



March 4 marked the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Travel Promotion Act, which established Brand USA. Niall Gibbons, CEO, Tourism Ireland (left) and Christopher Thompson, President & CEO, Brand USA, celebrated at the former's Dublin office.

## Coronavirus Fears Lead to Mass Convention Cancellations *Major Cities See Loss of Thousands of Visitors*

By Jonathan Trager

Anxiety surrounding coronavirus cases in America have led to a rash of cancellations of meetings and conventions, with the rate of the cancellations picking up momentum last week.

In addition, organizers in Asia, Europe, and North America have nixed at least 440 trade shows and exhibitions in response to the disease last week, according to *m+a*, a German expo trade magazine.

The first major cancellation was Mobile World Congress, which had expected to draw 100,000 people to Barcelona.

Perhaps the largest exhibition to cancel was New Hope Network's Natural Products Expo West 2020 scheduled for March 4 – 8 at the Anaheim Convention Center. The four-day tradeshow was expected to attract more than 85,000 people.

"As with all our events, it was the intention here at Expo West in Anaheim, to follow official guidance from local authorities and to listen to the voices of the community we serve and support, in order to [maximize] the health of the industry," said Fred Linder, Group President of New Hope Network. "Today, it is clear the majority of those voices are saying they want Expo West but not this week."

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## Susan Robertson Named ASAE President & CEO for 18-Month Term

*National President & CEO Search will Commence on Oct. 1, 2020*

By Todd McElwee

Susan Robertson, CAE, has been named President & CEO, ASAE, - effective March 1. The first woman to occupy the post in the association's 100-year history, Robertson will serve

an 18-month term.

ASAE's Board of Directors announced a national search for the next president and CEO will begin in October with the intention of a new CEO beginning Sept. 1, 2021.

"I'm thankful for the board's confidence

and look forward to working with them and the great ASAE staff to keep us firmly on course as an organization," said Robertson. "I work with a very talented team, and together we fully understand and truly appreciate that ASAE represents

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## IMEX Frankfurt Remains on Schedule

By Todd McElwee

IMEX remains a "go" for May 12-14 at Messe Frankfurt.

In a March 2 email to the industry, Ray Bloom, Chairman, IMEX Group; and Carina Bauer, CEO, announced they "have no plans to postpone or cancel the show" due to the coronavirus, but did note, "that should the situation change significantly in Europe, it is possible that the authorities

could ask us to cancel."

"With major events cancelling across Europe over the past few days, we know that many in our community are asking questions about this year's IMEX in Frankfurt," the letter said.

"With IMEX due to take place in the middle of May (still 10 weeks away), the IMEX team continues to plan confidently for the show. We

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## Two Nashville Hotels Damaged in Deadly Tornado; As Was Another in Lebanon, TN

By Grant Broadhurst

A tornado hit Music City March 3 damaging two downtown hotels and a third in Lebanon, TN.

In Nashville, after taking damage from the tornado the FieldHouse Jones Nashville boutique hotel and the Clarion Hotel Nashville Downtown – Stadium are both closed. A Sleep Inn in Lebanon, Tennessee, is also closed. The downtown core of Nashville was largely spared, including Music City Center.

Across the state, at least two dozen people died but the hotels said none of their guests or staff were injured.

"Fieldhouse was hit hard as

was a Clarion Hotel by Titan Stadium," Butch Spyridon, President and CEO of the Nashville CVC, told *USAE*. "Some without power. Most of our properties are open and functioning. All meeting facilities are open."

A spokesperson for the FieldHouse Jones told *USAE* on March 3: "[Associates] are currently working to make sure everyone receives the support and accommodations they need at this time. They will be focusing their efforts on helping those in the community today and addressing storm damage on-site." A photo of the hotel taken after the tornado showed broken

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# NEWS

## Meetings Industry Associations Share Coronavirus Resources, Updates and Concerns

By Todd McElwee

Carefully monitoring the coronavirus pandemic, meetings industry associations are working to keep their respective constituencies up-to-date.

ASAE, U.S. Travel Association, MPI, Destinations International, IAEE, PCMA, Events Industry Council (EIC), Association Forum and others are issuing statements and developing resources to insure members are kept abreast of the situation in order to make informed and safe decisions.

"ASAE, like the general public, is concerned about the growing spread of the Coronavirus internationally and the impact it will have here in the U.S.," said Susan Robertson, CAE, Interim President & CEO, ASAE. "For those of us in the association meeting and events industry, there are additional issues that we need to consider and to be prepared for. ASAE is committed to sharing vital information and updates with the association community through a variety of channels."

She went on to say: "As the impact of the coronavirus evolves, you can count on ASAE to continue to share information and provide updates as well as how it impacts the association community. And in the immediate term, ASAE has encouraged attendees at our meetings as well as staff to practice good health habits.

"We all hope healthcare professionals will find a way to end this epidemic so we can embrace a much more positive outlook for the longer term."

Resources offered include U.S. Travel's Emergency Preparedness and Response: Coronavirus toolkit. Accessible on the association's website, and regularly updated, it features factsheets, media talking points, tips, links to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO).

"We appreciate the aggressive response to coronavirus by the entirety of the U.S. government, and we are hopeful that the collective effort will continue to keep the risk of coronavirus in the U.S. to a minimum and enable American life and commerce to go on unimpeded—as health experts have repeatedly empha-

sized should currently be the case," said Roger Dow, President & CEO, U.S. Travel, in a media talking point. "We will continue to closely engage the administration and public health authorities in the event official guidance must change based on this evolving situation. As we head into a traditionally strong season for leisure and business travel, we are reminded by public health officials that coronavirus risk in the United States remains low and that no official guidance recommends interruptions in travel plans in the U.S. at this time."

MPI, IAEE, PCMA, EIC, American Hotel & Lodging Association, ASAE, Association Forum, Global Business Travel Association, and Cruise Lines International Association have also provided resources including fact sheets, webinars, statements, links and more on their websites and social media platforms.

"At Meeting Professionals International, we continue to monitor the global situation with COVID-19, the Coronavirus, the association's official statement said. "Our community of more than 60,000 industry professionals worldwide is involved every day in facilitating events that are impacted by matters ranging from healthcare to politics to security and beyond.

"It's our duty to serve as a resource to our community, ensuring they are prepared, informed and in-tune with ongoing developments, whether through providing education and connections in advance of these potential situations or disseminating current information as occurrences unfold.

"Our community can access relevant, curated and consolidated information and government and health board advisories and updates through MPI Pulse, MPI News Brief, the MPI blog and our social channels."

Amy Calvert, CEO, EIC, said: "Bringing people together for face-to-face events is never more affected or resilient than when tested by adversity, crisis or uncertainty. The Events Industry Council (EIC), our members and our CMP community know firsthand the critical importance of being aware, prepared and responsive

to issues that potentially disrupt global travel and meetings."

"This industry is resilient," said David DuBois, CMP, CAE, President & CEO, IAEE. "We have dealt with challenges like this in the past. We will deal with this challenge, together. Containing the spread of unnecessary panic is as important as stopping the virus itself. Keeping safety and health priorities in mind, continue to promote the need to attend exhibitions and events where there have not been any government mandated travel restrictions. Our global economy depends on the great work and opportunities that we provide for trade and economic development."

On March 4, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce hosted a press conference in Washington, D.C. with Tom Donohue, CEO, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, William "Chip" Rogers, President & CEO, AHLA; Stephanie Martz, Chief Administrative Officer and General Counsel, National Retail Federation; Nicholas E. Calio, President & CEO, A4A; and Dow discussing the coronavirus' impact and how the business community is respond-

ing. The Chamber and participating organizations also offer a myriad of resources on both their websites and social media platforms.

"Americans should continue to monitor the situation, but feel confident as they go about their daily lives, head to work, conduct meetings, or drop their children off at school," said Donohue. "And businesses, working together with government, should help instill confidence and calm."

Also on March 4, A4A and CEOs from several U.S. carriers, met with President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence to discuss pragmatic, efficient solutions to assist the U.S. government in addressing the coronavirus health emergency.

"We commend President Trump's decisive action to appoint Vice President Pence to head the Administration's continued strong leadership during this public health crisis," said Calio. "We appreciate the opportunity to meet with the Vice President and his senior team to discuss with them pragmatic, effective solutions that further our shared goal of protecting the health, safety and well-being of travelers."

## To Cancel or Not to Cancel? A Legal Perspective on COVID-19 Events Liability

By Grant Broadhurst

What are the legal implications of the coronavirus for associations that want to still hold their conferences, conventions, and trade shows? To cite just one question: What if someone gets infected with COVID-19 while at a meeting?

USAE asked Jonathan Howe, President and Founding Partner of Howe & Hutton, and Ronald Jacobs, a Partner with Venable whose focuses include nonprofit organizations and crisis management, about the legal implications of the coronavirus for events. They both said they aren't advising their clients to cancel events due to fears of lawsuits, but nevertheless they said some events may find themselves non-viable from a business perspective due to fears of the virus.

"If we make a decision to go somewhere, that's our decision," Howe told USAE.

He said even for people whose jobs send them to an event must address any concerns with their employers—concerns such as illness or having qualities that make them vulnerable to COVID-19 such as respiratory issues or age.

In terms of the event sponsor's liability, Howe also noted that it would be hard to pinpoint where the infection occurred since someone could have sneezed on the attendee at the convention, the airport, or even in the taxi on the way to or from the airport.

Jacobs said Venable has done some research on the liability potential and has not come across any examples. Indeed, he said the case law suggests there's no legal liability for the event host, although he said someone might still come up with a theory to bring a lawsuit.

"But based on the elements of negligence, if you're following CDC guidelines and adhering to any travel restrictions, you'd be hard to show that there's a theory of legal liability for an association that went ahead with an event," Jacobs said, saying that by CDC guidelines he means any travel advisories to avoid certain areas.

Like Howe, he said it'd be hard to prove causation or that the host failed in its duties. For instance, Jacobs said most of the courts have said passengers on a cruise ship spreading a virus to one another doesn't prove that the cruise ship did anything wrong.

"Those are all things that give me comfort in saying to clients: 'Go ahead, do the event as long as you're not in a place where the CDC has said don't host events, don't travel,'" Jacobs said.

Howe said event hosts can also go a step further.

"My advice that we've been giving to clients is try to impress upon [attendees] that you're going to do everything you can to safeguard them, but you're not a guarantor of what happens," Howe said.

That means things like providing hand sanitizer, reminding attendees to wash their hands, and encouraging exhibitors to help promote sanitary habits. Basically, Howe said: "Practice good health."

But even if the legal risk is low, the business side might make less sense if attendees and exhibitors can't—or won't—attend the conference. Howe said organizations might be "a heck of a lot better off canceling the show" if attendance is going to be dismal because of attendees' individual—or employer-mandated—judgment.

"Be realistic about it," Howe said. "If

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Don Welsh, President & CEO of Destinations International, attended the Cincinnati USA CVB's Annual Meeting on February 25 at the Duke Energy Convention Center. Welsh celebrated the CVB's 75th anniversary and recognized the bureau for completing the Destinations International Accreditation Program. Pictured here: Welsh presenting the accreditation to Julie Calvert, President & CEO of the Cincinnati USA CVB.

# HOTS

Recently HOTS had the opportunity to participate in the 68<sup>th</sup> Detroit Autorama. And aside from a toxic chicken sandwich, the Autorama featuring over 800 cars did not disappoint.

The ground level boasted the best of the best, gleaming hot rod and other vehicles worth hundreds and thousands of dollars, polished tires that will never see a street, and owners standing protectively nearby.

In contrast to the dazzling cars upstairs, the lower level offered a different scene. The first thing HOTS saw being a rusted and dirtied truck, adorned with massive spikes, depictions of skulls, and a too-fragile frame: in short, a death trap. With music blasting and a herbaceous smell tainting the air, the downstairs offered the party scene while the upstairs offered the more refined experience.

HOTS had more involvement than simply attending this show. On the upper level HOTS' father was showcasing a dark green 1930 Model A Ford coupe, with a 1957 Oldsmobile Rocket engine. It has been modified to reflect the common

styles and customizations of mid-1950s hot rodders. And to HOTS surprise, the Ford placed first in its category: traditional coupes.

And to digress for just a moment, the term hot rod derived after veterans returned from WW II, eager for speed and excitement, put their wartime skills to use modifying cars. Today, everyone has their own idea of what a hot rod is, but they are generally defined as cars that have been modified for speed and performance.

HOTS' father exhibited his car along with Hilton Hot Rods and Ross Racing Engines, who built the 1930 Ford and its engine. The exhibition process started with registration; Hilton Hot Rods purchased a block in which they could display whatever they'd like. They chose a singular engine and four early 1930s Model A Ford hot rods, including HOTS' dad's green Ford. Once the spot was assured, months passed in a frenzy, everyone scrambling to finish the cars before the show.

With parts thrown on and altered the night before, HOTS' contingent jumped in



HOTS' father's 1930 Model A Ford coupe.

a trailer and made the long drive to Michigan for the show. Once arrived, the setup process was seamless and organized.

Exhibition at the Detroit Autorama

offered HOTS few perks other than a place to sit and a special pass. However, for Hilton Hot Rods and Ross Racing Engines, the event was a chance to get in front of a crowd to demonstrate what they can do through showing their works such as the green Ford. Given that these exhibitors are promoting expensive cars which require months to build, it is not practical to sell their product on the spot; rather exhibitors publicize their services and form relationships, the goal being to foster that relationship until it turns into business.

After conversing with the owner of a beautiful custom 1938 Hudson Victoria Coupe, HOTS walked out of the Autorama hopeful this car would soon join its dad's collection. However, HOTS' father fell prey to Bring A Trailer, a site used to buy and sell vintage vehicles and just two days after the show, purchased a white 1957 Ford Thunderbird from them.

Now HOTS knows why its dad stopped by so many Thunderbirds at the show.



Show floor at the 68<sup>th</sup> Detroit Autorama.

WEEKLY NEWS  
OF ASSOCIATIONS  
CVBs AND  
HOTELS

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## COMMENTARY

*USAE* is all-too-aware of the Story of the Week; the worldwide concerns, travel disruptions and event cancellations due to the coronavirus (COVID-19). Elsewhere in this issue, and packed into nearly every reader's inbox, are comments, quotes and missives from those in the meetings, associations and hospitality industry reflecting the current situation in all of its permutations and circumstances.

But there's another side to all of this that's deeply human and heart-warming. The stories that seldom make it past the "official statements" about which we've become all too familiar. It's the personal side of this tragedy and its response -- filled with raw emotions reflecting sadness, a profound sense of loss, and a worry about traveling into a potential pandemic zone and being in charge of decisions that could encourage others to do the same.

A client of ours has been working with the staff of a small association on a major international trade show for many years. Every year, it sees the sheer dedication of the organizations small staff, working herculean hours to plan, prepare and set up this event. The show has steadily grown, and this year another record was in sight, both in terms of exhibit space and attendance.

As the news of the virus started to

circulate, the organization did all the right things. It continually informed its registrants and exhibitors that it would follow Centers for Disease Control, World Health Organization and the host country's government agencies in terms of what would happen with the event. As the event drew nearer, updated emails were sent, countless phone calls were answered by a sleep-deprived staff, and every communication was an effort to provide up-to-date information to all of their constituencies. Finally, as the number of organizational and national travel restrictions increased, and the miasma of information about the virus seemed to suggest more new questions than answers to existing ones, the organization announced the cancellation of the event about a week before it was set to begin.

But the most uplifting thing our client experienced -- and it has worked in our industry for many years -- was its conversation with one of that organization's senior managers a few hours after the cancellation. We didn't talk much about contracts, money or already-spent efforts. Instead we talked about children hugging their parent, with kids saying "everything was going to be all right" and that "you did your best." And how they tear-ed up when other vendors and exhibitors called -- not talking about freight and refunds and troubles, but rather asking "how are you doing", "is

there anything I can do to help?", and "we'll deal with everything else later after you've had a chance to figure stuff out."

A different major event owner this week summarized the conundrum faced by their staff about their show, cancelled just a couple of days before their huge exhibit was set to open and thousands of people were about to descend upon a western U.S. city. "[This] situation has been very different in that [our] show was in-flight, with production underway, when the views of the community started to diverge. Some of our partners strongly advocated continuing with the show as planned. Some of our partners wanted the show, but not now, and some just wanted a straight-forward cancellation."

So to those of you in that difficult place this week, *USAE* salutes you and thanks you for making the difficult decisions and calls that you had to make for your communities' sakes.

And we are reminded how great is to be just a small part of such a resilient industry of professionals who think about their customers, members and organizations first. Who all worked tirelessly to make something happen that just couldn't this time around, and who will be there again to do it all over again.

Next time.

# NEWS

## Coronavirus Slams International Inbound Travel; U.S. Travel Predicts 6% Three-Month Hit

By Todd McElwee

International inbound travel is forecast to plunge 6% during the next three months due to the coronavirus according to U.S. Travel Association's Travel Trends Index (TTI). The report captures data from January, when awareness of sickness began to heighten and China - one of the biggest travel markets to the U.S. - implemented aggressive measures to curb travel out of certain cities.

"There is a lot of uncertainty around coronavirus, and it is pretty clear that it is having an effect on travel demand - not just from China, and not just internationally, but for domestic business and leisure travel as well," said Roger Dow, President & CEO, U.S. Travel. "A big part of the coronavirus narrative is about whether it's safe to travel but it's important to keep in mind that the restrictions and warnings are highly specific to countries where there have been pronounced outbreaks. Right now there is absolutely no official guidance that people need to be recon-

sidering travel in the U.S."

The TTI is produced monthly with Oxford Economics with each report including the Current Travel Index (CTI) measuring trips involving hotel stays and/or flights each month, and Leading Travel Index (LTI), which gauges the likely average pace and direction of business and leisure travel - both domestic and international inbound. Numeric scores are assigned to every segment in current, three-month and six-month predictive indicators with scores above 50 indicating growth and below reduction.

International's LTIs were 47 and 47.8 for the three and six-month LTIs, respectively. U.S. Travel said the predicted 6% three-month drop compared to the same period in 2019 is the sharpest in the five-year history of the TTI, and would be the largest decline in international inbound travel since the 2007-2008 financial crisis. January's international CTI was 50.1.

U.S. Travel economists caution the detectable impact from coronavirus is almost certain to escalate once data

becomes available for February, when the U.S. functionally restricted inbound travel from China and concern began to take hold in earnest around the world.

"The January TTI report is the first solid piece of intelligence on the harmful impact that coronavirus will have on the travel industry and, by extension, the U.S. economy," said David Huether, Sr. Vice President, Research, U.S. Travel in the report. "Over the next six months, the international inbound travel LTI projects the largest decline in travel to the U.S. since the financial crisis of 2009—a stark deterioration compared to expectations just a month ago. It is important to note that conditions are changing daily and the prospect for an even larger impact on travel should not be discounted."

Domestic leisure's 4.2% growth fueled a positive showing for the U.S. travel industry with the overall CTI of 51.5 indicating 3% overall growth for January. All domestic readings topped 50.

Adam Sacks, President of Oxford's Tourism Economics group said: "An

already-weak international travel segment will likely experience some severe declines due to coronavirus-related adjustments and concerns. Domestic travel remains strong, but it too will soften as global and US economic momentum continues to slow."

U.S. Travel warned the uptick is almost certain to change as future TTIs begin to reflect the coronavirus' cascading effects. Dow pointed to advice from agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that the best thing travelers can do is utilize good health practices - wash hands often, cover coughs or sneezes, stay home if you are sick, etc.

"Obviously the traveling public should be exercising caution just as they would for the average flu season," said Dow. "But for the many of us who have upcoming plans to attend a convention or meeting or go on a family vacation, public health officials have repeatedly said there is no cause to alter those U.S.-based plans at the moment."

## Preliminary Results Show Narrow Defeat for San Diego Conv. Ctr. Measure

*With Outstanding Ballots, Backers Still Hoping for Victory*

By Jonathan Trager

Preliminary results indicate that a ballot measure to provide funds for expanding the San Diego Convention Center had been narrowly rejected, but proponents are holding out hope uncounted mail-in and provisional ballots will change the apparent outcome.

The day after the vote on March 3, San Diego news outlets reported that voters had rejected Measure C by a margin of 63.55% to 36.45%. The measure, which would have also funded road improvements and homelessness projects, needed a two-thirds supermajority for passage.

However, Clifford "Rip" Rippetoe, President & CEO of the San Diego Convention Center Corp., told *USAE* it's still too early to admit defeat and patience is needed because the measure still has a chance for victory.

"I'm an eternal optimist," Rippetoe told *USAE* on March 5. "As long as it's

possible, I'm going to continue to give optimistic energy toward that."

Mail ballots still had three days to arrive if postmarked by March 3. Provisional ballots results from voters going to a non-assigned polling place; those who sign up to vote by mail, then decided to go to a poll anyway, and those who register on Election Day. Election workers must inspect and process each provisional ballot.

The *San Diego Union-Tribune* reported on March 4 that there were still 350,000 ballots that remained uncounted, although the San Diego Registrar of Voters was unable to say how many of those were countywide or within the city of San Diego, which are the only ones that count toward Measure C. *USAE* contacted the Registrar of Voters on March 5 and was told there would be no update until after press deadline.

While acknowledging a win for the measure was still a mathematical possibility, the *Union-Tribune* said that out-

come was a long shot and the loss "has likely killed any near-term prospects for enlarging the bayfront venue, a civic priority for the last decade."

San Diego currently has an occupancy tax of 10.5%, with an additional 2% levy added by hotels.

Over the course of its 42-year life, the measure was projected to raise \$3.8 billion to expand the convention center, \$2 billion for homeless services, and \$600 million for road repairs.

If after all the votes are counted the measure still falls short, the Measure C Coalition, which mounted a vigorous campaign to garner enough voter support, will regroup and consider their options going forward, Rippetoe said.

"No matter what path forward we have right now, we want to continue to drive ourselves as a first-tier destination and continue to provide great customer service so we can keep functioning as such for many years," he said.

## Cancel?

*continued from page 2*

you have a lot of people who going to say, 'Hell, no, I'm not going to go,' if you want to keep the show going - which a lot of people are - and there are a lot of people saying it's just not worth the risk and the problems, you do what you have to do."

Howe and Jacobs both recommended that organizations examine their insurance policies as well as their contracts with convention centers, hotels, and vendors for any exits. Howe also recommended reaching out to local CVBs to see what they're doing about the situation.

Jacobs brought up a potential wrinkle when it comes to event cancellation insurance, though.

"We've seen situations where event cancellation policy clearly covers disease but doesn't cover the fear of disease," Jacobs said. "And so what does that mean? When is a member not attending because of fear of disease or avoiding a disease if it's in that area? So I think there will be a lot of fights in those areas."

Jacobs also said that if the exhibitors already paid and the host organization is not required to make refunds, then the insurance policy likely won't cover event organizers if the organizers decide to refund tickets anyway.

"What may be a good business relations decision may really cause economic distress for the association," Jacobs said.

Overall, it's a tough call.

"I think overall this is something that is really sort of getting so overblown," Howe said, saying the United States is in "watching and waiting" mode right now. Nevertheless, he said there are real concerns with how COVID-19 plays out.

"There's so many unknowns from the medical and scientific side that it's very hard to make the business judgment," Howe said. "I think a lot of companies have made a business judgment, saying: 'I'm not going to expose my personnel to that possible risk. I don't know what the risk is, but I don't like what I'm hearing.'"

Compared to associations, employers have both a lower economic impact from skipping an event and a higher legal responsibility, according to Jacobs.

"There's a difference between a duty that a trade association may owe to its members that are coming to attend an event versus the duty that an employer owes to its employees," Jacobs said. "That tends to be a higher standard of care that the employer has."

According to Jacobs, that means a company may decide to play it safer than an organization putting on an event, especially since the company's economic loss in the event of cancellation is also likely lower than the association's economic loss.



Travel Portland's State of the Industry event was held on Feb. 25 at the Portland Art Museum. The event celebrated strong tourism in 2019 when Portland region welcomed 8.8 million overnight person-trips and visitors. Roger Dow of the U.S. Travel Association was the keynote speaker at the event. Left to right: Keith Leavitt, Port of Portland; Dan Pippenger, Port of Portland; Dow; David Zielke, Port of Portland; and Jeff Miller, Travel Portland.

# NEWS

## United, JetBlue Curb Domestic Flights Amid COVID-19 Fears

By Grant Broadhurst

While international travel to and from China has become a no-go for now, United Airlines and JetBlue are also reducing their domestic flights.

In a letter provided to *USAE*, United CEO Oscar Munoz and President Scott Kirby said United's schedules in the United States and Canada will be reduced 10 percent in April with similar reductions for the May schedule. United said the specific changes were planned to be announced March 7. United cited decreases in domestic and international demand as the reason. Like United, JetBlue told *USAE* in a statement it is reducing its capacity by about five percent "in the near term to address the fall in demand."

In their statement to *USAE*, JetBlue said: "We are closely monitoring book-

ing trends to assess whether additional capacity reductions will be required. Our plan ensures that, in nearly all cases, customers can be moved to other flights that will get them to their destination on the same day. In addition to the capacity adjustment, we are taking additional measures aimed at preserving cash including reducing hiring for both frontline and support center positions, considering voluntary time off programs as appropriate, and limiting non-essential spending."

United is similarly tightening the belt. "Due to decline in demand flowing from the impact of COVID-19, we're taking additional steps to reduce our international and domestic schedules. All of our schedule reductions are, importantly, being implemented in a way that minimizes the impact on our

employees and our operation," Munoz and Kirby wrote. "For example, we're reducing the number of frequencies per week, finding routes with alternative travel options via other United hubs, and delaying start dates for seasonal travel to certain destinations – without closing any domestic stations."

In addition to the 10 percent reduction in flights domestically, United plans to reduce its international schedule by 20 percent in April with similar changes in May.

To give new passengers more flexibility, United said it is waiving change fees for any bookings made between March 3 and March 31, allowing passengers to change flights for free for the next 12 months.

However, to save money amid the reduced operations, United is implement-

ing a hiring freeze for non-critical roles through at least June 30, postponing non-union merit salary increases for management and administrative employees to July 1, and offering U.S. employees to apply for voluntary, unpaid leaves of absence or reduced schedules.

Munoz and Kirby said United is also staying in contact with health organizations including the CDC and the World Health Organization to enhance safety.

"We sincerely hope that these latest measures are enough, but the dynamic nature of this outbreak requires us to be nimble and flexible moving forward in how we respond," Munoz and Kirby wrote. "We are confident that if we continue to stick together as one United family, we will emerge from this challenge better positioned than ever to take United to new heights."

## Tornado

continued from page 1

windows and damaged signage, but the building was still standing.

Pearl Amaechi, a spokesperson for Choice Hotels, told *USAE* no one was injured at either of their impacted franchises. "Both hotels are temporarily closed as the owners work with insurance agencies to assess and repair any damage, and safely reopen as soon as possible," Amaechi said.

While the damage was still being assessed as of print, Amaechi said the Sleep Inn & Suites in Lebanon took some damage to the lobby and a stairwell, causing the staircase walls to be exposed. Some guest rooms also had water damage.

As for the Clarion in east Nashville, Amaechi said it "had some windows blown out, and damage to the roof and awnings. Currently, there is no power. However, some areas of this hotel were

unaffected, and the hotel plans to reopen once power is restored."

A few state legislators were staying at the Clarion the night of the tornado. State Representative David Hawk (R-Greenville) told News 5, a local NBC affiliate, that he took refuge in the bathroom. "I got on the other side of the bed after I started hearing glass shattering in some of the other rooms adjacent to me. I'm just happy to be here."

"I heard all this stuff hitting the window, some big stuff started hitting," State Senator Todd Gardenhire (R-Chattanooga) told *The Chattanooga Times Free Press*. He came through safely, but the back window of his SUV was blown out.

State Representative Yusuf Hakeem (D-Chattanooga) told the newspaper that small pieces of debris fell from the ceiling while he hunkered down in the bathroom.

On the other side of the river, the impact downtown entertainment area was low. "We are grateful that even with all the devastation, the majority of the city



The scene at the FieldHouse Jones Nashville boutique hotel on the morning of March 3. Photo Credit: Cory McCauley

and the downtown entertainment district was spared," Spyridon said. "As we support those in need and focus on their immediate concerns, we are encouraged that Nashville's music will keep playing. The Grand Ole Opry, Ryman Auditorium and others are open, and many will be collecting donations from audience members. Our industry has come together to focus on helping our neighbors while also serving our visitors."

Spyridon said some hospitality industry partners have employees who lost homes. The CVC is accepting donations for impacted people through its Music City Inc. Foundation and started a fund with a donation of \$10,000. "Our hearts

go out to all who have been affected," Spyridon said.

On March 5, the Convention Center Authority also announced a donation of \$50,000 to the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee fund. "The devastation from the tornado impacted many people and businesses in our community, including some from our team," Charles Starks, President and CEO of Music City Center, said. "On behalf of our team, we are making a donation as we stand together with our community."

Through Airbnb's OpenHomes program, affected people and relief workers can find free accommodations through March 24.

## Robertson

continued from page 1

the entire association community. We do not take that responsibility lightly, and everything we do is with an eye toward giving association leaders the tools and resources they need to be successful in their own organizations."

Robertson has more than 19 years of experience at ASAE. Since last June, she had served as Interim President & CEO after John Graham, IV, CAE, President & CEO, ASAE, stepped away due to cancer; Graham died in January at 70. Previously she'd served as Executive Vice President of ASAE, and President of the ASAE Research Foundation.

"Susan has the board's full confidence as a chief staff executive," said Patricia Blake, CAE, ASAE Chair; CEO, Heart Rhythm Society. "ASAE continues to thrive as an organization under her leadership, and continuity is very important for ASAE during its Centennial and beyond. The board looks forward to working with Susan to give her the volunteer support she will need to ensure ASAE meets and exceeds the expectations of its members, volunteers, industry partners and other important stakeholders. This board decision provides clarity for Susan, the staff and the ASAE community."

Information about the search will be posted on ASAE's website and other pertinent industry publications. A search firm will be identified in October. If inter-



Susan Robertson, CAE

ested, Robertson would be eligible for consideration.

"The board has a responsibility to ensure the most efficient, effective transition possible, so we will perform our due diligence and retain professional, external assistance to conduct a national search for ASAE's next president and CEO," said Blake. "ASAE's future is dependent on strong CEO and staff leadership, and it is the board's intent with an executive search to prudently safeguard ASAE's stature and ensure the organization is positioned for long-term growth and success."

## IMEX

continued from page 1

currently have NO plans to postpone or cancel.

"We're very grateful for the ongoing support of our exhibitors and attendees who continue to register and plan for the show and we've not experienced any substantial impacts so far."

Bauer told *USAE* that as of March 2, there had been no impact on the show – including no cancellations – adding feedback on the e-mail and related matters had been really positive. No cancellation deadline has been set with IMEX group confidently moving forward. Postponing or moving IMEX is not under consideration.

In event of cancellation IMEX Group is guaranteeing the refund of stand

space for exhibitors; and guaranteeing the refund of any flights hosted buyers may have purchased to Frankfurt

As noted, IMEX's future could be out of organizers' hands. European events are under siege as governments across the continent seek to mitigate the virus' impact. Switzerland recently prohibited gatherings of more than 1,000 people forcing the cancellation of the 90<sup>th</sup> Geneva International Motor Show, March 5-15. The Italian government announced all sporting events will be played sans spectators until April 3 with Serie A soccer and other prominent competitions contested in empty venues.

On Feb. 28, the cancellation of ITB Berlin at Messe Berlin was announced in a release. In 2019, 10,000 companies and organizations from 181 countries exhibited with 160,000 attendees - including

Please turn to page 6

## —INDUSTRY MOVERS—



**Frederick Sawyers** has been named Managing Director for Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek and Waldorf Astoria Orlando. Sawyers' 35-year career includes multiple leadership roles. Most recently he served as Complex General Manager for Walt Disney World's Swan and Dolphin. He also was Complex General Manager for Hilton New Orleans Riverside and Doubletree by Hilton New Orleans. Sawyers' experience also includes time at the Hilton New Orleans Airport.



**Brittany Kummer** has joined the French Lick Resort's sales staff. She comes to the Indiana resort with eight years of experience at hotels in the St. Louis area, having served as a Sales Manager at Chase Park Plaza St. Louis, Marriott St. Louis West and Drury. A University of Missouri graduate, Kummer is a MPI St. Louis Chapter member and serves as Director of Member Care.



**Alex Cormier** has been tapped as Director of Food & Beverage for Hotel Contessa in San Antonio - BENCHMARK, a global hospitality company announced. Cormier was previously Outlet Manager at Hotel Contessa. He has served as General Manager for Ruggles Green of Houston and earlier as Food & Beverage Manager for Redstone Golf Club, also of Houston. He is a graduate of College Mont Morency in Montreal.



**Ayten Miroyeva** has been appointed Sales Director at NH Collection New York Madison Avenue - the company's first hotel in North America. Miroyeva formerly was Vice President of Business Development and Partner at Vasconi Architects International. She was also Regional Director of Global Sales and Marketing for East Coast /Canada/LATAM at Melia Hotels International. She holds degrees from Texas A&M University and Oxford School of Management.

## IMEX

*continued from page 5*

113,500 trade professionals - on hand.

"Due to the rapid spread of the new coronavirus (COVID-19) the Federal Ministry of Health and the Federal Ministry of Economics have stated their opinion that ITB Berlin be cancelled. This evening at (6:27) hours, the responsible health authority of the district of Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf in Berlin imposed significantly tighter restrictions on holding the event. Among its requirements the authority stipulated that each participant would need to prove to Messe Berlin that they were not from a designated risk area or had not been in contact with a person or persons from a risk area. It is not possible for Messe Berlin to satisfy these requirements overall."

Messe Berlin had for weeks made it known that a decision on holding or

cancelling large-scale events would only be taken based on the recommendations or instructions of the relevant specialist authorities."

Dr. Christian Göke, CEO of Messe Berlin GmbH, said: "With more than 10,000 exhibitors from over 180 countries ITB Berlin is extremely important for the world's tourism industry. We take our responsibility for the health and safety of our visitors, exhibitors and employees very seriously. It is with a heavy heart that we must now come to terms with the cancellation of ITB Berlin 2020."

IMEX Group is monitoring the situation with German health officials as well as Messe Frankfurt, German Convention Bureau, Frankfurt Tourist Office and more. Bauer said the team is closely studying World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines and is working with Messe Frankfurt and other partners to determine which onsite precau-

tions should be installed; the plan is forthcoming. She added the facility is hosting other events in the interim and those protocols and procedures will be reviewed.

"Mindful of our duty of care, we're also carefully considering and consulting with experts on what the appropriate sanitary, health and other measures should be. Ray and I assure you that all appropriate measures will be in place at IMEX," the letter stated.

"COVID-19 is presenting the business events and travel industries with an unprecedented global challenge. The IMEX team are passionate believers in, and advocates for, the substantial social and economic power of meetings and events. Like you, we know that the negative long-term impact of speculation, hype and over-reaction will be damaging not just to our industry, but also to your local communities and business as a whole.

"We feel strongly that it is our collective responsibility to focus on the facts and to act with common sense and sound judgement, taking the advice of the relevant authorities and scientists. In the words of Gloria Guevara, President and CEO, World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTTC), "containing the spread of unnecessary panic is as important as stopping the virus itself."

Organizers noted more than 3,400 suppliers from every sector of the worldwide meetings industry attend IMEX annually and meet with approximately 5,100 qualified buyers. A full-slate of education/networking is also on the agenda. Bauer said sessions on the coronavirus are being developed with areas such as crisis management on the docket.

IMEX Group is encouraging everyone to visit [www.imex-frankfurt.com/covid-19-update](http://www.imex-frankfurt.com/covid-19-update) for regular updates from it and industry partners.

## Coronavirus Fears

*continued from page 1*

In the tradeshow mecca of Chicago, the International Housewares Association (IHA), announced it wouldn't hold its four-day Inspired Home Show at McCormick Place this year. The show which draws close to 60,000 visitors each year, was scheduled for March 14 - 17.

"The IHA board of directors made this decision after consulting with industry constituents including exhibitors and retailers," said IHA President Derek Miller. "In the end, the global nature of our event, combined with the worldwide concern regarding the coronavirus outbreak and ongoing travel restrictions, make it impossible for us to hold the Inspired Home Show next week."

The IHA had previously announced its International Sourcing Expo, which mostly houses Chinese-based suppliers, wouldn't open in 2020 at McCormick Place due to restrictions on travel between China and the United States. The trade group said in its statement that its 2021 show will be held at McCormick Place next March.

"We were disappointed that the Inspired Home Show was cancelled, but

look forward to welcoming them back next year," said Larita Clark, CEO of Metropolitan Pier & Exhibition Authority, which oversees McCormick Place.

Clark noted that the Chicago facility has recently hosted a number of successful events, including the NBA All-Star game earlier in February and an estimated 90,000 guests for the Chicago Comic & Entertainment Expo (C2E2).

"As this situation has evolved, we have been in conversations with our customers and are working closely with them as they assess the situation and are not aware of any other planned cancellations," said Clark.

The Game Developers Conference and Google Cloud Next, shows that last year drew around 30,000 attendees, cancelled their events scheduled for March 16 - 20 and April 6 - 8 at the Moscone Center in San Francisco. Gatherings of Facebook and Beautycounter have also been cancelled.

Joe D'Alessandro, President & CEO of the San Francisco Tourism Association, said the organization is also expecting more cancellations in the near future. It's disconcerting that the destination just had its 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of record growth but that trend clearly won't continue this year, he added.

"We're fortunate to have a lot of international conferences here in San Francisco, and those are obviously being impacted the most," he told *USAE*. "We know we're going to come back from it, but this is the first time we've seen something like this in a very long time."

Tech research firm IDC cancelled its Directions conference scheduled for March 4 in San Jose, opting for a similar event on March 10 in Boston.

"We have made this choice out of an abundance of caution and believe it is the correct decision given the evolving public health concerns in the Bay Area," IDC said. "The potential risk to the well-being of Directions attendees and our staff is something IDC takes seriously."

In Denver, the American Physical Society cancelled its planned conference for more than 10,000 physicists at the Colorado Convention Center, which had been scheduled for March 2 - 6.

"VISIT DENVER met with the American Physical Society on [March 1], and we know that this was not a decision that they made lightly," said Richard Scharf, President & CEO of VISIT DENVER. "In addition to providing resources for APS attendees who had already arrived in Denver, we are looking at dates for APS to return to Denver."

Scharf added: "Our primary concern at this time is for all who are affected by this global health challenge, and we are hopeful for a swift resolution that keeps travelers to the U.S., Denver, and Colorado safe and secure."

Given the concerns of tradeshow exhibitors and convention attendees, there are groups that are being proactive in their approach. This includes Events DC, which oversees the Walter E. Washington Convention Center, a facility that hasn't seen any cancellations to date.

"It's very sad what's going on throughout the world, and our hearts go out to everybody affected by it," said Greg O'Dell, President & CEO of Events DC. "But we also want people to know Washington, D.C., is still open for business."

O'Dell said his organization has nearly doubled the sanitation stations and ramped up the frequency for cleaning the building. More messaging appears throughout the facility about the importance of hygiene.

"Just as we live and breathe by these protocols for our employees, we demonstrate these practices for our customers as well and I think they appreciate it," O'Dell told *USAE*.

Nashville has had a spate of 11 tour-

*Please turn to page 7*

## NEWS

## Meet Ken Price, Palmer House Hotel Historian

### *P.S. He Once Hated History*

By Grant Broadhurst

The interview began with a question and a shout.

Ken Price, the Hotel Historian (and Director of Public Relations) at the Palmer House, A Hilton Hotel, started by asking what this reporter knew about the Palmer House.

Well, it's a well-respected old hotel in Chicago that . . .

"Only say vintage and classic!" Price suddenly boomed through the phone. "Old is pejorative!"

As this reporter recovered, Price chuckled and said he likes surprising people with that move.

"Old is kind of pejorative," he explained. "We are a vintage, classic piece of American history, and I want everyone to be aware of that."

While Price received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Historic Hotels of America in 2018, history hadn't always been his passion. Far from it.

When Price – who said his age is "somewhere between 60 and death" – joined the Palmer House 37 years ago as Director of Public Relations, his brushes with history had not been happy ones.

"When I was in high school and college, I hated history," Price said. "I hated

it because of the way it was taught."

He hated how it was all about chronology – a series of dry dates and statistics.

But the Palmer House had a problem. In the late 1970s, the hotel's Empire Room nightclub closed, cutting off what had been a great draw of business. Then Chicago Mayor Jane Byrne cut off vehicular traffic on State Street in order to create a pedestrian-only thoroughfare.

Cutting off the traffic artery was "a major, major mistake," according to Price, and the hotel suffered. So Price's boss at the time, Jim Sheerin, told him the hotel needed to tap into something else to draw guests. And that something else was the hotel's history. After all, the hotel had been continuously operating since 1873.

Price wasn't enthused, but he was game to try. So he spent eight months of weekends learning from stacks of books and records "about the blood and guts and DNA of the people related to the dates."

In the process, he had an epiphany. "All of a sudden, I got this religion. I realized that, God, this is so great learning the good and the bad about the people," Price said.

His research into the people and the stories eventually grew into his popular "History Is Hott!!" tour, which focuses not on the dates but on the people who made

Chicago what it is.

Why is the tour called "History Is Hott!!" with two T's? Price replied: "Because it helps underscore [how] the tour is completely different from other such tours. We have trademarked the name!"

The tour takes about three hours and accommodates about 25 people at a time. Price said it's highly interactive and involves letting guests handle historical artifacts.

"I pass it around and say, 'Touch this. This is from the Great Chicago Fire!'" Price said.

In fact, the first Palmer House opened in September 1871. It was a luxurious wedding present from business magnate Potter Palmer to his bride Bertha Honoré. It was also doomed. The hotel burned down only 13 days later in the Great Chicago Fire. Undeterred, Palmer built the second Palmer House, which opened in 1873.

Since then, the hotel has hosted U.S. Presidents and notables including Charles Dickens and Oscar Wilde. The Empire Room served as the stage for entertainers like Judy Garland, Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, and Louis Armstrong.

Price said that while he still does some work as Director of Public Relations, three-quarters of his time is now spent on his hotel historian duties, giving tours and helping out researchers, authors, and documentarians from all over the world.

His work also meshes with promoting the hotel, as was originally intended more



Ken Price

than 30 years ago.

Price said: "I work very closely with our sales department because one of our marketing edges is our history. Very, very few hotels in the world have the kind of history we have and that is a bit of magic – and all of it is true – to sell the hotel."

Because for the man who once hated history, the charm is not in the dates and statistics.

"I tell people who are going on these tours with me, if you take the 'H' and the 'I' off of history, what are you left with?" Price asked.

Story.



The lobby of the Palmer House, A Hilton Hotel.

## Coronavirus Fears

*continued from page 6*

ism-related cancellations because of concerns surrounding coronavirus, according to Nashville CVC officials, none of them huge.

The largest was restaurant group TGI Friday's one-day convention and bartender competition. Scheduled for the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center, the event had booked about 600 rooms.

"We are seeing cancellations driven by an abundance of caution," said Butch Spyridon, President & CEO of the Nashville CVC, according to the *Nashville Tennessean*. "No panic, but people trying to mitigate any potential long-term impacts."

After Switzerland lawmakers decided to ban all events with more than 1,000 people, Baselworld, the largest annual tradeshow in that industry, was postponed to January 2021. The Geneva International Motor Show cancelled its event scheduled from March 5 – 15.

Meanwhile, the effect of the virus is being felt in the cruise industry as well. About 3,500 passengers on Princess Cruises' Grand Princess cruise ship were stranded last week off the coast of San Francisco.

By mid-week there were 11 passengers and 10 crew members who had reported symptoms of coronavirus on board.

Gov. Gavin Newsom said at a press conference on March 4 that the ship would remain offshore near San Francisco until coronavirus testing on some passengers could be completed.

South by Southwest (SXSW) the wildly popular annual tech, film, and music conference in Austin, Texas, had come under public pressure to cancel. The event last year drew a whopping 417,000 attendees.

Fortunately for the state's capital city, organizers agreed to proceed as planned from March 13 – 22 despite concerns about coronavirus, Austin public health officials said during a March 4 press conference.

"It's important for us to remember at this stage that we're actively evaluating mass gatherings on a daily basis," said Mark Escott, the interim medical director and health authority for Austin Public Health, CNN Business reported. "Right now there's no evidence that closing South by Southwest or other activities is going to make this community safer. We're constantly monitoring that situation."

This story is still developing.

## Coronavirus Cancels World ATM Congress in Madrid

By Todd McElwee

Less than a week before it was scheduled for a March 10-12 run at IFEMA Feria de Madrid, World ATM Congress, the world's largest international air traffic management (ATM) conference, was canceled due to the coronavirus. A partnership between the Civil Air Navigation Services Organisation (CANSO) and Air Traffic Control Association (ATCA), the decision was announced March 4.

The congress' website notes 9,500 registrants from 135 countries. North of 200 speakers and 250 sessions were penciled in with 253 exhibitors set to be onsite.

The notice read: "Dear World ATM Congress Exhibitors, Presenters, and Attendees.

"Thank you for your continued support and patience as we have worked through the last few weeks. As you know, we have been in lockstep communication with the Spanish health authorities, IFEMA, the city of Madrid, and our exhibitors, vendors, and attendees.

"At this time, due to the inordinate amount of travel restrictions, imposed on exhibitors and attendees at both national and organizational levels, we have decided to cancel World ATM Congress 2020. We feel this cancellation is in line with guidance from the World Health Organization and is in the best interest of public health and the safety of our participants. We apologize for the inconvenience this

decision causes.

"We did not arrive at this outcome lightly. From the beginning of World ATM Congress eight years ago, we envisioned an event by the industry for the industry. In light of this worldwide epidemic, we believe cancellation benefits our industry more than holding the event would. As managers of the world's largest air traffic management (ATM) exposition, we too are members of the aviation industry, a community of front-line users, technology developers, academics, and government officials, as well as passengers ourselves, all committed to a 365/24/7 operation. World ATM Congress is an integral piece of the global airspace ecosystem and provides the most valuable venue in the world for advancing our industry. It is with heavy hearts that we make this announcement, but we know you will all understand. To our exhibitors, sponsors, and presenters, we kindly ask for your patience as we develop and announce next steps. We will be in contact with each of you in the coming days and weeks. Until then, our sympathies are with those affected by COVID-19 and our gratitude with those who continue to maintain aviation as the lifeblood of our global economy and the world's safest form of transportation.

"Thank you again for your support, loyalty, and expertise. We look forward to hosting you next year at World ATM Congress 2021, held at IFEMA Feria de Madrid, 9 – 11 March 2021."

# NEWS

## Oklahoma City CVB Unveils New Brand

By Jonathan Trager

The Oklahoma City CVB has launched an all-new branding campaign to evolve the current perception of Oklahoma City called “The Modern Frontier.”

The new brand was debuted to attractions, hoteliers, and other CVB partners in Oklahoma City in late February at the Will Rogers Theatre.

The CVB bills the campaign and tagline as a “contemporary nod to OKC’s heritage” that also “looks ahead as the city defines its own future.”

“It takes more than the CVB to tell the story of Oklahoma City,” said Mike Carrier, President of the OKC CVB. “We hope that locals will rally behind this campaign just as much as the Chamber and the CVB to help share the message of OKC.”

The bureau engaged in a 10-month branding project that included more than 75 one-on-one interviews, extensive research, news media and competitor city analysis, and input from civic, business, tourism, and other industry partners. The research and development process cost just under \$40,000, Lindsay Vidrine, Vice President of Destination Marketing for the OKC CVB, told *USAE*.

“Key values identified during the research process include the following: collaborative, diverse, honest, resilient, authentic, kind, and daring.”

“This campaign unifies our brand story across convention and leisure audiences, while also being relevant to local residents, economic development audiences and beyond,” said Vidrine.

“No single entity tells OKC’s story, but collectively we can share an authentic



and welcoming voice which reflects the driven, resourceful and collaborative spirit that makes our city distinct.”

The citywide branding elements will be introduced through advertising and promotional efforts by local industry partners, in addition to the OKC CVB’s national print and digital advertising,

website content, video elements, and social media channels. The CVB worked with two local agencies: Nominee for the branding exercise and Jordan Advertising for the creative execution.

The OKC CVB’s page for key messaging, promotional items, social graphics, and more is [www.visitokc.com/brand](http://www.visitokc.com/brand).

## Destinations International Turns Focus to Coronavirus Response

By Jonathan Trager

Destinations International launched a website resource and hosted a member webinar last week to provide information about the impact of coronavirus on the visitors industry and how members can deal with the fallout.

The organization’s [COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\) Travel Industry Resource Page](#) contains the following statement:

“Destinations International’s number one goal is to give our members the tools they need, which includes accurate and up-to-date information as it pertains to the effects of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) on travel, tourism and the meetings industry. We will continue to monitor and share news and factual data from industry partners around the world. We believe in the many benefits of travel and tourism as well as the resilience of our industry. Education and preparation are key to the safety and security of public health during this outbreak.”

Site offerings include tips and articles, website links to key health and industry organizations, and a tool for members to keep up with the cancellation status of conventions.

The member webinar on March 5 offered insights from industry experts on a variety of crisis-related issues.

Don Welsh, President and CEO, noted that earlier the association had issued this statement in conjunction with partner organizations ASAE, EIC, IAEE, IAVM, MPI, PCMA, and USTA. It states in part:

“As numerous organizations determine plans related to conducting meetings, conferences, conventions and trade shows—where people gather in sizable groups to conduct business—we strongly encourage decisions to be based in facts rather than fear, given the enormity of the impact to the workforce that supports the events industry.”

While experts are saying to be prudent and practice best-health recommendations that are similar to the prevention of the seasonal flu, public health authorities are not saying there should be restrictions on business or leisure travel anywhere in the United States. That’s a critically important point: there is no official guidance that travel plans in the U.S. should be curtailed or cancelled.”

During the webinar, Amy Calvert, CEO of the Events Industry Council, said it’s important to make “fact-based decisions” and for value-based organizations to honor commitments, particularly when considering “people whose paychecks rely on it” such as the front-line hospitality and convention center workers.

Andreas Weissenborn, Sr. Director of

Research & Advocacy for DI, noted that research shows safety and security is at the top of meeting and event planner concerns.

Cathy Tull, President of Cartier Global Strategies and former Chief Marketing Officer at the Las Vegas CVA during the shooting at Mandalay Bay hotel in 2017. Tull spoke about need for a DMO to have a trained crisis response team identified with a team leader and to have pre-written message points for an emergency targeted at key audiences.

Brian Grimaldi, an attorney at Greenberg Traurig, spoke about contract issues regarding hotel cancellations and insurance coverage.

In order to trigger a “force majeure” clause, a contract provision that relieves the parties from performing their contractual obligations when certain

circumstances beyond their control arise, there needs to be an official act such as the government declaring an emergency, said Grimaldi.

Julie Hart, President of CFO by Design, predicted a decline in hotel revenues. Many large businesses are placing travel restrictions on employees, limiting the number who can participate in meetings, said Hart, and many people are requesting refunds from attractions.

Tammy Blount-Canavan, Executive Vice President, Principal - Destination & Travel Practice, Fired Up! Culture, mentioned the importance of leadership and dealing with stress and anxiety. Practices include maintaining a positive attitude through difficulty, acknowledging stressors, keeping a gratitude journal, getting enough sleep, and consuming healthy energy-boosting foods.

## Columbus-Lowndes CVB, Preservation Society Battle Over Pilgrimage

By Jonathan Trager

The Columbus-Lowndes CVB and the Preservation Society of Columbus (PSC) in Mississippi are engaged in a legal spat over the name of an annual event that will take place later this month.

“The argument has led to dual cease-and-desist letters being sent to each party, according to Dick Leike, President of the PSC, told *USAE*.”

While the PSC has registered the name “Columbus Spring Pilgrimage,” the CVB registered the name “Columbus MS Spring Pilgrimage” on behalf of the Columbus Cultural Heritage Foundation (CCHF), which has the same board members as the CVB. The PSC registered the name after it discovered the original registration had lapsed.

The PSC is comprised of owners of historic homes dating back to the 1800s. Tours of those homes have been integral to the 80-year-old Pilgrimage, which will be held on March 26 – April 4.

“They probably want us to sue them so if they have liability insurance they can make them pay for lawyers,” he told *USAE*. “We don’t plan to sue them, but

we’ll get down to the nitty gritty about it.”

Leike said the quarrel stems from the desire of the PSC to run the home tours itself starting in 2021. The group has also requested \$117,000 from the CVB used to help fund the Pilgrimage each year, an amount traditionally allocated to the CCHF.

“Every time it seemed like they didn’t want to talk about it; they didn’t want to discuss it,” said Leike. “It just hasn’t been a good fair discussion about it.”

Leike said historic homeowners aren’t participating this year as a result. CVB Executive Director Nancy Carpenter said her group will still conduct the celebration without those particular homes while featuring other events such as a birthday celebration for the late local playwright Tennessee Williams. More information may be found <https://visitcolumbusms.org/calendar-of-events/spring-pilgrimage/>.

Carpenter called *USAE* and said she’d be available to further discuss the issue at a later time but didn’t meet the deadline. *USAE* also reached out to CVB Chair Scott Wallace, who didn’t respond.



In recognition of its 30th anniversary, the Minneapolis Convention Center (MCC) is presenting bottles of Mill City Cellars wine — the private label of in-house caterer Kelber Catering — to clients who have held their events at the facility for each of the past 30 years. On Feb. 27, MCC staff presented bottles to members of the Minneapolis Home + Garden Show. Left to right: Jody Geiselhart, Lori Rausch, Autumn Pennington, Kristin Nelson, Danielle Maki, Kim Shipman, Lauren Wallerius, Jeff Johnson, Jennifer Sorensen, Katie Smith, and Jill Kottke.

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