



The PCMA Foundation Visionary Awards took place on April 11 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. Shown here (left to right): Geoff Freeman, President & CEO, U.S. Travel Association; Butch Spyridon, former CEO, Nashville CVC, Lifetime Achievement honoree; Angie Briggs, Vice President of Destination Engagement, U.S. Travel Association; Don Welsh, President & CEO, Destinations International; and Gretchen Hall, CDME, COO, Destinations International.

Global Meetings Industry Day 2024 Highlights Why “Meetings Matter”

By Todd McElwee

Poems were penned, events staged and lessons shared all in the name of “Meetings Matter” during Global Meetings Industry Day on April 11.

Powered by U.S. Travel Association’s Meetings Mean Business Coalition, the day was dedicated to championing the professional, personal and economic benefits of business meetings, trade shows, conferences and conventions.

“In-person meetings and events are essential to the success of businesses and individuals across every industry,” said Geoff Freeman, President & CEO, U.S. Travel. “Global Meetings Industry Day is an opportunity to highlight how this critical sector fuels local economies, business profits, individual growth and the professional relationships that advance common causes.”

Among several initiatives to commemorate GMID, Visit Orlando, in collaboration with Orlando’s Poet Laureate, Shawn Welcome, composed a poem highlighting the value of in-person meetings and the positive impact they have on the destination’s community, businesses and economy.

Please turn to page 7

Mike Waterman Tapped to Lead Visit Anaheim

By Jonathan Trager

Visit Anaheim announced on April 8 that Mike Waterman has been appointed President & CEO of the organization, effective April 29.

A hospitality veteran with more than 30 years of leadership and sales experience, Waterman has served as Chief Sales Officer at Visit Orlando for nearly 5 years. He succeeds Jay Burress, who left the California organization last November.

Waterman, 58, told *USAE* he had been looking for a CVB president and

CEO role for a bit and he’s “super-excited” about the opportunity.

“My wife and I raised our family in Southern California and are very much looking forward to this next chapter,” said Waterman. “I am eager to work with the talented Visit Anaheim team and its local stakeholders to fulfill our mission and create new economic opportunities for the community.”

Prior to Visit Orlando, Waterman served as President & CEO of the Greater Houston CVB, also known as Visit Houston. Waterman started his career at Marriott International,

where he last served as Vice President of sales for the Western region overseeing 100 properties, including a grouping of Marriott hotels in Los Angeles’ convention district known as L.A. Live.

“Mike brings extensive experience and a long history of leadership, innovation and success in the hospitality and tourism industry, making him the ideal candidate to guide our organization into the future,” said Fred Brown, Chairman of Visit Anaheim. “We are very excited to welcome Mike and look

Please turn to page 6

Tropicana Las Vegas Closes After 67 Years

By Jordan Bradley

The Tropicana Las Vegas locked and shuttered its doors for good on April 2, just two days before the 67th anniversary of the property’s grand opening.

Following its closure, the property is preparing for demolition, which is expected to take place this October, to make way for a new Major League Baseball stadium.

When demolition and deconstruction of the Tropicana is complete, work will begin on the new 33,000-seat, \$1.5 billion stadium

that will be home to the Oakland Athletics beginning in 2028.

At the beginning of March, the A’s unveiled renderings of the forthcoming stadium.

“Our design for the new Vegas home for the A’s is conceived in response to the unique culture and climate of the city,” said Bjarke Ingels, Founder and Creative Director of Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), one of the firms spearheading the stadium’s design.

Ingels goes on to compare the stadium’s design to

Please turn to page 5

Inside



Page 3

Page 2
World Equestrian Center Opens Second Hotel

Page 4
New Hotel Aimed at Jewish Travelers Proposed in Las Vegas

Page 5
Events Industry Council Announces Global Awards and 75th Anniversary Celebration

Page 6
Hilton Acquires Owner of NoMad Hotel Brand

Showcase Meets with Mixed Reviews from Exhibitors

By Jonathan Trager

The first year of Showcase held at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center after its exodus from Gaylord National Harbor Resort and Convention Center met with both positive and negative reactions from destination organization exhibitors.

Sherri Thadeus of Visit Norfolk was enthusiastic about the event when speaking with *USAE*.

“We have so much space this year; it’s fantastic,” she said. “I think the food and beverage is great. I think the planners are here and

we’d love to see a lot more. We’re still in the middle of it and hoping more will come over.”

Some attendees referenced the ability to interact with other destinations as a valuable opportunity.

“From a destination side, to be able to network with our other destinations we haven’t seen in a while, that has been very important to me,” said Elizabeth Boylan of NYC Tourism & Conventions. “I was here for the sales and services summit and to now segue into this has been a great way to

Please turn to page 5

NEWS

Civil War Round Table Congress Focuses on Sustainability for Round Tables

By Jonathan Trager

Today, April 15, marks Abraham Lincoln's death, but the Civil War Round Table (CWRT) Congress is helping keep the memory of that historical event alive.

Headquartered in Olympia, Washington, CWRT Congress is "dedicated to helping Civil War Round Tables to develop recruitment, governance, marketing, preservation and fundraising strategies," according to the group.

Founder and President Mike Movius launched the organization when he was ascending to the presidency of a Civil War round table in Seattle in 2015. Realizing that group's practices were "kind of archaic," he sent out an email for help—only to find out that many of the other round tables no longer existed.

"I asked the folks who responded what they thought about that, and they said the round tables were not well led and there wasn't a lot of thought of keeping the organization alive," Movius told *USAE*. "I thought it was an opportunity to see if we could help round tables think about being sustainable."

Movius, who holds a master's

degree in public administration and previously worked in the Washington State governor's office, uses his experience in organizational development to facilitate the group's mission.

The group holds annual conferences that vary in their offerings. Past events have featured lectures and battlefield tours. They've been held at locations such as the National Civil War Museum in Harrisburg or the Seminary Ridge Museum and Education Center in Gettysburg.

A precursor to the CWRT Congress was called The Civil War Round Table Alliance. That group held an annual conference called The Congress, which sparked the name of Movius' group.

"That was all about battlefield preservation; our conference is all about preserving round tables," he said.

Attendees to the group's conference range from 75 to 100 from different round tables. However, it can sometimes be difficult getting those involved to adopt changes to the practices within their own groups, said Movius.

"Many of those who try what we talk about say it really worked," he noted. "Others say they went back to their board of directors and they say they



got kicked out."

Though the CWRT Congress, a 501(c)3 organization, as a board of directors and council of advisors, it doesn't have members or dues, existing solely on the largesse of Civil War enthusiasts. It charges a fee for its annual meeting, but that doesn't even cover the cost of putting on the conference, said Movius.

Movius said it requires a steady commitment to keep round tables going. Over the last 10 years, more

than 100 of them have ceased to exist, he added, because "people age out, or die, or get sick, or can't run them, or move."

"What I want to do with this is have roundtables take on public history as opposed to only among the members of their organizations," said Movius. "That's really what I'm about: to make this America's history, not just the history of 60, 70, or 80-year-old people."

For more information, visit cwrtcongress.org.

World Equestrian Center Opens Second Hotel *Continues to Cater to Traveling Animal Lovers*

By Jordan Bradley

The World Equestrian Center in Ocala, Florida, officially opened its second hotel, The Riding Academy Hotel, on April 1, a month ahead of its original schedule.

The World Equestrian Center (WEC) facilities first opened in December 2020 on a 380 acre lot in Ocala, often regarded as the "Horse Capital of the World."

The Riding Academy Hotel is the latest in a series of developments for the Center. Designed to offer more accessible accommodation, the hotel has 390 guest rooms (50 of those are suites) and is pet friendly.

The property held a soft opening for The Riding Academy Hotel, decked out in sleek equestrian-themed decor, on March 15 to accommodate guests who would be traveling to the center for events already on the books. It didn't begin taking reservations until April 1.

"This really was geared towards family-friendly, pet-friendly accommodations where really anyone feels comfortable," said Justin Garner, the property's Sr. Director of Marketing and Brand Management.

Guests of The Riding Academy Hotel are also able to access all of the offerings across WEC, including the Calluna Spa, nearly 13,000 square feet of retail space, a chapel and nine restaurant concepts sprinkled across the property, including an authentic French bakery.

The WEC grounds are able to accommodate "up to 3,000 equine athletes and all the people that come with that," said Garner. "So anywhere between 8,000 to 10,000 people a day [are] on property, joining a horse show or participating in the horse show."

Before there was The Riding Academy, the WEC had completed and opened its first hotel, The Equestrian Hotel, in May 2021. The property is a 248-room luxury hotel bedecked in oil paintings of dogs, crystal chandeliers and a floor-to-ceiling fireplace.

On average, the facility hosts 40 weeks of horse competitions per year, according to Garner. And when the clatter of horse hooves is not present, WEC hosts a local Food and Wine Festival, and a number of other themed festivals.

The WEC is open to the public, with no fee to enter, which invites curious



The World Equestrian Center opened its second hotel, The Riding Academy Hotel, on April 1. Credit: Maven Photo + Film

locals and travelers alike, Garner said. Inviting newcomers into the sport is part of the ethos of the center.

"Part of the reason that the facility was built—and the reason it was built the size that it is—is because we wanted to expose the equestrian sports to a broader audience," Garner said.

"Our audience is typically very en-

gaged in the sport, being in the Horse Capital of the World here in Marion County, they know what's going on," Garner said. "So it's pretty easy; when you see them cheer, you cheer. And then you can catch on pretty quickly."

Though he couldn't share many details yet, Garner said that "the next big phase for us is hopefully home sites."

HOTS

HOTS A Real Goat Time... A mountain goat in Kansas City, Missouri, was found stuck under a bridge following the April 8 eclipse. No one is quite sure how he got there, but things went quickly awry when a rescue of the barnyard animal was attempted. A bystander tried to help the goat down from a ledge using a rope before local firefighters came on the scene, according to The Associated Press. When one of the firefighters repelled over the side of the bridge in a rescue attempt, the goat leapt from the bridge pillar, dan-

gling some 15 feet onto the ground. Luckily, the firefighters had placed cushions below the goat in order to soften his landing. When the goat was assessed by veterinarians, he had not broken a single bone. To make matters odder, a family two hours from Kansas City believes that the goat may be theirs, as they lost a goat that shares a striking resemblance to our hoofed daredevil in February. HOTS thinks the grass isn't always greener on the other side of the bridge.

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HOTS Invasion of the Cicadas... This year, the eastern United States is experiencing a unique cicada phenomenon in which broods of 13- and 17-year cicadas will hatch together. Trillions of cicadas will be emerging from their slumber when the ground warms to 64 degrees, according to The Associated Press. According to John Cooley, University of Connecticut's



Shown here (left to right): Jerry Horan, President & CEO, ConferenceDirect; Associate of the Year Fred Mitzner, Sr. Vice President, ConferenceDirect; and Brian Stevens, Executive Chairman, ConferenceDirect.

resident cicada expert, this is the first time the broods have synched up since 1803. Coley is calling the phenomenon

the "cicada-geddon." HOTS thinks it sounds like people in the east should stock up on earplugs now.

WEEKLY NEWS OF ASSOCIATIONS, CVBs AND HOTELS

USAE

PUBLISHER & EXECUTIVE EDITOR 1982 – 2021
Anne Daly Heller

PUBLISHER, USAE & CUSTOMNEWS, INC.
Ross E. Heller
rheller@usae-e-mail.com

COO
James Heller
james@usaenews.com

MANAGING EDITOR
Jonathan Trager
jon@usaenews.com

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER AND ASSOCIATION EDITOR
Todd McElwee
todd@usaenews.com

ASSOCIATIONS/SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR
Julia Stumbaugh
julia@usaenews.com

HOTEL EDITOR
Jordan Bradley
jordan@usaenews.com

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Diane Nichols
dkn@usaenews.com

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Danielle Erbe
danielle@yespleasebrand.com

MARKETING & CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
Christy Pumphrey
christy@usaenews.com

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT
George Roman
george@georgeromanmedia.com

To ensure publication, all Letters to the Editor must include a telephone number and mailing address in order to verify authenticity.
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6809 Delaware Street
Chevy Chase, MD 20815

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IAEE, MPI, SITE Relaunch Global MICE Collaborative

By Todd McElwee

IAEE, MPI and Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) have partnered to relaunch The Global MICE Collaborative. Offline since the pandemic, the pan-industry partnership offers two educational offerings designed for new MICE industry professionals.

"The Global MICE Collaborative brings three of the industry's best-known associations—IAEE, MPI and SITE—together to provide the global community of business event professionals with a 'best of' collaboration, initially focused on education," said Marsha Flanagan, CEM, President & CEO, IAEE. "MPI brings networking, thought leadership and education for meetings; SITE for incentives; and IAEE for conventions and exhibitions. We bring indispensable connections to our combined communities of over 110,000 MICE professionals located all over the world."

Initially launched in 2018, the Global MICE Collaborative delivered educa-

tional content in Shenzhen and Abu Dhabi before the global pandemic imposed a mandatory pause in its activities.

The collaboration is relaunching with a keynote on business & event trends for MICE professionals at The Meetings Show, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore (April 17–18) followed by MICE Fundamentals: Conference, Exhibition & Incentive Events, a one-day course available in-person in Germany on May 13, the day before IMEX Frankfurt commences. This course will also be available at future industry events, which will be announced in later communications.

Paul Van Deventer, President & CEO of MPI, said: "Over the past three years the business events industry has seen significant change in workforce composition. Some reports show that upwards of 60 % of industry professionals are new and the average age has declined by nearly 10 years. This brings forth a significant opportunity for new, fresh thinking, yet also demonstrates the need for

skill development. Our MICE Fundamentals course provides the perfect pan-industry immersion for those new individuals entering this amazing industry."

He added the collaboration is a "perfect primer" for the certifications offered by the partners,

"As more regions, countries and cities around the globe recognize the hard dollar and soft power contribution of meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions, the demand for professionally trained business events executives is increasing," said Annette Gregg, CMM, CEO, SITE. "That's why the leading associations in the industry have joined forces to develop the best MICE workforce in established and emerging markets worldwide. IAEE, MPI and SITE look forward to expanding the scope of our 'Collaborative' and to serving an industry that currently makes a \$1.6 trillion USD contribution to global GDP"

Details are available at miccollaborative.com.

The PCMA Foundation Visionary Awards, part of Business Events Industry Week, were held on April 11 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C. The following is a list of this year's honorees.

2024 PCMA Visionary Awards Lifetime Achievement honorees: Stuart Levy, Associate Professor of Management, George Washington University; Greg O'Dell, President, Venue Management, OVG360; Elizabeth Tovar, President, Turenlaces;

and Butch Spyridon, former CEO, Nashville CVC.

Business Events Strategist of the Year: Stuart Ruff-Lyon, Chief Events and Sales Officer, RIMS

Community Advocate of the Year: Dana Johnston, Vice President, Client Partnerships, EMC Outdoor

Digital Experience Strategist of the Year: Shawn (Yih-Hsiang) Cheng, Co-Founder, #EventProfsBreakShit

Event Designer of the Year: Jasmine and Tyra Dyson, Founders, The Brand Xperience Lounge, Boss Up Girl Co.

Groundbreaker Award: Beth Surmont, FASAE, CMP Fellow, CAE, Vice President of Business Event Strategy & Design, 360 Live Media

Supplier of the Year: Doug Bennett, Executive Vice President, Louisville

Tourism Professional Excellence Award for Outstanding Service to a Chapter or Region: Marcus Eng, CMP Fellow, DES, Director, Meeting Operations & Technology, American Public Transportation Association, Capital Chapter

NEWS

Loews Hotels Appoints Dan Flannery as COO

By Jordan Bradley

Loews Hotels & Co. announced on April 9 that industry veteran Dan Flannery has been appointed to the position of Chief Operating Officer.

In his new position, Flannery will take on responsibility for developing and implementing strategies designed to improve efficiency, guest experiences, and drive overall business growth for Loews' portfolio of 25 hotels.

Prior to joining Loews, Flannery spent 37 years with Marriott International. Notably, Flannery worked with Studio 54 creator Ian Schrager to launch a new luxury brand for Marriott, EDITION. The first EDITION opened in Miami Beach in 2009 and Flannery was key to the brand's 14



Dan Flannery

other openings around the world. Most recently, Flannery served as CEO of Cape Resorts, a collection of resorts and cottages in New York and New Jersey.

"Dan's impressive background, tenure in the industry and all-around skill set position him as the ideal person to lead our operations efforts. His qualifications have us even more excited to see what's next in this area," said Alex Tisch, President and CEO of Loews Hotels.

Flannery attended the University of Maryland, College Park, initially majoring in English, but experience working at a local hotel prompted him to change his major to business the next year, according to the Cape Resorts website.

"Early in my freshman year, I was hired by a hotel," Flannery said. "I waited tables in their casual restaurant and bussed tables in the fine dining restaurant."

Flannery currently sits on The Industry Advisory Board for Pennsylvania State University School of Hospitality Management and has served on advisory boards at the New York University, Tisch Center for Hospitality and at the University of Maryland's Robert H. Smith Business School.

Looking forward, Tisch said: "As COO, Dan and his team will continue to deliver exceptional experiences for our guests, team members and neighbors, while bringing new and innovative ideas to achieve performance and guest satisfaction."

NAIA Prohibits Transgender Women from Women's Sports

By Todd McElwee

The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) has voted transgender athletes out from competing in women's sports. Overseeing mostly smaller colleges, NAIA's new policy states "Only NAIA student-athletes whose biological sex is female may participate in NAIA-sponsored female sports."

The policy states: "The NAIA supports fair and safe competition opportunities for all student-athletes. Title IX ensures there are separate and equal opportunities for female athletes. As a result, the NAIA offers separate categories of competition in all sports except for competitive cheer and competitive dance, which are both co-ed."

CBS Sports reported the NAIA's Council of Presidents approved the policy in a 20-0 vote after a December survey indicated widespread support for the move. The association's previ-

ous policy only applied to postseason competition. The new directive goes into effect on August 1.

"We know there are a lot of different opinions out there," NAIA President Jim Carr told CBS Sports. "For us, we believed our first responsibility was to create fairness and competition in the NAIA... We also think it aligns with the reasons Title IX was created. You're allowed to have separate but equal opportunities for women to compete."

All eligible athletes may participate in NAIA-sponsored male sports. ESPN noted only athletes whose biological sex assigned at birth is female and who have not begun hormone therapy will be allowed to participate in women's sports, adding that a student who has begun hormone therapy may participate in activities such as workouts, practices and team activities, but not in interscholastic competition.

"College sports are the premier stage for women's sports in America and the NCAA will continue to pro-

mote Title IX, make unprecedented investments in women's sports and ensure fair competition for all student-athletes in all NCAA championships," NAIA said.

Transgender participation in athletics has developed into a divisive issue at seemingly every level of competition. The *Washington Post* reported that since 2020, about half of the states have enacted measures banning transgender girls and women—and sometimes boys and men—from publicly funded scholastic sports in the categories that align with their gender identities. Court challenges have followed.

The *Post* added a variety of international sport governing bodies, such as World Aquatics and World Athletics, have been grappling with how to institute scientifically sound and equitable rules.

Kelley Robinson, President of the Human Rights Campaign said: "Today, the NAIA decided to bar an entire

category of people from competition simply because of a right-wing outrage campaign that purposefully misrepresents and distorts the realities of transgender athletes while doing nothing to support women's sports. The benefits of sports to the mind, body, and spirit are well known. Every student, including transgender student athletes, deserve the opportunity to be a part of a team and to learn about sportsmanship, self-discipline, perseverance and more."

Independent Women's Forum (IWF) is fighting to keep transgender women and girls from competing in women's sports. Responding to push back from the Women's Sports Foundation to NAIA, it wrote on X: "@WomensSportsFdn should be standing with women & celebrating the @NAIA's move to protect the safety, equal opportunity, & privacy of female athletes. The evidence is very clear—Men have an athletic advantage over women."

New Hotel Aimed at Jewish Travelers Proposed in Las Vegas

By Jordan Bradley

A hotel catering to Jewish tourists could be coming to Las Vegas.

The proposed hotel would be a 486-room King David Hotel, according to documents submitted to the Clark County government by the developer, RK Vegas Circle LLC.

The hotel would include a synagogue, kosher restaurants, bars and a banquet facility, retail and convention space, an outdoor swimming pool on level 11, and five levels of underground parking.

"The uses and amenities provided in the hotel will include the standard fare as well as kosher restaurants and amenities which are otherwise unavailable in the immediate area," read a justification letter submitted with the hotel plans. "The closest synagogue to the subject area is approximately four miles from the Las Vegas Strip and the resort corridor."

The 0.6-acre parcel sits on Vegas Plaza Drive near Treasure Island and Caesars Palace as well as Interstate 15. The property is owned by Ray Koroghli, who also owns The New Pioneer in

Laughlin.

As part of the hotel proposal, the developer is requesting changes to the parcel's parking requirements, street designs and landscaping. The proposed hotel would offer 531 parking spaces—significantly less than the 854 required by the Clark County Zoning Commission.

In the justification letter, Koroghli and RK Vegas Circle noted that Jewish holidays will impact parking at the hotel.

"The parking provided is adequate for the site because there are specific

Jewish Holidays with specific requirements where vehicular access to the site is not allowed because of religious requirements," the letter said.

The hotel's developer is also seeking to waive development standards when it comes to the building's proposed height. On the parcel, the maximum height allowed is 100 feet. To accommodate the 46-story hotel as it is proposed, Clark County will need to allow an increase in building height up to 648, a 548% increase.

NEWS

Events Industry Council Announces Global Awards and 75th Anniversary Celebration

By Todd McElwee

Commemorating its history and those who've helped shape its name-sake sector, the Events Industry Council (EIC) will host its annual Global Awards Gala in conjunction with a 75th Anniversary Celebration on October 7 at the MGM Aria Resort and Casino in Las Vegas.

The black-tie event will include the induction of the 2024 Hall of Leaders and falls immediately before IMEX America.

"This 75th anniversary milestone offers a wonderful opportunity for our global community to celebrate and reflect on the legacy of our sector and the remarkable achievements of so many leaders who have had a profound impact on the business events industry and society in general," said

Amy Calvert, President & CEO, EIC. "Now more than ever we recognize the true purpose and value of the experiences we create. With more than 1.6 billion participants engaging in business events annually, we truly can be a catalyst for the change we envision."

More than 155 leaders have previously been inducted into the Hall of Leaders. Last year's class included Carina Bauer, CEO, Regent Exhibitions Ltd / IMEX Group; Barbara Connell, CMP Fellow, CAE, President & CEO, Solutions by Connell, LLC; Wanda Johnson, CAE, CEO, American Society for Parenteral & Enteral Nutrition; Steve O'Malley, Enterprise Vice President, Maritz Global Events; Amelia binti Roziman, CIS, CEO, Business Events Sarawak (BESarawak); Christine "Shimo" Shimasaki, CDME, CMP,

Managing Director, 2Synergize, LLC; and Dr. Deborah Breiter-Terry, CEM, (retired) University of Central Florida, Rosen College of Hospitality Management.

"We're excited and honored to bring together a truly global representation of our membership for this milestone event," said EIC Board Chair Ana María Viscasillas, CDME, DES, Board Liaison & Immediate Past Vice President, COCAL (Federación de Entidades Organizadoras de Congresos y Afines de Latino América). "These awards are always one of the biggest highlights of the year for the global business events industry. This year promises to be even more meaningful as we celebrate EIC's founding while honoring the leaders past and present who have volunteered their time to EIC's journey and who have helped shape the global

events industry."

The Global Awards will also recognize innovation and leadership in the business events industry with the following accolades: Pacesetter Award, EIC Social Impact Award, and the EIC Adaptation and Innovation Award.

"Partnering with EIC to host this wonderful event each year is such an honor for MGM, and we look forward to welcoming EIC members, award recipients and others to the Aria in October," said Stephanie Glanzer, Sr. Vice President & Chief Sales Officer of MGM Resorts. "We always welcome the opportunity to work with EIC to not only drive the meetings industry forward, but also recognize and celebrate the leaders who make the magic happen every day."

Find more information at eventscouncil.org.

Showcase

continued from page 1

collide both worlds of just destinations and then bringing the planners right in front of us."

Melvin Tennant, President & CEO of Meet Minneapolis, also said he views the show as "an opportunity to look at our colleagues" for the purposes of cross promotion and sharing of information. He suggested it might be beneficial to have color-coded badges

that distinguish between customers.

However, several destination sales professionals who criticized the event were wary about it being published and gave *USAE* permission on condition of anonymity.

One destination representative said the following: "I don't know what forces people to come out of their office or home, but there has to be some sort of magic that this event just doesn't seem to have.... There was some obstacle to people getting over to Gaylord. We were hoping that being in the district

was going to make it easier for people, but it doesn't seem to have."

The individual added that he'd still been able to interact with perhaps 10 major customers at the event.

Another destination representative made this comment: "It's been good to see some customers I haven't seen, but it would also be good to have more intentional conversations with clients.... Sometimes it's hard with the spring meeting season and also the holiday calendar recently, and with all that compacted it's hard to find

the perfect date, so I think we could be more intentional in looking at the timeframe and holidays as well."

Jen Sullivan of the Nashville CVC suggested shortening the show hours a bit to make traffic more concentrated, but also said Showcase is "the only show in the industry that brings everybody in this market together at one time."

"I think it's an excellent opportunity to see clients, friends, colleagues," she said. "It's quality versus quantity, and we're happy to be here."

Tropicana

continued from page 1

that of "a spherical armadillo" in order to create "passive shading and natural light" as best befits Nevada's climate.

The Tropicana site spans 35 acres, and the forthcoming stadium will occupy nine of those acres.

"We hope to add to the dynamic atmosphere and liveliness of the Las Vegas Strip, creating a welcoming environment for all of Southern Nevada," said John Fisher, Managing Partner and Owner of the Oakland A's.

To honor the iconic property's passing into Las Vegas lore, the Tropicana Las Vegas highlighted more than 700 names of "esteemed employees" on the property's grand marquee the two weeks leading up to the property's April 2 closure "in a heartfelt display of gratitude," a Bally's representative shared with *USAE*.

To further honor the employees who made the Tropicana such a beloved piece of the Vegas Strip, executives held a team member appreciation day, according to Bally's, "paying homage

to the remarkable careers these individuals have forged at the property."

At least 180 employees at the Tropicana can boast more than 20 years of employment at the property, Bally's said. And on closing day, more than 150 past and present employees, management and lookers-on witnessed the ceremonial locking of the Tropicana doors.

"This emotional farewell served as a poignant tribute to the dedicated employees, marking the official conclusion of a chapter in the rich history of this storied establishment," Bally's said.

The Tropicana Las Vegas opened with three stories and 300 guest rooms on April 4, 1957, to a crowd of more than 12,500 people, according to *The Associated Press*. Throughout the years, the Tropicana has cemented itself in the foundation of Sin City with its ties to the infamous mobster Frank Costello, to its hand in the making of the iconic feathered Las Vegas showgirl, and its shoutout from 007 himself in the 1971 franchise film *Diamonds Are Forever*.



The Tropicana Las Vegas shuttered its iconic doors for good on April 2. The property first opened in 1957.

Before demolition takes place, Bally's said it will decommission and transfer assets—"both gaming-related and otherwise"—in collaboration with the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, the Neon Museum and the Showgirl Museum.

"Together, they are diligently working to safeguard the rich heritage and cherished artifacts that hold immense sentimental value within the hallowed halls of the Tropicana Las Vegas, ensuring that its legacy lives on for generations to come," Bally's said.

NEWS

Hilton Acquires Controlling Stake in Owner of NoMad Hotels

By Jordan Bradley

Hilton Hotels announced on April 3 that it has acquired majority controlling interest of Sydel Group, the owner of luxury hotel brand, NoMad Hotels.

Hilton said that it intends to expand the NoMad Hotels portfolio up to 100 properties in “high-end markets around the world.” Under the deal, Sydel will head the new hotels’ design, branding and management; Hilton will lead development.

“Adding NoMad to our growing brand portfolio will create new offerings for guests seeking unique luxury experiences in some of the world’s most desirable locations,” said Chris Silcock, President of Global Brands and Commercial Services at Hilton. “By pairing an already proven brand concept that’s ready for expansion

with the power of Hilton’s commercial engine, we are accelerating our ability to drive growth in the luxury lifestyle segment.”

The acquisition announcement comes on the heels of Hilton’s planned acquisition of Graduate Hotels, a brand specializing in unique accommodations on or near college campuses, and the recent announcement of an exclusive partnership with Small Luxury Hotels of the World.

Each NoMad hotel will be part of Hilton’s reward platform, Hilton Honors, and each property will remain independently owned, the hotel giant said.

A key concept for the brand going forward is maintaining the initial properties’ style.

“NoMad Hotels are both grand and intimate, fun and elegant, and classic and playful, creating a unique blend

NOMAD

of luxury and lifestyle experiences,” Hilton said, with guest room and suite designs highlighting local artists in “the world’s most sought-after neighborhoods.”

“Grounded in the idea of the hotel as a great home, the NoMad brand is dedicated to providing guests with accessible luxury, exceptional design and award-winning food and beverage,” said Andrew Zabler, Founder and CEO of Sydel Group. “Hilton’s expertise in both luxury and lifestyle, paired with its track record in scaling brands, makes for an exciting opportunity. We look forward to seeing NoMad expand into sought-after neighborhoods all

around the world.”

NoMad was established in New York City in 2012 by Sydel. The first NoMad hotel closed permanently in March 2021 due to the pandemic. Two NoMad hotels remain; one in Las Vegas—which opened in October 2018 and was excluded from the terms of the deal with Hilton—and the flagship hotel in London—opened in May 2021. Sydel has also established six other lifestyle brands, including The Line, Freehand, and The Ned.

Currently, approximately 10 NoMad hotels are already in “advanced stages of discussion with Sydel,” Hilton said.

ALA Reveals Annual list of Top 10 Most Challenged Books

By Todd McElwee

The American Library Association (ALA) said its list of the Top 10 Most Challenged Books of 2023 exhibits a pattern of targeting those about the LGBTQIA+ community and people of color.

Gender Queer by Maia Kobabe was the most challenged book of last year. ALA noted the number of unique titles targeted for censorship surged 65% in 2023 compared to 2022, reaching the highest levels ever documented.

“In looking at the titles of the most challenged books from last year, it’s obvious that the pressure groups are targeting books about LGBTQIA+ people and people of color,” said Emily

Drabinski, President, ALA. “At ALA, we are fighting for the freedom to choose what you want to read. Shining a light on the harmful workings of these pressure groups is one of the actions we must take to protect our right to read.”

Sexuality, drug use, LGBTQIA+ content, sex education and rape were all listed as reasons books were targeted. The Top 10 Most Challenged Books of 2023:

1. *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe
2. *All Boys Aren’t Blue* by George M. Johnson
3. *This Book is Gay* by Juno Dawson
4. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky
5. *Flamer* by Mike Curato

6. *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison
7. (TIE) *Tricks* by Ellen Hopkins
8. (TIE) *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* by Jesse Andrews
9. *Let’s Talk About It* by Erika Moen and Matthew Nolan
10. *Sold* by Patricia McCormick

The Top 10 Books are featured in Unite Against Book Bans’ Book Résumé resource. Launched in February, the resource helps advocates defend books from censorship.

“These are books that contain the ideas, the opinions, and the voices that censors want to silence—stories by and about LGBTQ+ persons and people of color,” said ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom Director Deborah Caldwell-Stone. “Each challenge, each

demand to censor these books is an attack on our freedom to read, our right to live the life we choose, and an attack on libraries as community institutions that reflect the rich diversity of our nation. When we tolerate censorship, we risk losing all of this. During National Library Week, we should all take action to protect and preserve libraries and our rights.”

ALA also announced the theme for Banned Books Week 2024, “Freed Between the Lines,” which honors the ways in which books bring us freedom and that access to information is worth preserving. Banned Books Week will take place from September 22–28.

Find more information at ala.org.

Anaheim

continued from page 1

forward to working alongside him to benefit the residents and businesses of Anaheim and the surrounding region.”

Waterman said there’s “a lot of new and exciting things going on in Anaheim that I’d love to be a part of.” That includes a new development called OC Vibe!, which Waterman said is “going to be remarkable once it’s finished.”

A graduate for the University of New Hampshire, Waterman holds a degree in hotel and restaurant management. He and his wife, Bridget, have three sons. They enjoy walking, traveling, and renovating and flipping homes.

“Visit Orlando was a great opportunity, and I’ll miss this city, but I’m ready for the next adventure,” Water-



Mike Waterman

man said.

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NEWS

GMID

continued from page 1

It begins: “One silver lining lesson around the clouds of 2020 we can never erase, nothing replaces the value of meeting face to face, static electricity between people, ionic bonds that build the chemistry for solid relationships.” Find the complete work on Visit Orlando’s YouTube page.

“When groups meet in Orlando, they not only support our local businesses, vendors and hospitality workers, but they also make an indelible impact on our community through charitable donations and endeavors,” said Casandra Matej, President & CEO, Visit Orlando. “Celebrating Global Meetings Industry Day is a great opportunity to recognize these efforts and their positive effect on Orlando.”

MPI hosted a 12-hour broadcast featuring industry leaders sharing insights and experiences on the impact of meetings on the global economy.

Caesars Entertainment sponsored a wellness session during the broadcast

titled “Wellness Resilience: Winning Even When Things Go Awry.”

“Embark on a journey of self-discovery and perspective change in this captivating segment with Kelly Smith, Vice President of Sales for Meetings and Events, Caesars Entertainment and Nolan Nichols, Keynote Speaker and Founder, A Million Dreams,” the company said.

The Las Vegas resort community united to celebrate GMID by showcasing the value of in-person meetings and conventions to Southern Nevada with a marquee takeover featuring the campaign hashtag, #MeetingsMatter. Las Vegas resorts will also feature blue exterior lighting to mark the initiative.

“Meetings provide undeniable value to Southern Nevada as our visitors combine business with the iconic Las Vegas experience,” said Lisa Messina, Chief Sales Officer, Las Vegas CVA. “GMID is our opportunity to recognize the many organizations that prioritize in-person meetings in our destination. They help move business forward while driving job creation and economic growth in our community.”



Visit Orlando and Orange County Convention Center staff members celebrate Global Meetings Industry Day on April 11 at the convention center. “Meetings Matter” was the day’s theme.

Hilton invited organizations to share their meeting success story for its contest, “The Meeting That Meant Everything.” The PCMA Capital Chapter hosted a discussion on the current landscape and impact of the

industry at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in D.C. and NC Meetings Mean Business Alliance staged educational sessions followed by a celebration.

Find more information at ustravel.org.

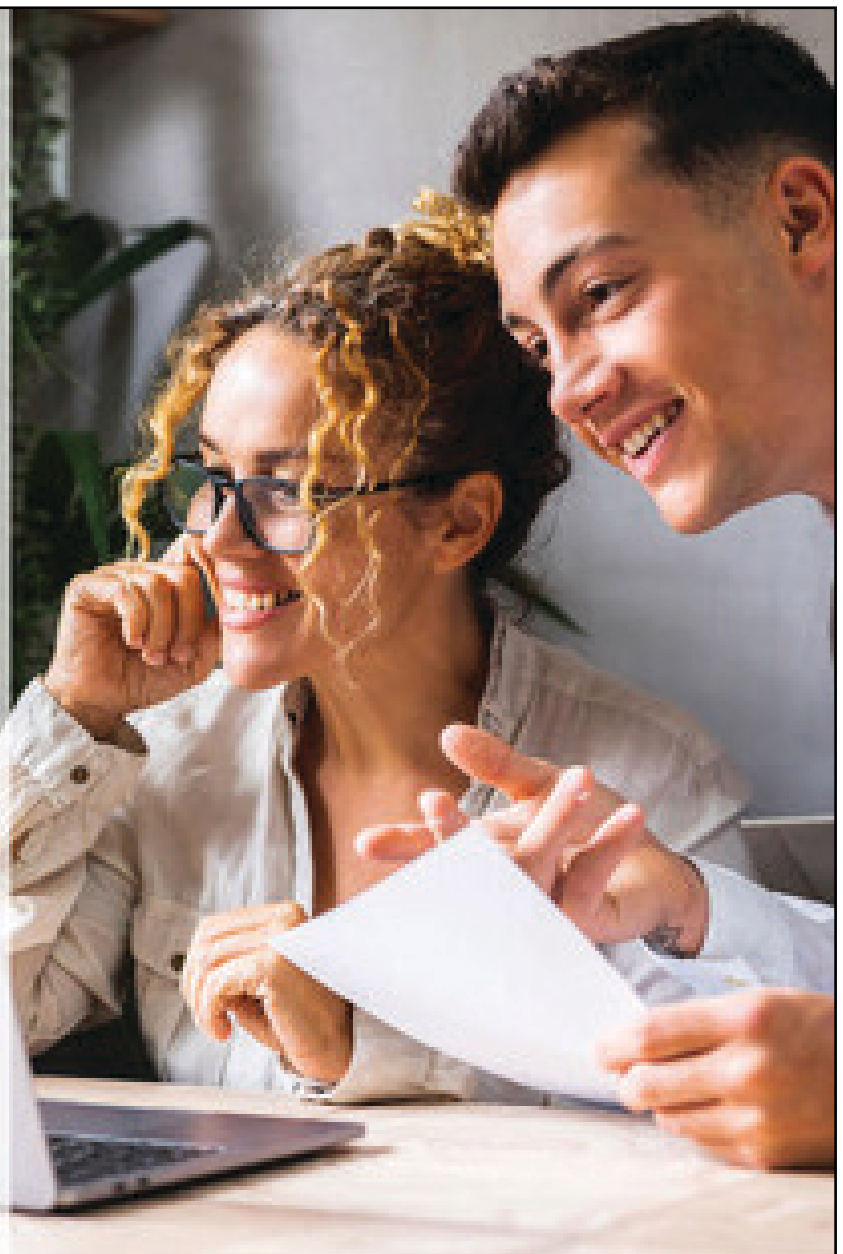
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Scene at 2024 Showcase

