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## CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

FEBRUARY/MARCH  
2017

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

**Hot-Button  
Legal Issues**  
From 'Bathroom Bills'  
to Open Carry  
PAGE 30

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**Meet  
Today's  
Atlantic City**  
**A Meetings Mecca!** PAGE 36

Denise Gallo, Senior Managing Director of Meetings at the New Jersey State Bar Association, has used Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa for the past nine years.

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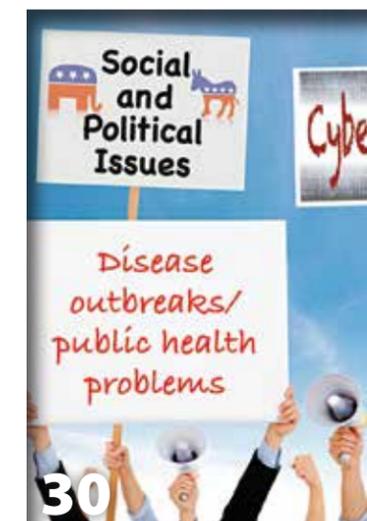
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Credit: Dan Carter Photography for Associated General Contractors Oregon—Columbia Chapter



## Remember to Breathe



Throughout this issue there are many first-person accounts of planners dealing with all types of stressors and challenges faced in the performance of their multifarious duties. We've even devoted a feature to "surviving and thriving in a meeting planner's world" on page 24. "Meeting planners are typically high performers who like to exceed expectations. We put a lot of pressure on ourselves, but that's our nature," says Britt Jackman, senior director, SmithBucklin. Says R. Michael Anderson of the Executive Joy Institute, "Being able to manage stress is one of the differentiators that make meeting planners successful." His obvious but often-forgotten advice: "Breathe deeply."

Indeed! New Jersey State Bar Association Senior Managing Director of Meetings Denise Gallo, who graces our cover, has conquered the unique challenge of exceeding expectations year after year in the same destination — her annual convention has been held in Atlantic City for more than three decades, the last nine years at The Borgata. Planners like Denise must keep a finger on the pulse of membership likes, dislikes and expectations, and choose destinations and venues that meet them. Of course it helps when the destination is resurgent and invested in building its meeting and convention business: "Atlantic City offers the meeting space we need, the social activities attendees appreciate and consistently high level of service," she says in our feature on page 36. "We selected Borgata shortly after it opened because of its upscale energy, meeting space, creative food and beverage options, and their commitment to customer service. We continue to return to Borgata because they have not only maintained this level of appearance and service, but improved upon it over the years."

A challenge of a different flavor is in "The Art of F&B" on page 18. "Planners have to select food and beverage options for thousands of attendees from around the world, within a budget," says Terry Ross, catering director for Orlando's Orange County Convention Center. "The key is to create special menus to accommodate the budget and also satisfy attendees." A tall order in the age of the foodie.

A more serious source of stress falls undoubtedly in the legal realm. "How to Handle Hot-Button Legal Issues — From 'Bathroom Bills' to Open Carry" on page 30 will certainly strike a chord. "We're seeing more and more that there are social and political issues that come up that cause meetings to want to avoid certain cities and states and hotels," says Joshua L. Grimes, Esq. Read how your fellow planners are dealing with these and other thorny issues — and remember to breathe...

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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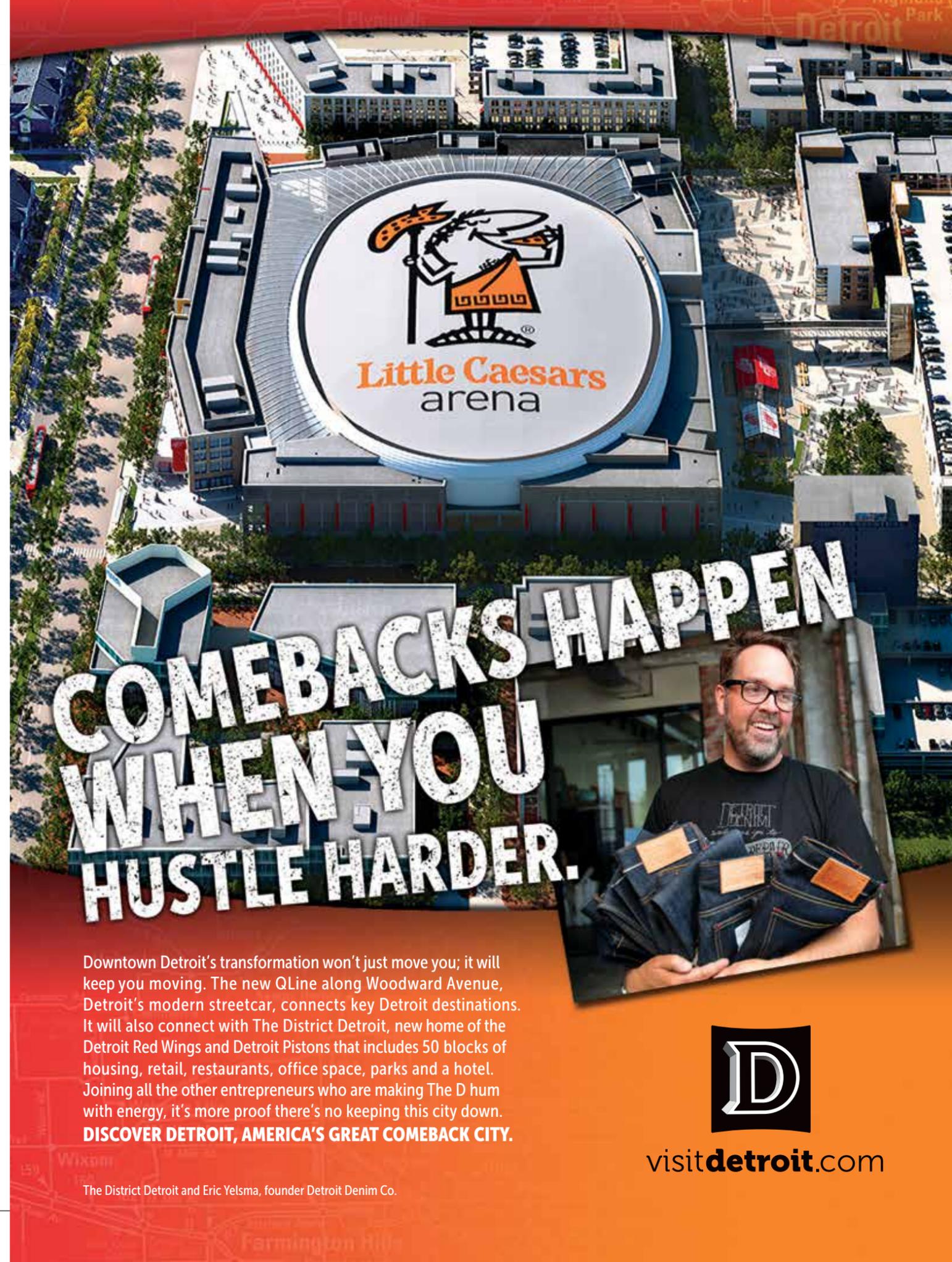
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Downtown Detroit's transformation won't just move you; it will keep you moving. The new QLine along Woodward Avenue, Detroit's modern streetcar, connects key Detroit destinations. It will also connect with The District Detroit, new home of the Detroit Red Wings and Detroit Pistons that includes 50 blocks of housing, retail, restaurants, office space, parks and a hotel. Joining all the other entrepreneurs who are making The D hum with energy, it's more proof there's no keeping this city down.  
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The District Detroit and Eric Yelsma, founder Detroit Denim Co.



## Music City Center Concourse Expansion Approved

**NASHVILLE, TN** — The Convention Center Authority voted unanimously to approve a \$19.9 million construction budget to build a new food and beverage outlet and expand the Exhibit Hall and Davidson Ballroom concourse space at the Music City Center. The expansion will add 5,000 sf of additional concourse space and 4,350 sf of retail and kitchen space on the Exhibit Hall level as well as 2,000 sf of additional prefunction space outside the Davidson Ballroom. The new food and beverage outlet, which will be operated by the Music City Center's culinary team, will be located on the third level of the Music City Center. The concourse space adjacent to the new market will be expanded to allow for a registration area on the Exhibit Hall level. The Davidson Ballroom concourse also will be extended to accommodate registration and receptions. Construction is slated for completion by the end of year.

The Convention Center Authority also voted to join Tennessee Thrives, a coalition of businesses committed to a equal treatment of all residents and visitors. [www.nashvillemusiccitycenter.com](http://www.nashvillemusiccitycenter.com)

## Meeting Planners Offered 'Golden' Opportunity at Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa

**SOUTH WALTON, FL** — Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, the largest full-service beachfront resort hotel on Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast, has introduced a new "Golden Days" promotion that gives meeting planners the chance to earn Hilton Honors Gold Status when they book a meeting by May 31, 2017. The promotion applies to meetings taking place between October 1, 2017 and March 9, 2018. With this status, worldwide perks include a 25 percent Elite Status Bonus on Hilton Honors Base Points earned. Planners with Gold Status also receive every fifth night free on standard room reward stays of five nights or more. Hotel benefits include a discounted, changeable and refundable rate, digital check-in, complimentary internet access, quick reservations and check-ins, late and express checkout, complimentary second guest and more. For details, visit [www.hiltonsandestinbeach.com/golden-days-2017](http://www.hiltonsandestinbeach.com/golden-days-2017).

## Travel Leaders: User Fee Bill Opens the Door to Efficient Airport Fixes

**WASHINGTON, DC** — U.S. Travel Association President and CEO Roger Dow issued the following statement in support of the Investing in America: Rebuilding America's Airport Infrastructure Act of 2017:



Dow

"This bill is proof that the conversation around fixing our aviation infrastructure has fundamentally changed, with bipartisan, broad-spectrum support coalescing behind the approach of sensible user fees and local control over projects. There has long been overwhelming agreement that our nation's airports must be updated in order to keep up with growing travel demand if America is to remain economically competitive. Meanwhile, consensus has been steadily building that the PFC is the perfect pay-for to achieve that goal. Adjusting the PFC cap will empower local airport authorities to invest in targeted infrastructure projects, improving security and the flying experience for travelers, and keeping us globally competitive. We thank Ranking Member DeFazio and Rep. Massie for elevating the PFC as the common-sense funding solution we need to accomplish this goal." [www.ustravel.org](http://www.ustravel.org)

## Las Vegas Named No. 1 Trade Show Destination

**LAS VEGAS, NV** — For the 23rd consecutive year, Las Vegas was named the country's No. 1 trade show destination according to the Trade Show News Network's "2016 TSNN Top 250 Trade Shows in the United States" list. According to the list, Las Vegas hosted 57 of the largest shows held in the country last year.



Ralenkotter

"Las Vegas is committed to providing the best possible venues, service and experience for trade shows and meetings, and being named the country's No. 1 destination for a 23rd year in a row is an honor," said Rossi Ralenkotter, president/CEO of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority.

"We are determined to maintain this distinction through our commitment to always staying ahead of the competition and listening to our customers. To continue to provide the best possible experience for our customers and potential new clients, the LVCVA is expanding and renovating the Las Vegas Convention Center to meet those needs. Vegas means business, and this investment in our future is crucial to remaining the No. 1 business destination."

The list by TSNN represents the largest 250 trade shows held in the country each year, ranked by net square footage. According to the rankings, the Consumer Technology Association's CES 2016 show again secured the top spot with more than 2.47 million sf of exhibit space across several Las Vegas convention facilities, welcomed more than 3,800 exhibitors and more than 177,000 attendees. Las Vegas' closest competitor was Orlando with 25 shows. To see the full list, visit [www.tsnn.com/toplists-us](http://www.tsnn.com/toplists-us).



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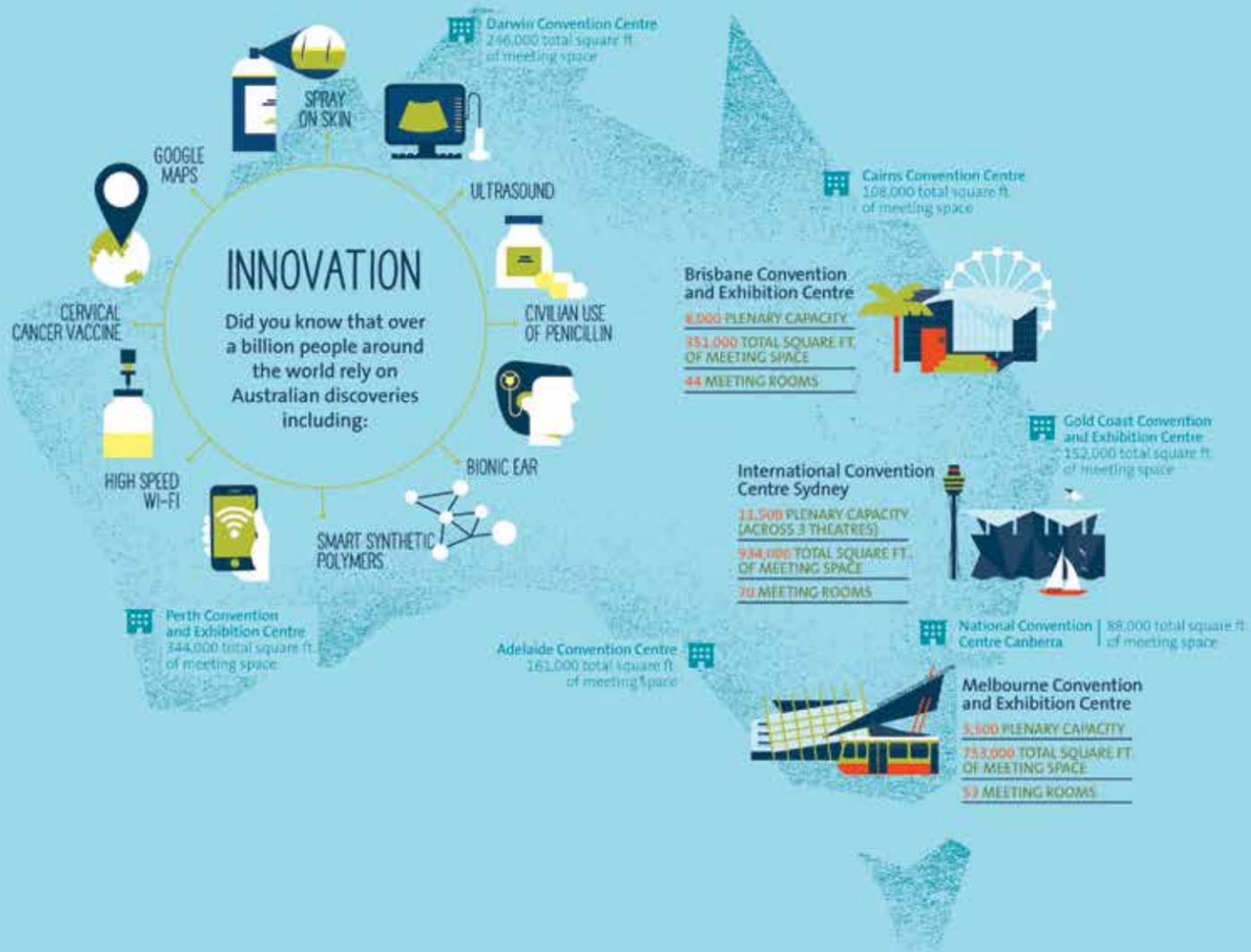
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1-8 ASAE's 2017 Great Ideas Conference, March 5-7, attracted 601 association professionals and industry partners who took part in more than 40 education sessions, 150 Brain Dates and three Executive Leadership Workshops. The event was held at the Hyatt Regency Orlando in Orlando, Florida. ASAE's next Great Ideas Conference will be March 11-13, 2018 at the Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

# BIG LANDSCAPES INSPIRE BIG THINKING

Australia's a country of innovative people. We're a nation of problem solvers at heart who find solutions in our backyard and proudly share them with the world. Our convention centres are within walking distances of city attractions, offer award winning food and wine and constantly deliver outstanding meetings for event organisers.

Contact our North America team and find out why there's nothing like Australia for business events.



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## PRIMED FOR ENJOYMENT

### Sydney: The City That Knows Good Food

*Australians have long embraced good food but the nation's growing passion for quality produce, ingredients bursting with flavour, and simple yet sophisticated cuisine is something which increasingly sets it apart.*

At the heart of this, is a recognition by locals that provenance is key as the land – and the talented farmers who work it – deliver some of the best produce in the world.



Sydney in particular is a renowned cultural capital with a reputation for food excellence and experimentation. And the city's love of fine dining, al fresco venues, health and wellbeing mentality, and melting pot of influences is fuelling a new era of gourmet entertainment.

With the International Convention Centre Sydney (ICC Sydney) now open, enjoying the very best of quintessential Sydney cuisine and culture at a conference has never been easier.

Australia's first fully integrated convention, exhibition and entertainment precinct, ICC Sydney has set a new benchmark for conference dining, as the world class in-house catering team delivers a superior approach to every food and beverage experience.

ICC Sydney caters to a range of global palates and events, and serves up some of Sydney's most refined and delectable dishes thanks to a talented team of professionals, including renowned Executive Chef, Tony Panetta, and Executive Pastry Chef, Michael Belcher.

At the heart of every recipe is the basic principles of balance, quality, freshness and taste – the hallmarks of great food. This is underpinned by an industry-first 'Feeding Your Performance' philosophy, which ensures nutrition and flavour are married together in style.

Unlocking the nutrition behind ingredients, ICC Sydney delivers 'smart' menus comprising of fresh, seasonal and ethically sourced ingredients, expertly combined to drive physical and mental performance. This innovative approach to food and beverage is a key driver for event, visitor and business success, helping provide the best possible environment for collaboration and engagement.

As such, the venue is committed to sourcing fresh, peak of season, ingredients with natural performance qualities from farmers in New South Wales who practice sustainable techniques.

ICC Sydney's beverage selection also shines a light on the exceptional produce of its surroundings. In fact, the venue is so committed to showcasing home-grown talent, that 80 per cent of the venue's wine collection features drops directly from New South Wales.

Embracing the Sydney-wide trend for drops with less oak and richness, the drinks selection offers varieties that are fresher, with less alcohol and more readily complement dishes – a necessity in this food-obsessed city.

Healthy, house made spa waters and infused aromatic teas are also available, alongside select craft beers from Sydney-based breweries. Even the cocktails feature small-batch spirits from select distilleries, like Archie Rose, which has created custom gin and vodka infusions for ICC Sydney with a lower level of impurities and cleaner taste.

Across the broader city, visitors can explore Sydney's range of inspiring farmer's markets, which are testament to their discerning preference for local, organic and sustainably-sourced foods.

The other good news is some of the nation's best wine regions are just a short journey from the city providing great natural beauty, a thriving food culture and welcoming accommodation for a broader Australian experience.

Come and experience the splendour of the city and book your next event at ICC Sydney here: [www.iccsydney.com](http://www.iccsydney.com).



# 4 Sure-fire Strategies to Navigate an Uncertain Hospitality Market

Benjamin Rabe and Susan Gilbert



## Don't Let It Paralyze Your Planning

Is it or isn't it? Event planners are scratching their heads over the 2017 hospitality market and whom it favors: buyers or sellers. Some analysts are making strong cases that economic factors are shifting to a buyer's market, such as the Wagonlit Travel's 2017 Meeting & Events Forecast report that suggests hotel supply growth may outpace demand. Other reports insist it's too soon to tell.

You don't have to delay making decisions on site selections or other contracts while waiting for the market to declare itself. Carol McGury, executive vice president of event and education services at SmithBucklin, has seen buyer's and seller's markets come and go during her 30 years in the industry.

"These market changes are just part of the business cycle," McGury said. "So don't allow it to paralyze your planning. Instead, focus on what's best for the client.

"Whether you're negotiating hotel room blocks, convention center space, or food and beverage details, be transparent about what is most important to your client," she said.

Below are four sure-fire strategies McGury recommends to achieve affordable and cost-effective events regardless of whether the buyer or seller has the advantage.

### PLAN IN ADVANCE

Ideally, the timeline for planning an event begins years in advance. Forty-six percent of large meetings are booked more than three years out, according to the "Meetings Market Survey" conducted by the Professional Convention Management Association. By initiating the planning process early, hotels and convention centers are more willing to negotiate dates and meeting specifications, and associations are more likely to obtain favorable concessions. This forward-thinking requires a detailed, thorough discussion with stakeholders early in the planning process.

### PRIORITIZE BASED ON STRATEGY

Discuss with the board of directors what the associa-

tion's overall strategic focus is before planning the event. Knowing the big picture can help planners negotiate the smaller details.

For example, a business trade association wanted to increase attendance at its annual event, but its location in Las Vegas was primarily attracting a West Coast audience. The SmithBucklin event team worked closely with the association's leadership to review other locations. After extensive research into membership data, the team discovered that eight states with the highest concentration of members were within a six-hour drive of Nashville, making the Music City more accessible than Las Vegas. The association changed the location to Nashville for its 2016 event and experienced the highest attendance since the economic downturn. In fact, the location was such a hit that they are committed to returning to Nashville in 2019, 2022 and 2024. These early commitments resulted in better terms during negotiations.

### BE FLEXIBLE

Flexibility opens doors for negotiation. "Be nimble with dates and locations," says McGury. "You may find more concessions in cities that are not among the top tier."

The Clinical Laboratory Management Association, for example, is open to a wide range of annual meeting dates between February and May. This allows the event team to negotiate in a highly desirable location.

If the location is important to the client, try to be flexible with dates. On the other hand, if the dates cannot be altered, go shopping for a city that offers the best pricing during that time period. The more flexible you are, the more likely you will uncover great deals.

Certain circumstances, such as an evolving event strategy or changing industry dynamics, may limit your ability to plan years in advance. If you find yourself planning an event in the same year it's being held, be as flexible as you can. Work with the hotel or convention center to accommodate their open dates (for example, middle of the week).

### LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS AND PURCHASING POWER

Establishing relationships with partners that are built on trust and forward-thinking will boost your ability to negotiate. This might mean booking with one hotel brand across multiple years or establishing a multiyear vendor contract for audio-visual services.

Be open to new thinking from trusted partners and be willing to embrace new ways of driving value for the association, even if they are unorthodox.

For example, the American Society for Bone and Mineral Research, the American Urogynecologic Society and the National Association Medical Staff Services were plan-

be innovative," McGury said. "Then you'll do the best you can for your client, regardless of what's happening in the market."

### MORE INDUSTRY INSIGHTS FROM SMITHBUCKLIN

For more on this and related topics, visit SmithBucklin's online publication *Circuit*. The industry resource includes "20 for 2017," which focuses on 20 key issues, trends and developments that will impact associations in the coming year.

Some of the 20 issues, trends and developments include:

- "Associations 2027": Why associations are more vital than

*Be open to new thinking from trusted partners and be willing to embrace new ways of driving value for the association, even if they are unorthodox.*

ning back-to-back events in Seattle, so the event teams used SmithBucklin's collective purchasing power to their advantage.

All three teams reserved the same convention hall, which meant they could use the same general service contractor. Carpet only had to be laid down once. Some of the staff worked all three events, which cut down on travel expenses. The associations agreed to the same signs and graphics, creating further savings. For example, the registration area had a cutout of Seattle that was reused with the client name adjusted each time. Additionally, attendees stayed at the same hotels, making negotiations for room blocks easier and more advantageous for the client organizations. Two of the associations used the same audio-visual company, so the machinery only had to be unloaded and reloaded once, cutting down on labor costs. The results were more concessions at significant cost savings. The three association boards were aware the event planners were negotiating this way and applauded the tactics for saving them money.

"The bottom line is: Be strategic, be collaborative and

ever before, and why the foundation for the future is strong. [www.smithbucklin.com/circuit2017/#one](http://www.smithbucklin.com/circuit2017/#one)

- "Purpose: The Secret Weapon for Associations": Associations do work that matters and, therefore, they inspire and deliver powerful calls to action. [www.smithbucklin.com/circuit2017/#fourteen](http://www.smithbucklin.com/circuit2017/#fourteen)
- "It's All About the Experience": How to engage members — especially millennials — through meetings and events. [www.smithbucklin.com/circuit2017/#twelve](http://www.smithbucklin.com/circuit2017/#twelve)
- "Tradeshaw Table Stakes": Why data is integral to decision-making. [www.smithbucklin.com/circuit2017/#seven](http://www.smithbucklin.com/circuit2017/#seven)
- "Healthcare Associations Fuel Innovations": How associations can serve as a mutually beneficial bridge between companies who innovate in the health care arena and those responsible for treating, healing and caring for patients. [www.smithbucklin.com/circuit2017/#sixteen](http://www.smithbucklin.com/circuit2017/#sixteen) AC&F

Benjamin Rabe, CEM, and Susan Gilbert are event directors at SmithBucklin, the association management and services company more associations turn to than any other. Contact Benjamin at [brabe@smithbucklin.com](mailto:brabe@smithbucklin.com) and Susan at [sgilbert@smithbucklin.com](mailto:sgilbert@smithbucklin.com), or visit [www.smithbucklin.com](http://www.smithbucklin.com).

# Budget-Friendly Meeting Destinations

## Above Average Experiences at a Below Average Cost

By Ron Bernthal



The Winston-Salem, North Carolina, skyline.

**H**otel guest room and meeting room rates, as well as food and beverage costs, certainly play an important part in determining if meeting planners will make budget, or have higher costs than expected, pushing well-crafted plans way over budget. During site selection, however, savvy (and frugal) meeting planners also must take into consideration the less obvious costs that can either squeeze the last few dollars out of a budget or enable the event to be held right on, or even

under budget! And much of this has to do with the specific city selected to host the group.

City taxes, labor costs, resort fees, parking and ground transportation all play a major role in overall budget consideration, and organizing a meeting or convention in a “budget friendly” destination is often priority No. 1 for many planners. Below are some budget friendly U.S. cities that, in most cases, will offer lower than national average prices for almost all venue and offsite services.

### ATLANTIC CITY

Few cities can beat Atlantic City for great pricing on offsite group venues. Yes, the casinos offer top food and beverage outlets, as well as gaming, theaters and nightclubs, at competitive prices, but taking meeting or convention groups out of the casino and into local establishments adds flavor to the destination experience that will not be detrimental to most group budgets.

The Atlantic City Aquarium (100 reception) offers a 25,000-gallon exhibit featuring a variety of sea life native to the Atlantic waters off of New Jersey and the mid-Atlantic region. Meeting planners should ask about the 1,000-sf Harborview Room, or renting the entire Aquarium after hours.

The Buena Vista Country Club (275 reception), just outside Atlantic City, turns 50 years old this year and is the perfect venue for a private luncheon or dinner banquet in a colorful atmosphere and with a wonderfully affordable price. Another historic venue, right in downtown, is the Carnegie Center, a unique building operated by Stockton University, offering options for meetings, seminars and receptions (205). The center features completely restored 19th century architecture with 21st century amenities, including the latest in media and technology. The Noyes Arts Garage of Stockton University — the cornerstone of the new Arts District in Atlantic City — is another interesting venue for offsite meetings, and budget friendly as well. The venue is adjacent to Tanger Outlets, the Convention Center, Boardwalk Hall and Dante Hall Theater.

*For an in-depth look at Atlantic City's offerings, see our destination feature on page 36.*

### BOISE, IDAHO

Boise, Idaho's state capital, offers association and convention visitors an accessible, lively city with upgrades to virtually every aspect of business travel. The Boise Airport is a 10-minute drive from the downtown core where association facilities are located, and meeting and convention attendees can take advantage of free shuttles that are offered by every hotel in Boise. The city's compact, walkable downtown also reduces transportation costs.

The Boise Centre on the Grove recently completed an expansion, adding 45,000 sf of space. It now offers a total of 85,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space in two buildings.

The largest space for overnight

**“The lower costs in Winston-Salem really help us to keep our prices down for our conference participants. ...They provide a generous supplement on rent in return for the economic impact of our conference attendees over 3½ days.”**



Pat Hall  
Executive Director  
North Carolina Music  
Educators Association  
Raleigh, NC

guests is the Riverside Hotel on the banks of the Boise River. It has 303 rooms, 22,000 sf of meeting space and a resort-like feel. The Grove Hotel is a block from the convention center and has 250 guest rooms and 14,000 sf of event space. A new Residence Inn and Hyatt Place will both open this year, and the 111-room boutique Inn at 500 Capitol debuted in December.

The Boise Convention and Visitors Bureau provides free services to planners, including logistics support, site visits and RFP distribution.

### IRVING, TEXAS

Association planners who choose Irving, Texas, as their host destination receive not only VIP treatment from hotels and the local CVB, but accommodations, amenities and attractions without the big-city price tag and urban distractions.

Irving was rated the fourth least expensive city in the country by GoodCall Research, and this

city of about 236,000 residents offers many sweet budget-saving amenities, such as being close to either coast in flying time, and just 11 miles from DFW and eight miles from Love Field, a 20-minute drive to either airport. With more than 75 hotels and 12,000 rooms, from a AAA Five Diamond resort to all-suite extended stay and economy motels, Irving offers a diverse selection of rooming options. The city's 14 full-service meeting hotels provide more than 200,000 sf of meeting space, and that much competition assures very affordable rates year-round.

With the completion of the pedestrian-friendly visitors district in 2018, planners will be able to choose from

Downtown Boise offers a walkable environment for attendees to explore original, locally owned restaurants and shops.





Credit: Irving Convention & Visitors Bureau

Clad in copper, the 275,000-sf Irving Convention Center will welcome a new Westin brand convention center headquarters hotel in 2018.

a variety of entertainment venues to book offsite events and meetings, all in the heart of Irving's Las Colinas Urban Center, saving money on long-haul bus transfers to offsite attractions.

Construction is well underway on the site of the \$173 million entertainment complex, the Irving Music Factory at Las Colinas. This project is the second phase of Irving's vision for a distinctive visitors district. The Irving Convention Center was the initial anchor, and the opening of a \$110 million, 350-room Westin brand convention center hotel will mark the completion of the district in 2018. Meeting attendees in Irving can easily walk between the Music Factory, the convention center and the future headquarters hotel. Plus, they will have prime access to Dallas Area Rapid Transit's (DART) Orange Line and the Las Colinas Area Personal Transport (APT) people mover system — a great way to stay "green" and offer a low-carbon event.

Last fall the Hispanic Women's Network of Texas held their annual training conference at the Dallas Marriott Las Colinas in Irving. "We had about 250 participants at the Las Colinas venue, and it worked out beautifully for the attendees, especially because the meeting spaces and costs were so ideally suited to our group," says Lupe Morin, the association's executive director. "We received a great rate from the hotel, parking was free for all our guests, which was great since so many had driven to the venue, and high-speed broadband was complimentary as well. Food and beverage functions at the property were equally as cost-friendly. The Irving Convention and Visitors Bureau also provided us with great assistance with our group, enabling us to offer the training conference to our members for a terrific rate," says Morin.

### NORTH CAROLINA'S BIG THREE

**WINSTON-SALEM.** The three big meeting and convention cities in North Carolina are all favored by meeting planners who want to keep costs down while enjoying a friendly environment, comfortable facilities, high-tech amenities and good offsite options.

Centrally located in downtown Winston-Salem, the 100,000-sf Benton Convention Center is undergoing a \$20-million-dollar renovation, which includes significant structural, design and technological upgrades to the interior and exterior of the building. The multiphased "reinvention" project has completed the expansion on the lower level, which offers greater flexibility. The project, which is expected to be finalized this May, also will add more windows and skylights along the upper level to give the venue a contemporary, open and inviting aesthetic. The center remains operational throughout all phases of the project. To celebrate the renovation, Visit Winston-Salem has introduced the Wake-Up Rewards program, which offers planners up to a \$3,000 credit plus incentives for meetings booked with Visit Winston-Salem and at the Benton Convention Center Complex by June 30, 2017.

"The Raleigh-based North Carolina Music Educators Association (NCMEA) Professional Development Conference took over downtown Winston-Salem in November, 2016," says Pat Hall, executive director of the NCMEA. "We held sessions, clinics and concerts in a number of venues, including The Benton Convention Center, Marriott Hotel, Embassy Suites, The Hawthorne Inn & Conference Center and the Stevens Center. Due to renovations at The Benton, we also held rehearsals and concerts in two downtown churches, Centenary United Methodist and First Baptist.

"At this conference we had over 1,600 paid attendees, more than 500 student musicians and 4,000 audience members for our Sunday Honors Choral and Orchestra Concerts," Hall says. "NCMEA has been holding our conference in Winston-Salem for more than 40 years, and there doesn't seem to be another city in North Carolina that meets all our space requirements for the value. The lower costs in Winston-Salem really help us to keep our prices down for our conference participants. We appreciate our long-standing relationship with Twin City Quarter and Visit Winston-Salem. They provide a generous supplement on rent in return for the economic impact of our conference attendees over 3½ days. This very important to us."

Both Winston-Salem, and Greensboro, located just 30 miles from each other, offer association planners great meeting facilities, budget-friendly shopping and restaurant venues, and lots of assistance from local convention bureaus that give new meaning to the term Southern hospitality.

**GREENSBORO.** Greensboro offers more than 135 visitor attractions, almost 90 lodging venues (16,000 hotel rooms) with competitive pricing and more than 500 restaurants. The Koury Convention Center, located at the Sheraton Greensboro at Four Seasons, together offer one of the largest meetings/accommodations venue in the Southeast, with 985 guest rooms and suites, and more than 250,000 sf of meeting and event space, accommodating up to 3,000 guests.

The Greensboro Coliseum Complex offers 197,000 total sf of exhibit space, and includes the Special Events Center, the 23,500-capacity Coliseum Arena and the adjacent 2,376-seat War Memorial Auditorium, the 298-seat Odeon Theatre and the outdoor White Oak Amphitheatre, which seats 7,688.

In *Business Travel News*' 2016 Corporate Travel Index, Greensboro was rated 71st out of 100 (the higher number, the least expensive) in average daily hotel costs. The city's average daily rate in all hotel size categories was \$130.56, with average sales tax, occupancy tax and surcharges \$16.65, under the national average of \$22.13.

**RALEIGH.** North Carolina's capital, Raleigh, also was rated quite affordable based on *Business Travel News*' U.S. city per diem ranking, with one of the country's lowest food cost per diems \$87.95 and a low \$44.52 daily car rental average.

"I organized the annual conference of The Wildlife Society in October 2016 at the Raleigh Convention Center, using the Marriott Raleigh City Center and the Sheraton Raleigh, both very close to the convention venue, right in downtown. Over 1,900 attendees participated in the event, which made it a very successful conference," says Kerrell McNeal, owner and principal planner for "the next great event LLC," based in Phoenix.

For McNeal, the affordability of meeting in Raleigh was quite influential in deciding that the North Carolina capital was going to get their business. "Working with the Raleigh Convention Center was like a breath of fresh air after working in countless venues where everything you need seems to cost 'extra,'" says McNeal. "They may sound like small things, but when you add them up, they make a difference, things such as exhibitors being permitted to hand-carry in their materials, complimentary water stations, flexibility of how the client may utilize the contracted meeting space, no additional fees to host an event outside on the plaza, and so many other things. Additionally, this group really likes to do one night offsite, and the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences was a great fit for us, and we found transportation to be affordable as well."

Saving money for her client was evident in almost every aspect of the conference, says McNeal. "Downtown Raleigh offered a full spectrum of dining options within walking distance of the convention facilities, and that is an important factor for us when selecting sites. There were several lunch spots near the convention center that allowed our attendees to get off-property, eat and return within our tight one-hour lunch breaks, without missing a beat. Our attendees from across the country also enjoyed the availability of North Carolina originals, such as local breweries and Carolina barbecue — all within walking distance. Having a compact, walkable downtown not only was great logistically, but the diverse eateries in the area saved our attendees money as well."

**OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA**

Oklahoma City has one of the lowest city per diem corporate rates in the country, meaning that OKC is a true low-cost meeting destination. Everything from room rates and facility rentals to restaurants and entertainment is relatively inexpensive, especially given the variety of options meeting planners find in the city.

Since 1993, Oklahoma City has seen more than \$5 billion of public and private investment in quality-of-life projects and improvements throughout the city. Many sports-related associations make good use of the city's Boathouse District along the Oklahoma River, a U.S. Olympic and Paralympic training site and home to USA Canoe/Kayak. Along the river are unique

of exhibit space, and includes the Special Events Center, the 23,500-capacity Coliseum Arena and the adjacent 2,376-seat War Memorial Auditorium, the 298-seat Odeon Theatre and the outdoor White Oak Amphitheatre, which seats 7,688.



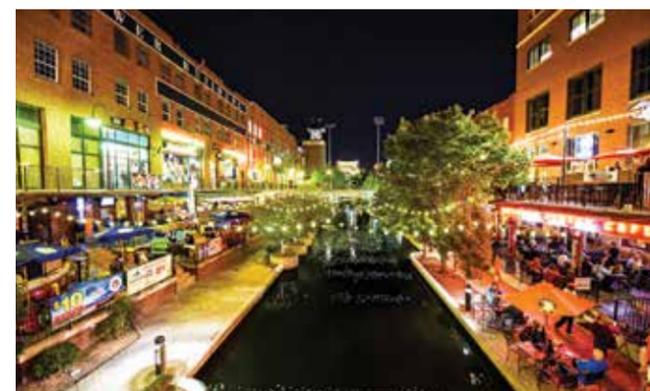
Credit: Oklahoma City Convention and Visitors Bureau

(Above left) Rendering of the new Oklahoma City Convention Center, slated for a 2020 completion. Nearby is the Bricktown Entertainment District.

"Working with the Raleigh Convention Center was like a breath of fresh air after working in countless venues where everything you need seems to cost 'extra.'"



Kerrell McNeal  
Owner/Principal Planner  
the next great event LLC  
Phoenix, AZ





ReBecca J. Murray, CEM  
Manager, Conference Meetings and Events  
National Rural Water Association  
Duncan, OK

**“We used the Cox Convention Center, and the center’s costs, along with the reasonably priced hotels in the area, was certainly influential in deciding to hold the event in Oklahoma City.”**

area of the city, and all the restaurants, shops and nightlife in the area. It offers easy access, a clean and safe atmosphere, lots of things to do at your fingertips, and everything the attendees wanted to do was really very affordable.”

The big news for meeting planners thinking about Oklahoma City as a future meetings or convention site is the opening of the city’s new Oklahoma City Convention Center and an Omni convention center hotel in 2020. Omni Hotels & Resorts has proposed a 19-floor hotel with 600 rooms, approximately 50,000 sf of meeting space, and several food and beverage outlets including two restaurants. The hotel will be located next to the new convention center and is targeted to open with the convention center in early 2020. Construction of the \$287 million convention center is expected to start in 2018, and its opening in 2020 will coincide with completion of a new, 70-acre park and a streetcar system that will connect the park and convention center with Bricktown, Midtown, Automobile Alley and the Central Business District. The building will top 500,000 sf, including 200,000 sf for exhibit halls, up to 35,000 sf for the ballroom and 45,000 sf for meeting rooms.

#### ONTARIO, CALIFORNIA

Greater Ontario, California, offers an abundance of things to see and do, and the Greater Ontario Convention & Visitors Bureau is your official guide to the area. The Mediterranean climate provides year-round outdoor activities. Known as a shopper’s paradise, the massive Ontario Mills Mall, which the CVB says attracts more visitors annually than Disneyland, is a good offsite venue for association participants, boasting the largest concentration of movie screens west of the Mississippi River. The 10,000-seat Citizens Business Bank Arena hosts world-class performers and entertainment as well as private events. In addition, the city offers NASCAR sanctioned races at Auto Club Speedway, and a nearby wine region dates back to the 1800s.

Ontario is easily accessed by three major freeways, and is under an hour from Big Bear mountain resorts, freshwater fishing lakes, Pacific beaches, golf, Disneyland and Hollywood. The



Ontario, California's convention center and downtown mountain panorama.

Credits: Greater Ontario California CVB



Credits: Virginia Beach CVB

The Virginia Beach Convention Center offers 500,000 sf of event space.



Ontario Convention Center is a beautiful, modern venue frequently used by filmmakers as an onsite location for movies and commercials. The building offers more than 225,000 sf of flexible exhibit, meeting and function space, and is a great venue for conventions, trade shows, exhibits and meetings, providing a full range of technology services, including Wi-Fi, internet, DS3 and video-conferencing capabilities. Some of the venue’s early 2017 events include the Landscape Industry Show, the So Cal Retro Gaming Expo, and Dance Educators of America competition events.

As a non-union building, costs are kept low, and there are 6,000 hotel rooms nearby (2,500 hotel rooms are within walking distance of the convention center), all offering competitive room rates. Association and convention planners also save money on airport transfers, with LA/Ontario International Airport just two miles from the convention center and most hotels.

#### VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

Thanks to its miles of beaches, Navy presence, and affordable restaurants and bars, Virginia Beach is not only one of the most visited leisure destinations, but the city has been rapidly becoming an important association and convention site as well — from surfing competitions to the Coastal Virginia Wine Fest to the Virginia Fire & Rescue Conference. According to Smith Travel Research Virginia Beach’s ADR for 2016 was a very budget-friendly \$130.11.

“Located within a few hours of our nation’s capital, Virginia Beach was recently named among the nation’s Top 20 Meetings Cities by SmartAsset,” says Todd Bertka, CASE, vice president of convention sales and marketing for the Virginia Beach CVB.

“Our easily accessible mid-Atlantic location makes Virginia Beach an extremely desirable destination for meeting planners. An ideal, affordable destination with a wide range of meeting hotels, Virginia Beach offers a state-of-the-art convention center and a variety of unique meeting spaces. Boosted by amenable year-round weather, the city’s diverse entertainment and dining options make our vibrant coastal city an enjoyable, group-friendly meeting destination for associations and organizations of every size, style and market,” says Bertka.

The Founders Inn Conference Center offers 25 meeting rooms and 25,000 sf of total meeting space, and is connected to the Founders Inn & Spa, with 240 guest rooms, 18 meeting rooms and an additional 24,000 sf of flexible meeting space. The Holiday Inn Virginia Beach-Norfolk Hotel & Conference Center provides 307 guest rooms, 17 meeting rooms and a total of 22,000 sf, while the Wyndham Virginia Beach Oceanfront offers 244 guest rooms, 11 meeting rooms and 16,000 sf of available meeting space.

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# The Art of F&B

## Trends and Best Practices for 2017

By Christine Loomis

**C**hristina Devlin, CMM, events manager with Associated General Contractors Oregon – Columbia Chapter, says when it comes to F&B, her members just want to have fun. “My attendees like to work hard, and they play just as hard,” she says. “In our evening events especially, we need to have appetizers and foods that are really good and also easy to eat, foods that don’t require a lot of silverware, for example. We like to keep the group engaged while they eat, so our receptions are very interactive with games and activities for the entire family.”

### FUN FOODS & THEMES

In August, the group’s summer convention at Sunriver Resort near Bend, Oregon, drew 296 attendees. Food and fun combined for a highly creative event themed around the movie “Talladega Nights.”

“We tried to incorporate several of the movie’s elements into our F&B choices. The food at our reception was sophisticated in what we offered but also fun, such as corn dogs,” Devlin says. “We had shake ‘n’ bake pork tenderloin for the entrée because, as anyone familiar with “Talladega Nights” knows, that’s one of the key phases through the movie.”



Aventura, part of Aramark, caters events at Phoenix Convention Center.

Travis Taylor, Sunriver Resort’s executive chef, says, “That was a really fun event for us to put on. It was a NASCAR/carnival theme, full of hot rods, games, entertainment and fun street food. With a movie like ‘Talladega Nights’ for inspiration, we had no lack of fun concepts to play with. Shake and bake!”

Taylor says the reception was part of a larger trend in group F&B, that of one-of-a-kind, highly customized events. “What I’m seeing is that groups want to do something totally different from what they’ve done at any other place they’ve been. We are doing a lot of customized events, where we may only do one like it ever, then start the whole process over for the next set of guests.”

Themes are increasingly popular, whether meetings are set in hotels or convention centers. “We have been seeing more and more carnival and street-fair requests,” says James Perry,

director of catering and premium services at the Phoenix Convention Center, where catering is provided by Aventura, part of Aramark. “Food trucks, which we thought had passed their prime, continue to go strong and are a subject of regular conversation in meeting circles. In addition, we’ve had quite a few requests for ‘Across America’ regional themed parties, where we display a menu item from each region of the country.”

### HEALTHY, BALANCED & LOCAL

In conjunction with creative themes, unusual presentation and fun foods, a move toward more healthful, balanced menus and local and sustainably produced foods is the overarching theme still driving F&B these days. “Everyone is watching the cooking shows,” Taylor says. “As a result, people are more aware of gourmet food and some of the mind-blowing things that the world’s best chefs are doing.”

Yet gourmet doesn’t equal huge entrées or meat. “Now it is OK to offer an amazing salad as an entrée for a lunch,” Devlin says, “where 10 or 15 years ago I would have heard complaints that the beef was never served.”

Paul Cohn, director of events at Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront, agrees, noting that today it’s often vegetables rather than meat at the center of a plate. “This is especially important for meeting and event attendees — not just for vegetarians or vegans, but for most people. That is the focus these days.”

The farm-to-table ideal also remains strong. “That core concept is always on the tongues of our guests and meeting planners,” Perry says. “Guests want to be informed that we’re using locally procured items and seasonally appropriate menus. However, when guests have a particular dish, ingredient or theme in mind, many of these notions go by the wayside a bit more than they did in the past.”

Terry Ross, who directs a catering staff of eight for Centerplate at Orlando’s Orange County Convention Center (OCCC), says planners continue to request fresh and healthful options for their attendees. “Meats free of growth hormones, free-range poultry, product origins and concern over processed foods are part of the discussions between planners and catering personnel now,” he says. “Concerns over use of chemicals or genetically engineered foods have increased in recent years.”

To meet the demand for farm-to-table and sustainable menu items, OCCC grows some of its own greens. “The recent installation of 88 aeroponic growing towers prominently positioned inside a large entrance lobby provides the freshest greens, herbs and edible flowers visible to all who enter the building,” Ross says. “Every six weeks a full harvest at the Center-To-Table Gardens produces approximately 3,500 plants ready for consumption.”

The downside to farm-to-table options for large groups, however, comes in terms of production capability and cost.

“Guests want to be informed that we’re using locally procured items and seasonally appropriate menus. However, when guests have a particular dish, ingredient or theme in mind, many of these notions go by the wayside.”



James Perry  
Director of Catering  
and Premium Services  
Phoenix Convention Center

“For large groups,” Ross says, “the farm-to-table concept exceeds what many individual small farmers can provide. And the cost of local farm-to-table products many times limits the farm-to-table option for planners’ budgets.”

In addition to a local/sustainable focus, Ross notes that requests for very specialized menus and foods are increasing as public awareness of food trends and options increases.

“Convention center food continues to evolve as the general public becomes better educated about food, its nutritional value, and how and where food products are grown,” he says. “Providing food for large groups now must satisfy the diverse dietary needs of attendees. In the past, there were menu accommodations for vegetarian and kosher. Today, we’re asked to accommodate gluten-free, halal, low-carb, dairy-free, nut-free and paleo requests, to name a few.”

Cohn points out that farm-to-table now extends into the larger ideology of social responsibility; it’s about the vendors and ethical practices, not just the food. “Meeting planners and groups want to do business with organizations that have a higher purpose. For us at Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront, it’s what we call ‘Food. Thoughtfully Sourced. Carefully Served.’ It’s the philosophy that we live by as we execute food and beverage in the hotel. That means using ingredients such as cage-free eggs and choosing sustainable agriculture.

“A part of that higher purpose is local,” Cohn continues. “It makes good sense from an environmental standpoint and leads to a better experience. If a hotel can feature local food and beverage items, attendees will more likely have a memorable experience. We make sure to work closely with local breweries and farmers to capture the unique taste of Jacksonville for out-of-town guests and local customers.”

### WASTE NOT

In conjunction with sustainability and local sourcing, there’s also a movement to minimize waste, whether a meeting is based at a hotel or a convention center. “Waste is still a very big issue,” Devlin says. “Planners need to know their audience members and what they will eat and what functions they will attend. I have tried a few times to get creative with my menus.



Christina Devlin, CMM  
Events Manager, Associated General Contractors Oregon – Columbia Chapter  
Wilsonville, OR

“Waste is still a very big issue. ...If you set it up ahead of time to have safe, leftover food sent to a shelter, that at least makes for a happier ending to food overages.”

Sometimes they're a hit and other times they get 'lost in translation.' If you set it up ahead of time to have safe, leftover food sent to a shelter, that at least makes for a happier ending to food overages.

“I'm constantly looking into my crystal ball to figure out if a fully registered attendee will get up in the morning for the breakfast, or if an attendee will actually attend the lunch while enjoying a beautiful day at a wonderful resort such as Sunriver,” she says. “Food counts are a challenge, and I take full advantage of any percentages the kitchen might incorporate into my guarantee. You are just never going to get 100 percent attendance at an event.”

Taylor says Sunriver Resort partners with groups and local organizations to minimize waste. “Some groups are concerned about the meeting environment, whether from a brand prospective or because they feel strongly about waste management,” he says. “Certain groups help us with the local food bank and shelter outreach we do. We box up unused, safe-to-eat leftover food and deliver it to Bethlehem Inn in Bend, one of our local shelters.

“Some groups want to lessen their environmental impact,” Taylor adds, noting that they “might want to recycle everything or make the majority of their meals totally vegetarian — and the resort is willing to help. Really, it's us educating (planners and attendees) that it's OK to ask for recycle bins and compost cans and OK to move away from the normal meat-and-potatoes kind of food.”

At some centers, mitigating waste is now standard practice. “As meeting planners and clients began asking venues and caterers more questions about sustainability, the basic level of their expectations increased,” Ross says. “In a paradigm shift, operators began implementing standard waste and recycling procedures for their daily operation versus only upon re-



Associated General Contractors Oregon – Columbia Chapter held a “Talladega Nights” themed event at Sunriver Resort near Bend, Oregon.

### THE B IN F&B

As in the case of farm-to-table items, larger groups are sometimes at a disadvantage in terms of incorporating the latest beverage trends into

quest. This ‘raising of the sustainability bar’ has not only broadened the appeal of participating venues and caterers, it has increased revenues in both the front and back of the house.

“At the Orange County Convention Center, minimizing landfill waste and increasing recycling capabilities have become the norm. Guests are provided both waste and recycling receptacles in all public areas including meeting rooms and exhibition halls. The increase in sustainable waste options has brought more visibility to what is now considered an industry standard. In response to the increased focus on waste diversion, the center has added dedicated compactors for each waste stream generated during regular business.”

The keys to success regarding most new initiatives are communication and ease of participation, Ross adds. “If you invest on the front end by putting the right methods in place, the results will usually exceed your initial expectations.”

Perry says nearly every planner who visits the Phoenix Convention Center on a site inspection includes the issue of waste among his or her questions. “We are constantly asked what we do with leftover food. Partnering with the community has made this process much easier. Any food we can donate to local soup kitchens, diocese and shelters, we do. And we just revamped a food-waste removal program through a partnership with our city.”

As for trends related to waste, Perry believes that in 2017 there will be a bigger push toward waste-based cooking, thanks in part to the raw movement as well as a new focus among such famed chefs as Dan Barber and Massimo Bottura.



Credit: Orange County Convention Center

The Orange County Convention Center in Orlando grows its own greens in aeroponic towers.

their programs, but that doesn't mean they can't be creative or up-to-date. Group size, time available and budgets dictate what beverages are served at events and how.

Everyone agrees that “craft” continues to be the major buzzword, related to beer and to cocktails, and their various ingredients. Local is critical, too. “Sourcing local beverages is as important as sourcing local food; local craft beer and wine are a must,” Cohn says.

At the Phoenix Convention Center, Perry notes, “Craft, craft, craft” is the trend, along with local. “Our guests want fresh, innovative beverages with a Southwest flair. We are in the midst of rolling out different approaches focusing on specialized cocktails. The bitters market continues to grow and expand. We have recently partnered with a local bitters lab that has created some great bitters themed for our area, including mole/chocolate, cactus blossom, figgy pudding, amber mesquite and orange/citrus.”

According to Perry, “Aperol Spritz was the cocktail of 2016. Other cocktails we've seen on the rise are gimlets, Negroni variations, Sazeracs and Bellini variations.”

In keeping with the trend of highly customized events, Ross says requests for cocktails designed specifically for a particular group have increased. In addition to more requests for craft beers at OCCC, requests for Scotch and bourbon tastings are also on the rise. He notes, however, that while “mixologists” are prominent in upscale restaurants and lounges, there are limited applications for them at group events with a large attendance and limited time frame due to costs and the time needed to create specialty cocktails. “Smaller events, however, such as board of directors' receptions, provide an opportunity to showcase the creativity of a good mixologist,” he says.

Non-alcoholic drinks and lower-alcohol drinks also are gaining popularity. “Non-alcoholic beverages now include a variety of energy drinks, vitamin water, infused water and cold-brewed coffee,” Ross says. “These are displayed along with

standard sodas and bottled water. Show management offices and exhibitors love coffee options that include single-serving pods, providing staff and attendees with many flavors to enjoy. Even coffee condiments have expanded with flavored creamers and the vast array of sugars and sugar substitutes.”

Serving non- or low-alcoholic options is definitely a trend according to Cohn. “Session beer is a term for beers that have lower alcohol content, and we are seeing that in cocktails and sparkling wines as well. Non-alcoholic drinks such as mocktails and smoothies are something meeting planners and hotels should consider in order to provide a diverse experience for everyone.”

### THE OTHER B — BREAK FOODS

An evolution in break foods isn't new. For several years, planners, attendees and catering staff have minimized traditional sugary snacks served during breaks in order to avoid giving attendees a sugar high followed by a crash just as afternoon sessions demand their attention. The trend has been toward whole foods, proteins and, yes, sweets but more healthful options.

Cohn says there are new trends as well. “Adding a twist to

“For large groups, the farm-to-table concept exceeds what many individual small farmers can provide. And the cost of local farm-to-table products many times limits the farm-to-table option for planners' budgets.”



Terry Ross  
Catering Director  
Orange County Convention Center  
Orlando, FL



“Sourcing local beverages is as important as sourcing local food; local craft beer and wine are a must.”

Paul Cohn  
Director of Events, Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront  
Jacksonville, FL

an old favorite is one of the rising trends. For example, miniature fig grilled cheese and bite-sized macaroni and cheese provide that familiar comforting taste yet make the meeting break more fun and generate conversation among attendees.

“Another way of doing that is having a story that goes with the food — items made from a chef’s family recipe, for example, add a personal touch to the taste. Our chef at Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront recently served peanut-butter balls. They are small, bite-sized protein options that taste amazing and also help energize guests for the rest of the day. Serving food responsibly and maintaining a healthy balance for guests is key.”

Perry agrees that more healthful options are requested — mostly. “This year we have had requests for homemade granola bars, a variety of hummus and baba-ghanoush shooters, even ‘ants on a log.’ We had an entire group request all breaks to be paleo. On the other side, we’ve done more and more donut walls, pretzel and popcorn breaks.”

Ross says popular morning breaks at OCCC include brain foods, Greek yogurt, dried fruits and nuts. “And breakfast cookies high in fiber and nutrition are requested in addition to the standard breakfast pastry selection.” Popular afternoon break foods include yogurt-covered raisins, trail mix and whole fruit, and vitamin and infused waters are offered next to the standard selection of soft drinks and bottled water.

### FOSTERING CREATIVITY

It’s no easy feat to provide healthful, delicious, creative foods at conventions while also staying on budget. So how can planners and catering staff work together to create the best events?

“Planners have to select food and beverage options for thousands of attendees from around the world, within a budget,” Ross says. “They report food and beverage costs as one of the largest event expenditures they have. And when the conference budget is squeezed, it often falls on food and beverage services to try to come back in line.

“To help planners be creative, food and beverage professionals need to be part of the planning team early in the process in order to learn about the group and conference,” he says.



A group reception at The Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront, overlooking the St. Johns River. The hotel emphasizes locally sourced F&B.

“The key is to create special menus to accommodate the budget and also satisfy attendees. These menus are designed to accommodate the demographics of each group and allow the executive chef to feature local ingredients or new food trends while maintaining the desired budget — a win-win for all.”

Perry says themes are helpful to the creative process, noting that his crew focuses on how the food is presented and delivered. “What type of equipment are we using to present a buffet? What kind of tables? We are constantly bugging reps about new, innovative equipment, and we’ve moved to customizing our own décor and tables through a local artisan. We look to best match a theme to what the planner is trying to accomplish or the background of the group. Sometimes,” he adds, “talking away from a menu is helpful to the creative process. Then, when we better understand the direction the planner is going, we return to the menu to fill in the gaps. When we get to the ‘why’ with meeting planners instead of focusing so much on the ‘what,’ we see creative and impactful events come together.”

Cohn offers one last thought for planners. “Don’t be afraid of adding new elements to your meeting and truly making your event authentic,” he says. “You don’t always have to match all the décor and food items. Mixing up some colors or settings might just spark an even better turnout.”

Credit: Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront

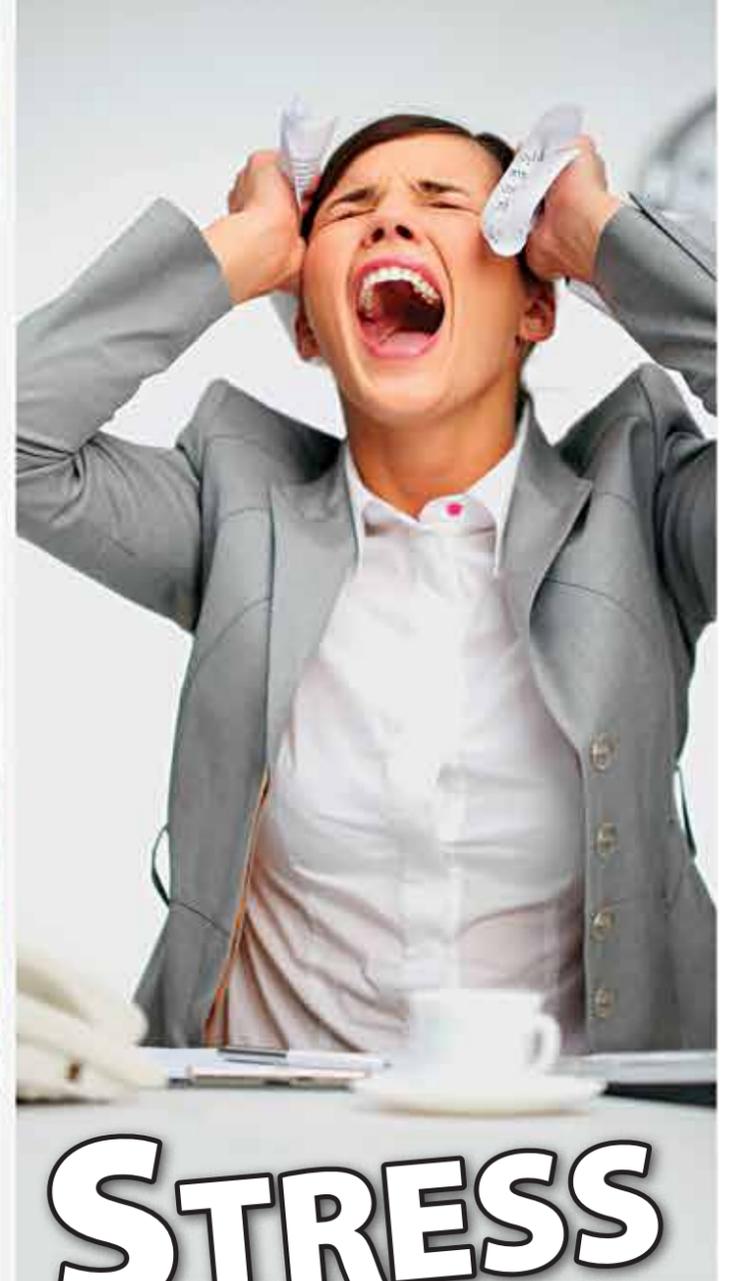


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Attendees of the Natural Products Expo West welcomed the warm Southern California morning with a sun salutation during a yoga class on March 11, 2016, in the Grand Plaza in front of the Anaheim Convention Center.

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## A Guide to Surviving and Thriving in a Meeting Planner's World

**F**or just a few minutes, Cindy Lemek, CAE, thought she was going to die. Or at least be seriously injured. As an association manager with Technical Enterprises, an association management firm in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Lemek was on an outing with the board of directors of an association for which she was the executive director. This association was a little more active than most, and at this particular destination, Auckland, a major city in New Zealand, they spent the day riding motor scooters around Waiheke Is-

By Diana Lambdin Meyer

land. Lemek had never ridden a motor scooter before, and sharing the roadway with fast-moving automobiles did little to relieve her anxiety.

"None of my other clients make me risk my life to get the job done," Lemek remembers shouting to one board member when it was all over.

Now that the event is a distant memory, Lemek says it is a good memory, as stressful as it was at the time. The experience helped her bond with the board and as a result become more effective at her job.

Not all meeting planners have to partake in life-threatening activities when coordinating an event, but stress is indeed a factor that everyone, no matter what their job, must cope with on a day-to-day basis.

In the past couple of years, the job of event planner/meeting planner has made *Forbes'* Top Ten list of most stressful jobs in the country, right after police officers, firefighters and airline pilots.

In the meeting planning business, that stress level is often multiplied by the sheer number of people attending the event. And if a planner doesn't learn how to manage that stress, the quality of his or her life is indeed at risk. What's more, research by the American Institute of Stress, among others, affirms that job-related stress is responsible for increased rates of heart attack, hypertension and other disorders.

Stress in the workplace is such a global topic of importance that the World Health Organization has devoted significant resources to its study for more than a generation. Among the many findings by the WHO, the most stressful type of work includes excessive demands and pressures while having little control over a situation. Other factors include lack of support from coworkers and supervisors, insufficient resources for completing the task and so on. Meeting planners know it all too well.

"By the simple nature of the work, meeting planners have a stressful job," says Michael Anderson, founder of The Executive Joy Institute in Encinitas, California, which specializes in improving productivity and efficiency while reducing stress and creating a balanced life. "Being able to manage stress is one of the differentiators that make meeting planners successful."



To reduce stress while on the road for her association, avid cyclist Cindy Lemek always works in time at the hotel gym.

“I know a lot of meeting planners who go back to their room and order room service to decompress, but I have to get out of the building. Even if it’s just to get a cup of coffee, but I have to get out of the hotel, out of the building for some fresh air.”



Cindy Lemek, CAE  
Association Manager  
Technical Enterprises  
Milwaukee, WI

should thrive where you work, and if not, you’re in for a stress-filled life.”

Stress occurs for many reasons — lack of sleep, overwhelming responsibilities, poor health and the list goes on. But planners may contribute to their own level of stress when they try to control something that is out of their control.

“If you think about it, the only thing in life we can control is ourselves,” says Anderson. “That doesn’t mean we can’t have influence over other things, but we influence them by our thoughts, feelings and actions — not by exerting control.”

Some of the suggestions Anderson offers, which have worked in his life as he has traveled around the world speaking and managing a variety of projects, focus on how we manage our day-to-day lives.

“First of all, don’t check your email on your phone while still in bed in the morning,” he says, noting that he charges his phone in another room overnight to avoid the temptation to grab the phone at all hours. “Let your body and mind wake up more naturally. Those emails and the related stress should wait at least 15 minutes.”

The same process should take place when you go to bed at night. Put the phone away and turn the TV off at least 15 minutes before you turn out your light. Do some deep-breathing exercises and let your body and mind unwind in order to get a good night’s sleep.

That quiet time, preferably managed several times each day, is vital to reducing stress, according to Anderson.

“Even for just a few minutes, go outside, walk around the block and breathe fresh air,” he says, emphasizing that your cellphone should stay inside on your desk at this time. Your body will respond and relax.

Mealtime is another opportunity to put work and cellphones aside and let stress dissipate for a few minutes. Too often we work at our desks while we eat, checking emails, reading news, typing out reports.

Instead, Anderson says we should strive to do nothing while we eat.

“Breathe deeply. Chew your food thoroughly. Experience the taste and energy of the food. Your body will digest food

Let’s take a look at what seasoned and successful meeting professionals do to keep their stress under control and as a result, become more successful in their work and enjoy their personal lives more fully.

## IDENTIFYING STRESS

Britt Jackman, CMP, senior director of event services for SmithBucklin in Washington, DC, began her adult life as a middle school teacher. Managing a classroom of hormonal, energetic 6th, 7th and 8th graders was so stressful that she started looking for other career options and stumbled into event planning more than 20 years ago.

Over the years, she has coordinated everything from small, hands-on board meetings with a dozen or so people up to citywide events with more than 20,000 people where streets were closed and traffic rerouted for several days. Yet, she finds this type of work much less stressful than being a middle school teacher.

“We’re all cut out for different work,” says Jackman. “You

## Tips for Reducing Travel Stress

- Book the earliest flight possible. If/when delays occur, flights resume in order of the original schedule.
- Book travel a day earlier than necessary to minimize the impact of potential flight delays.
- Apply for a Global Entry Pass, even if you don’t fly internationally. By entering this trusted flyer number on your airline frequent flyer form, you receive automatic pre-check and avoid most security hassles.
- Become familiar with the Passenger Bill of Rights, which may be of help when flights are delayed or canceled.
- If you check a bag, make sure your carry-on has at least two days of clothing in case your bag is lost.
- Pack extension cords, surge protectors and multiple USB outlets in your carry-on bag. Airports and hotels rarely have enough.
- Drink plenty of water and limit alcohol consumption.

— DLM

better, and as a result, you will be healthier and better able to cope with real stress.”

## MANAGING STRESS

Of course, following those guidelines during a big meeting or event can be an entirely different situation. Nonetheless, successful meeting planners incorporate as many of these suggestions as they can into their daily routine.

Lemek has incorporated many of Anderson’s tips into her work schedule while on the road, which is about once or twice a month.

“For a lot of members, this is the only personal contact that they have with an association throughout the year, which increases the pressure you place on yourself to make sure everything goes well,” says Lemek, who always schedules a personal massage a day or two before she departs, just to make sure she is in top form.

Any specialist in stress management will remind you that regular physical exercise is an important tool. Lemek, an avid cyclist when not traveling, always works in time at the hotel gym, no matter how long the day ahead.

But not all exercise has to be a scheduled, strenuous workout to be beneficial. Anderson allows himself about 10 or 15 minutes in his hotel room for pushups, stretches and stomach crunches, but getting outside and walking is always a good idea.

“I know a lot of meeting planners who go back to their

room and order room service to decompress, but I have to get out of the building,” says Lemek. “Even if it’s just to get a cup of coffee, but I have to get out of the hotel, out of the building for some fresh air.”

Although fresh air and exercise is always and universally valuable, the important thing is to know yourself and what works for you. Stress is an individualized experience and varies widely among different people placed in identical situations. Thus coping with stress, to an extent, also is very personalized.

Trudi Moore, a meetings and events manager for the more than 2,000 members of the Washington, DC-based American Beverage Association, allows herself three simple indulgences to cope with on-the-job stress:

- 1 “I love a good mani-pedi before and after an event, love that relaxing feeling as someone massages my hands and feet.”
- 2 “A small glass of wine before I go to bed to help me sleep.”
- 3 “I admit I’m a fashion junkie, and I always carry a fashion magazine or two with me. Flipping through them inspires me and calms me — allows me a mini-escape.”

Certainly, the fashion magazine fix would not work for a majority of people, but nonetheless, it emphasizes the point that managing stress is a highly personalized experience. Carrying a picture of your cat on your phone, a sachet of aromatherapy in your handbag or even ordering your fa-



R. Michael Anderson speaking to a group in San Diego.

“By the simple nature of the work, meeting planners have a stressful job. Being able to manage stress is one of the differentiators that make meeting planners successful.”



R. Michael Anderson, MBA  
Founder  
The Executive Joy Institute  
Encinitas, CA



Britt Jackman  
Senior Director  
SmithBucklin  
Washington, DC

“Meeting planners are typically high performers who like to exceed expectations. We put a lot of pressure on ourselves, but that’s our nature.”

“We knew the snow was coming, so we had some time to think and prepare, and bring in reinforcements,” says Jackman.

The event was held in a couple of locations around the city, but driving would be out of the question. Walking to some locations would be possible, if the sidewalks were clear, so the company began early reaching out to every hotel or property owner along the route to ensure that they would clear walkways. They invested in snow blowers and set up coffee/hot chocolate stations along the path and had others standing by in case of a slippery accident.

They also worked with caterers and other suppliers in advance to guarantee that their delivery vehicles were equipped with snowplows, chains and the necessary tools to get through a major snow event. And to make a generous pitcher of lemonade out of Mother Nature’s snowy lemons, the SmithBucklin team organized a good-natured snowball fight among participants in the middle of Dupont Circle that ended up receiving local news coverage.

“I admit I’m a fashion junkie, and I always carry a fashion magazine or two with me. Flipping through them inspires me and calms me — allows me a mini-escape.”

Trudi Moore  
Meetings and Events Manager  
American Beverage Association  
Washington, DC

The event was successful and memorable, in large part to the team keeping calm, creating a plan and asking for help when needed. They could not control the snow, but they could influence the action of others and maintain control of their own sense of calm.

### BE HAPPY, DON’T WORRY

Face it. Something is likely to go wrong, despite a planner’s best efforts. Be prepared for problems by switching into a problem-solving mode, and remember to not worry about those things that can’t be controlled.

“Meeting planners are typically high performers who like to exceed expectations,” says Jackman. “We put a lot of pressure on ourselves, but that’s our nature.”

Overall, a planner’s job is to respond to the ever-changing demands of the event, to solve problems when they can and to recognize that they can’t solve all the problems.

“People really just want you to give it your best,” says Anderson. “After that, stop worrying about it.”

AC&F

favorite flowers for your room also are options that work for many individuals.

Buy yourself a new outfit or get a fresh haircut to feel good about yourself going into a big meeting. Save that new pair of shoes as a reward after the event because you certainly don’t want to be breaking in new shoes when you’re on your feet all day.

Britt Jackman, CMP, senior director at SmithBucklin in Washington, DC, has learned over the years to pack her own hair dryer, shampoo and other toiletries when she travels, rather than relying on hotel products. No need to start the day with bad hair, a stressor for many people.

Jackman also has learned to maintain her home routine as much as possible when on the road. That means not drinking too much coffee, eating healthfully and getting a good night’s sleep. These are things that help her remain calm and avoid what she calls “busy head,” that stress-induced experience of lying awake at night worrying about every tiny detail.

The company she works for, SmithBucklin, has been in the event planning business for nearly 70 years and has learned to dissect any event into a series of tasks and responsibilities at various levels. They teach new employees three steps for managing the stress of managing meetings and events.

- 1 Stay calm, always.
- 2 Break down the problem into what you can resolve and what you cannot.
- 3 Know when to ask for help.

The company has a general plan that is then adapted to each client, relying heavily on cloud-based technology and an eventual spreadsheet document that is the master plan for each event.

SmithBucklin also has developed an internal book outlining a variety of solutions and contingency plans that relate to whatever type of event and whatever kind of crisis might ensue. That big book received another chapter after the 2015 “snowmageddon” that dropped more than three feet of snow on Washington, DC, just as the company was hosting a high-caliber event that included a dozen Nobel laureates, among other notables on the guest list.



# WE’RE EXPANDING MORE THAN JUST HORIZONS.

Opening late spring 2017 through fall 2017, the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate will add new meeting space, a spectacular wedding venue, outdoor event space, room accommodations, a market-style restaurant and expanded pool areas—including Orlando’s only resort wave pool. With the completed expansion, there will be more ways to defy convention and even more reasons to celebrate.

GUEST ROOMS: 862  
SUITES: 71  
INDOOR MEETING SPACE: 248,111  
LARGEST MEETING SPACE: 28,800  
MEETING ROOMS: 48  
THEATER CAP: 3,200  
BANQUET CAP: 2,400  
CLASSROOM CAP: 2,000  
EXHIBIT SPACE: 72,000



### MEETING SPACE

An additional 100,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space will be added, scheduled to open this fall. The Osceola Conference Center will feature six new flexible breakout rooms, with a fresh, sleek design. Also included, a 6,500-square-foot Great Room, designed for special events and weddings, and the Great Room Terrace and Patio offers the option of a grand lawn, fireplace and promenade, ideal for outdoor events.

### ACCOMMODATIONS

In addition to the 769 guest rooms and luxury two and three bedroom villas, additional accommodations will be added this fall. A new three-story building will consist of 93 spacious, upscale guest rooms. This will bring the resort’s total guest room count to 862.

### DINING AND F&B

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### SPECIAL AMENITIES/INCENTIVES

In early summer 2017, expanding the already impressive 15-acre recreation area, Omni Orlando Resort will unveil 24,000 square feet of additional deck space, Orlando’s only resort wave pool, 16 additional private cabanas and an expansion of the kid’s pool area and water slides. ChampionsGate is also home to the Greg Norman designed National and rejuvenated International Course, and the David Leadbetter Golf Academy World Headquarters.

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# How to Handle Hot-Button Legal Issues

## From 'Bathroom Bills' to Open Carry

By Sophia Bennett

**W**hen the North Carolina legislature passed House Bill 2 in 2016, it required that schools, colleges and government buildings limit use of multi-occupancy bathrooms based on a person's gender at birth rather than their gender identity. The national reaction was swift. Musicians cancelled concerts; the National Basketball Association moved its All-Star Game to another state; and businesses reconsidered setting up or expanding offices.

ACPA-College Student Educators International, which works with students and educators involved in student affairs programs at colleges and universities, found itself in a tight spot. They had an assessment institute scheduled in Charlotte six weeks after the bill became law. Executive Director Cindi Love, Ed.D., was certain members would be uncomfortable going to North Carolina

after the law's passage. Not only did the association have a long-held commitment to equity and inclusion, but members had previously expressed concern about going to states with discriminatory laws.

When Indiana was considering a 2015 religious freedom law that allowed business owners to use their beliefs as a legal defense if they discriminated against LGBTQ people, the association asked members how they would feel about hosting future events in the state. "Over one-third responded and said they didn't want us to go there if this legislation passed," Love says. Based on that finding, Love and her team made the decision to move their assessment institute from Charlotte to Baltimore. They were able to do it with few monetary consequences because of force majeure and discrimination clauses they'd recently started including in their event contracts.

Planners will face more site selection quandries in 2017, as so far this year, another 16 states have introduced 22 "bathroom bills."

### SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES

"We're seeing more and more that there are social and political issues that come up that cause meetings to want to avoid certain cities and states and hotels," says Joshua L. Grimes, Esq., a Philadelphia attorney who has worked with the meetings industry for more than 20 years.

Cancellations such as this are not included under typical force majeure clauses. However, "I've designed clauses that say if something unanticipated comes up that causes a significant percentage of attendees to note strong objections to the host group, the group can cancel or attrition will be waived," Grimes says. "You're not to get this with every hotel, but you need to ask for it. If you don't ask you don't get it."

In ACPA-College Student Educators International's case, their hotel didn't charge penalties as long as they moved to a venue within the same chain. Members were not penalized for cancelling their rooms. They did have to pay rebooking fees for their airline tickets, but in some instances the association covered those costs.

Love remains an advocate for including discrimination and revised force majeure clause in contracts, and surveying members before issues arise to assess whether they're supportive of avoiding states or companies that support particular policies. She also recommends communicating the association's values to hotels, third-party site selection companies, and anyone else involved in choosing convention venues.

"Early and deeply, engage them on issues that matter to your population," she says. "Make sure that's part of the criteria they're using in their search. They shouldn't be bringing you a hotel group that has a history of excluding."

Love also believes it may be necessary for associations to

reconsider the criteria they use for site selection. "We're used to picking locations based on whether it's a destination, and asking questions like, Will our members enjoy the amenities?" she says. "Now we have to look much more deeply at questions like, Are our members going to feel safe? Are they going to be able to move around freely?" That may mean paying more for conference facilities, but if location will affect attendance, it may be worth it.

### OPEN CARRY AND OTHER GUN LAWS

Changes to gun laws in many states — and the controversy that's caused — are causing some planners to create safety policies or educate members about local firearms regulations before traveling to meetings and conventions.

"Laws have expanded recently, meaning more states allow people to bring guns into public spaces," Grimes says. Compounding concerns is that some states even allow weapons in bars and restaurants. "It creates more of an issue of liability," he notes. "Liquor is a hard enough issue for the hospitality industry, and when you put guns into the mix, it gets worse."





Joshua L. Grimes, Esq.  
Attorney  
Grimes Law Offices  
Philadelphia, PA

**“I’ve designed clauses that say if something unanticipated comes up that causes a significant percentage of attendees to note strong objections to the host group, the group can cancel or attrition will be waived.”**

Associations concerned about weapons at events should first understand the gun laws in states where they’re hosting meetings. “When you’re meeting in a state that allows people to bring guns into a convention, you should think about whether your organization needs to create a ‘no guns’ policy, a ‘no concealed weapons’ policy, or a ‘no guns at events with alcohol’ policy,” Grimes says. “Whatever policy you create needs to be communicated to attendees so they know beforehand.”

Can you buck state law in creating your own policy? “It depends on the state,” Grimes says. “It may get tricky in states where there are very broad firearms laws. You may not be allowed to ban them outright, but you may be allowed to ask

attendees to check them at the door. There’s always something you can do.” The policies you can create also depend on the venue, so check with them before making too many plans.

The American Academy of Religion (AAR) fielded regular inquiries about firearms laws in advance of its annual joint meeting with the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) in San Antonio in 2016. A large percentage of the membership is academics, says Executive Director Jack Fitzmier, and they tend to oppose expansion of guns laws in general. However, they were very concerned about recently passed laws that allowed for open carry on college campuses in Texas. Some members who believed the law would limit academic freedom vowed to boycott the San Antonio meeting in protest.

AAR and SBL issued an in-depth letter to members in advance of the meeting to educate them about concealed carry laws in San Antonio and beyond. “Everyone needs to recognize that the bulk of the states in the union provide for concealed carry, so people could have guns almost anywhere,” Fitzmier says. The letter provided a detailed description of the laws in San Antonio and Texas so people knew exactly what they were before attending the meeting.

The letter also helped communicate to members that the associations were working to keep the meeting as gun-free as possible. Because AAR and SBL were the only groups occupying a large atrium space at the local convention center, they were allowed to post signs stating that people were not allowed to bring firearms into the meeting.

One of the most helpful actions the associations took in advance of the gathering was meeting with the police officer in charge of the convention center district. “He told us that in the times he’d been around the convention center, he’d only on a few occasions seen someone with a weapon on their hip,” says Fitzmier. “The convention center wasn’t bristling with weapons — not that anyone thought that was the case. But it made us feel at ease.”

For associations considering a safety or no-firearms policy for a meeting, Fitzmier has this advice: “Consult your membership broadly and pay attention to concerns on either side. You should also get in touch with the CVB, and they can put

you in touch with the appropriate people to learn more about local policies. We found the convention bureau and police department to be extremely helpful.”

On the other hand, if an association decides to allow guns, it’s important to discuss that with your insurance company. “I believe insurance

premiums could be affected if you choose to allow firearms at your event,” Grimes says. He also strongly recommends barring guns from events with alcohol. “It’s just too risky,” he says. “It’s just like you wouldn’t let someone drink too much and drive.”

#### DISEASE OUTBREAKS/PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEMS

Recent concern over the Zika virus and its presence in Florida provides a good case study for what associations should do when a public health problem breaks out in a host community. Depending on the circumstances, it may not be necessary to cancel or reschedule a meeting even if frantic phone calls from members start pouring in.

“Our general recommendation is to give or direct people to the information they need and let them make their own decisions,” says Laurie Sherwood. She’s a partner at the California law firm Walsworth WFBM LLP who specializes in the travel, tourism and hospitality industry. “It’s not a good idea to keep information from travelers.” In the case of Zika, she recommends that clients share information from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of State.

If enough people decide to withdraw from the meeting, work with hotels, airlines and other stakeholders to see what kinds of assistance they can provide. Hospitality industry partners often were able to help planners who had to postpone or cancel meetings due to the Zika outbreak, Sherwood says.

While associations can’t control what attendees do, they should be sensitive to whether or not staff members want to attend meetings in communities affected by public health issues. “It isn’t advisable to force employees to go,” Sherwood says. “It’s a workplace safety issue because the destination for the meeting becomes the temporary workplace.”

#### LEGALIZED RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA

Recreational marijuana is now legal in seven U.S. states and the District of Columbia, and that’s leading to some new issues meeting planners have to consider.

“We’re seeing companies that will bring marijuana to your meeting, just like a bartender would bring alcohol,” says Grimes. “If you’re going to have an event where you specifically endorse using marijuana, you definitely need to talk to your insurance company and create parameters around it.” As is the case with alcohol, people who consume too much marijuana can create a liability for sponsoring organizations.

Even if the association doesn’t sanction marijuana use at a meeting, chances are some attendees will try it if given the opportunity. Associations are wise to make some effort to educate attendees about smart usage and good decision-making when impaired. Remind them to take taxis rather than driving, and to watch out for each other.

#### CYBERSECURITY

Sherwood reinforces the importance of understanding the legal issues around cybersecurity, particularly how to properly respond if attendees’ personal information is compromised.

“There are state and federal legal frameworks that govern personal data,” she says. “Companies need to make sure they’re familiar with those and complying.”

One of the most important things associations must do is have good plans in place for handling personal data. “It’s a good practice to have a plan for how you are storing and maintaining that information,” Sherwood says. “Have a policy to protect that information, and make sure the people who



are gathering that data are using the proper systems.” If a third-party company is maintaining the data, make sure there’s language in the contract that indemnifies and holds the association harmless in case of a data breach.

There are many federal and state laws that regulate the collection and use of personal information. Some of these laws may require

that companies have a plan for how they respond to data breaches and identify certain individuals to carry out the response plan. At the very least, having a data breach response plan is considered best practice for organizations that collect personal information.

A vital part of that response plan is how the association will inform people that their data has been stolen. For that reason, it’s important to keep a record of all personal details you’re collecting. Meeting attendees need to know exactly what information may have been stolen so they can take appropriate action.

Data breaches can lead to regulatory penalties and civil lawsuits. For that reason, some associations are considering cybersecurity insurance. The decision to purchase it should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, Sherwood says. However, it may be most beneficial for associations that gather a high volume of sensitive information, such as credit cards, medical records and social security numbers; those that serve a large number of people; or associations with an unusually high risk of a cyberattack due to their industry.

#### ROOM POACHING, OTHER HOUSING ISSUES

Not all of the legal issues vexing meeting planners are of the headline-grabbing variety. Room poaching is still an

**“Everyone needs to recognize that the bulk of the states in the union provide for concealed carry, so people could have guns almost anywhere.”**



Jack Fitzmier  
Executive Director  
American Academy of Religion  
Atlanta, GA

issue in many cities. Room poaching happens when a third-party booking service — or an individual or group perpetrating a fraud — contacts conference attendees and offers to book their hotel room at a discount.

“There are several issues with this,” Grimes says. “First among them is that your attendees might not actually get the rooms they were promised. The caller might be a total fraud and not have anything to sell. Or they might sell rooms that aren’t part of room block. That means the association might not get credit for filling the room block.”

To avoid room poaching, make it very clear to attendees how they should book their rooms (and why alternatives may not be safe). If you’re utilizing a third-party booking service, make sure the name is clearly communicated; room poachers often have official-sounding titles like Housing Bureau. If attendees report room poaching, recommend that they call the hotel where they’ve booked a room to confirm they actually have a reservation, Grimes says. Then obtain as much information as possible about the offender and get in touch with them.

“Call them, send them a letter, or get a cease and desist order,” Grimes says. “Or work with the local convention and visitors bureau to get them to stop. A lot of times the same companies poach in the same cities, so the CVBs know about them. Ask if they can help you head off problems.”

Grimes cautions against ignoring the problem and hoping it goes away, especially if you always use the same convention city. “Chances are the issue is only going to get worse.”

The other housing-related issue facing planners is attendees booking accommodations through websites such as Airbnb. While there’s usually no legal issue for associations, many planners have found themselves dealing with upset convention attendees after their plans have gone awry.

“An Airbnb may not be in the location someone thinks it is, or it may not be clean,” Grimes says. “In New York, certain rentals are illegal, so your attendees could sign on and when

“Now we have to look much more deeply at questions like, Are our members going to feel safe? Are they going to be able to move around freely?”



Cindi Love, Ed.D.  
Executive Director  
ACPA-College Student  
Educators International  
Washington, DC

they show up, they find they have nothing. When that happens, they go to the meeting planner and ask them to help.

“The bottom line for Airbnb is that if people are going to use it, there’s often a moral obligation for the planner to look into it and give attendees guidance about whether it makes sense for them,” Grimes continues. Helping attendees understand how to best use the service — and why staying at the convention hotel may make more sense — will help reduce headaches later on.

#### INDEPENDENT CONTRACTING, EMPLOYEE REQUIREMENTS

Independent contracting has become more of a hot-button issue as more associations contract out portions of their meeting planning or service provision. Independent contracting is regulated by state law. While most states have laws that are similar, there are nuances to them, so make sure you’re familiar with them before hiring contractors.

Generally, though, whether or not someone is an independent contractor has to do with how much control the association has over them, Sherwood says. “If a company hires someone to lead a tour or something, are they doing all or part of the trip? Are they using the company’s equipment to do their job? How much is the company directing them? How are they paying them?”

Just because a company plans to issue a 1099 to a service provider doesn’t necessarily mean a court will see that person as an independent contractor. There need to be other relevant indicators as well. “Across the board we find it more difficult to prevail when you’re trying to argue that someone is an independent contractor,” Sherwood says.

For employees, associations should consider issuing this reminder before people hit the road: “Keep in mind that employee issues, roles, policies and laws may still govern employment even if you’re not in your employment setting,” Sherwood says. “If your company has an employee handbook, company policies will generally still apply. All the general rules around employment, including sexual harassment, still apply.”

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Laurie Sherwood  
Partner  
Walsworth WFBM LLP  
San Francisco, CA

“It’s a good practice to have a plan for how you are storing and maintaining (personal data). Have a policy to protect that information, and make sure the people who are gathering that data are using the proper systems.”



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By Cynthia Dial

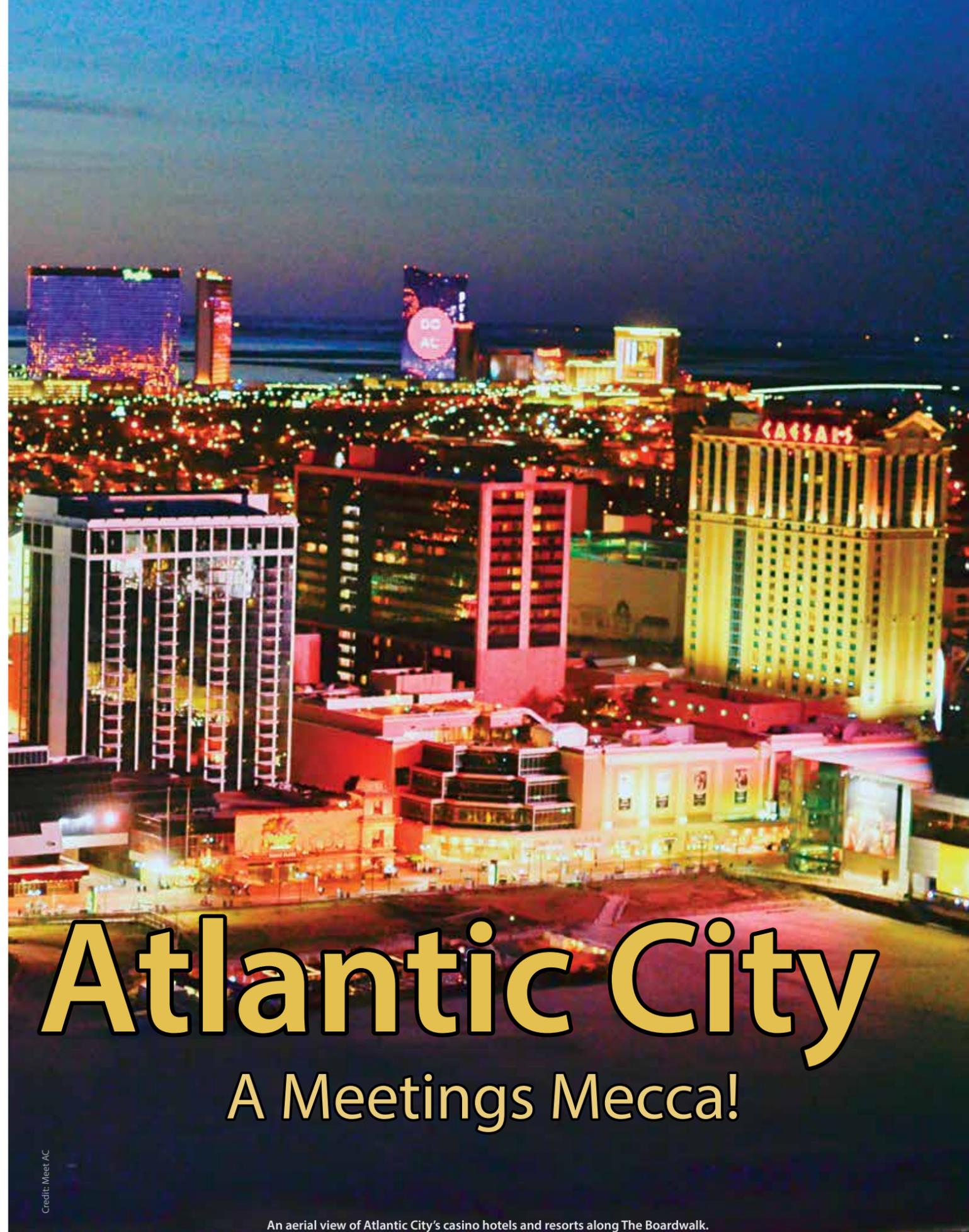
**A**tlantic City is a meetings mecca. Proof is its selection as host to a major meeting of planners — giving industry decision-makers the opportunity to meet New Jersey's new and improved city by the sea.

Here's a bit of backstory. Known as the place to see and be seen in its heyday years of the 1930s and 1940s, Atlantic City's rich history surprisingly began more than two centuries before the spinning of its first roulette wheel. Back in the day when the city was replete with grand hotels, fine dining and train transportation, it faced a problem — sand. The solution was a boardwalk, the nation's first, which was built in the 1870s; and this wooden walkway soon became an iconic landmark and romantic lure, one that attracted such varied celebs over the decades as Marilyn Monroe, Adam Levine and Peyton Manning. In the '20s the challenge became how to extend the tourist season beyond summer; and voilà, the Miss America pageant was conceived. Then Atlantic City opened its first casino in 1978. However, its roller-coaster history of rise and decline continued throughout these years.

# Meet Today's

# Atlantic City

## A Meetings Mecca!



Credit: Meet AC

An aerial view of Atlantic City's casino hotels and resorts along The Boardwalk.



Matthew Marcial, CAE, CMP  
Vice President of Education  
and Events  
Meeting Professionals  
International  
Dallas, TX

**“Work closely with the Caesars and Meet AC teams. They are experts and true professionals who have the resources to make planning your meeting in Atlantic City a success.”**

Here are some specifics: There was no better act to open the general session than Atlantic City’s so-called “hottest ticket in town,” the musical comedy act called The Water Coolers. Specifically selected to preset the meeting’s genial mood, it was complemented by host, stand-up comedian and former Miss New Jersey Dena Blizzard, who ensured convivial continuity with her pitch-perfect tone, humor and pacing. Featuring the Grammy award-winning band Train, known for such hits as “Drops of Jupiter,” Rendezvous earned its reputation as the industry’s premier networking event. Sealing the deal, Atlantic City-style, was the Big Deal. Held in Caesars Palladium Ballroom and described as the place where meeting pros play to win, the event capitalized on its gaming environs, making the night of non-stop networking poker action anything but a gamble.



Harrah's new Waterfront Conference Center, Harrah's Atlantic City.

If “love is in the details” as Oprah is fond of saying, MPI WEC is indeed a romance. From puppy-cuddling and massage chairs to the here-to-help ladies in pink and all-over-town branding, the following meeting planner’s comment reflects the sentiments of most in attendance. “Atlantic City did a fantastic job of letting all in the area and hotels know MPI WEC was in town — all the signage and buttons made it feel as if we were a force to be dealt with. All of the recognition was very cool. I felt like a VIP!”

Verdict: The conference was deemed a success by 96 percent of its attendees, with more than three out of five planners more likely to book a meeting or event in Atlantic City after attending WEC.

In conclusion, Marcial’s advice to other planners is basic. “Work closely with the Caesars and Meet AC teams. They are experts and true professionals who have the resources to make planning your meeting in Atlantic City a success.”

Underscoring the significance of the tight alliance between the association and Atlantic City’s key players, Jim Wood, president and CEO of Meet AC, elaborates, “We held a weekly



Caesars Atlantic City on The Boardwalk.

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Jim Wood  
President and CEO  
Meet AC  
Atlantic City, NJ

**“The opening of the Harrah’s Waterfront Conference Center was one of the driving factors that brought MPI WEC to Atlantic City.”**

conference call with MPI, Caesars and Meet AC to review the planning of the conference.”

Of the association’s decision to come to his town, Wood explains: “The opening of the Harrah’s Waterfront Conference Center was one of the driving factors that brought MPI WEC to Atlantic City.” Debuting in September 2015, the \$250 million venue represents the East Coast’s largest convention center-hotel complex between Baltimore and Boston. Consisting of two 50,000-sf ballrooms (divisible into 29 configurations), these state-of-the-art, technologically advanced meeting spaces can accommodate up to 5,000 attendees. Additional perks of special interest to planners are the conference center’s behind-the-scenes tours and recent room renovations at Harrah’s Bayview Tower, Bally’s and Caesars Forum Tower.

### GROUPS RETURN YEAR AFTER YEAR

Long-time returnee, New Jersey State Bar Association, has conducted its annual meeting and convention in Atlantic City for almost three decades, the last nine of which have been at



Bally’s Atlantic City on The Boardwalk.

Credit: Meet AC



Attendees enjoy opening night at Bally’s Beach Bar at MPI WEC 2016.

“Atlantic City offers the meeting space we need, the social activities attendees appreciate and a consistently high level of service,” explains Gallo. “We selected Borgata shortly after it opened because of its upscale energy, meeting space, creative food and beverage options, and their commitment to customer service. We continue to return to Borgata because they have not only maintained this level of appearance and service, but improved upon it over the years.”

Even challenges were met with Gallo’s approval. With little more than two hours, Borgata’s staff dismantled a section of the exhibit hall and reset it for the Installation Dinner — seating for more than 400, a large stage, video, recording equipment and accent lighting. “The transformation in such a short period of time is mind-boggling,” summates Gallo.

Giving a special shout out to Borgata staffers — Bernard Sefeik, Jennifer Zavaglia, Robert Murphy, Allison Diamond and Bill Barnes — she cites an example of their commitment to her association. “Every summer they travel to New Brunswick (the association’s New Jersey office) for a debriefing and discussion as to how to make next year’s event more successful.”

Holding its 18th annual conference in Atlantic City once again in June, 2017, Doug Cerminaro, conference chairman of the Pennsylvania-New Jersey Chapter of the International Association of Rehabilitation Professionals (IARP), explains the global association’s repeat visits. “We return to Atlantic City because it is a fun venue with a lot to do.”

Credit: Caesars Entertainment

Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa. Denise Gallo, senior managing director of meetings, explains why 2016 was yet again a repeat performance for this year’s nearly 3,000 attorneys, judges and other legal professionals. An association of more than 18,000 members, 2016’s theme — diversity — was reflected by its keynote speaker, James Dale, plaintiff in the 2000 U.S. Supreme Court case Boy Scouts of America v. Dale.

Tropicana Atlantic City has been selected as the conference hotel for the majority of those years, with Cerminaro’s group so pleased with the venue that their balance of time spent on versus off property is typically a ratio of 90 to 10. This year’s conference of 300 attendees was no exception.

Making a \$90 million commitment to its future and to the meetings industry, Steve Callender, general manager of Tropicana, explains its financial investment. “Our objective continues to focus on transforming Tropicana into a full resort destination providing unique experiences in one location offering gaming and non-gaming amenities.” Though it represents only a small portion of this investment, the revamp of each evening’s Multimedia Light and Sound Show (playing nightly every half hour beginning at dusk) additionally lures recurring groups such as IARP to the resort.

### THE FIRST CASINO HOTEL STILL GOING STRONG

Spanning 11 acres at the northern end of the famed Atlantic City Boardwalk is Resorts Casino Hotel. Celebrating its 38th anniversary last May, Resorts originally made history as the first American casino outside of Nevada.

Resorts has 942 guest rooms, an 80,000-sf casino, 10 restaurants, an indoor-outdoor swimming pool and 64,000 sf of meeting space — including two theaters, four ballrooms, 24 meeting rooms and the Club Tower level, which perfectly frames the Atlantic City skyline and Atlantic Ocean views.

Working toward Resorts Casino Hotel President and CEO Mark Giannantonio’s goal to bring his hometown back to its roots of being the East Coast’s premiere beachfront, boardwalk and tourist destination is the property’s investment in the future. Since 2012, Resorts Casino Hotel has completed more than \$100 million in renovations, including a new conference center (said to be responsible in driving a 30 percent increase in the booking pace compared to 2015).



The LandShark Bar & Grill in front of Resorts Casino Hotel is open 365 days a year.

**“Once we stayed there (Resorts Casino Hotel), they want to return again and again. The difference between pre- and post-renovation is dramatic.”**



Lou Riccio  
Executive Director  
New Jersey Chapter of the  
National Association of Housing  
and Redevelopment Officials  
Madison, NJ

“We’ve been to Atlantic City 10 times and half of those conferences were held at Resorts Casino Hotel,” says Lou Riccio, executive director of the New Jersey Chapter of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials. The reason: There was an initial resistance to stay at Resorts because it is Atlantic City’s oldest casino hotel (opened 1978). “However, once we stayed there, they want to return again and again. The difference between pre- and post-renovation is dramatic.” Riccio gives details: capacity to handle much larger groups, significant technological advances and state-of-the-art acoustics. All played part in the success of the association’s April 2016, annual event — training conference, educational seminar and introduction of new innovations — for 450 attendees and 60 exhibitors.

A crisis management situation at the 2016 conference validated Riccio’s allegiance to Resorts when there was a back-up of approximately 150 attendees at check-in. “Once I called my contact about the issue, it was immediately handled with two additional staffers dispatched to the front desk and a separate check-in area set up exclusively for our group.”

The appeal of Resorts and Atlantic City to Riccio, a 25-year industry veteran, is twofold — this hotel’s value and the city’s fine-dining selections. Resorts touts itself as offering quality accommodations at half the price of Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, DC, or New York City. Of additional appeal, it is less than 175 miles from Philadelphia, New York City and Washington, DC. With regard to the food and beverage scene, at the top of this seasoned planner’s list are Chef Vola’s, Café 2825, Docks Oyster House, Knife and Fork Inn and Capriccio (a Resorts eatery).

When asked if he had suggestions for planners holding meetings in Atlantic City, Riccio’s recommendation involves timing. “Try to design the program so that it ends mid-afternoon each day

Credit: Brian R. Heimbuecher



Denise Gallo  
Senior Managing Director of  
Meetings  
New Jersey State Bar Association  
New Brunswick, NJ

**“Atlantic City offers the meeting space we need, the social activities attendees appreciate and a consistently high level of service.”**

— allowing attendees to take advantage of the gaming option, if desired.

#### NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

With miles of beach and boardwalk to stroll, eight major casinos to enjoy, a tax-free outlet for shopping and more than 16,000 hotel rooms in which to stay — all a short distance from the convention center — Atlantic City seems in a perfect position to appeal to groups.

Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa announced in 2016 it is spending \$50 million on projects, including an outdoor pool and beer garden and a new eatery, which debuted at the beginning of summer 2016. The 3,200-sf pool can be used for swimming during the day, and as an entertainment gathering spot at night. The Borgata’s projects also include a new nightclub that opened May 2016 with an 18,000-sf nightclub, Premier. The space is designed as “a theatrical experience for partygoers” and competes against blockbuster clubs in Las Vegas, New York and Miami, according to the resort. Tiered booths will tilt toward a DJ station,



Borgata’s Premier Nighclub opened in May as “a theatrical experience for partygoers.”

stage and “digital proscenium.” Carved-stone bars 35 feet long will flank the main room, with a horseshoe-shaped mezzanine and 25-foot-wide digitally programmable chandelier hanging overhead. In addition, Borgata’s new Central Conference Space will include an additional 18,000 sf and meeting space. A new restaurant, Angeline with celebrity chef Michael Symon, is coming this spring.

Closed since 2014 and formerly known as Revel Casino Hotel, this property is slated to be rebranded and reopened in 2017 as TEN. Its new vision has been described as vintage East Coast.

Tropicana Atlantic City’s final \$50 million renovation includes Boardwalk façade enhancements, hotel room upgrades and property expansions. Its new multimillion-dollar AtlantiCare LifeCenter features the most advanced gym facility in Atlantic City, and more eateries are on the horizon too. Partnering with Iron Chef Jose Garces, Tropicana opened multiple seafood restaurant concepts.

Resorts Casino Hotel’s Margaritaville Café and LandShark Bar & Grill, located within Jimmy Buffett’s Margaritaville Entertainment Complex, remains Atlantic City’s only full-service, on-the-beach restaurant and bar.

The Steel Pier is currently developing a 200-foot-high observation wheel, which will offer riders sweeping views of the ocean and Atlantic City skyline from inside climate-controlled gondolas. This \$14 million project is scheduled to open summer 2017.

Showboat Hotel reopened as a fully functioning hotel in July 2016 with 872 hotel rooms. Plans are in the works to revamp the property with additional meeting space and restaurants.

The Claridge hotel reopened in 2014 as a fully restored historic hotel with 483 renovated guest rooms. The property recently announced their new brand, a Radisson Hotel. The property, home to the Holtzman Art Gallery, debuted additional conference space, adding 15,000 sf to meet the growing demand for conference space throughout Atlantic City. This brings Claridge’s conference space to 100,000 sf, including a 6,400-sf room and four smaller conference and boardrooms. In addition, The Claridge boasts an elegantly renovated ballroom and recently opened Atlantic City’s first rooftop bar, VUE, with expansive views.

Billionaire investor Carl Icahn reached a deal to sell the shuttered Trump Taj Mahal casino in Atlantic City to Hard Rock International and two New Jersey investors. “We are excited to be part of this revitalization of Atlantic City creating thousands of jobs to help local employment,” Jim Allen, chairman of Hard Rock International, said in a statement. “We are 100 percent convinced Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Atlantic City will be a success.”

He said the company plans to invest \$300 million in renovating and rebranding the property. AC&F

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The Diplomat Beach Resort in Hollywood.

**W**hen planning the recent 17th Annual State of the Art Winter Symposium for the American Society of Transplant Surgeons (ASTS), Jamison Visone, CMP, meeting planner at ASTS, was delighted with the pristine ocean backdrop that Loews Miami Beach Hotel boasts. And Visone is not alone. Many association meeting and event planners revel in all that Florida has to offer in terms of meeting venues, glorious weather and recreational activities aplenty.

As Visone explains, it is hard to beat January weather on Miami Beach. “We like hosting this event in Florida, and specifically Loews Miami Beach, because the hotel is just the right size to manage the size of our symposium,” Visone says.

The meeting focuses on ASTS’ younger members, and they enjoy coming back year after year as they progress in their careers and the Society.

“Their familiarity with the venue adds to their enjoyment of the meeting,” Visone says. “We have a wonderful partner-

ship with the Loews, and they also share in the success of the symposium. This year, we had around 550 attendees, and the activity that our attendees look forward to the most, aside from the scientific content of the meeting, is the closing dinner on Saturday night. We host this dinner on the Americana Lawn of the Loews Miami Beach Hotel, and the beach is a perfect backdrop to end another successful symposium.”

Located in the heart of South Beach’s vibrant Art Deco District, the renowned oceanfront Loews Miami Beach Hotel recently completed a \$50 million transformation. Guests now are welcomed to a new lobby experience; 790 upgraded luxury guest rooms; state-of-the-art meeting spaces; a new, oceanfront poolscape including private, adult-only cabanas and more. Attendees can reserve private cabanas called Soak Cabanas & Daybeds, and indulge in spa therapies and fitness classes at Loews’ exhale Spa. Located just steps from the shopping and dining of famous Lincoln Road, as well as

By Maura Keller

# FLORIDA

## Sunny Weather and Fabulous Meeting Venues



The Loews Miami Beach Hotel.

the nightlife and entertainment of Ocean Drive, Loews Miami Beach Hotel offers 65,000 sf of refreshed, flexible indoor and outdoor state-of-the-art function space that can accommodate events from 10 to 2,700 people.

The resort’s redesigned oceanfront poolscape with private beach access is an ideal location to partake in teambuilding activities or simply bask in the ambience of South Beach.

### SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Sean Hewitt, meetings manager at the Nashville, Tennessee-based Society for Maintenance and Reliability Professionals, recently orchestrated the 2016 Society for Maintenance and Reliability Professionals Annual Conference, which was held at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront in Northeast Florida. More than 1,000 people attended the conference.

Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront was contracted back in 2013 as the designated venue for the society’s annual conference.

“The hotel is large enough to accommodate all of our guest room and function space needs versus having to look at a convention center, for example,” Hewitt says. Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront was a good fit — both from a size as well as room rate/cost standpoint. I know that Florida is always a strong contender in any site selection process due to the number and size of hotel venues available, the availability of ample leisure activities and opportunities to tack on a vacation after the conference for attendees and, of course, the weather.”



Credit: Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa

One way association meeting attendees can enjoy Florida’s warm climes is by taking part in Hyatt’s new bike service — a fun way to view Jacksonville up close, pedaling along the St. Johns riverfront. Adding to the convenience, helmets, bike locks and baskets are provided by Hyatt for a safe and smooth ride around downtown Jacksonville.

### SUNSHINE AND ACTIVITIES CAPTIVATE ATTENDEES

Not surprisingly, Florida’s weather is one of the enticing features that the meeting planners at the Nashville-based Tennessee Trucking Association (TTA) embrace when planning their annual event.

Dave Huneryager, president and CEO at TTA, recently planned their annual trade association convention at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, in Destin on Florida’s Northwest Gulf Coast. Considered to be the most important event on the Tennessee Trucking Association’s calendar, the Florida environment and the recreational amenities offered at the Hilton Sandestin melded well with Huneryager’s vision for the event.

“We had 450 people in attendance, and they enjoyed things such as outdoor receptions, beach activities and a fireworks display,” he says. “Our folks love the destination, and when offered other options, attendance has lagged. The time of year we go — September — the weather is always terrific.”

Group activity options abound at the many recreation facilities at Florida’s hotels and resorts. For example at the Hilton Orlando, which is connected via covered walkway to the Orange County Convention Center (the second largest convention center in the U.S.), is best known for its out-of-the-box event and meeting offerings, from onsite food trucks to a live-action circus and world-class culinary options including made-to-order truffles and ramen soup stations. The hotel provides a robust offering of wellness and fitness activities for groups and associations. This includes a themed 5K fun run, ideal for groups that want to engage in a plain fun run, or dress according to their association’s theme.



The Tennessee Trucking Association recently planned their annual trade association convention at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa,



Credit: Hilton Orlando

The Hilton Orlando.

Hilton Orlando also offers a Boot Camp for a full interval training experience. And to help association attendees relax, the hotel offers yoga and meditation. Chair massage also is available during check-in to enhance the group's arrival experience, during breakout sessions or even on the trade show floor.

Celebrating everything that Florida has to offer, Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort and Spa in Bonita Springs on Florida's Southwest Coast features a 26-acre resort teeming with recreational amenities for attendees to enjoy. Delegates can spend time collecting shells on the resort's semi-private beach on the Gulf of Mexico, noted as one of the best in the country. Or they can tee it up at Raptor Bay Golf Course or relax at Stillwater Spa. The resort's newly opened pool boasts activities where attendees can plummet down three-story corkscrew slides, ride the gentle currents of a lazy river, and dine on local cuisine from a rotating selection of food trucks.

Nearby the resort, the best of Southwest Florida awaits, from shopping and cultural experiences to outdoor activities including boat charters for fishing excursions on the Gulf of Mexico, exploring the wilds of the Everglades and parasailing 600 feet high above the coastline.

Teambuilding also is a popular element of meetings in Florida. In Naples, 30 minutes south of Bonita Springs, the Naples Grande Beach Resort boasts an in-house GlobalWorks Events & Destination Management group to help provide unique offsite excursions for groups and teambuilding activities. The GlobalWorks team has fostered relationships with the best local tour operators in Naples. Tours and experiences include deep-sea fishing, Everglades experiences and sunset cruises. For example, Ngala Wildlife Preserve is the ultimate destination for a unique, private event with the opportunity to encounter exotic wildlife combined with authentic entertainment. And after hosting a daytime meeting at Naples Grande, an offsite soirée at Naples Botanical Garden — with more than 170 beautiful acres of cultivated gardens and event space — would be an event to remember. Onsite, Naples Grande Beach Resort offers a variety of pursuits from award-winning golf and tennis, to relaxed poolside luxury and diverse dining.

The resort offers an unparalleled setting for meetings and events for SMERF groups and all types of associations in a beautiful setting when business and recreation meet.

After spending a day in Turnberry Isle Miami's 40,000-sf conference center, attendees can enjoy the only lagoon-style pool of its kind in South Florida. Turnberry Isle Miami's beautiful 7,500-sf Laguna Pool invites time spent splashing and soaking up the Miami sun. A 1,600-foot-long lazy river, 35-foot-high waterslide and splash pool let guests lounge or play. The Laguna Pool boasts a beautiful outdoor space, perfect for poolside celebrations or group gatherings.

### NEW & NOTEWORTHY

Newly transformed in the last couple of years with billions invested in new hotels and reimagined iconic resorts, Greater Fort Lauderdale is a destination that celebrates its diversity with Latin American and Caribbean influences and a landscape that stretches from 23 miles of beach to the Everglades.

Visitors to the Fort Lauderdale area enjoy plenty of options for downtime after meetings with Broadway-style theater shows, Vegas-style gaming at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, shopping at luxury brand stores such as Prada and Gucci at Sawgrass Mills, and an eclectic music and art scene. And associations looking to "wow" attendees will enjoy Seminole Hard Rock's 5,500-seat Hard Rock Live arena with 18,000 sf suitable for a sound and lighting extravaganza for exhibitions, galas, concerts and sporting events.

The 998-room Diplomat Beach Resort is ideally located in Hollywood, Florida, between Miami and Fort Lauderdale. The recently completed \$100 million transformation includes reimagined guest rooms, indoor/outdoor event spaces, oceanfront spa and more than 10 dining concepts.

Among the culinary offerings are The Diplomat Prime



Credit: Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa

The Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa in Bonita Springs.

steakhouse; Monkital, featuring Japanese-inspired fare crafted by famed chef and restaurateur Michael Schulson; Point Royal, showcasing celebrity chef Geoffrey Zakarian's coastal-American fare with modern seafood dishes and raw bar; and Playa, a beachfront nuevo-Latina restaurant and bar with an extensive selection of rum and tequila. The largest hotel in Broward County, The Diplomat also offers more than 200,000 sf of meeting and event space including a 50,000-sf Great Hall, four ballrooms and 39 individual meeting rooms as well as outdoor special event areas including the pool deck and 33rd floor lounge space. The newly renovated guest rooms at The Diplomat, which feature ocean or Intracoastal views, fit one of two separate design schemes: Sunrise or Sunset. Sunrise rooms are modern, vibrant and refreshing with earthy tones that provide a soothing, calm atmosphere accented with blue ocean col-



Credit: Turnberry Isle Miami

The Turnberry Isle Miami.

ors, with vintage artwork that harkens the region's history. Sunset rooms reflect a more subtle, modern and organic design scheme.

Situated amid stunning scenery and hushed seclusion in Central Florida, Streamsong is a distinctive luxury meeting destination intentionally designed in harmony with its natural surroundings.

Streamsong boasts two remarkable, nationally ranked golf courses — Streamsong Red and Streamsong Blue — with a third, Streamsong Black, debuting this fall. Leisure activities include a grotto-style AcquaPietra Spa, guided bass fishing, sporting clays, tennis, fitness center and a lakeside infinity pool. Offering five distinct dining options, Streamsong presents the chance to enjoy excellent food and drink in the most beautiful setting imaginable.

The resort also offers an inspirational, distraction-free environment for meetings in its 24,600 sf of dedicated meeting space. Thirteen large and small meeting rooms accommodate 10 to 600 people in complete comfort and pri-

**"Our folks love the destination, and when offered other options, attendance has lagged. The time of year we go — September — the weather is always terrific."**



Dave Huneryager  
President and CEO  
Tennessee Trucking Association  
Nashville, TN

vacy. General session and breakout rooms are conveniently clustered for effective program flow. Modern, sophisticated and meticulous in detail, Streamsong features 228 spacious guest rooms and suites with floor-to-ceiling glass and custom louvers offering striking sunrise or sunset lake views.

If being in the midst of nature is high on the priority list, The Henderson, a Salamander Beach & Spa Resort, could be the destination. Located on the Gulf along one of America's top beaches in Destin, the new property is adjacent to the pristine 208-acre Henderson Beach State Park. Some of the most popular recreational amenities that groups participate in include paddleboarding, kayaking, jet skiing, snorkeling, snuba, charter boat fishing and parasailing. Reminiscent of a luxurious grand seaside manor of yesteryear, the resort features 170 spacious guest rooms and suites, a nature-inspired spa, Gulf-to-Table cuisine, 10,000 sf of indoor meeting space, and 20,000 sf of outdoor event space.

Following an extensive multimillion-dollar renovation, the Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace has transformed the property with a series of upscale refurbishments including a new guest room and lobby design, new lobby bar and outside terrace.

Perfect for meeting attendees who want to "work some and play some," the hotel also opened an expansive new recreation area including a Float Lagoon lazy river, new pools and cabanas, as well as a new poolside restaurant



Credit: Streamsong Resort

The Streamsong Resort in Central Florida.

— Shades. They have a updated lawn space for meetings, and cocktail receptions can take place in 20 Seven, an event space that boasts panoramic views of fireworks from the highest vantage point in Disney. The hotel boasts more than 90,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space.

Transforming the landscape of downtown West Palm Beach, the Hilton West Palm Beach recently celebrated the first year anniversary. Connected directly to the Palm Beach County Convention Center, Hilton West Palm Beach is located directly across the street from CityPlace, a shopping and entertainment district with more than 60 specialty retail shops, a distinguished collection of restaurants and bars and an open-air plaza with dancing fountains. Also



The Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace.

nearby, there is more entertainment, dining and attractions on Clematis Street, fabulous art exhibits at the Norton Museum of Art, and Broadway shows and more at the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts, which are all less than a mile from the hotel. Attendees can enjoy thoughtful amenities including a 55-inch, flat-screen TV, an ergonomic work desk, wireless high-speed Internet and views of downtown West Palm Beach.

The property boasts more than 29,000 sf of meeting space, and the hotel exterior includes two 2,400-sf lawn spaces for special events.

To help meeting attendees unwind and relax, Hilton West Palm Beach features outdoor fitness boot camp classes to music designed by the onsite music curator. To decompress after meetings, the hotel offers glow-in-the-dark lawn games such as bocce ball, bean bag toss and ladder golf.

Attendees meeting at Hilton West Palm Beach can cool off by creating their own ice sculptures. The hotel provides tools and techniques courtesy of the culinary team who are well versed in ice sculpting. Participants are divided into teams whose goals are to sculpt blocks of ice into a masterpiece. All finished sculptures are used as centerpieces during dinner.



The Hilton West Palm Beach.

The new Grove Resort & Spa Orlando recently launched its first phase with 184 of its 878 residential-style suites that span up to nearly 1,600 sf. Open now with three swimming pools, a spa, fitness center, two bars and lounges, a large-scale grab-and-go, a lakefront pier with watersports, and a children's game room, The Grove will grow to also include a variety of other dining options and an onsite water park with a dual rider surf simulator, winding lazy river and multiple water slides. The resort brings a new type of hotel destination to the Orlando area with an expansive 106-acre blueprint that incorporates a portion of Central Florida's conservation grounds.

Guests arriving now will be the first to enjoy the resort's full-service Escape Spa and fitness center; three swimming pools with ample space for both play and relaxation; watersports, paddleboats and fishing at Lake Austin Pier; traditional cocktail favorites and signature citrus-inspired creations at Zest lobby bar; an elegant, modern atmosphere, live entertainment and a libation menu featuring craft cocktails and craft beer at Element lounge; and a selection of hot and cold self-serve food, made-to-order sandwiches



A rendering of the Grove Resort & Spa Water Park in Orlando.

and grocery-style items at Alfresco Market.

The hotel, which offers convenient access to Orlando's prime entertainment locales and iconic parks, also is a retreat from the boisterous pace of the theme parks with its natural marsh, wooded landscape and waterfront setting on Lake Austin. The Grove can accommodate up to 300 meeting-goers with onsite catering and audio-visual support available.



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EDWARDS

Visit Phoenix has promoted **Lorne Edwards** to vice president of sales and services. He joined Visit Phoenix five years ago as director of sales after a 16-year career at Hyatt Hotels Corporation.

The Birmingham Convention & Visitors Bureau has named **Steve Pierson** as director of convention sales; and **Carman Atchison** as sales manager for the Northeast territory. Pierson formerly served as vice president of sales for convention bureaus in Knoxville, Rochester and Houston. Atchison was sales man-



PIERSON

ager for The Westin and Sheraton hotels in Birmingham.

Visit Salt Lake has appointed **Karen Staples**, CMP, CASE, as Northeast director of convention sales based in Connecticut. She was managing director of development for the Talley Management Group.

Visit KC, Kansas City's tourism and hospitality organization, has named **Andre Walker** as national account manager based in Washington, DC, responsible for the East Coast region. He



ATCHISON



WALKER

formerly was national sales manager for the Memphis Convention & Visitors Bureau in Tennessee. **Lauren McKee** was named national sales manager for the Southeast market. She most recently served as sales manager at Crowne Plaza Kansas City Downtown.

The Plano Centre in Plano, Texas, has named **Bethany Hastings** as director of sales. She most recently served as sales manager for Courtyard and TownePlace Suites by Marriott in Grapevine, Texas.



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