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CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING

New Orleans

The Birthplace of Jazz Strikes the Right Note for Association Conventions

PAGE 58

Jazz Education Network President Caleb Chapman jammed with jazz greats at his annual conference in New Orleans.

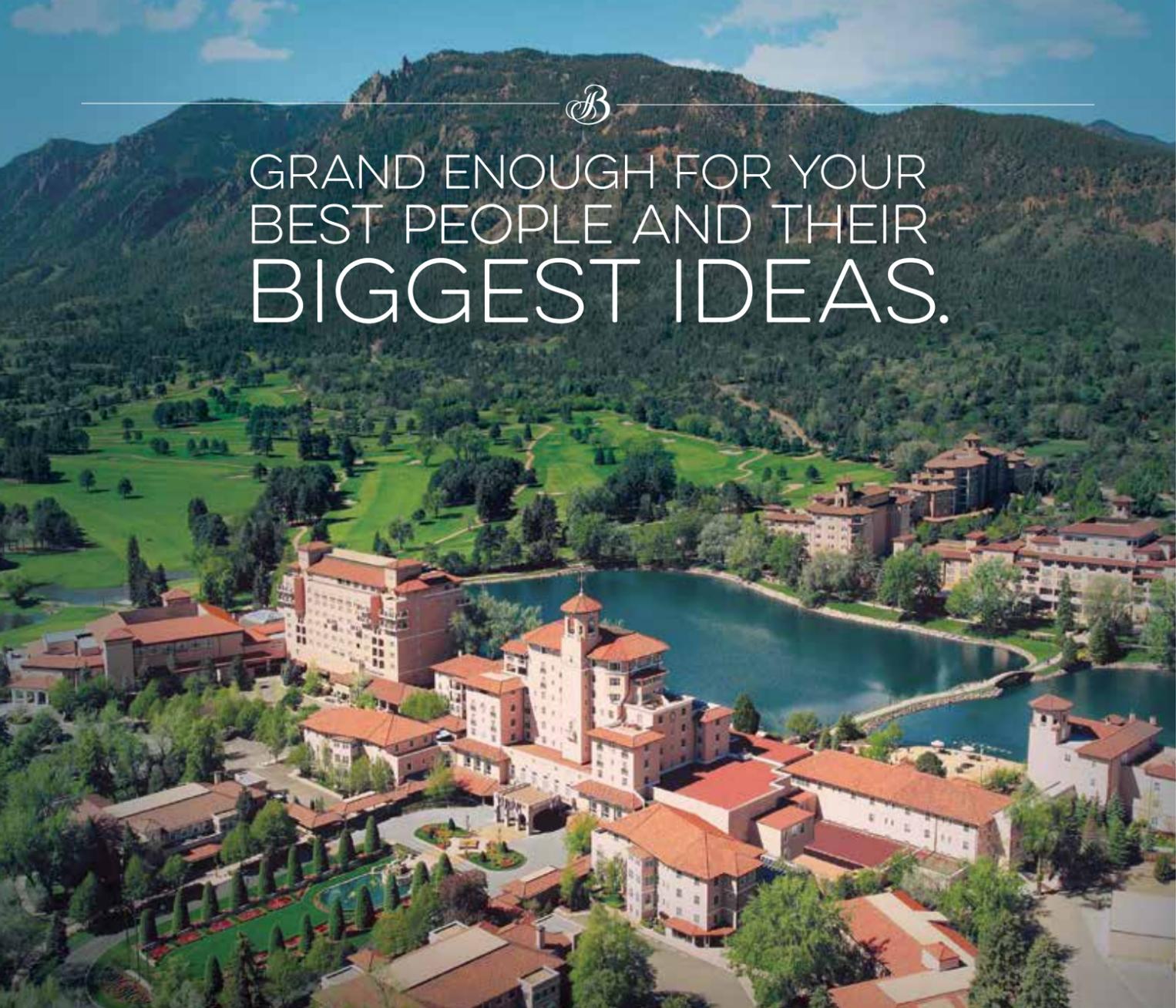
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John Graham**

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**10th Annual Distinctive
Achievement Awards**

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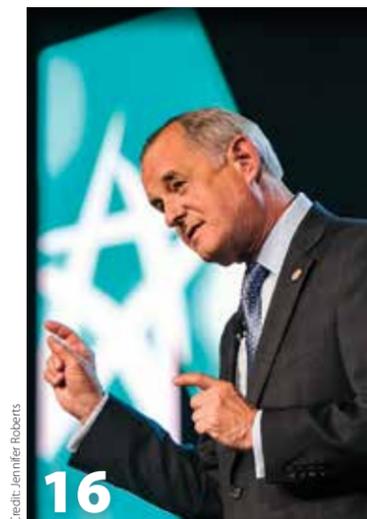
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Credit: Jennifer Roberts



Credit: Los Angeles Convention Center



Credit: National Confectioners Association

Weather the Storm & Play On



The celebrated, culturally rich meeting and convention destination of New Orleans, famous for food and music that feed the soul, will nevertheless be forever linked to images of Hurricane Katrina's devastation. More important, though, the Big Easy also will be remembered for its recovery, resilience and resurgence. The 2005 storm was deemed "unprecedented," yet we find ourselves having recently experienced a flurry of equally unprecedented weather events this August and September, with Houston being inundated by Hurricane Harvey, and Florida and the Caribbean raked by Hurricane Irma's fury — followed by Hurricane Maria's devastating assault on Puerto Rico.

We applaud the hospitality industry, which stepped up to help. For example, the Rosen properties in Orlando slashed rates for Hurricane Irma evacuees, and convention centers that housed storm refugees one minute, turned on a dime to successfully host previously booked events. Of course there are some damaged hotels and facilities that still must recover and rebuild in some areas, and meetings and conventions that must be relocated. (See John Graham's Q&A on page 16 for ASAE's efforts on dealing with meeting disruptors.)

But the silver lining is that times like these do bring out the best in all of us, notably, the meetings industry and hospitality community. For example, PCMA and the PCMA Education Foundation established the Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund to provide assistance to members in the meetings and events industry who were impacted by the storm. "We are committed to doing whatever it takes to help southeastern Texas emerge from this disaster stronger than ever," said PCMA President and CEO Deborah Sexton. And The Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association and Tourism Cares have partnered to create the Tourism Recovery Fund to help the most severely impacted islands of Anguilla, Bahamas, Barbuda, British Virgin Islands, St. Barts, St. Maarten-St. Martin, the Turks and Caicos Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands and more. "This effort is a natural complement to all the wonderful giving we've already seen from the travel and tourism industry," said Mike Rea, CEO of Tourism Cares in a statement. "We can make the greatest difference by giving together with our industry, for our industry — especially in times of crisis."

And though the daunting process of recovery is long and hard, we all can look for inspiration and hope in New Orleans, whose spirit runs as deep as its musical roots. For a look at all New Orleans has to offer, start by reading about the Jazz Education Network's New Orleans conference — that's JEN's president Caleb Chapman on our cover — on page 58.

Lastly, don't miss this year's winners of our 10th Annual Distinctive Achievement Awards on page 26.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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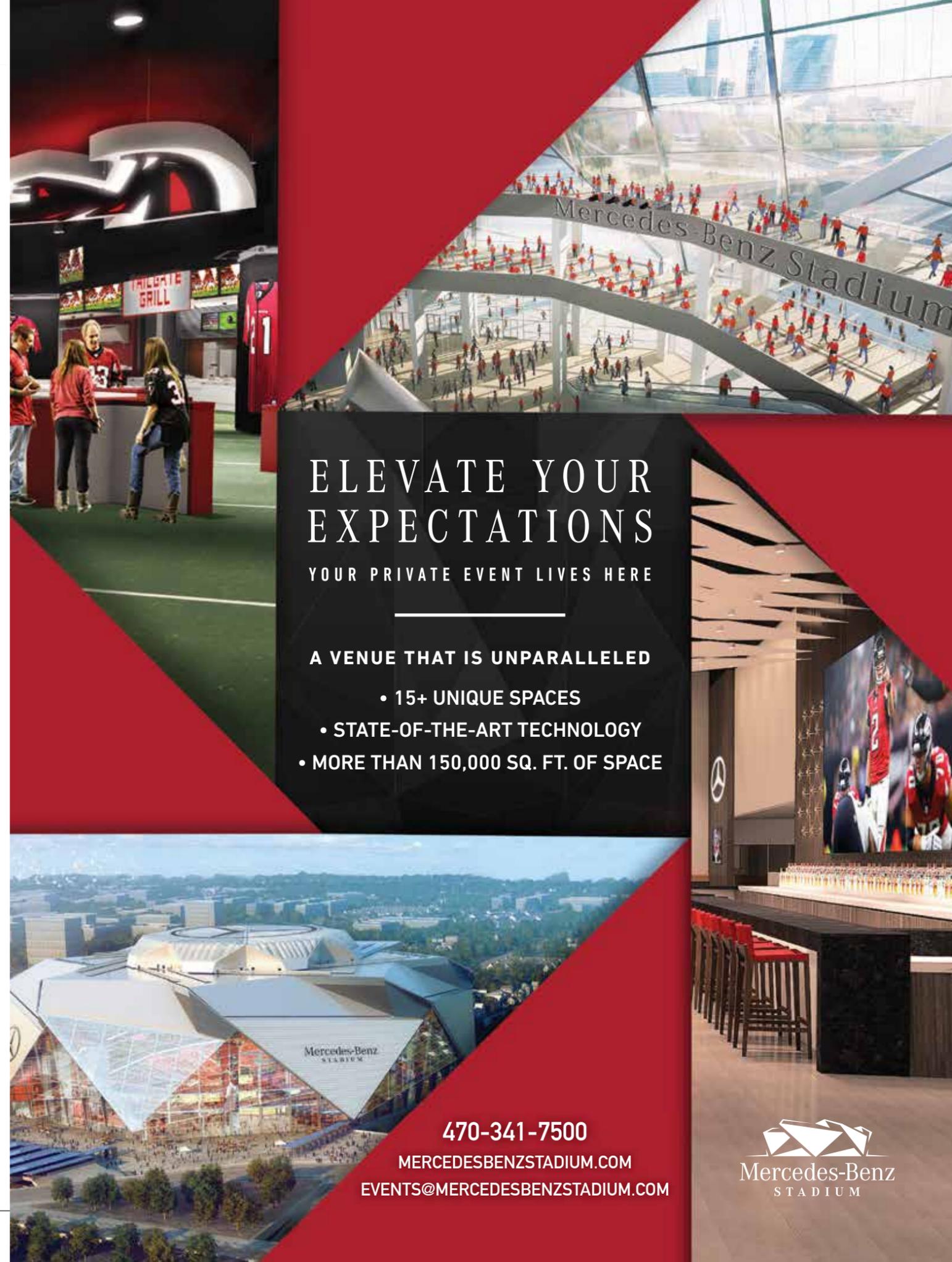
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Bookings Strong for New Anaheim Convention Center Expansion

ANAHEIM, CA — Visit Anaheim announced that 75 definite meetings and conventions have already booked Anaheim Convention Center's (ACC) North building. The new building, which officially opens September 26, 2017, is the center's seventh expansion, adding 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space and cementing the Anaheim Convention Center as the largest convention center on the West Coast.

New bookings include the Oncology Nursing Society, Society for Science & the Public and International Society for Technology in Education.

"The addition of ACC North is giving us the opportunity to bring in more diverse events that might not have considered Anaheim," said Jay Burress, president and CEO, Visit Anaheim. "Ultimately, the increase in event attendees will translate into additional positive economic impact for our local community, adding additional revenue to the city of Anaheim."

With the addition of the new building, Anaheim Convention Center will officially join the "1 million square foot club," be-



Rendering of the expansion's grand entrance.

coming the 11th largest convention center in the U.S. This latest expansion, the seventh in its 50-year history will grow the convention center to 1.8 million sf

Meetings and events utilizing ACC North will result in approximately 1 million room nights for the destination, equaling roughly 1.1 million attendees (numbers are estimated).

www.accexpansion.com

Tom David Named EVP/Chief Sales Officer With San Francisco Travel

SAN FRANCISCO, CA — The San Francisco Travel Association has named Tom David as executive vice president/chief sales officer, effective October 16, 2017. He will oversee all convention division activities including the development and implementation of sales strategies, citywide group business optimization, long-range sales and marketing of the city and county's major convention facilities including Moscone Center.



David

In fiscal year 2016/2017, San Francisco Travel booked more than 1,600 meetings that will consume 1,587,552 total room nights and generate more than \$1,123,332,998 in direct spending. And Moscone Center is in the midst of a \$551 million expansion. David was most recently vice president of sales, Marriott Western Mountain Pacific Region. www.sftravel.com

ADMEI Announces Emergency Preparedness Certificate Program

DAYTON, OH — The Association of Destination Management Executives International (ADMEI) has introduced the only comprehensive event emergency preparedness and risk management training course customized for meeting, event and destination management professionals. The Emergency Preparedness Certificate Program is developed by ADMEI in collaboration with MSA Security, a leader in security, intelligence, training and investigative services.

This 10-plus hour program is designed to develop emergency and risk management specialists within an organization by providing participants with in-depth training that focuses on:

- Emergency Planning Mission with a focus on prevention, mitigation and recovery.
- Basics of Emergency Operations Planning.
- Comprehensive, team approach to assist in building an Emergency Operations Plan.
- Additional planning considerations and risk assessments tools.
- Current events and trends impacting the event and destination management industry.
- Each participant will receive an Emergency Operation Plan that includes training tactics and procedures to customize for their use.

The program begins at 1 p.m. on day one, includes a mandatory evening event for which an emergency preparedness and risk management plan is developed by the course participants, and concludes the second day at noon. Participants who successfully complete this 10-hour program will receive a certificate in event emergency preparedness. The program will be offered in Las Vegas on November 14-15. Cost is \$585 for staff of current ADMEI member companies. The fee for individuals who do not work for an ADMEI-member DMC is \$650. 937-586-3727, www.admei.org/aws/ADME/pt/spemergency

L.A. Convention Center Reports Most Successful Year in Its History

LOS ANGELES, CA — The Los Angeles Convention Center (LACC), managed by AEG Facilities, closed its Fiscal Year (FY) 2016-2017 with the largest financial and operational surplus, highest occupancy rate and hosted the most citywide conventions and special events in the LACC's 46-year history.

The LACC reported an operating surplus of more than \$10.2 million; a 5 percent jump from the year prior. The impressive FY 2016-2017 results are not only in financial performance but also increases in total attendance and citywide convention bookings, building improvement projects, sustainability metrics, positive client survey results and community involvement and corporate responsibility projects.

The LACC successfully closed the year at an occupancy rate of 74 percent, surpassing the prior year's 72 percent

— industry standards indicate a convention center is considered fully occupied at 70 percent.

Through the partnership with the Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board (LATCB) and the Los Angeles Department of Convention & Tourism Development (CTD), the LACC has increased citywide bookings by 7 percent, which included large medical conventions such as the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery and the American Association of Neurological Surgeons; and other international conferences such as the USGBC Greenbuild and Optical Society of America. Additionally, the LACC received 96 percent favorable post event survey results from clients compared to 92 percent favorable last fiscal year.

"The increase in citywide conventions is a huge success for the city of



The Los Angeles Convention Center.

Los Angeles with attendee direct and indirect spending stimulating the local economy. Events held this year at the LACC have economically contributed \$732 million to the city of Los Angeles and an estimated 300,000 booked hotel room nights. AEG has been instrumental in the convention center's incredible success, and we are proud to call them partners," commented Doane Liu, executive director of the Los Angeles Department of Convention and Tourism Development. www.lacclink.com

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Plans for the Omni call for a 600-room full-service hotel north of the convention center.

OKC OKs Omni to Operate Convention Center Hotel

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK — Oklahoma City has approved a redevelopment agreement with Omni Hotels for a headquarters hotel to support the MAPS 3 Convention Center capital improvements program. The agreement calls for Omni and the city to share development costs for the 600-room, full-service hotel, which is planned to be built just north of the MAPS 3 Convention Center near the MAPS 3 Scissortail Park, Chesapeake Energy Arena and other major attractions in downtown and Bricktown. The convention center and hotel are scheduled to be finished in 2020. Early plans for the 600-room Omni hotel call for a mid-rise tower to be designed by architect HKS, with about 570,000 sf of total space. The full-service, four-star hotel will have six restaurants and bars with about 16,500 sf of space, plus more than 50,000 sf of ballroom and meeting space. A consultant group estimates the hotel will help the new convention center boost spending from \$62 million per year to \$137 million per year. www.visitokc.com

Marriott Marquis Makes Its Debut In Chicago

CHICAGO, IL — Marriott Marquis Chicago officially debuted this month as the largest hotel to open this year in Chicago, and the largest Marriott to open in North America in 2017. Directly connected to the country's largest convention center, McCormick Place, and adjacent to the new 10,000-seat Wintrust Arena, the property brings 1,205 guest rooms, including 44 suites, to the burgeoning entertainment and convention district of McCormick Square.



The city's newest hotel connects to McCormick Place.

The property boasts 93,000 sf of high-tech meeting and event space, including two 25,000-sf ballrooms and 43,000 sf of breakout meeting rooms. The Junior and Grand ballrooms, meant for corporate and social functions, are among the largest in the city and the only ones to feature dramatic views of the city skyline. The American Book Company building boasts 29 meeting rooms varying in size, along with centralized lounges with soft seating and charging areas on each floor. A 4,000-sf event space on the 33rd floor will open later this year with floor-to-ceiling windows offering unobstructed 180-degree views of Chicago and Lake Michigan.

www.marriottmarquischicago.com

Boise Centre Completes \$47.5 Million Expansion



Boise Centre concourse.

BOISE, ID — Boise Centre, Idaho's premier convention venue, recently finished a three-year expansion project that added 36,000 sf of meeting and event space in an effort to accommodate larger regional and national conventions, and multiple events simultaneously. In total, Boise Centre now offers 31 meeting rooms and 86,000 sf of highly flexible space, all of which offer a modern and contemporary-style design.

On the heels of completion in early June, Boise Centre welcomed 1,500 public health officials to the Annual Conference of the Conference of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE). Registrants included representatives from the U.S. and several countries, including China, India and Sudan. "It has been exciting to see our expansion in use right away. With 1,500 delegates, CSTE is the largest multiday convention in Boise Centre's 27-year history," said Pat Rice, executive director of Boise Centre. "With the proven capability to accommodate conventions with over 1,000 attendees, we look forward to welcoming more national and international events of this size in the future."

New spaces added during the expansion include a 14,000-sf ballroom with a spacious, two-story glass-enclosed lobby overlooking the city's civic plaza and fountain, nine additional meeting rooms and a concourse to provide attendees convenient access between spaces. www.boisecentre.com



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Credits: 2-8 Jennifer Roberts

1-8 More than 4,500 association professionals and industry partners gathered in Toronto, August 12–15, for the 2017 ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition. **1** William Talbert III, CDME, CEO and president of the Greater Miami CVB looks ready for his Miami Beach Convention Center's redevelopment project. **2** ASAE President & CEO John H. Graham IV, FASAE, CAE, sneaks a selfie. Participants listened to keynotes by **8** Nilofer Merchant, who discussed the importance of embracing "onlyness" as a key approach to making ideas powerful enough to dent the world, and **6** chef Jeff Henderson, who did a cooking demonstration on stage while sharing his personal journey of redemption — from imprisoned drug dealer to executive chef at several top restaurants to award-winning television personality. Attendees participated in more than 120 education sessions, five game changers and a packed expo hall with close to 400 companies, a fun run and networking events. The final attendance breakdown: 2,484 executives, 1,758 exhibitors, 343 others, including guests, spouses, press, vendors, and staff, for a grand total of 4,585. A total of 395 companies representing 676 booths exhibited in the expo hall, which resulted in a strong ratio of 59 percent buyers (association staff) to 41 percent sellers (industry partners).

Checking In With the Millennials as They Take on New Roles

Phelps R. Hope, CMP



Defining What They Bring to the Table

Despite some doom and gloom prophecies from the last decade that foretold of deserted convention show floors and isolated millennials networking exclusively through virtual reality, the truth is that the meetings industry is booming. And that's not despite millennials, it's because of them. In many ways, millennials are ushering in an era of opportunity for this industry.

Sure, it's a generation that does things a bit differently. But our industry actually stands to gain from the millennial mindset, as long as we embrace the change.

WHAT WERE WE AFRAID OF, AGAIN?

Now that we're a couple of decades into the Digital Age, we can take a step back and rethink our initial reservations.

Like virtually every other industry, the meetings business began bracing for change driven by a mysterious group of kids labeled millennials. Barely out of high school, their strange ways and preferences were sending shockwaves across every sector. Coupled with the advances in technologies and the general populace use of these technologies, we watched as print media evolved into e-reader screens and smartphone displays and as cable television pivoted to offer more on-demand programming. We saw travelers shift from travel agencies to one-stop-travel sites and brick-and-mortar brands build out their online retail presence to serve this audience. Surely the meetings industry was next, right?

Perhaps our biggest fear was that the hordes of teens staring down at their smartphones would grow into working professionals who recoiled at the thought of face-to-face interaction. At best — or so we thought — we would soon be competing with online networking platforms that don't require a plane ticket or an overnight stay.

Our fear was that millennials would bring about the end of an era.

So, fast-forward to 2017. Millennials are pushing into their 30s, and they're signing up for conferences and conventions. Not only did they disprove pessimistic predictions, they're actually pushing the envelope of what an

industry meeting should be. They're eager to shake hands and downright hungry to learn from your more experienced attendees.

The challenge will be to meet increasingly high expectations when it comes to putting on a stellar event. But that's a good challenge to have. Because of a generation we feared — and with their help — we're poised to transform how we bring people together.

THEY'RE HERE. WHAT DO WE DO NEXT?

We're no longer in hypothetical territory. Baby boomers are aging out of the work force, and millennials are rushing in to replace them.

Take a sigh of relief that this new generation values what you do, but don't grow complacent. Keep your old playbooks intact, but get ready to make some changes to them.

Take full advantage of millennial change by defining clearly what they bring to the table.

- **Tech.** It's long defined them, but it's nothing to fear. Millennials grew up with technology. They're also improving it. Young tech-savvy go-getters are paying close attention to how industry groups interact. All the while, the wheels are turning. Would more intuitive software make for smarter planning? Would a new platform give networkers more bang for their buck? Could machines and artificial intelligence better respond to attendee needs? Millennials will develop and implement the very tools that improve their experiences. It's on you to be open-minded.
- **Education.** The way millennials learn has shown us a new way of constructing our conferences. Interaction and sharing; collaborative work groups and discussion; shorter time bites and less structured topics; encouraging all voices to be heard, not just the biggest personalities; a combination of remote and in-person interaction — this is how our millennials are changing the way we learn.
- **Culture.** Cultural change is not exclusive to any single

generation. However, social media has certainly amplified current shifts. Millennials are bringing cultural change that's seemingly riddled with contradictions and paradoxes: they're casually dressed but hard-working; they'll work into the night if they can do it from the comfort of home; they strongly value personal time but won't hesitate to turn on that corporate charm. In the meetings space, that gives you a lot to chew on. Now is the time for you to rethink how your event balances work and leisure, personal and professional, onsite and offsite — just to name a few.

- **Causes.** Millennials are socially focused. That's not to

ing budgets from a decade ago and compare them to those same budgets today. You'll notice a dramatic shift toward digital and word-of-mouth marketing that has a potentially massive reach. The concept of personalized marketing, where suggestions are provided given purchasing habits and likes/dislikes (à la Amazon), has shown to be a leading method when marketing to this group. Important, too, is the clear value propositions of the conference, as time is certainly one of the currencies millennials deal in.

- **Opinions.** More than almost any other asset, millennials bring their opinions to the table. They grew up making

Take a sigh of relief that this new generation values what you do, but don't grow complacent. Keep your old playbooks intact, but get ready to make some changes to them.

say that they are more philanthropic than any other generation, but they like to know that their professional activities are doing some good beyond the bottom line. For meeting planners, this is an opportunity to shine a light on the good that can come from your event. For example, highlight the fact that leftover meals are donated to food banks, or partner with a charity in a way that's mutually beneficial. Giving back is important to this demographic group, more so than ever before.

- **Green dreams.** For that same reason, millennials pay close attention to their environmental impact. More and more, they are taking note of what their respective companies are and aren't doing. That same mentality has spilled into the meeting space. While going green(er) is a challenge, it's also an opportunity. With countless industries in flux in regards to green thinking, it's an excellent time to distinguish your event by going the extra mile and demonstrating how the impact has been mitigated.
- **Marketing opportunities.** Their technical savvy is opening a world of marketing potential via social media channels. Take a look at your traditional market-

noise in ways no other generation could. You can view that as a challenge or an opportunity. A forward-thinking meeting planner will get ahead of the inevitable feedback, rather than waiting for post-event survey results. If your new attendees feel heard, they provide immediate feedback you can react to in real time, while using it to make each event better than the last.

In summary, while we're certainly better off than we could have anticipated just a few years ago, the meetings industry has some decisions to make. While business-as-usual might not sink you, listening to millennials can provide new opportunities for your conferences and events, and certainly put you at a huge advantage with engaging this huge market segment. Whatever happens next, we at least know that we've got far more to look forward to than to fear. How exciting, huh?

Phelps R. Hope, CMP, is senior vice president of meetings and expositions for Kellen, an association management company with offices and representation in the U.S., Europe, China, the Middle East, India and Southeast Asia. He can be reached at phope@kellencompany.com or 678-303-2962.

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How Facilitation Can Help Make Your Next Meeting a Success

Mujtaba Mirza



And What Exactly Does a Facilitator Do?

The definition of the word facilitate is “to make easy” or “ease a process.” What a facilitator does is plan, guide and manage a group to ensure that the group’s objectives are met effectively, with structure, clear thinking, good participation and buy-in from everyone present. The key responsibility here is to create appropriate processes and a safe environment in which it can flourish, and so help the group reach a successful decision, solution or conclusion.

Before a facilitator designs the group process, he or she meets with the client sponsor (or group leader) and other key participants to understand their needs, desired outcomes, the participants and the session logistics. A facilitator then will design and plan the group process, and select the tools that best help the group move toward that outcome as set out during the client consultation, including what the final product may look like and participation opportunities; perspectives are heard to build shared understanding to optimize outcomes that can be supported by all. The facilitator also will record the action items and decisions so they can be properly dealt with afterwards. A good facilitator will help group members take ownership and accountability for themselves.

WHAT FACILITATORS DO

Good facilitators always include some of these basic components for all meetings:

- Using breaks in a creative manner in order to maintain group energy levels.
- Frequently mixing up the groups across functions and departments to encourage diversity.
- Adding physical movement to minimize prolonged sitting.
- Using flipcharts, brainstorming or other fun, engaging and purposeful activities to maximize interaction.
- Using different approaches and techniques, to help drive a group toward their meeting goals.

There is a library of diverse methods and techniques in the international facilitation community. An experienced facilitator knows when and how to employ the right one, suited for the purpose and the participants.

WHAT FACILITATORS DON'T DO

These myths illustrate what a facilitator does not do:

Myth 1: Facilitation is another name for training. The most common misconception about facilitation is using the term interchangeably with training. Training is intended to transfer knowledge and skills, so a participant can perform a specific task competently. On the other hand, facilitation aims to use the knowledge, ideas, wisdom and experience of the participants in the room to help the participants perform tasks collectively or helping them achieve certain identified and agreed-to outcomes.

Myth 2: Facilitation is getting inundated with a whirlwind of ideas. It is not enough just to identify and collect ideas by brainstorming; a group will feel dissatisfied if left in this “groan zone” with an enormous amount of ideas or data without knowing what to do with them. An effective facilitator will help the group make sense of all the ideas, to bring the ideation process to some closure, to converge them to some meaningful purpose and/or product.

Myth 3: Facilitation is a new buzz word. Facilitation has been around since the early 1980s, with roots that go back at least as far as Alex F. Osborn’s work on creative problem-solving in the late 1930s. Edgar Schein’s series of books on Process Consultation (1969) is often considered the resource that popularized the concept of facilitation.

Myth 4: Facilitation is tricks and gimmicks. A facilitator’s job is to help a group achieve the outcome required in consultation with the group leader, and then deliver it. As part of the process, appropriate techniques and methods are designed and used to generate ideas, encourage discussion, shift perspectives and reach decisions that all participants in the group can support. A professional facilitator will select a method that is purposeful and meaningful in achieving a desired result.

Myth 5: Facilitation is “touchy-feely” like group therapy. In a well-designed meeting, participants feel engaged, involved and empowered in their work. When a group learns how to work through challenges, disagreements and diverse perspectives together, it leads to a stronger, higher

performing team. It is more likely to have continued support in implementing the decisions made from a session in which participants were involved in making those decisions. A group may ‘feel’ better after a well-facilitated session, but that is because the group leaves the session after having contributed to the next steps or priorities.

Myth 6: Facilitators are only involved in what happens in the meeting. Conducting a good meeting is only part of the facilitation process. A facilitator’s job starts well before the meeting. The bulk of the work includes scoping methods, such as consulting with the group leader in advance of the meeting, working with the group leader to design (or

increases productivity. When everyone has a chance to contribute, they feel like an integral part of a team.

3. With increased participation, you encourage creativity within the group, letting new thoughts and ideas enter the mix and creating more far-reaching, innovative solutions.
4. Employing facilitators for meetings will yield a higher probability of achieving goals and minimize the risk of failure on big projects.
5. In addition to meetings, facilitators can help in different types of events, such as conferences, where an audience can be involved in a learning process instead of just sit-

Before a facilitator designs the group process, he or she meets with the client sponsor (or group leader) and other key participants, to understand their needs, desired outcomes, the participants and the session logistics.

tailor) the session outputs, designing the meeting processes, preparing materials and planning appropriate interactivities to be used during the meeting. Facilitators often are asked to document the results of the session or prepare summary reports after the meetings are concluded.

WHY USE FACILITATION?

Here are six reasons why meeting planners should use facilitators:

1. Using a facilitator helps keep the discussion on track, reduces wasted time and makes smart use of time available to achieve the desired outcome. It also provides a forum for constructively resolving conflicts and clarifying misunderstandings within the group.
2. A skilled facilitator helps improve communication within a team. Facilitated meetings encourage participation from all team members. It is well known that group members are more motivated to support decisions if they are part of the process. Increased participation within the group

ing through an information dump. It also can be used in community development and engagement events to bring together various members of a community to resolve issues or reach a decision.

6. Finally, it is important to recognize that facilitation is a leadership skill in all disciplines, fields and industries. It is possible for managers and leaders to draw more on their staff as resources, which contributes to overall organizational success. A facilitative leader encourages participation of all team members, models effective listening, is more open to the ideas of others and deals with conflicts and negative group dynamics more effectively. AC&F

Mujtaba Mirza is an Account Coordinator at Managing Matters Inc., the association management company for the International Association of Facilitators. IAF works to grow the community of practice for all who facilitate, establish internationally accepted professional standards, build credibility and promote the value of facilitation worldwide. Find out more about facilitation by visiting www.iaf-world.org

Q&A With ASAE

President and CEO John H. Graham Reflects on Industry Issues of the Day



Editor's Note: Following ASAE's 2017 Annual Meeting & Exposition in August, we asked ASAE President and CEO John H. Graham IV, FASAE, CAE, to reflect on critical association industry issues, from meeting design and risk management to travel bans, technology and other challenges meeting planners should be ready to deal with in the coming year.

Q What are the most timely and relevant issues association meeting planners are most concerned about? Safety and security? Technology? New attendee engagement techniques? Meeting design? How is ASAE helping planners deal with these challenges?

A All the concerns you have listed are certainly top of mind. The topics of technology, engagement, meeting design, and to add a few more, learning formats, experience design, were all discussed and showcased at ASAE's new event, the Xperience Design Project (XDP), which was launched in May 2017.

XDP showcased new opportunities and helped planners

experience firsthand how they can apply new learning formats, design and engagement elements, technology and operational innovations into their future meetings. On day one, zone captains — who were the thought leaders in each of the five zones — led an immersive and collaborative learning experience to help participants think outside the mold of conventional meetings. Day two created one-on-one conversations between industry partners and association executives. ASAE innovated and took a risk on behalf of our members to help those involved in the planning, design, implementation and hosting of events, create new and better meeting experiences to engage their members and stakeholders.

Q How is the approach to risk management in the association meetings industry changing in the face of increasing meeting disruptors, such as terror threats, major weather events, cyber threats and active shooters?

A There is still work to be done in this area, and one of ASAE's volunteer groups, The Meetings & Expositions Section Council, is focusing on this topic in the fall. The most critical aspect in any risk management situation is to have a clear and widely distributed crisis communications plan. This is pivotal to success in managing any meeting disruptor, regardless of what the specific incident is. The M&E Council will be working with an industry crisis management expert to review several organizations' crisis communications plans with a goal of developing one overall plan that combines the best elements of those reviewed. The group will then consider how to work with the facility and venue to define key responsibilities when a crisis occurs. The council has already looked at three potential meeting disruptors and has drafted action plans to be reviewed and eventually shared with the association community in summer 2018.

Q How do you think the divided political landscape and travel ban efforts are affecting the association meetings industry? Which White House policies are affecting our industry for better or worse?

A Certainly, the partisanship and political animosity we are witnessing in Washington make it difficult to see progress on a legislative agenda — whether it's a Republican agenda, a Democratic agenda, the White House's agenda or the association community's agenda. We are not seeing a lot being accomplished without difficulty. Even legislative tasks that were relatively routine a decade ago — such as passing a budget resolution — present significant challenges. Different factions within the same political party even sometimes have trouble agreeing on common priorities and legislative solutions.

In terms of the travel ban and so-called "extreme vetting" of visa applicants, we think there's a better balance that needs to be struck to ensure safety and security without discouraging inbound travel to the U.S. We understand and support the proper review and establishment of standards to prevent national security risks posed from our visa and immigration system, but the travel ban — coupled with the administration's more stringent vetting of visa applicants — has given international visitors reasons not to bother to come to the U.S. if they don't have to. Travel search engines are reporting a sharp decline in international travelers looking for flights to America. Professional and trade associations also report markedly fewer registrations from international attendees at their meetings and conventions here in the U.S. The economic losses also do not account for the missed opportunities for

foreign scientists, medical professionals, researchers and others who share knowledge and trends about their industries and professions with their U.S. counterparts at association-sponsored conferences.

Q Are association meeting budgets keeping pace with costs? Do you see any swing away from the seller's market?

A It is still very much a seller's market, and the costs for major meeting commodities are going up. Key costs that add to a meeting's experience, such as food and beverage, technology, labor and travel, are all on the rise. Attendees at association events are expecting more for less. So many times, increasing registration fees are met with potential lower attendance or meeting satisfaction. It takes discipline, annual review and keen negotiations and partnerships to help manage costs within fairly stagnant budgets in associations. Meeting teams have to constantly review the value of specific offerings as well as meeting venues and destinations, to ensure they are spending money on variables their attendees value.

Q Do you see association meeting planner salaries remaining stagnant or rising? What are the contributing factors? What gives a planner the best chance at achieving top salary and position?

A Based on recent industry studies, planner salaries are increasing by 5 percent or less for most planner positions within associations. However, the role of meeting professionals has shifted from being a superior logistical manager to an event strategist and producer. Planners who are pushing the boundaries of their events and looking at their organizations' products and services as a whole and making sure that face-to-face meetings are delivering on the organization brand, certainly elevates the position and the role within associations.

Q How has technology most changed the association meetings industry and how challenging has it been for you to keep pace?

A I think the most visible and most obvious change has been the proliferation of meeting-specific mobile apps that manage the logistics and engagement at meetings. Every major meetings software company has a companion app for their systems, and there are a slew of third-party mobile meetings apps as well. These apps help attendees locate and select sessions, navigate the exhibit hall, find colleagues to connect with, etc. The latest trend in these apps is to provide Facebook-like activity feeds where attendees share the meeting experience with each other in real time.

Not new anymore, but not widespread either, is the use

of beacon technology (and other location-aware technologies) that allow real-time information to show where people are/have been throughout the meeting venue. Having this information allows you to make real-time adjustments to the meeting experience before things become a problem. For example, if you have a room set for 50 people, and the real-time heat map generated through the beacon technology tells you that the room is already full five minutes before the session starts, then you take action (get more seats, adjust the room temperature, etc.) before attendees are adversely affected.

It really hasn't been a huge challenge keeping up because meetings is what we do. The real challenge is making sure we don't outpace our members' tolerance for change as all of these changes hit the market. As always, there is walking the line between leading and serving.

Q What encouraging signs do you see ahead for the U.S. and the global association meetings industry?

A The need for bringing communities together to solve problems that impact their industries and members is not going away. The trend of design thinking, bringing people from different backgrounds and disciplines together to focus on solutions is needed more than ever. U.S. and global associations see that their work has more depth and value when working together, and organizations are more open to this today than ever before. Associations are abundant globally, and the eagerness to learn from industry counterparts across the globe is becoming more the norm than not. There is tremendous energy and opportunity to discover the best solutions for the future.

Q How is ASAE advocating for diversity and inclusion and events accessibility?

A More than a year ago, ASAE created a diversity and inclusion decision tree that we use to make decisions and respond to emerging social justice issues that have implications for associations, such as the proliferation of state laws that permit discriminatory practices against the LGBTQ community. We have made that decision-making model available to anyone in the association community. The ASAE Board also approved an anti-discrimination clause for future convention center and hotel contracts that is consistent with ASAE's policy on diversity and inclusion. The purpose of the clause is to protect ASAE against discriminatory laws that threaten the success of a planned meeting or convention. ASAE's intent is not to tell other associations where they should hold their own meetings and events. But in our case, what we have said is that we can't bring our meetings and our events to a state that is going to discriminate or deny public accommodations to segments of our membership.

This year, ASAE devoted considerable time and resources to combat controversial anti-LGBTQ legislation in Texas. Versions of the so-called "bathroom bill" in Texas drew widespread opposition throughout the Texas legislative session from the business community and hospitality industry. ASAE and the Keep Texas Open for Business coalition opposed several versions of this bill that would preempt existing anti-discrimination ordinances put in place by cities such as Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth and San Antonio to protect the LGBTQ community. We were gratified to see the special session end in Texas (August 15) without passage of any bathroom bill, but we know we will have to stay vigilant on the issue.

Q Where do you envision ASAE in the next 10 years?

A Ten years is a long time horizon for any organization given the rapid pace of change and the evolving technology landscape. That being said, ASAE does have a multiyear strategy to move from a traditional membership model to an engagement model. With our hybrid membership model, we are able to engage a much larger portion of the association professionals working in associations. Our strategy is to engage them in career development activities as well as learning opportunities through our new learning platform, ASAE Learning Online. We recognize that these new members may not be able to participate/engage the same way more traditional members have. Therefore, by focusing on career and online learning, we believe we can get them involved in ASAE in areas where younger professionals are going to be most interested and at price points they can afford. It is an evolving strategy but we are confident we are on the right track.

Q What in your opinion are the biggest areas of change association meeting planners and the meetings industry will face in the coming year?

A Staying nimble and always looking to be one step ahead of where your members' needs are. This is a challenge in all areas of an organization and not just in the area of meetings. Being able to remain relevant as an organization, providing information and resources to members in a "just in time" environment in a delivery format preferred by members.

Specific to meetings, the ability to deliver relevant content in various learning formats that appeal to multigenerational audiences is crucial to success. And in line with content delivery, we also must create experiences that capture the hearts and minds of those participating. Planners have to start thinking about their meetings and events as live media experiences and create the conditions throughout the various touch points of the event that will help deliver experiences unique to the individuals who are participating. AC&F

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Convention Center F&B Trends

Chefs Think Outside of the 'Big Box' With Creative, Restaurant-Style Cuisine

By Sophia Bennett

Credit: Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center



Convention center food and beverage trends are closely following those seen in restaurants and hotels across the country. Many venues are sharpening their focus on farm-to-table meals that meet a variety of dietary needs. They're serving healthier foods that are creatively composed and beautifully displayed.

The fact that convention centers are paying attention to trends at all may surprise some people. "When you look at the age-old perception of convention center food, it's overwhelmingly not good," says Matt Del Regno, executive chef and general manager for Levy Restaurants at the Huntington Convention Cen-

ter of Cleveland. "Even the word 'concessions' means you're making a concession to what you'd normally want to eat."

Del Regno is one of several convention center chefs looking to change this idea. "My goal in life as a chef is to make people want to have all their premier and headline events at the convention center, because our food isn't just competitive with the hotel, it's excelling," he says.

"In Cleveland we focus on being restaurant-minded and thinking about the small scale of things and how we execute that one dish or one order and present it at the same quality," says Del Regno. "We're moving away from prepackaged food and going back to doing things from scratch. We're going back to individual portioning. There doesn't have to be a huge trough of food out there."

Kelley Whetsell, an independent meeting planner and owner of Meeting Demands in Brunswick, Ohio, works on the annual Content Marketing World Conference and Expo for the Content Marketing Institute. It takes place at the Huntington Convention Center every year. She's been very impressed with Del Regno's approach.

"The chef is willing to get creative with the menu items themselves," she says. "He really looks to use the latest in food trends that are flavorful and interesting and not the same thing you're going to get from venue to venue."

A principle reason convention centers are so focused on overhauling their food choices is that consumers are demanding it. "Overall, people have more of a connection to food," says Del Regno. "Five years ago people didn't grab on to the food buzz words like GMO and gluten-free. They didn't recognize the importance of local farms and humanely sourced product. Now planners are bringing that to convention centers." And they are responding in kind.

CREATIVE FOODS AND DISPLAYS

"Our mandate from the county is that we bring a five-star hotel experience to the convention center, and that's what we're doing," says Marcel Martinez, executive chef at the Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center.

So when the convention center hosted the Professional

"Our mandate from the county is that we bring a five-star hotel experience to the convention center, and that's what we're doing."

Marcel Martinez
Executive Chef
Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center



The Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland's working farm produces food for catering purposes. Pictured are Levy Restaurants Executive Chef and General Manager Matt Del Regno (in white apron) and intern Andy Mondello.

"My goal in life as a chef is to make people want to have all their premier and headline events at the convention center, because our food isn't just competitive with the hotel, it's excelling."
 Matt Del Regno, Executive Chef and General Manager, Levy Restaurants at the Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland

Convention Management Association for a recent meeting, Martinez put together a memorable display. "I visited some of the local beaches and picked up some driftwood and sponges and shells, and drilled holes in them and created a beach scene," he says. He made a variety of foods that were placed in bite-sized waffle-like cones and served on sticks. On the savory side there was hummus in a curry-infused cone and tuna tartare in a squid ink cone. The sweet cones were coated in chocolate and nuts, and filled with mango lemon mousse.

The creativity doesn't end there. Martinez likes to put on a "taco truck" meal where fixings are served in Tonka trucks. Another group at the convention center had a James Bond theme for a special event. At their request, he crafted dishes with names that riffed on Bond movies, including Pie Another Day and Goldfinger mac and cheese.

Content Marketing World's theme color is orange, and every year the Huntington Convention Center's kitchen puts together a snack break that's full of orange foods — and not just oranges and Cheetos, Whetsell notes. In recent years they've

"When you incorporate tastings or things to provide visual interest, attendees think, 'Wow, this group really put some thought into this.'"

Kelley Whetsell
 Owner
 Meeting Demands
 Brunswick, OH

done pretzel bites with beer cheese dip, carrot sticks with red pepper hummus, paprika French onion dip with housemade cheddar cheese chips, orange waffle parfaits with orange cream and orange whoopie pies.

"When you incorporate tastings or things to provide visual interest, attendees think, 'Wow, this group really put some thought into this,'" Whetsell says to explain why the Institute goes to such great lengths with the break. "They're grateful they're not getting just a turkey sandwich."

Christine Couvelier is a president and global culinary trendologist for Culinary Concierge in Vancouver, BC. She gives some insight into the trendy flavors planners may see from convention centers and other F&B providers soon. "Salt is still the new pepper," she says. "There's crunchy, flaky and crystal salt from out-of-the-way places, everywhere from Key West to Vancouver. It's a great way to add a twist to a dish." She recently experimented with putting merlot balsamic vinegar salt on roasted potatoes with great success.

"Doughnuts are the new cupcakes," she adds. "Meatballs are the new meatloaf. Mason jars are the new bowls. Deviled eggs are the new comfort food appetizers."

Waffles are Couvelier's dish of the year and another food that will be showing up on more menus. "It's more than chicken and waffles," she says. "It's breakfast, lunch and late night." She's seen waffles turned into cinnamon rolls and grilled cheese sandwiches, made with brownie batter, topped with tater tots, or filled with vegetables such as zucchini or roasted red peppers. They're a fun food that's easy to eat and familiar to everyone.

HEALTHFUL, VEGETABLE-FOCUSED MENUS

Vegetables of all kinds continue to be hot items as convention centers move toward more healthful foods. "Vegetable-centric menus are big this year, and next year they'll be even bigger," says Couvelier. "Everything from A to Z, artichokes to zucchini. This is veggie cuisine without being expressly vegetarian. We're not saying you're not going to have meat on your plate, but veggies are the star."

Paula Schneider, director of meetings and conventions with the Fairfax, Virginia-based American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery, recounts an excellent vegetable and fruit-heavy lunch that was served at their annual conference at the Los Angeles Convention Center. It started with a market fruit basket, which included a selection of seasonal hand fruit. The main portion of the meal included a vegetable antipasto platter, vegetarian lasagna with oregano panko and sautéed green beans. For dessert, the staff served cannoli with fresh berries.

"The fruits and vegetables were all high quality, and the presentation of the meal was very well done," Schneider says.

Veggie-focused meals can get very creative. "It's all about changing it up," Couvelier says. "You might always have had cauliflower on the menu, but let's mix it up and do cauliflower rice or purple cauliflower. Purple cauliflower is huge this year." Another trendy option is vegetable Popsicles made with ingredients such as purple carrots and beets.

Meals packed with vegetables help convention centers meet another important goal: providing quality food for vegetarians, vegans and people on the paleo diet. The need to meet dietary restrictions is important in today's marketplace, and venues are rising to that challenge. They're also committed to doing it in a way where everyone will be satisfied with the meal they receive.

"We design all of our buffet meals so we have a vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free and dairy-free option available," says Del Regno. "It's not just something that's on the table as a vegan option, it's something we've put a focus on to make sure it's



A scrumptious starter courtesy of L.A. Convention Center catering.

Credit: Los Angeles Convention Center

"Doughnuts are the new cupcakes. Meatballs are the new meatloaf. Mason jars are the new bowls. Deviled eggs are the new comfort food appetizers."



Christine Couvelier
 President and
 Global Culinary Technologist
 Culinary Concierge
 Victoria, BC

the best item we can do and it tastes great. It presents so nicely that someone who's not vegan walks down the line and happily takes it. We have to prepare it for 3,000 because everyone wants to eat it." Examples include sweet potato croquettes, Tuscan white bean cakes, kale chips or garlic chips with chard.

GOING GREEN AND LOCAL

As interest in sourcing local grows, more convention centers are making an effort to procure meats, fruits, veggies and other products from area farms and producers. The Huntington Convention Center really takes this to the next level with their 100 percent local sourcing policy.

"We have a farm 40 miles from us that grows all our greens year-round," Del Regno says. "We have more farms that grow our other vegetables. Our pork is Ohio raised and humanely handled. We have certified-humane antibiotic-free chicken."

The convention center even produces some of its own food onsite. They have bee hives for honey, chickens for eggs and an herb garden. They also keep hogs in a special onsite pen. These animals don't produce much in the way of edibles, Del Regno notes; they partner with locals to maintain bee hives offsite, and they get additional eggs from other vendors. What the animals do is serve as catalysts for conversations about the convention center's values and practices. "People see the animals and then ask the staff about it and they can tell the story of 100 percent local sourcing," he says.

Many convention centers are obtaining LEED certification to demonstrate their commitment to eco-friendly practices. The Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center is one. They received LEED Gold certification in 2012.

Recycling and composting is a big focus for the kitchen. "We use a lot of plant-based recycling materials as to-go containers," says Martinez. "We have a food digester in the kitchen, which saves it from going to our landfill in Broward County. There's a recycling program in the kitchen and convention center."

In addition, they're working on ways to limit food waste — another big industry trend these days. "We're preserving a lot of the vegetables that we know we won't use," he says. "We'll



A food truck extravaganza at the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center's new Cove, an indoor/outdoor event space.

Credit: Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center

pickle them, dehydrate them, make jams, that kind of thing." These from-scratch items are a big hit for people who are looking to consume healthier foods with fewer preservatives.

TAKING BEVERAGES TO ANOTHER LEVEL

Like hotels and other venues, convention centers are re-vamping their drink menus to stay current with industry trends. "I'm almost shocked to see how much the mocktail has taken off," says Del Regno. They do a lot of blueberry lemonade for breaks, and their bar staff can whip up custom alcohol-free cocktails for groups upon request.

Couvelier has noticed the same thing. "People are playing with things like cold-pressed juices, lavender, herbs and spices in them," she says. They may add ice cubes that have been smoked or come in interesting shapes.

The other beverage that's taken Del Regno by surprise is cold-brewed coffee. "If you asked me 18 months ago if it had legs I'd have told you it was a flash in the pan, but it's done nothing but take off," he says. "We've gone from just cold-brewed coffee to cold-brew mocktails, like mojitos with coffee instead of rum. It's not going to work for everyone, but for the right group, when we offer it people are really excited about it."

The way beverages are presented matters too. "At the morning breaks, instead of doing pitchers of cranberry juice or orange juice, we'll put them in glass bottles with straws with fun colors or polka dots," says Martinez.

Waters flavored with fruits and vegetables can be a great alternative to sugary sodas and other drinks. "No one wants to just look at a few gallons of water, so try to do some spa water," says Whetsell with Meeting Demands. "For our orange break, we do oranges in the water."

Smoothie bars also continue to be big. For a modern, health-conscious twist, Couvelier is seeing vendors add turmeric, a bright yellow spice that has anti-inflammatory properties and also adds great color to beverages.

FOOD TRUCKS

Convention centers have traditionally been reluctant to bring in outside food vendors that could take sales away from their onsite venues. But that's starting to change.

"When we did our site visit at the Los Angeles Convention Center they introduced the idea of having food trucks come in, which we thought was new and different," says Schneider with the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery.

The convention center's staff arranged for a different food truck to come every day of the five-day event. Choices were quite varied and included gyros, Korean barbecue, grilled cheese, Mexican and homemade ice cream sandwiches made with fresh cookies. The trucks parked in the loading dock and served food that could be eaten at outdoor tables or taken back into the convention center.

"We had it start during move-in, which is a time the convention center doesn't like to open outlets because traffic isn't as high," Schneider says. Having the food truck available meant exhibitors didn't have to leave the convention center to grab lunch, which they really appreciated.

Conference attendees loved it, too. "It really hit the market for grab-and-go, and it was very affordable," Schneider says. Folks also liked the outdoor seating, which gave them a convenient excuse to get out of the building for a little while.

"When we did our site visit at the Los Angeles Convention Center, they introduced the idea of having food trucks come in, which we thought was new and different."

Paula Schneider
 Director of Meetings and Conventions
 American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery
 Fairfax, VA

"The only thing the convention center asked was that we keep all the outlets open, which we knew we would have to do anyway," Schneider says (their event draws around 12,000 people between the participants and exhibitors). "They had lines every day — and I don't mean that in a negative way." The meals at the onsite venues were apparently quite good as well, which doesn't come as a surprise in this new environment of convention center food excellence.

Other convention centers are hopping onboard the food truck trend including the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center, which recently debuted The Cove, a new indoor/outdoor street party event venue perfectly suited for food truck events and other special catering setups. "We're constantly rethinking our spaces, and this is a venue unlike anything you'll see at any other convention center," said Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the Long Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Savvy conventions centers like these that stay on top of culinary trends know that the quickest way to a planner's heart is through creative cuisine that leave attendees well satisfied. AC&F

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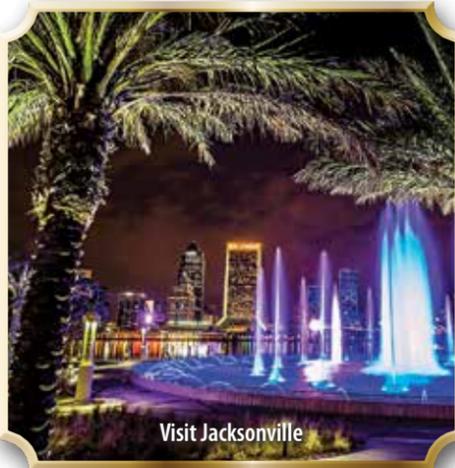
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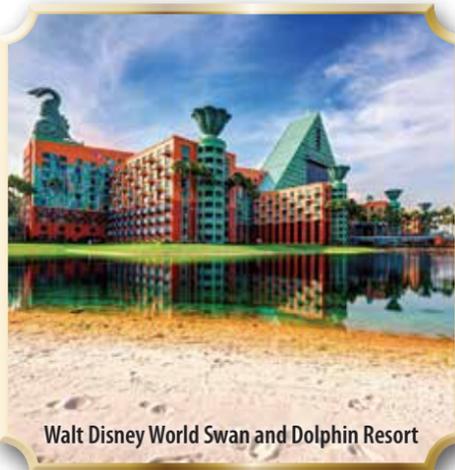
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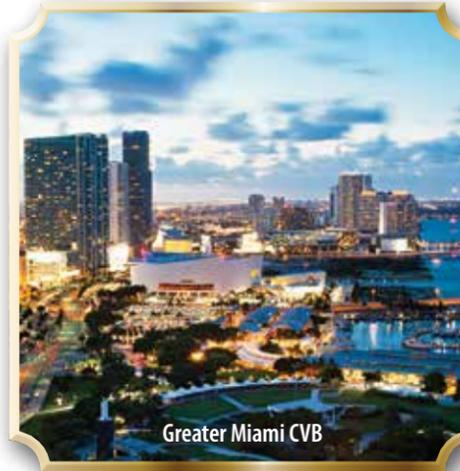
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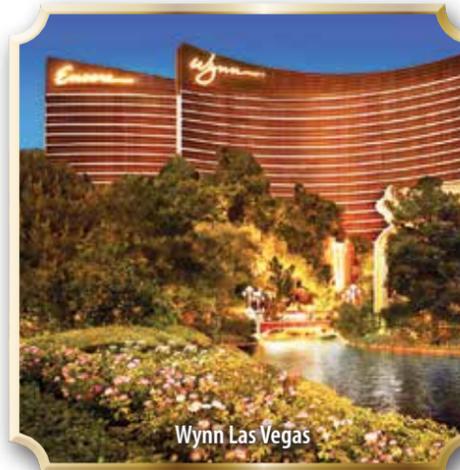
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- Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino
Las Vegas, NV
- MGM Grand Hotel & Casino
Las Vegas, NV
- The Mirage
Las Vegas, NV
- New Orleans Marriott
New Orleans, LA
- New York Marriott Marquis
New York, NY
- Omni Dallas Hotel
Dallas, TX
- Omni Nashville Hotel
Nashville, TN
- Orlando World Center Marriott
Orlando, FL
- Rosen Shingle Creek
Orlando, FL
- South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa
Las Vegas, NV
- The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino
Las Vegas, NV
- Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort
Lake Buena Vista, FL
- Wynn Las Vegas
Las Vegas, NV



Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau

701 Brickell Avenue, Suite 2700, Miami, FL 33131

Contact: Barry Moskowitz, Vice President, Sales • barry@gmcb.com • 305-539-3042

Fax: 305-530-4276 • planners.miamiandbeaches.com

Avibrant and dynamic global hub, Miami offers a stunning array of creative venue options for even the largest meeting needs, including the new Miami Beach Convention Center coming in 2018.

Located in the heart of South Beach, the new Miami Beach Convention Center will be a bright, glass-encased facility as innovative and tech-rich as it is beautiful. In addition to the 500,000 sf of versatile exhibition space and more than 180,000 sf of meeting space, the new Miami Beach Convention Center also will include a 60,000-sf grand ballroom and a 20,000-sf junior ballroom.

Each space will feature a terrace where attendees can step out, mingle and soak up the city's signature sunshine and oceanfront beauty. The new Miami Beach Convention Center also is environmentally friendly and LEED Silver-certified.

WHAT'S NEW

Along with the new Miami Beach Convention Center, Miami continues to reinvent itself with new hotels, meeting spaces and enhanced infrastructure. Some of the recent additions to the city include:

- **Brickell City Centre**

The \$1.05 billion project by Swire Properties opened its doors in November 2016. Spanning 9.1 acres, Brickell City Centre includes a 352-room hotel, an open-air shopping center,

two luxury condo towers, two office buildings and an entertainment center.

- **Brightline**

The new express train service will provide intercity travel in Florida. In September 2017, Brightline will begin service connecting Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach. Service between Miami and Orlando will follow in 2018.

- **Miami Worldcenter**

The \$2 billion project planned for downtown Miami will include retail, restaurants, entertainment, hotels, and residential and commercial space.

- **Frost Science Museum**

The Phillip and Patricia Frost Museum of Science opened its doors to the public in May 2017 at its new home in downtown Miami's Museum Park. The 250,000-sf facility combines a planetarium, aquarium and science museum on one campus.

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

Along with its world-famous weather and beaches, the city also offers nearly endless possibilities for entertainment and exploration. From unique hotel and dining experiences to culturally diverse neighborhoods and a thriving arts scene, Miami seamlessly blends the benefits of a sophisticated international destination with the natural beauty of the tropics. And it's easy to get to, with Miami International Airport (MIA) offering more than 400 flights from around the globe daily and serving more airlines than any other airport in the U.S.

These are just a few of the memorable and magical highlights awaiting any meeting planner thinking of Miami. Visit MiamiMeetings.com to learn more.

AC&F



CITYWIDE FACTS & FEATURES

Guest Rooms: 55,394

Hotels/Resorts: 426

Meeting Space: 1.2 million sf

CONVENTION CENTER FYI

Located in the heart of South Beach, the new Miami Beach Convention Center will open in 2018. This innovative and tech-rich facility will feature 500,000 sf of exhibition space.

FIND YOUR CENTER

The newly renovated Miami Beach Convention Center, that is. Unveiling in 2018, it's the perfect meeting space to put your perfectionist-side at peace, just blocks from the ocean.



500,000 square feet of renovated exhibit space, a new 60,000-square-foot ballroom and 81 breakout rooms with more than 190,000 square feet of meeting space.

Contact us to learn more. 800-933-8448 ext. 3071
Meetings@MiamiMeetings.com | MiamiMeetings.com



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Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau

301 E. Ocean Boulevard, Suite 1900, Long Beach, CA 90802

Contact: Steve Goodling, President & CEO • steveg@longbeachcvb.org • 562-436-3645
www.visitlongbeach.com

Long Beach — California Fresh, Urban Coast — is the central jewel in Southern California's glittering array of beachfront towns. But Long Beach is more than just a pretty beach. Unlike most oceanfront cities, Long Beach boasts an urban, downtown waterfront, blending the casual atmosphere of a beach town with the electric hum of an exciting big city. Residents and visitors enjoy all the amenities and entertainment found only in an ethnically and culturally diverse urban environment.

Experience everything that makes this city magical: the food, the nightlife, the scenic pathways, and miles and miles of sandy beachfront and inland waterways. With its Mediterranean climate, Long Beach boasts 345 days of sunshine each year, offering unlimited outdoor activities. Dine in singular restaurants, many with panoramic ocean vistas. Stroll along well-lit, palm-lined promenades, boardwalks and esplanades. Long Beach is listed as one of the "most walkable" cities in America as well as one of the top bike-friendly cities.

MODERN TRANSPORTATION

While staying in Long Beach, leave your car behind and never worry about parking or getting where you want to go. The city's transportation system is modern and efficient. Metro light-rail trains whisk passengers to downtown Los Angeles in less than an hour, with frequent service and

connections to all the Metro rail and bus lines. Long Beach Transit operates a fleet of electric and hybrid buses throughout the city, and the Passport buses are free in the downtown area. The Aquabus water taxi runs between Rainbow Harbor, Shoreline Village and the Queen Mary, and a high-speed AquaLink provides service from downtown to Alamitos Bay.

WORLD-CLASS ATTRACTIONS

Long Beach offers its own world-class attractions: the majestic Queen Mary, the spellbinding Aquarium of the Pacific, whale watching, harbor cruises, and comedy and musical clubs featuring entertainment across all genres.

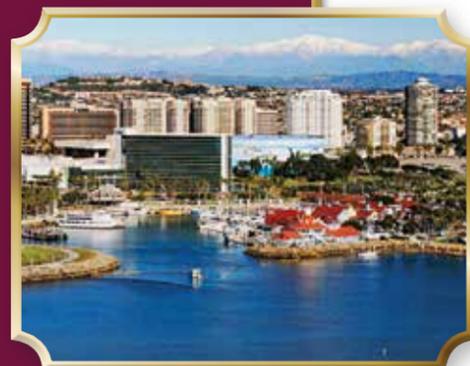
Art and culture is a vital part of the community. With four unique museums, historic Spanish-era ranchos, numerous historic sites and buildings, the community is proud of its past and looking forward to a dynamic future.

CENTRALLY LOCATED

Located in the center of Southern California, Long Beach is close to all the Southland's major attractions via freeway and public transportation: Downtown L.A., Hollywood, Universal Studios and the Disneyland attractions are all within 30 minutes of our downtown.

Getting to and from Long Beach is also quick and easy, with three major airports less than 30 minutes away. Long Beach Airport, the West Coast hub for JetBlue, is just 10 minutes from downtown. LAX and Orange County's John Wayne Airport are less than 30 minutes via freeway.

AC&F



CITYWIDE FACTS & FEATURES

Guest Rooms: 4,752
(3,000 within walking distance of the convention center)

Hotels/Resorts: 27

Meeting Space:

Hotels: 219,000+ sf
Offsite: 500,000 sf

CONVENTION CENTER FYI

The Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center, with more than 400,000 sf of modern, flexible exhibit and meeting space, is located in the center of the downtown waterfront with sweeping harbor views.



At the forefront of experiential trends, Long Beach's latest evolution can accommodate anywhere from 100 to 5,500 people within **40,000 sq. ft. of "wow"**. Introducing The Cove, a totally expandable outdoor street enclave that morphs into a high-octane atmosphere and embraces the food truck culture. With conversation hubs, encouraging networking, selfies, **and just plain fun**, it creates a connection that promotes a sense of community. Permanent LED stage lighting, renowned artist street murals, stylish furniture and much more can save you up to \$100,000 in rental costs. There is no limit to your imagination. The Cove allows you to make your next event **unconventionally unforgettable**.



800.452.7829 | MeetInLongBeach.com
f MeetLBC | MeetInLongBeach



New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center

900 Convention Center Boulevard, New Orleans, LA 70130

Contact: Elaine Williams, Director of Sales and Marketing • m-s@mccno.com • 504-582-3023

Fax: 504-582-3032 • www.mccno.com

An award-winning city steeped in culture, culinary excellence and centuries-old architecture, New Orleans' meeting facilities are no exception. Events held in New Orleans are unlike any other, and exquisite and unique venues as well as unmatched Southern hospitality are just a few of the reasons.

The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center is the sixth largest and one of the most technologically advanced convention facilities in the country. With more than 1.1 million sf of contiguous exhibit space, 140 different meetings rooms, two multipurpose ballrooms and a 4,000-seat divisible performing arts theater, the

New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center has been tested by the most demanding clients from all event segments.

The Great Hall boasts 60,000 column-free sf with 25,000 sf of prefunction space, interior and exterior balconies served by a large outdoor pedestrian plaza and grand entrance. State-of-the-art lighting systems feature energy-efficient lighting that can create nearly endless color combinations to transform any event. The grand entrance is overlooked by a high-definition video display board promoting the event.

Plans for the exciting transformation of Convention Center Boulevard in New Orleans, which will connect the bustling Warehouse/Arts District with the historic French Quarter and dramatically transform the guest experience at the

New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, are becoming a reality.

A new \$65 million park will update the urban environment with a tree-lined pedestrian plaza, bike lanes, moving walkways, sleek overhangs, fountains, green walls, water walls and shaded sitting areas for visitors.

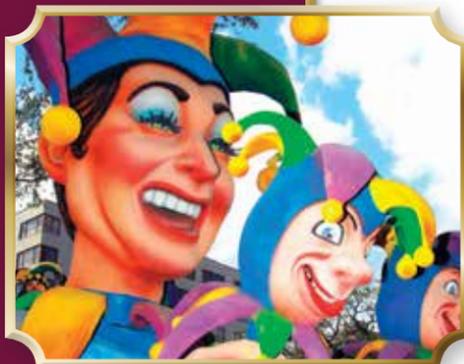
Two key components of the transformation are a multimodal transportation hub where shuttles will more efficiently move attendees to and from the Center, and improvements to several roads and intersections within the Warehouse District that are the normal shuttle route.

THE NEW ORLEANS FOOD EXPERIENCE

More than 1,400 restaurants in the city mean you never have to travel far for a good meal. With Centerplate, MCCNO's culinary partner, you don't even have to leave the show floor. Centerplate is committed to providing the essence of the New Orleans food experience through three onsite restaurants featuring live local music and menus of iconic Louisiana dishes by award-winning chef Donald Link.

After business ends, the Center is just a stone's throw from the newly renovated Outlet Collection at the Riverwalk, the historic Warehouse District and French Quarter, and the National World War II Museum.

As a consistent top 10 host of the largest number of conventions and trade shows annually, New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center is an expert in hosting groups of all sizes and industries. The Crescent City, The Big Easy, a sportsman's paradise — whatever you call New Orleans, call it your next meeting destination. AC&F



CITYWIDE FACTS & FEATURES

Guest Rooms: 40,177

Hotels/Resorts: 291

Meeting Space: More than 2 million sf (including the convention center).

CONVENTION CENTER FYI

Now open at the 1.1-million-sf New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center: The Great Hall, a 60,300-sf divisible, column-free ballroom with 25,400 sf of multi-use prefunction space, rooftop terrace and hotel-like appointments.



A NEW LOOK FOR NEW ORLEANS

Plans for a \$65 million transformation of Convention Center Boulevard, connecting the bustling Warehouse/Arts District with the historic French Quarter and dramatically transforming the guest experience at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, are becoming a reality.

DESIGN ELEMENTS

- + Tree-lined pedestrian plaza
- + Bike lanes
- + Moving sidewalks
- + Covered porches
- + Outdoor event spaces
- + Multi-modal transportation hub to move attendees more efficiently to and from the Convention Center
- + Improvements to roads and intersections on shuttle routes within the Warehouse District
- + Green spaces
- + Water walls
- + Shaded gathering areas
- + Fountains



For more information, please visit mccno.com, or call 504-582-3000. Like us on Facebook, at facebook.com/MCCNODevProject and follow us on Twitter at @MCCNODevProject.





Visit Jacksonville

208 N. Laura Street, Suite 102, Jacksonville, FL 32202
Contact: Monica Smith • convsales@visitjacksonville.com • 904-733-2668
Fax: 904-798-9102 • www.visitjacksonville.com/meetings

It's time to uncover a new side of the Sunshine State, not so far from the theme parks and flashy nightlife, a side bursting with authentic Florida experiences and unique waterfront venues that push the boundaries of traditional meetings. Your imagination is the limit in Jacksonville!

Perfectly positioned along the Atlantic Coast in Northeast Florida, Jacksonville is the place to be when looking for a luxurious yet affordable destination. Our city is the perfect mix of Florida Flair and Southern Hospitality, offering groups a warm and welcoming community filled with small neighborhoods that will make anyone feel at home, a delicious local food culture to satisfy all tastes, flexible meeting venues eager to host your event, convention hotels that offer way more than just convenient meetings space, and a fun nightlife vibe to keep everyone entertained during their visit.

UNIQUE WATERFRONT VENUES

The "River City by the Sea" provides groups and associations the opportunity to meet by the water, either the St. Johns River or the Atlantic Ocean in beautiful, historic, flexible and state-of-the-art venues that cannot be found anywhere else in Florida. From our remarkable Prime F. Osborn III Convention Center to our modern and award-winning Sports Complex, Jacksonville has the right venue for your group of 10 or 10,000. Jacksonville is home to more than 200 hotels and resorts with

nearly 18,000 rooms, giving planners the unique opportunity to choose from oceanfront boutique resorts, modern suburban hotels and elegant riverfront convention hotels as they plan their stay.

DAILY'S PLACE

Our newest venue, which just opened on Memorial Day weekend, is Daily's Place Amphitheater and Flex Field at EverBank Field, already a top draw for groups. Daily's Place will house the new 5,500-person capacity amphitheater and 94,000-sf covered flex field, as well as a luxurious back-of-house artist building. The soon-to-be-iconic superstructure will reside underneath a roof that covers both venues, just feet from the sparkling St. Johns River and the home of the NFL's Jacksonville Jaguars, EverBank Field. Daily's Place will be fully integrated into EverBank Field, creating a cohesive environment for events and festivals to utilize the entire stadium premises.

Visit Jacksonville's experienced sales and services team works with more than 400 groups annually to plan, promote and execute their meetings, conventions and events in our exciting and affordable destination. Jacksonville provides groups and associations the opportunity to meet by the water, either the St. Johns River or the Atlantic Ocean, in beautiful, luxurious, historic, flexible and state-of-the-art venues. Our team works with thousands of local companies to accommodate every group's needs, wants and budgets. Our team has more than 300 years of combined hospitality experience and is ready to plan your next getaway, for business or pleasure, to our unforgettable and affordable destination.

AC&F



CITYWIDE FACTS & FEATURES

Guest Rooms: 18,157
Hotels/Resorts: 176
Meeting Space: Prime F. Osborn III Convention Center: 275,000 sf

CONVENTION CENTER FYI

Located in downtown Jacksonville, the Prime F. Osborn III Convention Center offers 275,000 sf of flexible meeting space, making it the perfect setting for conventions, trade shows, meetings and banquets.



Have you met Jacksonville?

It's the city that makes a meeting feel like an outing; where your attendees can get a clear view of your presentation while overlooking the ocean or the river. And a place that's known for its fresh seafood, warm smiles, and endless supply of outdoor adventure. So what's missing? Your group.



Go to visitjacksonville.com/meetings to explore Jacksonville's meeting options!





Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin

1500 Epcot Resorts Boulevard, Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830
 Contact: Gino Marasco • meetings@swandolphin.com • 800-524-4939
 Fax: 407-934-4880 • www.swandolphinmeetings.com

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort is a nationally respected and recognized leader in the convention resort arena. The resort offers more than 329,000 sf of meeting space, 84 breakout rooms and 2,267 guest rooms and suites, which feature The Westin Heavenly Bed.

In mid-2017 the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort's Dolphin lobby will undergo a \$12 million redesign as the final stage of the largest makeover in the resort's history. When finished in September 2017, the new lobby will be completely transformed into a sleek contemporary space, and feature new dining and beverage options.

"This lobby will mark the final piece of an exciting transformation for the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort," said General Manager Fred Sawyers. "This space is designed specifically to cater to today's guests and offer an inviting place where they can come together to relax, network, and grab something to eat or drink."

The centerpiece of the new lobby will be a dazzling custom crystal chandelier, which will sparkle above the fountain. Other new features will include a new geometric ceiling, increased lighting, all new contemporary décor and furnishings, and more than double the amount of seating.

The lobby redesign is the final stage of a total \$140 million project, which also includes the transformation of all 2,267 guest rooms, along with upgrades to the hotel's meeting space. The renovated

guest rooms feature all of the latest technology including large HDTVs and all-new upgraded furniture centered on the famous Westin Heavenly Bed. The design continues into a completely new bathroom, featuring residential-style vanities and a back-lit mirror on iridescent glass tiles.

AWARD-WINNING MEETINGS TEAM

When it comes to the business of meetings, the award-winning team is highly regarded for their ability to exceed expectations. Meetings are supported by an award-winning banquet, catering and culinary team that delivers customized solutions with a passion for each customer. Whether your event is in the ballroom, on the beach, on the causeway or in one of our signature restaurants, the creative opportunities abound. For the adventurous, nothing beats a private event in the theme parks to add that magical touch while supporting your meeting theme.

The resort is recognized as a top "foodie" destination in Orlando, featuring 17 world-class restaurants and lounges including the famed celebrity chef Todd English's bluezoo, Il Mulino New York Trattoria, and Shula's Steak House, which serves the best beef money can buy.

The resort is situated in the heart of the Walt Disney World Resort, within footsteps of both Epcot, Disney's Hollywood Studios and Disney's Boardwalk. Complimentary transportation is provided throughout the resort, and guests enjoy the Extra Magic Hours Benefit and Fastpass+ access. On property, guests can enjoy one of the resort's five pools, two health clubs, tennis courts or indulge at the luxurious Balinese-inspired Mandara Spa. 



FACTS & FEATURES

Guest Rooms: 2,267
 Meeting Space: 329,000 sf

SPECIAL SERVICES & AMENITIES

As a recipient of numerous meeting industry awards, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort is a nationally respected and recognized leader in the convention resort arena.



All-New Walt Disney World Dolphin Lobby Concept - Scheduled for completion in September 2017

The Walt Disney World Dolphin lobby will undergo a \$12 million re-design, the final stage of a \$140 million renovation project, the largest makeover in the resort's history. It will be completely transformed into a sleek, contemporary space featuring new food and beverage options and offer an inviting area for guests to relax or network. A recipient of the prestigious Meetings & Conventions Hall of Fame Award, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin is a nationally respected and recognized leader in the convention resort arena. The resort offers more than 329,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, 84 meeting rooms, and 2,267 guest rooms and suites which feature the Westin Heavenly® Bed. Attendees can also relax in the luxurious Mandara Spa, indulge in one of our 17 world-class restaurants and lounges or enjoy our unique Disney Differences.



Award-Winning Dining



All-New Guest Rooms And Suites



Impressive Meeting Venues



1500 Epcot Resorts Blvd.
 Lake Buena Vista, FL, 32830
 800.524.4939 | 407.934.4290
swandolphinmeetings.com





Wynn Las Vegas and Encore

3131 Las Vegas Boulevard South, Las Vegas, NV 89109

Contact: Steve Blanner, Vice President of Convention Sales and Services • stephen.blanner@wynnlasvegas.com
702-770-7800 • www.wynnmeetings.com

From the moment you step into Wynn Las Vegas and Encore, the first thing you'll notice is an exceptional attention to detail. More highlights unfold as you explore, from thoughtful in-room amenities to curated menu selections at each restaurant, and it becomes clear why Wynn Las Vegas and Encore have captured more *Forbes Travel Guide* Five Star Awards than any other independent hotel company in the world. (Not to mention, multiple *Association Conventions & Facilities* Distinctive Achievement Awards.) Steve Wynn famously loves to tweak details in his unending quest for providing an unparalleled experience in luxury hospitality — and it shows.

Services team is ready to assist with tech needs, from state-of-the-art Wi-Fi and audio-visual capabilities, to customized equipment and effects to maximize any presentation.

Meanwhile, Wynn's outstanding Catering Services team is devoted to designing personalized menus that combine restaurant-quality cuisine with guest-friendly attention to gluten-free, vegan or other dietary needs.

ONLY THE BEST

Once the day's business is complete, there are a wealth of options to dine, drink and socialize. Resort restaurants feature a wide range of cuisine and ambience, from the most premium cuts of beef at SW Steakhouse to the hip scene and modern Asian fare at Andrea's at Encore. Bright and open with a garden-inspired setting and patio, Jardin is perfect for a breakfast meeting, while Terrace Point Café is the go-to place for a power lunch.

The Restaurant Services team also can assist with arranging group reservations and parties inside Wynn and Encore's beautiful private dining spaces.

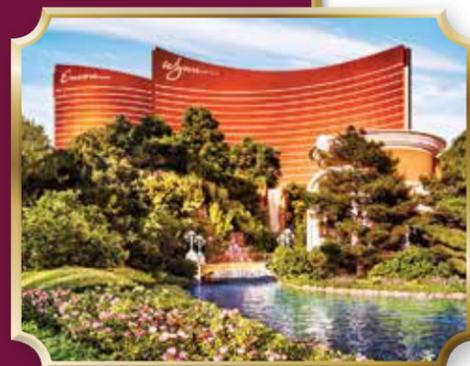
LATE-NIGHT HOT SPOTS

To relax with a drink, kick back at Encore's Eastside Lounge or visit Parasol Down to see the Lake of Dreams. The resort's newest nightclub, Intrigue, joins XS and Surrender in the resort's roster of upscale late-night hot spots with headlining DJs. These are among the latest in Wynn Las Vegas and Encore's never-ending pursuit of perfection and guest service. AC&F

SOPHISTICATED TWISTS ON IMAGINATIVE MEETING SPACES

This precision and personal service extends to conference planning. Wynn and his team have crafted 260,000 sf of stunning meeting spaces, each embellished with sophisticated design and guest-friendly touches sure to impress even the most seasoned attendee. Many meeting spaces can accommodate groups of any size, and are outfitted with dramatic, floor-to-ceiling windows and open-air terraces offering inspired views of the resort's expansive pools and serene grounds.

Your personal assigned Meetings Concierge will help alleviate any worries, from planning to last-minute needs. Wynn's in-house Production



FACTS & FEATURES

Total Guest Rooms/Suites:

2,716 rooms and suites at Wynn and 2,034 at Encore.

Meeting Space: 260,000 sf

SPECIAL SERVICES & AMENITIES

Wynn and Encore offer high-tech support, a full-service business center, high-speed internet access, spacious sunlit meeting spaces, state-of-the-art audio-visual capabilities and three technically supported stages.



YOUR SUCCESS IS OUR BUSINESS.

(866) 770-7268 | wynnmeetings.com

Wynn | *Encore*
LAS VEGAS



Tools of Engagement

The Options Are Many, but First, Know Your Audience

By Patrick Simms

Many are the roads that lead to increased engagement. Some are digital, ranging from gamification to livestreaming to audience polling via apps and social media. Others are event design approaches, ranging from signage and branding elements in the convention center to receptions targeted to certain peer groups. And others are content and speaker choices, such as hot topics and keynoters who will generate a buzz. All of these roads can lead to engagement with both the convention and the host organization. But which are the most expedient for a given association? And how exactly should the roads be traversed? After all, there are a variety of ways to implement gamification, many different branding styles, many options in keynoters to hire, and so on.

The specifics of an engagement strategy should be informed by knowledge of the association membership, as opposed to fads in engagement techniques. Trendy approaches surely have worked for many associations, but that does not guarantee they will work for your delegates, or that they are practical given your staff and budget. So it is always best to take knowledge of your audience as a starting point to determine what are the “best” tools of engagement. “I think it’s very important to determine the constituencies you’re trying

to serve,” remarks Ramón R. Santiago, MTA, CMP, director, exhibits and conferences for the American Healthcare Association (AHCA). “We have found throughout the years that just because it is the latest and greatest engagement (approach), whether it’s gamification or a high degree of social media (use), it may not work with every single group.” And even when planners find the right road to engagement, it’s essential to have patience along the journey. “It’s not as simple as introducing a new tool to communicate and engage one year and then that gets 100 percent traction,” Santiago says. “You have to be realistic as a meeting planner and understand that that is a process that might take several years.”

YOUR EXPO, YOUR WAY

Even getting to know the needs, preferences and demographics of potential attendees can take patience. A case in point is the processes of the National Confectioners Association when it comes to the delegates of its Sweets and Snacks Expo. “We put a lot of effort into getting to know who our attendee is, via many different mechanisms,” says Jenn Ellek, senior director, trade marketing and communications. The Expo draws about 18,000 attendees, including about 6,000 retailers. And even though trade show growth overall has been down 8 percent this past year, the Expo’s attendance has been up



Attendees at ASAE's Annual Meeting & Exposition in August enjoyed multiple opportunities to engage with programming and each other.

14 percent over the last two years, Ellek notes. “We didn’t get there just by happenstance, but because we planned to get there. I think with engagement people don’t really stop to look at their data on whom are they talking to. Do you know what their problems are? Can you provide them solutions? We try to find out what their pain points are; what keeps them up at night. And then we build our offering and our show to meet their needs.”

Customizing the offering begins with the Expo’s website, which features a “Your Expo, Your Way” tab where a potential attendee can identify as Specialty, Snack, Confectionary, New Attendee or Returning Attendee. Clicking on each yields information about the show geared toward that segment. “We list all the education that is geared to that market, what they’ll find in their specialty market when they attend and a pre-show planner,” Ellek describes. First-timers receive more basic information about the show, while returning attendees get informed about what’s new this year. “We wanted to use the web as our main proving ground, and we wanted folks to design the expo their way,” Ellek explains. The URL to the website is included in the direct-mail pieces marketing the Expo, and 33 percent of the recipients visited the website specifically to design their own experience — without any incentives such as registration discounts, she reports.

The overall approach is called “Show Me You Know Me Marketing,” and that knowledge of the membership also informs the design of the convention itself, beginning with the general session. “We used to get headliners for our general session, like James Carville and George Will, and what we found is that it was mainly the exhibitors attending and not our attendees, which is whom it was designed for,” says Ellek. “So we looked at the surveys about what kind of education they want, and what we found is that they need information about their industry, shopper insights, the trends. They’re not looking for the big names.” Based on that knowledge, Ellek’s team added “State of the Market” morning sessions led by subject matter experts on trends in different areas of the confectionary industry.

INTERACTIVE PRESENTATIONS

The mode of delivery for such targeted content also makes a difference to engagement. Presenters with a more interactive style tend to be preferred, as are those who can make themselves available to attendees post or pre-session, in person or virtually. “For several years we have encouraged our keynote speakers to engage with smaller groups after the general session, in a meet-and-greet before opening of the exhibit hall,” notes Santiago regarding the AHCA/NCAL



“We put a lot of effort into getting to know who our attendee is. . . . We try to find out what their pain points are; what keeps them up at night. And then we build our offering and our show to meet their needs.”

Jenn Ellek
Senior Director, Trade Marketing
and Communications
National Confectioners Association
Washington, DC

entertainment companies, can help to create a compelling experience in common areas. “We do a lot with our event branding now that we didn’t five years ago; we’re really big on the show look, color scheme, etc. There’s a strategy behind everything that we’re doing now,” says Ruff-Lyon. “We’ve done simple things, like having giant wooden block letters for our RIMS logo, and people became the ‘I’ in ‘RIMS’ and tweeted it. Little things like that go a long way.”

A more extravagant element was added to the registration area. “This year when people arrived for registration on the Monday morning, we had aerialists performing, dropping down from the ceiling, and jugglers juggling knives — things that are ‘risky’ and were engaging to our membership. They stopped and took photos,” Ruff-Lyon describes. “Some people have been to this conference for 30-40 years, and if it’s not different every year to some degree, we’re not doing a good job.”



Credits: National Confectioners Association

Annual Convention. And on the show floor, exhibitors are “encouraged to have interactive presentations,” he adds. TED Talk-style presentations also tend to connect more with delegates, Santiago observes, as many of the qualified decision-makers on the floor are pressed for time.

Helping exhibitors to be more engaging ultimately supports the appeal of the convention itself. “We work with our exhibitors to have the most eye-catching builds, to go beyond your typical 10-by-10-foot booth,” says Stuart Ruff-Lyon, CMP, DES, vice president, events and education at the RIMS – The Risk Management Society. “If they want to hang signage, whatever technicality there may be when it comes to rigging, we try to work with them step by step to make sure they’re really getting their money’s worth on their investment in the exhibit hall.”

RANDOM ACTS OF ENGAGEMENT

Opportunities for engagement extend beyond the session rooms and exhibit floor. Indeed, a team of good partners, from the convention center to third-party exhibit and

The National Confectioners Association Expo included a popular Instagram Selfie Contest (below). “It was a real moment where people were feeling connected and engaged,” says planner Jenn Ellek.



One of the most familiar components of any convention is the traditional reception, where hundreds if not thousands of delegates stand around with drinks and perhaps musical entertainment. A major reason this type of event tends to be un-engaging is that many attendees will not happen to connect with anyone of business or career value amidst the crowd. Thus, helping guests to effectively network at receptions has become a trend in engagement.

MICRO MEETUPS

Ellek’s team takes the approach of staging “micro meetups” within the reception. “We looked at our audience and how they selected during the registration process. We picked Snack, Specialty, First-timer as the three types of audiences we wanted to cater to, and created meetups for each during the reception to engage these types of folks,” Ellek explains. “One of the things we know to be true in the trade show world is that there’s always competition: they all offer products, education and networking. What’s going to differentiate you from the rest? We think it’s creating a community. And you have to work a little bit harder; you can’t just throw a big reception and assume everyone’s going to talk to each other. Instead, (help attendees) create a memorable moment with someone they connect with, and they’ll come back next year to see that person.”

Attendees of the Sweets and Snacks Expo receive RSVPs for the meetups, inviting them to join their peer set at a certain time and place within the reception. “And in order to add more excitement we built an Instagram contest we called the Selfie Contest: You take a picture of you and somebody that you met at the reception and post it to our Instagram feed, and you would be entered to win Amazon gift cards, etc. So over the hour of the reception and a little into the night we got over 150 posts of selfies from our industry,” says Ellek. “It was a real moment where people were feeling connected and engaged.”

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

Social media such as Instagram is increasingly a useful metric for engagement. “It has really taken off with our group,” Ruff-Lyon says. “We have seen about a 300 percent increase in activity in Twitter, Instagram etc. So that is one way we can tell people are enjoying themselves, if they take the time to tweet about their experience in a positive way.”

But this sort of social media commentary just scratches the surface of digital engagement. Both digital interaction with presenters and digital polling of attendees achieve deeper levels of engagement with content and the event itself. This can be facilitated by what is known as second-screen technology. “There are ways you can engage with a presentation via your mobile app

“It’s not as simple as introducing a new tool to communicate and engage one year and then that gets 100 percent traction. You have to be realistic as a meeting planner and understand that that is a process that might take several years.”



Ramón R. Santiago, MTA, CMP
Director, Exhibits & Conferences
AHCA/NCAL
Washington, DC

or your iPad; it could be pulling questions the speaker asks and then people are voting on their phones,” notes Jennifer K. Kush, DES, executive director of PCMA’s Digital Experience Institute.

The host organization also can poll attendees throughout the event on various aspects of the convention. “We have the ability in our mobile app to crowdsource on sessions and content onsite,” Ruff-Lyon says. “We will then review suggestions and create additional, on-the-spot sessions around that, which makes people more engaged in the education sessions as well. We use eShow for all of our events; they’ve been a good partner to RIMS, constantly evolving their product to something we want it to be.” There are quite a lot of questions that potentially can be asked of delegates, from what they thought of a particular presenter to their opinion of the convention center food. How often should digital polling be deployed, bearing in mind that attendees already have so much vying for their attention? “You have to take a look at what you’re doing holistically, and you don’t necessarily want to have polling in every session,” Kush advises. “You want to make sure that it makes sense, so you have to look at the format, the flow and the timing. If you have too many polls it can be distracting, but if you have the right one at the right time, it can be a very powerful way to engage.”

BEACONS

Beacon technology is an up-and-coming medium for a variety of engagement practices. For instance, beacons can enable a kind of gamification where attendees hunt for digital badges from beacons placed in less popular areas of the show, via a mobile app. Thus, they are encouraged to fully explore the show layout. Attendees also can receive information on upcoming sessions at a given hall when they walk by the nearby beacon. They even can obtain profile information on attendees in their immediate vicinity, facilitating networking. (The latest development here is the wearable beacon, affixed to the lanyard or in the form of a smart badge. Companies offering such beacons include Loopd, Hubvents and Limefy.)



Stuart Ruff-Lyon, CMP, DES
V.P. Events and Education
RIMS
New York, NY

“We have the ability in our mobile app to crowdsource on sessions and content onsite. We will then review suggestions and create additional, on-the-spot sessions around that, which makes people more engaged in the education sessions as well.”

conducting a moderated text chat, presenting live interviews with presenters exclusively for the remote audience, and of course, streaming the sessions that will be most compelling to those participants. (Interestingly, the Digital Experience Institute’s 2018 Digital Event Benchmark Report notes that survey respondents said that the use of an emcee when streaming content increases engagement.) All of these approaches help to keep the attention of the virtual attendee, who is prone to multitasking and distraction. They also pique interest in the face-to-face experience. RIMS makes sure to broadcast its general session, “which is usually a big hit with the beautiful staging and a celebrity keynote; for example this year we had Michael J. Fox,” says Ruff-Lyon. “When they see everything RIMS is doing, hopefully they think how cool it is and are more likely to attend (face to face) in the future.”

There are many providers planners can tap to produce hybrid events that effectively extend the life and reach of onsite meetings and conventions for a global audience. IN-XPO is one provider that markets itself as a turnkey, virtual events platform designed to seamlessly integrate the physical event’s content and experience so it can be promoted and experienced as a single entity for both online and in-person attendees. The online platform drives attendee engagement with interactive tools such as chat, polls Q&A and social media sharing, and captures and measures real-time analytics to immediately measure event ROI. Planners have found that rather than cannibalizing attendance at face-to-face events, a digital version can stoke interest in attending the next meeting or convention in person.

It is telling that when asked “What are the goals of using new technologies at events?” the respondents to Planning for the Meetings of Tomorrow said “improving attendee experience” (84 percent) and “make event more fun/engaging” (78 percent) — the top two replies. We can therefore expect ongoing exploration of how various types of technologies can be appropriated to attendee engagement, a prime example being virtual or augmented reality.

“It’s not as common (at conventions), but is becoming more and more so,” Kush observes. In fact, 39 percent of respondents to Planning for the Meetings of Tomorrow said that in the next three years they anticipate using virtual or augmented reality tools. Currently the technology is making inroads on the exhibit floor, where companies are giving attendees VR experiences with their products. The future may see educational session attendees wearing “mixed reality” headsets (e.g., Microsoft’s HoloLens) that superimpose holograms onto the environment, keyed with the presentation.

It may seem rather farfetched, but then again, today’s world of digital engagement seemed that way not that long ago.

Such potential uses for beacons have prompted both the AHCA and RIMS to explore the technology for future conventions. “One interesting experiment that we’ll be carrying out this year will be how we can use RFID for crowdsourcing,” says Santiago.

REMOTE ENGAGEMENT

More conventions are welcoming virtual audiences: Remote participation was the top emerging technology cited in Planning for the Meetings of Tomorrow: The Present and Future of Technology in Business Events, a June 2017 study conducted by Association Laboratory on behalf of the PCMA Education Foundation. Thus, digital engagement strategies will increasingly include best practices for capturing the attention of remote attendees.

The starting point for engaging this audience is the same as for the face-to-face audience: attendee knowledge. “You need to know what they’re interested in and what provides them value, and then you have to deliver that in a very engaging way,” says Kush. Options include polling the virtual audience,



Creating a successful hybrid event, the Digital Experience Institute streamed live coverage of PCMA’s Convening Leaders 2017 all over the world.

Credit: Jacob Slaton

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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.

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What's New in Planner Certification & Education

Those Initials After Your Name Show You've Kept Up With Industry Trends

By Sophia Bennett

Certification and education programs provide opportunities for meeting planners to grow both personally and professionally. They're a terrific way to build a network of colleagues, make new friends and build knowledge of a fascinating industry. Having a set of initials after your name can help the next time a job hunt or salary negotiation comes around. They'll also make you more confident that you're doing everything possible to plan meetings that are safe, engaging, well organized and on budget.

"I would make the case that with all the security and other challenges in the meetings and event space, you really need to hire professionals and partner with professionals that have certifications," says Christie Pruyn, CAE, CIS, executive director of the International Live Events Association (ILEA), which manages the Certified Special Events Professional program, a certification for people focused on special and live events.

"For the employee it's a way to set themselves apart from other potential candidates," says Karen Kotowski, chief executive officer of the Events Industry Council (EIC), the nonprofit that manages the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) certification. "It gives the employer a third-party validation that the person has the knowledge and skills to do their job."

Education programs are a great way to keep up on ever-changing industry best practices, says Chris Murphy Peck, senior director of education and learning services at SmithBucklin. Organizations also are changing the way they deliver education. A good example of this is attitudes toward where and how educational sessions should take place. "People are actively moving away from that old classroom-style seating, where you sit in rows and learn, and instead, creating atmospheres where people can engage and learn," she says.



Karen Kotowski
CEO
Events Industry Council
Washington, DC

"The CMP covers the full spectrum of meetings and event management and execution relevant to both the planner side and the supplier side of the planning team."

There are general and highly specialized meeting planning certifications that can meet varying needs for professionals. Which program or programs to choose is highly personal. If you've been pondering a certification for a while, you may be interested in knowing that

there are some relatively new programs out there, as well as updates to existing programs that you might not be aware of. Make sure you explore these options in the search for the certification that's right for you.

CERTIFIED MEETING PROFESSIONAL (CMP)

The CMP continues to be the unfettered leader when it comes to professional certifications for meeting planners. The program was developed by meeting planners as a way to create an industry standard for best practices and ethics. The body of knowledge (the CMP-International Standard) is regularly updated to ensure planners are up-to-date on changes in the field. The last update took place in 2016.

Kotowski calls the CMP a great baseline certification. "The CMP covers the full spectrum of meetings and event management and execution relevant to both the planner side and the supplier side of the planning team," she says. "After that you may choose to do one of the other meeting industry certifications for a deeper dive into the specific sector they're involved in."

EIC recently initiated a research program to identify opportunities and barriers to expanding the certification globally. "We're looking at what markets are right for the CMP, and which ones are coming online and will be the next places where we really develop the CMP program," she says. "We want to know what barriers there might be that we need to look at to help people successfully pursue the CMP."

HEALTH CARE SUBSPECIALTY

The biggest program change in recent years is the addition of a subspecialty in health care. The industry's rules and regulations are quite complicated. Meeting planners have to understand health care laws and regulations which govern how health care meetings are to be executed. This program can help professionals gain a better understanding of the regulations they need to follow when organizing these meetings.

Planners interested in receiving the CMP-HC designation must first complete their CMP, then sit for the health care-focused exam. One of the first people to success-



Robin Simon, CMP-HC
S.V.P.
Association & Meeting Solutions
Thorofare, NJ

"The (CMP-HC) exam validated my knowledge of the rules and regulations I apply on a daily basis to meetings."

fully complete that test was Robin Simon, CMP-HC, senior vice president of Association & Meeting Solutions in Thorofare, New Jersey. "The exam validated my knowledge of the rules and regulations I apply on a daily basis to meetings," she says. "It also gave me knowledge in other areas in terms of international compliance codes and laws, and regulations I might not have been exposed to. It made me more well-rounded."

Simon first learned about the CMP-HC at IMEX in December 2013. The first exam was being offered in February 2014, which didn't give her much time to prepare. A woman she met at IMEX was planning to put together a study group, which Simon joined. That turned out to be a very smart decision.

"The exam was very rigorous, and participating in that study group prepared me well to sit for it," she says. "We met as a group via conference call twice a week during the month of January. We broke down the standards and each person took a section, and we shared that information amongst all of us." She recommends that others looking to take certification exams consider joining similar groups.

DIGITAL EVENT CERTIFICATION

The Digital Event Strategist (DES) certification designation was launched in 2012 in response to the rising popularity of digital meetings. "Digital events are a powerful way for associations to extend their reach," says Jennifer Kingen Kush, DES, executive director of the Digital Experience Institute, which manages the program.

Organizations can use fully digital meetings to train and empower members throughout the year or reach people who can't travel. Associations are increasingly organizing hybrid events, where certain sessions are livestreamed or on-demand packages are made available after the event.



Miranda Connon, CMP, DES
Meetings Manager
Société Internationale d'Urologie
Montreal, QC

"I realized there was no hiding from the fact that digital events are no longer the future of the industry but are here today."

The DES course focuses on crafting all kinds of digital events so they meet the organization's goals and provide a quality experience for attendees. Topics include user experience strategy, how to make participants feel engaged, marketing and production technology. "That's bookended with metrics — how

MPI Academy

The Meeting Professionals International (MPI) Academy was established several years ago to provide more senior and executive-level training for meeting planners. The program has some new offerings that planners might consider.

The Emergency Preparedness for Meetings and Event Certificate Course is designed to help meeting planners prevent, prepare for and respond to an emergency (such as a terrorist attack, natural disaster or violent outbursts among participants). Topics include how to ensure participant safety, limit damage and restore any lost services. The certificate program was developed in partnership with the University of Southern Mississippi's National Center for Spectator Sports Safety and Security. MPI obtained security resources and best practices from FEMA, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Interpol when developing the course.

The certificate program was presented for the first time at MPI's World Education Congress in June. Twenty-five people attended the pilot, and their response was overwhelmingly positive, says Kristi Casey Sanders, CMP, CMM, DES, HMCC, director of the MPI Academy. The six-hour class will be given again on November 6 in Dallas and at the SITE+MPI Global Forum in January 2018 in Rome.

The **MPI Experiential Event Series** and **Experiential Event Professional** designation gives meeting professionals a chance to demonstrate their expertise in this growing field within the meeting and event industry. Participants complete 15 to 20 hours of coursework and go behind the scenes at several major events, including SXSW, the Indianapolis 500 and Venice Film Festival. At the end, they receive a certificate in one of four event design areas: sports, culinary, entertainment or mega-event.

Certificate-holders can then apply for the **Experiential Event Professional (XEP)** designation. To achieve that designation, they must develop a business case and presentation that demonstrates knowledge gained during their coursework. The case is presented at an MPI event or online. Either way, the presenter will receive im-



Attendees study during an education lab at MPI's World Education Conference in June.

mediate feedback from a panel of industry experts and a live audience. If MPI concludes the planner has met all program requirements, they will receive the professional designation.

The **MPI Women in Leadership: Executive Leadership Skills** certificate course helps women identify and create a plan to overcome the obstacles they face in meeting their career goals. In addition to four hours of seminars, MPI shares several resources available for women who are looking to advance to more senior positions in the meetings and events industry, and provides them with access to a mentor. The program will be offered in Las Vegas on October 9 and New York on November 27. It was developed in partnership with Marriott.

Several of these programs involve an element of peer-to-peer learning, which studies have shown enhance the learning environment. "When you get to a certain level of seniority in the industry, it's hard to find instructors who can talk to your experience and have something to add," says Sanders. "However, when you're surrounded by peers who have similar experiences but maybe in slightly different areas of focus, you learn from the collective wisdom in the room. And being pushed to having those higher-level discussions also helps you learn. In fact, science shows us that the person who speaks most in an educational setting learns most. So if you encourage discussion and group work rather than focusing on lecture-based delivery, you're creating a more effective learning environment." —SB

do you create the metrics to measure the success of the events, and how do you report that to your stakeholders and have data for continual improvement going into the future?" says Kush.

"With technology constantly changing and evolving, the course is always changing," Kush says. "We did a complete rewrite of the curriculum in 2015 so it was brand new in 2016. There are constant updates to the technology module."

Miranda Connon, CMP, DES, meetings manager for the Société Internationale d'Urologie, based in Montreal, Quebec, has high praise for the program. She's responsible for the association's annual Congress, which has become a hybrid event. Although the organization has specialists who assist with the digital aspects of the event, Connon wanted to increase her knowledge of this growing part of meeting management.

"I realized there was no hiding from the fact that digital events are no longer the future of the industry but are here today," she says. "I'm very comfortable with technology, but this had been turning everything I'd been doing for the past 15 years upside down."

Connon started researching digital meeting training programs, and when she found the DES certification, "I knew right away it was going to help me understand the digital side of the industry," she says. She completed the program in 2016.

Today, Connon is better able to offer valuable input to her digitally focused colleagues during meetings. She's better able to negotiate with technology suppliers and plan out space at physical events. "Acoustics matter more now," she points out, and she remembers to make room for bulky recording equipment.

"I recommend this course to all meeting planners at all stages in their careers," she says. "This is the only course that gives you everything you need to know about digital meetings from A to Z."

"Digital events are a powerful way for associations to extend their reach. With technology constantly changing and evolving, the (DES) course is always changing. ...There are constant updates to the technology module."



Jennifer Kingen Kush, DES
Executive Director
The Digital Experience Institute
Chicago, IL

DIVERSITY EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

A training program meeting planners may not be familiar with is the Diversity Executive Leadership Program offered through ASAE. Its goal is to help mid- to high-level association staff from under-represented identity groups advance their careers in the field. The two-year program provides ample network-building opportunities with peers and leaders, and funding so participants can attend a wide variety of professional development events.

"When the scholars enter the DELP program, we work with them to develop their goals and try to customize their experience," says John H. Graham IV, FASAE, CAE, ASAE's president and CEO. "They attend education sessions in the areas they want to focus on, and we provide opportunities for them to be mentored one-on-one and attend networking events. It's a great opportunity for anyone in the association field."

Jerome Bruce, CAE, CMM, CMP, CEM, director of meetings and expositions for the Association of Government Accountants, is a recent DELP participant. He enjoyed everything about the program, including the opportunity to learn about various functions within associations. "I've been doing meetings for close to 20 years, but being part of the DELP program exposed me to the different aspects of association management," he says. His colleagues helped him learn about the basics of areas such as governance, policy, membership.

Bruce is still in touch with many of the people he met through the program. "The DELP community is very close," he says. "We have our own group and talk to each other when we're looking for referrals and recommendations."

The program confirmed his desire to stay in the association industry. And it helped him land his current job, which is a more senior event management position. He was able to impress the people who interviewed him with his knowledge of the many different aspects of running a successful association, not just his experience organizing quality meetings. That's only one of the benefits that made this certification program extremely worthwhile.

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Jerome Bruce
Director, Meetings & Expositions
Association of Gov't Accountants
Alexandria, VA

"I've been doing meetings for close to 20 years, but being part of the (Diversity Executive Leadership Program) exposed me to the different aspects of association management."



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The SMERF Meeting Challenge

Planners Learn the Art of Doing More With Less



A Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ) staff conference.

Credit: Tom Mills © Cru

The acronym may sound whimsical, but coordinating SMERF events is serious business for planners serving social, military, educational, religious and fraternal associations. With a close eye on costs and a willingness to undertake creative approaches, planners for these organizations have become adept at tackling a common set of needs.

Budget constraints and date parameters always seem to be the biggest challenges in the SMERF arena, according to Jamie Kervin, senior account manager for Arrowhead Conferences and Events, a wholly owned subsidiary of Cru Ministry, (Campus Crusade for Christ) that also serves church denominations and other parachurch ministries.

“We often have to consider family and school schedules when planning for many of our meetings, which means that some of our clients are even competing with each other for the same space over the same dates in the same hotels and cities,” she says. “This demand is driving up rates and making availability even more scarce.”

Another trend with some SMERF groups is the desire to avoid convention centers, when possible, to save costs.

“Most of the time it’s less expensive to hold an event all under one roof as opposed to utilizing a convention center,” Kervin says. She notes that the number of large hotels with 1,000-plus guest rooms and a 100,000-sf ballroom or exhibit hall is relatively small, so availability becomes a challenge, especially when availability is needed at a lower rate.

In fact, the need for extra attention to budget matters is typical of many SMERF situations. While there are exceptions, many conferences fall on the smaller side and may not be considered among the most lucrative prospects for some top venues. At the same time, many attendees participate as private individuals. As such they are often responsible for their own expenses, making it imperative for planners to keep costs reasonable.

TIGHT BUDGETS

And even those with costs covered by their employer may have to be more budget-conscious than the typical corporate

traveler, according to Matthew Wales, CMP, senior director, meetings, events and special projects for the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. He notes that with colleges and universities, tight budgets often can be inhibiting factors when it comes to conference attendance by faculty and administrators. Any efforts planners can make to keep expenses at a reasonable level will be in everyone’s interest.

“When we can be a bit more budget conscious it’s not just good for the organization, but also for our attendees,” he says. “They need to get the biggest bang for spending the minimum amount possible.”

At the same time, such efforts may bear explaining. “It puts the onus on people in the SMERF environment to educate attendees and let them know why we choose terms we do,” he says. “It helps to take a holistic approach by, for example, breaking out what registration fees actually cover.”

Wales says in planning meetings, his organization strives for a good measure of variety. “One year we may have a great deal with a big box property,” he says. “Another might be in a convention center with four or five supporting hotels.”

The association’s annual meeting attracts 2,300-2,500 participants. Several regional meetings on topics such as accreditation and assessment bring in 100-300 participants.

One strategy that has worked for AACT is taking advantage of arrangements such as the Three City Collective, where Visit Milwaukee, Visit Pittsburgh and Travel Portland have partnered to offer financial advantages and other incentives

“It’s obvious to us when all of the parts of a city aren’t working together to earn a piece of business. When given the option, a city that is really coming together to work for a piece of business is most likely going to win it.”



Jamie Kervin
Senior Account Manager
Arrowhead Conferences & Events
Redlands, CA

that can be especially attractive to planners with budget challenges. The three cities share a number of similar features including convention center size, enough hotel rooms to accommodate 1,100 to 1,500 on a peak night and a variety of convention services.

The same goes for Synchronicities, where San Antonio, Anaheim and Baltimore offer an array of collaborative features to convention groups and meeting planners.

REUNION GROUPS

Even without such multicity cooperation, many smaller cities, which may be considered second- or third-tier destinations, can be ideal for SMERF meetings. That’s certainly true for military reunions, says Ted Dey, founder of Armed Forces Reunions Inc. in Norfolk, Virginia. He points out that, as is the case with



Courtesy of Armed Forces Reunions Inc.

Part of Armed Forces Reunions Inc. is The Misawa Project Reunion in Providence, Rhode Island.



The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education's annual meeting attracts 2,300–2,500 participants.

Credits: AACTE

many other SMERF markets, his participants pay their own way, so the lower room rates and other expenses typical of smaller cities can be a plus.

Ray Casey, president of Military Reunion Planners LLC in Grapevine, Texas, faces the same situation. "The biggest challenge is meeting budget and managing client expectations," he says. "Our reunion clients foot the bill out of their own pocket, so it's important that we find the best value for them while helping them understand why things cost what they do."

At the same time, another factor adds an interesting dimension for military groups that may be less applicable across the board. "They like to congregate and share stories; they prefer to have function space where they are allowed to provide their own refreshments, including alcohol — which can be problematic," Dey says.

But a number of other needs are more common across the different types of SMERF organizations. "Cities must have good airport access and attractive day tours, and the hotels must offer good rates and allow groups to provide their own refreshments," Dey says. Other discounts also are important, he adds,



Ted Dey
Founder
Armed Forces Reunions Inc.
Norfolk, VA

"Understand your members' needs and negotiate everything into the hotel contract upfront, including banquet pricing and all the concessions such as AV discounts or comps."

including breaks on standard banquet menus and reduced costs for audio-visual equipment.

Obviously, some locations may be more attractive, or conversely less so, to specific groups depending on how they match with a given group's interests. Proximity to museums or monuments may be attractive to military associations, for instance. On the other hand, cities known for their gambling opportunities or rollicking night life may be less desirable to some religious associations.

Transportation is another part of the equation. Easy accessibility is a must, especially for groups that may include family members where the cost of air travel for an entire family could be prohibitive. So locations with ready access to interstates and rail or bus transportation is optimum. Having meeting venues, dining options and accommodations within easy walking distance is generally another must.

As another way to keep costs down, Casey looks closely at both location and scheduling options. "I tend to look outside the required area, like airport instead of downtown," he says. "You can shift the pattern if your group is retired and every day is Saturday. If I can fill a hole at a place they want, I may be able to bring it within budget tolerances."

Day affirms that reunion groups are highly motivated by discounted pricing. "They will alter their dates and arrival/departure pattern to get lower rates," he says. "And hotels can fill need nights by being flexible with rates."

FLEXIBILITY REIGNS

In fact, budget limitations shouldn't make it tough to negotiate if you're willing to be flexible, according to Kervin.

"We often tell our clients that you have to be flexible on one of three things — dates, location, or cost," she says. "You can meet anywhere you want over any set of dates that you want

as long as you're willing to pay for it. So if you want to save money and have a specific place you want to meet, then you may need to be flexible on your dates to make that happen. Or if you want to save money and have specific dates you need to meet, you're most likely going to have to be flexible with your location."

Kervin advises planners striving to save money always to enter a competitive bid process. "If cost savings are important, whether the meeting is for 10 people or 10,000, be open to multiple hotels and/or cities," she says. "And in that process, make sure that you're looking at all cost centers."

When her organization distributes an RFP, venues are asked to provide pricing on everything from guest rooms to meeting space and audio-visual support. Each RFP is extremely detailed and tailored to the specific event.

"So, for example, if a group has frequent room turns, we communicate that in the RFP process and ask for a certain number of room turns complimentary," she says. "All of those cost centers add up and allow us to accurately compare venues from a financial perspective."

When budget is a strong factor, she often encourages clients to consider second- and third-tier cities, which can be more competitive with an overall package.

Kervin says that a key for some of the destinations that work best for SMERF meetings is their willingness to be flexible. "I always appreciate hotels that will help us think outside the box to make a piece of business work," she says, noting that positive responses to questions such as these are always welcome: Can you shift us one day and drop the rate \$20? Will you work hard with us on menu planning to decrease the cost of individual meals in an effort to increase the overall F&B spend? If you don't have a lot of affordable dining options, can you offer some inexpensive boxed lunch options for individual purchase?

VENDOR PARTNERSHIP AND COOPERATION

Also attractive are citywide approaches where CVBs, hotels, and convention centers all work together to provide complimentary rental at the convention center.

"It's obvious to us when all of the parts of a city aren't working together to earn a piece of business," Kervin says. "When given the option, a city that is really coming together to work for a piece of business is most likely going to win it."

Being budget conscious "puts the onus on people in the SMERF environment to educate attendees and let them know why we choose terms we do. It helps to take a holistic approach by, for example, breaking out what registration fees actually cover."



Matthew Wales, CMP
Senior Director, Meetings, Events
& Special Projects
AACTE
Washington, DC

Of course the efforts of individual properties can go a long way in developing a positive situation, especially those that make it a priority to serve SMERF groups.

"I think almost universally at these properties there is a can-do attitude and willingness to go to bat for their client," Casey says. He finds them more willing to agree to simple requests such as a complimentary podium and microphone, free ice and so forth.

"If I can show our clients a basket of freebies, I can better sell their property," he says. He tells of a SMERF salesperson

who was out unexpectedly one day when he was scheduled for a site inspection. Casey was handed over to a corporate salesperson who seemed to say no to every simple request that he had.

"Little did she know that I knew they would do those things, but her market training was different," he says. "The SMERF market is all about value for dollars spent."

Dey recalls a successful meeting at the Hilton Minneapolis Airport where things went very well. There were 400 people in his group, a size larger than the restaurant could handle by serving only off the menu.

"The hotel put special lunch and dinner buffets in the restaurant, with reasonable prices inclusive of service charge



Ray Casey
President
Military Reunion Planners LLC
Grapevine, TX

"The biggest challenge is meeting budget and managing client expectations. Our reunion clients foot the bill out of their own pocket, so it's important that we find the best value for them while helping them understand why things cost what they do."

and tax," he says. "The wait staff was not overwhelmed and folks could charge to their room and eat quickly."

Kervin notes that in her experience, the vast majority of meetings go smoothly. "Many planners want to rush through the site selection and contracting phase," she says. "We always tell a new client that the RFP, site selection and contracting phase may seem tedious but that in the end, it's worth it."

Invariably, hard work during the process of negotiating hotel contracts prevents problems later. But headaches do arise. Kervin recalls an instance where a hotel canceled a client's meeting because it landed some more lucrative business over the same dates.

"Because our rates were much lower than the other groups, the hotel made the poor decision to cancel on our group," she says. But eventually, previous efforts at relationship-building paid off. "We immediately called on our national sales representative and ultimately a vice president within the chain to leverage the relationships that we have cultivated for 30-plus years," she says. "Their own hotel brand making the hotel aware of our total value in the industry quickly resolved the issue in our client's favor."

Wales, too, stresses the importance of building relationships as well as planning for the long term. If you're considering locations for the future, he advises other planners to start early. "If you want to go there, you'll need to establish that network," he says. "It's much easier to work with relationships that have been developed over time than to start cold."

To ensure successful meetings, Dey focuses on effective negotiation. "Understand your members' needs and negotiate everything into the hotel contract upfront, including banquet pricing and all the concessions such as AV discounts or comps," Dey says. "Also ensure that the restaurant will accommodate by offering special buffets, and remember that groups like breakfast included in the rate."

STAY PATIENT AND BE OPEN-MINDED

Patience is also a key, Casey says. "Be patient, as these tend to be a longer close," he says. "Pay close attention to performance clauses and get good history on your group — you can't make SMERFs attend."

Being open-minded is another plus, according to Kervin, who says that it's easy to fall into the trap of doing things the same way over and over. "Being open to small changes can sometimes have huge impacts on the bottom line," she says.

She tells of saving a new client close to \$1 million simply by convincing the group to consider a new location and bidding the event out to various other cities.

"The amazing thing was that the group got to use the same hotel they were already contracted in," she says. "The key factor was that the group was really willing to move the entire event. The original hotel lowered their pricing enough to be competitive with the other potential locations."

In another instance, a client agreed to move its annual meeting from historical dates to a holiday week. The move, although originally not an option, resulted in hotel rates dropping from \$219 to \$99. The savings convinced the group to meet again in the future over that same holiday period.

Another tip is to realize the importance of previous history and be ready to call on that knowledge. "A hotel sales manager often has to sell you and your meeting to her director of sales and even her revenue manager," Kervin says. "You want to arm her with as much information as you can to convince her team to pursue you, and also to offer you the most competitive bid they can."

She also adds details such as pickup from at least the past three meetings, the banquet food and beverage spend, and where appropriate, even the concession sales in a convention center.

"The more information you can provide in the RFP process, the better," Kervin concludes. "A hotel is going to look at all potential revenue centers before bidding." AC&F



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Credits (here and opposite): Rene Huemer for Jazz Education Network

Jazz Education Network (JEN) annual conference attendees visited the iconic live music venue Preservation Hall (left) and enjoyed a concert at the Hyatt Regency New Orleans. (Opposite) JEN President Caleb Chapman (right) jams with jazz greats Kirk Whalum and Branford Marsalis.



New Orleans

The Birthplace of Jazz Always Strikes the Right Note for Association Conventions

By David Swanson

After too many years away from the Crescent City, it doesn't take long after arriving one evening to be reminded and become reacquainted with one of New Orleans' greatest assets: music.

Jazz music.

Live jazz music.

Stroll through the French Quarter after dusk and there's nary a block without jazz trickling into the streets, most of it very much played live. Enter the polished confines of The Ritz-Carlton's Davenport Lounge and, for the price of a drink, Jerry Davenport sings and plays trumpet with a fierce

band four nights a week. Nearby, at the Royal Sonesta New Orleans, the Jazz Playhouse is a frequent home to Gerald French and the Original Tuxedo Jazz Band, and to soulful singer Germaine Bazzle. At the Monteleone Hotel, the Carousel Bar has been revolving since 1949 while standards spin — live. Amble beyond the French Quarter to Frenchman Street in the Marigny neighborhood and you'll find the Spotted Cat crowded with music fans and the Blue Nile hopping almost any night.

Even for breakfast at Café Beignet the next morning, a band effortlessly wakes the sunny courtyard with gently pulsing music starting at 9 a.m. Live music.

February marked the 100th anniversary of the first jazz recording, and the ensemble that made that historic record, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, is still based in New Orleans and operating today. For Jazz Education Network (JEN), a nonprofit that seeks to advance jazz education, promote performance and develop new audiences, could there have been a better landing than New Orleans for the organization's eighth annual conference in January?

As 2017 marked the 100th anniversary of the first jazz recording, "It made sense for us to host our 2017 conference in New Orleans."

Lou Fischer, Ph.D., Cofounder
Jazz Education Network, Columbus, OH

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

"New Orleans is the birthplace of jazz, America's true indigenous art form," explains Lou Fischer, Ph.D., cofounder, past president, operations administrator and conference coordinator for JEN. "The city gave birth to the music, and to the ensemble that recorded that initial record. It made sense for us to host our 2017 conference in New Orleans," which the group framed around the centennial of the record. "The city is always fun to visit and the weather is generally good in

January. There is much to offer for those not interested in remaining onsite throughout the four days of the conference."

For the gathering, which drew upwards of 4,000 attendees — many of them high school- and college-age musicians — JEN used the Hyatt Regency New Orleans, a 1,193-room property adjacent to the Mercedes-Benz Superdome. As the hotel with the largest in-house convention facilities in New Orleans — 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space — JEN had plenty of options to choose from for its event, including two ballrooms,

80,000 sf of exhibition space, and 70 meeting and banquet rooms. Plus, the recently opened Hyatt House next door has a connecting passage into the Hyatt Regency on the second level, providing an additional 194 rooms for larger groups.

"As an organization we seek out venues where we can fit and offer all of our events under one roof," Fischer adds. "The Hyatt Regency afforded us that opportunity. And, as expected, the convention services management and staff were quite attentive onsite."

The hotel also has its own catering arm, 1718 Events, an onsite hotel department designed to provide DMC-style services. More than 30 other offsite venues around the city use 1718 Events, including Mardi Gras World, Generations Hall and Champions Square (right next to the Hyatt Regency).



The 22,538-sf Empire Ballroom at the Hyatt Regency New Orleans.

Credit: Hyatt Regency New Orleans



“The ‘Big Easy’ makes big things seem easy. I have worked the LCMS Youth Gathering in seven convention cities, and New Orleans has this unique and wonderful supportive relationship across agencies and businesses.”

Kurt Bickel
Dome Event Technical Producer
LCMS Youth Gathering
Orlando, FL

CITYWIDE PRIMED

New Orleans is well-designed for citywide events. The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center is the sixth-largest facility in the nation, and the vast majority of the city’s hotels are located within walking distance — 22,000 guest rooms lie within a two-mile arc along the north (east) bank of the Mississippi River. In 2013 the facility expanded its ballroom into a 60,300-sf “Great Hall” to complement its existing, 1.1 million sf of exhibit space, the largest exhibit space in the U.S.

One group that made good use of the convention center was the LCMS Youth Gathering, an annual citywide event held by the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. Drawing 25,000 attendees, the event has had a great history in New Orleans, according to Rev. Mark Kiessling, the director of the LCMS Youth Ministry.

“The city always grades well with participants in our evaluations, including scores that have improved over time,” says Rev. Kiessling. “We were able to engage with New Orleans culture through music, art, history tours, and with knowledgeable and proud citizens. The food is both outstanding and unique, and our participants love sampling the cuisine and making a memory out of the experience. And the music of New Orleans helps create an environment which is memorable and engaging. Our participants look forward to these great aspects of the city, and citizens and business owners helped our planners tie the event to the city.”

The LCMS Youth Gathering used the convention center for its daytime program options and event offices. “The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center provided ample space, flexible arrangements for various program options, and a host of amenities, such as food, Wi-Fi and connections to other tourist attractions,” notes Rev. Kiessling. “The flexible space ranged from great exhibit space to large ballrooms, plus a wealth of meeting rooms for small breakout

The Hyatt’s event spaces are concentrated on the first four levels of the hotel: Exhibition space is on the ground floor, ballrooms are on the second and third, and breakout rooms are found on the second and fourth.

“Each floor of the event space is accessible by elevator and escalators or stairwells,” says Fischer. “The layout can be a bit confusing and requires a few trips up and down to familiarize oneself with that layout. But the sleeping rooms are very convenient to the event spaces, given all event spaces are on levels one through four.”

Of particular note: The 22,538-sf Empire Ballroom has one wall lined with floor-to-ceiling glass windows providing both natural light and a balcony that overlooks Loyola Avenue. At 24,564 sf, the Celestine Ballroom upstairs is slightly larger.

Fischer cautioned that “hidden costs” for some hotel services added up. “Ask all the questions you can think of ahead of time about freight elevator use, and moving equipment through the hotel — load in and load out, etc. Of course, as with any hotel, there is a substantial plus-plus service charge associated with event services such as in-house F&B and AV services. Budget accordingly to avoid surprises.”

Fischer also recommended alerting attendees upfront about incidental costs associated with a visit to New Orleans, such as airport transfers.

“The trip from the airport to downtown is expensive, as there is no rail line. The one-way city-established flat rate is \$33 plus tip. If you are driving in, parking in the city is outrageously high as there is limited space. In addition, beyond the state sales tax, New Orleans imposes a flat-rate, \$2-per-day tax on hotel occupancy, over and above the established room-block rate an organization may have in their contract.

“Do the best you can to alert your attendees to these types of costs ahead of time. It is paramount to the mindset of your attendees and to ensure they are in a ‘positive’ frame of mind once arriving to your event,” Fischer adds.



The \$65 million Linear Park project, a transformation of Convention Center Boulevard in New Orleans, will connect the Warehouse/Arts District with the historic French Quarter.



Events large and small are accommodated at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome whether on the field or in Club Lounges.



Credits: Hosts Global New Orleans

sessions and offices. It allowed our planning team to work creatively and collaboratively. Also, participants had ample area in meeting rooms and exhibit floors to participate and navigate the space. The convention center provided technological options from Wi-Fi to audio-visual. We made a major investment in smartphone app technology, and having Wi-Fi across much of the convention center was important to our participants. The center also made program-related use of Wi-Fi cost-effective for our budget.”

Anyone planning a program in New Orleans must keep in mind that food is one of the top things that guests look forward to, and Rev. Kiessling says Centerplate, the convention center’s exclusive food service provider, offered food options that reflected the local cuisine. “Centerplate worked with us to provide food during our event lunch options. This is never an easy feat for the number of people we need to feed in a short amount of time.”

SUPERDOME-SIZED EVENT

The other major site used for the LCMS Youth Gathering was the Mercedes-Benz Superdome, home stadium to the NFL New Orleans Saints, an SMG-managed venue that can hardly fail to impress first-time visitors. With seating for more than 73,000, the Superdome caters to a wide variety of events — from Super Bowl-sized productions, to general sessions utilizing the facility’s tiered seating, to “intimate” corporate incentive dinners for a few dozen held right on the turf (talk about wow factor!). While the turf field is available August-January only, there are also four 13,000-sf Club Lounges offering floor-to-ceiling windows onto the field. Adjacent to the Superdome is Champions Square, a 45,000-sf state-of-the-art outdoor festival space with a stage setup, and the Smoothie King Center for entertainment and sports events — both also managed by SMG.

The LCMS Youth Gathering occupied the Superdome for 10

days. “We produced and performed four 90-minute evening festival events and a morning worship service on the last day,” says Kurt Bickel, technical producer for the LCMS events held at the Superdome. To do this, seven tractor trailers full of gear rolled in and, with stage hands and riggers from Rhino Staging Solutions, 115 hang points were installed. “The production departments of the Superdome were directed by William Dede, SMG event coordinator, who quickly formed a partnership in pursuit of an excellent experience for our young people. Justin Roux, director of suites and catering for Centerplate, personally was engaged with us and his staff to provide over a thousand meals for our crews, talent and hundreds of volunteers.

“During my 36 years producing this event, no other facility provides this level of rigorous support,” adds Bickel. “The ‘Big Easy’ makes big things seem easy. I have worked the LCMS Youth Gathering

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Credits: Hosts Global New Orleans



Visitors delight in the sights and sounds of the French Quarter, the oldest section of New Orleans, known as the Vieux Carré Historic District.

in seven convention cities, and New Orleans has this unique and wonderful supportive relationship across agencies and businesses. The convention community works together — hotels, the convention center, the Superdome, law enforcement, news media, production companies, caterers and food venues have apparently formed an alliance of cooperation and support for one another that benefits the meeting customer. The New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau connected us to the multitude of people that planned and executed our unique event. It should be obvious, but they seem to recognize the mutual benefit of teamwork.”

Rev. Kiessling concurs. “The city provides a wealth of facility options for various kinds of events, and venues take hospitality to heart. New Orleans is definitely a class act in taking care of event planners and participants. The city works so well together, from the facilities to the police to the convention and visitors bureau to the entire hospitality industry. They truly make New Orleans home away from home.”

Of course, while the city’s bawdy side is a draw for some visitors, it presented a few challenges for the youth-oriented ministry. “We did take additional care in bringing a youth event into New Orleans with the lure and reputation of Bour-

bon Street and Mardi Gras. We helped parents and adult chaperones prepare for these aspects, potential interactions, and to engage in conversation with young people. The facilities and city worked hand-in-hand in providing a safe and comfortable event experience,” adds Rev. Kiessling.

KNOW YOUR LOCATION

But the sights and sounds and edgier allure of the French Quarter remain a draw for other groups — as long as they can



Credits: The Roosevelt New Orleans, a Waldorf Astoria Hotel



The Roosevelt New Orleans, opened in 1893, is famous for the Blue Room (above) where Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey performed regularly.



Credits: NOPSI Hotel, New Orleans



Newly opened this summer is the NOPSI Hotel, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Shown is the rooftop bar, Above the Grid.

I receive a response to the effect of ‘we can’t do that, we don’t have that’ or ‘that’s not available.’ Every request was met with ‘no problem, we can handle that’ or ‘absolutely, glad to help!’ — all the things a meeting planner likes to hear. And, the sales team was great.

“The meeting space is extremely diverse. You can use it for several different formats. General session near exhibits, large GS with lots of breakouts or just breakouts. Guest room elevators access the meeting room floors perfectly. I also liked how the meeting space did not interfere with transient guest traffic.”

Although Allanson planned one offsite VIP dinner at the Chophouse New Orleans, which she called outstanding, The Roosevelt handled the balance of the group’s meals. “Most of the food in New Orleans is fantastic, but when it comes to specific menu pricing and having to keep an eye on budgets, sometimes the food choices in banquets gets slim. Not here. The chef created wonderful menus to meet our pricing needs.”

In the end, Allanson says New Orleans was a perfect fit for the 250 attendees from the Clinical Orthopedic Society. “The city has something to offer everyone. It is wonderfully

keep members focused on the meeting at hand. For the Clinical Orthopedic Society, The Roosevelt New Orleans, a Waldorf Astoria Hotel, offered a happy medium, according to Teri Allanson, the society’s manager of meetings and conventions. The group held its 2016 annual meeting at the hotel, located just outside the French Quarter.

“Know your location,” Allanson advises. “Some groups are distracted by hustle and bustle and, vice versa, some attendees like the hustle and bustle. The Roosevelt offers the grace of a Waldorf Astoria and the celebration of New Orleans all wrapped in a beautiful bow.”

The 504-room Roosevelt is New Orleans’ grand dame. Opened in 1893, the hotel is famous for the walnut-paneled Sazerac Bar, the Blue Room where Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey performed regularly, and how author Arthur Hailey checked in for two months and wrote the bestseller *Hotel*. After flooding caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the hotel went through a \$170 million renovation that led to its reflagging as a Waldorf Astoria in 2009. The elegant and historic hotel has nearly 60,000 sf of meeting space, including three ballrooms.

“The Roosevelt was able to meet our dates, rates, space and concession requirements,” notes Allanson. But it was service levels at the hotel that left the greatest impression on Allanson, who said she felt the staff was genuinely happy to assist. “Every member of the hotel staff was extremely customer oriented. It wasn’t just a job to them — they actually enjoyed assisting their guests. It was quite refreshing. Never once did

“The food is both outstanding and unique... and the music of New Orleans helps create an environment which is memorable and engaging. Our participants look forward to these great aspects of the city, and citizens and business owners helped our planners tie the event to the city.”

Rev. Mark Kiessling, Director
LCMS Youth Ministry, Kirkwood, MO

diverse and very colorful — in every sense of the word. Our organizations are national, and everyone loves experiencing New Orleans.”

NEW ORLEANS UPDATE

A proposed \$1 billion public/private development that would utilize 47 acres of land upriver from the current con-

“The city has something to offer everyone. It is wonderfully diverse and very colorful — in every sense of the word. ...Everyone loves experiencing New Orleans.”

Teri Allanson
Manager of Meetings and Conventions
Clinical Orthopedic Society, Richmond, VA

vention center for a 1,200-room hotel, transportation hub and a mixed-use development is currently on hold. But another project is moving forward: Linear Park, a transformation of Convention Center Boulevard in New Orleans, will connect the Warehouse/Arts District with the historic French Quarter. The \$65 million project will enhance the attendee experience at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center with a tree-lined pedestrian plaza, bike lanes, moving walkways, sleek overhangs, fountains, green walls, water walls and shaded sitting areas for visitors.

Newly opened this summer is the NOPSI Hotel, originally constructed in 1927 as the headquarters for New Orleans Public Service Inc. (NOPSI), the city's former utility company and transit operator. Now, nine decades after it originally opened to service the city's needs, the historic landmark has been re-imagined as a luxury hotel with a community spirit.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, NOPSI Hotel features 217 refined guest rooms, a regionally inspired restaurant called Public Service, 14,000 sf of architecturally significant indoor and outdoor meeting space, and a sophisticated rooftop pool and bar named Above the Grid.

In March, the 1,622-room Hilton New Orleans Riverside, located adjacent to the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, completed a \$6 million renovation to the 26,894-sf Grand Ballroom, Grand Salon and first-level meeting space and second-level Exhibition Center. The hotel boasts a total of more than 130,000 sf of event space.

Construction is well underway on an all-new, \$917 million state-of-the-art terminal for the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport (MSY). Passengers are not currently impacted by the construction project, which completely relocates the airport's terminal, parking structure and vehicle access from the south side of the main runway to the north. The project is on schedule for an October 1, 2018 opening, according to Mark Reis, acting director of the airport. “While

the current airport is easy to use, it's not a great customer experience,” adds Reis. “They won't complain about it, but it won't be something they comment on favorably. The new airport — they will. It will be a very pleasant experience, and a more efficient operation.”

The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center has created a new offering for groups, in partnership with Centerplate. Building on the dinner theater concept, Creole of Course is based on the history of food in New Orleans and features a voodoo priest, live jazz between food courses, and a chef doing cooking demos. Conceived to take place in the convention center's theater, Creole of Course also can travel to other venues around the city for groups of up to 300. Separately, the convention center announced a \$32 million project to train people in the culinary and hospitality industries, in conjunction with the New Orleans Culinary and Hospitality Institute. An existing building in the CBD has been chosen for the facility, which will provide teaching labs, a banquet kitchen and event center.



The Hilton New Orleans Riverside completed a meeting space renovation in the spring that included the Grand Ballroom, Exhibition Center and Grand Salon (shown).

Credit: Hilton New Orleans Riverside

The Royal Sonesta New Orleans on Bourbon Street completed a renovation of its 483 guest rooms last year and added a new fitness center and refreshed the hotel's famed Desire Oyster Bar. The Royal Sonesta then embarked on a remodel of its 20,000 sf of meeting spaces, overseen by Atlanta-based Design One Studio and completed in December 2016. The 5,000-sf Grand Ballroom can accommodate up to 500 for a cocktail reception, and is divisible into two spaces. The update also included a state-of-the-art upgraded banquet kitchen and upgraded audio technology for the meeting facilities.

AC&F



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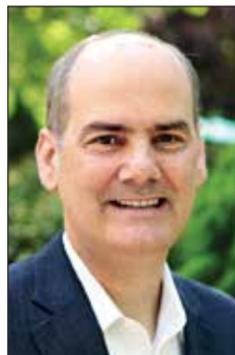
BLANEY



RICHTER-PIRAINO



MURPHY



SURETTE



JUNG



DOUGLAS



GRIMLEY

Visit San Antonio has named **Mario Bass** as vice president of sales and services. Bass most recently served as director of sales and marketing for JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa.

Wendy Blaney was named chief sales officer, group sales, for Atlantis, Paradise Island in The Bahamas. She previously served as director, in-market East and Atlantic City for Caesars Entertainment.

Team San Jose has named **Ken Slattery** as vice president of sales and destination services. He was global sales director at Omni Hotels and Resorts.

The Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau has named **Melissa Richter-Piraino** as national sales manager responsible for the association segment in Washington, DC, Virginia and Maryland. She was most recently a sales manager for group meetings and events at The Westin New York at Times Square.

The Chattanooga Convention & Visitors Bureau has named **Brian Murphy** as vice president of sales. He was most recently the director of sales and marketing at the Omni Corpus Christi Hotel in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Daniel Surette was named vice president of sales for Omni Hotels & Resorts. He most recently served as the vice president of North America sales and field marketing for Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide.

Laura Jung was promoted to director of sales

and marketing for the San Francisco Marriott Marquis. She most recently served as director of group sales for the hotel.

Visit Indy has promoted **Krysten Douglas** to senior sales manager, DC market. She has served on Visit Indy's sales team since 2010 and will now focus on meetings with 601-1,500 rooms on peak with organizations based in Washington, DC, Virginia and Maryland.

VisitDallas has promoted **Mary Grimley** to vice president of sales. She most recently served as director of group sales for the bureau.

Chateau on the Lake Resort, Spa & Convention Center in Branson, Missouri, has named **Gayla Welsh** as corporate sales manager and **Jessica Wrenfrow** as event sales manager. Welsh, responsible for the Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa and Illinois markets, formerly served as director of group sales for The Lodge at Old Kinderhook in Camdenton, Missouri. Wrenfrow was hospitality services instructor at Arkansas State University-Newport in Jonesboro, Arkansas.

The Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau has promoted **Kristin Childers** to sales manager, responsible for the small meetings market. She was a marketing specialist for the bureau.

AMResorts has promoted **Jan LaPointe** to vice president of strategic sales planning, North America. She recently celebrated her 15th anniversary with AMResorts and has logged more than 30 years of experience in the tourism industry.

AC&F

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EAT

Our premier meeting resort, The Pyramid at Grand Oasis, offers 26 international restaurants and 24 amazing bars. There's truly something for everyone!

* According to TripAdvisor as of 6/1/17.

NEW CASINO



PLAY

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NEW SPACE



MEET

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