



The Houston First Corporation team welcomes attendees of PCMA's Convening Leaders to the George R. Brown Convention Center. The convention is running from January 12–15. Photo Credit: Houston First Corporation

California Hotels Respond to Wildfires with Discounted Rates, Donations

William Randolph Hearst's Topanga Ranch Motel Destroyed

By Jordan Bradley

Spurred on by high winds throughout the week, wildfires broke out around Los Angeles and Southern California on January 7, causing approximately 153,000 people to evacuate their homes and devastating thousands of acres of land.

As of January 10, at least 11 people had died as a result of the Eaton and Palisades wildfires. Officials estimate that the death toll will likely be higher. The cause is still under investigation, and the Palisades, Hurst, Eaton, Lidia and Sunset fires were still burning at

press time.

Hotels are responding with discounted room rates—many waiving resort fees—and donations of products and bedding to temporary shelters.

In a January 8 statement, the Hotel Association of Los Angeles (HALA) said: “We are devastated by the destruction of the fires raging across the Los Angeles region. Hotels are currently taking in thousands of Angelenos who have been displaced by the Palisades, Eaton and Hurst fires. Many of our hotels are providing guests with discounted rates and

the necessities they may have left behind in their evacuation, including toiletries. Many hotels are also taking in pets. Our hotels are also working to donate bedding and personal care items to temporary shelters. We stand ready to continue assisting Angelenos and first responders during this crisis.”

The California Hotel and Lodging Association (CALA) released a statement to its members following California Gov. Gavin Newsom's January 7 declaration of a State of Emergency in response to the Palisades fire, reminding hotels that “we must be mindful of the needs of our communities and avoid any form of price gouging within the lodging industry.”

CALA also noted that state law prohibits business owners from increasing room rates at hotels, motels and other temporary rental units by more than 10% for 30 days after a local or state agency declares an emergency.

Nonprofit 211 LA has also partnered with Airbnb to offer free temporary housing for people displaced from their homes in the wake of the wildfires.

Visit Santa Monica and Visit Anaheim have created lists of hotels offering discounted rates to evacuees. HALA also released a list of more than 40 hotels with rooms available in the Los Angeles area on January 8 for evacuees looking for lodging.

Although the extent of the damage remains to be seen, the California State Parks (CSP) confirmed that multiple structures in the Topanga State

Park, including the historic Topanga Ranch Motel, had been destroyed by the Palisades fire.

The motel was built in 1929 by William Randolph Hearst, a newspaper publisher and politician. With 30 guest rooms across the street from Topanga Beach, the Topanga Ranch Motel “provided an inexpensive seaside holiday vacation retreat for families and writers and was a popular film and television location,” according to CSP.

The organization acquired the motel in 2001 and had planned to restore 20 of the cabins for public use.



Wildfires destroyed the historic Topanga Ranch Motel in Topanga State Park on January 8. Photo Credit: California State Parks

Inside

Page 2

Drew Holmgren Named Leader of Promotional Products Association International

Page 4

Jonathan Thompson Retiring from National Sheriffs' Association

Page 4

Ban on Single-Use Plastics in N.Y. Hotels Goes into Effect

Page 5

Conversation with Michael Heckman, President & CEO of Houston First Corp.

NEWS

Drew Holmgreen Named Leader of Promotional Products Association International

By Todd McElwee

Drew Holmgreen has made the leap to President & CEO of the Promotional Products Association International (PPAI). And with the organization's PPAI Expo 2025 set to take place at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center from January 13–16, just three days after his arrival, MPI's former Chief Experience Officer is jumping right into his new role.

Asked what attracted him to PPAI, Holmgreen told *USAE*: “Two simple words: people and joy. Over the past seven years at MPI, I’ve discovered that the association world is an extraordinary space for a fulfilling career—primarily due to the passion and dedication of the people involved, whether they are staff, volunteers, or active members of the community. When I explored this opportunity, it resonated deeply with me as a lifelong marketer. Promotional merchandise offer a unique and powerful way to connect—both tangibly and emotionally—with audiences in ways no other medium can. They bring ‘joy’ to brands and their customers.”

Holmgreen noted he’s been a huge fan of promotional merchandise dating back to his 17 years of working with major brands in the advertising agency space. He added MPI’s team has been incredibly active in ensuring the association’s brand finds its way into our community’s hands in creative and meaningful ways.

“One of my favorite examples—connected to my affinity towards the craft beer scene—was partnering with local breweries for branded beers at EMEC Brighton and TLS Buffalo,” Holmgreen

said. “Seeing our amazing creative team design labels that perfectly reflected MPI’s brand while embracing the local culture was a highlight for me. It’s a perfect example of how promotional merchandise can emotionally and tangibly express a brand—sometimes even in a drinkable way!”

Arriving at MPI in 2017 as senior director of marketing and communications, Holmgreen said he was most proud of how the brand has grown into a dynamic and widely recognized force that is organic to everything it does—from signature events to chapter endeavors.

“One of the most rewarding moments is standing in the audience at a Chapter event and hearing our volunteer leaders on stage, passionately sharing how ‘when we meet, we change the world’ resonates with our community and shapes global business,” he said. “What began as a simple tagline has evolved into a global rallying cry for the meetings industry—used consistently across initiatives and embraced wholeheartedly by our team and volunteers. Witnessing that transformation, powered by an incredible team, has been deeply fulfilling.”

Prior to MPI, Holmgreen worked at Dallas-Fort Worth based Calise Partners, where he was executive director of client services.

“Drew is a visionary leader with a deep understanding of the dynamics of member-driven organizations,” said Andrew Spellman, CAS, Chair, PPAI Board of Directors and Vice President of Corporate Markets, Therabody. “His experience and passion for innovation make him uniquely suited to lead PPAI and create value for our members and



Drew Holmgreen

the industry as a whole.”

Denise Taschereau, Incoming Board Chair, PPAI, CEO, Fairware, added Holmgreen’s “unique blend of marketing agency leadership, association leadership, and promotional products experience made him the ideal choice.”

Asked if he will remain involved with the meetings industry, Holmgreen said, “Absolutely! The meetings industry remains close to my heart—as I have told a number of people, ‘You’re not

done with me yet!’”

The graduate of the University of Texas at Austin also sees opportunities to collaborate with organizations such as MPI, while deepening PPAI’s relationships with IAEE and others.

Holmgreen resides in North Texas, home to PPAI headquarters, with his wife of 20 years, their son, and pets. He is often found running, hiking, or exploring craft breweries in his downtime.

Rochester Breaks Ground on Improvements to Convention Center

By Jonathan Trager

Officials in Rochester, New York, on January 8 kicked off a \$13 million project that will make upgrades to the Joseph A. Floreano Rochester Riverside Convention Center.

Improvements to the facility will include a new building addition along Main Street with a glass-fronted, 1,650-square-foot event space; LED display panel; and landscape planters. The south terrace steps will be knocked down and transformed into a ramp for greater accessibility.

Work is expected to be done in 2026, with scheduled events continuing uninterrupted. The convention center opened in 1985.

“The Rochester Riverside Convention Center has been a community resource and an economic driver for the city since it opened,” Rochester Mayor Malik Evans said. “The convention center isn’t just a gathering place, it’s one of the first places in Rochester that visitors will

see if you come in for a conference or an event. It takes place right here. So we want to make sure it is welcoming and inviting. That’s why our convention center must reflect the energy, optimism and prosperity that is modern-day Rochester.”

The project is being aided by a \$5 million investment from New York’s Upstate Revitalization Initiative. Officials say it’s the first of more potential upgrades in the future if funding is obtained, according to *Spectrum News*.

“The importance of this project should not be underestimated,” said James Brown, Executive Director of the Rochester Riverside Convention Center. “The convention center operates in a highly competitive marketplace and improvements such as these that increase our footprint and add quality amenities are not only essential to our long-term health as a venue and a city but is an expectation by today’s meeting planners and the community it serves.”



Michelle Keck (seated) of the Homewood Suites by Hilton Wilmington-Brandywine Valley, winner of the Hilton 2024 CEO Light & Warmth Award, was one of 16 team members and one hotel team from around the world to receive the company’s highest honor celebrating team members who exemplify Hilton’s values and purpose.

HOTS

HOTS Bawdy Boutique Hotel... A former brothel was transformed into a boutique hotel in Pendleton, Oregon, and now guests can stay in one of five guest rooms or the property's suite to experience some of Oregon's former life as a wild west town. According to the *Central Oregon Daily News*, the Working Girls Hotel was the site of a former brothel and a stop on the Pendleton Underground Tour, which showcases the town's history. At one point, there were 32 bars and 18 brothels in Pendleton within a four-block radius. "With the underground tours, we kept having people come through and say how cool it would be to stay in an old brothel," said Brooke

Armstrong, owner of the hotel and the tour company, in an interview with the *Daily News*. Guest rooms on property are decorated with antiques from the era, and the hotel only takes reservations by phone in a truly old school fashion. HOTS thinks that's one way to take a vacation.

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HOTS Belgian Blunder... Belgium's food safety organization, the Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FASFC), warned citizens not to eat their Christmas trees after the city of Ghent recommended cooking with conifer needles as a way to recycle Christmas trees following the holiday season. "In Scandinavia, they have been doing it for a long time: picking the needles from the branches, briefly immersing them in boiling water, pouring them through a sieve and drying them on a clean cloth. Once the needles are dry, you can make delicious spruce needle butter with them for bread or toast," the Ghent website reads. But the FAS-



Delta Air Lines ushered in its 100th anniversary during the Consumer Technology Association's (CTA) CES 2025 in Las Vegas, January 7-10. CEO Ed Bastian delivered a keynote at the Sphere, which was illuminated in Delta imagery.

FC told residents that Christmas trees "are not meant to end up in the food chain" and noted that most of the trees grown for decoration during the holidays are treated with pesticides and potentially dangerous chemicals,

UPI reports. Ghent has since editing its post on the website to note that "not all Christmas trees are edible." HOTS wonders how many Belgians ate their Christmas trees before the warning went up.

WEEKLY NEWS OF ASSOCIATIONS, CLUBS AND HOTELS

USAEXtra

PUBLISHER & EXECUTIVE EDITOR 1982 – 2021
Anne Daly Heller

PUBLISHER-EMERITUS
Ross E. Heller
ross@usaenews.com

PUBLISHER
James Heller
james@usaenews.com

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
Todd McElwee
todd@usaenews.com

MANAGING EDITOR
Jonathan Trager
jon@usaenews.com

HOTEL EDITOR
Jordan Bradley
jordan@usaenews.com

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Diane Nichols
dkn@usaenews.com

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Danielle Erbe

MARKETING & CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
Christy Pumphrey
christy@usaenews.com

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New Maryland Hotel Inside Former Convent Facing Religious Pushback

By Jordan Bradley

A newly opened hotel in Frederick, Maryland, is receiving pushback from locals alleging the hotel's restaurant disrespects the building's original Catholic history. Owners and developers disagree.

The Visitation Hotel Frederick, a Tribute Portfolio by Marriott International hotel, and its Wye Oak Tavern, owned by celebrity chef brothers

Bryan and Michael Voltaggio, opened on December 19 at 211 E. Church Street, the site of the former Visitation Academy, an all-girls Catholic school, and convent.

As part of the transformation, owners and developers of the Visitation kept the property's chapel, working with the Frederick Historic Preservation Commission to adhere to regulations while transforming the chapel into the tavern bar.

Now, a local Visitation Academy alum, Elyssa Koren, is calling for the tavern to move the bar, which is situated on the property's chapel altar.

In a post on the public community Facebook group with more than 40,000 members, All Things Frederick, Koren shared the [change.com](https://www.change.com) petition on December 17, two days before the property was slated to open.

"To the owners of Visitation Hotel, a Marriott property: We ask you to restore the dignity of the chapel by relocating the bar," Koren wrote in the petition. "While we lament the loss of the beautiful Visitation Academy convent and school, we thank you for allowing the building to live on for new purpose. That said, we are deeply saddened that the sacred chapel, used for countless celebrations of the Holy Mass, has been converted into a bar and restaurant."

The building now home to the 65-guest room Visitation Hotel and

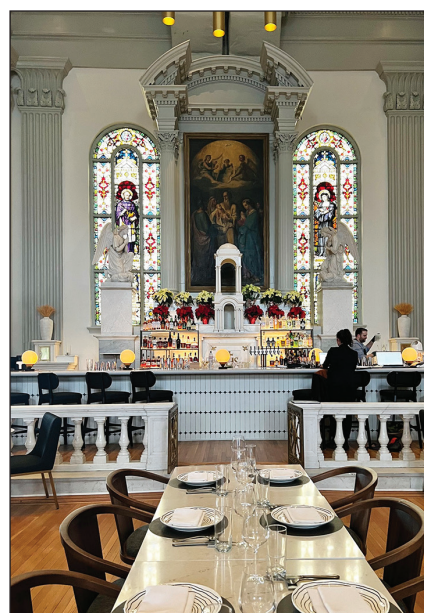
its Wye Oak Tavern was originally built in 1846 as the Visitation Academy and a convent for the nuns who ran the all-girls school.

According to the *Washingtonian*, the property served as a convent until 2005 when it was turned into a private school, which eventually closed in 2016.

Prior to its sale to co-developers Jim O'Hare, President, O2 Holdings, and Lance Jaccard, CEO, OTJ Architects, in 2017, "representatives of the Archdiocese removed the tabernacle from the former altar. After the sale of the property, the tabernacle space on the former altar was kept vacant, and stations of the cross, church pews and other religious artifacts were donated to Frederick churches," according to the hotel's website, and "the bar of the new restaurant, Wye Oak Tavern, was placed on a newly built structure, separate from the historic altar."

In an interview with the *Frederick News-Post* on December 27, O'Hare said in its first week of operating the property had received "overwhelmingly positive feedback about the restaurant and the design."

In an emailed statement to USAEXtra, O'Hare said: "We designed Visitation Hotel Frederick as a gift to both the beloved hometown community and guests visiting the historic city. And, we know how much this space means to so many generations of Frederick families. Restoring and revitalizing a



The Wye Oak Tavern in the recently opened Visitation Hotel, a Tribute Portfolio by Marriott International property, in Frederick, Maryland, has garnered criticism from locals offended by the bar's use of the former chapel altar.

Please turn to page 5

NEWS

Jonathan Thompson Retiring from National Sheriffs' Association

By Todd McElwee

Following more than a decade of championing the nation's law enforcement community, Jonathan Thompson is retiring as Executive Director and CEO of the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) at the end of 2025. The association is accepting applications for the executive director position.

"This has been an honor of a lifetime," said Thompson. "I've had a front-row seat at the most important moments in law enforcement these past 10 years. The success we've encountered isn't the result of one person or Sheriff. Rather, it has been our employees, our member Sheriffs, the Chief Deputies, Under-Sheriffs, deputies, and partners who have done the lion's share of the work."

"I will never forget the reason we fight as hard as we do, because everyday deputies, corrections officers, and dispatchers pledge to protect everyone in their community, regardless of their social status, gender, race, political views, or personal circumstances. We owe these public servants an enormous debt and should be 110% committed to helping them succeed."

Asked about his proudest accomplishments by *USAE*, Thompson replied: "When we started on this journey I was given three missions: 1. Make the Office of Sheriff and the Association front and center in the Washington policy debates relevant to law enforcement; 2. Insure that the Brand of the NSA is respected, strong, and something people and organizations want to affiliate; and 3. Improve membership, finances, and benefits for the organization."

"We've been very successful on all three, but the most important is the legacy is giving a national voice to Sheriffs and the NSA. Influencers, politicians, thought-leaders, peer groups and the media start with us, see this Association is where leadership is learned, skills enhanced,

and knowledge is shared. Always a work in progress, but I think we have created an amazing platform for my successor to build upon and make even better."

Prior to his current post, Thompson was a principal with Refero Communications. He occupied a variety of government roles including Director of External Affairs, Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency and also led communications for the Consumer Electronics Association, as well as overseeing the Consumer Electronics Trade Show.

NSA President Sheriff Kieran Donahue said: "This is a significant time for the Association and the Nation's 3,081 Sheriffs. For a decade, Jonathan has been a driving force in helping move the NSA forward, overcoming many hurdles and challenges. Working alongside the NSA Executive Committee leadership and Board of Directors, he has been asked to make some tough decisions, and the Association is undoubtedly better because of it. His experience and relationships inside the Beltway and on Capitol Hill have been instrumental to the NSA's success in advocating for the Office of Sheriff, Sheriffs, and law enforcement interests in Washington, D.C., and across the nation."

Thompson's plans for retirement include sitting on a couple boards of directors—one a for-profit and one a community service group—writing, enjoying his farm, and advising the NSA's membership when called upon.

"Importantly retirement is peace of mind at a moment in time," said Thompson. "I have a small farm to work; my wife, family, friends and colleagues to engage me or in the unlikely event rescue me from boredom and mindlessness."

Applicants for the executive director post should have extensive law enforcement experience and/or considerable exposure to the policy, legislative, judicial, and regulatory



Jonathan Thompson

activities that affect the NSA's membership and its partners.

Find more information at sheriffs.org.

Ban on Single-Use Plastics in N.Y. Hotels Goes into Effect

By Jordan Bradley

Guests of hotels throughout New York will no longer be offered single-use toiletries when they stay in hotels or motels with more than 50 rooms in an attempt to decrease plastic waste throughout the state.

The ban, called the Small Plastic Bottle Hospitality Personal Care Product Restrictions Law, went into effect on January 1. It prohibits hotels from providing "any small plastic bottle container less than 12 oz. of a hospitality personal care product," according to New York's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the governing body responsible for the policy.

Beginning on January 1, 2026, hotels and motels with fewer than 50 rooms will also be subject to the restriction.

According to the New York State Senate, any hotel or property that violates the provision will receive a warning and 30 days to correct the violation—if the hotel does not correct the violation within that time period, it will receive a \$250 fine. Should the same property be found to violate the ban a second time within the same calendar year, the hotel will be fined \$500.

Prior to any civil penalty, "a hearing or opportunity to be heard shall be provided," according to the legislation, originally introduced in September 2019 by State Sen. Todd Kaminsky.

"By restricting hotels from providing these small bottles used for personal care products, the state will take another important step in combating single-use plastic pollution," Kaminsky wrote at the time.

The ban was signed into law by Gov. Kathy Hochul in 2021. Restrictions were intended to take effect in 2023 for hotels with more than 50 rooms and in 2024 for properties with fewer than 50 rooms, but members of the hotel industry pushed back, asking for more time to distribute toiletries that hotel owners had already paid for.

This ban is the most recent effort in the state to curb plastic waste. In 2020, single-use plastic bags and polystyrene foam products were banned, except under specific circumstances most frequently relating to food packaging and food safety. In 2021, single-use plastic straws were banned, except upon request, and in 2023, plastic utensils, napkins and extra containers for takeout or to-go orders were also banned unless specifically requested by a customer.

California established a similar ban on single-use plastic at hotels that went into effect in 2023, and Washington state signed a similar bill into law that will go into effect in 2027.

New York State Hospitality & Tourism Association President Mark Dorr did not respond to *USAE* request for comment by press deadline.

Stay Connected



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Conversation with Michael Heckman, President & CEO of Houston First Corp.

By Jonathan Trager

PCMA's *Convening Leaders* has kicked off in Houston, the first time the largest city in Texas has hosted the gathering. Prior to the event's commencement, USAE spoke with destination leader Michael Heckman about how he feels to host the convention, what it was like to prepare for it, and just some of what the city has to offer those in attendance.

USAE: Why is hosting the PCMA Annual Convention important for the city of Houston?

Heckman: Our convention business is a huge part of our tourism business. Research shows that upward of half of meeting and convention planners who attend PCMA in the past have never been to the host city before. In Houston, you expect at least half

and maybe more to be here for the first time. We see it as a monumental opportunity to introduce Houston to those planners who may not know us. We were supposed to host in 2021, but it got kicked back due to COVID. With Houston transforming its convention campus in the future, we can talk about what a great destination we are.

USAE: How does an organization help prepare to host a convention such as this one?

Heckman: The way we have approached is like a lot of big cities. We've hosted two Super Bowls, in 2004 and 2017, and it's really all hands on deck from a DMO perspective. Over the last 18 months, we took a big group of hotel partners and our team from Houston First and we went out to San Diego [2024 PCMA host] to experience it and make connections and learn how we can do it. Are there any

opportunities to improve on the experience for the attendees and for them to leave with a better sense of what the community and destination is about? I love San Diego and they were a great host last year, but we really want to emphasize the walkability of our convention campus; you'll see all the major events truly within walking distance of the convention center and campus.

Over the last year, we had numerous contact points with PCMA, but we established a project manager who oversaw our team and was a go-between us and PCMA. We planned site visits and were thinking about where we could go beyond that.

We've had seamless planning and visits with people from PCMA. We want people to know this is a major event and it's important to us—we're treating this as the Super Bowl of our industry.

USAE: What are some unique things Houston has to offer people who attend?

Heckman: You only have so much time while you're there, but you have to experience at least one of our unique restaurants and our museum district; you can access that on our light rail. Those would be two things people could squeeze in. We have 12,000 restaurants, but we also have the Michelin guide in Texas. You can find almost any culinary type from around the world. It's one of the great aspects of international flair that Houston has. Houston is the most diverse city in the United States, and our culinary scene is a window into that diversity. We also have the Museum



of Fine Arts, Houston, which has been recognized by the *Washington Post* as one of the top 10 museums of our size, the Houston Museum of Natural Science, the Holocaust Museum Houston, and more.

USAE: What one thing do you hope attendees take away from this experience?

Heckman: If you're a meeting or convention planner or professional who puts on events and makes sure your attendees are being cared for, I want you to walk away understanding that we in Houston will go above and beyond for you and deliver you the best client experience in the United States. We try to figure out a way to "Yes." It's like the old ad campaign from AVIS, which is "We Try Harder." We want people to see what we've done for PCMA putting on an outstanding event and know we will do the same for them.

Melissa Chrisman Tapped to Head Bloomington-Normal Area CVB



Melissa Chrisman

By Jonathan Trager

Melissa Chrisman has been hired as President & CEO of the Bloomington-Normal Area CVB in central Illinois, enabling her to represent her hometown to visitors.

Chrisman, who will start in the position in early February, most recently served as Vice President of Marketing & Communications at Trinity Metro transit agency in Fort Worth, Texas. She succeeds Crystal Howard, who resigned in August after more than 20 years at the helm of the organization.

"It is an honor to be chosen as the

president and CEO of the CVB," said Chrisman. "I look forward to working alongside the board, BNACVB team, and my hometown community on the future growth of our visitor economy. Bloomington-Normal is a great place to be, which is why I was eager to return to the area and join this dynamic organization."

Chrisman takes the job as the destination prepares for the Route 66 centennial and expects to attract millions of tourists traveling the Mother Road in 2026, local news station WGLT reported. Route 66 was one of the United States' first continuous stretches

of paved highway and served as a major path for those who migrated west.

"Melissa's love for the community, leadership expertise and professional experience all stood out in the selection process," said Chair Beth Whisman, who led the search committee, according to WGLT. "This is a great community organization, and we know Melissa will take it to the next level by building strong relationships and positioning Bloomington-Normal as the central Illinois destination while fostering our quality of life and place for current residents."

Chrisman takes the job as the destination prepares for the Route 66 centennial and expects to attract millions of tourists traveling the Mother Road in 2026, local news station WGLT reported.

Maryland Hotel

continued from page 3

property is a delicate job, and we take the responsibility seriously."

O'Hare also noted that when he and Jaccard toured the Visitation Academy, "it was a building that was going to die from neglect and demolition."

In the post, Koren noted the petition was "NOT a condemnation of the hotel, but a request to take action on a specific point."

"Even though the chapel was properly deconsecrated—for the girls of Visitation, for Christians, and for people of goodwill everywhere, this is an evident and painful misuse of the space," Koren said in the petition.

By press deadline, the petition garnered more than 3,500 signatures of support, with locals continuing to add their support.

However, some Frederick residents

pushed back against the petition on Koren's post, as commenters asked where the support for the sacred property was when it was lacking funds and facing inevitable closure in 2017.

"As someone who was on the Board at Visitation for years while my children attended, and desperately tried to raise money to keep it open and to preserve the amazing history, I find your petition disrespectful to those of us who gave time and money then, when it counted, and very few responded either within the Visitation community or in the broader Frederick community," wrote Cindy Kurak.

She noted the renovations were "tastefully done" and that "great care" went into the transformation of the historic property.

Koren eventually closed comments on the post, though it is unclear when. She did not respond to USAE request for comment by deadline.

Women Leading the Way

AHLA's Rosanna Maietta Looks to a 'Whole New Landscape' in Hospitality



Rosanna Maietta

By Jordan Bradley

The American Hotel and Lodging Association's newest President and CEO, Rosanna Maietta, is "really excited for the future," she told *USAE*.

But this isn't Maietta's first dance with the association.

Maietta's first joined AHLA in 2014 and spent about eight years in various roles, including President and CEO of the AHLA Foundation, the giving arm of the association, and Executive Vice President of Communications and Public Relations of AHLA.

In 2022, Maietta left the hotel association and took on the role of Chief Communications Officer and Senior Counselor to the CEO at the American Clean Power Association, where she also oversaw the revenue generating event portfolio for the organization.

"I'm glad to be back at AHLA," Maietta said. "I missed it dearly. It holds a special place in my heart, both the organization and the industry, and I feel very honored to be in this role now."

As she makes her return to AHLA in her new role as President and CEO, which she began on November 14, Maietta is pleased to see the association in its current state.

"Certainly leaving the industry, and time away seeing what other trade associations are doing and how they operate brings a really great, fresh perspective," she told *USAE*. "It's really wonderful to come and see the growth and the depth of talent in our ranks."

Before she joined AHLA, Maietta spent the first decade of her ca-

reer as a journalist, beginning as an unpaid intern in the Rome Bureau of the *Associated Press* in Italy, eventually working her way into finance reporting with *Bloomberg* and freelancing before moving back to the United States.

After marrying a fellow journalist, Maietta and her husband moved to New York City, where she "began her journey into public relations." She took a job as the Media Relations Manager at *Newsweek Magazine*, where she stayed for five years, she said.

In 2005, Maietta and her husband moved to Washington, D.C., to be closer to family, and she took on a role at global public relations firm, *Fleishman-Hillard*. There, she worked for Fortune 500 companies and small nonprofits doing "primarily media relations, crisis communications, and public affairs campaigns and efforts."

During the almost 10 years she spent at *Fleishman-Hillard*, Maietta was introduced to then-CEO of AHLA, Katherine Lugar, in 2013. She went to work for Lugar at AHLA the following year.

Maietta doesn't take her previous experience with the hotel association for granted, she said.

"I really wanted to come back and spend time with every single person who works at AHLA," Maietta said. "I want to understand what they're working on, what's working well, what's not, and to do the same with everyone on our board and executive committee by going back to my roots as a journalist. To me, leadership is about listening and observing, and hearing what people have to say. That's how I intend to design the vision for the organization in the future. It's with everyone's input."

Given how the "landscape that we're all operating in has really, dramatically changed in the last five years," Maietta said, she wants to bring "a renewed sense of energy and purpose" to the ways that AHLA as an organization approaches shifts in policy at the federal, state and local levels.

"When things aren't working in Washington, we tend to see much more regulation at the state and local level," Maietta said. "So what is AHLA's

role in that? How do we work with our partner state associations and all our allies to be strong together? And then with that fresh perspective, [we also need to] look at how we can go on offense and better tell our story."

Stepping in to 2025, Maietta said she sees "a whole new landscape—both in Washington and around the country" with a new administration and freshman lawmakers stepping into their Congressional seats—with varying degrees of understanding and familiarity with AHLA—that make AHLA's storytelling imperative.

"There is a hotel in every congressional district in the country," Maietta said. "And anytime a hotel goes up, you're building and creating communi-

ty, because on that same street, you're likely to see a coffee shop, flower shop or souvenir shop, and a grocery store. The role we play is so important, and it is imperative that we tell that story to legislators at the state, local or federal level, so they really understand what role the industry plays in driving the economy and in creating good, long, lasting jobs."

Maietta said she will also focus her leadership of the association on collaborating more effectively with association partners and allies, "strengthening those bonds and connections where we have them, and building them where we don't."

"We are stronger when we work together," she said.

Around Associations

Industry Coalition Encourages President-Elect Trump to Find Common Ground and Keep America's Air Traffic Control System the World's Safest...

A coalition representing various corners of the nation's aviation and aerospace industry has sent a letter to President-elect Donald Trump, urging his administration to work with the sector to find a unified path forward to create efficiencies within the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) that will ensure our nation's aviation system remains the safest in the world.

U.S. Travel Association, Airlines for America, National Business Aviation Association, Association of Flight Attendants - CWA, National Air Traffic Controllers Association and Air Lines Pilots Association, International were among the signatories.

"The United States is the global leader in aviation, and it is a top priority to ensure our aviation system remains the largest, safest, most diverse and most efficient in the world," said National Business Aviation Association President & CEO Ed Bolen. "This letter sends an important message to the new administration that the industry is united in agreement that our nation's aviation infrastructure must remain prepared to meet the needs of the citizens, companies and communities that rely on it in the years to come."

"The aviation industry—from commercial aviation to general aviation, manufacturing, labor, airports, advanced air mobility and other emerging technologies—accounts for more than 5% of the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) generating over 10 million high-quality jobs," the letter states. "Our nation's ATC system is a vital infrastructure asset, essential to

safe air travel and to our nation's economic growth and competitiveness."

The groups encouraged the Trump administration to work with industry, exclusive representatives of the FAA's workforce and Congress to support needed improvements and efforts to ensure the FAA can more effectively utilize the Airport and Airway Trust Fund to modernize its facilities and air traffic control equipment.

"We stand ready to work with you and your administration," the letter states.

Find the complete letter at nbaa.org.

Registration Open for Specialty Coffee Association's Expo...

The Specialty Coffee Association (SCA) has announced its flagship North American Specialty Coffee Expo will take place in Houston at the George R. Brown Convention Center from April 25–27. More than 17,000 attendees from 85 countries are expected with the exhibit hall housing north of 600 companies.

"Specialty Coffee Expo is more than an event—it's where the global coffee industry comes together to tackle today's challenges and celebrate its future," said Yannis Apostolopoulos, CEO of the Specialty Coffee Association. "In 2025, resilience will be key as we navigate the impacts of climate change, rising costs, and evolving consumer demands. Expo 2025 will showcase innovative solutions, from advanced brewing technologies to sustainable products, and foster meaningful connections across the coffee value chain. It's the premier North American event for innovation, collaboration, and business in specialty coffee."

Additional details can be found at sca.coffee.

THE FINAL WORD

Tax Legislation, Workforce Issues Dominate ASAE Legislative Agenda for 2025

By Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE, Chief Public Policy and Governance Officer, ASAE

As the 119th Congress begins its legislative session, ASAE is focused on two critical priorities: anticipated tax legislation and workforce issues, including the Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act.

With the sweeping tax breaks from 2017 set to expire in 2025, Congress is preparing for major tax changes. Leaders on both sides of the aisle have called for a fully funded tax package, expected to cost more than \$4 trillion. ASAE is sounding

the alarm that the tax-exempt sector could be targeted to offset these costs. Proposals have already surfaced suggesting that all tax-exempt organizations should be taxed at the 21% corporate tax rate on non-donation net revenue. This puts membership dues, sponsorships, investment income, and educational program revenue at significant risk.

With Republicans controlling the White House, Senate, and House—albeit by slim margins—there is a strong likelihood that GOP leaders will attempt to fast-track tax reform within the first 100 days of the Trump administration. In response, ASAE is

proactively launching a coalition to defend the 501(c) community from increased taxation. Initial support for this coalition has been robust, but defending our sector's interests will require the collective action of the entire tax-exempt community. We urge all stakeholders to join this effort and stand united in protecting our shared mission. For more information or to join ASAE's coalition, visit powerofassociations.org.

In addition to tax policy, workforce development remains a cornerstone of ASAE's advocacy agenda. A key priority is the Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act, which would expand 529 savings accounts to cover expenses related to obtaining and maintaining professional or post-secondary credentials. These credentials, often provided by associations, are essential for career advancement and workforce readiness.

Last year, this legislation advanced out of the influential Ways and Means Committee, marking significant progress. ASAE is optimistic about pushing



Mary Kate Cunningham

this bipartisan bill across the finish line in the new Congress.

These legislative priorities underscore the vital role associations play in workforce development and economic growth. ASAE remains steadfast in advocating for policies that support our community's ability to thrive and serve its members.

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NYSAE Rebrands as Metro NYSAE

By Todd McElwee

Just a few days after the ball dropped in Times Square, it was out with the old and in with the new at the 106-year old New York Society of Association Executives (NYSAE).

Rebranding as Metro New York Society of Association Executives (Metro NYSAE), the association said the new moniker and identity reaffirm a commitment to serving association professionals in the Tri-State region while embracing a forward-thinking approach to growth, sustainability and inclusivity.

Metro NYSAE also noted the rebrand maintains its historic ties to ASAE and other state societies of association executives (SAEs). Metro NYSAE is a member of the Association Societies Alliance.

"Three years of feedback, learning, and listening have taken us to this point. Our new identity reflects the reality of today's workforce and strengthens our commitment to serving association professionals across the tri-state area," said Colleen Harper, CAE, Chair, Metro NYSAE and CEO, Illuminating Engineering Society. "At the same time, we remain deeply aligned with ASAE and our fellow SAEs, recognizing the importance of collaboration within

the broader association community."

The rebranding was spearheaded by NYSAE's Future Directions Task Force and launched in September 2023 by Harper and Immediate Past Chairman Dr. Robert Spangler, Assistant Executive Director of the New Jersey State Bar Association. Task Force members included NYSAE leaders, nonmembers and stakeholders from across the region, who evaluated the long-term impact of post-COVID changes on association professionals in Metro New York.

"Our findings reaffirmed the importance of honoring our legacy and staying true to our roots in New York City, where NYSAE began over a century ago," said Spangler. "At the same time, we recognized that today's association professionals live and work beyond city borders, including Connecticut and New Jersey. The rebranding allows us to embrace this broader Metro New York Community, while maintaining our strong foundation in the city. To support that, Metro NYSAE's flagship event remains branded as Meet New York and is scheduled for February 27, 2025, at the Marriott Marquis."

Metro NYSAE has added board members who live outside of New York City to reflect its expanded focus, including leaders from the American Pet Products Association, New Jersey Dental Association, Interactive Advertising Bureaus, International Communication Association and Finance Executives International.



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Contact Ron Eifert,
Director of Sales,
reifert@destinationdayton.org
937-226-8284