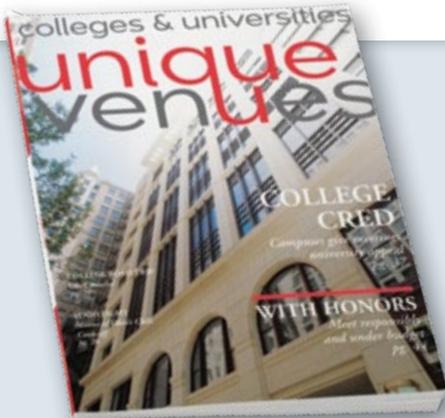


a league of our own

a quarterly newsletter for unique venues members



hot off the press

It's in the mail! Unique Venues' brand-new Colleges & Universities magazine has now been signed, sealed, and delivered to 17,000 professional meeting planners in the U.S. and Canada. This inaugural edition is just the first in a robust schedule of Unique Venues print magazines that will include four publications a year: Two issues that cover topics for all unique venues and two issues devoted to our largest segment of colleges and universities. In addition to the glossy print piece, there is also an enhanced digital version that will be an interactive tool for 36,000 professional and freelance planners who are often on-the-go: They will easily be able to link to member profiles from each story and ad they read.

"There is nothing like this on the market," says president Chuck Salem, noting that Unique Venues was in a prime position to develop such a publication to give colleges, universities, arenas, retreats, and all the non-conventional venues the attention they deserve. "This publication is great for our members because it gives them the exposure they are worthy of; the exposure the rest of the hospitality industry has enjoyed for years.

The magazine is demonstrable of the coming of age of our venues who have recognized a 162% increase in leads since the economic downturn of 2009. It's a tangible step forward to say we're on a level playing field."

Salem also notes that the new schedule of magazines is an evolution from the Annual Planners Guide; however, each issue will still include a directory that lists each Unique Venues member. Given the high activity rate and comprehensive information provided on the uniquevenues.com website, Salem says it made more sense to use a print piece to let planners not only know the spaces exist but *why* unique venues are so beneficial for meetings and events.

"We felt an obligation to begin the education process with this magazine—more than just listing member contacts in a directory—but to really provide tactical information that teaches planners about the opportunities and challenges that are presented with these unique spaces," he says.

Soon, you will receive a detailed brochure that lists key dates in the production schedule, the editorial calendar, and the ad sale deadlines. In addition, online orientation meetings will be scheduled to illustrate how your membership will work in conjunction with the magazines. ■

Look out for these feature topics in future issues:

Women and meeting planning; events in remote destinations; dollars and cents of meeting on campus; college unions; and historical and cultural venues.





about the author

Lori Cassidy, Director of Corporate, Incentive, and Charter Sales, Royal Caribbean International

cruising through the sales process with planners

“The majority of planners and buyers have been working with hotels and resorts for years and years so there’s a comfort level there, a knowledge base, and an awareness we have to tackle,” says Lori Cassidy, director of corporate, incentive, and charter sales for Royal Caribbean International. “Most planners and buyers are not familiar with cruising today nor are they aware of the facilities and the value proposition that it brings to the table.” So just how does Cassidy and her team of sales reps combat the obstacles?

“Our number-one objective is to build awareness within the planning community and educate them on what cruise ships can offer their clients. It’s eye-opening for planners when they realize today’s cruise lines offer unique destinations, but also that the facilities we have on board the ship are unique. There’s a lot of cost savings involved, too, because your meals, entertainment, and all the activities are all included in the price. So is the function and meeting space as well as the A/V capabilities.”

First though, Cassidy has to bait the planner before she can hook them into the benefits. Here are five ways she’s found success:

1. A comprehensive marketing and sales plan: “We have a full-blown marketing plan in place and have dedicated corporate sales managers that focus on just this channel of business. They are out there meeting with incentive houses and independent meeting planners, reaching out to corporate directs, and really building awareness and expanding the knowledge about

doing events on ships.”

2. Print and digital advertising: “We execute a wide variety of advertising from online search optimization in Google, Bing, and Yahoo to print advertising with some of the key magazines that touch the planning community.”

3. Nurturing internal databases: “We have our own internal database that continues to grow, and we reach out to those folks on an ongoing basis.”

4. Being on the frontline of industry events: “We like the hosted buyer events the best. The old format of tradeshow where you set up the booth and hope someone walks by are over. Now you get one-on-one time with people you preselect and they preselect you.”

5. Finding solutions in the presale stage: “Can we do everything a hotel or convention center can do? Absolutely not. There are some restrictions—for example, it would be difficult to get 40,000 square feet of open ballroom space or find 20+ breakout areas to run concurrently. So, we have to review the RFP the planner provides to determine if this is something that can be executed on board a ship and make sure to tap into the planner’s flexibility. There’s a lot of factors we have to take into consideration in the presale stage to move forward to the pricing side. We want to make sure it achieves the objective the planner has in mind.”

Cassidy’s number-one tip? “Have a diversified marketing plan and try different angles to see what sticks.” ■

fun fact:

Lori has been in the cruise industry for 20 years and worked her way up from a business development manager in the field to the corporate and incentive side.

The big blog theory

“Blogs are forever,” says Christy Crans, Unique Venues’ word whiz who puts together the informative and search optimized posts you see three times a week. Before you get commitment phobic, Crans points out forever is a good thing. “Whereas a social media tag is a one-time deal, our venue blogs will remain online forever and their SEO merit will not decrease even five years from now.” Crans also notes that blogs help drive in traffic: “The majority who access us from our blogs end up on our homepage (and profiles) because they want to learn more.”



So just what does Crans blog about? Up until now, many have been venue-specific postings; however the plan is to provide blog articles that have a broader spectrum, which incorporate numerous venues, such as in niche or regional-type articles. “We get more bang for our buck this way,” she notes. “There’s a better

chance someone will be searching for ‘planning conference in Chicago’ than ‘venue in Chicago near south side art museum,’ so we’ll have a better chance to rank higher in online searches and be able to provide seven different venues for readers to discover, rather than just one.”

Crans also posts planning and marketing tips, such as using Pinterest to boost business or the best mobile apps for event planners. Upcoming blog topics include regional articles about Pittsburgh, Houston, and Washington, D.C. as well as tips on creative twists, working within a theme, and cooking events. And so far, Crans’ results speak for themselves—since taking on the blog in August, the average visits per month have jumped 75%!

If you have tips to share, awards to brag about, or news on upcoming conferences and events, Christy welcomes your guest articles! Contact her by e-mailing christy@uniquevenues.com or calling (814) 254.1310. ■

Fun fact: Christy was previously a nurse but most of her college scholarships were actually for writing, which she is glad to return to in her current role.

Save the Date:



Capture this QR code with your smartphone to add this important event to your calendar.

Unique Venues member conference

October 7-8, 2013 • Loyola University in downtown Chicago

Look for more information on reserving your spot this February, and check your membership package as most come with a complimentary registration!



new on campus: champlain college shares meals with “my fitness pal”

Now diners at Champlain can keep up their new year resolutions. The Vermont-based college recently introduced a brand-new wellness and nutrition program called “My Fitness Pal” that allows diners to track what they consume and see if it aligns with their personal health goals. Here’s how it works:

1. Download the MyFitnessPal app, available at the myfitnesspal.com website, and through free apps for iPhone, iPad, Android, Blackberry, and Windows Phones.
2. Use the search box to find items, using the keywords “sodexo campus” or utilize the scanning feature to grab nutrition information from the barcodes on the station signs.
3. Build and save your meals. Track against your personal nutrition objectives. ■

au moment:

canada sees the light after the economic dark ages

Let's face it, no matter if you are U.S. or Canadian-based, everyone felt the slump of the economic downturn the past few years. Yet while the States have

shown gradual improvements in the event industry in the last 12 months, Canada is still battling the loss of its relied upon U.S. meeting travel business. We

checked in with Anne McCaw who is based in Unique Venue's British Columbia office to get the latest developments.

"There does seem to be modest increases in visitor volume from the U.S., but Canadian venues are still looking to welcome back American

meetings and conferences," she says. These measures include further promotion of Canada as a close, easily accessible, and safe designation that "offers something different and a bit exotic for delegates, without dramatic changes in language, currency, comfort, food, etc." In the meantime, the Canadian Tourism Commission is focusing on short-term business to fill the gap. "Canada is marketing to emerging markets in Asia and other destinations to compensate for reduction in traditional markets, such as Europe," notes McCaw.

There is good news, though—planners are optimistic and booking again. "We are seeing dramatic increases in planner requests across the country," McCaw points out, noting that "Ontario and Alberta remain at the top of the charts, but British Columbia also

has grown steadily, and we are seeing huge increases in interest in Quebec and the Atlantic area." In fact, British Columbia and Ontario both project a boom year in 2015. ■

Here are some key points to keep in mind for incoming leads this new year:

- Planners are predicting the same amount of meetings in 2013, with flat or only slightly increased budgets
- The trends of short booking windows and fewer delegates continue
- There will be a large push for alternate meeting spaces
- Sustainability is no longer a trend but an expectation so include local food products when possible
- Technology and social media will continue to take importance for meeting interaction



seo tip line: inbound links

The most impressive way to increase ranking and traffic to your uniquevenues.com profile is to post the link everywhere you can! Include your profile link on your Facebook page, Twitter profile (and routinely Tweet it out), Pinterest, Google Plus, and on your venue's own website or venue webpage. Also if you have a blog, make sure to include the link on each post. Not only will your rankings get a boost, but you'll find better distribution of your content on social media channels by readers who share the content. ■

Extra tip: Unique Venues offers a linking program. To access it, login to your member profile and click on the "Cross Promotion" link to grab the code.

The screenshot shows the University of Denver website. The main content area is titled "ABOUT US" and lists staff members: Brianna Culberson (Event Coordinator), Cathy Greive (Executive Director), Shannon Jahn (Manager of Internal and External Events), Maria José Mata (Manager of Summer Conference Programs), Mary Kay Moore (Manager of Client Services), and Richard Michel (Budget Manager). The sidebar on the right is titled "CONFERENCE AND EVENT SERVICES" and includes links for Summer Conferences, Meetings & Special Events, Weddings, and Internal Events. At the bottom, there are logos for "1 STOP Certified ACCED-I", "Member of VISIT DENVER, the Convention & Visitors Bureau", and "unique venues you belong here".



on the road: RCMA bound

Unique Venues just returned from the Religious Conference Managers Association's (RCMA) tradeshow in Minneapolis this January. The annual Emerge conference and tradeshow brings together a collection of religious and faith-based meeting and event planners to mingle with industry suppliers prior to booking their main business of summer camps and retreats.

Each year, Unique Venues has one of the largest appearances with strong representation of our members; this year, 10 of our venues were present with booths and able to engage in one-on-one appointments with nearly 300 attending planners. The registrants were invited by a mailer we delivered that promoted our fantastic giveaways. Planners who turned in a qualified RFP were given extra entries to receive the grand prize, a Kindle Fire, or smaller

prizes, including iTunes, Amazon, and Dunkin' Donuts gift cards. The attending members included:

- California University of PA
- Trinity University
- University of Illinois Conferences and Special Events
- University of Minnesota
- University of California, Los Angeles
- University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Purdue University
- Iowa State University
- Longwood University
- Campus Conference Solutions

If you'd like to hear more about the experience, contact Chuck Salem (chuck@uniquevenues.com) or Shannon Glover (shannon@uniquevenues.com). ■

Fun fact: RCMA asked Chuck to sit on a forum addressing the re-branding and restructuring of this year's show!

Social Butterfly

Unique Venues is now on Pinterest! Find us by typing in **Unique Venues** in the search box and choosing the option for pinners. Our page features photos from *premier plus* members and tradeshows we attend, plus company highlights and blog posts. Pinterest is a great way to drive visitors to our website and your profile pages. Follow us!



member must-do: six point profile check-up

Are you getting the most out of your membership? Is your profile 100% accurate and up-to-date? A



A new year is a great reminder to take a fresh look at what planners see on your profile page. Here's a list of tips from Tony McGuirt

to clean up your space:

- Make sure the description of your venue is accurate and tells the story of your location; you should also make sure to use key search terms in the writeup.
- Check your URL—did you recently launch a new, targeted webpage for your venue?
- Check your photo gallery—have you uploaded the maximum number provided with your membership package or should you add a few more? Also make sure each photo has a relevant and descriptive caption.
- Ensure your contact information is up-to-date and that your address, phone number, or team members have not changed.
- If you have the expanded profile, make sure ALL the pages are filled in and accurate.
- Also if you have an expanded member package, make sure you take advantage of the video gallery.

Extra tip: Every member can post venue news and special offers on the communal areas of uniquevenues.com. You also have access to the open RFP page, which you should shop around for more business. Respond to all leads promptly, even if you can't host the event. If you need assistance in setting up any of these features, contact tony@uniquevenues.com. ■

corporate giving program moving forward in giving back

This year, Unique Venues decided to adopt a new plan for our Corporate Giving Program: Choose just one organization to donate to for an entire year to impact the difference we make. Each year an employee's name will be drawn, and they get to choose the charity to partner with for the next 12 months. This year, it was founder Michele Nichols and she selected Children's Global Alliance. Here is their story.

"In Nicaragua I saw things that I couldn't believe were happening right in front of my eyes. I gained so much from the trip and have a new perspective on my life. I worked really hard and feel like I made a difference. The service trip to Nicaragua showed me how truly blessed I am to have a caring, loving family that is always there for me, to live in such a great valley and community, and to have the opportunity of a great education. It also taught me that everyone in the world has the same potential, but not the same opportunity."

Some pretty strong words, especially when you consider Kevin Nichols is only 14 years old. It's the exact response Lisa Marie Howell was looking to achieve when she started the Children's Global Alliance in Vail, Colorado three years ago.

"I was engaged in student mentoring at a local middle school and when it came time to do our service projects, I noticed there was a lack of large-scale volunteer experiences for this age group of 12- to 16-year-olds," recalls Howell who herself has been a passionate volunteer since she was eight years old and cleaning homes for the elderly. "They were capable of so much more than they were ever trusted with so I thought, what could I do to open their eyes to the rest of the world and get them involved in something bigger?"

With the Children's Global Alliance, Howell has created a breakthrough program that invites teenagers to visit an orphanage in Cambodia and a special needs school in Nicaragua to



work alongside less fortunate families in developing countries. Howell emphasizes that her program is hard work, "It's not a vacation or a tour. We work hard, all day every day, building and creating a better future for someone else." And the children who attend come back changed forever, many having gone on to more regular volunteer work. "Once they see how little effort it takes to enhance someone's life so greatly, they become fascinated with the idea that, 'I can be this young and change someone's life,'" Howell says proudly. "Our students come back to their community with a new sense of pride, appreciation for their family, and feel fortunate to live in their house and eat their food.

Kevin Nichols, son of Michele, came upon Children's Global Alliance himself after seeing a presentation from the organization at his school. In order to qualify for the experience, he had to submit an essay and fundraising plan (students have to raise their own money for airfare and hotels) and sit down for an interview with Howell, plus log 10 hours of community service. "We supported him from the very beginning; we felt he needed this experience," says Michele, recalling a particular experience that impacted Kevin—and her. "He went on a home visit with another student and teacher to a girl's house who's 22 with Cerebral Palsy. They were checking in on her to see if she was doing okay. Kevin found her locked in a dark closet on the floor,

playing with a plastic bag. She went on to have a seizure in front of them. When I heard about this from my own kid, I wanted to do more."

With the donations from Unique Venues, it's possible. "The donations go towards the projects we perform while we're in the countries," notes Howell. "In Cambodia, we've built pig tents, planted crops, built clotheslines, repaired fences and provided families with running water for the first time in their entire lives. In Nicaragua, we were able to get school supplies, repair structures, clean, and teach sustainable classes on gardening and woodshop."

For Kevin, the experience made all the difference. "I strongly recommend every teenager get involved with some kind of volunteer work whether its local or global. Going to Nicaragua has opened my eyes to volunteering and has made me the person I am today." ■

Here's how the donations work:

We start the year off with a \$500 donation to our partner in lieu of sending our members holiday cards. We also give \$5 to the organization for every new member and renewal we do business with that year; plus we give our members the opportunity to match the \$5. We will be creating other opportunities throughout the year as well, so stay tuned to read how you can help! For more information on Children's Global Alliance, visit: www.childrensglobalalliance.org.

welcome new members

Often when a planner chooses a unique venue, it's because it stands out from most traditional venues. We're proud to welcome these new members who make planner's options

even more varied—or should we say fun! From historical to sporty, scholarly to entertaining, please join us in welcoming our newest member venues. ■



Bethel College,
Mishawaka, Indiana



Carleton University's Conference Services,
Ottawa, Ontario



Colorado Mountain College -
Leadville, Colorado



Earlham College - Runyan Center,
Richmond, Indiana



George Mason University,
Fairfax, Virginia



Institute of American Indian Arts,
Santa Fe, New Mexico



Lewis & Clark,
Portland, Oregon



Lindy C. Boggs International Conference Center,
New Orleans, Louisiana



Memorial University - St. John's Campus,
Newfoundland



Memorial University, Grenfell Campus,
Corner Brook, Newfoundland



Niagara College NOTL Campus,
Niagara on the Lake, Ontario



Niagara College Residence & Conference Center
Welland Campus, Ontario



Oklahoma Memorial Union,
Norman, Oklahoma



Truman State University,
Kirksville, Missouri



University of Redlands,
Redlands, CA



Universities at Shady Grove Conference Center,
Rockville, Maryland



University of Hartford,
West Hartford, Connecticut



Vancouver Aquarium Marine Science Center,
Vancouver, British Columbia



Weber State University,
Ogden, Utah



Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois

being unique: news from our members



before



after

Lutheridge Retreat & Conference Center Refreshes Dining Hall

Asheville, NC - Out with the old, in with the new—except for a historic stone fireplace, that is. “I think we would have had a mutiny if we got rid of that,” says guest relations manager Suzanne Delap. Instead, the team at Lutheridge designed their dining hall renovation around the hearth, with a rustic lodge feel that fit the North Carolina mountains outside its doors. The updates to the 60-year-old

building began in 2011 and included replacing the linoleum floors with hardwood-like finishes and cinder-block walls with french doors. New windows were also installed as well as a brand-new HVAC system that provides central air for the 200 folks who come for summer camps and retreats each year.

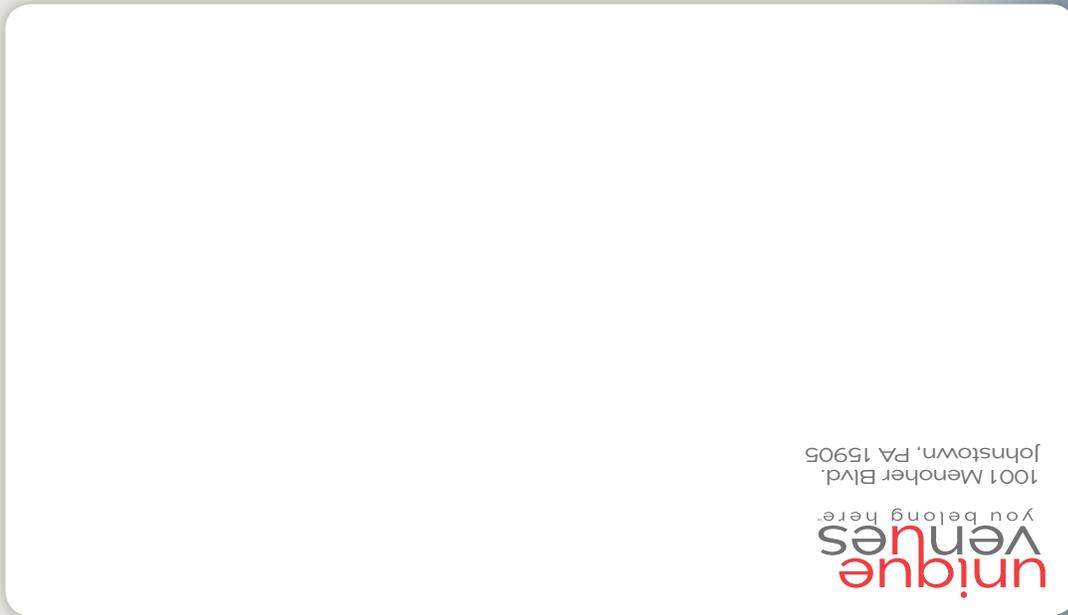
Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts Gets Creative ... with Their Space

Hartford, CT — Talk about an innovative floor plan! When it came time to host the annual Hartford Hospital’s Black & Red Gala, benefiting a new, comprehensive Transplant Center, the team at the Bushnell Center were faced with a dilemma: A guest list topping 1,200 and nowhere to seat them onstage in the current theatre space. But utilizing the creative resources they had, they



hired a company to build an extension of the stage by placing scaffolding over the auditorium’s orchestra seats that was then covered with carpet and black velour. The new “floor” aided additional seating for 100 guests and was a big success—especially for the guests who were able to have a place to take a breather in between dancing to special guests Earth, Wind, and Fire. ■

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