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2016 University of Denver WE CROWN ALL THE WINNERS OF THE UNIQUE VENUES BEST OF AWARDS.

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/ Market Value

The venues aren't the only ones receiving Unique Venues Best of Awards. We also salute the creative work that went into these successful marketing campaigns.



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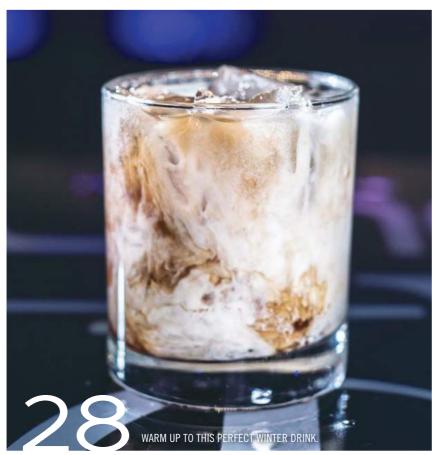
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Snapchat EXPERT TIPS FOR USING SNAPCHAT AT YOUR NEXT EVENT.

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Unique Venues Founder Michele Nichols meets with original member Cathy Grieve at the University of Denver to talk about the changing industry. Photo by Tomas Bernal Page 102

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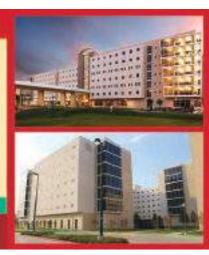
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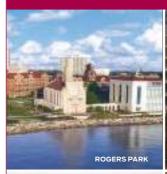
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PUBLISHER'S LETTER



S WE LOOK FORWARD TO WELCOMING 2017 in just a few short weeks, many event professionals are starting to lay out forecasts for meetings and events in the new year. But one trend that many probably didn't expect is unique facilities taking a huge share of the market.

According to American Express Global Meetings & Event Forecast Reports, the biggest rise in the industry has been the surging demand for non-traditional meeting and event venues. In fact, for three consecutive years our niche community has been outpacing every other type of traditional property, including lower and mid-tier hotels and luxury and resort properties.

It's a rather shocking development. Non-traditional venues weren't even on this same report a few years ago, and now we're leading the pack. What this swing shows is that there's a need and desire for something new in the meetings and event industry, and venues like our members are stepping up to the plate to prove their worth in a crowded marketplace. Historical, cultural and special event venues can provide professional day meetings and memorable parties and events. Colleges and universities offer free or low-cost A/V and technology services that can't be matched elsewhere. And camps and retreats can offer the same modern-day amenities as their traditional counterparts.

We believe in their capability so much that every year we honor these leaders in our Best of Awards, focused on a range of categories, from "best venue on a per diem" to "best venue for transportation" and "best venue for LGBTQ-friendly events." Each award recognizes the incredible service and attention to detail these venues provide that has helped move the needle for our segment and provided the opportunity to be noticed on a more public scale.

This year is no different—with this latest edition devoted to the Best of Unique Venues in 2016. Inside these pages, you'll discover the venues that lead the way in a number of areas, including premium technology, unique catering, and desirable locations. We also salute the venues that have created award-winning marketing campaigns, often with small budgets.

As Unique Venues wraps up its incredible 30th anniversary year, we would be remiss not to also honor the members who have been with us since the beginning and gave our organization a chance when the rest of the industry wouldn't even acknowledge us. We chose to name these dedicated few as our "People of the Year," beginning with Cathy Grieve, executive director of conference and event services at the University of Denver who has been with the university for nearly 40 years and with us since day one.

While we didn't always know where we were going, we did it together and have now arrived at a destination we could only dream of with 2017 as the year we really come out on top.

Millula

Michele Nichols, Founder Unique Venues

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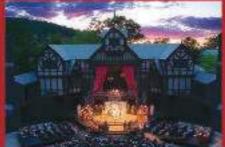


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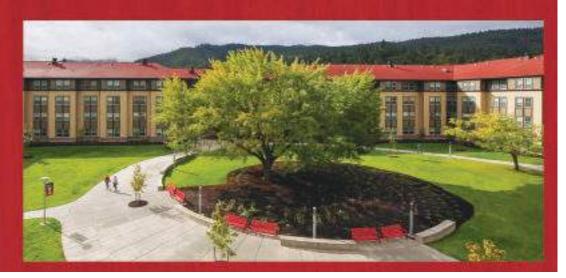




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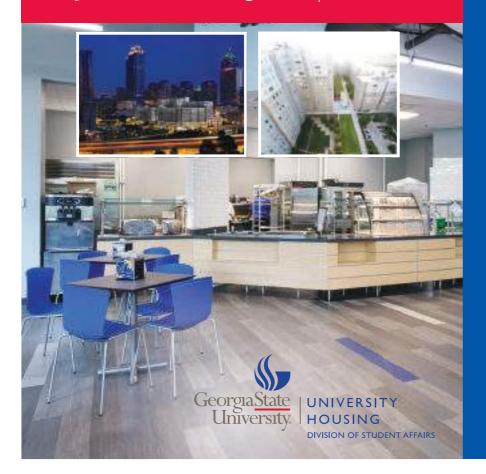
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THE AGENDA work/life/balance BY MICHELE NICHOLS Founder, Unique Venues



The Big Day

HOW TO KEEP CALM AND KEEP GOING THE DAY OF YOUR BIG EVENT

After weeks, months, maybe even years of planning, it's go time. The day of your big event or conference has finally arrived. Though you probably have gotten barely any sleep, and are crossing your fingers that everything goes as planned, there's no need to sweat the small stuff. Just follow these six tips to keep calm and carry on.

THE WEEK BEFORE

GET SOME HELP. Success with anything happens when you realize you can't do it all yourself. There's no shame in asking for some help—if your colleagues are too swamped with their own workloads, consider bringing on an intern or a temp as you get closer to the calendar date of your event. Students in hospitality management programs will appreciate the experience, and you'll have double the brainpower and manpower.

THE NIGHT BEFORE

LAY IT OUT. If you have access to the venue early, use it to your advantage and set up the room ahead of time. That way you won't be scrambling the morning of your event trying to get the right configuration of furniture or finagling with all the décor, and instead can focus on the other important details.

SET ALARMS. No one wants to be late on the big day, so set an alarm for at least 30 minutes before you must get up (just in case the lack of sleep has you hitting

the snooze button). In addition, you might also want to set alarms on your phone throughout the day for any targets that need to be hit at certain times; for example—meeting with catering or finalizing the check-in table.

THE DAY OF

BRING CHARGERS. Your smartphone and other devices will do you no good if they are out of power. While it may sound intuitive, one of the first items on your checklist should be "pack up chargers." This way you won't miss any important calls and can continue to check e-mail for any up-to-the-minute developments.

HAVE BACKUPS. Technology happens, so make sure to have backups for... everything. In addition to having printed checklists, schedules, contracts, and lists of registrations, also save all the files to cloud storage so everyone on your team can access them in case of a Wi-Fi outage or some other snafu.



RELAX. No, really. Being frazzled will actually delay your progress. So take a deep breath, drink lots of water, make sure to eat a nutritious meal, and go forth with a positive attitude that everything will turn out okay. uv





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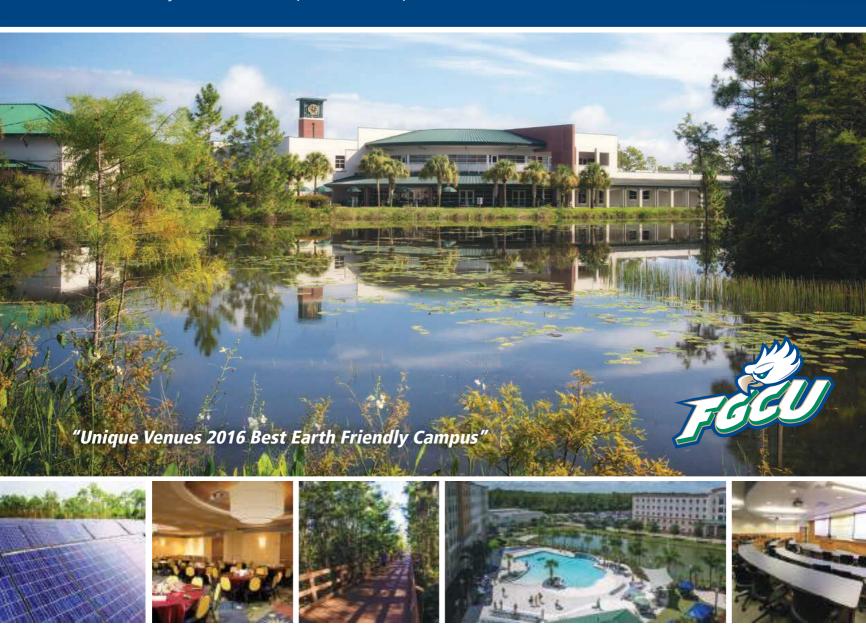
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THE AGENDA expert advice by whitney anderson



SNAP TO IT. How to Use Snapchat to Tell Your Event's Story

We call it our "reality show in real time." About a year and a half ago, our team at Roanoke College decided to start using Snapchat as a way to communicate with our audience—both to attract prospective new students and also showcase some of our biggest events held on campus, like speaking engagements with Chelsea Clinton and Senator Marco Rubio. It's one of the largest and fastest growing social media platforms used daily by our target demographic, so we knew we'd be crazy if we weren't participating in this medium—although we learned a lot of these best practices along the way.

KNOW YOU'RE GOING INTO THIS WITH A RAW STORY. The essential thing that separates Snapchat from other platforms like Instagram and Facebook is that there is no planning out the content, and there is no ability to make it perfect. While some might have hesitancy about this unscripted nature, what you get in return is an authentic way to connect with your followers in the moment. You can give an insider look through photos and video that are pieced together to become your story.

USE YOUR AUDIENCE TO YOUR
ADVANTAGE. Occasionally, we like
to pass the Snapchat duties off to
one of our audience members so they
can give us a "day in the life" story.
This not only engages them, but also
provides a different
perspective from that of
the institution. The key to
finding the right collaborators is to hone in on
your target audience and
pick varied people with
different interests

so the content they produce will have more views.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING. While you might plan out some more promotional items in the days leading up to the event, it's really the day of that's important. Many Snapchat devotees are looking for the most current content so hitting them in the moment can be more impactful. Plan some Snaps earlier in the day to entice people to come out; and always provide Snaps during the event to let your audience see what they are missing out on so they register next time.

"PLAN SOME SNAPS EARLIER IN THE DAY
TO ENTICE PEOPLE TO COME OUT;
AND ALWAYS PROVIDE SNAPS DURING
THE EVENT TO LET YOUR AUDIENCE
SEE WHAT THEY ARE MISSING..."



WHITNEY ANDERSON is

the Internet communications manager for Roanoke College. She manages the college's web content as well as all of the main social media accounts. Prior to Roanoke, Anderson did web design, graphic design, and SEO initiatives. When not at work, she can be found wrangling her twin three-year-olds.

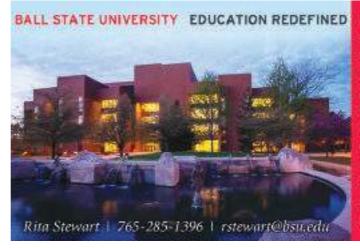
HAVE A GOOD MIX OF CONTENT.

You'll want to vary up the types of Snaps you publish; if you have all the same kinds of videos and photos, your audience will become bored and think you have nothing new to show. Also, we have found, the more personal the videos, the better. Talk directly at the camera, and then perhaps pan to what is going on around you to give viewers a full look at all the activity.

of your social media platforms as an extension of your brand, and include logos and handles everywhere—like on websites, printed materials, and e-mail signatures. Also, create your own Snap Code (which acts like a QR Code) and custom geofilters for even more branding opportunities that will get you noticed. Lev

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WE'VE ALL BEEN THERE. You get caught in a rainstorm and your smartphone is soaked and won't turn on again. Or, while trying to load a recipe on your tablet, you accidentally drop it in water—and, as expected, it won't turn back on again. While a savvy few have come up with some creative hacks—like coating the waterlogged devices in a bowl of rice to soak up the moisture—they don't always work as planned. That is, if you even have rice on hand in the first place.

Now, TekDry comes to the rescue. The Denver-based company has come up with a proprietary dryer that "bakes" your phone for 30 minutes, removing all traces of water and ensuring that all your contacts, data, pictures, and other media are safe and secure. You can find one of these revolutionary machines at a variety of retail stores, including 82 Staples

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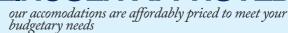
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THE AGENDA happy hour

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INGREDIENTS:

2 oz. Kahlua

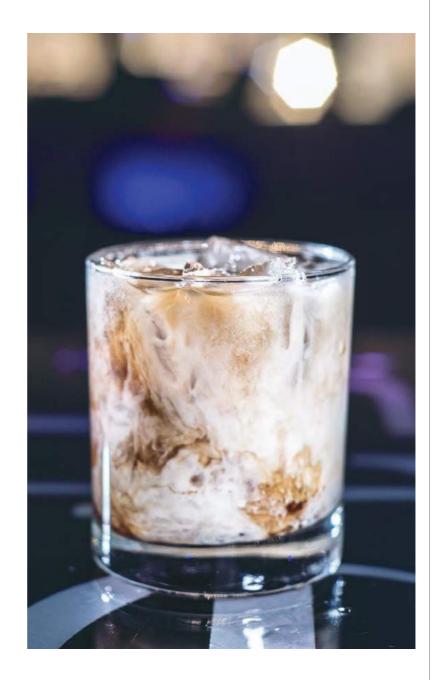
1.5 oz. vodka

1 oz. heavy cream

Splash of Sprite

TO PREPARE:

- 1. Fill a rocks glass with ice cubes.
- 2. Add the Kahlua and vodka.
- 3. Layer the cream by stirring with a spoon.
- 4. Add a splash of Sprite to top it off. *Makes I serving* w



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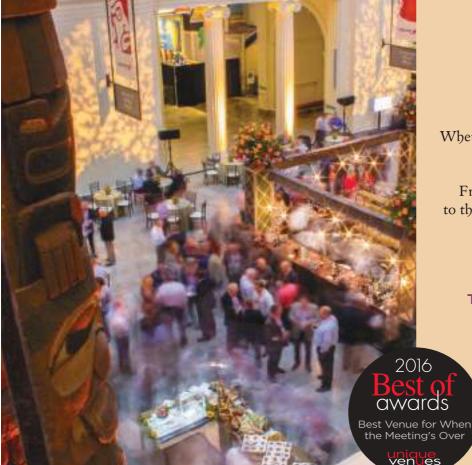




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THE AGENDA food for thought



Horseshoe Spoon

Courtesy of Secret Recipes
Catering at the Abraham
Lincoln Presidential Library
& Museum (Springfield, IL)

INGREDIENTS:

1 lb. ground Kobe beef2 Idaho potatoes

INGREDIENTS FOR THE CLASSIC CHEESE SAUCE:

½ cup unsalted butter ½ cup all-purpose flour

1 tsp. salt

½ tsp. dry mustard½ tsp. cayenne pepper

2 cups whole milk, at room temperature

1 Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce8 oz. sharp cheddar, grated34 cup beer (preferably a lager), at room temperature

Springfield, Illinois is known as the home of President Abraham

Lincoln, but for locals, it's also known for its signature dish, the Horseshoe. This open-faced sandwich was originally created in 1920 at the town's Leland Hotel and was composed of thick toasted bread, a hamburger patty, French fries, and a special cheese sauce. Today, many Springfield chefs and restaurants have their own version, including the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum. This appetizer option, created by Chef Chip Kennedy, is often served at events.

GET CONNECTED

Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum Springfield, IL UniqueVenues.com/LincolnLibrary (217) 558.8873

TO PREPARE: MEAT AND POTATOES:

- 1. Form the ground Kobe beef into 24 half-ounce patties, and season with salt and pepper.
- 2. Using a skillet over medium heat, quickly sear the patties on each side.
- 3. Slice the potatoes julienne-style using a mandolin.
- **4**. Fry the potatoes at 300 degrees Fahrenheit until crisp (about 7 to 10 minutes).

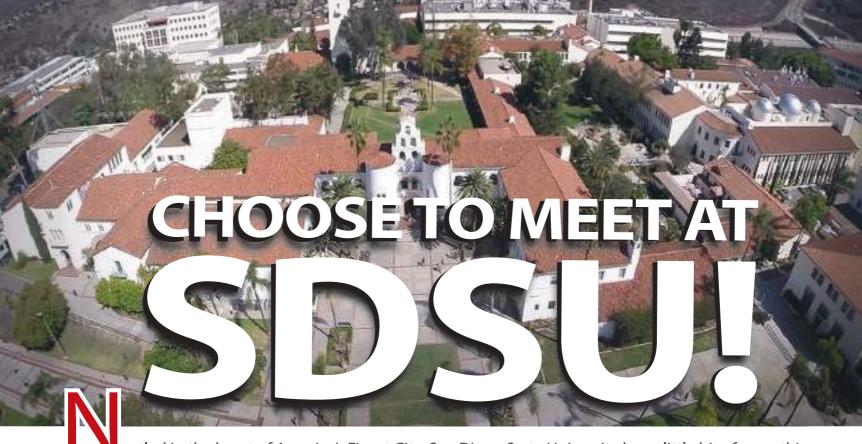
CHEESE SAUCE:

- 1. Melt the butter in a large, heavy saucepan over medium heat.
- 2. Add the flour, and stir with a wooden spoon or whisk to combine, and cook for a couple minutes until the flour loses its raw taste.
- 3. Whisk in the milk, salt, mustard, and cayenne pepper.
- 4. Bring to a simmer and cook, stirring constantly, until the mixture is quite thick.
- 5. Remove the saucepan from the stove, and then add the Worcestershire sauce

- and cheese, and stir until the cheese is completely melted.
- 6. Whisk in the beer, and return the saucepan to the stove. Cook, stirring constantly, until the sauce comes to a slight simmer, but do not let it boil.

ASSEMBLE THE SPOON:

- 1. Place a beef patty on an appetizer spoon, and pour a teaspoon of the cheese sauce on top.
- 2. Then, top with a few French fries, and serve immediately. *Makes 24*. w



estled in the heart of America's Finest City, San Diego State University has a little bit of everything to appeal to visiting conference guests. The sprawling campus is just minutes away from Southern California's Pacific Coast and Mexico's Baja Peninsula as well as the Gaslamp Entertainment District and

the world-renowned San Diego Zoo.

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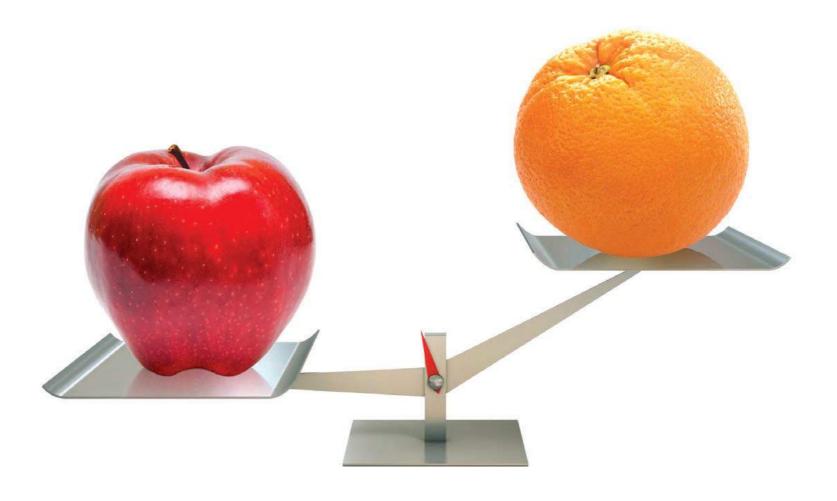
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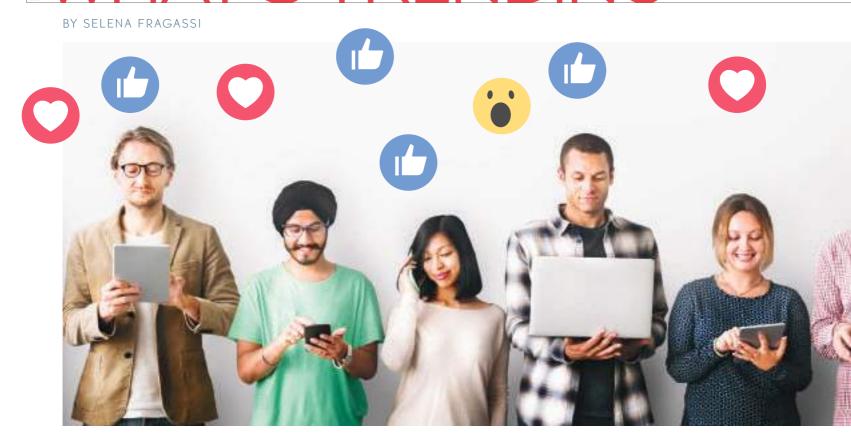
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WHAT'S TRENDING



It's A-Live!

Facebook Live is the latest way non-traditional venues and event planners are bringing audiences into their world, big or small.

A decade ago, no one was talking about Facebook. But today, it's all people can talk about with an estimated 1.1 billion people actively using the social media platform every single day. That's nearly one in every seven people around the world.

Not only has Facebook become a versatile tool for many to stay tuned into their own personal networks, but more and more businesses have started to use the platform for practical marketing purposes as well. That transition has had execs in Silicon Valley paying attention. In recent years, they've rolled out Facebook ads and rejiggered algorithms (much to the dismay of many traditionalists).

But, in the summer of 2015 came a golden ticket. Building off the rapid success of YouTube and Vimeo services, Facebook Live was launched. Initially it was a way for celebrities to communicate with their fanbases; but by April 2016, the live streaming option was rolled out to the mass market of Facebook users. Within the past several months, many in the planning industry have gleaned to the tool as an effective way to broadcast special events, build excitement through promo videos, and stay engaged with their audience on an ongoing basis—all without needing huge production budgets.

For Memorial University of Newfoundland's Grenfell Campus, Facebook Live literally saved the day. In August, officials had gotten just days notice that the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau would be paying a visit. "Our Prime Minister is super popular right now, especially with young people, so we knew there'd be a lot of interest," recalls Melanie Callahan, communications advisor. Just one problem: the small campus didn't have the space to fit such demand.

The highly anticipated speaking engagement was held in their Arts and Science Atrium, which has a capacity of 300. "We wanted to try to find a way to make the event accessible to people that couldn't be there with us in the room," Callahan says. "[Prime Minister Trudeau] also doesn't visit many campuses, so we wanted to show off a bit."

Facebook Live allowed her team to accomplish both, producing a 90-second video that now lives on the venue's page in perpetuity and can "remind people that we had such an important visitor," says Callahan.

The platform, she says, is very simple: "We put a cell phone on a tripod and pressed start; it was that easy." But Cal-





lahan did find some issues; first and foremost, the sound quality. "If you're able to mic somebody, it can work better, but for impromptu events like ours, it was a challenge." As well, she says, the visual quality of the video was subpar: "Facebook Live's platform seems to shrink the video for your page, so if you're looking for a professional video, this might not be what you want." Furthermore all Live videos can only live on Facebook there's no way to export them to websites or other social media for more multilateral uses. But, Callahan concedes, "If you're looking for a quick and free way to present video content, with very little planning, Facebook Live is great."

The American Helicopter Museum in West Chester, Pennsylvania has also started experimenting with Facebook Live, using it for the first time at their annual Father Fest gathering in June—a day-long event with rides, games, vendors, and authors, all celebrating dads.

"We thought it would be a good idea to try it out on this weekend with all the activities we had planned," says Jan Feighner, PR and membership coordinator for the museum. Colleagues banded together to take turns filming a series of videos (from 30 seconds to 19 minutes in length). Included were a speech by the board president, demonstrations from a "drone show," and teaser pieces for the arrival of the 2016 McLaren automobile.

In the end, Feighner thought the platform was incredibly useful and the quality sufficient (but also wonders if using better equipment would help).

"We would use it again, but we'd do things a bit differently," she admits. "One of the main takeaways is to really think about what we should be filming and ask ourselves, 'Do we have enough here to captivate people to watch the stream?"

Rather than film the entire event ad hoc, she envisions preparing interview subjects and putting together almost scripted segments. She sees potential for making the tool work as a fundraising campaign for the small museum, too, "almost like how PBS provides programming and then asks for donations." Feighner also wants to focus on doing

FACEBOOK'S 7 TIPS FOR MAKING "LIVE" A SUCCESS

- 1. Tell people ahead of time when you're going to broadcast
- **2.** Go live when you have a strong connection
- **3.** Write a compelling description before going live
- **4.** Ask your viewers to follow you and receive notifications when you go live
- **5.** Say hello to commenters by name and respond to their comments
- **6.** Broadcast for longer periods of time to reach more people
- 7. Be creative and go live often

Read more about each tip at facebook. com/facebookmedia/best-practices/live

more teasers in advance to promote the event and possibly drive attendance, or at the very least let people know to tune in.

"We've done events with our You-Tube feed before, but you have to direct people there and that's a challenge," she says. "But on Facebook, most people are already logged on anyway, so even if they don't take time to sit and watch the stream, they can see it's happening, which can be a great way to raise awareness. And let's be honest, there's very little [marketing] these days that you can do for free." uv

GET CONNECTED

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THE MAIN EVENT

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

A Good Sport

The Bingham Cup is the largest amateur international rugby tournament, dedicated to the memory of an American hero. And Vanderbilt University handled it like a champ.



The name Mark Bingham might always be associated with tragedy, but the Mark Kendall Bingham Memorial Cup will always be a celebration and remembrance of what made him happy. The sporting event is the world's largest amateur international rugby tournament, named for a former player on the San Francisco Fog who passed away before his time in 2001. Bingham notably was a passenger on United Airlines Flight 93, which was overtaken by terrorists during the September 11 attacks; he's one of the heroes credited with fearlessly trying to regain control of the plane.

As the 15th anniversary of that fateful day loomed this year, 2016 Bingham Cup Chairman Jon Glassmeyer says, "One of the things I wanted to focus on was Mark. That's the reason why we are here." During the opening ceremonies,

the massive crowd observed a moment of silence and heard remarks from Bingham's mother Alice Hoagland. As well, on several nights during the event (held May 22-29), there were screenings of "With You," the 2012 documentary

made about Bingham, a public relations executive and aspiring sports star who was largely credited with breaking stereotypes for gay athletes—the Bingham Cup draws predominately from the LGBTQ community.

It was held at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, one of the few times it's been hosted in the States since its inception in 2002. "I really do think Vanderbilt is a large part of why we got the bid," says Glassmeyer who is well connected in the local community and former president of the Nashville rugby chapter, the Grizzlies. Glassmeyer also goes a ways back with Linda Welch, di-

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Springfield College Conferences & Special Events

THE MAIN EVENT

BY SELENA FRAGASSI







rector of conferences at Vanderbilt, who he says, "Laid it all out for us."

Welch and her team, including Program Coordinator Brandis Blodgett, worked with Glassmeyer for two years figuring out all the logistics for attendee accommodations, opening ceremonies, practice facilities, meals held at the campus, and transportation to games held at the nearby Ted Rhodes Sports Complex. In total, there were 2,500 attendees representing 15 countries.

"Part of the RFP that was important for the Cup committee was showing how inclusive Vanderbilt could be," says Welch. "We explained how important diversity is for us, our students and faculty, and all our visitors."

Because the Bingham Cup is an international affair, the sporting event was

also considered a vacation for many of the visitors coming from abroad. "Many participants came early," says Welch, "and there were a lot of activities planned throughout the city." That included trips to Dollywood, the Jack Daniels distillery and other pub crawls. "The Mayor's office got involved, so did the Chamber of Commerce because it brought a lot of revenue to Nashville," furthers Welch.

Because of the large influx of guests, Blodgett says, "We wanted to make sure expectations were met early on, so we set up communications from the beginning." That included creating an online registration page to purchase meal plans ahead of time—and ensuring catering was set to create literally thousands of boxed lunches every day, many of them with specialized items since many of the

athletes were on restrictive diets.

"Jon had informed us that many of the players hadn't seen each other in a while so socializing would be important," says Blodgett. "Offering the chance to secure meal tickets early ensured they could be in the same place at the same time."

The team provided the same opportunity for overnight accommodation requests, which became quite the puzzle and took weeks to figure out, says Blodgett. "We had a big old whiteboard and wrote out the number of people on every team and then went through our floor plans of every dorm we were using. It was a trial by error. But since our residence halls have single and double rooms and suites all in one building, we could get creative and keep teams together for the most part." The general setup of the campus also created socializing opportunities. "One thing I heard a lot of was people liked that they could easily meet friends in the lobby area or dining hall."

Blodgett adds that she also prepared the guests ahead of time by sending photos of their rooms and detailed checklists of the items they needed to bring, down to the hangers to hang up their uniforms.

"We really could not have pulled off this event without them," says Glassmeyer, commending all the extra attention to detail. "They were 100% committed to us, and if there were any problems they jumped on it." He points to one example on opening night. "Everything was set up on the lawn and this horrible storm started rolling in with lightning. Vanderbilt banded together to move everything into the student center, only running 20 minutes behind. It was unbelievable. And made this year very memorable." uv

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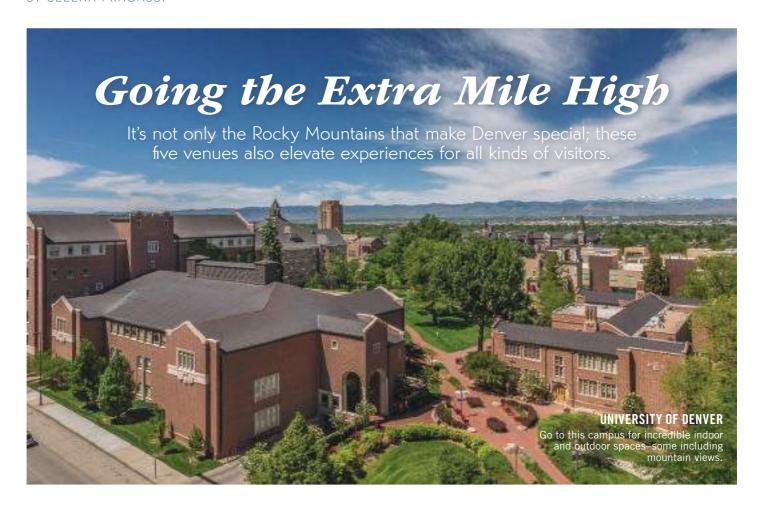
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ON THE ROAD

BY SELENA FRAGASSI



Denver, Colorado is known for a lot of things—impeccable views, champion sports teams, and a lot of beer. But as these six venues show, it's also becoming known as a destination for meetings and events that want something extra special.

University of Denver

Time is on the side of the University of Denver. Established in 1864, this largest private institution in the Rocky Mountain Region offers many, many years of experience in hosting a range of meetings and events. "Whether private, corporate, or nonprofit, the University offers distinct venues year-round," says Mary Kay Mauro, manager of client services, noting the availability of ballrooms, two large auditoriums, 50-plus classrooms, a world-class performing arts center, sports & wellness facility, historic chapel, and abundant lawn spaces—some with mountain views. In fact, the campus has

developed a reputation as the place to host not only groups like LIV Sotheby's and the Colorado Medical Directors Association, but also high profile events such as the 2012 Presidential Debate and The Denver Post Spelling Bee.

In addition to ample spaces, walking paths, and proximity to a number of local businesses, the University of Denver offers a breadth of services and amenities on-site, including Cisco TelePresence and video conferencing, free Wi-Fi, inhouse catering, single, double, or suitestyle rooms for up to 2,000 guests during the summer, and ample parking. The campus also has a light rail stop, which

provides guests access to downtown Denver, the Denver Tech Center, and the Denver International Airport. All services can be coordinated with helpful event staff, says Mauro. "We offer a onestop-shop approach providing clients one contact, one contract, and one bill ... as well as attractive rates for an incredibly easy event planning experience."

UA Denver Pavilions Stadium 15 & RPX

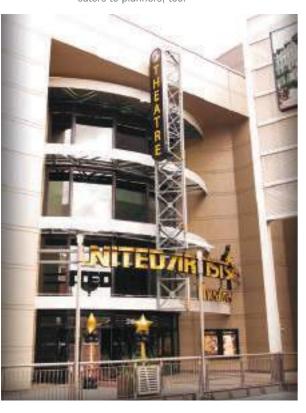
Meeting at the movies isn't just for social events anymore; it can also be a thrilling business experience. Regal Business Events provides a team of dedicated consultants that help planners coordinate trainings, presentations, and other corporate affairs at the UA Denver Pavilions, conveniently located at the 16th Street Mall in the downtown district. Here, 15 screens (measuring up to 60

feet) offer state-of-the-art visual and sound experiences in auditoriums that can accommodate 45 to 250 people. "Our projectors are designed to showcase Hollywood movies, so they are the best in the business, and the audio and sound systems are second to none," says Barry Brown, director of national event sales, who notes that because the cost of producing training videos and short movies has come down dramatically, movie theatres are now in a unique position. "A lot of businesses want to find a special venue where they can showcase content, and we can provide a great learning environment."

Inside each auditorium at UA Denver Pavilions Stadium, guests will find comfortable reclining chairs and attached writing tables that allow for laptops and note taking. Regal Business Events also offers a number of amenities that

UA DENVER PAVILIONS STADIUM 15

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ON THE ROAD

BY SELENA FRAGASSI



HOWL AT THE MOON

Left: The interactive piano show includes music for each group and the venue snaps photos, free of charge.

HISTORY COLORADO CENTER

Below: All the exhibits at this natural history center are open for groups to browse during sessions and after hours

planners might not expect. "We provide everything from event signage and registration tables to standard concessions and customized catering," says Brown, noting they can work with high-end vendors in the area to do themed catering. "Planners can leave all the event needs to us so they can focus on driving attendance and coordinating their program."

Howl at the Moon

Entertainment has become a prominent part of many meetings and events nationwide—but when Denver-based planners want to find the best in show, they head to Howl at the Moon. This interactive piano show has 17 locations across the country; in Colorado, the venue is situated just outside Coors Field, home of the Rockies baseball team, three blocks away from the 16th Street Mall, and one block from Union Station with mass transit. "We do corporate events, company holiday parties, client appreciation nights, and we work with a lot of conventions that come here," says Justine Brown, national director of sales, and every show is tailored to individual groups.

"They request the music and we provide custom songs that are based on the info the client provides, such as the company history or any upcoming promos they want to throw out. We can incorporate inside jokes and terminology or jab at competitors. And we always incorporate guests and bring them up on stage." For example, she says, "We might make the



CEO do a dance. There's a lot of interaction and team-building so everyone feels involved." Howl at the Moon also creates custom piano banners and sidewalk signs highlighting the company logo and also provides an in-house photographer to snap photos to commemorate the experience, all free of charge. In addition to being the "after party hot spot" for conventions and conferences, the venue also provides meeting space of its own during the day, comfortably seating up to 240 in the showroom. Services include A/V, on-site catering with a full-service wait staff, as well as drapery and décor for a complete experience.

History Colorado Center

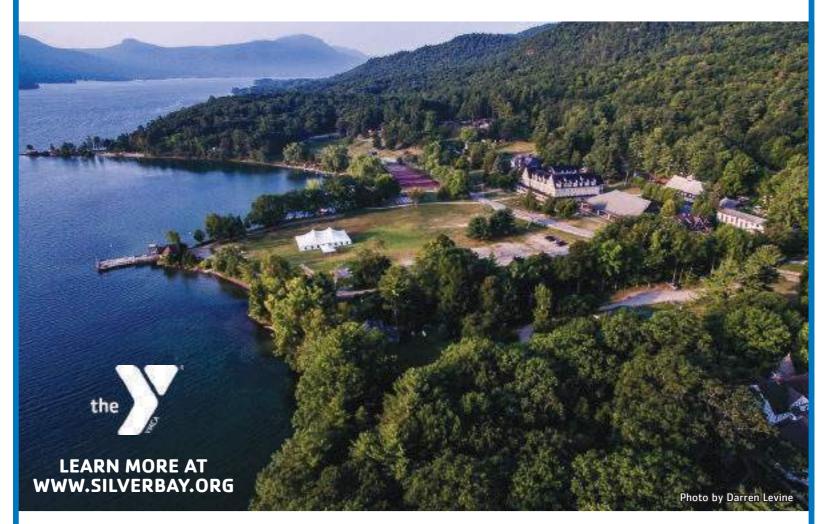
If you want the full scope of what Denver has to offer, the History Colorado Center

is the ideal venue. Not only does the accredited museum offer sweeping views of the Rocky Mountain Range and downtown city center, but inside guests can also explore a range of exhibits about the Living West. "Access to the museum is always included with every event," says Casey Bishop, catering services manager. "During the day attendees can explore while on breaks or lunches; and for events outside of museum hours, we keep the lights on, which has become a popular component of cocktail hours."

History Colorado Center offers a good mix of meeting spaces, from a 40-person boardroom to the larger Colorado Room that provides an area for presentations and speakers. Two spaces are also on the top floor, one of which has an outdoor terrace where tables and chairs can be set

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ON THE ROAD

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

up for mingling. There's also an atrium that can be used in the early morning or at night; the key feature here is a floor decorated with a map of Colorado. "Everything is very interactive," says Bishop. Because the museum is managed by the state of Colorado, there are discounted rates available for nonprofit groups, though weddings and corporate functions are also return clients. All visitors enjoy a range of amenities, including free basic A/V with screens, projectors, audio, and microphones built into each room, as well as the on-site café that offers fresh catering. However, the biggest benefit for planners, says Bishop, is that "guests are really excited to come here."

Boettcher Mansion

For a retreat setting away from the city, there's also Boettcher Mansion in Golden, Colorado, about 30 minutes from downtown Denver and located at the summit of Lookout Mountain. Originally built as a summer home for a local entrepreneur, Charles Boettcher, in 1917, the Craftsmanstyle mansion has existed as a private rental for much of the past century. "It's a great example of adaptive reuse," says Director Cynthia Shaw. "Our spaces really lend

themselves to modern day functions." The entire property is available for rent, which is a popular option for weddings and weeklong business conferences, but individual rooms can also be booked for a range of corporate and social events.

All of the original bedrooms are each their own meeting space, comfortably fitting 8-15 people around a board table. More notable quarters include a large terrace in the front of the house that holds up to 200 people or the Fireside Room (originally called the Great Hall) with a cathedralbeamed ceiling, fireplace, stone walls, and wood floors. "There's incredible ambiance here," says Shaw. Though there are no overnight accommodations, Shaw's team offers a preferred list of hotels and B&Bs in the area. Boettcher Mansion also has a preferred list of local caterers and photographers. Though the house upkeeps its vintage charm (it's on the National Register of Historic Places), there are "modern-day amenities" for clients, says Shaw. That includes Wi-Fi, state-of-the-art A/V, teleconferencing systems, and big screen TVs and whiteboards, offering the best of both worlds. w

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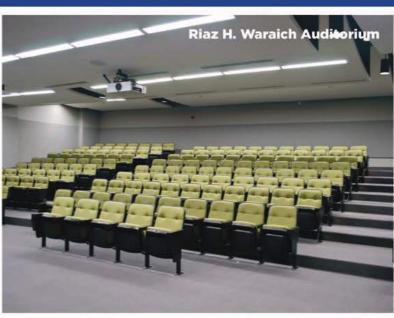


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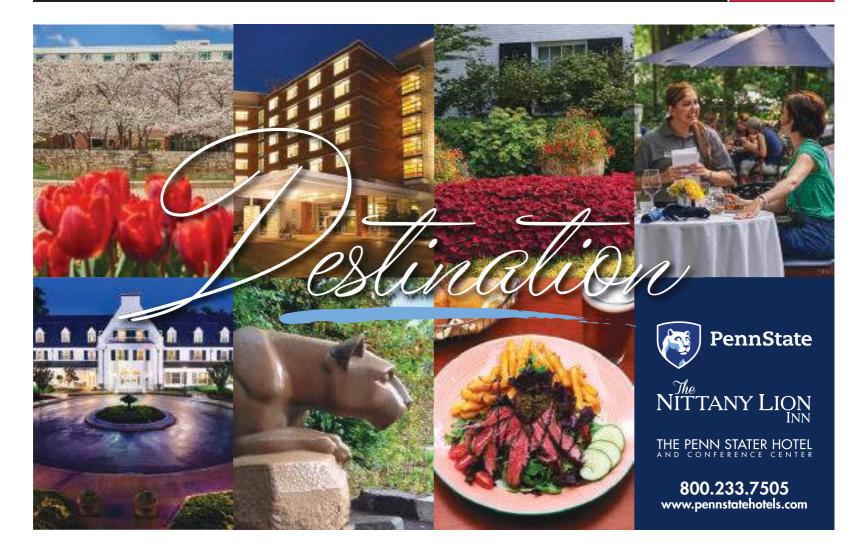
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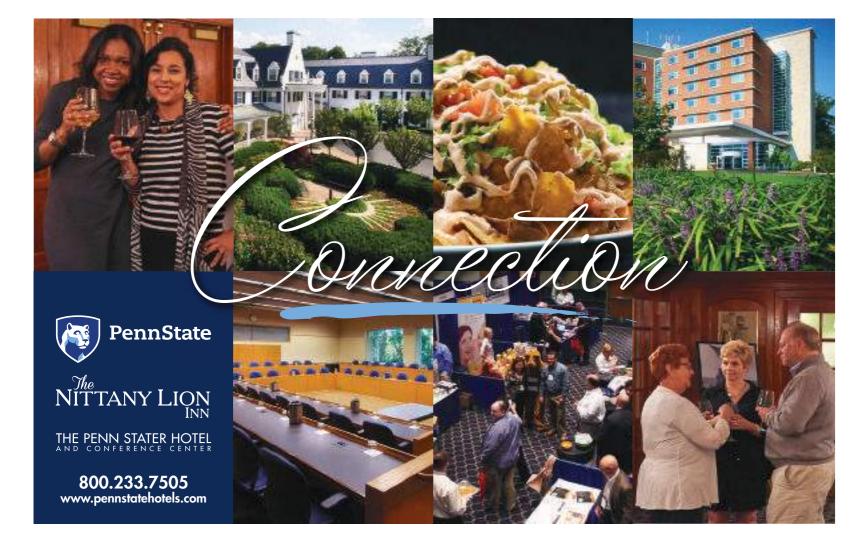






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RECOGNIZES 19 LEADERS IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY, FROM THE BEST VENUES FOR SPIRITUAL GATHERINGS, PER DIEM RATES, CREATIVE CATERING AND MUCH, MUCH MORE.

By Selena Fragassi

The third time's a charm.

Especially when it comes to naming the elite winners and runners up in the Third Annual Unique Venues Best of Awards. We tallied up all your votes and are proud to announce your standouts in 19 categories that cover every inch of our niche industry and make us all proud.



winner/:

American University, Washington, D.C.

Being located in the nation's capital offers its share of advantages, including high-level access to transportation. American University has an abundance of options for visitors to arrive by plane, train, or automobile. The campus is less than 45 minutes from three major international airports (Dulles, Reagan National, and Thurgood Marshall-BWI) while also having its own stop on the redline of the D.C.-area Metro train. "We provide free shuttle buses seven days a week to take students and guests around campus as well as to the metro stop," notes Kimberly Araya, director, university conferences &

include shared bike racks and immediate Zipcar memberships, and in 2017, a new meeting center will open with secured underground parking for conference guests. AU is also an incredibly walkable campus, says Araya. "We are located in Spring Valley, which is one of the most exclusive neighborhoods in the District of Columbia, so if walking is your chosen means of transportation then this is the place for you." UniqueVenues.com/AmericanUniv

(202) 885.8247 **RUNNERS UP:**

Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta, GA, UniqueVenues.com/georgiatech), University of Colorado (Colorado Springs, CO, UniqueVenues.com/uccs)

guest services. Other on-campus features

BEST VENUE FOR FORMAL AFFAIRS

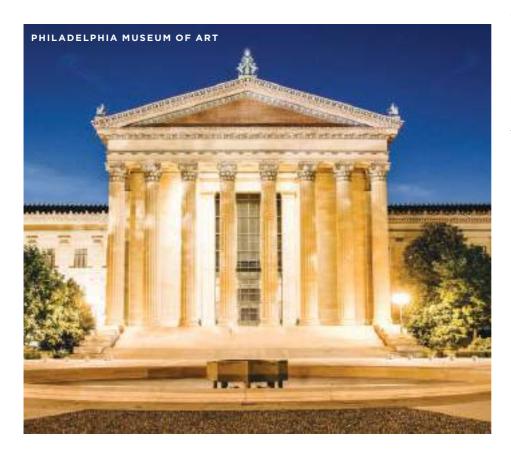
winner/:

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA

Setting the mood for a formal event comes easy when you have a lavish space already fit with the décor. At the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the centerpiece of any special gathering becomes the esteemed works that encompass every corner of the Art Deco building. Here, you can give a toast from a grand balcony adorned with Renaissance tapestries, dance the night away in the stunning atrium, or mingle in a garden decorated with Rodin's classic bronze sculptures. "No matter the affair, the setting will be unforgettable at the Philadelphia Museum of Art," says Morgan Bedore, vice president of sales, marketing, and creative for Starr Events. "Our spaces offer an array of options for indoor and garden events of all sizes, from photo shoots to business meetings to formal weddings." STARR Events is the exclusive caterer and can create custom menus to match the opulence. In 2017, the museum is also working on curating alternate ceremony and special event locations at the grounds to better capitalize on the experience and flow of entertaining on-site. UniqueVenues.com/PhiladelphiaMuseumArt (267) 239.5272



The National Archives Museum (Washington, D.C., UniqueVenues.com/NationalArchives), Ohio Union at The Ohio State University (Columbus. OH, UniqueVenues.com/OhioUnionOSU)





BEST CITY CENTER VENUE

winner/:

The Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago, IL

The Museum of Science and Industry (MSI) may be one of the last remnants of the World's Fair of 1893, but the gilded building also showcases the city of Chicago in all of its modern glory, too. The former Palace of Fine Arts is just steps away from the shores of Lake Michigan and the scenic route known as Lake Shore Drive, which easily transports visitors from the museum's home in Hyde Park (also the site of the University of Chicago) to the attractions of nearby downtown Chicago. "With thousands of exhibits, artifacts, and 'wow' moments, MSI is the premier destination for unique and engaging special events," says Stan Hansen, Sodexo Marketing Manager, which handles event planning at the venue. "[The museum] offers unique and spectacular spaces that can be used alone or in combination for transformative corporate events, holiday parties, picnics, receptions, awards ceremonies, and more." One of newest is the Smart Home, a former exhibit that has been opened up for exclusive use as a special event venue with an energy-efficient, eco-friendly design. It can hold up to 40 people for a seated lunch or dinner, up to 100 for a cocktail party, and up to 150 for picnics in the adjacent Smart Park area outside the building. UniqueVenues.com/MSIChicago (773) 753.2583

RUNNERS UP:

The Loft at 600 F (Washington, D.C., UniqueVenues.com/Loftat600F), National Archives Museum (Washington, D.C., UniqueVenues.com/NationalArchives)



BEST VENUE FOR AN LGBTQ-FRIENDLY EVENT

winner:

Purdue Conferences, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN

In 2016, Purdue University was the host site for the Midwest Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, and Ally College Confer-







ence, the largest of its kind in the nation representing 13 Midwest states. Since 1993, the conference has grown to offer 90 educational workshops as well as special guest speakers and entertainment, all aimed at bringing people together in a safe and supportive environment to address issues that affect the community. "The Purdue Student Leadership Initiative and the Crossroad Coalition were the driving forces behind, and the ultimate success of, this event," says Nick Bonora, director of Purdue Conferences. "In addition, the Purdue University LGBTQ Center is a great resource and played a key role by offering training to internal and external partners." In the spring of 2017. Purdue LGBTQ Center will also host a two-day event based on education and leadership training for students, faculty, staff, and the larger community. UniqueVenues.com/Purdue // (800) 955.6385

RUNNERS UP:

Distinction by Sodexo at the Canadian Museum of History (Gatineau, QB, UniqueVenues.ca/CAMuseumHistory),
President Lincoln's Cottage (Washington, D.C.,
UniqueVenues.com/PresidentLincolnsCottage)

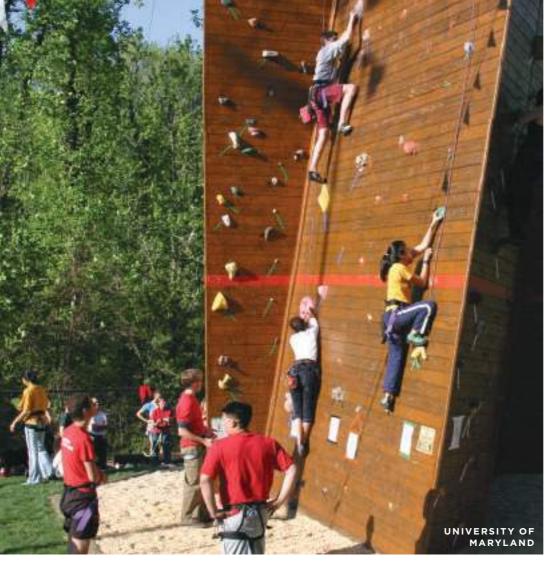


BEST VENUE FOR UNIQUE OR LOCALLY SOURCED CATERING

widner:

Miami University Conference & Event Services, Oxford, OH

Miami University is delivering something fresh to conference guests and visiting groups. The campus in Oxford, Ohio recently unveiled a 35acre farm that harvests fruits and vegetables used by the on-site Miami Catering staff in developing a variety of seasonal menus. Some of the crops grown include apples, lettuce, radishes, heirloom tomatoes, onions, and pumpkins—and what the campus can't get from the yield, they supply from a series of local vendors. That list includes Young's Jersey Dairy, which is run by Miami University alumni. In addition to sustainably crafting menus, the conference and event services staff also coordinates foodie team-building experiences, such as chili cook-offs and the "Farm to Fork" program where groups actually head to the farm fields to harvest and prepare a meal



together. "[Groups] understand the value of global vision, good choices, and the power of teamwork in this group initiative," says Kathy Crowley, senior manager of marketing and sales for conferences and events. UniqueVenues.com/MUOhio // (513) 529.6918

RUNNERS UP:

University of Colorado Boulder
(Boulder, CO, UniqueVenues.com/CU), Georgian
Conference and Event Services (Barrie, ON,
UniqueVenues.ca/GeorgianConferenceServices)



BEST VENUE FOR REUNIONS

winner:

Silver Bay YMCA Conference and Family Retreat Center, Silver Bay, NY

When it comes time to gather up the family for a reunion, many come home again to Silver Bay YMCA Conference and Family Retreat Center in upstate New York, which has won this category three years in a row. "Year after

year, we see the same families return because they find Silver Bay an ideal location to form lasting bonds," says Marketing & Communications Director Liz Hinck. Here, groups can choose standard programs and activities or customize programs for their needs. "We take great pride in our multigenerational programming. Each member of the family, no matter their age or interests, will find fun in every corner of Silver Bay," furthers Hinck. Some of the options include craft shops and swim lessons for children, or scavenger hunts and trivia nights for the adults. The idyllic location, set on 700 acres on Lake George in the Adirondack Mountains, is also a key selling point. Encompassing more than 60 buildings (which are on the National Registry for Historic Places), Silver Bay YMCA also plans to break ground in 2017 on a new dining facility with meeting spaces and 22 new guest rooms. UniqueVenues.com/SilverBayYMCA

(518) 543.8833 RUNNERS UP:

YMCA Camp Elphinstone (Vancouver, BC, UniqueVenues.ca/CampElphinstone), American Helicopter Museum (West Chester, PA, UnqiueVenues.com/HelicopterMuseum)



BEST VENUE FOR YOUTH/SPORTS GROUPS

winner:

University of Maryland, College Park, MD

Youth-friendly is one of the many ways to describe the University of Maryland, College Park. With more than 8,000 beds on campus, plus two dining halls and an iron-clad, twolayer security program, planners can rest easy bringing their young clients to this sprawling suburban campus near the nation's capital. "Each summer, sports camps that are run by our Big Ten Conference coaches combine with college immersion, special studies, and STEAM programs (Science-Technology-Engineering-Arts-Math) to stimulate young minds," says Joseph E. Criscuoli, marketing and sales coordinator of Conferences & Visitor Services at UMCP. "Our Ropes Challenge Course, Rock Climbing Wall, and TerpZone facility are also must-do add-ons for any youth program." The University of Maryland, College Park can also provide in-house motor coach charters that make ground transportation to nearby Washington, D.C. a breeze for additional educational components.

UniqueVenues.com/umcollegepark (301) 314.7884

RUNNERS UP:

Florida Gulf Coast University (Ft. Myers, FL, UniqueVenues.com/floridagulfcoast), Carleton University (Ottawa, ON, UniqueVenues.ca/CarletonUniv)



BEST VENUE FOR WHEN THE MEETING'S OVER

winner:

The Field Museum, Chicago, IL

If you want a night at the museum after a long day of meetings, Chicago's Field Museum is the perfect place to convene. While hosting your group in one of the spectacular event spaces (guest counts range from 10 to 8,000), guests can wander off to explore incredible artifacts, like the Evolving Planet exhibition, which looks at 4 billion years of the Earth. Each event space

BEST OF UNIQUE VENUES

is paired with unique and stunning exhibitions, like Stanley Field Hall, which has SUE the world famous T.Rex, fighting elephants, and Haida totem poles. "Planners are able to add on private viewings of the museum's temporary exhibits, many of them highlighting artifacts never on display anywhere else," says Danielle Kosanovich, special events account manager. Trained docents can also interact with your party, allowing for insider knowledge and greater understanding of the museum's collections, and interactive pop-up stations can also engage guests. The museum (just steps from Lake Michigan), even has its own beer, Tooth & Claw, developed exclusively by Off Color Brewing..

UniqueVenues.com/FieldMuseum (312) 665.7600

RUNNERS UP:

Museum of Science and Industry Chicago (Chicago, IL, UniqueVenues.com/MSIChicago), College of William and Mary (Williamsburg, VA, UniqueVenues.com/WilliamandMary)



BEST VENUE FOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

winner:

UCLA Lake Arrowhead Conference Center, Lake Arrowhead, CA

Who better than an internationally renowned university to offer learning-based meeting spaces? In fact, the UCLA Lake Arrowhead Conference Center is so focused on this mission that it does not accept reservations for social events. "We want to provide a unique learning environment for training and development groups and other educationfocused conferences and meetings," says General Manager/UCLA Director Steve Caloca. To accomplish that goal, the conference center offers 10,000 square feet of IACC-certified meeting space in 14 varied meeting rooms, all including a suite of audio-visual services. "Our all-inclusive meeting packages include meeting space, deluxe overnight accommodations, and three complete meals each day," adds Caloca. The serene setting also offers the opportunity for more concentrated learning—situated on 42 acres along the north shore of Lake Arrowhead in California's San Bernardino Mountains and National Forest. The





Arrowhead Adventures team-building program makes use of the natural surroundings, too, with activities that also stimulate cognitive problem solving. When it's time to retire for the night, guests can enjoy chalet-style guest rooms with fireplaces and impeccable views that encourage reflective time.

UniqueVenues.com/UCLALakeArrowhead (909) 337.2478

RUNNERS UP:

The Conference Center at Montclair State University
(Montclair, NJ, UniqueVenues.com/MontclairStateConfCtr),
Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta,
GA, UniqueVenues.com/georgiatech)



winner:

Florida Gulf Coast University, Ft. Myers, FL

Unique Venues isn't the only one noticing the eco-conscious programs at Florida Gulf Coast University. The campus also was recognized as one of the "25 greenest colleges" in 2015 and was a finalist in Sustainable Florida's 2016 Best Practice Awards, among many

other accolades. The physical grounds offer 385 acres of conservation lands, five miles of nature trails, and a student-maintained food forest. University officials have made a concerted effort to ensure all buildings (many LEED certified) complement the natural surroundings. "They are undergoing systematic automation and retrofitting of lighting and other fixtures to reduce energy consumption," says Ruth Rodrigues, director, campus reservations and records management. Other initiatives include a 15-acre solar field that provides approximately 85 percent of the power for three of the campus' largest academic buildings, a partnership with TrimTrax to reduce consumer food waste in dining halls, Zipcar locations on-site, the use of Green Seal certified cleaning products, biweekly farmers markets to provide students and the public with fresh produce (and recipe cards), and partnerships with local thrift stores and food banks to donate items during move outs each spring. UniqueVenues.com/floridagulfcoast (239) 590.1426

RUNNERS UP:

The Field Museum (Chicago, IL,
UniqueVenues.com/FieldMuseum),
Vancouver Aquarium Marine Science Centre (Vancouver,
BC, UniqueVenues.ca/VancouverAquarium)



BEST VENUE ON A PER DIEM

winner:

St. Lawrence College Conference Services, Kingston, ON

Budgets don't have to be burdensome when working with a venue like St. Lawrence College that can maximize your dollars—and your bottom line. "We often work with notfor-profits, government groups, and charitable organizations that have strict stipends," says Conference Service Sales & Marketing Manager Amelia Campbell. "In these situations, we work closely with internal departments to do our best to accommodate the meeting planner's goals and budget requirements." One way they economize services is to go through internal departments for the use of audio/visual equipment, tables and chairs, as well as other additional setup equipment. The college also keeps overhead costs low to allow for flexible room rates in residence buildings.

UniqueVenues.ca/StLawrence (613) 544.5400

RUNNERS UP:

The Conference Center at Montclair State University
(Montclair, NJ, UniqueVenues.com/MontclairStateConfCtr),
Colorado State University (Fort Collins,
CO. UniqueVenues.com/CSU)



BEST SUBURBAN/RURAL VENUE

winner/:

University of Maryland, College Park, MD

Suburban spots can be just as thrilling as their urban counterparts, especially with a property as unique as the University of Maryland, College Park. "Visitors and guests are amazed by the serenity and open spaces of our secluded and secure campus. That includes a campuswide arboretum," says Joseph E. Criscuoli, marketing and sales coordinator of Conferences & Visitor Services. UMCP sits on 1,800 acres in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. with a main gate right on Route 1 and quick access to three international airports, often resulting in competitive airfare for visiting groups. When you do want to get into the city, a series of metro bus stops, trains, and motor coach charters can quickly transport groups to nearby Annapolis, Baltimore, or the nation's capital. On-site, UMCP offers a total of 200,000 square feet of meeting space in 100 meeting rooms and five ballrooms along with 8,000 beds in the summer months. In 2017, the campus will welcome The Hotel at University of Maryland, offering 297 guest rooms and 43,000 square feet of conference space.

UniqueVenues.com/umcollegepark (301) 314.7884

RUNNERS UP:

University of Scranton (Scranton, PA,
UniqueVenues.com/universityscranton), Georgia International
Horse Park (Conyers, GA, UniqueVenues.com/GAHorsePark)



BEST VENUE FOR EXPOS AND TRADESHOWS

winner:

Georgian College Conference and Events Services, Barrie, ON

The winner for best in (trade)show for the third consecutive year is Ontario's Georgian College Conference and Event Services. Here, the events department transforms the campus' student athletic center into a 20,000-square-foot, obstruction-free



event space with room for up to 100, 8' x 8' booths that can fit banners, displays and furniture. Plus, state-of-the-art technology is included with the rental. To make the experience even more convenient for guests, "Georgian College provides on-site parking, catering within the exhibit hall, and access to numerous meeting and breakout spaces in the same building," says Katie Sleep, manager, conference and event services. As such, the college (just 90 minutes from Toronto) has developed a considerable reputation and hosts around 15 large-scale shows annually. *UniqueVenues.cal Georgian Conference Services*

RUNNERS UP:

Chase Center on the Riverfront (Wilmington, DE, UniqueVenues.com/ChaseCenter), Banff Centre (Banff, AB, UniqueVenues.ca/BanffCtr)



BEST HIGH-TECH VENUE

winner/:

Virginia Tech Executive Briefing Center, Arlington, VA

Without the right tools, it's hard for anyone to do their job efficiently—and for many, that equates to premium technology. At the Virginia Tech Executive Briefing Center, guests can tap into state-of-the-art platforms at no additional cost, "which translates to seamless meetings," says Center Manager Larissa LaCour, noting that all meeting rooms offer easy access to connect laptops to projection systems with screens ranging from 46" to 103". One of the pieces de resistance is the 20-foot visualization wall in the Foggy Bottom Room that can display 3D images; in the other rental spaces, video conferencing is available, connecting up to three remote sites. On-site tech experts are always available, free of charge, and test connections beforehand. A Hospitality Zone also includes four monitors for further branding and presentation opportunities. One of the most exciting developments, though, is a recent partnership with Cyviz, which donated half a million dollars in highly advanced collaborative technology.

UniqueVenues.com/VATechResearchCtr (571) 858.3044

RUNNERS UP:

Ohio Union at the Ohio State University (Columbus, OH, UniqueVenues.com/OhioUnionOSU), OFFSITE Chicago (Chicago, IL, UniqueVenues.com/OffsiteChicago)



BEST VENUE TO FILM A MOVIE OR TV SHOW

winner:

3 West Club, New York, NY

It doesn't take much to set a scene at 3 West Club in the heart of New York City, which has been a favorite location of such movies as "Rebel in the Rye" and "The Nanny Diaries" and TV shows including "Mozart in the Jungle," "Dateline NBC," and "20/20." Part of the allure is the historical nature of the buildings with tall ceilings and chandeliers and incredible views of the city offered from an adjacent terrace, according to Director of Marketing and Sales Louise Scrivines. "It's particularly attractive for

period pieces and ballroom scenes." Word of mouth has been key in getting on Hollywood's radar with additional selling points including reduced fees (about 20 percent less than other competitors in Manhattan) and limitless flexibility. "We can do multiple tours so scouts can see the space as many times as they need, and we can work one-on-one to get questions answered quickly," says Scrivines, whose team takes the same approach with meeting and event planners. "We feel the quicker they have the information they need, the better for the decision making process."

UniqueVenues.com/3West (212) 582.5454 xt. 2183

RUNNERS UP:

New York Historical Society (New York, NY, UniqueVenues.com/nyhistoricalsociety), The Nest at UBC (Vancouver, BC, UniqueVenues.ca/AMS)







BEST VENUE TO GATHER FOR THE DAY

winner:

OFFSITE, New York, NY

A good day is when you can have the whole place to yourself—which is exactly what groups can find at OFFSITE in New York City. This convenient turnkey solution offers complete exclusivity for every booked meeting or event, offering full use of the entire threelevel, 4,200-square-foot "corporate oasis" for no extra charge. Also included in the package is a dedicated event coordinator that arranges state-of-the-art technology, customized setups, and all snacks, beverages, and office supplies. "We take care of our clients through and through, so that they can focus on the business they are here to do," says Co-Founder Patrick Everett who notes that the idea of the three OFFSITE locations (two in New York and one in Chicago) is to simplify the meeting rental process without sacrificing quality or amenities. Technology is also a key component—the building is fully equipped with synced projections on five LED HD TVs, and additional features include a digital smart board, surround sound, live music integration, live camera feeds, high speed dedicated fiber Wi-Fi, and award-winning plug-and-play Halcon conference tables. UniqueVenues.com/offsite // (212) 366.1828

RUNNERS UP:

Metro Meeting Centers — Boston (Boston, MA, UniqueVenues.com/MetroMeetingBoston), Columbus State Conference Center (Columbus, OH, UniqueVenues.com/ColumbusStateConfCtr)



BEST VENUE FOR SMALL GATHERINGS

winner:

The Loft at 600 F, Washington, D.C.

At The Loft at 600 F, the fourth floor is specifically set aside for more intimate and private meetings and events. "Two business rooms and a cozy foyer are perfect for groups of 15-30 in seated panels, and the space transforms beautifully for intimate





cocktail parties of up to 75 guests," says

Venue Manager Wyatt Hull. "Our strength
for small gatherings is the ease and
flexibility for getting attendees in the venue
as well as fast responses to questions and
attentiveness to event needs." The Loft at
600 F provides customizable raw space
with hardwood floors and high ceilings
that can change in size, look, and feel
depending on the group size, and the staff
is also cognizant of fitting the perfect
amount of furniture into each space, so
no rentals are required. Says Hull, "The
spaces are designed to allow comfortable
conversations to unfold naturally, helping

to foster creativity in a space that feels like a very large, beautiful living space.'"

UniqueVenues.com/Loftat600F
(202) 431.8516

RUNNERS UP:

Virginia Tech Executive Briefing Center
(Arlington, VA, UniqueVenues.com/VATechResearchCtr),
Spirit Fire Retreat Center (Leyden, MA,
UniqueVenues.com/SpiritFire)





BEST VENUE FOR SPIRITUAL/ WELLNESS GATHERING

winner:

The Art of Living Retreat Center, Boone, NC

Although most retreats conjure up ideas of rest and relaxation, The Art of Living Retreat Center taps into another plane with a whole host of mindful programs. "We have several yoga and meditation teachers in residence that have trained both in India and the U.S. that offer workshops in yoga practice, guided meditation, deep relaxation, insights into the mind, holistic nutrition, and more," says Art of Living Teacher and Director of Digital Media Andrew Keaveney. An outdoor labyrinth offers moving reflection while creative exploration can be found in an on-site pottery studio. But, Keaveney says, "The whole atmosphere promotes wellness, silence, and restoration," especially with a serene location overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountain Range. "Groups love the pure air and spectacular views." Menus are designed to be supportive of wellness and the on-site spa offers holistic treatments that complement many of the programs. Plans are also underway to open a School of Ayurveda and School of Yoga in 2017. UniqueVenues.com/artofliving // (800) 392.6870

RUNNERS UP:

Silver Bay YMCA Conference and Family Retreat Center (Silver Bay, NY, UniqueVenues.com/SilverBayYMCA), American University (Washington, D.C., UniqueVenues.com/AmericanUniv)





BEST OUTDOOR/ROOFTOP EVENT SPACE

winner:

YMCA Camp Elphinstone, Gibsons, BC

Enjoying the great outdoors in Canada is second nature, but finding a functional event space that taps into the lush surroundings takes a bit more exploration. Many planners return to YMCA Camp Elphinstone, just a 40-minute ferry ride from Vancouver, which offers a forested chapel and waterfront campfire, popular for wedding and religious ceremonies. "Other groups have utilized the breadth of space to plan outdoor yoga work-

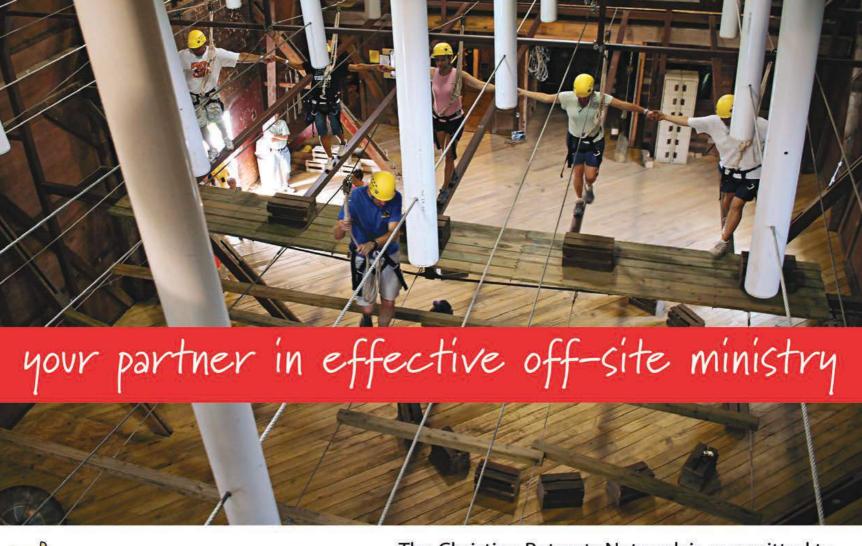
shops, various team-building and leadership retreats, Marine Search and Rescue trainings, family getaways, and birthday parties," says

Nadia Gormley, manager of marketing & communications. "What makes us unique is our ability to cater to a wide range of needs and a wide range of groups." Although there are indoor meeting spaces on-site, many planners opt to secure a section of the 144 acres for their functions. In addition to space, YMCA Camp Elphinstone offers activities from archery to ropes courses and water sports. LV

UniqueVenues.ca/CampElphinstone (604) 886.2025

RUNNERS UP:

Oak Ridge Hotel & Conference Center (Chaska, MN, UniqueVenues.com/OakRidge), Lewis & Clark (Portland, OR, UniqueVenues.com/lewisandclark)





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Ideal Location

Excellent

Superb Facilities

CHICAGO'S NORTH SHORE... WHERE YOU GET EVERYTHING

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Our hotels with meeting space are:

Crowne Plaza Chicago/Northbrook — Northbrook

DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel and Conference Center Chicago-North Shore — Skokie

Hilton Chicago/Northbrook — Northbrook

Hilton Garden Inn Chicago North Shore — Evanston

Hilton Orrington/Evanston — Evanston

Holiday Inn Chicago North-Evanston — Evanston

Holiday Inn North Shore — Skokie

Renaissance Chicago

North Shore Hotel — Northbrook

Westin North Shore — Wheeling

Wyndham Glenview Suites — Glenview

Unique meeting and event venues include:

Chicago Botanic Garden — Glencoe

The Glen Club — Glenview

Illinois Holocaust Museum - Skokie

Lakeview Banquets — Glenview

Levere Memorial Temple — Evanston

North Shore Center for the Performing Arts — Skokie

Northwestern University — Evanston

Pinstripes — Northbrook

Redfield Estate — Glenview

Winnetka Community House — Winnetka









THE VENUES AREN'T THE ONLY ONES RECEIVING UNIQUE VENUES BEST OF AWARDS. WE ALSO SALUTE THE CREATIVE WORK THAT WENT INTO THESE SUCCESSFUL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS.

By Selena Fragassi

Dedicated websites, pragmatic social media, and unique marketing collateral—the work is never done when it comes to getting the word out about non-traditional venues. We honor four of the best campaigns we've seen this year.

BEST MARKETING COLLATERAL AND BEST PRINT AD

winner:

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Conference Services (Lincoln, NE)

Sometimes, simple can be successful. That strategy paid off for University of Nebraska–Lincoln Conference Services with a memorable campaign that also caught the attention of Unique Venues, which honors the work with two Best of Marketing Awards.

"Our tagline is 'exceptional made simple,' and so our goal was to communicate to meeting planners the three main services we offer—eat, meet, sleep—in a very straightforward manner," says Tony Rathgeber, conference services and events manager, of a print ad and coordinating marketing collateral push. "Life in Nebraska is simple. It's easy to get here, there aren't crowds, people are incredibly friendly, and costs are low," he furthers. "And in the same way we've worked hard to be a full-service venue with streamlined processes that can handle all aspects of an event on campus. We wanted a campaign to reflect that."

The headline and overall idea were crafted "relatively quickly" during a team brainstorming session, with the concept visually laid out by Andrea Zeiler, a graphic designer from the University

Communications department. In addition to the ad (which was kept clean with just two lines of copy and recognizable icons), UNL Conference Services also decided to send out a promotional item related to each of the three targeted services (dining, meeting space, and residential accommodations).

"The more difficult task was finding the right item to go with each part of the campaign," Rathgeber admits. "We offer quality services, and we needed items that could match up. At the same time they needed to be mailed relatively easily." The item for "Meet" was the easiest, says Rathgeber. "The notepad and pen seemed like a no-brainer, but to make the pen more appealing, we upgraded



it to a stylus pen." For "Eat," the team scrapped the original idea for a chocolate bar (which they feared could melt) for an Italian Garden Herb Kit that hinted at fine dining. And finally, for "Sleep," the team settled on a mask that become so popular, says Rathgeber, "We actually ended up ordering more of them because we thought they'd be a nice touch to leave in the rooms of our VIPs."

Each promotional item is sent two weeks apart (along with an insert with more info) in order to have more contact points with the planner. Because the ticket price of each piece is quite high (about three times the normal budget), UNL Conference Services also narrowed down a list of recipients to include only the planners that the department has had substantive contact with and that they believe will be solid prospects.

"We see this campaign as helping us close a deal by providing tangible, high-quality examples of our services that could help address some common hesitations planners might have about a new venue," says Rathgeber, who also hopes to continue the campaign into the near future. "Since it isn't intended to reach a large number of people, I hope to keep it around for a few years." *UniqueVenues.com/UnivNebraska* (402) 472.5063

RUNNERS UP: For marketing collateral—Boston
University (Boston, MA, UniqueVenues.com/BostonUniv),
Miami University Conference and Event Services (Oxford, OH,
UniqueVenues.com/MUOhio); For print ad—Boston University
(Boston, MA, UniqueVenues.com/BostonUniv), University of
Delaware (Newark, DE, UniqueVenues.com UnivDelawareNewark)

to heart and designed its official website (mac-events.org) with touches of their surroundings to make users feel at home when browsing.

"Our venue is architecturally unique and stunning with rich wood décor, dark copper colors, lots of natural light, and water features. We are very intentional about conveying that beauty and elegance on the website, taking cues from the building's architectural features to develop design elements and a color palette that is carried throughout," says Amy T. Leyden, director of marketing and sales. "We want planners to get a sense of what the space feels like before they've ever been in it."

McNamara Alumni Center's site was most recently redesigned in late 2014, focusing on importing larger photos (and less text) and more seamless navigation. On the homepage, three distinct sections are laid out-impress (for social events), marry (for the wedding market), and meet (for conferences and business functions)—clicking on one of the options funnels prospects to the appropriate section. The user will also find a whole host of relevant information, including sample floor plans and menus, photographs, recommended vendor partners, an FAQ section, availability calendar that pulls directly from the campus' booking software, package pricing, and virtual tours.

"We created our website with clients"

BEST WEBSITE

winner:

McNamara Alumni Center at the University of Minnesota (Minneapolis, MN)

One of the great things about the Internet is it can connect people from all over the world in a single place. McNamara Alumni Center at the University of Minnesota took that idea



BEST OF UNIQUE VENUES

questions in mind, and provided all the information they would need to help them make their decision," says Leyden, which in turn also helps provide more qualified leads for the more than 850 meetings and events that are held annually at the McNamara Alumni Center. "With that many booked events, we get a lot of inquiries. But now, many questions can be answered on the website, which means sales calls are filtered."

And the venue is not stopping there. "We will soon be adding video," says Leyden, and Google Street View. "The footage they shot was excellent and the virtual tours are linked to our meeting rooms."

UniqueVenues.com/mcnamara // (612) 625.8876

RUNNERS UP: Harbor Tower Events at Legg Mason Tower (Baltimore, MD, UniqueVenues.com/HarborTowerEvents), Spirit Fire Retreat Center (Leyden, MA, UniqueVenues.com/SpiritFire)

BEST SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

winner:

(TIE) Frost Valley YMCA (Claryville, NY) & NOAH's Event Venue (South Jordan, UT)

Social media is here to stay, but in such a crowded marketplace, it's the venues that develop the most unique strategies that end up becoming the leaders in gathering followers. "We use the 80/20 rule," says Amanda Hinski, director of marketing and communications at Frost Valley YMCA, one of two winners in this category recognized for their Facebook profile. "We provide 80 percent of our content with the goal of audience engagement, while 20 percent of our content is self-promotional," she explains.

If you do the math, that means the venue relies most on sharing curated features and infographics from sites like Soul Pancake, Kid President, and WHYY, "as well as local news stories that reflect our core values," says Hinski. "We feel this keeps us top-of-mind for our audience when they see that we're sharing the kinds of things they want to see each and every day." It's also pragmatic since Facebook doesn't give





as much reach to promotional content as it does to actual storytelling. "When people like, share, or comment on this content, that shows Facebook it belongs in people's newsfeeds."

These ideals have allowed Frost Valley YMCA to grow to more than 30,000 followers in just the last couple of years. The communications team posts several times a day, including a "Photo of the Day" in the morning, featured reading material in the afternoon, and less frequent evening posts that are boosted to push for event registration. In the future, the venue also helps to create more of its own story-based posts. "This may be more time intensive, but we have inspirational stories happening here every day,"

At NOAH's Event Venue, recognized in this category for their Twitter presence, the idea is to continually tweet and retweet every day, all day—and also share the wealth of posts across all platforms, says Kendalyn Hartsock, the venue's director of social media. "Anything we post to Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and our blog is also shared on Twitter." Specifically, the event venue conglomerate (with 37 locations in 25 states) has been using Twitter since late

2014 as part of their overall communications strategy. "We are building a brand, not just a following," says Hartsock.

Her team has come up with five parameters that guide all of their posts. First and foremost, to always include photos and videos. "If your posts don't have visuals, viewers probably won't even see it," she says. It's also imperative to have unique content every time and always share links to the main blog site. Being consistent is also key to make followers look forward to your posts. And giveaways always help.

In 2017, NOAH's Event Venue will look to expand their reach: "Snapchat is becoming a dominant platform," says Hartsock. "Our viewers are using it, and we want to be where they are. "W UniqueVenues.com/FrostValleyYMCA (845) 985.2291

UniqueVenues.com/NoahsSouthJordan (801) 357.9258

RUNNER UP: Morris Inn, University of Notre Dame (Notre Dame, IN, UniqueVenues.com/notredameconfcenter)

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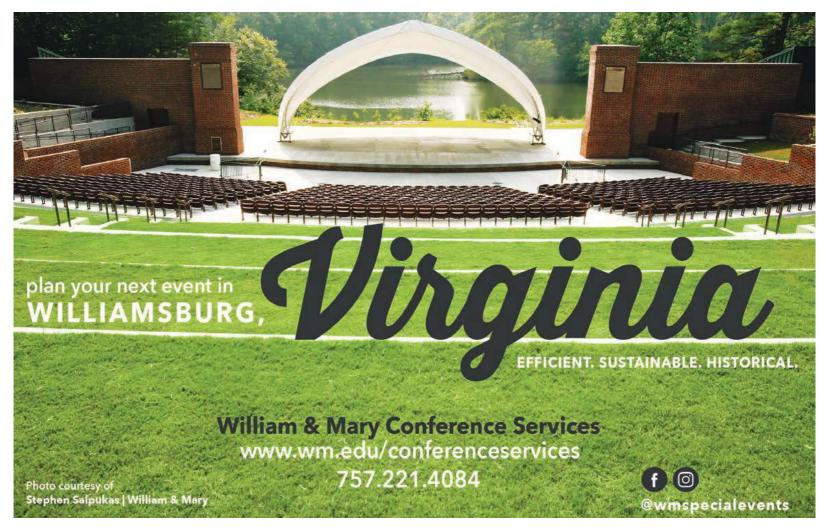
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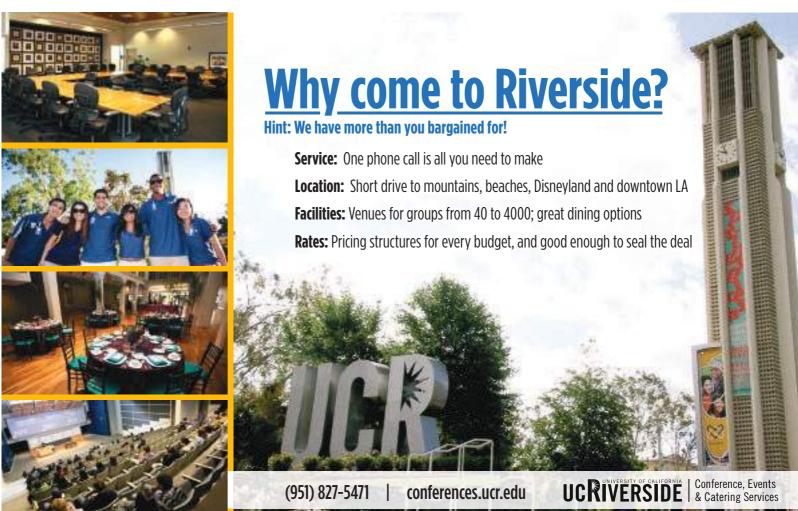
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Parsons Center // Phoenix uniquevenues.com/ParsonsCenter

Sea of Glass - Center for the Arts // Tucson uniquevenues.com/seaofglass

The Colonnade at Peoria Sports Complex // Peoria uniquevenues.com/PeoriaSportsComplex

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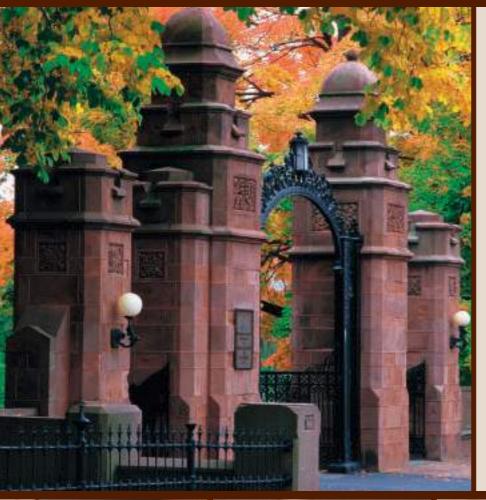
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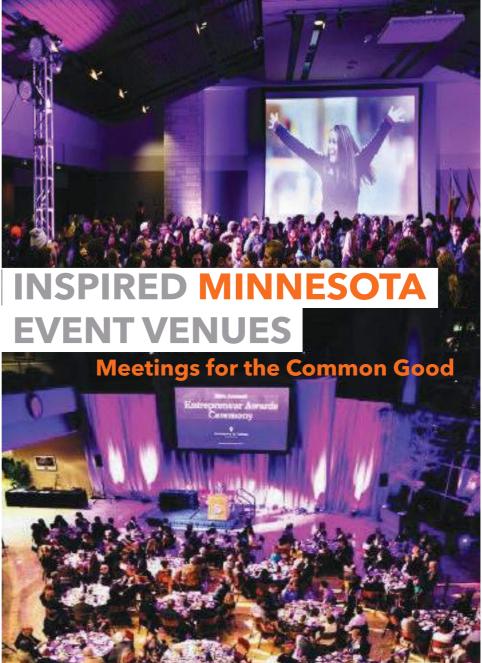
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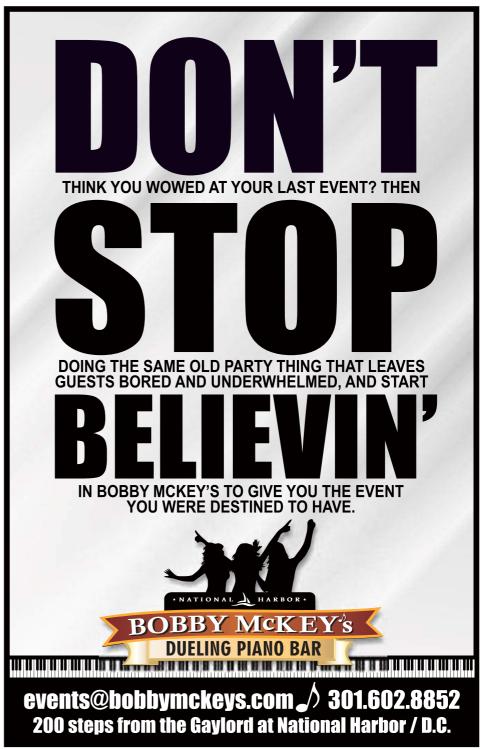
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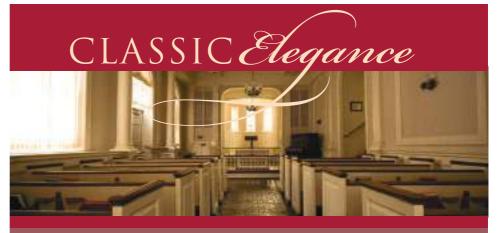




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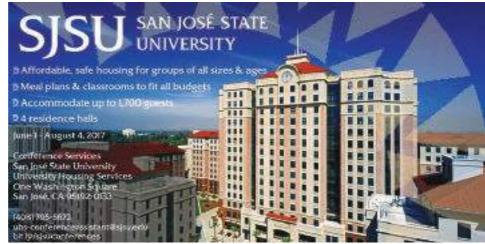


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Vancouver Lookout // Vancouver uniquevenues.ca/VancouverLookout

Waterview // Vancouver uniquevenues.ca/WaterviewBC

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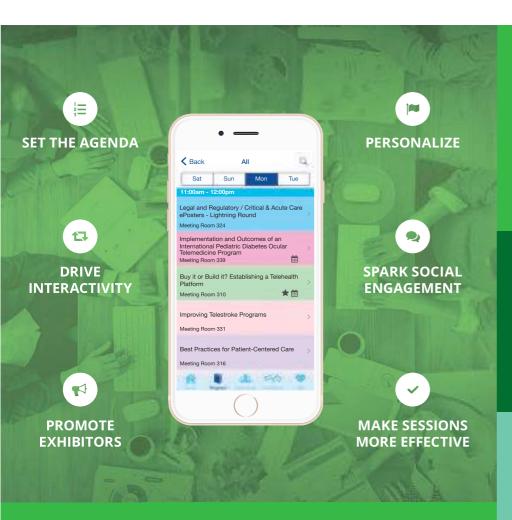
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REOPLE OF INTEREST

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

People which were

We couldn't choose just one person to recognize in 2016; instead, we honor our original members who have stuck by us for 30 years.

This year is a special one for Unique Venues. We are celebrating our 30th anniversary, which we could not have done without the support and collaboration of our earliest members. They were pioneers with us and stuck it out through recessions, uncertain times, and even as we moved from representing campuses to more market segments.

Our list begins with Cathy Grieve, the executive director of conference and event services at the University of Denver who has been with the university for nearly 40 years and was our very first client. Without her reaching out to ask how the university could get their name in the marketplace, we might not be here. We ask her, and our other early partners, to reflect back and tell us:

"WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHANGE YOU'VE SEEN IN THE INDUSTRY OR YOUR VENUE OVER THE PAST 30 YEARS?"

University of Denver

Thirty years ago, we struggled to have non-traditional events recognized as integral and valuable components of the university culture. Traditional events like commencements, convocations, athletics, and award ceremonies have always been recognized as important. However, over the years, high profile events such as the 2012 presidential debate, international conferences, and community outreach programs have all become imbedded within the mission. These events have increased exponentially and have been woven into the culture of the university. Now, Conference and Event Services manages a robust summer conference season, providing housing, dining, and event services to over 4,000 guests each season.



-CATHY GRIEVE, PhD, Executive Director, Conference and Event Services UniqueVenues.com/uofdenver // (303) 871.4333

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Twenty years ago, conference housing assignments at our university were planned and scheduled on huge, handwritten paper charts that filled whole walls from floor to ceiling. Changes could be a nightmare, entailing the messy erasing of penciled-in entries and manually moving assignments. As technology has become ubiquitous at all levels of our business, and subsequently streamlined our processes, it has raised the productivity of our operations by allowing our staff to provide more services and information more quickly and accurately to more clients. The leveraging of technology has helped grow our business at



a rate inconceivable in the analog era: We are better at what we do, and we do more of it.

-LEONARD O'CONNOR, General Manager, Conference Services UniqueVenues.com/UnivWashington // (206) 543.7636

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Conference schedules 20-30 years ago were primarily filled with internal campus groups or external athletic/cheerleading camps. Over the years we have added many professional organizations and international groups. Our level of service has changed significantly as well. We used to have a crew of students turn over units in between conference groups, and our idea of providing amenities was to put room keys on keychains. Now, we provide linens, professionally cleaned units, access to coffee shops and convenience stores on-site, and state-of-the-art meeting spaces

to provide comfortable facilities for our clients.



-CLAIRE DAVIS, Associate Director of Administrative Services UniqueVenues.com/CalStateNorthridge | (818) 677.4986

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA, LINCOLN

I feel like planners used to think that holding an event on a college campus meant they had to make a sacrifice, perhaps in quality of sleeping accommodations, meeting spaces, catering, or A/V equipment. Today, however, colleges and universities rival, or surpass, traditional meeting venues in all of these areas while still being budget-friendly and providing outstanding service.

I'm really proud of the progress we've made.



-TONY RATHGEBER, Assistant Director for Conference Services *UniqueVenues.com/UnivNebraska || (402) 472.5063*

UMASS AMHERST CONFERENCE SERVICES

In the early years, our biggest challenge was being able to work "outside the box" for groups that were not the traditional conference. So the biggest change we have noticed is the ability to be more flexible with the types of business we book, as well as being able to offer more competitive pricing when the need arises by working closely with our on-campus partners like Dining



Services, which was just ranked #1 Best Campus Food in the Nation by the *Princeton Review.*

-JENNYLYN FONTAINE, Director of Sales *UniqueVenues.com/UMassAmherst // (413) 577.8100*

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CENTER FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION, HOTEL AND CONFERENCE CENTER

Thirty years ago women were an obvious minority of the executives attending conferences. As well, events in general were longer, and educational content often utilized the resources of the university. Conference "homework assignments" meant that providing desks in hotel rooms for writing was important since there were no laptops or smart devices yet. Today, our mission continues as a facility for adult education, but we have adapted our business model to meet the needs of the many organizations that now create their own educational content. In addition to continuing to provide programs, we also offer our

facility to the public to engage in this mission.



-ELIZABETH J. HOVELL, JD, CGMP, Department Head, Sales and Event Coordination Division UniqueVenues.com/ugcce // (706) 542.1044

TRINITY UNIVERSITY

Certainly the entire evolution of technology has had an incredible impact on the venues and the industry as a whole when print materials were primary and contact was done via telephone and/ or fax. What is now called "networking" was even a challenge because the technology was just not there. Thirty years ago, it was also a challenge to "sell" conference office operations to one's administration. Now, a meeting planner can go to a venue's

website and get the information they need to begin the decision-making process.

-ANN KNOFREL Former Assistant Vice Presidents

-ANN KNOEBEL, Former Assistant Vice President *UniqueVenues.com/trinityuniversity || (210) 999.7601*

PEOPLE OF INTEREST

BY SELENA FRAGASSI

"WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHANGE YOU'VE SEEN IN THE INDUSTRY OR YOUR VENUE OVER THE PAST 30 YEARS?"

THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY

One of the biggest changes is that on-campus conferences, camps, and events have grown from fledgling program offices into full-service meeting planning departments. We've emerged as an asset to colleges and universities and become part of a multi-million dollar industry. When we were first starting out, we were a small independent office that really only did events in the summer working around construction and other projects. Now we are an integral part of the planning process for the campus and hold events year-round. Conference planning is a much more collaborative experience now, which benefits

the campus as well as our many guests.



- MARIELLYNN D. MAURER, CCEP, Director of Conference Services UniqueVenues.com/WilliamandMary // (757) 221.4084

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

In 1979, OSU opened The LaSells Stewart Center, a conference and performing arts center, based on the vision of a group of alumni. The first year of business, the center hosted maybe 50 events, but over time we built the business and showed its value on campus. In 2002, Conference Services was born out of the need for faculty and staff to host regional, national, and international conferences, events, and symposia. It's amazing to think that from the idea of alumni wanting to have a performing arts center, we now have two venues and a headquarter hotel each hosting more than 150,000 people through our doors.

-DONNA WILLIAMS, Associate Director, Conference Services *UniqueVenues.com/OregonState || (541) 737.9820*

UCLA

When I started in collegiate conferencing, the majority of communication was still done through fax machines, mail, and phone calls. Today, fax machines have been replaced by pictures taken with an iPhone. Contracts are still handled via e-mail, but they are just as often photographed and sent via iPhone. So, communications have become a lot easier and cheaper. In addition, there is a never-ending number of summer teen programs that are trying to reach every possible niche in experiential education while the tour business has dried up.

曹

Teens want more exotic or unique experiences because they have become more sophisticated.

-JASON WALLEY, Director of Sales at UCLA Conference Services & UCLA Catering *UniqueVenues.com/ucla* // (888) 825.5305

HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY

Not long ago, planners only needed mailers, print ads, and brochures to market their venue. Today, it's important to add a social media component, including a Facebook page, Instagram, Flickr, and other online outlets for marketing and promotion. Many planners miss the old way of doing business and actually handing someone a sales kit, but keeping up with the times and maintaining an online presence is a more efficient way of networking and promotion—potential clients can easily see our spaces on our website from anywhere in the country and around the world. This opens up our venue for more opportunities. At the same time, however, for the new generation of planners it's important to remember that a phone call or a face-to-face interaction with a customer helps to build

stronger and long-lasting business relationships.



-JESSIE GARCIA, Associate Director of Event Management UniqueVenues.com/hofstra // (516) 463.5066

PURDUE UNIVERSITY

Online registration is by far the biggest and best change the industry has seen. The transition to digital technology and on demand services through mobile apps has been a positive change in general. But the ability for attendees to register online, from anywhere that is convenient to them, and also get instant confirmation has been the real difference maker. Not only does it allow for drastic reductions in pre-event accounts receivable, but as event producers, we are able to begin the customer experience long before they arrive on-site, which sets the stage for the rest of the event. It also allows for better control of space usage, transportation needs, and

food and beverage to eliminate waste and keep costs down—all in real time.

-NICK BONORA, Director, Purdue Conferences *UniqueVenues.com/Purdue // (765) 496.6632*



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