

Speakers and Crisis  
Management  
PAGE 10

Choose to Seize  
Opportunity  
PAGE 12

Family-Friendly  
Atlantic City  
PAGE 46

Golden State  
Meetings  
PAGE 54

The Big Easy  
& Beyond  
PAGE 60

A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

FEBRUARY 2018 VOL. 36 NO. 2 \$12.00

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# CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

## Golf Programs

Planners and Golf Professionals  
Reveal What Drives Success  
PAGE 28

## Meetings on Deck

How Cruise Lines Are Upping Their Game for  
Corporate Meetings and Incentives  
PAGE 14

## New & Renovated Hotels

Building Interest From Coast to Coast  
PAGE 36

**CLICK HERE TO  
DOWNLOAD/VIEW  
TABLET VERSION**

Chrissy Felton (left), Senior Instructor and Group  
Golf Professional at the Sea Island Golf Performance  
Center on St. Simons Island, Georgia.



Meet with Purpose Puppies & Ice Cream event at Boca Beach Club, A Waldorf Astoria Resort, Boca Raton, FL

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## In This Issue

VOLUME 36 NO. 2

FEBRUARY 2018

### FEATURES

- 14 **Meetings On Deck**  
Cruise Lines Are Upping Their Game for Corporate Meetings & Incentives  
By Keith Loria
- 28 **What Drives a Successful Golf Program?**  
Tips and Strategies From Planners and Golf Professionals  
By Christine Loomis
- 36 **New & Renovated Hotels**  
Building Interest From Coast to Coast  
By Patrick Simms

### DESTINATIONS

- 46 **Atlantic City**  
Meetings & Family Friendly — It's Not Just a Gaming Town Anymore  
By Derek Reveron
- 54 **The Golden State**  
Whether You Want a Big-Name Draw Location or a Lesser Known Gem, California Delivers  
By Christine Loomis
- 60 **The Big Easy & Beyond**  
Louisiana Offers Vibrant, Only-in-America Culture, Food and Venues Guaranteed to Impress  
By Christine Loomis

### DEPARTMENTS

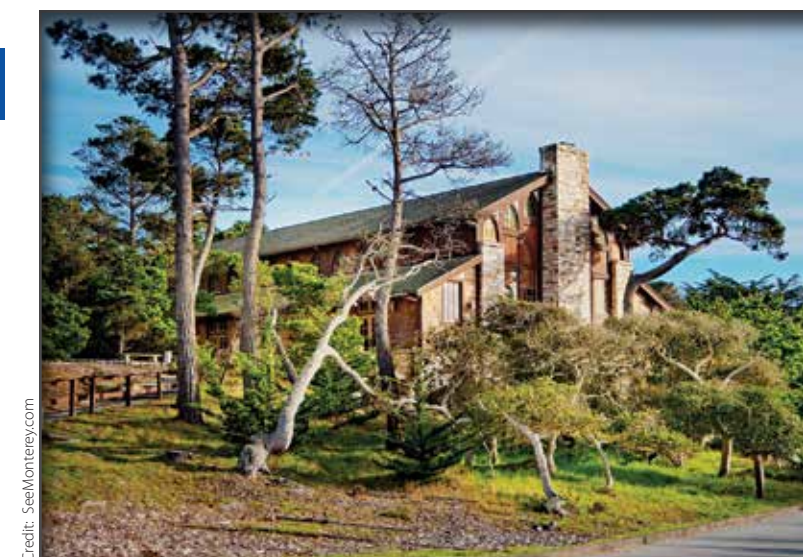
- 4 **Publisher's Message** 7 **Tips & Trends**
- 6 **News & Notes** 9 **Snapshots**
- 10 **Perspective**  
Making Speakers an Extension of Your Crisis Management Team  
By Deborah Gardner, CMP
- 12 **Perspective**  
Opportunity Isn't Opportunity, Unless We Choose to Seize It  
By David Ahearn, Frank Ford and David Wilk
- 66 **People on the Move**



Royal Caribbean has state-of-the-art conference centers and event venues (like the Aqua Theater above) for events of all sizes. **PAGE 14**



The 33-story, 533-room JW Marriott Nashville opens in July with 50,000 sf of function space and a world-class Spa by JW. **PAGE 36**

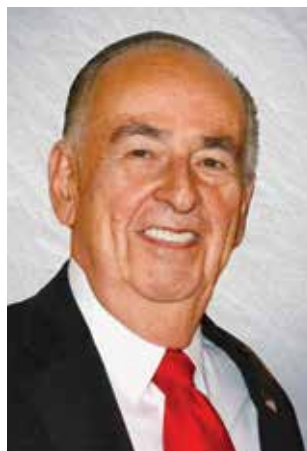


Asilomar State Beach & Conference Grounds accommodated 1,224 Genentech Conference attendees (above, Merrill Hall). **PAGE 54**

# Publisher's Message

## Driving Success

It's been expressed that the presidency — or any high position really — doesn't change who you are; it magnifies who you are. The same can be said about our relationship with golf! Spending four hours with a client or coworker on the links has a way of exposing temperament, testing patience and revealing character like no office interaction can. It can seal or sour a business deal, or build or break a relationship by the 18th tee.



And all of us weekend duffers can identify with Charles Dickens' famous line from Tale of Two Cities: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." That's why it's so important for planners to make sure their golf programs are the best of times for participants. They must finesse a golf program's design so that both skilled and unskilled players have fun and don't feel intimidated or uncomfortable.

Because many planners are not experienced golfers themselves, their partnerships with resort golf professionals are key. Our feature on page 29 "What Drives a Successful Golf Program?" offers tips and strategies from planners who've been there, done that, and from experienced golf staff at top resorts.

One of those is Chrissy Felton (who graces our cover), senior instructor and golf professional at Sea Island, a Forbes Five Star resort on St. Simons Island, Georgia. "We offer golf clinics before events to help make players feel more confident," she says. "Golf is a wonderful game that brings colleagues, clients etc., together outside of an office or meeting environment. When planning your golf event, always take into account the skill level of attendees. While this typically varies from group to group, you want to make sure the format sets you up for success. The main goal is to have fun!" Brad Hauer, director of golf at Hammock Beach, a Salamander Golf & Spa Resort in Palm Coast, Florida, assures planners, "Our staff is here to educate and assist in every aspect of running the golf tournament. There's nothing to be afraid of."

In golf as in life, great partnerships just make everything go better. And so do great hotels and resorts! Read about new and renovated hotels building interest from coast to coast starting on page 36. And for a real change of pace, chart a new course out to sea: "Meetings on Deck" tells how cruise lines are upping their game for corporate meetings and incentives. Finally, learn how meeting in Atlantic City, California and New Orleans will help "drive" your meeting's success.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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*Six New Cottages*



*New Pool and Pool House*

The Lodge at Sea Island, surrounded by two championship golf courses and twice named the #1 Hotel in the U.S. by *U.S. News & World Report*, is adding new meeting and event space, sleeping rooms, a pool, pool house, and 18-hole putting course. Once complete in November 2018, The Lodge will have 57 sleeping rooms and more than 11,000 square feet of meeting and event space, making it the perfect location for your next incentive trip, board of directors or intimate corporate meeting. A new Golf Performance Center debuts in 2018, adding even more opportunities for an exceptional experience.

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## News & Notes

### MGM Grand Conference Center Expansion Tops Out

The award-winning MGM Grand Conference Center reached an important milestone — the topping out of its 250,000-sf expansion. More than 100 construction workers along with MGM Resorts and MGM Grand executives were onsite to sign the last of nearly 2,700-individual steel beams before it was lifted into place by a 270-foot-tall, 125-ton crane.

The \$130 million project, opens the end of 2018. When completed, the conference center will total more than 850,000 sf including a 22,000-sf expansion of Stay Well Meetings, the industry's first-ever wellness meetings experience. The new space seamlessly connects to the existing conference center on all three levels.

The expansion includes:

- 5,500-sf outdoor courtyard available for private events
- 49,000-sf ballroom
- 32,000-sf ballroom
- Three junior ballrooms
- 11 breakout rooms

Stay Well Meetings is expanding its footprint by 22,000 sf, encompassing the conference center's entire second floor.

MGM Grand's new space comes on the heels of expansions at sister properties Mandalay Bay and Aria. Mandalay Bay completed a 350,000-sf expansion totaling over 2 million sf, while Aria is currently adding 200,000 sf to create more than 500,000 sf at the resort (opening February 15, 2018). Upon completion of these projects, MGM Resorts International will offer a



total of 4 million sf of leading meeting and convention space within a two-mile stretch on the Las Vegas Strip. [www.mgmresorts.com](http://www.mgmresorts.com)

### Meet AC Reports Another Record Year in Booking Future Meetings Business

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — In 2017, Meet AC booked a total of 255 meetings and conventions representing 313,451 future hotel room nights for Atlantic City. The group tour market was part of the overall booking number attracting 34,279 hotel room nights. The number of future convention delegates to Atlantic City will reach more than 883,993 with a projected economic impact in excess of \$348 million.

Meet AC continued to place a greater emphasis on driving more business and increased revenues into the Atlantic City Convention Center throughout 2017. Future bookings now reflect that shift with 65 percent of business being driven into the Atlantic City Convention Center, while the other 35 percent represents single property bookings.

This month, Meet AC will introduce an innovative marketing initiative, which is a virtual reality (VR) experience created through a partnership with YouVisit. Meeting planners, brands and prospective visitors now can experience everything Atlantic City's convention scene has to offer from the comfort of their chairs. [www.meetac.com](http://www.meetac.com)

### Next Level Performance Names Dave Dittman as President

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — Next Level Performance announced the appointment of Dave Dittman as the new president of the company. As president, Dittman will have responsibility for all operating units. He takes over for Jim Dittman who remains as chairman.

A 30-year veteran of Next Level Performance, Dave Dittman has worked closely with every business unit and has been a driving force behind the company's success. He has formed and maintained valuable relationships with clients, vendors and employees that allow the company to be a strategic and innovative partner to their customers.

He had a hand in developing best-in-class solutions for both recognition, rewards and incentive travel, most recently with the next generation online recognition solution, Applaudit. [www.nxlperformance.com](http://www.nxlperformance.com)

### Harrah's Las Vegas Completes \$140 Million Transformation

LAS VEGAS, NV — Harrah's Las Vegas completed a \$140 million renovation, which includes 1,622 modern new guest rooms and suites in its Valley Tower, and a new lobby bar and casino floor. The new look comes as Harrah's celebrates 80 years as a premier gaming brand. This follows the renovation of 672 guest rooms and suites on the south side of the tower in 2016, resulting in a completely refreshed Valley Tower.

Designed by Marnell Architecture, the stylish interiors of the reimagined Valley Tower guest rooms consist of bold yet sophisticated décor with warm tones of gray and purple accents. Bold, purple fabric and blue sitting chairs complement the room's cream décor, dark wood accents and contemporary fixtures. Oversized vanities offer backlit mirrors and bars, while suites feature ceramic dark plank tile.

Located on the ground floor of the Valley Tower, the resort now offers a new lobby bar with a sleek design that features 12 gaming stations and seating with charging stations. The resort's recent renovations also include a completely remodeled casino floor and a new Starbucks near the Carnival Court Bar.

As part of Caesars Entertainment's Code Green initiative, which aims to reduce landfill waste by 50 percent by 2020, much of the furniture from the renovated guest rooms and suites was donated to charitable organizations in Las Vegas.

Harrah's Las Vegas offers free live entertainment seven days a week at venues including: Toby Keith's 'I Love this Bar & Grill,' which features live country music acts, hand-picked by Toby Keith; Carnival Court, an open-air street party; and The Piano Bar, offering 12 hours of live, interactive shows daily. [www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com](http://www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com)

## Tips & Trends

### FIT FOR BUSINESS TRAVEL

Travelers are not adhering to their health and wellness regimens during business trips

40% try to stick to their fitness routines when on the road  
54% acknowledge that their exercise and wellness routines are usually disrupted by travel

Hotels and destinations around the world have begun to prioritize fitness and wellness

Business travelers likely to exercise while traveling

When it comes to sticking to other wellness routines, such as listening to music, reading for enjoyment or meditating, in all regions it's business as usual

Business travelers in control of their routines when traveling

Business travelers most likely to get as much rest as possible on business trips

© CWT 2018 carlsonwagonlit.com Data from a multi-generational survey of more than 1,900 travelers from 16 countries.

### Do Business Travelers Keep Personal Fitness on Their Agenda?

While fitness and wellness routines may increase for most people at the start of a new year, this is not necessarily the case for business travelers. According to data released by Carlson Wagonlit Travel, most business travelers are not adhering to their health and wellness regimens during business trips.

The data shows that:

- Only 40 percent TRY to stick to their fitness routines when on the road.
- 54 percent acknowledge that their exercise and wellness routines are usually disrupted by travel.
- The data varies based on geography.
- 84 percent of Asia Pacific business travelers are in control of their routines when traveling.
- 76 percent of Americas business travelers are in control of their routines when traveling.
- 73 percent of European business travelers are in control of their routines when traveling.

To help offset these trends, many hotels and destinations around the world, such as Westin and JW Marriott, continue to add new "on demand" fitness offerings into their programming.  
— Carlson Wagonlit Travel

# News & Notes

## The Ritz-Carlton, St. Louis Unveils Event Space Makeover

ST. LOUIS, MO — The Ritz-Carlton, St. Louis has officially completed the re-mastering of its 30,000 sf of event space. The renovation delivers tasteful, sophisticated new interiors along with enhanced group offerings and numerous technological upgrades. The most impactful upgrades include a technical makeover of the hotel's 3,300-sf amphitheater, while event themes and designs have been reimaged.

Highlights include:

- Advanced lighting and technological systems in The Ritz-Carlton Ballroom and major updates to the group dining experience.
- Technological innovations in the 3,300-sf amphitheater, along with a 16 by 10-format glass rear-screen projection and live videoconferencing capabilities. Flanking the stage on either side are two large LCD monitors, which are also 1080p high-definition-capable.
- Updates includes the hotel's new Blue Lounge evening experience, highlighted by a full-size bar crafted of sculptured ice.

- Amenities and table-top features for meetings of all sizes, include: herbal-infused hand-bottled waters to individual ice sculptures of the Gateway Arch, and hand-shaped pastries inspired by company products and logos.

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

## IRF Study Reveals Low Knowledge of Non-Cash Reward Regulations

WASHINGTON, DC — The Incentive Research Foundation announced the release of its signature study U.S. Federal Regulations and Non-Cash Awards. The study examines program owners' understanding of the regulatory environment and discusses how they are adjusting their programs to accommodate these regulations.

"Most program owners understand their reward and recognition activities are impacted by the regulatory environment, but struggle with the detailed implications," said Melissa Van Dyke, IRF President. The survey was executed summer of 2017 to a cross-section of 419 businesses, 106 of which operate in the financial services sector. Program owners were targeted based on sector and revenue size.

With a focus on key regulations program owners indicated that they were highly aware of regulatory and tax codes, but less knowledgeable about how to comply with them. Many program owners reported that they find regulations unclear and challenging to accommodate, but are making numerous changes to their programs in an effort to comply.

Key findings discussed in U.S. Federal Regulations and Non-Cash Awards include:

- 67 percent are aware of regulatory considerations for their programs.
- Only 38 percent consider themselves very knowledgeable about regulations and tax requirements.
- Fewer than two-thirds of U.S. businesses have formal compliance mechanisms to address these requirements.
- 86 percent of U.S. businesses make some revision to their rewards program on an annual basis. [theirf.org/research/us-federal-regulations-and-non-cash-awards/2371/](http://theirf.org/research/us-federal-regulations-and-non-cash-awards/2371/)

# Snapshots



Credits: 1-4 Eco DMS and One Happy Photographer; 5 ESPA; 6 Buy the Sea; 7 Terramar

**1-4** Nearly 600 meeting and incentive professionals from around the world came together in Rome for the inaugural SITE + MPI Global Forum held January 12-14 at the Rome Cavalieri, Waldorf Astoria. **1** Rhea Stagner, SITE Foundation president 2017, introduces John Iannini as SITE Foundation president 2018. **2** SITE Chicago president and chapter members accept the award for SITE Chapter of the Year 2017. **3** After serving two years as SITE president, Rajeev Kohli passes the gavel to Annamaria Ruffini, SITE president 2018. **4** Leaders from both SITE and MPI gather for a dinner to kick off the SITE + MPI Global Forum. **5** At the Event Service Professionals Association 30th Anniversary Annual Conference held in Nashville January 5-7, 2018, are (l to r) Denise Reid, Hyatt Centric French Quarter, New Orleans; Brooke Lazizi and Mariya Brewer, Philadelphia CVB; Emily Nichols, Chemical Heritage Foundation; and Dominique Bonds, Pennsylvania Convention Center. **6** Cruise and all-inclusive brokerage company Buy the Sea celebrates its sixth win as Royal Caribbean's Corporate Incentive Partner of the Year. **7** Terramar, a DMC Network Company, with offices in Los Cabos, Cancun and Panama, announced in January the acquisition of Cappa & Graham Inc., a DMC Network Company, based in San Francisco.

## Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Puerto Rico Reopens March 1st

RIO GRANDE, PR — Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Puerto Rico Golf & Beach Resort is reopening March 1, 2018 following its brief closure after Hurricane Maria. At its unveiling, the lush oceanfront resort will reveal a multimillion-dollar renovation and refreshed spaces including the lobby lounge. In addition, travelers are invited to celebrate the resort's commitment to the island's recovery: One dollar of every room night booked by all guests for March and April will be donated to the El Yunque Rainforest Restoration Fund, with the goal of raising \$10,000.

Executive chef Ramon Carillo will showcase new culinary offerings at the following dining outlets during the resort's reopening: Caicu Rum Bar, featuring handcrafted, rum-based cocktails, including rare private reserve batches; and Marbella's \$1.2 million renovation debuts as the resort's modern restaurant, with a menu of traditional American favorites and Caribbean specialties.

Additional offerings that will be available following the March reopening include: Palio, an intimate and elegant restaurant serving exquisitely prepared Italian cuisine; Hole in One, offering drinks and bites served by the golf course; and 5 O'Clock Somewhere Bar & Grill.

Wyndham Grand Rio Mar offers secluded access to one mile of golden beaches, 7,000-sf Mandara Spa and fitness center, two championship 18-hole golf courses, premier casino, international tennis center, lounges and entertainment venues. [www.wyndhamriomar.com](http://www.wyndhamriomar.com)

By Deborah Gardner, CMP

## Making Speakers an Extension of Your Crisis Management Team

Imagine! You were working on your upcoming meeting or convention, and you wanted to do something really creative for the opening dinner event. After all, your attendees have seen and experienced almost everything. You and your team decided on a circus theme that had colorful tablecloths, cotton candy as the centerpiece, clowns walking around, an acrobat on the stage, a popcorn machine in one corner of the room and even a baby elephant for photo ops in the other corner with circus-themed music playing throughout the entire ballroom. The company stakeholders and your boss were there with everyone enjoying the festivities.

That is, until it was time to serve dessert. The wait staff was clearing trays full of dishware and glassware, when one server slipped and fell as he stepped from the ballroom carpet to the back-of-the-house tile floor. His tray with all the dishes and glasses came crashing down to the floor, spooking everyone on that side of the ballroom — including the baby elephant, whose wobbly rear legs gave way as he reared up, then fell over and died! Talk about the elephant in the room!

Now, I know what you're thinking. Whew! I'm glad that wasn't my meeting or conference. But, what if it was? What would you do? How do you help the attendees through this unexpected ordeal? Would you know how to handle a dead elephant situation?

### Having a Risk Management Plan Is Not Enough

Planners have their hands full on many fronts, especially safety and security considerations, which rank at the top of everyone's list nowadays. Whether it's a terrorist attack, a fire, weather event or bizarre meeting mishap — like an elephant passing away — a crisis can happen any time, any day.

So, is having a risk management plan going to adequately manage these situations? NO! There is more work to be done from everyone.

Recently, MPI shared a study from the University of Southern Mississippi National Center for Spectator Sports Safety & Security (NCS<sup>4</sup>) that showed regardless of the disruption, whether it's an active shooter, a fire alarm or some other crisis, the results are the same:

- 10 percent of people will be very active and help others to an exit door.

- 80 percent of people will sit in their seats until you say something.
- And, 10 percent of people won't move even when you tell them to, probably because they are loading their laptops.

### What Would Your Speaker Do?

As the professional speaker who was hired to conduct the opening keynote program before that circus-themed dinner event, I reflected on this devastating situation. What if this incident happened while I was delivering my speech? What would I do or say to the attendees? After all, I'm most likely holding the microphone.

So, what does this mean to the future of meetings? Meeting and event professionals along with their organizations must have the conversation with all those involved to create a safe meeting environment.

While speakers are in the room or up on the stage, sometimes you or the crisis team may not be available. This is where speakers come in...to be part of the plan. Include them as an extended part of your team.

### Here Are Three Ideas

1. **Share your risk management contingency plan.** Are there any concerns at the meeting destination or venue? What should speakers know about the area that could be a potential risk? Let them know what to review upon arrival at the venue, onsite. Familiarize them with the venue assembly points, first-aid locations and exit doors in case they have to give emergency instructions from the stage. I witnessed firsthand an unfortunate situation while viewing a speaker friend's program. Right in the middle of her speech, the fire alarm went off and she froze! Everyone froze! What took (a very long) few seconds, the meeting professional had to come from the back of the room to the stage in order to give the audience instructions. If there had been a fire and the NCS<sup>4</sup> results hold true, many people could have been seriously injured or could have died.
2. **Provide your terminology list.** It's important for your speakers to know the safety and security language. Terms such as emergency action plan, neutralized, shelter in place, all clear or means of escape are

important if a crisis happens. If a speaker doesn't know a particular code or word, it can delay help during an emergency situation. Show them where your command center is as well. After all, there should be a designated area for every meeting — right?

A valuable skill that speakers can put into practice in an emergency is cardiopulmonary resuscitation, better known as CPR. A cardiopulmonary resuscitation certification is a lifesaving technique useful in many emergencies, including heart attacks. The view a speaker has from the stage can be very helpful. For example, if

And, when something like this happens, the last thing a meeting or event professional wants is to have their event associated with it in any way. So, what can your speakers do to help you report potential HST?

- **Be aware of your surroundings.** If your speaker uses an elevator and sees girls or boys not acting quite normally, like giggling, not looking at cellphones, not talking, are dressed the same or maybe holding money or their wallets tightly, report it or call 911.
- **Use the TraffickCam app.** This app ([www.exchangeinitiative.com/traffickcam](http://www.exchangeinitiative.com/traffickcam)), allows

“What if this incident happened while I was delivering my speech? **What would I do or say** to the attendees? After all, I'm most likely holding the microphone.”

one of your attendees starts choking on a piece of bacon during a breakfast meal, what can your speaker do to help? A speaker who is CPR-certified can immediately jump into action. The best part is, anyone can receive their CPR with an online training course, which can be found at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) or [www.onlineaha.org](http://www.onlineaha.org). Suggest that your speakers become CPR-certified.

3. **Help speakers stay current on potential risks.** Hurricanes and active shooters are not the only security threats these days. Potential threats we are seeing in the industry include drone privacy, destination marijuana laws and an even bigger concern — Human Sex Trafficking (HST). Since illicit sexual behavior most commonly happens in hotels, internet trolls look for meetings or conferences that help distract from what they are doing.

your speakers to take pictures of their guest room for investigators to use help find victims of trafficking who are being advertised online by comparing the guest room backdrop. At this time, the developer's database contains more than 254,000 hotel rooms in every major metropolitan area of the U.S.

Safety and security is an ever more serious issue in the meetings industry, and as such, the roles of meeting and event professionals have changed. And now, speakers' roles have to change as well. Today's speakers must be equipped to not only impact the lives of audiences but to save them as well. Failing to include speakers in crisis planning is a lost opportunity that easily can be managed when leveraging relationships. In times of crisis, the worst thing in the world would be to have a speaker go silent from the stage when lifesaving words and actions would have made all the difference. **C&IT**



**Deborah Gardner, CMP**

is a swimming champion, longtime hospitality veteran, ambassador to Meetings Mean Business, author and performance expert who presents to hundreds of companies and organizations worldwide. Better known as the PIT BULL IN A SKIRT by many Fortune 500 companies, Deborah helps to transform her audiences, personal and business, when servicing customers, selling, negotiating or leading. To reach her, visit [www.DeborahGardner.com](http://www.DeborahGardner.com).

By David Ahearn, Frank Ford and David Wilk

## Opportunity Isn't Opportunity, Unless We Choose to Seize It

*Editor's note: David Ahearn, Frank Ford and David Wilk are founders of Four Day Weekend Comedy and entrepreneurs-in-residence at The Neeley School of Business at Texas Christian University.*

Whether it finds you in your professional life or your personal life, opportunity is present in each moment of each day. Great ideas and suggestions are presented to us all the time, and the difference between someone who is successful and someone who is unsuccessful is simply the ability to recognize opportunity and then seize it. So often we live in the space of saying the word no, and we do this so reflexively, that the best opportunities go unnoticed and pass us by.

“Every organization from a corporation to a family unit is far better and **more effective** when we **honor** and include **everyone's ideas**.”

In the world of improvisation, we strike the word no from our vocabulary and replace it with a technique called “Yes, and.” We have trained our brains to listen well and then to build on the pertinent information of our partners to come up with out-of-the-box ideas that we normally wouldn't have.

How often in your life has someone offered you a suggestion you instantly dismiss that may have been the genesis of an extraordinary innovation? How many times has someone suggested something crazy and then you quickly dismissed the idea? That very idea could have changed your life.

### ‘Put a Dent in the Universe’

Forward thinkers like Steve Jobs constantly challenged convention in the face of major resistance, only to prove the doubters wrong, and as he said, “Put a dent in the universe.” Great thinkers and doers aim to put a dent in the universe, the force that creates that dent is the word “yes.”

There's an important element that's also necessary in order for ideas to materialize into the physical realm, and that

word is “and.” Saying yes is crucial, but by adding the word and, we allow others to add their take to the original idea. We always say yes is the spark plug that ignites an initial idea; however, the word and is the engine that keeps the idea moving forward. It brings everyone into the arena of the idea, and now your idea becomes our idea. Once we all have ownership of an idea, we'll work harder to accomplish bringing that idea into reality.

In our world of improvisation, it's not about what one person creates — it's about what we create together as an ensemble. Every organization from a corporation to a family unit is far better and more effective when we honor and include everyone's ideas. Each person is an expert in some-

thing that others aren't; if we value the differences, we create innovative, unconventional ideas that otherwise would not be realized. This all starts with adopting an attitude of acceptance and the words “Yes, and.”

### Happy Accidents

When we meet ideas with acceptance, we ignite the fires of opportunity and Happy Accidents. Framing ideas in a positive light with the word “yes” opens up people's creativity because they feel their ideas are being accepted, and they feel they are part of the group or institution. The word “and” breeds inclusion of the entire group. This creates loyalty in the organization because everyone feels heard and feels directly responsible for the success of the group. This is not a panacea that only exists in fairy tales. It's a culture shift out of the word no and into the world of “Yes, and” that takes time to implement and does not happen overnight. Like working out our bodies in a gym, we work the “Yes, and” muscle in our brains. Over time, it becomes a conscious lifestyle choice and

soon leads to the recognition of Happy Accidents.

Once we fully enter the space of seeing the value in all things, we start to recognize perceived bad luck to instead be divinely orchestrated where we can capitalize on this unexpected opportunity. Sometimes being fired from one job creates the pathway to discovering our professional purpose (it certainly did in our case). The key is to see opportunity in perceived bad luck. It takes a unique, forward-thinking optimist to see the silver lining where most see the cloud. Our greatest leaders saw the luminescence of the edges of our darkest times and created opportunity. This comes from a place of seeing the potential where others see only the pitfalls: all possibility starts with “Yes, and.”

In improvisation, we give something that we like to call gifts to other performers. This is simply acknowledging the talents of those around you and setting them up to exercise those talents. If someone is proficient at doing impressions, we will create scenes in which that performer can shine by showcasing their talents of impersonation. If someone sings well, we orchestrate scenes to allow them to improvise songs. Saying “yes” to other people's ideas is giving the gift of expression to those around you; in return, they will allow you to say “and” to improve the original idea. This is giving a gift. We allow others to flourish with their talents, and they in return allow us to flourish with ours.

You don't have to be an improviser to give gifts; you can do it at work and at home as well. Giving gifts allows others to shine without any need to steal the spotlight from them, and they will in return give us gifts. This is “Yes, and” — and it can fundamentally change your life for the better. Be a gift giver!

C&IT

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Authors David Ahearn (far right), David Wilk (second from right) and Frank Ford (third from right) are members of the improvisational comedy group Four Day Weekend.

# Meetings On Deck

## Cruise Lines Are Upping Their Game for Corporate Meetings & Incentives

By Keith Loria



The Regent Seven Seas Explorer sails into the Bay of Naples in Sorrento, Italy.

Credit: Regent Seven Seas

Many companies and organizations may be surprised by all the ways cruise lines are now making it easier than ever to take a meeting to sea, from offering more three- to-five-day sailings from an increasing number of departure ports around the U.S., to a full menu of all-inclusive experiences and programs. Corporate meeting and incentive planners will find that compared to land-based

**On a cruise, “there truly is something for everyone, so meeting planners can offer every attendee a fun and useful experience.”**

**Anthony Paola, CMP, Managing Director, Meetings and Management Travel Leaders Corporate, Plymouth, MN**

programs, cruises not only simplify the logistics of planning for F&B, entertainment and event space, they’re budget-friendly.

Anthony Paola, CMP, who is managing director, meetings and management at Plymouth, Minnesota based Travel Leaders Corporate, notes that a cruise ship offers a wide variety of experiences for attendees.

“There truly is something for every-



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Event attendees can relax by the aft pool on Carnival Cruise Line's Horizon.

one, so meeting planners can offer every attendee a fun and useful experience," he says. "Whether the event is designed around a high level of activity and teambuilding or for a group incentive with leisure time, a ship offers it all."

The most obvious advantage, Paola adds, is the ability to meet in multiple ports of call.

"Not only do you have the ship's facilities available for meetings, there are venue options in all ports, each providing unique experiences," he says. "During free time, attendees have numerous activities available that can appeal to both their interests and budget."

Mark Walker, senior global sales executive for Morris Meetings & Incentives, Salt Lake City, Utah, says that since most costs are included — meeting space, AV and food (and some drinks) — it makes things easier on the planner.

"Plus, the group can see multiple destinations in one week without having to unpack and repack," he says. "The prices are usually less than land programs. It is easy and inexpensive to fly to a port in the U.S. to begin the cruise, as opposed to leaving the country."

Another advantage is that many corporations choose to charter a ship exclusively for their program. This allows

the planner to chart their own course, making the event unique.

### Catering to Corporate Groups

Jerilyn Giacone, director of corporate meetings, incentives and strategic alliances for Crystal Cruises, notes a full charter buyout allows companies to "own" the ship and fully customize for the company's needs and branding.

"Crystal's all-inclusive experiences include shipboard staff gratuities, unlimited Wi-Fi and complimentary use of all standard audio-visual equipment for private meetings, which provides



**"Every vessel has purposely built state-of-the-art conference centers and a wide variety of event venue spaces to conduct private events for all size groups."**

**Lori Cassidy**

Associate Vice President, Global Corporate Incentive and Charter Sales  
Royal Caribbean International, Miami, FL

an easy ability to budget and great value upfront when companies and organizations are planning their offsite meeting events," she says. "We also offer Michelin-inspired dining, the only river line to include European butler service for every room category, and a selection of complimentary Crystal Adventures shore excursions."

The Crystal Signature Event on every voyage, Giacone notes, is a planner's

dream because the cruise line has created a beautiful off-the-ship experience at a unique venue with a cultural entertainment feature that is included in the experience features.

"That event would cost thousands of dollars for a planner to create and produce on other programs," she says. "Crystal Esprit also includes a selection of shore excursion experiences and a luxury yacht experience that is ideal for full charters with fully inclusive on-board ambience including exceptional made-to-order cuisine, and a host of water sports used primarily on our West Indies voyages."

Lori Cassidy, associate vice president, global corporate incentive and charter sales for Royal Caribbean International, Miami, Florida, notes the company's fleet of 26 innovative floating resorts were built with business in mind.

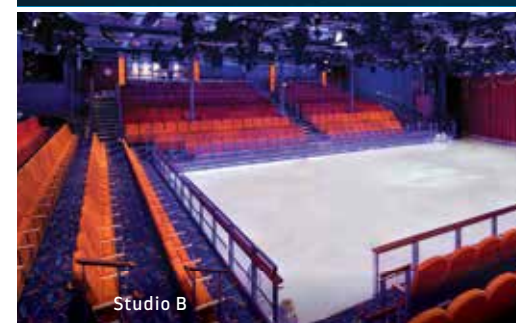
"Every vessel has purposely built state-of-the-art conference centers and a wide variety of event venue spaces to conduct private events for all size groups," she says. "Our ships range in size from 1,500 guests to 5,500 guests and we sail the globe on three-, four-, five- and seven-night cruises."

She feels Royal Caribbean's innovative ship design, wide range of award-winning entertainment and activity choices, myriad of culinary experiences



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**“There is a non-intimidating, refreshing, inclusiveness about Carnival that makes our guests feel rejuvenated and simply happy to be on board.”**

**Ann Sedgwick, CIS**  
Division Vice President  
Charter, Corporate and Incentive Sales  
Carnival Cruise Line, Miami, FL

make their trip meaningful and memorable,” Cassidy shares.

Ann Sedgwick, CIS, division vice president, charter, corporate and incentive sales for Carnival Cruise Line, Miami, Florida, says the all-inclusiveness of the ship is what makes holding a meeting or incentive trip on the seas a perfect choice for meeting planners.

“Attendees tell us that they prefer the friendliness and professionalism of the staff, the choices on board for din-



Silversea Cruises includes well-appointed state rooms for an intimate incentive experience.

ing and entertainment, the comfort of larger staterooms and the unique and memorable atmosphere that truly engages them from the moment they step on board,” she says. “There is a non-intimidating, refreshing, inclusiveness about Carnival that makes our guests feel rejuvenated and simply happy to be on board.”

#### Incentive Trips

Cruise lines often demonstrate the

“wow” factor, which is a requirement of all planners looking for a destination to host their next incentive trip.

Tanya Barnette, director, strategic key accounts, charter and incentive sales for Seabourn, Seattle, Washington, notes because the ships accommodate between 458–600 guests, they’re a perfect size for incentive trips.

“The Seabourn difference represents real value and budget control with pricing that includes complimentary inclusions such as meeting space with audio-visual equipment, receptions/cocktail parties, award-winning dining, open bars, gratuities, entertainment and much more,” she says. “In addition to our value, what better reward is there than sailing on the world’s finest ultra-luxury cruise line? Our size makes us ideal for private charter where we can fully customize a unique and exclusive experience for award-winners — everything from the itinerary, customized menus, shore excursions and adjustments to programming and entertainment.”

Since incentives tend to be more social in nature to “reward” employees for achieving their goals or customers as an appreciation, Giacone notes that Crystal can provide customization of shore excursion events, private Vintage Room food-and-wine pairing events for lunch and dinner, and receptions in its various lounges.

Freddy I. Muller, vice president of corporate and incentive sales, Americas for Silversea Cruises, Miami, Florida, says because of the intimate size of the com-



Credit: Royal Caribbean

Credit: Silversea Cruises

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pany's voyages, many are chartered for incentive programs.

"We can carve out something specific for the clients, and focus on the passengers," he says. "Almost everything is included, and we have many of the same amenities for our passengers as our larger competitors — casinos, show lounges, multiple bars and lounges."

Having a dedicated team that understands the incentive language is an important attribute of Silversea, and Muller notes that helps those planners who haven't dealt with seagoing incentive programs.

### The Cruise/Planner Relationship

The key to any successful program is the trust and bond between the planner and those running the show on the cruise line.

"It's important to listen to their needs/program requirements and provide creative 'outside of the ballroom' experiences, demonstrating the value of your destination," Cassidy says. "Hold their

hand every step of the way and provide exceptional follow-up and customer service from start to finish."

Sedgwick shares that a successful relationship develops through trust and commitment to the planners.

"We have many itinerary and ship options within the Carnival brand



**"Because of the intimate size of the company's voyages many are chartered for incentive programs. We can carve out something specific for the clients, and focus on the passengers."**

**Freddy I. Muller**, V.P. of Corporate & Incentive Sales, Americas  
Silversea Cruises, Miami, FL

alone; however, if we feel that is not a perfect match for a program, we will engage our sister cruise lines for options," she says. "Running a successful program is the utmost importance to us. We pride ourselves on handling the business correctly and have a goal that every meeting planner and company decision-maker is so completely satisfied that they will return to Carnival again in the future."

Seabourn's Barnette says that open communication and a focus on exceed-

ing expectations is the key to perfecting a partnership with a planner.

"Pre-cruise planning is crucial. Work with your cruise contact to confirm all details of the program as far in advance as possible," she says. "We tell people to partake in as many of the amenities the ship has to offer as possible. Seabourn

offers an exclusive mindful living program by (alternative medicine guru) Dr. Andrew Weil. Our tour program features unique experiences with UNESCO, and our Seabourn Conversations program features lectures by visionary experts."

Crystal Cruises' Giaccone feels the secret is an honest and open line of communication with full disclosure upfront on what the planner is hoping to achieve and if the cruise line can realistically deliver that experience and more with "surprise and delight" for their guests.

It also helps if a planner does a little homework before asking multiple cruise lines to bid on a program. After all, planners need to understand that this is not just a floating hotel. Cruise ships have full day-by-day agendas, and it is best if the planner doesn't try to swim upstream and over-schedule the passengers.

Paola advises paying particular attention to the inclusions, which are dependent on the duration of the sailing.

"They bring tremendous value," he says. "The inclusions can dramatically decrease the overall cost of the program."

### Tips for Success

Planners are more likely to succeed if they understand that while a cruise ship looks and functions very much like a hotel, there are still some basic differ-

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The new 4,004-passenger vessel Norwegian Bliss will take its inaugural cruise to Alaska.

ences that require a different approach, so flexibility is key. A planner's daily agenda for a hotel is unlikely to work on a ship simply because the ports of call need to be factored into the agenda.

"Be open-minded to create and deliver a meeting or incentive event that is different than you are accustomed to on land at a hotel or resort," Giacone states. "Give us all the details, your wants/needs and information we need to advise the ship so we can fully brief our staff on board before day one of the cruise. This way the planner walks on board from day one and everything will run effortlessly. However, we recognize that changes often are necessary while on board, and our shipboard team is fully ready to make as many adjustments as possible to accommodate the group. Just be open and flexible to ideas."

Even the most experienced planners can make mistakes from time to time, simply because there are basic differences in planning cruise-based versus land-based programs.

"Planners should fully review all requirements in advance and review programming with our event planning specialists," Cassidy says. "They should conduct a pre-con meeting, meet the key shipboard personnel, advance all events (in tandem with our onboard group coordinator), and communicate any concerns."

Oceania Cruises' Marina and Riviera ships introduced La Cuisine Bourgeoise by Jacques Pépin.

**"The group can see multiple destinations in one week without having to unpack and repack. The prices are usually less than land."**

**Mark Walker**  
Senior Global Sales Executive  
Morris Meetings & Incentives  
Salt Lake City, UT

ing. And while cruise ships are often referred to as floating hotels, the logistics are vastly different.

"If the planner is sailing with the group, secure a ship phone to ensure availability to your guests," he says. "Identify a meeting point (like the hospitality desk) that is easily accessible to your guests and plan to spend time there daily when not with the group. Arrange at least two full group gatherings. This enables you to touch base with participants during the course of the sailing."

Additionally, he shares, make sure you design the program — both pre-cruise and onboard — carefully around



A wide-angle view of the interior of the Dubai Mall, showing a large, modern lounge area. The space features a curved bar with high stools on the left, a large, ornate chandelier hanging from the ceiling, and a highly reflective floor. The walls are decorated with intricate patterns, and the overall atmosphere is one of luxury and modern design.

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the ship's schedule as there is no flexibility in the ship's timing.

Setting the stage early — months before sailing — is what Sedgwick recommends.

"For larger programs, we encourage ship visits or even sailings to meet with onboard staff," she notes. "Our dedicated event staff on board have full programming and meeting requirements well in advance and daily meetings to review schedules for the day are recommended."

One thing a planner should do ahead of time is go on a site-sailing and get to know the ship and destination so there are no surprises once at sea.

Utilizing all a ship and sailing has to offer can deliver an unforgettable program at an affordable price point.

### Cruise News

The **Carnival Horizon**, currently under construction at the Fincantieri shipyard in Marghera, Italy, will offer a bike-ride-in-the-sky attraction called SkyRide, an IMAX Theatre and a massive WaterWorks aqua park featuring a water tube slide called Kaleid-o-slide.

Sedgwick says a wide range of accommodations also will be offered, such as spa cabins with exclusive

**Planners should "be open-minded to create and deliver a meeting or incentive event that is different than you are accustomed to on land at a hotel or resort."**

**Jerilyn Giacone**

Director of Corporate Meetings, Incentives and Strategic Alliances  
Crystal Cruises, Los Angeles, CA

privileges at the luxurious Cloud 9 Spa, extra roomy staterooms in Family Harbor, and tropical-inspired Havana staterooms and suites with exclusive daytime access to a Cuban-themed bar and pool.

**Royal Caribbean** is in the process of a fleet modernization initiative that will introduce its fourth Oasis Class ship in 2018, the Symphony of the Seas, sailing from her new port in Miami beginning late fall. It also will be adding some groundbreaking technology initiatives.

**Silversea** will be serving up a new menu for its 2018 and 2019 Enriched Voyages, featuring enhanced onboard offerings with a culinary or wine theme, including five sailings developed in partnership with The Peninsula Hotels.

"Our culinary and wine Enriched Voyages are a wonderful way to blend together fascinating destinations with

a generous serving of cooking events and demonstrations designed to entertain and enlighten," says Rudi Scholdis, Silversea's culinary director.

**Seabourn** will be launching a new ship in May 2018, the Seabourn Ovation, a sister ship to its prestigious Seabourn Encore, with 300 all-suite, all-veranda accommodations.

At **Crystal Cruises**, recent enhancements made aboard Crystal Symphony during her redesign in November 2017 also will debut aboard Crystal Serenity in November 2018, including expanded specialty dining options, an open-seating dining concept, cutting-edge technological upgrades, and more of the spacious, butler-serviced Penthouse accommodations.

**Celebrity Cruises** recently unveiled its 100-guest Celebrity Flora ship, designed expressly for the Galapagos Islands. One of the most energy-efficient ships of its size in the archipelago, Flora's outward-facing design gives guests a 360-degree views of the islands, while personal suite attendants, new dining venues, an open-air stargazing platform, and expert-lead ecological seminars round out the experience.

Celebrity Cruises unveiled its new "Edge Class" design last March, with four ships ordered that will debut starting in fall 2018. The 2,900-passenger vessels are slightly smaller than Celebrity's groundbreaking "Solstice Class" line, and will have several innovative features, including a movable deck and cabins with balcony-like spaces that convert from outside to inside. Celebrity Edge also will feature the Eden venue, which will span three decks at the aft of the ship with nearly 7,000 sf

Swim into the horizon in the infinity pool on the Regent Seven Seas Explorer.



Credit: Regent Seven Seas



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Holland America Line's newest Pinnacle-class ship, Nieuw Statendam, launches in December 2018.

of glass — more outward-facing glass than any other room at sea.

In November 2018, **Norwegian Cruise Line** will introduce the Norwegian Bliss, a sister ship to Norwegian Escape, notable for the largest go-kart track at sea, an open-air laser-tag course, a high-

ly simply happiness on a plate, and I am thrilled to share this with our guests."

Oceania Cruises recently unveiled enhanced concierge level stateroom amenities, which include free laundry and in-stateroom dining service from The Grand Dining Room during

2016. The new all-suite, all-balcony ship will have a gross tonnage of 55,254 and capacity of 750 guests.

And Regent has added Cuba calls to six itineraries in the cruise line's 2018-19 Caribbean season. Travelers can visit Havana on select itineraries aboard Seven Seas Mariner, Seven Seas Voyager and Seven Seas Navigator, which depart Miami from October 2018 through March 2019.

**Princess Cruises** is debuting new features and upgrades onboard its Star Princess to start the 2018 Hawaii Season. Among the offerings are the addition of the Princess Luxury Bed, a Camp Discovery Youth & Teen Center and revamped Sabatini's restaurant.

**Holland America Line's** 99,500-ton Nieuw Statendam, the second Pinnacle Class ship for Holland America Line, will celebrate her inaugural sailing December 5, 2018. The new ship will join ms Koningsdam, which launched in April 2016. A third Pinnacle Class ship will set sail for the cruise line in 2021. While much of the ship's design will be similar to Koningsdam, Nieuw Statendam will have exclusive public spaces and its own style created by leading hospitality designer Adam D. Tihany, and designer and architect Bjorn Storbraaten. The ship will carry 2,660 guests and feature all of the hallmarks of Pinnacle-class design: grand light-filled spaces; visual drama; and sumptuous interiors inspired by the fluid curves of musical instruments. **C&IT**

lunch and dinner, with meals such as the Herb-Crusted Rack of Lamb with Vegetable Ratatouille & Gratin Dauphinois and the mouth-watering Papuan Chocolate Volcano.

Pépin's recipes are prepared throughout the ships, even in the main dining rooms, and Marina and Riviera also each feature a state-of-the-art teaching kitchen, where guests can embark on hands-on cooking classes. Limited to 24 students per session, the courses are ideal for group bonding.

In the first quarter of 2020, **Regent Seven Seas Cruises** will launch Seven Seas Splendor, the second Explorer-class ship with high-end features and amenities that have made sister-ship Seven Seas Explorer renowned as the most luxurious ship ever built with her launch in

end barbecue venue and water slides that send riders out over the ocean. The 4,004-passenger vessel will first head to Alaska, becoming the largest ship ever to sail the West Coast, before beginning service from Miami on November 17.

**Oceania Cruises** continues its focus on culinary by adding La Cuisine Bourgeoise by Jacques Pépin to its two newest ships, Marina and Riviera. Limited to 24 guests, making it ideal for intimate networking, the affair is a seven-course meal paired with fine wines and served in La Reserve, a private wine-tasting room. "Cuisine Bourgeoise is rooted in tradition and is one that shaped my childhood," explained Jacques Pépin, master chef and executive culinary director for Oceania. "It is a cuisine to savor rather than admire or evaluate, it is

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“We have an amazing hotel, the beach, two golf courses, many activities and a great family atmosphere.”

Brad Hauer, Director of Golf  
Hammock Beach Resort  
Palm Coast, FL

# Successful Golf Program?

## Tips and Strategies From Planners and Golf Professionals

By Christine Loomis

It's probably true that you'll learn something about a person's temperament, focus and integrity based on how they play golf. And tournaments are a proven platform for funding charitable causes.

All of that makes including a golf tournament in corporate events good business. But someone has to organize it, and often that person is not a golfer, which can be a disadvantage.

Fortunately, there's plenty of help on hand. We asked experienced planners and golf staff for tips and strategies on how and where to create successful corporate golf events that drive business and fun.

### From the Planner: Hammock Beach

Brenda Randolph, event specialist with MarketSource Inc., a Georgia-based sales and marketing company, has planned several corporate tournaments at Hammock Beach, a Salamander Golf & Spa Resort in Palm Coast, Florida. The tournament is part of an annual leadership conference for about 200 attendees.

The resort features two golf courses: the famed Ocean Course, designed by Jack Nicklaus, and the Conservatory Course, designed by Tom Watson. The Ocean Course reopened last fall after a 13-month restoration project.

Randolph says the goal of golf at this conference is teambuilding. Her top considerations when planning the tournament are customizing for the groups, options for contests and overall value. The MarketSource group played the Ocean Course.

About golf at Hammock Beach, she says, “Expect your golfers to be pleased with the course and the folks who make it happen,” noting that the resort's golf staff assist with the right groupings

coming back because of the consistent partnership and outstanding customer service.”

In terms of the resort, Randolph says, “Location is important and pricing aligns; however, the value and customer service are what are key for our company. There's a willingness to align with our budget, as well as to accommodate the needs of our attendees to make sure our program is a success,” she says. “Plus, everything we need is onsite

for contests and play on the course. “Our folks thoroughly enjoy golf at Hammock Beach.”

There have been no challenges, and Randolph says there's nothing she'd do differently. “We have over 10 years

— it's the complete destination package for meeting planners.”

The company has a long history with Hammock Beach. “This is a property that delivers with a unique offering versus the standard hotel options. They truly partner with you through all facets of your event from start to end.”



Central Florida's Streamsong Resort recently debuted its third course, Streamsong Black, a par-73, 7,566-acre course designed by Gil Hanse.

Credit: Gregory Heck

“Always take into account the skill level of attendees. ...You want to make sure the format sets you up for success.”

**Chrissy Felton**, Senior Instructor and Group Golf Professional  
Sea Island Golf Club,  
St. Simons Island, GA



Credit: Sea Island Golf Club

Among the resort employees who stand out for Randolph are, “Stephen Baker, outstanding sales professional, Beth Townsend, providing incredible customer service, even down to the AV team under Glen, and the banquet staff under Sonny — all of these folks deliver!”

Her advice to anyone considering a meeting or tournament at Hammock Beach: “Definitely utilize the resort from indoor to outdoors to create a memory for your groups. The various settings for meals, teambuilding and breakouts, along with the amazing scenery, bring a relaxing element to an event yet excite attendees at the same time.”

Heather P. Allen, executive director of Flagler Hospital in St. Augustine, Florida, helps plan an annual gala for about 250 at Hammock Beach Resort each May. Her top three considerations when putting together a golf tournament are the size of the group, best course to accommodate the group, and additional amenities and activities available for attendees.

“We used the Conservatory Course to host our guests for an all-day Friday shotgun start with box-lunch option,” she says. “The courses are magnificent and our guests feel honored to play on either of the courses — it’s a very special treat.”

Allen calls Hammock Beach “a wonderful destination for us because it provides a little getaway for our guests close to home. The beautiful yet secluded resort provides many amenities that make for a fun and relaxing three-day event.”

Among the resort features Allen likes are the three-bedroom suite options and the golf courses, as well as “the ability to hold multiday functions all in different venues, which provides variety in our guests’ experience. We use the lounges, outdoor spaces, golf courses and formal ballrooms. In addition, the staff is extraordinary in their preparation, responsiveness, customer service, pride and overall level of excellence. The sky is the limit with the staff and their support of the overall event success,” she adds.

“Each year we do significant transformation of the ballrooms with the help of a local décor company, and the staff is all part of that experience. Give the resort a try,” Allen recommends to those considering bringing their groups here. “You will be a repeat customer!”

### Off the Beaten Path

Exclusive and secluded in Central Florida is the 16,000-acre Streamsong Resort, which received golf accolades in April from *Golfweek*, which listed Streamsong Red and Streamsong Blue as the No. 2 and No. 3 golf courses to play in Florida. Built around the contours of former phosphate mines, the courses feature rolling elevation changes, native grasses and stunning views of ridges and the surrounding landscape — a delightfully distinctive golf experience unlike any other in Florida.

Debuting last fall, along with a new clubhouse and restaurant, is the third

championship course, Streamsong Black, designed by Gil Hanse. Hanse also is the architect of the Olympic Golf Course in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and co-designer of Castle Stuart Golf Links in Scotland. With the addition of Streamsong Black, the resort is the only location in the world where guests can enjoy three distinct courses designed by four legendary architects, including Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw of Coore & Crenshaw and Tom Doak of Renaissance Golf Design. And the resort plans to add a second practice facility, clubhouse and restaurant to serve guests playing Streamsong Black.

Streamsong Resort features 228 guest rooms, 25,000 sf of indoor and 40,000 sf of outdoor meeting and event space, five dining options, conference and event facilities, the grotto-style AcquaPietra Spa and infinity pool. Streamsong’s Clubhouse includes 12 guest rooms, a restaurant and bar, an award-winning golf shop and meeting space with breathtaking views. In addition to golf, guests can enjoy such activities as bass fishing, sporting clays, nature trails and tennis.

### From the Planner: Terranea

On the other side of the country, in Rancho Palos Verdes, California, is Terranea Resort, a Destination Hotels-managed property overlooking the Pacific Ocean on the Southern California coast. Terranea features a links-style course along the ocean presenting plenty of interest and challenge.

This unusual layout is a collection of nine championship-caliber, par-3 holes — enough to test the skills of low-handicappers yet provide fun and pleasant play for those with less experience. It’s exclusively a walking course, allowing only pull carts. An added positive to the shorter course is that golf doesn’t have to take up as much time on your agenda if you don’t want it to.

Maria Tapia, event planner and executive assistant with Hofman Hospitality Group, a family-owned restaurant group based in California, helped plan the 11th Annual HHG Leadership Retreat for approximately 195 attendees in October. It was based at Terranea Resort and in-



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## “Everything about the event and tournaments (at Terranea Resort) was amazing.”

**Maria Tapia**, Event Planner and Executive Assistant  
Hofman Hospitality Group  
Signal Hill, CA

cluded a golf tournament. She calls the location ideal. “This was the most convenient for many of our local and out-of-state participants. And the views from all over the resort are outstanding.”

Tapia says it’s critical to consider course condition, availability and weather when creating a corporate golf tournament, adding that Terranea’s Dan Marvosh went above and beyond.

Golf tournaments may be traditional but that doesn’t mean you can’t add something new to increase the fun and corporate teambuilding quotient. “Our golf tournament is a vendor and company social opportunity,” Tapia says. “In 2017 for the first time we added a foot-golf open for our company team members only, and it was a huge success.”

Tapia suggests letting players know upfront that the golf course is walking only. “A few guests were unable to participate due to the cart policy and one guest was escorted around the course during foot golf to support her team. Even though guests typically like to drive themselves on a golf course,” she notes, “it wasn’t really a problem. Our overall experience was absolutely outstanding.”

Marvosh and his team provided solid support in organizing the tournaments. “Dan and his team were amazing. We had several phone conversations to brainstorm ideas for tournaments, prizes, teams, rules, etc. At the end of both contests (golf and foot golf), we were provided with winning results to be announced that evening.”

In the end, Tapia says, “Everything about the event and tournaments was amazing.”

### From the Planner: The Broadmoor

Golf at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colorado, is as impeccable as every other aspect of the resort. Amanda Crocker, meetings and events planner with Pinnacol Assurance, says the company runs a fundraising tournament every year to benefit the Pinnacol Foundation scholarship fund and calls The Broadmoor a perfect fit.

“Attendee experience is very important to this program. Where else can you have a 200-person golf tournament in Colorado with ample space for an awards luncheon and accommodations that welcome our donors, all at a high level of quality and service?”

The Broadmoor has three layouts: The East, West and Mountain courses. That’s

“There’s something truly special about being on the property, no matter where you are.”

Crocker says pace of play is always an issue, especially with a 200-person shotgun start. “We worked with the tournaments manager to come up with ways to eliminate the bottlenecks on certain holes. They are the course experts, so I rely heavily on them when it comes to on-course challenges.”

Staff assists off-course, too. “They’re there to help from initial planning to the day of the program,” Crocker says. “They are 100 percent devoted to us during that time. They have hustled to help us with load-in, move items from the golf club to the course, with signage and to ensure our guests are happy throughout the day. If I need a cart, an extra



Ocean view from the links at Terranea Golf Resort, Rancho Palos Verdes, California.

Credit: Figlewicz Photography

another fit for Pinnacol’s tournament, which requires multiple courses. Crocker counts timing, weather, available space for lunch and an awards program and player experience among the primary considerations when planning a tournament, but notes that anyone planning at The Broadmoor has ample help.

“Use their resources,” she advises. “The Broadmoor service team is there for you and can help think through challenges and propose ideas. The tournament staff at the golf club is so helpful and experienced. They are there to help with everything.”

That service extends across the resort. “As soon as you step out of your car, you’re greeted with a high level of service and ambience,” Crocker says.

hand or something last minute on the course, it’s done.”

One thing she’s learned since she started planning tournaments is that it’s important to know the courses. “I drive the courses before the tournament to

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## “There’s something truly special about being (at The Broadmoor), no matter where you are.”

**Amanda Crocker**, Meetings and Events Planner  
Pinnacol Assurance  
Denver, CO

review sponsor signage and on-course setups for our volunteers,” she says.

Her advice for anyone considering The Broadmoor is to work with a sales manager on what all of the meeting spaces offer because there are so many options. “And book early if you have a specific date in mind.”

### From the Pro: Sea Island

At Sea Island, a Forbes Five Star resort on St. Simons Island, Georgia, senior instructor and group golf professional Chrissy Felton says tournaments require upfront discussions. “We ask planners several questions in front of the event to plan for their needs. Depending on the number of golfers, we offer standard tee times, a double tee start (off both No. 1 and No. 10 tees) or a shotgun start. It’s important to determine the format of the tournament (scramble, Ryder Cup, four ball, foursomes). This allows us to set up the event for success.”

Knowing the number of players is critical. If it’s fewer than 60, for example, Felton says, “A shotgun start is not always the best option. Depending on size, managed tee times can work just as well.”

Like other pros, Felton believes non-golfers can successfully plan tournaments — with help. “They may benefit from assistance and understanding of how the event will operate, and that’s where we come in. If they don’t know what they want, we coach them with our experience to ensure a successful event.”

At Sea Island Resort, every group is assigned its own golf professional at no extra charge, Felton says, “to assist with pairings, cart signs, scorecards, scoring and rules sheets. They handle the details relating to the golf portion of the event, which allows the meeting planner to focus on the rest of the program. The planning for a golf event starts with the contracting process. Our sales team works directly with the client and the golf staff to reserve the right format, whether with tee times or a shotgun start. This process continues with our conference service team as we get closer to the event dates.”

Sea Island has three championship



Enjoy mountain views at The Broadmoor’s West Golf Course, in Colorado Springs.

courses, five-star accommodations and a magnificent setting, making it ideal for high-end incentive programs. It also has a Golf Performance Center.

“This is available for groups to enjoy full-swing instruction, putting lessons, golf fitness, course management and personalized club fitting,” Felton says. “We offer golf clinics before events to help make players feel more confident. The players then go out and play a scramble. We also offer pro-am scrambles so a less experienced golfer

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## “About golf at Hammock Beach...expect your golfers to be pleased with the course and the folks who make it happen.”

**Brenda Randolph**, Event Specialist  
MarketSource Inc.  
Alpharetta, GA

can go out with a pro and get some on-course assistance.”

In addition, Felton notes, the resort offers fun events such as glow-ball driving and putting tournaments as well as fun and challenging putting competitions. “Events such as these are great for teambuilding as well as relationship building.”

The resort can accommodate groups of from eight to 450 golfers, and Felton

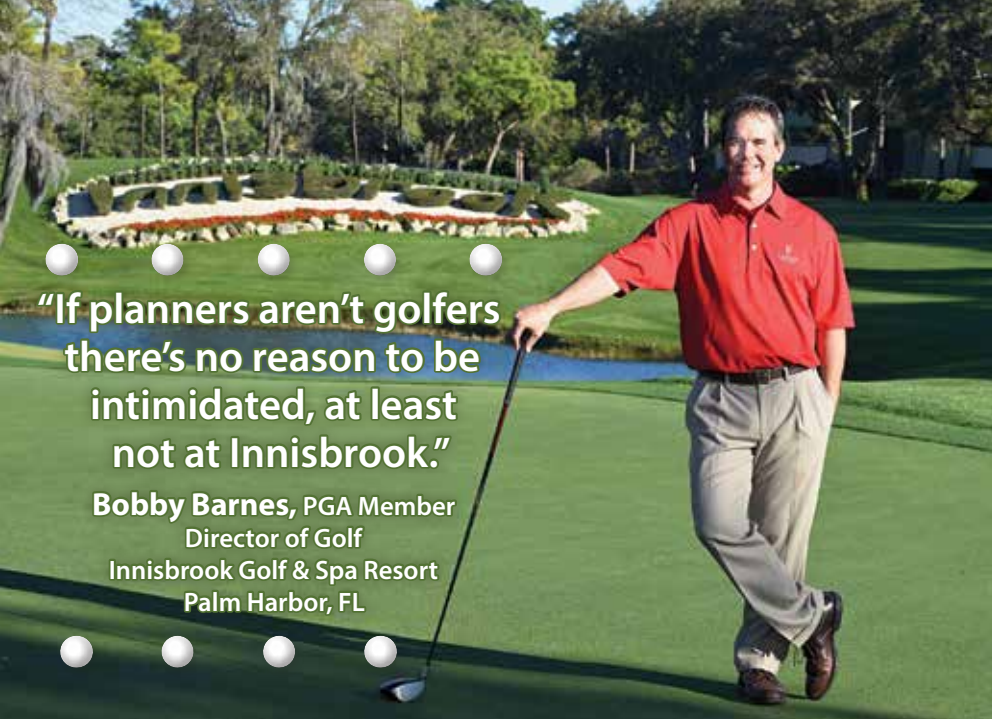
says scrambles and shambles are the best formats for corporate events. Her biggest challenge relates to weather. “Predicting the weather is difficult but it is something we have to deal with when planning an outdoor activity.”

Regarding timing, Felton says the earlier you book, the better. “This is especially the case if the group is interested in peak golf season, March–May and September–November. Tee times are blocked during the contracting process and details are worked out during the planning process.”

To planners she says, “Golf is a wonderful game that brings colleagues, clients etc., together outside of an office or meeting environment. When planning your golf event, always take into account the skill level of attendees. While this typically varies from group to group, you want to make sure the format sets you up for success. The main goal is to have fun!”

Work began in December 2017 on a \$25 million enhancement program at The Lodge at Sea Island that will include six new cottages, a new state-of-the-art Golf Performance Center, an ocean-front pool and pool house, and a new putting course. The new additions are expected to debut in November 2018 in time for the RSM Classic, an official PGA Tour event held annually at Sea Island Golf Club.

Additionally, in December 2018, Sea Island’s Plantation Course will undergo a full renovation under the direction of Love Golf Design, reopening in October 2019.



Credit: Innisbrook Golf & Spa Resort

“If planners aren’t golfers there’s no reason to be intimidated, at least not at Innisbrook.”

**Bobby Barnes**, PGA Member  
Director of Golf  
Innisbrook Golf & Spa Resort  
Palm Harbor, FL

### From the Pro: Innisbrook

Bobby Barnes, PGA member, director of golf at Innisbrook, a Salamander Resort, in Palm Harbor, Florida, says providing accurate information is critical.

“The most important thing for me to know about a group in terms of assisting them in planning a golf tournament is first, how many players are in the field. This is critical to determining their rate and how many tee times are required to accommodate their event. Next would be what type of format and what assistance they’ll need from our staff, e.g. scoring, proximities on the course, prizes, etc.”

He says if he can get all details 72 hours prior to the tournament, that goes a long way to ensuring success.

Golf knowledge is helpful but not required. “If planners aren’t golfers there’s no reason to be intimidated, at least not at Innisbrook,” Barnes says. “Our professionals will assist and make sure the planning is easy for everyone. We’ll walk them through each step.”

That said, planners should be very organized and get everything in order early, including selecting the format, getting prizes, setting up rental clubs and providing all player names to the staff. At Innisbrook, golf staff helps by setting up a pre-con meeting to discuss all details. Barnes recommends a year in advance as a good timeline but says he’s run successful programs

in less time. “The more lead time, the better,” he says.

In terms of numbers, Barnes puts the ideal at 120 players per course. “This allows for a full field to optimize revenues for the resort but doesn’t over saturate the golf course and allows for a good pace of play.”

He believes a scramble is the best format. “It allows everyone to participate despite their skill level and adds the element of teambuilding that I believe is important with corporate events. As long as I know ahead of time that a tournament will include all levels of players, and I have input regarding the type of format being played, player skill levels aren’t an issue.”

In addition to format, Barnes says it’s easy to accommodate groups of mixed skill levels by having “an A, B, C & D player in each foursome, which evens out the field and prevents a group of a low-skill-level players from holding up the entire field.”

Among Innisbrook’s assets are a staff that includes nine PGA members, as well as four championship courses, one of which has hosted a PGA Tour event for almost 30 years and another that has hosted LPGA and NCAA championships. That can be a big draw for corporate participants.

The biggest challenges in Barnes’ view are “last-minute changes leading up to and on the day of the event. If there

are little to no changes,” he says, “tournaments usually go off without a hitch.”

### From the Pro: Hammock Beach

Brad Hauer, director of golf at Hammock Beach Resort, wants to know upfront what a group wishes to accomplish with golf. Is it meant to be fun? Competitive? He lists scramble and captain’s choice as formats that work well for players and pace of play, but says, “We can do any kind of format they’d like and accommodate any number of players.”

Like the other pros, Hauer says his team is ready and able to help planners who don’t have deep knowledge of golf. “It takes more time explaining how golf tournaments work and about the potential challenges they may not understand, but our staff is here to educate and assist in every aspect of running the golf tournament. There’s nothing to be afraid of. Our staff is very knowledgeable and is happy to assist planners to make the experience as easy as possible.”

That said, it’s helpful if planners can enlist a golfer at the company to help, too.

Hauer lists poor communication as a challenge in the process, especially if planners don’t understand the inner workings of a large group tournament and what’s required to run it. From that perspective, planners are encouraged to ask questions, ask for assistance and provide as much detailed information to resort staff as possible.

“We have an inside team that works closely with the group after contracts have been signed,” Hauer says. They find out exactly what the client wants from start to finish. He suggests groups book at least a year in advance to secure the tee times they want.

“We have an amazing hotel, the beach, two golf courses, many activities and a great family atmosphere. Groups can expect service and experience to be top-notch.”

However you plan and play it and whatever the goals may be, one thing is sure: A golf tournament is another worthy business tool in a planner’s conference toolkit. **C&IT**



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## New & Renovated Hotels

### Building Interest From Coast to Coast



The residential lobby at the Omni Louisville Hotel, which is topped with 225 luxury apartments.

Long-established meeting destinations such as Atlantic City, New York and Las Vegas thrive in part on a certain nostalgic appeal: Groups want to have those classic experiences, whether it's the Boardwalk, Carnegie Hall or the Flamingo of Bugsy Siegel fame. But what's new in these cities can be just as engaging, and hotel openings, expansions and renovations are often exactly the kinds of new developments that catch a planner's eye.

#### Northeast

Such was the case in 2016 when Harrah's Resort Atlantic City introduced the \$125 million Waterfront Conference Center. According to Glendia Bursey, executive assistant to Jeff Bender, CEO of Harris Computer Systems, the conference space was the major factor in selecting Harrah's for the 2017 Harris

Customer Training Conference. "To date it was the best conference space that I have worked in. The overall feedback on the space was amazing." Held in November, the conference brought 1,400 attendees to Harrah's for the first time, and participants were able to experience the renovated Bayview Tower guest rooms. Completed last summer, the \$30 million project redesigned and enhanced the 450 guest rooms and suites with fresh design elements such as a lavender and blue color scheme, and new luxurious bathroom amenities. All Bayview rooms and suites now feature high-speed internet access and accessible charging stations, in addition to 55-inch LG LED televisions. Besides the rooms renovation, The Pool at Harrah's/The Pool after Dark received a \$2.6 million redesign and a brand new, \$300,000 fitness center was added. An enhancement project at Atlantic

City's Resorts Casino Hotel, a Mohegan Sun property, somewhat parallels the developments at Harrah's. Last year, Resorts renovated all 480 rooms in its Ocean Tower, and prior to that opened a new conference center in 2015. The guest room renovation was inspired by Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville, with sand-toned carpets, coral patterns and tropical dark woods. The new high-tech conference center offers 64,000 sf of meeting space, encompassing 24 meeting rooms, four ballrooms and a multi-purpose showroom.

Wayne Feret, general manager of Praxair Distribution Inc., has been bringing sales meetings to Resorts for about 15 years, and truly appreciates the evolution of the property. He most recently brought a kickoff meeting of about 100 attendees to the hotel, and back in 2015 brought in one of the first groups to use the new conference center. The stage

for general session "used to be like an old Vaudeville stage with curtains," he recalls. "And when they rebuilt the conference center, it's now much more accommodating and modern with the big screen, 90-inch TVs in each one of the breakout rooms. We had zero technical issues this year with our computers; we hooked them in and the speakers worked well, everything linked in. It was a picture-perfect event."

The service, not just the new facility, also was conducive to the success of the program. "They went the extra mile because when you have these meetings, at the last second things change. Two other people needed to present, and they were able to accommodate me by adding extra breakout rooms very quickly," Feret relates. On the F&B side, the group enjoyed the property's Landshark Bar and Grill on the Boardwalk for the opening night reception of the last sales meeting. "It's a great atmosphere," says Feret. "We had an open bar, and they had the endless Jimmy Buffet mini cheeseburgers, pulled pork and more. People trickled in to the event between 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. It was a great gathering place."

The hotel renovations and conference center openings in Atlantic City should be on the radar of any planner considering the Northeast. Following is a selection of other significant hotel developments in various regions of the country.

#### Southeast

Atlanta is now home to a new offering from Omni Hotels & Resorts that will especially appeal to baseball fans. The 264-room Omni Hotel at the Battery Atlanta is a full-service hotel that serves as a cornerstone of the mixed-use community adjacent to SunTrust Park, future home of the Atlanta Braves. Groups can avail themselves of more than 20,000 sf of function space, rooftop hospitality suites and an elevated pool deck and bar with views into the Battery Atlanta.

In Orlando, work is progressing on the expansion of Disney's Coronado Springs Resort, the largest of the six convention hotels at Walt Disney World

Resort. This year, the resort will complete a new 15-story, 500-room tower, along with a new rooftop restaurant and lounge atop the tower offering views of nighttime fireworks. Currently, Disney's Coronado Springs Resort houses more than 500 guest rooms and 220,000 sf of function space. At Universal Orlando Resort, two value-priced properties will debut in the summer of 2019: a 750-room hotel and a 2,050-room hotel, both located near Universal Orlando's three theme parks as well as Universal CityWalk.

In September 2017, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort in Or-



**"To date (Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center) was the best conference space that I have worked in. The overall feedback on the space was amazing."**

**Glendia Bursey**, Executive Assistant  
Harris Computer Systems, Ottawa, ON

lando, Florida, completed a \$150 million, three-year makeover that included a total redesign of all 2,270 guest rooms, renovation of the resort's 331,000 sf of meeting space and a top-to-bottom, \$12 million transformation of the lobby (for details, see page 44).

In Miramar Beach, Florida, the Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort has announced a \$2.7 renovation of its 15,000-sf Linkside Conference Center (for details, see page 42).

In Tampa on Florida's Gulf Coast, the JW Marriott brand is making strides with the agreement to operate the new, 519-room hotel being developed next to the Marriott Waterside Hotel & Marina. The 26-story hotel is expected to open in 2020. Together, the properties are expected to help the Tampa Convention Center book larger groups. In addition, it has been reported that Strategic Property Partners, a joint venture between Tampa Bay Lightning owner Jeff Vinik and Bill Gates' Cascade Investment, plans to spend \$40 million to renovate the 719-room Marriott Waterside Hotel & Marina by early 2019.

#### South and Southwest

Hotel development in Music City has been in full swing with several major new openings, beginning in 2016 with the debut of the 453-room Westin Nashville, adding 20,000 sf to the city's meeting space inventory. This year will see the 533-room JW Marriott Nashville open in July. The 33-story property will house 50,000 sf of function space, the award-winning Bourbon Steak by Michael Mina, a world-class Spa by JW and a collection of musically inspired contemporary art. In addition, by midyear a tri-brand hotel opens in Nashville's SoBro neighborhood. The property will

comprise an AC Hotels by Marriott that occupies 209 rooms in one wing, and a combined 125-room SpringHill Suites by Marriott and 136-room Residence Inn by Marriott in the adjoining wing.

"Nashville is under some massive construction in the downtown area right now, and they're growing by leaps and bounds," says Judy Payne, CMP, director, meetings and travel with GameStop.



2017 Harris Customer Training Conference at Harrah's AC's Waterfront Conference Center.

# Avoiding Disruption

The word “disruption” has acquired a positive connotation in today’s atmosphere of business innovation. But when it comes to hotel renovations, a disruption to a meeting is something to be avoided, and that is a matter of both contractual language and onsite flexibility in some cases.

“We ask the hotel to immediately notify us once they decide that construction or maintenance might occur over our dates,” says Judy Payne, CMP, director, meetings and travel with GameStop. The contract clause would then provide the group the right to cancel without penalty. If disruption occurs onsite due to a renovation that was not announced, Payne adds that she would likely seek some kind of reimbursement or rate discount. But that scenario can be avoided with some resourcefulness on the hotel’s part to ensure the meeting flows smoothly despite the renovation work.

## Going Above and Beyond

Such was the case at the Anaheim Marriott that GameStop utilized in 2014. “They completely remodeled their whole lobby area in the middle of our meeting in 2014. The construction was extensive, a lot more than we expected. One of the bars was closed down, which is where we would mingle the most,” Payne relates. “But we worked with the hotel and we found the solution. They pipe-and-draped off everything so there was nothing that our attendees would



Anaheim Marriott’s remodeled Laxah Lobby

see, and we relocated the lobby area. They reworked it to make sure we were happy with the relocation. And then the hotel created an impromptu restaurant for our attendees on the patio. They added in tables, seating, a lot of outdoor lighting, palm trees and heaters. It actually ended up being better than if we would have had it at the bar. The attendees really liked being outdoors, and the hotel went above and beyond to create a custom atmosphere for them.”

That kind of commitment to the client experience not only prevents the renovation from becoming a disruption, but also impresses the planner. GameStop returned to the property in 2016 and enjoyed the new lobby. “It shows that they’re a partner and want to make sure we’re happy. And quite frankly, that impromptu bar ended up bringing them a lot of revenue because it was a place where people would congregate,” she adds. — PS

The GameStop Annual Conference in 2019, bringing in an expected 7,000 attendees, will utilize the new Westin and the AC Hotels property. “This will be our first event in Nashville in about a decade since we’ve grown so large,” Payne explains. “GameStop purchased EB Games in 2005 and immediately went

new property, Payne observes certain best practices. “First, I try to reach out to a fellow planner who’s been there before me, and hopefully get their opinion on what works best and what doesn’t, because nothing travels faster than word of mouth,” she says. “If I can’t get that, I post on forums and see what peo-

cently opened hotel, “we’re going to go in wide-eyed and ready, knowing that there’s probably a few kinks they haven’t worked out yet. But we’re always willing to work with the hotel as a partner to get the best overall experience for our attendees.”

A newly built property that opened in late December in the city of Denton, Texas, makes that town more promising for meeting groups. The Embassy Suites by Hilton Denton Convention Center is built to LEED Gold specifications and features a 70,000-sf convention center that can divide into 22 separate meeting rooms. Amenities include an outdoor pool, 8,000-sf event lawn and 24-hour health club. The 318-room property is located in the heart of the up-and-coming Rayzor Ranch Town Center, close to a variety of shops, bars and restaurants.

“Having a business-class hotel and event space here in Denton expands Peterbilt’s options for hosting events locally,” says Robert Woodall, assistant



**Accommodating small meetings can guide some hotel redesigns. “It could be...adding little cubbies to the common areas so people can sit down and have little impromptu meetings.”**

Judy Payne, CMP, Director, Meetings and Travel  
GameStop, Grapevine, TX

from 2,000 stores to 4,000. We outgrew the Gaylord, so now that Nashville has that beautiful downtown convention center, it’s large enough to hold us, and they’re adding all these beautiful downtown hotels.”

When doing a site inspection for a

ple have said who have (utilized) these brand-new hotels, like the ones that are popping up in Nashville.”

Ideally, a property would be open for at least a year and a half before her meeting, she adds. But in general, when onsite with her group at a re-

general manager, sales and marketing, Peterbilt Motors Company. “We are pleased to see the hotel and convention center come to fruition and are excited to take advantage of this new local resource.”

Omni Hotels & Resorts is not only making an impact on Atlanta with the opening at the Battery Atlanta, but also in the Midwest. The 612-room Omni Louisville Hotel opens in March. Located in proximity to 4th Street Live, the Kentucky International Convention Center and Whiskey Row, the property offers groups approximately 70,000 sf of function space. The hotel is home to Bob’s Steak & Chop House, a rooftop pool deck, a Mokara Spa, and even a speakeasy with a bowling alley.

And in Austin, the Omni Barton Creek Resort & Spa has begun a \$150 million renovation and expansion, expected to be completed by mid 2019. The project will redesign the property’s guest rooms, lobby, poolscape and golf course, add a new 180-room resort tower (bringing the total to 493), a conference center with six new meeting rooms and a new ballroom, an event pavilion, six dining outlets, Mokara Spa and tennis complex.

## West and West Coast

Caesars Entertainment not only has been enhancing its Atlantic City hospitality product but also its considerable portfolio in Las Vegas. In 2016, the company upgraded more than 4,800 rooms at four of its Las Vegas resorts, including Caesars Palace, Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino, Paris Las Vegas and Harrah’s Las Vegas. Last year, Caesars invested more than \$100 million in renovating its 1,181-room Palace Tower, including the exclusive 29th floor with its luxurious villas. Through the second quarter of this year, the company continues its \$90 million renovation of 1,270 rooms at the 3,460-room Flamingo Las Vegas, a project that began in August. The property’s 70-year history is being celebrated in the “retro-chic” redesign. (Turn the page to learn about the new Caesars Forum.)

In Colorado, the 613-room Hilton

Denver City Center debuted its \$27 million renovation in December. The 20-story property affords Rocky Mountain views and is located near the Colorado Convention Center and Denver Art Museum. The hotel’s 32,000+ sf of meeting space is serviced by an in-house AV staff.

Planners who favor the Disney experience will have a new option in Anaheim, California, with Disneyland’s first new-build hotel in nearly 20 years. Construction is expected to begin this summer on the 700-room, AAA Four Diamond hotel, located at the north end of the Downtown Disney parking lot. A 2021 opening is expected. A



**“(Resorts) went the extra mile because when you have these meetings, at the last second things change. They were able to accommodate me...very quickly.”**

Wayne Feret, General Manager  
Praxair Distribution Inc. Morrisville, PA

tried-and-true Disney meeting hotel in Anaheim, Disney’s Grand Californian Hotel & Spa, recently finished remodeling its guest rooms, pool area, concierge-level Craftsman Club and updating lobby furniture. The Grand Californian houses more than 940 guest rooms and 20,000 sf of function space that includes the 11,900-sf Sequoia Ballroom.

The Anabella Hotel near the Anaheim Convention Center is being replaced with the new 613-room Westin Anaheim Resort by 2019. Among several property highlights will be three restaurants, a resort-style pool with tropical landscaping and a rooftop lounge that allows groups to enjoy Disneyland’s nightly fireworks. The Westin Anaheim will also be well stocked with meeting space: 42,000 sf, including a 16,000-sf grand ballroom.

Also of note is an airport hotel renovation in Portland, Oregon: the Sheraton Portland Airport Hotel completed a \$7.5 million improvement project in January. All 215 rooms and suites have

been refurbished and now feature more media outlets, and the F&B offerings have been enhanced with the opening of Rose & Compass, showcasing Northwest cuisine. The hotel offers groups 22,500 sf of meeting space spanning 15 rooms.

## Supporting the Small Gathering

The Sheraton Portland Airport Hotel also has introduced its “Meetings in a Minute” concept with several four-person meeting rooms equipped with business amenities.

Indeed, the idea of accommodating small and sometimes informal gather-

ings has guided redesigns at many hotels, Payne observes. “It could be expanding their bar with a lot of networking pods, or adding little cubbies to the common areas so people can sit down and have little impromptu meetings when they need to,” she notes. “One thing that I’ve seen at many of the newer hotels around the Dallas/Fort Worth area is that they’re creating the opportunity to have small, impromptu meetings. For example, the Courtyard Dallas DFW Airport North/Grapevine has in the restaurant area little booths that seat maybe four to six people. At the end of each booth there is a built-in monitor with dongles so you can easily plug in and put your PowerPoint right there on the wall, so you can immediately have a screen. You can have a conversation and a meeting without having to secure a room or going through the hoops of trying to find a location where you can put your PowerPoint up. It’s a fantastic feature.”

Turn the page for more “new & renovated” news. C&IT

## CAESARS FORUM

Caesars Entertainment has announced plans to develop CAESARS FORUM, a brand new 550,000-sf conference center in Las Vegas. The \$375 million investment will feature the two largest pillarless ballrooms in the world, located at the center of the Las Vegas Strip. Scheduled to officially open in 2020, Caesars expects to break ground on CAESARS FORUM early in the second quarter of 2018. CAESARS FORUM will be the ideal location for anyone looking to host meetings and events in Las Vegas.

FORUM will offer the latest in technology, a modern design, natural light and a neutral palette. The conference center will be LEED Silver certified, maintaining our dedication to our corporate social responsibility initiatives.

CAESARS FORUM will be built all on one level with two loading docks, making it easy to set up and tear down meetings. The facility will feature Forum Sky Bridge, which will have access to a monorail stop, giving attendees an effortless way to get around the Las Vegas Strip.

### Sky Bridge Access

The facility will have direct access to the 5,000 rooms at both Linq and Harrah's hotels through the Forum Sky Bridge. Flamingo Las Vegas is accessible through the Linq Promenade and offers another 3,500 hotel rooms. In addition, the conference center will be walking distance to eight of Caesars Entertainment's Las Vegas properties, providing accessibility to 20,000 rooms. With so many options, planners can offer a range of hotel rates to their attendees, providing complete flexibility. Caesars Entertainment has invested more than \$200 million in renovations to its hotel rooms in Las Vegas. Planners will love the modern design, created with the business traveler in mind.

### Forum Plaza

CAESARS FORUM will feature Forum Plaza, a 100,000-sf outdoor plaza. The plaza will be perfect for breakfast, lunch or dinner under the stars. The outdoor space also can be used for wellness breaks, receptions and CSR activities. The Forum Plaza will be connected to the Linq Promenade, offering world-class dining, live entertainment and shopping, and is anchored by the world-famous High Roller. Caesars Entertainment is already taking reservations for this state-of-the-art conference center.

C&IT

### Meeting Space

CAESARS FORUM will feature 300,000 sf of flexible meeting space, with two 108,000-sf ballrooms, two 40,000-sf ballrooms and four boardrooms. The two 108,000-sf ballrooms are each divisible into 41 sections, while the two 40,000-sf ballrooms are divisible into 22 sections. The ballrooms will be perfect for any event including general sessions, breakouts, meals and exhibit space. The conference center can hold meetings for more than 10,000 attendees but is flexible enough to still accommodate small meetings. CAESARS

Las Vegas, NV 89019  
Contact: Michael Massari  
Chief Sales Officer  
855-633-8238  
MEET@Caesars.com  
CaesarsMeansBusiness.com



**Guest Rooms:** 8,500  
**Meeting Space:** 300,000 sf  
**Special Services & Amenities:** CAESARS FORUM will feature the two largest pillarless ballrooms in the world, located at the center of the Las Vegas Strip.



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Resort Sales  
866-626-9215  
Fax: 850-267-8097  
dankeyser@sandestin.com  
www.sandestin.com/CIT

Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort recently announced its multimillion-dollar renovation of the 15,000-sf Linkside Conference Center. Offering superbly equipped function space adjacent to Sandestin's Bayside area and a short stroll from the Bayside Villas, the conference center is ideal for groups from 10 to 1,200, including two bayfront venues, a 5,500-sf ballroom, four breakout rooms and an executive boardroom.



**Guest Rooms/Suites:** 1,300  
**Meeting Space:** 65,000 sf  
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- Fitness center access.
- Seasonal resort tram service.
- Preferred beach parking.

### Elegant Transformation

The \$2.7 million elegant transformation of Linkside Conference Center features a Southern coastal contemporary look with soothing colors of chocolate brown, different hues of blue and cool grays. The tasteful and elegant new design brings the space to light with custom-colored carpet in the pre-function and ballroom areas. Beautiful pendant lighting and sconces, tasteful furniture and eye-catching artwork all accentuate the space.

The Bayview Room, featuring breathtaking views along Choctawhatchee Bay, has been elevated with elegant carpet and crystal chandeliers.

This project signifies the resort's commitment to providing the highest quality meeting experience for attendees and

resort guests. The meeting professionals of Sandestin look forward to presenting Linkside Conference Center's exterior and interior transformation.

Meeting planners can utilize creative and unique landscape options including outdoor gathering spots such as lawns, marina, pool decks, terraces and beach to host a sunset luau on the beach, a night of entertainment aboard a luxury yacht, fishing on a charter boat, teambuilding and much more. Options for mixers and private dining are just steps away in the 26-acre pedestrian Village of Baytowne Wharf, offering several entertainment and dining options.

Sandestin also has an impressive list of activities for groups. Sandestin's four championship golf courses are perfect for hosting company tours featuring tee prizes and 19th hole cocktails and catering. There's also charter boat fishing from Baytowne Marina and beach bonfires with live entertainment.

### Teambuilding

Teambuilding activities include: fun runs, beach olympics, scavenger hunts, relay races, bay fishing, Baytowne Adventure Zone, stand-up paddleboard relays on Choctawhatchee Bay, interactive games such as spiderweb challenge, "Minute to Win It" challenges and much more. Baytowne Adventure Zone challenges groups with everything from a ropes course and zip line to a rock climbing wall in the Village.

The resort is recognized as a premier meeting and conference destination capturing the industry's highest awards. Sandestin delivers seamless service, flawless programs and impressive corporate retreat facilities. A meeting resort such as Sandestin is the perfect way to make your next business function a fun, productive and memorable one.

For more information about planning a meeting at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort, call 866-626-9215 or visit [www.sandestin.com/CIT](http://www.sandestin.com/CIT).

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## Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort

In 2017, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort underwent a comprehensive renovation of the Walt Disney World Dolphin lobby. This \$12 million redesign was the final stage of the largest makeover in the resort's history. The new lobby has been completely transformed into a sleek contemporary space, and features new dining and beverage options as well as more space for attendees to socialize.

### Inviting New Lobby

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

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

The lobby redesign is the final stage of a total \$150 million project, which also includes the transformation of all 2,270 guest rooms, along with upgrades to the hotel's meeting space.

The renovated guest rooms feature all of the latest technology including large HDTVs and all-new upgraded furniture centered on the famous Westin Heavenly Bed. The design continues into a completely new bathroom, featuring residen-

tial-style vanities and a back-lit mirror on iridescent glass tiles.

### Award-winning Meetings Team

A recipient of the many prestigious meeting and other awards, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort is a nationally respected and recognized leader in the convention resort arena. The resort offers more than 331,000 sf of meeting space, 86 breakout rooms, and 2,270 guest rooms and suites.

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

### Foodie Destination

The resort is recognized as a top "Foodie" destination in Orlando featuring 16 world-class restaurants and lounges including the famed celebrity Chef Todd English's bluezoo, Il Mulino New York Trattoria and Shula's Steak House, which serves the best beef money can buy.

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

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800-524-4939  
Fax: 407-934-4880  
meetings@swandolphin.com  
SwanDolphinMeetings.com



**Guest Rooms:** 2,270  
**Meeting Space:** 331,000 sf  
**Special Services & Amenities:** 86 meeting and breakout rooms; onsite DMC and AV services; 17 restaurants and lounges.

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



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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Destination

# Atlantic City

## Meetings and Family Friendly — It's Not Just a Gaming Town Anymore

By Derek Reveron

**T**here are more reasons than ever to meet in Atlantic City. The destination has shed its decades-old reputation as only a gaming capital by expanding and renovating properties and meeting spaces while offering more activities, entertainment and dining options.

As a result, Atlantic City is attracting more families and meetings, including many groups from outside its traditional East Coast base of businesses and associations. Groups have a choice of gaming and non-gaming properties offering a total of about 7,000 guest rooms, 260 meeting rooms and 1 million sf of meeting space.

Non-gaming hotels include Sheraton Atlantic City, Showboat Atlantic City, The Claridge Hotel (now a Radisson property), Courtyard by Marriott and Stockton Seaview Resort. Gaming hotels include Harrah's Resort Atlantic City, Caesars Atlantic City, Bally's Atlantic City, Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, The Water Club (Borgata), Resorts Casino Hotel, Golden Nugget Atlantic City, Hard Rock Hotel & Casino and Tropicana Hotel & Casino.

Many Atlantic City properties are undergoing improvements. The iconic Tropicana, for example, completed \$40

million in renovations including 500 Havana Tower Hotel and the North Tower. Tropicana offers 122,000 sf of meeting space including an 18,000-sf column-free ballroom that accommodates up to 1,800 attendees as well as 50 function rooms and the Grand Exposition Center, which accommodates groups of up to 2,000 people.

### The Tropicana Experience

In September, Five Below, a Philadelphia-based discount store chain, held its annual meeting for 900 store managers, district managers, regional directors and other employees at the Tropicana. "In the past, we have had smaller meetings at the Tropicana," says Dennis Lattman, director, field human resources, Five Below. "We were excited to return with the entire Five Below team."

Tropicana was a good fit for Five Below for several reasons, including the meeting space. "Meeting accommodations were perfect," says Lattman. "We occupied almost 500 rooms and everyone was close to the meeting space and theater. Both were in close proximity so it was convenient and allowed

The concert venue at Harrah's Resort Atlantic City seats 1,200 for special events.

Credit: Meet AC

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HOTEL CASINO & SPA  
ATLANTIC CITY

An MGM Resorts Luxury Destination



Credits: Resorts Casino Hotel

Resorts Casino Hotel's Horizon Ballroom overlooks the Atlantic. (Top) The Margaritaville entertainment complex was recently overhauled.

us to network and communicate information to attendees in an easy manner."

Location also was a big plus. "Being on the Boardwalk with the beach within walking distance was great for everyone," says Lattman. "Tropicana also has many convenient restaurants, shopping and entertainment activities to choose from within the hotel."

Five Below attendees enjoyed almost everything the Tropicana offers. "They utilized Tropicana gift cards that Five Below provided to them," says Lattman. "We had our district manager happy hour at Jose Garces' Olón restaurant, which provided great views of the beach and authentic food and cocktails. The entire group enjoyed meals at Tropicana's other restaurants."

Lattman plans to continue meeting at the Tropicana, partly because of its stellar service. "There are so many examples of this that it's hard to limit it to a few instances," says Lattman. "The food and catering department responded quickly to menu changes and event needs. The head of hotel sales ensured that everything was handled with pleasure, gratitude and smiles."

### Resorts Casino Shines

Another property that offers top service is Mohegan Sun's 942-room Resorts Casino Hotel. The resort is re-establishing its reputation as a top East Coast beachfront property with a \$100 million expansion and renovation, which included a

recent facelift of all 480 rooms in its Ocean Tower (including 112 junior suites, 14 parlor suites and one presidential suite).

Other upgrades that are part of the renovation investment include \$35 million spent on the Jimmy Buffett-themed Margaritaville entertainment complex, which features Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville restaurant and LandShark Bar & Grill. The new high-tech conference center, which was added in 2015, has 64,000 sf of meeting space, 24

meeting rooms, four ballrooms, a showroom and two theaters seating 300 and 1,350 people, respectively.

Wawa, a Media, Pennsylvania-based convenience store chain, held its first meeting at Resorts Casino Hotel in November after having met at other Atlantic City hotels over the years. About 1,000 Wawa sales employees attended.

Raechelle Jackson, Wawa's meeting planner and public relations representative, was impressed by Resorts' meeting space. "It was perfect for what we needed and within our budget," says Jackson. "The hotel has plenty of space for different planning options. The open space, the ability to divide the space into smaller rooms, the larger conference space for receptions and the theater were perfect. We had three workshops that the space accommodated well. The flow of getting in and out of each room was good."

### Top-shelf Service

Jackson says that Resorts Casino is now her first choice for all of Wawa's Atlantic City event space needs, and one reason is the property's service, which, she says exceeded expectations. "The flexibility and the paying attention to detail were excellent," says Jackson. "Everything was set and ready on time. The team was always available to make any changes or



**"The head of (Tropicana) hotel sales ensured that everything was handled with pleasure, gratitude and smiles."**

**Dennis Lattman**, Director, Field Human Resources  
Five Below, Philadelphia, PA

accommodate us. We booked the space a few weeks before the meeting date and we were able to meet with the property, plan and execute the event as if we did it for months."

Groups looking for a Las Vegas-style experience can look to the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, which is a favorite of large and small groups.

John Boyd Jr., principal of the Princeton, New Jersey-based Boyd Company, a management consulting firm, has planned

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Credit: The Boyd Company Inc.

The Boyd Company's recent client meeting was held at the Borgata. Pictured are John Boyd Jr. (l), principal, and Founder John "Jack" Boyd.

"When you talk to executives who have spent time in Las Vegas, they say Borgata is the most comparable property in terms of service and accommodations."

**John Boyd Jr., Principal**  
The Boyd Company Inc., Princeton, NJ

Boyd. "Most of our meetings are held in private suites unless we are hosting an entire team of executives. Then we will use a conference room, and arrange for different activities, dinners and entertainment, including pursuits for wives."

The Borgata's gaming, entertainment and dining options remain a big draw for Boyd's attendees. Boyd regularly holds dinners at the property's Old Homestead and Bobby Flay Steak restaurants.

Off-property, dining and entertainment options are plentiful. "My favorite place to bring clients for dinner is Angeloni's II Restaurant & Lounge because it offers a good private dining experience, has a real Atlantic City experience and an extensive wine list," says Boyd. "Off-property entertainment has included Jerry Seinfeld, Don Rickles, Jay Leno and a country music festival."

### More Meeting Space

The Borgata is among the properties that have added meeting space with the opening of its new 18,000-sf Central Conference Center (CCC), increasing the resort's total meeting and event space to 106,000 sf spread over three venues — The Event Center, The Water Club and the new CCC, which includes five flexible meeting rooms and a 6,500-sf ballroom.

Borgata's sister property, the 800 room Water Club at Borgata, features 36,000 sf of meeting space.

Harrah's new 100,000-sf Waterfront Conference Center is the largest such facility between Baltimore and Boston. The modern facility boasts two 50,000-sf ballrooms, 64,000 sf of meeting space and LEED Silver Certification.

The 483-room Claridge Hotel, a Radisson Hotel, added 15,000 sf of conference space bringing the property's total to 100,000 sf, including a 6,400-sf room and four smaller spaces. The Claridge, home

to the Holtzman Art Gallery, recently renovated its ballroom and opened Atlantic City's first rooftop bar, VUE, which features panoramic views of Atlantic City.

Atlantic City's prime meeting space is the Atlantic City Convention Center (ACCC), the largest convention center in New Jersey and one of the biggest on the East Coast. The facility offers more than 600,000 sf of total meeting, exhibit and function space for small and large meetings.

Improvements to the ACCC include a \$1 million Wi-Fi system upgrade offering attendees top-of-the line connectivity.



**Raechelle Jackson, Meeting Planner**  
Wawa, Media, PA

"The flexibility and the paying attention to detail were excellent (at Resorts). Everything was set and ready on time. The team was always available to make any changes or accommodate us."

"Folks at the Borgata know who we are, and we have a good relationship with them."

Boyd's attendees typically arrive on a Thursday, have a group dinner that night, do business on Friday and then take in some entertainment. Many stay for the weekend.

Boyd uses mostly small, elegant spaces in the Borgata. "We need privacy for the sensitive nature of our work — advising companies on location decisions and cutting costs," says



Credit: Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa

The ACCC also installed a new marquee atop the facility to welcome people to Atlantic City. In addition, plans call for improvements to Exhibit Hall A and improved LED lighting in the exhibit halls.

Groups seeking "green" meeting sites will appreciate the ACCC's environmental practices, which include retrofitting, recycling and energy alternatives. The facility has reduced its energy consumption each year since it opened in 1997. Planners can learn more about the ACCC's green practices by contacting Meet AC, the destination's sales and marketing organization that supports the facility.

### What's New

AC Ocean Walk has acquired the former Revel Casino Hotel and plans to open the property this summer as Ocean Resort Casino. Located along the Boardwalk, the 1,399-room



The Borgata's 106,000 sf of meeting space is spread over The Event Center, The Water Club and the new Central Conference Center.

Revel, first opened in April 2012 encompassing 6.4 million sf. Plans call for the Ocean Resort to retain its 165,000 sf of meeting and convention space, 138,000 sf of gaming space and 7,700-space parking facility.

Hard Rock International, new owners of the former Trump Taj Mahal, plans to open the renovated and refurbished property over Memorial Day weekend 2018. The renovation includes guest rooms and suites, new and upgraded dining options, meeting and convention spaces, performance venues and indoor pool. A Hard Rock Casino, Hard Rock

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A Mohegan Sun PROPERTY



Credits: Tropicana Hotel & Casino

The Tropicana recently completed \$40 million in renovations. The hotel's 122,000 sf of meeting space includes the Grand Exposition Center.

Cafe, a full-service Rock Spa and state-of-the-art casino will also be included. Entertainment venues will include two 7,000-seat arenas.

Tropicana recently purchased the Chelsea hotel and plans to complete construction of its skyway bridge connecting the two properties. The hotels offer a total of 2,730 guest rooms.

Caesars Entertainment is investing \$200 million to upgrade its Atlantic City properties. Harrah's master plan includes its new Waterfront Conference Center, an upgrade to its 450-room Bayview Tower, new dining options and a renovation for the property's nightclub, The Pool After Dark. Bally's

opened its new Wild Wild West bar to go along with its 1,760 guest rooms and 80,000 sf of meeting space.

Caesars Atlantic City Hotel & Casino offers 28,000 sf of meeting and event space, including its 17,135-sf Palladium Ballroom and 10 meeting rooms varying in size from 490 sf to 1,262 sf.

### More Activities

New projects are aimed squarely at diversifying activities and attracting more families, including those who may visit with meeting attendees.

The Board of the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA) recently approved a 2018 Capital Improvement Budget of about \$64 million for upgrades that include the Atlantic City Convention Center (ACCC) and Boardwalk Hall.

New projects also include the 200-foot observation wheel at Steel Pier, which opened in October 2017, featuring scenic views of the city's skyline and ocean from enclosed, climate-controlled gondolas.

Another attraction, the 350-foot-high vertical Polercoaster roller coaster is scheduled to open in 2019 on the site of the former Sands Casino. Other planned family-friendly attractions opening near the coaster include a zip line, skydiving simulator, extreme ninja course, and bar and retail space.

Meanwhile, Atlantic City also is expanding culinary experiences. Restaurants feature celebrity chefs such as Gordon Ramsay, Wolfgang Puck, Guy Fieri, Michael Symon, Jose Garces and Bobby Flay. Attendees also can shop till they drop at trendy outlets on properties such as Tropicana and Caesars as well as off-property outlets. Golfers can enjoy more than 25 golf courses in the Atlantic City area.

In addition, Atlantic City's gaming industry is growing and diversifying. By the end of November, total gaming revenue was \$2.45 billion, up 2.4 percent from 2017. Online gaming accounted for most of the growth. Gaming will diversify further if efforts underway to approve sports gaming in Atlantic City prove successful.

Atlantic City offers everything groups nationwide need for successful, memorable, small and large meetings. Most groups meeting in Atlantic City, especially repeat visitors, are based in the Northeast within a few hours' drive of the destination. However, more groups nationwide are discovering all that Atlantic City offers.

C&IT



Credits: Meet AC

Reflected in Bally's glass facade, the non-gaming Claridge hotel features Atlantic City's first rooftop bar aptly named VUE. Entertainment options at the Steel Pier revolve around the new observation wheel.



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## Destination

Dramatic views from Shannon Ridge Family of Wines' vineyard in Lake County.

# The Golden State

## Whether You Want a Big-Name Draw Location or a Lesser Known Gem, California Delivers

By Christine Loomis

To say that California is diverse is an epic understatement. At nearly 164,000 square miles, the third largest state in the union is a glorious mix of ocean, desert, bread-basket valleys, dramatic rock formations, imposing peaks, sublime sandy beaches, wild lands and singular cities that draw visitors from across the globe. Its West Coast location gives it easy access from Asia and the Pacific, and a collection of busy airports from north to south bring in non-stops from across the U.S. mainland and beyond.

The Golden State stirs the imagination. Even those who have never visited know it through its many film and TV appearances. Simply put, California is a place people want to be.

### Los Angeles County

Los Angeles County is immense. Within its 4,750 square

miles are 88 cities and a population of more than 10 million. Its star quality and more than a handful of its cities are legendary. There are literally thousands of places groups might meet within the county, including a few lesser-known options planners should consider.

Rancho Palos Verdes sits on an evocative stretch of coastline south of L.A., between Santa Monica and Huntington Beach. Among its worthy resorts is Terranea, the choice for Littler Mendelson's shareholder meeting in January 2017 with 675 in attendance. Bob Treadway, owner of Treadway Meetings, calls Terranea the perfect location for this event.

"Los Angeles and Orange County offer two great airports for our attendees, who come in from the U.S., Canada, Latin America and Europe. The physical location, the views, the ocean and the wonderful Terranea team keep us coming back.

Our group loves that we basically own the hotel for the three nights we are in town."

Treadway says the group stays on property with the exception of two afternoons on which activities are offered in the general vicinity — on property, in Long Beach and Los Angeles.

"Terranea offers a total package," Treadway says. "Flexible meeting space, top-notch banquet food and beverage, great restaurants, a spa and one of the best teams I've had the opportunity to work with in my years as a planner. We have become a family."

Treadway made his first site visit soon after the resort opened. "The economy was shaky, my client's upper management was worried that Terranea was not going to make it financially, and I was skeptical because it was so new. Melisa Rodgers at the resort told me it was going to happen for us, it did, and we start our 11th year this January."

In terms of meeting space, Treadway says the AV and internet work well, and meeting rooms are well located in respect to accommodations. The larger picture for Treadway, however, is how the staff makes a difference. "As I always say in our pre-con, 'This coming week we are a team, we succeed or fail together.' We have succeeded every time. The property has always gone above and beyond."

To others considering Terranea, Treadway says, "Be ready to ask for future dates once your conference ends. And ask for Courtney Gresham to be your Convention Services Manager.

### Marina del Rey

If proximity to LAX is a priority, it's hard to beat Marina del Rey, a waterfront playground just four miles north of the airport. Although only 1.5 square miles in size, Marina del Rey has six hotels — including a Hilton, a Marriott and a Ritz-Carlton — and 1,100 rooms, most providing walking access to almost everything the area offers. On-water activities give attendees plenty to do when not in meetings, from fishing and whale watching to kayaking, paddleboard yoga, parasailing and jet skiing.

Janet Zaldua, CEO of the Marina del Rey Convention & Visitors Bureau, says, "Our hotels have recently undergone renovations and upgrades that delegates are sure to love. Plus, they'll appreciate Marina del Rey's proximity to LAX airport, Venice Beach, Santa Monica, Playa Vista and popular L.A. attractions."

In short, she says, "Marina del Rey is a smart choice for meeting planners looking for an impressive waterfront destination that offers clients the biggest bang for their buck."

### Long Beach

Sitting south of L.A., Long Beach is almost equidistant between LAX and Orange County's John Wayne Airport, giving planners two good options for bringing groups in.



The Ritz-Carlton Marina del Rey makes a unique waterfront destination.

The city's star attraction for groups is the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center with three adjoining exhibit halls, two theaters, an arena, four ballrooms, two VIP lounges and 34 meeting rooms for a total of more than 400,000 sf of space. Some \$50 million has been reinvested into the center, perhaps most notably in upgraded technology, which was announced last April.

"Long Beach is proud to offer the best network experience of any boutique-size convention center," says Steve Goodling, president and CEO of Long Beach Area Convention and Visitor's Bureau. "The center and Smart City recently inked a deal to dramatically improve wireless connectivity for high-density groups. This means more people with more devices connecting faster."

Last May the center started replacing core technological equipment with the most advanced wireless system available, with a goal of creating a network able to handle the needs of all major trade shows and special events. The new system increases the number of simultaneous devices supported by more than 350 percent.

"No other convention center will be capable of handling more capacity than Long Beach," Goodling says.

In addition to technology, the center also has launched what it calls, "turnkey special event venues." These venues offer built-in fixtures and amenities but allow planners to create and customize according to their imaginations and needs, while saving on costs. The newest turnkey space, The Cove, debuted last spring. Providing an "under-the-pier" fantasy aesthetic, the new space is located below the Terrace Theater.

### Los Angeles

The City of Angels is always evolving, offering something new to planners no matter how often they meet there. In 2017, several hotels of note opened. Dream Hollywood Hotel welcomed guests in July. The 10-story boutique property features 179 "hyper-chic" rooms and 11,000 sf of dynamic event space in The Highlight Room, located on the hotel's



The Cove, Long Beach's newest turnkey special event venue, debuted last spring.

rooftop. Among the restaurants is Beauty & Essex, a bi-level indoor-outdoor space with a 20-foot skylight and dramatic crystal chandeliers.

In June, the InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown opened at Wilshire Grand Center — all 73 stories of it with 889 rooms, a sky lobby on the 70th floor and 95,000 sf of meeting and function space. The hotel features a soaring open-air Skydeck, where a max of 548 guests can thrill to sunsets from the top of the tallest building west of Chicago.

Other 2017 openings included The Everly, a Kimpton property with 216 rooms; Hotel Indigo Downtown Los Angeles with 350 rooms; and for groups embracing the sharing economy, there's the Freehand Hotel and Hostel, housed in the former Commercial Exchange Building in L.A.'s Historic Core, with 226 rooms ranging from traditional accommodations to haute hostel rooms (aka poshtels) with up to eight beds. The Freehand has a rooftop pool and lounge available for private events, stunning views complimentary.

"Our city's unrivaled intellectual capital, incredible mix of 'only-in-L.A.' experiences and venues, and endless sunshine are fueling L.A.'s popularity as a premier meetings destination," says Ernest Wooden Jr., president and CEO of the Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board. "Fantastic new hotels are opening their doors with frequency, diverse chefs are exploring creative territories, and noteworthy cultural institutions are choosing to call L.A. home. A truly irresistible magnet for collaboration, Los Angeles is the perfect destination for both corporate and incentive professionals to connect individually and innovate collectively."

If planners are hesitant because of the fires, Wooden puts fears to rest. "The recent fires that affected residential areas of the city had no impact on our meetings sector and there are no smoke advisories or road closures that visitors

need to be aware of. The three temporarily closed attractions — the Getty Center, the Skirball Cultural Center and the Hammer Museum — are fully operational and have been re-opened for weeks. We are thankful for our first responders and firefighters for their truly heroic work."

## Ventura County

Ventura County and its namesake city lie between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara. Among the meeting-friendly properties is the Ventura Beach Marriott, base hotel for two annual events of PanAmerican Seed, the breeding and research division of Ball Horticultural. Its industry-wide event, CAST, occurs in April with approximately 1,100 attending over five days, while the sales

meeting runs in October, with 65 attending.

Janessa Bender, management team administrator and Spring Trials Event coordinator, says the location works well. "Because we have a breeding facility in Santa Paula, about 20 minutes from Ventura, it's very convenient to stay in town. We love the downtown area of Ventura," she says. "There are restaurants with all different price points where we can bring our customers during the CAST events, and the hotel is within walking distance to many of them. This is great for our staff who frequently travel to the area to visit our facility. And of course, having the beach nearby is a big plus!"

The group uses venues in the Marriott and outside of it. "We've had several big internal celebration dinners at Spasso Cucina Italiana," Bender says. "We utilized one half of the restaurant for our group of 50. The food is always excellent and service is great. We held a scavenger hunt in downtown Ventura for our sales team one year, which was a lot of fun and we learned a lot about the city while looking for clues. We've



Incredible views from the Starlight VIP Booth in La Boucherie at the InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown, which opened in June at Wilshire Grand Center.

done boat cruises in Ventura Harbor with Island Packers, and more recently a kayaking outing. All of these were excellent teambuilding activities. During CAST, we provide lunch onsite for our customers as well as some dinners. We've discovered an excellent caterer in the area, Season's Catering, which we use now for all our catered events. The food is superb and customer service is top-notch."

Bender says Ventura doesn't have a lot of large indoor spaces for events but adds, "The two main hotels, Ventura Beach Marriott and Crowne Plaza Ventura Beach, have large ballrooms that have worked perfectly for our meeting needs."

About the Marriott specifically, she says, "Ventura Beach Marriott is within close proximity of our facility. The service is always great, and we love that it's close to the beach and many restaurants. As a company, we've been staying at that property for approximately 23 years. I generally work with Marie Castillo, and she has great customer service and has helped me tremendously with reservations, room arrange-

ments, menu planning and all my event needs. And the food is probably the best food I've had at a hotel. We always have a welcome dinner and everything the chef prepares is tasty."

Bender says there are no major challenges except during CAST, when many rooms get reserved outside of the room block. "The Marriott Ventura works with us to try and get our customers booked at a reasonable rate once those are full."

She advises planners to set their room block at least a year



PanAmerican Seed excited to take a boat cruise with Island Packers at Ventura Harbor.



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Chapel interior at Asilomar State Beach & Conference Grounds.

in advance. "July/August is the hotel's busiest time and when Ventura County Fair is held each year."

### Monterey County

The most defining feature of Monterey County is arguably the vast bay from which it takes its name; however, the magnificent coastline south of the bay, stunning state parks and beaches, internationally acclaimed golf courses and several famed towns, including Carmel-By-The-Sea, all contribute to the powerful allure of this area. And a new draw for meetings is the newly renovated \$60 million Monterey Conference Center, which celebrated its grand reopening in January.

Among the state facilities planners can consider is Asilomar State Beach & Conference Grounds in Pacific Grove, a historic property with lodging and conference space that has been used by groups since 1913. In October 2017, South San Francisco-based Genentech, Inc. held its research conference at Asilomar with 1,224 attendees.

"Asilomar Conference Grounds was chosen for this event many years ago due to its location and the conference center having meeting space to accommodate the size of the group," says Elaine Taylor, Genentech program manager. "Pacific Grove is drivable from our corporate office. Using this location has to do with the culture and history of this conference, however. Attendees enjoy the beauty and laid-back environment at Asilomar."

Taylor has been organizing the conference since 1999, but it was located at Asilomar long before that. "History dictates that our conference takes place at this location — the scientists love it."

The conference runs wholly on the conference grounds with a couple of exceptions. "The first night, all attendees spent the evening at Monterey Bay Aquarium enjoying a private showing and strolling dinner. It's a wonderful environment and allows attendees to feel special by having the entire aquarium to themselves."

In addition, Taylor has to use several offsite properties for lodging as the group requires about twice the sleeping rooms available at Asilomar.

She says organizing a conference at Asilomar is different than at other places. "Asilomar is a grand, historic site, and you have to work within the parameters of the history and culture there. Meeting space is limited and spread out over the grounds. Depending on the size of your group, you have to be creative to make it work. We have a 100-by-100-foot tent installed for the extra space we require. We also use an underground parking garage and transform it into a very cool party space for evening events."

Taylor calls the staff accommodating and easy to work with, and notes that all catering is handled through the property. "They do a very good job. They provide breakfast, lunch and dinner but also cater our special events. Everything has been well received by the group. For special events, I work with a party event

decoration company. Outside vendors used are mainly local and know how to work within the special parameters of historic Asilomar."

One "must" according to Taylor is that planners make a site visit and walk the grounds. "You need to see the conference rooms and lodging to get an understanding of the facility so you can make the most of what Asilomar has to offer," she says. "It's quite wonderful and different. Everything depends on the size of your group and what you're trying to achieve."

### City and County of San Francisco

No California bayside city is more universally beloved and recognized than San Francisco, long a top meetings destination. San Francisco needs no introduction to planners; however, it always has something new, and the \$551 million expansion of the Moscone Center is new in a big way, with completion expected this year.

The city calls it "more than an expansion. It's an attention-grabbing, attendance-getting masterpiece on a grand corner of San Francisco." When complete, Moscone will have an additional 157,000 gross sf of flexible meeting space, two new floors of column-free space including a 50,000-sf ballroom, expanded lobbies totaling 60,000 sf and cutting-edge technology. It will be at minimum LEED Gold certified.

Planners should keep in mind that the Moscone Center is within a few minutes of 22,000 of the city's more than 33,000 hotel rooms, not to mention stellar dining and shopping.

Virgin Hotel San Francisco is scheduled to open in February with 196 rooms, while the Lodge at the Presidio should open this summer with 42 rooms in one of the city's historic and most beautiful areas. As for renovations, Loews Regency San Francisco recently unveiled a transformation of its entire meetings and event space and rolled out a new program for groups on the 40th-floor Sky Deck, including breaks, morning yoga, and wine and cocktail events.

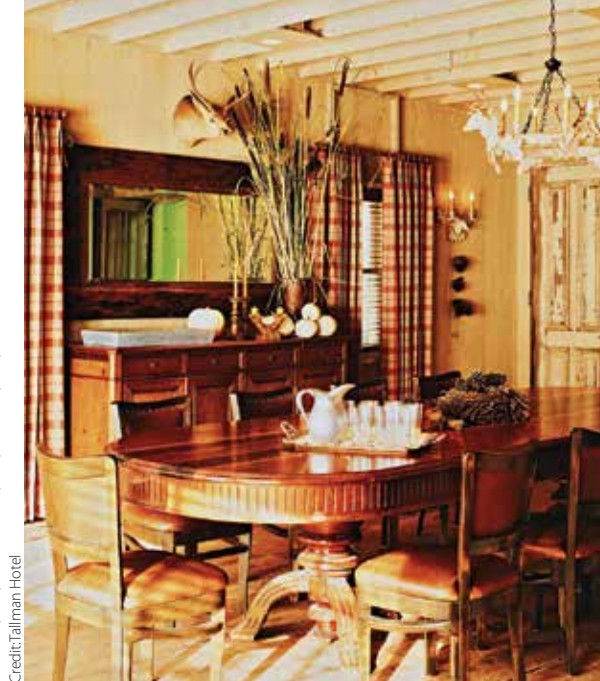
### Lake County

Approximately two hours north of San Francisco, Lake County is within California's wine country, adjacent to Napa

and Sonoma counties. Among its historic properties is the stately Tallman Hotel, founded by 19th century pioneers Rufus and Mary Tallman. The hotel was renovated in 2003 and reopened to guests in 2006. In 2008 it was added to California's Register of Historical Resources as a Point of Historical Interest.

Peter Molnar, partner, Obsidian Ridge Wine Co., has organized multiple events for eight to 50 attendees, including retreats for Obsidian Wine Co. and meetings of the Lake County Wine-grape Commission.

"The Tallman Hotel boasts an incredible combination of factors for a small/medium high-end group retreat," he says. "It has beautiful private rooms nicely located around a common courtyard, warm and engaging staff and management that is incredibly accommodating. The Tallman has allowed us to showcase our new and exciting wine region and wines to groups of discerning national and international writers, tastemakers and fellow vintners."



Riffe's Meeting House at the Tallman Hotel in Lake County provides a comfortable meeting space with natural light.

While he often makes use of offsite tent events in local vineyards for some meals, Molnar says, "The Tallman is the anchor and focal point of our hospitality."

He describes the hotel as, "A remote and quiet spot for great group focus in an upscale but relaxed setting — the best in our region." The meeting space, he says, is ideal for a strategy session for a small- or medium-sized group of up to 20 people and the décor is exemplary. "The space is convenient to guest rooms, it's very quiet, the coffee is great, as are snacks and the staff is very attentive."

Molnar notes that the porch also lends itself to small groups gathering to meet or enjoy drinks together and calls the hotel "perfect for an overnight or a two-night/three-day event coupled with local wineries and outings. It's hard to communicate just how much guests love the Tallman and its blend of remoteness and sophistication," he says. "I would bring any level of client, guest or group to the Tallman — and have!" **C&IT**

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## Destination



Credit: New Orleans CVB



Credit: Shreveport-Bossier Convention and Tourist Bureau



Credit: New Orleans CVB (also right)



# The Big Easy & Beyond

## Louisiana Offers Vibrant, Only-in-America Culture, Food and Venues Guaranteed to Impress.

By Christine Loomis

**L**ike the tasty gumbo and jambalaya served across the state, the culture of Louisiana is a rich mélange of ingredients. It is Southern tradition spiced up with French, Spanish, French-Canadian and African heritage (among others), all set to a beat that makes you tap your toes and grin.

Louisianans love to celebrate — food, culture, irreverence, Fat Tuesday, blues, jazz, Cajun accordion riffs, marching down the street at any opportunity and life itself. To be in Louisiana is to embrace celebration. For corporate and incentive groups, that provides a float-load of possibilities with which to create a memorable program.

### New Orleans

As its notable nickname assures, The Big Easy is a city that effortlessly delivers that over-the-top factor incentive programs require. Yet it's a place where serious business is conducted, too.

"New Orleans inspires, which is why great American writers like William Faulkner, Mark Twain, Truman Capote and Tennessee Williams, to name a few, all lived here. We value those things that make our culture unique and visitors come here to bask in the riches we provide," says Yvonne

Collazo, DMCP, CIS, associate director of sales with Hosts New Orleans, a destination management company.

"Incentive destinations must be experiential, and in New Orleans people quickly understand that they have permission to be different here. They can eat a little more, stay out a little later than, drink a little more, and be adventurous — or at least a little less bashful — than they are at home," she says.



The Grand Oaks Mansion provided the perfect New Orleans ambience for a corporate group's "Connect" event, planned by Hosts New Orleans.

Credit: Barrett DeLong

From New Orleans to Shreveport, Louisiana destinations distinguish themselves through the richness of their experiences, including unique venues, cuisine, music and colorful Cajun, Creole and French colonial-inspired culture and events such as Mardi Gras.

"When you are in the city that invented the word 'cocktail,' reveres the traditions of Mardi Gras, gave birth to jazz and produced Cajun and Creole cuisine, you are in a place that inspires creativity...a place that values and celebrates it. There's no question of authenticity in New Orleans; you always know the feeling you get is unique, interesting and real. Southern hospitality is celebrated and widely apparent in New Orleans."

As an example of the kinds of experiences and services Hosts New Orleans can create, Collazo recalls a company's meeting her group was tasked with handling, which held its second annual "Connect" event in New Orleans in 2016. In addition to meeting services, Collazo and her team were responsible for booking the hotel, sourcing unique alternative meeting space, providing airport transfers, as well as creating evening functions and receptions.

"Throughout the creative process, our task was to create a one-of-a-kind conference. We planned, coordinated and delivered the client's entire program," Collazo says. "The attendees from offices across the United States came together for networking and education. That this just was their second Connect convention, which meant limited history for the three-day program."

The heavily millennial group settled on the hip Ace Hotel, which at the time of their site visit was still under construction and opened just 30 days prior to the event. Collazo says the hotel was a perfect fit except that it lacked the space for larger meetings.



"There's no question of authenticity in New Orleans; you always know the feeling you get is unique, interesting and real. Southern hospitality is celebrated and widely apparent in New Orleans."

**YVONNE COLLAZO, DMCP, CIS**  
Associate Director Sales, Hosts New Orleans

The group asked for "unique alternative space at an untraditional venue," which Collazo's team found in a historic site that was primarily raw warehouse with both indoor and outdoor space. They completely transformed it with interactive stations, furniture, staging, AV, extensive décor, lighting and F&B, and it was just a 10-minute walk from the hotel.

Two evening functions also were created at two very different venues. "The first event was at Race and Religious, a compound consisting of several small historic homes built in the 1800s, with connecting courtyards and a pool surrounded by an old brick wall. It had a French Quarter tropical feel. The décor consisted mostly of candles and lighting with specialty linens, tables and bars. The client's logo was subtly displayed around the venue. Because of this specific venue, our caterer was chosen both on food quality and station design," Collazo says.

"The second evening was held at Mardi Gras World, fol-



The Overlord Boardroom at the new Higgins Hotel & Conference Center at The National WWII Museum.

Credit: Higgins Hotel & Conference Center

2019. It will feature a second-floor conference center and 18,000 sf of meeting space.

The new terminal at the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport is already under construction, but plans have been expanded to include more gates and more parking. The terminal is expected to open in early 2019, but new flights to Europe and South America are already available, providing even more ease of travel for international groups wanting to experience The Big Easy.

New Orleans is what comes to mind for most of us when thinking of Louisiana. But there are other cities planners should consider, too.

## Baton Rouge

The capital and second-largest city in the state, Baton Rouge is Louisiana's political hub, a thriving industrial center and one of the largest ports in the United States. It sits on the eastern bank of the Mississippi River, about 80 miles from New Orleans and 55 miles from Cajun country.

With creative venues from stately historic mansions and nature conservation areas to escape rooms, museums and floating casinos, Baton Rouge offers planners much to choose from, not to mention don't-miss events including LSU football and the city's own annual Mardi Gras.

Law firm Hammonds, Sills, Adkins & Guice held its 504 Workshop for 188 attendees in Baton Rouge in January 2017. The group was based at the 256-room Renaissance Baton Rouge Hotel.

Kevin Silvio, workshop coordinator and assistant office manager with the law firm, says the best elements of the hotel are location, ease of access, the quality and age of the hotel, the quality of food and the staff.

"The hotel is located conveniently off of I-10 on Bluebonnet Boulevard in Baton Rouge, across the street from Baton Rouge's largest shopping mall and just down the street from the second largest mall in Perkins Rowe. Our attendees have downtime after our workshop each day, and there are plenty of restaurants and things to do close by. There's even a shuttle from the hotel that runs to the mall for those without vehicles."

In addition to excellent meals and an expansive menu to choose from, Silvio says, "The hotel itself is newly renovated, and the interior is modern and fresh. Our attendees raved about the rooms and amenities within them."

Price wise, he adds, "It was more expensive to do the various things we like to do, including meals and breaks, but our attendees seemed to greatly enjoy the Renaissance as opposed to other meeting areas and hotels in town."

Silvio notes that the company does host events at other hotels in Baton Rouge on a regular basis, but calls the

Renaissance "one of the best." For this meeting, all events were at the Renaissance. "We used a majority of the hotel function and conference space," Silvio says, "and to my memory, all of the meetings rooms were modern and in fine shape."

For large meetings, he says, "I would strongly suggest scouting areas for registration and check-in tables, as well as developing a couple of plans to prepare for moving large numbers of people around the hotel in a short amount of time."

One issue he had was conference-room setup, as well as some furniture/immovable structures that made sign-in difficult.

"Generally, we like to have a straight line of tables, with each one for a specific group. At the Renaissance, we had to adjust and put the registration tables at different angles and formations to make it work. With fewer than 200 people, this was one of our smaller workshops; however, at times the setup was a little too quirky for my taste," he says.

"We were able to come up with a workable solution for our group, but depending on the needs of the conference, others may not be able to make it work. The best solution we found was to put the sign-in tables as close to reception



The lobby lounge at the Renaissance Baton Rouge Hotel.

Credit: Marriott Hotels & Resorts

as possible and have employees directing traffic to various locations, in addition to clear signage."

Silvio recommends reserving all of the meeting rooms for any meeting over 100 people, "as the meal seating can get a bit dicey without a dedicated room."

That said, he notes that the AV worked well, "and the company onsite, PSAV, met all of our needs and was extremely professional and ready when needed."

In the end, Silvio says, "Compared to others in the Baton Rouge area, Renaissance checks off a lot of boxes and does a lot of the little things well. Melissa Silva, Jacob with PSAV, and all of the other staff were great at addressing our needs and consistently checking in on us to ensure that we had everything we needed. A nice perk was having access to the lockable bridal suite to store various things for our meeting, and to have a private restroom for our staff."

"We've utilized Abacus, Café Vermilionville and Social Southern Table...for their excellent food, facilities and service. More importantly, they all offer a taste of what Lafayette, Louisiana, has to offer through its cuisine."

KEN DUGAS, Interactive Events Manager  
Stuller Inc., Lafayette, LA

Silvio calls the décor "modern with a nice Louisiana twist," and says everything was in good condition. "From our workshop evaluation forms, we know that one of the most important things to conference attendees is the overall cleanliness and 'feel' of a hotel. The Renaissance checks off those boxes, and our attendees were very pleased with how the hotel was cleaned and maintained."

To anyone considering Baton Rouge or the Renaissance, Silvio says, "The best advice I can give for this venue, or any for that matter, is to plan as far in advance as you can. Go onsite and scout the meeting areas and figure out the best way to smoothly move large groups of people from one area to another. I recommend using the in-house catering for meals, as it keeps the conference flowing and avoids overly long lunch breaks. Your attendees will enjoy all that the Renaissance has to offer. We enjoyed the Renaissance greatly and are hosting another large workshop there at the end of 2018."

## Lafayette

A planner would be hard pressed to find a more genuinely friendly and welcoming city than Lafayette; a little more than two hours west/northwest of New Orleans. Planners looking for a uniquely American, one-of-a-kind influence, to give their meeting extra richness and pizzazz will find that Lafayette's deeply rooted Cajun culture is just the thing.

For Ken Dugas, manager of interactive events with Lafayette-based Stuller Inc., the city offers plenty of interesting venues and restaurants, and the 129-room Homewood Suites by Hilton Lafayette-Airport, with 3,384 sf of meeting space, provides a good base for attendees and functions. In October, the company held its Bridge event at the hotel.

"The Homewood Suites is conveniently located on a well-traveled road almost halfway between Lafayette Regional Airport and Stuller's global headquarters. It includes well-equipped and comfortable rooms and a large common area with ample seating and meeting space. Guests are also able to enjoy a buffet breakfast and evening reception with a light dinner buffet option," Dugas says.

"Compared to others in the Baton Rouge area, Renaissance checks off a lot of boxes and does a lot of the little things well."

KEVIN SILVIO, Workshop Coordinator  
Hammonds, Sills, Adkins & Guice LLP  
Baton Rouge, LA





Lafayette's Café Vermilionville offers private rooms as well as full restaurant buyouts for group events.

Credits: Lafayette Travel

"Bridge is a multisession event, so we utilize meeting space at both the Homewood and our global headquarters," he notes. "The hotel's meeting room can accommodate approximately 120 people depending on the seating layout. Overall, it provides a very intimate setting for the size and purpose of our event." As for meals, Dugas says the Bridge event incorporates a combination of catered meals at the hotel and at Stuller's corporate offices, as well as dinner at various local restaurants that are able to accommodate approximately 160 guests. "We've utilized Abacus, Café Vermilionville and Social Southern Table, just to name a few, for their excellent food, facilities and service. More importantly, they all offer a taste of what Lafayette, Louisiana, has to offer through its cuisine." As always, staff makes a difference. "Summer, the hotel's general manager, is excellent," Dugas says. "She's very warm, accommodating, attentive and responsive."

Though the hotel doesn't have a full-service restaurant on property, Dugas points out that there are many excellent restaurants just a short drive away.

"Since this property is very popular with the business traveler," he adds, "I suggest planning ahead."

New for the city is that its signature venue, the Cajundome, has reopened following a \$22 million makeover that included a new coating on the arena roof as well as new concessions featuring regional specialties and a greater number of healthful choices on the menu. A brand new venue, The Chandelier Room, also has opened, giving planners an upscale venue with 16,000 sf of space and services that include catering, signature drinks, premier entertainment, valet service, white-glove service and more.

There are currently three hotels under construction in Lafayette: Courtyard by Marriott, Townplace Suites and a new La Quinta hotel, and the New Orleans-based live music and bowling venue, Rock 'n' Bowl, will open downtown in spring 2018 with a catering hall and suites available on the second floor.

Nearby, Tabasco will celebrate its 150th anniversary this year and is offering expanded Tabasco sauce factory tours and special group experiences and events — not to be missed.

For groups visiting Lafayette during Mardi Gras, the city's

convention and visitors commission, Lafayette Travel, now offers group and VIP seating for the event, giving visitors a close-up and comfortable way to join in the celebration.

### Shreveport-Bossier

Tucked into the northwest corner of Louisiana, some five hours and more than 300 miles from New Orleans, Shreveport-Bossier lies near the Texas and Arkansas borders and can easily draw groups from all three states.

Among its newest attractions is the Shreveport Aquarium, which opened November 2017. In addition to giving guests up-close time with sharks, rays, jellyfish and other creatures of the deep, the aquarium also offers groups private event space and catering through its onsite restaurant,



The Shreveport Convention Center features more than 350,000 sf of meeting space.

Credits: Shreveport-Bossier C&TB

Salt. The restaurant's contemporary menu includes cocktails and an eclectic selection of foods.

Also new is Gator Raceway at Gators & Friends, an exotic animal petting zoo and adventure park. The raceway opened in September, giving thrill seekers a chance to take high-speed go-karts for a spin around a twisting track that challenges drivers' skills and nerves. It lends itself perfectly to a teambuilding or leadership-training activity.

There's a lot to choose from in Louisiana. But wherever a group meets in the state, planners can count on a warm and friendly atmosphere with local people who can't wait to show off their food, culture and full-on spirit of celebration. **C&IT**



# One Time in New Orleans

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## On The Move



SPAULDING



MCSHEFFREY



ENGEL



HARDEE



JOHNSON



MENSHON



FRENCH



HILLIARD

**Jeanette Ulep** was named director of group sales for the Anaheim Marriott in Anaheim, California. She was most recently global accounts manager for Marriott International's Convention and Resort Network.

Benchmark has named **Jean Spaulding** director of sales and marketing for Villas of Grand Cypress, a Gemstone Collection property in Orlando, Florida. She formerly served as director of sales and marketing for the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate in Orlando.

**Blair McSheffrey** was named vice president of global and hotel sales for Sonesta International Hotels. Prior to joining Sonesta, he served as the vice president, hotel commercial performance at InterContinental Hotels Group.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort has named **Emily Engel** as group account director, responsible for the mid-Atlantic and Midwest regions, as well as associations in the Northeast. She formerly served as a senior sales executive at Marriott Marquis Houston. **Lindsay Hardee** was promoted to group sales manager. She most recently was catering and convention services coordinator for the resort.

**Jess Johnson** was named director of sales and marketing for Cheyenne Mountain Colorado Springs, a Dolce Resort. Before joining Cheyenne Mountain, he was director of sales and marketing at Sheraton Bay Point Resort in Panama City Beach, Florida.

La Playa Beach & Golf Resort in Naples, Florida, has named **Linda Menshon** as director of sales and marketing. She formerly served as director of sales and marketing at Naples Bay Resort.

The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa has named **Steve French** as director of sales and marketing. He most recently was director of group sales with Washington Marriott Wardman Park in Washington, DC.

Hilton New Orleans Riverside has appointed **Marshall Hilliard** as director of sales and marketing. He formerly served as director of sales and marketing at The Westin Charlotte in Charlotte, North Carolina.

**Jennifer Jones** was named director of global sales for Rosewood Hotel Group. She was most recently group sales manager for Four Seasons Resort & Residences Anguilla. **C&IT**

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A woman with dark curly hair and glasses is smiling and clapping her hands. She is wearing a colorful, abstract, painterly garment. The background is a vibrant, swirling mix of pink, orange, blue, and purple, resembling a large, expressive brushstroke or a colorful nebula. The overall composition is dynamic and artistic.

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