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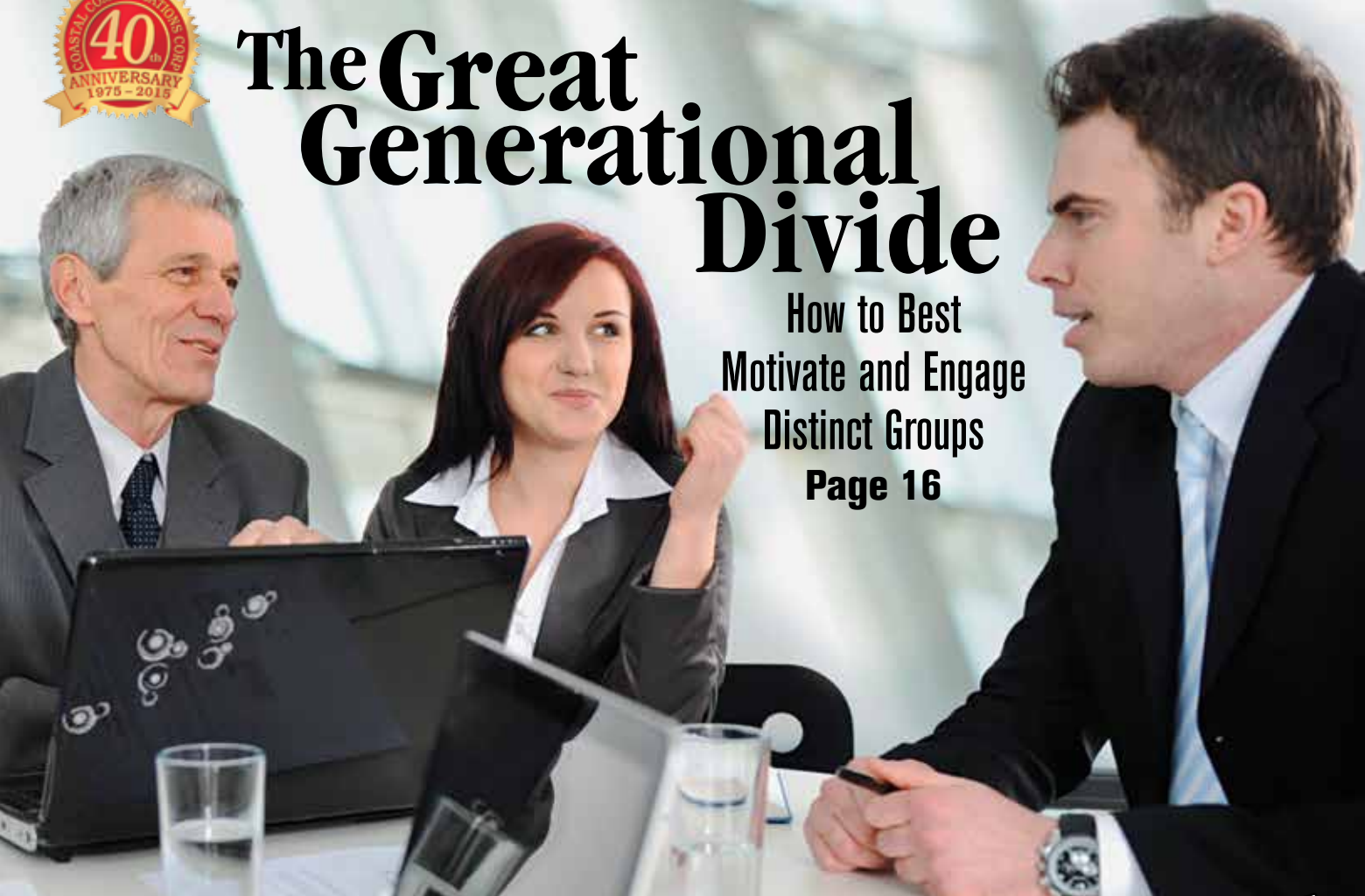
INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES



The Great Generational Divide

How to Best Motivate and Engage Distinct Groups
Page 16



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**FICP Annual
Conference
Photo Roundup**
Page 6

Golf Programs Page 10 Florida Page 20 Louisiana Page 28

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2015 Vol. 22 No. 6

Credit: The Wigwam Golf Resort



The Patriot Course's island green at The Wigwam Golf Resort in Arizona.

FEATURES

10 Getting a Grip on Golf Programs

Tips for Planning
Motivating Events
By Patrick Simms

16 The Great Generational Divide

How to Best Motivate and
Engage Distinct Groups
By Maura Keller

Second liners celebrate and parade in classic New Orleans style.



Credit: New Orleans CVB

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE
- 6 FICP ANNUAL CONFERENCE PHOTO ROUNDUP
- 8 INDUSTRY NEWS
- 9 FICP OUTLOOK
By Sheila R. Cleary & Joe Scully
- 34 CORPORATE LADDER
- 34 READER SERVICES

DESTINATIONS

20 Florida

Why Sunshine State Meetings Have It Made in the Shade
By Mark Roub

28 New Orleans

The Big Easy Is More Popular Than Ever
By Derek Reveron



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The new, oceanfront Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort in Florida.

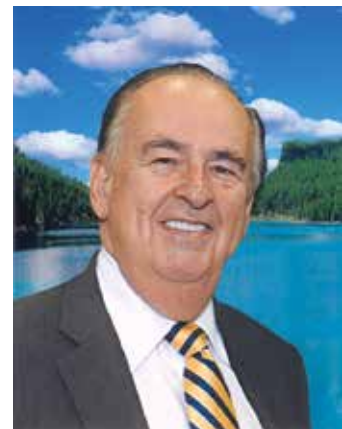
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Publisher's Message

It's Better in The Bahamas

I just returned from The Bahamas as I attended the 2015 FICP Annual Conference November 15–18, which was held at Atlantis, Paradise Island. More than 600 participants agreed that the conference was a great success. Attendees chose from an array of education sessions, including three captivating keynote presentations. Leading off the conference was industry favorite



Michael Dominguez, who discussed the state of the industry, economic concerns and trends to anticipate in the coming years. Sally Hogshead captured attendees' attention on Tuesday with her keynote address, "The Fascination Advantage: Unlocking Your Personality's Natural, Hardwired Advantages," which explored the science of fascination as it relates to personal branding. Wednesday's closing keynote by Jearlyn Steele delivered an impactful presentation, where she examined the importance of passion and purpose in everyday life.

A unique aspect of this year's Annual Conference was the cruise ship experience, where attendees spent the day aboard Royal Caribbean's Allure of the Seas. While on board, attendees heard the keynote presentation from Michael Dominquez, enjoyed an entertainment show and lunch in the Royal Promenade, and experienced the unique meeting venue.

Attendees also enjoyed several networking events throughout the conference. Sunday's opening reception was a lively affair, providing a glimpse into the Bahamian celebration Junkanoo. Attendees chose from seven onsite restaurants during Monday's dine-arounds, which offered a more intimate networking experience. Finally, Tuesday's evening pool party featured a "Colors of Bahamas" theme, complete with Bahamian cuisine and entertainment.

A successful The Network – Live also provided attendees a chance to connect in a business-centered environment. The 14th Annual Silent Auction was a success as well, raising \$50,306.90 for Junior Achievement, which is the dedicated philanthropic partner for the organization. The partnership promotes education, supports students interested in the travel and tourism industry and provides long-term volunteer opportunities for FICP members and hospitality partners.

I look forward to next year when the 2016 FICP Annual Conference is set for November 9–12 at the Omni Nashville Hotel. If you are not an FICP member, now is the time to join. www.ficpnet.com

Harvey Grotsky

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FICP[®] FINANCIAL & INSURANCE CONFERENCE PLANNERS

These snapshots were captured at the 2015 FICP Annual Conference held November 15–18 in Atlantis, Paradise Island, Bahamas. The event drew more than 600 planners and hospitality partners who soaked up an array of education sessions, spent a day aboard Royal Caribbean's Allure of the Seas, reveled in the Bahamian celebration Junkanoo, enjoyed seven onsite restaurants during Monday's dine-arounds and attended an event on Tuesday evening featuring a "Colors of Bahamas" theme — complete with Bahamian cuisine and entertainment. The 2016 FICP Annual Conference is set for November 9–12 at the Omni Nashville Hotel. www.ficpnet.com

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Omni Frisco Hotel to Open Early Summer 2017

FRISCO, TX — Executives from Omni Hotels & Resorts and the Dallas Cowboys, along with Frisco Mayor Maher Maso recently previewed new details about the Omni Frisco Hotel, which is set to open in early summer 2017. The hotel will serve as a cornerstone of The Star development, which will be anchored by the Dallas Cowboys World Headquarters and The Ford Center.

The hotel will feature 300 guest rooms and suites, a fine-dining venue, a lobby coffee and wine bar, and a rooftop pool bar and grill. The rooftop pool and deck can accommodate 300 to 400 guests and features three fire pits, cabanas and a bar and grill.

The hotel will feature 24,000 sf of meeting space, inclusive of a 13,000-sf ballroom. The Omni and Dallas Cowboys partnership also offers planners and attendees access to additional meetings and exhibit space in the Ford Center, as well as events on the plaza. www.omnihotels.com/hotels/frisco www.visitfrisco.com



(L to r) Jerry Jones, owner, general manager, and president of the Dallas Cowboys; Robert Rowling, chairman of TRT Holdings Inc., and owner of Omni Hotels & Resorts; and Frisco Mayor Maher Maso commemorate the construction progress of the Omni Frisco Hotel located at The Star by leaving their hand prints in cement.

Eau Palm Beach Launches New Programs

PALM BEACH COUNTY, FL — Recently crowned Florida's Top Resort in the prestigious 2015 *Condé Nast Traveler's* Readers' Choice Awards, Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa announced a new oceanfront restaurant and lounge, a culinary program with fresh menus and exciting gastronomic events, a bespoke Cultural Concierge program and a beauty compendium at the Forbes Five Star Eau Spa.

"We're thrilled to share our latest expressions of the modern Palm Beach lifestyle with new and returning guests this winter season," said Michael King, managing director of Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa. "Winter is an exciting time in Palm Beach, and we're dedicated to providing our guests with distinctive programs and experiences that embody the spirit of this award-winning destination."

New executive chef Josh Thomsen will premiere exciting new menus, and the Breeze Ocean Kitchen will introduce a dramatic new design, menu focus and personality. Open daily from sunrise to sunset, the space includes



Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa.

a "look out" bar floating above the resort's private beach, GPS-controlled slat roofing, a dynamic music scene, farm-to-glass juice program, vintage cocktails and light bite menus of Floridian flavors. www.eaupalmbeach.com

Turnberry Isle Miami Debuts New Guest Rooms

AVENTURA, FL — Turnberry Isle Miami recently introduced 241 renovated guest rooms and suites in the South Florida resort's Jasmine and Magnolia buildings. Boasting private balconies and views of the resort's golf courses, pools and tropical grounds, the spacious guest rooms and suites range from 500 sf to more than 2,400 sf. The rooms have new carpeting, draperies, furnishings and linens. The introduction of chrome metal accents and new contemporary artwork bring a modern touch to each room. Guests will enjoy the hotel's new custom deluxe mattresses and box springs by Serta, 47-inch, flat-screen TVs, iHome clock radios with the latest Bluetooth technology, personal Keurig coffee machines and bathroom amenities by Molton Brown. www.turnberryislemiami.com

FICP Outlook

By Shelia R. Cleary and Joe Scully



We asked Financial & Insurance Conference Planners (FICP) Board members **Shelia R. Cleary**, chair, and **Joe Scully** to give us their take on how the New Year will shape up on topics from technology to ROE. Thanks and a tip of the hat to these two savvy FICP members: Shelia the 2nd vice president, recognition and conferences, for National Life Group in Montpelier, Vermont, and Joe who is senior director, meeting and event management for John Hancock Financial Services in Boston.

What are some of the overall meeting trends that you think are most important?

CLEARY Overall, you must stay relevant. I ask myself, how do our agents want to receive information? How should we be designing our meetings?

Despite the advent of more technology, face-to-face meetings have increased in value in recent years. Think back to a few years ago during the worst of the financial crisis, we were all thinking, "Virtual meetings are going to replace in-person events." But the reality is, we're human beings and we need interaction. Yes, we are distributing tools and education using technology, but the value of face to face is just as relevant and important as it always has been. Our attendance continues to increase year-over-year.

We hear over and over — there is value in hearing agent perspectives about how they do business, in person. Our attendees want to hear from leadership within the company, in person.

With FICP, we are constantly hearing from our members that the value of FICP is in helping to generate more ideas and staying on top of trends face to face with hospitality partners. As planners, we are able to strategically form our lists of possible properties, CVBs, speaker bureaus, etc. because we have the ability to connect with those experts face to face. At our Annual Conference, The Network — Live serves as a perfect venue for this.

Ten-minute meetings arranged ahead of time with hospitality partners allow just the right amount of time to meet a new face and to determine if a future partnership is possible.

Technology: From meeting apps to social media, do planners use these cool tools?

CLEARY Technology in every area of business continues to expand and improve. Meeting apps seem to be fairly new in our space, but as with any technology, there's so much more we will be able to use them for than what we have to date. Our audience of insurance agents is in transition — we are seeing younger people enter the industry, so it's critical for us to remain relevant. A younger audience requires that we communicate to them in this new way. However, we also are straddling the generations and must remain thoughtful of communicating to our more seasoned agents in more traditional ways, too. Overall, I recommend evaluating who your audience is and tailoring your degree of "paperless" accordingly.

We're also evaluating technology from a transitional perspective. Social media is very focused on people sharing their experiences firsthand. The "selfie" phenomenon is a prime example of this. We hope our audience shares their positive experiences with our meetings and events to their social networks, thereby fostering more positive associations with the work we do.

We're having fun with technology at FICP events, too. The mobile apps for our Annual Conference and Education Forum are accompanied by a game designed to help users accumulate points for completing actions we deem valuable (e.g. viewing session details, completing evaluations, scheduling networking appointments). Attendees earn digital trophies, and the top point-earners receive tangible prizes after the event concludes. We're seeing enthusiastic participation and better overall awareness of the technology and how it works.

SCULLY With multiple generations in the work force, it is up to us as meeting planners to take a look at the audience we are serving and decide on a strategy for integrating any type of technology. Meeting apps are a valuable tool because they provide all relevant information in one place, and allow us to make critical updates to information as needed. A change in venue because of rain or a reminder about attire for an evening event are perfectly suited for updates using mobile apps. I think we will see more widespread use in the future.

But, there's also a segment of the population that will be reluctant to give up those handy pocket agendas, and I think we're feeling that right now with FICP events. Our members are really embracing the new technology, but I still see people pulling paper resources out of their pocket to see what's next on the agenda. I believe we will be in this transitional phase for quite some time.

Social media tends to be a bit more tricky, with privacy and compliance issues in the insurance and financial industry. I recommend checking with your legal department before diving in to any activity with social platforms around your events.

Strategic values: Is ROI more important or ROE when planning meetings and incentives?

SCULLY Return on investment will always be a deciding factor when determining whether or not to hold a meeting or incentive in the first place. As planners, it is on our plate to accurately represent the value of a program to leadership and continue doing so as the planning process continues.

Once you determine that a meeting or incentive is worth the time and money, that is when return on experience kicks in. Planners need to constantly evaluate and tweak meetings and events to keep attendees coming back for more. If your attendees' experience keeps them engaged and energized, then ROI will take care of itself with a motivated sales force.

I&FMM

Questions about FICP? Call 312-245-1023 or www.ficpnet.com.

Getting a Grip on Golf Programs

Tips for Planning Motivating Events

By Patrick Simms

Meeting planning can be a complex affair, but when it comes to coordinating group golf outings, planners can to an extent “leave it to the pros.” In her six years of planning meetings for Baton Rouge-based Louisiana Farm Bureau Insurance, Jennifer N. Meyer, director of agency services, has found that “usually the golf pros are really good at what they do” and the director and staff can autonomously handle a multitude of tasks relating to the tournament.

Her most recent experience with this expertise was at La Torretta Lake Resort & Spa in Montgomery, Texas, about 40 minutes outside of Houston. Louisiana Farm Bureau Insurance held its Sportsman’s Holiday incentive trip at the resort in September, and the agents enjoyed a Ryder Cup-format golf tournament on the lakeside course. The services of La Torretta’s PGA-certified staff are myriad, including pairing sheets, registration, personalized cart placards, pre-event announcements, scoring and customized scoreboards, conducting special contests, bag drop, sponsorship signage, prize distribution and more. That’s quite a lot of details that a planner needn’t stress over, and golf pros will even advise on which tournament format and course (when there is a choice) will best suit a group’s skill level and goals.



Ponte Vedra Inn & Club’s Shoot for the Pin activity is designed for groups of up to 25 participants who compete for closest to the pin honors on the island 9th hole on the Ocean Course.



Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, claims the famed TPC Sawgrass course, home of the PGA Tour's Players Championship.



Credit: TPC Sawgrass

Course Choice

When golf is a key recreational component, however, course choice can inform site selection for the meeting itself. An incentive trip for avid golfers, for example, will be more motivating when qualifiers are scheduled to visit a resort with a famous course,

"We want them to be healthily competitive with one another in the office, and that kind of transfers over to the greens."



Jennifer N. Meyer

Director of Agency Services
Louisiana Farm Bureau Insurance
Baton Rouge, LA

especially one they haven't played. And here again a planner can rely on the advice of the pros, namely upper management and agents: Which resort courses are on their bucket list?

Louisiana Farm Bureau Insurance, Meyer notes, is considering the Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, for a future program in part due to the famed TPC Sawgrass course (home of the PGA Tour's Players Championship). Last year the group played on the Torrey Pines Golf Course (home of the

PGA Tour's Farmers Insurance Open), adjacent to the AAA Five Diamond Lodge at Torrey Pines in La Jolla, California. While the agents commented it was a very challenging course, it was definitely one of their "must plays," she says. Courses such as "TPC Sawgrass, Torrey Pines and Pebble Beach are all places where the masters have played and (sites of the) great golf

tournaments that you watch on TV, so getting to play some of those courses is a big incentive."

The near future will bring new resort courses to the Southeast that will surely incentivize many agents. In White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, The Greenbrier is developing an 8,042-yard,

18-hole mountaintop championship golf course. Set to open next fall, the course will be designed by Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Gary Player and



Credit: The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa

The bunkers and greens on The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa's 27-hole Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course recently were rejuvenated.

Lee Trevino — the first-ever collaboration among these greats of the game.

Out West in Arizona, the AAA Four Diamond Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa offers newly rejuvenated bunkers and greens on its 27-hole Jack Nicklaus Signature desert golf course, framed by the Santa Catalina mountains. Nongolfers can experience the beauty of the desert on the resort's Sonoran Desert Walkway, offering an educational glimpse into the flora and fauna of the desert. The resort also recently underwent a \$35 million rejuvenation encompassing all 487 guest rooms and 64,000 sf of meeting space.

In Central Florida, Streamsong Resort is building Streamsong Black to complement Streamsong Red and Blue. Scheduled to open in autumn 2017, Streamsong Black will be designed by Gil Hanse, architect of The Olympic Golf Course in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and co-designer of Castle Stuart Golf Links in Scotland, among other prestigious courses. The new course will stand apart from the Red and Blue courses and challenge players with rolling elevation changes, accented by native grasses and panoramic views of ridges and the surrounding landscape. Yet Streamsong's existing courses are

already strong draws for experienced golfers, having recently been named to *Golf* magazine's list of "Top 100 Courses in the U.S." In less than three years since opening, the courses have garnered accolades from *Golfweek* and *Golf Digest* as well.

Also in Florida, the Innisbrook Golf Resort's famed Copperhead Course recently reopened after a six-month restoration. Managed by Salamander Hotels & Resorts, the Copperhead is one of the 10 resort courses that constitute the company's new Salamander Golf Collection. (Salamander is offering a variety of packages to entice groups to play all 10, including Salamander Resort & Spa's new golf package with the acclaimed Creighton Farms Golf Club, a Nicklaus

rector with SEI. Contests such as closest to the pin and ladies' and men's longest drive were part of the outing. "They are very competitive, and we don't announce our winners at the course; we wait until later that afternoon to post it on our hospitality desk, and people are chomping at the bit to know," says Lisenbee. "We also build a lot of competitiveness and engagement through our mobile app." For example, an event app can be used to send teasers to golfers about the upcoming announcement of the winners.

In North Florida, the AAA Five Diamond Ponte Vedra Inn & Club aims to



Credit: Streamsong Resort

Two championship courses at Streamsong Resort in Central Florida are carved out of beautiful acreage reclaimed from a former phosphate mine.

Signature Design, located in nearby Aldie, Virginia.)

Yet another golf hotbed in Florida is the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, where attendees enjoy golf privileges at four championship Sandestin golf courses — Baytowne Golf Club, Burnt Pine Golf Club, Raven Golf Club and The Links Course — as well as The Dunes putting course at Sandestin. Irving, Texas-based SEI Meetings & Incentives planned an incentive program for an insurance and financial company at the Hilton Sandestin in July.

Encouraging Competition

Among the 600 total attendees (including families) were many avid and casual golfers who participated in a tournament on the Raven course, relates Lisa Lisenbee, senior account di-

spur good-natured competition with its new Shoot for the Pin activity for groups of up to 25. Each attendee receives two balls to hit from the first hole tee box toward the resort's famed ninth hole on the Ocean Course, and attendants measure which shot is the closest. A scoreboard and prizes also are available. The contest allows plenty of time for socializing and networking while other guests tee off. In general, building camaraderie among a sales team is a well-known benefit of golf, which affords the space for conversations. Yet at the same time, the sport fits with their competitive natures. "Camaraderie is a big benefit, and healthy competition is good," says Meyer. "We want them to be healthily competitive with one another in the office, and that kind of transfers over to the greens."

"If your group has more seasoned golfers, consider adding a club or ball fitting to get golfers to arrive early and increase networking opportunities."



Mindy Gunn

V.P., Meeting & Event Planning Manager
Enterprise Meeting and Event Services
Wells Fargo Bank NA, Scottsdale, AZ

For Lisenbee's client, the golf outing was an opportunity for senior management to "spend some quality time on the course just to get to know certain reps a little better and what motivates them. They have offices all over the U.S., so they don't really get that one-on-one time."

Enhancing Networking

Mindy Gunn, vice president, meeting and event planning manager, with Wells Fargo Bank NA in Scottsdale, Arizona, suggests a way to enhance the social component. "If your group has more seasoned golfers, consider adding a club or ball fitting to get golfers to arrive early and increase networking opportunities," says Gunn, who has derived many of her ideas on planning golf events from consulting with Mark Stutes of Type A Marketing. "Ball fittings (the process of finding the best ball for a player's game) have become very popular because they can include a free sleeve of balls, don't take much time and are a little less 'personal' than club fittings. It really depends on how much you are planning to invest." Gunn's most recent golf event was Wells Fargo's employee recognition meeting at the TPC San Antonio, which included a casual tournament with optional scramble for 60 golfers.

Planning Basics

While the resort's golf staff typically



Footgolf players at Reunion Resort in Orlando kick their way around the specially designed Watson Course, aiming soccer balls at giant cups.

Credit: Reunion, a Salamander Golf & Spa Resort

handles most of the logistics surrounding the tournament, there are certain best practices for planners that can ensure the event runs smoothly. The first step is to make the golf event scheduling part of the contract. “Usually I write it into the contract that we’re going to want to play golf on Tuesday with an 8:30 a.m. start, for example,” says Meyer. “Some clubs are closed on Mondays or they only allow members to play in the morning. So you want to make sure that all those details are not going to be a problem.”

Relaying all the logistical details to participants is also vital. “Tell them what to expect, what time to be where, (and when to arrive) if they want to hit golf balls beforehand to warm up,” advises Lisenbee. “Let them know what time the first shuttle and last shuttle runs, and provide them the address as well if some will drive themselves over to the course.”

With so many great courses in warm climates such as Arizona and Florida, corporate golfers may find themselves battling too-hot temperatures on occasion. Scheduling the outing as early as possible can help. “We try to do very early tee times when we do golf in August,” says Meyer, usually as early as the course will open, 7:30 for instance.” The golfers who were part of Lisenbee’s client group at the Hilton Sandestin thoroughly enjoyed the course but “were sweating from being out there all day,” she recalls. “We do start early with an 8 a.m. shotgun, so we get them out there

before it gets extremely hot. But we also take precautions, such as having plenty of branded water on the carts.”

Particularly on warm days, planners should “make sure the course has enough beverage carts to service the group — request additional staff if needed,” Gunn suggests. “The courses don’t always volunteer it but will typically provide it if asked.” The availability of bottled water throughout the

It’s an opportunity for senior management to “spend some quality time on the course just to get to know certain reps a little better and what motivates them.”

Lisa Lisenbee
Senior Account Director
SEI Meetings & Incentives
Irving, TX

course is always well appreciated, she has noticed, as is “a ‘goodie bag’ on each cart with the basics: a healthful snack, sunscreen, lip balm, bug spray (if in an area that needs it), etc.” One word of warning: “Never give out sunflower seeds (they wreak havoc on the greens), greasy chips or anything messy (cleaning your hands or getting it on your gloves is no fun),” she says.

When it comes to gifts for golfers, some of Gunn’s favorites include: “shoe bags, preferably compact and simple

ones that players can take home easily; and a divot repair tool, which is great if you have a group that’s traveling and renting clubs. For high-value groups, consider bringing in a choice of sunglasses, shoes, shirts, etc.,” including appropriate choices for female golfers.

Keeping Nongolfers in Mind

It’s also important to cater to nongolfers by booking a resort with a variety of recreational options, whether other sports, spa or exploring the local area. La Torretta Lake Resort & Spa, for example, is located about 20 minutes outside of the Woodlands, “which is a really good area for shopping,” Meyer says.

Boating also was popular. “Many of our agents from South Louisiana brought their own boat, which they could dock at the hotel for free.” Given that about half the group was comprised of nongolfers, it was important that the incentive destination offer plenty of activities for them while the others were on the greens.

Between nongolfers and the golf aficionados are the casual players and beginners, and Gunn shares several tips for making these participants feel comfortable. Planners can offer “a casual day of play, with no scores and free drops. They also might consider side games on the greens: blackjack for a sleeve of balls, putting contests on reachable greens, etc. A wine/bourbon/tequila tasting on a green can be a fun addition,” she says. But she cautions

not to “overwhelm your players with paid contests for a corporate outing.”

Footgolf

A golf-related game that can put golf aficionados on par with the beginners and casual players is Footgolf. Developed in the mid-2000s, Footgolf is essentially golf played with a soccer ball, where players kick their way through a course of nine or 18 large “cups” instead of golf holes. Reunion, a Salamander Golf & Spa Resort, introduced Footgolf this summer on its award-winning Watson Course, a Tom Watson Signature Design. “We are thrilled to introduce FootGolf at Reunion,” said Kevin Baker, director of golf for Reunion Resort, in a statement. “It is a great sport for families and can be played in a fraction of the time as a traditional round of golf. It also provides a youthful and exciting aspect to the game.” Planners can offer a round of Footgolf where golf pros, casual players and beginners, and even nongolfers can all get out and experience a great course together.

Brock Bulbuck, president and CEO of Winnipeg, Manitoba-based Boyd Group Income Fund, notes that “we have a broad range of golf skillsets” among the attendees of the company’s leadership meeting held annually at The Wigwam in Litchfield Park, Arizona. That calls for “more of a fun event than a serious golf event. We play golf one afternoon during 2½ days of meetings. It’s just a very informal, low-key Texas scramble to ensure speed of play.” (The Texas scramble requires that at least four drives of each of the four team members be used during the round, thus getting the weaker drivers into the game.) Having partnered with The Wigwam for seven years, the group has found that “many of the staff that are serving us there currently were there seven years ago. They know us, we know them, and it just makes for planning and execution much easier and much more seamless,” Bulbuck comments.

The resort also has kept its Gold Course (nicknamed the “Arizona Monster”) well maintained, he observes. “The course has improved over the

years, (as they) continue to upgrade its quality, conditions and playability.” This year marks the 50th anniversary of both the Gold and Patriot courses, and the former underwent an extensive renovation and redesign this summer. “With this update, the course is more playable for the average golfer while continuing to challenge even the most accomplished player,” asserted Leo Simonetta, director of The Wigwam Golf Club, in

a statement. The Wigwam consulted with Tom Lehman, former British Open champion and winner of numerous PGA Tour events, in revamping Robert Trent Jones Sr.’s original design.

Here again, a planner effectively relies on the expertise of the pros to ensure that attendees’ experience on the greens is top notch, which reflects positively on the meeting as a whole.

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Walk into any financial or insurance office and you're bound to see a diverse group of individuals. From suit-donning, gray-haired executives carrying leather-bound portfolios, to tennis-shoe-wearing 20-somethings with iPads in hand, to middle-age leaders lugging their laptops from meeting to meeting. This generational divide among at least the three largest groups (baby boomers, Gen X and millennials) is causing meeting planners to take notice and determine the best way to engage these distinct groups in their next event.

According to Sarah Sladek, author of *Knowing Y: Engage the Next Generation Now* (Association Management Press, U.S. 2014) and CEO of XYZ University, the three largest generations in the work force today are baby boomers, Generation X and millennials — also known as Generation Y. The Generation Zs are turning 19 this year, so we'll start hearing more about them

in the next year or so as they begin moving into college and careers.

"The 'distinct group' everyone is talking about is the millennials, because this year they became the majority



Sarah Sladek
CEO
XYZ University
Osseo, MN

of the work force," Sladek says. "This is a monumental shift considering boomers have been the majority of the work force for 34 years."

Millennials are beginning to domi-

tion to be rewarded for participation and not achievement; and they came of age during one of the worst recessions our country has ever observed, which has left them the most debt-ridden generation in history.

"The 'distinct group' everyone is talking about is the millennials, because this year they became the majority of the work force."

How to Entice Millennials

So how do financial and insurance planners entice millennials to partake in meetings and events in an industry that has been profoundly inundated by the baby boomers and Generation X individuals?

Tamra Fairbrother, CMP, CMM, CUDE, vice president of training and events at Cornerstone Credit Union League, says that although she orchestrates meetings geared specially toward their young professionals or their board volunteers, they also have conferences that blend education across all generations.



The Great Generational Divide

By Maura Keller

How to Best Motivate and Engage Distinct Groups



nate the work force, and though the majority have just entered the job market or have recently stepped into early leadership roles, soon they'll be the key decision-makers. Engage them in unique, fun and impressionable events now, and you'll be building a mutually beneficial relationship for the future, say the experts.

Millennials are distinct for several reasons: They are the largest generation in history; the first generation of the post-industrial era and the first generation never to have known life without access to technology. In addition, they are the best-educated and most diverse generation in history; the most protected, supervised and provided-for generation; the first genera-

"We ensure we have various tracks set up to meet the needs of everyone," Fairbrother says. "Our larger events have an event app that is gaining usage with each opportunity. The app lists the schedule, speaker information and gives them push notifications during the event of reminders or possible changes. Although the younger generation is known for their utilization of technology, we are finding that with instruction, we are gaining ground with other members as well. At our upcoming annual meeting next April in Oklahoma City, we will add CU Talks in place of a breakout session. These short yet though-provoking sessions are sure to engage the audience."

Fairbrother believes that having a

designated Young Professionals Conference appeals to the millennials and gives them the forum for peer-to-peer networking at various career levels.

“At the same time, we provide education sessions at our annual meeting not only for the younger professionals but for the volunteer as well,” Fairbrother says. “This is of course in addition to other tracks for specific career fields.”

In addition, Fairbrother says “cause-related” opportunities at events are often popular as well.

“We work to incorporate CSR (corporate social responsibility) events at our larger meetings and we find that millennials are always eager to lend a hand or make a donation,” Fairbrother says.

Ann Fishman, president of NYC-based Generational Targeted Marketing who wrote and published *Marketing to the Millennial Woman* (August, 2015), operates a specialized marketing firm that provides insights into the preferences, trends and buying habits of each of America’s generations. Fishman says that it is important that meeting and event planners in the insurance and financial arenas don’t think of boomers as old.

“They picture themselves 10 to 15 years younger than their chronological age,” Fishman says. “They expect to be treated special. Give prizes like spa treatments. These people need R&R. They juggle aging parents, themselves, children and grandchildren. Build that into your meetings. This group loves music from the ’60s, but that will probably turn off every other generation present.”

Likewise, Fishman says millennials travel in groups. So give discounts if they bring friends and colleagues.

“Teach them skills to move them ahead, again, like how to give a speech, run a meeting, network and negotiate. Give out goody bags full of fun stuff,” Fishman says. “Millen-

nials have been team-taught, team-graded, and rewarded for showing up for team sports. They love the bonding that goes into team activities, such as rock climbing as part of the teambuilding exercise. Hotels with pod seating in the lobbies encourage socialization with this group-oriented generation. Offer a yoga class and a seminar on how to handle student debt for you and your clients.”

When planning events and meetings for his firm, Morling Financial Advisors, Victor Huang has found that millennials have been more engaged when the events the firm has planned have had an educational aspect to them.

“Millennials have been team-taught, team-graded, and rewarded for showing up for team sports. They love the bonding that goes into team activities.”



Ann Fishman
President
Generational Targeted Marketing
New York, NY

“We’ve been doing happy-hour themed events in conjunction with the educational piece,” Huang says. “It’s something that is very familiar to this specific group: food and drinks after a day of work. This means our meeting venues are private rooms in bars that are nearby their workplace, serving beer and finger foods. It’s also a space that conveys conversation and relationship building, which is exactly the feel that we want in these types of events. We also make sure that these venues are near popular streets or near public transportation for convenience.”

However, Huang has found that when they only had social events without an educational piece, there was less followup afterwards.

“I think the problem with these

events was that it was fun, but it did not convey our expertise and how we could address their needs in a practical way. This also meant no trust was built, even though everyone had a good time,” Huang says.

Meeting Their Needs

Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario’s conferences and events offer different formats of learning to engage the broad age range of attendees. They include a mix of learning styles at their events — ranging from traditional and formal presentations, to hands-on workshops, and TED Talk-style shorter keynotes.

“We engage our members by profiling keynote speakers from outside of the accounting and finance industry, who have a broader business appeal,” says Cameal Soverall, CMP, CMM, manager of conferences and events at CPA of Ontario. “At some events we offer live-streaming and webinars. We also incorporate a social media campaign into all of our events, such as Twitter chats with speakers before the event, live tweeting and twitter feed during the event, and conference apps and social media contests.”

CPA of Ontario’s younger members, referred to as Young CPAs or YCPAs, are very receptive to technology — typical of most millennials.

“They are more inclined to download and use our event apps and participate in social media contests and are often easier to engage pre-event,” Soverall says. “Whereas our older members tend to prefer more traditional approaches to programming. For example, these members don’t like having to go online to access conference materials and would prefer to have handouts printed and distributed at events.”

Soverall also plans events specifically for the YCPAs or millennials. These events tend to focus more on topics around innovation, technology trends and personal branding, and the venues where these events are held are trendier, such as a new restaurant or unique venue. Also, the format of

The Generations Through the Years

- **1883–1900** *The Lost Generation*
- **1900–1924** *The Greatest Generation*
- **1925–1942** *The Silent Generation*
- **1946–1964** *The Baby Boomers*
- **Early 1960s–1980s** *Generation X or Gen X*
- **Early 1980s–Early 2000s** *The Millennials or Gen Y*
- **Late 1990s/Mid 2000s–Present Day** *Generation Z or Gen Z*



these events is experiential, offering creative and unique experiences.

As Soverall has noticed, millennials are thirsty for knowledge, but they just learn in a different way. “Organizations that recognize this can adjust the format and content of their events to meet the needs of this group,” Soverall says. “Millennials are also collaborators who love being part of a team; work with them and have them participate in the discussion and planning of events.”

Know Your Audience

Melissa Erenberg, communications and education consultant at Assurance, one of the largest insurance brokerages in the U.S., also plans meetings and events for this nationwide insurance company. The strategies she’s seen fail across generations, specifically millennials, are boring communication collateral and presentations.

“In our industry, we’re PowerPoint-focused,” Erenberg says. “It definitely has a place in some presentations but it needs to be relied on less. People do not want to be read to. If you use it, or something similar, do not read from your slides. Let it just be a guide. Death by PowerPoint is real. Make insurance and financial education fun and interesting. Be charismatic when talking about it. Show video, add pictures and tell stories.”

It all comes back to knowing your audience and varying the media used to convey the messaging.

“If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always gotten,” Erenberg says. “In laymen’s terms, if you continue to communicate one way, you’re only going to be



Cameal Soverall
CMP, CMM
Manager, Conferences & Events
Chartered Professional Accountants
of Ontario, Toronto, Canada

heard by a handful of people. Shake it up. Do something different, and spend time to make sure your message is received.”

What the Future Holds

Soverall says it is important to attract different members of different age groups because it allows financial and insurance companies and organi-

zations to implement different meeting formats, which in turn helps them to better understand what motivates members of different generations. “The more we understand, the better equipped we are to meet their needs and offer learning environments that are more productive,” Soverall says.

The future of millennials at events will be increasingly digital. From social media capabilities, to digital invites, to mobile check-ins, millennials are craving to bridge the gap between face-to-face interaction and technology. They long to share their experiences online while it’s happening in person. The digital revolution will continue to transform events into a hybrid between both in-person and virtual interactions.

“Your outreaches will be more effective and easier if you understand the generational characteristics of each of America’s living generations,” Fishman says. “You will understand why you succeed with certain outreaches and how to duplicate that success, and you will learn how to avoid certain failures in your outreaches. It pays in so many ways to get to know America’s generations and their unique values, attitudes and lifestyles.”

“The more we understand, the better equipped we are to meet their needs and offer learning environments that are more productive.”

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Florida

Why Sunshine State Meetings Have It Made in the Shade

By Mark Rowh

The allure of Florida as a destination is unquestionable. How can you top a place that calls itself the Sunshine State? And with the investments made by a number of properties, today's options may be better than ever.

"Florida offers many of the sun-and-sand benefits which can be so motivating to participants, but is also likely to meet the business requirements of many financial services or insurance organizations," says Susan Adams, senior director of engagement for Dittman Incentive Marketing in New Brunswick, New Jersey. "When policies require domestic travel, travel within footprint only or restrict the number of days out of office, Florida can inspire guests and satisfy these business rules."

She adds that the combination of great airlift, reliable hotel partners and creative destination or event management

partners can contribute to a memorable experience for guests and make planning easier.

"When you're considering white sandy beaches for a corporate program, Florida can be pretty hard to beat," Adams says.

Certainly diversity of offerings is a key factor when considering Florida. The wide range of properties around the state offers nearly unlimited options for meeting planners.

Weather is also an important factor in site selection for Noël S. Mladinich, supervisor, meetings and events for financial advising firm Raymond James. But it's far from the only one.

"Florida is an attractive destination for meetings in the colder months because it can provide respite for our attendees from the more harsh Northern climates," she says. "It also offers many diverse areas, from Orlando to Miami to the beaches in the Panhandle,

"Florida offers many of the sun-and-sand benefits which can be so motivating to participants, but is also likely to meet the business requirements of many financial services or insurance organizations."

**Susan Adams, Senior Director of Engagement
Dittman Incentive Marketing, New Brunswick, NJ**



which can help serve an array of meeting objectives."

Central Florida

Adrienne Gutbier, second vice president, corporate marketing for Ohio National Financial Services in Cincinnati, reports that Florida is an ideal meeting destination for her company, having coordinated several meetings at the Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek. Last winter, 97 quali-



The Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek.

fying general agents from across the country attended a meeting along with headquarters staff and spouses. Gutbier cites the weather in January and February as a prime factor in the location's attractiveness.

"This is an incentive for most of our attendees," she says, noting that sunny Florida will always be a draw in the first quarter of the year, and that historically many of those eligible to attend these meetings reside in states where the weather is less ideal.

"As we have changed our business model and agents across the U.S. are now eligible, weather doesn't draw quite the way it used to, but it is still a factor," she says. And she adds that Orlando specifically is a great destination with its airlift capacity and number of direct flights.

And when it comes to accommodating her meetings, Gutbier says the Wyndham has consistently offered everything her groups have needed.

"There is ideal meeting space, wonderful sleeping rooms, great food and beverage, and impeccable service," she



A rendering of Loews Sapphire Falls Resort at Universal Orlando opening in 2016.

says. "Overall it has been a perfect value proposition for us for three years."

The 400-room hotel can serve both large and small groups. A total of 32,000 sf of meeting space includes facilities accommodating up to 800, while the smallest, at 304 sf, seats 10. The hotel recently embarked on a meeting space expansion set for completion in May 2016.

"The meeting space fit our group perfectly," Gutbier says. "We were able to have the ideal amount of general session and breakout space. We were moments from Downtown Disney, which offered a great offsite option for one evening, and being a new property, everything was fresh and sharp."

A few attendees came early or stayed late with spouses or kids to en-

joy the Orlando parks, Gutbier adds. That option served as a welcome bonus to a successful business outing. Located in the Walt Disney World Resort and offering easy access to the area's theme parks is the Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista. Along with its 814 guest rooms, the hotel has 78,000 sf of meeting space. Prefunction space includes three built-in registration counters that service two large ballrooms. The grand ballroom, with more than 18,000 sf, can accommodate more than 2,000 guests. The hotel recently completed a remodel of public spaces, guest rooms and meeting space. A new walkway bridge between the hotel and the new Disney Springs was completed this fall. (Disney Springs is a transformation of Downtown Disney featuring more dining, shopping and entertainment options.)

At Universal Orlando Resort, with five hotels and several theme park attractions, meeting participants can



The Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista.

enjoy both large-scale and smaller events. At the upper end of the spectrum, corporate groups can buy out either Universal's Islands of Adventure or Universal Studios for an event high-



The Crescent Terrace at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel.

lighted by exclusive access to rides and attractions. Or for groups under 200, customized options from dinner receptions or teambuilding to “ride & dine” options are available. A variety of venues accommodates from 300 to 1,900 attendees.

New in 2016 will be the Caribbean-themed Loews Sapphire Falls Resort,

“We were moments from Downtown Disney, which offered a great offsite option for one evening.”

**Adrienne Gutbier, 2nd V.P.
Corporate Marketing, Ohio National
Financial Services, Cincinnati, OH**

which will be Universal Orlando’s fifth hotel. It will bring another 1,000 rooms and 115,000 sf of meeting space to the picture. All told, the combined meeting and function space among all of Universal Orlando’s hotels will then total nearly 250,000 sf, with options for meeting the needs of virtually any sized group.

Located within the Walt Disney World Resort, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel recently redesigned every guest room in the 758-room Swan hotel, with the same effort planned for the 1,509-room Dolphin hotel. The rooms feature new upgrad-

ed furniture, the latest technology including large HDTVs, additional power outlets and attractive colors and other design features.

Along with its convenient location between Epcot and Disney’s Hollywood Studios and proximity to Disney’s Animal Kingdom and Magic Kingdom Park, the Swan and Dolphin offers a huge variety of meeting options with more than 329,000 sf of combined meeting space. Some 84 meeting rooms include executive boardrooms and a number of ballroom configurations. One totals 55,000 sf divisible into 16 meeting rooms, and another 34,000 sf is divisible into 11 meeting rooms. Convention and exhibit space tops 110,000 sf, and 99,000 sf of outdoor space includes a number of terraces and courtyards.

The hotel also offers some truly nontraditional event spaces. Dinners, receptions and other group events can be held in areas including banquet kitchens, back hallways and even a giant freezer. With the latter, up to 60 guests may enjoy unusual offerings such as a martini bar served on carved ice, or a raw bar and caviar also served on ice — all while outfitted in parkas provided by the hotel.

At SeaWorld, exotic marine life and exhibits can provide exciting backdrops for group events. Meeting and event spaces include the Ports of Call

Credit: Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin

banquet facility, featuring a 12,000-sf ballroom; Discovery Cove, with a capacity of 100–400; and TurtleTrek (with the same capacity) with naturalistic habitats featuring rescued manatees and sea turtles. Still other choices include the Penguin Encounter and Wild Arctic.

New in Orlando, I-Drive 360 opened in May. The \$200 million retail, dining and entertainment complex revolves around the 400-foot-tall Orlando Eye observation wheel. In addition to a range of restaurants, the complex includes a 420-foot-tall spinning attraction, the StarFlyer; Madame Tussauds Orlando; Sea Life Aquarium; and Skeltons: Animals Unveiled.

Planners looking for an incentive retreat far from the maddening crowds would do well to consider Streamsong Resort, located 86 miles south of Orlando and accessible from both the Tampa and Orlando airports. Set on 16,000 acres of dunes, lakes and lagoons, the 228-room resort offers a spectacular grotto-style spa, golf on two championship courses (with a third on the way) and unique outdoor activities (think teambuilding) such as sporting clays at multiple stations and guided bass fishing. The property has 25,000 sf of conference facilities, which can accommodate groups of 10 to 500, as well as 50,000 sf of outdoor event space.

Northeast Florida

Among the attractive properties in Northeast Florida is the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront. It offers 110,000 sf of function space including 30 meeting rooms, most of which overlook the St. Johns River. Facilities include more than 21,000-sf of outdoor river decks, eight conference suites and space for small meetings.

Twenty-nine miles north of the Jacksonville airport is the oceanfront Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort, which now boasts 80,000 sf of meeting space, including a new 16,825-sf ballroom. The spacious conference center houses more than 13,000 sf of prefunction space as well as an 11,000-sf event



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The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa.

lawn. The 404 oceanfront guest rooms include 27 suites.

Twenty miles southeast of Jacksonville is the AAA Five Diamond Ponte Vedra Inn & Club, a 300-acre resort in operation since 1928. Its luxury accommodations include 250 rooms and suites. Guests can enjoy top-quality golf and tennis programs as well as a spa. The resort has 25,000 sf of meeting and banquet space and 17 meeting

rooms, the largest of which is just over 6,200 sf. The resort recently completed a multimillion-dollar renovation of its Peyton House accommodations and oceanfront Surf Club, while also introducing the new Tavern Lounge and upgrading the complimentary Wi-Fi system property-wide. The resort will complete a multimillion-dollar renovation of its Ocean House accommodations in fall 2017.

Daytona's multifaceted Ocean Cen-

ter convention center features 32 meeting rooms, an executive board room and VIP suite and 32,000 sf of total meeting space. A large ballroom offers divisible space, and the facility also includes a 94,000-sf exhibit hall and 42,000-sf arena that seats 9,300. Located 400 feet from the ocean, the center is flanked by a selection of shops and restaurants.

The Panhandle

Located in Destin, in Northwest Florida's Panhandle, the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa proclaims that it is Northwest Florida's largest full-service beachfront resort hotel. It offers 602 guest rooms as well as 40,000 sf of recently renovated meeting space designed to handle groups ranging from 10 to 2,000. Included in the total meeting space is the new 7,500-sf Coastal Ballroom.

"Miami is a prime location for meetings as there is a wide range of properties to choose from, and a plethora of dining and leisure options as well."

Noël S. Mladinich, Supervisor, Meetings & Events
Raymond James, St. Petersburg, FL

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Sister property Ponte Vedra Lodge & Club has completed a multimillion-dollar renovation of its 66 oceanfront guest rooms.

The Shores Resort and Spa in Daytona Beach Shores completed a property-wide renovation last year encompassing the 212 guest rooms and 20,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space. Event facilities include a 6,800-sf grand ballroom that can be subdivided into five smaller meeting facilities ranging

from 830 to 3,700 sf. Guests using this ground-level facility find themselves walking through the Daytona Beach Stock Car Racing Hall of Fame featuring plaques of famous faces in racing. Also available are boardrooms and smaller meeting rooms plus more than 8,000 sf of rooftop "cloud level" meeting facilities with floor-to-ceiling glass for outstanding views.

Daytona's multifaceted Ocean Cen-

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The Gulf Coast

Following an \$18 million renovation completed earlier this year, the Waldorf Astoria Naples in Southwest Florida transitioned to the independently owned Naples Grande Beach Resort & Naples Grande Golf Course. The 474-room hotel has 83,000 sf of meeting space, five restaurants and bars, three pools and 100-foot waterslide. A scenic boardwalk to the beach winds through a protected mangrove sanctuary.

Saddlebrook Resort in Tampa boasts more than 95,000 sf of meet-



The Palm Terrace Pool at the Naples Grande Beach Resort.

ing and function space. Some 34 meeting and breakout rooms are available, along with 15 outdoor areas. The largest ballroom offers 17,743 sf of space for up to 1,400 guests, while another with 12,500 sf of space accommodates up to 750. The unusual glass-enclosed 5,763-sf Lagoon Pavilion is built out over the water. Outside event venues include the Commons, which provides 13,000 sf of space that can accommodate banquets for up to 1,000 guests or receptions up to 1,360, and a 9,600-sf super-pool deck.

A unique event venue is the 18th fairway of the Saddlebrook Course which, when lighted during evening hours, handles large groups. And a sports village overlooking the golf course and lake can be used for casual gatherings and teambuilding activities.



Prefunction space at the Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort.

Southeast Florida

Just opened in 2015 in Hollywood, the 349-room Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort also adds something new to Florida's already rich selection of destinations. Inspired by the lyrics and lifestyle of "parrothead" singer-songwriter Jimmy Buffett, the facilities overlook the Atlantic Ocean and include 30,000 sf of combined indoor and outdoor event space. The 23,000 sf of meeting and prefunction space on the resort's ninth floor is strategically located to avoid distractions for business activities. In addition, two floors higher is a 7,000-sf outdoor event area for receptions and dinners with great oceanfront views. Meeting spaces include a 10,000-sf



The oceanfront Eau Palm Beach Resort and Spa.

ballroom and seven smaller rooms for breakouts or other needs. They range in size from 600 to 1,170 sf.

The oceanfront Eau Palm Beach Resort and Spa on Palm Beach island was named the top resort in Florida in the 2015 *Condé Nast Traveler's* Readers' Choice Awards. The tony AAA Five Diamond resort, which offers 309 guest rooms, recently debuted a new oceanfront restaurant and lounge, a celebrity-chef-led culinary program and a bespoke Cultural Concierge program. For meetings, there is more than 30,000 sf of meeting and event space that includes a 9,860-sf ballroom divisible into three equal salons. Two additional ballrooms are supplemented by 10 breakout meeting rooms, including two boardrooms, ranging in size from 387 to 602 sf. Outdoor event space includes an oceanfront courtyard, pool terrace and poolside cabanas.

An important amenity for incentive programs, Eau Spa is 42,000 sf of welcoming relaxation. The Forbes Five Star, award-winning spa offers a departure from traditional appointment-based treatments, encouraging an individualized spa approach. A few of the features of the spa include the Self-Centered Garden, Private Villas, Scrub and Polish Bar, Bath Lounge, Eau Zone Relaxation Lounge, 19 treatment rooms and salon.

Also on Palm Beach Island is the

historic Brazilian Court Hotel, dating back to 1926, where ballroom and Conservatory spaces were recently remodeled. With only 68 units available at any time, planners can consider a buyout of the iconic property.

Across the bridge to the mainland in West Palm Beach, the new 400-room Hilton West Palm Beach is being constructed next to

the 350,000-sf Palm Beach County Convention Center. The convention hotel, which has announced that it will open ahead of schedule in January 2016, will house 24,000 sf of meeting space, and will be accessible via covered walkway from the convention center.

In choosing a Florida destination, Mladinich especially likes the Miami area.

"Miami is a prime location for meetings as there is a wide range of properties to choose from, and a plethora



Cafe Boulud Palm Beach in the Brazilian Court Hotel.



Credit: Hilton West Palm Beach

A rendering of the new Hilton West Palm Beach opening in January.

ora of dining and leisure options as well," she says.

In October, Mladinich and her colleagues coordinated a meeting at Turnberry Isle Miami for 100 financial advisors along with partner firm and home office representatives, and they were pleased with the results. A major consideration was the convenient access to both the Fort Lauderdale and Miami airports.

"The sleeping rooms, common areas, dining outlets and meeting space have recently been redone, and are phenomenal," Mladinich says. "The staff, at all levels, is professional and easy to work with."

Located in Aventura, an exclusive section of North Miami Beach, Turnberry Isle is a Mediterranean-style resort covering 300 acres. Along with 408 guest rooms and suites and beach access, it also has two championship golf courses. More than 40,000 sf of meeting space provides planners a variety of options. A grand ballroom totaling nearly 12,000 sf and accommodating up to 1,060 guests can be divided into three sections. The resort's confer-

ence center has 21 meeting rooms, and a 7,314-sf outdoor terrace accommodates up to 400 guests.

The Trump National Doral Miami offers more than 100,000 sf of redesigned meeting space plus 75,000 total sf of outdoor function space. Heading the list is a 24,000-sf grand ballroom. Other facilities include the 9,500-sf White & Gold Ballroom, the 8,100-sf Ivanka Trump Ballroom, and the Crystal Ballroom & Terrace with 7,200 sf of indoor space and an 8,000-sf outdoor terrace.

The Miami Worldcenter, which breaks ground later this year, will be anchored by a new, \$750 million 1,800-room Marriott Marquis Miami Worldcenter Hotel & Expo Center that will include more than 600,000 sf of convention facilities, including a 100,000-sf ground floor exhibition hall, a 65,000-sf main ballroom, a 1,500-seat theater and 390,000 sf of meeting rooms and event space.

Key Largo

The Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, located on 2,500 acres of the northernmost tip of the Florida Keys, welcomes select groups for meetings, corporate retreats and conferences. The property — which has a range of accommodations that include 175 inn rooms, 100 spacious one-, two- and three-bedroom villas and private homes —



Credit: Turnberry Isle Miami

Turnberry Isle Miami.

boasts its own private airport and private 175-slip marina, two golf courses, tennis, croquet and 30,000 sf of meeting space, including a ballroom that can hold 700 and a rooftop terrace for 175 with views of the marina.

Attendees can take advantage of a range of group activities beyond golf and spa at Ocean Reef Club: Angling aficionados can experience deep-sea,



Credit: The Ocean Reef Club

A rendering of the new meeting and function space opening at The Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo in early February.

flats, reef or backcountry fishing off the shores of the resort; other group activities can include chartered yacht dinners, beachside events, eco-tours and teambuilding programs such as golf cart scavenger hunts, cardboard boat regattas and beach olympics, to name a few.

A new meeting facility, Carysfort Hall, will open in February. Able to accommodate up to 300 guests, the hall will include a 5,607-sf ballroom; five breakout rooms, all with natural light; an expanded, 3,000-sf interactive cooking school where up to 150 attendees can participate in tasty teambuilding activities; and wraparound outdoor decks with breathtaking views of the marina.

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Credit: The Trump National Doral Miami

The Trump National Doral Miami.

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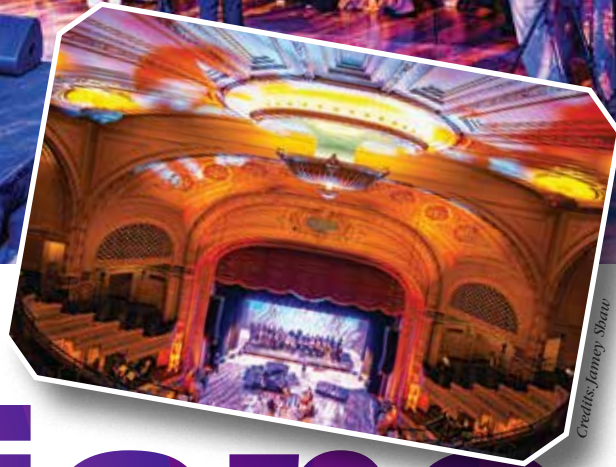
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The Orpheum Theater in New Orleans was restored to its full glory and now boasts a customizable floor plan ideal for meetings and events.



Credits: Jamie Shaw

Louisiana

The Big Easy Is More Popular Than Ever

Louisiana boasts three distinct meeting experiences. New Orleans offers boisterous non-stop revelry, omnipresent jazz and some of the world's finest restaurants. Baton Rouge oozes Southern charm and provides a variety of unique meeting venues. Shreveport-Bossier, whose slogan is "Louisiana's Other Side," is home to a bevy of riverboat casinos.

By Derek Reveron

But New Orleans remains the main driver of Louisiana's expanding meetings industry. The Big Easy will be 300 years old in 2018 and is more popular than ever as borne out by key measures such as repeat visitation.

During 2014, 62.6 percent of visitors indicated they were making a return trip, according to the 2014 New Orleans Area Visitor Profile study. In

addition, 57.8 percent of business and convention visitors extended stays by an average of two nights, up from 55.4 percent in 2013.

Accolades keep pouring in for New Orleans. In October 2015, the city was named the No. 5 Big City in the U.S., according to *Condé Nast Traveler's* Reader's Choice Awards 2015. In July 2015, *Travel + Leisure* named New Orleans the No. 2 city in

the U.S. and Canada after Charleston, South Carolina.

First-time Groups

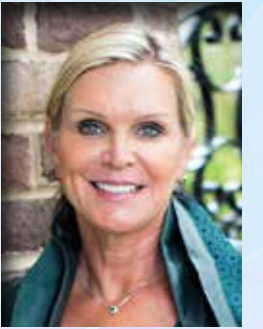
In April, the San Diego-based ISU Insurance Agency Network held a three-day meeting in New Orleans for 280 insurance agents and executives. It was the group's first meeting in the city, according to Andrea H. Glenn, ISU vice president and meeting planner. The meeting was a hit for everyone, including those who had never been to New Orleans and originally had doubts about coming. "I was surprised at the number of people in our group who had never visited New Orleans," says Glenn. "Our members range in age from late 20s to mid-60s. There was some concern that some may not like the Bourbon Street scene. I emailed people information about the city, and they saw that there was a lot to do besides partying. Everybody said they had a good time."

The group chose New Orleans for two reasons. "I poll the group every year on where they would like to go and New Orleans started coming up a lot," Glenn says. "Also, my priority was making sure people have time to socialize and get to know one another outside of a business setting, and New Orleans has lots of places for that."

The fun networking activities start-

"Also, my priority was making sure people have time to socialize and get to know one another outside of a business setting, and New Orleans has lots of places for that."

Andrea H. Glenn, Vice President
ISU Insurance Agency Network, San Diego, CA



ed during the group's registration at The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans. "I had two alligators with handlers set up in one of the meeting halls," says Glenn. "That was an icebreaker. There was a social media booth set up so people could take their pictures with the alligators and show them to each other. They used the booth to send pictures to friends and coworkers who weren't there. We also had a Twitter account set up for people to post pictures."

A welcome reception was scheduled to be held outdoors on The Ritz-Carlton's grounds. "But it rained so we brought it inside," says Glenn. "We hired look-alikes from the TV show 'Duck Dynasty' through a talent agency. People posed with them for pictures while a Cajun band performed."

Other events included a cocktail reception with jazz music in The Ritz-Carlton's Crescent View meeting room, which offers a scenic view of New Orleans. During another func-

tion, a dinner in a Ritz-Carlton ballroom, entertainment was provided by Bronkar, who combined comedy, juggling and music. Bronkar bills himself as "the world's only rhythmic juggling beatboxer."

Off-property activities included a gala dinner at the World War II Museum, a popular venue. "It started with cocktails in the French Quarter room at the hotel as a Second Line parade band performed," says Glenn. "The band led us outside to buses in front of the hotel. At the museum, we had a cocktail buffet with musical entertainment by a 1940s USO-type show we booked through the museum. Attendees took pictures with three women who were dressed in a 1940s vampy style and sailors attired in uniforms from the era."

The museum also hosted a dinner this year for 160 attendees who were staying at The Ritz-Carlton for an insurance company incentive. "We took them over by bus and they saw a movie about World War II narrated by (actor) Tom Hanks," says Bonnie Boyd, CMP, DMCP, president, BBC Destination Management, a New Orleans DMC. "We brought in a 92-year-old World War II veteran to speak about his experiences. They had exclusive use of the museum's Louisiana Memorial Pavilion, which was set up for a buffet dinner. They also danced to the band."

Jazz Attracts Meetings

An international financial firm also held its first meeting in New Orleans — a three-day incentive for about 100 executives at one of the city's luxury hotels. New Orleans' music figured significantly in the decision, says Diane



Meeting-goers parade through the French Quarter in true New Orleans style.



BBC Destination Management Company arranged this parade for a corporate group meeting in New Orleans.

Lyons, CMP, DMCP, president, Accent on Arrangements, a native New Orleansian who founded the New Orleans DMC. “The group included a lot of Europeans, and they love New Orleans because of jazz,” she says. “We wanted to tie that into their meeting by having jazz musicians in their activities.”

Activities included a parade to a restaurant. “We put them on Mardi Gras-type floats in front of the hotel,” says Lyons. “Each float had 30 people and a jazz trio. They were greeted in front of Emeril’s Delmonico restaurant by costumed revelers. After dinner, they went to a private club on Bourbon Street for cocktails and desert. Afterwards, a jazz trumpet player performed as the group threw beads to people.”

The group also participated in a Corporate Social Responsibility program (CSR) by spending a half-day at a food bank preparing and distributing meals. Attendees watched a film depicting how the food bank helps people, and then they passed out box lunches to families.

Corporate Social Responsibility programs continue to be very popular among corporate groups, especially those that provide help to hospitals, homes, schools, food banks and playgrounds.

Last year, many of the 400 attendees at an insurance company incentive

planned by Boyd spent a day building bookshelves at three New Orleans-area charter schools. “People came with an expectation of doing something to make a difference,” says Boyd. “They believed they exceeded their expectations. It was a very warm and fuzzy feeling for them. Later, we showed a video of the effort at the awards dinner. We also had survivors of Katrina talk about their rebuilding experiences.”

New and Noteworthy

Several major construction projects are underway that New Orleans officials believe will attract even more meetings. “It has been 10 years since Katrina, and we are going gangbusters,” says Boyd. “Our comeback will not fizzle out, and that is what is so exciting about the city’s future. There is a fair amount of building and expansion going on.”

The fastest growing airport in the U.S., **Louis Armstrong International Airport**, will begin construction on a new terminal facility to be completed in 2018 and has added a variety of new flights.

New Orleans offers about 40,000 hotel rooms with some of the most popular properties within walking distance of the French Quarter. The city has picked up where it left off before Katrina hit, continuing to build new

properties and expand existing ones, including the following:

Le Meridien New Orleans has completed a \$29 million renovation that includes 410 redesigned guest rooms; a new destination restaurant and two other new food and beverage outlets; and 1,600 sf of additional meeting and event space, bringing the total to 20,000 sf. The transformation also includes improvement of existing meeting space, and a redesigned front desk and port-cochere valet entrance.

The 346-room AAA Four Diamond **Omni Royal Orleans Hotel** has completed a \$15 million renovation. The makeover includes guest rooms, improved lighting, custom furniture and 24 wrought-iron balconies. Other improvements include refurbished meeting rooms with new furniture, window treatments and carpeting. The property’s 14,000-sf of function space includes 17 meeting rooms and the 5,284-sf Grand Salon.

The Omni Riverfront Hotel, formerly the Riverfront New Orleans, has reopened following an \$8 million renovation of all guest rooms, which now include new carpet and furniture, 42-inch, flat-screen televisions, and black-tiled bathrooms. Located near the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, the Omni Riverfront offers 202 guest rooms and 4,000 sf of meeting space.

Loews New Orleans has finished a \$4 million renovation of its 285 guest rooms and suites as well as Café Adelaide. The property updated and refreshed its corridors and made improvements to carpeting, art, lamps and sconces.

The 166-suite **Homewood Suites by Hilton New Orleans Downtown** opened in the Central Business District with 2,500 sf of meeting space.

The Wyndham New Orleans French Quarter’s completed renovation encompassed 374 guest rooms, parking garage and the property’s exterior.

Other Projects

The New Orleans Ernest N. Mo-

rial Convention Center (MCCNO) has been in talks with a group of developers to build **The Trade District**, a Convention Center District Development Project, which would include an MGM Grand hotel, more than 1,400 residences, a 250,000-sf building dedicated to retail space, a needle-shaped structure with views of the Mississippi River and much more. The development site sits just upriver from the MCCNO, which recently transformed existing spaces into the 60,300-sf, column-free Great Hall. The MCCNO also added 25,400 sf of prefunction space, a 4,660-sf junior ballroom, a 3,420-sf rooftop terrace, a 5,700-sf executive club lounge and a 980-sf indoor balcony. The MCCNO currently offers 140 meeting rooms, 1.1 million sf of exhibit space and the 4,000-seat New Orleans Theatre.

Elsewhere in New Orleans, the historic **World Trade Center** building will begin construction next year on a \$360 million redevelopment project, which will be the home of the **Four Seasons Hotel and Private Residences New Orleans**.



A rendering of the Convention Center District Development Project to include a hotel, a park, outdoor entertainment, arts and cultural venues, retail and housing.

Plans call for 350 guest rooms, two signature restaurants, more than 20,000 sf of meeting space, a Four Seasons spa and fitness center, and a roof-top pool and deck.

The two-story rooftop cupola, which at one time was a restaurant in the round, will become a spectacular sightseeing attraction.

In addition, the historic **Orpheum Theater** has reopened for the first time since 2005 in the city’s Central Business District following a \$13 million renovation that includes an expanded lobby, reconstructed acoustic shell, larger seats and more bathrooms and bars. The theater, which opened in 1918, is on the National Register for Historic Places.

The Orpheum is an intimate concert and performance space with perfect sight lines and unparalleled acoustics from each of its seats, which range in number from 1,500 to 1,800 due to the customizable floor seating. Three levels of seating, private VIP boxes at the gallery level and six bars round out the audience

art sound and lighting, a projection screen and displays for presentations or branding, green rooms that can be used for small meeting breakouts and VIP spaces for a fully adaptable event experience.

The space can accommodate live music, private parties, corporate meetings and events, comedy acts, Mardi Gras balls and more.

According to the New Orleans CVB, cruising from New Orleans has become increasingly popular, and the industry is experiencing a boom: **American Cruise Lines** added a second riverboat to its river cruise offerings from New Orleans in April 2015, and **Carnival Cruise Lines** will expand its capacity in New Orleans by replacing the Carnival Triumph with the Carnival Elation in April 2016.

Also, the **New Orleans Steamboat Company** and Gray Line Tours will build a new Mississippi riverboat for New Orleans. The new boat will complement the Steamboat Natchez, offering harbor cruises, dinner cruises and private charters beginning in 2017.

Viking Cruises also will launch two new luxury riverboats on the Mississippi River in New Orleans in 2017, making New Orleans Viking’s first homeport in North America.

Shreveport-Bossier City The region’s Southern flavor reflects the influences of its location — Northwest Louisiana along the Red River less than 20 miles from the Texas border. Shreveport-Bossier City combines fine dining and Cajun entertainment with events such as the Mudbug Madness Festival and gaming.

The area is known for its riverfront gaming properties, including The

“The group included a lot of Europeans, and they love New Orleans because of jazz. We wanted to tie that into their meeting by having jazz musicians in their activities.”

Diane Lyons, CMP, DMCP, President
Accent on Arrangements, New Orleans, LA





“Some people may not want to do the Bourbon Street scene. They may want something quiet in a private home in the garden district with a three-piece trio. There’s something for everybody.”

Bonnie Boyd, CMP, DMCP, President
BBC Destination Management, New Orleans, LA

Horseshoe Bossier City Hotel and Casino, a Caesars Entertainment property with 606 suites and a new \$3.5 million tropical swimming pool.

Other gaming properties include Jimmy Buffet’s Margaritaville Resort Casino, the Eldorado Shreveport Resort & Casino, Sam’s Town Hotel & Gambling Hall, DiamondJacks Casino & Resort, Boomtown Casino Hotel and Harrah’s Louisiana Downs.

Hotel rooms and meeting space are plentiful. The region provides more than 10,000 hotel rooms, with many located along the riverfront. The region’s biggest meeting space is the Shreveport Convention Center, a 350,000-sf, state-of-the-art facility, followed by the 24,000-sf Bossier Civic Center.

When it comes to great golf, Shreveport-Bossier boasts several top-flight courses. These include Olde Oaks Golf Club, designed in collaboration with golf pro Hal Sutton and the Golf Club at Stonebridge, designed by the popular PGA pro Fred Couples and Gene Bates.

Like all destinations in Louisiana, Shreveport-Bossier offers tasty cuisine prepared with a mix of cultural influences. The area boasts its own distinctive take on Cajun and Creole dishes and offers traditional Southern dishes with a Shreveport-Bossier twist.

Baton Rouge

Louisiana’s capital, located 80 miles from New Orleans, offers its own version of cultural attractions, restaurants and nightclubs flavored with Creole,

French and Spanish heritage. Baton Rouge is an affordable and sophisticated city that specializes in meetings for up to 2,000 attendees. The 12,000-seat Baton Rouge River Center is a multipurpose entertainment, convention and meeting facility.

Many larger groups use the Baton Rouge River Center (BRRRC), a multipurpose entertainment, convention and meeting facility. The BRRRC includes 17 breakout rooms, a new 70,000-sf Exhibition Hall, Arena and Theatre for the Performing Arts.

Baton Rouge offers a range of historical, cultural and government venues for special events. Popular sites include Louisiana’s Old State Capitol, a 160-year-old National Historic Landmark and Gothic building featuring displays honoring former governor Huey P. Long, who was assassinated in 1935. The Old Governor’s mansion is a museum with displays and memorabilia showcasing nine Louisiana governors.

The Museum of Art offers a 13,000-sf gallery that accommodates up to 400 guests. The Shaw Center for the Arts, a 125,000-sf mainstay of the revitalized downtown, offers several venues that planners can reserve for gatherings.

The fine-dining scene continues to prosper. Popular restaurants include Beausoleil Restaurant & Bar, Dolce Vita, Blend, The Cove and Juban’s — all of which offer dining space that can be reserved for small groups.

Final Thoughts

New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Shreveport-Bossier City can meet the needs of just about any meeting or incentive. That’s especially true of New Orleans. “In the end, what’s important to stakeholders is good returns on investment for sending people,” says Glenn. “Higher-ups who may not go to the meeting want to know that people are having a good time and achieving the goals of the meeting.”

Louisiana’s diverse amenities and cultural offerings also can help any meeting achieve its goals. “You can tailor the experience to each group depending on what they want,” says Boyd. “Some people may not want to do the Bourbon Street scene. They may want something quiet in a private home in the garden district with a three-piece trio. There’s something for everybody.” **I&FMM**



The National WWII Museum in New Orleans features immersive exhibits, multimedia experiences, and an expansive collection of artifacts and oral histories.

Credit: The National WWII Museum



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Ed Curry was named director of sales and marketing at Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel in Santa Monica, California. He formerly was vice president, marketing and direct sales for St. Supéry Estate Vineyards & Winery in Napa Valley.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel in Orlando, Florida, has promoted **Kristina Moehe** to group sales manager for the Southeast market. She most recently served as a catering coordinator. **Kelly Hartig** was named group sales manager for the Midwest and West Coast markets. She was catering sales manager for The Country Club of Orlando.

Frederik G. Houben was named director of sales and marketing at the Lodge of Four Seasons on the Lake of the Ozarks in central Missouri.

Most recently, he was regional director, sales and marketing for Warwick International Hotels, North America and Bahamas.

Allison Lesser was named director of sales and marketing at Hotel Irvine in Orange County, California. She most recently served as vice president of business development at BTS Hospitality.

John Hess was named director of sales and marketing for the Omni Bedford Springs Resort in Bedford Springs, Pennsylvania. He was director of sales for Seven Springs Mountain Resort in Pennsylvania.

The St. Regis Atlanta, Atlanta, Georgia, has named **Andréa Heffner** as director of sales and marketing. She most recently served as director of sales

and marketing at Hotel Jerome, an Auberge Resort in Aspen.

Omni Hotels & Resorts has promoted **Ryan O'Byrne** to corporate director, global sales in the Dallas corporate office. He most recently served as global director, sales in the New York global sales office.

The Chattanooga, a Benchmark Hotel in Chattanooga, Tennessee, has promoted **Adriane Elrod Long** to senior sales manager. She most recently served as a group sales manager.

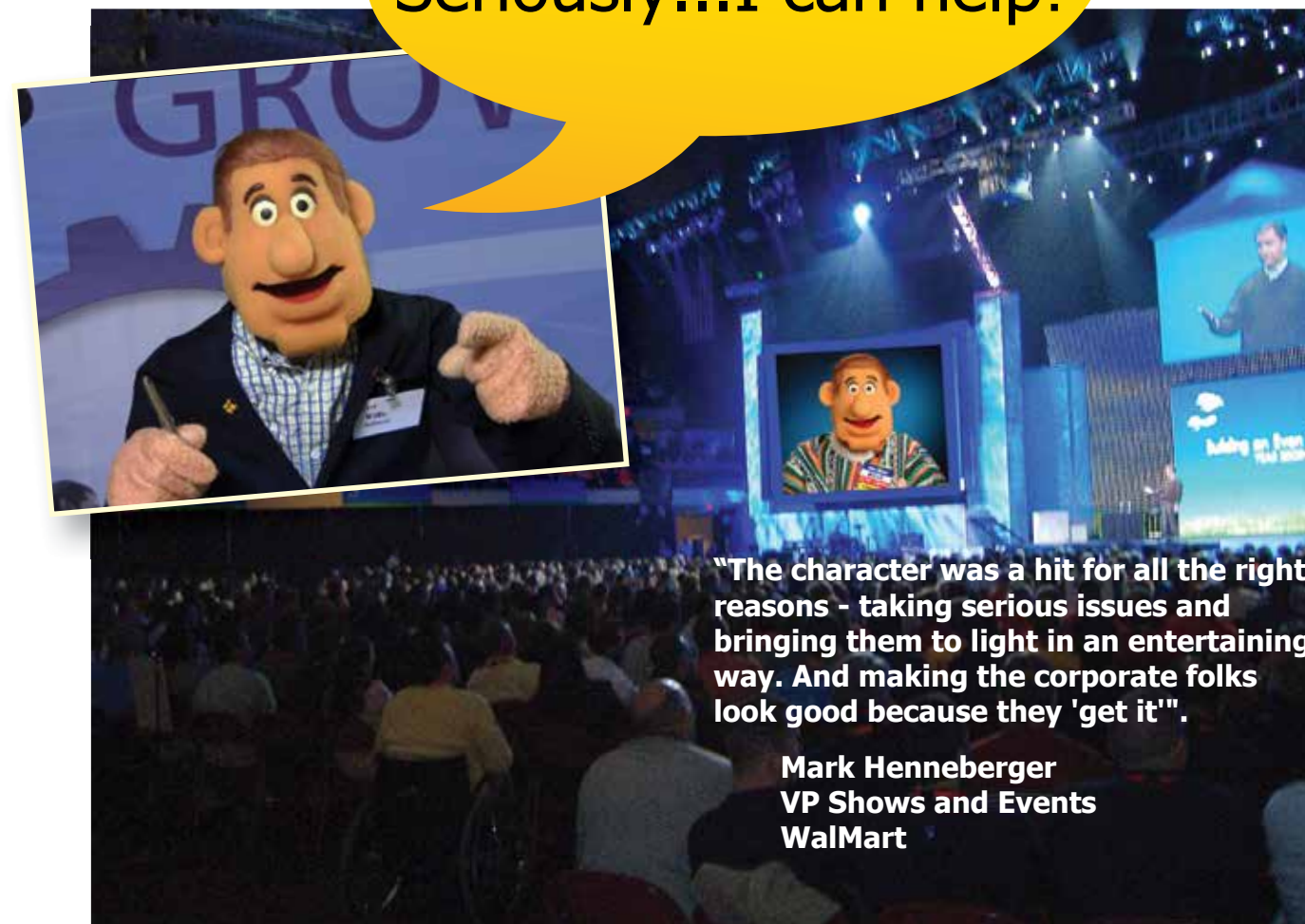
Nathan Wood was named director of sales and marketing for Chateau on the Lake Resort, Spa & Convention Center in southwest Missouri. He was director of sales and marketing for The Westin Columbus in downtown Columbus, Ohio. **I&FMM**

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