



Visit Savannah is bringing the sights, sounds, flavors, and hospitality of Savannah directly to travelers at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport through a four-week, multi-sensory brand activation in Terminal 3, which runs through May 24. Shown here with Savannah Brand Ambassadors, wearing navy Emily McCarthy dresses, are Angela Westerfield (second from left), Chief Marketing Officer, Visit Savannah; Savannah Mayor Van Johnson (center left); and Visit Savannah President & CEO, Joseph Marinelli (center right), President & CEO, Visit Savannah.

BWH Hotels Notifies Guests of Six-Month-Long Data Leak

By Jordan Bradley

The cyber security team of BWH Hotels discovered a data breach spanning six months that leaked guests' names, email addresses, phone numbers and/or home addresses alongside their reservation numbers, dates of stay and any special requests made.

An unauthorized third-party was discovered to have accessed the information through one of the company's web apps on April 22, but the hackers had been accessing the system since October 14, 2025, according to an email sent to certain BWH Hotels guests and shared on social media in early May.

BWH Hotels is the parent company of Best Western Hotels & Resorts, World Hotels and SureStay Hotels. It was not immediately clear which guests at which BWH Hotels branded properties were impacted by the breach.

"Importantly, payment and other financial information was not stored in the affected system and therefore was not accessed," the letter from Bill Ryan, BWH Hotels Chief Technology Officer, read.

In the letter, Ryan went on to note that as soon as the breach was discovered, the company "immediately took

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IAEE Announces Partnership with China Trade News

By Jonathan Trager

The International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) announced on May 12 a strategic media partnership this week with a state-affiliated Chinese publication tied to the country's meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions industry.

The partnership with China Trade News (CTN) expands Dallas-based

IAEE's footprint in China amid ongoing tensions between Beijing and Washington, D.C. It will allow CTN to publish excerpts and highlights from research produced by the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR), the research arm of IAEE.

IAEE said the effort is intended to establish the organization "as a trusted research reference in the Chinese market."

The agreement also is intended to promote IAEE membership, educational programs, and professional standards to Chinese exhibition and trade professionals.

"This partnership represents a significant milestone in our mission to serve the global exhibitions and events community," said IAEE President & CEO Marsha Flanagan. "By

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Boise's Largest Hotel Opens with 296 Guest Rooms

By Jordan Bradley

Downtown Boise gained almost 300 hotel rooms with the opening of a new property on May 12, hospitality officials announced.

The AC Hotel Boise Downtown and Element by Marriott Boise Downtown is the city's first dual-branded property and its largest hotel.

The 296-room dual-branded hotel is divided by floors, with the Element by Marriott occupying

floors five through seven, and the AC Hotel occupying floors eight through 15.

Each property offers guests a different stay experience: Element consists of 121 studio and one-bedroom suites intended for extended-stay guests and featuring full kitchens; and the AC hotel consists of 175 guest rooms designed to accommodate short stays for business and "design-conscious leisure travelers," officials said.

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Chattanooga Hosting Spanish National Team During World Cup

By Todd McElwee

What happens in Chattanooga this summer may well decide the FIFA World Cup.

The Spanish national team (La Roja) has selected the southeastern Tennessee city as its home base for the group stage of the world's largest sporting event. La Roja will stay at the Embassy Suites by Hilton Chattanooga Downtown, with training

sessions occurring at Baylor School's worldclass athlete facilities.

FIFA's second-ranked men's national team, Spain, is amongst the betting favorites to win the World Cup.

"This validates what our community has always known about Chattanooga: we're a special place worth sharing," Susan Harris, Interim CEO, Chattanooga Tourism Co., told *USAE*.

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IS OMAHA THE RIGHT FIT?



EXPANDED CHI HEALTH CENTER & ARENA

Omaha is building an experience.

CHI Health Center Omaha is making big moves, expanding to 420,000 square feet of flexible meeting space with sweeping views of the Missouri River and attendee-friendly amenities (like coffee that costs less than \$50 a gallon). A billion-dollar airport expansion will elevate the passenger experience, just four miles from CHI Health Center Omaha, getting attendees from runway to meeting room in minutes. And Omaha keeps building: A modern streetcar will connect attendees to vibrant, walkable neighborhoods in 2028. These developments enhance an already impressive lineup, including the nation's No. 1 zoo, a world-acclaimed art museum and 72 acres of riverfront parks in a safe, well-connected downtown – all within easy reach of the convention district.

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HOTS

HOTS Traffic Ticket... A parked car in an Illinois museum has been issued a speeding ticket and the museum is absolutely stumped. Officials at the Volo Museum in Volo, Illinois, are scratching their heads as to why a replica of a black Trans Am from the 1980s TV show Knight Rider starring David Hasselhoff—which has been parked in the museum for years—received a speeding ticket in Brooklyn, New York. According to the Associated Press, the car in question was caught doing 36 mph in a 25 mph zone on a traffic camera on April 22. The car caught on camera has the same California customized license plate KNIGHT, and is reported connected to

five other unpaid traffic violations in New York City since late 2024, according to AP. “The fact that we’re legally tied to a movie prop is interesting,” Museum Director Jim Wojdyla said in an interview with AP. “We’re known for having our Hollywood cars from TV and movies, but I have no idea how we got registered from a ticket in New York to the plates in California to the Volo Museum in Illinois. We’re still trying to figure it out.” HOTS thinks this museum should be Hassel-ing the Hoff for those ticket fees.

HOTS Big Ball... In celebration of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the Massachusetts Port Authority announced that it will construct the world’s largest soccer ball in the event’s honor. In order to make that record, UPI reports, the ball is planned to have a diameter of 45 feet. The current Guinness World Record holder is Qatar’s Doha Bank, with a soccer ball that stands at a diameter of 39 feet and 11.8 inches, and was unveiled in 2013. “We’re proud to welcome the world to Boston as Massachusetts prepares to host the FIFA World Cup matches and showcase the unique attractions and welcoming



Before heading over to PCMA’s Visionary Awards on May 7, Mark Huntley (left), regional vice president and general manager of the Fairmont, Washington, D.C., Georgetown, joined Jennifer Erney (center), executive director of global sales, meetings & incentives, industry relations at Accor and Jaouad Hcini, Fairmont’s master mixologist, in the hotel’s lobby.

communities that make our state such a special place to visit,” said Massport CEO Rich Davey. “Bringing this iconic display to East Boston gives people the opportunity to come together,

enjoy the neighborhood’s vibrant waterfront and skyline views, and share in the excitement of the FIFA World Cup.” HOTS thinks this a great way to get the World-Cup-Hype-ball rolling!

company was referring to in the letter and which BWH Hotels branded properties were impacted.

As of press deadline, BWH Hotels had not made an official announcement regarding the breach on any of its branded press and media websites or social media pages.

Going forward, Ryan’s letter to customers encouraged guests to be “extra vigilant” about communications regarding hotel stays.

“If you receive a suspicious communication such as an unexpected email, text, WhatsApp message, or telephone call that asks for payment, codes, logins, or ‘verification,’ even if

they reference a BWH Hotels property or an upcoming reservation, do not engage,” Ryan said. “Navigate to sites directly rather than clicking links.”

Ryan went on to advise guests to “stay alert” for messages from suspicious addresses and numbers; unexpected, urgent or unsolicited requests; and strange links, “especially any unexpected request for payment or personal information.”

Guests were also advised that scammers “may create webpages that closely resemble legitimate hotel booking pages” and to verify the validity of a page before entering any payment information.

Data Leak

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the application offline and revoked the unauthorized access.”

In an emailed statement to USAE, BWH Hotels said it believes removing the app “has resolved the issue. We have also engaged leading external cybersecurity experts to support our incident response efforts and to assist with the further strengthening of existing safeguards.”

However, BWH Hotels did not address USAE questions regarding the number of guests impacted, and it was unclear both what web application the

Trio of Learning Journeys On Deck for MPI’s WEC

By Todd McElwee

Hoping to spur professional curiosities, MPI has setup a trio of Learning Journeys for this year’s World Education Congress (WEC) in San Antonio.

Learning Journeys are small group sessions that offer practical takeaways that can be applied immediately to events. They’re scheduled set for June 3 during the WEC, which runs from June 2–4 at the Henry B. González Convention Center.

“Step out of the convention center and into San Antonio with WEC Learning Journeys,” MPI said. “These immersive, offsite experiences are designed to bring ideas to life through hands on learning, local perspective, and meaningful connection.”

Set for the Hard Rock Cafe San

Antonio, Hard Rock Cafe Learning Journey: The Formula for Audience Engagement is being presented along with Encore and will break down how intentional design, production, and delivery mesh to create experiences to sustain energy and resonate beyond the moment. Multi-generational engagement, varying style of communications and attention drivers will be discussed.

The Aztec Theatre Learning Journey: Rhythm, Connection & Collective Energy will be led by local musician Nina Rodriguez and is presented by the venue and Live Nation Special Events.

“Through guided drumming and shared rhythm, you will experience how connection, communication, and group energy are built in real time,” organizers said. “This session

highlights how nonverbal cues, shared moments, and collective participation can transform audience dynamics.”

Regarding the third Learning Journey, no trip to San Antonio is complete without a stop at the Alamo. MPI said participants will walk away with new ways to think about how events influence audiences, organizations, and communities over time.

“Explore the concept of legacy through guided experience and discussion at one of the most iconic historic sites in the United States,” MPI said. “Through storytelling and reflection, you will examine how decisions, moments, and shared purpose shape lasting impact. This session connects historical perspective to modern leadership and event design.”

Find more information [here](#).

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USAE

PUBLISHER & EXECUTIVE EDITOR 1982 – 2021
Anne Daly Heller

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

PUBLISHER
James Heller
james@usaenews.com

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
Todd McElwee
todd@usaenews.com

MANAGING EDITOR
Jonathan Trager
jon@usaenews.com

HOTEL EDITOR
Jordan Bradley
jordan@usaenews.com

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Diane Nichols
dkn@usaenews.com

MARKETING & CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
Christy Pumphrey
christy@usaenews.com

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NEWS

PCMA Announces Sustainability Certification and Advisory Board

By Todd McElwee

The Events Industry Council (EIC) has awarded PCMA's Convening Leaders 2026 (CL26) Platinum Level Certification to its Sustainable Event Standards—the program's highest distinction. It is the second consecutive platinum recognition.

"Earning Platinum certification for CL26 reflects PCMA's continued commitment to advancing sustainability as a core principle of how we design and deliver experiences for the global business events community," said Sherrif Karamat, CAE, President & CEO, PCMA and CEMA. "This achievement demonstrates what's possible when the global community comes together to lead with intention, accountability and a shared vision for a more sustainable future."

The EIC Sustainable Event Standards were created through a global collaborative process with participation from subject matter experts in all sectors. The standards specify performance criteria in the areas of organizational management; marketing; communications and engagement; climate action; water

management; materials and circularity; supply chain management; diversity, equity and inclusion; accessibility; and social impact.

"PCMA continues to raise the bar for what sustainable events can achieve," said EIC President & CEO Amy Calvert. "Their leadership reinforces the role of business events as a powerful force for positive environmental and social impact."

CL26—held in Philadelphia, PCMA's founding city 70 years ago in 1956—saw an official total registration of 4,211, representing 43 countries with more than 1,100 first time participants. PCMA collaborated with Honeycomb Strategies, sustainability consultants for the events industry, to ensure alignment with EIC standards. Independent verification was conducted by the Alliance for Audited Media (AAM).

"PCMA is setting a strong example for how sustainability can be embedded into event operations in a meaningful and measurable way," said Richard Murphy, CEO, President and

Managing Director of AAM. "Through independent validation, PCMA is reinforcing trust and advancing greater transparency across the global events ecosystem."

PCMA has also announced the formation of the inaugural Convene 4 Climate (C4C) Advisory Board—a global collective of 14 leaders, including experts from the meetings and events industry as well as leading voices in climate science, finance, and conservation. The board will help shape C4C's strategic direction and expand its global impact.

"The formation of the Advisory Board represents a pivotal step in scaling Convene 4 Climate's ambition into meaningful global action," said Karamat. "Together with our foundational partners—Destination Canada, Fáilte Ireland, Marina Bay Sands, and United Airlines—and this distinguished group of global advisors, we are uniting diverse expertise and regional perspectives to deliver practical, measurable solutions and drive transformative,

industry-wide change."

Advisory Board members will:

- Serve as local ambassadors, amplifying C4C's presence and influence within their respective regions.

- Provide insights and feedback on regional sustainability strategies, emerging innovations, and new technologies.

- Participate in initiatives that support the growth and expansion of C4C.

- Support the strategic development of the C4C annual event and global platform.

- Contribute to the creation of sustainability-focused resources to drive industry-wide impact.

PCMA said this next phase of growth is facilitated by C4C's foundational partners—Destination Canada, Fáilte Ireland, Marina Bay Sands, and United Airlines— whose partnership represents a powerful alliance committed to reshaping the future of sustainable business events.

C4C is a global initiative aimed at accelerating the transition of the Business Events Industry (BEI) towards sustainability and regeneration.

Find more information [here](#).

"Through independent validation, PCMA is reinforcing trust and advancing greater transparency across the global events ecosystem."

Chattanooga

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"When one of the world's best teams chooses to call your city home, even temporarily, it's a reflection of what our residents, businesses, and leaders have built together."

Chattanooga Tourism Co. is part of the Chattanooga Host City Authority—comprised of the City of Chattanooga, Baylor School, Vision Hospitality Group, Hamilton County, and The Sports & Events Corporation. The bureau said its role is communicating the visitor experience for Spain's players, coaches, support staff, and families with a goal of having the group experience the city like a local would via outdoor adventures, dining and the community interaction.

Tim Morgan, President, The Sports & Events Corporation, said: "Hosting one of the world's most respected teams is the result of strong partnerships and a shared belief that Chattanooga can deliver at the highest level. We're proud to have this rare opportunity to build a true home away from home for Spain and welcome this international delegation with the genuine Southern hospitality that defines our community."

Early last month, executives from

the Royal Spanish Football Federation spent a day in Chattanooga, making sure all was ready at Baylor School and the Embassy Suites. Players arrive in early June, WTVC NewsChannel 9, an ABC affiliate reported.

"When you are here you realize how good the place is," said Aitor Karanka, the Sporting Director for the Royal Spanish Football Federation and former Spain National Team player. "It's not just the facilities and the city. It's a perfect place to be for the World Cup."

"Years of passion and hard work growing the sport of soccer here has led to this historic moment," said Chattanooga Mayor Tim Kelly. "And hosting Spain, the No. 1 seed in the tournament, is an incredible honor and cements our recognition on the world stage as a great soccer city. I encourage Chattanoogaans to embrace Spain's national team and show them the love and hospitality that makes our city so special. La ciudad de Chattanooga da la bienvenida a la selección nacional de España con los brazos abiertos."

The CVB said the community will see immediate economic benefits as Spain enjoys Chattanooga's hotels, dining scene, attractions, and outdoor experiences during their several weeks in town. It added the global spotlight means Spain's World Cup prepara-

tion will put Chattanooga on screens worldwide.

"People will see what makes our city amazing," according to Chattanooga Tourism Co. "That kind of international exposure will continue to generate interest in Chattanooga well beyond

their visit."

Spain will play their first two World Cup matches in Atlanta, facing Cape Verde on June 15 and Saudi Arabia on June 21. The group stage will conclude on June 27 against Uruguay in Guadalajara, Mexico.

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Industry Movers



Jahnae Erpenbach is the new Executive Vice President and General Manager of Wind Creek Chicago Southland. Wind Creek Hospitality made the announcement. Erpenbach brings more than 35 years of experience and joins Wind Creek Chicago Southland following her role as General Manager of Golden Nugget Danville. She was CEO and Board Chairperson of Spectacle Entertainment, where she helped with the opening of Hard Rock Casino Northern Indiana.



Gregory Maliassas is now CEO of Driftwood Hospitality Management (DHM). Maliassas joins DHM from Playa Hotels & Resorts, where he served as executive vice president and COO, overseeing operations for an extensive portfolio of branded all-inclusive resorts across the Caribbean and Mexico. During his tenure with the firm, he led a team of more than 15,000 employees, and spearheaded partnerships with brands including Marriott and Hilton.



Sang Yi is now President & CEO of American Association of Port Authorities (AAPA). Most recently, Yi was deputy administrator of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration (MARAD), where he oversaw programs supporting the commercial and strategic maritime infrastructure. Before coming to MARAD, Yi served in the U.S. House of Representatives for almost a decade and a half. He was in intelligence prior to joining Congress.



Robin Repass is now Executive Director and Chief Legal Counsel of the Restaurant Law Center (RLC), the independent organization created specifically to represent the interests of the food service industry in the courts. The National Restaurant Association made the announcement. Prior to the Restaurant Law Center, Repass was a partner at Fisher & Phillips in Washington, D.C. She held senior legal and public policy roles at Amazon.

[See More Industry Movers](#)

Boise Hotel

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Both brands participate in Marriott International's loyalty program, Marriott Bonvoy.

Officials say the hotel meets a need

for more hotels in Boise.

"Boise has reached a point where demand supports a project of this scale and sophistication," said General Manager Doug Russo. "This hotel brings together two distinct brands in a way that reflects how people travel today—seamless, flex-

ible, and steps from all the city has to offer."

The new hotel was developed by Pennbridge Hospitality and brings approximately 8,250 square feet of flexible meeting and event space to the city, including the Bristol Mitchell Ballroom spanning just over 3,000 square feet on the property's 16th floor.

"Our team is already seeing strong interest from meeting planners and group organizers looking for a destination that's both accessible and distinctive," said Director of Sales Tanya Minor. "With flexible event spaces and two complementary brands under one roof, we're able to offer solutions that meet a wide

range of group and event needs."

The hotel provides in-house banquet and catering services for all of its meeting and event spaces, Pennbridge said, and offers a rooftop restaurant—the Boise Post—as well as the AC Café, which operates the only Starbucks in downtown Boise.

The hotels share a 24/7 fitness center, outdoor hot tub, BBQ grills, fire pits, a co-working lounge, Element bikes, and EV charging stations.

The AC Hotel Boise Downtown and Element by Marriott Boise Downtown hotels are now welcoming guests. Officials expect to hold a grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony in late June.



The dual-branded AC Hotels Boise Downtown and Element by Marriott Boise Downtown hotels are now hosting guests, developers announced on May 12.

IAEE

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collaborating with China Trade News, we are expanding our reach in one of the world's most dynamic markets and creating meaningful opportunities for knowledge exchange that will benefit industry professionals on both sides of the Pacific."

CTN was described in the announcement as "the official state-affiliated media outlet of the MICE and trade exhibition industry in the People's Republic of China." The publication has "government-recognized" status in the one-party country and distributes content through English- and Chinese-language print and digital platforms. The agreement marks the latest step in IAEE's broader expansion into China

over more than a decade. The organization previously partnered with the China Incentive, Business Travel & Meetings Exhibition, or CIBTM, to co-produce educational programming in Beijing.

In January 2025, IAEE also established a China Council and maintained a representative office in Shanghai to strengthen relationships with exhibition organizations and government-connected industry groups in China.

The new partnership comes as U.S.-China relations remain strained over trade, technology restrictions, and national security disputes. Congressional leaders and federal agencies have increasingly scrutinized relationships between American organizations and Chinese state-linked entities in recent years.

NEWS

Illinois Hard Rock Casino to Add Hotel & Conference Center

By [Jordan Bradley](#)

In order to stay competitive with a nearby casino expansion, the Hard Rock Casino in Rockford, Illinois, announced in conjunction with city officials on May 7 that it intends to expand with the construction of a new hotel and conference center.

Should it be approved by the Rockford City Council, the forthcoming Hard Rock Hotel and Convention Center is expected to add between 215 and 225 guest rooms to the city's hotel offerings, a spa, fitness center, and new dining options, according to the City of Rockford. The adjoining convention center will have 15,000 square feet of flexible meeting and event spaces.

"We're doubling down on Rockford," said Geno Iafrate, President of Hard

Rock Casino Rockford, in an interview with the *Chicago Tribune*. "This hotel and convention center cements our commitment to this community and its growing needs. Our belief is that this region is a destination that can compete at the highest level."

In the nearby city of Beloit, Wisconsin, 18 miles north of Rockford and just across the state border, the Ho-Chunk Nation's gaming arm, Ho-Chunk Gaming, is in the process of building a casino and hotel complex. The complex's casino is expected to open this September, with the hotel and conference center poised to open in 2027, according to Ho-Chunk Gaming officials.

"This investment will help attract more visitors, strengthen tourism, support local businesses and continue Rockford's momentum as a



Rendering of the proposed Hard Rock Hotel & Convention Center in Rockford, Illinois

destination community," Rockford officials said.

According to the city, the project will be financed through Rockford's bonding authority in a public-private partnership. Hard Rock will be "solely responsible for repayment through a Development and Management Agreement," the City of Rockford said in its announcement. "Repayment would come from Hard Rock Hotel and Convention Center project revenues—not from the City's General Fund or property taxes."

At the time of the announcement, the Rockford City Council had not yet approved the bond, but in a May 11 meeting, the council's finance and personnel committee unanimously approved a \$103 million bond for the Hard Rock Rockford expansion. Next, the proposal goes to the city council.

During the May 11 committee meeting, members debated the bond for around an hour, discussing concerns and questions. Committee members pointed to the way the project was

announced via Facebook both by Hard Rock Casino Rockford and the City of Rockford, concerns about Rockford construction workers receiving contracts, and concerns regarding the size of the hotel and convention center.

Alderman Gina Meeks noted that only 17% of the workforce for the Hard Rock Casino's development was from Rockford, and Alderman Gabrielle Torina said she was "irritated" with the way the project's proposal was announced as though it were already a done deal—though the bond sale has not yet been made official.

Iafrate addressed the committee's size concerns in the meeting, noting that the conference center's size as proposed would complement the 25,000-square-foot Hard Rock Live entertainment venue, which opened in late August 2024.

Before the Hard Rock Hotel and Convention Center's bond sale is official, the city council must approve. The sale will be discussed in the council's May 18 session.

New Orleans Convention Center Unveils Omni HQ Hotel Website

By [Jonathan Trager](#)

The Ernest N. Morial New Orleans Exhibition Hall Authority launched on May 13 a new website dedicated to the planned Omni New Orleans headquarters hotel project.

The website is designed to provide updates, renderings, and project information for the proposed 1,000-room hotel that will be built adjacent to the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in the city's Warehouse District. Officials said the site will also serve as a public information hub as the project advances through design and permitting phases.

"Our board, executive team and Omni leadership are committed to continuing to present all information about the Omni New Orleans project clearly and as it becomes available," said Jim Cook, President & CEO of the Morial Convention Center. "The revamp of the NOLAHQHotel.com website gives our neighbors and partners a single source location for data, updates and insights. Transparency remains a priority as we keep our community informed and engaged in this important project for our state."

Announced earlier this year, the hotel project is expected to cost roughly \$575 million to \$600 million and is projected to open in 2029. The

development agreement between the Exhibition Hall Authority and Omni Hotels and Resorts was approved in January.

Plans for the Omni New Orleans include approximately 100,000 square feet of meeting space, multiple restaurants and bars, a rooftop pool deck, a spa, and a parking garage. The hotel is slated for the former Sugar Mill event venue site across Convention Center Boulevard from the convention center.

Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry previously called the project "a gamechanger for the tourism industry," saying it would create jobs and generate new economic activity for the state and region.

The convention center, which boasts more than 1 million square feet of exhibit space, has undergone a multiyear capital improvement program valued at more than \$550 million. Officials say the headquarters hotel is a key part of that broader modernization effort.

Omni Hotels already operates the historic Omni Royal Orleans in the French Quarter and has said the new headquarters hotel reflects the company's long-term confidence in New Orleans as a tourism and convention destination. Construction on the new property is expected to begin in 2026 pending city approvals.

Find the website [here](#).

Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry previously called the project "a gamechanger for the tourism industry," saying it would create jobs and generate new economic activity for the state and region.

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NEWS

OBITUARY

Bill Edwards Jr., Longtime Hilton Executive, Dies

By Jordan Bradley

Bill Edwards Jr., a longtime Hilton executive and icon of the hospitality industry, died in Henderson, Nevada, on May 13 following a long battle with cancer. He was 80.

Edwards was born on May 10, 1946, in Detroit, Michigan, and lived a portion of his early life in Muskegon, Michigan. The son of former Hilton CEO William H. Edwards Sr., Edwards grew up in the hotel world and lived in many places. He attended the John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio, where he earned a bachelor's degree in marketing.

Edwards officially began his career with Hilton as a trainee at a Chicago property in February 1968, according to official Hilton documents shared with *USAE* by the Edwards family.

His time with the hotel company was interrupted by two years of service with the United States Army between 1969 and 1971. When he returned to the states, Edwards rejoined Hilton, again as a trainee, this time at the Washington Hilton, moving from a general position into sales. He spent a short time at the Omaha Hilton in Nebraska as director of sales from 1973–1974 before returning to the Washington Hilton as executive assistant manager.

While in Omaha, Edwards met his future wife, Patty, who was working in the hotel's sales department.

"When he was transferred back to Washington, he asked if he could come visit me at the Jersey Shore, where I used to go with my family," Patty Edwards told *USAE*. "Then he asked me to come to Washington, and I went to visit him that Labor Day weekend. The following April, we got married."

She describes the period before their wedding as "a very crazy courtship" conducted across state lines, and when Edwards did propose "he wasn't prepared," she said.

"Back in 1974, I couldn't spend money on long distance phone calls, and I didn't have the money for airline flights," Patty Edwards recalled. "I said, 'I don't see this working out.' I don't think he had any intention of asking me to marry him then, but it just came out of his mouth, so he wasn't prepared at all. And then I said yes."

The pair married on April 12, 1975, and earlier this year celebrated their 51st wedding anniversary.

Edwards retired from Hilton Hotels Corporation in February 2006, after 36 years with the company. Most of his time with the company was spent at properties within the D.C. area, but Edwards also spent around eight years as the General Manager of the San Diego Hilton. When he retired, Edwards was a regional vice president with Hilton, overseeing the D.C. area's hotels and convention centers.

In a 2001 interview with the *Washington Times* after receiving the Greater Washington Board of Trade's 2001 Leader of the Year award, Edwards said: "If you're an executive running a business in a major city, you had better put as much effort into improving that city and those in need as you do in improving your own business."

Throughout his career, Edwards was dedicated to service within and without the hospitality industry. He served in various positions on the boards of the American Hotel and Lodging Association, the Washington D.C. Hotel and Lodging Association, the Greater Washington Board of Trade, the Washington D.C. Convention and Tourism Bureau, the Knights of Malta - Sovereign Military Order of Malta, the U.S. Marine Corps' Scholarship Fund, the Society of the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick, Martha's Table, and HEROES, Inc. (Honor Every Officers Eternal Sacrifice).

Family, friends, and former colleagues remember Edwards as a generous, kind, and hard-working man.

"I think what I realized in Bill from the beginning he was just a kind, decent person who always took care of everybody else, and always worked to help everybody else," Patty Edwards told *USAE*. "He loved what he did, and he loved the people at the Washington Hilton. He loved helping them along in their careers, and he was just a great person. He had the qualities that—hopefully—you find in today's world, but you don't come across them as readily as you did years ago. Everything to Bill is your integrity, and his family always came first. He just lived by that."

Bill Edwards III said of his father: "He was a fiercely loyal individual—to a fault almost. His family was his priority all the time... Anything that he could do for us instead of himself, he did so. It's truly a selfless way of living. He treated his workers the same way. It was no different. So it was interesting growing up in a hotel where you're watching father-slash-businessman in sort of the same breath. The Hilton

folks that are coming out of the woodwork right now are a testament to just how well he treated his teams. He always came home and told me some story, and I'd ask him why he was going through all that extra work when it wasn't his issue, and he would say, 'It's my employee's issue; it's my issue.'... He fought for people."

Brian Edwards recalled his father's love for the family dog, Ace, a French Bulldog who "laid many days in bed with him" during his battle with cancer.

He added: "He was a Hilton and a hotel icon in the industry, but at the end of the day, I think everybody respected him because it was more. He always thought that it was about the team as opposed to the individual. Even running the Washington Hilton, he always put his employees ahead of him. And when it came to recognition and things, he was putting the team forward and the employees, as opposed to him and the leadership. I think that's the biggest quality of his that anybody will relay to us. 'Your dad gave me a chance that nobody else would.' Or, 'Your dad was personally involved with me and my family when we were going through XYZ.' He genuinely cared about treating employees—whether they were a housekeeper or doorman—with the utmost respect and making them feel seen."

David Giger, a retired Hilton executive, met Edwards when Giger served as director of sales and marketing at the Washington Hilton, he told *USAE*. The two maintained contact long after Giger moved into other positions at Hilton.

"Bill Edwards was a giant in the hotel industry and was Hilton royalty," Giger said. "Son of years ago CEO of Hilton, William Edwards Sr., he grew up in Hilton Hotels. I was proud to have served as director of sales and marketing for him for eight years at the Washington Hilton—then one of the two largest hotels in D.C. To have known him for decades, I certainly learned the depth of his knowledge, experience, kindness, and compassion—and I kept in touch as recently as two weeks ago. His humility drove



him to hide his unwavering support of many civic and Catholic charities. [My wife] and I have heartaches for Patty and their family's loss."

Gordon Marr, former executive chef and director of food and beverage at the Washington Hilton, said: "Bill was an incredible mentor that gave people an opportunity to do things that others might not give us opportunities to do. He trusted people and developed literally hundreds of us. He was a special man. He was a very unique individual and did tremendous things inside the industry, but outside too. He was involved in so many things and taught hundreds of us the right way to treat people."

Patrick Duffy worked with Edwards at the Washington Hilton when the pair were early in their careers in 1974. Edwards had just joined the property as a trainee in sales, Duffy recalled to *USAE*.

"We had a unique relationship in the sense that we both came from hotel families. My father managed a hotel in Washington, D.C. And we lived in the hotel as kids, just like [the Edwards family] did," Duffy said. "So I think that was the common thread that connected us at the beginning. He was always guided by what I call the three F's: faith, family and friends. He was always guided by these principles in his business decisions as well as his social decisions. He was a guy who still knew the names of every employee, their problems. Very quietly behind the scenes, he took care of people."

Edwards was predeceased in death by his parents William H. and Peg Edwards. He is survived by wife

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USAEats

The Story of Houston's Agnes and Sherman



Photo credit: Arturo Olmos

By Todd McElwee

Agnes and Sherman is the acclaimed Asian American diner-inspired restaurant in Houston, co-founded by best friends-turned-fiancés, Executive Chef Nick Wong (formerly of Momofuku Ko, Momofuku Ssam Bar, and Houston's UB Preserv) and Managing Partner Lisa Lee.

"Agnes and Sherman weaves together two uniquely American food genres—Asian American and Diner—into a menu that is whimsical, nostalgic, and genre-defying," according to the restaurant. "Through the lens of Asian American food, we hope to expand the definition of American culture."

In less than a year's time, the restaurant has become one of the most buzzed about dining destinations, not only in Texas, but also across the United States at large.

The establishment garnered a 2026 James Beard Award Finalist nomination for Best New Restaurant, was named *Texas Monthly's* "Restaurant of the Year" for 2026 and received official recognition in Michelin's 2025 *Texas Guide*.

"Agnes and Sherman harnesses the idea of the American diner as common ground: a place where immigrant flavors and mainstream comfort food meet without hierarchy, and where Nick creatively showcases his take on what American diner food looks like for him," according to Houston First Corporation. "The restaurant marks his first solo project and showcases his most personal cooking to date. It's even named after his own parents and inspired by the cultures of his Hong Kong-born mother and San Francisco-raised father."

Getting to Know Nick Wong and Lisa Lee of Agnes and Sherman



Nick Wong and Lisa Lee
Photo credit: Arturo Olmos

Opening in April 2025, Agnes and Sherman has truly taken off in Houston. Todd McElwee, Associate Publisher, *USAE*, connected with Wong and Lee to discuss their connection to the city, culinary inspirations and more.

McElwee: How is Agnes and Sherman a reflection of Houston?

Wong & Lee: Houston is one of the

few cities where Agnes and Sherman could really exist. The city is incredibly diverse, and people here are open to cuisines and cultures naturally overlapping. That's reflected in the menu, where dishes like Crawfish Egg Foo Young or Cheeseburger Fried Rice feel very normal in the context of Houston dining culture. The restaurant is also rooted in the collaborative spirit of the

city's food scene and the idea that different influences can coexist without needing to fit into one category.

McElwee: What inspired you to first enter the culinary industry?

Wong: Food was always tied to care and routine growing up. Both of my parents worked, and one of my earliest memories is realizing that if I cooked dinner myself, I got to eat earlier. That eventually turned into a real interest in cooking. I originally went to UC Berkeley before deciding to pursue restaurants full time, and once I started working in kitchens, I became drawn to the intensity, creativity, and sense of purpose behind it. Cooking became the clearest way for me to express my own experiences and identity.

McElwee: What dish or two do you find yourself consistently ordering off your menu?

Wong & Lee: The two dishes we would order are the cheeseburger fried rice and the crispy shell on shrimp. Both are delicious, but there is such a great contrast of flavors and textures between the two of them.

McElwee: What do you hope is the primary feeling someone has when leaving Agnes and Sherman?

Wong & Lee: More than anything, we want people to feel taken care of. We put a lot of thought into the food, but the experience matters just as much. We want it to feel welcoming, joyful, and approachable, somewhere people can come regularly and feel comfortable bringing anyone. Ideally, people leave feeling satisfied, comfortable, and like they experienced something personal to us without it ever feeling exclusive or intimidating.

See the recipe for Scallion Waffle Batter on page 12

"Houston's tremendous diversity and its identity as a global city are among its core strengths. Our culinary scene is a constant illustration of these attributes, offering Houstonians and our visitors dishes from cultures around the world," said Michael Heckman, President & CEO, Houston First Corporation. "Nick Wong and Lisa Lee's Asian American hotspot Agnes and Sherman is a beautiful juxtaposition of American comfort food and Asian flavors in a fantastic atmosphere. Think Egg Foo Young with Crawfish Gumbo and the popular Cheeseburger Fried Rice. Through the award-winning menu of this neighborhood restaurant, diners are getting a literal taste of what makes Houston special."

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Rising Stars

Spotlight on Industry Rising Star Marley Dewey

By Jonathan Trager

Who is Marley Dewey?

That’s not a question, but an answer suited to someone who tried out for “Jeopardy for Kids” when she was in sixth grade. Dewey, who lightheartedly told *USAE* she has a “knack for retaining useless information,” completed an online exam and then was able to travel to Philadelphia for the audition.

Unfortunately, Dewey wasn’t selected for that opportunity (though she said it was still fun to pretend to be buzzing in). She recently was selected, however, to receive a 2026 Future Leaders Professional Development Scholarship from ASAE while working in her current role of Sr. Manager of Learning Experience for the Urgent Care Association (UCA), the leading trade association representing physicians, clinicians, and other professionals working in urgent care centers.

Dewey credits her parents for instilling a curiosity and love of learning in her and her siblings. In fact, she participated in a Spanish Immersion program from kindergarten through fifth grade, during which time her entire curriculum was taught to her and the other young students in Spanish. She went on to study foreign language education at Temple University and overseas in the city of Oviedo Asturias, a principality in northwest Spain.

“That was an amazing opportunity that was the culmination of studying Spanish at an early age,” Dewey said. “I really put it to use while I experienced a different culture and way of life.”

Dewey’s exposure to the world of associations came in the form of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, which sets standards for foreign language instruction and Dewey called a “guiding light” for her while in college. In addition, after graduation Dewey was recruit-

ed by a consulting company called Cygnet Strategy, which worked with nonprofits in strategic planning and governance, as an executive assistant and lead project manager.

After moving out to California with her husband, Mark, and serving as director of operations for an orthodontic practice, the couple moved back east and Dewey joined UCA, marrying her early association and nonprofit experience with her experience in the medical field.

In her current position, Dewey designs learning experiences such as the association’s annual convention. It’s a complex process that includes selecting speakers, reviewing proposals, and making sure the program flows in a way that most benefits attendees, which Dewey describes as “a puzzle and a challenge.”

Dewey recently returned from Chicago, where she spoke at the annual conference for the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education. There, she delivered a session with another woman who she’d previously met at the conference.

“I think one of the beautiful things about associations and organizations like them is you can attend a conference in person and know nobody, but you can walk away with a great professional relationship with a colleague who can challenge you and you can collaborate with,” said Dewey.

While she was working for Cygnet, Dewey heard about ASAE as the “gold standard” for association management. After she started working with UCA, Dewey dug into ASAE’s resources and found out about its NextGen



Summit, where about 30 young professionals are chosen each year to participate in a two-day summit in Columbus, Ohio. She attended and has been growing her peer network as a result.

“Just being a part of that was pretty special,” said Dewey, adding that she’s currently serving on a NextGen Summit advisory committee focusing on community engagement. “Serving on the committee has been a fantastic career opportunity for me, just getting that volunteer leadership exposure is something I’ve been craving.”

Although she wasn’t able to attend

the last year’s ASAE Annual Meeting, Dewey said she wanted to “level up” her engagement and was happy to be chosen as a scholarship recipient.

When asked which values she thinks are important for a young professional entering the association sphere, Dewey cited persistence, resilience, and intentionality.

“I want to be intentional about the leader I want to be and the impact I can have on the field,” Dewey said. “I also want to give back to folks coming into this space. I’ve had some great mentors and supporters and I’m hoping to be the same for someone else.”

Scallion Waffle Batter

Ingredients

- AP Flour 5 ½ cups (spooned and leveled)
- Cornstarch 4 ½ tablespoons
- MSG 1 teaspoon
- Active Dry Yeast 1 tablespoon (roughly 1.5 packets)
- Sugar 1 tablespoon + 1 teaspoon
- Buttermilk 1 ¾ cups + 2 tablespoons
- Milk 2 ½ cups
- Scallion Oil ¾ cup + 1 tablespoon
- Eggs 4 large eggs
- Baking Soda 1 teaspoon
- Salt 2 ¾ teaspoons (fine sea salt or table salt)

Method

1. In large bowl, combine flour, yeast, sugar, cornstarch and MSG and mix thoroughly.
2. In pot or microwave, combine buttermilk and milk and heat till warm.
3. Pour milk mixture into flour mixture and



- whisk until fully incorporated and smooth.
- 4. Add scallion oil and yeast mixture to bowl and whisk until fully incorporated.
- 5. Place in container with at least 6” clearance from top and cover with lid or plastic wrap.
- 6. Let ferment overnight at room temperature.
- 7. Whisk together eggs, baking soda, and salt.
- 8. Add egg mixture to fermented batter and whisk until incorporated.

Edwards Obit

continued from page 8

of 51 years, Patty; his children, Kelly (Jason) Zimmermann, 47; Bill (Paige) Edwards III, 45; and Brian (Chelsea) Edwards, 40; five grandchildren; and brother Brad Edwards of Bethesda, Maryland.

The family will hold a celebration of life for Edwards on June 12 at the Little Flower Church in Bethesda, Maryland, with a reception to follow at the Washington Hilton in Washington, D.C.

In lieu of flowers, the family is asking that donations be made in Edwards’ honor to HEROES, Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to supporting the families of first responders killed in the line of duty in the Washington, D.C., area.

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