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THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



James Wood, CEO of Meet AC, strolls on the world-famous Boardwalk in Atlantic City, NJ

Atlantic City's Rebirth

A Reenergized Meetings and Conventions Market Is Leading the Charge to Diversify Growth Beyond Gaming
PAGE 24

Broaden Your Horizons

Tantalizing Destinations for International Meetings
PAGE 12

The CSR Movement

Giving Back in Big Ways
PAGE 18

Florida
PAGE 64

● Las Vegas
PAGE 72

Special pullout section



Credit: Thomas Robert Clarke

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Contents

VOLUME 33 NO. 5

MAY 2015

FEATURES

- 12 International Meetings**
Global Business Means Looking Beyond Borders for Meetings — Here Are Some Tantalizing Options
By Christine Loomis
- 18 The CSR Movement**
Giving Back in Big Ways
By Maura Keller

DESTINATIONS

- 24 Atlantic City's Rebirth**
A Reenergized Meetings and Conventions Market Is Leading the Charge to Diversify Growth Beyond Gaming
By Patrick Simms
- 64 Florida**
Meeting in the Sunshine State Keeps Attendees Beaming From Ear to Ear
By Derek Reveron
- 72 Las Vegas**
Always Ready to Put a New Spin on Meetings
By Karen Brost

DEPARTMENTS

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| 4 Publisher's Message | 10 Perspective
Give Attendees More With Give-back Events
By Sydney Wolf |
| 6 News & Notes | |
| 9 Snapshots | 82 People on the Move |
| | 82 Reader Services |

SPECIAL PULLOUT SECTION

- 27 (1A) Destination Hotels**



Credit: Gleneagles Hotel

The Kings Course at Scotland's five-star Gleneagles golf and spa resort dates back to 1919. **PAGE 12**



Credit: Andrew Kokoczk

Attendees at CRDN's Gilligan's Island-themed event in Florida had a ball channeling the Ginger and Skipper characters. **PAGE 64**



Credit: The Neon Museum

The Neon Museum, dedicated to the preservation of Las Vegas' most iconic landmarks, is available for bookings. **PAGE 72**

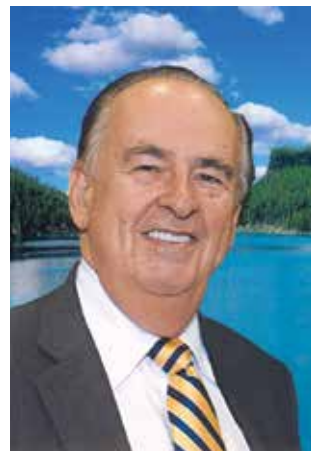
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Publisher's Message

The Rebirth of Atlantic City

James Wood is the CEO of Meet AC. Just like a Jersey Shore lifeguard, Wood is a hero in waiting. He has been tasked with “saving the life” of Atlantic City, recreating and rebirthing the iconic city known for its storied history — The Boardwalk, the Miss America Pageant (yes, it's back in AC), and since the late '70s, a thriving casino hotel and gaming and industry.

Nowadays, Wood and his team are in the business of bringing back meetings and conventions to AC. They are trying to “reenergize that aspect of the business and bring more meetings and conventions back to Atlantic City,” Wood explains in our cover story “Atlantic City's Rebirth — A Reenergized Meetings and Conventions Market Is Leading the Charge to Diversify Growth Beyond Gaming” on page 24.



Wood's plan is working. “We booked more convention room nights in 2014 than we had in the previous 15 years. So we have very positive momentum,” he said.

What's more, Atlantic City will host the 2016 MPI World Education Congress to “showcase the city as a viable destination for meetings and conven-

tions,” said Wood.

Wood says Atlantic City's traditional attractions remain a draw. “When people come to Atlantic City they still have a tremendous Boardwalk and some of the best beaches in America,” he says. “And the gaming piece is still very popular; millions of gamers come every year.” But with approximately 60 casinos in the Northeast vying for business, “there is now a focus on diversifying the mix a little bit more, to add more non-gaming business opportunities to Atlantic City. That philosophy had emerged over the last couple of years.”

Meeting planners applaud this new approach and welcome the investments in the city's meetings and tourism infrastructure. For example, Susan Elise McGonigle said, “As a meeting planner, I've never seen a city that was more competitive for the business.” Meet AC and Atlantic City's hotels are all “very proactive for the business, and they show appreciation for it.”

And Sally O'Shea, CEM, adds, “Meet AC makes it a point to be very knowledgeable of what assets they have within the city. They do not play favoritism in any way; that's been my experience.”

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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News & Notes

IACC Reports Highest Single-year Growth Globally

CHICAGO, IL — Following an 18-month restructure, the International Association of Conference Centres (IACC) recently reported its



COOPER

highest single-year growth in membership globally, with 58 new members. Six new countries were added to the growing portfolio, including Kenya, Ukraine, Hungary,

Portugal, Switzerland and Italy.

Mark Cooper, CEO, IACC, said, "We are delighted to report our highest single-year growth in membership globally in IACC's 30-year history. We have welcomed 58 new members on board, and what is more, 54 of these new recruits are conference centers, of which we are seeing a large growth in non-residential day conferences entering the marketplace globally."

To download the 2014 IACC Annual Members Report, go to: http://www.iacconline.org/_assets/images/about/IACC-Global-Annual-Report.pdf
www.iacconline.org

Hilton Opens Hotel on Philadelphia Waterfront

PHILADELPHIA, PA — The Hilton Philadelphia at Penn's Landing, which sits on the Delaware River, has 348 rooms, a full-service restaurant and a café. The property, which was developed by Pyramid Hotel Group, also has 24,000 sf of meeting space, according to *Travel Weekly*.

Hilton Worldwide has 13 hotels in the Philadelphia area, including two under its flagship badge.

MPI Selects Atlantic City for 2016 World Education Congress

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Atlantic City has been selected as the site for the 2016 Meeting Professionals International (MPI) World Education Congress (WEC) June 11-14, 2016, at the Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center, a Caesars Entertainment property. Scheduled for completion in August 2015, the new conference center's 100,000 sf of meeting space offers a first-class meetings experience with state-of-the-art technology.

Held annually, WEC is MPI's signature event through which it delivers premier education, business and networking opportunities, attracting more than 2,000 attendees including corporate, third-party and association planners, suppliers, students, industry faculty and more. This will be the first time MPI has hosted a conference in Atlantic City or the State of New Jersey.

This year, WEC takes place August 1-4, 2015, in San Francisco at the Moscone Center. For more information or to register for WEC 2015, see www.mpiweb.org/wec15.

Meet Puerto Rico Forecasts a 53 Percent Increase in the Economic Impact of Meetings and Conventions This Summer

SAN JUAN, PR — Puerto Rico's group business this summer kicks off with 47 events and includes conferences, annual meetings and sports activities. This represents a total direct spending of \$22.6 million into the local economy and an increase of 53 percent compared to the same period last year when the economic impact was \$14.8 million, according to Milton Segarra, president and CEO of Meet Puerto Rico (MPR-Puerto Rico Convention Bureau).



SEGARRA

"The groups and conventions segment in Puerto Rico is a major driver in the tourism industry. One in four rooms occupied in hotels that can accommodate large-scale meetings belongs to the groups and conventions segment," said Segarra.

Segarra said that in the month of June, Puerto Rico will host 13 groups for an estimated total of 11,591 room nights and a direct expenditure of \$6.5 million. Fourteen groups are scheduled for July with a total of 10,336 hotel nights and a contribution of \$5.7 million. www.meetpuertorico.com

The Luxury Collection Hotels & Resorts to Make Chicago Debut

NEW YORK, NY — Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc. will introduce The Luxury Collection brand to Chicago, following the renovation and conversion of the Conrad Chicago. The hotel's new name will be announced at a later date. Owned by DiamondRock Hospitality, the hotel is located in a prime downtown Chicago location. The hotel boasts a second entrance on the Magnificent Mile shopping district on Michigan Avenue and offers direct access to The Shops at North Bridge. The hotel is within close proximity of the Chicago Loop and Navy Pier. www.luxurycollection.com, www.starwoodhotels.com

Marriott Survey Reveals Positive Trends for Meetings Business

BETHESDA, MD — Marriott's Convention & Resort Network (CRN), an integrated network of more than 60 JW Marriott, Autograph Collection Hotels, Renaissance Hotels, Marriott Hotels and Gaylord Hotels, recently conducted a survey that revealed positive trends: group demand, pickup and spend are all up for 2015 and beyond. Large meetings were defined as 50 percent of the largest group (peak rooms) a hotel would extend one group.

Group demand is reaching an all-time high. Corporate and incentive meeting leads are increasing. Seventy-eight percent of CRN hotels are seeing an increase in corporate leads, 90 percent of those coming from U.S. mainland resorts. And 71 percent of off-shore resorts are seeing an increase in incentive groups, and 50 percent of U.S. resorts are experiencing an increase in leads for incentive business.

Mike Wainwright, vice president sales strategy, Convention & Resort Network, said, "We are encouraged to see these trends as they underscore what is happening across our industry as a whole. Demand is exceeding pre-recession levels, which we see as increased confidence in the economy and an investment that companies are making in their employees."

Stability for large group bookings and meeting attendance is strong. Forty-seven percent of Marriott CRN hotels reported a decrease in cancellations versus two years ago, and 65 percent of hotels said the majority of large groups are achieving or exceeding their room blocks. "We are experiencing our strongest group pickup across our Network resorts. Attendees enjoy the opportunity to be very productive in meetings while recharging or discovering more about the destination with short pre- and post-stays. Resorts as a powerful option for meetings are back," said Wainwright. www.marriott.com/marriott/innovention-network.mi

Orlando Sets New Record for U.S. Tourism With More Than 62 Million Visitors



Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacobs and Visit Orlando President and CEO George Aguel celebrate the milestone.

ORLANDO, FL — Visit Orlando, the destination's official tourism association, announced that more than 62 million people visited Orlando in 2014, including 10 million who came for business and conventions. The announcement marks a new all-time record for the U.S. travel industry, solidifying Orlando's position as the most visited destination in the nation. Visitation grew five percent from 2013 as visitors from around the world came to experience all that is new across the ever-expanding destination.

"This historic milestone is the latest testament to Orlando's leadership in tourism," said Visit Orlando President and CEO George Aguel. "It's a tribute to the steadfast commitment and continued investment by our tourism community, the special brand of service that greets our visitors, and the global marketing and sales efforts of our Visit Orlando team and member companies."

A record 32 million room nights were sold in Orlando in 2014, resulting in bed tax collections topping \$200 million for the first time in Orange County, Florida, home to the Central Florida tourism district. www.orlandomeeting.com

Hyatt Boston Harbor Announces Completion of \$10 Million Renovation

BOSTON, MA — Hyatt Boston Harbor, located at the harbor's edge near Boston's Logan airport and minutes from downtown, completed a \$10 million renovation of the hotel's 270 guest rooms and suites. Perfect for guests on business and leisure, each guest room offers a new work desk with pop-up electrical plugs, plus LED lighting and bedside electrical outlets. The rooms feature comfortable, stylish chairs and ottomans, and decorative window treatments to match the new red, brown and neutral color scheme.

Guest rooms include soundproof windows, Hyatt Grand Beds, iHome docking stations and boast harbor and city views. The hotel's signature restaurant, Harborside Grill, serves farm-to-table seasonal cuisine and offers coffees, pastries and grab-and-go fare. Hyatt Boston Harbor offers a fully equipped 24-hour business center, StayFit gym and 24-hour complimentary airport shuttle services. A seven-minute water taxi ride brings guests to the center of Boston's business district. www.bostonharbor.hyatt.com

News & Notes

InterContinental Miami Upgrades Meeting Space in Second Phase of Renovation



The InterContinental Miami meeting space.

MIAMI, FL — InterContinental Miami, ranked No. 1 among all InterContinental Hotel properties across North America, is upgrading its more than 100,000 sf of meeting space. The iconic downtown hotel added new furnishings and fixtures throughout all meetings areas and corridors and expanded to 35 total meetings and banquet rooms. The new phase of upgrades will continue with the complete redesign and renovation of the hotel's pool deck and outdoor reception area, scheduled to begin in late 2015.

The hotel also launched new Miami-centric breakout menus that highlight the destination's Latin influence and culture. With classics such as cafficitos, Cuban sandwiches and tres leches desserts, guests can sample some of the city's most well-known Latin treats without leaving the hotel.

Celebrating more than 25 years as an icon of the downtown Miami skyline, the InterContinental Miami is located at the crossroads of Miami's Business and Arts & Entertainment districts. The hotel features 641 luxury guest rooms including 34 suites; three restaurants; a full-service fitness center and spa; and a rooftop pool deck with gardens. www.icmiamihotel.com

San Francisco Records Highest Ever Visitor Numbers and Spending

SAN FRANCISCO, CA — The San Francisco Travel Association reported that San Francisco welcomed 18.01 million visitors in 2014, an increase of 6.5 percent from 2013. These visitors spent \$10.67 billion in 2014, up 13.7 percent from the previous year.

The tourism industry generated \$665 million in taxes for the City of San Francisco, up 8 percent from the previous year. The number of jobs supported by tourism rose 13.2 percent to 87,005 jobs in 2014, with an annual payroll of \$2.67 billion, an increase of 15.9 percent.

In 2014, there was an average of 150,412 visitors in San Francisco each day. Visitor spending equated to \$29.23 million daily (including spending related to meetings and conventions).

In October, San Francisco Travel re-launched its website, www.sanfrancisco.travel, with a bold new design, large, dramatic photos and streamlined navigation that allows visitors to easily explore, plan and search for their exact needs and interests. The new site provides tools to help visitors at every stage of their planning process, from dreaming to arriving. www.sanfrancisco.travel

WTTC Says USA Will Retain Status as World's Biggest Travel & Tourism Economy in 2015

LONDON, ENGLAND — The United States will retain its status as the world's largest Travel & Tourism economy in 2015 ahead of China and Germany, according to research published by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC).

In 2014, the sector contributed US\$1,402 billion in GDP and 13.7 million jobs to the U.S. economy.

During 2015, the sector's GDP contribution is forecast to grow by 3.1 percent and employment by 1.7 percent. This demonstrates the sector's enduring ability to generate economic growth and create jobs.

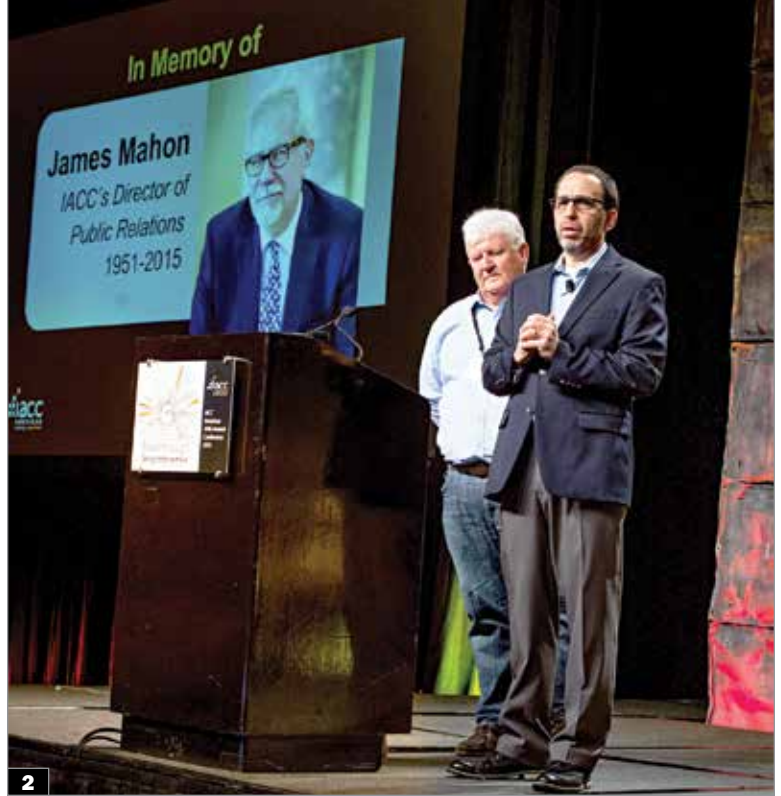
By the end of 2015, the Travel & Tourism sector will contribute US\$1,445 billion, 8 percent of the GDP

of the United States, and 13.9 million jobs, over 9 percent of total employment, once all direct, indirect and induced impacts are taken into account.

The U.S. continues to rank ahead of China, Germany, Japan and the U.K. when measured by the economic contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP.

www.wttc.org

Snapshots



Credits: 1-5 Genesis Photography; 6 Discover The Palm Beaches; 7 IAEE

1 The International Association of Conference Centres (IACC) held the IACC-Americas 34th Annual Conference at Benchmark Hospitality's Bonaventure Resort & Spa in Fort Lauderdale. Ken Mysterly (*l*), general manager of the Millennium Conference Center in Manhattan, and Jason MacEachen, director of catering and conference services, Dolce Aspen Meadows Resort, were presented with the IACC-Americas Award of Excellence by T.J. Fimmano, president, IACC-Americas **2** Peter Stewart, global president of IACC, joined Fimmano at the conference to pay tribute to James Mahon, the longtime IACC public relations director, who passed away shortly before the conference. **3** Bonaventure Resort & Spa General Manager Chas Reece and executive chef Bob Axenfeld share a laugh with Sigrid, an IACC-appointed meeting planner, in front of the resort's Ireland's Steakhouse. **4,5** Two IACC delegates make friends with some reptilian residents of Florida's Sawgrass Rescue Center. **6** Jorge Pesquera, president and CEO of Discover The Palm Beaches, with supporters at the fifth annual Travel Rally Day celebration. **7** The International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) E.V.P and COO Cathy Breden, CAE, CMP, (*l*) with the 2015 IAEE Woman of Achievement Award recipient Karen Chupka and Jennifer Muna (*r*), chair of the IAEE Women's Leadership Forum Task Force at the Women's Leadership Forum in Washington, DC.

By Sydney Wolf

CSR — Give Attendees More With Give-back Events

Social responsibility has always been a prominent and important part of our personal lives. As the interconnectivity between our personal and business lives grows, so does the desire for employees to give back at work. To this end, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) events are on the rise as they create goodwill with attendees and the community. Corporate groups of varying sizes are able to come together through a mix of different programs set up to benefit local or national nonprofit organizations. However, the key to success is selecting the right CSR activity for your group, as well as following some best practices.

CSR Is on the Rise

CSR is a hot topic of conversation among many meeting executives. It is more widely accepted that companies with a CSR policy seem to have more credibility and integrity with clients and customers. According to an article published by Meeting Professionals International (MPI), nine out of 10 meeting industry businesses actively engage in CSR. Meetings and events provide a great opportunity to meet this growing desire by team members to give back.

As quoted in the same article, Alex Kenyon from Leeds Metropolitan University stated that there is growing evidence that CSR agendas and strategies can enhance reputation and identity in the minds of stakeholders. Consider that 75 percent of CEOs are concerned about maintaining their organization's image, particularly with an increased appetite for transparency, communication and trust; it makes sense to explore avenues to enhance market value.

CSR activities not only increase brand equity from an external standpoint, but they also offer many internal opportunities for teambuilding. When integrated into a meeting or event, CSR logistics can be streamlined because people are already gathered in one spot. However, like any activity, there are some keys to success to ensure the activity meets your goals.

Getting Started

CSR activities come in all shapes and sizes. The important thing to consider is your objective so you can select the right cause. To begin, are there organizations that are already integrated into your organizational culture? If so, it may make sense to pick an activity or non-profit that is an extension of your brand or industry as it allows you to continue that relationship. For

example, if your company sells educational software, supporting local schools in the host city for your event may be a fun way to help attendees build a connection with their target audience. Case in point was a recent conference held in Nashville. Even though Nashville is known as the "Music City," the music programs in schools are historically underfunded. Building on the music theme because of the conference location, and educational theme because of the organization's product offering, an activity that catered to both themes created a rallying point for attendees.

The most effective and efficient CSR projects relate to the geographic region, organizational passion and available budget. One recent example was the August 2014 World Education Congress (WEC) Conference, hosted by MPI. Minneapolis-Saint Paul is the No. 1 metro area in the country for volunteerism. To spotlight Minneapolis' passion for philanthropy, event planning firm metroConnections, in partnership with Meet Minneapolis, conceptualized and executed a give-back event that turned the Minneapolis Convention Center into "CSR Central." Six different hands-on activities supporting eight local charities engaged attendees, while educating them on how to incorporate CSR initiatives into teambuilding events. The outcome was the assembly of 16 bikes and 500 personal hygiene kits, the stuffing of 96 backpacks, the sorting of 927 cans of food, the painting of 15 furniture pieces and the creation of 85 blankets.

Meeting attendees also can provide great insight into appropriate activities. This personal engagement helps them to be better advocates for the cause. Other factors to consider include issues that may impact that region, or even the time of year (such as a winter coat drive). However, it is key to recognize that initiatives don't always have to be large orchestrated events. Rather, an event may incorporate a recycling focus to ensure a CSR initiative. For example, consider ways in which you can reuse materials and handouts from the meeting.

Another consideration is whether or not this will be an annual activity. Since people tend to get bored easily, you may consider doing a similar activity each year to make CSR a tradition, albeit with new ideas mixed in every year.

Establish a Team

Once you have established your desire to engage in a CSR activity, select volunteers to organize the event who care about the

cause. They will not only feel more engaged but also will serve as advocates for the project. Although it is often advantageous to use a professional meeting planner for your event, it is still essential to have internal advocates for the CSR activity to create allegiance and excitement. Delegate action items to committee members to maximize the efficiency of the project. This allows the meeting's project manager to focus on the big picture.

One of the first steps for the CSR planning team should be reviewing the conference or meeting agenda to evaluate time and space restrictions. These factors are key to selecting the right activity. In addition to the available space and schedule factors, also consider the make-up of attendees as their demographic, attitudes and work styles can influence what you do. The necessary time and supplies for the activity also are key. For example, if you are planting a garden, are the right tools available and within reach for participants? If stuffing backpacks with school supplies, are the supplies in piles and organized for efficient stuffing? If your meeting is out of the area, assign a local advocate to work directly with the non-profit organization and coordinate logistics. On the day of the activity, assign a host who can help the group navigate throughout the activity. A host can really drive home the message of giving back and connect it to the company cornerstones. In addition to engaging the appropriate players to help manage the CRS event, it also is important to promote the activity. Many organizations choose to mandate attendance at the CRS activity to show how significant it is to the overall meeting or conference.

Debunking the Money Myth

Although there is a perception that CSR activities and donations can be costly, with proper planning, there are a variety of ways to alleviate the budget drain. The percentage of your overall meeting or conference budget that is tied to your CSR activity is really up to your team. There are no best practices or rules of thumb. Donating time, rather than monetary resources, is a simple and impactful way to give back without sacrificing the bottom line. Another idea to save money could be to provide an incentive for employees to give their own monetary donation during a conference. For example, if you wanted to raise \$10,000 for a charity but couldn't justify it as a company, auction off extra vacation days for employees.

Another means to afford a CSR activity is to look for funds outside of the conference or event budget. While the confer-



Credit: metroConnections

A bike-build activity, which provides bikes to kids who now have transportation to school or home, can be customized for your group.

ence budget can cover the cost of the facility rental and actual organization of the activity, there may be funds available from a corporate CSR line item or other funding mechanism. If you are donating goods or resources, oftentimes companies use a different internal budget center, which helps make the activities more feasible.

It's Good for Business

Although CSR may be the trendy topic in the business world today, the benefits are real. Integrating CSR into your next event, provided it is accomplished in a mindful way, creates goodwill for all involved.

(See page 18 for more on CSR.)

C&IT



Sydney Wolf

has been working in the Event Services division at metroConnections since May 2011. As a member of the Sales Team, Sydney leverages her expertise in creative design, program management and event logistics to create experiences for metroConnections clients. With previous roles as Event Coordinator and Program Manager, she can help clients understand the process from start to finish as she works alongside the Operations Team every step of the way. Sydney holds a degree in Sports, Entertainment and Event Management from Johnson & Wales University with an emphasis in Sales and Meeting Management.

International Meetings

It's a big world and getting bigger. As more companies go global, more places in the world make sense as a meeting destination, which makes choosing the right one exponentially harder.

It's not just about location. It's also about culture, facilities, tantalizing opportunities, growth, relationships, how business is done, what languages are spoken, what documentation is required and how many flights

Dubai is quickly becoming one of the world's most intriguing destinations for meetings and incentives.

go in and out each day. The upside to so many options is that with good research, every planner should find a destination that's the right fit. Here are a few top choices to consider.

Australia — Wish List Destination

Australia offers a dynamic business environment and is a country that continues to invest in exceptional facilities. The \$1.1 billion International Convention Center will open in Sydney's Darling Harbour late 2016. There's the new West Building at Adelaide Convention Centre and a new space ac-

commodating 700 at Star Event Centre in Sydney. The five-star Mayfair Hotel opened in Adelaide, construction began in January on an onsite hotel at the three-year-old Royal International Convention Centre in Brisbane, and Four Points by Sheraton Sydney embarked on a \$200 million redevelopment plan that will add substantial meeting and event space, among other things.

Australia is a top wish-list destination for North Americans, meaning it can boost attendance. And according to Jane Whitehead, vice president, the Americas, at Tourism Australia, the country easily inspires, motivates and rewards. "We understand



Broadening

By
Christine
Loomis

Global Business Means Looking Beyond Borders

the importance of excellent service, and our service professionals are warm and friendly while also being adept at handling events of all sizes and will go the extra distance to ensure perfect event execution,” she says. “Australia offers truly inspiring teambuilding experiences, from sailing regattas to surfing lessons to indigenous experiences. Whether you’re looking for active pursuits or cultural discovery, we can tailor unique experiences that will create lasting memories and bonds.”

Australia is so expansive geographically that at any given time of year there’s someplace for corporate and incentive groups to meet, and Australia offers some of the best wine and food in

the world. Bottom line: “Australia,” says Whitehead, “has a proven track record of hosting successful business events.”

Dubai — On the Move

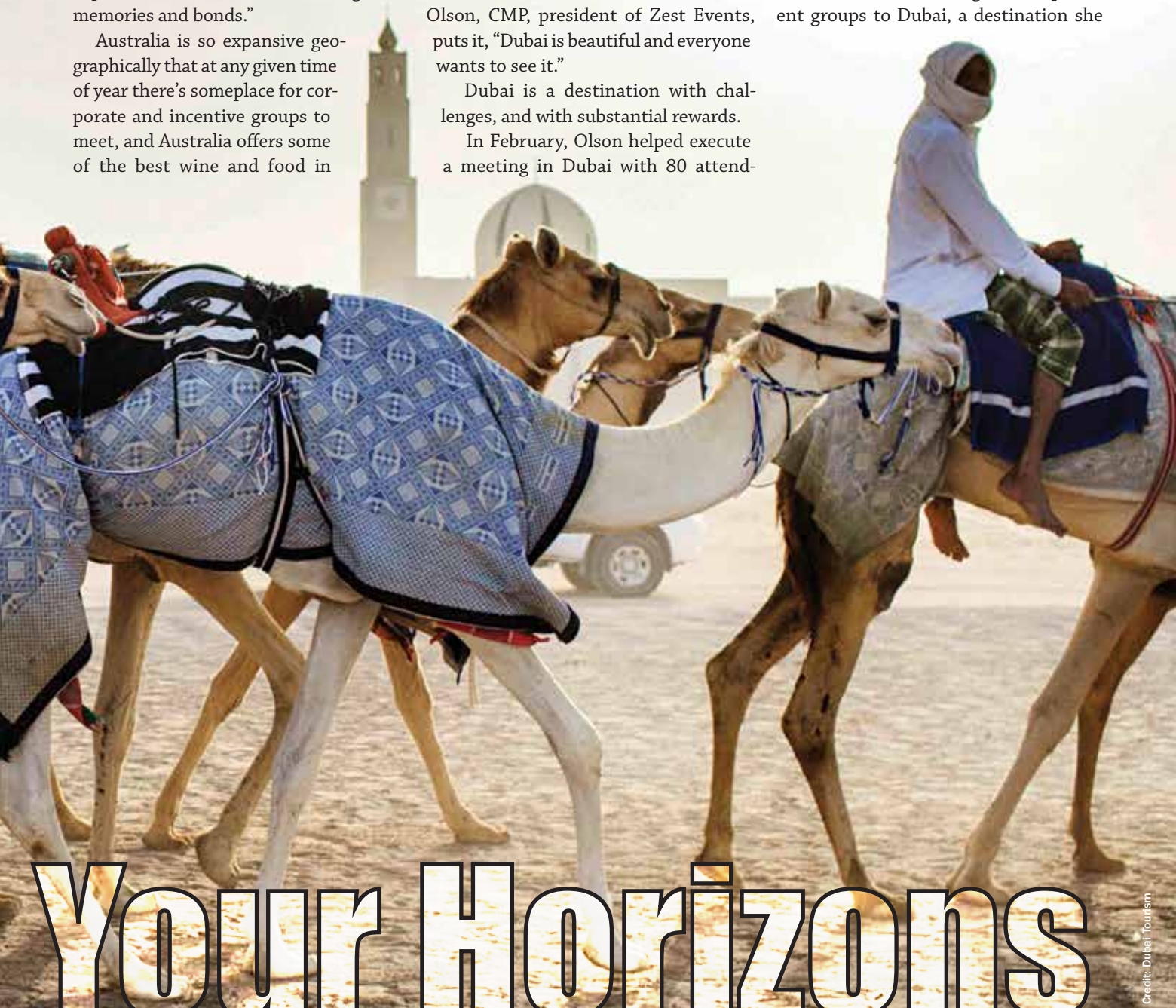
A decade ago, much of the world knew nothing about Dubai. In 2014, 71 million international passengers passed through the city’s airport — more than went through London’s Heathrow — and today Dubai is an “it” destination for business and leisure travel. As Louise Olson, CMP, president of Zest Events, puts it, “Dubai is beautiful and everyone wants to see it.”

Dubai is a destination with challenges, and with substantial rewards.

In February, Olson helped execute a meeting in Dubai with 80 attend-

ees for UL, the safety consulting and certification company headquartered in Illinois. The meeting was based at The Palace, Downtown Dubai, which Olson says was chosen for its “location, service and beauty.” The challenge, says Olson, is that Dubai is “very expensive to get to and rates for hotel, food and beverage can be high.”

Zabrina Hazeltine, CMP, CMM, president of Hamilton Group Meeting Planners Inc., has brought multiple client groups to Dubai, a destination she



Credit: Dubai Tourism

Your Horizons

for Meetings — Here Are Some Tantalizing Options

likes because it's new and convenient to Europe. But she also experienced challenges, in one case, maybe too much of a good thing. "So many hotels are coming online each month, inventory is constantly growing and new areas of the city are springing up all the time," she says. "It's difficult to narrow down choices."

Additionally, Hazeltine notes, "I could do more business there if they had fewer visa restrictions, and not allowing Israeli passport-holders to get a visa is a deterrent for a lot of our groups."

But the benefits to meeting in Dubai are many. For one, it's likely to boost attendance. "It's an exciting destination and attendance is good because it's a new destination with new business opportunities," Hazeltine points out. Moreover, she calls the city "easy to work with," noting that her contacts were fluent in English, responded quickly and were easy to negotiate with — all attributes that help planners working in international locations.

Looking to the future, Dubai will host the World Expo in 2020, a mega event held every five years that attracts millions of visitors and global leaders. City tourism officials believe it will propel Dubai forward as one of the world's top destinations for meetings and events.



The triangular Emirates Towers in Dubai house a five-star hotel, office space and upscale shopping and dining.

which hosts the Hard Rock Cafe Fiji and a number of shops and restaurants, perfect for downtime or regional team dinners."

The team also worked closely with Tourism Fiji. "They connected us to all the organizations we needed to plan alongside. Our vendors, especially Rosie Holidays, were extremely

willing to help us coordinate activities for the sales team to help them sell this destination in the future. Of course, we could not have hosted this meeting in Fiji without the support from Fiji Airways, who is our key partner to this destination."

Sullivan has high praise for Fiji as a destination but is aware of its challenges, too. "Fiji is an exciting destination, but we knew it would take a significant amount of planning based on its location." He also notes, "It's also important to be familiar with Fiji and its culture/weather, etc. We knew that we needed a backup plan for events in case the weather didn't cooperate."

As for highlights, Sullivan says, "Captain Cook Cruises provided us with a full-day excursion out to a private island. It was certainly a highlight of the meeting!" But perhaps the best event of all was taking the sales team to one of the Collette Foundation sites. The entire group volunteered with projects such as painting and gardening to help Koroipita

Fiji — South Pacific Adventures

Collette is a travel company so it makes sense that it sets its global sales meetings in the destinations it covers. "We sell travel, and we offer unparalleled travel experiences on over 160 tours to every continent," says Dan Sullivan Jr., Collette's president and CEO. "Hosting our sales meetings in destinations where we offer tours provides training and knowledge to our sales managers that we can't provide through a webinar or brochure. When they get to experience a destination firsthand, they have the enthusiasm and personal stories to share with group travel professionals."

In December 2014, the meeting took place on Fiji's Denarau Island at Sofitel Fiji Resort & Spa, which has the meeting space Collette needed. "The staff was extremely helpful in arranging anything that was needed," Sullivan says. "The Sofitel is perfectly located a short walk from Port Denarau Shopping Centre,



The Collette travel company's global sales meeting in Fiji included a Collette Foundation CSR activity to aid Koroipita Village.

Village with much needed attention (learn more in this video of that day: www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9NYedLEDu4).

Fiji is committed to meetings business. In November, Tourism Fiji announced the establishment of the country's first convention bureau, expected to launch in 2015. Last year, Sheraton Fiji Resort opened a new convention facility, the largest on Denarau Island, which seats 1,700 theater-style; 1,000 for a banquet. Three resorts completed major renovations in March: Vomo Island Resort, Matamanoa Island Resort and Namale Resort & Spa. Captain Cook Cruises Fiji also refurbished its sailing catamaran, Fiji One, popular for private group charters.

Greece — by Land and Sea

A cradle of modern civilization, Greece has strong appeal for conferences attended by people in the arts and sciences. How can attendees not be inspired by art and architecture that still awes after centuries, to say nothing of the sea and terrain that define the Greek isles? The hardest choice for planners may be deciding between the urban riches of Athens and the appealing natural bounty and intimacy of the islands.

According to Visit Greece, the country's tourism organization, the seas around Greece are also drawing planners to book boats as floating conference centers, offering attendees the chance to moor in multiple harbors. With its mild climate, Greece is a year-round destination and travel is streamlined because

“So many hotels are coming online each month, inventory is constantly growing and new areas of (Dubai) are springing up all the time. It's difficult to narrow down choices.”

Zabrina Hazeltine, CMP, CMM
Hamilton Group Meeting Planners Inc., Tustin, CA

no visa is required for Canadian and U. S. citizens.

Hong Kong — Cultural Crossroad

“From its strategic location to sophisticated infrastructure and leading-

edge venues, Hong Kong is one of the world's leading meeting destinations,” says Bill Flora, U.S. director of the Hong Kong Tourism Board. “There's no better base to connect with mainland China's

international influences and offers facilities, hotels and infrastructure firmly in place. Meetings with thousands of attendees are no problem. Hong Kong Convention Center and AsiaWorld-Expo offer 975,000 and 753,000 sf, respectively, and there are nearly 73,000 hotel rooms. In 2013, Kai Tak Cruise Terminal opened overlooking Victoria Harbour. Built on a former runway of Kai Tak airport, the terminal features four indoor venues that accommodate 3,000 guests each. On the expansive roof, a garden provides an inspiring setting for functions. Other worthy venues include Hong Kong Maritime Museum and PMQ, the historic site of the former Police Married Quarters.

It's not just about facilities. Hong Kong is a cultural crossroad. Its East-



Planner-to-Planner Tips

Louise Olson, CMP, President, Zest Events

- Network with other professional planners who have worked in those destinations because doing business offshore is different than in the U.S.
- Ask a lot of questions to understand how much of meeting room rental is negotiable (it can be very, very high in the first proposals from some countries and negotiated down to less than half).
- Understand you WILL pay meeting room rentals even if you have food functions in the room in most offshore hotels.
- Find a very, very good DMC at your destination, ideally through networking with other professionals. Interview them when you make a site visit.
- DO make a site visit before picking the hotel.

Zabrina Hazeltine, CMP, CMM, President, Hamilton Group Meeting Planners Inc.

- Understand local and national holidays and how they may impact your meeting if you book over a holiday.
- Know your meeting attendees, where they are coming from and ensure the visa requirements for your international destination will allow everyone to attend.
- Have clear knowledge of transportation options to the destination; don't be afraid to consider a second-tier city in the region as they often offer great value.
- Ensure the contract terms and conditions are clearly outlined and expectations of both parties are defined.

Dan Sullivan Jr., president and CEO, Collette

- It's important to start thinking about these meetings up to two years in advance. From a logistical perspective, you will need that time to consider the pros and cons of certain locations and destinations.
- Understand that not every destination will work out.

— CL

meets-West culture has appeal for conference-goers from both sides of the Pacific, and that multiculturalism extends to the superb cuisine and notable shopping, as well as to diverse cultural attractions. Attendees can learn such skills as traditional lion-dancing and dragon-boat racing, experience a traditional fishing village or take to the seas in a tall ship, among other options.

Iceland — Meeting in the Middle

Iceland is a primary destination for meetings, drawing attendees from North America and Europe. The tagline for Meet in Reykjavik, the capital city's convention bureau and go-to resource for planners, puts it this way:

Let's Meet in the Middle. Founded in 2012, a joint venture of the city of Reykjavik, Icelandair Group and Harpa Concert Hall and Conference Center, the bureau's goal is to make Reykjavik one of the top 10 meeting cities in Europe.

Between 2014 and 2017 Reykjavik's hotel-room inventory is slated to increase from 3,400 to 5,500. Three new hotels will open in the city center this year, including Fosshotel Reykjavik, with 320 rooms and conference facilities. Two new Icelandair hotels will open in 2016, including one near the convention center. And in 2017, a five-star hotel will open at Iceland's most famous attraction, the Blue Lagoon. The hotel will feature private access to the lagoon, and the plan is to build new conference facilities as well. As for event and reception spac-

es, Iceland delivers that "wow" factor at such venues as The Whales of Iceland museum; The Pearl, a visually striking dome and revolving restaurant; and Inside the Volcano, open summers, which puts visitors inside an actual volcano.

Ireland — A Great Buy

The reasons meeting planners consistently turn to Ireland for corporate and incentive trips are many. "Ireland

"Ireland offers value and has never been easier to get to, with direct services from 14 gateways across North America. The availability of a U.S. CBP (Customs and Border Protection) pre-clearance facility at Dublin and Shannon airports provides an added benefit for clients traveling from across the country by reducing connecting times."

Jodi Swailes, senior buyer, geographic specialist with ITA Group, of-



"Fiji is an exciting destination, but we knew it would take a significant amount of planning based on its location. ... We knew that we needed a backup plan for events in case the weather didn't cooperate."

Dan Sullivan Jr., President and CEO
Collette, Pawtucket, RI

offers the complete package and is fortunate to enjoy high satisfactions levels. The combination of world-class infrastructure as it relates to the range of accommodations, meeting space and technology options, and the wide variety of unique and authentic experiences all brought together by Ireland's renowned brand of hospitality have made Ireland one of the top European incentive travel destinations for North American corporations," says Alison Metcalfe, executive vice president, U.S. and Canada, Tourism Ireland. "There has also been continued investment in new experiences to excite and delight such as the 'Game of Thrones' Tour in Northern Ireland, the Wild Atlantic Way, new culinary tours and our championship links golf, which remains as good as ever.

fers a few additional reasons. "Ireland is a great buy, even before the lower exchange rate," she says. "The size of the country allows you to give participants multiple experiences — city of Dublin combined with the countryside of Killarney and the Cliffs of Mohr — or a less-traveled experience such as Belfast and Northern Ireland." She adds that guests feel comfortable in part because English is spoken and many North American visitors have ancestors from Ireland. But, Swailes notes, "The people are what really make the destination. They're extremely friendly, and they enjoy meeting Americans."

Macao — the Las Vegas of Asia

Macao is a compact 11 square miles but offers extraordinary richness of history, culture and experience. Set on a peninsula on China's south coast 37 miles from Hong Kong, Macao also encompasses the islands of Taipa and Coloane, now connected by a strip of landfill transformed into a neighborhood of high-rise hotels, shops, theaters and casinos. It's no accident that the Cotai Strip, with 9,000 hotel rooms, evokes Las Vegas. Familiar hospital-



The Whales of Iceland exhibit in the Reykjavik harbor area is a strikingly unique venue for meetings and events.

Credit: The Whales of Iceland



The 12th century Malahide Castle and Gardens in Dublin, Ireland, hosts indoor and outdoor corporate events, private tours and banquet dining.

ity brands include the expansive Sands Cotai Central resort, home to the Conrad Macao, Holiday Inn Macao Cotai Central and Sheraton Macao Hotel, Cotai Central. Nearby is the Venetian Macao. Macao also has a Wynn and an MGM.

The Sheraton Macao is meeting central with more than 3,000 guest rooms and its Kashgar Grand Ballroom accommodating 5,000. Six other ballrooms accommodate 12 to 2,000. Among the hotel's interesting options are Fit meetings, based on the integrated approach to training used at Exos (formerly Athletes' Performance) facilities.

Madrid — Means Business

Madrid came in at No. 11 on the *Condé Nast Traveler* list of best international cities for business travelers. It's the third largest metro area in Europe and was ranked by Eurostat as the continent's second safest capital. Madrid is a dynamic city with much to offer groups — year after year. According to the Madrid Convention Bureau, 13 new hotels and 24 new restaurants opened in the city from 2013–2014. Meeting space is diverse and includes such options as the lower level of the mega Apple store, which opened in 2014. Madrid is also home to four major convention and exhibition centers, 89 museums, 14 universities, 27 golf courses and lots of sunshine, making it an alluring meeting and incentive destination on multiple levels.

Mexico — VAT-free

Mexico is meetings friendly. According to Visit Mexico, the country's tourism organization, there are 68 major convention and exposition centers across the country and 500,000 hotel rooms in more than 3,000 luxury hotels. It's also budget-friendly. Meetings and conferences are exempt from the VAT tax, which equates to a 15 percent discount on a range of meeting services. Mexico is culturally rich, with 29,000 archaeological sites and 31 UNESCO World Heritage Sites. And U.S. and Canadian citizens with a valid passport don't need a visa.

In spite of news stories about cartel violence, the fact is that the violence is region-specific, and there are no travel advisories in place for the vast majority of Mexican cities and resorts where meetings take place, including Cancun, Cozumel, Playa del Carmen, Riviera Maya, Tulum, Riviera Nyarit, Los Cabos, Puerto Vallarta, Guadalajara, San Miguel de Allende, Zihuatanejo, Ixtapa, Mazatlan, Mexico City and Leon.

Scotland — Home of Golf

The ultimate bucket-list destination for lovers of golf has to be in St. Andrews, the Home of Golf. While the immediate area boasts 11 courses, The Old Course Hotel offers corporate golf programs that include 18 holes of play, snacks, a main meal and an awards presentation. Located an hour from Glasgow

and Edinburgh, the five-star Gleneagles golf and spa resort offers three championship courses, including the Kings Course dating back to 1919. Gleneagles is converting one of its Activity School equestrian arenas into a nearly 27,000-sf modern, multipurpose event space. Located within the hotel's 850-acre estate, the venue will have capacity to cater up to 2,000 guests for concerts, launches and brand-experience events.

Singapore — Golden Jubilee

A city-state of remarkable diversity, Singapore's native population is made up of Chinese, Malay, Indian, Peranakan and Eurasian cultures, which can be seen in the food, art and architecture. 2015 marks Singapore's Golden Jubilee, its 50th year of independence. The celebration will feature significant events throughout the year, including the opening of the National Gallery of Singapore with its impressive collection of art, and the Jubilee Walk, a designated city walk with trail markers and new public artworks to commemorate Singapore at 50.

Singapore is also business- and meeting-savvy. Among its new programs is My Way in a Day, a digital game that introduces Singapore to the meetings sector to showcase the history, culture, food, heritage, new attractions and more, giving planners substantial information in a fun, easy-to-access way. Also new in the past year or so are eight hotels, giving planners plenty of options. **C&IT**

Social Responsibility



Credit: Sergio Martinez

The CSR Movement

Giving Back in Big Ways

By Maura Keller

Most of us are no strangers to the world of philanthropy and the concept of “doing good.” We’ve been asked to lend our time and financial support to various charitable causes. We often are solicited by groups to help combat various diseases, construct new buildings or save the rainforest. And for many causes, business professionals are the cornerstones of these efforts — participating in philanthropic initiatives and charitable endeavors during onsite or offsite meetings and events.

Business volunteerism, often referred to as corporate social responsibility (CSR), can take many forms and can

be a quadruple win. Everyone involved — the organizations that provide the employee volunteers, those where employee volunteers help out, the wider community and the employees themselves — has something to gain.

Such efforts offer a low-cost, low-risk, high-impact way of making the knowledge, skills and experiences of the business sector accessible to the non-profit sector while building understanding, employee skill and community goodwill.

And experts agree that business professionals who volunteer during meetings and events find their experiences inspiring, empowering and sometimes

Cintas employees receive a warm welcome and thanks from local Cancun school parents for assembling hundreds of new school backpacks for their children.

life-changing. They are giving the opportunity to practice service and compassion for those who need it most.

The Human Element

According to Lauren Deese, account supervisor of corporate events at GMR Marketing, a Milwaukee, Wisconsin-based global, full-service engagement marketing agency that creates custom solutions for clients to meet their specific CSR goals, numerous corporate clients want to give back to the community as part of goodwill activities that serve

a higher purpose while also empowering employees to do more.

“The most popular component of CSR programs are those real-life moments when a child’s smile or a mother’s thank you resonate with our guests and let the attendees experience firsthand how they are making a difference,” Deese says. “It’s the human element that is so vital to the success of a CSR program.”

From orchestrating the distribution of meals to Hurricane Sandy victims to painting the gym at a local Boys & Girls Club, many of these activities are becoming part of companies’ meeting and events initiatives — especially at offsite locales including resorts and convention venues.

“In our regional office in Charlotte, North Carolina, I chair a committee that runs an internal CSR program called Casual for a Cause (CFAC),” Deese says. “We help promote an employee-nominated charitable cause within the organization on a monthly basis. All GMR employees that donate or volunteer to support the monthly cause are permitted to dress casual for a designated CFAC week each month. This not only supports the passions of our employees but also our local community.”

Companies increasingly are offering

employees the opportunity to participate in philanthropy as part of a structured meeting or event — and believe they’ll attract the best people by doing so. It gives everyone a chance to make a difference as not everyone can afford to donate to charities each year, so this helps them be a part of the greater good.

On August 15, 2014 GMR Marketing and the Cancun

of school supplies relieves some of that burden and helps promote pride in education in the young students of Mexico.

“This social responsibility initiative is part of the annual Cintas President’s Club program, an incentive program for Cintas sales employee-partners produced by GMR in partnership with Cintas since 2009,” Deese says.

In addition to the school supplies,



“The most popular component of CSR programs are those real-life moments when a child’s smile or a mother’s thank you resonate with our guests and let the attendees experience firsthand how they are making a difference.”

Lauren Deese, Account Supervisor, Corporate Events
GMR Marketing, Charlotte, NC

destination management company, Meeting Incentive Experts (MIE), assisted Cintas Corporation with an initiative to donate 850 backpacks filled with school supplies to students at the Raza de Bronce elementary school in Cancun, Mexico. While education in Mexico is government-funded, the funding is not adequate to cover all of a school’s needs.

As Deese explains, often this burden falls to the students’ parents, who most often are not in a financial position to take on the burden. Cintas’ donation

Cintas donated sports equipment including a dozen each of volleyballs, soccer balls and basketballs along with soccer goals. MIE and GMR also were inspired to participate in the philanthropy. They, along with Cintas, donated funds to purchase truckloads of gravel to refurbish the school yard, and they hired cleaning and plumbing crews to restore the school’s neglected restrooms to full working order.

According to Deese, Cintas introduced this social responsibility initiative



Corporate groups that seek outdoor CSR projects can turn to organizations such as Save Our Shores and similar groups that offer beach cleanup projects among other environmental-related advocacy and action opportunities.

Credit: Save Our Shores

to the reward trip in 2013 by donating 500 backpacks filled with school supplies to the students of a local elementary school in Playa del Carmen, Mexico.

“CSR programs, like Cintas’, continue to grow within the meeting and events industry because they provide a unique teambuilding experience while also inspiring pride in the organization and fostering a company’s culture of integrity and service,” Deese says. “The CSR experience is often the most appreciated and talked about event within our multi-day events and meetings. This is especially the case during incentive programs when attendees take time to reflect and celebrate their own successes. Knowing that they can share their successes with the community and make the world a better place is a very powerful feeling to impart. The stories and buzz that surround a well-executed CSR program truly are priceless.”

A Greater Good

Asilomar Conference Grounds, in Pacific Grove, California, also places a strong emphasis on CSR.

As Suzan Carabarin, director of conference services at Asilomar explains, their facility incorporates sustainable efforts into everything that they do including offering environmentally friendly options and volunteer opportunities to companies that are considering hosting a meeting or event at Asilomar.

“When we speak with companies about hosting an event one of the things we discuss is CSR, it’s part of our sales package,” Carabarin says. “For example, we offer everything from sustainable meals to refillable water bottle dispensers at meetings rather than individual plastic water bottles. Additionally, we partner with organizations such as Ag Against Hunger, Pacific Grove Museum, Habitat for Humanity and the Food Bank for Monterey County to offer volunteer opportunities for groups.”

Carabarin is seeing a much greater demand for properties to offer sustainable options to those hosting meetings

and events. For this reason, there has been an increase in industry standards.

“We have found that companies are recognizing it’s the right thing to do,” Carabarin says. “They are looking for volunteer opportunities now for teambuilding events



“By incorporating CSR into a meeting, it allows employees to interact with their environment, do something worthwhile, promotes teambuilding and camaraderie while educating them about needs in the community.”

Suzan Carabarin, Director of Conference Services
Asilomar Conference Grounds, Pacific Grove, CA

and group activities. Companies want to give back and show they are active in the community.

Standards have increased for the properties as well. Groups are booking events based on what the properties are doing from an environmental perspective.”

Asilomar works with a variety of local organizations to provide volunteer opportunities to their clients. For example, recently a group built birdhouses for the native birds around the area, while another group did planting work in Asilomar’s greenhouse.

“By incorporating CSR into a meeting or event, it allows employees to interact with their environment, do something worthwhile with their free time, promotes teambuilding and camaraderie while also educating them about various topics and needs that exist in the community,” Carabarin says.

Doing Good Together

When looking for teambuilding activities that give back, meeting and event clients from around the country regularly turn to Marlton, New Jersey-based Team Builders Plus, the largest teambuilding company in the U.S.

“Years ago we started with a program

called Wheels for the World, which is a program where the participants engage in team initiatives to earn bike parts,” says Team Builders Plus CEO and planner Jeff Backal. “They then build and decorate new bikes that are donated to underprivileged children. What the par-



ticipants do not know is, we have pre-arranged for the kids to come running in the room at the end of the program. Once the participants see the smiles on the kids' faces, there is typically not a dry eye in the room."

Because of the increased interest in CSR teambuilding-focused events, Team Builders Plus also initiates Smile Kits whereby participants create care packages that are donated to kids in children's hospitals, our military overseas or animal shelters.

"Our Kindness Wins event is a treasure hunt-type of activity, but as opposed to finding answers to clues, the groups are performing Acts of Kindness, such as recycling bottles and cans, inflate the beachball and give it to a stranger, and build the kite and let a stranger use and keep it," Backal says.

And during their Mini Golf Charity Classic, participants create a miniature golf course made out of canned food. They then play the course.

Following the game, all of the cans are donated to a local food bank.

"Once a client goes through one of these programs, the participants realize this is not a typical teambuilding event and everyone leaves feels great about themselves as they had the opportunity to help others," Backal says. "It creates such a memorable event that the participants share their experiences with friends, family and coworkers. This word-of-mouth awareness results in an increasing number of groups wanting to experience the same."

Alternative Ways to Embrace CSR

While many companies are incorporating philanthropic efforts and volunteerism into their meetings and events, others are determining ways their meetings can give back to the environment, through alternative corporate responsibility initiatives.

Hilton continues to drive meaning-

ful change within their organization and in the communities where they live, work and travel.

"In fact, our corporate responsibility strategy, 'Travel with Purpose,' was the inspiration behind the recent launch of Meet with Purpose, a concept designed to make it even easier for meeting professionals to reduce waste and incorporate health and wellness into meetings and events," says Andrew Flack, vice president, B2B marketing and customer insights at Hilton Worldwide.

As Flack explains, Meet with Purpose has two focus areas: Mindful Eating, which encourages meeting professionals to minimize food waste and make healthy choices, and Mindful Meeting, which helps meeting professionals host more sustainable events.

"From the initial planning stages, our sales team presents customers with a menu of options to add sustainable and healthy practices to their event, allowing them to easily select those that best



Attendees pose with their "smile kits," which will generate many more smiles once they are donated to kids in children's hospitals and in the U.S. military overseas.

meet their needs,” Flack says. For example, Hilton offers solutions such as locally sourced food, preplated meals for reduced waste, central water stations and paperless registration.

“From there, we work to customize each event to ensure that our customers get the most out of the planning process and to infuse greater purpose into the final outcome,” Flack says.

Hilton also was one of the first major multibrand companies in the hospitality industry to make sustainability measurement and improvement a brand standard with the launch of LightStay, a proprietary system that measures sustainability performance by tracking more than 200 utility and operational metrics such as energy, water, carbon and waste. The tool features a “meeting impact calculator” that can calculate the sustainability impact of meetings or events held at any of our hotels.

“As we’ve seen an uptick in companies interested in planning more meaningful, sustainable meetings, ensuring we have dedicated, accessible and useful solutions for meeting professionals is critical for us,” Flack says. In fact, Hilton’s corporate responsibility strategy, Travel with Purpose, encourages every one of their hotels to find meaningful ways to contribute to the thousands of communities they touch in one way or another.

As Flack explains, this comes to life in many different ways, from Hilton hotels partnering with organizations such as the Global Soap Project to donate discarded soap to be reprocessed into new bars for vulnerable populations around the world, to activating more than 3,500 volunteer projects company-wide during Hilton’s annual Global Week of Service.

Flack associates the growth of corporate responsibility within the meetings and events industry primarily with greater consumer awareness.

“We also see it as a byproduct of increased consumer demand for hyperpersonalization and transparency in

how companies deliver their products and services,” Flack says. “Today’s meeting professionals are looking for tailored, unique solutions, and today’s attendees are seeking personal, memorable experiences. By making meetings and events more purposeful, brands can deliver just that.”

Maria Barboza, events manager at Los Suenos Marriott Costa Rica, agrees. “As a whole, the corporate social responsibility industry continues to gain traction this year, with social impact increasingly making its way into every segment of the market and transparency becoming the new norm,”

Barboza says. Currently Marriott Costa Rica offers meeting and event attendees a variety of CSR options in-



“Hilton works to customize each event to ensure that our customers get the most out of the planning process and to infuse greater purpose into the final outcome.”

Andrew Flack, Vice President of B2B Marketing and Customer Insights
Hilton Worldwide, McLean, VA

cluding the opportunity to participate in the The Reforest the Rainforest program, which reintroduces the scarlet macaw to their natural habitat, an alliance with Habitat for Humanity, and a waste-water educational program.

Marriott’s Reforest the Rainforest initiative allows meeting and event attendees to participate in the resort’s ongoing efforts to preserve the rainforest while creating a habitat for the area’s 150 species of birds and local wildlife. Guests can participate in the complimentary program by planting a Tropical Almond Tree, beneficial for the preservation of the iconic macaw, along the property’s La Iguana Golf Course located on a 1,100-acre rainforest overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The Reforest the Rainforest initiative is part of the Scarlet Macaw Reinsertion Project, the property’s ongoing initiative to preserve the rainforest while creating a habitat specifically for the endangered macaw.

What the Future Holds

Deese expects that CSR programs will continue to grow in popularity as an element of meetings and events. As the demand increases, planners, facilities and destination management companies are going to have to be more creative, and the ability to create custom programs will be essential.

“We continue to see the build-a-bike CSR experience being offered in multiple markets these days and eventually clients are going to say, ‘Ah, we’ve done that. We want to do something new,’” Deese says. “Unfortunately, there are plenty of communities and people in need, so there is a world of opportunity for creativity within the CSR landscape. Tapping into the most essential needs of the local market or into the strengths

and passions of the attendees so that the CSR program makes the most positive community impact, will be key.”

Carabarin adds that while companies strive to differentiate themselves from competitors, they are becoming increasingly more transparent about their desire to give back and have an environmental footprint. “Surveys have shown that employees are happier when they can be active in communities and look favorably upon companies that offer those kinds of benefits,” Carabarin says.

“CSR has become the norm now for corporate functions. It has replaced the elaborate gala or reception,” Carabarin says. “We are doing a lot more organic and sustainable meals and planning more outdoor activities and events. We have even seen brides and grooms, for example, planting trees to commemorate their special day. We anticipate we will continue to see this shift in mindset.”

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Atlantic City's Rebirth



Credits: Boardwalk, Meet AC; James Wood, Thomas Robert Clarke

America's first — the iconic Atlantic City Boardwalk was dedicated on June 16, 1870. Nearly 150 years later, the Travel Channel named the storied Boardwalk as "The Best Beach Boardwalk" in the world.

A Reenergized Meetings and Conventions Market Is Leading the Charge to Diversify Growth Beyond Gaming

Lady Luck has not smiled on Atlantic City's gaming industry in recent years. Revenue in that segment has fallen since 2007, and four casinos have closed to date. A major reason is competition: While Atlantic City is still considered the gaming capital of the East Coast, up-and-coming gaming markets in Delaware, Pennsylvania and Connecticut have been siphoning away clientele.

Fortunately, Atlantic City has many other cards to play in the tourism business, from its nostalgic appeal to great entertainment, restaurants and shopping. For incoming meeting groups, it also offers top-tier function space and services by upscale brands such as Caesars, Tropicana and Trump.

By Patrick Simms

"Meet AC makes it a point to be very knowledgeable of what assets they have within the city. They do not play favoritism in any way; that's been my experience."

Sally O'Shea, CEM

Comprehensive Show Management Inc., Philadelphia, PA



Non-gaming Revenue

Focusing on these non-gaming virtues has effectively led to the "rebirth" of this classic resort town, renowned for Americana such as The Boardwalk and the Miss America Pageant. The Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA) reports that in the

Event managers such as Sally O'Shea have discovered an improved Atlantic City Convention Center since the management change to Global Spectrum.

last two years, non-gaming revenues have increased by more than \$160 million and are now nearing \$1 billion annually. Group bookings at the city's primary meeting hotels also have been on the rise, increasing by more than 22 percent since 2009.

But the "new" Atlantic City has certainly not left the success of its meetings business to chance. It is taking calculated measures to ensure that the revenue stream continues trending upward. A significant step was the formation of the CRDA-funded Meet AC last April and the appointment of James Wood as its CEO. Formerly president and CEO of the Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau, Wood is intent on fulfilling Atlantic City's potential as a meetings hub. "Knowing that the convention market is one that used to be vibrant here in Atlantic City years ago, (we're trying to) reenergize that aspect of the business



Credit: Meet AC

ments, including corporate, regional association and sports, so that's very encouraging for us." Sports convention business in particular will benefit from the new Atlantic City Sports Commission, launched in January.

Wood indicates the city is on track to realize a 20 percent increase over 2014 in its meetings business this year. During the first quarter of 2015, the Meet AC sales team brought 30 conventions and meetings to the Atlantic City Convention Center and another 19 to the city's hotel properties. That's

"We're seeing growth in multiple segments, including corporate, regional association and sports, so that's very encouraging for us."

James Wood, CEO
Meet AC, Atlantic City, NJ

and bring more meetings and conventions back to Atlantic City." The effort has seen results, with 8 percent more group bookings and 15 percent more convention-related room nights, in 2014 than in 2013. "We booked more convention room nights in 2014 than we had in the previous 15 years. So we have very positive momentum," he says, adding, "We're seeing growth in multiple seg-

an increase of more than 25 percent from the first quarter of 2014. In addition, attendee spending rose 32.7 percent from the same quarter as last year, to approximately \$73.1 million.

New Convention Center Management

"Atlantic City is a destination that is expanding outside of the gaming market. While gaming may still be an important part of this city, attracting convention business is their current goal," affirms Sally O'Shea, CEM, a Philadelphia-based independent event manager who oversees manufacturer EP Henry's Mid-Atlantic Hardscaping Trade Show at the Atlantic City Convention Center. O'Shea has worked with shows in the city since 2004, and has seen an improved Atlantic City Convention Center under Global Spectrum management. "Their hands-on management team is very active with the shows," she says. "When the management first came in they invited show managers of different companies that produce shows in Atlantic City to a meeting where they introduced them to the organization." Initially, the convention center also "asked us for feedback and actually followed up on that feedback with information on what they've done and plan to do based on it," O'Shea notes. In addition, Global Spectrum





The Atlantic City skyline.

Credit: Meet AC

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“I’ve never seen a city that was more competitive for the business. (Meet AC and Atlantic City’s hotels are) very proactive for the business and they show appreciation for it, unlike other locations.”

Susan Elise McGonigle, President
 Susan Elise McGonigle Corporate Events, New York, NY

negotiated new union contracts at the convention center that have reduced operating costs.

“We have a tremendous relationship with Global Spectrum; they’re a terrific partner with Meet AC as well as the CRDA,” notes Wood. Meet AC’s staff, currently numbering 26, was mostly comprised of new hires when it was formed, with a few employees of the CVA. Sales territories were changed, but O’Shea notes that they ensured her that she would continue to work with the same representative she was accustomed to. “Meet AC makes it a point to be very knowledgeable of what assets they have within the city,” she adds. “They do not play favoritism in any way; that’s been my experience.”

Revel Case Study

While Meet AC is doing much to revitalize the city’s meetings business, there are also ambitious ideas coming from the private sector. Florida developer Glenn Straub has purchased Revel, the \$2.4 billion casino resort that closed last September after failing to turn a profit, for \$82 million. He reportedly

intends to build the resort’s never-completed second tower. “I think Revel is an interesting case study for everyone to look at,” Wood says. “They invested a significant amount of money to build the property, but they didn’t finish building it out; that’s No. 1. And they came to the market with a different approach, but obviously the strategy didn’t work for them. It’s going to reopen sometime this year, and we’re excited about its reemergence and a new brand associated with it.” But the new property is just a part of Straub’s overall vision for Atlantic City, a \$500 million deal that includes an agreement to purchase the former Showboat casino from Stockton University; a proposal to reopen Bader Field as a sports complex; numerous new recreational facilities (such as an equestrian complex

Continued on page 59



Credit: Caesars Entertainment

A rendering of Harrah’s Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center — the largest convention center-hotel complex from Baltimore to Boston, which is slated to open in August.

Continued from page 26

and waterparks); and high-speed ferries and helicopter service between Manhattan and Atlantic City.

New Developments and Revitalizations

While Straub is certainly “thinking big,” it remains to be seen whether his \$500 million deal will come to fruition. In the meantime, planners can take advantage of several developments in the city that have been realized, primarily at hotels and resorts. The 507-room **Claridge Hotel**, whose largest meeting space is 3,800 sf, reopened last year with new restaurants and entertainment offerings at this 1920s-era property. **The Twenties Restaurant**, frequented by Frank Sinatra and Marilyn Monroe in its heyday, reopened in November. Here, groups can also experience the Atlantic City Ballet and the Garden State Discovery Museum. Cem Erenler was appointed as the hotel’s new GM in February.

Wood asserts, “Everybody is opening their doors to the meetings and convention market,” and a standout example is Caesars Entertainment. In August, the company is debuting the \$125.8 million **Harrah’s Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center**, the largest convention center-hotel complex from Baltimore to Boston. Groups will have at their dis-

posal two 50,000-sf ballrooms that can be divided into up to 29 individual sections, directly accessible to Harrah’s Atlantic City’s 2,500-plus hotel rooms.

Richardson, Texas-based Lennox Industries Inc., an HVAC systems provider, has held its Northeast Dealer Meeting in Atlantic City for the past 11 consecutive years. According to Kim Hentges, CMP, senior planner, events and incentives, the



“Harrah’s new conference center is going to be a great fit for us due to all of our meeting space needs located together on one level.”

Kim Hentges, CMP, Senior Planner, Events & Incentives, Lennox Industries Inc., Richardson, TX

company has contracted the new conference center for its 2016 meeting. “Harrah’s new conference center is going to be a great fit for us due to all of our meeting space needs located together on one level,” she says. “And the size and quantity of the meeting space allows us to grow our program, while still keeping it on one level.”

New meeting space is also coming to **Resorts Casino**



The Margaritaville Casino housed within the Resorts complex on the Boardwalk sports a 5 O’Clock Somewhere Bar featuring bartenders who mix cocktails and perform, too.

Credit: Meet AC

Renovations of the North Tower rooms and casino at Tropicana Atlantic City and the new multimedia light and sound show on the Boardwalk façade were recently completed.

Hotel, the first casino to open in the city. Planners will be able to utilize an additional 12,000 sf of meeting space, including 11 new conference rooms, thanks to a \$9.4 million expansion plan. When the project is complete this summer, Resorts will offer 64,000 sf of function space consisting of 27 rooms accommodating from 40 up to 1,350 attendees.

Last October, Chrysler held a parts and service meeting for its mid-Atlantic and Northeast Business Centers at Resorts, bringing in 500 attendees. Susan Elise McGonigle Corporate Events arranged the program for Chrysler, and McGonigle



Credit: Tropicana Atlantic City

a multimedia light and sound show to the Boardwalk façade, a new fitness center on Brighton Avenue, North Tower hotel room renovations, a completely renovated North Tower casino floor and new retail shops. All projects were recently completed.

Also investing in upgrades is **Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa**, with \$13 million in renovations to its Borgata Buffet, men's and women's lounges at Spa Toccare, the Pump Room (Fitness Center) at Spa Toccare and the casino floor. Recently, the hotel announced \$14 million in additions, including an outdoor concert venue, Borgata Festival Park and a new nightclub. Festival Park will debut this June, while the new nightclub is expected to open at the end of the year. Borgata has invested \$50 million in redesigning its 1,566 Classic guest rooms and hotel corridors, and the room improvements continue this year with \$6 million dedicated to restyle 39 Opus suites and two 5,000-sf Residence suites.

Both the **Atlantic City Convention Center** and **Boardwalk Hall** will receive more than \$100 million in maintenance-related upgrades, ensuring that these facilities remain in peak condition to host attendees, whether for a meeting or entertainment, in the case of Boardwalk Hall. Also managed by Global Spectrum, the venue hosted 54 ticketed events last year, a 26 percent increase from 2013. The events included 13 concerts by major acts such as Lady Gaga, Luke Bryan, Aerosmith, Kiss, Queen, Jason Aldean and Def Leppard.



Credit: Meet AC

A rendering of the Playground, formerly The Pier Shops, which will become a multifaceted dining and entertainment venue.

notes that Resorts was selected partly based on “how they treated us on the site inspection. We felt they could fit our needs the best and bend over backwards to make sure our event was a success.” Ultimately, Resorts confirmed that impression was correct with “an amazing attention to detail,” she says. “Even the desserts had our logo in them and they did ice sculptures with our logo — little things that build up in the end.” Attendees also enjoyed private dining in groups of 50–60 at Margaritaville, a popular Jimmy Buffet-themed restaurant at the hotel, as well as the Landshark Bar & Grill. Resorts Casino Hotel will be even more attractive to the group with the additional meeting space, particularly the new breakout rooms all on one level. “The expansion they’re doing is key; we do a lot of breakouts,” says McGonigle, adding, “We will be going back in the fall for a smaller meeting using the new facility.”

Major hotel makeovers include **Tropicana Atlantic City's** \$50 million resort-wide renovation featuring the addition of



Credit: Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa

600k^{SQ FT}

OF REASONS TO MEET AC



14,000
HOTEL ROOMS

45
MEETING ROOMS

1,000,000
WAYS TO UNWIND



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Atlantic City's broader focus on non-gaming entertainment also will be supported by **"The Playground,"** a 464,000-sf self-contained entertainment venue, which rests over the Atlantic Ocean and includes high-end retail as well as eight live entertainment clubs and restaurants. The Playground also will boast a 50,000-person oceanfront concert space, bowling alley, swimming pool and the Varsity Club, a sports bar. The new venue will be fully operational by year end.

Caesars has a new venue of its own with the recently opened **Gordon Ramsay Pub & Grill at Caesars Atlantic City.** The 250-seat restaurant offers an authentic English pub experience on the East Coast.

Yet another highlight is the \$34 million **Bass Pro Shop at the Walk,** which opened in April.

One of the city's classic attractions is also seeing investment: The iconic **Steel Pier** is undergoing a \$100 million, three-phase makeover and will be open year-round. Phase two includes plans for a new museum, retail entertainment space and a 200-foot-high observation wheel. The third and final phase revamps the Marine Ballroom as a 2,000-seat venue suitable



Credit: Meet AC

The Atlantic City Aquarium in Gardner's Basin commands magnificent vistas of the Atlantic Ocean, Absecon Inlet, Absecon Bay and the waterfront casinos.

for concerts. The renovations are expected to be completed in this year. This spring also saw the beginning of a \$50 million reconstruction of The Boardwalk from Revel to Gardner's Basin.

Wood emphasizes that however much Atlantic City develops, its traditional attractions remain a draw. "When people come to Atlantic City they still have a tremendous Boardwalk and some of the best beaches in America," he says. "And the gaming piece is still very popular; millions of gamers come every year." But with approximately 60 casinos in the Northeast vying for business, "there is now a focus on diversifying the mix a little bit more, to add more non-gaming business opportunities to Atlantic City. That philosophy had emerged over the last couple of years."

Showcasing the City to the Industry

Atlantic City will display its non-gaming attractions for meeting planners next year when it hosts the 2016 MPI World Education Congress. "It's all part of the new strategy of Atlantic City, to (bid for) some of the industry shows and showcase the city as a viable destination for meetings and conventions," says Wood. "We'll be working with Caesars Entertainment to host the MPI conven-

tion, which will bring in over 1,000 meeting professionals to the destination. Our preliminary plans include an opening-night party at the brand new Playground entertainment venue so people will get a taste of the true Atlantic City experience. We're going to pull out all the stops to make the 2016 convention the most memorable for MPI."

McGonigle has personally experienced the city's zeal in pursuing the corporate group market. "As a meeting planner, I've never seen a city that was more competitive for the business," she relates. Meet AC and Atlantic City's hotels are all "very proactive for the business, and they show appreciation for it, unlike other locations." The surging number of group bookings is thus no surprise, and the multitude of investments in the city's meetings and tourism infrastructure guarantee Atlantic City will continue to have new selling points in the future. **C&IT**



Credit: Meet AC

The Steel Pier is undergoing a makeover that includes a new museum, retail entertainment space and a 200-foot-high observation wheel.

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Florida

Meeting in the Sunshine State Keeps Attendees Beaming From Ear to Ear

By Derek Reveron



Credit: Andrew Kokoczka

Although Florida's weather makes it one of the planet's most popular destinations, the state counts on much more than sunshine to attract meetings. Florida's array of destinations — from internationally renowned Orlando and Miami to up-and-comers such as Jacksonville and Tampa Bay — continue to build new hotels and resorts, and improve existing ones while adding retail, dining and entertainment venues. Florida's theme parks are adding more at-



Credits: (L & R) Joni Sabo, Andrew Kokoczka

One of CRDN's Florida events kicked off with a choice of golf (the alligator was extra!) or fishing trip. The next night, guests were off to an island for a Gilligan's Island-themed evening of fabulous food, live music, costume contest and a glorious sunset on the beach.

tractions, and the state's meeting properties offer stellar services to large and small meetings alike.

No wonder the prospect of meeting in Florida excites attendees. "They can't wait to get here and they get off the plane with smiles on their faces," says Joe Gutierrez, director of operations and customer service, and meeting planner for Jupiter, Florida-based Jetstream Ground Services. "Half the battle when you put together a meeting is getting buy-in from the group. When that happens, they get so much more out of the meeting."



"We need a different feel going from a general session to an elegant, celebratory awards environment. ... We feel the Florida properties can meet our needs."

Jeff Schultz, V.P. of Communications
CRDN, Berkley, MI

Miami

Miami is embellishing its reputation as one of Florida's premiere destinations. The Miami Beach Convention Center (MBCC) started a \$592 million expansion and renovation that will add \$600,000 sf of ballroom space upon completion in 2018. The project includes several green features such as solar energy and natural lighting that will decrease the facility's energy use by 20 percent. A new 6-acre public green space in front of the MBCC will provide an outdoor mingling and networking area.

While the MBCC is popular for large meetings, Miami has an abundance of hotels that cater to small and mid-size meetings, according to Linda Santos, corporate director, continuing medical education, Baptist Health South Florida. Santos and her team plan up to 15 medical meetings a year at South Florida hotels. Meetings range in size from 140 to 450 attendees. Over the last few years, Baptist Health has held meetings at the Trump National Doral; Fontainebleau Miami Beach; Eden Roc Miami Beach; The Biltmore in Coral Gables; Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort, Golf Club & Spa; and the Ritz-Carlton Coconut Grove, Miami.

Santos says she can always find a Florida hotel to meet the varying criteria for each meeting. "Every meeting has a different audience, content, focus, length and personality," she says. "The meeting leaders and the physicians and clinical employees who attend are different for every meeting. The top factors for choosing a hotel are location, room rates, banquet costs and convenience. We need an enticing hotel with reasonable room rates to attract out-of-town and international attendees, and the location needs to be convenient for local attendees who drive in. We don't put money into entertainment, in keeping with our not-for-profit status."

The Fontainebleau met all of those requirements for a four-day meeting that Baptist Health held in February for 450 doctors, nurses, physician assistants and other health care

providers. The Fontainebleau also had one other advantage, says Santos. "The hotel and its location have a national and international appeal. That works in our favor. A lot of people came from Canada, New York and Italy."

Santos says the value provided by the Fontainebleau was comparable to other properties and was as good as can be expected. "You will pay a premium to be anywhere in Florida during the winter, which is when everybody wants to come," says Santos. "We understand how that works and if resorts can fill hotels, they don't necessarily want to give deals. We are known as a large institution in our community, but sometimes we are 'small fish' in a big sea of meetings when it comes to negotiations."

Orlando

Although Orlando is known primarily as a large-group destination, it continues to make



Attendees take in the sights and sounds of Miami during National Travel and Tourism Week as they experience the Cuban Heritage Tour in Little Havana.

small groups welcome. "One of the areas where Orlando has stepped up to the plate is catering to small groups," says Jane Scaletta, general manager, AlliedPRA, Orlando. "When you walk into a large convention hotel with many meetings going on at the same time, the convention service managers are paying close attention to the groups. Hotels do a good job of separating the groups. The layouts of the hotels, especially many of the newer properties, make that possible."

Many groups visiting Orlando for the first time often return as repeat customers. "There are groups that come annually or every two or four years," says Scaletta. "They also arrive early and stay later. That is something that we lend ourselves to more than any other destination. You also have the three top theme parks in Orlando. It's difficult to explore even one park let alone three parks. It keeps people coming back."

Small groups planning to visit Orlando for the first time include CRDN, a Berkley, Michigan-based textile restorations company. The firm recently scheduled site visits to two Orlando



Credit: Visit Orlando

Orlando's newest attraction, the Orlando Eye, a 400-foot-tall observation wheel, is the centerpiece of the I-Drive 360 entertainment complex.

resorts for its 2016 four-day meeting of 350 franchise owners and their salespeople, according to Jeff Schultz, vice president of communications, who also plans meetings for CRDN. “We are looking at Florida resorts because they enable us to let franchise owners provide a reward for their top salespeople,” Schultz says. “I’m optimistic because they’ve both given us really good proposals that came in a little lower than I expected. They are willing to work with us because they have space to fill.”

Orlando has a variety of properties that can accommodate the size of Schultz’s group and its other needs. “Our group isn’t the biggest but it’s not real small, so we have to find locations that can accommodate us and provide flexibility with space,” says Schultz. “For example, we need an open area for a general session. We also do an awards banquet, and we need someplace that doesn’t take the general session area and transform it. We need a different feel going from a general session to an elegant, celebratory awards environment. That’s a big thing for us. We feel the Florida properties can meet our needs.”

In fact, Schultz previously used the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa in Bonita Springs, Florida, for a successful event. The resort’s access to a private island about 20 minutes away by boat provided great memories and many smiles, too, as the group replicated the characters from Gilligan’s Island for their themed event. “Ginger,” “Skipper” and the rest of the crew had a grand time.

More Options for Planners

Orlando’s spending on new meeting-related projects also keeps groups returning. Recently, TV cameras captured daredevil Nik Wallenda walking without a safety net on Orlando’s newest attraction, the 400-foot-tall observation wheel — the Orlando Eye at I-Drive 360, which is the \$200-million dollar entertainment complex that blends dining, entertainment, attractions and shopping in an upscale setting. Its courtyard

is a special space for outdoor events, and the \$1.5 million water show set to music and color-changing lights will delight attendees. Centrally located on International Drive, minutes from the Orange County Convention Center, I-Drive 360 will have plenty for meeting groups to see and do.

Also new are Madame Tussauds, the Sea Life Orlando Aquarium and Skeletons: Animals Unveiled!, which will be open soon and one of the more unique venues to throw a bash surrounded by more than 400 skeletons from the animal kingdom.

Restaurants now open at I-Drive 360 include Yard House, with a myriad of craft beers, and Tin Roof, a great place for live music and Southern-inspired eats. Sugar Factor and Ben & Jerry’s will be open for dessert.

Other restaurants opening this year include Buffalo Wild Wings, Café de Paris, Tapa Toro, Shake Shack, McFadden’s, Naru Restaurant & Sushi Bar and Cowgirls Rockbar Orlando, which will boast a mechanical bull.

Walt Disney World Resort’s multi-year transformation of Downtown Disney into Disney Springs is well underway. The first two restaurants to be announced — The Boathouse, which opened in April, and Morimoto Asia — will include private dining rooms for special events, conventions and presentations. In addition, Disney’s culinary and catering team offers teambuilding sessions dedicated to cooking for groups of up to 50 participants.

A new nighttime spectacular “Rivers of Light” is among the many new entertainment experiences that will be available to groups as part of the largest expansion in the history of Disney’s Animal Kingdom. The multisensory experience will combine live music, floating lanterns, water screens and swirling animal imagery.

Orlando also bustles with options for offsite activities. “A lot of groups do restaurant buyouts,” says Scaletta. “You usually need 200 to 400 people to do that. Some groups do partial buyouts. Quite a few groups do restaurant dine-arounds on what we call the “restaurant row” corridor. The Orlando



Credit: Wyndham Grand Jupiter at Harbourside Place

The pool bar at Wyndham Grand Jupiter at Harbourside Place.

Harley-Davidson Historic Factory Dealership is fun. For groups with less of a budget, Howl at the Moon live music bar is popular. The Isleworth Golf & Country Club is nice for upper-end groups. The Richard Petty Driving Experience and BB King's Blues Club are always popular."

Palm Beach County

Palm Beach County, one of Florida's best-known upscale destinations, is becoming even more attractive to meeting groups. Discover The Palm Beaches, the county's convention and visitors bureau, recently announced that it posted a 9.5 percent rise in revenue per available room from \$104 to \$114 in 2013. The county also recorded an average daily rate of \$156, a 6.8 percent increase year-over-year.

Palm Beach County has big plans to further boost its number of visitors. The CVB believes that its new television advertising campaign will help attract 400,000 additional visitors in 2015, bringing the yearly total to 6.6 million. The TV spots, "Unplug and Reconnect in The Palm Beaches" and "Big Break The Palm Beaches, Florida," have been running nationwide. In addition, the Hilton West Palm Beach is offering incentives for planners who book before the property opens adjacent to the Palm Beach County Convention Center in spring 2016.

In January, Jetstream Ground Services held a three-day leadership conference at the 179-room Wyndham Grand Jupiter at Harbourside Place, which opened last October and is located about 20 minutes north of Palm Beach. The meeting's more than 50 attendees took full advantage of Harbourside Place, a 360,000-sf entertainment, restaurant and retail complex that held its grand opening last December. "We had a very nice event one evening using the bars, dining areas and restaurants," says Gutierrez. "People could go from one venue to another. Another night we hired some drivers and went to the beach for a catered dinner."

Jetstream selected the Wyndham Grand Jupiter after it made a big impression during site visits. "The hotel really sold itself," says Gutierrez. "It's in a great location with the Intracoastal on one side and just a couple of miles from the beach on the other side. The

layout is part of what sold it to us. You have a meeting room that overlooks the Intracoastal. Other rooms overlook a nice fountain. Every meeting space has quite a bit of natural light."


Gutierrez also raves about the Wyndham Grand Jupiter's service. "Even with a group as small as we are you get the feeling that you are the only group in the hotel because the design of the hotel lends itself to that," he says. "That adds to the value, which was good even though we had the meeting during the thick of the tourist season. Sometimes you go to large resorts and can go for a whole day without seeing a member of your group because they are so spread out. We are

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having conversations with the hotel about holding another meeting later this year.”

Jacksonville

This promises to be another banner year for Jacksonville, a unique destination that borders both the St. Johns River and the Atlantic Ocean. Hotel occupancy and rate levels are expected to continue growing after posting a 14th consecutive rise last year, according to Visit Jacksonville, the destination’s convention and visitors bureau. Jacksonville is introducing new hotels, restaurants and meeting venues as well as revitalizing the downtown district.

Jacksonville’s many offsite venues will include the Jessie Ball duPont Center (formerly the Haydon Burns Library), which will reopen in June after a \$21 million renovation. The facility will include a conference center, 12 meeting rooms, reception spaces and a green roof garden that will be available for special events. Other popular offsite venues include the Atrium at the Jacksonville Main Library, the rooftop at the Museum of Science and History, the Ritz Theatre and The River Club.

Sandestin

Located along the white-sand beaches on Florida’s northwest coast, Sandestin is one of the top resort communities in Florida. That’s why the Southeast regional office of a company chose the AAA Four Diamond 602-room Hilton Sandestin

“We need an enticing hotel with reasonable room rates to attract out-of-town and international attendees, and the location needs to be convenient for local attendees who drive in.”



Linda Santos, Corporate Director, Continuing Medical Education, Baptist Health South Florida, South Miami, FL

Beach Golf Resort & Spa for a three-day meeting of 187 managers in January.

The Hilton Sandestin’s coastal location and its 32,000 sf of recently renovated meeting space were major deciding factors for the company’s executive assistant to the president and meeting planner, who plans about seven meetings a year. “I wanted something in a beach area and the Hilton Sandestin had the best meeting facility that I found on the beach,” she says. “Our managers in the Southeast don’t see the beach that much, and beaches along the Atlantic Ocean aren’t like those in the Florida Panhandle.”

The planner was awed by the caliber of Hilton Sandestin’s service. “This year, we tried something new, having managers use their cell phones to answer questions posed by presenters onstage using PowerPoint and display screens,” says the plan-

ner. “When we were setting things up, the resort’s technology person was working with my AV person getting things in place and running tests. The hotel’s person saw things that were a little off on the screen and fixed it even before my AV person noticed it. The Hilton staffer sat beside my person throughout the presentations.”

In another instance, the planner says, “We planned fireworks for the beach party and it ended up being cold before we could launch them. The hotel brought out its portable heaters but didn’t have enough. So they borrowed some from other hotels and purchased more. They really went above and beyond to make it perfect.”

Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa now offers a third, 7,500-sf ballroom, and has expanded and enhanced the award-winning Serenity by the sea Spa. Completed in March, the Coastal Ballroom addition now provides meeting planners with more than 23,000 sf of ballroom and event space on a single level, with approximately 10,000 sf of additional pre-function area. Now with nearly 40,000 sf of indoor meeting space and 20,000 sf of outdoor event space, the resort can now accommodate larger conferences and events, and provide additional flexibility for group activities.

Daytona Beach

Daytona Beach is keeping pace with other Florida destinations by offering more attractions as well as new and improved hotels. The destination is investing more than \$1 billion in

construction and renovations, including \$400 million to expand the Cici and Hyatt Brown Museum of Art and the Daytona International Speedway. The speedway project due for completion in 2016 will include 60 new luxury trackside suites with patios; 11 new football field-size social areas called “neighborhoods”; and 101,000 new grandstand seats.

Daytona Beach hotels also are sprucing up. One of the destination’s signature properties, The Shores Resort & Spa, debuted new paint, carpeting and décor in its 20,000-sf function space as well as wider bandwidth wireless throughout the property. The Shores Resort & Spa also features a new built-in AV package and 80-inch, flat-screen monitor in the Surf Boardroom, an added lobby check-in area and new banquet equipment. All 212 guest rooms and suites feature new beds, new furniture in rooms and on balconies, HDTVs and drapes. There also are plans to build a new Hard Rock Hotel & Cafe, set to open in 2016.

Tampa Bay

The Tampa/St. Petersburg area is trying to cut a higher profile among Florida destinations. Visit Tampa Bay, the city’s CVB, has joined several other Florida destinations in taking to the television airwaves. The CVB premiered its first national television commercial on January 1. The 30-second spot is entitled “Unlock Tampa Bay.” The commercial features a boy who, as he prepares to leave after a family stay in Tampa, experi-



Sun Life Stadium, the home of the NFL Miami Dolphins, is adding great options for groups throughout the renovated venue.

ences a flood of joyful memories that are depicted in the spot. A 15-second version of the commercial ran during the winter.

New & Noteworthy

Orlando continues to expand and improve its formidable supply of hotels. The 1,000-room **Loews Sapphire Falls Resort at Universal Orlando** is scheduled to open in the summer of 2016 with more than 131,000 sf of meeting space. The property will be located near the **Cabana Bay Beach Resort** and **Loews Royal Pacific Resort**, which is set to complete expansion of its meeting space from 85,000 sf to about 140,000 sf this fall. A covered, air-conditioned bridge will connect the two Loews properties, which offer a combined total of 272,000 sf of meeting space.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel is undergoing a \$125 million multiphased renovation, the largest

makeover in its history. The project includes every guest room in the 758-room Swan Hotel and the 1,509-room Dolphin Hotel. The makeover will be completed by the end of 2017 and will not disrupt service or the availability of the majority of guest rooms and meeting rooms.

The Hard Rock Hotel at Universal Orlando Resort, with 6,000 sf of meeting space, has renovated all of its 650 guest rooms.

The Westgate Lakes Resort & Spa is adding a new development that will feature 32,000 sf of flexible meeting and banquet space, restaurants and a bowling alley. The project is scheduled for completion by the end of 2015.

In Palm Beach County, the upscale 318-room **Boca Raton Resort & Club** recently completed a \$30 million makeover. **The Palm Beach Marriott Singer Island Beach Resort & Spa** is finishing up renovations on common spaces, including the bar and lobby, as well as new furniture and increased Wi-Fi bandwidth. **The Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa** redesigned its 309 guest rooms in partnership with Jonathan Adler, who also designed exclusive new furnishings for the project. The property offers more than 30,000 sf of meeting space.

In Jacksonville, the 963-room **Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront** recently announced a renovation scheduled for completion this fall. The project includes all guest rooms, six new meeting rooms, improvements to the hotel's rooftop fitness center and Regency Club lounge, which will



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Credit: Hawks Cay Resort

The Marina Walk at Hawks Cay Resort in Duck Key, Florida, will sport the new Angler and Ale Restaurant in late 2015.

ing able to meet in one room and dine in another. Technology also has been upgraded to ensure desired connectivity outside and in. Groups also may take advantage of new all-inclusive programs. A new Marina Walk serving as an entertainment destination within the resort will include the new Angler and Ale Restaurant later this year.

The **Henderson Beach Resort** is scheduled to open in Destin in 2016. The property's 171-rooms will feature views of the Gulf of Mexico, a spa with 11 treatment rooms and 10,000 sf of indoor event space.

Central Florida's **Streamsong Resort**, home to two golf courses, has announced plans to build a third course — Streamsong Black. Set to open in autumn 2017, the course will be designed by Gil Hanse, architect of The Olympic Golf Course in Rio de Janeiro and co-designer of Castle Stuart Golf Links in Scotland, among others.

In addition to world-class golf, Streamsong features a 216-room Lodge, with three casual and fine dining restaurants, conference and event facilities, a spa and infinity pool.

The re-designed **Sundial Beach Resort & Spa**, named the "Best Full-Service Resort" on the Gulf Coast's Sanibel and Captiva Islands, invested more than \$6 million in refreshed amenities. The resort features the new Resort Centre, which is the largest meeting venue on Sanibel Island. Boasting 12,000 sf of flexible space, the center accommodates up to 300 guests and features unique outdoor event space with water views. Newly renovated meeting facilities include nine separate event rooms, all with expansive Gulf views, a full business center and AV capabilities. Wireless Internet is available throughout all meeting rooms.

Sundial Beach Resort & Spa's new restaurants include the Waterview with floor-to-ceiling windows offering unbeatable views and the Sea Breeze Café, which sports a spacious bar, live music and an outside terrace.



Credit: Sundial Beach Resort

The refreshed and renovated Sundial Beach Resort on Sanibel Island boasts unique water views.

All types of groups can find the Florida destination and property that perfectly matches their needs. That's why meeting in Florida inspires confidence that attendees will arrive in Florida with smiles on their faces and leave with even bigger ones.

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feature improved networking areas, work stations overlooking the city and a meeting room. The hotel offers 110,000 sf of meeting space.

In South Florida, Miami's **Sun Life Stadium** modernization is well underway. Football enthusiasts and corporate groups will experience a refreshed environment and amenities for the 2015 season. The home of the National Football League Miami Dolphins will be remodeled and redesigned. Stadium improvements include new and more comfortable seats as well as expanded room between rows; more seats closer to the



Credit: Steamsong Resort

The impressive views from the meeting rooms at Steamsong Resort in Central Florida are second to none.

playing field; improved concourse and concessions on both the lower and upper levels; and increased number of premium seating areas and enhanced club seating options. By 2016, there will be state-of-the-art video boards in the four corners of the stadium as well as a partial roof over the stadium, providing more shade and weather protection.

The **Trump National Doral Miami** recently completed the renovation of its Golden Palm golf course, one of five on the property. The facelift was part of a \$250 million project that included three new and three revamped ballrooms including the largest — the 24,000-sf Donald J. Trump Grand Ballroom.

Elsewhere in Florida, **Hawks Cay Resort** in the Florida Keys on Duck Key in the lower Middle Keys, has recreated itself. Walls, carpeting and even fixtures now reflect the aquamarine life located just steps from the meetings area. Walkways and meeting room entrances are now located outside under a covered awning, not buried in an interior hallway corridor, maintaining the connection between water inspiration and experience-sharing as a meeting objective. For the first time, the resort can accommodate large groups of up to 600 people and provide the flexibility of the entire group be-



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Destination

Considering the fact that there are so many options for meeting venues in Las Vegas, it's all about continuing to narrow down the choices until you find the one that's the best fit for your event. For Larry Schur, CEM, president of San Antonio, Texas-based All Baby & Child Corporation, the right choice was the Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino, a Caesars Entertainment property.

Schur chose the Rio for his company's 7th Annual Spring Educational Conference & Trade Show, which gathers specialty store retailers together to learn more about the products they sell and to get updates on issues that are relevant to the juvenile products industry. The event draws approximately 125 exhibitors and 800 attendees. "Attendance is free for qualified retailers, who also can qualify to receive a rebate off their lodging and merchandise purchases," Schur explains.

"The Rio is a perfect fit for our conference because it contains

just the right amount of meeting and exhibit space to fit our program," he continues. "The exhibit area, The Pavilion, conveniently breaks up into 10 portions, allowing for the maximum flexibility for our trade show. We will utilize two-thirds of the space for exhibits and the remaining one-third for food and beverage. The close proximity and size of the meeting rooms to the exhibit space allows us to tailor each meeting room to fit our varied program.

"We have also selected two excellent venues within the Rio to hold our receptions," he adds. "Our welcome reception will be held poolside at VooDoo Beach, while our all-attendee reception will be held

Las Vegas



Always Ready to Put a New Spin on Meetings

By Karen Brost



Meeting planners experience The High Roller observation wheel at The Linq during a tour of special event venues arranged by event planning firms Fancy Shindigs Inc. and Astound Group.

Credits: Fancy Shindigs Inc.



“With reasonable lodging rates, outstanding restaurants and a contained venue, we feel that (Rio) will allow us to help keep our attendees in-house during our scheduled programming and not wandering around Las Vegas.”

Larry Schur, CEM, President, All Baby & Child Corporation, San Antonio, TX



Credit: The MGM Resorts International

The Nassau Boardroom at The Mirage Hotel & Casino, which has a total of 170,000 sf of meeting space and 3,044 guest rooms.

high atop Las Vegas at the VooDoo lounge and outside terrace. These two venues provide unique and completely varied networking experiences.”

The VooDoo Rooftop Nightclub occupies the 51st floor of the Rio’s Masquerade Tower and offers spectacular views of the Las Vegas Strip. It also features the VooDoo Zip Line, which takes guests on a one-minute, 10-second ride from the top of the Masquerade Tower down more than 800 feet to the Ipanema Tower at speeds up to 33 miles per hour and a height of more than 400 feet. It can accommodate up to two riders at one time, and then they ride back up to the starting point facing backwards.

In addition to 2,522 suites, the Rio contains 160,000 sf of convention and meeting space, multiple entertainment venues, including the popular Penn & Teller magic show, as well as 10 restaurants and the Rio Secco Golf Club designed by Rees Jones.

Schur summed up the reasons that make the Rio a good fit for his conference: “With reasonable lodging rates, outstanding restaurants and a contained venue, we feel that this property will allow us to help keep our attendees in-house during our scheduled programming and not wandering around Las Vegas.”

For Nancy Vince, president of Mooresville, North Carolina-based Wholesalecrafts.com, the right fit was the 2,079-

room South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa. Located just minutes from the Las Vegas Strip, the hotel includes 71,000 sf of conference space, an 80,000-sf carpeted, column-free pavilion and a 4,600-seat arena. It also contains multiple dining outlets, a 64-lane bowling center and a 16-screen movie theater. Last fall, South Point debuted a new \$35 million, 90,000-sf bowling tournament facility, South Point Bowling Plaza.

Vince’s event, the American Craft Retailers Expo, also known as ACRE, is expected to draw 1,000 attendees plus hundreds of jewelry buyers coming over from other shows. “(South Point) is close to the JCK Jewelry show at Mandalay Bay each year, and they have placed our show on their official bus schedule, which is convenient for buyers,” she explains, “and we have aligned our timing at South Point to be in ‘jewelry week’ for years to come, which allows buyers a way to shop multiple shows with one low travel dollar. Our show is 40 percent handmade jewelry, and the 60 percent handmade gift/gallery artists are also appealing to jewelry stores, so being in jewelry week makes sense.”

She gave a few other reasons why the hotel was the right choice for her expo. “South Point is affordable and offers an intimate environment and is the right size for our event,” Vince notes. “They give us great service there, too.”

It’s All About the Image

There also are times when it’s critical for the image of the venue to precisely match the image of the event. That’s the case with Couture Las Vegas, an annual event devoted to the luxury jewelry and timepiece market. The show, which attracts approximately 225 exhibitors and 4,000 attendees, is held each year at the Wynn Las Vegas. Show director Gannon Brousseau explains why. “The Wynn Las Vegas is the perfect location for hosting the Couture show. There is no other venue that is comparable to the Wynn/Encore in terms of ambience, service, staff and amenities. The high-end designers, brands and retailers who attend Couture each year are all pleased to consider these properties their home in Las Vegas.”

The Wynn contains more than 2,700 hotel rooms and suites, and its sister property Encore has 2,034 suites. Couture’s attendees likely feel right at home, since the Wynn’s two shopping esplanades include luxury brands such as Alexander McQueen,



Credit: South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa

The lobby at South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa.



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“South Point is affordable and offers an intimate environment and is the right size for our event. They give us great service there, too.”

Nancy Vince, President, Wholesalecrafts.com Inc., Mooresville, NC

Cartier, Chanel, Dior, Givenchy and Louis Vuitton. The Wynn and Encore also offer three nightclubs, a 60,000-sf beach club and an 18-hole golf course. The resorts also are home to the aqua theater-in-the-round show, “Le Rêve – The Dream.” Combined, the Wynn and Encore offer 260,000 sf of event space, and many of the meeting areas feature floor-to-ceiling windows that provide views of the resort’s pools and gardens.

The Encore Tower Suites and Encore Resort Tower at Wynn Las Vegas will launch a room renovation project this summer that will encompass new furnishings, carpeting and technology, including additional USB plugs and electrical outlets.

A Menu of Venues

Las Vegas also has an extensive “menu of venues” for planners to choose from when they are looking for unique spaces to “wow” their attendees. Lisa Gentilin, PhD, CMP, is president of Fancy Shindigs Inc., a corporate event planning and training services firm based in Castro Valley, California. In March,



Credits: Wynn/Encore

(Top) The Encore Ballroom; (above) The Wynn Country Club patio. Together, Wynn and Encore offer 260,000 sf of meeting space.

she presented a session titled “Special Event Venues – Four Exciting Las Vegas Venues That Will Dazzle Your Guests” at the ExhibitorLive 2015 Conference & Exhibition. Her co-presenter was Katie Zanardi, director of business development for the San Francisco Bay area event planning firm Astound Group.

Legends Ranch. Gentilin and Zanardi took a group of 22 planners on the tour, and their first stop was something they may not have expected to see so close to The Strip. “It’s called Legends Ranch Las Vegas,” Gentilin explains. “It’s beautiful. It’s a working ranch. They board some horses there for folks who come and ride, and they have a beautiful outdoor area where you can do daytime or evening events. They’ll work with you. They’re like a one-stop shop. You can let them know everything that you want, and they’ll work with their preferred vendors. You can do something that’s more rustic and ranch-themed with family-style seating with the big plank tables, if you like. They’ll also do high-end linens on rounds, whatever you’d like in that area.

“It’s a beautiful location,” she continues. “It’s something that is very unexpected because it’s only 10 minutes (from The Strip), and it’s so tranquil. Inside, there’s some reception space. They also have what I call the executive room. It’s a special room in the back that has its own private bathroom and actually opens out onto the patio area by the pool. They also have a space I would use for the war room, for the meeting planner’s office. It has lots of storage, and its own bathroom, as well.

“In their large patio space they have a large, built-in bandstand, so if you want to have a band play, it’s a great spot,” she adds. “People can dance in that area, and you can have seating in the lower patio area.”

The High Roller. The tour continued with stops at two Caesars Entertainment properties. The group had lunch at the wheelhouse for the High Roller, the world’s tallest observation wheel. It’s part of The Linq, an open-air shopping, dining and entertainment district. “(The wheelhouse) has floor-to-ceiling windows that overlook the Linq promenade and then there is beautiful patio space right there, as well, where you can put outdoor furniture. You can see the pods as they go by. Our folks got to do the half-hour (ride) — 15 minutes to the top and 15 minutes down.”

Drai’s Beach Club. They also toured The Cromwell, a 188-room boutique hotel set on one of the busiest corners of the Las Vegas Strip. “There are several locations within The Cromwell where you can do small events,” Lisa notes. “They have a beautiful hospitality bar that you can take over, but for me, the most beautiful part is upstairs, where they have Drai’s Beach Club. It is spectacular. It’s a nightclub, but if you wanted to do a presen-

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Legends Ranch is “a beautiful location. It’s something that is very unexpected because it’s only 10 minutes (from The Strip), and it’s so tranquil.”

Lisa Gentilin, PhD, CMP, President, Fancy Shindigs Inc., Castro Valley, CA

tation of some type you could technically do it on the dance floor and then there’s built-in seating there already.

“There are floor-to-ceiling doors that will open from the nightclub to the pool area. From that beach club area, there are these



Credit: Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino

A rendering of the new exhibit “Graceland Presents Elvis,” which recently opened at Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino.

great little hospitality cabanas that you could sell off as sponsorships that people could have their own area to invite their special VIPs in. Each one of those has its own bathroom and furniture and its own LCD television so you can run branded videos if you’d like.”

She described the venue’s flexibility. “You can go all the way to the very end of that level and have a 180-degree view of The Strip. You can take over just that back corner where it’s all lounge furniture and they have outdoor seating or you could take over the entire area including the cabanas, and its two levels. Or, you could take over the entire facility, which would include the nightclub, as well. So there are lots of opportunities if you wanted to do something from day into night. You could do a presentation during the day, then go outside for a cocktail reception. They’ll flip the inside really quick and get rid of any staging where the presenter was and set up buffets, and people can sit either inside or outside.”

Gentilin added that The Cromwell has two other event venues, Drai’s After Hours, which offers a late-night nightclub atmosphere, and Giada, the restaurant by celebrity chef Giada De Laurentiis. “They have two private rooms that can accommodate roughly up to 40 people (20 in each) with French doors that open between both spaces.”

Neon Museum Boneyard. Gentilin and Zanardi also treated their group of planners to a unique experience: a tour of the Neon Museum Boneyard. The two-acre outdoor museum features more than 150 of Las Vegas’ iconic neon signs, six of which have

been restored. It also includes an event venue called the North Gallery, which contains additional rescued neon signs and is used for special events. “If somebody wants to take both sections over, the museum has control of the road that separates them, so that can be shut down and you can put out a red carpet or stanchions.”

She was surprised by the planners’ reaction to the Neon Museum. “They were just floored,” she says, adding that they couldn’t wait to have their pictures taken in front of the famous signs. She explained that the museum also can provide a docent to answer all of the questions guests invariably ask.

“It’s right across the street from the Cashman Center, so if you needed to have something really big and you were at the Cashman Center and then you wanted to do a private event, you could take over the entire space. It’s a great place to get a piece of history.”

Gentilin is already thinking about doing another tour of unique venues for the ExhibitorLive 2016 Conference & Exhibition, which will take place next year on February 28–March 3.

More Las Vegas News

The Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino (formerly the LVH – Las Vegas Hotel & Casino), in partnership with Elvis Presley’s Graceland, has unveiled a permanent exhibition, “Graceland Presents Elvis: The Exhibition, The Show, The Experience.” The exhibit includes hundreds of artifacts never before displayed outside of Graceland.

In other Westgate news, the resort has announced plans to do a full remodel of its 200,000 sf convention center, which will include the installation of new technology and a modern new look. The project is scheduled to begin in the fall. The resort’s newly refurbished spa and health club is expected to open this



Credit: The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino

The Venetian recently renovated all of its standard guest suites.

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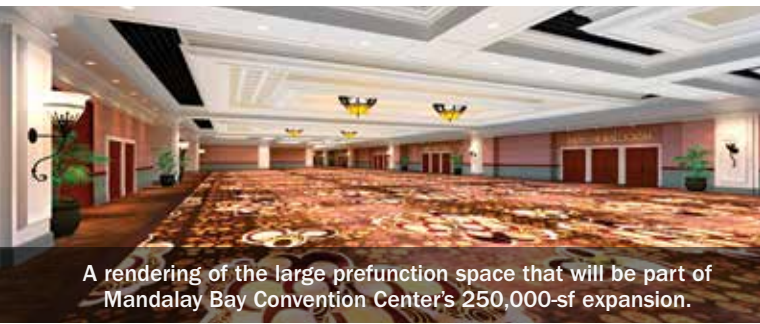


SOUTH POINT
Las Vegas



“There is no other venue that is comparable to the Wynn/Encore in terms of ambience, service, staff and amenities. The high-end designers, brands and retailers who attend Couture each year are all pleased to consider these properties their home in Las Vegas.”

Gannon Brousseau, Show Director, Couture 2015, San Juan Capistrano, CA



A rendering of the large prefunction space that will be part of Mandalay Bay Convention Center's 250,000-sf expansion.

Credit: Mandalay Bay

summer. Upgrades to 1,200 signature guest rooms and the pool area have been completed.

The Mandalay Bay Convention Center is adding 250,000 sf of exhibit space, more carpeted ballroom space and other amenities, which will bring its total amount of event space to more than 2 million sf. The \$66 million project is now underway and is on schedule to welcome its first attendees in August, with the anticipated completion of the entire expansion and renovation in January 2016.

The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino recently completed a renovation project of all of its standard guest suites that included the installation of a media hub system to give business travelers a convenient workspace with electrical and USB charging capabilities for phones and laptops.

With the renovation of the 403 suites in **Bellagio's** main tower now complete, the MGM Resorts International hotel has finished the \$165 million remodeling of all 3,933 rooms and



Credit: The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority

The Las Vegas Global Business District development plan will expand the convention center, add a centralized transportation hub and develop a global business center.

suites that began in 2011. Bellagio also recently debuted Lago by Julian Serrano — a contemporary, Milan-inspired Italian restaurant concept that boasts a new outdoor patio with spectacular views of Bellagio's world-famous fountains through the dining room's large arched windows.

The Tropicana Las Vegas - a DoubleTree by Hilton's Trinidad Pavilion and Meeting Rooms, a 30,000-sf expansion of the convention area, is now officially open. The expansion brings the hotel's total meeting, event and exhibition space to more than 100,000 sf with 38 separate meeting rooms, which does not include the outdoor venues.

The Omnia Nightclub — the former Pure Nightclub — opened in March at Caesars Palace after a top-to-bottom makeover. The completely redeveloped 75,000-sf venue houses



Credit: Bellagio

Bellagio recently debuted the new restaurant Lago by Julian Serrano, which features an outdoor patio with front-row views of the Fountains of Bellagio show.

three distinct nightlife spaces: the Main Club including the Balcony level, Heart of Omnia; the sleek ultra-lounge; and the Terrace offering sweeping views of the Las Vegas Strip. Omnia is available for corporate event buyouts for groups of 200–4,000 people.

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) purchased the Riviera Hotel & Casino as part of its plans for the new

Las Vegas Global Business District. The acquisition will make it possible for the project to add 750,000 sf of exhibit space and 187,000 sf of additional meeting space to the Las Vegas Convention Center. The \$2.3 billion Global Business District project is the largest economic development project the LVCVA has undertaken since the Las Vegas Convention Center was built in the late 1950s. It is estimated that once this expansion initiative is completed, it will attract 20 new trade shows and conventions.

Upon the LVCVA's approval to purchase the historic Riviera Hotel & Casino's 26-acre site, Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval said, "Las Vegas has proven time and again, its ability to reinvent itself as the economic engine for Southern Nevada. For the better part of 60 years, this historic property has created memories for millions of guests and will always have a place in the history of this great city. As the storied resort makes way for the Global Business District, this site will continue to play an integral role in the attraction of visitors to Nevada." **C&IT**



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Wynn Las Vegas has promoted **Steve Blanner** to vice president of sales and **Pedram Pakneshan** to executive director of convention sales. Blanner was most recently executive director of convention sales and services. Pakneshan most recently served as director of convention sales.

The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa, Tucson, Arizona, has appointed **Mark Stavitski** as director of sales, **Nancy Miller** as Midwest account director and **Diana Kamper**, Southwest account director. Stavitski most recently served as director of group sales at The

Westin Charlotte in North Carolina. Miller previously served as director and top producer for the Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Towers and The Westin Chicago River North. Kamper was director of national accounts for The Grand Wailea, a Waldorf Astoria Resort on Maui.

Plantation on Crystal River, Crystal River, Florida, has promoted **Terry Matwick** to director of sales and marketing. She previously served as group sales manager.

Gina Ovinnio was named sales

manager at Mission Inn Resort & Club, Howey-in-the-Hills, Florida. She was city sales manager with Kimpton Hotels in Miami.

The Westin New York Grand Central has appointed **Kerstin Pace** as director of sales and marketing. She formerly served as director of sales and marketing for The Westin Dublin.

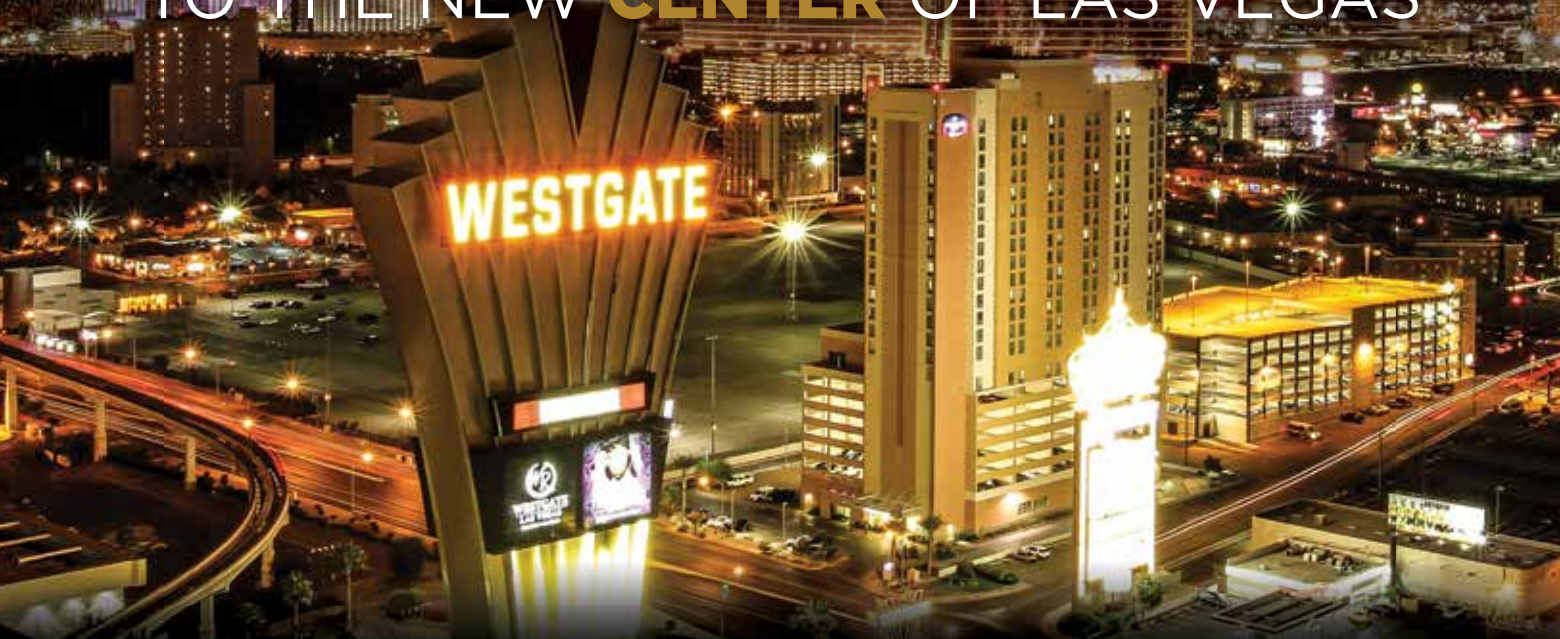
Loews Regency San Francisco has named **Austin Phillips** as director of sales and marketing. He previously served as director of sales and marketing for Stanford Court San Francisco. **C&IT**

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