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INSIDE:

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Corporate Meetings Overcoming The Stigma

> Event Planner's Guide To Florida

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APRIL 2017 volume 33 · NUMBER 9

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putting it in perspective

Memorable WOW Moments

As we were about to go to print with this issue, I was able to enjoy a WOW-filled weekend at the Sheraton Bay Point Resort in Panama City Beach, Florida. My first

WOW moment was viewing the hotel and convention center, which has been beautifully rebuilt and offers a stunning vista of St. Andrews Bay from the moment of entry. There were many more WOW moments throughout the visit, including Stand Up Paddleboarding, a Chef's Table dinner, a helicopter ride and fireworks.

All of these events demonstrated that WOW experiences can range from taking part in thrilling activities to taking in a gorgeous setting; what all WOW moments have in common is that they engage our senses and provide us with great



memories. In our special WOW section, which begins on page 16, you will find a variety of both beautiful settings and exciting experiences that are available at Southern destinations. From special events aboard a yacht to soothing spa massages and from brand-new lazy rivers to historic hotels, the options are nearly endless.

Corporate groups are among those seeking a bit more WOW in their meetings and corporate planners are delivering, adding more fun, innovative activities, as detailed in our special market segment report, which begins on page 12.

Also, when it comes to evoking a sense of WOW, Florida gets the job done! With its massive coastlines and numerous inland waterways, its nature trails and tropical settings, its theme parks and recreational opportunities, the Sunshine State has lot of memorable WOW moments to offer.

Here's hoping that the places and activities discussed in this issue will inspire lots of future WOW moments for meeting planners and participants!

Maria Bradford Senior Editor





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APRIL 2017

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Experiences That Captivate & Inspire

These Southern destination WOW

experiences will create memories

and make meeting participants want to return again and again.

VOLUME 33 • NUMBER 9

Recap of this year's Rendezvous SOUTH pg. 10

Corporate Meetings

Overcoming The Stigma How planners and meeting sites are adding a special flair by incorporating fun, social and innovative events into corporate gatherings. **ng. 12**

pg. 6 headlines, trends & ideas

pg. 8-9 news across the south

pg. 58 Sponsor Index

Event Planner's Guide



headlines, trends & ideas

ASAE Great Ideas Conference

Attendees of the American Society of Association Executives' (ASAE) 2017 Great Ideas Conference, held March 5 - 7 at the Hyatt Regency Orlando, were encouraged to take risks, be flexible and lead with trust. The 601 association professionals and industry partners participated in more than 40 education sessions, 150 Brain Dates and three Executive Leadership Workshops.

"We used a variety of formats to help participants learn and engage inside and outside the classroom," said ASAE President and CEO John H. Graham IV, FASAE, CAE. "Opportunities ranged from peer learning to in-depth explorations to hands-on training on innovation from ideation to execution. The keynotes and eight speakers from outside our industry shared revolutionary ideas and inspiration they can take back to their organizations."

Opening keynote speaker Srini Rao, chief creative instigator of Unmistakable Media and author of "Unmistakable," encouraged organizations to ignore best practices and create unique products and services so distinctive that nobody else could have done it, which would make one's competition become irrelevant. Rao advised participants to let go of masks and labels, which hinder creative thinking.

The closing keynote speaker, Chris Fussell, chief growth officer at McChrystal Group,

best-selling author and former U.S. Navy SEAL officer, encouraged organizations to build on and embrace the fundamental attributes of elite, high-performing teams including trust, common purpose, shared consciousness and empowered execution.

Executive Leadership Workshops included "Ultimate Power Skills & Team Building," which applied gamification techniques to teach participants hard and soft intellectual skills, as well as build deeper relationships, develop confidence, practice out-of-the-box thinking, improve communication, increase happiness at work and strengthen creativity.

"Video.org—The Versatility of Video to Drive Business Objectives" focused on the diversity of ways associations are using video, how to have strategic conversations with organization leaders, the major trends, and how to plan and produce video content.

A two-hour evening workshop entitled "Putting Women's Ideas to Work—Authentic Ways to Hear and Be Heard?" led by Ruha Benjamin, assistant professor at Princeton University and author of People's Science, explored gender-related challenges in ideation and execution, and the role of voice, presentation, positioning and bias in supporting a pipeline for women-led intrapreneurship within associations.

Josh Lesnick Named President of Associated Luxury Hotels



Josh Lesnick has been named president and CEO of Associated Luxury Hotels (ALH), the parent company of Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI) and Worldhotels, which includes several resorts in the South. In his new role, Lesnick will oversee all business operations and subsidiaries of ALH, which significantly expanded its global footprint, hospitality services and collection of member hotels and resorts with the recent strategic acquisition of Frankfurt, Germany-based Worldhotels. He

will also become only the third CEO in the 30-plus-year legacy ALHI history. Lesnick will assume his new role in April.

Previously, Lesnick served as executive vice president and chief marketing officer with Wyndham Hotel Group, where he was responsible for all aspects of revenue generation for 18 brands encompassing more than 8,000 hotels in 77 countries. He also led a team of more than 1,200 sales, marketing and call center associates through a major global transformation that touched all revenue generation functions.

New Product:

Duluth Pack Announces Launch of New City Portfolio

Duluth Pack, the oldest canvas and leather bag and pack maker in the USA, has handcrafted a new style of portfolio for under \$150. The City Portfolio, available at duluthpack.com, is offered in 13 canvas color options, including Duluth Pack's original canvas hue, Olive Drab.

"Our priority has always been and will always be our quality and the customer's wants, needs and expectations," said Ryan Hanson, Duluth Pack's outside sales and marketing manager. "We are proud to be able to offer our most affordable portfolio style which still comes with our lifetime guarantee on craftsmanship and hardware."

"We are so pleased to offer our retail customers a new product they have been asking from us for some time," said Molly Floen, Duluth Pack's retail store manager. "Our customers are our best source and we have listened to them once again. We are ready for them to enjoy this product they have been wanting."

The briefcase is detailed with cotton web straps and canvas exterior and interior, along with lifetime-guaranteed rivets, snaps and zipper. For additional added function, the portfolio includes a shoulder strap. As always, each Duluth Pack handcrafted item includes three tags on the inside: the authentic Duluth Pack tag, the American Made tag and the Handcrafted By tag. Each craftsperson hand signs the bag they proudly handcrafted for the customer.







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Alabama New Element Coming

To Hunstville

HUNTSVILLE — Element Huntsville, a boutique hotel by Starwood, will open this month on floors 7 - 11 of the Westin Huntsville as a separate extended-stay hotel and will be managed by Crescent Hotels & Resorts.

As one of Starwood's select-service hotels, Element by Westin is designed to be "green from the ground up," according to Mark Nelson, general manager for the Westin Huntsville. Element made history when it launched as the first major hotel brand to mandate that all U.S. properties pursue the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED certification.

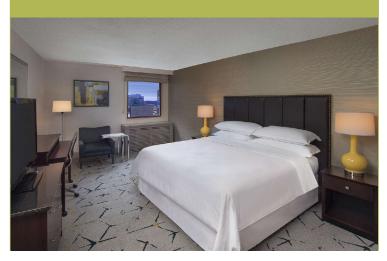
The new construction of the Element Huntsville includes the build-out of 150 rooms including 68 suites with full kitchens. The property will offer Rise: Breakfast bar, a complimentary breakfast served daily; Relax: Evening reception, held nightly with wines,

Refreshed Guestrooms, Enhanced Offerings

SILVER SPRING, MD. — The Sheraton Silver Spring Hotel has completed a \$7.5 million renovation project, which includes the addition of a fully licensed Starbucks and upgrades to the public space areas and the 18,000 square feet of meeting space. The hotel's guest corridors have also been modernized and Wi-Fi has been enhanced to increase speed and accessibility for guests.

All 229 guest rooms and suites have been refreshed and now feature an oversized work desk, ergonomic chair, flat-panel television and the Sheraton Sweet Sleeper bed, designed to meet AAA's Five Diamond Award criteria.

"These recent upgrades are in keeping with the Sheraton brand promise of providing exceptional accommodations in extraordinary settings," said Sheraton Silver Spring General Manager Jeff Musselman. "Improvements such as these help ensure guests of the Sheraton Silver Spring Hotel will continue to enjoy genuine hospitality in a relaxing and comforting environment."



beers and soft drinks, thoughtfully paired with enticing appetizers; and Restore: Gourmet pantry, a marketplace with grocery options available on site for extended-stay guests.

While Westin and Element by Westin are both Starwood brands, this will be the first "dual property" complex in the country with both the Westin and Elements brands in one location. Guests at both hotels will enjoy easy access to the Bridge Street Town Centre, where the hotel complex is located.

The first floor of the hotel building will have one entrance for Westin guests and a separate entrance, lobby, check-in desk and elevators exclusively for Element guests. There will only be one connector between the two hotel brands in the first-floor lobby.

Florida Redesigned Suites & Cabanas

MIAMI BEACH - In late February, Fontainebleau Miami Beach completed resort updates, including a new design in the Versailles Tower and renovations to the hotel's existing poolside cabanas. Jeffrey Beers International enhanced the overall look and feel of the historic Versailles Tower to match the elegance of the resort's famed Chateau Tower. Design elements include polished metal accents; an elegant, geometrical headboard; custom nightstands with integrated power for ease of charging electronic devices; and custom vintage-inspired nightstand lamps.

Clausen-Collaborative Interior Design worked with Fontainebleau to optimize and upgrade the poolside cabanas into a retreat more suitable for guests' desires. All 33 guest retreats were provided with warm-slatted wood panels and sleek custom furniture, modern Haiku Home ceiling fans and new sofas and loveseats.

"At Fontainebleau, we are committed to focusing on ways to improve our guests' experiences while upholding a fresh, luxurious look," said Philip Goldfarb, president and COO at Fontainebleau. "Working with our design partners, Jeffrey Beers International and Clausen-Collaborative Interior Design, allows us to elevate the standards of luxury while staying true to our original vision," he said.

Georgia Kevin Runner to Head the Westin Jekyll Island

JEKYLL ISLAND — Kevin Runner has been named general manager of the Westin Jekyll Island, a 200-room beachfront hotel that opened in 2015 adjacent to the Jekyll Island Convention Center and the recently completed Beach Village.

A career hospitality executive, Runner opened the Jekyll Island Club in 1986. Originally a 134room full-service hotel, the historic Jekyll Island Club Hotel has evolved into a AAA Four Diamond resort largely credited with the island's renaissance.

"The first two years of a new hotel are very challenging and the Westin staff has done a remarkable job getting the hotel ramped up and ranking in the top 10 percent for guest satisfaction among Westins worldwide," said Runner. "I'm starting with a table that's been expertly set and I look forward to leveraging 35 years of local area expertise to help both the hotel and the entire island achieve their full potential as a resort destination."

Mississippi New Executive Director Of Hotel Sales

BILOXI — Beau Rivage Resort & Casino has named Randy White-



side its new executive director of hotel sales. Whiteside, who has 35 years of experience in hotel sales management,

Whiteside

will be responsible for group and individual room sales, convention sales, directing the solicitation and negotiation of wholesale and corporate tour travel accounts and contracts, creating various marketing strategies and the administration of the convention and leisure sales departments.

Prior to joining Beau Rivage, Whiteside held several seniorlevel management hotel sales and marketing positions at national chains, including Marriott and Hilton Corporation, as well as prestigious franchise and independent properties, including the Palmer House Hilton, the Chicago Hilton and the Nashville Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center.

Texas

New General Manager & Director of Sales & Marketing

DALLAS — The Statler, an iconic downtown Dallas hotel undergoing a \$225 million redevelopment, has named Evan Danziger as gen-





Danziger

Wasserman

eral manager and Jennifer Wasserman as director of sales and marketing. The boutique luxury hotel is set to open in late spring 2017.

Danziger joins The Statler with more than 13 years of experience in hotel management. He previously served as general manager at Embassy Suites Denver International Airport. Wasserman brings more than 20 years of hotel sales and marketing experience to The Statler, with expertise in opening and converting hotels. She most recently served as opening director of sales and marketing at The Highland Dallas, the inaugural property for Hilton's Curio Collection.

"We are honored to welcome two remarkable hospitality executives to The Statler," said Dave Johnson, president and CEO of Aimbridge Hospitality. "Both Evan and Jennifer are proven experts in the hospitality industry and, with their combined wealth of experience, are the perfect fit for a redevelopment of such magnitude as The Statler."

Hilton Americas-Houston Ranked Best Hotel in Texas

HOUSTON — With MSN's announcement of the Best Hotels in Every State, Hilton Americas - Houston takes the number one position as Texas' Best Hotel. Chosen by MSN based on expert reviews, local recommendations and its own list of the Best Hotels in America, Hilton Americas -Houston's overall dedication to guest satisfaction was a leading factor in the choice.

Recognized for superior guest service, the hotel is also the recipient of the TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence, an honor awarded to hotels that earn high reviews from travelers on a reg-

Online Resource Launched

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — Visit Winston-Salem recently launched www.ReinventYourMeeting.com, a complimentary online resource for meeting planners that offers enhanced content, expanded planning information and new features.

"This new platform is another testament to our commitment to providing exceptional service and product to meeting planners," said Richard Geiger, president of Visit Winston-Salem. "Keeping planners informed and making the information readily available online will help them take the next step when considering Winston-Salem as their host city."

The new "sitelette" includes information on the \$20 million reinvention of the 100,000-square-foot Benton Convention Center, as well as more than \$1.5 billion in business initiatives over the last decade, according to Visit Winston-Salem. Planners will also find information on meeting facilities and hotels, convention services, incentives, RFP submissions, and video and image assets.



ular basis. TripAdvisor bases its rankings on user reviews written by hotel guests, with Hilton Americas - Houston holding the No. 7 spot of the 499 hotels in Houston. Always keeping guest satisfaction as its highest priority, the hotel holds the No. 1 spot as TripAdvisor's Top Green and Top Family Hotel in Houston, ranks No. 2 as the Top Spa Hotel in Houston and is in the top 7 on the Houston lists for Top Business Hotel, Top Luxury Hotel and Top Romantic Hotel.

Directly connected to the

George R. Brown Convention Center, Hilton Americas - Houston contains the city's largest number of guest rooms, ballrooms, hotel meeting space and the most technologically advanced services available under one roof. Conveniently situated between Toyota Center and Minute Maid Park. this AAA Four Diamond hotel boasts 1,200 elegantly appointed guestrooms; 91,500 square feet of flexible, technologically advanced meeting space; restaurants; lobby bars; Starbucks; and a full-service spa and health club.



Highlights From Rendezvous South 2017!

Meeting professionals from around the country gathered at the Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center in Virginia's Blue Ridge from Feb. 27 – March 1 to share information, make plans for future events and have some fun! Here's a look at some of the highlights of the event.

For more coverage & photos visit www.ConventionSouth.com

Welcome!

Rendezvous South 2017 got off to a great start with a Welcoming Reception in Peacock Alley at the beautiful and historic Hotel Roanoke.







Great Ideas Breakfast Planners and suppliers shared frustrations and offered solutions to meeting industry issues.







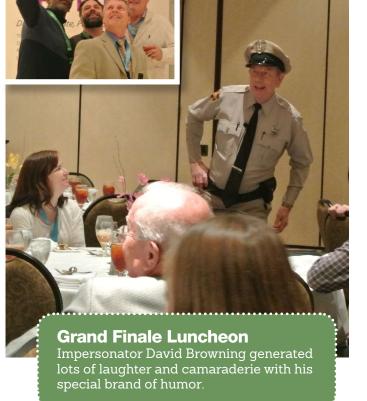
Meet-Up Sessions Meeting planners and suppliers participated in pre-scheduled appointments to discuss future events.





A Night at the Musuem

The elegant Taubman Museum provided a glamorous setting, with music, refreshments and tours of special exhibits.



MARKET SEGMENT REPORT: CORPORATE MEETINGS

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Corporate Meetings

Overcoming The Stigma By Adrianne Bowen

Just hearing the words "corporate meeting" can give planners and prospective attendees a sense of despair. For many employees, "corporate meeting" is synonymous with "boring," an event they must attend. For planners, the challenge is to overcome the stigma of dull "corporate" meetings. But it doesn't have to be that way! Corporate meeting planners have been delivering more social elements and fun, innovative activities to help transcend the impression of corporate meetings, incorporating flair that's transforming those two little words into something meaningful and exciting, compelling attendees to run toward the sponsors' booths instead of looking for the exit.

Photo courtesy of Meg Slentz, CME

Pulling Out The Stops

Dominating the wildly popular, constantly expanding world of gaming, GameStop – based in Grapevine, Texas – pulls out all the stops when it comes to planning corporate events, according to Samantha Vogel, CMP, manager of travel and meetings for GameStop. The gaming industry has some big players that play a vital role in making GameStop's corporate events a success. And it's the fun elements – and social interaction between attendees and sponsors – that make the events memorable.

In fact, one of the most important elements in creating spectacular GameStop functions is working with corporate sponsors that showcase their most innovative products to captivate attendees. "The vendors are really the life force behind our events." Vogel said. "They bring the newest in gaming, virtual reality and collectibles. We've seen vendors bring out Dave Navarro, Stan Lee, The Hoff, Hershel Walker and more. They've built life-size arenas for game play on our show floors, and they give hundreds of thousands of dollars in exclusive giveaways to our attendees. Making sure our vendors are happy, have the ability to capitalize on their vision and leave feeling like they'll experience a huge ROI is always a top priority for our event."

Vogel said it's important to work with sponsors, even if initial requests don't seem possible. "I am always open to hearing them out on new ideas or revamping certain opportunities to help them achieve their visions. And in the event they want to do something that is just not feasible, we don't tell them no," Vogel said. "We find a new way to bring their vision to life. We do this quite often with vendors and it always results in an amazing experience for our attendees and a better ROI for our vendors."

Just last year, at a corporate event for GameStop, Vogel had a sponsor that wanted to present a new film at the event. "They wanted to take all our attendees off campus to another venue. We wanted the viewing to take place at the convention center so we could maximize other aspects of the event simultaneously."

She knew how important the screening was to the sponsor and made sure a creative compromise was reached that worked out even better for the vendor, the attendees and the event. "In brainstorming with the sponsor, we decided to build an outdoor movie area on the plaza for the entire week. They loved it! We were able to help bring their original vision to life, keep our attendees on campus to maximize other opportunities and even sell the outdoor screen to other vendors on other nights to maximize the build-out."

Ensuring Sponsor Exposure

Meg Slentz, CMP, president of Meetings To Order, Inc., has been planning meetings for 28 years and started her own full-service meeting management company in Melbourne, Fla., in 1997. Like Vogel, she also believes that it's crucial to take care of sponsors when planning corporate events. "For many corporate meetings, the sponsors pay for the meeting. It is essential for the sponsors to feel that they are receiving the necessary networking time with the attendees and acknowledgement for their sponsor dollars," Slentz said. Planning the event's logistics to guide attendees to sponsors is an important step for planners, such as "incorporating all food and beverage functions throughout the exhibit hall to ensure traffic to their booths and exposure," she said.

Even when meetings are more focused on business and finance than showcasing products, Vogel said having the right venue to make >>

Duke University's Brand New Venue Open for Corporate Business

JB Duke Hotel, on Duke University's West Campus in Durham, N.C., opened its doors in January and, according to General Manager Gregg Hilker, the venue is ready to host and meet all corporate meeting needs. "JB Duke Hotel continues the lineage of unparalleled service, gracious staff and attention to detail set by its father property, Washington Duke Inn & Golf Club, in its own contemporary style. Corporate meeting planners will find a unique level of flexibility and a wealth of options with the properties located across the street from each other," Hilker said.

The venue offers 198 guest rooms and suites, the Thomas Executive Conference Center, a full-service restaurant, two bars and a fitness center. It's linked by a skybridge to the Fuqua School of Business and is only steps away from Cameron Indoor Stadium, the Duke University Golf Club and other Duke athletic venues, according to Hilker. "The JB Duke's central location, impeccable service and 20,000 square feet of state-of-the-art meeting, classroom and event spaces make it the ideal destination for conferences, weddings and social gatherings," he said.

Beyond offering a brand new, elegant host destination, the JB Duke Hotel also features extraordinary opportunities to enhance corporate events. "Some of the unique experiences offered at JB Duke Hotel include private yoga lessons hosted in one of our outdoor courtyards and a 'Taste of Durham' tour, allowing attendees to experience the sights and tastes of Durham," Hilker said. "We can also incorporate the Duke Basketball Experience into corporate group events, where guests can take a lesson right from Coach K's daughter. There's nothing that says 'Duke University' quite like that."







every element accessible creates an efficient workspace. At GameStop's annual Field Leadership Meeting (FLM), "success revolves around agenda and content management. The venue flow plays a huge role in our success, and we often look for venues that can enhance our agenda flow for this meeting," she said.

Picking The Right Venue

Picking the right venue for just the right mix of business and pleasure can definitely help create an ideal atmosphere. "Marriott Shoals Hotel and Spa in Florence, Ala., is an excellent location for corporate meetings," said Selena Miller, director of sales and marketing for the hotel. "The hotel boasts 196 sleeping rooms all under one roof. All sleeping rooms have views of Wilson Dam and the Tennessee River, as well as the incredible pool. All rooms have private balconies for guests to truly relax and unwind after a long day of meetings. The conference center has more than 30,000 square feet of meeting space to accommodate most any size meeting. With two on-site restaurants and the additional culinary team in the conference center, attendees will have a variety of menu options for any type of event."

When it's time to wind down from a corporate meeting, attendees simply want to relax and enjoy themselves, an easy feat at the Marriott Shoals. "Alabama's only rotating restaurant, 360 Grille, is a wonderful location



for a private reception or to simply dine and see beautiful views of the Tennessee River and the entire area," said Miller. "The property also has an incredible spa with both men and women's sides, featuring whirlpools, steam rooms and quiet treatment rooms to truly enjoy your massage or facial. There is also a lovely salon for mani/pedis as well as



professional hair stylists."

In addition, the area of Muscle Shoals has an important musical history and was known as The Hit Recording Capital of the World with artists including the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan and Aretha Franklin recording their famous tracks at studios around town. And the 2013 film "Muscle Shoals" has revived musical interest in the region. "Studios have been refurbished and are making a tremendous comeback with artists such as Jason Isbell, The Black Keys, Gregg Allman and so many more returning and bringing new sounds from the studios," Miller said. "There is live music every night in the hotel at Swampers Bar & Grille."

Sightseeing adventures can be a great way to help attendees let off some steam and have fun in a social setting after a day of corporate meetings. "Our events team is well established at coordinating music tours of the studios, the Alabama Music Hall of Fame and W.C. Handy Birthplace. There are also historical tours such as Helen Keller Birthplace, The Rosenbaum House which is a Frank Lloyd Wright design, The Florence Indian Mound and Museum, and much more," Miller said. "The events team also works with groups to have dinners and receptions at off-site venues. And to make it as easy as possible, Marriott Shoals coordinates everything so the group only has one master bill, making it so much easier."

Making sure attendees are engaged, especially when it comes to corporate meetings, can be a challenge, according to Vogel, but it's also a way to get creative and produce a great event while saving money. "Sometimes when attendees are forced to attend, the level of engagement is lacking," Vogel said. "We are always looking for new and innovative ways to ensure our attendees have an exciting experience year after year. For instance, providing attendees dinner on your own gift cards - that we also get sponsored - gives them an opportunity to get out on the town with their colleagues, while also cutting the cost of \$120 for a ballroom dinner down to \$30 a person. It's a way we get them engaged with the city we're in, engaged with each other, engaged with our sponsor of the gift card and a way to help cut costs by over \$1.2 million. It's a win-win!"

The Importance of CSR

You may have heard of it in vague conversations about corporate meeting planning but what exactly is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)? According to Colorado Springs-based KNECT Events Owner Kristen Douglas, "It's an umbrella term used to describe voluntary corporate initiatives concerned with community development, the environment and human rights."

It sounds important but what does CSR have to do with planning corporate events? "Incorporating a CSR component in corporate meetings allows the company to embrace actions that will positively impact the environment, consumers, employees, communities and stakeholders. In addition, more consumers than ever before are considering a company's CSR-related actions before purchasing a product or service," Douglas said. "Incorporating a CSR component within an event creates an opportunity for the group to unite in an effort to improve society in some way. These efforts could include financial donations, eco-friendly aspects of events or hands-on volunteer services. Shared CSR experiences bond team members on a fundamental level, increase employee morale and create a healthier culture within the company."

Many companies are incorporating CSR into their events and it can have a great impact on everyone involved. "In partnership with a local children's home in Miami, Fla., which is developing a safe house for child survivors of human trafficking, we had the privilege of supporting their cleanup efforts for the groundbreaking of a newly acquired property soon to be a safe



haven for many children," Douglas said. "The old phrase 'many hands make light work' proved to save the day. Thanks to a team of about 30 volunteers and their sweat equity, the cleanup was complete and ready for the professionals to move forward. Without the help of this dedicated team, delays would have continued, stalling a healthier environment for these children's well being."



AT YOUR NEXT MEETING, make sure the devil's in the details.

An impressive new player has checked into Duke University's West Campus and is now open for business. A top-tier contemporary hotel, The JB Duke Hotel arrives paired with the brand new, state-of-the-art Thomas Executive Conference Center. A dedicated staff will help plan your meeting, corporate retreat or team-building experience down to the tiniest detail in a seamless blend of attentive service and Southern hospitality. The JB Duke is just a short walk from Duke's storied athletic and educational venues and mere minutes from vibrant downtown Durham. Call to book your event today or visit JBDUKEHOTEL.COM.

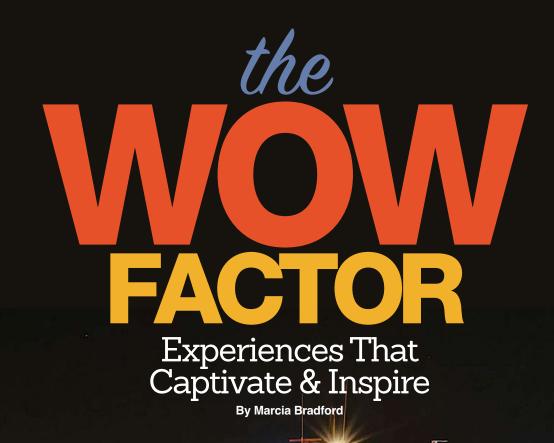
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COVER: THE WOW ISSUE



With its rich heritage, beautiful scenery and wide range of attractions, the South offers meeting planners a full range of WOW! experiences that will attract participants and make them want to return again and again. Take a look at ConventionSouth's top picks for 2017 to find WOW! experiences suitable to all types of meetings and events.

A Special Events Yacht

the WOW FACTOR

The Carolina Girl, the only exclusive special events yacht in Charleston, S.C., is cruising again after receiving newly installed Rosewood Teak flooring in the formal dining area in the middle deck, which compliments the stunning black granite bar. The impressive \$5 million yacht is 100 feet long, features three deck levels and accommodates up to 150 guests. The main dining room is equipped with A/V equipment and big screen TV. Attendees can expect to have views of the harbor, Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge and Battery as well as other notable landmarks, all set against the backdrop of the beautiful Charleston waterways, and gorgeous sunset skies.



WOW Mobile, **PROFILE:** Alabama

INTRO: Historic Elegance **WOW FACTOR:** Crystal Ballroom **DESCRIPTION:** In the historic Crystal Ballroom at Mobile, Alabama's Battle House Hotel & Spa, meeting planners and attendees are transformed into royalty as they descend an iconic stairway. The Battle House has been hosting Mobile's top social events since 1852. Neo-Classical in design, the Crystal Ballroom has been restored to vintage colors circa 1908. The ornate work around the crown molding was a common architectural feature and has been painstakingly restored to its former grandeur. The hotel's restoration offers an exceptional WOW! factor for meeting attendees, historians and others seeking exceptional Southern charm.

An Amazing Lazy River

A new Lazy River with waterslides debuted in November 2016 at the AAA Four Diamond Hyatt **Regency Coconut Point Resort** & Spa in Bonita Springs, Florida. Offering 85,000 square feet of event space, the new venue follows a \$4.1 million renovation to the resort's indoor meeting space in 2016. Meeting planners can now use charming courtyards with fountains, dramatic open spaces with towering palm trees or lakeside grassy lawns for outdoor venues as well as 37,600 square feet of indoor event space. Three acres of poolscape, including a serene adults-only pool and hot tub, and a 19,000-square-foot Stillwater Spa are also part of the 26-acre resort.





WOW PROFILE: Bourbon Orleans Hotel of the New Orleans Hotel Collection

INTRO: Authentic, Original, & Very New Orleans!

WOW FACTOR: French Quarter Courtyard

DESCRIPTION: The iconic Bourbon Orleans Hotel, a French Quarter treasure, recently completed a multi-million-dollar restoration, positioning the historic property as an upscale haven offering many modern amenities. The grand Orleans Ballroom, complete with large pre-function foyer, anchors this historic event space while the French Quarter courtyard offers a more casual setting and the St. Ann Cottage provides the perfect spot for more intimate gatherings. In addition, the Bourbon Orleans in known for its stellar service and has topped the list of the *Conde Nast "*Ten Best Hotels in New Orleans."

WOW PROFILE: Gulf Shores & Orange Beach, Ala.

INTRO: Incorporate vacations before & after meetings

WOW FACTOR: 32 Miles of Sparkling White-Sand Beaches

DESCRIPTION: Alabama's 32 miles of beaches make the coastal communities of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach stand apart from other destinations and venues! Conventions and meetings are hugely successful here because of the location—families incorporate vacations before and after, and there is a wealth of activities to explore while a family member or significant other attends sessions.

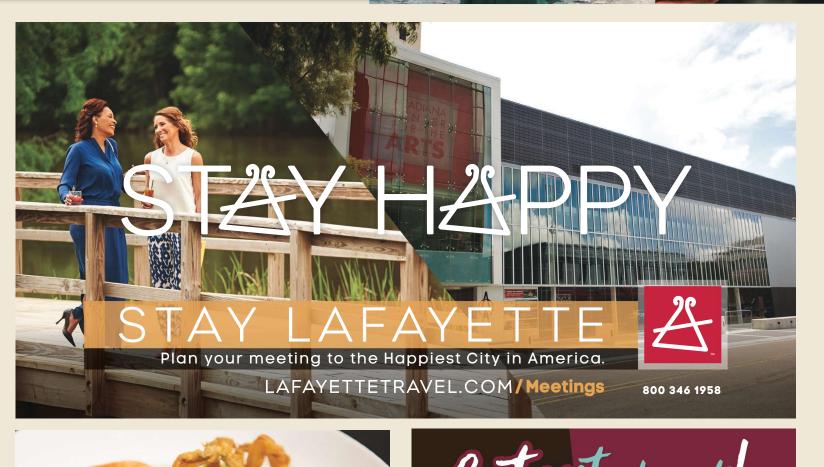
Other highlights along the Alabama Gulf Coast include fishing, golf, dolphin/nature cruises, sunset sails, Segway tours, paddleboard/kayak rentals and more for off-site activities. Not to be missed are the extensive ongoing enhancements at Gulf State Park, including new paved paths and trails!



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WOW PROFILE: Georgia World Congress Center

INTRO: An Upgraded Events Campus

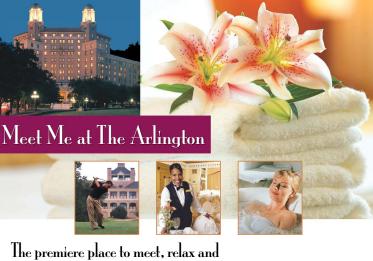
WOW FACTOR: Major Improvements by 2020

DESCRIPTION: As part of an in-progress development project, the Georgia World Congress Center Authority's campus is being updated and modernized through the addition of Mercedes Benz Stadium, the development of an on-site headquarters hotel, an update to the exterior of the 40-year-old Georgia World Congress Center, and retooling of Centennial Olympic Park. These major improvements will fundamentally enhance the GWCCA campus experience by the year 2020.

Supporting local vendors and showcasing Georgia Grown food options is a cornerstone of GWCC's mission. Social Table, a modern, fresh-restaurant concept, aims to provide the most authentic Georgia culinary experience to attendees and visitors to the Downtown Atlanta campus.

Centennial Olympic Park, directly adjacent to the Georgia World Congress Center, is undergoing a \$25+ million renovation that will provide additional green space, an outdoor event facility and state-of-the-art amphitheater that can be booked in conjunction with GWCC event space. New terrazzo and Georgia-sourced carpet located in lobbies and entrance points throughout the Georgia World Congress Center provide the groundwork for a fresh, inviting feel.





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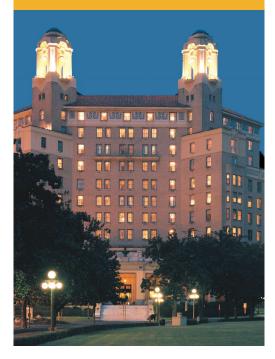


WOW PROFILE: The Arlington Resort Hotel & Spa

INTRO: An Historic Hotel In A

WOW FACTOR: Crystal Ballroom

DESCRIPTION: The Arlington Resort







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Dramatic Dining Views

The expanded and redesigned Tavola restaurant at Sea Island, a Forbes Five-Star resort on Georgia's coast, features a vivid new canvas created by Georgia artist Steve Penley. Painted on site at The Cloister, the artwork's notable colorful palette and distinctive bold brush strokes enliven the guest experience.

A rustic Italian eatery, Tavola offers warm, old-world ambiance combined with pops of Italian flair, including hand-painted tile wainscoting and floor-to-ceiling EuroCave wine cabinets at the entrance. With additional seating, an enclosed porch and a garden courtyard, more guests will be able to take in the vibrant sunsets over the Southern salt marshes. Also adding to the dining-with-view options, the new River Bar Lounge, adjacent to the River Bar restaurant, overlooks Black Banks River.



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Designated by the Texas State Legislature as "the official opera house of Texas," and listed on the National Register

of Historic Places, The Grand 1894 Opera House offers a unique setting for a yearround performance schedule, weddings, lectures, meetings, and events. The beautifully restored, 1,000-seat theatre on Galveston Island features state-of-the-art

lighting and sound, additional meeting space and options for seated dinner for 400 guests. Located in the heart of Galveston's historic cultural arts district, The Grand is within walking distance of many restaurants, art galleries, and distinctive shops.







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A part of Alabama's Resort Collection on The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail ROBERT TRENT JONES GOLF TRAIL



Valid until June 30, 2017 for groups arriving in November/December 2017 or 2018 and January/February 2018 or 2019. Minimum of 200 cumulative room nights required. Additional concesssions available for groups above 400 cumulative room nights. Not valid for existing contracts. Certain blackout dates apply. © 2017 Marriott International, Inc.

WOW PROFILE: Grand Hotel Marriott Resort, Golf Club & Spa

INTRO: A Grand Tranformation!

WOW FACTOR: 550 acres of giant live oak trees, multiple beaches and lush landscaping

DESCRIPTION: Alabama's Grand Hotel Marriott Resort, Golf Club & Spa, one of America's top historic hotels, is undergoing a massive transformation. "From redesigning meeting space and guest rooms to enhancing the resort's legendary service and culinary options, this historic legend will take Southern hospitality to a higher level," said Tony Davis, CEO of the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail Resort Collection. The construction is being done in phases so the property will be up and running throughout the 16-month project. Once construction is complete in Spring 2018, the Grand Hotel will join the Autograph Collection

The resort, which dates back to 1847, has 37,000 square feet of meeting space that was completely renovated. The Grand's 550 acres feature giant live oak trees, multiple beaches and lush landscaping. The current project follows the opening of a new golf practice facility, The Grand Golf Experience, in 2016. The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail is celebrating its 25th year in 2017.



WOW PROFILE: Lafayette, Louisiana



INTRO: A Hot Adventure!

WOW FACTOR: Jungle Gardens, nature preserves & the scent of hot sauce

DESCRIPTION: Avery Island, located near Lafayette, Louisiana, and home of TABASCO[®] brand Pepper Sauce, recently began offering a new improved tour. Participants can experience the unique feel of the South Louisiana marshes and bayous and the nature preserve inhabited by indigenous plants and animals. When groups are ready for the hot stuff, meeting participants can go back in time and visit the history museum and then go through the process of making the hot sauce. Experience the plants growing in the greenhouse, see the barrels of mash aging in the warehouse, inhale the smell of sauce in the blending vats, view the bottling and learn about distribution. Other fun displays help guests learn more about Avery Island's conservation efforts, check out the salt mine display, shop in the Country Store, eat in the restaurant "1868" and explore the Jungle Gardens.



WOW PROFILE: Lake Charles, Louisiana

INTRO: Golden Nugget Hotel & Casino & L'Auberge Casino Resort **WOW FACTOR:** Glamour & Gaming Galore!

DESCRIPTION: In Lake Charles, Louisiana, the Golden Nugget Hotel & Casino, with 30,000 square feet of meeting space, and L'Auberge Casino Resort, with 26,000 square feet of meeting and conference space, together form a casino resort area with a huge WOW factor for convention groups. Located adjacent to one another, the sheer size of the two properties sets them apart from other venues. L'Auberge Casino Resort is a towering 26-story property complete with more than 1,000 guest rooms and 147 luxury suites. L'Auberge continues to upgrade with luxury accommodations, earning the designation of being a AAA 4-Diamond property. Having only been open since December 2014, the property is already expanding. An all-new 350-room hotel tower is slated for completion this summer, bringing the room count to over 1,000 luxury hotel rooms. Meetings and conventions, no matter how large or small, can be hosted in style in the Lake Charles casino resort area.

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With so many options to choose from in Gulf Shores & Orange Beach, it helps to get a birds-eye view of everything available to create a memorable experience for your group. Let our knowledgeable team save you time by securing competitive proposals from area venues, facilitating site visits and helping you plan the perfect meeting. **Contact us today to get started.** GULF SHORES & ORANGE BEACH

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WOW Marriott Shoals **PROFILE:** Hotel & Spa

INTRO: Panoramic views of Florence & the Tennessee River

WOW FACTOR: A Spectacular Spa

DESCRIPTION: Pamper yourself when meeting in Florence, Alabama with a visit to the Spa at the Shoals. One of the premier spa destinations in the Muscle Shoals area, the 6,000-square-foot state-of-the-art facility offers massages, facials, and body treatments. For extra-special events, add-in some salon time, where hair treatments, manicures and pedicures, and makeup services are available.

The Spa at the Shoals is just one of the features that allows the Marriott Shoals Hotel & Spa to set a new standard for Southern hospitality. The hotel provides stunning views of the beautiful Tennessee River and striking panoramic views of Florence at its signature 360 Grille.







THE WOW ISSUE

Leverage Event Technology To Create **By Chad Frank**

"Wow" has many meanings. Merriam-Webster's definition is: 1. used to express a strong feeling (as pleasure or surprise), 2. a striking success, and 3. to excite to enthusiastic admiration or approval. Wow is generated in different ways at conventions and conferences. What once wowed attendees doesn't necessarily wow them today. Not all wows are created equally, nor are they all strategic marketing tools that accomplish more than just a big wow. Take, for example, today's leadingedge interactive event technologies. When leveraged effectively, they create a wow factor to the umpteenth degree and a marketing/ sales value that is meaningful, measurable and consistent with the goals of all good events – to connect, engage and build relationships. It's important that event planners and exhibitors learn how advanced event technologies are

leading the pack in wow factor for branding and lead generation.

The Wow Factor: Then & Now

Remember the fish bowl? Drop your business card in the fish bowl and hope to be the lucky winner of golf clubs, a television set, or the mother of all wow gifts, a vacation. Other perennial favorites were beautiful girls in bikinis or branded cheerleader outfits walking the floor and escorting attendees back to their employer's booth. Also, who could forget the magician mystifying attendees with mindboggling tricks, or the mime mimicking attendees until they have to stop at the booth if for no other reason than to have the mime stop mimicking them?

Okay, so at one time, these were the showstoppers getting the wows. And, to some

extent, these tried and true methods still work along with things like prize wheels, money blowing machines and great food giveaways. Today, however, exhibitors are looking to engage event attendees at a higher level and derive more benefit. They are investing less in booth displays and more in sophisticated event technologies. Event planners may invest hundreds of thousands of dollars to create a huge wow factor at a general session using advanced A/V and lighting technologies.

The Wow Line-up in Event Technologies

The best event technologies captivate while achieving other vital business goals. They streamline registration processes, help attendees navigate an event, deliver information and brand messages, track attendees' interests and drive them to a >

booth or workshop, create good will, and capture valuable data and ultimately, sales leads. Consider these technologies:

- Seamless LED Video Walls, created by arranging a series of 42" LED or plasma video wall monitors, offer big screen, marquee impact for conveying brand messages and product information video, animation, photos and other graphics in super high resolution up to 1920 x 1080 to capture attention, engage and market. They can be customized or used in standard configurations using 2x2 and 3x3 grid shapes placed vertically or horizontally. Connected to mobile devices, PCs, DVDs, Blu-ray and cameras, they facilitate interactive broadcasts and presentations.
- Charging Stations, available with different size touch screens, create a good will wow factor for attendees relieved to have an easy solution for charging their mobile devices. While waiting for their devices to charge, targeted product or institutional messages can be delivered to this captive audience through the station's interactive touch screen or through good old fashioned conversation.
- iTab Core and Giant Smartphone, together deliver a one-two wow punch



to engage attendees/potential customers and drive higher engagement and sales. They transform an ordinary display into a bigger than life, high impact, easy to use smartphone format. The iTab Core transforms touchscreen displays into an iPhone or Android phone giving access to various apps, brochures/PDFs, picture galleries, games, and key branding messages. The Giant Smartphone is a fully-functioning smartphone of huge proportion which operates on iOS and Android platforms.



- Digital Signage, armed with dynamic content management software, helps meeting planners and exhibitors deliver information in an engaging manner, while achieving cost savings and sustainability goals by eliminating printed materials. Digital signage is more visually compelling than a brochure, and facilitates target marketing.
- Mobile Event App Software drives attendees to specific, high engagement activities (e.g., product demos, contest drawings, celebrity receptions, etc.) in real-time, creating a connection while capturing valuable behavioral data.

A 2015 Regalix survey found that passive offline content as in static billboards and printed materials will see a decline in marketing budgets. Today's convention planners and exhibitors are seeking interactive, high impact event technologies to achieve engagement, gather market intelligence, and create the wow factor.

Chad Frank is Vice President of Sales, Event Solutions, Corporate Events & User Conferences, for SmartSource Computer & Audio Visual Rentals, www.smartsourcerentals. com)

BREVARD ZOO

Located in Melbourne, the Brevard Zoo offers a number of options for group events, including the Nyami River Lodge, a 3,000-square-foot indoor space with A/V, Wi-Fi and a caterer's kitchen. A covered veranda overlooks a picturesque giraffe exhibit. Special animal encounters with sloths, goats, alpacas and birds add a unique touch to any event. Additional group options include a Treetop Trek adventure, train rides, animal feedings, kayaking and scavenger hunts.

EVENT PLANNER'S GUIDE TO

According to Visit Florida, both corporate and association meeting planners across the country gave the Sunshine State the highest ranking for affordable travel, accessibility and value in a recent research study. Along with beautiful year-round weather, and diverse hotel and venue opportunities, Visit Florida cites convenient and abundant air service, unlimited activities and a wide range of corporate social responsibility (CSR) opportunities as key reasons why it's "Good business to do business in Florida!"

NORTHEAST FLORIDA Amelia Island

Just 30 minutes from Jacksonville International Airport, Amelia Island has a variety of lodging, meeting and event options, ranging from upscale resorts to quaint bed and breakfast inns to traditional conference spaces at brand hotels.

The Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort completed an extensive \$85 million re-imagination in 2013 and offers 404 guest rooms with 27 suites, nine dining options and 80,000 square feet of meeting space, plus additional pre-function areas and an 11,000-square-foot event lawn. Lodging also includes 350 rooms at The Villas of Amelia Island Plantation.

The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island has more than 48,000 square feet of conference space including several oceanside areas, with 19 meeting rooms. The 488-room resort features a private 18-hole golf course, luxury spa and numerous fine-dining options. Summer Beach Resort is adjacent to the Ritz-Carlton and offers 75 oceanfront or resort-view accommodations in private villas, townhomes and luxury condominiums, with meeting space for up to 84 guests.

Florida

BY D. FRAN MORI FY. T. WAYNE WATERS

& SABE FINK

The 50-block historic district of Fernandina Beach, the largest town on the island, has dozens of shops, restaurants and attractions. Lodging in town includes the 122-room Hampton Inn & Suites Amelia Island-Historic Harbor Front, which has 1,500 square feet of event space. ►

BREAKOUT SPOTLIGHT: Jacksonville



Jacksonville combines Florida flair and Southern hospitality in a perfect mix with unique venues, a delicious local food culture, welcoming neighborhoods and a thriving craft beer scene, according to Patty Jimenez, communications manager for Visit Jacksonville. "Location, affordability and the huge return on experience all make Jacksonville one of the best emerging meetings destination in the nation," she said. "It's not just about the great venues but most importantly about the great experience attendees have in those venues and outside of them. Jacksonville is a city that is eager to host them and show off its beautiful beaches, water activities, nature, dining scene, cultural assets, vibrant nightlife and welcoming attitude."

Jimenez said the destination is most excited about the redevelopment of the Northbank Riverwalk and areas across from EverBank Field. "Coming this spring, Daily's Place at EverBank, home of the NFL Jacksonville Jaguars, will house a new 5,500-person-capacity amphitheater and 94,000-square-foot covered flex field, all under one roof and just feet from the St. Johns River. It will create a cohesive environment for events and festivals to utilize the entire stadium premises."

Other new venues in Jacksonville include Topgolf Jacksonville, a 65,000-square-foot entertainment center with meeting rooms; Unity Plaza, an outdoor event venue with amphitheater and community center; and Institution Ale Works and Manifest Distilling, two businesses in one facility with restaurants, craft beers and spirits, entertainment and meeting spaces.

Planners and event attendees enjoy Jacksonville's accessibility, Jimenez said. "Our airport, Jacksonville International Airport (JAX), was just ranked number one in customer service in the entire nation. Plus, we are located by I-95 and I-10, making our downtown so easy to get to. Then there's our people! We are very much a Southern city and very much a Florida destination, a perfect mix for hosting events because our locals are welcoming and just so nice! Then there's the quality of the facilities. Historic yet modern. Most of them waterfront and so flexible, they can accommodate a wide variety of events and themes."

Contact: www.visitjacksonville.com/ meetings

Jacksonville & the Beaches

Situated along the Atlantic Ocean, the "River City by the Sea" boasts more than 20 miles of wide and uncrowded beaches, close to 40 miles of the Intracoastal Waterway and the longest stretch of the St. Johns River. On land, Jacksonville is home to the largest urban park system in the nation, with 10 state and national parks. Its thriving craftbeer scene and fun and cosmopolitan nightlife make Jacksonville a unique destination.

According to Visit Jacksonville, the city is home to more than 450,000 square feet of meeting space, including the Prime F. Osborn III Convention Center and an award-winning sports complex. There are more than 200 hotels and resorts that offer nearly 18,000 rooms and the area offers 70 year-round golf courses.

Among the recently renovated properties, the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront, with 966 guest rooms and 110,000 square feet of event space, has completed a full renovation with new river-inspired decor, new rooftop pool and additional meeting space. The 159-room Sheraton Jacksonville competed a \$7 million property renovation in February 2017, including updates to all eight meeting rooms. The Omni Jacksonville completed renovations to all 354 guest rooms as part of a \$9 million overhaul that also included upgrades to the restaurants and 14,000 square feet of meeting space. DoubleTree by Hilton Jacksonville Riverfront completed renovations to its 293 guest rooms as well as upgrades to 12,000 square feet of event space. Embassy Suites Jacksonville Baymeadows has completed a \$13 million total renovation to all two-room guest suites, meeting space and restaurant. The Lexington Hotel and Conference Center is in the final stages of a \$15 to \$20 million renovation of the entire property, including the 35,000-square-foot conference center, to be completed in Summer 2017.

Several small beach communities along the Atlantic Ocean add extra interest to the Jacksonville metropolitan area. The quaint, historic village of Mayport is home to casino boats and seafood restaurants, and biking and hiking trails. Atlantic Beach and Neptune Beach are intersected by Beaches Town Center, which offers casual and upscale dining, diverse shopping options and a happening nightlife scene.

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- Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts: three theaters with seating for groups from 600 to 2,900, with more than 20,000 square feet of reception space
- Jacksonville Marriott: 250 guest rooms; 16 meeting rooms and 13 breakout rooms
- DoubleTree by Hilton Jacksonville Airport: 201 guest rooms; 11,000 square feet of event space
- Ramada Hotel & Conference Center: 150 guest rooms; 10,000 square feet of event space
- One Ocean Resort & Spa: 193 guest rooms and suites; 10,500 square feet of indoor and outdoor conference facilities

(For more information, see Breakout spotlight on page 30.)

St. Augustine

Proclaiming itself America's oldest city, St. Augustine has 5,800 guest rooms in the metro area, with historic attractions and world-class golf, according to St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & the Beaches Visitors and Convention Bureau (VCB). The city is home to World Golf Village, which is home to the World Golf Hall of Fame and the only courses co-designed by Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer, as well as four meeting rooms for up to 700 people. The World Golf Village Renaissance St. Augustine Resort has 271 guest rooms with 30 suites and 73,101 square feet of function space. The Clubhouse at TPC Sawgrass, home of the PGA Tour, has 13,000 square feet of event space with additional upper-level terraces. The adjacent Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa has 511 guest rooms and more than 60,000 total square feet of indoor and outdoor event space for up to 2,500 people, with 32 meeting rooms and a

private beach club venue.

Off-site meeting venues include Lightner Museum, which can accommodate up to 400 guests, and various spaces at historic Flagler College, including a 795-seat auditorium.

Lodging options also include Hammock Beach Resort, with 325 suite and villa lodging accommodations, a championship golf course, a water park and lazy river, and 80,000 square feet of indoor and oceanfront event space with 12 meeting rooms. The Holiday Isle Oceanfront Resort (expected to complete a full guest room renovation this spring) has 153 guest rooms and 4,220 square feet of indoor and outdoor beachfront event space. In March, The Collector Luxury Inn & Gardens opened, featuring nine buildings –including seven guest houses with 30 guest rooms – and occupying a city block on the edge of Old Town.

The city's only AAA Four Diamond hotel, the



Ponte Vedra Inn & Club, a AAA Five Diamond resort on the beach that has welcomed guests since 1928, is always updating to keep everything fresh and new. "In this past year, we opened a new restaurant, the Surf Deck Grille, that offers a cutting-edge culinary experience in a beautiful space right at the beach," said Nathan Williams, marketing manager. "We also completely updated our conference center, which has 25,000 square feet of event

space, indoor and out. In addition, we are renovating lodging space at the Atlantic House and we've redone the walk-up oceanfront snack bar. We have several great options to dine right on the beach."

Renovations to the main dining room at the sister Lodge & Club property gives the space an "open, bright, sunny concept," Williams said. "The Lodge & Club has really cool event space with three good-size meeting rooms with huge windows overlooking the beach."

The Inn & Club has 250 guest rooms and suites, and the Lodge & Club has an additional 66 guest rooms.

The resort has also completed upgrades at The Spa at Ponte Vedra Inn & Club, which offers more than 100 services and treatments.

Contact: www.PonteVedra.com

historic Casa Monica Resort & Spa, Autograph Collection, dates from 1888. It offers 138 guest rooms and 12,000 square feet of function space in nine meeting rooms.

Daytona Beach

The big news in Daytona Beach is the opening of the 200-room Westin Daytona Beach Resort & Spa in Fall 2017, according to Linda McMahon, director of group sales for the Daytona Beach CVB. The hotel will be Daytona Beach's first four-star hotel and will feature 19,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space. "We're excited about a lot things going on in Daytona Beach," McMahon said. "The area is investing nearly \$2 billion in renovations and construction."

McMahon said the Hilton Oceanfront Resort is completing a major renovation of guest rooms, meeting space and public areas. The Daytona International Speedway completed a \$400 million project, adding 16 new break rooms and other



event spaces to now total more than 120,000 square feet. "Corporate groups love meeting at the Speedway," she said. "They can either stay in hotels near there or stay on the beach with quick transportation to the speedway. Also new is One Daytona, a mixed-use retail, dining and entertainment destination just across the road from the speedway." ►

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According to the CVB, One Daytona will include a 250-room Fairfield Inn and Suites, opening this summer, and an exclusive Marriott Autograph Collection hotel called The Daytona, opening in early 2018.

Daytona Beach has more than 12,000 guest rooms in the metro area, with more than 1,200 of those within a few blocks of the Ocean Center convention center. Directly across the street from the Ocean Center, the Hilton Daytona Beach Resort/Ocean Walk Village has 744 guest rooms and 32 suites, with 60,000 total square feet of event space. The Wyndham Ocean Walk resort has 740 suites with full kitchens and offers 6,000 square feet of meeting space, including a 5,000-squarefoot ballroom and a 1,000-square-foot conference center. A couple blocks north, the Plaza Resort & Spa has 322 guest rooms and 40,000 square feet of function space with indoor and outdoor beachside venues.

Additional Daytona Beach Meeting Space • Daytona Beach Resort Hotel & Suites:

- 322 guest rooms; 17,000 square feet of event space
- The Shores Resort & Spa: 212 guest rooms; 17,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space
- Jackie Robinson Ballpark: 4,000-seat stadium

Historic Coast Highlights

Site Visit By Selena Chavis

A recent visit to one of the sunshine state's lesser known gems -- the region encompassing St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra Beach and The Beaches, also known as Florida's Historic Coast – offered a chance to appreciate the inherent beauty of Florida's northern

Atlantic Coast beaches. This culturally-rich part of Florida has an appealing old-world charm—dating back to 1565. At the same time, groups will find modern, up-to-date amenities and offerings in this area. From seasoned convention properties and resorts to historic, upscale boutique offerings and one-ofa-kind facilities. Here are some highlights of my four-day experience.



- A stay at Hammock Beach Resort, in beautiful Palm Coast, where the one- to three-bedroom suites with balconies overlook the area's pristine beaches. An intimate banquet with exquisite views of the Super Moon, a putting green lesson at the Tom Watson Signature-designed Conservatory Course and a visit to the area's renowned Marineland for a tour and dolphin encounter were all great fun.
- A tour of the Casa Monica Resort & Spa, Autograph Collection in St. Augustine, a restored 1888 landmark hotel and the city's only AAA Four Diamond hotel. A pirate kidnapping and a visit to the Lightner Museum, housed in the former Alcazar Hotel built by Henry Flagler in 1888 was followed by a stop at the St. Augustine Distillery Company, which distills handcrafted bourbon, vodka, gin and rum and is available for group events and outings.
- A stay at the Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa, an experiential upscale convention and meetings property, which included a morning's team-building exercise at the property's oceanfront beach club and a tour of nearby TPC Sawgrass, home of The Players Championship and the headquarters of the PGA Tour.

- News-Journal Center at Daytona State College: two theaters, seating 264 and 859; lobby reception space for up to 750 people
- Bethune-Cookman University, Daytona State College and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University: classroom and auditorium spaces
- Ormond Beach Performing Arts Center: seats 600 in stadium-style seating
- Bruce Rossmeyer's Destination Daytona: World's largest Harley-Davidson dealership, with 35,000 square feet of amphitheater space, a 30-room hotel, restaurant, bars and meeting rooms

Space Coast

Florida's Space Coast, including the cities of Titusville, Port Canaveral, Cocoa Beach, Melbourne, Viera and Palm Bay, offers more than 11,000 hotel rooms with more on the way. "In the next 12 to 18 months, there will be nearly \$200 million in new hotel development," said Bonnie King, director of sales, Space Coast Office of Tourism. "This spring, we break ground on the Space Coast Stadium complex renovation in Viera, a \$25 million project to convert the former professional baseball spring training facility to a world-class youth and amateur sports complex. It will operate year-round and be the home of USSSA, the largest sports organization in the country." King also noted recent renovations and upgrades: the 284-room Radisson at the Port has 30,000 square feet of meeting space, and Comfort Inn & Suites Cocoa Beach has multiple event rooms with reception space for up to 511.

The Space Coast features a wide variety of unique venues for events and team building, King said. "Everything from space-age attractions and interactive museums to America's most diverse estuary and the largest sea turtle nesting area. At the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex, you can host a dinner under the Atlantis Space Shuttle and have an astronaut speak to your group. The Brevard Zoo has a meeting room that overlooks giraffes and the Exploration Tower at Port Canaveral has a 72-seat auditorium and is the perfect place to watch a rocket launch. (A schedule of launches is at www.spacecoastlaunches.com.)

Additional Space Coast Meetings Space: • Hilton Cocoa Beach Oceanfront: 295

guest rooms; 10,000 square feet of meeting space plus 10,000-square-foot oceanfront deck

- DoubleTree by Hilton Cocoa Beach Oceanfront: 148 guest rooms; 10,000 square feet of event space for up to 800 meeting attendees
- Hilton Melbourne Beach Oceanfront: meeting space for up to 300 guests
- **Crowne Plaza Melbourne-Oceanfront:** 290 guest rooms and suites; 10,000 square feet of indoor space plus 6,000 square feet of outdoor deck space
- International Palms Resort: 13-acre resort with 500 guest rooms and 13,000 square feet of function space for up to 650 guests
- **Courtyard Cocoa Beach:** 155 guest rooms; 5,000 square feet of event space

CENTRAL FLORIDA

Ocala/Marion County

Ocala/Marion County is a welcoming and eclectic area of Central Florida. Known for its horse farms and competitions, the area is home to



Equiventures, the nationally recognized horse show that attracts thousands of visitors to the Ocala Jockey Club during Thanksgiving week. BG Ocala Ranch offers travel and exploration of the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway's hundreds of miles of riding trails, arranging rides for meeting attendees and providing team-building opportunities.

Other meeting venues in the Ocala/Marion County area include the Webber Center and **>**

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BREAKOUT SPOTLIGHT: Ocean Center, Daytona Beach



As they say in the real estate business, "Location, location, location." The Ocean Center convention center in Daytona Beach has that wrapped up. The center is just 400 feet from Atlantic Ocean beaches, minutes away from Daytona International Airport and in the core area of Daytona Beach. "We're surrounded by upscale accommodations, restaurants, shopping, entertainment and attractions," said Angela Daniels, the center's director of sales, marketing



and event services. "The Ocean Center is beautiful, with sweeping architecture and natural light, marine light colors, and permanent and touring art exhibits."

The center has more than 200,000 square feet of meeting space, including a 42,000-square-foot arena seating 9,300; a 93,000-square-foot exhibit hall; a 12,000-square-foot ballroom that seats up to 768 for dinners; and 32 meeting rooms.

The fifth-largest convention center in the state of Florida has other things going for it as well, Daniels said. "Our staff is always willing to go out of their way to please the customer with personalized service and one-on-one event planning. Also, planners always remark on the quality of our food and presentations, and on the cleanliness of the center, which is important."

Contact: www.oceancenter.com

the Klein Conference Center at the College of Central Florida – Ocala Campus, with a capacity of 400 in its nearly 7,000 square feet of space; the Appleton Museum of Art, which has space for 500 meeting attendees; and the Circle Square Commons, located in the On Top of the World Communities. The Southeastern Livestock Pavilion, Ocala's landmark agricultural showplace, features a covered arena, grandstand seating for 4,200 and an adjacent 800-seat auditorium.

In area hotel news, the Comfort Suites Dunnellon opened in late 2016, bringing an additional 75 guest rooms to the market plus on-site meeting facilities for up to 30 attendees. The Hilton Ocala and the Courtyard Ocala are both undergoing renovations and upgrades. The renovation of the 196-room Hilton is focusing on exteriors, with extensive landscape improvements to bring a true Florida feel to the entire property, including the pool area. Guest rooms will be renovated in phases and all of the bathrooms will be completely redone, replacing tubs with glass-enclosed showers. The 40,000 square feet of meeting space will be refreshed and the VIP concierge lounge will be enlarged and modernized. The Courtyard Ocala is more than halfway through the \$3 million complete renovation of all 169 guest rooms. Public spaces and exteriors will be upgraded as well.

(For more information, see the Breakout spotlight on page 38.)

Orlando

Orlando and vicinity continues to add new lodging, unique meeting facilities and one-of-a-kind attractions. Getting to Orlando will soon be easier with a \$1.3 billion capital improvement project at Orlando International Airport, with terminal enhancements and expansion and a new automated people mover scheduled for completion in mid-2017 and 2018.

The newest hotel at Universal Orlando, the 1,000-room Sapphire Falls, has 114,000 square feet of meeting space plus 16,000 square feet of outdoor event space. The hotel connects by a skybridge to meeting space at Royal Pacific, and combined, the two hotels have 247,000 square feet of event space.

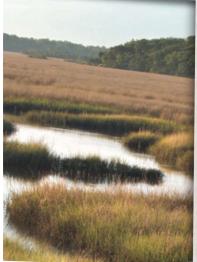
Walt Disney World's Swan and Dolphin Resort will complete the largest makeover in the resort's history this fall, with a lobby re-design that is the final phase of a \$140 million project. Together, the two hotels offer 2,267 guest rooms. ►













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Disney's Coronado Springs Resort is adding a 15-story tower with 500 guest rooms and rooftop dining. This addition will bring the number of guest rooms at Walt Disney World's 27 resort hotels to nearly 30,000.

In Fall 2016, the Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace Disney Springs Area debuted its rebranding and extensive multi-million-dollar renovations. An official Walt Disney World hotel, it has 1,011 guest rooms and 92,000 square feet of event space to accommodate groups of up to 2,000 guests.

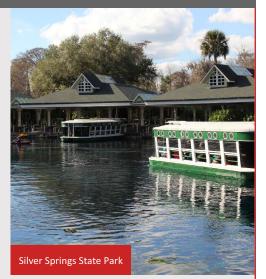
A 54-room boutique property, The Delaney Hotel, opens this year in downtown Orlando with a private dining room that can accommodate up to 100 guests. The 304-room Courtyard Orlando Lake Buena Vista has completed a major guestroom renovation. The hotel has 2,900 square feet of event space in four meeting rooms. The 353-room DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando Airport, which has 15,000 square feet of event space, is expected to complete \$8 million in renovations later this year. In 2016, the 1,004-room hotel added 40,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space, bringing its total to more than 100,000 square feet.

Rosen Hotels & Resorts, the largest independently owned hotel operation in the Orlando market, has more than 6,300 rooms and suites across seven properties. Connected by skybridge to the West Building of the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC), the Rosen Centre Hotel

BREAKOUT SPOTLIGHT: Ocala/Marion County

The big news in Ocala/Marion County is that a new hotel is in the planning stages for the downtown square, on the site of the old Chamber of Commerce building. The Ocala City Council has approved a plan to move forward with Downtown Ocala LLC for a mixed-use hotel, retail, restaurant and residential complex to begin construction in August 2017. Phase I will consist of 90 hotel rooms, approximately 10,000 square feet of meeting space and 7,000 square feet of restaurant and retail space. Phase II will feature 2,000 square feet of retail space and 8,000 square feet of residential space. Phase I should be competed in March 2019, with Phase II to follow.

Ocala and Marion County are full of unique meeting venues. According to Ashley Dobbs, sales and marketing coordinator for Ocala/Marion County CVB, the bureau can put together a program that takes full advantage of Ocala's gently rolling hills, unique springs, its famous horse country with more than 700 horse farms, and the Ocala National Forest. Silver Springs State Park provides both meeting opportunities and group activities, including the Springs' iconic glass-bottom boats. The Paradise Ballroom at the park offers two dramatic glass walls: one



overlooking the vast expanse of lawn and the other featuring the headspring and the glassbottom-boat dock. The room is 5,000 square feet and can accommodate up to 300 meeting attendees.

The CVB actively courts new meeting and convention business, offering an incentive program called Meet and Save in Ocala/ Marion County that provides up to \$1,500 to groups that book a new meeting through the bureau.

Contact: planners.ocalamarion.com

has 1,334 guest rooms and suites, nine dining options and more than 150,000 square feet of event and meeting space. The hotel can host up to 2,700 for banquets or 5,000 guests for receptions. Set on 230 acres, Rosen Shingle Creek has 1,501 guest rooms and 490,000 square feet of indoor event space plus 40,000 square feet outdoors. It also has a full-service spa, 15 dining options, four pools and a nature trail. Located on International Drive, the 800-room Rosen Plaza can host groups of up to 2,800 people and is adjacent to the OCCC. Also, Rosen Inn International has 728 guest rooms, Rosen Inn has 315 guest rooms, Rosen Inn at Pointe Orlando has 1,029 guest rooms and Rosen's Clarion Inn Lake Buena Vista has a 2,400-square-foot ballroom and outdoor pavilion. (For more information, see the Breakout spotlight on page 41.)

Additional Orlando Meeting Space • Orlando World Center Marriott:

- 2,009 guest rooms; 450,000 square feet of event space; four ballrooms, including the 105,000-square-foot Cypress Ballroom; eight dining options; four large outdoor function spaces
- Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill Club & Lodge: 70 guest rooms in lodge; 9,000 square feet of meeting space; Golf & Tennis Academy
- Holiday Inn & Suites Across From Universal Orlando: 390 guest rooms; two



meeting rooms accommodate up to 616 people

- Marriott Village in Orlando: includes 304-room Courtyard with four meeting rooms; 400-suite SpringHill Suites, with two meeting rooms; and Fairfield Inn and Suites, with 388 guest rooms
- Villas of Grand Cypress: 1,500-acre resort with suites and villas; meeting facility for up to 240 guests; 45 holes of golf; Academy of Golf
- Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts: includes 2,700-seat Walt Disney Theater, 294-seat Alexis & Jim Pugh Theater, and banquet and reception spaces for up to 600 guests

Kissimmee

With its next-door proximity to a host of worldclass theme parks and attractions, more than 300 meeting spaces that total more than one million square feet and nearly 50,000 lodging rooms to choose from, Kissimmee offers event planners accommodations for all sizes of groups and all budgets.

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Central Florida

Site Visit By Marcia Bradford

Experiencing the Marriott Orlando World Center

With 2,009 guest rooms, 120 suites and 450,000 square feet of event space spread over 200 acres, The Marriott Orlando World Center truly is a universe onto itself. Among my favorite aspects:

- Mikado, a Japanese-style restaurant, offering Teppanyaki-style cuisine
- A special back-of-the-kitchen space for desserts
- Room with a view-my suite (one of 10 types of suites, all recently renovated) had a kitchen, living room, bedroom and balcony
- Hawk's Landing Steakhouse & Grille, where we helped prepare lunch and signature cocktails
- Awesome Meeting Spaces: Gary Dybul, director of sales and marketing, showed me the property's vast meeting space, much of it recently renovated
- The West Terrace Spa Pool for serene relaxation
- Six Courses, Six Cocktails at Siro Urban Italian Kitchen, a "Farm to Fork" meal
- A group golf lesson at Hawk's Landing Golf Club
- Lunch on The Falls Function Lawn
- The International Suite on the 28th floor for a gourmet meal followed by the nightly laser show at the Oasis Pool.



o Orland Lakeland

Central Florida's Convention, Sports, Lifestyle, and Entertainment Destination 863.834.8100 www.thelakelandcenter.com According to Experience Kissimmee, several lodging properties are completing or planning expansions and updates for 2017. Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate breaks ground this year on a \$40 million expansion that will include a new 93-room villa building, an additional 100,000 square feet of expanded event lawn and conference center space, and 23,000 square feet of additional pool deck. The resort currently has 720 guest rooms plus two- and three-bedroom villas and 128,000 total square feet of event space.

The first phase of Margaritaville Resort Orlando is set to open in late 2017. The \$750 million resort will have 187 guest rooms and 1,300 vacation homes and timeshares. Also new is the 412-room Red Lion Hotel-Lake Buena Vista South, with 1,800 square feet of meeting space; the 200-room GreenPoint Hotel Kissimmee; and a newly renovated 198-room Comfort Suites Maingate East.

BREAKOUT SPOTLIGHT: DoubleTree By Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld



Situated on 28 acres in the heart of Orlando's famous attractions and close to the Orange County Convention Center, the DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld is "branching out" with a multi-million-dollar renovation and expansion.

According to Director of Sales and Marketing Steven Green, the changes feature an all-new 20,000-square-foot Majestic Ballroom and an extensive transformation of the property's outdoor event space, creating the new Palm Promenade with four distinct outdoor venues.

Once the project is completed, the property will offer 100,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor space that will be suitable for business meetings, social events and conferences

that can accommodate up to 2,000 participants.

With a total of 1,020 guest rooms and suites, the resort offers accommodations amongst its tropical landscape or in its 17story tower, which offers panoramic views of the surrounding area.

Green pointed out several additional aspects of the property that make it a premier Orlando meeting and event destination. For starters, meeting destinations will get to enjoy the exclusive benefits of an Official SeaWorld Hotel. In addition, the property offers a number of high-end resort amenities, including several large swimming pools and a pool bar; a Kids Lounge with a game area and miniature golf; several on-site dining options and a spacious fitness center.

Contact: www.doubletreeorlandoseaworld.com

New and updated attractions include a new wooden roller coaster at Fun Spot America; new outdoor adventures at Gatorland, one of the area's oldest attractions; and a new waterslide complex at Gaylord Palms Resort. In April, Universal Studios Florida unveils the 3-D experience "Race Through New York Starring Jimmy Fallon" and the new 30-acre water park Volcano Bay will open at Universal Orlando Resort in May. Also in May, the World of Avatar opens at Disney's Animal Kingdom and a virtual-reality roller coaster comes to SeaWorld Orlando this summer.

Additional Kissimmee Meeting Space • Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention

- **Center:** 1,406 guest rooms and suites; 65 meeting rooms in 406,662 square feet of event space
- **Reunion Resort:** lodging for up to 320; 25,000 square feet of event space in 19 rooms
- Westgate Town Center Resort & Spa: 1,184 guest rooms; 8,545 square feet of event space
- Bohemian Hotel Celebration: 117 guest rooms; 5,000 square feet of event space
- Holiday Inn Orlando SW Celebration: 444 guest rooms; 5,043 square feet of event space
- Ramada Kissimmee Gateway: 507 rooms; event space for up to 460 guests
- **Kissimmee Civic Center:** 16,000 square feet of event space
- Silver Spurs Arena at Osceola Heritage Park: 33,946-square-foot arena

Lakeland/Polk County

Located just off Interstate 4 between Orlando and Tampa, Lakeland is home to The Lakeland Center, Central Florida's main entertainment, sports and convention complex, (For more information, see the Breakout spotlight on page 46.) and Rocking H Ranch, a 100- acre residence that blends classic Western flair with 21st century originality. The Barn has 4,800 square feet of seating area and the Veranda offers an additional 2,400 square feet of space. Lakeland's home town charm is supported by a variety of arts and cultural opportunities. Florida Southern College hosts the largest on-site collection of Frank Lloyd Wright architecture, while the Polk Museum of Art is popular with history buffs and art lovers. Flight enthusiasts can't miss the annual SUN 'n FUN Fly-in. Also, in the heart of downtown, Lake Mirror Park offers a historic promenade, amphitheater and pedestrian walkways. Hollis Garden is a breathtaking formal garden that showcases more than 10,000 flowers and indigenous plants.

Additionally, Polk County features several meeting and event sites. Westgate River Ranch Resort & Rodeo is a 1,700-acre authentic dude ranch, suitable for conferences and retreats, with 10,000 square feet of meeting space and 150 guest accommodations. Resort activities include horseback riding, cattle drives, airboat and swamp buggy rides, trap and skeet shooting, fishing, hayrides and more. The River Ranch Saloon and 1,200-seat rodeo area provide unique special-event locations for meetings. Accommodations range from hotel rooms and cottages to glamping and luxe teepees.

Streamsong Resort features 216 guest rooms, casual and fine dining, a full-service spa, 22,000 square feet of meeting space and a rooftop pavilion. In addition to 35 holes of golf designed by Bill Coore, Ben Crenshaw and Tom Doak, the property includes The Clubhouse, with 12 guestrooms, 4,500 square feet of meeting space, a lounge, golf shop, and on-site restaurant.

Safari Wilderness offers more than 260 acres of pristine wilderness filled with herds of African and Asian species. The Safari Lodge is a two-story, 14,500-square-foot multipurpose agricultural building, with 360-degree views overlooking the exotic wildlife. Guided safaris by vehicle or camelback are available.

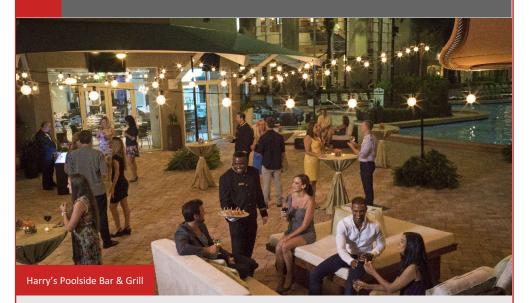
Haines City is home to Lake Eva Community Park, which has an aquatic center, banquet hall, band shell, tennis courts, basketball courts and a walking trail alongside Lake Eva. The state-ofthe-art banquet hall, overlooking Lake Eva, can accommodate any event up to 1,400 people.

In Polk City, Fantasy of Flight offers full-service meeting and events capabilities in 62,000 square feet of indoor space. The attraction houses the world's largest private collection of vintage aircraft, with more than 40 of aviation's great accomplishments in a rotating display. This Art Deco facility often hosts unique events.

SOUTHEAST FLORIDA The Palm Beaches

Palm Beach County, including Palm Beach and West Palm Beach, offers nearly 50 miles of Atlantic Ocean beachfront and a bit of the primordial Everglades. The county has 39 towns and 15 districts, replete with 40 museums and 200 >>

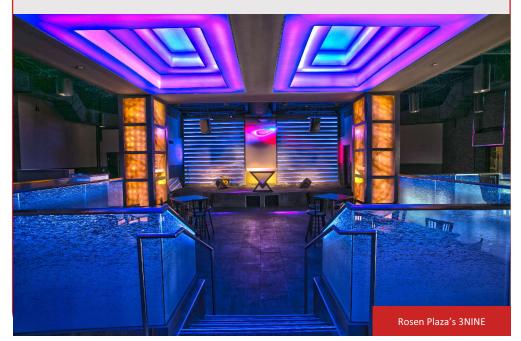
BREAKOUT SPOTLIGHT: Rosen Hotels & Resorts



The award-winning Shingle Creek Golf Club at Rosen Shingle Creek now features an innovative redesign, courtesy of Arnold Palmer Design Company, and a new covered pavilion. Less than a mile away and connected to the Orange County Convention Center, Rosen Centre and Rosen Plaza provide guests complimentary round-trip transportation to the course.

Rosen Centre's popular Harry's Poolside Bar & Grill is now offering its gourmet fusion of Caribbean Cuban cuisine for breakfast. Rosen Plaza's 3NINE turnkey entertainment venue is available for buyouts. For exciting opportunities, visit RosenHotels. com/ROI to learn more about the Rosen Difference and how the company tailors concessions to exceed its clients' planning needs.

Contact: www.rosenhotels.com



hotels offering 16,000 guest rooms in everything from luxury resorts and upscale chains to boutique hotels and beach rentals. Exceptional eateries, great shopping and exciting nightlife are easy to come by here. And Palm Beach County is also Florida's Golf Capital and the spring training home to four Major League Baseball teams.

The Palm Beach County Convention Center in downtown West Palm Beach anchors the Downtown Convention District with more than 1,000 hotel rooms in its midst. The convention center boasts 350,000 square feet of meeting space, including a 100,000-square-foot exhibit hall. It's easily accessed by an enclosed walkway to the new 400-room Hilton West Palm Beach, with 24,000 square feet of event space of its own in two ballrooms and six meeting rooms. The new Hilton opened last year and offers a restaurant, an outdoor terrace and an outdoor pool.

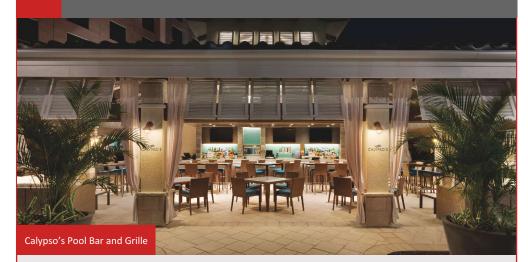
The Brazilian Court Hotel, an 80-room elegant iconic Palm Beach property with Spanish Colonial architecture, offers a small ballroom and a conservatory of more than 700 square feet.

The region is accessible by air through the Palm Beach International Airport, served by 15 airlines.

Fort Lauderdale/ Broward County

The folks at the Greater Fort Lauderdale CVB are excited about the ongoing expansion and renovation at the airport. The Fort Lauder-

BREAKOUT SPOTLIGHT: Caribe Royale, Orlando



The largest all-suite convention hotel in Florida, Caribe Royale in Orlando has 1,335 suites and 150,000 square feet of flexible event and meeting space. The resort offers a host of amenities, including lighted tennis and basketball courts, running and bike trails, bike rentals, two restaurants, two lounges, a boutique spa and the new Calypso's Pool Bar and Grille, which features a "Floribbean" menu, craft cocktails and al fresco dining.

The addition of Calypso's Pool Bar and Grille completes an \$8 million refurbishment of the hotel's restaurants and public areas, including the complete renovation of the property's main reception building. The bedding, hallway carpets and wall coverings in each of the three primary guest suite towers were also updated.

Gerald Urquiola, the hotel's general manager, said more upgrades are on the way. "We are by no means finished with our continued commitment to update and improve our beautiful facility," he said. "This fall, we will begin a full renovation of our Grand Caribbean Convention Center."

Caribe Royale celebrated its 20th anniversary in October 2016; many employees have been on staff since the resort opened.

Contact: www.cariberoyale.com

dale-Hollywood International Airport opened a new concourse with five new gates and new concession areas as part of the first phase of a \$450 million expansion and modernization project. Another new concourse should be finished soon and another next year. New domestic air service starting this year includes additional flights from several major cities.

Meanwhile, Broward County's hotel scene, already with more than 13,000 sleeping rooms, keeps blossoming. A number of hotels have either undergone recent refreshing and renovation, are newly opened or are due to open this year and in the next two years.

The Fort Lauderdale Marriott Harbor Beach Resort & Spa, with 620 guest rooms and 100,000 square feet of meeting and event space in 34 meeting rooms, was recently renovated. In addition to the large lagoon pool area, the resort offers facilities for beach volleyball, sailboat and jet-ski rentals, cabana rentals and a beach bar. There are also tennis courts, a basketball court and a 22,000-square-foot spa.

In other hotel news:

The Ikona Hotel opened following a multi-million-dollar renovation of a historic building. It has 24 deluxe rooms, as well as apartment suites and penthouses overlooking a private pool and courtyard garden. Indoor and outdoor event space includes a second-level balcony overlooking the ocean.

A new \$21 million, 142-room Wyndham Garden Hotel in Dania Beach is expected to open in late 2017.

Opening this spring is the eight-story, 150room, maritime-themed Tryp by Wyndham Maritime Hotel. It will offer 5,000 square feet of meeting space, a rooftop bar and lounge, and 11 aquariums.

Coming later this year, The Conrad Fort Lauderdale Beach will have 10,000 square feet of meeting and event space, indoor and outdoor restaurants, a pool with cabanas, and a spa and fitness center.

Also later this year, the Meliá Costa Hollywood is expected to open on Hollywood Boardwalk on the beach. The property will have 307 new condo-hotel rooms in a range of sizes.

A \$30 million renovation and conversion is underway at The Le Méridien Dania Beach at Fort Lauderdale Airport, formerly Sheraton Fort Lauderdale Airport & Cruise Port Hotel. It will feature 245 guest rooms, 20,000 square feet of state-of-the-art flexible meeting ►



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space and two redesigned restaurants.

Several additional properties are due to open in 2018, including a new dual-branded Starwood Hotel in downtown Fort Lauderdale. The 24story, 323-room property will have a 210-room The Dalmar, a Starwood brand, and a 114-room The Element by Westin. Its features will include 12,000 square feet of meeting space, a rooftop bar, a pool deck and a secret garden.

Coming in 2019 are an Aloft Fort Lauderdale with 1,500 square feet of meeting space and a new 23-story, 150-room Four Seasons with 95 residences, a ballroom and meeting facilities, two restaurants, a spa and fitness center. And the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood is adding a nearly \$2 billion, guitar-shaped, 800room hotel tower adding to its existing 500 guest rooms, 50,000 square feet of function space, and new dining and entertainment venues to be completed by late 2019.

The recently refreshed and renovated properties in Broward County include the \$100 million transformation of The Diplomat Beach Resort, which has 200,000 square feet of meeting space, 998 guest rooms, a beachside infinity pool that features two cascading waterfalls falling into a 240-foot lagoon pool, and now offers 10 new culinary experiences provided by celebrity chefs. W Fort Lauderdale's recently completed a \$55 million renovation of its 517 guest rooms, lobby, terrace, infinity pools and public spaces. The property has a new 4,000-square-foot ballroom planned for this fall, along with a new restaurant with sidewalk dining. The 484-room B Ocean resort also underwent renovation. The property features 14,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space, one major restaurant, four other food and beverage operations, and two outdoor infinity pools.

Broward County's primary properties also include the 385-room Hyatt Regency Pier Sixty-Six on 22 acres, offering 25,000 square feet of meeting space, five restaurants, three heated pools and four lounges; the 589-room Hilton Fort Lauderdale Marina, featuring 21,000 square feet of meeting space and located across the street from the Broward County Convention Center; the 374room Hilton Fort Lauderdale Beach Resort, with

B R E A K O U T S P O T L I G H T : Embassy Suites Orlando–Lake Buena Vista South

Located in Kissimmee, just 3.5 miles from the entrance to the Walt Disney World[®] Resort and a 20-minute drive from Orlando International Airport, Embassy Suites by Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista South offers 40,000 square feet of function space. Catering and A/V services are available for the property's 15,000-square-foot Palms Ballroom and 5,000-square-foot Magnolia Ballroom. Additionally, 15 breakout rooms are great spots for training seminars while 10 boardrooms offer space for business meetings.

Each of the property's 300 suites features a private bedroom, separate living area with a sofa bed, microwave, refrigerator, two flatscreen televisions and in-room safe. On-site dining options the casual American bistro-style restaurant, Kyng's Grille, the lobby lounge, The Oasis, and The Marketplace, for sundry items.



A fitness center, outdoor pool and whirlpool are among the recreational amenities on-site.

Contact: www.orlandolakebuena vistasouth.embassysuites.com

10,000 square feet of function space and several restaurants; the 240-room Sonesta Fort Lauderdale Beach, with 8,000 square feet of meeting space; and the 230-room Hollywood Beach Marriott, on Hollywood Beach's Boardwalk, with 7,000 square feet of function space.

Additional Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Meeting Spaces

- Greater Ft. Lauderdale / Broward County Convention Center: 600,000-square-foot facility; 200,000 square feet in four exhibit halls; 52,000 square feet in two ballrooms; 31 meeting rooms
- Pelican Grand Beach Resort: boutique property with 156 guest rooms and several beachfront venues for meetings of up to 100 participants
- **BB&T Center:** event space for up to 500 people in three venues; 12 function and meeting areas; three eateries; 21,000-seat arena; home to the Florida Panthers NHL team
- Hard Rock Live: 5,500-seat indoor arena; 40,000 square feet of meeting space; 32 meeting room configurations; live entertainment venue
- **Gulfstream Park:** 30,000 square feet of indoor event space; 44,000 square feet of outdoor space; thoroughbred racing and casino gaming; performing arts entertainment; more than 20 restaurants
- Kravis Center for the Performing Arts: 2,200-seat theater; two theater spaces can accommodate 2,350; 10,000-square-foot Weiner Banquet Center; Gimelstob Ballroom with 700-person capacity
- **Broward Center for Performing Arts:** 3,000-plus seats in two theaters; about 12,000 square feet of indoor meeting space

Miami & The Beaches

Greater Miami has two major convention centers, two more major facilities due to be completed by late 2018 and the only IACC-certified hotel conference center in South Florida. The city also offers more than 50,000 hotel rooms, including 15 properties that opened last year, with eight to open this year, several scheduled for major renovations and four new hotels scheduled for 2018.

On the hotel front, an expansive \$10 million renovation of the IACC-certified Sheraton Miami Airport Hotel & Executive Meeting Center included major enhancements to its ►



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With the need to stay connected, the Destination Lounge offers over 7,000 square feet of space where attendees and exhibitors can sit comfortably and continue to do business. Targeted for small groups, individuals, and private events; you can create sponshorship opportunities through corporate branding with the HD video wall and displays. This area will allow for spaces that are technology friendly with comfortable seating and open views, perfect for your next reception or presentation.



sales@occc.net occc.net 405 guestrooms, lobby, meeting space, outdoor pool, entryway and porte cochere.

Additionally, upscale boutique hotels and restaurants are popping up in Miami's trendy South of Fifth neighborhood, dubbed SoFi, near South Beach.

Among SoFi's new or soon-to-open upscale eateries are Lobster Bar Sea Grille, Craft Café, Malibu Farm at the Nobu Eden Roc Hotel Miami Beach and Planthouse, offering plant-based cuisine at the 1 Hotel South Beach.

Miami's classic Turnberry Island Resort underwent a major redesign and expansion of its spa facility, resulting in the opening of the âme Spa & Wellness Collective in January. The three-floor luxury spa offers 22 treatment rooms and a yoga studio.

Another upscale property, the JW Marriott Miami, offers 296 guest rooms and more than

25,000 square feet of meeting space in 20 event rooms, including a 10,000-square-foot ballroom.

The Hilton Miami Airport, located just across a waterway from the airport and situated on a private peninsula in the heart of the Blue Lagoon business complex, offers 30,000 square feet of meeting space.

The Greater Miami CVB (GMCVB) staff is also excited about the possibilities ahead as a new inter-city high-speed passenger rail service – Brightline – gets closer to finishing its first leg between Miami to West Palm Beach.

Miami Vice

Two new cultural/recreational offerings of particular note in Miami & The Beaches include Thriller Miami Speedboat Adventures, which has a new tour available that takes in a historic lighthouse and Stiltsville, the striking collection

B R E A K O U T S P O T L I G H T : The Lakeland Center

A multi-purpose entertainment complex featuring the 10,000-seat Jenkins Arena, 2,300seat Youkey Theatre and 100,000 square feet of meeting and exhibition space, the Lakeland Center began a \$14-million-dollar renovation this spring. According to Director of Sales John Oney, the project will focus on the consolidation of its two convention halls, Sikes Hall and Exhibit Hall, into 50,000 square feet of continuous exhibition space. In addition, the number of break-out and meeting rooms will increase by more than 50 percent, along with additional upgrades including; carpeting, lighting and increased pre-function space.

"The Lakeland Center hosts a wide variety of events ranging from nationally renowned artists, family shows, athletic events, trade shows, conventions, weddings and ride and drives," said Oney. "Situated in sunny central Florida and conveniently located minutes between Orlando and Tampa in Lakeland, Florida, The Lakeland Center is a short drive from anywhere in Central Florida and is a key destination stop for all types of events and their attendees."

Jacqueline L. Johnson, senior vice president of the Lakeland Convention & Visitor Bureau



and Lakeland Chamber of Commerce, said "The Lakeland Center staff is readily available and great to work with as a team! They are dedicated to making your event special with superb planning, support and execution! That very personal service is the key to why their business keeps returning!"

Contact: www.thelakelandcenter.com

of wood houses on stilts at the edge of Biscayne Bay. Also, Miami Culinary Tours explores Little Haiti, sampling the cuisines of Haiti, Jamaica and the Bahamas as well as Caribbean art and culture.

Greater Miami's Convention Centers

- James L. Knight Center: 100,000 square feet in the heart of downtown Miami, including the Miami Convention Center and Miami Conference Center; three exhibit halls that total 28,000 square feet; 37 meeting rooms equaling 72,000 square feet; connected to the Hyatt Regency Miami offering 612 guest rooms and an additional 23,000 square feet of meeting space
- Miami Airport Convention Center: 172,000 square-foot facility; four ballrooms; 60 individual function rooms; dedicated conference center; adjoining newly renovated DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel and adjacent to Miami International Airport
- Hilton Miami Airport: 30,000 square feet of meeting space; 22 meeting rooms; 508 guest rooms
- Sheraton Miami Airport Hotel & Executive Meeting Center: 17,000 square feet of recently renovated meeting space; only IACC-member hotel in South Florida; 405 guest rooms

Under major redevelopment – Booking for late 2018 and beyond:

• Miami Beach Convention Center: Exhibit halls total 500,000 square feet; new multipurpose ballroom of 60,000 square feet; 81 breakout rooms of 190,000 square feet; scheduled for completion in late 2018 and, if approved, a hotel in 2019 (For more information, see Breakout Spotlight on page 50.)

Under construction – Completion of first phase expected by late 2018:

• Miami Worldcenter: 600,000-square-foot facility; 390,000 square feet of meeting space;100,000-square-foot exhibit hall; two ballrooms: 65,000 and 45,000 square feet; 1,500-seat lecture hall; 1,800-room Marriott Marquis World Convention Center Hotel; retail and residential space

Florida Keys & Key West

"The Florida Keys and Key West offer an experience that's a world away from a typical meeting experience at a mega-metro convention center," said Jack Meier, group sales manager for the Monroe County Tourist Development Council. "With our wide array of properties, it's simply finding the right fit for your group."

Meier and the tourism council are excited about the recent opening of the 144-room luxury Playa Largo Resort & Spa, Autograph Collection Hotel in Key Largo. Sitting on 14 acres with a 6,000-square-foot beach, the new property offers 40,000 square feet of meeting space, three gourmet restaurants, a full-service spa, a pool with a spacious deck and bungalows.

Other Keys properties with substantial meeting space and grand amenities include the Key Largo Bay Marriott Resort, which sits on 17 waterfront acres and boasts an impressive 52,000 square feet of meeting space in 11 event rooms. The resort also has 153 guest rooms. The private Ocean Reef Club, with 30,000 square feet of meeting space, including the new Carysfort Hall, has 300 rooms in villas and homes. The 60-acre Hawks Cay Resort in Duck Key offers 20,000 square feet of oceanfront meeting space, 177 guest rooms and 225 two- and three-bedroom villas. The 216-room Key West Beachside Marriott has Key West's largest ballroom, which is being upgraded this year, and 10,000 square feet of meeting space in six event rooms.

Largo, a new private luxury development open for small corporate functions, is a gated resort in Key Largo that accommodates 15 guests as singles or 30 as doubles in its 5,000-square-foot The Lodge and its six 800-square-foot bungalows, which also provide modest function space.

Smaller properties with limited meeting space include The Marker Waterfront Resort, a 96-guestroom luxury property, and the 216-room DoubleTree Resort by Hilton Hotel Grand Key, which recently underwent a \$7.5 million renovation.

Islander Resort in Islamorada offers more than 5,000 square feet of indoor meeting space along with 114 guest villas and suites, and 25 cottages. Hilton Key Largo Resort offers luxurious guest rooms and 17,000 square feet of meeting space on 12 acres of tropical forest.

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA Naples, Marco Island & The Everglades

With 30 miles of beach, 1.5 million acres of wetlands and appealing upscale resorts, Southwestern Florida's Paradise Coast has plenty to offer



event planners. Approximately 400,000 square feet of meeting space is contained in the recently rebranded 810-room JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort, formerly the Marco Island Beach Resort, Golf Club & Spa. Work on the \$320

million renovations creating the new JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort is scheduled to continue until this summer and a grand opening celebration is planned for November. The reimagining will bring a new restaurant, ►

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B R E A K O U T S P O T L I G H T: Orange County Convention Center, Orlando



One of the largest convention center facilities in the U.S., Orlando's Orange County Convention Center (OCCC) is in the midst of a multiphase long-term expansion, with several new projects recently opened or set to open later this year, said Gwen Wilson, public relations manager. "We're excited about the Center-to-Table Gardens in the Westwood Lobby. This structure has 81 towers with 44 planting spots on each and gives us the ability to serve herbs and vegetables grown on property in an all-natural, chemical-free environment for meals prepared at the OCCC."

Also new at OCCC is the 7,000-squarefoot Destination Lounge, a state-of-the-art "meeting sanctuary" with video walls and LED displays to support corporate branding, Wilson said. "This venue provides attendees and exhibitors a place to sit comfortably and continue to do business. The Destination Lounge allows for spaces that are technology friendly with comfortable seating and open views perfect for meetings or private functions."

Opening in May 2017, the OCCC's new International Drive Pedestrian Bridge will connect the West Building of the center to the Hyatt Regency Hotel and will be the fifth bridge connecting nearby hotels to the convention center.

The OCCC has 2.1 million square feet of total exhibit and event space, with 74 meeting rooms (49 in the West Building and 24 in the North/South Building) and 232 total breakout rooms. The Chapin Theater seats 2,643. ■

Contact: www.occc.net

rooftop lounge and new meeting space that will bring the total for the property to 100,000 square feet.

In Naples, the Naples Grande Beach Resort has 83,000 square feet of meeting space and the New Hope Event Center in Naples, provides 44,000 square feet, including a large banquet hall, meeting rooms, a lecture hall, a gymnasium and a 20-acre event lawn/sports field.

A number of other Paradise Coast properties are just finished or are undergoing renovations, as well:

The 310-room Hilton Marco Island Beach Resort & Spa recently completed a \$40 million transformation that created a new floor-to-ceiling window overlooking the beach and Gulf of Mexico in a new entryway, lobby and reception area. Sixteen new one- and two-bedroom suites have been added, along with seven new poolside suites. The resort's 12,000 square feet of meeting space was also refreshed.

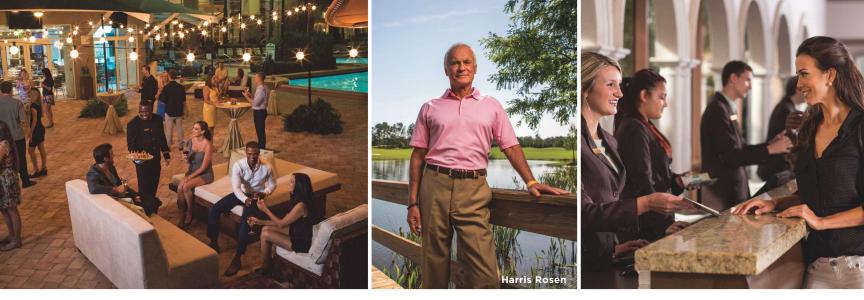
LaPlaya Beach & Golf Resort in Naples enhanced its ballrooms and its public spaces around the conference center and terraces. The 190-room property offers 12,000 square feet of meeting space.

The Inn on Fifth has renovated the executive boardroom meeting space and completed an extensive remodeling of the Spa on Fifth. The hotel's new signature restaurant, Ocean Prime, opened late last year.

The Naples Grande Beach Resort renovated its public spaces, including enhancements of its ballroom and lobby lounge.

All this makes JoNell Modys, PR and communications manager, and Debi DeBenedetto, group sales manager, for the Naples, Marco Island, Everglades Convention & Visitors Bureau quite happy.

The Paradise Coast also has several unique and appealing off-site meeting venues such as Artis—Naples, a performance and art center, and Sugden Community Theatre. Outdoor recreation and educational attractions include Rookery Bay, a 110,000-acre research reserve dedicated to wetlands featuring the Museum of the Everglades; the 13,000-acre Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary; Everglades Adventure Tours; the Conservancy of Southwest Florida Nature Center; Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens; NGALA Wildlife Preserve; the Naples Botanical Garden, which has a new visitor center and three new gardens; and the Dolphin Explore cruise boat. And Pure Florida, based in downtown Naples, ►



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BREAKOUT SPOTLIGHT: Miami Beach Convention Center



The redevelopment timeline for the Miami Beach Convention Center (MBCC) continues to get clearer. According to Matt Hollander, general manager of the facility, MBCC is reopening in May through November this year for a modest number of events that are already booked, before closing to outside business in order to handle Art Basel, a popular arts show that occurs in December. After that, MBCC will revert back to operating other limited events until finally opening up the entire renovated facility, likely in late 2018 or early 2019.

During this timeframe, the convention center will be operating out of the half of the facility that's already renovated.

"It's a very exciting time – truly reimaging what the convention center is and will be," said Hollander. "There's not a single part of the building going untouched through this renovation process. It's been a challenge but we're working very hard to keep everyone informed and up to date and make everything as painless as possible. But the building is going to be something spectacular!"

In addition to the major design, tech and structural renovations, about 140,000 additional square feet are being added to the building, including a new grand ballroom. The exhibit hall flooring is being replaced, and all of the underground utilities have been updated.

"All of the technology is being upgraded to state-of-the-art," said Hollander. "The telecommunications infrastructure is now a very robust fiber backbone throughout the building, running on redundant paths. The exhibit hall show floor has greatly enhanced connectivity. All the audio-visual equipment in the building has been replaced with new technology. We can capture an audio or visual signal anywhere in the building and send it through the digital network. And there's a new distributed antenna system being installed for cellular carriers and a greatly enhanced Wi-Fi network."

But Hollander stressed that the renovation is as much about the service model as the building.

"The building we're doing and the overall service model we're developing to support it are going to be a real game changer that elevates Miami Beach to the pinnacle for the convention and meetings industry," Hollander said.

The reimagined convention facility will feature:

- 500,000 square feet of exhibit space
- One 60,000-square-foot ballroom
- Three 20,000-square-foot junior ballrooms
- 60,000 square feet of breakout meeting spaces
- 700+ on-site rooftop parking spaces
- A small park across the street, converted from an area that is currently being used for parking.

Contact: www.MiamiBeachConvention.com

offers jet boat rides, jet ski rentals and group onthe-water sightseeing tours.

Southwest Florida International Airport, only a half hour from Naples, is served by four major U.S. airlines, as well as six limited-service airlines and several international carriers.

The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel

Offering 50 miles of beaches and Gulf Coast islands, the Fort Myers area has many large resorts and 12,000-plus hotel rooms, mostly on properties with exceptional recreational amenities. The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel area in Southwest Florida includes its namesake locales and nine other vacation-worthy spots, among them Captiva Island, Bonita Springs, Estero, Cape Coral and Pine Island.

Several area properties have undergone recent major renovations and additions. The Sundial Beach Resort & Spa on Sanibel Island completed a multi-million-dollar renovation that included a new Kay Casperson Lifestyle Spa and Boutique, fitness center and HydroGrid tennis courts. The property has 12,000 square feet of meeting space and four on-site restaurants.

A triple waterslide and lazy river pool complex opened at Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort and Spa in Bonita Springs, increasing the resort's total pool area to three acres. The 454-room property sits on 26 acres overlooking Estero Bay and the Gulf of Mexico, and offers 82,500 square feet of inside and outside meeting and event space.

Also in Bonita Springs, The Southwest Florida Performing Arts Center opened last year with 20,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space, a banquet capacity for 650 people, a culinary test kitchen and an Italian-themed celebrity-chef restaurant.

Two prominent new projects are expected by late 2018. The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village is adding 30 guest rooms to its current 263, as well as creating a new 30,000-square-foot conference center with a 13,000-square-foot ballroom to complement the property's current 15,000 square feet of multifunctional space. The property boasts an 18,000-square-foot outdoor terrace overlooking the Caloosahatchee River estuary.

Also, the 12-story 225-room Fort Myers Harborside Hotel, a luxury Autograph Collection property, is planned with 22,000 square feet of function space, a rooftop bar, a signature restaurant and a culinary theater featuring world-renowned chefs – all connected to downtown Fort Meyer's Harborside Event Center along the Caloosahatchee River, currently closed for renovations.

The Mound House, Fort Myers Beach's oldest standing structure. which sits atop an ancient Calusa Indian shell mound, debuted \$2 million in renovations and has three new galleries: Ancient People Gallery, Settlers on the Shells Gallery and the Digging Deeper Exploratory Gallery.

Meeting properties in the area include DiamondHead Beach Resort & Spa, a 125-suite Sun-Stream Hotels & Resorts property on Fort Myers Beach, with a full-service restaurant and 8,000 square feet of meeting and event space. Captiva Island's South Seas Island Resort has 470 guest rooms, 30,000 square feet of meeting space and 26 meeting rooms. On Cape Coral, The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village has 263 rooms and 15,000 square feet of meeting space. In Sanibel, The Sanibel Harbour Marriott Resort & Spa provides 30,000 square feet of meeting space.

Punta Gorda/ Charlotte Harbor

Halfway between Tampa and Naples on the Southwest Florida Gulf Coast, this modestly sized destination is just right for smaller meetings. Boasting Florida's second-largest harbor, the state's premier year-round eco-tourism attraction and 200 miles of blueway trails mapped for kayakers, this charming area may be one of the Sunshine State's lesser-known outdoor adventure jewels. But that's changing, in no small part thanks to an innovative marketing campaign that calls attention to the destination with an innovative original web series called "Adventure and Wildlife," developed by the Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Visitor & Convention Bureau's marketing program. There's plenty new in Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach, according to Jennifer Huber, tourism public relations manager for the Visitor & Convention Bureau, including name changes for a couple of area attractions to go along with the Charlotte County destination's new designation.

The popular Babcock Wilderness Adventures, now known as Babcock Ranch Eco-Tours, lets guests view wildlife such as alligators and a panther during a 90-minute buggy tour through the 90,000-acre Babcock Ranch and Telegraph Cypress Swamp. And the former Peace River Botanical Gardens is adding sculpture to its adornments to become the 27-acre Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens by late this year. Also planned at the outdoor attraction are more than 15,000 square feet of boardwalks and docks.

A brand new outdoor adventure here is Riding the Waves, in Englewood, which offers a variety of waterway tours with a certified Florida naturalist in two-person motorized catamarans.

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BREAKOUT SPOTLIGHT: Visit South Walton



A four-time winner of *ConventionSouth's* Readers' Choice Award, South Walton host everything from large corporate meetings to intimate reunions. "Of course, the beach is the primary draw, and the attractive and efficient meeting venues and award-winning lodging are designed to make group events easy and the event staff can take care of even the smallest detail," said Visit South Walton's Marketing Coordinator Kelli Carter.

Along with a stretch of sugary white beaches, this area offers 16 distinct communities, with something new and exciting for every meeting planner, attendee and family member.

Recently, Visit South Walton welcomed P.J. Loughman as the new director of marketing. In other area news, construction is underway on the Seascape Towne Centre, an innovative 55,000-square-foot indoor-outdoor gathering space. Part of the Seascape Resort, a 300-acre golf, beach and tennis resort in Miramar Beach, the new venue features a ropes course, climbing walls and Thrills Laser Tag & Arcade. "Towne Centre is poised to become the premier restaurant and entertainment complex in the Destin-Miramar Beach area," said Jay Nettles, general manager.

To support area wildlife, South Walton is undertaking artificial reef construction, which will also provide swimming, snorkeling, diving and fishing opportunities for group team building. In addition, more than 30 vendors offer "ecosploring" tours and activities that showcase the unique ecosystem of brackish coastal dune lakes, longleaf pine forests, moss-draped oaks and native palmetto groves.

Contact: www.meetinsouthwalton.com

Tours can accommodate up to 12 people at a time.

Charlotte Harbor is home to the King Fisher Fleet, which offers a number of fishing charters and sightseeing cruises. The new vessel in the fleet is the "Charlotte Lady," a custom-built double-decker boat with a topside canopy and well-appointed interior that can accommodate 125 passengers. It's a great option for a business event. Shopping and dining options at the adjacent and newly renovated Fishermen's Village include five restaurants and the Military Heritage Museum.

The Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center provides 26,000 square feet of meeting space and the Englewood Event Center another 6,400. Within walking distance, The Four Points by Sheraton Punta Gorda Harborside provides 106 guest rooms, meeting space for up to 100 and a Tiki Bar along the water. Punta Gorda Waterfront Hotel & Suites has 5,300 square feet of meeting space, along with 187 guest rooms. The Wyvern Hotel Punta Gorda is a boutique property with 63 guest rooms, the 750-square-foot River Room, which accommodates 50, and the Rooftop Terrace pool, bar and event venue overlooking the bay. Riverwood, an 18-hole championship golf course, has a conference room that accommodates 60 and is a popular place for group tournaments.

Nearby, the Palm Island Resort at Cape Haze offers 160 accommodation in one-, two- and three-bedroom villas and 1,200 square feet of meeting space, along with many recreational options.

The Charlotte Sports Park in Port Charlotte is another interesting Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach-area venue. The 5,400-seat baseball stadium has group function areas and is the spring training home of the Tampa Bay Rays.

Sarasota

Only 60 miles south of Tampa, modestly sized Sarasota offers a mix of 30 beachfront and bayfront properties with more than 5,000 guest rooms, including the 140-room Aloft Sarasota that opened last year.

Lynn Hobeck Bates of Visit Sarasota County said 1,200 guest rooms are expected to be added in Sarasota County by the end of 2018. A 300-room Westin Hotel will open next to The Ritz-Carlton Sarasota this year and will include about 20,000 square feet of meeting space and a 20,000-square-foot rooftop deck. A Hilton Homewood Suites is also expected to open this year. An Embassy Suites and a Hampton Inn & Suites, both in downtown Sarasota, are expected next year.

All downtown Sarasota properties are situated on Sarasota Bay. The 294-room Hyatt Regency Sarasota is the county's largest property and has 20,000 square feet of meeting space. The nearby Ritz-Carlton Sarasota has 266 guest rooms with 20,000 square feet of meeting space. The 1,700seat Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall is a nice off-site option with 6,000 square feet of flexible indoor space and additional outdoor bayfront space.

Sarasota County's beachfront properties include the 180-room Sandcastle Resort at Lido Beach and the 223-room luxury Lido Beach Resort property, the latter with 6,000 square feet of elegant meeting space. On Longboat Key, the new, contemporary Zota Beach Resort features 2,700 square feet of beachfront event space and 187 guest rooms and suites. The Resort at Longboat Key Club has 223 guest rooms, 12,000 square feet of meeting space, an on-site marina, golf course and spa.

Sarasota County has several appealing attractions, including the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus campus, which has a 31-gallery Museum of Art, the Circus Museum, the Historic Asolo Theater, an Education Center and the 66acre Bayfront Gardens.

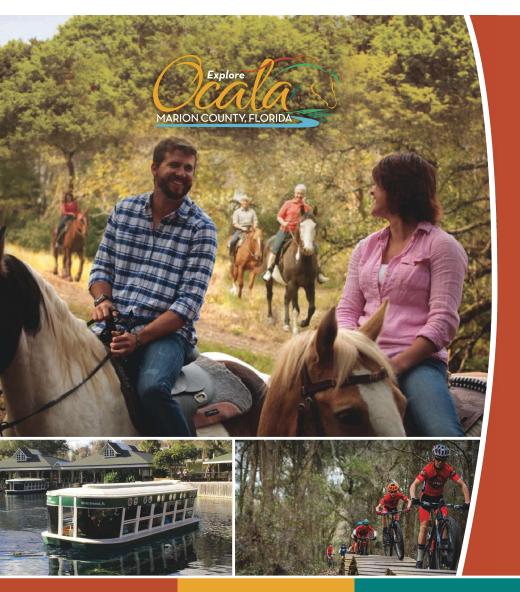
St. Petersburg & Clearwater

On the northernmost Gulf Coast reaches of the Southwest section of Florida sit St. Petersburg, Clearwater and Clearwater Beach. What's special about this coastal trio? How about mile upon mile of beautiful beach, the Gulf of Mexico, more than a dozen first-class resorts and upscale hotels, and dozens of top-caliber golf courses?

As Suzanne Scully, director - International for

the St. Pete/Clearwater CVB, said, "When booking a meeting in St. Petersburg and Clearwater, you get the best of both worlds. We have 36 miles of white-sand beaches with world-renowned resorts for those wanting their toes in the sand after a long day of meetings. For those who like to turn it up a notch after a long day, we also have a vibrant downtown that sits on the waterfront in St. Petersburg, with superb art and culture at The Dali Museum and The Chihuly Collection, live music venues and world-class restaurants, nightclubs and shopping – all just minutes from conference hotels."

Overall, there are 2,000 new rooms in the works, more than 1,000 of them planned for Clearwater Beach alone. Opened in February, Opal Sands Resort on Gulfview Boulevard at Clearwater Beach has 230 guest rooms and 17,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space. The 450-room Wyndham Grand Resort at Clearwater Beach, opened in January, features ►



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two 15-story towers and 24,000 square feet of event space.

St. Pete's classic 1950s-era Plaza Beach Hotel is undergoing renovation that will transform it into an independent 66-unit condo-hotel scheduled for completion within the next few months and rebrand it into the Allure Suites Hotel-Beachfront Resort. A new 173-room Hyatt is scheduled for late 2017 opening in downtown St. Pete as part of a mixed-use project that will include a 253-unit condo tower.

The Vinoy Renaissance St. Petersburg Resort & Golf Club, a venerable St. Pete property is a restored 1925 luxury property that offers 347 guest rooms, 42,000 square feet of function space and exceptional high-end amenities and recreational opportunities. It's undergoing a two-phase renovation with Phase I, centered on golfing and the pool area, scheduled to be com-

pleted late this year. Phase II will include the establishment of a new glass-walled waterfront restaurant, an expanded and relocated salon and day spa, an expanded and relocated fitness center, and a new tennis center – all projected for a mid-2018 completion.

The 250-room Hyatt Regency Clearwater Beach Resort & Spa, with 12,000 square feet of meeting space, two restaurants and two lounges, and the 253-room Sandpearl Resort in Clearwater Beach, with 25,000 square feet of meeting space, two restaurants and two lounges, are also popular properties.

Additional St. Petersburg & Clearwater Meeting Spaces

 TradeWinds Island Grand Beach Resort (St. Pete Beach): 70,770 square feet of meeting space; 10,585-square-foot ballroom;

B R E A K O U T S P O T L I G H T : Hilton Sandestin Resort



The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa is the largest beachfront full-service hotel along the northwest Gulf Coast of Florida, and as such it is a linchpin of the dynamic South Walton string of communities. The resort stands out in any number of ways: it boasts 602 well-appointed guest rooms, more than 40,000 square feet of meeting space, a worldclass spa and fitness center, six on-site dining venues, abundant resort recreation options and access to championship golf courses. According to Angela Vaughn, director of marketing at the hotel, there are new food and beverage offerings at two of the property's restaurants: Sandcastles Restaurant, located just off the resort lobby, and Picnix Poolside Market. The resort has also completely revamped its in-house catering menus to provide meeting planners with a broad array of choices plus exceptional food and service options.

Contact: www.hiltonsandestinbeach.com

29 meeting rooms; 585 guest rooms

- Innisbrook Golf Resort (Palm Harbor): 65,000 square feet of meeting space; 14,000-square-foot ballroom; 35 meeting rooms; 620 guest rooms
- Hilton Clearwater Beach Resort & Spa: 40,000 square feet of meeting space; 9,800-square-foot ballroom; 15 meeting rooms; 415 guest rooms
- Hyatt Regency Clearwater Beach Resort & Spa: 32,500 feet of meeting space; seven meeting rooms; 250 guest rooms
- Hilton St. Petersburg Bayfront: 30,000 square feet of meeting space; 17 meeting rooms; 333 guest rooms
- Sirata Beach Resort: 30,000 square feet of meeting space; 14 meeting rooms; 382 guest rooms
- Safety Harbor Resort and Spa: 30,000 square feet of meeting space; 21 meeting rooms; 175 guest rooms

Tampa Bay

On the Florida mainland, the city of Tampa sits on Tampa Bay with the Hillsborough River running alongside it and the Tampa Riverwalk offering a walkway that links many of the city's museums, galleries, restaurants and hotels.

Tampa Bay's new developments, include the new AC Hotel by Marriott and two new food halls, Hall of Franklin and Armature Works, in historic Tampa Heights. In south Tampa's Hyde District, the Epicurean Hotel is updating EDGE Social Drinkery, its rooftop lounge, adding a 60-inch television, ambient lighting, new artwork and refreshed seating areas.

Tampa Bay's attractions include Busch Gardens Tampa, Lowry Park Zoo and The Florida Aquarium.

Ybor City, the historic enclave of Cuban culture in Tampa, is another must-see. You can get there on the delightfully old-fashioned TECO Line Streetcar.

Tampa-based Yacht StarShip Dining Cruises offers three luxurious yachts – a huge yacht that accommodates 600 and two smaller vessels – and provides 10,000 square feet of function space, seven meeting rooms and a banquet capacity of 850.

Tampa Bay's Meeting Spaces

• Tampa Convention Center: 600,000-squarefoot downtown facility, 200,000-square-foot exhibit hall; 36,000-square-foot ballroom

Riverwalk at Tampa Convention

NORTHWEST FLORIDA Crystal River/Citrus County

Center: 146,000 square feet of event space Tampa Marriott Waterside Hotel & Marina: 50,000 square feet of meeting space; 33 meeting rooms Tampa Airport Marriott: 25,300 square

- feet of meeting space; 16 meeting rooms; revolving rooftop event space; 295 guest rooms
- Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay: 23,000 square feet of indoor meeting space; 10,000 square feet of outdoor meeting space
- TPepin's Hospitality Centre: nearly 19,000 square feet of function space; four meeting rooms; 900-seat theater
- Westly Event Center: 17,000 square feet of meeting space; expansive terrace
- Saddlebrook Resort & Spa: 95,000 square feet of meeting space; 540 guest rooms

With 12,000 square feet of flexible meeting and event space in Crystal River, there is space for meetings of almost any size, according to Visit Citrus, the area's CVB. Among the venues, Plantation on Crystal River, an eco-friendly resort hotel, can accommodate up to 500 attendees in its 15 meeting spaces and its 3,000-square-foot Magnolia Ballroom, which has a covered veranda. The property also offers 27 holes of championship golf, swims with manatees in the wild, educational boat tours and an outdoor pool.

Florida's Adventure Coast

At Weeki Wachee Springs State Park, visitors can witness the magic of the mermaids, take a riverboat cruise, and canoe or kayak on the Weeki Wachee River. The 538-acre park features a first-magnitude spring and a 400-seat submerged theater for watching the live mermaid show.





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Buccaneer Bay offers a fun-filled flume ride for thrill seekers of all ages. The Weeki Wachee River offers the best location to see and interact with the Florida manatee and Weeki Wachee provides a team-building side trip during or after a meeting.

Tallahassee

Florida's capital city and surrounding Leon County saw its seventh consecutive year of growth in 2016, with more than 2.35 million visitors from 47 different states and 36 countries, generating \$863 million in economic impact, according to Visit Tallahassee. Among the good news was a 61.8 percent increase in hotel occupancy, with \$17.5 million in visitor spending related to meetings and leisure groups and 99 youth and adult sports events held during the past year.

"There are positive indicators in visitation, spending and tourism-related jobs that frame our goal of achieving even more and reaching new heights," said Visit Tallahassee Executive Director Kerri Post. "We are closer to becoming a nationally recognized destination acclaimed for our tremendous outdoor recreation, dining, arts and culture, history and heritage, and entertainment."

One project underway is the redevelopment of the Centre of Tallahassee (formerly the Tallahassee Mall), which will become the city's hub for arts, retail and dining, with a 10,000-seat amphitheater and a local brewery. Additionally, the city is constructing a Capital City to the Sea Trail, which will run through town and continue to the Gulf of Mexico.

Tallahassee has 58 hotels offering 6,000 guest rooms, with approximately 34,000 square feet of exhibit space and 40,000 square feet of meeting space at a variety of properties, including Four Points by Sheraton Tallahassee Downtown; Hotel Duval, Autograph Collection; Aloft Tallahassee Downtown; and Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Tallahassee.

A variety of meeting and event venues accommodate groups of 10 - 1,200 people. The Florida

B R E A K O U T S P O T L I G H T : Pelican Beach Resort & Conference Center

Imagine a team-building event on the beach, a sunset social event on a gulf-side deck nestled in the dunes, or breakout sessions under beach umbrellas. The Resorts at Pelican Beach in Destin offer all of these options, along with a two-story conference center that accommodates groups of us to 300 people and has a circular staircase and signature artwork to welcome attendees. All meeting space in the conference center is located on the second floor with a terrace and large window views overlooking the outdoor pools and the Gulf. Additionally, the resort offers the Dolphin Room, located on the third floor above the lobby in the Pelican Beach Resort, serves groups up to 30 people. The Terrace Room, located on the lobby level of The Terrace at Pelican Beach, serves groups up to 40 people and overlooks the pool deck.

For outdoor functions, a beachside deck is nestled in the dunes overlooking the beach and Gulf of Mexico and serves up to 250 people in a social setting.



Located on the west side of Destin, The Resorts of Pelican Beach are close to all the popular area attractions. Accommodations include one-, two- and three-bedroom condos, with pools, tennis courts, fitness centers, a tiki bar and lounge among the on-site amenities.

Contact: www.pelican-beach.com

State University Conference Center has 47,000 square feet of state-of-the-art meeting space, while the 35,000-square-foot Tallahassee Automotive Museum offers the city's largest banquet facilities. The Tallahassee Museum has 10,000 square feet of function space on a 52-acre lakeside setting and the Cascades Park Amphitheater is a 3,500-seat outdoor venue often used for musical performances.

Panama City Beach

Panama City Beach boasts 27 miles of sugar-white sand beaches bordering the clear turquoise waters of the Gulf of Mexico and St. Andrews Bay. Family attractions, championship golf courses, sporting events, award-winning dining, predictably sunny weather and a vast number of recreational activities draw visitors to this seaside destination and a wide variety of meeting venues provide 160,000 square feet of event space. Additionally, there are four conference resorts and 20,000 additional rooms at area hotels and condos.

Following a multi-million-dollar renovation, the Sheraton Bay Point Resort recently re-opened its main hotel, with 200 all-new guestrooms, 60,000 square feet of indoor event space and several outdoor event venues. Nestled within a 1,100-acre wildlife preserve on St. Andrews Bay the resort also offers 120 golf villas, two 18-hole golf courses, five clay tennis courts, three outdoor pools, a full-service luxury spa, a private bay beach and boat trips to nearby Shell Island.

Destin Area

The beachside cities of Destin, Fort Walton Beach and Okaloosa Island beckon travelers with the lure of stunning sugar-white beaches, vibrant emerald-green waters and an abundance of dining options focused on the Gulf-to-table philosophy. Accommodation options include budget to luxury hotel rooms and condominiums. The Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS) is just eight miles from the beaches.

On Okaloosa Island, the Emerald Coast Convention Center has 35,000 square feet of flexible meeting and event space within a short stroll of the Gulf of Mexico, and offering views of Choctawhatchee Bay. The facility has 12 breakout rooms, the 21,000-square-foot Emerald Grand Ballroom and a 6,000-square-foot kitchen.

Other meeting facilities include the Emerald Grande, which overlooks the East Pass and the

Gulf of Mexico and has a banquet room of nearly 2,000 square feet along with 280 condo units. The property features an on-site restaurant, a spa and 24-hour front desk service and the surrounding HarborWalk Village has boutique shops and restaurants. The Palms of Destin has 416 condo units and 9,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, as well as Trader Vic's, a poolside mai tai bar and full-service spa. Pelican Beach Resort along with The Terrace at Pelican Beach provides almost 6,000 square feet of meeting and event space along with gorgeous Gulf views. (For more information, see breakout Spotlight on page 56.)

The executive conference center at ResortQuest's SunDestin Resort has nearly 3,000 square feet of space and top-quality A/V equipment. Also, the Ramada Plaza Beach Resort has 14,000 square feet of space, Four Points by Sheraton and Holiday Inn SunSpree offer hundreds of sleeping rooms and thousands of square feet of event space.

Pensacola/Pensacola Beach/Perdido Key

The Pensacola Bay Area combines historic attractions, modern amenities and beaches that rival any in the state, along with diverse and affordable meeting facilities. Newly introduced this spring are two 75-foot, double-decker, 150-passenger catamaran ferries that will travel between downtown Pensacola, Pensacola beach and Fort Pickens on the Gulf Islands national Seashore.

The Pensacola Civic Center, located in the heart of downtown Pensacola, can accommodate up to 10,000 meeting attendees in its 22,000-square-foot facility, with additional meeting space available at the New World Inn, the historic Saenger Theatre and the Crowne Plaza Pensacola Grand. The University of West Florida Conference Center offers several options for meeting planners on its spacious, wooded campus.

Nearby Pensacola Beach is home to several hotels with meeting facilities, most of them with beach frontage and amenities. The Pensacola Beach Conference Campus is a group effort by a number of hotels, condos, restaurants, retailers and nightlife venues to come together and create a flexible campus of 1,292 hotel rooms, 38,000 square feet of meeting space, 25 meeting rooms and 26 restaurants all within walking distance – with complimentary trolley service during the summer months. The National Naval Aviation Museum allows visitors to experience hands-on history on board the Pensacola Naval Air Station, view artifacts and restored aircraft and experience the thrill of flight in the Flight Simulators. In addition, the Museum offers 10,000 square feet of space for meetings and special events on site. Just east of Pensacola, Navarre Beach offers Summerwind, ResortQuest and the Caribbean Resort as family lodging alternatives. To the west of the city, Eden Resort Condominiums on Perdido Key provides a business setting with conference rooms accommodating up to 75 participants.

B R E A K O U T S P O T L I G H T : Tops'l Beach & Racquet Resort

The award-winning TOPS'L Beach & Racquet Resort is taking full advantage of its unparalleled location on 52 acres nestled between the Gulf of Mexico and a nature preserve to provide secluded meeting space with all sorts of water sports, tennis, multiple swimming pools and hot tubs, still within easy distance of city attractions just minutes away in one direction or the other.

With Pensacola to the west and Destin to the east, TOPS'L Beach is easily accessible and close to shopping and nightlife. According to Brittney Newby, marketing manager for Northwest Florida for ResortQuest by Wyndham Vacation Rentals, "The meeting market is one we see as a great fit for properties such as TOPS'L Beach. It has all the components and amenities to make for a productive and enjoyable meeting venue."

Featuring a wide variety of accommodations from beachfront luxury condominiums to tennis villas in a garden setting, the resort offers on-site fine and casual dining with tennis or beach views, and refreshments at the beachside and clubside tiki bars. Boasting expansive meeting rooms and social gathering facilities, TOPS'L Beach is perfect for hosting meetings and events. Plus, with on-site tennis courts and other sporting options, a nature trail, and multiple swimming pools and hot tubs, the resort provides plenty of options to enjoy between events or for breakout sessions.

Amenities include full-service meeting and banquet catering as well as three on-site restaurants: Blue Dunes Grille, Club Tiki and Ocean Club; 12 Rubico clay tennis courts; full service racquet club and fitness facility featuring aerobics classes, racquet ball court, sauna,



steam room and wellness message therapy service; beach service, nature trails, swimming pools, watersport rentals, basketball, shuffleboard and a miniature golf course. Accommodations range from luxury Gulf-front units, studios, tennis villas, five-bedroom condos and up to four bedroom townhomes, making TOPS'L Beach ideal for combining a family vacation and a healthy lifestyle with a productive business meeting.

Meeting facilities include the Beachside Pool Deck, which is 7,000 square feet and can accommodate up to 400 participants; Centre Court, 2,480 square feet, 300 attendees; the Wimbledon Room, 1,041 square feet, 70 people; The Ridge Lawn, 4,900 square feet, 400 people, and the Club Tiki, which is 1,500 square feet and accommodates up to 150 people.

Contact: www.TOPSLMeetings.com

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