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# ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

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2016

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT



## Convention Centers Reimagined

Building for the Future Now

PAGE 16

Michael Lockwood, architect, senior principal at Populous, blends trends and ideas from meeting planners to design convention center expansions from Los Angeles to Orlando.

Credit: Populous and IHMC Architects

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THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

April/May 2016

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# Building for the Future



The term “big box” to describe convention facilities conjures up visions of vast, featureless warehouse-type space through which convention attendees must trudge for what seems like miles. I know my aching feet can attest to it when I return home from walking the floor. With expansion projects springing up all across the country, convention centers may not be getting any smaller, but their design and configurations are becoming much more innovative and customer-centric. For example, the architectural and design firm Populous (whose tagline is “Drawing People Together”) annually hosts the “Imagine That Workshop” to gauge trends and solicit ideas from meeting planners and CVBs. The result is what the designers call a “trend fusion”: “We believe that if you solve for any one trend, you probably are not going to end up with a building that’s addressing the future, so you need to fuse those trends together and come up with a bigger idea that starts to address as many trends as possible,” says Michael Lockwood, architect and senior principal at Populous, who graces our cover.

Among the design firm’s many projects is the recently completed Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center expansion, with its “meeting room of the future,” and current projects such as the Los Angeles Convention Center and Orange County Convention Center expansions.

Our feature on page 16 describes all the ways in which convention centers are being reimagined to provide much more flexible and engaging environments, which ideally are also designed to mirror a city’s personality — similar to the 2013 San Jose McEnery Convention Center expansion designed by Populous to reflect Silicon Valley’s spirit of innovation.

Lockwood details key design elements important to planners, including flexible space (“space should not be designated as anything so that it can be used for everything,” said one planner); networking hubs designed to be part of a larger “cosmopolitan” environment that also “brings in hints of authentic local culture”; and tech features such as the meeting room of the future’s touchscreen monitors, projection walls, digital content sharing systems and flexible partitioning systems.

About all those miles traipsed at trade shows? Thanks to the Fitbit fad, Lockwood notes that step-logging attendees may actually prefer using stairwells rather than elevators. In a session with planners, Lockwood and the group came up with a “Wellnesswell” concept for stairwells. “They might become an opportunity for branding or advertising,” he says. “Every flight of stairs you climb you burn 25 calories.”

Looks like convention centers are really beginning to walk the talk.

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— *Dr. Linda H. Gilliam, Mid-Atlantic Regional Director  
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# Harrah's AC Conference Center Nearly Doubles Bookings

**ATLANTIC CITY, NJ** — Since its grand opening six months ago, the Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center has



**Wood**

nearly doubled its booked meetings and conventions through 2019 and expects to bring nearly 300,000 conference attendees to Atlantic City. Total room nights booked are currently at almost 200,000 — up from 140,000 in September 2015. Harrah's Atlantic City is an indirect subsidiary of Caesars Entertainment Corporation.



**Massari**

"In a short period of time, the Waterfront Conference Center has accomplished more than we ever hoped for when we first opened the doors," said Michael Massari, Caesars Entertainment's



*Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center.*

senior vice president of national meetings and events. "This facility has finally given meeting planners an option in the Northeast with the large space, flexibility and functionality necessary to elevate the quality of their meetings. The Waterfront Conference Center has filled a void in the market and put Atlantic City on the map as a premier destination for meetings and conventions."

Jim Wood, president and CEO of Meet AC, said, "We are seeing organizations that typically book in convention destinations like Orlando and Las Vegas now considering and coming to Atlantic City as a result of the Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center. This validates the center as not only a major player in the Northeast, but in the national meetings business." [www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com](http://www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com)

## Mandalay Bay Completes Rooms Remodel

**LAS VEGAS, NV** — Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino has completed the final phase of its resort-wide remodel of more than 3,000 guest rooms and suites. Created by the MGM Resorts International Design Group, the redesigned rooms and suites feature refreshing color palettes and modern designs in three distinct collections.

This marks the conclusion of an approximately \$100 million remodel that began in 2015. [www.mandalaybay.com](http://www.mandalaybay.com)

## Jeff Homad Named VP of Convention Sales and Services for Memphis CVB

**MEMPHIS, TN** — The Memphis Convention & Visitors Bureau has hired resort hotel executive Jeff Homad to lead efforts to grow convention and meeting business. As vice president of convention sales and services, Homad will assume convention- and meeting-related duties for the CVB and the Memphis Cook Convention Center. Homad has more than 18 years of experience in luxury and upscale destination resorts, hotels and vacation rental properties, most recently as executive director of sales at the Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, FL. He headed sales and marketing for hotels and resorts in California, Georgia, South Carolina and Washington, DC. [www.memphistravel.com](http://www.memphistravel.com)

### ASAE Announces New Event: Xperience Design Project

**WASHINGTON, DC** — The new ASAE Xperience Design Project (XDP) — a two-day event for association professionals and industry partners to co-create solutions around shared challenges in the meetings industry, will replace ASAE's Springtime Expo. It is set for May 23-24, 2017, at Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center at National Harbor, MD. [www.asaecenter.org](http://www.asaecenter.org)

# Tom Noonan Named President and CEO of the Austin CVB

**AUSTIN, TX** — The Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau (Austin CVB) Board of



**Noonan**

Directors named Tom Noonan the bureau's new president and CEO. Noonan will replace Bob Lander, current president and CEO, who announced his retirement last fall.

Noonan brings 28 years of experience within the hospitality industry to the bureau, most recently as the president and CEO of Visit Baltimore. Noonan oversaw the team responsible for promoting

the Baltimore region as a destination for conventions, meetings and leisure visits.

"I'm thrilled to join the Austin CVB as its new president and CEO," said Noonan. "Austin, the Live Music Capital of the

World, is a top convention and leisure destination in the U.S., and I look forward to this incredible opportunity." Noonan will start in his official capacity in May 2016. [www.austintexas.org](http://www.austintexas.org)

## Hilton Austin Begins \$23 Million Renovation

**AUSTIN, TX** — Hilton Austin announced a multimillion-dollar transformation initiative that will include a full renovation of the hotel's lobby, public areas and meeting space, as well as the launch of two new restaurant concepts, a Starbucks and a flexible event venue. The massive project will begin in May and continue through the end of the year.

This 80,000-sf meeting space refresh combines elegance with modern elements and will complement both social and business functions. This announcement follows a steady stream of improvements to the hotel including a \$23 million upgrade to the hotel's 801 guest rooms, suites and executive lounge in 2014 and an extensive \$1 million refurbishment of the hotel's eighth-floor pool deck and bar in spring 2013.

[www.hilton.com](http://www.hilton.com)

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## Denver Launches Commuter Rail



A group including Denver Mayor Michael B. Hancock, U.S. Senator Michael Bennet, Regional Transportation District General Manager and CEO Dave Genova as well as members of the Denver City Council help launch the University of Colorado A Line in Denver, Colorado.

**DENVER, CO** — Denver's Regional Transportation District (RTD) officially launched the A Line April 22, connecting the country's sixth busiest airport to downtown Denver. The new A Line, an electric commuter rail, now offers a convenient link between Denver International Airport and Denver Union Station, the city's historic urban transportation hub.

Richard Scharf, president and CEO of Visit Denver, The Convention & Visitors Bureau, said, "World-class meeting and convention destinations offer world-class public transportation for their attendees. Denver offers a stellar public transportation network, and this addition really helps to bring our city to the next level by connecting our airport directly to our compact, walkable downtown with convenience and value."

By opting for the new \$9 train ride, visitors now can travel at 79 mph to cover the distance between downtown Denver and the airport, which is the sixth busiest in the United States and 19th busiest globally. [www.visitdenver.com](http://www.visitdenver.com)

## Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Completes Renovation

**JACKSONVILLE, FL** — Northeast Florida's Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront announced the completion of its major, multimillion-dollar renovation, which featured a floor-to-ceiling overhaul of all 951 guest rooms, corridors, the rooftop fitness center and Regency Club lounge. The redesigned Regency Club lounge offers improved networking areas, workstations facing the city skyline, and an additional room for small meetings and gatherings.

For meetings and social events, Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront added six hard-walled meeting rooms, located on the fourth level of the hotel's Terrace Building. The renovation also included a complete redesign of the hotel's extensive rooftop fitness center. New state-of-the-art fitness equipment is positioned to take full advantage of the 270-degree river and city vistas. With more than 116,000 sf of flexible meeting and exhibit space, anchored by a 28,000-sf Grand Ballroom, the hotel features outdoor terraces and event space overlooking the St. Johns River, and is the largest convention hotel from Atlanta to Orlando.

[www.jacksonville.hyatt.com](http://www.jacksonville.hyatt.com)

## Jacob K. Javits Convention Center to Add Event Space

**NEW YORK, NY** — New York State Governor Andrew M. Cuomo unveiled the seventh signature proposal of his 2016 agenda: dramatically expand and improve the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center to stimulate the regional economy. The proposal will expand the Javits Center by 1.2 million sf, resulting in a fivefold increase in meeting and ballroom space, including the largest ballroom in the Northeast. A four-level, 480,000-sf truck garage capable of housing hundreds of tractor-trailers



*The Jacob K. Javits Convention Center*

at one time also will be constructed to improve pedestrian safety and local traffic flow. The proposal's total projected cost is approximately \$1 billion, paid for by the Javits Center within existing resources. Construction is expected to begin in late 2016.

Fred Dixon, president and CEO, NYC & Company, stated, "We are pleased to hear about the plan to expand the Javits Center on Manhattan's Far West Side. This robust plan to add more convention and meetings space capacity is welcoming news for the more than 6 million meetings delegates that convene in New York City each year. This addition will ensure NYC continues to lead in the convention and exhibition industry." [www.nycgo.com](http://www.nycgo.com)





**1** The first Global Event Summit, a partnership among VisitScotland, the International Special Events Society and the IMEX Group, included 30 senior event professionals who gathered at the Gleneagles Hotel & Resort and participated in high-level debates and toured Edinburgh. **2, 3** (L to r) Senator Dean Heller (R-NV), the 2016 Sentinel Award winner, joins President of the Michigan Society of Association Executives Cheryl Ronk, CAE, CMP, FASAE, the Association Political Leadership Award honoree, with ASAE President and CEO John H. Graham IV, FASAE, CAE, at ASAE's American Associations Day held in Washington, DC. **4** On April 14, the Global Meetings Industry Day was held worldwide, and in Las Vegas, Caesars Entertainment partnered with the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority (LVCVA) and other resort leaders to demonstrate the impact that the meetings industry has on businesses, communities and the economy. Participants included LVCVA President and CEO Rossi Ralenkotter and speakers from MGM Resorts International, Wynn Resorts, The Venetian and The Palazzo and Caesars Entertainment's own Senior Vice President of National Meetings and Events Michael Massari. The city's esteemed guest, President and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association Roger Dow, opened with a keynote to an audience of more than 220 industry professionals in the new T-Mobile Arena.

Credits: 1 VisitScotland, 2, 3 Sabrina A. Kikwai, 4 Caesars Entertainment

# Demystifying Meeting Value, Metrics & ROI

## SMM Validates You and Your Association's Success

**M**eeting value and ROI reporting is a hot industry topic, which has increased senior management's expectations for improved meeting planner productivity, cost savings, hotel contract risk reduction and added meeting value. Additionally, the acceptance of Strategic Meetings Management (SMM) standards by corporate and association planners fast tracks the need for metrics to define, measure and report success. Meetings are big investments and today, meeting planners must have a new value-based business model to assure success.

### THE BIG SHIFT IN VALIDATING & REPORTING MEETING VALUE...INDUSTRY ISSUES & TRENDS

- SMM still an emerging/maturing business practice.
- Meetings under scrutiny/business plan approach required.
- Increased expectations from senior management for improved planner productivity and ROI.
- Meeting value reporting is essential to validate success.
- Robust technology drives/validates meeting ROI and SMM.

**Feedback from meeting managers:** 49 percent of planners are feeling pressured to enhance meeting results, measurable metrics and ROI.

**Feedback from senior management:** More than 50 percent of CEOs feel their organization is not getting maximum ROI from their meetings and events. More than 40 percent of CFOs are not satisfied with their organization's travel/meeting spend.

A Strategic Meetings Management Program (SMMP) was launched by GBTA in 2004; however, this initiative really gained traction during the recession, and it is here to stay. SMMP is not just a knee-jerk reaction to the recession but an essential value and accountability business model for corporate and association planning teams. Keep in mind it is not just about dollar signs. In addition to cost savings, there is an umbrella of value components. According to GBTA, you do not have SMMP unless you have all the pieces that define the SMMP. But you can have a Strategic Meetings Management (SMM) initiative, which is a more customized approach to value-based meeting planning,

developed in phases based on your current priorities and the evolving needs within the organization.

### DEMONSTRATING MEETING VALUE TO SENIOR MANAGEMENT

As you start thinking about putting together a value-based action plan, there are some steps you can take that will enhance your success. Building your business acumen starts with learning about your organization and focusing on less "logistical speak." So where do you begin? Start with senior management and their objectives, goals and vision for enterprise-wide meetings and events. Prior to meeting with management, review your organization's annual report, website, mission and vision statements, strategic initiatives announced by the organization, and understand how your organization works.

#### Twelve critical steps to building your business plan:

1. How meetings are generated/approval process.
2. Identify key stakeholders/core competencies.
3. Meeting needs assessment/goals and objectives.
4. Sourcing/negotiations/cost savings.
5. Hotel contract/risk reduction.
6. Planning process/procedures/logistics.
7. Preferred suppliers (services/pricing/agreements).
8. Hotel/vendor master accounts/deposit.
9. Meeting budgets/variance.
10. Management and financial reports.
11. Post-meeting evaluation/learner outcomes and meeting value.
12. Technology tools and resources that drive SMM.

Regardless of what components you implement, technology



Terri Woodin, CMP

is the driver. There is no “one size fits all” solution. Identify your priorities whether responsibilities are enterprise-wide, a division, department or cluster of meetings, SMM will add value. Select the components that you can change.

### METRICS TO DEFINE AND MEASURE SUCCESS

Key measurement options include increased planner and team productivity, cost savings, contract risk reduction and cost containment, return on objectives (ROO), return on event (ROE), and robust technology that efficiently drives strategic decisions by producing management and financial reports that validate results.

**Cost savings.** Planners continue to share that one of their top

- Meeting and event space complimentary
- Force majeure
- Breach by hotel
- Indemnification/insurance

### TECHNOLOGY DRIVES SMM AND ROI METRICS

- Delivers efficiencies.
- Drives common standards.
- Supports/enables pre-approval process.
- Reporting capabilities from the meeting level to the enterprise level.
- Automates processes.
- Centralized data.
- Improves visibility to meeting activity.
- Reduces paperwork/automates workflow.

*A seat at the table is very important in today’s environment to demonstrate the value of meetings to the organization and how meetings drive revenues and profits.*

challenges is producing credible metrics and formulas to define real cost savings and then how to communicate total savings to senior management. Produce a cost savings report by meeting after each counter-signed contract. Be sure to include all concessions negotiated within the contract working with the hotel to determine the true value of each item. For example, when defining savings on group rates, benchmark against the original rate quoted or average group rate in-house over your dates. Benchmarking against the hotel rack rate creates inflated savings, since seldom are planners negotiating rack rates, even in this hot seller’s market.

**Hotel contract performance clauses that validate risk reduction/cost containment.** These are not legally required for a hotel to include; however, as a savvy planner you should request them or incorporate them into your custom contract that you issue to the hotel.

- Attrition
- Cancellation
- Published rate
- Sleeping room rates
- F&B minimum guarantee
- Hotel fees and surcharges
- Resell/audit
- Relocation/do not walk
- Construction/remodeling
- Unauthorized changes

### CONCLUSIONS

A seat at the table is very important in today’s environment to demonstrate the value of meetings to the organization and how meetings drive revenues and profits. Consider how you are perceived. How would you like to be perceived? Build your business acumen and talk the language of senior management. Communicate SMM value and outcomes to key stakeholders. Distribute timely data and reports that validate your SMM success. Implement SMM to impact your organization and career.

*For a complimentary copy of Terri Woodin’s Strategic Meetings Management (SMM) Top 10 Tips, contact her at [twoodin@meetingsites.net](mailto:twoodin@meetingsites.net).*

AC&F

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# Special Needs Require Special Attention

## How to Plan a Conference That Accommodates Deaf Attendees

Conference planners have a million different tasks on their to-do lists. From working with multiple groups in different cities to finding the coolest new venues, planning around people's specific food and beverage requests and helping handle transportation issues, it's a seemingly never-ending list. One factor that doesn't come up as much as some of the other basics — but is extremely important — is planning for conference attendees with disabilities. There are a few extra steps that planners can consider that assist with planning a conference where deaf and hard-of-hearing attendees feel welcome and are considered as fully participating members of the event.

One of the best places to start looking to find local interpreters is reaching out to the Chamber of Commerce in the conference host city. Planners should be able to get a pre-reviewed and certified list of interpreting companies to assist with deaf and hard-of-hearing attendees. The Chamber also should have contacts for a planner looking into services for blind attendees, handicapped guests or anyone else with special needs.

### INSURANCE IS KEY

One of the most important criteria when considering hiring a company to provide sign language and oral interpreting is to ensure that they have all of the necessary insurance. Ideally a company should have the complete general liability package. Included in this package are all of the necessities from errors and omissions to liability. This coverage is a must have when dealing with a professional group of interpreters.

You'll want to make sure that the interpreting company you are working with has a large enough team to cover any last-minute incidences, such as a medical issue with an interpreter. Working with a large interpreting staff means that the team can easily replace an interpreter and provide you with the adequate number needed for your event.

An onsite interpreter coordinator is required for any event with more than one deaf attendee. The onsite inter-

preter coordinator is similar to an air traffic controller at an airport. They handle coordinating the scheduling between the interpreting team and deaf and hard-of-hearing attendees. The coordinator is responsible for making sure that everyone is covered 100 percent at every event.

Another important thing to consider when deciding which team to work with is confirming that the company has worked at similar type of and size events. For instance, a company that primarily handles interpreting for students at education events won't necessarily have the skill set to handle a full day at a conference with thousands of attendees and the experience of platform interpreting. Don't forget to ask the company for references.

### DON'T EVER ASSUME

For conference sessions that are more than an hour, a deaf or hard-of-hearing individual should have two interpreters available to work together and interpret in shifts. No matter how much advance planning and scheduling that people do, it's almost guaranteed that attendees will want to alter their plan and decide to attend other sessions. It's critical that planners don't ever assume that several of their deaf and hard-of-hearing attendees will plan to attend the same sessions. Just like everyone else attending the conference, these attendees should have the option to go to whichever sections they choose, and to change their minds about the sessions without a moment's notice.

Then, if you expect an international audience attending your conference, you want to make sure that the interpreting company is familiar with different languages. Spanish Sign Language is quite different from American Sign Language!

Deaf attendees are a culturally diverse group, and it's important that the interpreters you work with are familiar with the community. Interpreting is far more than just knowing how to sign. An interpreting company should have a full understanding of the unique cultural group. While there are federal laws requiring accessible com-



Marilyn L. Weber

munication, many organizations go above and beyond to truly understand this unique group.

With all of the miscellaneous items to be accounted for and planned around at events, making sure that you accommodate all of the attendees should be at the very top of the list. Plus, conferences marketing that sign language interpreters are available upon request automatically have a new audience of attendees who might not have thought about it otherwise.

When conference planners consider the broad range of their attendees and choose to plan ahead to accommodate them accordingly, both the conference organizers

and attendees with disabilities benefit, leaving the conference-goers with a positive and memorable experience. AC&F

*Marilyn L. Weber, President/CEO of Deaf Interpreter Services Inc. (DIS) headquartered in San Antonio, Texas, is a certified sign language interpreter and has an adult daughter who is deaf. Marilyn has been working for more than 25 years promoting accessible communication and advocating for the rights of the deaf community. She has interpreted in thousands of professional situations, and conducts deaf awareness workshops, cultural diversity training and ADA Compliance Consulting. Marilyn has over 2,900 hours of related professional training. Marilyn has received several awards from various local and national organizations recognizing her work and dedication to the deaf community. [www.deaf-interpreter.com](http://www.deaf-interpreter.com)*

*Conferences marketing that sign language interpreters are available upon request automatically have a new audience of attendees who might not have thought about it otherwise.*





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# Convention Centers

## Designers Work With Meeting Planners to Build for the Future Now

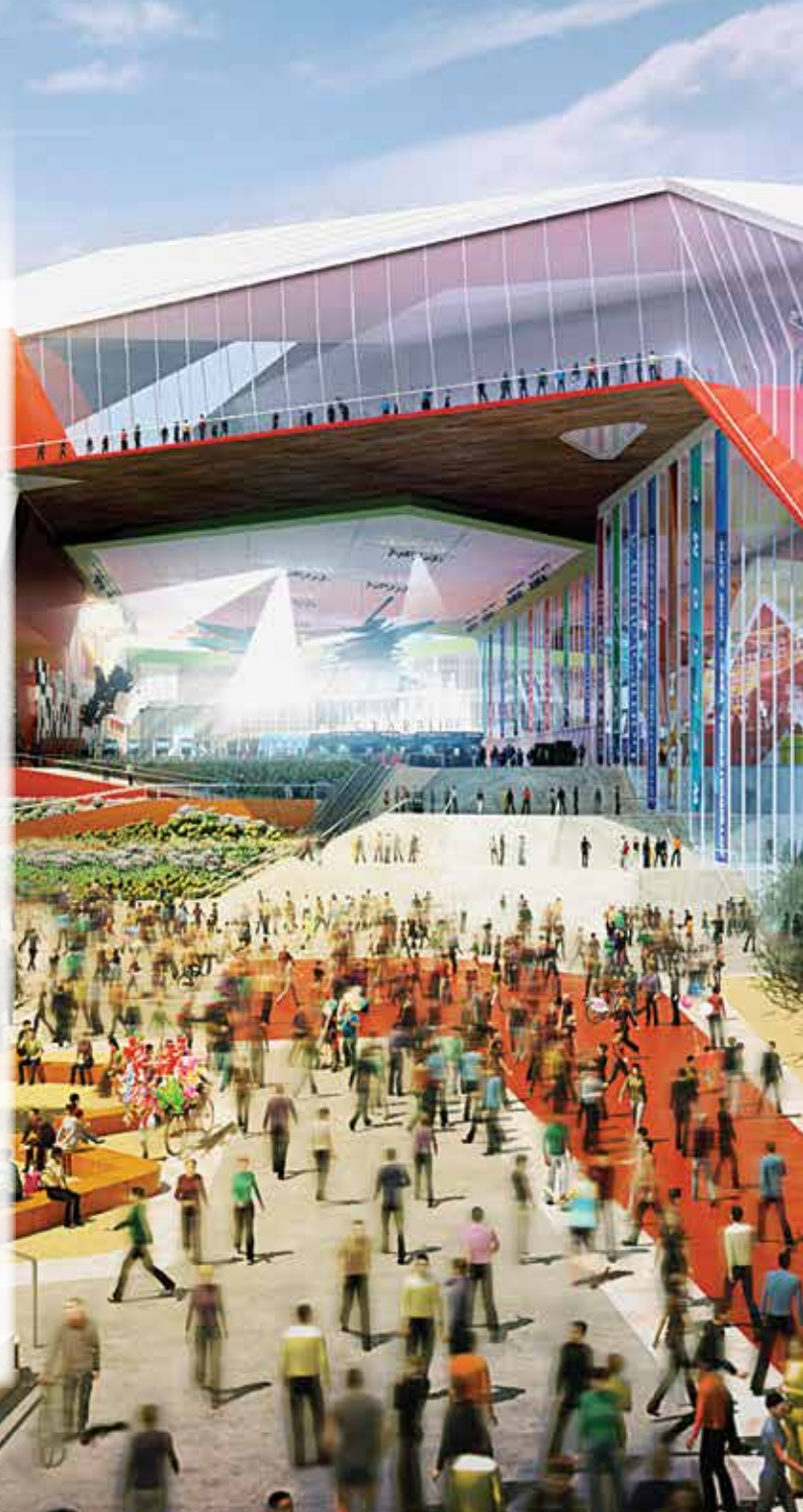
By Patrick Simms

**C**onvention center expansions regularly make the meeting industry headlines, and examples of these projects can be found nationwide, from the Moscone Center in San Francisco to the Jacob J. Javits Convention Center in New York City to the Miami Beach and Orange County centers in Florida. Expansions often create opportunities for association groups, and are generally good news. But there is more to the future of these facilities than leaps in square footage. Layout, architectural motifs, technology, amenities, transportation infrastructure and many other aspects must be attuned to the needs and desires of convention center clients. Ultimately, they are the ones who drive the trends in convention center design.

It's best when these trends are incorporated holistically, in what Michael Lockwood, architect and senior principal at Kansas City, Missouri-based architecture and design firm Populous, calls "trend fusion." "We believe that if you solve for any one trend you probably are not going to end up with a building that's addressing the future, so you need to fuse those trends together and come up with a bigger idea that starts to address as many trends as possible," he explains. Populous, whose current projects include the Los Angeles and Orange County convention center expansions, has regularly sought input from meeting planners in order to help determine which ideas to "fuse." For 15 years, the company has annually hosted its Imagine That Workshop in Kansas City "where we invite people to talk about the future of the convention center business," says Lockwood. "The guest roster has changed over the years. At first it was mostly (building) operators and over the last few years we blended them with CVBs and planners."

### FLEXIBLE SPACE

If there is one buzzword that can be culled from planners' numerous suggestions at such workshops as well as through customer advisory boards, it's flexibility. "I've served on two advisory boards which suggested improvements to convention center renovations/expansions. In both cases,





# Reimagined

The Los Angeles Convention Center expansion architectural team is led by Populous, and includes HMC Architects.

Credit: Populous and HMC Architects

Los Angeles  
CONVENTION CENTER

*"We try to create a civic presence and bring in hints of authentic local culture; we try to blend what the city is and what the city wants to be."*

Michael Lockwood  
Architect, Senior Principal, Populous  
Kansas City, MO



Credit: Populous and HMC Architects

the boards recommended flexible meeting/exhibit space — that is, space that could be used for exhibits at one event but be converted to meeting space for another,” notes Randy Bauler, CEM, corporate relations and exhibits director, American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. According to Debra Rosencrance, CMP, CAE, vice president of meetings and exhibits, American Academy of Ophthalmology, “The issue is that we just don’t know what the future will bring, so the space should not be designated as anything so that it can be used for everything. Planners are looking for empty shells that can be utilized however their meeting needs.” Toward this goal, Rosencrance suggests “having doors to halls and ballrooms be on sliders (like a barn door) so that the whole wall of doors could be open to allow for a real flow.” Planners are also urging the development of more breakout options, and Populous is responding to this request as well. In particular, “medical and technology conferences need a lot more breakout spaces,” Lockwood observes. “The trend toward smaller and smaller meeting rooms is better for the industry and for the buildings because they can actually be a little more nimble.”

Part of keeping the spaces flexible is avoiding permanent installations that limit the utility of the space, including the public areas that a client may want to use. “We become concerned every time a convention center, and in our case it’s basically the Las Vegas and Orange County convention centers, puts permanent things in their public space,” says Geoffrey D. Cassidy, senior vice president, exhibitions and meetings group, National Association of Home Builders, who is on the customer advisory board for the Orange County Convention Center. “Because at times, depending on the economy and the size of our show, we could be a full facility event, and that includes public space. Even if you’re only using a portion of one of the buildings, to have flexibility with respect to the public space even within that smaller portion of the building is beneficial.”

Permanent installations in public space can include kiosks, fixed furniture groupings or registration counters. The latter “doesn’t work because some of us like to put in our own registration counters where we want with flexibility to brand them how we want, and to be able to move them out in the first or second day of the show to create other networking areas,” explains Karen Malone, vice president meetings and sales, HIMSS. “So I look for the opportunity to continually reimagine the space throughout the week.”

The ability to create networking areas in public space may be especially important for associations that cannot accommodate such areas on the exhibit floor. “We’re trying to sell as much square footage as we can sell in the exhibit hall, and so sometimes we are unwilling to allocate space to lounge areas,” Cassidy remarks. “They are trendy, but also (cost the opportunity) for a full facility event. So that’s why we need flexibility in public space because we may need seating in a different area than the building wants to place it.”

## NETWORKING HUBS

Assuming that public space installations are movable, they can certainly be a plus to the attendee experience. “One of the things Orlando has done that’s really important is they’ve created nice networking pods throughout the convention center,” Malone observes. “And networking is the No. 1 reason why people go to conferences, studies are starting to show. So I think it’s really important to create areas where networking can be enhanced.” As a designer, Lockwood shows sensitivity to this trend. “Giving guests an opportunity to interact outside of the meeting rooms I think is becoming a priority because people now operate on their own terms, finding the attendees they want to connect with using their own devices,” he explains. “And that happens out in the lobby or prefunction space.”

Networking hubs also serve an overall goal of many convention center projects: to create a more cosmopolitan environment for delegates. “In a lot of these buildings you could easily walk in the exhibition hall or concourse (the equivalent of) three or four city blocks,” notes Lockwood, “and it’s funny how somehow it’s been OK inside a convention center but outside in the city you would never really ask somebody to walk three or four blocks with nothing to do. That’s just not a great urban experience. So we’re trying to move inside of the building all the qualities that exist outside in a good city.” Those qualities can include panoramic city views, gathering spaces and F&B outlets, although care must be taken not to make public space features too entertainment-oriented or otherwise distracting from the convention itself. That’s something that event organizers themselves try not to do.

“Our show is only three days, and it’s a lot that’s compressed into those three days,” says Cassidy. “Show floor hours are only 9–5, and so to create some sort of alternative attraction that might pull people away from the exhibit floor or the meeting rooms where we have education going on is something we would look at carefully.”

## OUTDOOR SPACE

Hotels typically offer groups several ways to get a breath of fresh air, including patios, gardens, al fresco dining, pool areas and rooftop venues. Both Rosencrance and Malone note that this kind of opportunity is also desirable at convention centers, which fortunately have been accommodating. “All of our buildings right now have some aspect of outdoor space, whether a covered balco-

*“We become concerned every time a convention center...puts permanent things in their public space. Because at times...we could be a full facility event, and that includes public space.”*



Geoffrey D. Cassidy  
Senior Vice President  
Exhibitions & Meetings Group  
NAHB  
Washington, DC

ny, a plaza or a courtyard,” Lockwood says. “So attendees can meet on their own terms, they can feel plugged into the city that they’re in, and they can feel part of the urban environment.” Vertically stacked convention centers in particular offer the designer many opportunities to create terraces and balconies. However, planning an outdoor function can be challenging, he adds. “It’s difficult to plan for an outdoor event three to five years in advance because of the unpredictability of the weather. We’re trying to mitigate that by designing outdoor spaces that have covers and heaters. The spaces also have easy access to the indoors so planners feel comfortable integrating those spaces into their meetings.”

The option of outdoor exhibit space is also advantageous for some convention groups, such as the National Association of Home Builders, which had more than 30,000 sf of outdoor exhibits at this year’s International Builders’ Show in Orlando. The ideal situation, which can be difficult to realize at metropolitan conven-



The San Jose McEnery Convention Center expansion, a Populous project, was completed in 2013.

Credit: Populous



Cobo Square at the Cobo Center.



Javits Center expansion rendering.

Credit: Cobo Center

## Renovation Update

**Cobo Center.** The Detroit facility's five-year, \$279 million renovation is complete with this spring's debut of the 45,000-sf Cobo Square, a terrace for outdoor events.

**Greater Columbus Convention Center.** Scheduled for completion in July 2017, the \$125 million renovation and expansion will add 37,000 sf of exhibit space, 10,000 sf of meeting space and a new 800-space parking garage.

**Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center.** After the recently completed \$325 million expansion, the San Antonio facility offers 514,000 sf of contiguous exhibit space, 86,500 sf of column-free multipurpose space, 70 meeting spaces and the 54,000-sf Stars at Night Ballroom.

**Jacob K. Javits Convention Center.** New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has called for a \$1 billion improvement project that features a fivefold increase in meeting and ballroom space, including a 60,000-sf ballroom, 500,000 sf of contiguous

tion centers, would be "open areas with movable landscaping, big pods that can be moved out of the way so you can put exhibits into them when you wanted to, and when you didn't, you could have a lush area with seating outside," Cassidy describes.

### DESIGN ELEMENTS

A popular feature in this area, for both aesthetic and energy conservation reasons, is the use of natural light. "We enjoy centers which offer natural lighting, and higher ceilings with a feeling of openness," Bauler says. But even natural light is not ideal in all scenarios. "If you want to put a registration setup in a lobby that is just drenched with natural light, you're going to have issues with respect to your computer monitors," Cassidy says. "So if you have some sort of window covering or the ability to dim the glass itself, that kind of flexibility is of interest."

In general, the visual aesthetics of centers are becoming more appealing with color schemes that express the destination as well as the work of local artists and other cultural décor. But planners advise that some thought be put into these common aesthetic choices. "As far as color schemes, I think it's nice when they use colors that don't pigeonhole us too much, and either use neutral colors or a lot of colors where we can pull a color out that's within our branding palette," Malone says. And regarding art installations, the interest can quickly be lost for attendees who have been to the

center numerous times. "Oftentimes, they end up getting dusty and can often look dated," says Rosencrance. "Maybe rotating art (photos, paintings) from local artists would be appealing, as that would never get stale."

It is indeed challenging to express the spirit of a city in the design elements of a convention center without appearing "too contrived or obvious," says Lockwood. "Cities are made up of a lot of different things, and I think our buildings should feel that way as well. If you think that one homogenous solution could identify what a city is all about you'd be mistaken as a designer. So we try to create a civic presence and bring in hints of authentic local culture; we try to blend what the city is and what the city wants to be. A great example is our project in San Antonio (the expanded Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center) that just opened. City leaders saw the building as an opportunity to look toward the future."

### TECH FEATURES

Plentiful charging hubs, digital signage, easy-to-use wayfinding and facility-wide Wi-Fi are typically on planners' high-tech checklists. "Many shows now bring in these mobile charge units, and I think convention centers need to get on the ball and start putting those in many places throughout," says Malone. "Instead of every show bringing them in, it makes more sense that the center provides them. It's like having Wi-Fi Internet access now." Rosencrance



Credit: Jacob K. Javits Convention Center



Rendering of Moscone Center expansion.

Credit: Moscone Center

ous exhibition space, a 34,000-sf solar energy array, a green roof terrace and truck garage. Construction is expected to begin late this year. (Also see page 8.)

**Los Angeles Convention Center.** The \$350 million renovation and expansion would increase exhibit space from 720,000 sf to 865,000 sf, meeting space from 150,000 sf to 206,000 sf, and add 172,200 sf of ballroom space.

**Miami Beach Convention Center.** The \$500 million improvement project would expand exhibit space to 500,000 sf

and add a 60,000-sf grand ballroom, three junior ballrooms and 59,000 sf of breakout space.

**Moscone Center.** The \$500 million expansion, to be completed in 2018, will add 305,000 sf of exhibit, meeting and ballroom space to the San Francisco convention center.

**Orange County Convention Center.** The Orlando facility's proposed expansion would add a 130,000-sf multipurpose hall, approximately 80,000 sf of meeting rooms and a 1,500-space parking garage.

adds that the hubs "should not be built in such a way that they limit how lobbies are utilized. Ideally, it would be cool if buildings had charging stations that were mobile that could be placed where needed like the old mobile phone banks."

"People need power," Lockwood stresses, "and they want to be comfortable while using it. In San Antonio, we located USB power outlets everywhere in the building, every aspect of the seating has a place to plug in."

Both Malone and Sean Lenahan, A.V.P., convention operations for the National Association of Home Builders, say they appreciate the quality of the digital signage in the Orange County Convention Center. Lenahan notes that "It would be nice if some of that signage were to extend into the actual meeting rooms."

The "meeting room of the future" may well have a good amount of digital signage, as a Populous project at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center suggests. "We took one of the meeting rooms and integrated the latest and most interesting technology as far as the



The Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center expansion includes a Populous-designed "meeting room of the future" with multi-wall presentation formats, dramatic views to the city and an innovative, flexible partitioning system.



Credits: Populous and Mairmon Mok Architecture



Karen Malone  
V.P. Meetings & Sales  
HIMSS  
Chicago, IL

***“One of the things Orlando has done that’s really important is they’ve created nice networking pods throughout the convention center. And networking is the No. 1 reason why people go to conferences.”***

meeting room experience goes,” says Lockwood. “There’s one wall that has a tiled array of touchscreen monitors where the presenter can get up and literally interact with the content. There are two other projection walls and a system in the room where guests with devices can share their content as well. I think what we’re looking at in the future is less of one person presenting and everybody listening, and more collaborative sessions. That’s what this room tries to address. It’s one of the marquee architectural features of the building: it’s a meeting room that cantilevers out over the street with city views. We’re excited to see where that room can go.”

### **TRANSPORTATION ORGANIZATION**

Planners are looking for an organized layout to the transportation options outside a convention center. “Centers are getting better at laying out traffic flow, but now with Uber it’s really important that they have allocated spaces where Uber vs. traditional shuttles can pick up attendees,” Malone says. Hubs organized by type of transportation, or a centralized hub for all types, would also be helpful, Lenahan notes. “From a transportation standpoint things tend to get spread out in both the Las Vegas and Orange County convention centers, and I think a more centralized cab station/train station kind of scenario would serve those centers well, so you’re not spread out with a cab stop in one spot and a bus stop half way down the road.”

### **WELLNESS OPTIONS**

From bike rentals to outdoor group yoga sessions, fitness

regimens are being accommodated in today’s convention center experience. Populous is even considering incorporating exercise rooms into some of its designs. But with the amount of walking and, in particular, stair-climbing attendees can do at a convention, a basic workout is readily available. Personal technology such as Fitbit is facilitating this option, Lockwood feels. “Imagine in the past when you attended a conference or trade show for two days and at the end of the day you were exhausted. Now with wearable technology people are actually looking for that experience where at the end of the day they can look at Fitbit or their iPhone and say, ‘Oh my gosh I just walked nine miles today, great,’” he says. The technology will encourage many attendees to take the stairs in lieu of the escalator or elevator, he expects. “One of the things we came up with at PCMA (January 2015 session with planners) was a “Wellnesswell” (wellness stairwell). Especially in stacked buildings we have a lot of stairs, and typically they’re fire stairs, so we try to place them strategically throughout the building. They are not elements that are



Planners appreciate the quality of digital signage at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando.

Credit: Orange County Convention Center

typically celebrated, whereas if it’s something people are desiring (for fitness reasons) you could see a lot more staircases celebrated in the building. They might become an opportunity for branding or advertising. ‘Every flight of stairs you climb you burn 25 calories.’”

Convention centers themselves are becoming more fit to host groups with tailored offerings that go far beyond additional space. Planner feedback on the projects has been and will continue to be key to ensuring that expanded centers are not just *new*, but also *improved* in exactly the ways that matter to clients. AC&F



# Grows On Trees **HERE**

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# Family - Friendly

## Conventions

### Make Everlasting Memories in These Trendy and Welcoming Destinations

By Ron Bernthal

#### ATLANTIC CITY

“Atlantic City has always been a very popular tourist destination for families of all types. And most recently we are strongly encouraging convention delegates to bring their families along with them and extend their stay by a day or two and to enjoy all of the family activities Atlantic City has to offer,” says Jim Wood, president and CEO for Meet AC.

Supporting Jim Wood’s statements are the new family-friendly hotel projects that have sprouted in recent months at many of Atlantic City’s popular venues. The new 464,000-sf Playground at Caesars (formally The Pier Shops at Caesars), is an entertainment venue with eight live clubs and restaurants, a bowling alley, swimming pool and a lively sports bar. It has turned into an exciting nightlife, retail and dining destination for the spouses, companions and children (yes, even the grandchildren) of convention and association meeting participants.

Built on a 900-foot pier over the Atlantic Ocean, the Playground

is physically connected to the hotel and casino, allowing guests to reach the new music outlets featured on T-Street without going outside. Tethered by the Monkey Bar, the central axis of the first floor, a series of five music pubs extend over the ocean. Inspired by the nation’s iconic music streets like Broadway in Nashville and Beale Street in Memphis, T-Street in Atlantic City offers something the other famous streets don’t have — striking views of the Atlantic Ocean from Level 3. High-end retail stores at the Playground include Burberry, Gucci and Tiffany & Co., as well as dining venues such as Buddakan, Phillips Seafood, Continental and more.

Of course, while family members are enjoying themselves inside the property, or on The Boardwalk or ocean beaches outside, Caesars Atlantic City also boasts 28,000 sf of meeting space, including 10 separate meeting rooms, as well as the 17,135-sf Palladium Ballroom, with its expansive prefunction space and an elegant environment for dressy evening events. Meeting planners also can reserve the 1,500-seat Circus Maximus Theater for special events.

This year, the Steel Pier will sport a spectacular new addition — the 200-foot-high observation wheel featuring grand views of the ocean and the fabulous Atlantic City skyline from climate controlled cabins.

The Tropicana has introduced a jaw-dropping free multimedia light and sound show on the property’s re-imagined Boardwalk façade. Daily high energy, ever-changing shows, massive LED screens, strobe lights and continuous digital media displays light up the night in a choreographed multimedia light and sound show that is perfect for families. Spouses and companions will love the four new retail locations located in The Quarter, including the travel outfitter Tumi, the

An urban scavenger hunt was held on DC’s National Mall for AAP families who searched for clues around these attractions.



Credit: American Academy of Pediatrics





Credit: Meet AC

Family fun reigns supreme on The Boardwalk in Atlantic City.

Marshall Russo women's boutique, the designer watch and jewelry purveyor Time After Time, and athletic wear shop from Step Up.

The Atlantic City Convention Center will welcome more than 45,000 sports fans and memorabilia collectors for the 37th Annual National Sports Collectors Convention (NSCC) in August. A vote by the show's long-time exhibitors brought the show back to the Atlantic City Convention Center for the first time since 2003.

The facility offers 500,000 sf of space and occupies nearly 31 acres, making it one of the East Coast's largest convention centers. The NSCC has grown tremendously in the past decade, and they now need at least 325,000 sf to house the annual gathering of collectors, dealers and many other groups interested in collecting trading cards, autographs, vintage game-used equipment and other sports and entertainment related memorabilia. The association is offering six Atlantic City properties — The Sheraton Atlantic City, Bally's Atlantic City Hotel and Casino, Caesars Atlantic City Hotel and Casino, The Tropicana Casino & Resort, Harrah's Atlantic City Hotel & Resort and The Claridge Hotel — as part of its negotiated conference housing for attendees.

In addition to providing enough attendee and exhibitor space, Atlantic City, with its famous Boardwalk and ocean beaches just a short walk from the convention center, is a great place for this summer-time, family-friendly convention. "We are excited the 37th National Sports Collectors Convention is returning to Atlantic City," says John Broggi, NSCC executive director. "The Northeast is one of the strongest memorabilia and card collector bases in the

country, and Atlantic City is the ideal family-oriented destination location, known for their world-class shopping, hotels, Boardwalk entertainment and of course the gaming options. In addition, Atlantic City and the convention center have been extremely helpful in assisting our event planning and promotional efforts. We are excited that both exhibitor and attendee pre-show interest has been extremely strong and look forward to a great 37th National in Atlantic City."

At the NSCC event, children under 12 are free, and family day will be held Sunday, August 7. Tristar Productions has announced the athletes who will be signing in the Tristar Autograph Pavilion, and the Atlantic City Convention Center will be turned into a collector's paradise for the entire family.

### AULANI, A DISNEY RESORT & SPA

The 21-acre oceanfront Aulani Disney Resort & Spa, located on the coastline of Oahu, Hawaii, opened in 2011 and has been a popular, family-friendly venue for association meetings and conventions ever since. The property features 351 traditional guest rooms as well as 481 two-bedroom-equivalent Disney Vacation Club villas in two towers, along with 50,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space.

Three years ago Aulani finished a major project, which included expanding its water recreation area, adding new dining venues, and the new Halawai Lawn — a 22,000-sf landscaped, outdoor space for entertaining, functions and special events. For association convention events, the property also offers a 21,000-sf conference center.

"Aulani offers groups a unique resort experience by emotionally connecting with attendees through its powerful tribute to the stories and art of the Hawaiian culture," says Joe Medwetz, sales and services director for Aulani. "Every meeting and event has its own story, and Aulani provides resources for planners to deliver their message in a unique way. Our events team can help planners add distinctive Hawaiian moments to their events, from customized lei presentations to a 'sand ceremony' that has attendees sharing

*"The Northeast is one of the strongest memorabilia and card collector bases... and Atlantic City is the ideal family-oriented destination, known for their world-class shopping, hotels, Boardwalk entertainment and of course the gaming options."*



**John Broggi**  
Executive Director  
National Sports Collectors  
Convention  
Edison, NJ



Leslie Graham  
Director, Synchronized Skating  
U.S. Figure Skating  
Colorado Springs, CO

*“The teams are looking forward to a great competition, and the athletes know that the experiences their families will have visiting Hershey attractions during the weekend will really enhance the competition.”*

deeply meaningful stories. It’s another example of how we blend the special magic of Hawaii and Disney storytelling to help planners vividly communicate important messages and create unforgettable meeting and incentive experiences.”

Naturally, the Disney connection is a big draw for conventions that include families. There are two elaborate slides, a lazy river and a main pool complex. The new Ka Maka Landing features an infinity pool and grotto, as well as a new location for poolside dining, Ulu Café and the Wailana Pool Bar. The Lanikai Spa provides 15 treatment rooms and a full-service fitness center, the 8,200-sf Waikolohe Pool features a body slide, cabanas and three whirlpool spas, and the Waikolohe Stream launches kids and adults down a 321,000-gallon adventure course through the beautiful landscape of Hawaii.

Family-friendly attractions on the island of Oahu include a visit



Kids enjoy a dip in Waikolohe Valley, a Lazy River featuring a stream, winding water slides and more, at Aulani, A Disney Resort & Spa.

Credit: Walt Disney Hotels & Resorts

to the Dole Plantation to hop aboard the Pineapple Express Train; the Fiji Temple at the Polynesian Cultural Center; the Waikiki Aquarium and snorkeling at Hanauma Bay; and the free Kuhio Beach Park Hula Show, with Polynesian music and dances. Finally, families can enjoy a shaved ice at Matsumotos in Haleiwa and Waiola Shave Ice near Waikiki.

## BOSTON

In July, 2015, Boston hosted the American Veterinary Medical

Association’s (AVMA) annual convention. Of the 9,000 attendees, 5,800 were professional members and 1,395 were spouses, significant others and children of the participants at the convention. Fortunately, Boston is a city that doesn’t lack activities for families, and certainly the destination was one of the reasons the convention was so successful. “Attendees loved Boston,” says Deidre Irwin Ross, MHA, CMP, CAE, former director of convention and meeting planning at the Schaumburg, Illinois-based AVMA. “The families and children went to Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market, they rode the swan boats in Boston Common, saw Red Sox games, shopped, walked the Freedom Trail and so much more. It’s a city that’s made for families.”

Planning activities for convention families sometimes goes way beyond the usual city attractions, and in Boston, where numerous family-friendly events are scheduled almost every day from spring to fall, planners can find ways to include them into their agenda.

“There is an exclusive talent booker at the Blue Hills Bank Pavilion who we used to book the Beach Boys at the Blue Hills Bank Pavilion, one of the city’s most popular outdoor amphitheaters,” says Ross. “We set it up like a beach boardwalk with games, food, bars and free t-shirts. We handled all the logistics, though we did use a DMC who supplied games and décor. There were lots of opportunities to win meet-and-greets with the Beach Boys before the concert, and one lucky winner won a surfboard signed by the band. There were children of all ages there, and everyone from babies to grandmas and grandpas were up and dancing. It was a big success. There was also a fireworks display going on as people left the pavilion.”

Naturally, at any AVMA convention, participants’ pets are always welcome, and in dog-friendly Boston even the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center (BCEC) got into the act by agreeing to be the site of a special demonstration. “We had the Purina Agility Team on the Sunday of our conference, and families were invited to come to the exhibit hall to see the shows,” Ross says. “The Purina Agility Team is a group of dogs Purina rescued from shelters and trained in agility, and they did fantastic agility demonstrations. It was the first time we arranged that and we placed it between the escalators in Hall A of the BCEC. It was very popular with our families.”

## HERSHEY/HARRISBURG

Barry Dively, assistant general manager and director of sales and marketing for the 341-room Hilton Harrisburg in Pennsylvania, says the short distance of Harrisburg to the Hershey attractions is “very attractive to event attendees when spouses, or significant others, join the guests. From door-to-door, our hotel



Families at the AVMA convention in Boston enjoyed every minute together at a special Beach Boys concert.



in downtown Harrisburg is only 15–20 minutes to Hershey’s many family-friendly attractions. The attendee can be with their colleagues at a meeting or conference while their loved ones are enjoying the attractions not far away.”

The downtown Hilton Harrisburg, with more than 38,000 sf of flexible function space, can accommodate banquet seating for 950 people, and up to 1,200 for a reception. The property offers 21 meeting rooms.

One of the big family events taking place in Hershey will commence in January 2017, when the city hosts about 5,000 participants and visitors for the U.S. Figure Skating Eastern Synchronized Skating Sectional Championships. The Giant Center, as well as the Hersheypark Arena, will welcome 150 teams and about 2,400 athletes and their families from all over the East Coast.

“These athletes and families love traveling to Hershey,” says Leslie Graham, director of synchronized skating at the U.S. Figure Skating headquarters in Colorado Springs. Graham, a former skater and coach, works with the events department and competitions committee to select figure skating clubs to host the Synchronized Sectional Championships and U.S. Synchronized Skating Championships. “I work with athletes and coaches from our basic skills synchronized skating teams through our international synchronized teams. In addition, I coordinate all of the travel and logistics for our synchronized skating teams that are part of Team USA,” says Graham.

“It is a special experience for the athletes and their families to stay at the Hershey Lodge and make chocolate at Hershey’s Chocolate World,” says Graham. “Having last held this event in 2014, the teams are looking forward to a great competition, and the athletes know that the experiences their families will have visiting Hershey attractions during the weekend will really enhance the competition.”

Hershey Story Museum has announced a new chocolate experience called “Tastings” that features samples of warm drinking chocolates made from cacao beans grown in one specific region of the globe.

Another great attraction for families in the region is the Nation-

al Civil War Museum, which kicked off its 2016 season with a new exhibit that illustrates the moral challenges faced by thousands of men and women on both sides of the American Civil War.

## ORLANDO

“For all of my 26 years in this community, meeting professionals who have come to Orlando tell me that attendance increases because many of their attendees want to bring the family before or after the event, and there’s a host of reasons why,” says George Aguel, president and CEO of Visit Orlando. “We have nonstop service from more than 100 domestic and international cities, and because we have such a large volume of leisure travelers, airfares are among the lowest of the 50 largest United States airports. The choices in lodging, from budget to five-star properties, also make Orlando attractive, and we have seven of the top theme parks in the world here, as well as many other family-friendly attractions, dining and entertainment options.

Like many other family-friendly convention destinations that do not just offer ballrooms and meetings-centric hotels, Orlando is part of a larger metropolitan area that can offer both top-notch conference and incentive properties, but offsite venues that are enticing to association meeting planners. “We’re seeing a trend where attendees don’t want to just fly in and out for a meeting, they want to experience the destination,” Aguel says. “And there’s no better place to create memories with the family than in Orlando.”

Two properties in Orlando that cater to family-friendly association and convention events is the 400-room Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek, with 25,000 sf of meeting space, and the 1,639-room Hyatt Regency Orlando, the largest Hyatt convention hotel in the world, located directly across from and connected to the Orange County Convention Center, and boasting 100,000 sf of space.

The 9th Annual 1p36 Deletion, Support & Awareness Conference was held at the Wyndham last July. The conference is for families who have children affected by 1p36 Deletion Syndrome, a genetic condition in which a small amount of genetic material is missing (deleted) at the tip of the short arm of chromosome 1.



Jared Cohen, CMP  
 Manager, Convention and  
 Meeting Services  
 American Academy of Pediatrics  
 Elk Grove Village, IL

*“We encourage our doctors and attendees to bring their families, and we plan...particularly for them. So when the AAP is sourcing a city...it must offer a variety of family-friendly attractions and Washington, DC excels at doing that.”*

1p36 Deletion Syndrome (also known as Monosomy 1p36) causes birth defects, minor changes in physical appearance and intellectual disabilities of varying degrees. About 300 attendees including 90 families spent three or more days in Orlando. “During the conference the families spent most of the time at Wyndham Bonnet Creek,” says Tracee Campbell, a family member and Orlando resident who attended the conference and helped plan the event. “It was really great for the families spending time together at the hotel during the conference and then staying in the area for a few days post-conference seeing all the nearby attractions that Orlando has to offer. The CVB helped me prepare 96 gift bags for the group, including brochures and discount coupons for many of the local attractions. As an Orlando resident I knew that these kids and their parents would be given a warm welcome wherever they went in the area.” The Bonnet Creek property will complete a major expansion that will increase the available meeting space by 7,000 sf by May.

The Hyatt Regency, with its sprawling infrastructure (32 stories, 315,000 sf of flexible function space; 105 breakout rooms) is a city within a city, but still manages to provide personal services to convention participants and their families. “The Hyatt Regency Orlando is located directly across the street from the Orange County Convention Center, so our property is ideal for families to tag along because we offer resort-style amenities and have beautiful grounds to explore while another family member is attending a meeting,” says Katie Satava, a Hyatt Regency Orlando marketing coordinator. “From seven onsite restaurants, three pools, a full-service spa, 24-hour fitness center to everything else in between, the property is more than able to cater to families who came with a convention or association participant.”

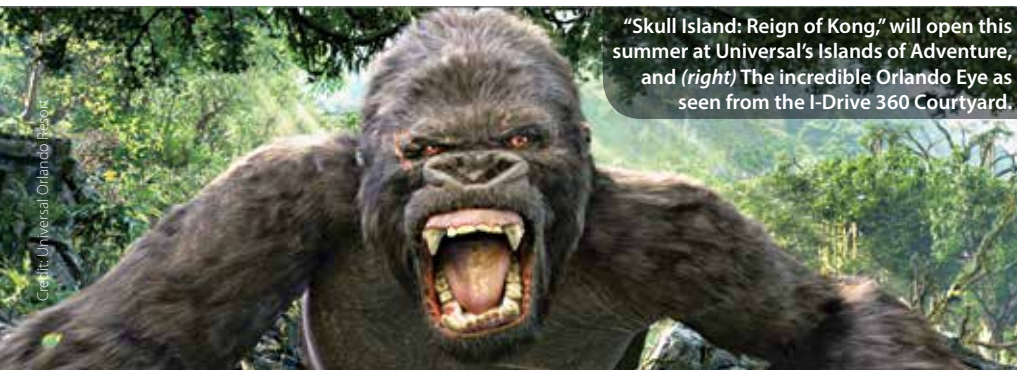
Mollie S. Wallace, CMP, CMM, of Texas-based Planning Professionals Ltd, agrees. “As a planner, the Hyatt Orlando is a dream property. Not only is it located in a safe, accessible location on International Drive, but it also offers close proximity to Sea World, Universal, and Ripley’s Believe It or Not,” says Wallace. “There is a large selection of wonderful restaurants and bars to choose from as well as shopping, golf and just about anything a family could want or need. Most of these establishments are walkable from the Hyatt or by the I Trolley, which the children and adults alike enjoy to the fullest. The Hyatt’s main pool is especially a favorite with its great waterslide, the waterfalls and all-around Caribbean flair, makes for the perfect family getaway. The poolside restaurant is fully staffed, which allows food orders anywhere within the main pool area. This hotel services both the business traveler and family alike and makes for a great meeting location or family holiday.”

New family-friendly hotel developments in Orlando include The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort’s multiphase, multiyear \$125 million redesign project that will transform all 2,265 guest rooms in both the Swan and Dolphin buildings with a brand new look. The hotel’s meeting and convention space will also be equipped with the latest advancements in high-density Wi-Fi technology.

This summer, Universal Orlando Resort and Loews Hotels & Resorts will open the Loews Sapphire Falls Resort, the fifth on-site hotel at Universal Orlando Resort, offering 1,000 rooms built around a lagoon and towering waterfall. A new Loews Meetings Complex, with 247,000 sf of contiguous meeting space will also open between Loews Royal Pacific Resort and Loews Sapphire Falls Resort.

This year, Walt Disney World Resort will complete a multiyear transformation of Downtown Disney into Disney Springs. Featuring an eclectic and contemporary mix from Disney and other brands, the new expansion will double the number of shops, restaurants and other venues for families to explore to more than 150 establishments.

This summer, the Universal Orlando Resort will open an attraction at Universal’s Islands of Adventure called “Skull Island: Reign of Kong,” which will honor King Kong. Guests will board large vehicles and explore ancient temple structures while encountering hostile natives and fending off unspeakable terrors. And SeaWorld Orlando will open Mako, a 200-foot-tall coaster. It will be Orlando’s tallest, fastest and longest roller coaster, reaching speeds



“Skull Island: Reign of Kong,” will open this summer at Universal’s Islands of Adventure, and (right) The Incredible Orlando Eye as seen from the I-Drive 360 Courtyard.



# Making Memories in Detroit

Lori Bremerkamp is a metro Detroit-based wordsmith and mother of two who penned this “parental bucket list” of things to do with kids in the Detroit area, which Visit Detroit published on their website.

“There are adventures that don’t take a lot of time or money — and that’s the point. It’s all about creating memories,” says Bremerkamp.

## In the City

- Smell the flowers at the Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory at Belle Isle.
- Go for a boat ride on the Detroit River.
- Ride the Detroit People Mover just for fun.
- Take a spin on the Cullen Family Carousel in Rivard Plaza along the Detroit Riverfront.
- Ice skate at Campus Martius Park.
- See the toy trains and old-time streetscape at the Detroit Historical Museum, and make some music in the Kid Rock Music Lab.
- Go bowling at Garden Bowl — America’s oldest active bowling center and Detroit’s original home of Rock ‘n’ Bowl.
- Bike along the Detroit Riverfront. (Rent your two-wheeler — ones with child seats, too — at Wheelhouse Detroit.)
- Share a Coney dog and chili cheese fries at American Coney Island.
- Get your face painted alongside the little ones during a Sunday Kids Day at Comerica Park. (Get a photo with the Giant Tiger outside, too.)
- Experience Detroit Lions football at Ford Field.
- Catch a Red Wings game at Joe Louis Arena.
- Attend an art-making workshop on a Family Sunday at the Detroit Institute of Arts.
- See a show at the Fox Theatre.
- Stargaze at the Michigan Science Center.
- Watch the Target Fireworks along the Detroit River.
- Welcome Santa Claus to town at the annual America’s Thanksgiving Parade.



Credit: Visit Detroit

An outing to Ford Field for a baseball game is a treat for the whole family.

of 73 mph as it races along 4,760 feet of steel track, and will be the centerpiece of the newly themed two-acre plaza.

## WASHINGTON DC

This past October, more than 15,000 pediatricians and their families, exhibitors and other health care professionals descended upon Washington, DC, for the American Academy of Pediatrics National Conference & Exhibition in part because of the city’s incredible opportunities for families and children. The attendees stayed in more than 30 hotels located throughout the city, and utilized much of the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. The Marriott Marquis and Renaissance Washington DC hotels also were used for sessions and events, but it was city’s allure for families that was the real attraction.

“The family-friendly attractions can be found throughout the city starting with the 19 free museums and attractions that make up the Smithsonian. These include the Air and Space Museum, the American History Museum and the Natural History Museum to name a few,” says Jared Cohen, CMP, manager of convention and meeting services at the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) in Elk Grove Village, Illinois. “The AAP National Conference took advantage of these museums being located on the National Mall to host an urban scavenger hunt where families discovered and un-

covered clues both inside and outside these attractions.

“The National Mall also provides a treasure of history from its numerous monuments and memorials. The AAP provided several tours including a Monuments by Moonlight evening tour that allowed attendees to hop on and off shuttles at the various monuments which seem to come alive at night, and we offered a choice of two theater performances at the world-famous Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts that included ‘Beautiful, the Carole King Musical,’ and ‘Shear Madness,’” says Cohen.

The AAP meeting planners take the extra step to make sure that their efforts to plan for a family-friendly convention are not in vain. “Our meeting is unique in that we encourage our doctors and attendees to bring their children and families, and we plan many programs and events particularly for them,” says Cohen. “So when the AAP is sourcing a city to host its National Conference, it must offer a variety of family-friendly attractions, and Washington, DC, excels at doing that.”

For assistance with setting up some of the events the AAP worked with Destination DC. “This group designed their meeting around attending families,” says Kate Gibbs, media relations manager at Destination DC. “AAP hosted a family reception that Friday night and donated the efforts of a toy drive to a local charity afterward. Children were welcome in sessions and on the scavenger hunt. They also had a children’s art gallery with the theme of the conference in the grand lobby. The children of attendees made a cartoon-style ‘National Mall’ featuring the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument in the 150 level of the Walter E. Washington Convention Center with benches to make it look like a park.”

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# Different Strokes for Different Folks

Members of The Association of Lincoln Presenters appear at venues and events such as Lincoln Douglas debate reenactments.

Credit: peggyschulzphotography.com

## From Honest Abes to ‘Dummies,’ There’s a Convention for

Karen Brost

**C**onferences and expos are held by just about every industry, interest group and profession imaginable, but without a doubt, some are more unique than others. Here’s a look at some of the events held across the country that unite attendees for reasons that are a little more out of the ordinary.

### IT TAKES TWO

For most planners, it wouldn’t be politically correct to refer to some of their attendees as a bunch of dummies, but for Anne B. Roberts, that’s perfectly OK. She serves on the board of directors of Vent Haven Museum, the world’s only museum dedicated to ventriloquism, and she handles media relations for the annual Vent Haven ConVENTion that raises funds to support the museum.

Now entering its 40th year, the ConVENTion is held at the Cincinnati Airport Marriott Hotel located near the museum. As the only convention of its kind, it draws 600 attendees from the U.S. and other countries around the world that include Japan, Germany, South Africa, Australia, Brazil, New Zealand and England. Most attendees are practicing ventriloquists.

Roberts described what attracts people to ventriloquism.

“Some people are looking for an entertainment form that’s out of the ordinary. That’s a draw. Ventriloquism is really challenging, so I think, especially for the professional ventriloquists, there’s an appeal to that. A lot of people don’t give it the credit that it’s due. A ventriloquist is an actor playing two parts at the same time. When you have the Academy Awards and you have somebody playing a dual role in a movie, they’re never playing both roles at once. Ventriloquists do that all the time. One of the tricks is that when you are making the dummy say something, your face has to have a different reaction. If the dummy is laughing you have to remember that you have to make your face do something different. You have to have good timing. It’s more than being a comedian and more than being a puppeteer.”

In case you’re wondering (we did), attendees don’t walk around the convention carrying their dummies (or puppets or figures as they’re also called). “It’s a learning convention,” Roberts explains. “In a lot of ways it looks like other conventions — people with name badges walking around and meeting people.” She said that they do, however, take a group photo of attendees with their puppets.

Some of the sessions at the ConVENTion focus on comedy writing, an essential aspect of being a ventriloquist. “One of our people said, ‘If you’re not funny, then you’re just a person with a



Anne B. Roberts  
ConVENTion Media Coordinator  
Vent Haven Museum  
Fort Mitchell, KY

***“In a lot of ways (the ventriloquist convention) looks like other conventions — people with name badges walking around and meeting people.”***

doll,” Roberts notes. “They’ll forgive a lot of the bad aspects of ventriloquism — like if your manipulation isn’t good or your lips are moving — if you’re funny.” Other sessions focus on topics such as marketing and how to get more business, and there’s a “Junior Vent University” to help kids develop their ventriloquism skills. There are also American Idol-style open mic events for kids and adults where they get immediate feedback from a panel of expert judges. And at the accompanying Vent Mall, attendees can shop for new puppets, comedy material, joke books or magic tricks.

Each year, the convention hosts a raffle that benefits the museum, and one of the figure-makers creates a fig-

number of the attendees look alike. That’s the task that Beth Link, acting festival director for the Parkes Elvis Festival in New South Wales, Australia gladly takes on.

Elvis obviously has no intention of leaving this building (or the festival grounds as the case may be). “Parkes Elvis Festival has experienced an increase in attendees since the very first festival in 1993 where a few hundred people attended,” Link explains. “In 2016, a record 22,000 people attended, and we anticipate this figure to continue to grow as we celebrate the festival’s 25th anniversary in 2017.

“Parkes Elvis Festival, in its entirety, is unique as it’s a celebration of the life and music of Elvis Presley in the small country town of Parkes, New South Wales, Australia. We often get asked, ‘Why Elvis in Parkes?’ It was a group of dedicated community members that wanted to put on an event for the enjoyment of the wider community. The support of these volunteers helps as-

## Whatever Floats Your Boat

ure to raffle off. One year, Jeff Dunham, who Roberts describes as the top ventriloquist performing today, said, “Let’s do something big to benefit the museum.” He came up with the idea of raffling off a midnight tour of the museum, and a young auctioneer in the audience volunteered his services. “It raised something like \$3,000, which for us is a huge deal,” Roberts explains. Dunham, who serves on the museum’s board of advisors, picked up the winner and their three guests in his tour bus and led the midnight tour himself. “It was super exciting,” she adds. “He’s done a couple of those since then.”

### **HUNKA HUNKA BURNING (FESTIVAL) LOVE**

Imagine the challenge of planning an event where a large

Ventriloquists descend upon the Vent Haven ConVENTion, which benefits the only museum dedicated to ventriloquism.

Credit: Vent Haven ConVENTion





Beth Link

Acting Festival Director  
Parkes Elvis Festival  
Parkes, NSW, Australia

*“In 2016, a record 22,000 people attended (Parkes Elvis Festival), and we anticipate this figure to continue to grow as we celebrate the festival’s 25th anniversary in 2017. ...We hope to continue to honor Elvis’ legacy for many more years to come.”*

sist in the smooth delivery of the festival each year. With more than 120 events on offer across five days, there is something for everyone to enjoy.”

The five-day festival is packed with plenty of activities, including Elvis tributes, exhibits and movies; a Miss Priscilla contest, rock ‘n’ roll dancing, a display of cars of the era and edible Elvis art. There’s even bingo with Elvis. Who could resist that?

Link describes one of the festival’s keys to success. “Parkes Elvis Festival organizers have built longstanding relationships with many Elvis tribute artists and fans over the festival’s 24-year history, which allows for the ongoing planning of the 120 events on offer each year. Of those people surveyed in 2016, 96 percent said they were likely to attend future festivals.”

She says that one of the biggest challenges the festival faces is audience development, which is critical so the festival can continue to broaden its appeal and attract new attendees. “With targeted marketing and promotion, coupled with program development, the festival is confident of meeting this challenge,” she explains. “We hope to continue to honor Elvis’ legacy for many more years to come.”

### CIRCLE LEFT AND DO-SI-DO

The National Square Dance Convention is the world’s largest square dancing event and draws 4,000–5,000 attendees each year. “There are several levels of dancing each year,” explains Thomas R. Robbins Sr., who is the publicity chairman for the 2016 event. It will be held at the Iowa Events Center in Des Moines, which the organization promotes as being “an easy drive from 22 states.” The different types of dancing performed at the convention include mainstream, plus, challenge I, II and III and round dancing levels two through six. In

An Elvis tribute artist performs at the Parkes Elvis Festival in the town of Parkes, New South Wales, Australia.

Credit: Parkes Elvis Festival



addition to competitions, the convention offers dance workshops and clinics.

Robbins describes the process of planning an event of this size. “It takes a lot of volunteers to make this a great convention. We normally have 15-plus halls available for all types of dancing: square, line, round, clogging, etc. With that, you have to make sure you can use a large convention center during the last week of June, so we start planning four years out. With that, you have to have enough hotels and transportation systems to accommodate that many people at one time.” The organization also provides attendees with information on camping facilities available at the Iowa State Fair Campgrounds.

Robbins says that the most enjoyable aspect of planning the convention is “seeing the fun that people are having making new friends and being with older friends.” He then describes another major benefit the event has provided in addition to opportunities to perform, compete, learn and socialize. “Quite a few single square dancers have met their mate and gotten married because they learned to square dance. It’s a family activity with dancers starting around eight years old and still dancing in their 90s.”

### OTHER UNIQUE GATHERINGS

As you navigate the challenges of planning your own annual conferences and expos, take a moment to ponder the types of issues the planners of these events might encounter: **NC Merfest.**

This annual event attracts mermaids and mermen who don artificial fins and “learn the ways of mermaiding” as a form of entertainment. Last year’s event was held at the Triangle Aquatic Center in Cary, North Carolina, and was promoted as “A Grand Gathering of Merfolk and Pirates.” Educational sessions included techniques for breath-holding (obviously an important skill for a mermaid or merman), a discussion of mermaids in film and tips on underwater modeling. There was also a mermaid fashion show and an evening gala titled (what else?) 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea.

**Frozen Dead Guy Days.** Yes, you read that right. This annual festival pays tribute to a man named Bredo Morstoel who is frozen in a state of suspended animation on dry ice in a Tuff Shed in Nederland, Colorado. Billed as a “home



grown frosty fest,” the event includes coffin racing, costumed polar plunging, frozen t-shirt contests, icy turkey bowling, brain freeze contests, a frozen salmon toss and a parade of hearses. One can only imagine the creativity that goes into the frozen dead poet slam.

**Blobfest.** This event might be a horror to plan, but in a good way. It’s a three-day celebration of the cheesy 1958 B-movie classic “The Blob” starring Steve McQueen. It’s held each July at the Colonial Theatre in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, where some of the movie was filmed. In addition to hosting screenings of *The Blob* and other horror classics, Blobfest reenacts the scene from the movie where people run screaming out of the theater when the Blob shows up. More than 1,000 spectators show up each year to watch this spectacle called the “Run Out.”

**HorrorHound Weekend.** The planners of this event obviously aren’t scared away easily, either. Sponsored by *HorrorHound* magazine, this March event in Cincinnati makes it possible for fans



Credit: Las Vegas News Bureau

RollerCon is held annually in Las Vegas: “If you love roller derby, you know that magic happens when derby people get together,” say event organizers.

to meet some of the biggest horror celebrities in film and TV to get their autographs and pose for photo ops. Fans also can shop for horror toys, t-shirts, posters, displays, VHS/DVD/Blu-rays, masks and other items from more than 100 vendors. Movies are premiered during this weekend and there are other special events. At this year’s HorrorHound Weekend, *Elvira, Mistress of the Dark*, made a special appearance.

**World Clown Association.** Yes, even clowns have their own meetings, and The World Clown Association (WCA) has mem-



Credit: Paul Walsh

The World Clown Association, which has members in 35 countries around the world, offers conference sessions such as Basic Balloon Twisting, Comedy Body Movements, Basic Three Ball Juggling and more.

bers in 35 countries around the world. According to WCA President Randy Christensen, the organization is “a leader in clown education, resourcing and networking.” If you think some of your own meeting’s session titles sound a bit dry, the WCA’s session names might sound more fun: Basic Balloon Twisting, Extreme Clown Makeover — Make-Up Edition, Comedy Body Movements, and Basic Three Ball Juggling & Scarf Juggling. The group photo taken at the most recent convention of the attendees in costume is certainly colorful. Naturally, the association’s magazine is titled *Clowning Around*.

**RollerCon.** This annual event held in Las Vegas is where roller derby aficionados come to play. According to the event’s organizers, “If you love roller derby, you know that magic happens when derby people get together. Well, picture this: a few thousand skaters, league members, vendors, coaches, manufacturers, fans and more from all over the world, all gathering in Las Vegas to share some stories, raise some hell and get their skate on.” In addition to the expected bouts, challenges and scrimmages, there are events such as a skate park tour and Sk8 the Strip, a group skate held at 6:00 a.m. each day of the convention. When they’re not on a roll, attendees can attend a gala cleverly named the Black N Blue Ball. And while many planners provide attendees with a dress code for their events, most aren’t like this one offered by RollerCon in the description for the gala: “We thought we didn’t have to mention it, but every year proves we do: nudity is frowned upon. You ought to wear clothing of SOME kind, preferably black or blue. Body paint counts. Sharpie mustaches do not count as clothing.”

**Midwest FurFest.** No, this one isn’t about fashions that would get PETA all riled up. It’s a convention for “furries,” people who like to dress up in life-sized animal cartoon character costumes. According to the organizers, “We come together to celebrate the



Credit: Midwest FurFest

Thousands of “furrries” dressed in animal cartoon character costumes attend the annual Midwest FurFest, which raises funds to benefit animal-related causes.

furry fandom, which includes art, literature and performances based around anthropomorphic animals.” The event, which is held west of Chicago, has grown from having 388 attendees in 2000 to more than 5,606 attendees in 2015 when it raised more than \$62,000 to benefit various wildlife and animal-related causes — the lifetime total raised to date is just shy of \$300,000. It also features educational sessions such as “How to Commission a Fursuit” and “Common Beginner Mistakes,” and there’s a Fursuit Parade that promises to be the “best in furry pageantry anywhere!”

**International Cake Exploration Soci   (ICES) Annual Convention.** Now, here’s one attendees can really sink their teeth into. It’s a four-day convention that draws cake decorators and sugar artists from around the world to learn from each other and share ideas. There are classes on creating flowers from sugar and how to make 3-D confectionary designs such as baby shoes and handbags. Attendees even can bring their decorated cakes in tiers, then assemble them and do any last-minute touch-ups in the “cake hospital” provided by the show’s organizers. ICES, which is being held in Mobile, Alabama, this year, also features expert demonstrations, a sugar art gallery and a vendor hall. And there’s a gingerbread talent showcase that benefits a local children’s home.

**The Association of Lincoln Presenters (ALP).** With a motto

of “Would I might rouse the Lincoln in you all,” ALP is an organization of men and women dedicated to bringing Abraham and Mary Lincoln to life by dressing up in costume and appearing at venues and events such as Lincoln Douglas debate reenactments, schools, plays, historical societies, movies, parades and celebrations throughout the world. ALP has an annual convention in April, and this year’s event will take place at Lincoln’s boyhood home in Spencer County, Indiana, where the group will tour a number of historic Lincoln sites to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Lincoln family’s move from Kentucky to Indiana. If you should happen to need to line up an Abe or Mary presenter (as they are known) or even an Abe and Mary team, the organization promises to be “ready, willing and Abe L.”

*“It takes a lot of volunteers to make this a great convention. We normally have 15-plus halls available for all types of dancing.”*

Thomas B. Robbins Sr.  
Publicity Chairman  
2016 National Square Dance Convention  
Preston, IA

**WHY UNIQUE CONVENTIONS MATTER**

Photographer Yvette Marie Dostatni became so fascinated by conventions that she has launched a Kickstarter campaign so she can publish a book called “The Conventioneers,” which will contain photos of the people and sights she’s seen at unique conventions. She explained the appeal of these events. “That’s just the culture of the United States: People are looking for places they can fit in for two to three days, a pass to get out of their daily lives. They’re looking for people who are like them.”

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# Trade Show Trends

A dynamic floor plan at DMAI's Destinations Showcase Washington, the annual trade show connecting planners and destination experts.



Credit: DMAI

## Novel Ideas and Big Data Emerge to Deliver Impressive Results and Enhanced Experiences

By John Buchanan

**A**s the association trade show market grows and evolves, new ideas and trends that impact the planning and use of the all-important show floor — the cash cow of every event — are becoming more influential in the process.

And virtually all of them are related to improving the exhibitor experience and the return on investment exhibitors and sponsors earn from their participation in shows.

Somewhat ironically perhaps, one of the most apparent current trends is a new perspective on the trade show floor itself. After decades of a tried-and-true but increasingly predictable and tired layout, fresh new ideas are emerging.

“Something fun that I’m seeing now — and not too many associations are doing it yet — are floor plans that are not the traditional rectangles or squares,” says Tom Corcoran, president of Chicago-based exhibition planning and management company Corcoran Expositions. “For years and years, trade shows have been defined by the basic design of the convention centers. But now I see that changing.”

For example, Corcoran says, his company is now working on a show that changed their look so the trade show floor sets up something similar to a baseball field that spreads the attendee and draws out to drive traffic to all parts of the exhibit hall. “And we’re saying, ‘OK, over here at first base we have a stage with TED-type talks. Behind second base is a fully functioning hospital emergency room sponsored by exhibitors. And on third base, we have all of the state associations and trade journals. It is a diamond shape with some vertical aisles and that changes the whole dynamic for the better.”

In addition, Corcoran recently has seen diagonal aisles that make traffic flow more interesting than the traditional perpendicular aisles. “In other shows, instead of all 10-foot aisles, we will drop in a center aisle that is a 20-foot wide aisle with park benches and trees that creates more opportunities for more on-the-floor attendee networking,” he says. “In other words, trade shows want more attendee excitement and interaction by being more creative with floor plans and not using the ‘same old look’ that has been around forever.

“The same can be said for the use of different colors in directional carpet to identify various special event areas. It is all about doing all you can to have your trade show stand out. In one show we organized for surgeons, we actually had a stage in a corner of the exhibit hall that showed a remote video of actual surgery going on, which turned out to be a really good draw that brought more doctors to the exhibit floor.”

Corcoran continues, “The basic idea is to create something different, a new dynamic. That makes the show more interesting and brings the wow factor to the show floor. That’s really what it’s about.”

Sam Lippman, president of Arlington, Virginia-based Lippman Connects, which consults with and holds conferences for executives in the convention and exhibition industry, agrees that new visions for the trade show floor are a genuine trend — and represent innovation.

“Floor plans are now being more developed for the convenience of attendees and not just for logistics,” Lippman says. “The good news is that the general services contractors for major shows is now becoming much more of a marketing partner to show organizers, whereas in the past, the general services contractor would fight anything that (interfered with) their logistical productivity. Now they recognize that the most important thing is to increase the productivity of the exhibitors and attendees. So they’re developing floor plans that have things like solution centers. And that kind of thinking leads to floor plans that deliver better results for both exhibitors and attendees.”

Lippman also is seeing more floor plans that highlight new exhibitors that have something novel and innovative to offer. Historically, new exhibitors played second fiddle to those that had been in the show every year and thereby earned premium positions. “But why do attendees come to shows?” Lippman says. “They come to see what’s new. So now you see more and more organizers putting new companies, especially those with something exciting to show, at the front of the floor rather than the back.”

Yet another interesting trend related, indirectly, to the show floor, Corcoran says, is the increasing rental and use of meeting rooms on the exhibit floor adjacent to the show floor for more private presentations or meetings. “It’s an extension of the old hospitality suite idea,” he says. “But now it’s happening just off the exhibit floor. This trend first caught on in the medical show market. It’s just a new way to get quick access to people in a quiet surrounding away from the booth. Some companies are performing market research or meeting one-on-one with their key customers. But overall, the use of private meeting rooms is a quiet trend that has begun to happen at more shows now.”

Another emerging trend Corcoran finds particularly interesting — and one that provides clear benefits for both attendees and the association hosting the show — is the increasing use of

***“Trade shows want more attendee excitement and interaction by being more creative with floor plans and not using the ‘same old look’ that has been around forever.”***



Tom Corcoran, President  
Corcoran Expositions  
Chicago, IL

career centers, hosted by human resources professionals from companies actively recruiting new employees on the show floor.

“As an organizer, you are always looking for new areas that draw traffic to various parts of an exhibit hall. We have learned that hosting a Career Center area in the back of an exhibit hall works for everyone,” Corcoran says. And unlike when working with companies that compete so hard for the attendees’ attention, you don’t have to market career center booths a year in advance. These sales typically begin to happen closer to show time.”

And the benefits of such a simple innovation are obvious. For attendees, it offers the potential for career advancement. And for show organizers, it represents a new and unique revenue stream that can often add up to incremental profits from the show.

And a career center does not involve only selling booth real estate, where the exhibitor’s vendor furnishes the space. “With a career center, you often find the HR folks looking for more of a turnkey solution, as a typical Career Center booth will include a rug, a draped table and an ID sign.”

## **THE TECHNOLOGY TREND**

While fresh and innovative thinking about floor plans is a key trend, it pales by comparison to the trend toward the use of ever-improving technology to manage and analyze activity on the show floor and demonstrate the return on investment exhibitors are getting for their major investments in major trade shows.

Beacon technology, now being developed and offered by a growing list of vendors, is a next generation technology that improves upon the activity tracking and analysis capabilities offered by earlier RFID technology.

In particular, the use of wearable beacon technology placed in attendee badges to track attendee activity on the trade show floor is now a major trend — and one that will continue to grow because it is an innovative and accurate way to demonstrate the results exhibitors get for their substantial investments.

“For show managers, there are also some very good ways to use beacon technology,” Corcoran says. “For example, you can use it to better understand what are the low traffic areas at your show and figure out what didn’t work. And that allows you to make improvements in your show. The same can be said for gaining an understanding of where you had your strongest traffic patterns



Amy Ledoux, CMP, CAE  
Senior Vice President of  
Meetings and Expositions  
ASAE, Washington, DC

***“You can also see whether people are leaving a session...or whether they’re leaving the hall during exhibit hours. And those kinds of capabilities allow you to determine what is working and what is not working.”***

too. We especially find beacon technology useful for the events that return to the same venue — it helps us to improve traffic patterns throughout a trade show.”

Amy Ledoux, CMP, CAE, senior vice president of meetings and expositions at the Washington, DC-based ASAE, The Center for Association Leadership, not only concurs that the use of technology on the show floor is a major trend. She says it is the single most significant trend she observes at the moment.

Exhibitors, Ledoux says, are now using technology — and particularly beacon technology — for two key functions: to enhance the attendee experience and to collect data about the success of the show as a business investment.

And at the same time that onsite data capture by show managers and exhibitors is a major trend, it’s also clear that beacon technology, based simply on its superiority, is eclipsing RFID as a tool. One reason: Beacons tend to be more accurate and more broadly functional than RFID.

“We’re using beacons now,” Ledoux says. “We work with a beacon company that is a pioneer in the field. For example, they’re developing things like wearable beacons.”

ASAE used beacon technology for the first time at its technology show in 2014. Last year, it used it for all of its major shows.

And the data is available in the cloud. “So I can pull it up wherever I am, even if I’m on a plane,” Ledoux says. “That’s another thing that’s great about it.”

Likewise, exhibitors have their own dashboards that allow them to track and analyze the data related to the show floor in general and their exhibits in particular.

“They can also tell how many people walked past their booth and did not come in,” Ledoux says. “They can also measure how long visitors spent in their booth.

And today, it can even be used to differentiate a hot prospect from a cold prospect based on prior behavior at the show, such as what other booths they have already visited or what sessions they attended.”

And every conceivable type of data and function can be analyzed and reacted to in real time. For example, Ledoux says, one widget vendor can compare its results to another widget exhibitor and analyze why it did better or worse for the day or the show versus its direct competitor.

Ledoux says the technology is revolutionizing the trade show floor and the analysis that can be accomplished. “For example, when we used beacon technology for the first time at our e-technology show in 2014, we saw on the first day that there wasn’t a lot of traffic on one side of the floor,” Ledoux says. “So we moved our ice cream break and some other things over there the next day to drive more traffic so exhibitors would see the traffic and could engage with attendees. The ability to do that kind of thing is one of the obvious benefits of beacon technology for show managers.”

It also can be used, she adds, to tell if a meeting room is too crowded or whether a particular session has not attracted much of an audience. “You can also see whether people are leaving a session while it’s underway or whether they’re leaving the hall during exhibit hours,” Ledoux says. “And those kinds of capabilities allow you to determine what is working and what is not working.”

## FACE-TO-FACE BUYER-SELLER APPOINTMENTS

Another growing trend is the “hosted buyer” format — meaning that the travel expenses of attendees are paid in return for a commitment to a certain number of appointments with sellers. But that is beginning to change, with new ideas coming to the fore.

“The use of preset face-to-face appointments is the biggest trend in our industry at the moment,” Corcoran says. “More and more shows are trying it now, and those buyer appointments are very valuable. Exhibitors are willing

to pay a premium to be able to guarantee one-on-one meetings with key buyers.”

Based on its obvious benefits, will the format ever become universal? “I don’t think it will become universal,” Corcoran says. “But it’s a hot trend right now.”

Now, there is a new trend toward more innovative iterations of an appointment format.

The reason? “Attendees are more and more interested in having appointments with people who can help them solve their problems and do their jobs better.”



ASAE, which used beacon technology for the first time in 2014, now can track what is working and what is not working at its exhibit hall.

Ledoux says. “And exhibitors want to talk to people who can help solve problems. So the format is a natural outgrowth of that. And new ideas like appointment matching formats just cater to that.”

However, Ledoux cautions, the traditional hosted buyer format has just as many critics as fans, if not more.

“If you talk to attendees about the hosted buyer format and the number of appointments required of them, you find that a lot of them — in focus groups and interviews — are steering away from hosted buyer shows because you are required to have so many appointments,” Ledoux says. “They don’t mind appointments. But they want them in their terms and not the terms set by the show manager or exhibitors.”

At the same time, however, ASAE has developed what Ledoux characterizes as an entirely new format that will be announced April 28 at ASAE’s 40th annual Springtime Expo in Washington, DC.

“We’re getting ready to launch a new meeting and a new model for the industry,” Ledoux said at press time. “It brings association professionals and exhibitors together in an entirely new format. But that’s all I can say about it at this point.”

A hint: The concept is based on what she calls “consultative sales.” “For example,” she says, “if you’re a meeting planner, what good does it do to have a hotel tell you, ‘We have this many rooms and this much meeting space.’ Who cares? You can look that up online. The issues that should be talked about are things like what the planner is looking for in a destination or what his or her challenges are with airlift — in other words, substantive issues that need problem-solving. And that means moving from transactional sales to consultative sales. And that’s what our new model addresses. It’s a new format that leads to problem-solving for association professionals in a collaborative format that can lead to a sale.”

Lippman says smart exhibitors are becoming more demanding in their expectations of the ROI they will get from a show, which is good for the industry because it will force associations to be more attentive to exhibitor business goals. “And that will mean,” Lippman says, “that show managers do a better job with their shows.”

And that leads to more demand for hosted buyer formats and others designed to facilitate exhibitor-buyer appointments. “And the reason for that,” Lippman says, “is that the more demanding exhibitors are now asking show managers, ‘Who will I be seeing at your show?’ And that means we’re seeing new things like new ideas and new technologies like appointment-setting apps.”

## GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

In the end, Lippman says, the reason association trade shows exist is to do business, both via educational content and expositions on the show floor. But it is the latter that determines the financial success of a show. And for that reason, more exhibitors are exercising more influence over the process.

“Educated and demanding companies that are investing in expositions are becoming much more aware of ways to stand out from the crowd,” Lippman says. “They’re negotiating much more for access to their particular targeted audience. And because of that, they are not just selecting a space on a floor plan and sending in their deposit.”

Lippman adds, “The demanding exhibitors are really giving smart show organizers the opportunity to have a collaborative experience and relationship. And that means that understanding what the exhibitors goals are, what their expectations are, will really shape how the show organizer puts together a package that includes things like exhibit space and sponsorship opportunities that will hopefully achieve the company’s particular objectives at

***“Educated and demanding companies that are investing in expositions are becoming much more aware of ways to stand out from the crowd.”***



Sam Lippman, President  
Lippman Connects  
Arlington, VA

the show. And I’m particular when I say ‘certain exhibiting companies,’ because there are still a majority of companies that are not really as aware of those issues or are not sophisticated enough to ask the right questions in advance to increase their chances of getting the results they want.”

Surprisingly, Lippman says that in his observation only a minority of exhibitors that participate in trade shows “take full advantage of the opportunities they could have or do not fully analyze the results they get from their trade shows.”

By the same token, Lippman says, too few show organizers grasp what is at stake and act accordingly.

“In all of the large show roundtables and exhibit sales roundtables that I do during the year, there’s only one show — the SEMA Show done by the Specialty Equipment Manufacturers Association — that on their exhibit space application asks the question, ‘What is your objective for the show?’”

That simple fact, he says, illustrates the shortcomings of most shows when it comes to making sure exhibitors get the ROI they are seeking. “And how can a show organizer help an exhibitor meet their objective if they don’t even know what the objective is?”

In the future, he implies, the increasing power of exhibitors to drive results from their expensive participation in shows will force show managers to do a better job of understanding their business goal from the start of the process.

And that will become the most important trend of all.

AC&F

# Las Vegas

## Attendance-Building Mastery and More Attract Groups to the Entertainment Capital

By Maura Keller

**T**anisha Bibbs, CMP, director of event planning at the Alternative & Direct Investment Securities Association (ADISA) in Indianapolis, recognizes that Las Vegas offers a wealth of meeting and event planning options for associations of all types and sizes.

Continued on page 42



Guests danced the night away underneath Bliss Dance, a 40-foot-tall statue by artist Marco Cochrane located in the heart of The Park.





## Le Dîner en Blanc Revealed at The Park

Le Dîner en Blanc, a global epicurean event, made its official Las Vegas debut in April at The Park, MGM Resorts International's new outdoor dining and entertainment district connecting New York-New York, Monte Carlo and T-Mobile Arena. Le Dîner en Blanc is an elegant, world-famous picnic teeming with guests all dressed in white who gather at a venue kept secret until the very last minute. More than 1,000 stylish guests armed with their gourmet picnic baskets flocked to The Park.

Created in Paris nearly 30 years ago, Dîner en Blanc has taken place in more than 70 cities around the world such as New York, Miami, Sydney, Los Angeles, Singapore, Mexico City, London, Montreal, Tokyo and Abidjan.

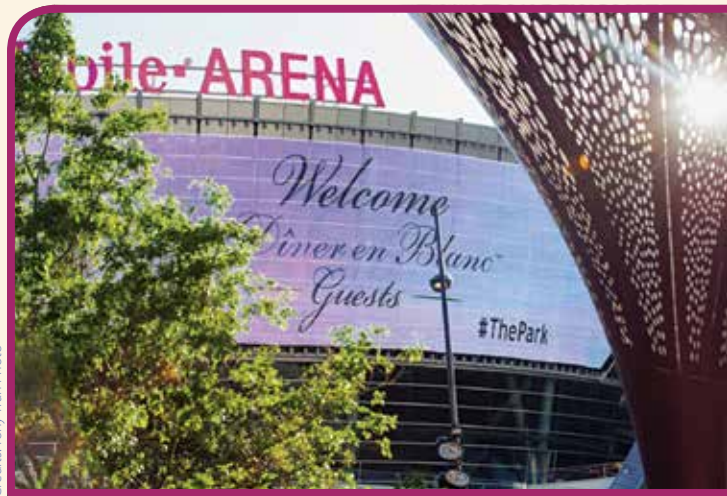
Guests boarded buses across the Las Vegas Valley and were transported to the secret destination. Upon arrival at The Park, awe-struck participants eagerly brought out their decorations, dinnerware and food to begin designing their tablescapes.

In true Las Vegas fashion, tables were dressed with beautiful floral arrangements, extravagant canopies and centerpieces. Curious onlookers watched as The Park was flooded with a sea of people dressed head-to-toe in elegant white attire. Guests showed off their flair with chic accessories, sophisticated clothing and unique styles.

Le Dîner en Blanc's traditional napkin waving signaled the



Credits: Tony Train Photo



The T-Mobile Arena is perfectly situated to welcome guests to The Park, MGM Resorts International's new outdoor dining and entertainment district connecting New York-New York and Monte Carlo resorts.



Credit: Tony Tran Photo

Guests enjoy a bit of bubbly under their exquisite canopied creation.

beginning of dinner during which people enjoyed a feast of luxe entrées and exquisite wine. For those who chose not to bring their own gourmet picnic, a local catering company provided guests with an array of baskets.

Las Vegas' night sky was lit up with sparklers to commence the beginning of the dance party. Guests danced the night away underneath Bliss Dance, a 40-foot-tall statue by artist Marco Cochrane located in the heart of The Park. Other sights to be seen throughout the evening included a DJ encapsulated in a geometric sphere hovering above the crowd, as well as acrobatic performers entertaining guests with ribbon twirling and dancing.

An eclectic blend of restaurants, bars and entertainment tucked into rich desert landscaping, The Park is a central gathering place on The Strip's west side. An interactive and social environment, The Park aims to build a sense of community through innovative programming and events.

Designed with sustainability in mind, The Park incorporates cooling shade structures and landscaping, and features 600 stone pieces taken directly from the Mojave Desert. — **AC&F**



Credit: Tony Tran Photo

A thousand guests dance the night away at The Park.

Continued from page 40

In September 2015, ADISA held their annual conference with more than 900 attendees in Las Vegas. "The biggest draw of bringing a meeting or event to Las Vegas is definitely the abundance of restaurants and entertainment options in the city," Bibbs says.

Like Bibbs, Stephanie Hudson, meeting manager of the Marietta, Georgia-based Professional Pricing Society, sees Las Vegas as a good locale because of the diverse options the city offers for events and meetings.

"There is a hotel for a small group of 50 or a large group of several thousand," Hudson says. "Even though some of the hotels are massive, some hotels can have a space where a group of 500 can be in their own little world. Most of the meeting space for a group can be on one level so groups don't have travel on different levels in between breakouts and meals." Hudson's most recent meeting that she planned for the Professional Pricing Society included about 450 participants at Encore at Wynn Las Vegas.

"The group had the entire section of the Encore hotel for the conference and never had to leave," Hudson says. "Normally the group would have an offsite reception but decided to have it on the patio at the Encore immediately after the last session; therefore allowing attendees to have an early evening to enjoy time on their own in the city. Some hotels may be huge where they feel like a city within a city, but you can still have your own section for your group and not have to run into other groups depending on how the conference program is set up."

## SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

"The weather is also ideal and averages 320 days of great weather and less than five inches of precipitation annually," says Kevin Fliess, vice president of product marketing at Tysons Corner, Virginia-based Cvent. "The warm, dry climate makes Las Vegas an attractive option year-round. When attendees aren't at the event, no place can match Las Vegas for entertainment."

Gil Bowen, administrator at Carolinas Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Office, based in Wilmington, North Carolina, plans his association's meetings. He says Las Vegas offers something for everyone. "Las Vegas offers a wide variety of outstanding hotels, shows and nightlife to keep attendees busy after business hours," says Bowen, who helped plan the association's recent conference at Wynn Las Vegas, which hosted approximately 300 attendees.

Jeffrey Cesari, CMP, president and creative director of Wilmington, Delaware-based Industrious Meetings, sees Las Vegas as a great destination for many types of meetings. He has managed several large corporate meetings and association conventions in Las Vegas.



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LAS VEGAS



## “The biggest draw of bringing a meeting or event to Las Vegas is definitely the abundance of restaurants and entertainment options in the city.”

Tanisha Bibbs, CMP  
Director of Event Planning  
Alternative & Direct Investment Securities Association  
Indianapolis, IN

“One of the big reasons we like Las Vegas is we can gather delegates in the same hotel and with enough meeting space under one roof,” Cesari says. “And airlift into Las Vegas is great — serving major U.S. and international cities — which means easier travel for folks flying into the city. We also find many delegates will pre- or post-extend in Las Vegas to explore the city or area attractions, like a trip to the Grand Canyon, Hoover Dam, etc.”

Says Kim Bergeron, program director at HelmsBriscoe ResourceOne in Tempe, Arizona, “One of the large draws to Las Vegas is the entertainment factor. An association is able to draw more attendees to their events with the ‘lure’ of the Las Vegas nightlife. Las Vegas is a 24-hour city with something to do around every corner. Most people want to go to Las Vegas, but cannot justify the expense for a weekend trip, however, add a conference and there is the justification. I have seen a meeting double in size because it was being held in Las Vegas.”

Aside from the entertainment and gambling, the options for meetings are endless. As Bergeron explains, Las Vegas has 167 hotels with more than 140,000 sleeping rooms, more than 3 million sf of convention space and more than 10 million sf of meeting, event and trade show space. The average hotel room rate is \$92, making the location affordable for any budget. Most hotels are within four miles of the Las Vegas Convention Center and The Strip is only two miles from the airport. There is literally something for everyone.

### EXPERIENCE COUNTS

Las Vegas has been ranked as the No. 1 trade show destination in North America over the past two decades. And it offers much more than just meeting space.

Las Vegas reached record visitation in 2015 welcoming 42.3 million visitors, a 2.9 percent increase from 2014. Convention attendance was a primary driver of that growth, increasing 13.4 percent, according to a Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) commissioned Economic Impact Study by Applied Analysis. The report also shows that the convention industry continues to be valued for its positive impact on average daily room rates and helps smooth out seasonality associated with leisure travel.

Las Vegas resorts host more than 22,000 events, meetings, conventions and incentive programs annually, and their expertise in the service industry is world-class. No matter the size of the group, Las Vegas has the flexibility to tailor space to ac-

commodate any event and is built for scalability from small to enormous events.

Rossi Ralenkotter, president and CEO of the LVCVA, stated, “We are encouraged by the continued strength and growth of the tourism industry particularly in the meetings and convention sector. As a destination, we look forward to building on this momentum in the coming years. We need to ensure that we continue to provide the world-class experience and facilities our visitors have come to expect.”

Las Vegas is a great option for meeting planners because they don’t have to schedule every minute of every day, adds Chris Meyer, vice president of global business sales for the LVCVA. “Meetings in Las Vegas in particular are better attended because attendees know that restaurants, shows and the casinos are still going to be there when they finish their business,” he says. “So they are able to get their business done without fear of missing out on all the excitement the city has to offer.”

While of course Las Vegas has earned an unsurpassed reputation as a premier gaming destination, that’s not all that it offers, Meyer adds.

“What meeting planners might be surprised to find is that gaming resorts now offer a wide array of world-class dining, shopping, entertainment and outdoor experiences that expand beyond the casino floor,” he says. “Las Vegas makes a planner’s job easier because there is such a diverse collection of amenities that are available to every demographic.”

Meyer notes that the town was built to host visitors and has decades of experience when it comes to customer service.

“Las Vegas resorts continually evolve to meet the needs of the visitors — both leisure and business,” he says. “It is a destination that is about the overall experience and not one specific amenity.” Meyer encourages planners to reach out to the LVCVA when beginning the process of planning a meeting.

“We are the destination experts, and no meeting size is too big or too small,” he says. The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority staff is very knowledgeable and can assist plan-

“Las Vegas offers a wide variety of outstanding hotels, shows and nightlife to keep attendees busy after business hours.”



Gil Bowen  
Administrator  
Carolinas Association of Collegiate  
Registrars and Admissions Office  
Wilmington, NC

ners with identifying the venues that are ideal for association meetings based on the type of group and their needs.

“So many hotels renovate and make changes and the LVCVA can give you updates on the latest changes and offsite venues,” Hudson says.

And as a city that continues to evolve, it is imperative to keep track of the “latest and greatest” updates, additions and renovations happening in Las Vegas.

## NEW & NOTEWORTHY

MGM Resorts International recently unveiled **The Park**, (see page 41) a vibrant outdoor dining and entertainment district celebrating the beauty of the surrounding desert landscape and offering visitors a new way to experience the Las Vegas Strip. Located between New York-New York and Monte Carlo resorts, The Park is designed as a social gathering space where guests can experience stunning design elements, a fun culinary lineup boasting great indoor/outdoor environments, iconic art and playful entertainment.

The Park serves as the gateway to the new 20,000-seat **T-Mobile Arena**. In addition to featuring a venue with a 20,000 capacity, the T-Mobile Arena also offers a wealth of event spaces for rent — ideal options for small and larger gatherings.

**Aria Resort & Casino** has long been considered one of North America’s premier destinations for large-scale meetings and events. As such, Aria will be expanding its convention center to deliver an additional 200,000 sf of state-of-the-art indoor and outdoor meeting spaces. With this new addition, Aria will boast more than 500,000 sf of meeting space, and is expected to be completed in February 2018.

**Wynn Las Vegas** and **Encore** together have 260,000 sf of beautiful and unique settings for any size meeting or convention. Amenities aplenty, Wynn also offers Steve Wynn’s ShowStoppers, a music spectacular featuring a reinvented collection of songs and dances. Voted “Best New Show” in Las Vegas, ShowStoppers brings a vibrant and talented cast of 66

singers, dancers and a full orchestra with dazzling scenery and costumes to the intimate Encore Theater.

Wynn’s most recent news is word that a new entertainment destination — named **Wynn Paradise Park** for now — built around a first-ever recreational lake concept has been proposed by the chairman and CEO himself — Steve Wynn. Subject to approval by the company’s board of directors, the new destination



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Kim Bergeron  
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**“Most people want to go to Las Vegas, but cannot justify the expense for a weekend trip, however, add a conference and there is the justification. I have seen a meeting double in size because it was being held in Las Vegas.”**

will take the place of the golf course and is expected to include a 38-acre lagoon surrounded by premium meetings and convention space, a 1,000-room hotel tower, a small casino and extensive dining and nightlife.

“We have a chance to reinvent Las Vegas and make the whole venue an entertainment attraction...an idyllic beach paradise surrounded by white sand beaches,” stated Wynn. “People come to Las Vegas from all over the world to live large and have a good time and we can dish up an irresistible entertainment attraction.”

The proposed lagoon will be lined by a white sand beach and boardwalk and feature an array of daytime activities including water skiing, paddleboarding and parasailing. At night, the space will transform with an elaborate fireworks display that is launched from the center island and surrounding areas.

The park will add 260,000 sf of premium meeting space with unobstructed views of the waterfront, spacious guest rooms with a separate bedroom, living room and balcony, and a variety of restaurants, including an expansion of the current Country Club restaurant.

Not only that, but Wynn also is developing **Wynn Plaza**, an expansive retail complex featuring nearly 80,000 sf of luxury retail space. Debuting fall 2017, the complex will augment the existing luxury retail collection currently showcased at Wynn Las Vegas and Encore as well as bring the shopping experience to the high traffic area bordering Las Vegas Boulevard.

Also located at Wynn, the **Encore Player’s Club** features luxurious lounge seating with tables all equipped with Suzo Happ InteractivePro tables; roulette, craps, blackjack and slots; mobile sports betting; a specialty cocktail program; a DJ booth; a shuffleboard table and Blatt billiards table.

**Caesars Palace** also offers an amazing casino and meeting space experience. Its 300,000 sf of meeting space is comfortably set apart from the casino area, yet remains within easy reach of attendees. Caesars Palace offers a large range of flexible venues with countless configuration options to suit groups of all sizes. In addition to traditional meeting venues within Caesars, the site’s 4,100-seat Colosseum boasts one of the world’s largest LED screens, a perfect location for presentations that really “wow.”

Caesars Entertainment Corporation announced plans to upgrade more than 4,800 hotel rooms this year at four of its Las Vegas resorts. These resort upgrades include the transformation of the original tower at Caesars Palace to create the Julius Tower as well as the refurbishment of the resort’s Augustus Tower. Additional room upgrades will include Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino, Paris Las Vegas and Harrah’s Las Vegas.

To meet the ever-growing needs of convention managers and attendees, the **Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino Convention Center** recently completed its expansion with the opening of the 70,000-sf Oceanside Ballroom. The \$70 million expansion



The award-winning Qua Baths & Spa at Caesars Palace Las Vegas.

Credit: Caesars Entertainment

includes 350,000 sf of new exhibit space, a 20,000-sf foyer and underground parking. Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino also completed the final phase of its resort-wide remodel of more than 3,000 guest rooms and suites. Created by the MGM Resorts International Design Group, the redesigned rooms and suites feature refreshing color palettes and modern designs in three distinct collections.

Likewise, **The Flamingo Las Vegas** offers more than 100,000

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Kevin Fliess

Vice President of Product Marketing

Event

Tysons Corner, VA

**“The weather is also ideal and averages 320 days of great weather and less than five inches of precipitation annually. The warm, dry climate makes Las Vegas an attractive option year-round.”**

sf of flexible meeting and exhibition space in a convenient location on The Strip just minutes from the airport, major convention centers and top entertainment stadiums. After a recent expansion, their all-new conference facility is divisible into as many as 38 breakout rooms and includes a 25,000-sf ballroom, a 55,000-sf pavilion that is perfect for large general sessions and exhibits, and elaborate venues such as the Havana Room and Beach Club.

If hosting a meeting or event outside The Strip is more apropos, **The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort and Spa** is a magnificent desert hotel where natural splendor meets luxurious accommodations. The idyllic full-service resort accommodates groups from 15 to 2,100 guests. The Westin also offers completely customizable conference facilities, including more than 50,000 sf of exterior meeting spaces.

For many convention attendees, personalization is key. That’s why **MGM Grand Hotel & Casino** is personalizing the attendees’ journeys by creating meaningful content based by integrating customization and enhanced technology to personalize service at every touch point from pre-arrival to arrival to departure. MGM Grand’s new Skylofts features a personal concierge who asks upcoming guests a series of questions prior to arrival to ensure room, mini-bar and travel preferences are met. Those choices are then documented and saved so when the guests return, everything is as if they never left.

Located in the heart of the Las Vegas Strip, **The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino** features all-suite accommodations, ex-

quisite restaurants by celebrity chefs and world-class entertainment and shopping. The luxury resort offers 4,028 elegant suites, including standard suites that are nearly double the size of the average Las Vegas hotel room. The resort also features Canyon Ranch SpaClub; a five-acre pool and garden deck; Tao nightclub; the Grand Canal Shoppes retail and dining mecca; and a 120,000-sf casino and The Strip’s largest poker room. The Venetian, The Palazzo and Sands Expo complex offers more than 2.25 million sf of meeting and convention space.

Entertainment and **Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino**, a legendary world-class destination, offers a unique blend of amenities and excitement with table games, slots, restaurants, and more than 225,000 sf of meeting space and the world’s largest race and sports SuperBook. The property features entertainment options in the International Theater and the Westgate Cabaret. Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino is currently undergoing a \$100 million renovation that will encompass every square inch of the property including the addition of 300 time-share villas, the all-new International Bar, a fully renovated pool deck, 1,200 remodeled Signature Rooms and more.

### MAKING THE MOST OF LAS VEGAS

It’s vital for association meeting and event planners considering Las Vegas to firm up a budget before deciding on any property, as there are so many options — many of the newer and more popular properties can be higher priced than others. You will want to know what you can afford prior to your search.

“Go to Las Vegas for a site visit and tour the conference space and hotel,” Bergeron advises. Most of the major hotels and resorts have vast conference centers on multiple levels. You’ll want to make sure the meeting space is not so complicated that you will lose attendees because they could not find the meeting rooms. This is from experience: The space

provided looked easy enough to find looking at the map but in reality we could not provide enough signage to help get attendees to the space.

“Lastly, be prepared to find an additional hotel for overflow rooms,” Bergeron says. “Las Vegas hotels sell out quickly and every meeting I have done in Las Vegas has required an overflow hotel.”



This solar array, one of the largest in the world, takes up nearly 20 acres of roof space atop the Mandalay Bay Convention Center.

Credit: MGM Resorts International

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**Morgan Natzke** was named sales account executive for Meet Minneapolis, Convention and Visitors Association. She was executive meetings manager at the Marquette Hotel in Minneapolis.

Discover The Palm Beaches, the official tourism marketing corporation for Palm Beach County, Florida, has named **Peter Cronin** as director of sales, Southeast, and **Peggy Murray Hagaman** as director of sales, Midwest. Cronin was national sales director for Choose Chicago. Hagaman was manager, Midwest regional sales office, for the New Orleans CVB.

Visit Winston-Salem (North Carolina) has named **Alexandra "Alex" Collins**, CHSE, as national sales manager. She was most recently group association sales manager at Twin City Quarter in Winston-Salem.

Visit Anaheim has named **Paul Romero** as convention sales director, mid-Atlantic region. He recently served as senior national sales director at Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Turnberry Isle Miami in Aventura, Florida, has appointed **Valerie Peru** as national sales manager responsible for the

Southeast and Southwest regions. She was sales manager for the Hilton Fort Lauderdale Beach Resort.

Visit Carlsbad in California has announced **Tamara McGiboney** as group sales and development manager. She formerly worked for Visit Newport Beach in the role of business development.

Loews New Orleans Hotel has named **Barry Rodriguez** as director of sales and marketing. He most recently served as director of sales at The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans.

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45	Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority	702-892-0711	www.vegasmeansbusiness.com	Chris Meyer	cmeyer@lvca.com
14, 15	Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board	213-624-7300	www.discoverlosangeles.com	Kathy McAdams	sales@LATourism.org
47	Mandalay Bay	702-632-7900	www.mandalaybay.com/conventions	Group Sales	groupleads@mandalaybay.com
COV II	Meet AC	609-449-7148	www.meetinac.com	Sandi Harvey	sharvey@meetinac.com
35	Streamsong Resort	863-428-1000	www.streamsongresort.com	Group Sales	meetings@streamsongresort.com
23	Team San Jose	800-san-jose	www.sanjose.org	Mark McMinn	mmcminn@sanjose.org
5	Visit Winston-Salem	336-728-4216	www.visitwinstonsalem.com	Alexandra Collins	alex@visitwinstonsalem.com
43	Wynn/Encore	888-320-7117	www.wynnmeetings.com	Hotel Sales	hotelsales@wynnlasvegas.com



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