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FEBRUARY/MARCH 2016

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Skyline view of Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Atlantic City

on the

Rebound

On the Strength of New
Development, a Healthy Year Ahead
for Association Conventions

PAGE 20

Drive-in Meetings

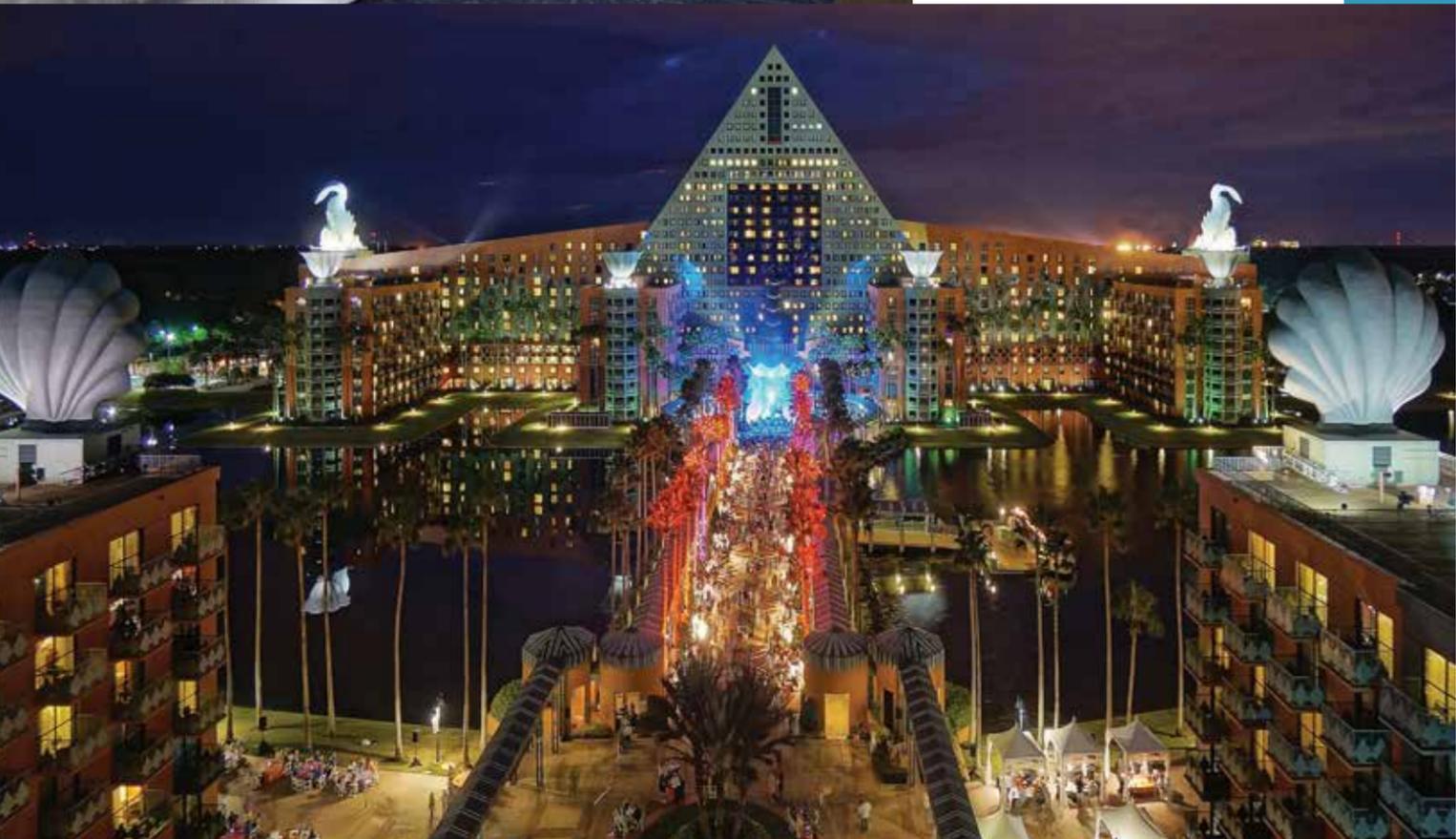
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ISSN 21628831 USPS 003500
A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION
www.TheMeetingMagazines.com
ASSOCIATION
CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES
THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT
February / March 2016 Volume 9 • Number 1

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Photo courtesy of Meet AC

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Meeting 'Down the Shore'



"Who doesn't like to be 'down the shore' in June?" asks Barbara Parmese, who heads the annual meeting committee for the New Jersey Health Information Management Association. NJHIMA has held its annual meeting in Atlantic City every June since 2002. A resurgent Atlantic City offers the perfect blend of nostalgia and new, with new development sprouting up all around its historic Boardwalk — about which many of us can say we share fond memories from family vacations visiting the Steel Pier and Fralinger's salt water taffy (since 1885). But it's not just nostalgia that brings NJHIMA to Atlantic City year after year. "Many hotels around the state don't have the space that we need to use concurrently," Parmese explains. "Price and available space at the venue are essential in our decisions to return to Atlantic City." There's also the people factor: "I have found that pretty much every person we have dealt with at every hotel, from banquet/catering to AV, to convention services, they're just a really nice bunch of people. ...The longevity of the people who work there is a big benefit." Atlantic City, which is within a few hours' drive of nearly one-third of the nation's population, is just one city featured in "Drive-in Meetings" on page 10.

For an in-depth look at "Atlantic City on the Rebound," turn to page 20, where Meet AC's CEO Jim Wood notes, "2016 is going better than planned, so we are very optimistic that the city is rebounding nicely as a great destination for association meetings and trade shows. ...When an association meeting planner wants to have a trade show or convention in Atlantic City, they have so many options of doing various types of events right onsite, without having to hire buses to move around hundreds or thousands of participants. That's what makes Atlantic City unique, with the self-contained properties that offer everything, and you still have the Boardwalk, and the Atlantic Ocean beaches are just steps away for planners who want to do creative, outside events."

Read about all the new property expansions and enhancements going on in the city, including Harrah's Resort's new Waterfront Conference Center, which now makes Harrah's the largest hotel conference center complex from Baltimore to Boston; and read more about what other planners have to say about meeting "down the shore."

After you've knocked the sand off your shoes, get your Cajun on and experience "laissez les bons temps rouler" hospitality in New Orleans, where meeting planner Jeanne Larson tell us in our feature on page 28 that when she returns to the Omni Royal each year, she gets hugs from one veteran bellhop — and homemade gumbo from another. Ça c'est bon!

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES
THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT
A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

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Association Conventions & Facilities is published bi-monthly by Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394; 561-989-0600. Single copies \$13.00 U.S.A. only. Yearly subscription price is \$65.00 in the U.S.A. Canada and foreign is \$135.00. Back copies \$14.00 plus shipping and handling, U.S.A. only. Distributed without charge to qualified personnel. Periodicals Postage Paid at Boca Raton, FL, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send Form 3579 address changes to Association Conventions & Facilities, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Nothing contained in this publication shall constitute an endorsement by Coastal Communications Corporation (Association Conventions & Facilities), and the publication disclaims any liability with respect to the use of or reliance on any such information. The information contained in this publication is in no way to be construed as a recommendation by AC&F of any industry standard, or as a recommendation of any kind to be adopted by or to be binding upon any advertiser or subscriber. Reproduction of any portion of this publication by any means is strictly forbidden. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care. However, the publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited photographs or manuscripts. Subscribers: Send subscription inquiries and address changes to: Circulation Department, Association Conventions & Facilities, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Provide old and new addresses including zip code. Enclose address label from most recent issue and please allow five weeks for the change to become effective. Printed in U.S.A. © 2016.



Visit Orlando President & CEO Honored with Lifetime Achievement Award

NEW YORK, NY — Visit Orlando President & CEO George Aguel (r) was honored with the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International's (HSMAI) Albert E. Koehl Award for Lifetime Achievement in Hospitality Marketing at the Adrian Awards in New York City. The award, presented by HSMAI President Robert Gilbert, recognizes individuals who have spent a major portion of their careers in the hospitality and travel profession and have contributed to the betterment of the industry in a significant and lasting way. www.visitorlando.com



Tom Caradonio to Retire From the Daytona Beach Area CVB

DAYTONA BEACH, FL — Tom Caradonio, executive director of the Daytona Beach Area CVB, is retiring after presiding over record tourism growth.



Caradonio

"After much soul searching and personal deliberation I feel the way to end a successful 44-year career in the tourism industry is to leave when we have just finished our two record-setting years," Caradonio said. "I truly believe it is time to bring someone in that will commit to five to eight years and take the momentum we have and build on that."

www.daytonabeach.com

Visit Spokane Appoints Robert Enriquez as Vice President of Sales and Marketing

SPOKANE, WA — Visit Spokane announced the appointment of Robert Enriquez as vice president of sales and marketing. He will lead the sales and marketing departments and provide strategic input.



Enriquez

For the past 15-plus years, Enriquez has held sales and marketing leadership positions for several destination marketing organizations. Most recently, he was V.P. of sales, services and sports at the Albuquerque CVB.

Previously, Enriquez served in management and director positions at Loews Anatole Dallas, The Venetian Las Vegas and Wyndham Hotels and Resorts. www.visitspokane.com

New Orleans Named One of the Best Cities in North America by Travel + Leisure

NEW ORLEANS, LA — New Orleans was named the No. 2 city in North America for visitors according to a *Travel + Leisure* reader's survey. New Orleans ranked second to Charleston but above San Francisco, New York City and Chicago. Readers ranked cities based on categories such as arts, shopping, dining, romantic ambience and friendliness. New Orleans was chosen as the No. 2 destination in America, ranking No. 1 in the world for nightlife and No. 2 in the nation for dining. *Travel + Leisure* touted both historic dining options and innovative new jazz clubs and bars in the Crescent City as reasons for its high ranking. In 2014 and 2015, New Orleans was named the No. 2 city in North America as part of the *Travel + Leisure* "World's Best" annual survey. www.neworleanscvb.com

Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau Reports Record Convention Bookings for Future Years

PHILADELPHIA, PA — The Philadelphia CVB (PHLCVB), which posted its highest year of bookings ever with 856,663 room nights secured for future years, surpassed last year's bookings by 1.2 percent. "We are extremely pleased with the results of last year's sales efforts. Stellar feedback shared by groups who met at the convention center in 2015, our strong partnership with the business and civic community, as well as Philadelphia's growing reputation as a vibrant, welcoming destination have contributed greatly to our ability to sell our city to meeting planners," said Julie Coker Graham, PHLCVB president and CEO. "Since the implementation of new work rules in 2014 at the center, we have seen renewed interest from meeting planners who were previously wary of what they would experience in Philadelphia, and so we're thrilled that not only are groups returning, but that we're also attracting new groups." www.discoverphl.com



Graham



Credit: Jacob Starn Photography



1-8 In her blog in *Convene*, esteemed PCMA President and CEO Deborah Sexton **1** (2nd from left) suggests that PCMA's Convening Leaders in January is "the best way for the meetings industry community to start things off on the right foot, as we focus on what we can bring to the table, connect face-to-face with our colleagues and get inspired." **8** PCMA also added a focus on health and well-being so the "attendees could be in the best shape to learn and grow; and two, so they could see how to offer similar opportunities to their attendees," she says. The Vancouver Convention Centre did not disappoint as it inspired the thousands of participants.

How Best to Engage Millennials

Patricia Coleman



Harness the Power of Interactive Technology

Professional meeting planners have a new mission. It is to attract and engage millennials who now represent the largest generation in the U.S. work force. According to data from the Pew Research Center, one in three American workers is a millennial, defined as being between the ages of 18 to 34 in 2015. This large group also is defined by several distinct characteristics, which must be accommodated by meeting planners seeking their attendance, participation and positive event reviews. At the core of achieving this goal is the ability for meeting planners to leverage interactive technologies, which says to millennials — “We get you.” It starts with understanding more about millennials and the integration of technology in their day-to-day living.

DIGITAL NATIVES

Millennials are the first generation born into the digital age. For these digital natives, the Internet, social media, mobile technology and apps always have been a part of their lives. On any given day, they use multiple devices. They have an ease with digital technology and a reliance on it like no other generation before them. Their communications, socializing and activism are heavily reliant on technology. They shop, bank and track their fitness levels using digital technology. Millennials expect rapid responses and, some might say instant gratification, which technology helps facilitate. Furthermore, research from the 2015 Cone Communications Millennial CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) Study found that millennials don't hesitate to voice their opinions quickly and broadcast them across far-reaching online and social media platforms. There, millennials' comments are magnified and multiplied as large audiences, comprised of many peers, too, are engaged and likely to respond.

Millennials' complete alignment with technology also has fueled their eco-friendly sensitivities. They are ardent supporters of paper-free communications, seeing little reason to communicate with paper when technology can be used. They are much more likely to respond to online, email and mobile marketing than they are to mailings and/

or printed collateral materials. Equally important, they favor organizations that adopt practices that reduce carbon footprints and protect the environment. Based on the 2015 Deloitte Millennial survey, millennials look to the business community to facilitate innovation and progress.

Here's how to capture the attention and engagement of millennials:

ADOPT THE LATEST TECHNOLOGIES

Within the context of a large-scale event or meeting, planners have many opportunities and ways in which to demonstrate they are tech-savvy. Starting with registration, banish manual, labor-intensive and time-consuming badge creation processes. Instead, embrace new registration and check-in software that enables coded badges to be produced and printed quickly and easily. Meeting attendees simply go to the registration kiosk, click on a search bar, enter their data (i.e., email address, name, title, etc.), select and confirm the accuracy of their information record and then print their badge. In addition to providing convenience for their meeting attendees, meeting planners also gain the value-added benefit of being able to apply the information captured through the registration process for audience segmentation and tracking purposes — market intelligence that can be used in planning future events.

Another technology that offers efficient information capture and delivery is a digital document library. It facilitates paperless communication and interactivity, both of which are highly valued by millennials. These turnkey, digital kiosks enable meeting planners to provide and manage timely content, capture and store information about their event attendees, and deliver a high-level, engaging 21st century event experience. They can be used with large LCD touch screens, tablets, mobile devices or interactive kiosks, digital document libraries, and eliminate the time, labor and costs associated with printing and shipping boxes of collateral materials.

One of the best technologies to leverage for delivering what is being dubbed the “Apple” experience for its height-

ened customer focus are video wall displays. They can be customized to project specific corporate or organizational brands, strategic marketing messages, event agendas, speaker biographies, etc. and unique infotainment (i.e., videos, commercials, documentaries, training films, music, etc.). Video wall displays create the “wow” factor that fully engages millennials.

Interactive audio response systems allow planners to poll event attendees for real-time feedback on an event and its various components, from breakout sessions and keynote speakers, to luncheons and social/recreational activities. Drawing on this feedback, meeting planners gain

make certain it will be sufficient in accommodating the demands of the smartphones, iPads and other mobile devices used by the projected number of event attendees. It may be necessary to have a Wi-Fi array specifically designed and supported by an onsite technician during the course of the event.

FOR MILLENNIALS, THE ENTIRE EXPERIENCE COUNTS

Millennials are driven by experiences. They crave experiences that engage and surprise them. Leading-edge, interactive technologies can do that. Meeting planners

“One of the best technologies to leverage for delivering what is being dubbed the ‘Apple’ experience for its heightened customer focus are video wall displays.”

a finger on the pulse of their event and, based on the responses they receive, can make adjustments in their event to further create a positive, best-in-class experience.

FACILITATE CONVENIENCE AND RELIABLE TECH PERFORMANCE

Well-placed charging station kiosks not only enable millennials to stay connected, they also give planners another platform for conveying important information to a captive audience waiting for their mobile device to charge. These charging stations can be used to convey the schedule of events, reinforce key mission and vision statements, introduce products or services, and highlight timely news developments and/or organizational achievements. Equipped with interactive apps, they are another way to give millennials a voice in the event.

Finally, one technology that should never be overlooked is that of a well-designed Wi-Fi solution. Without it, even the best technologies will suffer in performance, and meeting attendees will become frustrated. It is incumbent that meeting planners consider a venue's Wi-Fi bandwidth to

can create an unexpectedly dynamic event by leveraging the technologies' many performance features to deliver an event that not only captures the millennials' attention, but has them sharing their positive experiences with others. What better way to create positive buzz about an event and set the stage for future events. Keep in mind, too, that millennials rely on their participation in various activities and events as a way to build a sense of community. In fact, Eventbrite's nationwide research of millennials conducted by Harris found that 69 percent of millennials believe that attending events helps them to feel more connected to other people, their community (be that a company, association or group) and the world at large. For meeting planners, their role in instilling a greater sense of community in their event participants may well be their greatest contribution to an organization's success.

Patricia Coleman is Director, mid-Atlantic sales, SmartSource Computer & Audio Visual Rentals, a provider of computer, AV and technology rentals and services headquartered in Hauppauge, NY, with 21 branches nationwide. www.smartsourcerentals.com

Drive-in Meetings

Foxwoods Resort Casino comprises four hotels with a total of 2,200 rooms and 150,000 sf of conference space.



Choose These Easy-to-Reach Value Destinations to Get More Mileage Out of Attendance

By Karen Brost

The old adage “location, location, location” doesn’t just apply to making real estate decisions — it also applies to site selection. After all, members will be more inclined to attend a meeting if it’s being held in a destination that’s either easy to reach or affordable — or both. Here are a few options to consider:

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

The Organization of American Historians (OAH) based in

Bloomington, Indiana, the largest professional society dedicated to the teaching and study of American history, has chosen Providence as the site of its 2016 annual meeting in April. The meeting, which is expected to draw approximately 2,000 attendees, will be held at the Rhode Island Convention Center, which offers 100,000 sf of exhibition space, 20,000 sf of ballroom space, 23 meeting rooms and 30,000 sf of prefunction space. The official meeting hotels will be the 564-room Omni Providence Hotel, which is connected by indoor walkway to the Rhode Island Convention

Center, the 294-room Providence Biltmore Hotel and the 219-room Courtyard Providence Downtown.

Hajni G. Selby, director of meetings for OAH, cited several factors that made Providence a good choice for her organization’s annual meeting. “I think it is a great alternative to Boston, which is often very expensive. It is close to major cities in the Northeast corridor, and the venue is relatively affordable. For small associations, it is a place that is easily accessible, and though not a big city, holds all the amenities needed to keep attendees engaged.” Providence is known for its safe, walkable downtown area, world-class restaurants, thriving arts community and historic sites.

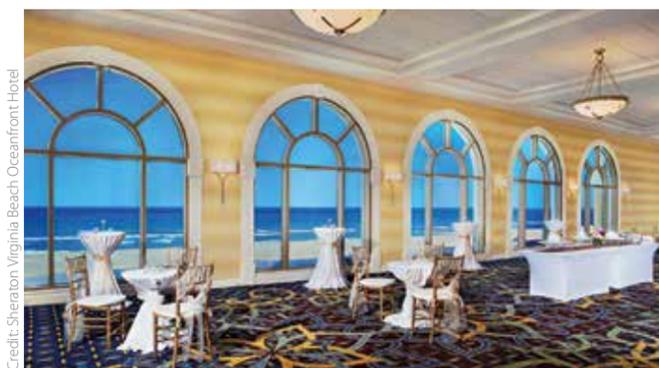
Providence will be a convenient location for OAH’s annual meeting, as 40 percent of the organization’s members are located a quick train ride away. In fact, according to the Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau, about 25 percent of the population of the U.S. lives within 500 miles of the city.

VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

The Virginia Recycling Association (VRA), headquartered in Ivy, Virginia, chose the 214-room Sheraton Virginia Beach Oceanfront Hotel in Virginia Beach as the site of its 2015 conference. The hotel contains 11 event spaces, including the oceanfront Ocean Grand Foyer that can host meetings, banquets and receptions.

Erica Trout, who was association manager for the 2015 conference, explains, “An oceanfront location was important to our members who travel from far southwest Virginia and northern Virginia. The meeting space can accommodate three breakout sessions as well as the general session. Renovation of the meeting area is very nice.” Trout, who now is manager, global accounts for HelmsBriscoe, also noted that parking was readily available for attendees who drove. “Parking is great (in a parking deck across the street).”

Virginia Beach is centrally located on the East Coast. According to the Virginia Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau, the city is within a day’s drive for two-thirds of the nation’s population.



The Virginia Recycling Association chose the Sheraton Virginia Beach Oceanfront Hotel as the site of its 2015 conference.



The Omni Providence Hotel offers nearly 23,000 sf of meeting space and direct access to the Rhode Island Convention Center via indoor walkway.

The Virginia Beach CVB staff is available to help associations that want to include a charitable component in their agendas. Through its “One Beach, One World” program, it can help attendees engage in a variety of meaningful experiences such as restoring and protecting the environment, supporting the Armed Forces, combating homelessness, hunger and domestic violence; assisting youth and the elderly; and participating in international outreach programs.

The Virginia Beach Convention Center (VBCC) recently renewed its LEED Gold certification under a more stringent rating system adopted by the U.S. Green Building Council. The VBCC offers more than 500,000 sf of event space and has put a long list of sustainability initiatives into place that focus on recycling, energy reduction, water efficiency, waste reduction and environmentally friendly practices.



“I think (Providence) is a great alternative to Boston, which is often very expensive. It is close to major cities in the Northeast corridor, and the venue is relatively affordable.”

Hajni G. Selby
Director of Meetings
Organization of American Historians
Bloomington, IN

ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY

Barbara Parmese heads the annual meeting committee for the Princeton-based New Jersey Health Information Management Association (NJHIMA), representing certified professionals responsible for acquiring, analyzing, coding, and management of digital and paper medical information vital to providing quality patient care. The event attracts approximately 200 attendees and 125 exhibitor representatives, and it has been held in Atlantic City every year since 2002.

Parmese says there are several reasons Atlantic City is a good fit for NJHIMA's annual meeting and the No. 1 reason is pricing. “We're a nonprofit organization and usually our meeting space is either free or priced extremely attractively. And the hotel rates are more than competitive, usually much less than elsewhere throughout the state of New Jersey.

“The price structure for the association is essential,” she continues. “That and the fact we use a lot of space. Even though our meeting isn't considered a large event, we need a lot of space. Convention centers tend to be too big for us, and then we wouldn't always have the hotel linked right there. We like to keep everybody in one place if we can. Many hotels around the state don't have the space that we need to use concurrently. Price and available space at the venue are essential in our decision to return to Atlantic City.”

Parmese elaborated on other reasons that make Atlantic City so appealing for her association's members. “Our meeting is in June, and who doesn't like to be ‘down the shore’ in June? Atlantic City has something for everyone. If you're into gambling, you can do that. If you're into shopping, you can do that. If you just want to walk the Boardwalk, you can do that.”

NJHIMA has held its annual meeting at a number of different properties in Atlantic City over the years. The 1,749-room Bally's Atlantic City was the site of NJHIMA's 2015 meeting, and this year, the event will take place at the 2,590-room Harrah's Resort Atlantic City. “We're going to Resorts (Casino Hotel with 942 rooms) in 2017,” Parmese explains. “We've been at Bally's before, we've been to (Trump) Taj Mahal, we've been to Tropicana (Casino & Resort). Pricing is important and feedback from attendees is very

important,” she says, noting that the condition of each hotel must meet the expectations of the NJHIMA members and exhibitors.

NJHIMA is a state association, so attendees drive to the annual meeting, although some speakers and exhibitors do fly in. Parking, either valet or self-parking, is always available.

She describes a common thread she has found at all of the properties she has worked with in Atlantic City. “I have found that pretty much, every person that we have dealt with at every hotel, from banquet/catering to AV, to convention services, they're just a really nice bunch of people. After so many years, I'm on a first name basis with many of them. The longevity of the people who work there is a big benefit. The hotel staff remembers you and your group, which makes running a meeting that much easier. I have found them to be really wonderful to work with.



“Atlantic City does offer so much,” she sums up. “It's a great place for people to consider. Depending on the time of year, why wouldn't you want to be at the beach? There's so much to do. It's a fun place to be. It's not just all work.”

Larger groups may want to consider booking the Atlantic City Convention



Harrah's Resort's new Waterfront Conference Center in Atlantic City features two 50,000-sf ballrooms, each with 26,000 sf of prefunction space.

Center for their meetings, conferences and expos. Offering more than 500,000 contiguous sf of exhibit space, the facility is set on 31 acres and is one of the largest convention centers on the East Coast. Also of special note to planners is the fact that it is located within a few hours' drive of nearly one-third of the nation's population.

Enhancing the city's meetings capacity is Harrah's Resort, which added the new Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center last September. The conference center expands the property's total meeting space to 125,000 sf while adding two 50,000-sf ballrooms, each with an additional 26,000 sf of prefunction space.

And, debuting in summer 2015 was the multifaceted convention and event space at Resorts Casino Hotel that added 12,000 sf of meeting space and 12 more conference rooms all on one level.



Connecticut's Mohegan Sun will open the new Earth Tower this fall.

The new conference center brings Resorts' total offerings to 24 meeting rooms and 64,000 sf of usable space. (For more on Atlantic City, see page 20.)

THE MEADOWLANDS, NEW JERSEY

Another option for groups looking to avoid the hustle and bustle of a big city is The Meadowlands area, which is named for the large wetlands ecosystem in the northeastern part of New Jersey. A number of meeting venues are available in the area, including The Meadowlands Expo Center, a facility that offers more than 60,000 sf of meeting space that can accommodate up to 6,000 attendees. More information on meeting and event services in the area is available from the Meadowlands Liberty Convention & Visitors Bureau.

While The Meadowlands area is probably best known as being home to the NFL's New York Jets and New York Giants at MetLife Stadium, it also is home to more than 250 species of birds as well as acres of trails, estuaries and protected marshland, which give nature-loving meeting attendees plenty to explore in their free time.

CONNECTICUT

Foxwoods Resort Casino, located in the southern part of the state in the town of Mashantucket, is another meeting destination to consider in the Northeast. The complex includes four hotels with a total of 2,200 rooms, 150,000 sf of conference space, six casinos, multiple restaurants ranging from casual to fine dining, shopping, golf and a spa. Foxwoods offers a Meeting Planner Tool Kit on its website, *Foxwoods.com*. It includes an interactive space planner, speed RFP and a property map.

Mohegan Sun is located in Uncasville, 45 minutes from Providence, Hartford and New Haven and just 90 minutes from Boston. The property offers 1,200 guest rooms and 100,000 sf of meeting

space, including the 38,000-sf, pillar-free Uncas Ballroom, along with the assistance of event service managers that are CMM- and CMP-certified. Recreational amenities include the Earth, Sky and Wind casinos, an 18-hole golf course, the Elemis Spa, a fitness center and pool solarium. The hotel's new Earth Tower is slated to open in the fall and will include 400 deluxe rooms, an indoor pool, fitness center and additional meeting space.

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Located at the crossroads of the Northeast and mid-Atlantic States, Baltimore is another conveniently located meeting destination. According to Visit Baltimore, Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport handles 650 daily flights from 70 destinations, and for attendees who drive, parking is plentiful with more than 40,000 off-street spaces available in the city's downtown garages.

Baltimore offers numerous convention and meeting facilities, including the Baltimore Convention Center, which offers 300,000 sf of exhibit space, 50 flexible meeting rooms and a 36,000-sf ballroom. Visit Baltimore reports that there are more than 8,500 hotel rooms near the convention center and the city's Inner Harbor area, 5,500 of which are committable. The Visit Baltimore staff also can provide meeting groups with access to local business, non-profit and public sectors through its board of directors and Meet Local network of community leaders.

The first 10 meeting planners to book a meeting through 2017 with more than 3,000 total room nights can receive a free crab feast for up to 200 people. Complete details are available at *Baltimore.org*. Visit Baltimore also has created a list of “hot meeting dates” for 2016 and 2017 so groups can take advantage of special savings on selected dates.



The Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center Hotel is connected to the Schaumburg Convention Center with 150,000 sf of meeting space.



SCHAUMBURG, ILLINOIS

For groups in search of a Midwest meeting venue that's not in the heart of a downtown area, Meet Chicago Northwest promises that

“It's Better on the Edge.” The organization, which was originally incorporated as the Greater Woodfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, promotes eight communities northwest of Chicago and is certified by Destination Marketing Association International. The bureau represents 62 hotels and more than 50 alternative venues,



“Price and available space at the venue are essential in our decision to return to Atlantic City. ...It’s a great place for people to consider.”

Barbara J. Parmese
Chair, Annual Meeting Committee
NJHIMA
Princeton, NJ



The Old Post Office Building in Washington, DC, will be transformed into the Trump International Hotel this fall.

Credit: Trump International Hotel Washington, DC

including the 474-room Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center Hotel, which is connected to the Schaumburg Convention Center offering nearly 150,000 sf of flexible meeting space.

Groups that need a smaller venue may want to consider the American Society of Anesthesiologists Conference Center, which offers more than 6,000 sf of meeting and event space and a 150-seat auditorium. The venue is located in the heart of Schaumburg’s business district and promotes the fact that it offers “affordable pricing with discounts for non-profits.”



ballroom and 36,000 sf of dedicated registration space. This spring, the convention center will begin offering expanded free Wi-Fi services.

The area’s convention hotels are large, as well. The Marriott Wardman Park contains 1,256 guest rooms, 76 suites and 173,000 sf of event space, while

WASHINGTON, DC

In this election year, the country’s focus is on Washington, DC, so it just might be a good time for planners to cast their eyes on the nation’s capital, as well, when searching for a meeting site. The largest meeting venue in the area is the 2.3-million-sf Walter E. Washington Convention Center, which offers more than 198,000 sf of meeting space in five exhibit halls, 67 meeting rooms, a 62,000-sf

the Washington Hilton features 1,118 guest rooms, 82 suites and 110,000 sf of meeting space. The Grand Hyatt Washington, Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill and the Renaissance Washington, DC each offer more than 800 guest rooms and meeting space that spans from 40,000 to 60,000 sf.

In this election year, there soon will be other new “faces” in Washington, DC, in terms of hotels. The Trump Hotel Collection is completing a \$200 million restoration of the iconic Old Post Office building and is expected to open the Trump International Hotel, Washington, DC, this fall (two years earlier than expected) with 263 guest rooms and suites, 38,000 sf of meeting and event space, a street-level steak house and a 10,000-sf spa and fitness facility designed by Ivanka Trump.

The Watergate Hotel, a Washington, DC, legend, is projected to reopen this April as a luxurious 336-room hotel after a \$120 million renovation. It will include Top of the Gate, a rooftop bar that will feature panoramic views of the Potomac River; as well as a fine dining restaurant. The hotel also will contain 27,000 sf of meeting space, including a 7,000-sf grand ballroom. And here’s a fun bit of trivia: The hotel staff’s uniforms have been designed by Janie Bryant who created the costumes for the “Mad Men” TV series.

Oh, and don’t worry — meetings at The Watergate Hotel don’t have to be scandalous. As the hotel’s new website advises, just make sure the recorder is off.

AC&F



Credit: The Watergate Hotel

When the legendary Watergate Hotel reopens in April, a new rooftop bar Top of the Gate will feature panoramic views of the Potomac River.

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Improving Sponsorship Sales

Tried-and-True Methods to Develop Long-Term, Win-Win Partnerships

By Maura Keller

Finding sponsors for meetings and events takes planning, tenacity and a lot of hard work. Just ask Dan Melesurgo, vice president of strategic partnerships for ASAE, the Center for Association Leadership. He believes the biggest challenge in finding sponsorships is meeting partner expectations.

“Our partnership program has been very successful for 10-plus years, and with that success has come greater expectations on the ROI front from our partners,” Melesurgo says. “Our partners are also seeking more and more unique elements to ‘own’ and continue to push us in the sponsored content space as they want to be seen as thought leaders and content providers.”

While ASAE doesn’t create traditional sponsorships as they have a very structured Alliance Partner Program, they do develop comprehensive and customized partnerships that allow for access and connection points throughout the year. These partnerships encompass their meetings and events as well.

“It’s important to identify all the assets and opportunities that

are ‘sponsorable,’” Melesurgo says. “Then you need to know how to put together highly meaningful opportunities for sponsors that also contribute meaningful value to the organization’s event. Sponsors should be contributing to the event and organizational mission, not undermining.

For example, ASAE’s most recent strategic partner is YourMembership, which has committed to the Alliance Partnership Program for the next three years. The new partnership includes a collaboration to create new learning initiatives aimed at senior association leaders and technology officers.

JP Guilbault, president and CEO of YourMembership, said in a statement, “We are pleased and confident that the three-year

effort between YourMembership and ASAE will help increase engagement and prepare associations for the shifting expectations of nearly 170 million Generation X and millennial consumers, and that our investment in research and education through the ASAE Foundation will continue to strengthen future leaders, the association community and the world.

Experts agree that locating and securing sponsorships can be a difficult task at best. And Jim Fowler, CAE, president of the Atlanta Apartment Association, realizes that when creating sponsorship packages that sell, it is important for association planners to provide flexibility to customize the packages to meet specific needs of suppliers.

“Companies today are looking to differentiate themselves from the field, and the same goes for their marketing spend,” Fowler says.

Historically speaking, the methodology of sponsorship sales also has changed in recent years, thanks in part to the advancements in technology.

Kevin Smith, corporate sponsorship manager for the Denver Film Society, a membership-based organization, says that with the digital marketing world being so fast-paced, it is critical for an association to stay abreast of current trends to provide the assets that potential sponsors and partners are looking for.

Melissa Forziat, event planner at Seattle-based Melissa Forziat Events, has worked with several associations on sponsorship packages. She also notes that planners have to keep up with technology, as it develops very quickly. “Each year there are new ways to reach the audience, and there are other methods that become obsolete,” she says. “There is a ‘new kid on the block’ every year when it comes to apps, social media platforms, etc. There is a lot of press about the latest popular thing and with it comes pressure to stay current.”

That said, Forziat stresses that the core principles behind sponsorship acquisition fundamentally should remain the same regardless of what tools you use.

“At the end of the day, you need to understand who your audience is and how you reach them effectively,” Forziat says. “Then, you look for sponsors who are trying to reach a similar target market or achieve a similar mission, and you show them all the ways that sponsoring your project can help them do that.”

A few of the main challenges for sponsorship include adapting assets to the marketplace, understanding the current status of industry segments, timelines of sponsorship discussions with prospects and in general, being able to sign multiyear deals.

“Truly understanding everything you can about a potential sponsor or partner to ensure that in those initial conversations you are able to bring valuable assets to the table is very important,” Smith says. “From there, working with a potential sponsorship partner on identifying what they see as the main components of a sponsorship program that they are looking for and finding out how we can work together to develop the program is our key.”

Generally speaking, the Denver Film Society likes to prospect companies and organizations that have the potential of becoming long-term partners. In year one of a partnership, they work to show ROI as well as other intangible value to the partner, along with sharing data to ensure that the goals of the partnership were exceeded.

“From there the goal is to sign a multiyear deal so we can focus on adding value to all constituents involved and less time on negotiation,” Smith says.

STEPS TO TAKE

For the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) Chicago, Melissa Lagowski, owner of Chicago-based Big Buzz Idea Group, has created year-long partnership options along with event-specific sponsorship opportunities.

“It was very clear that some companies wanted to engage with

“Our partners are also seeking more and more unique elements to ‘own’ and continue to push us in the sponsored content space as they want to be seen as thought leaders and content providers.”



Dan Melesurgo
Vice President of Strategic Partnerships
ASAE
Washington, DC

NAWBO Chicago on a year-round basis, and thus corporate partnership was an ideal fit for their organizations,” Lagowski says.

NAWBO Chicago hosts multiple events each year including two signature events, which then opens up additional sponsorship opportunities. Each event offers different attendees, different geographic locations and different types of engagements and opportunities.

“This allows us to have a meaningful conversation with a sponsor and identify which event would best meet their goals,” Lagowski says. “Are they looking to connect with members and corporate partners? Are they looking to connect with the largest number of members possible? Are they looking to connect with members in a specific geographical region? Are they looking for an opportunity to speak and share their expertise? Do they have budget limitations for supporting the organization? All of these questions help us drill down with a sponsor and match them to the opportunity that helps the organization and the sponsor find success so that they will hopefully develop a long-standing partnership.”

Forziat encourages association planners who are seeking sponsors to remember that the best sponsorships are long-term relationships. It is not about asking people for favors.

"If it is a favor, it may not be in alignment with the sponsoring companies' goals, and you will inevitably lose that relationship," Forziat says.

Sponsorship packages also should be reasonable and justifiable. You can't just put a number down on paper because that is the amount of money that you wish to raise. You need to offer a package that provides value to the sponsor.

"Gone are the days when people can freely allocate money out," Lagowski says. "These days everyone has to justify expenses and the value associated with those expenses so if you can document a clear case why a corporation should support your organization, they will have an easier time taking it up the chain of command for approval. And better yet, if you follow up with a sponsor post-event and show how the sponsorship benefited them, you are more likely to secure a renewal or identify a growth opportunity with a sponsor."

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY?

Before any solicitations are made, time should be spent researching companies that are active in supporting projects that have similar missions or audiences. When you see that a company is coming up numerous times in a certain sphere, you can assume that your project is already in alignment with their objectives to some degree, and the ask becomes much more natural.

"From there, it is about finding the right contact at the company and wooing them," Forziat says. "Show them all that you have to offer to them, because ultimately that is what they are interested to know. Spend minimal time talking about what they can do for you and maximum time talking about what you can do for them."

Most companies have specific business goals in mind when deciding what projects to sponsor in a given fiscal year. It has nothing to do with what your organization wants or needs.

In fact, the best way to design your sponsorship package is

"These days everyone has to justify expenses and the value associated with those expenses so if you can document a clear case why a corporation should support your organization, they will have an easier time taking it up the chain of command for approval."

Melissa Lagowski
Owner, Big Buzz Idea Group, Chicago, IL

to address for the company, in one document, all the important things they need to know to compare your project to the dozens or maybe even hundreds of solicitations they have received.

"There are some things to make clear to them up front: your mission, your team, stats on your audience across each medium, a clear set of sponsorship levels with as many different categories of benefits as you have," Forziat says. "Make it a clean, appealing document that looks professional and has compelling visuals."

Also find all the ways you can to showcase your project in the best light. If you can, give them a range of programmatic, social media and event benefits, because some companies cannot sponsor certain types of projects by policy.

"Once you have the most appealing first introduction, communicate it via email so it can be forwarded to all the right people in the office easily," Forziat says. "And once your conversations are underway, the most important thing is to be flexible. Be interested in their needs and find out immediately what type of projects they look to support, what types of benefits they are looking to receive, and what tools and media are relevant to them to reach their audience. Tailor your partnership with them around that."

When creating sponsorship programs, Fowler creates a "suppliers council" or "sponsorship advisory committee" for the purpose of gathering feedback on a regular basis around how to continue adding value to the sponsorship program.

"Also, be sure to have an annual dedicated appreciation reception or event recognizing sponsors of a certain level and up, specifically for them, paid for by the association," Fowler says.

David James Group works with a variety of associations providing full-service marketing services.

"When we help set up sponsorship programs for our clients, we try to be as forward thinking and creative as possible," says David Lorenzo, founder and president of David James Group in Oakbrook Terrace, Illinois. "For example, one of our association clients, the Society of Women Engineers, was looking for a way to provide more value to their dedicated sponsors, so we came up with a unique package that utilized some of the clients' strong digital assets to provide a new avenue to spread the sponsor's message. Our client has an extremely strong following on social

media and on their blog, so the package allows our sponsor to incrementally use these spaces to push out their message in the form of valuable content."

Specifically at conferences, Lorenzo set up social media sponsorship packages that do very well.

"Social media has become a key component in marketing, and with our client's strong, dedicated following, we're able to create packages that are very valuable," Lorenzo says. "For instance, at their last conference for women in engineering, WE15, we set up a sponsored tweet wall — a place where attendees can see their tweets streaming live throughout the conference. We're also working on a sponsored social media lounge for this year's conference, WE16."

MISTAKES TO AVOID

Smith says association meeting planners need to avoid common mistakes that are made in developing a sponsorship program, which can include:

- Not fully understanding the goals of a partner.
- Finding partners that are less engaged and don't fit the organizational mission.
- Packages being sold or created by members of an organization that are handed off and not activated the way they should be.

Other key mistakes that association planners may make when orchestrating sponsorship sales programs include:

- Organizations do not properly value their assets. They just throw out a number and hope that a sponsor target will pay it.
- Organizations do not spend enough time researching which sponsor targets/corporations would be the best match for their organization. If you are an arts organization, then you should take the time to research which companies support art organizations; if you are trying to secure a company that supports the poor, you aren't going to get where you want to go, and it will be a waste of your time.
- Organizations do not properly value, acknowledge and show appreciation for their supporters. "Due to the fact that everyone is stretched thin for time these days, I think that many organizations do not take the time to properly thank their sponsors or donors, and this is often the most valuable tool in strengthening relationships and renewing a contribution for another year," Lagowski says. "It is much easier to grow an existing supporter than it is to recruit a new supporter."
- Many organizations put the responsibility of sponsorship on one person. It is vital that the board members, the staff and the development committee work together to secure sponsors. "It is hard work to secure pitch meetings with your desired target, but once you have done your research and found your target, it is best to work the network of your

organization to see who might be able to make a warm introduction for you," Lagowski says. "The warm introduction is always preferred over a cold pitch any day."

- Don't give up! Sometimes you have to court a potential sponsor for a couple of years before you can bring them onboard, so once you make contact, stay in touch with the prospect regularly through holiday cards, invitations to events, article sharing, etc. You never know when the sponsor's focus will change and there might be an opportunity for you to secure dollars that you were previously denied.

"Truly understanding everything you can about a potential sponsor or partner to ensure that in those initial conversations you are able to bring valuable assets to the table is very important."



Kevin Smith
Corporate Sponsorship Manager
Denver Film Society
Denver, CO

"Sponsorship is, plain and simple, about selling stuff," Lagowski says. "You need some money. Therefore you need to create value for those who might buy what you have to offer. The only way to do this is to ask questions. I find it highly ineffective to create a highly detailed, big and glossy thing that details multiple levels of sponsorship. You do need to have some guidelines, but you also need to have the authority and flexibility to deviate from that. Be sure that you have some guidelines from the director on what the parameters may be for negotiation and let the potential sponsor know that you have the authority to negotiate on everyone's behalf, but that final approval of the sponsorship terms rests with the director."

It also is imperative that organizations spend some time to identify what type of companies would make the ideal fit. For example, small organizations shoot for the largest corporations, and there just isn't a logical fit, so the answer is "no," and then the team gets discouraged.

"Don't waste time and resources on companies that are not the right fit for your organization," Lagowski says. "And if a potential sponsor does say no, be sure to ask them why. You can gain so much knowledge by asking follow-up questions. Was it budget limitations? Timing issues? Should you submit your request at a different time of year next time? Or was this opportunity just not a good fit for this company? These answers help to plan for future success."



Jim Fowler, CAE
President
Atlanta Apartment Association
Atlanta, GA

"Be sure to have an annual dedicated appreciation reception or event recognizing sponsors of a certain level and up, specifically for them, paid for by the association."

Atlantic City on the Rebound

On the Strength of New Development, a Healthy Year Ahead for Association Conventions

By Ron Bernthal

Atlantic City's skyline is bright with promise as new development is attracting a healthy convention business.

Like the ocean breezes that blow over its storied Boardwalk, Atlantic City is welcoming winds of change that are clearing away the dark clouds of casino closings and bringing in a new air of revitalization to one of America's oldest resorts, and along with it, a renewed surge in convention bookings.

Atlantic City meetings industry executives have read all the

media stories and felt the financial impact of the 2014 closings, but they're smiling now, as there are too many positive things happening in the city for anyone to be anything but bullish about Atlantic City's future. In fact, for 2016 and beyond, things are looking pretty darn sunny.

"The year 2015 was Meet AC's first full year as a new organi-

zation, and we exceeded our goals by almost 39 percent," says Jim Wood, CEO of Meet AC, the sales and marketing force that supports the Atlantic City Convention Center (ACCC), and has been instrumental in helping to attract corporate and association events to the city. "We are really thrilled with the outcome of how we ended the year in terms of productivity. We booked quite a

few association events into Atlantic City in 2015, and 2016 is going better than planned, so we are very optimistic that the city is rebounding nicely as a great destination for association meetings and trade shows."

One of the reasons Atlantic City continues to be so popular for association meeting planners is that all the large hotel properties

have everything groups need under one roof, says Wood. "Tropicana has 19 different restaurants within itself, so whether it's the Borgata, Harrah's, Golden Nugget, Caesars, Resorts, the Taj Mahal or Bally's, they all have a plethora of dining venues and function rooms. When an association meeting planner wants to have a trade show or convention in Atlantic City they have so many options of doing various types of events right onsite, without having to hire buses to move around hundreds or thousands of participants," Wood says. "That's what makes Atlantic City unique, with the self-contained properties that offer everything, and you still have the Boardwalk, and the Atlantic Ocean beaches are just steps away for planners who want to do creative outside events."

"One of our biggest assets, of course, is the Atlantic City Convention Center (ACCC)," Wood continues. "This venue provides exhibitors with 486,600 contiguous sf of exhibit space, as well as 45

"I chose the Trop because of the capable, knowledgeable and friendly staff that you interact with when running seminars."

Niles Breslau, Executive Director

New Jersey Association of Public Accountants, Northfield, NJ

meeting rooms featuring an extra 109,100 sf, ample prefunction space and all the amenities you would expect from a top-notch, professional convention venue." The ACCC is the largest facility of its kind in New Jersey.

ATTENDANCE BUILDER

One of the major events scheduled for 2016 will take place in March, when the New Jersey Builders Association brings its 67th annual trade show to Resorts Casino Hotel. The Association of Building Contractors (ABC) trade show, hosted by the New Jersey Builders Association (NJBA), is the largest building industry trade show in the Northeast, drawing approximately 6,500 participants, including residential and commercial builders, developers, remodelers and subcontractors, plus a variety of manufacturers, suppliers and consulting professionals. The convention features nearly 400 exhibits and includes many educational seminars as well.

"This event has been growing tremendously since it started in 1949, and it has always taken place



Resorts Casino Hotel features Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville restaurant and bar.

Credit: Resorts Casino Hotel



Credit: Tropicana Resort & Casino Atlantic City

Tropicana Resort & Casino debuted a new Multimedia Light and Sound Show on the property's re-imagined Boardwalk façade last year.

in New Jersey," says Diane Nicolo-Pocino, vice president of events and programs for the New Jersey Builders Association. "We had been using venues all across the state, but in the last 30 years or so, because of the large amount of guest rooms and meeting space we now need, we have been holding the event in Atlantic City, using many venues in the city multiple times. During the past two years we were at Resorts (Casino Hotel), and will be there again in March for the 2016 ABC event.

"We have blocked over 800 room nights at Resorts, with an additional block at the Sheraton Convention Center hotel since many of our educational programs and other functions will take place at the Atlantic City Convention Center just across the street," Nicolo-Pocino says. "Resorts really wowed us with what they have to offer in terms of service, cuisine and the new Resorts Conference Center."

The new multifaceted conference center at Resorts Casino Hotel, completed last summer, added 12,000 sf of meeting space and 12 more conference rooms all on one level. The 12 completed meeting spaces, named the Atlantic Rooms, include mobile partitions, modular lounge areas with outlets and USB ports, prefunction spaces with snack and coffee areas, and state-of-the-art AV and lighting controls.

The showpiece of the conference center is the Atlantic Ballroom, a 6,500-sf function room with a multiuse prefunction area and views of the Atlantic Ocean. The new conference center brings the total offerings at Resorts to 24 meeting and function rooms with more than 64,000 sf of usable space. Fourteen of those meeting rooms feature natural light and ocean views. The 12 new breakout rooms have built-in 80-inch or 90-inch LED monitors, dropdown screens and cinema-quality DLP projectors. Two theaters offer seating for 300 or 1,350 with state-of-the-art sound and light technology.

Nicolo-Pocino says that Resorts provided everything they needed

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in terms of meeting and exhibit space for the last two events, and the scheduled three-day, March 2016 event should be even better. “The Builders Beach Party, called Head on Down to Margaritaville, will be held on the ‘beach’ at Jimmy Buffett’s Margaritaville entertainment complex,” says Nicolo-Pocino. “The organization’s Sales & Marketing Awards (SAM) banquet, called Carnival, a Rio-style SAM Spectacular, will be the grand finale and take place in the Ocean Ballroom & Superstar Theater. It will all be really spectacular.” Margaritaville is located at Resorts Casino Hotel.



Credits: Harrah's Resort Atlantic City



Harrah's Resort's new Waterfront Conference Center features two 50,000-sf ballrooms.

property suggests that 250–300 rooms are workable blocks, with 400 rooms as a maximum.

Harrah's \$125 million **Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center** made a big splash when it opened in September of last year, and it is now gearing up for the 2016 World Education Congress (WEC), hosted by Meeting Professionals International (MPI) in June 2016. The WEC will attract more than 2,500 attendees, including corporate, third-party and association planners, suppliers, industry faculty and students, and it will be the first time that MPI has hosted a congress in Atlantic City. The Waterfront Conference Center offers 100,000 sf of meeting space and state-of-the-art technology throughout the venue. The huge amount of meeting space can be easily reconfigured into as many as 63 individual meeting rooms, including two 50,000-sf pillarless ballrooms that can accommodate up to 5,000 guests.

“We are happy to be partnering with Caesars Entertainment in hosting MPI’s WEC in 2016,” says Meet AC’s Jim Wood. “This is a strategic direction for Meet AC and for Atlantic City as we continue to diversify our mix of business. Showcasing Atlantic City to over 1,000 meeting planners and over 2,500 total attendees will definitely help us grow the meetings and conventions market.”

Harrah's Resort's other features include 2,590 hotel rooms, directly accessible from the Waterfront Conference Center, a 1,200-seat theater and an indoor pool covered by a 90-foot glass dome.

MORE HOTEL AND DEVELOPMENT NEWS

Bally's, another Caesar's Entertainment Atlantic City property, offers 1,760 guest rooms, many with ocean views, and 147 guest rooms in Bally's Tower have recently been renovated. The hotel can provide 80,000 sf of meeting space, all located on one level, with 23 meeting rooms, from a 20-person boardroom to a ballroom for 1,900. There also is the Bally's Legends in Concert Theater, with 450 seats and plenty of technological capabilities.

The third Caesars Entertainment property in Atlantic City, the 1,144-room **Caesars Atlantic City**, has 28,000 sf of meeting space, including the 17,135-sf Palladium Ballroom, with its generous pre-function space and elegant atmosphere. Ten meeting rooms range from 490 sf to 1,262 sf, and can be combined to create a larger space. The renovated Circus Maximus Theater at Caesars has comfortable seating for more than 1,500 guests for special events,

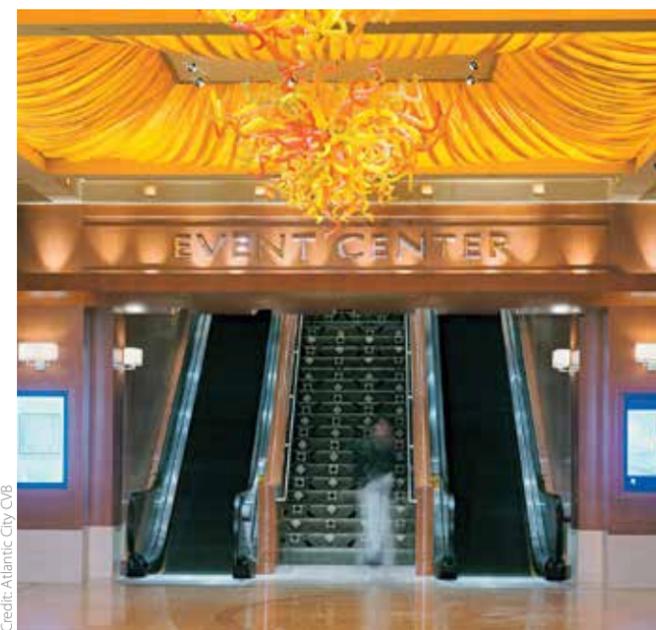
and renovations of 286 guest rooms in Temple Tower will be completed by May. And, of course, for association planners booked into Bally's and/or Caesars, meeting options can be extended at sister property Harrah's Resort Atlantic City and its Waterfront Conference Center.

“Bally's opened Guy Fieri's Chophouse last year with a view of the Boardwalk and beach,” says Steve van der Molen, vice president of meeting operations Atlantic City for Caesars Entertainment National Meetings & Events. “Caesars was also busy with new dining venues, including the debut of the Gordon Ramsay Pub and Grill, modeled after the famous concept brought by the Michelin Star chef to Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. The Gordon Ramsay Pub & Grill has become the best spot in Atlantic City for a true, authentic British pub experience.”

Atlantic City's **Golden Nugget** hotel casino, the former Trump Marina property, has been a shining star on the Atlantic City skyline since Landry's Inc. completed the hotel casino's \$150 million transformation in 2011. In 2014, which saw four casinos close, the Golden Nugget generated \$179 million in net revenue, a 36 percent increase over 2013, and in the first half of 2015 net revenue was \$100 million, a 26.7 percent increase over 2014.

The renovation at Golden Nugget was top-to-bottom, and included new meeting space, guest room upgrades, and adding several popular dining venues, including Vic & Anthony's Steakhouse, the Chart House, and the seasonal H2O Pool + Bar Grill, located on the 6th floor of the hotel, with a breathtaking view of Atlantic City and the ocean. The property offers several unique meeting spaces, including the outdoor Event Lawn (45,000 sf), the Observation Deck (9,000 sf) and The Grand (19,920 sf).

The 2,010-room **Trump Taj Mahal** is New Jersey's largest hotel



Credit: Atlantic City CVB

The Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa's Event Center hosts topline entertainment.

“We are very optimistic that the city is rebounding nicely as a great destination for association meetings and trade shows.”



James Wood
CEO
Meet AC

meeting, conference and exhibit facility under one roof. Covering 17 acres of Boardwalk real estate, and 4.2 million sf of enclosed space, the Taj offers 155,000 sf of meeting space, including the 63,000-sf Mark G. Etes Arena, allowing association trade show planners to offer up to 325 8-by-10-foot exhibit booths, or 6,000 theater style. The 30,600-sf Grand Ballroom is just one of three large ballrooms for groups.

Meeting rooms at the 2,000-room **Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa** offer association planners additional options for anticipated group bookings. The property provides 70,000 sf of event space, accommodating 10 to 3,500 people, including a 12,000-sf meeting room. All meeting spaces at Borgata have built-in lighting systems, extensive video and sound technology, with additional meeting venues at **The Water Club**, the 800-room upscale hotel adjoining the Borgata. The 18,000 sf of meeting space at The Water Club includes 13 venues accommodating 20 to 200 people, with its own banquet and catering department, signature in-room dining and banquet menus by noted chef Geoffrey Zakarian, and access to Immersion, the 32nd-floor, 36,000-sf spa and lap pool.

The Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa recently announced plans to invest more than \$50 million into the improvement of its property throughout 2016: Borgata Festival Park will be transformed into an outdoor pool beginning this summer, featuring more than 400 chaise lounges, daybeds and cabanas, a full-service canopied bar, entertainment stage, and a variety of lawn games and activities, all centered on a 3,200-sf Roman-style pool. Debuting this spring is Premier, an 18,000-sf nightclub offering “a theatrical experience for partygoers.” The Borgata also added the James Beard award-winning chef Michael Symon to its fine-dining roster. With the anticipated fall 2016 opening of his new Borgata signature restaurant, Symon will join fellow chefs Bobby Flay (Bobby Flay Steak), Geoffrey Zakarian (The Water Club), and Wolfgang Puck (Wolfgang Puck American Grille), as part of the Borgata's culinary family.

The iconic **Steel Pier** will reopen March 26 after a \$14 million restoration. The amusement park will feature a 220-foot-high observation wheel offering riders views of Atlantic City and the ocean from inside climate-controlled gondolas.

The Playground, a 464,000-sf entertainment venue featuring



“Everything is here, the gaming, shows, high-end shopping, room availability and meeting space, and everyone at all the venues works hard to make sure our event is successful.”

Diane Nicolo-Pocino
V.P. of Events & Programs
New Jersey Builders Association
Hamilton, NJ

eight live entertainment clubs and restaurants, plans to add more amenities including a bowling alley, sports bar and outside pool on the beach with cabanas.

Gardner’s Basin, located in the marina district, will launch an expansion and redevelopment project by the end of this summer. The project will include additional restaurants, shops and entertainment venues. In addition, the Boardwalk between Gardner’s Basin and Revel will be reconstructed.

MAJOR CONVENTION BOOKINGS

Several other large association groups are seen as pivotal for Atlantic City’s continued success in 2016. The Triple Play Realtor Convention and Trade Expo guaranteed a return to Atlantic City in 2016 when they signed a three-year contract extension that will keep the 8,000 attendees, 325-booth trade show at the Atlantic City Convention Center through 2018.

The convention, co-sponsored by the New Jersey, New York State and Pennsylvania association of Realtors, is now in its 15th year at the Convention Center. The annual estimated economic impact derived from their convention is more than \$4.8 million annually, which means the contract extension will mean a combined \$14.4 million economic impact to Atlantic City. “We are thrilled that the Triple Play Realtor Convention has elected to remain with us here in Atlantic City through 2018,” says Wood. Last year the Realtor Convention attendees booked 3,900 room nights at various Atlantic City properties during the December event.

Teams ’16, the world’s leading conference and expo for the sports event industry, presented by *SportsTravel* magazine, will be held in Atlantic City on September 26-29, 2016. Teams attracts more than 1,400 attendees, including CEOs, executive directors and event managers from sports organizations as well as representatives from sports commissions, convention bureaus, corporate sponsors, event suppliers and other hospitality industry entities.

“The Atlantic City Sports Commission is ecstatic to host Teams ’16 in Atlantic City,” says Wood. “The sports business in Atlan-

tic City continues to grow, whether it’s a convention or tournament. Teams will help us develop the AC Sports Commission as a cutting-edge agency and strengthen our relationships within the sports industry. Teams will generate substantial ROI for Atlantic City.” The event will be held at Harrah’s Waterfront Conference Center.

The ACCC will again welcome one of the biggest conventions of its kind as it hosts more than 45,000 attendees for the 2016 New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) Convention. Local Atlantic City businesses are expected to greatly benefit from the NJEA Convention activity over the six-day event in November. The estimated delegate spending is expected to reach more than \$16 million, and more than 2,000 hotel room nights throughout the city will be contracted by convention attendees. In the past, the NJEA Convention has brought in the largest attendance of the year of all events at the Atlantic City Convention Center.

Atlantic City officials also are attempting to extend the Miss America Pageant following the expiration of their three-year contract last year. The Miss America planners are negotiating with the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA) to see if the competition will remain in its original home on the Atlantic City Boardwalk in 2016 and beyond.



The Tree House meeting room in the Atlantic City Convention Center features floor-to-ceiling windows offering panoramic views of the city.

Credit: Atlantic City CVB

Although some local residents believe that the competition does not bring in enough revenue to warrant the city’s multimillion-dollar investment to keep the pageant in town, most feel otherwise, alluding to the historic, emotional connection between Miss America, which started here in 1921, and Atlantic City. That connection, they say, has a public relations value that is priceless.

Stockton University marketing professor Jennifer Barr told the *Press of Atlantic City*, “The Miss America Pageant is part of the fabric of American history and society. Despite the television ratings slipping, it is a prestigious event that has a very high level of brand equity that spills over to Atlantic City. Brand heritage also is an important factor, because both past and prospective visitors are reminded that Atlantic City is not only the home of the pageant but also a viable resort destination.”

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New Orleans

There's Always Something New and Big and Different in This Dream Destination



With more than 1,000 members and 31 animated super-floats, the Krewe of Bacchus is one of the most spectacular krewe in Carnival history.

Credit: New Orleans CVB, Cheryl Gerber

By Sara Churchville

Twenty-one states have declared milk their official beverage, but how many cities can boast their own legislature-anointed cocktail? The “laissez les bons temps rouler” hospitality of New Orleans, coupled with its walkability, embarrassment of great food around every corner and, most of all, ease of forming and maintaining local relationships, makes it a dream destination for meeting planners.

ENGAGING ATTENDEES

“When you want to do something different in New Orleans, the answer is always the hurricane cocktail,” says Martin E. Bay, CMP, director of meetings and expositions for the Atlanta office of Kellen Meetings. At a trade association meeting at the Hotel Monteleone, his 260 attendees enjoyed a cup of the rum, passion fruit syrup and lime juice concoction in the lobby during a 10-minute break, then returned to the meeting. “No one left the participatory session, and they were very — engaged,” he laughs.

The hurricane may be the go-to drink, but it’s not the official cocktail of New Orleans. In 2008, the Louisiana Legislature agreed that honor should go to the Sazerac, made with cognac, rye and bourbon; absinthe; Peychaud’s bitters (named for the 19th-century bayou pharmacist who concocted the drink); and simple syrup.

The hotel’s The Carousel Bar and Lounge, with its leisurely merry-go-round seating, makes the drink with rye minus the absinthe.

Bay has brought several groups to the hotel, which he says is “very accommodating with the agreement template.” That the

property is historic makes it a good choice for certain meetings, he says, though he notes that his group size was right on the edge of the number of people the hotel’s largest ballroom can comfortably hold.

The meeting included a general session, multiple breakouts and two receptions, with the attendees getting dinner on their own afterward. “Some people called weeks in advance to make reservations; others just walked around,” he says. “One of the key things clients look for in a destination is walkability and availability of dining near the hotel. Reservations are not required.”

NETWORKING ON THE MISSISSIPPI

The gathering was 90 percent about networking, and as such it was a success, Bay says. Just how much of one became evident during the one offsite event, a riverboat cruise along the Mississippi River with a full dinner and drinks. The attendees walked from the hotel through the French Quarter to the boat.

“If you’re trying to force the networking, the riverboats can be kind of boring,” Bay admits. “But we had a great group. It was a beautiful night, and we had to pry them off the boat. The bar was closed, the food was long gone, but they were still sitting around having a good time. That doesn’t happen often.”

FAMILIAR FACES

Bay also notes with approval that there’s not a lot of staff turnover at the Hotel Monteleone, something that planners at several of the city’s other hotels also have remarked on. “If I went in 2007, I was working with the same people seven years later. That kind of service is one of the key things that makes the hotel special. They’re proactive. If you’re low on something, they replenish it.”

Jeanne Larson, CGMP, the meeting planner for the Minneapolis-based Battered Women’s Justice Project and the first vice president of the Northern Lights Chapter of the Society of Government Meeting Professionals, also is pleasantly surprised to see the same faces whenever she meets at the 345-room Omni Royal Orleans. One of the bellmen, who has worked at the hotel for 45 years, gives her hugs when she returns each year. Another one brought her gumbo his wife had made. Larson describes the staff overall as “empowered.” For example, a maid took the initiative of bringing a complimentary bowl of chicken soup to one attendee who was sick in bed.

The hotel staff’s friendly attentiveness is one compensation Larson has found in her continued struggle to manage attendee meeting satisfaction, something that’s become a trifle more harrowing since 2011. This was the year of “Muffin-gate,” when the U.S. Department of Justice’s meeting spending was exposed as apparently profligate: a certain line item — the \$16 muffin — featured dramatically in the discussions.

Since Larson’s association is DOJ-funded, the upshot is that attendees at her meetings, including one she held for a group of 100 members of law enforcement and other advocates for battered



Martin E. Bay, CMP
Director of Meetings and
Expositions
Kellen Meetings
Atlanta, GA

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women, forage for their own sustenance. Even during meeting breaks. Even for coffee. Especially for muffins.

The downsides to this are more than low blood sugar and flagging attention spans. “People have to run to Starbucks in the first-floor gift shop during breaks, so there’s no mingling or networking or mentoring going on,” she laments. “We used to be able to offer lunch with a speaker, and we were kind of hoping the pendulum would swing back, but it hasn’t.”

Still, attendees know what to expect — and what not to. One of the Omni Royal’s significant draws for her association, given its mission, has nothing to do with the food. “Our organization appreciates the fact that they’re a porn-free hotel. The owner doesn’t believe in any pay-per-view that is pornography. They’re losing a revenue stream, and we appreciate that.”

THE PLEASURES OF EATING

And since Larson booked during a lower season for the hotel, the staff put a little balm on the sting of no food by supplying complimentary lemonade and cookies.

Though the attendees grumbled a bit about the lack of coffee, they had all the more reason to visit spots like Café Du Monde for beignets and chicory-flavored café au lait. Naturally, the hotel was ready with recommendations and reservations. Some attendee favorites over the years have been Emeril’s NOLA, Cochon and the more casual Cochon Butcher, Sammy’s Po-Boys and Frenchman Street.

But no one really needs reservations to eat well in New Orleans. “You can just walk into a hole in a wall and have an excellent meal and service and great conversations,” Larson says. “You’d think Mardi Gras was the night before.”

BEYOND BOURBON STREET

As easy as it is to make a beeline for the city’s busiest street, Larson recommends looking beyond the obvious. She suggests Louis Armstrong Park, right outside the French Quarter, which she says has jazz festivals every weekend (although the week of

the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, April 22–May 1, 2016, is best avoided by the budget-minded, Bay warns). Larson mentions crafts fairs, strolls by the river, palm readings at Jackson Square and just general walking around as ways to get a feel for New Orleans. “I would have known so much more right away had I used the CVB,” she says. “What I know now comes over five years.”

AUDIO-VISUAL ASSISTANCE

The Omni Royal Orleans continues to upgrade its meeting space tech offerings, with Wi-Fi access points in all the conference spaces, several new 60-inch HDTVs coupled with ceiling-mounted projectors, and plans to double its LED accent lighting and upgrade all meeting space audio equipment.

For her own AV needs at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside, Sheryl R. Abshire, Ph.D., vice president of programs and advocacy for the Louisiana Association of Computer Using Educators, opted for PSAV for her tech-heavy meeting. She appreciated the “easy access to the engineers who were managing the tech,” their responsiveness and multiple daily updates. And when the inevitable tech mishap came up, “within minutes, they were able to redirect traffic and figure out where the glitch was.”

BEING PART OF THE AMBIENCE

Abshire’s association has held its annual fall conference in New Orleans since 2011, and in 2014 when they marked their 30th anniversary, 2,500 educators from Louisiana and the surrounding states as well as vendors from across the country converged on the city. “We want to draw a wide range of presenters to showcase ideas and solutions,” she says of the choice of destination. “You’re not going to get 200 or 300 companies to come to, say, Lake Charles. New Orleans has its own savoir faire; people want to come.”

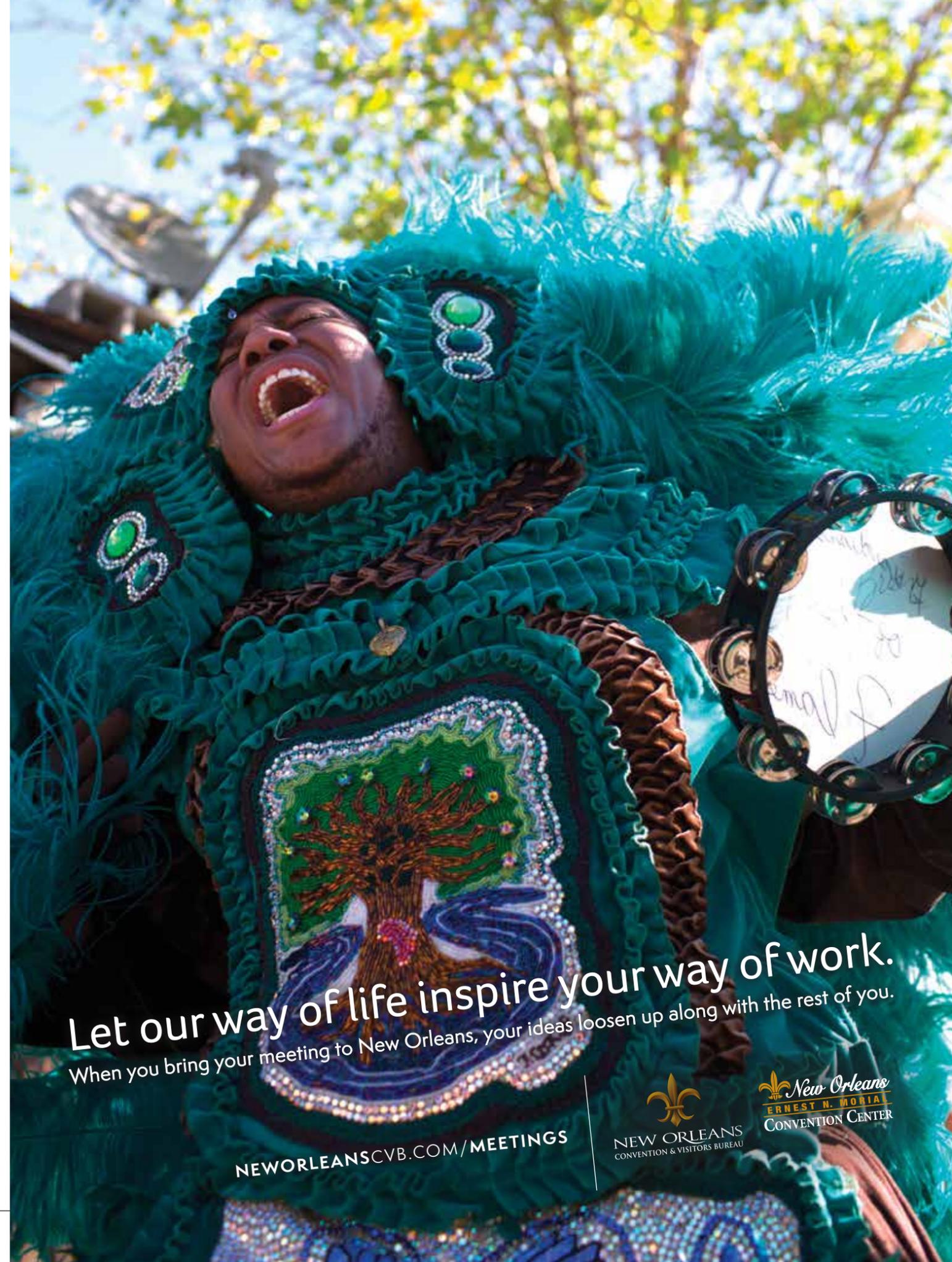
Apart from the variety of transportation options that make New Orleans an obvious meeting hub, “there’s a real sense of commitment and respect for what it represents for our state — certainly after the hurricane — and people want to help the city grow and be part of that.” And once attendees arrive, there’s no need for them to drive anywhere, she notes.

As the conference’s keynote speaker, Jaime Casap, global education evangelist at Google, stirred up the crowd with his message of how the Internet is transforming education, the attendees then suited the action to the word in a series of hands-on sessions with new educational software.

Abshire planned a couple of cocktail parties as well as a luncheon where the hotel provided such New Orleans staples as crawfish pasta, boudin balls, muffuletta sandwiches and the local Abita beer.

She also engaged a school brass band — “New Orleans lends itself to that because of the Mardi Gras atmosphere 24/7/365” — and had cups, beads and lollipops made with the 30th anniversary logo.

She also planned a presidents’ and founders’ luncheon, where



Let our way of life inspire your way of work.
When you bring your meeting to New Orleans, your ideas loosen up along with the rest of you.

NEWORLEANS CVB.COM/MEETINGS





Jeanne Larson, CGMP
Meeting Planner
Battered Women's Justice Project
Minneapolis, Minnesota

No one really needs reservations to eat well in New Orleans. "You can just walk into a hole in a wall and have an excellent meal and service and great conversations. You'd think Mardi Gras was the night before."

she passed out acrylic fleurs de lis with the logo and the executive's years of service embossed on them.

The New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau provided PR for the meeting, maps, suggestions for places to eat and special bargains. Abshire's team put the CVB's lists of restaurants within walking distance of the hotel into the conference bags, so attendees didn't need to use the concierge desk or find food "by happenstance."

Her suggestion for great meetings especially resonates for the Big Easy: "If something goes awry, don't lose your mind and ruin the event for yourself. At the end of the day, if the people who came felt it was worthy of their time and resources, the meeting was a success. Don't dwell on what didn't happen; dwell on what did."

NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

Progress toward the city's dream of revitalizing the riverfront via the **Convention Center District Development Project** — 47 acres of terrain near the convention center that the city reimagines as a hotel, entertainment and shopping hub by 2018 — continues apace. The Convention Center District Development Project represents the largest single private investment in the city of New Orleans since the 1984 World's Fair. In addition to the linear park, key elements include a world-class anchor hotel, improved walkability, lighting and streetscaping, new premier retail shopping options, residential living, fine dining and casual restaurants and entertainment, cultural and arts venues. These plans will be accomplished in the form of a public/private partnership with a Master Developer that is expected to invest more than \$700 million.

Bob Johnson, president/general manager of the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center says, "This is a transformative plan to take Convention Center Boulevard, from Poydras Street to Henderson Street, and transform it into an urban park, a canopy of trees and plantings, and make it an active green space for Downtown New Orleans, both to enhance the experience for our meeting attendees and conventioners and also the residents. It will provide an important function as the ribbon that ties the core of downtown to the new development, located upriver from the

convention center." Meanwhile, inspired by a recent green convention, the convention center has been pushing itself toward increasingly sustainable practices: composting, recycling and replacing thousands of incandescent outdoor lights with energy-hoarding LEDs and iridescent lighting with induction lighting. The center says its changes have cut its monthly electric bill in half and saved it nearly \$4 million when figured annually. It's looking toward a "meeting room of the future" that will include solar panels on the 40-acre roof.

The historic **Orpheum Theater** reopened 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.

Apart from the convention center, the **Sheraton New Orleans Hotel** remains the city's largest meeting space, with 105,700 sf of convention space and the 28,000-sf Napoleon Exposition Hall & Ballroom that can seat 2,600 and deliver 12 breakout rooms. The Grand Ballroom at the **New Orleans Marriott** seats 3,600.

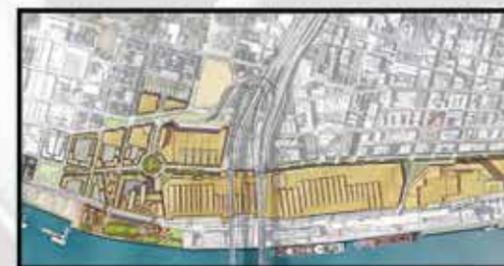
In mid-December 2014, the former **W New Orleans** showed off the first phase of its \$29 million rebranding as **Le Méridien New Orleans**. All 410 rooms have been renovated, and there are now 22 suites among them; 1,600 sf of new meeting space brings the hotel's total up to 20,000 sf; and executive chef Mauricio Gutierrez will preside over the new **LMNO** restaurant, bringing his molecular gastronomy technique to bear on the New American-meets-NOLA fare.

The 285-room **Loews New Orleans Hotel** also has had a nip/tuck, with more and brighter lighting in the guest rooms and contemporary artwork in the main spaces. The onsite restaurant, **Cafe Adelaide**, is run by the culinary dynasty behind Brennan's and Commander's Palace, home of the 25-cent martini and mainstay of "best restaurant" lists everywhere. After a \$20 million re-sprucing, Brennan's is open again under executive chef Slade Rushing, whose menu includes New Orleans barbecue lobster, octopus "à la Creole" (with tomatoes, sausage and olives), and smoked squab and foie gras gumbo — and those are just the starters.

The renovation of the iconic **Royal Sonesta New Orleans**, long a favored hotel in the heart of the French Quarter, is complete as the 483 guest rooms are newly reimagined. In addition to guest rooms, other public spaces also underwent renovation. A new fitness center is well equipped with free weights and state-of-the-art equipment. The hotel's **R Club Level** has been expanded from 29 to 58 rooms and features a new **R Club lounge**.

The **Wyndham New Orleans French Quarter** has completed a multimillion-dollar renovation that included 374 guest rooms as well as the property's exterior and parking garage.

The **Hyatt House New Orleans/Downtown** debuted in the Central Business District in November 2015, bringing 194 extended-stay hotel rooms to the downtown area.



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LUSK

Visit Denver, The Convention & Visitors Bureau, has promoted **Jason Lusk, CMP, HMCC**, to associate vice president, convention sales. He most recently served as director of sales for the bureau.

Benchmark Hospitality International has named **Perry Goodbar** as director of sales and marketing for the Villas of Grand Cypress, a Personal Luxury property in Orlando, Florida. He was vice president of sales, services and business development for the Colonial Williamsburg Company in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Bill Hume was named director of sales and marketing for Hyatt Regency Aurora-Denver Conference Center. He was director of group sales at The Omni Interlocken Resort and Spa, Broomfield, Colorado.



ROSENBERG

The Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau has named **Sybil Davis** as national accounts manager responsible for international, multicultural, and religious meeting and convention groups. She was a senior sales executive for the Renaissance Washington, DC Downtown Hotel.

NYC & Company has named **Cory Rosenberg** as regional director of sales for the West Coast. He was previously based in New York City at NYC & Company's headquarters.

Resorts Casino Hotel has appointed **Maribeth Grandpre** as manager of business development, introducing the new conference center to meeting planners. She most recently served as the vice presi-



FLICK

dent of national sales for Conference Solutions Network.

The Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau has named **Shannon Johnson** as national sales manager covering the Rocky Mountain territory. She previously served as territory manager for American Hotel Register. **Stephanie Flick** was named national sales manager for the mid-Atlantic market. She most recently served as sales manager for the Park Hyatt Aviara Resort in Carlsbad, California.



JOHNSON

Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego has named **John Yeadon** as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing for Hyatt Regency Maui Resort and Spa.



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