

USAE Xtra

Destinations
International
Annual Meeting

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Santiago C. Corrada, President & CEO of Visit Tampa Bay (front left in blue suit holding yellow sign), and the rest of the Visit Tampa Bay crew welcome attendees of Destinations International's Annual Convention from July 16–18. The organization invites all conference goers to discover the destination's unique treasures during their stay.

ASAE Applauds House Committee Passage of Top Legislative Priority *Green Lights Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act*

By Todd McElwee

ASAE's top federal legislative priority, the Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act (H.R. 1477 / S. 722), cleared the House Ways and Means Committee on July 9 as part of a larger bill. The body approved H.R. 8915, the Education and Workforce Freedom Act, by a vote of 23-13.

"ASAE and its Tomorrow's Workforce Coalition—now with more than 810 member organizations—are extremely grateful to the Ways & Means Committee for approving H.R. 8915," said ASAE President & CEO Michelle Mason, FASAE, CAE. "This important

legislation would help strengthen countless careers and the entire economy, which is why we strongly support the bill's provisions enabling people to pursue workforce training and credentialing—this legislation can shift the 529-paradigm from "college savings plans" to "career savings plans."

The Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act permits beneficiaries of 529 savings accounts to use their account funds to cover costs associated with workforce training and both obtaining and maintaining high-quality postsecondary credentials, such as professional certifications and occupational licenses.

ASAE added the bill would provide

valuable tax-advantaged resources for families, students and workers—with or without a college degree—who pursue career growth, mid-career changes or pathways that diverge from a typical academic route. The Senate companion bill has 24 bipartisan cosponsors.

The Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act has been ASAE's primary legislative target for some time. Last July, ASAE launched the Tomorrow's Workforce Coalition to support the bill. The bill was the centerpiece of the ASAE Legislative Fly-In in March.

Find more information at asaecenter.org.

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Workers at Westin Long Beach Strike Over July Fourth Weekend

By [Jordan Bradley](#)

Dozens of room attendants, cooks, dishwashers, front desk agents, and other hotel staff at the Westin Long Beach in Southern California approved a strike at the property ahead of July Fourth weekend, walking off the job on the morning of July 6.

The Westin Long Beach—along with roughly 60 other SoCal hotels—has been engaged in contract negotiations with hotel worker union UNITE HERE Local 11 for more than a year.

At the time of press deadline, most of those hotels have reached agreements with the union, barring a handful of properties, including the Westin Long Beach.

“Our members have shown over the past year that workers are prepared to strike to secure living wages and other basic rights and protections,” said Kurt Petersen, Co-President of Local 11, when Westin workers authorized the strike. “Long Beach is part of the hospitality mosaic of Southern California. Yet the Westin Long Beach

wants its workers to agree to a second-class contract compared to what their peers have won. Workers won’t stand for it.”

Workers at the Westin have continued to strike in the hopes of securing what other area hotels have gained through contract negotiations and striking actions in the last year: higher wages, better health insurance and pension plans, and lighter workloads, according to Maria Hernandez from Local 11’s Communications team.

“The workers at the Westin Long Beach are at a point where they’re not going to negotiate anything less,” Hernandez said. “They’re not going to take anything less than what other workers already have.”

More than 50 hotels in the Los Angeles area have agreed to \$5/an hour wage increases within the first year of their contracts and other wage increases, guaranteed pre-pandemic staffing levels, the addition of June-teenth as a paid holiday, and more.

“I think what makes this unique is that it’s been a year, and it’s really



Dozens of hotel workers at the Westin Long Beach in Southern California walked off the job on July 6 amid stalled contract negotiations.

interesting to see how some hotels just haven’t gotten the memo,” Hernandez said. “They haven’t realized that, if anything, workers are not going to be dissuaded and they’re not going to give up.”

The strike led by Local 11 has constituted the largest strike in modern history, with more than 10,000 hotel workers participating in approximately

170 striking actions, which began around the Independence Day holiday last year.

Representatives from the Westin Long Beach declined to comment on the strike when reached by USAE.

Hernandez said the union expects that actions will continue at the property until a contract agreement can be made.

TravelAbility Announces INNOVATEable Shark Tank for DI Convention

By [Jonathan Trager](#)

TravelAbility has announced InnovateAble @ DI Shark Tank, curated by TravelAbility, which will feature four groundbreaking entrepreneurs pitching assistive technologies designed to ease barriers that people with disabilities face when they travel.

The unique event will take place during the Destinations International (DI) Annual Convention in Tampa on July 18, from 2:15 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Marriott Tampa Water Street.

“InnovateAble @ DI Shark Tank, curated by TravelAbility, will highlight four innovations and technologies, each addressing a different disability,” said Jake Steinman, founder of TravelAbility. “The four innovations invited to Tampa were selected from the finalists at INNOVATEable, our annual pitch event held every July 26.

The 48 companies included in the pitch event since 2019 have raised just over \$583 million.”

The companies presenting at the Shark Tank session are the following: for mobility, AccessRec, whose CEO was the original founder of the Mobi Mat; for deafness and hard of hearing, Empower 360 Direct Video, which can provide the industry with everything from sign language interpreters to AI captioning for meetings and conferences; for blindness, Glidance, an AI-driven autonomous navigation device that serves as a self-guided cane that will revolutionize navigation; and for autism, Hidden Disabilities Sunflower, which offers training, a lanyard recognized in hundreds of airports, and sensory kits.

The event will feature a distinguished panel of guest judges who will pose questions to the entrepreneurs.

The panel includes Ryan George, President & CEO, Simpleview; Adam Burke, President & CEO, Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Board; Sophia Hyder Hock, Chief Inclusion Officer, DI; Santiago Corrada, President & CEO, Visit Tampa Bay; Alvaro Silberstein, Co-founder, Wheel the World; Zach Curry, Vice President, Rooms Opera-

tions and Guest Experiences, Marriott Worldwide; and Maunda Land, MBA, CMP, CAE, Sr. Director, Conscious Inclusion, ASAE.

“We’re pleased to introduce these innovators to destination organizations and tourism boards around the world, so they can introduce them to their local industries,” said Steinman.

AHLA Finds U.S. Hotel Staffing ‘Behind Where It Needs to Be’

By [Jordan Bradley](#)

The American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) released a report on the state of the U.S. workforce at hotels, finding that despite adding 700 jobs to hotel payrolls in June, hotels are still more than 196,000 short of pre-pandemic levels.

“Halfway through 2024, the hotel industry is behind where it needs to be when it comes to hiring staff, despite near-record high wages and expanding workplace benefits and flexibility,” said Kevin Carey, AHLA’s Interim President and CEO.

The hotel industry employs about 1.92 million people, which is almost 200,000 jobs short of industry data from February 2020, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) that the U.S. Department of

Labor released on July 5.

AHLA noted the shortfall “reflects the scarcity of available employees” despite a 26% increase in average hotel wages in recent years. It also reflects revisions made by the BLS to the number of hotel jobs in the country, which negated job gains that had previously been reported in prior months.

“The reason is the nationwide workforce shortage, which is preventing hoteliers from meeting their full potential as demand for travel remains strong,” Carey said.

AHLA has been consistent in its lobbying for support of bills aiming to address that shortage at the national level.

The top three bills being lauded as solutions by the association include

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HOTS

HOTS Hotel Seeking Banter Merchant... A hotel in Glasgow, Scotland, is looking to hire a "banter merchant" in time for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe to be held August 2–26. Sky News reports The AC Hotel by Marriott Glasgow said it's seeking a "breakfast roaster" to keep guests "in stitches" during the festival. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe is a three-week festival celebrating arts and culture dating back to 1947. The festival features every kind of physical art, including classical theatre, musicals, comedy, dance, and more, and brings headlining performers as well as unknown artists front and center. The Glasgow AC Hotel is offering a paid position to a performer—which includes free ac-

commodation and travel expenses—in exchange for daily performances that transform "ordinary mornings into laugh-a-minute experiences" at the hotel and sets "the perfect tone for the day ahead." HOTS is dusting off the old joke book and resume!

* * * * *

HOTS Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport... An adventurous kangaroo named Skippy was caught 50 miles from home more than six months after his New Year's Eve escape, UPI reports. Skippy was living with his owner in Germany when he hopped out of town. Despite numerous sightings, Skippy

evaded capture until the first week of July, when he was captured 50 miles from his owner's home. Skippy was kept safe in his rescuer's horse pen until his owner was able to collect him. HOTS thinks Skippy's owner will have to build a taller fence.

Gary Hernbroth Releases New 'Playbook' for Success

By Todd McElwee

What do good bosses, lousy bosses and Bozo the Clown have to do with success? Tenured hotelier, speaker and business coach Gary Hernbroth believes he has the answers.

Hernbroth's provided *USAE* a sneak peek inside his new book, *Twist the Familiar: Your Playbook for Success, One Story at a Time*, a collection of curated stories employing different

angles and perspectives designed to help readers lay out their own plan for success.

Hernbroth told *USAE* he has always loved writing and during his 17 years in luxury hotels and 25-plus years as a professional speaker and business coach he has "come across countless interesting stories and interesting people." Encouraged by family, friends and colleagues to write a book, he came up with the goal of "helping people to create their own playbooks from my stories and lessons, plus those of others."

"I wanted it to be meaningful and make an impact with people at all levels," he said.

Touching on what can be learned from good bosses and our lousy bosses, he said: "They both teach us something at different ends of the spectrum, such as good methods to emulate from some, and then with others, things to avoid like the plague. Smart leaders and leaders-to-be can gain a world of experience along their journey by paying attention to both kinds of bosses."

Hernbroth also penned a chapter/story on complicating things in this business. Saying he's a "raving fan of un-complicating the complicated," he pointed to using common sense and employing critical thinking skills to



Gary Hernbroth

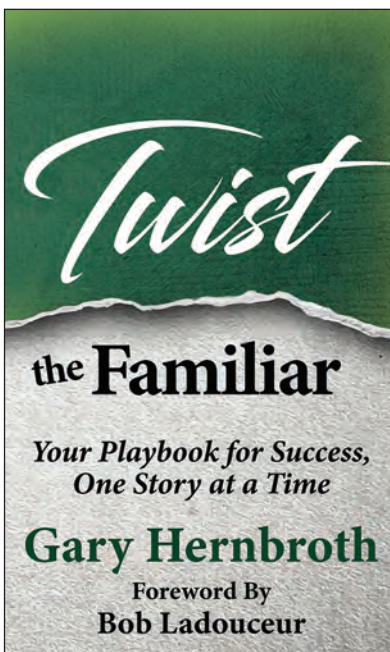
help solve the problem.

"Bozo-isms"—modeled after Bozo the Clown from a childhood TV show—is a term Hernbroth coined.

"Those are the things that people say that may not always be intended to come out wrong, but they make people scratch their heads and ask themselves, 'did they really just say that?'" he said.

Once he shared the idea, people emailed Hernbroth examples of "Bozo-isms," some of which were funny and others "borderline criminal in

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WEEKLY NEWS OF ASSOCIATIONS, CLUBS AND HOTELS

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James A. Heller Named Publisher of *USAE*

James A. Heller, currently Chief Operating Officer of *USAE*, has been named Publisher of the newspaper.

Ross E. Heller, current Publisher, will become Publisher-Emeritus. The actions became effective July 1.

James A. Heller, 52, is the eldest son of Ross E. Heller and his late wife Anne Daly Heller. Before her passing in 2021, Anne Heller was both Publisher and Executive Editor of *USAE*.

USAE was founded in 1982 by Ross and Anne Heller. It has been published weekly, both in print and online, ever since.

In passing the reins and title of Publisher to his son, Ross E. Heller said: "While I am only edging into semi-retirement, James has taken

on the day-to-day responsibility of this job and done splendid work. It only seemed right to give him the title as well."

In accepting his new responsibilities, James A. Heller said: "It is a great honor to carry *USAE, Inc.* into the future from what Anne & Ross Heller started 42 years ago. As technology changes the publishing industry, *USAE* too has had to change to keep up with the times.

"It is my goal to continue what they started, follow their beliefs and provide unbiased, fair and honest news coverage of the meetings, travel, and tourism industries. My goal is to improve on our digital content and user experience, as we transition from printed media to more digital media.

"But don't worry, we will still print a monthly edition and have our printed issues at conferences for as long as it is appropriate," he added.

James A. Heller has served in a variety of positions at *USAE* for more than 20 years and will now be responsible for all aspects of managing the company's business. His email remains james@usaenews.com. His contact phone is 703/898-3528.

Ross E. Heller remains active in ASAE and Destinations International. He is also doing work related to the publication of his 2022 book *by Abraham Lincoln: His 1858 Time Capsule* and has become active in Lincoln-related organizations. He can be reached at ross@usaenews.com.

USAExchange

Conversation with Scott White, Incoming Chair, Destinations International and President & CEO, Visit Greater Palm Springs

Ahead of Destinations International's Annual Convention in Tampa this week, USAE spoke with Scott White, the incoming Chair of the association. White offered his thoughts about how he feels to step into the role, what his vision is for DI, and the value of the association to its members.

USAE: How do you feel to become the new Chair of DI

White: I am very honored to be selected to represent our industry. I am excited to work with the DI team and Board of Directors on their goals and objectives for the coming year. It is critical we continue to ensure DI is the premier global association for destination organizations and convention & visitors bureaus. I want to support their strategy on building a more inclusive and expansive global network. It is important that we listen to diverse perspectives from around the world. I want to support and help Don continue to grow his vision for DI to be the largest and most dynamic association in our field and serve as the key resource and collaborative platform for destination professionals worldwide. We are discovering that the DMOs outside of North America are facing many of the same issues we have domestically. The more we can all collaborate together, the more likely we will be successful. I look forward to attending the first Destinations International Global Leaders Forum in Dublin, February 11–13. We hope to see you there!

USAE: What do you hope to accomplish during your term generally

White: I am fortunate to be following Fred Dixon, Al Hutchinson and Butch Spyridon. Their leadership and vision has established DI as a global leader. DI has a very strong management team dedicated to building relevant programs that are important to the success of our organizations. I want to continue to build upon their efforts and ensure DI has the resources and support to accomplish all of the goals outlined in their 2024 business plan. We are fortunate to have an organization that is highly respected.

USAE: What particular goals/priorities would you like to see achieved

White: I want to create opportunities to that will engage our next generation of leaders. It is critical that we listen and learn together. I want to create a "Shadow or Junior board" and a mentorship program consisting of young leaders interested in joining the DI board. I co-chaired the Governance and Nominating committee with Al Hutchinson, and we had a lot of young leaders interested in joining the board. It was nice to see so much interest in DI. I am grateful, the committee nominated two future leaders for the board: Zeek Coleman of Tourism Economics and Cody Chomiak of Travel Manitoba. I think it is important we have a diverse board and the board has access to the insights and vision of our future leaders. I also want to engage the business partners that are investing

in DI and better understand how we can work with them and meet the needs of the DMO members.

USAE: How has serving on the board benefitted you as a DMO leader

White: Being part of DI has been very beneficial for our organization and for me personally. DI provides great resources for our team and creates opportunities to network and develop important relationships. We are all fortunate to be in an industry that is open and willing to help each other. DI has created a culture and atmosphere of collaboration. I want to make sure we protect and preserve what DI has created under Don's leadership.

USAE: As the new Chair, what message would you like to give to attendees to this convention

White: I am excited for the year ahead and working with our board and our new slate of officers: Leslie Bruce, Chair Elect; Kyle Edmiston, Treasurer; Ricky Thigpen, Secretary; and Al



Hutchingson, Immediate Past Chair (stepping in for Fred Dixon). I would say my theme is engagement and collaboration. I want to hear from our members about their ideas, needs and vision for our industry. Please connect with me at scott@visitgreaterps.com. I look forward to hearing from our DMO partners!

JW Marriott Coming to Detroit Convention Center

By [Jordan Bradley](#)

The development group behind a forthcoming convention center hotel near the former site of the Joe Louis Arena in Detroit announced on July 3 that the hotel will be a JW Marriott-branded property.

Detroit's Sterling Group and the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority (DRCFA) said the hotel will be called the JW Marriott Detroit Water Square. It will be attached to the convention center via a skywalk.

While it had been reported last December that there would be a hotel attached to the Huntington Place Convention Center, the news that the hotel will be a JW Marriott branded property is new.

"This connected hotel will change the hospitality landscape in the City of Detroit and allow for Huntington

Place to attract more and larger conventions," said Danny Samson, Chief Development Officer of Sterling Group. "It will be a significant economic benefit to the City and the region."

The hotel is expected to be 24 stories and offer 600 guest rooms, "significantly boosting the city and state's appeal for large conventions and major events," Sterling Group and DRCFA said.

The hotel development will also include 50,000 square feet of meeting spaces, and food and beverage concepts.

The hotel will be the JW Marriott Detroit Water Square will be the first hotel attached to a Detroit convention center, according to Claude Molinari, Chairperson of the DRCFA,

"A connected hotel is a critical component that will allow Huntington

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American Bar Association Launches Initiative to Count Lawyers with Disabilities

By [Todd McElwee](#)

Launched during July's Disability Pride Month, the American Bar Association's (ABA) #BeCounted campaign is designed to count lawyers with disabilities across the country.

Spearheaded by the ABA Commission on Disability Rights, the initiative encourages lawyers with disabilities to add themselves to a U.S. map to express their disability pride.

Lawyers with disabilities are encouraged to complete a short digital form, which requests city, state and disability. No personally identifiable information is needed.

According to the 2021 ABA Model Diversity Survey, lawyers with a disability are generally underreported and/or underrepresented at every level within law firms. A 2023 report from the National Association of Law Placement showed only 1.4% of law firm lawyers surveyed self-identified as having a disability.

ABA said the Commission on Disability Rights updated its 21-Day Dis-

ability Equity Habit-Building Challenge in honor of Disability Pride Month. The challenge invites participants to engage in 21 consecutive daily assignments, usually 20 minutes, followed by discussion questions. The assignments—which cover topics ranging from disability identity and culture to disability justice and etiquette—include readings, listening to podcasts and watching videos.

"The goal of the activities is to help participants become more aware and engaged in the quest for disability equity, and specifically to learn more about the members of the disability community as well as the barriers, biases, stereotypes and discrimination they encounter in everyday life," ABA said.

Disability Pride started as a day of celebration in 1990 when the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law, ABA noted. That same year, Boston held the first Disability Pride Day. The first official observance occurred in July 2015, which marked the 25th anniversary of the ADA.

NEWS

Destinations International 30 Under 30 Honorees

Destinations International 30 Under 30 Honoree: Macy Dolton

Macy Dolton, 29, is Content Marketing Specialist for Destination DC. She graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a degree in mass communications. She enjoys crafting (creating polymer clay earrings), finding the best gluten free bites around the city, and attending concerts.



Macy Dolton

USAE: How do you feel to have been named a 30 Under 30 honoree?

Dolton: I am incredibly honored and proud to be a part of the class of 2024. This recognition is not something I had ever imagined and am excited to become more involved with the program, organization, and alumni network.

USAE: What attracted you to your job with Destination DC?

Dolton: I grew up in the area but didn't take advantage of living in DC's backyard, so I was intrigued to learn more about the city and view it from a marketing perspective. The strong mission and approachable culture of the organization was also very enticing, especially as someone early on in their career.

USAE: What advice would you give someone who's thinking about going into the industry?

Dolton: Be adaptive, immerse yourself in the industry, and take every opportunity that you're presented with—the hospitality industry is vast and diverse, offering something for everyone whether you know

it yet or not. I've gotten to where I am today in my career because of accepting new opportunities and responsibilities, which has helped guide my career path and passions.

Destinations International 30 Under 30 Honoree: Andrew Lawrence

Andrew Lawrence, 28, joined the Arlington Sports Commission at Arlington CVB in late 2021 and was promoted to his current post as Assistant Director last year. A University of North Carolina Asheville graduate, Lawrence enjoys golf and is a Manchester United supporter.

USAE: How do you feel to have been named a 30 Under 30 honoree?

Lawrence: It's an honor to be selected as one of Destinations International's 2024 30 Under 30 recipients. I'd like to thank Destinations International for this recognition as well as thank all my colleagues and community partners whose support has helped me reach this milestone in my career.

USAE: What attracted you to your



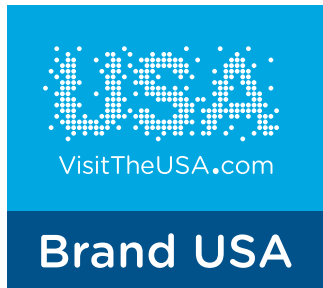
Andrew Lawrence

job with the Arlington Sports Commission?

Lawrence: I've always had a passion for sports and a drive to pursue a career in the sports industry. Arlington, Texas offered a great opportunity to recruit world-class events in a community built for the big stage.

USAE: What advice would you give someone who's thinking about going

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Congratulations KATIE STREATER

2024 30 UNDER 30 HONOREE

Katie Streater is senior coordinator, global trade development, at Brand USA. She is responsible for assisting global travel trade initiatives with a special focus on Canada and Latin America.

Prior to joining Brand USA, Katie held positions at Destination DC and an education technology firm. She received her bachelor's degree in international business from Florida Atlantic University as well as the Masters of Tourism Administration with a concentration in sustainable tourism management from The George Washington University.

Katie loves getting lost in a good book, playing video games, biking, bird watching, and of course, traveling. She is originally from Fort Myers, Florida, and has ventured to 21 of the USA's stunning national parks. She recommends Istanbul as her favorite travel destination.



The entire Brand USA team thanks Katie for her dedication to marketing the USA and extends heartfelt congratulations on this achievement.

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into the industry?

Lawrence: I would recommend gaining experience in the sports industry through internships or volunteering at events. Continuously build your professional network and be open to learning from leaders in the industry.

Destinations International 30 Under 30 Honoree: Megan Myers

Megan Myers, 28, serves as Digital Marketing Director for the Hocking Hills Tourism Association in Ohio. She graduated with a degree in communication studies from her hometown college of Ohio University in Athens in 2018. Outside of work, Myers can be found spending time with her wife, Meagan, and their two dogs, Chestnut and Fig, reading, attending local events, or catching up on her favorite shows.

USAE: How do you feel to be named a 30 Under 30 honoree?

Myers: I am honored and excited to be a part of this year's cohort. This is an incredible opportunity for mentorship, learning, and networking. I am



Megan Myers

excited to grow as a professional in this program. One of the most exciting parts for me is meeting 29 peers from across the world who are all as passionate about tourism as I am.

USAE: What attracted you to your job with Hocking Hills Tourism Association?

Myers: I accidentally fell into tourism. During the pandemic, I searched for a position where I could use my communication skills and passion for online marketing. I applied for a position at the Hocking Hills Tourism

Association (Explore Hocking Hills) and began in 2021. Promoting Hocking Hills is something I am passionate about. We encourage families to enjoy an outdoor vacation, spend time together, and learn about Appalachia with a focus on sustainability, all of which I am passionate about.

USAE: What advice would you give someone who's thinking about going into the industry?

Myers: My biggest advice is to learn as much as possible, ask questions, think outside the box, and try new things. Tourism is such a creative field, and there are so many parts to it. Some people think tourism is only travel agents, and while travel agents are wonderful, there are so many ways to be a part of the industry, no matter what your skill sets are. Coming into a new industry can be scary and intimidating. Still, you won't find a more welcoming industry either—it's foundational to the message of tourism and welcoming guests and visitors into new places. That energy translates to new people in the industry.

Destinations International 30 Under 30 Honoree: Hailey Post

Hailey Post, Destination Data Manager for Visit Raleigh, received her undergraduate degree in sustainable tourism and hospitality from UNC-Greensboro and her master's degree in parks, recreation and tourism from NC State University. A prolific reader of sci-fi and fantasy, Post loves listening to a good audiobook while out on a hike. She just turned 30 and has a fiancé named Keisei.

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Hailey Post

congratulations!

ANDREW LAWRENCE

Congratulations Andrew Lawrence, Assistant Director of the Arlington Sports Commission, for being named one of Destinations International's 30 under 30 Class of 2024. Arlington is proud to have you on our team!



arlington.org/sports



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USAE: How do you feel to have been named a 30 Under 30 honoree?

Post: It's a great honor to represent Visit Raleigh and the work that we do to spread the value of tourism. I'm thrilled to connect with other young professionals as we navigate our careers in such a wonderful industry.

USAE: What attracted you to your job with Visit Raleigh?

Post: I had the privilege of working with Visit Raleigh during my master's thesis work at NC State University (Go Pack!). During that time, I witnessed the dedication and passion the Visit Raleigh team has for innovation in the DMO space, so I was excited to join the team after I graduated.

USAE: What advice would you give someone who's thinking about going into the industry?

Post: The tourism industry is vast and diverse, I encourage those interested in the industry to remain curious and find the corners of the industry that excite them. Travel brings sincere joy to those who experience it, and it should be the same for those of us who make the magic

happen. Find that joy and seize it!

Destinations International 30 Under 30 Honoree: Lee Prutsman

Kansas City native Lee Prutsman, Sr. Marketing Manager for Visit KC, has been with his hometown bureau for more than six years. A graduate of Kansas State University with a marketing degree, the 30-year-old enjoys time with his wife, Alexandria, as well as traveling, gardening, and golf.

USAE: How do you feel to have been



Lee Prutsman

named a 30 Under 30 honoree?

Prutsman: It is an absolute honor to share this distinction with 29 other tourism professionals from around the world. This recognition is incredibly gratifying and wouldn't have been possible without the amazing mentors and talented team at Visit KC. They've allowed me to immerse myself in the exhilarating world of tourism by encouraging new ideas, supporting my achievements and ultimately guiding me toward achieving my goals.

USAE: What attracted you to your job with Visit KC?

Prutsman: I initially followed Visit

KC on social media and participated in various programs like KC Restaurant Week and Kansas City Tap Tour. With no prior experience in tourism, I was captivated by the idea of promoting a destination rather than a product. As a marketing professional and Kansas City native, combining my love for the city with my marketing experience felt like a dream. Six years later, I can confidently say it has been the most rewarding experience and I wouldn't change a thing.

USAE: What advice would you give someone who's thinking about going

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AHLA

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Closing the Workforce Gap Act of 2024 (also called H.R. 7574), which would transition the cap on H-2B guest worker visas from 66,000 to a system responsive to current workforce climates; the H-2 Improvements to Relieve Employers (HIRE) Act (or H.R. 4708), which would make it easier for qualified job applicants to find positions in struggling fields by expanding the H-2A/H-2B labor certification to three years and permanently waive

in-person interviews for workers returning to the United States; and the Asylum Seeker Work Authorization (known as S.255/H.R.1325), which would allow asylum seekers to be eligible for work authorizations 30 days after they apply for asylum provided they qualify, instead of at least six months under the current system.

"Both Congress and the administration can provide relief to our members, many of whom are small business owners, and AHLA will continue to call for action to expand the pool of available workers," Carey said.

destination
DC

Congratulations
MACY DOLTON

30 UNDER 30
DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL

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into the industry?

Prutsmann: Familiarize yourself with the tourism industry. Learn about tourism development in your city, connect with hospitality professionals, and stay updated on travel trends. Industry experience is crucial, but actively engaging with the tourism space shows potential employers that you understand the landscape and helps you determine if it's the right fit for you.

Destinations International 30 Under 30 Honoree: Wayne Stewart

Wayne Stewart, 27, serves as Director of Marketing & Communications for Visit Casper in Wyoming. He holds a degree in mass communications from Rochester University in Michigan. Stewart is a triathlete—swimming, cycling, and running—and married his wife, Andee, in March 2023.

USAE: How do you feel to have



Wayne Stewart

been named a 30 Under 30 honoree?

Stewart: I'm grateful to be named a 30 under 30 honoree, and consider it an honor to represent my organization and the community of Casper in this year's class of honorees. I truly love this industry, and hope to be in it for a long time, so this recognition gives me a boost of confidence and I'm sure

will provide me with great connections and a wealth of knowledge that will help me as I continue to grow within it.

USAE: What attracted you to your job with Visit KC?

Stewart: Casper is lucky to have so many passionate community members and stakeholders that work so hard to continuously make Casper a better place, and it's contagious. This position and organization have equipped me with tools, resources, and knowledge to help in those efforts, and the opportunity to do so was what brought me here. Plus, the Wyoming scenery and outdoor recreation is an added bonus!

USAE: What advice would you give someone who's thinking about going into the industry?

Stewart: Ask yourself if you're truly passionate about the community and the destination, because having that passion is critical to your success. Do you really care about the future of your community and its residents? If you do, that passion will drive your curios-

ity, willingness, and sense of direction, all of which will make you successful.

Destinations International 30 Under 30 Honoree: Katie Streater

Katie Streater is Sr. Coordinator, Global Trade Development, for Brand USA. The 30-year-old said she enjoys "biking, hiking, and climbing - basically anything that makes me feel like a rugged adventurer." Reading sci-fi and fantasy books is also a pastime. She's a graduate of Florida Atlantic University and The George Washington University.

USAE: How do you feel about being named a 30 Under 30 honoree?

Streater: I am incredibly excited and humbled to be named a 30 Under 30 honoree. This recognition highlights my dedication to my career and motivates me to continue exploring exciting areas within the industry. It's an honor to be included among such a talented group of individuals.

USAE: What attracted you to your

Please turn to page 9



with a capital T.



FALLON TULLIER
Research & Technology Manager
Visit Baton Rouge

Visit Baton Rouge congratulates Fallon Tullier on her selection as a part of the "30 Under 30" Class of 2024 for *Destinations International*. Fallon is recognized as a leader of tomorrow, and we are proud to have her on our team - innovating for Baton Rouge and inspiring her peers and colleagues across America.

NEWS

30 Under 30

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Katie Streater

job with Brand USA?

Streater: I was drawn to my current role on the Global Trade Development team at Brand USA by the opportunity

Hernbroth

continued from page 3

terms of customer service.”

“I think that chapter will create a lot of chuckling from readers yet should also remind people that those very things can be said in their own organizations every day, and they have to manage the process and communication a bit better,” he said.

In 1995, Hernbroth founded Training for Winners, which provides speaking services and other motivational offerings. The PGA TOUR, Disney, Genentech and Marriott International are amongst his clients. He spent 17 years in sales and leadership with Westin, Fairmont and Park Lane Hotels.

“The varied and robust experiences that my careers within this industry (so far) afford me the opportunity to come across many situations—good, bad, and ugly—where learning moments jumped out at me,” he said. “I engaged people in this industry when I heard their interesting and impactful stories, too. They were glad to be a part of the journey. This hospitality and meetings industry is one huge petri dish for situations, experiences, dilemmas, great moments, dark moments, you name it—and we learn from it all. I included a healthy selection in my book, for the purpose of learning and a bit of entertaining, too, because that’s an important facet of learning.

“It’s got to be fun. It’s not all hospitality, of course, that’s too narrow a niche, and this industry can borrow some good ideas from other industries, and vice versa. But hospitality is my DNA and those stories abound in my book.”

Find the book and more information at trainingforwinners.com.

to collaborate with our international teams and learn about travel trends across global markets. This role allows me to be part of driving international visitation to the United States, which is incredibly rewarding. Before joining Brand USA, I hadn’t ventured into Travel Trade, but it plays a significant role within the industry, and I am thrilled to be part of it.

USAE: What advice would you give someone who’s thinking about going into the industry?

Streater: The travel and tourism industry extends far beyond flights and hotel stays—it actively contributes to local economies and fosters

cross-cultural connections. What continues to draw me to this industry is the opportunity to collaborate with passionate individuals who care deeply about their communities. It’s a dynamic field where “work hard, play hard” is the unwritten mantra. If any of that ignites your passion, you know you’re in the right place.

Destinations International 30 Under 30 Honoree: Nathaniel Sweetman

Nathaniel Sweetman, Sports Marketing Coordinator for Visit Sarasota, turned 30 soon after being named an honoree. A graduate of D’Youville

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Nathaniel Sweetman



CONGRATULATIONS,
HAILEY POST!
30 UNDER 30 CLASS OF 2024

Meet destination data manager Hailey Post at DI’s Annual Convention. A recent graduate of N.C. State University with an M.S. in tourism management, Hailey jumped right into our destination organization industry just three years ago. We’re proud of your 30 Under 30 selection and value your thought leadership at home in Raleigh, N.C.—a place with clever, like-minded leaders and uniquely homegrown hospitality.



NEWS

30 Under 30

continued from page 9

University (formerly D'Youville College) in Buffalo, New York, Sweetman played basketball from childhood through all four years of undergrad. He loves to keep active and is an avid traveler who "loves seeing the world and experiencing all the possibilities within it."

USAE: How do you feel to be named a 30 Under 30 honoree?

Sweetman: It's very surreal to be honored as one of Destinations International's 30 Under 30. The program itself is such an amazing accomplishment for those representing the tourism industry. When I first received the news that I was chosen, I truly couldn't believe it. During the application process, I had a real drive and passion to show what I've done for my destination in the few years I've been here. Being recognized for that still leaves me speechless.

USAE: What attracted you to your job with Visit Sarasota?

Sweetman: To be honest, I never looked into the tourism industry as something that would suit me, at

first. But that quickly changed after talking with a friend who has been in the industry for 10+ years. Through our conversations, he brought up the opportunity for real growth and real change, being a part of meaningful things. That resonated with me, especially because he was a member of Visit Sarasota before my time, and that was attractive in and of itself.

USAE: What advice would you give someone who's thinking about going into the industry?

Sweetman: My advice for people entering the industry is to believe in yourself and your talents. The industry may sound and feel very different than anything you've ever done before, but it is so worth it if you believe in yourself and what you can do. Entering this industry just three years ago, I didn't know I'd be a part of momentous change and service and be rewarded for all the accomplishments I've been a part of.

Destinations International 30 Under 30 Honoree: Fallon Gerald Tullier

Tullier, 25, works as Research & Technology Manager for Visit Baton Rouge, her hometown. In her free time, the graduate of Louisiana State

University and pop culture enthusiast can be found spending time at home with her husband and their two dogs, streaming a show, or reading a good book. She has also recently started "making one pie a month with my granny to hopefully master her recipes and learn how to make her renowned crust!"

USAE: How do you feel to be named a 30 Under 30 honoree?

Tullier: I am honestly still in shock! I am truly humbled to have been selected. I work in the best industry, so to be honored as one of DI's 30 Under 30 is definitely the biggest highlight of my career so far. But I do wish I could share this honor with my whole team because I truly would not be here without them.

USAE: What attracted you to your job with Visit Baton Rouge?

Tullier: My parents owned a restaurant when I was growing up, so you can say the hospitality industry is in my blood! During my first two years at LSU, I worked at the gift shop inside the on-campus hotel and saw the inner workings of hotel life and the retail industry before I started as an intern at Visit Baton Rouge. I have a lot of pride in saying I am from Baton Rouge, so



Fallon Gerald Tullier

being able to highlight that it's a great destination is so fulfilling. Working for the best city with the best team, what more could I ask for?

USAE: What advice would you give someone who's thinking about going into the industry?

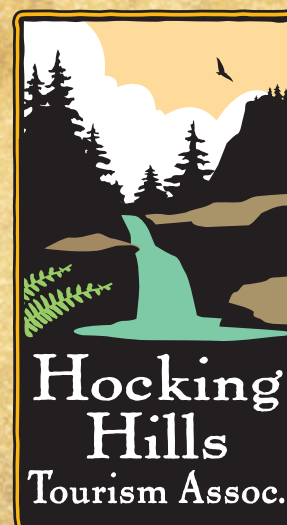
Tullier: I always remind myself that we work in tourism, and it is supposed to be fun! So have fun, ask a lot of questions, and surround yourself with inspiring people. I would not be here without the people who helped guide and push me along the way.

Congratulations



Megan Myers, one of the 30 Under 30 being celebrated by Destinations International.

The Hocking Hills Tourism Association is proud to have Megan on our team promoting Ohio's natural crown jewels, the Hocking Hills.



ExploreHockingHills.com

NEWS

— OBITUARY —

Jim Smither, Former Leader of Greater Birmingham CVB, Dies

By Jonathan Trager

Jim Smither, who served as President & CEO of the Greater Birmingham CVB (GBCVB) in Alabama from 1993–2015, passed away on July 2 following a brief illness. He was 83.

Smither was the longest-tenured leader of the GBCVB since its inception in 1969. The organization described the 50-year veteran of the hospitality industry as “a trusted leader and celebrated tourism professional.”

“Jim was a member of an iconic generation of CVB CEOs, steeped in years of travel industry experience, that educated the public, local, state, and national officials about the importance of tourism to their communities,” said John Oros, President & CEO of the GBCVB, who succeeded Smither in 2015. “He was highly regarded in all the destinations that he led, and personally, I was fortunate to have him as a valued friend and advisor after his retirement.”

While with the GBCVB, Smither was part of numerous critical projects for the destination, including Olympic Soccer in 1996, Indy Car racing, and the Davis Cup as well as the development of the Uptown District, the Westin Birmingham, and Birmingham Crossplex.

“Jim was a white shirt, black shoes only, suit-and-tie kind of guy,” said Mike Gunn, Sr. Vice President of Sales for the GBCVB, who worked under Smither’s leadership. “When he entered a room, people immediately took notice. He was a man’s man, yet he had a heart of gold, and would give you the shirt off his back. He was firm in his commitments, and his leadership style was unmatched. He was truly one of my heroes.”

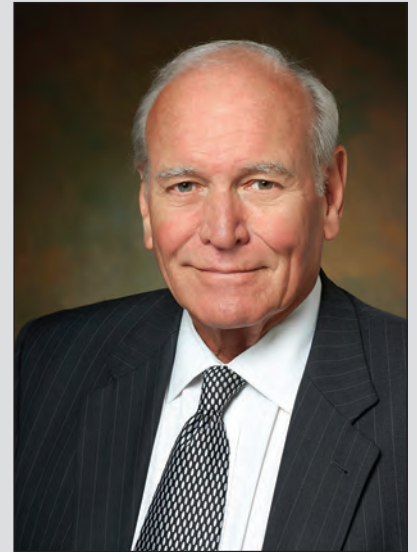
Before joining the GBCVB, Smither spent 10 years as executive director of the Lexington CVB in Kentucky. He also worked as director of sales for the Kansas City CVB and executive director of the Baltimore Convention Center, and he held sales positions

with bureaus in Houston and San Antonio.

Smither was born in the Texas town of Chrystal City to parents who were ranch farmers, growing mostly spinach. The GBCVB noted that Smither spent several years as a rodeo cowboy on the Professional Rodeo Circuit and later modeled men’s clothing for Foley’s Department Store—often appearing in print advertisements in the *Houston Post* and *Houston Chronicle*.

A “voracious reader of nonfiction history,” Smither had accumulated an impressive personal collection of hardback books, which he donated to a local library following his retirement, the GBCVB stated. He also enjoyed tennis, golf, and the Birmingham dining scene.

“Jim’s advocacy for Birmingham was critical for our success today,” Oros added. “His vision and efforts played a foundational role in positioning Greater Birmingham as a destination that now generates more



Jim Smither

than \$2.5 billion in economic impact through tourism.”

Smither is survived by his son, Lee. A date for Smither’s memorial service hadn’t yet been set when *USAE* went to press.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Wayne Stewart

Director of Marketing & Communications

30 UNDER 30

Destinations International Honoree
Class of 2024



Women Leading the Way

AAG's Rebecca Lave Aims to Bridge Gap Between Landscapes and People

By Jordan Bradley

A running joke among the American Association of Geographers (AAG), according to Rebecca Lave, the association's current Past President and President at the time she spoke with *USAEXtra*, hinges on a fundamental misunderstanding of what, exactly, geographers do these days.

"Almost every person I know with a Ph.D. in Geography in the U.S. has had someone at a party when you introduce yourself, say, 'Oh, I didn't know you could get a PhD in memorizing state capitals,'" Lave said with a laugh. "So I think in the U.S., there's a huge disconnect between geography as it's taught in the public schools and then what academic geography is."

For Lave and her 10,000-plus cohorts at AAG, modern geography has the potential and the power to bridge the disconnected gap between citizens and the environment around them. She and her contemporaries are doing more than memorizing names on a map—many are engaging with climate change, the impact of natural hazards like extreme storms and droughts on communities, working on solutions to challenges wrought by immigration policies and housing inequity, and other areas of urban climate justice.

Lave, a Professor of Geography and Associate Dean for Social and Historical Sciences at Indiana University, felt inspired to pursue a career in geography "because I was so excited about thinking about the interaction of social and physical forces in the environment," she said. "Geography to me is so special because it brings environmental, physical and social

scientists together."

Lave was nominated to the AAG's Executive Committee in 2023 and acted as President for the 2023–2024 term. Her work as President focused on two main facets: getting people excited about the potential geography has to make positive impact on the world, and helping communities better understand their relationship to the environment.

During her term, Lave presided over the association's 2024 Annual Meeting, held April 16–20 at the Hawaii Convention Center in Honolulu, Hawaii. The meeting represented a turning point in the association's approach to planning the event, she said, where the planning focused heavily on the local environment as opposed to the conference itself.

"So the thing with geographers is: we care enormously about the places where we are, because we study them," Lave said. "But we've never run our conferences this way."

So what changed for the AAG with its 2024 meeting? The impetus was concern from membership about indigenous sovereignty in Hawaii, a topic that has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, Lave said.

To address the concerns, the AAG reached out to geographers in Honolulu and asked whether the association should move locations.

"They said, 'Come, but center our issues.' And so we changed our practices in a lot of different, very locally engaged ways," Lave said.

Those differences for AAG looked like creating a series of 10 webinars to educate members on Hawaii and its history before the event, hiring a local events coordinator who was an indige-

nous Hawaiian to ensure the members of the local community were involved in the event in thoughtful ways, and centering Hawaiian speakers in keynote spots, like Charles Nainoa Thompson, a Pwo navigator, cultural revivalist, educator and storyteller, who was the AAG's Honorary Geographer.

Lave and AAG see untapped potential for collaboration between event planners and geographers, she told *USAEXtra*.

"I do think that there are people within the geography community that could be super helpful for event planners if they are continuing to think about sustainability in terms of what are the local environmental impacts of conferences and what are ways conference-goers might offer reparations or some kinds of offsets of



Rebecca Lave

their impacts," Lave said. "Because my sense is that's increasingly of interest to people who are traveling."

Introducing 'Women Leading the Way'

USAEXtra's column highlighting women in positions of leadership is moving forward with a new title.

The column made its debut in 2022 under the title 'Leading Ladies.' The aim of the column is to highlight women in positions of leadership at associations throughout the United States and to share their stories and experiences.

Recently, *USAEXtra* received feedback that suggested we change the Leading Ladies title; the term 'ladies' is most frequently used to denote a polite woman, "a woman of refinement and gentle manners," according to Merriam-Webster.

USAEXtra has decided to retire the column name in favor of a title that more accurately reflects the essence of the column.

"After *USAEXtra* Publisher and Executive Editor Anne Daly Heller passed away, I felt a good way to honor her legacy of being a powerful business woman was to start a monthly column in our *USAEXtra* print edition," said James A. Heller, Publisher, *USAEXtra*. "We came up with the name Leading Ladies. With a nod towards women with lead roles in motion pictures, it felt right for the message we were trying to convey in the column. There are many women in the association, CVB, meetings, and

hotel industries who don't seem to get the proper acknowledgement for their accomplishments, and it is important to celebrate those with our readers.

Heller continued: "However, we have come to realize that the title of Leading Ladies might not convey that message to everyone. Although only one person has shared her concern about using the word 'Ladies,' there might have been more women who felt uneasy to broach the subject. So I asked my staff to come up with some potential replacement names for the column, and we selected Women Leading the Way. We will continue to highlight the achievements of women leaders under this new banner."

"When I took over the (formerly titled) Leading Ladies column for the May *USAEXtra* edition, I was thrilled with the prospect of learning through conversation with women in leadership positions in a variety of disciplines," said Jordan Bradley, Hotel Editor, *USAEXtra*. "As a woman early in her career, I believe the column's new title, Women Leading the Way, better reflects its spirit. I look forward to continuing to share stories and perspectives from women leading associations with *USAEXtra* readers."

Marriott

continued from page 4

Place and the City of Detroit to be a competitive force to attract such events going forward," said Molinari.

According to Sterling Group and the DRCFA, the JW Marriott will be the second development at Water Square, as Residences at Water Square opened

February 2024. Development plans for Water Square also include a public park with a variety of features include public art and a dog area.

Construction on the forthcoming JW Marriott began this April. The hotel is scheduled to open early 2027, in time to host guests for the NCAA Men's Final Four basketball tournament, which will be held in Detroit that year.

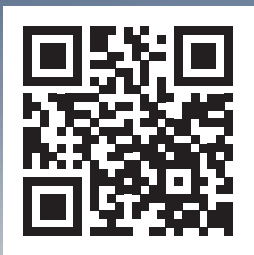


Congratulations to **Nathaniel Sweetman**, Visit Sarasota County's Sports Marketing Coordinator, for being named one of Destination International's 30 Under 30 for 2024!



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BUSINESS

NEWS

AAHOA Voices Concerns About Grants Pass Ruling

By Jordan Bradley

Following the June 28 Supreme Court ruling that upheld a case that criminalized outdoor sleeping in Grants Pass, Oregon, the Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA) has voiced “significant concerns” about the implications the ruling could have outside of Grants Pass.

The ruling from the Supreme Court centers on a municipal code in Grants Pass—a rural town just north of the Oregon-California state line with a population of approximately 38,000, according to the ruling from the Supreme Court – that prohibits members of the public from sleeping outdoors in public spaces, including community centers and parks.

In 2019, approximately 600 of the city’s residents were unhoused, according to reporting from Reuters, and Grants Pass is without public homeless shelters. As a result of the ordinance, individuals who sleep outside—despite being unable to find

shelter or affordable housing—could be fined \$259 by city law enforcement.

Opponents of the ordinance say that the fines for unhoused individuals without access to a public shelter constitute a violation of the Eight Amendment’s Cruel and Unusual Punishment Clause. However, the June 28 decision from the Supreme Court did not agree.

To AAHOA, the Supreme Court’s ruling “has far-reaching implications for municipalities and businesses, including the hotel industry,” the association said. Specifically, the group of hoteliers is “concerned that such criminalization could lead to efforts” in the vein of an ordinance recently considered in Los Angeles that would have required hotels to report vacant rooms daily to the city in order for unhoused residents to occupy.

“By criminalizing sleeping in public spaces, the unhoused population will be in desperate need of places to stay,” said Miraj Patel, Chairman of AAHOA.

“One of the easiest and quickest ways to find shelter will be via hotels. This places the hotel industry in a precarious position by providing shelter for people traditionally requiring wrap-around services, such as mental health support, job placement, and more.”

AAHOA noted the ordinance did not require city officials to provide any wrap-around services, social workers trained to offer assistance services, thereby putting “an immense burden on the hotel industry.”

Like AAHOA, other associations—like the American Association on Health and Disability (AAHD)—see the potential of unintended consequences

in other sectors of society.

“This Supreme Court decision will cause undue harm on people across this country, with disproportionate effect to the disability community,” said Michelle Sayles, Communications Manager for AAHD. “We are seeing growing rates of chronic homelessness at a time when affordable, accessible housing is out of reach for millions of people. What’s needed next is an intentional, good-faith effort to support housing for all to support healthy communities and combat the criminalization of being unhoused.”

American Bar Association President Mary Smith also spoke out against the Supreme Court’s ruling.

“While not directly addressing homelessness, this case could have practical implications for the homeless and unhoused populations permitting cities and states across the country to issue fines or impose jail time for violations of laws involving life-sustaining activities, such as sleeping in public spaces,” Smith said.

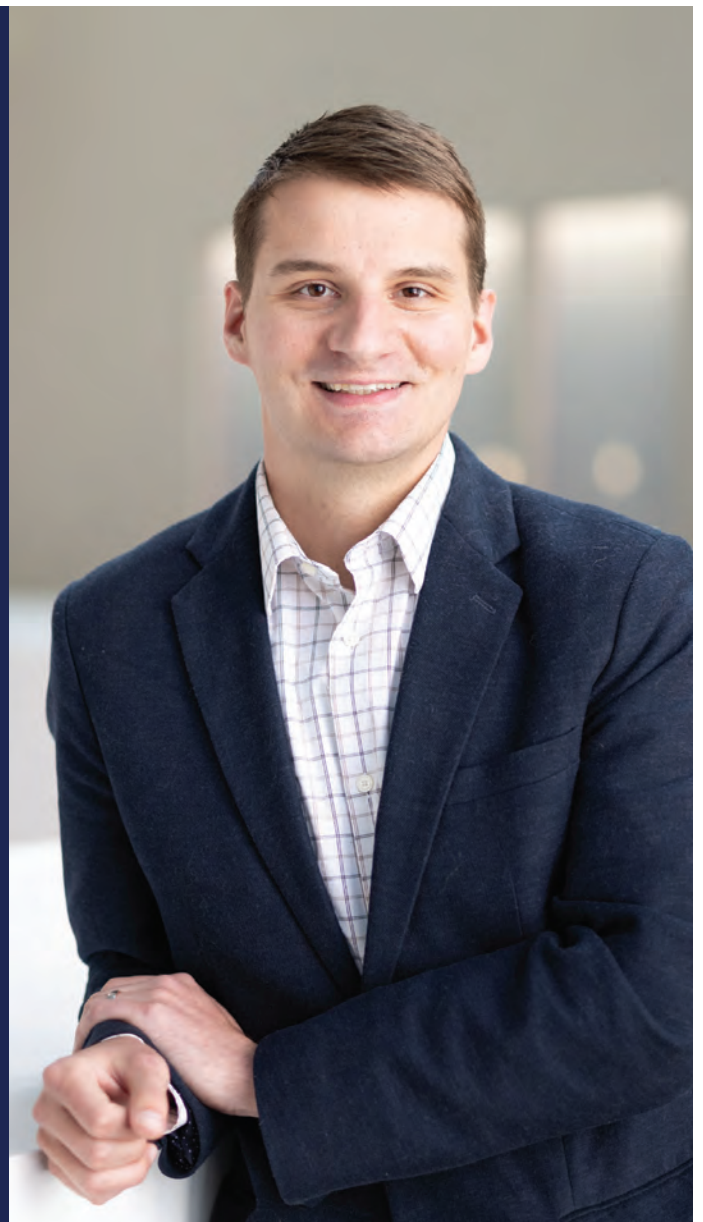
“By criminalizing sleeping in public spaces, the unhoused population will be in desperate need of places to stay,” said Miraj Patel, Chairman of AAHOA.

Congratulations LEE PRUTSMAN

DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL

30 Under 30 Honoree

Your Visit KC family and the KC hospitality community join you in celebrating this well-deserved recognition from the heart.



THE FINAL WORD

Anticipating Transformation: A Prelude to DI's Annual Convention

By Gretchen Hall, COO,
[Destinations International](#)

As we approach the Destinations International (DI) 2024 Annual Convention, we reflect on a year marked by significant strides and anticipate the unveiling of transformative tools and resources poised to redefine our industry. Our recent shift from EDI to a broader framework of social inclusion underscores our commitment to fostering environments where every individual feels valued and understood.

Last year, DI proudly expanded its global reach, welcoming more than 100 new member organizations and solidifying its role as a pivotal resource and support for destination organizations worldwide. Our membership now includes more than 750 members from 34 coun-

Our recent shift from EDI to a broader framework of social inclusion underscores our commitment to fostering environments where every individual feels valued and understood.

tries and territories. As we gather in Tampa, we look forward to not only celebrating these achievements but also engaging in deep, meaningful dialogue about the future of tourism and community engagement.

New Metrics for Success

Destination organizations are coming to the realization that the days of evaluating success by metrics such as “heads in beds” are past, and there must be a broader set of criteria to demonstrate their impact on the local community. This is the focus of recent updates to our landmark study, “Destination Promotion: An Engine of Economic Development,” which confirmed that destinations with substantial visitor economics tend to outperform their peers, making destination promotion a true engine of economic development

that extends beyond the tourism industry to benefit residents and the entire community.

Our convention will serve as a launching pad for several groundbreaking initiatives, including the Accessibility Playbook and the Catalyst Report Toolkit—resources designed to empower destination organizations to lead with innovation and inclusivity. While specifics will be unveiled at the convention, the anticipation builds for how these tools will enhance our members’ ability to drive change and advocate for their communities.

Looking Ahead

We also look forward to further exploring these and other topics later this year at our upcoming fall summits. These include the 2024 Advocacy Summit (October 22–24 in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico), 2024 Social Inclusion Summit and 2024 Business Operations Summit (both October 28–30 in Spokane, Washington). Each will take a deeper look at current challenges and opportunities in these areas and offer the opportunity to explore, learn, and network among industry peers. Information and registration are available on the DI website.

As we look to the future, Destina-

tions International remains dedicated to equipping our members with the tools and knowledge to thrive in an ever-evolving landscape. We hope you will join us as we explore these themes and more, shaping the future of destination organizations at both our upcoming convention and beyond.

For those unable to attend in person, we encourage you to follow along through our updates and resources available at [DestinationsInternational.org](#), ensuring you’re equipped with the latest insights and innovations from the field.



TravelAbility “Heads in Accessible Beds” Pilot Mapping Program Finds Height Discrepancies

By Todd McElwee

Addressing what it called the “primary concern for wheelchair travelers: the unpredictability of bed heights in hotel accommodations,” TravelAbility launched the Heads in Accessible Beds pilot mapping program.

The program gathered essential data on the accessibility of hotel sleeping rooms as well as bathrooms. A survey of 25 hotels revealed ADA room bed height and toilet seat height can vary by as much as 18 inches.

“For individuals who use wheelchairs, traveling can often feel like a gamble due to the lack of standardized information on hotel accessibility,” TravelAbility said. “While their homes are tailored to their needs, and they are familiar with accessible local businesses, the same cannot be said for hotels they may visit. Images of hotel amenities abound, yet details on ADA-compliant rooms are scarce, leaving wheelchair users without the necessary information to plan their travels.”

TravelAbility collaborated with four Destination A11Y Club members to conduct the research: Visit Alex-

andria (Virginia), Visit Kissimmee (Florida), Visit Tampa Bay (Florida) and Visit Lexington (Kentucky). There was 14-inch variation in bed height from just eight properties in Alexandria alone, according to data provided to USAE by TravelAbility founder Jake Steinman.

“This information will be made available on the dedicated accessibility page on each DMO’s website, ensuring that wheelchair users—as well as locals hosting visitors with mobility challenges—have access to the information they need to make informed travel decisions,” TravelAbility said. “But hotels should include an accessibility page on their website that also includes photos of accessible rooms as well as descriptions. Every image and data point sends a welcoming message to travelers with disabilities.”

TravelAbility thanked accessibility leaders of the four destinations for being part of the groundbreaking pilot program: Claire Mouledoux of Visit Alexandria, Jason Holic of Visit Kissimmee, Patrick Harrison of Visit Tampa Bay, and Arin Arnold of Visit Lexington.

Find more information at [travelability.net](#).

Association Forum Opens Forty Under 40 Application Period

By Todd McElwee

Ready to highlight the best and the brightest young professionals in the association industry, Association Forum has opened nominations for its Forty Under 40 program. August 31 is the deadline to apply.

“Are you a trailblazer, an innovator, a change-maker?” the Forum said. “Have you achieved remarkable success for yourself and your organization before the age of 40? If so, it’s time to step into the spotlight, let your achievements shine, and inspire future generations of association management leaders!”

Eligibility requirements include:

- Being currently employed at a 501(c)(3), 501(c) (4) or 501(c)(6), or association management company
- Having three-plus years of employment at a 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4) or 501(c)(6), or association management company

- Planning on continuing in roles that aid the future of the association and nonprofit community
- Exhibiting characteristics that demonstrate continued success and leadership skills
- Under the age of 40 as of December 5, 2024

Applications must include a current resume, two letters of recommendation on organization/company letterhead, a copy of a valid ID (for age verification) and a \$49 application fee for non-members.

“We’re seeking exceptional individuals shaping the future and significantly impacting their organizations and the association management community,” the Forum said. “It’s time to honor the rising stars, innovators, and game-changers who have achieved remarkable success before the age of 40!”

Find more information at [associationforum.org](#).

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