



Elliott Ferguson, President & CEO of Destination DC, addressed city leaders, stakeholders, and representatives of local businesses during the organization's annual Marketing Outlook Meeting on August 29 at the Warner Theatre. See story on page 7

President of National Association of Realtors Resigns After Sexual Harassment

By Julia Stumbaugh

National Association of Realtors (NAR) President Kenny Parcell resigned on August 28 after multiple women employed by NAR accused him of sexual harassment in a *New York Times* report.

Parcell called the claims “categorically false” in his resignation letter.

Some members of the Chicago-based organization are also pushing for the exit of NAR CEO Bob Goldberg, according to *Inman News*. Goldberg announced in June that he will retire at the end of 2024 after seven years as CEO.

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TravelAbility Summit Digs into Nuance of Traveling With a Disability

By Jordan Bradley

The 2023 TravelAbility Emerging Markets Summit was held in Savannah, Georgia, from August 18–20, bringing together destinations and hotel representatives, travel industry experts and disability advocates to share their respective experiences with the purpose of transforming the world of travel into more accessible territory.

“It felt like some kind of frontier,” said Jake Steinman, founder and CEO of TravelAbility. “It felt like people were on to something.”

The annual TravelAbility summit launched in 2019. Since then, Steinman said he’s witnessed a change in the way attendees and presenters are sharing information, that the topics are becoming more in-depth and getting to the heart of accessibility travel. For Steinman and many within

the accessibility travel sphere, making hotels and destinations accessible is a win for everyone because everyone will eventually have an accessibility or mobility need, should we be lucky to live long enough.

“We know something that other people don’t know: This is a growing area,” Steinman said. “When we cater to people who are disabled today, that’s like a down payment for people who will be disabled tomorrow—and I don’t necessarily mean with your money; it’s also with things like attention, focus on training and promoting accessibility on your website. It’s beyond just doing research.”

A growing consensus at the conference is that compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is not enough to genuinely accommodate people with disabilities.

“The ADA provides a baseline [for accommodations,] but there is no

ADA accommodation for information,” Steinman said. “So what we’re trying to teach them here is we’re trying to give them access to the people with the lived experience, where they can meet—and it builds empathy.”

Alison Brooks of Visit Mesa of Mesa, Arizona—the first city in the United States to become a Certified Autism City—has attended every TravelAbility summit since 2019.

“I love it. It’s grown, which is really great to see,” Brooks said. “So many people are really opening their eyes to the need for destinations to become more accessible.”

For Brooks, the summit offers a chance to educate herself on up-and-coming technology and initiatives that she can implement in Mesa. Just from the first day of meetings, Brooks said she saw two promising program implementations: Enchroma, glasses

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NEWS

Canadian Government Urges LGBTQ Travelers to Check Laws Before Visiting U.S.

U.S. Travel: "Stop the Madness of Issuing Travel Advisories" for Controversial State Policies

By Todd McElwee

The Canadian government is warning LGBTQ travelers from north of the border to take heed when going to the United States. On August 29, Global Affairs Canada posted an advisory stating "Some states have enacted laws and policies that may affect 2SLGBTQI+ persons. Check relevant state and local laws."

U.S. Travel Association reasserted its industry's commitment to inclusivity and called for an end of similar advisories.

Geoff Freeman, President & CEO, U.S. Travel Association, told *USAE*: "It is hard to imagine an industry that is more welcoming to everyone than travel. It is who we are. From Florida to Hawaii, Texas to California, we provide meaningful experiences for all visitors. It is time to stop the madness of issuing travel advisories whenever a state government enacts

a controversial policy."

As noted by the *Washington Post*, the advisory did not mention any particular state laws or policies. Jérémie Bérubé, a spokesman for Global Affairs Canada, noted legislation passed this year in certain U.S. states "banning drag shows and restricting the transgender community from access to gender affirming care and from participation in sporting events," among other restrictions.

Found in a section featuring travel advice that touches on everything from entry procedures/programs to crime to hitchhiking to cannabis, the advisory links to the page: "Travel and your sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics." That offering includes more advice and information about traveling outside of Canada.

Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, a former foreign minister, told reporters on August 29, the

travel advice was updated because Ottawa prioritizes "the interests and the safety of every single Canadian." The *Post* reported she said, "We have professionals in the government whose job is to look carefully around the world and to monitor whether there are particular dangers to particular groups of Canadians," adding that it was "the right thing to do."

Responding to the advisory, Kelley Robinson, President, Human Rights Campaign (HRC), said just two months after HRC issued a National State of Emergency in response to the "unprecedented and dangerous onslaught of anti-LGBTQ laws passed across the country, the Canadian government has updated their U.S. travel policy warning LGBTQ+ Canadians about traveling to the country."

Robinson said: "When another country is affirming the state of emergency that LGBTQ+ people in

the U.S. are currently living through, it only further validates the grim reality that our community is facing. These declarations are anything but theatrical. This year alone, over 500 anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been introduced in state legislatures throughout the country, with over 220 of those bills specifically targeting transgender people. Over 80 anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been signed into law this year, more than any year on record. We are seeing this political extremism also manifesting into real life, fatal violence. LGBTQ+ Americans are living in a crisis, and it's vital that LGBTQ+ people stay informed about the risks and realities when traveling to and throughout the U.S."

The National Travel and Tourism Office reported in 2022 that Canada supplanted Mexico as the top source market for international visitation, with roughly 14.4 million arrivals.

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HOTS

HOTS See Ya Later, Alligator... It is, horrifyingly, alligator huntin' season in Mississippi. A group of four hunters have shattered state records with a more than 800 lb. catch, local NBC news affiliate channel, NBCDFE reported. The 'gator weighed in at exactly 802.5 lbs. and measured 14 ft. and 3 in. in length, beating the previous record by more than 2 inches, according to the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. The four hunters—Donald Woods, Will Thomas, Joey Clark and Tanner White—caught the alligator in the Sunflower River in

De Soto County before taking it to be processed in Yazoo City. They needed a forklift to move the reptile. Alligator hunting season begins on the last Friday of August each year and ends on September 4. Frankly, HOTS is shocked these hunters walked away from their encounter with all 60 digits.

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HOTS Tomato Tussle... What do you get when you give 120 tons of overripe tomatoes to 15,000 people? The answer is a whole lot of tomato sauce. Revelers in Buñol, Spain, learned that lesson on August 30 during the annual "Tomatina" street battle, which was inspired by a legendary 1945 food fight that took place in the same town.

Participants ended up drenched in red pulp, which was helpfully sprayed off of them by a town cleanup crew armed with hoses "within minutes" of the end of the battle, according to the Associated Press. HOTS hopes to attend next year's event armed with 120 tons of cooked pasta and a house-sized block of Parmesan cheese.

Association of Australian Convention Bureaux Commences Shutdown

By Julia Stumbaugh

The Association of Australian Convention Bureaux (AACB) is beginning its "voluntary closing down process" to make way for the new Australian Business Events Association (ABAE), Andrew Hiebl, CEO of AACB, announced August 24.

The AACB was founded in 1985, and Hiebl has served as CEO of the organization since 2012.

The AACB voted earlier this year to merge with the Exhibition and Events Association of Australia (EEAA) and the Australian Convention Centers Group (ACCG) to form a new representative body for the Australian business events industry.

The AACB is now beginning to wind down as a separate entity after the ABAE officially began operations on July 1.

"It has been an honor and a privilege to represent Australia's leading

convention bureaus and the broader business events industry for the past 11 years as CEO of the Association of Australian Convention Bureaux," Hiebl said. "As the association commences its voluntary closing down process to make way for the new industry peak, the Australian Business Events Association, I am extremely humbled to be leaving on a high."

Hiebl cited AACB's "collaborative approach under the Business Events Council of Australia" (BECA) as part of that high.

According to EEAA, a 2022 study commissioned by BECA reported that 84% of respondents said they wanted "a unified body representing the (business events) sector to government."

The EEAA said the study concluded that "duplication of services from numerous associations resulted in inefficient use of industry funds, with multiple advocacy voices creating confusion with stakeholders and diluting

industry messaging."

In order to consolidate their funds and resources, the three leading Australian business events associations agreed to form ABAE. Together, the organizations represent about 480,000 business events each year, according to EEAA.

In his final farewell, Hiebl thanked the leadership of AACB, as well as the 18 convention bureaus across Australia who served as members of AACB.

The AACB also offered thanks to its "long-standing strategic partners," including the IMEX Group, Destinations International and the Asia Pacific Incentives and Meetings Event.

The ABAE will be led by incoming CEO Melissa Brown, who previously served as CEO of the Australian UK Chamber of Commerce and will assume her new role on September 4. The association is currently headed by Chair Peter King, former CEO of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

NAR

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Unlike the CEO, NAR's elected officers, including president, president-elect and vice president positions, serve for one-year terms and are not eligible for re-election.

Parcell, who took the office of President in November 2022, was scheduled to relinquish the position to President-Elect Tracy Kasper in November. Previously, Parcell had served as the association's president-elect and first vice president.

The *Times* reported August 26 that 29 employees and former leaders of NAR and affiliate organizations said they knew about "years of complaints of sexual harassment, discrimination and retribution by Mr. Parcell and other leaders."

According to the *Times*, 19 women involved with NAR or affiliate organizations said they had suffered sexual harassment while working, while another 10 described experiencing "a sexist, belittling culture." Many of these women told the newspaper the response from NAR representatives

when these issues were brought up "discouraged them from ever speaking up again."

Three women, including former NAR chief storyteller Janelle Brevard, filed formal complaints regarding these harassment allegations. The NAR offered the women settlements contingent on non-disclosure agreements, the *Times* reported. Brevard withdrew her suit in July.

Of these reported allegations, 16 involved Parcell, including accusations of "improper touching and lewd photos and texts."

Two days after the report was published, Parcell denied the claims while announcing his resignation in a letter to members.

"I am deeply troubled by those looking to tarnish my character and mischaracterize my well-intended actions," Parcell wrote. "I've been shocked by these false accusations, hurtful words, whispers and character assassination."

Parcell said his resignation "signifies that I will put the organization's needs first to move forward above my own personal needs to stay in this position."

Kasper, who will now step immedi-

ately into the role of NAR President, wrote in a message to members that she is "incredibly sorry for what's led us here."

"We recognize there is lots of concern, anger and disappointment, and we want to acknowledge the people who have come forward and shared their stories and those of you who have shared your perspective over the past few days," Kasper wrote.

Kasper said the NAR would continue to advance an advisory group to the president focused on improving the association's internal culture, which was launched in early August after initial inquiries from the *Times*, according to the news organization.

Kasper added that another "culture council" would be created to advise the CEO.

"We are looking to make lasting and positive change and to do so as quickly as possible," Kasper said.

The NAR has more than 1.5 million members and is the largest trade association in the United States. Although being a member of NAR is not technically obligatory to work in real estate, membership is a requirement for employees of many major brokerages.

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LEADING LADIES

Lorrie Trogden, Head of Arkansas Banking Association, Celebrates Summit Award

By Julia Stumbaugh

In more than 125 years of Arkansas Bankers Association history, eight previous presidents led the state's banking industry. All eight were male bankers.



Then, Lorrie Trogden took over as President and CEO in fall 2018.

Trogden had never worked in banking. She had, however, spent a decade gaining connections with local legislators and a CAE certification as associate executive director and director of government relations at the Arkansas

Bar Association.

"I told them, I can learn banking, just like I learned to work in the legal profession, but I know how to run a (6) trade organization, and I know how to lobby, and those are the two things you need in this position," Trogden told USAE.

She also, through her work with the Arkansas ASAE chapter, knew almost every other association executive in the state.

"I had a lot of support, and it's directly related to the relationships that I had through ASAE," Trogden said.

That made it particularly meaningful for Trogden when her organization was honored with a 2023 Power of Association Summit Award, the highest honor offered to associations by ASAE.

The Arkansas Bankers Association earned the award for Opera-

tion Vax Speed, an initiative organizing COVID-19 vaccine shot clinics in bank drive-throughs, community rooms and lobbies. Several other states began similar pandemic initiatives after the launch of the Arkansas program.

"Having been such a big fan of

ASAE my entire career, it was truly an honor to have our program recognized," Trogden said. "This is an organization that understands associations. To be recognized by our peers is a true honor."

Before helping organize Operation VaxSpeed in coordination with pharmacists, the governor's office and the health department, Trogden had a few things to get in order when she first took over the association in 2018.

With what Trogden describes as 99% penetration into the Arkansas banking industry, the association did not need to grow its membership. It needed to maintain those numbers by standardizing internal practices. Thanks to her association experience, Trogden knew how they should look.

Trogden spent two years conducting internal reforms such as correcting the organization's Form 990, bringing its budget into the black and codifying its nomination process.

Now that those practices are standardized, banks have re-opened and the association is a Summit Award winner, Trogden has some advice for other women looking to reach the level of association executive.

"An executive position is not a 40 hour-per-week position, pretty much

ever," Trogden said. "I think as you're moving up the ranks, you have to be willing to show that you're willing to do the work that it requires."

Part of determining what that work looks like involves finding mentors who can provide industry-specific advice. Trogden said she received initial

banking guidance from the association's chair, Catherine Owen, and still uses her as a resource five years later.

"I think it's really important that you connect with the women in leadership roles and ask to be

mentored, even if it's an informal mentorship," Trogden said.

In the male-dominated legal and banking professions, Trogden has often been the only woman in a room of male leaders. She said the key to establishing herself in that room has been to ensure she knows what she is talking about.

"It's easy to allow yourself to get talked over because you're a little intimidated by the fact that you're the only female. I think you have to find your voice and do whatever it takes for you to have that confidence to speak up," Trogden said. "You're going to be a little more closely scrutinized because you're the only woman in the room, so do your prep work, and if you know the answer, speak up."

"Having been such a big fan of ASAE my entire career, it was truly an honor to have our program recognized," Trogden said.

MPI Opens Registration for WEC Louisville

By Todd McElwee

Registration is now live for the 2024 edition of MPI's World Education Congress (WEC) in Louisville. The Commonwealth of Kentucky's largest city will host from May 20-22.

"Experience matters. People crave authentic experiences in the events they attend, and those events need experienced pros to craft them," MPI said. "That means you. You're in luck: there won't be a more spirited event experience in 2024 than MPI's WEC Louisville. Event professionals are our audience, so you know we're getting this right. Speaking the local language, this is an event distilled for the distillers. Through its actionable education and vibrant participants, you'll mix the right know-how with the right know-who, a success cock-

tail as refreshing as a Mint Julep and as satisfying as an Old Fashioned."

Early bird pricing is now available. Rates for MPI members are \$749 (planner), \$1,049 (supplier), \$529 (faculty) and \$319 (student). Non-member freight is \$1,099 (planner), \$1,399 (supplier), \$679 (faculty) and \$319 (student). The early bird deadline is December 31.

Roughly 1,400 attended the 2023 WEC at the Barceló Maya Resort in the Mexican Caribbean.

Discussing the event's programming, MPI said: "But there's nothing old-fashioned about WEC's programming. It's future-focused, adventurous, and built for honing your strategic event mindset. Our mantra: we take the event risks so you don't have to. Our goal: for ideas, insights and innovation to flow through every aspect—and every participant—of WEC,



like Bourbon through the streets of its host city. By day three of WEC, you'll be brighter, connected, and ready to distill what you've learned and whom you've met into invaluable takeaways and lasting business relationships.

You'll hone your craft so you can craft unique experiences that your attendees will want to raise a glass to."

Find more information at at.mpi.org/events/wec24.

NEWS

TravelAbility

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that enable people with color blindness to see vibrant colors, and TranslateLive, a program which provides closed captioning in real time.

For Cory Lee Woodard, a travel blogger who uses a wheelchair and a first-time attendee of the conference, the TravelAbility Summit is a breath of fresh air.

"It's been amazing. I think it's really great that there is an entire conference devoted just to accessible travel, which is so rare," Woodard said. "Usually at travel conferences that I go to, there may be one panel about accessibility, but to have an entire conference about accessible travel is amazing. I'm thrilled."

Jessica Reyes, Destination Interna-

tional's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, said her second year attending the summit has offered her more nuanced insight into accessibility in travel.

"Coming into it last year it was definitely more about what is there to really learn about accessibility and tourism and accommodating that community in destinations," Reyes said. "Whereas here, it's going more in depth about how to really make the difference."

A major benefit to the conference, Reyes said, was the community connections she has been able to make, having been inspired by Brooks and the initiatives Visit Mesa has implemented throughout the past several years.

"What I love about this community is that they are not afraid to share their information," she said.



The 2023 TravelAbility Emerging Markets Summit was held from August 18-20 in Savannah, Georgia. The conference offered representatives from hotels, destinations and travel agencies the chance to learn more about ways they can make their respective spaces more inclusive.

Environmental Groups Urge Second Utility to Exit American Gas Association

By Julia Stumbaugh

Environmental advocacy organizations are hoping a New England energy utility's decision to leave the American Gas Association (AGA) will lead to other members exiting the national association.

Three weeks after WBUR broke the news that New England utility Eversource left AGA in part because of its decarbonization policy, 20 climate and health organizations urged Northern Californian utility PG&E to end its AGA membership.

Signatories of the August 24 letter included Earthjustice, Sierra Club California, Public Citizen and Acterra.

"We are calling on PG&E to end its membership with an organization that is fighting the very climate policies that both PG&E and Californians support," said Matt Vespa, Sr. Attorney for Earthjustice. "PG&E cannot claim to be a climate leader while simultaneously supporting the American Gas Association's schemes to block local governments from expanding access to energy-saving clean technologies."

PG&E describes itself as being "committed to climate action." A list of "climate goals" published by the utility in June 2022 describes PG&E's plans to encourage electrification of communities currently served by natural gas and support emissions regulations of natural gas.

Although AGA has stated its support of reaching a "net-zero" of greenhouse gas emissions from natural gas, the association has pushed against state and federal electrification projects and lobbied for policies that would protect natural gas utilities from emissions

regulations.

Brandon Dawson, Director, Sierra Club California, added that the AGA had "knowingly misled the public about health risks associated with methane," which "should disqualify the trade association from receiving membership dues from PG&E, and all other utilities presenting themselves as leaders on health and climate."

Dawson might have been referencing a January statement from AGA that contested a study in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. The study linked the natural gas used in stoves, which also releases methane into the atmosphere, with respiratory health problems. The AGA called the article an attempt to "generate consumer fears with baseless allegations."

Eversource, which delivers electric, natural gas and water services to Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire, left AGA in order to "redirect costs to more targeted associations and memberships with a focus on decarbonization," an Eversource spokesperson told WBUR.

WBUR noted that this departure appeared to be the first time a "major utility" had cited climate policy when leaving AGA.

Climate advocates are now hoping PG&E will similarly redirect its funding. The utility currently pays more than \$800,000 per year to AGA, according to HEATED.

According to Vespa, PG&E, SoCal-Gas and San Diego Gas & Electric, California's three major utilities, together pay "approximately \$2 million dollars" annually to AGA.

This means that "California energy customers may unwittingly be the

largest funder...in the nation" of AGA, Vespa said.

A PG&E spokesperson told the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 2019 that the utility pays for lobbying through shareholder funds, not customer rate increases, but it is unclear how PG&E sources its trade association dues.

There is a growing movement to stop utilities from paying these dues with ratepayer money. Several states, including Connecticut, Colorado and Maine, have recently passed legislation limiting utilities from raising rates to cover the costs of association membership.



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USAE^{Exchange}

Maui-Related Conversation with Heather Bailey, VP of Operations, MC&A, Inc.

Based in Honolulu, Bailey is Director of Membership – Hawaii for the MPI Oregon Chapter, which merged with the Aloha Chapter a few years ago. She recently connected with USAE to provide some insights on the situation in Maui.

USAE: What is the number one thing you'd like members of the meetings industry to know about the current situation in Maui?

Bailey: While travel to West Maui is discouraged through mid-October, the rest of Maui is open. Travel to the other areas of Maui such as Kahului, Wailea, Makawao, and Hana are critical to the recovery efforts by supporting local businesses. Hotels and vendors such as activities, restaurants and more need the meetings industry's support to keep people working and allowing them to generate revenue in the local economy. The only ask is that travel

is respectful of the great loss that many have experienced as a result of the fires.

USAE: How is the situation compared to the past few weeks?

Bailey: It continues to evolve as the government moves from search and recovery efforts to the daunting task of clearing toxic materials from Lahaina. It's saddening to see the plummet in visitors to Maui. Businesses are furloughing staff and reducing hours of service. On top of the trauma of the fires, now the community is faced with losing their incomes as well.

USAE: What challenges do you foresee for Maui's tourism/meetings industry?

Bailey: This tragedy has highlighted much of the tension with the visitor industry and residents. While tourism is greatly needed and is a huge contribu-

tor to Maui's economy, it's going to be critically important to consider resident input when rebuilding Lahaina. And the conversations around what tourism looks like in the future are going to be hard. How do we encourage responsible, respectful and thoughtful visitors to Maui? A balanced approach is necessary to continue to welcome visitors to Maui while providing quality of life to its residents.

USAE: Please share a few ways to help those affected by the fires in Maui?

Bailey: The Hawaii Visitors & Convention Bureau has provided an excellent resource list of ways to support those affected by the fires: [Mālama Maui \(hvcb.org\)](#)



Heather Bailey

How to Get Started in Accessibility

By Jordan Bradley

At TravelAbility's 2023 Emerging Market Summits held in Savannah, Georgia from August 18–20, destination, hospitality and tech representatives gathered to discuss their respective approaches to accessibility, share information and make connections. Though much of the discussions were fairly nuanced, panels also touched on ways to start offering more accessible options to guests, customers and community members.

Assess Your Offerings

Assessments for accessibility are key in understanding where a business or organization stands. Assessing your business's website and property to understand how someone with a disability experiences your hotel or destination is important in understanding what you're doing well and where you can make improvements.

"Assessments are very important piece of making the world more accessible and for us our experience came down to a user centric approach," said Camilo Navarro, Co-Founder of Wheel the World, during a panel on designing and implementing accessibility assessments.

Assessments, Navarro went on to explain, cover more than just the physical accessibility questions such as: Can someone in a wheelchair easily reach the faucet in the bathroom, navigate the room layout, etc.? Does the building have fire alarms that emit flashing lights so that a blind individual is aware of a potential fire? Assessments also include staff trainings.

"Training and education is an im-

portant key to make that fully accessible experience," Navarro said. "We can encounter the most accessible building, right, but if the people are just treating like people with disabilities very poorly, and that's not going to be an accessible experience."

Build an Accessible Website

During a panel on designing and implementing accessibility assessments, Craig Kennedy, Program Director for Chicago-based Open Doors Organization, a nonprofit that helps businesses in the travel industry succeed in the disability market, said an accessible website is paramount.

"The entire journey really starts with the website," Kennedy said. "That's predominantly where everybody's getting their information now."

Kennedy pointed out that frequently, when people think of a person with disabilities, they think of someone in a wheelchair. However, 93% of people with disabilities are not wheelchair users.

Someone who is blind would need a screen reader to access the information on any given website, making text alternatives on images throughout a webpage crucial to their user experience, according to the Americans with Disabilities website. The same goes for websites that use color alone to communicate information. For people who are blind and color blind, formatting and use of color on a website could make a significant difference in the way that person is able to gather information.

"If your website's not accessible, you're not going to get business from

Please turn to page 8

Columbus Chosen as Host City for ESTO 2024

By Jonathan Trager

Columbus, Ohio, has been selected as the host city for the U.S. Travel Association's Educational Seminar for Tourism Organizations (ESTO) 2024, Experience Columbus has announced.

Celebrating its 40th year in 2024, ESTO is U.S. Travel's premier educational and networking event for destination marketing professionals. It will take place from August 10–13 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center.

"We are honored to have been selected as the host city for one of the most valuable conferences of the year in the tourism industry," said Brian Ross, President & CEO of Experience Columbus. "We can't wait to showcase Columbus to this important group of industry leaders and show them all that our city has to offer, from our vibrant and diverse neighborhoods to our welcoming and inclusive community to our top-rated attractions and experiences."

The four-day conference offers attendees the chance to network, learn through sessions that showcase

current and future trends, and celebrate the year's best campaigns, promotions, and creative during the Destiny and Mercury Awards program. Attendees will also give back to Columbus through ESTO Cares, a volunteer activity that supports and generates awareness for a local charitable organization.

"We look forward to bringing the 40th edition of ESTO to creative and vibrant Columbus," said Nan Marchand Beauvois, ESTO General Manager and Sr. Vice President of Membership and Industry Relations for the U.S. Travel Association. "Ohio's capital city is a proven and popular host for national meetings and events, and we are proud to add ESTO and its best-in-class programming to the lineup next year."

In 2023, Columbus hosted PCMA Convening Leaders as well as the U.S. Conference of Mayors Annual Meeting. Major events coming to Columbus in 2024 include the U.S. Figure Skating Championships (January) and the Major League Soccer All-Star Game (July).

For more information about ESTO 2024, visit experiencecolumbus.com/esto2024.

NEWS

Destination DC Reveals New Ad Campaign, 2022 Visitation Numbers

By Jonathan Trager

Destination DC (DDC) on August 29 announced a new advertising campaign that “positions the destination as wholly unique” as well as visitation figures for the last year that show the city is continuing its post-pandemic rebound.

The organization shared the information at its annual Marketing Outlook Meeting at the Warner Theatre. City leaders such as Mayor Muriel Bowser, stakeholders, and hundreds of representatives from local tourism and hospitality businesses attended the event.

Developed with MMGY Global, the new advertising campaign—“There’s Only One DC”—will officially launch on November 1. It sends the message that the nation’s capital matches other world-class cities in dining, nightlife, arts, culture, sports, theater, outdoor activities and green spaces, but no other destination in the country can compete with DC’s monuments, museums, memorials and free things to do, according to the organization.

“As we celebrate progress in bringing visitors back to DC, and the jobs and opportunities those visitors create, we are also excited to support Destination DC’s new ‘There’s Only One DC’ campaign,” said Bowser. “It is true: there is only one place in the world like Washington, DC. Only one place where you can visit the White House during the day and then go to Ben’s Chili Bowl at night. Only one place where you can go to Cedar Hill and then to Sycamore & Oak in one trip. And only one place where you can take in the history of our nation while celebrating and enjoying the culture of the 700,000 Washingtonians who call D.C. home.”

In addition, DDC shared that in 2022 the city welcomed 21.9 million visitors, including 1.2 million international visitors. That means domestic visitation has rebounded to 91% of pre-pandemic figures, while international visitation has rebounded to 60%.

International visitors typically comprise 7% of total visitation but account for 27% of spending. The 1.2 million international visitors represent a 279%



year-to-year increase. Top international markets included the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, India, France, Brazil, Mexico (by air), China, South Korea, and Australia. DDC plans to increase its representation in select markets in the next fiscal year, starting with Brazil and Mexico.

“We knew domestic travelers would return quicker than those from international markets, and when domestic travelers are considering where to

spend their money, the data tells us D.C. is a top choice,” said Elliott Ferguson, President & CEO of DDC. “The data also tells us we must continue enticing international travelers to return. With support from the tourism recovery district legislation, we will continue to win back global travelers with higher spending potential. That matters because visitors directly support local jobs and contribute to the quality of life for residents.”

— OBITUARY —

Skip Hartman, Longtime Loews Executive, Dies

By Jordan Bradley

Harrison A. “Skip” Hartman died after a long struggle with dementia on August 22 at Arden Courts Pro-Medica Memory Care Community in Annendale, Virginia. He was 90.

Hartman was born “on a kitchen table” on April 24, 1933, in Silgo, Pennsylvania, according to his family.

A stalwart of the hotel industry, Hartman served his entire career with Loews Hotels, starting in 1964 as director of personnel and labor relations. He rose through the ranks quickly, serving as assistant vice president of personnel, managing director of Loews New York Hotel; assistant vice president of operations for seven Loews New York Hotels; and regional vice president for the Drake, Regency, Loews New York and Warwick hotels in New York City.

In 1973, Hartman, in a new capacity as general manager, led the

opening of the Loews L’Enfant Plaza Hotel in D.C. He served in that capacity for 32 years before he retired in 2005.

In an article from 2005 on his retirement, the *Washington Post* noted that Hartman was “known for his wicked sense of humor and refusal to wear neckties until a few years ago.”

In 1999, Hartman was awarded Penn State’s Executive of the Year Award.

“Skip has made tremendous contributions to the Loews

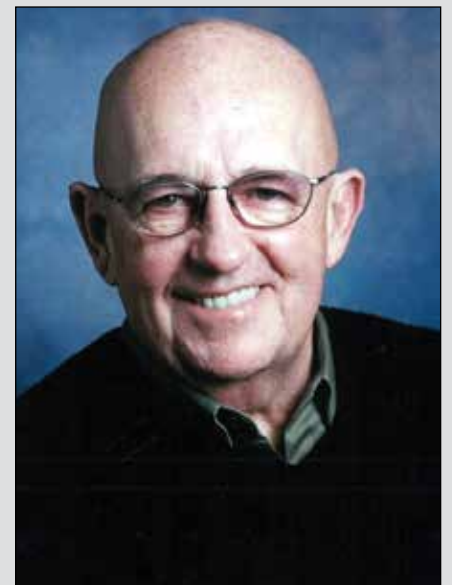
Hotel chain during the 35 years he has been with us,” said Preston Robert Tisch, Co-Chairman of the Board of the Loews Corporation, at the time. “He has been a major factor in the success of so many of our properties, offering his unique skill in managing the ‘back of the house’ while acting as the consummate host to our guests.”

“Skip’s commitment to the hos-

pitality industry has been demonstrated not only by his exemplary career at Loews, but also through his work with the next generation of hoteliers at Penn State’s School of Hotel, Restaurant and Recreation Management,” said Jonathan Tisch, President & CEO of Loews Hotels and Co-President of Loews Corporation, at the time.

After serving as chairman of the Hotel Association of Washington, D.C., in the mid-1990s, Hartman was instrumental in founding Hospitality High School in Washington, D.C., in 1999, a public charter school for students interested in pursuing hospitality as a career.

Hartman grew up in Clarion, Pennsylvania, before being stationed in White Sands, New Mexico, where he served in the Army. Following his military service, he attended Pennsylvania State University. He earned his Bachelor of Science in



Skip Hartman

Hotel Administration, graduating in 1958, and was an active member of Lambda Chi Alpha.

Hartman is survived by his life partner, Jill Gross; three children, Kelli (husband, Dave) Pasierb, Scott Hartman, and Kim Hartman O’Dea; and five grandchildren, Michael Fort, Hunter Harman, Herrick Hartman, Hali Hartman and Sean O’Dea.

A stalwart of the hotel industry, Hartman served his entire career with Loews Hotels.

NEWS

Wheel the World Sets Sights on Verified Accessible Destinations

By Jordan Bradley

Wheel the World, an innovative accessible travel database and bookings site for travelers with disabilities, is launching a new program called Destinations Verified, its team announced at the 2023 TravelAbility Emerging Markets Summit in Savannah, Georgia.

Created by Camilo Navarro and Alvaro Silberstein in 2019, Wheel the World has been building its booking platform, comprised of accessible hotels, activities and multi-day trips in more than 250 locations around the world for disabled travelers to find and reserve accessible travel experiences. The website offers extremely detailed information about the accessibility of accommodations at any given location or experience so a disabled traveler is able to tailor search options to find the trip best suited to that person's needs.

As they moved through the vetting process, Silberstein and Navarro said they started to wonder how the information they had gathered would be able to benefit destination management organizations (DMOs) and their verified providers.

"One of our challenges was how we can help destinations to understand better what's their accessibility, how they can improve it and how they can promote it, because those are the three things that we see that they are missing and they need support," Silberstein said.

The Destinations Verified program does two things: first, Wheel the World

will partner with destinations to verify the accessibility of their cities and offer insight into ways they could make their destination more accessible; second, the program will offer online training to members of a verified provider, such as a hotel in Paris or a tour guide in Mesa, to help educate them on best practices when working with and assisting travelers with disabilities.

In many cases, Silberstein—a wheelchair user himself—said people without disabilities aren't educated in ways to be helpful to those with disabilities, though their intentions may be good.

Frequently, someone will see a wheelchair user "pushing up a ramp, and you automatically assume that he needs assistance and you will start pushing them from behind—and many times people don't need assistance. People just want to do things on their own. So the guidance would be to ask first," Silberstein said. Training through the new program would address similar situations and many others.

The first Destination Verified city, Navarro said, is Mesa, Arizona. Visit Mesa has been a pioneer in the world of accessible travel as a destination: Mesa was the first city to become an Autism Certified City and to adopt the Hidden Disability Sunflower Program, which subtly allows individuals with invisible disabilities, such as cognitive disabilities, identify themselves so community members can be more aware and thoughtful in their interactions. He and Alison Brooks, Vice President of Destination Experience

and Advocacy for Visit Mesa, met at the first TravelAbility Summit in 2019.

"I immediately felt that Mesa was really trying to build the most accessible city in the U.S., and we started having some conversations around what we could potentially do together," Navarro said.

Working together, the organizations identified a process through which a destination could be verified. Starting with assessments of tourist attractions, hotels, museums and restaurants throughout Mesa, Wheel the World was able to give actionable feedback about things they were doing well and ways in which they could

improve their accessibility as a whole. Next, Wheel the World provided more thorough training for Mesa partners and providers. Finally, the platform will share content and stories about accessible travel experiences and opportunities in the Arizonian city.

Following Visit Mesa's trial run through the process, Wheel the World has been able to work with 20 other destinations, Navarro said. For Brooks, the experience was extremely beneficial.

"It made sense," Brooks said. "And what I love best about working with them was that they listen—it was a partnership."

Accessibility

continued from page 6

people who can't read your websites," Kennedy said.

Connect With Partners

Destination management organizations (DMOs) at the forefront of accessibility have taken a number of approaches to their accommodations for disabled community members and travelers as best suits their respective locations. But all of those destinations are partnering with local businesses and businesses that cater to individuals with disabilities.

"We had DMOs left and right cutting membership programs in place of partnerships because the \$300 they were tracking down to get a restaurant wasn't worth their trouble," said Con-

nor Nolan, Destination Development Manager for Travel Lane County.

Working with disabled community members to learn about their experiences, local businesses learn about what they can offer and that travel disability companies are great ways to enhance a destination—or hotel or business—in a way that better accommodates someone with a disability.

"You saw that shift during the pandemic where everyone had that kind of 'aha' moment where they realize that their product is their stakeholders," Nolan said, "and it's only through engaging their partners—whether those are restaurants, public officials, or attractions—to be able to work with them to understand the pieces the assets you have in your community, to put together in ways to create product, to create experiences."

Margaritaville Opens in San Diego's Gaslamp Quarter

By Jordan Bradley

Following a \$30 million conversion, the Margaritaville San Diego Gaslamp Quarter in downtown San Diego opened on August 24.

The opening marks the first city-center hotel on the west coast from Jimmy Buffett's hotel brand.

"After much dreaming and planning, we are delighted to formally open our doors and introduce Margaritaville Hotel San Diego to the Gaslamp Quarter," said Jim Hollister, General Manager of Margaritaville Hotel San Diego Gaslamp Quarter. "With our signature 'no worries,' easy-going vibes and welcoming service, we look forward to bringing this unique style of hospitality to our beloved city of San Diego."

The new Margaritaville is comprised of 235 guest rooms and suites. It takes a "local spin" on the typical Florida Margaritaville style, infusing the property with elements of Baja

California and Mission styles throughout. The halls and common spaces were influenced by Jimmy Buffett's Laurel Canyon days, harkening back to California in the 1960s.

"It's a little more luxury, curated in a way that's probably more thoughtful," said Andrea Sheehan, principal at Dawson Design Associates, the design firm behind the reimagining of the property, in an interview with *San Diego Magazine*. "It has a Bohemian undertone to it, but lots of color and a casual California vibe."

The Margartiaville San Diego Gaslamp Quarter was originally the Hotel Solamar before it was bought in 2020. The conversion was expected to be complete by 2021, but pandemic-induced pauses kept the project behind schedule. Sheehan told *San Diego Magazine* that the pauses served to strengthen the vision for the property as a getaway from every day life.

"The 'hang loose attitude' is con-



The Margaritaville Gaslamp Quarter San Diego opened on August 24. With 235 rooms, the hotel is the first city center hotel for the Jimmy Buffett brand on the west coast.

tagious after a couple margaritas," Sheehan said.

Following the redesign, the hotel is now home to San Diego's largest rooftop pool deck, three dining and

entertainment destinations—including the LandShark Bar & Grill, 5 O'Clock Somewhere Bar and the Margaritaville Coffee Shop—and meetings and event spaces.

Scene At TRAVELABILITY Summit



NEWS

ASAE Files Brief in Soccer Federation v. Relevant Sports Case

By Todd McElwee

ASAE on August 28 said it would file an amicus curiae brief in the U.S. Supreme Court case of U.S. Soccer Federation v. Relevant Sports, LLC.

Detailing the case to the ASAE Board of Directors, Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP said ASAE is supporting the federation's petition for certiorari—asking the Court to hear the case on its merits. At issue is if a plaintiff “that is challenging an association for alleged antitrust violations may also include association members as co-defendants merely because they belong to the association and the association obligates members to follow its rules, codes, standards, or guides.”

Donald B. Verrilli Jr., former Solicitor General of the United States, submitted the brief on behalf of

ASAE. Michelle Mason, FASAE, CAE, President & CEO, ASAE, providing the board brief to USAE.

“In its brief, ASAE explained how ubiquitous are associations in the U.S., including associations that impose some form of rules or requirements upon their members,” Pillsbury wrote. “ASAE emphasized that for association members to be so easily exposed to antitrust suits against associations—just because the members join, pay dues, and follow their obligations—would be a catastrophic blow to associations and their members.”

Reviewing the case, Pillsbury noted U.S. Soccer was asked by a commercial firm that promotes soccer matches in the United States, Relevant Sports, to approve a match in Miami between two teams from Spain. The federation asked the worldwide gov-

erning body for soccer, FIFA, if this would be consistent with its rules; FIFA responded in the negative as it permits national governing bodies to approve matches only between teams in their geographic territories.

Relevant Sports sued U.S. Soccer on the basis it is a member of FIFA and agreed to follow FIFA's rules the firm alleges are anti-competitive. A federal district court in New York ruled for U.S. Soccer, dismissing the case on the basis the plaintiff must assert more than mere membership in an association for the member to be considered part of an association's alleged antitrust conspiracy.

However, a federal court of appeals overruled that decision, holding that membership and an agreement to follow an association's rules is enough, at least at the pleading stage, to include the member as a defendant.

That court of appeals decision may now be considered by the Supreme Court.

“It is noteworthy that the Supreme Court agreed once before to consider the issue, in that 2016 case in which ASAE filed successive briefs,” the board brief said. “Also, there is a split among the federal appeals courts, with now three of them holding that more is needed to plead an antitrust violation against an association member and two, including the recent one in the U.S. Soccer case, holding the reverse. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court is asked to consider some 7,000 cases each year and actually takes up no more than about 150 of them.”

The law firm added it could take weeks, or even months, for the Supreme Court to rule on U.S. Soccer's petition for certiorari.

NYSAE Announces 2023 Synergy Awards Winners

By Julia Stumbaugh

The New York Society of Association Executives (NYSAE) announced on August 29 the seven winners of its 2023 Synergy Awards.

These leaders are recognized by NYSAE for their contributions to the New York association and nonprofit community.

The winners will be honored October 24 during a breakfast at the International Council of Shopping Center (ICSC) offices in Manhattan.

The 2023 Synergy Awards Winners are the following:

- DEI Champion: Jazmen Johnson, Vice President, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, ICSC
- Chief Executive of the Year: Mary Jane Eimer, Executive Director, Association for Behavioral & Cognitive Therapies (ABCT)
- Meetings Professional of the Year: Jenn Klein, Manager, Event Operations, International Trademark Association (INTA)
- Excellence in MarCom: Justin Smulison, Business Content Manager & RIMScast host, RIMS, the risk management society
- Rising Star: Annie Farley, Assistant

Vice President, Conferences and Events, SIFMA

- Rising Star: Scott Clifford, Program Manager, Events, Secured Finance Network

- Lifetime Achievement: Lou Coletti, former president and CEO, Building Trades Employers' Association (BTEA)

Mary Jane Eimer called receiving NYSAE's Chief Executive of the Year award “a deeply moving honor.”

“NYSAE has been my professional home for over 40 years, having helped me hone my professional skills through their educational programs; a CAE Study Group that has led to

lifelong friendships; and access to an outstanding 'kitchen cabinet of women executives' who are always there with insightful advice no matter what the challenge,” Eimer told *USAE*. “I have been blessed to be surrounded by an outstanding staff, many whom have been with me and the association for a good long time. I strongly recommend surrounding yourself with colleagues who are smart, are willing to disagree with you, and want to see you succeed.”

Justin Smulison called receiving NYSAE's Excellence in Marcom award “extremely gratifying and humbling.” Smulison hosts the RIMScast, the official podcast of the Risk and Insurance Management Society, which just celebrated its 250th show and five-year anniversary.

“I'm proud of how RIMScast resonates with RIMS members and a global audience,” Smulison told *USAE*. “I've always been mindful of the risk RIMS took on me and I remain motivated to make each episode as good as can be.”

Jenn Klein was named NYSAE's Meeting Professional of the Year after helping shape INTA's 145th Annual Meeting in Singapore in May.

“To be recognized with a 2023 Synergy Award validates all of the strong relationships we built in planning an event of this magnitude,” Klein told *USAE*.

Jazmen Johnson said she was “honored and grateful” to earn NYSAE's DEI Champion award after contributing to ICSC's DEI talent initiatives,

Traveler Advocacy Group Sues Hyatt for Hidden Fee Practices

By Jordan Bradley

Travelers United, a nonprofit travelers advocacy group, filed a class action suit in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia in Washington, D.C., against Hyatt Hotels Corporation for its hidden fee practices on August 17.

The advocacy group is alleging that since at least 2020, Hyatt has been “cheating” consumers out of millions of dollars through false advertising of their room rates and the company has added a destination or resort fee at the final stage of booking, inflating room rates.

“Rather than disclosing the full cost of its hotel rooms upfront, Hyatt instead adds on last-minute ‘destination fees,’ ‘resort fees’ and other

similar charges that are really part of the daily room rate,” Travelers United said in the lawsuit.

“You don't see pricing like this for other things. We don't see this when we go to the grocery store—a banana is advertised for 20 cents and then you go to checkout and the cashier says, ‘Well, actually, the banana is going to be \$1,’” said Lauren Wolfe, Travelers United's Chief Legal Officer. “You don't see it for other goods because every state has a law about how things should be priced. That's pretty basic. The advertised price is the price that you pay plus taxes.”

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) also calls the fees “junk fees” and has declared them to be deceptive, unfair and offer no real value to the con-

sumer. However, hotels collecting the fees argue they support services like wireless internet, discounted passes for local public transportation. There are no options to opt out of paying for those extra offerings for hotel guests; the fees are mandatory.

The FTC also estimates that consumers paid more than \$2 billion in hidden hotel fees prior to the pandemic and that number has risen since travel returned. In February of this year, President Joe Biden and his administration declared that it would do away with junk fees, introducing the Junk Fee Prevention Act.

Travelers United has been working to curb deceptive fees and pricing practices for more than a decade,

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Please turn to page 12

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THE FINAL WORD

Mindfulness and Mental Health Thoughts for Creating Work-Life Boundaries

By Pandit Dasa

Pandit Dasa is a workplace culture, mindful leadership and well-being expert who has worked with Caesars Entertainment, Google, NASA, London Stock Exchange and the Federal Reserve Bank. A former monk of 15 years and an author, his latest book is Mindfulness for the Wandering Mind.

Work, at times, can be all-consuming with meetings, an overloaded inbox, projects, travel and deadlines. This leaves us with little time for self-care. When we finally get some downtime, we are bombarded with responsibilities and commitments from our personal life. With so much happening, how can we find time for some self-care?

First of all, we shouldn't feel guilty about taking care of our physical, mental and emotional health. Self-care is not selfish. When the airline industry tells us to put our own oxygen mask on first, before helping others, they are providing us with very practical advice in case of an emergency, but advice that also applies to other aspects of our life. If we lose consciousness or if we are not well, it won't be possible for us to show up for our colleagues, clients and family members. An empty gas tank isn't going to get us very far.

A very important, and often ignored, component of self-care is our mental health. According to the CDC, "More than 1 in 5 US adults live with mental illness." The stigma surrounding mental health means that many are struggling in silence afraid of being labeled and judged for acknowledging their challenges with depression and anxiety.

Taking care of our physical health

while ignoring our mental health is like taking our car to the car wash but never taking it to the mechanic. We won't get very far and the vehicle will breakdown. Both body and mind need care and we shouldn't be embarrassed about taking care of our mind.

Here are some daily strategies that can help us reduce stress and anxiety and recharge our mental and emotional batteries:

Breathe Deeply—During the workday, pause and take five deep breaths. Fill your lungs completely, while focusing just on the breath and then thoroughly exhale breathing out all of your anxieties and fears. Mindful breathing can lower stress and helps put things in perspective. This can be done throughout the day and especially helpful in between meetings.

Express Gratitude—Think of three things happening in your life at the moment and feel grateful for them. This is a great way to shift our mood.

Appreciate Someone—Take a moment to appreciate a colleague, family member and friend for their good qualities and contributions and the positive impact they are having on our life.

Digital Disconnect—Go for a short walk and take your lunch break without looking at your device. This allows our eyes and mind to disconnect and recharge.

Sleep Tight—A lack of sleep can affect our mood, judgment, memory and your overall health, so make sure you're sleeping enough so you can have clarity and focus to tackle whatever may come next. At night, dim the lights in your home, find an activity you find calming and avoid sending emails while sitting in bed.



Pandit Dasa

Eat Mindfully—Maintain a well-balanced diet and increase your intake of fruits and vegetables and plenty of water. Staying hydrated can also lower stress. Avoid eating late in the day so the body has enough time to digest the meal before going to sleep.

Create a Schedule—The home can be filled with distractions, so it is important to create a schedule of self-care for yourself. Actually, write

it down, and try your best to stick to it. This will help you remain productive and provide a sense of accomplishment, instead of frustration, at the end of the day.

Quality Time with Family—Family is the most important thing we have in life. Let's be fully present when we are with them.

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Synergy Awards

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which help historically underrepresented groups enter the shopping center and retail real estate industry.

"It is so rewarding to see students go from having no exposure to our indus-

try to pursuing and receiving full time employment with some of our industry's most prevalent firms," Johnson told USAE. "DEI work can be hard, but this award reaffirms my commitment and passion for developing meaningful initiatives to help people from under-represented backgrounds."

Hyatt

continued from page 10

Wolfe said. Other activist groups have as well.

"The reason that you're seeing so much going on right now is because of activists—not just because of us, but because of other groups in DC as well—who we've got to join us in this fight and other people pushing their members of Congress saying that they're fed up with this," Wolfe said.

Travelers United specifically names the Grand Hyatt Washington in Washington, D.C., as a consistent culprit, charging guests a destination fee of \$20 per night. Travelers booking through Hyatt's website, the lawsuit alleges, would be shown an average room rate of \$248 per night but were not made aware of the \$20 "parti-

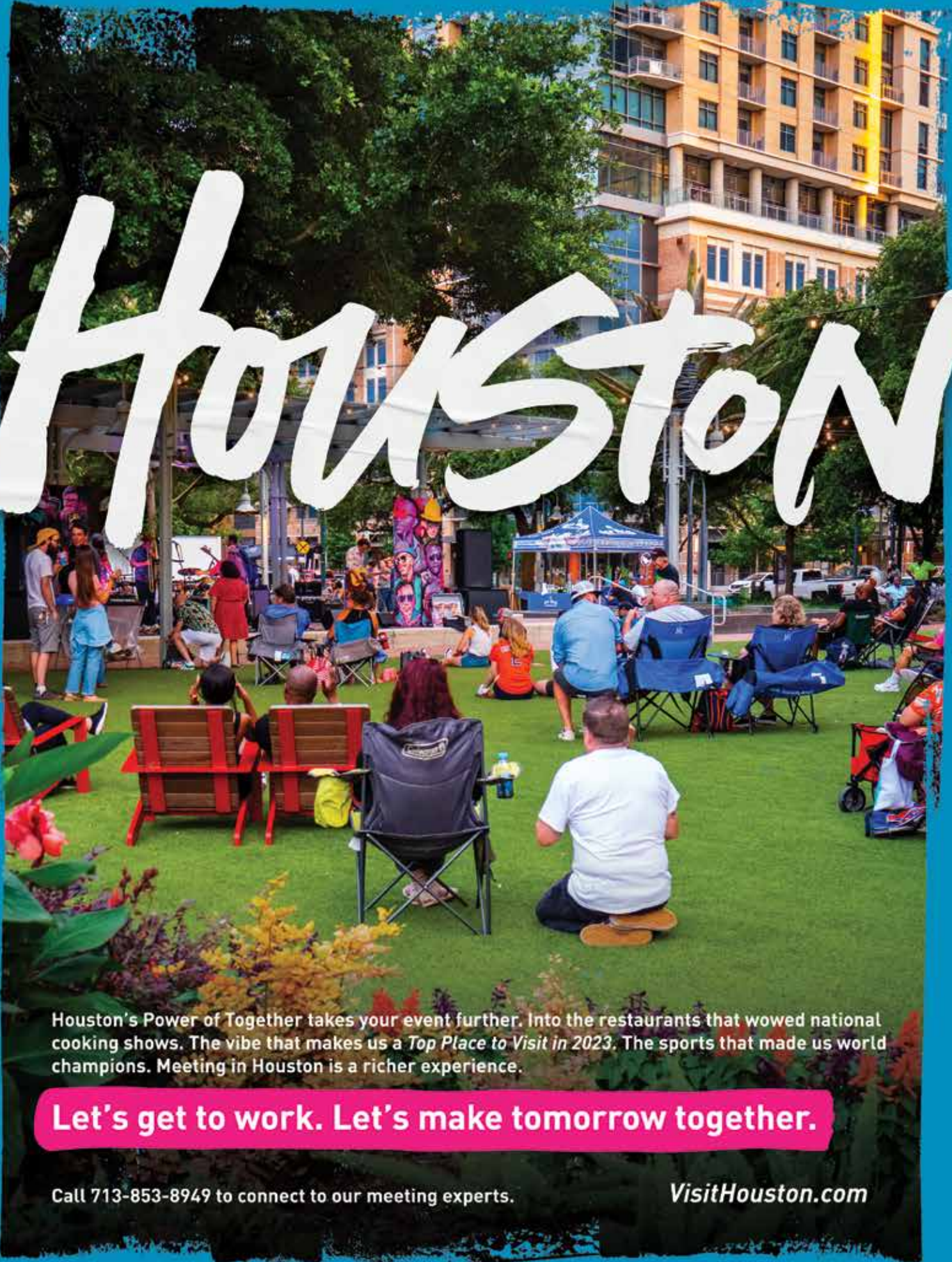
tioned" destination fee until a later page in the booking process.

"Due to this partitioned pricing, consumers still could not reasonably compare the costs and benefits of a given Hyatt hotel room to other rooms available through Hyatt and at other companies," Travelers United said in the lawsuit.

Most recently, Travelers United sued Sonesta Hotels, one of the fastest growing hotel brands, on August 24 for their destination fee practices. Before that, Marriott International, Hilton and MGM Resorts had also been sued, with Marriott ordered to pay a \$225,000 fine for the deceptive fees by the Pennsylvania Attorney General's office in April of this year.

"We wanted to make sure the law applied to them," Wolfe said of Hyatt and Sonesta. "And we'll likely be suing other groups in the future."





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