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magazine

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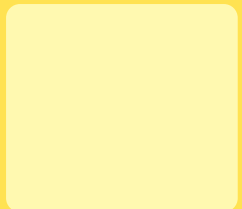
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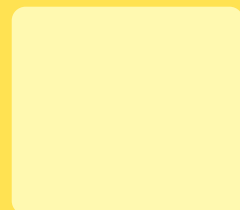
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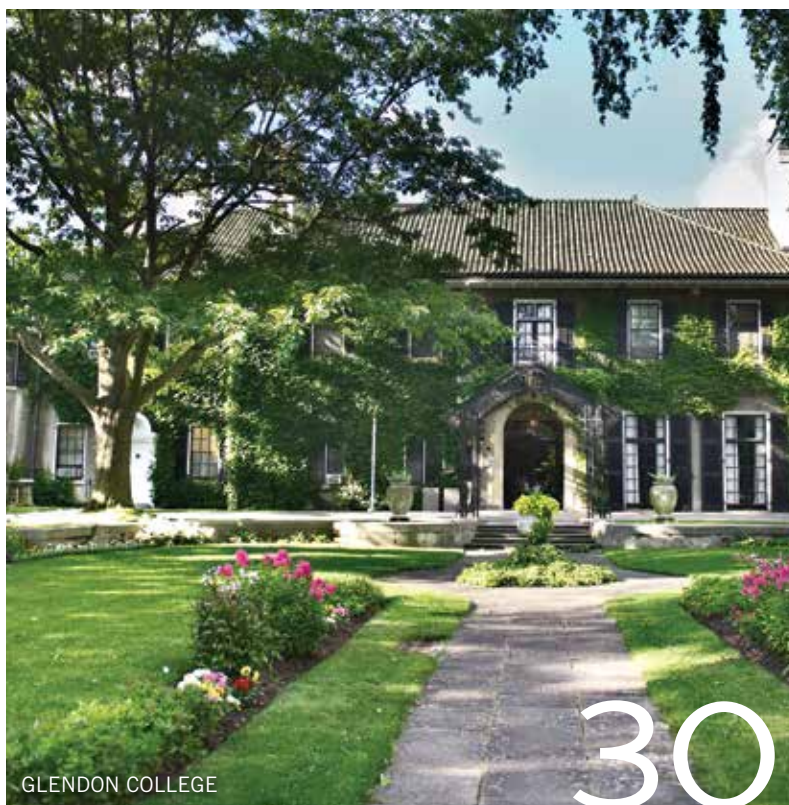
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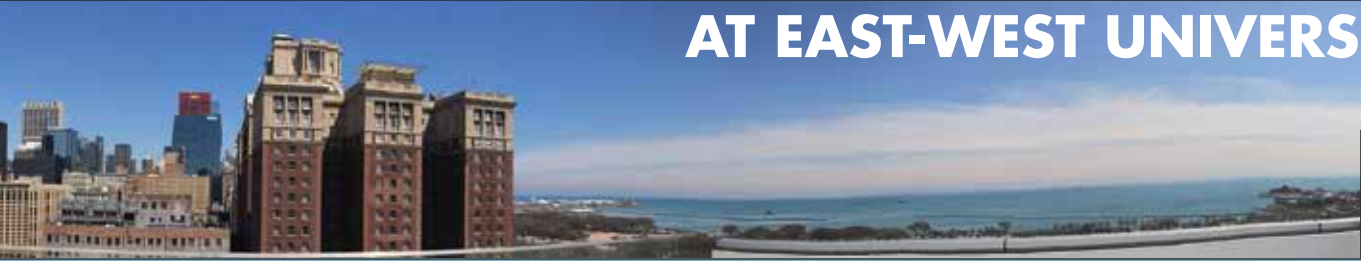
For unique events such as a cultural fashion show and a dinner for MLB groundskeepers, choosing non-traditional venues made all the difference. Here are four stories of finding the perfect match.

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The grass can be greener on the other side, especially when planners consider unique garden spaces as a natural choice for meetings and events.

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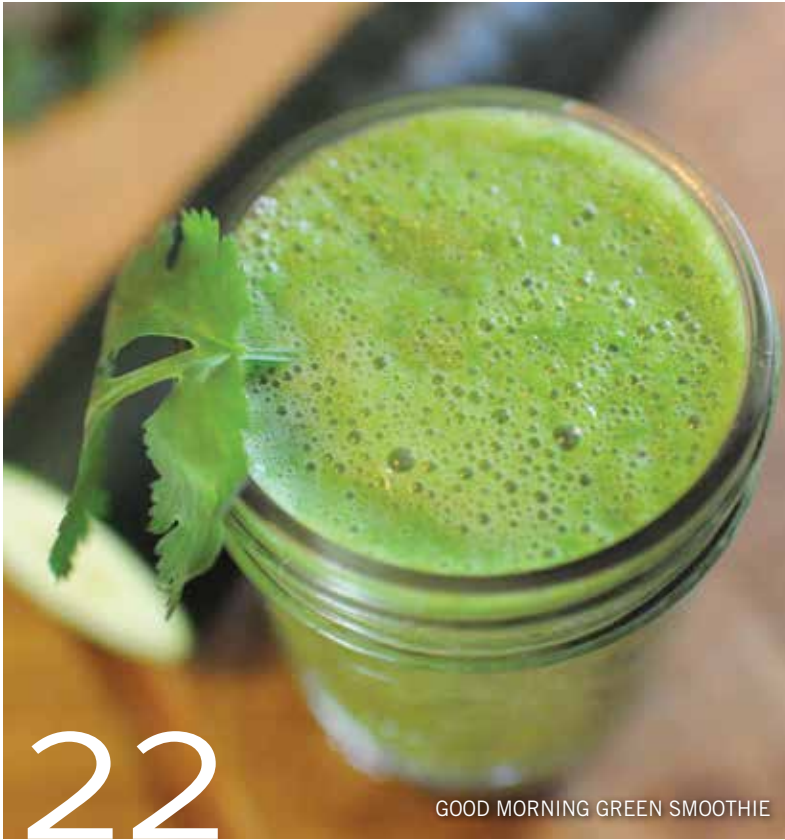
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Lewis & Clark College

Estate Gardens Photo by Robert M Reynolds

The lavish gardens at the Portland campus can be rented for beautiful summer events.

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PRODUCED BY
TIGER OAK MEDIA
900 South Third St, Minneapolis, MN 55415

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PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.



A PUBLICATION OF:
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PUBLISHER'S LETTER



WHEN I THINK ABOUT THE WORDS WE HEAR most in our industry today, “flexible meeting space” always comes to mind. Every venue has it—the movable walls, the interchangeable seating, the breakout of breakout rooms. We sometimes get carried away with the idea and often miss the point that “flexible” is not just a logistical selling proposition, but rather a state of mind. Reading this issue’s cover story on “The Place To Be” makes this idea even more transparent.

The four venues profiled in this interesting case study all have something very important in common: the willingness to adapt. When a family was looking to find a space for an unexpected funeral reception, the last-minute request was no problem for the Old Naval Hospital in Washington, D.C. When a sales team found that they needed more food than initially ordered for a luncheon, Iona College in New York made it happen before anyone finished their first course. There’s no better definition of “flexibility” than these examples.

Just like their hotel counterparts, non-traditional event venues are complete professionals with the knowledge and service mind to execute successful meetings and events. The planners we interviewed for this story know it. All of them were new to Unique Venues members but all admittedly walked away with the appreciation that the museums, colleges and cultural institutes they booked could do events just as well, if not better, than the standard they were used to. Most have committed to becoming repeat clients and wondered why they didn’t know about these venues before.

It’s reasons like these why we pride ourselves on putting together our magazines and newsletters, to spread the word about the beautiful “Secret Gardens” on page 43 that shouldn’t be secret anymore or letting planners know about the trend on page 24 that non-traditional venues have started before their competitors to better engage the LGBTQ community. These unique venues are often the ones tagged for being “a long shot” or “out of the box,” but look at what happens when you don’t have confined limitations: You have something truly unique.

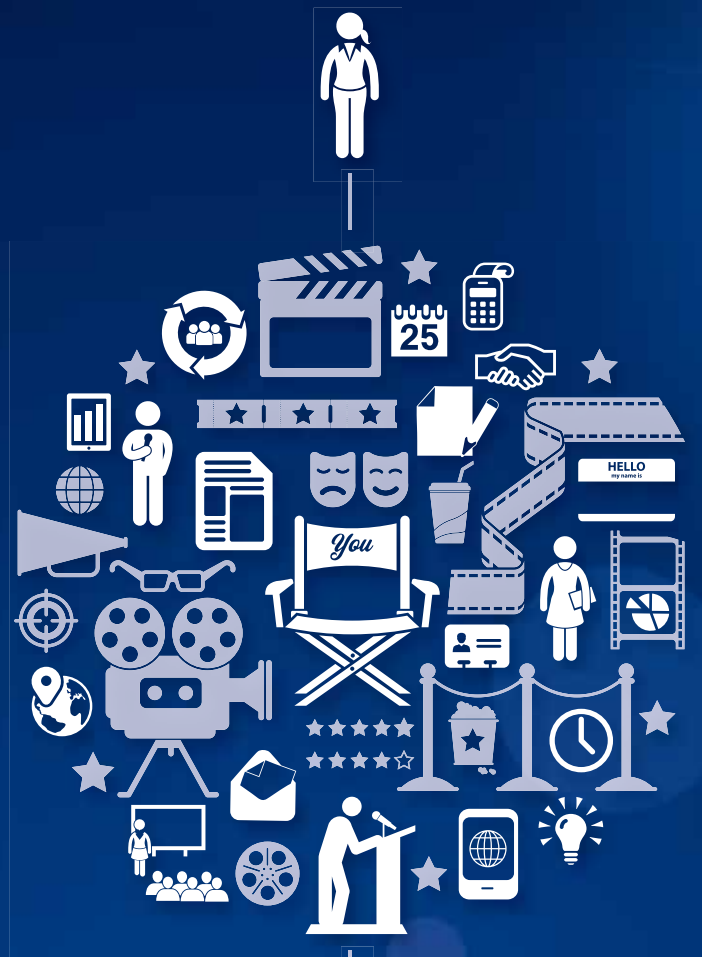
Our good friend and meeting industry colleague James Mahon taught us this principle nearly 30 years ago as one of the first true champions of Unique Venues, and after his recent passing, our tribute to him is to continue the conversation until the whole industry knows we are in fact the place to be.



JAMES MAHON
1951 - 2015

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michele Nichols".

Michele Nichols, Founder
Unique Venues



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THE AGENDA

work / life / balance BY SELENA FRAGASSI



On The Job HUSTLE

The clock keeps moving at work, but are you? If you stay at your desk most of the day, it's important to find ways to still remain active for your overall health and well-being. Here are four simple things you can start doing during the workweek.

BIKE TO WORK. Not only will you be stepping up your physical activity, you will also be saving gas money, helping the environment and noticing your commute is much more peaceful than when sitting in traffic. Before you gear up, plan your route—look for back roads or streets with dedicated bike lanes for your safety. Also make sure your work has racks or a secure place to lock up your bike. Then pack a bag with work clothes, toiletries to clean up when you get to the office and a water bottle, and be on your way.

START A LUNCHTIME WALKING GROUP. Taking a walk at lunch has proven to ward off afternoon slumps, and it's one of the easiest ways you can enhance your daily schedule with more activity. Pack your lunch and take it with you, and look for a park where you can stop and eat before heading back to the office. You don't have to do it alone, either—start a group with colleagues and promote it in internal newsletters.

MODIFY YOUR WORK AREA. Push the chairs aside. Today's modern workstations

are all about incorporating physical activity. For example, sitting on an exercise ball while you check e-mails will strengthen your core muscles and lead to improved balance and flexibility. The FitDesk 2.0 (available at Walmart and Sharper Image) is another good option: This exercise bike has a sliding desk platform for your laptop so you can get a workout while you work; it also includes upper body resistance bands for when you are hands-free, such as watching videos. Or you can forego sitting altogether and get a standing workstation.

TOUR DIFFERENT FLOORS. Here's your chance to travel every day. Every time you need to use the washroom, make copies in a printing area or grab a coffee in the break room, use a different floor from your own. So if you work on level four, head up to level ten—and of course, always use the stairs. This will give you some aerobic exercise several times a day. **uv**





Stephanie Brazzle

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Nights At the Mansion: 5 WAYS to Always Feel At Home

If home is where the heart is, then a mansion is where it beats to its own drum. The luxurious setting, combined with incredible architecture and important legacies, makes for a unique setting for galas, parties and even retreats. Before you open the doors, get an insider tour with these five tips.

GIVE YOUR UPSCALE EVENTS A REMARKABLE SETTING. By definition, mansions are large residences located on impressive pieces of property. The Boettcher Mansion, just minutes from Denver in Golden, Colorado, is situated in a secluded nature preserve that sits atop Lookout Mountain with commanding views of the forest, meadows and plains below. With such grandeur, there is an established “sense of place” that allows guests to feel just as privileged as those who once occupied the house and grounds. This sets the tone for an especially upscale event.

LET THE LAVISH ARCHITECTURE BECOME YOUR DÉCOR. Wealthy mansion owners and their architects spare no expense when it comes to detail, and they often hire skilled artisans to use the finest materials for building both the exterior and interior. Whether classical or rustic in style, mansions tend to “speak for themselves,” rarely requiring further embellishment. This saves money on unnecessary décor.

UTILIZE ALL THE UNIQUE SPACES FOR YOUR SPECIAL EVENT. Given the great number of rooms inside a mansion, there are abundant opportunities for spreading out an

event and customizing it for the occasion at hand. Whether it’s a ballroom, conservatory and great hall, or the carriage house, gazebo and gardens we offer, these areas provide interest and intrigue for all sorts of functions and help foster creative event planning.

FIND A NETWORK OF AVAILABLE HELP. A mansion is nothing without its staff and vendors. Here you’ll find a variety of professionals “waiting in the wings” to ensure that all visitors feel welcomed and cared for from the time of booking to the conclusion of the event.

LET GUESTS WALK AWAY WITH A MEMORABLE STORY. Each mansion has ‘a past,’ with colorful tales about former family members and/or the happenings that took place in and around the home. The Boettcher Mansion is a testament to the life and times of Charles Boettcher and his descendants who promoted awareness of the Arts & Crafts Movement (c. 1895-1920). Hosting a special event within an historic home like the Boettcher Mansion gives everyone a chance to add their own chapter and makes for lasting memories. **uv**



CYNTHIA SHAW
Director of Boettcher Mansion

Built in 1917, the Boettcher Mansion is a recognized landmark listed on the National Register of Historic Places. With its original terrace and Great Hall that accommodates up to 200 people, as well as newer but historically compatible entrance lobby and commercial kitchen, the estate is an impressive example of adaptive re-use. Since opening to the public in 1975, the hideaway has been painstakingly restored and revamped for modern-day usage as a versatile venue for social galas, business retreats, cultural programs and other distinctive gatherings.

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THE AGENDA

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WHEN SKYMALL ANNOUNCED ITS BANKRUPTCY in January, it was a shocking blow to anyone who loved (and laughed off) the kitschy gadgets featured in the in-flight catalog. Soon #RIPSkyMall hashtags appeared as the future of the publication remained up in the air. Even as a new investor plans to buy it out and make it “free of kitsch,” it might never be the same. SkyMall.com is not dead yet though, and we found three of the must-have products to get before they depart for good.



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Santa Fe Beef Tenderloin Lettuce Wraps

Courtesy of St. John's College, Santa Fe, NM

The Santa Fe campus of St. John's College marks its 50th anniversary this summer, and in celebration they have created this easy-to-assemble, seasonal recipe perfect for any big crowd. The campus has a series of special events planned, including *NY Times* bestselling author and columnist David Brooks who will be the keynote speaker at a dinner on June 26.



INGREDIENTS:

- 4 limes
- 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup black beans, rinsed
- 1 lb. corn, whole kernel
- 2 tomatoes
- 1 cup red onion
- 1 green pepper
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cilantro
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup minced chipotle peppers in adobo sauce
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup canola oil
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. salt
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. black pepper
- 2 lbs. Romaine lettuce hearts
- 12 oz. queso fresco

- 3 lbs. beef tenderloin strips
- 1 Tbsp. ground cumin
- 1 Tbsp. mild chili pepper
- $\frac{1}{8}$ cup soy sauce
- 2 tsp. canola oil

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TO PREPARE:

1. Juice the 4 limes and divide juice into two separate small bowls and set aside.
2. Make chipotle black bean salsa: In a bowl, combine black beans, corn, tomatoes, onion, green peppers and cilantro. Add lime juice, chipotle peppers, oil, salt and pepper to taste. Cover and set aside in a cooler.
3. Prep meat: In a small bowl, combine cumin, chili powder, soy sauce and remaining lime juice. Pour marinade over beef and let sit for 30 minutes.
4. Preheat a sauté pan. Heat oil and sauté beef until desired temperature is reached.
5. Remove outer leaves of the Romaine hearts to expose the smaller “cups.”
6. Assemble by combining ½-oz. beef tenderloin with 1 Tablespoon of salsa in one lettuce “cup” and garnish with queso fresco. Serve immediately.

Serves Approximately 50. uv

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THE AGENDA

happy hour

Good Morning GREEN SMOOTHIE

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This 95-acre retreat center prides itself on locally grown and organic food, which comes together in this delicious smoothie that gets guests ready for a productive day first thing in the morning.

INGREDIENTS:

- ½ cup frozen organic chopped spinach
- ½ frozen ripe banana
- 8-10 pieces frozen ripe pineapple chunks
- 1 handful fresh cilantro
- ½ unwaxed, unpeeled cucumber
- 4 cups coconut water
- 2 cups unsweetened plain organic almond milk

TO PREPARE:

1. Combine all ingredients in a high-speed blender and blend until smooth.

Makes 6 servings. uv



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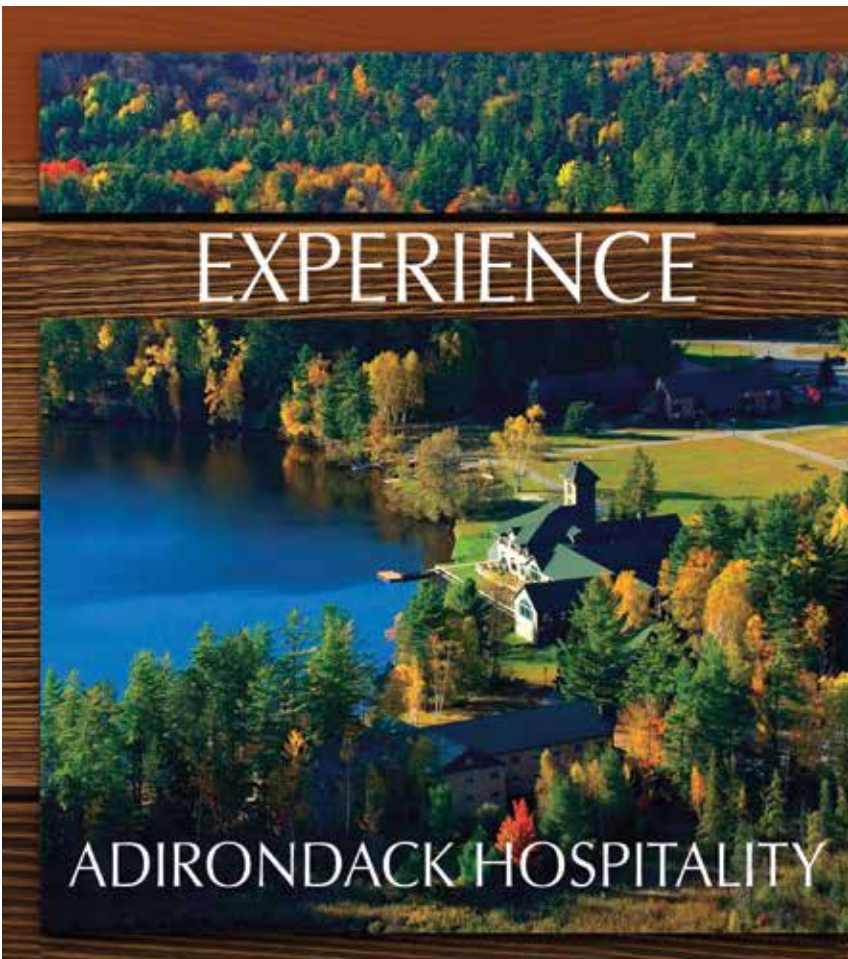
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WHAT'S TRENDING

BY SELENA FRAGASSI



(This page): San Francisco's Bently Reserve was one of the country's first to host gay weddings.

With Pride

Special event venues are providing the LGBTQ community with equal opportunity to host colorful weddings, proms and conferences they can be proud of.

With same-sex marriages now recognized in 36 states, event venues are showing a lot of love for the LGBTQ community with new marketing and planning strategies that make everyone feel included.

At the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, for example, printed materials promoting the event hub Perelman Quadrangle were updated this year to include more varied images that better reflect the breadth of clients they serve. "It makes you feel more comfortable and you can relate better when you see that [the venue] isn't just geared to one couple or one set of people," says Manager of Event Sales Veronica Kraft.

It was a decision that was applauded by the campus' LGBTQ Center that has often supported and collaborated with the event department to help guide the planning of functions like gay-friendly proms, which they have hosted for four years. "Just like visiting the chaplain's office for certain religious ceremonies I'm not familiar with, I'll meet with the Center to ensure that what we are doing is in no way offensive," says Kraft.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: JIM VETTER PHOTOGRAPHY - VETTERPHOTOGRAPHY.COM.



It's one of the benefits of working with niche venues like campuses and universities that have built-in resources to cater to all backgrounds. At the University of Montana in Missoula, there is a UM Allies Program "where we train our staff on diversity awareness," says Shannon Brilz, director, Montana Event Services.

The Allies program, along with support from an on-site Lambda group, has helped the department put together events such as the Power of One leadership conference in April that brought together students from the Northwest to learn about intersecting identities while promoting social justice. In addition to panels and educational sessions, activities included an opening night drag show and daytime workshop that offered makeup and dress tips, an interactive play called "Queer Bathroom Stories" and a movie screening. Brilz's department also coordinated to offer a number of gender-neutral bathrooms to make guests feel more comfortable.

Yet it wasn't just the campus that went the extra mile. The Power Of One organizers received funding through a joint effort of the Missoula CVB and the Downtown Business Improvement



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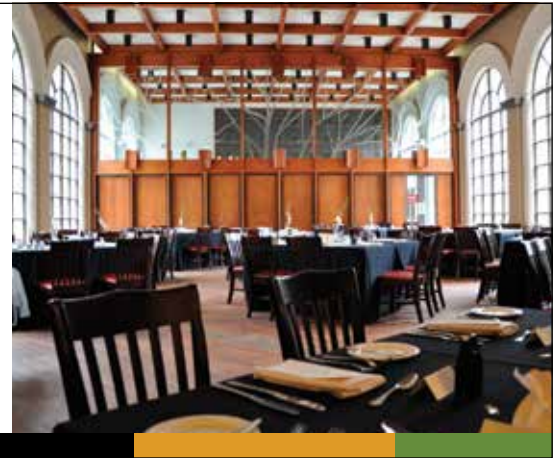
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WHAT'S TRENDING

BY SELENA FRAGASSI



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District to bring the conference to town.

“It ties into the mission of the Destination Missoula CVB that has concentrated on the LGBTQ community to let them know Missoula is a safe place for conferences and individual travelers in the community,” says Brilz.

Doing so is not only a measure of goodwill but also financially responsible as gay-friendly events continue to become a growing client segment.

Across the country in San Francisco, locations like the Bently Reserve have recognized this and put together special packages to cater to the gay wedding and event market such as a 20% discount for room rentals on Sundays throughout 2015. Here, the former federal bank transformed into a special event venue, has a long connection to the community in a city that has often been considered the heart of the gay rights movement. The Bently Reserve has hosted Aids Walk ceremonies, Prop 8 functions and some of the first gay weddings in the country and they look to build on that portfolio with the special incentive.

“We saw that there was a real trend coming forward for Sunday morning weddings and brunches,” says Event and



(Pictured here)

The University of Montana has booked the Power of One Conference and special events while (pictured above) University of Pennsylvania works with on-campus departments to host gay-friendly proms.

Sales Director Jim Bruels. “The cost at the Bently Reserve is significantly lower to host on a Sunday, and we just wanted to encourage that kind of inquiry to come into us.”

Wedding bookings have increased steadily for the venue in recent years, especially since it now hosts the popular Gay Vanity Wedding Show annually where couples can meet with event planners and vendors and see a fashion show. Though he says there’s no real difference

in the trends that have come forward for gay weddings (“couples all have their own vision”), Bruels does appreciate the open-mindedness and creativity his clients have. “They really make it very unique and special to them,” he says.

Kraft couldn’t agree more. “The energy is very high right now,” she says, “and it’s really refreshing to meet these couples that have been together for so many years who are finally ready for a grand celebration.” **uv**

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THE MAIN EVENT

BY SELENA FRAGASSI



Charming THE PRINCE

President Lincoln's Cottage gives Prince Charles and Duchess Camilla the royal treatment during a stop on their spring tour.

The British were coming. That was the message the events team at President Lincoln's Cottage received just weeks before a special visit from Prince Charles and Duchess Camilla on March 19. The royal couple was in the States for a short four-day trip to promote the historical connections between the two countries, and part of their agenda was visiting the Washington, D.C. landmark in the midst of the 150th anniversaries of Lincoln's death and the end of the Civil War.

"Camilla was sad their time was so short and she couldn't explore more," says Hilary Malson, marketing and membership coordinator. Though the tour was only scheduled for 30 minutes, Executive Director Erin Carlson Mast covered a lot

of ground with the dignitaries, beginning with the history of the national monument, which sits on the 300-acre property of the Armed Forces Retirement Home and was once a favorite summer retreat for the Lincoln family. It's the spot where the President wrote the Emancipation Proclamation that legally abolished slavery and is one of the few monuments open to private rentals.

The Duchess was particularly interested in learning about what the group is currently doing to shed light on modern-day slavery and human trafficking, including the annual Students Opposing Slavery International Summit that brings together teenagers from 20 different countries as well as the sale of survivor-made goods in the museum gift shop. The Prince and Duchess also took home gifts of their own for their grandson, Prince George. "We gave them copies of the definitive chil-



Prince Charles and Duchess Camilla visited President Lincoln's Cottage on March 19 and were given an in-depth tour of the landmark facilities that are one of the few monuments open to private rentals.

dren's book on Abe Lincoln as well as the inspirational best-seller 'What Do You Do With An Idea?' that we use in our educational programs," says Malson.

Though President Lincoln's Cottage has hosted high-profile visitors before—most notably actress Sally Field during the filming of her role as Mary Lincoln in Steven Spielberg's biopic and President Bill Clinton who designated the grounds as a national site in 2000—nothing compared to the British royalty.

"We were not anticipating the size of the security detail," says Events Coordinator Sahand Miraminy. "There were about 15-20 cars full." Miraminy and his team had held previous walk throughs with members of the Secret Service so they knew where everything was before the arrival. The events team also had to make sure the other groups on-site that day were in their place, too.

"We had a lot going on. Without much lead time [for the royal visit] we had already made commitments to a site rental and a school group that date, and we wanted to honor them, which we did. But we also ensured that everyone was where they were supposed to be and not wandering by setting up designated spots," recalls Miraminy. Lining up the swath of national press was also a challenge, especially after the Prince

and Duchess' visit to the National Mall the day prior was leaked, but Malson says it was overcome with "a lot of communication ... We really learned the value of keeping everyone on all levels informed."

The strategy helped the team gather up extra hands to work overtime the night prior to ensure that recent volunteer yard work around the cottage was cleaned up in time for all the press photos taken on the verandah and expansive lawns, one of the favorite outdoor spaces in the city, says Malson. "You can't find a bigger lawn besides The White House, and on a really clear day you can see all the way to the Capitol Building and Virginia." It was a view even the royal couple won't soon forget. [uv](#)

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ON THE ROAD

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

Team Toronto

The 17th Pan American Games are headed to Canada's largest city this summer, which has inspired some local meeting and event venues to remain just as competitive.

It's called the Queen City for a reason, and when visitors come upon Toronto this summer for the crown jewel of international sporting competitions they'll notice just how well these special event venues and meeting centres have kept up their game.

Humber Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning

It's not often you'll get a taste of the great outdoors in the middle of a big city, but Humber Institute offers an urban oasis with an arboretum attached to its northern campus. "It's not uncommon to see deer in the parking lot at any time of day," says

Arielle Berube, conference coordinator. Here, groups can tap into unique team-building activities, such as guided arboretum or wildlife tours and swimming at the Humber Community Pool located on the property. A second campus on the southern edge of Toronto is just as scenic nestled near Lake Ontario.

Humber Institute also gets down to business hosting meetings and events as varied as youth sports camps, stock market workshops, a knitting and embroidery seminar and the 2,000-person Ontario Association for Mathematics Education. "Because we're a college, we capitalize on the fact that we have so many different styles of [rooms]," says Berube. That includes classrooms, banquet facilities, tiered lecture theaters for up to 300 and an auditorium that seats 500. Accommodations are also available May through August for overnight guests, which include traditional



HUMBER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY & ADVANCED LEARNING

Outside the Institute is an arboretum for breaks between sessions; inside is a variety of spaces from classrooms to banquet halls and lecture theatres.

residence halls and hotel-style suites with private washrooms.

“We have an infrastructure people can use to develop their event,” says Berube of the one-stop shopping experience. “We will take care of communication within our team on your behalf.”



IVEY TANGERINE LEADERSHIP CENTRE

The facility is one of Toronto's only day meeting centres open 365 days a year and with competitive prices to rent the 8,000 square feet of space.

Ivey Tangerine Leadership Centre

Groups looking to meet in Toronto's financial district can bank on the Ivey Tangerine Leadership Centre that occupies a convenient storefront location in the Exchange Tower. The Centre is one of the area's only day meeting centers open 365 days a year that can actually save you money. “We work with you in terms of rates,” says Director of Corporate Sales Gunjan Kahlon, noting that rental prices begin at just \$750.

Though Ivey Tangerine Leadership Centre does not have overnight accommodations, it does have 8,000 square feet of meeting space with two amphitheatres and nine individual meeting rooms. Each rental includes a wealth of built-in technology including an LCD projector and screen, 100 megabytes

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ON THE ROAD

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THE SECOND CITY (RIGHT)

In addition to hosting corporate workshops that use the tools of improv to improve communication skills, Second City Toronto also unveiled more meeting and event space with a recent add-on that opened in May.

TMX BROADCAST CENTRE (BELOW)

With a convenient space in the Exchange Tower, the TMX Broadcast Centre is likewise state-of-the-art with a full audio system, projectors and screens for webcasts and even a customizable ticker screen.



of wireless Internet access and a power outlet at each desk. As well there is availability for built-in video conferencing and webcasting. Catering packages are also available for sit-down dinners of up to 100 people or 150 cocktail-style, which is just one of the ways groups utilize the space. “The Centre was purpose built for learning and development, and that’s what 95% of our clientele does here,” says Kahlon.

TMX Broadcast Centre

Also located in the Exchange Tower is the state-of-the-art TMX Broadcast Centre. Built in 2003, the venue is owned by TMX Group, which operates the exchange’s electronic marketplace—and the integration is quite compelling for groups who want extra atmosphere. A viewing gallery allows event guests to look upon busy broadcasters and journalists and a traditional ticker screen can

be customized with personalized messages or corporate slogans.

Technology is really the cornerstone of the Centre, says Manager Kris Backus. “The real thing that makes us stand apart is that our pricing model includes everything in the room.” A full audio system, projectors and screens allow for webcasts and video conferencing—and technicians are ready to assist. “It’s really a turnkey solution for a planner,” admits Backus.

One of the other interesting aspects of TMX Broadcast Centre is its central spot on the ground floor, which offers the ability to host indoor/outdoor events. “We can put tents outside in the courtyard,” says Backus. “We’ve actually gotten creative with bands playing and food being served outdoors.” The Centre works with nine preferred caterers ranging in price to suit the needs of any client. Overall the venue can ac-

commodate 130 theater-style, 70 classroom, 80 in-the-round and 200 per reception and is accessible via the subway system and Toronto’s underground pedestrian walkway, the PATH.

The Second City Toronto

Comedy is for everyone says The Second City Toronto. Not only does the troupe offer corporate workshops in a B2B division called Second City Works, but in May, they also opened a brand new Training Centre adding on to the availability of private rental spaces with 8,000 more square feet. Inside the third-floor venue there are seven studios, a 65-seat black box theatre, plenty of lounge space and digital screens, a projector and lights for the full multimedia production.

Eventually the Centre will serve alcohol and provide catering (they work with the neighboring Wayne Gretzky Toronto restaurant). It will mirror the options of



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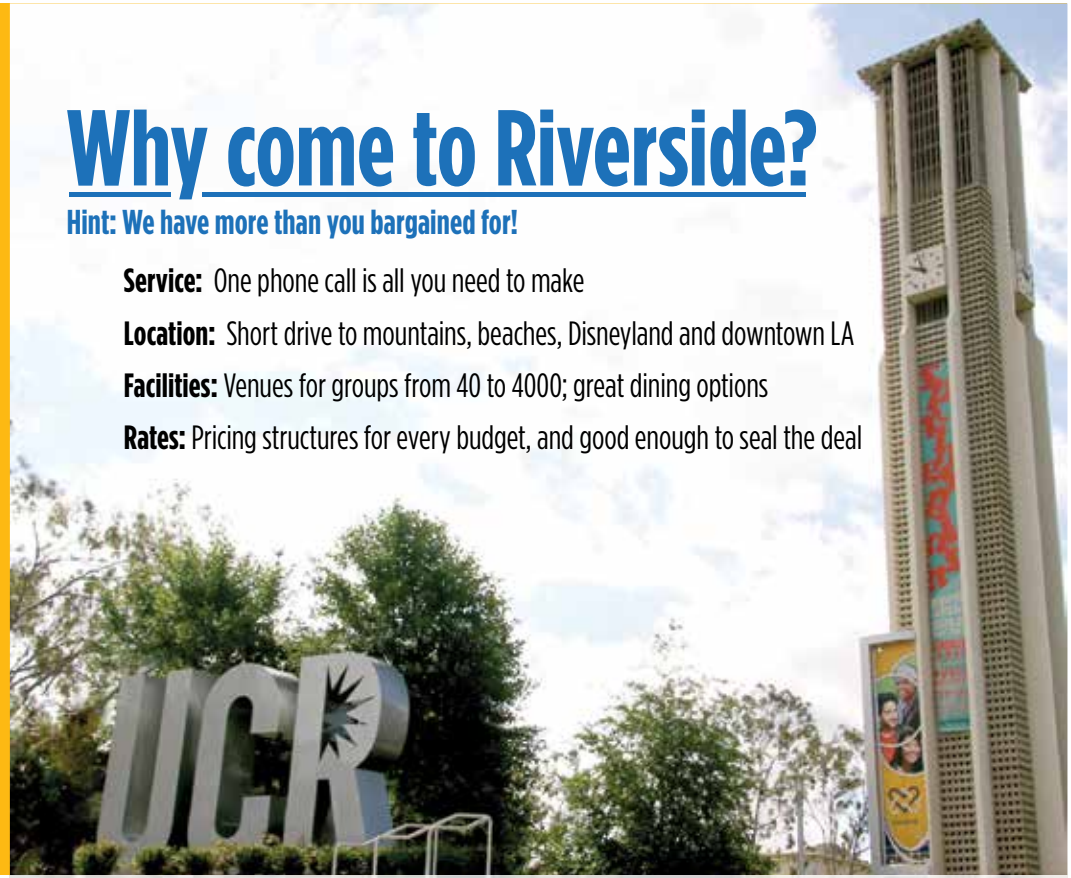
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ON THE ROAD

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

the main performance theatre, which can also be bought out during the day or enjoyed at night with regular comedy shows for group outings.

The best part though may be the workshops, taught by Second City alumni, that use lessons of improv to teach team-building and communication skills. "In the corporate world you're also working as an ensemble, listening closely and collaborating to make something out of nothing, so it's transferable," says Richard Gasee, marketing manager.

Workshops are customized to the industry of the clientele and are ideal for groups of 12-40 people though other types of training sessions and seminars are available for larger groups up to 300.

Glendon College

The campus of Glendon College is like nothing you've ever seen before, quite literally. "Our teams travel all over the world and bring back trees to plant that you just can't see anywhere else," says Vinesh Saxena, manager of housing and hospitality services in the accommodation and conference services department. It's just one

part of the beautiful setting that gives the campus a country feel just outside the city limits in uptown Toronto. It overlooks the Don River with a rare oasis of wood lots, rose gardens and a private manor.

As the original site of the illustrious York University, the property is heritage protected, which is beneficial to maintain its beauty, but also means that new construction and add-ons can be tricky to appeal to the growing number of interested clientele who like to use the campus for retreats, camps and corporate day events.

Currently, Glendon College offers 50 meeting and event rooms fitting up to 250 guests that are available year-round; overnight accommodations are only open from May to August for up to 400 people. "We do get filled up very fast," says Saxena, suggesting that early May and late August can be good times to secure dates as well as weekends, if applicable. Groups also have use of the lower-level athletic centre with Olympic-sized swimming pool, soccer fields, baseball diamonds and tennis courts for a nominal fee as well as simultaneous bilingual translation services. [uv](#)



GLENDON COLLEGE

As the original site of York University, this college campus is heritage protected which limits new construction but still makes it an appealing choice for May-August rentals.

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When someone passes away there is barely any time to think straight let alone put together a service and reception that are both tasteful and meaningful. That is, unless you look to a venue like the Hill Center at the Old Naval Hospital in Washington, D.C. As a historic hospital with ties to the Civil War, it was a fitting choice for Patricia McQueen whose deceased family member was a Navy veteran.

“It has a nice personal touch,” says Executive Director Diana Ingraham, noting that the facility is a preferred choice for memorial services like McQueen’s as well as retirement ceremonies and weddings for current and ex-military (though it’s not a requirement to book here). After a \$10 million rehabilitation project to the 19th century building in 2011, the board of directors is especially committed to putting the two floors of event space (including a banquet hall and garden areas) towards community use. “I’d say that fifty percent of the activities that take place in the building are tied to a special event,” says Ingraham.

As planners like McQueen find out, though, Hill Center is not just ideal for its personal touch; it’s also quite practical. “Funerals by nature are last-minute and we had availability. A lot of times we are able to accommodate more last-minute requests than other venues,” says James Sims, a special event and programming manager with Hill Center who also worked on the reception. His colleague Macky Vellon adds, “There are also so many décor details you wouldn’t normally find, so if there’s not a lot of time to put those items together it’s still a beautiful space as opposed to maybe a hotel ballroom that needs a bit more decoration and personal touches to make it feel more intimate.”

That was especially the case for the McQueen service, held last August, which the family wanted to set up as a “life celebration” for the 350 guests throughout the day to remember the deceased through his favorite music and photo slideshows. “We have a wireless system throughout the property that allowed her to play music throughout the entire floor where the service was held. We also have ceiling-mounted projectors and screens so folks can do a slideshow as part of their family event,” says Sims of the modern features Hill Center offers, which they often put together in one package for events like this to make it more efficient and affordable. “There was a set rate for the family, and anything they needed for the event (even furniture) was included in the price. It was a little bit easier for them compared to other venues.”



Hill Center at the Old Naval Hospital is a special event venue in Washington, D.C. with ties to the Civil War. As such it is a preferred venue for current and ex-military to host events such as weddings, retirement parties and life celebrations, as profiled here.





SELLING THE SALES LAUNCH

Easy was also a key word for Trevor Williams, North Atlantic sales operational manager for UPS, when he had very little time to choose a venue to coordinate an annual sales launch in January for 300 regional employees.

“Initially my boss said, ‘If we can’t have it at the same place we did last year, we probably won’t have it,’” he recalls. That place, a conference center in New York City, was not available. “We were really behind the ball, and I was getting worried,” Williams admits, but at the last hour he found out about Iona College in the town of New Rochelle, which he liked for its central location. “We have a large district that covers all of Long Island, Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, Westchester and New Jersey, so it was convenient for everyone.”

Within a day of filling out an RFP, Office of Conference Services Manager Cindy Zapata was in touch with him. “She was a godsend,” says Williams. “From that point forward it was just a full-fledged effort of let’s move forward and get it done, and it went very smoothly.”

Zapata and her team jumped on the chance to work with UPS and to develop a relationship that could be beneficial in the future. Though she admits the planning process did move really quickly, Iona College is used to the protocol and was fully prepared to execute it for Williams. “We’re really good with conferences. That’s kind of like our bread and butter,” she says. “For UPS, they came in and did a face visit, and we walked through the spaces and then the next week they were here.”

Zapata suggested the campus’ Murphy Auditorium, which has space for up to 350 people. “The room was the perfect size for what we needed,” says Williams, “and the A/V was adequate for our PowerPoint presentation.” During the full-day program there were several speeches and an award presentation so the set up was key. “We decided to put the food in another room so



Iona College’s Murphy Auditorium (above) was the setting for a regional sales launch for UPS, while a luncheon was held in the Burke Lounge.

this way we could use the whole auditorium for seating and give them more space,” says Zapata.

Lunch was held in the Burke Lounge, which presented the only snafu of the day when attendees wanted a number of extra helpings that surpassed the initial order of food. “Some people see free food and they can’t control themselves,” joked Williams who says he was very pleased with how the college reacted. “They worked quickly to accommodate us and resolved it before we knew it was an issue.”

“It’s those little things can make or break an event and you don’t want the clients to look bad,” admits Zapata. “Overall this was a very positive experience.”

FIELDING REQUESTS FOR A SPORTSMAN'S DINNER

Food was also the hallmark of a championship dinner for a group of 60-plus Major League Baseball groundskeepers that was held at the History Colorado Center in January.

"You wouldn't expect a venue like that to have outstanding food, but we heard so many compliments from our attendees," says Jeff Langner, a brand manager for Profile Products LLC and a former planner who was in charge of coordinating the event. Though he says the choice of the Denver-based museum was a bit "out of bounds" for what they would normally select for the sports-loving crew (past events have been booked with a pool hall, bowling alley and go-cart racing field), he says, "What I really enjoyed was the fact that they were willing to customize the event more than I have found in the past."

"We do menu customizations a majority of the time," says Melissa Cordova, event sales manager, of the Center's specialty. "We understand that, regardless of the event, everyone is different and the event should be, too. It shouldn't feel like you're having the typical catered food." Chef Samir Mohammad of in-house Cater Rendezvous crafted a menu that was upscale without being unapproachable for the casual crowd that also enjoyed the museum's lack of dress code (one man came dressed in overalls).

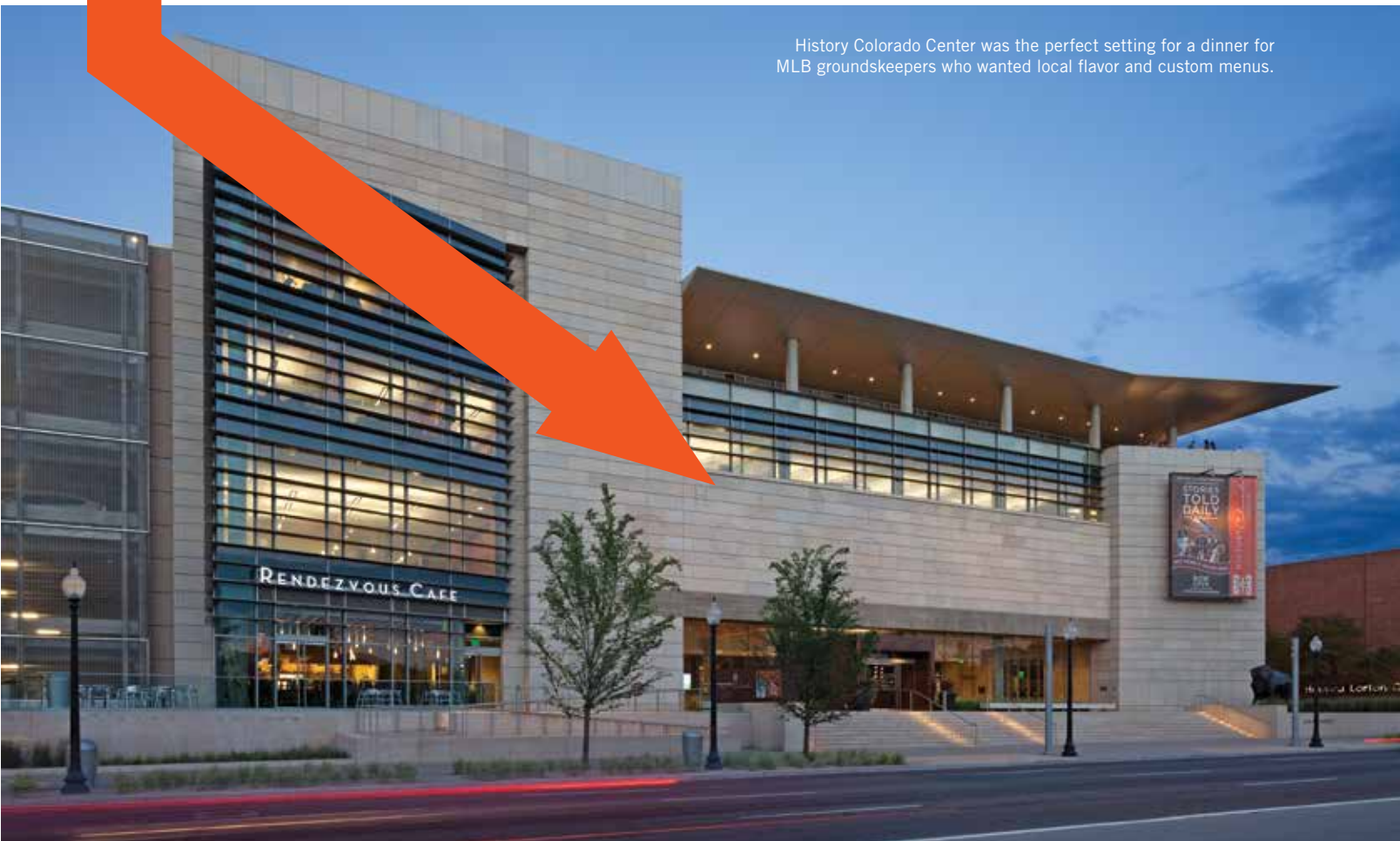
The dinner, held in the open-kitchen environment of the museum's Café Rendezvous, included the attendee's choice of wedge salad or New England clam chowder for a

starter, beef tenderloin or smoked salmon linguine for an entree and either a chocolate chip bread pudding with a whiskey bacon glaze or butterscotch pot de crème topped with marshmallow fluff for dessert. Cordova printed out menus to help the guests see their choices, which Langner appreciated. "I didn't want to have people pre-order, and I didn't know what their taste choices would be so I liked the museum's flexibility. They really met our needs."

Beyond the food, the other appealing aspect was the venue's setting—both external and inside. "It was only a mile from our hotel, which was great because I was nervous about scheduling transportation in the middle of winter," says Langner. "I also appreciated that it was representative of Colorado. We go to a different city each year and so we strive to find some local flavor."

"People like to come here from out-of-town because of the Colorado theme," notes Cordova referencing a Denver Broncos area. That in particular was of interest to the groundskeepers who had the museum to themselves and were able to walk around the property and view the exhibits during the early cocktail hour. "In the past, an issue we've had to overcome is when people walk into the venue they normally sit down and just wait around for dinner," admits Langner. "So, this setup gave everybody a chance to take in everything the museum had to offer, and it was very well received."

History Colorado Center was the perfect setting for a dinner for MLB groundskeepers who wanted local flavor and custom menus.





CREATING A ONE-OF-A-KIND FASHION SHOW

Venue layout was also of supreme importance to event planner Nisa Muhammed when she was looking for a functional space to host a fashion show for 175 guests during D.C. Fashion Week in late February. So naturally she settled on the District Architecture Center, a space belonging to the Washington chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

“The space itself was really appealing,” she recalls of the multi-level floors that were advantageous for the behind-the-scenes logistics. “We used the downstairs for dressing rooms and hair and makeup, which was great because it took us away from the audience and gave us a ‘backstage’ area.” As well, the stairs were utilized for models to line up on before heading to the runway on the main floor.

For this particular event, Muhammed worked with Areej Fashions, a lifestyle group of Muslim designers keen to counter negativity about the Islam culture by showing the beauty of their fashions. She also works with a number of other organizations to plan other events such as marriage retreats and award ceremonies and most often turns to hotels as her choice of venue. “I really preferred the new space though,” she says of District Architecture Center. “They helped us see things in a better way.”

Though it was the first actual fashion show at the venue, says Events Manager Laura Headrick, “We were confident it would be a great event. Every new event is a new adventure for us, but we’ve done hundreds of functions here so we know what works and what won’t.”

The whole planning process took about a month and a half and was helped by a number of walk-throughs. “We met here and talked it through to see what the possibilities were and how that might work,” says Headrick.

“We were looking at a variety of sites around D.C. and when we went to the Center they were warm and welcoming and

showed us how we could feasibly do a fashion show there,” recalls Muhammed. She says the suggestion of pipe and draping was particularly effective. “The staff was very helpful in terms of guiding us to see how it could look nice and gave us a suggestion of a great vendor.”

That essentially is the purpose of the Center, says Headrick. “Our space is built for events. It has a lot of flexibility with moving walls, natural light, everything that you’d want.” There’s also the utility of people, which made the whole operation run smoothly, says Muhammed. “They provided two dedicated staff members to be there the whole evening for anything we needed, and it turned out wonderful.” **uv**

For planner Nisa Muhammed, the biggest benefit of District Architecture Center was the layout of the space that made her fashion show a success (above and below).





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Secret GARDENS

*The grass can be greener on the other side,
especially when planners consider unique garden spaces as
a natural choice for meetings and events.* BY SELENA FRAGASSI

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBERT M. REYNOLDS.

Portland's Lewis & Clark College rents out its lavish estate gardens in the summer months with five levels of greenery, water features and incredible views.



The Copeland Sculpture Garden at the Delaware Art Museum is a scenic venue choice with 12 pieces of towering art (at left).

Hidden gems are literally everywhere when it comes to non-traditional venues—and sometimes the best-kept secrets can be wonders of the event world. Such is the case in the middle of the hot, dry Las Vegas desert where there grows a secret garden at a mystical place called the Springs Preserve. “It’s really the birthplace of Las Vegas. It’s where water was first found in the city, so it is a natural preserve,” says Jason Bailey, event specialist in group sales. On the 180-acre “campus,” which opened to the public in 2007 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, are two museums, a café, indoor meeting spaces and a lavish botanical garden where many weddings and group meetings gather to take in the natural setting.

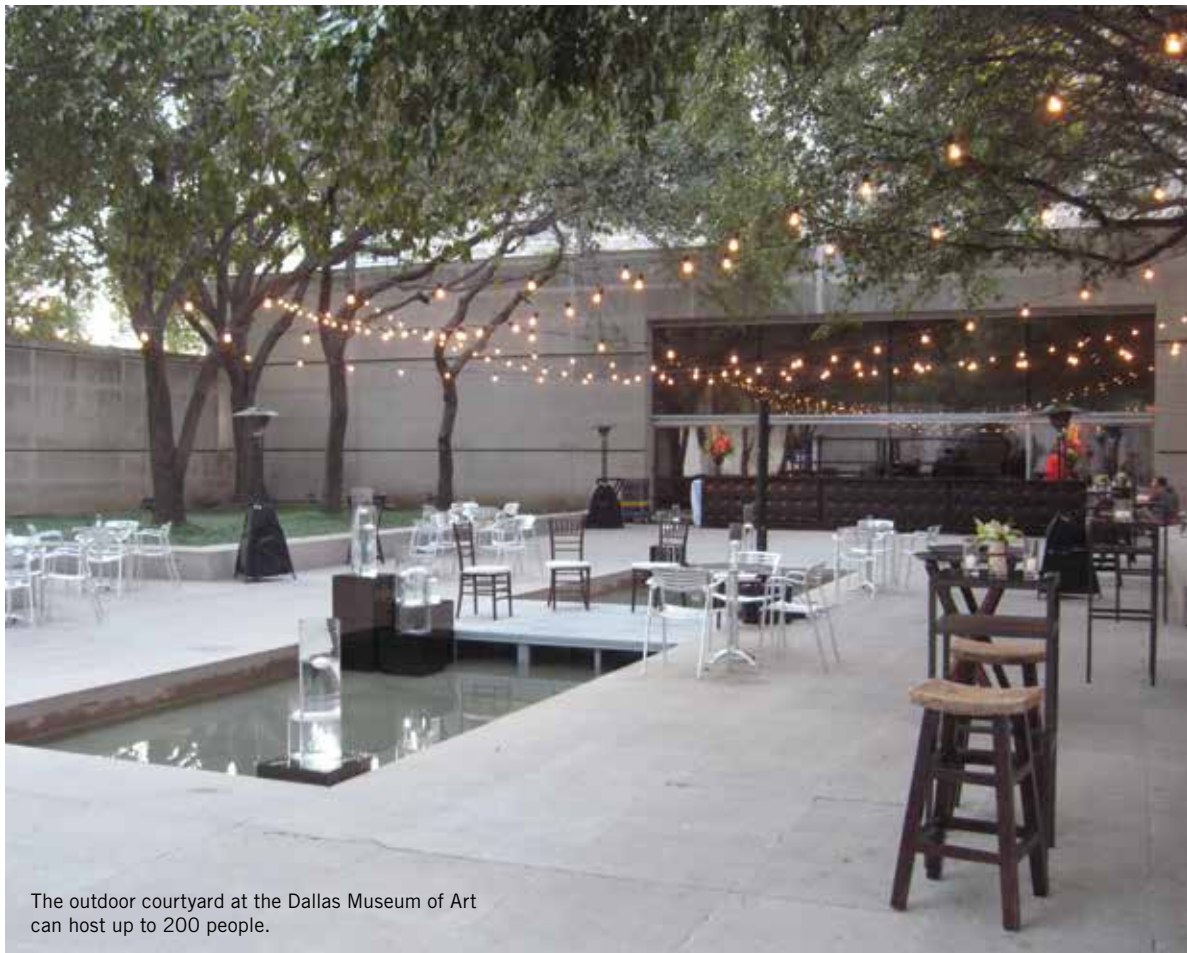
“We have a garden amphitheater that seats up to 250 people and also a brand-new solar house that was designed and built by students of the University of Nevada Las Vegas,” says Bailey of some of the most unique rentable spaces. There’s also an arboretum and a framehouse where groups can have sit-down meetings or schedule cooking demonstrations or a cocktail hour. The entire swath of the 8-acre gardens can also be rented in full for one flowing production. The flexibility of the space has attracted a number of clients in the medical, financial, design and nonprofit industries who have come to adore the atmosphere and ease of use. “The gardens are very peaceful and such a different place than you’d normally get to experience in a meeting or an event. There’s nothing like it in Las Vegas.”

EXPLORING THE GROUNDS

It’s a similar selling point at the Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon that touts incredible estate gardens rentable in the summer months. They are part of the Frank Manor House built in the 1920s by a prominent family of department store retailers and were designed by famous Estate architect Herman Brookman who put a lot of thought into the layout. There are five levels, all that run along the same axis as Mount Hood, “one of the most beautiful views you can see,” says Kerry Keenon, associate director of conferences and events.

The many features of the garden are also breathtaking, including wisteria and grape arbors, a reflection pool, cobblestone circle and the Great Plat Field, an open lawn surrounded by tall fir trees that can seat up to 900 people, “which is rare,” admits Keenon, also noting that groups as small as 100 guests are welcome for more intimate events. Water features run through each level of the gardens right down to the lower terrace. The reflection pool, just below the Wisteria Terrace, has become a popular spot for a number of social parties and galas. “Groups put bistros all along the sides or run café lights over the top of it . . .and sometimes they turn it into a jazz club with a local orchestra,” Keenon says.

One of the great benefits of booking at Lewis & Clark is that the rental includes the entire estate garden property, “a very extensive space,” with very few restrictions. One is that the team must hire security “because we block off



The outdoor courtyard at the Dallas Museum of Art can host up to 200 people.

the entire perimeter of the gardens for you,” says Keenon. Another is that all music must be concluded by 10 p.m. though after-hour parties can be moved indoors to the 200-person Stamm Dining Room or the charming Albany Smith Hall & Courtyard.

Beyond those rules, guests are able to use the property at whim. “We’ve had a lot of corporate picnics set up bowling and croquet on the side lawns, and we’ve hired lifeguards for folks who want to actively use the pool,” recalls Keenon. “There are lots of nooks and crannies that are fun to explore and use in unique ways.”

WORKS OF ART

Art museums are also taking it outside by promoting their garden spaces to clients. At the Delaware Art Museum, in a residential area of Wilmington, a 9-acre Copeland Sculpture Garden provides the benefit of built-in décor with 12 pieces of towering art dating back to the 1930s and the addition of the 200-foot Anthony N. Fusco Reservoir that was constructed in 2005 where small ceremonies-in-the-round take place.

At the Dallas Museum of Art in Texas there’s also a sculpture garden with space for 1,500 people. The area is flanked

by modern art and enhanced by a brick floor, reflection pool and three waterfalls. Elsewhere, a first floor sculpture terrace is ideal for receptions for up to 40 guests while courtyards can host nearly 200 people. The space is popular for weddings and fundraising events, including the museum’s annual Fair of the Arts donor night that sets up a variety of food stations and incorporates live mural artists. “It’s one of the best events we do in the garden,” admits Craig James, general manager and executive chef.

Like the other garden spaces at Springs Preserve, the art museums host events year-round, though the caveat is that they have to be scheduled around the museum’s hours. “We mostly do evening events,” says Liz Derosier, general manager of Sodexo Leisure Services at the Delaware Art Museum. “Otherwise, during the day you might see our neighbors walking through or school groups having a picnic since the gardens are open to the public.” Everyone has been pretty respectful of the private events, though, says Derosier. “No one has wandered through a wedding ceremony yet.”

Art museums are also taking it outside by promoting their garden spaces to clients.



The Springs Preserve in Las Vegas is a natural treasure where gardens grow in the dry heat and provide a beautiful setting for events that come alive with the right setup (at right).

WEATHERING ALL THE STORMS

At Springs Preserve, nighttime events are popular too, especially in the dead heat of a Vegas summer. “It can be a challenge because we do get some pretty warm days for quite a few months,” says Bailey, noting his team always works with the client. “If we think it’s not a good idea to be outside at 3:00 in the afternoon in August we’ll caution against that and try to recommend moving the event indoors or scheduling back to a later time. We can go until 11 p.m. for most functions and can also coordinate morning events.”

In general weather remains one of the biggest tasks for outdoor venues, but all interviewed have said that staff is well prepared with comprehensive backup plans. That can involve judgment calls in moving the production to the site’s enclosed quarters. “Sometimes we know the forecast a week ahead so we can plan accordingly, but we can also make a decision the day of the event before we start setting up,” says James of the Dallas Museum of Art’s policies.

GARDENS GROW WITH ADD-ONS

In the case of Lewis & Clark, the planning department almost always requires tents to stave off rain or prevent people from

getting chilled by the Portland breezes—especially since they have to call in the order ahead of time with suppliers. While some venues like Springs Preserve and Dallas Museum of Art have a good internal supply of production incidentals, Lewis & Clark has relationships with preferred professionals that bring in all the tenting, tables, chairs, lights and dance floors the event needs. It’s an important part, says Keenon, since “there’s nothing out in the gardens except for what you see naturally.”

Garden venues are essentially naked spaces so there’s considerable time spent in working with vendors to understand the property and how to best utilize it. “Because of the large sculptures in the garden, sometimes working around them can be tricky,” says Derosier who leaves extra time for walk-throughs with vendors. Here, the garden spaces are also a consid-

erable distance from the Delaware Art Museum’s kitchen so everything has to be taken out by cart and pre-planned. “But with the right amount of lead time we can pretty much make anything happen,” she assures.

The other important aspect of dealing with raw spaces is helping clients envision what is possible. “If they’re local to Vegas, we’ll definitely have them come out and walk the site with them. I think that’s the most important thing in

The other important aspect of dealing with raw spaces is helping clients envision what is possible.



the planning process,” says Bailey. In other cases, he says Springs Preserve can provide detailed floor plans and photos of past events to help stir a client’s imagination. “We do what we can to help them get beyond any trepidation of hosting outdoors,” he says. “When all is said and done, our best events take place in the gardens.” **UV**

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INDUSTRY UPDATES

news & awards BY SELENA FRAGASSI

353 West NYC Lightens Up with Renovations to Multipurpose Space

Floor-to-ceiling windows offering a room full of natural light and lightweight modular furniture are just two of the ways the private venue in Times Square is lightening up with its latest renovations. In particular, panel discussions, film screenings, art exhibitions, photo and video shoots and cocktail parties will enjoy the convertible space that helps promote creativity, team spirit and proficiency. Other features include a self-service kitchen as well as an outdoor terrace with illuminated features and attached bar. UniqueVenues.com/353west



Bobby McKey's Dueling Piano Bar Welcomes U.S. Presidential Hopeful Rand Paul

The Republican senator from Kentucky paid a visit to 250 guests assembled at Bobby McKey's in National Harbor, Maryland in late February. The visit was part of the Conservatives for Political Action Conference and leads up to Paul's campaign in his 2016 bid for the White House. The day included a speech, meet-and-greet and a live interview with newsman Sean Hannity for his Fox News show "Hannity Live," a chat set up perfectly at the venue's famed piano benches. UniqueVenues.com/bobbymckkeys



Conference Chicago At University Center Gets A Name Change

The venue formerly known as University Center Conference Chicago is getting a makeover. The new name (and accompanying logo and website) are all part of a rebranding strategy to better market the full-service center to the hospitality industry at large. Conference Chicago is connected to the multi-school residence hall University Center, and has opened itself up to conference guests the past 10 years with 15,000 square feet of space and overnight accommodations that together serve as a hotel alternative in downtown Chicago. UniqueVenues.com/ConferenceChicago

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By Helen Fogarty

NATIONALS PARK
waited an hour to host a lavish event right after it opened its roof. The stadium, normally home to the Washington Nationals Major League Baseball team, welcomed former Pope Benedict XVI for a well-publicized Papal Mass just two weeks later.

It was an auspicious beginning and an extraordinary one for the venue to come to host," says Catherine Shook, vice president of marketing, operations and general admission who now oversees the ballpark, home to over 40,000 people who come to see the baseball team, which has a pretty average fan base.

It was an early experience at The Line, a new arena complex in the University of Utah when it was home to the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City.

"Having the corporate already at hand to be engaged and offer our entire corporate staff," says Melissa Van Hise, client services manager, who notes that many corporate functions will be able to enjoy all the Olympic theme. "To give us the opportunity to not having to work with the facility to hold special events is a tremendous opportunity."

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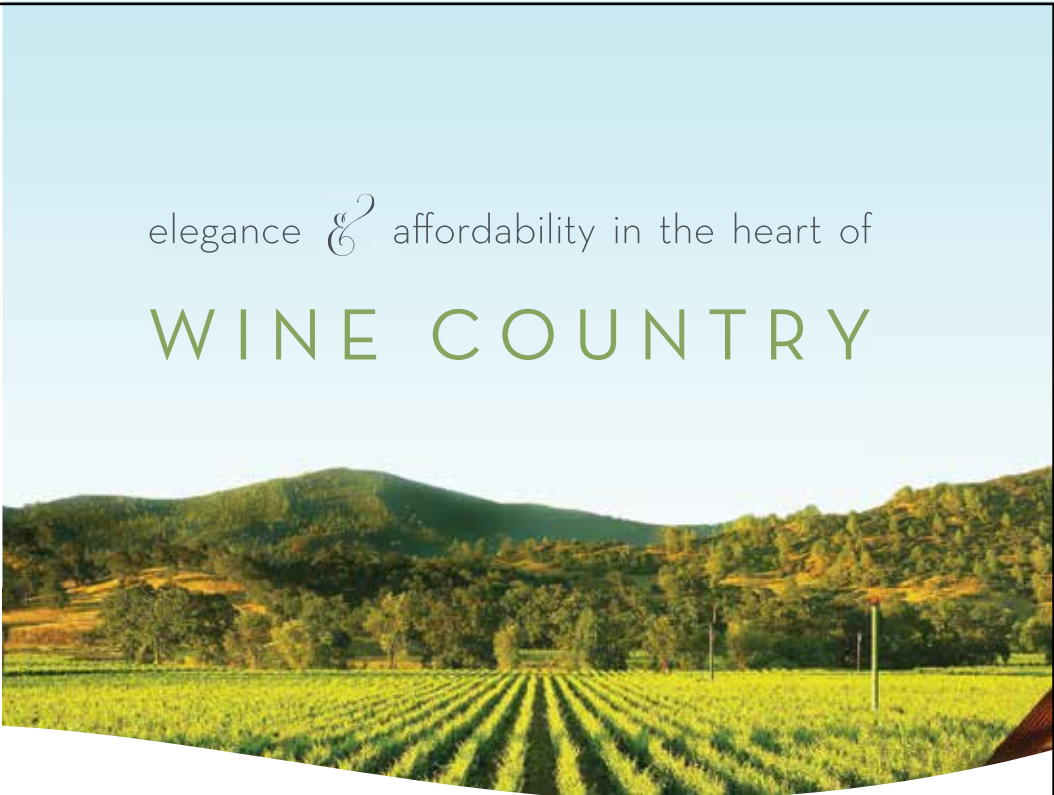
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PERSON OF INTEREST

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

The ANCHOR

In 20-plus years of leading corporate and incentive sales for the cruise industry, Lori Cassidy has helped planners get on board with booking programs at sea.

Lori Cassidy was always planning for a career in travel. In college she was a foreign language major and received her hospitality certification at the Wilma Boyd Career School before finding her first job with an airline in New York and later with a leisure travel agency. Yet it wasn't until she attended a conference called Cruise-A-Thon that she really found her calling. "I felt an immediate connection," she admits, "and realized I had to be in this industry."

Since, Cassidy has steered sales efforts at several different cruise lines, including 15 years with Carnival and 7 years with Royal Caribbean where she has brought about a sea of change for planners considering bigger options. "Cruises weren't always a popular choice for conducting a meeting/event at sea ... but we have been able to build a grassroots approach of informing one planner at a time," she says. "Once they see the product, they understand it."

Unique Venues: How have cruise ships changed since you began?

Lori Cassidy: "Perceptions are changing. People probably remember the 'Love Boat' or the old Queen Elizabeth 2 when there were very few options and limitations. Today it's a compete 180 of that. It's all about choices, options and flexibility, and the hardware is just spectacular. We're coming out with more purposely-built conference center spaces and more dining options."

UV: What strategies have you used to change perspectives or build awareness?

LC: "We try to be very involved in the meeting planning industry associations like MPI and SITE. We also try to engage in some of the vertical markets, which have a high propensity to do incentive programs and conferences. We also conduct a lot of what we call 'corporate symposiums at sea' and lunch-and-learns to educate planners about the brand and conducting events at sea. We try to get them to 'think outside the ballroom.' ... The great thing is we've had year-over-year consecutive growth, which means whatever we are doing is working."

UV: Is there anything you personally implemented in this process that you are proud of?

LC: "We've always had a travel agent guide that has anything consumers ever wanted to know about booking a cruise, so what I helped to do is create a meeting planner version of that. It's the bible for meeting planners interested in putting together an event on board a ship. I also initiated the Royal Incentive Rewards Program, which is our individual incentive cruise certificate program."

UV: Do you have tips for planners who might be interested in taking the next step?

LC: "Every cruise line has a different set of specs and capabilities, so planners really need to do their homework to make sure they're matching the right product to the right audience and their expectations. Just like there are different categories of hotels, there are different categories of cruise lines all offering different experiences." **uv**



LORI CASSIDY
Director, Global Corporate,
Incentive & Charter Sales, Royal
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