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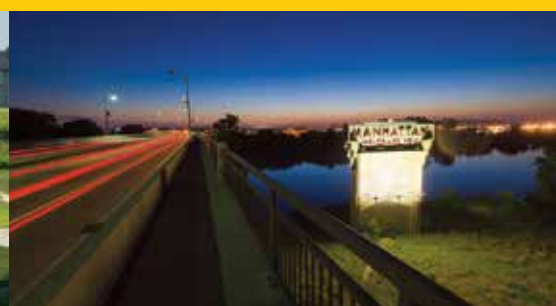


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Winter 2020

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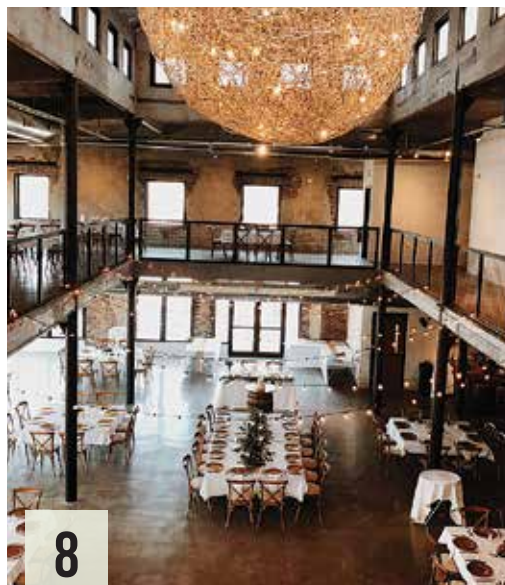
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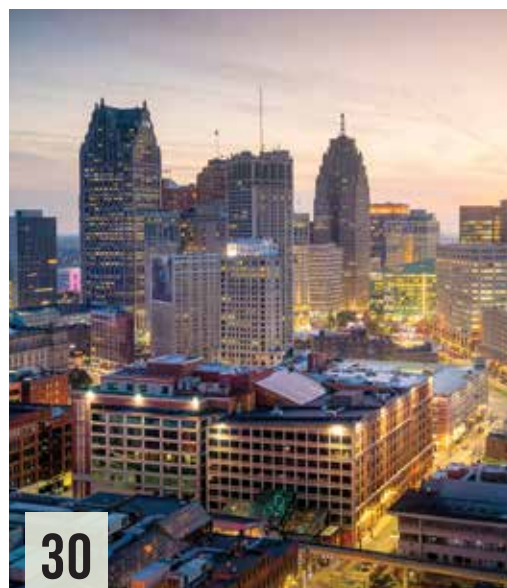
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From scenic lakefront and wilderness to golf course and chic urban, discover the variety of settings Michigan offers to groups.



ON THE COVER: CVBs are ready and willing to partner with you.

From the Editor

"When will meetings come back?"

If we've been asked this once, we've been asked it a hundred times!

However, for those of us involved in the industry, we know that meetings are still taking place and have been since the pandemic first began earlier this year.

Granted, we had to make some severe pivots initially, and it may still be awhile before large groups will be able to gather safely.

Some of us may have had crash courses in new technologies, while others have had to create and test new strategies for communicating, engaging and connecting with our clients in safe, distanced ways.

However, with news of three possible vaccines that may soon become available, there's optimism that the "return" to in-person events may be closer than we had originally anticipated. While we still have many obstacles to overcome, our clients, teams and co-workers are eager to start meeting again. And as professionals, we will help them do so safely and effectively.

So as this unprecedented year comes to a close, we share in the optimism of all that we have experienced and learned this year, and that we may never take for granted those people and values we hold dear.

On a separate note, you may have noticed some of the changes taking place in the pages of this issue of Midwest Meetings. Publisher Randy Hennen launched this publication more than 20 years ago. Through the years, he has brought much deserved attention to the many great, value-oriented, customer service-driven destinations in the Midwest that are perfect choices for meetings and conventions, but sometimes have been overlooked for the glitz and glam of larger cities. In September, Randy decided to step down to pursue other interests, and Nei-Turner Media Group stepped in to take over publishing of the magazine. Despite these behind the scenes changes, we are committed to continuing the mission of Midwest Meetings by providing engaging, helpful and informative content that gives you the tools to plan successful, cost-effective and memorable meetings and events.

Have a story idea to share? Or maybe news from your organization? We want to hear about it. Please email me directly at bpeck@ntmediagroup.com.

Regards,



Becky Peck
Editor



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or better yet, give it to a friend.

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SOUTHWEST AIRLINES ADDS O'HARE TO ITS ROUTE

Beginning in February, Southwest will start flying in and out of Chicago's O'Hare Airport. The airline has served Chicago's Midway Airport for 35 years. The airline added Colorado Springs to its routes as well.

The airline's initial flight schedule from O'Hare has 20 daily departures to Baltimore, Dallas, Denver, Phoenix and Nashville.

"Our low fares and friendly policies, like no change fees and bags fly free, mean more today as they give people the peace of mind to book travel beyond 2020. We're growing the reach of Southwest as we add more destinations across the United States while bringing our warm hospitality and iconic customer service to more people than ever before," said Andrew Watterson, Southwest Airlines chief commercial officer and executive vice president. "These additional investments in Chicago and Colorado provide even more convenience for our current customers while also making it more convenient for new travelers to choose Southwest as we begin service from their preferred airport."



MADISON'S DEB ARCHER TO RETIRE

After 25 years serving with Destination Madison, Deb Archer is retiring. In a letter Archer wrote to Destination Madison partners, she said she would depart her role at the end of 2020 to focus on traveling with her husband and spending time with her first grandchild.

"I know this may not seem like an ideal time for me to depart the organization, but honestly, I think it could prove to be an ideal time. As our community and industry strives to recover, there is an amazingly talented group of professionals at Destination

Madison and we have a board and industry and community partners that most organizations like ours would covet. Together with an industry that is eager, hungry and creative, with new leadership, I know this destination will emerge as a leader and sought-after place to hold meetings, sports events and spend leisure time."

Archer added: "After two-plus decades in this position, I am hopeful that one of the legacies I leave is a community that understands and values visitors and the visitor economy more than when I began. Visitors are truly the lifeblood of many communities and when visitors begin to return to greater Madison, our region — and the businesses and workers we all rely on for much of our enjoyment and pride will begin to revive and recover."



DETROIT METRO CVB NAMES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Claude Molinari, general manager of TCF Center, has been named president and CEO of the Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau (DMCVB), effective January 1. He will succeed current president and CEO Larry Alexander who is retiring at year end after 22 years at the helm of the DMCVB.

In his new role, Molinari will be responsible for developing the strategic direction and overseeing the operations of the DMCVB. He will provide the leadership and direction necessary to enable the DMCVB to bring meetings and conventions, leisure and business visitors to metropolitan Detroit and accelerate economic growth. He will lead the creation of the annual sales and marketing plan of the DMCVB, which outlines the direction the DMCVB will take to attract tourism and meetings business to the region.

Molinari will also oversee the direction of the Detroit Sports Commission [a DMCVB subsidiary], which is responsible for securing amateur sports for the entire region.

In his current role at TCF Center, Molinari is responsible for managing the day-to-day operation and also business development of the 17th largest convention center in North America.



NEW BOUTIQUE OPENS IN AMANA COLONIES

A new boutique hotel opened in October in Iowa's Amana Colonies. Hotel Millwright was created from a historic woolen mill that once produced yards of fabric for clothing and linens. With 65 elegantly appointed guest rooms, a farm-to-table restaurant and craft whiskey bar, Hotel Millwright offers unique event opportunities for couples, groups of friends and family members, and professionals. The hotel blends old with new and guests will find many of the mill's original features preserved, including exposed brick walls, scarred hardwood floors, and various mill tools and machines. Photos of the mill's workforce line the walls, including the sheep who contributed the wool. The history of the location and its original use is incorporated into guest rooms, as well as the hotel's restaurant, the Indigo Room; bar, the Electric Thread Social Club; and event rooms, the Merino Loft and Carding Studio.

The hotel's event rooms, the same rooms where mill workers once toiled, offer huge windows, gorgeous natural light, exposed fixtures and verdant views for miles. The Merino Loft (7,000 square feet) accommodates up to 225 guests, and the Carding Studio (1,000 square feet), up to 65 guests.

JW MARRIOTT GRAND RAPIDS RESTAURANT REOPENS

Margaux, located on the first floor of the JW Marriott in downtown Grand Rapids, recently reopened for indoor dining for lunch, brunch and dinner with a refreshed design and new menus. The updated interiors boast a modern-yet-comfortable Parisian aesthetic, with velvet and tufted upholstery, exposed grey brick, brushed metal finishes, dramatic draping and a sleek marble bar.

New menu items include Short Rib à la Bourguignonne, a red-wine braised beef short rib with carrots, pearl onions, button mushrooms, bacon lardon and potato puree; a classic Steak Frites Café de Paris, or charred strip steak with black truffle fries and herb butter; and a Scottish salmon wrapped in flaky pastry in a white wine sauce. On top of the restaurant's extensive wine list, inventive new cocktails include the Eiffel Tower, Stoli vodka, St. George spiced pear, honey, lime and sparkling

wine; and Vieux Carre, Rittenhouse rye, Courvoisier, Dolin sweet vermouth, Benedictine, and angostura and Peychaud's bitters.

VISIT KC'S CONTRACT EXTENDED

The City of Kansas City, Mo., has awarded a five-year contract extension to Visit KC as its official destination management organization. Effective May 1, 2021, with the option to renew for an additional year at the city's discretion, the new agreement was approved recently by the City Council.

"Visit KC's relationship with the city is critical to its day-to-day operations and the continued recovery of our local economy," said Visit KC Chair Cindy Circo of Evergy. "In addition to recognizing the dedication and commitment of our President Jason Fulvi and his tremendous staff during these unprecedented times, I'd like to personally acknowledge and thank the mayor, the Finance Committee and the entire City Council for their continued support and today's vote of confidence. For the next five years and beyond, we look forward to continuing our mission of igniting global passion for Kansas City."

As outlined in the new agreement, the city will measure Visit KC's performance on a quarterly basis

through several key metrics in the areas of sales and marketing, convention and visitor services, and the operations of the KC Film Office.

State law requires Kansas City to appropriate and pay a portion of funds collected from the Convention & Tourism Tax to a contracted non-profit entity for the purpose of convention and tourism promotion.



MILWAUKEE'S SAINT KATE REOPENS

Saint Kate – The Arts Hotel, located in downtown Milwaukee, reopened in November for overnight guests. The hotel's main floor has been open since the end of June, allowing guests to peruse current art exhibitions. The property's restaurant (Proof Pizza) and bar have been open as well.

The 219-room property has received numerous awards, including Conde Nast Traveler's 2020 Readers' Choice Award and one of the Top 10 Best New Hotels by USA Today, since opening in June 2019. Saint Kate is owned and operated by Marcus Hotels & Resorts.

RADISSON LA CROSSE ADDS WEFRAME ONE TECHNOLOGY

weframe One technology is now being offered for the next generation of meetings at the Radisson Hotel La Crosse, the first hotel in Wisconsin to offer this up-and-coming meeting capability to its clients. The weframe One technology allows meeting planners to create a hybrid meeting to accommodate both in person and virtual attendance. Virtual attendees will be part of a secure, interactive video conferencing and screen sharing service which provides all attending the ability to collaborate and contribute to the discussion. The system easily captures and distributes information to those joined into the meeting by using a cloud-based technology. Whether attendees are in the conference room or engaged via laptop or smartphone, participants can submit questions or share ideas immediately by sending pictures, notes or videos to the weframe One system. *M*



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A Planner With a Purpose

Catching up with Naomi Tucker, 25 years of industry experience leads her to a new purpose in planning.

BY MAURA KELLER

When Naomi Tucker, CMP, HMCC, fell into the wonderful industry of meeting planning over 25 years ago, she began by working in hospitality at a prominent hotel chain. And although she enjoyed that area of expertise, she found her heart continually tugging at her to become a planner within the event industry. So she hung up her proverbial 'hospitality hat' in one area of the industry and donned another — that of meeting planner. Ultimately, her journey allowed her to spend time in a series of meeting planner roles, each one leading her to the role she embraces today — account director at Meetings & Incentives Worldwide.



"This is a very balanced role for me, as I'm responsible for ensuring our teams are putting out the highest level of service to our clients," Tucker says. "And on the other hand, I'm ensuring not only my clients' satisfaction, but also providing insights on process improvements and other enhancements that will improve their meetings programs."

Part of any meeting planner's role is being involved in a team, and for Tucker, her team is what keeps her motivated and engaged in an ever-evolving industry. "I enjoy working with my team. They are truly the best in the business," Tucker says. "I just love how much we learn from each other, and put challenges ahead of ourselves to keep us trending forward. I'm excited every day to get up and see what's new on the horizon because every day is different."

Indeed, and as the world continues to grapple with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Tucker recognizes the tremendous number of challenges facing meeting planners throughout the industry as well as those within Meetings & Incentives Worldwide.

Like many organizations, COVID-19 hit the industry hard in March and Tucker recognizes the challenges companies and organizations, as well as meeting planners, have faced.

"It was a tough time; however, we've seen tremendous support from our clients, and also have seen some surprise growth in business with several of our clients," Tucker says. "We have been challenged to support in ways that we hadn't in the past, but we have jumped at the opportunity. We remain strong, and are looking forward to getting folks back in ballrooms again."

In her efforts to offset the ongoing frustration and anxiety that the COVID-19 climate is causing, Tucker works to make sure that the Meetings & Incentives teams feel supported and encouraged during this challenging time. "This is a time where the industry feels much challenge with learning new technologies and providing services within uncertainty," Tucker says. "I understand that mental health and wellbeing are extremely important during this challenging time."

When not helping meetings teams put their strategic foot forward in meeting their clients' needs, Tucker can be found working on her other adventure, growing her project Planners on Purpose, an organization that "empowers event planners to stress less and live more."

As Tucker explains, Planners on Purpose sees there is tremendous need for enhanced wellness in the meetings and events industry, which provides tangible results.

"Event planning remains one of the most stressful jobs in the world, and I would like to help contribute to the industry to change this alongside others that already are," Tucker says. "Many event planners love their jobs, but it doesn't have to come with overwhelm and stress. Planners on Purpose will help through guidance, resources and coaching services."

Specifically, in addition to offering insights via a blog, podcast and book club, Tucker works individually with fellow meeting planners as a certified business and life coach — helping meeting planners find more meaning in their lives, prioritizing their personal and professional goals while creating a healthy work-life balance.

"I'm trying to impact the meetings and events industry one person at a time — by listening, by sharing and by helping if my help is needed," Tucker says. With that said, Tucker also supports industry professionals as a past-president and active member of MPI-Wisconsin. Additionally, she embraces her role on the advisory board for the Fox Cities Technical College Event Industry and Hospitality programs. And she also serves on the Knowledge Committee for the Events Industry Council.

"I think everyone wants to get back to meeting in person, and getting on the road! So I'm just ever so hopeful that the pandemic is on the way out, and that people will start to meet, and engage, again very soon," Tucker says. "My hope is that I can continue to lend a hand alongside others to help impact our industry in a positive way." *M*

Venues with a Wow Factor

Whether it's a historic setting, beautiful view or architectural character, these spaces deliver a unique setting that your guests won't soon forget.

BY AMY WUNDERLIN

DOWNTOWN MARKET Grand Rapids, Mich. downtownmarketgr.com

Downtown Market in Grand Rapids, Mich., was originally created with the purpose of bringing entrepreneurship to local businesses. The 138,000-square-foot market brings together local food production, education and entrepreneurship opportunities. In addition to its event spaces, the facility features more than 20 vendors, two full-service restaurants, a rentable incubator kitchen and rooftop greenhouses.



Downtown Market

"The big focus of our business is to weave together a traditional hospitality mindset and a hyper-local entrepreneurial food culture," explains Kate Burke, the venue's director of sales and private events.

"We want to make sure that we are always giving people the ability to convey a message but in a way that stimulates better engagement, excitement and brings people into a unique space," she adds.

The venue offers five event spaces, including the Banquet Room (up to 250 people), two meeting rooms (12 people), and the Greenhouse and Garden Room (up to 250 people). The Greenhouse, which is arguably the most unique aspect of Downtown Market, was not originally meant to be a meeting space until people started showing interest in hosting events there.

Burke says that after revisiting the idea, they decided to go for it. "We have this big space with beautiful windows, amazing plants, great oxygen — all of the things that meeting planners are looking for. We've transformed that space, so while it is still a live functioning greenhouse, it is now a place where people can meet and get a new perspective on the conversations they're already having," she adds.

All events at the venue are catered in-house by the market hall tenants, giving people 20 different options ranging from barbecue to tacos to Thai.

Also of note is Downtown Market's location in the heart of Beer City. The venue is within walking distance of several breweries and is in close proximity to the downtown convention center and the DASH line, a free transportation service in Grand Rapids.



River Center

RIVER CENTER Des Moines, Iowa rivercenterdsm.com

Long before it was home to weddings, banquets and trade shows, the River Center in Des Moines, Iowa, held a unique history of its own. Originally constructed in 1915 as an expansion of the Des Moines Brewing Company, the building has also operated as a furnace company, door company and various manufacturing facilities. This industrial past is what now makes the venue a popular choice for events of all types.

In 2017, the building was remodeled with a design to honor its history. High ceilings, exposed brick walls and reclaimed wood details can be seen throughout. Antique light fixtures and additional industrial influences further add to the River Center's historic, rustic charm.

The facility can accommodate up to 600 guests and features a grand main floor, large mezzanine overlooking the main floor, a private suite and a covered patio. The outdoor patio is one of the venue's most impressive features, as it faces Principal Park, a minor league stadium home to the Iowa Cubs, and offers beautiful views of the Des Moines skyline. The Iowa State Capitol building can also be seen from the patio, with the bustling Court Avenue District just steps away.

In addition, the River Center offers an in-house kitchen and full staff. The venue's on-site chef Diego Critelli can customize any menu. Critelli is a native of Padua, Italy, and has worked as a sommelier and chef in kitchens all over the world — from Paris to the UK. The River Center also offers high-end dessert options from executive pastry chef Nike Pugmire, who brings a decade of global pastry experience from luxury hotels and restaurants.

BRICK HOUSE BLUE Dublin, Ohio brickhouseblue.com

Forget the days of coffee shop meetings and hotel events. That is the idea behind Brick House

Blue, a new meeting and event facility hoping to revolutionize how companies look at office and meeting space. Located in Dublin, Ohio, the venue offers a mix of collaborative co-working spaces, executive suites and private offices.

Whether you are planning off-site team building for 200 or hosting an important meeting for two, Brick House Blue's modern rooms featuring natural green walls, organic teas and creative seating arrangements create both a calming energy and memorable experience.

"Our collaborative spaces provide everything teams need to create a day of focus and productivity. From the moment you arrive on-site, we're here to help you plug in and start the day," explains Katherine Gioffre, Brick House Blue's director of growth.

Brick House Blue offers five room choices, which include the Jukebox room (32-100 people), Blues Room (up to 40 people), Jazz Room (up to 40 people), Classic Rock Room (up to 25 people) and huddle rooms (1-5 people).

Each room is equipped with state-of-the-art A/V, including HD monitors, phone and video conferencing equipment, and surround sound speakers. Rooms

also offer snacks and beverages, ergonomic furniture and lounge furniture, floor-to-ceiling idea paint walls and other various meeting essentials.



Vennebu Hills

VENNEBU HILL
Baraboo, Wis.
vennebuhill.com

Overlooking the picturesque bluffs of the Wisconsin River, Vennebu Hill breathes rustic charm. Named after a Norwegian term meaning "a gathering place for friends and family," the venue fulfills this promise with its Norwegian-inspired barn outfitted with modern amenities.

The year-round venue offers both indoor and outdoor space. The two main indoor spaces can seat up to 325 people and feature a 2,800-square-foot upper level and a 5,700-square-foot lower level. Outside, a 4,500-square-foot patio area is made up of three separate ceremony, dining and cocktail spaces.

The facility is fully equipped with audio-visual capabilities, including in-house sound, lighting and large screens for presentations. It also includes a full commercial kitchen space with warming capabilities, two get-ready rooms, a coat closet and lobby. Additionally, Vennebu Hill provides full in-house bar services and can supply all needed barware, china, flatware, glassware and linens.

But what truly sets Vennebu Hill apart is its location. Located on a hill between quaint Baraboo and the tourist town of Wisconsin Dells, the landscape surrounding the barn cannot be beat. Views of the Baraboo Bluffs along the Wisconsin River and more than 60 acres of beautiful farmland make Vennebu Hill a venue your guests will not soon forget. *M*

Amy Wunderlin is a freelance writer based in Fort Atkinson, Wis.

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Curating an Inclusive Event

Inclusivity is much more than gluten-free menu options and diverse speaker panels. Planners need to consider all aspects of their events from who they include in the planning process, to the site, to marketing and beyond.

BY SHELBY ROWE MOYER



We've all heard event planning horror stories — a mishap that had guests raising their eyebrows or feeling excluded. Most, if not all event planners not only want attendees to have a good time but to also feel welcomed and included.

Accommodation isn't the same as inclusion, so here are some ways to help ensure your event caters to everyone who wants to attend.

ACCESSIBILITY

When it comes to accessibility, venues are usually top of mind, and because theaters, arenas, hotels and convention centers are required to meet ADA standards, those venues are a good place to start. But there's much more to consider in creating an inclusive environment for differently abled guests.

If this is an in-person event, during the registration process, ask your guests if they have any accessibility needs and give a deadline so you can plan accordingly.

When designing how guests will flow through your event space, consider how a person with a wheelchair, scooter, cane or vision impairments might need to navigate the area. Think about the entrance, the

flooring, the table heights and the step-and-repeat, to name a few. Make sure the flow of traffic between and around vendors is wide enough for people to comfortably move through. The same applies to sit-down events — chairs and tables should be spaced out.

If there are any video components, make sure they're captioned so people who are hearing impaired can participate — something to keep in mind for virtual events as well.

SPONSORSHIPS AND VENDORS

Event sponsors often get left out of the diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) conversation. Event sponsors can be integral to the success of an event but be mindful that those sponsors align with your DEI values.

When it comes to hiring your vendors — caterers, A/V, décor, security, entertainment, etc. — do some research to see if there are minority-, women- or LGBTQ-owned vendor businesses in your area.

It's important to have a wide variety of perspectives involved in the entire event process (this goes for the event planning team as well). Including people from all different backgrounds helps ensure your event is truly inclusive — from the décor, to the food and beverage, to the entertainment, to the sound and video. They might think of a detail that would never cross your mind, and that's why diversity is important.

THE LITTLE THINGS MATTER

A detail as mundane as gendered bathrooms or an attendee questionnaire that asks about pronouns or ethnic backgrounds can be offensive or disheartening without proper consideration. Instead of having male and female bathrooms, consider making them gender-free, or post a friendly sign encouraging guests to use the bathroom they feel best aligns with themselves.

If you're going to ask guests any personal information, like their gender or ethnic background, consider allowing guests to write in their own answer as opposed to multiple-choice, that way you don't pigeon-hole anyone's response.

POST EVENT SURVEY

We all want to know what guests thought about the event. Along with your typical questions, be sure to ask guests how they felt you met their accessibility needs and whether they felt it was inclusive. Be specific — ask about the speakers, the catering, the venue, the sound and video, etc. *M*

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Kearney is typically home to more than 1,350 events a year. Everything from large conferences to state and regional sporting events as well as a number of smaller professional and educational meetings come to town every year.

The reason is simple. In Kearney you'll find a combination of excellent facilities, complimentary services, and welcoming hospitality that just isn't available anywhere else in the Midwest.

Throughout Kearney, you'll find professional staff and volunteers committed to ensuring that your event is a success. Incorporate that with over 350,000 square feet of flexible meeting space and more than 1,900 rooms that will work for any group and any budget; you'll see why Kearney is the premier host community of the Heartland.

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Kearney's newest convention space, Younes Center North, adds an additional 56,000 square feet on top of what was already the largest meeting space between Omaha and Denver. Opening in Fall of 2021 it comes complete with an attached Crowne Plaza hotel, national coffee shop and a bistro for your dining pleasure.

If you're interested in learning more about how Kearney can help make your next event a success, contact Sarah Focke. sfocke@visitkearney.org | 308-237-3170

For a full listing of meeting space, visit MeetInKearney.com.

Five Best Bets for Virtual Meetings

Maximize your attendees' experience as you pivot your events with suggestions from these professionals.

BY AMANDA N. WEGNER



The pandemic has changed the face of business in innumerable ways, and that includes how we hold meetings and events.

"We've had to redesign the way we think about, design and produce meetings," says Joe Faulder, director of creative and strategy at Projection, a privately held national audiovisual company. "In virtual events, people consume content in an entirely different way; whether it's on a phone, tablet, laptop or TV, they are logging on from their homes while their attention is pulled in multiple directions." He adds that much of his company's strategic work is helping clients understand that there's still value in what they deliver, even if it's at home and participants are distracted.

Companies, organizations and associations have no choice but to pivot their meetings and events for the foreseeable future. To help smooth out that transition, we've talked to a few experts to get their insight on how to best approach this shift and offer some tools for consideration.

FINDING YOUR PLATFORM

So what platform is best? The answer is that it depends.

"This is one question we get all the time in this new world of virtual meetings and is the hardest to answer," says Faulder. "The reason: It's really hard to find one platform that meets all needs for a typical large association meeting; each comes with their own pros and cons."

Rich Schmig, president of Plum Media, agrees. [Plum Media is a full-service production company creating a wide variety of videos and live events. It is based in Milwaukee, Wis.]

"The choice of platform is driven by client needs.... We ask questions like: How many presenters will there be, are they presenting one after the other or having a conversation, and what other visuals are involved, [like] pre-recorded videos, PowerPoint slides, etc.?" Schmig explains.

While the platform you choose should be based on all the factors (and more) listed above, here are some suggestions to get you started.

BEST FOR VIRTUAL NETWORKING AND RECEPTIONS:

- **Wonder:** Even though the platform is free and still in development, they have captured the ability to mingle in small groups while attending an event of thousands brilliantly, says Faulder.
- **Zoom:** It has a new breakout feature where attendees can choose the breakouts they want to attend, so you can have a networking Zoom meeting for 200 people who can quickly break out into 10 different areas/interests, and attendees can choose which one they'd like to participate in.

BEST FOR EXHIBIT HALLS:

- 6Connex and vFairs

BEST FOR WEBINARS:

- Zoom and BigMarker

BEST FOR LARGE EVENTS:

- Intrado and MeetingPlay

BEST LIVESTREAM PROVIDERS:

- **Vimeo, BoxCast, IBM Cloud and BrightCove:** Some platforms don't provide the video technology but rather a web interface to deliver content, so the company/organization/association still needs a production partner and video to support webcasts, live streams and presenters. These back-end streaming services can distribute content to the platform and/or to any social media platform at the same time.

BEST FOR VIEWING CONTENT DURING A LIVE VIDEO CHAT

SwapCard offers the ability to view content while in live video chats with other video attendees, so you can experience content in a group. But there's a caveat. They currently only support this functionality with two video chat attendees at once, but the company has said it will be releasing an update to accommodate larger groups.

MAXIMIZE THE VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE

As your company or association looks to expand

or innovate its virtual meetings and events, our professionals offer some suggestions for maximizing the experience.

Build in some fun: “People participate much more when they’re having fun,” says Faulder. For instance, a recent national association meeting Projection worked on included a live concert with Jennifer Hudson, a cooking lesson with Wolfgang Puck and game show-like trivia, where all attendees could participate.

Ensure proper presenter training: Walk each presenter through everything they need to know — audio, platform interface, event logistics, etc. — to deliver their content in a seamless, high-quality manner. And don’t forget eye contact: “Nothing makes an attendee lose attention more than when the presenter does not look them in the eye when they’re giving their remarks through a computer,” says Faulder.

Make it engaging: “Ensure you have new, exciting content available that is relevant to the attendees,” says Ryan Pitterle, product manager for NEC Display Solutions of America. “If the content is stale and has been shared before, attendance ... might be lower than expected. In this virtual environment, there needs to be a draw for attendees to click ‘Attend.’”

In addition, make sure that there is a way for attendees to engage with each other in every single session, and that attendees and speakers/presenters have a means to engage. “Don’t create an event where attendees are talked at,” says Pitterle. “Make it interactive and as close to in-person as possible.”

And if the budget allows, consider giveaways.

Remember that everything speaks: “You’ll be judged not just by the content of your virtual event, but by how it looks, how it sounds and how visually engaging it is,” says Schmig.

When planning an online meeting, ask yourself what you want the attendees to get out of the meeting: Information? Inspiration? Share ideas? Once you have that figured out, then design your event’s content and interaction around that.

And don’t forget about the remote, non-content aspects of your event.

“Your remote audience’s experience is paramount to how they will engage with your content.

“Overlooked things like the landing page, ease of getting access, providing ample information on

what the audience should expect and providing audience troubleshooting are things that are just as important as the content of the show.”

PLATFORM CONSIDERATIONS

When looking for a virtual meeting platform, Pitterle offers a list of features and requirements to consider:

- Easy, user-friendly navigation
- Enough bandwidth to support large events
- The ability to interact with speakers and other attendees; breakout rooms are ideal for continuing conversations
- An option for attendees to create their own agenda (add meetings, attend specific presentations, etc.) to their own calendar
- If applicable, a section for exhibitors to showcase products, brochures, videos and white papers — with downloadable links and actionable steps for more information
- The ability to track leads, especially what the user clicks on
- A how-to video on interacting on the platform to ensure every attendee gets the most out of it based on their individual needs. *M*

Amanda Wegner is a freelance writer who writes for a number of B2B and consumer publications from her home in Wisconsin.

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Value Proposition

Having a high-powered speaker at your virtual event might be what attendees need — and may be more affordable now than before.

BY SHELBY ROWE MOYER



It was scary when COVID-19 first hit, says Cheri Neal, president of the National Speaker Association-Wisconsin chapter.

Speaking engagements in March and April events were wiped away or replaced with virtual conferences — and that was almost as nerve-wrecking.

"A lot of people panicked, because we're used to being in front of people, and the thought of [speaking to a crowd] online was kind of mortifying," she says. "But we had a few champions that really embraced it, and not just embraced it but they're really having a ball with it."

Large-scale events will likely be impossible for quite a while, but there's still a need to host conferences and meetings, and incorporating independent speakers is a great way to capture your audience and hold their attention — especially now that attendees are so easily distracted.

Neal, who has been on the public speaking circuit for several years, says professional speakers are adapting their presentations with the understanding that their usual stories likely won't resonate in a virtual audience format. Neal says she probably put 100 hours into revamping each of her presentations, with several rounds of practice and feedback sessions within her personal sphere.

"To really land your talk — and help people feel engaged — I go for a shift in people," she says. "It's not enough to impart information. We want them to think differently."

Professional speakers, especially members with NSA-Wisconsin, are doing a lot of front-end leg work to understand who will be in the audience and what they hope to gain, Neal says. Professionals are also incorporating photos, videos, music, live polls and chat rooms to mix things up and interact with attendees.

"To really land your talk — and help people feel engaged — I go for a shift in people. It's not enough to impart information. We want them to think differently."

—Cherie Neal,
President, NSA-Wisconsin

The value of speakers comes from their ability to revive audience members' mindsets, and Neal says she understands this firsthand. A few years ago, she started bringing her whole staff to a leadership building conference, and it had a far more empowering impact than she expected.

"They started leaning in and coming up with solutions to problems I didn't even know were problems," she says. "The work is off the charts for our community. It's really empowered and encouraged them to lead with me. By exposing them to different methodologies, it really charged them up to want to make a bigger difference. And not just at work but at home."

And now just might be the time when that kind of boost is needed most.

GOOD TO KNOW

Rates: Without the need for travel, booking a speaker might be easier on your bottom line. Even though it does take more work to prepare a virtual presentation, Neal says she's noticed speaker rates are the either same as usual or a little bit reduced.

Look for Certification: Before booking a speaker, make sure to vet them, Neal says. ESpeakers, an online platform that connects speakers and event planners, offers a virtual event speaker certification. Asking for references and recommendations can also help ensure you book a quality speaker. *M*

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Winning Combinations

Resorts that offer ample indoor space for spreading out, combined with outdoor activities, will give you the framework for a successful meeting this winter as you try to bring people back together.

BY MELANIE RADZICKI MCMANUS

The coronavirus upended the meeting industry earlier this year, just as it did pretty much every other group. But now, many months into the pandemic, we are learning how to more safely gather in smaller groups. You just need to select a site with ample space to spread out — and one that offers lots of outdoor recreational opportunities. Fortunately, there are plenty of places in the Midwest that can do just that.

GRAND GENEVA RESORT & SPA LAKE GENEVA, WIS.

This resort sits on a beautiful, wooded campus within 90 minutes of Madison, Wis., Milwaukee and Chicago. The resort features more than 62,000 square feet of meeting space, including the recently renovated 13,770-square-foot Forum Convention Center, which can seat up to 1,800 theater-style. This translates into plenty of space for a smaller, socially distanced event. The resort is also home to numerous other event spaces, which are scattered around the property. In addition, guests can stay in the main lodge, which has 355 rooms; in Timber Ridge Lodge, with 225 guest suites; or in one of 30 villas.

Perhaps more important in the COVID-19 era, guests have a wealth of outdoor recreational opportunities right on site. The resort sits on 1,300 acres of land that is laced with five miles of mountain bike trails and a wealth of hiking paths. When the snow flies, attendees can ski or snowboard down the property's Mountain Top ski hill, whirl around its ice rink or fly down the sledding hill.

Brad Lyles, director of sales, says Grand Geneva can easily create fun team-building experiences as well. One popular option is Grand Race, a scavenger hunt that can be held inside or outdoors. Another wintertime staple is extreme sled-building, where teams design and build their own sleds with common materials. "Bungee cords,

cardboard boxes and other ordinary utensils come together to form a unique contraption in this communicating and problem-solving activity," he says. Once the sleds are completed, attendees are allowed a test run before competing on the basis of distance, speed and creativity.

Grand Geneva also offers meeting planners a hotel buyout package, where entire buildings and private accommodations can be reserved to allow extra distancing. grandgenevaresort.com

LODGE AT DEADWOOD GAMING RESORT DEADWOOD, SD

South Dakota's Lodge at Deadwood Gaming Resort is home to one of the most spacious convention centers in the Northern Black Hills National Forest. With 16,000 square feet of flexible meeting space that can normally hold 1,700, plus 140 guest rooms and suites, there's plenty of space to spread out inside. But the outdoor options are where the resort really shines.

A five-minute drive from the Lodge at Deadwood gets you to 5,800-foot Mt. Roosevelt, where you can take a short hike (less than one mile) to the Friendship Tower monument commemorating one man's friendship with President Teddy Roosevelt. Sweeping views await, including one of Bear Butte, a popular geologic formation that lies to the east. Heading into town, downtown Deadwood is home to the northern terminus of



Deadwood Skiing





the 109-mile George S. Mickelson Trail. The undulating path features more than 100 converted railroad bridges and four rock tunnels, and is open for hiking, biking and cross-country skiing.

Deadwood is also home to Terry Peak Ski Area, where you can ski and snowboard on its 29 trails and one terrain park. Terry Peak's summit soars 7,100 feet skyward, while the mountain boasts a vertical rise of 1,100 feet. In addition, the park offers the highest lift service between the Rockies and the Alps. Equipment rentals and a ski school complete the offerings. deadwoodlodge.com

BOYNE MOUNTAIN RESORT BOYNE FALLS, MICH.

Over in northwestern Michigan, Boyne Mountain Resort has a treasure trove of options for winter meetings. The facility, home to a popular ski resort, features 37,000 square feet of event space with rooms that can hold six to 600. Attendees have 428 guest rooms and suites available, plus more than four dozen condos. There are also 10 dining spots on-site.

Judy Booth, vice president of sales, says Michigan's current COVID-19 indoor social distancing rules stipulate no more than 20 people per 1,000 square feet, something easy to achieve at Boyne Mountain for groups up to 300. Booth says they're also considering tenting outdoor green spaces this winter, which would allow easy access to accompanying outdoor activities.

"There are a lot of fun things you can do then," she says, "like outdoor s'mores stations, roasting hot dogs over a fire

and hot toddies. Or groups can use our sleighs and wagons to transport them to a special dinner in the woods, or take a snowshoe trip to a roaring fire in the woods, then head off to dinner at the top of the mountain."

Groups looking for team-building activities, spousal programs or after-hours activities are in luck, too. Boyne Mountain has 60 downhill ski runs, 7 terrain parks and 35 kilometers of cross-country ski trails. Guests can also go snowshoeing, ice skating and tubing. But that's hardly all.

There's a zipline that's open year-round, chairlift rides up the mountain and horseback riding, an extra special experience when you're clip-clopping through a snowy landscape. There are also snow bikes for rent – curious contraptions that sport three skis to allow you to zip down the mountainside – and fat tire snow bikes, both of which come in

electric versions, too. You can even hold a winter triathlon involving snow biking, tubing and cross-country skiing.

"I used to work at an urban hotel, and we didn't have anything," says Booth. "We're so fortunate here to be set in a beautiful atmosphere where we have built-in activities you don't have to bus to." boynemountain.com

EAGLE RIDGE RESORT GALENA, ILL.

Eagle Ridge Resort is another great option for winter gatherings. The resort, located in the state's northwestern corner, is tucked into 6,800 acres of both hilly woodlands and open country. It's also on the shores of Lake Galena. The property includes more than 15,000 square feet of event space spread throughout nine function rooms, one of which is the 5,300-square-foot Eagle Ballroom.

Not surprisingly, given its setting, the resort offers a wealth of outdoor recreational possibilities. The Nordic Center is the headquarters for winter fun, where you can access gear for ice skating, snowshoeing and sledding, the latter of which occurs on the signature 10th hole of The General golf course. Popular team-building events include a cardboard sled derby and a mini version of the Amazing Race.

Fifteen miles away, Chestnut Mountain offers 19 downhill ski runs and The Farside, one of the largest terrain parks in the Midwest, with more than 25 rails and other features. And just a few miles south, Shenandoah Riding Center has 40



Grand Geneva Resort



Sundara Inn & Spa



Deadwood Conference Center

miles of groomed horseback riding trails. Lessons are available, too. eagleridge.com

SUNDARA INN & SPA LAKE DELTON, WIS.

With COVID-19 changing a lot of rules, many meetings are being downsized. If that's your situation, check out Sundara Inn & Spa. The posh facility is tucked into a fragrant, 80-acre pine forest in Lake Delton, Wis., about 40 minutes north of Madison. A few years ago, Sundara added conference space and additional guest rooms after frequent requests from visitors. So today, the facility offers nearly 4,000 square feet of flexible indoor meeting space, part of which includes a demonstration kitchen, plus a spacious outdoor patio with six fire pits and lodging via 34 suites and two villas.

When the snow flies, guests love to take a dip in the two outdoor pools that are open year-round. Both are warmed to 84 degrees and sport heated decks. The property also has a 2.2-mile hiking trail through the forest, perfect for snowshoeing in the winter — or for holding walking meetings, a more recent trend. And with its natural focus on wellness, it's easy to set up group yoga or meditation classes for attendees, welcome offerings in these stressful times. Such classes are often held in Sundara's Woodland Reflection Room, which features floor-to-ceiling windows facing the forest.

"In these stressful times, people don't want to be in a behemoth, 800-room vertical hotel," says John Morris, general

manager. He adds, "When you're in that Woodland Reflection Room taking yoga in January, and it's snowing, and a herd of deer is feeding right outside — that's what we hang our hat on." sundaraspa.com

GRAND VIEW LODGE NISSWA, MINN.

While smaller, this resort is another prime option. The facility recently opened North, a 60-room boutique hotel and conference center. North contains some 3,500 square feet of meeting space, plus a lounge area and Brew, a coffee, beer and wine bar. Additional lodging can be found in the property's 200 plus accommodations.

Thanks to its location in the Northwoods on 670 acres, attendees can enjoy numerous activities al fresco, including ice skating, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Custom team-building activities are available, too. grandviewlodge.com

CRYSTAL MOUNTAIN RESORT & SPA THOMPSONVILLE, MICH.

Back in Michigan, Crystal Mountain Resort & Spa sits on 1,500 acres in the western portion of the state, where some 11 feet of snow falls annually. The spacious property offers more than 20,000 square feet of meeting space, spread between its Crystal Center, Lodge and Lodge Pavilion. Guests can stay in one the property's 250-plus hotel rooms, suites, condos, townhomes and resort residences.

Winter meeting attendees have a wide variety of outdoor entertainment options, including downhill skiing along 58 runs,

27 of which are lit for evening skiing, and snowboarding in one of three terrain areas. Guests can also opt to glide along 25 kilometers of groomed Nordic trails, four of which are lighted at night, or tromp along designated snowshoe trails. Ice skating and fat-tire biking are other options.

Probably the most unique aspect about Crystal Mountain is that the Michigan Legacy Art Park is on the property. The park, which is open year-round from dawn to dusk, boasts more than 50 sculptures, each of which interprets a particular piece of Michigan history. There are also poetry stones and an outdoor amphitheater at the site.

"The art park is a great snowshoe destination," says Sammie Lukaskiewicz, director of public relations, adding Crystal Mountain is able to work with clients to create a function at the art park, if that's a desirable locale.

No one knows exactly what the future holds regarding the coronavirus. But for now, lots of space, fresh air and outdoor entertainment options are hot commodities, something to which all of these resorts can attest. crystallmountain.com *M*

Editor's Note: Each resort has implemented various cleaning and sanitizing procedures. To learn more about this and any local group size restrictions, please contact the resort directly.

Melanie Radzicki McManus is a freelance travel writer who has written for a variety of travel publications and is based in Sun Prairie, Wis.



CVBs Can Be the Key to Your Event's Success

Nobody knows a destination better than the local CVB or DMO. So it only makes sense that you would partner with one to leverage its relationships with suppliers and local players to maximize your event's success.

BY SUE SVEUM

They may not give out keys to the city, but convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs) or destination management organizations (DMOs) definitely hold many of the keys to making your meeting a success. Think of them as wedding planners for organizations.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26



Fox Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau

3433 W. College Ave.
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GET A FOX CITIES EVENT EXPERIENCE DELIVERED TO YOUR DOOR

A virtual happy hour or long day at the home office will be brighter with a piece of the Fox Cities

The spirit of originality, authenticity and creativity runs deep in the Fox Cities/ Greater Appleton area of Wisconsin. Events and conventions in the Fox Cities provide opportunities for attendees to experience, explore and discover that spirit in and outside of the event in our Midwest communities. With events cancelled and conventions postponed due to the ongoing COVID19 health crisis, there are still ways to experience the originality and creativity of the Fox Cities until you're ready to travel or meet again in the Fox Cities.

Here's how to get a highlight of our local makers, small businesses, and culture while away:

- Nothing says Wisconsin more than dairy. Simon's Specialty Cheese in Little Chute ships its international award-winning cheddar, feta, mozzarella and other cheeses across the country. Get a pack of squeaky curds to munch on at home during the work day, a seasonal spread to serve at a holiday gathering or a signature cheese to enjoy with a glass of wine during that upcoming virtual happy hour. Lamers Dairy, a fifth-generation Wisconsin dairy, ships its award-winning cheese and other Fox Cities products across the country. Gift box options – for an at-home office treat or for a client gift – feature fudge, cheese, crackers and more.

- Conference networking gatherings and typical after-work happy hours have gone virtual. Don't be caught empty handed during an upcoming virtual happy hour. From Stone Arch Brewpub – designated a Fox Cities Original as the oldest continually operating brewpub in the state –

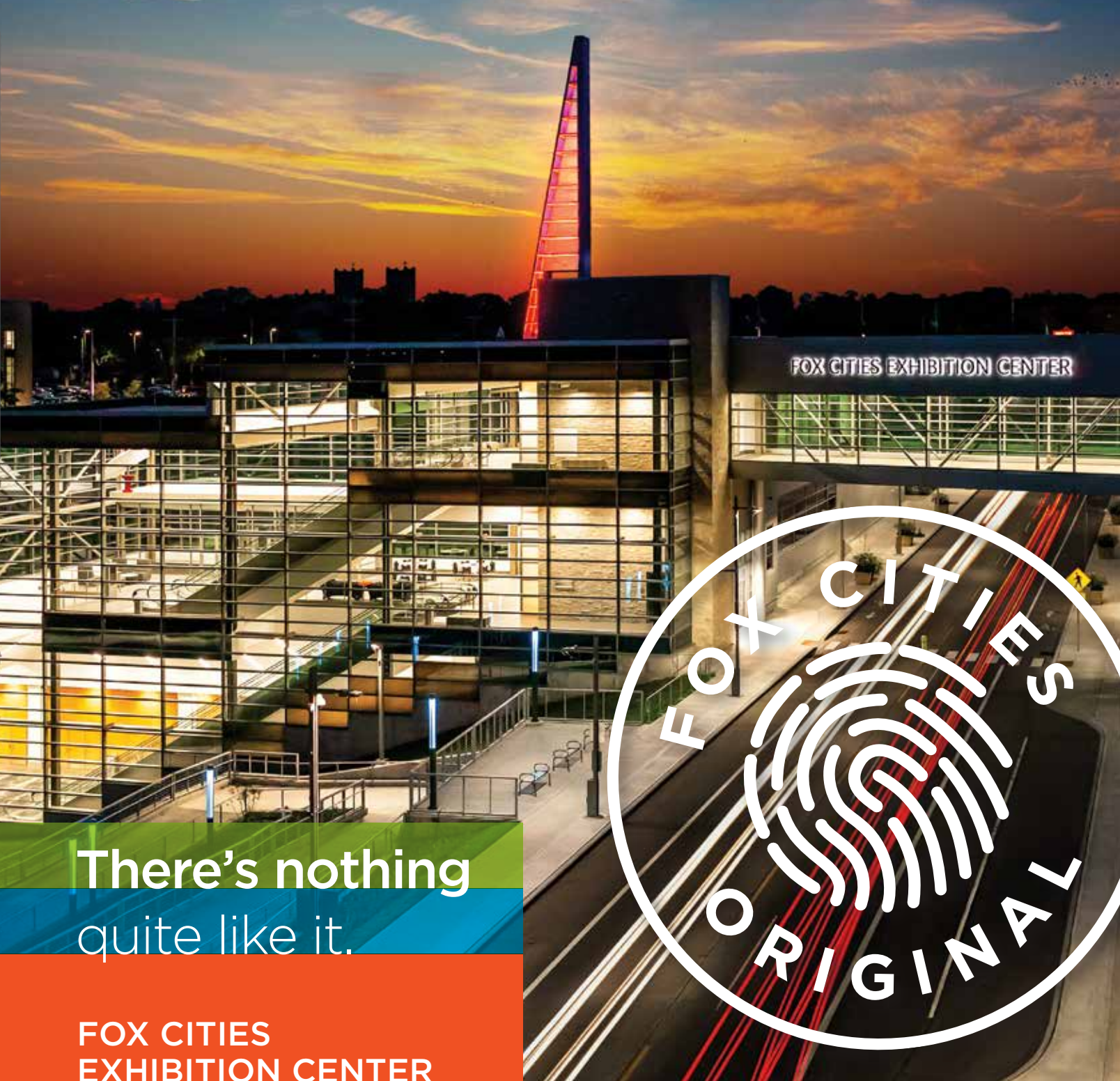
to Barrel 41 Brewing Co. – an award-winning newcomer – order a pack of craft beer (or pick up curbside next time in town).

- Looking for a perfect holiday gift for a client or coworker? Custom chocolate gives an extra special touch to a treat loved by many. Through Wilmar Chocolates, custom candy bar ingredients can be selected and ordered online, created at Wilmar's, and shipped anywhere in the U.S. The locally owned chocolatier also has dozens of other types of hand-crafted, small-batch chocolates and caramels to choose from online. The seasonal Vande Walle's Candies Angelfood Candy is also another local seasonal option to get boxed, shipped and delivered to a client or professional connection.

- Fox Cities t-shirts, mugs, prints and other Fox Cities memorabilia typically seen from strolling our vibrant downtowns and streets are available online and can be shipped anywhere. Fill that virtual cart online at unique boutiques, such as Blue Moon Emporium in Appleton and Red Door Mercantile in Neenah, with gifts, décor and clothing from local artists and designers featuring Fox Cities favorites.

Until you're here again, a virtual happy hour, holiday, and long day at the (home) office will be a bit brighter with the spirit of the Fox Cities in it.

Contact the Fox Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau (FCCVB) convention and sales team to learn more about the Fox Cities at arivera@foxcities.org or 920-734-3358.



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CVBs give event planners — who like brides think they can do it all themselves, until they realize they can't — somewhere to turn. CVBs are not only there to help, but unlike a wedding planner, their services are also totally free.

CVBS ARE PREPARED TO HELP

If you've ever worked with a CVB on an event, you already know how valuable they can be. You might think they're one of the best kept secrets out there. But the truth is that CVBs don't want to be a secret. It's their job — and their passion — to welcome you to their city and make your event the best it can be.

"A lot of people don't know what we do," says Dana Maugans, director of sales at the Springfield Missouri Convention & Visitors Bureau. "But we can help in a lot of ways. We know the area, and we know what's worked here and what hasn't." And that's only the tip of the iceberg.

CVB services range from assistance with event pre-planning, to helping with grants and donations, to keeping event planners informed and up-to-date about everything from weather to local COVID-19 case rates, mandates and restrictions. And of course, they can also provide help at the actual event.

But don't worry that they're going to take over, says Alison Hutchinson, group sales manager with the Fox Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau in Appleton, Wis. Their purpose is simply to help out with whatever you need. "But since we know our area, we can often arrange to get you a perk or discount you might not know about — and wouldn't normally get on your own," she says. And who wouldn't want that?

Just ask Holstein Association USA President Corey Geiger, who worked with Hutchinson and the Fox Cities CVB on the 2019 National Holstein Convention. The event drew a robust attendance from 38 states and 19 countries, filling 400 local hotel rooms. "My wife and I were

the co-chairs," he explains, adding that while neither are professional meeting planners, they're both very organized. "We had successfully planned our own 600-person wedding by ourselves, but couldn't have done all this without the CVB. They're familiar with the location and the people — and how to make things happen."

REACH OUT EARLY IN THE PROCESS

"It all starts with preplanning and promotion — sometimes as early as four or five years in advance, depending on the size of the event," explains Hutchinson. "Many of our groups return here year after year, but we're always happy to educate new people."

Geiger says CVB help is invaluable — especially for new event planners or ones going into a new area. "When planning a convention, you need to rely on people to get things done," he says, "and the CVB was our lifeline."

Hutchinson says the CVB starts by making contact with hotels and then arranging for in-person or virtual site visits with those that fit the size and location needs for your event. "We act as a one-stop shop — as mediators between you and the hotels and other local vendors," she explains. "We also serve as your meeting concierge — before, during and even after the event."

CVBS OFFER NEW IDEAS AND IDENTIFY TRENDS

Hutchinson says in recent years the trend has moved away from organized excursions to local tourist attractions — in favor of community service projects. "It's a great bonding activity for the attendees," she says, "while giving back to the community." A win-win for everyone.

One popular activity is helping out at Appleton's non-profit Riverview Gardens, which relies on volunteers. Another option that's been well-received is donating blood. "We've brought in a portable donation van for some events," Hutchinson explains. "It doesn't take up extra space, you can do it in your

"We act as a one-stop shop — as mediators between you and the hotels and other local vendors.... We also serve as your meeting concierge — before, during and even after the event."

—ALISON HUTCHINSON, GROUP SALES MANAGER, FOX CITIES CVB



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Maybe fresh air is on your mind? Plan a patio parley at Tuscan Hills Winery, where outdoor meeting space is not only picturesque, it's also temperature controlled and pet-friendly. Oh, and did we mention the wide selection of wines they carry for 'happy hour'?

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free time, and you don't have to leave the premises or worry about weather."

But a CVB's role is not all about location and activities. They can also be very instrumental behind the scenes in helping event planners find the funds to make their convention a reality.

"Besides in-kind donations from local businesses and TV coverage for the event, they helped us apply for a substantial grant from the Wisconsin Department of Tourism," recalls Geiger. "We applied four years in advance and they took over the facilitation for us." The result? The National Holstein Convention was awarded a \$16,320 grant.

But don't worry — the CVB is definitely not all work and no play. Their fun side was evident in the airport welcome they planned for the National Holstein Convention attendees. They decorated with a large banner, and black and white balloons — and a cow mascot greeted incoming visitors. "You definitely knew there was a cow convention in town," laughs Geiger.

HELPING YOU NAVIGATE LOCAL REGULATIONS DURING COVID-19

There was a slightly different look to the National Street Rod Association's recent Mid-America Street Rod Nationals in Springfield, Mo., in October 2020. But the Springfield CVB was equally present — and every bit as helpful.

In addition to the fact that it featured cars rather than cows, the street rod show — with more than 1,300 attendees — was originally planned for Memorial Day, but had to be postponed until October due to the pandemic.

"We really relied on the CVB to keep in contact with us regarding COVID," says Mike Adams, special events director for the National Street Rod Association. "Luckily our event was mostly outside." Thanks to the CVB, event planners were able to plan ahead to accommodate mask-wearing, social distancing and other restrictions.

Maugans says the Springfield CVB has helped other groups hold events during these unpredictable times as well. "Some

go with a hybrid component, holding a smaller conference in person, with parts of it live-streaming. Or as in the case of the National Street Rod Association, they'll hold events outdoors when they can," she says. "Either way, we keep planners informed about the health protocols in this area and help them find ways to make it work."

While pandemic planning became an integral part of the job this year, CVBs still help event planners with plenty of other routine elements, such as bid proposals, press releases, financial incentives, sponsorships — or simply making restaurant suggestions.

"We even have a Meeting Planners Toolkit on our website," says Maugans. (You can find it at www.springfieldmo.org/meeting-planners-toolkit.)

CVBS CAN CONNECT YOU WITH LOCAL VOLUNTEERS

Many CVBs provide help on the day of the event as well — again depending on what event planners want or need. "Mostly, we depend on volunteers to help out at the site," explains Maugans. "Sometimes they'll stuff gift bags or work registration, but most often it's their job to man the information table." She says a lot of volunteers are seniors who are familiar with the area's history and attractions — and love to talk about it.

"That was the hardest part this time around," says Adams. "A lot of the volunteers were seniors who had been helping with our event for 20 years — they were devastated they couldn't be there this year because of the pandemic."

Between staff and volunteers, CVBs are an invaluable resource. "We're the local experts, the local storytellers," explains Maugans. And whether in times of sickness or in health, in past events or future ones, it's clear they know what they're doing — and love what they do. *M*

Sue Sveum is a freelance writer based in the Madison, Wis. area.



"We really relied on the CVB to keep in contact with us regarding COVID."

—MIKE ADAMS, SPECIAL EVENTS DIRECTOR, NATIONAL STREET ROD ASSOCIATION



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STATE SPOTLIGHT MICHIGAN

From urban chic to rugged outdoors, planners will find a variety of facilities and activities to entertain their groups.

BY KATH USITALO

Michigan's handprint on the earth — its mitten-shaped Lower Peninsula — is surrounded by massive blue, freshwater inland seas that impressively make it visible from space. The Great Lakes — Erie, Huron, Michigan and Superior — splash against the state's 3,200 miles of freshwater coastline, defining its two peninsulas and shaping its unique identity as "Pure Michigan."

The Anishnaabeck, the first people, had the Upper Great Lakes waters to themselves until the 17th century, when French explorers, missionaries, fur trappers and traders arrived. And then came the troops: French, British and American flags have all flown over the Straits of Mackinac, the strategic narrows between Michigan's Upper and Lower Peninsulas.

Lured by abundant natural resources and access to water transportation,

industrialists and speculators transformed the Great Lake state's wilderness with logging, fishing and mining operations, and commercial shipping trade. By the late 1800s, passenger trains and steamships were carrying city dwellers escaping the heat and grime of Detroit and Chicago for the pure air, clean waters, and the beauty of lakeside resort towns and cottage communities.

Well over a century later, Michigan's reputation as a desirable destination adds up: two peninsulas; four freshwater, inland seas; 11,000 inland lakes; hundreds of rivers and streams; 200 waterfalls; 650 public golf courses; 140 wineries; 350 brew pubs and breweries; 53 distilleries; 26 casinos; 19 million acres of forested land; 129 lighthouses; a bounty of museums and historic sites; four national parks; a five-mile suspension bridge and three bridges to Canada; and cities as

urban oases — including Detroit, which in 1896 opened the first convention and visitors bureau.

URBAN ADVENTURES

It's still the Motor City, but Detroit has been working hard — and succeeding — at shedding the image of a one-horse manufacturing center. The once-industrial Detroit Riverfront has been transformed into a miles-long network of gardens, plazas and parks, for year-round enjoyment of the waterway that separates the U.S. and Canada. Graceful skyscrapers from the city's 1920's heyday have been revived for residential and commercial use, several as boutique hotels.

The downtown entertainment district encompasses the fabulous, circa 1928 Fox Theatre, the equally splendid Detroit Opera House, and the homes of the pro sports teams — Tigers baseball, Red



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It's easy to spend a day in the city's cultural center at the Detroit Institute of Arts, Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History and Michigan Science Center. And no music fan would miss a tour of the Motown Museum and Hitsville USA, home of the distinctive sound heard around the world. In Dearborn, The Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation houses a mind-boggling collection of inventions and vehicles including the Rosa Parks Bus associated with the 1950's Civil Rights Movement. Greenfield Village is an 80-acre neighborhood of the relocated homes and workshops of notables such as the Wright Brothers and Thomas Edison. The Ford Rouge Factory Tour shows how F-150 trucks are built.

Ann Arbor has all of the coffee shops, eclectic food stops, museums and cultural amenities expected of the hometown of the University of Michigan. Similarly, Michigan State University is a major presence in Lansing, where the gracious State Capitol building is open for tours.

Grand Rapids, Michigan's second largest city, has earned its Beer City cred with more than 40 stops along its Ale Trail. The walkable downtown boasts public art, a hot culinary scene, entertainment options, and trails and parks along the Grand River, where the Gerald Ford Presidential Museum is located. Nearby, the magnificent indoor/outdoor Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park displays

more than 100 works from artists including Henry Moore, Keith Haring, Louise Nevelson and Auguste Rodin.

CRUISING THE FRESHWATER COAST

A drive along the Lake Michigan shoreline, starting in the southwest corner of the state, takes in the orchards, vineyards and wineries of the fruit belt, beaches called the "singing sands" for the squeaky sound they make, photogenic lighthouses, resort towns and sensational sunsets. Multiple sand dunes include the spectacular Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore, named for a Native American tale that explains the 400-foot-high mound and offshore islands of this national park at the state's "Little Finger."

Traverse City, the Cherry Capital, is a great base for exploring the wine trails, small towns and natural beauty of the region. Boutiques, galleries, specialty stores and eateries line downtown streets, but kayaking, beaches and trails are within easy reach. Further north, picture-postcard Petoskey retains much of the Victorian era charm that made it a tourist destination in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when the Hemingway family, including young Ernest, spent summers in the area.

At the "Tip of the Mitten," Lake Michigan meets the waters of Lake Huron at the Straits of Mackinac leading to the eastern shore's "Sunrise Side" beaches, lighthouses and the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center in Alpena, where the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary preserves 200 vessels that went down in the treacherous waters of "Shipwreck

Alley." At the "Thumb" the Bavarian-themed architecture of Frankenmuth is a nod to German immigrants who settled there in 1845. Millions of visitors order chicken dinners served family-style, and shop for holiday décor at Bronner's, the world's largest Christmas store.

A WORLD APART

Linked to the Lower Peninsula by the five-mile Mackinac Bridge, the Upper Peninsula (U.P.) remains a world apart. The suspension bridge spans the straits where Mackinac Island has been a strategic, historic and sacred place since the time of the Ojibwa people. Ferry boats from Mackinaw City and St. Ignace shuttle visitors to the island, where automobiles are banned and transportation is by foot, horse-drawn carriage or bicycle. Favorite activities include pedaling the island; admiring the pastel Victorian architecture; hiking wooded trails to natural formations like Arch Rock; exploring the 18th century fort; and sampling the fudge, a popular confection since 1887, the same year the iconic Grand Hotel opened.

In sharp contrast, the U.P. is a sprawling, sparsely-populated land rich with natural wonders, from the wide, rushing waters of Tahquamenon Falls, to the mineral-colored sandstone cliffs of Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, rugged Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park and remote Isle Royale National Park. The stories of lost sailors and vessels are told at the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum at Whitefish Point on majestic Lake Superior. Manmade marvels include the Soo Locks, which allow boats to navigate the Great Lakes, and Quincy Mine in the Keweenaw Peninsula, where the Keweenaw National Historical Park preserves the mining history of "Copper Country."

Wilderness meets culture in Marquette, the largest city in the U.P., as brew pubs, cafes, shops, impressive red sandstone architecture and historic sites are within easy reach of the four-season sports and wilds of the surrounding deep forests, rocky landscape and powerful Lake Superior. *M*

Kath Usitalo is a travel writer based in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Strategy

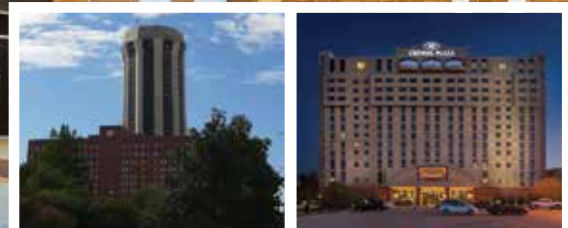
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