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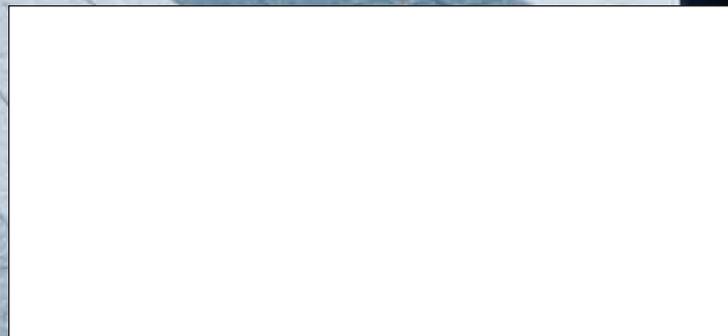


NEW ORLEANS ERNEST N. MORIAL CONVENTION CENTER

Bigger and Better

Competition Spurs Convention Centers to Renovate and Expand

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Photo courtesy of New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center

Robin E. Slye, CMP, CEM, Director, Meeting and Event Planning, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, and Bob Johnson, President and General Manager, New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center.

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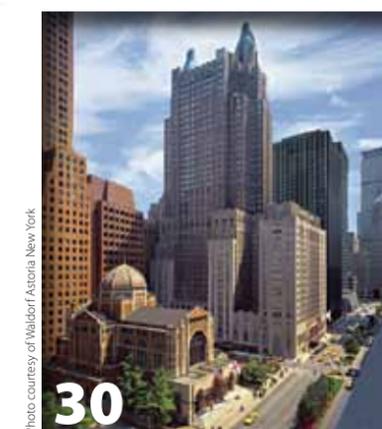
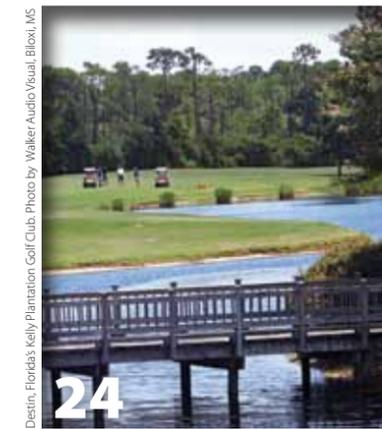
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The Power of Ideas — and Being There



I was one of the first to set foot in the vast expanse of The Great Hall, the new 60,300-sf column-free space that debuted in January at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center. I, along with other industry colleagues, previewed this king of all New Orleans ballrooms just before the Super Bowl came to town. I can tell you that new spaces like this one generate great excitement and energy in a city, helping to drive the economic engine by attracting lucrative meetings and conventions. But beyond the obvious bottom-line benefits — and even more important — spaces like this one provide an inspirational environment for groups to gather and kindle new ideas.

Robin E. Slye, CMP, CEM, director, meeting and event planning for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), who graces our cover this month, staged The Great Hall's first-ever association event during her group's TechAdvantage Conference and Expo in February. Talk about generating ideas — no doubt the lightbulbs went on when electric co-ops and vendors presented new technologies at the Fast-Track Technovations session that attendees could further investigate in the Expo Hall. Inspiration at this meeting came not only inside the convention center, but out and about in The Big Easy, a vibrant city that NRECA's attendees loved to investigate as well. Slye noted, "The new grand entrance...and the column-free Great Hall created a memorable meeting experience for approximately 9,000 attendees. ...The NRECA staff and membership are excited about the future partnership with the city of New Orleans."

It's that synergy of great facilities and a great city that leads to great things for all stakeholders. In our cover story on page 10, you'll read about other cities that are expanding and renovating their convention centers to attract association meetings, where face-to-face collaboration powers big ideas. No one knows this better than destination marketing organizations who can cite some supportive new science: In behavioral research conducted at the IMEX 2012 Frankfurt exhibition by The Meetology Laboratory, it was found that, on average, face-to-face meeting participants generated 30 percent more — and more varied — ideas than those connecting via virtual meetings.

And speaking of virtual meetings, our story on mastering the hybrid meetings balancing act (page 20) explores this idea: using the virtual component of a meeting to create a "wish I was there" effect.

As I can attest, having stood in the sparkling new Great Hall with my colleagues, being there will always be hard to beat.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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Truth

DENVER HAS A STATE-OF-THE-ART CONVENTION CENTER SURROUNDED BY 8,400 HOTEL ROOMS.

You know about the Blue Bear outside the Colorado Convention Center. But did you know that the building is LEED Certified? You know Red Rocks Amphitheatre is a top concert venue. But you probably didn't realize you can hold a meeting there. We dare you to see Denver in a whole new way at TruthOrDareDenver.com

The Colorado Convention Center's 40' Blue Bear, *I See What You Mean*, by Denver artist Lawrence Argent, has become a Mile High City icon.

Dare

PLAN AN OFFSITE AT A ONE-OF-A-KIND VENUE. ONE BUILT 250 MILLION YEARS AGO.

Rosen Hotels & Resorts Announces Plans for Skybridge



ORLANDO, FL — In Orlando, tourism officials and guests gathered as Rosen Hotels & Resorts President and COO Harris Rosen announced plans for the Gary Sain Memorial Bridge, a new pedestrian skybridge that will connect Rosen Plaza with the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC). Celebrants used shovels to “dig” into a cake featuring the three structures. The skybridge will be named the Gary Sain Memorial Bridge in honor of the dynamic Visit Orlando president and CEO who passed away in May 2012. Participants included (l to r) Victoria Hall, director of sales and marketing, Rosen Plaza; Yulita Osuba, deputy general manager, OCCC; Jan Addison, deputy general manager, OCCC; Scott Boyd, Orange County Commissioner; Teresa Jacobs, Orange County Mayor; Harris Rosen; David Ramirez, executive pastry chef, Rosen Hotels & Resorts; Pamela Sain, Mr. Sain’s widow; Maria Triscari, executive director, International Drive Chamber of Commerce; Pete Clarke, Orange County Commissioner; George Aguel, president and CEO, Visit Orlando; Leslie Menichini, vice president of sales and marketing, Rosen Hotels & Resorts; and Gary Hudson, general manager, Rosen Plaza. www.rosenplaza.com, www.rosenhoteles.com, www.occc.net

The New Tropicana Las Vegas Relaunches Theater Venue



The Tropicana Theater reopened in February.

LAS VEGAS, NV — The Tropicana Theater recently celebrated its reopening. The new theater is tiered and bowl-shaped to ensure that every one of the 1,045 seats has a clear view of the stage. The front rows have U-shaped booths and cocktail tables, a nostalgic throwback to classic Vegas cabaret-style seating. The theater boasts all-new lighting equipment including a GrandMA2 console and rotating, color-mixable Vari*Lite VL2500 wash and spotlights and a superb acoustic environment. The New Tropicana Las Vegas recently completed a \$200 million transformation including a fresh redesign of every room and suite, the 50,000-sf casino, more than 60,000 sf of meeting and exhibition space, several new restaurants and bars, a Mandara Spa, and Bagatelle Supper Club & Beach Club. www.troplv.com

Hilton Sandestin Beach Reveals Enhanced Meeting Space

DESTIN, FL — The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, the largest full-service beachfront resort on Northwest Florida’s Gulf Coast, recently completed a \$5 million renovation of its meeting space, accommodations and fine-dining restaurant. The 598-room Hilton Sandestin Beach boasts more than 32,000 sf of flexible indoor meeting space. The 9,504-sf Emerald Ballroom, 5,600-sf Coral Ballroom, 20 breakout rooms and prefunction space have all been enhanced with an array of new light fixtures, custom Kinon finished pilasters, Axminster carpet, wall treatments and fresh paint. The renovation also includes state-of-the-art technology in new teleconferencing facilities in the boardroom and touch-screen lighting in the ballrooms. The award-winning Seagar’s Prime Steaks and Seafood also received a facelift, and updates have also been made to the common space of the 400-room Emerald Tower. www.hiltonsandestinbeach.com

Mohegan Sun Unveils New Name for Mass. Casino

PALMER, MA — Mohegan Sun unveiled a new name and brand for its casino project in Western Massachusetts: Mohegan Sun Massachusetts. “Mohegan Sun Massachusetts represents what we expect our project will come to represent: the premier New England gaming brand — and one of the premier gaming brands worldwide — delivering for Massachusetts,” said Mitchell Etes, CEO of the Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority. “We will deliver jobs, revenue, economic growth and memorable experiences for visitors from all over the Northeast — and from every corner of the Commonwealth.” The project will include a hotel, casino gaming and branded retail stores and restaurants. www.mohegansunma.com



Photo credits: 1-4, PCMA; 5, Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau; 6, ESPA; 7, ASAE Convene Green Alliance; 8, ADMEI

1-4 The Professional Convention Management Association’s Convening Leaders annual meeting January 13-16 in Orlando matched the record attendance set last year with 3,751 face-to-face attendees. **1** Attending the annual meeting’s fundraiser “Party with a Purpose” at Hard Rock Live Orlando! are (l to r): Kathy Canning, executive director of the Orange County Convention Center; Deborah Sexton, president & CEO PCMA; Gary Cain, president Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Florida; Tammi Runzler, V.P. convention sales and services, Visit Orlando; and Sherrif Karamat, COO, PCMA. **2, 4** Closing reception at Universal Studios. **5** The Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau and National Association of Music Merchants marked the grand opening of the Anaheim Convention Center’s Grand Plaza and the start of the 2013 NAMM Show on January 24 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, attended by a who’s who in the music and convention industries. **6** Maritz Travel’s Heather Black, senior project manager, received the Event Service Professionals Association’s 2012 “Meeting Professional of the Year” award from ESPA President David Dvorak, CMP. **7** ASAE Convene Green Alliance took an adventurous group of 20 meeting professionals on a behind-the-scenes “Green Safari” tour of the sustainability program at the Renaissance Arlington Capital View, one of only three Gold LEED-certified hotels in Virginia. **8** The Association of Destination Management Executives International elected 2013-2014 officers and directors at their first non-U.S. conference held in Montreal, Quebec February 9 (www.admei.org).

Social Responsibility

Christine Shimasaki, CDME, CMP



Choosing the Right Charity for Your SR Program

Has your organization incorporated a community service project into your annual meeting agenda? Associations and corporations have been sponsoring fundraising activities for many years, but Hurricane Katrina and its devastation to New Orleans in 2005 ignited the massive Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) movement that is sure to remain part of our business and non-profit culture. But meetings move from destination to destination and your organization's culture evolves, so how do you choose the right charity to be the recipient of your attendees' goodwill each year? And how do you make the case for CSR to your stakeholders in the first place?

In addition to being the "right thing to do," there are many internal benefits of supporting charitable projects:

- A sense of striving together to help others creates goodwill among your staff and attendees; teamwork is an equalizer, crossing management/support/member boundaries.
- You are fulfilling your attendees' desire to "give back."
- Positive community relations are built between your organization and the local destination.
- Your project can generate positive PR and perhaps garner local media recognition.
- The addition of a unique community service project can add new interest to an annual meeting; adding a fundraising element can put a new spin on a traditional event.

There are many kinds of community service projects that can be incorporated into your meeting — hands-on physical projects such as helping clean up neighborhoods hit hard by a natural disaster, product drives such as collecting winter coats for school children in poor neighborhoods or books for underfunded libraries, or simple fundraising and food donation. Which charity you choose depends on your organization's mission, the scope of resources you can tap into, and the emotional fit between your meeting attendees and the selected cause.

To find the perfect project, ask yourself these questions:

1. Is the receiving charity a good philosophical fit with my organization?
2. Will this project create an emotional connection with my attendees?

3. Does this project fit the number of participants we'll have, their physical limitations (such as an older demographic), and the amount of time we can dedicate to it?
4. Have I enlisted the assistance of the CVB from the start?

LOOK FOR A PHILOSOPHICAL FIT

The project you choose for your annual meeting may be an extension of your organization's Social Responsibility guidelines or chosen charity. Or, perhaps your organization focuses its humanitarian efforts on one annual event positioned at the annual meeting. In that case, choosing a charity that complements the purpose of the organization and touches a segment of its attendee base is important.

Cheryl Russell, CAE, principal of C. Russell & Associates, spent many years as director, conventions and meetings for the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). "We did a program called Because We Care, which was an opportunity for ASHA members to reach out to the community where our convention was held each November," Russell explained. "We would work with the CVB to find out what opportunities were available, then decide which ones might match our mission/vision and what our members



The Professional Convention Management Association's 2013 Convening Leaders annual meeting in Orlando included a Hospitality Helping Hands project to benefit the Coalition for the Homeless of Central Florida. Volunteers cleaned, painted and served food.

Photo courtesy of PCMA

would identify with the most. Since the majority of our members worked in schools, anything that had to do with literacy, communication or reading, would be ranked high. However, depending on where we were and what the need may be, the rankings changed. For instance, in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina we worked with Habitat for Humanity on doing a build day in the 9th ward — it was one of the most popular programs we had."

FIND AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

"I truly believe that the most important factor in choosing a Corporate Social Responsibility activity to support is looking for the emotional connection for the participants," says Tammi Runzler, senior vice president of convention sales and services at Visit Orlando. Tammi should know. Not only does she connect meeting planners with community services organizations, she has a personal passion for helping combat hunger, homelessness and unsanitary conditions in Haiti; she is also founder of My Neighbor's Children, a group dedicated to helping the world's impoverished children. "Most groups have their own culture and personality, and if you look closely, you can see where and what they might emotionally connect to...and that just makes a world of difference as to the experience."

As an example, Russell notes that "since the majority of members are women at American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, we knew that anything that would help empower women would be popular, so we donated supplies to a woman's shelter. At the 2012 convention, ASHA held a donation drive to collect new, unused children's socks, underwear and sneakers to benefit the Atlanta Children's Shelter and Partnership Against Domestic Violence, organizations that address issues of great concern to women."

CONSIDER YOUR LIMITATIONS

Although your organization's heart may be in the right place, and at your upcoming meeting in New York you would love to be involved in the ongoing cleanup effort following Hurricane Sandy, you may not have the number of able-bodied volunteers or time in the meeting schedule to take on a large-scope project. "You do need to consider your group's limitations, what they are able to physically engage in," advises

Runzler. "CSR is not one size fits all. It's OK that not all groups can build a house or plant a garden; there is other work that can be accomplished inside, or by taking a more gentle or artistic approach." Don't try to squeeze what should be a day-long project into the four hours that are available before your opening general session — the goals of your project should be attainable to keep enthusiasm and interest high.

If human capital and time limitations are restrictive, your organization can give back by arranging to have leftover food delivered to local shelters, collecting exhibitors' products at the end of a trade show, and/or donating leftover convention supplies such as tote bags or notepads to local charities.

START WITH THE CVB

"CVBs are most helpful in identifying charities and learning what opportunities are available," states Cheryl Russell, "and I would always recommend that a planner start with their CVB rep." Some CVBs, such as the Providence Warwick CVB, The Virginia Beach CVB, and the Philadelphia CVB, have partnered with outside firms or non-profits to help set up community service projects, often referred to as "voluntourism."

Tammi Runzler takes CVB involvement one step further, recommending that you work with the CVB to include community service venues in the site inspection process. "Once a planner has narrowed down the potential projects, we do recommend they site the venues, if at all possible. That way the planner can see, in advance, what the experience will look and feel like. Most organizations welcome this site. Also ask your CVB partner for references from other groups that have done similar projects at a particular organization. It is wonderful to tap into someone else's experiences, both positive and negative."

Visit empowerMINT.com, the virtual CVB sales office, for contact and services information at more than 140 destinations. Then reap the humanitarian rewards of including just the right community service project in your meeting. AC&F

Christine Shimasaki, CDME, CMP, is the managing director of empowerMINT.com and the Event Impact Calculator for Destination Marketing Association International. She previously served as executive vice president and chief strategy officer for the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau, as well as a distinguished career in sales with Marriott.

Bigger and Better

By Derek Reveron

Competition Spurs Convention Centers to Renovate, Expand

Meeting planners are benefiting more than ever from the competition among Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs). That's because DMOs nationwide are vying to attract more meetings and conventions by building new convention centers, enlarging existing facilities and adding services.

More DMOs are providing what planners want and need. "Planners seek partnerships to save time, better understand what's going on at the local level, and enhance meetings and exhibits" says Christine Shimasaki, CMP, CDME, managing director of empowerMINT, a Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) initiative that educates planners on the value of DMOs. "Planners are asking, 'What kind of local partnerships do I need through DMOs to be more productive if I can't grow my own staff?'"

Seeking to address such issues, DMAI formed a new industry-wide advisory board of meeting professionals, which is meeting this year for the first time. Some DMOs have had advisory boards for a few years or more, but DMAI's effort is industry-wide. The DMAI board will consist of 25 to

30 planners nationwide who will hold one face-to-face and two or three online meetings this year, says Shimasaki. A professional facilitator will conduct the meetings.

The advisory board will examine ways to improve DMO services, encourage more planners to use the organizations and overcome industry misperceptions. "Some planners don't know about the breadth of services that DMOs provide," says Shimasaki. "Or there are perceptions that DMOs prefer to send leads to their member hotels. There are misperceptions that DMOs have a membership bias and about what it

means to be a membership or non-membership DMO. At the same time, DMOs have to challenge themselves. What is it that they don't do on a consistent basis?"

Shimasaki adds: "We want to get to the next level of what it will take to make a shift within the industry. An advisory board can give us some perspective on how to help the industry get beyond some of those longheld beliefs."

In addition, EmpowerMINT educates planners on the value of DMOs. During 2012, EmpowerMINT conducted 12 sessions at major industry events and hosted 10 webinars, mostly for planners, on topics such as site inspections and negotiating with hotels. More activities are planned for 2013.

Educating planners and expanding convention centers and services are vital keys to attracting meetings and conventions. In fact, convention centers are a destination's most important revenue producer for hotels, according to a recent study of 15 major cities by Jones Lang LaSalle, a Chicago-based firm specializing in real estate services and investment management. The study "FocusOn: Convention Centers' Impact on Hotel Markets" reported that convention center expansion increases

revenue per available hotel room (RevPAR) 1.6 percent annually over five years following the construction. Cities without convention center expansions had a 0.4 percent decline in RevPAR over the following five years.

Another recent study confirms the importance of DMOs in increasing group hotel bookings. During 2011, DMOs influenced 19 percent of total group room bookings in 275 markets where the organizations conduct group sales, according to a DMAI study. New group room bookings increased 4.8 percent in 2011.

With numbers like that, it's no wonder that so many destinations are racing to build or expand convention centers and increase services.

One outstanding example of a convention center expansion is the **New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center (MCCNO)**, which recently finished a \$52 million project that renovated and reconfigured existing spaces into the 60,300-sf, column-free Great Hall, which debuted in



The entrance to the new 60,300-sf Great Hall, which debuted in January.

Photo courtesy of MCCNO

January. The project also added 25,400 sf of multiuse, prefunction space, a 4,660-sf junior ballroom, a 3,420-sf rooftop terrace, a 5,700-sf executive club lounge and a 980-sf indoor balcony. The MCCNO now has 1.1 million square feet of exhibit space, 140 meeting rooms and the 4,000-seat New Orleans Theatre.

The expanded convention center is helping to attract more meetings and conventions. "For 2012, we are about 20 percent ahead of 2011 in terms of room nights on the books coming through the CVB," says Nikki Moon, vice president of sales for the **New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau** (NOCVB). "This year is looking excellent. We are 4 percent ahead so far. We have a strong mix of associations and corporate meetings. The first quarter of this year started strong with the Super Bowl. That helped a lot." It was the 10th time that the game was played in New Orleans, tying it with Miami for the city that has hosted the most Super Bowls.

Also, Robin E. Slye, CMP, CEM, director, meeting and event planning, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) based in Arlington, VA, holds the distinction of staging the first association event in The Great Hall. NRECA has held its annual meeting in New Orleans eight times in its 71-year history, and in 2012 New Orleans was selected as one of four annual meeting cities on a future rotation schedule. "New Orleans is a location that is favored by the NRECA membership, which is comprised of CEOs and directors from more than 900 rural electric (consumer-

"New Orleans is favored by the NRECA membership. The new grand entrance at the MCCNO and the column-free Great Hall created a memorable meeting experience for approximately 9,000 attendees."

Robin E. Slye, CMP, CEM
Director, Meeting and Event Planning
National Rural Electric Cooperative Association
Arlington, VA

owned) cooperatives all across the country. The new grand entrance at the MCCNO and the column-free Great Hall created a memorable meeting experience for approximately 9,000 attendees at its February meeting. The NRECA staff and membership are excited about the future partnership with the city of New Orleans," says Slye.

Robert L. "Bob" Johnson is the president and general manager of the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center and the executive vice president of the New Orleans Exhibition Hall Authority (Authority), the convention center's governing board. Johnson, a 39-year veteran of the assembly facility industry, oversees the operation of the facility and acts as the primary liaison between the Authority, city and state governmental agencies, and the convention center. Johnson has initiated \$82 million in upgrades, including The Great Hall and various technological and aesthetic improvements. "Over the course of the last five years we have spent \$82 million on improvements, including The Great Hall and new arrival plaza, toward the goal of being the best convention center of this size. We are now

looking at other opportunities in the immediate surrounding areas to build new and exciting demand generators for New Orleans."

The NOCVB continues to spearhead the destination's successful comeback from Hurricane Katrina. The president of the NOCVB, Stephen Perry, received a 2012 World Travel Market Globe Award for his role in helping to lead the city's comeback as a destination. In addition, the City of New Orleans received a 2012 World Tourism Award for outstanding accomplishments in the travel industry.

MAKING FULL USE OF CVB SERVICES

Visit Denver, the Mile High City's CVB, reports that the city's meeting and convention business is healthy and growing.



NRECA's Robin E. Slye and the MCCNO's Bob Johnson plan for the association's first event at the new Great Hall that was held in February.

Convention attendance rose about 2 percent in 2012, and the outlook for 2013 is even better, says Rachel Benedick, vice president of sales and service for Visit Denver.

Most of the increase stems from association meetings and conventions. Benedick says, "About 80 percent of bookings overall are associations. We love that mix because you can count on associations. They got us through 9-11 and this last recession. Their meetings may get smaller in tough times but they continue to meet. When the economy was struggling, they pulled back their booking windows. Now they are looking out further into the future."

Many groups seek assistance in several areas from Visit Denver. For example, Educause, a Boulder, CO-based association of information technology professionals in higher education, held its 2012 Annual Conference in Denver in October. The four-day conference attracted more than 7,000 attendees and encompassed 16

"Over the course of the last five years we have spent \$82 million on improvements, including The Great Hall and new arrival plaza, toward the goal of being the best convention center of this size."

Robert L. "Bob" Johnson
President and General Manager
New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center
New Orleans, LA

hotels. Most meetings and workshops were held at the Colorado Convention Center (CCC).

Gretchen Bliss, CMP, Educause director of conferences and educational activities, sought Visit Denver's assistance from the very beginning. "We booked the whole convention with their help," she says. "They helped me with booking the convention center, and they handled hotel RFPs at the very start. They sent out leads to the hotels and we got an idea of who was offering what. Then I have a (hotel booking company) take it from there. They also partnered with us to build a microsite about Denver that we put on our conference website."

Educause will be working with Visit Denver for years to come. The organization has committed to meeting in Denver every four years starting in 2018, says Bliss. "There were some concessions, but it's not necessarily about that. We wanted to lock in the dates because we know how popular October is for meetings. We are a big enough convention that we are competing, trying to find a lot of space and a lot of hotels. Our priority is to get the right dates in the right city. That's why we booked so far in advance," she says.

Visit Denver is among the DMOs that has its own planner advisory committee. The group, formed in 2004, has about 30 planners and meets twice a year. The meetings are run by a professional facilitator. Such groups are beneficial because they encourage planners to know destinations and spread the word about them, says Bliss. "You end up creating ambassadors in the marketplace who help you sell your destination. The key to success with these is you structure them as a business meeting. A professional facili-

tator runs the advisory board. We get their input. They help guide us in areas like advertising and marketing," she says.

For example, Visit Denver's advisory committee offered a suggestion regarding the 40-foot, 10,000-pound statue of the Blue Bear outside the CCC. "One of the most valuable ideas we got from them was to use the Blue Bear to brand our destination. Now we sell replicas of the bear and give them to clients," says Bliss.

CONSTRUCTION AND EXPANSION UPDATES

Oklahoma City plans to construct a new convention center, scheduled to open in 2018. The facility will provide more than 250,000 sf of exhibit space, a 35,000-sf ballroom and 50,000 sf of meeting space. The current convention facility, the Cox Convention Center, has more than 100,000 sf of exhibit space, a 25,000-sf ballroom and 21 meeting rooms totaling 27,500 sf.

The new convention center will make Oklahoma City more competitive. "It will give us the chance to solicit more and larger meetings," says Mike Carrier, president of the **Oklahoma City Convention & Visitors Bureau**. "Most meetings now are in the 750- to 1,250- (attendee) range. With the new building, our sweet spot will easily be 2,000 (attendees) and more. We will be more heavily in the national market in addition to the regional meetings market. We will also better handle concurrent meetings, which are now challenging for us."

Meanwhile, Oklahoma City's meetings business is strengthening. During the 2011-2012 fiscal year that ended June 30, bookings from meetings, conventions and horse shows totaled about \$185 million. The destination is on pace for this year's bookings to match or exceed last year's numbers, says Carrier.

There are also initial plans to construct a convention headquarters hotel. "We have had conversations with major flags about a convention headquarters hotel. The city is in the early stages of a serious conversation about that, and we will bring on a consultant in the near future to guide the process," says Carrier.

In addition to improving meetings infrastructure, Oklahoma City offers considerable value. "While we are not cheap, groups get good value for the price paid. We also have strong hospitality here. The community understands the travel and tourism business. Groups feel good about being here because they are so well received," Carrier says.

The San Jose Convention Center (SJCC) plans a \$120 million expansion and renovation that will add 125,000 sf of new convention space, including 39,000 sf of meeting space and 35,000 sf of flexible ballroom space. The project, scheduled for completion by this fall, includes more outdoor event space and upgraded technology. The SJCC currently offers 425,000 sf exhibit, meeting and ballroom space.

As an additional incentive to groups, the SJCC and **Team San Jose**, the city's CVB, are offering up to three days free convention center rental for groups that sign contracts by June 30, 2013 and meet by December 31, 2014. The offer also includes free housing registration for groups using at least three hotels; free move-in and move-out days; free tables, chairs, microphones, podiums, linens and water services; and free wireless in public areas.

In Florida, the Miami Beach Commission has voted to initiate



Gretchen Bliss, CMP
Director of Conferences and
Educational Activities
Educause
Boulder, CO

“We are a big enough convention that we are competing, trying to find a lot of space and a lot of hotels. Our priority is to get the right dates in the right city. That’s why we booked so far in advance.”

a project to expand and renovate the **Miami Beach Convention Center** (MBCC). Initial plans include additional meeting space, a new 60,000-sf multipurpose ballroom, an 800-room convention hotel as well as proposed retail, entertainment and residential developments surrounding the MBCC. Plans call for hiring a developer this year.

Detroit’s **Cobo Center** is undergoing a \$300 million expansion and renovation that is scheduled for completion in 2015. Improvements will include a new 40,000 sf ballroom, 25,000 sf of additional exhibition space and a new entrance. Cobo Center currently offers more than 700,000 sf of exhibit space and 70 meeting rooms with more than 178,000 sf of space. In addition, the **Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau** launched a new website, www.meetdetroit.com, which showcases the city’s attractions and services for planners. The site has a 50-language translation feature.

The **Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center** (LBCEC) is one of the most modern and elegant in the U.S. due to a \$35 million renovation over the last three years. The makeover includes the Long Beach Arena, which is undergoing a \$7 million renovation that will add 45,000 sf of multipurpose event space.

The LBCEC’s renovation also includes meeting rooms, lobbies and hallway areas as well as new carpets, plants, furniture and artwork. There are also networking “pods” and mini meeting spots where people can sit and network. Other enhancements include free Wi-Fi in public areas and new seats in the LBCEC’s 3,000-seat Terrace Theatre. The LBCEC currently offers more than 400,000 sf of exhibit and meeting space.

The **Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority** (LVCVA) reported that Las Vegas hosted 21,615 meetings, trade shows or conventions in 2012, up 13.6 percent from the 2011 total of 19,029 — and highest number since 2008. The trend is certain to continue with LCVA’s recent announcement of new plans to develop a \$2.5 billion Las Vegas Global Business District, which will encompass major renovations of the Las Vegas Convention Center, creation of a World Trade Center facility and the development of a centralized transportation hub. To be completed in three phases over several years, the first phase, extending through 2014, focuses on the convention center and will include expansion of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space, upgraded technology, a grand concourse connector with more lobby space and more F&B outlets.

In Nashville, the **Music City Center** (MCC) is scheduled to open in May. The MCC will be about three times larger than the existing **Nashville Convention Center** (NCC), with 1.2 million sf space including 350,000 sf of exhibition space, a 57,500-sf ballroom and 90,000 sf of meeting space. The headquarters hotel for the MCC, the 800-room Omni Nashville Hotel, will open late this year with 80,000 sf of meeting and ballroom space.

The NCC will continue to be part of Nashville’s meetings infrastructure in some way. “There are several re-use proposals on the table, including a hotel, museum, performance venue and conference center. No decision has been made yet,” says Butch Spyridon, president of the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corporation.

Nashville’s new projects are paying big dividends. As of early January, advanced bookings for the MCC exceeded 800,000 room nights, mostly from associations, says Spyridon.

The MCC will help make Nashville a top convention destination by enabling the city to book larger meetings and conventions. “It will put us in the top 10 in terms of room nights and number of groups,” says Spyridon. “The new building opens up 80 percent of the market in the country for us and triples the size of the average group. Attendance-wise, we were averaging groups with 1,000 to 1,500 people. Now, we are averaging 5,000 to 6,000 per group.”

In March 2012, more than 6,000 people attended the Commodity Classic, the annual four-day convention and trade show for four associations — the National Association of Wheat Growers, National Corn Growers Association, American Soybean Association and National Sorghum Producers. Attendees stayed at about a half dozen hotels. Meetings were held at the group’s headquarters property, the Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center, which offers more than 100,000 sf of meeting space and is located about 20 minutes from downtown.

The Commodity Classic last met in Nashville in 2008. “We go to Nashville every four years or so and typically stay at the Gaylord because of the space. Attendees love the city. We considered downtown, but the package was better for us at the Gaylord. They enjoy the various tours and museums downtown, and they certainly loved the nightlife,” says Peggy Findley, show director of the Commodity Classic. The highlight of the activities involved renting the Grand Ole Opry for an evening of entertainment, she adds.

In San Francisco, the **Moscone Center** has finished a two-year, \$56 million renovation of the North and South buildings, which offer a total of 1.2 million sf of space. The project included upgraded escalators, elevators and HVAC systems as well as new carpet, paint, lighting, ceiling and restrooms, and a new wireless system that provides high-speed Internet for up to 60,000 devices simultaneously.

Moscone Center also recently received LEED Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. The center’s sustainable features include a solar array that saves energy and reduces greenhouse gas emissions, intelligent wireless lighting controls technology and low-flow plumbing fixtures.

See the following pages for more news about Oklahoma City, New Orleans and San Jose. AC&F

Oklahoma City Convention & Visitors Bureau

123 Park Avenue, Oklahoma City, OK 73102
405-297-8906 • Fax: 405-297-8806

Johnny Danrich III, CMP, Assistant Director of Sales & Services • jdandrich@visitokc.com • www.visitokc.com

In the heart of downtown Oklahoma City, the Cox Convention Center boasts more than 150,000 sf of total meeting space including an impressive 25,000-sf ballroom; 100,000 sf of exhibit space and additional meeting rooms totaling 27,500 sf. And the best is yet to come — a new \$252 million downtown convention center projected to be completed in 2018.

With seven hotels within walking distance of the Cox Convention Center, downtown Oklahoma City provides several options for groups. The Renaissance Oklahoma City Convention Center Hotel is connected to the center via skybridge. The historic, charming Skirvin Hilton opened in 1911 and features original details.

Downtown Oklahoma City offers plenty to see and do including the Oklahoma City Museum of Art, the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum and more. Also, the Bricktown Entertainment District is home to dozens of restaurants.

The Will Rogers World Airport, with 22 nonstop flights to 19 destinations in the U.S., is conveniently located just 15 minutes from downtown.

The Oklahoma City Convention & Visitors Bureau offers complete convention servicing and support for groups of all sizes and can assist in any aspect of meeting planning. AC&F

CITYWIDE FACTS & FEATURES

Guest Rooms: Approximately 16,000

Hotels/Resorts: Approximately 150

Meeting Space: Cox Convention Center: 100,000 sf of exhibit space; 25,000-sf ballroom; and an additional 27,500 sf among 21 meeting rooms.

Convention Center FYI: The new convention center will be located directly south of the Myriad Botanical Gardens & Crystal Bridge Tropical Conservatory and directly north of the proposed 70-acre MAPS 3 public park.

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In perfect harmony with her timeless charms, New Orleans' newest great improvisation — The Great Hall — debuted January 2013. The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center now features the 60,300-sf divisible Great Hall, boasting 25,400 sf of

to all attendees and serves as a seamless connection to nearby hotels.

TECHNOLOGICAL OPPORTUNITIES

The ballroom expansion project is the latest in a series of \$140 million in upgrades to the facility since 2006. The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center — the sixth largest convention center in the nation — boasts a 1 gigabyte fiber optic Internet backbone that is 100 percent redundant, providing meeting planners with unlimited technological opportunities to extend programming to attendees and exhibitors.

In addition to a repainted exterior and extensive landscaping, the center's vast lobby features comfortable furniture groupings in more than 150,000 sf of space for registration, information kiosks and sponsor banners.

Attendees will enjoy learning the origins of unique New Orleans words via an interactive QR code on the "Word Wall." The lobby's decorative banners feature iconic New Orleans images of art, music, food, history and architecture, and purple-coated "Fleur de Lis Ambassadors" greet attendees at every entrance.

Digital, flat-panel audio-video information systems are strategically placed throughout the main lobby, meeting room levels and in prefunction areas. In addition, key card access and a fully integrated, digital signage system with screens were implemented in all 140 meeting rooms and throughout public space.

The center's highly qualified and experienced production team offers a full menu of integrated services for all lighting, audio, video and rigging needs in-house or to support selected contractors.

The center offers a full suite of high-definition video equipment for a variety of satellite broadcasts, presentations or recording formats and the trained personnel to design, capture and edit programs onsite.

The full-service UPS Store provides show management, attendees and exhibitors a full range of services including large-image, onsite printing of meter boards, directional signs and banners; in-bound and out-bound small package handling; and a satellite mobile kiosk for printing, packing and shipping.

The center's food service contractor, Centerplate, is committed to providing the essence of the New Orleans food experience, operating three onsite restaurants featuring live local music and menus of iconic Louisiana dishes by award-winning chef Donald Link. AC&F



multiuse prefunction space and hotel-like appointments throughout.

The impressive 1.1 million-sf center, which so perfectly complements the city's walkable hotel packages, is now more attractive than ever to groups large and small.

Additional features of The Great Hall include a 4,660-sf junior ballroom, complete with a 3,420-sf rooftop terrace, a 980-sf indoor balcony and a 5,700-sf executive club lounge. A new pedestrian plaza provides a grand sense of arrival

CONVENTION CENTER FACTS & FEATURES

Meeting Space: 140 meeting rooms, 1.1 million sf of exhibit space, 4,000-seat theater.

Special Services & Amenities: New 60,000-sf, column-free ballroom with 25,000 sf of prefunction space with a new pedestrian plaza; UPS Store onsite; VIP dining area; three food courts.



The site of many a command performance, the Crescent City's long revered convention center now features a 60,300 square foot, column-free, divisible ballroom with 25,400 sq ft of multi-use pre-function space all with hotel-like appointments throughout. This impressive 3.1 million sq ft center, which so perfectly complements the city's walkable hotel packages, is now more attractive than ever to groups large AND small. Additional features of note include the 4,660 sq ft Rivergate Room, contiguous to 1.1 million sq ft of exhibit space, 140 meeting rooms, a 4,000 seat theater and a 36,000 sq ft ballroom.



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Mark McMinn, Director of Sales • mmmcminn@sanjose.org • www.sanjose.org

Instead of handing planners off to other organizations once they book the meeting, Team San Jose (TSJ) does it all, from housing, event services and customized food and beverage menus to permits, marketing support and technically savvy special events. It's no wonder

of the meeting. With the walkable and exciting downtown, planners don't need to worry about group transportation.

Team San Jose manages the main meeting venues, ensuring quality control of the experience from beginning to end. In addition to managing the San Jose Convention Center, TSJ manages the San Jose Civic (home to shows, concerts, corporate rentals, family shows, special events), the Center for the Performing Arts, California Theatre, Montgomery Theater, Parkside Hall and South Hall.

COMING FALL 2013: BIGGER, BETTER CONVENTION CENTER

The San Jose Convention Center is undergoing a major revitalization reflective of the destination's innovative spirit. In the fall of 2013, the center, which will remain open and 100 percent operational throughout the project, will complete a \$120 million expansion and renovation, adding 125,000 sf of flexible ballroom and meeting space to the center's existing 425,000 sf. After the project concludes, the center will offer 550,000 sf of total usable space for meetings, conventions and events.

98 percent of planners say they'd return to San Jose in the future.

From beginning to end, TSJ offers a streamlined solution to booking the destination, from the smallest corporate group to a big citywide. Because of the close hotel, arts and labor partnerships, booking the city is as easy as booking and operating in a big-box hotel property. This saves the event planner valuable time, energy and resources, so they can focus on the success

Booking Incentive: Book now through 2014 and get up to three days of FREE San Jose Convention Center rental plus: FREE tables, chairs, linens, water services, pens, pads, microphones, podium; FREE move-in/move-out day; FREE housing registration for groups using three hotels or more; FREE wireless in public areas; two FREE telephones and electrical at registration desk; FREE coffee service for staff offices; and \$10 per day parking.

REVITALIZED DOWNTOWN

Downtown San Jose is undergoing a transformation. In addition to the convention center project, Mineta San Jose International Airport, just four minutes from downtown, recently completed a \$1.3 billion modernization. The City of San Jose has launched complimentary Wi-Fi for downtown visitors and residents. Also, the San Jose Civic completed a \$15 million dramatic makeover.

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Discover San Jose's 300 days of sunshine, walkable downtown laid out like a cultural campus, historic California landmarks, engaging museums, theaters, galleries and innovative events — all within walking distance of a myriad of restaurants and hotels, and central access to Northern California beaches and wine country. AC&F

Other Amenities: To continue streamlining service and value, Team San Jose offers an in-house culinary team that serves up customized menus. Their unconventionally good cuisine features local and often organic ingredients.

CITYWIDE FACTS & FEATURES

Guest Rooms: 8,900

Hotels: 89

Meeting Space: Currently 425,000 sf; after the renovation of the San Jose Convention Center, there will be 550,000 sf of total usable space for meetings, conventions and events.

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Give Face-to-Face Attendance a Virtual Boost

By George Seli

In recent years, a certain risk has been stereotypically associated with virtual meetings. It's often characterized by the rather unpleasant word "cannibalization." The worry is that the virtual event will siphon away many of the live convention's potential attendees who chose to stay comfortably and cost-effectively in their homes (or home offices) and take in all the content from their computers. The unwanted results include attrition, weaker traffic flow for exhibitors and a less vibrant networking scene.

VIRTUAL MARKETING

But the truth is that most association members recognize that remote attendance is not the ideal way to participate in the meeting: They want to experience that famous speaker while seated among their peers; they want to make a more personal connection with colleagues and exhibitors. Instead, virtual attendance is a welcome option only when they can't fit the travel time into their busy schedules, or if they can't attend relying on their own

"I felt like I was kind of there, but not really. And it did make me want to participate the following year live, which I did."

Marian Long, CMP
Director of Meeting Services
American Association of Diabetes Educators
Chicago, IL

funds. It's also a nice option when they want to get a sense of the content being offered, before making the decision to attend in person. In that case, elements such as webcasts of educational sessions, virtual trade shows, online networking with other attendees and real-time Q&As with presenters all serve to "advertise" the real convention. The virtual meeting effectively says, "All of this is what you could be experiencing in that more compelling, face-to-face way."

INXPO, a major provider of virtual event solutions, has some data to confirm that promotional effect. "We've been working with PCMA for several years, and we did a survey to determine

Mastering the Hybrid Meetings Balancing Act

how many people attended 2012 Convening Leaders based on their 2011 Convening Leaders virtual participation," says Scott Kellner, chief marketing officer with INXPO. "Fourteen percent said that their virtual experience had directly led to their decision to attend in person. Some hadn't even been (at the face-to-face meeting) in the last five to six years." Any small cannibalization effect that a virtual meeting might have would surely be offset by the new face-to-face attendees it draws to the next convention, as these stats suggest.

Most recently, a post-meeting survey from PCMA's 2013 Convening Leaders hybrid event revealed that attendees were 63 percent more likely to attend a future PCMA face-to-face event because of the hybrid experience.

And there is anecdotal evidence that virtual attendance can foster the desire to participate in person. Marian Long, CMP, is director of meeting services with another of INXPO's clients, the Chicago-based American Association of Diabetes Educators (AADE). "My first virtual meeting experience was PCMA about three years ago," Long recalls. "Two colleagues from my department had gone to Las Vegas for the event, and I attended virtually." To a degree, Long did get a sense of a shared experience with those colleagues. "It was great just going back and forth with them while they were in the general session: 'I'm not feeling it with the speaker, are you guys? How is it live?' One of the speakers was just not resonating with me, and I thought maybe it was just me. 'No, she's not doing very well here either,' they said." But apparently the virtual interaction with her colleagues was less than ideal. "I felt like I was kind of there, but not really. And it did make me want to participate the following year live, which I did."

ADDED VALUE

AADE's national convention in August will be its 40th, and will be paired with its virtual meeting for the third time. Long and Meetings Coordinator Erin Luytjes say they have thus far seen no evidence of cannibalization, and feel that the virtual event is mainly a resource for members who can't always attend in person. A health care organization might only be able to send two out of six diabetes educators to the convention each year, for example. "We're just looking at it as another member benefit, giving them a chance to feel like they're still part of the meeting without having to be there," Long explains. "If a member can't

be there we understand it, because we already have a history 40 years going (with many members) rotating in every two to three years."

And the greater value of physical attendance is not in question. "When you attend live you get much more CE credit and you get to attend all the social events," says Luytjes. Long adds, "Our people are very social, and they talk to colleagues and friends about cases at the meeting. I don't think they're ever going to take that face-to-face (interaction) away because it's just too powerful." Indeed, virtual meetings would never drive physical attendance if the former were just as compelling as the latter; so in a sense, the limitations of virtual are important.

The AADE is selective as to which breakout sessions to capture virtually, and only about 1 percent of exhibitors choose to have a virtual presence. But even if the virtual meeting were more robust — with capture of all sessions and significant exhibitor

participation — Long and Luytjes feel that it would not detract from physical attendance, which is about 3,000 professionals. The number of virtual participants has been about one-tenth of that figure, and thus far, no trend in decreasing physical attendance coupled with increasing virtual attendance has been observed. That's reassuring, and Long notes that the members will benefit from more access to the virtual content in the future as INXPO keeps the captured sessions available for 12 months instead of six. So although the association is financially just "breaking even," as Long puts it, with the virtual event, the member benefit has proven a strong enough reason to continue the event and develop it. "I get a lot of calls and people are definitely engaged in it. They're requesting to see more sessions next year," adds Luytjes.

But some associations are abandoning the virtual component because it's not a revenue-generator — breaking even apparently isn't good enough. "What I'm hearing is that a lot of medical as-

Create Your Own Interactive TV Network

A virtual meeting, at least in the case of a hybrid event, coincides with a physical convention. But virtual content can be offered year-round and thereby serves to increase member engagement on an ongoing basis, often resulting in a better turnout at the face-to-face event. Why not give that online content a format that just about everyone is used to, a format that draws people in compulsively? Why not make it like a TV network?

That's the basic idea behind Social Business TV, a new product from Chicago-based INXPO. "Social Business TV enables an association to have its own online, ongoing broadcasting solution," says

Scott Kellner, chief marketing officer. The tool enables "all your content, your captures in your live session and your additional sessions that you may be creating throughout the year to be available in a single environment that is organized by topic-specific channels just like regular TV."

And yet it's more than regular TV in that participants have the ability to interact and discuss the content. That feature also makes Social Business TV more dynamic than an online knowledge

center, a common tool for associations. Like a knowledge center, Social Business TV "enables you to go in and download content, but you don't do it in a vacuum," Kellner explains. "There is a reason we put the word 'social' in the title's product. It enables a great deal of interaction to

particular types of content, and so on. Using the tool, the host can then obtain Nielsen-type metrics on how different content resonates with the audience segments, and in view of that information, adjust future offerings.

"What we hear a lot from our association customers is that they need a better way to stay in touch with various audiences, a vehicle that is going to be tailored not only to engaging them, but also to providing a level of metric analysis that enables them to be smarter with how they follow up and whom they target," Kellner says.

Those metrics also can be used to determine content for the annual convention,

creating a more relevant and ultimately better-attended event. "And this is a very important point: If you're going to use Social Business TV, you should have a year-round content marketing program," he says. "If all you're going to do is stream live content from your event, then probably just a basic webcasting or hybrid event solution is right for you. But if you're interested in ongoing communications, then Social Business TV is appropriate."

To get the most out of Social Business TV, the "channels" should target certain member demographics: prospective members, active members, somewhat disengaged members, early-career members, members interested in par-



A Social Business TV network, organized by topic-specific channels, gives associations an interactive online repository for content.

Photo courtesy of INXPO

sociations are trying it and then stopping because it's not making revenue," says Lu Anne Bankert, senior director, programs and meetings, with the Rockville, MD-based Association of Community Cancer Centers (ACCC). "And I would have to say that we're basically the same way: It's not making revenue for us. But it's a benefit to our members, and it has shown that some of the people who (participate remotely) come to the next meeting. We follow the attendance to see just how many of them turn into onsite attendees. We've run the virtual program for just three years, so we're still in the baby stages of that (data collection)."

HYBRID MEETING VETERANS

Unlike the AADE and the ACCC, Alexandria, VA-based American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) has run its virtual meeting for quite a long time — more than 10 years. Like both associations, however, ASCO has seen no evidence of the cannibalization of its physical event, which draws about 26,000 professionals. "I think medical meetings have a unique perspective on (the value of virtual meetings) because all of our attendees can't

attend a meeting," according to a source from ASCO. "Hospitals need to keep running, and especially with a lot of smaller practices, only a certain percentage of their people can attend. So giving them access to the educational content is crucial. It's something that our membership and leaders had been requesting for years."

Sixty to 70 percent of attendees (including both remote and in-person) purchased ASCO's virtual meeting product when it was a separate charge, and then "we rolled it into the annual meeting registration and raised the price accordingly," the source explained. "We were prepared, we had policies ready for complaints, and we got nothing. So I think it was a value that our attendees saw and something that they thought they could use. I think it's now almost an expected piece of the meeting experience instead of an add-on." While virtual is clearly valuable for those ASCO members who can't attend in person, so are its limitations in terms of educational effectiveness. "They tell us it's great to have the virtual, but when you get back into your day-to-day life you really don't have time to stop and watch the sessions. But when you're at ASCO, that's why you're there, you've

already taken the time to do it," the ASCO representative notes. "So it's important to come to the face-to-face meeting in order to 'disconnect' (from one's daily life). And it's also important for them to have the face-to-face time with the other attendees and colleagues around the world."

ASCO runs about 18 parallel sessions and captures practically all the content (in few cases speakers choose not to allow it). "We were almost at 97 percent captured last year," says the source. But due to the high degree of "parallelism" in the sessions, many members invariably miss sessions they want to participate in. "We needed to figure out a way to allow people to see more of this education that we're having, because the meeting would be 14 days long if we didn't run all these sessions against each other. So how do we create a way for attendees to select sessions to see that is not just based on time constraints?"

The answer lies in the use of the virtual meeting by onsite attendees. After the meeting, or even after a day of sessions back at the hotel room, an attendee can tune in to those sessions he or she wishes to have been able to physically attend. It's the next

best thing, and the sessions are available virtually about seven hours after they take place. "It allows them to kind of tailor the meeting experience, and I think they don't feel as panicky when they're there since they don't have to catch everything live and in person anymore," says the ASCO representative. "Our IT director jokingly called it 'ASCO DVR' where you could look at ASCO's entire schedule while you were sitting in a meeting and click a checkbox, and it would put that session on your virtual meeting 'playlist' to catch later."

Virtual and physical meetings aren't mutually exclusive, of course, and the added convenience of captured sessions for onsite attendees makes the convention even more attractive. On top of the compelling educational and networking experiences that face-to-face offers, attendees can use the virtual platform to supplement those experiences, and needn't worry they will completely miss out on sessions or colleague connections due to happenstance or time constraints. A planner shouldn't be surprised if stronger physical attendance results from that winning combination. AC&F

How to Hybridize Your Meeting

By David McMillin

Mary Reynolds Kane, director, online marketing for the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA), and Jennifer Kingen Kush, marketing, PCMA, have seen just how much of an impact a hybrid meeting can have on an organization and its face-to-face event. Reynolds Kane and Kingen Kush were the brains behind the screens of Convening Leaders 2013 Hybrid.

I caught up with both of them to understand how PCMA leveraged cutting-edge technology to welcome a record-breaking 800+ attendees to its hybrid community during the face-to-face Convening Leaders held in Orlando in January. Here's a look at six key steps to taking a meeting hybrid.

1 Choose Your Content Wisely.

Convening Leaders featured hundreds of sessions, but not all of them were appropriate for the hybrid format. As the meeting approached, Reynolds Kane worked with PCMA's Education Department to determine which sessions would be the most interactive. "We wanted to bring them sessions that would teach them something, but most importantly, we

wanted to deliver sessions that would engage attendees even while they sat at their desks," Reynolds Kane says.

2 Prepare Your Speakers. Choosing the sessions is only half the equation for engagement. Long before the selected speakers arrived in Orlando, PCMA was

"You have to create that 'I wish I was there' feeling. Just sitting watching a session may not be enough."



Mary Reynolds Kane
Director, Online Marketing
PCMA
Chicago, IL

working to help them understand how to appeal to both the onsite audience and those attendees engaging via their computer screens around the world. In order to help selected speakers consider how hybrid technology would impact their sessions, Kingen Kush shared a session with them from an actual attendee's perspective and offered helpful tips for

adapting to the hybrid environment during a pre-meeting webinar. "You don't change your presentation, but you do think about how you'll deliver it differently," Kingen Kush says.

3 Be a Team Player. While PCMA organized the entire program, Reynolds Kane says that the hybrid meeting would not have been possible without the dedicated work of the organization's partners: Mediasite by Sonic Foundry for streaming, INXPO for the platform, Freeman for AV and bXb for production. "It's a huge team effort for success," Reynolds Kane says.

That effort started with plenty of phone calls to determine technology needs, delegate responsibilities and ensure everyone understood their roles in Orlando. Even with all that preparation, the days leading up to the beginning of the program were packed with going room to room to check audio and video feeds. "There are so many uncertainties in a hybrid meeting," Kingen Kush says. "Running all of those tests long before any of your attendees arrive is essential to success."

4 Start the Conversation. Once the

meeting started and attendees logged in, they discovered a new element that PCMA hadn't used in its previous two years of hybrid meetings: online chat capabilities. "The chat component made the biggest difference this year," Reynolds Kane says. "Attendees loved being able to share ideas and challenges and learn from one another."

From informal greetings to sharing success stories to submitting questions for the onsite speakers, groups featured lively discussions among attendees.

Still, getting them talking relied on a moderator to help fuel the conversation. Reynolds Kane and Kingen Kush, along with marketing specialists Daniel Metz and Corey Domek, helped fulfill that role. "An online moderator has to be friendly and approachable to help set the tone and foster a real sense of community," Reynolds Kane says.

5 Show the Onsite Energy. A hybrid meeting must strike a balance between digital engagement and a desire to encourage that audience to join face-to-face the next year. "You have to create that 'I wish I was there' feeling," Reynolds Kane says. "Just sitting watching a session may not be enough."

In order to show the true onsite en-



A screenshot from PCMA's Convening Leaders 2013 Hybrid shows the online chat component.

ergy, PCMA displayed videos and images of networking, receptions and elements that are only possible to experience as a face-to-face participant.

6 Extend the Life of Your Content and Your Hybrid Community. Just as the industry stresses the importance of a face-to-face experience extending after attendees return home, hybrid meetings can be part of that extension, too, with a rebroadcast. "You've already got the content, and you've already paid for it," Reynolds Kane says. "All you have to do is set aside one extra day. Even if you can't

get the speakers involved, a rebroadcast helps the hybrid experience live on beyond the traditional start and end dates."

Reynolds Kane says that the rebroadcast can deliver additional value for face-to-face attendees, too. In fact, more than 13 percent of rebroadcast attendees participated because they wanted to watch the sessions again or missed the sessions while onsite in Orlando.

Excerpted with permission from "6 Steps to Take Your Meeting Hybrid," by David McMillin, staff writer, Professional Convention Management Association.

Florida

Accessibility, Affordability and Variety Make the Sunshine State a Winner

By John Buchanan

It's no coincidence that Florida ranks perennially as a top dog statewide meeting destination, alongside its chief competitor, Arizona. Like Arizona, Florida offers consistently good weather year-round, formidable airlift and a dazzling array of hotel options, from five-star resorts to affordable major-flag hotels.

"Among the 100 associations that we manage, Florida is the No. 1 destination as a state for all of our meetings," says Phelps Hope, CMP, the Atlanta-based vice president, meetings and expositions, for Kellen Meetings, a division of Kellen Company. "Weather is obviously a key factor. Accessibility is another one. It's just easy to get to Florida from anywhere else in the country. And there is quite a variety and levels of affordability in the hotel product."

There are a number of reasons why so many associations find the Sunshine State so attractive as a destination for meetings large and small, Hope says. "But one important one is the variety of ho-

tel product. We can put our smaller board retreats or high-end or family-based conferences in a boutique property on the beach. And we can take a large, exhibit-hosting, convention-style major meeting with multiple hotels to Florida, too. So you have the full range of options in terms of what is available there."

A REGULAR BEACH-GOER

Among Florida's most enthusiastic longtime users is the Louisiana Finance Association (LFA), based in Baton Rouge, whose 650 corporate members are consumer finance companies.

Last July, LFA hosted its annual

Showtime Events, Santa Rosa, FL, arranged the unique Kentucky Derby decorations for the Louisiana Finance Association's special event at Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa.

Photos by Walker Audio Visual, Biloxi, MS



four-day convention for 300 attendees and family members at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa (598 guest rooms; 32,000 sf of meeting space) on northwestern Florida's Emerald Coast for the 27th consecutive year, notes executive director Kimberly Baggett.

Why such extraordinary loyalty?

"First of all, the staff at the hotel knows our group and our attendees," Baggett says. "And we've been doing this meeting for so long with them that they know exactly what we want. They know what we expect. So the planning of the event is just seamless from my point of view as the person responsible for it. It's a no-brainer at this point. And I like that."

But another key factor is Hilton Sandestin's location along one of the most pristine and acclaimed beaches in the U.S.

"And there is also something in the area for everyone to do," Baggett says. "That's very important, because another practical factor for us is that a lot of attendees bring their families to this meeting. About 75 percent of our attendees treat it like an annual family vacation. And one of the nice things about Hilton Sandestin is that their rooms are set up for families. There are bunk beds in every room. And it's a very family-oriented property. But there's also great nightlife literally right across the street, so there's plenty for kids and also for their parents to do while they're there. And there's great shopping at an outlet mall right down the street. The hotel also operates shuttles that bring people back and forth, so there's no need for a car."

Convenient location is yet another factor that makes the destination popular year after year. "You want a place that's far enough from home to make it feel like a vacation," Baggett says. "But you also don't want a place that's so far away that it feels like it takes a vacation to get there. And that's especially important to us because the majority of our attendees drive in, and it's just a five-hour trip."

Highlights of last year's meeting included a Kentucky Derby-themed dinner and ball staged in two ballrooms on closing night. "We brought in decorations and had the place look like Churchill Downs," Baggett says. "All the women wore their big hats and we served mint juleps and had a band."

Another highlight was an afternoon outing for 75 attendees on seven party barges rented from Boogie's Water Sports for an excursion in Destin Harbor.

LFA also hosted a golf tournament at nearby Kelly Plantation. In addition, Baggett says, many attendees took advantage of the area's other celebrated golf courses in their free time — another reason why the destination is so popular.

Of primary importance to Baggett, however, is the extraordinary service and support she gets from the Hilton Sandestin staff.

"I'm relatively new in my posi-

"Weather is obviously a key factor. Accessibility is another one. It's just easy to get to Florida from anywhere else in the country. And there is quite a variety and levels of affordability in the hotel product."



Phelps Hope, CMP
Vice President, Meetings and Expositions
Kellen Meetings
Atlanta, GA

tion," she says. "I've only been in the job for four years. And this is our most important meeting of the year. The Hilton Sandestin makes me look wonderful to our members. They make me look like a rock star as a planner. And for me, that seals the deal, because it's a hotel that makes me look good at my job."

But equally important, she says, is the fact that LFA's attendees love the hotel. "The food and beverage is excellent," she says. "And you can't find better beaches anywhere in the country. The rooms are wonderful. And the overall service is wonderful. As a planner, I couldn't ask for a better hotel. It's awesome."

Hilton Sandestin, which just completed a renovation of its meeting space, including the 9,504-sf Emerald Ballroom, also features the AAA Four Diamond flagship restaurant, Seagar's Prime Steaks and Seafood.

FIRST-TIME VISITOR

Robert Glaser, CAE, president of the North Carolina Automobile Dealers Association (NCADA) in Raleigh, hosted the organization's first major meeting in 25 years last June for 300 attendees at the AAA Four Diamond Omni Amelia Island Plantation (404 oceanfront hotel rooms; 80,000 sf of meeting space) near Jacksonville.

There were three primary reasons for his selection of Florida and Omni Amelia Island Plantation, Glaser says. "No. 1, Amelia Island Plantation is an absolutely beautiful location," he says. "No. 2, the service at the property is just outstanding. And the third reason is that the food and beverage at Amelia Island — the culinary expertise they bring to your meeting — is just magnificent."

Another important factor in the equation, however, was the resort's appeal to attendees. "And in terms of draw, Amelia Island also performed very well," Glaser says. "One of the reasons is that we structured and promoted the meeting as a family convention," he says. "And that idea works very well at Amelia Island because of the condo facilities they have. And it drew very well. We had more kids at the 2012 meeting than we've had in 20 years."

NCADA has always welcomed spouses and children at its major meetings, but 2012 was the first time they marketed to families

Robert Glaser, CAE, president of the North Carolina Automobile Dealers Association, says the golf course at Omni Amelia Island Plantation near Jacksonville is "pretty awesome."



Photo courtesy of Omni Amelia Island Plantation

to the extent they did. "And the role that Amelia Island Plantation played in our being able to do that was very important because the ability to book various kinds of condos in various buildings with various setups allowed our family attendees to get exactly what they were looking for," Glaser explains. "Instead of being in a typical hotel setting, they were in a setting that provided them more flexibility in terms of what they wanted. And that had a very positive impact on our attendance and family participation."

That's especially important because the auto dealership industry is very much family-oriented, Glaser says. "That's why we formally marketed this meeting that way," he says. "We've come to the conclusion that is our sweet spot with this meeting, and things just worked out very nicely because we chose Amelia Island Plantation as our venue."

As a result, some attendees arrived early with their families and others stayed a few days after the meeting. "And some brought just a few family members, and others brought 10," Glaser says. "Some used hotel rooms in the main building, and others used multiple condos in the outlying facilities."

Glaser also had high praise for the quality of the food and beverage and the three championship golf courses at the resort.

"The food at Amelia Island is just outstanding," he says. "The culinary expertise there is as good as you will find anywhere."

A highlight of the meeting was an "Iron Chef: Amelia Island" cooking competition. "We had a half-dozen different teams competing," Glaser says. "And we had the hotel's chef coordinating everything. It was very well done, and it was just a fabulous event for our attendees."

Golf also played an important role in the success of the meeting. "Any time you bring together car dealers and vendors, there's always a role for golf," Glaser says with a chuckle. "And there was a balance at this meeting, because attendees also wanted to spend time with their families. But it definitely played a role, because the golf course at Amelia Island is pretty awesome."

Another highlight of the meeting was a ballroom-staged

"Family Feud" competition based on auto industry-related questions such as the 10 ugliest cars ever made and 10 hottest muscle cars ever made.

Omni Amelia Island Plantation is now completing an extensive \$85 million renovation that includes an expanded 80,000-sf conference center and 155 additional rooms and suites for a total of 404 guest rooms. The resort's sister property, The Villas of Amelia Island Plantation, offers more than 320 villa units.

And for his part, Glaser says he expects to go back. "Based on the experience we had, we'll definitely look to get back there in the next four or five years."

THE LAP OF LUXURY

Last October, Mike Horner, director of administration and membership at the National Association of Water Companies (NAWC) in Washington, DC, hosted his first meeting in Miami at Turnberry Isle (408 guest rooms; 40,000-sf conference center), a member of the Autograph Collection of hotels.

NAWC had previously held the meeting, which attracts about 350 attendees, in Orlando.

Based on feedback Horner and his executive leadership received after a small meeting at Turnberry Isle, the organization selected it for the 2012 meeting, its annual National Drinking Water Summit.

"At the earlier meeting, which was attended by CEOs of water companies, everyone remarked about what a great venue it was and how it really had everything we needed for our national summit," Horner says. "So when we were looking for a place to do the 2012 meeting, about a year in advance, we pursued Turnberry because of the previous comments we had gotten after the smaller meeting there."

The critical factors for NAWC are easy access for attendees from across the country. "And Miami and Fort Lauderdale are both pretty convenient," Horner says.

But it was the exclusive environment and high-end facilities



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Mike Horner
Director of Administration
and Membership
National Association of
Water Companies
Washington, DC

“We were supposed to have our opening-night reception outside, but it had been raining all day. ...And even though they had to move inside on short notice, they were able to create an atmosphere that was very well received by our attendees and myself as a planner.”

at the recently renovated Turnberry Isle that cinched the deal for the 2012 conference. “Because senior executives of water companies are our attendees, we look for a certain level of service in the properties we choose for the summit,” Horner says. “And in addition to hearing good responses from the CEOs who had attended the earlier meeting there, we also heard from other people that Turnberry met the high standard that our members expect for our annual meeting.”

Given the tony ambience at Turnberry Isle, NAWC also raised its standard for keynote speakers.

Because 2012 was a presidential election year, and the meeting was being held in October, the organization decided to do something different and dramatic. Horner booked authors and political gurus Mark Halperin and John Heilemann as co-keynoters for the opening morning of the conference. “Our attendees really responded well,” Horner says. “That was the highest-rated of all our sessions.”

Rarely does NAWC bring in such well-known and expensive speakers. “But we’ll probably do it more frequently in future years,” Horner says, “based on the response we got in October.”

Another factor in the success of the meeting was the extremely high quality of the food and beverage service at Turnberry Isle. “It was excellent,” Horner says. “And what happened to us is also an indication of the level of service and support you get at Turnberry. We were supposed to have our opening-night reception outside, but it had been raining all day. But the staff did a great job of waiting until the very last minute, to see if the weather would improve, before moving the event indoors at the last minute. And even though they had to move inside on short notice, they were able to create an atmosphere that was very well received by our attendees and myself as a planner.”

Yet another aspect of Turnberry’s appeal was its world-famous golf course. NAWC hosted a golf tournament on the Sunday morning before the meeting began. About 15 foursomes participated in a shotgun tournament. “We gave away some small prizes, but it was mostly for fun,” Horner says. “It just gives people

a chance to get out and have some fun. And if they’re talking business, at least they’re doing it on a golf course.”

And the Turnberry links were a big hit. “Our attendees loved the course,” Horner says.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Kellen’s Hope is not surprised that LFA and NCADA are leveraging the appeal of family-friendly meetings to extend the appeal of their major meetings. And he’s not surprised that given that objective, Florida has been their destination of choice.

“Family-friendly meetings have always been popular with many associations,” Hope says. “That’s always been one of the things that set association meetings apart from corporate meetings. But what does influence that practice is the destinations in Florida. Whether you plan for family members to attend or not, if you hold your annual meeting in a resort environment in Florida, you’re going to get families anyway, because the attendee is going to say to his or her spouse, “We’re going to Disney World this year, so why don’t we take a few extra days and go as a family?”

And he, too, finds time-honored resort properties such as Hilton Sandestin and Omni Amelia Island Plantation as powerful draws for families. “I could name a hundred in Florida,” he says.



The new lobby at Rosen Centre Hotel in Orlando, one of three Rosen convention hotels, provides a variety of spaces for attendee networking.

Photo courtesy of Rosen Hotels & Resorts

Among the most appealing individual destinations for some planners are old-school, classic beach destinations such as Daytona Beach. “When you go to a place like Daytona Beach, you’re getting something completely different,” he says. “It’s a more relaxed environment in more of a resort setting.”

And in a budget-conscious post-recession era, the value proposition Florida offers will ensure its status as a popular choice for many associations.

“The value you get is absolutely another factor in Florida’s favor,” Hope says. “You can also keep going back to Florida every single year and have a different experience every single time. But if you’re looking for good value, you can also find that every single time, too.”

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Meet NY-NJ

From the Big City to the Boardwalk

By George Seli

What a year it has been for New York City's meetings industry, according to George Fertitta, CEO of the city's tourism marketing organization, NYC & Company. "In 2012, we had the most spending by our meetings and convention delegates ever," he remarks. "5.2 million delegates visited the city, up 2 percent from (2011). Total spending was almost \$5 billion, again up 2 percent from 2011. All this in a tough economy." Add to that the fact that Manhattan is not the most cost-effective place for delegates to find lodging.

But there is an undeniable business value — even beyond the convention itself — to staying a number of days in New York City. "One of the things we know about New York City is that conventions that meet here tend to generate record-breaking attendance consistently, and I think from a business standpoint it's very smart for groups to want to meet in New York. It's a center of business and commerce," says Chris Heywood, first vice president, communications, NYC & Company. "And people understand that business proposition. They're going to be more productive in the city, not just at the convention they're attending, but also with other meetings they can take."

New York City

Attendees of the Independent Petroleum Association of America (IPAA) Oil and Gas Investment Symposium (OGIS), held each April in the city for the past 18 years, certainly grasp that

motivation. There are a "high concentration of institutional investment firms, portfolio managers and private wealth managers located in the city," notes Tina L. Hamlin, vice president, meetings, for IPAA. "Our delegates travel from all over the country because half of the attendees come from the oil-producing states, mostly Houston (Texas), and the other half are from the investment community, which is heavily concentrated in the Northeast corridor. While the lodging costs are higher than what we would find in Houston, our members know that they need to be in New York City to get business accomplished, and we need to go to the audience we are trying to attract."

PRODUCTIVE SITE EXPLORATION

For the past 10 years, the IPAA has held its Oil and Gas Investment Symposium at the **Sheraton New York Hotel & Towers** (1,781 guest rooms; 60,000 sf of meeting space) bringing 1,800 attendees to the hotel last year. "I have viewed every large conference hotel in the city, and the Sheraton is the perfect match for our program given the layout of space, location and responsiveness of staff," says Hamlin. "The Sheraton Conference Services staff stands out as one of the Sheraton's strongest assets for any meeting planner. Randall Grimes, assistant director of conference services at the Sheraton, has truly become an extension of the IPAA staff over the years. He has just as high standards as we do, is invested in our program and wants to see it be a success year after year, as does his team. He also provides a sense of calm to my staff when a challenge arises, and he always contributes to the solution."

Quality staff is just part of the recipe for an ideal conference, of course. "The central location of the Sheraton New York also is key to our program's success," Hamlin adds. "We needed our attendees to have easy access from train, subway and air terminals, and to ample nearby options for great business restaurants. Additionally, each year we kick-start our investment symposium by ringing the opening bell at NASDAQ OMX, as they are a big supporter of IPAA and its OGIS programs, and they are located only a few short blocks away at Times Square."

"During any free time they may find, our members also like to get out of the hotel and walk around Central Park, which is only a few short blocks away," she explains. "And on several occasions, the Sheraton has been instrumental in helping me arrange special outings for my sponsors and members in a private suite at Yankee

Stadium. The subway that takes you directly to the stadium is located underneath the hotel, so it doesn't get much easier than that!"

MAKING A CASE FOR LOWER MANHATTAN

The American Bar Association found an ideal Manhattan hotel "down south," at **The Ritz-Carlton New York, Battery Park** (298 guest rooms; 13,000 sf of meeting space), the location of a 100-attendee ABA forum last year as well as a board meeting this November. "We're big Ritz-Carlton users," notes Martin D. Balogh, director of meetings and travel. Attendees "know what they're going to get (in terms of quality), add on top of that, Lower Manhattan on a weekend is a pretty good value, all things considered; we tend to meet on the weekends." Balogh notes that the hotel, despite being a smaller property, has "an openness, a spaciousness. Unlike many Manhattan hotels where you can feel somewhat claustrophobic, you don't feel that at The Ritz because of its setting" in Battery Park. "I also think that the amount of new restaurants that have opened downtown makes it more appealing. You'd almost think you're in a European city with these cafés that fill the street."

For the upcoming board meeting, the ABA is considering the nearby Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian, Delmonico's Restaurant and Fraunces Tavern as offsite event options. Many attendees will want to experience an iconic New York City attraction such as Fraunces, which is housed in a Georgian-style building dating from 1719. But there are plenty of major attractions that, while not indigenous to the city, will beckon many attendees nonetheless. The world-renowned Blue Man Group, for example, performs downtown at the Astor Place Theatre on Lafayette Street and offers a unique, multisensory experience. And Bowlmor Lanes, a natural locale for a small but upbeat time away from the convention, can be found in both Times Square and Union Square.

A PLACE TO WRITE HOME ABOUT

Another field with major representation in the city is publishing, and 2013 will be the fifth year The American Society of Journalists and Authors holds its conference in Manhattan, specifically the **Roosevelt Hotel** (1,015 guest rooms, 30,000 sf of meeting space). "Our conference relies on a heavy concentration of media people, and editors and book publishers, so for this event, there isn't really any other place that we could hold it," asserts Executive Director Alexandra Cantor Owens. "We typically get between 600–700 attendees," which is close to a takeover of the Roosevelt. "Typically there will be a couple of plenary sessions, ballroom functions and a lot of breakout activity over the course of the three days," Owens explains. "A big reason for my affection for the Roosevelt is that they have been incredibly flexible, and it's also a big plus when you have the same people there year in and year out; there has been no turnover. We love the grand spaces, such as the ballrooms and the lobby, which is absolutely stunning; it's one of those classic New York spaces."

MEETINGS HUB

The city's hub for larger association meetings is the **Javits**



Tina L. Hamlin
Vice President, Meetings
Independent Petroleum
Association of America
Washington, DC

"While the lodging costs are higher than what we would find in Houston, our members know that they need to be in New York City to get business accomplished, and we need to go to the audience we are trying to attract."

Center, which hosts 150 events a year. The center's 840,000 gross sf of exhibition space can be divided into 10 self-contained halls, as well as 75 meeting rooms. The Special Events Hall can seat up to 3,200 for theater-style meetings and receptions, and up to 1,700 for banquets. In the summer of 2010, Javits gained additional space with the construction of the 110,000-sf Javits Center North, offering 80,000 sf of additional exhibition space.

The good news for groups is that Javits has embarked on a renovation project expected to be completed this year. Apart from the various electrical, mechanical and plumbing upgrades, a new green roof will be installed that will be the largest in New York City. The renovation will increase the facility's energy efficiency by 25 percent, and the building will ultimately achieve LEED Silver status. The center also will be installing additional telecommunications services over the next 18 months, with enhancements such as free Wi-Fi service in the Level 1 Food Court area. In addition, Javits has launched the first American Express Open Business Lounge in a convention center, located on the south side of the Javits Center's Crystal Palace lobby.

Javits' 34th Street location on the West Side is easily accessible from a number of stellar Midtown hotels. These include mammoth properties such as the **Hilton New York** (2,040 guest rooms, 151,000 sf) at 53rd Street; the **New York Marriott Marquis** (1,900 guest rooms; 101,450 sf) on 45th Street; and the **Grand Hyatt New York** (1,305 guest rooms; 60,000 sf of renovated meeting space) at 42nd Street. And a planner can't forget Waldorf Astoria New York (1,416 guest rooms; 60,000 sf) for those members looking for Gotham-style opulence. The Waldorf occupies an entire city block between Park and Lexington Avenues, and 49th and 50th Streets.

Midsized properties also abound in Midtown, including **The Westin New York Times Square** (873 guest rooms; 34,000 sf) at 43rd Street; the **Crowne Plaza Times Square** (770 guest rooms; 23,500 sf) at 48th Street; and the **InterContinental New York Times Square** (607 guest rooms; 10,000 sf) at 44th Street. The **Hyatt Times Square** will open in fall 2013 with 487 guest rooms. Meeting space is yet to be determined.

Planners looking to contract with diverse hotels for their Javits-bound delegates will note that New York City's hotel room inven-



The 2012 American Society of Journalists and Authors' 41st Annual Writers Conference assembled in the "grand spaces" of the Roosevelt Hotel.

“Our conference relies on a heavy concentration of media people, and editors and book publishers, so for this event, there isn’t really any other place that we could hold it.”



Alexandra Cantor Owens
Executive Director
The American Society of
Journalists and Authors
New York, NY

tory continues to expand and is currently at roughly 91,500 active rooms. “What’s interesting is that there used to be a time when you couldn’t find a reasonably priced hotel in Manhattan, and now I think there are more options in terms of budget,” Heywood observes. “There are limited-service properties and more possibilities in terms of brand, experience and price point. The number of hotels in Lower Manhattan has tripled over the last decade.” Yet the city’s hotel occupancy remains strong at 87 percent, the highest in the nation, so early booking is essential. There are nearly 10,000 rooms already in the pipeline through 2015, and NYC & Company estimates that the city will have more than 102,000 rooms by 2015.

WHAT’S NEW AND RENOVATED

Following are some of the larger recent developments:

Last March, the **Conrad New York** (463 guest rooms; 17,000 sf) opened in Lower Manhattan’s Battery Park City, proximate to the Financial District.

In October, **The Westin New York Grand Central** (774 guest rooms; 12,000 sf), formerly the New York Helmsley Hotel, opened on 42nd Street at 3rd Avenue after a \$65 million renovation.

A 378-room **Courtyard by Marriott** and 261-room **Residence Inn Central Park by Marriott**, a multi-hotel property, is scheduled to open late this year at Broadway and 54th Street.

Some of New York City’s major existing properties are also making strides, such as the **Sheraton New York Hotel & Towers**, which has begun a \$20 million renovation to transform its 60,000 sf of meeting space. This final phase of the hotel’s overall \$180 million renovation debuts on March 1 to reveal the remodeled meeting space. The hotel’s meeting facilities, comprising 43 meeting rooms, an Executive Conference Center, the 13,768-sf Metropolitan Ballroom and the 8,715-sf New York Ballroom, are complemented by a dedicated Meeting Specialist team and the latest in AV equipment and high-tech communications, including a Telepresence suite.

And Lower Manhattan, which was recently graced with the new **Conrad New York**, also offers recently renovated meeting space at **The Ritz-Carlton New York, Battery Park**, which completed a remake of its 13,000 sf of meeting space last winter to

coincide with the property’s 10th anniversary. Attendees staying at The Ritz have the option of engaging in some “volunteering” via the hotel’s partnership with the Battery Conservancy. Groups can help in the organic vegetable garden and assist with general park maintenance and horticulture, guided by the Ritz’s meetings and special events managers.

New Jersey

The Javits Center immediately comes to the mind of many association meeting planners considering a New York/New Jersey site choice, but so does the **Atlantic City Convention Center (ACCC)**, which offers an impressive 500,000 sf of contiguous space, including five spacious exhibit halls located on the building’s second level. In addition, the ACCC houses 45 meeting rooms that total 109,100 sf with flexible configurations.

And in the future, there will be a midsize conference center available in Atlantic City: Last fall, the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA) approved \$45 million in financing for Caesars Entertainment’s planned 200,000-sf conference center at **Harrah’s Resort Atlantic City**. Located on the southwest side of the property, the two-floor conference center will feature 100,000 sf of meeting space and large windows overlooking the bay. Harrah’s Resort, which itself offers 25,000 sf of meeting space, has also recently completed the 960-room Waterfront Tower, bringing its total room inventory to 2,590.

Represented by the Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority, the town known for its 140-year-old Boardwalk rebounded relatively quickly on the casino side after the impact of Hurricane Sandy. Casinos and related businesses reopened to the public on November 2 after closure on October 28 due to the storm. “The speed with which our partners were able to prepare to reopen their doors is a testament to the resilience of our state and our nation in the face of a disaster of this scale,” said Liza Cartmell, president of the Atlantic City Alliance, in a statement.

Located at the center of the Boardwalk and two blocks from the ACCC is **Caesars Atlantic City** (1,144 guest room; 24,000 sf of meeting space). The hotel’s renovated Circus Maximus Theater seats more than 1,500 delegates.

The Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa (2,000 guest rooms; 70,000 sf) features the 30,000-sf, column-free Ballroom and Event Center, and a 1,000-seat theater. Borgata completed a \$50 million redesign of its 1,566 classic guest rooms last spring; and recently introduced in-room gaming, a first for the hotel industry.

Tropicana Casino & Resort (2,078 guest rooms; 122,000 total sf of meeting space) bills itself as “the only Atlantic City casino with five Certified Meeting Professionals on staff.” Meeting and convention space includes 54,000 sf in the North and South Towers; and 45,000 sf in The Quarter and Havana Tower. There is a 20,000-sf Grand Exhibition Center; the 2,000-seat Tropicana Showroom, which is the largest venue of its kind in Atlantic City; and the 18,000-sf Royal Swan Ballroom, which will undergo renovations this summer.

During their free time, attendees can enjoy not only gaming on the 147,000-sf casino floor; but also The Quarter at the Tropicana, with its 200,000 sf of retail, dining, entertainment and spa experiences; and the Marketplace at the Boardwalk, with an additional 21,000 sf of retail, dining, entertainment options. The Quarter also features a 300-seat Imax Theatre, which can be used for presentations. The recently opened Boogie Nights ’70s/’80s dance club can be used by groups as a fun alternative for cocktail receptions and dinners. Set to debut this summer at the Tropicana are six new food and beverage venues, including Chickie’s & Pete’s, Broadway Burger Bar & Grill, Tony Luke’s, Caffè Tazza Delizioso and Casa Taco & Tequila Bar.

A solid choice in midsize properties is the 740-room **Golden Nugget Atlantic City** (740 guest rooms; 90,000 sf of indoor-outdoor), which underwent a \$150 million renovation a year ago and offers a 500-seat Showroom and 17,000-sf Grand Ballroom.

New Jersey is certainly less expensive than Manhattan for delegates due to lower room rates and taxes, but planners may want to give them easy access to the Big Apple for business and/or entertainment reasons. The Meadowlands is a vantage point to consider in that regard. Here planners will find New York Harbor dinner cruise companies such as Spirit of New Jersey and Smooth Sailing Celebrations. Upscale lodging choices include **Sheraton Meadowlands Hotel and Conference Center** (427 guest rooms; 30,000 sf); the **Teaneck Marriott at Glen Pointe** (340 guest rooms; 26,500 sf); and the **Newark Liberty International Airport Marriott**, (585 guest rooms; 13,260 sf plus a new 10,000-sf ballroom opening this fall). Judy Ross, director of the Meadowlands Liberty CVB, cites another meeting space for associations to consider: **The Meadowlands Exposition Center** in Secaucus, which offers 61,000 sf of convention space. “They have a few conference rooms in addition to the main exhibit space, and the center sits in an area with six hotels all within walking distance,” she notes. “We have everything from budget to luxury hotels in that area. The complex also offers restaurants, and attendees can walk around and do some shopping on their free time.”

DESTINATION EXPERTS

A CVB can be a key resource for navigating the dynamic New York/New Jersey region, and NYC & Company (www.nycgo.com/meetingplanners) certainly fits that bill, says IPAA’s Hamlin. “NYC & Company has always been extremely supportive of our program and our needs over the years,” she notes. “They were instrumental when it came time to look for a new venue



Martin D. Balogh
Director of Meetings and Travel
American Bar Association
Chicago, IL

“I also think that the amount of new restaurants that have opened downtown (NYC) makes it more appealing. You’d almost think you’re in a European city with these cafés that fill the street.”

when we outgrew the Securities & Exchange Commission space near Wall Street, and again when we outgrew the Millennium Broadway’s meeting space at Times Square, to find our new home at the Sheraton New York in Midtown.”

Recently, the CVB has launched Meet NYC, a LinkedIn group that serves as a forum for discussion on bringing meetings to the city, and a source for planners to learn about new hotel projects and key happenings around town. And as planners will discover, a lot can happen in a “New York minute.”

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WHITING



ZELENKA

Jim Curtis has returned to The Westin Diplomat Resort & Spa, Hollywood, FL, as director of sales and marketing, after three years overseeing sales and marketing efforts for Starwood Caribbean.

Chianti Cleggett was named national sales manager for the Greater Birmingham (AL) Convention and Visitors Bureau. She comes to the bureau from Forci Media where she assisted clients with public relations, editing and marketing services.

The Venetian and The Palazzo have named **Lori Aparicio** as director of national accounts, Northeast; and **Karen Petty** as director of national accounts, Midwest. Aparicio most recently was director of national accounts/pharmaceutical-medical specialist for Gaylord Hotels, Nashville,

TN. Petty was director of vertical sales for Gaylord Hotels.

Alan Feurman was appointed director of sales and marketing at The Westin Cleveland Downtown, which is scheduled to open in spring 2014. He was the director of sales and marketing at Embassy Suites Cleveland Downtown.

Scott Lane was named director of sales at Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center and Grand Hyatt Denver. He formerly served as director of sales at Hyatt Regency San Antonio and Grand Hyatt San Antonio.

VisitPittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, has named **Tamara Whiting** as national sales director responsible for minority, reli-

gious and women's convention markets as well as selected association territories. She was account manager and social media trainer for Expion LLC, Raleigh, NC.

The St. Louis Convention & Visitors Commission has named **Jason Jordan** as director of sales. He most recently was regional director for Experient.

Meet Minneapolis, Convention and Visitors Association, has named **Amy Zelenka** as national account executive responsible for healthcare, medical device, pharmaceutical and health insurance industries in addition to technical, association, banking and salon care industries. She most recently served as associate director of sales for Hilton Minneapolis/Bloomington.

AC&F

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COV IV	Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau	800-452-7829	www.visitlongbeach.com	Iris Himert	irish@longbeachcvb.org
17	New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center	504-582-3023	www.mccno.com	Keith Levey	klevy@mccno.com
15	Oklahoma City Convention & Visitors Bureau	405-297-8906	www.visitokc.com	Johnny Danrich III	jdanrich@visitokc.com
COV II	Omni Dallas Hotel	214-744-6664	www.omnihotels.com/FindAHotel/DallasHotel	Chad Enloe	daldtn.leads@omnihotels.com
27	Rosen Centre Hotel	407-996-9840	www.rosencentre.com	Todd Frappier	tfrappier@rosencentre.com
19	Team San Jose	408-SAN-JOSE	www.sanjose.org	Mark McMinn	mmcminn@sanjose.org
33	Tropicana Casino & Resort	609-340-4398	www.tropicana.biz	Group Sales	plavegli@tropicana.net
COV III	Universal Orlando Resort	888-322-5531	www.uomeetingsandevents.com	Group Sales	meetings@universalorlando.com
5	Visit Denver	800-480-2010	www.visitdenver.com/conventions	Rachel Benedick	rbenedick@visitdenver.com
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