

TORONTO



Neil Brownlee (left), PCMA Chair, Director of Business Events, VisitScotland; Andrew Weir (center), President & CEO, Destination Toronto; and Sherrif Karamat, CAE, President & CEO, PCMA, attend the PCMA Foundation's Visionary Awards at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C., on April 10.

ASAE Names Five to 2025 Class of Fellows

By Todd McElwee

ASAE is inducting a quintet of association industry stalwarts into its Fellows program who will join a group of more than 300 professionals to have received the designation.

The ASAE Fellows program, established in 1986, celebrates individuals who have demonstrated visionary leadership, a commitment to conscious inclusion, and a sustained impact on their organizations and the community of association professionals, organizers said.

Christina Lewellen, FASAE, CAE, President & CEO, Association of Technology Leaders in Independent Schools; Tara Puckey, FASAE, CAE, CMP, Executive Director, Radio Television Digital News Association; Christopher Urena, FASAE, CAE, Chief Learning Officer, Endocrine Society;

Nikki Walker, FASAE, Strategic Advisor & Global Consultant, MCI; and Aaron Wolowiec, FASAE, CAE, CMP Fellow, Founder and President, Event Garde, comprise this year's class. They join a group of more than 300 professionals who have received the designation.

"Congratulations to the 2025 Class of ASAE Fellows," said Tonya Muse, FASAE, CAE, 2025 Fellows Selection Committee Chair. "This year's class represents a diverse group of individuals who are visionary, dedicated, and deeply committed to advancing our profession. Their contributions will undoubtedly shape the future of the association community, and I look forward to seeing the impact they will make as ASAE Fellows."

Lewellen was named the Executive Director of ATILIS in 2019. Her CV includes executive posts with the Association of Proposal Management

Professionals and National Court Reporters Association. She has contributed a variety of pieces for ASAE and is active with the Research Committee.

"This recognition reflects not only my career in association management, but more importantly, the shared commitment and passion of the association community I've had the privilege to lead and collaborate with," she told *USAE*. "The accomplishments and innovation for which I'm being recognized are the result of collective vision, partnership, and purpose, the hallmarks of what makes association work so impactful. The ASAE Fellows award underscores the importance of the work we do together to serve our members and strengthen the communities we support. For these reasons and more, I'm honored to be named an ASAE Fellow."

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NEWS

Geoff Freeman Champions Travel System Upgrades Before House Committee

By Todd McElwee

Geoff Freeman, President & CEO, U.S. Travel Association, testified on April 8 before the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security, urging members to upgrade the American travel system ahead of hosting major global events.

Freeman noted that competing countries such as China and Saudi Arabia make massive investments in travel.

“Travel is an economic powerhouse in the U.S., driving nearly \$2.9 trillion in economic activity each year, but we now face growing challenges that threaten both the future of the industry and America’s competitive edge,” said Freeman. “The reality is: Bold leadership is required

now to prioritize travel. Our travel systems are under pressure, and without immediate action, we risk falling behind.”

Freeman pointed to inefficient processes in visas, customs and airport screening, antiquated air traffic

control systems and aging screening technology.

“Modernization is essential to ensure we remain competitive and responsive to the evolving needs of global travelers,” he said. “At a time when every economic opportunity matters, we must work together to strengthen our travel infrastructure and keep pace with the rest of the world,” Freeman said. “This is a moment for thoughtful, forward-looking action. The status quo is not an option.”

U.S. Travel launched a national campaign in February outlining what it believes are key policy proposals the administration and Congress must take to ensure the United States remains the world’s travel leader.

The association has said as the nation prepares to host prominent global events, including the 2026 World Cup and 2028 Olympics, solutions focusing on transforming the entire travel experience to ensure a seamless and secure process for all travelers are required.

“The next decade represents a defining moment for the American travel

“The reality is: Bold leadership is required now to prioritize travel. Our travel systems are under pressure, and without immediate action, we risk falling behind.”



Geoff Freeman

experience,” Freeman said. “The status quo is not an option. Travel demand is surging, our infrastructure is aging, and global competitors are moving fast. If we fail to act, we risk turning travelers away, ceding economic opportunities and compromising our

leadership in the world. The steps we take today will determine whether the U.S. remains the global leader in travel or struggles to keep pace with competitors.”

Find the complete testimony at ustravel.org.

Arizona Considers ‘Mixed Hoteling’ Disclosure Bill *Would Require Hotels to Notify Guests of Homeless Occupants*

By Jordan Bradley

A proposed bill would require hotels in Arizona to disclose to guests whether their property is also serving as a shelter for people experiencing homelessness.

Arizona House Bill 2803 passed the Arizona House of Representatives on March 4. It then passed the Senate Government Committee on March 19 before being passed by the Senate Rules Committee on March 25.

The bill, introduced by Rep. Matt Gress, (R-Phoenix) on February 11, specifically requires hotels engaging in “mixed hoteling” by providing emergency, temporary or transitional shelter to homeless people to “post signs over each entrance and exit to the building.”

Requirements of the sign are specific down to the font. According to the bill,

the sign must state in Gothic bolded red and black font: “This business is being used to house homeless individuals alongside the general public. It is recommended that all guests keep hotel doors locked, safely store their belongings and report any health or safety concerns to local law enforcement.”

The bill would also require the sign to be at least 18 inches wide and 24 inches tall, and it prohibits hotels from using state or local monies for mixed hoteling.

Hotels throughout the country—including in Arizona’s capitol of Phoenix and the nearby Scottsdale since 2023—have been utilizing hotels for emergency housing for people experiencing homelessness when homeless shelters are full.

Gress argues that use for hotels is a bad policy and said in an interview with Capitol Media Services there’s a “consumer protection angle” in the bill.

Gress argues that use for hotels is a bad policy and said in an interview with Capitol Media Services there’s a “consumer protection angle” in the bill.

“If there is a paying patron who is going to the hotel, I think that they should be made aware that the hotel they’re going to is also being used as a quasi homeless shelter,” Gress said in the interview.

Gress also said in the reading of the bill to the Arizona House on March 4 that the practice is “akin to warehousing.”

The bill has drawn support from some lawmakers such as Sen. John Kavanagh (R-Fountain Hills), who says hotels are not equipped to offer services to the homeless population.

“Some of these people are street-homeless people who are extremely mentally ill who may have bedbug infestations,” said Kavanagh in an address to lawmakers. “I think you need to give people notice when they go to a hotel that they’re not going to be exposing themselves to this.”

But critics of the bill note that it heavily stigmatizes people experiencing homelessness and the hotels that offer support.

“HB 2803 unfairly targets hotels

that provide emergency housing for victims of domestic violence and homelessness,” said Jeanne Woodbudy, a representative from the Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, in an address to lawmakers on March 19. “We feel it stigmatizes hotels that support these programs, making it less likely that businesses will participate in critical emergency housing efforts.”

Sen. Lauren Kuby (D-Tempe) said: “If you want to talk about actual facts, you’re more likely to be the victim of a crime than commit a crime if you’re a homeless person.” And she noted that hotels fill a need in serving couples and those with pets who cannot go into homeless shelters.

The bill would also require hotels to publish notices of mixed hoteling on their websites and allow guests to receive a full refund of their hotel fees if they have any objections.

Representatives from the Arizona Lodging and Tourism Association did not return *USAE* request for comment by press deadline.

HOTS

HOTS Geriatric Galapagos... The Philadelphia Zoo welcomed the arrival of four Galapagos hatchlings from a pair of critically endangered, almost 100-year-old Galapagos tortoises, the Associated Press reports. The zoo announced the hatchlings' arrival on April 4, noting that their arrival is the first in the zoo's more than 150-year history. The hatchlings' parents—named (appropriately) Mommy and Abrazzo—are the zoo's oldest residents and first-time parents. The first hatchling broke the shell on February 27, and all four

hatchlings are "eating and growing appropriately." Jo-Elle Mogerman, President and CEO of the zoo, said: "This is a significant milestone in the history of Philadelphia Zoo, and we cannot be more excited to share this news with our city, region and the world." According to the London Zoo, there are only about 17,000 Galapagos tortoises left in the world, making them critically endangered and the hatchlings a welcome addition. The zoo said it plans to unveil the hatchlings to the public on April 23, and it will host a naming contest. HOTS is pondering possible hatchling names and wonders if it's too obvious that one would be named Shell?



HOTS Beach Clean-Up Results... Clean Ocean Action, a New Jersey group dedicated to cleaning up coastal beaches, released its 2024 Beach Sweeps report, which found that its operations cleaned up some 276,899 pieces of trash throughout 2024. The strangest things found included a rubber foot, a full can of ravioli, a set of vampire teeth, and a literal sink, according to the report. According to



Choice Hotels International kicked off its 10th annual MasteryX tech conference on April 9 in Scottsdale, Arizona. Choice Chief Information Officer Brian Kirkland (center left) and other Choice representatives spoke to approximately 500 Choice associates at the conference, which aims to keep associates' skills current by exposing them to emerging tech and cutting-edge tools. "MasteryX is more than just a conference—it's a launchpad for the future of hospitality technology," Kirkland said of the weeklong event.

the Clean Ocean Action, the 12 most commonly picked up items in 2025 were plastic bottle caps, food and candy wrappers, straws, plastic bottles, cigarette filters, plastic cap rings, cigar tips, metal drink cans, packing foam, paper pieces and assorted pieces of plastic. The organization was estab-

lished in 1985 and has removed more than 8.7 million pieces of trash from beaches at more than 83 locations. The group kicked off its 2025 Beach Sweeps on April 12. HOTS wonders what weird lost items will turn up this year? Maybe someone will find HOTS' lost chainsaw.

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Former Carthage CVB Director Reaches Plea Agreement

By Jonathan Trager

The former executive of the Carthage CVB in Missouri has entered a plea agreement for stealing from the organization using a CVB-issued debit card.

Callie G. Myers, 45, reached the agreement last week in Jasper County Court. She stood accused of using the debit card to rack up unauthorized purchases of nearly \$8,000.

Under the plea agreement Myers, had her charged reduced from a felony to a misdemeanor and pay a \$2,000 fine.

Myers worked at the CVB from November 2020 through July 2021. A warrant for her arrest was issued in October 2022.

A former bureau employee had reported seeing unauthorized expenditures made by Myers to a city administrator. Myers said she acknowledged using the debit card for

personal purchases but maintained she used it unintentionally, according to local news outlet KOAM.

Myers' unauthorized purchases include clothing items, grocery items, payment to her husband, payment to her daughter through a Cash App source, payments for hair salon and beauty items, numerous purchases at local restaurants for lunches and dinners, cell phone and cell phone accessories, and alcohol.

HSMAI's Commercial Strategy Conference Heads to Indianapolis

By Jordan Bradley

The Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI) announced on April 7 that it will host its second annual Commercial Strategy Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana, on June 16–18 at the Indianapolis Convention Center.

The conference kicks off with exclusive executive roundtables and workshops on June 16 before expanding into general sessions and breakout sessions on June 17 and 18.

The 2024 Commercial Strategy Conference—the inaugural event from the association—sold out, welcoming more than 850 commercial

professionals, according to HSMAI.

"Following the success of last year's event, we are excited to once again welcome hospitality professionals from across the industry to exchange ideas, discover cutting-edge strategies, and shape the future of hospitality," said Brian Hicks, President & CEO of HSMAI.

Like the previous year's event, HSMAI's 2025 Commercial Strategy Conference focuses on key topics impacting hospitality sales and marketing professionals today. General sessions include breaking down silos for maximum profitability, an in-depth look at today's customer, artificial intelligence's impact on hospitality

commercial strategy, and insights outside of hospitality that could benefit hotels.

During the conference, HSMAI will also offer 14 breakout sessions each day that "will address the most important issues facing commercial professionals," the association said.

"In today's rapidly changing hospitality landscape, commercial success depends on adaptability and collaboration," Hicks said. "As we enter our second year, we look forward to an engaging and impactful conference that will equip leaders with the strategies they need for the future."

For more information, visit commercial.hsmai.org.

USAExchange

A Conversation with Stephen Revetria, President, Giants Enterprises

Major League Baseball's Opening Day was a few weeks ago, making this the perfect time to catch up with Revetria. A former Chair of MPI and member of the Executive Committee of U.S. Travel Association, Revetria discussed balancing baseball and events, working at one of the nation's most unique venues, the opera and more.

USAE: Can you describe the coordination between baseball operations and Giants Enterprises when it comes to hosting events?

Revetria: It's a synergistic relationship that has to work. Oracle Park—Pacific Bell Park at the time—was built in 2000, and it was built primarily for baseball. We hope for 81-plus games a year at the building. It was privately financed, and we had a great ownership group who identified that we can do other things here. That's how Giants Enterprises was born. Through the 25–26 years that I've been there, it has been a relationship out of respect for the game but knowing that every other day there needs to be a conversation.

The integrity of the field is always going to come first through the season, without a doubt, and the integrity the building is always back of mind. We're not going to do anything that's going to destroy any part of the building. But we pressed it over the years with a Monster Jam or a super cross or absolutely tearing up the field for rugby. But when you have confidence in your ground crew and the people that work there to put things back in order, and you have the ownership support, it's a nice process.

Baseball typically releases its sched-

ule, or at least an early version to us, in mid-June or early July. It's usually made public in an August timeframe. We take the dates baseball plugs in their calendar first, and then then we look at it and say, okay, these are the big conventions coming to town. These are the big opportunities we have. Then we start to fill the calendar. It's a collaborative process and requires a lot of discussion.

USAE: A follow up: Could you host an event the day of a game?

Revetria: Occasionally, and the reality is the expenses go up significantly when you have that opportunity. We're a union facility in a very union town so you're paying double time, or sometimes triple time, if you have an extended evening. But we have had maybe a watch party for a World Cup game in the past, and then what could be a potentially big game. Let's say the game ends at four or five, and a soccer game is that night. We could put it on the scoreboard and let people watch. There are things where you can quickly turn the building over on a large scale and on a smaller scale. We often do things in the morning of an evening game when there's an opportunity to use some of the ancillary spaces and venues within the ballpark.

USAE: How much fun is it to have a venue like Oracle Park to sell to clients?

Revetria: It's incredible. It's a dream. It's become a passion. We like to say in the office that we're in the fun business. We're in the entertainment business. We're in the sports business. We're in the hospitality business. And it's the convergence of all of these



events and opportunities that makes it fun and exciting. We're not selling four walls inside of a hotel. We're outdoors, indoors—great views. We're one of 30 Major League Ballparks in the country. It's 30 of us. It's really special, and I feel so grateful for being in the position that I am and have been for decades now.

USAE: What is the number one question you receive when someone is inquiring about hosting an event at Oracle Park?

Revetria: The building is built for 42,000 people. When dealing with meeting planners, convention planners, small intimate dinners, people think it's so vast. Does my little group of 200 people fit? Are we going feel out of place and is that going to make us uncomfortable?

I'll say just the contrary. Sit on a field and have a dinner on second base with 100 people at a long table—that's pretty incredible. It's a wow! It is something not everybody gets to do in their lifetime, and to be able to create those types of experiences is wonderful.

We do these fantasy bating practices where we create an experience that's second to none. We bring in alumni players and allow people to run the bases and have a game, use the scoreboard, put their employees names up on the scoreboard. That's pretty incredible. There's not a lot of places you can do that. You can make an 18-to-25-person event feel really grand in a space like this and not feel intimidated, even though it is built for 42,000 people.

USAE: Please share a few of the events people would be surprised to hear that have been hosted at the stadium.

Revetria: We've had so many, honestly, but I there are some that are special. Opera at the Ballpark

happens to be one of my favorites, and that's because we partnered with the San Francisco Opera now for 20 years. A simulcast with the very best Dolby sound, we have literally 25,000–35,000 people who come at experience the opera. You think it's a black tie and fancy and stuffy, but we create this evening every year that is so easy, and they can picnic on the grass and we encourage that. We encourage people sit in the stands and watch. It's magical. It's been really special collaboration.

We've had some really touching moments too. Willie Mays's memorial was last summer.

Just to sit there with President Bill Clinton eulogizing him with other incredible players, like Barry Bonds and people from around the country and world coming in, it was special. You sit there on the field and reflect on how sport can really bring people together, and how an incredible player who's been so active in the community and has done so much really can be inspiring.

USAE: Do you plan events for possible playoff dates?

Revetria: There are large events that come to San Francisco on an annual basis using Moscone Center or the hotels, and they want to use the ballpark at any time for any reason. What we'll do is issue a contract that has in very large bold writing that this is subject to baseball's playoff schedule and we have the right to cancel. We'll refund you your money and will be as fair as possible. But people take a chance. It may be there only opportunity to do something like this. Maybe it's an association with people flying in from around the world, and they think this is a pretty iconic place. They're willing to take that chance and then have the hotel ballroom as the backup.



Carol McGury, Retired Executive Vice President, Event & Education Services, Smithbucklin, accepts her Lifetime Achievement Award during the PCMA Foundation's Visionary Awards at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C., on April 10.

NEWS

Springfield, Illinois, Hotel Closure Prompts Collaboration to Accommodate Groups

By Jordan Bradley

On March 27, local fire and safety officials were called to the Wyndham Springfield City Centre hotel in Springfield, Illinois, not to address a fire, but in response to significant flooding and damage to the property’s elevator system, according to local officials.

After inspections, officials deemed the property unsafe for guests and shuttered its doors for an undetermined amount of time.

“We are in contact, along with other City agencies, with the Wyndham staff to see they understand the issues and we will do what we can to assist in seeing they take the steps needed to return the hotel for safe condition for

overnight occupancy,” said Chief Ed Canny with the Springfield Fire Department, according to local news outlets.

In the wake of the incident, local tourism professionals and community officials have banded together to ensure a smooth experience for groups and events that had been booked at the Wyndham, which sits across the street from the Springfield BOS Convention Center.

According to Scott Dahl, Director of Visit Springfield, the situation has caused challenges, but with almost 4,000 hotel rooms and a collective 400,000 square feet of meeting space in the city, none of the events have needed to cancel or move to other cities.

“While the temporary closure is hard, there’s still plenty of guest room and meeting room options in the city of Springfield for convention meetings and major travelers,” Dahl told USAE.

As soon as the organization found out about the Wyndham’s closure, “we assembled the team and reached out” to groups booked between the date of the closure and the next 90 to 120 days to rearrange their bookings, Dahl said.

In collaboration with the Springfield Hotel and Lodging Association (SHLA), Dahl and the Visit Springfield team have successfully relocated more than a dozen groups—“and more every day,” he said—to other properties in the area, organizing and providing transportation wherever necessary.

“What makes it possible for us to make this pivot is really our tourism partners,” Dahl said, including SHLA. “The city of Springfield have been very supportive. Mayor Misty Buscher pledged her full support on relocating the conventions and meetings as needed, so really it’s a team effort—and I’ll brag on our team: we have 200 years of tourism experience at Visit Springfield, so we haven’t panicked.”

Dahl also pointed to established relationships of trust within the Springfield meetings and events community as reason for the quick pivot.

“The other side of it is we have years of relationships with the meeting planners,” Dahl said. “Most of the

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ASAE Fellows

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Prior to her position at the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) and Radio Television Digital News Foundation (RTDNF), Puckey served as the Society of Professional Journalists’ (SPJ) interim executive director, associate executive director and membership strategist. In 2018, she was named to Association Forum’s Forty Under 40 class. Her ASAE resume include serving as vice chair of the Executive Management Professionals Advisory Council.

Urena was the director of professional development for the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), before arriving at the Endocrine Society in 2019. He is a 2017 Forty Under 40 honoree and an ASAE Power of A Silver Award honoree. He has written or contributed to a variety of ASAE offerings.

Urena said: “To say I’m humbled is an understatement—it’s truly an honor to join ASAE Fellows, a group I’ve long respected. I am confident that together as a field, we can take actions to make



Tara Puckey

the world a safer, smarter, healthier, and stronger place for all. This philosophy is core to ASAE Fellows, and I’m ready and excited to roll up my sleeves and do my part.”

Walker spent more than three decades within the industry working across the globe before retiring earlier this year. MCI said in January she was remaining with the company part-time as a strategic advisor consultant to support further key global clients’



Christopher Urena

transitions. A speaker and regular content contributor, in April 2023 she opened up to Women Who Advance Associations on the topic of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Wolowiec has north of two decades of association experience. A certified Technology of Participation (ToP) facilitator and mentor trainer, he is also a CMP Fellow. He has contributed to a variety of publications, including with ASAE, has presented at events



Aaron Wolowiec

hosted by MPI amongst others and has been honored by groups including the Events Industry Council.

“Becoming a Fellow has been a long-time goal—not for the title, but for what it represents: a call to continued service as a mentor, thought partner, author, and leader,” Wolowiec said. “I’m excited (and a little in awe) to be in community with such a brilliant, passionate, and diverse group of changemakers shaping the future of our field.”



Christina Lewellen



Nikki Walker

Stay Connected

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Women Leading the Way

AFWA's Cindy Stanley Leads With Equal Passion for Associations and Accounting

By Jordan Bradley

Reflecting on her more than 20-year career working with associations, Cindy Stanley, CAE, Executive Director of the Accounting & Financial Women's Alliance (AFWA), tells *USAE* that she's come full circle.

After the Wisconsin native graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire with a degree in general business and accounting coursework, Stanley started working part-time for an accountant. Of course, part-time work wasn't paying the bills, Stanley said, so she took another part-time gig with an association.

"It launched a whole new career for me," Stanley said. "So now I tell people that I've come full circle, because I'm working in accounting, and in my favorite field—which is association management. So it worked out really nice for me."

Prior to joining AFWA—which is managed by Stanley through Associations International, an association management company—in February 2018, Stanley held roles at several associations, including executive vice president at the Central Palm Beach County Association of Realtors for a little more than two and a half years, executive vice president of the Metropolitan Association of Realtors of Milwaukee and Waukesha Counties for more than seven years, and executive vice president of the Northern Kentucky Association of Realtors for almost 10 years. She has held the role of executive director at AFWA for more than seven years.

For Stanley, the most exciting part of working with an association is "having all the plates in the air, being able to work on so many different things at one time, and just being able to help an organization meet its goals," she told *USAE*.

Throughout her career, Stanley has participated in a myriad of leadership training. Alongside strategic planning, it's an aspect of association management that she absolutely loves.

"A true leader listens. They support," Stanley said. "And to me, leadership is really about creating an environment where individuals feel valued and where they can thrive—where their contributions really matter. It's

really both about being a guide and a collaborator."

AFWA was established in 1938 "to increase opportunities for women in all fields of accounting and finance," according to the association's official webpage. The association has 57 chapters across the United States and 1,160 members.

"I really love the whole organization right now," Stanley said. "I'm just very passionate about supporting women in finance and accounting and that led me to pursue this job."

Stanley's mindset aligns with a major focus for AFWA: expanding the number of women accountants who reach partner roles in their firms through community support and education.

Every year since 2010, the association has produced the Move Project, which tracks statistics related to women in accounting and how successful they are in finding and achieving partner roles. In 2010, only 17% of women working as accountants at a firm were partners, and today that's at 34%.

"Today, we're at about 34%," she said.

Because of the AFWA's foundation in gender equity among accountants, Stanley and her cohorts at AFWA are watching the changes to diversity, equity and inclusion policies at federal levels in the wake of Trump administration policies closely.

"That's something that I think is really challenging right now," Stanley said. "We're a little bit concerned with some of the DEI initiatives going away. Everybody's wondering how is that going to shake out? Is it going to affect the role women play in those positions?"

From Stanley's perspective, "society has changed" for the better – though she fully acknowledges the concern.

"I think one of the things that is encouraging is that businesses today are seeing that by having a diverse workforce, they are more successful," Stanley said, noting that there is

"I really love the whole organization right now," Stanley said. "I'm just very passionate about supporting women in finance and accounting and that led me to pursue this job."

"I think one of the things that is encouraging is that businesses today are seeing that by having a diverse workforce, they are more successful," Stanley said, noting that there is some statistical data to support her perspective.



some statistical data to support her perspective.

Still, the changes at the federal level have led to changes in that sponsors have had to change the way they budget support for the association, Stanley said.

"However, we're finding they still want to work with us, but they're working with us from a little bit of a different angle now, and so I don't think that's going to impact us all that much," she said.

As the dust settles around DEI, Stanley said that AFWA will continue to watch what happens and look for ways to mitigate any negative fall-out while continuing to serve and advocate for members and their interests.

"We're still trying to push forward with those things, because we feel that

it is important to still advocate to a certain extent for that equity," Stanley said.

As part of its offerings, AFWA is continuing to set up leadership train-

ings for members, and encouraging participation.

"It's really fun to watch people grow [through the trainings]," Stanley said.

The leadership trainings, she explained, teach women to stand up for themselves, and to recognize situations where gender plays a role in their mistreatment in professional settings, Stanley said. The association also offers a mentorship program, and women walk away from AFWA conferences feeling "so welcome," she said.

The association's 2025 Connect. Advance. Lead. Conference is set for June 25-27 in Cincinnati, Ohio, something Stanley looks forward to, she said, as AFWA has expanded the conference to include more chapter leadership training.

The association also recently revamped its education portal and offerings, and has turned focus to its mentorship program, an offering that Stanley said is important.

For Stanley, a tenant of leadership is knowing that there is no single right answer to a situation or problem.

"When you can get people to believe in themselves and believe that there's more than one right answer, helping them create that journey for themselves – to me, that is just very exciting," Stanley said.

Scene at PCMA Foundation Visionary Awards



NEWS

Destinations International Releases Destination Reputation Research

By Jonathan Trager

Destinations International (DI) has unveiled a comprehensive research

study that provides insight and guidance for destination organizations into how reputation, public sentiment, and societal issues influence meeting and event planners when selecting destinations.

The study titled “Destination Reputation: Responding to Societal Issues” was released on April 9 in collaboration with research firm Future Partners and with support from the DI Foundation.

“As global dynamics become increasingly complex, destination organizations must navigate a range of challenges affecting how they are perceived by visitors and event professionals,” according to DI.

“As global dynamics become increasingly complex, destination organizations must navigate a range of challenges affecting how they

are perceived by visitors and event professionals,” according to DI. “These include political climates, social issues, natural disasters and public safety concerns. This new research aims to help destination leaders better understand these influences and respond with informed, strategic actions that enhance destination appeal and

economic opportunity.”

“This study reinforces the important

role destination organizations play in community and economic development,” said Don Welsh, President & CEO of DI. “Understanding how societal factors shape perception is essential for destinations to stay competitive in the global meetings and events marketplace.”

The study employed a multi-method research design that included an online survey of 400 meeting planners, in-depth interviews with 12 planners, and a nationally representative survey of 967 adult American meeting travelers.

Key insights are that safety and politics are critical considerations, transparency builds trust, marketing and incentives must be strategic, collaboration strengthens results, and planners should be supported in advocating for the destination. Each is

expounded upon in the study.

“The Destinations International Foundation is proud to support research that provides both insights and actionable guidance for destination organizations,” said Amir Eylon, President & CEO of Longwoods International and Chair of the DI Foundation. “This study reflects our commitment to fostering innovation and resilience across the global tourism and meetings sector.”

Erin Francis-Cummings, President & CEO of Future Partners, applauded the foundation “for supporting this timely study to help destination leaders

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Hotel Closure

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conventions, meetings and groups that are scheduled in 2025 have been meeting in Springfield for years, so we have those relationships built up, and they trust us. We’ve worked hard to relocate them.”

At press deadline, it was as yet unclear what transpired, but local officials have reported that the incident at the Wyndham is being treated as an intentional act of vandalism, and have posted rewards for credible information leading to an arrest.

In a statement to local outlet News Channel 20, the Wyndham City Centre expressed its “deepest apologies” for the incident, noting that the property and its staff are fully cooperating with local law enforcement to uncover the “details of what occurred.”

“Our primary concern is the safety and well-being of our guests and staff,” the statement read. “We understand this has impacted those with in-house stays and future reservations, and we sincerely regret any inconvenience this has caused. We are working hard to resolve the situation as quickly as possible and look forward to welcoming our guests back very soon.”

Dahl is well-versed in Illinois hospitality: he managed hotels for 10 years, spent 16 years with the Illinois Hotel and Lodging Association and has been serving as Director of Visit Springfield for the last six years. During those years, he has encountered unexpected hotel closures before—though the circumstances of the Wyndham Springfield City Centre are unique, he said.

“Certainly in my 30-year career, I haven’t seen anything quite like this,” Dahl said. “We’ve seen hotels close before and taken out of the supply, so that’s not unusual, but not quite this way. But I think it goes back to having that experience, having that network in place, [and] having great tourism partners.”

— OBITUARY —

Loretta DeLuca, DelCor’s Founder & CEO, Dies

Association Advocate Served on ASAE, Association Forum Boards

By Todd McElwee

Loretta Monterastelli DeLuca, FASAE, DelCor’s Founder & CEO, died on April 3 after a prolonged struggle with cancer. She was 63.

Expressing the firm’s “unprecedented sadness,” Dave Coriale, President, DelCor, said: “Loretta’s entrepreneurial spirit started immediately after graduating from The University of Maryland when she started a software development business, PC Innovators. In 1984, she co-founded Business Information Technologies, Inc., which would later become DelCor. Her contributions to our company, community, and lives have created a shared legacy we all treasure.

A truly extraordinary individual respected by all, Loretta has been honored with our community’s most prestigious awards.”

DeLuca was a respected, well-regarded and highly visible leader within the association sector. Generous with her time, she served on the boards of both ASAE and Association Forum. She also chaired the ASAE Key Consultants Committee and Technology Council and was a member of the Forum’s Technology Advisory Task Force. Involvement also included work with the ASAE Power of A Summit Awards, Forum’s WE Welcome Committee and



Loretta DeLuca

Canadian Society of Association Executives’ Technology Advisory Group.

Posting on Instagram, ASAE called DeLuca a “beloved member of the ASAE community and a true champion for associations.” The association added: “She was a passionate leader, a generous mentor, and a dear friend to so many. Loretta’s contributions to ASAE were immense.”

A few of DeLuca’s series of honors include ASAE’s Academy of Leaders Award, Association Forum’s John C.

Thiel Distinguished Service Award and Association Women Technology Champion’s “Badass” Award. Michelle Mills Clement, FASAE, CAE, Chair of Association Forum, called her a “a beacon of light and strength in our community.”

Artesha Moore, FASAE, CAE, President & CEO of Association Forum, said: “Loretta’s legacy is one of unwavering dedication and heartfelt mentorship. Her impact on the Association Forum and the broader community will be felt for generations. She truly embodied the spirit of service and leadership.”

DeLuca was born on June 17, 1961, in Washington, D.C., to the late Dorina Corsini and Giuseppe Monterastelli. She graduated from the University of Maryland.

DeLuca is survived by her daughter Michela, fiancé Mike Evans, father Giuseppe and others family members. Francis J. Collins Funeral Home provided the information.

A celebration of life was held on April 8 at Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Potomac, Maryland.

The family asks for any donations to be directed to Children’s National Children’s Hospital in Washington, D.C., where she served on the board of visitors.

NEWS

AHLA Network Partners with Japanese Association to Improve Hospitality Tech

By Jordan Bradley

The American Hotel and Lodging Association's (AHLA) announced on April 9 that its Hospitality Technology Next Generation (HTNG) network is partnering with the Japan Hospitality Technology Association (JHTA) to help Japanese hotels improve technology efficiency to make for better guest experiences.

The JHTA was created last month to promote data standardization in hospitality in Japan, AHLA said.

"HTNG's mission is to put the collective wisdom of hospitality technology leaders to work in solving common problems and unlocking global business potential," said David Sjolander, CAE, Vice President of AHLA for HTNG Operations. "Our collaboration with JHTA represents a major advance in that mission."

The alliance between HTNG and JHTA was announced at the HTNG Connect: Asia-Pacific 2025 meeting held April 8–10 in Bangkok, Thailand.

As part of the collaboration, JHTA will translate HTNG's global technology operations standards from English to Japanese. The association also plans to create its own standard technology extensions to serve the needs of Japanese businesses and hotels in order to "improve efficiency and make guest experiences more seamless and consistent," AHLA said.

"Our collaboration with AHLA, representing hotel and lodging industry in the United States, will enhance our interoperability with global standards," said Yuuki Kameoka, Director of JHTA. "We are thrilled to reinforce the international competitiveness of the Japanese Lodging and Tourism industry."



Representatives from AHLA, HTNG and JHTA attended the HTNG Connect: Asia-Pacific 2025 meeting in Bangkok, Thailand from April 8-10 where they announced an alliance. Pictured from left: Sandy Angel, Senior Director of Technology & Information, AHLA; Yuuki Kameoka, Director, JHTA; and David Sjolander, CAE, Vice President of AHLA for HTNG Operations.

DI Business

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deepen their understanding of factors impacting destination reputation among meeting planners."

"Safety concerns, political issues and societal problems significantly influence planners' decisions, with the research showing that four-in-five reconsider destinations based on these factors," said Francis-Cummings. "The study findings underscore the importance of proactive communication, honesty and continued marketing in addressing these issues to maintain a positive reputation and

attract group meetings."

Based on the research findings, destination organizations are encouraged to develop and distribute planner toolkits with data sheets, case studies, and messaging support; host familiarization trips and create opportunities for peer-to-peer learning; align marketing efforts with community progress and transformation; collaborate across sectors to ensure a consistent and welcoming visitor experience; and maintain long-term engagement strategies with planners and stakeholders.

The full report and other resources are available at destinationsinternational.org/destination-reputation.



The Mohegan Sun in Uncasville, Connecticut in partnership with A.T.Y Hospitality held a grand opening ceremony on April 8 to celebrate the debut of its Sift Bake Shop and A.T.Y Bar & Bonbons. The Sift Bake Shop is a 2,930 square-foot bakery featuring artisanal breads, breakfast pastries, and sweet and savory treats. The A.T.Y Bar & Bonbons sit adjacent in the Mohegan Sun offering guests crafted cocktails, wine and house-made chocolate bonbons.

Around Associations

AMPs Golf Tournament Around the Corner... On April 30, the Association of Meeting Professionals' (AMPs) Golf Tournament will be held at Old Hickory Golf Course in Woodbridge, Virginia.

AMPs is partnering with Experience Grand Rapids for the Planner/Supplier Challenge, benefiting a local pet rescue organization.

"Join us in supporting high-risk animals in need by donating pet food or making a financial contribution at Hole #16," the association said. "Your generosity will help provide care and find homes for cats, dogs, and other species. Experience Grand Rapids proudly supports pet-friendly initiatives in Beer City USA, and together, we can make a difference for animals in need."

More information is available at ampsweb.org.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Report Highlights Concerns of Small Businesses... Findings from the first quarter MetLife and U.S. Chamber of Commerce Small Business Index showed small business owners are losing confidence across measures of business health, cash flow, and increases in staff. Notably, concern for revenue increased by 10 percentage points to 35%, reaching the highest level of concern since Q3 2021 (34%), when tracking of this measure began. Concern for inflation reached a new high with 58% reporting it as a top concern this quarter.

The overall Small Business Index score, a measure of small business confidence, dropped to 62.3 this quar-

ter from 69.1, falling back in line with where sentiment stood one year ago in Q1 2024 (62.3). Despite the drop, views of the U.S. economy and local economies remained stable.

"The data is clear, confidence is being shaken as small businesses increasingly worry about their revenue while at the same time confronting the possibility that tariffs will raise costs for them and their employees," said Tom Sullivan, Vice President of Small Business Policy, U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "But while measures related to revenue and cash flow dipped, other underlying indicators such as hiring plans, investment plans, and overall confidence in the economy remain strong. The prospect of tax and regulatory relief may be buoying optimism amid uncertainty."

According to the results of the survey, conducted from January 28 to February 14, 66% of small businesses are comfortable with their cash flow, down six points from last quarter. Confidence in business health dropped from 67% last quarter to 63% in Q1 2025. One in five small businesses report having increased staff in the past year, a slight dip from Q4 2024's 22%.

"Honestly there is confusion right now as to what is happening with the local economy, and I am not comfortable as a business owner," said Michelle Mekky, Founder & President of Mekky Media Relations in Chicago. "We saw sales holding before the election and then it picked back up, but things have started to slow a bit with customers holding back on spending."

Find the complete report at uschamber.com.

THE FINAL WORD

Where Vision Meets Action: The Power and Impact of BEIW

By Emily Scheiderer, Sr. Director of Education, Sales and Services, Destinations International

In today's rapidly evolving global landscape, the business events industry plays a vital role in shaping economic outcomes, driving community impact and fostering innovation.

Business Events Industry Week (BEIW) stands as a beacon for what's

possible when visionaries across the sector come together to take meaningful action. Launched in 2020 through a partnership between PCMA and Destinations International, BEIW has become much more than an annual event—it's a movement to redefine the future of business events. It has come to include participation from

leading organizations, including the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), International Association of Exhibitions & Events (IAEE), Events Industry Council (EIC), National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals (NCBMP) and International LGBTQ Meeting Professionals Association (IGBT MPA).

At its core, BEIW is a collaborative platform where bold ideas, inclusive leadership and cross-sector partnerships converge. It serves as a rallying point for destination organizations, event strategists, associations and corporate leaders to align on shared goals: creating inclusive experiences, advancing sustainability, empowering the workforce and unlocking the full value of face-to-face engagement.

The strategic collaboration between Destinations International and PCMA reflects a shared commitment to positioning destinations not simply as venues, but also as essential co-creators of impactful experiences.

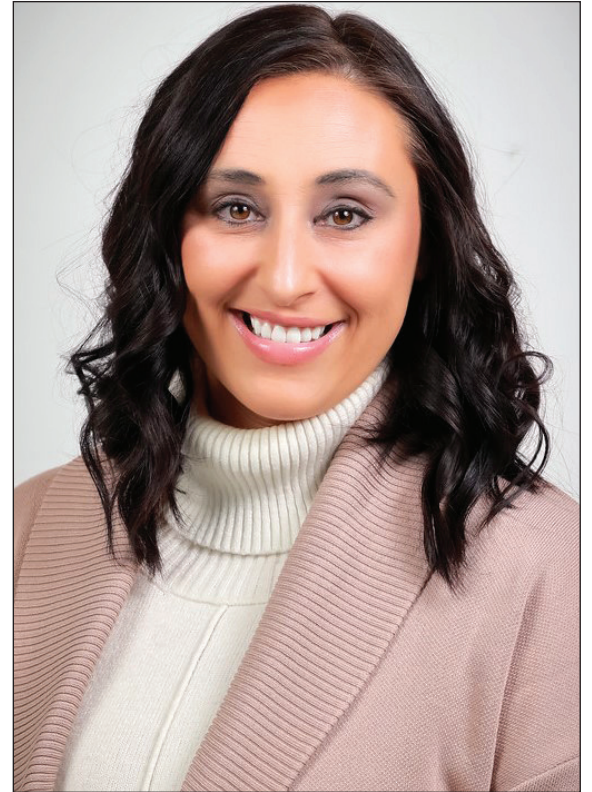
The strategic collaboration between Destinations International and PCMA reflects a shared commitment to positioning destinations not simply as venues, but also as essential co-creators of impactful experiences. These efforts aim to elevate the destination's role in event strategy—showcasing how place, purpose and people intersect to create lasting legacies and economic growth.

Today's reality is that no single sector can solve today's complex challenges alone. Events don't happen in a vacuum; they require an ecosystem of committed collaborators, from planners to policymakers, from desti-

nation marketers to local communities. BEIW has played an important role in signaling a new era of industry leadership grounded in shared purpose and united action.

Together, we have been able to create a week of focus on the events industry. PCMA's forward-thinking approach to business events strategy, content innovation and global education blends seamlessly with Destinations International's expertise in destination stewardship, advocacy and community alignment. This synergy has allowed BEIW to evolve into a week-long experience that combines learning, celebration and connection with real-world application.

The programming at BEIW is intentionally curated to reflect the pressing issues of our time. From immersive workshops on social impact to leadership summits addressing



sustainable growth and workforce development, the content is both aspirational and actionable. Each session is designed to challenge assumptions, inspire innovation and equip attendees with tools they can bring back to their communities.

For Destinations International, BEIW also has presented an opportunity to emphasize the critical role destination organizations play in shaping meaningful event experiences. These organizations are uniquely positioned at the intersection of community, commerce and culture. In an environment where public perception, funding models and stakeholder expectations are all evolving, destination leaders must be empowered with not only tools, but also with trusted allies and transformative insights. BEIW delivers both, and this year our Convention Sales & Services Summit contributed through a focus on "Leading at All Levels."

What makes BEIW truly powerful is its ability to spark momentum and catalyze change. It's where we turn shared ambition into measurable progress. It's where we transform strategy into stewardship and challenges into opportunities. It's where vision meets action.

In a world that is hungry for purpose and connection, BEIW reminds us that our industry has the power not just to recover, but also to reimagine what's possible when we work together, with clarity and conviction.

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NEWS

Ask the Expert: Why the Lake George Area is a Top Choice for Conferences and Corporate Retreats

Featuring Gina Mintzer, CMP, MHA, Executive Director of the Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce & CVB



waterfront events and historic meeting spaces to team-building adventures that align with your organization's goals.

Q: What are some activities for groups during business travel?

A: One of the greatest advantages of hosting an event in the Lake George Area is the opportunity to blend business with leisure. Groups can enjoy a range of [outdoor activities](#) such as scenic boat cruises, guided hikes with panoramic views,

or time on the lake with kayaking and paddleboarding. For team-building, there are exciting options like ziplining, horseback riding, rail biking, and boating excursions that provide fun and engaging ways to build camaraderie. Attendees looking to relax will find plenty of ways to unwind, whether that's through a day at the spa, a tour of a local winery or brewery, or shopping at the more than 50 designer outlets and local boutiques in the area. The region also boasts a [lively calendar](#) of entertainment and events throughout the year, including festivals, fireworks, and live music, such as the Adirondack Wine & Food Festival and the Lake George Music Festival.

Q: Why is the Lake George Area a great place to host a company conference or retreat?

A: The [Lake George Area](#) is an exceptional destination for corporate retreats, association conferences, and educational gatherings. It offers a unique blend of natural beauty, modern amenities, and accessibility that sets it apart. The inspiring Adirondack setting encourages creativity and collaboration, providing a backdrop that naturally supports team bonding and productivity. Planners will find a wide [variety of accommodations](#) to choose from, including luxury resorts and charming waterfront hotels, allowing flexibility for different group sizes, preferences, and budgets. Conveniently located in the foothills of the Adirondacks, the Lake George region is [easily accessible](#) from major Northeast cities like New York, Boston, and

Montreal. With walkable downtown areas, historic trolleys, and ample parking, it's a destination that's easy to navigate and enjoy for both planners and attendees.

Q: What types of gatherings can the region accommodate?

A: The Lake George Area is well-equipped to host a broad range of gatherings, from intimate leadership retreats to large-scale conferences and incentive trips. Groups of 10 to more than 500 can be comfortably accommodated in the region's array of [meeting spaces and unique venues](#). Whether you're planning a formal business conference or a more relaxed incentive getaway, the Lake George Regional Convention & Visitors Bureau offers personalized support to help create tailored experiences. These can include everything from catered



About the Expert:

Gina Mintzer, CMP, MHA, is the Executive Director of the Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce & Convention and Visitors Bureau. In her role, she is responsible for the strategic development of tourism initiatives that support the region's economic growth. Gina is active in several tourism and business organizations at the local, state, and national levels, including the New York State Hospitality & Tourism Association, New York State Destination Marketing Organization, and the Empire State Society of Association Executives (ESSAE). She also works closely with SUNY Adirondack and SUNY Delhi, supporting tourism and business education in the region. Her passion for promoting the Lake George Area makes her a valuable resource for planners looking to



bring their events to this dynamic destination.

website: meetlakegeorge.com

Social:

LinkedIn: Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce & CVB

Facebook and IG: [@meetlakegeorge](#)



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