



IMEX America attendees wave hello on October 8, as the 13th edition of the trade show opened at Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas.
Photo by IMEX Group

Tampa Prepared for Expected Onslaught of Hurricane Milton *Florida's Third-Largest City Ultimately Spared Direct Hit*

By Jonathan Trager

Prior to the expected arrival of Hurricane Milton on the coast of central Florida last week, Tampa was bracing itself for devastation.

Before Milton made landfall as a Category 3 storm on the evening of October 9, Visit Tampa Bay was in constant communication with Hillsborough County and City of Tampa officials. Representatives were involved in meetings with each respective Emergency Operations Center.

"Storm preparation efforts by Hillsborough County, City of Tampa, Temple Terrace, and Plant City officials have been comprehensive, and Visit Tampa Bay is proud to have been involved in the process, working with these dedicated people," said Santiago Corrada, President & CEO of the Visit Tampa Bay, prior to landfall.

The coastal destination saw two

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Marriott Resolves FTC, State Investigations into Cyber Breaches *Hotelier Paying \$52 Million Penalty*

By Todd McElwee

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) will require Marriott International and subsidiary Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide to implement a "robust information security program" to settle charges that the companies' failure to implement reasonable data security led to three massive data breaches from 2014–2020. Those incidents impacted more than 344 million customers worldwide.

Under a separate settlement, Marriott agreed to pay a \$52 million penalty to 49 states and the District of Columbia to resolve similar data security allegations. The FTC and the states worked in parallel on the investigation.

"Marriott's poor security practices led to multiple breaches affecting hundreds of millions of customers," said Samuel Levine, Director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection. "The FTC's action today, in coordination with our state partners, will

ensure that Marriott improves its data security practices in hotels around the globe."

"Protecting guests' personal data remains a top priority for Marriott," Marriott said in a statement. "These resolutions reaffirm the company's continued focus on and significant investments in maintaining and adapting its programs and systems to assess, identify, and manage risks from evolving cybersecurity threats."

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Hotel Associations Still Oppose NYC Safe Hotels Act

By Jordan Bradley

A group of hotel associations—the American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA), the Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA), and the NYC Minority Hotel Association (NYCMHA)—remain opposed to a proposed hotel safety act that would require hotels in New York City to be licensed to operate following extensive revisions to the bill from NYC Council sponsor Julie Menin.

Following industry feedback, Menin and other New

York City Councilmembers submitted an amendment on October 2 to the Safe Hotels Act, which was proposed first in mid-July, but hoteliers say the changes aren't enough.

"While we appreciate the Councilwoman's willingness to listen to industry feedback and work toward more sensible outcomes for New York City's hotels, the new version of the legislation still contains language that will cause significant economic harm—primarily to small, family-owned hotels and

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Destinations International Releases Tampa Case Study

By Jonathan Trager

Destinations International (DI) has issued a report detailing its approach in planning the association's 2024 Annual Convention in Tampa Bay following member concerns about anti-DEI legislation in Florida.

DI announced the release of "Tampa Case Study: Empowering Communities Through Inclusive Business Events" on October 8. The document was produced with the support of the DI Foundation and released at IMEX America.

Association members upset by what they consider an exclusive political agenda in Florida pushed back in 2023 when DI announced the selection of Tampa Bay as the site of its Annual Convention in 2024. DI stated that after speaking with key stakeholders and Tampa leaders, the association decided to proceed but set a specific goal of "putting to the test its long-held belief that deliberate engagement is more effective than boycotts."

"The Tampa Case Study explores the consultations,

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NEWS

U.S. Travel Hires Trio of Senior Leaders

By Todd McElwee

A trio of tenured travel and association professionals have joined U.S. Travel Association's senior leadership's ranks.

Allison O'Connor has been named Sr. Vice President, Strategic Communications; Kevin Hinton has been named Managing Director, Group Travel; and Courtney Mesmer has been named Vice President, Event Programming and Experience.

"We are excited to introduce new U.S. Travel talent that will address the industry's evolving needs and supplement the association's growing capabilities," said Geoff Freeman, President & CEO, U.S. Travel Association. "Each of our new additions will help to expand the association's services, provide members with greater value and ensure that the industry achieves newfound success."

O'Connor brings experience in global communications, public relations, crisis management and brand awareness. Her travel industry experience includes serving as Marriott International's

Vice President, Public Relations



Allison O'Connor

and Communications, Americas, and in global communications at The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company. O'Connor led communications at Frontdoor and most recently served as Vice President, Customer Experience of The Boca Raton.

Hinton will lead the association's group travel community. He most recently served as Executive Vice

President of Strategy at consultancy Minding Your Business. He is the former CEO of Hinton + Grusich as well as CEO of Society for Incentive Travel Excellence. At Associated Luxury Hotels International, he held a vice president post.

Mesmer joins U.S. Travel to provide leadership and support to the association's signature events and



Kevin Hinton



Courtney Mesmer

member experiences. The global event production veteran comes from WorldAtWork, where she was Vice President of Events. Mesmer has deep experience in event design at multiple trade associations, including Finseca, the American Telemedicine Association and American College of Cardiology.

Events Industry Council Celebrates 75 Years

By Todd McElwee

On February 3, 1949, leaders from the American Hotel Association (American Hotel and Lodging Association); American Trade Association Executives (ASAE); Hotel Sales Management Association (Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International) and International Association of Convention Bureaus (Destinations International) founded the

Convention Liaison Committee/Council (CLC) to foster engagement and understanding with one another's respective memberships.

On October 7, 2024, what is now the Events Industry Council (EIC) celebrated its annual Global Awards Gala in conjunction with a 75th Anniversary Celebration at the MGM Aria Resort and Casino in Las Vegas.

Here are a few key moments and

initiatives EIC has noted that shaped the organization during the past three quarters of a century:

1961—The First Convention Liaison Council Manual is published.

1970—The First Open Forum Meeting on Convention and Meeting Planning is held at the Fairmont Dallas.

1973—In November, the Convention Liaison Committee approves a new strategic action plan. Bylaws and membership criteria are established

1974—Bylaws take effect on January 1 with a new organizational name—Convention Liaison Council. Three new members join: Council of Engineering Society Secretaries (CESSE); National Association of Exposition Managers (IAEE); and International Association of Auditorium Managers (IAVM)

1981—CLC formally incorporates as a Washington, D.C., nonprofit

1985—The Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) program is launched

1985—The Hall of Leaders is established. The first class of 11 leaders includes luminaries such as Conrad Hilton, George Little and Buck Freeman. Today, it includes more than 150 members

1986—An industry glossary is assembled. It is restricted to terms specifically related to the meetings industry

1995—The first CMP Conclave is held at the Chateau Elan Resort & Conference Center, in Braselton, Georgia, with 46 CMPs in attendance

1999—CLC approves a name change to Convention Industry Council (CIC) to better reflect the strategic importance and scope of the organization going forward

2004—CIC releases its Green Meet-

ings Task Force Report, the first resource of its kind for the meetings industry that provides specific guidance and best practices for suppliers and planners in planning greener meetings

2012—After a five-year development process with ASTM International, nine new standards for sustainable meetings and events are released: the APEX/ASTM Sustainable Meetings Standards

2016—CIC announces the Green Meeting Industry Council (GMIC) will become a council of CIC with specific charter and mandate to advocate and educate the events industry about sustainable events

2017—CIC rebrands as the Events Industry Council (EIC)

2019—Amy Calvert named CEO of EIC

Find more information at [eventscouncil.org](https://www.eventscouncil.org).

Marriott

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The hotelier noted it was making no admission of liability with respect to the underlying allegations, as indicated in agreements with the FTC and State Attorneys General.

Marriott and Starwood agreed to provide all U.S. customers with a way

to request deletion of personal information associated with their email address or loyalty rewards account number, the FTC said. The proposed settlement also requires Marriott to review loyalty rewards accounts upon customer request and restore stolen loyalty points.

The FTC alleged Marriott and Starwood deceived consumers by claiming to have reasonable and appropriate

data security, the proposed complaint said.

"Despite these claims, the companies unfairly failed to deploy reasonable or appropriate security to protect personal information," the FTC said. "Specifically, the proposed complaint alleges that Marriott and Starwood failed to: implement appropriate password controls, access controls, firewall controls, or network segmentation;

patch outdated software and systems; adequately log and monitor network environments; and deploy adequate multifactor authentication."

The first breach began in June 2014 and went undetected until November 2015. A second incident began around July 2014 and went undetected until September 2015. The third breach began in September 2018 and went undetected until February 2020.

HOTS

HOTS Raccoon Ruckus... A woman in Washington State called the Kitsap County Sheriff's Department (KCSO) when she was forced to flee her property after anywhere between 50-100 raccoons "descended upon" her home and "were acting aggressively," according to the Associated Press. The raccoon ruckus was a decade in the making, apparently. The woman first started feeding a small family of raccoons 10 years ago, "and it was fine until about six weeks earlier, when the

number showing up went from a handful to around 100," AP reports. "She said those raccoons were becoming increasingly more aggressive, demanding food, that they would hound her day and night—scratching at the outside of her home, at the door," said Kevin McCarty, a KCSO spokesperson. It is unclear what caused the number of raccoons to skyrocket. HOTS will take this as a living example to not feed the wildlife and thinks this Washington woman should do the same.



HOTS Prowling Owlers No More... A 31-year-long treasure hunt across France finally concluded on October 3. The search was part of a book of riddles, *On the Trail of the Golden Owl*, published in 1993 by author Régis Hauser and artist Michel Becker that included 11 puzzles and a hidden 12th puzzle leading to the location of a hidden token. The book amassed a "cult-like following with a community of more than 200,000 players, known as 'owlers,' from France and abroad," according to the Associated Press. The



Visit Anaheim hosted an Anaheim Ducks Happy Hour at IMEX America on October 9, where President & CEO Mike Waterman had the opportunity to showcase the all-new Anaheim Ducks away jersey sponsored by Visit Anaheim. This was the first time anyone has had the chance to wear the official jersey in public. Shown here (left to right): PCMA President & CEO, Sherrif Karamat, CAE; Anaheim Ducks mascot Wild Wing; Waterman; and MPI President & CEO Paul Van Deventer. Photo credit: Visit Anaheim

prize was an owl made of more than six pounds of gold and 15 pounds of silver with diamond chips in the owl's face, though a replica was buried instead of the valuable item. In order to claim the real deal, the winning trea-

sure hunter was required to submit the replica along with the answers to all of the book's puzzles. The winner was an unidentified 30-year-old man. HOTS thinks that's one long mystery—what will these dedicated Owlers do now?

WEEKLY NEWS OF ASSOCIATIONS CVBs AND HOTELS

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Ryan Callison Hired as VP for Little Rock CVB

By Jonathan Trager

Longtime destination marketer Ryan Callison has joined the Little Rock CVB in Arkansas as its new Vice President of Marketing & Communications.

Callison started in his new position on September 30. He succeeds Kasey Summerville, who left the organization earlier this year.

"It's an honor to join the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau and work with a city that has so much to offer," Callison said. "Helping people find joy and unique experiences through traveling is a lifelong passion for me. I look forward to helping share Little Rock's vibrant culture and com-

munity by connecting Arkansans and visitors from around the country with this thriving capital city."

Callison, who has worked almost exclusively in travel and destination marketing, brings 17-plus years of experience to the Little Rock CVB. He has served as vice president of destination development for Little Rock-based Waymack and Crew; vice president of destination strategy for Madden Media in Tucson, Arizona; and director of marketing and communications for Visit Frisco in Texas.

During his time in Texas, Callison also served on several state tourism promotion boards and was recognized by the Texas Travel Alliance in 2017

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Ryan Callison

Safe Hotels Act

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the largely immigrant and minority-owned businesses that support them," said Kevin Carey, Interim President and CEO of AHLA.

The amendments include changes to front desk staffing requirements (including a shift from requiring a front desk agent on site at all times to allowing only a security guard during overnight shifts), cleanliness mandates, and clarifications to aspects of the licensing process (a hotel's license cannot be revoked for a temporary disruption in service, such as a leak).

Under the proposed amendments to the bill, the subcontracting ban would be limited to exclude engineers and other technical workers, but it would require front desk workers and housekeeping subcontractors to be rehired under an existing law called the Worker Retention Bill, essentially grandfathering them in, according to the *New York Post*.

Still, hotel operators are concerned with the act's requirement that licensing prohibits the use of subcontracted employees for core functions, its potential institution of new staffing requirements, and its treatment of hotel owners and operators as joint employers.

In response to the act's amendments, AHLA created a webpage dedicated to breaking down the association's concerns about the Safe Hotels Act, ahla.com/nyc.

"The New York City Council should slow down and work together with industry leaders to address concerns over hotel operations given the magnitude of the proposed changes," the webpage reads.

The bill was intended to increase safety and cleanliness at New York City hotels and aims to set forth city-wide standards to address human trafficking in hotels, something that hoteliers argue has long been part of many hotel

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NEWS

Hundreds of Striking Hotel Workers in S.F. Attend City Hall Meeting

By Jordan Bradley

Hundreds of striking hotel workers and members of hotel union Unite Here Local 2 rallied at the San Francisco City Hall on October 8 at a special meeting to urge the city's Board of Supervisors to support their strike efforts.

In San Francisco, 1,500 hotel workers at the Grand Hyatt San Francisco Union Square, the Hilton San Francisco Union Square, and the Westin St. Francis—a Marriott property—have been on strike since September 22.

The special meeting was arranged by board President Aaron Peskin to give the hotel workers a public forum to explain their decision to strike.

"For the past two weeks, hotel workers have been protesting against painful workloads and wages that aren't enough to afford the cost of living and affordable health care," Peskin said as he introduced Local 2 representatives Anand Singh and Lizzy Tapia.

"This is not the first hearing this board has held about working condi-

tions and labor disputes in the hotel industry," said Singh, the union's negotiator. "And we appreciate the focus on this because hospitality remains—despite all the headlines that we see all the time—one of the bedrocks of San Francisco economy."

The striking workers in San Francisco—and at hotel unions across the United States—are seeking higher wages. According to Singh, the average Local 2 hotel worker makes about \$53,000 a year including benefits.

Dozens of workers stepped up to the podium, sharing stories of needing multiple jobs to make ends meet and maintain residency within the city, complaints about inconsistent health insurance coverage and the struggles of keeping up with cleaning and staffing mandates.

"Local 2 members truly believe in the future of hospitality in this city," said Tapia, Unite Here Local 2 President. "We know that guests will continue to come here, but we're clear-minded about what it will take



Hundreds of striking hotel workers and members of Unite Here Local 2 attended the October 8 Board of Supervisors meeting at San Francisco City Hall.

for hotel jobs to continue to sustain the kind of working class communities that our city and our region also needs."

According to a social media post from the union: "Our elected officials

said they support us and are going to hold the hotels accountable."

Future strikes are possible in cities throughout the United States, Local 2 said.

Western N.C. Hotels Still Recovering from Aftermath of Hurricane Helene

By Jordan Bradley

Communities in Western North Carolina have been walking the long road to recovery since historic flooding from Hurricane Helene washed through the region on September 27.

The River House Inn & Restaurant in Grassy Creek, which sits above the North Fork New River, was booked for a 100-guest wedding on September 28, Julie Milunic, one of the River House Inn's owners, told *USAE*. During the wedding rehearsal on September

27, flash flooding caused the river to submerge the first floor of the house of the inn's neighbor across the waterway.

While the water continued to rise, the neighbor searched for a way out on the second floor, Milunic recalled. Onlookers from the wedding party and inn staff suddenly noticed "another house coming downstream, making a beeline" for the trapped neighbor's house, and shouted for the woman to jump, which she did just before her house was swept away.

The father of the groom then leapt into action, swimming across the river wearing a life jacket and holding a rope held by guests on the inn property.

"He got out to her and brought her to shore, and she was fine," Milunic recalled. "She didn't have a scratch on her."

After the rescue, the bridal party invited the woman to join the family for the rehearsal dinner, which Milunic said was held by candlelight due to the power outage on site.

Eighty guests still showed up, Milunic recalled, and the wedding went on as scheduled—albeit with some adjustments.

"It was a great wedding," she said. "It was my favorite one we've ever done."

The inn was without electricity for 12 days, Milunic said, but didn't sustain much damage other than loss of food as a result of the power outage.

Guests have been cancelling their reservations through early November, "which hurts my heart because we need the business now," Milunic said.

Though the power and water have been restored, the inn is closed with a soft reopening sometime after October 15, Milunic said.

As of October 10, the historic Inn on Biltmore Estate in Asheville was still without operating phone lines due to damaged technology and downed power lines throughout the North Carolina community.

In an effort to support the Asheville

community as it recovers from Helene, the Biltmore established the Biltmore Relief Fund for WNC on October 7, committing \$2 million to support localized relief.

The funds will "provide critical and immediate financial relief for people in need, including supporting employees in crisis, providing support to area non-profits aiding our region, and investing in the recovery of our community," according to the inn.

In Blowing Rock, a small mountain town northeast of Asheville, the Hotel Embers—a newly built boutique hotel—remained operational throughout the destruction of Hurricane Helene.

In the days since, the hotel has been encouraging guests who have retained their bookings to donate nonperishable items upon check in.

The property has hosted "a handful" of displaced residents but has largely been focusing efforts on providing support to more impacted areas, McKethan said.

General Manager Ben McKethan delivered donated items from guests to the cornerstone Summit Church in its neighboring town of Boone, he told *USAE*. He has been delivering items to those in need himself, sometimes driving more than two hours to reach his destination "because getting to those places were tricky."

McKethan said he and his colleagues are "trying to move to brighter days."

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Bringing southern hospitality to southern Nevada, Visit Savannah staff and partners pose for a photo at IMEX America. Shown here (left to right): Maura O'Donnel, Ethos; Jeff Hewitt, Visit Savannah; Kellie Linder, Visit Savannah; Sissy Livingston, Westin Savannah Harbor; Ryan Cornelius, The Alida Hotel; Kris Hammett, Juice Studio; Anne Kelly, Outside Brands; and Joseph Marinelli, Visit Savannah.

NEWS

Study Finds Most Expensive Budget Hotels in Boston

By Jordan Bradley

For the third year in a row, an annual study conducted by cheapotels.org, a budget hotel booking site, found that Boston has the highest average rate for budget hotels at an average of \$320 per night.

The survey looked at rates “for the most affordable double room” at

centrally-located budget hotels with three star ratings or higher in U.S. cities with populations higher than 200,000 people during the month of October 2024—“the month when hotel rates tend to peak in many U.S. cities,” according to the site.

This year, the survey looked at hotels in 100 cities throughout the United States, double the previous

survey last year.

Boston’s hotel rates “are up more than 5% compared to last year,” the study found.

The study also found that Jersey City, New Jersey, affordable double room accommodations are more expensive than New York City budget hotels at an average of \$310 per night, beating out New York City at \$284 per night.

Meanwhile, the city with the least expensive budget hotels this year is Reno, Nevada, at an average of \$87 per night.

The biggest increase in average budget hotel rates were in San Diego, which jumped from an average of \$134 per night in 2023 to \$177, meaning “visitors will have to spend an average of 31% more than last year for the least expensive room,” the survey found.

Judge Dismisses Price-Fixing Suit Against Atlantic City Casino-Hotel Operators

By Jordan Bradley

The U.S. judge presiding over a proposed price-fixing class action lawsuit against major hotel-casino operators in Atlantic City, New Jersey, has dismissed the case with prejudice (it cannot be filed again).

Consumers alleged that Hard Rock Atlantic City and Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa—owned by Vici and operated by MGM Resorts International—three Caesars Entertainment-affiliated properties in Atlantic City—Caesars Atlantic City, Harrah’s Atlantic City,

and Tropicana Atlantic City—and software company Cendyn Group “unlawfully conspired to inflate and fix the price of their hotel rooms,” according to U.S. Judge Karen Williams’ September 30 filing.

The consumers, however, were unable to provide enough evidence to support their claims, according to Williams, who granted the casino-hotel operators’ motion to dismiss the case.

According to Williams’ filing, the plaintiffs alleged that “Casino-Hotels began using the Rainmaker products”—technology that has also been

named in a related price-fixing lawsuit in Las Vegas—“at various points in time” over a fourteen-year period” and by 2018 “started charging higher prices for hotel rooms.”

Cendyn’s Rainmaker products use data from casino-hotel clients gathered by the software, feeding that information into a pricing algorithm to suggest property-specific room rates designed to optimize profit.

The complaint alleged “the Casino-Hotels have engaged in a conspiracy to artificially raise and fix the prices of their hotel rooms, and that their

conspiracy is achieved through their ‘knowing and purposeful shared use’ of the Rainmaker products.”

However, the plaintiffs could not provide proof of “knowing and purposeful shared use,” according to the filing.

“The Court cannot infer a plausible price-fixing agreement between the Casino-Hotels from the mere fact that they all use the same pricing software,” Williams said.

The casino-hotel operators and Cendyn have all maintained no wrongdoing since initial complaints were filed in May 2023.

DI Study

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strategy, planning, implementation and outcomes of this engagement, and demonstrates how the event succeeded in fostering meaningful connections, making an impact and leaving a positive legacy,” DI stated.

The study is divided into five parts that offer insights and strategies for event planners and destination professionals spanning sales, marketing, and community engagement functions. It’s accompanied by a detailed toolkit

that provides actionable guidance for meeting and event planners and destination organizations to implement similar inclusive strategies when planning and hosting events.

“Choosing Tampa was a purposeful act to promote engagement and understanding,” said Don Welsh, President & CEO of DI. “With outstanding support from Visit Tampa Bay and the local community, we were able to demonstrate and document the tangible benefits that come from investing in social impact and inclusion, as well as confirm our long-held belief in the

importance of active engagement in the communities we visit.”

DI has reported that its 2024 Annual Convention was its largest ever, claiming nearly 2,000 attendees, including participants from more than 30 countries and territories. However, DI sees the Tampa Case Study as part of a broader effort.

“Our vision extends beyond a single convention to creating a lasting imprint of inclusivity in Tampa and a model for others to follow,” said Sophia Hyder Hock, DI Chief Inclusion Officer and lead author of the

report said. “We sincerely hope this case study and toolkit serve as an informative and actionable document for destination organizations, event strategists, policy makers and anyone seeking to unleash the potential of travel to benefit local communities and foster social inclusion.”

The report and accompanying toolkit are available free of charge. Both documents, a brief video, and additional information about DI’s approach to social inclusion can be found at destinationsinternational.org/tampa-case-study.



The Tropicana Las Vegas was demolished at 2:30 a.m. on October 9 following a fireworks and drone show. The implosion lasted 22 seconds, according to Bally’s Corporation, the property’s owner. The destruction of the long-standing Las Vegas Strip icon makes way for a forthcoming ballpark for the Oakland Athletics. Photo credit: Denise Truscello/Getty Images



Earlier this month, the Georgia World Congress Center kicked off its 50th anniversary celebration with a cocktail reception honoring its first executive director Dan Graveline (center) who spent 33 years at the helm. He is joined by former executive director Frank Poe (left) and newly appointed CEO Kevin Duvall.

NEWS

IMEX America Continues to Grow

By Todd McElwee

IMEX America is getting bigger and bigger.

Staged at Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas, from October 8 - 10, the show's 13th edition welcomed more than 15,500 participants including in excess of 5,500 buyers, of which 4,300 were hosted buyers. Buyers took part in over 86,000 pre-scheduled meetings.

The tradeshow floor enjoyed a 7% increase in space compared to 2023 with over a third of returning exhibitors expanding their square footage and more than 400 exhibitor booths occupying the hall. Last year's show saw 360 do so.

"The business events community is the shining star of IMEX America – our buyers, attendees, exhibitors, speakers and partners rightfully take the spotlight," Carina Bauer, CEO, IMEX said.

"Over the last decade or more the industry has really taken this show to their hearts, encouraged by proof

of business value but also the strong sense of community and togetherness they experience here."

The number of exhibiting companies joining the show for the first time increased from 65 last year to 70 in 2024. Among the new booths were Guatemala; Exhibition World Bahrain; Sonder Hotels, Destination Niagara USA, Yosemite Park, Experience Grand Rapids along with DMCs including Dragonfly Africa and Greenroute Africa.

Organizers noted this year's event was home to 46 technology booths, a third of which were new. Many other sectors of the show have also seen growth, from event production and incentive products to airlines and cruise lines – all pointing to the current strength of the wider business events community.

"From growing exhibitor participation and exciting, immersive activations, through to dozens of fringe events both on and off the show floor, it's now clear the sector feels empowered to make this show



Tourism Ireland brought Eileen Gannon from Mairtin Music to play for IMEX America attendees at Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas.

their own," Bauer said. "It's a sign of the trust placed in the IMEX team and a living expression of two of our company values – people first and achieve together. I'm excited for the week ahead and looking forward to

hearing about all the deals, the new connections and the bright ideas that will spring to life here."

For more about IMEX America visit imexamerica.com.

Greenbrier Hotel in W.V. Announced for Auction Again

By Jonathan Trager

For the second time, it looks like the storied Greenbrier Hotel in Lewisburg, West Virginia, will be up for auction.

A legal advertisement published in the *West Virginia Daily News* on October 10 announced the sale of the luxury resort at a public auction on October 25 at the Courthouse of

Greenbrier County.

The notice said the hotel, owned by West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice and his family, is being sold due to default on a loan from JPMorgan Chase. Loan documents including the deed of trust were sold to a credit collection company associated with Beltway Capital.

A representative of Greenbrier Hotel

Corp. characterized the announcement as a procedural matter, according to the *Charleston Gazette-Mail*.

"As the Greenbrier previously announced, its agreement with Beltway Capital provides for a final payment to be made by October 24, 2024," wrote Steve Ruby on behalf of The Greenbrier. "The Greenbrier remains on track to make that payment. Today's advertise-

ment is merely a procedural matter. It in no way reflects any change in the parties' relationship or The Greenbrier's plans regarding payment."

The first announcement of a sale for the property appeared on August 1. That sale was paused on August 22 after Greenbrier Hotel Corp. said it had reached an agreement with the credit collection company.

Tampa Hurricane

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cancellations ahead of the hurricane's arrival—The Southern Gas Association's Gas Machinery Conference, which was scheduled for October 7–9, and The Independent Electrical Contractor's SPARK Electricians Expo, which was scheduled for October 14–17. Visit Tampa Bay has been in

contact with both organizations to discuss future options.

In addition, the Destinations Florida Annual Meeting originally scheduled for October 9–11 at the Hotel Haya had been rescheduled for December 4–6 in the same location.

"No matter what work lies ahead once Milton passes, Visit Tampa Bay will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our local officials at the county, our

cities, and our more than 900 community partners who call this region home," Corrada had said. "Together, with a resilient spirit and sense of community, we will remain Tampa Strong."

Milton ended up making landfall in Siesta Key, about 70 miles south of Tampa, which was ultimately spared a direct hit. The forecasted water surge of up to 15 feet on the shores of the densely populated city never

materialized.

Nevertheless, as of *USAE* press time, at least 14 Floridians had been confirmed dead due to the storm. Of the more than 3 million people who were without power in the aftermath, more than 500,000 were in Hillsborough County, which includes Tampa, and more than 400,000 were in Pinellas County, which includes St. Petersburg.

Safe Hotels Act

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policies and training.

AAHOA Chairman Miraj Patel said the association reviewed the proposed amendments that had been "crafted behind closed doors" and still found it to be detrimental to the hotel industry in the city. "As advocates for minority hotel owners and operators, we support efforts to enhance guest and worker safety, including human

trafficking training," Patel said. "However, this bill continues to ignore legitimate concerns of our minority owned small businesses members, including limitations on subcontracted workers and many other operational burdens. We urge the City Council to continue working with the industry to find a balanced solution that protects both workers and businesses."

The Hotel Association of New York City (HANYC) was initially a vocal opponent of the Safe Hotels Act, but it has reportedly come around to the bill

following the amendments, the *Post* reported. HANYC joins the Hotel Trade Union, NYC's hotel worker union, in support of the measure. Representatives from HANYC did not respond to *USAE* request for comment by press deadline.

A hearing on the amendments to the bill was held by the New York City Council's Committee on Consumer and Worker Protection—one of the committees for which Menin acts as Chair—on October 9, with experts and stakeholders testifying on the

bill. Hoteliers held a press conference outside New York City Hall on October 9 following the meeting, speaking on the bill's potential for harm.

"This bill will cause devastating and unintended consequences across New York City's tourism and hospitality industries, forcing many hotels and small businesses to close their doors," Carey said. "We urge the City Council to reconsider and work toward real solutions that protect both safety and the livelihoods of thousands of hardworking New Yorkers."

NEWS

Caesars Provides Updates on Properties, Initiatives During IMEX America

By Todd McElwee

News about property transformations, disaster relief efforts and more were shared by

Caesars Entertainment over the course of IMEX America's October 8-10 run in Las Vegas.

New Orleans

Harrah's New Orleans will transform into Caesars New Orleans as part of a \$325 million renovation and construction project set to be completed by 2024.

The plans, presented recently before the New Orleans Building Corporation, detail a large-scale renovation of Harrah's, the only land-based casino in New Orleans. Plans include an all-new 340 room hotel tower above the existing casino valet porte cochère, new culinary and hospitality offerings, additional development of the unoccupied area on the second floor of the casino, and full exterior and interior architectural and design enhancements.

"We are excited to introduce Caesars New Orleans to the city," said Tom Reeg, CEO of Caesars Entertainment. "As the only land-based gaming operator in the city, we take great pride in our 20-year history in New Orleans, and this reinvestment is a testament to our continued commitment."

"We will continue to move this city forward and fuel our economic recovery, moving important projects that put people to work and entertain residents and visitors alike," said New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell. "We are excited that this expansion will mean hundreds of construction

jobs during the project and hundreds more in sustainable and new jobs post-construction. The addition of Caesars New Orleans will strengthen our city's position as the top cultural and entertainment destination city in the nation."

Hurricane Helene Relief Efforts

Harrah's Cherokee Casino Resort & Harrah's Cherokee Valley River Casino & Hotel are operational and continue to receive supplies and deliveries. They are facilitating donations through ticket redemption kiosks and point-of-sale systems at both properties in Cherokee and Murphy, North Carolina, benefiting the United Way of Haywood County.

To kick start donation efforts, the company contributed \$20,000 to the cause. The property has also partnered with World Central Kitchen to provide meals for those displaced by Hurricane Helene. Team Members of Harrah's Cherokee Casinos are actively involved in relief efforts.

For its Team Members, Harrah's Cherokee Casinos offer 24/7 access to onsite food pantries, toiletries, vision support and financial aid through initiatives like Caesars Cares and the C.A.R.E Fund. Lodging is also provided for those in need at both properties.

Media Recognition Breakfast

On October 9, Caesars Entertainment and MPI produced the inaugural "Media & Momentum: A Morning of Recognition and Impact" to celebrate and recognize the contribution, commitment, and professionalism of the Meeting and Event Industry's Media. Top journalists and publishers from the meetings-industry trade

press gathered at Ramsay's Kitchen at Harrah's Las Vegas for an inaugural awards ceremony. The event also served as the launching point for donations in honor of the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) Hospitality College Scholarship program.

"Today, we are here to celebrate you and thank all of you for your contributions and commitment to our industry," said Kelly Gleeson Smith, Vice President of Sales, Caesars Entertainment. "Each one of you makes such an impact every day when you share the stories you write about the happenings in our industry, about our people, the trends, and where we have been and where we are heading. Early on in my career and still today, I read the trade news to stay current. You provide us all a greater perspective. Besides recognizing each one of you, we have made arrangements for a scholarship donation to the hospitality college at UNLV."

The event was held in concert with the Las Vegas CVA (LVCVA). It was moderated by Dianne Devitt, CEO, Dianne Devitt LLC, author, and adjunct professor at New York University's SPS Jonathan Tisch Center for Hospitality and Tourism.

"It is a thrill to participate in the recognition of our trade press. We rebounded faster and better because of the service they provide our industry," said Drew Holmgreen, Chief Experience Officer at MPI. "To be part of the establishment of these donations advancing UNLV hospitality college students is exciting and an innovative step to ensure we support the industry that keeps us all informed and moving

forward."

Top honors went to trade press industry giants Laurel Herman, President and CEO of Worth International Media; Solomon J. Herbert, Founder, Publisher & EIC of Black Meetings and Tourism; and Harvey Grotzky, President, CEO, Publisher and EIC of Coastal Communications, for their longstanding service to the meetings and events industry. Also recognized were the outstanding contributions of the late Marin June Bright, CEO of Bright Business Media, publisher of Smart Meetings. Accepting accolades on her behalf was Luc Troussieux, President & Co-Founder at Smart Meetings.

Caesars Entertainment's presented the leaders with their Keys to the Empire and the LVCVA presented the official Clark County proclamations.

The brainchild of Reina Herschdorfer, Director of Marketing and Public Relations, Caesars Entertainment National Meetings and Events, the awards event and scholarship program will continue to support and encourage the trade press.

"Ensuring we have a strong trade press is vital to a healthy industry. Taking the time to recognize everyone who plays a role in the media, in our industry specifically, was missing. I am incredibly grateful for everyone's support and for the partnership with MPI in this effort, as well as the LVCVA and the Clark County Commissioners for their strong backing of this initiative," said Herschdorfer. "Las Vegas is the capital of the meetings industry, so what better place to launch this event and scholarship program?"



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N.C. Hotels

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In that effort, Hotel Embers is organizing a benefit on October 20 for a local organization, Hospitality House. The organization offers hot meals and housing assistance for the lower income community, "which was pretty devastated as a lot of the lower income areas took a lot of damage," McKethan said.

Like many North Carolina hoteliers, McKethan is concerned about the impact Hurricane Helene will have on economic recovery, with so much of the area's tourism cancelled during its peak season.

"October is our busiest month of the year, and people come here for the fall foliage," McKethan said, but the community in Blowing Rock is "about a week away" from reopening for tourists.

"We're all eagerly hoping for a very strong [ski] season," he added.

Little Rock CVB

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tional communication from Lubbock Christian University.

"Throughout his career, Ryan has been a standout in the field of destination and travel marketing," said Gina Gemberling, President & CEO of the Little Rock CVB. "Both the city and the LRCVB are lucky to have him. With the help of his expertise and skill set, we'll continue to build Little Rock's status as a top-tier travel destination."

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Events Industry Council Celebrates 75 Years



Scene At IMEX America



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