



The Asian American Hotel and Lodging Association (AAHOA) hosted its annual conference, AAHOACON25, at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center from April 15–17. AAHOA representatives kicked off the event with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Left to right: Pinal S. Patel, Secretary, AAHOA; Rahul Patel, Treasurer, AAHOA; Miraj S. Patel, Chairman, AAHOA; Kamallesh (KP) Patel, Vice Chairman, AAHOA; and Laura Lee Blake, President & CEO, AAHOA.

Dan Williams Tapped to Lead Greater Birmingham CVB

By Jonathan Trager

Dan Williams, a 27-year veteran of the tourism and hospitality industry, has been appointed President & CEO of the Greater Birmingham CVB (GBCVB) in Alabama.

Williams, who currently serves as Chief Sales Officer for Experience Columbus in Ohio, will officially assume his new role on June 1. He succeeds retiring CVB leader John Oros.

"I am extremely excited for this new endeavor and honored to lead the tourism efforts for Birmingham and Jefferson County," said Williams. "The momentum here is tangible, and I look forward to building on the outstanding foundation and impact that John and the GBCVB team have established."

Williams, 52, told *USAE* he has family who lives in the Birmingham area and he loves the destination's "resilience and innovation."

"It's one of those cities where the heritage and civil rights legacy attracted me," said Williams. "It's a destination that's up and coming with its arts and food scene. I see

Please turn to page 7

Destinations International and Foundation Release 2024 Annual Reports

By Jonathan Trager

Destinations International (DI) and the DI Foundation have issued their 2024 Annual Reports, revealing significant growth in participation and productivity, the organization announced on April 17.

"Our annual reports reflect more than organizational progress, they capture a growing international

movement of destination leaders who are helping their communities thrive through travel and tourism," said Don Welsh, President & CEO of DI.

DI 2024 Annual Report highlights include:

- Membership grew to 755 member organizations across 32 countries and territories, including 91 new and reengaged members. This represents

a total of more than 8,000 individual members and partners. This association had a 94.3% retention rate for members.

- A new partnership model was launched at the end of 2024 to maximize alignment with the long-term strategic goals of DI, its members, and partners. Seven new partners joined during the year, bringing the

Please turn to page 3

IAEE's Women's Leadership Forum Coming Next Week

By Todd McElwee

Designed to "focus on topics that are unique to women in the exhibitions and events industry," IAEE's Women's Leadership Forum (WLF) will take place at the MGM National Harbor in Prince George's County, Maryland, from May 1–2.

IAEE noted the event will provide knowledge and strategies for attendees to succeed in their current positions, as well as motivation and inspiration to take their careers to the next level.

A trio of presentations have been highlighted on

the event's website. The former include Fear[less]ly Forward, Future Forward: Work Culture and AI, and Bring Yourself & Negotiate Fearlessly—A Conversation with Mori Taheripour.

Dr. Rebecca Heiss, a tenured speaker and stress physiologist, will dive into the transformative power of channeling fear and stress to propel one forward in Fear[less]ly Forward.

"Using science-based insights and practical resources to unlock the potential of fear and anxiety, you'll discover insights into

Please turn to page 5

Inside



Page 3

Page 2
Union Workers on Strike at
Caesars Southern Indiana

Page 4
First Hyatt Studios Hotel Opens
in Mobile

Page 4
Mitch Pally Becomes Interim
Head of Discover Long Island

Page 5
HSMIA Opens Grant Applications
for Student Success

TravelAbility and USAE Partner to Conduct Accessibility Study

By Jordan Bradley

TravelAbility, a leading travel accessibility solutions association, and *USAE* are partnering to conduct a study focused on accessibility in the meetings, incentives, conventions and events (MICE) sectors.

The study—dubbed the MICE Study—takes a comprehensive look at accessibility within the meetings and events industries today, posing 13 specific questions to meeting planners, hotels and destination marketing organizations (DMOs).

Questions are focused

around how many requests for accessibility services and accommodations a meeting planner, venue or destination has received in the last year.

"What we're trying to determine is, really, what are the most important accommodations that people can provide, and how much will those accommodations cost—because that's always a big factor," said Jake Steinman, Founder and CEO of TravelAbility.

The survey also takes a look at whether including a page of information on

Please turn to page 2

NEWS

Union Workers Strike at Caesars Southern Indiana

By Jordan Bradley

More than 140 union workers at the Caesars Southern Indiana Hotel & Casino in Elizabeth, Indiana, walked off the job on April 14, the Teamsters Local 89 union announced.

The union said the strike is the result of the company's failure to "offer a fair contract that matches the property's record-breaking profits."

Local 89, a Louisville-based union representing more than 18,000 workers in the region across several industries, including gaming and hospitality, said the strike followed the reopening of the property after a 10-day closure due to flooding on site.

The union also said that the hotel-casinos owners and operators, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), has reported more than \$240 million in revenue in 2024, making it one of the most profitable properties in Indiana.

"We're going to hold management accountable for their greed and blatant disrespect," said Avral Thompson,

President of Local 89. "It's time for the people who run this casino to recognize the workers who make their profits possible. We'll do whatever it takes to win what our members deserve."

Negotiations have stalled between EBCI and Local 89 after months of back and forth over retirement benefits, pay increases, and "other critical economic issues."

"None of us wanted to strike, but management forced our hand," said Heather Emily, a cage cashier at Caesars Southern Indiana. "All we're asking for is the ability to support our families and retire with dignity. This property makes more than enough money to do right by us."

Union General Secretary-Treasurer Fred Zuckerman said: "The Teamsters won't back down. Our members are united, and we won't stop until they get what they've earned. This strike is the direct result of corporate greed and indifference."

A Caesars Southern Indiana representative did not return *USAE* request



Union members protest outside the Caesars Southern Indiana Casino & Hotel in Elizabeth, Indiana, on April 14.

for comment by press deadline.

However, the casino-hotel shared a statement to local news outlets and casino.org that said the property was negotiating with the union in good faith.

"Caesars Southern Indiana remains committed to the collective bargaining

process and continues to negotiate in good faith with union representatives," the statement said. "Caesars Southern Indiana looks forward to continuing productive discussions and remains optimistic about reaching a mutually beneficial agreement in the near future."

AAHOA Establishes Two New Partnerships to Benefit Hoteliers and Members

By Jordan Bradley

The Asian American Hotel and Lodging Association (AAHOA) has launched partnerships to create a new lending platform and investigate national policy impact on the hotel industry.

The AAHOALending.com platform, made possible through a new partnership with Bridge on April 14, was created "in response to [the] growing challenges in securing financing" that hoteliers are facing today, AAHOA said.

Bridge, a leading fintech plat-

form, connects hotel owners and developers with a network of diverse lenders. Through its partnership with AAHOA will connect AAHOA members with more than 150 lenders.

"The launch of AAHOALending.com is a game-changer for AAHOA Members," said Laura Lee Blake, President & CEO of AAHOA. "Bridge's commitment to innovation aligns perfectly with AAHOA's mission to support our members with the best resources available. We are excited to see how this new platform will empower our mem-

bers to access the capital they need to succeed."

The association also noted that Bridge is planning to add more lenders "regularly to maintain a competitive edge."

Through the lending platform, AAHOA members will be able to compare financing options side-by-side, find the best rates, and secure their funding in one place.

According to Patel, the partnership was "featured prominently" at AAHOA's annual conference, AAHOACON25 held April 15-17 in New Orleans.

As part of the partnership, AAHOA said that members will be able to connect with Bridge representatives at more than 200 events each year, including town halls, and hotel owners conferences and trade shows.

"We're thrilled to partner with AAHOA to bring innovative lending solutions to their 20,000+ members," said Rohit Mathur, Co-Founder and CEO of Bridge. "This partnership highlights the strength of our technology and reinforces our commitment to continuously evolve."

Please turn to page 5

TravelAbility

continued from page 1

accessibility in a destination's bid book can benefit both meeting planners and DMOs, Steinman said.

"It might be a differentiator in being able to get business," he said, noting that accessibility is "where sustainability was four years ago."

As part of the partnership with *USAE*, the MICE survey will be distributed via email to *USAE*'s more than 63,000 subscribers, said *USAE*'s publisher, James Heller.

"*USAE* is honored to partner with TravelAbility with this important survey on the state of accessibility within the meetings travel and tourism industry," said Heller. "The survey is

being sent to *USAE*'s list of 60,000 subscribers, which contains corporate decision makers, meeting planner professionals, hotel sales & marketing executives, and DMOs from around the country. Hearing directly from those on the front lines, will shed light on some of the difficulties planners may face when booking meetings with concerns to different disabilities, where improvements may be needed, and lead to further conversation on how to improve the overall experience for all attendees."

A study from the Center for Talent Innovation found "approximately 30% of white collar employees identify as having a disability," Steinman said.

If conferences, trade shows, meetings and events are not accommodating to a wide variety of disabilities, employees

who need those accommodations opt out of critical networking and continuing education events due to a lack of accessibility, thereby missing out on crucial opportunities for advancement in their fields, Steinman added.

"Accessibility for the MICE industry is really all about this advancement," Steinman told *USAE*. "People with disabilities hesitate to go to meetings and the reason they're hesitant is because meetings aren't set up for them, or they don't know they're set up for them. So that's the impetus behind [the study]. It's really about helping people with disabilities get promoted, and have the same opportunities as everybody else."

Visit Lansing CEO Julie Pingston said the information garnered from the survey would help the DMO better

accommodate visitors and conference, event and meetings attendees.

"As a meetings and events destination, we are seeing more and more requests from our meetings industry professionals for information related to accessibility for their attendees," Pingston said. "The findings from this study will allow our destination to focus our efforts to ensure we have the resources and information available for our visitors and guests now and into the future."

Steinman said the survey will be open for the next three weeks. TravelAbility is hoping to receive at least 500 responses from industry professionals in order to gain enough insight to publish a complete study.

To complete the survey, visit survey-monkey.com/r/J6PT6VG.

HOTS

HOTS Book Brigade... The town of Chelsea, Michigan, gathered about 300 of its residents to help a local bookshop move every one of its 9,100 books to a new storefront about a block away on April 13, the Associated Press reports. Serendipity Books' Book Brigade formed two lines on either side of the street and passed each title from one hand to the next beginning inside the store at its original location on East Middle Street down the block and around the corner to a new shop on Main Street. The bookshop's owner, Michelle Tuplin, said in an interview

with AP: "It was a practical way to move the books, but it also was a way for everybody to have a part. As people passed the books along, they said 'I have not read this' and 'that's a good one.'" Tuplin announced the move in January, and the town was abuzz about it ever since. The move took less than two hours, and "The brigade even put the books back on the shelves in alphabetical order," according to AP. Tuplin hopes to open the new location within two weeks. HOTS thinks this book brigade schooled all the local movers with this endeavor.

✱ ✱ ✱ ✱ ✱

HOTS Elephant Huddle... A group of three older elephants at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park in California formed a protective huddle over two younger calves during a 5.2 magnitude earthquake on April 14, the Associated Press reports. The three older elephants—Ndulula, Umngani, Khosi—encircled Zuli and Mkhaya, both 7 years old, during and after the quake. Once in the protective huddle, "they sort of freeze as they gather information about where



Members of the media and executives from Caesars Entertainment visited Reno's National Automobile Museum on April 17. After a tour and wellness activity they rode back to the Silver Silver Legacy Resort Casino in vehicles from the movies "Ghostbusters" and "Jurassic Park" as well as a 1930s Ford convertible.

the danger is," said Mindy Albright, curator of mammals at the San Diego Zoo. The zoo shared a video of the moment, which shows young male Zuli moving frantically between the three matriarchs and his mother, Ndulula, tapping him on the back with her trunk

to communicate that he was okay and to stay in the circle. "It's so great to see them doing the thing we all should be doing—that any parents does, which is protect their children," Albright said. HOTS loves cute family moments like these—no matter the species.

MPI Helping Would-Be Attendees Make Case for Attending WEC

By Todd McElwee

It's less than two months until MPI's World Education Congress (WEC) lands in St. Louis, and to help those hopeful attendees whose bosses may need a bit of persuading, MPI has produced the Convince Your Manager letter template.

MPI said: "WEC St. Louis isn't just another event industry conference; it's your catalyst for personal and professional transformation, where you'll make connections to actionable ideas and amazing people, while basking in the renowned hospitality and event-ready infrastructure of St. Louis."

The association went on to say the

event's sessions are led by subject matter experts who've produced exceptional events through solving real problems.

Noting return on investment is a manager's top priority, MPI said WEC is about so much more than personal growth—it's also about bringing tangible value back to an organization.

"You'll have direct access to experienced pros who can help you maximize your event planning and production efforts," MPI said. "Imagine connecting with peers who've solved the exact challenges you're facing. Imagine returning to your team not just with ideas, but plans to implement them and drive real

growth. The relationships you build at WEC last far beyond those three days in June. They could lead to new partnerships, collaborations, and innovations that can last a career."

MPI also highlighted the benefits—both professionally and financially—of multiple team members attending.

"Want to be part of the premier conference for meetings and events, but need help making the case? We've got you," said MPI. "Let's walk through how to position WEC St. Louis as the strategic investment it is."

The WEC will be held from June 18–20. Find more information at wec.mpi.org.

DI Annual Reports

continued from page 1

total to 71. There are now a total of 112 business members, including 43 who joined during 2024. The association had a retention rate of 93% for partners.

• The 2024 Annual Convention in Tampa, Florida, drew a record attendance of nearly 2,000 destination professionals for networking and informative sessions on topics spanning destination

stewardship, AI, social impact, and community alignment.

• DI successfully launched a new membership structure in Europe. This model provides more tailored programming, localized governance, and greater value for European destination organizations, while expanding the association's footprint and impact.

• More than 250 professionals advanced through DI's Certified Destination Management Executive (CDME) and Professional in Destination Manage-

ment (PDM) certification programs.

• DI also published 12 major research reports, including the "Tampa Case Study: Empowering Communities Through Business Events" and "Destination Promotion: Catalyst for Community Vitality," both supported by the DI Foundation.

DI Foundation 2024 Annual Report highlights include:

• The DI Foundation raised a historic \$1.26 million, a 28% increase over the prior year, to fund programs for the destination sector in research, education, and workforce development.

Please turn to page 7

The DI Foundation raised a historic \$1.26 million.

WEEKLY NEWS
OF ASSOCIATIONS
CVBs AND
HOTELS

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NEWS

First Hyatt Studios Hotel Opens in Mobile

By Jordan Bradley

Hyatt Hotels Corp. held a grand opening ceremony complete with ribbon-cutting to celebrate the opening of the first Hyatt Studios hotel in Mobile, Alabama, on April 15.

The Hyatt Studios Mobile/Tillmans Corner, the newest property from Hyatt's upper-midscale extended stay brand, commemorated the opening with local officials, Hyatt leaders, hotel owners and operators, customers, and community members.

"The grand opening of Hyatt Studios Mobile/Tillmans Corner marks an exciting milestone as we continue to expand our offerings to meet the growing demand for extended stay accommodations," said Dan Hansen, Global Head of Hyatt Studios.

Located 10 miles from the Mobile International Airport, the property offers extended stay guests modern amenities and a "home-like experience," Hyatt said. The 122-guest-room hotel

has equipped each of its rooms with kitchens that include a full-size refrigerator, built-in cooktop, microwave with air fryer and convection-oven capabilities, dishwasher and essential cookware.

The Hyatt Studios Mobile/Tillmans Corner also boasts a 24/7 market, free self-serve breakfast, a 24-hour fitness studio, self-service laundry, an outdoor patio with a fire pit and grill, and a robust Borrowers Program, which allows guests to borrow items like blenders, board games and items for kids and pets.

The Hyatt Studios brand also offers free fiber internet and electric vehicle charging stations on site.

Developer Hiren Desai of 3H Group said the Hyatt Studios brand of hotels "fills a critical gap in the extended stay space," calling the brand's design "smart" and "efficient."

"This is just the beginning for the Hyatt Studios brand as the brand demonstrates enthusiasm among



Local officials, community members, hotel owners and operators, customers, and Hyatt leaders—including Mark Hoplamazian (center, with scissors), President, Hyatt Hotels—celebrated the grand opening of the first Hyatt Studios hotel, the Hyatt Studios Mobile/Tillmans Corner in Mobile, Alabama, on April 15 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

hotel owners and developers," said Hansen. "We're proud to celebrate the grand opening with 3H Group and

LBA Hospitality, whose dedication has brought the Hyatt Studios vision to life."

Mitch Pally Becomes Interim Head of Discover Long Island

By Jonathan Trager

Discover Long Island (DLI) in New York has appointed current Board Chair Mitch Pally as its Interim President & CEO, the organization announced on April 17.

The move follows the recent announcement that longtime leader Kristen Reynolds will depart at the end of the month to take the helm of Choose Chicago. Pally has been a member of the board of directors of DLI for eight years and served on the board of its previous tourism organization, the Long Island CVB and Sports Commission, for 12 years.

"Long Island's tourism industry has never been stronger, and I'm honored to step into this interim

role to help keep the incredible momentum going," said Pally. "Kristen built a world-class organization over the past decade, and I'm excited to continue working with this outstanding team to ensure 2025 continues to be a landmark year for tourism, economic growth, and community pride within Suffolk County and the greater Long Island region."

Pally is the former CEO of the Long Island Builders Institute from 2010–2022 and current Chair of the Midway Crossing Local Development Corp., Chair of the Long Island MacArthur Airport Advisory Board, Co-Chair of the Long Island Business Development Council, and a member of the Town of Brookhaven Industrial Development Corp.

"As a longtime board member and tourism advocate, I've seen firsthand the positive trajectory that Discover Long Island has cultivated over the years," said Hilton Long Island General Manager and DLI Board Treasurer Gus Montesantos. "Even with this leadership change, our collective momentum is undeniable and the future for Long Island's visitor economy is brighter than ever."

DLI will soon initiate a formal search for a new full-time leader. In the meantime, the organization "remains laser-focused on its mission to drive year-round tourism, support local businesses, and celebrate the vibrancy and diversity of Suffolk County's communities," according to DLI.



Mitch Pally

ASAE Hosting Inaugural AGI Governance + Strategy Forum

By Todd McElwee

ASAE is introducing the AGI Governance + Strategy Forum on April 29–30 at the Kaiser Family Foundation's Barbara Jordan Conference Center in Washington, D.C.

The event is designed exclusively for CEOs and chief elected leaders of national and international associations. ASAE stated attendees will delve into cutting-edge research, explore the fundamentals of building a trusted partnership and build

valuable connections with leaders of other associations.

"Association leaders today are faced with a set of dynamic and challenging forces—from accelerating business model innovation to drive new revenue to delivering on strategy that's both data-informed and appropriately risk-oriented—and the keys to success are so often found in the collaboration and relationship between the chief executive, the chair and the board," ASAE said.

Leading the program are executives from association consulting firm McKinley Advisors: Jay Younger, FASAE, President & CEO; Jon Hockman, FASAE, Chief Practice Officer; Tim Hopkins, CAE, Managing Director; and Meena Dayak, CAE, Practice Director. They will look at

leadership, economic headwinds and business models, divergent belief systems, AI's impact, workforce development imperatives, financial and business concepts, includ-

ing principles of risk management, strategy execution, product management and continuous learning.

Organizations are encouraged to bring up to three guests, including the chief staff officer, plus one or both of their current and incoming chair officers. The event is being offered to a select group of organizations and therefore space is limited.

Find more information at asae-center.org.

NEWS

HSMAI Opens Grant Applications for Student Success

By Jordan Bradley

The Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI) Foundation opened applications for its 2025 Mike Dimond Student Career Success Grant on April 11.

The annual grant initiative was created in honor of industry veteran Mike Dimond and supports “the next generation of hospitality leaders pursuing careers in commercial strategy,” the HSMAI Foundation said.

Students who are awarded funds from the grant are provided with financial support, access to industry

through leadership, and industry mentorship.

This year, two Career Success Grants will be awarded. Each student will receive a \$2,000 academic development grant, a complimentary

registration to an HSMAI conference of the grantee’s choosing, and a one-year mentorship with a hospitality industry leader.

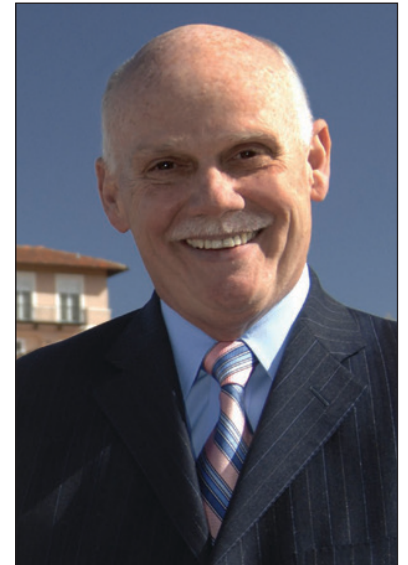
“The Mike Dimond Grant not only honors the legacy of an exceptional leader but also plays a vital role in building talent for commercial strategy roles across the hospitality industry,” said Brian Hicks, President and CEO of

HSMAI. “We’re proud to offer this opportunity to students who are passionate about shaping the future of hospitality.”

Dimond, a member of HSMAI’s Hall of Fame who passed of a heart attack in 2009, is recognized as one of “The 25 Most Extraordinary Minds in Hospitality & Travel,” according to the association’s foundation. He was also well known for serving as Sr. Vice President of Sales and Marketing at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colorado, leaving a legacy of leadership and innovation in hotel marketing.

Applicants for the Career Success Grant must be enrolled in a degree-seeking hospitality program and show a clear interest in a career in hospitality sales, marketing, revenue management, or distribution.

The deadline to apply is May 7,



Mike Dimond

and the application can be found at global.hsmai.org/foundation.

IAEE’s Forum

continued from page 1

human behavior, equipping yourself to consciously sort through your fears, embrace stress as a competitive advantage and spark your next evolution of growth,” IAEE said.

In Future Forward: Work Culture

and AI, Armida Ascano, Chief Content Officer and Futurist, TrendHunte will explore the fusion of technology and workplace dynamics and discover how organizations can adapt to a culture that fosters collaboration, communication, and employee satisfaction in the era of AI.

Mori Taheripour, Negotiation Expert, Author and Faculty at The Whar-

ton School and Moderator, Sherron Washington, M.A., CEO, The P3 Solution, is set to show attendees ways of shifting fear of missing out towards a mindset of intentional choices and personal empowerment.

For 2025, WLF’s Social Giving Project attendees will work with House of Ruth, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit that empowers survivors of domestic

violence to break the cycle of abuse and live independently, safely, and with dignity. House of Ruth provides comprehensive, trauma-informed services that address the unique needs of each survivor and their family. WLF attendees will provide essential personal items and monetary donations.

Find more information at iaee.com.

AAHOA

continued from page 2

that more than 90% of hoteliers reported experiencing more challenging market experiences than in previous years. In addition, 95% of respondents also said they would benefit from being able to compare

financing terms in a standardized format, the association said.

In another partnership, AAHOA is now working with Kalibri Labs, a hotel performance analytics company, to identify how federal policy changes are impacting the hotel industry.

The association announced the partnership on April 10. Early re-

search gathered through AAHOA’s more than 20,000 hoteliers and Kalibri’s data from more than 35,000 hotels in the country indicates the hospitality sector has a mixed outlook in 2025. The findings show only one-third of hotel submarkets in the United States are outperforming 2024 benchmarks.

According to AAHOA and Kalibri,

this means that a large share of the market is experiencing declines.

Cindy Estis Green, CEO of Kalibri Labs, said: “While some markets are managing well through a turbulent period, the broader trend shows evidence of contraction—particularly in government and corporate segments. Our collaboration with

Please turn to page 7



Allison Ausband, E.V.P. and Chief People Officer, Delta Air Lines, recently sat down with Capt. J.R. Canales to discuss how he’s been able to “Keep Climbing” during his career. Ausband is sharing employee stories as part of the carrier’s 100th anniversary celebration.



Members of the media dined with executives from Caesars Entertainment and the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority on April 16, at Roxy Restaurant & Bar at the Eldorado Reno Casino. Caesars Entertainment hosted a Reno Press Trip from April 16–19.

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NEWS

Williams

continued from page 1



Dan Williams

it as building on what John and the team has created. Just being a part of that is extremely exciting to me."

Prior to joining Experience Columbus in 2015, Williams served as vice president of sales at Destination Cleveland. He's an active member of Destinations International, PCMA, ASAE, and the National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners.

Williams said being active with industry associations is crucial for

building awareness for destinations such as Cleveland, Columbus, and Birmingham.

"It's extremely important for visibility," he said. "To be able to be where the planners and your peers are is extremely important. Our trajectory changed when we hosted ASAE and PCMA in our community. It shown a different light on our city that we're able to host big citywide conventions."

Bill Murray, Chair of the GBCVB, said the board is "thrilled" to welcome Williams into the fold.

"After a comprehensive national search, it was clear that his energy, strategic vision, and deep understanding of destination marketing make him the right leader at the right time," said Murray. "We're confident that, under his leadership, Birmingham will continue to grow as a premier destination for meetings, events, and tourism. The future is bright for the tourism industry in the Greater Birmingham Region."

Williams and his wife, Jennifer, have four adult sons and five grandchildren. He's also "an extremely bad golfer who wants to get a lot better."

"I'm extremely excited about being in Birmingham, and I look forward to us not just competing as a destination but setting the standard," he said.

AAHOA members in March also noted a 50% reduction in government per diem bookings in the 30 days prior to the survey.

"The hospitality industry is navigating a period of change, and the ability to make informed, data-driven decisions is more important than ever," said Blake, adding that some hospitality segments are showing resilience, but others are "beginning to feel the pressure of recent federal shifts."

AAHOA

continued from page 5

AAHOA brings both context and clarity to these early warning signs."

Kalibri and AAHOA found government per diem business down 9% year over year, and future bookings within the next 30 days down 16% when compared to last year in their first partnered survey.

DI Annual Reports

continued from page 3

- The Destination Effect Awareness Campaign helped destination organizations communicate their broader value to residents and policymakers.

- The "Destination Promotion: A Catalyst for Community Vitality" report defined destination promotion as a strategic function for community growth and identity.

- Global Exchange & Engagement Grants supported international learning and leadership diversity

across the industry.

"The Destinations International Foundation is proud to support programs and research that provide both insights and actionable guidance for destination organizations," said Amir Eylon, President & CEO of Longwoods International and Chair of the DI Foundation. "We are proud to issue the foundation's first stand-alone annual report this year, which reflects the growing scale and impact of our work to advance the industry."

The 2024 DI Annual Report and DI Foundation Annual Report are available at publications.destination-sinternational.org.



The Atlanta CVB (ACVB) earlier this month celebrated 404 Day, an unofficial holiday that honors Atlanta's rich culture, community, and the iconic 404 area code. ACVB's marketing team launched an activation at a 404 Day parade as a key element of their new digital "You're Welcome" postcard campaign. This activation included a life-size physical representation of the postcard. ACVB team members left to right in back row: Andrew Clark, Jailen Moore, Sheretha Bell, Chinela Bertrand, Sheretta King, and Jaylon Griffith. ACVB team members left to right in front row: Taylor Boser and Aubree Dumas.



Philip MacDougall, President & Executive Director at National Automobile Museum, guided members of media and Caesars Entertainment representatives around the museum on April 17. Here, he's discussing the museum's most valuable car, the 1907 Thomas Flyer, which won the New York to Paris automobile race. When asked how much the car—which still drives—is worth, MacDougall said it's priceless. Caesars Entertainment hosted a Reno Press Trip from April 16–19.



Corporex and Commonwealth Hotels celebrated the grand opening of the Homewood Suites by Hilton Newport Cincinnati with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on April 11. The event included an open house for hotel investors, local officials, clients, and guests; a networking reception and guided tours of the Newport, Kentucky extended-stay property.

NEWS

Punta Gorda, Florida



Boating excursions are just one of many outdoor activities your group can enjoy.

Imagine stepping out of a morning strategy session in a cutting-edge facility and walking straight into a refreshing coastal breeze, where the scent of salt air mingles with the aroma of freshly grilled Gulf shrimp from a dockside café. Just ahead, a heron wades gracefully in the shallows while dolphins frolic in the shimmering waters of Charlotte Harbor. Welcome to Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach, a meeting destination that offers the perfect blend of productivity and relaxation.

A Meeting Destination Like No Other

Nestled on Florida's Southwest Gulf Coast, this charming waterfront region is a place where attendees can begin the day with an inspiring keynote overlooking the harbor and then wind down with a sunset cruise or a round of golf. Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach isn't just a location—it's an experience where the beauty, flavors, and adventure of the water enrich every meeting, retreat, or conference.

Exceptional Meeting Venues

From intimate executive retreats to large-scale conferences, Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach offers venues that combine functionality with unforgettable scenery.

For large gatherings, the Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center is the top choice. Situated in the heart of downtown Punta Gorda, this 44,000-square-

foot waterfront venue features a grand 20,000-square-foot exhibition hall, several breakout rooms, and a beautiful outdoor terrace ideal for networking receptions. Equipped with state-of-the-art audiovisual technology and adaptable layouts, it serves a range of events, from corporate conferences to trade shows. Most importantly, attendees can step outside and explore Punta Gorda's historic district, where waterfront restaurants, boutiques, and cultural attractions are just a short walk away.

For those seeking luxury and exclusivity, Sunseeker Resort Charlotte Harbor is a game-changer. Set to redefine high-end events, this sophisticated resort features 785 rooms and

60,000 square feet of elegant indoor and outdoor event spaces, along with a private golf course for networking in the Florida sunshine. Host a morning leadership session with views of the harbor, then reward attendees with a spa retreat or a private culinary experience showcasing the Gulf's freshest seafood. For more intimate gatherings, Palm Island Resort offers a secluded beachfront setting, perfect for executive retreats and team getaways—with island charm and personalized service at every turn.

Beyond the Boardroom

One of the most amazing benefits of hosting an event in Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach is that work doesn't feel like work—it feels like an

opportunity to connect, recharge, and experience something new.

A Vibrant Arts Scene Worth Exploring

Attendees can take a break and explore the area's vibrant arts scene. Stroll through the Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens, where contemporary art merges with lush greenery, or visit the cozy Hatch Gallery, a hidden gem that showcases local talent. Don't miss the Sea Grape Gallery in downtown Punta Gorda—an artist-owned co-op featuring a diverse collection of fine art, photography, pottery, and jewelry created by regional artists and selected guest artists.

Discover Nature's Playground



Give your group the tee time of their lives on 15+ challenging golf courses.

NEWS

Punta Gorda, Florida



Inspire and unify your group like never before with Pure Florida charm.

For those who favor fresh air over fluorescent lighting, Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach is an outdoor paradise. Kayak along nearly 200 miles of Blueway Trails, where winding mangroves lead to hidden estuaries teeming with wildlife. Borrow a complimentary loaner bike and ride the scenic Punta Gorda Harborwalk, a waterfront path lined with swaying palms and breathtaking views. Alternatively, explore Alligator Park Preserve, where nature trails offer opportunities to encounter Florida's native wildlife.

Unwind on Englewood's Pristine Shores

Although meeting spaces are situated inland, a pre- or post-conference

stay provides the ideal opportunity to enjoy the sugar-white sands of Englewood Beach or Stump Pass Beach State Park. Unwind after a productive event with a peaceful beach stroll, search for fossilized shark teeth (a cherished local tradition!), or soak in the Gulf breeze. Longing for something more energetic? Try paddleboard yoga—where the water transforms into your floating studio.

Fresh Seafood, Craft Cocktails, and Good Vibes

Dining in Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach is as much about the atmosphere as the flavors. The area is renowned for dockside seafood, craft cocktails, and a laid-back vibe that makes every meal a pleasure.

For an upscale executive dinner, The Perfect Caper is a must-visit. It features elegant dishes such as lobster ravioli and filet mignon, complemented by an award-winning wine selection. If the group prefers a more casual, toes-in-the-sand experience, Lock 'N Key Restaurant & Pub delivers with fresh grouper sandwiches and stunning waterfront views, perfect alongside a round of margaritas.

For a truly unique experience, host a team dinner at Farlow's on the Water, where Caribbean flavors blend with Southern hospitality in a lush garden setting. Or, head to Laishley Crab House, a local favorite where guests can enjoy cracking open

steaming stone crab claws while taking in the views of Charlotte Harbor.

The best part? Many restaurants in Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach offer private dining rooms and catering services, making it easy to plan unforgettable meals tailored to your event.

Planning Made Simple

With so much to offer, planning a meeting in the destination may seem overwhelming—but it doesn't have to be. The Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Visitor & Convention Bureau is here to assist, providing free planning services, personalized site visits, and insider tips to ensure your event goes off without a hitch.

Need an off-site excursion to wow your attendees? They'll coordinate eco-tours, deep-sea fishing charters, sunset cruises, and more. Looking for a group-friendly restaurant? They'll offer tailored recommendations that match your event's vibe.

Where Productivity Meets Paradise

In Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach, meetings don't just happen within four walls—they unfold on the water, at the golf course, during sunset cocktails, and around tables brimming with fresh seafood. So, why settle for the ordinary when you can provide your group with an extraordinary experience? Start planning today at purefloridameetings.com and discover a destination where productivity meets paradise.



Gather your team and indulge in Punta Gorda's finest cuisine.