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OF THE YEAR**

Julie Wiggins

(PAGE 88)



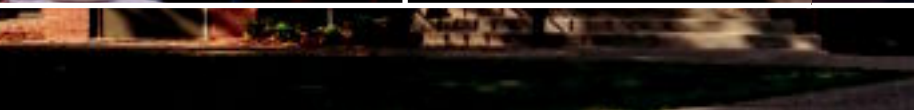
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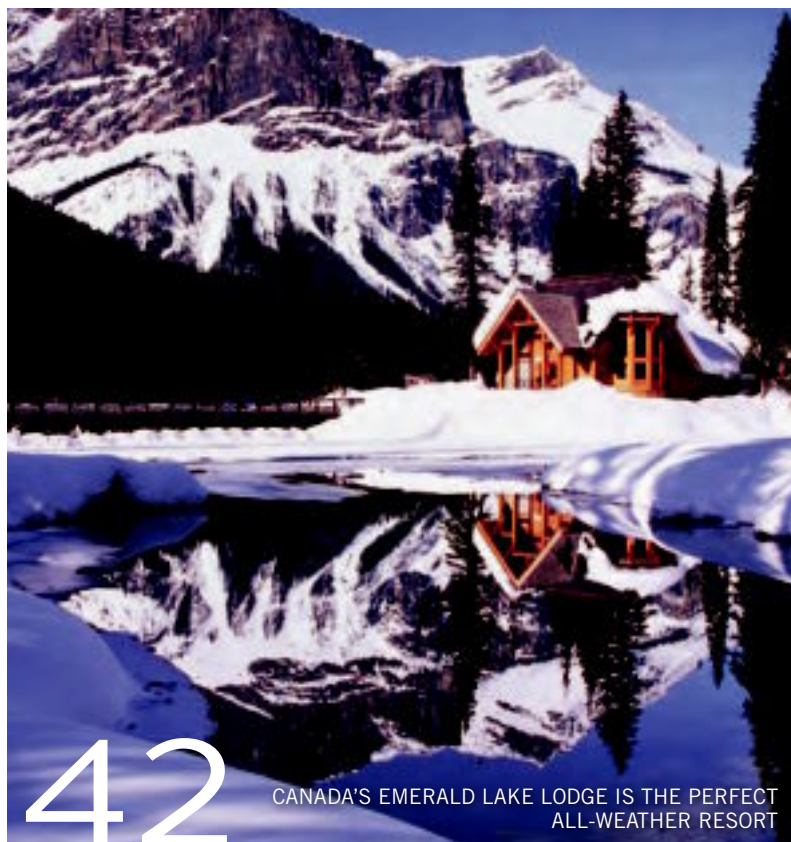
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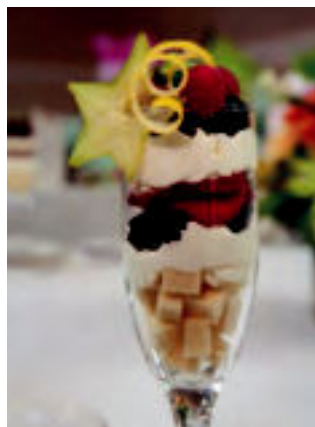
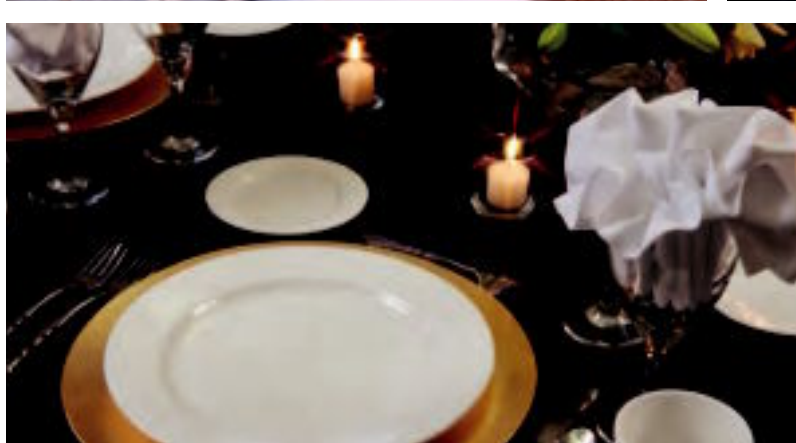
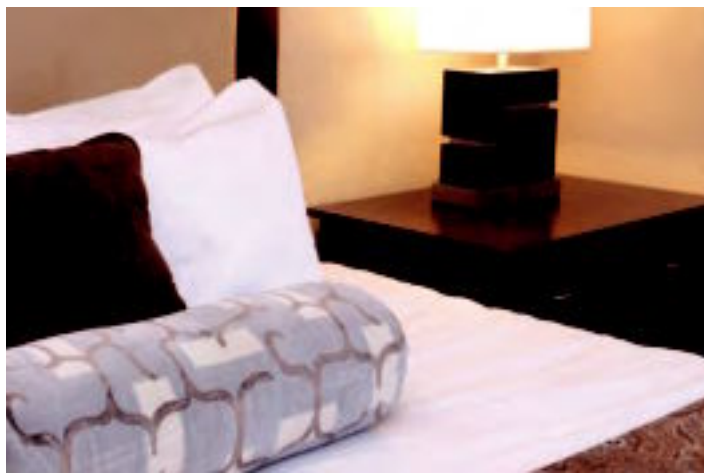
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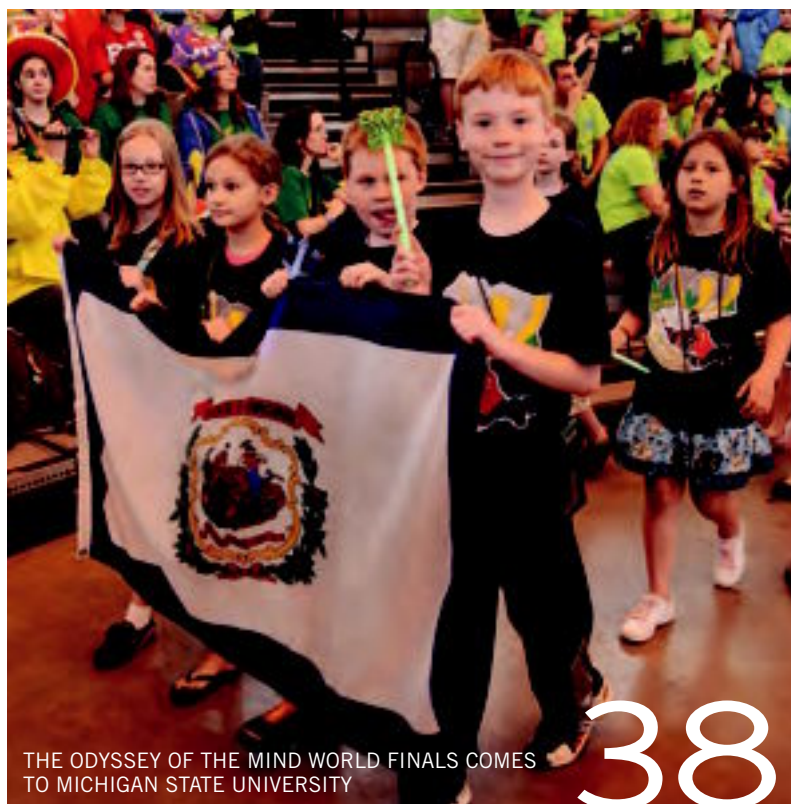


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Cineplex's Julie Wiggins is awarded the first ever "professional of the year" title from Unique Venues for her dedicated work to help move the industry. *Photo by Sara Sidwell.*

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PUBLISHER
MICHELE NICHOLS

PRESIDENT
CHUCK SALEM

EDITOR
SELENA FRAGASSI

SALES
JEANNE FEATHERS
ANNE MCCAW (CANADA)
TONY MCGUIRT
LISA MORRELL

MARKETING MANAGER
MANDY VOLPE

TECHNOLOGY
TODD WONDERS

PLANNER SERVICES
SHANNON GLOVER
ANN MCKENZIE
COREY SALEM

ART DIRECTOR
CASIE BELDO

PROJECT MANAGER
DIANNE TALMAGE

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CORPORATE OFFICE
225 MAIN STREET
OPAL BUILDING, SUITE G-1
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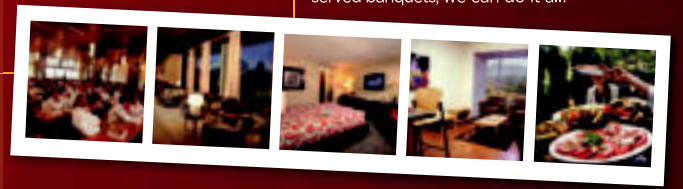
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PUBLISHER'S LETTER



A YEAR AGO, WE HAD AN IDEA. The Unique Venues team was having our regular meeting in our Collaboration Room and someone started the brainstorming session with two very important words: “What If...” “What if we devoted one of our magazines to recognizing the best of the best? What if we gave out a few of these awards at our Annual Marketing Conference?” It got us thinking—*what if* we were the very first in our industry to recognize the best of the best on an annual basis?

The idea was new and exciting, but really it was already a philosophy Unique Venues was born on and has continued to live by each and every day in our 29-year history. We have been pioneers helping to carve out this niche of the meetings and events industry, so it's only natural we'd want to continue to give attention to these very purposeful spaces.

As pioneers, we continue to explore and invent and create new opportunities for the college and university campuses, museums, zoos and cruise ships and other special venues that are often forgotten by the mainstream industry. And in the process we set out to create goals to achieve what other industry models have accomplished.

There are a lot of “Best Of” issues in the traditional hotel industry, but ours has something unique that the others don't promote. In addition to shedding light on the best of our industry in 25 varied categories, our awards also aim to help planners understand why these venues were chosen and how they work to make meetings and events stand out just as much as they do. By sharing the best, we help advance our industry which, in turn, makes all of us better.

It's our call to keep moving forward and never settling in exposing the great attributes of these special event venues. By doing so, we can only hope the next event planner that comes across this issue will say, “What if we booked our next event here?”

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M Nichols". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Michele Nichols, Founder
Unique Venues

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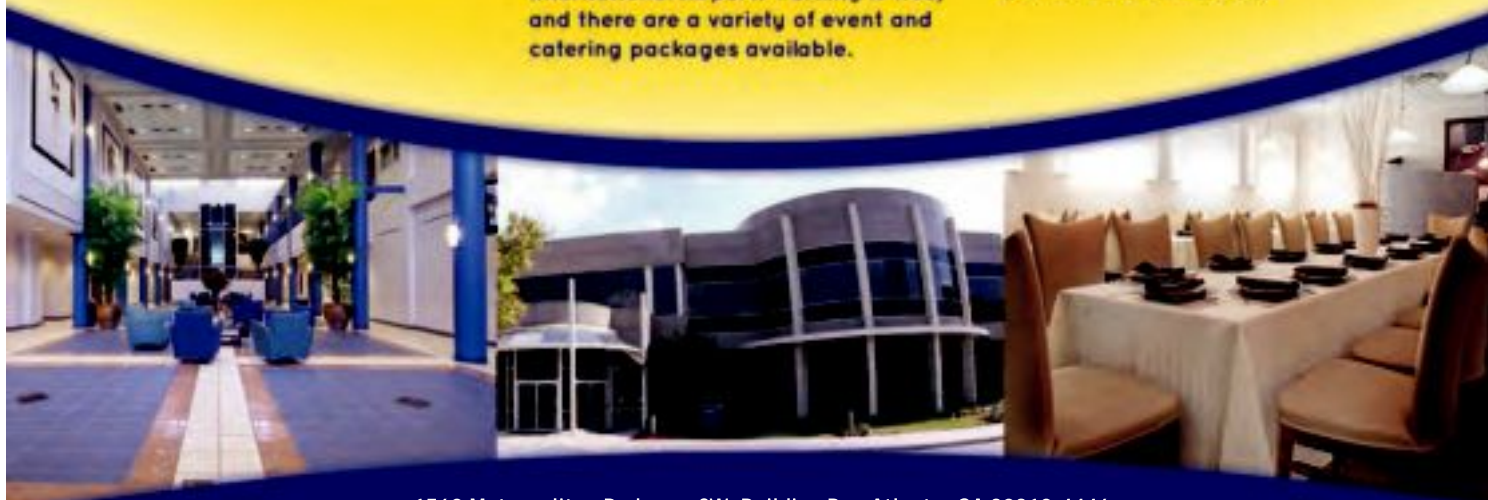
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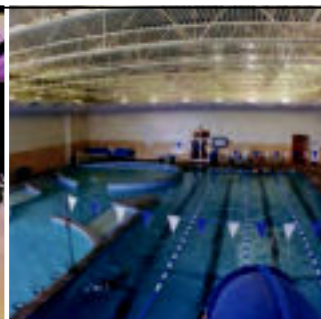
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5 TIPS for Having a Life & Making a Living

Work-life-balance can seem like a mystical, sometimes impossible, concept. But there are ways to find passion in both your day job and your life outside the office. Here are five simple steps you can take to find more equilibrium.

1 GO TO LUNCH. Whether it's just 30 minutes or an hour, step away from your computer and phones every day to re-charge. That doesn't mean grabbing lunch and eating it back at your desk, either. Take your meal outside to a picnic table or one of your favorite green areas, or plan to meet a friend at a restaurant. Whatever your lunch break looks like, make sure it is away from your desk so you can feel refreshed for the rest of the afternoon.

2 DISCOVER YOUR WORK PASSIONS. Everyone has tedious responsibilities in their job, the kinds of tasks that are saved until the last minute because they seem boring or like mountains to conquer. Break down the work into three smaller steps so you can make movement, cross the item off your list and get to the things in your job that you are truly passionate about every day. Think about what it is in your job that makes you happy to accomplish and talk with your colleagues and boss to see if there are ways you can increase those responsibilities.

3 FIND A HOBBY. Maybe you love to cook, or you're interested in joining a book club or you want to try a new class at the gym. Go for it! Find activities that interest you outside of work and enjoy them with your family or look forward to making new friends. Filling your downtime with fun and investing in relationships

outside of work is essential to having a happy work-life-balance.

Filling your downtime with fun and investing in relationships outside of work is essential to having a happy work-life-balance.

4 GET ACTIVE. Even something as simple as taking a walk on your lunch break or getting in a run after dinner can have great benefits. Studies have shown that just 20 minutes a day can get the creative juices flowing and make you feel refreshed.

5 PURGE SOCIAL MEDIA. Get ready to detox. When you're away from the office for the weekend or a vacation, make it a habit to store away your smartphone. Instead, focus on the real people and real conversations around you. At night, try adhering to no social media after dinnertime.

These little things can make a huge impact in how you feel about yourself and your workload. Think of it as an investment in your future self and your ability to avoid a mental breakdown from stress. **uv**

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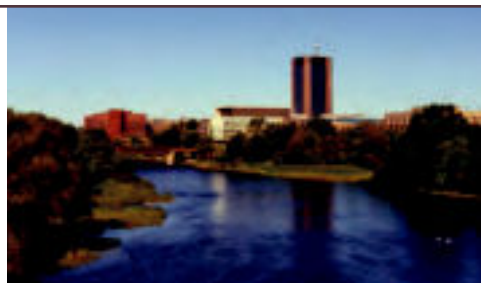
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With new technology, meeting participants around the world can be united

With travel costs looming, and potential attendees spread out across the world, you might think it impossible to get everyone together in one room for your meeting. Not so with efficient new technology such as video conferencing and streaming that brings everyone—both onsite and virtual—together at the same time. Our expert Steph Pfeilsticker, an award-winning innovator with 15-plus years of event planning experience, provides her top 10 tips on how to make your hybrid meeting a success.

- 1. Understand why people aren't attending your physical event.** If distance or travel costs are the reason, a hybrid event is a great solution. If it's that they don't know the value of your content, entice invitees with a sneak peak to get them more engaged with your organization.
- 2. Know that hybrid meetings are an attendance driver.** The myth has been debunked—hybrid meetings can actually increase your future onsite attendance. After a virtual guest gets a taste of your content, they will want to attend the next meeting in-person.
- 3. Keep your virtual team separate from your onsite team.** There will be demand on your manpower to design your hybrid event. While it may seem natural to have one team plan both the virtual and onsite aspects of the event, it is best to separate them to provide better focus and accomplish your goals for these two different audiences.
- 4. Surround yourself with people that welcome new situations.** With any new endeavor, team members need to have an open mind and be willing to ask questions. Be sure you have selected individuals who are comfortable with developing new ideas.
- 5. Content is king.** Quality content is a must to retain any audience, but especially the virtual audience. Plan rich, interesting content accordingly.
- 6. Keep the virtual attendee at the heart of your decisions.** As the beneficiary of the hybrid meeting, the experience of the virtual attendee is important. Understanding their perspective and unique situation will guide planners to make appropriate decisions.
- 7. Hire a virtual emcee.** Similar to a reporter at a sporting event, a virtual emcee reports on what is going on live from the scene for those who are not in the room. Paid talent is typically best as they are experienced on camera. However, if your budget doesn't allow it, use internal employees who are comfortable in the spotlight.
- 8. Engagement is the key to virtual success.** Without it, a hybrid meeting is not much different than watching a video. Encourage virtual attendees to chat with one another, ask questions of the speakers and respond to poll questions.
- 9. Establish how you'll measure return on investment.** Before the project starts, determine exactly what you can measure and how you'll do it. Showing results is essential to gaining future support.
- 10. Have a plan for post-event content.** Hybrid events produce a great deal of content. Plan ahead for how you can use that content again to reach more people. Consider monetizing it if appropriate. **uv**



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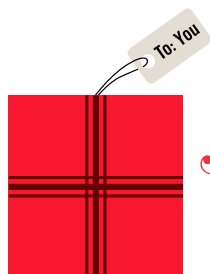
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in any event

THE AGENDA

gift ideas



Happy Holiday GIFT GUIDE



You've made your list, checked it twice and still can't figure out what to get your clients and colleagues this year. Relax, we've done the work for you and found four great—and practical—gift ideas that no one will be returning in January.

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technology



Hosting an Event? *There's An App For That*

IN RECENT YEARS, mobile apps have become a planner's best friend. With just the swipe of a finger, you can sell tickets, track registration, monitor social media activity, store all invoices and files and pretty much have your complete control center in the palm of your hand. Not only that, but the technology is rapidly changing and getting better with each new virtual introduction. In that spirit, we've compiled three of the best new apps you should download before your next event.



EVENTBRITE NEON

If you thought the Eventbrite app was great, it just got a whole light brighter. Neon now allows you to sell tickets to an event on the spot or even after its begun—and offer last-minute discounts. It accepts mobile payments, can scan ticket barcodes for easy entry, keeps track of your guest list and compiles data you'll need later. eventbrite.com//neon



CROWD MICS

How many times have you wanted to ask a participant to speak up during an audience Q&A? Not anymore with Crowd Mics, which instantly turns any iOS or Android device into a wireless microphone. Your attendees simply need to download the app, then speak into their phone and their voice will be heard loud and clear over the room's sound system. There's also a text comment and polling feature. crowdmics.com



EXPOSITOR

When you don't have a budget for a photographer or need to capture quick but high-quality shots of your event, turn to Expositor. This photo-focused app helps amateurs determine the right shutter speeds and exposure settings by answering a few questions about your surroundings so you get the perfect image every time. wunderkemmer.com/expositor





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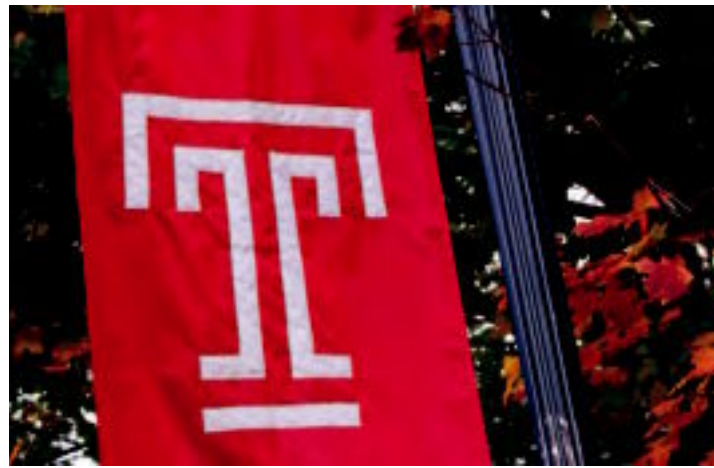


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THE AGENDA

happy hour



Basil Lemon-Drop Martini

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INGREDIENTS:

- 2 oz. Rain Cucumber Vodka
- .5 oz. fresh lemon juice
- .5 oz. simple syrup
- Basil leaf

TO PREPARE:

1. Add ingredients to shaker tin and shake until well mixed.
2. Muddle fresh basil leaf and place in martini glass.
3. Pour the contents over a strainer into the glass and serve. **uv**

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THE AGENDA

food for thought



Chef Drew's Granola

Courtesy of Springfield
College, Springfield, MA

The granola makes a great grab-and-go snack or breakfast cereal. Or, pour into a Mason jar and add some ribbon and gift it to colleagues and clients this holiday season.

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 cups old-fashioned oats
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ cup shredded coconut
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ¼ cup maple syrup
- pinch of salt
- ¼ cup pumpkin seeds
- ¼ cup flaxseed
- ¼ cup sunflower seeds
- 1 cup raisins or dried cranberries

TO PREPARE:

1. Mix together all ingredients except for raisins.
2. Lay out on a baking sheet and bake mixture in a pre-heated oven at 325° for 15 minutes.
3. After baking, mix in raisins.
4. Put all ingredients in large freezer bag and shake the mixture to blend.
5. Then store in your favorite airtight container to keep it fresh. **uv**

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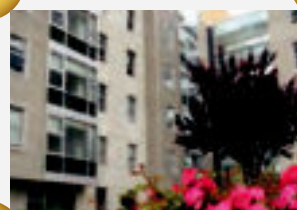
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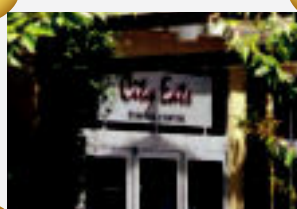
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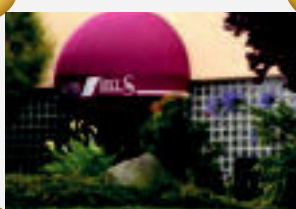
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WHAT'S TRENDING

BY SELENA FRAGASSI



*Ready, Set, **Action!***

When location scouts need to find a unique place to film their projects, they often turn to these non-traditional event venues that have the space, knowledge and teams to make it a blockbuster production.

Hollywood is the land of bright lights and big stars. So naturally when visiting groups head to L.A., the first thing they expect to see is a celebrity or—even better—a film crew in progress. It's a request Trish Carlson is not only used to but can happily oblige. As the director of conference and event services at L.A.'s Loyola Marymount University, she can think of a number of times clients have been on campus at the same time a crew is using the grounds for filming projects such as episodes of "Dexter," "Bones," and the recent Steve Jobs movie. "The conference guests get so excited to see something like this happen," she says. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

The university receives frequent calls from production offices since they have a wealth of acreage as well as traditional dorm accommodations that can give

that college look for commercial shoots without crews having to travel away from the industry epicenter. "Because we can only allow it during the downtime when

classes aren't in session, it falls right into our summer conference season," Carlson affirms, referencing a recent shoot for a new ABC Family sci-fi pilot called "Stitchers" this past summer. The crew filmed for three days, transforming Carlson's department into a professor's office, the student commons into a morgue and a conference room into an FBI interrogation center.

"It can be challenging," she says of the experience. "They take over the whole building and can be demanding." For example, there has to be complete silence when filming so there can't be any conversations or opening of doors and Carlson

has had to ask others on campus to accommodate the needs. "It can require some patience."

Yet the payoffs are a big benefit, says Jeff Hendrick, senior director of operations with the Richmond Raceway Complex in Richmond, Virginia that recently was the home of AMC Network's new show "Turn" about George Washington's spy ring. Although it's one of the first projects to use the raceway/tradeshows/conference facility for filming purposes, partnering together has brought increased revenue and exposure.

"It's a great relationship," says Hendrick, calling it a fairly smooth process.

Yet the payoffs are a big benefit, says Jeff Hendrick, senior director of operations with the Richmond Raceway Complex. Partnering together has brought increased revenue and exposure.

"They lease the facility from us ... and the filming ties in perfectly with our race schedule when we normally wouldn't have a lot of activity onsite. It's a great use of our property, and we see this as an opportunity moving forward to work with the local film office."

For the production team, they benefitted from the isolation of their secured spot tucked away behind the Raceway's Terminal 1 and Terminal 2. Inside, the 225,000-square-foot building had multiple bays and loading docks for hauling in materials and ample, raw space for original set creation.

That unique rapport is something the Georgia International Horse Park has also enjoyed for the last decade, says



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WHAT'S TRENDING



Sprawling grounds like the Georgia International Horse Park provide for versatility and privacy.

Director Jennifer Bexley. Starting with the film “Sweet Home Alabama” in the early 2000s, the facility has welcomed several HBO productions and movies like “Identity Thief” and “Joyful Noise”—and each time, Bexley says, “we love working with them.”

The multi-purpose Horse Park (originally built for the 1996 Olympics) is owned by the town of Conyers, Georgia, which has become a popular filming attraction. “We’re a camera-ready community,” says Bexley. As such the 1,400-acre property has become popular, like the others mentioned here, for its rural wooded areas and pastureland, the breadth of which makes the 100-person crew seem separate enough from the daily business. “The great thing is we don’t really even know they’re here. They set up in an area away from the core

where we have other events.”

Although, Bexley says, there can be challenges in a lot of the last-minute decisions film crews make, the silver lining is that it has given her team a better understanding of how to enhance their planning operations in general. “Normally we book things well in advance so it’s been an adjustment to learn their ways, but overall I think it’s helped us work better with all of our groups.”

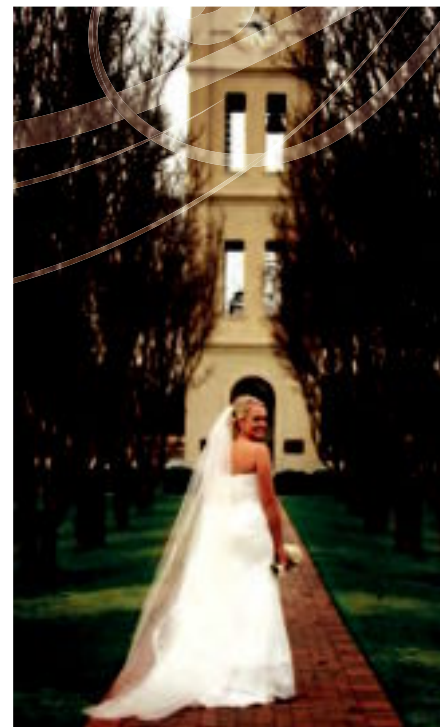
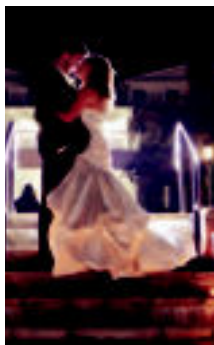
Hendrick agrees. “It’s amazing to me what goes into filming a series like “Turn.” The level of detail that these companies go through to produce what we ultimately see on television is incredible, and it’s opened our eyes to the detail in putting any kind of production together for our guests.” **uv**

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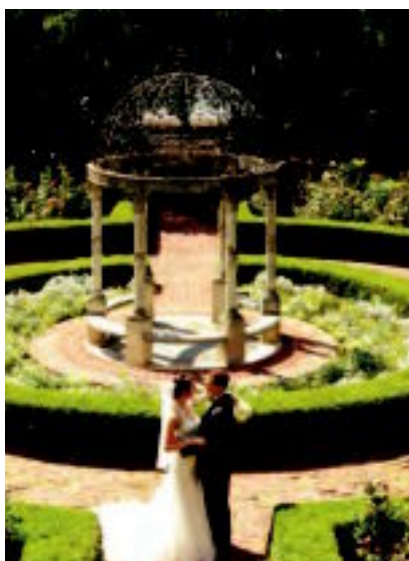


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THE MAIN EVENT

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

Meeting of the Minds

When Michigan State University welcomes the Odyssey of the Mind World Finals to campus, it's not just the students who are putting their brains together to solve problems.

Every other year, Michigan State University plays host to the incredible Odyssey of the Mind World Finals, a chance for thousands of qualifying children and teens from across the U.S. and abroad to compete against each other in various creative problem-solving challenges to win the ultimate bragging rights.

Yet when it comes to arranging the event, these whiz kids are not the only ones putting their brains together. A specially curated team has the great task to figure out where to lodge the 7,500 students and 7,500 judges, families and coaches; how to feed

them for three meals and two breaks each day; and how to transport all to 16 different competition sites via a shuttle system. Talk about having a problem to solve.

"Our university planning team meets monthly to go over all the moving parts and make sure everyone understands the impact of their decisions on other [departments]," says Laurin Gierman, manager for university conference services who leads the group of 30 event strategists representing a cross section of the student events center, local police, transportation, the convention and visitors bureau, residence hall and dining staff and the hotels the campus partners with for the judges' quarters.

"The housing is probably the biggest

piece to manage," Gierman says, especially when it comes to ensuring elementary kids and high schoolers have their own wings and experiences. "We not only house children by age group but also by region since most of the schools share chaperones and coaching staffs." In addition there are buddy teams for international competitors that have to be situated near each other. "Domestic buddies can help their visiting counterparts navigate American culture and provide a support system to watch their games and cheer for them since they don't often have family here."

Because the event is held the week of Memorial Day, right after commencement, it also keeps MSU staff on their toes




Kids from all over the world come to Michigan State University to participate in the annual Odyssey of the Mind World Finals, which tests their problem solving skills. From figuring out housing arrangements to pairing up buddy teams and providing rooms for prop storage and costume changes, the campus staff also has problems to solve—and they get it right every time.

PHOTO COURTESY OF: MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, CAROL ANN DESIMINE.

to refit the residence halls in time. "The staff is here on the Friday before to get everything set up," says Gierman.

There's also fun and games to keep the kids engaged, including an opening and closing ceremony and a mid-week creativity festival with DJs, a magician, face painting and pin trading, one of the most popular activities, says Gierman. "It's a huge part for this particular group. Everyone comes with their pin towels and is ready to trade with people from across the world." The participants also look forward to the new ice cream flavor developed specially for the event from the campus dairy store. "Sometimes there's a two to three-hour wait."

Although MSU is versed in juggling so many different pieces, there are differences when hosting children versus regular conference groups. One of the biggest external challenges is handling requests from parents who are not able to attend with their child, says Gierman. "We have a big uptick in dietary needs, so our dietician on staff helps pick food, and we post menus online." As well, the university takes special measures to ensure the safety of the visiting students. "We instituted a youth protection policy that requires all chaperones and staff to have been background checked and checked against the national sex offender registry within 12 months," says Gierman. "It's a contractual obligation."

So far all the procedures have worked; MSU has hosted Odyssey of the Minds on three occasions and is contracted for three more. "There's always a way to improve every time," says Gierman who visits Iowa State on the odd years when they host the event. "I see what they are doing right that we can implement. If we are not tweaking something every time, we are resting on our laurels and that's not something I want to do." 

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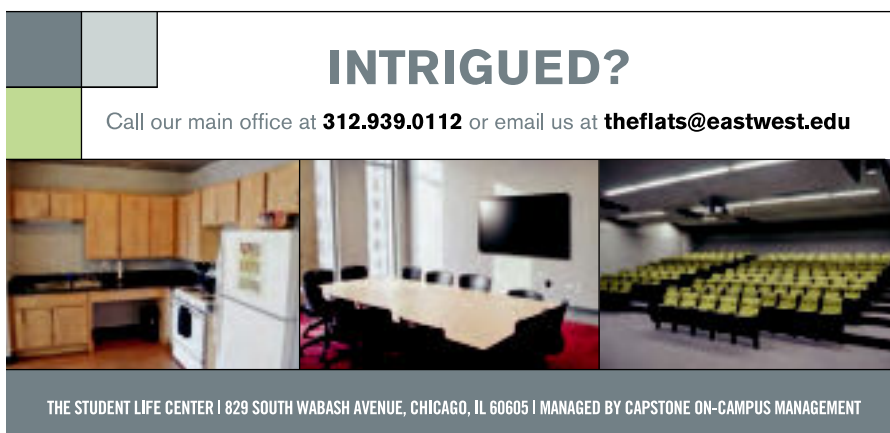
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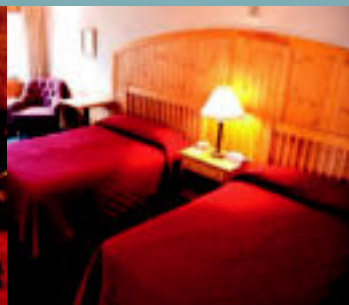
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ON THE ROAD

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

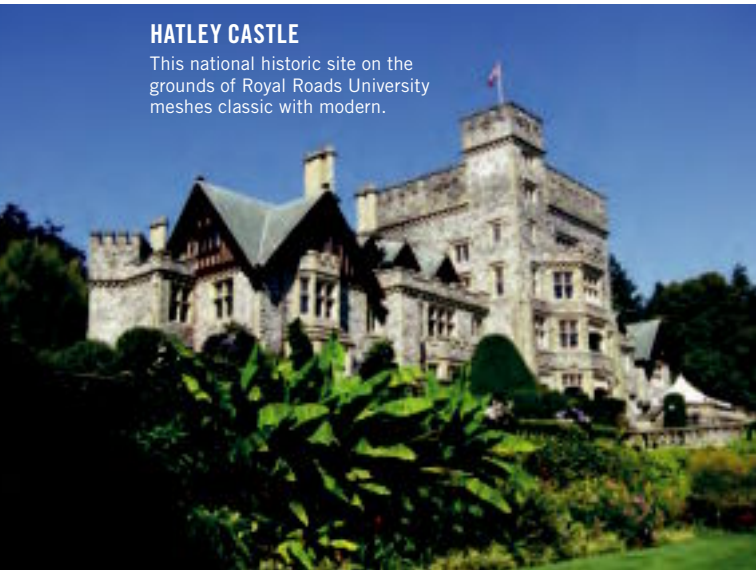
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Canada is not only about the dazzling Northern Lights. Due west there are a number of special event venues in Alberta and British Columbia that are planner's real shining stars.

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Hatley Castle (Victoria, British Columbia)

When brides want to feel like a princess, they turn to the gorgeous Hatley Castle, a national historic site on the grounds of Royal Roads University in Victoria. Originally a private retirement home, the Edwardian style castle features lush gardens, a forest and recreational trails all overlooking the Strait of Juan de Fuca across to the Olympic Mountains. "We've done 60 weddings in 5 months," says Manager for Campus Services Lorraine Burtoi of the site's mass appeal for wedded bliss.

Although it remains their largest line of business, Burtoi says the waterfront venue also coordinates a number of special events like incentive travel programs and conferences as well as anniversaries, parties and galas that can be themed if desired. "Medieval is quite popular of course," she says, noting that the estate speaks for itself. "To date we haven't had any clients that needed to bring in décor other than chair covers and linens, and the caterer can help with that."

Hatley Castle exclusively partners with Truffles Catering, one of Victoria's leading culinary companies, that assembles a variety of high-end buffets for guests; seated and plated options are also available. The site can accommodate 100 people seated or 200 standing in the first floor Drawing Room, or up to 350 guests with exterior tenting in the Croquet Garden. Although the castle is in its original state, Burtoi assures, "we do have in-house A/V," merging the historic flair with modern appeal.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: HATLEY CASTLE, ROYAL BC MUSEUM.



Royal BC Museum (Victoria, British Columbia)

From a private Valentine's Day dinner for two to a school of 1,500 children that rented out the entire building, the Royal BC Museum in Victoria is one of the most popular—and versatile—attractions in the area. “We have bookings going into 2018,” says Judith Brunt, facilities rentals manager. One of the reasons behind its appeal is the convenient location. “We are in walking distance to all the major hotels and across the way from the Victoria Conference Centre so if you have a conference with international guests, they can visit without having to rely on cabs or buses,” says Brunt. In fact, corporate groups are one of the most frequent to rent out any of the three gallery spaces, each hosting up to 400-500 people. Inside, guests can mingle with cocktails near Woolly Mammoth statues and set up dinner tables around a submarine.



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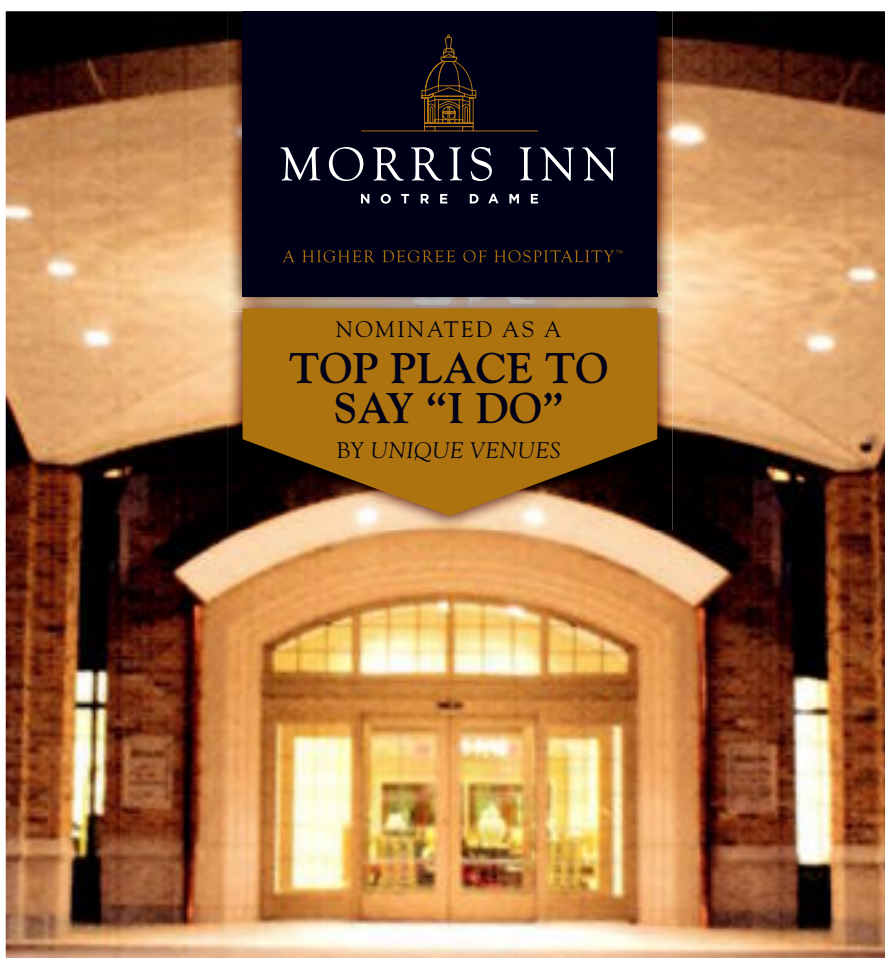
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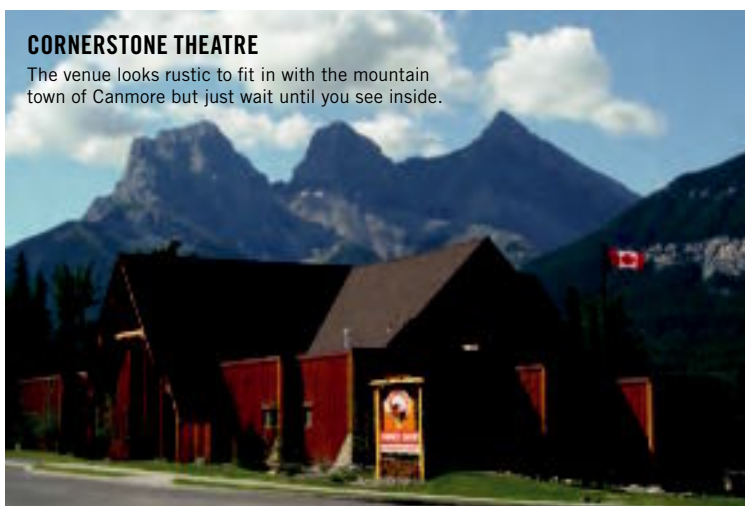
ANVIL CONFERENCE CENTRE

This brand-new, state-of-the-art cultural building and conference center fills the need for a midsize venue in New Westminster, BC.



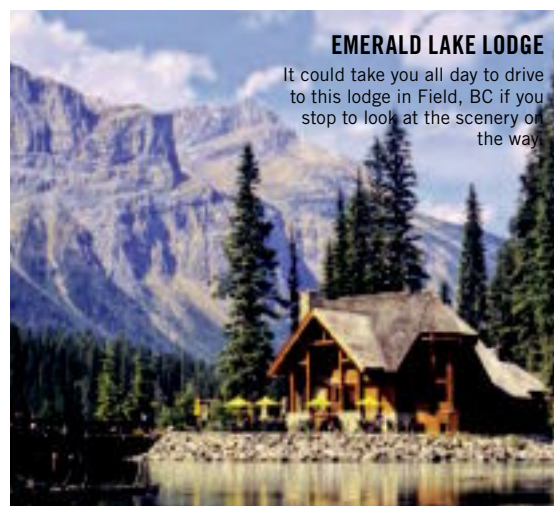
CORNERSTONE THEATRE

The venue looks rustic to fit in with the mountain town of Canmore but just wait until you see inside.



EMERALD LAKE LODGE

It could take you all day to drive to this lodge in Field, BC if you stop to look at the scenery on the way.



The museum was completed in 1967 as a legislative initiative to house the province's archival collection. It expanded into the private event sphere 18 years ago and has since found success by focusing on its unique history. "Menus are all done to reflect the area of the museum you're stationed in," says Brunt. The "old-fashioned town" will have grazing stations with ham and pulled pork, the "seashore" display offers a range of seafood and bison burgers are served at the prehistoric exhibit. There's also special entertainment that can be booked to fit in with the theme, from traditional masked dances to a Dixie band. Says Brunt, "In one night you can get a full taste of British Columbia."

Anvil Conference Centre (New Westminster, British Columbia)

This boutique conference centre in metro Vancouver just opened in September and already it has drawn a lot of publicity, including a grand opening ceremony attended by 7,000 people excited to see the

arts and culture and conference hybrid. "We like to position ourselves not just as a venue, but an experience," says Heidi Hughes, director of sales and marketing.

Level one is dedicated conference space for up to 700 people, she says, while upper levels offer a 364-seat performing arts center, a new media arts gallery with panoramic digital art, the Westminster museum and archives and a temporary exhibit space where groups can custom fit the room with their own displays and materials for an original reception area. "It's really a place where people can meet, network, create, exhibit, learn and be engaged," says Hughes, noting the building fulfills its mission as a civic facility owned by the city of New Westminster.

It also fills a gap for the midsize conference venue that, until now, was not represented in the area. "A lot of hotels can take on these events, too, but because we are a regional venue without attached lodging we can accommodate day groups that hotels might shy away from." Onsite, plan-

ners have access to event services, preferred suppliers, in-house catering, A/V capabilities and décor facilitators that can arrange for pipe and drape for tradeshow needs.

Painted Boat Resort (Madeira Park, British Columbia) Emerald Lake Lodge (Field, British Columbia)

The family-owned Canadian Rocky Mountain Resorts knows retreats. Based in Calgary, the company operates three mountain lodges including the Emerald Lake Lodge in Field as well as a villa resort on the Sunshine Coast called Painted Boat, both popular for groups looking for a real getaway.

The adventure starts on the drive, says Tiana Demers, senior sales manager. "You have to drive through the Rockies to get to the Emerald Lake Lodge. It features some of the most beautiful parts of Canada, and really it could take you all day," she says, noting many groups have participated in scavenger hunts along the way.

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ON THE ROAD



THE PAINTED BOAT

The Painted Boat Resort in Madeira Park, BC has 30 villas that sit right on the water.

Once you do get to the lodge, though, be ready for downtime. “It’s completely secluded,” says Demers. So much so that you have to be bused to the front doors since there’s only one bridge that enters and exits the property. There’s no cell service, as required by Parks Canada, “but it adds to the appeal,” admits Demers. Many groups will use the chance to unwind and enjoy outdoor activities like hiking, canoeing or skiing and then retiring at night for a murder mystery party. With 24 cabins, there are a total of 85 guest rooms, each with a fireplace. There are also private spaces including a restaurant and main lodge.

Painted Boat is less pastoral with 30 villas that sit on the water. Each rented condo is 1,100 square feet with two beds, two baths and a full kitchen. “Guests enjoy a resort feel with room service, a full spa, bike and paddleboard rentals and an infinity pool,” says Demers. Onsite there is also a restaurant that can be booked out as well as lower level conference space. In total, the property has room for up to 150 people. Both locations have set menus but they can be flexible; and the best part just might be the bison and elk from the family’s own game farm.

Cornerstone Theatre and Restaurant (Canmore, Alberta)

If Cornerstone Theatre and Restaurant looks familiar to you, it’s because it is modeled after Niagara’s famous The Oh Canada Eh?

dinner theatre. “The owners really wanted to replicate it here,” says General Manager Pam Warburton of the Alberta venue, which is rustic enough to fit in with the atmosphere of the local mountain town but also has a lot of scenery and features to boast inside.

“Because we’re a theatre we have everything a planner needs onsite,” says Warburton. That includes an elevated stage that can allow for bands, DJs or featured speakers, as well as theatre lights comprised of LEDs and Gobos, a projector and screen and a soundboard that can man wireless or lapel microphones.

Although there are theatre productions that run throughout the week and weekend, there are regular days and times available for private groups, with Warburton figuring the property has hosted 27 weddings and conferences in 2013. The theatre itself can seat up to 280 and can be split into three separate areas with curtains; a lobby is useful for meetings of 10-12 people.

Another benefit of Cornerstone Theatre is its in-house catering department. “We have our own chef and food and beverage consultant on hand,” says Warburton. The staff encourages a buffet or family style setting, but can tailor make the experience, too. “Planners can mix and match from menus, and if they have a certain theme we like to work with the idea to make something that’s more one-of-a-kind.” That, she says, always gets a good round of applause. **uv**

TIP:

Find your perfect unique venue in western Canada (or anywhere!) with new, advanced search options on UniqueVenues.ca and UniqueVenues.com that let you browse by region.



Turn to page 84 to see a comprehensive list of all our member venues in western Canada.

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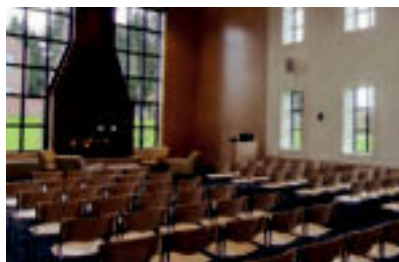
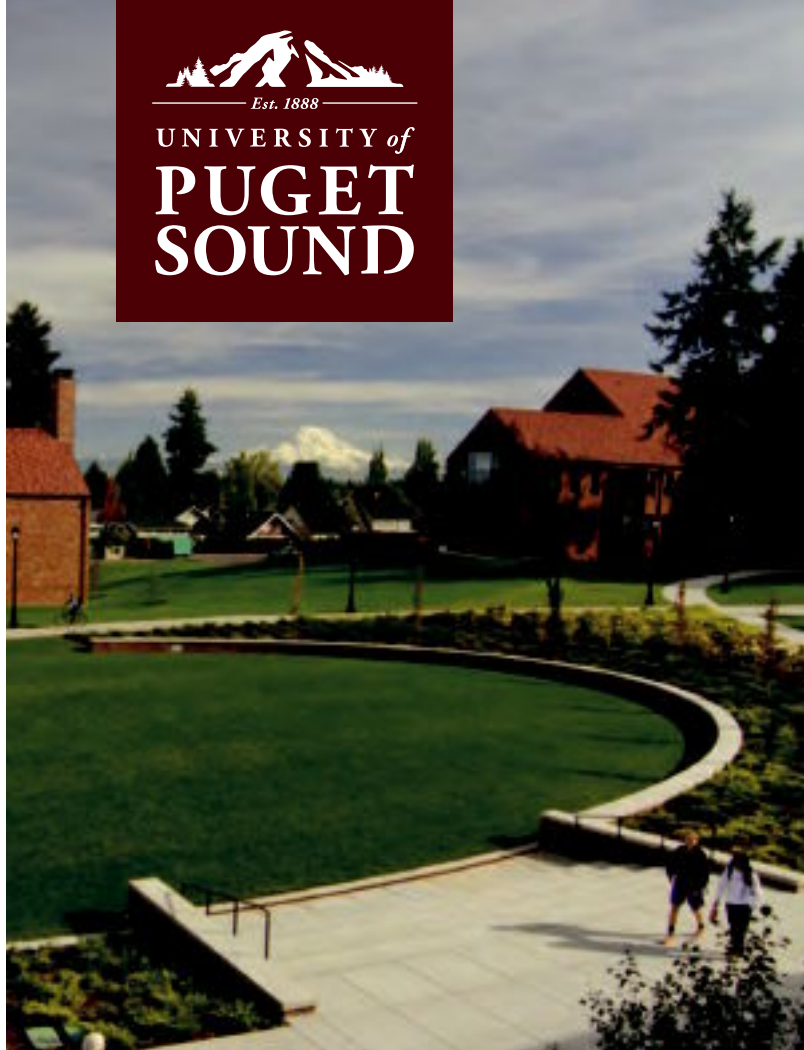
Cornerstone Theatre and Restaurant
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BY SELENA FRAGASSI

In our industry, it's a hallmark to stand out from traditional meeting and event venues. Many times, these unique spaces do so on a daily basis without recognition.

We needed to change that. So, for the first-time ever in the history of the Industry and our organization, Unique Venues assembled its very own Best Of 2014 awards, asking our readers to vote for their favorite venues in 25 distinct categories, from the best venue on a per diem to the best spot for a family reunion. **CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE WINNERS AND THE RUNNERS UP!**

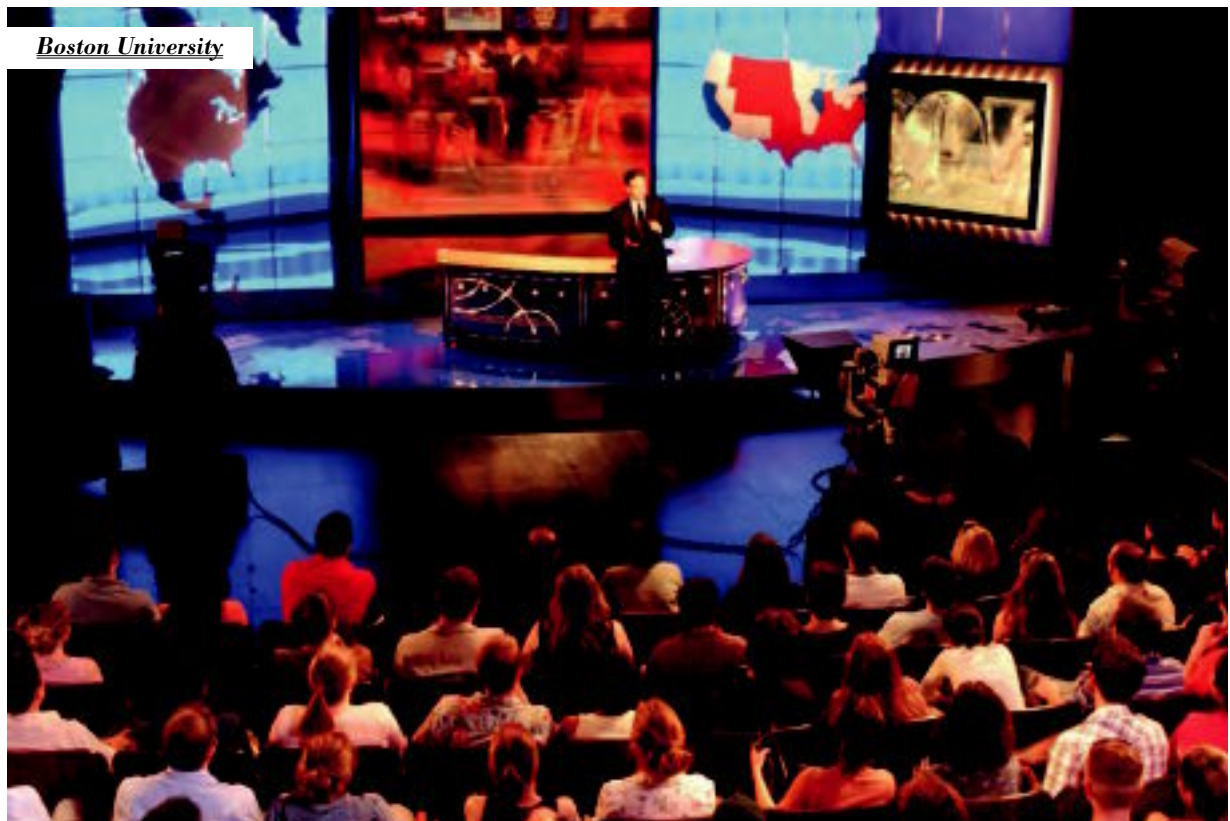


Best Venue to Film a Movie

WINNER: Boston University, Boston, MA

"Boston University was basically our back lot for [filming], and the cooperation we received was unprecedented," says Charlie Harrington, a top location manager about working with the campus staff to film the Columbia Pictures movie "21." Boston University has also been the setting for productions such as "The Social Network," "Friday Night Lights" and "60 Minutes," among others. While film and television crews can be a demanding audience, any surprise requests are met by a One-Stop Shop department that is versed in working with a number of service providers to make sure needs are met. "It gives us the opportunity to see how many things our campus can actually provide to clients," says Nicolle Paeglow, associate director of events and conferences. UniqueVenues.com/BostonUniv // (617) 353.3520

RUNNERS UP: *Nipissing University* | North Bay, ON
Iona College | New Rochelle, NY



PHOTOS COURTESY OF: BOSTON UNIVERSITY, CARNEGIE HALL.



Best Venue to Host a Meeting or Event on a Per Diem

WINNER: University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, CO

Budgets are a necessary, if not exasperating, part of the planning process. Yet venues like the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs have systems in place that help ease the situation and enable coordinators to stay in line. “We [are] transparent and upfront with our costs so that each client can visualize their event without worrying about hidden fees,” says Andreanna Romero, conference and event specialist. Whether accommodating a state or federal agency, a nonprofit or conference group with limited funding, the department looks for cost effective measures such as procuring goods and services and reducing overhead costs. That doesn’t mean the campus cuts corners on spaces and services, though—they have welcomed recent expansions including a new classroom building and parking garage and the launch of a self-operated Dining & Food Service department. UniqueVenues.com/uccs // (719) 255.4445



**best of
WINNERS**

RUNNERS UP:

Salve Regina University
Newport, RI,

*The Conference Center at
Saint Vincent College*
Latrobe, PA

Carnegie Hall



Best Venue for a Formal Affair

WINNER: Carnegie Hall, New York, NY

For black tie galas and high-profile events, venues can be just as dressed up—none more than the illustrious Carnegie Hall in New York. “For more than a century, the greatest entertainers in the world have taken the stages here, and the history and palpable legacy permeates within the space,” says Morgan Bedore, vice president of sales and creative development and part of the legendary Starr Restaurant group that oversees special events and menus at the venue. The landmark status has attracted both corporate and social planners to utilize the venue each year, with a number of spaces at their disposal. There are the classics such as the Shorin Club Room for 79 guests reception-style or 50 seated and the 220-cap Rohatyn Room, which features walls decorated with oversized posters of the noteworthy concerts. There are also new spaces such as the intimate May Room for 50 people and the skyline-facing Weill Terrace Room for up to 250 people. “Because our team works onsite, our familiarity with the spaces give planners an insider perspective,” says Stockton-Brown. UniqueVenues.com/CarnegieHall // (212) 903.9600

RUNNERS UP:

Metropolitan Centre
Calgary, AB

Dallas Museum of Art
Dallas, TX

Georgian Conference & Event Services



Best Venue for Exhibitions and Tradeshows

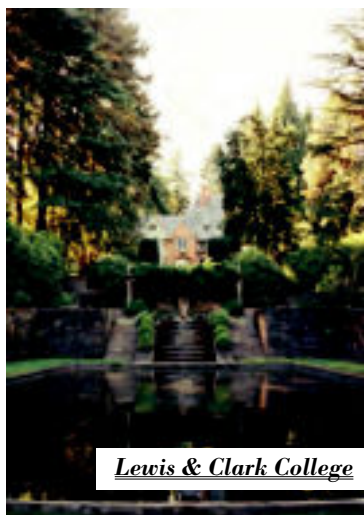
WINNER: Georgian Conference and Event Services, Barrie, ON

The Aging Wellness Fair, Skor Food Tradeshow and Flanagan Tradeshow are just some of the examples of the 15-20 large scale productions Ontario's Georgian College hosts on a yearly basis. All come to the campus, just 90 minutes from Toronto, for its unlimited space and flexibility. "We can transform our Student Athletic Centre into a 20,000-square-foot [grid] with column-free event space," says Sara Tuck, manager of conference and event services. Here, the capacity allows for up to 110 booths, sized 10' x 10', that can fit pull-up banners, displays and even furniture. In addition to tradeshows, Georgian is also popular for conferences, meetings, youth/sports camps and religious retreats and corporate training. UniqueVenues.ca/GeorgianConferenceServices // (705) 728.1968

RUNNERS UP:

MacEwan University
Edmonton, AB

University of Maryland
College Park, MD



Lewis & Clark College



Best Outdoor Event Space

WINNER: Lewis & Clark College, Portland, OR

According to the *Princeton Review*, Lewis & Clark College is one of the most beautiful campuses in the country, and the scenery starts at the moment of arrival. Guests are greeted by lavish gardens filled with fountains and flowers and a glamorous 1920s pool. There are three outdoor rooms available for rent: a stone terrace covered by a wisteria arbor that looks down to a reflecting pool popular for cocktail receptions or intimate weddings; the Great Plat Lawn, one of the largest garden venues in Portland (for up to 950 people), with rhododendron walls and a water lily fountain; and Cobblestone Circle used for artistic performances and ceremonies. Special events are welcome June through August; one of the most special was "a jazz club around the reflection pool at sunset," says Kerry Parker Keenon, associate director of conference and events. "It was magical." UniqueVenues.com/lewisandclark // (503) 768.7235

RUNNERS UP: Vancouver Aquarium Marine Science Centre | Vancouver, BC
The New York Botanical Garden | Bronx, NY



Best Teambuilding Equipment and Programming

WINNER: Headspace, Calgary, AB

Want to create a large trust circle or human knot? Pull out bleachers and have improv theatre? Set up a human chain or fitness challenge? Create a yoga studio? Headspace can do all of that. "Our space is 100% customizable to meet the needs of each team," says Chris Bedford, president and CEO of Karo Group that oversees Headspace. The 5,000-square-foot raw concept space also has a projection system and 15' screen, PA and mixing board and a catering kitchen. The amenities have made it popular with clients such as Apple, Audi, Range Rover and Jaguar for teambuilding, trainings and planning sessions. The space is a "blank canvas," says Bedford and can host up to 200 people. "We can do classroom-style, living room, boardroom, gym, dancefloor, stage — you name it. And to top it all off, Headspace is 100% solar-powered." UniqueVenues.ca/headspace // (403) 541.2799



**best of
WINNERS**

RUNNERS UP:

Rutgers University Inn & Conference Center
New Brunswick, NJ

University of Florida Conference Services
Gainesville, FL

Headspace



Best Farm-to-Table Group Catering Offerings

WINNER: Phipps Conservatory & Botanical Gardens, Pittsburgh, PA

At Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, the farm-to-table dining program is so fresh, it was just launched this summer. Here the focus is on locally sourced ingredients for menus. "We use as much produce as possible from our own onsite Green Rooftop Edible Garden as well as a variety of local farms that participate in our Farmers at Phipps Market, held from June to October," says Jonathan Crayton, general manager of leisure services for Sodexo, which services the venue. There's no standard menu for any event, which makes it possible to get creative with each group. Family-style seating is offered in either the Outdoor Garden or Special Events Hall, both accommodating up to 150 people. UniqueVenues.com/PhippsConservatory // (412) 622.6915

RUNNERS UP: *Chicago Botanic Garden* | Glencoe, IL
University of California, Davis | Davis, CA



Best Place to Host an LGBT-Friendly Event

WINNER: Metropolitan Centre, Calgary, AB

Canada's Metropolitan Centre has a lot of pride for the number of LGBT-friendly events it arranges each year, with many couples flocking to the luxury venue for their special wedding day. In addition, the multi-purpose space is also home to a large fall event, the Superheroes, Villains and Pride Halloween Gala. "We have a lot of acceptance and willingness to host these events as opposed to other traditional downtown facilities," says Tracey Wilkinson, head of sales. Onsite there is a ballroom for 350 seated or 500 reception-style as well as a lecture theatre for up to 150. UniqueVenues.ca/MetropolitanCentre // (403) 266.3876

RUNNERS UP: *University of Pennsylvania—Perelman Quadrangle* | Philadelphia, PA
Delaware Art Museum | Wilmington, DE
Glenview Mansion & F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre | Rockville, MD



Best Place to Say 'I Do'

WINNER: Younts Conference Center at Furman University, Greenville, SC

Finding the perfect wedding venue is one of the biggest challenges for any bride and groom. Luckily, Younts Conference Center at Furman University is available—and offering reduced rates on Fridays and Saturdays for even more incentive. “We offer wedding parties a lot of versatility,” says Director Kay Knight of the 40-plus ceremonies and receptions her team coordinates each year. That includes the use of the outdoor Heller Terrace and DeSantis Pavilion, an onsite chapel, numerous scenic locations for photo opportunities, free parking and an inclusive rental fee that offers everything “borrowed” for one flat rate. Says Knight, “Our center is easy to navigate and no one else is in the building during the reception, which makes the event even more intimate.”

UniqueVenues.com/Younts // (864) 294.2390

RUNNERS UP: Museum of Science

and Industry | Chicago, IL

Notre Dame Conference Center and Morris Inn | Notre Dame, IN



Best Venue to Go DIY

WINNER: Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art, Vancouver, BC

You’d expect an art gallery to be supportive of getting creative with your food and décor—and Vancouver’s Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art doesn’t disappoint. Here, planners are allowed to transform the space into their own vision by choosing their favorite suppliers and caterers, “and there are no additional fees to do so,” says Paula Fairweather, director of marketing and sales. She further notes that “staff can assist in sourcing artists for cultural introductions or unique performances” as part of the program. Many, she says, opt to use First Nations caterers who can present traditional Northwest Coast cuisine, which aligns with the built-in ambiance of fixed and rotating displays that include jewelry, a soaring totem pole and various colorful paintings. Further amenities include the use of docents, a gallery gift shop, free Wi-Fi and basic presentation support. *UniqueVenues.ca/BillReidGallery // (604) 682.3455*



Younts Conference Center



Best Venue in a Rural Location

WINNER: Lodge at Little Seneca Creek, Potomac, MD

It’s a bit country but also totally rocks for special events. The Lodge at Little Seneca Creek in Maryland is surrounded by 26 acres of wooded parkland, rolling hills and a bubbling creek. “You can get away from the hustle and bustle of the urban environment in this rustic and natural setting,” says Facility Manager Shelley Fisher. Inside there is a towering wood-burning fireplace for a cozy and intimate setting while outside the elegant Seneca Tent is installed every year from April to October to provide for a protected outdoor area for dining, dancing and special ceremonies. While the tent can accommodate 120-150 guests, the lodge can fit up to 175 depending on the room setup. A new bridal room with private washroom and ample space will be available in early 2015 as well. Although it’s away from the big city, Fisher says the Lodge has partnered with a number of area hotels for discounts, some of which also provide free shuttles.

UniqueVenues.com/LodgeSenecaCreek // (301) 563.7510

RUNNERS UP: Emerald Lake Lodge | Field, BC

Colorado Mountain College | Leadville, CO

Lied Lodge & Conference Center | Nebraska City, NE

RUNNERS UP:

National Museum of Nuclear Science and History
Albuquerque, NM

Glenview Mansion & F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre
Rockville, MD



Bill Reid Gallery



MEET Las Vegas



University of Texas

best of WINNERS



Best Venue for the Latest & Greatest Technology

WINNER: MEET Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV

Upgrade is the name of the game at MEET Las Vegas. “We update our technology on a regular basis,” affirms Chrissy Meslener, director of marketing. Some of the high-tech features the three-floor venue offers include tele/data access points within every 10 feet and up to 100MBps Internet bandwidth, a specialized interior/exterior lighting infrastructure, portable and wall-mounted display monitors for signage, two plug-and-play classrooms with built-in workstations and upgraded projectors, audio mixing boards, microphones and speaker systems. Don’t fret—there’s also a team of help both in-house and freelance that can help you migrate all the special effects. “We have partners in Juniper, Cisco, Innovative Network Solutions, Shortel, Layer 3 and Aruba,” says Meslener. “And we can quickly load Windows 8, Windows 7, Linux, or even XP for our clients, depending on their needs.”

UniqueVenues.com/MeetLasVegas // (702) 734.6338

RUNNERS UP: Georgia Institute of Technology | Atlanta, GA
Ryerson Conference Services and Lodging | Toronto, ON



Best Venue for Fitness Offerings

WINNER: The University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX

“We believe fitness options are important to offer to groups to help them get energized or unwind from long days of classes or meetings,” says Pam McElrath, associate director of residential life. “Many of our groups utilize the fitness facilities during afternoon breaks or for organized evening activities. We also have the availability to host group classes within our housing facilities.” In addition, the University of Texas at Dallas has a comprehensive list of fitness equipment in two recreational centers with more than 150,000 square feet of space. This includes 100-plus cardio machines and free weights, five outdoor swimming pools, a 1,000-square-foot climbing wall, 10 soccer fields, three outdoor basketball courts and 10 tennis courts (all lit at night) plus 30 different group exercise classes. The campus can arrange temporary memberships, reserve facilities and arrange for lifeguards as needed. UniqueVenues.com/univtexasdallas // (972) 883.7419

RUNNERS UP: Ithaca College | Ithaca, NY
Kenyon College | Gambier, OH

Best Training and Development Facility

WINNER: OFFSITE New York, New York, NY

When your team needs to get in the zone, go OFFSITE. “Our locations are designed and wired to foster productivity and inspire creativity in a way that no other venue can,” says Sarah Vaynerman, direction of communications. Open since July 2012, the New York facility has three levels tailored for collaboration, discussion and presentation, all open to the client. It includes a main floor with lounge seating, three LED Smart TVs, thick curtains providing for breakout sections and a stocked kitchen when you need an energy boost. The mezzanine level offers a state-of-the-art conference room table for 30 that can also be rolled away for an open area as well as floor-to-ceiling whiteboard walls and a SMART Board for high-tech interaction. Other features include a third, underground level, a library of reading material, accessible Wi-Fi and an on-call host that can print documents. UniqueVenues.com/offsite // (646) 918.0625

RUNNERS UP: Bowling Green State University | Bowling Green
Babson Executive Conference Center | Babson Park, MA



OFFSITE New York



Best Venue to Meet with Fewer than 100 People

WINNER: The Carriage House, Washington, D.C.

When size does matter, The Carriage House in Washington, D.C. is equipped to provide intimate quarters for smaller groups. The “modern meeting space in a classic setting” can host as few as 5 in an upstairs conference room and as many as 70 people in the downstairs reception area; there’s also patio space for receptions. Plus, says Events and Digital Media Coordinator Laura McHugh, “We are tucked away from the hustle and bustle of one of D.C.’s busiest areas, the Dupont Circle neighborhood, which means Carriage House can be a quiet retreat and the ideal setting for small to mid-size meetings, workshops and conferences.” Recently they’ve hosted events for the U.S. Institute of Peace and the National Science Foundation that were able to tap into amenities including wireless Internet service, coffee breaks and staff support. [UniqueVenues.com/CarriageHouse // \(202\) 319.8476](http://UniqueVenues.com/CarriageHouse // (202) 319.8476)

RUNNERS UP: *AMA San Francisco Conference Center* | San Francisco, CA
Tilson Conference Center | Greenwood, IN



Best Venue for a Family Reunion or Gathering

WINNER: Silver Bay YMCA, Silver Bay, NY

Family time is at the heart of the Silver Bay YMCA located in the beautiful Adirondacks. Just ask the Eastham Family that celebrated their 50th reunion this year. “The wonderful part about the Silver Bay experience is how each family member can do their own thing and then get together for interfamily activities,” says one member. Specifically for children, there’s the Silver Camp day program, a craft shop and swim lessons; but all can come together for a scavenger hunt, beach party, square dance or trivia night. “Families can put their personal stamp on their reunion,” says Liz Hinck, sales and marketing director. Knowing that memories are also made around the family meal, Hinck says there are many options to choose from including a beach barbecue, formal dinner at the historic inn, campfire with s’mores, or even making a family recipe the dish du jour. [UniqueVenues.com/SilverBayYMCA // \(518\) 543.8833](http://UniqueVenues.com/SilverBayYMCA // (518) 543.8833)

RUNNERS UP: *Georgia International Horse Park* | Conyers, GA
The Conference Center at George Williams College | Williams Bay, WI



Best Venue to Host a Youth Meeting or Sports Camp

WINNER: Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO

The youth of America are in good hands at Colorado State University. The campus has a number of parameters in place to make sure visiting groups of children are well attended to during their stay, which can average three to five nights. First the university requires a 12-1 adult-to-youth ratio at all times and provides every adult group leader with a green wristband to assist staff and young guests with quick identification. The layout of the one square mile campus is also beneficial because it is self-contained with no major thoroughfares—and is walkable and bike friendly. “Our rec center is very appealing for our youth groups because of the lazy river pool and 55-foot climbing wall,” says Dezarai Brubaker, director. But even more important are the long-term goals, she says. “The experience gives potential college students firsthand experiences that can be valuable in making educational choices in the future.”

[UniqueVenues.com/CSU // \(970\) 491.1378](http://UniqueVenues.com/CSU // (970) 491.1378)

RUNNERS UP: *Simon Fraser University* | Burnaby, BC
National 4-H Youth Center | Chevy Chase, MD



Tinkham Veale



Best Newly Opened or Renovated Venue

WINNER: Tinkham Veale University Center, Cleveland, OH

Sometimes the best things are not only new but also novel. Such is the story of Tinkham Veale University Center, a 24-hour facility at Case Western Reserve University that recently opened to staff, students, faculty and visiting groups. The 83,000-square-foot building, named for an esteemed 1937 graduate, features four conference rooms, a video gaming room, a two-story media wall with a beacon and touch-interactive screen, a 7,500-square-foot ballroom with advanced A/V and sound systems, an amphitheater and a full-service restaurant and food court with outdoor seating and bar. The new center can host up to 750 for lectures and has flexible catering options. [UniqueVenues.com/tinkhamvealecenter // \(216\) 368.0436](http://UniqueVenues.com/tinkhamvealecenter // (216) 368.0436)

RUNNERS UP: *The Anvil Centre* | New Westminster, BC
Atlanta Metropolitan State College Easley Pavilion | Atlanta, GA



Montclair State



Best Conference Center to Get Down to Business

WINNER: The Conference Center at Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ

When it's time to hit the books, there are venues ready to help you turn the page. The Conference Center at Montclair State University has a lot to offer clients, says Associate Director Kaitlin Kurdyla. "We pride ourselves on our price transparency, which includes a generous flat rate for setup, breakdown, housekeeping, A/V and a technician and site supervisor." There is also parking, shuttles and food onsite for business guests, and interested planners can look forward to spaces such as the 500-person ballroom and prestigious presidential board room as well as breakout rooms, lecture halls and theaters. "One of our most amazing features is our unique location with breathtaking views of the New York City skyline. We have trains and buses that run constantly for access to the city," says Kurdyla. Some recent clients have included Apple, Verizon, even a "General Hospital" fan meet and greet. UniqueVenues.com/MontclairStateConfCtr // (973) 655.3391

RUNNERS UP:

*Conference Center at
Waltham Woods*
Waltham, MA

Metro Meeting Centers
Boston, MA



Best College or University to Hold a Meeting or Event

WINNER: Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA

"It has been one of the best experiences of my life," said one participant who attended a conference at Georgia Tech last summer. The sentiment is universal for many who convene on the Atlanta campus. "Georgia Tech is always seeking ways to enhance services for clients," says Sravanthi Meka, marketing manager. That includes boasting a certified One-Stop Shop, onsite registration and access to a professional conference manager who leads planners through the early stages. The campus has small spaces including classes for 25-100 guests all the way to a 9,000-cap arena and a 1,100-seat performing arts center. Lodging is also available for more than 4,000 overnight visitors with traditional and apartment-style rooms. Location is an advantage, too. "Being in the heart of midtown Atlanta allows our conference services department to offer the best options," says Meka. That includes working with the Georgia World Conference Center, the Georgia Dome and the Atlanta CVB to secure activities anywhere you want to go. UniqueVenues.com/georgiatech // (404) 894.6675

RUNNERS UP: *MacEwan University* | Edmonton, AB
UCLA | Los Angeles, CA



Georgia Tech



Royal Caribbean



FedExField



Best Cruise Ship to Host Your Event at Sea

WINNER: Royal Caribbean, Miami, FL

When you want to mix business and leisure, look no further than a cruise ship. “About 82% of North Americans have never cruised, so this is an opportunity to create a memorable and unique experience,” says Lori Cassidy, director of global corporate, incentive and charter sales for the Royal Caribbean International line, one of the leaders with 22 ships that sail on three to seven night voyages. These resorts-at-sea offer something for everyone with activities like shopping at Coach® and GUESS® or zip lining, dining, entertainment including Broadway hits “Chicago” and “Mamma Mia,” spas and event spaces ranging from 400-person conference centers to the Studio B Ice Rink with stadium seating for up to 1,000 guests—and all at an affordable price. The new Quantum of the Seas vessel will be the first Smart Ship with advanced technology like satellite service to enhance wireless capacity, SMART Check-In and SMART Concierge that lets you access all the features with just your wristband. UniqueVenues.com/royalcaribbean // (800) 762.0458

RUNNER UP: *Carolina Girl Yacht* | Charleston, SC



Best Cultural or Historical Venue to Make History

WINNER: Dolce Hayes Mansion, San Jose, CA

Sometimes history repeats itself and sometimes it provides something entirely new as in the case of the Dolce Hayes Mansion that offers visiting guests the chance to be surrounded by a thrilling legacy. When the original 64-room mansion was completed in 1905, it was the home of the illustrious Hayes family who built their fortune in iron ore mining and was later involved in politics. The house was sold to the city of San Jose in 1985 and today is a private hotel and conference venue operated by Dolce Hotels and Resorts. Onsite, there is 33,000 square feet of indoor and 15,000 square feet of outdoor space with terraces and lawns available for rent. Some of the memorable locations include an original drawing room, a library that serves as a lobby, an extravagant mosaic fireplace, historic photographs and original wood and décor from the early 20th century. UniqueVenues.com/hayesmansion // (408) 362.2328

RUNNERS UP: *Navy Pier* | Chicago, IL, *Springs Preserve* | Las Vegas, NV



Best Stadium or Arena to Have a Meeting/Event (and a Ball)

WINNER: FedExField, Landover, MD

If you want team camaraderie, look no further than a ballpark, arena or stadium for your next meeting or teambuilding session. At parks like FedExField, home of the Washington Redskins, the game is just the backdrop for what can be done inside and on the field for private groups. “Being a historic NFL franchise, we specialize in adding a unique touch,” says Jonte Valentine, manager of special events. That includes coordinating activities such as flag football, alumni player appearances, chalk talks and VIP tours. Groups can also use the HD video boards and LED ribbon boards for welcome messages and company logos. Some of the rentable spaces that clients like Mercedes Benz and MedStar Family look for include an Owner’s Club for 175 standing or 60 seated, a players lounge for 350 standing or 160 seated or a whole club level for up to 8,000 people. UniqueVenues.com/FedExField // (301) 276.6711

RUNNERS UP: *PNC Park* | Pittsburgh, PA, *Nationals Stadium* | Washington, D.C.



Lutheridge Conference & Retreat Center



Best Camp or Retreat Center to Unplug and Refocus

WINNER: Lutheridge Conference and Retreat Center, Asheville, NC


There's a home away from home for busy, geared up groups to get away from it all. At Lutheridge Conference and Retreat Center, tucked away on top of a hill, "it is a place away from a daily routine yet close enough to the local attractions and resources in downtown Asheville," says Executive Director Keith Johnson. "The simple act of meeting in a new place can spark a new idea or be the motivation needed to have open and forward moving discussion, which can be groundbreaking for an organization." Here, customized retreats can have as much or as little programming as desired with access to group facilitation, A/V needs and meals either shared in the dining rooms or made in private cabin kitchens. Activities include the Group Interaction Course, a climbing tower, rock climbing, white water rafting, hiking and ropes courses. For meeting purposes, spaces range from the new 552-seat Faith Center to the two-story Efrid Hall and the open pavilion Lakeside Lodge. UniqueVenues.com/Lutheridge // (828) 684.2361

RUNNERS UP: Blachford Lake Lodge, Arkansas 4-H | Little Rock, AR

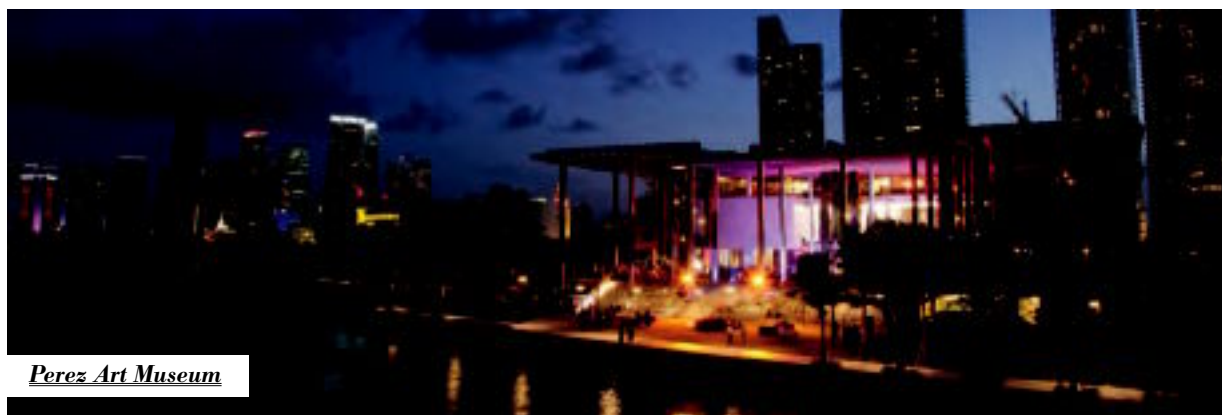


Best Special Event Venue to Get the Party Started

WINNER: Perez Art Museum, Miami, FL

From huge installation works to modern photography and surrealist paintings, the Perez Art Museum Miami is one of Florida's leading galleries for international art of the 20th and 21st centuries. In addition to the dynamic artwork on display is the building's expressive design. "The space opens onto a sprawling outdoor plaza with greenery cascading from an open canopy, which allows for a venue that is neither inside nor outside but rather fully integrated with the environment," says Morgan Bedore, vice president of sales and creative development. Inside, the lobby offers views of Biscayne Bay, Museum Park and Downtown Miami and can be rented for event use. The East Portico is the venue's signature space that has been used by clients like *W* and *GQ* magazines to host receptions for 1,000-plus guests and dinners for 600. There is also the Terrace Platform, the Hoffman Boardroom and the outdoor Northern Trust Terrace available as well as other smaller performance, meeting and educational spaces for a truly memorable event. UniqueVenues.com/PerezMuseum // (786) 345.5645 

RUNNERS UP: Melrose Market Studios | Seattle, WA, *Howl at the Moon* | Denver, CO



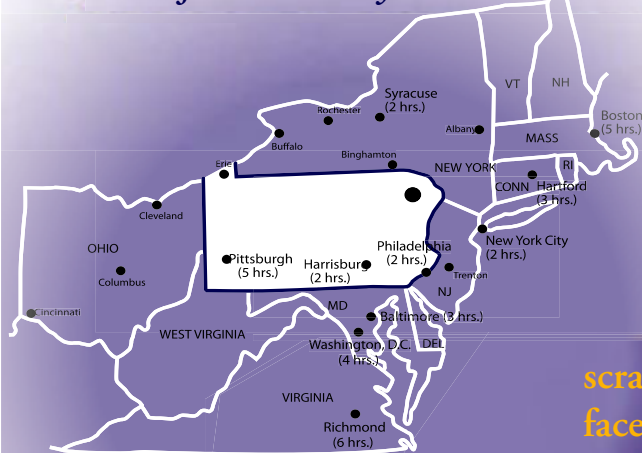
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BY SELENA FRAGASSI

At Unique Venues Annual Marketing Conference In Nashville In October, four venues got a big surprise when they were called to the stage to accept one of the first-ever Best Of Awards. Whereas the readers voted for their favorite venues for special services, these four were chosen for another reason—how well they marketed what they had to offer. Here are the winners for best website, best printed collateral, best Unique Venues member profile and best social media campaign.

Best Website

WINNER: Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA

Easy navigation is key for a venue website. Meeting and event planners need to effectively and efficiently find the information they need to fully consider the location and submit a proposal. Mount Holyoke College and the Willits-Hallowell Conference Center were chosen because the campus best offered a simple, comprehensive and easy-to-manuever website. Visitors to the site can enjoy a multi-faceted experience with a comprehensive selection of media including rich images, compelling video, easy calls-to-action and a clean and crisp design that is not only welcoming but also informative.

www.meetatmhc.com // (413) 538.2051

RUNNERS UP: *COSI Columbus* (www.cosi.org/events), *University of Delaware* (www.udel.edu/conferences)

Best Printed Collateral

WINNER: University of California, Davis

Direct mail and printed materials are still vital in today's plugged-in world. University of California, Davis understands this need and assembled a visually appealing brochure that has a clean look, large photo displays and superior quality of content to better reflect their meeting spaces for potential clients. *UniqueVenues.com/ucdavis // (530) 747.3851*

RUNNERS UP: *Vancouver Art Gallery* (UniqueVenues.ca/VancouverArtGallery), *Simon Fraser University* (UniqueVenues.ca/SimonFraser)



Above: (l-r) Jennifer Marion, Michaela Cahillane, Rachel Osborn and Imad Zubi: The team at Mount Holyoke College proudly displays their web design that won a Best Of award. At right: A look at the award-winning UC Davis printed collateral and the people behind it.





Above: A snapshot of some of the Best Of Award winners, including the Vanderbilt University staff who received an honor for hosting the Annual Marketing Conference. At left: Jennifer Liesener from Carter Hall Conference Center accepting the award for "best member profile." At right: Tami Lee from Brenau University accepting the award for "best social media campaign."

Best Unique Venues Member Profile

WINNER: The Carter Hall Conference Center, Millwood, VA

The Unique Venues website allows members to have their own portals with various sections that can be filled in to provide more information on event spaces, catering, accommodations, dining, services and technology, among other categories. The team at Carter Hall Conference Center is this year's winner for the best venue profile for expertly completing all pages of their expanded profile with comprehensive information, fantastic imagery and updated information that is highly relevant for the targeted audience. The profile in total emulates the breadth of knowledge that meeting and event planners need to know to make the decision to pursue a proposal all from one spot.

UniqueVenues.com/carterhall // (540) 837.9482

Best Social Media Campaign

WINNER: Brenau University, Gainesville, GA

In January 2014, the Office of University Events at Brenau University was tasked with putting together a large-scale event to signal the end of the first phase of the university's Capital Campaign. It was a black tie event with an expected attendance of 500 people.

To create buzz before the event, the department utilized a #BrenauGala hashtag, which helped with ticket sales. They also engaged attendees, students and staff to use the hashtag during the night to allow those who were not in attendance to see the fun activities taking place and also generate interest in the silent auction. As well, Brenau put together their first "Tweet Wall" that featured real time posts and a prize for the person who posted the most Tweets using the official hashtag for the event. The campaign in total allowed the university to reach its goals and prove how effective this modern tool is for engaging people and promotion.

UniqueVenues.com/brenau // (770) 531.3122 

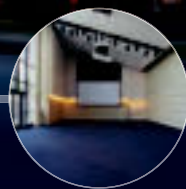


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INDUSTRY UPDATES

news & awards

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

Cooper Hotel and Conference Center Has a Healthy Outlook

The 61-room, full service Cooper Hotel and Conference Center in Dallas, Texas has been undergoing renovations in recent months; when completed it will represent the next phase of Cooper Aerobics' multi-million dollar improvement plan. Cooper Aerobics was founded in 1970 by Kenneth H. Cooper, MD, MPH, "the father of aerobics," and each of its venues has the same mission to make good health a habit. As such, the Cooper Hotel is open to the public and provides easy access to the health and wellness center as well as providing a location to de-stress and relax. Each corner of the hotel will be touched from refreshing all the guest rooms, outdoor pool and corridors to revamping the two 900-square-foot meeting rooms. The improvements also touch on Cooper Hotel's new energy conservation initiatives. That includes the use of low VOC paint, wall coverings made of recycled materials, full LED lighting and Green Label Plus-certified carpet.

UniqueVenues.com/cooperhotel



Conferences are More Than Welcome at California State University Northridge Student Union

The Northridge, California campus opened its first dedicated East Conference Center in August, located in the popular Student Union. Included are five state-of-the-art meeting spaces and two conference rooms for a total of nearly 4,000 square feet. The new building offers a lounge, prayer/meditation/reflection room and washroom with two-foot washing stations for religious purposes. The meeting rooms in particular are quite versatile allowing for multiple seating configurations and individual touch screen settings to control the lighting and A/V systems in each. In the conference room, there's a dividable wall to provide independent capabilities. For any rental, there is an onsite professional staff available to assist with room set up and usage. "The University Student Union at CSUN has long been known for having the largest meeting and event facilities in L.A.'s San Fernando Valley," says Jack Raab, associate director, operations and services. "But with the opening of the East Conference Center, we've raised our capabilities to an exciting new level." UniqueVenues.com/CSUNUSU



OFFSITE Moves Beyond NYC with Second Location in Second City

Look out, Chicago—there's a brand-new meetings and events venue causing quite a stir. OFFSITE, famous for its successful, turnkey New York operation, just opened the doors to a new space this October in the bustling West Loop neighborhood of the Windy City. The venue offers a multipurpose facility "designed and wired to inspire creativity, innovation and productivity in a way never before possible." After a year scouting, planning, constructing and enhancing, OFFSITE is able to offer even more versatility and convenience in its second venture, including a larger event space, more adaptable furniture and an easy load-in area for vendors.

UniqueVenues.com/OffsiteChicago

Loyola's Chef Scott Commings Survived "Hell's Kitchen" and Won!

A huge congrats to Scott Commings, the executive chef of Loyola's Retreat and Ecology Campus in suburban Chicago. He single-handedly won the latest installment of the FOX cooking competition series "Hell's Kitchen," and if you're familiar with the host Gordon Ramsay you know that's quite the feat. The top two contenders were actually both from Chicago (the other being Chef Jason Zepaltas), but it was Commings who took home the lucrative prize, a \$250,000-a-year offer to head up the kitchen at Gordon Ramsay Pub & Grill in Las Vegas. It will be a tough loss for Loyola who has enjoyed his culinary expertise since 2010; in his tenure, Commings developed a locally sourced program that aligned with the campus' sustainability efforts. He oversaw the five-acre farm at the Woodstock, Illinois grounds where students learned how to grow food and prepare it; it also supplied a large portion of the food served in the dining hall. Commings was also responsible for developing a number of hands-on culinary classes and programs at Loyola, from knife skills to pasta making and wine and food pairings. "Of course we'll be sad to see him leave, but we realize this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Scott and his family. We really wish him nothing but the best, and we absolutely plan to continue the programs that he created," says Tim McGuriman, associate vice president of capital planning at Loyola. **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.

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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» *Thunderbird Executive Inn & Conference Center* // Glendale
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» *Arkansas 4-H Center* // Little Rock
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CALIFORNIA

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// Berkeley
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» *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

» *Simpson University* // Redding
uniquevenues.com/SimpsonUniv

» *Sonoma State University*
// Rohnert Park
uniquevenues.com/SonomaState

» *UCLA Lake Arrowhead Conference Center* // Lake Arrowhead
uniquevenues.com/UCLALakeArrowhead

» *University of California, Davis*
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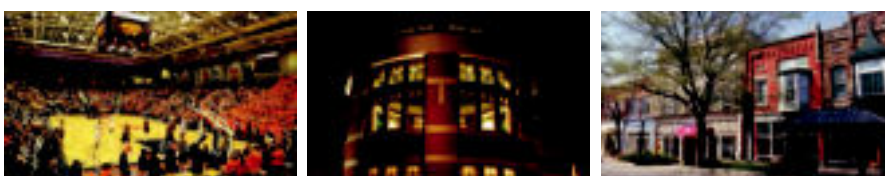
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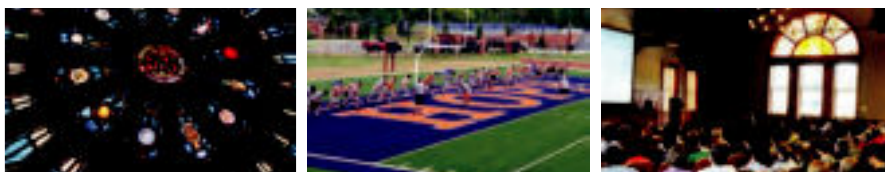
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PERSON OF INTEREST

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

Unique PROFESSIONAL of the YEAR

Julie Wiggins turned Canada's largest movie theatre chain into a practical meeting venue—and still managed to make it feel like a featured attraction.

Meeting at the movies. It's something friends, dates and families do all the time. But literally meeting at the movies—that's something Julie Wiggins helped to reinvent as the executive director of sales for Canada's largest chain, Cineplex. "Julie has taken a very unique venue type and developed momentum across the country in illustrating the benefits and specialness of using movie theaters for meetings, conferences and events. Under her leadership, business has flourished because she is innovative and takes a challenge head on," says Unique Venues President Chuck Salem. "This epitomizes our own passion of introducing meeting and event planners to venues that turn traditional upside down, and for that reason we recognized Julie as our 2014 Unique Professional of the Year." Here, Wiggins tells us how she got started in the meetings business, what she's been able to achieve for the 161 theaters in her portfolio the past three years and her marquee success this year.

Unique Venues: How did you first get started in the industry?

Julie Wiggins: "I was in the meetings business; for 10 years I worked with the Meetings Canada group—they put together North America's largest conference for meeting planners called IncentiveWorks."

UV: What made you want to make the switch to Cineplex?

JW: "I've had success helping to turn around sales teams that were struggling... so the role with Cineplex was my chance to completely change their approach to the meetings business. Prior to my arrival they were more interested in the 'fun' type of client appreciation events where people came in to see a movie together. We needed to change that to let them know a movie theater is actually a better ballroom with better chairs, better A/V and a better way to see a presentation or have a training or a town hall or shareholder meeting. That's what attracted me—fundamentally changing the customer they were going after, and that's what we've done."

UV: How did you start to accomplish that objective?

JW: "Good old-fashioned prospecting. Changing where we were marketing was a big part, as was our positioning. We completely revitalized our marketing plan and went after the industries we thought would have a need for that—and it worked. In three years, we've increased the number of meetings booked by 50 percent. In 2012, there were a lot of new customers so now we are seeing the benefit of repeat business."

UV: What knowledge did you take from your time in the meetings industry that helped you at Cineplex?

JW: "The relationships I've cultivated over the years. People think Canadians are super touchy-feely and maybe that's true, but holding on to personal connections I've found is key."

UV: What is your biggest accomplishment of 2014?

JW: "We relaunched our website to make it a more user-friendly, searchable database. With 160 locations, it's a huge undertaking to get that entire inventory in the system. I have a writer and designer helping me, but I've done all the strategizing and learned more about websites than I ever thought I would." **uv**



JULIE WIGGINS

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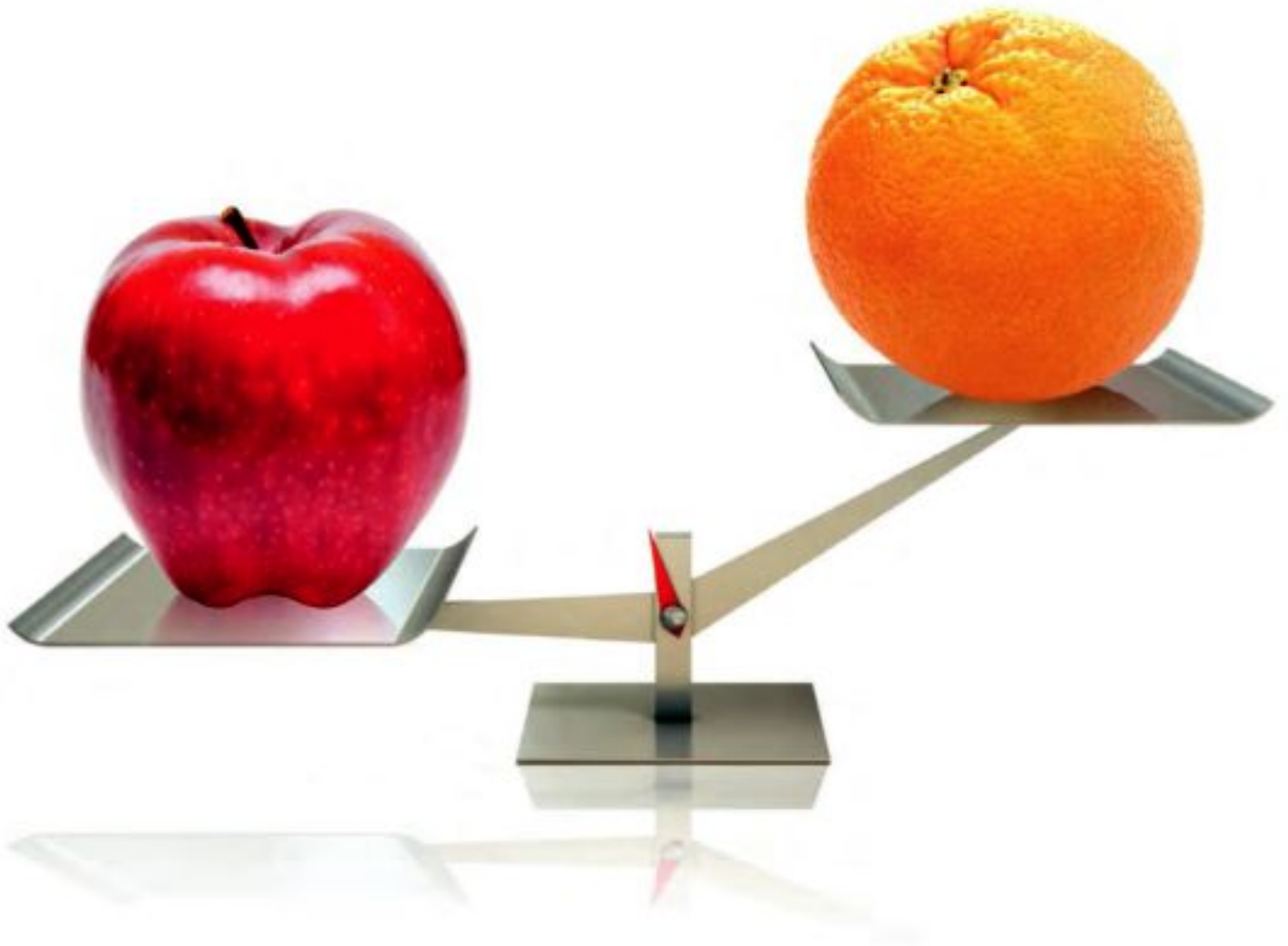
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