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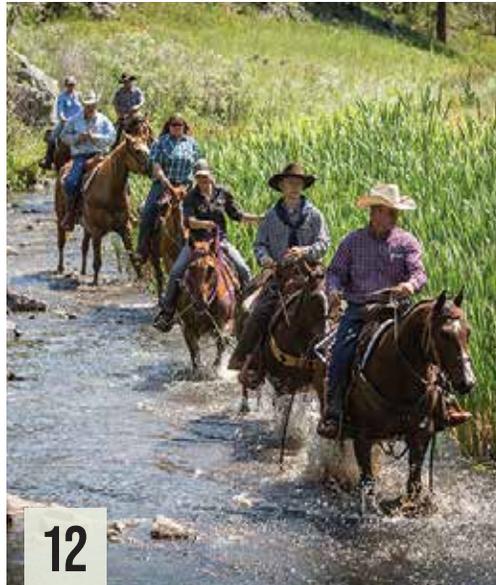
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ON THE COVER: Oneida Casino, Green Bay, Wis.
© Travel Wisconsin

I recently attended my first in-person conference since the pandemic began. It was a milestone for me, as well as the other more than 200 guests that gathered in a Denver suburb to discuss all things publishing. Like many of my fellow attendees, I was ready to turn off Zoom and see people face to face, where we could reconnect, after an almost two-year hiatus.



Whether it was information I received in a session, chatting with someone in the elevator about their business or swapping pandemic stories at the hotel lounge, the conference was a huge step forward in finding my new "normal," and I believe my peers felt the same.

Prior to the pandemic, meeting and event planners already shouldered a great deal of responsibility — delivering ROI, while offering engaging content and value to clients, and doing so in a safe environment. Now add the additional safety protocols for reducing transmission of the coronavirus to the list, and the deliverables planners must meet can be overwhelming at times. However, it's not unattainable and we are here to help you!

Learning how other planners are navigating these rapidly changing times, what resources are available to help you and strategies for moving forward are just some of the great topics we cover in this issue of Midwest Meetings.

In the following pages, you'll find resorts perfect for holding retreats and conferences that offer a variety of outdoor activities and team building — perfect for those seeking some social distance. In addition, we look at the popularity of water park resorts for conferences and how attendance often increases when attendees are able to bring along family. We share some options for project management and collaboration platforms — perfect for those who have remote teams. And be sure to read up on the common myths of hybrid events and how you can successfully implement this type of event to offer your guests the in-person experience they desire, but with the virtual component others, who aren't ready yet to travel, need.

As we close out 2021, it's exciting to consider the opportunities that will present themselves in the new year. We are eager to experience the benefits of in-person events and all of the personal connections that will result. Now that's something we can all raise our glasses to!

Happy Holidays,

Becky Peck
Editor



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Wisconsin Center District

WCD EXPANSION BREAKS GROUND

The much anticipated Wisconsin Center District (WCD) convention center expansion broke ground in late October with a ceremony that included a number of stakeholders and city leaders.

“Today’s groundbreaking is the formal celebration of our \$420 million expansion that has been years in the making,” said WCD President and CEO Marty Brooks. “Doubling the size of the convention center allows us to execute multiple, simultaneous and overlapping events, bringing even more visitors to Milwaukee. Meeting planners can expect flexible space, robust IT infrastructure and top-of-the-line health and safety features, along with our signature bold, proud, experience-obsessed delivery of service. I couldn’t be more excited for the future.”

With a planned early 2024 open date, the expanded Wisconsin Center will offer 445,000 square feet of total convention space. That space includes a rooftop ballroom with a terrace overlooking downtown Milwaukee; a 300,000 contiguous-square-foot exhibit hall; 24 additional meeting rooms for a total of 52; a minimum of 400 indoor parking stalls; and six new loading docks. The project includes modernizing the existing facility’s interior as well.

Designed with meeting planner input and located in the heart of downtown Milwaukee,

the 300,000-square-foot Wisconsin Center convention space offers the ultimate in versatility, functionality and style.

“Groups have already booked events in the expanded convention center, and we have received a lot of interest from organizers interested in hosting their events in the new space,” says Leslie Johnson, vice president of sales for VISIT Milwaukee. “We are strongly encouraging meeting, convention and event planners to start making plans today for their Wisconsin Center bookings in 2024 and beyond.”



H-D MUSEUM ADDITION BREAKS GROUND

The Harley-Davidson Museum has broken ground on a new addition to its lineup of event spaces located on the 20-acre campus in Milwaukee. When complete, the all-new Garage will boast more than 8,000 square feet of event space, floor-to-ceiling views of Milwaukee’s Menomonee Valley, state-of-

the-art audio/visual components and more. The new space is expected to be complete in spring of 2022.

UW-MADISON SPEAKER BUREAU RESUMES IN-PERSON

Badger Talks has re-opened its in-person speaker request system, in addition to its virtual speaker offerings. Topics range from the history of the Amish, improving communication in your workplace, to learning about the latest groundbreaking health care research and feature a roster of 400 University of Wisconsin experts ready to give talks around Wisconsin. For more information, visit <https://badgertalks.wisc.edu/topics-speakers>.



THE PFISTER HOTEL RECEIVES COVETED AWARD

The Pfister Hotel, owned and managed by Marcus Hotels & Resorts, has received the AAA Four Diamond Designation for its 45th consecutive year.

The hotel is one of only 11 properties throughout North America to maintain the AAA Four Diamond designation since the inception of the Diamond inspection program in 1976.

“We are extremely honored that The Pfister Hotel is once again named a AAA Four Diamond hotel,” said Tim Smith, general manager of The Pfister Hotel. “The Pfister is known for its many amenities, like award-winning restaurants and spas, as well as its breathtaking historic architecture. But it is because of our fantastic team and their dedication to delivering extraordinary guest experiences that has allowed us to maintain this distinction for nearly half a century. We are excited to continue The Pfister’s legacy of service for years to come.”

In addition to The Pfister Hotel earning the AAA Four Diamond designation, Marcus Hotels & Resorts has two other AAA Four Diamond properties in its portfolio. The Grand Geneva Resort & Spa in Lake Geneva, Wis., has been recognized with this top honor for 23 consecutive years and the Skirvin Hilton in Oklahoma City has earned this recognition for 14 consecutive years.

MPI’S LATEST OUTLOOK REPORT RELEASED

Meeting Professionals International (MPI) released

its Summer 2021 Meetings Outlook Report showing increased optimism for the industry. However, the survey results were collected just prior to many locations seeing increases in COVID infection rates due to the Delta variant.

Some of the findings of the report included:

- 93% of respondents project favorable business conditions over the next year, marking the second consecutive quarter with record-breaking positive expectations.
- Many meeting pros remain on furlough or are still seeking employment, though more are getting back to work. And many professionals expressed concerns over the massive amount of hiring activity that may be required soon.
- Planners anticipate favorable live attendance over the next 12 months, marking another all-time high. Virtual attendance projections continue to decline.
- Respondents noted observations that the market is shifting from a position that favored buyers to now favoring suppliers as more events return and venues deal with the current labor shortage.
- 63% of planners expressed a greater interest in wellness-specific content at meetings and events.

PENDRY CHICAGO LAUNCHES

Located in the heart of the Loop district, Pendry Chicago is a reimagining of the iconic 1920’s-era Carbide & Carbon Building, a true American Art Deco landmark. Pendry Chicago delivers 364 newly redesigned guestrooms and suites; completely renovated and reinvigorated public spaces including the hotel’s signature modern French brasserie and cafe, Venteux; the intimate Bar Pendry; The Billiard Gallery; and a summer rooftop bar.

The hotel offers 13,000 square feet of diverse meetings and event space, for groups ranging from 10 to 500. Michigan Terrace features floor-to-ceiling windows and a 40-foot outdoor veranda with views onto its namesake avenue, while the Ballroom is an impressive Art Deco-inspired space with seating for 500. For meetings and more intimate events, Pendry Chicago offers multiple gallery rooms and salons featuring divisible space and creative menus from the Pendry Chicago culinary team.

The property also includes a state-of-the-art fitness center, a curated art collection featuring works from both world-renowned and local Chicago artists, and select guestrooms also feature Tonal digital training equipment for on-demand, in-room fitness.

Come immerse yourself in the coastal cities of Lake Michigan, Manitowoc & Two Rivers, where we invite your group to “Connect on the Coast”. Our scenic shores are filled with rich maritime history, the natural beauty of lush gardens and beaches, picturesque rivers and falls and cultural attractions that will highlight your time here on the coast and provide unique, and exciting venues to host your next meeting.

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Hotel Indy

HOTEL INDY OPENS

Hotel Indy, a one-of-a-kind boutique hotel experience inspired by the history and icons of Indianapolis, opened its doors in October. The property is located at the corner of Washington and Delaware in the former State Life Insurance building. Managed by Coury Hospitality, the \$30 million, 90-room Hotel Indy features modern inspiration that preserves the building's architectural roots dating back to the 1950's Brutalist movement.

"Hotel Indy is the foundation of a re-emerging downtown Indianapolis Wholesale District. We see Hotel Indy as the ultimate gathering place for travelers and locals seeking an extraordinary and unique hospitality experience," said Jocelyn Kraus, Hotel Indy general manager. "As we complete the design elements, we plan to highlight many Indianapolis icons and focus on the local arts and cultural offerings."

Hotel Indy offers a rooftop bar as well as other upscale amenities and is Indiana's first Tribute Portfolio by Marriott property.

M&IW GIVES BACK TO RWANDA

Meetings & Incentives Worldwide (M&IW), a leading global event management and strategy firm, is excited to share that their recent global giveback initiative raised \$8,240 for the Verkanos Art Center located in Kigali, Rwanda. They were excited to re-connect their attendees with the world, re-explore the gift of giving, and together, re-build the future for the young aspiring artists through the Art of Travel auction experience.

FOX WORLD TRAVEL EXPANDS OFFERINGS

Fox World Travel has expanded its capabilities by becoming a Deem Collective premium partner.

(Deem is a mobile and cloud technology provider for the corporate travel industry.) The enhanced relationship allows Fox to increase its ability to customize some of Deem's trip management platforms serving corporate clients.

Fox World Travel has partnered with several third-party service providers in recent years, including Traxo, Travelport and Rocketrip.

LARSON EARNS MEET MINNEAPOLIS AWARD

Blaine Larson, sales coordinator at The Marquette Hotel in Minneapolis, has been named the Hospitality Hero award winner for second quarter 2021 by Meet Minneapolis, Convention and Visitors Association. The award is given to a member of the Minneapolis tourism and hospitality community who has been nominated by their colleagues for their valuable contributions to the image and

culture of Minneapolis through outstanding service. Kathryn Laulainen, associate director of Sales at The Marquette Hotel, nominated Larson based on his passion for customer service that shines through to the hotel's guests each day. Larson took the opportunity during the pandemic to work at the front desk, learn new skills and enhance his knowledge of different departments while his sales position was paused.

"Blaine has a desire to please with a charming 'Spirit of Conrad' (meaning Conrad Hilton, as The Marquette is a Hilton hotel) in putting others first," said Laulainen. She pointed out positive guest feedback and said, "We are very fortunate to have Blaine on our team and creating happiness for our guests at The Marquette Hotel!"

DES MOINES AWARDED 2022 USA SWIMMING EVENT

USA Swimming announced its schedule for the 2021-2022 season, which includes Des Moines as host site for the TYR Pro Swim Series at the MidAmerican Energy Aquatic Center at the Wellmark YMCA March 2-5, 2022. Des Moines has hosted the event in years past, bringing hundreds of the world's top swimmers to the metro.

"We are honored that USA Swimming will be bringing TYR Pro Swim Series to Des Moines for another year. We enjoy hosting world class athletes and Olympians in our city and showing them what Des Moines has to offer," said Greg Edwards, CEO and president of Catch Des Moines. "We have great facilities to host such events, and we are glad USA Swimming recognizes that." *M*



Des Moines

Stepping Into the Spotlight

Planner Deanna Nwosu steps away from in-house planning to launch a business focused on planning event micro-experiences and event strategy.

BY RONNIE WENDT

Planners are the wizards behind the curtain, pulling the strings to keep an event moving and exciting for all. But though the work lights a spark that keeps planners on their toes, over time, the hyper focus on logistics started to dull Deanna Nwosu's day.

The Ohio-based event strategist explains that planning alone lost its appeal because as a planner, she says, she "never got to collaborate with attendees and enjoy the experience. I was too focused on logistics."

Though planning had lost its luster, it wasn't always this way. Nwosu found her passion for planning in college while planning events as a member of various clubs and organizations. She has known, since those alumni and sorority events, that it was what she wanted to do.

After graduating college, she worked with a small association in Cleveland and then transitioned to the corporate sector with a B2B events company. Later she worked for a construction software firm as their in-house planner and coordinator for industry events.

But over time, a new dream took shape, and Nwosu began planning events outside of her full-time role. She says she originally just started her business, Deanna Camille, as a side hustle, but it quickly transformed into something bigger.

"I knew I wanted to do more speaking and facilitating. I get the best of both worlds with coordination of logistics, content creation and strategy, figuring out platforms and creating a holistic experience for attendees. This is my niche," she says. "It's the intersection of where I'm a speaker, a facilitator, an emcee and an event professional creating a holistic experience."

There is something to be said about those who have the bravery to chase their dreams, no matter the obstacles that stand in their way. Nwosu pursued her business full time when she found herself at work wishing she could work on her side project. "I realized I needed to follow that passion because it was what was keeping me up at night," she says.

Thankfully, Nwosu had resources available that made her more secure in her decision to leave, and it was the perfect time to take the leap.



Nwosu realizes starting a business can be frightening, and that everyone has different financial responsibilities. She advises those who dream of going out on their own to reassess their finances, make sacrifices and follow their passions. To create a financial cushion, she moved out of her apartment and began splitting her time between the homes of her parents and her partner as she built her business.

"It is definitely a sacrifice. I am grateful for my family and my partner. If I didn't have them, I probably would have downsized to cut expenses," she says.

She encourages anyone who wants to follow a new dream but worries about finances to "be bold... If this is something you really want to do you can figure it out," she says.

Nwosu also advises giving yourself the grace to learn as you go. "Give yourself freedom and space to make mistakes and change your mind," she says.

The pandemic presented many challenges to business owners, herself included. When the pandemic started, Nwosu still worked for her previous employer. She found that with her own business, she was better able to cope with COVID-19 concerns because she controlled her destiny.

Diversity and inclusion also emerged as top priorities during the pandemic. Nwosu says she addresses this by taking risks on new vendors and speakers that she hasn't worked with before.

"Planners need to increase the diversity of their pipeline; too often we rinse and repeat our programs," she says. "If you want to diversify your supplier opportunities and panels, look beyond the places you're used to. As professionals, we have to get creative about where we are sourcing from."

Deanna Camille arranges events that run the gamut from virtual networking to bar crawls. The company's sweet spot, however, is micro events and experiences, such as team building events and networking activities. Nwosu also hones in on speaker selection and overall event strategy. Her new role keeps her on top of trends within the event creation space. One trend she has noticed, and hopes will grow, is getting attendees more involved in event creation.

"Have attendees vote for what's on the agenda, submit ideas for networking activities or select the location," she says. "So many times, especially in associations, we rely on the executive team to make all those decisions, but I would love to see a shift where the attendees make the decisions and planners carry them out." *M*

Featured Facilities

Call of the Wild

Ranging from boutique B&Bs to rustic lodges, outdoor activities and beauty are the focus at these properties.

BY MAURA KELLER

Fresh air... the sounds of songbirds or maybe a loon... woods and water that seem to extend as far as the eye can see. This is the setting perfect for your next retreat. Where your team can turn their Zoom cameras off, step away from their laptops and enjoy the camaraderie of their peers. This is what groups are looking for as they work to recapture the personal connections that have been lost over the past 18 months. And the Midwest is teeming with options – from delightful island getaways to resorts tucked amidst the grandeur of majestic woods to charming country locales that keep attendees wanting more. Here are a few to check out.

STOUT'S ISLAND LODGE

Birchwood, Wis.

Who wouldn't want to spend a few days on an exquisite island teeming with historic charm in northern Wisconsin? Located on Red Cedar Lake in northwestern Wisconsin, Stout's Island Lodge features a 12-acre main island that has been welcoming visitors for more than 150 years. This historic gem includes incredible early 20th-century log buildings reminiscent of a time when life moved more slowly and people embraced a more relaxed lifestyle.

Built in 1903 as a summer family estate, Stout's Island Lodge offers an idyllic locale to work some and play some. Located about two hours from the Twin Cities, meeting and event attendees are whisked to the island via a private ferry. With a variety of accommodations, attendees can enjoy unique amenities situated within both cabins and lodges.

The sprawling property offers a wealth of outdoor areas for gatherings and recreational activities. In addition, the ice house, which is adjacent to the main lodge, features a 1,000-square-foot space and can host 60 guests indoors, with additional seating available on the outside patio.

Located off of the lodge's Great Room is Mrs. Stout's Room, a charming space that can host 24 adults in the 475-square-foot space. The room's wood-burning fireplace and barrel-vaulted ceiling are perfect accoutrements to the overall historic lodge feel.



Stout's Island Lodge



Custer State Park Resort

All catering on Stout's Island Lodge is prepared onsite, using local ingredients when possible (including items from the lodge's own gardens). The staff at Stout's Island Lodge can work with you to make your meeting or event successful.

CUSTER STATE PARK RESORT

Custer, S.D.

More and more companies are taking notice of the unique venues available for their next meeting or event across the country. And Custer State Park Resort is one such option. The resort is a collection of several historic lodges and cabins located in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Custer State Park offers an array of incredible natural sights, scenic drives and abundant wildlife. And while there is a wealth of outdoor activities to enjoy, when it comes to getting down to business or gathering as a group, Custer State Park Resort is the perfect location. The resort features four distinct and historic lodges for guests to enjoy.

The resort's State Game Lodge was considered the "summer White House" for Calvin Coolidge in 1927. The outdoor pavilion at the lodge boasts an open-air floor plan, complete with wood-burning fireplaces, WiFi connectivity and can accommodate up to 350 people.

Located on the grounds of the State Game Lodge, the Creekside Lodge offers interior meeting space that accommodates up to 75 people, and both adjoin an outdoor patio space so attendees can enjoy the beautiful Coolidge Creek. The Creekside Lodge is open year-round and features modern amenities.

Considered to be Custer State Park's "crown jewel," the Sylvan Lake Lodge is a stunning resort that invites visitors to stay for awhile. Sylvan Lake Lodge offers various meeting locations accommodating 20 to 280 people. In addition to



Custer State Park Resort

wood-burning fireplaces, these spaces feature everything from auditorium spaces, patios and verandas to presentation areas for meeting needs. The Blue Bell Lodge offers a wonderful atmosphere thanks to its log building interior and exteriors. Two spaces fit from 40 to 80 guests and offer an adjoining outdoor patio, which boasts beautiful views of French Creek.

For outdoor meeting or event gatherings, the team-building activities of Custer State Park Resort are paramount. From open-air, off-road jeep tours and chuck wagon cookout adventures to geocaching and horseback riding tours, the resort offers ample opportunities to have fun and explore the surrounding environs.

STONEWATER COVE RESORT & CLUB
Shell Knob, Mo.

Looking for the ideal place for a corporate retreat? Look no further than Stonewater Cove, located on Table Rock Lake in southwest Missouri. Perfect for smaller groups of 10 to 40 people, Stonewater Cove Resort offers a conference room, boardroom and outdoor terrace for groups.

To continue the team-building experience, Stonewater Cove offers all-encompassing menu options, including three meals per day, coffee service during meetings, hors d'oeuvres and snacks, as well as nightly s'mores by a bonfire. Adventure as well as relaxation await meeting attendees, with a variety of activities, including canoeing, ziplining, miniature golf, kayaking, hiking and swimming.

Plus, resort guides are available to help groups explore the area on an ATV tour or boat ride, and guided fishing excursions. And when it comes time to relax and unwind, the resort offers plenty of spa services to choose from.

CEDAR CREST LODGE
Pleasanton, Kan.

For smaller gatherings, Cedar Crest Lodge, located an hour from Kansas City, Mo., is an ideal place to connect. Cedar Crest Lodge exudes a splendor and peacefulness all its own. And along with the beauty of nature's handiwork surrounding this bed and breakfast, the lodge offers a style that is quietly conducive to escaping big city life, making it a great option for retreats or small groups. The award-winning bed and breakfast features a 7,000-square-foot lodge that boasts

nine bedrooms in the main building, three luxury rooms in the 3,000-square-foot carriage house, a meeting room, two living rooms and various decks and patios.

Being a bed and breakfast means that each of the guest rooms boast a charm all their own. While some rooms include jetted tubs, others offer steam showers and relaxing environs to unwind after group gatherings or post hiking, swimming or exploring. All spaces offer a rustic, yet elegant charm that will make an impact on attendees.

And when guests are looking to further explore Cedar Crest Lodge's expansive 100-acre property, they can enjoy wandering over 16,000 feet of garden space, which is complete with vegetables, herbs and flowers aplenty. *M*



Cedar Crest Lodge

Balancing Act

Collaboration, planning and management tools to help ensure your event goes off without a hitch.

BY AMANDA N. WEGNER



Planning and successfully executing events requires a delicate balancing act of long checklists, hard and fast deadlines, keeping stakeholders updated, making sure the right people are in the right place at the right time and more. Luckily, there are plenty of tools and platforms available to planners to ensure that the planning and event management processes run efficiently, and events go off without a hitch.

If you're looking for options for collaboration, planning and event management, here are six tools to consider.

ASANA

With Asana, teams can create projects, assign tasks, specify deadlines and communicate about tasks directly in the platform. A free version is available; premium versions offer additional tools and benefits.

"This tool allows us to assign work, manage projects tasks and keep track of where we are for each event project," says Deany Dormer, event strategist and owner, Executive Events, LLC. "It helps keep the team on track, and we can easily see the status of each project."

Maria Peot, CMP, an account manager with MDS Association Management, finds Asana very flexible as well and appreciates that it can be set up in different ways.

asana.com

TRELLO

Similar in concept to Asana, Trello uses boards, lists and cards to manage projects, organize tasks and get team members on the same page. There is a free version with limited features for individual practitioners, and premium versions for those desiring more features or have a larger number of projects.

"When there are a lot of moving pieces and others that I need to keep in the loop, I use Trello," says Terri Lynn Yanke, founder and CEO of Eventful Advantage, LLC. "It is very easy to manipulate, keep lists, add dates and times, and share with others."

trello.com

GOOGLE DRIVE

If you're in the market for a free project management option, consider Google Drive, which can be accessed by anyone with a Google account, offers free file storage and is an easy way to share files with

numerous individuals. Peot did note one downfall of Google Drive is that the creator of files must be the one to share with new people. In addition, if there is a lot of turnover, this can be a problem in managing access.

Another note is that file space is limited to 15GB across Google Drive, Gmail and Photos. If you need more space, Google Workspace plans start as low as \$6 per month and offer additional features and space.

drive.google.com, workspace.google.com

CVENT

On the event management side, Cvent is one platform to consider, suggests Jennifer Mell, CMP, director of business development for NorthCoast Productions & Made Ya Look, who has been using Cvent exclusively for seven years. She likes that it's a robust tool that can manage many parts of an event: sourcing, budgeting, task management, registration, surveys and more.

Cvent offers a free trial of its event management software, and your experience can be customized to suit your organization's needs.

cvent.com

AVENTRI

Because Cvent is so robust — and perhaps not worth the cost for many organizations — Mell also suggests Aventri as an event management option.

"It has so many tools and features that Cvent has, is actually easier to learn and use in many ways, and has a lower price tag," says Mell.

aventri.com

SOCIAL TABLES

If you're looking for a tool for event diagramming, guest management and check-in, look at Social Tables, a standalone product that's part of the Cvent family. The tool is especially good at maintaining guest lists and allowing organizers to visually spot guests in diagrams. Social Tables offers a free, limited plan for events of up to 150 guests; premium plans are also available.

socialtables.com

If none of these suggestions suit your fancy, don't underestimate the power of networking.

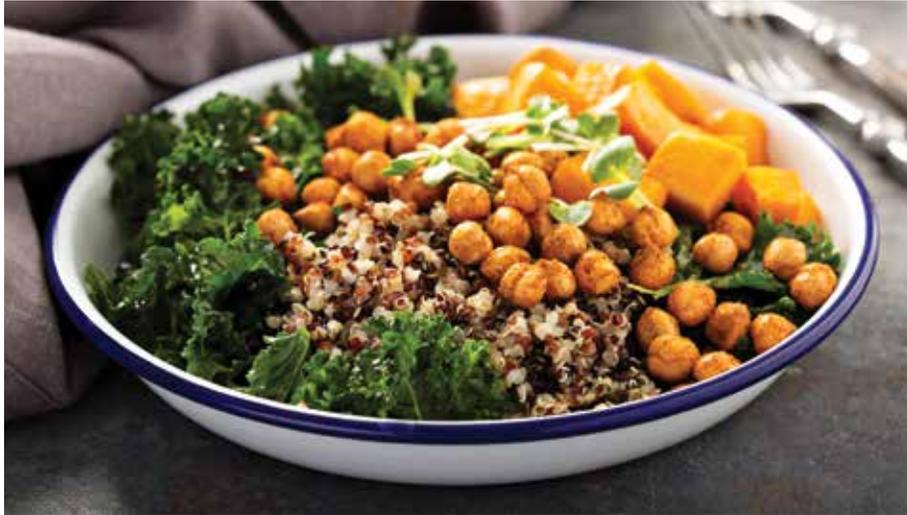
"Don't be shy about reaching out to other event professionals to learn what they're using, what they like, don't like. Your local chapter of MPI, NACE and the like is a great place to start," says Mell. "There's also several event professional groups on Facebook and LinkedIn that can be great resources." *M*

Amanda Wegner is a freelance writer based in Madison, Wis.

Back to Lunch

Creative ideas to spice up the boring lunch-hour meeting.

BY CANDICE WAGENER



Now that there are opportunities to meet in person at the workplace once again, it's time to start thinking about those lunch meetings. Any time you have a longer meeting or all-day conference on site, your guests will appreciate a meal or snacks to keep them engaged and fueled up for the longer haul. In addition to considering healthier foods, you'll also want to be mindful of dietary restrictions, as well as safety precautions and mitigating risk. We've rounded up some creative catering ideas that will help make your next event unforgettable.

BOARDS ARE NEVER BORING

Spend any amount of time scrolling through Pinterest or Instagram and you are sure to spy a cheese board or two. You can keep it simple with a basic variety of cheese, meat and crackers. However, the basic cheese board knows no limits! Create a cultural roadmap across your board with Italian specialties like capicola, Spanish delights like Serrano ham, any number of pickled items from places like Germany or Korea, and pita bread with olives and hummus from Greece. You could even have some regional fun, comparing cheeses from California, Vermont, Wisconsin and Tennessee.

Also, don't hold yourself to cheese and charcuterie. Why not do a brunch board, with mini waffles and toppings like fresh fruit, hazelnut spread, whipped cream or almond butter? Add in breakfast sausages, yogurt and hard-boiled eggs, and you'll be accommodating a variety of taste buds.

BAR FUN

Bars are another way to have some fun with your meals. Who wouldn't love an avocado toast bar? Remember to include a nice variety of breads, especially a gluten-free option. If you're using a catering service, you could enlist them to dress the toasts with avocado, and then have attendees walk down the line to add garnishes like radishes, microgreens, seasonings and eggs.

If you've got a meeting that goes later in the day, introduce a dessert bar. Ideas range from fresh fruit and fancy chocolate to build-your-own sundaes, cookie sandwiches or parfaits (also a great idea for breakfast). Get creative!

BOX IT UP

Boxed lunches are definitely an old standby in catered events, and more so today due to the precautions planners are taking to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but don't let them get stale. Offer sandwiches with

a nice variety of breads, vegetarian/vegan options and unique condiments. Instead of the standard bag of chips, why not substitute a side of pasta salad, fruit salad or green salad?

You could also send out boxed salads, giving attendees options on proteins (grilled chicken, salmon or tofu), vegetables (roasted beets, sweet potatoes or sliced radishes) and other fun toppings (pepitas, sunflower seeds, a variety of nuts and berries).

BOWLS ON BOWLS ON BOWLS

Another craze that is worthy of catering consideration are customizable bowls. These could very easily be individually packaged: have everyone choose a grain or veggie bowl of their choice (include greens, rice, quinoa as base options), then have individual packages of proteins (tofu, chicken, beans), condiments (nut butter, hummus, dressing), and roasted vegetables. Attendees can pick and choose what works for them.

Another bowl idea that is all the rage? Poke! (Poke is a dish of raw, marinated fish served with rice and vegetables.) If you have a poke restaurant near you, see if you can partner with them to provide a fun twist to your next work lunch.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Speaking of partnering with local restaurants, if you aren't tied down to a specific catering company, why not outsource the meal from one of your local restaurants? It's a win-win! Bring a food truck on the premises or order from one of the independent restaurants in your area. Tacos, gourmet sub sandwiches, gyros, sushi or pho – all could translate well into your next lunch event. Or enlist your favorite restaurant to do a number of appetizers and desserts. Your attendees will be excited to indulge in some local eats and the restaurant will be grateful for your business.

You can make the most of any event by providing some memorable meals that will easily please most everyone with some thoughtful planning ahead. Oftentimes, attendees are just grateful to have options for a fulfilling meal when they attend a work event, but you can go above and beyond by considering different dietary needs, safety precautions, and fueling their energy while still providing a very delicious and enjoyable spread. *M*

Candice Wagener is a freelance writer based in Madison, Wis.



Meet with Success

Convention and visitor bureaus are ready to support you each step of the way.

BY KATH USITALO

The concept of a convention and visitors bureau (CVB) or destination marketing organization (DMO) charged with promoting a location and bringing meetings and conventions to fill hotel rooms is not new — and it is rooted in the Midwest. In 1896, a Detroit journalist named Milton J. Carmichael was instrumental in convincing businessmen to form the first such effort to enhance the local economy and boost the image of the city. As the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau recognizes its 125th anniversary, this year is also a celebration of the founding of the industry.





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“We recognize that change is taking place in the association world and even corporate world, and we want to take some of the work off of the planner. Their resources are stretched, and we want to see what we can do to help...”

—Tammy Tritz,
Waukesha Pewaukee CVB

For the corporate employee tasked with planning an occasional sales seminar, a professional meeting planner responsible for producing conferences, conventions, exhibitions and tradeshow, or someone organizing a board meeting or large family reunion, a CVB or DMO can be valuable resources with a common goal of a successful event that benefits both the attendees and host destination.

And the best part — the bulk of services typically offered by a CVB are usually available at no charge to groups utilizing a block of hotel rooms.

While the type of services offered by CVBs are fairly standard, not all offices are organized in the same way. Some are the official marketing arms of their city, funded as a department; others are independent, non-profit operations financially supported by hospitality industry memberships and may be limited to working with those businesses. It's important for a planner to understand the type of organization they are working with, and any limitations that may influence the services it can offer.

INSIDER INFORMATION

One of the key benefits to working with a CVB is the deep knowledge that its staff has of the facilities and resources in its community. A planner can turn to a CVB with its needs,



as business, university, science, tech, creative, corporate, or industry experts and leaders who are potential program speakers or panel participants.

Incorporating the flavor of the host destination makes for a memorable event, and a CVB can suggest ideas and unique locations and experiences for receptions, dinners and team-building activities. The CVB knows its area attractions, and can develop itineraries for spouse and family tours that enhance a meeting and may help to build excitement about attending.

During the event itself, some CVBs offer on-site information booths staffed by local volunteers who are familiar with the area and can answer questions about things to see and do and where to eat, shop and find personal services.

ONE-STOP SHOP

Sure, an internet search of an area may turn up lists of meeting spaces, hotels, event locations, suppliers, and other vendors and resources, but there's no need to reinvent the wheel when a CVB has that information readily available. In addition to raw information, a CVB has a support staff in place to assist the planner

budget, dates and other parameters, and the CVB staff can save time by suggesting best-suited venues or even making the connection between planner and sites.

"I like to send out a bid to hotels for the planners and compile the information for them to work directly with the proper-

ties," says Sharree Brenneman-Reehling, the conventions, meetings and events director for Visit Greater Lima in Ohio.

A CVB is a liaison to officials such as the mayor or governor, who may deliver welcoming remarks. It is a resource for local entertainers for social events as well



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throughout the entire process, starting with a site inspection of the destination, arranged by the CVB.

Shayna Keanaaina, marketing manager for Enjoy Eagan, the Minnesota destination's CVB, says that "Enjoy Eagan is a meeting planner's ultimate one-stop shop when planning an event. In addition to traditional venue support, Denise Olsen, our senior sales director, can help planners find off-site venues, transportation companies, party and event rentals, and other providers."

In some cities, the CVB has done the legwork and provides extras such as welcome bags for all attendees. Enjoy Eagan provides bonus goodies — a Twin Cities Premium Outlets VIP coupon book voucher, an Enjoy Eagan dining guide and more exclusive area information.

PROMOTIONAL PARTNER

Getting the word out about the meeting or convention is important for promoting attendance in advance, as well as in reporting news during the event itself. It's common for CVBs to have short promotional videos and photos, information, brochures and other tools available for planners to

share with their attendees to build excitement for the event and destination.

A CVB also has the local digital, broadcast and print media contacts a planner might want for publicizing its convention, meeting or other event. And some destinations even assist with developing and distributing press releases.

For groups of a certain size (for example, attendance of 30,000 in Lima) some CVBs will produce welcome signage for display throughout the area.

AT YOUR SERVICE

Tammy Tritz, executive director of the Waukesha Pewaukee, Wisconsin CVB, neatly summarizes the main benefits of working with her organization, which offers three types of services that are fairly typical of other destination marketing offices:

- Planning support, including providing facility and destination information and working with the facilities to coordinate site visits. Resources and help to secure speakers and suppliers, such as florists and entertainment.
- Support for promotion, including destination information and photos, local and state media resources and even, if



needed, writing and releasing press releases for a group. The CVB assists with attendance building by offering tools, such as electronic links and materials on things to see and to do, "such as that iconic Wisconsin fish fry," Tritz says.

- Extensive onsite support during the event, including providing welcome bags or folders with local information, name badges and assistance with attendee registration. The bureau can

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also help to arrange for a welcome letter or appearance by the mayor.

COPING WITH COVID

With all of the limitations necessitated by the pandemic, CVBs have gotten creative in working with planners. In bidding for future business, Brenneman-Reehling has pitched Lima virtually in presentations that traditionally have been conducted in person. There have been

virtual site visits, and hotel and facility walk-throughs. Even now, as face-to-face meetings are returning, hybrid in-person and online events are not unusual and, according to some, are likely here to stay.

Tritz says, "We recognize that change is taking place in the association world and even corporate world and we want to take some of the work off of the planner. Their resources are stretched, and we want

to see what we can do to help; we try to make our services more personalized. We truly want to let the planners know that we really want to work with them."

Kristi Lee, executive director of Visit Leavenworth, the Leavenworth, Kansas CVB, simply states, "We know our community and will work with the planners on customizable services. We want to bring them to our town." *ML*

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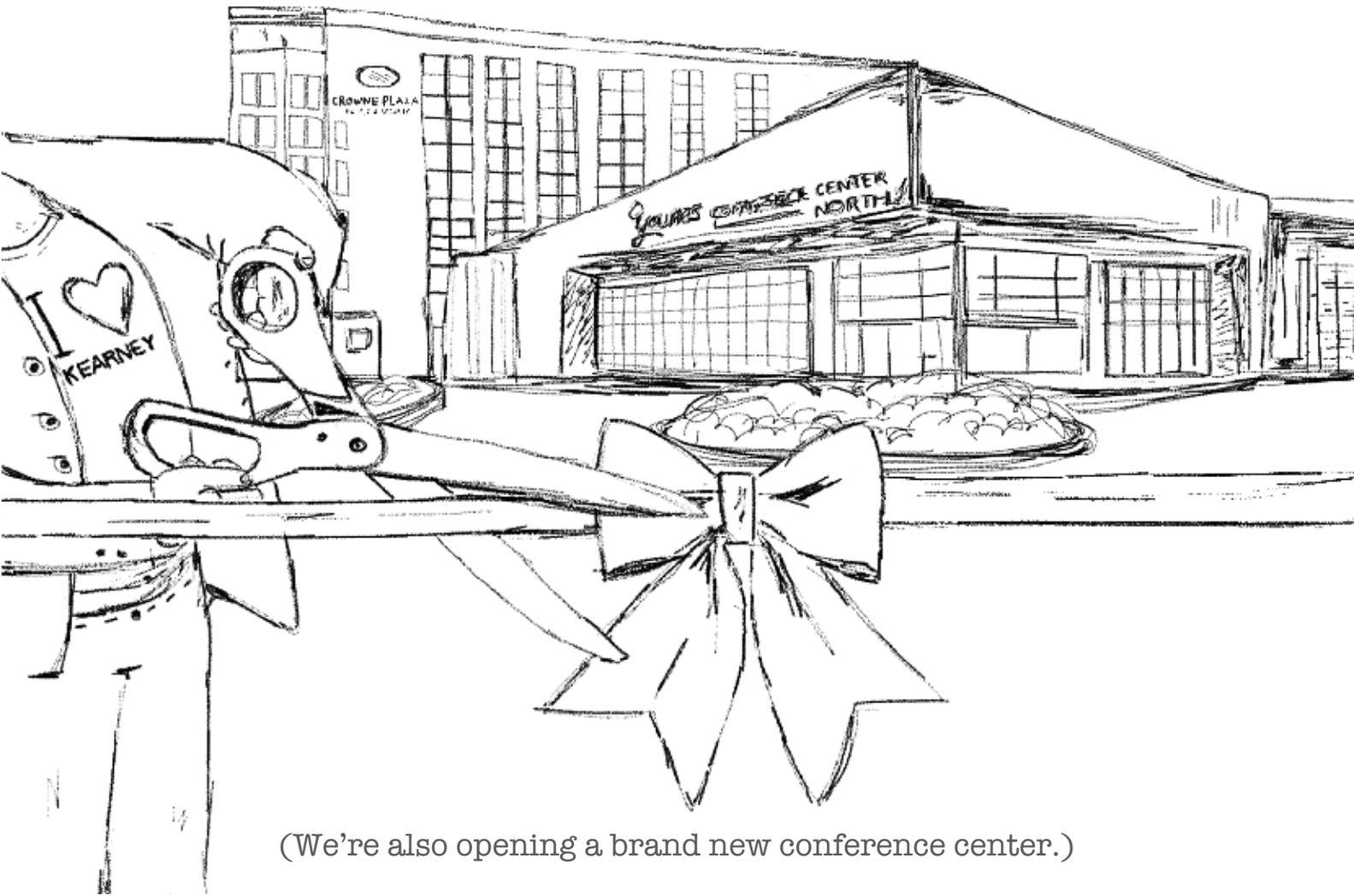


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Kearney, where the Heartland gathers. <<



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Kearney, Nebraska

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Kearney, where the Heartland gathers. <<<

If you're looking to host an event in the Heartland, Kearney's meeting and event facilities are the best between Omaha and Denver.

With the new Younes Conference Center North opening in January 2022, Kearney will be home to the largest convention facility from Denver to Omaha.

Younes Conference Center North will add an additional 75,000 square feet of meeting space to the Younes Campus. It will feature flexible meeting spaces, multiple pre-function areas, and state-of-the-art facilities. Younes Conference Center North will also feature a brand new Crowne Plaza hotel that will boast 172 sleeping rooms, an indoor water park, Fyre Grill & Spirits, Y Boutique, and Starbucks.

Conveniently located right off of I-80 and with air service from Denver and Chicago, Younes Campus offers attendees access to 5 restaurants, a full-service spa, 3 shopping locations, a medical facility, and 911 guest rooms. Kearney's ease of access allows attendees to unwind or catch a breath of fresh air at the Kearney Cinema 8 Theater, the Big Apple Fun Center and Sports Bar, Yanney Park, and the Kearney Hike & Bike Trail.

Every year, Kearney hosts more than 1,350 events in the heart of central Nebraska. The facilities and amenities are just two reasons why so many events are held at Kearney every year. The other reasons? The other reasons are the people.

The staff at the Younes Campus are some of the most dedicated in the industry and are committed to providing the highest level of service, no matter the

event. Behind every conference, wedding, sporting event, trade show or meeting, large or small, there's a team of experienced event planners and coordinators, chefs, servers, and bartenders. Decades of experience working hard to ensure each event is a success – that's the Younes Difference.

The best facilities between Omaha and Denver and the best people you'll find anywhere. That's what makes Kearney a great destination. That's what makes Kearney where the heartland gathers.

If you're interested in learning more about how Kearney can help make your next event a success contact Sarah Focke at sfocke@visitkearney.org or call 308-237-3170.

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A Variety of Meeting Options

From non-traditional meeting locations to historic venue options, and natural settings...

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Regional Airport
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Janesville, Wisconsin's Great Outside is the ideal destination to hold your next meeting, convention or retreat. In addition to a selection of venues, Janesville also offers a variety of hotels, restaurants and attractions, including many affordable options that provide you with great value. Janesville is easily accessible - right off of I-39/90.

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Along with a great location, Janesville features a variety of versatile meeting venue options including one-of-a-kind natural and historical locations that are sure to make your meeting or special event distinctive and unforgettable.

It doesn't just offer fantastic Irish fare and fresh seafood, it hosts private parties and tasting events in the Twisted Chimney room. With room for up to 55 guests, this space offers great seating for conversation, as well as its own bar.

From meetings held in locations filled with a rich history such as the Rock County Historical Society's Lincoln-Tallman House or the Janesville Armory, to meetings surrounded by nature at the award-winning Rotary Botanical Gardens, to meetings held in a conference center with state-of-the-art technology, Janesville offers an impressive assortment of options. If you're looking for a fun and unique meeting venue you may also want to consider one of our breweries, wineries, our beautiful performing arts center or even a local farm.

If you need a dinner for making deals or for board relations, Lark is the place to land. Locally-sourced, seasonal ingredients drive the menu with both small plate and entree items, not to mention the plethora of diverse cocktail mixology. Quiet, contemporary, and appealing to all the senses, Lark offers a backdrop for creative discussions.

Give your attendees the "In Wisconsin" experience with catering from the Milwaukee Grill. Wisconsin Cheese Curds and the all-around Best Fish Fry are staples of the state, and your group will love them too. Pair with local brewery offerings for a "Taste of Wisconsin" evening.

Rest assured that during your visit you can expect to be treated to our friendly Midwestern hospitality while enjoying comfortable, clean accommodations, low costs and no fees for parking.

Our staff at the Janesville Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is here to help you every step of the way, from welcome packets and nametags to sanitizer stations and signage, to assisting you and your guests in locating the perfect venue, pavilion or overnight accommodations. Our services to you are completely complimentary.

Our selection of spaces can accommodate meetings ranging in size from 10 to 1,300 attendees. Our convenient location provides lots of transportation options to make planning even easier. Janesville is located directly off of I-39/90, less than one hour from major travel hubs Milwaukee, Madison and Rockford, IL, and less than 2 hours from Chicago, IL.

We know meeting and event planners also need diverse venues and entertainment for evening receptions and group activities. Luckily, Janesville offers alluring venues to suit groups of all kinds.

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Waukesha Pewaukee is a convenient location to meet between Milwaukee and Madison (off I-94) within southeast Wisconsin's Lake Country.

Meeting planners will find more than 100,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, including recently renovated spaces at The Ingleside Hotel and the Milwaukee Marriott West. With 1,300+ guest rooms, complimentary parking and many options for post-meeting activities, planners can make their meetings a success while keeping attendees entertained during their stay.

The Ingleside Hotel offers a refreshing change of pace from conventional meeting and conference destinations. Business events are special with trails for hiking and wide-open spaces for team building outside. The hotel offers 192 guest rooms and over 40,000 square feet of flexible banquet and meeting space as well as many amenities.

The 281 room Milwaukee Marriott West offers generous amenities and public space. The

10,000 sq. ft. of state-of-the-art event space is ideal for receptions, special events, business meetings, conferences and tradeshows. Don't miss BLVD Kitchen & Bar an American Bistro experience.

Planners can choose from more than 25 activities for team building with their group. Find outdoor recreation activities like water sports, including standup paddleboarding, yoga, tree climbing, horseback riding and golf. Or try hands-on workshops for crafts, home décor and cooking. Groups can also enjoy indoor adventure parks with go-karting, ropes courses, bumper cars, trampolines, skyriders, bowling or climbing walls. Rounding out activities are axe throwing, laser tag, escape rooms, indoor bocce, plus brewery and wine tasting experiences.

Learn more about the meeting facilities, promotions, group activities and complimentary meeting services that the Waukesha Pewaukee Convention & Visitor Bureau offers groups.



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Form Meets Function

The Brookfield Conference Center was designed with flexibility in mind. Over 40,000 sq. ft. of meeting/function space allows for a multitude of configurations for the business or social event planner. Our facility offers 4 distinct gathering spaces:

- The Connect Ballroom with 18,000 sq. ft. of space and 11 different layout options is the centerpiece of the Brookfield Conference Center.
- The Collaborate Ballroom offers 6,000 sq. ft. and 3 space configurations. Banks of custom-designed channel-glass enhance natural light.
- The glass-encased Celebration Atrium is a 9,000 sq. ft. space for pre- or post-function gatherings, breaks, and more.

- The Celebration Plaza offers 9,000 sq. ft. of outdoor meeting space. Beautiful landscaping, Edison lighting and comfortable seating make this an inviting outdoor location for smaller gatherings.

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The Brookfield Conference Center has an in-house Executive Chef, and full-service food and beverage catering. An attached 168 room Hilton Garden Inn provides convenient accommodations for Conference Center guests. Ample, free, surface parking rounds out the amenities at our facility.

We invite you to schedule a tour of the Brookfield Conference Center before booking your next event. Conveniently located at I-94 and Moorland Road, just minutes from downtown Milwaukee. Contact us at 262-789-0220.



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- Get a quick run or walk in on Middleton's award-winning trail system or work out in a fitness center at your hotel.
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EVENING

- Indulge in fun, fine and fresh dining — Middleton has nearly 70 restaurants ranging from Wisconsin food favorites to more cultural cuisine. Or check out the local wine bar, cidery, or brewery.

NIGHT

- Return to the hotel and enjoy a good night's rest in a comfortable, clean room with all the amenities you need.

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NOON

- Attend a keynote luncheon or special session — Middleton's hotels offer more than 66,000 square feet of meeting space, including ballrooms and spaces that can be converted to fit meetings of any size.

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- Drop in on a breakout session at your hotel.



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- The Old State Capitol, where Lincoln delivered his famous "House Divided" speech
- The Lincoln Tomb, the second-most visited cemetery in the United States

In fact, the city has more Lincoln sites here than anywhere else in the world — plus many more group-friendly historic homes and museums.

Our city excels at offering you a comfortable, well-organized experience. Visit Springfield

provides complimentary itinerary planning and scheduling at our historic sites, helping you maximize your time and guaranteeing entry for your group. We also offer on-site registration assistance, name badges and pre-promotional materials to boost attendance, to name a few. Our central location between Chicago and St. Louis, makes us a natural and economical choice. You'll find our services and amenities can't be beat.

The Visit Springfield team is a powerhouse team with more than 70 years industry experience and a combined 200 years of living in our city! When the "brain trust" unites, there is literally nothing that we cannot solve for our customers and guests. The plethora of contacts, references and experiences sets us apart to be able to tackle any challenge sent our way. Let our sales team help you create a unique experience that is perfect for your group. From hotel solicitation and itinerary planning to marketing support and creating a unique experience, Visit Springfield has you covered with the latest on what's new in Springfield, IL.

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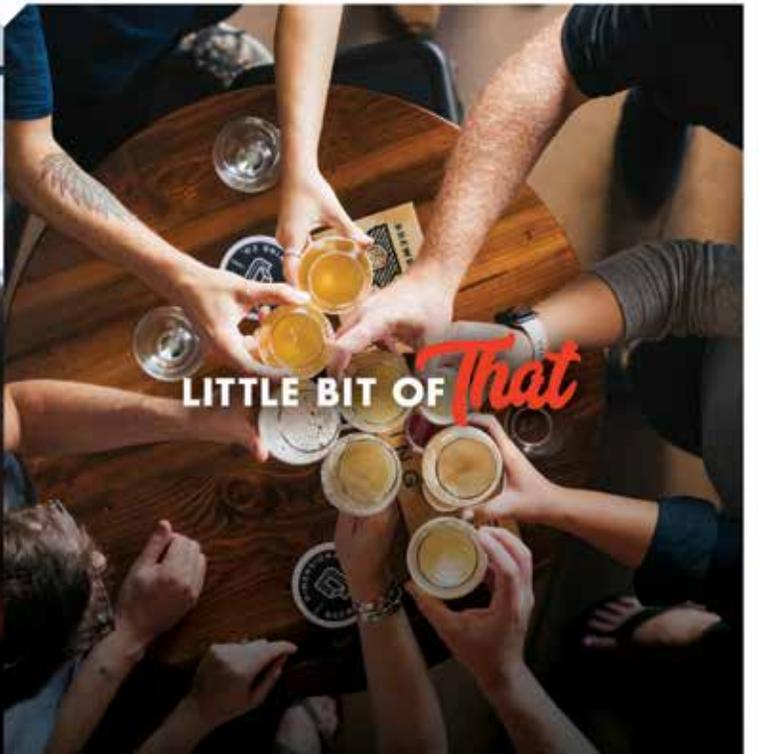
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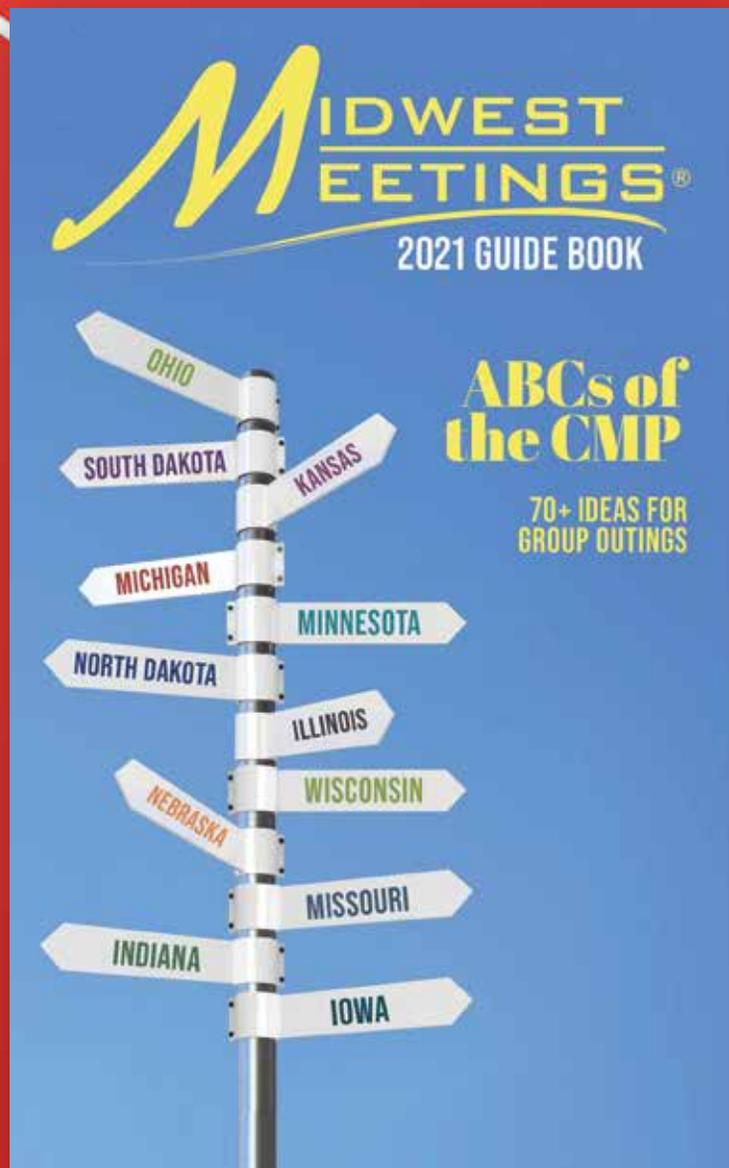
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Myth-Busting for Hybrid Meetings

Dispelling the top 5 misconceptions about hybrid meetings.

BY RONNIE WENDT

Mark Wollskog, owner of Heartwood Resort & Conference Center in northern Wisconsin, has seen the corporate meeting environment change considerably since the beginning of the pandemic. Where national and international companies once gathered the entire staff in one location for annual meetings, they now gather employees by region to participate virtually in a hybrid event.

As Wollskog learned, the pandemic has forced organizations to get creative with meetings. One innovation is the hybrid

meeting, which combines the best of in-person and virtual events into a single gathering.

Hybrid events take advantage of all that virtual and in-person events can offer. And they allow people in-person to meet with people in other geographies. These events, when done correctly, can broaden your audience and your exposure, allow meetings to occur amid COVID fears and provide a rich experience for all involved.

Hybrid meetings are not new. They have been around for a while. But as they surge again in popularity, misconceptions surrounding them have also reared their heads.

MYTH 1: **The Virtual Part is a Livestream**

A hybrid event mixes live and virtual elements. Though it may have live-streamed components, a hybrid event involves more audience participation and engagement from in-person and virtual audiences.

Forrest Doolen, director of marketing and communications for Make-A-Wish Wisconsin, says it's important to inject compelling storytelling into the videos you present. "We work with a video storyteller, who does an excellent job of telling compelling stories through video," he says. "That is important because if your content isn't engaging and people get bored, your virtual audience will stop watching."

The material also must encourage participation from both audiences. Ask for feedback in real time, encourage interaction between attendees, and include online quizzes or surveys for all attendees.

MYTH 2: **A Virtual Component Will Lessen In-Person Attendance**

Sometimes planners shy away from hybrid events because they fear the virtual portion will hurt in-person attendance. But most hybrid events draw the same in-person audience while adding a virtual audience too.



“Be intentional in how you include virtual attendees. Speakers must welcome both audiences.”

the same. You must consider the décor, food, stage, entertainment and more. But beautiful flowers, impeccable décor, delectable food and an impressive stage mean little to virtual attendees.

Be intentional in how you include virtual attendees. Speakers must welcome both audiences. Often speakers and event hosts forget to acknowledge online attendees. And when in-person attendees break for coffee or networking, incorporate elements into breaks that allow online participants to engage in networking activities too.

MYTH 4: **The Virtual Parts Will Lack a Personal Touch**

If you only give virtual attendees access to a livestream and a platform lacking ways to message in-person attendees or each other, your hybrid meeting will lack a personal touch. Fortunately, there are ways to personalize the virtual components.

Make-a-Wish delivered a personal touch to virtual attendees during its hybrid gala by offering party boxes. Anyone who hosted a virtual event in their home or business could receive a party box to enhance the experience. The organization offered two types: a dessert box and an appetizer box.

“People loved them. They included champagne and beer, Make-A-Wish swag and treats,” he says. “It really added to the excitement.”

Hosting virtual roundtable discussions and live Q&As that encourage attendees to network also boosts participation. Produce a video about event staff and what went into creating the virtual event. Feature employees who talk directly to online attendees. Express that you wish they could be there in person but are glad they can join virtually.

MYTH 5: **Hybrid Meetings are Hard to Put On**

There are resources available that remove the fear factor from hosting a hybrid meeting.

“As a planner, I don’t know everything about putting on a hybrid meeting. But I know who to hire to connect the dots between my clients and the venue,” says Terri Lynn Yanke, founder and CEO of Eventful Advantage in Madison, Wis.

Many venues offer technology that simplifies hybrid events. Heartwood, for example, added a smart TV and cameras to their boardroom. Now 15 to 20 people seated around a conference table can participate in hybrid events. Video streaming capabilities are readily available, through Facebook and other sites, and platforms, like Pathable, already have experience with hybrid events and staff ready to assist.

Make sure video streaming and web conferencing technology work seamlessly before the event. And prepare presenters to speak in front of an audience and a camera for recording.

“People want to see and hear each other. Planners want to make sure to communicate the pitch, tone and cadence associated with each presentation,” Wollskog says. “Work with a venue that offers the technology you need for a hybrid event. Your virtual audience must be able to hear you, see you and communicate with you.”

Don’t let common misconceptions instill fear. Hybrid meetings offer the best of both worlds during tough circumstances. The pandemic may be waning, but not all attendees are ready to gather face to face.

Ronnie Wendt is a freelance writer based in Waukesha, Wis. She specializes in writing about meetings and events across the Midwest.

Virtual attendees often are people who have never attended the event. And, if these attendees have a great experience virtually, it may encourage them to attend in-person next time.

“With a hybrid event, you can expand your audience,” Doolen says. “We may keep our Walk for Wishes as a hybrid event. People can participate in person. But if they want to stay closer to home, they can host a walk in their community. We provide the support, and they do the fundraising. A hybrid event gives you a broader audience.”

MYTH 3: **You Can Reach Both Audiences the Same Way**

A good hybrid event treats all attendees equally. But this does not mean you use the same tactics to engage both. Planners must craft one event offering two vastly different experiences.

When planning an in-person event, the emphasis on the experience remains

For a Full House, Casino Resorts are a Good Bet

BY KATH USITALO

Casino resorts offer planners convenient and cost-effective meeting and convention destinations that can boost attendance with a winning combination of business and pleasure. While function space and support services are important, it's the extras, from unique venues and social events to ideas for team-building exercises, that enhance conference programs. Updated and amenity-filled hotel rooms, topnotch golf courses, posh spas, and a variety of entertainment, dining and gaming options entice attendees — who often tack on an extra day to enjoy them.

“The biggest advantage of booking an event at a casino resort hotel is that all of these services and amenities are available and guests don't have to leave the building,” says MGM Grand Detroit Executive Director of Sales Lisa Williams.

From that urban high rise to nationally recognized historic hotels, here's a look at a handful of casino resorts — and one especially family-friendly spot without gaming — across the Midwest.

FRENCH LICK RESORTS, French Lick, Ind.

The “Miracle Waters” that made French Lick and West Baden destinations in the mid-1800s still flow in the historic resort area, where the opulent luxury of yesterday meets the amenities of today. French Lick Resort encompasses the 443-room French Lick Springs Hotel and 243-room West Baden Springs Hotel, both more than a century old — and the 71-room Valley Tower, which opened in 2019.

Director of Sales Adina Cloud says French Lick is special: “You can't buy history. There's a difference between an old hotel and historic hotels that have gone through the renovations that we have.”

French Lick and West Baden are one mile apart and connected by train and trolley, making it convenient to attend events and enjoy the amenities of both. “We have groups with a split block between the hotels, either because of the





size of the groups, or some attendees would like to experience one hotel over the other. A group may want the executive board housed at one property and the attendees at the other,” says Cloud.

The 169,000 square feet of function space includes meeting rooms and ballrooms, ornate reception areas, plus outdoor pavilions and formal gardens. West Baden Atrium, once called the “Eighth Wonder of the World,” hosts 3,000 for a reception, and the Event Center’s 32,000-square-foot Exhibition Hall accommodates trade shows.

Golfers hit the top-rated Pete Dye and Donald Ross courses and nine-hole Valley Links course, and spa-goers bathe in mineral waters. There are a dozen team activities, including sporting clay shooting, chuck wagon dinners and hayrides.

“We get very involved with our groups to create a memorable experience,” says Cloud. “We want them to say, ‘that’s the best conference I’ve ever attended,

and we want to go back to French Lick Resorts:”

RIVERSIDE CASINO & GOLF RESORT **Riverside, Iowa**

In 1990, Bob and Ruth Kehl landed the first riverboat gaming operator’s license in Iowa. Today, the Kehl family has majority interest in Elite Casino Resorts, owner and operator of Riverside, which opened in 2006, followed by Grand Falls and Rhythm City Casino resorts with two additional properties opening in Illinois and Nebraska in the near future.

Riverside is celebrating its 15th anniversary with extensive remodeling of its 12,000-plus-square-foot Event Center. “We’ll be the shiny new penny,” says Senior Event Services Manager Brianne Stone of the flexible space that accommodates a board meeting for 10, 500 for dinner or 1,200 in a theater setting.

Groups can arrange private events at the fine dining Ruthie’s Steak & Seafood

restaurant, casual Robert’s Buffet or a lunch by the pool, says Stone. “Because Riverside is a casino, it’s a fun place to be. We try to add activities that make it more like a retreat.”

In addition to slots and table games, Riverside entertains with live performances in the Show Lounge, Draft Day sports lounge and an indoor/outdoor pool. The full-service Aveda spa and salon features an indoor hot tub and infrared sauna.

Golfers head to the Rees Jones-designed Blue Top Ridge, rated one of the top courses in Iowa by Golfweek. Groups enter into friendly competition at the indoor Topgolf Swing Suite, where simulators challenge players of any level.

“Clients are surprised, blown away about what they can do on property,” says Stone, adding that the resort works with planners to maximize their group experience. “If they’ve got a vision or really crazy idea, we’ve got a great team that will work with them to make it happen.”



Prairie Band Casino & Resort



Riverside Casino & Golf Resort



PRAIRIE BAND CASINO & RESORT Mayetta, Kan.

The Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation owns and operates the first full-service casino in Kansas on tribal land about 20 miles north of Topeka. Prairie Band Casino & Resort is also home to Firekeeper Golf Course, the top public course in Kansas, according to Golfweek. Firekeeper, which opened in 2011, was designed by Native American and four-time PGA tour winner Notah Begay III, in partnership with Jeff Brauer, a leader in the environmental preservation of modern courses.

“The golf course is our number one attraction. It’s pristine,” says Prairie Band Sales Manager Chele Kuhn. In addition to golf groups, the resort caters to associations and conventions in the immediate region, and is a destination for board retreats. With 297 guest rooms, the average meeting size is 75-125, but Prairie Band can accommodate up to 400-plus for meals and 900 theater-style.

The casino, bingo hall and live shows are popular entertainment. Dining ranges from the high-end Three Fires Steakhouse featuring Midwest beef to the casual Embers Bar & Grille and Kapi Coffee Bar. The handsome lobby bar pours Prairie Band Imperial Lager, and Knob Creek and Crown Royal single barrel batches exclusive to the resort.

Kuhn says that because Prairie Band is an all-in-one destination, attendees come early and stay late, and make it a vacation. One recent client credited the resort for the best attendance they’d ever experienced.



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“Another factor is our service,” says Kuhn. “Customer service is the key.” Due to the longevity and excellent reputation of the sales staff, Prairie Band has developed strong relationships with clients who bring repeat business and make referrals. “That’s a real part of our success.”

MGM GRAND DETROIT Detroit, Mich.

The familiar golden lion outside of the sleek, 17-story casino hotel is the first clue that the MGM Grand Detroit is about to offer a taste of Las Vegas in the heart of the Motor City. When opened in 2007, the \$800-million property was hailed as the first such resort-style casino built in a major metropolitan area.

“We offer the Vegas-style gaming experience, the same as at Bellagio or any of our Vegas properties,” says Lisa Williams, executive director of sales. The hotel earns four-star status in the Forbes Travel Guide and a AAA Four Diamond award for its 400 rooms and suites and 20,000-square-foot, full-service Immerse Spa and fitness center with an indoor saltwater pool.

Dining options include casual spots and D.PRIME Steakhouse, starring open flame, oak-grilled beef. Entertainment starts in the 100,000-square-foot casino with nearly 3,500 slots and video poker games, almost 150 table games and a deluxe poker room. “Our high limit lounge is phenomenal,” says Williams.

At the BetMGM Sports Lounge, fans catch matches from comfy chairs with refreshments nearby. Local bands perform in the AXIS Lounge, and the Topgolf Swing Suite “is not limited to golf. You can play hockey, football and my favorite, Zombie Dodgeball,” laughs Williams.

The 30,000 square feet of function space easily accommodates a meeting of 18, banquet for 900 or theater seating for 1,200. Mid-size associations, incentive trips, sales meetings and corporate retreats are a good fit, and groups that buyout the hotel at 250 to 300 guest rooms gain exclusive access to all venues.

With Detroit a major Delta hub, Williams says it’s a value location. “Not the least expensive by far, but still a great value.”

ONEIDA CASINO AND RADISSON HOTEL & CONFERENCE CENTER Green Bay, Wis.

Located in the shadows of Lambeau Field’s frozen tundra, convention planners will find an entertainment complex that includes both gaming and ample square footage for their next conference. Oneida Casino and Radisson Hotel & Conference Center are connected, allowing guests to travel between the two properties without needing as much as a jacket. And with their proximity to Austin Straubel Airport (just across the street), convenience is a key factor for those choosing this property. On the gaming floor, guests will find a variety of options, ranging from bingo and slots to blackjack and poker. A number of dining options run the gamut, from casual to fine dining. For groups, the Radisson offers 30,000 square feet of flexible space. *M*

Kath Usitalo is a freelance travel writer based in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula.

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After the meetings end, get casino-bound or check out one of our live shows in the show lounges. If you enjoy sports, our sportsbooks and lounges are a great place to relax after a day of meetings.

Riverside Casino & Golf Resort® – Riverside, IA

Riverside features 12,000 square feet of newly renovated flexible meeting space with seating configurations from 10 to 500, a 200-room hotel, Spa, live entertainment, four unique restaurants, live poker room, boutique, championship golf course and Performance Studio, and ELITE Sportsbook™.

Grand Falls Casino & Golf Resort® – Larchwood, IA

Located near the Sioux Falls Regional Airport, Grand Falls features 12,000 square feet of flexible meeting space with configurable breakout rooms, a 163-room hotel, Spa, live entertainment, three unique restaurants, RV Park, spectacular outdoor pool and lounge, championship golf course and Betfred Sportsbook™.

Rhythm City Casino Resort® – Davenport, IA

Just minutes from the Quad Cities International Airport in Moline, IL and close to various area attractions including championship golf courses, shopping, museums and sporting venues. Rhythm City features over 16,000 square feet of flexible meeting space with configurable breakout rooms, a 106-room hotel, luxurious Spa, live entertainment, three unique restaurants and ELITE Sportsbook.

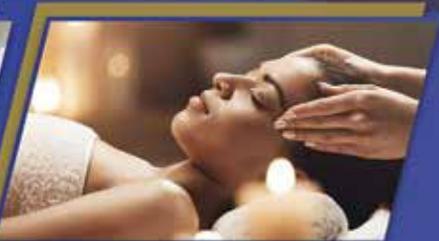
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Just Add Water

Water Park resorts offer a family-friendly environment for your next convention.

BY EMILY MCCLUHAN

Whether it's the complete abandon of hurtling down a four-story waterslide or the relaxation of floating in a tube on a lazy river, water parks are a chance to escape the stiff, professional workday. And with many water parks building or enhancing their meeting and conference space, it's easier than ever to combine business with pleasure.

"One of the most unique things about hosting a meeting at a water park is the opportunity to bring your family and make a leisure experience out of it," says Leah Hauck-Mills, communications manager with the Wisconsin Dells Visitor & Convention Bureau. "And we have been told time and time again that groups see an increase in attendance that bring their families along."

The Dells, also known as The Water Park Capital of the World, has plenty of options, but other resorts strewn across the Midwest offer similar advantages. Hauck-Mills says some of the perks of water park convention centers include free parking — since most are not located in metropolitan areas — as well as having everything from lodging, recreation and dining all under one roof. And most resorts include water park admission for guests with the lodging.

"Our facilities also have themes and decor that can be more welcoming than a standard convention center," she says. "It's just more warm and cozy."

Hauck-Mills admits that some groups may be intimidated by the idea of hosting an event at a water park, but she notes that many resorts keep the meeting space separate from the water park, so "you won't see kids in wet swimsuits dragging a towel through your conference area."

She suggests working with the local DMO to plan off-site activities, allowing your guests to truly experience the destination, as well as requesting visitors guides to send to the attendees in advance to build excitement.

So pack your swimsuit, bring the family and check out these water park options for your next meeting.



great wave

Wilderness Resort
Great Wave
Water Park



Kalahari Resorts

KALAHARI RESORTS & CONVENTIONS Wisconsin Dells, Wis. and Sandusky, Ohio

With some of the largest water parks and conference spaces in the country, Kalahari Resorts offers plenty of options for a vacation getaway for families and meeting attendees.

The Wisconsin Dells property, just 45 minutes from Madison, two hours from Green Bay and Milwaukee, and three hours from Chicago, houses a 125,000-square-foot indoor water park, the largest in Wisconsin, plus an outdoor water park.

Unique features, like the Screaming Hye-na, a waterslide that starts 60 feet above the roof and plummets riders through a trap door to the indoor pools below, is just one option for thrill seekers. A lazy river, tree fort and swim-up bar are available for those looking for a different pace.

And when the family is soaked through, Tom Foolery's Adventure Park and The Arena, a virtual gaming experience, can keep them entertained.

The convention center offers 212,000 square feet of flexible space, making it the largest convention center in Wisconsin. There are more than 700 guest rooms

ranging from single rooms to multi-bedroom suites to standalone villas accommodating up to 20 guests.

Hauck-Mills suggests working with the Wisconsin Dells Visitor & Convention Bureau for other off-site activities like Duck Tours that pick up attendees at the resort, a lavender farm tour, private socials on a cruise down the Wisconsin River or winery and brewery tours.

The Kalahari Resort in Sandusky, Ohio, is located near the shores of Lake Erie and is easily accessible from Cleveland, Akron, Cincinnati, Detroit and Pittsburgh. The property boasts one of America's largest indoor water parks at 173,000 square feet and a large outdoor park for endless thrills and floating relaxation. The indoor park also offers one of the first underwater virtual reality experiences in the country, as well as the option to book a lesson to learn how to be a mermaid or merman. An adventure park with a ropes course, zipline, climbing wall and a mini golf course round out the entertainment.

Away from the indoor water, families can rent bikes and explore the Sandusky Bay and Lake Erie shoreline or take a spin through the Merry-Go-Round Museum in a converted historic post office.

Offering 215,000 square feet of flexible meeting space and 890 guest rooms and suites, plus private villas, allows the Sandusky property to meet the needs of all group sizes.

WILDERNESS HOTEL & GOLF RESORT Wisconsin Dells, Wis.

Covering more than 600 acres, the Wilderness Resort located in Wisconsin Dells is home to three properties: Wilderness Hotel & Golf Resort, Wilderness on the Lake and Glacier Canyon Lodge. Together, these properties make up one of America's largest water park resorts, offering four indoor and four outdoor water parks totaling more than 500,000 square feet.

Try out the daring thrill slides and raft rides at Klondike Kavern and Wild West water parks, or relax indoors at Wild Water Dome, featuring an energy-efficient Foil Tec roof that allows guests to tan year-round. Challenge each other to a game of hoops at Cubby's Cove in the sports pool at Wilderness on the Lake or enjoy the 13,000-square-foot swimming pool at Lake Wilderness, with a lounging island and zero-depth area for toddlers.

Nationally-acclaimed Sundara Spa is located next to the Wilderness Wild Rock Golf Club and is affiliated with the resort, offering a different kind of oasis for guests. A championship golf course and four-star dining ensure that meeting attendees and their families have everything needed for a Northwoods-inspired getaway. Over 1,100 lodging options are available from outdoors-themed hotel rooms to private villas, condominiums and log cabins.

Glacier Canyon Lodge houses the 56,000-square-foot conference center with two ballrooms and a large patio, and a flexible meeting room layout. The Wild Rock Golf Club features a rustic simplicity and provides a bar and lounge, plus banquet space for up to 160 guests.

BOYNE MOUNTAIN RESORT Boyne Falls, Mich.

Although it's known as a Midwest winter ski destination with Austrian flair, Boyne Mountain Resort also houses an indoor water park kept at a balmy 84 degrees

with pools, a lazy river, surf simulator, waterfalls and a 10-foot water slide. Nestled among the lakes and hills in the north-west Lower Peninsula of Michigan, Boyne also provides year-round outdoor activity options for guests and families from ski lessons to kayaking and fly fishing to golfing on two championship courses.

Off the property is Michigan's playground with the crystal blue waters of nearby lakes and the quaint vibes of resort towns like Charlevoix, Harbor Springs and Petoskey. The resort is located about one hour from Traverse City, three hours from Grand Rapids and four hours from Detroit.

The 37,000-square-foot conference center at Boyne Mountain offers meeting space for breakouts and large meetings spanning two stories of the main mountain lodge. Over 400 guest rooms, suites and condominiums provide flexible options for families of all sizes.

ARROWWOOD RESORT & CONFERENCE CENTER Alexandria, Minn.

Surrounded by lakes in northern Minnesota, Arrowwood Resort & Conference Center is about one hour from St. Cloud and two hours from Minneapolis/St.

Paul and Fargo, S.D. In addition to the marina where guests can rent motorized and non-motorized boats, the resort also features a 38,000-square-foot water park. Three four-story waterslides await thrill seekers, and a lazy river and whirlpool spa are available for a relaxing float. The whole family can battle it out in the play fort with water blasters, geysers and a basketball shootout.

The main resort offers nature-inspired guest rooms and suites, or the option to spread out in a three- or four-bedroom townhome on Lake Darling, with access to all of the resort's amenities. The attached conference center boasts 12 meeting rooms and 28,000 square feet of meeting space.

Explore more of the lake country at nearby Carlos Creek Winery, which also has a brewery, pizza kitchen and food truck for casual camaraderie and team building. Or explore the local lake culture at the Legacy of the Lakes maritime museum.

WATIKI INDOOR WATER PARK RESORT Rapid City, S.D.

Situated in the heart of western South Dakota, WaTiki Indoor Water Park features 30,000 square feet of body slides,

water avalanches, giant twisting tubular slides, a lazy river and hot tub area for kids of all ages.

Five hotels make up this complex with four directly connected to the water park, giving planners plenty of options for guest rooms and meeting space. The Courtyard by Marriott, Residence Inn, Fairfield Inn and LaQuinta Inn each have their own conference rooms and catering, but Liv Hotel Group manages planning for meetings and events for each hotel and offers discounted admission to the water park for all guests.

"Many groups take advantage of our limited winter hours — when the water park is only open in the evenings during the week — by booking private water park rentals during our non-business hours," says Desarae Biggins, sales director with Liv Hotel Group.

When families aren't splashing, they can venture into Black Hills National Forest, Badlands National Park, Mount Rushmore National Memorial or Crazy Horse Memorial, all less than an hour from WaTiki. *M*

Emily McCluhan is a freelance writer based in Madison, Wis.



STATE SPOTLIGHT



With its picturesque cityscapes to its awe-inspiring landscapes, from the expansive plains of Nebraska to the valleys and rivers of Minnesota, the Midwest offers ample locales for unique meeting options. Teeming with historic sites, quaint towns and mighty metropolis experiences, the Midwest appeals to many planners because of its unique venues, distinct Midwest charm and natural beauty. And thanks to the cultural offerings throughout cities such as Minneapolis, Kansas City, Dubuque and Milwaukee, the Midwest truly has something for everyone.

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BY MAURA KELLER

ILLINOIS

Photos provided by
Illinois Office of Tourism



©Adam Alexander



Looking for a unique meeting locale that offers big city amenities yet boasts affordability and convenience throughout? Illinois is a unique, eclectic state, housing diverse options for meeting and events. From state-of-the-art expo centers to trendy restaurants to revitalized warehouse buildings teeming with character, Illinois offers many unique options for events of all types.

Of course, when you mention “Illinois” as a great locale for meetings and events, most thoughts turn to Chicago — and rightfully so. Chicago boasts ample event space — from sports facilities to outdoor venues teeming with nature aplenty. Classic meeting spaces include full and select-service hotels, colleges/universities, expo centers, museums and historic spaces.

And no meeting or event would be complete without memorable dining experiences. When it comes to eateries, the state capital, Springfield, offers a wealth of options for groups of all sizes, from classic “mom and pop” pizza joints to trendy craft brewers to upscale venues that offer memorable cuisine that will keep you coming back for more. Of course, hosting an event at the acclaimed Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield would certainly offer a memorable experience for all.

Looking for an Illinois location that has historical appeal? Check out Galena. This charming town boasts a main street that is filled with well-preserved 19th century buildings. Featuring charming shops, delightful eateries and history aplenty, Galena feels like you have traveled back in time. Countering this historic charm is the favorite Eagle Ridge Resort, which is a favorite venue among planners looking for state-of-the-art meeting amenities in a relaxing, yet expansive resort.

Of course, Illinois is a very strong agricultural state, and very united in terms of its agricultural culture. That’s why many planners are drawn to some of the state’s smaller communities that are quieter gems. For example, known as the “Crossroads of Opportunity,” Effingham, in south central Illinois, is ideally located just two hours west of Indianapolis, 1½ hours east of St. Louis and 3½ hours south of Chicago. The town’s Thelma Keller Convention Center boasts over 20,000 square feet of meeting space. Of course, smaller and simpler venues, including beautiful recreation areas, unique art attractions, as well as a charming winery also offer ample options for meetings and events of all sizes. *M*



CHICAGO SOUTHLAND CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

Stressed about planning a group meeting? Sit back and relax, let the experts at the Chicago Southland Convention & Visitors Bureau help unburden your workload.

Located in the south and southwest Chicago suburbs, the Chicago Southland is just a mere five-hour drive from eight different states (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin) with accessibility to six interstates. The area also boasts two International Airports (Midway and O'Hare), proving you won't find a more convenient event location in the Midwest!

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Other traditional meeting spaces include local colleges/universities and smaller venues like La Banque boutique hotel, a quaint repurposed historic bank in the heart of downtown Homewood. Impress your guests with unconventional space like Irons Oaks Environmental Learning Center, one of the few team building facilities in the Midwest. Other unique options include outdoor nature centers, theaters and breweries. We've got you covered regardless of your event size! Contact our Sales Team about our current incentive programs, complimentary event services and site inspection coordination.



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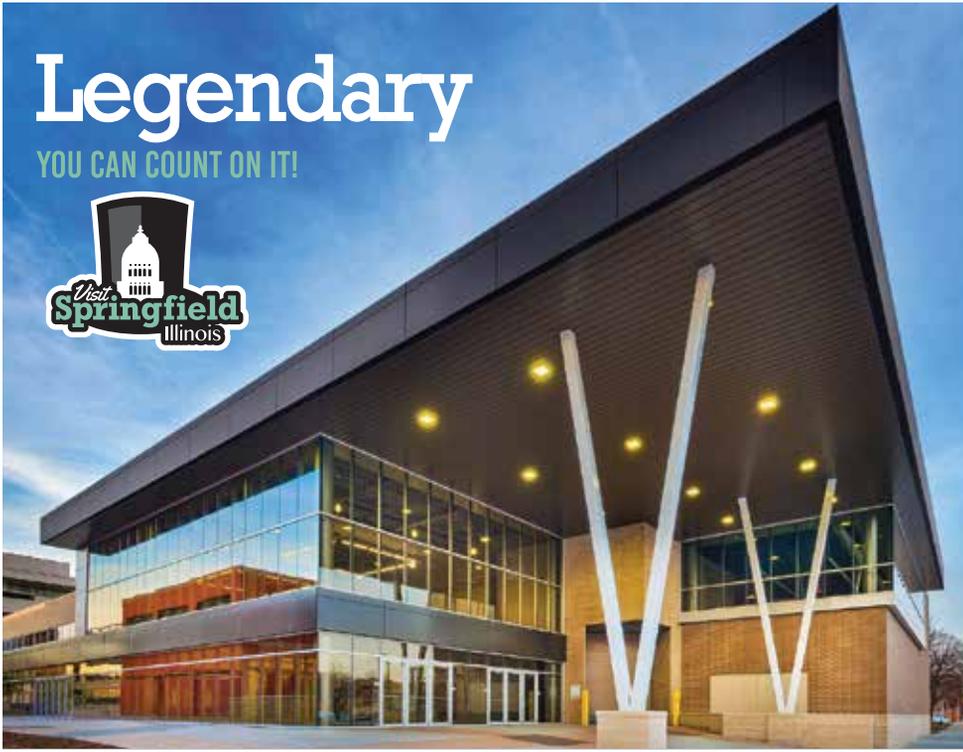
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BY MAURA KELLER

INDIANA

With its picturesque cityscapes and its awe-inspiring landscapes, as well as its expansive valleys and rivers, Indiana offers ample locales for unique meeting options. Teeming with historic sites, quaint towns and mighty metropolitan experiences, Indiana appeals to many planners because of its unique venues, distinct Midwest charm and natural beauty. And thanks to the cultural offerings throughout cities such as Indianapolis, Fort Wayne and Bloomington, Indiana truly has something for everyone.

A Midwest favorite that offers big city amenities with smaller town charm is Indianapolis. This urban favorite features a wealth of exhibit space, numerous downtown hotel rooms and hundreds of restaurants.

Some of the city's largest venues include the Indiana Convention Center, Lucas Oil Stadium, Bankers Life Fieldhouse and the Indiana State Fairgrounds. Indianapolis' new Bottleworks District includes the boutique Bottleworks Hotel that occupies the top two floors of a historic bottling works building. The hotel also includes restaurants and a rooftop bar.

Venture just north of Indianapolis and you'll find the inviting communities of Hamilton County, Indiana. Explore Connor Prairie, a living history museum in Fishers; Grand Park – the Sports Complex at Westfield, a 400-acre, multi-sport complex with indoor and outdoor facilities for just about any sport; or The Palladium, a world-class concert hall in Carmel.

Located in northeastern Indiana, Fort Wayne is the state's second largest city and offers a very unique convention location experience. The Grand Wayne Convention Center boasts over 225,000 square feet of meeting space in a very walkable environment. In fact, the downtown area in which the convention center is located features a wealth of walkable venues for eating, lodging and entertainment. The Lodging is the nearby neighborhood offering retail, dining and entertainment options for groups. And for those looking for relaxation and outdoor opportunities, the Promenade is a beautiful park offering many recreation opportunities, as well as various outdoor spaces for meeting and events.

And for those groups seeking entertainment, check out French Lick Resort. The property features three hotels, a casino, two spas and 45 holes of golf over three courses. Golf outings can accommodate groups of many sizes, whether it be eight people or all the way up to 144 players. The golf professionals at French Link can customize an event in any facet that meeting planners would like. The French Lick Resort Event Center features 169,000 square feet of space and the property also boasts 27 luxurious state-of-the-art meeting rooms that are perfect for any sized event – from large-scale galas to smaller conferences and meetings. The adjacent French Lick Casino, is a Las Vegas-style gaming facility all on one floor and offers the ideal place for meeting and event attendees to relax and unwind. *M*



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The Terre Haute Convention & Visitors Bureau would love to help you plan your trip through the Midwest. Known as the “Crossroads of America,” Terre Haute is just an hour from Indianapolis. Opening in 2022, the new Terre Haute Convention Center will be ready to host a variety of events, conventions, trade-shows and more. Our hotel selection continues to grow, offering a variety of convenient rooms for groups.

To book events, contact info@terrehautecc.com



TERRE HAUTE
CONVENTION CENTER



Popular stops include everything from wineries, breweries, unique restaurants, theatres, museums, spiritual walking tour at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods college campus, Griffin Bike Park and the LaVern Gibson Championship Cross Country Course. The veteran-themed Griffin Bike Park features trails that all have special riding styles for everyone of all ages. It has a new "Freedom Trail," which is offered for those individuals with differing disabilities or those with adaptive riding equipment. The LaVern Gibson Championship Cross Country Course has hosted a variety of races over many years including: NCAA Division I, Great Lakes Regionals, Division III Men & Women's, and NCAA Division I Championships.

Located right downtown is the Terre Haute Children's Museum, home to fun for the whole family. With a wide-variety of restaurants to choose from, Terre Haute has something for every visitor.



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Indiana's second largest city — located in the heart of the Midwest. Our Downtown Convention package is connected, convenient, and affordable. Enjoy three full-service Hilton and Marriott properties attached to the Grand Wayne Convention Center with covered parking. Fort Wayne's signature boutique hotel, The Bradley, opened earlier this year as a partnership between Provenance Hotels and the co-founder of Vera Bradley Designs. Two premier event facilities are the Grand Wayne Convention Center, with over 225,000 sq. ft. of versatile space and two attached hotels in Downtown Fort Wayne, and the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum; one of the region's most popular venues for sports events, concerts, or gatherings for up to 10,000

Attendee entertainment abounds with TinCaps baseball at downtown's Parkview Field, Botanical Conservatory, Embassy Theatre (all three attached to the Grand Wayne Convention Center), Promenade Park at Riverfront Fort Wayne, Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Genealogy Center at the Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne Children's Zoo (one of the top 10 in the nation!), and high-end, affordable dining.



Visit Fort Wayne

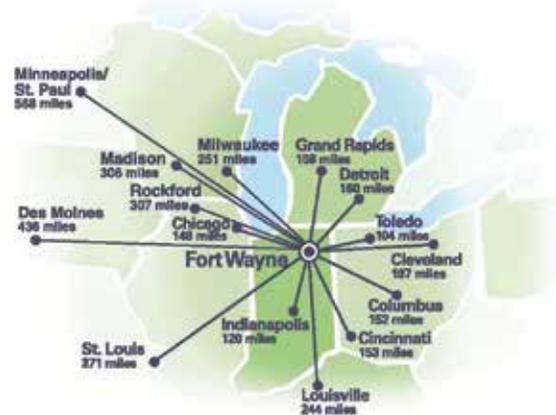
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INDIANA

“Grand Wayne Center is a stunning work of architecture with easy access to hotels, restaurants and entertainment. Our members were impressed with how clean, modern, walkable, and friendly downtown Fort Wayne, Indiana, proved to be.”

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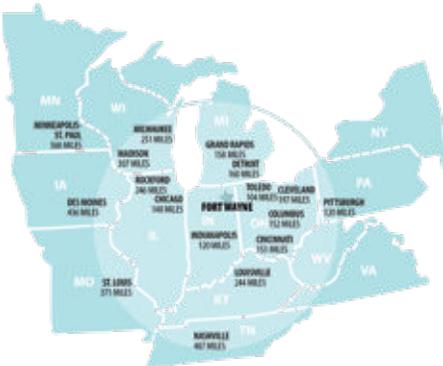
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RECAPTURING THE FORT

Say hello to the revitalized Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Historically and geographically, downtown Fort Wayne has always captivated the curious and connected its visitors with a dose of undeniable charm. Maybe it's the natural beauty of its three meandering rivers ... or it's convenient one-day, drive-to-proximity with half the U.S. population that welcomes guests back again and again. Whatever the reason, there's always more to discover and enjoy in this Midwestern gem known as downtown Fort Wayne, Indiana.

The resurgence to “recapture the Fort” is absolutely intentional. In downtown alone, a host of 60+ new restaurants, pubs, coffee houses, and cafes have burst onto the scene with fresh flavors, fresh flowers, and fresh faces everywhere. Arts and entertainment, shopping and sporting options are knocking it out of the park with a renewed sense of play; and boutiques, trendy hot spots, and relaxing riverside retreats offer guests easy options to fill the gaps.

REBOOKING THE FUTURE

Fort Wayne is reliably resilient and with a true sense of hospitality. Even the COVID conundrum could not quell Fort Wayne's commitment to remain clean, safe, inviting, and open. For event planners and their guests, Indiana's second largest city's award-winning Grand Wayne Convention Center (GWCC) remains one of the Midwest's most aesthetic and accommodating event venues, literally in the center of it all.

This acclaimed facility spans two city blocks in the heart of downtown Fort Wayne. With sleek, contemporary architecture; intuitive, easy-to-navigate floor plans; and fully in-house

professional services, GWCC is designed to simplify every event planner's job — and to create good memories for every guest. To that end, Grand Wayne Convention Center offers

- 225,000 square feet of remarkably accommodating, perfectly appointed space
- 18 carpeted event spaces, including a divisible Convention/Expo hall, ballrooms, banquet and meeting rooms
- In-house professional sales and event management, technology services, and catering
- Complimentary guest experiences and event enhancements, event hosts, and high-capacity WiFi
- 24/7 event engineering and room set staff

The result is Grand Wayne Convention Center's nearly 80% rebooking rate with capacities to serve 4,500 theatre style, 3,100 banquet guests, and 2,900 classroom attendees. Contributing to these event planners' desires to return to downtown Fort Wayne are four beautifully appointed, full-service hotels (6,000 guest rooms citywide), the Fort Wayne International Airport (FWA) within a convenient 8 miles, and the notable savings of up to 15% versus comparable destination cities.

More information about Grand Wayne Convention Center and downtown Fort Wayne, Indiana, is available online at grandwayne.com with clearly identified journey pages for event planners, exhibitors, and guests. It's all here and it's all good in downtown Fort Wayne's Grand Wayne Convention Center — where every event is beyond convention and beyond expectation!

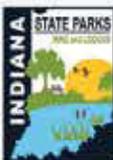
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BY KATH USITALO

MICHIGAN

Michigan is known as the Great Lakes State for the four freshwater seas — lakes Erie, Huron, Michigan and Superior — that form the Lower Peninsula’s “Mitten” and the sprawling and sparsely populated Upper Peninsula. The two parts of the state are connected only by the graceful, five-mile Mackinac Bridge, and are destinations with their own appeal for meetings, conventions, exhibitions and trade shows.

Detroit is home to the state’s largest exhibition center, located on the Detroit Riverfront, the

busy waterway that serves as the international border with Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Detroit’s lodging scene is dominated by the towering Marriott Renaissance Center and complemented by boutique hotels in reinvented 1920’s office buildings. The Motor City has a lively cultural scene that includes the world-class Detroit Institute of Arts; Hitsville USA, home of the Motown Sound; Detroit Symphony in the acoustically-perfect Orchestra Hall; The Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation; and Greenfield Village, where visitors can step inside the actual homes and

workplaces of famous Americans including the Wright Brothers and Thomas Edison.

The capital city of Lansing, as well as Grand Rapids, Ann Arbor and Kalamazoo, are urban centers with the cultural appeal, culinary variety and amenities of college towns. Traverse City, in the Mitten’s “Little Finger,” is a destination for a variety of meetings and conferences with easy access to top-rated golf courses, wineries, Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore and toast-worthy sunsets over Lake Michigan.



©Bill Bowen

Further north, in the Straits of Mackinac between the two peninsulas, the no-cars-allowed Mackinac Island is a step back into the 19th century. After arriving by ferry, island transportation is by bicycle or horse-drawn carriage, and hotels, restaurants, boutiques and fudge shops fill pastel Victorian buildings. Following a long day of meetings at the 1887 Grand Hotel, guests relax in quaint white rocking chairs that line the world’s longest porch. Marquette, the largest city in the Upper Peninsula, boasts impressive red sandstone architecture, brew pubs, cafes, shops and galleries within minutes of wilderness trails, multiple waterfalls, thick forests and dramatic, rocky Lake Superior shoreline. *M*



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DETROIT'S DYNAMIC DESTINATION

Events at M1 Concourse in Metro Detroit blend style and speed at the 28,500 sq. ft. event center, which recently opened on the 87-acre auto enthusiast playground. The state-of-the-art facility features indoor and outdoor spaces that overlook the 1.5 mile Champion Motor Speedway.

When combined with performance driving experiences, M1 can transform any event into a one-of-a-kind opportunity. Ride shotgun with a professional driver to get your heart racing at more than 100 mph or drive controlled laps behind the wheel of a performance vehicle. Alternatively, visitors may see M1's private garage owners speeding around the track in their exotic sports cars or historic race vehicles.

For meeting and event spaces, the Grand Concourse (6,200 sq. ft.) sets the pace for corporate social experiences, accommodating 350-500 guests. This ballroom basks in natural light thanks to massive windows that look onto the speedway. The windows open to allow vehicles and other showcase pieces to be displayed indoors. Furthermore, M1's catering partner can provide a menu to suit any palate.

"We wanted our new Event Center to be a unique facility in Metro Detroit for many different kinds of events," said Tim McGrane, CEO, M1 Concourse. "There are a lot of places where meetings and events can take place, but none quite like ours in this area. This is the Motor City, and we are providing a first-class event facility that celebrates the heritage of the automobile, and provides an opportunity for event planners to create an unforgettable

experience for their guests."

The Grand Concourse can be divided into three separate salons (2,800 sq. ft., 1,700 sq. ft. and 1,700 sq. ft.), each of which has an outdoor view and is fully equipped with audio/visual equipment.

The outdoor plaza that lies before the event center is 40,000 sq. ft. and can accommodate 2,500 individuals, numerous display vehicles and much more. Just steps away from the Grand Concourse ballroom is the two-story lounge that is highlighted by its floor-to-ceiling windows that open wide to incorporate a first-floor patio. Upstairs, the lounge's outdoor terrace provides an expansive view of the M1 homestead.

Yet another indoor/outdoor option at M1 is an event tent (6,000 sq. ft.) that can be easily incorporated into activities on track or the event center. Beside the event tent is 20,000 sq. ft. of outdoor trackside event experience space.

M1 is conveniently located just off the legendary Woodward Ave. in Pontiac, and is less than 35 miles from Detroit's Metropolitan International Airport, a major hub for travelers around the world. It is also less than 10 miles from Oakland County International Airport, a popular destination for private jet travel.

Complete details can be found at www.m1concourse.com. Contact Bruce Rothschild, Director of Event Sales, at brothschild@m1concourse.com for booking.

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MICHIGAN
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Find lodgings that fit your budget. As a vacation destination, we specialize in hospitality. There are several new and updated hotels and resorts in Benton Harbor, St. Joseph and Stevensville. Use our complimentary bid service for 10 or more rooms at swmichigan.org/planner to have us find the best room rates and amenities for you. Or, use our Book a Room service at swmichigan.org to do your own comparisons.

Meet in small breakout rooms to convention halls. Our hotels and large meeting venues provide anywhere from an intimate space for up to 32 guests to banquet and theater seating

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Strengthen your team or client relationships. Whether you are gelling a new team, solidifying long-time relationships or shaking up the status quo, you can customize your gathering with a wide range of team-building activities. Here's a small sampling:

- Take trail adventures. From leisurely riverbank walks to exhilarating dune climbs and swooping mountain bike trails, your team members can clear their heads. In winter, they can downhill ski, fat tire bike or cross-country ski.
- Taste craft beverages. Enjoy discovering the liquid artistry of our craft wineries, breweries, cideries and distilleries. Each destination is unique from hilltop vineyard views to cozy fireplaces.
- Watch legendary Lake Michigan sunsets. The sun performs a soul-stirring show nightly on our horizon. But when you meet by our waters, your attendees also can fish or kayak, tour our historic lighthouse, crew a sailboat or golf on courses designed for beginners to champions.

Make your planning job extra easy. Brandi at our Visitor Center is available to help with your planning.

Southwest
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IN & AROUND ST. JOSEPH

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A Michigan Treasure



BY KATH USITALO

This Midwest gem offers everything from urban excitement, a thriving arts and culture scene, and award-winning culinary experiences, to the charm and ease of smaller communities.

The Ohio tourism office invites visitors to “find it here,” promising that whatever it is you’re seeking, you’ll not be disappointed. In the Buckeye State you’ll find the Capital City of Columbus, with its eclectic neighborhoods and energy of Ohio State University; bucolic Amish country; the urban bustle of Cleveland, with the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame; and the beaches of the Great Lake Erie and the ferries that shuttle to Kelleys Island.

Find the cultural Queen City of Cincinnati; the sandstone cliffs, caves, boulders, gorges and waterfalls of the Hocking Hills; and waterways, hills and woods of Appalachian country. The 19 covered bridges of Ashtabula County are a step back in time, while Sandusky’s 151-year-old Cedar Point offers state-of-the-art amusement park thrills.

Meeting, convention and tradeshow planners can opt for the major exhibition spaces in Ohio’s largest cities of Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati, or smaller venues with urban amenities in Lima and Toledo.

Culture abounds at the Cincinnati Art Museum, which was called “The Art Palace of the West” when it opened in 1886, and the Toledo Museum of Art, known for its world class glass collection. Gracious Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens, the 65-room manor house of Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company co-founder F.A. Seiberling, is in Akron, and the historic homes of U.S. presidents, astronauts and innovators like Paul Laurence Dunbar and Thomas Edison welcome visitors. Find the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton; the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, the world’s oldest and largest military aviation museum, in Dayton; and the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati.

Indulge in Jeni’s Splendid Ice Creams to half-pound cream puffs, Lake Erie perch sandwiches and old world German Village sausages, and find refreshment in the lively coffee, cocktail and craft beer scenes emerging across Ohio. *M*

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