



The city of Asheville experienced massive flooding from Hurricane Helene, which struck the western North Carolina area on September 27, killing dozens of people in Buncombe County and leaving thousands without power and water service. Photo obtained from the N.C. Department of Transportation via Twitter.

Asheville, N.C., Struggles to Recover After Hurricane Helene Devastation

By Jonathan Trager

The city of Asheville in Buncombe County, North Carolina, is in urgent recovery mode after Hurricane Helene's destructive sweep through the western part of the state on September 27.

On October 3 prior to *USAE* press deadline, Explore Asheville said that while the city's downtown, lodging, and much of its hospitality infrastructure "fared well," most areas are still without power and water service, and early stages of recovery are ongoing.

"Traditionally, fall is the most vibrant time of year for us, both visually across the Blue Ridge Mountains and for our economic vitality," according to Vic Isley, President & CEO of Explore Asheville. "This is definitely going to hurt. Our hearts and minds are focused on supporting our community right now and

starting to lay the foundation for recovery in the days and months ahead."

The Asheville Regional Airport is open and operating, and critical highways like I-40 (east of Asheville) and I-26 are now accessible, making it easier to mobilize support, according to Explore Asheville.

As of October 2, the county announced that a new general shelter had opened at a former Gold's Gym with a playroom for children. That shelter was in addition to another general shelter at AB Tech Conference Center and a medical emergency shelter for those dependent on medical equipment. Another shelter at the WNC Agricultural Center was full.

Regarding power outages, 91,000 customers remain without power. The provider, Duke Energy, expected the majority of what can be restored

to be back online by October 4.

Ready-to-eat meals and bottled water were made available at two distribution sites beginning on October 2. Two meal packages per adult and one per child were to be allowed per day, and cases of bottled water were to be available, one case per family per day.

The damage to water distribution systems is extensive. The county noted that even if plants are operational, water can't be delivered to the community if distribution systems are not available. Crews were working to repair inaccessible areas as soon as possible.

In addition, the Asheville Police Department (APD) is under full patrol staffing. Many officers were working overtime to ensure safety and receiving support from other police departments outside of the city.

For individuals wanting to lend support, Explore Asheville is encouraging donations to the Salvation Army of Asheville, MANNA Food-Bank, and United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County.

"This is definitely going to hurt. Our hearts and minds are focused on supporting our community right now and starting to lay the foundation for recovery in the days and months ahead."

Inside

Page 3
Association Forum Announces Forty Under 40 Class

Page 4
MPI Supporting Members Impacted by Hurricane Helene

Page 5
Las Vegas Hotels Confront Implosion, Price-Fixing Allegations, Closures

Page 10
Conversation with Reina Herschdorfer, Director of Marketing, National Meetings & Events, Caesars Entertainment

Page 11
U.S. Hotels Reporting \$1,000 ADR Quadruples Over 2019

Page 13
Gary Musich to Take Reins of Visit Atlantic City

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HOTS

HOTS Spooky Season Comes to Stanley Hotel... Fans of horror movies and Stephen King novels will know the infamous Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, Colorado, for its role in inspiring The Shining with its famously ghastly vibes. This year, the hotel invites horror fans to “check in if you dare,” for a “one-weekend-only experience” put on in partnership with Peacock TV and Blumhouse, the studio behind Insidious, The Purge, and Happy Death Day. From October 18–20, guests can book an “Overnightmare” stay in guest rooms decked out in themes from Blumhouse movies. “Come sundown, things will quite literally go bump in the night,” according to Peacock, with after dark experiences for guests fea-

turing interactive characters, scares and fully immersive narratives. Guests who choose to put their mental and emotional safety on the line for a two-night stay at the eerie hotel will also be treated to two nights of screenings, a complimentary welcome dinner, \$100 credit toward breakfast or lunch at the property’s Brunch & Co., and two drink vouchers per guest for the Blumhouse Bar. HOTS is haunted already.

* * * * *

HOTS Fat Bear Face-Off... The Katmai National Park and Preserve in Alaska launched its annual Fat Bear Week contest last week, sharing a bracket of 12 rotund brown bears. “Fat bear Week is a celebration of success and survival,” the national park said of the annual tradition. “It

is a way to celebrate the resilience, adaptability and strength of Katmai’s brown bears.” Semifinalists will be crowned on October 7 with the 2024 Fat Bear being crowned on October 8. HOTS encourages fat bear enthusiasts to visit fatbearweek.org to vote on favorite chubby competitors and learn more about their lives around the park.

Association Forum Announces Forty Under 40 Class

By **Todd McElwee**

Top emerging leadership within the sector are being recognized by Association Forum, which has announced the recipients of the 2024 Forty Under 40 Program powered by Destination Vancouver.

The Forum said the Forty Under 40 Program is an opportunity to honor and celebrate stellar individuals whose notable endeavors (before turning 40) have had an impact within the association community with this year’s honorees representing the nation’s top 40 professionals from across nonprofits.

“Association Forum proudly unveils this year’s cohort of changemakers, an

extraordinary group that ignites inspiration across our community,” said Artesha Moore, FASAE, CAE, President & CEO of Association Forum. “These leaders exemplify the essence of new power leadership, leveraging their innovative mindset and intrapreneurial drive to push boundaries and reshape the industry.”

Recipients were selected based on their career accomplishments, commitment to the industry, and their continued pursuit to advance the professional practice of association management.

Eligibility requirements included:

- 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

Honorees will be celebrated during Holiday Showcase 2024—Amplify on December 4–5, at the Hyatt Regency Chicago. Furthermore, recipients will be featured in the spring 2025 issue of *FORUM Magazine*.

Association Forum’s 2024 Forty Under 40 Class

Roohi Ali, MPH
Orthopaedic Research Society

Zinat Ali
Association Management Center

Alex Andryk
Arthroscopy Association of North America

Thomas Azar, CMP, CAE, PMP
Legal Associations Management

John Bacon, MBA
ASAE

Elisa Barnes, CAE
Houston Building Owners and Managers Association

Emily Bennett
American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians

Lianna Bolton
Professional Convention Management Association

Lindsay Bullock, CAE
Executive Director, Inc.

Jessica Capistrant, IOM
Phoenixville Regional Chamber of Commerce

Grant Carpenter, CAE
Raybourn Group International

Jessica Dangles, MBA, MS, PMP, CAE
Certification Board of Infection Control and Epidemiology

Bradley Davis, BRMP
International Accreditors of Continuing Education and Training

Emily Eagon, MS, CAE
Design-Build Institute of America

Manu Edakara
iVenture Accelerator

Erin Espy
Smithbucklin
Priya Garg, MBA
American Osteopathic Association

Illana Hodges
American College of Healthcare Executives

Nikki Hoffman, DES
American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine

Christopher Hurst, CAE, CAPM, CC
International Foodservice Manufacturers Association

Lindsey Jager
Association of Diabetes Care & Education Specialists

Angela Jonker, CMP, MBA
Lions Clubs International

John Kasper, MBA, CAE
American Dental Association

Vy Le, MBA CAE
Linguistic Society of America

Elisabeth Lisican
American Association of Endodontists

Ariel Litewka, CMP, DES
Society of Critical Care Medicine

Jose Marroquin
Society of Actuaries

Hannah Martin, MPH, RDN
Association of Diabetes Care & Education Specialists

Emily Marxer, MBA
Smithbucklin

Gina Pantone, MPH
American Association of Nurse Anesthesiology

WEEKLY NEWS OF ASSOCIATIONS, CLUBS AND HOTELS

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Please turn to page 11

NEWS

MPI Supporting Members Impacted by Hurricane Helene

By Todd McElwee

In the wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Helene, MPI is offering one year of subsidized membership to members facing financial challenges due to the widespread effects of record rainfall, flooding, mudslides and power outages.

The subsidized memberships are being offered through the MPI Member Hardship Program in partnership with the MPI Foundation. MPI said more than 600 members could potentially be impacted.

“Our community’s strength lies in how we come together, especially in times of crisis,” said Kevin Kirby, Executive Director of the MPI Foundation. “The MPI Foundation is dedicated to helping our members rebuild their professional lives, and we’re proud to stand with those affected by Hurricane and Tropical Storm Helene. When we support one another, we foster a positive impact that ripples throughout our industry.”

The Hardship Program provides a six-month membership extension, while the MPI Foundation covers the

remaining six months, ensuring a full year of support. MPI said the assistance will help ease the burden by providing continued access to its network, resources and educational offerings.

The association is also working in conjunction with its chapters in affected areas to amplify their local initiatives. MPI said chapters are at the forefront of providing direct support to the meeting and events community, which has been deeply impacted by this unprecedented weather event.

“As MPI chapters across the region work tirelessly to provide local

assistance, MPI remains focused on ensuring that no member has to face this hardship alone,” MPI said.

To support destination recovery efforts, MPI will collaborate with impacted destination organizations to provide complimentary visibility through its digital and print media platforms, helping to meet their marketing and communications needs.

Those in need can apply for support by visiting mpi.org/hurricane. All applications submitted by January 31, 2025, will be reviewed, and responses will be provided promptly.

Destinations International, IMEX Group Donating to Areas Impacted by Hurricane Helene

By Jonathan Trager

Destinations International (DI) has announced that the association and IMEX Group are contributing \$70,000 in relief funds to areas most impacted by Hurricane Helene.

Don Welsh, President & CEO of DI, notified members of the association’s action by emailed Executive Update on October 3.

“We are all privileged to work in our industry and represent the communities that we love,” wrote Welsh. “And during my tenure at Destinations International, I have never seen our community come together more passionately or more quickly than when our peers and colleagues are in need of help.”

Welsh noted that as the storm developed in the Gulf of Mexico, the

association’s membership team led by Julia Holmen, Vice President of Membership Engagement, began dedicated outreach to destinations that were in the path of the storm. DI worked with state tourism offices and destination members to determine where assistance was immediately needed.

Once this information was available, Welsh reached out to Amir Eylon, DI Foundation Chairman,

and Scott White, DI Association Chairman, to provide an update and recommended support plan. Eylon and White immediately engaged their respective executive committees for approval of the financial support plan.

Consequently, the DI Foundation has made the following donation:

- North Carolina (\$10,000): North
- Please turn to page 10*

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NEWS

Las Vegas Hotels Confront Implosion, Price-Fixing Allegations, Closures

By Jordan Bradley

In Las Vegas, there is always change afoot. From the forthcoming implosion of the Tropicana, to allegations of price-fixing, and the quiet shuttering of an LGBTQ+-friendly hotel, Sin City keeps guests and residents alike on their toes.

Las Vegas will bid farewell to a long-standing icon this month.

The Tropicana Las Vegas—originally built in 1957 with ties to organized crime—will be demolished on October 9 to make way for a proposed new ballpark for the Major League Baseball's Oakland Athletics, and a new entertainment resort developed in partnership with Tropicana owner, Bally's Corporation.

In true Las Vegas fashion, the implosion of the Tropicana will be celebrated with a "breathtaking spectacle," Bally's said on October 8, which will include a drone show consisting of 555 drones and a fireworks display by Fireworks by Grucci.

Due to safety concerns, there will be no public viewing of the Tropicana's implosion. However, the Las Vegas CVA (LVCVA) and Bally's will present livestreams of the implosion at x.com/vegas and ballylive.com, respectively.

When news of the official implosion date was announced, hotels with "direct sight lines" of the Tropicana "almost immediately raised prices for rooms on the night of Oct. 8," the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* reported.

Las Vegas Review-Journal reported.

According to the *Review-Journal*, rooms at the MGM International-owned New York New York and Excalibur properties—which sit on the same four-way intersection as the Tropicana—were sold out in early September, and rooms at the MGM Grand casino-hotel—also at the same intersection—were listed at \$1,500 a night before selling out by the end of September. Rooms at the Bellagio and Vdara—both approximately one mile from the Tropicana—casino-hotels were listed at \$699 in early September and sold out by the end of the month as well.

Meanwhile, consumers in a class-action lawsuit alleging price-fixing of hotel rooms by Caesars Entertainment, Treasure Island, Wynn Resorts, software company Cendyn and more in Las Vegas that had previously been dismissed

by a Nevada judge last May have escalated their plight to the 9th U.S. Court of Appeals.

In a September 26 filing, the plaintiffs claimed several Las Vegas hotel owners contracted with Cendyn to use the company's Rainmaker software, sharing sensitive business data that created pricing recommendations, which artificially inflated the market.

However, the district judge dismissed the lawsuit when plaintiffs failed to prove the hotel companies were using Rainmaker at the same time and noted hotels were not

required to charge the generated pricing recommendations from Rainmaker, nor did plaintiffs supply proof the hotels had agreed on room pricing methods.

The plaintiffs now allege the hotels "entered into a set of vertical agreements" with Rainmaker, and those agreements "injure competition by facilitating horizontal collusion," according to the appeal.

"This is not abstract: since at least 2015, Casino-Defendants' room prices have risen significantly faster than a benchmark property on the Strip that does not use Rainmaker, and room prices on the Las Vegas Strip—which are heavily weighted by the prices Casino-Defendants charge—have rapidly outpaced both room prices for the rest of Las Vegas and an industry price index," the plaintiffs said in the appeal.

The defendants in the case have previously denied any wrongdoing.

Las Vegas also lost 33 hotel rooms when the boutique, LGBTQ+-focused hotel, Bent Inn, closed due to "ongoing battles" with their general contractor, ADJ Contracting and Development, according to a social media announcement from the hotel on September 30.

Mark Hunter and Greg Kafka purchased the hotel property in 2020 and opened the Bent Inn in October 2023 following almost three years of pandemic-related delays.

The pair noted they and the contractor are involved in two lawsuits.



The Tropicana Las Vegas is scheduled to be demolished on October 9 at 2:30 a.m. PT.

The first lawsuit was brought by ADJ who filed a lien against the pair's company, Escape Resorts, for almost \$917,000 in unpaid work, according to the June 20 filing.

Hunter and Kafka filed a countersuit on June 24, alleging ADJ increased its bill by approximately \$748,000, which Hunt and Kafka argue could not be done without an approved change order to their contract, according to court records.

"These battles have taken their toll financially, forcing Bent Inn to close," Hunter and Kafka said.

Guests See Services Limited at Hotels with Striking Employees

By Jordan Bradley

More than 4,000 hotel workers are on indefinite strikes at hotels in San Francisco, San Diego and Honolulu, impacting guest services at the five properties participating.

A hotel operator at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikiki Beach Resort told *USAE* that guests of the hotel are experiencing disruptions to their services and amenities.

"There is currently no valet. Our housekeeping services are limited," the operator said.

The Hilton Hawaiian Village is the largest in the state of Hawaii, with almost 4,000 guest rooms spread across two towers, the Ali'i and

Rainbow Towers, according to the hotel's website.

During the strike, guests have access to stations at the base of each tower, which provides certain amenities, including towels, but daily room cleanings are not being offered, the operator said. Guests are still able to order room service, but in-room dining has been paused, the operator added.

Hotel workers at the resort have been on strike since September 24. Like other properties involved in the strike, the 1,892 contracted workers at the hotel who walked off the job on strike consist of housekeepers, front desk agents, cooks, dishwashers, servers, bartenders, bellhops, doormen and more, according to

Unite Here, the hotel worker union initiating the strikes.

In San Francisco, workers at the Grand Hyatt San Francisco Union Square, the Hilton San Francisco Union Square and the Westin St. Francis (a Marriott International property) have been on strike since September 22.

"We weren't expecting this loud ruckus," a hotel guest identified as Alessia told ABC7 News Bay Area of the striking hotel workers' picket line outside the Grand Hyatt Union Square. "The kids are like, 'It's too loud!'"

The phone line at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront—where workers have been on strike the longest, beginning Labor Day weekend—rang without

answer when *USAE* called for comment, as did the phone at the Westin St. Francis San Francisco Union Square.

Requests for comment from the Hilton San Francisco Union Square and Grand Hyatt San Francisco were not returned before press deadline.

Hotel workers in Greenwich, Connecticut, and Providence, Rhode Island, who have been involved in the national labor dispute alongside the California and Hawaii hotels ratified new union contracts on September 27, according to Unite Here. The new contracts include wage increases and more affordable health care, the union said, but specifics of the contracts have not yet been released.



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USAExchange

Conversation with Reina Herschdorfer, Director of Marketing, National Meetings & Events, Caesars Entertainment



sponsoring the IMEX Wellness Challenge—hekahealth.com/imexamerica24.

We also encourage everyone to take the time to recharge in between the many meetings. In our booth, for example, we have built a wellness bar and will be serving a zero-proof botanical drink in addition to ginger shots and green shots. We are staying away from the sugary drinks and are providing healthier food options. For our group presentations, we have also included a short two-minute video with breathwork from Sepideh Eivazi with Dawn of the Earth. Just taking a few minutes to focus on your breath can make all the difference.

USAE: What are a few of your preferred activities or locations to practice wellness around Las Vegas?

Herschdorfer: It's surprising how many options are available. First, our hotels have amazing pools and spas. At Caesars Palace for example, we have a five-acre pool complex, the Garden of the Gods with seven stunning pools as well as the 50,000 square foot award-winning Qua Baths & Spa with three roman baths, an arctic ice room, sauna, steam bath, gym as well as 51 treatment rooms. Sound baths and moon baths are also a regular occurrence in Las Vegas and take place in beautiful small facilities around the valley in addition to the great outdoors. Las Vegas is surrounded by natural beauty: Valley of Fire, Red Rock National Canyon, Mount Charleston, Lake Mead and the Colorado River offer some of the most beautiful views with majestic mountains and world-class hiking and climbing.

USAE: Wellness can be interpreted in many ways. How does Caesars Entertainment define it?

Herschdorfer: Wellness is one of

the pillars for our organization. We recently rolled out wellness options for meetings and events. Wellness increases attendee engagement and satisfaction. Deeper connections are made. We worked with our director of culinary to identify healthier and nutrient rich food options in our catering menus to make it easier for planners to incorporate these into their planning. We also offer botanical zero-proof drinks and added wellness speakers and practitioners.

USAE: Are clients looking to incorporate more wellness into their events when booking with Caesars. If so, what are they requesting?

Herschdorfer: Many conferences are adding wellness elements, be it yoga or walking as well as quiet rooms. Some are now even adding EFT Tapping for 5 to 10 minutes at the beginning of their general session. Wellness is important to all generations, but for Gen Z and Millennials this has become an important topic to include. One of our clients who recently attended the Caesars Entertainment Global Wellness Conference actually changed their programming after attending as

they could see how impactful wellness can be for participants. It changes the energy in the room and the conversation, especially when your attendees are millennials and Gen Z. Wellness, mindfulness and inclusion are becoming the norm.

USAE: Caesars Entertainment is taking wellness on the road, please share some details for what's in store.

Herschdorfer: Last June, in conjunction with Global Wellness Day, we held our very first global wellness conference, which was a huge success. We invited our top clients to Las Vegas and brought in elements from our menus to showcase our food options, our wellness speakers and practitioners. We are planning our second annual this coming June. In addition, we are taking wellness on the road with a roadshow to seven destinations around the country, bringing wellness to our clients directly. Our events will be half day events and provide everyone a taste of what we have to offer. All indications are that incorporating wellness into the workplace and into conferences is here to stay and will continue to grow.

Demanding schedules, an abundance of food and drink and arduous travel itineraries can make it easy to overlook wellness when on the road. Just before IMEX America kicked off, USAE connected with Herschdorfer to discuss maintaining a wellness regimen in Las Vegas, Caesars Entertainment's commitment to the practice and what's coming down the road.

USAE: Wellness may not be the first thing that comes to mind when mentioning Las Vegas. How can Caesars Entertainment help attendees of IMEX America, or others in town, maintain their wellness regimen?

Herschdorfer: Caesars Entertainment's team is looking forward to welcoming everyone to Las Vegas and IMEX America. This is one of the most cherished shows we participate in every year. We host many clients and several events. It's always challenging to incorporate wellness but any opportunity we have to enhance attendee engagement and foster communities is easy to do when we add wellness elements. For everyone attending IMEX America, we are

MPI Announces Istanbul as European Meetings & Events Conference 2025 Host

By Todd McElwee

MPI is taking its premier international event to the shores of the Bosphorus.

Istanbul, Türkiye, will host the European Meetings & Events Conference (EMEC) from February 22–25. The event is returning to Türkiye for the first time since 2014.

"EMEC has long been a cornerstone for the global events community, fostering professional development through innovation, learning and connections," said Paul Van Deventer, President & CEO of MPI. "Returning to Istanbul after more than a decade is not only a testament to the city's enduring appeal but also a clear indicator of the excitement and popularity surrounding this iconic destination. Istanbul offers a unique blend of tradition and modernity that resonates with our international audience, and we are thrilled to bring EMEC back to this vibrant city."

Now in its 37th year, MPI said EMEC is designed with three tenets at its core: to serve as an idea incubator for the global MICE community, designed

by Europeans for Europeans, and to carry a strong reflection of the host destination—its culture, history and heritage. The association noted it boasts the industry's largest presence in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa with 1,000 members and 10 Chapters and Clubs. EMEC brings together 300-400 global MICE professionals within a format that has received multiple awards, including recognition by BEA and a Gouden Giraffe.

Ismail Bütün, General Manager of the Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA), said: "Hosting EMEC 2025 is a monumental opportunity for Türkiye to showcase its position on the global MICE stage. Istanbul has a proven track record of hosting large-scale international events, and EMEC's return highlights our commitment to growing and evolving as a premier destination for meetings and events professionals."

MPI will soon be releasing a request for proposals (RFP) for the 2026 and 2027 host destinations. Registration and more information is available at mpi.org.

DI Donating

continued from page 4

Carolina Disaster Relief Fund

- Asheville, North Carolina (\$7,500):

World Central Kitchen

- Florida (\$5,000): Florida Disaster Fund

- Georgia (\$5,000): United Way of the CSRA and Camp Rock of Georgia

- Tennessee (\$5,000): East Tennessee Foundation

- South Carolina (\$2,500): United Way of Greenville County

As the DI plan was coming together,

Welsh noted, Ray Bloom and Carina Bauer from the IMEX Group contacted the association to see how they could assist. This led to the IMEX Group matching the above contributions.

"These communities need urgent, large-scale support as they begin what will be a long and arduous process of recovery and healing," Welsh wrote.

Those interested in donating to the DI Foundation Hurricane Helene Relief Fund (100% of any contribution will go to the above organizations) should visit login.destinationsinternational.org/donate-now.

NEWS

U.S. Hotels Reporting \$1,000 ADR Quadruples Over 2019

By Jordan Bradley

Luxury hotels in the United States have seen a dramatic increase in hotels reporting average daily room rates (ADR) reaching \$1,000 since 2019, according to data analytics firm CoStar.

In the first half of 2024, 80 hotels in the U.S. have reported ADRs of \$1,000, whereas only 22 claimed that same rate in 2019.

Four major factors are pushing this rise in ADR, according to Jan Freitag, National Director of Hospitality Analytics at CoStar Group, Sr. Vice President of Lodging Insights for STR.

At the top of Freitag's list is a trend economists call the wealth effect wherein an individual's income may not increase, but their assets become more valuable leading to changes in spending habits.

"Your 401k is worth much more, your house is worth much more; whatever assets you have in the market have increased in value, and then that makes you feel wealthy," Freitag said. Unemployment rates have dropped and "you feel pretty good about the stock market, so you splurge a little bit."

Another piece driving the significant rise in frequency of \$1,000 ADR hotels

is the post-pandemic rise of "revenge travel," Freitag said, where families recovering from pandemic pause on travel and isolation practices are choosing to travel together in order to make up for lost time.

"This idea of multi-generational travel has been a topic for a while, where the grandparents pay and host the kids and the grandkids," Freitag said. "That, of course, implies you need either suites with connecting bedrooms or multiple hotel rooms. Of course, then that costs additional

money, right? Those are the more expensive rooms."

Adjacent to the rise in revenge travel is increases in international travel for "the upper income strata," Freitag said.

"Here's a discerning traveler who wants a luxury experience, and [luxury hotels] are willing and able to provide that," Freitag said.

Globally in 2019, there were approximately 115 hotels that reached an ADR of \$1,000 compared to the 460 that can claim the same ADR in the first half of 2024, CoStar reported.

The fourth trend resulting in \$1,000 ADRs at luxury hotels is inflation. With costs of hotel operations rising, luxury hotel rates must adapt to accommodate, Freitag said.

According to CoStar, it's "likely" that the numbers are actually short of the true total because smaller, ultra-luxury hotels, such as lodges in the African savannah or boutique bed and breakfasts in rural Europe may not participate in the CoStar reporting.

The increase in such high average

Please turn to page 14

Forty Under 40

continued from page 3

Ashley Piper
American Society of Anesthesiologists

Tracey Powell, CNP
U.S. Travel Association

Michelle Robinson
Chicago Association of REALTORS

Andrea Schmidl
Strategic Management Society

Sandra Schueller
Association Resource Center, Inc.

LaToya Tapscott, CAE
Healthcare Businesswomen's Association

Maggie Voves
American Society of Anesthesiologists

Sarah Wright, DVM, CertAqV
American Veterinary Medical Association

Paige Zelinsky, MSC
American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians

Ellen Zimmerman
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Women Leading the Way

Lisa Ruggiers Sees Stewardship in Greenhouse Manufacturing

By Jordan Bradley

Lisa Ruggiers, Executive Director of the National Greenhouse Manufacturers Association (NGMA), never expected to land in association management when she set out to pave the way for her career.

“We always tease that no one goes to school to become an association executive,” Ruggiers told *USAE* with a laugh.

Regardless of Ruggiers’ intent before she arrived in association management, she said it’s a “fun ride to be on.”

“We always tease that no one goes to school to become an association executive,” Ruggiers told *USAE* with a laugh.

“It’s a lot of fun to be able to work with amazing members,” Ruggiers said. “NGMA is such a good industry and a good group as an association and as leadership to work with, which makes my job that much better; to be able to collaborate with my board and to really be able to work with them on initiatives.”

Prior to joining NGMA in 2016, Ruggiers acted as director of communications for the Pennsylvania Bankers Association and the director of marketing and events for the Pennsylvania Land-

scape and Nursery Association.

The NGMA was established in 1958 and represents a niche in the greenhouse market, focusing on the U.S. manufacturers and suppliers of greenhouses and greenhouse components, which includes all the internal guts of a greenhouse operation like lighting, shelving, and hydroponics.

For members of the NGMA, Ruggiers said, the ramifications of supply issues brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic still linger today. Steel, which serves as the bones of modern greenhouse structures, has experienced supply chain disruptions since 2020.

“Of course everyone had something to deal with when it came to Covid,” Ruggiers said. “But I think really it was the supply chain piece that happened post-Covid that was affecting the industry. A few years ago, steel was a huge issue in pricing and availability, and that’s a big issue for greenhouse manufacturers if you cannot get your hands on steel.”

That supply chain issue impacted the cost of greenhouse structures, a major concern for manufacturers who “don’t want to see that impact on their end users,” Ruggiers said. “So that’s certainly a big piece of what our members are following.”

According to research conducted by Grand View Research, the U.S. greenhouse market accounted for just over 10% of the global greenhouse market and is expected to grow almost 9% by 2030.

“Greenhouse farming offers protection to crops from severe weather conditions by using techniques such as controlled environment agriculture technology, where the facilities use climate control systems. It offers numerous benefits which include increased production with fewer risks,” the Grand View report said.

These benefits combined with increased urbanization, a growing population, climate change and depleting water resources are propelling growth in the industry, according to Grand View.

Of some concern to NGMA members as the market grows and changes is increase in regulation in part due to the cannabis industry boom. As states have begun legalizing the substance for recreational use in recent years,



Lisa Ruggiers

policy makers have turned keen eyes on regulatory standards for greenhouses.

“A couple years ago, there was a change to what the definition of a greenhouse was that could have been fairly detrimental,” Ruggiers said. “I think it was the explosion of the cannabis industry because that’s indoor growing—but growing cannabis is very different from growing other crops.”

At the time, Ruggiers recalled, NGMA and its members were concerned that the change in definition would mean changes to code requirements, “especially on the energy side,” leading to increased costs, and potential damage to growers of different greenhouse crops who were also concerned about “just being good stewards in the world.”

The NGMA is set to host its next annual meeting on April 6-8 in Dallas, Texas, a location that Ruggiers said she and other association members are excited to visit because of its proximity to the Texas A&M - AgriLife Research and Extension Center at Dallas. The association does its best to incorporate university ties in agricultural programs whenever possible, Ruggiers said, to keep the proverbial green thumb on the pulse of the industry.

For her part, Ruggiers said she has more of a “brown thumb.” Though she and her husband plant a vegetable garden every year (this year’s consisted of zucchini, cucumbers, tomatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, watermelon and a smattering of herbs), they haven’t quite graduated to a greenhouse “yet,” she said.

Flanders Welcomes Events Industry for Inaugural Impact Day

By Todd McElwee

How can conferences and events leave lasting positive effects on host communities and their residents? VISITFLANDERS, #MEET4IMPACT, and the GDS-Movement’s Inaugural Impact Day is designed to answer that question.

Set for October 14 at Saint Magdalene’s Church in Bruges, Belgium, Impact Day will showcase innovative practices, leading research, and collaborative methods aimed at maximizing the social and environmental value of conferences and events.

More than 120 participants from Australia, North America, and across Europe are expected to attend.

Brecht Putman, CMP, Sr. Association Manager North America, VISITFLANDERS, told *USAE*: “External factors like climate change and overtourism demand ‘a resilient new business model’ to ensure people will be convening long into the future. At Impact Day I’m looking forward to seeing how local communities can be best involved in the process!”

Impact Day will address the future of the conference and events sector, which organizers say is at a crossroads. They noted a resilient, new business model is essential to ensuring long-term success. Central to this evolution is social impact.

At the core of Impact Day is the unveiling of a framework developed by VISITFLANDERS. The bureau said it will help organizers measure and enhance the social impact of their events, contributing to the well-being of local communities and the

environment.

Keynote speakers include Piet Colruyt, Impact House—one of Belgium’s leading social entrepreneurs—who will share insights on how event organizers can access funding to support impactful initiatives. Professor Jan Beyne from the Antwerp Management School is an authority on sustainability and the circular economy. Beyne will explain the concept of impact and highlight emerging trends in sustainable practices for the events industry. Geneviève Leclerc, #MEET4IMPACT, and Guy Bigwood, GDS-Movement, will explore “Why Funding for Impact?” and its relevance to the business events industry.

The event will also feature presentations from the European Academy of Childhood-onset Disability (EACD), the European Federation of Food Science and Technology (EFFoST), and the World Breaking Championship. Breakout sessions will look at how associations have formed impactful partnerships to scale their impact, best practices for using subvention funds to drive social and environmental change in cities, and how governmental and supranational funding schemes can support associations in achieving impact goals through event-related projects.

Organizers noted Saint Magdalene’s Church, which dates from the mid-19th century,

is an eco-certified Flanders Heritage Venue and embodies the event’s commitment to sustainability.

Visit www.meetinlanders.com/impact-day for more information.

NEWS

Gary Musich to Take Reins of Visit Atlantic City

By Jonathan Trager

Gary Musich will take over as President & CEO of Visit Atlantic City in New Jersey following the retirement of current leader Larry Sieg, the organization announced on September 27.

Musich, who has more than 25 years of experience in sales and hospitality, currently serves as Vice President of Sales at Visit Atlantic City. Sieg will depart the organization at the end of 2024.

Visit Atlantic City said Musich's promotion "marks a new chapter in Visit Atlantic City's history" with a focus on innovation, strategic partnerships, and continuing to attract major events to the city.

"I am honored to step into this role and continue the great work that Larry has set in motion," said Musich.

"Atlantic City has endless potential, and I look forward to working with our partners to promote this incredible destination to visitors from across the globe. We will remain focused on expanding our reach, innovating our offerings, and ensuring that Atlantic City continues to thrive as a top-tier destination."

Sieg's leadership "was instrumental in rebranding the organization, integrating leisure marketing with the CRDA, contributing to increased visitor numbers and enhanced experiences for travelers," according to Visit Atlantic City.

"I am incredibly proud of the work we've accomplished during my time here at Visit Atlantic City," said Sieg. "The team's resilience and dedication have been instrumental in helping us meet the challenges of a rapid-

ly changing tourism landscape. I'm confident that Gary is the right person to take the reins and lead this organization to even greater heights."

Prior to his tenure with Visit Atlantic City, Musich held executive positions within the sales departments at Meet AC, the Atlantic City CVA, and casino resorts.

Musich has been a volunteer with the Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF), Captains For Clean Water, and the American Cancer Society. He's a graduate from the hotel school at Paul Smith's College in New York.



Gary Musich

CVB Update

Destinations International (DI) is calling for applications to volunteer for a committee or task force in 2025. The deadline to apply is October 31. Appointments are for a one-year term from January through December. Any destination member or partner of DI in good standing is eligible. "Our committees and task forces play a pivotal role in advancing our mission to empower destination organizations worldwide," according to a DI email on September 27. "Serving as a volunteer leader allows you to contribute to meaningful initiatives that help our members, and their destinations excel." Committee appointments for 2025 will be made by Scott White, Chair of the DI Board of Directors, and Amir Eylon, Chair of the DI Foundation Board of Trustees, in collaboration with committee co-chairs and the DI staff. To view the list of committees and task forces and to apply, visit destinationsinternational.org/committees-task-forces.

The **Atlanta CVB** will recognize former executive **Mark Vaughan** during



Mark Vaughan

the 25th annual Atlanta Hospitality Hall of Fame ceremony on November 11 at the Westin Buckhead Atlanta.

Vaughan served as the organization's executive vice president and chief sales officer from 2005 until his retirement in 2023. During his tenure, convention bookings increased from 1.3 million room nights to 1.7 million annually, while total visitation grew from 32 million to 57 million prior to the pandemic.

Under Vaughan's leadership, Atlanta's major citywide conventions and sporting events included two NCAA Men's Final Four tournaments (2013 and 2020), Super Bowl LIII (2019), two College Football Playoff National Championships (2018 and 2025), and FIFA World Cup (2026).

Vaughan served on the board of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), ASAE Foundation, Association Forum, and Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl. He was also a member of the Federal Reserve Bank's Tourism Advisory Council and chair of Atlanta Sports Council. In 2017, he was chosen for ASAE's Class of Fellows, recognizing his accomplishments and contributions to ASAE and the association sector. The Atlanta Business Chronicle, Delta Air Lines and The Coca-Cola Company serve as presenting sponsors for this year's Hospitality Hall of Fame. Individual tickets or tables are available for purchase at discoveratlanta.com/HHOF.

Visit Greater Palm Springs announced on September 30 its new brand campaign launching this fall, "Escape Your Ordinary," which invites

travelers to "explore the surreal beauty, vibrant culture, and unique experiences that define Southern California's premier oasis."

"Greater Palm Springs is a place where the everyday fades away, and the extraordinary comes to life," said Colleen Pace, Chief Sales & Marketing Officer for Visit Greater Palm Springs. "Our new campaign, 'Escape Your Ordinary,' embodies the spirit of the Southern California oasis, offering a journey through surreal landscapes,

rich cultural experiences, and moments of pure relaxation that can only be found here."

As part of the campaign, Visit Greater Palm Springs will roll out a series of video, digital and traditional media placements, engaging social media content, and immersive experiences designed to bring the campaign to life. Travelers and locals alike are encouraged to share their extraordinary moments in Greater Palm Springs using the hashtag #EscapeYourOrdinary.

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THE FINAL WORD

Old, New and Revitalized in a Transforming Atlantic City

By Jessica Kasunich, Director of Communications, Visit Atlantic City

Atlantic City is home to more than five miles of pristine beaches, the world-famous Atlantic City Boardwalk, more than 17,500 luxurious hotel rooms, 1.8 million square feet of meeting space citywide, and is located within driving distance of one third of the nation's population.

When many think of Atlantic City, N.J., they think of casinos. Well, think again. While Atlantic City is known for its dazzling casino resorts and exclusive experiences, the city's enriched history is also reflected in every corner throughout our seaside destination. Atlantic City has evolved tremendously over the years while also keeping its history alive.

A true renaissance continues to take shape in the Orange Loop district, which borrows its name from everyone's favorite board game, Monopoly. Experience three beach blocks of unique restaurants, bars, chocolate, coffee, live music, yoga and more. Thanks to steadfast developers who continue to see the potential in Atlantic City, a Container Park project in Atlantic City's Orange Loop has gained momentum. The shipping container park, made possible by a grant of nearly \$2.5 million from New Jersey's

Activation, Revitalization, and Transformation Program, will feature an entertainment venue, a local vendor market, and a gourmet marketplace.

Take a step into history. Staying true to its roots and history is Jim Whelan Boardwalk Hall with incredible history through every detail of the building and its walls. Jim Whelan Boardwalk Hall, formerly known as the Historic Atlantic City Convention Hall, is a multi-purpose indoor arena in Atlantic City, New Jersey. It was Atlantic City's primary convention center until the opening of the Atlantic City Convention Center in 1997. Jim Whelan Boardwalk Hall houses the largest musical instrument on earth, the pipe organ. More powerful than a dozen orchestras, the pipe organ can both whisper and thunder into the 5.5 million cubic feet of air space in the main arena. A second instrument by W. W. Kimball is also part of the Adrian Phillips Theater. The Historic Organ Restoration Committee continues to maintain and restore the pipe organ. Free concerts are offered daily.

Family owned, Atlantic City's famous Steel Pier is the centerpiece of family entertainment on the Boardwalk and where memories are made. Originally opened in 1898, Steel Pier quickly became known for showcasing the world's top entertainers,



Jessica Kasunich

delighting thousands of visitors each day with top names and novelty acts. Today, kids of all ages enjoy the amusements, thrill rides and games of chance on Steel Pier. To continue to attract returning and new visitors, the Steel Pier is continuously staying up-to-date with amusement trends and rides and a new rollercoaster will debut in 2025.

Our nine casino resorts also continue to reinvest into their products and guest experiences.

Ocean Casino Resort has invested \$75 million in property reinvestment, including 12 floors of new hotel rooms and suites bringing the property to 1,860 rooms, and Fanatics Sportsbook located inside The Gallery Bar.

Caesars Entertainment has invested \$400 million into its three Atlantic City resorts, including 750 newly-renovated rooms and suites in Caesars' Centurion and Ocean towers, a Nobu restaurant and Nobu hotel tower at Caesars Atlantic City. Spiegelworld's \$75 million project The Hook and Superfrico are now open at the historic Warner Theatre in Caesars Atlantic City. The Hook is Atlantic City's

only permanent live entertainment destination. The venue also houses Spiegelworld's hugely successful Italian-American-Psychedelic restaurant, Superfrico, alongside four cocktail bars, each with its own must-taste experience.

Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa recently completed a \$55 million remodel and rebranding of the Water Club tower to the MGM Tower. In addition, eligible MGM Rewards members who have also enrolled in Marriott Bonvoy are able to link accounts and receive exclusive tier matching benefits at participating Marriott Bonvoy destinations.

Lastly, Island Waterpark at Showboat Resort debuted a \$100 million indoor waterpark in 2023 featuring 11 slides, a 1,000 square-foot surf simulator, a splash pad, a lazy river and so much more.

As you can see, this is only a snippet of the renaissance that is taking place in Atlantic City. We invite all meeting and event attendees to bring their families and extend your trip to explore our iconic and historic seaside destination.

Scott Galloway Opening Convening Leaders as Keynote Speaker

By Todd McElwee

Sharing the strategic blueprint he believes will shape the 2025 business landscape, New York University professor, author, and entrepreneur Scott Galloway will deliver the main stage keynote on January 12.

Galloway's speech will take place immediately prior to PCMA'S Convening Leaders 2025 (CL25) opening reception. Convening Leaders will be held January 12-15 in Houston.

"To ensure the global business events industry has the knowledge to create change, we must first have a solid understanding of what lies ahead," said Sherrif Karamat, CAE, PCMA and CEMA President and CEO. "I am very much looking forward to kicking off CL25 with a new format, and what better way to do so than with Scott who will undoubtedly challenge us to push the boundaries and think differently on how changes in our society and workforce are having a transformational impact on our businesses and lives and what we can do

to turn these into opportunities."

PCMA believes the opening keynote is meant for leaders who dare to push boundaries. Galloway will discuss the future of work, the rise of new business models, and how to navigate an increasingly digital world.

"His predictions are not just forecasts—they are a call to action for the global business events industry leaders to challenge their assumptions, adapt to disruptive changes, and gain a competitive edge," PCMA said.

Galloway is a professor of marketing at NYU's Stern School of Business. He was named one of the world's best business professors by *Poets & Quants* and has founded nine companies, including Prophet, RedEnvelope, L2, and Section. PCMA's bio also notes he is a *New York Times*-bestselling author and has served on the boards of directors of The New York Times Company, Urban Outfitters, Berkeley's Haas School of Business, Panera Bread, and Ledger.

Find more information at conveningleaders.org.

U.S. Hotels

continued from page 11

daily rates as the hotel industry recovers from pandemic-era slowdowns piqued Freitag's curiosity, he told *USAE*.

"What I was curious about was just to see the proliferation because it used to be that \$1,000 ADR was this sort of sound barrier," said Freitag.

Rates at these hotels must actually exceed that rate throughout the year,

Freitag explained that "implies that there are certain nights when the hotel charges \$3,000 or \$4,000 on average" to reach that ADR "for the whole year. So it's a pretty high number; you have to have a lot of high paying guests."

From Freitag's perspective, this rise in ADR for luxury hotels did not come as a shock but is a sign of a bigger trend. He told *USAE* he expects to see the number of hotels with \$1,000 ADR increase within the next three to five years.

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