

Corporate & Incentive Travel

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

New and Renovated
Rising Demand Spurs
a Wave of Debuts
and Redos From
Coast to Coast
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Orlando

**Where Exciting, Energetic
and Engaging Events Are
the Name of the Game**

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The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando Resort, the site of a recent McDonald's event for more than 9,000 attendees.

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Photo courtesy of Visit Orlando

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Photo courtesy of NCL

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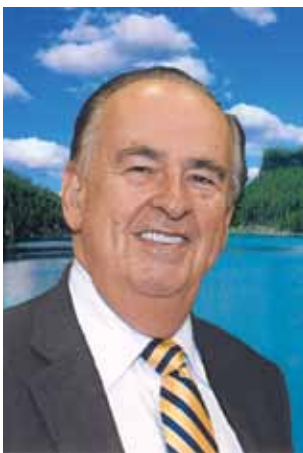
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PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE

The Beat Goes On...

At a tribute last month in Washington, DC, more than 225 travel industry professionals came together to remember Gary Sain's life and legacy — a man who tirelessly promoted travel during his career. The event raised about \$250,000 for the Gary C. Sain Memorial Endowed Scholarship for the University of Central Florida's Rosen College of Hospitality Management.



Sain, who died suddenly on May 4 of a heart attack, spent more than three decades in the travel industry, most recently as president and CEO of Visit Orlando. Sain's visionary leadership resulted in Orlando becoming the first destination to top 55 million visitors.

The tribute was organized and led by a steering committee including Bill Carteaux, SPI: The Plastics Industry Trade Association; Danielle Courtenay, Visit Orlando; Roger Dow, U.S. Travel Association; James Evans; Elliott Ferguson, Destination D.C.; Michael Gehrisch, DMAI; Bob Gilbert, HSMIA; John Graham, ASAE; Steven Hacker, IAEE; Bruce MacMillan, MPI; Rossi Ralenkotter, LVCVA; Pam Sain; and Deborah Sexton, PCMA. (The committee members in attendance at the June 26 event are

pictured with Pam Sain on page 11.)

But the beat goes on, and Sain's influence, hard work and perseverance are paying off in a major way. As Tammi Runzler, senior vice president of convention sales and services for Visit Orlando, tells us in our cover story on Orlando in this issue: "We have seen a lot of positive numbers come in this year in things we look at every day as far as the different levels of convention center use, occupancy, etc. Attendance numbers for individual groups are exceeding projections across all market segments — corporations, incentives, associations."

Record-breaking attendance is another good reason to consider Orlando for your next meeting or event. For example, Jennifer Hojnacki, the training and communication events supervisor for Oak Brook, IL-based McDonald's Corporation, was truly impressed with all that Orlando had to offer her company: "I believe McDonald's exceeded their expectations with the highest attendance we have ever had for a U.S. event. With over 16,000 people total at the convention and over 9,000 (9,317) people deciding to spend the evening with us at Universal Orlando, I would say we went beyond what we ever thought was imaginable."

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher



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NEWS&NOTES

Las Vegas McCarran International Airport Opens 14 New Gates

LAS VEGAS, NV — On June 27, Nevada's Clark County Department of Aviation celebrated the opening of McCarran International Airport's new Terminal 3 — a 1.9-million-sf expansion. "T3," the first unit terminal to be constructed in the U.S. in the post-9/11 era, includes 14 gates, seven of which can be used for international arrivals; an expansive ticketing lobby; space for two Transportation Security Administration checkpoints with up to 31 lanes; an eight-story garage with room for nearly 6,000 vehicles; more than 12 stores and restaurants; and an automated tram system that enables Terminal 3 to handle the check-in, security and baggage claim needs of up to 26 gates at McCarran's nearby D Concourse. Coupled with the airport's existing infrastructure, Terminal 3 increases McCarran's annual capacity to approximately 53 million passengers. "Las Vegas expects to welcome a record 40 million visitors in 2012, and the new terminal will help us achieve that goal," said Rossi Ralenkotter, president/CEO of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. "The visitor experience in Terminal 3 is unlike any other in the country and delivers on our brand promise. Visitors will immediately have a unique sense of place and receive the type of welcome we want to provide." www.mccarran.com

Rosen Convention Hotels Offer Free Wireless

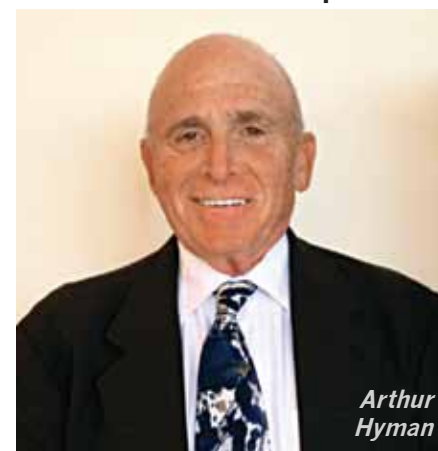
ORLANDO, FL — The three Rosen Hotels & Resorts convention hotels, the award-winning AAA Four Diamond 1,500-room Rosen Shingle Creek, 1,334-room Rosen Centre and 800-room Rosen Plaza, now offer free Internet service — wireless or hardwired — in guest rooms and public areas. Rosen Hotels & Resorts has implemented this change as part of its ongoing commitment to providing exceptional value and service to its business and leisure guests. The costs will not be reflected in a resort fee, said President and COO Harris Rosen. "It gives them the freedom to connect on their own terms, in the privacy of their guest rooms, without worrying about financial constraints or additional charges." www.rosenhoteles.com/ROI

Hilton Carlsbad Oceanfront Resort & Spa Welcomes First Guests

CARLSBAD, CA — Hilton Carlsbad Oceanfront Resort & Spa celebrated its ribbon-cutting and the arrival of first guests recently. Located across from Ponto Beach in north San Diego County, Hilton Carlsbad Oceanfront Resort & Spa was designed to offer spectacular views of the Pacific, not only from many of its 215 guest rooms but also from its 25,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space. The resort's stylish Chandler's Restaurant & Lounge presents the coastal regional cuisine of acclaimed international chef Pascal Vignau,

and the Ocean Crest Spa offers an environmentally mindful spa experience. The property features 215 guest rooms including eight suites, many offering panoramic ocean views and all providing travel conveniences including in-room mini-refrigerators, 42-inch flat-panel televisions, complimentary Wi-Fi and complimentary printing. Hilton Carlsbad Oceanfront Resort & Spa is situated 10 minutes from Carlsbad's Palomar Airport and 35 minutes from San Diego International Airport. www.hiltoncarlsbadoceanfront.com

Arthur Hyman Appointed Group Publisher at Coastal Communications Corporation



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

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MEETING VALUES



Eden Roc Renaissance, Miami Beach. Meetings over select value dates receive ROC Incentives based on number of rooms booked (50-150 peak room nights receive four incentives; 151-250 peak room nights receive seven incentives; 251+ peak room nights receive all 11 incentives): one complimentary continental breakfast; welcome signature beverage upon arrival; 1/35 comp room; complimentary wireless Internet in general session (up to five users); 15 percent off AV; two complimentary VIP round-trip airport transfers; 25 percent attrition on actualized rooms on a cumulative basis; double Marriott Reward Points up to 100,000 points; 5 percent credit to the master account on guest rooms only; complimentary guest room Internet; 10 percent discount on catered F&B. Call 305-674-5524 and mention the ROC Incentives promotion. www.edenrocmiami.com


■ **JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa, San Antonio, TX.** Groups that hold meetings between August 1 and December 31, 2012 and spend between \$10,000 and \$100,000 can choose four of the following perks: 10 percent off catered F&B; 10 percent off in-house AV; 50 percent off one Internet line in meeting room; upgrade to one hot food item on a continental breakfast; upgrade to premium bar; two-night gift certificate for future stay; 3 percent rebate to master; 100,000 Marriott Reward Points. Groups that spend more than \$100,000 are eligible for even more perks. For details, call 210-276-2500, www.marriott.com/satjw


■ **The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel, Dana Point, CA.** Planners earn triple rewards points, as well as Silver Elite status for meetings contracted prior to October 31, 2012 with a minimum of 10 rooms per night and held at the resort before December 31, 2012. With triple rewards, planners earn nine points for each U.S. dollar spent with a maximum of 150,000. 949-240-2000, www.ritzcarlton.com/lagunaniguel

IN&OUT

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NEWS&NOTES

Rivera-Marín to Lead Puerto Rico Tourism Company

PUERTO RICO — The government of Puerto Rico recently appointed Luis G. Rivera-Marín, Esq., as the new executive director to lead the Puerto Rico Tourism Company (PRTC). Rivera-Marín was selected by Puerto Rico Governor Luis Fortuño and confirmed at public hearings in late March. Rivera-Marín, who will be at the helm of a public corporation with more than 500 employees and a budget of \$100 million, expressed his commitment to further the goals, objectives and initiatives of PRTC. “My mission as executive director of PRTC is to provide continuity to the strategic plan geared towards the growth and development of the tourism industry and to position Puerto Rico as the most vibrant and diverse travel destination in the Caribbean,” said Rivera-Marín. Before joining PRTC and since January 2009, Rivera-Marín was secretary of the department of consumer affairs. His prior experience includes tenures as attorney and notary at law firms Lespier & Muñoz Noya, García Arregui & Fullana and Rivera-Marín Law Offices, representing diverse financial, commercial and tourism industry institutions. www.seepuertorico.com



RIVERA-MARÍN

The Scottsdale Plaza Resort Unveils Renovations

SCOTTSDALE, AZ — The Scottsdale Plaza Resort, located in the heart of Scottsdale and Paradise Valley, AZ, announced the completion of its \$3 million property-wide renovation, including updates to all 404 rooms and suites. The guest rooms are appointed with burgundy fabrics, custom window treatments, taupe carpeting, new mahogany-toned case goods, new seating and flat-screen televisions. The rooms also have new lighting, bathroom accents and décor. Facilities also were updated with a newly remodeled fitness center, complete with new equipment and a studio for group classes. Remington's Restaurant and Lounge was refreshed with new furnishings throughout; the Terraza tent received new carpeting; the tennis court was refinished; and state-of-the-art infrared saunas were installed at The Salon & Day Spa. www.scottsdaleplaza.com

Arlington CVB Rebrands as Experience Arlington

ARLINGTON, TX — The Arlington Convention & Visitors Bureau, which builds and markets Arlington, TX, as a destination to leisure, business and convention travelers, unveiled its new name of Experience Arlington and a new brand recently at the Batter's Eye Club at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington. According to the non-profit, the new logo and Experience Arlington name have a retro style that is reminiscent of the rich past of Arlington. “Tourism and CVBs are evolving. We want to make sure we're evolving with them,” said Jay Burress, president & CEO of Experience Arlington. “Tourism is about the experience. We want visitors to have great ones when they are here, so we're involved in every aspect of their experience, from the marketing of it, to the delivery of it, to looking at the future of what experiences we can add for the leisure visitor or a convention delegate coming to town.” www.experiencearlington.org

Minneapolis Posts Higher Visitor Numbers

MINNEAPOLIS, MN — Meet Minneapolis, Convention and Visitors Association, announced that a study conducted by D.K. Shifflet & Associates Ltd., shows that visitors and visitor spending increased in 2011. Minneapolis St. Paul saw 26.8 million visitors in 2011, an increase of 6.1 percent over the previous year's 25.3 million convention and leisure travel visitors. Spending was up 10.2 percent over 2010. “Minneapolis is a destination on the move,” said Melvin Tennant, president and CEO, Meet Minneapolis. “The efforts to make the city clean, eco-focused and welcoming to visitors by providing an excellent mix of entertainment, sports, music, outdoor activities and more are clearly making a difference, and visitors are coming to see for themselves.” www.minneapolis.org

Meliá Hotels International's Paradisus Cancun Resort to Debut in November

PALMA DE MALLORCA, SPAIN — Meliá Hotels International announced the transformation of the Gran Meliá Cancun property into a luxury all-inclusive Paradisus resort, to be completed by November 15, 2012. Paradisus Cancun will feature all the attributes of the 'luxecutive' Paradisus brand, featuring 136 Royal Service Suites and 97 Family Concierge Suites. Resort amenities will include signature adult-only Royal Service program, Family Concierge program, four pools with swim-up bars, eight restaurants featuring a variety of international cuisines, full-service YHI Spa and Health Club, more than 10,000 sf of meeting and convention space, and a nine-hole, par-3 golf course. The multi-pyramid architecture of Gran Meliá Cancun will remain, while a series of renovations and beautifications are planned to elevate the property to the design standards of Paradisus resorts. www.paradisus.com



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NEWS&NOTES

Sheraton Lake Buena Vista Resort to Debut New Ballroom and More This Fall

LAKE BUENA VISTA, FL — As part of the recent \$25 million transformation of Sheraton Lake Buena Vista Resort in Orlando, the resort will offer approxi-

mately 20,000 sf of new and completely reinvented meeting space to include: the all-new 7,000-sf Majestic Palm Ballroom, an updated 6,000-sf Royal

Palm Ballroom; multiple breakout spaces; an expansive outdoor area in the new pool courtyard and flexible spaces for 10–800 guests. All spaces were upgraded with modern technology features, new finishes, fixtures, furnishings and names incorporating the hues and vibe of the resort's sprawling twin-pool courtyard. Outdoor event spaces in the courtyard include an elegant fire pit, pool bar and outdoor kitchen with wrap-around bar that can be used for private events under the palms. The resort also boasts 490 new guest rooms, new restaurants, updated public spaces, a new spa and more. www.sheratonlakebuenavistaresort.com

Palms Casino Resort Begins Transformation

LAS VEGAS, NV — Palms Casino Resort in Las Vegas is investing \$50 million in the first phase of a transformation that will encompass a redesign of the Palms Tower rooms and suites, new culinary options, reimagined gaming spaces and new nightlife experiences. Beginning in July, all 428 rooms and suites in the Palms Tower will be remodeled in an ultra-chic and modern style. Each space will highlight custom artwork that complements the overall atmosphere. In addition to the updated rooms, the entire casino layout also will be reconfigured to maximize flow and ambience. The property's Center Bar will be remodeled by the end of the year. Heraea, a new sports-themed restaurant and lounge, opens for guests by the end of the year. In addition Palms will be expanding its food offerings in the Bistro Buffet as well as adding two new outlets to The Eatery. The property renovations also will elevate the Palms' signature nightlife outlets. Renovations are expected to be completed by year's end. The boutique property boasts three distinct towers and a diverse mix of bars and restaurants across a 95,000-sf casino and more than 60,000 sf of meeting space. www.palms.com



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SNAPSHOTS



1 More than 225 travel industry professionals gathered on June 26 in Washington, DC, for a tribute event to remember the life and legacy of the late Gary Sain, president and CEO of Visit Orlando (also see page 4). Pictured (l to r) are members of the tribute's steering committee: John Graham, ASAE; Deborah Sexton, PCMA; Dr. Holsenbeck, Rosen College of Hospitality Management; Pam Sain; Bill Carteaux, SPI; Danielle Courtenay, Visit Orlando; and Roger Dow, U.S. Travel. **2** DMAI's Destinations Showcase Chicago took place June 27 at the Donald E. Stephens Convention Center in Rosemont, IL. **3** Guadalajara hosted Meeting Place Mexico June 3–6. **4** AIBTM recorded a record number of attendees and exhibiting companies June 19–21 at the Baltimore Convention Center. **5** Gary Loveman, chairman, CEO and president of Caesars Entertainment Inc., addressed the Hospitality Industry Technology Exposition and Conference, at the Baltimore Convention Center June 25–28. **6** Erica Westmyer, sales executive, Anaheim Marriott, accepts the Best Overall Booth Award from HSMIA's Director of Chapter Relations Margie Sheffer (r) at HSMIA's MEET West May 30–31 in Anaheim. **7** The CMP Conclave convened at the Tampa Marriott Waterside Hotel & Marina June 9–11. **8** Attendees at the IRF's Annual Incentive Invitational enjoyed the San Antonio History Quest event at the JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa May 30–June 3.

1. Steve Canning Photography; 2. Curt Cechowicz; 3. Paradox Photography; 4. AIBTM; 5. Hospitality Financial and Technology Professionals; 6. Ambience Photography; 7. CIC; 8. Specialty Imaging International/IRF

By Drew Ross, Ph.D.

Turning Technology Disruptions Into Opportunities

Let's face it: In our always-on world, it isn't easy to turn off. But no meeting planner wants to invest in a speaker or programming for an event when the audience's attention is more focused on smartphone screens, Web surfing and whispered discussions. At a professional meeting or convention, these back-channel interactions can seem to be disruptive and even rude.

But instead of fighting against them, why not turn these many means of communication to your advantage? With the right technology and tools, plus a little foresight, meeting planners can turn rudeness and distractions into effective ways to engage audiences, forge meaningful connections and even raise the profile of an event. Consider these tactics:

- **Expect and plan for back-channel communication.** Smart meeting planners and organizers know that side conversations of both the in-person and virtual kind stop for nothing — not even for the keynote.
- **Take time to plan out and create virtual and in-person parallel sessions, gathering spaces and conversation areas for those wishing to share feedback, more closely explore specific ideas and create groups for further collaboration.** Almost any conversation that can be created in a physical space can also be taken online via any number of means, including using a dedicated hashtag on Twitter, developing a Facebook page or creating a wiki or blog.
- **Think in terms of more, not less, room collaboration.** Think that these “distractions” decrease the potential for collaboration? Think again! Giving people the space — literally and figuratively — to fully communicate before,

after and even during an event allows them to collaborate in ways that go far beyond an email, a raised hand or a follow-up note. Using technologies such as collaborative workspaces and interactive learning management systems (LMS), event organizers can create communities of interaction and communities of practice through event-themed discussions, chats and even tweets.

- **Remove the temptation for distraction by shifting to online environments for increased engagement and interaction.** Many training events and presentations do not actually demand face-to-face interaction. Why not switch up the location and mode of delivery of your events? Shifting to online environments allows people to engage from their own offices or homes, and it's much more cost-effective as well.
- **In addition, time shifting and making the sessions asynchronous allows participants to get involved whenever and wherever they are most interested and excited.** This flexibility removes some of the sense of obligation of sitting in a room and watching a presentation while distracted. Depending on the nature of the event, there may also be opportunities for creating and disseminating audio-video downloads, smartphone apps and/or mobile-friendly websites.
- **Be flexible and ready for change in real time.** With the right input before, during and after an event, you can tailor content and focus on what your attendees want, even if what they want is always evolving.
- **Prior to an event, communication can be**



My Anaheim Experience



At this year's California Dental Association show, *CDA Presents the Art and Science of Dentistry*, everyone worked together to help our exhibitors in a way that felt like we were all on the same team. This kind of service makes Anaheim a partner in supporting loyalty among exhibitors. —*Debi Irwin, Vice President, California Dental Association*



Watch Anaheim's labor video to hear from recent exhibitors themselves at anaheimoc.org/labor-works.

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started and encouraged via a variety of technology channels, such as a website poll, a well-timed email sequence or a dedicated event page on a website.

Through any of these interactive pathways — and by informing audience members that their input will actually help build the event content — organizers can gain insight into which topics attendees would like covered, what moves them and how to best speak to them in a way that will encourage engagement and action.

- **During the actual event, get a real-time measure of what's getting through — and what's not.** Presenters can make on-the-fly changes to content in direct response to their monitoring of real-time interactions, such as in a participant-only forum or through following a specific hashtag on Twitter. What's more, instead of discouraging the use of smartphones during the program, encouraging tweeting, Facebook status updates or check-ins and other public declarations of presence and interest will go a long way toward the presentation of more relevant content. Encouraging social

networking during your event also raises its online visibility and can draw others not present at the event into the conversation, too, enriching the discussion even further.

- **After the event, the opportunities for ongoing connection, valuable feedback and targeted follow-up are endless.**

Monitoring online spaces and being sure to respond to comments, questions and issues as quickly as possible are musts. And, while you have the attention and interest of participants, start promoting your next event...with their input, of course.

What does all of this mean for organizations like yours? Giving your audience members permission to learn, interact and communicate in multiple ways that work best for them will, ultimately, work best for you and your event as well. Whether in the form of increased back-channel communications, new possibilities for collaboration, additional online spaces for information exchange or the potential richness of real-time audience feedback, opportunities for deeper communication and interaction are both exciting and plentiful. Don't ignore the whispers in your audience — make them work for you. **C&IT**

“Don't ignore **the whispers in your audience** — make them work for you.”

Drew Ross, Ph.D.

Since 2009, New York City-based Drew Ross, Ph.D. has served as the dean of the School of Graduate Education at Chicago-headquartered Kaplan University, where he first started three years earlier as a part-time teacher. Ross' research in online learning focuses on online communities of adults, organizational theory and qualitative data analysis. He earned his doctorate at Oxford University in England and returned to New York City in 2004, where he founded an online learning consulting firm. drewross@kaplan.edu



Odds on Favorites Gaming Resorts That Improve Your Chances of a Successful Meeting

By George Seli



Photo courtesy of Mohegan Sun

Mississippi



Beau Rivage Resort & Casino

Like a poker player who recovers from being dealt a bad hand, Beau Rivage Resort & Casino's corporate group business has been challenged by Katrina, followed by the recession and then the

Gulf oil spill, but is now on the upswing. One sign is the \$3 million the property invested into renovating its convention floor, a project completed at the end of last year.

The Biloxi, MS, resort has also thrived despite being in a destination that does not immediately come to mind for planners interested in a gaming locale; rather, they'll think of the usual suspects: Las Vegas, Atlantic City and Connecticut. "The location is not within the general area that you would consider for a casino or resort, but more planners should consider this property because of its affordability, elegance, customer service, food and grand style of presentation," remarks Jeannie Van Hoesen,

sourcing specialist for Maxvantage, a strategic alliance between Maritz Travel and American Express Business Travel that provides global strategic meetings management services. "It's a 'mini Bellagio' and a bit of Las Vegas in the South," she says.

Van Hoesen was recently onsite to experience the property's first full convention-level renovation since it reopened in 2006. Her impressions were positive, to say the least: "With any renovations, you always have the 'clean and new' sensation, and that is the case with Beau Rivage. The renovations were well thought out in that the meeting space is located on one level (second floor) that is accessible to the casino by escalator/el-

evator. One nice aspect is that the sound from the casino does not travel up to the meeting space. The layout includes boardrooms, ballrooms, registration desk, business center and bathrooms all within proximity for attendees. There was a meeting in progress when I went on the site visit, and everyone was organized with plenty of space for movement. The colors of the carpet, walls and lighting all reflect the grandeur of this sophisticated venue."

Part of MGM Resorts International, the 1,740-room, AAA Four Diamond Beau Rivage has much to offer corporate groups besides gaming, including 10 restaurants, a retail promenade with 11 upscale shops, a Tom Fazio golf course, and a spa that has been ranked by *Travel+Leisure* as one of the top 20 hotel spas in the U.S. Planners can make use of 50,000 sf of convention space as well as a state-of-the-art theater. Groups that do want to emphasize the gaming aspect can run a tournament with the assistance of the hotel, pending Mississippi Gaming Commission approval (which is generally not a difficult process). For example, some of the slot department's latest games can be turned to tournament mode. At the very least, attendees can enjoy relaxing Gulf views (with occasional speedboat races) from their guest rooms or the veranda.

Reno/Tahoe, Nevada



Peppermill Resort Spa Casino

Another gaming destination that is sometimes overshadowed by Las Vegas in the meetings market is Reno/Tahoe, billed as America's Adventure Place. Its attractions are on display across five LCD, flat-screen TVs that are part of the Grand Sierra Resort and Casino's new lobby, courtesy of an ongoing \$25 mil-

lion improvement project. The resort has also debuted new carpeting and check-in counters, a new ultra lounge called WET and a tequila bar. Still to come are upgrades to the convention center, health club and spa. Redondo Beach, CA-based STN Media Group, a marketing services firm and publisher of *School Transportation News*, realized the virtues of the property long before these improvements: The company has held its School Bus Expo at the Grand Sierra for 15 years, drawing around 1,500 bus operators in the public and private sectors, nationally and internationally. Travel logistics are smooth, thanks to the Reno-Tahoe Airport's free, three-minute shuttle access to Grand Sierra. The event, which runs July 21-25 this year, includes education, networking and a trade show, which is entirely contained at the Grand Sierra.

Unlike gaming resorts on the Las Vegas Strip, there isn't a great deal of motivation for attendees to venture outside of the nearly 2,000-room Grand Sierra, which offers more than 200,000 sf of meeting space. "We're huge on networking and social events, and the Grand Sierra provides a great environment for that," says Tony Corpin, president. "Attendees tend to stay on-property, so whether they're in the elevator or the hotel bar, they see everyone they know. And we have a captive audience for our vendors." STN hosts its welcome reception at the hotel bar, which features glass walls and waterfalls. The concluding STN Industry Social is held at both the grand ballroom and out by the pool, "where we do more of a Hawaiian exotic theme, and the hotel has been able to provide us with everything from fire-breathers to craps and blackjack tables for a casino-based party."

Janna Smeltzer, account executive with STN, who has been planning the expo for the last four years, notes that she "personally wanted to change the casino-themed party because we're already at a casino." She expects to be visiting the Grand Sierra soon in order to experience the latest renovations and "see if there's a new spot for our welcome party." The resort sources all entertain-

ment for the socials, and the staff, says Smeltzer, has offered very personalized service over the years: "One of our CSMs knew what temperature all of our staff likes their rooms and would personally go to all of our rooms before we arrived to make sure that it was comfortable for us. They even know kind of wine we all drink." STN provides its attendees "ample downtime" during the event so that they can enjoy the casino and other amenities, Corpin notes.

Another great option in Reno is the AAA Four Diamond Peppermill Resort Spa Casino, which offers a broad range of meeting facilities totaling 106,000 sf, including 62,000 sf of clear-span space, which can handle up to 340 exhibit booths or 3,400 for dinner. A recent \$15.8 million renovation updated meeting space and 395 guest rooms in the Peppermill Tower, and added a two-story, 4,000-sf high-tech executive boardroom. The resort can accommodate any size group, with a total of 1,635 guest rooms, including the 600-room all-suite Tuscan Tower. Amenities include the 43,000-sf Spa & Salon Toscana, which features a caldarium with indoor pool, a 100,000-sf casino, 16 bars and lounges, and 10 award-winning restaurants. On a sustainability note, geothermal energy now provides 100 percent of resort's heating needs.

Las Vegas, Nevada



The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino

In a gaming destination of Las Vegas' magnitude, there is always something new for attendees to experience. Las Vegas is long past pushing the envelope on the casino front and is now becoming a top culinary destination. Caesars Entertainment's hotels are no exception to this trend, with two top steak houses recently opening: Gordon Ramsay Steak



Gaming 101

While gaming is a surefire attraction for many attendees, there will be those who are still unsure about stepping onto the casino floor. Caesars Entertainment is developing a kind of gaming primer in a removed section of the casino where neophytes can learn about gaming in a comfortable, social atmosphere. “We can replicate it for groups as well,” says Amy Allen, director of marketing for Caesars Entertainment, adding that the program will likely be tested at Flamingo Las Vegas. The original motivation for the initiative was to “try to get more females to play table games,” Allen explains. “When we look at our gaming customer database, which has about 40 million people, it’s about 50/50 men and women. But when we look at the people that play table games, it’s only about 20 percent women, a disproportionately low number.” — GS



at the Paris Las Vegas and Center Cut Steakhouse at Flamingo Las Vegas. The former establishment, which celebrates both Chef Ramsay’s English heritage and his French culinary training, offers 274 seats, a private dining room and a “behind the scenes” tour of the exclusive beef-aging program created under the direction of Chef Ramsay. The latter features beef sourced from Aspen Ridge Farms in Colorado and accommodates up to 172 guests in the bar, lounge, restaurant and private dining room.

Gaming hasn’t exactly receded into the background as an attraction for Las Vegas-bound groups, but its entertainment proposition is now seen more holistically, encompassing the latest in dining, shows and resort experiences. Next year, among Caesars’ offerings will be The Linq, a \$550 million outdoor retail, dining and entertainment district at the heart of the Strip that includes a 550-foot-high observation wheel.

Amy Allen, director of marketing for Caesars Entertainment, notes, “Many people come here to gamble, but I think just as many people come here that don’t, and we certainly see with our meeting groups that they’re not choosing the destination because of the gambling in and of itself, but because of the collection of offerings.”

According to Allen, meetings business is “definitely up” across Caesars’ 38 properties “despite some of the

challenges we’ve had over the last couple of years, particularly with resort-type destinations like Las Vegas.” Corporate clients, she says, have rediscovered the importance of offsite meetings as well as the value of Las Vegas as a meeting destination.

Last fall Caesars reorganized its meetings businesses into a single department under one leadership team, extending benefits to planners originally introduced under the Las Vegas Meetings by Caesars Entertainment brand, such as the Meeting Diamond program, to meetings at all 38 properties, as well as providing the ability to mix-and match properties and venues within a destination with a single contact, contract and minimum.

Caesars’ top hotel for both Las Vegas meetings and incentives is the 3,960-room Caesars Palace. “For incentives you’re looking at the more luxury end of the spectrum, so a property like Caesars Palace certainly is appealing not only because it’s luxurious but also because it has such a recognizable name,” Allen says. “It also happens to be our property that has the most meeting space (300,000 sf), so it’s also the property where we do the most business meetings.” Speaking of luxury, the new 668-room Octavius Tower opened in January at Caesars Palace. And later this year, the Nobu Hotel at Caesars Palace, and Nobu Restaurant and Lounge at Caesars Palace debut.

Meanwhile, the 3,460-room Flamingo Las Vegas will complete the refurbishment of 2,307 of its standard guest rooms, now dubbed FAB Rooms for their fabulous contemporary style, at the end of this year. The Flamingo offers 73,000 sf of meeting space.

From the Flamingo, the oldest hotel on The Strip, to one of the newest, MGM Resorts International’s AAA Five Diamond Aria Resort & Casino is centerpiece to the CityCenter campus, which features Crystals, a 500,000-sf entertainment, dining and shopping complex. Aria has 4,004 guest rooms and suites, 300,000 sf of meeting space including four ballrooms, and 150,000 sf of gaming.

When it comes to sheer size of meeting facilities in one hotel property, MGM Grand claims the No. 2 spot as most expansive in the city with 602,000 sf of meeting and convention space. (According to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino is No. 1 at 1.6 million sf.) The 5,044-room MGM Grand is currently undergoing a \$160 million makeover of 3,570 guest rooms and 642 suites in the main tower that will be completed early this fall. Coming in December is the new nightclub Hakkasan, which replaces Studio 54.

But Las Vegas Sands Corporation wins the overall meeting space race with its complex comprising the AAA

Five Diamond Venetian and Palazzo resorts, and the Sands Expo and Convention Center, totaling 2.25 gross million sf. The complex is the largest LEED-certified building in the world. The 4,000-room Venetian Resort Hotel Casino chips in 510,000 sf of the total meeting space including the 85,000-sf Venetian Ballroom. Features include gondola rides along the Grand Canal Shoppes, the Canyon Ranch SpaClub, and headliner and production shows, including Blue Man Group and Phantom.

The Southwest



Inn of the Mountain Gods

Outdoor activities abound at the Inn of the Mountain Gods, located near Ruidoso, NM, in Mescalero, home of The Mescalero Apache Tribe. Most of the resort’s 273 guest rooms offer views of Sierra Blanca, the 12,000-foot peak in the Sacramento Mountains of the Southern Rockies, as does the 72-par Mountain Gods Resort Championship Golf Course, designed by Ted Robinson. Everything from skiing, horseback riding and bird watching to gaming in the 38,000-sf casino is available for attendees, who can convene in the resort’s 15 configurable meeting rooms, totaling 40,000 sf.

Midland, TX-based HNB Mortgage has been holding a training meeting and retreat at the Inn for four years, according to Marketing Coordinator Diane Klein, who plans the event. The training begins en route to the Inn on an All Aboard America! bus that the company rents, and once onsite “our employees enjoy activities such as golfing, skiing, gaming and shopping in town, where there are so many cute boutiques to see,” Klein relates. Among the small group of 21 employees, most partake

of golfing and/or gaming, so the Inn is a good fit. And there are the exciting live concerts and performers to experience. “The resort staff always accommodates us to keep our attendees together during shows,” says Klein.

Performances at the Talking Stick Resort in Scottsdale, AZ, take place in its 750-seat Showroom, which doubles as a nightclub after hours. For even more entertainment options, the 497-

room resort has recently launched Lucky Express, a shuttle that will drive guests to and from some of Scottsdale’s prime destinations, such as Scottsdale Fashion Square and Scottsdale Quarter, a shopping, dining and entertainment district.

But attendees don’t have far to go for great golf: Talking Stick Golf Club, a championship-caliber golf layout managed by Troon Golf, is adjacent to the resort. Onsite is the massive Casino

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Arizona, at 240,000 sf, and ample resources for serious business: a total of 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space, including a 25,000-sf grand ballroom. Cultural education is also available at the resort, which has a collection of Pima and Maricopa tribal art.

The Pacific Northwest



Tulalip Resort Casino

Indeed, gaming resorts can serve as a fascinating introduction to a particular Native American tribe's heritage, and the Tulalip Resort Casino, located in Tulalip, WA, near Seattle, is no exception. Artworks of the Coast Salish peoples (which include the Tulalip tribe), such as sculpture and traditional cedar baskets, decorate the 370-room hotel, which houses 30,000 sf of meeting space, including a 15,000-sf grand ballroom. Adjacent to the meeting areas is the Indoor Oasis Pool, which can also serve as a unique function space, as can the 450-seat Canoes Cabaret.

The Northeast



MGM Grand at Foxwoods and Foxwoods Resort Casino

The Northeast is of course much more identified with gaming than the Northwest, thanks to the Atlantic City, Connecticut and Pennsylvania gaming markets. Always ahead of the curve in Atlantic City is Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, a massive property with 2,000

guest rooms, 70,000 sf of event space, 161,000 sf of gaming and a 54,000-sf spa. Recently, Borgata unveiled a \$1 million renovation of its 21,500-sf poker room, including the debut of an exclusive high-limit poker lounge — The Boardroom. And a \$50 million room redesign project is scheduled for completion this month. The project will completely refurbish 1,566 “classic” guest rooms and corridors.

Foxwoods, located in Mashantucket, CT, on the Mashantucket Pequot Indian Reservation, also features renovations across the 317 guest rooms in its Great Cedar Hotel. The upgrades were completed earlier this year, and a complete renovation is planned for Foxwoods' signature hotel, the Grand Pequot Tower. Also, Foxwoods and the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation have joined with the Gordon Group to develop a 300,000-sf retail outlet shopping complex. Construction is expected to begin late in 2012. Foxwoods Resort Casino and MGM Grand at Foxwoods house a total of 150,000 sf of meeting space.

Foxwoods' only major competitor in the area is the 1,200-room Mohegan Sun, located on 240 acres along the Thames River in Uncasville in southeastern Connecticut. Mohegan Sun's convention center's 100,000-plus sf of meeting and function space includes the 38,000-sf Uncas Ballroom, which is divisible into 10 separate meeting rooms, and more than 14,000 sf of prefunction space. Planners also have at their disposal Mohegan Sun's 10,000-seat Arena, which can be transformed into 30,000 sf of exhibition space; a 17,500-sf outdoor terrace; the 350-seat Cabaret Theatre; the 300-seat Wolf Den; and Mohegan Sun Country Club at Pautipaug for outdoor and golfing events. Attendees can also enjoy offsite diversions such as museums, antique shops and the waterfront of Mystic Country.

Pennsylvania's gaming market is certainly up-and-coming, with recent gaming revenues in its 11 casinos outpacing New Jersey and second only to Las Vegas, according to a report in *USA Today*. The state's first casino opened in 2006, and its latest is the Valley Forge

Casino Resort, which opened in March. The 486-room resort features 100,000 sf of function space.

In 2009, the Sands Casino Resort Bethlehem debuted on the site of the historic Bethlehem Steel plant located approximately an hour from Philadelphia. Among its highlights are a 150,000-sf casino and restaurants by celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse. The 302-room hotel offers 5,000 sf of meeting space and 3,000 sf of pre-function and exhibit space. Future plans include the construction of an additional 50,000 sf of meeting and function space. Newly opened are the Sands Bethlehem Events Center, featuring live entertainment, and the luxury Shoppes at Sands.

The Southeast



Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino

In the Southeast, the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino near Fort Lauderdale in Hollywood, FL, recently completed a \$7.8 million renovation of its 481 guest rooms and suites. The property offers approximately 40,000 sf of function space, including a 16,000-sf grand ballroom divisible into eight sections and several smaller rooms for breakouts or board meetings. A 7,000-sf poolside function area is also available. During free time, attendees can immerse themselves in the resort's 130,000-sf casino, the Rock Spa, and a lush tropical pool area with a theme-park-style water slide and authentic Seminole Chickee cabanas, which certainly makes for a Florida-style gaming experience.

A group will doubtless have a pleasurable and productive time at any of today's upscale gaming resorts. With all of their diversions, amenities and top-notch meeting space, they are resorts first and foremost, and gaming destinations second. **C&IT**



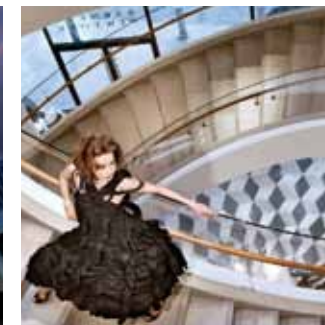
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Part of MGM Grand's \$160 million remodel, the Skyline Marquee Suite is among the 642 suites redesigned with stylish finishes, fabrics and features.

Photo courtesy of MGM Grand Las Vegas

New and Renovated

Rising Demand Spurs a Wave of Debuts and Redos From Coast to Coast

By John Buchanan

Now that the meeting industry is returning to its pre-recession glory — and growth — a wave of new hotel construction and high-profile renovations of well-known properties is sweeping across the country.

One significant sea change: Some of the most acclaimed new entries are sprouting up in destinations that were considered second-tier before the economic meltdown of 2008–2009. Now, places such as Baton Rouge, Minneapolis and even Wyandotte, OK, are planning to go head to head with their better known and larger competitors, while established destinations such as Nashville and Austin jockey for enhanced market share.

New and Noteworthy Debuts

Hyatt Hotels will debut its first luxury hotel in New York City later this year with the highly anticipated opening of the Park Hyatt Hotel New York. Designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Christian de Portzamparc, the \$375 million, 210-room property will be located on West 57th Street, across from Carnegie Hall. The hotel, which will become the U.S. flagship of the acclaimed Park Hyatt brand and include a trendy restaurant and bar, will be part of a 90-story mixed-use project that will include 5,000 sf of retail space.

In late 2013, Omni Hotels & Resorts will debut its new, \$250 million, 800-room Omni Nashville Hotel, which will

serve as the headquarters hotel for the new, 1.2-million-sf Music City Center convention center complex also opening next year. The Omni Nashville, which also will be connected to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, will feature more than 80,000 sf of meeting and event space, including 25,000- and 15,000-sf ballrooms. As a result of booming demand for Nashville as a destination, the property has already booked more than 55 major meetings and conventions totaling more than 100,000 room nights.

Yet another celebrated debut will be the \$137.5 million, 500-room Radisson Blu Mall of America opening on the outskirts of Minneapolis next March.

Located just minutes from Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport, the new property will be the second outpost of the Radisson Blu brand, hailed for its innovative design and modern comfort. The property, which will become the first hotel to be connected by skyway to the landmark Mall of America, will feature 26,300 sf of meeting space, including two ballrooms, and a FireLake Grill House & Cocktail Bar showcasing American cuisine.

A new \$300 million, 1,012-room JW Marriott Austin will open in Texas in March 2015. Located two blocks from the Austin Convention Center, the new hotel will feature more than 110,000 sf of meeting space. Designed to be on the cutting edge of green initiatives, the JW Marriott Austin will seek LEED Silver certification, as well as a two-star Austin Energy Green Building rating.

In Baton Rouge, the new \$368 million, 575-acre, 206-room L'Auberge Casino & Hotel, scheduled to open this summer with 12,580 of meeting and event space that includes concert seating for up to 1,600 attendees, will be the cornerstone of a state-of-the-art casino entertainment complex that will include a 74,000-sf casino. The hotel, designed by Las Vegas-based Marnell Architecture, creators of such fabled properties as Bellagio, Caesars Palace and Wynn Las Vegas, as well as Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa in Atlantic City, is modeled after a Southern river lodge. L'Auberge Casino & Hotel will feature a rooftop pool with sweeping views of the Mississippi River. Its dining and entertainment amenities will embrace Louisiana's unique culture and heritage.

Competing for smaller groups that want some casino action will be the new, \$85 million, 117-room Bordertown Bingo & Casino Hotel, located in Wyandotte, OK, and owned by the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma. The hotel, opening in September, will feature an 80,000-sf, two-story casino.

A new, \$140 million, 532-room

Hilton Columbus Downtown will open in September in Columbus, OH. Connected by a pedestrian bridge to the 1.7-million-sf Greater Columbus Convention Center, the Hilton Columbus Downtown will feature 31,000 sf of meeting space and an atrium with an all-glass ceiling. The property, conveniently located at the intersection of the city's entertainment/arts and business districts, also will feature a Gallerie Bar & Bistro and a Hilton Fitness by Precor fitness center with an indoor pool and whirlpool.

A new, \$120 million, 360-room Margaritaville Hollywood Beach — a joint venture between the City of Hollywood, FL, and a private developer partnered with legendary singer Jimmy Buffett — is tentatively scheduled to make its much-touted debut in August 2014. The property, located in five acres along Hollywood Beach Boardwalk, will feature 35,000 sf of meeting space, 30,000 sf of restaurant and bar space including a 1,600-sf Landshark Bar & Grill on the Intracoastal Waterway, and 6,500 sf of retail space.

Meanwhile, already open in the perennially popular Phoenix market is the new, 121-room DoubleTree by Hilton Phoenix-Gilbert, located in an eastern suburb of the Valley of the Sun just 15 minutes from downtown Phoenix.



The newly renovated 563-unit Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort, Phoenix, AZ, features nearly 50,000 sf of meeting space.

Photo courtesy of Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort

Formerly a Radisson property, the new DoubleTree by Hilton Phoenix-Gilbert features 15,000 sf of meeting space, including the 9,963 sf San Tan Elegante ballroom. The hotel's locally popular Brock's Restaurant and Bar has been re-



One of the redesigned rooms at Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa in Atlantic City.

designed and features hand-crafted bistrot-style American comfort food with a Mediterranean twist, based on locally sourced seasonal ingredients.

Also in Phoenix, Kimpton's Hotel Palomar Phoenix at CityScape opened its doors in June in the heart of downtown Phoenix, marking the completion of CityScape Phoenix — a \$500 million mixed-used development of shops, restaurants, bars, entertainment venues and offices. The 242-room hotel features more than 10,000 sf of art-infused meeting space across 10 event rooms.

A Wave of Renovations and Expansions

Now that the meetings market is in full-throttle recovery, major hotels and resorts across the country have undertaken major facelifts and expansions.

In Phoenix, for example, the 563-unit, all-suite Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort has completed a contemporary new design of its lobby and 6,362-sf Palacio event venue. The 27-acre, Spanish-Mediterranean resort, with 49,800 sf of meeting space, nestled into the slopes of the Phoenix North Mountains, is bordered by 3,000 acres of Sonoran Desert. Located adjacent to the hotel is acclaimed Rico's American Grill, serving fresh farm-to-table cuisine with Southwestern flair. The property's resort

amenities include Hole-in-the-Wall River Ranch, a sprawling four-acre complex that includes waterfalls, secluded waterways, three swimming pools and a lazy river for tubing, an 18-hole putting course and a 130-foot waterslide, as well

as a 3,000-sf Rodeo Drive retail center. The Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort also features the 10,000-sf Tocasierra Spa, Salon & Fitness center.

Not far away is the rebranded, 19-story, 520-room Renaissance Phoenix Downtown, which earned a prestigious American Society for Interior Design (ASID) Award for hospitality design. Conveniently located near Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport and the Phoenix Convention Center, the property features more than 60,000 sf of meeting space, a full-service business center and fitness center.

Another local area landmark, the 649-room Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, will debut a new, \$20 million, 52,331-sf conference center that will bring the property's total meeting space to 150,000 sf. The addition will include a new 23,000-sf Palomino Ballroom. The facilities will feature the latest meeting technology, including state-of-the-art audio-visual capabilities.

One of the most revered meeting resorts in the U.S., the Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, is in the first phase of a \$60 million, multiyear renovation that recently included the re-opening of its Southlake Building rooms and suites, as well as a new exterior for Cheyenne Lodge, one of the property's premier meeting and event facilities. Opened in 1918, The Broadmoor features 744 rooms and 185,000 sf of space. The ongoing renovation project will include a facelift for all guest rooms and suites, as well as extensive updates to its meeting and event facilities and F&B operations. The master plan also includes a new activity center.

Two other major meeting properties, the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center outside Washington, DC, and Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center in Kissimmee, FL, outside Orlando, also have completed renovation projects.

The 2,000-room Gaylord National in National Harbor, MD, with 470,000 sf of space, debuted a new 15,000-sf RiverView Terrace outdoor special event venue along the Potomac River in May.

The 1,406-room Gaylord Palms, with 400,000 sf of meeting and convention space, has completed a \$50 million renovation that included upgrades to all guest rooms, as well as new event venues such as the 10,000-sf Coquina Lawn outdoor space and a new adults-only South Beach Pool lined with tropical palm trees and featuring fully stocked private cabanas, white couches, oversized chairs and an acrylic stage over the pool. New facilities for meeting and event planners include two new planner offices located just steps away from the resort's ballrooms.

The 2,000-room Borgata Hotel



La Costa Resort and Spa, located near San Diego, CA, recently debuted its new 50,000-sf Coastal Events Center.

Southern California

A pair of time-honored San Diego-area landmarks, La Costa Resort and Spa and Hotel del Coronado, have undergone extensive renovations.

At La Costa, which features 611 rooms and 110,000 sf of meeting space, a new Coastal Events Center opened last May featuring 50,000 sf of new space including the Costa Del Sol Ballroom and the outdoor 50,000-sf Vista Terrace La Costa. The expansion also included the addition of four dedicated meeting planner suites conveniently located near the new event complex. La Costa, long honored as one of the premier golf and spa resorts in the country, also has completed a renovation of 474 of its guest rooms.

The 757-room Hotel del Coronado, built in 1888 and designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1977, completed an \$8 million renovation of the 368 guest rooms and suites located in its original, 124-year-old original building. The globally celebrated property, located on Coronado Island in San Diego and named one of the top 10 hotels in the world by *USA Today*, features 65,000 sf of meeting space.

The nearby, 440-room Loews Coronado Bay Resort, with 65,000 sf of space, will complete a \$12 million multi-phase renovation in December of its lobby, Bay Terrace, Cays Lounge, Market Café and Market to Go facilities.

The 18-acre, 357-room Hilton San Diego Resort & Spa, located on Mission Bay just six miles from San Diego International Airport and featuring 25,000 sf of space, completed a \$1.1 million renovation of its meeting facilities in January. The project included extensive refurbishment of the property's prefunction space, three main ballrooms, breakout rooms and public foyers. The hotel is currently upgrading its wireless Internet systems and audio-visual technology, as well as upgrading televisions throughout the

conference center to high-definition, flat-screen sets.

Located in downtown San Diego's wildly popular Gaslamp Quarter arts-and-entertainment district, the 450-room Westin Gaslamp Quarter, with more than 35,000 sf of event space, is in the final phase of a \$25 million renovation that includes the addition of the new 5,940-sf San Diego Ballroom and adjoining 5,752-sf outdoor Garden Terrace. The existing 9,064-sf California Ballroom, three large meeting rooms and eight breakout rooms also are getting a facelift.

Another time-honored Southern California property, the 444-room Las Palmas Resort & Spa, located in Rancho Mirage, outside Palm Springs, is in the midst of a \$3.5 million renovation. The first phase, a renovation of its ballrooms and prefunction space and the addition of a new, intimate executive meeting space, will be completed in July. This fall, Rancho Las Palmas, with 41,000 sf of meeting space, will begin a renovation of its swimming pools and spa and double the size of its fitness center. The project also will include a freshening of its lobby, plaza and dining areas. In addition, the resort's 22 suites will be renovated, with three new suites being added for a total of 25.

Las Vegas and Reno

The AAA Four Diamond, 5,044-room MGM Grand in Las Vegas, with 602,000 sf of meeting facilities, will complete a \$160 million renovation of the 3,570 rooms and 642 suites in its main tower in September. The internationally renowned property features world-class amenities such as the "KÀ" show from Cirque du Soleil and the Michelin Three Star, Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond restaurant from superstar celebrity chef Joel Robuchon, hailed as the most important chef of the last 100 years. Accommodations within the vast complex include The Mansion, an

exclusive hotel within the hotel, and The Signature at MGM Grand, an all-suite, non-gaming hotel located adjacent to the main resort.

Sister properties also operated in Las Vegas by MGM Resorts International also have completed renovations.

In January, the 3,933-room



The 1,193-room Hyatt Regency New Orleans doubled its meeting and exhibition space to 200,000 sf and features two 25,000-sf ballrooms including the Celestin Ballroom (top right).

the project, in a statement. "Using the grand canvas of a hotel, we were able to elaborate on the use of hand-crafted, curated materials that create a luxurious effect and provide a world-class



Nobu experience." Nobu Hotel guests also will have private access to the adjacent 11,200-sf restaurant and lounge with priority seating and 24-hour access to Nobu cuisine through the first-ever in-room dining menu. The menu will include popu-

lar Japanese items, along with Nobu's signature twists on American classics. The 3,767-room Circus Circus, with 21,400 sf of space, has completed a renovation of 1,900 of its guest rooms in the Casino and Skyrise Towers. Amenities at Circus Circus include the five-acre indoor theme park Adventuredome, which can accommodate groups of up to 4,000.

In Reno, the 1,990-room Grand Sierra Resort, with 200,000 sf of meeting space, has completed a \$25 million renovation that has given it a more luxurious, contemporary look. The resort's amenities include a pair of critically acclaimed restaurants from superstar chef Charlie Palmer, as well as eight other dining options including Rim, a Pan-Asian bistro and all-you-can-eat sushi bar. Grand Sierra also features WET Ultra Lounge, a renovated Health Club at Grand Sierra, an executive business center and a bowling center.

The Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort, Spa and Casino completed a \$20 million renovation of its 398 guest rooms, Sierra Café and the Spa Terrace Conference Center. Improvements to the guest rooms included new oak furniture, new carpeting of dark gray mo-



Photo courtesy of Saddlebrook Resort

A view of the golf course from a guest room at the newly renovated 800-room Saddlebrook Resort near Tampa, FL.

cha, modern showers, locally themed artwork and jack packs — all-in-one media hubs that pair the television with laptops and media players. A \$500,000 upgrade of Hyatt's meeting space, featuring seven rooms and 3,000 sf was completed at the end of 2011. The meeting facilities stay true to the resort's contemporary "Grand Lodge" look, and now feature state-of-the-art audio-visual capabilities and drop-down screens. The all-day dining restaurant, Sierra Café, also received a facelift including contemporary oak tables and leather seating.

Southern Charm

The 1,260-room Hyatt Regency Atlanta, located on Peachtree Street in the heart of downtown Atlanta, has completed a \$65 million, property-wide renovation of its guest rooms, meeting space and restaurants. Opened in 1967, the local landmark features 180,000 sf of meeting space. Its new eateries include Sway, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner and offering tried-and-true Southern favorites such as pimiento cheese sandwiches and buttermilk fried chicken. Storys features beer-based creations, such as beer-battered fish and chips and steamed brats and kraut using locally and Georgia-brewed beers and ales.

In New Orleans, the 1,193-room Hyatt Regency New Orleans, adjacent to the Mercedes Superdome and often cited as

the city's premier meeting and convention hotel, reopened last October after being closed since Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The \$275 million redesign and revitalization project that carefully restored the property to its pre-Katrina prominence doubled its meeting and exhibition space to 200,000 sf. Facilities include two 25,000-sf ballrooms, as well as 70 meeting and banquet rooms, and 19 executive level meeting rooms, seven permanent boardrooms and more than 80,000 sf of dedicated exhibition space, highlighted by a new 50,000-sf exhibit hall.

The hotel's flagship restaurant is Borgne, from James Beard Award-winning local chef John Besh, which features casual coastal Louisiana cuisine including fresh local seafood. The hotel also includes the 8 Block Kitchen & Bar, a Starbucks and clear glass elevators.

Located in the French Quarter, the 254-room Hyatt French Quarter, with 10,660 sf of meeting space, has completed an \$18 million renovation of its exterior and interior, including new flooring and carpet and a facelift for each of its rooms.

In Florida, 30 minutes north of Tampa International Airport, the Sad-

dlebrook Resort is undergoing renovations. The 800-room resort is building exterior elevations with new accommodation entrances, staircase landings, extended patios and new balcony railings. Also, new cobblestone pavers adorn a newly landscaped courtyard. In the guest rooms, an iBAHN ETVi platform delivers an IP-based, high-definition TV viewing experience through large flat-screen TVs in all living rooms and bedrooms. New interior wall coverings in the guest rooms enhance the tropical Bahamas-style decor. In addition, the partnership with iBAHN provides the conference center with broadband offerings covering every technical demand, including private networks and an unlimited pool of IP addresses as well as VPN certification.

Saddlebrook Resort features 90,000 sf of flexible meeting and banquet space, 10 outdoor banquet private dining areas, a teambuilding course, two 18-hole golf courses and 45 tennis courts.

In South Florida, the legendary Forbes Four Star, 408-room Turnberry Isle Miami, located just north of Miami Beach and tony Aventura, has completed a \$2 million renovation of its Orchid building, one of four guest towers on the upscale 300-acre tropical resort, which is renowned for its two championship golf courses redesigned by Raymond Floyd, Celebrity Chef Michael Mina's award-winning Bourbon Steak



Photo courtesy of Turnberry Isle Miami

The exterior of the sprawling 408-room Turnberry Isle Miami, north of Miami Beach, which completed a \$2 million renovation of its Orchid building, one of four guest towers.

dlebrook Resort is undergoing renovations. The 800-room resort is building exterior elevations with new accommodation entrances, staircase landings, extended patios and new balcony railings. Also, new cobblestone pavers adorn a newly landscaped courtyard. In

restaurant, three-story Spa & Fitness Center, the elite Cañas Tennis, three relaxing pools, 40,000 sf of meeting space and private beach club.

For more information about new and renovated properties, see the following pages. **C&IT**

Turnberry Isle Miami

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

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

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

There is no shortage of recreational amenities for groups to enjoy, including two championship Raymond Floyd-redesigned golf courses, the elite Cañas Tennis, three-story Spa &

Fitness Center, private Beach Club, lagoon-style pool with private cabanas, waterslide and lazy river, and acclaimed Chef Michael Mina's Bourbon Steak.

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Aventura, FL 33180

Contact: Ben Baez

Director of Group Sales

800-661-8101

rfp-tir@TurnberryIsleMiami.com

www.TurnberryIsleMiami.com

Guest Rooms: 408

Meeting Space: 40,000 sf

Special Services & Amenities:

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

Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa

Furthering its position as the leading resort destination in the region, Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa in July completed its \$50 million room project that saw a complete redesign of 1,566 of their "classic" guest rooms and corridors.

"This redesign will ensure that we continue to deliver the world-class, luxury resort experience our guests have come to expect from Borgata," said Bob Boughner, COO of Borgata. "Our guest rooms represent a progressive departure from other hotels in the region, with impeccable attention to detail

that combines feelings of established hospitality, original touches, and smart amenities to exude absolute comfort."

Refreshed Guest Rooms

Dedicated to a full-service guest experience that blends genuine friendliness with efficient luxury, Borgata's redesign provides guests with a variety of in-room amenities coupled with personalized care that

results in rooms that are as smart as they are stylish.

Each element of the redesigned room complements the others, with cut-out floral details in the metal lamp echoed in the dark wooden headboards, and magenta ribbon swirls in the carpet reimagined in the wall art. The furniture is skillfully mismatched with English Sycamore bedside tables and desks paired with dark wooden dresser sets featuring jewel-like knobs.

A commitment to excellence is apparent in all aspects of the hotel, allowing guests to feel at home throughout the entirety of their stay. Covered by sumptuous 300 thread count Egyptian cotton sheets with Fili

D'oro linens and hypoallergenic poly-filled pillows, Borgata's signature beds welcome guests into a peaceful sleep sanctuary.

Every switch, power source and light fixture was meticulously placed for maximum accessibility. The oversized, glass-enclosed showers and ample counter space in the guest room bathrooms deliver a spa-like atmosphere.

Providing the right technology support for guests is essential, and the redesigned Borgata room delivers. Each redesigned guest room is outfitted with a 46-inch flat-screen TV, equipped with an interactive ITV solution by All-In that provides the ability to check My Borgata Rewards balances and existing reservations, explore all aspects of the property via imagery and menus, review room folios and check out without visiting the front desk. Guests will also have access to wireless, high-speed Internet access and a Bittel integrated phone unit offering multimedia functionality, including speakers, clock radio and alarm, iPod charger and player, and a USB charge port.

Fine Amenities

Located at Renaissance Pointe in Atlantic City, Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa features 2,000 guest rooms and suites; 161,000 sf of gaming; 182 gaming tables; 3,475 slot machines; the largest poker room in Atlantic City with 80+ tables; 11 retail boutiques; six acclaimed fine-dining restaurants by world-renowned chefs; six casual dining options; a 54,000-sf spa; 70,000 sf of event space; four signature nightlife experiences; and parking for 7,100 cars.

The Water Club

The resort also features Atlantic City's first cosmopolitan hotel experience, The Water Club at Borgata, with 800 guest rooms and suites; a 36,000-sf spa; 18,000 sf of meeting space; six designer retail boutiques; and five heated indoor and outdoor pools. **C&IT**

One Borgata Way
Atlantic City, NJ 08401
609-317-1000
Fax: 609-317-1075
meetings@theborgata.com
www.TheBorgata.com



Guest Rooms: 2,800 total (2,000 at Borgata and 800 at The Water Club)

Meeting Space: 70,000 sf of event space at Borgata and 18,000 sf of meeting space at The Water Club.



**GENIUS
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AT OUR
MEETINGS.**



For groups of 30 to 3,000, Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa in Atlantic City is an exceptional destination for meetings and events. Atlantic City's premier entertainment resort features thousands of square feet of flexible meeting space, two distinct hotels with splendid rooms and the area's most inviting dining and spa facilities. To take your next event to a higher level, you belong at Borgata.

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Gambling Problem? Call 1-800-GAMBLER. ©2012 Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa. All rights reserved.



Grand Sierra Resort and Casino

Grand Sierra Resort's \$25 million renovation in 2012 includes a more luxurious, contemporary look with sleek finishes, vivid colors, trendy fixtures, upgrades to the hotel's guest rooms, the grand entrance and the front lobby. In addition, several new outlets were added including Cantina — an authentic Mexican restaurant that boasts one of the largest selections of tequila in the area.

The new décor offers a more modern and relaxing ambience with a color palette of vivid orange, cream and blue hues to brighten public areas as well as guest suites. Welcoming guests is an elegant front entrance accented in white marble accompanied by playful light fixtures. Contemporary furnishings that offer comfortable gathering spaces are located just above the casino floor. A dynamic, multi-dimensional art installation of five 60-inch high-definition video screens greets hotel guests in the registration area.

The lobby has upgraded carpet, which not only complements the new check-in counters but also provides a more spacious "welcome home" feel for visitors. The Summit Suites were also updated to reflect the casino's new colorful and modern feel, and soon each guest room in the Grand Sierra Resort will follow suit.

New Entertainment and Dining Venues

The resort also opened WET Ultra Lounge, a chic, relaxing and private atmosphere that provides an intimate setting to wind down from the day.

Known as the best steak house in Reno,

Charlie Palmer Steak upgraded their CP Lounge, providing a great atmosphere for groups to congregate and dine on some of the most exquisite appetizers and entrees that Reno has to offer. From the ever-popular Lobster Corn Dogs to Ahi Tuna Sashimi, dining in Reno does not get any better than this.

Other fine-dining experiences at Grand Sierra include Briscola — a family-style Italian eatery also led by Master Chef Charlie Palmer, and Rim — a Pan-Asian bistro and all-you-can-eat sushi bar. Guests are also invited to enjoy The Lodge Buffet, Café Sierra and 2nd Street Express, as well as convenient dining options such as Johnny Rockets, Starbucks, Port of Sub and Round Table Pizza.

The Health Club at Grand Sierra recently received fresh paint, new flooring and all-new daily group fitness classes such as kick-boxing and Zumba. Still to come is an upgrade and expansion to The Spa.

More exciting changes at Grand Sierra Resort and Casino are on the drawing board. In the meantime, maximize your Reno convention planning by experiencing all that Grand Sierra Resort has to offer. For groups of any size, we will create an intimate atmosphere that your crowd will truly enjoy.

Grand Sierra Resort and Casino (GSR) is in the heart of Reno/Tahoe — America's Adventure Place. Conveniently located next to the airport, GSR is northern Nevada's most complete resort destination with 1,990 guest rooms and suites. The property offers a wide variety of accommodations for the everyday business traveler with amenities that include 200,000 sf of meeting and convention space, banquet halls, and accommodations for up to 4,000 attendees. Grand Sierra also features 10 restaurants, bars and lounges, headliner entertainment, two-screen cinema, a 50-lane championship bowling center, aqua golf driving range and much more.

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2500 E. Second Street,
Reno, Nevada 89595
866-473-6672
www.GrandSierraResort.com



Guest Rooms: 1,990
Meeting Space: 200,000 sf, 45 meeting rooms.
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We're Northern Nevada's largest convention hotel with over 200,000 sq feet of flexible meeting space, 2,000 guest rooms and suites, over 10 restaurants and bars, 50-lane bowling center, movie theater, outdoor driving range and so much more for your attendees to enjoy.



For complete details, please call 866-473-6672
or visit sales.grandsierraresort.com



MGM Grand Hotel & Casino

3799 Las Vegas Blvd. South
Las Vegas, Nevada 89109
800-929-1112
702-891-1200
Fax: 702-891-1003
Contact: Brian Keenan
Vice President of Sales
bkeenan@mgmgrand.com
www.mgmgrand.com/
meetings



Guest Rooms: 5,044 guest rooms, including 751 suites.
Meeting Space: Total of 602,000 sf includes 57 meeting rooms for 20 to 10,000 people; and the 380,000-sf MGM Grand Conference Center's indoor and outdoor meeting space with two ballrooms (first level 61,388-sf Grand Ballroom and third level 49,234-sf Premier Ballroom), and nearly 50,000 sf of prefunction space with views of The Strip and the Pool.

From A-list entertainment and award-winning restaurants to high-energy nightlife and rejuvenating amenities, the AAA Four Diamond MGM Grand provides meeting planners and attendees with the ultimate Las Vegas experience.

To maintain its high level of quality offerings, MGM Grand is undergoing a \$160 million remodel of 3,570 guest rooms and 642 suites in the hotel's main tower, scheduled for completion by September 2012. In keeping with MGM Grand's commitment to sustainability, the newly remodeled rooms incorporate environmentally responsible elements including LED lighting; improved thermostats and solar shades; and bath amenities that are 100 percent biodegradable. Visit www.TheGrandRenovation.com for renovation information and updates.

For the VIPs of the group, the rare and private sanctuary of Skylofts, a Forbes Five Star and AAA Five Diamond Award winner, provides elegant two-story accommodations high above The Strip while The Signature at MGM Grand offers an indulgent all-suite, non-gaming experience in a separate world of calm and tranquility.

Award-Winning Restaurants and Nightlife

With more AAA Diamond Award-winning restaurants under one roof than any other hotel in the world, MGM Grand offers attendees delectable dining choices to satisfy any palate. Legendary chef Joël Robuchon opened his first fine-dining restaurant in the United States at MGM Grand, Joël Robuchon, and a more casual eatery, L'Atelier de Joël

Robuchon. Since opening, his eponymous restaurant has received the Michelin Three Star, Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond and Wine Spectator "Grand" awards — the only restaurant in Las Vegas to hold all of these top honors.

After dinner, attendees are invited to experience the incredible acrobatics, thrills and action of KÀ by Cirque du Soleil or enjoy some laughs at the new Brad Garrett Comedy Club, which appropriately opened April Fools weekend. To spice up the night, MGM Grand redefines the legendary Vegas nightlife scene with Tabú, Rouge, Centrifuge, Zuri and West Wing Bar.

Opening December 2012, combining the best of dining and nightlife, is Hakkasan, an innovative concept certain to revolutionize Las Vegas nightlife and dining experiences. The transformation will expand the size of the former Studio 54, creating an indoor/outdoor space with unparalleled views of the famed Las Vegas Strip.

Meeting Facilities

Completely self-contained and smoke-free, MGM Grand's 602,000 sf of flexible meeting and convention space combines functionality and versatility with elegance and state-of-the-art technology. The multipurpose, stand-alone Marquee Ballroom provides 92,000 sf of meeting space that can accommodate up to 6,000 guests. Other highlights include three additional ballrooms (the largest is 61,388 sf); 50,000 sf of prefunction space; 57 meeting rooms; and two boardrooms. In all, MGM Grand's expansive conference space can accommodate groups of 20 to 10,000 people. Two fully staffed business centers ensure planners never find themselves without a helping hand when it comes to packages, faxes, equipment rentals and copies. A skilled team of 15 Certified Meeting Planners is also available to assist in crafting the perfect event.

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Experience MGM Grand's new rooms and suites.

MGM Grand presents GRANDer experiences thanks to an exciting makeover. Energy meets relaxation in these beautifully redesigned rooms. Each room invites with lavish linens, striking artwork and modern furnishings. Combine all that with MGM Grand's impeccable meeting facilities, dedicated staff of Certified Meeting Professionals and a wide variety of entertainment and dining options. You have the best of Las Vegas under one roof.

For more reasons to choose MGM Grand, call 1-800-278-6003 | TheGrandRenovation.com



Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel

A quick four-mile trip from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport leads you to the newly transformed Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel. Just steps away from the Phoenix Convention Center, and a light-rail ride away from the city's most unexpected gems, this sophisticated urban hotel is located in the heart of it all.

Stimulating meeting environments, creative and indigenous food and beverage, and personal REN Meeting Experts set this hotel apart from the rest. Meetings thrive at

the Renaissance Phoenix Downtown, with more than 60,000 sf of total function space including a 10,000-sf Grand Ballroom, a 20,000-sf outdoor terrace and onsite exhibition space. The moment you walk into a meeting, you feel the difference. From calm, soft lights, to engaging table elements, all aspects of the meeting rooms are designed to inspire creativity.

Local Inspiration

When you check-in to the Renaissance, you are greeted by a host of amenities, unexpected luxuries and local inspiration. Enjoy a rustic flatbread in Marston's Cafe', a Signature Martini in ICON Lounge, a swim in the heated outdoor pool, an invigorating workout in the fitness center or relax in the comfort of a stylish guest room.

For a bit of excitement outside the hotel, look to the Navigators for tips on great local spots to discover in the area. Through expert, personalized concierge service, the Navigators will ensure your attendees discover the best hidden treasures to savor, sip, shop and see. These in-the-know

guides can even create tailored experiences for your group and offer a turnkey solution for discovering the vibrancy and excitement of downtown Phoenix.

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

Reimagine Meetings and Be Rewarded

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

- One complimentary guest room for every 40 rooms actualized.
- Free high-speed Internet access in each attendee's guest room.
- 10 percent discount on in-house AV equipment.*
- Triple Marriott Rewarding Events bonus points (150,000 maximum).
- 70 percent allowable attrition.
- 2 VIP welcome amenities.
- 2 VIP round-trip airport transfers.
- 1 VIP suite upgrade.

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

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50 East Adams Street,
Phoenix, AZ 85005
Contact: William Stratton
Destination Sales Executive
602-333-5115
Fax: 602-333-5180
William.Stratton@
RenaissanceHotels.com
www.RenaissancePhoenix
Downtown.com



Guest Rooms: 520 including 86 suites.

Meeting Space: 18 meeting rooms hosted in more than 60,000 sf of total function space including a 10,000-sf Grand Ballroom, 20,000-sf outdoor terrace and onsite exhibition space.



IN THE CENTER OF THE CITY, ON THE EDGE OF SOPHISTICATION.

Introducing the newly transformed Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel. Just steps from the Phoenix Convention Center and only four miles from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, our intriguing urban retreat is ideal for savvy convention and business travelers.

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

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

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

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

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BEST PRACTICES

SMMP

The Great Debate Moves From the Talking Stage to the Action Stage

By John Buchanan

The great debate over what would become known as strategic meetings management (SMM) began more than a decade ago as a conversation about cost savings and a theoretical new best practice then called “meetings consolidation.” Since then, SMM has become a cause célèbre — and gone on to become a genuine conundrum for many organizations and meeting planners trying to wrestle it into submission. The reason: the actual implementation of a strategic meetings management program (SMMP) is nowhere near as simple or easy as it was first thought to be.

At the same time, however, no one disputes the critical importance of SMMP’s underlying intent. The issue now is simply one of the will and resources required for real success.

“We’ve been working on this for more than five years,” says Christine Gorham, CMP, CGMP, SMMC, senior manager, meeting services, at global consultancy Booz Allen Hamilton in Herndon, VA. She and her seven-person team plan 75–100 meetings each year. “And I always say we’re moving in the right direction because we’re moving forward.”

That said, Gorham quickly adds that the SMMP process has been more challenging — and at times frustratingly daunt-

ing — than she or anyone else at Booz Allen Hamilton ever foresaw going in. “We spend so much time trying to make sure that we’re researching all possible avenues and making the right decisions and that everything is perfect, rather than just saying ‘we’re going to move forward in whatever ways we can,’” Gorham says. “Otherwise, you spend a lot of time just to get people onboard and your plan lapses. You just have to push forward, even if you don’t have a perfect solution. You just have to forge ahead,” she adds.

Gorham holds one of the first Strategic Meetings Management Certifications (SMMC), the professional development certification program from the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA). (Note: The GBTA recently discontinued the SMMC as a separate designation. Nowadays, the SMMC, along with the CCTE and CGTE designations, is equivalent to the “Manager” certificate program level of the newly created GBTA Academy.)

Such relative inefficiencies and potential frustrations as outlined by Gorham are a natural result of the way SMMP exploded onto the scene as a hot topic more than five years ago.

“What we’ve done as an industry is create a business model, a best practice model,”

says Mike Malinchok, an SMMP pioneer whose work dates back a decade to the topic’s inception at what’s now the GBTA and his role as an early member of the former National Business Travel Association’s (NBTA) Groups and Meetings Committee — for whom Malinchok co-authored its first white paper on the subject. “And we’ve created a lot of publicity around SMMP that has created a lot of misperception, a lot of confusion and a lot of complexity.”

As a result, a few years ago Malinchok launched Newtown, PA-based S2K Consulting, which advises corporate clients on the implementation of SMMP. “One of the first things I talk to a client about is the fact that you have to break this down,” says Malinchok, who taught the inaugural GBTA SMMC course in 2010. “It’s not rocket science. But for most companies, implementing SMMP is not one of the core competencies of the organization.”

SMMP 101

Despite its genesis as a cost-cutting discipline, SMMP today offers three additional important benefits, says Malinchok. They are visibility into meeting activity, risk mitigation and the driving of compliance. “And,” says Malinchok, “there is no company out there that doesn’t want cost

savings, visibility into the category, risk mitigation and the driving of compliance. Every company wants all four of those things today. But the key is the prioritization of those benefits for your individual organization.” Only then can the expected benefits be made real rather than just theoretical, Malinchok says.

Given the mere promise of such clear-cut benefits, more and more companies of all sizes and shapes are now beginning to move SMMP from the talking stage to the action stage.

“Actual implementation of SMMP is finally starting to take place,” says Linda McNairy, vice president, strategic partner management at StarCite, part of Active Network, in Indianapolis, IN.

Like Malinchok, McNairy was on the SMMP train from day one. She is a past chair of the GBTA Groups and Meetings Committee and headed the committee addressing the development of an SMMP maturity model. “We’re seeing more and more corporate organizations starting to get going and implement it at some level. But that said, our data tells us that less than 20 percent of all meetings within the average organization are currently being managed within the basic parameters of SMMP.”

Meanwhile, no one knows for sure what percentage of companies have begun adoption of SMMP. Research from American Express and Meeting Professionals International found that about half of all U.S. companies now have “some semblance of SMMP,” with another 40 percent now seriously talking about

it, Malinchok says. But, he adds, similar research from GBTA suggests that only about one-third are actually engaged with SMMP — at any stage.

However, says McNairy, the financial crisis and unprecedented scrutiny of the meeting industry over the past few years have been catalysts for more interest in SMMP. “When planners were asked to account for and report on what meetings were taking place and what they were costing, many organizations realized they had no method to do that,” McNairy says. “So that gave a lot of organizations the impetus to say, ‘We’re going to have to do something about that.’”

On top of that, she says, additional new regulation in certain meeting-intensive industries, such as pharmaceuticals, forced many companies to face the reality that they needed a formal process for tracking and reporting meeting spend and any relevant compliance. “For meeting planners,” says McNairy, “the days of just doing what you want are gone.”

“You just have to push forward, even if you don’t have a perfect solution. You just have to forge ahead.”

CHRISTINE GORHAM, CMP, CGMP, SMMC
Senior Manager
Meeting Services
Booz Allen Hamilton
Herndon, VA



Challenges and Obstacles

As a now-famous — if not infamous — element of the high-profile rollout of the SMMP concept to the meetings industry, GBTA created an “SMMP wheel” that included seven essential components of a fully realized SMMP initiative — registration of the meeting or event, approval, sourcing/procurement, planning/execution, payment/expense reconciliation, data analysis/reporting and technology.

Instead of inspiring enthusiasm and participation, however, to a large extent the daunting requirements and complex tasks lurking beneath the surface of the simple language of the steps required caused many organizations and planners to fold their SMMP tent before it was even pitched. “Everybody wanted to be able to just flip a switch, or have just one kind of initiative, and put that model perfectly in place,” says McNairy. “But the reality is, to coin a phrase, that’s like trying to boil the ocean. You just can’t do it in a short amount of time. So people became intimidated. They saw what they thought was perfection, but they couldn’t see a path for how to get from point A to point B and then to that ultimate point of perfection.”

As a result, hoped-for compliance fell to unanticipated resistance — from both meeting hosts and planners at many companies.

“I think the biggest challenge for most companies is the whole concept of change management,” says Wendy Dell, CMP, SMMC, director, business development, strategic meetings management, in the Atlanta office of Chicago-based BCD Meetings & Incentives, an inde-

“There is no company out there that doesn’t want cost savings, visibility into the category, risk mitigation and the driving of compliance. But the key is the prioritization of those benefits for your individual organization.”

MIKE MALINCHOK, President, S2K Consulting
Newtown, PA



One of the key reasons why SMMP has turned out to be so hard to implement has been the mythology that swirls around it. A spokesperson from technology provider Cvent in Mclean, VA, has identified misperceptions that often stall forward motion:

SMMP is too complex and hard to implement.

Although SMMP does contain many different components, it does not need to be complex. The secret to keeping SMMP simple is to approach it one step at a time — by following a defined path and dividing the project into phases. Another essential truth is that there is no “one size fits all” SMMP solution. Each organization’s journey toward and through SMM will be unique to that organization’s overall goals, structure, culture and capacity for change.

SMMP is too expensive. Although considerable upfront investments were often common, today there are options that allow for the adoption of SMM practices with minimal initial investment. In addition, although SMMP technology may require an initial investment, the efficiencies and business automation advantages provided will quickly justify the expenditure. The bottom-line fact is that with an average savings or 10–15 percent actually realized in the first two years of SMMP

The Myths of SMMP

implementation, the savings opportunities cannot be overstated.

SMMP only works for large organizations. The core principles of SMMP, such as centralized

meeting registration and data consolidation, deliver real value to organizations of all sizes. In fact, smaller, less diverse companies may see quicker success and incur fewer roadblocks, due to their size and nimbleness. Smaller companies can capitalize on the research, best practices and resources from sources such as GBTA, the Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE) or Meeting Professionals International (MPI).

Technology is the silver bullet. Despite the fact that a range of SMMP solutions have cropped up in response to ever-increasing demand, not one of them can effortlessly and painlessly implement SMMP. Technology alone cannot decide the overarching strategy and goals for an SMMP initiative. Nor can it define an organization’s meeting policy or create meeting management processes, decide what data should be tracked or define reports and validate return on investment. What SMMP technology can do is create a framework for achieving organizational SMM strategy and goals, and facilitate adoption of the organization’s meeting policy and procedures. — **JB**

pendent meeting planning firm that also manages corporate meeting programs under the auspices of SMMP. “They typically have a department of meeting planners who have been doing this internally, and now they’ve decided to outsource. Or they’ve decided to force everybody in the company’s business units to utilize the same SMMP program.”

Even with the best of intentions — or the strictest of requirements for compliance — progress toward the promised land is slow for most companies.

After three years, Mentor Graphics, a Portland, OR-based supplier of electronic design automation to circuit board designers and software developers, was only able to account for about 20 percent of its total meeting spend, says Wendy Hunt, meeting, event and trade show planner. She and two other meeting planners, as well as a trade show manager, execute approximately 50 meetings a year.

Like countless other companies and planners, Mentor Graphics and Hunt have learned that tracking meeting expenditures is much more complex and difficult than it seems at first. That’s

because what are loosely called “meeting budgets” are, in reality, dispersed throughout any number of real budgets, from a specific one for that meeting to a special events budget that covers the opening night reception or charity golf tournament, or expenses incurred personally by a meeting planner or attendee, then reimbursed as a T&E expense.

Therefore, the once quaint notion of accounting for every penny of annual meeting spend has given way to the bruising reality that such accuracy might be virtually impossible.

Last year, to solve that riddle, Hunt and her colleagues worked with Mentor’s procurement department on tech applications that would allow them to track and monitor planned expenses before they actually occurred. They also deployed the Cvent SMMP technology platform. In addition, as part of the overall effort to rein in and account for all meeting costs, Hunt and Mentor’s other meeting planners use a captive meeting credit card. Such cards are now available under the auspices of American Express, Visa and MasterCard.

Defining Best Practices

Given the sometimes rocky road to a designation organizations once thought easily accessible, it’s not surprising that any realistic idea of what’s actually possible in the near term has been downsized considerably after all the early hoopla about SMMP.

One current trend, says Dell — another of the first recipients of the SMMC designation — is that more companies are focusing on a preferred-supplier program that limits expenditures to certain hotel brands or types of properties, as well as other formal partners such as venues, restaurants or service providers. While retroactively tracking costs is very difficult if not impossible, implementing and enforcing a preferred-supplier program that leverages spend to deliver maximum savings is relatively easy, says Dell. “And as a result of that, we’re seeing more and more travel procurement departments getting involved in the implementation of SMMP. We’re even seeing procurement departments looking at RFPs or managing suppliers or the contracting process.”

Another key best practice is represent-

ed by the first step on the GBTA wheel — the registration of all meetings. But that, too, has turned out to be more difficult than first anticipated.

Years down the path to SMMP, Gorham’s team is still trying to achieve full compliance. “Our ultimate goal is to register all meetings and use a technology tool to do that,” Gorham says. “And that ties back to identifying the spend. But like many companies, we’ve found that both of those things are much harder to do than we originally thought.”

And she notes that, indeed, the biggest cause of resistance — from any quarter within Booz Allen — is a natural anxiety over change management — and how any new policy would impact a planner’s traditional autonomy.

McNairy advises patience over the long haul. “You need to understand that what you have embarked upon is tough. It’s an important initiative. It’s vital to the long-term health of the organization from both financial and cultural standpoints. So it’s not just a three-month project. You need a well thought out long-term plan that acknowledges that it’s going to take time to implement SMMP.”

One key to success, McNairy says, is an educational plan that informs and motivates all meeting stakeholders within the company. “You have to make sure that everyone is onboard,” she says.

For planners, the important practical lesson lies in one’s adaptation to the realization of what is possible and what is not, says Gorham. “My approach has been to say, “Okay, let’s take a step back



“You need to understand that what you have embarked upon is tough. It’s an important initiative. It’s vital to the long-term health of the organization from both financial and cultural standpoints. So it’s not just a three-month project.”

LINDA MCNAIRY, Vice President, Strategic Partner Management, StarCite, Indianapolis, IN

and stop hitting a brick wall,” she says. “Let’s just slowly make progress on individual initiatives that eventually will lead to the end result we want. And that’s what we’ve done.”

For Hunt, the most important consideration is a formally defined meeting policy. “That’s because the SMMP platform is really just a skeleton for making a procedure work,” she says. “If you’re trying to come up with a policy and build out the procedure at the same time, it’s like you’re putting the cart before the horse. That has been our biggest challenge.”

Getting to the Finish Line

Over the last couple of years, it has become readily apparent to many organizations and meeting managers that actually being able to track meeting spend and provide comprehensive reporting on overall activity is much more challenging than originally thought. To have a real chance of long-term success, planners must focus on a few simple principles, Malinchok says.

“First, do a little homework,” he says. “There’s enough research and information out there now that you can understand what the concept of SMMP is. Then you have to figure out how to make this personal. You’ve got to take your understanding of SMMP and think about how to make it personal for your company. The next thing you have to do is make it matter. You have to answer the question, ‘In what ways would an SMMP help my company achieve its mission?’ And that’s a tough thing to do sometimes. For example, if your mission statement is to eradicate a certain form of cancer, how does SMMP help the company do that better? You have to connect those dots. Then you have to make it simple. And that’s tough to do, too. And that’s because for most companies, meetings and events are not part of their core competencies.”

The most important question, Malinchok says, is why are you and your company interested in SMMP in the first place? What do you want and expect from it? What practical value does it have to you and your company? “Then,” Malinchok says, “you can manage toward that.”

For Gorham, meanwhile, the overarching lesson is patience. “You can’t go into SMMP thinking it’s going to be a two- or three-year process,” she says. “It seems so simple and easy at first. But if you go into it thinking it’s easy and that you’re going to accomplish it fairly quickly, you’re going to be disappointed and get frustrated.

“But,” she says, “if you can put up milestones along the way, you’re eventually going to get there. But it’s a daunting process, and it’s going to take a long time.” **C&IT**



“We’re seeing more and more travel procurement departments getting involved in the implementation of SMMP. We’re even seeing procurement departments looking at RFPs or managing suppliers or the contracting process.”

WENDY DELL, CMP, SMMC, Director, Business Development, Strategic Meetings Management BCD Meetings & Incentives, Atlanta, GA

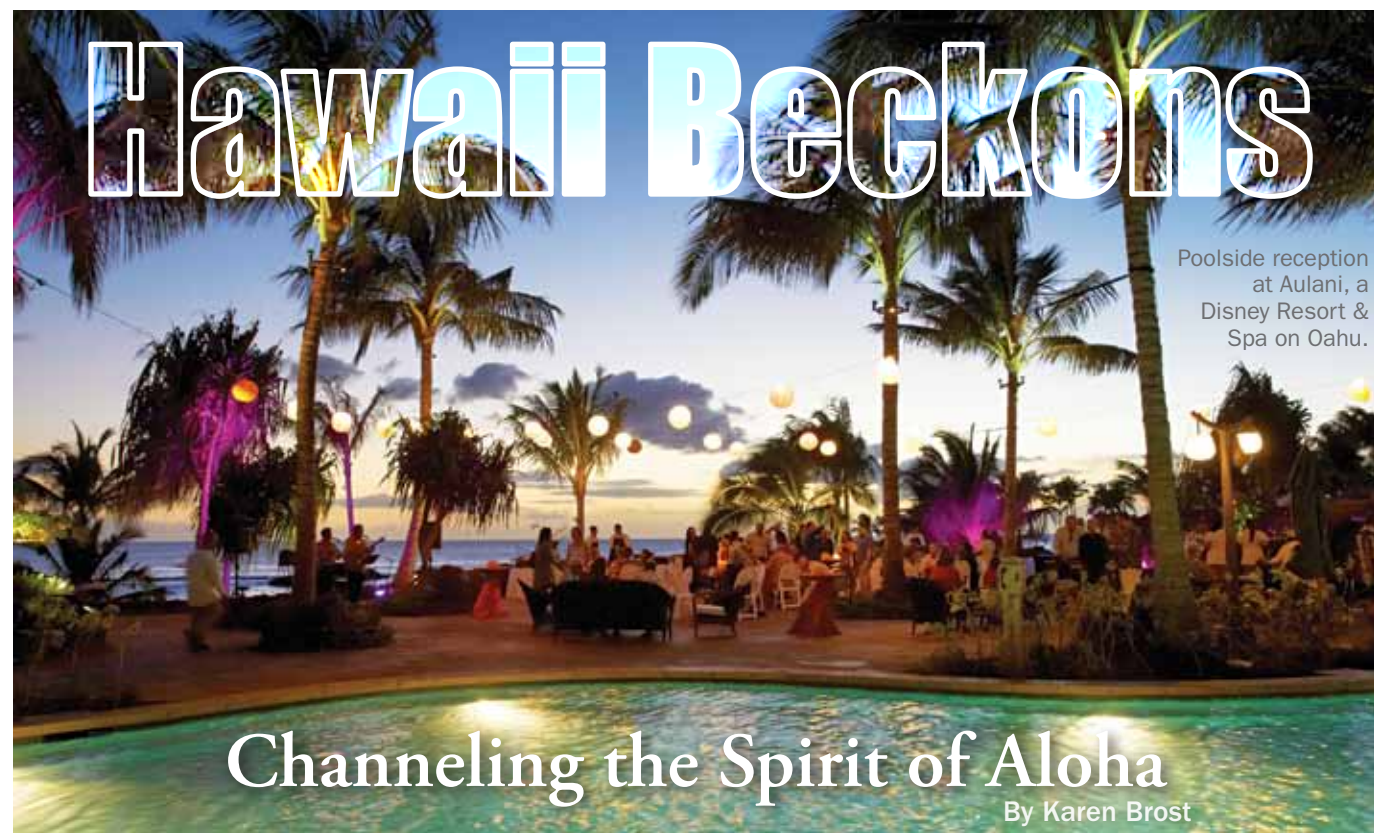


Photo courtesy of Disney Parks and Resorts

Time and time again, planners have found that offering attendees their own piece of paradise in the Aloha State is a surefire way to get them to sit up and take notice, meet their sales goals or do whatever else it takes to make the trip. After all, what's not to love about stunning tropical landscapes, a wide range of adventures and attractions, and a rich cultural heritage that can't be experienced anywhere else? It's those qualities, along with the islands' famous welcoming spirit of aloha that makes attendees want to keep coming back.

Say Aloha to Aulani

Hawaii's newest meeting and incentive property is Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa, which opened last year on 21 acres of oceanfront property in the Ko Olina area on Oahu. If the name "Disney" has you thinking "theme park," think again. Disney has done something truly unique here by using its extensive storytelling expertise to create a gathering place that authentically honors and embraces the Hawaiian culture. For once, they're not the authors of the story. Instead, they're helping the Hawaiian people tell their own story of their history and culture.

To accomplish this, Disney "Imagineers" worked closely with Hawaiian cultural advisors and other local experts to ensure that every element, from how the buildings are sited to the architectural design, landscaping, art and music, convey an authentic Hawaiian sense of place. All of the artwork throughout the re-

sort was created by Hawaiian artists, and guests are immersed in Hawaiian culture at virtually every turn.

The resort offers 359 guest rooms and suites along with 481 vacation villas, all housed in two 16-story towers. Nestled between the towers is a recreation area called Waikolohe Valley which is lushly landscaped and contains pools, whirlpools and water play areas that include a lazy river. It was inspired by the boyhood experiences of Joe Rohde, senior vice president and creative executive for Walt Disney Imagineering, who grew up near Waikiki. Aulani also features 50,000 sf of meeting space and the full-service Laniwai Spa.

Justin Ball, who is in operations with a Colorado-based IT consulting firm, planned his company's annual general meeting at Aulani. The event drew more than 950 attendees, including spouses, significant others and immediate family. Approximately 300 of the guests, including the majority of the company's VIPs, stayed at Aulani, while the remaining guests stayed at an adjacent property.

The group used Aulani's facilities for multiple events. "From the pool area, to the conference event center and beach, our events at Aulani ranged from 100 to 1,000 guests," Ball explains. "Blackout shade options and LED lighting let you set the ambience of the (meeting) room without hitting against your budget. A covered lanai and open-air event space connects the two primary ballrooms for great pre/post and coffee break space.

"Our favorite space was the restaurant outlet 'Ama 'Ama. Its open-air concept and Hawaiian oceanfront views gave life to professional breakfast meetings, casual lunches and formal celebration dinners. The outlet's design tells the story of a family fishing hale (house) that has grown through the generations, so you can enjoy a unique ambience in each of its four seating areas. Of course, the primary venue we used daily was the amazing white sand beach and lagoon. This flat-water (read: family friendly) lagoon was the hub for VIP cabana experiences, beach recreation, a live concert venue and our many attempts at standing up on a paddleboard!"

Ball's group took advantage of the children's amenities at Aulani, which include Aunty's Beach House, a state-of-the-art 5,200-sf venue where kids ages 3 to 12 can have fun learning about Hawaiian culture, art and music. "The idea of a traditional kids club is turned on its head with Aunty's Beach House," Ball notes. "Parents had the perfect excuse to make the most of the property while kids enjoyed this free amenity."

Ball also appreciated the resort's convenient location. "Aulani's proximity to Honolulu International Airport (17 miles) and all the resources on Oahu are a meeting planner's dream," he notes. "The resorts of Ko Olina gave us everything we wanted in a Hawaiian destination that we thought was only available on the outer islands: Lush gardens, quiet sandy beaches, amazing wildlife and picturesque mountains all surrounded us, but with all the conveniences of staying on Oahu.

"Our attendees had a phenomenal time during the annual general meeting and raved about the service they received from the staff at Aulani," he continues. "They showed us what it meant to be a part of their ohana (family) and bask in their aloha spirit. Their banquet team is one of the most innovative I have worked with in the world, and for being a new resort, Disney has worked its magic to present a very established property."

Oahu's North Shore a Natural Choice

Victoria Brumfield, executive director of the NYC-based sports marketing and events firm Korff Enterprises Inc., has found that Turtle Bay resort on Oahu's North Shore is the ideal site for an event that she plans for the grocery retailer Foodland. It's the Give Aloha Golf Program that raises funds for Hawaii non-profit organizations. The event attracted 400 attendees this year.

Located on 840 oceanfront acres on Oahu's legendary North Shore, Turtle Bay offers 375 guest rooms, 26 suites and 42 beach cottages. The resort's Pacific Rim Conference Center has 31,000 sf of flexible event space, including two ballrooms.

The recreational amenities at Turtle Bay are extensive. Guests have unlimited access to two golf courses that form the island's only 36-hole championship facility. The Arnold Palmer Course surrounds a 100-acre wetland preserve, and the George Fazio Course offers generous fairways combined with deep bunkers.

Turtle Bay also offers a golf academy and surfing school along with a host of other outdoor activities that include 12 miles of oceanfront hiking trails, kayaking, moped rentals and Segway tours. It is also the only resort that offers helicopter



"The advantage of Turtle Bay resort is you get a captive small island experience with the convenience of Honolulu being an hour's drive away."

Victoria Brumfield, Executive Director
Korff Enterprises Inc., New York, NY

tours that depart and return onsite. Guests can also opt to indulge in spa treatments at Spa Luana.

"Our program is a combination of island-based and mainland food vendors and manufacturers," Brumfield explains. "The advantage of Turtle Bay resort is you get a captive small island experience with the convenience of Honolulu being an hour's drive away. It's close enough for the locals that they can have their kids come up after soccer on Saturday. It's convenient enough that a mainland person can fly in from California for the weekend."

Another popular meeting property on Oahu is the 2,860-room Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikiki Beach Resort, which recently completed a \$45 million renovation of its Rainbow Tower. All 800 rooms in the iconic tower, known for its colorful mosaic mural, received a total makeover, including furnishings, carpeting, draperies and bathrooms. The beachfront resort offers more than 150,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space.

Kicking Back on Kauai

The Kauai Marriott Resort was the site of a highly successful incentive program planned by Margaret Grobisen, director, recognition and inspiration for Kforce Service Corporation based in Tampa, FL.

The luxury resort, which recently completed a \$50 million renovation of its guest rooms, restaurants and pool area, is located on Kalapaki Beach just three miles from Lihue Airport in Kauai. The hotel features 345 guest rooms, 11 suites and more than 27,500 sf of meeting space, along with 18 holes of Jack Nicklaus-designed golf.

"We have about 250 employees who attend, and they are all



Kauai Marriott Resort on Kalapaki Beach hosted Kforce Service Corporation's incentive program with 250 attendees.

Kauai “feels like the most Hawaiian of the islands that I looked at. It’s the way you want Hawaii to be.”

Margaret Grobisen
Director, Recognition & Inspiration
Kforce Service Corporation, Tampa, FL



Kforce employees attend the final night awards dinner in Kauai.

the exact results she was looking for: “Our employees are really happy.” And, they can’t wait to return to Kauai next April.

New and Notable

Cruising: You might call it a Hawaiian Sampler Package, but what better way for a group to get a taste of all four of the Hawaiian Islands than by cruising the sapphire sea that links them? Norwegian Cruise Line’s Pride of America ship offers a seven-day round trip out of Honolulu every Saturday with ports of call in Maui (overnight), Hilo and Kona on the Big Island of Hawaii, and Kauai (overnight). Pride of America accommodates 2,138 guests double occupancy, and offers 18,000 sf of meeting space. Norwegian’s Freestyle Cruising concept allows dining at any time — no set reservation times required — so guests are free to sample the nightlife during overnights on Maui and Kauai.

Maui: Several Maui properties have recently completed renovation projects. The Sheraton Maui Resort and Spa invested \$6.5 million to enhance all 508 of its guest rooms. The Makena Beach and Golf Resort wrapped up a multimillion-dollar upgrade of its 320 rooms and suites. The \$500 million renewal project at The Westin Maui Resort and Spa focused on revitalizing its meeting experience by adding eco-friendly elements such as linen-free cocktail tables.

The Big Island: The Hapuna Beach Prince Hotel has invested \$500 million to upgrade 96 of its luxury suites and oceanfront guest rooms. The upscale oceanfront hotel is located on the island’s sunny Kohala Coast and offers 350 guest rooms, more than 85,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space and 18 holes of golf designed by Arnold Palmer and Ed Seay.

Transportation: GreenCar Hawaii is expanding its offerings of self-serve, electric vehicle rentals on the islands of Oahu and Kauai. The company also offers a green airport shuttle service for guests staying at the Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort and Spa.

Help for planners: The Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau’s website for meeting planners, www.businessaloha.com, includes an Added Value Resource Center. It lists hot rates and hot dates, special offers from DMCS, descriptions of complimentary services the bureau offers and special savings for groups. The site also includes details on corporate social responsibility projects that are available in Hawaii and on Hawaii-based speakers who can be booked for events.

C&IT

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Orlando

Where Exciting, Energetic and Engaging Events Are the Name of the Game

By Derek Reveron

One would be hard-pressed to find anything that Orlando doesn't offer meetings and conventions.

No other destination offers Orlando's unique combination of theme parks, world-class resorts and hotels with more than 113,000 guest rooms, and fine dining, championship golf and spacious meeting and convention facilities. It's no wonder that the city is on track to surpass its record number of 55.1 million visitors in 2011. It's shaping up to be a very positive year for Orlando, says Tammi Runzler, senior vice president of convention sales and services for Visit Orlando. "We aren't projecting an actual number. But all indicators are that we will

"The CVB helped with the RFP...and with finding a venue...that fit my group and budget. They followed me through the process to answer questions and intermediate any issues."



Rebecca Hinton, MSA, CMP, Public Relations and Admin Coordinator, TRIB Group Ltd., Lawrenceville, GA

continue to see an escalation. We have seen a lot of positive numbers come in this year in things we look at every day as far as the different levels of convention center use, occupancy, etc. Attendance numbers for individual groups are exceeding projections across all market segments — corporations, incentives, associations," says Runzler.

Visit Orlando is helping to spur growth with incentives for meeting planners and groups. Visit Orlando also increased its number of FAM trips this year. "We raised it because so many people have contacted us about attending FAM trips. Last year, we did about 12 trips. We have planned or conducted 18 so far this year. We will increase that number if we need to. There



TRIB Group members riding the Manta Dual Rollercoaster at SeaWorld Orlando — the site of their closing-night celebration.

doesn't have to be a specific piece of business attached to a planner coming on a FAM," says Runzler.

A Favorite Destination

True Value Company, a Chicago-based retailer-owned cooperative that operates over 5,000 hardware stores, took full advantage of Orlando's dazzling array of properties for its True Value Spring Market held in February this year. The event attracted 11,000 True Value employees, executives, store owners and vendors worldwide for meetings, conferences and purchasing. True Value booked 24 hotels for the meeting, most of them along world-famous International Drive and held events at the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC), the second largest in the U.S. The OCCC offers 2.1 million sf of exhibit space, the 63,000-sf Valencia Room and 74 meeting rooms.

Orlando is one of True Value's favorite destinations partly because of a mutual familiarity and comfort level between the properties and the company's meetings. The Spring Market, which meets twice a year, was held 16 times in the last eight years. Five of the 16 events were held in Orlando. Susan Katz, True Value's director of corporate events and travel, hopes to book future dates in Orlando. "We have been working with Orlando for so long that we know the properties, and they know us. The only hotels we would site-visit it would be the new hotels we haven't visited before. The work force understands the meeting and convention business, and they are always ready to help."

Visit Orlando was a big help in lining up hotel space for True Value's event. "The CVB helped us put the entire package together," Katz says. "They go to all the hotels in the area to gather what their availability is and how much they are willing to dedicate to our conference. Orlando's hotel packages are

some of the best in the country. There are hotels at every price point for our people."

The space and amenities offered by the OCCC was another big reason for meeting in Orlando. Most of the meeting's functions were held in the OCCC, which provided the technology the company needed. "Internet connectivity and bandwidth are growing issues for everybody," says Katz. "Our needs are great. We have some online ordering processes that take a lot of connectivity. We also set up a closed-booth link back to our headquarters. The convention center is always easy to work with on those things."

True Value looks forward to holding more meetings in Orlando. Says Katz, "It's easy for us to go to Orlando, because our members know what it offers, and they are always anxious to go back."

Multiyear Meetings in Orlando

Some companies like Orlando and its properties so much that they sign multiyear meeting deals to obtain even more value. Lawrenceville, GA-based TRIB Group Ltd., a buying cooperative for companies in the rent-to-own industry, negotiated a contract to meet for five consecutive years in Orlando from 2011 through 2015. The 2011 meeting was the TRIB Group's first in Orlando. The company chose the Orlando World Center Marriott for its annual three-day, 400-attendee meeting and convention for store owners, employees, vendors and board members.

The TRIB Group selected the Orlando World Center because they could hold the entire event under one roof and take advantage of all the hotel's services and amenities. The 200-acre property provides 2,000 guest rooms and suites, 450,000 sf of event space and the 18-hole Hawk's Landing Golf Course. It's a challenge to find a property that meets all of the meeting's needs, says Rebecca Hinton, MSA, CMP, public relations and admin coordinator for the TRIB Group. "We have a rather large golf outing of about 80 golfers so we need a property with a course or one nearby. Otherwise we have to bus them offsite and that drags the day. They also had the square footage to accommodate our space as well as the breakout space for our meetings and enough guest rooms. The AV staff and F&B staff are wonderful. Since this was our second year, everything went even more smoothly because they know our group and were more attentive to what we need," says Hinton.

New, Renovated and Noteworthy

Walt Disney World plans to open a new Four Seasons resort in 2014. The 444-room resort will feature about 38,000 sf of meeting and event space, a 14,000-sf spa, three pools and a fitness center. Another property, Disney's new Art of Animation Resort, is opening its guest rooms in four phases this year. The resort and its guest rooms and suites feature themes, characters, sketches and icons from the movies "Finding Nemo," "The Lion King," "Cars" and "The Little Mermaid."

The first phase, "Finding Nemo," opened in May with 320 suites. The 480 "Cars" suites opened in June, followed by 320



Guests celebrate the anniversary of The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, which opened in June 2010, at Universal Orlando Resort's Islands of Adventure theme park.

Over 9,000 Served at McDonald's 'The Wizarding World of Harry Potter' Event

Jennifer Hojnacki, the training and communication events supervisor for Oak Brook, IL-based McDonald's Corporation, was challenged with a daunting task: planning an extraordinary party for McDonald's own-



HOJNACKI

ers/operators, staff, suppliers and guests — about 16,000 attendees — who were in Orlando for the company's bi-annual convention in April. Hojnacki knew she needed a little help from her friends at Universal Orlando Resort to pull off the feat. In the following Q&A, Hojnacki relates her success story.

C&IT What factors led your company to choose this location and property?

Hojnacki We have done several events with Universal Orlando before and have been very pleased with the outcome each and every time. But this time, it was the excitement around The Wizarding World of Harry Potter in combination with all the other wonderful attractions Universal Orlando has to offer.

C&IT What was your event's objective?

Hojnacki The objective of our event was to give our guests a chance to come together, let loose and enjoy the people that they work with and build amazing memories together. It was an evening for our "McFamily" to have fun, be proud and thankful that they are part of such a magnificent brand, and that their hard work and dedication afforded them the opportunity to attend this amazing McDonald's event.

C&IT Do you believe you met your objectives?

Hojnacki I believe McDonald's exceeded their expectations with the highest attendance we have ever

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

had for a U.S. event. With over 16,000 people total at the convention and over 9,000 (9,317) people deciding to spend the evening with us at Universal Orlando, I would say we went beyond what we ever thought was imaginable.

C&IT How did you measure that?

Hojnacki We measured our success this year by the large increase in attendance, the excitement building up to the event, the pure vibe of enjoyment that perfect evening, and all the positive feedback we received that night, days after and even still until this day.

C&IT What about food and beverage? Anything exceptional and different?

Hojnacki The food and beverage that evening was all the rage. There was delicious, hot, fresh food everywhere...from all the restaurants within the park to specialized food stations and fun snack carts. The Universal Orlando food and beverage team went above and beyond any catering experience I have ever had before. We met several times because McDonald's did this same event at this park four years prior. I needed it all to be different and unique from our guests' last experience. As a team we created delicious off-the-menu creations that were healthy and able to meet McDonald's high standards of freshness and quality.

C&IT What guidance did the Universal Orlando staff provide that made the event go more smoothly?

Hojnacki I do not even know where to start with the exceptional service I got from all of the Universal Orlando staff. From our first meeting with our sales manager and the ease of working through our initial proposals and contracts, I knew we were off to a great start. Then moving into our planning phases with our event and catering managers working together to make sure the park was set up with just the right amount of food and beverages, attractions, character interactions, décor, entertainment and amazing plan of how our guests will experience the park from the moment they walk through the gates. I set some pretty lofty goals for this team on how we were going to make this experience different from the last time McDonald's was here and challenged them several times on menu, entertainment and décor ideas until they were exactly as I envisioned...and they totally hit the mark on each and every one.

C&IT What about staff responsiveness?

Hojnacki My appreciation for the entire Universal Orlando staff went above and beyond just my working team of managers: The operating staff that evening in the park also exceeded my expectations to make my guests feel welcomed. We received so many compliments from our guests that with every turn or question someone had, a Universal Orlando staff member was nearby to answer their questions and assist them with a smile and friendly word.

Continued on page 48

"The Lion King" suites in August and 864 "The Little Mermaid" rooms in September. The resort's 11,859-sf "Big Blue" pool is the largest at Walt Disney World Resort. Meanwhile, in Downtown Disney, a two-story, 50,000-sf bowling alley named Splitsville will open this fall. Splitsville will combine hip and retro design elements and offer live entertainment, billiard tables and outdoor seating. Splitsville is available for corporate events.

Universal Parks & Resorts and Loews Hotels & Resorts will build the Cabana Bay Beach Resort on a 37-acre site within Universal Orlando Resort and adjacent to Universal's Islands of Adventure. Site work will begin soon on the development's multiple buildings, which will include 900 standard guest rooms and 900 family suites. The new resort is scheduled to open in 2014.

Earlier this year, the Sheraton Safari Hotel and suites announced a \$24 million makeover and name change. The name of the renovated property will be Sheraton Lake Buena Vista Resort. The project includes the property's 490 guest rooms, restaurant, lobby and 20,000 sf of meeting and event space. The project also includes a new ballroom, spa and fitness center.

Hilton offers a number of choices for groups. The Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek and the adjacent Waldorf Astoria Orlando provide a total of 1,500 guest rooms and 150,000 sf of meeting space, including ballrooms. The Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek alone offers 1,000 guest rooms and 122,000 sf



The shores of Seven Seas Lagoon frame Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa, the Victorian-style flagship hotel of Walt Disney World Resort.

of meeting space. The two hotels are located within the private 482-acre Bonnet Creek vacation destination, which is bordered on three sides by Walt Disney World Resort. The two properties share the Waldorf Astoria Golf Club's 18-hole championship course, 24,000-sf Waldorf Astoria Spa by Guerlain and a 4,000-sf fitness center. Another Hilton property the 1,400-room Hilton Orlando provides 200,000 sf of meeting space. Connected to the OCCC by a pedestrian skybridge, the Hilton Orlando also provides a 50,000-sf ballroom, a 30,000-sf ballroom and 21 meeting rooms.

The DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld, formerly the Doubletree Resort Orlando International Drive, is located on a 28-acre tropical setting. The 1,094-room property is the DoubleTree brand's largest resort. The DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld offers 60,000 sf of indoor and outdoor

meeting space, including two grand ballrooms and the Tropical Terrace, which overlooks native palm trees. Meeting space also includes the 13,000-sf Lakes Conference Center and the 20,000-sf Oceans Conference Center.

Groups seeking traditional elegance may consider The Peabody Orlando. The property has been a mainstay of Orlando's meeting and convention industry since opening in 1986. Connected to the OCCC via covered walkway, The Peabody Orlando has 1,641 guest rooms and 300,000 sf of modern meeting space. There also is a 22,000-sf spa, a fitness center and 10 dining and entertainment choices. The Peabody is now accepting reservations for The Loft at The Peabody — its brand new boutique experience. The Loft comprises 52 rooms located within three private-access floors in the Mallard Tower. Each guest room is luxuriously appointed with premium comfort items such as plush blankets, robes and slippers, and upgraded bath amenities featuring spa-inspired and aromatherapy products. The Loft also features a private lounge furnished with spacious seating and contemporary décor, and a daily wine reception.

The Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Resort is a premiere meeting facility that offers 2,265 guest rooms and more than 329,000 sf of meeting space, including 110,500 sf of contiguous convention/exhibit space and four ballrooms. Amenities include 17 restaurants and lounges, the new Mandara Spa, golf and five pools. Groups also have the option to use the cutting-edge services of Disney Event Productions.

Florida's largest independent hotel chain, Rosen Hotels & Resorts, operates three convention Orlando properties. These include the Rosen Shingle Creek, Rosen Centre Hotel and Rosen Plaza Hotel. The Rosen Plaza recently renovated its 800 guest rooms, hallways and hospitality suites. Located next to the OCCC, the Rosen Plaza offers 60,000 sf of meeting space, including 22 meeting rooms and a 26,000 sf ballroom. The Rosen Centre Hotel renovated its 1,334 guest rooms, Grand Lobby, hospitality suites and more. Located just minutes from Walt Disney World Resort, the Rosen Centre Hotel offers more than 106,000 sf of meeting space, including two ballrooms and 33 meeting rooms. The 1,500-room Rosen Shingle Creek boasts 445,000 sf of meeting space, including 99 meeting rooms, 100,000 sf of prefunction space and three ballrooms.

The Rosen Shingle Creek's meeting space appealed to Navistar International Corporation, a Lisle, IL-based manufacturer and marketer of medium and heavy trucks and mid-range diesel engines. In February 2011, the Rosen Shingle Creek hosted 2,000 Navistar employees, execu-



Rosen Shingle Creek (pictured), Rosen Centre Hotel and Rosen Plaza Hotel now offer free Internet service — wireless and/or hardwired — in guest rooms and public areas.

tives, managers and dealers for education sessions, meetings and an exposition as part of the company's three-day annual Navistar Parts Expo. Attendees hailed from about 40 countries.

Navistar selected the Rosen Shingle Creek primarily because it could comfortably contain every single function of the meeting. The size and layout of the meeting space perfectly matched the meeting's needs, says Kathy Miller, president and chief creative officer of Total Event Resources, a meeting and event planning company based in Chicago. "Breakout space is a huge need for education sessions about parts and services. We needed 60 breakouts a day that ranged between 30 and 150 people. We worked in tandem with the Rosen, giving them our needs, times and dates. They helped us make sure that each breakout space was the best one for that particular session," says Miller.



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Value and service also were considerations. “Rosen was willing to provide concessions in F&B, Internet access and attrition. They showed that they really valued the business. And they certainly have a great team, from the salesperson to the meeting and convention services person who was with us from the beginning. They are very solution-oriented,” says Miller.

She cites an example of the Rosen staff’s on-the-spot attention to detail: “We had a lot of buses providing transporta-

Continued from page 46

C&IT Did you face challenges while at the destination specifically related to crisis management?

Hojnacki McDonald’s and Universal Orlando worked collaboratively to put safety and security plans in place months before the event, and luckily we did not have to use any measures to activate our plans.

C&IT What was the overall attendee reaction and feedback about the event and location?

Hojnacki Our guests were so excited when they found out that they were going to Universal’s Islands of Adventure again and that they would get an exclusive experience in the newest island, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter. We were getting calls months before the event was even announced, voicing hopes that McDonald’s would take them back to this fabulous park... so we listened to our audience, weighed all our venue options and in the end made the perfect decision. The decision was the right one, because our guests left that evening with smiles on their faces and amazing memories in their hearts.

C&IT How well do you think meeting at this venue helped to train/motivate/reward your attendees?

Hojnacki Universal Orlando, in partnership with the planning team at McDonald’s, I believe developed an evening that made our guests feel proud and motivated to work at McDonald’s and to go back home and try even harder to make McDonald’s customers feel as valued and happy as they were that enchanted April 25th night.

C&IT What advice would you offer to other planners who may be considering this destination?

Hojnacki The advice I would give other planners working with this property and this staff is that if you set goals, challenge the team on anything and appreciate their wealth of knowledge and expertise they have to offer, there is no reason why someone else’s event could not be as wonderfully successful as ours was.

C&IT Would you plan an event at this site again?

Hojnacki I would most definitely plan another event at Universal Orlando. Our guests love these theme parks and what they have to offer. They have amazing, professional staff working in a great venue that makes you leave there with nothing less than a smile from cheek to cheek.

C&IT



Photo courtesy Universal Orlando Resort

The Cabana Bay Beach Resort, a hip, vintage-looking, value-priced hotel set to open in 2014 within Universal Orlando Resort, will feature 900 family suites and 900 standard guest rooms.

tion between the hotel and airport. We had to manage massive amounts of luggage. They provided a solution to help people locate their baggage within the baggage room and get it onto the bus. They brought in extra staff to manage the process and did it alphabetically and by times of departure, so that people could quickly and easily access their luggage when departing. While that sounds like it should be the norm, it isn’t always,” says Miller.

In the meantime, Rosen Hotels & Resorts’ President and COO Harris Rosen announced that all three properties now offer free wireless and wired Internet in all guest rooms and public spaces.

Theme Parks and Recreation

What venues are more unique than Orlando’s wide assortment of theme parks? Attractions such as Universal Orlando Resort, Walt Disney World Resort and SeaWorld provide truly unique meeting spaces and jaw-dropping entertainment for small and large groups.

Universal Orlando Resort is home to two theme parks — Universal Studios and Universal’s Islands of Adventure — the Universal CityWalk entertainment complex, and three AAA Four Diamond onsite hotels: Loews Portofino Bay Hotel, the Hard Rock Hotel and the Loews Royal Pacific Resort. These three world-class hotels offer more than 133,000 sf of combined meeting space, dining and diverse venues. Attendees staying onsite will enjoy an exclusive package of theme park benefits and perks. Planners can choose from incredible backdrops such as the prehistoric jungles of Jurassic Park, Marvel’s biggest superheros, and the shops of Hogsmeade in The Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Universal Studios is a real, working film and TV production facility with an array of rides, shows, movie sets and attractions as well as themed dining options and unique meetings spaces such as the Universal Music Plaza and stage. Universal CityWalk features one-of-a-kind themed venues with unique menus, live entertainment and all-night excitement. Planners can buy out a restaurant for an evening reception or the whole complex for a massive block party.

Walt Disney World Resort offers a stunning array of options.

These include the Magic Kingdom, Pleasure Island and Epcot, Disney’s Hollywood Studios, Typhoon Lagoon and Disney’s Animal Kingdom. Groups also can enjoy pampering spa services at Disney’s Saratoga Springs Resort and Disney’s Grand Floridian Resort & Spa. Walt Disney World Resort also has golf, fishing, tennis and horseback riding, and the new Exotic Driving Experience at Walt Disney World Speedway.

Islands of Adventure and Universal Studios are the two popular theme parks at Universal Orlando Resort (see page 45). Visitors also have a choice of more than 60 retail outlets, some of which are located at the 30-acre Universal CityWalk.

SeaWorld captivates visitors with marine animals, shows, exhibits and rides. Meeting facilities include Ports of Call, a banquet venue that accommodates groups of 100 to 750 people. Ports of Call also has a 12,000-sf ballroom divisible into three segments. SeaWorld also provides a teambuilding program that accommodates up to 250 people.

One of the highlights of the TRIB Group’s meeting was the final-night cocktail hour, dinner and entertainment at SeaWorld. “We bused the group to SeaWorld. We had music throughout the reception from SeaWorld’s bands. We pretty much had the run of an area of the park, where we utilized the different attractions and had access to the aquarium area and saw a Dolphin show,” says Hinton.

Hinton chose SeaWorld after considering several options with help from Visit Orlando. “The CVB helped with the RFP process and with finding a venue close to the hotel that fit my group and budget. They followed me through the process to answer questions and intermediate any issues. We considered about 20 venues before whittling it down to maybe five. We chose SeaWorld primarily because of its proximity to the hotel and the variety of entertainment options,” says Hinton.

Visit Orlando recently launched a new marketing campaign to showcase the area’s diverse dining, entertainment and other “after meeting” options for the national meetings and conventions market. Fine dining in Orlando was put on the global map by internationally renowned chefs such as Emeril Lagasse, Kat Cora and Roy Yamaguchi. Also, the home-grown talents of John Rivers (4Rivers Smokehouse), Kevin Fonzo (K restaurant), and James and Julie Petrakis (Ravenous Pig) have begun to expand Orlando’s foodie image. The newly identified dining and entertainment districts of Orlando include Winter Park, Restaurant Row, Convention Area, Downtown, Universal/CityWalk, and Disney/Lake Buena Vista. *OrlandoDistricts.com* details these new districts and includes links to the

restaurants, along with videos of local chefs sharing their take on the Orlando culinary scene.

The Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex, just a short drive from Orlando, offers exciting programs for groups. The center, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this month, has two rare tour opportunities on tap: For the first time in more than 30 years, NASA is allowing guests inside the Launch Control Center and inside the 525-foot-tall Vehicle Assembly Building. In addition, the space shuttle Atlantis will be featured in a multimillion-dollar exhibit expected to open in July 2013.

Corporate meeting attendees looking to hit the greens will find about 200 options in Orlando. Options include Walt Disney World’s golf courses including the Palm Golf Course, the Osprey Ridge Golf Course, Lake Buena Vista Golf Course and the Oak Trail Golf Course. The Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate offers 36 holes of Greg Norman-designed golf — the International Course and the National Course.

World-class golf is just one of many reasons why Orlando continues to be a magnet for meetings and conventions worldwide. Never a destination to rest on its laurels, Orlando constantly seeks to increase its appeal. That’s why the city continues to invest in new attractions, hotels and more, says Runzler. It’s a strategy that appeals to meeting planners. “The city is constantly changing and adding new opportunities. It is a great place to take people and then return because they always experience a new Orlando,” says Katz.

C&IT

Free internet access starting July 4th. Kind of gives a new meaning to Independence Day.

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The Omni Bedford Springs Resort & Spa, Bedford Springs, PA, has named **Jeffery Rudder** as director of sales and marketing. He previously served as director of sales at Turning Stone Resort & Casino in Verona, NY.

The Broadmoor has named **Maureen Carter** as sales manager responsible for the Western region including Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Nevada, Alaska and Hawaii. She most recently served as The Broadmoor's executive meeting manager.

Michael J. Mustafa was named director of sales and marketing for the Hilton Anaheim, Anaheim, CA. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing at the Hilton Orange County/Costa Mesa, Costa Mesa, CA.

Steven DeFelice was named director of sales and marketing for Hotel Contessa, San Antonio, TX. He was previously director of sales and marketing for Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa near Albuquerque, NM.

John G. Oakley was named director of sales and marketing for Swissôtel Chicago. He most recently served as director of sales at The Westin Galleria & Westin Oaks in Houston, TX.

The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club, Naples, FL, has named **Megan Wells** as sales manager, responsible for the New Jersey, Pennsylvania and South Central regions. She previously served as sales manager at Embassy Suites in Grapevine, TX.

C&IT

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