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# ASSOCIATION

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# CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

## Texas Passion and Pride

Welcomes All to Enjoy This  
Bigger-Than-Life Destination

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TABLET VERSION**

**On our cover – Mike Nichols, CAM**, vice president, Operational Excellence and Professional Development, National Business Aviation Association set up the NBAA Schedulers & Dispatchers Conference at the Fort Worth Convention Center with nearly 3,000 attendees.

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## CVBs Are Working With Millennials



Are you getting the message? It seems that millennials value the experience over the commodity. Creating events that are intriguing and irresistible makes the directive for you to seek what is genuine, what is real and not manufactured. It is often said the experiential and authentic are now more than ever considered by most planners to cater to the millennial influence. Options differ depending on the destination. For example, in Puerto Rico, attendees can participate in a rum tasting, mixology class and also bottle their own rum at Bacardi. More active attendees can zip line through the jungle and rain forest or take advantage of other challenging outdoor activities. Cities like Indianapolis, with a long history as a sports destination, have numerous potential venues to capture attendees' interest. If your attendees fall into the foodies category, Montreal is recognized for its internationally acclaimed restaurant scene. Other urban destinations, like Detroit, offer all things different, distinctive and yet-to-be discovered. I personally visited the Automotive Hall of Fame and The Henry Ford exhibit featuring one-of-a-kind vehicles such as JFK's limo and those of other presidents. It was truly a great experience. Florida, known as the Sunshine State, offers an abundance of opportunities to satisfy all millennials. Greater Miami and the Beaches draws inspiration from all over the world with its dining, entertainment and artistic offerings. In reality, any venue should encompass the culture known to the area and include activities and menu options that showcase it. See "CVBs: The Millennial Influence" on Page 12.

For planners looking for a way to serve international members by bringing education and networking opportunities to destinations more accessible to them, "Planning Global Meetings" on Page 18 may prove to be helpful when choosing destinations like Australia, New Zealand or even our neighbor to the north, Canada.

Also in this issue is the subject always on planners' minds: "Contract Negotiations" (Page 30). Reaching out to CVBs when negotiating with hotels and convention centers may help you offset costs. Always list all charges in the contract to avoid any surprises. Showing a track record of meeting or exceeding room block commitments can be an effective bargaining tool. Check out what others have experienced and see the negotiating tips that are offered for your benefit.

Take a look at Texas for your next meeting or event and experience the "Texas Passion and Pride" (Page 44) starting with Fort Worth and other popular state destinations. Read what Mike Nichols (on our cover), Vice President, Operational Excellence and Professional Development, National Business Aviation Association, has to say about his Fort Worth experience.

Harvey Grotzky  
Publisher

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## St. Louis Announces Plan to Expand and Update Convention Center



**ST. LOUIS** — Officials of St. Louis City and County have announced the AC Next Gen Project, which will update and expand the America's Center Convention Complex to secure its place as an economic and employment driver for the entire region.

The complex is an anchor to an entire subsector of the city's downtown, bringing hundreds of thousands of people to the metropolitan area every year. It hosts nearly 100 events annually, with more than 600,000 attendees, 300,000 hotel room nights and generating \$265 million of new direct economic spending for the community, according to Johnson Consulting.

The total cost of implementing the AC Next Gen Project is estimated at \$175 million and will include the addition of 92,000 square feet of exhibit space, a 65,000-square-foot multipurpose ballroom and meeting area with a 20,000-square-foot prefunction event space, 22,000 square feet of new support space to improve service access to current and new exhibit halls and ballrooms, an outdoor pavilion and more. [www.explorestlouis.com](http://www.explorestlouis.com)

## Hyatt Regency John Wayne Airport Newport Beach Unveils Renovation

**NEWPORT BEACH, CA** — The Hyatt Regency John Wayne Airport Newport Beach has officially unveiled its top-to-bottom transformation. Perfectly positioned halfway between Los Angeles and San Diego, the hotel is just minutes from the bustling business district, John Wayne Airport and many of Southern California's most popular attractions, making it the ideal destination for groups and business travelers.

The renovated property offers an array of meeting venues, dining experiences and tech-forward, comfort-driven guest rooms and suites.

Venues include 28,000 square feet of redesigned function space with the latest in wireless technology, lighting and sound capabilities and customizable boardrooms and ballrooms, including 20,000 square feet of contiguous indoor/outdoor space, such as the Pacific Ballroom that flows into the Monarch Pavilion and Lido Event Lawn — perfect for a wide range of events from exhibitions to receptions and large-scale dinners.

The hotel's 343 well-appointed guest rooms and suites feature 65-inch smart televisions and premium bandwidth. Additional amenities include a resort-style pool, fitness center and yoga room. [www.hyatt.com](http://www.hyatt.com)

## IAEE Recognizes Louisville Tourism's Angi Van Berg

**LOUISVILLE, KY** — Angi Van Berg, CEM, vice president of trade show sales for Louisville Tourism, was one of three people to



Van Berg

receive the Chapter Merit Award by the International Association of Exhibitions (IAEE).

This award recognizes IAEE members whose ideas and/or work have benefited IAEE as an organization in some special way and is generally reserved for those who have stepped forward at the chapter/local level.

Van Berg was instrumental in re-launching the IAEE Mid-South chapter in September 2017. The chapter has approximately 60 members encompassing Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee and Michigan. [www.iaee.com](http://www.iaee.com)

## Greater Boston CVB Picks New CEO

**BOSTON** — The Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau's board has named Martha Sheridan its new CEO, succeeding



Sheridan

longtime chief Pat Moscaritolo. Sheridan has served as president and CEO of Rhode Island's Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau since 2006. She will join the Boston

tourism bureau in January as CEO-elect and officially take office February 15, 2019. With more than 25 years of destination marketing experience, Sheridan has served as chairman of the Destination Marketing Association International and is on the board of the U.S. Travel Association. Recently, she was appointed to the Destinations International Diversity & Inclusion Task Force. [www.bostonusa.com](http://www.bostonusa.com)

## L.A. City Council Endorses Expansion of Convention Center and Hotel

**LOS ANGELES** — Shortly after members of the L.A. City Council Economic Development Committee approved a proposal from Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG) for a \$1.2 billion subsidized development that would add hundreds of hotel rooms at the J.W. Marriott hotel at L.A. Live and enlarge the Los Angeles Convention Center, AEG filed plans for the project that includes a proposed \$700 million, 40-story hotel featuring 850 guest rooms and 51,000 square feet of meeting space. The new 420-foot tower would connect to the Convention Center and existing hotel via pedestrian bridges. The combined J.W. Marriott and Ritz-Carlton complex would encompass 1,851 guest rooms, making it the second-largest hotel in the state. The projects are set to be completed by 2022. [www.lacclink.com](http://www.lacclink.com)

## IAEE Tech Startup Pavilion and Competition at Expo! Expo! 2018

**NEW ORLEANS** — IAEE will feature its fourth annual Tech Startup Pavilion and Competition at "Expo! Expo! IAEE's Annual



DuBois

Meeting & Exhibition" December 11-13 in New Orleans.

"The Tech Startup Pavilion and Competition is a unique opportunity for Expo! Expo! attendees to explore and engage with

emerging technology companies in the exhibitions and events space," says IAEE President and CEO David DuBois, CMP, CAE, FASAE, CTA.

The Tech Startup Pavilion is open to technology-based companies who have been in business for less than two years, are a new or second-year exhibitor at Expo! Expo!, have launched a product within the last 12 months and whose annual revenue is less than \$500,000. [www.iaee.com](http://www.iaee.com)

## Board Approves \$337 Million Salt Lake City Convention Hotel

**SALT LAKE CITY** — The Governor's Office of Economic Development Board approved a proposal for a new \$337 million downtown convention center hotel for Salt Lake City. The 680,000-square-foot hotel, which will directly connect to the Salt Palace Convention Center, will include approximately 750 rooms with 62,000 square feet of meeting space, consisting of a 25,000-square-foot grand ballroom, a 14,000-square-foot junior ballroom and an outdoor rooftop space.

The New Convention Facility Development Incentive provides a post-performance incentive to add \$281 million in capital investment over 20 years. The new convention center hotel will be a joint venture between DDRM, a real estate developer headquartered in St. George, and Portman Holdings, a real estate development, investment and management company.

"The hotel convention center has been discussed for several years and is a need in our community," says GOED Executive Director Val Hale. "With the approval of this incentive, the state can attract larger conferences, and Utah can enter into a new market for meetings and conventions."

Portman Holdings and DDRM expect to break ground on the new facility in the fall of 2019 with the hotel operator to be announced early next year. The hotel is slated to open in 2022. [www.visitsaltlake.com](http://www.visitsaltlake.com)

## Las Vegas Marriott Welcomes Las Vegas Convention Center Expansion



**LAS VEGAS** — The Las Vegas Marriott provides guests easy access to the Las Vegas Convention Center, as the venue undergoes an expansion set to add 1.4 million square feet to the facility, including 600,000 square feet of new exhibit space. The hotel offers suite-style rooms with a variety of amenities for guests in town for expos and conventions. The hotel's location also puts guests conveniently close to the Las Vegas Strip.

The third phase of the expansion project will see the renovation of the existing 3.2 million-square-foot facility, scheduled to be completed by 2023. The project, set to have a huge impact on the economic growth and expansion of meetings in Las Vegas, will allow the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority to pursue new business opportunities, bringing guests of the Las Vegas Marriott instant access to the growing venue in the city as it expands. [www.marriott.com](http://www.marriott.com)

# Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa Announces Renovation to Provide Covered Meeting Space

**SAN ANTONIO, TX** — Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa has completed a renovation to its Rogers-Wiseman Pavilion. The resort has converted the pavilion tent, which was previously used as a back-up option, to a full-use signature meeting and event space.

“After using the Rogers-Wiseman Pavilion as a back-up venue for several years, we started to notice that more and more groups were looking to book their events outdoors and surrounded by nature,” says John Hernstat, director of sales and marketing at Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa. “With more groups expressing interest in the venue as their primary function space, we decided to renovate and update the tent to provide

a truly unique and distinctive space that would showcase our beautiful Hill Country scenery while still providing full protection from the outdoor elements.”

Through the renovation, the Rogers-Wiseman Pavilion was outfitted with floor-to-ceiling windows on three sides of the venue in order to allow natural lighting and to create a more open space showcasing the outdoor scenery. The venue’s flooring was also updated with luxury vinyl tile to further reflect the elegant and rustic feel of the property.

Named in honor of the family who owned and operated a cattle ranch for more than a century on the land where the resort now sits, the Rogers-Wiseman Pavilion was originally intended as a temporary

venue space in 2010. The resort turned the space into a permanent structure in 2014.

Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa features 100,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor meeting and event space. In addition to the pavilion, the property includes three grand ballrooms, including the Independence Ballroom, Fredericksburg Ballroom and Hill Country Ballroom, which each have individual courtyard and garden prefunction space.

The property also offers the Luckenbach Pavilion, an outdoor covered terrace overlooking Hill Country Golf Club, as well as a freestanding retreat reminiscent of an 1880s ranch house that can be used for private and VIP functions.

[www.hillcountry.regency.hyatt.com](http://www.hillcountry.regency.hyatt.com)

# Delta Hotels by Marriott Dallas Allen & Watters Creek Convention Center Nearing Completion



**DALLAS** — Delta Hotels by Marriott Dallas Allen & Watters Creek Convention Center, with 90,000 square feet of flexible and state-of-the-art meeting space, will be the first Delta new build by Marriott in the United States when it opens in January.

The 300-room, six-story Delta Hotels by Marriott Dallas Allen & Watters Creek Convention Center will feature 23 meeting rooms, a 40,000-square-foot event center that can be divided into smaller spaces, a 12,000-square-foot ballroom divisible into 4,000 square feet and an outdoor patio and courtyard for events. There will be a dedicated AV staff onsite and more than \$300,000 in AV equipment on property. [www.marriott.com](http://www.marriott.com)

# New Orleans & Company Names SVP of Convention Sales & Strategies

**NEW ORLEANS** — Stephen R. Hahn will become senior vice president of convention sales and strategies for New Orleans & Company effective in December. A three-decade Marriott veteran, Hahn most recently served as regional vice president for Brighton Management, LLC, managing a multi-brand portfolio of full and select service properties at Marriott, Hilton, IHG, Hyatt and Wyndham. As regional vice president, he led executive management teams for each property. “Stephen Hahn is a proven leader in the highly competitive industry of convention sales, strategies and service,” says Stephen Perry, president and CEO of New Orleans & Company. [www.neworleans.com](http://www.neworleans.com)



Hahn



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**1** Kathleen Matthews (center), former chief global communications and public affairs officers at Marriott International, received a distinguished leadership award from the U.S. Travel Association, represented by National Chair Geoff Ballotti (left) and CEO Roger Dow (right). **2** Winners of the International Facility Management Association (IFMA) 2018 Awards of Excellence were announced at its World Workplace Conference and Expo last month. Among the honorees was Erick Kniedt, AVP of Facilities & Assets (third from left), flanked by (left to right) Don Gilpin, David Sholkovitz and Graham Tier, CFM, FMP, MRICS, chair of IFMA’s global board of directors. **3** The team from Visit Seattle traveled to London last month to establish connections with travel contacts and media in the U.K. From left to right: Brian Canlis, Bill Weise, Natalie Jushinski, Tom Norwalk, Brady Williams, John Boesche. **4** Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau inducted new members into the Atlanta Hospitality Hall of Fame Nov. 1. From left to right: David Rubinger, William Pate, Claudia Mashburn, Gov. Nathan Deal, Kathleen Bertrand, Ben Shanley, John Stephenson. **5** Connecticut Convention & Sports Bureau presented its 4th annual Hospitality Industry & Awards Night. Seated (left to right): Susan Keane, Suzy Whaley, David Rocha, Liz Parenzan. Standing (left to right): Lynn Vasquez, Thomas Madden, H. Scott Phelps, John Heine, Richard Parenzan and son Zachary, Matt Scott.

# Keeping Attendees Engaged

## With the Tools You Have

By Alexa Newman



### Creativity — and Technology — Means Memorable Meetings

Association event planners are always on the lookout for the next innovative idea. Fresh content, experiences and networking opportunities keep attendees and exhibitors engaged and coming back for more.

Understanding your audience and what will resonate with them is key. If your attendees are risk-takers, creative opportunities will surprise and delight them. If they prefer getting right down to business, maybe theatrics aren't necessary.

Here are three noteworthy, high-value concepts utilized by world-class events that associations should know about.

#### BRAIN DATES

Professional conferences create excellent platforms to network, but to some, the idea of meeting and interacting with strangers is stressful. In addition, it's not guaranteed that those interactions will be productive.

C2, an annual conference for executives that is designed to provoke "collisions" (productive disagreements among attendees) and generally spark new ideas on how to do business, has created a way to enable meaningful networking interactions: Brain Dating. This customized process encourages knowledge sharing and learning by facilitating one-on-one conversations.

When registering for the conference, C2 attendees make a list of topics they want to learn more about, as well as those with which they have expertise they want to share. Attendees then use an online hub to schedule one-on-one or group meetings during the conference with people that have the knowledge they are seeking.

At C2, these Brain Dates are held in unique places, such as on a "Ferris wheel," or chairs suspended from convention center ceilings that hang 18 feet off the ground with a safety net underneath. (Cirque du Soleil is actually a C2 partner and helps design its networking spaces.)

While that aspect likely isn't replicable for

many associations, they can still provide attendees with similar matchmaking services — and clever meeting places perhaps a little closer to earth — to help them have the most stimulating and productive networking interactions possible.

#### ENGAGEMENT THROUGH COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCES

If you regularly read event industry publications, you've undoubtedly encountered the phrase "the festivalization of events." Festivalization is the buzzword of the day for large conferences and corporate meetings that create community-like atmospheres in order to engage attendees through collective experiences.

Examples abound outside the association world, including the Murmuration Festival in St. Louis, a three-day event that brings together artists, musicians, innovators, scientists and entrepreneurs to engage the public and share their work. Murmuration functions less like a conference and more like a music festival with education.

While it isn't feasible for most associations to move



PCMA Convening Leaders attempted to break a Guinness World Record last January in Nashville. Unique activities like this provide unforgettable experiences.

their events outdoors in order to create a festival atmosphere, it is entirely possible for them to focus on less all-encompassing engagement activities that still unify attendees and exhibitors. Such activities can include anything from volunteer opportunities that support the local community to organized attempts for attendees to try and break a world record. One event did the latter by setting the record for the largest rock, paper, scissors tournament with 2,950 players.

Offsite activities can also provide an unforgettable experience. However, it does require more planning. Transportation, weather, third parties and more will play

an event in Massachusetts that aims to make science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics accessible to all — used it to create an interactive sandbox.

The sandbox used about \$1,000 in easily obtainable equipment to project the image of a color-coded elevation map on top of actual sand.

While many AR experiences require the viewer to participate via a smartphone, the science festival sandbox used a projector instead, so no additional equipment was needed.

The AR map helped attendees learn about topography, water flow and watersheds. As visitors pushed the sand around, the topographic map updated in real time.

*While it isn't feasible for most associations to move their events outdoors in order to create a festival atmosphere, it is entirely possible for them to focus on less all-encompassing engagement activities that still unify attendees and exhibitors.*

a role. But if the opportunity matches the association's mission and appeals to attendees, then it is definitely worth considering!

#### AUGMENTED REALITY (AR)

AR — which involves using technology to superimpose a computer-generated image on a user's view of the real world — is rapidly becoming more accessible and cost-effective, and event planners are noticing.

In recent years, the technology has made its way onto trade show floors. For example, a sponsor at last year's New York Comic-Con used AR to allow attendees to interact with Wonder Woman. Sporting events are also adopting it. At Citi Field during New York Mets games, attendees can use their smartphone to bring the iconic Home Run Apple — a statue located just behind the outfield fence — to life.

While these types of experiences can be cost-prohibitive, there are already a few smaller events using more modest AR-driven approaches. The Cambridge Science Festival —

The map even had a feature to simulate rainfall if users held their hand in a particular way. An innovation such as this could be the next step in association education. Allowing for real-time, hands-on interaction with things like that would have been impractical before.

As American inventor Thomas Edison once said, "I start where the last man left off." But associations following Edison's lead can be inspired by many sources beyond the event world.

Maybe the next innovative idea will be found by looking at how restaurants implement theme-based menus for limited time frames to increase excitement. The inspiration can come from anywhere, so don't stop looking. AC&F

Alexa Newman is events director at SmithBucklin, an association management and services company in Chicago and Washington, D.C. Reprinted with permission from SmithBucklin, this article originally appeared in the 2018 edition of *Circuit*, which offers 20 articles on key trends, issues and development that will impact associations in the coming year.



# CVBs: The Millennial Influence

## Advice for Planners Seeking Authenticity

By Cynthia Dial

Long gone are the days when a job well done is rewarded by an engraved plaque or even a gold watch. What's more, today's top achievers no longer consider a perfectly planned trip as an adequate "thank you" if its inclusions are simply visiting a place and seeing its sights. Nowadays, they want to experience all of the activities the destination offers and meet locals who can guide them to spots only residents know about.

Coupled with stats that millennials — representing more of today's workforce — value an experience over a commodity, planners get the message.

Groups seek authenticity. Underscoring the importance of the "a" word are the most recent findings of Eventbrite, one of the world's leading event technology platforms, which finds that four out of five millennials say attending live events

makes them feel more connected to other people, their community and the world.

So, the question might be how to make group travel intriguing, even irresistible — whether it's incorporating a locally inspired CSR into the program, using indigenous foods and beverages as a window into the region (through food-tasting tours, cooking classes or events with celebrity chefs) or having a backstage or behind-the-scenes experience? Seems the directive for planners is simple: Seek what is genuine, what is real, what is original — not what is manufactured.

"We work hard with all of the local host committees for our World Education Congress (WEC) in order to provide authentic experiences," says Melinda L. Burdette, CMP, HMCC, director of events at Meeting Professionals International. She proclaims the association's most popular behind-the-scenes experience was Freeman AV.

Explaining its favoritism with groups, Burdette says, "As meeting planners, we typically do not hear nor play the 'producer' role at our meetings." She names the following as some of the most successfully authentic WEC events: beach party in Atlantic City, the B-52's and Joan Jett concerts in Las Vegas and a Fast Lap opportunity with professional race car drivers at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

### INDIANAPOLIS

"What we're hearing from convention planners and attendees is that they want to experience what makes Indy unique as a destination and sets it apart from other major cities," shares Susie Townsend, senior vice president of Visitor Experience with Visit Indy. They want to know where the locals hang out, experience the neighborhoods, sample its way of life and eat local cuisine. But beyond these desires, Visit Indy's senior vice president expounds on the city's long history as a sports destination, citing such events as the Indy 500 ("more than a century old, it's the largest single-day sporting event on the planet"), the Super Bowl and numerous Final Fours and Olympic Trials. The tally is more than 400 national and international sporting events in recent decades.

Describing the Indianapolis Motor Speedway as a potential venue, Townsend says, "Think of the thrill of going more than 120 mph on an oval track — a bucket list experience that only a select few will ever have the opportunity to do." Having recently hosted a behind-the-scenes event at the speedway, the group was able to peek into garages of the drivers, learn how organizers keep more than 300,000 spectators safe and listen in on a drivers' meeting as the pros prepare for the race. Additional venue options include Lucas Oil Stadium (home of Super Bowl XLVI) and the NCAA's National Office, its Hall of Champions and Conference Center (all located in downtown Indy). Among Indianapolis' CSR availabilities are "Back on My Feet" (the opportunity to run with residents experiencing homelessness) and "Keep Indianapolis Beautiful," the planting of trees, beautification and revitalization of communities.

Of the meeting world's marriage with authenticity, Townsend says, "The terms experiential and authentic are now



Melinda L. Burdette, CMP, HMCC  
Director of Events, Meeting Professionals International, Dallas, TX

"We work hard with all of the local host committees for our World Education Congress in order to provide authentic experiences."

"The terms experiential and authentic are now a part of most DMOs' and corporate marketing departments' best practices. It is the age of storytelling, best told from a personal experience."



Susie Townsend  
Senior Vice President,  
Visitor Experience  
Visit Indy  
Indianapolis, IN

a part of most DMOs' and corporate marketing departments' best practices. It is the age of storytelling, best told from a personal experience."

With respect to generational influence, she doesn't attribute the drive for authenticity to millennials, but rather to a trend inspired by the desires of industry planners to take some risks, create additional value for the attendees and grow their events in a positive way.

Coming from a different perspective regarding the influence of millennials is Pamela S. Dallstream, CMP, CMM, director of education, Society of Critical Care Medicine (SCCM), who explains, "Since they traveled extensively with their parents, they already have an interest in new experiences, but want more than what was offered to their parents — they want something else, something different. Younger people attending the SCCM Congress are asking for more opportunities to experience the local culture during the meeting."

SCCM's upcoming February 17-20, 2019, event for 6,000 attendees in San Diego promises to be equally as inviting with VIP tours scheduled for the San Diego Zoo, San Diego Zoo Safari Park and the USNS Mercy hospital ship — venues Dallstream selected for their distinctively San Diego vibe.

### SAN JUAN

"It's back!" says Joel A. Dolci, CAE, of Puerto Rico. As president and CEO of the New York Society of Association Executives (NYSAE), he recently conducted its Five-Star Board Meeting on the Caribbean island. Described as the "association of associations" headquartered in the Tri-State region of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, NYSAE's members are full-time, paid chief executives and middle managers of trade associations, professional societies, voluntary organizations and other not-for-profit organizations and supplier firms.

"This is a group that needs five-star treatment," states Dolci. "The board is very influential and responsible for more than \$5.2 billion a year in meetings and conventions." Having been there before but concerned from news reports that post-Hurricane Maria's Puerto Rico might not be ready to



Pamela S. Dallstream  
Director of Education  
Society of Critical Care Medicine  
Mt. Prospect, IL

“Since (millennials) traveled extensively with their parents, they already have an interest in new experiences, but want more than what was offered to their parents.”

— serving up such options as a rum tasting, mixology class and bottle your own Bacardi. And for the active, there’s still adventures like rappelling a waterfall, zip lining through the jungle and rain forest and kayaking in a bioluminescent bay (ideally during a full moon).

“Puerto Rico is a place that will always guarantee high attendance,” says Vanessa Figueroa, destination support services director for Discover Puerto Rico. “We are a warm, diverse, energetic destination with superb service and top amenities. Many options are available from walking the trails of El Yunque, a refreshing swim in our clear-blue waters, tasting mofongo at a local restaurant or experiencing history as you walk the cobblestone streets of Old San Juan transporting you back to the 15th century.”

There are many factors that ensure a successful program in Puerto Rico. “Let’s start with our people,” says Figueroa. “We are genuinely friendly, heartfelt and service-oriented. Our services team is here to anticipate needs and assure that the attendee experience is a memorable one.”

Since his return, Dolci has fielded dozens of calls, as has his board, wanting to know the status of Puerto Rico. His answer: “Absolutely, no question, go to Puerto Rico — it’s ready, it’s open. In fact, my board didn’t want to come home.”

host meetings, the association president took these important decision-makers for a firsthand look. Here’s what greeted them: San Juan Marriott Resort and Stellaris Casino serves up an island-style welcome three nights of the week. Called “Authentically Puerto Rico,” the lobby entertainment showcases different island bands and shows. “Is this special?” Dolci asked. “Yes, it’s special for every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night!”

Still available are tours of Old San Juan, Fort San Cristóbal and Casa Bacardi. Located across the bay from Old San Juan and known as the world’s largest premium rum distillery, the Bacardi tour was a hit with the Five-Star Board Members

Puerto Rico’s San Juan Marriott Resort and Stellaris Casino is open for business meetings — and fun — after Hurricane Maria took her toll on the island.



Credit: San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino

## MONTREAL

“An authentic local experience usually incorporates something to do with culture, maybe something historic, something that’s special and unique to the city,” says Sue M. Dykema, CAE, executive director for the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS), Aesthetic Surgery Education & Research Foundation (ASERF) and the Society of Plastic Surgical Skin Care Specialists (SPSSCS).

When Dykema selected Montreal for the ASAPS/ASERF annual meeting, she incorporated the Canadian city’s uniqueness with a locally inspired cooking class, a Harricana workshop (a Montreal eco-lux brand that recycles furs into new creations) and Cirque du Soleil elements.

Along those lines, here are some made-in-Montreal options. Cirque Éloize teaches basic circus elements to groups through teambuilding components such as trampoline classes, aerial work on silks or hoops and juggling — followed by a show watching the real artists work. Ghost walks through Old Montreal are available year-round, though are most popular during Halloween.

On a foodie’s checklist, Montreal is recognized for its internationally celebrated restaurant scene: Michelin-star chef Joël Robuchon’s newest eatery, L’Atelier de Joël Robuchon, where diners are seated around an open-concept kitchen; Chef Helena Loureiro’s Portus 360, a revolving restaurant showcasing above-the-city views and featuring cuisine of her native Portugal to its walking food tours in the famous Jean-Talon Market; and a food truck scene for which Tourisme Montreal can help with the reservation process through the Quebec Food Truck Association.

Montreal’s downtown core has a vast range of accommodation choices — 16,000 rooms — 4,000 of which are linked directly to the Palais des Congrès (Convention Centre) via the brightly lit underground pedestrian network. Among these selections is the

## Detroit is Back!

Described as a city on the rise, Visit Detroit has a directive for planners and visitors alike: “Feel it. Embrace it. Discover it in everyone you meet. Sure, some things about The D are the same. We’re still a manufacturing town, but we’ve recently reinvented that. The city of makers is back, building something better, and the positive momentum will sweep you off your feet.”

Known as the Motor City and the home to Motown, Detroit’s history is legendary. Offering up innumerable distinctive venues and Detroit-inspired themes, here’s a bit about its past. It’s the birthplace of the Model T, headquarters for Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, Ford and General Motors, setting of the famous North American International Auto Show (which typically displays more than 500 vehicles and represents more than 50 worldwide companies and was attended by more than 800,000 this year) and the address of such historic auto baron dwellings as Fair Lane Estate (home of Henry and Clara Ford), the Edsel & Eleanor Ford House and Matilda Dodge Wilson’s Meadow Brook Hall. As the hometown of soul, rock, hip-hop and pop stars and icons including Diana Ross and Kid Rock, it’s little surprise that Detroit is also where Motown was founded by Berry Gordie Jr. in 1959. The Detroit Jazz Festival occurs annually, and among its attractions are the Motown Museum and United Sound Systems Recording Studios. Additional Motor City draws include the Automotive Hall of Fame and The Henry Ford (features such one-of-a-kind vehicles as JFK’s limo and Rosa Parks’ bus, as well as the possibility to see the assembly of a Ford F-150 on the Ford Rouge Factory Tour).

Beyond this colorful history is its diversity in the sports world arena, with equally colorful venues — from housing all four of its professional sports teams, including the Detroit Tigers (baseball), Detroit Lions (football), Detroit Red Wings (hockey) and Detroit Pistons (basketball), in a central location and all within walking distance of one another to the Garden Bowl, America’s oldest active bowling center.

With 17 metro Detroit companies making the Fortune 500 list, they include such



Home to 17 metro Fortune 500 companies, including General Motors headquarters (above), Detroit is a popular international meeting location.

notables as General Motors, Ford Motor Company, Dow Chemical, Whirlpool, Lear Corporation and Kellogg. Impressive in size, Metro Detroit covers nearly 2,000 square miles, is a major port connecting the Great Lakes to the Saint Lawrence Seaway and is an international destination, sharing a border with Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

In addition to Auto Baron Home Tours and Automotive Attractions and Museums, among its other group itinerary offerings are African-American Historical Sites (including such options as the First Congregational Church’s Underground Railroad Living Museum and Uncle Tom’s Cabin Historic Site), as well as an international outing, a Canada/Windsor Tour.

The bottom line for this metro area offering 36,000 hotel rooms (5,000 available downtown) and serving up such cultural enclaves as Mexicantown, Greektown, Hamtramck (Polish community), Corktown (on the National Register of Historic Places, it’s Detroit’s oldest neighborhood) and Midtown (home to 80 restaurants, 13 theaters, 12 galleries and eight museums) is impressive.

The D is back with all things different, distinctive and yet to be discovered. So, as its current ad campaign suggests — Detroit: It’s GO Time!

AC&F



Sue M. Dykema, CAE  
Executive Director  
American Society for Aesthetic  
Plastic Surgery, Aesthetic  
Surgery Education & Research  
Foundation, Society of Plastic  
Surgical Skin Care Specialists  
Garden Grove, CA

“When we are working with a convention and visitors bureau, we’re trying to find those things that you can’t necessarily find or book yourself. What we’re looking for are those unique opportunities and experiences that you can only get if you’ve got the right connections.”

recently reopened and newly renovated 950-room Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth, the city’s largest hotel and a historic icon that also offers 85,000 square feet of flexible function space (with a 4,300-square-foot outdoor terrace).

“When we are working with a convention and visitors bureau, we’re trying to find those things that you can’t necessarily find or book yourself,” says Dykema about her interest in local experiences. “What we’re looking for are those unique opportunities and experiences that you can only get if you’ve got the right connections — things you can’t just go online and book.”

Among this planner’s most exclusive experiences are a private home tour on Boston’s Beacon Hill and a New Orleans’ event in a 100-year-old antique shop known for its secret room of art and antiques (a venue so exclusive that one typically must be financially pre-qualified to gain entry).

#### MIAMI

“Greater Miami and the Beaches has long been known for its sunshine and shoreline, but what keeps attracting travelers is something much deeper,” says William D. Talbert III, CDME, president and CEO, Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau (GMCVB). “With so many cultures coexisting, Miami draws inspiration from all over the world in its dining, entertainment and artistic offerings. The reality is that all of these cultures overlap throughout its landscape, offering visitors the opportunity to enjoy a genuine Haitian meal in Little Haiti, sip a Cuban cafecito in Little Havana and admire captivating street art in the Wynwood neighborhood.”

Among Miami’s one-of-a-kind experiences are touring one of its almost 20 brewers to learn how some of its acclaimed craft beers are prepared, taking a dessert and chocolate decorating class (paired with wine, of course) in Little Havana’s Exquisito Chocolates and even joining a “hands-on” graffiti excursion of Wynwood, where participants tour and then paint their own murals.

Agreeing with Talbert’s assessment of Miami is a CAE-designated meeting planner with a Midwestern association management company who selected the city for a medical conference of approximately 900 physicians last May. “I would define an authentic local experience to be everything from the airport arrival to the atmosphere of the venue to the area’s attractions and its dining.”

She elaborates that the venue should encompass the culture known to the area and include activities and menu options that showcase it, adding that it’s very important to have a “taste” of the area at each reception and meal, if possible. Some attendees want to find the local experience in every aspect of the meeting, including social opportunities. “Most attendees are really looking to make the most out of their experience at a meeting. They want to go home and be able to tell a story.”

With respect to millennials, the association planner explains their constant quest for what’s genuine. “They want the

“With so many cultures coexisting, Miami draws inspiration from all over the world in its dining, entertainment and artistic offerings... All of these cultures overlap throughout its landscape.”



William D. Talbert III, CDME  
President and CEO  
Greater Miami Convention &  
Visitors Bureau  
Miami, FL

most authentic experience to share with family members and friends who are with them at the event — and those watching from social media.”

Her advice to CVBs: “When meeting planners request information about experiences that are unique to the area — don’t hold back. While something may seem out of the ordinary for that type of conference, the meeting planner could have a different perspective and think it is a great idea. Just put everything on the table that is out there to showcase the culture of your city! I would rather have more to choose from than not enough.”

“In today’s global tourism climate, we know that we must take advantage of what makes our destination unique,” says Talbert. “That is why in response to this demand the GMCVB launched ‘Found in Miami,’ an active domestic and international advertising and destination branding campaign that speaks to the destination’s authentic travel experiences.” AC&F



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# Planning Global Meetings

Convening in Destinations Outside of the U.S. Raises Educational Awareness

By Patrick Simms

**F**or growth-minded international associations, convening in new locations outside the United States is a key way to raise awareness of their educational offerings and, ultimately, gain new members across the world. It's also a way to serve international members by bringing education and networking opportunities to locations accessible to them. Thus, the convention planners for these associations are effectively charged with helping to build and maintain a global community of trade professionals.



“Going to these rest-of-the-world destinations is really part of our mission and vision of providing education around the world,” asserts Lisa Astorga, CMP, director of meetings with the International Society on Thrombosis and Haemostasis (ISTH). The ISTH’s convention currently alternates between the United States and Europe, and visits the rest of the world every fifth year. Upcoming international destinations include Melbourne in 2019, London in 2022 and Montreal in 2023. Destinations being considered for 2024 include South America, Asia and Africa.

Similarly, RIMS – The Risk Management Society holds its Risk Forum at a variety of international locales with the goal of creating “a community of risk professionals,” says Stuart Ruff-Lyon, CMP, DES, vice president, events and education. “RIMS has 10,000 members from about 60 different countries, and as we grow globally, we’ve seen the need for increased meeting and product development in our target regions. We’ve been creating regional Risk Forums to target different parts of the world. Right now, we do the forums in China, India, Latin America, the Middle East and Singapore.”

The education level at the forums, which usually draw around 300 participants, is naturally tailored to the local community. “For example, in North America, it’s a very high-level risk manager that exists, so we do a lot of our deep



Lisa Astorga, CMP  
Director of Meetings  
International Society on  
Thrombosis and Haemostasis  
Carrboro, NC

**“We may go from a North American city where we’re using three to four hotels to a city like Milan where we’re maybe getting 25 to 40 rooms in a hotel, and we may be looking at 40 different hotels.”**

dives. But abroad, we find it can be a much newer profession, for example in the Middle East or in China, and we’ve had to reconsider some of those deeper dives, longer format [sessions] as we build the profession in those markets.”

Of course, within a broad market like the Middle East or China, there will be numerous site possibilities. Just like domestic site selection, international site selection is informed by the city’s drawing power, the local meetings and business infrastructure, cost and space availability. As

to the first criteria, the ISTH has seen the value of choosing popular cities.

“For our meeting last year in Berlin, we just missed 10,000 attendees,” Astorga relates. “Part of why our numbers hit in Berlin, and in Dublin, as well, was the destination draw. We’ve just been increasing attendance year in and year out.

“We do anticipate probably a little lower attendance in Melbourne next year,” she adds. “But that is something everyone recognizes when you go to Australia based on the distance and the cost.”

For RIMS, the local business and government infrastructure also comes into play in city selection. “In the case of China, for example, the two choices were Shanghai and Beijing for us. But we felt strongly that Beijing was building the government relations that are necessary to our future success,” Ruff-Lyon explains. “Whereas in India, the city [choices] were down to New Delhi and Mumbai; Mumbai being more the business center. So we opted to have our meeting there.”

#### OTHER VIABLE OPTIONS

Sometimes, however, the ideal city in terms of drawing power and a robust business infrastructure is rather pricey for members and the association itself.

Fortunately, there are often viable second-tier options, just as there are domestically.

“Many U.S. associations are looking at second-tier destinations instead of cities like London or Paris, which are becoming so expensive and so booked up,” observes Cynthia Cortis, events director with SmithBucklin.

That congestion can impede the annual growth of a convention regarding its additional space needs. “Oftentimes, the more popular cities like London, Paris or Rome don’t have a lot of options right in the heart of downtown,” she says. “So a lot of associations are looking toward cities like Glasgow [instead of Edinburgh or London] and finding that’s a really attractive city that’s drawing a lot of groups now.”

Cortis also cites second-tier hot spots Brussels, Copenhagen, Lisbon, Prague, Toulouse and Zurich. They offer business specializations that will be advantageous for associations representing certain industries: For example, Toulouse is home to the Airbus headquarters, and Brussels and Zurich are financial hubs. And the local congress centers in these second-tier cities can be quite formidable, whether it’s Copenhagen’s Bella Center or Glasgow’s SEC Centre.

“Glasgow has done such a good job of building a convention center, putting a hotel package around it and then marketing their product,” Cortis notes. “So if you can’t get into Edinburgh or London or you can’t afford it, then Glasgow is a really good U.K. alternative.”

In selecting an international convention center, a little

care should be taken to ensure that the facility is suited to meetings, as well as exhibits — if, indeed, the convention will include educational sessions. “We think of congress centers as having trade show halls, but a lot of the larger venues in Europe will be almost all very large halls,” Cortis says. “So if you’re having an event that’s very education-focused, you have to make sure you are looking at a true congress center as opposed to a trade fair.”

Planners should also be clear up front on the service package the congress centers are offering. “International congress centers will say they like to have things inclusive, so their exclusive providers are much larger. They’ll include basic AV, for example, and you really don’t have an option to exclude that,” Astorga points out.

The exact service provided, however, will differ across centers in Dublin, Milan, Melbourne, Berlin and so on. “They’ll say it includes labor. Well, what are the hours of the labor, and what is the level of the technician? So that’s one thing we find very challenging to navigate,” she explains.

Also challenging is the higher cost of meetings in many international congress centers compared to U.S. convention centers. “I think it’s a whole different business model because many of these centers are privately owned and maybe don’t have that financial support from the city,” Astorga suggests. That’s where the second-tier cities can cushion the financial blow.

“We just finished a program in Prague,” Cortis says, “and costs were substantially lower than what we had paid at our U.S.-based show a couple months earlier.” To control costs, Cortis recommends planners file for value-added tax (VAT), which ranges from about 18 percent to 25 percent across most European countries. Planners can then reclaim the amount paid on F&B, meeting rooms and more.

Negotiation can also help to improve costs, and certain associations have the advantage of representing industries that are attractive to cities and congress centers. A case in point is ISTH’s upcoming meeting in London, one of the more expensive cities in Europe.

“London knows that the medical sector is a huge congress generator, and it’s important for any city to bring them in,” says Astorga. Even if that leverage doesn’t result in lowering costs, it can result in the city and its venues going the extra mile in terms of service.

Cortis has found, however, that sometimes association business does not carry as much weight with European venues as the corporate market. “As more associations do go to Europe, they are becoming more familiar with [that market],” she explains.

Currently, hoteliers’ level of familiarity with association business is not ideal, she has found. “When they pick up

the phone and it’s Pfizer or American Express or Microsoft, that’s something they can relate to and then they have a trust behind that [in regards to the group’s] financial [responsibility]. When they pick up the phone and it’s the Association of XX, they don’t know that. So you may have to work a little bit harder to explain to them who you are, give them some history, give them contacts of some other international shows that you’ve done and be prepared to pay deposits. And, it’s very rare that you don’t end up coming to an agreement.”

**“I think we do the best job we possibly can in building partnerships with people to ensure that we’re delivering a stellar event that is relevant to that market.”**



Stuart Ruff-Lyon, CMP, DES  
Vice President, Events and Education  
RIMS – The Risk Management Society  
New York, NY

There can be a negotiation advantage in working with a global hotel chain that the association has a history of booking, as opposed to a local chain or independent property. But in many European cities, partnering with the latter kind of property often can’t be avoided when many hotels are needed. The properties tend to be smaller, so large groups can’t simply book a few “big box” Marriott or Hilton hotels, for example.

“We may go from a North American city where we’re using three to four hotels to a city like Milan where we’re maybe getting 25 to 40 rooms in a hotel, and we may be looking at 40 different hotels,” Astorga explains.

Ruff-Lyon actually prefers the indigenous properties for the RIMS’ Risk Forums, which are hotel-based programs. “When we’re going into new markets and targeting people from those markets, we’ve been exploring brands that are unique to those countries,” he says. “So, our China event was not held in a traditional Marriott or Hilton property. And, our inaugural event in India was not held in a U.S.-based property, either. I don’t think this [practice] has any data behind it, but we just feel that we should be in brands that the locals already know and are comfortable with, particularly with China and India.”

## VIRTUAL TOURS VS. SITE VISITS

Although Ruff-Lyon's team does not do site visits for international programs, they receive invaluable assistance from RIMS' local partners. "We get a lot of pictures taken from hotel staff, and we have our local partners do that on our behalf sometimes," he says. "For example, the Mumbai program is at the ITC Grand Central Mumbai, and that's a brand that we would not be aware of typically in the U.S. It's unique to the Indian market. And being able to have our local partners suggest it, visit it on our behalf and give us a 'thumbs-up' goes a long way toward our comfort level and reassurance."



Cynthia Cortis  
Events Director  
SmithBucklin  
Chicago, IL

**"Europeans are not as rigid about meal times.... We'll have lunches a little later and longer, but we'll also have grab-n-go food throughout the day. That way, we can kind of be on everyone's time zone."**

The virtual tours that many hoteliers offer can also be reassuring for planners unable to visit the properties beforehand. Or a planning team can fashion its own virtual tour. "For our smaller programs, what we have found very valuable is using some of our local partners who will go into a hotel and FaceTime us live as they do a walkthrough of the facility," Cortis says.

SmithBucklin relies heavily on its network of local DMC partners for international programs, she adds. "They're our eyes and legs on the ground. So they can help us with everything, from getting our customs cleared to letting us know that there is a religious holiday next week."

Local partners are, in fact, cultural resources and can help an association design a culturally appropriate program. "We definitely don't take the same meeting we could do in Cincinnati and plop it down in India," says Ruff-Lyon. "It goes through a lot of finessing and work, and (we receive) input from our local advisory group to ensure that the education and the event format that we're offering to people is truly right for that market."

A major aspect is the timing of the sessions: Early start

times are not ideal for many international markets, for example. "Our meetings in the U.S. can start very early, sometimes as early as 7:30 in the morning; whereas, in some other parts of the world, we know that we have to start at 10 a.m.," says Ruff-Lyon. "So, we have to alter the start time quite a bit based on the local market."

In addition, more time should be allotted to lunch for European programs. "Lunches are longer and more leisurely," Cortis observes. In general, "Europeans are not as rigid about meal times. We have had a lot of success with having F&B offerings throughout the day. We'll have lunches a little later and longer, but we'll also have grab-n-go food throughout the day. That way, we can kind of be on everyone's time zone."

The more casual approach to meals is somewhat paralleled in the less formal approach to sessions that Europeans tend to prefer. "We're finding that Europeans enjoy more panels and interaction" as opposed to the "talking head"-style presentations, Cortis says.

She also finds that European attendees are becoming more accustomed to audience polling. "They're still getting used to it, but they're definitely enjoying that aspect of having more participation in the sessions."

When it comes to networking events, local attendees can certainly enjoy local entertainment, as long as it's a quality performance. So a planner need not be concerned that guests will lose interest in a kind of act they're already familiar with.

"We try to stay away from the overly stereotyped entertainment and just get something that's local," says Cortis. "Not only do the Americans like it, but even the locals really enjoy a well-done flamenco show when you're in Barcelona."

Interestingly, cultural considerations have led RIMS to eschew its post-session networking events for Risk Forums in the Middle East. "We've found that it's sort of unnecessary because of the timing of the day there and how they like to operate. They get to work much earlier, and they tend to go home and don't drink alcohol," Ruff-Lyon says. "We were finding that our networking receptions were attended by our U.S. and European members more than the local members."

The discovery was among the "lessons learned" when designing programs for a variety of international markets. But overall, "I think we do the best job we possibly can in building partnerships with people to ensure that we're delivering a stellar event that is relevant to that market," he concludes.

Such events will ultimately build the worldwide risk management community RIMS envisions and is already developing, thanks to its international meetings. AC&F

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# Keep the Message Going

Sponsorship Trends Are Leaning Toward Experiences Rather Than Branded Items

By Patrick Simms

**T**he experiential trend seems to be reaching every corner of the meetings industry, including conventions held by associations. The underlying idea is that attendees want meetings to deliver more than a series of “talking head” presentations.

They want interaction with speakers, engaging visuals, hands-on encounters with products, dynamic networking receptions in memorable locales and so on.

Convention sponsors, too, want experiences. More specifically, they want the attendee to associate their company, brand or product with an experience at the event. The rationale is that, via experiences, sponsors make a stronger impression on the attendee than they do via a branded knickknack, for example.



Live demos, such as virtual reality, are popular for sponsorship. Using the sponsor's equipment, there is promotional value beyond just a logo display.

Whether it's branded mugs, pens, bags, lanyards or hand sanitizers, novelties “are kind of trending out of the picture,” observes Megan Ogden, CMP, director, meetings and events with the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).

“Not only are sponsors not as interested in those items as they were in the past, but it also takes a lot of staff time on our end to [deliver them]. You're working with a supplier to get pricing and samples in, and working on getting them branded and shipped. Attendees put them away and, oftentimes, they get lost. So we're trying to move toward more of an experience that's content-related” as a sponsorship opportunity.

The lower price-point sponsorship items that seem to be maintaining their popularity are those tied in a more integral way to the convention. While not “experiences,” conference

apps, Wi-Fi and charging stations are certainly facilitating and enabling the convention experience — more so than many knickknacks do — and thus, put the sponsor's name in a more relevant context.

In this vein, Heather M. Seasholtz, CMP, director, meetings and events with Talley Management Group, Inc., relates a case where a Talley meeting planner realized that a client's meeting room was always cold and “as silly as it is, she put blankets as a sponsorship item on her prospectus to fill the need for the attendee, and then the attendee has the blanket with the sponsor's logo on it to take home with them.”

In that scenario, the sponsor became associated with meeting a pressing need for the attendee, an effect that a branded pen, for example, would not achieve. In another case, personalized centerpieces at a Talley client's convention dinner were offered as sponsorship items. These items “really



The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) provided a sponsored experience to attendees at its 2018 Conference + Expo in New Orleans.

showcased their sponsored table vs. just having a logo and a tent card on the table instead,” Seasholtz explains. “It’s something that doesn’t cost much, but has a big impact.”

In theory, a positive impact tied to the sponsor results in a positive memory about their brand and products. And the more experiential the sponsored element is, the more impactful. NACE has seen success offering sponsorship of its Campfire Conversations, which are informal discussions of hot topics that allow for both learning and networking.

“We worked with the hotel to have an afternoon break that was tied to the campfire theme, and they served s’mores and hot chocolates,” Ogden relates. “We were able to get our marshmallows branded [by Platinum-level sponsor Chevron]. Attendees loved that break.”

NACE is also reformatting its awards dinner from the traditional onstage presentation of the awards to a series of 20-minute SmartTalks by award winners discussing their projects. This more engaging kind of recognition event will also be available for sponsorship.

Bundling lower and higher price-point sponsorship items is a common practice that allows the association more flexibility in meeting varied sponsorship interests.

“One of our organizations does what’s called an

**“If we can put the logo on an app, email or website and link to their site, that gives more impact than just [displaying] the logo throughout the meeting space.”**

Heather M. Seasholtz, CMP  
Director, Meetings and Events  
Talley Management Group, Inc.  
Mount Royal, NJ

Engagement Sponsorship, which is a bundling of three different items: the conference app, the Wi-Fi and a reception,” says Seasholtz. “We’re also trying to bundle smaller price-point items to create something more impactful.”

Essentially, the potential sponsor is asked, “What are you looking for? What can we create for you? We’re not confined by what’s in the prospectus,” she says.

Educational events are also meaningful sponsorship items. One of Talley’s clients, a hematology group that is meeting next March, is seeing strong sponsorship interest in its satellite symposia, Seasholtz reports.

“The satellite symposia sold out within minutes of opening our sponsorship,” she says. “In fact, we’re trying to rearrange

our schedule now to create more satellite symposium opportunities because of how quickly they sold.”

### EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Naturally, experiential education — arguably the most compelling kind — is of great interest to many sponsors. Julie Ichiba, director, professional relations and development with the Association Management Center, has seen the live demos at the Hematology/Oncology Pharmacy Association (HOPA) annual conference become popular sponsorship items. These sessions use the sponsor’s equipment, and thus, have promotional value beyond a mere logo display, for example. A new kind of experience cropping up at many conventions is virtual reality (VR), which can also serve an educational role.

Ichiba notes that VR experiences are one of HOPA’s newer sponsorship opportunities. The technology is presented as pain management therapy that puts the user in tranquil settings that distract him or her from pain, as an alternative to opioids. Other kinds of leading-edge tech elements that can be sponsored include interactive video walls and mobile app games (e.g., those that promote networking and booth visitation). Sponsors that want to position their company as avant-garde may be especially interested in associating themselves with these technologies.

On the more recreational side, the coloring wall in the attendee lounge at the HOPA convention is another newer sponsorship item for the organization. “Some of the nursing associations are really into that,” says Ichiba. “They’ll pick a theme or something specific to their association, and during the breaks, sometimes they’ll have an exhibit hall or an attendee lounge where everybody will go and participate.”

Even photo booths can be considered experiential and memorable, and Seasholtz has seen sponsors take interest in them. “You think it’s kind of cheesy, but people actually love going in and having their photo taken,” she says. “And the frame of the photo can feature the sponsor’s logo with the meeting dates — something that will always be on the attendee’s desk.”

When branding an event such as a reception, the visibility of the sponsor’s name and logo is, of course, critical to their ROI. The visibility can certainly go beyond the conference booklet, signage, tablecloths, napkins and other physical media. Digital media, such as the convention website and app, can greatly enhance visibility.

“If we can put the logo on an app, email or website and link to their site, that gives more impact than just [displaying] the logo throughout the meeting space,” Seasholtz says. “We try to do a showcase email about our sponsors, an email going out just about them.”

These digital placements make ROI measurement easy for the sponsor, via tracking click-throughs. “If the conference app

**“Not only are sponsors not as interested in (branded pens, mugs, etc.) as they were in the past, but ... attendees put them away and, oftentimes, they get lost. So we’re trying to move toward more of an experience that’s content-related” as a sponsorship opportunity.**



Megan Ogden, CMP  
Director, Meetings and Events  
National Association of Colleges and Employers  
Bethlehem, PA

is sponsored, it’s really key to get the analytics from the app company you’re using,” Ogden advises. “They should be able to provide [data on] which screens were shown, how many times, etc.” As far as measuring ROI for sponsored events, attendance is one barometer, as is Twitter commentary on the event.

Typically in the higher echelon of sponsorship opportunities is actual face time with the attendees. Some associations offer these opportunities in a more limited way.

“As conference organizers and conference hosts, sometimes you’re a little uncertain if you want to have a specific face-to-face and allow what’s going to be a sales presentation, which is what you’re usually worried about,” Ogden comments. “Something that we’re doing that’s new is instead of giving the sponsors a microphone, we’re allowing the sponsor to show a video that we approve in advance.”

The video will be played during lunchtime on a loop, or for up to a minute and 30 seconds before a keynote for general session sponsors. “We prefer the video format so we have some control,” Ogden explains. “We can make sure it fits within our time parameters for that specific event, so you’re not having someone on stage talking who you just can’t get off the stage, and they kind of start going rogue in their presentation.”

Not all associations share these concerns, of course, and some will offer companies the opportunity to present to attendees as part of a sponsorship package. HOPA’s Platinum-level sponsorship includes a 45-minute presentation, for example.

“It’s not commercial, but they have the opportunity to talk about something disease-state specific, such as metastatic breast cancer,” says Ichiba.

HOPA’s Industry Relations Council program gives sponsors truly robust face-time opportunities, with Associate, Executive and Premier tiers. At the Premier level, sponsors can host an advisory board with 10 to 15 HOPA members representing top companies. They can also meet with attendees at receptions, board meetings and an annual summit. Opportunities like these basically provide “access to the members and



**“Some of the nursing associations are really into (virtual reality). They’ll pick a theme or something specific to their association, and during the breaks, sometimes they’ll have an exhibit hall or an attendee lounge where everybody will go and participate.”**

Julie Ichiba  
Director, Professional Relations  
and Development  
Association Management Center  
Chicago, IL

The finalized prospectus for the convention should offer numerous opportunities, supplemented by some unlisted offerings. “Depending on what your revenue goals are, you need to find a balance between too many opportunities that the sponsor can see, and some opportunities that might be in your pocket for the potential sponsor that is looking at the list and nothing is of interest to them,” Ogden explains. “I think it’s also important to have some unique opportunities you can present to a potential sponsor or a past sponsor.”

Typically, past sponsors are given first choice of the items, and then it’s a matter of promoting the opportunities by featuring the prospectus on the convention website combined with networking and outreach.

“As an association management company, we may not always have the relation with corporate support, but people on our clients’ boards do because they’re either speaking for corporations or working with them,” Seasholtz explains. “We actually work with our boards, as well, and ask, ‘Do you know of anybody that may be interested in sponsoring our meeting? If you can do an introduction for us, we’ll take it from there.’ Sometimes we just need help getting the door open.”

Usually, emailing a potential corporate sponsor’s marketing department is ineffective, she adds. Cross-promoting lists of opportunities with sister associations may be another option. The small hematology group that Talley represents even attends large conferences in their industry to try to source corporate sponsorships.

The timing of the promotion is also key. Talley begins the sponsorship outreach at least nine months out, and typically, a year out for end-of-year conventions. “Know your calendar. If you’re meeting at the end of November, you don’t want to start marketing for it in January, only because budgets have already been set the previous year,” Seasholtz advises.

While there are always new and intriguing ideas in the sponsorship realm, the “big sellers” in the current market are experiential in nature. Sponsors want to make an impact, not simply remind attendees of their presence in the industry. A sponsored experience fulfills that goal, whether the experience is a networking event, live demonstration, hot topic discussion or a technological element, such as virtual reality, video walls and mobile app games.

Face time with attendees is also prized, whether via a pre-recorded video, webinar, live presentation, reception or some other medium. The planner or sponsorship salesperson can make these opportunities even more attractive by bundling them in different ways with lower-priced items and by offering year-round opportunities to connect with members, if possible. Making an impact at the annual convention is great, but why not also “keep the message going” in between conventions, as Seasholtz puts it.

AC&F

attendees,” she says. “The sponsors want face time to really pick their brains.”

According to Ichiba, face-time sponsorship opportunities are getting to be standard in the medical association meeting sector. “The average Industry Relations Council may include five to 10 companies instead of the 25 to 30 companies in our case. They’re running similar benefits but maybe not to the same level,” she explains.

#### YEAR-ROUND VALUE

What is more, the Industry Relations Council program is year-round. Sponsors can do webinars for members and one-on-one meetings. Sponsorship packages that deliver year-round value are attractive to companies, even if the opportunities are not as robust as those HOPA’s Industry Relations Council provides.

Seasholtz notes that sponsors “want to keep the message going after the meeting. So, we may put their logo in an email blast every other month. That costs us nothing to do if we’re going to be sending an email anyway, but it provides them visibility that could be valuable to them.”

Sponsorship ideas like these seem simple, but devising them along with packages of different opportunities takes forethought. “We try to brainstorm what’s new and exciting, what’s the need that’s not being fulfilled right now that we could get sponsorship for,” says Seasholtz. Staying abreast of similar associations’ sponsorship tactics can also be fruitful.

NACE staff both research and attend those conferences to keep their finger on the pulse of sponsorship trends, Ogden notes. They also keep tabs on how well the offerings on the prospectus are selling, in order to inform future decisions.

“We meet as a team with the sponsorship salesperson, who (then) meets with each sponsor post-event to get the feedback. Then, we look to see which sponsored opportunities were not sold, and the frequency with which they are not being sold. So, let’s put something in their place that might sell.”

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# Contract Negotiations

## Planners Can Bargain if They Know the Value of Their Business and Show Flexibility

By Derek Reveron

**N**egotiating with hotels and convention centers has never been a planner's favorite activity. The task is even tougher nowadays, thanks to a seller's market and high demand that allows venues to be more selective and less flexible due to increased options for securing group business.

To get the best deals, planners must raise their negotiating game by thinking like sales managers, knowing the value of their business and being more flexible with dates, rates, meeting space and other logistics.

However, negotiating acumen among planners ranges from seasoned, tough bargainers to those who accept first offers without seeking concessions. Lacking good bargaining skills can lead to even greater expenses for meetings and conventions.

While the seller's market is most notable among hotels, convention centers are also driving harder bargains on contracts, called facility licenses. Negotiating with the centers is crucial because they are the heart of association meetings.

### CONVENTION CENTERS

Bargaining with convention centers can be tricky because they are typically managed and owned by municipalities and follow pricing guidelines with several goals in mind. Centers seek to earn revenue on every bit of meeting and exhibit space, boost ancillary spending by attendees and increase expenditures by groups on room blocks and other services citywide.

According to Jennifer Collins, CMP, president and CEO of Silver Spring, Maryland-based JDC Events, which plans meetings, conferences and trade shows, "Convention centers are often impacted by local municipalities in their operations and cost structure. This can add an additional layer in affordability and approval for meeting professionals, who are faced with having to do more with less. Centers have different fees and unique requirements in staffing, insurance, security and other areas not found in hotels. However, this does not mean that a center may not be in your best interest."

It's important to remember that convention centers and hotels have different sources of revenue and profit.

According to Terri Woodin, CMP, vice president of marketing and global meeting services for Meeting Site Resource, "Hotels make their money on guest rooms because, on average, 80 percent of the room rate is profit.

Convention centers do not have rooms, so they must charge rental for every square foot to pay for the building. If you are in a city with unions, it can add up to 30 percent to overall costs. Keep in mind when working with centers that they have different requirements for what you can do and at what costs."

### SURPRISE CHARGES

Convention centers also negotiate contracts to earn revenue from a variety of ancillary costs such as parking, attendants, crowd control and security. Planners have long complained that convention centers have a reputation for nickel-and-diming planners for ancillary charges and undisclosed fees.

To avoid surprises, Woodin suggests the following: "Be sure that all fees are disclosed

**"List all charges in the contract so there are no surprises later. Achieving this level of granularity can be tedious up front but can save a lot of headache and budget overages in the long run."**

Christine Hilgert, CMP  
Senior Vice President of Meeting Planning  
Meeting Expectations  
Atlanta, GA

up front and ask what else could potentially be charged. Some CVBs and hotels have marketing budgets that can help offset rentals at city convention centers, so you need to ask about these promotions, says Woodin."

Also, some hotels will often give part of the room rate back to offset costs.

In addition, says Woodin, centers may provide discounts during less busy periods — January, February, March, July and August. Large citywide conventions that destinations covet are most likely to get the biggest concessions.

Convention center contracts tend to be lengthy and confusing, so patiently read the fine print and ask questions, especially about costs that may not be included.

Ask that the agreement have a clause

stating that you will not be responsible for any fees or surcharges not outlined in the contract.

### REACH OUT TO CVBS

Christine Hilgert, CMP, senior vice president of meeting planning at Atlanta-based Meeting Expectations, an association and event management company, offers this advice for getting the lowest possible rates and ancillary charges from convention centers: "Work with CVBs to help the center and ho-



Jennifer Collins, CMP  
President and CEO  
JDC Events  
Silver Spring, MD

**"If you have hosted a particular meeting or event previously, you should have real data on how much spend is realistic. This figure will be your negotiating starting point even though the property will have their own internal minimum."**

tels see your business as a package and not two or more separate contracts or pieces of business. The CVB and/or hotel may be able to help offset center costs with hospitality contributions or destination incentives."

In addition, Hilgert continues, "Discuss potential ancillary costs at the time of contracting. Also, request discounts on F&B (coffee and tea, prepackaged items based on consumption, customized menus, waiver of small group function fees), audio-visual, etc. List all charges in the contract so there are no surprises later. Achieving this level of granularity can be tedious up front but can save a lot of headache and budget overages in the long run."

Lastly, keep this in mind. "Each convention center serves its own city in a different way. Some are loss leaders that exist to support local hotels, and some are the economic drivers to bring conventions to their city," says

Hilgert. "Each center is different just as each hotel is different."

### STRATEGIES FOR HOTELS

Negotiate strategically and know how hotels earn money on meetings. Hotels bargain based on room nights and F&B, the properties' two highest profit centers. Sleeping rooms account for around 70 to 75 percent of profit, and F&B comprises about 25 to 30 percent. Some hotels may lower meeting space costs if F&B and/or sleeping rooms reach a certain dollar amount.

Planners, even those offering highly desired association citywides, shouldn't give facilities added clout by revealing their budgets up front. Sales managers tend to use the numbers as a starting point for negotiations and offer standard rates or higher to meet their profit targets. However, sharing the budget with a trusted property that has provided value in the past may help negotiations. Even then, provide figures at the right time during bargaining to improve chances of getting the best rates.

Answer the question, "What is your budget?" strategically, especially if it comes early during negotiations. One possible response is, "We are still finalizing our budget."

Woodin shares this strategy: "When a hotel asks for the room rate budget, I respond by saying the market drives the rates, and I don't know what's happening in your market with room compression due to citywides, compression within your hotel due to business on the books, how the pattern affects what you already have, the rooms-to-meeting space ratio and revenue management rates. I then ask for the best rates given these revenue management parameters."

Woodin takes a different approach for groups receiving a per diem, which often includes associations.

"Then, by all means, that is driving where you can go and start the conversation that way," says Woodin. "Otherwise, planners typically back into the rate-budget discussion based on where they need to be and what dates they need. If you are flexible, let the sales manager know your date and pattern

of flexibility so they can shift you to the best rates available."

Being aware of a hotel's meeting space-to-rooms ratio may help reduce meeting space fees.

"Hotels have different ratios that are used to determine the appropriate amount of meeting space based on the number of guest rooms that will be needed," says Collins. "Essentially, hotels want to avoid having a significant number of guest rooms with no meeting space to sell. So, if there is an equitable ratio, then this factor in conjunction with the amount of F&B you will bring to the property often will result in the waiver of at least some meeting space fees. However, it's important to know the F&B minimum as each property will be different."

### HISTORY HELPS

Showing a track record of meeting or exceeding room block commitments can be an effective bargaining tool because it shows reliability as a source of revenue and helps hotels better forecast room inventory.

According to Collins, "Planners can help venues understand the value of their business by providing three years of meeting history that includes meeting dates, the number of attendees, cities and hotels used, guest room pickup per night, room rates, meeting agendas and F&B details. The more transparent meeting professionals can be about history, the better it will help fuel negotiations."

Also include spending on spas, restaurants, bars and onsite entertainment. Use strong meeting history as leverage to bolster weaker areas of an RFP.

Meeting history for F&B is crucial. "This is another area where it's important to know your history," says Collins. "If you have hosted a particular meeting or event previously, you should have real data on how much spend is realistic. This figure will be your negotiating starting point even though the property will have their own internal minimum."

Collins recommends that planners who met at a hotel the previous year consider negotiating that year's F&B pricing. She also advises planners to "work with the hotel to

design menu offerings that fall within a certain price range or explore conference center venues that offer a complete meeting package, which is a daily packaged rate including such items as meeting room, select meal functions, breaks, select audio-visual, etc."

Also consider designing menus based on a group's budget. Focus on items that are less expensive and take less time to prepare. Include special dietary needs.

Another option: Research other groups that are meeting at the hotel at the same time and consider sharing menus, which allows meals to be ordered in bulk and saves money. Don't commit to early and high F&B minimums, and try to provide guarantees on the last possible cutoff date. Always request a discount on menu pricing and service charges.

### ATTRITION ALERT

Negotiating favorable attrition rates is always thorny because penalties vary, and planners don't control how many attendees

**"Planners typically back into the rate-budget discussion based on where they need to be and what dates they need. If you are flexible, let the sales manager know your date and pattern of flexibility so they can shift you to the best rates available."**



Terri Woodin, CMP  
Vice President of Marketing and  
Global Meeting Services  
Meeting Site Resource  
Breckenridge, CO

book rooms in reserved blocks. Other factors include an event's total value, the number of rooms reserved and meeting history.

Clauses for attrition typically mandate that a planner guarantees guests will fill a set percentage of rooms in a reserved block by a certain date or pay a fee for unbooked rooms. For example, a 15 percent attrition rate means that planner guarantees guests will book at least 85 percent of rooms in the block.

# AN **ALL-NEW** PERSPECTIVE ON MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Knowing attendee booking history with room blocks, as well as non-block hotels is critical.

Collins explains: "For instance, do participants tend to book late or early? Is the event required or voluntary, etc.? These factors and others can influence how you approach attrition negotiations. For instance, if it's a mandatory event, negotiating a lower attrition slip-page of 10 percent six months out might be possible. But it most likely won't work if you won't know the number of participants until closer to the meeting date."

Woodin suggests the following tactics for negotiating attrition rates.

"Cutoff dates are typically 30 days and, often, planners prefer 21 days," says Woodin. "If you have strong history on attrition to back up why 21 days works best for both parties, then you can support why you need 21 days. If you have a strong history of room pick-up at 90 to 95 percent and you ask for 20 percent attrition rate to reduce your contract risk, then the hotel understands that you are sharing the risk and you are likely to pick up the difference, so they can manage around your block to accept others with hopes of selling out each night."

Also consider negotiating waiver of attrition fees should the hotel sell out over the group's dates.

"Many planners use 100 percent as the guide for instituting this clause," says Collins. "However, perhaps you can consider taking the average of the hotel's occupancy over a period of time, which could potentially reduce the rate under 100 percent."

In addition, remember that hotels usually base attrition calculations on lost revenue, which is usually higher than lost profit. Negotiate loss based on lost profit, which is defined as gross revenue minus expenses.

Also ask that total room nights, not rooms per night, be the basis for attrition calculation. Finally, request that the property do a post-meeting audit to calculate the number of attendees who booked with hotels outside the room block. Use the figure to negotiate down attrition penalties.

The seller's market can create a mismatch

between planners, who negotiate periodically, and sales managers, who do it every day.

That's why it's crucial that planners be savvy enough to negotiate the best deals possible.

## NEGOTIATING TIPS

Contact the local CVB because it usually has information about other meetings held at convention centers and hotels that will help demonstrate the value of your meeting.

If possible, provide a staffer or two to assist convention center employees with basic duties for a meeting in exchange for discounts.

Don't give an ultimatum because it won't work. Taking a hard line forces convention center and hotel salespeople to make a fast decision, which typically doesn't favor planners.

Don't yield to pressure to review and sign a contract in a short period of time.

Stick to the amount of time needed for you and others in your organization to review the offer and decide. If salespeople show no flexibility, then consider another property.

As a rule of thumb, don't start negotiations with a property if the meeting cost is more than 20 percent higher than your budget. It's unlikely that a property will drop its initial offer by enough to make a deal.

When securing a discount in one area, such as meeting space, make sure the property doesn't overcompensate in another area, like food and beverage.

Don't readily agree to the usual complimentary room ratio. Typically, the ratio is one free room to every 50 rooms booked but aim for something in the 1:40 range.

Research the rates of a handful of hotels and use the information at strategic times to mention that a competitor is charging less for a desired service.

It's a seller's market, making it more difficult for planners to find the dates they want at their desired properties because the demand for group business has been rising.

Hotel and convention salespeople are more willing to hold the line during negotiations. But planners still have some bargaining clout if they know the value of their business, believe that nothing is too small to negotiate and show flexibility at the appropriate time. AC&F



All-New Walt Disney World Dolphin Lobby

The Walt Disney World Dolphin lobby has undergone a \$12 million re-design, the final stage of a \$150 million renovation project, the largest makeover in the resort's history. It has 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 331,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, 86 meeting rooms, and 2,270 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.



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Harrah's is a popular resort for many meeting planners, whether it be the Las Vegas location (shown) or the Lake Tahoe property.

# The Best of Nevada

## It's Not Just All About Las Vegas Anymore

By Christine Loomis

When planners think of meeting in Nevada, they typically think Las Vegas — with good reason. It's one of the most well-known cities in the world, an urban cornucopia of meeting space and inspiring entertainment, not to mention superb dining. Yet, Reno-Tahoe — at the edge of the towering Sierra Nevada — offers its own brand of inspiration and should be on every planner's Nevada go-to list.

### LAS VEGAS

With members from 43 countries, good airlift is a priority for the Aircraft Electronics Association (AEA), which held its annual convention and trade show at **MGM Grand** earlier this year, drawing 1,752 attendees. This was the second time the group met there, with both meetings very successful, according to Debra McFarland, AEA's executive vice president.

McFarland says close proximity to the airport is another plus, along with the fact that the group has everything it needs under one roof. "We can have our general sessions, breakout training classes, social functions and our exhibit

hall at one location. That saves time and money by not having to bus attendees from hotels to meetings and exhibits."

Additionally, she notes, the lodging is excellent, and the wide range of restaurants appeals to all budgets and palates.

McFarland readily admits that there are many hotel options in Las Vegas that receive high marks from groups, but for her, "it's the people at MGM Grand that make this a first-class operation. From the top down, they are working with you and for you. It's nice to have the hotel on 'your side.' Never once did I feel I had asked a stupid question and always received quick responses to calls and emails," she says.

"The MGM meeting staff understands the pressures a meeting planner is under; they truly team up with you to help with budgets, meeting needs, special events — have you seen their entertainment warehouse? OMG! — and basically make you look like a superstar to your attendees and, in my case, my board of directors!"

Specifically, she adds, "It's my salesperson, my convention services manager and my catering manager — Crystal

Terwilliger, Lynda Posgay and Diane O'Brien. I made sure when I signed my second contract that I was assigned the same staff. They're team players who make sure every detail is done to perfection."

McFarland says her events included pool parties on-site both years, which were highly successful. Additionally, "Audio-visual was top-of-the-line and always ready to help with general session openings and uplighting at the parties. Catering offered unique options — not just off a pre-printed list — and worked with me to create the perfect menus, from small receptions to parties for more than 800."

Although the hotel was in the middle of a major construction project this year, McFarland says the team worked with her to minimize impact. "The entrance into our exhibit was an alley of sorts, where all the HVAC systems were. They put up greenery and planted flowers to make it into a beautiful garden-looking area — I seriously doubt my attendees even realized that this was not the normal entry. The hotel also provided extra staff to direct attendees through the construction area," she says.

To planners considering the MGM Grand, McFarland says, "You have access to some of the most caring and thoughtful individuals that I've had the pleasure to work with, and I've been doing this for 41 years. It's not every hotel that treats the hardworking planning staff to unexpected treats during the day. My staff felt so appreciated and pampered."

Beyond that, she says, "Go in understanding that the hotel can't give everything away for free, yet there could be areas of cost that could be adjusted to help you stay within your budget. Let's face it, a happy attendee means everyone is going to be happy!"

Earlier this year, Monica Dozier brought 2,000 domestic and international attendees of the Corporate Legal Operations Consortium (CLOC) to **Bellagio Las Vegas** with equal success.

"Most of the attendees are lawyers or professionals in the legal industry," CLOC's head of marketing says. "The attendees are well-traveled and have high expectations when attending the CLOC Institute. Bellagio does half the work for us in terms of creating a professional atmosphere the moment our attendees arrive."

CLOC has chosen Bellagio because of its five-star service and

**"The MGM meeting staff understands the pressures a meeting planner is under; they truly team up with you to help with budgets, meeting needs, special events — have you seen their entertainment warehouse? OMG!"**



Debra McFarland  
Executive Vice President  
Aircraft Electronics Association  
Lee's Summit, MO

five-star accommodations," Dozier says. "We keep our meetings in Las Vegas because of ease of access, cost and value. We keep coming back because of feedback from our attendees that they love it at Bellagio."

Dozier says the group never has to go offsite because everything they need is on property, "keeping down our costs and augmenting the experiences for our attendees. We leverage the nightclubs and extraordinary restaurants surrounding the world-famous fountains; we send guests to the Cirque show, "O"; the lobby is an experience every time you have the good fortune to go there; the casino is classy and bustling; the shopping is second to none; the pool and patios are a respite; and, of course, we leverage the astounding spa and exercise room."

Every amenity, she adds, is worth experiencing. Dozier's recommendation to planners is to get to know Bellagio's service providers. "Most have been there over a decade and will



Earlier this year, the Aircraft Electronics Association held its annual convention and trade show at MGM Grand in Las Vegas for the second time, drawing 1,752 attendees from 43 countries.



Bob Dorsa  
President  
American Credit Union Mortgage  
Association  
Las Vegas, NV

**“The Bellagio is one of the premier hotels in the world. Its overall class, as well as very nice sleeping rooms, event space and much more to do for our guests while onsite makes it highly desirable for our events.”**

Mortgage Association, has used multiple hotels in Las Vegas, including Bellagio, where the group of 490 met this fall. “The Bellagio is one of the premier hotels in the world,” Dorsa says. “Its overall class, as well as very nice sleeping rooms, event space and much more to do for our guests while onsite makes it highly desirable for our events.”

The group meets in Las Vegas in September when the weather is “outstanding,” and over 22 years has only met elsewhere once. Although prices have risen since the group was first drawn to Las Vegas in part for its affordability, Dorsa says the city still provides great value.

“Las Vegas is an ever-changing city, including hotels and attractions, which makes it a great city for events. Our group uses a single venue. We find with the spacious ballrooms offered by most of the finer hotels combined with quality sleeping rooms and other event amenities, it has worked very well for us,” he says. “The large hotels also have more specialized staff for assistance with meetings and events. This allows an organization like ours with only two dedicated employees to produce a great event. We do use local temp staff and outside services for logistics, transportation, entertainment and speakers.”

Dorsa calls the F&B “very good and consistent,” and praises the staff not just for being efficient but also for working hard to “ensure that our event went smoothly.” He says that even with a moderate budget for AV, Bellagio provided exactly what was needed, including talented tech support.

That said, he notes that the hotel is “outsourcing more functions than ever before.” He says his group had to pay extra for electrical — primarily power strips, “not exotic exhibits” — and for Wi-Fi. His group also requires minimal décor, but says costs are rising, and “it’s often difficult to pass those costs on to our participants.”

Still, he says, “The Bellagio is an outstanding property known to most people in the world. Its location at the center of the Strip is great. Food and beverage for events is very good and choices for restaurants and entertainment is also outstanding.”

Considering the size of the hotel, 8,000 employees and a slew of individual departments and vendors that a planner has to work with, Dorsa says good communication is critical — even with a qualified convention services manager in place.

“My advice is to ask as many questions as you can in advance. Be sure you’ve clearly communicated your goals and objectives and that you have received the same from the hotel. And create a realistic time line so you are not having to deal with too many final details just prior to your event. Mistakes are more likely to happen during high-stress times, in my experience.”

provide useful guidance on what will work for your group. Ask the Bellagio team for advice. This is a special property. Let them show it off,” she says. “You might not know what questions to ask. There are hidden gems all over the property, such as nooks for intimate dinners and a perfect room to bring in a celebrity chef.”

In addition to the amenities and service, Dozier says her group was also “blown away by the hotel staff’s willingness to work with us to create a custom experience for our attendees. We continue to choose Bellagio because of the people and because of the top-quality property and amenities.”

While putting together a custom event for 2,000 is a project, Dozier says that Bellagio staff “understood that the bulk of the CLOC staff had day jobs and that our event was special. They went above and beyond to develop a relationship with us. Every person on the convention services team showed up on time and prepared for our weekly team meetings. Kristi Berardi, our Bellagio convention services manager, set the bar high, and we continue to improve and streamline our event each year.”

Bellagio’s partner-providers also made a difference. “We use Shepard to support the exhibit floor,” Dozier notes. “They’ve been a treasure, transforming a traditional exhibit floor into an innovative, interactive, vibrant space. Although not Bellagio’s preferred provider, the hotel partners seamlessly with them and with us.”

Dozier says that although the size of the property and the fact that it has multiple businesses under one roof can be a challenge, working with the hotel has been highly rewarding. “We have spent a lot of time informing the entire Bellagio team about who we are and what our expectations are. It has paid off in terms of creating a custom experience for our attendees year over year,” she says.

In choosing Bellagio, Dozier concludes, much of a planner’s work is already done. Before you do anything, she says, “Bellagio has already created a feel and an experience.”

Bob Dorsa, president of the American Credit Union

M E E T T H E F U T U R E



# CAESARS FORUM



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Tracy Sears  
Marketing Communications and  
Event Planner  
MacTools  
Westerville, OH

**“Las Vegas is a great location for our annual West Coast Show... The team at South Point is a great group of people who work hard to meet the requests and needs of the event planner. They were a perfect match for our down-to-earth group.”**

Tracy Sears, marketing communications and event planner, Mac Tools, held its West Coast Show with 700 attendees at **South Point Hotel & Casino** in September.

“Las Vegas is a great location for our annual West Coast Show,” she says. “We were pleased to find the South Point Hotel & Casino. This venue is truly a hidden gem in Las Vegas. Our attendees like the fact that it is away from the hustle and bustle of the bigger hotels, and appreciate the close proximity to the airport and the complimentary airport shuttle.”

Located just minutes away from the Strip, some of the property’s many amenities include a 16-screen movie complex, 64-lane bowling center, 400-seat showroom and 11 restaurants, including the DiRoNa and Zagat award-winning Michael’s Gourmet Room.

“The bowling alleys, movie theaters and restaurant options were a fantastic draw for our attendees. Our group is very family-oriented, and South Point offers activities for family members of all ages,” Sears says.

Boasting a 75,000-square-foot conference center with 22 breakout rooms and an 80,000-square-foot, column-free, carpeted exhibit hall, South Point can accommodate everything from a 20-person board meeting to a 500-booth trade show. The space provides state-of-the-art technology, and high-speed and wireless connections are available.

“We used the exhibit hall and a few breakout rooms. Move-in and move-out for the exhibit hall was seamless with the available dock accessibility,” she says. “I was very impressed with the hotel’s Wi-Fi service. We have about 500 iPad users during our events, and we experienced no hiccups in wireless service. The AV staff was very knowledgeable and supportive.”

Additionally, she notes, “all of the venue meeting services, such as utilities, internet and audio-visual, are very (affordable) compared to other cities.”

And getting back to that family-oriented priority, Sears was pleased to find that “the function space is easily accessible from guest elevators without having to go through the casino.”

Sears strongly believes the South Point Hotel & Casino is the perfect location for meetings and conventions. “The team at South Point is a great group of people who work hard to meet the requests and needs of the event planner. They were a perfect match for our down-to-earth group.”

### RENO-TAHOE

This dual destination combines small city and lakeside resort. While the core meeting can be set in either, most attendees are likely to take advantage of both during a stay.

The Association of College and University Printers (ACUP) held its 53rd annual conference in April at **Harrah’s Lake Tahoe**. Jennifer Bowers, administrative director, calls the location great thanks to good restaurants and shopping, affordability and the fact that it’s walkable. “The price of rooms and F&B costs were reasons we chose Harrah’s,” she says.

To maintain that affordability, she says the group stayed on Harrah’s property for the most part. She liked the abundance of space for the group. “We are space hogs,” she says. “Plus, the food was a hit, especially the top-floor restaurant with its sweeping views.”

There were a couple of downsides, however. One was the one-hour shuttle and its extra cost for attendees to get to the property, and Bowers felt there was too much “nickel-and-diming for small changes and standard requests, such as easels for our signage.”

That said, Bowers notes that the hotel worked with the group and, ultimately, helped offset transportation costs by providing a credit and reduced the cost of the easels by half.

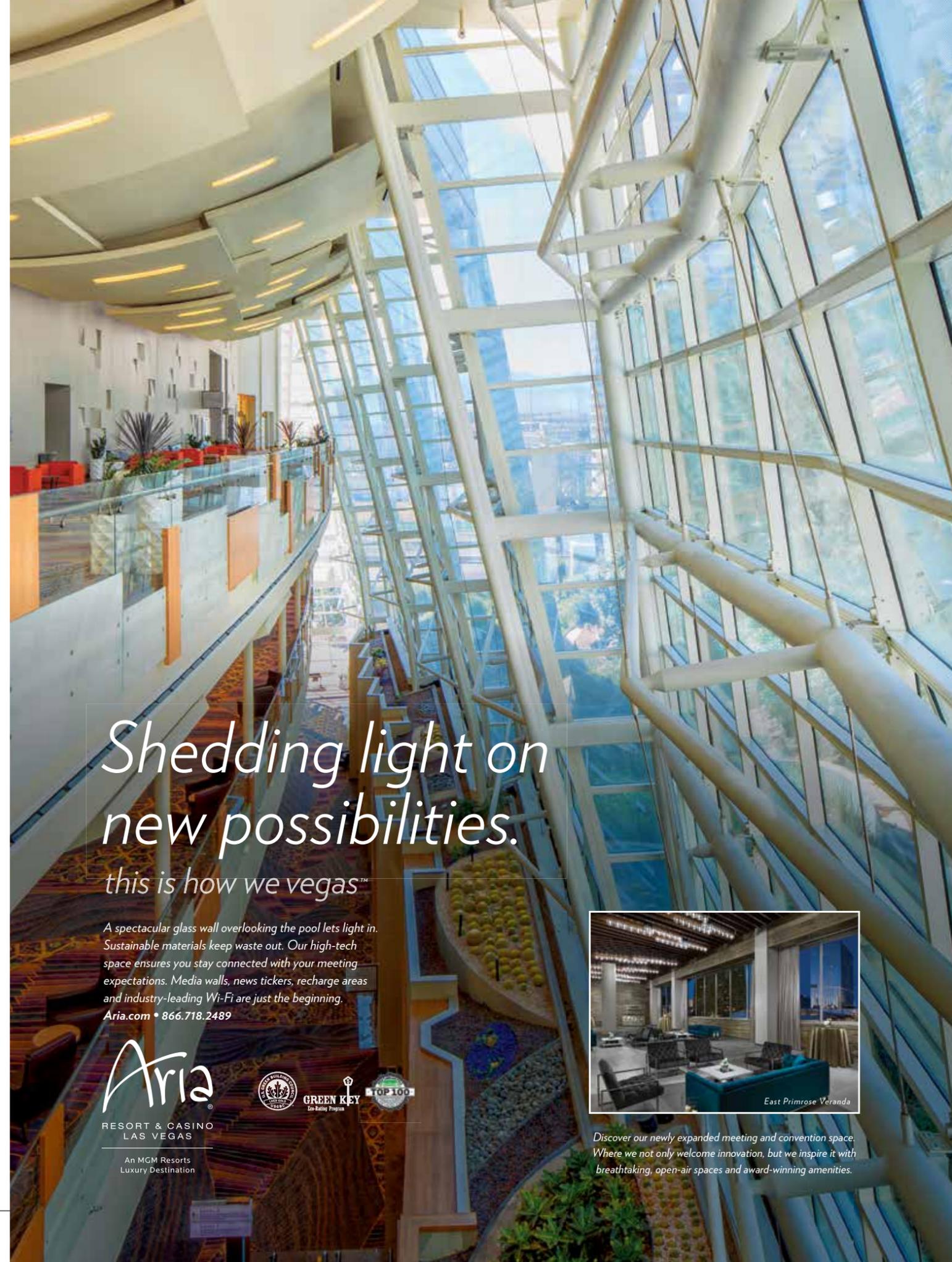
She says it’s also important to know your group before booking here because not every member likes casinos. Some of her group, for example, were bothered by the smoke from the first-floor casino, which they said, “wafted up the stairs and escalator to the second-floor conference center.”

Still, the location by a spectacular lake and ultimate affordability made Harrah’s work for ACUP.

The city of Reno, says Amberly Jackson, national event coordinator for the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and DAV Auxiliary, stands out from other comparable cities because of its affordability and amenities.

The DAV national convention was set at **Grand Sierra Resort & Casino** last July, with 2,435 in attendance. “Some of our members are on a fixed income or have strict travel budgets, so the significantly reduced room rates, discounts and concessions offered by Reno hotels, which met or exceeded our stringent standards for consideration, made the destination affordable to a larger population of members,” says Jackson.

And that allowed the group to enhance and increase its schedule of events.



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Jennifer Bowers  
Administrative Director  
Association of College and  
University Printers  
Carrabelle, FL

**“The price of rooms and F&B costs were reasons we chose Harrah’s.... Plus, the food was a hit, especially the top-floor restaurant with its sweeping views.”**

“As we began planning, we quickly realized the difference in the level of service from our property, Grand Sierra Resort and Casino, and our account manager and her support staff at the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority,” Jackson says. “The accessibility, responsiveness, excitement and compassion we received was unlike any we had experienced in recent memory.”

And, it went beyond the immediate staff. “It was a community-wide network of hospitality professionals across many businesses,” she says. “For instance, we needed a wheelchair ramp for a second stage, and our hotel only had one. Typically, it becomes our problem to find another ramp, rent it and have it delivered and picked up. But our catering and convention services person reached out to a neighboring hotel and made arrangements to borrow a ramp, collect and return it at no cost to us! This was one of several situations that allowed us to stretch our budget extensively and improve our guest experience.”

The Grand Sierra, Jackson says, not only offered the best product and most competitive pricing, its staff was creative in its concession offerings, which differentiated it from other properties. Additionally, she adds, “The property was clean and well-cared for, a must for our ill and injured veterans and their families.”

As always, people make the difference. Jackson says the hotel’s catering and convention services manager was “amazing, cared about our event and went to bat for us whenever a road block appeared.” The account manager, Jackson continues, “was the best we’ve encountered in any city. She knows everyone at all the hotels and has a love for her city that shows in everything she does, but she also knew how to make us feel like her most important client.”

Jackson says the AV director and techs all delivered what was needed, not only for the group’s breakouts and show, but on a more human level, too. “They were exceptional and, most of all, were compassionate to our members, often expressing their appreciation of being able to work our show.”

That dedication extended to the entire staff, Jackson notes. “For our final night, we had a sit-down dinner for 1,700, and I saw every VP and manager from sales and convention services in the back plating food,” she says. “It’s a team effort at Grand Sierra Resort, and that was impressive.”

The space itself was also a positive. “The newly remodeled space is great — light and bright, and it helped our members focus during the long days. We enjoyed a private concert in the Grand Theatre that was top of the line. It’s a gorgeous theater, and the sound and lights were of the highest quality. There was no bad seat in the entire room!”

Not surprising, Jackson says DAV will return to Grand Sierra. “I heard many, many staff thank our members for their service and tell them it was an honor to serve them. It was a genuine hometown-service experience in a sophisticated yet affordable venue.

“We are excited to return in 2021,” she says.

**Peppermill Resort Spa Casino** is another popular option in Reno. Sherry W. Hadley, CMP, is the contract event coordinator for the Airborne Public Safety Association, which has been meeting there for more than a decade.

“The association has been using Reno for many years and intends to continue to do so. We have a good attendance here that speaks to the property itself and location in the country, as our attendees are national and international,” Hadley says. “We like Peppermill for our large summer meeting that utilizes the convention center and for our smaller meetings that are self-contained in the resort. Our attendees like staying here, and the staff is one of the best I have worked with in my 27 years as a planner.”

In addition to the AV staff and capabilities, which the group’s education manager called “the absolute best,” Hadley points to Alberta Sanchez, conference services manager.

“I’ve worked with her several times now and can depend on her professionalism in the planning and execution stages of my event,” she says. “She is a no-nonsense, attentive partner, and I hope to continue to work with her in the future.”

Hadley’s group relies primarily on the Tuscany meeting space at the hotel and says it works perfectly.

In addition to the hotel, Hadley says, “Reno is flexible; they have always strived to make our events easier to plan and execute.”

To any planner considering the resort, Hadley says, “I highly recommend the Peppermill; you will not be disappointed. We love it and continue to come back.”

The bottom line is that Nevada is more than its most famous city, which is good news for associations. Planners can find an ideal destination for their conferences, regardless of the budget, goals or specific demographic of their members and attendees.

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Credit: Visit Fort Worth

Fort Worth is a unique meeting destination for attendees offering a variety of activities from museums to rodeos.

# Texas Passion and Pride

Welcomes All to Enjoy This Bigger-Than-Life Destination

By Cynthia Dial

Well-known for its passion and its pride, the vast state of Texas is no stranger to visitors, who are always shown a good time, made to feel at home and are forever welcome by a Texas-size hospitality that envelops all. It's this and more that warmly beckons meeting planners and explains their repeated returns to this bigger-than-life destination.

One such planner is Martha C. Barton, CEM, exhibitor services director, Turbomachinery Laboratory with Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station (TEES), who has taken the annual Turbomachinery & Pump Symposia to Houston each September for more than 15 years. "The Turbomachinery Laboratory

conducts basic and applied research into important problems of reliability and performance of turbomachinery — rotating machinery that extracts or adds energy to fluids," she says about the association. "That's everything from classic Dutch windmills to the space shuttle's main engine turbo pumps and compressors that move natural gas through the distribution system."

Barton explains that though the meetings' objectives are measured in multiple ways, of particular importance are the responses of its participants (from delegates and exhibitors to speakers and authors) and its continued growth, having expanded from 3,000 to 5,500 attendees over the years. The

planner says, "Even when the economy was down, we continued to have record-breaking years, which we did again during this year's symposia."

Explaining her destination pick, Barton says, "Houston has a very strong base for oil and gas, energy and technology companies — our target groups. The city ranks in the top five of the nation's Fortune 500 companies — companies from which we have many participants, so it makes good business sense to go where the bulk of your attendees are employed," she says. "Another reason is that we, our event and our attendees are so appreciated. The Houston team is the best; it's a vital part of our success."

## QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Having selected the **Hilton Americas-Houston** and **Hyatt Regency Houston** for her group, Barton expounds on this duo. "The Hyatt Regency was the headquarter hotel for more than 15 years, although we moved it to the Hilton Americas when this property was built due to its proximity to the convention center and to the team whose dedication makes my life as a meeting planner easy," she says. "To this day, we maintain a block of rooms at the Hyatt for their long-term quality customer service and loyalty to us for many years."

Among Symposia attendees' faves are its food and attractions — from Texas barbecue to attending sporting events

## Fort Worth-Style Fun

Known as the "City of Cowboys and Culture," Fort Worth covers a wide range of interests for groups seeking authentic fun.

For planners whose attendees are motivated by spurs and saddles, the Stockyards National Historic District fits the bill. As one of the state's most sought-after attractions, this is where Exchange Avenue's brick streets lined with historic buildings set the stage for only-in-Texas activities such as the Fort Worth Herd (the world's only twice-daily cattle drive featuring 16 Texas Longhorns), the weekly Stockyards Championship Rodeo, the Stockyards Museum, Billy Bob's Texas (known as the world's largest honky tonk, where luminaries such as Garth Brooks, Hank Williams Jr. and Alabama have played) and the Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame. There's even a Segway Stockyards tour which follows the actual cattle trail that once ran down the city's Main Street right through historic Sundance Square.

Mike Nichols, CAM, vice president, Operational Excellence and Professional Development, National Business Aviation Association (NBAA), set up the NBAA Schedulers & Dispatchers

Conference at the Fort Worth Convention Center last year with nearly 3,000 attendees. The conference had more than 1,200 rooms booked in hotels within close walking distance to the center.

"For us, Fort Worth provides the whole package. We have held a number of conventions and in-hotel meetings in Fort Worth over the past several years. The city has everything we look for when hosting events: significant airlift, competitive pricing (particularly with the convention center, food and beverage and evening offsite activities), a variety of venues for exhibitors to entertain their customers and attractions that excite prospective attendees and exhibitors," he says. "If the destination is appealing, affordable and is easy to access, and we provide a compelling program, our attendance grows."

The evening offsite function was held at River Ranch — a Western-themed event space. "The staff there facilitated a fun and memorable event. We used the entire facility and created experiences in each area, ranging from photos on the Longhorn Steer to s'mores around the fire

pits in the back to line dancing in the main room to Texas Whiskey tastings in the Trophy Room. It'll be difficult to top that in future years," he says.

Nichols credits the CVB for their assistance in planning and coordinating the NBAA's extraordinary conference. "The Visit Fort Worth staff and our hotel partners are strong allies and incredible resources for us," he says. "They understand that the city looks good if the attendees and exhibitors have a great experience and want to come back. (Our group) did have a great experience, and we will be back!"

John Cychol, FCDME, CTA, vice president of meeting sales for Visit Fort Worth agrees. "Fort Worth is a premier meetings destination with diverse amenities to help planners facilitate the event of a lifetime. There are multiple venues available throughout the city, including the Fort Worth Convention Center, featuring more than 300,000 square feet of event space, as well as the planned Dickies Arena, which will accommodate any type of event starting November 2019," he says. "Fort Worth is also home to outstanding hotel accommodations with 3,100 hotel rooms in downtown Fort Worth alone,



Mike Nichols, CAM, Vice President, Operational Excellence and Professional Development, National Business Aviation Association, Washington, DC

**"The Visit Fort Worth staff and our hotel partners are strong allies and incredible resources for us. They understand that the city looks good if the attendees and exhibitors have a great experience and want to come back."**

plus additional hotel properties under development."

Visit Fort Worth's promise: "Cowboys and Culture isn't just a tagline. Nowhere else can you find Western heritage that is so quintessentially Texas."

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Jami Lucas  
Executive Director and CEO  
American Academy of  
Otolaryngic Allergy Association  
Reston, VA

**“The location in the middle of the country and (Four Seasons Resort and Club Dallas at Las Colinas’) 15-minute proximity to the two local airports, Dallas Love Field and Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, makes getting to our meetings easy and affordable for attendees.”**

**Hotel Houston** gives guests the opportunity to play such notable courses as St. Andrew’s and Pebble Beach. Pillow fights can be arranged at **Hotel Derek**, and the best place to cool off from the state’s notorious summer heat can be found in the world’s only Texas-shaped lazy river at the **Marriott Marquis Houston** (at 6,500 square feet, it takes 15 minutes to circumnavigate). Lastly, **The St. Regis Houston** promises: “No request is too small or unattainable no matter what the hour of the day.”

Midway between the east and west coasts, Irving, Texas, is perfectly positioned for the nation’s planners. A new headquarter hotel and a vibrant visitors’ district are complemented by a top-of-the-line convention center, situated within walking distance of the two.

“Since its opening in 2017, the Toyota Music Factory has become a high-energy site, full of activity — people, music, entertainment, restaurants and retail,” says Maura Allen Gast, executive director of the Irving Convention and Visitors Bureau. “For planners, the new complex in the heart of Las Colinas provides a wide range of entertainment and dining options to fill free nights on the convention schedule, and it’s an excellent venue for opening or closing night events.”

#### **DISTINCTIVE VISITOR’S DISTRICT**

The Live Nation Pavilion amphitheater anchors the new \$173 million Toyota Music Factory complex, which serves up the Alamo Drafthouse movie theater and more than 20 bars and restaurants.

“The final piece of Irving’s visitor district, the **Westin Irving Convention Center at Las Colinas** hotel, will open in January 2019,” says Gast. Offering 350 rooms and 16,000 square feet of meeting place, including a 10,000-square-foot ballroom, the 12-story hotel is a welcome addition to the Texas city’s more than 12,000 guest rooms.

Gast concludes, “Irving’s vision for a distinctive visitor’s district in the Las Colinas Urban Center will become not only a spectacular reality but a real game-changer for us.”

“Eighteen years ago, we chose Irving’s **Four Seasons Resort and Club Dallas at Las Colinas** as the site for our resident program,” says Jami Lucas, executive director and CEO of the American Academy of Otolaryngic Allergy Association (AAOA) — a Virginia-based national medical specialty society of ENTs and related health care providers who focus on allergy, sinus, asthma, rhinology and related ear, nose and throat diseases, which supports its physician members through advocacy, education and research.

She explains that while this program has evolved over the years, the AAOA’s choice in sites has stayed constant for the group which conducts four annual meetings. These include the Interactive Allergy & Rhinology Course (February), the Basic Course in Allergy & Immunology (July), the Advanced

Course in Allergy & Immunology (December) and the Annual Meeting (Fall).

It’s all about geography. “The location in the middle of the country and resort’s 15-minute proximity to the two local airports, Dallas Love Field and Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport (DFW), makes getting to our meetings easy and affordable for attendees,” says Lucas. And the climate is ideal for the February meeting. With respect to affordability, the AAOA exec says, “The Four Seasons in Las Colinas offers great value for the money as the ROI, so to speak, is there and continues to be there. Above all, the hotel consistently delivers excellent service.”

Situated upon 400 acres between Dallas and Fort Worth, this 405-room, AAA Five Diamond Four Seasons property has such meeting stats as 31 multipurpose rooms, 40,871 square feet of meeting space, including a 7,992-square-foot ballroom and 10,473 square feet of outdoor meeting space — earning the luxury resort such honors as “Best Recently Renovated Venue,” by the Best of Texas Meetings + Events 2016 Awards and “Best Golf Resort” by the Best of Texas Meetings + Events 2016 and 2018 Awards.

Regarding specifics, Lucas describes an Interactive Allergy & Rhinology Course meeting’s welcome reception last year. Held in Byron’s, one of the hotel’s eateries, it offered expansive views from its floor-to-ceiling windows of the TPC Four Seasons Las Colinas golf course and showcased local foods and beverages with the inclusion of margaritas, a taqueria and an assortment of Hill Country buffet stations.

For larger groups, Big D has a Texas-size option, the 2 million-square-foot Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center Dallas — 1,000,000 square feet of exhibit space, 65,000 square feet of ballrooms (divisible into four separate rooms), 88 meeting rooms and 4,000 hotel rooms within walking distance — all within 30 minutes of DFW airport.

As manager of membership and operations for the Texas Association of Freestanding Emergency Centers (TAFEC), Lisa Keltner explains that her trade association comprises freestanding emergency center owners, both independently owned and hospital-based. She says, “This is a fairly new market, so it’s a hotbed in politics and the health care industry, in general.”

Thus, what better city to conduct an event of an association with political elements than in Texas’ capital city, Austin? Keltner explains, “Austin is a thriving community that is very diverse. We are a high-tech, creative, political and entrepreneurial city with excellent colleges and universities. People are drawn to Austin’s ‘weirdness;’ thus, the theme ‘Keep Austin Weird.’ I’m a native Austinite, so I get this.”

Having conducted her organization’s membership meeting at **Hyatt Regency Austin**, located on Lady Bird Lake, this

**“New private development and significant public projects are ... leading to incredible new venues and amenities for visiting groups. Pair all of this with San Antonio’s unique sense of place, culture and history, and you have an unbeatable meetings destination.”**



Casandra Matej  
President and CEO  
Visit San Antonio  
San Antonio, TX

homegrown Texas planner details why the hotel was a match for her meeting of approximately 100 members and sponsors.

“I love the Hyatt Regency Austin because of the space, the staff and the location. Who wouldn’t love the Hyatt on Austin’s Lady Bird Lake? The fact that they’ve expanded their meeting space and added a nice and reasonable parking garage also makes it attractive to attendees because parking in downtown Austin is a nightmare and very costly. But we loved every minute of our membership meeting, which offered the best service ever, as well.”

#### **PERKS FOR THE PLANNER**

With 448 rooms and 45,000 square feet of customizable function space (new Zilker Ballroom’s 14,138 square feet of space and an open-air 3,700-square-foot terrace), the hotel’s location offers additional nearby perks for the planner — from the South Congress (SOCO) shops and dining district, the Warehouse Restaurant District, 2nd Street Shopping District and 6th Street Entertainment District to the State Capitol building, LBJ Presidential Library and The University of Texas at Austin campus. Nature enthusiasts will enjoy the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and a bat colony visible at the Congress Avenue Bridge.

The planner illuminates the leisure endeavors of the association, which typically spends 90 percent of its time on property. “Generally, we have a reception with live music or some other fun activity such as a sporting event. We’ve done riverboat cruises, gone to trendy restaurants and learned how to roll cigars, among other activities.”

Activities which the planner considers “exclusively Austin” are its riverboat cruise featuring live music and a full bar and the YETI flagship store (an Austin-based company of outdoor products which opened next to the Hyatt Regency), described as “equal parts bar, showroom and a live music venue located on South Congress.”

**Omni Barton Creek Resort** is seeing the results of a \$150 million project — a newly added resort tower with 180 guest



## It's All Here in Austin, Y'all

To best describe the plethora of Texas' homegrown experiences in the capital of Austin, located in the heart of the state, one might borrow lyrics from the loudly and proudly sung song "Texas, Our Texas!" — "so wonderful, so great." Here's a sampling of the city's one-of-a-kind happenings.

### EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY

If the F&B scene is your group's scene, Austin is the place to be. Here, in this town known for craft beer and sourced craft cocktails, as well as barbecue and beyond, are a variety of options. From a private tour of the Hill Country brewhouse, Jester King Brewery, and a visit to Stanley's Farmhouse Pizza for pie tossing with the chef to an Austin Eats Food Tour of an assortment of the city's 1,400 different food trailers, a planner's possibilities are limited only by their group's taste buds.

### ROCK IT!

Where better to be a rock star for a day than in this city deemed the Live Music Capital of the World? A visit to Groove Labs is complete with such interactive experiences as writing a song, producing a show, donning rock costumes and props, choreographing performances, learning instruments and playing with a full band on a stage under show lights.

### WATER WORKS

Waller Creek Boathouse, located in the hub of the city and said to be the "all-around best place to experience Lady Bird Lake," is where groups can learn to row at the Austin Rowing Club or kayak and stand-up paddleboard with their colleagues.

### GET ON THE FAST TRACK

Austin's state-of-the-art Circuit of the Americas, home of the nation's only Formula 1 Circuit, serves up the opportunity for car enthusiasts to get behind the wheel of some of the world's fastest Audisport vehicles. Offering a variety of thrilling programs, among the auto choices are a 2017 Audi R8 V10 Plus, 2018 Audi TT RS and 2018 Audi RS 3.

### GROUP GRAFFITI

While touring the city in discovery of its most iconic murals, visitors will learn about the artists, their inspirations and the neighborhoods in which their works appear. And afterward, the group will go to HOPE Outdoor Gallery or SprATX gallery to meet an authentic street artist, who will provide guidance to participants interested in creating their own.

### RIDE 'EM COWGIRLS AND COWBOYS

Following a 90-minute trip to a Hill Country ranch maintained by genuine rodeo circuit cowboys, there's barbecue and Lone Stars (beers, of course), followed by such rodeo games as riding a mechanical bull, calf roping 101, horseshoe and cornhole competitions, stick horse barrel racing and hay hauling. AC&F

rooms, conference center and ballroom, 5,556-square-foot pavilion, six dining outlets, Mokora Spa, lobby experience, expanded poolscape, golf clubhouse, golf course renovations and tennis complex — all set to open in 2019. Also on the horizon is **Hotel ZaZa Austin**, with 8,500 square feet of meeting and event space.

Keltner gives colleagues insight regarding Austin and its selection as a meeting destination: "I highly recommend Austin for its natural beauty, choices in bars and restaurants, live music and a general laid-back vibe. Most of our members across the state prefer events in Austin to other events we have across the state because everyone just loves coming here!"

Moving a bit south, meet San Antonio. A cultural combo representing Mexico, Germany and Old West roots, it's the notable home to Texas' most visited site — the Alamo. Offering planners the state's most historic legacies, including the nation's oldest operating cathedral (San Fernando Cathedral near the Alamo) and Texas' first UNESCO World Heritage Site (the city's collection of five missions), even San Antonio's culinary landscape is one-of-a-kind — from white tablecloth European restaurants and genuine steakhouses to Tex-Mex eateries, BBQ joints and savory food trucks. Last year, the city was recognized as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy for its unique culinary heritage.

"San Antonio is investing in itself in every direction," says Casandra Matej, president and CEO, Visit San Antonio. "In 2016, we saw the game-changing renovation and expansion of the now-1.6 million-square-foot Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center (including Texas' largest ballroom at 54,000 square feet). This was followed by major improvements to the Alamodome, completed in advance of the 2018 NCAA Men's Final Four."

Among the town's biggest news is the all-new electric fleet of its iconic River Walk barges. Boat operator Go Rio Cruises offers group opportunities such as brunch and cocktail cruises, even out-of-the-box activities like yoga and spinning can be accommodated — all while enjoying the city from its through-the-town river.

San Antonio offers nearly 45,000 guest rooms, with close to 14,000 located downtown and 6,500 within walking distance of the convention center.

"We've seen multiple new hotels open around the city and another 500 rooms are in the early planning and construction phases downtown," says Matej. "New private development and significant public projects, such as San Pedro Creek, Confluence Park and the redevelopment of Hemisfair, are transforming San Antonio's urban core and leading to incredible new venues and amenities for visiting groups. Pair all of this with San Antonio's unique sense of place, culture and history, and you have an unbeatable meetings destination." AC&F



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Betancourt

Visit San Antonio has promoted **Laura Betancourt** to the role of national sales manager. Betancourt joined the Visit San Antonio team in 2007 as a senior events coordinator and advanced to the organization's destination services team before joining the convention sales team in 2017.

**Jessica Viramontez** is the new convention sales manager for Visit Wichita. Prior to joining Visit Wichita, she worked as a consultant for Cerner Corporation in Kansas City.

**Jenny Lynch** has joined Visit Indy as national sales manager. Most recently, Lynch spent three years with VisitDallas as regional director of sales for the Midwest.

Visit Seattle announced the promotion of **Kelly Saling** to vice president, convention sales and services. Saling joined the Visit Seattle Convention sales team in 2009. Previously, she worked in Seattle for Columbia Hospitality.



Viramontez



Lynch



Saling



Norgren

The Monterey County Convention and Visitors Bureau (MCCVB) in Monterey, California, has appointed **Wendy Norgren** as regional sales executive for the Northeast region of the United States, Eastern Canada and the European group market. Prior to this, she was the regional sales manager for the Fairmont Mayakoba in Playa del Carmen, Mexico.

**Heather Terry** has been promoted to director of sales for Kentucky's Owensboro Convention Center and Owensboro Sportscenter. Prior to this, she worked as a supervisor at Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center in Nashville.

**Belinda Daniel** has been appointed director of sales at Dallas Marriott Las Colinas. She entered the hospitality industry in 2010 as business travel sales manager at the Dallas/Fort Worth Marriott Hotel & Golf Club at Champions Circle.

**Josh Hoce** is the new associate director of sales, and **Laura Gonzalez Pena** is the new meeting connections/business travel

sales manager at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront hotel. Hoce has more than 10 years of industry experience in the Jacksonville market. Gonzalez Pena previously served as the business and leisure travel coordinator at Hyatt Regency Orlando.

Discover The Palm Beaches has appointed **Mike ("MJ") Jackson** as its new senior director, group sales. Prior to this, Jackson was a national sales manager with Destination DC.

Explore St. Louis has added three new members to its sales staff: **Jill Hericks**, director of convention sales; **Erin Jackson**, director of executive meetings sales and **Stephanie Monroe**, director of specialty market sales. Hericks served in senior positions with the Sioux Falls Convention Center in South Dakota, Century Center in South Bend, Indiana, and Hollywood Casino and Hotel in St. Louis. Jackson served as the director of sales of the Moonrise Hotel. Monroe joined Explore St. Louis in 2007 as national convention sales manager.



Terry



Daniel



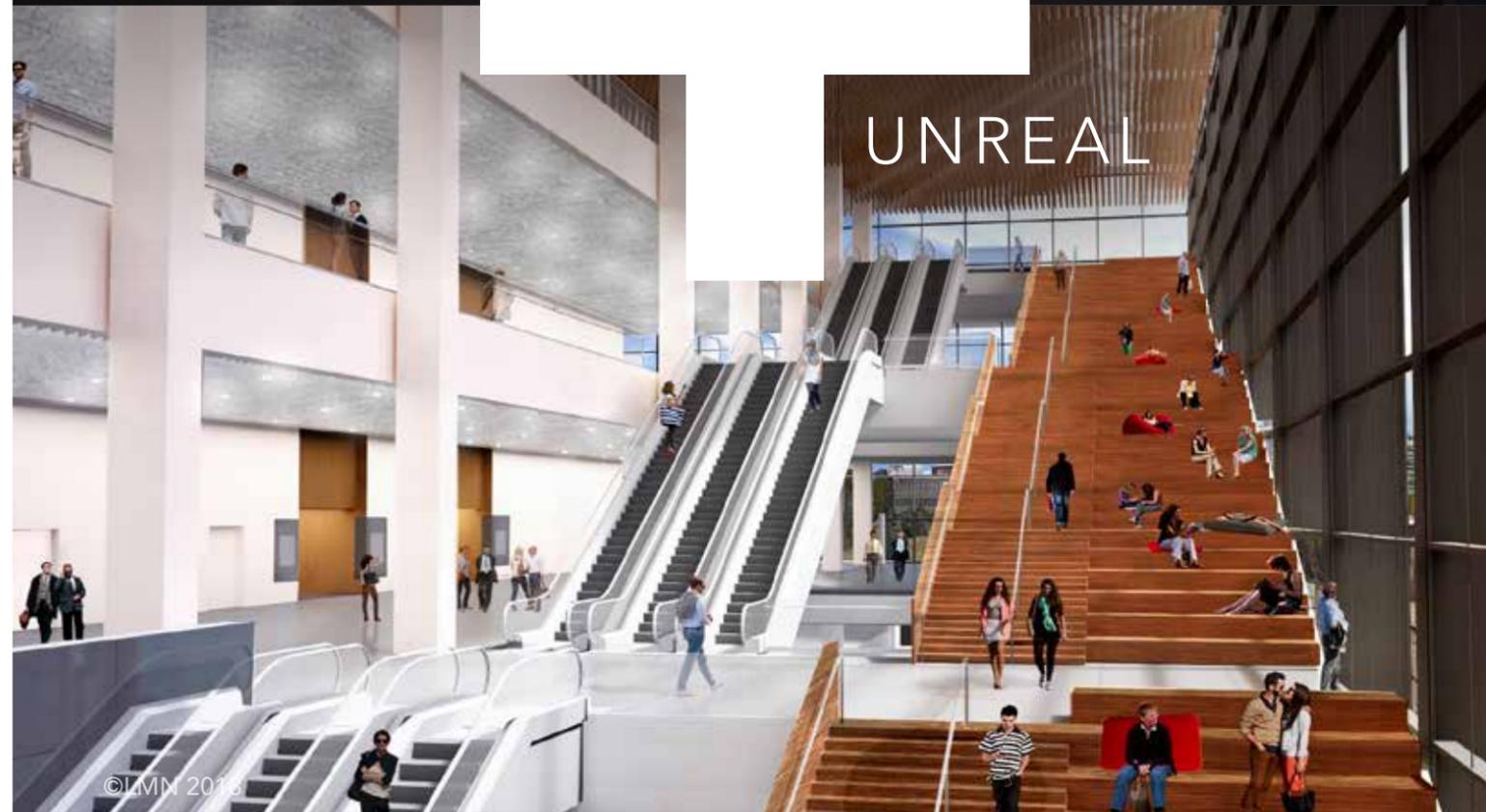
Hoce



Gonzalez Pena



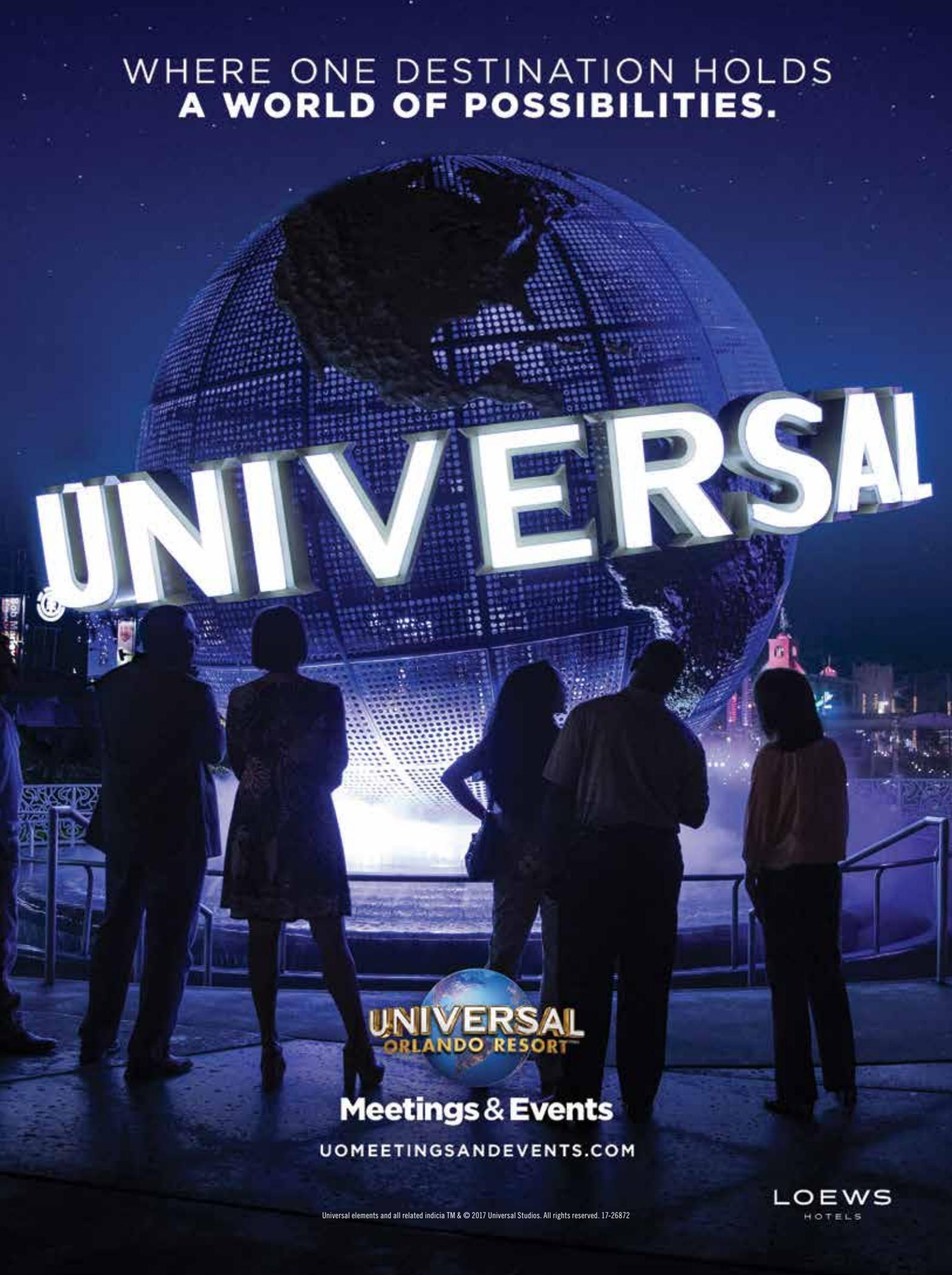
Jackson



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