



With the Atlanta CVB (ACVB) busy promoting the destination as a host city for FIFA World Cup 2026, a themed bus traveled through iconic locations in Madrid late last month to engage local audiences and build momentum ahead of the tournament. Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium will host eight World Cup matches from June 15 through July 15. Credit: ACVB

Destinations International Launches Inaugural Global Virtual Advocacy Day

By Jonathan Trager

Destinations International (DI) is expanding its global advocacy efforts with the launch of its first Global Virtual Advocacy Day, an initiative designed to unite tourism professionals, community leaders, and policymakers in a coordinated push to elevate the role of destination organizations.

The event, scheduled for May 13, 2026, marks the first time the association has organized a fully virtual advocacy campaign on a global scale, reflecting a shift in how the travel industry engages stakeholders and communicates its impact.

DI said the initiative is intended to broaden participation in advocacy by moving beyond traditional government-focused outreach to include a wider network of voices.

"Advocacy today must reflect the complexity and importance of the role destination organizations play in their communities," said Don Welsh, President & CEO of DI. "This initiative equips a broader network of stake-

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Atlanta Promotes World Cup Readiness in Madrid

By Jonathan Trager

The Atlanta CVB (ACVB) touted the city's preparedness to host matches during FIFA World Cup 2026 at a late-April media event in Madrid, Spain.

During the presentation, which took place at the museum Legends: The Home of Football, Andrew Wilson, ACVB's Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer, highlighted

the Georgia city's infrastructure, hospitality, and international accessibility.

Atlanta is one of the U.S. host cities selected for the tournament, which will be held across the United States, Canada, and Mexico this summer. The Madrid gathering was held to engage international partners and emphasize Atlanta's capacity to welcome global visitors.

"The World Cup is an opportunity

to show the world the transformation Atlanta is undergoing," said Wilson. "We want Spanish fans to feel that Atlanta is not just another host city, but a world-class destination that truly lives and breathes football."

In addition to touting the city's convention infrastructure, hotel capacity, and experience hosting major global events, the presentation also under-

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Rosewood's Gender-Neutral Parental Leave Brings Presence to Associates

By Jordan Bradley

The Rosewood Hotel Group is looking to build more than just a hospitality company—it's looking to build a future where there's a symbiotic relationship between people and the regions they live in.

To support that, in January this year, the company instituted a global, gender-neutral parental leave policy

for qualifying associates worldwide this year.

"Our purpose at Rosewood Hotel Group—to create a future where people and place enrich one another—is our guiding force," said Paula Zelaya, Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusive, Global at Rosewood. "It's something we strive to live and put into action every day, and our commitments to diversity, equity

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Global Meetings Industry Day Lands This Week

By Todd McElwee

Council (EIC) said.

From Washington, D.C., to Zimbabwe, onsite and online events will highlight the significance of meetings and events on Global Meetings Industry Day, May 6.

"Each year, Global Meetings Industry Day (GMID) brings the global business events community together to spotlight the powerful role meetings, conferences, exhibitions and incentive travel play in driving progress," the Events Industry

"Business events create the space where ideas are shared, partnerships are formed and innovation begins. They bring people together across industries and borders to exchange knowledge, strengthen relationships and unlock new opportunities. More than gatherings, business events are catalysts—generating economic impact while creating the human connections that move industries

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HOTS

HOTS Crowd for Chonkers... A sea lion nicknamed Chonkers is drawing crowds to San Francisco's Pier 39, UPI reports. He is, apparently, a massive sea lion. Chonkers is a steller sea lion, which can grow to be 11 feet long and weigh up to 2,500 pounds—about twice the size of the California sea lions that are most often seen in Fisherman's Wharf. According to the pier's harbor master, Sheila Chandler "They're so big because they dive deep and they swim in much colder waters than the San Francisco Bay. So they need all that blubber for sure." Chan-

der told local news outlet KGO-TV that Chonkers appears to be getting along with his scrawny cousins and is "very mellow." One visitor told CBS San Francisco that they had traveled from Atlanta after seeing Chonkers on the news. HOTS hopes those piers have been reinforced to hold Chonkers and his chonk-ness.



HOTS Fate of Nipper... The fate of Albany, New York's giant dog statue is yet to be determined, the Associated Press reports. The beloved Nipper is a 28-foot-tall white dog with black

ears that sits on an Albany warehouse roof—and has done so for the last seven decades—with his head cocked to one side as if he's listening for something. Although he has become a beloved local feature to locals, his future is suddenly unclear. The warehouse upon which he sits, which has been unused for decades and is in disrepair, has received a red-and-white caution placard on its entrance to warn firefighters and first responders to enter the building with caution, AP reports. This has left the fate of the dog up in the air. Moving Nipper doesn't seem to be a serious consideration, as the

cost would be great. "There's a whole redevelopment downtown," said Cara Macri, Director of Preservation for the Historic Albany Foundation. "You could put him there. You could put him on the riverfront. But he's a big dog." The office of Albany Mayor Dorcey Applyrs said she is "working to add Nipper to the city's list of historic landmarks," AP reports, which could potentially protect the statue and its building from destruction. HOTS wonders what new tricks this old dog will learn to come through the other side of this dilemma.

WEEKLY NEWS OF ASSOCIATIONS, CVBs, AND HOTELS

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GMID

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and communities forward."

"Meeting Matters" is an eight-hour long broadcast from MPI. This year's GMID broadcast includes a lineup of thought leaders, subject matter experts, advocates and influencers who MPI said will "inspire, engage and inform." Annette Gregg, CMM, CEO, Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE); Marsha Flanagan, CEM, President & CEO, IAEE; Adam Sacks, President of Tourism Economics; and Stacey Yates, Chief Marketing Officer, Louisville Tourism, are among those scheduled to appear.

Caesars Entertainment is hosting The Power of Gathering: Elevating Experiences. Michael Massari, Chief Sales Officer, Caesars Entertainment; Kelly Gleeson Smith, Sr. Vice President of Sales, Caesars Entertainment; Dena Lowery, President, OPUS Agency; Carina Bauer, CEO, IMEX; Steve O'Malley, President, Maritz; and John Palmisano, AMEX GBT Meetings & Events, will explore the trends and forces shaping the global meetings community.

GLOBAL MEETINGS INDUSTRY DAY
6 MAY 2026 | #GMID2026
POWERED BY EVENTS INDUSTRY COUNCIL

Travel Rally 2026 is being held at Washington, D.C.'s Ben's Chili Bowl.

"Celebrate the power of travel and tourism in Washington, DC and the reopening of a local institution," Destination DC said. "Join Destination DC, Mayor Bowser, the U.S. Travel Association, Brand USA and fellow industry champions at Ben's Chili Bowl as we rally around DC's vital travel and hospitality industry."

The Events Industry Council is hosting an invitation-only event for EIC members and stakeholders at the French embassy in Washington, DC. It will include the first look at the 2026 *Global Economic Significance of Business Events Study*, a CEO panel and special workforce development component.

Developed by EIC in partnership with

Oxford Economics, the *Global Economic Significance of Business Events Study*, is designed to provide updated, credible data on the industry's global contribution including jobs, business activity and community impact.

Globally, The Institute of Events Professionals in Zimbabwe is celebrating virtually as is the Club de Empresas de Turismo de Negocios in Spain. Collective Conversations: Special Global Meetings Industry Day Edition will be held at the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre and is hosted by Spark Event Collective.

The GMID initiative began with Canadian Meetings Industry Day, which morphed into 2015's North American Meetings Industry Day and finally GMID the following year.

Find more information [here](#).

Atlanta World Cup

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scored Atlanta's cultural offerings, diverse neighborhoods, and reputation as a hub for sports and entertainment.

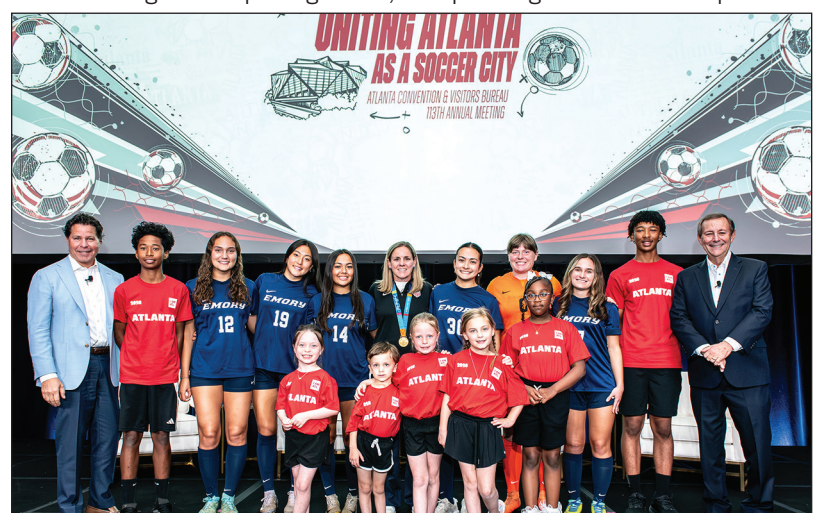
The event included the unveiling of a jersey belonging to former Atlanta United captain and U.S. Men's National Team goalkeeper Brad Guzan, which was presented to the Legends collection as a nod to the city's soccer heritage. Guzan's jersey will remain on display at the Madrid-based museum as a tribute to the connection between Atlanta's soccer culture and the global game.

The Madrid event is part of a broader international outreach strategy aimed at strengthening relationships with travel partners and raising awareness of Atlanta's role in the tournament, expected to draw millions of visitors.

Atlanta previously hosted the 1996

Olympic Games and has since staged numerous large-scale sporting events,

experience officials say will be critical in planning for the World Cup.



The Atlanta CVB (ACVB) held its 113th annual meeting at Georgia Aquarium in late April. Pictured here: Dan Corso (far left), President, Atlanta Sports Council and Atlanta World Cup Host Committee; Cat Whitehill (center), Assistant Coach, Women's Soccer, Emory University, and former defender, U.S. Women's National Team; and William Pate (far right), President & CEO, ACVB stand with Emory women's soccer players and youth players to symbolize the future of the beautiful game in Atlanta. Credit: Picture This!

NEWS

PCMA Lifetime Achievement Honorees Discuss Award and Association

By Todd McElwee

On May 7, Carolyn B. Pund, CMM, DES, Consultant, Strategic Meetings Management, OneMoreEvent Consulting; Dave Lutz, Managing Director, Velvet Chainsaw Consulting; Angie Ranalli, CMP, Sr. National Sales Director, San Diego Tourism Authority; and Charles Starks, President & CEO, Music City Center, will be honored by PCMA as the 2026 Lifetime Achievement honorees during the Visionary Awards at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C.

Before heading to the capital, *USAE* connected with the quartet, asking just two questions: What does this honor mean to you? How has PCMA shaped your career?

USAE: What does this honor mean to you?

Pund: “To be recognized in a room—and by an organization—filled with people who have shaped this industry, it’s incredibly humbling. These are the people I’ve learned from, worked alongside, and admired deeply for decades. This honor isn’t just about a moment or a title—it represents a lifetime of relationships, experiences, and shared work that really matters. And especially this past year, it’s taken on an even deeper meaning for me. It’s a reminder of just how much this industry—and the people in it—have given back to me. I consider myself very blessed, and feel incredibly grateful... and very, very lucky to be part of it.”

Lutz: “I’m truly humbled to be part of this incredible group of professionals. This recognition is especially meaningful to me because I’m joining past honorees Lisa Block, Bruce Harris, David Peckinpaugh, Bill Reed and the late Peter Shure... who I’ve had the privilege of working with throughout my career.”

Ranalli: “I am incredibly humbled to receive this Lifetime Achievement Award! This recognition reflects all the learnings and joy I’ve gained for decades from relationships, while mentoring and supporting our business events industry. My sincere appreciation to my valued industry clients & colleagues, the San Diego Tourism Authority, and PCMA for this incredible honor!”

Starks: “I’m humbled to be recognized by PCMA, especially alongside titans of the industry like Carolyn, Dave, and Angie. I’ve had the privilege of working in hospitality since I was 14 years old. It is truly my life’s work, but I never imagined being honored in this way. This industry has been incredibly challenging and rewarding, and I’m immensely grateful to my clients,

colleagues, and peers for believing I’m worthy of this award. It is one of the highlights of my career.”

USAE: How has PCMA shaped your career?

Pund: “PCMA didn’t just connect me to opportunities—it connected me to people. And over time, those connections became relationships, and those relationships became some of the most meaningful parts of my career and my life. Serving on the Board and Executive Committee was a turning point. It gave me a broader perspective—not just on my role, but on the impact this industry can have as a whole. It pushed me to think beyond my corporate-view world view, to lead differently, and to give back in ways I might not have otherwise. I still love giving back—everyone who’s received from the industry should give back even if it’s in a small way. But more than anything, PCMA reinforced something I truly believe—that what you invest in this community... comes back to you in ways you can’t measure. Giving back is the reward. I’m living proof of that.”

Lutz: “PCMA is my professional home. They’ve provided me an incredible platform to help them raise the bar for business event professionals. For the past 20 years, I’ve penned over 180 articles in my Forward Thinking column for *Convene Magazine*.

Ranalli: “This incredible award is a collective recognition and reflection that I share with the extraordinary people in the business events sector committed to driving social and economic progress. I am so grateful for our accomplishments and humbled to make a difference. Thank you for this honor.”

Starks: “For me, education is a core value of being part of PCMA, but relationships have proven to be just as valuable, if not more so. Meeting people from across the globe, developing meaningful partnerships and friendships, and feeling a sense of belonging has shaped me in immeasurable ways. The combined knowledge and connection have been integral to my career growth. And it all came full circle when I was chosen as PCMA Chair in 2022, which was the first year of the combined board. I was finally able to give back just a little of

what I had been given over the years. I’m extremely proud and thankful for

my longtime association with PCMA.” Find more information [here](#).



PCMA’s Professional Excellence Awards to Be Announced Soon

By Todd McElwee

PCMA has selected finalists for its annual Professional Excellence Awards, which recognize exceptional contributions to strategy, marketing, experience design, digital engagement, and industry leadership.

Professional Excellence Award winners will be announced on May 7 during the Visionary Awards at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. The celebration caps off Business Events Industry Week (BEIW).

Business Events Strategist of the Year:

- Mindy Grubb, CMP, Vice President, Events, eXp Realty
- Kyle B. Morris, Vice President, NMR Events Inc.

Corporate Event Marketer of the Year:

- Adele Durham, Sr. Director, Global Events, Veeam Software
- Kim Hastings, CMM, Director, Event Marketing, Procure Technologies
- Keri Ibbitson, Sr. Director of Global

Scientific Engagements & Events, Danaher

Digital Experience Strategist of the Year:

- Uzi Drori, Chief Information Officer, Chief Technology Officer, Kenes Group
- Dahlia El Gazzar, Chief Ruckus-maker, DAHLIA+Agency
- Kimberly Inniger, DES, Sr. Events & Outreach Manager, ORCID

Experience Design of the Year:

- Sina Bunte, CMP, DES, Founder, DigitalMind.events
- Kimberly Keating, Director of Conference Education, Viticus Group
- David T. Stevens, Wellness Architect, Olympian Meeting

Groundbreaker Award:

- Bianca DeStout, Sr. Sales Manager, Visit Cincy
- Kyle Jordan, CAE, CEM-AP, CMP Fellow, DES, CMM, Director of Meetings, Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences (INFORMS)
- Nuria Fernández Roldán, Online Learning Specialist, Kenes Group

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Industry Movers



Scott Berger has been named General Manager of the Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills. Berger most recently served as hotel manager of the newly opened Peninsula London. He also worked at several luxury properties in Los Angeles. Scott earned his B.S. in Hotel Administration from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He has served with the Beverly Hills Rotary as well as with the Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce.



Melissa Levy is now President of Sparks. She'll report directly to Janet Dell, CEO of The Freeman Company. Levy joins Sparks from Digitas, where she was president and chief client officer. Before Digitas, Levy held leadership roles across the marketing and advertising landscape, including managing director roles and with start-ups. She began her career in financial services before earning her MBA from Babson and transitioning into marketing.



Adam White has joined the Hotel Monaco Denver as General Manager. White brings 18 years of hotel leadership experience and specializes in budget management and strategic marketing. He served as general manager of the Kimpton Brice Hotel in Savannah. White's career also spans Los Angeles, Fort Lauderdale, Florida and Austin, with experience across brands such as Hyatt, Hilton, Marriott and IHG, as well as at independent hotels.



Pipere Sailer is now the Mill Falls Resort Collection's Director of Sales & Marketing. Sailer will lead efforts to grow group business, including weddings, corporate retreats and social events. She returns to New Hampshire after more than seven years with Vail Resorts. With Vail, she was the senior national sales manager with a focus on the Northeast Region, supporting Mount Snow, Okemo, Stowe, Hunter, and Mount Sunapee.

[See More Industry Movers](#)

Rosewood

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and inclusion are a natural extension of that purpose."

Rosewood has more than 16,000 associates around the world, Zelaya told *USAE*, with a majority of those associates working full-time. Approximately 2,700 of those associates are based in the United States.

Associates for the company help to manage 79 luxury and lifestyle properties around the globe under four brand umbrellas, according to Rosewood's website.

"Prior to this, we didn't have a single global parental leave policy," Zelaya said. "Our benefits varied by country, which meant there wasn't a consistent minimum level of support for associates across our organization."

However, she continued, over the years, associates shared openly with Rosewood "about the barriers and realities they face around parenthood. So we made the decision to establish a global standard."

Now, Rosewood's standard provides a minimum of 16 weeks of fully paid leave to associates who have been with the company for at least 40 weeks. Zelaya said associates who have been with the company for a

shorter amount of time are still able to take the full 16 weeks of leave, but their pay will be prorated based on the length of their service.

Feedback about the policy from Rosewood's associates has been "incredibly positive," Zelaya said, and U.S. associates "have shared that this type of benefit is a first for them."

Associates from across Rosewood's global portfolio have "expressed how proud they feel to see Rosewood take this step," Zelaya said.

"We've also received encouraging support from our business partners,"

she said. "Overall, the response has been incredibly meaningful and reinforces why creating this global standard was so important."

Looking forward in the coming months, a cohort of associates are preparing for or expecting to take the leave later this year, Rosewood told *USAE*.

Mason Beck, Sr. Marketing Communication Manager at the Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek in Dallas, is preparing to welcome

her first child. She has been with the property's marketing team for two and a half years and describes herself as "genuinely grateful" for Rosewood's new leave policy.

"Preparing to welcome a new baby, especially for the first time, is both exciting yet very overwhelming," Beck

said. "The announcement of Rosewood's gender-neutral parental leave policy has given me such peace of mind, as it allows me to take 16 weeks of paid leave to fully concentrate on bonding with my baby and adjusting to this new stage of life."

For Beck, Rosewood's new policy provides the support she needs to "embrace" her transition into a new chapter of life, she said.

"It is a remarkable advancement, and I'm thrilled to see the company moving forward in the right direction," Beck said.

Jose Perez, an associate in the housekeeping department at the Rosewood Miramar Beach in Montecito, California, for almost seven years, said the company's leave policy shows that Rosewood cares about its associates and their families.

A father of four, Perez's partner does not work, and "the opportunity to take paternity leave represents much more than time off," he said.

"It is the chance to be present during one of the most important moments in my child's life and in my own life as well," he said.

For hospitality companies who are considering updating or changing their parental leave policies to be more inclusive, Zelaya encourages employers "to start by listening to their people," she said. "Many of the most meaningful insights come from understanding the experiences and realities employees face as they think about starting or growing their families."

She added: "It's also important that policies like this reflect the values of

the organization. For us, equity was a critical principle, and we wanted to ensure the policy recognized different paths to parenthood and supported associates in a meaningful way. Ultimately, parental leave should be seen not simply as a benefit, but as an investment in people. It should be felt as genuine support, with associates represented and considered at every step of the journey."

PCMA Awards

continued from page 4

Impact Award:

- Bianca DeStout, Sr. Sales Manager, Visit Cincy
- Elena Fis, Sustainability Manager, Kenes Group
- Joyce Leveston, CMM, CVP – CEO, Javits Convention Center

Outstanding Service to a Chapter or Region:

- Carine M. Desroches, MMP, HMCC, Meetings & Events Director, National Kidney Foundation
- Melissa Peticolas, CEM, CMP, Account Executive, Vista Convention Services

Supplier of the Year:

- Lori Adlesick, Vice President, Strategic Partnerships & Events, Choose Chicago
- Joy Cmiel, Sr. Vice President, ConferenceDirect
- Karen Staples, CMP, CASE, Managing Director of Sales, Visit Salt Lake

"Prior to this, we didn't have a single global parental leave policy," Zelaya said. "Our benefits varied by country, which meant there wasn't a consistent minimum level of support for associates across our organization."

Women Leading the Way

Carrie Hughes Is Excited for Boise's Future

By Jordan Bradley

When Carrie Hughes, CDME, Executive Director of Visit Boise, was heading off to college and considering her career path, she did what most future-minded students did: she took a career-matching test.

"I was actually steered towards tourism and hospitality, which is really crazy," Hughes told *USAE*. "I know everyone else kind of just happens into the industry."

Hughes grew up in Seneca Falls, New York, and earned her bachelor's degree in tourism/travel management and business at Commonwealth University-Mansfield in Mansfield, Pennsylvania. While in college, her parents moved to Lake Placid, and she spent her summers waitressing at a local resort. After she graduated, a sales position came open at the same resort and Hughes jumped into the role.

But when the resort went through a season of layoffs about a year later, a 22-year-old Hughes took her severance, her skis and her bike, and headed off to Colorado.

"I didn't really have a plan other than I knew I could work hard, and I could do what I needed to do," Hughes said.

While working in hotel sales in Denver, Hughes said she "kept hearing" about friends from New York and Pennsylvania moving to Idaho, specifically Ketchum and Sun Valley. She was enticed enough that she took a job in sales with the then-director of the Ketchum/Sun Valley CVB, eventually working her way up to the role of marketing director.

"And then life changes," she said. "I ended up moving to Boise. I, actually, was not sure what I was going to do in Boise, I just knew I wanted a different experience, a different market. I kept doing these informational interview with contacts and people I knew through being in Idaho. Everyone kept directing me to the Chamber of Commerce."

So Hughes landed a leadership role overseeing the chamber's leadership and young professionals program. The role positioned her well to eventually step into the executive directorship at the Boise Convention and Visitors Bureau (which became Visit Boise three years ago), and really allowed her to get "to know the people and the like-minded go-getters, people that wanted to make a difference and that loved the community."

During her three years with the chamber, "I fell in love with Boise," Hughes said. When her current role came available, it felt like the right move.

By the time she joined in 2015, the

CVB had gone through "a lot of changes," Hughes recalled.

"It was much smaller," she said. "We'd lost some funding, so I was excited to grow the organization. It kind of felt like a startup."

Though Hughes didn't directly succeed the late Bobbie Patterson, Hughes still felt the former executive director's "huge presence" in the CVB, she told *USAE*.

"She had a very feisty personality," Hughes said. "She wasn't afraid to speak up. During the time when she led and she was here at the organization, it was probably a time when there weren't a lot of women leaders, outspoken women leaders. And she really believed in the organization and fought for it. There was never a 'no' answer."

Patterson was responsible for bringing the National Governors Conference to Boise, Hughes recalled, and was the first woman to chair Destinations International.

"She definitely never shied away from anything, and I definitely felt that," Hughes said.

As she was getting settled into the organization and shifting from her background in leisure travel in Sun Valley's smaller market into Boise's sports-and-incentive-driven market, Hughes said she leaned on the expertise of two team members who had been with Patterson at the CVB, and Patterson herself was just a phone call away with advice, or a person to contact.

"She was very supportive of me from the beginning," Hughes said.

In 2015, Patterson was inducted into Destination International's Hall of Fame. During her acceptance speech, Hughes recalled, Patterson made sure to call on attendees to support Hughes as she stepped into the executive director seat at the Boise CVB.

"She said something about me: 'Oh, by the way, we've got my replacement out here in the audience. Please embrace her and help her along,'" Hughes recalled. "So she was definitely a female leader that helped other females succeed."

For women stepping into a leadership role, Hughes can't recommend networking and finding a mentor enough, she told *USAE*. She also emphasized the importance of asking questions.

"In the beginning [of my time at the Boise CVB,] we didn't have the budget to attend some of these national conferences and get to that peer-to-peer learning," Hughes said. "But if you pick up the phone, anyone will answer and help you. I don't think there's another industry like it, actually. To be compet-



itors yet share great advice. I would have loved to form some of those friendships earlier on. And, really, there's no dumb question. Everyone's probably been there or done that and needed that advice at some point."

During her time with the Boise CVB, Hughes has seen a lot: the pandemic, of course, but also a successful shift in storytelling around Boise's identity, bringing into focus the culinary and cultural offerings of the city alongside its outdoorsy reputation.

"When I started, it was like [we're] bringing out the map. 'Where's Boise?'" Hughes said. "Now, it's so exciting to see the shift that's happened due to that storytelling in a real, authentic way. 'It's on my list. I've heard about Boise. I want to come.' And hopefully we can give them more and more reasons to come."

Idaho's capital city is currently seeing a surge in high-quality (and James Beard Award-winning or -finalist) restaurants.

"Culinary in general has really evolved here," Hughes said. "I'd say a lot of it is because it's such a fabulous place to be. People who grew up here and went off and trained in other markets like New York City or Seattle or Portland then can come back here, raise their family and be the chef specializing in the thing."

Alongside a burgeoning restaurant industry, Hughes has watched the city's downtown hotel market grow significantly, increasing from around 500 guest rooms when she started in 2015 to approximately 2,000 today. Hughes was sure to call out the forthcoming of the largest hotel in the city, the dual-branded AC and Element

hotels, which is expected to open "within the next few weeks" adding almost 300 guest rooms to the city's hotel market, Hughes said.

Today, Hughes and the small-but-mighty team at Visit Boise are preparing their next strategic plan, which Hughes expects to be completed later this year.

"I've always believed that really thoughtful investment in meetings and conferences and events can create a meaningful, long-term impact for Boise," Hughes said. "So we've worked really closely with our partners—like Boise Center—and then we've focused on building that side of the business in a way that delivers really strong returns and helps position the destination for future opportunities, including projects like a future expansion."

The Greater Boise Auditorium District has recently obtained purchase agreements for six acres of property near the Boise River and just a handful of blocks from the district as it exists today. Though the district hasn't yet identified the projects for the parcels, "that to us is very exciting for the future and what that can be," Hughes said.

As the city grows in visibility, popularity and literal size, Hughes and the Visit Boise team are mindful of balance.

"There's definitely been the growth of people moving here, but it's also about the visitation," Hughes said. "I think you have to have both. You have to have the balance of everything to be able to support those types of restaurants that you want [and] the quality of life you want to enjoy here. We really want to maintain the Boise nice and welcoming nature."

NEWS

My Washington, D.C.



By Elliott L. Ferguson II,
President & CEO, Destination DC

PCMA's Business Events Industry Week is in Washington, D.C., from May 5–7. Who better than Ferguson to fill in the following blanks regarding the best the nation's capital city has to offer?

USAE: When I need coffee, my first stop is...?

Ferguson: I'm pretty set when it comes to coffee between the office and home. At DDC, we've invested in several options for the team, including iced coffee and an espresso machine, and I've done something similar at home. But when I do go out for coffee

and I'm not near either, I'll head to a local barista like Civic on Eighth in my Capitol Hill neighborhood. It is owned by a local Black woman and is community-focused. It's part of what makes D.C. stand apart from other destinations: the people and stories behind them.

USAE: One place I always take a first-time visitor to D.C. is...?

Ferguson: One place I always take a first-time visitor to DC is Eastern Market. It's one of the best ways to experience the city as a local. On weekends, the energy of artists, vendors, musicians and neighbors all come together. You can grab breakfast, browse handmade goods and take part in a community that has been in D.C. for generations.

USAE: I cannot resist this dish at...?

Ferguson: So many people from all over the world choose D.C. to make their home, and the international influence is seen in the food. You can experience everything from Ethiopian to Japanese, alongside classic steakhouses and long-standing neighborhood spots. The range says a lot about the city and how menus here often reflect a broader cultural story. You see it at Marcus Samuelsson's restaurant at The Morrow Hotel, where dishes draw on global influences while still staying rooted in place. The crab rice is lay-

ered and unexpected, and the praline vanilla rum cake prepared tableside is a memorable finish.

USAE: The most peaceful spot in D.C. is...?

Ferguson: The most peaceful spots in D.C. are in our parks. People don't always realize how much green space we have. Rock Creek Park cuts right through the city with miles of trails that feel far from downtown. The National Arboretum offers something different. It spans 450 acres with highlights such as the National Capitol Columns, which are the columns from the original Capitol Building, the bonsai collection and seasonal displays. You can walk, bike or just sit and take it in.

USAE: This neighborhood is often overlooked but is worth visiting is...?

Ferguson: Anacostia is often overlooked but worth visiting. There's a lot to explore, from museums and coffee shops to local restaurants, along with a deep sense of history. The Frederick Douglass House is a highlight, and the broader story of the neighborhood, including the development of the 11th Street Bridge, adds important context to how the city continues to evolve.

Mount Pleasant is another neighborhood that's well worth exploring. It's one of D.C.'s early streetcar suburbs, and you still see that history in the rowhomes and storefronts

along Mount Pleasant Street. Today, it stands out for its mix of cultures and its neighborhood feel, with long-standing spots alongside newer places, plus bookstores, small markets and murals that give it real character.

USAE: If I have 30 minutes for lunch, I head to...?

Ferguson: I head to Union Market. It's a snapshot of D.C.'s evolution with a mix of cuisines and entrepreneurs all under one roof. Closer to my office and the Walter E. Washington Convention Center, the cash-only Saint's Paradise Cafeteria, housed in a church, offers a classic Southern meal. Love Makoto is another great option. It's a Japanese food hall concept where you can move between different counters for sushi or ramen. These places show how dynamic the food scene is right now.

USAE: Do not miss this museum...?

Ferguson: Do not miss the National Museum of African American History and Culture; it's essential. The storytelling is powerful and comprehensive, and it challenges you to think more deeply about the American experience. I'm also looking forward to what's ahead—the opening of the National Geographic Museum of Exploration and the reopening of the African American Civil War Museum. And the National Museum of American History is spectacular as well. Taken together, they show both the depth and the continued evolution of DC's museum landscape.

USAE: Fashionistas cannot miss...?

Ferguson: CityCenterDC brings together a collection of luxury brands right in the heart of downtown. Georgetown offers something different with its historic streets and a strong mix of national and local names. You'll find menswear at Sid Mashburn and Todd Snyder, D.C.-founded Tuckernuck and international brands such as Sézane. Areas such as Book Hill and Cady's Alley add another layer with smaller shops and galleries that feel more personal.

USAE: When you want a sense of D.C.'s local history visit...?

Ferguson: When you want a sense of D.C.'s local history, spend time on U Street. This corridor, once known as Black Broadway, has a deep cultural legacy rooted in music, arts and Black entrepreneurship. A guided walking tour brings that history to life, from the Howard Theatre and Lincoln Theatre to the stories of Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. You also see that history in places like Ben's Chili Bowl, a neighborhood anchor for more than 65 years.

Advocacy Day

continued from page 1

holders with the understanding, tools and confidence to champion the value of destination organization—not just in economic terms, but in how they contribute to community well-being and stewardship.”

The Global Virtual Advocacy Day will bring together destination leaders, board members, public officials, and private-sector partners across multiple regions and time zones. Organizers said the program will feature digital meetings, educational sessions, and coordinated outreach efforts aimed at strengthening engagement with policymakers and community stakeholders.

The initiative comes as destination organizations continue to evolve beyond their traditional role of marketing and promotion. Industry leaders increasingly emphasize their contributions to economic development, workforce support, and community vitality, particularly as the travel sector adapts to post-pandemic challenges, and shifting expectations.

According to DI, the virtual format is designed to increase accessibility and participation, allowing stakeholders

from around the world to engage without the barriers of travel costs or geography. The organization expects strong participation from its international membership, which spans hundreds of destinations across multiple countries and territories.

Participants will receive guidance on how to effectively communicate with elected officials and other decision-makers, including messaging frameworks, data points, and best practices for virtual engagement. The organization also plans to provide adaptable resources that can be tailored to local and regional contexts.

“This global Virtual Advocacy Day is about shifting mindsets,” Welsh said. “When advocacy becomes a shared, continuous effort supported by data, storytelling and collaboration, we strengthen not only our organizations but the communities we serve.”

Organizers described the event as an interactive, action-oriented experience focused on building long-term advocacy capacity. In addition to real-time engagement, the initiative is intended to encourage ongoing efforts that extend beyond a single day, embedding advocacy into the daily work of destination organizations and their partners.

The program will focus on key priorities such as funding for destination promotion, the role of tourism in economic growth, and the importance of collaboration between public and private sectors. It also aims to highlight how destination organizations contribute to broader community outcomes, including quality of life and sustainable development.

The effort is supported by the DI Foundation and industry partners Chase Travel, Civitas, and Simpleview, a Granicus company.

DI said the success of the Global Virtual Advocacy Day will be measured not only by participation levels but also by its ability to foster lasting relationships with policymakers and stakeholders, ultimately influencing decisions that affect the travel and tourism sector.

By formalizing a global, digital platform for advocacy, the organization aims to create a more unified voice for the industry while ensuring that destination organizations are better equipped to communicate their value in an increasingly complex environment.

Find more information and registration details [here](#).

NEWS

Hyatt Regency Chicago Completes Final Phase of \$200M Renovation

By Jordan Bradley

The Hyatt Regency Chicago along the Windy City's Chicago River has completed a multi-year, \$200 million renovation.

The final phase in the renovation "serves as the capstone of the transformation," the Hyatt Regency Chicago said in its late-April announcement, "unveiling a full reimagined Grand Ballroom experience."

"We are thrilled to celebrate this milestone and debut the reimagined Hyatt Regency Chicago," said General

Manager Mark Wagner.

The renovation of the Hyatt Regency's 24,000-square-foot Grand Ballroom includes new customizable LED ceiling panels, modernized finishes throughout, renovated breakout spaces, and a completely redesigned 7,000-square-foot foyer complete with built-in registration desks, new digital screens for customized branding, and a digital feature wall.

Prior to the third and final phase of the property-wide renovation, the Hyatt Regency completed the transformation of its West Tower



The Hyatt Regency Chicago completed its multi-phase, \$200 million renovation last month.

guest rooms and suites in 2023. In the second phase, the hotel completed the modernization of its Regency and Crystal Ballrooms, and the remaining guest rooms in the East Tower in 2024.

"As the largest hotel in Chicago, operating in one of the most dynamic meeting markets in the country, this \$200 million transformation reinforces our commitment to delivering exceptional spaces for today's attendee," said Wagner. "Every guest room,

meeting venue, networking area, and public space has been thoughtfully redesigned to reflect how people gather, connect, and do business today."

To take advantage of the new spaces, the Hyatt Regency Chicago said guests "can look forward to a robust calendar of dynamic offerings" in 2026, "including new and signature holiday activations, refreshed food & beverage programming, and seasonal experiences throughout the hotel."

Find more information [here](#).



The newly renovated Grand Ballroom at the Hyatt Regency Chicago

Second Convention Center Hotel Planned in Detroit

By Jonathan Trager

Plans for a second hotel connected to downtown Detroit's Huntington Place convention center were unveiled on April 29, a project officials say is aimed at boosting the city's ability to attract major events.

The proposed development calls for a roughly 600-room hotel to be built on a full city block just north of Huntington Place. Tourism and development officials say the project would complement a separate 600-room JW Marriott hotel already under construction nearby.

Claude Molinari, President & CEO of Visit Detroit and Chair of the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority, said the additional hotel capacity is critical to growing the city's convention business.

"This will provide 'much-needed' additional hotel rooms and serve as a catalyst for attracting new conventions across our region," Molinari said.

The new hotel is expected to include a direct connection to Huntington Place, similar to the skybridge planned for the adjacent JW Marriott project. Officials have emphasized that

connected hotel rooms are often a deciding factor for large conventions when choosing host cities.

Molinari said interest from developers remains strong as Detroit continues to market itself as a destination for national events. The hotel will be jointly owned: 51% by the developers and possibly a hotel brand and 49% by the DRCFA, according to local news outlet WXYZ.

"We regularly have conversations with hotel developers, and I can tell you there is great interest in our destination," said Molinari.

The project, estimated at about \$450 million, would require demolition of existing structures on the site, including the Fort Washington Plaza office building and a nearby parking garage, according to officials and reports.

Construction could begin as early as 2027, with a targeted opening around 2029.

"This is another milestone moment for hotel development in Detroit and puts Huntington Place in a prime position to secure even more industry-leading meetings, conventions, and large-scale events," Molinari said.

ASAE Announces Gold Circle Award Honorees

By Todd McElwee

Honoring the creativity, execution and success of marketing, membership and communications campaigns in the association community, ASAE has announced the 2026 Gold Circle Awards.

Winners will be recognized during ASAE's Marketing, Membership, Communications + Tech Conference, taking place on May 28–29 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C. The Overall Excellence Award will be announced during the event.

"The Gold Circle Awards shine a light on the amazing work that associations do for the professions and communities they serve," said Joe Rominiecki,

CAE, Chair, ASAE Gold Circle Awards Committee. "Each winning project showcases the creativity and ingenuity that is abundant in marketing, membership, and communications in the association community. We are thrilled to have received so many great submissions, and we are eager to celebrate the winners next month."

The 2026 Gold Circle Award winners are:

- Advocacy Campaign—American Nurses Association, *Nursing is a Professional Degree*
- Convention/Meetings Marketing Campaign—Center to Advance Palliative Care, *Build and Connect: Reinventing the CAPC National Seminar*

Please turn to page 9

My D.C.

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USAE: America's 250th is wonderfully celebrated at...?

Ferguson: America's 250th is being celebrated in Washington, D.C., but what makes it meaningful here is how local the story feels. You can stand in front of the Declaration of

Independence and also explore neighborhoods and institutions that tell a fuller story of the country. Programs such as Eat 250, 51 Steps to Freedom, neighborhood tours and cultural events such as DC JazzFest connect that history to the present. It is an opportunity to see how the national story is reflected in the lives of the people who call D.C. home.

NEWS

Bishop-McCann Names Joelle Morgan as Chief Experience Officer

By Todd McElwee

Boasting more than 20 years of experience leading large-scale event programs and building integrated experience strategies, Joelle Morgan is now Chief Experience Officer of Bishop-McCann.

The firm said the newly created role reflects a continued investment in strengthening its creative, strategic, and delivery capabilities.

“I’m excited to join Bishop-McCann at a moment of real momentum,” said Morgan. “The team has built a strong foundation, and there’s a clear opportunity to continue evolving how

we design and deliver experiences that matter for our clients and their audiences.”

Morgan will focus on advancing Bishop-McCann’s approach to experience design, strengthening how strategy, creative, and delivery come together across the business, and ensuring programs are built to drive engagement, performance, and long-term client value.

“Joelle knows how to turn ideas into experiences that deliver real results,” said Rob Adams, CEO and partner of Bishop-McCann. “As we continue to grow, this role ensures we are building with intention. Joelle brings the leader-

ship and clarity we need to keep raising the bar for our clients.”

Morgan’s career has spanned the corporate finance, technology, food and beverage, banking, pharmaceutical, real estate, and services industries. She has designed and led event portfolios exceeding 350 programs, including experiences for up to 15,000 attendees and individual programs with budgets up to \$45 million. She has worked with World Vision and Doctors Without Borders and spoken at MPI and IMEX events.

Originally from Sydney, Australia, she has lived in Fiji, Canada, and the United States. Outside of work, she enjoys skiing, hiking, sailing, and travel.



Joelle Morgan

ASAE Gold Circle

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After a Five-Year Hiatus

- E-Newsletter—The American Institute of Architects, *AIA Access Member Newsletter*
- Media/Public Relations Campaign—College of American Pathologists, *Infectious Disease and Laboratory Readiness Media Briefings*
- Membership Recruitment Campaign—Center to Advance Palliative Care, *CAPC 2025 Membership Recruitment: Expanding Access to Improve Care*
- Membership Retention Campaign—Finseca, *Finseca Retention Strategy*

- Member/Volunteer Engagement Campaign—American Association of Nurse Anesthesiology, *Diversity Anesthesia Pathways Tour*
- Mobile App—Northern Virginia Association of Realtors, *Meeting Members Where They “R”: The NVAR Mobile App*
- New Product/Service Launch—American Society for Nondestructive Testing, *ASNT’s Freemium Membership Model*
- Podcast—American Association of Nurse Anesthesiology, *Grade 1 View Resident Podcast*
- Publications—Missouri State Teachers Association, *School & Community Digital Magazine*
- Rebranding Campaign—California

Association for Leading Innovation in Education, *From CUE to CALIE*

Sponsorship/Exhibits/Advertising Promotion—American Society of Landscape Architects, *ASLA 2025 Conference on Landscape Architecture: Integrated Industry Partner Growth Campaign*

- Video—California Association

for Leading Innovation in Education, *CALIE, THE NEXT FRONTIER*

• Website—American College of Radiology, *acr.org Website Optimization*

The Gold Circle Awards are supported by ASAE Business Solutions.

Find descriptions of each winning program [here](#).

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OBITUARY

Waste Association Founder Dean Buntrock Dies

By Todd McElwee

Dean Buntrock, a pioneer in the trash and recycling industry who helped found Waste Management (WM) and the National Waste & Recycling Association (NWRA), died on April 17. He was 94.

“Dean Buntrock was one of the architects of our industry,” said Don Ross, Chairman, NWRA. “Through his founding of Waste Management and his role in creating what is now the National Waste & Recycling Association, he brought vision, structure and credibility to a growing sector. We honor his legacy and the enduring impact he had on our industry and its people.”

The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported Buntrock’s career in sanitation began in 1956 when the death of his father-in-law thrust him into the business in Chicago. He was initially inclined to sell the family trash business, Ace Scavenger Service, but after further examination

he kept the business. Expansion soon followed.

Buntrock was a founder of the National Solid Wastes Management Association, today known as NWRA. He served as the organization’s first president in 1962. NWRA said he helped establish a unified voice for the private-sector waste and recycling industry and remained involved for nearly 20 years, serving as secretary, treasurer and director.

“Dean’s leadership helped transform the business of waste and recycling into a best in class industry today,” said Michael E. Hoffman, President & CEO of NWRA. “He understood early on the importance of building strong, responsible companies, with a focus on community, safety and capital stewardship coalescing around a unified industry voice. His contributions continue to shape how we operate, advocate and lead, and his legacy will be felt for generations to come.”

In the late 1960s, Buntrock teamed up with Wayne Huizenga, a cousin of

his ex-wife, Elizabeth, who had built a waste-hauling business in Florida. *WSJ* added their merged company went public in 1971 as Waste Management.

“As we reflect on his passing, we honor not only the company he helped build but the values he instilled—service, innovation, responsibility, and respect for the communities we serve. WM’s evolution into a sustainability leader is part of his legacy, and we carry it forward with gratitude and purpose,” Jim Fish, CEO, WM, said on LinkedIn. “On behalf of our entire WM family, we extend our deepest condolences to the Buntrock family. Dean’s name, leadership, and impact will continue to be spoken—and felt—for generations.”

Buntrock was born June 6, 1931, and grew up in Columbia, South Dakota. He served in the Army and attended St. Olaf College.

Buntrock is survived by his wife Rosemarie Nuzzo Parziale, along with three daughters from his first marriage, six granddaughters and two great-grandchildren.



A Memorial Service is set for May 6 at Spitzer-Miller Funeral Home in Aberdeen, South Dakota. The funeral will take place the following day at Our Saviors Lutheran Church in Aberdeen. In lieu of flowers, donations in honor of Dean L. Buntrock can be made to St. Olaf College.

NEWS

HANYC Foundation Awards \$15,000 Grant to Local Nonprofit

By Jordan Bradley

The Hotel Association of New York City (HANYC) Foundation awarded a \$15,000 grant to Afrikana, a local nonprofit dedicating to expanding support services for migrants new to the city.

The grant will help the Harlem-based organization in providing migrants of Black, Muslim, and Arab heritage with safe housing and employment “to survive and thrive as members of the New York City community,” the foundation said.

“It’s critical that we support the safety of our newest New Yorkers,” said Heather Davis, Chair of the HANYC Foundation and Sr. Vice President of Operations at Aimbridge Hospitality.

According to Afrikana’s website, Black, Muslim and Arab migrants “face significant barriers” when arriving to America, including barriers to accessing services, housing, food and employment.

“It is a joy to be in partnership with the HANYC Foundation and see the hospitality industry supporting New York’s migrant community during a crucial time,” said Adama Bah, Executive Director of Afrikana. “As someone who came through the immigration system myself and now helps others, I can attest that the road is particularly challenging for Black and Muslim migrants. This grant will allow our organization to connect people with the essential resources they need to not just survive in New York, but truly belong here.”

According to Afrikana’s website, Black, Muslim and Arab migrants “face significant barriers” when arriving to America, including barriers

to accessing services, housing, food and employment. Language barriers are also sometimes a challenge, the nonprofit said, and transitioning into a new community often requires emotional support. Through Afrikana, clients are connected to public benefits and nonprofits that address their individual needs.

The HANYC Foundation regularly works with local nonprofits “to address critical challenges facing New York City,” the organization said, “including public safety, sanitation, and immigration—while reinforcing the hospitality industry’s role as a civic leader in supporting a safe and thriving city.”

“New York City has always been shaped by people coming in and creating something new. When new arrivals have access to stable housing and meaningful work, it strengthens communities and supports the local economy,” Davis said. “Our industry is about welcoming people and helping

them find their footing, and Afrikana is doing that work every day. We’re proud to support their efforts.”

Around Associations

SITE Young Leaders Conference Coming to Frankfurt... Taking place on May 18 right before IMEX Frankfurt, the SITE Young Leaders Conference is an annual one-day event specifically designed to help young leaders engage with other emerging incentive travel professionals from around the world. The event is set for the NHow Hotel and will be held under the theme of “20 Years Old. 20 Years Young.”

“This year’s conference celebrates the many paths to leadership,” SITE said. “Whether you’re new to the industry or stepping into your next level of influence, you’ll be surrounded by peers navigating similar challenges and opportunities. At the heart of this year’s theme is the idea that growth is not linear, but dual. Each stage of the Young Leaders journey holds two realities at the same time - where you are and how you got there, how you show up and how you grow, how it feels and how it connects, where you can go and how far you can take it.”

The event will look at personal brands, imposter syndrome, professional growth and senior perspectives on leadership, burnout, and boundaries.

“Join us in Frankfurt as we celebrate 20 years of redefining what it means to be a Young Leader,” SITE said. “Experience doesn’t cancel youth, and the future of our industry is already in the room.”

Find more information [here](#).

AMPs Hosting Summer Bash 2026 in Washington, D.C... On June 18, the Association of Meeting Professionals (AMPs) will hold its Summer Bash 2026 at The Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C.

“Summer starts here,” AMPs said. “Join us for the AMPs Summer Bash 2026—an evening designed to bring together great people, fresh connections, and the kind of energy that makes this community so special. From vibrant conversations to a lively atmosphere, this is your chance to unwind, network, and celebrate the season in style. You won’t want to be the one hearing about it after—be in the room.”

Find more information [here](#).

Lori Medlin Retiring as Head of Halifax County CVB

By Jonathan Trager

Lori Medlin will retire November 1 after more than three decades as President & CEO of the Halifax County CVB in North Carolina.

Under Medlin’s longtime leadership, the bureau expanded its marketing reach and played a key role in highlighting the county’s historical and cultural assets. Tourism initiatives during her tenure helped draw visitors to sites such as Historic Halifax and Lake Gaston, contributing to the local economy.

“It has been the honor of a lifetime to serve Halifax County,” said Medlin. “Together, we have built an industry that not only drives economic growth but also shares our history, culture, and community with visitors from around the world.”

Medlin plans to spend time with her children and grandchildren and to enjoy Lake Gaston and the North Carolina beaches in her retirement.

Wit Tuttell, Director of Visit North Carolina, praised Medlin’s impact across the state, calling her “a driving force in North Carolina tourism” during her tenure.

“Her leadership, vision, and passion for place have elevated Halifax County into a destination of statewide significance,” said Tuttell. “She understands that tourism is not just about visitors, it’s about community, heritage, and economic opportunity. Her legacy will be felt for generations.”

Yvonne Thompson, Chairperson of the Halifax County CVB, said Medlin’s “dedication to Halifax



Lori Medlin

County is unmatched.”

“She has not only grown our tourism economy but has also strengthened our identity and pride as a community,” said Thompson. “Her work has touched every corner of this county, and her leadership has positioned us for continued success. On behalf of the board, we are deeply grateful for her service and lasting contributions.”

Details regarding transition plans and future leadership will be announced by the organization’s board of directors in the coming months.

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Workdays Meet Wanderlust on Kiawah Island—50 Years Strong

At [Kiawah Island Golf Resort](#), a group gathering isn't just about agendas—it's about experiences. Since 1976, planners have counted on this Southern paradise to inspire camaraderie with meticulous fairways, serene beachfront settings and world-class amenities designed to reset and reenergize. It's a legacy that spans five decades and an enticing reason many meeting attendees choose to extend their stays, turning a work trip into a weekend getaway—or even a full-family summer retreat.

Awe-Inspiring Options

Beneath canopies of Spanish moss-draped oaks, [purpose-built venues](#) offer a fresh perspective that keeps business at hand a little lighter, complete with ocean views and salt air. It's a feeling shared throughout the island, whether unwinding along 10 miles of striking South Carolina shoreline or collaborating in nearly 90,000 square feet of airy, inviting indoor and outdoor spaces.

The [West Beach Conference Center](#) is at the heart of it all, accommodating both focused executive sessions and grand events of up to 800 attendees. In-house conference managers and talented AV pros ensure meetings run smoothly, while chef-curated menus complement every occasion.

After a day of serious meetings, guests can explore and immerse themselves in the unspoiled surroundings—taking guided nature tours, breezing along 30 miles of bicycling trails, unwinding with beach yoga and spa treatments, or simply savoring quiet moments as pampas grasses sway and osprey anticipate their next catch. There's always something exciting on the horizon.

The secluded barrier island is framed by a unique mix of coastal environments, each with its own personality, giving rise to an endless array



Padding the winding waterways of Kiawah Island

of [water sports and activities](#). On the southern side, the gentle roar of the Atlantic Ocean promises days filled with sun, surf and serenity. The north is shaped by the Kiawah River and a tranquil vibe perfect for kayaking and paddleboarding. Salt marshes, tidal creeks and lagoons add to the lush natural scenery.

Iconic Rounds

At the nation's premier golf destination, the clubs will most certainly come out on [five championship layouts](#), including The Ocean Course. This Pete and Alice Dye masterpiece is just five years away from proudly hosting its third PGA Championship in 2031. Additional celebrated designs at the resort are Turtle Point by Jack Nicklaus, Osprey Point by Tom Fazio, Oak Point by Clyde Johnston, and Cougar Point by Gary Player. Legendary clubhouses are ideal for toasting a game well-

played and retelling stories that only a great round can create.

Courtside Connections

Guests can engage in a little friendly competition at the property's acclaimed [Roy Barth Tennis Center](#), home to 22 state-of-the-art tennis courts, six dedicated pickleball courts and two brand-new padel courts designed for every skill level. Group and private lessons are also available. Step into the newly renovated Tennis Clubhouse for a modern pro shop fully stocked with apparel, gear and accessories, and the Courtside Café, perfect for post-game relaxing and refueling.

New Adventures

Indoors, [The Treehouse Activity Center at Night Heron Park](#) offers more ways than ever to branch out. The latest chapter in Kiawah Island Golf Resort's long list of recreational outings, The Treehouse delights with two golf SIMS featuring top courses from around the globe, eight full-size bowling lanes and an arcade where the latest interactive games meet classic favorites—everything from Mario Kart to Skee-ball, shooting hoops and shuffleboard.

Also inside The Treehouse Activity Center, The Art Studio encourages creativity with a variety of guided and independent artistic endeavors, including pottery, wood crafts and canvas painting. The Nature Center offers an up-close look at the island's wildlife with exhibits and tours showcasing locals like diamondback terrapins and alligators. And when it's time to recharge, The Perch is an easygoing spot to unplug and share ideas over a menu of beverages and pub fare.

Delicious Directions

In addition to The Perch, a total of 15 other diverse restaurants and eateries make up [The Kiawah Dining Collection](#), each bringing its signature flavors to the table—be it poolside, indoors or under a starry sky. Experiences include The Ocean Room, South Carolina's only Forbes Five-Star dining destination, as well as fresh-caught seafood, authentic Italian dishes, casual gourmet options, and specialty Magic Milkshakes topped generously and crafted with locally sourced ice cream.

The [Mingo Point Oyster Roast and BBQ](#) is the resort's longest-standing culinary tradition, highlighted with steamed oysters, slow-cooked barbecue and live music overlooking the Kiawah River. A must for planners seeking to give their team a true taste of Lowcountry culture and cuisine in Kiawah's signature, spirited, laid-back atmosphere.

More to Stay For

Whether here for business or just a desire to unwind, an unforgettable stay awaits. Choose [private Resort Villas](#) with all the comforts of home steps from the sand or [The Sanctuary](#)—one of just five U.S. properties with a Triple Forbes Five-Star rating for accommodations, restaurant and spa. Each provides full access to resort amenities, including pool complexes and preferred times for dining and golf.

The resort is easily accessed by car or Charleston International Airport (CHS), followed by a leisurely drive. For workdays-turned-weekend getaways, nothing comes close to [Kiawah Island Golf Resort](#)—50 years and counting.



Forbes Five-Star dining at The Ocean Room

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VISITOMAHA™

NEWS

Certified Tourism Ambassador® (CTA) Program Celebrates 20th Anniversary

Enhancing the Attendee and Visitor Experience



Attendees, visitors, and residents will see CTAs staffing visitor centers, serving meals, working attractions, conducting traffic, giving speeches, and running cities.

They are among over 60,000 who have earned the industry-recognized, professional designation – Certified Tourism Ambassador® (CTA) – since the program's founding in May 2006. Today, there are 30 CTA programs in 20 U.S. states who are joining the year-long 20th Anniversary celebration.

The Certified Tourism Ambassador® (CTA) program is the only international, industry-recognized certification that aligns the entire community – from the front-line to the mayor – to strengthen tourism and deliver quality experiences for

attendees, visitors, and locals. Each program is customized and administered by a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) at the local level. Savvy CTA destinations continue to leverage CTA as a point of differentiation in the site selection process. Event planners and tour operators report that CTA tips the scale in favor of a "CTA City." Knowing the destination is constantly 'geared up' to welcome attendees matters.

Anaheim / Orange County is the longest-running, continuous CTA destination – launching in 2008. "The Certified Tourism Ambassador® program is a direct investment in the people shaping Anaheim's future," said Mike Waterman, CTA, President & CEO, Visit Anaheim. "By empowering our hospitality

community with deeper knowledge, pride, and a shared sense of purpose, we're unlocking new opportunities for growth while elevating every visitor interaction. As Anaheim enters a defining era of momentum, CTA ensures we're not just keeping pace, we're setting the standard as a welcoming, world-class destination."

Seattle's early 2025 launch of the CTA program has positioned the community to welcome the FIFA World Cup and beyond. "From our recent Seattle Convention Center expansion to our reimagined waterfront and beyond to the great outdoors, we are excited to show our city to the world," said Tammy Canavan, FCDME, President & CEO, Visit Seattle. "The CTA program aligns beautifully with who we are – An inclusive city forged from nature."

Palm Beach County has had equal success. "Since launching in December 2024, the reach and influence of the CTA program have delivered clear, measurable value," said Milton Segarra, CDME, CTA, President & CEO of Discover The Palm Beaches. "CTA is more than a training program. It connects residents and employees across industries to a shared understanding of tourism's value, strengthens our front-line experience, and has fostered an unexpected network of passionate community advocates." "Overall, CTA has become a powerful tool in enhancing service delivery and deepening our community's connection to tourism, creating a network of ambassadors who actively represent the destination every day."

The Founder, Mickey Schaefer, FASAE, CAE, CTA, reflected on the 20-year milestone. "The success of the CTA program stems from the dedication and commitment of the destinations of all sizes who have chosen to make their front-line and community engagement a priority," said Schaefer. "Sustainability has been proven. Surviving two recessions and a pandemic, the CTA

certification program has provided a rallying point. It's all about community engagement – bringing people together and building connections to strengthen the tourism economy. Creating a tourism home. That's the very essence of CTA."

ABOUT TAI AND CTA

The Tourism Ambassador Institute® (TAI) licenses and accredits local tourism entities as Accredited Providers (APs), such as Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO), to confer the Certified Tourism Ambassador® (CTA) professional designation at the local level. CTA Network LLC is the administrative entity for the certification program.

Since the program's founding in May 2006, over 60,000 CTAs have achieved this professional designation. At present, there are 30 programs in 21 U.S. states.

The Institute was founded by Mickey Schaefer, FASAE, CAE, CTA. In recognition of her dedication to the meetings & conventions industry, Schaefer was inducted by the Events Industry Council (EIC) into the industry's prestigious Hall of Leaders; presented the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA); named four times among the "25 Most Influential in the Meetings Industry" by *Successful Meetings* magazine; and "Top Six Industry Leaders" by *Smart Meetings* magazine.

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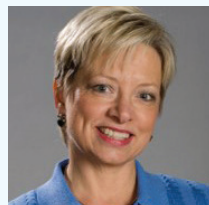
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