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.

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 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 the 100-year history, Robertson will serve an 18-month term. The 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 the 100-year history, Robertson will serve an 18-month term. The 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

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, Chair, IMEX Group; and Carina Bauer, CEO, announced they “have no plans to postpone or cancel the show” due to the coronavirus, but did note, “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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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.”

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 windows at the FieldHouse Jones, which is open. The Clarion Hotel Nashville Downtown – Stadium is closed.

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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 ensure 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.”

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 impacting 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 meeting events.”

“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; John Biel, President of Compliance Week; and Dow Constantine, President & CEO, A4A. The chamber discussed the coronavirus’ impact and how the business community is responding.

The Chamber and participating organizations all provide a variety 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 continuing leadership during this public health crisis,” said Calio. “We appreciate the opportunity to meet with the Vice President, and his team, to provide for trade and economic development.”

At the March 4 meeting, Pence to discuss pragmatic, efficient 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 other events? 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 breaching 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.

 Likewise, 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 concern. 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 and event hosts can also go a step further.

“My advice is 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.

The same advice applies to groups of associations. He said the group’s reference organizations might be “a heck of a lot better off canceling the show” if attendance is going to be dismal because of attendance work or employer-mandated – judgment.

“If it’s realistic, if it’s not, if it’s beyond the control of the conference or trade show, maybe we’re better off canceling the show.”

By Grant Broadhurst

Don Welch, 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 Destination International Accreditation Program. Pictured here: Welsh presenting the accreditation to Julie Calvert, President & CEO of the Cincinnati USA CVB.
Recently HOTS had the opportunity to participate in the 68th 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 rods and other vehicles worth hundreds and thousands of dollars, polished tires that will never see a street, and owners standing proudly nearby. In contrast to the dazzling cars upstairs, the lower level offered a different scene. The first thing HOTS saw was a rusted and dented truck adorned with massive spikes, depictions of skulls, and a too-forgive 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 digest for just a moment, the term hot rod derived after veterans returned from WWII, 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 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, on 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 and proud of his 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 his dad stopped by so many Thunderbirds at the show.

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 numb, the stories deep 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 on a major international trade show for many years. Every year, it holds the sheer dedication of the organizers 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 its 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 cancelation 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 straightforward cancelation.”

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.
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 international, 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 reconsidering 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, six and six-month predictive indicators with scores above 50 indicating growth and below reduction.

International LTIs were 47 and 4.8 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 that 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 Hueter, 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.

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

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 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 am 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 uncoun ted, 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 primary deadline.

While acknowledging a win for the measure was still a mathematical possibility, the Union-Tribune said that outcome 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 rate of 4.2%. Howe also said he would feel confident moving forward if after all the votes are counted the measure still fails 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.

“Whatever 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.

Preliminary Results Show Narrow Defeat for San Diego Conv. Ctr. Measure
With Outstanding Ballots, Backers Still Hoping for Victory

Cancel? continued from page 2

If 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.

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, “so I think for the United States is in “watching and waiting” mode right now. Nevertheless, he said there are real concerns with how COVID-19 plays out.

“With 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 heavy feet. They’re watching, they’re thinking, 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.”

Company officials have reported that exhibitors 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 an event where an employer owes it 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.
United, JetBlue Curb Domestic Flights Amid COVID-19 Fears

By Grant Broadcast

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 travel demand as the main 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 desti-
nation 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 furloughs, and other actions as appropriate, and limiting non-essen-
tial spending.”

United is similarly tightening the belt. “Due to a 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 flexibil-
ity 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 re-
duced operations, United is implement-
ing a hiring freeze for non-critical roles through at least June 30, postponing orders for new aircraft, and preparing for man-
agement 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 organiza-
tions 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 contin-
ue to stick together as one United family, we will emerge from this challenge better positioned than ever to take United to new heights.”

IMEX continued from page 1

IMEX has currently 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,” Sprydon said.

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 cancelation of the 90th Geneva International Motor Show, March 5-15. The Italian government announced all sporting events will be played sans spec-
tators until April 3 with Serie A soccer and other prominent competitions contested in empty venues.

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

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113,500 trade professionals - on hand.

“Due to the rapid spread of the new coronavirus (COVID-19) the Federal Ministry and the Federal Min-
istry of Economics have stated their opinion that ITB Berlin be cancelled. This evening at (6.27) h, the responsible health authority of the district of Charlott-
enburg-Wilmerdorff 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 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 Ber-
lin 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 preparing other events in the interim and those protocols and procedures will be reviewed.

“Mindful of our duty of care, we’re also care-
fully 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 (WTTC), “containing the spread of unnec-
essary panic is as important as stopping the virus itself.”

Organizers noted more than 3,400 sup-
pliers from every sector of the worldwide meetings industry attend IMEX annually and meet with approximately 5,100 qual-
ified 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-updates for regular updates from it and industry partners.

Coronavirus Fears continued from page 7

In the tradeshow mecca of Chicago, the International Hoteliers 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 im-
possible for us to hold the Inspired Home Show next year.”

The IHA had previously announced its International Sourcing Expo, which mostly houses Chinese-based suppliers, would be held at McCormick Place due to restrictions on travel be-
tween 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 In-
spired 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).

“At 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 can-
celled.

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 10th consecutive year of record growth but that trend clearly won’t continue this year, he added.

“We’re fortunate to have a lot of interna-
tional 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 Di-
rectors 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 Directors and attendees at our event is something IDC takes seriously.”

In Denver, the American Physical So-
ciety 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 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 Colora-
do safe and secure.

Given the concerns of tradeshow ex-
hibitors 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 saying what’s going on throughout the world, and our hearts go out to every-
body 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 near-
ly doubled the sanitation stations and ramped up the frequency for cleaning the building. More messaging appears throughout the facility about the impor-
tance of hygiene.

“Just as we live and breathe by these protocols for our employees, we demon-
strate 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-
Is completed from page 6

Frederick Sawyers has been named Managing Director for Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek and Waldorf Astoria Or-
lando. Sawyers’ 35-year career includes multiple leadership roles. Most recently he served as Complex General Man-
ger for Walt Disney World’s Swan and Dolphin. He also was Complex General Manager for Hilton New Orleans River-
side and Doubletree by Hilton New Orle-
ans. 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, Marriot 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 in June that 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 Sales and 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.
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," 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 weekending 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 Ts?" Price replied: "Because it helps underscore [how] the hotel is completely different from other such tours. We have trademarked the name!"

The tour takes about three hours and accommodates about 35 people per 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 luxuriously furnished 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 setting 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 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 ‘f’ off of history, what are you left with?" Price asked.

Story.

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 by 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.”
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 attract tourists, hoteliers, and other CVB partners in Oklahoma City in late February at the Will Rogers Theatre. “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.”

Destinations International Turns Focus to Coronavirus Response

Don Welch, 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. can be curtailed or canceled.”

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” such the front-line hospitality and convention center workers.

Oklahoma City CVB Unveils New Brand

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 phase 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, positive spirit that makes our city distinct.”

The citywide branding elements will be introduced through advertising and marketing 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.
Buzzing with energy from a multi-million-dollar renovation of the Benton Convention Center and a $2 billion investment in the downtown area, Winston-Salem provides a perfect setting for inspired meetings. With 5,000 hotel rooms — including 1,200 downtown, great incentives, and a skilled convention services team, you’ll love meeting in Winston-Salem as much as your attendees. **Come see why we were voted as one of Forbes’ Top 10 Best DOWNTOWNS!**

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