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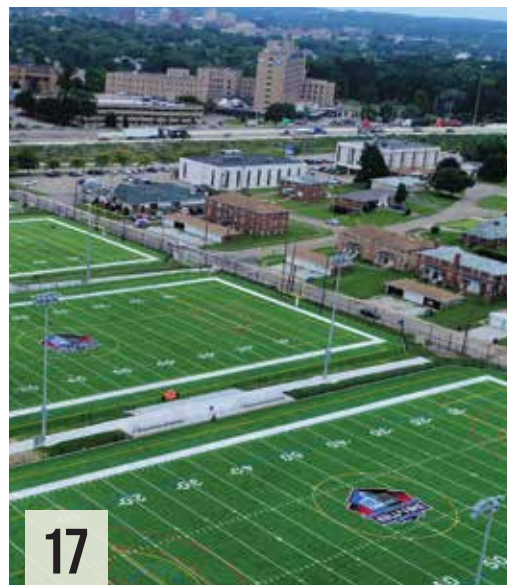
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Back to Business

For the first time in more than two years, meeting and event planners are finally getting back to business! While we may have had a few false starts in the past year, now, more than ever, planners are reporting a shift in attitude from both attendees and their organizations. There is overwhelming demand for in-person events. And recent surveys reflect this. Planners polled in surveys by Meeting Professionals International and Cvent/Northstar Meetings Group indicate some of the highest levels of optimism recorded in recent years for increases in the number of events planned for 2022 and 2023. People are ready to meet again!



While we continue to navigate the pandemic, planners are doing so with safety in mind. They continue to offer hybrid formats, allowing their content to be distributed to even larger audiences and for longer periods of time.

In this issue, we highlight the opportunities planners can seize when working with Midwest destinations and DMOs. From beautiful golf resorts that offer opportunities for networking and enjoyment to the sports venues that are in great demand, planners do not need to travel far to find state-of-the-art facilities that are accessible and affordable.

Looking for a great place to do a team brainstorm? Check out the creative Featured Spaces on pages 12-13. Want to make your life easier? Plan your next event at a resort where planning is streamlined with most needed services available on site. And wonder why your email marketing efforts aren't performing as well as hoped? Look for tips on how to boost engagement and effectiveness from writer Ronnie Wendt starting on page 32.

As always, I welcome your feedback. Please send your thoughts on this issue or what you'd like to see in future issues to me at bpeck@ntmediagroup.com.

Happy planning!

Becky Peck
Editor



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BOUTIQUE OPENS IN CENTRAL WISCONSIN

The Inn at SentryWorld, a boutique-style hotel recently opened in Stevens Point, Wis. The upscale property was built by Sentry Insurance and is located across the street from its Stevens Point headquarters on the SentryWorld campus and adjacent to the SentryWorld championship golf course. It features spacious suites and intimate gathering spaces.

“For more than 117 years, Sentry’s business has thrived on building relationships and delivering exceptional customer service,” says Pete McPartland, Sentry chairman of the board, president and CEO. “The Inn will allow us to provide our business insurance customers, agents and brokers a truly distinctive experience. What’s more, The Inn will offer a unique, unrivaled hospitality experience for those visiting the Stevens Point and central Wisconsin area.”

The Inn features 64 spacious guest rooms and suites, which have their own patio or terrace with seating — most facing the adjacent woods and SentryWorld golf course. In addition, there are a number of event/meeting spaces throughout the property.

UPDATES AT THE WILDERNESS IN WISCONSIN DELLS

A number of updates and renovations are taking place at the Wilderness Resort in Wisconsin Dells, Wis., in 2022. They include:

- The Wild West Waterpark will be adding two new slides and a new Wild West themed multi-level play and spray structure, among other



improvements to be completed by fall 2022.

- All 446 guest rooms will be renovated, which includes new paint, carpet, flooring, countertops, furniture, artwork and televisions. Renovations will be completed in late 2022.
- New escape room, Mission: Mars, opening this summer, takes participants on a journey to Mars to recover the 2004 NASA Rover Opportunity’s memory box and to repair the rover (which has gone silent since 2018). Participants will have just 30 minutes to complete the challenge before a solar storm arrives.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MUSEUM OPENS NEW SPACE

The Garage, an 8,000-square-foot event space, has opened at the Harley-Davidson Museum in



Milwaukee. The space features 14-foot, floor-to-ceiling glass doors that open up to the museum’s 20-acre, park-like campus, with amazing views of Downtown Milwaukee and the Menomonee River waterfront.

Additional updates are taking place at the retail Shop, which will soon offer an expanded collection of merchandise. And renovations are underway at the Experience Gallery, home to the impressive collection of exhibits at the H-D Museum.

SURVEY SHOWS EXPECTED INCREASE IN EVENT VOLUME



In a recently released survey conducted by Cvent and Northstar Media, planner optimism is high with 66% saying they are actively booking or sourcing events, a sharp increase from previous

surveys. And 81% say that their next event will take place within the next six months, also a recent high among surveyed meeting and event planners.

The survey, conducted among 463 planners in March, showed an increase in planner optimism of more than 50%, as compared to the previous survey conducted in January. Other takeaways from the survey show that bookings have resumed since January and rebookings have declined to near-normal levels. As for mask requirements, only 20% of those surveyed expect to enact mask requirements for their events.

To read the full report, scan the QR Code above.

THE LASALLE HOTEL TO OPEN IN JUNE

The Prime Group, Inc. and Aimbridge Hospitality have announced the planned opening of The LaSalle Hotel in early June, located in the center of Chicago’s Loop. Occupying the top five floors of the historic building at 208 S. LaSalle, adjacent to the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, the 232-room hotel will cater to business as well as leisure travelers.

Designed by DiLeonardo International and Chipman Design Architecture, the hotel has a classic Art Deco-style suited for the landmarked historic building originally designed by Daniel Burnham in 1920. Guests can explore dining options at the signature restaurant and lounge, Grill on 21. The luxury suites and guest rooms have elegant furnishings, millwork, cabinetry and large marble-clad bathrooms. Guests can spend time at the library or head to the solarium adjacent to the lobby. The hotel also features a fitness center and offers more than 7,500 square feet of ballroom and meeting space.

KIMPTON ANNOUNCES NEW EXECUTIVE CHEF



Brian Cripps has taken on the role of executive chef for The Kimpton Journeyman and its two restaurants, Tre Rivali and The Outsider, located in Milwaukee's Historic Third Ward neighborhood. Cripps' love of cooking started at a young age. He began his career at Laiola, a Spanish restaurant known for its bold Mediterranean flavors and continued to hone his skills

through Michelin-star restaurant experience. He joined Kimpton, Milwaukee, in 2021, where he now oversees daily operations and menu ideation for Tre Rivali and The Outsider. The Mediterranean-inspired menus are a nod to his roots, and he hopes to continue bringing seasonal, simple ingredients to guests and locals alike.

MEET CHICAGO NORTHWEST ELECTS BOARD

Meet Chicago Northwest, official destination marketing organization for Northwest Chicago, has announced officers and board of directors for 2022-23. Shirlanne Lemm, president of GOA Regional Business Association, will continue to serve as board chair. Other directors include: Past Chair, Dieter Heigl, Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Hotel; Vice-Chair, Michael Larson, Schaumburg Boomers; Vice-Chair, Christina Anderson-Heller, Lynfred Winery; Vice-Chair Trustee, John Scaletta, Village of Arlington Heights; Treasurer, Chuck Valenti, DoubleTree by Hilton Chicago Arlington Heights; Secretary, Trustee Patton Feichter, Village of Elk Grove; President/Ex-Officio, Heather Larson, Meet Chicago Northwest.


BOGGS TAKES LEADERSHIP OF VISIT FORT WAYNE

Jill Boggs has taken over as President and Chief Executive Officer of Visit Fort Wayne (Indiana),

succeeding Dan O'Connell who retired at the end of 2021. Boggs previously served as CEO of Kosciusko County Convention and Visitors Bureau. In her new role, Boggs will be responsible for the overall administration, supervision and operation of the DMO.



"I am honored to be selected as chief executive of the organization that represents Allen County and Fort Wayne as a vibrant destination in the visitor economy," Boggs said in a press release. "Having this opportunity to continue building upon a foundation of excellence, and to work alongside a team of experts, is quite frankly, a dream becoming reality."

Visit Fort Wayne is the official destination marketing organization for Fort Wayne and Allen County. Each year, over 6.5 million people visit Fort Wayne and generate \$741 million in direct economic impact. 



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The Relationship Builder

Tasha Squires is passionate about making connections

BY HYWANIA THOMPSON

Tasha Squires has always had a heart for service, so it's no surprise she was drawn to the hospitality industry. Squires has been in the industry for more than 20 years, serving in associate director of sales and sales director roles. She is a Certified Meeting Planner (CMP) and currently serves as the National Sales Manager at MGM Grand Detroit. In her role as National Sales Manager, Squires works to build relationships with customers and prospective customers to propel sales for the business. She also builds awareness and manages MGM Resorts International third party accounts who do business with MGM Grand Detroit, as well as mentors other sales managers.

Squires enjoys hearing customers' stories and seeing their vision for a meeting or event come to fruition. "I love to see the outcome," she says. One of the things Squires loves about her role is the opportunity to create unique experiences for guests. "Through collaboration and partnership, great working and lifelong relationships are built, and lastly, the opportunity to sell a superior product," she explains. "No one day is ever the same."

In the meetings industry, relationships are key. Squires stresses how important it is for everyone to work together to create great experiences. And that's the advice Squires would give to meeting professionals. She says "...building great working relationships through partnership, listening, transparency and collaboration. These efforts create mutual wins."

When it comes to relationship building, Squires does it well. She is involved in several professional organizations, including the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals (NCBMP). NCBMP is a nonprofit organization that provides training and education to African American meeting planners. Squires joined NCBMP in 2007 while working as a sales manager at The Westin Southfield Detroit. "NCBMP gave me the opportunity to meet industry leaders of color, who were leaders of national organizations, face to face," says Squires. "The education, community, networking, and most importantly, NCBMP's mission and vision aligned with my core values." Squires credits NCBMP for helping to book her very first national conference while at The Westin Southfield Detroit.



The NCBMP hosts the largest African American Hospitality Industry Conference. Squires says the organization does a good job making sure there's a mix of suppliers and meeting planners. Squires believes the education received at the conference is relevant and aligns with current industry information. "This ensures that people of color are knowledgeable and equipped," she says.

Organizations like the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals are important for Brown and Black people working in their specific industries. The value of these organizations is not lost on Squires. The NCBMP allows underrepresented industry professionals to come together to share ideas, network, discuss strategies and address challenges. When this is accomplished, the meeting professional can return to their organization revived, energized and equipped to introduce new perspectives and ideas.

Squires co-chairs the NCBMP membership committee. Along with her co-chair, they keep committee members engaged and tap into their passions when it comes to doing the work. "When people do things that they're passionate about, the sky's the limit and that's what we're able to do with the membership committee," Squires explains.

Last year, Squires won the Charles H. Wright - Supplier Award for her work as co-chair of the committee. She says it was an honor to receive the award. "This award means so much to me, due in part to whom the award is named, and most importantly, to be looked upon by the NCBMP board, for my service to the membership committee," says Squires. She's continuing her role as co-chair of the committee this year.

The COVID-19 pandemic put a strain on the meetings industry and its suppliers, as events were canceled or postponed. Now, with many restrictions lifted, events are back. Over the last two years, Squires has seen many in her industry come together to get through this tough time. Something she'd seen happen before, following September 11, 2001. "The world stopped, the situation caused our industry professionals to think outside the box, really use our know-how to create and be innovative in how we do business. I saw many good things come out of the pandemic. Our industry has not fully recovered, but the hospitality community is resilient," says Squires. *M*



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Pictured: Holiday Inn Express
and Janesville Conference Center

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Creative Collaboration

These spaces will inspire your team.

BY KRISTINE HANSEN

What better place to fire up and energize your team than in a space dedicated to creative use? Whether it's a co-working space in Chicago's trend-setting Fulton Market or a whimsical children's museum truly designed for all ages, there are plenty of spots like this throughout the Midwest. Interior design is strong and often it's in an historic, thoughtfully renovated building given a new lease on life.

These intimately sized venues are ideal for team-building, brainstorming, strategizing or hosting a retreat, without the fancy frills of a ballroom or more traditional setting. Because the creators were also thinking outside of the box in designing these spaces, you can easily feed off of that energy. You may finally get unstuck on a business strategy or hit upon the brilliant idea you've been searching for while in one of these spaces.

In addition to cultivating a cozy, home-like vibe, many also feature outdoor spaces to further stretch out and perhaps host a yoga session or cocktail hour — your choice.

CITY MUSEUM, ST. LOUIS

Anything and everything can be reused at City Museum, and that includes a bank vault on the second floor, built into the 10-story, 600,000-square-foot warehouse's design. Guests can walk right on into the vault. What was once the International Shoe Company, says marketing supervisor Nancy Celedon Ortega, "is a mixture of children's playground, funhouse, surrealistic pavilion, and architectural marvel made out of found and repurposed objects." The museum opened 25 years ago by artist and sculptor Bob Cassilly and his wife, Gail. It hosts private events for groups as small as 40 and as large as 400. On the first floor is an oceanic and jungle themed, ultra-dimensional backdrop, while on the second floor are a marble bar and the aforementioned bank vault. Then, on the third floor is a spot suited for antiques lovers and history buffs, due to the salvaged architectural pieces. Rental fees include museum admission. You might be so lucky as to arrive on an evening this July and August when the City Nights rooftop series returns, bringing live music, light-projection shows, DJs and retail from artists and makers.



City Museum



Machine Shop/©Janelle Elise Photography

MACHINE SHOP, MINNEAPOLIS

Tucked into Pillsbury Mill's former machine shop, the aptly named Machine Shop reopened in 2016 — a century later — as a result of three investors tapping into the wisdom of groups like the State Historic Preservation Office. Just like in its earlier days, natural sunlight floods the 19,000-square-foot space via 193 windows. As a nod to the building's history, some pieces of equipment were retained during the restoration process, as a reminder of its first chapter. Spanning two levels, between 100 and 1,000 people can be hosted for an event. On the first level the Break Room Lounge is bookable for private events and features high ceilings, leather furnishings, Soviet-era chandeliers and walls crafted from barn wood. Then, on the upper level is a mezzanine that's included with private-event rentals, making for an airy space with an amazing view. Movable wood walls create lots of ability to customize the spaces even further. Portable bars — as opposed to a fixed location — allow you to always have drinks on hand and nearby.

WORKING FROM FULTON MARKET, CHICAGO

Formerly a neighborhood stocked with meat-packing plants, within the last decade, the streets of this near-west enclave have since become lined with celebrity-chef restaurants (such as Stephanie Izard's Girl & the Goat and Grant Achatz's and Nick Kokonas' Next) and trendy boutique hotels. Working From is a members-only, co-working



Work From Fulton Market

space on the third and fourth floors of The Hoxton, Chicago, filled with open-shelf bookshelves artfully arranged with plants and cloth-bound antique books. When it's warm, the outdoor terrace opens, providing space to congregate around fire pits. For overnight accommodations linked to an event, it doesn't get any easier than booking rooms at The Hoxton, Chicago, below, which also features two restaurants/bars — one on the ground floor

and one on the rooftop. Both are operated by the locally famous Boka Restaurant Group. Groups can opt to use just one of the four conference rooms, home to flat-screen TVs, white boards and video conferencing. Food can be catered through Cira, The Hoxton's lobby restaurant. Coffee and tea service, as well as snacks, are available to anyone using Working From. Like Working From's main space, each conference room is outfitted with art on the



The Living Room

walls, a sideboard and other details that make it feel more like a living room than a conference room. Each can fit between four and 10 people.

VISIONLOFT, INDIANAPOLIS

"This building was built in the late 1800s and used to be a livery. We bought the building and designed and renovated it ourselves," says Julie Johnston, VisionLoft's co-owner with her husband, Don. Both have decades of experience in the business world and, by opening this space, want to give back to entrepreneurs. People can come here to collaborate on business ideas as well as create innovation in small groups. The blend of modern design and historic features is right in downtown Indy close to hotels, shopping and restaurants. VisionLoft's list of preferred caterers, however, means attendees never need to leave the building so they can hunker down and focus on their meeting. There is also a full-service bar available with any event rental. In addition to weddings and parties, a common reason for a group to book the space is for a product launch or non-profit benefit.

THE LIVING ROOM, CINCINNATI

Like Working From in Chicago, The Living Room functions mostly as a co-working space — and not many people realize it can also be rented for meetings and events. In 2017, The Living Room transferred to new owners, father and son, Jerry and Joey Haselmeyer, who rebranded to the new name shortly after. Within the 12,000 square feet of space, spread across more than one building, are four "living room" areas dedicated to private events. A popular use of the space is for hosting focus groups designed for companies to gather customer data. Instead of a one-way mirror, a live video stream — and a dedicated suite on the second floor, away from the focus group — allows a company's employees to observe how potential customers react to their product or service. Local companies wishing to host product or food tastings have also found The Living Room to be accommodating. The Living Room will even provide on-site facilitators and moderators for a group's meeting, avoiding the possibility of some employees not getting the full benefit as they are leading more than they are participating. *M*



VisionLoft

Planned Reset

Tips for incorporating wellness into your next meeting

BY AMANDA N. WEGNER



Meetings and events provide excellent opportunities for individuals to learn, network, foster relationships, celebrate success and more. But because these activities require deep thinking, active listening and authentic engagement, it's a good practice to balance them with opportunities to relax and reset. And one way to do that is to incorporate wellness into your meetings and events.

"These practices help us to cultivate greater resilience so that we can bounce back more quickly from adversity," says Stephanie Wagner, a meditation teacher and program specialist at Healthy Minds Innovations, a nonprofit affiliated with the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin-Madison that translates science into tools to cultivate and measure well-being.

So how can event planners bring these benefits to meeting attendees?

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE AND WHAT THEY WANT

As you're planning the event, ask attendees what they are interested in via the registration form or pre-event surveys. "You don't want to just throw things at the wall to see what sticks," says Ashley Johnson, a benefits advisor with insurance firm Vizance and a wellness specialist. "You want to meet people where they're at."

Another way to get input and build a culture of wellness is to form a wellness committee to help ensure that the wellness programming is based on what participants want and need, suggests Shannon Dentice, a master certified health coach and owner of E&E Health Coaching.

It's also important to take your audience and the platform for the meeting into account, says Wagner. "You wouldn't teach a group of people wearing business suits a five-minute kickboxing routine. You want to consider the group's overall attitude and well-being literacy."

SMALL CAN MAKE A BIG IMPACT

"Wellness is something you can do in smaller increments and do through an event," says Johnson. "When you sprinkle it in, you can bring different ideas, offer variety and engage participants in different ways."

For instance, Wagner suggests giving participants the time and space to take deep breaths, stand or lead a brief stretch break. Offer a conference room where participants can stop by to stomp out stress with more physical activity.

Wagner also offers her organization's Healthy Minds Program app, which offers five-minute practices that can help set the tone for the meeting.

Room setup and meeting format can also help facilitate wellness. "One of the easiest ideas for extra movement is to give participants an option to walk and talk about ideas rather than sitting and sharing," suggests Dentice. "The great thing about walking is that it helps increase creative thinking!"

If a task involves brainstorming, participants could sneak in extra movement by adding their ideas to large pieces of chart paper scattered throughout the room.

FOOD IS FUEL

Typical event foods like pastries, cookies, juices and soda can be loaded with sugar, sodium or fat. To facilitate attendee well-being and good nutrition, consider offering healthier options for breaks and meals.

Dentice suggests setting up a water station with various garnishes such as berries, cucumber, lemon/lime and mint leaves to encourage hydration. "To make it extra fun, challenge participants to try a little of each flavor throughout the meeting or event, and everyone who participates can put their name in a drawing for a fun prize!"

CHECK IN ON MENTAL HEALTH

Be sure to check in on participants to see how they are feeling mentally, especially if the event is a training with lots of information or a discussion about a difficult topic. This could be done through a quick, anonymous polling tool. "If participants are exhausted for the day, it might be best to set the topic aside for a different time, if possible, which will be more productive for everyone in the long run," suggests Dentice.

Wellness is even more top of mind after the past two years. Show your commitment to your attendees' well-being by incorporating some of these simple suggestions. *M*

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Youth Sports Market Heats Up

DMOs compete to attract youth sporting events with great venues, key messaging and attractive sponsorships.

BY RONNIE WENDT

Pandemic or no pandemic, the youth sports market is hot — and growing, say Midwest DMOs.

The \$19.2 billion youth and amateur sports industry has seen steady growth since the early 2000s, reports Wintergreen Research Inc. Today, 73.4% of children ages 13-17 play a team or individual sport regularly, finds Aspen Project Play.

These trends stayed strong even during the pandemic. In fact, youth sports became the meeting industry's bread and butter during the pandemic, according to Nathan Hermiston, senior vice president of convention sales and services for Visit KC in Kansas City, Mo.

Matt Ten Haken, director of sports marketing for the Fox Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau in Appleton, Wis., echoes this sentiment, noting 2021 was among the Top 5 sports tourism generating years for the Fox Cities.

Trina Flack, CMP, president of sales for Catch Des Moines, says youth sports never slowed during the pandemic in the Greater Des Moines area. In fact, the city hosted events throughout 2020.

“We saw strong participation,” she adds, “parents wanted their kids to get out and compete. We secured events other states couldn’t host. It provided a boost that kept many hotels and restaurants open.”

Hermiston attributes the strength of youth sports — even during the pandemic — to a couple of things. First, as COVID-19 concerns escalated, people saw the outdoors as a safe place to meet. Sports — from baseball to softball and soccer — can take place outside. Second, many parents wanted children to have an outlet, and for many, COVID-19 presented less risk to children, so they were willing to travel to compete.

Looking ahead, all three remain bullish about the 2022 youth sports market. “There’s a tremendous appetite to get out and play,” Flack says. “It’s going to be a strong year.”

Ten Haken agrees, “The Fox Cities saw a huge bump in sports events in the first quarter, so we think 2022 will be better than 2021 by a lot.”

MORE THAN FACILITIES

Travel + Leisure recognizes Kansas City as one of the Top 10 Cities for Sports-Crazed Fans with good reason. The metro area includes award-winning professional sports stadiums, state-of-the-art convention facilities, and modern multi-functional arenas.

But even with an impressive network of competition facilities and a strong youth sports presence, Hermiston says the

community — which has hosted more Final Four basketball tournament games than any other city — is not resting on its laurels.

“We are reinforcing the value of Kansas City, that it’s in the Heartland of America, making it easy to drive and fly to, and has ample facilities,” he says. “We are considered the soccer capital of the U.S. and offer amazing facilities for games. We also have great facilities for baseball, lacrosse and other sports.”

Visit KC promotions also center on two new projects in the works: the \$43 million, 12-field Northwind Soccer Complex and the \$35 million, 10-field Kansas City Central Bank Sporting Complex opening this fall. The city also will host the Sports Events and Tourism Association’s National Symposium in May 2023. That too will be a “fantastic opportunity for us



Courtesy of Visit KC



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to showcase the investments that have taken place since 2020,” he adds.

Catch Des Moines also stepped up its promotional efforts. Iowa’s capital city hosted the Nike Tournament of Champions in 2020, when Chicago could not. Holding this prestigious interscholastic and club basketball tournament put the city squarely on the youth sports map.

The enthusiasm continues as the community’s MidAmerican Energy Company RecPlex captures national attention. The multi-sport facility offers over 300,000 air-conditioned square feet with two NHL-size hockey rinks; four 94-foot basketball courts that can convert into eight volleyball courts; two dedicated pickle ball courts with three more available when using one of the basketball courts; and a regulation indoor turf field appropriate for soccer, softball, lacrosse or rugby. The new facility has allowed Iowa’s capital city to double the size of events it hosts and provides a championship venue for events like the NAIA Men’s Volleyball Championships.

Des Moines upped its marketing to attract more events to this complex, as well as

its other facilities. The Catch Des Moines marketing team focuses efforts on video segments and other creatives. “We looked at our attendees, our buyers and the social platforms they use,” Flack says. “Now we use every platform available and change our messaging to reflect whether we are targeting a planner or an attendee.”

The Fox Cities focuses marketing efforts on events for 10- to 18-year-olds. In the summer, these include soccer, baseball and softball, and in the winter, basketball, volleyball and hockey.

The CVB shines a spotlight on community facilities to attract these events. Premier facilities include the Community First Champion Center, offering up to eight basketball hardwood courts, 12 volleyball courts or two ice rinks with seating; the Neuroscience Group Field, home of minor league baseball team, the Timber Rattlers, which also opens its field to outdoor youth sporting events; and the popular Scheels USA Youth Sports Complex.

However, facilities alone cannot tell the full story Ten Haken explains. “We

also stress the overall community when talking to planners and sports directors,” he says. “We talk about affordability, drivability and safety because they are the things families traveling for sports want. Fox Cities checks all three boxes.”

Canton, Ohio, also expects youth sports to grow in 2022 and Visit Canton actively chases new events. “Sports events have been a consistent base of business in Stark County, helping to buoy the destination throughout the pandemic,” stresses Mary Vlahos, Visit Canton vice president of sales.

The community of 70,000, just an hour south of Cleveland, draws visitors to its Pro Football Hall of Fame, but it is the youth sports infrastructure around the Hall that attracts families and sports teams, she says. This infrastructure includes the Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium, a 22,000-seat professional-caliber stadium with a press box, club lounge, suites and hospitality space; the Hall of Fame Village Sports Complex with four turf fields and a grass field stadium (it will add three more turf fields in 2022); and The Performance Center, an 85,000-square-foot indoor space for youth sports.

Hall of Fame Village Sports Complex/Courtesy Visit Canton



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Scheels Soccer Complex/Courtesy Visit KC

But again, impressive facilities alone do not attract youth sports. It's also vital to tell the community's story, Vlahos shares. "Planners want to ensure these destinations are easy to get to via airport or nearby interstates," she says. "Canton is centrally located to the East Coast and Midwest population and easily accessible by highway or by air."

Planners also want professional service and convenience. Visit Canton brings its full resources to bear for every sporting event, helping planners find vendors and professional services, lodging and more, she adds.

Long famous as a vacation destination, Branson became home to Ballparks of America, a park where youth athletes can play ball at five different replicas of America's most iconic stadiums, in 2016. The facility has hosted major tournaments, including the Babe Ruth League's Cal Ripken Major and the 7- to 12-year-old World Series, and it continues to attract major events.

But Terra Alphonso, director of sports events and marketing for Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce & CVB and Taney County Partnership, says they focus messaging on the community's family appeal, which includes three area lakes, dozens of attractions, and a vast array of family-friendly lodging.

Indianapolis is another attractive youth sports destination that presents plenty for families being home to the world's largest children's museum and a plethora of war museums. Conde Nast Traveler named Indianapolis as the most "Under-rated City in America" in 2021. It offers 8,000 hotel rooms connected to or within walking distance of Lucas Oil Stadium, restaurants and other attractions.

"Indy was built to host major sporting events and continues to excel in this area," says Nate Swick, senior communications manager for Visit Indy.

"Indy spent much of 2020 and 2021 catering toward large-scale sports tournaments and events including youth volleyball and basketball tournaments," he says. "We transformed the Indiana Convention Center ballrooms and meeting rooms into dozens of courts throughout the building. Indy also played host to the 2021 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament in its entirety."

SPEAKING OF SPONSORSHIPS

Sponsorships help draw youth sports to communities like Kansas City, Des Moines and others.

The Fox Cities, for instance, offers a grant program to support new or growing events. The CVB uses these funds to offset the costs of facility rentals, other expenses and bid fees. "If there is an

event that comes in with a bid fee, we can help reduce or totally cover those fees," Ten Haken says.

Des Moines partners with its corporate base, restaurants and attractions to create packages that appeal to attendees and organizers of youth sports events, according to Flack.

"It is expensive to put on these events. There are a lot of details that go into them. We look for ways we can offset specific costs," she says, noting that may involve getting creative with a specific space, finding local vendors, arranging tents on the ground or even shuttle or bus transportation.

Kansas City endeavors to keep families focused on the competitions, by helping planners arrange suitable housing at affordable price points.

"We then work with housing companies to develop sponsorships that highlight the tournament and make sure the tournament has the correct financial package in place," Hermiston says. "By working with housing companies in this way, we can track event ROI and see where teams are spending their money."

An additional value Kansas City and Missouri provides is the Missouri Department of Economic Development – Amateur Sporting Tax Credit Program. This is a program designed to promote the growth of Missouri's economy by incentivizing the selection of competitively bid amateur sporting events in Missouri. It allows for tax credits of \$5 per admission ticket sold or \$10 per paid participant. The grant is funded to the tune of \$3 million annually for the state of Missouri.

Visit Canton offers event sponsorships via grants for youth sporting events. It distributes funds based on the scale and expected economic impact of the event. "Interested event holders are encouraged to reach out directly for assistance and consideration," Vlahos adds.

Youth sports events are hot, hot, hot. Midwestern cities stand ready to deliver facilities and amenities that make these states "the" place to compete. *M*

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Grand Hotel

Resort Retreats

Discover a destination that offers turnkey services for your group

BY PAULA HENDRICKSON

Whether they're luxurious, restful or rustic, resorts offer guests a chance to get away from the daily grind while allowing others to take care of the details. That makes resorts a great option for business meetings and conferences.



Grand Hotel



Grand Hotel

Most resorts have in-house event planners ready to coordinate gatherings of any size, many offer on-site activities, and all can provide a central location that eliminates the logistical challenges of transporting attendees to and from multiple venues. On-site catering is also a plus.

“We’ve had corporate events that hosted interviews for only two people, and we’ve had events where we maxed out at 250,” says Arielle Niemeyer, marketing director of **Pere Marquette Lodge & Conference Center** in Grafton, Ill.

Niemeyer says the resort’s on-site event planner has been coordinating events for over 15 years. “Tell us the date you’re look-

ing at and pick menu options. Other than that, we really take care of everything, so it’s stress free.” You can opt to house attendees in the hotel or its 22 original rustic cabins located a few yards away.

If you’re looking for the opportunity to disconnect, then consider an island where time seems to slow down. On Mackinac Island, located just off Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, cars are prohibited, and visitors tour the island via foot, bicycle or even horse-drawn carriage.

“**Grand Hotel** offers modern amenities and venues in a historic setting that are

designed to inspire, creating one-of-a-kind experiences for your attendees,” says Jen Moeckel, director of sales at Grand Hotel, which is accessible via frequent ferryboat service. “Our professional conference services team will assist in planning the details to ensure your attendees have a truly ‘grand’ experience.”

Gunflint Lodge & Outfitters, a 97-year-old resort near Grand Marais, Minn., offers one-stop-shopping. Its events coordinator, guest services manager and restaurant manager collaborate to ensure all your needs are met. It specializes in hosting groups up to 144 in well-appointed,



Pere Marquette Lodge & Conference Center



Pere Marquette Lodge & Conference Center

year-round cabins; in warmer months it can accommodate 45 more in rustic seasonal cabins.

“We have small spaces that are ideal for board meetings, executive meetings or presidents’ clubs,” says Gunflint co-owner Mindy Fredrikson. “Because we’re small and family-owned, we have the ability to provide a lot of attention and deliver a custom event that’s not like anything they’re going to find any place else.”

MEETING AMENITIES

Grand Hotel’s convention rates include meeting spaces, access to an extensive



Gunflint Lodge & Outfitters

selection of AV equipment, banquet music and even tennis court time. With a combined 22,000 square feet of meeting space, it can accommodate groups from 12 to 1,000.

At Pere Marquette every detail is custom planned, right down to refreshments. “Some want to do breakfast and lunch and let their guests go to dinner on their own. Others might want something simple like snacks or coffee. We can

accommodate full catering, full bar service, whatever they want,” Niemeyer says.

Due to Gunflint’s remote locale — it abuts the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, which is over a million acres of undeveloped wilderness — Fredrikson recommends requesting any special AV equipment ahead of time. “We definitely have the technology, solid Wi-Fi and AV equipment for our large event center, but we want to make sure everything is set up and ready.”



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ACTIVITIES

In addition to tennis, The Grand Hotel offers a wide range of activities, from golf, horseback riding and biking to a relaxing spa. The Woodlands Activity Center is home to a BMX course, lawn games, archery and there's mini-golfing in the forest.

"Iconic views, world-class cuisine and stellar service will allow your guests to be productive and make this an unforgettable destination," Moeckel says.

When attendees aren't working at Pere Marquette, groups can opt for guided hikes through the 8,000-acre state park that surrounds the resort, sample local wines in the lodge's Mary Michelle Winery, enjoy a sauna or even play chess on a life-size chessboard.

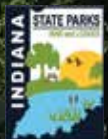
Gunflint's activities vary by season, but there's always plenty to do. "Whether you want yoga or massage or forest bathing, we're able to craft experiences for whatever our guests want. We can be very inclusive in putting together packages with everything you want, right up to teambuilding activities on our zipline," Fredrikson says. "It's not going to be a cookie-cutter experience. It's going to be a unique and special experience crafted to a small group." *M*



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Email Know-How

How to successfully use email marketing to increase event attendance.

BY MAURA KELLER

The email inbox has always been a direct line of communication between consumers and retailers. Now email marketing is being used for all facets of communication within the meetings and event industry. Thanks in part to the proliferation of mobile devices, advanced email marketing tools, and the need for relevant and personal content — meeting industry professionals are using strategic email marketing campaigns to connect with potential attendees in new and engaging ways.

According to Kim Pearlstein, CEO of Pearlmark, a strategic marketing solutions company, over the last several years and due to the pandemic, more businesses are realizing the value of email marketing.

“It is one of the best and most cost-effective forms of marketing, with an amazing ROI — \$36 for every dollar spent,” Pearlstein says. That’s why savvy meeting and event planners are also targeting potential attendees with better engagement by delivering contextually relevant email.

“Email marketing providers continue to offer new features that make it easy and efficient for businesses to stay top-of-mind with their connections and share products, services and events,” Pearlstein says. “And the number one app on a smartphone is email. In fact, 99% of email users check their inbox every day, with some checking 20 times a day. Of those people, 58% of consumers check their email first thing in the

morning. So, using email marketing is one of the best decisions you can make — you are reaching people where they live — in their inbox.”

CONNECTING WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

Brent Turner, executive vice president, strategy and solutions at Opus Agency, a global agency delivering premier experiences, says that from picking a technology platform to developing core strategies, success in any email marketing campaign starts with the basics. First, begin by creating core audience segmentations. “At its simplest, these are the starter lists: Has Attended in Past, Has Not Attended Yet and Has Registered. As the teams advance, these segmentations often get more specific and focused; however, we recommend a maximum of six-to-seven segmentations,” Turner says.

Once the audience segmentations are set, Turner and the Opus Agency team design the email marketing messaging “flights.”

These typically are aligned with the expected event marketing playbook — like ticket price changes and speaker announcements. Event teams may add more flights as programs advance, including flights that align to specific segments.

If your email recipient lists have been built over time or were created through an amalgamation of sources, then you may be sending emails to people who do not remember signing up for communications from your company or for the event being planned. At best, these people may ignore your communications. At worst, they report your messages as spam and unsubscribe.

To combat the potential subscriber confusion, Turner recommends two approaches. First, for any emails from older lists, send a “warm-up” note that helps them connect the dots and remember their connection. Then, on ongoing emails, it is good to include a reminder. These can say something along the lines of “You are receiving this email because you subscribed to our brand in June 2017.”

Pearlstein points out that you can grow your email list in many ways. However, there are laws that govern how you can email prospects. So, you must get express consent and let your contacts know that they can unsubscribe at any time.

So what are the best ways to gather potential email recipients for events? Pearlstein’s recommendations include:

- **Via a website:**
Have a pop-up, dedicated area, or page on the meeting or event’s website or the website of the organization hosting the event, explaining why someone would want to subscribe to the email list. Tell people what they will get in their inbox and how it will benefit them.
- **Collect email addresses before and during events:**
When people register for the event, make sure to provide a check box for them to select if they’d like to receive email communications. You can also give away business cards and swag at an event in exchange for email addresses.
- **Add a QR scannable sign-up code to printed materials:**
Print the code on a business card, brochures, paper ads and posters. Anyone who scans the code can be automatically added to the email marketing list.
- **Advertise the event online or in printed publications:**
Drive people to the event by purchasing an ad. Send them to a registration page where they can also subscribe to the event’s email list and receive future emails from the event’s organizers.

CONTENT IS KEY

Many event professionals tend to communicate the “what” when developing an email campaign. They promote the dates, speakers, sessions and location. But as Turner points out, with this focus on features and tactics, planners often miss what’s key to getting someone to take action: benefits and value.

“When you start to design your next campaign, build a message map that begins with clear benefits and a single-minded focus on the value your event is providing,”

— Brent Turner, Opus Agency

“When you start to design your next campaign, build a message map that begins with clear benefits and a single-minded focus on the value your event is providing,” Turner says.

Also, when picking templates and structuring content, it is best to start “mobile-first.” This pushes teams to quickly hit most of the modern best practices for email marketing. As Turner explains, in a mobile-first approach, planners are more likely to be to the point with both words and visuals. By keeping the copy short and the visuals streamlined, emails are naturally more approachable and digestible — on phones and desktops.

“Explore using ‘social proof’ to drive persuasion. This includes featuring peers, like testimonials from past events or names of people attending the next event, and connecting your email campaign to social media initiatives through tools like Snoball — a favorite event marketing partner of ours here at Opus Agency,” Turner says.

Pearlstein also recommends following the 80/20 rule: 80% of the content you provide should be information that is valuable to your subscribers, while 20% can be promotional. Also be sure to keep the paragraphs short and include a “read more” link so you know if the person is interested in the content you have shared.

“Include a clear call-to-action above the scroll line,” Pearlstein says. Providing relevant, informative content to your audience helps establish your credibility and makes your prospects more likely to read the emails. Subscribers will be more likely to open the emails to see what is being shared, which also can prompt them to sign up for an event, purchase tickets and share the email with a friend.

“Make sure that the words you choose are concise, compelling, unique and provide value,” Pearlstein says.

And as far as including graphics in email marketing campaigns, remember using too many images can be distracting and make the email too long, so use one to three photos that relate to the email’s content. Pearlstein advises that you make the images clickable to send them to a website or landing page and make sure the email template matches the company’s brand.

“Yes, images are important,” Pearlstein says. “You want to catch the reader’s eyes. Good graphics should support the message and may make it easier to understand the content. They can also motivate readers to feel or do something.” However, Madeline Raithel, communication specialist at Entire Productions, says a lot of graphics will slow down the page speed or not translate well to mobile applications where 40% of emails are opened.

“That being said, a good graphic with valuable information that looks good on mobile is great, but certainly not needed,” Raithel adds. “We like to include a fun picture or two from past events that we resize within our email marketing platform to fit mobile screens.”

Also, as far as hyperlinks, try not to include your link right up front and don’t flood your copy with a ton of links. “Ideally, you should be hyperlinking one or two really important links that help mobilize users to your call-to-action,” says Raithel. “Including the link right away ensures that the person will immediately leave your newsletter and miss the rest of your valuable content. That being said, make sure your links go to open a new window so users can easily navigate back to the newsletter.”

“It [email] is one of the best and most cost-effective forms of marketing, with an amazing ROI.”

— Kim Pearlstein, CEO, Pearlmart

SUBJECT LINES THAT WORK

So you’ve written the content for your monthly marketing email, announcing the latest and greatest in an upcoming conference or tradeshow. Now you’re faced with the task of crafting a compelling and irresistible email subject line that entices recipients to open it. Sound familiar?

The good news is that by employing the right strategies you can craft powerful subject lines that will grab the attention of your recipients each and every time. So how do you create subject lines that truly stand out from the crowd?

- **Use appropriate language:** One of the most important things to do is use the language of the recipient. Take whatever the subject of the email is and do some research in a free tool like Google Adwords or Google Wonder Wheel to see what other words and phrases people use to describe your topic.
- **Make it timely:** Send email when people want it and stay present. Include info within the subject line that indicates it is a timely topic. Many companies make the mistake of gathering emails, then sending out a communication four months later and wonder why everyone marks it as spam.

- **Make it targeted:** One of the biggest mistakes made in email marketing is not sending targeted, segmented emails. If you have information about a recipient’s preferences, send them specific follow-up emails. For example, if you know someone is to attend an outdoor retail convention in Colorado, don’t send her a mass email about an association convention in Miami that would not be relevant.
- **Make it short and sweet:** Conventional wisdom says that all subject lines should be five to eight words and no more than 40 characters long because some email recipients will “tune out” the rest. Make each word within your subject line really count.
- **“It’s a good idea to ask a question or provide tips.** Think about sharing a statistic or providing a tip that would make you interested in learning more about the topic,” Pearlstein says.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

For event planning, experts advise that the first email should be sent at least six weeks in advance — earlier if travel is required to attend the event. With that schedule, Pearlstein recommends sending one to two emails a week for the first four weeks and then two to three times a week after that, until the event date.

“To determine the best day/time to send your emails, understand your audience and see what works for them — experiment, segment your list and test some options. Since every business is different, the same time may not work for everyone,” Pearlstein says.

One strategy to use is a drip campaign, which is a series of automated emails you set up in advance. This helps you stay engaged with your contacts through a steady stream of valuable communication. It also saves you time, because you set up the emails and create the sending schedule in advance, so you can “set it and forget it.”

“I recommend sending the series with one to three days in between each email. More advanced email platforms enable the automated emails to send people on different paths, depending on the actions they take with your email,” Pearlstein says.

And while there are many email marketing tools available today, including MailChimp, EventBrite and Constant Contact, the best platform is the one with the features you need and can afford.

Whatever tool you choose, make sure you include a link to “add to calendar.” “We hate having to create our own calendar reminders only to be waiting the day of the event to receive any info on how to access the event,” Raithel says. “Don’t be this person. Simply Google how to create an add to calendar link if you’re not sure how and include the link to the meeting.”

As you know, it is a lot of work to create and promote events. Pearlstein says it’s important to have enough time to effectively market the event so you can achieve your goals. “In addition, don’t rely solely on email marketing,” Pearlstein says. “Use social media and other online advertising tools (free or paid), and don’t underestimate the power of asking your network to share your event to their contacts, using their email lists and connections.”

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Par for the Course

10 tips to make your golf event a memorable success

BY GREG GERBER



PFAU Course

With weather getting warmer and days getting longer, now is the time to start planning a golf outing for your organization. Whether it's a way to connect colleagues, raise money or just have fun, here are some important considerations to make your event a memorable success.

1. WHAT'S THE PURPOSE?

What you hope to gain through the event will influence planning. Whether creating networking opportunities between staff and customers, building awareness of a product or service, or improving relationships among staff, start by envisioning the ideal end results.

2. WHO WILL ATTEND?

There will be a big difference in tone and atmosphere if the event targets people who frequently golf, those who haven't picked up a club in years or a combination of skill levels.



Ozarks National at Big Cedar Lodge

“Above all, planners must keep in mind their guests’ overall experience and enjoyment,” says Justin Gephart, director of sales for Destination Kohler, home to Whistling Straits Golf Course. “Golf portions should be challenging enough for experienced players, but also a day of fun for those who are not.”

3. WHERE WILL IT BE HELD?

Are you hoping people will disconnect from the office for a day of fun, or will the tournament kickoff a conference where people are there to collaborate? If people can’t drive to the venue, then you’ll have to factor in logistics and transportation costs. However, the bus trip to and from a course can be used to talk about a new product or provide an overview of the organization.

4. WILL YOU NEED HELP?

If you’ll need assistance to pull off a successful event, consider who you’ll ask

to serve on the planning team. Golfers will be helpful in evaluating a course, but highly organized non-golfers can be invaluable in running a smooth event. Someone skilled in networking can help recruit golfers to participate.

5. WHO PAYS FOR THE EVENT?

Even if an organization is picking up all costs, consider selling sponsorships by offering promotional placement on signage, invitations, and even an opportunity to address the crowd or host a hole. The more exposure a vendor receives, the more it should cost, such as covering bar costs vs. supplying a raffle prize. If the event is a fundraiser, make sure costs are covered with money left over to support the cause.

6. WHAT IF IT RAINS?

The Midwest’s wacky weather can disrupt your best plans. Not having a backup plan is an overlooked element of a successful

golf event, says Matt McQueary, director of golf sales and marketing at Big Cedar Golf.

It’s best to have an alternate date for two reasons. First, the same weather system may be in the area the next day, and it’s often hard for local people to take two consecutive days off from work, he explains.

“Be sure to put a soft-hold on another date one month later,” McQueary recommends. “Courses are often booked in advance. So, if your June event is rained out, you may not be able to reschedule to a later date.”

When selecting a venue, he encourages planners to choose a location with a large indoor meeting space so alternative activities can be planned in case of rain.

7. WHAT FOOD TO SERVE AND WHEN?

Food and beverages are an important

NOTABLE MIDWEST GOLF COURSES

While most large communities have a golf course or two, here are five of the Midwest's best links, experienced in hosting group events.

Whistling Straits, Kohler, Wis.

Site of the 2020 Ryder Cup and several major championships, Whistling Straits boasts two golf courses designed by Pete Dye. The Straits Course is set along the majestic shores of Lake Michigan, while the adjacent Irish Course offers striking features reminiscent of layouts in Ireland featuring ponds, grassland and dunes.

Destination Kohler's golf courses and other amenities, including a 500-acre wilderness preserve, the Kohler Waters Spa, and five-star accommodations at The American Club and The American Club Carriage House, provide a gracious and flexible setting for a memorable guest experience.

Forest Dunes, Roscommon, Mich.

Located in lower Michigan, Forest Dunes offers five golf courses, three of which rank in America's Top 100, according to Don Helinski, director of operations. The Loop is an 18-hole reversible course using the same greens and fairways; however, direction of play changes daily, which requires a completely different navigation strategy.

Onsite, Lake Ausable Lodge is ideal for smaller groups with 11 standard rooms and two suites. Large groups stay in two- and four-bedroom villas as well as three- to five-bedroom cottages. Enjoy a meal in the Adirondack-style clubhouse.

Big Cedar Golf, Ridgedale, Mo.

Created by the founder of Bass Pro Shops, Big Cedar Golf offers five courses, including Payne's Valley, the first public golf course designed by Tiger Woods and TGR Design. The most challenging is Ozarks National, which is carved into the Ozark Mountain landscape.

Offering 317 private accommodations, Big Cedar Lodge has space for groups of all sizes. Multiple on-site restaurants ensure a variety of formal and casual dining options, including a dinner cruise aboard a 62-foot luxury yacht.

Firestone Country Club, Akron, Ohio

Home to three different courses, Firestone Country Club hosted the 2021 Bridgestone Seniors Players Championships as well as other professional golf tournaments over the years on the South Course. However, North Course hosted the American Golf Classic and World Series of Golf. The club offers lodging options with standard and premium rooms as well as villas. Options for formal and casual dining include the club's infamous cream pies.

PFAU Course, Bloomington, Ind.

With 147 bunkers spread over 18 holes, Indiana University's PFAU Course has hosted many Big 10 championship golf tournaments. That makes it a big draw for people wanting to play on courses used by touring pros. When the round is over, players can relax and enjoy a drink or pub-style dining options in the 5,000-square-foot clubhouse.



Whistling Straits/Courtesy of Destination Kohler

aspect of successful golf tournaments. Some people prefer breakfast before heading out, while others want lunch served afterward. The key is to allow plenty of time for play before scheduling meals. Serving lukewarm food that was ready an hour before players arrive will create a bad ending to a great day.

Gephart encourages planners to account for the event's entire food and beverage offering, including on-course service. Preferences of each group make a difference in planning for enough beverage carts to be staffed and stocked appropriately. Bringing in a local craft brewery, restaurant or food truck to provide refreshments at a hole can also be a nice touch.

8. SPEED OF PLAY

Most 18-hole rounds will take 4 to 4½ hours with experienced golfers on a familiar course. Tournaments employing a full 120-plus player "shot-gun start" with everyone beginning at once can actually take up to 6 hours

because golfers don't play at the same speed or skill level, says McQueary.

To speed play and ensure everyone ends around the same time, he suggests imposing rules like picking up a ball and moving on after a double bogey.

Courses can also adjust speed of play by moving tees forward to accommodate shorter drive shots by casual golfers, explains Greg Bishop, general manager of the PFAU Course.

9. PAIRINGS

Golf is a great way to spark conversations, so plan a good mix of team members to encourage mingling. Skill level isn't as important as personalities, says Don Helinski, director of operations at Forest Dunes Golf Club.

"The person who cares about score, rules and etiquette won't mesh well with someone who is always on the phone or talking during someone's backswing," he explains.



“The bigger the tournament, the less intimate it can be and it’s difficult to accommodate everyone,” he adds. “Plan time for quality interaction among teams and players. Ideally, eight to 12 teams of four or five players works best. For really large groups, set up 16 teams, not 18, to avoid slowing play.”

10. CONTESTS

Often with tournaments, there are two or three players in contention for lowest score. The challenge is to keep others interested, too. That’s where contests can help, especially those offering a combination of skill and luck.

Awarding prizes for being closest to the pin is popular and so is longest putt. Gephart suggests fun contests that anyone can do, such as chipping golf balls into a bathtub to earn a prize.

Golf outings are a great way to bring a group together to develop or strengthen relationships, offer an escape from the office and take time to celebrate achievements. With these 10 tips in mind, you’re event is certain to be a success. *M*

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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.

Iowa.....	41
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Courtesy of Travel Iowa



Courtesy of Travel Iowa



It's the home of baseball's Field of Dreams, the birthplace of John Wayne and the setting of Grant Wood's "American Gothic." Between the Missouri River, which forms Iowa's western border, and the Mighty Mississippi on the east, there are fascinating sights such as the Native American Effigy Mounds National Monument, the ancient Devonian Fossil Gorge, and soaring eagles along the Great River Road National Scenic Byway. Visit the six covered bridges of Madison County and the German heritage Amana Colonies.

More than 85% of Iowa is dedicated to farming, and that means fun food adventures. Take your group on the 14-stop Iowa Cheese Trail to sample artisanal cheeses and other dairy products, watch the cheese-making process, and meet the cows, sheep and goats. Taste-testing the too-big-for-the-bun breaded and fried pork tenderloin sandwich on the Tenderloin Trail is a must. Pick up the passport, hit 10 of the spots and earn a T-shirt.

Steamboat tours down the Mississippi River are the perfect way to wind down a day of learning for a group. Beautiful views, delightful cuisine — your group won't forget the experience.

Iowa's quirky "world's largest" claims to fame range from a selfie-worthy 15-foot strawberry to a gigantic wooden nickel, ball of popcorn, frying pan and the Iowa-80 truck stop. It boasts parking spots for 900 tractor-trailers, a trucking museum, a dentist office and much more.

Top-draw events include the Tulip Time Festival in Pella, the nine-day National Balloon Classic and the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines, which has celebrated the state's agricultural heritage since 1854. Each year it stars a new sculpture made of enough butter to slather 19,000 slices of toast. *M*



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Courtesy of Kansas Tourism



KANSAS

With the state song “Home on the Range,” you’d expect wide-open plains in Kansas. It’s also where you’ll find the rolling terrain of the Flint Hills, Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve and unique rock formations, like 100-foot-tall chalky white spires and massive mushroom-shaped boulders. Towering Castle Rock was a landmark on the Butterfield Overland Despatch stagecoach route, one of the trails of the westward movement.

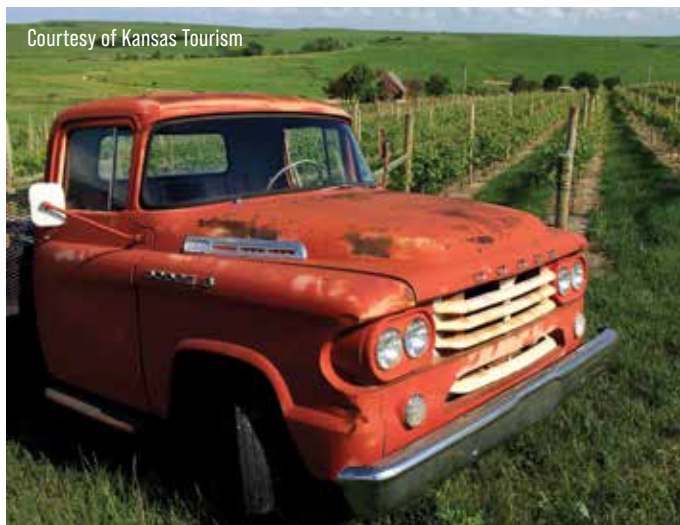
Kansas offers a wonderful array of activities for groups of all sizes. From rodeos to cultural, music and food festivals, Kansas provides a classic slice of America. Its urban energy, found in some of its largest cities of Wichita, Lawrence and Overland Park, balances the scenic beauty of the seemingly endless miles of captivating prairie and natural areas.

Fort Leavenworth, on the Missouri River, was called “the post that opened the west” as thousands of wagons rolled through on the Santa Fe and Oregon trails. Historic sites across Kansas tell the stories of the Native Americans, pioneers, cowboys and modern-day figures. Get a taste of the days of Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday at the Boot Hill Museum in Dodge City, visit an 1859

stone barn-turned museum on the Pony Express Trail in Marysville, and step into the 1860s and 1870s at the Old Cowtown Museum in Wichita.

Explore the boyhood home of Dwight D. Eisenhower at his Presidential Library and Museum in Abilene, or follow a stretch of Historic Route 66. Wizard of Oz fans make their way to Wamego and the OZ Museum to admire original and reproduction artifacts and memorabilia related to the original story and films. *M*

Courtesy of Kansas Tourism



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WICHITA *Kansas*



10

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8

WICHITA'S GOT TALENT

The performing arts abound, from the **Wichita Symphony Orchestra** and **Wichita Grand Opera** to **Music Theatre Wichita**—an incubator of Broadway stars.



7

WE'RE WATCHED OVER BY AN ICON

The 44-foot **Keeper of the Plains** in downtown Wichita—a majestic tribute to the Plains Indians— attracts visitors from around the world.

6

WE'LL SAY IT, OUR DOWNTOWN ROCKS

Meeting attendees can easily explore downtown Wichita's **eclectic neighborhoods** on foot, by riding the free Q-Line or via Bike Share ICT.



Credit: Drone-tography LLC



5

WE'RE A LITTLE NUTTY

Its aisles brimming with candy, nuts and fudge, the **Nifty Nut House** has been satisfying sweet and salty cravings since 1937.

4

AND A LITTLE SPICY

Sure, Wichita has lip-smackin' **barbecue**—we're in the heart of beef country, after all—but the city's foodie scene also includes adventurous ethnic eateries.

3

WE'RE TRAILBLAZERS

Home of the first successful student-led lunch counter sit-in in 1958, Wichita's progressive history is on display at **The Kansas African American Museum**.



2

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MINNESOTA



Newsflash from Minnesota: It's known as the "Land of 10,000 Lakes," but the current count is more like 11,842. With that number of bodies of water (plus the plentiful rivers and streams), any visit has to include a close encounter of the H₂O kind. It could be a stroll along Lake Superior on Duluth's Lakewalk, kayaking the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities, whitewater rafting or a quiet paddling excursion.

Culture buffs can find their bliss at a concert by the renowned Minnesota Orchestra, Judy Garland's girlhood home museum, Great Lakes Aquarium or the architecturally striking Frank Gehry-designed Weisman Art Museum.

Satisfy hunger pains with a smoked fish appetizer or walleye, the state's official fish. It's popular on menus and at the state fair served on a stick, in mac and cheese, and as sushi. The Juicy Lucy, a burger that oozes molten cheese stuffed in the middle, was concocted at a Minneapolis dive bar in the 1950s.

The Twin Cities offers the urban experience your group may be seeking, with a variety of culinary delights, imaginative museums and plenty of peoplewatching perfect for those much-needed breaks between sessions. With more than 9,000 rooms centrally located, including 4,500 that connect to the Minneapolis Convention Center (offering 1.2 million square feet of space), groups have a variety of options for lodging.

The cities also boast a top-ranked park system with more than 200 miles of walking and biking trails. Access to the cities is convenient, as a hub for Delta, most destinations are a three-hour or shorter flight away.



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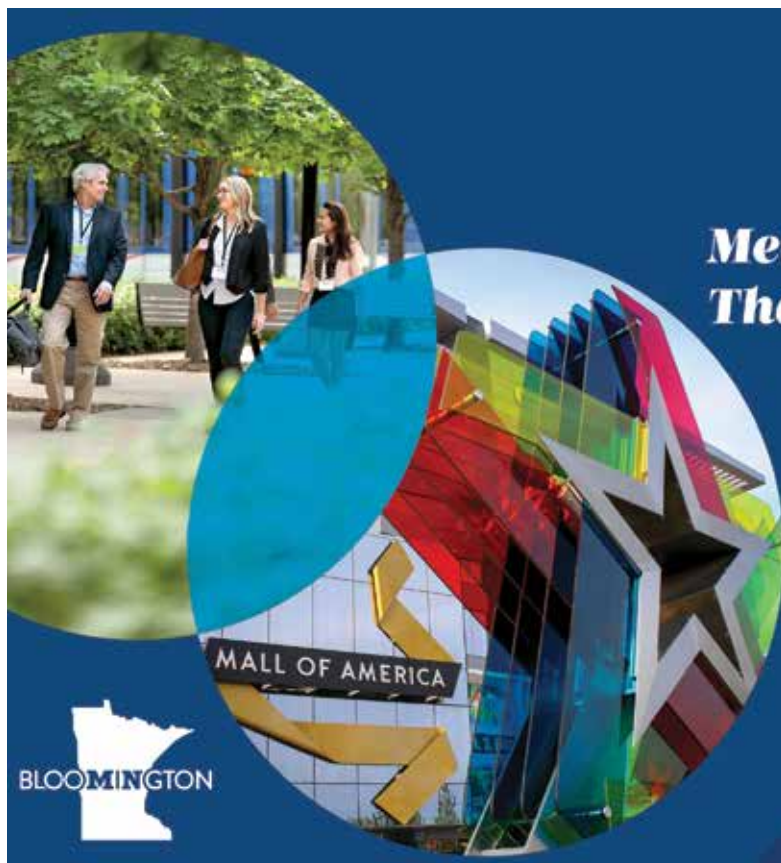


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NEBRASKA

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Its major lakes are huge reservoirs, and there are prairies, grasslands, valleys, towering rock formations, farms, ranches and wide-open skies. The lack of light pollution in the Sand Hills area makes it ideal for the annual, six-day Nebraska Star Party. In spring, visitors flock to see the migration of more than 600,000 Sandhill cranes.

Historic sites, museums, monuments and scenic routes are dedicated to the Native Americans, explorers, trappers and pioneers and settlers, including the Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail, a scenic byway along the Missouri River. On 200 acres in Grand Island, the Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer depicts a town of the 1890s, plus early log cabins and a Pawnee Earth Lodge.

Chimney Rock and Scotts Bluff were landmarks for pioneers whose wagon ruts are still visible in the protected lands. Learn about Pony Express rider, scout, buffalo hunter and showman William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody at his grand home along what is now the Lincoln Highway.

Admire the American West and Native America art at the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, then stroll the brick streets of The Old Market arts and entertainment district, with its galleries, shops and dozens of dining and drinking spots. The Historic Haymarket is a similar neighborhood in the Capital City of Lincoln. 



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The spring and summer months lend themselves to breathtaking and unique scenery throughout Lincoln, which is reflected in available meeting spaces. These spectacular venues outside of the bright city lights make the perfect backdrop to events of all sizes and themes, making your meeting one that attendees will remember fondly and hope to duplicate in the future.

Located just minutes west of Lincoln, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center will ensure your meeting will take advantage of and amplify nature's natural beauty in one of North America's most distinct and picturesque settings. Available year-round for meetings, weddings and other social gatherings, their visitor center features a full kitchen, seating for up to 100 people and plenty of parking. Amidst an 850-acre tallgrass prairie, the sprawling preserve contains educational exhibits, miles of walking trails and historic Oregon Trail wagon ruts.

Discover the historic Prairie Creek Inn Bed and Breakfast Inn, located seven minutes east of Lincoln. Featuring the Leavitt House, a distinct home built in 1911 that was moved outside of the city, this bed and breakfast offers

views of brilliant sunrises and sunsets, wildlife and peaceful tranquility. With a capacity of nearly 300, the Golden Sunset Farm Barn is an Opry Barn that is perfect for concerts, dances, receptions and other gatherings. Recently renovated, the barn is complete with a stage, mezzanine and unmatched views of the countryside.

Situated 15 minutes south of Lincoln, Roca Berry Farm boasts the Creekside Event Barn and the Pioneer Event Barn, nestled in picturesque farmland and towering oaks. A beautiful and serene outdoor setting awaits weddings, family gatherings, company celebrations and more. Both barns feature over 4,000 sq ft of space with accommodations for up to 250 people. The Creekside Barn is an authentic post and beam 1917 barn, one of the first built in the area that once served as a storage for horses and hay and is now the center of rustic elegance. Additionally, a 1,000 sq ft deck overlooks the nearby Salt Creek.

Take advantage of these unique local spaces and see how a quiet and peaceful setting can transform your event!

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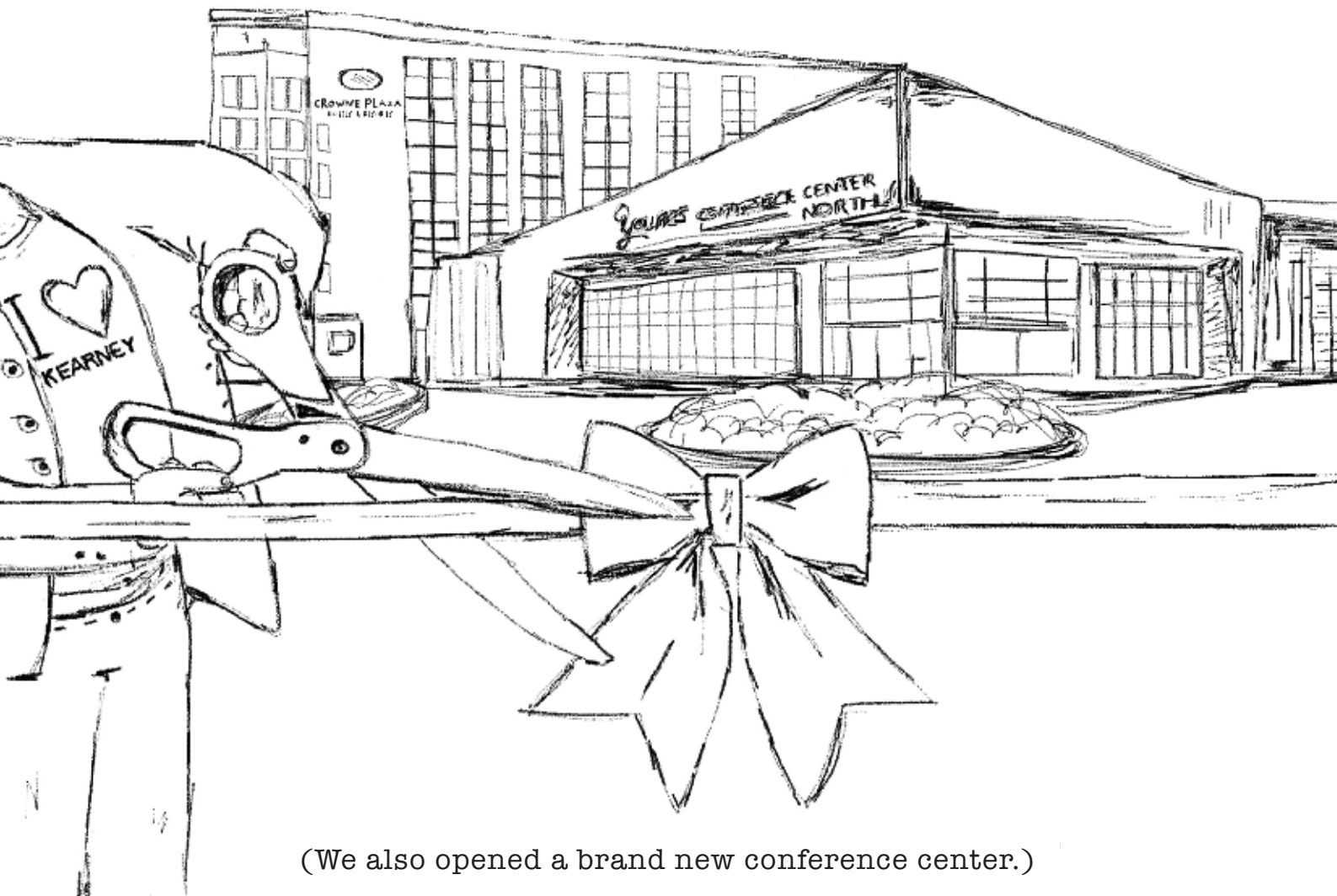
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If you're looking for a host city for your next event, make sure you look at Kearney.

Meet Nebraska's Newest Hotel & Conference Center



The best meeting facilities just got better with the completion of the Crowne Plaza and Younes Conference Center North in January 2022! Crowne Plaza includes 172 sleeping rooms and offers an indoor water park, restaurant, Starbucks and shopping. Younes Conference Center North adds 75,000 square foot of state-of-the-art meeting space to the Younes Campus, which is known for their top-notch facilities and amazing event and catering staff.



Conveniently located in Central Nebraska, right off I-80, the Younes Campus features three meeting venues: Holiday Inn Conference Center, Younes Conference Center South, and newly opened Younes Conference Center North/Crowne Plaza. Along with multiple properties, attendees can enjoy restaurants/bars, shopping, and spa, all within walking distance. With a total of 150,000 square feet of flexible space and over 900 hotel rooms, the Younes Campus makes a perfect place to gather for meetings of all sizes.



Younes Campus

Younes Center North:	75,000 sq. ft.
Younes Center South:	50,000 sq. ft.
Holiday Inn:	25,000 sq. ft.

With ample parking, electric charging stations, and easy access to lodging and amenities, Kearney has big city offerings, with the small-town hospitality that the Heartland is known for.

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 to all events. Behind every conference, special event, or trade show, there's a team with decades of experience working to ensure that each event is a success.



Top-notch facilities, experienced professionals, convenience, and ease for attendees, combine with everything you need to make your event a success — that's why Kearney is where the Heartland gathers!

Ready to book your next event? [Contact Sarah Focke](mailto:sfocke@visitkearney.org) at sfocke@visitkearney.org or call 308-237-3170.



SOUTH DAKOTA



Scenic beauty, manmade wonders and historic sites spell an epic South Dakota road trip. Marvel at the eerie buttes of the Badlands and the enormity of Mount Rushmore. Time travel 2.5 billion years of geological and human history at the Journey Museum. Visit the gold rush days in Deadwood, where Wild Bill Hickock played his last hand of poker.

In Rapid City, life-size bronze statues of U.S. presidents permanently loiter. Duck into Art Alley for the colorful murals and shop Prairie Edge & Sioux Trading Post for Native American art and goods. Head to the Black Hills and Custer State Park's Wildlife Loop, where buffalo roam free. Needles Highway is named for the slender granite spires along the roadway's sharp curves and narrow passages, including Needles Eye Tunnel.

After gazing at Mount Rushmore's likenesses of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln, taste history in a scoop of vanilla ice cream based on Jefferson's 1780 recipe.

In 1947, sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski started chipping and blasting away at a Black Hills mountain to reveal what will be a 641-foot-long likeness of Crazy Horse. The artist's family has carried on since his 1982 death; learn about the project and Native American culture at the Indian Museum of North America. [M](#)





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- Larry Bird Museum Opening 2023

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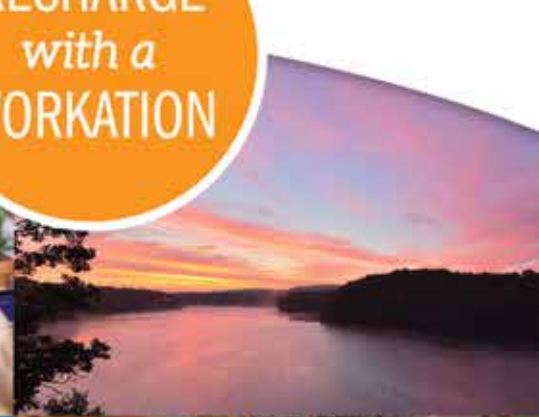
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