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magazine

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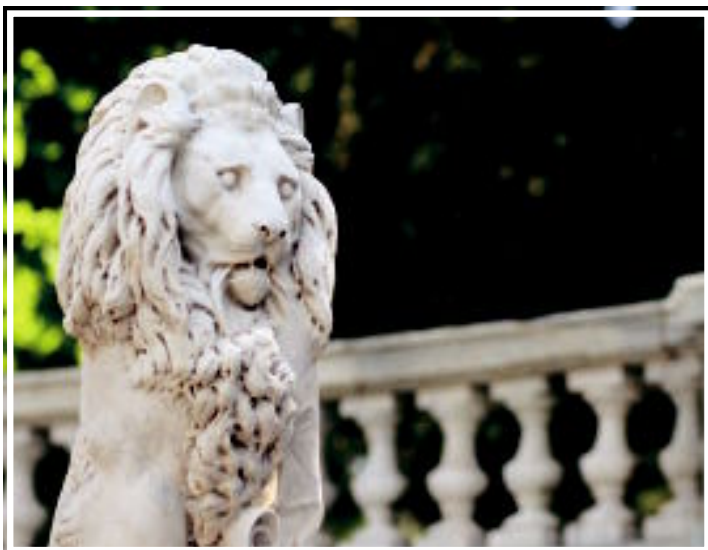
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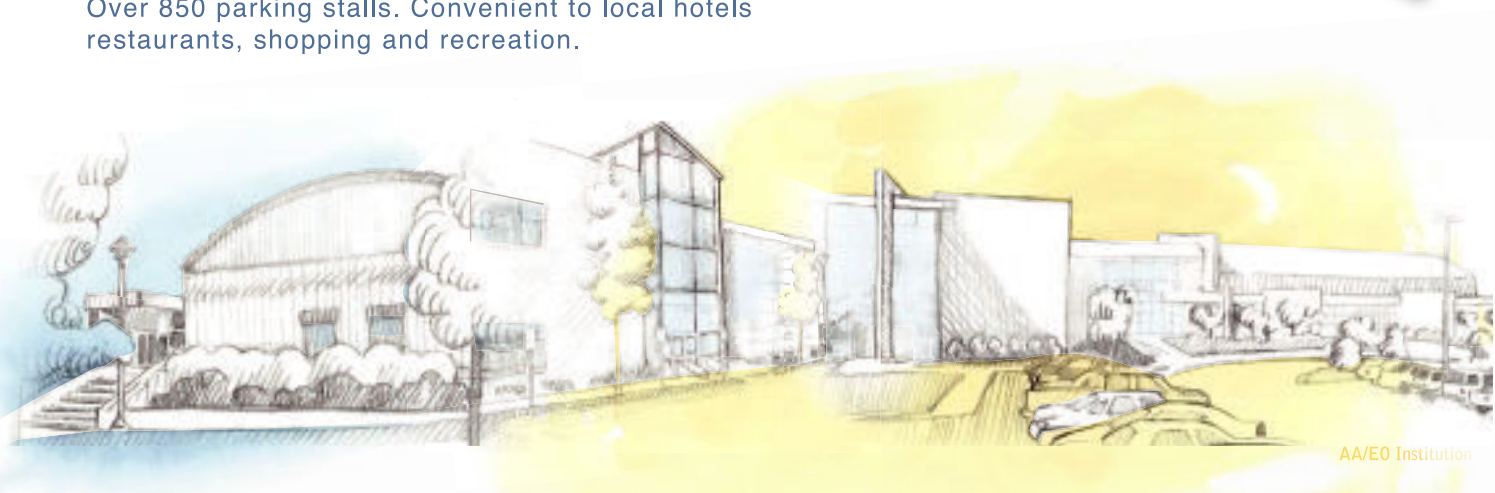
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Bored at school? Not at these colleges and universities. With so many extra curricular activities available, your group's downtime is always up and running.



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A PINTEREST IDEA WAS CREATING THIS DIY POCORN BAR



UNIQUE VENUES ANNUAL MARKETING CONFERENCE
BROUGHT 100-PLUS MEMBERS TO NASHVILLE

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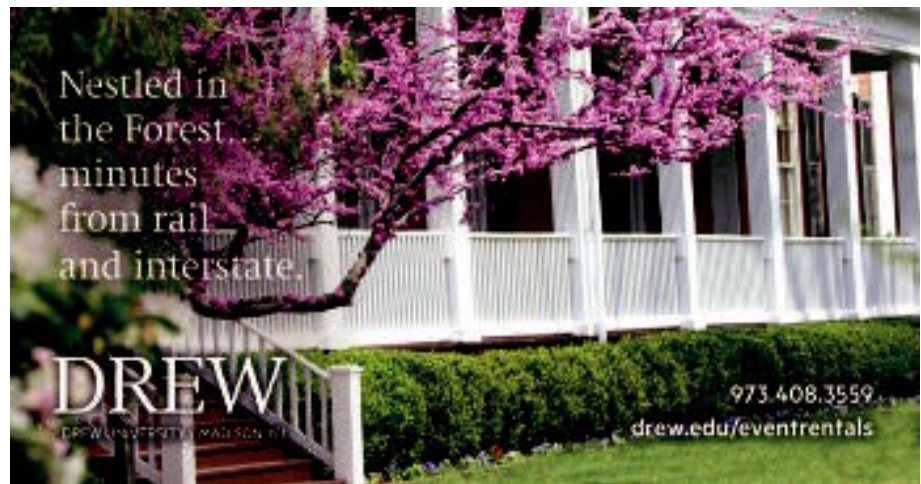


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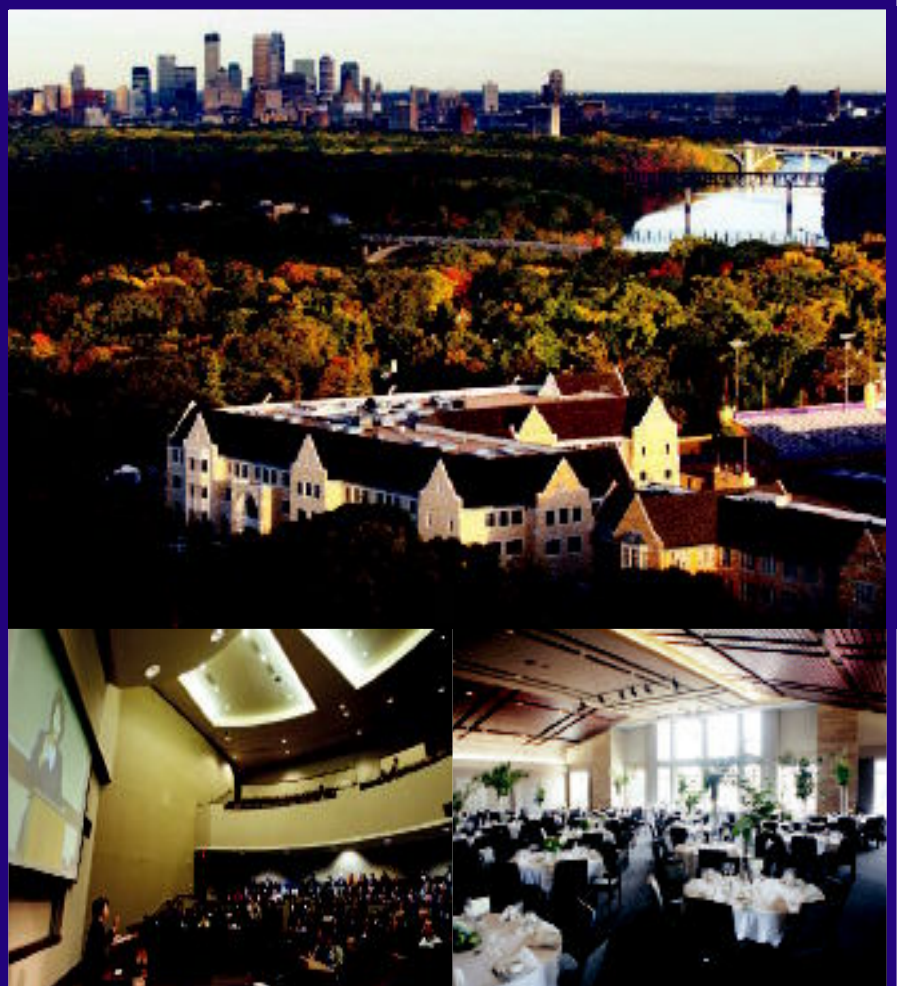
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PUBLISHER'S LETTER



IF THERE'S ONE CITY IN AMERICA WHERE HOMEGROWN turns into a household name, it's Nashville. If you've watched the TV show or have been to one of the city's many cafes or bars late at night, you know what I mean. The heart of Tennessee is where small stages make big stars. It happened for Taylor Swift, for Dolly Parton, for Kings of Leon—and in many ways it was something that we recognized happening for Unique Venues when we held our Third Annual Marketing Conference in Nashville last fall.

This yearly summit is a free service for our members; it provides attendees a chance to hear from featured speakers and industry insiders, catch up on the latest technology and network with peers to uncover successful strategies for attracting more groups to their venues. It's also a way to learn tips that will help their planning departments become more effective while also developing the professionals on their staff.

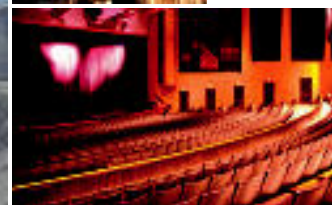
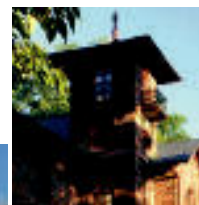
This past October, we decided to add a new element, too, focused on rewarding those who have taken these learning experiences and effectively applied them. We announced the winners of our first-ever Best Of Marketing Awards recognizing categories such as best collateral, best website, best member profile and professional of the year in our own little Grammy celebration.

In particular, one category stood out for us. Determining the professional of the year was an especially hard task because we realized how many incredible talents there are in our niche field. So we decided to continue that conversation in this issue, putting a spotlight on seven of them who we have affectionately called the “rock stars” of Unique Venues' college and university segment.

Like the musicians who obsess over their craft, these collegiate professionals are incredibly talented, hardworking and stand out from the rest through perseverance, tenacity and ingenuity. From our expert “sound tech” who actually once toured with a popular rock band to the “legendary act” that has kept the hits coming with an incredible 20-year track record, this band has developed quite a following and is becoming more and more recognizable for their talents. While the music industry has its struggles, our industry is coming in loud and clear thanks to people like these—and we have a feeling they have more of their “best of” hits on the way.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M Nichols". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M".

Michele Nichols, Founder
Unique Venues



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IN THE HEART OF SEATTLE



Some cities claim to thrive, but the streets of Seattle pulse with vitality. A few steps beyond the downtown bustle is a campus that's an urban wildlife sanctuary. Picture restful accommodations, meeting facilities with tech wizardry, award-winning catering and a staff that understands good service.

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CLIFF NOTES

work / life / balance

BY SHANNON GLOVER



SHANNON GLOVER
Unique Venues
Meeting Planner Liaison

In addition to working for Unique Venues, Shannon is the team's fitness cheerleader. She is a Team Beachbody Coach and teaches local fitness classes.



Work Out Your Workout: 5 TIPS for Keeping Fit from Anywhere

Remember those fitness resolutions you made just a couple of months ago? There's no need to give up on them just because you have to hit the road. In fact, working out is no sweat with these five tips that are perfect for you and your attendees.


1 QUEUE YOUR DVDS. Many of your favorite workout programs are available on portable discs, such as Beachbody and P90X, even fitness shows like the "Biggest Loser" have some. Just make sure to also bring your computer or portable player to watch and participate from the comfort of your overnight room.

2 GET VIDEO AND TRAINERS ON DEMAND. One of the bigger trends lately is Video On Demand fitness programs. A website like Dailyburn.com allows you to sign up for a simple fee and access a myriad of workouts for 30-, 60- or 90-day plans based on your goals and abilities. Or, if you have a personal trainer you work with already, ask them if they can do 1-on-1 coaching online while you're gone.

3 BE WITH THE BANDS. If you are into resistance training, bring your cords and bands with you. They take up barely any space in your suitcase and can be attached to doors and doorknobs for

in-room sessions. Some moves to try: bicep curls and hammer pulls to work your arms and leg raises and monster walks for your lower half.

4 FIND YOUR VENUE'S GYM. Research your venue ahead of time; if the property has a gym, you might as well take advantage. Head to a free website like Bodybuilding.com, build a program and print worksheets that you can take with you to the fitness center. For any program, plan at least 30 minutes of activity.

5 EAT HEALTHY, TOO. You don't have to sacrifice your healthy eating when you travel, either. Stay in touch with your event organizer and ask them for customized menus that help you stay on track with your nutrition. Ask them to modify for special dietary requirements like Paleo-style or gluten-free meals and to portion appropriately. They will be more than willing to help you. 



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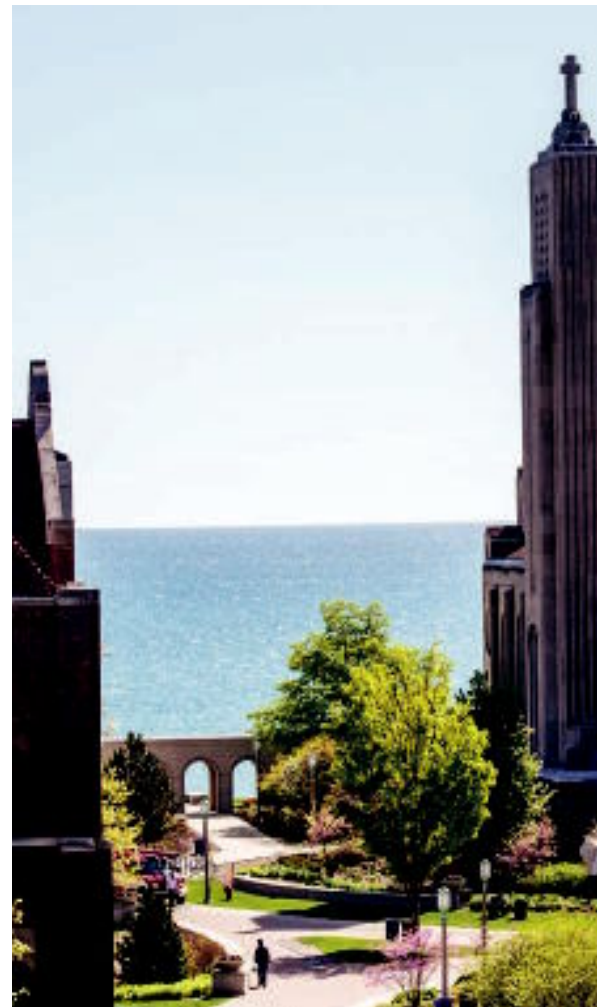
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A *Pinterest-ing* Idea: Get On Board for More Creative Events



DIY Popcorn Bar



Perfect spring centerpiece



Creative food options

If you're a Pinterest user, you probably have a whole online scrapbook of food, décor and other ideas stored up for inspiration. Now's the time to take all those pins and create a pretty picture for your next meeting or event. Here are a few ways to get started:

1 SET THE TABLE. When meeting with the venue, ask them for the name of their food provider, whether it's in-house or a private company such as Sodexo or Aramark. Then head to Pinterest, search for the vendor and look through their creative ideas to see the types of events and plating they can create. Also ask the caterer if they have commonly pinned items such as mason jars, burlap or tablecloths that you can incorporate to complete your vision. Venues get Pinterest-worthy requests all the time, so go ahead and use what they already have on hand with a new spin.

2 DIY CAN BE FOR YOU. Find novel ways to incorporate DIY elements into your meetings and events. As an example, Unique Venues included a very popular DIY popcorn bar at our recent Annual Marketing Conference. During sessions, attendees became excited as the buttery smells wafted into the meeting rooms. As they adjourned to the hallway for the afternoon break, they discovered a buffet of toppings where they could create their own snack for a pick me up. It made for a memorable and Tweetable moment.

3 LOOK LOCAL. Use Pinterest to search for ways to incorporate local flair into your event, too. Since our conference was held in Nashville we searched for interesting ideas that included music, boots and Southern foods.

Pin It! Show us what you came up with using the hashtag #uvevents on social media. We'll compile our favorites to share with you. **uv**



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Next is the NOVA Mini Portable Speaker that, at 80g and with an Expanding Bass Chamber, “fits in your palm and can fill a room with sound.” Music can be played via Bluetooth from any device within 33 feet making it compatible with Pandora, iTunes and other digital music players. Audio controls are located on the base for ease of use. Even better, Tego Audio Nova speakers can be daisy-chained together with a 3.5mm audio cable and input built into each, creating as much amplified sound as you need. (\$49.99, tegoaudio.com)

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Prefer pen & paper? We’ve started a checklist for you →

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- ☐ _____ Suits or formal wear
 - ☐ _____ Business casual ensembles
 - ☐ _____ Casual outfits
 - ☐ _____ Workout clothes
 - ☐ _____ Pajamas
 - ☐ _____ Socks
 - ☐ _____ Undergarments
 - ☐ _____ Other
-
-
-
-
-

TOILETRIES

- ☐ Body soap
- ☐ Shampoo & conditioner
- ☐ Face wash
- ☐ Toothbrush & paste
- ☐ Hairbrush
- ☐ Deodorant & fragrances

MEDICATIONS


- ☐ Prescriptions
- ☐ Advil or Tylenol
- ☐ Allergy relief
- ☐ Antacids

TECHNOLOGY

- ☐ Laptop & charger
- ☐ Phone charger
- ☐ Tablet or iPad

MISCELLANEOUS

- ☐ Passport
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 - ☐ Other
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Vegan Chocolate Cupcakes

Courtesy of University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH

Even if your guests have dietary restrictions, they always deserve something sweet. With that in mind, the pros at the University of New Hampshire have put together a recipe for rich chocolate cupcakes without dairy and eggs—but with all the flavor.

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE CUPCAKES:

- 5 cups organic all-purpose flour
- 3 cups organic granulated sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup organic unsweetened cocoa
- 1 T & 1.5 t baking soda
- 1.5 tsp iodized salt
- 3 cups water
- 1 cup canola oil or regular olive oil
- 3 Tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 Tbsp pure vanilla extract

FOR THE FROSTING:

- 5 cups vegan chocolate chips
- 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups hot coffee
- 2 cups vegan soy margarine
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp pure vanilla extract



TO PREPARE:

1. Preheat convection oven to 325 F (or conventional oven to 350 F) on low fan.
2. Spray or line muffin pan(s) with paper liners; set aside.
3. Sift the first five dry ingredients on the list and set aside in a large bowl.
4. Whisk the next four wet ingredients together and fold into the dry ingredients. Then divide the batter evenly among the muffin cups, filling them one half to two thirds of the way. Place in the oven.
5. Bake for 12-15 minutes until a toothpick comes out clean (final baking times may vary).
6. Make the frosting by pouring the hot coffee over the chocolate chips in a bowl and melt the mixture.
7. When frosting mix has cooled, whip with vegan soy margarine until smooth, light and fluffy. Finish with the vanilla.
8. When both the frosting and cupcakes have cooled, ice the tops and serve.

Yields 12-14 medium-sized cupcakes. uv

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The Pomojito

Courtesy of Loyola
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INGREDIENTS:

- 1 oz. silver rum
- 1.5 oz. simple syrup
- Juice of half a lime
- 2 mint sprigs
- 1 rosemary sprig and/or 1 blackberry
- 3 oz. club soda
- 1 oz. pomegranate juice

TO PREPARE:

1. Muddle mint sprigs with lime in the bottom of glass.
2. Add ice and other ingredients.
3. Adorn with rosemary sprig or blackberry.
4. Stir and serve. **uv**

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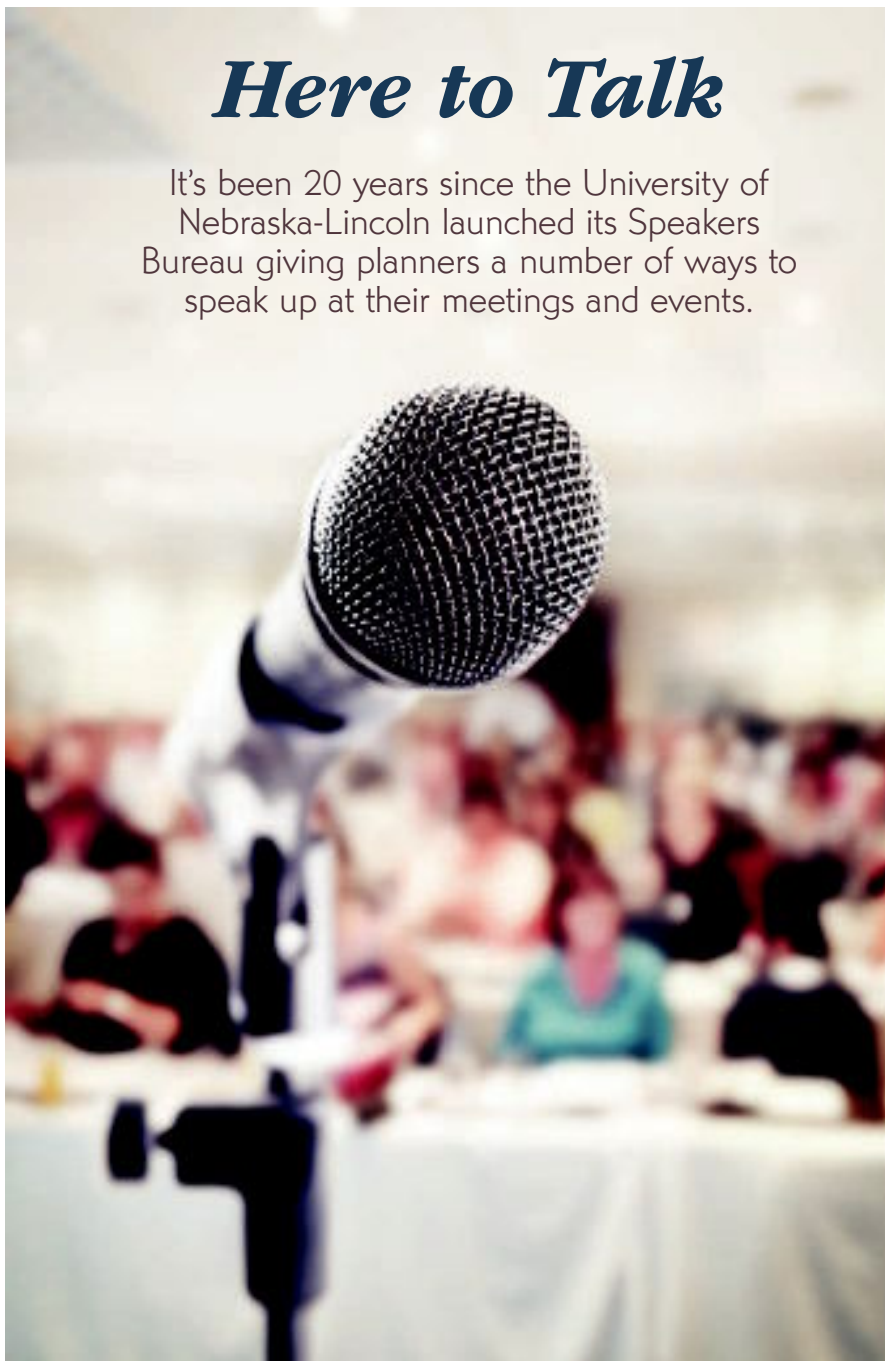
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WHAT'S TRENDING

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

Here to Talk

It's been 20 years since the University of Nebraska-Lincoln launched its Speakers Bureau giving planners a number of ways to speak up at their meetings and events.



TIP:

Planners be sure to ask the collegiate conference department you are working with if they offer a similar service for speakers. Most are free of charge!



The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is a big believer of free speech. That is why, since the early '90s, the campus has offered a complimentary Speakers Bureau providing experts on a variety of topics that can speak to both the regional public and guests hosting conferences on the university grounds.

"There is a group of faculty and staff that love what they do. They have particular expertise and passions and this is their way of giving back to the community," says Kellie Wesslund, Speakers Bureau coordinator and administrative assistant for the Communications Department. Speakers are all active in their fields, ranging from engineering, weather, astronomy, art history, music, journalism and other various extensions—some available year-round; others just during the academic year.

Michael Hoff, a professor of art history, can talk about "Ancient Roman Religion and Nebraska Football." Donald F. Costello, associate professor emeritus of computer science and technology speaks to "Investment Versus Gambling in a Digital Economy." Even the Assistant Chief of the Campus Police Department Todd Duncan can give a presentation on "A Non-Partisan Look at Nebraska Gun Laws."

"People are always really thrilled to hear we offer these services," says Wesslund of the program, which was novel for its time when it first debuted as part of the school's land grant mission and is now celebrating its 20th year. She gets a call or e-mail nearly every day requesting a speaker.

It takes just a few moments to start the "simple, straightforward" process wherein Wesslund obtains the interested party's information on dates, time allotment (anywhere from 30 minutes to plural speakers for a multi-hour program), place and the topic of choice.

"Usually a group will come to me with what they are looking for, and I'll go through my list to find a match," she says, referencing

a recent example. “I had a planner who wanted a presentation on Black History Month, and I reached out to a professor who has a topic on African Americans on the Great Plains.” On the other hand, the Bureau is also flexible in tailoring a talk to a specific group’s needs.

Annette Wetzel, director of special events for the Chancellor’s Office, had an incoming assembly of middle schoolers for a leadership conference last October and was looking for something both entertaining and educational for the children’s comprehension level.

“One of the professors gave a speech on comic book physics and superheroes and the kids went crazy,” she recalls. Thanks to the success of the program, “they’ve already expressed interest to come back next year.”

Return guests are put on Wesslund’s mailing list to keep up with the program, too. “We send out a postcard every September to all our past groups that have used us [about 400] to inform them of the new group of speakers for the year or the new topics that existing participants will be offering,” she says. There’s also a press release, updates in the university’s inter-departmental newsletter “UNL Today” and a website (speakersbureau.unl.edu) that stays current.

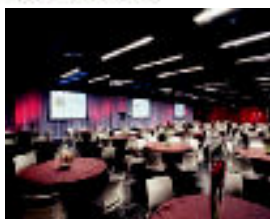
While talk isn’t cheap at other like-minded speakers databases, the best part of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Bureau is that it is *completely free*. “People are surprised we don’t charge for it,” admits Wesslund, “but it boils back down to our professors wanting to share what they’ve learned.” **uv**

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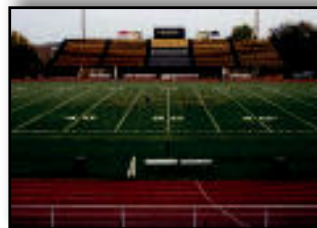
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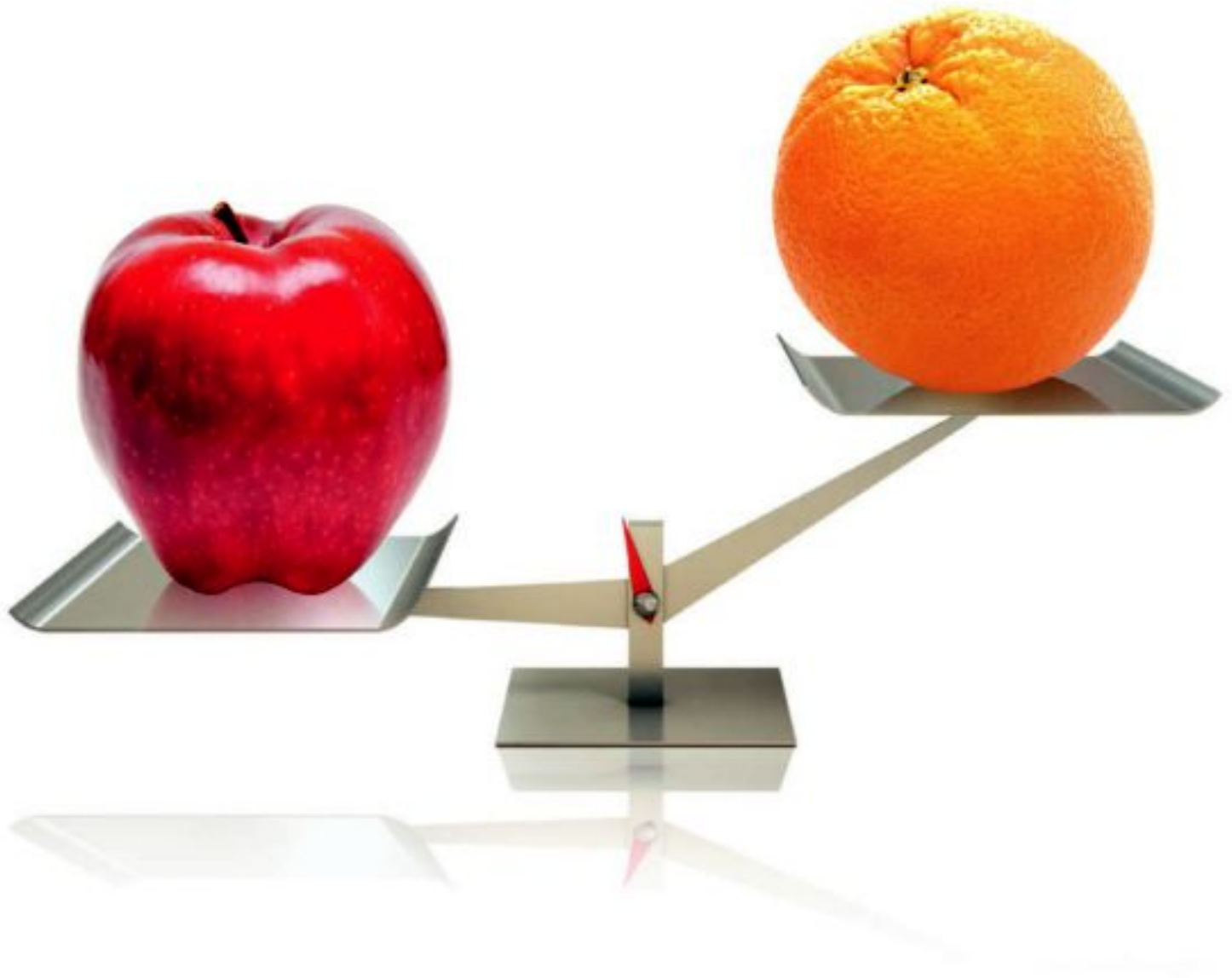


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THE MAIN EVENT

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

Going for GOLD

When The College of New Jersey was selected as an official site of the 2014 Special Olympics USA Games, all departments teamed together to make it a success.

It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. When The College of New Jersey was told they were an official host site for the 2014 Special Olympics USA Games last June, Shari Blumenthal knew just how special it would be for the college, too.

“The USA Games are never held in the same state, and they occur only once every four years so it would be another [century or more] before we could be asked again,” estimates the assistant director of campus space management services. So, under Blumenthal’s leadership the college started planning sessions nearly two years ago to make it a successful and memorable experience, utilizing the cross campus efforts of the building services crew, facility maintenance, dining services, campus police, a dedicated student staff and the crew of the athletic department and the student center to bring it to fruition.

It’s something the college is well rehearsed at orchestrating by now. They’ve been the host site for the Special Olympics New Jersey’s qualifying rounds for the past 24 years—including 2014, which made for an interesting challenge.

...the college welcomed 2,700 overnight guests as the temporary home for coaches and athletes from 27 states as well as 5,000 to 10,000 additional competitors, spectators and family members each day...



“We had only five working days to turn the campus over from the New Jersey Games to the USA Games without sacrificing our standards,” recalls Blumenthal, noting that getting the residence halls ready was the biggest task. To prepare, she hired 120 student part-timers for the summer; normally it’s a staff of 15. “We identified our target dates and worked backwards to meet those deadlines. I’m familiar with the process of running our summer conferences so I guided the [Olympic subcommittees] on how we would best be able to serve the needs of the groups.”

That included accommodating any special needs of the visiting athletes. “All of our residence halls are handicap accessible with elevators and/or ramps, and we have specialty rooms equipped with wheelchair-guided bathrooms and strobe lights

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: SPECIAL OLYMPICS.




The Special Olympics USA Games had many winners including those who took the stage (left) to receive their medals (top) and those happy to complete the sport for their home state (bottom).

for the hearing impaired,” says Blumenthal. “We also could meet any dietary requests, for example if a gluten-free or pureed meal was needed.”

When all was said and done, the college welcomed 2,700 overnight guests as the temporary home for coaches and athletes from 27 states as well as 5,000 to 10,000 additional competitors, spectators and family members each day who were bussed in from other official sites including Prudential Center, Princeton and Mercer County Park. While The College of New Jersey hosted the bocce ball, basketball and powerlifting tournaments, they were also the grounds of the Olympic Town (held in one of the massive parking lots) and the Special Olympics’ Healthy Athletes program, which transformed the Student Center with build-outs and additional signage.

The college’s Kendall Hall was also a big benefit for hosting the powerlifting activities, which drew in the biggest crowds. “It’s our largest venue on campus that holds 800-plus people and has comfortable seating. We’ve had several years of practice in that specific location so the venue managers are famil-

iar with coordination. ...In general, we all work well together on our campus to make things happen.”

While the Games did a great service providing extra exposure for the college through a swath of media covering the event for a national audience, there was an even more important takeaway, according to Blumenthal. “It’s almost like Christmas to see the joy on the faces of the athletes after they complete their activity. It fills you with such emotion, and it makes us proud to be a part of it. At the end everyone was looking for a souvenir they could take home to remember it.” 

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COLLEGE ROAD TRIP

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

All That BRACKET

With March Madness on the horizon, we take you on a trip to six different NCAA PAC 12 schools that are at the top of their game for meetings, too.

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

The university's mascot, Ralphie, is so beloved he was recently the inspiration for a new outdoor pool that is shaped just like him.

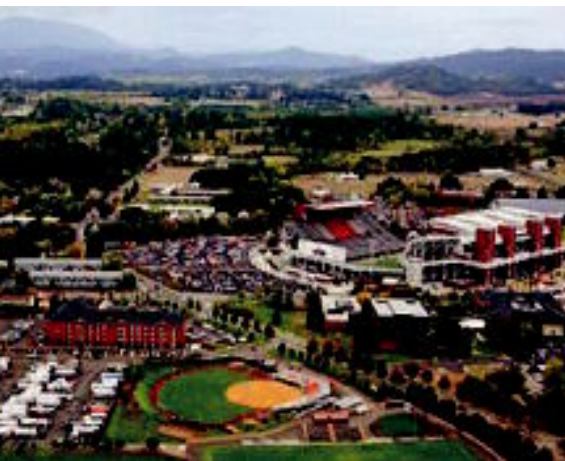


Think you have your brackets ready? Consider these big league universities that are competitive in more ways than one. For meeting planners, they offer a wealth of unique spaces, services and activities that makes them a slam dunk every time.

University of Colorado Boulder (Boulder, Colorado)

If you're a fan of University of Colorado sports, you know about Ralphie the Buffalo. The mascot is so loved that the Boulder campus recently memorialized him in the shape of a new outdoor pool. "You can now enjoy a leisure swim in Ralphie," chuckles Kylee Thomas, director, CU Conference Services. It's just part of the package at the newly renovated recreation center that also includes a rock climbing wall, ice skating rink, indoor practice field and four-court basketball gymnasium with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the Flatiron foothills.

In January, another grand reopening celebrated the Glen Miller Ballroom in the University Memorial Center. "At 9,400 square feet it's the largest ballroom in the city of Boulder," says Thomas. Both are open to incoming groups, which normally range from 50-2,000 guests that have enjoyed dealing with a certified One-Shop Stop department. "The majority of our conference coordinators have 10-plus years of experience on this campus," says Thomas, "so they are experts beyond just coordinating logistics."



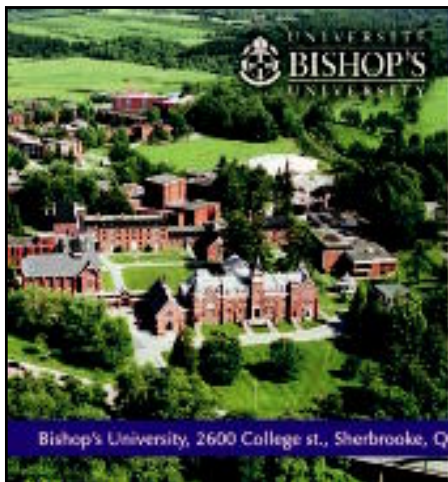
OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

The Corvallis, Oregon campus is one of the only two American universities to hold the land, sea, sun and space grant designations, which provides benefits for conference guests.

Oregon State University (Corvallis, Oregon)

In addition to having a thriving athletics program, Oregon State University is one of only two American universities to hold the land, sea, sun and space grant designations, says Kavinda Arthenayake, director of university conference services. "It's a unique campus to bring conferences to, with many opportunities to advance the university's academic and research mission," but Arthenayake also stresses complete flexibility. "We can even do programs off campus," he says, referencing one client's 150-person road trip across the state. Just 90 minutes from Portland and 50 minutes from the coast, there's a plethora of vineyards, beaches, even a regional baseball team to enjoy.

Onsite, the campus is unparalleled with a number of meeting spaces for 5 to 1,400 people including 80,000 square feet of combined, year-round conference and performing arts space at The LaSells Stewart Center, CH2M Hill Alumni Center and an on-campus Hilton Garden Inn offering 153 beds. "In a few years we could have a second hotel onsite too," says Arthenayake. As well, a \$65 million classroom building in the works promises state-of-the-art spaces.



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COLLEGE ROAD TRIP

BY SELENA FRAGASSI



UCLA (LEFT)

The Palisades Ballroom is one of the venues that will host the Special Olympic Games.

UNIVERSITY OF UTAH (BELOW)

The 180-room University Guest House provides hotel-style accommodations for guests after a busy day of meeting sessions.



UCLA (Los Angeles, California)

It will be the biggest sporting event to come to L.A. since the Summer Olympic Games of 1984—and when the Special Olympics arrive in the city in a couple of months, they will be held on the campus of UCLA.

“We’ll be feeding and housing 3,700 athletes and coaches who will also be using our meeting spaces and athletic venues,” says Jason Walley, director of conference services. “In a way it’s like putting together a very complex meeting.”

At the forefront will be Pauley Pavilion, the home of UCLA’s basketball team available for large-scale events, meeting and entertainment for crowds up to 12,000 people. Elsewhere the campus has 70,000 square feet of meeting space (including the Palisades Ballroom) and 6,000 sleeping rooms with a boutique guesthouse for summer visitors.

Off-campus there’s plenty to see and do, too. “We’re close to the shopping and entertainment of Beverly Hills and Santa Monica and walking tours of the arts district and historic tours of Hol-

lywood,” says Walley. For the sports-minded folks, “we can build active programs, too,” he says.

University of Utah (Salt Lake City, Utah)

Outdoor sports are as vast as the great outdoors around Salt Lake City. “There are six ski areas just 25 minutes from us, and public transportation to get you there,” says Perry Hacker, director of the onsite University Guest House and Conference Center. There are also national parks including Zion, Bryce Canyon and Arches. “Once you get out west, you can get to all sorts of places pretty fast,” says Hacker.

When there is time to slow down, the university hosts the state’s natural history museum and the state arboretum for reflective moments, and the exclusive 180-room University Guest House has hotel-style accommodations for further relaxation. The attached 30,000-square-foot conference center also provides hotel-level service for business clients. “We can do full video and sound recording, full A/V and rooms

are wired for anything you can imagine,” says Hacker. “There are few places that operate the same way we do.”

In the early part of 2016, Hacker’s team will expand on that mission by offering the high-end Wall Mansion as a retreat center for up to 300. Says Hacker, “It continues to show the diversity in facilities we manage.”

University of Washington (Seattle, Washington)

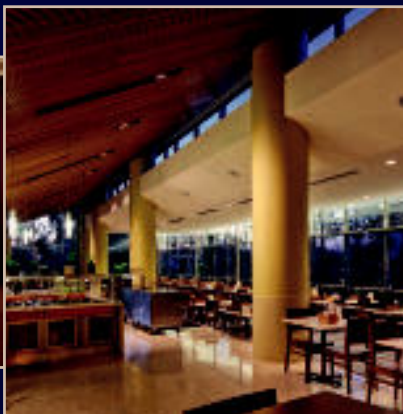
The University of Washington just got a little more competitive with the recent expansion of a new construction housing district called the “West Campus.” Here, Lander Hall offers rooms with private baths and upgraded furniture, wireless Internet and a 24-hour front desk suited for guests with varying travel itineraries. “We call it a ‘city within a city,’” says Ebony White, conference coordinator, pointing out the full-service grocery store/coffeehouse called District Market and a sit-down restaurant, Cultivate, that offers ingredients from the university garden.



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UCLA *Conference Services*

COLLEGE ROAD TRIP

BY SELENA FRAGASSI



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON (ABOVE)

The Seattle campus offers a plethora of formal venues, including the sit-down restaurant Cultivate which offers ingredients culled from the school's own garden.

UC BERKELEY (LEFT)

Be on the lookout for the Pauley Ballroom to re-open, one of the most popular venues in the East Bay for weddings and conferences.

For conference guests with stricter budgets or those looking for a more communal atmosphere, the “North Campus” is also available offering more traditional residence halls and an all-you-care-to-eat dining facility. In addition to the One-Stop Shop certified service, the university’s location is also a big draw for many tech-heavy clients.

“We’re close to downtown so guests can go to the city and see where Starbucks first started,” says White. “And for long-term guests, they can go to the San Juan Islands or wine country and see what the northwest is really known for.”

Event Services at U.C. Berkeley (Berkeley, California)

U.C. Berkeley will soon be able to promote its new “draft” of “all-star” buildings with the January 2016 re-opening of the ASUC Student Union including the 9,000-square-foot Pauley Ballroom for

550 seated, 999 standing (the second largest in the East Bay Area). “I get questioned a few times a week about when is it opening,” says Vivi Nordahl, associate director of events for Events Services.

The ASUC Student Union will also offer its first exclusive in-house caterer, Chartwells, later this fall. “They’ll do everything from boxed lunches to plated dinners,” says Nordahl. Or, for those guests who want a taste of the town, she says, “we are right in the heart of the downtown area where there’s a multitude of different ethnic food options.” If you’re looking for a show after, check out the movie theatre and karaoke nearby or head back to campus for one of the musical performances or TED Talks. Says Nordahl, “There’s always something happening here.” **uv**

TIP:

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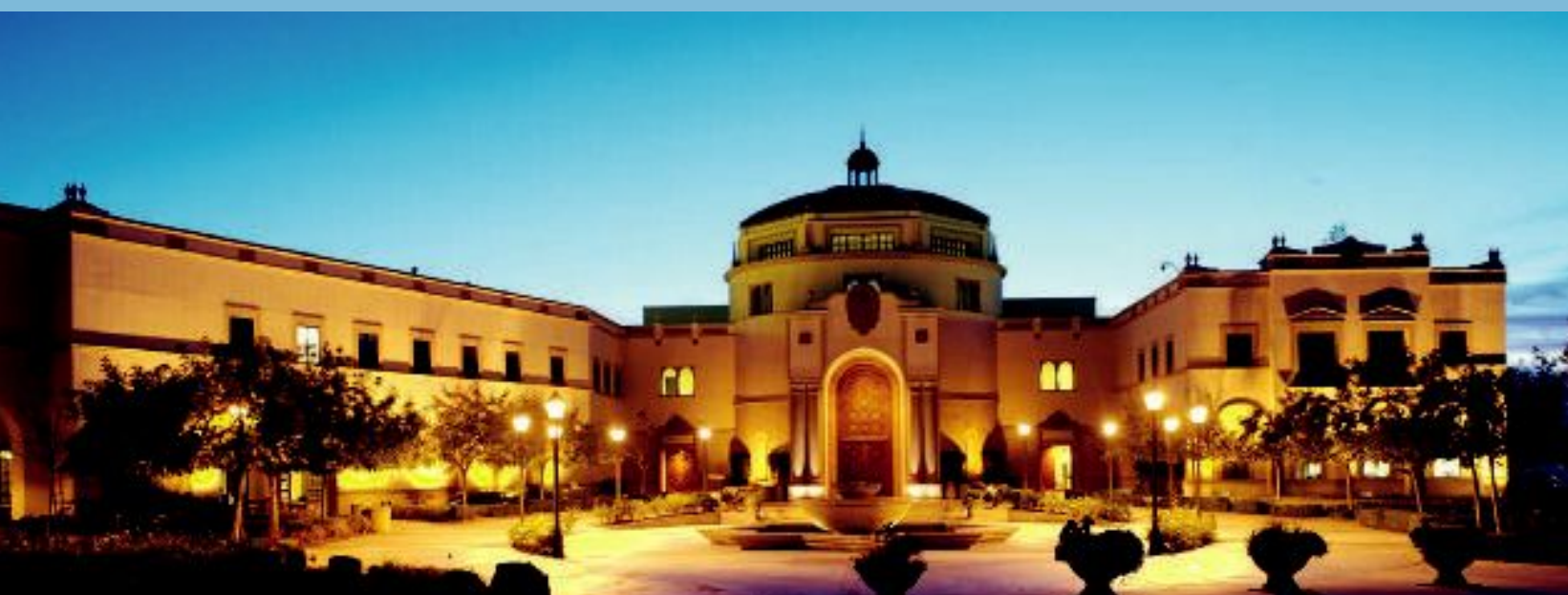
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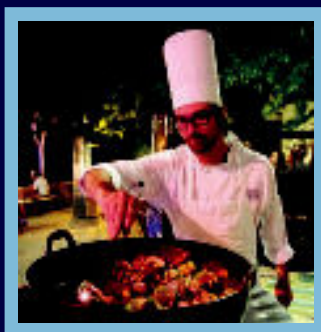
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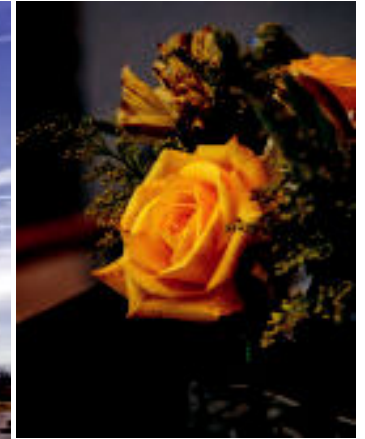


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The background of the page is a photograph of a stage. A bright red spotlight illuminates a central area, creating a vertical beam of light. The floor of the stage is covered with numerous small, glowing red lights, possibly LED candles or stage lights, which are also illuminated by the spotlight. The overall color scheme is dominated by red and black.

★★★ unique ★★★

Rock stars

MEET THE HIT MAKERS BREAKING THE CHARTS
IN THE COLLEGIATE CONFERENCE WORLD.
FROM THE SOUND TECH WHO IS ALWAYS PLUGGED
IN TO THE TOUR MANAGER COORDINATING
EVERYTHING FOR HER GROUPS, IT'S CLEAR
THESE SEVEN STARS WERE BORN TO
ROCK THEIR JOBS.

★★★★★★

By Selena Fragassi

This year, Unique Venues has its own Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees with these seven stars who are always making sure the stage is set for their clients to have a memorable performance. Meet the Legendary Act, Opener, Sound & Light Tech, Rider Provider, Tour Manager, Remastered Master and Fan Club President who are making lots of fans in the collegiate conference industry.



Polly Weir

★ "THE LEGENDARY ACT" ★

works at
UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
NEWARK, DE

official title
DIRECTOR OF CONFERENCE
& EVENT SERVICES

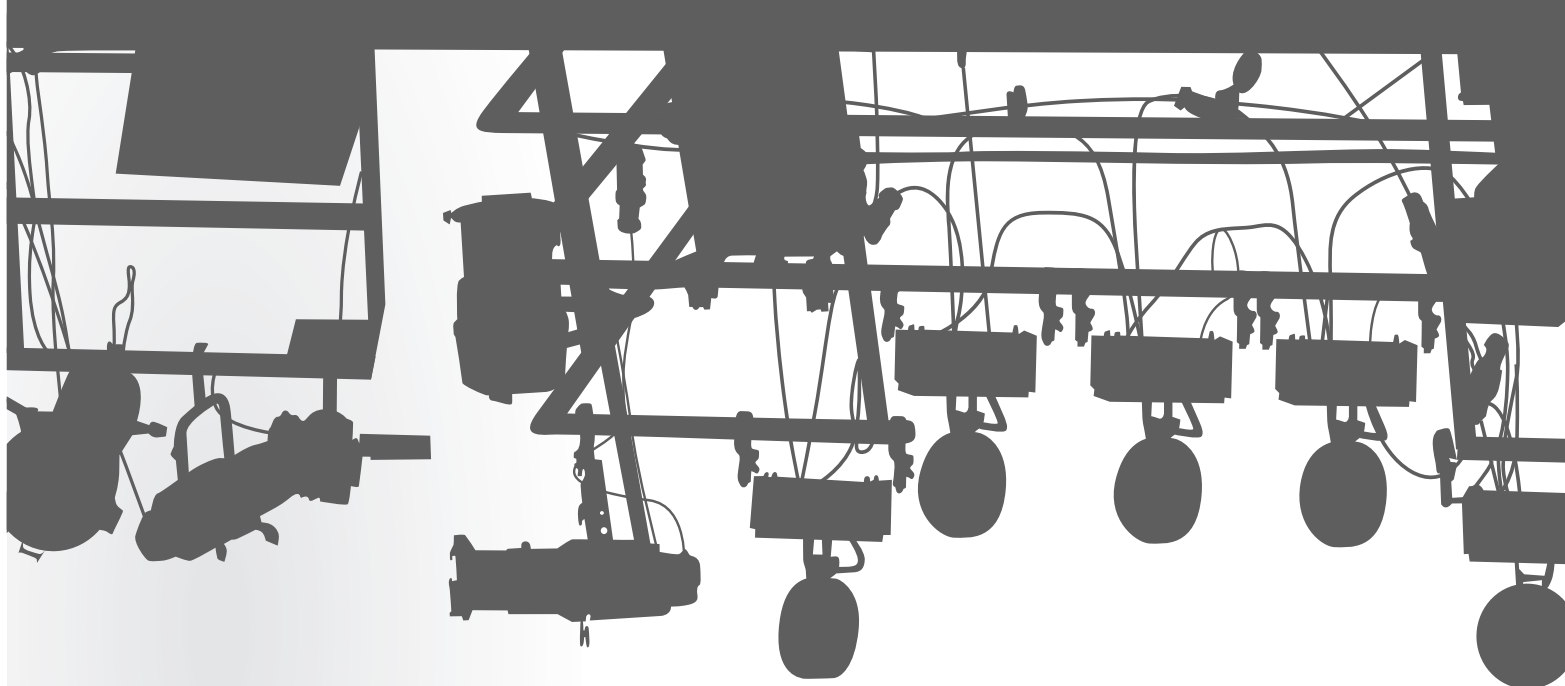


Twenty years is a long time to be in any one industry, but part of the reason Polly Weir has remained the front-woman of conference services for the University of Delaware the past two decades is that it continually challenges her—and the program director finds a thrill in meeting those expectations by staying ahead of the curve.

"When I started at the university in 1995, I thought I was on the cutting edge because I had our menus saved on floppy discs. No one was doing that, they were still handing out paper menus," she laughs, recalling how she prided herself on being just as intuitive in her previous roles in hotel and restaurant management and owning her own fitness center with her husband. "This is the role I've been in the longest, and it's because I'm never doing the same thing; it's diverse and interesting every day," she admits of overseeing four dedicated conference centers spread out in three locations from downtown to the beach. "We try to do something new every year and also adapt to the differences in the market."

That has meant embracing social media by "getting better at it every day," having a more reactive sales force that continues to build relationships, welcoming new channels for growth and understanding the department's unique role within the university. In addition to orchestrating a successful Alumni Weekend every year as well as consistent summer camps, Weir says, "We do a lot of business with the local community who oftentimes can't believe they can use these spaces. We put on a public face and keep it fresh and interesting, and we define a lot of our success on the repeat business we have."

While she's already a legendary act, Weir still says there's a lot more of her greatest hits coming in the years ahead. "I look forward to providing newer and more state-of-the-art facilities for our clients. I want to continue to make this operation better and assist the university in bringing it the recognition it deserves."



Jessica Posey

★ "THE TOUR MANAGER" ★

works at
VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
NASHVILLE, TN

official title
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR,
OFFICE OF CONFERENCES



Jessica Posey has been around the backstage

world of event planning since she was a child. Her step-mother owned a corporate planning business, and in their house "birthdays were everything," she says. "I was always wondering how I would plan my next party and make it better than the last. ...Now I do that with my own kids." It's also a daily mission in her role as assistant director, office of conferences for Nashville's Vanderbilt University where she makes sure everything is in perfect order for each of the visiting groups she manages.

The university is not only a certified One-Stop Shop but two years ago they also launched a special Meet At Vanderbilt marketing campaign to spread awareness of the campus' offerings as well as centralize all the conferences and camps, special events, weddings, holiday parties and more that they host.

"We have a meticulous series of checklists when we start contracting with a planner," she says of keeping everything in order for recent functions like the Iron Fork competition, ID Tech Camp and celebrity appearances by Bill Nye and Billy Joel. "Together we create target dates for things like deposits, reserving meeting spaces and dining guarantees. We also provide online registration to make it seamless for the planner."

The complex system of multi-tasking was something she learned in a number of previous planning roles within the sports industry, including working for the Orange Bowl Committee in Miami and as an administrative assistant for the Nashville Predators, the National Basketball Association and the Southwest Sports Group that owns the Texas Rangers and Dallas Stars. In each, she helped with player travel, budgets, VIP relations, contracts and promotions.

Six years ago, though, she made the choice to make planning her mission, working her way up the ranks and currently enrolled in CCEP (Collegiate Conference and Events Professional Certification Program) courses.

"I've always been in love with the collegiate world and wanted to try to get in with Vanderbilt, but it's not the easiest thing to do because it's such a great place to work that people are lifers," Posey admits. "Now I don't ever plan on leaving."



unique venues

Rockstars

of 2015



Robert Ostrow

★ "THE REMASTERED MASTER" ★

works at
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
GAINESVILLE, FL

official title
DIRECTOR OF HOUSING
OPERATIONS



Robert Ostrow had been a prominent session player for a number of big acts before coming onboard as the assistant director of housing operations at the University of Florida. He had logged nearly 13 years in retail management at music stores in New Orleans and Miami, as a district manager for Starbucks, a wine representative, software analyst and the president of a bank.

At Starbucks, he had a staff of 130 people across 9 stores and an \$8 million budget. Ostrow was doing so well in fact that, in 2008, he was primed to advance, possibly even moving to Seattle to work in the home office—until the company laid off a number of its workforce.

"I had to reinvent myself," he admits, "and I've never been able to take a job if I didn't align myself with the product or service." So Ostrow turned to the University of Florida, a place that he believed in for four years while earning his undergraduate degree.

"I still know a lot of the people in the operation; the director of housing was my advisor back in the '80s. There were all these intricate aspects that made a huge impact on my life," he says, "and it was easy to understand and promote the mission statement."

His current position didn't exist when he rejoined the university four years ago, and it was his job to take the conference services department and turn it into a thriving business, which required a lot of reorganization. "You can be like Jackson Pollock and throw a whole bunch of stuff on a canvas, and then you look at results and it's madness. You have to have laser focus." To do so, Ostrow spent the first couple of years leveraging relationships on campus, figuring out decision makers and absorbing best practices from other universities, as well as fine-tuning his client base.

"You can be like Jackson Pollock and throw a whole bunch of stuff on a canvas, and then you look at results and it's madness. You have to have laser focus."

"I knew if we sat around and waited for business it wasn't going to happen," Ostrow says, always cognizant of looking ahead. "You never know what will happen a couple of years from now, but I know I will continue to grow the business as best as I can."



Larissa Straily

★ "THE OPENER" ★

works at
UNIVERSITY OF OREGON
EUGENE, OR

official title
CONFERENCE SALES
COORDINATOR



Although she only auditioned for the role of conference sales coordinator at the University of Oregon five months ago, this is not Larissa Straily's first time plugging into the hospitality stage. Prior to moving back to her home state to accept the job, Straily had a tenacious track record in Las Vegas. She had worked as a special events coordinator for the MGM Grand Hotel & Casino, most memorably putting together a Superbowl party for 2,000 guests. As well, Straily developed her sales side at one of the top DMCs called Destinations By Design where she helped clients enhance their event by choosing the site location and picking out décor, entertainment, activities and transportation.

"I liked having two different experiences on both a sales team and a full planning role at a hotel," she admits. "It gave me a good view of both worlds and provided insight for my current position because now I know both sides of the industry and can anticipate what people are looking for and what questions to ask."

Not only is Straily new to the University of Oregon, but the conference sales coordinator is also a brand-new position in the department. "I liked the idea of coming into a new setting and the challenge of starting something from scratch. It lets me put my creative side to good use," she says, and already she has nabbed a good lead. In the summer of 2015, the campus will welcome a conference for the Overseas Association for College Admission Counseling (OACAC). "We will be hosting over a thousand members from around the world and giving them all an experience to remember. They will be staying in our residence halls, using multiple meeting and special event spaces as well as many of our athletic facilities."

Although there has been a learning curve in understanding how a university system works and the type of client she is now pursuing (mostly educators and associations), Straily is excited for what's to come, including a brand-new meeting and conference center with 200,000 square feet of space opening in the summer of 2016 she can soon market. "I wanted a job that would allow me to grow professionally, and I found it."

Joe Bradley

★ "THE SOUND & LIGHT TECH" ★

works at
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY MARYLAND
BALTIMORE, MD

official title
DIRECTOR OF EVENT SERVICES



Someone who really knows the rock and roll lifestyle is Joe Bradley. Before he became director of event services and auxiliary management for Loyola University Maryland, Bradley was on the road as a touring sound, video and light tech for a popular '90s alt rock band.

"They were headed to Europe, and I didn't have a great desire to tour with them," he says. At the same time a colleague who had started up the special event program at Loyola asked Bradley if he wanted a role in A/V at the university. "I was pretty upfront that I'd be willing to help for two years and then be back on the road; that turned into 23 years very quickly."

One thing Bradley took away from his early experience: The show must always go on. "Things can go wrong every day; you have to learn how to adapt." What helps is having a qualified staff able to handle the needs of clients and ready to attack when tech hiccups happen.

"Much like we have integrated our technology services over the years, we have a great staff made up of people with all different skill sets that we

Keith LaPointe

★ "THE RIDER PROVIDER" ★

works at
PAUL SMITH'S COLLEGE
PAUL SMITHS, NY

official title
MANAGER OF SODEXO
DINING SERVICES



unique venues

Rockstars

of 2015

Tour riders can have

the most bizarre requests—only red M&Ms, bottled water from France chilled to an exact 68 degrees. Yet big demands are something Keith LaPointe is used to receiving from his visiting groups and wedding clients as the manager of Sodexo dining services at Paul Smith's College.

"We once had an all vegan and gluten-free wedding," he recalls of one of their biggest feats to date. "You don't know if everyone in the room is off gluten or meat- and dairy- free so you have to make sure it tastes good for all." It's something he calls the "Paul Smith flair," or tweaking menus until it perfectly meets the discerning tastes of this small community in the Adirondacks of New York.

"As a school we have two main programs—culinary and forestry—so we are appealing to two really different types of palates. Part of that is serving locally sourced products for students and catered functions," says LaPointe. In fact one of the college's signature items is following Sodexo's "Mindful Program" which allows for not only sustainable but also healthier choices, too.

Before joining Paul Smith's culinary program nearly eight years ago, LaPointe was himself a student—in business and marketing—before he started to understand what his true passion was.

He's always been in the restaurant field. Growing up he was a busboy and helped out on Friday and Saturday nights at a seafood buffet at a local restaurant in upstate New York while going to school. He found himself working at the restaurant in Hotel Saranac, which was formerly owned by Paul Smith's College. "I was getting really good at my job, I was a lead server and became a mentor for interns. I thought this is fun, why not go to school for this?"

The rest, as they say, is history. Now LaPointe oversees a team of 26 people that are all focused on providing great service, no matter how extreme the request. "We have a really good one-on-one rapport with the client. They know they can come to me for anything."

integrate to provide singular service to clients," he says. Training is also very important. "Our student staff, logistics team and production people all get the same training."

The university has trusted the team in more ways than one, making sure they have input on purchasing decisions of equipment, too. "We have a very stringent replacement cycle of all equipment," says Bradley, which means Loyola leads the way in audio, video and lighting, including all digital consoles and wireless mic systems.

Although Bradley has migrated a number of technological revolutions in the two-plus decades he's been at the university ("we were showing the admissions video on 16mm projectors when I first arrived"), he sees the future as becoming even more evolved. "We are certainly moving from the analog to digital age at 100%," he says—and his team is ready to adapt yet again. "When planners come to us they might think they will have to hire a lot of third party vendors, and that is not the case here."





Dezarai Brubaker

★“THE FAN CLUB PRESIDENT”★

works at
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
FORT COLLINS, CO

official title
DIRECTOR OF CONFERENCE
& EVENT SERVICES



Just like any successful band, an event venue knows that it needs a good number of followers to keep them in the public eye. So under the leadership of Director Dezarai Brubaker, the conference and event services department at Colorado State University has developed several street team efforts to keep their “fan club” engaged.

“Over the last few years it’s been more accepted on our campus” to engage in social media, she says. The main portal her group uses is Facebook for networking and promotion purposes and generally “to get the word out about who we are and what we are doing.”

That includes posting weekly Throwback Thursday photos with nostalgic college themes from past decades, holiday planning tips and recipes for planners, “getting to know” staff profiles, invitations to department functions including open houses and recaps of a variety of events around campus including a recent visit from Michelle Obama. “I try to pull ideas from pages I personally like and incorporate that into what we do,” Brubaker says, targeting followers that include clients, employees of the university and contemporaries on other campuses (“we trade ideas quite a bit”).

“It helps that there’s a variety of different faculty and staff from CSU that follows us, so when they like our post, their network of individuals sees it as well and spreads awareness,” Brubaker points out, noting that they’ve often hosted contests to get more page likes.

The department will likely be adding an Instagram page in 2015 and is considering Twitter, but for now premium value is on marketing their innovative new website, which launched last summer.

“It’s a complete overhaul. We tried to make it more interactive with a 3-D map that shows all the spaces we offer and a whole layout of the campus. It helps us sell the property from afar if we can’t get prospects onsite,” she says.

The other big addition is the hiring of a new dedicated sales and marketing manager this year to help with things like social media and planner outreach. His or her first task: “A back to basics snail mail piece,” says Brubaker. You never know what the fans want. **UV**

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Extra Time

Bored at school? Not at these colleges and universities. With so many extra curricular activities available, your group's downtime is always up and running. *by Selena Fraggassi*



IF there's one thing colleges and universities love, it's extra curriculars. Remember the push to complete them to look appealing on your entrance application? It's no different today, except that now extra curriculars like culinary, arts and sports programs on campus are more and more available to visiting groups as part of an engaging, entertaining itinerary. After all, if you're going to be at a place of higher learning, you might as well take the time to learn something new.

That's the idea at Endicott College in Beverly, Massachusetts. Here you can build kaleidoscopic quilt blocks, take a jewelry making class or try your hand at silk painting—no experience necessary. All are taught by active professors in the college's Art Department who instruct on playing with symmetry, color, pattern and texture in cutting and adhering fabrics; how to bead jewelry with pearls, semi-precious stones and crystals on silver wire; and blending techniques of vibrant silk dyes to create stained-glass effects on fabric. Or really anything else you might desire, says Kristen Franco, corporate event manager.

"We have a really strong arts program here with many resources and connections, so if a group doesn't see something that interests them and has something else in mind, we can provide it in some way." Classes are ideal for 10 people but can be tailored for up to 30 "students"

and run about \$150 an hour for the facilitator fee and an additional \$10-20 per person for supplies. The activity has its reward, too, as each participant gets to take home his or her own self-designed souvenir. And for those really into art, Franco says, "We also have three art galleries that are open to the public."

Also open to the public is the Missetwood Estate, a private building the college acquired about seven years ago for corporate outings, weddings and year-round add-ons like cooking classes for up to 20 people. These are led by popular culinary professor (and author) Brendan Cronin—so book early for the academic year; summers are more flexible. "The estate is right on the Atlantic Ocean so after the instructional part is over, the group can enjoy the meal together with this great view," says Franco.

Cooking classes on scenic grounds are also a popular option at Loyola University Chicago's Retreat and Ecology campus tucked away in an "ecological mecca" in Woodstock, Illinois.

Here there are four acres of vegetable and perennial gardens to give guests

the full farm-to-table experience with the freshest, local products and the new, state-of-the-art Duchossois Food Systems Lab and Kitchen that continues the property's strong culinary tradition. Their former executive chef just won a season of "Hell's Kitchen" and was recently replaced by John Schnupp, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America and owner of the upscale Schnupp's Place in Wisconsin, who leads all the instructional group courses. Recent options have included "The World of Italian Cuisine," "Tapas 101," "Desserts and Cakes" and a variety of food and wine pairings, some even themed for holidays. Classes are for a minimum of six people; they run about three to four hours and are roughly \$45-65 per person.

"It's great for team-building and to do something else in the day that's a little different and hands-on—and who doesn't like to eat and drink?" says Daphne Stojiljkovic, marketing and sales specialist.

That also extends to the campus' other food-focused items such as an Iron Chef Experience where teams work with chefs from the university in a friendly competition or the upcoming Farm Workshops that provide guided tours of the property's gardens where guests will learn how to plan and harvest, attain tips for food preservation and understand



Counter-clockwise from top: Loyola University Chicago's Retreat and Ecology campus offers comprehensive cooking classes; The University of Calgary has a whole host of physical activities including rock climbing; and Endicott College has every arts class you could ever imagine with a built-in souvenir that guests can take home with them.

cooking techniques for fresh produce.

All options are add-ons to both multi-day retreat programs and daytime meetings held at the year-round campus, which can host up to 200 people with overnight accommodations. They can be scheduled for half-day, full-day or more limited schedules.

“A campus environment allows our conference and events department to be incredibly unique in what we can provide for our clients.”

“If a group comes to us with even two hours to spare we can build a customized option,” says Stojiljkovic, noting that Chef Schnupp can, at the very least, present a talk on a particular food topic. “He has really taken off running in his new role and is in the process of building new events as well, so I’m sure we’ll have even more to offer in the very near future.”

Physical activities also have a prominent role in extra curricular options. Loyola University has one of the largest ropes courses in Illinois and just hired a full-time challenge course director and Endicott College has indoor and outdoor basketball courts, a yoga studio, an in-progress hockey rink and two public beaches among other options. Yet at the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada, there are three whole departments to develop sports-focused programs that also offer instructional elements.

“When a client asks what they can do on campus as part of their event management services, we work with them to narrow down the group’s interests and determine how it can be built into their retreat or workshop. We are then able to partner with The University Outdoor Centre, Active Living or the Olympic

Oval to set up times based on availability and cost,” says Brent Mann, manager of meetings and special events. Examples of activities include kayaking or whitewater rafting down Alberta’s scenic rivers, rock and ice climbing and trainer-led yoga or fitness classes (including belly dancing and hip-hop dance classes). “A campus environment allows our conference and events department to be incredibly unique in providing for clients,” he says.

Unique doesn’t even begin to explain the activities the U of C’s Meetings and Special Events area can coordinate as

part of their team-building or workshop packages. The Olympic-sized Aquatic Centre can host underwater hockey games, the creation of synchronized swimming routines (they’ll record it for you), inner tube water polo and deep-water group fitness. “We also provide practical skill group training, including first aid, swimming and diving lessons,” says Mann, reflecting on the advantages booking such excursions can have for a planner’s bottom line. “Fun challenges can encourage collaboration, and overcoming it together promotes better communication,” which really may be the biggest learning lesson of them all. **uv**

One of the benefits of being in Alberta, Canada is that the University of Calgary has no limit to the outdoor activities it can schedule, such as group skiing lessons.

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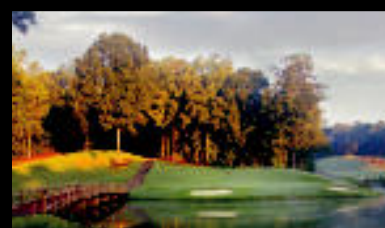
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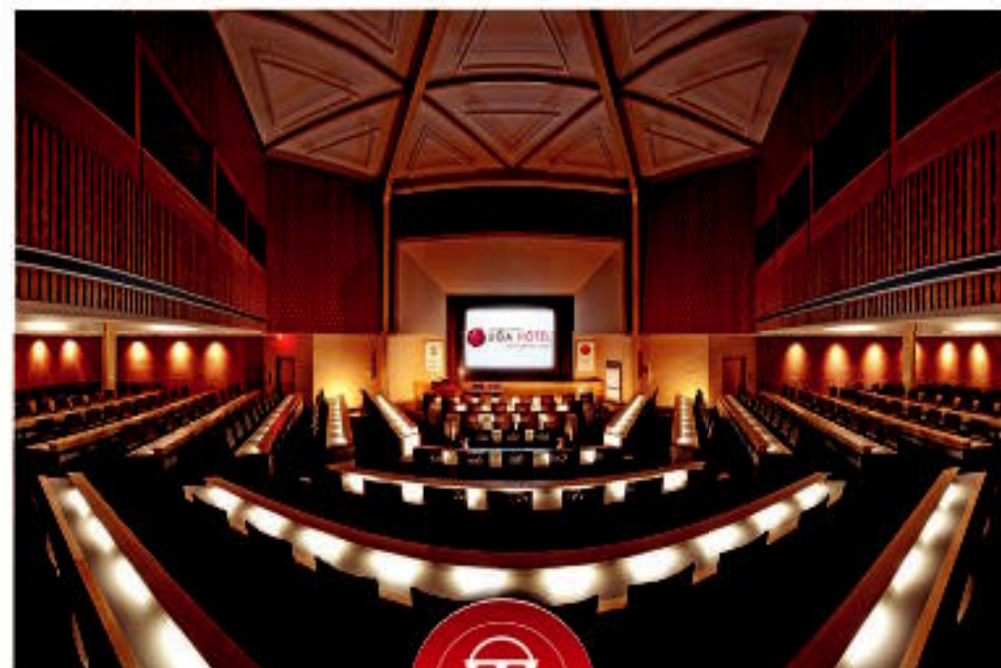


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EACH YEAR, UNIQUE VENUES HOSTS a conference solely for member properties to learn new strategies for business, network with colleagues and have fun enjoying the host city. Last October, Nashville's Vanderbilt University was the setting for the three-day summit where the tunes buzzing around the "music capital" got everyone amped up for future perfor-

mances for planners. Representatives from member venues listened in to guest speakers and participated in sessions that offered tools for better serving planners and groups and overall improving our industry. By the end, we all stood to take a pledge to respond to all group sales leads in 48 hours. Here is a look at our scrapbook.



1. Dr. Mark Mulder from Pacific Lutheran University speaks to an engaged group. **2.** Julie Wiggins from CINEPLEX Entertainment gives Unique Venues President Chuck Salem a good laugh. **3.** Jake Holtz from University Center Conference Chicago chats with Michelle Wu from Vanderbilt University. **4.** In the spirit of Nashville, Celinda Miranda-LaBella from University of Nevada, Las Vegas took a challenge to sing her favorite tune. **5.** Unique Venues Founder Michele Nichols gets the group amped up for the day. **6.** Marketing Manager Mandy Volpe gives one of her presentations. **7.** All the members in attendance stood together to take a pledge to respond to sales leads in 48 hours. **8.** Erin Hegarty from University of Colorado - Boulder meets with colleagues. **9.** (l-r) Dustin Frost from Tallahassee Community College Conference & Events, Dawn Wolff from Newton Conference Center at Georgia Piedmont Technical College and Sharon Melnik from Wake Forest University pose for a photo. **10.** Melanie Sandberg from Lewis University (r) listens to a fellow colleague during an icebreaker session. **11.** Bill Paladino from The Conference Center at George Williams College and Unique Venues' Chuck Salem and Michele Nichols (l-r) look over a new tech tool talked about in the conference. **12.** Kay Lewis from American University is tuned into the daily presentations. **uv**



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THE FOLLOWING PAGES FEATURE A COMPREHENSIVE INDEX OF ALL THE UNIQUE VENUES MEMBERS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA. EACH LISTING IS ORGANIZED ALPHABETICALLY FOR EASE OF USE AND FEATURES THE NAME OF THE VENUE, CITY AND UNIQUE VENUES WEBSITE ADDRESS, WHICH HOLDS EVEN MORE INFORMATION FOR PLANNERS.

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DEAN'S LIST

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

THE BUSINESS MODEL

Being on the campus of an entrepreneurial think tank has rubbed off on Nancy Lindemer who's turned Babson Executive Conference Center into a better business bureau.

Nancy Lindemer had her first learning experience in hospitality at the young age of 23 while working as a GM at an economy hotel in the suburbs of Chicago. "I managed everything," she says. "If the housekeeper didn't show up or the night auditor called in sick, I was [doing their jobs]." During this time, she also quickly learned there was a better opportunity waiting for her and moved into the conference center industry where she has remained ever since.

Now a global board member of IACC (International Association of Conference Centers) and the director of sales and marketing at the 22,000-square-foot/211-guest room Babson Executive Conference Center in Massachusetts, Lindemer still finds new lessons every day. "Babson College's number one focus is the education of entrepreneurs, and that environment seeps through in teaching people to think independently and do what's right for the business," she says.

Unique Venues: What appealed to you about making the move to Babson—and the Boston area?

Nancy Lindemer: It was the right opportunity at the right time, and it's exciting to be on a college campus. It's creative and collaborative and there are always interesting people involved. We can take part in what's happening onsite like the special speakers and entrepreneurs in residence, which has included Gail Simmons from "Top Chef," Daymond John from "Shark Tank" and designer Tory Burch. The entrepreneurial spirit is alive all the time.

UV: Have you found the experience of a college conference center to be different from the more traditional option?


NL: "A campus is very hospitality-oriented, and we are IACC-certified so there are standards we uphold. Sometimes clients might expect they'll be eating in a cafeteria and sleeping in dorms, but in actuality they're sleeping in a very nice guest room and have some of the best in class for food service. Our clients are here for weeks sometimes so we get to know them and personalize the

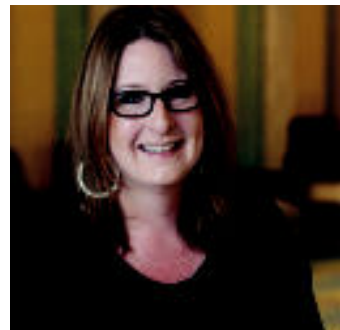
service to help make them comfortable and facilitate what they're here to do."

UV: What has been one of the more memorable customer service experiences?

NL: "There's not just one that stands out because we make sure it happens all the time. A lot of people come here for programs that are life changing so quite frequently the staff is part of that experience and they become embedded in people's minds, whether it's the housekeeper that goes out of their way to take care of you or the front desk that personally knows you by the time you check out."

UV: What are you looking forward to in 2015?

NL: "The [meetings] industry is [getting stronger], and it's interesting to see the new opportunities and new training programs our clients are offering to educate and develop their teams, and we can be a part of that as we develop our people as well." 



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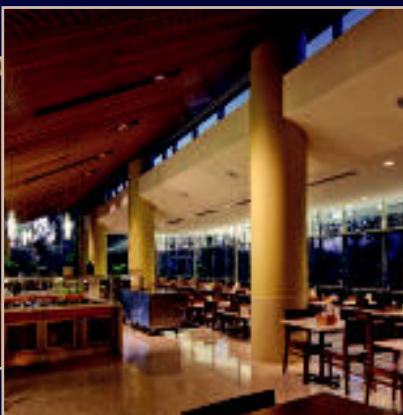
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