutes apart. For those looking for spectacular views, a trip on the Sandia Peak Aerial Tramway, located on the eastern edge of Albuquerque, takes visitors to an observation



Photo by Mark Kane@2011

This sculpture welcomes visitors to Santa Fe’s Museum of Indian Arts and Culture. The museum offers indoor and outdoor venues for meetings and receptions.

# New and Noteworthy

**Bishop's Lodge Ranch Resort and Spa** in Santa Fe is nestled around the base of the Sangre Resort & Spa and includes 15 adobe-style lodges housing 91 rooms and eight gated villas. The resort has instituted its "Equus Experience," which, according to Marketing and Sales Director Jeff Lashar, is "a teambuilding exercise perfect for corporate groups." The Equus Experience is designed to help inspire self-mastery, teambuilding and collaborative leadership in participants through their

interaction with horses in a controlled setting. Bishop's Lodge provides four conference rooms totaling 8,000 sf plus outdoor event space.

**The Hotel Andaluz** in Albuquerque now bills itself as "one of the greenest hotels in the country." The LEED Gold-certified hotel has reduced water usage by more than 45 percent, uses solar-heated water that is produced onsite, has a comprehensive recycling program, composts all banquet food waste and has preferred parking for low-emitting and fuel-efficient vehicles. The AAA Four Diamond, historic hotel has 107 oversized guest rooms and 6,000 sf of meeting space.

**The Eldorado Hotel & Spa** in Santa Fe just completed a renovation of its 219 guest rooms that included new furnishings and new bathroom product. In addition, the hotel last fall opened the Agave Lounge, which is situated next to the hotel's Old House restaurant. "It's a hip, sophisticated upscale lounge," says Doug Libby, director of sales and market at the Eldorado. "It's been well received, not only by our hotel guests, but by the locals as well." The hotel offers more than 23,000 sf of conference space.

At the **Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa** on the Pueblo of Santa



Photo courtesy of Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort

Ana between Santa Fe and Albuquerque, groups can engage in untethered hot air ballooning teambuilding adventures (above). While not quite up to Harry Potter's high-flying quiddich battles, participants still engage in a series of aerial competitions that include dropping scoring bags onto targets on the ground below. The Hyatt Tamaya, renowned for its Native American art and cultural programs, offers 350 pueblo-style guest rooms and nearly 74,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting space.

Planners who want to offer the big three of gaming (left), spa and golf can head to the **Hilton Santa Fe Golf Resort & Spa at Buffalo Thunder**, situated on 587 acres 15 miles south of Santa Fe. The classically Southwestern-themed resort offers 450 guest rooms and 66,000 sf of meeting space, plus an old Spanish chapel that can be used for events. — MB



Photo courtesy of Hilton Santa Fe Golf Resort & Spa at Buffalo Thunder

deck atop the 10,378-foot Sandia Peak, giving them a panoramic view of the Rio Grande Valley.

## Santa Fe

Santa Fe is a small city with an international reputation, says Mark Holland, which is one of the reasons he brought the Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation's annual meeting to the city last July.

"It's an incredibly desirable location for a lot of people," says Holland. "People in Texas love to drive there, and people from elsewhere in the U.S. hear about the food, art and fantastic scenery, and they want to see it for themselves — or if they've already been there, they want to go back."

Santa Fe also has a certain cachet for international visitors, Holland says. "Few people would make it their primary destination if they're coming from another country, but our

meeting gives them an opportunity to visit and use it as a jumping off point to go elsewhere in the Southwest.

Last year's event had 1,056 attendees, which means the group used up quite a bit of Santa Fe's hotel inventory. It was also the first time Holland was able to book the LEED Gold-certified Santa Fe Convention Center.

The convention center opened in 2008 and contains 40,000 sf of meeting space, including an 18,000-sf ballroom, 11 breakout rooms and outdoor meeting areas. Entrances into the center from Marcy and Grant streets open into a lobby with fireplaces, custom-made furniture and a two-story ceiling.

"It's a gorgeous facility," says Holland. "And it was the first time we've ever been able to fit 1,000 people into a room, classroom style."

Jim Bradbury, executive director of the Santa Fe Convention & Visitors Bureau, agrees that the convention center is certainly a draw for groups looking at Santa Fe. "It's brand new, fits perfectly into the design of the city, and is within a two-block walking distance of 1,500 hotel rooms."

But what really draws visitors to the city, Bradbury says, is, "We're a cool, small city with a myriad of things for groups to do if they have leisure time or want spousal planned activities."

This wide range of activities includes the outdoor variety such as hiking, biking, skiing and golfing, says Bradbury, while the indoor variety includes great restaurants and wonderful cultural options, including excellent art galleries and museums.

Holland says he hired a local destination marketing company to put together some optional tours for his group, including a backstage tour of the Santa Fe Opera, a class at the Santa Fe School of Cooking, a trip to Bandolier National Monument (about an hour from Santa Fe), and a citywide treasure hunt for children and their parents.

The Mineral Law Foundation did have a hosted reception, but other than that, attendees were on their own. "There are so many good places to eat in Santa Fe that we didn't want to limit their choices," Holland says.

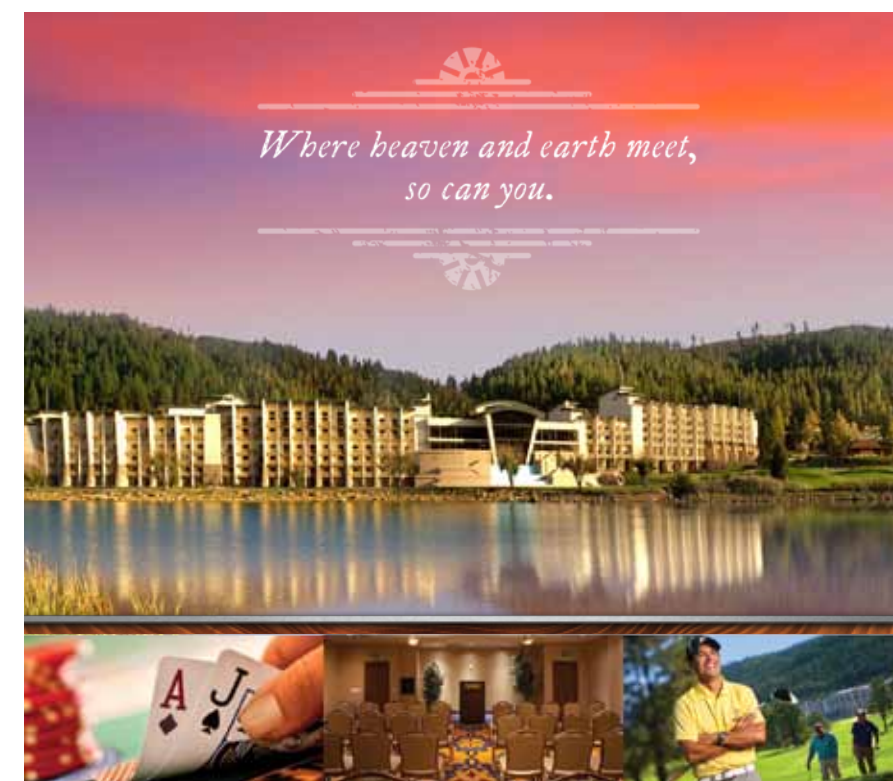
Another benefit to holding a meeting in Santa Fe is the walkability factor, which "is a major selling point," says Bradbury. Holland notes that "almost



*"We're a cool, small city with a myriad of things for groups to do if they have leisure time or want spousal planned activities."*

**Jim Bradbury**, Executive Director  
Santa Fe CVB

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Photo by Tina Larkin/courtesy of town of Taos

Rapturous over white-water rafting on the Rio Grande — the Taos area boasts the wild and scenic portions of the river.

where people can walk to breakfast, lunch, dinner, shopping and all those art galleries.”

As a small city, Santa Fe also has a small municipal airport, although it does offer direct service to Los Angeles and Dallas-Fort Worth. But most groups coming to Santa Fe usually come in via Albuquerque.

“We don’t think that’s a problem,” says Bradbury. “We actually use it as a selling point. Sure it takes 50 minutes to get from Albuquerque, but it’s a hell of a beautiful drive.”

While getting people to Santa Fe is “a little more difficult than having the meeting in a major city” the fact that so

Taos is known for two distinct kinds of activities, says Jeanne Kitzman, tourism and meetings coordinator for the town. The more passive of the two involves the cultural aspects of the area.

Drawn to the area by the culture of the Taos Pueblo and the area’s beautiful landscape, historically renowned artists, photographers and writers such as Georgia O’Keefe, Ansel Adams and D.H. Lawrence made the area famous as a mecca for the creative arts. Today Taos supports dozens of art galleries as well as three museums.

Taos is also the site of the Taos Pueblo, the only existing Native American community designated both as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and a National Historic Landmark. The adobe structures have been continuously inhabited for more than 1,000 years and currently have 150 permanent residents.

There are also a number of activities for the more athletically inclined, says Kitzman, primarily white-water rafting. “The area has the wild and scenic part of the Rio Grande,” says Kitzman, “And it offers different kinds of rafting experiences that are appropriate for just about anybody.” Visitors

can also go hot air ballooning, hiking, biking, camping, fishing and skiing.

Taos has a small convention center — the Taos Civic Plaza & Convention Center — which is located in the heart of the Taos historic district. The center has four halls totaling approximately 23,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space. According to Kitzman, the center is often used by smaller properties that lack sufficient meeting space of their own.

There are some larger properties appropriate for incentive groups, such as the El Monte Sagrado Resort & Spa, which has 84 rooms, suites and casitas, as well eight potential meeting and function rooms, including a 2,400-sf ballroom.

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.

In addition to the golf and casino, guests have a myriad of

recreational options, including hunting, skeet shooting, fishing, and skiing and snowboarding at the Ski Apache ski resort on the slopes of Sierra Blanca.

The Inn recently opened the Elks Lodge at Ski Apache, a two-story building 10,000 feet up on the mountain. “It’s a great place for a small corporate function” says Sales Director Charles Meeks, who points out that it is adjacent to a tubing run, “which can be a great add-on to an event.”

Well to the south, near the New Mexico/Texas border, Las Cruces is an up-and-coming meeting destination, says Rael, particularly with the opening of the new LEED-certified Las Cruces Convention Center in 2011.



Photo courtesy of Las Cruces Convention Center

The 55,000-sf Las Cruces Convention Center opened last year.



*“The area...offers different kinds of rafting experiences that are appropriate for just about anybody.”*

**Jeanne Kitzman**, Meetings Coordinator  
Town of Taos, NM

The 55,000-sf facility has 30,000 sf of meeting space and features a 14,500-sf exhibition hall, an 8,950-sf ballroom, as well as six breakout rooms totaling another 3,000 sf of meeting space. In addition, the center has 5,000 sf of outdoor space and 8,500 sf of prefunction space.

The area gets lots of sunshine — more than 350 days a year — so there are plenty of recreational activities for groups, including golf, camping, hiking and horseback riding.

The town gets a lot of business from Texas — it’s close to El Paso — says Rael, although the lack of a nearby airport could be problematic. “Sometimes the issue is getting groups from out of state to visit parts of New Mexico,” she says. “But once they’re here, they always want to come back.”

The desire to return is a common theme among planners and attendees alike who experience this uncommonly beautiful and culturally rich state, which more than lives up to its nickname, The Land of Enchantment. **C&IT**

*“Sometimes the issue is getting groups from out of state to visit parts of New Mexico. But once they’re here, they always want to come back.”*



**Melissa Rael**, Independent Planner  
Melissa G. Rael & Associates, Albuquerque, NM

many of Holland’s attendees come from the Southwest U.S. means that many drive in.

And while transportation issues may be more difficult than normal when it comes to holding an event in Santa Fe, it hasn’t dissuaded Holland from coming back: He’s negotiating right now to bring the Mineral Law Foundation’s annual meeting back to the city in 2017.

### North and South

Taos is located north of Santa Fe, about 85 miles south of the New Mexico/Colorado border.

It’s a “beautiful” town, says independent planner Melissa Rael of Melissa G. Rael & Associates. “You’ve got the pueblos, the scenic drives, lots of art galleries and some great restaurants. There aren’t any malls or big, boxy chain restaurants, just a lot of mom and pop places, and I think people really like that.”

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**Diane Brady Anderson** was named regional director, national accounts, Northeast, for NYC & Company, New York City's official marketing and tourism and partnership organization. She previously worked in sales and marketing positions with Sodexo, BUCOM International Inc. and The Waldorf=Astoria.

The Albuquerque (NM) Convention and Visitors Bureau (ACVB) has named **Tom Caradonio** as senior director of

sales. Before joining ACVB, Caradonio spent 13 years as the president and CEO of the Northern Kentucky Convention & Visitors Bureau. **Serena Sullivan** was promoted to national sales manager for the Southeastern U.S. territory and SMERF market. She was the ACVB sales support manager.

The Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau has named **Bill Bohde** as senior vice president, sales and mar-

keting. Bohde, a 39-year hospitality sales and marketing veteran, was most recently vice president, convention sales, at the Kansas City (MO) Convention & Visitors Association.

**Angelina Preza** was named director of sales and marketing for the Sheraton Keauhou Bay Resort & Spa, Kona, HI. Preza, a native of Hawaii, most recently served as senior director of sales for the Big Island Visitors Bureau. **C&IT**

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