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New Orleans

A Meetings Revival in the Business-Friendly Big Easy
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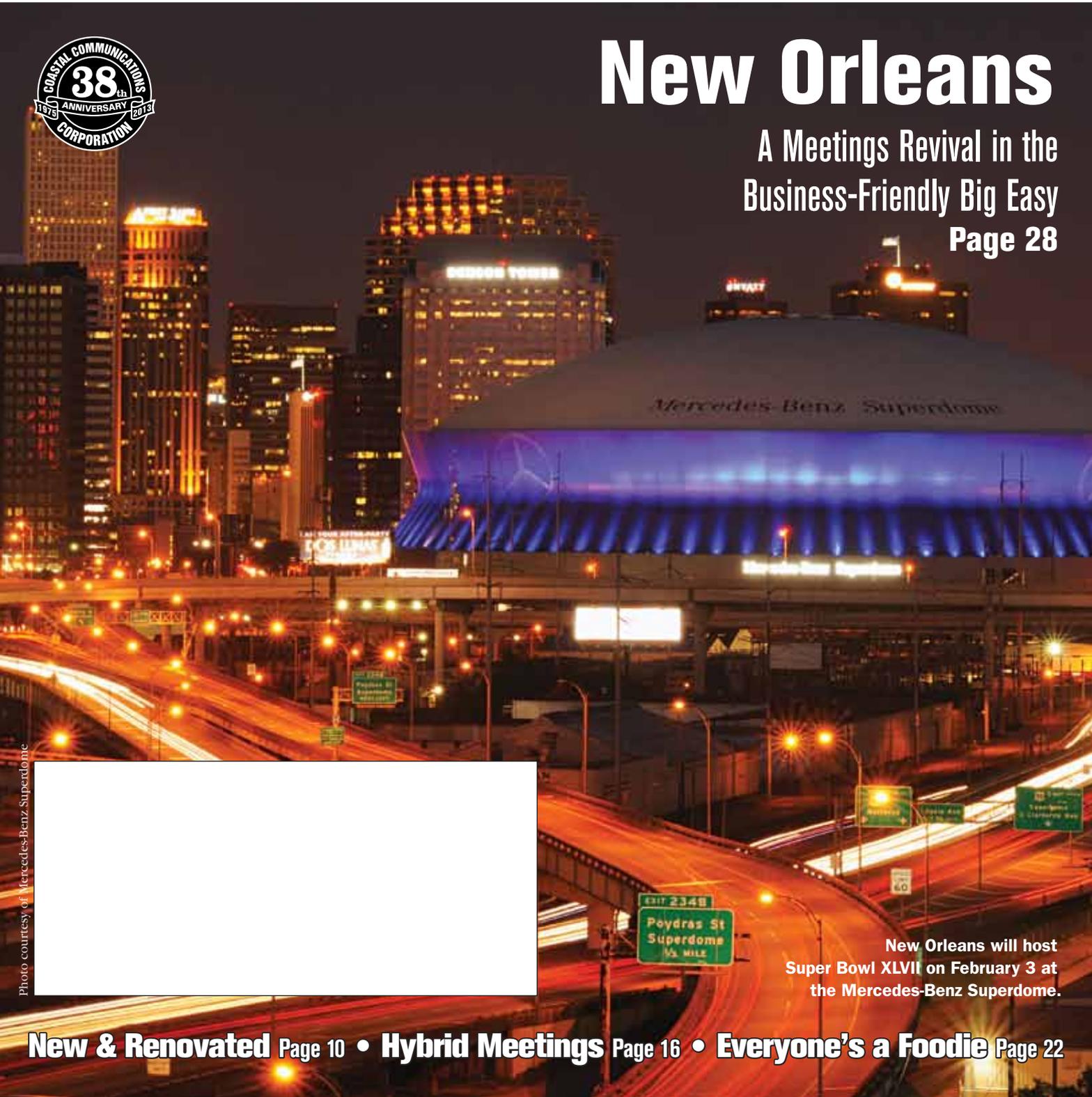
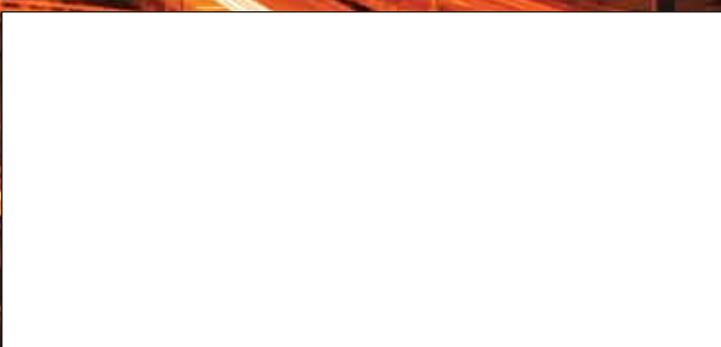


Photo courtesy of Mercedes-Benz Superdome



New Orleans will host Super Bowl XLVII on February 3 at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome.

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The Presidential Suite at the Hyatt Regency New Orleans, which reopened in 2011 after a top-to-bottom renovation.

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Photo courtesy of JW Marriott Los Angeles L.A. Live

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Photo courtesy of Mercedes-Benz Superdome

In preparation for hosting Super Bowl XLVII, New Orleans has completed a citywide renovation program that included the refurbishment of the Mercedes-Benz Superdome and nearly every hotel.

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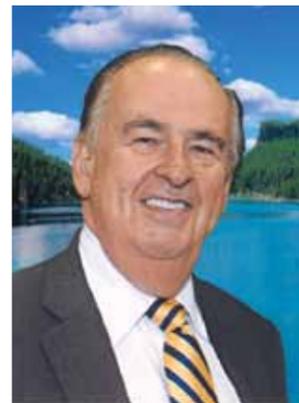
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Publisher's Message

'Super Gras' Indeed

Recently, I spent a few days in New Orleans and was continually amazed at how much has changed for the good since pre-Katrina days. As we note in our cover story "New Orleans – A Meetings Revival in the Business-Friendly Big Easy," the Crescent City is back — bigger and better than ever. As New Orleans native Terry Epton, president of Hosts Global Alliance says, "New Orleans is a truly authentic destination that's unlike any other place in the U.S."

Today, a plethora of new and renovated hotels, more than 300 new restaurants, exciting attractions and meeting venues await your insurance and financial meetings and events. For example, Borgne at the Hyatt Regency New Orleans is just one of three of chef John Besh's new restaurants in New Orleans. (He has eight now.) And having stayed at the Hyatt, I wholeheartedly share General Manager Michael Smith's suggestion that "The re-opening of Hyatt Regency New Orleans is symbolic as it represents the end of a journey and the beginning of a new chapter for Hyatt and the city of New Orleans. We spared no detail in positioning ourselves to be the quintessential hotel for conventions, leisure and business travelers alike."



The brand-new Great Hall at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center and the refurbished Mercedes-Benz Superdome are spit-polished from top to bottom in preparation for this year's "Super Gras" — Super Bowl XLVII on February 3 and Mardi Gras on February 12. The sports-minded city is spiffed up to welcome thousands of guests to the first Super Bowl post-Katrina. New Orleans now shares the most number of Super Bowls with Miami at 10.

Meetings and events are back not only in New Orleans but in Chicago, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, New York and Orlando — the five cities studied over the past four years in The Active Network's "Event Trends: 2008-2012," which reveals that organizations have reinvented their event sourcing practices to fit the new normal. According to the report, average monthly unique electronic requests for proposal (eRFPs) across the five cities surpassed 2008 levels by 6 percent during the first 10 months of 2012, and the total eRFPs received through October 2012 were 46 percent higher than the recessionary low mark in 2009, illustrating the dramatic scale of the recovery. Moreover, the study concludes that companies are meeting smaller, shorter and planning on the fly.

Harvey Grotsky

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Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort to Expand Meeting Facilities

SAN ANTONIO, TX — Woodbine Development Corporation announced details of a \$35 million expansion and renovation of its Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa in San Antonio, TX. The project will essentially double the resort's indoor function space, triple its prefunction space, add new outdoor function space, enhance and freshen guest rooms and landscaping, as well as expand the water park to include a FlowRider wave machine and a tower slide. The entire project will be completed by fall 2013, with portions of the project completed in the spring of 2013.



Rendering of a new motor court and separate entrance at the Hyatt Regency Hill Country.

The resort's indoor function space is being increased from approximately 35,000 sf to approximately 70,000 sf, including the addition of a 20,000-sf ballroom. Guests will access the new state-of-the-art space either through the existing function space corridors or via a new motor court and separate entrance. The grand ballroom will be divisible into eight breakout rooms, each with its own entrance. Generous prefunction space will be added and connected to the existing Hill Country Ballroom space.

Exterior function space includes a 7,260-sf landscaped courtyard, complete with a Texas-sized, stacked limestone working fireplace. Additionally, a 5,000-sf event lawn will be connected to the new ballroom. All 500 guest rooms and suites will be transformed into classic modern accommodations, with a Texas Hill Country twist. The addition of new Hyatt Grand Bed mattresses, complete re-tiling of the tub surrounds, a decoratively framed and well-lit mirror with freestanding, oversized, granite-top vanity, are just a few of the features to be offered in every room.

www.hillcountry.hyatt.com

Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton Debuts

MCLEAN, VA, LAS VEGAS, NV — On January 15, DoubleTree by Hilton and Tropicana Las Vegas announced the opening of Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton, following a two-month conversion period since the announcement of a strategic partnership between the two entities in late October. Under a franchise agreement, Tropicana Las Vegas will continue to own and operate all 1,500 guest rooms in the 35-acre resort under the DoubleTree by Hilton brand. The recently completed \$200 million transformation features 1,500 newly renovated guest rooms and suites, four restaurants, a spa, an entertainment complex, a state-of-the-art conference center and exhibition hall, and the Bagatelle Supper Club and Beach Club, which features lavish pools and cabanas, and a beautiful setting for indoor and outdoor bistro dining. The resort includes more than 60,000 sf of meeting and exhibition space, Glow, A Mandara Spa and fitness center, and entertainment includes Dancing with the Stars: Live in Las Vegas (seasonal), Laugh Factory and the Mob Attraction Las Vegas. www.troplv.com, www.doubletree.com



The Penthouse Loft at Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton.

AMEX Forecast Outlines Meeting Trends

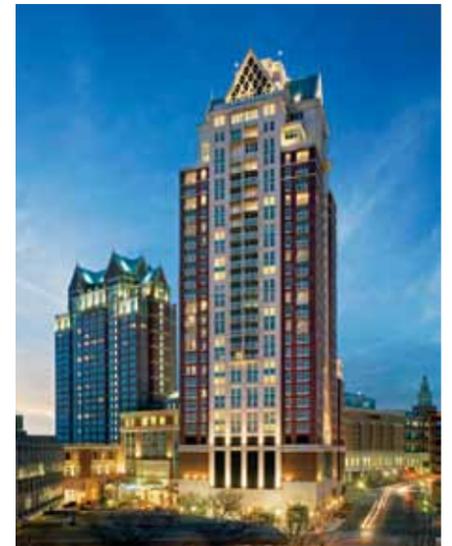
NEW YORK, NY — As reported in *HotelNewsNow.com*, hotels in Asia are expected to see the strongest growth in both meetings activity and spending, according to the American Express Meetings & Events “2013 Meetings Forecast.” The report explored four trends meeting planners will face during 2013:

1. Budget challenges mean more local meetings.
2. Security and stability are impacting destination choice.
3. Meetings approvals are becoming more challenging.
4. Engagement via social media is increasing.

North American meetings activity and spending, however, will remain relatively flat, according to Issa Jouaneh, vice president and general manager of American Express Meetings & Events. “With a predicted continued focus on costs in 2013, organizations in North America will need to balance their likely flat budgets with the increasing demands of their stakeholders to deliver effective meetings that deliver on business objectives,” he said.

The Westin in Providence Acquired by Omni

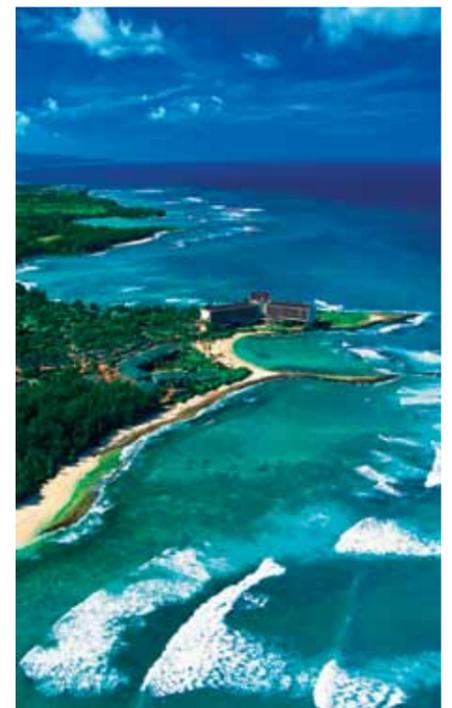
IRVING, TX — Omni Hotels & Resorts rebranded The Westin Hotel in Providence, RI, as the Omni Providence Hotel on January 15. Located in historic downtown Providence, the 564-room hotel will be part of Omni's expanding Convention Collection of hotels. The nearly 700,000-sf mixed-use development is connected to the Rhode Island Convention Center and the Providence Place Mall. The development includes three food and beverage outlets, including a Fleming's Steak House. The property will undergo renovations later this year to reflect the local flavor of Providence, with a special focus on the arrival experience, meeting space and guest rooms. The Omni Convention Collection includes the Omni Nashville Hotel, set to open in 2013, the Omni Dallas Hotel, the Omni Fort Worth Hotel, the Omni San Diego Hotel, the Omni Hotel at CNN Center in Atlanta and the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington, DC. www.omnihotels.com



The Omni Providence Hotel.

Turtle Bay Plans Extensive Renovations

NORTH SHORE, OAHU, HI — Turtle Bay Resort, the only destination resort on Oahu's North Shore, is embarking on the largest component of \$60 million in upgrades. The renovation, which begins January 2013 and is expected to be completed by the end of the year, will encompass all of the 840-acre resort's 397 standard and premium guest rooms and hallways; the Spa Luana and fitness center; two restaurants; as well as improvements to the main building roof and lobby area. The resort's full-service Spa Luana will nearly double in size to 11,000 sf. Improvements include the addition of a movement studio; an expanded salon, reception, retail area and women's locker room; and the relocation of the fitness center. Two of the resort's premier restaurants — Palm Terrace/Leonardo's and 21 Degrees North — will be completely renovated. Both restaurants will feature dine-around seating to easily accommodate larger groups. With 28,000 sf of function and prefunction space, Turtle Bay's Conference Center can accommodate up to 600 guests, and the resort's grounds can handle events for as many as 2,000 attendees. The new Surfer, The Bar, is specially designed to meet the technological needs of meeting planners and attendees. The entire facility is hard-wired with brand-new screens, control systems and lighting, and the space is flexible for everything from small meetings to large-scale interactive presentations, private concerts, media events and as a portal for live-streaming webcasts. www.turtlebayresort.com



Turtle Bay Resort on Oahu's North Shore.

On the Road Again

By Diane Bozicevich, SMMC



10 Things You Need to Know About Business and Group Travel

Business people on the road never have it easy, but if you are a frequent traveler, a road warrior as they say, you probably know all the workarounds for getting to your event and back again quickly and efficiently. The same may not be said for the unsuspecting, occasional business traveler. The nuances of travel can challenge even the most stalwart. Here are just a few surprises the unwary, and yes, weary, not-so-frequent traveler might encounter. They may even surprise a few of the more seasoned travelers as well.

1 Hey, I thought my baggage was checked through to Moscow?!

International travelers might be surprised to learn that they are expected to retrieve their baggage after the first leg of an international flight and have it cleared again for their final destination. This adds time, inconvenience and weariness to an already long trip. It typically happens when the carrier for the second portion of a trip is not in an alliance with the carrier for the first part. For example, a Delta flight out of Chicago that connects to Aeroflot in London could experience this inconvenience. If you are traveling internationally, be sure to confirm whether you need to check baggage personally mid-way through your trip. Also, if you change your itinerary en route, you had better make sure your bags are also redirected!

2 I paid for that seat. You have to get me on this plane, or I'll miss my meeting!

Overbooking is an ongoing issue. An airline with 100 seats on a flight will sell 120 as part of their inventory management strategy. Their goal is to fill every seat. Your goal is to conduct business with 100 percent accuracy. Sometimes these goals conflict, and if you have a less expensive seat on the plane, you are most likely to get bumped. Consider paying for a premium seat if you absolutely must get to your destination on time and cannot take an earlier flight to do so.

3 Long security lines. Scanners. Take off my shoes. Get me out of this nightmare!

Getting through security these days is like getting mugged. If you expect to travel even occasionally, it might be worth your time to investigate two U.S. government programs that offer expedited screening. With TSA Pre, eligible participants use dedicated lanes for faster screening. With Global Entry, participants proceed to kiosks at 25 international airports to expedite travel. Prescreening is required for both. Although there is no minimum number of trips to be considered for these programs, not all airports participate in the domestic version. As they say, "restrictions apply." Learn more at TSA.gov for the domestic version and GlobalEntry.gov for the international one.

4 What?!? Why did my company receive a \$1,200 invoice after my latest international trip?

Changes in destination while en route during an international business trip lead to adjustments in airfare that every traveler anticipates and expects. Computers calculate the fare differential and payment is made at the time of travel. However, airlines audit those changes after an international trip is complete, and can make rate adjustments. Why? Airlines no longer back rate quotes on those



trips. The traveler who is in Madrid with a ticket to Moscow, but who changes plans and must travel to London instead, could be billed again with a reassessment long after returning to the U.S., and has no recourse but to pay.

5 What do you mean, I can't board my plane to Munich?

If it has been awhile since you used your passport, check to make sure your name is precisely as it appears on any of your other travel documents — such as your driver's license and ticket. If a traveler's passport says, "Thomas John Smith," but his driver's license identifies him as "T.J. Smith," or even "Tom Smith," it can lead to difficulties, delays, or even outright refusal for permission to travel abroad.

6 What happened to my frequent flyer points?

Many airlines are now "on board" with the need for travelers' identification documents to align. If the name on your ticket does not match the way you are registered for your frequent flyer account, you stand the chance of losing credit for the mileage on that trip.

7 How could you give away my room? It was guaranteed!

If you have not notified your hotel of your late arrival, they can resell the room for which you also will be billed. The hotel assumes you will be a no-show. If the room is guaranteed, they will send you to a sister property, with cab fare. If your flight is delayed, contact the hotel to secure your reservation. If you are scheduled for late arrival, make sure the hotel was notified of this at the time of booking.

8 I've been in the air 12 hours. I have a room reservation. Why can't I get into it?

Travelers on extended international trips — such as DC to Beijing — can encounter problems if the wrong night is booked for arrival. If you're arriving in Bangkok at 1 a.m. Tuesday, book a room for Monday night and notify the hotel that you are arriving to their property at 2 a.m. so the room is

ready, and you don't have to spend a night, after an exhausting flight, in the lobby.

9 Hey, the rest of my group is boarding this flight. You can't bump two of us.

Yes, the airlines can — and will. Group travel, such as a Hawaii sales incentive trip, that is booked at a reduced fare could mean vulnerability if two people in your party show up at the very last minute to board. Every passenger has a status, and

How could you give away my room? It was guaranteed!

those in cheap seats who don't have a substantial frequent flyer presence with that airline, might be vulnerable to getting bumped. Arrive on time, or early, to ensure a seat.

10 The flight is cancelled? I can't be late for tomorrow's meeting!

Travel early in the day to get to your important meeting tomorrow on time. Weather, mechanical delays and other disruptions often back up flights. Your ticket only guarantees that you will get to your destination. It doesn't guarantee arrival on the date that is printed on the ticket.

Diane Bozicevich, SMMC, is vice president of corporate operations at Omega World Travel, where she is responsible for upholding the company's reputation for high quality over corporate operations across the United States. Omega World Travel is a global travel management company headquartered in Fairfax, VA. In addition, Bozicevich oversees Omega's global 24-hour Emergency Service, Mega Housing Management and Strategic Meetings Management. Bozicevich may be reached at dianeb@owt.net or 800-969-4152.

Hotels and resorts nationwide are taking advantage of the resilient economy to spruce up properties in order to keep pace with competitors and attract budget-conscious planners seeking value.

New properties offer value for planners who carefully assess the pros and cons of booking meetings at hotels still under construction. "They are anxious to get rooms filled and get staffs working," says Gary Pearson, director of corporate meetings and events at Aon Service Corporation, a Chicago-based insurance services

rooms. According to Pearson, "Some new properties may offer good deals and others may not. Sometimes you might feel the rates are higher than they should be for a new hotel. It will vary depending on which hotel you deal with, how big the group is and other factors."

Pearson believes it's important for planners to always include a time cushion when booking meetings at new and renovated hotels. "You have to play it smartly," he says. "I will schedule the meeting at least two months after construction is supposed

market. Experts predict that planners will face higher rates, fewer concessions and tighter booking windows with reduced availability. According to a recent report from PKF Hospitality Research, hotel supply growth will remain under 2 percent as occupancy levels rise, especially among upper-tier properties. Meanwhile, the average room rate will increase more than 4 percent through 2014.

A recent report from PricewaterhouseCoopers concurs. In 2013, room supply is expected to rise 0.8 percent as overall occupancy increases to 61.9

Taking a Chance?

How Planners Reap the Rewards of Selecting New and Renovated Properties

By Derek Reveron

firm. "It's a seller's market, but if you can get into a new place that is trying to feel its way around as to what its rate structure will be, you may be able to come up with a bargain."

Pearson planned a two-day sales meeting for about 260 Aon employees at a brand new hotel in Las Vegas. He considered other properties before making a site visit to the hotel. He left the property impressed with everything that it offered, including meeting space for general sessions and breakouts.

The hotel assured Pearson that it would be ready before his meeting date, and he obtained a deal that provided good value. "New hotels are willing to accept a lower rate for a temporary period in order to get groups in and get the word out about the property. Once they do that, we see patterns where rates start to increase," Pearson says.

But don't expect every brand-new hotel to offer a rate break to fill

to end. It might be more, depending on the destination, weather and other factors," says Pearson, who oversees planning for about 300 meetings a year ranging in size from 10 to more than 700 people.

A time cushion helps protect planners against the risk of extended construction deadlines. "I have had meetings in hotels that said renovations would be completed by a certain time but they weren't, and we incurred some 'interesting' situations," Pearson says. "Delays happen due to situations that hotels can or can't control. It's bad if your group walks in and they are still renovating rooms, and your people have to step around things in the hallways. You want a finished product when you arrive."

Outlook for 2013

Finding value among new and renovated properties is more important these days because the pendulum is continuing to swing toward a seller's

percent while occupancy for "upper upscale hotels" rises above 70 percent, according to PwC. Overall, RevPAR (revenue per available room) will rise by 5.4 percent in 2013.

Seller's market or not, planners who book new and renovated properties must consider several factors, including attendee expectations, the hotel brand and the quality of the property. Scott Lawson, vice president of sales, Travelmart Inc., a Westlake, OH, meetings, incentives and travel solutions firm, says, "I look at whether it's a tried-and-true brand, whether it's one that I have a good working relationship with, and whether it's an independent property or one that I don't know."

Familiarity with The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess in Arizona was one reason why Lawson selected the hotel for a meeting as the property was nearing completion of a major renovation. He had held previous meetings at the hotel and en-



Spectacular views of the Las Vegas Strip from this brand new MGM Grand Skyline Terrace Suite make for an exceptional experience.

joyed a good working relationship with the staff.

Working on a short turnaround for a Midwest-based financial company's sales meeting, Lawson signed a contract in September 2012 for a three-day meeting for 60 salespeople held in December 2012. When Lawson signed the contract, the hotel had begun the final phase of a five-year, \$60 million renovation plan scheduled for completion in spring 2013. The project includes the new 53,000-sf Palomino Ballroom and Conference Center, which opened in November 2012, one month before the financial firm's meeting.

Get It in Writing

Lawson's contract with the hotel included safeguards to protect the financial firm from risks that construction might not be completed on time. "We included clauses to protect meeting functions from noise," says Lawson. "We also had a clause requiring them

to keep us updated on construction and anything about it that would interfere with the conference. The sales manager was very responsive in that regard. They kept us updated with phone calls and emails."

Along with the updates, Lawson made a site visit to The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess in November. The Palomino Ballroom and Conference Center still required some finishing touches, but Lawson was confident that the work would be done before the meeting. "It was just about ready to open," says Lawson. "They weren't doing substantial work, just things like general painting. When we arrived for the meeting, everything was great. They were very conscious to schedule any remaining work away from meetings. Everything worked well for our attendees."

It's important to assure that hotels schedule and position construction work so that attendees don't see or hear it. That is a key for planners

as well as DMCs that hold events on property, says Karen Shackman, president of Shackman Associates, a New York City DMC and events company.

Shackman has held several on-property events at the Waldorf Astoria New York in Manhattan as it undergoes a multimillion-dollar renovation of guest rooms, public spaces, meeting rooms and restaurants. Shackman is also planning onsite functions for an insurance firm that will hold a sales incentive for 250 attendees in the Waldorf Astoria early next year.

She is confident that the insurance group will be largely unaware of the construction. "They do such an amazing job of closing off the construction area that you don't realize there's a whole portion of the hotel behind a fake wall that blocks everything off and prevents everybody from accessing the main entrance. They do a great job of repositioning the meeting space and lobby. People who had never been there before didn't even

know the construction was going on," says Shackman.

Like other meeting professionals, Shackman considers myriad factors when it comes to using new and renovated properties. "No. 1 is how

"It's a seller's market, but if you can get into a new place that is trying to feel its way around as to what its rate structure will be, you may be able to come up with a bargain."

Gary Pearson, Director of Corporate Meetings and Events
Aon Service Corporation, Chicago, IL

extensive are the renovations. Is it a property-wide renovation that has a big impact on sleeping rooms, where people enter, where they can go in the property and where they sit and eat? In that case, as a planner you have to consider the risk, particularly since construction can have a life of its own and often doesn't adhere to correct schedules," says Shackman.

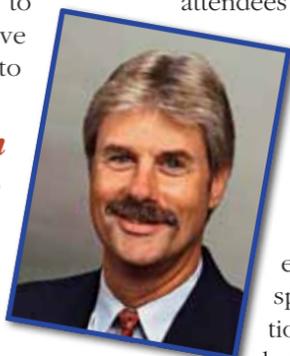
Overcoming Obstacles

But problems may arise even if construction is completed on schedule. Venessa Grant, business development manager for Minneapolis-based Carlson Wagonlit Travel, once faced a post-construction problem upon arriving at a hotel with an incentive group. "There was a large crane on the front driveway. It was a big problem," says Grant. "We told them that we were promised there would be no construction. Their response was that construction was finished, but they simply hadn't moved the crane yet because it was down to the wire for them to complete renovations."

The hotel removed the crane by the end of the next day. In return for the inconvenience, Grant's group received food and beverage discounts and a complimentary cocktail reception. "We never thought we would see a large crane in front of a hotel in

that type of situation. These types of things help us determine what to add to future contracts," says Grant.

She advises planners to use broad and inclusive language in contracts to



ogizing for the inconvenience," says Sullivan. "The letter also named a construction worker and offered prizes for attendees who met him. We made it a game, kind of like a scavenger hunt. Out of 100 attendees, maybe 20 met the worker and claimed prizes. Some people took pictures of the worker."

Sullivan offers another example of putting a positive spin on incomplete renovations. "Let's say there is a big ballroom that's being remodeled. The wallpaper, carpeting, chandeliers and everything else is done except part of the stage. You could hide the work with a big curtain, perhaps with the client's brand on it," says Sullivan.

Sometimes an incident beyond the control of the property can impact the construction schedule. When that happens, it's doubly important to determine whether a property can meet its deadline. One planner went to extra lengths to double-check whether a property undergoing renovation was ready, says Terry Epton CITE, DMCP, president of Hosts Global Alliance.

As Epton explains, a New Orleans hotel was undergoing renovation when Hurricane Isaac hit in 2012. The property required some additional work after the storm. "The property

provide protection against all construction-related issues. "Be clear that the completion date will not be a moving target. And be very clear on the parameters of any sort of delay that would impact your program. Have language in the contract as to when you will be notified about any delay," Grant suggests.

On the other hand, groups facing unfinished construction can still have successful meetings. Patrick Sullivan, president, AlliedPRA New York, offers the following example. His DMC was providing services for an incentive group set to stay in a recently opened hotel. Upon the group's arrival, there were still workers onsite. Guest rooms



"I look at whether it's a tried-and-true brand, whether it's one that I have a good working relationship with, and whether it's an independent property or one that I don't know."

Scott Lawson, Vice President of Sales
Travelmart Inc., Westlake, OH

were ready but only some of the public space was finished.

Sullivan decided to turn the situation into a positive experience. "We gave attendees construction hard hats with their names on them and metal lunch boxes. Inside the boxes were letters from the general manager apol-

had to do a lot of work quickly because it had a lot of business booked," says Epton. "A friend with a group coming to the property called and asked me to check on the renovation progress. He wanted a neutral set of eyes to look at things, so I did it as a professional courtesy. I checked it out

and everything was okay. The meeting went great."

Advice for Planners

Epton and other meeting professionals cite the following advantages to holding meetings at new and renovated properties.

Service. "The people at new properties are highly motivated to make their first impressions be great ones," says Epton. "There is a sense of urgency from the top down. They will do whatever it takes to make things come out great."

Buzz. "The primary thing about a new or renovated property is the buzz of going to the new hot place in town," says Epton. Buzz can equal increased attendance depending on other factors, including destination, brand of the property and a group's attendance history.

Cool technology. Typically new hotels and resorts feature state-of-the-art audio-visual, broadband, Internet, video and HD capabilities. Such amenities are especially important for attendees of financial and insurance companies who want to quickly access the latest information about global economic markets, says Shackman.

Improved meeting experience. "You are getting a product that is new or like new that impresses your attendees. It's a pleasant surprise and added motivator, especially for groups that have been to the hotel before and are impressed by the changes. I've gotten comments on that," says Pearson. That's especially true for extensive renovations that give a property an entirely new look and bigger size, he adds.

Location. Many renovating properties are older ones that were among the first to open in conveniently located downtown areas. These hotels look to renovate as newer competitors open up downtown or in trendy neighborhoods, says Shackman.

New and improved properties can enhance meetings and provide value for planners who carefully assess the benefits and risks. As Epton says, "There are a lot more positives than negatives to being in an improved place where everybody is anxious to get it right and make a great first impression."

New and Improved and Noteworthy

Following is a roundup of new and renovated hotels:

MGM Grand Las Vegas debuted last fall a \$160 million remodel of 3,570 guest rooms and 642 suites in the hotel's main tower. The newly remodeled rooms incorporate environmentally responsible elements including LED lighting; improved thermostats and solar shades to better manage



Venessa Grant, Business Development Manager
Carlson Wagonlit Travel, Minneapolis, MN

"We never thought we would see a large crane in front of a hotel in that type of situation. These types of things help us determine what to add to future contracts."

temperature and guest comfort; and bath amenities that are 100 percent biodegradable. Go to <http://www.thegrandrenovation.com> for additional information and updates.

In other MGM Resorts International news, the company collaborated with Cisco Systems to create a high-density Wi-Fi system that is the highest-performing wireless LAN in the industry, allowing travelers with multiple wireless devices to enjoy quality Wi-Fi. Advantages of the program include 30 percent faster connectivity, an automatic Wi-Fi connection that eliminates user hassle, and delivery of customized, relevant and timely offers and information that are delivered directly to attendees' mobile devices.

The Wi-Fi rollout at MGM Resorts destinations in Las Vegas began with

Bellagio, MGM Grand, Mandalay Bay and The Mirage, all completed in 2012. Monte Carlo, New York-New York, Luxor and Excalibur will install Wi-Fi in 2013.

In 2013, **MGM Grand at Foxwoods** in Connecticut is planning the development of a new high-end retail shopping mall as well as a total revamp of the existing retail corridor.

However, the biggest news at Foxwoods, according to Jessica Baran, vice president of resort sales, is that she was brought aboard to "implement a three-point plan aimed at making Foxwoods a major meeting destination resort." Baran did previous four-year stints at Atlantis in the Bahamas and The Venetian in Las Vegas.

"The first part of the plan is to implement a seamless transition between the sales and conference services department, because there has been a

disconnect in the past between booking a group and actually managing that group," Baran says. "So what we are doing now is making a transition so that the same people are with you from start to finish so that your program is seamless."

Related to that is a new shared services policy for meetings and events. "That applies to all entities, including third parties. Sometimes hotels say 'We don't own that, so we can't work with you on that.' So again, we are working to make the entire process seamless for planners. Now that includes vendors, and we are making sure that clients can get the services they need without paying additional fees. And an important part of that is that I am now in charge of both resort sales and conference services, so

I am responsible for making sure we achieve the seamless integration of those two departments.”

Finally, Foxwoods and Baran are on a mission to recruit the country’s top meeting sales and service team from A-list properties across the country.

In San Diego, **The Westin Gaslamp Quarter** completed a \$25 million refurbishment. The project included a redesign of all 450 guest rooms, and a refreshment of the hotels 35,000 sf of meeting and event space.

Among major hotel brands, Chicago’s **Hyatt Regency McCormick Place** started in 2012 the renovation of the hotel’s 800-room tower. Phase three will see the renovation of the hotel’s 25,000-sf Hyatt Conference Center. Currently, the property offers 800 guest rooms and 43,000 sf of meeting space.



“Let’s say there is a big ballroom that’s being remodeled. The wallpaper, carpeting, chandeliers and everything else is done except part of the stage. You could hide the work with a big curtain, perhaps with the client’s brand on it.”

Patrick Sullivan, President
Allied PRA New York, New York City

The **Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego** is renovating the entire hotel, including its 1,625 guest rooms, 125,000 sf of meeting space and guest rooms. Completion is scheduled for fall 2013.

The **Westin New York Grand Central** opened in the former New York Helmsley Hotel after a \$75 million renovation. The property features 774 guest rooms and more than 12,000 sf of state-of-the-art meeting space, including an expanded 4,100-sf ballroom.

The **Sheraton Tampa East Hotel**, formerly a Crowne Plaza property, opened after a \$9 million renovation of its 265 guest rooms and 30,000 sf of meeting space.

Sheraton is investing more than \$230 million to refurbish four Hawaii properties — the **Sheraton Waikiki**, **Sheraton Maui Resort & Spa**, **Sheraton Kauai Resort** and **Sheraton Kona Resort & Spa at Keauhou Bay**.

Among Hilton properties, the **Hilton Chicago** completed phase one of a four-phase, three-year \$150 million renovation project. Phase one

included renovation of all 454 guest rooms. The hotel now offers 234,000 sf of event space.

The DoubleTree by Hilton Metropolitan New York City, located in Midtown’s upscale East Side, has renovated its 764 guest rooms and 12,000 sf of meeting space.

In Florida, the 641-room, 34-story **InterContinental Miami**, located downtown, is undergoing \$30 million in upgrades. Improvements include renovated suites, a 19-story “digital canvas” that illuminates the nighttime skyline, and

hotel-wide multimedia showcasing Miami’s culture. The hotel features 101,000 sf of meeting, conference and exhibition space.

The **Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa**, located in Destin, FL, boasts expanded deck areas overlooking the Gulf, a new beachside restaurant and bar, remodeled meeting spaces and amenities, and much more. The 598-room resort has 32,000 sf of meeting space.

In Central Florida, **Rosen Hotels & Resorts’** three Orlando convention properties are renovating and updating as well and now offer free wired and wireless Internet service in all guest rooms and public areas. **Rosen Centre Hotel** completed a multimillion-dollar makeover of its 1,334 guest rooms, 14 two-bay and three-bay hospitality suites and one of three 2,500-sf Presidential Suites. Rosen Centre Hotel’s 124,000 sf of meeting space includes the new 18,000-sf Executive Ballroom, 35,000-sf Grand Ballroom, a 14,375-sf Junior Ballroom and 24 meeting salons.

Rosen Plaza Hotel, which is adjacent to the 2.1-million-sf Orange County Convention Center, recently renovated all of its 800 guest rooms, 10 hospitality suites and hallways. Rosen Plaza’s more than 60,000 sf of modern meeting space also includes the 26,000-sf Grand Ballroom; 22 meeting rooms; the 12,500-sf Foyer; and the 4,500-sf Regency Salon.

The AAA Four Diamond **Rosen Shingle Creek**, located less than a mile from the Orange County Convention Center North/South

building, boasts 1,500 guest rooms and suites, and 445,000 sf of meeting and event space, including three ballrooms of 95,000 sf, 60,000 sf and 40,000 sf. The hotel also offers 99 meeting rooms, 55,000 sf of breakout meeting space and 250,000 sf of exhibition space. In addition, the hotel offers an 18-hole championship golf course and the 13,000-sf Spa at Shingle Creek.

The **Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club** completed a \$5 million renovation. The project includes a ballroom with a view of the Gulf of Mexico, prefunction space, Gulf-side meeting rooms and the 12 remaining guest rooms in the resort’s Florida Wing. Upon completion of the renovation by the end of 2012, the hotel will have renovated all 317 guest rooms and suites. The resort offers 34,000 sf of meeting space.

At Universal Orlando, the **Loews Royal Pacific Resort**, **Hard Rock Hotel** and **Loews Portofino Bay Hotel** have renovated a total of more than 80,000 sf of meeting spaces. **I&FMM**



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Hybrid Meetings

By Karen Brost



How to Power Your Face-to-Face Event With a Virtual Edition

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a hybrid is “a thing made by combining two different elements.” In the case of hybrid meetings, those two elements are a face-to-face meeting and an online component. When it’s done right, this powerful combination can lead to a better meeting experience overall.

Hybrid meetings offer an excellent opportunity to deliver the content of a face-to-face meeting to those who cannot attend the event due to time or cost restraints. The virtual component is intended to expand the reach of the live event, not to replace it. “The simple fact is that the content delivered in face-to-face events is the most powerful and most valuable, and it always will be,” explains Tony Lorenz, founder of bXb Online, an agency that specializes in developing online events. “Virtual events on their own are OK, but the online extension of the physical event is where the real power of this category lies. Without that physical event, we lose that power.”

Virtually Together

Kathleen Zwart, CMP, corporate meetings and events manager for Florida Blue (formerly Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida), uses videoconferencing to enable regional offices to participate in events held at the company’s headquarters in Jacksonville. She shares an example: “When we got our new CEO, we had a live event here for 600–700 people in our main ballroom in our onsite conference center. Then we videoconferenced his welcome and remarks to all of the offices, so we had probably another 500 people who were able to participate through watching him.”

Florida Blue primarily uses videoconferencing for informational meetings and for some training sessions. “The camera feed goes both ways, so if one of our other offices wants to speak, they’ll come on, and they’ll be able to address the group in all of the other different offices,” she notes.

Zwart describes her participants’ response to hybrid events. “I think, in general, they prefer it because they don’t have to leave home. Florida is a long state, and there are not a lot of flights. It’s a good six-hour drive (from Jacksonville) to Miami, which is our next largest office. They love not having to spend hours in the air-

port trying to find a connecting flight. I don’t think they feel like they’re missing anything. We can see them. They can see us, and they can interact with us just as if they were here.”

She noted that advance preparation is critical, so she makes sure the regional offices receive any handouts or other related materials before the meeting begins. “If it’s a PowerPoint presentation, we’ll often send the presentation in advance so if there is some sort of technical glitch, they at least have the paper, so they can follow along if they can’t see the screen.”

Zwart also organized a virtual event in her role as vice president of education for her local MPI chapter. “We did a hybrid meeting, and our speaker used an online site to beam herself in from Atlanta to Jacksonville. Then we broadcast that to our members in Tallahassee and Gainesville, so we had three different locations participating with a speaker who was in a fourth location. She was able to do online polling, and we were able to type questions to her. She had someone feeding her the questions and she would answer the questions live. It was a neat way to get a little bit deeper into a more advanced hybrid meeting that we presented to our MPI members.”

Capturing Attention

Lorenz says it’s important to create an engaging environment that people are going to want to be in from start to finish. “We know there are physical events we go to where we’re there, but we’re not really ‘there.’ The same holds true for online events. If the real estate of the screen in an online event is crafted in such a way that the content and community that is being presented is compelling to the viewer, they may

stay. That’s part of the program design piece that’s so very important.”

He also says that plans for the live event always need to take the online component into consideration. “The biggest factor, I think,” says Lorenz, “is that you want the physical presenter to recognize and embrace the online audience. For a lot of events, there’s not a lot of attention paid to the online audience, and that’s a mistake.”

Virtual Success

Steph Pfeilsticker, CMP, CMM, MBA, virtual strategy manager for Thrivent Financial in Minneapolis, was inspired to try a hybrid event when she attended an industry event and heard then MPI president and CEO Bruce MacMillan speak on the future of meetings. “I just got the bug,” she says. “We knew we weren’t attracting our entire audience to our National Sales Meeting, so I thought if we added a virtual component to



it to make it a hybrid meeting, we could attract more of our financial reps into it and have them hear the quality content.”

Pfeilsticker spent the next three months researching hybrid meetings, and then she wrote a detailed business plan on what it would take for her company to do one for their National Sales Meeting. “I presented it, and they said, ‘Yes, let’s try it.’”



Thrivent Financial included a virtual component for the first time at their 2011 National Sales Meeting. At left is the view from the control room; and (right) virtual event emcee Emilie Barta interviews speaker Frank Abagnale, whose life was depicted in "Catch Me if You Can," starring Leonardo DiCaprio. The hybrid meeting was an organizational win.

The previous year, Thrivent's National Sales Meeting had attracted approximately 800 financial representatives. When the company created the hybrid event in 2011, approximately 1,000 representatives attended in person and an additional 451 registered virtually. "We weren't sure what to expect," Pfeilsticker notes. "We had thought 300 would be a great number, so 451 was fantastic."

"I was shocked when I saw the results. Those who attended virtually increased their sales production at a rate that was twice that of the face-to-face attendees."



Steph Pfeilsticker, CMP, CMM, MBA
Virtual Strategy Manager
Thrivent Financial
Minneapolis, MN

One important lesson she learned was to take the time to understand who your virtual audience really is. "We saw the virtual attendees as a different group of individuals." She explained that the representatives who normally attended the meeting had more years of experience and tended to be in the top half of the organiza-

tion. "They have very different needs than reps that are newer to the business. We knew (for the virtual event) that we would likely attract reps that had less experience, so we built our curriculum around that type of individual. Since we weren't streaming all of the content, we could select the breakout sessions that focused on fundamental skills that would be relevant to these folks, and we streamed those."

Pfeilsticker worked with Samuel Smith, managing director of Interactive Meeting Technology, to design the event. Smith stressed the importance of making sure that the online component of the meeting is compelling. "Think about the attendee experience and people's attention online," he says. "They are one click away from doing anything else on the Internet, so you've got to be really careful. A lot of hybrid events look like bad public access TV." He explained that this usually happens when a single camera is placed in the back of the room and viewers only see a long angle shot of a person on stage.

"Learn how to use different angles," he recommends. "Maybe you can use two camera angles or four, or whatever you can afford to do. You can change them up to create a different level of engagement for people. Once you change the shot,

even if you go to a graphic and back, it's almost like restarting the attention clock for the remote attendee. That's really important. If you watch a sporting event, there's a reason there are eight camera people. There's a reason there's a sideline reporter. They're trying to keep you engaged and connected to it.

"For Thrivent, we built a studio," Smith explains, "and the backdrop was the general session. You saw people milling around and you saw the live event. We'd interview the speakers. We'd interview people from Thrivent. That kept people engaged." He said they also solicited questions from the audience. "(We'd announce) 'Bob Smith in Iowa is asking...'. Not only did we answer the question, but everybody got to hear his name read off. Who doesn't love hearing their name? That creates engagement.

"We also had different breakouts," Smith notes. "We would automatically push people into the next session, but they could switch to other sessions, almost like they were changing a channel. But then at the end, when all four of the sessions ended, we pushed everybody back to the studio so the whole audience came back together again. We had a host, a virtual emcee, and she would welcome them back.

"We kept them online participating for three days when the normal is only a few hours," he added. He attributed that level of participation, in part, to the steps they took to keep

the audience engaged and the quality of the content they delivered.

To Charge or Not to Charge

So, should you charge your virtual attendees for the opportunity to attend your event online? Pfeilsticker makes a good argument in favor of charging a modest fee. "We charged \$49 per person, which is a low amount to attend a meeting. We didn't want cost to be a barrier, but we wanted there to be some sort of value. When you say it's free, people equate that to 'not valuable,' so we wanted to be in the middle where we're charging something, and they're buying into it, literally. Our goal was for them to understand and receive the knowledge to build their business. I felt, too, that if we can give them the knowledge that they need to build their business, we're going to earn this back tenfold."

Interaction Is Key

Lorenz describes some of the tactics that can be employed to keep the online audience engaged: "There's live streaming, there's the ability to bring documents into your briefcase online, there's the ability to do surveys and polling. There's an ability to chat, both through mainstream social media channels and right there in the platform. There are also opportunities for gaming. You can incent the online audience to participate in the online event in ways that are valuable to them."

He noted that online attendees often participate even more than those who are attending the live event. For example, some people may be uncomfortable standing up at a large meeting and addressing a question to the speaker. But, he says, "If you're on your own at your computer, you can provide questions in a little safer environment. Potentially, there's a natural inclination to be more involved online than in a face-to-face event."

We'll Be Right Back

One important element to con-

sider when planning the virtual component of the meeting is to find ways to keep the virtual audience engaged while the live audience takes a coffee break or goes to lunch. Pfeilsticker filled that time with interviews, recordings of previous speakers and prepackaged content. "We always kept it going. That content was also tailored to the particular type of financial rep (who attended virtually)." She

compared it to watching TV — there's always something on to see.

The Proof Is in the Feedback

Pfeilsticker received a very positive response from her virtual attendees. "In our final evaluation, they actually rated the meeting slightly under what the face-to-face meeting participants rated it. We were shocked. We really thought there would be a bigger dif-

ference, but it was 4.72 for the people who attended the live event and 4.69 for the virtual attendees.”

Results

Was the event successful? Data was gathered three months after the event to see if the financial reps were able to use the education to build their business. Pfeilsticker states, “I was shocked when I saw the results. Those who attended virtually increased their sales production at a rate that was twice that of the face-to-face attendees. This delivered content to those not able to attend, and we were able to demonstrate a definitive ROI.” It was an organizational win.

The ‘Cannibalism’ Concern

Some companies fear that adding a virtual component to an event will “cannibalize” attendance at the live event, but those concerns are ap-

“Work with somebody who has done (a hybrid meeting) before, who is experienced, who can walk you through the steps and who doesn’t think any question is a stupid question.”



Kathleen Zwart, CMP
Corporate Meetings & Events Manager
Florida Blue
Jacksonville, FL

parently unfounded. “Actually, most companies that have done this have found that’s not true,” Pfeilsticker states. “A statistic that I had heard before I did this was that 34 percent of attendees that attend virtually attend onsite the next year. They get a taste of it, and they want to attend. So I used that same question in my evaluation, and 51 percent of the reps that

attended virtually said, ‘Yes, I want to be there next year.’ It really is more of an attendance driver than an attendance detractor.”

“There are plenty of case studies out there where online audiences are growing physical events,” Lorenz notes. “There’s no question about it. You’re providing more exposure to the value of face-to-face events and the more people see that value, the more they’re inclined to come the next time around.”

Getting Started

“You really need to do your homework and understand why you’re doing an event and make sure that your objectives are very clear when you start,” Pfeilsticker explains. “I would also recommend doing a business plan. That was the method that worked for us. It showed that I thought through all of the financial and marketing implications. I would also recommend that you build a good team around you.”

“For some folks that haven’t experienced a hybrid event themselves, it’s really hard for them to get their head wrapped around what it means to be on the production side,” Smith states. “That’s one thing to keep in mind. If you want to produce great hybrid events, you need to attend a lot of them and understand what that attendee experience is like. You’ll also get an appreciation for what is really boring.”

“You want resources around you that are proven and solid and that will deliver,” Lorenz notes. “You want to align with services and a platform underneath those services that can grow with you. There are a zillion platforms out there, but there are only a select few that do it well.”

He added that the time frames



Tony Lorenz
Founder
bXb Online
Chicago, IL

needed to plan the online component of a hybrid meeting are not as long as they are for a physical event. “The platform is scalable, so you can pick that up at any time. It’s a lot shorter. Ninety days is tight, but not undoable.”

Smith noted that the pricing models are very different between vendors. “Know that you’re dealing with apples and oranges, and pay close attention,” he advises. “Some vendors will go into super detail on one little tiny piece (of the program) and say, ‘That’s \$10,000, and then there’s this huge bucket with little detail at all, and it will be \$150,000. What’s happening there is that they’re just kind of throwing a number at you.’”

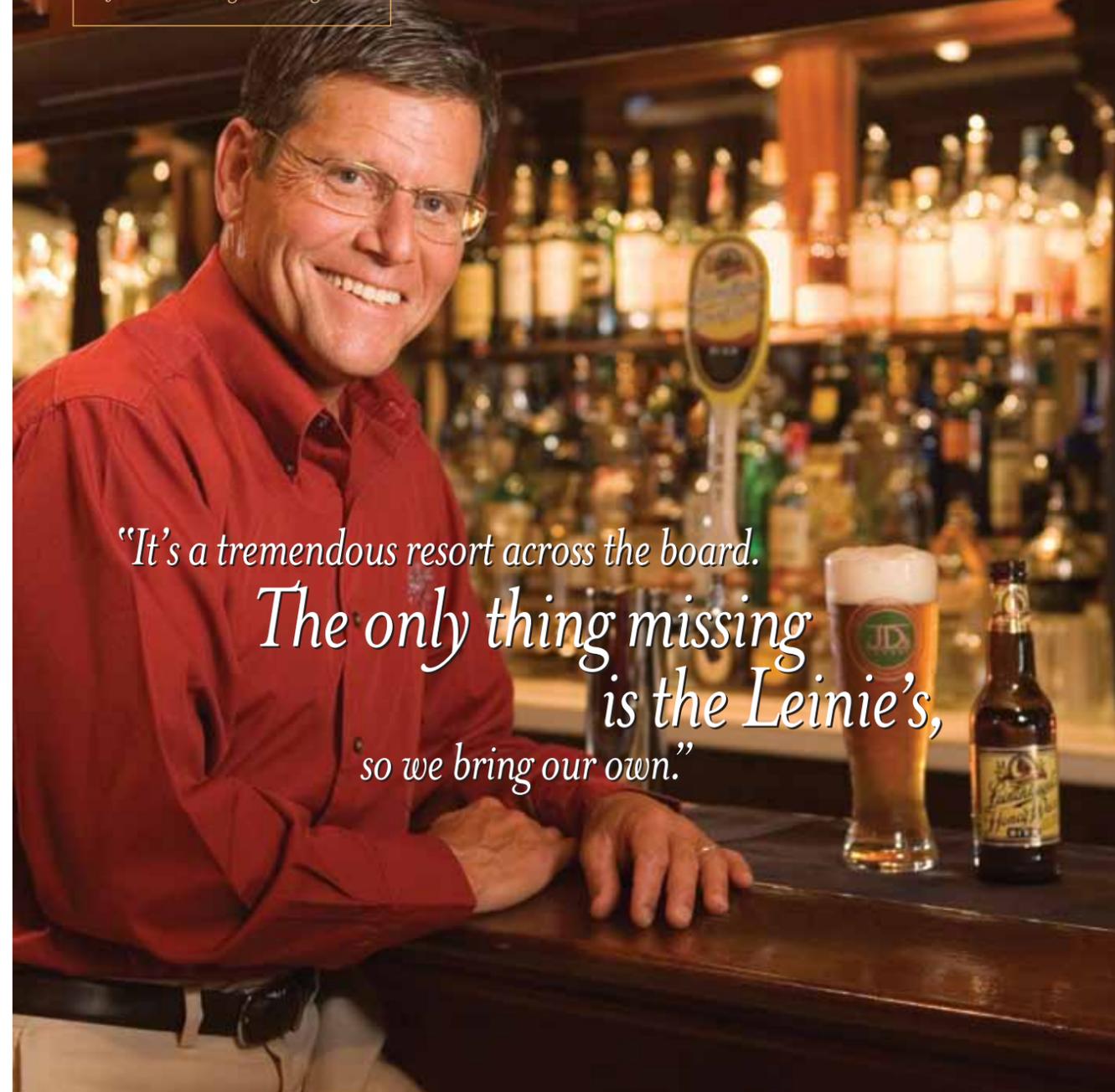
Zwart also offered some helpful tips for planners who are just venturing into hybrid meetings. “I would say, don’t be afraid. It’s really not that difficult, but get people who know what they’re doing. Work with somebody who has done it before, who is experienced, who can walk you through the steps and who doesn’t think any question is a stupid question.”

“You have to focus on the virtual audience and who they are,” Smith sums up. “You need someone who is an advocate for them in the planning and design process. It could be one person, but they’ll remain an advocate for the virtual event to help keep driving it forward.” **I&FMM**

“Virtual events on their own are OK, but the online extension of the physical event is where the real power of this category lies. Without that physical event, we lose that power.”

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Everyone's a Foodie

Catering to Increasingly Sophisticated Palates

By Timothy Herrick

Even if the meeting content is stellar — from the presenters to their presentations — the attendance is robust and the destination is unforgettable, when the food and beverage fall below expectations, the entire event is undermined if not forgettable. The difference in today's meeting environment, compared to even just five years ago, is that attendee F&B expectations have never been higher, more complicated or the meeting of them within budget, more challenging.

The popularity of Food Network shows such as the "Iron Chef" or National Public Radio's "The Splendid Table" — not to mention the hyper-local "yelp" reviews and Twitter buzz about which restaurants are hot and

which are not — has made nearly everyone a "foodie." Planners and facility executives are recognizing that

"Foodie culture means that you need to make sure you are knowledgeable on the newest culinary trends. You can still have classics on the menu, but you want to provide something new and refreshing."

James Kim, V.P. Operations
Access Destination Services
Lafayette, CA

attentive organizing means partnering to create a menu that reflects this new sophisticated-eater reality.

Foodie Culture

"Foodie culture means that you need to make sure you are knowledgeable on the newest culinary trends," says James Kim, vice president of operations for Access Destination Services, Northern California. "You can still have classics on the menu, but you want to provide something new and refreshing. For instance, instead of plain mac 'n' cheese, you can serve truffle mac 'n' cheese; or instead of mashed potatoes, you can serve sweet potato mash with goat cheese and chives. It's out-of-the-box thinking."

Satisfying these heightened expecta-

tations has shifted the roles of planner, event manager and chef. Jennifer Squeglia, principal at RLC Events, Warwick, RI, has more than 20 years of experience as a planner specializing in meetings and other events for insurance and financial services industries. Instead of burdening the event manager with the role of mediator between planner and kitchen, she recommends going directly to the source. "I tap into the chef more than ever before when devising a menu," she says. "I am dealing directly with the chefs. I ask them what they are excited about. The chefs know what people are looking at on the Food Network. They want to kick up the culinary offerings."

For effective F&B planning, she adamantly recommends, "Make the chef your creative partner."

According to Squeglia, how gourmet the food can get, especially for insurance and financial services, is often determined by the event. The uninspired convention chicken dinner may be gone, and in general, higher caliber cuisine may be more the rule than the exception, but how high still depends on the setting. "The more straightforward meeting banquet, maybe things are not as fancy, but incentive-type gatherings, the red carpet is being rolled out. It depends on the nature and scope of the event," she adds.

Discerning Palates

"Palates are more discerning now; they want more flavors and don't want to see the old rumaki on the menu," says Patty Phelps, vice president of sales for Access Destination Services, Texas. "They want what is new and hip and on the food channel; planners want the haute cuisine not only on the buffet but in food trucks as well."

The foodie trend has caused even in-house catering at many convention centers to undergo a radical makeover. Meeting attendees and other business travelers are certainly pleased about the scarcity of rubber chicken on the rubber chicken circuit. However, this new culinary awareness means not

10 Trends for 2013

The difference between a fad and a trend is that a trend has longer staying power. Food and beverage fads last weeks or months; trends are usually good for a couple of years at least. Gathered from a variety of sources, here are 10 F&B trends that have lasted long enough to not be considered fads. Throughout 2013, these trends will define menu options at meetings and events.

1 Handcrafted Cocktails

Handcrafted, signature cocktails remain popular. Ambitious bartenders infuse vodka, gin, rum and other spirits with fruits, such as mango and kiwi, as well as exotic herbs and spices to make distinctive adult beverages. Too complicated for a reception? Main ingredients can be pre-made, so the bartender only shakes or stirs. Many restaurants are now storing barrels of infused liquors. Limiting the bar service to the signature cocktail (and beer and wine), can reduce costs and have no negative impact on attendee experience. If the cocktail is interesting enough it will only enhance the event, especially if tied into a reception theme.

2 Gourmet Tea

Tea may not yet be the new coffee, but more and more people are drinking it. Tazo teas are the fastest growing segment of the Starbucks menu, a response to the growth of new, tea-centric competitors, such as Argo Tea, David's Tea and Teavana, which are rapidly opening locations throughout North America. Quality, gourmet teas are considered a more healthful alternative to coffee. F&B providers now include an ever-widening tea selection at breakfast and breaks, as well as an accompaniment to the dessert course at lunch and dinners. Tea is not just Lipton anymore, and simply adding a black tea, such as a robust "breakfast tea" and a green tea option is so two years ago. Newer tea varieties include: red (rooibos) tea, white tea, yerba mate tea and chai tea — in addition to the perennial herbal tea favorites such as jasmine, mint, chamomile and hibiscus. The ever-widening tea selection ranges from highly caffeinated black tea blends to the flavor-rich caffeine-free herbals.

3 Food Trucks

The days of the food truck solely being a grimy lunch wagon parked at construction sites are history. Food trucks are now a 21st century urban lunch mainstay. These brightly colored vehicles serve a limited but delectable selection of gourmet and/or ethnic food. The price is affordable, but the food is upscale and often as good as or better than what some of the city's best restaurants serve. Seeing the long lines these food trucks attract probably meant it was only a matter of time before meeting professionals realized that food trucks could put a fun and distinctive twist on outdoor events. That time is now. The Hilton Orlando has utilized food trucks for street-fair themed corporate events, courtesy of the hotel's culinary team, headed by executive chef Louis Martorano. JW Marriott Los Angeles at L.A. Live also can customize events using the city's best-known food trucks for a Gourmet Food Truck Lunch. The hotel notes that the cost per person is roughly equivalent to serving a buffet-style meal.

4 Gluten-Free Variety

The heightened awareness about the benefits of gluten-free dining both coincides with and has encouraged the expansion of whole-grain availability. Barley has become a rice alternative, whole-wheat pizza is common and quinoa is fast becoming a staple. Other providers are creating new concoctions, combining corn with other grains for gluten-free baked goods. Gluten-free has gone from restriction to flavor opportunity. Gluten-free goods are now signature specialties of many bakeries, pizzerias and other artisanal food providers throughout the U.S., happily overlapping with the overarching foodie and locavore consumer trends.



L.A.'s most popular gourmet food trucks assemble at JW Marriott Los Angeles L.A. Live for a corporate group's Gourmet Food Truck Lunch.

Photo courtesy of JW Marriott Los Angeles L.A. Live

5 Wine Surge

With the increased adherence nationally to farm-to-fork and eat/drink local initiatives, wine-lovers today are discovering that there are many excellent U.S. possibilities to select from — including very good wines produced in their own backyards. Other wine trends include a rediscovery of Moscato grapes (fast replacing Pinot Grigio); value-priced champagne and sparkling wine from non-European producers; the lighter, fruitier and less pricey unoaked Chardonnays; and a new appreciation for red and white aperitif wines. In addition, new, highly affordable and quality imported wines from Georgia (former USSR), Moldova, China, India and Mexico are gaining popularity.

6 Cupcake Craze

The cupcake renaissance may be a few years old by now, but with planners and event managers coming up with new cupcake variations, it shows no signs of slowing down. The craze continues with fancy fillings, mini-sizes and personalized decorations — planners often put mini-replicas of logos to reinforce branding, launches and staff training.

7 Cooking Classes

Meetings imitate reality television. With the Food Network and the plethora of cooking shows populating cable television having made everyone more cognizant of cooking at home, the popularity of onsite cooking classes and cooking competitions as teambuilding and/or event activities at meeting facilities is expected to continue throughout 2013. Everybody becomes a celebrity chef for the day, and as the prepared food is subsequently plated and served to the participants, attendees share a great sense of accomplishment and teamwork.

8 Action Stations

With the need to accommodate a wider range of attendee dietary demands, look for carving and/or action stations to multiply. Stir-fry and pasta stations are welcomed augmentations to the typical carving stations. Tapas are considered the rising action station favorite, further expanding the already growing variety of action stations. Planners report that with foodie expectations at an all-time high, servers should be ready to inform attendees about the health, dietary and gourmet stylings available at each station.

9 Appetizer Diversity

An informal, unscientific survey shows popular reception appetizers can fulfill locavore and healthy eating trends, but its current foodie makeover augmentation features hummus or some other type of Mediterranean spread, instead of the so-last-century ranch dressing dip; beef and chicken mini sliders are here to

just better prepared food, but more healthful food. But a gourmet sensibility now widespread among meeting attendees is only the tip of the ice sculpture. Meeting attendees and other business travelers are insisting that they no longer leave their healthful eating habits at home. Meeting planners, event managers and facility chefs have heard and responded, even though the result can be a more complicated — and diverse — menu.

Food Allergy Options

“With heightened awareness on diet — whether it’s a true dietary restriction based on allergies or religion or Atkins, Miami Beach (diets) — it is important to have an appropriate menu,” says Jennifer Beam Johnson, CMP, The Johnson Meetings Group, Raleigh, NC. “Guests are more health-conscious and also have more allergies these days. You need to spend extra time planning menus to make sure you cover all bases.”

Those bases now include gluten-free and other food allergy-conscious categories, which include dairy-free, soy-free, rice-free, wheat-free, peanut-free and pine-nut-free. Food allergies are better understood and identified by today’s consumers. While food allergy sufferers may seem as commonplace as vegan-vegetarians, it is important to understand that demand for these options transcends the actual allergy. The reason gluten-free and other “free” food items are being requested is they are perceived as healthful, often regardless of an individual’s medical sensitivities. Like vegetarianism, this “free” movement in food has become a personal preference. Planners must create menus accordingly.

Healthful Eating

In addition, fitness- and weight-consciousness have long been part of the culture, and meeting attendees can be especially wary of waistline inflation while attending conferences.

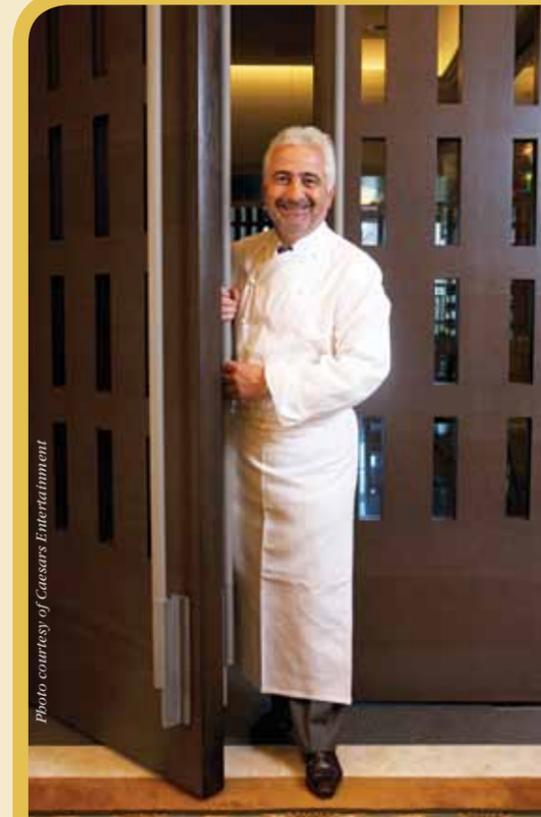
“Attendees are more conscious of eating healthy foods and appreciate that there are those selections,” says

Best Hotel Restaurants

The hotel restaurant has been reimagined. While pricey was commonplace, the food was undistinguished and just an extension of the onsite catering kitchen. Now, especially in meeting hotels, onsite restaurants are upscale, creative and can go fork-to-fork against some of the best restaurants in their cities, thus expanding the opportunities planners have to organize unique and memorable events. One of the leading “foodie” websites *thedaily meal.com*, self-described as dedicated to “everything food and drink,” recently published a list of the “101 Best Hotel Restaurants Around the World.” Here are the North American hotels that they cite.

- Adour at The St. Regis Hotel (New York City)
- The Bazaar by José Andrés at SLS Hotel (Los Angeles)
- Blue Duck Tavern at Park Hyatt (Washington, DC)
- Café Boulud at The Brazilian Court Hotel & Beach Club (Palm Beach, FL)
- Capitol Grille at The Hermitage Hotel (Nashville, TN)
- CityZen at Mandarin Oriental (Washington, DC)
- Clio at Elliott Hotel (Boston)
- é by José Andrés at The Cosmopolitan (Las Vegas)
- gaZette at Le Westin (Montréal)
- Hakkasan at Fontainebleau Miami Beach (Miami Beach, FL)
- Hawksworth Restaurant at Rosewood Hotel Georgia (Vancouver)
- Jean Georges at Trump International Hotel & Tower (New York City)
- Joël Robuchon Restaurant at MGM Grand (Las Vegas)
- La Marea Restaurant at Viceroy Riviera Maya (Playa del Carmen, Mexico)
- Maialino at Gramercy Park Hotel (New York City)
- MASA's at Executive Hotel Vintage Court (San Francisco)
- MICHAEL MINA at Bellagio (Las Vegas)
- Mount Burgess Dining Room at Emerald Lake Lodge (British Columbia)
- NoMad at The NoMad (New York City)
- NoMI at Park Hyatt (Chicago)
- ONE Restaurant at The Hazelton Hotel (Toronto)
- Proof on Main at 21C Museum Hotel (Louisville, KY)
- Restaurant Guy Savoy at Caesar's Palace (Las Vegas)
- Tiara at Queen's Landing (Ontario)

— TH



Guy Savoy at the door of his eponymous French restaurant at Caesar's Palace.

Photo courtesy of Caesars Entertainment

Pamela J. Martin, managing director, Creative Meetings and Incentives, Fairfield, CT. “It falls to us to plan

“If you can incorporate local cuisine, in both menu choice and food product, it gives (attendees) some local flavor and a bit of variety from the normal meeting.”

Jennifer Beam Johnson, CMP
The Johnson Meetings Group
Raleigh, NC

for attractive presentation and to offer creative (serving techniques) for smaller portions, such as serving salads in martini glasses or soups in shot glasses.”

Johnson suggests: “Offer a three- or four-course plated meal with lighter fare. If you offer a heavy entrée, then consider a lighter salad and broth-based soup. Include a plate of petit fours on the table in addition to the dessert. If someone doesn’t want a slab of cake, then they have the choice for just a bit of something sweet.”

We all love dessert, but since it’s a major culprit in weight gain, planners and chefs are reinventing the concept. “Years ago a big slice of choco-

late cake or pie and ice cream would suffice, but that has changed, says Martin. “Smaller portions, even a tasting combo of three similar desserts are popular. Who doesn’t like a variety of cheesecake in bite-size portions? Just enough to satisfy the sweet tooth.”

Squeglia has found a subtle way to lighten the impact of the final course that disguises the downsizing trend while maintaining its allure. “I’ve been serving dessert family-style, which means small portions of two or three plates of dessert, which people pass around the table. People eat less dessert, have more variety, and it lends itself to more interaction at a table, which is important for most meetings.”

stay (at least in 2013). Crostini, satay, Southwestern crab cakes and lobster shooters have also been cited as maintaining their positions on the hors d'oeuvres tray. Not surprisingly, bacon remains the popular appetizer adornment — a little bacon goes a long way.

10 Check Please

When looking to trim the budget, food and beverage is a much-scrutinized line item. Scrimping may be a necessity, but if attendees notice the scrimping it may be the only thing they notice. The challenge is to create more excitement in the food service so the cutbacks on the margins are not apparent. The easiest F&B component where scrimping can take place is likely the bar. Instead of a full bar, offer a wine-tasting event: bourbon, scotch and tequila tastings are noteworthy additions to the concepts. Utilizing drink tickets also can limit consumption. Most important, upfront and detailed communication with the facility staff from the get-go will result in austerity that is hidden but effective.

And One More for Good Measure: CVBs at Your Service

Visit Denver launched a new foodie blog *EatDrinkDenver.com*, to celebrate the fresh, local food scene in and around the Mile High City. And Visit Orlando launched an “After Five” marketing campaign that highlights the city’s variety of upscale dining and entertainment options. A new microsite *www.orlandodistricts.com* showcases six newly identified dining and entertainment districts. — **TH**

Wake Up and Eat Right

Compared to other mealtimes, breakfast and breaks, the healthy makeover trend is blatantly uncoined. People may end the business day by going off their diets with the decadence of dessert, but by morning everyone is nutritionally enthusiastic for what tradition has told us is the “most important meal of the day.”

“The continental breakfast is going the way of the dinosaur,” says Johnson. “No one is satisfied with a sweet roll or bagel and schmear, as not only is it not healthy, but it certainly doesn’t help you feel full until lunch. You must have protein, some type of egg and/or meat and possibly cheese. Fruit is a good idea as are yogurt cups, and now the yogurt cups need to be more along the lines of the healthier Greek yogurt and not the super sweet traditional products.”

The Locavore Movement

Anyone who identifies himself as a “foodie,” is also by default a locavore — an aficionado of in-season, local foods. The popularity of locally sourced and sustainable menu choices has probably been the longest lasting trend redefining meeting and event menus, a fact not lost on insurance and financial services meeting planners.

“The foodie culture means wanting to experience something of the region,” says Johnson. “Many times, meeting attendees don’t have the option of going offsite or away from the program for a meal. ... (But) if you can incorporate local cuisine, in both menu choice and food product, it gives them some local flavor and a bit of variety from the normal meeting.”

Diversifying the menu often makes the event more memorable. Local food, Johnson continues, “is often, better food quality as it is fresher. In



“It is up to the planner...to inform the attendees...about what they are eating and create excitement. Food is a great conversation starter and something to network around.”

Jennifer Squeglia, Principal
RLC Events, Warwick, RI

the South, we can use a lot of local produce, locally farmed meats, regionally caught fish and locally produced cheeses. That makes planning a ‘regional’ type of menu much easier and oftentimes, a change for the attendee from the regular chicken breast with rice pilaf and green beans.”

is up to the planner, and the serving staff, to inform the attendees, either one-on-one and/or with small signs, about what they are eating and create excitement. Food is a great conversation starter and something to network around. People love talking about what they are eating.” **I&FMM**

In addition to providing culinary distinctiveness and quality, the smaller producers are also noted for their flexibility. They often more easily produce specialty goods, such as gluten-free and other food allergy-conscious items, than larger suppliers.

Along with the benefits of using locally produced foods comes the downsides of cost and availability. “People want to support local farming and manufacturing, but this often limits choices and can sometimes be more costly,” says Martin. In addition, while some local artisanal — handcrafted — food items, such as honey, breads and meats, are available year-round, produce availability is seasonal.

Regardless of category, the challenge is finding cost-effective common ground where local foods can be provided within budget. As the locavore movement has gained momentum, suppliers are more plentiful and often larger, thus able to produce in bigger quantities. Buying groups — in this case, essentially a coalition of meeting facilities that can bring economies-of-scale to purchasing — are now forming locally (they have long been part of independent facilities when it comes to non-local, more mainstream food items).

“People are excited about the regional experience,” Squeglia adds. “It



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New Orleans

A Meetings Revival in the Business-Friendly Big Easy

By Timothy Herrick



A seated dinner at the Pavilion of the Sisters in New Orleans City Park.

New Orleans has been sprucing up. Throughout 2012, new hotels and significant renovations of classic properties came online, and new restaurants and attractions opened, augmenting the legendary dining and nightlife of the Big Easy. For meeting professionals, New Orleans has not merely come a long way since the devastation of Katrina in 2005, but as a meetings destination, the city has effectively redefined itself as possessing a more wholesome, business-friendly environment.

Most of the more recent sprucing was intended to coincide with Super Bowl XLVII on February 3, 2013. The clash of NFL champions — held at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome, which has completed the final \$85 million phase of an ongoing \$336 million renovation — puts New Orleans on an international stage, further prompting meeting attendees to suggest the city as a destination to their meeting planners.

New Orleans hosted 4.9 million visitors in the first half of 2012, an increase of 2 percent over the same period in 2011, according to the 2012 University of New Orleans Hospitality Research Center's 2012 New Orleans Area Visitor Profile, commissioned by the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau and the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation.

These visitors spent a total of \$3.45 billion, a boost of 11 percent over January–June 2011.

Although itemizing what portion of this increase in visitors or their expenditures can be attributable to meetings was not part of the study, the time period surveyed traditionally is a heavy meeting and convention season. The city's hospitality industry has noticed growing interest in the city as a destination for meetings of all sizes. "Out of all our meetings, going into the future, anywhere from 50 to 80 percent, are smaller meetings that may not even use the convention center," says Nikki Moon, vice president of sales, New Orleans CVB. "We have a great package of hotel offerings, from big hotels and chain properties to wonderful independent hotels, and a city-wide renovation program has been in effect in anticipation of the Super Bowl. Every single hotel has been refreshed, even after they were rebuilt following Katrina."

Serious About Meetings

The city and its hospitality industry have bounced back stronger than ever — an assertion made by the city's meetings industry and vouched for by planners who have booked meetings in the city post-Katrina. That bouncing back though,

was not just replacing, refurbishing and adding to its meetings infrastructure. New Orleans has actively changed its image, fostering a more business-conducive atmosphere. New Orleans is now taken more seriously by more planners; their perception of the city is now akin to other first-tier destinations. They are seeing New Orleans as something other than a great convention center and a 24/7 Mardi Gras.

Moon adds, "Katrina will always be part of our legacy, but Katrina will be eight years ago now, and part of that bouncing back is how we've changed, and part of that change has been that we are still a city where you can have a good time, but we're not just about having a good time. New Orleans is a city where meetings can get business done."

Because of the nature of the industries they serve, insurance and financial services meeting planners tend to prefer low-key settings. New Orleans may still offer world-class nightlife, but planners acknowledge that the city has a new attitude, one no longer potentially at cross-purposes with the goals of an insurance/financial services event. "Some companies may feel the destination presents too many opportunities for people to get into trouble," says Koleen Roach, director, meetings and conference management, Securian Financial Group. Roach has organized small meetings in New Orleans of about 50 attendees and also served as the chairman of the board of the Financial and Insurance Conference Planners (FICP). She organized FICP's 2012 spring board meeting, a three-day, two-night stay at The Ritz-Carlton in New Orleans. "I disagree with that and have always had very positive and memorable experiences with programs in New Orleans."

"New Orleans has received a lot of bad publicity regarding being a party city, but there is so much more the city offers with regard to history, the museums, great food and charm that is not part of the Bourbon Street area," says Carlin Putman, CMP, director, incentives and promotions, VALIC/Western National, who has planned three large conferences ranging from 100–400 peak block over the past 2 1/2 years in New Orleans. "After Katrina, the city really got hurt because of the devastation after the levees broke and flooded a lot of the city. The city has done a great job in the rebuild, and New Orleans looks really nice now with all of the improvements."

Lisa Ramsay, CMP, director of meetings and incentives, Protective Life Insurance Co., says that when insurance and financial meeting planners recommend New Orleans as a destination to stakeholders, the biggest obstacle to overcome is the party-town reputation: "...that it's all play and no one will attend the meetings...not true," she says. "Also, I think some people might think it's dirty, or not clean...again, not true. I actually flew in the morning after Mardi Gras for a site visit, and if I hadn't known that a few hours prior there had been one of the biggest celebrations in the world, I never would have known. The city looked great, and I remember commenting on that fact to my cab driver."

Diverse and New

Another factor prompting planners to consider New

Orleans has been a new diversity of meeting hotel facilities. In the years following Katrina, the city experienced a wave of renovation and construction, multiplying site selection options — a meeting space and lodging supply now further enhanced by the citywide preparations for the Super Bowl. "There is such a wide range of hotels and venues here, that New Orleans is truly a great fit for any size group," says Jeff O'Hara, CMP, DMCP, president, AlliedPRA New Orleans. "While we do have the 'big four' convention hotels, we have a multitude of options in the boutique to mid-size range. Our historic and unique venues offer space for events of all sizes, and our restaurants have great private dining spaces. We also have great 'new' hotel product, as all the hotels had to do a complete repositioning after Katrina, and most are going through another upgrade now in advance of the Super Bowl."

Adds Bonnie B. Boyd, CMP, DMCP, president and CEO, BBC Destination Management, "All our hotel properties are either brand new — the Hyatt's three new properties — or



Nikki Moon
V.P. Sales
New Orleans CVB

"Out of all our meetings, going into the future, anywhere from 50 to 80 percent, are smaller meetings that may not even use the convention center."

recently renovated — Ritz-Carlton, Windsor Court, Omni Royal Orleans, Sheraton — and several boutique properties have opened in the French Quarter."

Meeting planners have welcomed the very visible physical makeover of the city. "Most of the properties have been refurbished, refreshed or repurposed on a grander scale, and much of the city is in better shape than it was before Hurricane Katrina," observes Roach. "New Orleans lost so much in that terrible storm, but the city rose like a Phoenix from the ashes. It now presents visitors with a fresh new experience in one of the most historical cities in the U.S."

Accompanying the hotel rebuild, there's been new activity on the restaurant and nightlife front, remarkable for a city already so renowned for its food and fun. New Orleans hospitality professionals now emphasize to planners the "new" in the things that have always made New Orleans famous. According to O'Hara, "The restaurant scene has transformed in a couple of interesting ways. Prior to Katrina we had 891 full-service restaurants, we now have 1,313." (O'Hara adds these figures do not include fast-food outlets).

He continues, "New Orleans does not take to chain

restaurants, so these are largely independent restaurateurs with unique offerings. There has been a shift from the traditional style of New Orleans cuisine to contemporary and cutting-edge.”

New Orleans, of course, is famous for its cuisine, which includes variations on Southern, soul and Cajun cookery. Few cities, other than Rome or Paris, have a food experience so tightly intertwined with that destination’s culture. “Since Katrina, there are more than 40 percent more restaurants than before,” says Boyd. “There has been an explosion of culinary arts. Much focus is on sustainability and the slow-cooking, farm-to-table movement so popular all over the country.”

In addition to cuisine, live music continues to be intrinsic to the appeal of New Orleans as a meetings destination, and those offerings have likewise been enlivened. Boyd points out: “There is more live jazz in the French Quarter and on Frenchman Street, and there are more festivals all throughout the year than before Katrina. Three major new jazz clubs have opened in the Quarter, all of them upscale.”

Accessible and Affordable

Ramsay says she organized two “spectacular meetings” at New Orleans meeting hotels — a four-day meeting with 150 attendees at The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans; and a three-day meeting for 100 attendees at the Windsor Court Hotel — noting the advantages of both the airlift of the destination and the compact layout of its urban design. “Southwest Airlines flies into New Orleans and many of our attendees liked that, as they had to pay to get themselves to the meeting location, and we picked up the cost for hotel, meals, etc.,” she says, adding that another “... advantage is that you have so much to do, or enjoy within walking distance from 90 percent of the hotels...therefore eliminating the need for transportation.”

New Orleans is a world-class city, and considered a first-tier destination, but compared to other competing convention cities such as Las Vegas, Los Angeles or New York, Moon points out that the compact layout of New Orleans enhances affordability and ease of access throughout the city. “We’re one of the most walkable cities in the U.S., so all the options are available to attendees, from fine dining to a bowl of delicious gumbo,” says Moon.

New Orleans is budget-friendly in other areas as well. “There are reasonably priced options that are still part of the New Orleans experience,” says Moon. “Also, we are a right-to-work state, which means that meetings and events can be more affordable because of lower labor costs.”

Says Putman, “New Orleans has been a great destination for our meetings and events because the airlift has been very good, priced very reasonably, and the cost for conducting your meeting at the different hotels there is affordable.”

Trying to precisely estimate the affordability of New

Orleans, compared to other first-tier destinations, can be problematic. Taking into account the range of mitigating factors, including time of year and group size, sources seem to indicate that a general ballpark average is that New Orleans can be about 10 percent less expensive than other first-tier destinations, with savings possible in a range of budgetary line items. Hotel and occupancy and room tax, according to planners, are generally lower than other first-tier destinations. “We saved nearly 5–6 percent on food costs, AV costs, transportation costs and overall hotel costs,” says Putman. “I feel that New Orleans is much more affordable with regards to air rates and hotel rates.”

“My impression is that room rates are lower than cities like Chicago, Las Vegas, Los Angeles and Atlanta,” says Roach. “It has always been easy to negotiate rates with New Orleans properties, flight costs in and out tend to be comparatively low, and ground services and offsite venues are reasonably priced.”

O’Hara adds, “Relative to other first-tier cities, New Orleans offers great value. I would put us in the lower 25 percent of cost in first-tier cities.”

Return on Investment

Budgetary concerns in today’s meeting climate are complex. It’s not just about cutting corners, shaving costs and counting pennies — although those remain critical aspects



KOLEEN ROACH
Director, Meetings and Conference Management
Securian Financial Group, St. Paul, MN

“New Orleans lost so much in that terrible storm, but the city rose like a Phoenix from the ashes. It now presents visitors with a fresh new experience in one of the most historical cities in the U.S.”

of meeting planning — but planners desire destinations that can also add value to the content and purpose of meeting. They are looking for destinations that bring more to the table than just the table, a trend New Orleans acknowledges. “In my clients, I don’t see as much of strictly budget issues; more so that their events have to be justified and provide value to the attendees and the company,” says O’Hara. “There is a constant push in this area.”

The post-Katrina, business-friendly Big Easy’s makeover aligns with current meeting industry zeitgeist: “Face-to-face meetings are always going to be important,” says Moon. “With New Orleans, there are more networking opportunities; it’s so easy to see everyone in the city, at a restaurant or in the

French Quarter. You can see your colleagues in many places, whether it is an organized event or not. It’s a natural place for conferences.”

Renovations, Expansions and Openings

For the past few years, New Orleans has been on a rebuilding spree. Here are some of the more notable upgrades planners can expect to see in the near future.

The 1.1-million-sf **New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center** — the sixth largest convention center in the nation — opens The Great Hall in late January 2013. The \$50 million project encompasses 86,000 sf of flexible function space, including: the 60,300-sf, column-free Great Hall, the largest ballroom in New Orleans; 25,400 sf of multi-use pre-function space; a 4,660-sf junior ballroom with a 3,420-sf rooftop terrace called The Rivergate Room; a multipurpose lounge; and an open-landscaped pedestrian plaza. The Great Hall, named for the 1984 World’s Fair exhibit space of the same name, can be divided into multiple configurations, allowing for several concurrent but independent session rooms. The Great Hall debut follows \$140 million of other post-Katrina upgrades to the 27-year-old facility. www.mccno.com

The New Orleans Marriott, which is now offering teambuilding exercises featuring a special cooking class with the hotel’s acclaimed executive chef Mark Quitney, recently completed a \$5 million restoration with new carpeting, wall coverings and lighting for its more than 80,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space. The facility is home to one of Louisiana’s largest hotel ballrooms, spanning more than 27,000 sf. The property boasts 1,329 newly renovated guest rooms and a variety of onsite amenities including a full-service business center and a Starbucks coffee shop. www.neworleansmarriott.com

The Hyatt French Quarter reopened in 2012 following an \$18 million renovation that included upgrades to the hotel’s 254 guest rooms, as well as the hotel exterior, lobby, landscaping, and pool and deck area, and its 10,660+ sf of customizable function space, which is located in one central area of the hotel’s first floor. The hotel connects the downtown Central Business District with the French Quarter, providing attendees with a convenient location in the Big Easy. “The location is outstanding being only steps away from world-renowned restaurants and most of the city’s main attractions,” says Larry Daniels, general manager, Hyatt French Quarter. Newly designed food and beverage outlets include a bodega-inspired market called Powdered Sugar and Batch, an upscale lounge, and the award-winning Red Fish Grill. www.frenchquarter.hyatt.com

The \$45 million renovation of the **Sheraton New Orleans Hotel** — located in the city’s Central Business District and adjacent to the French Quarter — is scheduled to be completed in 2013. The sweeping upgrade is a floor-to-ceiling transfor-

“We saved nearly 5–6 percent on food costs, AV costs, transportation costs and overall hotel costs. I feel that New Orleans is much more affordable with regards to air rates and hotel rates.”



CARLIN PUTMAN, CMP
Director, Incentives and Promotions
VALIC/Western National, Houston, TX

mation of the hotel’s 1,100 guest rooms and suites, Sheraton Club Lounge, state-of-the-art meeting facilities (more than 100,000 sf and 54 meeting rooms) and lobby. Sheraton hotels across the globe have been undergoing a \$6 billion brand-wide revitalization. “The comprehensive renovation to the Sheraton New Orleans underscores our commitment to attracting an even larger segment of the meetings and convention business in this vibrant city,” says Denise Coll, president of the North America Division for Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc. www.sheraton.com

The iconic French Quarter landmark the **Bourbon Orleans Hotel** completed a multimillion-dollar renovation last year. The restoration included all of the hotel’s 218 luxury guest rooms and 28 distinctive balcony suites and also featured major property upgrades, including repainting of all exterior balconies and window frames, and the addition of an enlarged, glass-fronted fitness center on the hotel’s second floor. “The substantial improvements to guest rooms and bathrooms have continued the upgrade of this iconic New Orleans luxury hotel that was begun several years ago,” says Joe Jaeger, managing partner of the New Orleans Hotel Collection, to which the Bourbon New Orleans Hotel belongs. Nestled in the heart of the French Quarter (only a short walk or cab ride from the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center) the venue is just steps away from the famed St. Louis Cathedral, upscale shopping on Royal Street, local artists and performers of Jackson Square, and many restaurants, galleries and nightlife venues. www.bourbonorleans.com

Following a \$275 million redesign and revitalization, the **Hyatt Regency New Orleans**, featuring 1,193 all-new sophisticated guest rooms and suites and 200,000 sf of state-of-the-art, flexible event space, and expansive food and beverage offerings, reopened in 2011. The 32-story hotel — in the city’s downtown district and adjacent to the Mercedes-Benz Superdome — offers two 25,000-sf ballrooms, 64 versatile meeting and banquet rooms, 19 executive-level meeting rooms, seven permanent boardrooms, and more than 80,000 sf of exhibition space, highlighted by a new 50,000-sf exhibit hall. In addition to revitalizing its 1,193 guest rooms, including 95 suites, five meeting planner suites and four presi-

dential suites, other highlights include 8 Block Kitchen & Bar, a 360-seat, full-service restaurant and bar; Vitascope Hall, a media/action bar outfitted with 42 flat-screen TVs; and Borgne, the latest restaurant by chef John Besh. Additional culinary options include a 65-seat Starbucks; Lagniappe Exchange, a 24-hour fresh market and convenience store; Whole Hog Café, featuring award-winning barbecue; and Pizza Consegna. “The re-opening of Hyatt Regency New Orleans is symbolic as it represents the end of a journey and the beginning of a new chapter for Hyatt and the city of New Orleans,” says Michael Smith, general manager. “We spared no detail in positioning ourselves to be the quintessential hotel for conventions, leisure and business travelers alike.” www.neworleans.hyatt.com

Irvin Mayfield’s Jazz Playhouse; and an updated Fleur de Lis Suite. High-speed wireless Internet access was expanded and is now available throughout the hotel. Last May, chefs John Folse and Rick Tramonto opened the highly anticipated Restaurant R’evolution, a fine-dining establishment. The Royal Sonesta offers 483 guest rooms, 35 suites and 20,000 sf of meeting space. www.sonesta.com/royalneworleans

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

New Orleans entertainment options include the historic **Joy Theater** (originally opened in 1947), which has been extensively renovated, reopening as a 10,000-sf multipurpose complex at 1200 Canal Street. www.thejoytheater.com

And, located across the street from the Joy on Canal Street, the **Saenger Theater** is currently undergoing a \$51 million restoration, adding another exceptional performance venue to the city’s theater district. www.saengernola.com

The National World War II Museum (formerly known as the National D-Day Museum), located in the Central Business District on Magazine Street, was designated by the U.S. Congress as “America’s National World War II Museum” in 2003. The museum is undergoing a \$300 million expansion project — “The Road to Victory: A Vision for Future Generations” — which will eventually quadruple the size of the original museum. Although due for completion in 2015, portions of the project already opened to the public include: the E. J. Ourso Discovery Hall, the Solomon Victory Theater, Stage Door Canteen entertainment venue, the American Sector restaurant and the John E. Kushner Restoration Pavilion. The museum is available for rentals and is an unforgettable setting for receptions, meetings and other events. www.nationalww2museum.org

In Avondale, about 20 minutes west of New Orleans, is the new **NOLA Motorsports Park**, designed for full-scale large and small events with multiple meeting rooms and event spaces. The park, which opened in June 2012, offers corporate entertainment and teambuilding programs including a “Geaux Kart” Mini Grand Prix; the Pit Stop Challenge; and several driving skills challenges in full-sized racecars. www.nolamotor.com

In a city renowned for food, it’s not surprising that **The Southern Food and Beverage (SoFAB) Museum**, which opened in 2008, has become one of the city’s most popular new attractions. In March 2013, the facility will open a new state-of-the-art, 30,000-sf facility, which will include a restaurant, an exhibit for each of the 17 southern states, a children’s gallery, a cultural innovation center and the SoFAB Culinary Library. www.southernfood.org **I&FMM**

“I actually flew in the morning after Mardi Gras for a site visit. ...The city looked great and I remember commenting on that fact to my cab driver.”



Lisa Ramsay, CMP
Director of Meetings and Incentives
Protective Life Insurance, Birmingham, AL

The trendiest boutique property in the Big Easy, the **W New Orleans – French Quarter**, has unveiled a full-scale, property-wide renovation, including the look of all 97 guest rooms, the Living Room (W’s take on the traditional hotel lobby), studio meeting spaces and the outdoor courtyard. It has also opened Sweat, a state-of-the-art fitness center, and a new signature restaurant SoBou (an acronym of South of Bourbon Street), a contemporary Creole concept from the Commander’s Family of Restaurants; and 735+ sf of newly renovated meeting space, which overlooks a stunning French courtyard. www.frenchquarter.com

Within walking distance of the French Quarter, **Windsor Court Hotel – New Orleans** completed a \$22 million restoration, including new décor in 316 guest rooms and suites, a refurbished Club Level lounge, a renovation of Le Salon, a refresh of The Grill Room, The Polo Club Lounge, the pool area and meeting spaces; and the addition of a lobby bar and spa. The hotel features 10,000 sf of function space, which can accommodate meetings for up to 250 people and banquets for up to 240. www.windsorcourthotel.com

In 2012, the French Quarter’s **Royal Sonesta Hotel New Orleans** spent nearly \$18 million in upgrades and improvements. Renovations included new furnishings and carpeting in all of the third-floor guest rooms; a brand new second-floor Acadia event space; new furnishings and carpeting in



**“There is one thing we agree on —
New Orleans is a great place to hold an event!”**

2013 New Orleans Super Bowl Host Committee Co-Chairs
(and New Orleans locals), Mary Matalin and James Carville





PAGE



GORDON



MEYERS



PERKINS



SACHS

Colleen Pace was promoted to director of sales and marketing for Cheyenne Mountain Resort, Colorado Springs, CO. She was director of sales for Cheyenne Mountain Resort.

Salamander Hotels & Resorts, based in Middleburg, VA, has named **Arthur Gordon** as director of insurance and financial sales. He formerly served as senior sales manager for the American Club Resort, Kohler, WI, and the Old Course Hotel & Resort in St. Andrews, Scotland.

Sheraton Kona Resort & Spa at Keauhou Bay on the Kona coast of Hawaii has named **Donna Meyers** as director of group sales. She was area sales manager for Oregon and southwestern Washington for the Great Wolf Lodge, Grand Mound, WA.

Kari Dehn was named regional director of sales, meetings and incentives, throughout the Midwest region, for the All-Inclusive Collection's Hard Rock Hotels in Mexico and the Dominican Republic. She was global sales director at Melia Hotels International.

Wynn Las Vegas and Encore, Las Vegas, NV, announced that **Joseph Perkins** has joined the hotel sales team as the director of regional accounts, Southeast. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing for the Sheraton Dallas Hotel by the Galleria, Dallas, TX.

The Inn at Pocono Manor has appointed **Robert Baldassari** as director of sales and marketing. He was most recently director of sales and marketing for Skytop Lodge, Skytop, PA.

Cranwell Resort, Spa and Golf Club, Lenox, MA, has named **Tim Paulus** as director of sales. He was director of sales and marketing at The Westin Poinsett Hotel in Greenville, SC.

Cherylanne Thomas was named area director of marketing and sales for The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa in Henderson, NV, and The Westin Las Vegas Hotel, Casino & Spa, located one block off the Las Vegas Strip. She was director of sales and marketing for Ravella at Lake Las Vegas.

Sean Sachs has been appointed vice president of sales and marketing for all of The Dawson Companies, which includes The Scottsdale Plaza Resort, Scottsdale, AZ. He most recently served as associate director of sales for The Scottsdale Plaza Resort. *I&FMM*

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