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# CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

**Michael A. Massari**, Caesars Entertainment's senior vice president of national meetings and events, pictured in Atlantic City at Harrah's Atlantic City — home to the new Waterfront Conference Center.

## Atlantic City

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Select Poland, a Global DMC, can arrange group events inside The Wieliczka Salt Mine in Wieliczka, Poland. **PAGE 16**



Folsom Field at the University of Colorado sports high-end meeting and event spaces and mountain views. **PAGE 34**



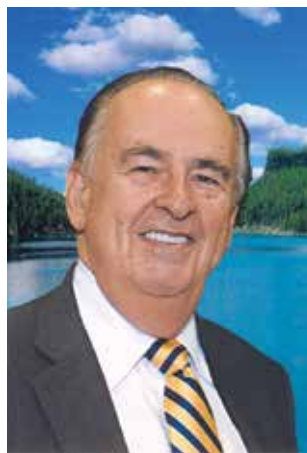
A "Star Wars" theme featuring Chewbacca and more characters was a big hit for the Danfoss Drives attendees. **PAGE 44**



# Publisher's Message

## Build It, and They Will Come

Or rebuild it or revive it or relaunch it, and they will come. No matter how you describe it, Atlantic City has successfully reinvented itself time after time. This time, the resurgence in popularity and number of visitors, especially meeting and convention visitors, is due to the fine leadership and dogged persistence of its leaders, such as Jim Wood, the president and CEO of Meet AC, who was challenged to make Atlantic City viable again, to revitalize the city as a premier meetings mecca



— a place where companies and associations want to visit and hold their face-to-face meetings. Meet AC's mission of breathing new life into the city by attracting meetings and conventions back to AC is right on target. In our cover story on Atlantic City on page 58, Wood says the numbers speak for themselves: "Our convention numbers are up 40 percent (2014 versus 2015), and over the past three years, we have seen a 150 percent increase in bookings as Atlantic City continues to reposition itself as a more vibrant and robust meetings destination."

Wood had a little help from his friends, too, including Michael A. Massari, senior vice president of national meetings and events for Caesars Entertainment, who graces our cover this month. Massari was a guiding force behind the development of the new Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center, which opened last fall, and is billed as the largest hotel-conference center complex from Baltimore to Boston. Massari said, "With the opening of the Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center, our meetings business in Atlantic City has seen continued growth. We have groups booked through 2019, and we don't anticipate this trend to slow down anytime soon."

In addition, Resorts Casino Hotel, which offers Atlantic City's only All-Inclusive Meeting Package, recently opened a new conference center adding 15,000 sf of meeting space within its 12 rooms.

Having attended MPI's highly successful WEC in Atlantic City in June, I can attest to the notion that AC is truly on its way back despite the closing of a few casino hotels. The more than 2,000 WEC participants also were duly impressed, and I am sure many of the planning pros in attendance are looking forward to bringing their meeting groups to Atlantic City in the near future for serious business as well as extraordinary dining, fun in the sun and a stroll on The Boardwalk at the Jersey Shore.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

## www.TheMeetingMagazines.com CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

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## News & Notes

### Caesars Palace Las Vegas Celebrates Golden Anniversary

LAS VEGAS, NV — Marking an amazing half-century, the world-renowned Caesars Palace Las Vegas celebrated its golden anniversary with a weekend of exciting events highlighted by a free public fireworks display. The milestone anniversary weekend included a variety of events, specials and amenities to celebrate including resort-wide champagne specials, anniversary room packages, decadent menu offerings and specialty cocktails.

"Since opening in 1966, Caesars Palace has set the standard for the Las Vegas experience," said Mark P. Frissora, CEO of Caesars Entertainment. "Caesars Palace became an iconic brand by continually transforming its hospitality, entertainment and gaming products. Our focus on innovation continues as we look ahead to the next 50 years of industry leadership."

The legendary resort first opened its doors on August 5. On August 6, Caesars Palace hosted a Grand Gala event for invited VIP guests headlined by Tony Bennett who was the second performer to ever appear at the Circus Maximus Showroom in 1966, and in 1969 was the first and only entertainer ever offered a lifetime contract to perform at Caesars Palace. Most recently, Bennett performed at The Colosseum in 2012 and 2013.



Caesars Palace then and now.

Comedian and actor Howie Mandel who previously appeared at the Circus Maximus showroom and served as Master of Ceremonies for Caesars Palace 30th Anniversary television special in 1996 hosted the evening's festivities. The gala featured surprise appearances and special performances by current Caesars Entertainment headliners including Wayne Newton, Donny and Marie Osmond, Matt Goss and The Righteous Brothers.

As part of the ongoing Summer of

Caesars celebration, the iconic resort is offering a free, self-guided walking photo tour and exhibit highlighting the most memorable moments and people in the rich history of Caesars Palace. From bringing the biggest names in entertainment including global superstar Celine Dion to offering an unmatched collection of celebrity chefs to serving as home to top sporting events and daredevil stunts, Caesars Palace has become synonymous with Las Vegas itself. [www.caesars.com/CP50](http://www.caesars.com/CP50)

### MGM Resorts International Completes Acquisition of Interest in Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa



MURREN

LAS VEGAS, NV — MGM Resorts International closed on the previously announced acquisition of Boyd Gaming Corporation's interest in Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa in Atlantic City, New Jersey, for approximately \$900 million.

"As the premier resort in Atlantic City, Borgata is a great addition to our growing presence in the mid-Atlantic and Northeast United States," said Jim Murren, chairman & CEO of MGM Resorts. "We are excited to welcome the talented Borgata leadership team and employees into MGM Resorts and look forward to serving guests with new and exciting opportunities through our diverse resort offerings, entertainment dominance and market-leading loyalty program, M life Rewards."

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

### Silversea Announces \$170 Million Fleet Refurbishment Plan

MONACO — Silversea, a leading ultra-luxury cruise line, announced a \$170 million fleet refurbishment plan — the biggest fleetwide refurbishment plan in its history. This investment is designed to reaffirm the company's commitment to exceptional standards of guest comfort and timeless elegance.

Silver Whisper, host to the iconic World Cruise, will undergo a refurbishment that will take place by the end of 2016, and which has been largely influenced by feedback from World Cruisers.

The luxurious suites will be refurbished, and the bathrooms adorned with dark emperor marble flooring. Public spaces will be upgraded with a freshly tiled pool and new chaise lounges. Dining areas at The Restaurant and La Terrazza will receive plush new carpet and elegant hardwood parquet respectively, and will each receive new furniture. Silver Whisper's communications hub is set for a major overhaul with the addition of two satellite antennas, vastly improving internet speeds on board and enabling guests to take full advantage of the new, interactive TVs and on-demand movies available in every suite.

The refurbishment program extends to Silver Wind during her dry dock scheduled for October 2016. Beyond the Classic fleet, Silver Discoverer also will benefit from this investment in 2016, entering dry dock this October. While service and suite presentation will be held strictly to Silversea's high standards, it is in the public areas of this Expedition vessel where guests will see the most visible changes. The Restaurant will be remodeled with a lighter, more contemporary color palette and the ever-popular pool grill area will boast new furniture. The Discoverer lounge will go through a transformation from breakfast venue to a sophisticated lounge in which to relax, read and reflect on the day's excursions. [www.silversea.com](http://www.silversea.com)

### DMAI 2016 Annual Convention Closes Out With More Than 1,500 Attendees



Pictured at the DMAI Annual Convention in Minneapolis, (l to r) Ray Bloom, chairman and founder, IMEX Group; Roger Dow, president and CEO, U.S. Travel Association; John H. Graham, IV, FASAE, CAE, ASAE president and CEO; Austin CVB President and CEO Emeritus Bob Lander and Don Welsh, DMAI president and CEO.

WASHINGTON, DC — The Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) Board of Directors and President and CEO Don Welsh August 5 announced final attendance numbers for the 2016 Annual Convention held August 1–3 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. More than 1,500 attendees engaged in general sessions, discipline-focused roundtables and networking.

Throughout the program, DMAI's association and foundation leadership recognized and celebrated those whom have demonstrated commitment and promise towards the continued success of destination marketing worldwide. This year, 42 industry representatives received their CDME certification; 18 DMOs were honored for their DMAP accreditation and reaccreditation; four industry leaders were inducted into the Hall of Fame; and the 2016 Class of 30 Under 30 was introduced.

Bob Lander, Austin CVB President and CEO Emeritus, turned over the association's board leadership role to Visit Newport Beach & Company President and CEO Gary C. Sherwin, CDME. In his new role as DMAI Board Chairman, Sherwin will work alongside Don Welsh and the global trade association's new executive team to transition the organization into a high-performing association focused on supporting its members. Under Sherwin's leadership, he will spearhead a renewed focus on education, certification, accreditation and advocacy opportunities for DMAI members around the world.

"I am honored to represent our industry and advance educational opportunities for the association's members across the globe," said Sherwin. "It's a new day for DMAI as we work together to recognize and seize those opportunities that will bring value and collaboration across the industry. Today's travelers are seeking unique destination experiences, which presents a promising opportunity for destination marketing organizations like never before."

#### The DMAI Board Officers for the 2016-2017 term are:

**Chair** — Gary C. Sherwin, CDME, Visit Newport Beach & Company

**Chair-Elect** — Tammy Blount, FCDME, Monterey County CVB

**Immediate Past-Chair** — Bob Lander, Austin CVB President and CEO, Emeritus

**Secretary/Treasurer** — William Pate, Atlanta CVB

**At Large** — Craig Davis, VisitPittsburgh

**At Large** — Casandra Matej, San Antonio CVB

**Ex-Officio** — Chris Thompson, Brand USA

[www.destinationmarketing.org](http://www.destinationmarketing.org)



# CAESARS MEANS BUSINESS

CaesarsMeansBusiness.com



## 1988

**Rain Man** starring, Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise filmed at Caesars Palace. The famous "Rain Man" suite is located in the Forum Tower.

## 2010

**Conference Space** at Caesars Palace expands to a total of 300,000 square feet of meeting space and receives LEED Silver Certification.



## 2009

Caesars Palace was featured prominently in the Warner Bros. block-buster comedy **"The Hangover"**.



## 1946

**Bugsy Siegel**

opens the Flamingo, one of the first casino resorts on the Las Vegas Strip.



## 1997

**Caesars Palace** opens the Palace Tower, adding 170,000 square feet of meeting space to the property.



## 2013

**Britney Spears**

headlines her first show at Planet Hollywood, paving the way for future headliners Jennifer Lopez, Pit Bull and Lionel Richie.

## 1967

**Robert "Evel" Knievel** attempted to jump the Caesars Palace fountains.



## 1999

Paris Las Vegas opened showcasing their **Eiffel Tower** built to half the size of the original in France, and featured 140,000 square feet of elegant meeting space.



## 2014

**The Cromwell**

is the first boutique hotel to open on the Las Vegas Strip, and is home to celebrity chef Giada DeLaurentiis' flagship restaurant.



## 1980

**Larry Holmes** faces **Muhammad Ali** in an arena that seated 24,000 fans. Holmes won the World Championship Title.



## 1974

After four years, **Frank Sinatra** returns to Circus Maximus at Caesars Palace.



## 2003

**Celine Dion**

graced the stage at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace, marking the beginning of her iconic residency.

## 2005

Harrah's Entertainment acquires **Caesars Entertainment**, creating a combined total of approx. 647,000 square feet of meeting space in Las Vegas.



## 2016

**Caesars Entertainment** undergoes guestroom renovations that represent approx. 20% of rooms in Las Vegas.



## 2014

**The High Roller**

at The LINQ Promenade transformed the Las Vegas skyline when it opened at The LINQ Promenade as the tallest observation wheel in the world.



# News & Notes

## Hosts Global Alliance Hosts First Fam Trip to Cuba



LAS VEGAS, NV — Hosts Global Alliance (HGA), along with Cuba Incentive Travel Associates, hosted an inspirational and educational familiarization (FAM) trip to Cuba. The group of 21 people including HGA clients, members and staff were treated to three days of music, culture, historical sites and plenty of warm Cuban hospitality. “The HGA FAM trip to Cuba was one of the highlights of my meeting management career,” said Steve Goodman, managing director at Atlanta-based MeetingAdvice. “Not only did we get the chance to see this fascinating country...but we saw hope and opportunity at every corner. Havana has such potential to be the hotspot of the Caribbean, with welcoming people, beautiful architecture and, of course, those 1950s cars.”

Guests enjoyed a night of music by the legendary Buena Vista Social Club, caught a show at the Tropicana Nightclub, and attended a symphony performance at the Gran Teatro. Other highlights of the trip include a motorcade of clas-



sic 1950s vintage cars for their VIP arrival at the Hotel Nacional to take in the oceanfront views before dinner at La Guarida. An afternoon stroll through the San Jose Almancenés Artisan’s Market let guests peruse unique Cuban art, cigars and craft goods. At every stop locals were eager to welcome the group and hear firsthand about life the U.S. while proudly sharing stories about Cuba.

“We had a great trip to Havana! It is always so much fun to witness U.S. incentive buyers’ excitement when they experience Cuba for the first time and discover the unexpected possibilities for meeting and incentive groups. The absolute best part of the experience for our team was the privilege of revealing the destination to HGA clients for the first time and hearing, ‘We can’t wait to come back with our groups,’ said Scott Andrews, president and founder of Cuba Incentive Travel Associates, based in The Woodlands, Texas.

[www.hosts-global.com](http://www.hosts-global.com)

## Beteta and Nassetta Named to U.S. Travel Hall of Leaders

WASHINGTON, DC — Longtime travel industry leaders Caroline Beteta and Christopher J. Nassetta are the 2016 inductees into the U.S. Travel Hall of Leaders, the U.S. Travel Association announced.

Beteta, president and CEO of Visit California and a past national chair of U.S. Travel, and Nassetta, president and CEO of Hilton Worldwide and chairman of U.S. Travel’s CEO Roundtable, will be officially inducted November 16 in Washington, DC.

“Caroline and Chris have not only demonstrated exceptional leadership at the helm of two premier travel



BETETA



NASSETTA

brands — they’ve also used their authority to serve as passionate advocates for the travel industry,” said U.S. Travel President and CEO Roger Dow. “When Brand USA was first launched, Caroline stepped into multiple leader-

ship roles within the nascent organization and worked tirelessly to prove that a public-private partnership to promote America to the world could succeed. Chris, meanwhile, has successfully transformed Hilton into one of the world’s largest and fastest-growing hospitality companies, while also doing incredible work to promote travel and tourism as a whole. During his tenure as CEO Roundtable chairman, he has driven the industry’s advocacy agenda through active engagement with policymakers on key issues.”

[www.ustravel.org](http://www.ustravel.org)

# Snapshots



Credits: 1. 3, 4, 5, Chuck Fazio 2 Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort, 6 Iris Keenan

**1** More than 1,500 participants enjoyed the DMAI Annual Convention in Minneapolis including (l to r) DMAI President/CEO Don Welsh; V.P. Paula Pate and President Julie Hart, CFO by Design; Herb Malone, president/CEO, Alabama Gulf Coast CVB; U.S. Travel Association President/CEO Roger Dow; Karl Pietzrak, V.P. Convention Sales, Visit Pittsburgh; and Austin CVB’s Bob Lander. **2** (L to r) Manny Corral, DOSM, Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort; Harvey Grotzky, publisher of *Corporate & Incentive Travel* magazine; and Terry Epton, president, Hosts New Orleans, at the Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort during the HGA Global Forum’s final-night event (see story on page 22). **3** At DMAI (l to r) Kristin McGrath, V.P., sales and services for Visit Richmond; Maura Gast, executive director, Irving CVB; Shelly Green, president/CEO of the Durham CVB; and Tammy Blount, Monterey County CVB. **4** Abigail Posner, head of strategic planning, Google ZOO, who gave the opening keynote address at the DMAI Annual Convention, is flanked by Don Welsh and PCMA President/CEO Deborah Sexton. **5** Alison Best, DMAI E.V.P. of member engagement, with Ronnie Burt (l), president/CEO, Visit KC and AI Hutchinson, president/CEO of Visit Mobile **6** Stephen Lazar, Key Events, a Hosts Global Alliance Member, received the H Factor Leadership Hosts Honors Award at the HGA Global Forum.



By Mary MacGregor

## Head vs. Heart: Applying the Science of Behavioral Economics to Event Planning

**A**ppplied behavioral economics is the practical use of understanding how rational and irrational thoughts combine to drive decisions and behavior. To put it another way, it helps us understand what drives humans to do what we do. Despite what we'd like to think, we're often irrational and ruled by emotion. We say one thing, "a healthy lifestyle is important to me," but find ourselves doing something contrary, "I've had a long week, I think I'll skip the gym (again)."

Humans consistently defy logic because we are naturally emotional creatures reacting to our environment and current state of mind. Understanding this fact is one thing, but effectively ap-

boldly reinforce a message. Consider incorporating scent and other special touches to bring your entire experience to life.

**Why it's important:** A vivid event is a memorable event, and a memorable event is an effective event. Participants who can remember the experience well will benefit from greater enthusiasm even as time passes. These detailed memories fuel motivation and excitement for months and years beyond.

**IDIOSYNCRATIC FIT** refers to the idea that everyone feels a sense of individuality, and we appreciate when others recognize that we are unique. In fact, when we feel that we've been recognized as an individual with our own unique set of circum-

“Getting better results doesn't always require more spending. The key is to spend in areas that will resonate with your **inherently emotional audience.**”

stances, we are more likely to become personally invested and enjoy the experience.

stances, we are more likely to become personally invested and enjoy the experience.

**How to apply:** Offer the opportunity for choice whenever possible. Instead of putting an identical gift in every room, set up a special gifting station where participants can "shop" for their own gift based on style, size, color, etc. The same goes for activities: Give participants several options so they can spend their free time doing exactly what they want.

**Why it's important:** It doesn't matter how incredible your event is if your participants don't feel a personal connection. Giving them opportunities to choose encourages them to fully engage in the process. Choice honors the individual, which is a hallmark of a quality event.

On the other end of the spectrum, many participants experience what is called the **TYRANNY OF CHOICE**, which refers to the idea that people tend to get overwhelmed when they are offered too many options. To combat this pitfall, wise planners leverage **CHOICE ARCHITECTURE**, which is the idea that choices can be carefully selected and presented in a way that makes it easier and more satisfying for participants to make a

### Emotional Design of Events

As masters of crafting human experiences, planners have countless opportunities to observe and leverage behavioral economics. If you can truly understand the nuances of human behavior, you'll hold a significant advantage. As you plan your next incentive trip or meeting, try to incorporate some of the principles listed below.

**VIVIDNESS** refers to the idea that people tend to remember things more easily when they are highly graphic or dramatic. Something that is particularly stunning or striking makes for an experience that becomes deeply rooted with positive lasting effects.

**How to apply:** When you think through the aspects of an event, consider all possible senses. Meals shouldn't just taste good, they should look good. Décor shouldn't be filler; it should



decision. People often do better with a more limited and manageable set of choices.

**How to apply:** When planning for elective activities, focus on putting together a thoughtful list of a few choices with simple and straightforward descriptions. Even if your destination or venue offers dozens of activity options, it is better to pare it down to a few good options that fit your audience really well.

**Why it's important:** Elective activities should be inherently fun and easy — not stressful and time consuming! When faced with too many choices and too much detail, your participants will find themselves agonizing over all the options, resulting in a time suck and an increased risk that they will wish they had selected one of the other options instead.

**RE-CONSUMPTION** refers to the concept that it is possible for someone to relive an experience over and over whenever they are reminded of it. Each time the experience is remembered the same emotions and positive effects come into play and reinforce the person's original state of mind.

**How to apply:** Participants can experience re-consumption when they have a good reminder of the experience. Consider gifts (or even small trinkets) that are a direct reminder of the experience. The gifts could relate to the message of the meeting or the destination of a trip.

**Why it's important:** The success of any program is built on whether the audience successfully received a message. It's better yet if the message lives on long after the event is over. When

participants are able to mentally revisit the experience, you are maximizing the investment.

The **DOPAMINE EFFECT** is the result of a chemical reaction that produces a rush in the brain after something good happens. As human beings, once we experience this rewarding feeling we become motivated to experience it again.

**How to apply:** Broadly speaking, the dopamine effect can come into play nearly any time you provide a positive and exciting experience for your participants. To capitalize on this principle of behavioral economics, provide opportunities for sweeping views and thrilling excursions.

**Why it's important:** It's common knowledge that participants should enjoy their experience, but the dopamine effect actually can impact the psychology of participants. Once a participant experiences a rush in the brain, the positive memory is sealed with powerful motivation to achieve it again. The difference between a "nice" trip and a "wow" experience can have a huge impact on future performance and overall satisfaction with the program.

When armed with an understanding of behavioral economics, planners can maximize the impact of a meeting or event. If your goal is to increase effectiveness without increasing budget, you may want to consider reallocating your dollars. Getting better results doesn't always require more spending. The key is to spend in areas that will resonate with your inherently emotional audience.

C&IT



**Mary MacGregor**

is Corporate Vice President – Event Solutions for BI WORLDWIDE (BIW), responsible for all operating areas of the BIW Event Solutions Group including purchasing, design, delivery, group air, individual incentive travel, onsite operations, technology, communications and merchandise. She leads a team of more than 175 industry professionals who deliver memorable experiences and measurable results for their customers. [www.BIWORLDWIDE.com](http://www.BIWORLDWIDE.com), [info@BIWORLDWIDE.com](mailto:info@BIWORLDWIDE.com)



By Terri Woodin, CMP

## Successfully Navigating International Meetings

**P**lanning and delivering successful international meetings presents a variety of challenges and variables that corporate and association meeting planners do not encounter on the domestic front. Planner surveys reveal that international meetings don't just take more time to plan and execute, but require more follow-up after the hotel contract is signed, cost more than what was budgeted and require more onsite and destination support services. All that said, the demand for international meetings is on the rise, but clearly, planners are seeking new solutions to assure successful meetings, enhancing the attendee experience and value-based outcomes.

### Big Picture Planning

Before getting into the details of specific international destinations, hotel RFP distribution and budgeting, it is important to carefully evaluate the global landscape and potential yellow or red flags. This process can start with the PEST test (political, economic, social and technology). Of course, we just need to read the newspaper or watch the evening news to be reminded of the political unrest that negatively impacts many countries and high appeal destinations, or the global fallout from China's recent economic decline, or social conflicts and union labor disputes, which impacts services, logistics and costs.

There are many factors that come into play when evaluating and selecting destinations for consideration. In addition to understanding the past and current political, economic and related issues, it is important to evaluate the current airlift, access and preliminary costs from attendee departure cities, travel and visa requirements, and destination support services (custom brokers, transportation, translation services, technology, etc.). Other important factors include if your organization has offices or personnel in the area, MPI or other industry affiliation chapters in the region, local tourism bureau support options, and season and weather patterns over your preferred meeting dates.

### Going Global

When planning international meetings, there are a multitude of important details that must be incorporated into your strategy and action plan. In addition to understanding the many cultural, language and protocol considerations, hotel-

iers and suppliers often have different terminology for meeting and event support services, and each country will have policies around travel, visa and immunization requirements. Evaluating currency fluctuations and stability and tax implications in each country (and United States) is another part of the equation.

### Expand Hotel and Supplier Communications

Starting with the RFP process, in addition to your day-by-day agenda, meeting and event space, group food and beverage, and audio-visual and production support, it is important to assess hotel and municipal taxes, VAT tax and refund policy, hotel fees and surcharges, and what services are delivered by the hotel, or require outside suppliers. International hoteliers generally do charge meeting space rental, but offer meeting packages that include continental breakfast, breaks, lunch and basic AV. Add custom questions to your RFP that allow you to identify all line-item costs and create a preliminary budget by hotel and forecast variable costs.

### Plan and Think Before You Ink

Whether hotel chains or independents, international hotel contracts often have unrealistic performance obligations for the meeting organization. For domestic meetings, I prepare a custom hotel contract, ready for hotel signature, but for international meetings, I create a modified contract that addresses all performance clauses, mandatory taxes, hotel fees and surcharges (eliminate or reduce), force majeure, hotel support services and liability language. As in the U.S., this is a give-and-take process, with the ultimate goal of achieving measurable savings, mutual performance obligations and assuring contract risk reduction and cost containment measures.

### Six International Meeting Management Tips

1. Understand each country's political and economic environment, cultural issues, language considerations, currency stability and international protocol.
2. Create a strategic RFP, including standard and custom questions and identify all fixed and variable costs, meeting package components, support services and costs, technology resources and breakdown of all taxes.
3. Prepare a custom hotel contract and address all mutual



performance clauses, liability language, hotel fees and surcharges, hotel performance standards and risk mitigation measures.

4. Evaluate and create a preferred supplier network and preliminary costs for custom brokers (shipping and customs) DMC or PCO services and costs, technology support, etc.).
5. Review all government regulations, travel and visa policies, airlift and current costs from attendee gateway cities, tax implications, immunization requirements, and create a crisis management plan.
6. Identify destination and regional resources, including company satellite offices or personnel, convention and tourism bureaus, industry affiliations chapters

(MPI, SITE, etc.), global strategic partners and U.S. consulate or embassy.

### Conclusions

There is an umbrella of high-impact benefits to organizations, stakeholders and attendees when global meetings are well planned and executed, but success today requires a strategic plan. Post meeting, collaborate with key stakeholders and suppliers to evaluate results and outcomes, and use this valuable feedback to apply to future meetings. Yes, meetings are big investments, and when it comes to international meeting management, clearly the bar (and expectations) has been raised!

For a complimentary copy of Terri's SMM Action Plan for Success, contact her at [twoodin@meetingsites.net](mailto:twoodin@meetingsites.net). **C&IT**

“It is important to carefully evaluate the global landscape. ...Start with the PEST test (political, economic, social and technology).”



### Terri Woodin, CMP

is Senior Director of Global Meeting Services at Meeting Sites Resource (MSR) in Irvine, California. She has been with MSR since 2012 and is responsible for strategically partnering with MSR customers on all facets of global site research, custom hotel contract negotiations, meeting support services and Strategic Meetings Management (SMM) solutions. Terri is an industry veteran with 35 years in the hospitality industry with extensive experience in hotel operations, hotel sales and as a meeting planner. She currently serves as Secretary on the Rocky Mountain PCMA Board, on The Meeting Professional Advisory Board for MPI, on the APEX Standards Committee and on The School of Hospitality Business at Michigan State University Board of Directors.



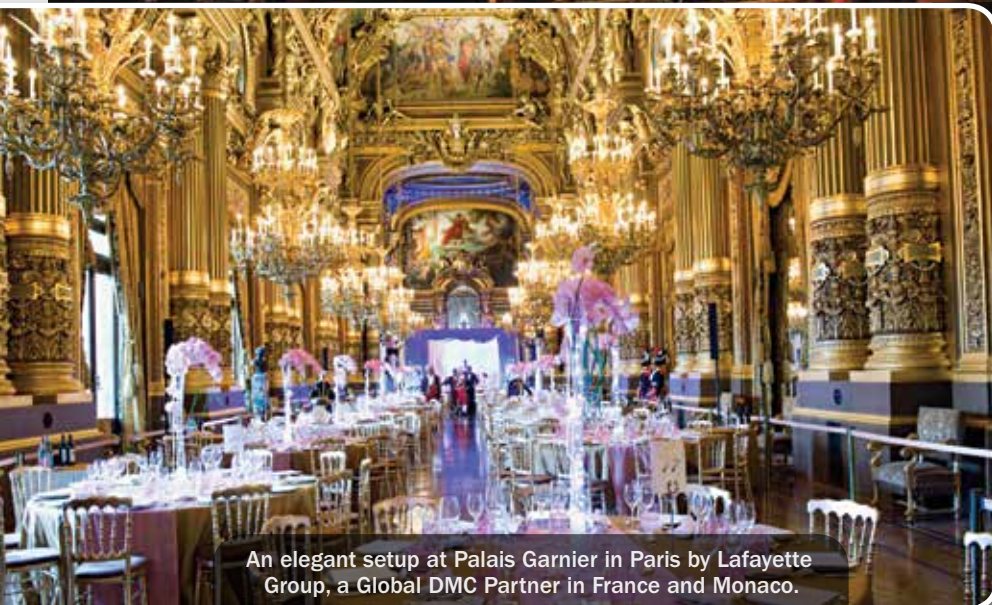
## Partnerships

# The DMC Difference

By Sara Churchville



AlliedPRA reserved 250 box seats for July 4th fireworks at the Hollywood Bowl as part of a seven-day client event.



An elegant setup at Palais Garnier in Paris by Lafayette Group, a Global DMC Partner in France and Monaco.

## Destination Management Companies Help Planners Escape DIY Disasters

**I** can do this myself for less” is often the rallying cry during cash-strapped times, but as destination management companies that are part of a larger alliance can attest, less can often lead to more headaches, wasted time and unfulfilled expectations.

“L.A. can be a broad, confusing market for outsiders,” says Annette Gregg, CMM, MBA, vice president, corporate West, for destination management company AlliedPRA. She recalls one international company — \$300,000 over budget thanks to the exchange rate — that

came to L.A. wanting a unique, seven-day experience for the attendees. The AlliedPRA Los Angeles team sprung into action: They secured access to a celebrity home, offered drinks on a balcony overlooking the Hollywood Hills, organized a private dinner on the back lot where

“Seinfeld” was filmed as well as one under the Space Shuttle Endeavor (“this resonated with the group, she says), provided access to members-only Magic Castle — a mansion (huge mansion with different magic acts going on throughout the house) that is the private clubhouse for the Academy of Magical Arts — and, for the pièce de résistance, found 250 box seats for the Hollywood Bowl July 4 fireworks. “Each one of those was an economical solution,” Gregg says. “Economical” for someone with a huge network of contacts honed over numerous years, absolutely. For a planner from overseas trying to create a nonstandard experience for a large group? Not so much.

“A local expert is almost like an orchestra leader, bringing all the instruments together, not playing instruments themselves,” says Gregg, who joined AlliedPRA in April. “Exclusive access to certain venues, or knowledge about a brand-new offering or venue that a planner never would have known about, create a uniquely local experience that gives them a true sense of the destination they’re in.”

Crafting an unforgettable attendee experience can be even more of a challenge when it requires more than just “buses, boats and balloons,” but the creation of a lasting monument to the group’s time on location.

### Helping to Do Good

When Germany-based medical equipment maker Dräger Medical approached Chris Lee, DMCP, CEO of Access Destination Services’ team, it was with a tall order: a CSR program that would leave a permanent impression on the community, even 10 years later, and that also would allow 500 attendees to participate at the same time. As always, the team went through a lengthy interview process to determine Dräger’s objectives; they discovered that the company’s CEO wanted a project that would benefit children.

Ultimately, Access found an orphanage in Arizona with a plot of land and

housing but no real play area. Together, all 500 Dräger attendees spent a day transforming a one-acre dirt lot into a play park with swing sets, a basketball court, 18,000 sf of grass complete with irrigation, a concrete walking path, planter boxes and planted flowers, and a refurbished skate park. Local contractors helped out some, but 90 percent of the work was done by attendees, says Lee, with some last-minute assistance from the kids themselves during recess. For the CSR project, Dräger won an award from Pharma Forum. The project was one that required a team that was truly on the ground, with ears to it, and indeed two of Access’ team members were raised in Arizona and instrumental in scouting. Access also was able to handle the risk management aspects of the project and to find reputable contractors.

### Destination Partners

Sometimes working with one DMC involves working with multiple partners in the destination, as when Terry Epton, CIS, CITE, DMCP, president of



Access Destination Services arranged a park-build CSR project in Arizona for Dräger Medical.

Hosts New Orleans, produced the opening event for the New Orleans CVB and Brand USA at IPW (formerly International Pow Wow). The million-dollar event took place in June at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans, an experience he describes as “atypical” in that it was a complete community effort.



*“A local expert is almost like an orchestra leader, bringing all the instruments together, not playing instruments themselves.”*

**Annette Gregg, CMM, MBA**  
Vice President, Corporate West  
AlliedPRA West  
San Diego, CA

Epton says, “It was complicated and multilayered, with north of 6,000 attendees.” Hosts New Orleans took on the coordination and production of the IPW Superdome experience. The team was tasked with showcasing “the brands that New Orleans stands for: first is our food, second is culture and music; following that, European heritage and architecture.” Hosts worked with Centerplate, which provided bar service and essential F&B setup, while the Hosts team handled the specialty aspects: “We had to pull together dozens of local restaurants and famous chefs in a place they don’t normally work,” he says.

The evening began with the top tier of VIP buyers on floats from Harry Connick Jr.’s Krewe of Orpheus with policemen on motorcycles and marching bands in a giant parade into the Superdome — the full Mardi Gras experience included buyers throwing branded beads from the floats and a kind of theater-in-the-round from which local entertainers performed. “We also had a nod to the international crowd, with vignettes of German, Brazilian, Caribbean and Venetian carnivals. It was a very well thought out and extraordinarily detailed event,” Epton says.

Lee, too, finds that working in concert with other locals can help bring off complicated events such as the one Access planned for Kawasaki in June 2015. The company wanted to celebrate its top



***“A true incentive is to provide an experience for an individual that they cannot buy at any price.”***



**Stuart J. Gardner**  
President  
Florida Meeting Services  
Fort Lauderdale, FL

“similar to the ‘Good Morning America’ setup” and offered 10-minute bike demonstrations every half hour for two hours. Once the baseball game ended, Lee estimates some 4,000 people had a gender, providing a great level of exposure for Kawasaki as well as an inimitable experience for the attendees. “We got

great reviews; even the San Diego police gave us thumbs up,” he says.

### Why Use a DMC?

“A true incentive is to provide an experience for an individual that they cannot buy at any price. They need to have the experience created by someone else,” says Stuart Gardner, president, Florida Meeting Services, a member of Global DMC Partners. Case in point: He once arranged to have 20 attendees dine in Stiltsville, a collection of wooden houses on stilts in Miami’s Biscayne Bay, where they arrived by a high-performance Cigarette boat.

But what of planners who aren’t looking for an “experience” per se? Jenelle Benoit, director, marketing and communications for Global Eagle Entertainment, which provides media and technology for inflight entertainment,



**Terry Epton, CIS, CITE, DMCP**  
President, Hosts New Orleans

***“Once the planner has done a site inspection, seen the options and met the people involved, it’s not about price but about what’s going to be the best fit for the brand.”***

permitting for four blocks for a private event, three blocks additionally for public,” Lee explains. To add to the challenge, on the only available evening, a Padres game was in play a mere two blocks away.

Working with the San Diego CVB, the mayor’s office and the Gaslamp Quarter Association (“to get through red tape”), the team decided on private demonstrations for the attendees as well as bleachers set up for the public in a gallery area

organizes incentives primarily for the software engineers and technical operators at her company. She finds she’s more likely to have to coax attendees out of their comfort zones than wow them. Still, for an event in Singapore planned for the fall, she intends to use a DMC for the first time.

“Since I’ve never been there, it is great that I can refer to Destination Asia (a member of Global DMC Partners) as my

partner in sourcing local staff, location scouting, transportation logistics, etc. Because they are the experts in the region, they save me time from researching reputations, quality and prices since they are able to work within my specified budget. Time management is the number-one benefit for using a DMC.”

Epton notes that a planner’s decision to use a DMC is “very high stakes; they’re placing their jobs and reputations in our hands.”

### DMCs Know All the Locals

“If you’re having a fais do-do (Cajun party), choosing the right caterer for that event is very different from a mansion on St. Charles Ave,” Epton says. The local CVB can suggest some options, but its mission is to showcase the destination. The DMC then finesses the ins and outs for a company’s brand image and reputation through the events.

Knowing who the best local suppliers are presupposes the inverse: knowing who to avoid, not just in general, but in the context of a specific meeting’s objectives. “In the last 10 years, we’ve had the same suppliers,” says Gardner. “It took 21 years to get to that point, because suppliers didn’t understand our needs. It’s a constant exercise in reaffirming our relationship with suppliers or moving on if those relationships pass on for one reason or another. We’re only as good as our worst supplier, so constant communication is everything. We have to let them know that we do this level of meeting rather than this level.”

Access, AlliedPRA, Global DMC Partners and Hosts Global all vet their suppliers — and their partners. “We put a very high premium on being customer-centric,” says Epton, whose DMC is a member of Hosts Global Alliance of 60 DMC members doing business in hundreds of destinations. “It’s not so much about driving revenue as it is about upholding reputation and being the standard bearers.”

Says Catherine Chaulet, president, Global DMC Partners (GDP), a consortium of 60 DMCs who represent more than 100 destinations around the world: “We select our DMCs on how strongly po-



Credits: The Destination Manager, a Global DMC Partner



Western- and circus-themed events at The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess by The Destination Manager, a Global DMC Partner.

sitioned they are in their market. Many DMCs want to be part of GDP, only a few are chosen. We always start with client feedback. They know best and are critical to our decisions. We do an in-depth due diligence of factors that are critical to our clients, such as the DMC’s ability to provide unique experiences, creativity, reputation with clients and vendors, crisis management plans, financials, in-

as well as in-depth DMC reporting, and contingency planning across multiple programs and markets.”

For Lee, it’s about a continuing conversation that winnows down to the client’s ultimate objectives. He asks: How would you define success? Gregg wants clients to “feel they have a one-stop shop that will own the project to the end.”

Since in the end, planners may and

***“Trying to go direct and plan all details... of a successful meeting is like remodeling your house yourself: It sounds like a wonderful idea...then halfway through the project you’re fighting with your partner, it costs twice as much, and it looks nothing like you wanted.”***



**Chris Lee, DMCP, CEO**  
Access Destination Services, San Diego, CA

surance levels, number of years in the industry and their five-year plan.”

### DMCs Know Their Audience

Understanding what a client needs over the long-term is one of the elements that sets Global DMC Partners apart. “We provide much more than just lead generation and access to DMCs,” Chaulet says. “We have a deep understanding of the client’s business model and their programs. Over the years, we have become their strategic solution by assisting them beyond just one program. We help clients by giving them access to the largest network of DMCs worldwide

do choose a DMC based — all things being equal — on how the DMC rep comes across (Does he seem like he’s got it together? Does she answer questions frankly? Is this someone my team would enjoy working with for months on end?), all alliance members take hiring and training seriously.

Says Epton, “This business is not something that you automatically know how to do well; it has easy entry, but to be good at it takes experience. We put a great emphasis on finding good people and keeping them, never accepting mediocre people into our company.”

Gregg emphasizes continuous qual-

ity assurance and training: poring over client evaluations with her team, developing their skills to a rigorous standard, offering weekly training webinars. When hiring, she looks for a developable skill set, which she views as more important than specific past DMC experience.

Chaulet’s mission at GDP is to build an organization that addresses the ever-demanding and ever-changing needs

of meeting planners when it comes to creativity, safety and spend management. GDP achieves this through collaboration with their DMC members and client advisory boards, ensuring they are meeting as often as possible to share best business practices and new trends in order to constantly set the

bar higher in the event industry. New partnerships — such as GDP’s partnership with Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI) and SongDivision, an experiential music agency — also have formed as a result of this collaboration and allowed GDP to expand their unique offering to clients.

### DMCs Prepare for the Worst

“We have an emergency plan for anything from hurricanes to electrical storms,” says Gardner, who as a Florida specialist has experienced such emergencies from time to time. Now more than ever, the best DMCs are crisis management specialists: They know where the nearest local hospital is, what the host hotel’s preparedness plan is and



*“Through their creativity, local relationships and contingency plans, DMCs provide irreplaceable cost efficiencies and savings to planners.”*

**Catherine Chaulet**, President  
Global DMC Partners, Washington, DC



who can step in if the planner herself becomes indisposed, and they verify attendees' emergency contacts and cooperate closely with local law enforcement and security personnel.

#### DMCs Get Volume Discounts

“We will do 100 to 125 groups a year, half in Orlando,” says Gardner. “There’s considerable buying power in that. It allows us to provide concessions to the end user, and they get us as a security blanket — the ice cubes are frozen, the coffee is hot. You get our presence: For about the exact same money as you would do on your own, we do it.” Lee expresses the same thought: “Even with our fee, the client comes in for same price as clients pay if they go direct.”

#### Price vs. Value

And there it is, the mutual sticking point for DMCs and their clients: the price. “Planners are under pressure to find the lowest price,” says Gregg. “What I learned over time is it’s not always about price.” Having worked as a corporate planner with a financial firm, as a third-party planner who used DMCs,

and as a CVB manager, she can see the industry from multiple perspectives. “To sacrifice based on price can be penny wise and pound foolish if going for the lowest price can hurt our participants’ experience.” She recommends planners be transparent about their budget at the outset, which saves everyone’s time and avoids dissatisfaction.

Gregg finds that focusing on the price per attendee rather than the overall amount can put the overall spend into perspective for clients. Epton elaborates on this idea: “Once the planner has done a site inspection, seen the options and met the people involved, it’s not about price but about what’s going to be the best fit for the brand. If you ask, ‘Would you risk your company’s image to save \$25 per person?’ most all would say no.”

And Chaulet finds that among member DMCs, an ever-present issue is the client’s perception that DMCs are padding the bill — often putting the onus on the DMC to “prove” the pricing is real. “In a very competitive landscape one of our goals is to showcase the value that DMCs bring versus just the cost. In reality, through their creativity, local relationships and contingency plans, DMCs provide irreplaceable cost efficiencies and savings to planners,” she concludes.

Benoit, a first-time DMC client, echoes this sentiment: “Education on what a DMC has to offer and their pricing structures were my biggest hurdles, and I think spending more time on educating new and potential clients would make my life much easier.”

Addressing the general feeling

among DMCs about the impression of overcharging as a business model, Epton notes: “Our company was founded in 1958. If we were just middlemen buying low and selling high, we wouldn’t be in business today.” His solution? “More exclusive relationships with customers would make us much more efficient, and those efficiencies would result in better value for the customer. When we’re the official supplier, the customer can get and deserves a much better deal from us.”

Chaulet indicates, “We facilitate and foster best-practice sharing not just within our network of DMCs, but also with our clients. One of our main goals is to be a platform and knowledge of resources within the event industry.”

GDP is constantly putting solutions in place to give corporations and third parties better visibility of their DMC spend and help them manage it. “Larger corporations have very little idea what their true spend is. The way meetings and events are managed in companies tends to be very fragmented with multiple people in charge of events. Most of the spend is neither consolidated nor centralized making CFOs and procurement very nervous with meeting and event spend,” Chaulet says.

“Ultimately, a planner struggling with pressure from her company on expenses should have enough resources and information to confidently say, ‘This is the budget, this is the spend, that is what I’ve been able to save the company.’ This is a core offering of GDP, helping companies get a strong hold of this spend and help them better manage it.”

Lee advises planners that the DIY approach can ultimately cost more, not just in missed opportunities and less than stellar reviews, but in actual dollars. He says, “Recognize that trying to go direct and plan all details and elements of a successful meeting or incentive is like remodeling your house yourself: It sounds like a wonderful idea — you’re going to save money, go to Home Depot or Lowe’s, watch videos — then halfway through the project you’re fighting with your partner, it costs twice as much, and it looks nothing like you wanted.” **C&IT**

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## Partnerships

The HGA Client Advisory Board members and staff who met in Miami in June included (l to r) Jeff Broudy, Denise Marie Germano, Christi Heacox, Patti Palacios, Marty MacKay, Stuart Ruff, Lisa Sykes and Terry Epton.



Credits both pages: Specialty Imaging

# Meeting Trends From the Destination Experts

## HGA Global Forum Board Sets the Tone

**H**osts Global Alliance (HGA), is a worldwide consortium of select Destination Management Companies. HGA represents more than 50 Destination Management Companies, servicing more than 300 locations.

The Hosts Global Alliance Client Advisory Board provided enlightening answers to *Corporate & Incentive Travel* magazine's questions after their meeting that followed the 4th Annual HGA Global Forum at Turnberry Isle in July. The answers reflect a consensus of the board, which is comprised of the following individuals, many of whom contributed to the edited answers.

- Marty MacKay, DMCP, president of Hosts Global Alliance
- Terry Epton, CIS, CITE, DMCP, president of Hosts New Orleans
- Jeff Broudy, president of United Incentives Inc.
- Kara Leodler, manager of confer-

ence and travel, Kansas City Life Insurance Company

- Kathrine Faubert, senior manager, event services, Deloitte Canada
- Christi Heacox, manager solutions, Fedex Services
- Christina Lofton, CMP, manager, Meetings & Incentives Worldwide Inc.
- Patti Palacios, president and CEO, GlobauxSource
- Stuart Ruff-Lyon, CMP, DES, vice president, events and education, Risk and Insurance Management Society Inc. (RIMS)
- Lisa Sykes, CMP, director of meeting services for DRI – The Voice of the Defense Bar.

**Q How has technology most changed the meetings industry?**

**A** We can look at technology in many different ways. There are actual software programs that have allowed businesses to work more efficiently and streamline

work product, but also many other technology disruptors that have occurred in the marketplace. The speed and the tools that come with it also have reduced the planning window for meetings, as registrations and housing lists can be produced much faster and more efficiently, which shortens the entire planning window. Other disruptors include the speed at which business is now expected to be done and the personalization that comes with that. But this also comes with risk. How can you maintain the speed desired by clients and creativity? In addition, technology brings security risks that need to be managed on the cyber side. The group overall saw the changes as both good and bad — a double-edged sword if you will.

**Q How important are certifications (such as the DMCP) in your industry? Do you require your staff to continue their education?**

**A** While certifications are good, and they certainly show that employees are invested in their growth and development in the industry, the most important aspect is that overall education is most important — in whatever form it takes. All companies, clients and DMCs stressed the need for continuing education as being key to growing and staying on top of trends. This can come in the form of attending shows and being involved in associations such as PMCA, MPI, SITE, etc. We see this as targeted learning, and that the designation is not as important as the ongoing participation. It was noted that the DMCP was an important differentiator, showing the acceptance of both a sizable body of knowledge and best practices, as defined by the association of Destination Management Executives International (ADMEI), and that the DMCP was a single step in a detailed process of becoming accredited by ADMEI, the only



Christina Crue, a crisis management specialist, addressed the Forum.

body that speaks for the regulation of destination management globally.

**Q What are some of the top entertainment and event trends?**

**A** The event trends that we are seeing now all involve creating experiences for attendees. Whether they be fitting events (sunglasses, blue jean bars) or acrobatics, attendees want to be part of something interactive. This also includes the idea of “adults having fun” and the throwback to providing games like foosball, pool, Ping-Pong, video games, etc., which gives them permission to enjoy something they might not ordinarily be comfortable doing. Anything interactive is hot. For instance at an event in New Orleans we recently provided a VIP area

where we had hot shaves and haircuts for men and a lash bar and makeup touchups for women. Also, the use of cover bands and interactive DJs can save over top-name entertainment.

**Q What is an example of one of your most successful themed events.**

**A** A vintage trend reminiscent of the 1920s Gatsby Era is currently successful: Everything old is new again, such as Speakeasys, Moulin Rouge and “Fedoras, Fringe and Fitzgerald!” Props are being replaced with attention to table décor, variations in seating design, all with a greater emphasis on mixed furniture and lighting effects.

**Q What tips can you give planners on the best ways to engage audiences for memorable experiences?**

**A** Create an experience! That was the overwhelming answer. Whether it is in the form of a digital game or even a Pokémon Go game. You need to engage through an experience. If you can relate that engagement back to the company, letting clients or attendees tell a story — that is even more effective.

**Q How have client relationships and working with meeting planners evolved?**

**A** All agreed that the key to the relationship was communication. We are seeing more transparent discussions on acknowledgment of communication, managing expectations on what can be delivered and how quickly, and with a proactive approach to timelines.

**Q According to MPI's Meetings Outlook, 2016 Spring Edition, meetings costs are outpacing budgets. How do planners cope with this reduction in buying power?**

**A** Meeting planners are very resourceful, and the key is to work with resourceful partners. You need to understand the buying cycle, and if that means planning further out to get better prices, then you need to communicate that to your stakeholders. You can leverage your spend by, for example, booking multiple pieces of business at the same property to negotiate a better rate. And, in many cases, creating experiences for your clients can be less expensive than the traditional ballroom décor.



The iPad challenge at the Forum is an example of effective attendee engagement.

ROI is expected and rewarded. This was highlighted in the client advisory board meeting when we discussed the decision Turnberry Isle made to become the headquarter property for the HGA Global Forum. Three out of the five clients present in this meeting indicated that they had approached and were speaking to Turnberry about new group bookings. In addition, one of our guest speakers was booking future programs onsite with planners that were so impressed by both his content and delivery.

**Q What are the major concerns for planners and what encouraging signs do you see ahead for the U.S. and global meetings industry?**

**A** While many planners are making location decisions regarding the risk of a location, as some destinations do inherently have greater risks or perceived risks than others, the consensus was that no one is too concerned about traveling to most places nowadays. Planners have accepted that anything can happen anywhere, which is why is it so important to embrace emergency preparedness and make sure risk management is a fundamental process in planning.

**Q How have you changed your approach to risk management in the face of increasing threats of terrorism?**

**A** We all feel that heightened security will become the norm and the expectation, and talking about the risk and then preparing for any emergency will become a routine part of the planning process. Hosts Client Advisory Board members indicated that they anticipate tighter security with regard to access to their events in hotels, convention centers and other venues, similar to how public sporting events are now treated.



# 4th Annual HGA Global Forum

## 230 Industry Pros Representing More Than 300 Destinations Worldwide Participated



Luncheon welcoming new members.

Credits both pages: Specialty Imaging



HGA President Marty MacKay.



MGM's Mike Dominquez.



Welcome reception.



Icebreaker.



White party at Nikki Beach.



One-on-one session.

**H**osts Global Alliance (HGA) held its 4th Annual HGA Global Forum at Turnberry Isle Miami in July. The Global Forum brings attendees together for industry-focused educational sessions and local offsite activities. The 230 industry professionals attending the Hosts Global Forum included both HGA clients and members representing more than 300 destinations worldwide.

Participants traveled from North, Central and South America, the Caribbean, Asia and Europe to collaborate on industry challenges and trends, learn about new destinations, meet one-on-one about business opportunities, and to enjoy the local offerings of South Florida.

Cream of the Crop Events, a Hosts Global Alliance Member, worked hand in hand with the HGA team to organize a full range of activities highlighting the history, arts and culture that South Florida offers incentive, leisure and corporate groups. The venues, activities and locations showcased the vibrant hospitality of this iconic beach and golf paradise.

### Education Is Key

Educational content focused on emergency preparedness including special issues facing the hospitality industry. Other sessions included the latest trends in the hotel industry and how issues such as room piracy, cyber security, meetings advocacy, and health and wellness can affect meetings and incentives business.

Another session zeroed in on the use of alternative accommodations such as Airbnb, and a panel made up of members from the event management team of South by Southwest (SXSW) and Austin city officials discussed the design and execution of mega events.

In addition, attendees received continuing education (CE) credit for the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) credential.

### A Taste of Local Entertainment

There was entertainment throughout the HGA Global Forum with a variety of receptions and performances starting with the Taste of Turnberry welcome reception at the host hotel, Turnberry Isle Miami.

The session on how to repurpose centerpieces culminated in dozens of recycled centerpieces being delivered by attendees to the local Ronald McDonald House. Participant Michael Fried, owner of San Francisco-based

## Teambuilding Programs Make a Positive Impact in Communities

Hosts Global Alliance sponsored a remarkable CSR activity during its 4th Annual HGA Global Forum.

HGA and Best Corporate Events supported Feeding Children Everywhere (FCE) by packing more than 25,000 healthful meals for food pantries. The activity included Global Forum attendees, consisting of both HGA clients and DMC Members.

Feeding Children Everywhere's mission is to bring people together as an empowered group to make a difference for hungry children and families. HGA, which firmly believes in creating a difference in the community, says they discovered the perfect opportunity to support a well-respected charity and demonstrate their H Factor, too.

HGA President Marty MacKay defined The H Factor as "that extra something special in all that we do and for HGA it doesn't stop at supporting our clients, but also involves supporting our industry, each other and our communities.

"Partnering with FCE was the ideal way to bring together our HGA clients and DMC Members to be Heroes for our host community of South Florida," she says.



Participants gave back to the community by packing 25,000 meals for FCE.

### Competitive Spirit

Attendees were first brought together for the iPad challenge, where competitiveness ensued and carried over into the CSR activity as teams battled to finish first.

Experient National Account Manager Diane Steele, CMP, liked the competitive spirit of the teambuilding. "They did a really good job of having fun and being very competitive at the same time. Also, I loved the give-back. It made me feel like I was here for a purpose. I feel very lucky to be a part of this," she says.

Global Forum attendees packed meals bound for South Florida and for the African nation of Burundi. Through FCE's cooperation with the Seed Sowers of Faith, the meals will be distributed to local food pantries in the Fort Lauderdale and Miami area, while Burundi Christian Ministries will deliver to children and families in need in the East African country.

Andy Gladstone, DMCP, owner of Show Me Arizona, a Hosts Global Alliance member, says, "The teambuilding event by Best Corporate Events was outrageous. They immediately bonded strangers together and had us use technology, creativity and imagination to compete against each other. And boy, did we compete! In the second part of the event, we crossed through the curtains and found an assembly line of food products waiting for us to package and ship off. That, too, was outrageous with fierce competition among our newfound friends."







Credit: Specialty Imaging

HGA President Marty MacKay (l) and HGA CEO Jennifer Patino (r) award Robyn Bass, president of Nashville's Maple Ridge Events, with the DMC of the Year Award.

Michael J. Fried Travel Services, said, "What a wonderful idea to take something so beautiful as flowers and give them a second life. Reincarnation."

Oceanfront landmark Nikki Beach played host to the Miami Nights White Party where guests sporting chic white attire were treated to the food and flair that Miami is known for, and festivities continued the next evening on the patio at the Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort for a Jimmy Buffett-themed

evening of food, fun and entertainment overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.

#### Award Winners Honored

HGA proudly announced the winners of the annual Hosts Honors Awards given to those DMC members who exceed expectations in specific categories. This year's recipients include:

- Critic's Choice Hosts Honors Award: Hosts New Orleans, a Hosts Global Alliance Member

- Branding Hosts Honors Award: Hadler DMC Scandinavia, a Hosts Global Alliance Member
- H Factor Leadership Hosts Honors Award: Stephen Lazar, Key Events, a Hosts Global Alliance Member
- DMC of the Year 2015–2016 Hosts Honors Award: Maple Ridge Events, a Hosts Global Alliance Member

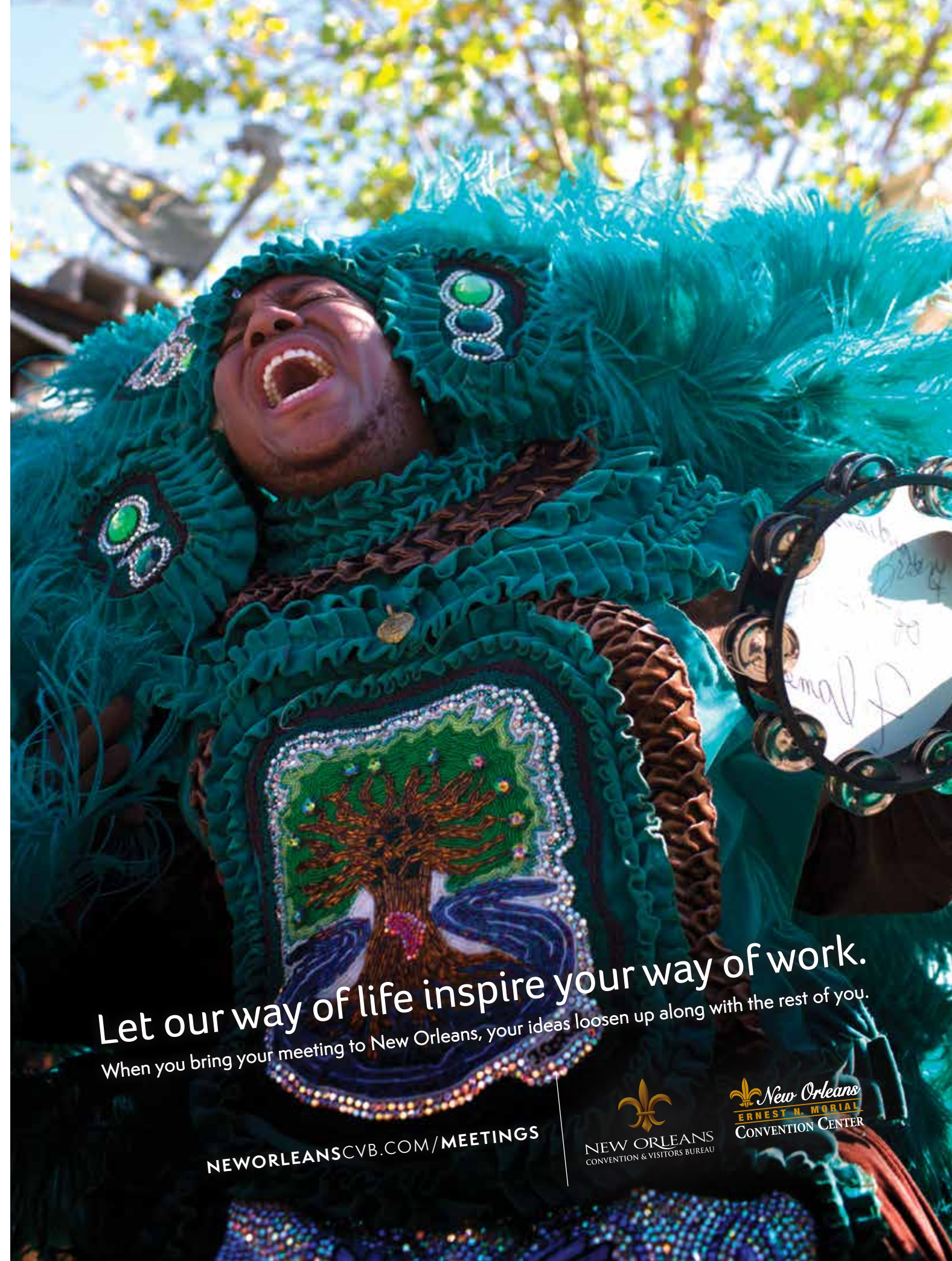
Hosts Global Alliance President Marty MacKay stated, "Our HGA members incorporate the H Factor into everything we do; it's that extra something special we bring to the table. This year's Global Forum is no exception. We put our Heart into creating a memorable experience for all attendees with engaging educational sessions and hip activities, honoring those HGA DMC members that truly exemplify our principles of excellence, and showcased our hospitality in this tropical paradise of South Florida."

Next year's Host Global Forum will be held in New Orleans. **C&IT**



Final night at Margaritaville Hollywood Beach.

Credit: Specialty Imaging



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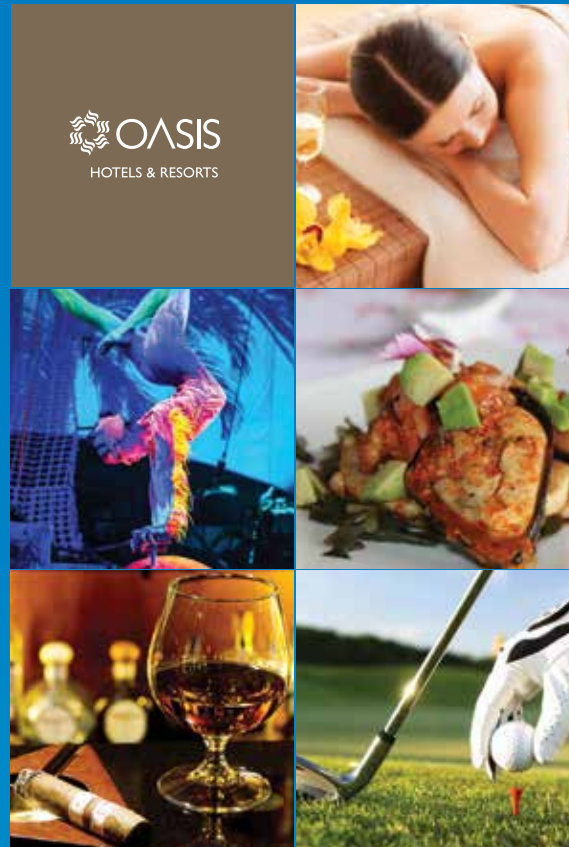
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### French Lick Resort

French Lick, IN

### The Greenbrier

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### Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa

Santa Ana Pueblo, NM

### Innisbrook Resort, a Salamander

### Golf & Spa Resort

Palm Harbor, FL

### The La Cantera Hill Country Resort

San Antonio, TX

### La Quinta Resort & Club

La Quinta, CA

### The Lodge at Torrey Pines

La Jolla, CA

### Loews Ventana Canyon Resort

Tucson, AZ

### Nemacolin Woodlands Resort

Farmington, PA

### Ojai Valley Inn & Spa

Ojai, CA

### The Omni Homestead Resort

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### The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel

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### The Sanctuary at Kiawah Island Golf Resort

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### Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa

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### Streamsong Resort

Streamsong, FL

### Trump National Doral Miami

Miami, FL

### Turnberry Isle Miami

Aventura, FL

### The Westin Mission Hills Resort & Spa

Rancho Mirage, CA

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### Wynn Las Vegas

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This, our 22nd annual Greens of Distinction Awards special section, recognizes the leaders who have demonstrated their excellence in designing and maintaining golf resorts that planners can count on. Consider these award-winning properties for your next golf program.





# The Broadmoor

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Nestled into the scenic foothills of Colorado Springs, Colorado, The Broadmoor is the longest-running consecutive winner of both the AAA Five Diamond and *Forbes Travel Guide* Five Star awards.

Since first opening in 1918, The Broadmoor has provided an incomparable Colorado experience to groups of all sizes and types, gaining a reputation as “the most unique resort in the world.”

Here, in a setting of remarkable natural beauty, guests can enjoy all of the amenities and activities one would expect from a world-class property; from its *Forbes Travel Guide* Five Star spa, to its superlative dining options, which include the only Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond restaurant in Colorado, Penrose Room.

Also available are six tennis courts, indoor/outdoor pools, distinctive retail shops and three championship golf courses.

## Unique Colorado Experiences

But what makes The Broadmoor such a one-of-a-kind experience are the breadth and diversity of uniquely Colorado experiences available to guests. Here, guests can go exploring on horseback or mountain bike, sample the ancient sport of falconry, hike the scenic Colorado mountains, learn the skill of flyfishing from an expert,



or take a thrilling zip-line adventure through a scenic canyon.

## Three Legendary Golf Courses

Presidents, celebrities, athletes and some of the greatest names in golf have all played at The Broadmoor. Consistently ranked among the best in the world, the three distinctive courses have challenged them all.

### The East Course

The Broadmoor's East Course is known for its wide, tree-lined fairways and expansive greens. With its challenging terrain and amazing mountain vistas, the East Course is ranked among the best golf courses in the country. Most recently, the famous course served as the host to the 2008 U.S. Senior Open and the 2011 U.S.

Women's Open Championship. In 2018, the East Course will celebrate The Broadmoor's centennial by once again welcoming the U.S. Senior Open.

### The West Course

At an altitude of 6,400 feet, The Broadmoor's West Course features rolling fairways, multilevel greens and demanding hazards, with more dog-legs and steeply angled greens than the East Course. Breathtaking views of both the mountains and city of Colorado Springs are available from the West Course, which was the host site of the 1998 PGA Cup Matches.

### The Mountain Course

The Mountain Course was originally designed by Arnold Palmer. It was redesigned in 2006 by Nicklaus Design (Jack Nicklaus won his first national title and first major championship, the 1959 U.S. Amateur Championship, on the links at The Broadmoor). Wonderfully scenic, the Mountain Course features wide, forgiving fairways and large greens with beautiful mountain vistas, ideal for a range of skill levels and handicaps.

No matter what course you play — or other Colorado activities your group chooses to pursue — you'll find The Broadmoor to be a one-of-a-kind venue, as well as an unforgettable experience.

C&IT



## Facts and Features:

- Guest Rooms/Suites: 784
- Meeting Rooms: 62
- Meeting Space: 185,000 sf
- Amenities: The Broadmoor Wilderness Experience offers distinctive, one-of-a-kind Colorado venues and activities in an all-inclusive Colorado experience: The Ranch at Emerald Valley, Cloud Camp and The Broadmoor Fishing Camp.

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Far from Florida's crowded beach and theme park resorts, this iconic destination has all of the ingredients to create a memorable group experience.

## Award-Winning Golf

Opened in January 2013, Streamsong Red, designed by Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw, and Streamsong Blue, designed by Renaissance Golf Design (Tom Doak), have ranked on some of golf's most prestigious lists including *Golf* magazine's "Top 100 Courses in the U.S." and *Golfweek*'s "Best Resort Courses." Designed to be walked, Streamsong Red and Streamsong Blue can host small, intimate groups as well as those of up to 288 players for tournaments, events and outings with the support of its PGA-certified staff.

In 2017, Streamsong will add a



third golf course, Streamsong Black, designed by Gil Hanse. Streamsong Black will feature abundant sand — the common denominator for the world's greatest golf courses — rolling elevation changes, native grasses and stunning views of ridges and the surrounding landscape.

But Streamsong is about much more than golf. From an intimate executive retreat to a grand international gathering, Streamsong is a place to accomplish things of value and return renewed. The resort offers an inspirational, distraction-free environment with 25,000 sf of dedicated meeting space. Thirteen large and small meeting rooms can accommodate 10 to 500 in complete comfort and privacy. General session and breakout rooms are conveniently clustered for effective program flow.

Set on 16,000 acres, Streamsong invites groups to explore the outdoors via guided bass fishing expeditions, sporting clays and a nature trail. Guest favorites for relaxation and rejuvenation include a lakeside infinity-edge pool and the unique grotto-style AcquaPietra Spa. Five distinct dining options include P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>, Restaurant Fifty-Nine, Fragmentary Blue, SottoTerra and Hemy's. The resort's outdoor venues are unlike any other — from the 2,000-sf rooftop terrace to a breezeway leading to the lakeside infinity pool to lawn spaces surrounded by the beauty of natural Florida.

Highlighted by stone, wood and glass, Streamsong's Lodge enables groups to take full advantage of freshwater views, Florida breezes and open vistas that accentuate sunrises and sunsets on the broad land-based horizon.

Modern, sophisticated and meticulous in detail, Streamsong offers 228 spacious guest rooms and suites thoughtfully situated on five levels and featuring floor-to-ceiling glass with custom louvers and striking sunrise or sunset lake views that extend to the natural Florida horizon. Rich linens, plush robes and boutique amenities throughout ensure no element of your stay is overlooked. **C&IT**



## Top Selling Points:

- Guest Rooms: 228
- Meeting Rooms: 13
- Meeting Space: 25,000 sf indoor; 40,000 sf outdoor
- Special Services and Amenities: Golf, guided bass fishing, sporting clays, archery, fitness center, lakeside pool, tennis, hiking trails, AcquaPietra Spa and more.

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# Sporting Venues

How Stadiums, Ball Parks and Other Fan Favorites Can Give Events a Winning Edge

By Mark Rowh

America loves sports. From the NFL to the local minor league baseball team, sporting events of all types attract incredible numbers of fans. At the same time, the stadiums and other facilities they occupy also can serve as meeting venues. In what seems to be a growing trend, operators of sports venues have leveraged their investments by making facilities available for meetings, opening up new possibilities for planners.

Why consider a sports venue? For many, a major appeal is the aura surrounding a facility whose primary function is hosting sporting events. Even in the off-season or when the home team is out of town, fans from all walks of life enjoy basking in an area where athletes have made their impact on sports history. And those who care less deeply about sports may still appreciate a break from traditional meeting sites.

These facilities also may bring logistical advantages. They're often located close to hotels, restaurants and other attractions, and parking is likely to be a non-issue.





*“Clients like to offer their attendees opportunities to see well-known sporting venues in more intimate settings with behind-the-scenes offerings.”*

**Shannon Gardner**, DMCP, President  
Accent Indy, a DMC Network Company



Certainly there are tradeoffs. Some attendees may prefer meeting rooms in the same hotel where they are staying, and staffing to support events may be limited compared to some alternatives. But when it comes to a change of pace, a sports venue can bring life to any meeting.

### Hall of Fame Appeal

The NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte, North Carolina, provides a location where guests can soak up the history of one of the country's most popular pastimes. Whether this means attending a reception surrounded by NASCAR memorabilia or dining next to a car once driven by a racing legend, participants can enjoy a meeting experience that is far from the ordinary.

For planners, the range of options is a plus. The facilities accommodate various-sized groups ranging from 10 to 2,400 people.

A national sales coordinator for a leading consumer goods company coordinated a meeting at this location, and she says it provides a great alternative to more traditional settings.

“When bringing in clients, this type of venue allows the organization to show them a piece of your community,” she says. She notes that participants have enjoyed getting an inside look at NASCAR as an industry and the popularity it enjoys in the region, as well as some history of the sport.

“You don’t have to be fans of the specific sport,” she says. “It’s still interesting to get a different look inside the sport than the average person.”

She adds that the environment allowed for interactive activities and offered a refreshing atmosphere.

“It was something different than hav-

ing a reception or dinner in a closed, stuffy banquet room,” she says.

One convenience was that because there were onsite activities, it wasn’t necessary to shuttle the group around. And the level of cooperation was outstanding.

“The onsite staff was amazing in helping us put together our event,” she says. “We would use this location again.”

Facilities include the Great Hall, a large open area with a flexible floor plan set against the backdrop of the famous Glory Road. It can accommodate from 380 to 650 people depending on the nature of the event. A huge 24-by-14-foot video board can be used to play a video or showcase graphics.

A smaller option, the Legends Room, accommodates up to 90 people (48 in a classroom format), while the Hall of Honor, where inductees are enshrined, handles 50 for a plated meal or 80 for a reception.

Even non-racing fans may be impressed by a reception in the areas dubbed Race Week and Heritage Speedway. Up to 250 attendees have access to interactive exhibits and can even try their skills in racing simulator cars. For outdoor events, a 32,000-sf patio is available.

### Famed Stadiums

Around the country, stadiums designed for football or other sports also double as meeting centers. In Indianapolis, Lucas Oil Stadium, home of the NFL’s Indianapolis Colts and the site of the 2012 Super Bowl, offers a variety of meeting options.

“Clients like to offer their attendees opportunities to see well-known sport-

ing venues in more intimate settings with behind-the-scenes offerings,” says Shannon Gardner, DMCP, president of Accent Indy, a DMC Network Company. She frequently holds events at Lucas Oil Stadium for attendees varying from upper management to top customers.

“Not only is it conveniently located within walking distance to most convention hotels in downtown Indy, but its notoriety is a huge draw,” she says. “Guests love being able to say, I was there!”

Gardner points out that an advantage of stadiums such as Lucas is the combination of size and flexibility.

“Its size and layout allow for groups of all sizes to utilize the space,” she says. “You can have an event with a hundred or a thousand people and the experience is just as impactful.”

She says her experience has shown that attendees often view their meeting time as something worth remembering.

“Seeing this giant, state-of-the-art facility right in the heart of downtown Indy is impressive for attendees,” she says. “Knowing all the events that take place, including all the famous players that have broken records there, makes it even more special to attendees.”

She adds that a conference participant who in the future is sitting on the



Checkered-flag tablecloths adorn a Great Hall banquet setup at the NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte.

couch watching “Monday Night Football” or an NCAA tournament can identify with the location. “It certainly creates great memories and hopefully associates a positive experience with that particular meeting,” Gardner says.

The stadium has 12 meeting rooms along with two exhibit halls, the field it-

self, and adjacent party areas. With a state-of-the-art retractable roof, the stadium features views of the city’s skyline along with plenty of meeting space. Meeting rooms range from 780 to 1,400 sf. Counting the field and exhibit halls, total space approximates 183,000 sf.

Connected to the Indiana Convention Center by an enclosed pedestrian corridor, the facility includes the 30,000-sf

Lucas Oil Plaza along with club lounges and suites. A plus for planners is that more than half of the city’s 7,100 hotel rooms are within blocks of the stadium.

While newer venues are usually more desirable, older options also have much to recommend. That’s the case at Green Bay’s Lambeau Field, home of the NFL’s Packers, where the term “historic” is no exaggeration. What it lacks in glitz, the facility offers in tradition as one of the most recognizable venues in sports.

Facilities include the Legends Club Room, with more than 6,800 sf of space that accommodates up to 800 people. Smaller rooms of 1,600 to 1,800 sf, named after football legends such as Johnny “Blood” McNally, Willie Davis, Paul Hornung and Bart Starr, serve groups of 40 to 120. A balcony area and “MVP” boxes also are available, along with lounges and a party deck. The atrium floor encompasses nearly 40,000 sf.

### Sporting Cities

In cities with multiple sports franchises, the choices available to planners may include two or more big-time sports options. In Miami, for example, both the football and baseball stadiums offer space to corporate groups.

The former Sun Life Stadium, home of the NFL’s Miami Dolphins, has undergone a major renovation scheduled for completion by the end of the preseason in September. (There was no title sponsor for the stadium as of press time.) The venue has several meeting rooms suitable for smaller groups, accommodating from 30 to 50 attendees.

And Marlins Park, home of Major League Baseball’s Miami Marlins, offers



Marlins Park, home of MLB’s Miami Marlins, accommodates large-scale events on the field and smaller groups in a variety of other venues within the stadium.

meeting spaces that include a conference room for 75 to 125, the Dugout Club with space for 50 to 100 and Lexus Legends with room for up to 700. For large-scale events, a retractable roof allows flexibility for sun or rain, and there is onsite parking for up to 5,700 cars.

To focus on teambuilding or simply add fun, extra features include corporate batting practice sessions, “run the bases” experiences, customized Marlins souvenirs, ballpark photo sessions, fireworks and pool parties.

Similarly, Paul Brown Stadium in Cincinnati also offers an attractive option. Along with the top-level sports environment, visitors enjoy the appeal of an Ohio River setting within walking distance of most downtown hotels.

For business meetings, stadium facilities range from a conference room for 25 to larger areas accommodating up to 1,000 people. Four rooms consist of balconied spaces overlooking club lounges and ranging in size from 1,700 to 4,700 sf. Designed to serve groups from 50 to 100, they can be used for meetings, receptions or breakout areas.

A strong sense of history also prevails at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, Major League Baseball’s third oldest ballpark. With year-round availability and close proximity to downtown, the stadium offers a nostalgic setting for corporate events.

Facilities include the Stadium Club, which overlooks the outfield and includes access to an outdoor patio. With a flexible design that allows a variety of setup options, it has a capacity of 499 guests for a reception, 250 seated or 230 guests seated with a dance floor. The Lex-

us Dugout Club, located behind home plate, includes displays of memorabilia such as a wall of gold gloves and the team’s World Series trophies. It seats 200 guests or accommodates 350 for a reception.

For smaller groups, the Baseline Clubs, overlooking the third and first baselines, have a capacity of 100 for a reception or 75 guests seated. And for an intriguing outdoor venue, the

Retired Numbers Plaza offers views of not only the field, but also the downtown area and the famous Hollywood sign. It handles up to 600 for a reception or 400 seated.

### College and Minor League Sports Venues

The opportunity to meet at a sports venue is not limited to the world of big-time professional sports. Other possibilities range from minor league pro sports to college and university campuses.

At Folsom Field, the University of Colorado’s football stadium, the location itself is part of the attraction, with guests enjoying a backdrop of the region’s spectacular mountains. An exclusive rooftop patio and several indoor rooms provide high-end meeting spaces. The Rooftop Terrace Club is a new open-air space overlooking the field as well as the Flatiron and Front Range mountains. The 13,900-sf terrace has a capacity of 400 to 600 people. It offers access to the Byron R. White Club, which offers upscale dining and beverage options, and two custom bars. Divided into halves, the room seats approximately 300 with round tables on each side.

The Touchdown Club, with 7,600 sf of space, is located just above the north end zone. The area has a capacity of 400 to 500 and features a walk-up bar with food and beverage service. The smaller Champions Club Lounge, at 4,500 sf, accommodates up to 250.

Also available are stadium suites designed for small groups, breakout sessions and board meetings. Ranging in size from 455 to 1,300 sf, they have





Credit: Destination Concepts, a Global DMC Partner

A client event by Destination Concepts, a Global DMC Partner, at Petco Park, home of the San Diego Padres.

floor-to-ceiling windows to take advantage of the stadium views.

The same approach is followed at Pratt & Whitney Stadium, the home field of the University of Connecticut football team. More than 7,500 sf of meeting and reception space is available. Facilities include a 325-seat function room with upholstered seats and 38 executive suites

On a smaller scale, the stadiums occupied by minor league teams also can be worth considering. One example is Cooley Law School Stadium in Lansing, Michigan. Home to the Lansing Lugnuts, a Class A affiliate of baseball's Toronto Blue Jays, the facility includes a recently added 2,000-sf, year-round special events facility. It seats up to 150 guests in a banquet setting with additional outdoor patio seating.

Offering similar appeal is Dayton, Ohio's Fifth Third Field, home to the Dragons, a minor league affiliate of the Cincinnati Reds. The entire stadium can be rented for groups of up to 10,000, or the facility's suite level will accommodate 600. Conference rooms and other meeting areas are suitable for groups from 10 to 60.

Facilities designed for hockey can also serve as meeting sites. At the Bank of Maine Ice Vault in Hallowell, Maine, a large conference room with flexible floor plans accommodates groups of 10 to 100, and a smaller boardroom seats up to 30 participants.

### Iconic to Innovative

Still other types of sports venue range from the iconic to the innovative. Among the most well known is the unparalleled Churchill Downs. The Kentucky Derby site also plays a less widely acknowl-

edged, but nevertheless attractive, role as a location for corporate events.

The sprawling facility offers up to 15 meeting rooms and event options, serving groups ranging in size from 20 to more than 5,000 people. Among the facility choices is the Triple Crown Room, a banquet room that

can serve up to 360 guests. Located on the fifth floor of the clubhouse, it offers a view of the downtown Louisville skyline, with a large balcony overlooking the racetrack.

For larger groups, an event area dubbed Millionaires Row 4 accommodates up to 832 guests. It offers dining space and a four-tier balcony overlooking the historic finish line. Located on



Credit: Al Powers

T-Mobile Arena, a new Las Vegas sporting venue, offers a variety of multipurpose spaces.

the sixth level of the clubhouse, the smaller Millionaires Row 6 has similar features with a capacity of 576.

The Stakes Room, with space for up to 168 guests, overlooks the entire racetrack directly over the finish line. It is sandwiched by a roomy foyer with bar and a tiered balcony. The Arisides Room has a capacity of 120, and a couple of smaller rooms accommodate up to 80 guests.

One of the oldest sports of all is boxing, and that is just major activity taking place in T-Mobile Arena, a new Las Vegas

venue from AEG and MGM Resorts International. The 20,000-seat multipurpose event center opened in April 2016. Along with world-class boxing, the facility hosts hockey, basketball and other sporting events, in addition to red-carpet events and concerts, among 100-150 events annually. It features 50 luxury suites, more than two dozen private boxes, the Toshiba Plaza — a two-acre outdoor entertainment space for pre-event functions and special events offering a performance stage and video screens — and a variety of multipurpose spaces.

### Refreshing Alternative

For any meeting planner considering a sports-related venue, the fact that it may not be everyone's first choice is an obvious consideration. But even non-sports fans may find it a refreshing al-

ternative and should understand its appeal to others.

"Sports are extremely popular, so giving attendees the opportunity to experience a professional sport firsthand is a memorable experience," says Kathy Poulin, who coordinates events for the North Carolina-based Okuma America, a manufacturer of precision machining equipment who has held successful events at the NASCAR Hall of Fame. "Just make sure the sports venue interests and appeals to the majority of your audience." **C&IT**



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## Site Selection

An aerial view of The Broadmoor Cloud Camp in Colorado Springs.

# Small Meetings & Executive Retreats

## 'It's About Finding the Right Fit'

Credit: Associated Luxury Hotels International

According to this year's Annual Meetings Market Survey conducted by the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA), the number of small meetings is on the rise. Survey respondents reported that in 2015 they held an average of 34 meetings with fewer than 50 attendees, compared to 29 meetings in 2014.

Overall, 28 percent of respondents held more small meetings in 2015 than 2014, and 26 percent expect to plan more small meetings this year, compared to 24 percent in 2014.

From lead time to demonstrating meeting value, the following meeting pros and experts show how planning small meetings and executive retreats can be accomplished successfully.

### Lead Time

Small meetings growth occurs as planners continue to face challenges in planning them. One of the biggest challenges is lead time, says Christine Shimasaki, CMP, CDME, managing director

of Destination Marketing Association International's (DMAI) EmpowerMINT. "Typically small meetings are planned in a shorter lead time, and this causes challenges with finding availability and paying higher rates, especially in this strong seller's market," says Shimasaki. "On the other hand, if your dates fall over a time when a hotel has availability, you can take advantage of negotiating in a position of strength."

Cori Dossett, CMP, CEM, president of Dallas, Texas-based Conferences Designed, was able to negotiate a favorable package for a company's 40-attendee board meeting last year in New Orleans because of its meeting pattern. "Because this is a small group that meets right after Thanksgiving and only during the week days, I feel we are able to get good rates," says Dossett.

Dossett also was favorably impressed with upgrades and amenities. "We negotiated upgraded meeting room Wi-Fi as part of our AV package," she says. "They sent a few extra VIP amenities that I did not request. The hotel also went above

and beyond in special ordering, at their suggestion, a few wines for dinner that our group and several VIPs really liked. The hotel worked with me on the detail of specific furniture, band and bar placement as well as table setup in the space to make the room work for our group."

Many planners complain that hotels respond slowly to small-business RFPs or not at all. However, Dossett didn't find that to be the case with the 300-room Windsor Court Hotel. "We selected this property partly because of the attentiveness throughout the RFP process and the meeting space," says Dossett.

"This particular hotel has high-level space with nice views that could be used for small (10 people) breakouts and the full board (35 people)," adds Dossett. "The space itself was nicely appointed. In addition, the hotel had various space options for lovely dinners. We utilized a trio of rooms including the library and formal boardroom that were elegant and delightful."

By Derek Reveron

Attendees also were pleased with the venue. "The group loved the property and would certainly go back there should a need arise," says Dossett.

Dossett says she plans successful small meetings by using a healthy lead time whenever possible. "Through experience in working with small groups, I have gotten better rates six to nine months out with hotels looking to fill a hole in their meeting space and room blocks," says Dossett. "I have had hotels say six months out that they will not consider a meeting if it is not their ideal rooms-to-meeting space ratio, or does not exactly fit the hole they have."

### Cast a Wide Net

Small meeting experts say to cast a wide net and consider properties of all sizes among downtown and suburban hotels, conference centers, airport properties and resorts. That's a strategy employed by Eric Hrubant, president of New York-based Cire Travel, a division of Tzell Travel Group, who plans dozens of small meetings a year.

Hrubant held a three-day meeting for a New York-based software company at Club Med Sandpiper Bay in Port St. Lucie, Florida, located about 45 minutes north of the Palm Beach International Airport. The meeting included 109 employees from across the United States and Canada.

The meeting was planned on short notice. "I booked it 10 weeks in advance and most of the work on it was done only four to six weeks in advance," says Hrubant. "Even then, it's important to know your clients and match the overall culture of the company with the perfect destination and hotel. My clients did not want a destination that involved...passports, and they liked the idea of an all-inclusive resort so they could control spending. I checked various ski destinations and spa properties but Club Med Sandpiper was the perfect choice."

Hrubant says that Club Med offered several services he seeks to meet the needs of small meetings. "Club Med offers a meeting package that includes meeting space and private dinners,"

says Hrubant. "They went above and beyond with the meeting space. They helped plan outdoor restaurant reservations with indoor backup in the event of inclement weather. Club Med also helped plan the first-night reception in an outdoor space with cocktails and dinner. Even the ground transportation company that Club Med contracted was professional and always proactive. I got compliments from attendees all during the meeting."

Like Dossett, Hrubant also was able to gain some concessions — something that is typically difficult to do for small meetings, says Shimasaki.

### Finding the Right Fit

Shimasaki offers the following tips for gaining small-meeting concessions: "In order to gain concessions, it is necessary to keep your meeting space in line with the hotel's guest rooms to meeting space ratio," says Shimasaki. "Limiting the amount of breakout space you need and using the main meeting room for meals can help you avoid additional costs and perhaps even get concessions. Also, giving the hotel an opportunity to bid on a larger meeting at the same time they consider your small program can have advantages."

Conventional wisdom among some planners is that it's a little easier to

fits on top of a larger meeting at a big property can in fact be very desirable."

There is another key factor to consider when considering large and small properties: "Do you like to be a big fish in a small pond and receive lots of attention and high levels of service?" says Shimasaki. "Or do you want to be a little fish in a big pond and not receive the same level of attention, but take advantage of a greater number of services and amenities a larger property can provide? There is no set answer here, but there is a sweet spot for each meeting and property. The key is finding it. To do so, be very specific with your objectives and needs, and let the hotel respond with its best options."

Dossett has a slightly different take. "Being the small fish in a big pond no matter how elegant the hotel, can make a small group feel lost," she says. "Unless it would fit your group's dynamic, and it is acceptable to get a fantastic rate when you are filling a gap in a larger property, I would steer a small corporate group to a smaller property. Smaller does not have to mean fewer amenities. Many times, it is the opposite."

### Demonstrate Meeting Value

It's easier to plan small meetings when clients value them and budget accordingly. But some stakeholders don't



**"Through experience in working with small groups, I have gotten better rates six to nine months out with hotels looking to fill a hole in their meeting space and room blocks."**

CORI DOSSETT, CMP, CEM, President  
Conferences Designed, Dallas, TX

find the right property for small meetings at smaller properties because they value the business more. "Not necessarily," says Shimasaki. "It's about finding the right fit. A small meeting that

value small and large meetings equally. In these cases, Shimasaki advises planners to gather as much information as possible to demonstrate the value of the meeting and include it in the RFP.



# A Unique Retreat in the Clouds

Alisa Metcalf, executive assistant at APEX, DaVita HealthCare Partners, in Denver, Colorado, wowed Senior Vice President Maggie Anderson by staging a successful meeting in the clouds. And we don't mean a virtual meeting in the *cloud* but an actual leadership team retreat at The Cloud Camp at The Broadmoor, which sits atop Cheyenne Mountain — 3,000 feet above The Broadmoor.

Anderson, who fell in love with The Broadmoor at her first visit early in 2015, intuitively knew it would be the ideal venue for their 18-person team retreat set for that October. Metcalf got to work and arranged an incredible event for her boss. “The Cloud Camp at The Broadmoor was unlike anything we have ever done as a team. We had the entire lodge to ourselves, and it was beautiful.”

Metcalf was very impressed with The Broadmoor's staff and level of service. “The Broadmoor staff is one of the most responsive and competent in the hospitality business. It's tough to beat their level of customer service,” she says. “The staff was available for any and all requests, and they were so friendly and accommodating.”

The retreat consisted of a good mix of activities and

content, says Metcalf, who again applauded the conference team at The Broadmoor, who “were so helpful in the planning stages of the meeting. They knew all the right questions and really anticipated all of our needs.” For example, “It looked like it was going to rain, so they quickly moved our group yoga activity indoors, and it was perfect.”

Metcalf adds, “They just really know their space and what will work and what will not. They are very good at what they do.” In addition, “all of the equipment worked beautifully, and they delivered on all that they said they could do for us.”

The quality of the food and the overall ambience greatly enhanced the attendee experience, according to Metcalf. Dinner was a real treat and very popular. She describes dinner in the main lodge as a “beautiful table with a very rustic feel, but still very luxurious, and the food was fantastic every night.”

The location of The Cloud Camp, on top of Cheyenne Mountain, is roughly a 45-minute drive up a private road to the very secluded site. Metcalf says, “All of the rooms were so unique, and it was just such a special place.”



The Broadmoor's Wilderness Experience includes The Broadmoor's Cloud Camp, the Ranch at Emerald Valley (shown here), Broadmoor Fishing Camp and Seven Falls.

In addition to enjoying the staff's morning sunrise and flag-raising event, the attendees were treated to a slew of activities such as mule rides, guided hikes, yoga, horse-shoes, archery and walks around the grounds.

Metcalf says the team would “absolutely” return to Cloud Camp at The Broadmoor in a heartbeat. “Our team really loved it. They thought it was really special and were very grateful for the experience,” she relates.

Metcalf also says her group met their company objective:

“After two nights up there, the team walked away refreshed and rejuvenated.”

The Broadmoor's Cloud Camp, part of the resort's Wilderness Experience portfolio, is located approximately seven miles from The Broadmoor.

Cloud Camp offers 360-degree views of Colorado Springs and the surrounding valley. Inspired by the historic timber and stone lodges of the American West, Cloud Camp is anchored by an 8,000-sf main lodge featuring hand-hewn beams and stone fireplaces, as well as a wraparound deck. Cloud Camp can sleep small groups of up to 56 guests total among 12 one- and two-bedroom guest cabins, as well as seven accommodations in the lodge, and an adjacent suite.

A unique two-story Fire Tower suite features a living room and bedroom, each with 360-degree views. Each cabin features a private porch, beautifully appointed furnishings and modern amenities along with spectacular views of Pikes Peak, Colorado's Front Range and the plains.

Cloud Camp guests enjoy activities such as hiking, mule rides, archery, arts and crafts, and Cloud Camp's signature nightly Cooking Club. Other activities include massage services, jeep tours, river rafting, hot air balloon rides and ranch roundup excursions.

— DR

“The more you know, the more you can show,” she says.

Start by keeping a good history on guest room pickup and overall spend in F&B, audio-visual, restaurant, bar and meeting space expenditures just like planners of big meetings do. “It is easy to ask the hotel to provide this kind of accounting for any size group,” says Shimasaki. “Just make sure to ask in advance of your meeting for a detailed accounting at the end.” Also include a list of CEOs, directors and other VIPs in attendance because they influence the decision-making about other meetings.

Flexibility about meetings dates is a must for obtaining the best small business deals. Educating meeting stakeholders about the hotel market can increase the likelihood of meeting flexibility. “Perhaps the biggest lever that a planner could exercise is to educate and prepare their internal customer (the boss or meeting owner) about the realities of the seller's market today and get agreement on flexibility before communicating with hotels, and convince them that flexibility will allow the planner to save the company money,” says Shimasaki.

Planners who know how to nego-

tiate with properties usually can get some concessions.

## Good Advice

Experts and planners recommend the following advice for getting the best deal in today's seller's market.

**Be flexible.** It's a seller's market. Don't be a hardliner when it comes to meeting dates, meeting space and budget items such as food and beverage. Being flexible is especially important when a small meeting uses meeting space that the hotel feels is disproportionately larger than the meeting size.

**Be selective.** Choose concession requests carefully. “What concession requests fall into your must-have and want-to-have categories?” says Dossett. “Really look at your program and see what is important to the end user and what makes the most sense to your bottom line. This is true for any size meeting, but adding small things becomes extremely important to smaller corporate meetings.”

**Consider alternative spaces.** Be willing to use alternative meeting spaces such as dining areas and outdoor patios. Re-schedule off-property meals to on-

property venues to increase the hotel's revenue and get more negotiating clout. Also use general session rooms for meals.

## Consider alternative properties.

Many small boutique hotels welcome small meetings. Museums and commercial properties also offer deals for small meetings.

**Use CVBs.** “The key is to find hotels that need your business, and it can be helpful to get an overview of destination availability from a CVB sales professional,” says DMAI's Shimasaki. “They can quickly help you ascertain which hotels have availability and can meet your needs and provide rates within your budget. Using them to help you filter the destination's offerings can save you a lot of time and frustration.”

**Use a national hotel representative representing a chain.** This increases the volume of business over time with one hotelier, thus increasing buying power for meetings over time

**Have the longest lead time possible.** The longer the lead time, the easier it is to get space, even with small meetings. At least six months is recommended. According to the PCMA survey, the average booking window for small meetings

is 10 months (although many lead times are actually shorter), compared to nine months in the 2014 survey. The average lead time for large meetings is 2.3 years.

## New & Noteworthy

Planners traditionally have noted that some properties modulate the effort they put into accommodating booking dates, space and other small-meeting preferences because they represent low payoff. However, more hotels are tailoring sales and marketing approaches to attract small meetings.

Here are some examples:

**Meetings Simplified by Hilton Hotels and Resorts** offers bundled pricing that reduces the time to book meetings for 25 sleeping rooms or fewer with up to 50 attendees. Planners choose the options and Hilton replies quickly with a quote.

The meeting package includes:

- Meeting room.
- Basic meeting Wi-Fi.
- Flip chart and markers.
- All day nonalcoholic beverage service.
- Per person pricing.
- Additional options:
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner options.

- Healthful and fun break options to enhance energy levels.
  - LCD projector and screen or monitor.
- Marriott** has its **QuickGroup** tool, which streamlines online bookings for groups with 10–25 guest rooms and meeting space for up to 50 people. If a planner needs 10–25 sleeping rooms (and/or event space for up to 50 guests), Marriott has a streamlined booking process and boasts easy-to-use digital tools to help manage the group's stay, while letting individuals choose their own rooms.

**Kimpton** hotels offers **Kimpton Instant Meetings**, known as K.I.M., which allows planners to book meetings online:

- Reserving 5–45 days out
- Blocking 6–25 guests rooms
- Booking meetings for 6–50 guests
- Staying up to seven days

As a special incentive from Kimpton, if planners book a group or meeting online using K.I.M, they'll earn an American Express Gift Card worth 5 percent of their total booked revenue. Go to [www.kimptonhotels.com](http://www.kimptonhotels.com) for dates and information.

**Associated Luxury Hotels Inter-**

**national** offers the **U-200 Gems Collection** luxury brand segment, a group of 19 AAA Four- and Five-Diamond quality hotels and resorts with fewer than 200 rooms.

Specializing in exclusive gatherings, these hotels are prized for their privacy, security, service and amenities. The properties allow smaller meetings to be a main focus of the property without competing with much larger groups. This segment of “Under 200” rooms ensures that your group receives personal attention.

Nowadays, more CVBs have sales staff that specialize in small meetings. **Visit Indy**, for example, has a meeting express manager who oversees meetings with peak room nights of 10–75.

There are more sources of information and options than ever for small meetings. However, when considering options, it's worth keeping in mind one of Dossett's prime guiding principles: “I have learned that you have to think on a smaller scale, but be more intimate and more interactive,” she says. “Small groups are special, and deserve to be treated that way, so they do not feel like their piece of business is minimal or not important.” **C&IT**



## Site Selection



The "Star Wars" theme helped the Danfoss Drives company meet their meeting objectives.

# Theme Park Meetings

## Where Fun Drives Serious Business

By Christine Loomis

Yes, there's a fun side to theme parks, to say nothing of gravity-defying thrills and crazy speed — not elements generally associated with serious business practices. As theme parks are serious businesses themselves, they understand business needs and how to meet them.

### Universal Studios Orlando

When Kimberly Coleman, CMP, senior event manager at Zeltiq, a medical technology company located in California, first considered a meeting at a theme park, she had reservations. "I was worried at first that we may not be able to afford it, but it's very affordable," she says. "I also thought it might be overwhelming to manage the logistics of having an event at a theme park, but the team at Universal Orlando took care of everything. They literally handle everything for you, so it really minimizes how many of the logistics you have to take care of as a planner. I was so impressed by that."

Location was key for the event that drew 265 attendees. "Orlando, as a whole, was a major draw for us," Coleman says. "Our event was a global sales meeting, and we wanted a major international airport in a city able to handle the influx of international flights. The city's entertainment and dining stood out as well."

Coleman's group took advantage of that. "We were looking for local steakhouses for a group dinner one night, and Orlando's Church Street area had several to choose from," she says. "We selected nine different steakhouses and broke our team up into nine groups for the evening. The restaurants were in close proximity to each other, so it was easy to organize ground transportation, and the menus appealed to all of our attendees."

For accommodations, the team chose Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando Resort because it had been recently remodeled and offered an affordable price point for the rooms, amenities and a large amount of meeting space. "The hotel was also able to provide plenty of double-room ac-

commodations, which was important for our group," Coleman adds. The staff proved to be a positive, too. "The people were so genuinely friendly and happy, and the service they provided to us was outstanding."

Primary meeting venues included the hotel's Tuscan Ballroom and several rooms for breakout sessions. "We also utilized the outdoor Villa Piazza for a reception and teambuilding activity, which involved building bikes and donating them to children from an Orlando-based organization," Coleman says. "And we worked with the hotel catering staff, which was excellent. I still have attendees commenting on the amazing granola bars that the catering staff made and asking me for the recipe."

The theme park itself, however, was not a major factor in the decision to meet in Orlando — at first.

"It wasn't a major factor in our decision to come to Universal Orlando," Coleman says. "But after we started planning and were looking for a final-night activity, we realized we should take advantage of being at Universal Orlando and incorporate the theme parks into our agenda. That's how the private event inside The Wizarding World of Harry Potter — Diagon Alley came about. It was a great fit."

It also was the event that proved most memorable. "To enter into Diagon Alley after park hours and have our intimate group in that space was really a wow factor," Coleman says. "When our guests realized that Diagon Alley was exclusive to them, that all of the shops and eateries



Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando.

were open for them to enjoy, that made the experience more special. It's hard to describe just how awesome it was."

In the end, Coleman says the park added immeasurably to the meeting and she doesn't hesitate to recommend it. "It will meet or exceed your expectations. It creates such a fun, 'wow' experience unlike any other. It will leave your attendees with a memorable impression."

### Universal Studios Hollywood

Across the country, Universal Studios Hollywood also offers rides, shows, a working movie studio, theaters, shops, restaurants and, of course, the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Planners can consider full- and partial-park buyouts that accommodate 100 to 25,000 attendees, as well as venues of all kinds that set the stage for networking, bonding, teambuilding, product launches and more. VIP experiences offer front-of-line access and VIP seating for shows and attractions, backstage "meet and greets" and entry to the VIP lounge.

### Walt Disney World

Walt Disney is often called a visionary. It's hard to argue that status when you consider that he looked out at a vast swampland near land-locked Orlando, Florida, and saw in it potential to create a theme-park destination that would draw fans from across the globe.

Disney's vision also resulted in precisely the right ingredients to create highly successful business conferences that

Dining at Universal's Islands of Adventure at Universal Orlando Resort includes a buffet option for groups.





Credit: Universal Orlando Resort

The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando Resort is an ideal venue for group events.

people want to attend. Nicki Bowling, marketing manager, Americas, branding, events and communications for Milwaukee-based Danfoss Drives, brought a group of 125 to the Holiday Inn located in Walt Disney World in October 2015 for the company's fall meeting. A location fairly close to the airport but also close to evening events was a priority, and she wanted to be walking distance from downtime activities, restaurants and entertainment. Price and amenities were important as well.

Because International Hotels Group (IHG) is a preferred travel partner for Danfoss, Bowling started with those hotels. She says, "The Holiday Inn really stepped up, providing not only a competitive price but also a very special custom chocolate room amenity welcome." The hotel was the main meeting location for both the North American group and global marketing team, and the perfect size.

"We used all of the meeting space and had over half of the hotel's guest rooms," Bowling says. "This meant there were no other groups in-house. It gave us the opportunity to 'brand' the entire property with Danfoss Drives and our theme of 'The Force is Strong, Grow You Must in 2016.' The branding element is especially important to me during these sales, marketing and service meetings to reinforce the Danfoss Drives values, goals and missions with the associates. Additionally, because we used a 'Star Wars' theme, we were able to include this element since this was a preferred Disney Hotel."

The theme played out throughout the meeting. "The agenda for our Jedi Knights consisted of general sessions,

er guests that these stars were not our executive management team dressed up."

Bowling says the theming and branding were particularly important and apropos this year. "Our company recently merged with another manufacturer, Vacon, bringing Danfoss Drives

to a No. 2 position in the marketplace. Our salesforce is especially



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strong now with the increase of personnel, therefore we are now all tasked with 'growing stronger in 2016.'"

Additional branded elements included themed candies and props of posters, fighter jets and traditional "Star Wars" figurines positioned around the hotel and meeting space. To tie it all in, Bowling used famous quotes from the characters to inspire the new team. From Yoda there was, "Always pass on what you have learned," "Difficult to see, always in motion is the future" and "Train yourself to let go of everything you fear to lose." There also was, "The Circle

***"The welcome reception was really exciting as we had some honored guests join us — Chewbacca, the Emperor, a storm trooper and Darth Vader himself."***

is Complete" from Darth Vader, and "The force is strong in my family" from Luke Skywalker.

The group used the hotel restaurant, closed to the public, for private lunches, but went off-property, too — with no additional transportation costs. "Staying with our 'Star Wars' theme, we took advantage of being close to Planet Hollywood (a suggestion from the hotel), and I reserved the entire sci-fi level of the restaurant for a private dining experience the second night of our meeting," Bowling says. (Planet Hollywood at Downtown Disney is temporarily closed as it is being transformed into what the company is calling a turn-of-the-20th-century observatory, and it will open later in 2016.)

"Attendees were able to walk to the venue and enjoyed a full night of delicious food, great cocktails and entertainment at this spectacular venue. We also used the in-house photographer for a group photo as a nice souvenir memento. Guests could then stay in the Downtown Disney area for additional fun and walk back to the hotel when they were done for the night."

Bowling calls the final night the highlight of the meeting and a surprise for attendees. "All they knew was that we were going to travel 'to a galaxy far, far away' to attend the final Feel the Power of the Force group dinner event and shared experience." To create excitement, a series of iMovie clips was shown throughout the day, providing a teaser for what was to come. Bowling and her team had taken video footage of the Star Tours area on a previous site visit, and used that to create the clips.

"Once we arrived at Disney's Hollywood Studios, we enjoyed our own private patio for a great dinner and cocktails while watching the Fantasmic! light and laser show. Afterward, the group was escorted to the Star Tours area for awesome desserts, coffees and the experience of a lifetime — private rides on the Star Tours attraction as many times as they wished.

It was truly an amazing evening for all enjoying the time and growing together."

Orlando also has its own draws, and that impacted Bowling's decision to meet there. "Orlando is always a great fit," she says, pointing to the city's excellent airlift, many outside activities and restaurants and the range of hotel options. "The mouse is awesome, of course," she adds, "but sometimes you just don't want to include him in a business meeting. I was especially concerned about that and wanted to make sure we captured the excitement of the area but downplayed the mouse. That's why the 'Star Wars' theme proved so perfect for my group. The demographics were 85 percent men ages 35–55. With the new 'Star Wars' movie about to debut, many were already anticipating the premier. Highlighting the older films was a great way to bring back memories and enjoyment for many in the group, adding to the enthusiasm for our meeting."

Bowling also booked two events at Wild Florida, a nature and wildlife park near Orlando. "I had learned of Wild Florida at a meeting-planner event and met with the staff," she says. "It was a great local and cultural attraction where attendees were thrilled on an airboat ride and got up close and personal with alligators and other Florida favorites."

While the meeting was very successful, Bowling says she'd do some things differently next time. "I would do a bit more research on transportation from the airport. It was quite costly for my group, and there were other means I think would have suited us better. I also originally tried to book in Kissimmee as the CVB there is awesome, but none of the hotel partners were available. At the end of the day, however, it all worked out. We had one of the best meetings ever, leaving lasting memories for all who attended and true inspiration that the force is stronger and that grow we must in 2016!"

## Disneyland & California Adventure

When Disneyland opened in California in 1955, it became the model for nearly every theme park today. The resort offers more than 180,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space, three hotels, two theme

parks and all the entertainment and dining of Downtown Disney.

Also available are the formidable creative and technological talents of Disney personnel and a variety of venues to meet any need. Fanciful suites in the Disneyland Hotel, which offers 136,000 sf of function space, lend themselves to VIP accommodations and intimate functions, while the two parks — Disneyland and California Adventure — give planners turnkey settings that take much of the logistical work out of organizing a meeting.

## Busch Gardens

Williamsburg, Virginia, and Tampa, Florida, are the locations for two popular theme parks. Busch Gardens Williamsburg sets its collection of thrilling roller coasters against a backdrop of recreated European villages and streets. Busch Gardens Tampa, one of the largest zoos in North America, is home to 12,000 animals representing 250 species, and to a variety of roller coasters and thrill rides that draw visitors from across the world. Both accommodate groups with discounts, venues and experiences that can enhance a meeting or corporate event.

## Hersheypark

In addition to its theme park, the Hershey collection includes Hershey Lodge, The Hotel Hershey and Hershey Country Club, together providing more than 135,000 sf of meeting and function space. Programs for groups include such fun options as teambuilding in which teams build free-standing structures using only Hershey candies, and classes where attendees learn about pairing chocolate with wine, spirits and beer.

Also within the property

The "Star Wars" theme was a huge hit at Danfoss Drive's fall meeting in Orlando. Marketing Manager Nicki Bowling battles Darth Vader during her group's fantastic final night event.

are ZooAmerica, three golf courses and a spa, and Hershey Story with its excellent museum exhibits and interactive Chocolate Lab. The new 30,000-sf indoor pool complex, WaterWorks, opened at Hershey Lodge on Memorial Day weekend. The theme park includes 13 coasters, for beginners to diehard thrillseekers, as well as a boardwalk and multiple water attractions.

## Silver Dollar City

Branson, Missouri, has a multitude of attractions, but Silver Dollar City stands apart with its blend of striking natural geologic features, musical entertainment, local artisans







Credit: Walt Disney World

Group dessert events at Walt Disney World's Epcot include a VIP view of IllumiNations: Reflections of Earth.

and theme-park thrills. The park draws many drive-to meetings and events for businesses in the region. Mercy Hospital Springfield held its Coworker Appreciation Event there in 2011, 2012 and 2015, and will do so again this year. The event typically draws 15,000 attendees.

Jennifer Elswick, event coordinator, says the decision to meet there is simple. "Mercy coworkers love Silver Dollar City. We choose this park because it is family friendly and provides entertainment for all ages. The price and exclusive benefits for the day really create a great event. Silver Dollar City group planners are also among the best that I have worked with. They have considered every request we have made and have made the process easy for us. I would recommend it to any group."

Silver Dollar City is a good fit for Mercy in terms of shared history, too. "Mercy has been in the Springfield area since 1891," Elswick says. "We appreciate that the park's theme preserves the 1880s Ozarks culture."

Silver Dollar City also offers value. "The attendance to our Coworker Appreciation Event is higher at Silver Dollar City than any other location we have been to," Elswick says. "Coworkers know the cost of a regular admission ticket so their perceived value of the event is very high compared to the actual cost to Mercy."

While they have tweaked a few things after each event there, Elswick can't think of anything that has not been successful. "The excellent location just outside of Branson is a plus for our group because

of all the additional entertainment options the city provides. Several of our coworkers will plan to spend the weekend there with their family as a short getaway."

Although there was no meal as part of the event, there was a food option. "Silver Dollar City found an economical option for our food and beverage needs by offering 'fun money' in the

amount per person that fit our budget. Each guest received the fun money, which they could use toward a meal or merchandise in one of the park's shops."

Elswick notes that a highlight for the group is exclusive admission times before and after regular park hours. "Our guests really take advantage of this and know this is something really special."

In addition, the park provides the group exclusive access to a building for the event, as well as games and entertainment exclusively for them. "Our coworkers were also able to upgrade to a season pass at a discounted rate — an excellent value to them since their admission was free," Elswick adds.

Silver Dollar City also offered something important the group has not got-

because they were scheduled to work on Appreciation Day."

Elswick's recommendation to planners considering a meeting or event here is to plan as much in advance as possible. "That way you are able to take advantage of all the special benefits Silver Dollar City's group planners have to offer," she says. "Every year they come up with new ideas to customize the event to our group and make it unique."

## SeaWorld

With parks in San Diego, San Antonio and Orlando, and Discovery Cove, also in Orlando, SeaWorld offers corporate groups multiple options for meeting in conjunction with memorable experiences related to dolphins, whales and other creatures of the sea. The biggest news is the company's recent announcement that it will end its orca-breeding program, making the current orcas the last generation in the parks. Also ending will be the theatrical shows starring the popular whales. Instead, more natural environments will be created for the orcas and presentations will focus on their enrichment, exercise and overall health. Groups can still experience educational encounters and private venues within the parks for meetings and functions.

## A Multitude of Options

Theme parks give planners a multitude of options. And because the parks are always adding new rides and elements, it's possible to meet in one year after year and offer attendees a new experience each time. There's something about the combination of thrills, entertainment and creative programs that draws attendees in and allows planners exciting ways to elevate their meetings.

From experiential education and top-tier entertainment to teambuilding challenges, chef-driven dining and stellar hotels, theme parks have it all. Better yet, they provide true one-stop shopping, making planning a meeting in a theme park simple — and nearly as fast as one of those gravity-defying roller coasters. **C&IT**

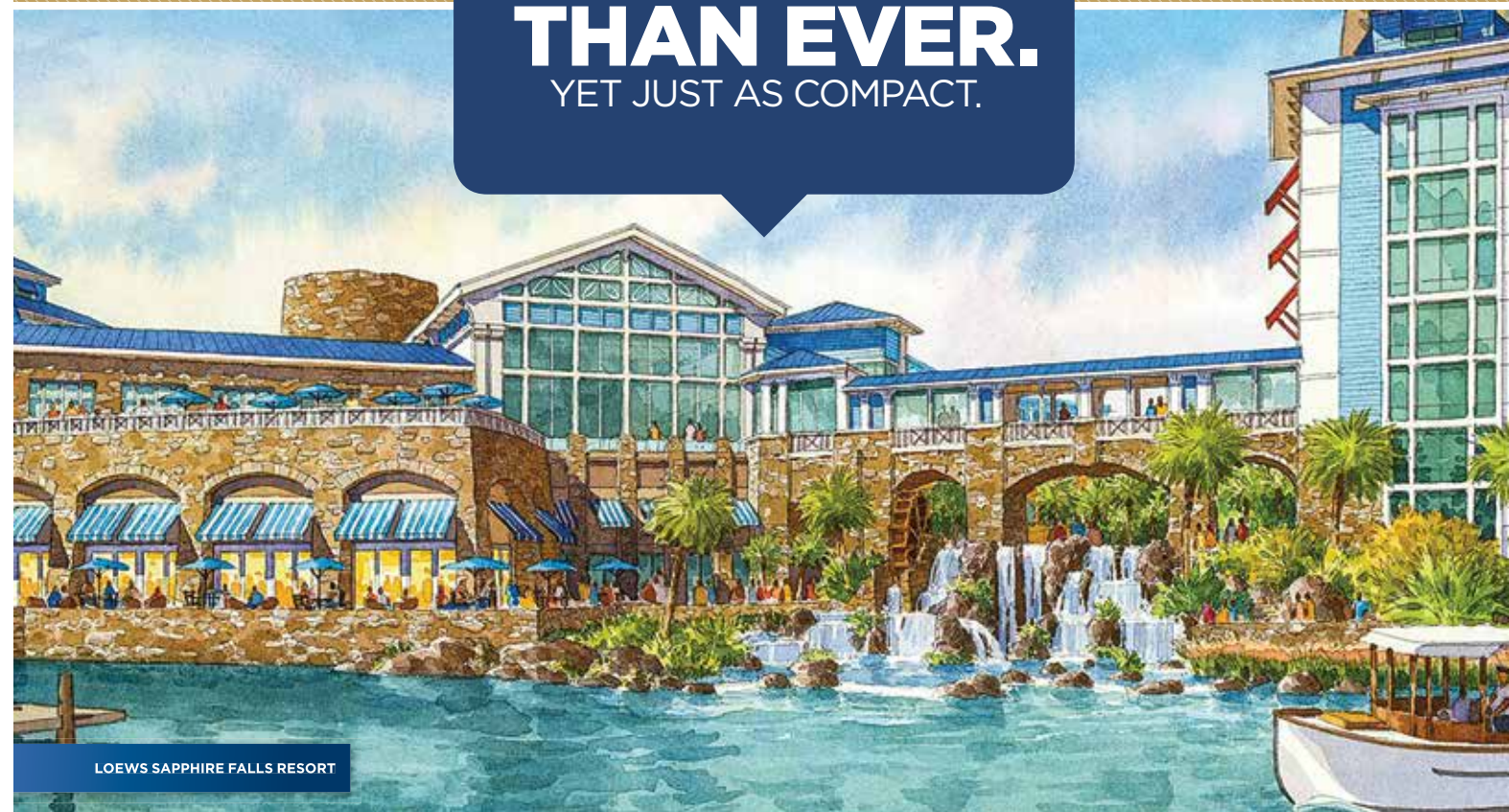


Credit: SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment

Named for one of the ocean's fastest sharks, Mako at SeaWorld is Orlando's tallest, fastest and longest roller coaster.

ten elsewhere: admission at a different time for employees scheduled to work on Appreciation Day. "The park printed a separate pass that could be used one time in a four-week period so those working could attend as their schedules allowed. This went over really well," Elswick says. "Those coworkers didn't feel penalized

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# Hotels & Resorts

## Hotel Brand Update

### Attracting the Meetings Market With New Offerings in Wellness, CSR, Planning Services and Expanding Portfolios

By Patrick Simms

These days, serving the corporate meetings market means much more than opening new meeting space and renovating existing meeting space. The best minds in the hotel industry recognize that, and seek to improve their offerings to groups on numerous fronts, including wellness features, meetings-related apps, online planner tools, CSR opportunities and the development of unique event spaces.

#### MGM Resorts International

One of those minds is Michael Dominguez, senior vice president and chief sales officer at MGM Resorts International. Dominguez is the catalyst behind a company that has consistently brought innovations to the Las Vegas meetings industry. "We are the largest convention player in the market, so for us to consistently create offerings that fit that model is really important," says Dominguez. "We have so much space and so many op-

portunities that I think it's easy for us to create unique meeting niches within our hotel portfolio."

By way of example are the dramatic changes taking place on The Strip that will enhance meeting offerings. "We're going to spend a half billion dollars to reinvent Monte Carlo, which will become Park MGM," says Dominguez. The project will reflect the fact that the new Park (a scenic outdoor space) and T-Mobile Arena are MGM Resorts' centerpiece in the city. Within Park MGM, we are developing unique meeting concepts for groups, particularly smaller ones.

"Eighty percent of the groups we host at MGM Resorts are 100 people or less, and we host over 3,000 meetings that are 50 people or less with an average size of 22 people. We are looking to create experiences and appropriate spaces to suit this demographic well," says Dominguez, adding that, "Complete meeting packages and day meeting packages for our cus-



Credits: Caesars Entertainment

(Top) The Vortex event venue overlooks The Linq at Caesars Las Vegas. (Above) Caesars Entertainment's Meetings for Good offers a menu of CSR activities for groups.

tomers also will be available to provide options to fit their needs."

Of course, the ideal facility for intense

meeting sessions works best when attendees are in the right mindset for those sessions. Dominguez also emphasizes the psychological component to productivity in his goals for MGM Resorts' wellness offerings. "We have the only StayWell meetings program in the U.S. currently, at the MGM Grand, and we are looking to be able to carry that experience to other meeting complexes within our portfolio," he explains. "We have partnered with Delos, which is one of the leaders in research around the human body and the mind, and how we interact during long periods of time. We've been creating spaces that are geared toward mental acuity and engagement, including everything from circadian lighting to air purification. Delos also partners with the Cleveland Clinic, which has created nutritionally certified menus for our meetings."

According to Dominguez, Delos had incorporated its wellness technologies in hotel rooms "but they had never thought about the meeting space, and we challenged them to it. There seems to be more demand for these features, and

services managers have successfully completed responsible-meetings training and are committed to making a difference."

Caesars is responding to the heightened interest expressed by meeting planners to integrate community service activities into their meetings — a popular option especially among millennial attendees. A study by Meeting Professionals International cites that 60 percent of meeting planners are more likely to book a venue with social impact benefits. The Meetings for Good menu, which includes organizations dedicated to seniors, en-

*"We are the largest convention player in the market, so for us to consistently create offerings that fit that model is really important."*

**Michael Dominguez**  
Senior V.P. and Chief Sales Officer  
MGM Resorts International



truly distinguishes our sales process is that our sales managers are located throughout the country, right in our clients' backyard," Massari continues. "This really allows us to build a more personalized approach and have face-to-face meetings, which ultimately builds stronger partnerships and relationships. This way, we get to know and fully understand our customers, and their needs and goals. Our sales managers are able to check availability right there on the spot, quote rates and finalize contracts with the customers. This means we can react

my goal is to get them into more of our properties and convert our traditional meeting space."

#### Caesars Entertainment

Another progressive player in the Las Vegas meetings market and beyond is Caesars Entertainment, a company that has recently made strides in the area of CSR opportunities for group clients. Michael Massari, senior vice president of national meetings and events at Caesars Entertainment, cites the company's Meetings for Good program, part of its Responsible Meetings initiative, as one of the most significant recent initiatives.

"The Meetings for Good menu allows groups to choose from preselected non-profit organizations that Caesars already has a relationship with to be able to easily incorporate a corporate social responsibility (CSR) activity into their program," Massari says. "All of our 130 sales managers and our 60 catering/convention



Credits: MGM Resorts International

vironmental sustainability, education, health and wellness, deployed soldiers and veterans, has been rolled out at select properties in Las Vegas, New Orleans and Atlantic City, and will be available in all other markets nationally later this year.

Massari describes the Caesars sales organization's overall strategy. "What



The StayWell Meetings program at MGM Grand in Las Vegas creates spaces "geared toward mental acuity and engagement."



***“By the end of this year we’ll have upgraded more than 4,800 rooms at four of our Las Vegas properties, accounting for approximately 20 percent of the rooms in Las Vegas.”***

**Michael Massari**  
Senior V.P., National Meetings and Events  
Caesars Entertainment



faster and give the customer an easier and smoother experience.”

Regarding major property developments, Caesars Entertainment has greatly enhanced the Northeast meetings industry with the debut of Harrah’s Waterfront Conference Center in Atlantic City. “This has made a huge impact on our company’s meetings business,” Massari asserts. “The Harrah’s Waterfront Conference Center sits within a tank of gas of one-third of the U.S. population, and is the largest hotel-conference center complex from Baltimore to Boston. The conference center has given clients who would not have considered Atlantic City in the past a venue suited and equipped to hold their events close to home. It has without a doubt grown the meetings market for us in Atlantic City, and we have so far received very positive feedback from clients and attendees. Two weeks ago, the Harrah’s Waterfront

Conference Center hosted MPI-WEC 2016 (Meeting Professionals International’s World Education Conference), and we have gotten back amazing feedback about the conference center and Atlantic City.”

While Harrah’s Waterfront Conference Center has understandably been in the meetings industry spotlight, Caesars also continues to invest in its Las Vegas product.

“We’ve recently completed a renovation of the Bally’s Jubilee Room, and

early last year, we opened The Vortex, a unique venue that overlooks the Las Vegas Strip,” Massari notes. “We are also investing in a major project to renovate more than 5,700 guest rooms nationwide. By the end of this year we’ll have upgraded more than 4,800 rooms at four of our Las Vegas properties, accounting for approximately 20 percent of the rooms in Las Vegas. These renovations began with the Julius Tower at Caesars Palace and will take place at Planet Hollywood, Paris Las Vegas and Harrah’s Las Vegas,” he continues. “We’ve also com-



Dolce Hotels & Resorts, recently acquired by Wyndham, announced a new 217-room property in Cincinnati that will open next year.

pleted renovations at Caesars Atlantic City, Bally’s Atlantic City and Harrah’s Gulf Coast. Later this year, Harrah’s Atlantic City will also be undergoing guest room renovations in the Bayview Tower.”

### **Wyndham Hotels & Resorts**

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts made a major foray into the conference center world with its acquisition of Dolce Hotels and Resorts in 2015. “I think it improved our perception within the market as being a meeting-focused company,”

notes Carol Lynch, senior director, global sales at Wyndham Hotel Group. “The Dolce brand is the best example of a true meeting hotel company, the pioneers of the CMP program. They’re all about meetings and the standards around meetings, (including) community, connectivity and nourishment, because people go there for training and really intensive meetings.”

Currently, the Dolce Hotels and Resorts brand portfolio consists of 24 upscale hotels, resorts, conference centers and day meeting centers in seven countries throughout Europe and North America. Dolce recently announced a new 217-room property in Cincinnati that will open next year. It will become the centerpiece of a \$124 million mixed-use development project known as Madison Center, home to the headquarters of Medpace, a global clinical research organization. The new hotel will house 22,000 sf of function space, including 16 individual meeting areas.

The Wyndham Grand brand also is expanding, with a 450-room property in Clearwater, Florida, opening next year (24,000 sf of meeting space) and the 450-room Sam Lord’s Castle Barbados, a Wyndham Grand Resort, opening in 2018 (20,000 sf of meeting space). Perhaps especially enticing to the incentive market is the Wyndham Grand Athens debuting in early 2017. The first Wyndham Hotel Group hotel in Greece, the property is

located in the city center in a building that formerly housed the Hotel Athens Imperial. When renovations are complete, the Wyndham Grand Athens will offer 273 rooms, 27,000 sf of function space, a restaurant, bar, spa and rooftop garden with a pool.

“Our biggest initiative around meetings was our launch of Go Meet, which is our Wyndham Rewards plan for meeting planners, last year,” says Lynch. “We’re also going to launch a new Meeting Standards program for our full-service hotels



Rendering of a restaurant at the beachfront Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach, scheduled to open next year on Florida’s Gulf Coast. The hotel will offer 24,000 sf of meeting space.

later this year, (focused on) F&B, meeting services, presentation, equipment, setup and other aspects.”

Last but not least, planners will more conveniently navigate Wyndham’s portfolio with a revamped website. “Our website will be refreshed throughout the remaining part of the year, and that also will carry over into the meeting and event website,” she adds. “Standardization will be prevalent in each of those websites, making it easy for planners to get at-a-glance information and be able to tell right away whether a particular hotel can fit the needs of their meeting.”

The brand’s sales representatives are more personalized resources for site selection on a national and international level. “Our focus is account management,” says Lynch. “We want to be more of a consultant with our meeting planner clients around their business, so they can come to us and ask, ‘Here is my meeting, what would you recommend?’ And not only about one meeting, but their business overall, so that we have a true understanding about what their goals are (and can determine) the best destinations for those meetings.”

### **Marriott International**

The finalization of the merger between Marriott International and Starwood Hotels will mean robust collective offerings for meeting groups. “Assuming receipt of required regulatory approvals and our anticipated closing of the Starwood transaction...Marriott will have nearly 40,000 meeting rooms available

to host events of all sizes,” says Brian King, global brand officer, Marriott International. “We expect the combined company to offer guests and meeting planners the broadest portfolio of brands, combining Starwood’s leading lifestyle brands and international footprint with Marriott’s strong presence in the luxury and select-service tiers, as well as the convention and resort segment.”

Not to be overlooked is Starwood’s Four Points brand, whose properties are located worldwide, typically near business hubs and conference centers. Four Points recently launched “In The Year For The Year,” which waives cancellation fees and charges for unused rooms in the block. The offer extends to groups that stay at Four Points before January 1, 2017.

Starwood’s higher-tier brands, such as Sheraton, Westin, W and St. Regis, will complement Marriott’s well-positioned brands in the meetings market, such as The Ritz-Carlton, JW Marriott, Renaissance and Gaylord Hotels. The latter is introducing what will surely be a major player in that market, the Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center, which will be completed in late 2018. Located in Aurora, Colorado, less than 10 minutes from Denver International Air-

port, the property is billed as the largest combined hotel and convention center in the state. The resort will feature 1,507 luxurious guest rooms, including 114 suites; more than 485,000 sf of exhibition, meeting, prefunction and outdoor space; a Grand Lodge with panoramic views of the Rocky Mountain Front Range; eight dining outlets; an indoor/outdoor pool complex with waterslides and lazy river; basketball and tennis courts; the Relâche Spa and Salon; and a state-of-the-art fitness center.

According to Marriott International, the team led by Michael Kofsky, the property’s director of sales and marketing, has the goal of pre-booking more than 1.25 million room nights prior to opening. “Through the power of both the Marriott and Gaylord Hotels brands, we’re excited to funnel first-time group business into the state of Colorado by adding to our portfolio a Western region resort and convention hotel of this magnitude,” said David Marriott, chief operating officer, Americas Eastern Region, at a recent ceremony to mark the commencement of vertical construction.

The Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center will be the latest addition to a brand that promises to deliver “everything in one place,” including the resources to handle both large-scale meetings and the kind of dining, spa and entertainment amenities that please resort-goers. The brand’s existing properties are the 2,882-room Gaylord



The Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center in Aurora, Colorado, will be the largest combined hotel and convention center in the state, when it opens in late 2018.



***“We want to be more of a consultant with our meeting planner clients around their business, so they can come to us and ask, ‘Here is my meeting, what would you recommend?’”***

**Carol Lynch**, Senior Director, Global Sales  
Wyndham Hotel Group



Opryland Resort & Convention Center in Nashville, Tennessee, with 600,000 sf of meeting space; the 1,406-room Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center in Kissimmee, Florida, with 400,000 sf of meeting space; the 1,511-room Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center, located between Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas, with 400,000 sf of meeting space; and the 2,000-room Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center in Washington, DC, with 470,000 sf of meeting space.

### Destination Hotels

The investments being made by companies such as Marriott, Caesars and MGM Resorts are justified by demand from the corporate meetings sector. From the perspective of Destination Hotels, that sector is quite healthy. André Fournier, executive vice president of sales and marketing, observes that “Corporate business is up across our portfolio about 5 percent. And average rate is up by 5 percent, so revenue is up by 10 percent.” One qualification to that positive trend: “What we have noticed in the second quarter is a pullback in ‘in the year, for the year’ bookings in the corporate segment, the smaller short-term bookings. Typically these are corporate regional meetings. But it’s nothing alarming.”

Today, Destination

Hotels has even more product to offer the corporate market. In January of this year, the company merged with Commune Hotels & Resorts to create a formidable operator of independent and lifestyle hotels and resorts. “It took us from 43 hotels to 92 hotels from Asia to Mexico to the U.K. and the U.S.,” Fournier says.

Apart from that major step forward, Destination Hotels has been focusing on what it does best: delivering meetings that are infused with the character and culture of their location. “Let’s say it’s San Antonio, with the Alamo, King Ranch all those really cool West Texas traditions. Our conference services team builds a program around La Cantera Resort, which incidentally is being renovated through September. We immerse the attendees in the local community,” Fournier explains. “So for



The Hilton Cleveland Downtown, which is connected via underground walkway to the Huntington Convention Center, opened on June 1.

example our conference services team would set up breaks with local fresh ingredients such as honey from the King Ranch area, and tell a story while we’re there about what the local commerce was. And they take it one step further: They make sure they’re not just meeting in the hotel, but also outside in the community. When you leave San Antonio you take a part of the culture and history with you.”

The company’s Destination Event Producers program trains CSMs to be ambassadors for their local community. “We were at 33 percent turnover in that department, and we’re now down to 20 percent. I believe by the end of the year, it will be down to 10-15 percent,” he adds. “They get more career development opportunities by achieving a minimum of 10 raving reviews from their planner clients, not from their internal associates: ‘This conference service director was outstanding and this is why.’”

### Hilton Hotels

Hilton’s primary new offering to the meetings market is undoubtedly the 600-room Hilton Cleveland Downtown, which opened on June 1. Connected via underground walkway to the Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland, the property offers more than 50,000 sf of meeting space, including a 20,778-sf Grand Ballroom with floor-to-ceiling windows. Complementing these facilities is a signature restaurant, The Burnham, whose consultant is James Beard award nominee Zack Bruell. Among its many creative menu items is Bruell’s Cleveland-inspired fried confit of chicken with Swiss cheese dumplings, stewed cabbage and paprika sauce.

Hilton’s partnership with Uber has helped to further connect guests with the local culture with Local Scene, a digital tool that allows meeting attendees to search

for popular neighborhood restaurants and nightlife destinations when searching for venues for offsite dinners.

Meeting planners can get ideas from Hilton’s Meet with Purpose, launched last year. The program includes health, wellness and sustainability elements that planners can incorporate into their events. One example is “cut and create,” a seasonally inspired salad bar designed by Capital Hilton executive chef Phillip Thompson. Attendees prepare and customize their meal from a custom-made display of local ingredients.

Planners concerned with sustainability also can take advantage of Hilton’s LightStay to help reduce the carbon footprint of their meetings. LightStay is Hilton’s state-of-the-art, in-house corporate responsibility measurement platform used across the company’s properties.

### Hyatt Hotels

In June, Hyatt announced a partnership with Be Well by Dr. Frank Lipman, a leader in the field of integrative and functional medicine. The program will be implemented across all Hyatt brands globally, beginning with Park Hyatt hotels in New York, Chicago and Washington, DC. Elements include healthful refreshments upon arrival, curated in-room amenities, increased fitness offerings, expanded menu options and nutritious to-go alternatives. Hyatt and Be Well also will partner on “Chef Workshops” where Hyatt chefs and Be Well team members collaborate on new F&B offerings. Wellness retreats for guests also are being designed.

For planners, Hyatt is facilitating the process of working with more than one of its properties for a meeting program. Following the success of the Hyatt Convention Alliance, the new Hyatt Resort Alliance is a cohesive unit that negotiates group contracts, provides custom-

ized proposals to planners who are interested in multiple destinations, and shares information about group clients among the members of the alliance in order to create a consistent experience for clients. The alliance is the result of interviews with customer interviews and advisory boards. Hyatt also is having its national events manager travel to organizations’ meetings in order to better understand customers’ goals.

Part of the Resort Alliance will be the company’s first Park Hyatt in the Caribbean. Opening later this year, Park Hy-



(L to r) The Be Well by Dr. Frank Lipman program’s Chief Wellness Advisor and Chef Seamus Mullen; Frank Lipman, MD; Hyatt Culinary Director and Chef Maximo Lopez May.

att St. Kitts has 48 rooms and 78 suites, complemented by 7,000 sf of function space. Nestled in a secluded area overlooking The Narrows, a strait separating St. Kitts and the volcanic island of Nevis, the property will be an attractive choice for incentive groups.

Andaz Hotels, Hyatt’s boutique brand, also fits this market: both the Andaz Mayakoba (Mexico) and Andaz Scottsdale (Arizona) will open this year.

The Hyatt Regency brand has recently completed two significant renovations: the Hyatt Regency Maui Resort & Spa refreshed its more than 25,000 sf of indoor meeting space, and the Hyatt Regency San Francisco Airport underwent a multimillion-dollar renovation that

includes massive upgrades to its more than 69,000 sf of meeting space.

### Loews Hotels

Making a creative addition to Orlando’s rich hotel infrastructure isn’t easy, but Loews Hotels has done just that with the recent introduction of the Sapphire Falls Resort at Universal Orlando. The 1,000-room property welcomed its first guests on July 14 with a Caribbean-themed arrival that included cheering team members, a steel drum band, stilt walkers and a colorful burst of

streamers. The resort offers 115,000 sf of meeting space, including a 41,000-sf ballroom divisible into 12 sections, a 31,000-sf hall, 16 breakout rooms and 27,000 sf of pre-function space. The surrounding tropical grounds include 11,000 sf of function space and a 16,000-sf resort-style pool with a white sand beach, a water slide, cabanas and a fire pit. Fitting the theme on the dining side is the Amatista Cookhouse, a Caribbean-inspired restaurant with an open exhibition kitchen and outdoor dining.

Sapphire Falls Resort connects to Loews Royal Pacific Resort to create the

Loews Meeting Complex with a total of 2,000 rooms and more than 247,000 sf of meeting space. For large groups that want to experience Orlando and particularly Universal Resort, the complex is arguably the best choice in the area.

### InterContinental Hotels Group

IHG promises small and mid-sized meeting groups more targeted service with its new IHG Meeting Point, a part of the IHG Small Meetings Solution. The program features a training portal for IHG hotel convention staff that is segmented by industry — pharmaceutical, automotive, energy, technology, medical healthcare and manufacturing. The idea is to equip employees with knowledge of



***“Our conference services team...make sure (attendees are) not just meeting in the hotel, but also outside in the community.”***

**André Fournier**  
Executive Vice President, Sales & Marketing  
Destination Hotels



### Omni Hotels & Resorts

the regulations that impact meetings in these sectors so they can deliver a higher level of service. IHG also has launched IHG Assist, a suite of initiatives to address corporate clients' concerns with traveler safety and security. IHG Assist includes the IHG Assist Groups & Meetings Service, a 24/7 phone line to answer client concerns in this area.

On the wellness front, IHG's most avant-garde brand is Even Hotels, launched in 2012 with the idea of providing wellness-minded travelers with an affordable lodging choice. Features include in-room fitness options, an athletic studio located off the lobby and healthful F&B options made to order from the Cork & Kale Restaurant. Three new Even hotels (with meeting space) are scheduled to open next year: a 100-room property in Eugene, Oregon; a 155-room hotel in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and a 13-room property in Houston, Texas.

In June, InterContinental Hotels Group announced the “Crowne Plaza Accelerate” plan, which will invest \$200 million over three years into enhancing the Crowne Plaza brand's offerings and appeal to business travelers. A new sales and marketing campaign focused on meeting the “holistic needs” of the business traveler will be rolled out in early 2017. Guest rooms will be reconfigured into WorkLife Rooms, which create more space to work, socialize and rest. And public spaces will be technology enabled to provide an alternative solo working space and small meeting space.

In the coming years, Omni will be introducing three new properties into the meetings market: Set to open in summer 2017 is the Omni Frisco Hotel in North Texas. The 300-room property will be part of The Star development that includes Dallas Cowboys World Headquarters and The Ford Center. Groups will have 24,000 sf of meeting space, including a 13,000-sf ballroom, at their disposal.

The Omni Louisville Hotel, which broke ground in January of this year,



Rendering of the library in the Omni Louisville Hotel, opening in 2018.

is scheduled to open in 2018 with 612 guest rooms, 70,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space, and an additional 300,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space at the Kentucky International Convention Center.

And in Georgia, planners can look forward to the fall 2017 debut of the 260-room Omni Hotel at The Battery Atlanta, housing 12,500 sf of meeting space.

Omni is certainly attuned to the wellness trend, a prime example being the Omni Hilton Head Oceanfront Resort. Here, groups can experience innovative

fitness programs such as Aqua Zumba, which blends the Zumba philosophy with water resistance, as well as a 30-minute Meeting Break Refresh Session, offering yoga and Zumba classes.

Like other major hoteliers, the company also has been facilitating the meeting experience with proprietary mobile apps. For example, OmniLink, powered by Encore, conveys event information to attendees via their tablets and smartphones, including facility information and maps, event agendas and schedules, speaker and attendee bios, local transportation details, downloadable content, event announcements and more.

Each of the aforementioned hoteliers is well-established in the meetings industry, and each is making significant progress in catering to that market. Thus, a planner can certainly find reasons for loyalty to any one of those companies. One rather controversial reason, however, is a hotelier's offer of personal reward points to the planner for booking. While these offers continue, some

hoteliers find that clients prefer alternatives, such as transferring all those points to a corporate account. “We definitely see a trend in the corporate market for consolidating meeting reward points into one account,” says Wyndham's Carol Lynch. “So we're investigating developing ways to facilitate that process with the corporations.” Another alternative is to forgo the

points in favor of concessions in negotiating the contract.

“We've seen that instead of planner rewards they would rather add something different to their program,” says Destination Hotels' Andre Fournier, “such as a unique meeting setup or conference break, perhaps with a sommelier from the local winery.”

To stay away from ethical controversy, it may behoove planners to explore such alternatives to reward points, and open a dialogue to that effect with their hotel partners. **C&IT**

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<sup>2</sup> Not all event revenue generates points. Contract must explicitly state that Program will apply to applicable event. Planner must be a Wyndham Rewards Member and identified in contract as the “Planner” of the event or substituted for such Planner in accordance with full Program terms and conditions. Program is subject to full terms and conditions: [wyndhamrewards.com/gomeet](http://wyndhamrewards.com/gomeet). Wyndham Hotel Group reserves the right to change/terminate the Program at any time without notice. Void where prohibited by law.

<sup>3</sup> Most properties: 10 points are earned per dollar spent on room rate only. Qualified stay is subject to a total room rate of \$25 and up and other restrictions. See program terms at [wyndhamrewards.com/terms](http://wyndhamrewards.com/terms).

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Destination

# Atlantic City



Atlantic City welcomed and made a great impression on more than 2,000 attendees at MPI WEC 2016.

Credit: Orange Photography

## The Historic City by the Sea Meets the 21st Century

**I**t is home to the nation's original Boardwalk, setting of the celebrated Miss America Pageant and within a day's drive of one third of the country's population. It is Atlantic City — and it answers to the name, America's First Resort.

By Cynthia Dial

"We are rich in American history," says Jim Wood, president and CEO of Meet AC, 2014's replacement of the Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority. "Our mission is to grow the meetings and convention business as Atlantic City continues to diversify its mix of non-gaming business," he explains. A hospitality industry veteran who began his career with Mar-

riott in 1980, today's CEO honed his CVB skills in previous positions with Tampa, Providence and Louisville's bureaus.

In addition to Atlantic City's prolific history and around-the-corner proximity (60 miles from Philadelphia, 125 miles from New York and 175 miles from Washington, DC), are its familiar lures — beachside location, seasonal weather, world-class dining, top-name entertainment and tax-free shopping. When paired with such lesser-known enticements as sport fishing, water activities, noted wineries and breweries and 20 blue-ribbon golf courses — all complemented by a variety of hotel and casino properties — the result is a magnet for meetings.

Using numbers to tell the tale, Wood cites stats: "Our convention numbers are up 40 percent (2014 versus 2015), and over the past three years we have seen a 150 percent increase in bookings as Atlantic City continues to reposition itself as a more vibrant and robust meetings destination."

### A City of Firsts

A city of firsts — the country's first passenger airliner landed here, the board game Monopoly was created here and the first convention hall in the U.S. is found here. However, as touted in MPI's recent promotion: "Though Atlantic City is the home of America's first convention hall, Atlantic City is anything but conventional."

# Q&A

WITH

## Michael A. Massari

In his position as senior vice president of national meetings and events, Michael Massari oversees the meetings, conventions and events business for Caesars Entertainment's portfolio of more than 38 U.S. properties.

Massari has been in his current role since leading a nationwide reorganization of Caesars' meetings businesses into a single department in November of 2011. The initiative mirrored a similarly successful effort he led in 2005 to combine meeting sales and services across the company's eight Las Vegas properties. The reorganization not only extended unique benefits originally introduced under the Las Vegas Meetings by Caesars Entertainment brand, which Massari developed and built, but also restructured the entire salesforce, placing representatives in metro areas throughout the country to be closer to customers.

Massari is an executive committee member of the board of the U.S. Travel Association, sits on the MPI Foundation's Global Board of Trustees and also serves on the College of Southern Nevada Board of Trustees. In 2008, Michael received the highest honor for management within Caesars Entertainment, the Excellence in Leadership Award, which recognizes executives who raise the bar for outstanding performance and exemplary leadership. Only a handful of company leaders are honored each year with this award.

Here is Massari's take on the meetings business in 2016.

### Q How's business in Atlantic City, and what is your outlook for 2017 and beyond?

With the opening of the Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center, our meetings business in Atlantic City has seen continued growth. We have groups booked through 2019, and we don't anticipate this trend to slow down anytime soon.

### Q Now that meetings and events are more experiential than ever before, how does Caesars accommodate meeting planners?

Caesars has been an innovator in offering experiential





meeting options for groups. By booking with us, groups are able to take advantage of our alternate venues and take their groups outside of the meeting space while staying within their one F&B minimum. We have options from our pool areas, golf courses, to The High Roller or The Vortex that lend themselves to unique experiences. Our team also is able to share their expertise and offer suggestions on décor that allows interaction, and speakers who actively interact with the audience.

**Q What are you doing to woo regional corporate meetings because it's an easy "commute" from Northeastern/mid-Atlantic cities?**

For our properties in Atlantic City, including the Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center, we're excited about the fact that we're located within a tank of gas of one-third of the U.S. population. With the addition of the Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center, the largest hotel-conference center complex from Baltimore to Boston, groups in the region can now experience meetings that they would normally take to Orlando or Las Vegas closer to home.

**Q Do you see a difference in bookings among your properties because of their locations?**

There is definitely a difference in bookings among our properties in Las Vegas and Atlantic City over some of the smaller markets but that is to be expected — Las Vegas is the trade show capital of the world.

**Q We're experiencing rapid change in our business because of the internet and technological advances. How are you adapting? Do you use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. to communicate with your customers?**

We do maintain a presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn to communicate with our customers. We also encourage our customers, team members and speakers to be active on social channels, and we make it a point to highlight our social channels during events. We also offer free standard Wi-Fi to our guests in our meeting spaces to adapt to that particular technological need.

**Q What's on the drawing board for the future?**

Currently, we are undergoing major renovations throughout our portfolio. We are renovating 5,700 guest rooms nationwide. These renovations began with the Julius Tower at Caesars Palace and will also take place at Planet Hollywood, Paris Las Vegas, and Harrah's Las Vegas. In Atlantic City, we've completed renovations at Caesars Atlantic City, Bally's Atlantic City and later this year at Harrah's Atlantic City's Bayview Tower.

— CD

Made-only-in-Atlantic-City experiences include tours of The Boardwalk on one of its famous rolling chairs, scavenger hunts along the renowned promenade, classes with the Viking Cooking School at Harrah's and environmental teambuilding activities, such as bay and beach cleanups.

Adding to this lineup is late summer's debut of the live-action, team-based "escape" game called Escape AC, Tropicana Atlantic City's latest contribution to the ever-changing resort scene. Described as "Clue meets Beat the Clock," the game is designed for groups of two to 10, with the goal to escape from a themed room — the Poker Room, the Boardwalk, the Casino Cage and Backstage. Requiring attention to detail, critical thinking, communication and teamwork, Tropicana General Manager Steve Callendar explains Escape AC's creation: "We are always looking for ways to offer our guests more."

When planning group events, Barbara Flamenbaum, DMCP, president and owner of destination management company Atlantic City Ambassador (ACA), takes prime time advantage of her city's idiosyncratic opportunities. From recreational gaming to solving murder mysteries, one recent ACA client, an international cable company specializing in college campuses, fused several homegrown happenings into its annual 2014 and 2015 Global Meetings. Both held at the Golden Nugget Atlantic City, the goals of each — to unite 50 employees with 100 clients for training, sales and technical workshops and to offer face-to-face collaborations — were deemed successful.

With the group's additional incorporation of a night of bowling at a local alley and a chef's demo at the Golden Nugget, diversity ruled. "Each year we did different offsite dinners, activities and events," says Flamenbaum of the distinct destination — a destination she describes as a city with "lots of group options during all seasons of the year."

**Convenient Location Is Key**

Drawn to Atlantic City because of its convenient location for many attendees of the cable company headquartered in Connecticut, additional pulls were Golden Nugget's selection of restaurants, nightlife, good hotel rates and great reputation for service, shares Flamenbaum.

It appears attendees agreed, as evidenced by this evaluation: "Thank you and your team for a fabulous conference — the best ever! ...It was great to be back and to see all the hard work going into Atlantic City and its efforts to revitalize your fantastic destination."

"The appeal of Atlantic City was clear when we began to explore possible event spaces in the area," states Abby Kahn, vice president of global events, Numerix, a New York-based FinTech company, servicing more than 700 financial institutions in 26 countries. "The 'change of pace' was refreshing and different from traditional New York City meeting spaces."

Called Kickoff, Numerix's annual January sales meeting of 150 to 200 attendees has been held in Atlantic City at the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa for the past five years, with plans to return in 2017. As one of its primary meeting objectives is to unite employees through teambuilding activities, Kahn details

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an especially successful Borgata-hosted group activity during the year themed “Crossing the Bridge.”

“We broke into groups, and each group was responsible for building a portion of a bridge. Once assembled, it formed a giant bridge and all employees were able to physically walk across it.” She adds, “It tied perfectly with our overarching theme of working as a single team to accomplish our goals. It was also the perfect approach for us to get all employees involved, no matter what their function within the company.”

In addition to teambuilding, Kickoff also is about celebrating employees for their contributions. The highlight of 2016, centered on the theme “Back to the Future,” was the reveal of the movie’s original DeLorean car at the annual awards night. The climactic finale was almost derailed, however, when the space regularly used for the awards dinner was already booked by another group. “This was going to make our setup very difficult, if not impossible,” says Kahn. Due to the efforts of Ca-



*“The appeal of Atlantic City was clear when we began to explore possible event spaces in the area. The ‘change of pace’ was refreshing and different from traditional New York City meeting spaces.”*

**Abby Kahn**, Vice President, Global Events  
Numerix, New York, NY

beach outing near Resorts Hotel Casino, complete with ladder ball, horseshoes and volleyball for a smaller party; a shopping opportunity at The Walk outlet mall for more than 100 retail enthusiasts, and fishing for 50 on two ocean-bound boats where the catch was bluefish, tautog, stripers and sea bass.

The largest event, however, was held at The Playground at Caesars, an exciting nightlife, retail and dining destination, on The Boardwalk built atop a 900-foot pier. Huttinger details the event: During this three-hour getaway, the third level’s bars and four restaurants were dedicated exclusively to the group of 1,200 with signature drinks, specialty foods, gourmet desserts and a variety of entertainment, even dueling pianos.

Beyond the fun of food and drink was the reward of the CSR endeavor. Pairing with the global project Helping Hands, 47 participants built 17 prosthetic hands for donation to amputees in developing countries during this philanthropic team-building event.

Huttinger’s advice to planners considering this meetings destination: “Compared to other Northeast destinations, Atlantic City offers tremendous value with respect to the cost of rooms, food and beverage, and overall experience.”

In addressing emerging trends, Jim Zierys, assistant vice president of hotel sales, Tropicana Atlantic City, concurs with Huttinger and underscores the importance today’s meeting planners place on their return on investment. “There is increasing emphasis on ROI that I believe is here to stay. Corporations are expecting more for their spend and are looking for



**Tropicana Atlantic City.**

Credit: Tropicana Atlantic City

## New Conference Center Is a Big Draw

Larry Huttinger, CMP, owner of Destination Philly A.C., a DMC operating in Philadelphia and Atlantic City, explains Atlantic City’s appeal to his client, a Fortune 1000 medical equipment company. “The primary decision was due to Harrah’s Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center, completed in fall, 2015. The space was large enough for this group of around 1,200, a group that had never been in Atlantic City before its April 2016 meeting.” Another consideration regarding the selection of Harrah’s Resort and its conference center was the great value offered by both, explains Huttinger.

Taking advantage of Atlantic City’s lower profile pursuits, activities included a day on the links at The Bay and The Pines Courses at the Stockton Seaview Hotel and Golf Club located in Galloway, New Jersey, for a group of approximately 150; a



**Bally's Atlantic City.**

Credit: Caesars Entertainment

hotels who will be good partners and share their vision. Making suggestions that will enhance the attendees’ experience in a cost-effective way is just one example of being a trusted hotel partner,” details Zierys.

## Year After Year

Great golf, strolls on The Boardwalk and exceptional service at Harrah’s Atlantic City are all Greg Diehl needs to bring his group back to AC year after year. As a senior sales engineer for HC Nye Company in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, a provider of HVAC equipment for schools, universities, health care, casinos and others, Diehl’s own positive experiences at Harrah’s prompted him to initially arrange for his engineering department’s continuing education classes at the resort. This year, the company marked their seventh consecutive meeting at Harrah’s Atlantic City, and they are already booked for 2017.

Diehl’s objective is to provide his group with a meaningful learning experience in an entertaining environment, and Atlantic City certainly fits the bill. The group, which usually spends about 80 percent of their time on-property in classes, also makes free time available for a few visits to the Loft, a fabulous gathering spot overlooking The Pool at Harrah’s Atlantic City. Diehl looks forward to conducting the same successful meeting at Harrah’s Atlantic City next year.

## What Lies Ahead

Its future bright, this summer Atlantic City will hold six beach concerts, and the world-famous Boardwalk continues its expansion — eventually extending into Gardner’s Basin, “the hidden gem in the marina district,” whose own redevel-

opment will transform it into a working harbor and entertainment complex.

“Optimism is the one word I would use to describe the current status of Atlantic City,” says Wood of his destination. “We are seeing new investment come in to the city. Closed casino resorts are reopening...and we are enjoying record hotel occupancies this year.”

What is the best description of today’s Atlantic City? “A city reinventing itself for the 21st century,” concludes Meet AC’s top executive.

## New and Noteworthy

Serving up 15,600 first-class hotel rooms, within eight casino hotels and several non-gaming properties, all with meeting and banquet space, the four largest include Borgata’s 2,800 rooms, Harrah’s 2,590 rooms, Tropicana’s 2,079 rooms and Trump Taj Mahal’s 2,010 rooms. But large or small, the commitment to continual renovation revives them all.

The latest news at **Bally’s Atlantic City** is two-fold: the \$3 million facelift of its Gold Rush-themed Wild Wild West area, a 60,000-sf renovation; and the remodel of its Jubilee rooms — now luxury accommodations featuring ultra-mod-



**Larry Huttinger**, CMP, Owner  
Destination Philly A.C., Atlantic City and Philadelphia

*“Compared to other Northeast destinations, Atlantic City offers tremendous value with respect to the cost of rooms, food and beverage, and overall experience.”*

ern and sleek design and complemented by premier views of the Boardwalk.

**Caesars Atlantic City** also tempts its guests with recent renovations in its Forum Tower, with the new Forum rooms sporting a modern interior design enhanced by warm neutral palettes and accented with a pop of yellow. Custom artwork throughout pays tribute to Caesars’ rich history of Roman-inspired architecture and sculpture.

Giving a nod to its guests who adhere to the emerg-



**Caesars Atlantic City.**

Credit: Caesars Entertainment



ing wellness trend of seeking fresh, healthful food and beverage options when on the road, **Harrah's Atlantic City**, which is known for its rooftop herb garden, serves up a strong farm-to-table program.

The **Showboat Atlantic City** and **Revel Atlantic City**, two of the destination's four casinos that closed in 2014, are reopening. Though both will be sans casinos, future plans call for the gaming floors to be utilized in some capacity. Showboat, which opened in July, plans to add a \$40 million event center, while Revel, which will open soon, will feature new non-gaming, of-interest-to-the-meeting-planner amenities, such as a ropes course.

The iconic 1929 **Claridge Hotel**, host of such celebs as Marilyn Monroe and Princess Grace of Monaco, ups the ante in its appeal to today's crowd with an additional 15,000 sf of meeting space, plus a rooftop bar, and **Resorts Casino Hotel's** \$5 million conference center adds 15,000 sf of meeting space within its 12 rooms.

In addition, Resorts Casino Hotel offers Atlantic City's only All-Inclusive Meeting Package (AMP) in 2016. This new, state-of-the-art, all-digital conference center's AMP includes: upgraded guest room (Atlantic City's largest at 525 sf); three meals daily (dinners can be at leisure or as a group in any Resorts restaurant such as Capriccio and Gallagher's Steakhouse or themed events in Margaritaville and LandShark Bar & Grill at no additional charge); a.m./p.m. coffee breaks; Wi-Fi in meeting and guest rooms; meeting rooms (most with natural light and ocean views); AV in the primary meeting room (screen or 90-inch 1080p LED display, sound, LCD and microphone); parking; gratuities, taxes and resort fees; personalized conference

Resorts Casino Hotel.



Credit: Resorts Casino Hotel

planner. For more information, contact Maribeth Grandpre, [mgrandpre@resorts.com](mailto:mgrandpre@resorts.com).

The latest at **Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa** is its brand-new-to-the-scene Borgata Beer Garden, which sits adjacent to its newly debuted 3,200-sf Roman-inspired outdoor pool. Termed "a refreshing concept unique to the Marina District," the beer garden is a full-service canopied bar, featuring more than 15 craft and domestic beers and showcasing live entertainment every Friday through Sunday.

"With the launch of Borgata Beer Garden & Outdoor Pool, we are thrilled to present our hotel guests with an excellent outdoor amenity, offered seven days a week, that effectively reinforces the resort as the summer destination in Atlantic City," summates Borgata's Joe Lupo, senior vice president of operations. Looking toward the future, next year's

*"Each year we did different offsite dinners, activities and events. (Atlantic City has) lots of group options during all seasons of the year."*



**Barbara Flamenbaum**, DMCP, President/Owner Atlantic City Ambassador LLC, Atlantic City, NJ

Borgata will see the opening of a signature restaurant by chef/partner Michael Symon, and the addition of 25,000 sf of meeting and convention space.

On the heels of last year's \$50 million property renovation to **Tropicana Atlantic City** comes another \$40 million enhancement with such inclusions as redesigned Havana Tower hotel rooms, Luxe Hair Salon and Ivan Kane's Kiss Kiss a Go-Go. Atlantic City's newest nightclub experience, Kiss Kiss, is described: "a trip down the rabbit hole into the neon-fueled nights of Bangkok." The icing on this hotel's cake is the unveiling of five all-new, fantasy-themed multimedia light and sound shows playing nightly on The Boardwalk.

Future plans for the **Golden Nugget Atlantic City** include the transformation of an unused restaurant into two 2,400-sf villas with views of the marina district.

Mere footsteps from the world-famous Boardwalk, the 502-room **Sheraton Atlantic City Convention Center Hotel** not only offers 20 meeting rooms, as well as its 11,618-sf Crown Ballroom, but also showcases the past. Among its tributes to the city's history are the Tea Garden's bronze statue of Miss America Pageant's beloved host Bert Parks (it plays his rendition of the iconic melody, "There She Is, Miss America"), the lobby collection of replica Miss America dresses and the self-guided Road to the Crown walking tour (complemented by a companion brochure, as well as an online mobile map accessed by scanning the hotel lobby's QR code). **C&IT**

Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa and The Water Club.



Credit: Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa

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On The Move



Kiawah Island Golf Resort, Kiawah Island, South Carolina, has appointed **Trish Luckenbill** as group sales representative for the Northeast region of the U.S. She formerly worked in group sales at The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa, South Carolina.

Sonesta Coconut Grove, Miami, Florida, has promoted **Christian Jaramillo** to director of sales. He most recently served as the hotel's senior sales manager and assistant director of sales.

Andaz Scottsdale Resort & Spa in Scottsdale, Arizona, has named **Terri Benich** as area director of sales

and marketing. She was director of sales and marketing at Hyatt Regency Scottsdale Resort & Spa at Gainey Ranch. **Rachel Jessop** was named director of group sales. She was senior sales manager for Hyatt Regency Scottsdale Resort & Spa.

The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa in Tucson, Arizona, has named **Maria Elena Armenta** and **Marc Van Dam** as group account directors and **Deborah Weiss** as group sales manager. Armenta, who will handle the Northeast region, most recently was regional director at the Preferred Hotel Group in Miami. Van Dam, who will be responsible for the

Midwest and Eastern Canada markets, was North American sales director for Savision Inc. Weiss was sales manager for the Omni Tucson National Golf Resort.

Mission Inn Resort & Club in Howey-in-the-Hills, Florida, has named **Daniel J. Sierka** as national sales manager. He was senior sales manager at Hyatt Regency Scottsdale Resort and Spa at Gainey Ranch. **Brian Lowery** was named national sales manager responsible for the Southeast Florida and Midwest markets. He formerly served as national sales manager, Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa, Fort Myers, Florida. **C&IT**

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