



Louisville Tourism staff and guests attended the 151st running of the Kentucky Derby on May 3. Pictured here is Cleo Battle, President & CEO of Louisville Tourism (far right, white jacket), and the group in the Louisville Visitor Center.

Lawmakers Question Louisville Mayor's Hotel Selection for Derby Guests

By Jordan Bradley

Louisville lawmakers say they're looking into the selection process behind this year's lodging for Mayor Craig Greenberg's Kentucky Derby guests, according to local reports.

Three hotels—the Hotel Genevieve, the Hotel Bourre Bonne, and the 21c Museum Hotel—were considered to host Greenberg's nine guests for the annual event, Louisville Public Media (LPM) reported on May 1.

The 21c Museum Hotel on West Main reportedly won a \$48,951 contract to host the mayor's derby guests, which included Pat and Alice Ann Battle and Henry and Mary Sanford Shepherd of Diamond Baseball Holdings; Keith Cox, President, Paramount Network; David and Michele Glasser, 101 Studios; Kit Moncrief and Gloria Moncrief Holmsten, philanthropists.

According to LPM, Greenberg's office sought out Louisville Tourism to solicit cost quotes for the nine guests' accommodations from three hotels instead of seeking bids through

Please turn to page 6

Women File Discrimination Complaint Against Boston Hotel

Bathroom Confrontation Leads to Lawsuit

By Jordan Bradley

Two women involved in an incident at a May 3 Kentucky Derby-themed party at the Liberty Hotel in Boston have filed a discrimination complaint with the Attorney General's office against the hotel on May 7.

Ansley Baker and Liz Victor—both cisgendered women and a couple—allege that a hotel security guard

confronted Baker while she was using the bathroom. The security guard demanded that Baker leave the bathroom stall, saying “that I was a man in the women's bathroom. I said, ‘I'm a woman,’” according to CBS News. Victor had been waiting by the sinks for Baker.

The security guard then demanded to see both Baker's and Victor's IDs to confirm their genders, which

they supplied. Despite verifying their identities, the couple was removed from the event, Victor said in a since-deleted Google May 5 review of the Liberty.

The hotel shared a statement on May 6 that it had concluded the investigation into the May 3 incident and had suspended the security officer “from their position immediately,”

Please turn to page 3

San Diego Hotel Tax Increase Goes into Effect

Convention Center Expansion in Question

By Jonathan Trager

Hotel room levies in San Diego increased on May 1, years after the move was approved by voters due to a protracted legal battle.

The transient occupancy tax rate has jumped from 10.5% to either 11.75%, 12.75%, or 13.75% depending on how close the property is to the San Diego Convention Center (SDCC). The highest rate is closest to the facility.

In 2020, ballot Measure C to increase the hotel tax was approved by slightly more than 65% of San Diego

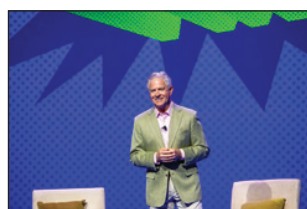
voters. The proceeds were to go toward financing an expansion of the SDCC as well as funding homeless services and road repairs.

Since then, the issue of whether the measure could pass with only a simple majority vote as against a two-thirds majority vote has been the focus of legal challenges. A San Diego Superior Court judge last year ruled that a simple majority was sufficient, but the case remains on appeal.

Although the city is now moving forward with the

Please turn to page 6

Inside



Page 3

Page 4
AAHOA Launches Marketplace
for Hoteliers

Page 4
Curtis Crider Named Leader
of Miami and Beaches Hotel
Association

Page 5
Michelle Mills Clement Appointed
Association Forum's Chair

Page 6
Casey Canevari of Brand USA Dies

National Travel and Tourism Week Celebrated Across United States

By Todd McElwee

From sea to shining sea, and everywhere in between, National Travel and Tourism Week (NTTW) was celebrated by organizations of all shapes and sizes from May 4–10.

U.S. Travel Association said the annual tradition highlights travel's essential role in driving economic growth, creating jobs and enhancing quality of life across the country.

“Travel is one of America's most powerful economic engines—supporting 15 million jobs, generating \$2.9

trillion in economic output and funding essential public services,” U.S. Travel said. “It strengthens every sector of the economy, from restaurants and retail to tech, manufacturing and agriculture.”

Seemingly everyone affiliated with travel and tourism got in on the action. Highlighting CVBs, the Maryland Tourism Coalition's (MTC) website featured an eclectic list of NTTW events, including Visit Baltimore and CON-NECT hosting an evening on Watermark's Raven yacht. Visit St. Mary's and stake-
Please turn to page 5



Where Business Meets the Waterfront

Greater Fort Lauderdale puts everything within reach—just minutes from the airport, beaches, and vibrant Las Olas dining and shops. At the center is the reimagined Convention Center, featuring a stunning waterfront ballroom, tropical plaza, and the new Omni Fort Lauderdale hotel steps away.



visitlauderdale.com/meetings-and-groups/



HOTS

HOTS Reappearing Woman... A woman who had gone missing 62 years ago after apparently hitchhiking her way out of a south-central Wisconsin town has been found safe in another state, the Associated Press reports. Detective Isaac Hanson took on Audrey Backeberg's missing persons case in February this year. He quickly found an out-of-state arrest record that matched Backeberg's, launching an investigation that eventually found her alive and well. Hanson told AP it's likely that Backeberg left town due to an abusive husband.

"She's happy, safe and secure; And just kind of lived under the radar for that long," Hanson said. After digging through census records, Backeberg's sister's Ancestry.com account, obituaries and marriage licenses from the region where Hanson found the arrest record, the officer found the address of a woman who shared a lot of traits with Backeberg. Hanson convinced a deputy from the area to go to the address and shortly thereafter, he received a phone call from Backeberg, AP reports. The pair had a long conversation, which Hanson declined to share with the outlet because Backeberg would prefer to stay lost, he said. HOTS thinks those are some stellar sleuthing skills.

✱ ✱ ✱ ✱ ✱

HOTS Burro Racing... The town of Cerrillos, New Mexico—which acted as the backdrop to the 1980s Western "Young Guns"—held its annual burro on May 3, gathering around 70 teams of racers in the historic turquoise-mining town. During the race, runners lead burros—"a Spanish-derived word for donkeys and their wild cousins," the Associated Press reports—who carry a saddle, pick, pan and shovel as a nod to "a bygone era and the mythical



The American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) Foundation hosted its annual ForWard Conference uplifting women in hospitality on May 6–7 at the Hyatt Regency Atlanta in Atlanta, Georgia. Foundation President and CEO Kevin Carey (pictured) spoke to attendees on the power of presence during the event.

sprint by miners to a land claims office with their pack animal." The Cerrillos races cover 6- and 3-mile courses over unpaved roads and single-track desert trails. Racers are not allowed to ride their burros, but they are allowed to push, pull and coax their animals across the finish line in what sometimes devolves into a battle of the wills between racer and burro. Unlike horses who bolt on instinct in the face of

danger, burros stop in place, assessing the situation before taking action. On May 3, mini burro Buttercup and her racer Marvin Sandoval of Leadville, Colorado, crossed the finish line first, completing the longest course in a little more than 49 minutes. HOTS thinks these racers must be good at keeping calm and hee-hawing on. HOTS loves cute family moments like these—no matter the species.

U.S. Travel Backs Plan to Modernize Air Traffic Control

By Todd McElwee

U.S. Travel Association congratulated Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy on announcing an initiative on May 8 to modernize the nation's air traffic control system.

The plan would address long-standing challenges in the aviation system by advancing new technologies and requesting increased federal investment to ensure timely implementation, the association said.

Congress is considering legislation providing a \$12.5 billion downpayment to support the plan.

"We commend Secretary Duffy for his leadership and vision in tackling the urgent needs of our air traffic control system," said Geoff Freeman, President & CEO, U.S. Travel Association. "Prior to President Trump's administration, America's leadership too often focused on fines and fees when it came to air travel. What Secretary Duffy announced today will benefit travelers and the broader U.S. economy, and it's the type of leadership that America's travel industry has been calling for."

The Trump administration wants to add fiber, wireless and satellite

technology at more than 4,600 locations; replace 600 radars and increase the number of airports with systems designed to reduce near misses on runways, PBS reported. Six new air traffic control centers would be built under the plan and new hardware and software would be standardized across all air traffic facilities. Completion is expected by 2028.

"Decades of neglect have left us with an outdated system that is showing its age," Duffy said. "Building this new system is an economic and national security necessity, and the time to fix it is now."

Bathroom Lawsuit

continued from page 1

according to Boston.com.

In the wake of the incident, the Liberty Hotel "is conducting mandatory retraining for all staff on inclusive practices and guest interaction protocols, with a particular focus on creating a safe and welcoming space for LGBTQ+ individuals."

The hotel also said it will make a donation to a local LGBTQ+ organization the property has partnered with in the past on International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia on May 17.

"The Liberty Hotel is and always

will be an ally of the LGBTQ+ community and a place where everyone is welcome and celebrated," the hotel's statement said. "We will continue to educate and train of our team to ensure that everyone feels safe and accepted within our four walls and guests who do not show tolerance and acceptance towards others will be removed."

This statement contradicts an earlier statement the hotel made to local media that alleged the two women were confronted because they were sharing a bathroom stall and the situation escalated when one of them put their hands on the security guard. According to these earlier statements made to local media, "The Liberty Ho-

tel has a zero-tolerance policy for any physical altercations on our property."

The couple denied that the incident unfolded this way, saying they had not been sharing a stall and did not touch the security guard.

In a May 6 social media post, Victor said that the hotel's general manager had called the couple twice to apologize for the incident.

In an interview with the *Boston Globe*, Victor said the updated statement from the Liberty did not include a public apology, but "it was better than what they put out initially."

Representatives from the hotel did not return USAE request for comment regarding whether the security guard will be reinstated.

WEEKLY NEWS
OF ASSOCIATIONS
CVBs AND
HOTELS

USAE

PUBLISHER & EXECUTIVE EDITOR 1982 – 2021
Anne Daly Heller

PUBLISHER-EMERITUS
ROSS E. HELLER
ROSS@USAENEWS.COM

PUBLISHER
James Heller
james@usaenews.com

Creative Director
Diane Nichols
dkn@usaenews.com

MANAGING EDITOR
Jonathan Trager
jon@usaenews.com

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER AND
ASSOCIATION EDITOR
Todd McElwee
todd@usaenews.com

HOTEL EDITOR
Jordan Bradley
jordan@usaenews.com

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Danielle Erbe
danielle@yespleasebrand.com

MARKETING & CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
Christy Pumphrey
christy@usaenews.com

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT
George Roman
george@georgeromanmedia.com

To ensure publication, all Letters to the Editor must include a telephone number and mailing address in order to verify authenticity.

Complete copies of USAE are available for all paid subscribers online. Log onto <https://usaenews.com> and locate the log-in and password boxes. Specific log-in and password information is provided to subscribers via e-mail.

To receive another copy, please contact the paper's circulation department at (301) 986-8496 or via e-mail at christy@usaenews.com.

USAE (USPS 702-930, ISSN 0894-8194) is published weekly except the week of Christmas Day by CustomNEWS, Inc. Subscription rate is \$175/year; add \$65 in Canada and Mexico. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to USAE, 6809 Delaware Street, Chevy Chase, MD 20815.

usaenews.com

CustomNEWS, Inc.
6809 Delaware Street
Chevy Chase, MD 20815

(301) 986-8496 • ©2025 by CustomNEWS, Inc.

NEWS

AAHOA Launches Marketplace for Hoteliers

By Jordan Bradley

The Asian American Hotel and Lodging Association (AAHOA) on May 6 announced the AAHOA Marketplace, a purchasing platform for members, in partnership with Avendra International, a leader in procurement services.

The marketplace will provide a centralized hub for AAHOA member hoteliers to access “high-quality products and services” for their hotels and businesses at reduced costs. The marketplace is “made possible by AAHOA’s unmatched collective buying power,” the association said.

The platform is launching under the theme “Your Business, Your Buying Power” and aims to simplify the purchasing process for hoteliers as they seek to support their food and

beverage offerings, room operations and more.

AAHOA Chairman Kamalesh Patel called the marketplace “game-changer for our members.”

“Our owners work hard every day to deliver excellence to their guests,” said Patel. “This platform gives them the tools to operate more efficiently, improve their margins, and reinvest in their properties and people.”

Though the site is still in the process of launching, when it comes fully online, hoteliers will be able to shop for everything they need to operate their hotels. This includes food and beverage vendors, contracting companies for housekeeping or staff management, products and services related to a hotel’s engineering and maintenance, and supplies for every facet of the property.



As part of the marketplace launch, AAHOA announced it will also unveil a private-label line of products for members, providing them “with even deeper discounts and exclusive deals,” the association said.

“This is about power in numbers and value in every purchase,” said

Laura Lee Blake, President and CEO of AAHOA. “With AAHOA Marketplace and our new private-label line, we are unlocking exclusive deals, slashing costs, and putting profits back where they belong—in the hands of our hotel owners. It’s smart buying for a stronger bottom line.”

Curtis Crider Named Leader of Miami and Beaches Hotel Association

By Jordan Bradley

The Greater Miami and the Beaches Hotel Association (GMBHA) announced on May 5 that it has appointed hotel industry veteran Curtis J. Crider as its new President and CEO.

Crider’s appointment was effective this month. He succeeds GMBHA’s Wendy Kallergis, who retired on December 31 after nearly 20 years with the association.

GMBHA announced Kallergis’ retirement in early November last year, noting that Crider would act as co-CEO during her transition out of the role and while the association searched for a successor.

“I look forward to working with the strong GMBHA team and all of our allies and partners connected to Miami-Dade County’s number one economic engine as we lead the hotel industry forward,” said Crider.

Crider brings more than 30 years of hospitality experience, helping to

shape the Miami area’s luxury service, food and beverage, and hotel sectors, GMBHA said.

“Curtis’s extensive background in hospitality leadership and his thoughtful, strategic vision for the future of our industry made him the clear choice for this role,” said Amir Blattner, GMBHA Chairman and Greater Miami CVB (GMCVB) board member. “We are confident he will promote the interests of our Allied members and support our vibrant hotel industry.”

Most recently, Crider served as Chairman, President and Managing Director of Jungle Island Resort, a wildlife adventure park that specialized in events and “a favorite South Florida landmark,” according to the GMCVB.

During his time at the resort, Crider helped launch Joia Beach, Miami’s first private beach club and restaurant.

Prior to his time at Jungle Island Resort, Crider spent more than 15 years with Sonesta Hotels. During his time with the company, he served as

general manager of the 225-guest-room Sonesta Coconut Grove, a luxury AAA Four Diamond hotel in Miami, Florida, and as resident manager at the 300-guest-room Sonesta Beach Resort & Spa in Key Biscayne, Florida.

Outside of his hospitality industry experience, Crider is an active member of the Miami community, serving on the boards of the GMBHA Executive Board and the Coconut Grove Arts Festival. Crider previously served as the Vice President of the Coconut Grove Chamber of Commerce. His community and industry efforts have also previously been recognized with the City of Miami’s Community Involvement, Business of the Year and General Manager of the Year awards.

“Miami-Dade County’s visitor industry needs to continuously build and strengthen alliances to maximize growth, workforce development, and make the necessary investments to keep service levels high,” said David Whitaker, President and CEO of the



Curtis Crider

GMCVB. “Curtis’s leadership will be key to these efforts and help our destination continue on its path of success. I look forward to collaborating with him.”

Destination DC Announces Record Visitation

By Jonathan Trager

More than 27 million people visited the nation’s capital in 2024, breaking the previous record by 1.25 million, Destination DC (DDC) announced on May 6.

Of the 27.2 million total visitors, the 25 million domestic travelers exceed last year’s total by one million, with a growth rate more than three times that of 2023.

In addition, the 2.2 million international visitors represent 10% year-

over-year growth. In 2024, international travelers to Washington, D.C., accounted for 8% of visitation but 27% of spending, DDC noted.

“The impact of visitation is immediate and it’s a big deal for D.C.’s bottom line,” said Elliott L. Ferguson II, President & CEO of DDC. “As we celebrate the 2024 figures, however, we are cognizant of a different climate in 2025. Destination DC continues to focus on promoting the nation’s capital as a welcoming and inclusive destination,

particularly for international visitors. We remain proactive with our offices around the world.”

Also noteworthy is that one-third of domestic visitors to D.C. are business travelers, who make up 45% of domestic spending, according to DDC.

“Many people think of sports, entertainment, and tourism as being fun and games, but as I like to say, it’s also dollars and cents,” said D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser. “That is why, with our FY26 Growth Agenda, we’re leaning in

heavy on sports and other parts of the live entertainment industry, like theater and conventions. Because when people fill our streets and sidewalks, fill our bars and restaurants, and fill our hotels and convention center—that’s good for jobs, good for revenue, and good for D.C.”

DDC’s \$27 million domestic and international creative campaign, “There’s Only One DC,” also completed its first full year in 2024. The impact resulted in more hotel room nights for the city.

NEWS

Joel Koester Named Head of Phoenix Sports and Events Commission

By Jonathan Trager

Visit Phoenix on May 6 announced the appointment of Joel Koester as Executive Director of the newly formed Phoenix Sports and Events Commission.

Launched in July 2024, the commission “aims to attract a diverse portfolio of sports, arts, and cultural events that drive economic impact and enhance the quality of life across Greater Phoenix” according to Visit Phoenix. It will focus on youth and amateur sports, arts and culture festivals, entertainment experiences, and emerging tech events.

Boasting more than 13 years of experience in the sports tourism industry, Koester said he’s “thrilled to join Visit Phoenix at such an exciting time

of growth and opportunity.”

“As the fifth-largest city in the country, Phoenix is uniquely positioned to be a global hub for world-class events,” said Koester. “I’m eager to collaborate with our partners to unlock new possibilities, strengthen our community impact, and showcase everything this incredible region has to offer.”

Having most recently served as director of sports sales for the Tulsa Sports Commission in Oklahoma, Koester played a key role in hosting more than 600 youth, amateur, and professional sporting events to the Tulsa region. During his tenure, he helped secure events such as the NCAA Division I Wrestling Championships, Big 12 Conference Championships, and the opening of the \$23 million USA BMX national headquarters.

Koester has earned honors such as *Connect Sports Magazine’s* 40 Under 40, the Connect Sports Game Changer award, and multiple *Sports Events Magazine* Readers Choice Awards.

Ron Price, President & CEO of Visit Phoenix, said the organization is “honored to welcome Koester to the Visit Phoenix team at such a pivotal moment in our organization’s journey.”

“His extensive experience, strategic insight, and deep understanding of the sports and events landscape will be invaluable as we continue to elevate Greater Phoenix’s profile on the global stage,” said Price. “We are confident that his leadership will help us forge new partnerships, attract world-class events, and further position our region as a premier destination for sports, business, and entertainment.”



Joel Koester

Michelle Mills Clement Appointed Association Forum’s Chair

By Todd McElwee

Michelle Mills Clement, FASAE, CAE, is set to become Chair of the Association Forum’s 2025–2026 Board of Directors.

The CEO of the Chicago Association of REALTORS was praised by the Forum for her “extensive expertise and unwavering commitment to the association sector.”

Clement told USAE that serving as Chair is “a deeply meaningful, full circle moment for me.”

“Years ago, as a young professional working at the Forum, I would walk past the board meetings on my way to my cube, captivated by the conversations shaping the future of our industry,” said Clement. “I was inspired



Michelle Mills Clement, FASAE, CAE

by the leaders around that table and the impact they made on our profession. Today, I have the honor of being at that very table, leading an organization that has given me so much—not just in professional growth, but in lifelong connections and friendships. It’s a privilege to guide an organization that continues to be a vital force for advancing who we are as association leaders, ensuring our collective voice is heard and our impact is felt far beyond our own community.”

Under Clement’s leadership, the realtors association hosted its first diversity, equity and inclusion conference, the Chicago REALTORS 360 Summit. Her association bio notes she also guided the launch of a new diversity leadership incubator which

mentors and provides leadership skill building.

Clement previously led the Commercial Brokers Association (CBA). A native Chicagoan, she was appointed to the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority by Mayor Lori Lightfoot. Honors include ASAE’s Key Award.

Vicki Loise, CMP, CAE, CEO, Society for Laboratory Automation and Screening, is Chair-Elect. Secretary-Treasurer duties go to Bruce Hammond, CAE, Executive Director, American Pediatric Society. Bob Moore, FASAE, CAE, Executive Director, American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians, is the Immediate Past Chair.

Find the complete board at associationforum.org.

NTTW Celebrated

continued from page 1

holders across the industry kicked off NTTW with a proclamation event. Visit Frederick celebrated with its annual Spring Social.

Public officials across the national attended events and took to social media to celebrate the initiative and market their respective destinations. Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers joined Travel Wisconsin at Big Manitou Falls at Pattison State Park to kick off the week. In Illinois, Gov. JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) released a video inviting Canadian travelers to visit, reaffirming the state’s strong relationship with Canada as a key tourism partner.

“I don’t blame anyone from Canada whose appetite for visiting the U.S. might have soured—with our current president and the shameful way he’s represented us on the national stage as

of late. But as Governor, and self-designated chief marketing officer of Illinois, I want to reassure you that we’re as eager as ever to have you come here,” said Pritzker. “Here in Illinois, we’re ready and eager to prove that Midwest nice is the closest thing to Canadian hospitality you can get south of Windsor. As you head south through our shared Great Lakes, we are ready to welcome you to the middle of everything.”

Colorado, Nebraska and other states released economic figures reinforcing travel’s importance.

“As we celebrate National Travel and Tourism Week, we recognize the incredible impact of Colorado’s tourism industry—not just on our economy, but on the people who power it,” said Colorado Tourism Office Director Timothy Wolfe. “In 2023, visitor spending grew to \$28.2 billion, with 93.3 million travelers exploring our state. Our tourism workforce plays a vital role in welcoming the world to Colorado. We remain committed to promoting our state as a premier

destination—delivering unforgettable experiences while protecting the places and people that make it so special.”

Destination Niagara USA illuminated Niagara Falls in red as did officials at the Tampa International Airport.

Prepping the industry for the event, U.S. Travel prepared a NTTW toolkit featuring a variety of media and messaging.

“Travel is one of our nation’s most powerful economic engines—supporting millions of jobs, fueling businesses and propelling industries forward,” said Geoff Freeman, President & CEO, U.S. Travel Association. “National Travel and Tourism Week reinforces the pivotal role travel plays in building a stronger, more prosperous America.”

NTTW was established in 1983 by a Congressional joint resolution and first celebrated in 1984. President Ronald Reagan also signed a Presidential Proclamation supporting the measure. More than 200 events are routinely staged nationwide.



Gary Musich, President & CEO of Visit Atlantic City, with a proclamation from Atlantic City Mayor Marty Small, Sr. declaring May 7, as Visit Atlantic City Day.

Credit: Visit Atlantic City

NEWS

Casey Canevari of Brand USA Dies

— OBITUARY —

By Todd McElwee

Casey Canevari, Brand USA's Director of Global Trade Development (Canada), passed away on May 1. He was 43.

Canevari was in Toronto for Brand USA's Canada Connect when he suffered a seizure on April 28, Canada's *Travelweek* reported.

"It is with profound sadness that we share the news that Casey Canevari, Brand USA's Director of Global Trade Development (Canada) passed away peacefully on May 1, surrounded by his family. Canevari experienced a medical emergency on Monday, April 28," Brand USA said. "We extend our heartfelt sympathies and condolences to the Canevari family and their loved ones during this deeply difficult time. We will always remember Casey for his genuine warmth, his boundless passion for travel, particularly international, and unwavering commitment to Canadian-U.S. travel trade relationships."

As evidenced by the dozens of

comments on Brand USA's LinkedIn, Canevari was an enthusiastic, committed, affable and productive member of the industry, who was adored on both sides of the border.

His organizational bio notes he occupied positions at various DMOs, including serving as a marketing manager at Visit St. Pete/Clearwater, where he was one of the inaugural class of Destinations International's 30 Under 30 program. He worked for Audley Travel as a senior sales manager on their Africa team and ran his own consulting business.

Canevari was a non-voting board member of the Discover America Committee Canada.

Susan Webb, President of Discover America Canada, shared: "Whether you were a tour operator, airline, DMO, industry association, journalist, marketing firm, government representative, OTA, loyalty program, or travel agent—Casey made you feel special. He made you feel like more than just a Brand USA partner, he made you feel like a

friend. Casey was deeply involved in the Discover America Canada Committee (DACC), where he played a vital role in developing ideas, bringing in new members, creating engaging events, and forging new partnerships. Travel was his passion. He was a true ambassador for Brand USA. His impact on the Canadian market was remarkable and lasting. He will be missed—deeply—both personally and professionally by the DACC board members and organization."

Born and raised in Warwick, N.Y., Canevari received his bachelor's degree in travel & tourism management from Johnson & Wales University before continuing to receive his master's in tourism administration from The George Washington University. An outdoorsman, he was an avid hiker and explorer, traveling to 30 countries. Lazear-Smith & Vander Plaats Memorial Home wrote an obituary.

Canevari is survived by his wife of 18 years, Christine Canevari, and children Parker, Connor, and Riley;



Casey Canevari

parents Dawn and Arthur Canevari; brothers Ryan Canevari and Christopher Canevari; and first cousin Darrion Whalen (Kim Whalen).

A celebration of life is set for May 24 in Wakefield at the Lakeside Inn. In lieu of flowers, the family is asking for donation in Canevari's name to be made to the Epilepsy Services Foundation (epilepsysf.org) in Tampa, where he served on the board of directors from 2009–2011.

Louisville Hotel

continued from page 1

the city's purchasing department. "This let Greenberg's office enter the contract without Metro Council's approval, which city purchasing policy requires for any no-bid contract above \$40,000," the outlet said.

A spokesperson from Louisville Tourism told *USAE* that receiving leads and processing those leads for clients is a common task for the organization; "however, that's the extend of our involvement."

Greenberg has been involved with the contract-winning hotel and its company "since its founding" in March 2006, according to his LinkedIn. Most recently, Greenberg served as the president and CEO of 21c Museum Hotels until July 2020 when he left the company to start Greenberg Group, a real estate development firm.

"It needs to be looked into," said Brent Ackerson, President of Louisville's Metro Council, in an interview with LPM.

Ackerson said more information needed to be gathered about the contract and declined to comment further to the outlet, but he noted that he would refer the situation to the council's Government Oversight/Audit and Appointments Committee for a closer look.

However, there was no agenda item

related to the mayor's hotel selection on the committee's May 6 meeting agenda. Committee Chair Donna Purvis did not return a *USAE* inquiry regarding whether the committee would be looking into the situation at future meetings.

Ackerson also did not return multiple *USAE* requests for comment before deadline.

Nor did Greenberg's media spokesperson, Kevin Trager. However, he did report to LPM that outsourcing bids to Louisville Tourism to select hotels for Derby guests was "consistent with prior practice predating Greenberg's term in office."

Hotel Tax

continued from page 1

tax increase, it's now unclear whether an expansion of the convention center is feasible given how much time has elapsed since voters initially approved the measure.

The *San Diego Union-Tribune* has written that "a key question remains as to whether the revenue generated by the hotel tax increase will be enough to finance the convention center project. Construction costs have soared in the past several years, and even more so since the project was approved by the California Coastal Commission in 2013."

The city has stated that 59% of the

additional tax revenue will "finance Convention Center improvements and otherwise support Convention Center operations," with Rachel Laing, spokesperson for Mayor Todd Gloria, saying city officials "will work with stakeholders to determine how best to proceed to improve the Convention Center to ensure the longevity and success of this essential economic asset."

Rip Rippetoe, President & CEO of the SDCC, also said more communication with the city is necessary.

"As we gather more information about the increased revenues and their

impacts on the Convention Center, we expect to enter into a period of collaboration and coordination with the City and the Port of San Diego regarding the timeline for improvements, design, and other specifics," said Rippetoe, according to the *Union-Tribune*. "A dedicated revenue stream for the San Diego Convention Center's expansion, modernization, promotion and operations could enable us to accommodate more events and bring more attendees to the region, which could lead to more jobs and generate even greater economic benefits for San Diego."



Local officials, community leaders, and hospitality executives gathered earlier this month to celebrate the official groundbreaking of Tru by Hilton Hagerstown. The Maryland hotel is set to open in Spring 2026.

AMPS GOLF TOURNAMENT



Photos by Christie's Photographic Solutions

NEWS

Greater Fort Lauderdale: The Perfect Blend of Business, Beaches, and Unforgettable Experiences



801-room Omni Fort Lauderdale headquarters hotel currently under development that connects to the convention center and is now taking reservations for September 2025.

Surrounding the convention center is a wide array of lodging that makes it easy for planners to match convenience with comfort. With over 38,000 hotel rooms available across the region and more than 3,500 within 1.5 miles of the center, guests have their choice of beachside resorts, high-rise brands, and boutique properties. Hotels like the Hilton Fort Lauderdale Marina, Renaissance Fort Lauderdale Marina Hotel, Embassy Suites on 17th Street, and B Ocean Resort provide ideal accommodations for business travelers, while resorts such as The Ritz-Carlton, Fort Lauderdale and Lago Mar Beach Resort & Club offer elevated escapes for those extending their stay or bringing family along for the trip.

Beyond the boardroom, Greater Fort Lauderdale is a destination that invites you to savor every moment—and that starts with the food. The dining scene here reflects the region's international influences and coastal roots, offering everything from fresh-caught seafood and dock-and-dine spots to global fusion and locally loved gems. Restaurants like Boatyard and S3 pair elevated menus with unbeatable views, while Takato's beachfront sushi and Louie Bossi's wood-fired Italian classics are crowd-pleasers for client dinners or team outings. Walkable dining districts like Las Olas

Greater Fort Lauderdale transforms meetings into immersive moments, where ocean breezes, upscale amenities, and vibrant local culture combine to create a destination that's as productive as it is inspiring. From the moment visitors arrive, they're met with a sense of place that invites them to stay a little longer, explore a little deeper, and connect on a whole new level.

The foundation of the region's meetings appeal begins at the Broward County Convention Center in Fort Lauderdale, a newly expanded waterfront facility offering 1.2 million square feet of total space, including 350,000 square feet of contiguous exhibit space. Designed with both scale and flexibility in mind, the center brings together cutting-edge design, sustainable features, and proximity to everything attendees want to see and do. It's a short walk—or an even shorter drive—from many of the area's top hotels, including the brand-new



NEWS

Greater Fort Lauderdale: The Perfect Blend of Business, Beaches, and Unforgettable Experiences

Boulevard and Flagler Village keep the energy going well into the evening, with outdoor patios, chef-driven concepts, and live music adding flavor to every bite.

One of the most defining features of the destination is its connection to the water—and that connection runs deeper than just scenery. Known as the “Yachting Capital of the World,” Greater Fort Lauderdale boasts more than 300 miles of navigable waterways that shape not only the landscape but the lifestyle. The water becomes part of the meeting experience, with opportunities for paddleboarding through mangrove trails, water taxi rides between venues, and private yacht charters that double as unforgettable networking events. Here, planners don’t have to invent ways to keep attendees engaged—the setting does it naturally.

Those looking to extend their trip or fill in downtime will find plenty of options to unwind, shop, and explore. Las Olas Boulevard combines upscale boutiques, galleries, and sidewalk cafés in a walkable stretch that’s perfect for solo strolls or group excursions. For more robust retail therapy, The Galleria at Fort Lauderdale features major fashion and lifestyle brands, while Sawgrass Mills—one of the largest outlet shopping destinations in the U.S.—is a short drive away and perfect for serious shoppers.

Adding to the destination’s depth is a rich cultural scene that reflects its diverse community and creative spirit. From modern art exhibitions at the NSU Art Museum to world-class



performances at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts, the area celebrates culture with a coastal twist. Many of these institutions also double as unique venues for offsite events, allowing planners to add a sophisticated touch to receptions or breakout sessions. The region’s inclusivity makes it especially welcoming to LGBTQ+ travelers, international guests, and multigenerational groups—an important consideration for today’s diverse audiences.

Accessibility is another key advan-

tage of choosing Greater Fort Lauderdale for meetings and events. The Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (FLL) is located just minutes from the convention center and connects to over 100 domestic and international destinations, making travel easy for attendees from around the world. For those looking to explore more of South Florida, Brightline high-speed rail service provides quick and comfortable access to the region, expanding the possibilities for pre- or post-event adventures without the need for addi-

tional flights or rental cars.

In the end, Greater Fort Lauderdale offers more than a place to meet—it offers a destination that inspires. With stunning settings, smart infrastructure, and a lifestyle that’s equal parts laid-back and luxe, this is a place where work and play don’t compete—they complement. For planners looking to create meaningful, memorable events, there’s no better setting to do it all.

Learn more at www.visitlauderdale.com/meetings.



NEWS

Premier Meeting Venues in the Pocono Mountains

Nestled in the northeastern corner of Pennsylvania, just a few hours' drive from major cities like New York and Philadelphia, the Pocono Mountains region is not just home to rolling hills and winding rivers. Set against the backdrop of natural beauty, you'll find impressive resorts and modern venues perfect for large-scale meetings and conferences. Minimize travel time and maximize productivity: treat your attendees to a convenient escape from the urban sprawl that will spark new ideas and connections at scenic properties in the Poconos.

Kalahari Resorts & Conventions

One of the premier meeting destinations in the region, Kalahari Resorts & Conventions in Pocono Manor features a massive 205,000 square feet of flexible meeting space waiting to be customized to fit your event vision. This expansive African-themed resort can accommodate several thousand guests with 977 rooms and suites, 25,000 and 9,000 square foot ballrooms, 35 meeting rooms, multiple hospitality suites, a dedicated convention center loading dock, state of the art lighting and A/V, on-site event coordinators, and incredible catering. A multi-million dollar expansion at Kalahari recently added new restaurants to the resort's delicious dining line-up: MACS, a fast-casual macaroni and cheese shop, and Redd's Piano Bar, an upscale lounge with live music perfect for post-session networking. The on-site Spa Kalahari & Salon is also an ideal spot for relaxing after a full day of meetings, with a Halotherapy Salt Room, Hydro Escape space, and a full treatment menu of massages, manicures, facials, and more.

Mount Airy Casino Resort

For those seeking a luxurious, upscale venue with a hint of Vegas



flair, Mount Airy Casino Resort in Mount Pocono stands out. This AAA Four Diamond property blends elegance and excitement, making it a fantastic choice for incentive trips, executive retreats, and boutique conferences. Mount Airy features 284 sleeping rooms and 25,000 square feet of event space, including a grand ballroom, executive boardrooms, and customizable function rooms with natural lighting. It's perfect for high-impact gatherings that demand a polished aesthetic, with modern design touches and seamless service. The resort also offers dynamic amenities including a full-service casino with slots and table games, a championship golf course designed by Hal Purdy, fine dining experiences like Guy Fieri's Mt. Pocono Kitchen, a luxury spa and salon, an incredible pool, plus great entertainment and nightlife.

Camelback Resort

Add some adventure to the meeting agenda at Camelback Resort & Aquatopia Indoor Waterpark in Tannersville. This exciting, experiential venue is located at the base of Camelback Mountain, the perfect year-round destination for groups that crave activity and engagement alongside business sessions. Camelback's mountaintop meeting facilities offer panoramic views and 20,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, including a grand ballroom, breakout rooms, and open-air terraces perfect for mixers and receptions. The team building possibilities are anything but ordinary: skiing and snowboarding in winter, not to mention glow-in-the-dark snow tubing at one of the largest snow tubing parks in the country, plus zip-lining, ATV tours, and mountain adventures in the warmer months. With 453 rooms and suites available and a mix of casual and upscale dining options, Camelback blends professional resources with playtime perfectly.

More than Mountains

In addition to their exceptional facilities, all three of these premier resorts offer dedicated event staff to support meeting planners through every step—from ideation and budget

management to setup and tear-down. On-site catering is customizable for a range of dietary needs, and integrated technology ensures smooth presentations and connectivity throughout each venue.

Beyond the resorts, the pristine parks and charming small towns of the Pocono Mountains region offer a wealth of team-building excursions and great add-on experiences for event attendees. From whitewater rafting to horseback riding, from brewery visits along the Pocono Beverage Trail to history tours along the new Pocono History & Arts Trail to hiking along the famed Appalachian Trail in Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, off-site activities will create memorable experiences that strengthen bonds and increase ROI for any meeting.

Whether you're planning a regional sales summit, a national industry conference, or a high-level retreat, Poconos meeting venues offer versatile spaces, high-end amenities, and activities that go far beyond the boardroom. Visit PoconoMeetings.com to browse even more fantastic venues in the region and submit an RFP today.



Stay Connected



@USAEnews

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Are you a bold, visionary leader ready to shape the future of one of the nation's most innovative and collaborative regional organizations?

The **Greater Topeka Partnership (GTP)** is seeking its next **CEO**—an **accomplished, forward-thinking leader** to head a nationally recognized model for integrated community, economic, tourism, and downtown development. This is a rare opportunity to oversee and align the efforts of multiple organizations under one umbrella: the Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce, GO Topeka Economic Development, Visit Topeka, Downtown Topeka Inc., the Riverfront Board, the Topeka Area Sports Commission, Forge Young Talent, and more.

GTP is one of the few organizations in the country to hold **triple accreditation**—Five-Star Accreditation from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Accreditation from the International Economic Development Council, and Destination Marketing Accreditation from Destinations International. Its structure and success have made it a national example of what's possible through integrated community development.

We are looking for a **high-energy catalyst**—a strategic, politically astute executive with a proven track record of leadership across economic development, chamber operations, tourism promotion, and urban revitalization. The ideal candidate is a confident communicator, a media-savvy community ambassador, and passionate advocate for inclusive growth. Experience managing complex organizations generating revenue, building high-performance teams, and cultivating strong public-private partnerships is essential.

To apply or learn more, contact:

Contact Winner Partners at GTP@winnerpartners.net.



Key Qualifications

- 10+ years of senior leadership in chamber, economic development, DMO, or community development organizations.
- Bachelor's degree required; advanced degrees and industry certifications (CCE, CEcD, CDME, IOM) strongly preferred.
- A strong record of board relations, fundraising, financial oversight, and stakeholder engagement.
- A passion for community and the ability to build trust, credibility, and momentum.

If you are ready to lead a thriving Midwest capital city into its next era of innovation and impact, we want to hear from you.

IN A WORLD WHERE MEETING PLANNERS STRIVE
TO OFFER EPIC DESTINATIONS TO ATTENDEES...



NIAGARA FALLS USA IS AN
ICONIC, WALKABLE DESTINATION
WITH PLENTY OF AFFORDABLE LODGING,
FLEXIBLE MEETING SPACES, AND MEMORABLE
ATTRACTIONS. IT'S ON EVERYBODY'S BUCKET LIST—AND
SHOULD BE AT THE TOP OF YOUR LIST OF MEETING LOCATIONS.

TO BOOK YOUR NEXT MEETING IN NIAGARA FALLS USA, CALL
1-877-FALLS-US, OR EMAIL MEETINGS@NIAGARAFALLSUSA.COM.



niagarafallsusa.com

