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THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

A Call to Action

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Credit: Lauberge de Scabona

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Publisher's Message

See Something, Say Something

Our cover story this month tackles human trafficking — a disturbing global problem that impacts our industry. Some of the organizations that are working to raise awareness include SITE, IMEX, Maritz Travel Company and the GBTA. These groups are working in tandem with ECPAT, (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of children for sexual purposes) to educate the industry. ECPAT's code of conduct is outlined in the enlightening and informative feature "A Call to Action — Human Trafficking & the Meetings Industry" on page 22.



At its convention in Orlando, GBTA announced a new partnership with ECPAT. Daphne Bryant, GBTA Foundation executive director, said, "In making this commitment, the GBTA Foundation will work with ECPAT to educate the travel industry about the warning signs of sex tourism and child exploitation. Working together, our industry can make a significant impact in ending child exploitation."

Rhonda Brewer, immediate past president of SITE and vice president, sales for Maritz Travel, said, "Human trafficking is a global issue and happens in many of the hotels and airlines that each of us in the industry use every day. Raising the awareness and training personnel on the signs of trafficking can help stop trafficking."

Brewer added, "It's naive to think that it does not happen where we may be traveling." It's important for everyone to learn how they can help eradicate this problem, and remember that if they "see something, say something."

Tina Weede, CRP, president of USMotivation and vice president, research and education, SITE Foundation, graciously provided SITE's Incentive Travel Outlook for 2016 on page 8. She reminds us that "participants are seeking more personalized and memorable experiences indigenous to the program destination, as well as activities that allow them to give back to the communities they visit."

For more ideas on memorable experiences and entertainment for award-winners, see "Entertainment" on page 18; for incentive programs, consider the impressive resorts in the beautiful state of Arizona on page 26; and for an update on the best new hotels and resorts ideal for insurance and financial meetings and incentives, check out "Hospitality Update" on page 12.

Harvey Grotsky

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MGM National Harbor Tops Off



A rendering of the MGM National Harbor.

NATIONAL HARBOR, MD — MGM National Harbor celebrated the topping off of the \$1.3 billion resort casino by placing the final level atop the highest point on the 24-story concrete structure, which is set for an opening in late 2016. “We commemorate an important construction milestone for MGM National Harbor, as our vision for building the finest luxury resort on the East Coast continues to come to fruition. When we began this journey, we set out to design a property that would rival any in our portfolio, bring great pride to Prince George’s County and the state of Maryland. Looking at the project now, it is clear that we are well on our way to delivering on that vision,” said Jim Murren, chairman and CEO of MGM Resorts International.



MURREN

MGM National Harbor reflects a contemporary, bold and progressive design inspired by the historic area, national icons and natural beauty of Maryland, Washington DC and Virginia. The resort will feature 308 guest rooms and suites, more than 25,000 sf of meeting space, a world-class spa, a 3,000-seat entertainment theater, high-end branded retail, and an expansive gaming floor with table games such as poker, baccarat and slot machines. www.mgmresorts.com

Destination Hotels Launches Destination Event Producers Program

DENVER, CO — Destination Hotels, the largest operator of independent hotels, resorts and residences in the country, announced the launch of its new event designing program. Destination Event Producers or DEP (pronounced “deep”) will serve as a catalyst to evolve the event planning industry and position catering and conference service professionals within the Destination Hotels portfolio with a competitive advantage through their ability to design extraordinary



FOURNIER

experiences for customers and drive revenues for owners.

“Destination Hotels’ Certified Destination Event Producer (CDEP) designation is created to recognize high achieving and consistently outstanding performers through their commitment to ongoing development,” said André Fournier, executive vice president of sales and marketing, Destination Hotels. “This certification demonstrates to meeting planners, owners and the industry at large, Destination’s commitment to being the recognized leader in the Event Planning Industry.”

To achieve the CDEP certification, employees must attend Destination

Hosts Global Alliance Recognized as 2016 FICP Strategic Partner

LAS VEGAS, NV — Hosts Global Alliance (HGA) has been recognized by Financial & Insurance Conference Planners (FICP) as a 2016 Strategic Partner. The Strategic Partner Program is a comprehensive partnership with FICP that provides a limited number of hospitality partners with enhanced year-round recognition and a presence at FICP 2016 events. FICP Strategic Partners are vital to the success of the organization because they allow FICP to deliver better tools and a higher quality of industry specialists to their planner members.

Marty MacKay, HGA president, said, “We are thrilled to be recognized as a 2016 FICP Strategic Partner. Our commitment to excellence and our corporate culture align perfectly with the ideals of the FICP organization. We are dedicated to delivering the H Factor with every program, and we are honored to have the opportunity.” www.ficpnet.com, www.hosts-global.com

Event Sales Bootcamp. Following this, the employee must receive 10 star reviews from guests or planners annually and have a Revinate score of 95 percent or higher on “Likelihood to recommend,” also known as Net Promoter. Additionally, the employee has to attend three quarterly Keeping It Alive (KIA) webinars, complete 10 out of 12 KIA monthly modules, serve in a professional event planner role for a minimum of three years or produce more than 100 events within Destination. Effective demonstration of ability to plan an innovative case study program is required. www.destinationhotels.com

Lansdowne Resort to Launch Multimillion-Dollar Transformation

LEESBURG, VA — Lansdowne Resort, a Destination Hotel announced a renovation just in time to commemorate the property’s 25th anniversary. The expansive project will feature a complete redesign of the resort’s 296 guest rooms, including signature suites and the Presidential Suite; coupled with extensive resources and training dedicated to elevating guest service levels. The guest room redesign will be completed in spring 2016. Lansdowne is nationally renowned for its premium amenities, including 45 holes of championship golf, a full-service luxury spa, five swimming pools, a state-of-the-art health and fitness center and a multitude of dining options located throughout the property. The resort boasts more than 55,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including 37 centrally organized meeting rooms, a 9,525-sf Grand Ballroom, a 3,293-sf Terrace Ballroom and a 126-seat amphitheater. www.lansdowneresort.com



Lansdowne Resort.

In-Person Meetings Are Beneficial, Says MMB Survey

WASHINGTON, DC — Business leaders report that in-person meetings are important to their companies, beneficial to operations and critical to career development, according to a new survey released by the national coalition Meetings Mean Business (MMB). As a result, corporate leaders are making in-person meetings a financial priority and report increasing investment in face-to-face meetings in 2016. The survey shows that in-person meetings are beneficial to several aspects of business operations, including the ability to close deals, engage a team and develop professionally. Executives report that meetings improve their ability to network, grow professionally and grow their company’s bottom line. Four in five surveyed believe they have attended an in-person meeting, conference or event that would not have yielded the same success if it had been conducted remotely. www.meetingsmeanbusiness.com

Grand Hyatt San Francisco International Airport to Open in 2019

SAN FRANCISCO, CA — Hyatt Hotels Corporation and San Francisco International Airport (SFO) announced that a Hyatt affiliate has entered into a management agreement with SFO to brand and manage a 350-room Grand Hyatt hotel. Located on the airport grounds, Grand Hyatt San Francisco International Airport is anticipated to open in mid-2019.

Hyatt is set to bring its hospitality expertise and award-winning Grand

Hyatt brand to SFO, which recently achieved a new all-time passenger traffic record of 50 million annual passengers in 2015.

“Realizing a brand new hotel at our world-class San Francisco International Airport has long been part of SFO’s Capital Plan, and I am pleased with this new relationship with Hyatt,” said San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee.

Grand Hyatt San Francisco International Airport will sit on a 4.7-

Don Welsh Named New President and CEO of DMAI

AUSTIN, TX — Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) announced that Don Welsh, CEO of Choose Chicago, has been chosen as the new president and CEO. “After a thorough search process that included a stellar group of candidates, we are thrilled that



WELSH

Don has accepted this position,” stated Bob Lander, chairman of the DMAI board of directors and CEO of the Austin CVB. “We are confident that he will lead DMAI in becoming the premier destination management organization both in the U.S. and globally.”

Welsh is a seasoned tourism executive with more than 35 years of experience in the industry. Prior to his role in Chicago, Welsh held the CEO positions at the Seattle Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Indianapolis Convention & Visitors Association. Welsh also brings extensive hotel experience with him having served in various capacities at Westin Hotels, the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company and the MGM Grand Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. www.destinationmarketing.org



SITE's Incentive Travel Outlook for 2016

Last year was one of the best years ever for the incentive travel industry, not just in North America, but also around the globe. And, 2016 is projected to be another banner year, according to the 2015 Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Index Benchmark Study, an annual analysis and forecast of the incentive travel industry.

In an effort to provide more meaningful and actionable information to incentive travel professionals, the SITE Foundation partnered with IMEX Group to utilize its database, and engaged leading global research firm J.D. Power to manage the survey and reporting. Survey partici-

pants were given the opportunity to identify themselves as an incentive travel buyer, seller or interested industry observer, enhancing the relevance of the questions and allowing for buyer/seller comparisons. The report reveals a number of positive and potentially challenging trends.

Sensibility Has Replaced Opulence

Although operational excellence remains a key focus, creativity is an even greater focus today. This holds true not only in the destination selection, planned functions, branding and promotions, but also in budget utilization and negotiation of concessions, which is a must. In most cases, sensibility has replaced the opulence of the past. Clients are asking for new and exciting experiences each time and not necessarily just trying to outdo the previous trip.

For sellers of incentive travel services, the market is likely to become even more competitive with customers' expectations going well beyond acquisition of a travel package. And, participants are seeking more personalized and memorable experiences indigenous to the program destination, as well as activities that allow them to give back to the communities they visit.

One way to create a memorable experience for the multi-generational mix is to provide more choice and ability to choose: Instead of providing room gifts every night, offer a shopping experience for the attendee and guest. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities also should provide choices that not only represent the client's brand but each individual, providing participants the opportunity to give back in their company's name, but also individually.

With customers' standards becoming even higher, sellers of incentive travel services cannot afford to remain complacent about creating value through greater creativity and innovative event design. If they do, they are very likely to fall behind the competition.

The focus is not bigger and better, but unique, authentic, memorable and meaningful experiences.

Slight Increase in Budgets

Overall, both buyers and sellers report a slight increase in incentive travel budgets over the past year, and many companies are planning to increase their budgets and the number of eligible participants in the next 12 months. While budgets may be increasing, nearly three-quarters of buyers are managing costs through a variety of ways such as planning shorter programs, having fewer inclusions and selecting less expensive destinations.

For our clients, not only in the financial and insurance verticals, but with most, the focus and differentiator is not bigger and better, but unique, authentic, memorable and

Faith and Belief Are Basis for ROI

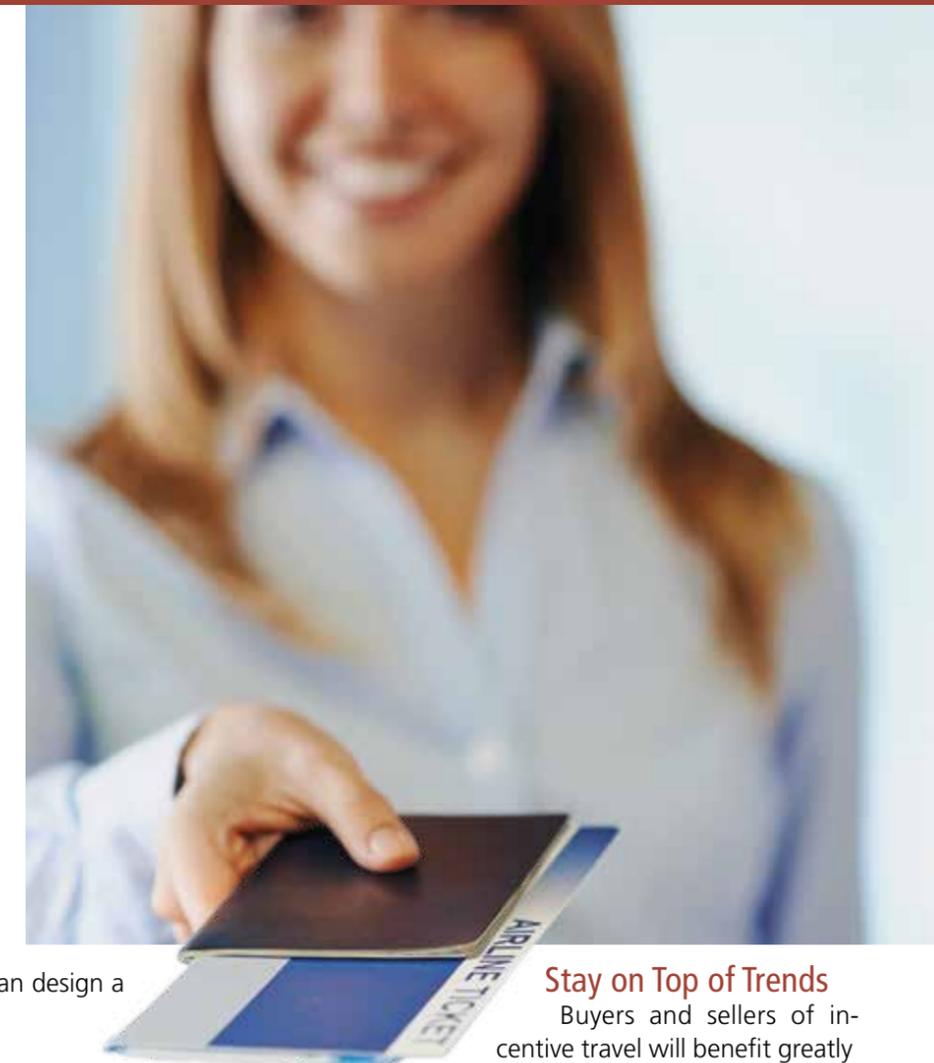
Despite a positive outlook for the incentive travel market, caution signs do exist. Among buyers and sellers, there is a fairly strong perception that domestic and world events — specifically airline costs, the world economy and the threat of terrorism — have the potential to negatively impact the incentive travel industry. However, an even greater challenge to the industry's health is how a majority of companies assess the effectiveness of their incentive travel programs — more on faith and belief than on metrics.

Although a large majority of both buyers and sellers believe that incentive travel programs are strong motivators of performance, only 28 percent report that they always/almost always track the ROI or ROE of programs. The lack of supporting metrics could make incentive travel programs especially vulnerable during financially challenging times. A well-designed program should demonstrate a quantifiable link between the reward and performance, which demands cooperative efforts among buyers who can identify and communicate the business goals, and skilled sellers who can design a program to achieve the desired results.

Make Recognition Personal

During the planning process, we must never lose sight of the purpose for the incentive program and what it took for the participants to earn the reward. Make the recognition portion of the incentive meaningful and tailored to the participants. Winners want to be recognized by their peers and leadership in front of their guests and hear that they are valued contributors to the company's success.

Tina Weede, CRP, is President, USMotivation and Vice President, Research and Education, SITE Foundation. Tina has an extensive background in performance improvement and recognition in both business-to-business and consumer marketing. She has designed, implemented and managed incentive programs of all sizes, providing wisdom through measurable results. Tina's background is in advertising, where she began her career at J. Walter Thompson. In 1990, she moved to the communications department at USMotivation. She later served as Divisional Vice President of Major Accounts, where she was instrumental in helping clients align incentives with their business objectives. In 2010, Tina was promoted to President of USMotivation. She currently serves as Vice President of Research and Education for the SITE Foundation and President of Recognition Professionals International (RPI) Board of Directors.



Stay on Top of Trends

Buyers and sellers of incentive travel will benefit greatly from reviewing the SITE Index re-

port (www.siteglobal.com/page/site-index), applying the findings and implementing strategies based on information relevant to their business. While times are good, it is vitally important that both buyers and sellers stay on top of prevailing trends and prepare for the future to ensure that their businesses and the global incentive travel industry remain strong for years to come.

I&FMM

Incentive Programs

By Susan Adams



Taxation & Incentives — It's Not All Fun in the Sun

Just when it seemed like it was all about throwing an unforgettable program in a great destination, that dreaded word comes up: taxes. When it comes to incentive and recognition programs, the tax laws can be challenging to say the least. While no one likes to tell program guests that they'll be hit with the taxes for their reward at the end of the year, it is important to understand the tax implications.

The cost of an incentive program is deductible for the organization, but the value of the reward is taxable for participants. In fact, even when there is a meaningful meeting agenda, there may be tax liabilities for winners who bring spouses.

Here are a few things you need to know to have a grasp of the tax issues faced by your organization and your program participants:

Seek Out an Expert

Tax laws change constantly, and it's not worth failing to comply with the law or taking the risk of leaving your guests with an unanticipated tax bill. Seek out the right advice in your own organization before you get started planning the program and certainly before you nail down your budget.

The document your legal team and accountants will be referring to is the Internal Revenue Service's "Employers Supplemental Tax Guide, Publication 15-A." Most incentive information is currently covered in a section called "Employee Achievement Awards." The most recent publication states:

"To be excludable from your employee's gross income, the award must be tangible personal property given to an employee for length of service or safety achievement, awarded as part of a meaningful presentation, and award-

ed under circumstances that do not indicate that the payment is disguised as compensation.

"To be exempt, tangible personal property awards cannot be in the form of cash, check, credit/debit cards, gift certificates, meals, lodging, event tickets and stock certificates or other securities."

In plain English, this means that the value of incentives — including travel programs — is considered part of the employee's personal income.



What's Taxable?

The costs of incentive travel programs can be deductible for your company as a business expense, as long as the IRS doesn't consider the award to be too "over the top" relative to the incentive program results.

Employees — including independent contractors — however, are taxed on the Fair Market Value (FMV) of the experience. If you are working with a third-party planner, they should be able to provide this number to you. This rep-

resents the actual value of the trip, without other markups, handling fees, and costs for staffing, communication materials and other peripheral expenses. The program participant should receive a W-2 for that amount.

And don't forget the spouses! The value of their trip is also taxable as part of the recipient's compensation.

The rules for channel programs have an additional modifier. If the reward is given to a company (not a proprietorship or partnership), it is not taxable for the individual as income. If it is awarded to an independent agent, however, it is taxable, just as if he were an employee.

Different tax attorneys have differing opinions on taxation of senior executives who have not "earned" the incentive, but must attend as hosts.

Don't Forget the Room Gifts!

Merchandise that is part of your travel program also should be considered. If they have an FMV of more than \$75, they are also taxable as income.

It's something to keep in mind when your program sponsors are choosing that final night room gift.

But We Had a Meeting...

There's a rumor out there that your participants don't have to pay taxes if you just hold a meeting as part of your incentive program. This is not necessarily the case.

This is an extremely gray area. The IRS has not released any clear definitions of how much meeting time is enough to qualify the program as a meeting, rather than an incentive program. Unfortunately, that leaves this issue open to interpretation, and every lawyer and accountant will see it differently. It is essential to have the conversation with your own team to be sure that you are in compliance, as your organization sees it.

Some things to keep in mind for your discussion:

If the rules and communication materials make it clear that this is a reward that must be earned, the IRS takes a dim view of what they perceive to be "smokescreen" meetings.

If you are going to claim your event as a meeting, you best have a serious intention to do so by creating a meaningful agenda. But keep in mind that people are not going to push themselves too hard for a trip where they spend half their waking hours in meetings.

Grossing Up

Once you know what's taxable, the next question should be: Who's paying?

Since the intention of an incentive program is to reward the recipient with a great experience, many organizations choose to "gross up" by contributing additional money in the form of payroll tax withholding to offset the tax liability.

This increases the overall program budget, but provides incentive program winners with the full value of the experience minus the sting of a tax bill at the end.

This only works for employees, though, as there's no way to adjust the payroll of channel partners.

Every Case is Unique

Because of the complexity of the tax laws surrounding incentives and compensation, it can be challenging — and risky — to even establish the most basic assumptions.

Take the time to discuss the tax implications with your

There's a rumor out there that your participants don't have to pay taxes if you just hold a meeting as part of your incentive program. This is not necessarily the case.

internal legal and accounting team, as well as what that means for your budget. It is worth considering your unique program, your audience and the potential ramifications for your company.

I&FMM

Susan Adams, CPIM, CEP, joined Dittman Incentive Marketing in 2005. As Senior Director of Engagement, Susan contributes to industry thought leadership on recognition and rewards. She is on the board of the Incentive Marketing Association (IMA); a past president of the Recognition Council; and on the board of the Performance Improvement Council (PIC). She also oversees Dittman's Air and Great Escapes divisions, and spearheads CSR initiatives. www.dittmanincentives.com

Hospitality

UPDATE



At the November 2015 Hotel Experience trade show, held at New York City's Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, Dan Berger, CEO of Social Tables, a meeting software developer, opined that new hotels catering to the luxury and group market will flourish in 2016, while others will lose business travelers and leisure travelers to sharing accommodations such as Airbnb and similar business models. Although the Airbnb model has proven to be a legitimate threat to hotels who target price-conscious individual travelers, it is the growth of the upscale, lifestyle

A Sampling of the Most Highly Anticipated Hotels & Resorts for 2016

boutique properties that has some sales managers in larger hotels concerned about their corporate accounts. Even among insurance and financial meeting planners, there has been a sea change, with many beginning to pull away from some of the larger, traditional brand properties and leaning towards the new-build, millennial-driven categories, such as Marriott's

By Ron Bernthal

Edition and Moxy brands, Hilton's Canopy brand, or Commune Hotels and Resorts' Thompson and tommie brands. "Millennials simply see hotels differently," said Philippe Cesson, CEO of Cesson 3.0, a social media specialist. "Thirty-six percent of millennials prefer working in the lobby of a hotel rather than their rooms."

However things roll out in 2016, insurance and financial corporate planners will have many new deluxe properties, large and small, new-builds and recently renovated, to consider in the year ahead.

Here's a breakdown of some of the more intriguing and keenly anticipated new hotels for 2016.

Although new properties will be opening in almost every large and mid-size city in the country, it is New York City, Miami, Texas and the Midwest that will lead the way in new, upscale properties. For meeting planners, many of the cities mentioned below are now facing an oversupply situation, and with less inbound international business groups and conventions due to the strong

U.S. dollar, planners can hope for a bit more rate flexibility from hotel sales managers.

New York City

The 686-room **InterContinental New York Barclay** hotel will reopen in April 2016, after a multiyear, top-to-bottom renovation. By spring, the property will have completely enhanced and expanded its group meeting space, restaurant, bar and lobby areas, and will reopen essentially as a new hotel.

Among the new-build 2016 properties in New York City that should attract planners is the **SLS Park Avenue**, with 190 rooms, a Philippe Starck-designed interior, and chef José Andrés' F&B program, which includes a glamorous 14th-floor rooftop bar and the subterranean S Bar. The hotel, which is expected to open this summer, will be located at 444 Park Avenue South, in the fashionable NoMad neighborhood.

Another new property that will garner much attention when it opens this summer will be the **Four Seasons Hotel New York Downtown**, a 185-room, Robert Stern-designed hotel located in New York's trendy South Tribeca neighborhood and very close to the new Calatrava-designed Path station, World Trade Center, the Wall Street financial institutions and shopping. The new Four Seasons New York Downtown encompasses the first 22 floors of the building and includes Wolfgang Puck's Cut steak house and bar, a full-service spa, 24-hour fitness facility, indoor pool and innovative, high-tech meeting spaces.

"With more than 6,000 sf of space,



Four Seasons Hotel New York Downtown

Four Seasons Hotel New York Downtown will offer three adaptable function rooms, each with modern décor and double-height windows on two sides," said Michael Law, director of sales and marketing for the property. "The 2,943-sf ballroom on the hotel's second floor features windows that look out to Church and Barclay streets and the glass pillars of the WTC. Two beautifully appointed meeting rooms, 1,387 sf and 1,027 sf, are both divisible in two, and there is also a grand staircase from the lobby that leads up to the second floor event/function space."

Commune Hotels and Resorts has been seeing more corporate group business in its design-friendly Thompson and tommie brands. In summer 2016, the colorful and eclectic **tommie Hudson Square** will open with 325 rooms on Hudson Street in Manhattan's West Village neighborhood. Although some insurance and financial meeting planners may shy away from this non-traditional section of southern Manhattan, others are discovering the benefits of upscale boutique properties in exciting urban neighborhoods.



New York Marriott at the Brooklyn Bridge

Many guest rooms at tommie Hudson Square have Hudson River views, multi-functional furnishings, such as a convertible flip-down desk, a flexible open closet or an alcove bed perched against an expansive window. Rooms include "high-touch" materials such as solid walnut table tops and

handmade porcelain tiles. The property is suitable for small corporate meetings with three meeting studios on the second floor, offering a combined total of 1,600 sf. Each meeting room holds eight people in a boardroom-style format, but when combined, a reception format holds 60, classroom setup 32, and theatre-style 40 persons. Each room also opens up onto a patio, and the rooftop, featuring indoor and outdoor space with full bar and food options, is bookable for events.

Brooklyn's business and neighborhood revitalization, combined with its proximity to JFK International Airport and Manhattan has resulted in more high-end corporate meetings and conferences in this now-trendy New York City borough. Brooklyn's largest hotel, the 667-room **New York Marriott at the Brooklyn Bridge**, is in the midst of a \$43 million renovation project. Meeting space renovations were recently completed, and room redesign work will be finished by July 2016.



tommie Hudson Square

The property offers well-appointed rooms, state-of-the-art audio-visual equipment, and its guest rooms, among the largest in New York City, have great views of the Manhattan skyline and the Brooklyn Bridge. The hotel has more than 40,000 sf of meeting and banquet space, including the 18,105-sf Grand Ballroom, and is close to the Barclays Center and the restored Brooklyn Navy Yard, both attractions offering unique offsite event options.

Florida

New hotels in Miami and Miami Beach will add a combined 1,600 new rooms to the area's inventory during 2016, with three ultra-luxury properties accounting for about a third of the total. The new, 169-room (111 are suites) **Faena Hotel Miami Beach**, in the upscale Faena District, opened

in December; the other Faena buildings in this sprawling, design-driven neighborhood project will open in 2016. Film director and producer Baz Luhrmann and his wife, the production and costume designer Catherine Martin, redesigned the Faena Hotel (the former historic Saxony Hotel) with a new 3,000-sf theater featuring live cabaret shows, a 22,000-sf Tierra Santa Spa, and a restaurant from Argentine chef Francis Mallmann called Los Fuegos, which includes an outdoor barbecue. The top two floors of the building are taken up by 13 deluxe penthouse residences.

For insurance and financial meeting planners with a sense of adventure (ok, adventure in ultra-luxurious, air-conditioned surroundings), note that Alan Faena, the project's wealthy Argentine developer, has been working to turn the stretch of land between 32nd and 36th streets, on both sides of Miami Beach's Collins Avenue, into a new cultural hub, modeling the \$1 billion project after a similar neighborhood he built in the Puerto Madero neighborhood of Buenos Aires. The project eventually will include not only the hotel, but condos, retail, restaurants and the 42,565-sf, \$150 million, multiuse Faena Forum, a venue to consider for exclusive receptions, board meetings and high-end social events. Designed by the Pritzker Prize-winning architect Rem Koolhaas, Faena Forum is an innovative, one-of-a-kind Miami Beach space that will surely gather much attention in 2016.

Miami's Brickell district will become an even bigger meetings destination later this year when the **SLS Brickell Hotel & Residences** opens for business in fall 2016, the fourth Miami area property for the deluxe hotel company. Like its new sister property, SLS Hotel New York, the SLS Brickell will reflect the design of

Philippe Starck and the remarkable culinary talents of chef José Andrés. The Brickell property also will include the noted Miami-based chef Michael Schwartz. With 10,000 sf of Philippe Starck-designed event space, property-wide Wi-Fi and Web conferencing capability, catering specialists and a multilingual staff, the hotel will not only boast an upscale, stylish meetings venue, but an experienced SLS staff as well.

North of Miami the new \$100 million, 400-room **Hilton West Palm Beach** opens January 27, 2016, and will be connected to the Palm Beach Convention Center by an enclosed walkway. The 12-story structure is a new-build and includes 24,000 sf of indoor event space, a boardroom, five meeting rooms, swimming pool and outdoor event lawns. The property is across the street from the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts and the CityPlace shopping, dining and entertainment district.

Executive rooms in the hotel offer access to the Executive Lounge, with free breakfast and snacks during the day.

Another anticipated Florida opening in 2016 is the new 1,000-room **Loews Sapphire Falls Resort at Universal Orlando**. Sapphire Falls will have a contemporary Caribbean theme and contain the largest convention space among the other Universal Orlando properties with 115,000 sf of meeting space, a 41,000-sf ballroom, 16 meeting rooms, 11,000 sf of outdoor meeting space and three dedicated meeting planner offices. It also will be linked by a short pedestrian bridge to the convention space at Universal's Royal

Pacific, its sister resort. The 1,000 spacious rooms and bathrooms at Sapphire Falls, including 83 suites, are part of three main towers and bring Universal Orlando's total onsite hotel room count to 5,200. The pool area is 16,000 sf, the largest among Universal Orlando properties, and includes a white sand beach, a water slide and fire pits. Four food and beverage outlets, 24/7 room service and private dining venues suitable for high-end corporate meeting groups, also will be available when the property opens in July 2016.

Hawaii

Meeting planners with incentive groups or conferences are looking forward to the June 2016 opening of the new **Four Seasons Resort O'ahu at Ko Olina**. With 358 guest rooms and suites, the fifth Four Seasons Hawaiian resort will offer dramatic views of the beach and ocean, and will host groups of up to 600 indoors, or 900 participants using both the indoor and outdoor spaces. The five-star property will provide 16,874 sf of function space including the expansive Ocean Ballroom and five meeting rooms. Additional outdoor event space is available on the lawn and beach or can extend to the adjoining 10-acre Lanikuhonua Cultural Estate.

In addition to the modern, high-tech meeting facilities, the property will include five restaurants and lounges, four pools and five beaches, a multilevel Spa and Wellness Centre, tennis facilities and watersports, and preferred access to the Ko Olina Golf Club.

"I heard that Four Seasons was opening a new property in Hawaii, and since I often use Hawaii, as well as Four Seasons properties, for incentive groups, I would certainly consider this property for a future group," says

Tawny Herron, CMP, CMM, corporate meeting and conference manager for the Standard Insurance Company in Portland, Oregon. "I like to use the deluxe, boutique hotels rather than a large resort if my group is small, but I will be using the Grand Hyatt Kauai (602 rooms) for a group in 2017, so it all depends on the group size. I also like to wait at least six months after a new property opens before I put a group there, but it's always interesting to hear about new properties, and see if I can match them up with my upcoming incentive groups and conferences."

Southwest

The Southwest has had several exciting openings in 2015, with more planned for 2016. In the state capital, the **JW Marriott Austin** opened in February 2015, giving a nice jolt to that city's downtown hotel capacity with its 1,012 rooms. Only 15 minutes from Austin International Airport, the property contains 120,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space, and easy access to the Austin Convention Center

In Houston, the 1,000-room **Marriott Marquis Houston** is expected to open in October. Located downtown, next to the George R. Brown Convention Center, the hotel will provide more than 100,000 sf of meeting space, including a 39,000-sf ballroom, the city's largest. There will be plenty of high-tech amenities in rooms and meeting spaces, a 5,000-sf spa and a fitness center the same size, a rooftop infinity pool and a state of Texas-shaped lazy river (pictured top) that will sit 110 feet above the ground on the



Marriott Marquis Houston

amenity deck. A two-story sports bar will attract business and leisure guests as well as incentive groups. **The Sheraton Georgetown Texas Hotel & Conference Center** will open in 2016 within the upscale Summit at Rivery Park development, a mixed-use project located 29 miles north of Austin (30 minutes by car). The 224-room property will feature a 30,000-sf conference center, a signature restaurant, destination bar, outdoor pool and a large health and fitness center.

The Andaz Scottsdale Resort & Spa

is expected to open in mid-2016 with 201 bungalow-style guest rooms, a full-service spa and salon, and more than 20,000 sf of meeting and event spaces, all on 22 acres of land less than two miles from Old Town and Fashion Square shopping mall.

Ritz-Carlton and Five Star Development Resort Communities will develop a new resort and residences in Paradise Valley near Scottsdale, Arizona. Spread over 20 acres and overlooking Camelback Mountain, **The Ritz-Carlton, Paradise Valley** resort will offer 200 casita-style guest rooms and 20,000 sf of function space. The resort, scheduled to open in late 2018, also will feature a destination spa.



MGM National Harbor



JW Marriott Minneapolis Mall of America

will open at the corner of Michigan Avenue and Erie St. in spring 2016 (the former Conrad Chicago has been rebranded as a Starwood Hotels & Resorts Luxury Collection property). The new Conrad Chicago is being constructed within a historic 20-story, downtown property, with beautiful interior design work by Pierre-Yves Rochon. The hotel will offer 287 rooms (each with a 65-inch HDTV), complimentary Wi-Fi throughout the property and an array of dining options.

The new Conrad will provide seven multifunction meeting rooms, two expansive hospitality suites and 12 guest rooms that can be converted into one-on-one meeting spaces with full access to the meetings concierge staff. The property will be the sixth in North America under the Conrad brand name. The company is currently working on opening properties in Fort Lauderdale and Washington, DC.

The highly anticipated **JW Marriott Minneapolis Mall of America** opened its doors in late November 2015, one of the most important corporate hotel developments to take place in the Twin Cities area. The property is the JW Marriott brand's first in Minneapolis, and is part of the Mall of America's recent expansion project.

The JW Marriott Minneapolis Mall of America has 342 rooms, a three-story lobby area and a signature restaurant, Cedar + Stone, Urban Table led by noted chef Everton Clarke. The restaurant's private dining room accommodates up to 14 guests. The hotel offers 20,000 sf of event space, including a ballroom with a capacity of 1,700 attendees. Another feature of the property is an innovative Event Lounge, where guests can relax or experience live culinary demonstrations or other events. The hotel is located in Bloomington, close to Minneapolis/St. Paul

Midwest

Hilton's new **Conrad Chicago**

International Airport and a 15-minute drive from downtown Minneapolis.

Washington, DC Area

Construction is underway at the **MGM National Harbor** in Prince George's County, Maryland, just outside of Washington DC, and MGM Resorts International has big plans for the company's first large-scale resort located on the East Coast. The MGM National Harbor project is expected to open in the second half of 2016. "We expect that resort to be one of the most successful U.S. resorts outside of Las Vegas when it is opened," says Jim Murren, chairman and CEO of MGM Resorts International.

The \$1.3 billion casino and hotel project will include a 125,000-sf casino with 3,300 video lottery terminals and 160 table games; a 26,500-sf spa and salon; a 24-story, 308-room tower hotel; a transformable arena with 3,000 seats; 18,000 sf of high-end retail space; 27,000 sf of meeting space; and 12 restaurants, many with notable national and international chefs, including chefs José Andrés, Marcus Samuelsson and Bryan and Michael Voltaggio.

Mexico

In the Caribbean region, the 547-suite **Hyatt Ziva Cancun** opened in late November 2015, after an \$85 million expansion and renovation project. The property is surrounded on three sides by the Caribbean Sea, and Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta designed the original resort building that has now been incorporated into the new Hyatt Ziva Cancun. An elevated lobby captures ocean views to the northeast and, in the evening, the lights of Isla Mujeres. All guest suites provide one-touch lighting efficiency, complimentary in-room refreshment bars, in-room dining service and, for upper-category accommodations, swim-up suites

and private butler service. Hyatt Ziva Cancun also offers an exclusive Hyatt Club Level with a private lounge and concierge service.

Hyatt Ziva Cancun now provides state-of-the-art meeting and convention space with more than 11,000 sf of flexible meeting and event areas, including a ballroom that can be divided into five breakout rooms, and seven additional meeting rooms. The outdoor lawn, garden and beach venues also are available for corporate incentives and meetings.

Panama

Panama City, Panama, is becoming Latin America's fastest growing meetings destination with double-digit growth in its meetings and conventions business in recent years, and is becoming a leading business hub in the region. The newest addition to the city skyline is **The Ritz-Carlton, Panama**, which brings a touch of luxury and elegance to this busy and interesting city. Sharing space with high-end retail within a 29-story new-build, this downtown hotel features four dining venues, two swimming pools, state-of-the-art meeting space and a luxury spa. Some of the biggest hotel companies in the world have opened new meetings and conventions facilities in Panama City in recent years.

In 2015, the Amador Convention Center, the largest convention center in the country, opened in Panama City, providing 570,505 sf meeting space. The \$193 million complex, designed by the well-known architecture firm RM+LLC, features a banquet hall, exhibition

hall and conference facilities, as well as a grand plaza, outdoor amphitheater and 1,500-seat performing arts theater with balcony and box seating.

In addition to the Amador opening, Hyatt opened its first Hyatt-branded hotel in Panama, the 165-room **Hyatt Place Panama City**, and the company is rumored to be considering another Hyatt-branded facility closer to the convention center, scheduled to open next year.

Hilton has opened the 347-room **Hilton Panama**, and the company already runs three other hotels in Panama City, including a Waldorf Astoria. A fifth Hilton is expected to open soon.

The number of hotel rooms available in Panama City has almost doubled since 2007, with more than 13,000 hotel rooms now available in Panama City. The oversupply of hotel rooms has resulted in declining room rates, which means that discounted rooms for business groups in all hotel categories are possible.

Grand Cayman

Also in the Caribbean, Kimpton Hotels, which has been attracting younger business travelers and small groups to its 60 boutique, city center properties in the U.S., is now targeting resort group business with its upscale and contemporary **Seafire Resort and Spa** on Seven Mile Beach on Grand Cayman Island, its first project outside North America.

"Cayman will be the crown jewel resort in our collection," says Mike DeFrino, the hotel group's chief executive officer. The resort's 266 rooms include 16 oceanfront suites, nine beachfront bungalows, 18 oceanview suites and 118 oceanview guest rooms. Indoor meeting space and a 1,300-sf event lawn is planned. The property is expected to open in November 2016.



Hyatt Ziva Cancun



The Ritz-Carlton, Panama

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ENTERTAINMENT



GigSalad staff with the Kamikaze Fireflies. GigSalad provides every and any type of entertainment for corporate events.

By Maura Keller

Creative, Memorable Ways to Wow Award-Winners on Their Night

Traditional awards banquets and galas held within the financial and insurance arena often tend to be boring, repetitive experiences for attendees and award-ees alike. We often equate them to a high school graduation where the names of the winners are read, and then the winner is paraded in front of their peers to receive their diploma. In many instances, attendees only pay attention when their name or the names of their friends is read, and then everyone goes back to socializing and drinking the table wine. In most cases, the awards banquet comes across as a “stuffy possession of names” as opposed to a celebration of the company’s top performers. So how are financial and insurance planners modifying today’s award galas and entertainment?

According to Karen Alfonso, CMP, director of conference planning at The Hartford Financial Services Group in Hartford, Connecticut, the main objective of an awards gala is to reward and recognize someone for a job well done. However, the objective always is to do so in a powerful and personal way.

“Find out interesting, meaningful facts about the award-winner(s) and weave the details into the award presentation,” Alfonso says.

She sees the trends of enhanced

emphasis not only on cost-savings but also event value. If it’s not going to provide a lasting, memorable experience, refrain from doing it.

“Are there different interests of people attending that you are trying to meet?” Alfonso says. “We find that whether or not attendees are seasoned award-winners or first-time winners, everyone likes to feel appreciated and recognized. No matter what the budget, the key is to create an emotional, memorable connection between the company presenting the

award and the person(s) receiving it. We also find this to be an effective way to inspire others to achieve and exceed their goals.”

Go the Creative and Cost-Effective Route

Internally, the Hartford Financial Service Group is placing less of an emphasis on expensive décor. Rather, Alfonso and her team seek creative and cost-effective ways to create a “wow experience.” For example, they produced an opening video to

capture the “year in review” with a focus on their accomplishments and created a paparazzi experience as everyone arrived.

Reduced entertainment budgets also are driving enhanced creativity at awards galas. We are helping to create a much more personalized experience with meaningful small touches and by remaining very detail orientated,” Alfonso says. “Based

are over-stimulated at all times, and our expectations have risen.

“Our ideas of what entertainment is has changed with the Internet, on-demand TV and shows as well as what restaurants and clubs are doing to separate themselves from their competition,” Smith says. “Especially as this millennial generation moves into the financial world, we need

are either present on stage or present the award to the new winner. Also, special décor for the tables of the award-winners has been popular, too.”

During one of 360 Destination Group’s more innovative evenings, a larger-than-life ice sculpture was the centerpiece of the stage.

This ice sculpture was beautifully displayed, lit to perfection and was the exact replica of the smaller glass award the recipients received once they came up on stage.

“Attendees of our financial industry programs are a sophisticated group,” Archer says. “They are well traveled and therefore their taste and expectations in music and entertainment are higher.”



“The key is to create an emotional, memorable connection between the company presenting the award and the person receiving it.”

Karen Alfonso, CMP, Director of Conference Planning
The Hartford Financial Services Group, Hartford, CT

on the chosen theme, find creative ways to name your assigned dinner tables instead of simply numbering them. Reputable dance bands, photo booths (with props), and unique dessert/candy stations with portable containers are also very popular.”

And instead of simply talking about what the award recipient did to achieve the recognition, The Hartford likes to showcase a short video of the person in the field or in their work environment describing the scenario.

“We find it to be a much more effective and intuitive way to ‘tell the story’ and to keep the interest of the audience,” Alfonso says. “Another technique is to personalize the walk-up/sit-down music to the award-winner depending upon where they are from or the interests they hold. Also, with our enhanced technological capabilities, if award-winners are remote, we like to have them participate by live video stream.”

Meeting Expectations

Hillary Smith, CMP, CSEP, partner at Konzept Events in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, says the entertainment component for financial and insurance galas is becoming more and more important because our attention spans in life are changing — we

to appeal to them by offering them an experience that they want to share on social media or talk about the next morning at breakfast.”

Indeed, Shelly Archer, partner at 360 Destination Group with offices in California, Florida and Chicago, says quality entertainment with captivating talent is important to their financial industry clients.

“There is a real desire for entertainment that engages the group and enhances the evening on a level that is far beyond background music,” Archer says. “Personal touches are very important and is something 360 DG is always providing to our financial and insurance clients. Past award-winners

Key Entertainment Trends

David Ahearn, co-founder of Four Day Weekend Inc., based in Fort Worth, Texas, takes a different approach to orchestrating awards banquets for his financial and insurance clients. “We believe the awards banquet should be a celebration of the company’s greatest asset — their people,” Ahearn says. “Our strategy is called the ‘Four Day Weekend,’ which creates an Oscar-style approach to the awards banquet where we integrate the entertainment into the awards night, and we take the company’s top talent and make them the stars of the night. We always like



to say we ‘have fun with’ the people and not ‘make fun of.’ Our job is to make the top performers shine as we celebrate their accomplishments.”

Ahearn created such an event with their client MetLife — incorporating live, improvised songs about the winners, using funny introductions to spice up the procession of winners and interviewing winners to add levity to the night.

“Our goal is to keep the night moving in a fun and innovative way so that by the end, people are longing for more as opposed to looking at their watches hoping for the night to end,” Ahearn says.

“We create a night that everyone will talk about for months or even years after the night has passed,” Ahearn says. “We encourage companies not to make the awards night an afterthought. Instead, make it one of the best moments of your conference.”

Mark Steiner, CEO of GigSalad, notes a trend that one must continually surpass past events. However, bigger and splashier is not always better.

“Sometimes the subtlety of a performance in entertainment is missed,” Steiner says. “You don’t have to go bigger; choose quality talent for a couple of hours instead of long hours of mediocrity. Break out of the box and be diverse in your choices for entertainment.”

Steiner stresses that flow and timing are essential in keeping these events engaging and entertaining. “Not losing track of audience patience and attention span is of utmost importance,” Steiner says. “Audiences today have shorter attention spans and planners must keep up by adding more exciting elements to their events.”

Sally Allen and the Water Coolers entertain and engage corporate audiences all the while making award-winners feel like rock stars.

As audiences change, producers will change. As long as producers know their audience, they can adequately create an event that matters and is entertaining.”

Many financial event bookings through GigSalad currently include outside-the-box acts such as



David Ahearn, Co-founder
Four Day Weekend Inc., Fort Worth, TX

stilt-walkers, strolling magicians, contortionists and other visual entertainment. If the goal is something more traditional, GigSalad suggests that music is universal.

“Try a string quartet or acoustic band for background ambience and setting a mood, or a cover band to add energy to an event,” Steiner says. “Music can almost always be effective and is seldom out of place or inappropriate.”

And when affordable, having a celebrity present the awards is always a lot of fun.

“Some companies on a budget will use a celebrity impersonator instead, which usually goes over just as well with the crowd,” Steiner says.

Many times, as themed events are back in style, the awards follow the specific theme. For example, companies may present an Academy Award-style Oscar statue for a movie theme

“We believe the awards banquet should be a celebration of the company’s greatest asset — their people.”

or have the emcee walk to the award-winner in the audience and escort him/her to the stage to accept the award.

“Again, finding creative, untraditional ways to present awards makes for a much more fun experience,” Alfonso says. “Isn’t it much more fun to have a unique award in your office that will generate conversation?”

Meeting the Challenge

It’s always been challenging to keep people engaged at awards programs, especially when awardees may be self-conscious and uncomfortable walking across a stage. And more often than not, the session is hosted by an executive, and unless the executive has the time to spend days preparing, like a professional host would, it’s almost impossible for him or her to keep the session on pace.

“These days attendees have access to everyone they know and all the information in the universe, right in their pockets,” says Sally Allen, executive producer at The Water Coolers, a corporate entertainment company. “Before you know it, the entire room is checking their email, and if you stand in the back of the darkened room, it looks like stars twinkling in a sky of boredom.”



Credit: The Water Coolers

You need the entire program to win this battle by being entertaining.”

The Water Coolers have provided gala entertainment to a wealth of financial and insurance-based clients including GenWorth Financial, Citi Financial, AFLAC, State Farm, Nationwide Insurance and Pacific Life, to name a few. They recently worked with one client in the financial services sector who hosted their sales channel for an awards evening at The AT&T Stadium, formerly known as the Cowboys Stadium.

“The event planner is a top-notch pro,” Allen says. “She had us create mini-songs about the key winners, who we brought up on stage, and while they were crossing on to the stage, the winners’ names and photos were running through the billboards and in the Jumbotron. That was pretty spectacular. The audience was completely engaged, and the winners felt like they were complete rock stars.”

Smith notes many financial or in-

“If you stand in the back of the darkened room, it looks like stars twinkling in a sky of boredom. You need the entire program to win this battle by being entertaining.”

Consider incorporating mini-screens or iPads into the centerpieces and let it rotate around the table depicting your company’s branding or show a live feed of the stage through the night. When a winner’s name is announced, show photos and share information about the individual. The night is about them, so let them be the star, suggests Alfonso.

Smith would like to see the financial industry start to mimic more of what happens on awards shows, such as infusing comedy or personal notes about the winners into their overall evening to keep the audience entertained.

“Often, it seems like all of the fun — the music, desserts and cocktails — happen in the after-parties, but the room itself and programming could use more of those special elements,” Smith says. “We need to start to look at these events as a fun-infused tribute to the winners.”

Allen and her team



Sally Allen, Executive Producer
The Water Coolers, New York, NY

surance awards galas often have the same flow — cocktail, dinner, awards, after-party.

“There is also a sense of conservatism to them,” Smith says. “Sometimes it’s tough to get them to shake things up by getting experiential with the menu or the entertainment, but we are pushing for it. Moving in a good direction though, more and more often, quality video production is being incorporated, whether about the winners or the organization.”

In fact, as technology continues to advance, Alfonso feels that it will play a much bigger role in award galas and include features such as live streaming for offsite recipients so that no one is excluded despite their physical location that evening.

also see financial and insurance-based clients get most creative when they have large numbers of awards to give so having them move across the stage one at a time would be too time consuming.

“We’ve seen people start an evening with a large group of winners on risers onstage in the darkness and then do a light cue that brings them all into light at once on a musical cue,” Allen says.

On the Horizon

The trend is shifting to not make the awards night an afterthought. Also, as the work force becomes younger it is imperative that companies take steps to make the awards night innovative and fun.

“We live in a culture where we have

all forms of entertainment at our fingertips,” Ahearn says. “Audiences have become much more savvy so it is important to treat them respectfully and give them the very best entertainment available to illustrate how valued they are to the organization. If your company is not willing to do it, there is another company out there that will, and soon top talent will find new areas to support their talent.”

A trend experts are seeing in industries across the board is full sensory experiences, and many believe that eventually we’ll see that crossover into the financial world, too.

“There will be more emphasis on engaging all of the senses,” Smith says. “To do that, we’ll see the galas become more interactive and showcase more special moments and elements that the audience will remember and want to share with their friends.”

Says Alfonso, “The basic concept of rewarding people for exceptional service will never go out of style. The way in which the award will be presented or the technology used to enhance the experience will continue to evolve, but the basic objective will remain the core of the award experience.”

Any company or industry has to be willing to evolve their programming to appeal to their audience.

“Let’s be honest, awards ceremonies with a sit-down dinner and deejay have been done and done,” Smith says. “If financial and insurance companies want their people to want to attend these events — and they should because it’s a fantastic opportunity for brand connection — they have to look at new ways to engage their attendees and honorees. With everything we are exposed to these days, capturing and holding people’s attention will become more and more challenging, and more and more vital. Companies have to be willing to step outside the so-called comfort zone to create truly memorable events, not just another awards night.”

I&FMM



If we're not part of the solution, we're part of the problem. Human trafficking, a \$150 billion per year global economy, relies heavily on the travel and hospitality industries of which we're an integral part. And whether we act as individuals, chapters or entire organizations, act we must.

One of the first things to understand about human trafficking is that it doesn't just happen "over there." It's not a victimless crime, and it occurs in some of the best hotels across the globe, including in the United States. It's not all about shady, underworld characters.

The men who purchase sex for

hire are from every country and every socio-economic background. Soroptimist International, a global volunteer organization working to improve the lives of women and girls through programs leading to social and economic empowerment, states on its website: "There is no one profile that encapsulates the typical client. Rather, men who

purchase trafficked women are both rich and poor, Eastern and Western. Many are married and have children."

A New Perspective

Lisa Langford, corporate meeting planner for Finance and Resource Management Consultants, which works with the petroleum industry, at-

tended an industry event in Las Vegas and had the chance to sit with one of the event's speakers. It gave her a new perspective on how human trafficking works, and how it so easily slips under the radar of most hotel guests and airline passengers.

"I sat with Dr. Katariina Rosenblatt late one night in the lobby of a Vegas hotel," Langford says. "Katariina, a former trafficked victim and now advocate and speaker, described what she looks for in identifying possibly trafficked girls — the downward focus of the eyes, the mature style of dress on a young girl, the submissive behavior. I had never noticed these signs before and have never people-watched the same since."

"It is difficult to reconcile two realities," Langford says. "One, that trafficking exists in nearly every U.S. city and in the same hotels we contract for meetings. Two, it's imperceptible. But it happens. Victims confirm it. And we have a unique voice in our industry to help."

In 2012, the United Nations International Labor Organization (ILO) issued a report on the economics of forced labor, estimating that 21 million men, women and children are in forced labor worldwide, 22 percent of them victims of sexual exploitation. Two-thirds of the profits from forced labor were generated by forced sexual exploitation, amounting to \$99 billion per year. According to the ILO research, about 55 percent of all victims are women and girls, and in forced sexual exploitation and domestic work an even greater majority are female.

Perhaps most disturbing, annual profits for the criminals who enslave these victims are highest by far in developed countries, including the United States. And while there are no statistics specific to the meetings industry, Julie Johnson, director of industry and media relations for SITE (Society for Incentive Travel Excellence), says it's well known that child sex trafficking spikes in cities holding large conventions and sporting events, including the Olympics and Super Bowl.

Remaining blind to this global atrocity is no longer an option. As the ILO report put it, "The continued existence of forced labor is bad for business, bad for development and bad for its victims. It is a practice that has no place in modern society and should be eradicated as a matter of priority."

See Something, Say Something

Raising awareness is the first step to bringing an end to human trafficking. To borrow from Homeland Security and other security organizations, we need to say something if we see something.

But first, we must understand what we see and know what to do if a scene doesn't look right.

No one is saying that's easy. Fortunately, there are people and organizations already helping, among them a number of meetings industry organizations including SITE, IMEX, Maritz Travel Company and GBTA (Global Business Travel Association). Most are working in partnership with the U.S. branch of ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of children for sexual purposes), and many have signed ECPAT-USA's Tourism Child-Protection Code of Conduct and committed to implementing its guidelines, created to help prevent human trafficking and protect children.

At its 2015 U.S. convention in Orlando, GBTA announced a new partnership with ECPAT. "The GBTA Foundation and ECPAT stand shoulder-to-shoulder against the trafficking and exploitation of children," said Daphne Bryant, GBTA Foundation executive director, at the convention. "In making this commitment, the GBTA Foundation will work with ECPAT to educate the travel industry about the warning signs of sex tourism and child exploitation. Working together, our industry can make a significant impact in ending child exploitation."

At the 2015 IMEX America in Las Vegas, several education sessions were devoted to the topic of human trafficking, including a collaborative presen-

ECPAT Code

Here are ECPAT Tourism Child-Protection Code of Conduct primary guidelines for hotels:

- Establish a policy and procedures against sexual exploitation of children.
- Train employees in children's rights, the prevention of sexual exploitation and how to report suspected cases.
- Include a clause in contracts throughout the value chain stating a common repudiation and zero tolerance policy of sexual exploitation of children.
- Provide information to travelers on children's rights, the prevention of sexual exploitation of children and how to report suspected cases.
- Support, collaborate and engage stakeholders in the prevention of sexual exploitation of children.
- Report annually on the implementation of Code-related activities.

Visit www.ecpatusa.org/6012/code to see the full code. — CL

GBTA Call to Action

Travel Buyers

- Establish if your company and your suppliers are knowingly, or otherwise involved.
- Put questions into RFPs for key suppliers asking them to identify any training and/or education programs. See the GBTA toolkit "How Travel Buyers Can Help + Sample RFP Language": gbta.org/foundation/ICARUS/Pages/ECPAT.aspx#5
- Continue to build your knowledge about the issue using the GBTA toolkit and the ECPAT website.
- Learn more by visiting ECPAT on www.reportchildsextourism.eu — then click on the dedicated site for your home country.

Travel Suppliers

- Ensure staff training and awareness takes place.
- Discuss the issue with employees; are they seeing something?
- Put in place companywide awareness and education campaigns.
- Continue to build your knowledge about the issue using the GBTA toolkit and the ECPAT website. — CL

tation developed by SITE and ECPAT. Michelle Guelbart, director of private sector engagement for ECPAT-USA, and Rhonda Brewer, immediate past president of SITE and V.P. sales Maritz Travel, sat on the panel.

A Personal Experience

For Brewer, the passion to help eradicate human trafficking is personal. “I worked on a mission trip in Belize a few years ago and got to know some of the women and children,” she says. “One of the girls I got to know was awarded a scholarship for a high school education. She was unable to attend due to her parents selling her to a male outside of Belize. She was 13. That hit me very personally.”

Around that same time, Brewer says, David Peckinpugh, president of Maritz Travel, began raising awareness within Maritz, and soon after signed ECPAT-USA’s Code of Conduct. Not long after, SITE signed on as well.

“Human trafficking is a global issue and happens in many of the hotels and airlines that each of us in the industry use every day,” Brewer says. “Raising the awareness and training personnel on the signs of trafficking can help stop trafficking. Maritz and SITE are both global organizations and have signed the code to commit to raising awareness through our employees and members.”

Echoing Langford, Brewer notes that planners have to realize that trafficking happens as much in the United States as it does in foreign countries. “It’s naive to think that it does not happen where we may be traveling,” she says.

And that includes U.S. cities where many conventions and meetings take place. A March 2014 *New York Times* article highlighting a report commissioned by the Justice Department on the sex-trade economy in U.S. cities found that it’s highly lucrative for those in charge, more so than drugs or guns. Studying Miami, Dallas, Washington DC, Denver, San Diego, Seattle and Atlanta, the report attempted to better understand how the business side



Lisa Langford
Finance and Resource
Management Consultants
Colorado Springs, CO

“I want to see in my hotel room, next to the Save Our Planet cards, a similar prompt on trafficking noting what to look for and who to call.”

of the underground sex trade works, especially in the age of the Internet. Atlanta, a city without the gritty underbelly reputation of New York, DC and Chicago, topped the list, generating \$290 million in sex trade vs. \$117 million in drugs and \$146 million in guns. Denver came in “last” at \$40 million in sex trade and \$64 million and \$47 million in drugs and guns, respectively.

Difficult to Prosecute

Unfortunately, it’s hard to prosecute sex-trafficking cases, and at least until now the emphasis has been on criminalizing the women and girls who are the victims, not the traffickers, because that’s the easiest way to get these cases into court at all.

Honorable Lindsay R. M. Jones, associate director at the Center for Advocacy and Dispute Resolution at Emory School of Law in Atlanta, a municipal court judge for the city of Decatur and associate magistrate judge for DeKalb

County, has deep interest in these cases, but says current practices related to this problem don’t do much to solve it.

“I issue a handful of warrants for human trafficking cases each year,” he says. “More often than not they involve small rings, one or two young people, male and female, often juveniles, enticed with the promise of modeling, dancing, acting jobs. The problem with prosecuting these types of cases by focusing on criminalizing the women caught up in prostitution is that the women are unlikely to volunteer as a witness against a human trafficking ring.

“Most of the young girls snared in the human trafficking trade fall into one of two categories,” he says. “They have aged out of foster care with no support system and are left to fend for themselves, or they’re victims of sexual abuse or other trauma arising out of environments from which they are running away. Fearing being on the streets alone with no perceived means of supporting themselves, fearing retaliation and fundamentally lacking trust from years of exploitation, they are more often than not reluctant to become witnesses to enable broader prosecutions against human trafficking rings.”

Jones also points out, “While most victims of human trafficking in the sex trade in Georgia are domestic, a growing number are foreign refugees or undocumented immigrants whose cultural marginalization further impacts victim reluctance to become witnesses against human trafficking rings.”

Georgia is not unique in that regard. Sex trafficking in the United States involves U.S. citizens as well as victims who come or are brought across borders, and we can’t depend on the legal system to right this global wrong — at least not by itself.

Making a Difference

It’s a problem that must be attacked on multiple fronts, including action and awareness by travel companies, hotel and airline employees, event attendees and meeting planners who frequently

use the same hotels and flights as traffickers and their victims. According to ECPAT, “If you work for a company in the tourism, hospitality, conference/meeting industry or a company that has a large traveling base, then you are in a position to help end the commercial sexual exploitation of children.”

And, says Brewer, individuals absolutely can make a difference. “They need to educate themselves on the signs and know whom to contact if they suspect human trafficking. They need to be cautious to not approach the traffickers but to contact the appropriate authorities for them to apprehend.”

Education — that’s where organizations and industry events can make a huge difference. SITE, GBTA, IMEX and others are providing education seminars and webinars, as well as developing slide presentations on human trafficking for members and attendees. SITE also is developing CSR activities that individual chapters can implement, including filling backpacks with everyday necessities for trafficked victims. Maritz has formed a task force to inform and educate its employees and to speak out on this issue in the travel industry.

ECPAT-USA is heavily involved in education, including training employees of companies that request it, and in establishing best business principles and practices for organizations and corporations. ECPAT’s code supplies clear guidelines, giving organizations a place to start and a partner to work with.

Travel and Meetings Industry Efforts

Delta is one of two airlines in the world to sign ECPAT’s code, and Hilton Worldwide, Hyatt Hotels Corporation, Carlson Companies and Wyndham Worldwide are among hoteliers that have signed. Hyatt also recently announced that its hotels will no longer offer pornographic movies in guest rooms, another plan of attack on the sex-trade industry and one Marriott hotels implemented several years ago.



Rhonda Brewer
Vice President, Sales, Maritz
Immediate Past President, SITE

“Maritz and SITE... have signed the code to commit to raising (trafficking) awareness through our employees and members.”

Orbitz Worldwide also has signed the ECPAT code, as have the Adventure Travel Trade Association, Association of Corporate Travel Executives and International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association, as well as regional chapters of various industry organizations.

ECPAT-USA also is working to change laws that further victimize those abused by traffickers yet allow traffickers themselves to continue to make millions. It has been a part of successful efforts in five states that passed Safe Harbor laws, and has provided guidance, policy recommendations and advocacy support to organizations across the country in an effort to help improve the legal and system response to exploitation.

But more education and advocacy are needed and more voices must be raised. In 2016 and beyond, planners are likely to find more education sessions and CSR programs devoted to the topic of human trafficking at in-

dustry events. Before passing them by because they don’t seem relevant, advocates hope attendees will fill these sessions and learn how to help — as individuals and as members of larger organizations.

Session by session, awareness will grow and planners will learn, as Langford did, what to look for in hotel lobbies and on airplanes and how to correctly report a suspicious incident. They also can learn how to address the issue in RFPs and contracts, such as by asking for confirmation from suppliers — and their third-party suppliers — that they have a zero-tolerance policy toward child exploitation and provide education on the subject for their employees.

Every sector of the meetings, travel and hospitality industries can become part of the solution by taking action. As President Obama stated in his address at the 2012 Clinton Global Initiative annual meeting, “Our fight against human trafficking is one of the great human rights causes of our time.”

Doing More

Langford believes that hotel companies and individual properties can go beyond employee education and signing ECPAT’s code, as important as both are, with programs that involve more guests and attendees in the cause.

“I want to see in my hotel room, next to the Save Our Planet cards, a similar prompt on trafficking noting what to look for and who to call,” Langford says. “I want to see properties promoting themselves as ‘trafficking-free.’ I am encouraged by the staff-awareness training that many hoteliers now require, but how powerful to invite guests to join the cause. I know our attendees would respond positively to this initiative.”

Like most things, there’s no single right way to effect change. Rather, there are multiple approaches that when worked together can have a major impact. The meetings industry has long been a proponent of social responsibility. Now is the time for resources to be put toward this cause. **I&FMM**



The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain

Arizona

There's Something for Everyone in This Land of Natural Beauty



Arizona Biltmore

By Maura Keller

When Lisa Simmons, field administrative assistant-Arizona North, American Family Insurance, was evaluating where to hold their end-of-the-year sales meeting, she looked no further than We-Ko-Pa Resort & Conference Center near Scottsdale, Arizona.

“Our sales office is located in Phoenix, so choosing We-Ko-Pa made it close enough for everyone to travel to the conference center easily. We liked that it was located out of Phoenix, but close enough that it wasn’t an issue for everyone to drive there,” Simmons says. Whether traveling near or far, hosting a meeting or event in Arizona offers something for everyone.

One of the reasons Simmons chose the We-Ko-Pa Resort is because it is conveniently located 20 minutes from the airport. The 246-room resort was also appealing because of its features and amenities including Native American-style décor and traditions, bold Southwestern cuisine at the Ahnala Mesquite Room, luxurious spa treatments and salon services at the Amethyst Spa & Boutique, the spacious heated outdoor pool with two whirlpools, as well as the putting green and horseshoe area. The resort’s proximity to the award-winning golf courses at We-Ko-Pa Golf Club, gaming and entertainment at Fort McDowell Casino, and the numerous Wild West-inspired outdoor activities at Fort McDowell Adventures make it the ideal destination for a corporate function, special event or incentive program.

Another planner found just the right match for her program at The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess. Liz

Planz, CMP, CMM, senior meeting planner, meetings and events, for Raymond James Financial Inc. in St. Petersburg, Florida, brought 200 West Coast-based financial advisors to the resort in December for the Raymond James Private Client Group Education and Practice Management Regional Conference.

A key reason the Raymond James group chose Arizona for its meeting locale is that the destination “has ample lift, is easy to navigate on the ground and has a large swath of venue choices to fit any budget and objective,” Planz says. “I have managed many different meetings in Arizona, and I would say to not be afraid of booking off-peak times, such as summer. The values are tremendous, and from my experience, attendance is not negatively affected.”

Options Aplenty

Also in Scottsdale, The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa offers insurance and financial planners a variety of contemporary indoor and outdoor meeting spaces totaling more than 200,000 sf among 41 meeting rooms, which also includes a wide range of breakout space options. Meeting guests enjoy not only state-of-the-art



Attendees rave about the once-in-a-lifetime Sonoran Desert excursion by Pink Adventure Tours based out of Fort McDowell Adventures near Scottsdale.

meeting facilities, but also revitalizing accommodations, 27 holes of onsite golf, a full-service spa and a choice of 10 dining venues as well as more shopping, dining and attractions located adjacent to the resort.

The resort boasts a wide variety of meeting rooms as well as unique indoor and outdoor spaces that complement the traditional meeting space. Another benefit is meeting space location within the resort. With four ballrooms and the majority of its meeting space located in a central location across two levels within the resort’s main building, meeting planners can create fully indoor programs ideal for hot summer days and inclement weather. Attendees in turn enjoy convenient, climate-controlled comfort at all times.

The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa has kicked off the new year with new guest room enhancements including larger flat-screen televisions, bedside charging stations for mobile devices and a new guest room door-locking technology that soon will allow guests to unlock their doors with their smartphones.

In addition to refreshing its guest rooms, the resort also added additional indoor/outdoor event space. Situated adjacent to The Westin Kierland Golf Club and overlooking a chipping green, Edie’s Range House is an ideal spot for a small board meeting with indoor space for up to 12 and also serves as an exclusive outdoor catering space with contemporary outdoor seating and fire pits.



We-Ko-Pa Resort and Conference Center



The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa

Activities Aplenty

Arizona offers a wealth of unique teambuilding activities to make meetings and events memorable. At The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain an array of group activities and teambuilding experiences takes full advantage of the resort's stunning location in the high Sonoran Desert in Marana, which is northwest of Tucson. Whether indoors or out, group programs at the property offer something for everyone, enhanced by seamless service and the attention to detail for which The Ritz-Carlton is famous.

From turning participants into chili chefs, margarita-mixing aficionados, astronomers and geocaching experts to engaging participants in cowboy-themed Old West activities, there's something for everyone at The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain.

When not at play, financial and insurance attendees can participate in meetings and events throughout the 20 indoor Tucson meeting rooms and three outdoor lawn locations at the resort. From its 9,000-sf ballroom to the 500-sf meeting rooms, The Ritz Carlton, Dove Mountain is the ideal location for groups of all sizes.

As part of the Ritz-Carlton's ongoing effort to incorporate sustain-

ability and social responsibility into their meeting and event programming, The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain offers a VolunTeaming program, which combines teambuilding activities with volunteer activities to help attendees make a meaningful contribution to the community during their stay.

Corporate groups are invited to work with Habitat for Humanity, helping with new construction, home preservation and neighborhood cleanup. To

"Choosing We-Ko-Pa made it close enough to travel to the conference center easily. We liked that it was located out of Phoenix, but close enough that it wasn't an issue for everyone to drive there."



Lisa Simmons
Field Administrative
Assistant, Arizona North
American Family Insurance
Phoenix, AZ

capture meeting attendees' creative spirit, The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain also offers a "Masterpiece Experience" whereby groups can create "masterpiece" paintings that are donated to a local children's group home in Tucson or auctioned off to raise money for nonprofit organizations helping children in need.

What's Old is New Again

With 200,000 sf of pristine indoor and outdoor meeting spaces, the Arizona Biltmore, a Waldorf Astoria Resort, in Phoenix is a premier destination for meetings and events. For more than 85 years, the Grand Dame has provided an extraordinary setting for legendary gatherings and memorable occasions. Boasting a professional event planning team, plus banquet and catering staff, the Arizona Biltmore is an all-around elegant venue for conferences, galas, business meetings and unique special events.

The Arizona Biltmore is in the process of unveiling a \$30 million renovation with even more upgrades on the horizon for 2016. The property is continuing to evolve and has invested \$30 million on upgrades that pay tribute to its classic style with chic, modern interpretations. The renovation includes a significant redesign to the majority of its guest rooms and meeting spaces, new poolside cabanas and reimagined state-of-the-art guest communication systems. Also, the Mystery Room, the Prohibition-era "speakeasy" that is now used as a pop-up bar and event space, has been re-mastered with a sophisticated new look that recalls the seductive style of the resort's early years. The renovations will continue to roll out in 2016 with a redesigned lobby space and revamp of its 64 luxury villas. The final phase includes a refresh of its Ocatilla at the Biltmore suites that make up the exclusive hotel within a hotel, offering

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Distinguished by its historic architectural landscape, Arizona Biltmore, A Waldorf Astoria Resort, has re-emerged with modernized ballrooms and public spaces after a multimillion-dollar enhancement. Over 200,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space is perfectly situated within 39 acres of manicured estate gardens at the foot of the Phoenix Mountain Preserve. With eight swimming pools, seven tennis courts, a full-service spa and fitness center, an array of innovative dining options and amazing golf courses nearby this impeccable desert sanctuary continues its storied tradition of timeless luxury.

To book your next meeting, call **602.955.6600** or visit **ArizonaBiltmore.com**



a secluded sanctuary in the heart of the Arizona Biltmore with a private concierge, pool and lounge.

Located in Litchfield Park, about 20 miles from Phoenix, The Wigwam, which officially opened its doors in 1929, is full of history and charm, legendary service and outstanding cuisine. It's the only resort in Arizona that offers three on-property championship golf courses, two of which were designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. In the past year, noted golfer and architect Tom Lehman has restored the luster of the Gold Course with an inspiring \$600,000 renovation.

Memorable meetings can be held in almost 45,000 sf of function space — all on one level. Lush green lawns with palm trees, lighting, bocce ball courts and fire pits add an additional 55,000 sf available for outdoor receptions and dinner events.

Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort in Phoenix hosted the Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of America National Board of Directors Meeting, orchestrated by Jeff Etzkin, CMP, former vice president of Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers of America and owner of Etzkin

Events in Austin, Texas. “We had great weather and a beautiful location, with great services and amenities at the resort and surrounding area,” Etzkin says. “Arizona is easy to fly into and offers great weather most of the time, excellent restaurants and

“I would say to not be afraid of booking off-peak times, such as summer. The values are tremendous, and...attendance is not negatively affected.”



Liz Planz, CMP, CMM
Senior Meeting Planner
Meetings and Events
Raymond James Financial Inc.
St. Petersburg, FL

tourist activities, and great nightlife.”

Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort, boasts 48,000 sf of flexible event space and 46 well-appointed boardrooms and conference centers. Because many financial and insurance events require high-tech options, Pointe Hilton offers state-of-the-art technologies, including DS3 high-speed Internet access and the Hilton Connectivity Station. They partnered with PSAV to bring event guests cut-

ting-edge production technologies and a highly skilled team of audiovisual professionals.

Getting Away From It All

Hilton Sedona Resort at Bell Rock is located in one of the most unique and inspiring destinations in the world, and offers meeting planners an opportunity to create a memorable event with truly authentic experiences, from adventures in red rock country to stargazing with professional astronomers.

Hilton Sedona also is a truly relaxing destination for high performers and top clients, with three pools, a full-service spa and golf onsite as well as dozens of trails for hiking, biking and sunset gazing just moments away. Located in Arizona's high country, Sedona offers mild weather year-round with bright sunny days and cool starry nights.

Hilton Sedona Resort at Bell Rock recently completed a multimillion-dollar renovation to its lobby, social spaces and guest rooms — all designed to bring the essence of Sedona through the doors of the resort. As part of the renovation and rebranding, the resort has partnered with Pink Adventure Group to provide onsite adventure guides who can help groups and guests plan adventures of all types from land, air and water tours of all types to the best spots to photograph the sunset and restaurants that are popular with locals. The adventure guides provide all concierge services for the resort, with an emphasis on getting outdoors in Sedona.

With more than 20,000 sf of state-of-the-art conference facilities, including two covered outdoor patios, Hilton Sedona Resort also offers onsite group golf options that can help bring the meeting outdoors. In addition, meeting attendees can experience magnificent sunsets, hike the canyons and ride horseback on numerous trails, take jeep tours deep into the backcountry or stroll through more than 45 art galleries and shop in eclectic boutiques featuring hand-crafted items from local artists.



The Wigwam

For many financial and insurance gatherings, convenience and flow of space is paramount, especially when working with large numbers of attendees. Enchantment Resort's Meeting Village was designed with flow of space in mind. The Village Terrace is the centerpiece, situated perfectly for al fresco dining. Spanning 5,100 sf, the grand Anasazi Ballroom with adjacent foyer, boardroom and business services center is ideal for general sessions. And the Juniper House, a separate space replete with fireplace and exposed beam ceilings is a comfortable “war room” for event planners seeking both privacy and proximity. Ample breakout space is available opposite the terrace in the Agave and Ocotillo Ballrooms, along with the exquisitely designed Manzanita Executive Boardroom.

Enchantment Resort is a full-service resort set in a retreat-style destination of unparalleled natural beauty. Its setting embodies the reasons financial and insurance meetings happen outside of the corporate office — an inspiring setting to promote creativity and togetherness with all necessary business services. Enchantment Resort is located within its own canyon but accessible, being a mere two hours from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport.

Enchantment Resort features more than 13,000 sf of beautifully designed indoor event space with floor-to-ceiling windows to show off the impres-

sive views, perfect for meetings of up to 200 participants. Additional outdoor space takes advantage of Sedona's year-round warm temperatures. In addition to the award-winning spa and golf offerings, there is a wealth of activities groups may partake in, including rugged jeep tours, horseback riding, hot air ballooning, air tours of Sedona and the Grand Canyon, private train excursions, hiking and mountain biking, archeological site



Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort

tours, Native American culture, wine and craft beer tastings, and more.

New and Noteworthy

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company will develop a new resort and residences in Paradise Valley near Scottsdale. The affluent community known as Paradise Valley spreads from north of the Phoenix mountains to Cave

Creek & Carefree and the McDowell Mountains to the east in greater metropolitan Phoenix. Spread over 20 acres, The Ritz-Carlton, Paradise Valley resort will consist of 200 casita-style guest rooms and 20,000 sf of function space to host luxury meetings for corporate meeting and incentive clients. The resort, with stunning views of iconic Camelback Mountain, also will have a large destination spa with a health and wellness program featuring both an indoor and outdoor desert-inspired treatment menu. A citrus orchard and garden will grow seasonal produce harvested for the onsite restaurants.

The Ritz-Carlton Residences, Paradise Valley will be developed by Five Star Development Resort Communities in several phases adjacent to the hotel with residence owners having access to services from and privileges at the hotel including a dedicated concierge, priority access to hotel guest accommodations and amenities, in-residence dining and housekeeping. The multiphased residential

community will include 45 single-family homes and 94 villa residences. Construction is expected to begin this summer, and the resort opening is scheduled for late 2018.

L'Auberge de Sedona, the creek-side retreat surrounded by Sedona's enchanting red rocks, will unveil three new restaurants, as well as a new partnership with nearby Page Springs

Enchantment Resort



Cellars to premiere three custom wine blends and an in-room wine program.

The result of a multimillion-dollar summer renewal, L'Auberge de Sedona recently finished a complete renovation of the resort's two creekside dining destinations to introduce brand-new culinary concepts. New restaurants Cress on Oak Creek and Etch Kitchen & Bar have been designed to showcase their creekside location.

Located outdoors, just steps above the banks of Oak Creek, Cress is a fine-dining experience featuring a constantly changing prix fixe dinner menu with seasonal cuisine and year-round favorites infused with locally grown ingredients, such as watercress, rosemary and mesquite.

Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, Etch Kitchen & Bar offers cuisine served in an artistically designed setting aimed at bringing the beauty of the outdoors, indoors. In conjunction with the resort's new Artist in Residency program, L'Auberge de Sedona commissioned a 25-foot custom bar top for Etch that incorporates many striking natural elements native to Arizona: Trammel wood from a more than 1,200-year-old native alligator juniper tree was used for the bar top, which features intricate



grain patterns and has more than 75 inlays of copper, azurite and stunning turquoise. The indoor-outdoor space overlooks Oak Creek with floor-to-ceiling windows.

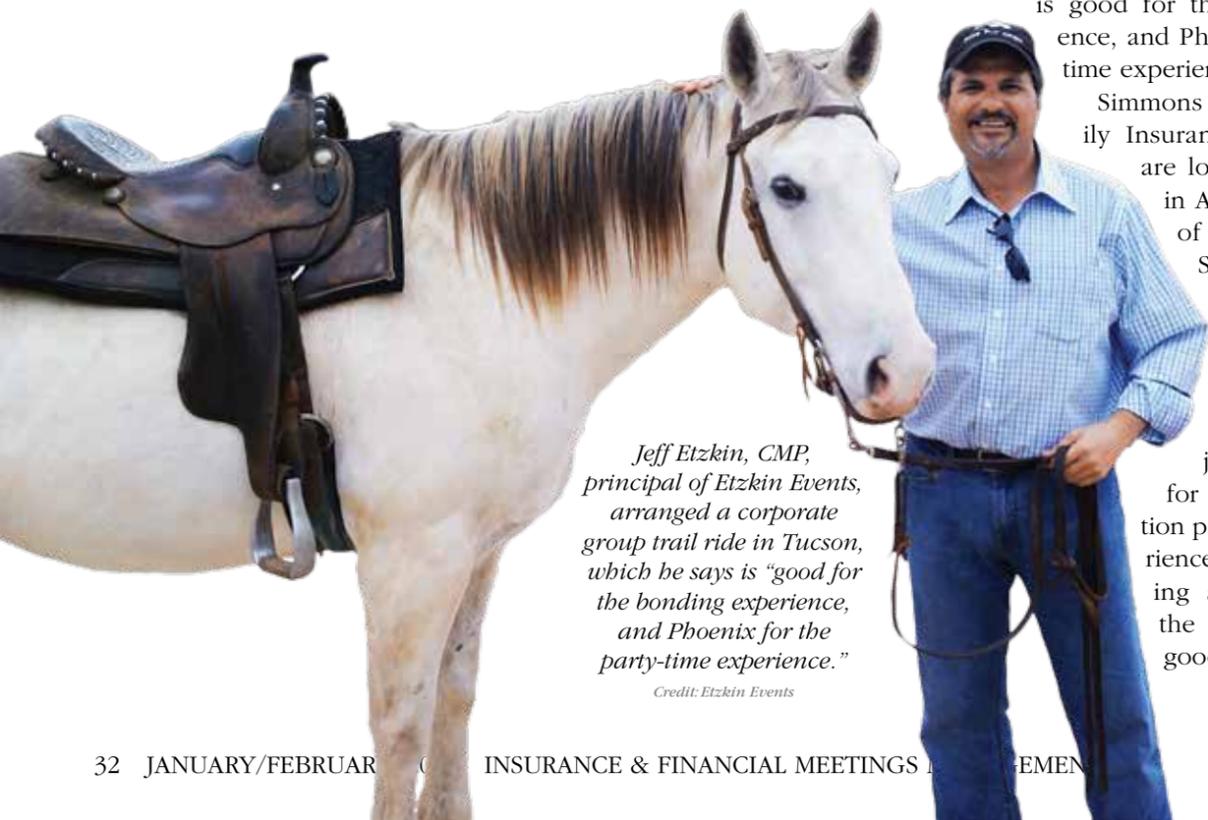
In addition to the two new creekside concepts, L'Auberge de Sedona recently introduced 89Agave Cantina, located just above the resort, along Highway 89A in Uptown Sedona, adding a casual and vibrant alternative to the property's other newly elevated dining offerings. The new restaurant offers Sonoran-style Mexican food and intriguing Tequila cocktails, in a fun and colorful environment.

Final Thoughts

To make the most of an Arizona meeting and event experience, Etzkin recommends financial and insurance meeting planners use a destination management company to help plan the perfect event.

"There are so many options on activities, décor and restaurants, it's easier to have a local partner helping out," Etzkin says. "Also remember that Tucson is fairly laid back compared to Phoenix. Look at the type of event you have in terms of keeping the group together or letting them go do their own thing. Tucson is good for the bonding experience, and Phoenix for the party-time experience."

Simmons at American Family Insurance agrees. "There are lots of great options in Arizona for all types of event planning," Simmons says. "Do your homework when searching for a location for your meeting or event. The two major things we look for are: Does the location provide a good experience for business meeting setting? And does the location provide a good value?" **I&FMM**



Jeff Etzkin, CMP, principal of Etzkin Events, arranged a corporate group trail ride in Tucson, which he says is "good for the bonding experience, and Phoenix for the party-time experience."
Credit: Etzkin Events

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OVERGAARD



FLICK



SHAPIRO



GOODBAR



HUME



STREBEL

The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colorado, has appointed **Jeffrey Overgaard** as sales manager for group sales at the resort's Wilderness Experience Properties, including The Broadmoor's Cloud Camp, Fishing Camp, The Ranch at Emerald Valley, Eagles Nest Ranch and Riverbend Ranch. He most recently served as group sales manager at Cheyenne Mountain Resort in Colorado Springs.

Waldorf Astoria Orlando and Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek have appointed **David Wahba** as director of sales. He was most recently senior director for Wyndham Hotel Group.

The Westin Fort Lauderdale in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, has named **Deanna Sylvestri** as director of group sales. She most recently was a se-

nior sales manager at Galleryone Fort Lauderdale – a DoubleTree Suites by Hilton Hotels.

The Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau has named **Stephanie Flick** as national sales manager for the mid-Atlantic market. She was sales manager for the Park Hyatt Aviara Resort in Carlsbad, California.

Celebrity Cruises has appointed **Alexandra Shapiro** as market sales manager, West region. She previously held the position of event specialist with Celebrity Cruises in Philadelphia.

Benchmark Hospitality International has named **Perry Goodbar** as director of sales and marketing for the Villas of Grand Cypress, a Personal Luxury property in Orlando, Florida. He was

previously vice president of sales, services and business development for the Colonial Williamsburg Company in Williamsburg, Virginia.

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

Omni Hotels & Resorts has named **Peter Strebel** as chief marketing officer and senior vice president of sales. He previously was the senior vice president of operations for Omni. **Mark Wykes** was named vice president of hotel sales and marketing. He was regional director of sales and marketing as well as director of global sales for the company. **I&FMM**

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Paul Van Deventer
President & CEO, MPI

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