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THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING & INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



Going Strategic

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From Passing Fancy to
Widespread Reality**

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Conference Center Update

**An Optimistic Outlook for
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Photo courtesy of Great Golf Events

Favors and awards for golf programs should promote the company's brand. **PAGE 22**

Photo courtesy of Visit Jacksonville

Attendees are in the center of it all when meeting on the boardwalk at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront. **PAGE 28**

Photo courtesy of Caribe Hilton

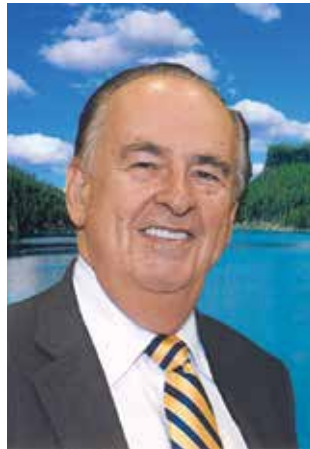
At the junction of the Atlantic Ocean and the Condado Lagoon, the Caribe Hilton hotel boasts incredible views. **PAGE 44**

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Publisher's Message

The Big Change

A new report recently issued by the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) found that strategic meetings management programs (SMMP) are increasingly being used by corporations across North America. Most of the respondents felt their company's SMM programs have benefited their organizations, enabling them to increase their control over cost savings (76 percent); streamline meetings and event processes (76 percent); and help better allocate resources and savings (67 percent). Moreover, 41 percent of those participants without a program in place say they expect to implement one within the next year.



In our cover story this month on page 12, "Growing Strategic: The Evolution of SMM from Passing Fancy to Widespread Reality," Kati Quigley, CMP, (on our cover) senior director of the worldwide partner group at Microsoft, and Kelley Butler, director of meetings and events at McDonald's Corporation, share their first-hand experiences of the last decade of SMM development. They agree that, among other things, meeting planners need to develop fiscal responsibility, learn how to use and communicate data and analytics, and achieve executive buy-in to earn their seat at the corporate table and continue to thrive in their chosen careers.

"The big change," Quigley says, "is that a meeting planner is now viewed as someone with a larger business function, rather than just someone who thinks of it as a fun thing to do and sources the hotel rooms and flights. You're running a business event now, and it's about the corporate bottom line. So as a planner, you have to think much more in terms of a process and not just in terms of your event." Quigley adds, "Now, it's more about your business acumen than it is your ability to select the right hotel."

Butler notes, "the industry is changing so much and so fast that in order to keep up with it and have value and be recognized within your organization, you have to be at the table," she says. "And in order to be at the table, you have to get out of the 'textbook' side of it and understand what the specific business objectives of your company and your brand are. You have to understand the organization's strategy and then you have to show how you fit into that. You have to elevate your thinking now. It's no longer about tactics or sourcing. It's about corporate strategy and how you can use meetings and events to serve that strategy."

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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News & Notes

Omni Nashville Hotel Celebrates Opening



The September 30th ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Omni Nashville Hotel included the Governor of Tennessee, Bill Haslam, Nashville Mayor Karl Dean, city dignitaries and Omni Hotels' Chairman Bob Rowling, among other Omni associates.

NASHVILLE, TN —The Omni Nashville Hotel on September 30 opened its doors with a ceremonial ribbon-cutting celebration attended by Governor Bill Haslam and First Lady Crissy Haslam, Nashville Mayor Karl Dean, members from the Metro Government of Nashville and Davidson County, leaders from Music City Center, Nashville Convention Center Authority, the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp., the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum and Omni Hotels & Resorts executives and associates. The 21-story, 800-room luxury hotel, billed as "The Key to Music City," is located in the South of Broadway, or SoBro, district. To date, the Omni Nashville Hotel has more than 395,000 definite room nights booked, comprised of more than 450 meetings and conventions contracted through 2024.

www.omnihotels.com

Sandals Emerald Bay Named 'Leading Conference Hotel' as Sandals Resorts Collects 14 World Travel Awards

MIAMI, FL — Sandals Resorts International (SRI) received prestigious recognition at this year's World Travel Awards' Caribbean and North America Gala Ceremony. The Luxury Included Resort Company collected an unprecedented total of 14 awards. In addition, SRI was recognized for the 20th consecutive year as the Caribbean's Leading Hotel Brand. "We truly value the recognition we receive at the World Travel Awards," said Gordon "Butch" Stewart, chairman of Sandals Resorts International. "These awards reflect our unwavering dedication to always providing our guests with the best possible experiences and maintaining top luxury standards within the travel industry."

One of nine properties in Sandals Luxury Meetings & Incentives Collection, Sandals Emerald Bay was honored as the "Leading Conference Hotel" and as the "Caribbean's Leading Luxury All-Inclusive Resort." The resort is located along a mile-long beach in Great Exuma, in the Out Islands of the Bahamas. www.sandals.com



Gordon "Butch" Stewart, chairman, Sandals Resorts International (center) receives World Travel Awards from Chris Frost, vice president, World Travel Awards.

Omni Grove Park Inn Gets \$25 Million Makeover

ASHEVILLE, NC — The Omni Grove Park Inn, near downtown Asheville, NC, is celebrating its 100th anniversary year with a resort-wide transformation including major enhancements to public spaces, meeting spaces and guest rooms. The \$25 million renovation was completed this summer in coordination with the resort's Centennial Celebration in July. New additions include Edison, craft ales + kitchen — a new bar and restaurant named after frequent visitor Thomas Edison — featuring local craft beer, hand-crafted cocktails and locally sourced Southern comfort food with a modern twist. A new terrace was also added to create additional seating for cocktails, small plates and sensational sunsets. The 167 guest rooms in the Vanderbilt Wing were renovated. The resort's 55,000 sf of meeting space has been upgraded with new technology, carpeting and new furnishings.

www.groveparkinn.com

Snapshots



1



4



6



2



3



5

1 Orange County, FL, Mayor Teresa Jacobs (left) proclaimed September 19th in honor of the late Gary Sain as Harris Rosen, President and COO, Rosen Hotels & Resorts along with Pamela Sain and Orlando tourism industry leaders officially dedicated the Gary Sain Memorial Skybridge. Sain, the highly respected Visit Orlando President & CEO, passed away suddenly in May 2012. Rosen picked up the tab for the bridge, which

connects Rosen Plaza with the Orange County Convention Center West Building. **2** Benchmark Hospitality International Chairman & CEO Burt Cabañas (r) presents Rebeccah Ray, media coordinator, Lockheed Martin Center for Leadership Excellence with the Chairman's Award of Excellence in recognition of her outstanding acts of service as Mark Grosh, general manager, Lockheed Martin Center, looks on. **3** Marking a major milestone for Washington DC, J.W. Marriott Jr., executive chairman of Marriott International, signs his name at the topping off ceremony of the Marriott Marquis Washington DC. **4** Team San Jose and city officials welcome the new interactive sculpture by artist and architect Soo-in Yang at the San Jose McEnery Convention Center Plaza. The "Idea Tree" creates an interactive exterior experience for visitors that references Silicon Valley's creative idea landscape. **5** Attendees at the recent GBTA AUS/NZ Conference 2013 held in Melbourne, Australia. **6** David Dubois, CEO of IAEE (second from right) and Paul Van Deventer, president and CEO of MPI (far right) circle the globe with colleagues from the world over at CIBTM 2013 in Beijing, China.



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By Melissa Van Dyke

Incentive Travel: What Makes or Breaks a Successful Program

Over the last 20 years, the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) has released more than 50 studies on incentives, recognition and motivational meetings. During that time, we have learned an enormous amount about the elements necessary to execute a successful incentive travel program. Many of these elements were initially discussed in our 2002 milestone study “Incentives, Motivation, and Workplace Performance.” They were confirmed again last fall when our Incentives Insights (<http://insights.theIRF.org>) effort reached out to more than 40 industry executives in order to better understand what makes or breaks a successful program.

Five Keys to Success

Following are five keys to unlocking the most successful incentive travel program possible.

- 1. Culture is crucial.** Above all else, recent efforts show that incentive travel events are most effective when they are the synthesized reflection of both the organization and the potential earners’ cultures. The amount of time spent in meetings, the level of interaction among key players, the inclusion of spouses and even the types of activities, communication and recognition that occur during the event must all be a distilled reflection of the desired organizational culture and the earners themselves. The program for a large family-oriented company with many earners who are nearing retirement should (and must) look very different from that of a small tech-centered start-up whose potential earners are on their first post-college career.

- 2. Visible management is a must.** Top performers need to believe that their efforts are being seen and recognized by the management representatives who influence their

careers most. However, this does not mean that all top performers want this recognition to culminate in a walk across a stage and a handshake with their president or CEO. In fact, IRF research found there are some cultures for which this type of recognition is the least important part of the program. It is most important to design visible executive and senior manager support at key points including when the organization announces the program, releases interim results and reveals the final winners. Senior management inclusion in an onsite event also should mean more than simply showing up. They should engage with each performer and reinforce how their individual and group accomplishments made a difference to the organization as a whole.

- 3. Communication is key.** The primary feedback we received when we asked incentive travel executives what could break a program, was that the communications efforts for most group incentive travel programs are underfunded, untimely and often uninspiring. A few text-laden emails will not suffice to rally any type of emotion in potential earners. Communications must help participants know exactly what is required to earn the trip, how well they’re meeting the performance expectations, and how close they are to achieving their goal. But the communication also must

be inspiring. In an attention-deficit world, even the most expertly crafted onsite experience will be for naught if its potential is buried in unending black and white text. Finally, communications should remind attendees of the efforts that lead to the award. Attendees who cannot readily articulate what exact performance led to their earning the experience is a major red flag of poor communication design.

- 4. Fairness is fundamental.** Although not the flashiest part of the program, the importance of a well-designed and communicated rule structure cannot be stressed enough. It is crucial not only to the program’s metric success, but also to its motivational impact. Rules structures that are overly complicated or perceived as even minutely unfair will quickly derail even the best efforts. In fact, the perception of unfairness or loss of status registers in the same brain centers as a threat to one’s life. Likewise, feelings of fairness ignite the same brain areas as financial rewards. Program designers must craft rules structures that are challenging but fair, and communicate these rules effectively to eligible participants to gain ongoing buy-in.

- 5. Lead with location.** As all skilled planners know, destination is key. The desirability of the incentive trip location and experience either sparks or repels the desire to achieve it. The destination and overall trip design must capture the hearts and minds of potential earners. Advances in technology and infrastructure mean that the world is collapsing and becoming more accessible to planners, but also to earners themselves. Planning the trip of a lifetime can therefore be difficult. However, all trends data seems to accentuate that authentic, culturally relevant experiences still resonate with almost all earners. When these experiences are coupled with trends in wellness, social media and social responsibility, the possibilities for a motivational event are endless.

No Single Answer

Years of experience and research have shown that there is no single right way to craft or run a group incentive travel program for all people, across all channels, in all situations. But research seems to show that planners who design programs that are culturally relevant, visibly supported, well-communicated and perceived as fair and execute these programs in authentic, inspiring destinations, will have greater success in creating a win for both their attendees and their organizations.

C&IT

“The **desirability** of the incentive trip location and experience either **sparks** or **repels** the desire to achieve it.”



Melissa Van Dyke

is president of the Incentive Research Foundation. She previously was the managing consultant of the Employee Engagement Practice and held leadership positions in Solution Management, Product Development and Business Technology Solution Management at Maritz. m.vandyke@theirf.org, www.theirf.org

Going Strategic

The Evolution of SMM From Passing Fancy to Widespread Reality

By John Buchanan

Before the recession, many meeting planners pretended that strategic meetings management was a passing fancy that would never become a widespread reality. Today, however, they are learning that SMM is not only here to stay, but that it is quickly transforming their roles from tacticians to strategic thinkers — and that in order to survive and prosper in a new, more accountable environment, they must adapt.

Put simply, says Deborah Sexton, president and CEO of the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) in Chicago, a meeting planner who aspires to a long career must now be perceived as someone whose skills and capabilities reach far beyond traditional logistics.

“Logistics are a given now,” says Sexton, who has been a leader of the industry’s SMM-related educational initiatives over the last few years. “So, in order for a meeting professional to truly play a strategic role within their organizations, they need to be sitting at the table with meeting owners and management. That means they need to understand the underlying business objectives of each and every

“You’re running a business event now, and it’s about the corporate bottom line. So as a planner, you have to think much more in terms of a process and not just in terms of your event.”

Kati Quigley, CMP, Senior Director, Worldwide Partner Group
Microsoft, Redmond, WA



meeting they do. And that means they have to be involved from the beginning in the discussions about how those objectives can be met and the bottom-line value of the meeting delivered.”

Kati Quigley, CMP, is now senior director of the worldwide partner group at Microsoft in Redmond, WA. Over the past 23 years, she has risen from rank-and-file meeting planner to oversee all aspects of the single most important event Microsoft hosts — its annual Worldwide Partner Conference, which draws 16,000 attendees. She exemplifies the career path many planners now aspire to.

“The big change,” Quigley says, “is that a meeting planner is now viewed as someone with a larger business function, rather than just someone who thinks of it as a fun thing to do and sources the hotel rooms and flights. You’re running a business event now, and it’s about the corporate bottom line. So as a planner, you have to think much more in terms of a process and not just in terms of your event.”

An important related change, she says, is increased fiscal responsibility. “In the heyday of the meeting industry, when corporations spent a lot of money on meetings, your budget really didn’t matter that

much,” she says. “And the perception really was about attendees having fun, rather than getting a return on the investment. Now, it’s more about your business acumen than it is your ability to select the right hotel.”

Kelley Butler, director of meetings and events at McDonald’s Corporation in Oak Brook, IL, has risen to a senior position within the company by embracing the evolution from a tactical role to strategic leadership.

“Although I was never actually a meeting planner, everything I have ever done in my entire career really goes back to the essence of what SMM is,” says Butler, who joined MacDonald’s 10 years ago as an event planner and two years later assumed responsibility for all of its meetings and events. “And that is being able to centralize and source, leverage your total spend and protect your brand. And I was doing those things regardless of what my job title was.”

As a result, Butler was in the right place at the right time, with the right perspective, to seize a career opportunity when SMM emerged as a major corporate discipline. She now oversees hundreds of meeting planners and administrative assistants who create thousands of meetings and events under the banner of an SMM program formally implemented in January.

Her message to meeting planners is a simple one. “The guidance I give people — and especially those that are just coming into the meeting business — is that our industry is changing so much and so fast that in order to keep up with it and have value and be recognized within your organization, you have to be at the table,” she says. “And in order to be at the table, you have to get out of the ‘textbook’ side of it and understand what the specific business objectives of your company and your brand are. You have to understand the organization’s strategy and then you have to show how you fit into that. You have to elevate your thinking now. It’s no longer about tactics or sourcing. It’s about corporate strategy and how you can use meetings and events to serve that strategy. And you also have to understand the analytics that are related to all that and



what your impact is, not just on the meetings and events, but the culture of the company in general. You have to be a strategic partner, not just a meeting planner."



"You have to raise your hand and volunteer to take on these new areas of responsibility. You have to show initiative. You have to show leadership skills."

Deborah Sexton, President and CEO
PCMA, Chicago, IL

The Denial Factor

Unfortunately, however, Sexton says, too many planners have failed to grasp that inescapable new reality. "There are still a lot of planners that are in denial," she says. "And that's because historically, an awful lot of the people who have been successful as meeting planners are essentially tactical in nature. So when you ask them to become more strategic, more visionary, and play a role at a higher level within the organization, you often find that they are ignoring the fact that this is the evolution within the industry. They're very, very busy with the day-to-day details of the meetings, and their focus is on making sure that everything is delivered on time and on budget. And they are also failing to understand that in today's world, the logistical aspects of the meeting can be outsourced very easily."

Butler finds a certain irony in the fact that so many planners remain in fear of SMM and what they perceive as its nega-

advance, before anyone really knew what the company was actually trying to accomplish with that meeting. There wasn't even an agenda yet."

Now that is changing, Butler points out, as meeting hosts and management executives assess the practical value and bottom-line benefits of a meeting before it is even formally approved.

Facing the challenges of such a changing world, says Cari Strouse, CMP, CMM, meetings, events and tradeshow director at CH2M HILL, a global project delivery firm located in Englewood, CO, planners who have long been in a tactical or sourcing mode must learn to think and act differently; they must think and act much more strategic. For planners who want to survive and prosper in this new environment, Strouse says, the message is you must be seen as a strategic advisor, not as someone who books hotel rooms and decides what's for dinner.

on what the initial meeting will cost. But the process should start with your client base and what they are trying to accomplish — not just how many hotel rooms you need or what those will cost. You must act as a strategic consultant, not just continue in a traditional logistics manner. It's more than bringing together a certain number of people for a certain number of days in a particular destination. It's much more than that, when your organization is spending money on a meeting."

A New Career Strategy

Given such a quickly shifting landscape, Strouse says, traditional minded meeting professionals must grow and evolve. "What I say to meeting professionals who are considering a career in the meetings industry, you have to continue your growth with education, but also figure out how you are going to demonstrate the metrics of your value to the company," says Strouse, who co-chaired a PCMA panel discussion on the topic at its annual convention this year. "You have to be able to demonstrate hard metrics and share the dashboards on your meeting spend/savings and what the organization is actually accomplishing from that spend. You have to learn to take all of that information and put it into a form that clearly demonstrates your value as part of the overall process."

Strouse did just that several years ago when she took the initiative and proposed a centralized SMM program for the company. "I created a business case," she says, "and presented it to my executive leadership." She asked for the opportunity to handle a couple of the company's training programs to document the cost savings. "Once the data was presented and the savings put on paper, it started a solid path forward for our growing SMM



"You have to be able to demonstrate hard metrics and share the dashboards on your meeting spend/savings and what the organization is actually accomplishing from that spend."

Cari "Cas" Strouse, CMP, CMM, Meetings, Events and Tradeshow Director, CH2M HILL, Englewood, CO

tive impact on their role. And that is that it's not really such a fearful thing at all if you truly understand it.

"A lot of planners think it's a bigger issue than it really is," Butler says. "And that's just because they haven't been in the strategic arena before. They're used to going on site visits and finding out what the newest and greatest dinner menu item is. They're not used to sitting at the table and talking about what the real business objectives of the meeting are. And one reason for that historically has been that some meetings were being planned years in

Strouse practices what she preaches. And as a result of her own initiative, she now oversees an ever-growing SMM program.

"When a meeting request comes in the door, the discussion her assigned planner has with the internal business partner sponsoring the meeting begins with a consulting meeting," she says. "We ask what the meeting is about, what the objectives are, what the meeting is actually trying to accomplish. In today's market, any person can call a hotel or get online and do an electronic RFP and easily get the basic data

program. I was very fortunate, because I had executive buy-in very early in the process," she notes.

Strouse says she ended up with the opportunity to move forward and organically grow the overall program of CH2M HILL's meetings, events and tradeshow team.

Butler concurs in that assessment. "The first thing you have to do is your due diligence, so you can find out what the people who have gone before you have done," she says. "You have to step back and listen and learn. I think a lot of planners are afraid of the word 'strategy.' They really make more out of it than what it really is. It's just a matter of taking the time to sit down with each one of your meeting owners and understand what their objectives are and how you can help them think through what the end result of their meetings should be. Then

you just have to show them how to get there. It's really just a matter of learning how to formulate the right questions, then come back with the right answers."

Quigley agrees that planners simply have to think and act differently, but that the change is easy to make. "Some planners just get too caught up in thoughts about how their budgets balanced and so therefore, it was a great event," she says. "But that doesn't necessarily mean it was a great event, because it might not have had any real relevance to actual business objectives or the company's bottom line. And if it hasn't been relevant in that sense, then it's a waste of time and resources."

Many veteran planners, Quigley says, still judge the success of a meeting by post-event surveys that show how many attendees liked the hotel or the dinner menu. That, she stresses, is no longer a viable measure of success. Now it's about whether the sales goals were met or customer service improved as a result of the training. "That's where the typical planner needs to shift their thinking," she says. "That's where we have shifted at Microsoft and where more companies are shifting. That's one of the things that has grown out of SMM that I'm not sure was there at the beginning. It started off being about whether our meetings are

efficient. Now it's evolved into asking whether they are being effective."

Get Educated

Although ongoing education has always been an important part of a successful career path for planners, today it is more important than ever.

"My team is required to do 40 hours of education, either internally or within the industry," Butler says. "They're also encouraged to join meeting organizations and get involved on a committee, because



"I think a lot of planners are afraid of the word 'strategy.' ...It's really just a matter of learning how to formulate the right questions, then come back with the right answers."

Kelley Butler, Director of Meetings and Events
McDonald's Corporation, Oak Brook, IL

I feel that unless you really get involved with an organization, you don't really benefit from your membership."

Butler has led by example, serving on a PCMA educational committee. "And you learn a lot from that kind of involvement," she says. "You also identify peers within the industry you can learn from."

For example, she says, with a little research, any planner can find a mentor who has already successfully gone through exactly what he or she is going through now. And the available resources are expanding almost daily.

PCMA has created a new corporate meeting task force that will work to develop more specific educational programs and opportunities for corporate planners. And one track, Sexton says, will be teaching general business acumen and leadership skills.

Without such ongoing education and the development of expanded skills, traditional planners will eventually render themselves obsolete, Sexton says. "And part of the reason for that is that your CEO or the V.P. of marketing is not going to pull you up," she says. "You have to raise your hand and volunteer to take on these new areas of responsibility. You have to show initiative. You have to show leadership skills. And if you don't do that,

you're not going to be heard, because in the minds of so many executives, meeting planners are people who make sure there is the right number of chairs in the room or that there's enough coffee. And when I go out and talk to CEOs, one of the things I hear over and over again is that they think their meeting planners are not strategic or visionary enough. And too many planners are just burying their heads and worrying about today's details of a meeting and hoping the rest of this stuff is going to go away. But it's not going away."

In fact, "The State of Strategic Meetings Management 2013," a new survey issued by the Global Business Travel Association, reports that more than half of the respondents work for companies with an SMM program in place or in development. Most respondents say SMM is a beneficial program that increases their control over cost savings (76 percent); streamlines meetings and event processes (76 percent); and helps better allocate resources and savings (67 percent). Out of those without an SMM program, 41 percent believe a program will be implemented by their company within the next three years.

The good news, Strouse says, is that the most powerful tool for career advancement is simply a demonstration of initiative. "That's what I did," she says. "I walked into my CFO and said, 'I know this is crazy and that we don't centralize a lot of things, but here's the value of doing it when it comes to our meetings. And this is something I believe in. Here's what we need to do.' And that's how I ended up getting a promotion into my current job."

Butler has a similarly simple message for planners who want to get ahead rather than fall behind in the era of SMM. "Don't be afraid of what's going on," she says. "Get in there and learn how you can make the most of it."

C&IT

Conference Center Update

By Timothy Herrick

Photo courtesy of Keystone Resort

Keystone Resort & Conference Center in Keystone, CO, provides 100,000 sf of meeting, exhibit and function space.

An Optimistic Outlook for Business-Focused Meeting Places

Conference centers weathered the economic downturn due in large part to their business-focused, budget-friendly model. And now that the economy is on the upswing, the corporate demand for conference centers is rising right along with it.

The International Association of Conference Centers (IACC) estimates that 70 percent of conference center business is derived from corporate meetings and events, according to its CEO, Mark Cooper. This proportion of overall conference center bookings has been consistent, even indicating a new resiliency as the economy and the meetings industry as a whole continues its recovery. What the past 18 months have shown is a small but notable uptick in business, reversing trends of corporate meeting sluggishness and meeting budget cutbacks that had stymied the corporate meeting con-

ference center business since 2008, the beginning of the economic downturn.

Upswing Signs

"In 2012," Cooper observes, "members reported a 7.3 percent increase in occupancy, a clear sign that meetings and conference business was improving. Rates improved marginally as well, showing 5 percent increases on 2011 rates, supporting the view that the meetings industry has turned a corner. The improvement in top-line sales and bottom-line profitability is a clear sign that the industry is benefiting from the wider economic recovery and returning to a stable and improving global economy."

Sandy Monkemeyer, vice president, corporate travel director, for Captive Resources LLC, who plans about 130 meetings, incentive travel programs

and other events annually, has seen an uptick in the use of conference centers mainly because the recovering economy has finally translated into an increased participation in her events. "We use conference centers if we outgrow the hotel meeting space," says Monkemeyer. "We have been using them more now than in the past, simply due to our growing meeting attendance."

Another positive economic sign is that cutbacks on corporate meeting program length have been either stalled or reversed. According to Monkemeyer, the length of conference center events "has remained the same. Those that have changed have increased by one night."

Budgetary Easing

Corporate budgets for conference center meetings may not be significantly expanding — or in most cases, not even

returning to pre-recessionary levels — however, the era of budget slashing may finally have come to an end. The difference may not be vast, but it is nonetheless a noticeable change from 2008–2011, when program reduction and/or elimination plagued planners and the facilities they utilized. What has increased substantially for all types of programs is the emphasis on proving ROI.

"I have seen minimal change from 2012–2013," says Ashley Russell, small meetings manager of Chicago, IL-based BCD M&I. "However we are monitoring our budgets closely, possibly closer than in previous years, to ensure the money we are spending is going to the right things, such as building client relationship and enhancing employee training programs."

Says Monkemeyer, "Our budget has actually improved for 2013 and 2014 both for internal department advancement as well as our meetings. We had held back on staffing the last few years and now are considering department growth. Our meetings, too, have increased in attendance, especially those in Europe and other locations, which had been stagnant or had decreased."



"In 2012, members reported a 7.3 percent increase in occupancy, a clear sign that meetings and conference business was improving."

Mark Cooper, CEO
International Association of Conference Centers

Because conference centers offer intimate spaces, enhanced learning environments and the latest in meeting technology, they are prime choices for small- to mid-size corporate events. Russell plans more than 70 meetings or events per year, and conference centers are critical facilities. "A small meeting is usually less than \$50,000 in estimated spend," she says. "At least 25 percent of those meetings go to a conference center."

Pricing Simplicity

Budgets may have stabilized, but planners remain more cost-conscious than ever, which has made them detest à la carte pricing and other budget surprises when booking a meetings venue. The all-encompassing services provided

at conference centers eliminate the need for outside vendors; and the adherence to straightforward pricing eliminates any risk of hidden costs.

According to Miki Brown, senior specialist, executive administrative assistant for Sapien, a global services company, it is the CMP (Complete Meeting Package) that these types of meeting venues still excel at, and that remains the most appealing attribute of conference centers. "We look to these types of facilities because they tend to offer the all-inclusive option," says Brown. "This makes meetings/events very cost-effective. You pay one fee for food, beverage, meeting space, AV needs and hotel rooms, while at resorts or hotels, each additional item is an added expense."

The IACC Advantage

Meeting planners would do well to choose IACC-approved conference centers, which adhere to strict guidelines by the International Association of Conference Centers. For example, at least 60 percent of meeting space must be dedicated, single-purpose conference space, and at least 60 percent of revenue must derive from meeting space, food and beverage, conference technology and services that are related to conferences. They must promote a package plan that includes guest rooms, meeting rooms, three meals, continuous refreshment services, and conference center technology and services.

The facility must have dedicated conference rooms (at least one must be a minimum 1,000 sf), ergonomically designed chairs, individual climate controls, specific acoustical rating, high-speed Internet connections and phone. Properties must have skilled conference planners, a designated conference planner for each group, office supplies, computer work stations, photocopying, digital media flash drives, computer rental and other services.

There must be at least one dining area specifically for groups that provides flexible dining areas.

Conference rooms of at least 1,000 sf must include at



Photo courtesy of Eaglewood Resort & Spa
The Eaglewood Resort & Spa recently completed a \$1.2 million renovation of its 37,000 sf of IACC-certified space.

least one built-in remote-input computer/video-image display system, and at least one projection screen mounted from the ceiling or on the wall. Skilled technicians are also required. The guest rooms must have a desk or table, comfortable chair, lighting separate from overhead illumination, high-speed Internet and a phone.

For more information, visit www.iacconline.org.

C&IT

In addition to the CMP and all-inclusive contracts, the self-contained environment often intrinsic to operations at most conference centers appeals to today's cost-conscious corporate meeting planner. Brown adds, "Having everything in one location makes meeting logistics run very smoothly. No need to have executives staying at one venue and needing to provide transportation to another. It is all right there. The people that we work with at the facility must be accommodating. They have to be willing to help out at a moment's notice."

Says Russell, "I expect package pricing, simple food, all-day beverage breaks included in package pricing, complimentary or low-cost Internet and efficient AV staff and equipment."

Image Change

Conference centers were often treated as stepchildren by some meeting planners, but after a concerted effort, these facilities seem to have successfully shed their stigma as staid and dull

meeting environments. Conference center spaces, services and amenities are now widely perceived as comparable to those offered by other types of meeting hotels. "I expect all of the same amenities and variables of hotel meeting space, though with more advanced AV options and square footage of meeting space," says Monkemeyer.

Conference centers have long touted this makeover, a process that has probably taken more than a decade. Leading this industry-wide elevation in standards has been IAAC, which has 300+ members. In recent years IAAC has been very busy issuing several standards and white papers on technology, ergonomics, sustainability and other topics. The organization also has incorporated many of these concepts into their best-practice guidelines, certifications and other programs. As a result, many conference centers — especially those properties within the portfolio of management companies specializing in conference centers, such as Benchmark

Resorts & Hotels, Destination Hotels & Resorts, Dolce Hotels & Resorts, Aramark Conference Centers and Sodexo Conference Centers — have implemented technological and physical upgrades, essentially adopting what has become an industry-wide upgrade.

These changes have finally paid off. Planner perceptions have drastically improved. The venues are now seen as a cutting-edge learning and training environment that is more conducive to achieving an event's objective, as opposed to merely functional space devoid of imagination or energy. "Conference centers seem to be more modernized as compared to the old, stale centers of the past with outdated equipment," Russell says. "They are cleaner and brighter with more amenities to distinguish them from their competitors and give them a unique brand and identity. In addition, I have noticed that some have partnered up and located on properties of luxury hotels to give the ambience of a more 'upscale' experience."

Booking Window

In a rather curious, almost paradoxical sign that the corporate meeting business is on the mend is that the conference center booking window is no longer shrinking. Why paradoxical? Conference centers have earned a reputation for being flexible, i.e., better able to accommodate comprehensive corporate meetings and events on shorter notice than other small- to mid-size event facilities. As the economy weakened, spending not only tightened but the decision-making also went closer to the wire. The shorter notice got notice, especially for corporate meetings and other events. A shrinking window was a sign that the economy and corporate meeting business were faltering — a scenario that served to boost demand for conference centers, underscoring the value of their flexibility.

Russell offers a succinct answer as to why a quarter of her events are booked at conference centers: "Quick event order turnaround, sufficient space and competitive package pricing." She continues that



"Our budget has actually improved for 2013 and 2014 both for internal department advancement as well as our meetings."

Sandy Monkemeyer, V.P., Corporate Travel Director
Captive Resources LLC, Schaumburg, IL

the booking window is still tight and buy is holding steady, i.e., no longer shrinking.

"We are trending at about the same lead time as recent years, but it is improving," she says. "For reoccurring programs, we have about a three- to four-month window to source, plan and execute. For those with short lead times, conference centers are always a great facility to lean on. They are always very flexible and accommodating."

By how much or by how quickly that window is lengthening remains an open question. Using the booking window length as a gauge of corporate meeting

business improvement or the extent of the economic recovery — especially based on mainly anecdotal evidence — seems problematic at best.

"IAAC has seen no real change in what is a very short lead-time window for meetings," says Cooper. "As the market continues to recover and popular meeting destinations become booked earlier, we will see lead times extend. But we are still a little way off seeing occupancies return to 2007 levels."

The economy may be recovering, but the pace of that recovery is dependent on industry, company and region, caus-



The Chattanooga.

New & Noteworthy

Benchmark Resorts & Hotels

In June, **The Chattanooga** in Chattanooga, Tennessee, completed a renovation that included new carpets, wall coverings, furnishings, AV equipment and flat-screen TVs. Public areas also were upgraded. The property includes a 25,000-sf conference center.

The Bonaventure Resort & Spa near Fort Lauderdale, FL, announced that the resort's 60,000-sf conference center, including a 175-seat amphitheater, will be completely refurbished. The ballroom, individual meeting rooms and communal spaces also will be updated this fall. Installation of wooden flooring in all guest rooms is planned for a future time.

Benchmark also recently completed renovations of **Cheyenne Mountain Resort** in Colorado Springs, with more than 40,000 sf of conference center space; the **Snow King Hotel** (more than 10,000 sf of meeting space) and the **Grand View Lodge** (more than 7,500 sf), both in Jackson Hole, WY; and **The Inn at Rancho Santa Fe**, near San Diego, that features 12 meeting venues.

Dolce Hotels & Resorts

The Alexander, a Dolce Hotel, with 16,500 sf of event space and an IACC-certified conference center, opened earlier this year in downtown Indianapolis.

Silverado Resort and Spa in Napa, CA, with 12,000 sf of meeting space, is renovating all 415 guest rooms and suites. Dolce also added to its overseas properties with the opening of the **Dolce CampoReal Lisbon** in Portugal.

Destination Hotels & Resorts

Skamania Lodge, 45 miles east of Portland, OR, improved its meeting space, public



The Alexander hotel's Plat 99 lounge is located adjacent to the lobby.



The Inverness Hotel and Conference Center.

areas, the restaurant and bar, and recreation spaces. The property also added a zip line for teambuilding activities and expanded the outdoor jacuzzi area.

In Arizona, the **Tempe Mission Palms Hotel** and conference center added a small ballroom, and renovated its lobby, bar, restaurant and dining area.

The Inverness Hotel and Conference Center in Denver remodeled the dining facilities, pool, spa, tennis courts and recreation area. The Inverness offers 63,652 sf of meeting space and a PGA championship golf course.

In downtown Seattle, the **Red Lion Hotel** on Fifth Avenue, a new Destination property, is undergoing a major renovation that will be completed in three phases by spring 2014. The Red Lion provides 17,715 sf of meeting and ballroom space.

Crestline Hotels & Resorts

Emory Conference Center Hotel in Atlanta, a LEED Silver-certified property, completed an extensive renovation of its 32,000-sf, IACC meeting facility in 2012 including auditorium, amphitheater, meeting space and ballroom. The property features a private bowling facility, Wisteria Lanes.

Emory Conference Center Hotel is currently offering a 3 percent rebate and complimentary lane fees for a two-hour event at Wisteria Lanes for a contracted CMP event worth a minimum of \$14,000. The meeting must be booked by December 31, 2013 and held by June 30, 2014.

Miki Brown, senior specialist, executive administrative assistant for Sapien, planned back-to-back meetings at Emory Conference Center in December/January, with approximately 150 attendees. "Especially in a large city like Atlanta, using the Emory Conference Center is so cost-effective because it is a one-stop shop. Planning similar events at hotels, you have to pay à la carte for everything. When you need something at the conference center, the people jump because everything is included; they don't have to get somebody from another department. You don't have to shuttle everybody all over Atlanta to get to the meetings because everything is under one roof. It's a very seamless meeting. They also have fantastic bowling alley space, which was great for teambuilding. My team loved it."



The boardroom at the Emory Conference Center Hotel.



Photo courtesy of Bonaventure Resort & Spa

Benchmark's Bonaventure Resort & Spa in Fort Lauderdale, FL, features a 60,000-sf conference center accommodating groups of from 10 to 1,000 attendees.

ing booking “paradoxes” beyond just the length of the window that conference centers accommodate. Nonetheless, even reports of booking window lengths edging closer to what was considered typical seems a positive, if sometimes counter-intuitive, occurrence. “We are booking three to five years in advance when possible,” says Monkemeyer. “We find many conference centers do not wish to book out that far, thus creating a challenge for us. Our issue is booking out too far long-term versus the short-term availability.”

As the manager of a Benchmark conference center explains, “The amount of time that meeting planners are inquiring about space and rates prior to the program’s arrival date has lengthened again. After 2008, we saw the booking window shrink to just over a few months. This was due to the fact that companies were very unsure of their projected sales numbers or how the economy was going to continue to react. Now, in 2013, we see that booking window lengthened to well past 14 months. This shows that companies are confident in the direction of the economy and the future performance of their sales teams.”

Perception Concerns Persist

Regardless of whether planners book a conference center, hotel or other meeting facility, they are still sensitive to the perception of excessive spending, a lingering repercussion of the AIG effect. But according to Monkemeyer, other than planners retaining an overly cautious attitude, the worst ramifications have passed. “I think people are simply making sure their i’s are dotted and t’s crossed more than ever.

Other than that, we have not noticed a major impact. There always has been and I think always will be a perception-versus-reality issue of which we need to be aware. This comes into play more so when we use upscale resorts for our meetings and upper scale hotels versus mid-line brands. There are particular meetings (for which) I would not be able to use a specific brand due solely to perception.”

Made for Business

The business-focused environment of conference centers helps to erase percep-



“We look to these types of facilities because they tend to offer the all-inclusive option. This makes meetings/events very cost-effective.”

Miki Brown, Sr. Specialist, Executive Administrative Assistant, Sapient, Boston, MA

tion concerns. When asked what are the main attributes of a conference center she looks for, Monkemeyer replies, “The square footage of space to be able to create any sort of meeting setup we wish, sound-proof air walls and pillarless rooms.”

Planners point out that conference centers have responded to demands for more ergonomic, less-claustrophobic spaces. Brown books conference centers because they are utilizing “open space, natural light. Our team does not like feeling that they are stuck in a conference room for three days.”

Among technology concerns, planners emphasize Internet access. “Conference

centers have enough bandwidth for usage by the multitude of their guests using several devices each,” says Monkemeyer. “Accessing the Internet throughout the entire facility is a strong concern.”

“Technology is a key component in our program,” says Russell. “Conference centers all have their pros and cons, but they are key to reporting accurate data and managing our account and client expectations.”

Other meeting amenities — especially leisure activities such as golf or spa — seem less critical in the current cost-conscious climate. As an executive with Destination Hotels & Resorts says, “Golf and other activities are still important, but pre- or post-meeting. It is not as important as a teambuilding function.”

“Decent golf either onsite or nearby is important to many of our groups,” says Monkemeyer. “Spa is a wonderful perk, but not a necessity.”

Brown agrees, noting that instead of spa services, she has observed more interest in activities centered on exercise. “Fitness centers, tennis, basketball, golf are more important than a spa,” she says.

Regarding F&B trends, conference centers seem to offer effective fare. “For the meetings I plan, I like the simplicity that conference centers offer,” says Russell. “A few basic hot and cold options for lunch, grab-and-go breakfast and all-day beverages packages.”

She emphasizes that the packaging of a meal plan is a crucial conference center attribute, but does not mean quality cuisine is ignored. “Some trends we are seeing is that they are partnering with higher quality vendors. They offer Starbucks coffee and local bakery bagels. I think like everyone else, they are implementing CSR and green initiatives wherever possible.” **C&IT**

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Golf Programs

Are **YOUR** Events Up to Par?

By Karen Brost

Experts' Strategies to Engage Players and Score More Business

Make no mistake about it. There's a lot that can be accomplished on a golf course that has nothing to do with hitting a spectacular drive straight down the fairway or making a difficult putt. There's just no telling how many business deals have been brokered or cemented while the participants were hitting the greens.

He shared an example of how one of his clients uses golf events to achieve stellar business results. "A corporate client of mine (a software company) created an event called 'Revenue Accelerators.' They brought in their top 10 clients that they were anticipating on closing by a certain date along with 10 existing clients that were running similar applica-

the same golf cart," he explains. "Here you are in a non-threatening world — you're not behind a desk. You get to talk one-on-one with somebody running (the software you're considering) and you can get the skinny: How's the sales rep? Does he respond to you? How's service? How's tech support? How is the installation process?"

"They did four of these events within a 30-day period and 30 days after the golf tournament, they closed \$15 million in new business. Now, was it totally attributed to golf? No. But did it help the sales cycle along? Yes, it did."



Roger Caldwell, Owner and Founder Great Golf Events, Prairie Village, KS

Roger Caldwell, owner and founder of Great Golf Events, headquartered in Prairie Village, KS, has been planning corporate golf tournaments for 15 years. He says that after nailing down the date of the tournament, the most important question to ask is "What is the business purpose?"

tions. Then they paired their customers with the potential clients along with the sales rep and somebody else. For all intents and purposes, we had 10 to 15 groups, and they were all foursomes."

Caldwell then revealed the smart strategy behind the plan. "They put the potential client and the current client in

The results of these carefully orchestrated foursomes speak for themselves. "They did four of these events within a 30-day period and 30 days after the golf tournament, they closed \$15 million in new business," Caldwell notes. "Now, was it totally attributed to golf? No. But did it help the sales cycle along? Yes, it did."

He explains that the company's execu-

He adds that the golf tournament also gives the prospect an excellent opportunity to learn about the character of the sales rep. "Now you're playing in the same group with them. Does he cuss when he hits a bad shot? Is he staying sober? Is he talking about his kids? What's this guy all about?"



Photos courtesy of Kate Drew Miller Photography

Great Golf Events put together the 14th annual CenterLight Health System Golf Classic held in July at Century Country Club in Purchase, NY. This year's fundraiser benefited the Beth Abraham/CNR Foundation.

utive vice president of sales attended every event and made the most of the opportunity to network with clients during the pre-tournament breakfast. "He went to every single table asked questions like 'What's keeping you up at night? How can we help?' And that was important."

"When I talk to corporate entities I always say, 'Golf is getting them here, but what are we trying to accomplish?' Then we start talking about venues and budget because the golf course is your No. 1 dollar figure in this whole element."

The Art of Appreciation

Another common reason for staging a golf tournament is to thank customers for their business. Barbara Cole, administrative assistant, commercial, for Crosstex, an energy company based in

Dallas, TX, plans a tournament called the Crosstex Energy Services Annual Customer Appreciation Event. The company limits the tournament to 72 golfers to keep it small enough so that Crosstex employees can have ample one-on-one interaction with their top customers.

This year marks the third consecutive year that Crosstex hosted the event at The Westin La Cantera Hill Country Resort in San Antonio, TX. The 250-acre hilltop resort includes two championship golf courses: The Resort Course at La Cantera, which was designed by Jay Morrish and Tom Weiskopf; and The Palmer Course at La Cantera, which was designed by the legendary Arnold Palmer. Both courses deliver spectacular views of the Texas Hill Country, and The Palmer Course includes the Winnie

Palmer Memorial Bridge, a touching tribute to Palmer's late wife.

While the Crosstex event is strictly golf-related, Cole says, "We do have a couple of people that are key customers that are not golfers that are still going to attend." She described one non-golfer in particular. "I guess he becomes the cheerleader. He rides around on the golf cart with them and enjoys the day with them, as well." Once the tournament is over, the group meets for dinner and awards, and mingles at The Gantry, the resort's poolside cafe.

Cole describes what it takes to pull off a successful golf tournament. "Plenty of pre-planning. We definitely allow enough time to send out invites to our customers so they can get it on their calendars, but not too much time

to where it goes on their calendar and gets forgotten.”

She says that they do the pairings for the foursomes internally, and then she turns them over to La Cantera’s golf pro. “They’ll make a tournament board for us so when we have our dinner after golf and our awards, we’ve

“The courses themselves (at The Westin La Cantera) are absolutely amazing. There’s no reason for us to look anywhere else.”



Barbara Cole
Administrative Assistant, Commercial
Crosstex
Dallas, TX

got our pairings up there, and we know the scores and what awards were given out.” She has high praise for the resort’s staff. “They’re great. I come out a day before. They’ll do a walk-through with me on our meeting space. We’ll go out and look at the course and see if there’s anything that has changed or anything that I need to know. We’ll hunt down my boxes and get those transferred into our dinner room and over to the golf course — whatever I need. The golf pro will have

people on staff that will help me get the golf carts ready as far as the different things we’ll put on there — the little goody bags. They’ll get the signs made up with the pairings, and they’ll have those all set. We’ll have a check-in table, and we’ll have lunches available and all set up. They take a lot of (tasks) off of me before I get there and even before, as well.

“The golfers love the course,” she continues. “We’re actually flipped this year in terms of which one that we’re doing. I think we’ve got the Palmer first. The Palmer’s harder than the resort (course), but the courses themselves are absolutely amazing. They are top notch.” After two successful years at The Westin La Cantera, she’s looking forward to a third successful event. “There’s no reason for us to look anywhere else.”

Bob Harrington is president of US Tournament Golf based in Rancho Cucamonga, CA. His company plans more than 100 tournaments a year and offers additional event planning services. One of the events he manages is called the Core-Mark Classic.

“Our client, who is a distributor in the convenience store industry, brings in suppliers and their customers for a customer/client/vendor appreciation day. We have a full field, we have breakfast,

we have lunch, and they have awards. There’s time for networking to develop new and existing relationships. We have over 120 golfers, and they just play a friendly scramble tournament.”

For the past five years, the event has been held at the Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa located in Santa Ana Pueblo, NM, just 30 minutes north of Albuquerque International Sunport. The resort is home to the Twin Warriors Golf Club, a nationally ranked, high-desert championship course designed by Gary Panks.

Harrington says his top three reasons for choosing the Hyatt Tamaya are its outstanding golf course, the hotel and the staff. “It’s one of Hyatt’s top properties in the country as far as we’re concerned,” he states. “We’re the event organizer, so we’re the go-between (with) the Hyatt and our client. We want our clients to have a wonderful experience, and there’s no question that the Hyatt is able to provide that. That resort is the best.”

When asked about any trends that he’s seeing in terms of golf tournaments, he commented that people are now more selective. “There are a lot of events out there, and before, they would participate in all of them. Today, they’re very selective on what events they choose.” He says it’s important to find a top destination, put on a well-organized event and create a good networking environment. “People now have higher expectations, and those tournaments (that meet those expectations) are the ones they’re going to participate in.”

Tee Times for Free Time

Golf tournaments are often included as part of a meeting to offer attendees a relaxing way to bond and spend some free time. Jan Lane, director of purchasing and event coordinator for the law firm Stinson Morrison Hecker LLP headquartered in Kansas City, MO, plans an annual retreat for her firm. Every other year, the event is reserved exclusively for partners and counsel.

This year, the firm is holding its retreat at The Broadmoor, a AAA Five Diamond historic resort in Colorado



The Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa in New Mexico is home to the Twin Warriors Golf Club.

Photo courtesy of The Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa

Springs that has been dazzling guests with its elegant accommodations and spectacular Rocky Mountain vistas since it opened its doors in 1918. “This will be the second time that we are holding a retreat at The Broadmoor,” Lane notes. “If we could do it every year there, I’d be happy! The Broadmoor is absolutely just a fantastic venue.”

The firm conducts meetings on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning, and then gives attendees free time on Saturday afternoon, which is when the golf tournament is held. The format they use is a shotgun start with a scramble. With a shotgun start, all of the foursomes start at the same time on different holes instead of having everyone start on hole No. 1 and playing through. For a scramble, all four players make their best shots, and then they each play their next shot from the position of the ball with the best lie. “We pair them up based on their handicaps so we have even foursomes throughout,” Lane explains. “We also do contests for lowest score, closest to the pin and the longest putt, things like that.”

The Broadmoor offers 54 holes of golf on its East, West and Mountain courses.

“Of The Broadmoor’s three courses, everybody much prefers the East Course,” Lane explains. The East Course, which is known for its wide, tree-lined fairways, is listed among *Golf Digest’s* Top 100 Public Courses.

Eyes on the Prize

Another question Caldwell asks is “What are we going to do for awards? Do we want to do awards that keep your brand in front of them? There are a lot of different things that come into play here.”

For the software company’s awards, Caldwell arranged to use custom PGA memorabilia. “It was a photo of Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer and Tiger walking in the fairway at Augusta, and then there were other photos we used. Then the plate that went inside the frame was customized with their logo, (the caption) ‘First Place Team,’ the golf course name and the date. Now it became a trophy, plus it’s a piece of memorabilia. It’s not something they’re going to put in the closet or in their desk drawer. They’re going to hang it up on their office wall. Anybody that walks into this person’s office that’s a golfer is going to

go to that photo and they’re going to talk about your event. And if it’s a competitor that’s waiting in your office, they’re going to see their competition’s logo on that plate.”

In terms of awards, Cole says, “We do first through third. We do have one for the worst score. I usually just run over to Target or Walmart before and I get a kids’ game. We’ve given a kids’ golf play game, just something fun. We also do a gift card drawing at dinner. We do have some companies that their policies require that they’re not allowed to take those or they have to pay for their own room. (Otherwise) the only thing you have to do for this event is get there. We pay for the rooms, and everything else that night is on us.”

Making It Memorable

In addition to providing his expertise to organize golf tournaments, Caldwell is also a golf entertainer who performs trick shots to keep the crowd engaged. “I go out there and have fun with their guests. I hit a left-handed club right-handed. I have a two-foot driver in my bag. I hit balls out of boxes. I hit with my putter. I’m the guy that they meet



A participant in the 2013 Crosstex Energy Services Annual Customer Appreciation Event takes a swing on the Resort Course at The Westin La Cantera Hill Country Resort in San Antonio, TX,

Photo courtesy of Crosstex

on the golf course, and I do a trick shot for them, and then when the last group goes through, I get on another hole and do something on that hole.”

He stresses the importance of adding an element or activity to make the tournament memorable. “What are they going to remember? Are they going to remember hole No. 17 and birdieing that hole, or are they going to remember the entertainer who took a left-handed club and flipped it upside-down and hit it better than they did conventionally? That’s what they take back with them. Are people going to remember great golf events because of how organized the tournament was, or are they going to remember it because they met this entertainer on hole No. 8, and they saw him do this unbelievable shot?”

Caldwell continues, “There are groups and companies out in the world today that hire me and other entertainers like me on a case-by-case basis to entertain their small groups, and what they’re trying to get out of this entertainment is the memory of it and how special it was and how different it was from any other tournament. Golf entertainment is a big business out there. There are guys that will charge what I charge all the way up to \$10,000–\$12,000 an event. Some are better than others.”

Caldwell spoke very highly of another golf entertainer Dan Boever.” If you’re a golfer and you have a bucket list as a golfer, Dan Boever’s golf show is on the bucket list. He’s the best on the planet that I’ve seen in 15 years. There are guys that can hit it longer than he can, but he won a long-drive championship four years ago, so he’s no slouch. He’s a partner of mine. He’s very entertaining.”

He says that Boever can be scheduled to perform before or after the tournament. “If we use him pre-event, then we stick him with the major sponsors for three or four holes each, and if we do something post-event, we might put him out on a hole to tease them a little bit. The post-event show is a little bit better at times if you have the right logistics for



US Tournament Golf organized the 2013 Core-Mark Classic, a customer/client/vendor appreciation day, at The Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa in New Mexico.

it. Everybody is relaxed, they’re already there, they have a cocktail in their hand. Their spouses may come. Even dinner guests that don’t even play golf love it.”

Golf News

Shingle Creek Golf Club, which is part of the 1,500 room Rosen Shingle Creek resort in Orlando, now offers a custom golf app for iPhone or Android that in-

battlefield?” The resort, located on historic land that saw action in both the American Revolutionary War and Civil War, is home to three 18-hole courses designed by Pete Dye, Arnold Palmer, Tom Clark and Curtis Strange. It’s even possible that golfers searching for a lost golf ball could find a historic musket ball, instead. Set on 2,900 protected acres along the James River, Kingsmill offers 425 guest rooms and suites.

A company named Golf RFP has launched a website (www.GolfRFP.com) designed to connect golf groups with the appropriate golf courses by facilitating the RFP process. The company also can assist with pre-event planning, tournament operations, procurement of entertainers and educators, and provide access to private clubs in some markets.

“People now have higher expectations, and those tournaments (that meet those expectations) are the ones they’re going to participate in.”



Bob Harrington, President
US Tournament Golf, Rancho Cucamonga, CA

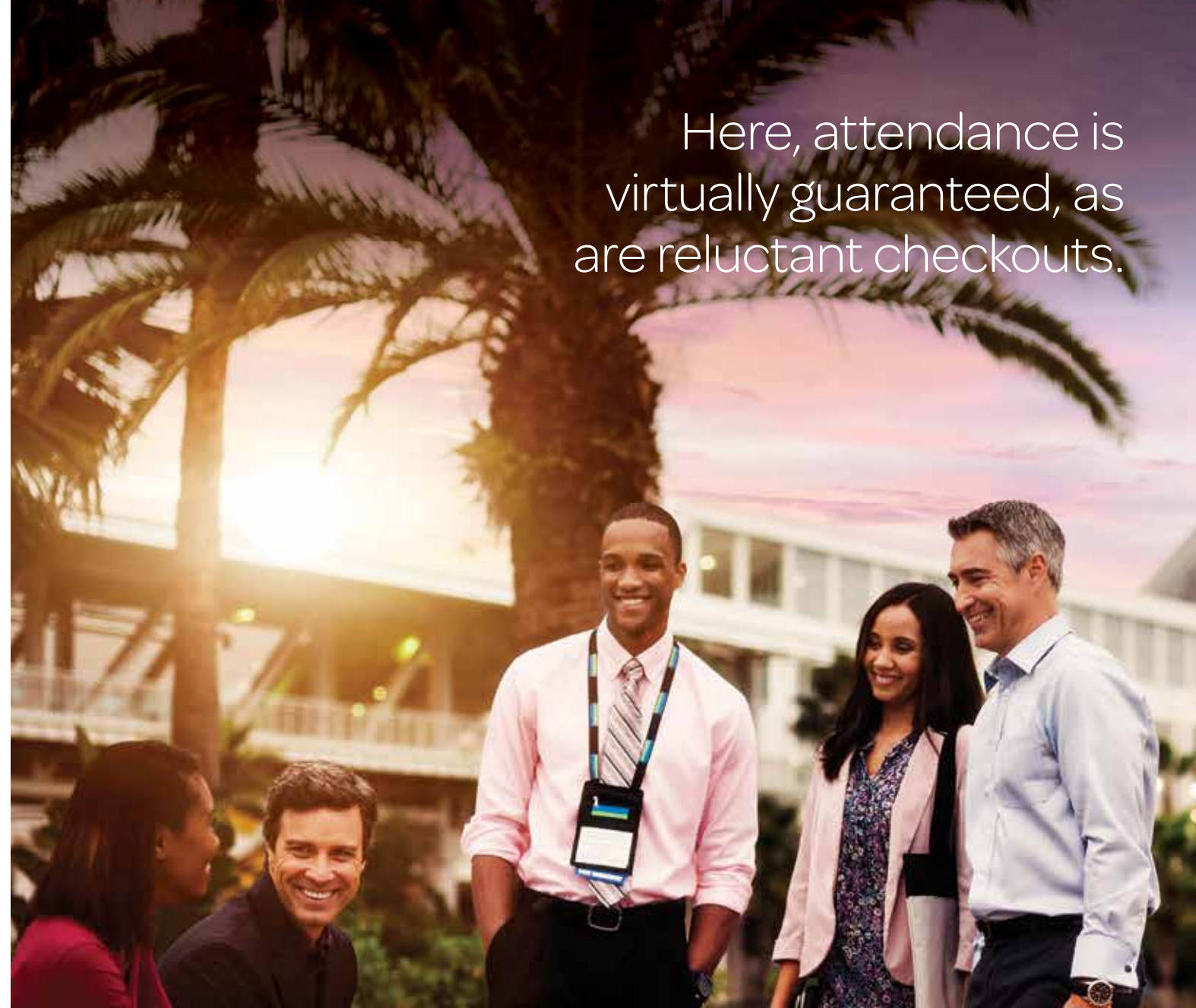
cludes a tee time engine, GPS feature, laser yardage device and other features. The course offers five sets of tees to accommodate golfers of all skill levels.

As representatives of Kingsmill Resort in Williamsburg, VA, report, “Golf is war, where men and women challenge the course, and the course usually wins. So why not play on a real

Swinging for Success

For Caldwell, the most successful golf tournaments are those that stand out from the rest and give the attendees something to talk about. “A golf event is just a golf event unless you make it a little bit different. It’s what they remember most about the event and about your brand.” **C&IT**

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Destination

Northeast Coast of Florida

Planners Discover the Drawing Power and Value of Meeting in Jacksonville, Amelia Island and St. Augustine/Ponte Vedra Beach

By John Buchanan

Although Florida offers a long list of popular, well-established meeting destinations, from north to south and from the Atlantic Coast to the Gulf of Mexico, it also features a trio of less well-known destinations along its Northeast Coast.

However, each year more planners discover — and swear allegiance to — the practical benefits and unique appeal of meeting in Jacksonville, Amelia Island and St. Augustine/Ponte Vedra Beach.

Jacksonville

For planners unfamiliar with the destination, there are many surprises to be found in Jacksonville. For example, Jacksonville is the largest city by landmass in the continental U.S. Nestled between the Atlantic Ocean and the St. Johns River, the sprawling waterfront metropolis boasts 21 miles of beaches and more than three miles of riverfront public spaces in its laidback downtown. Jacksonville also offers the largest public park system in the country, with more than 85,000 acres of recreation space, and is nationally recognized as one of the top 25 arts cities in the U.S.

Known as “The River City by the Sea,” Jacksonville can also claim a formidable inventory of meeting infrastructure, with 200 hotels offering a total of 18,000 rooms and hundreds of offsite venues delivering just the right size and feel for any kind of meeting or event.

The Prime F. Osborn III Convention Center, located in the heart of downtown just 15 minutes from Jacksonville International Airport and less than a mile from 1,000 hotel rooms, offers more than 275,000 sf of state-of-the-art meeting and event space.

The city also offers a robust roster of offsite venues and attractions. The Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens is among the most visited art outposts in the Southeast and features

spectacular gardens that are perfect for a memorable reception. Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens is perennially ranked as one of the country’s top animal attractions and also a unique meeting venue that includes its own catering department. Catty Shack Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary is a favorite local attraction, home to tigers, lions, panthers and other big cats. And Jacksonville Beach Pier is an historic landmark that overlooks the Atlantic Ocean and a vast, beautiful beach.

Jacksonville also features more than 50 golf courses, including famed TPC Sawgrass, home of the PGA Tour’s The Players tournament.

Gwen Knight, CMP, an independent meeting planner based in Lincoln, KS, used Jacksonville for the first time last year for a five-day, 1000-attendee conference for Pioneer Network, a health care organization that specializes in serving the senior care market such as nursing homes.

Knight discovered Jacksonville somewhat by accident, at the behest of her Hyatt national sales representative. “I had never been there,” Knight says. “And at the time, we were looking at another destination for the meeting. But I was convinced to



“I had never been there. And at the time, we were looking at another destination for the meeting. But I was convinced to go to Jacksonville and take a look at it. And I was very impressed.”

Gwen Knight, CMP
Independent Meeting Planner
Lincoln, KS

AMELIA ISLAND



Photo courtesy of Omni Amelia Island Plantation

The Omni Amelia Island Plantation’s three championship golf courses play through the natural beauty of tidal marshes, the Intracoastal Waterway, the Atlantic Ocean.

JACKSONVILLE



Photo courtesy of Visit Jacksonville

A river cruise with a stop at The Jacksonville Landing — an entertainment district along the St. Johns River featuring restaurants, shops and nightlife venues — is popular for groups.

SAINT AUGUSTINE PONTE VEDRA



Photo courtesy of St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches VCB

Forty-two miles of exquisite beaches await groups and their families along Florida’s Historic Coast from Ponte Vedra Beach to Crescent Beach for fun and relaxation.

go to Jacksonville and take a look at it. And I was very impressed.”

She was hosted by the convention and visitors bureau (Visit Jacksonville), and Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront, which ultimately earned hotel headquarters status for the meeting. “Both the CVB and the hotel did a very good job of convincing me to select Jacksonville,” Knight says. “And what I learned was that the financial advantages of meeting in Jacksonville just couldn’t be ignored.”

Based on responses to her RFP, Knight found surprising bang for the buck in Jacksonville. “And the value we got was the No. 1 reason we went there,” she says.

Bottom-line value was especially important to Pioneer Network, Knight explains, because they strive to keep their costs low so they can keep the registration cost down for attendees, many of whom are in the nursing home industry, which has suffered sharp budget cuts in recent years.

Another benefit of using Jacksonville, Knight says, was the exemplary service and support she received from the CVB and Hyatt Regency in the execution of her event.

“They were all true partners with us,” she says. “And we even got that kind of support from Swisscom, the AV company that operates out of the hotel. All of them were 100 percent behind whatever we wanted to do.”

Knight and her attendees also had high praise for Jacksonville International Airport. “It’s fresh, it offers easy access, and beats first-tier city congestion and annoyances,” Knight says.

And the service at the Hyatt Regency was so good that it earned a rare 100 percent rating in Knight’s post-meeting attendee survey.

Among the things Knight liked best about the hotel was



Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront, Northeast Florida’s largest convention hotel, features 110,000 sf of flexible meeting space and 30 versatile meeting rooms.

Photo courtesy of Hyatt Regency Jacksonville

its prefunction space. “Our receptions, our exhibits, our box lunches — all of those things were held in the middle of the huge, enormous foyer that is their prefunction area,” she says. “It is just magnificent, and it has great views of the river. And for me as a planner, finding just the right match of meeting space to my meeting is always a top priority. For this

meeting, the Hyatt Regency was perfect.”

As its reputation as a value-based beach meeting destination grows, Jacksonville continues to improve upon its hotels and venues.

The Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa, one of the area’s most popular meeting properties, is in the midst of a multimillion, resort-wide renovation. The intimate Aloft Jacksonville Tapestry Park reopened in August after a renovation. The Holiday Inn Baymeadows has been rebranded as a Wyndham-owned Ramada Jacksonville/Baymeadows. Two major airport hotels — the Jacksonville Airport Hotel, formerly a Clarion, and the Fairfield Inn & Suites Jacksonville Airport, are now undergoing renovations.

New meeting venues include the Schultz Center, which features 16 meeting rooms, two boardrooms, 10,000 sf of banquet space, onsite catering services and state-of-the-art audio-visual capabilities.

Riverfront Landing is a highly popular mixed-use facility located near several major meeting hotels, including the Hyatt Regency Riverfront, and offering a range of dining, entertainment and shopping options.

New local dining options include Moxie Kitchen + Cocktails from local celebrity chef Tom Gray, Epik Burger located in the city’s Southeast District and Safe Harbor Seafood located in Mayport Village.

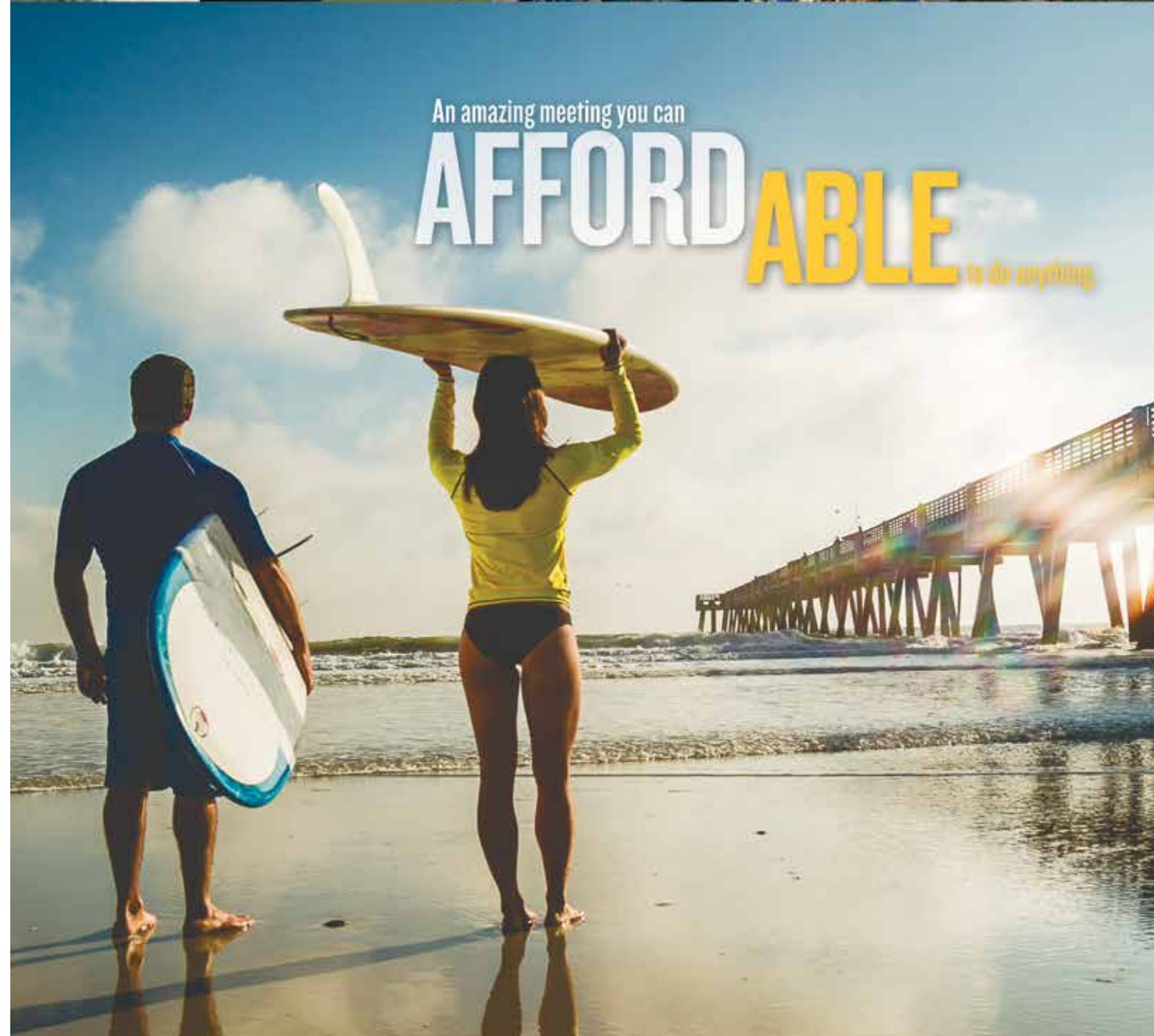


Photo courtesy of Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa



Photo courtesy of Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa

Recognize this stunning clubhouse? It’s a focal point during the televised The Players Championship, the annual PGA Tour event, which has been held every year since 1982 at The Stadium Course at TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach. Golfers can mosey over to the Island Green Pavilion (right) at the Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa for a fabulous post-game awards reception.



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Amelia Island

About a 30-minute drive from downtown Jacksonville is Amelia Island, one of the most exclusive island communities in the U.S. At the southern end of Sea Island, a chain of barrier islands that stretches along the East Coast from South Carolina to Florida, Amelia Island is 13 miles long and about four miles wide at its widest point. Its established communities are Fernandina Beach and Amelia City.

The island features 13 miles of ocean-facing beaches, abundant native wildlife and pristine waters, the characteristics of which have helped secure its status among the top 10 North American island destinations, according to *Condé Nast Traveler* Readers' Choice Awards.

Amelia Island features a pair of major meeting hotels: the 404-room, AAA Four Diamond Omni Amelia Island Plantation, with 80,000 sf of meeting space, and the 446-room Ritz-Carlton Amelia Island, with 48,000 sf of space.

Omni Amelia Island, a sprawling 1,350-acre complex that features a trio of world-class golf courses and a spa, reopened last March after completing an \$85 million, property-wide renovation that resulted from Omni's purchase of the landmark hotel. The updated property now features a breathtaking arrival experience that features a stunning lobby with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking an infinity pool and the Atlantic Ocean.

Keeping pace with its own \$65 million renovation completed last spring, The Ritz-Carlton Amelia Island created a new coastal theme that features new color schemes and wood floor entries in its guest rooms, as well as dramatic floor-to-ceiling balcony doors with plantation shutter treatments.

The fresh design, by Wilson Associates, is intended to take full advantage of the hotel's spectacular location above a dune-lined white sand beach surrounded by saltwater marshes. The Ritz-Carlton Amelia Island also features an acclaimed spa, as well as the new Talbot Ballroom.

In addition to the three championship golf courses at Omni Amelia Island Plantation, the island features the Golf Club of Amelia Island at Summer Beach Resort and the Royal

"The nice thing about the golf course is that everybody got to experience a great sunset, which is somewhat unusual on the east coast of Florida, where people are more accustomed to seeing a great sunrise."

Gail Meyer, Meetings and Incentives Manager
Mighty Auto Parts
Norcross, GA

Amelia Golflinks. The Fernandina Beach Golf Club is the resort's "city course."

Given its exclusivity, Amelia Island also offers top-of-the-line, fine-dining experiences.

Last year, the owners of Hoyt House Bed & Breakfast opened David's Restaurant, which features gourmet steak and seafood fare and excellent service. A daily three-course prix fixe menu is offered seven days a week for \$35 per person.

Joe's 2nd Street Bistro, a favorite eatery among locals that is open daily for lunch and dinner, completed a renovation last year. Lunch specials include Tuna Martini, Chopped Fried Chicken Salad and a Rib Eye Caprese Po' Boy.

Sliders Seaside Grill, another well-established local favorite that specializes in fresh local seafood, also completed a renovation last year.

Gail Meyer, meetings and incentives manager at Norcross, GA-based Mighty Auto Parts, experienced the Northeast Florida Coast for the company's five-day 50th anniversary annual sales meeting and trade show for more than 600 attendees.

"I actually stumbled upon Amelia Island by accident," Meyer says. "I was invited to go there on a leadership retreat, which was also sort of a FAM trip. And at that time, we at Mighty Auto Parts were not thinking about Amelia Island as a destination for our 50th anniversary meeting because we typically do an East Coast-West Coast rotation, and we had



Photo courtesy of Omni Amelia Island Plantation



Photo courtesy of Omni Amelia Island Plantation

Beach and golf — perfect together: Amelia Island is roughly four miles wide and not quite 14 miles long, yet it boasts six golf courses, with incredible golf holes like the spectacular 15th hole (right) at Ocean Links — one of the 54 championship holes at Omni Amelia Island Plantation. After golf, a gathering at the resort's beach firepit (left) is an ideal spot to recount the round hole by hole.

your island

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- 30 meeting rooms
- Outdoor venues from the ocean to marsh
- Luxury spa, golf, tennis and recreation
- OmniAmeliaIslandPlantation.com

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- 3 ballrooms and 11 meeting rooms
- 446 oceanview guest rooms and suites
- Luxurious spa, golf and beach
- World-class culinary expertise
- Dedicated and experienced staff
- RitzCarlton.com/AmeliaIsland



Photo courtesy of St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches VCB



Photo courtesy of St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches VCB

One of the four statues depicting Ponce de León on Florida's Historic Coast – St. Augustine – Ponte Vedra Beach. In April, this statue was dedicated at GTM Reserve's Ponce de León 30°8' Historical Site. (Right) The unique and colorful skyline of St. Augustine.

just done the meeting in Orlando the year before. So our eyes were on the West Coast for the big meeting."

But as soon as she saw Amelia Island, Meyer says, she knew instinctively that it was the perfect location for an event as special as Mighty Auto Parts' 50th anniversary celebration.

"One of the major factors was being on the beach and the fact that every room at Omni Amelia Island has a view of the water," Meyer says. "We also wanted a place that for our attendees would be more than just a meeting, but also be an incentive program reward for some of them. We wanted everyone to have an experience that was not just all business, but also represented pleasure."

Yet another factor was that a significant percentage of attendees at the company's annual meeting bring their spouses and children and treat it as a family vacation. About one third of this year's attendees brought their families to Amelia Island.

Meyer got her meeting off to a good start with an opening reception at the hotel's Marsh View Bar & Grill, which offers a menu of Southern-inspired casual fare and overlooks vistas of the marsh, the Intracoastal Waterway and the ninth hole of the Oak Marsh Golf Course.

"We had golf-related games and contests including a putting contest," Meyer says. "We had food and an open bar. And the nice thing about the golf course is that everybody got to experience a great sunset, which is somewhat unusual on the east coast of Florida, where people are more accustomed to seeing a great sunrise. But we got a great sunset."

For the meeting's one free evening, Meyer shuttled attendees to Fernandina Beach, where they enjoyed local seafood restaurants and shopping. "It's a cool spot because it's where the local fishing boats come in," Meyer says.

Among other meeting highlights were a vintage car show staged on the lawn at the hotel and a closing night awards

banquet. "We gave away two cars, a completely restored vintage 1957 Camaro and a 2014 Ford Mustang," Meyer says.

In addition to a truly memorable meeting, Omni Amelia Island Plantation also delivered some of the finest service Meyer has ever experienced. "I do an evaluation at the end of every meeting, based on the feedback I get from our attendees," she says. "And I just looked at that report, and the ratings for the hotel, based on a system of giving ratings of one to five for the various categories such as food and beverage, was an average of 4.75 and 4.89. So that really tells you what our attendees thought of the hotel and the service we got. Those numbers are near the top of any we've ever gotten for any meeting."

Meyer notes that such service can be largely attributed to the hands-on attention provided by general manager Paul Eckert. "He's young, he's approachable and to him, it's all about customer service," Meyer says. "He's visible. He's there on property the whole time. And from the first time I visited the hotel, on every single visit I have run into him, and he has been friendly and supportive. So I knew I could go to him for anything I needed."

Meyer, who plans about 15–20 small meetings a year in addition to the company's annual event, finds that kind of personal service from a GM highly unusual. "The only two places I've ever really encountered that are both Omni properties," she says. "The other is Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate, where we held last year's annual meeting."

St. Augustine/Ponte Vedra

Located just south of Jacksonville, St. Augustine is one of Florida's most historic and fascinating destinations. In fact, it is the oldest continuously occupied European-established settlement and port in the U.S.

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Photo courtesy of Ponte Vedra Inn & Club

The AAA Five Diamond Ponte Vedra Inn & Club in Ponte Vedra Beach, a landmark since 1928 on Florida's Historic Coast.

served as the capital of Spanish Florida for 200 years. It remained the capital of eastern Florida as the territory changed hands between the Spanish and British, and remained the capital of the Florida Territory until it was moved to Tallahassee in 1824. Since the late 19th century, its historical character has made the city a major tourist attraction.

St. Augustine features colonial-era buildings as well as elite 19th century architecture. The city's historic center is anchored by St. George Street, which is lined with historic homes from various periods of Florida history.

Some of the city's most popular attractions are also historic.

The St. Augustine Alligator Farm, incorporated in 1908, is one of the oldest commercial tourist attractions in Florida, as is the Fountain of Youth Archeological Park, which dates from the same time period.

The city also holds a special place in the history of the civil rights movement. A privately funded Freedom Trail links a number of historic sites that date back to key moments in the civil rights movement, and there is a museum at the site of Fort Mose, the location of a free black community founded in 1738. Historic Excelsior School, built in 1925 as the first public high school for blacks in St. Augustine, became the city's first museum of African-American history.

Another interesting local historical attraction is the Colonial Quarter, which opened last March and immerses visitors in the lives of Spanish and British militia members from the 16th to the 18th centuries.

The newly renovated Government House is now home to a First Colony exhibit developed by the University of Florida to explore and explain the area's Spanish origins. The exhibit features interactive displays and artifacts that provide insight into the lives of early Spanish settlers and their relationships with indigenous populations.

Rick Allen, corporate events coordinator at Needham, MA-based The Corporate Directors Group, which provides certification and education for members of corporate boards of directors, has taken one of his most important annual meetings to the St. Augustine area for each of the last four years.

Next year will mark his fifth journey to Ponte Vedra Inn & Club, a 300-acre beach resort built in 1928 on famous Ponte

Vedra Beach and boasting its own fascinating history as one of the most private and exclusive resorts in Florida.

Although Allen rarely repeats destinations and hotels, Ponte Vedra Inn & Club has emerged as the ideal venue for the organization's two-day, 100-attendee education and networking conference each spring.

"I initially did a site inspection trip," Allen says. "And in selecting Ponte Vedra Inn & Club, we looked at a lot of factors. And one that is especially important to us, given our audience, is the convenience of getting to the destination."

Attendees fly both commercially and on private corporate planes. "And it's very convenient to fly into Jacksonville," Allen says. "It's a great airport, very customer-friendly. And they also accommodate private planes." The airport is also convenient to the hotel.

What has accounted for Allen's unprecedented loyalty to Ponte Vedra Inn & Club?

"Because our audience is corporate directors, we always look for a hotel that can accommodate them in a very upscale fashion," he says. "But part of that is also putting them in an environment where they can feel relaxed and also like they are



"When you're at Ponte Vedra, they really cater to you. They take over. They manage everything for you in a very professional manner. You get the feeling that you are the only guest there."

**Rick Allen, Corporate Events Coordinator
The Corporate Directors Group
Needham, MA**

in a private setting. Ponte Vedra offers a beautiful beach and incredible accommodations. And we get rooms that are just steps away from the beach, with magnificent views."

The other factor that has made Allen an annual customer is exemplary service. "When you're at Ponte Vedra, they really cater to you," he says. "They take over. They manage everything for you in a very professional manner. You get the feeling that you are the only guest there. And in doing these corporate events, it is extremely important to me that when I arrive at a facility that I don't have to worry about anything other than taking care of my attendees."

Given his VIP audience, that high standard of service is even more critical than it is for other corporate meetings. "These people are used to having everything set for them and going smoothly," Allen says. "They don't want to waste time. They want to get in and get out and have the entire experience be very convenient and comfortable. And that's exactly what they get at Ponte Vedra. So the destination has just worked very well for us for this particular meeting."

C&IT



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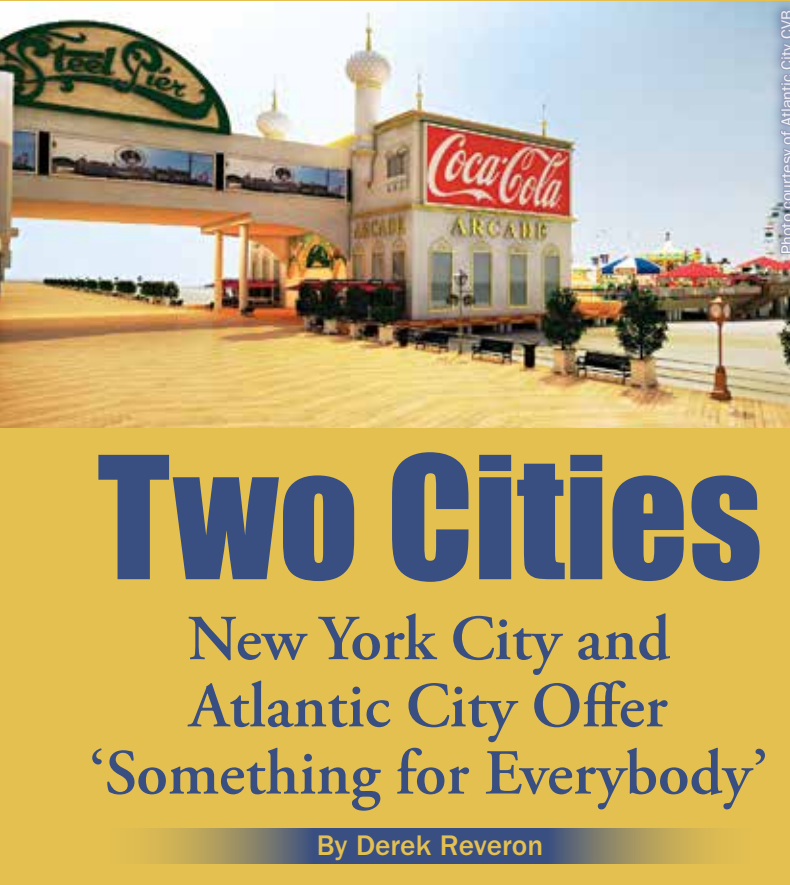
Destination

A Tale of

Two Cities

New York City and
Atlantic City Offer
'Something for Everybody'

By Derek Reveron



The Steel Pier amusement pier on The Boardwalk in Atlantic City (left) is dwarfed by The Empire State Building in New York City.

Tourism is thriving in New York City. A record 52 million visitors and an all-time high of \$55.3 billion in economic impact are two of the incredible firsts being touted in the first-ever NYC & Company official report on tourism “New York City Tourism: A Model for Success.” New and improved hotels are popping up all over The Big Apple, providing planners with an even greater variety of properties with a plethora of services, amenities and value.

New York City

New York City is a hustling and bustling site of new builds and renovations — everything from ritzy properties in Midtown Manhattan to intimate boutique properties downtown. Between 2006 and 2012, New York City saw 95 new hotels in Manhattan and 72 more in the city’s other boroughs, according to the report. Room inventory increased from 78,500 to a record 90,387 and is expected to reach about 110,000 units

by 2016. Moreover, in 2012, New York City had more conventioners than Las Vegas, despite having only 2.3 million sf of convention space compared to Las Vegas’ 10.6 million sf.

These numbers are manna from heaven for planners who arrange domestic and international group events. A top-of-mind destination, New York City attracts groups from the world over, says Karen Shackman, president of Shackman Associates, a leading DMC in New York City. “Some international groups, depending on what country they are from, their age and their needs, want New York hotels known for their superb service,” says Shackman. “That is most of our customers. Other groups want boutique or smaller, less expensive hotels that may not be located in Manhattan. There is a little something for everybody.”

Big Apple Awe

An incentive group of 350 people from a manufacturing and supply company located in another country visited New York

City for six days earlier this year. The group stayed at the landmark Waldorf Astoria New York, located on Park Avenue. “It was one of the hotels we put forth as a viable option because it could accommodate the group’s upscale needs,” says Shackman. “They are an older group that had heard of the Waldorf and thought it typified New York. Many groups choose iconic hotels that are closely identified with the city. They were awed by the Waldorf’s stately architecture and service throughout their stay.”

The group enjoyed a quintessentially New York City experience. “It was very upscale, customized and New York focused,” says Shackman. “We took them on a helicopter tour of the city. We also took them on a bus tour of neighborhoods including Greenwich Village, SoHo, Tribeca, Little Italy, Chinatown, Chelsea and Harlem. We gave them what I call ‘pop-up’ surprises along the way. One was a stop to buy pretzels from a street vendor who we had brand his pretzels and cart with the company’s name. Although we had to break the group up into small groups for tours every day, the value of the experience was the same for everyone.”

One night, the group had dinner at Sardi’s, a restaurant in the Theater District known for its show business patrons and hundreds of caricatures of famous people adorning the walls.

During dinner, they met the cast of the Broadway hit “Motown the Musical” prior to seeing the performance. “After the show, they met the cast in the theater, listened to them discuss the show and asked questions of the performers,” says Shackman. “They loved it. On another night, they had an event in The Allen Room (an amphitheater in Lincoln Center), where they watched an ensemble of Broadway performers put on a show customized for the group.” Attendees left the city feeling they gotten a true New York experience, says Shackman.

A major U.S. corporation reveled in a completely different set of legendary New York City experiences during a recent four-day incentive for about 950 attendees at a well-known hotel, according to Anthony Napoli, CMP, DMCP, president of Briggs Inc., a prominent New York DMC.

Flawless Planning

The first night, the group attended a reception at the Summer Garden & Bar, a beautiful space at Rockefeller Center, which morphs into the popular outdoor skating rink in the winter months. As a matter of fact, the start of the winter season in New York kicks off this year with the opening of The Rink at Rockefeller Center on Columbus Day, October 14. “Dinner was a Taste of New York theme with a dance band performing on an outdoor stage,” says Napoli. “During the party, they visited the observation deck on top of Rockefeller Center to take in the view.”

The next day, the group enjoyed a dinner cruise to Ellis Island and were mesmerized by colorful fireworks shot from a barge as the regal Statue of Liberty glowed in the background. Given New York City’s traffic, the planning and timing for such an event had to be flawless, says Napoli. “You have to go from bus to boat, boat to island, island to boat, and boat to bus back to the hotel. And we had to be on the island by a certain time because the Coast Guard gives you specific time to do the fireworks. But everything worked out fine.”

The group also held a black-tie affair at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. “We had cocktails in the main lobby, then divided them into three groups with each in a different venue,” says Napoli. “Each group heard a curator provide a history of the museum and the venue in which they were seated. During dinner, they heard background music from live musicians. One group had jazz, another had a string quartet and the other had Egyptian mood music.”

On the final night, the group visited the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum complex. “It’s good to have a rain plan because the weather didn’t cooperate that evening,” Napoli recalls. “We had planned for them to go to the ship’s top deck, have cocktails and visit the space shuttle. Instead, we had cocktails inside the ship where the exhibits are and then moved into the hangar area for dinner.”

Napoli says it was the first visit to New York City for many in the group, and they were awed by the experience. “They were surprised at how hospitable New Yorkers are,” he says.

Jim Bozzelli’s group had a similar and very positive experience meeting in New York City. Bozzelli, director of business development/account for Lincolnshire, IL-based Gavel International, a corporate meeting and incentive travel planning company, arranged a unique multi-wave corporate incentive for his client in August. The group, composed of 1,000 salespeople and their guests, arrived in eight overlapping waves of attendees for a four-day stay at the conveniently located New York Marriott Marquis. The hotel was in tip-top shape following the recent \$39 million makeover of its 1,943 guest rooms and suites, and the 29,025-sf Broadway Ballroom.

Bozzelli says the multi-phase (wave) incentive presented two unique challenges. “You need to make sure the enthusiasm and energy of the hotel staff, who must repeat the program over three weeks, has the same energy and enthusiasm all the way through, and they did,” he says. “You also want to make sure that the people in each wave have the same incentive experience, and they did.”

Bozzelli and his staff spent about two years planning the incentive, which required painstaking attention to detail. “We



The Rink at Rockefeller Center, one of the most visited sites in the world, is a must-see for corporate groups meeting in NYC.



“Some international groups...want New York hotels known for their superb service. Other groups want boutique or smaller, less expensive hotels that may not be located in Manhattan. There is a little something for everybody.”

Karen Shackman, President
Shackman Associates
New York, NY

went to New York City for a site visit about two years out,” says Bozzelli. “About a year out, we went back to have a planning session and explain how we needed them to remain focused and up during the entire program. We developed a rapport with key department managers who we interacted with on a daily basis during the incentive, asking them to tweak some things a little. They were very responsive.”

For example, Bozzelli relates, “We did a welcome event for each group and a daily breakfast at the hotel. In the beginning, we saw a higher demand for certain menu items, or the attendees asked about something they wanted to try. The Marriott was good about including the items on the menu for future arriving groups.”

Bozzelli and his client company evaluated several hotels and chose the New York Marriott Marquis for two main reasons. “Having a unique venue (the hotel’s Broadway Lounge) where they could eat breakfast everyday while overlooking Times Square was a big plus for the Marriott. ...Many things the city has to offer are right outside the hotel’s front door.”

Attendees, many of whom hailed from the Midwest and Southeast and had never been to New York City, raved about the incentive, says Bozzelli. “We did a paper survey at the conclusion of each wave, and the feedback was very positive. There is a perception of the city as big, busy and not the most welcoming, but they found it to be 180 degrees from that.”

Hotel Growth

According to “New York City Tourism: A Model for Success,” “New York City has been adding more hotel rooms at a faster rate than the national average, with new properties springing up as existing ones are being spruced up across the five boroughs. From boutique hotels and family-friendly properties to luxury and super-luxury brands, the city’s rapid development brings depth and design to its mix of already-diverse accommodations, as well as more affordable options, greater sustainability and the latest in amenities.”

Due to the increasing demand for hotel rooms, the number of properties isn’t the only thing rising. “The price points are increasing along with the number of hotels, and that’s something that people talk about, but nothing seems to stop groups from coming to New York. And you can still find value,” says Shackman.

Here is a brief summary of some of the new and improved properties.

The 487-room Hyatt Times Square New York, is now accepting reservations from December 3, 2013, and the hotel restaurant, spa, and lounge are scheduled to open in January 2014. The hotel has more than 8,000 sf of flexible meeting space including a 1,900-sf ballroom. The Grand Hyatt New York, a landmark hotel located on Park Avenue in Midtown, redesigned its 1,306 guest rooms and suites, and fully renovated its 60,000 sf of meeting space, which is equipped with state-of-the-art technology.

The Hilton New York celebrated its 50th anniversary with a name change to the New York Hilton Midtown. The property, the largest hotel in Manhattan, offers 1,980 guest rooms, more than 151,000 sf of meeting space and an 8,000-sf fitness center. Hilton Hotels & Resorts recently announced the launch of Herb N’ Kitchen, which is now open inside New York Hilton Midtown. The new restaurant concept offers healthy fare for breakfast,



Convене, a Manhattan conference center, uses a design methodology that promotes a productive meeting experience.

lunch and dinner. Meals can be packaged to take away or prepared for in-room delivery for hotel guests.

Starwood Hotels & Resorts recently announced that more than \$400 million has been invested to refurbish some of its 21 properties located in New York City. Starwood also updated the 774-room Westin New York Grand Central, which offers 12 meeting rooms. The Sheraton New York Times Square completed a \$20 million renovation that has completely transformed the hotel’s 60,000 sf of meeting and event spaces, which can accommodate up to 3,700 attendees. The completion of the meeting space renovation marked the final phase of the overall \$180 million top-to-bottom renovation to the hotel’s 1,781 rooms and public spaces. The new Sheraton New York Times Square offers guests a modern design, sought-after amenities, and new tech-

nology including digital signage outside meeting rooms and in public spaces — with the ability to stream customized messages and live news — as well as client-controlled individual digital panels to customize lighting and temperature in each room, and a Telepresence suite.

Park Central Hotel New York will launch a new look this month following an extensive multimillion-dollar renovation. This landmark property has 761 guest rooms and 15,000 sf of meeting space including 11 meeting rooms, one boardroom and a versatile ballroom.

Big Apple Unique Venues

New York City has an abundance of incredibly unique venues. Popular spaces include the historic Edison Ballroom, a 17,000-sf space that originally premiered in the 1930s as the Edison Hotel’s ballroom.

The Midtown Loft, a 5,000-sf indoor event space, accommodates up to 300 people for cocktails and 180 for seated dinners. Large windows let in natural sunlight. The 3,400-sf, mostly open-air Midtown Terrace accommodates up to 200 guests. The Terrace’s magnificent 360-degree panoramic view of the famous Manhattan skyline includes the Empire State Building and the majestic Marble Collegiate Church.

Additional upscale venues include Gotham Hall, a seven-story ballroom with gilded architecture that was originally built in 1924 as the Greenwich Savings Bank building. The venue accommodates up to 1,200 guests. The venue also boasts five executive meeting rooms that are comparable to traditional conference centers such as business breakfasts, corporate luncheons, teambuilding seminars, sales meetings or multi-day exhibitions.

Since its completion in 1931 as the world’s tallest building, the Empire State Building has been an international icon. Thus, corporate events held at the Empire State Building offer an experience unlike any other. The expansive event space, Art Deco architecture and unparalleled panoramic views of the Manhattan skyline and beyond provide an ideal setting for product launches, conferences, receptions and dinners.

Convене, New York City’s newest corporate conference center — an expansive, nearly 40,000-sf facility — opened for business in April in the city’s downtown financial district. The new location at 32 Old Slip is Convене’s third conference center in New York. Formerly a Goldman Sachs training center, a \$4 million renovation has transformed the space into a technologically integrated conference and collaboration site. Convене’s three

locations in Manhattan offer a combined 110,000 sf of space making it the largest network of dedicated conference centers in New York City.

Renovations should be completed by the end of 2013 at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, which is billed as the “Marketplace to the World.” Major renovations to the main building include replacement of the roof, curtain wall, skylights, enlargement and re-configuration of the main entrances and replacement and upgrades of the buildings systems. A green roof will be installed that will be the largest in the Northeast.

Atlantic City, New Jersey

New Jersey’s famous Atlantic City offers corporate groups much more than gaming action. The casino resorts and convention centers provide many options for meeting planners.

The Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, which has completed a \$50 million redesign project that included all 2,000 guest rooms and corridors, hosted in January the annual meeting of New York City-based Numerix, a company that develops software for risk analysis of financial derivatives. The Borgata, which features 70,000 sf of event space, also hosted the five-day meeting in 2011 and 2012. Numerix also will return to the Borgata in 2014.

According to Abby Kahn, global events manager for Numerix, the meeting was held in New York City for several years before moving it to New Jersey. “The move was done because our headquarters is in New York, and we wanted to take people out of

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“Dinner was a Taste of New York theme with a dance band performing on an outdoor stage. During the party, they visited the observation deck on top of Rockefeller Center to take in the view.”

Anthony Napoli, CMP, DMCP, President
Briggs Inc.
New York, NY



their element where they live,” she says. “We wanted to take people to a separate location where we could have more teambuilding and bonding time without them going home in the evenings. Price also went into the decision. It’s simply cheaper to do things in New Jersey than in Manhattan.”

This year’s meeting included more than 150 sales and marketing people, executives and researchers from more than 10 countries. Building relationships through teambuilding was a central theme of the meeting. During one teambuilding exercise, attendees were divided into 10 groups to build different sections of a sturdy cardboard bridge in a Borgata ballroom.

Each team picked a project manager and had two hours to build the bridge. “The point of the exercise was that, although we are different teams from around the world, we need to come together to build a cohesive bridge to how we were evolving the company into a risk management space over the year,” said chief marketing officer Jim Jockle. “At the end, project managers articulated their vision for the piece that their team built. Then, in a symbolic effort, the entire company walked across the bridge.”

The next night, the groups dined separately at different restaurants outside the hotel. “The idea was that one night you solve a problem together and the next night talk more on another level,” says Kahn.

During another teambuilding activity, a dueling piano act entertained the group after dinner in the Borgata’s Signature Room. The two piano players provided music, songs and instructions to attendees who were called up on the stage individually. They received a prop such as a hat, wig, moustache or sunglasses and followed instructions on a motion or dance move to do or person to imitate. The company’s CEO donned a hairpiece and sunglasses to do an Elvis impersonation. At the end of the show, everyone took to the stage to “perform.”

The dueling pianos teambuilding event was a huge hit. “Since we had an international group, we were hoping that everybody understood the songs and got into it,” says Kahn. “Within 10 minutes, everybody loved it. People who were shy got up on the stage to do things they don’t normally do. And people who at first refused to go up there had a complete blast.”

During the meeting, the Borgata’s staff went out of their way to provide superior service to attendees. “You always worry about participants feeling fatigued about using the same venues repeatedly,” says Jockle. “By the time we did our awards banquet, we had been in the same ballroom for breakfast, lunch and teambuilding for three or four nights, but the staff worked so hard to

re-dress the room for each event to create another experience. That completely impressed us.”

The Borgata staff performed beyond the call of duty according to Jockle. “We needed some gifts for awards night, so the banquet manager stopped on the way home to pick up items for us,” says Jockle. “The head concierge ran out to pick up stuff in town so we didn’t have to break the cadence of our meetings.”

New and Improved Properties and Venues

Like New York City, Atlantic City properties are renovating and expanding. Here’s what’s new.

The 2,079-suite Tropicana Casino & Resort has completed a \$180 million renovation it started last fall. The project included 16 floors of the 437-room North Tower. Rooms received new furnishings, carpeting, wall coverings and new-look bathrooms.

The Revel Casino-Hotel announced that the first week of July, 2013 was the hotel’s first profitable week since opening in April, 2012. Revel also said it is adjusting its marketing strategy with the help of a consulting firm, and has laid off about two percent of its workforce to enhance long-term performance.

Apart from hotel meeting space, Atlantic City offers the Atlantic City Convention Center (ACCC), one of the East Coast’s largest meeting facilities, with more than 486,600 sf of exhibit space and more than 109,000 sf of meeting space. The ACCC provides state-of-the-art computer, voice, data and video systems.

Atlantic City’s unique venues showcase the region’s character. Absecon Lighthouse, constructed in 1857, offers stop-and-stare views of Atlantic City from the top. Groups can hold meetings and events on the lighthouse grounds, which include a museum — formerly the lighthouse keeper’s residence.

Other special venues include: The Atlantic City Aquarium, which features the 100-person capacity Harborview Room. Boardwalk Hall, located on the renowned Boardwalk, offers six meeting spaces, the largest of which is 23,100 sf. Ripley’s Believe It or Not museum, which features interactive exhibits and artifacts, is available for private corporate functions.

New York City and New Jersey’s Atlantic City, located only 127 miles apart, each offer distinctive advantages that can make any meeting or incentive soar. New York City’s cosmopolitan character and seemingly endless supply of venues and activities is something to behold. Atlantic City’s concentration of splendid resorts, oceanfront amenities and gaming provide self-contained settings for the perfect meeting. Planners can’t go wrong with either location.

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Destination

Meeting in Puerto Rico

By
Derek
Reveron

A 'Smooth' Experience for Planners and Attendees

Smooth." That's the new tag line for the Puerto Rico Convention Bureau (PRCB) because they say meeting on the island is a smooth experience from start to finish.

Earlier this year, the bureau launched Puerto Rico Smooth Meeting University (PRSMU), an online education portal for planners that offers a series of online courses on planning meetings in Puerto Rico. Topics include meeting hotels, the PRCC, the island's rich culture and history, golf, dining and nightlife.

Upon completion, planners earn a "Puerto Rico Smooth Meeting Specialist" designation, explains Neil Mullanaphy, senior vice president, sales for the bureau. "Puerto Rico University offers busy planners a thorough understanding of Puerto Rico as a meetings destination and a centralized location for planning and booking tools," he says.

Meeting in Puerto Rico is so smooth, it is like meeting in the United States as Puerto Rico is a U.S. commonwealth whose residents are American citizens. "We are part of the U.S. and relatively close in distance," says Janet Santana, sales manager of RST Puerto Rico, a 35-year-old San Juan DMC. "You don't need a passport to come, it's cheaper to come to Puerto Rico than to Europe or someplace else overseas, and we have the same currency. There are many flights here from the mainland U.S. Our beautiful island and tropical weather year-round is an incentive, especially for people from the northern states."

Indeed, commonalities between Puerto Rico and the mainland U.S. are a big attraction for corporations. For example, Innovage, a Foothill Ranch, CA-based wholesale supplier to companies worldwide, held a series of three back-to-back incentive meetings for about 1,600 employees in 2012 and 2011.

Ease of entry into Puerto Rico was a significant reason for

choosing the destination, says Innovage president Marty Tenebaum. "The big thing for us is the passport. That's why we picked Puerto Rico. A lot of our people are young, they might not have passports, and they can't get it quickly. And some people can't get passports for different reasons," says Tenebaum.

Hotel and Resort Variety

Most important, Puerto Rico has an increasing variety of luxurious and technologically updated hotels and resorts. "We have every kind of hotel, all the way up to seven stars, for every kind of clientele, in the Condado and Isla Verde areas and all over Puerto Rico," says Santana. "We have every major hotel chain, and most of them have more than one hotel here. Rates have been flat or increasing slightly for the last two years. But what's happening now is, instead of increasing room rates, a lot of hotels are raising what



Ludwig Krammer, Director of Operations
Bucom International Inc., Chicago, IL

"I believe that when people arrive to register and see the ocean while they are doing it, they are put in a great mood to enjoy the rest of their stay."

One of Puerto Rico's most recognizable landmarks, El Morro is a historic fortress located on the northwestern-most point of Old San Juan.

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Photo courtesy of Bucom International Inc.

Incentive participants from 30 countries bonded on Bucom's group outings such as this ATV escapade through the rain forest.

they call resort or hotel fees." However, groups can still find good value, adds Santana.

In addition to value, Puerto Rico offers ample meeting space. The Puerto Rico Convention Center (PRCC), the largest and most modern convention center in the Caribbean, has 36,200 sf of meeting rooms and a 39,000-sf ballroom. The PRCC and the hotel's meeting spaces offer a combined 1.3 million sf of meeting space. The future is bright as a new multi-use, urban waterfront project is under development in the Puerto Rico Convention Center district, which also will include a World Trade Center, a link to Old San Juan and more hotels as well.

A U.S. corporation held an incentive at one of Puerto Rico's premier meeting hotels, the El Conquistador, A Waldorf Astoria Resort that offers more than 100,000 sf of event space. The company brought approximately 1,700 salespeople, executives and contractors and their partners to the hotel in two separate groups for three-day stays during the same month.

While the company's vice president of meetings and conventions has used other properties in Puerto Rico, he is partial to the El Conquistador, which is located in Fajardo, about 38 miles east of San Juan. "We have used the hotel five times over the last 20 years or so, he says. "It has a better resort feel, and it's not in San Juan proper. In a lot of people's minds when you go to an island destination, you don't want to be in town, so to speak. You want to be removed from other properties, and the El Con gives us that."

The group took full advantage of the hotel and its 100-acre Palomino Island. "We did business meetings and receptions on property and did private receptions on the island for some of our business partners. There was a special reception for a small elite group of about 50 higher level qualifiers and their partners. We took them to a house (Hacienda Siesta Alegre, a private horse ranch) in the (El Yunque) rain forest along with the CEO and other executives of the company. It is a very unique structure in a unique setting with a great view of the water."

The group plans to return to the island next year for several reasons. "When you go there, it's like you are leaving the states, but you're not," says the planner. "Import-export is easier than going to other islands in the Caribbean. We send a great deal of material — equipment related to the meetings and sessions, and gifts and awards. Taking that to some places other than Puerto Rico, you are paying duties, import fees,

etc. With Puerto Rico, it's less expensive and more convenient. They have the same customs and mail systems."

He also cites good value as a reason for repeatedly choosing Puerto Rico as a meeting destination. "They have been pretty good on price, but they are starting to escalate like everywhere else in the world. I don't think they are escalating quite as quickly as certain parts of the mainland U.S., though," the planner says.

Puerto Rico also is a popular destination for corporate meetings that attract attendees from around the world. A U.S. pharmaceutical company recently held a four-day incentive program including several strategy planning sessions for about 200 salespeople from about 30 countries. The meeting took place at the Condado Plaza Hilton, which has 41,000 sf of function space and overlooks the Atlantic Ocean and the picturesque Condado lagoon. It was the first time that the company's salespeople from different countries took an incentive trip together. Previously, each country handled its own incentives.

Ludwig Krammer, director of operations for Bucom International Inc., a Chicago-based meeting, incentive and event planning firm, handled the arrangements for the event. Krammer's innovative approach to registration paid off: "We used an outdoor terrace for registration. We didn't register them at the desk," he says, "because I believe that when people arrive to register and see the ocean while they are doing it, they are put in a great mood to enjoy the rest of their stay."

During their stay, the group held several meetings, including about 12 breakout sessions each day. However, there also was enough free time to participate in several planned outdoor activities — for a purpose, says Krammer. "We wanted to give people from different countries the chance to get to know each other and socialize outside of meeting rooms. They rode four-wheelers in the rain forest, did horseback riding, mountain biking, hiking, fishing, boating and catamarans. They had the evenings free and one night did a dine-around."

The meeting ended with an awards banquet at the Condado Plaza Hilton ballroom. "We set up AV equipment and opened the banquet by showing a three-minute collage of pictures accompanied by music of everything that happened during meetings and activities." The presentation was a big hit with attendees, Krammer adds.

Getting the Best Deals and Dates

The variety of hotels and amenities in Puerto Rico are a boon for planners like Carmen Torres, the Puerto Rico director for Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, who plans 10 to 12 meetings on the island annually for groups ranging in size from 150 to 1,500 attendees.

"We use The Caribe Hilton, The Condado Plaza Hilton, the El San Juan Resort and Casino, and El Conquistador because they have the double rooms that I need," says Torres. "There are relatively few hotels in Puerto Rico that have double rooms and the meeting space and breakout rooms that I need for the classroom-style sessions we have. I especially prefer the Caribe Hilton because they have about 30 breakout rooms — we have



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about 16 breakouts every day — and because they have almost 500 rooms with two beds.”

The hotels also are able to meet Torres’ important technology and audio-visual equipment needs. “We prearrange to get cable or wireless Internet access, depending on the computers we use,” says Torres. “The hotels provide the AV equipment and sound system. They have some very good suppliers that we work with. They are quite affordable, and they are there from early in the morning until late at night. If there is any problem with the equipment, they are very responsive.”

Torres’ groups typically meet over a weekend, mostly during low season, April through November, and sometimes during high season, late December through March. The veteran planner knows Puerto Rico hotels as well as anybody and shares her strategy for getting the best deals and dates:

“I ask about occupancy during ‘soft’ weekends so we can get a better price, and that’s when I try to book rooms,” says Torres. “I book meetings during low season, but also in low occupancy periods during the high season. During the weekend starting January 31 next year the occupancy dips temporarily at hotels, so I already booked a 700-person meeting for that weekend. That approach has worked for me so far.”

And it works through effective negotiating. “They are very good negotiators but so am I,” says Torres. “I tell them what my budget is and what I want, and either we can make it happen or we can’t, and I just go to another hotel. But usually they are very accommodating. I have one person at each hotel that I deal with, and I have long-time relationships with them.”

Torres leaves no stone unturned while sealing the deal with a hotel. “We have a lot of pre-meeting meetings with the hotel, and my staff is constantly in touch with their hotel staff,” says Torres. “We are constantly communicating through phone and email. For example, we talk to chefs to compare menus to make sure they aren’t repeated from the previous year. They are extremely accommodating. They usually supply a person who is with us from early in the morning on the first day through checkout on Sunday,” says Torres.

Hotel News, Attractions and Unique Venues

The 571-room Condado Plaza Hilton recently changed its name. It was formerly branded as the Conrad San Juan Condado Plaza hotel. The 225-room Hilton Ponce Golf & Casino Resort situated on the southern shore in Ponce, has completed a multimillion-dollar renovation as part of its 20th anniversary celebration.

Among other properties, the 130-room Dorado Beach, A Ritz-Carlton Reserve, has opened with three-, four- and five-bedroom villa residences. The historic 232-room Condado Vanderbilt Hotel will open all of its guest rooms by the end of this year after several years of renovations. The property has more than 15,000 sf of meeting space and 19 restaurants, bars and lounges. The 104-room Hyatt Place Manati and Casino, is scheduled to open in January 2014 with 10,000 sf of gaming space and 2,075 sf of meeting space.

Additionally, The Sheraton Old San Juan Hotel & Casino is renovating its 240 guest rooms, Wi-Fi services and air conditioning system. The hotel has 10 meeting spaces, the largest of which is 2,695 sf. The casino has 309 slot machines and 12 gaming tables.

Puerto Rico’s plethora of unique meeting venues and attractions are always high on the to-do list of corporate meetings and incentives. Earlier this year, Santana customized an activity itinerary for a five-day incentive for 220 people from a U.S. company.

The activities were jam-packed with the island’s highlights. “We did dine-arounds in different restaurants in the Condado and Old San Juan metro areas,” says Santana. “We took them on tours of El Yunque Rain Forest, El Morro

Fort and Old San Juan. They were divided into teams and did a teambuilding beach Olympics on the beach of The Ritz-Carlton. We did a balloon toss, relay race, limbo contest, hula-hoop, beach ball relays and coconut toss. The winning teams received trophies and medals. They also did a tropical-themed dinner in a ballroom with salsa lessons from professional dancers. We brought in couches, flowers and a five-piece salsa band. We do a lot of these types of events for companies.”

Historical sites suitable for receptions and events include the San Cristobal and El Morro forts built hundreds of years ago. Other venues include La Casa Blanca, built in the 1500s as a home for the island’s first governor, and the Dominican Convent, which can host more than 300 guests for a reception. There also is Hacienda Siesta Alegre, a horse ranch in the mountains, and Ballaja Barracks, once home to Spanish soldiers.

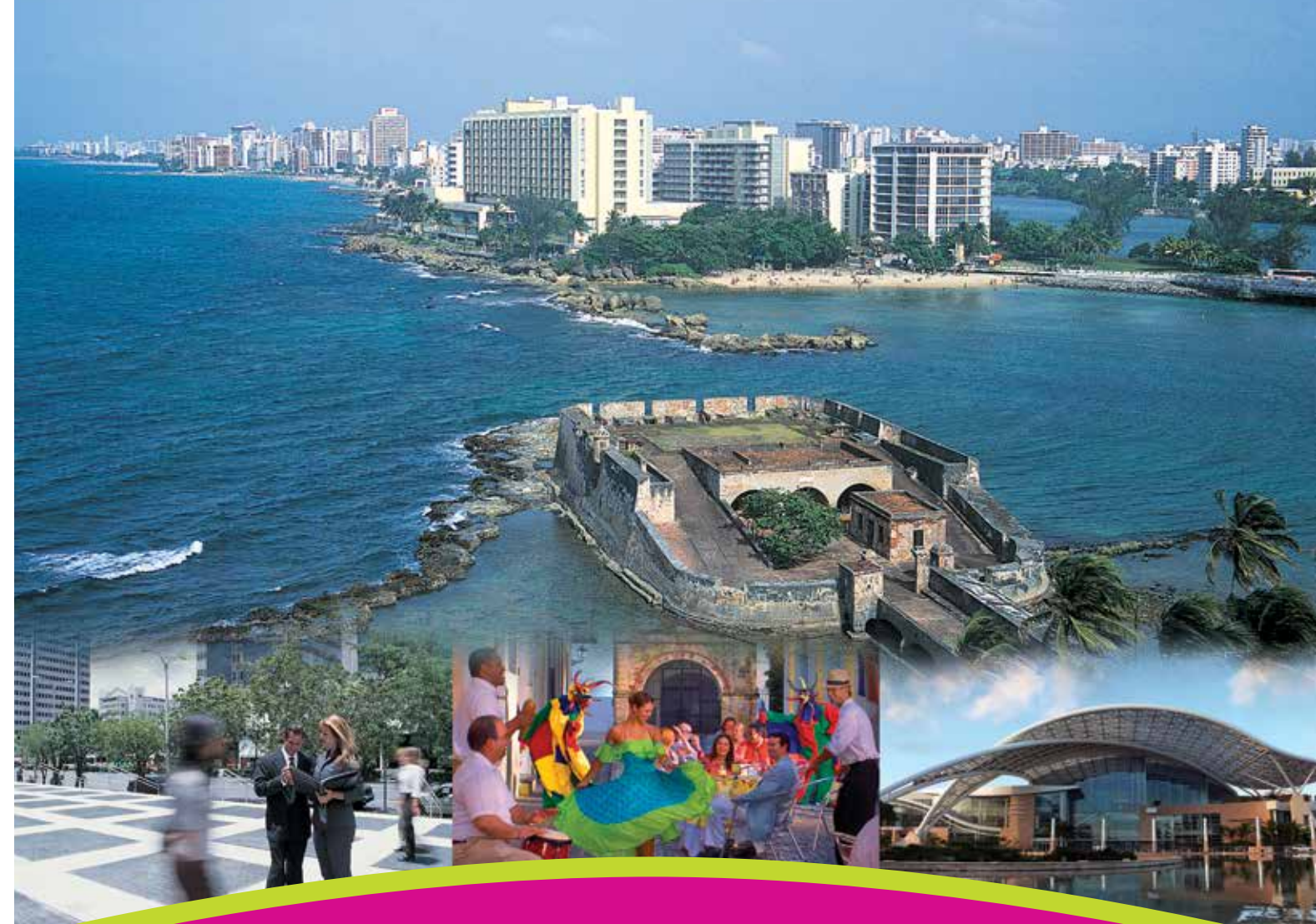
Anyone who thinks that all major Caribbean “sun and sand” destinations are similar has never been to Puerto Rico. Meeting in Puerto Rico is like meeting in America’s Caribbean state — familiar enough to be comfortable, but foreign enough to be intriguing. No other Caribbean destination offers Puerto Rico’s mix of modern meeting infrastructure and customs spiced by a distinctive Latino culture. Planners can’t go wrong with La Isla del Encanto. Especially when they need a “smooth” experience from start to finish.

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In northwestern Puerto Rico, the Camuy River Cave Park is a popular attraction with more than 200 caves and 17 entrances.

Photo courtesy of Puerto Rico Convention Bureau



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On The Move



PGA National Resort & Spa, Palm Beach Gardens, FL, has named **Jim Bishop** as director of sales. He formerly served as regional director of sales for the Americas at the Maybourne Hotel Group.

Grand Wailea, a Waldorf Astoria Resort on Maui, has named **Scott Boyer** as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing at Four Seasons Hotel Pudong, Shanghai.

Starwood Caribbean Hotels & Resorts has named **Dawn Parisi** as area director of sales and marketing, and director of sales and marketing for The

Westin St. John Resort & Villas, St. John, USVI. Within Starwood, Parisi previously acted as the director of sales and marketing for new builds and transitions.

John Annicchiarico was named director of sales and marketing for the Villas of Grand Cypress, a Benchmark Hospitality International property located in Orlando, FL. He was most recently the director of marketing for Loews Coronado Bay Resort in San Diego, CA.

Teresa Jackson was named senior sales manager focusing on the Midwest region for The Westin Westminster,

Westminster, CO. She most recently served as a senior sales manager at the Embassy Suites Denver Downtown.

Brad C. Mettler was named director of sales and marketing for the Grand Hyatt New York. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing at Hyatt Regency Waikiki Beach Resort and Spa in Oahu, Hawaii.

The Hyatt Regency Santa Clara, Santa Clara, CA, has named **Melissa Price Belluomini** as director of sales and marketing. She most recently served as director of sales at Oakland (CA) Marriott City Center and Oakland Convention Center. **C&IT**

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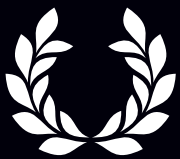
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