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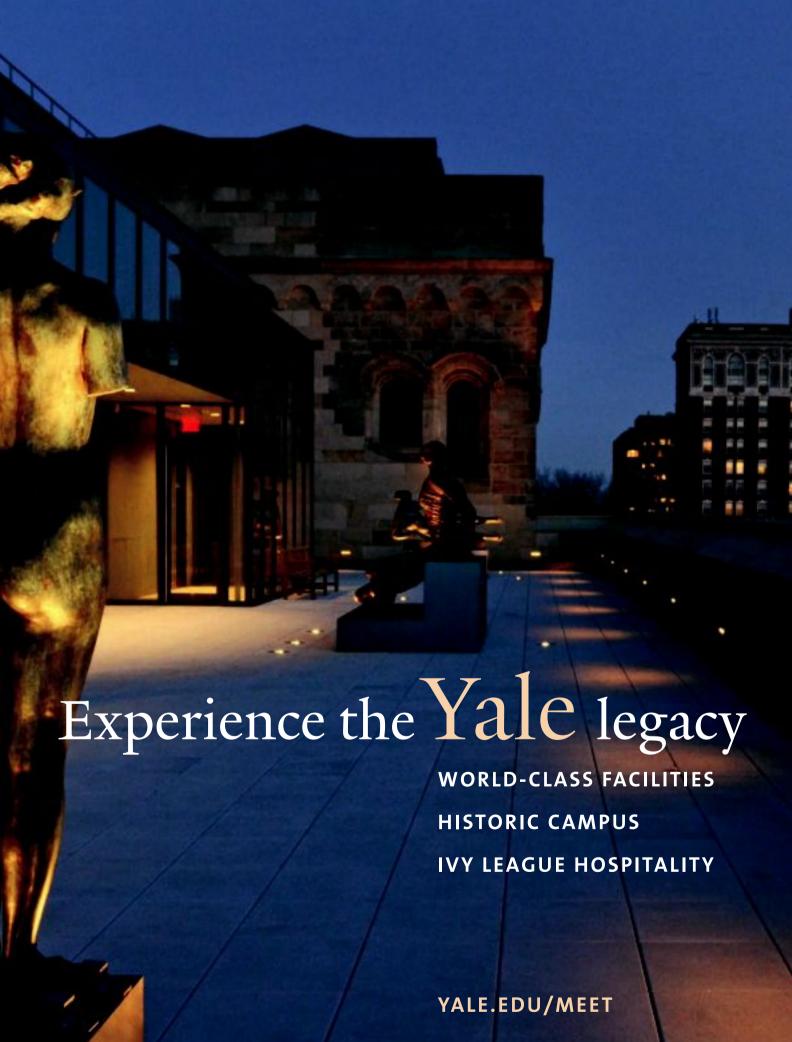
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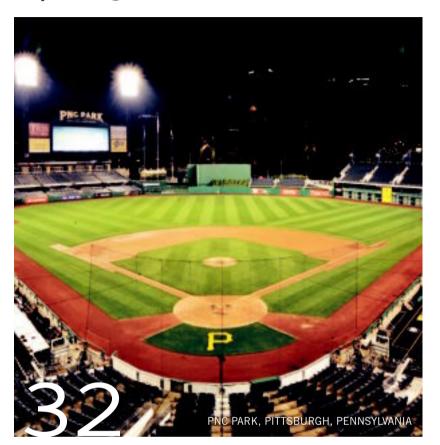
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## CONTENTS Spring 2014





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Nationals Park may be the home of the Washington Nationals, but during the off-season it hosts major league meetings. *Photo by Chris Kennedy Images.* 

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Spring 2014



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## PUBLISHER'S LETTER



HEN READING OVER THE ARTICLES for this brandnew issue, I couldn't help but think of the "Goldilocks" story
we all remember from our childhood: The curious little girl
stuck in bear country who ducked into a cabin and tried out
all different sizes of beds until she found one that was just right.
Much like that fairytale, the stories in this issue started to take on a similar theme,
pointing out unique conference and special event venues that are "just right" for
every type of curious planner, too.

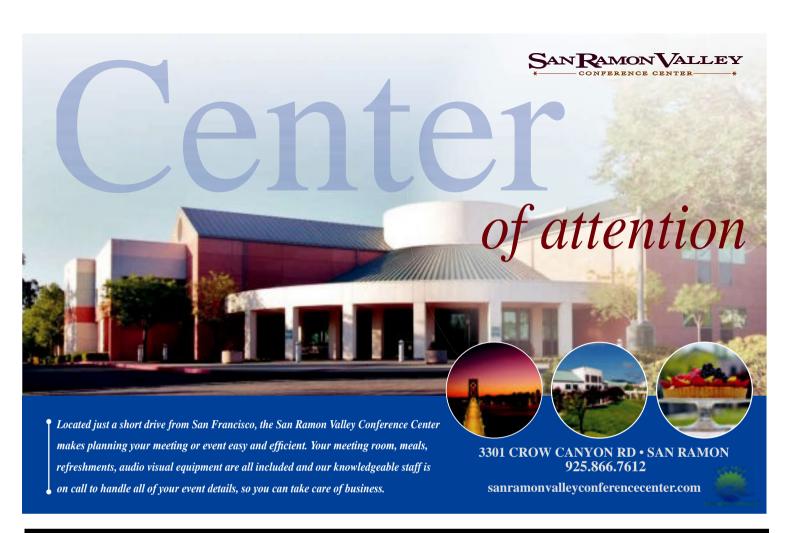
Although the names of many of the facilities profiled, like Nationals Park, PNC Park and FedExField in our cover story, or the Royal Caribbean Cruise Line in our "trend report," seem monolithic and daunting to those of you working with smaller corporate groups, these articles show that even here there are spaces that are fitting for all groups. Our feature on "day camps and away camps" also emphasizes flexibility in time commitments when planning either single-day sessions or full-on retreats—and pricing structures that match every type of budget. So whether you're planning a massive sales meeting for 2,000 people or a small meeting for just a few hours, there's a venue that's "just right" for you.

It's a perspective we continue to emphasize at Unique Venues with a wide range of non-traditional spaces—from college campuses to historical sites and everything in between—that offer built-in décor, flexible terms for catering and overnight accommodations and competitive rates so you can find a venue that always fits your needs. And, if you need help finding the right fit, our meeting planning department can help narrow down the choices to ensure your next event has a happy ending.

The stories in our new Spring Issue are full of rich detail from a variety of sources and industries. We hope by reading these articles, it will spark a new idea for hosting your function or new way of thinking about how you can transform it with the right choice of venue. From hosting a party inside the National Zoo ("Road Trip: Washington, D.C.") to watching the Northern Lights after taking your group to some of the best fishing spots in the world ("At Home on the Range"), there's no wrong choice here; everything feels just right.

Millale

Michele Nichols, Founder Unique Venues



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## THEAGENDA expert advice BY JULIE WIGGINS Executive Director, Sales, Cineplex Entertainment



## **Coming Attractions:**

A Preview of What To Expect When Meeting at the Movies

Imagine showing your presentation on the same screen that just showed "American Hustle" or "Wolf of Wall Street." It can happen when you bring your group for a meeting at the movies. Doing so will give you the "best A/V experience you've ever had," says Julie Wiggins, the executive director of sales at Canadian chain Cineplex. While it might not be intuitive that you can do business in a movie theatre, it actually makes a lot of sense: in addition to the great benefits of built-in technology services, you won't be competing with much of a crowd during day sessions and there are no restrictions on catering. Plus, just imagine the attendance you'll receive when you mention you're meeting at the cinema—it all makes for a blockbuster experience. Here, Wiggins fills you in on what to expect when booking your featured attraction.

#### Professional Staff

You might assume you'll have a 16-yearold, part-time employee facilitating your meeting, but that's not the case. A qualified manager handles all your meeting needs and is assigned to you from day one.

#### Good Seating

We do theatre style really well, which can be an engaging medium. One type of meeting that is really effective in this setup is a product launch. Cineplex recently had a retail chain come in with their employees to introduce the

new Christmas merchandise they'd be selling. On the big screen, the employees could see the products in greater detail than someone standing in the front of the room with a small sample.

#### Multiple Locations

The great thing about a theater chain is that there are locations in every town big and small, so no matter where your office or clients are there is a spot close to you. You're able to deal with one chain, one phone call and one person. There's also the capability to do satellite at multiple locations so an office in New York and Vancouver could participate in the same meeting.

#### Scheduling Flexibility

Because we have so many screening rooms, you can book with us two weeks to two years in advance. Theater spaces are available any time except for Friday nights after 6 p.m. and weekends after noon—and really who wants to have a meeting on a weekend? However, we do a lot of corporate functions on Saturday mornings, especially those that involve families, such as customer appreciation events.

#### Open Catering

A big selling feature for meeting at the movies is that you can pick your own caterer, since we don't have any dedicated onsite caterers. However, we do have kitchen space and food preparation areas for use by your catering company—or we can make recommendations.

#### Competitive Rates

Whereas a hotel might charge \$1,500-\$2,000 for A/V services, we have better equipment that costs around \$500 to utilize. And when you're spending so much money to make your presentation, this is a great area to save expenses and have it viewed properly. Lw

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Cineplex UniqueVenues.ca/cineplex-0 (800)313.4461









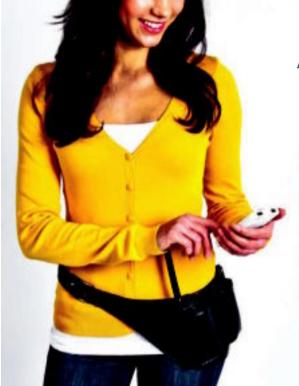


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## THE AGENDA cool gift idea



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HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU SAID TO YOURSELF, 'If only I had a place to store all my devices?' Enter the Circle T Event Holster to the rescue. Whether for yourself or a producer, planner, caterer or other event professional you work with, this fashionable and functional accessory is a great tool to store all your must-have communication devices with pockets for a smart phone, walkie talkie, head set pack and anything else you need within arm's reach.

Each holster holds most standard two-way radios and iPhone/ Androids, and a new line called "Comatch II" has extra space for keys, money and other valuables. Choose from different styles like the "Little Black Dress" to match your formal wear, the leather "Rock and Rollster" for an edgier look or the brocade patterned "Quick Draw." Sizes range from S-XL, and you can order a series of detachable belts if you will have more than one planner using the holster.

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### Summer Garden Tomato & Bean Salad,

Courtesy of University of Montana, Missoula, MT

For this recipe, the university used ingredients from their very own campus dining gardens. The butter and goat cheese were local too, from the Amaltheia Dairy farm in Belgrade, Montana.



#### **INGREDIENTS:**

1 lbs. Green beans

6 oz. Butter

½ cup Sliced almonds

½ cup Assorted small tomatoes

2 oz. Fresh goat cheese

Salt to taste

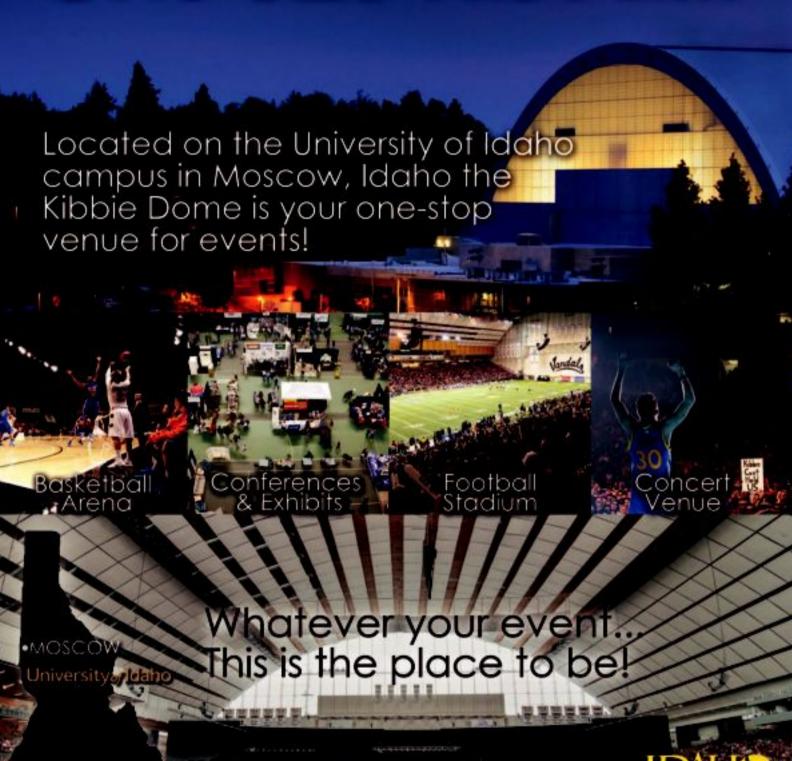
#### TO PREPARE:

- 1. Par blanch the tomatoes.
- 2. Sautee the brown butter and a pinch of salt.
- 3. Add tomatoes on top of green beans and drizzle butter over the mixture.
- 4. Top with sliced almonds and fresh goat cheese. w

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## THE AGENDA signature drink



### Orange Crush,

Courtesy of Restaurant Associates at Legg Mason Tower at Harbor East in Baltimore, MD

Need a refreshing cocktail for summer? Restaurant Associates shares their Orange Crush made with orange flavored vodka and some extras for a delicious spritzer.

#### **INGREDIENTS:**

2 cups lce cubes

2 oz. Orange flavored Vodka

1 oz. Triple Sec

2 Freshly squeezed oranges

#### TO PREPARE:

- 1. Mix all contents in a cocktail shaker.
- 2. Top with a splash of Sprite and an orange slice for garnish. w

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### INSIDE THE INDUSTRY

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

### Cruise Control

As more and more planners uncover the benefits of hosting meetings and events on cruise ships, everyone's getting cabin fever.

Just imagine having your conference sessions right by the water's edge, followed by a wine tasting and Broadway play with a nightcap of ice-skating—all within one easy-to-manage agenda. It's exactly what you'll find when you book a meeting or event on a cruise ship. "We're really like a floating resort," says Lori Cassidy, director of global corporate, incentive and charter sales for Royal Caribbean—one of the largest fleets available, which has seen an uptick in corporate bookings in recent years.



"We've had steady double digit growth for the last several years, year over year," she attests, relating the increase to more organizations who are starting to think of cruises as an option for meetings, conferences, events and incentive programs. "For years it was an unknown, but as more and more planners are being educated and coming on board, they're seeing all the possibilities it offers."

Cassidy points to advancements in recent years that have given more credence to a cruise ship as a business center. "We always have business in mind at all times. Years ago you'd never find a meeting room on a cruise ship, but we now have dedicated conference centers on all our vessels," which includes 22 ships in six different class sizes, with varying layouts and capacities; about 50% of the Royal Caribbean fleet has large, flexible space that can host about 400 guests, Cassidy says. As well there are theatre options that come with staging, décor, built-in production and seating up to 1,400. The brand's Studio B also offers an ice-skating rink/stadium that converts into a meeting venue for 700-900 people.

One of the most interesting additions in recent years, though, has been on the Oasis vessel, which has a neighborhood concept with a boardwalk, Central Park and solariums, all of which can also be used for private events accommodating up to 1,500 guests. "As ships get bigger and better and more innovative, there are going to be more venues for planners to choose from," says Cassidy who notes her biggest clientele remains direct selling companies and the insurance, financial, automotive and retail sectors (although the setting works just as well for reunions, meetings and trainings). "More companies want the newest and







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### INSIDE THE INDUSTRY

BY SELENA FRAGASSI





Featured at top: Meeting rooms have all your standard features, with even more atmosphere. Below: Aquatic demonstrations are just one of the entertainment options that make it a perfect vacation, too.

greatest and that wow factor, and that's what a lot of ships bring to the table nowadays."

That includes programs the whole family can enjoy, too, turning a conference into an actual vacation for many. "One of the things we're known for is activities and entertainment, so if it's a family or spouse program, the other guests can have fun while meetings are going on." From spas to cooking demos, rock climbing and surf simulators, targeted children's programs and good old-fashioned shopping and dining, there is no shortage of things to do—and the best part of the whole experience just may be that everything is included in the price.

"There's a lot of all-inclusiveness tied to cruises," says Cassidy, including all your meals, entertainment and activities. As well, "meeting space is complimentary and so is your audio/visual equipment and standard coffee breaks. So there's a lot of cost savings involved when a client looks to do a program at sea."

If you're new to this concept, rest assured cruise representatives will help you every step of the way. "The first thing we do is look at an RFP and program agenda so we can figure out how we can transform a land-based proposal onto a ship. There's a lot of brainstorming and customization on our end as well as flexibility needed by the planner to make things work on board, but we talk it out point by point," she says. Also know there are differences from a hotel; one of the most important is commiting to multi-night stays since few vessels offer less than 3-4 night stays. However, Cassidy admits, "Once a planner wraps one event, they find out how easy it is and how turnkey it can be by doing an event on a ship." uv

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### THE MAIN EVENT

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

## That's the **Team Spirit**

When The Millennium Centre prepares to host one of the biggest events of the year, the Mountain State Foundation's Spirit Gala, they get a little help from all their friends



**Even in an ice storm**, the staff at The Millennium Centre can melt away a planner's worries to produce a successful and memorable affair. Such was the case when the Johnson City, Tennessee venue (which also has a dedicated, IACC-certified conference center) hosted the Mountain State Foundation's Spirit Gala in January. The annual black tie event, one of the premiere events in the region, benefits the local children's hospital to raise money for specialized equipment needed for its patients.

While the inclement winter weather might have proved disastrous, "we turned it into an all-hands-on-deck operation," confirms Ken Misterly, general manager. Yet that has pretty much been the Centre's M.O. since the beginning, having hosted the annual fete for the past decade, which provides a number of benefits to the foundation's committee. "We have history with this event, and we know what the organizer expects and what attendees have experienced in past years and can then exceed expectations," says Misterly.

Indeed, one of the challenges is coming up with a new program each year that presents a fresh experience for returning patrons—a reason why they start working on the agenda 10 months in advance. "When you have a high-end ticket (\$300 a person), and those people are buying and paying for auction items and also going to a number of similar events, the strategy becomes figuring out how to jazz up the gala and keep it at that same high level so each occasion is memorable in its own right."

Misterly says his team is essential in that regard, most having been with The Millennium Centre for five-plus years, which helps provide consistency when there are rotating committee heads within the Mountain State Foundation, all of whom have their own vision. "Our team will help develop those ideas," says Misterly, pointing to an example during the planning sessions for this year's masquerade-themed format, called Tiempo de Fiesta. "One of the goals for the event was to foster more interaction amongst the attendees. The

typical setup of 10 round tables wasn't working because guests would purchase all the seats at the table and didn't mingle. So we mixed in a family-style setup with long tables, and we received really positive feedback on the arrangement."

The night altogether raised \$232,000 in proceeds, helped in part by the various auctions, including a pre-arranged silent auction and a second, live format. "The silent version is held two weeks prior; it's so large that we can't have it at the same time as the gala because no one would eat dinner." During the live auction, items including jewelry, guitars and vacations were bid upon, as well as one special addition provided by The Millennium Centre itself. "We donated a gourmet, seven-course dinner for 12 guests, prepared by our very own Master Chef Jean-Claude Seruga," says Misterly. Seruga has become one of the most competitive assets the Centre has, trained in Paris and having gathered quite a local following in recent years.

Thanks to Seruga, Misterly says, "planners know we are bringing a higher level of culinary knowledge to the table. What we offer them is the chance to do a high-end fundraiser that they won't find elsewhere in the region." As well, with their own staff of professional planners, The Millennium Centre's team is always attentive to details and sensitive to the fact that everything needs to be executed with precision. "Planners have the confidence to know we can deliver what they need," even with those rare blips come out of nowhere. When managed well though, no one ever knows—and that's the real surprise. Lv

#### **GET CONNECTED**

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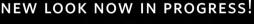
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### ON THE ROAD

BY SELENA FRAGASSI



## NATIONAL TREASURES

From historic memorials to zoos and cathedrals, these five D.C.area venues turn every affair into a national event

It's the epicenter of America, the home of the president and the keeper of our country's rich history, so would you expect event venues in Washington, D.C. to be anything less than spectacular? We take you on a tour of five non-traditional spaces that let you capitol-ize on planning lavish soirees and down-to-business conferences to rival the White House.

#### African American Civil War Memorial & Museum

One of the greatest attributes of hosting events in the nation's capitol is the abundance of educational and enrichment opportunities available within the historic properties. Such is the case at the African American Civil War Memorial & Museum where attendees can be immersed in exhibits thanks to its open layout.

"Most events are held within our auditorium space, but we do have some that utilize the museum and exhibits," Director of Education Dawn Chitty says, referencing a recent example when the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) held a reunion in the 200-person auditorium. Here they watched the film "Freedom Summer," had a Q&A with the producer and then enjoyed the informative displays throughout the museum.

Over the years, the property has welcomed a variety of functions like this, says Chitty. "We've had book signings, birthday receptions, website launches, fashion shows, even conferences." There are perks for planners, too, such as unrestricted use of caterers, ample parking and a Metro stop across the street. There are just two rules to keep the integrity of the museum's archives, says Chitty: "We don't like red wine since it stains. Also, we welcome guests to take pictures as long as there's no flash."



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## ...Rediscover the Gardens

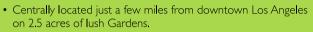




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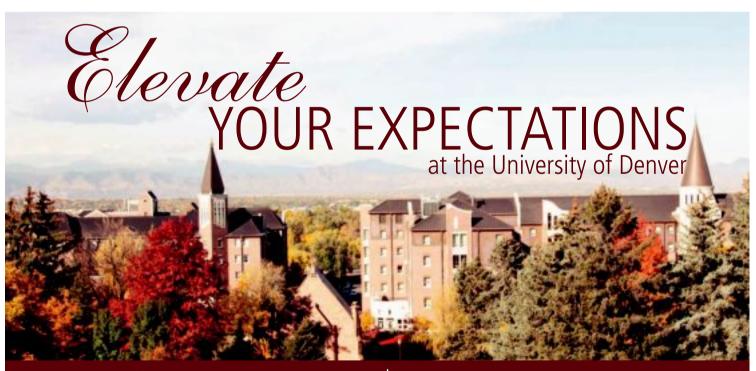






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## **ON THE ROAD**







#### AMA Washington, D.C. Executive Conference Center

There is something really special about being located within Arlington, Virginia's Crystal City. Known as an underground portal, a series of inter-connected buildings allows people to live, work and shop without ever going outside. In much the same way, the nearby AMA Executive Conference Center models itself as a self-contained unit with 10 executive meeting rooms (loaded with ergonomic chairs for 5 to 90 individuals), state-of-art A/V services and an onsite tech team as well as a plethora of lounges and beverage stations and even a business center and bookstore.

And the best part? "Everything is included in your meeting package," affirms Val Mazzilli-Brown, manager of meeting planning. "So, we don't mind if you drink a gallon of soda all day, because that's all included in your price." Since the AMA Centers run more than 3,000 meetings a year, she says they understand a planner's concerns. "Our biggest goal is to make meeting planning simple and affordable." That means no service charges and no sleeping commitments; in fact the center does not have overnight accommodations onsite, but they do have preferred hotels within a few blocks. Close, too, is Reagan National Airport, but you'll have to head outside and bid adieu to get there, which may be the hardest part.

#### The Loft at 600 F

"We've gone from having the space look like a nightclub with draping to hosting a craft fair where everything looks like a Martha Stewart catalog," says Dan Lovato, venue and events manager of The Loft at 600 F. That's precisely the beauty of the sprawling yet raw 2,000-square-foot space—it can be changed within 10 hours thanks to an attentive staff that's used to the protocol. "[All of the customization] is pretty much done solely by us. If someone puts in a request and they come for a site visit, we will make some notes and drawings, and when they show up, it's exactly like the picture."

Although the converted Loft (built in the 1900s) was originally intended to host meetups and hackathons for a number of tech clients, there was so much outside interest for corporate events and weddings that Lovato and his team knew they had to adapt. Now the venue, which can accommodate 120 standing, 80 seated, hosts everyone from political notables to PBS to more casual crowds simply looking for private party space after a concert or hockey game (The Verizon Center is just across the street). It also doesn't hurt that a famous Shakespeare theater and restaurant row are close by, drawing in a broader clientele. "In terms of high-level entertainment, this is where it's at in the District."







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## **ON THE ROAD**



#### National Cathedral School

As if a couple wasn't lucky enough to get married at the breathtaking National Cathedral, the second largest church in the United States, they also have access to the National Cathedral School just steps away for a lavish reception. "Brides and grooms are probably our biggest clientele," says Heidi Blake, facilities manager and event coordinator, although she's quick to point out numerous fundraisers and board meetings have also happened onsite in the popular Hearst Auditorium or the smaller Parlor space.

Because the spot is a functioning school, events have to be held in the evenings or on weekends though there is a lot of availability to be had. "Not everyone knows about us, so people who do book here like the flexibility in dates," Blake attests. Although, of course, the goal is to grow and make more people aware of this hidden gem—and with its epic views of the National Cathedral and its boutique services, including smart classrooms and an exclusive off-site caterer who provides all the linens and finer chairs, that is a close reality.

#### The National Zoo

Want to take your guests on a tour of the Amazon, a ravishing African safari or a trip to China to see baby pandas? Welcome to the National Zoo. Here, the country's premiere animal houses cater not only to wildlife but also welcome countless guests inside for receptions that are, in a word, interactive. "Let's just say the elephant house has no glass," jokes Mary Armbruster, food services manager. But no need to worry, "they're not going to go wild or jump fences, but they might make some noise."

It's all part of the thrilling experience and the reason why a number of corporate picnics and holiday parties return here year after year, with their families.

Rental options include the Great Meadow, a 250-person patio; a Picnic Pavilion for 125; and various animal houses that host around 75 seated or 175 for a less formal affair. As well, the Zoo provides access to a number of classrooms and boardrooms that can host 25-50 people.

Catering is available, but Armbruster cautions that planners know the cut-off for all rental drop-offs is 10 a.m. and pickups 5 p.m. since the property can't allow vehicular traffic inside during hours of operation. It's small peanuts though for an experience your guests won't soon forget. w



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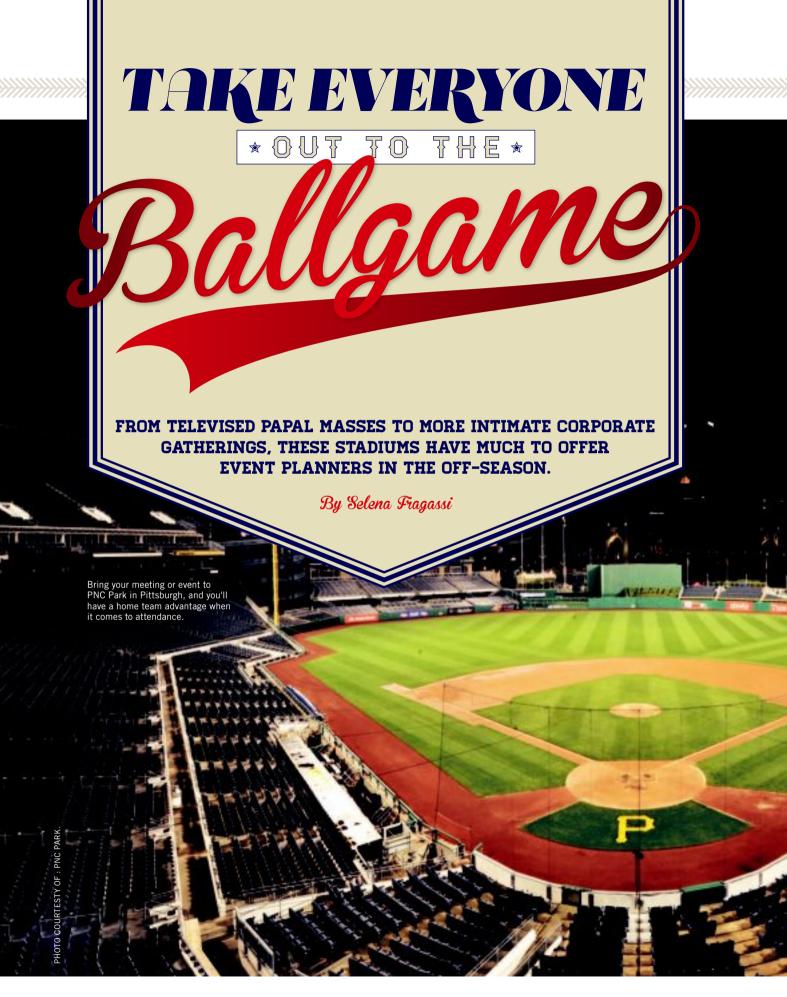
















wasted no time in hosting a lavish event right after it opened in 2008. The stadium, normally home to the Washington Nationals Major League Baseball team, welcomed former Pope Benedict XVI for a wellpublicized Papal Mass just two weeks later.

"It was an auspicious beginning and an extraordinary event to host when we were so new," says Catherine Silver, vice president of ballpark enterprises and guest experiences who now estimates the ballpark hosts around 600 events per year. "We literally had 40,000 people take communion at the concession stands, which was pretty amazing."

It was a similar experience at The Tower at Rice-Eccles Stadium at the University of Utah when it was home to the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City.

"Hosting the ceremonies actually allowed us to expand and offer our current reception areas," says Melissa Van Hien, client services manager, who notes that many private functions today still like to play off the Olympic theme. "It gave us the opportunity to start investing in more events with the funding to build [spaces] and bring in necessary equipment."

Today that means filling up the stadium with large groups for prominent public events like U2's 360 Tour or welcoming smaller corporate holiday parties in a variety of private skyboxes. In these and many more examples, what planners have come to realize is that arenas are in fact winsome places to host events of all sizes thanks to a variety of spaces, special services and oh yeah, stadium seating.



### Welcoming Visiting Teams

"We always like to say to the planner, 'Take a look at [the park] like a blank canvas, and we'll make it work," says Ann Elder, director of PNC Park Events, home of the Pittsburgh Pirates. Of course the grass and the seats are fixed but just about everything else can be re-orchestrated she says, pointing to the example of a recent triple Bar Mitzvah that she counts as one of the most unique uses of the stadium. "We had field presentations and fireworks. There was a private concert with a national act, and we redesigned the entire club level and hallways leading to that area with the theme of the event."

Here, too, corporate events have their choice, such as a game day gathering in one of two spaces that hold 10 to 2,000 people; after, groups can disperse into skyboxes or rows of seats to become spectators. Or there's the option for non-game day events

where you can rent anything "from a small private room to the whole ballpark," she says. "One client had a special anniversary celebration that utilized the whole venue with scavenger hunts, carnival games on the field and even a band performing on top of the dugout." Elder says PNC Park can go formal, too, with several galas under their belts, including tents in center field with plated dinners.

There's good reason to consider hosting an event at a stadium, says Chase Leonard, business development manager of FedEx-Field in Landover, Maryland.

"Feeling connected to so many historic moments and figures is a rare opportunity, and one that can have a special effect on guests," he says. "Just like on game days, it's the kind of environment that has the ability to inspire and motivate attendees."

At this stadium, home to the Wash-

ington Redskins football franchise, the smallest venue is the Owner's Club West Box (for 60 seated, 175 standing) while mid-tier spaces include the Bud Light Pavilion and Hall of Fame Plaza (each allowing 300-plus seated, 3,000 standing) or the full stadium, which can accommodate 85,000.

"We book events with clientele spanning the automotive, construction, hospitality, technology, wealth management and music industries, among others," says Leonard, noting the Adams Burch Tradeshow and the Lexus Ride and Drive have both optioned multi-day events over the years. There's also a large Diwali Mela Hindu festival that draws thousands each fall as well as the regular family parties and weddings to round out the park's diverse portfolio.

Weddings are a popular choice for The

Tower at Rice-Eccles Stadium as well. The marketing and licensing department offers the Ultimate Utah Wedding giveaway every year providing a free-of-charge ceremony and reception to a random fan.

"It's a place that brides and grooms don't normally have access to, which makes their day even more unique and special," says Van Hien. Plus, she adds there are the other ways the 45,000-capacity venue looks completely different from a sporting arena. "We have two large reception rooms that accommodate 350 people at table rounds; each has floor-to-ceiling windows that overlook the Salt Lake Valley and mountains, so it's really very elegant."



# A DIFFERENT VANTAGE POINT

It probably comes as another shock when planners see how the floor of the Tsongas Center in Lowell, Massachusetts can transform before their very eyes. Normally the home of the UMass Lowell hockey team, there's no one who will be skating on thin ice at group functions here. "We have a floor we can easily put down over the ice and then even assemble a stage and chairs over it," affirms David Aiello, assistant general manger and director of marketing. "We only need two days notice" to fit someone in, he says, which has happened before with assemblies that needed an indoor spot last-minute due to inclement weather.

The facility itself can host 6,500 people in the stadium seats while smaller groups are welcome to a number of suites and/or the Talent Club or Pavilion, which function as both restaurant and bar areas with space for 120-200 people. Another unique feature for this

ice rink is the extra area outside, called "the backyard," that Aiello says is often used for block parties or even weddings.

Nationals Park is another that prides itself on getting creative with its indoor/ outdoor capabilities, including a dedicated conference center and other concourse and on-field excursions for 40 to 40,000 guests. "We host a massive sales meeting for 2,000 people every year; the employees sit in the stadium's seats and the company uses our video board to broadcast their presentation. After, they break out into groups and use every space in the building," says Silver, adding, "It's the company's highest-attended meeting because it is such an unusual place to go off-site." During the meeting, the team's promotional pack will throw T-shirts into the crowd and send out the mascot to make it feel like an actual game. "People love the mascot," she laughs. "You wouldn't believe how many pictures get taken with him."



Consider making the team mascot your guest of honor. Seen here is Screech, the official bird of the Washington Nationals baseball team.

# THE SOUVENIRS

Guests also love their favorite players, which is an added perk you can find at FedExField. "We can coordinate alumni and/or cheerleader appearances, autographed items by high-profile players, exclusive backstage tours and souvenir gift bags," says Leonard. "We do our best to help planners leave a great impression on their guests."

At Nationals Park, baseball great Frank Howard has often come to events to sign autographs, just one of the alumni available. "We do have some players that live locally and we have been able to acquire them for paid appearances at events," says Silver. "It's rare but there are also times that the team is in town and has a day off, and we can pursue this opportunity with planners."

If attendees want to actually *feel* like a player, they can do so with added programs at PNC Park. "We offer team activities like group softball or baseball games or batting practice," says Elder. There's also the capability for ballpark tours for a behind-the-scenes look at the press box, clubhouse and dugouts.







# Vendors and Extra Services

Not everything models the ballpark though—take the food. After all, not every function is suitable for hot dogs and popcorn. No problem, says Silver. "We work with Levy Restaurants that has a separate catering arm for non-game day events. For example, we just held a government event with five-star gourmet dining. Levy is able to meet with planners and design custom menus. They can even bring in a sommelier if you want one!"

PNC Park also works exclusively with the Levy Restaurant Group as well as Aramark. "They put together a different menu than what is used at the games so you can have anything from plated meals to hors d'oeuvres and food stations," says Elder.

Another service that may not be expected at a major stadium is high-tech A/V. "Most of our larger spaces have been redesigned with in-house screen projectors, ceiling projectors, drop-down screens, po-

diums and microphones already installed," says Elder. "If a client needs something in addition to that—for example, if they need multiple wireless microphones or headsets—we will work through a vendor to gather that equipment."

At FedExField, Leonard mentions 30' x 100' high-def LED video boards that can be customized with welcome messages and company logos; additional monitors can be branded throughout the stadium, too. "We also recently installed 8,000 NRG solar panels which power the stadium on non-game days," he says, which help enhance the experience and allows the park to remain sustainable.

An in-house A/V manager comes with rentals at Tsongas Center and there are onsite crews to handle staging, rigging, sound and lights. Another benefit, says Aiello, is that "we do all the marketing, booking and promoting in-house as well as ticket sales."



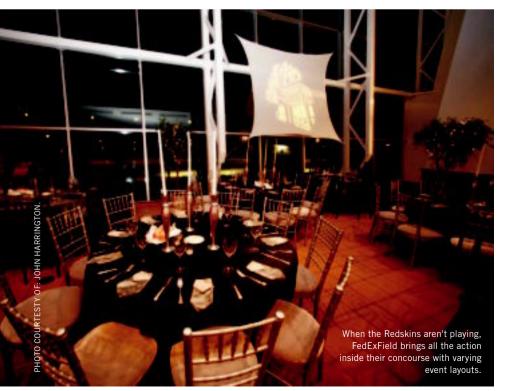


Top: Planners can customize video boards with welcome messages and company logos. Above: Give your guests the red carpet treatment with special add-ons available in packages at FedExField.

# THE CHANGE UPS

So, with all the advantages, you might wonder about the challenges of booking a meeting or event at a stadium. Scheduling is one. While venues like the Tsongas Center can book weeks out or The Tower at Rice-Eccles Stadium that plans six months ahead, others need more flexibility.

"Our game schedule doesn't come out until the end of September or October, and we can't guarantee any dates until that schedule is released for obvious reasons," says Elder of PNC Park's process for nongame day functions. "Once we do know the blackout dates, we can plan up to a week before the event."





It's a similar waiting game at Nationals Park. "During game season, we are typically available two full weeks a month during our two home stands, and then from November until March, the park is wide open," says Silver. "But once we get the schedule, I will say it fills up very quickly."

The other dilemma can sometimes be the weather. Since many of the arenas and stadiums are sans domes, inclement conditions have to always be part of the thought process.

"You have to have a contingency plan," says Elder. "We're working with a client right now who is looking to do a dinner on the warmup track in September, and her plan is within three days out—if the weather looks like it's not going to agree with us—then we need to make a decision to tent the field and have that pricing ready to go." Other options

might include moving the event to the concourse or other covered area last-minute.

Van Hien has another way at The Tower at Rice-Eccles Stadium. "Backup dates!" Although her biggest nightmare in recent memory had less to do with weather than with a banged-up rock star. "When we had the U2 tour a couple of years ago, Bono broke his back right as we were in the process of setting up the stage," she recalls. "The band had to postpone the tour, and we had to take the whole setup down and then find another date where we could do it all over again. We were able to tag on to the end of the tour to make it up," she adds, pausing slightly. "But sometimes that's just the name of the game." uw

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From custom day sessions to full-on retreats, these sprawling grounds with modernized comforts have a lot of planners ready to camp out

BY SELENA FRAGASSI



IF

the idea of a campground has you recalling images of "Wet Hot American Summer" or, worse yet, "Friday the 13th," have no fear—these scenic, nature-focused retreats are far from campy.

"We've invested at least \$10 million into our facility in the span of nine years," says Mike Ward, advancement director of Lutheridge Conference Center & Retreat, a sprawling 160-acre campus in the western North Carolina Mountains that just completed renovations on all their housing facilities. "What we offer is certainly different from the dingy, moldy idea people might have of camps. We've taken really good care of this place."

In fact, he says, Lutheridge offers "anything a meeting planner could want or need," including lodging for 180 people in hotel-like accommodations, food service provided by a professional chef, Wi-Fi, LCD projectors and an abundance of meeting spaces that includes 11 private rooms and a theater-style venue for up to 550 people (overflow hotels are located within three miles).

It's a similar scenario at the Midwest Christian Retreat Centers, which offers five locations within the central part of the country—all with modernized amenities. "We provide free Wi-Fi and A/V equipment in all of our meeting spaces, which are both included in the rental price. And we don't charge anything extra to set up screens or projectors," says Karen Moran, group accounts manager. "In fact a lot of our meeting spaces already have an LCD TV in the room

# AT HOWE ON THE RANGE

and most have projectors already in the ceilings." The Centers also offer state-of-the-art sound systems high-tech enough for full-band performances.

"We're constantly upgrading our meeting spaces to try and keep up with the demand," she continues, which is a nice accompaniment to the natural settings outside, such as the Eagle Rock location set in the Ozark Mountains or the Lost Valley property in North Michigan. The largest grounds, Lake Williamson in southern Illinois, can host up to 1,300 with overnight accommodations, but Moran is quick to say don't let those numbers overwhelm you. "We can also host as few as 15 people."

# EXPERIENCE ON YOUR SIDE

Really, the advantage of using a camp is that "we've been doing this for 112 years," says David Kisselback, CEO of upstate New York's Silver Bay YMCA nestled in the Adirondacks. "We have experience doing it all, from barbeques to large banquets or small meetings. We even have a repeat group that comes here for 11 nights every summer."

One of the resources Silver Bay YMCA offers is a helpful staff that walks planners and their groups through all points of their stay. "Our staff will review all aspects of the programming, the planning and make sure that the attendees are in the appropriate spaces and understand the layout." It's a good thing since the campus sits on 700 acres and has 65 buildings at a planner's disposal. Here, meeting

spaces range from boutique rooms to large auditoriums that seat up to 700 people; for overnight groups, varied accommodations offer dorm-style options to more upscale rooms with private baths. Silver Bay YMCA is also planning to expand to a dedicated conference center in the next few years.

"It's really a great place for conferences because spouses and children can come and find plenty of activities to do while training sessions are going on," says Kisselback noting 100 different types of programs from tennis courts, archery and a full-scale craft shop, plus the beautiful shoreline of Lake George, which offers the opportunity for rowboats and canoes.









# NATURE IS NURTURING

Water reserves are also the focal point of Manitou Springs, a retreat and meeting center in Saskatchewan, Canada that sits on the famed Manitou Lake, which is revered for its unique mineral properties. "Water like this could only be found in some places in the world like the Carlsbad of Czech Republic and the Dead Sea of Israel," informs Group Sales and Marketing Manager Sue Baybikova, "and it's said to help muscles and joints."

Although the retreat can't make any medical claims, "those who know about it say how great the Lake is for their health," she continues, noting much of their clientele remains seniors. However, government and private sectors make up a large portion of their group business, attracted to not only the location but also Manitou Springs' emphasis on healthy meetings like water activities, yoga sessions or the brand-new Water's Edge Restaurant that was revamped to offer more nutritious and gluten-free options.

Altogether it provides planners one huge benefit: attendance. "I've heard many planners say it's so nice not to be in another city hotel because there, people just seem to disappear after the lunch break to go shopping or go to the casino. Yet here it's really distraction-free and tranquil so people can concentrate on the actual meeting," Baybikova says. At Manitou Springs, meeting venues can host groups from 6 to 12 in boardrooms and 120 in the largest space, each offering free Wi-Fi and A/V services. For overnight groups, there are 102 rooms available, close enough to the lake for late-night dips in the water.

# LOCAL ATTRACTIONS

Another scenic spot in Canada is the Northwest Territories region, which sits just south of the Arctic Circle and has long been home to the original Dene tribe. In recent years, these communities have started to open up their region to visiting groups—and thank goodness for that.

"It's definitely going to be a place unlike any other meeting spot you've been to before," says Jason Knibbs, business developer for The Hotkey Group, which provides tourism solutions for

# AT HOWE ON THE RANGE

unique destinations like Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territories. Whether it's watching the aurora at night or tapping into some of the best fishing lakes in the world, "there's definitely a thing called northern hospitality up here, and the residents are really thrilled to be able to showcase their traditions and culture."

A newer option in the town of Deline offers immersion packages with the locals and stays in the Great Views Lodge, accessible only by plane, which makes it even more remote and special. But don't worry, says Knibbs, "there are a lot of local airlines in the Northwest Territories that run Monday through Friday, or charters can be worked out." The only thing you might have to plan for is luggage restrictions since they are smaller planes.

The other unique attribute to this region is that, in the summertime, there are 24 hours of daylight, making meetings possible at any time of day, says Knibbs. "What you'll find is that you really don't get tired when you're in the sun all the time."

Of course, there are modern amenities in this region, too, such

as the Blatchford Lake Lodge that can host groups of 6 to 26 and Yellowknife itself has an abundance of hotels that, in total, can host 700 people. Logistically, it's easier to host overnight groups, says Knibbs, but day groups can be done with "no problem."

# DAY CAMPS OR AWAY CAMPS

That's the general sentiment of most of the camps—you're welcome to stay over if you want to, but there's no pressure to host a retreat.

"We do a lot of day business," affirms Bob Blake, Arkansas 4-H Center director. "Since we're close to the capitol, we'll often host a government session for 400 to 500 people that will just come out for the day. Of use is a full-service conference center, a 500-seat auditorium, computer lab, cafeteria-style dining and even indoor and outdoor rock climbing and ropes courses. As well there are accommodations with 428 beds if needed.

Since the national group of 4-H Centers service youth leadership programs, there may be some co-mingling with a younger









Clockwise from top left: The Manitou Springs meeting rooms get down to business; then, guests of the resort can enjoy the boutique hotels; a 4-H Center auditorium provides a circular round for visiting groups; one of Silver Bay YMCA's unique spaces is this boathouse meeting room.

(Opposite page) Featured at top: The pensive settings at Lutheridge Conference Center & Retreat. Bottom: The Inn at Silver Bay YMCA.





population in places like the dining room—but overall the experience will be more cost effective than most in the area. "We offer the full meeting package but it's typically 60% less [than our competitors]," says Blake.

# EVEN MORE TO VALUE

Like the Arkansas 4-H Center, many of the camps profiled quoted significant savings over more traditional venues in the area. At Lutheridge, Ward says double occupancy with two meals a day is about \$80 per person.

Kisselback adds that the added value at the Silver Bay YMCA comes in the cost of food, which is not skimping by any means. "All of our rates include meals, and we have a full-scale dining room that offers everything from freshly-made entrees to vegetarian options."

Another benefit of using a camp like Silver Bay is that "we have the flexibility of closing and opening as needed," Kisselback says. Arkansas 4-H, for example, is open year-round. "We even do holidays; the only one we can't sell is Mother's Day," laughs Blake.

Yet the biggest value of all for camps and retreats is the experience, says Moran: "It's your chance to finally get away from it all, but still get so much done." uv

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# INDUSTRY UPDATES news & awards by Selena Fragassi

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

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# Centre Mont-Royal Accepts Design Challenge and Everyone Wins

In 2013, the Montreal conference centre completed the first phase of its interior redesign with new carpets, paint and wallpaper to provide a fresh and more inviting look. In 2014, Centre Mont-Royal will continue the mission with phase two aimed at revamping the reception area and providing contemporary and relaxing furnishings throughout the spaces.

UniqueVenues.ca/CentreMont-Royal

# University of Florida Breaks Ground & Barriers with New Residence Hall

In February, the Gainesville campus started work on the forthcoming Cypress Hall, a new residence for students and conference guests that will open in the fall of 2015. The accessible building has 255 beds, 35 spaces geared to help those with higher levels of physical support needs, adding to an inventory of 70 spaces campus-wide that are modified to accommodate those with disabilities. The facility is projected to cost \$20.5 million and is on track to be certified LEED Platinum.

UniqueVenues.com/UnivFlorida







# INDUSTRY UPDATES news & awards by Selena Fragassi

# St. Catharine's College Sacrifices No Expense in New State-of-the-Art Building

The breathtaking London-area campus (one of 40 properties within the Conference Cambridge portfolio) recently unveiled the McGrath Centre, a sleek stone, glass and steel building for meetings, lectures, receptions, catered events and performances. Named for esteemed alumnus Harvey McGrath, guests will enjoy a spacious lobby, meeting rooms and sophisticated downstairs bar. A versatile auditorium features tiered, retractable seating for up to 154 attendees and upgraded A/V and lighting systems for an innovative conference area. Since its opening, the McGrath Centre has been in high demand by planners for its beautiful and spacious facilities, which has some calling it "the best venue in central Cambridge."

UniqueVenues.com/StCatharines



# TIP:

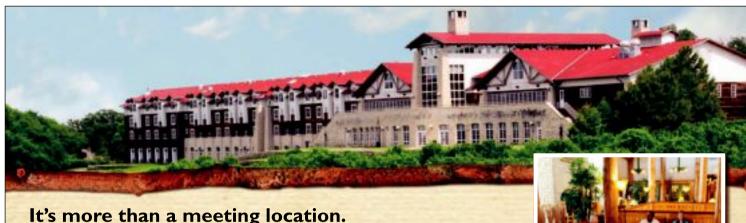
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# The Conference Center at RWJ Hamilton Could Be Entertainer of the Year

The sprawling conference center in Mercerville, New Jersey just announced a brand-new offering of diverse group activities for clients. These unique teambuilding exercises are modeled after a number of pop culture references and include cake wars, a cupcake challenge, "Survivor" challenge, "win it in a minute" and traditional scavenger hunts. Or, planners can take it up a notch with "celebrity" roasts, specialty event emcees, wine and beer tastings and singing and dancing servers. As well, all planners are invited to work with the RWJ Hamilton team to create a custom idea.

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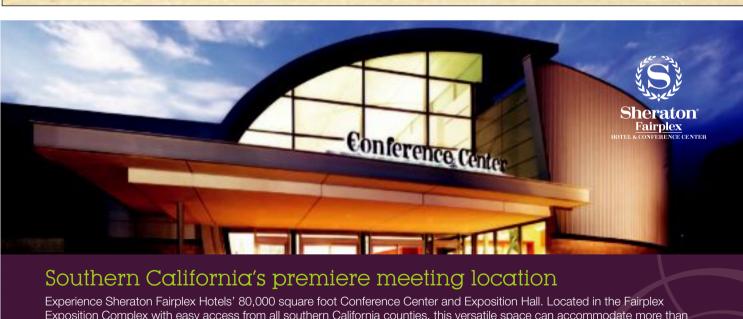
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*UniqueVenues.com* is the largest online database of unique meeting and event venues with additional, in-depth information about each of the listings. Here, you can uncover availability, accommodation offerings including bath types, technology capabilities, rental fees, plus targeted info about meeting specifications including group capacities and square footage of each space. You can also view videos and browse photo galleries to get the full perspective before making a decision to book your event. The best part is the website offers a free search service that requires no fees or registration—and there is no commission for using the site or sending RFPs. You can browse without commitment and request additional information with the click of a button.





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# **USA**

### **ALABAMA**

Shocco Springs Conference Center // Talladega uniquevenues.com/ShoccoSprings

# **ARIZONA**

- \*\*Black Canyon Conference Center // Phoenix uniquevenues.com/blackcanyon
- Desert Willow Conference Center // Phoenix uniquevenues.com/DesertWillow
- High Country Conference Center at Northern Arizona University // Flagstaff uniquevenues.com/HighCountryCC
- Thunderbird Executive Inn & Conference Center// Glendale uniquevenues.com/ThunderbirdExecutiveInn

# **ARKANSAS**

\*\*Description of the Indian Arkansas 4-H Center | Little Rock uniquevenues.com/arkansas4hcenter

# **CALIFORNIA**

AMA San Francisco Conference Center // San Francisco uniquevenues.com/amasanfrancisco

**Arrowhead Pine Rose Cabins** // Twin Peaks uniquevenues.com/pinerosecabins

- California State University -University Student Union // Northridge uniquevenues.com/CSUNUSU
- California State University Channel Islands // Camarillo uniquevenues.com/calstatechannelislands
- California State University, Northridge // Northridge uniquevenues.com/CalStateNorthridge

**Chapman University** // Orange uniquevenues.com/Chapman

Concordia University Irvine // Irvine uniquevenues.com/Concordialrvine

**Dolce Hayes Mansion** // San Jose uniquevenues.com/hayesmansion

- Devent Services at U.C. Berkeley // Berkeley uniquevenues.com/UCBerkeleyUnion
- Fairplex Hotel & Conference Center // Pomona uniquevenues.com/FairplexConfCtr

**Humboldt State University** // Arcata uniquevenues.com/humboldtstate

# Loyola Marymount University // Los Angeles uniquevenues.com/LoyolaMarymount

• Occidental College // Los Angeles uniquevenues.com/Occidental

**Pepperdine University** // Malibu uniquevenues.com/Pepperdine

- Pickwick Gardens Conference Center // Burbank uniquevenues.com/Pickwick
- **Pomona College** // Claremont uniquevenues.com/PomonaCollege
- Riverside Convention & Visitors Bureau // Riverside uniquevenues.com/RiversideCVB
- San Francisco State University // San Francisco uniquevenues.com/SFSU
- **▶** San Jose State University // San Jose uniquevenues.com/sjsu
- San Ramon Valley Conference Center // San Ramon uniquevenues.com/sanramonvalleycc
- > Sonoma State University // Rohnert Park uniquevenues.com/SonomaState

**Sparky's Hot Rod Garage** // San Carlos uniquevenues.com/Sparkys

- UCLA Lake Arrowhead Conference Center // Lake Arrowhead uniquevenues.com/UCLALakeArrowhead
- University of California, Davis // Davis uniquevenues.com/ucdavis
- University of California, Los Angeles // Los Angeles uniquevenues.com/ucla
- University of California, Riverside // Riverside uniquevenues.com/UCRiverside

University of California, Riverside - Palm Desert Center // Palm Desert uniquevenues.com/ucrpalmdesert

University of California, Santa Barbara // Santa Barbara uniquevenues.com/UCSB

**University of California, Santa Cruz** // Santa Cruz uniquevenues.com/ucsantacruz

**University of Redlands** // Redlands uniquevenues.com/UnivRedlands

University Student Union, California State University, Long Beach // Long Beach uniquevenues.com/CSULB

Whittier College // Whittier uniquevenues.com/WhittierCollege

# venue

# **COLORADO**

**▶** Colorado College // Colorado Springs uniquevenues.com/coloradocollege

Colorado Mountain College - Leadville // Leadville uniquevenues.com/CMCLeadville

- \*\*Dolorado School of Mines // Golden uniquevenues.com/ColoradoSchoolMines\*\*
- ) Colorado State University // Fort Collins uniquevenues.com/CSU

**History Colorado Center** // Denver uniquevenues.com/ColoradoHistoryMuseum

**Howl at the Moon** // Denver uniquevenues.com/HowlDenver

**)** Pueblo Community College // Pueblo uniquevenues.com/pueblocc

**The Manor House** // Littleton uniquevenues.com/TheManorHouseCO

**University of Colorado Boulder** // Boulder uniquevenues.com/CU

- University of Colorado Colorado Springs // Colorado Springs uniquevenues.com/uccs
- **▶** *University of Denver* // Denver uniquevenues.com/uofdenver

# CONNECTICUT

Southern Connecticut State University // New Haven uniquevenues.com/SouthernCT

**The Amber Room Colonnade** // Danbury uniquevenues.com/amberroom

**The Riverfront Boathouse** // Hartford uniquevenues.com/theboathouse

The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts // Hartford uniquevenues.com/BushnellCenter

University of Hartford // West Hartford uniquevenues.com/UnivHartford

Yale University // New Haven uniquevenues.com/vale

### **DELAWARE**

- Chase Center on the Riverfront // Wilmington uniquevenues.com/ChaseCenter
- The Clayton Conference Center
  // Newark
  uniquevenues.com/UnivDelawareNewark

**Delaware Art Museum** // Wilmington uniquevenues.com/delawareartmuseum

Goodstay Mansion & Gardens
// Wilmington
uniquevenues.com/UDelWilmington

Virden Retreat Center // Lewes uniquevenues.com/Virden

### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

**1331 G Conference Center** // Washington uniquevenues.com/1331gconferencecntr

▶ 20 F Street NW Conference Center // Washington uniquevenues.com/20fstreetcc

African American Civil War Museum // Washington uniquevenues.com/afroamcivilwar

AMA Washington, DC Executive Conference Center // Arlington uniquevenues.com/AMADC

**District Architecture Center** // Washington uniquevenues.com/DistrictArchitectureCenter

**Dumbarton House** // Washington uniquevenues.com/DumbartonHouse

FHI360 Conference Center // Washington uniquevenues.com/AEDConferenceCenter

Florida House on Capitol Hill // Washington uniquevenues.com/FloridaHouse

**Globe Theater** // Washington uniquevenues.com/globetheater

Hill Center at the Old Naval Hospital // Washington uniquevenues.com/HillCenter

**Hillyer Art Space** // Washington uniquevenues.com/hillyerartspace

**Josephine Butler Parks Center** // Washington uniquevenues.com/josephinebutlercenter

McLean Gardens Ballroom // Washington uniquevenues.com/McLeanGarden

National Cathedral School // Washington uniquevenues.com/NationalCathedralSchool

Nationals Park // Washington uniquevenues.com/nationalspark

Partnership for Public Service Conference Center // Washington uniquevenues.com/PartnershipConferenceCenter

**President Lincoln's Cottage** // Washington uniquevenues.com/PresidentLincolnsCottage

**The Carriage House** // Washington uniquevenues.com/CarriageHouse

The Loft at 600 F // Washington uniquevenues.com/Loftat600F

**The National Zoo** // Washington uniquevenues.com/nationalzoo

**The Whittemore House** // Washington uniquevenues.com/WhittemoreHouse

Trinity Washington University // Washington uniquevenues.com/trinitycenterdc

# **FLORIDA**

Adam W. Herbert University Center, University of North Florida // Jacksonville uniquevenues.com/univnoflorida

Collaborative Labs at St. Petersburg College // Largo uniquevenues.com/collaborativelabs

• Florida Gulf Coast University
// Fort Myers
uniquevenues.com/floridagulfcoast

Florida Institute of Technology // Melbourne uniquevenues.com/FloridaTech

Perez Art Museum Miami // Miami uniquevenues.com/PerezMuseum

University of Central Florida Continuing Education // Orlando uniquevenues.com/UCFContEd

*University of Florida //* Gainesville uniquevenues.com/UnivFlorida

Zadok Gallery // Miami uniquevenues.com/ZadokGallery

### **GEORGIA**

AMA Atlanta Conference Center // Atlanta uniquevenues.com/amaatlanta

Atlanta Metropolitan State College // Atlanta uniquevenues.com/amsc

**Brenau University** // Gainesville uniquevenues.com/brenau

**▶** Emory University // Atlanta uniquevenues.com/EmoryUniv

Georgia Institute of Technology // Atlanta uniquevenues.com/georgiatech

**Georgia International Horse Park** // Conyers uniquevenues.com/GAHorsePark

• Georgia Southern University // Statesboro uniquevenues.com/georgiasouthern

Georgia State University Housing - Conference Services // Atlanta

uniquevenues.com/GeorgiaState

LOFT at Castleberry Hill // Atlanta uniquevenues.com/CastleberryHill

Morrow Center // Morrow uniquevenues.com/morrowcenter

The Armstrong Center // Savannah uniquevenues.com/armstrongcenter

The Dennard Conference Center
// Atlanta
uniquevenues.com/ClevelandDennardCenter

UGA Hotel and Conference Center // Athens

uniquevenues.com/ugcce

**University of North Georgia** // Dahlonega uniquevenues.com/UnivNorthGeorgia

> Valdosta State University // Valdosta uniquevenues.com/ValdostaState

# **IDAHO**

North Idaho College // Coeur d'Alene uniquevenues.com/nic

The College of Idaho // Caldwell uniquevenues.com/Collegeofldaho

University of Idaho - University Support Services // Moscow uniquevenues.com/UnivIdaho

# **ILLINOIS**

Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum // Springfield uniquevenues.com/LincolnLibrary

Adler Planetarium // Chicago uniquevenues.com/AdlerPlanetarium

Allerton Park & Retreat Center, University of Illinois // Monticello uniquevenues.com/AllertonParkRetreat

AMA Chicago Executive Conference Center // Chicago uniquevenues.com/amachicago

American Dental Association // Chicago uniquevenues.com/AmericanDentalAssoc

**Arrowhead Golf Club** // Wheaton uniquevenues.com/ArrowheadGolfClub

**Chicago Botanic Garden** // Glencoe uniquevenues.com/ChicagoBotanicGarden

Chicago Southland Convention & Visitors Bureau // Lansing uniquevenues.com/chicagosouthland

Chicago's North Shore Convention and Visitor's Bureau // Skokie

unique venues.com/Chicago North Shore CVB

DePaul University - Loop Campus // Chicago uniquevenues.com/DePaulLoop

**Elgin Community College** // Elgin uniquevenues.com/ElginCC

Illinois Institute of Technology // Chicago uniquevenues.com/IIT

\*\*Illinois State University // Normal uniquevenues.com/IllinoisState

Lake Williamson Christian Center // Carlinville uniquevenues.com/LakeWilliamsonCenter

Lewis University // Romeoville uniquevenues.com/LewisUniv

**Loyola at Cuneo Mansion & Gardens** // Vernon Hills uniquevenues.com/CuneoMansionandGardens

Loyola University Chicago // Chicago uniquevenues.com/loyolachicago

Loyola University Chicago Retreat & Ecology Campus // Woodstock uniquevenues.com/LUCRetreatCenter

McCook Athletic & Exposition Center // McCook uniquevenues.com/McCookCenter

**Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago** // Chicago uniquevenues.com/MCAChicago

Museum of Science and Industry // Chicago uniquevenues.com/MSIChicago

Navy Pier Chicago // Chicago uniquevenues.com/NavyPier

**North Park University** // Chicago uniquevenues.com/northparkuniv

Northern Illinois University Conference Centers // Naperville uniquevenues.com/NIUConferenceCenters

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

// Carbondale uniquevenues.com/siuc

**St. John's Catholic Newman Center** // Champaign uniquevenues.com/StJohnsNewmanCtr

The Field Museum // Chicago uniquevenues.com/FieldMuseum

The Flats at East-West University // Chicago uniquevenues.com/TheFlats

The Hyatt Lodge & Hamburger University // Oak Brook uniquevenues.com/hyattlodge

The John G. Shedd Aquarium // Chicago uniquevenues.com/SheddAquarium

**The University of Chicago** // Chicago uniquevenues.com/UChicago

**Toyota Park** // Bridgeview uniquevenues.com/ToyotaPark

**U.S. Cellular Field** // Chicago uniquevenues.com/USCellularField

University Center Conference Chicago // Chicago uniquevenues.com/ConferenceChicago

University of Illinois at Chicago Event Spaces // Chicago

uniquevenues.com/UICEvents

• University of Illinois Conferences and Special Events // Champaign uniquevenues.com/uillinoisconferences

Wheaton College // Wheaton uniquevenues.com/wheaton

WhirlyBall // Chicago uniquevenues.com/WhirlyBall

### INDIANA

**Anderson University** // Anderson uniquevenues.com/Anderson

\*\*Ball State University // Muncie uniquevenues.com/BallState

**Bethel College** // Mishawaka uniquevenues.com/BethelCollege

**Earlham College - Runyan Center** // Richmond uniquevenues.com/Earlham

Manchester University
// North Manchester
uniquevenues.com/ManchesterCollege

Manchester University - Fort Wayne Campus //
Fort Wayne
uniquevenues.com/manchesterfortwayne

Notre Dame Conference Center and Morris Inn // Notre Dame uniquevenues.com/NotreDameConfCenter

Palais Royale at Morris Performing Arts Center // South Bend uniquevenues.com/PalaisRoyale2

**Purdue University** // West Lafayette uniquevenues.com/Purdue

The Children's Museum of Indianapolis
// Indianapolis
uniquevenues.com/indianapolischildrensmuseum

**Tilson Conference Center** // Greenwood uniquevenues.com/TilsonConfCtr

### **IOWA**

**Iowa State University** // Ames uniquevenues.com/IowaState

**)** Sunstream Retreat Center // Ogden uniquevenues.com/Sunstream

# venue

# **KENTUCKY**

Northern Kentucky University
// Highland Heights
uniquevenues.com/NKU

### LOUISIANA

**LSU of Alexandria** // Alexandria uniquevenues.com/lsua

**▶** *Tulane University* // New Orleans uniquevenues.com/Tulane

University of Louisiana at Lafayette // Lafayette uniquevenues.com/ULLafayette

### MAINE

**Bates College** // Lewiston uniquevenues.com/BatesCollege

**▶** Colby College // Waterville uniquevenues.com/ColbyCollege

University of Maine // Orono uniquevenues.com/UnivMaine

**University of New England** // Biddeford uniquevenues.com/UnivNewEngland

### **MARYLAND**

**Anne Arundel Community College** // Arnold uniquevenues.com/AnneArundel

**Antrim 1844 Country House Hotel** // Taneytown uniquevenues.com/Antrim1844

**Billingsley Manor** // Upper Marlboro uniquevenues.com/Billingsley

**Brookside Gardens** // Wheaton uniquevenues.com/BrooksideGardens

**Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum** // St. Michaels uniquevenues.com/ChesapeakeBayMaritime

**)** Coppin State University // Baltimore uniquevenues.com/Coppin

Delegant Settings of Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission // Greenbelt uniquevenues.com/elegantsettings

• Frostburg State University // Frostburg uniquevenues.com/Frostburg

**Glenview Mansion & F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre** // Rockville uniquevenues.com/GlenviewMansion

Harbor Market Catering at National Aquarium // Baltimore uniquevenues.com/NationalAquariumBaltimore

**Historic London Town & Gardens** // Edgewater uniquevenues.com/HistoricLondonTown

- Johns Hopkins University Conference Services // Baltimore uniquevenues.com/johnshopkins
- Legg Mason Tower at Harbor East // Baltimore uniquevenues.com/LeggMasonTower

Lodge at Little Seneca Creek // Potomac uniquevenues.com/LodgeSenecaCreek

- Loyola University Maryland || Baltimore uniquevenues.com/loyolamaryland
- National 4-H Youth Conference Center // Chevy Chase

**Newton White Mansion** // Mitcheville uniquevenues.com/NewtonWhite

uniquevenues.com/National4-H

Osprey Point Retreat & Conference Center // Royal Oak uniquevenues.com/OspreyPoint

Oxon Hill Manor // Oxon Hill uniquevenues.com/OxonHill

**Prince George's Ballroom** // Landover uniquevenues.com/PrinceGeorge

• Redskins Special Events at FedExField // Landover uniquevenues.com/FedExField

**Rockwood Manor** // Potomac uniquevenues.com/RockwoodManor

**Snow Hill Manor** // Laurel uniquevenues.com/SnowHill

- Towson University Event & Conference Services // Towson uniquevenues.com/TowsonUniv
- *Universities at Shady Grove* Conference Center // Rockville uniquevenues.com/shadygrove

**University of Baltimore** // Baltimore uniquevenues.com/universityofbaltimore

- University of Maryland Baltimore County // Baltimore uniquevenues.com/UMBC
- University of Maryland, College Park // College Park uniquevenues.com/umcollegepark
- **Washington College** // Chestertown uniquevenues.com/washingtoncollege

# **MASSACHUSETTS**

\*\*Babson Executive Conference Center // Babson Park (Wellesley) uniquevenues.com/Babson

**Boston College Connors Center** // Dover uniquevenues.com/BCConnorsCenter

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- Campus Center at UMass Boston // Boston uniquevenues.com/UMassBoston
- > Curry College // Milton uniquevenues.com/CurryCollege
- **▶** Endicott College // Beverly uniquevenues.com/Endicott
- Fitchburg State College // Fitchburg uniquevenues.com/Fitchburg
- **Hampshire College** // Amherst uniquevenues.com/HampshireCollege
- Hotel UMass // Amherst uniquevenues.com/UMassAmherst
- Massachusetts College of Art and Design // Boston uniquevenues.com/MCAD

Merrimack College // North Andover uniquevenues.com/Merrimack

Metro Meeting Centers - Boston
// Boston
uniquevenues.com/MetroMeetingBoston

Misselwood at Endicott College // Beverly uniquevenues.com/misselwood

- Mount Holyoke College and Willits-Hallowell Conference Center // South Hadley uniquevenues.com/mountholyoke
- *Nichols College //* Dudley uniquevenues.com/NicholsCollege

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**Simmons College** // Boston uniquevenues.com/SimmonsCollege

- > Springfield College // Springfield uniquevenues.com/springfield
- > Stonehill College Conference & Event Services // Easton uniquevenues.com/Stonehill
- The Conference Center at Bentley // Waltham uniquevenues.com/ConferenceCtrBentley
- The Conference Center at Waltham Woods // Waltham uniquevenues.com/walthamwoods

The Joseph B. Martin Conference Center at Harvard Medical School // Boston uniquevenues.com/harvardmedicalconferencecenter

The Red Barn at Hampshire College // Amherst uniquevenues.com/TheRedBarn

**Tufts University** // Medford uniquevenues.com/Tufts

- University of Massachusetts Dartmouth // Dartmouth uniquevenues.com/UMassDartmouth
- University of Massachusetts Lowell // Lowell uniquevenues.com/UMassLowell

Wylie Inn and Conference Center at Endicott College // Beverly uniquevenues.com/WylieInn

### **MICHIGAN**

**Calvin College** // Grand Rapids uniquevenues.com/calvincollege

**▶** Faholo // Grass Lake uniquevenues.com/Faholo

Gull Lake Ministries Conference Center // Hickory Corners uniquevenues.com/gulllake

- Grand Valley State University // Allendale uniquevenues.com/grandvalleystate
- **▶** Hope College // Holland uniquevenues.com/HopeCollege
- **▶** Lost Valley Retreat Center // Gaylord uniquevenues.com/LVRetreat
- Michigan State University // East Lansing uniquevenues.com/MichiganState

Oakland University - Oakland Center // Rochester uniquevenues.com/OaklandCenter

**Saginaw Valley State University** // University Center uniquevenues.com/SVSU

VisTaTech Center at Schoolcraft College // Livonia uniquevenues.com/vistatechcenter

Washtenaw Community College // Ann Arbor uniquevenues.com/WCC

Western Michigan University - Bernhard Center // Kalamazoo uniquevenues.com/WesternMichiganUniv

Ypsilanti Area Convention & Visitors Bureau // Ypsilanti uniquevenues.com/YpsilantiCVB

### **MINNESOTA**

Macalester College // Saint Paul uniquevenues.com/Macalester

# McNamara Alumni Center // Minneapolis

uniquevenues.com/mcnamara

Oak Ridge Hotel & Conference Center // Chaska uniquevenues.com/OakRidge

**Saint Paul Athletic Club** // St. Paul uniquevenues.com/stpaulathleticclub

**St. Catherine University** // St. Paul uniquevenues.com/StCatherineUniv

**University Club of St. Paul** // Saint Paul uniquevenues.com/univclubstpaul

• University of Minnesota Conference and Event Services // Minneapolis uniquevenues.com/UnivMinnesota

**University of Northwestern - St. Paul** // St. Paul uniquevenues.com/Northwestern

### **MISSOURI**

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• Eagle Rock Retreat Center // Eagle Rock uniquevenues.com/EagleRockRetreatCtr

**Missouri State University** // Springfield uniquevenues.com/MissouriState

**University of Central Missouri** // Warrensburg uniquevenues.com/UCMO

Washington University Medical Center Eric P Newman Education Center // St. Louis uniquevenues.com/EPNEC

# **MONTANA**

- Montana State University // Bozeman uniquevenues.com/MontanaState
- The University of Montana // Missoula uniquevenues.com/universityofmontana

# **NEBRASKA**

- Lied Lodge & Conference Center // Nebraska City uniquevenues.com/liedlodge
- **)** *University of Nebraska* // Lincoln uniquevenues.com/UnivNebraska

# **NEVADA**

**MEET Las Vegas** // Las Vegas uniquevenues.com/MeetLasVegas

- > Springs Preserve // Las Vegas uniquevenues.com/SpringsPreserve
- University of Nevada, Las Vegas // Las Vegas uniquevenues.com/UNLV

# **NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Canobie Lake Park // Salem uniquevenues.com/canobielakepark

Franklin Pierce University // Rindge uniquevenues.com/FranklinPierce

**Plymouth State University** // Plymouth uniquevenues.com/PlymouthState

- Southern New Hampshire University // Manchester uniquevenues.com/SNHU
- University of New Hampshire Conferences and Catering // Durham uniquevenues.com/UnivNewHampshire

### **NEW JERSEY**

- Conference & Event Services at Rowan University // Glassboro uniquevenues.com/Rowan
- Conference Center at RWJ Hamilton // Mercerville uniquevenues.com/RWJHamilton
- **Drew University** // Madison uniquevenues.com/DrewUniv

**Encore Event Center** // Freehold uniquevenues.com/EncoreEvent

**Fairleigh Dickinson University** // Madison uniquevenues.com/FairleighDickinson

• Georgian Court University // Lakewood uniquevenues.com/GeorgianCourt

**Grounds For Sculpture** // Hamilton uniquevenues.com/GroundsforSculpture

- Kean University Conference & Event Services // Union uniquevenues.com/keanuniversity
- Meadowlands Racetrack
  // East Rutherford
  uniquevenues.com/MeadowlandsRacetrack

Raritan Valley Community College // Somerville uniquevenues.com/RaritanValleyCC

Rutgers University - Student Centers // New Brunswick uniquevenues.com/RutgersStudentCenters

Rutgers University Inn & Conference Center // New Brunswick uniquevenues.com/RutgersCSCC

Seton Hall University School of Law // Newark uniquevenues.com/setonhall

- The Conference Center at
  Montclair State University // Montclair
  uniquevenues.com/MontclairStateConfCtr
- The Conference Center at Union County College // Elizabeth uniquevenues.com/unioncountycollege

# venue

# **NEW MEXICO**

Institute of American Indian Arts // Santa Fe uniquevenues.com/IAIA

National Museum of Nuclear Science & History // Albuquerque uniquevenues.com/NuclearMuseum

- **St. John's College** // Santa Fe uniquevenues.com/StJohnsNM
- University of New Mexico
  // Albuquerque
  uniquevenues.com/UNM

# **NEW YORK**

- **)** 353 West NYC // New York uniquevenues.com/353west
- **Adelphi** University // Garden City uniquevenues.com/Adelphi
- ▶ Alfred State College // Alfred uniquevenues.com/AlfredState
- AMA New York Conference Center // New York uniquevenues.com/amanewyork

**Brooklyn College Conference Center** // Brooklyn uniquevenues.com/BCCC

**Caedmon Spaces** // New York uniquevenues.com/Caedmonspaces

Carnegie Hall // New York uniquevenues.com/CarnegieHall

Center for Automotive Education & Training
// Queens
uniquevenues.com/AutoEdCenter

Ethical Culture Fieldston School // New York uniquevenues.com/FieldstonSchool

Glen Cove Mansion Hotel and Conference Center // Glen Cove uniquevenues.com/GlenCove

**Hofstra University** // Hempstead uniquevenues.com/Hofstra

Iona College // New Rochelle uniquevenues.com/ionacollege

Ithaca College // Ithaca uniquevenues.com/Ithaca

**Keuka College** // Keuka Park uniquevenues.com/Keuka

**Long Island University/LIU Post** // Brookville uniquevenues.com/cwpost

**Manhattan Penthouse and Alger House** // New York uniquevenues.com/GreenMansions

Nyack College // Nyack uniquevenues.com/Nyack

**Nyack College in Manhattan** // New York uniquevenues.com/Nyack2NYC

NYTT Auditorium On Broadway // New York uniquevenues.com/NYITAuditorium

NYU Wasserman Center for Career Development // New York uniquevenues.com/NYUWasserman

**OFFSITE** // New York uniquevenues.com/offsite

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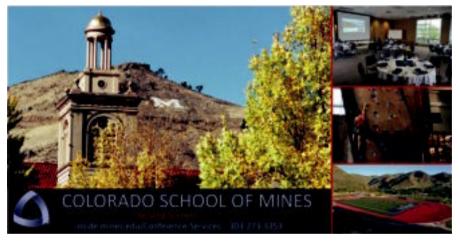




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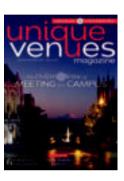
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# **PERSONALITIES**

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

# Culture Clubs

From concerts to rodeos, tradeshows and Shakespeare in the park, Darlene Watkins makes sure every event held within Elegant Settings is full of arts and culture

"There was a time in my career where I assessed what I was doing and if it was benefitting anyone," Darlene Watkins says, candidly explaining her decision 18 years ago to leave behind a lucrative career in retail management to join Elegant Settings. The company is part of the heritage division of the parks and recreation department in Prince George's County, Maryland; here, Watkins oversees public programs and rentals for historic properties.

Originally a native of Rhode Island, Watkins was transferred to the area through her former employer, but soon found herself admiring this new organization.

"I happened to live by a community center, and I started talking to the manager and learned more about the [Elegant Settings] establishment and grew to really love it. It's a multi-faceted organization within the county that also provides services in arts and culture to make a better quality of life for the citizens—and I like being a part of that." Watkins fills us in on her biggest achievements, challenges and her hidden passions.

**Unique Venues:** What are some of your favorite parts of the job?

Darlene Watkins: "Providing the best customer service and making sure when people come to us they have a wonderful experience. Part of my job sometimes entails working with disgruntled customers who aren't always happy about our restrictions since we are historic properties, so I get a lot of satisfaction in working things out with them. I also enjoy encouraging the individuals I work with to help them grow and succeed in their careers."

UV: Did you find any challenges throughout your career path?

DW: "The biggest challenge was moving from a service-based system to more of a business model when Elegant Setting started to grow. Branding is a large part of it as is making sure that the moment someone makes an initial phone call or looks us up on the web, we are providing the same information and attention to detail along the way."

UV: What have been some of the achievements you are most proud of?

DW: "Our organization is a five-time Gold Medal winner in the annual awards given by the National Recreation and Park Association. Personally, it was when I was recently promoted to the position of assistant chief of the arts division."

UV: What is something you are excited to be working on now?

DW: "Right now we are focused on tracking our activities and financials so we can streamline and work smarter. It's a big job and it will change the way people do business, but in the long run it will make our operation much stronger."

UV: When you're not working, what do you like to do with your time?

DW: "I am active in praise dance at my church. I also love movies and television, especially 'Game of Thrones.' My favorite character is the Queen of the Dragons. I'm really rooting for her to succeed. She has been the underdog, but she was smart and utilized her situation to work for her, and I admire that."



DARLENE WATKINS

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