

USAEXtra

IMEX
America

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Carina Bauer, CEO, IMEX Group; and Ray Bloom, Chairman and Founder, IMEX Group. IMEX America is October 13–15, at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center in Las Vegas. It is preceded by Smart Monday, powered by MPI on October 12. Credit: IMEX

IMEX America Fifteen Years of Possibility



By Vanessa Claspill,
Chief Sales Officer,
Las Vegas Convention and
Visitors Authority

Fifteen years ago, Ray Bloom and Carina Bauer chose Las Vegas to launch IMEX America, recognizing a natural home for their vision in a city built around hospitality. They set out to create a gathering where the global meetings community could do business, exchange ideas and build relationships both on the show floor and over dinner afterward. We are grateful for their trust in Las Vegas and proud to have helped bring that vision to life.

IMEX America welcomed approximately 7,200 industry professionals at its first show in 2011. By 2025, attendance had grown to

17,600, including buyers and decision-makers from more than 70 countries. That growth reflects the commitment of the IMEX team and the professionals who return each year with ideas to share, challenges to work through and business to accomplish. Hosting them is both a privilege and a responsibility. When we welcome people who organize events for a living, every detail matters.

**Over its history,
IMEX America has welcomed
nearly 185,000 participants
and generated an estimated
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impact for Southern Nevada.**

Over its history, IMEX America has welcomed nearly 185,000 participants and generated an estimated \$360 million in economic impact for Southern Nevada. That contribution reaches

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NEWS

NCBMP Conference in Louisville to Be 'Bigger Than the Moment'

By Todd McElwee

Home to Muhammad Ali and the Kentucky Derby, Louisville has a penchant for not just living up to the moment—but surpassing it.

Tapping into that energy and confidence, the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals (NCBMP) is staging its 43rd Annual Conference under the banner of “Be Bigger Than the Moment” during its December 9–12 run in Bourbon City.

“For me, this conference has three objectives,” Jason Dunn Sr., CEO, NCBMP, told *USAE*. “First, prepare our members for what’s next. The world is changing. Our industry is changing. And frankly, some of the old ways of doing business aren’t going to work anymore. Our job is not to make our members comfortable. It’s to make them prepared. I want people leaving Louisville asking better questions, making smarter decisions, and understanding how to position themselves and their organizations for what’s coming next. That’s ‘Be Bigger Than the Moment.’”

Addressing Dunn’s initial objective, the conference’s learning agenda features an eclectic lineup of speakers in a variety of formats, including fireside chats, keynotes and panel discussions. Sessions will explore meeting planning, data, marketing, revenue, legacy, community development, AI, sports, and more.

The Opening Plenary, “BE BIG: Perspective, Power, and Progress,” will be built around a conversation between Joy-Ann Reid, an award-winning political analyst, journalist, and *New York Times* bestselling author, and Dunn. Influence, advocacy, and the power of informed leadership will be explored.

The Hon. Judge Fanon A. Rucker, now the managing lawyer of the Cincinnati office of The Cochran Law Firm, will provide a practical understanding of one’s rights, responsibilities, and opportunities during “Know Your Rights, Protect Your Future,” while Lakshme Lachhman-Persad, a disabled industry leader and founder of Accessible Travel NYC, will delve into accessibility within events, in “Bigger Than the Checklist: Accessibility as Meeting Design Strategy for Experience and Growth.”

During The CEO Blueprint: “Unfiltered Lessons on Leadership, Legacy, and Career Pathways,” Al Hutchinson, Founder of AVH Enterprise; Melvin Tennant, CAE, President & CEO, Meet Minneapolis; Cleo Battle, President & CEO, Louisville Tourism; and Michelle Mason, FASAE, CAE, AAiP, President & CEO, ASAE, will share the lessons,

setbacks, and defining moments that have shaped their leadership journeys.

Connection is paramount for NCBMP, with turning relationships into business being Dunn’s second objective. The Opening Reception will be at the Muhammad Ali Center, with additional evening activities, including the 43rd Annual Excellence Awards, also on deck.

NCBMP is working with Feed Louisville for the community service project. In addition, organizers will welcome approximately 80 high school students to the conference from area hospitality programs.

“We say it all the time at NCBMP: we do business with our friends. But friendship in business requires trust, authenticity, and reciprocity,” said Dunn. “Nielsen projects Black buying power at roughly \$2.1 trillion in 2026. And their research says 70% of Black consumers will stop buying from brands they believe devalue their community. That should get the attention of every brand, hotel company, and destination in this industry. So, we’re not gathering in Louisville just to network. We’re bringing people together to build relationships that ultimately influence where business goes.”

Understanding the power of Black meetings and events is Dunn’s third objective.

“Our research with Tourism Economics found that Black meetings and events generate \$113.9 billion in total economic impact, including \$48.2 billion in direct spending,” he said. “So I think we’re past the point of having to prove that Black meetings matter. The data has settled that argument. The bigger question is whether we fully understand the power behind those numbers—and whether the industry understands that you cannot want our economic impact while being indifferent to the people and organizations creating it. That’s where NCBMP is going. Prepare our members. Strengthen our relationships.

And be much more intentional about where we place our influence and our business. That’s what it means to be

bigger than the moment.”

Find more information at conference.ncbmp.com.



PPAI Study Shows Branded Merchandise Accounts for \$472B in Global GDP

By Todd McElwee

Branded merchandise is ubiquitous at trade shows. From tote bags to sunglasses to Visit Anchorage’s signature stuffed animals, organizations use promotional products to help share their story.

In a first-of-its-kind study, the Promotional Products Association International (PPAI) commissioned Oxford Economics to provide a comprehensive look at the global economic ecosystem behind branded merchandise. Research showed \$338.3 billion was spent on branded merchandise globally in 2025, with the industry supporting \$472.3 billion in global GDP.

“For years, we’ve known branded merchandise has an extraordinary ability to connect brands with people,” said Drew Holmgreen, President & CEO of PPAI. “Behind every branded item is a global network of businesses creating jobs, economic activity and value around the world.”

Branded merchandise supported 11.9 million jobs worldwide. The sector generated \$141.3 billion in global tax revenues—roughly the same as the entire Swiss federal budget. Domestically, the industry supported 1.2 million jobs and \$37 billion in tax revenues.

Danny Rosin, PPAI Board Chair and Co-President of Brand Fuel, said: “An industry with \$338 billion in global spend supporting nearly 12 million jobs and almost half a trillion dollars in GDP contribution is an economic force. But what excites

me most is the real impact those numbers represent: millions of people creating tangible connections between brands, organizations and the people they care about. We’ve always known our work matters. Now the world has the numbers to prove it.”

PPAI said a distinguishing feature of the report is its examination of the industry through three channels of economic impact (direct, indirect and induced), demonstrating how activity generated by branded merchandise extends beyond those who directly create and sell the products. Combined, these channels produced a global GDP multiplier of 2.95, meaning that for every \$1 million in GDP generated directly by the industry, an additional \$1.95 million was supported elsewhere in the global economy.

Researchers added the findings broaden the definition of branded merchandise beyond traditional promotional products. The study includes licensed merchandise, apparel and workwear, retail-branded goods, creator merchandise, print-on-demand and e-commerce products, recognition gifts and merchandise used in marketing, events and brand activations.

Find more information at ppai.org



HOTS

HOTS More Mariachi... The University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) is one of the only universities in the United States to offer a minor in mariachi, according to the Associated Press. Axel Rodríguez Olivas, a violin player, will be the first UNLV student to graduate with the minor. Mariachi is a form of Mexican folk music, and it is engrained in the culture of Las Vegas, “a city where Latinos comprise more than a third of the population,” AP reports. Rodríguez Olivas began playing violin in high school, when he found that the Clark County School

District hosts one of the largest mariachi programs in the country, boasting around 6,000 participating students. “If you go out today, there’s going to be a mariachi somewhere on the Strip,” said Stephen Blanco, who oversees UNLV’s mariachi minor and directs Las Vegas High School’s Mariachi Joya band. He added: “I think that it’s just something that everyone enjoys. You don’t even have to be able to speak Spanish to understand it. I think it’s impossible for someone to walk away without a smile on their face.” HOTS hopes IMEX attendees catch a glimpse of some mariachis in Las Vegas this week!

✧ ✧ ✧ ✧ ✧

HOTS Enrichment Entertainment... The Sea Life aquarium at the Mall of America outside of Minneapolis hosted around two dozen rescue kittens for an afternoon of enrichment, the Associated Press reports. The event marks the sixth year that the Bitty Kitty Brigade, a rescue organization in the Twin Cities that connects orphaned kittens with foster homes, organized the field trip. Over the course of almost two hours, the kittens (complete with names like Turkey Leg, Lottie Dottie, and Mouth Trap) watched sand tiger sharks, sea

turtles and other aquarium fish move through their respective H2-homes. According to AP, some of the kittens “found the aquarium’s dim blue environment calming and closed their eyes for a little nap.” The field trip serves two purposes: bring awareness to the rescue in order to help place kittens in foster homes and provide the kittens with a fun, enriching experience that helps them learn to socialize with humans and other cats, thereby making it easier for these kittens to be adopted. HOTS has to wonder who really benefited from this enrichment activity: the kittens or the people watching them?

WEEKLY NEWS
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My Las Vegas: Carla Reynoso, Senior Marketing Specialist, Caesars Entertainment Meetings & Events

Las Vegas is hosting the global meetings industry for IMEX America, October 13–15. Reynoso provided USAE some local insights so visiting professionals from around the world can make the most of their time in town.

When I need coffee, **Mothership Coffee Roasters** is my first stop. As a locally owned Las Vegas business, Mothership has grown to six locations across the Las Vegas Valley, making it easy to enjoy a great cup of coffee no matter where you are in the city. The company is known for hand-roasting exceptional coffee and creating welcoming spaces that bring people together. I especially appreciate its commitment to sourcing beans from female farmers and supporting community connections through each of its unique cafés. Whether I’m meeting friends, working remotely, or simply starting my day, Mothership is always my go-to spot.

Whether I’m meeting friends, working remotely, or simply starting my day, Mothership is always my go-to spot.

One place I always take a first-time visitor to Las Vegas is the **LINQ Promenade**. It’s right in the heart of the Strip, surrounded by some of Las Vegas’ most iconic hotels, making it a perfect starting point for exploring the city. The area has a fun, energetic atmosphere with great dining, entertainment, and shopping, and no visit is complete without a ride on the High Roller. Seeing the city from the top is an unforgettable experience and gives visitors a unique perspective on just how expansive Las Vegas really is.

I cannot resist a cronut from **Dom-**

inique Ansel Bakery. I love that seasonal flavors are released throughout the year, so there’s always something new to try. It’s become one of my favorite sweet treats in Las Vegas and a must-stop whenever I’m nearby Caesars Palace or Paris Hotel & Casino.

When I’m looking for a peaceful escape, I head to **Lee Canyon**. Just a short hour drive from the Las Vegas Strip, it offers refreshing mountain views, cooler temperatures, and scenic hiking trails that make it the perfect place to recharge during the summer months. I also love that they host outdoor concerts in the mountains, creating a unique way to enjoy live music surrounded by nature. In the winter, it’s my go-to destination for snowboarding, offering a completely different experience from

the desert landscape most people associate with Las Vegas. It’s a great reminder that there’s so much more to discover beyond the Strip. Treat yourself to a massage or spa day at **Qua Baths & Spa at Caesars Palace**. The spa’s signature Roman-inspired baths and wellness experiences provide a luxurious escape and it’s one of my favorite ways to relax and recharge.

Lake Las Vegas is often overlooked, but it’s one of my favorite places to recommend. I love its European-in-

spired village atmosphere, scenic lake views, and mix of restaurants and outdoor activities. Whether you’re enjoying live music, dining by the water, or getting out on the lake for kayaking or paddleboarding, it offers a peaceful retreat and a unique experience that’s just a short drive from the Strip.

If I have 30 minutes for lunch, I head to **China Mama**. With several locations across the city, it’s always within reach when I’m craving a great meal. From handmade dumplings to

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Choice Opens 600th Extended Stay Property in Denver

By Jordan Bradley

Choice Hotels International opened its 600th extended stay hotel, the Everhome Suites Denver Airport hotel, the company announced on October 5.

Located less than 10 miles from the Denver International Airport, the new Everhome Suites hotel offers spacious studio and one-bedroom suites with full kitchens and flexible living spaces.

According to Choice, the hotel's location was selected with intention in a market "supported by the types of recurring demand generators that are fundamental to the segment," including healthcare establishments, ongoing construction and infrastructure activity, and major employment centers—all present in the Denver area.

For Matt McElhare, Choice's Vice President and Segment Lead, the opening of the Everhome Suites Denver Airport hotel "is a celebration of how far we've come and a signal of where we're headed."

He added: "This category demands a deep understanding of a unique guest and disciplined operations, and we've built our business on that foundation, with a team dedicated to helping drive hotel performance and advising franchisees on the highest-growth opportunities and markets."

According to the hotel's owner and developer, Rimrock Companies, a Florida-based real estate developer, the Everhome Suites brand from Choice "has been a natural complement" to its portfolio, which includes other extended stay brands

like Choice's WoodSpring Suites, Hilton's Home2Suites, and Extended Stay America properties.

Rimrock elected to work with Everhome Suites because the brand provided "an elevated purpose-built extended stay product that serves a different guest in high-demand markets" such as Denver, Rimrock CEO Micah Linton said.

"This is our second Everhome Suites to open, with several more in the pipeline, and we're excited about the opportunities we see across the segment," Linton added. "Our relationship with the Choice Hotels extended stay team goes back many years, and that partnership has been central to our growth. We're proud that this hotel carries the distinction of being Choice Hotels' 600th extended stay property."

During a second quarter earnings update in early August, Choice reported that its extended stay

**As of June 30, 2026,
Choice boasts
approximately
29,900 extended stay
guest rooms in its
global pipeline.**

segment "remained a core growth engine" with the number of extended stay guest rooms in the United States growing by 13% when compared to late June 2025, "marking the 12th consecutive quarter

of double-digit growth" in the segment for Choice.

As of June 30, 2026, Choice boasts approximately 29,900 extended stay guest rooms in its global pipeline.

McElhare noted that Choice's extended stay strategy was responsible for the continued growth in the segment.

"Our scale allows us to keep investing in new capabilities and innovation that propel franchisee performance in a dynamic, competitive environment, and our momentum is proof that approach is working," he said.



Choice Hotels International announced the opening of its 600th extended stay property, the Everhome Suites Denver Airport in Colorado, on October 5.

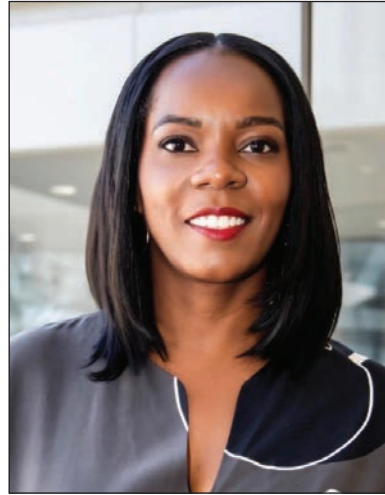
Industry Movers



Marisa Pechanec has been promoted to Vice President of Convention Sales at Visit Wichita. Pechanec has grown her career at Visit Wichita since joining the organization in 2020, advancing from convention sales coordinator to convention sales manager and, most recently, director of convention sales in 2025. In her new role, Pechanec will oversee the department's long-term strategy and direction, team development and industry and community partnerships.



Chinela Bertrand has been promoted to Manager, Memberships at the Atlanta CVB. In this role, Bertrand will lead ACVB's member billing and onboarding processes and manage its digital platforms for members. She joined the bureau in 2025 as membership coordinator. Bertrand is an Atlanta native with more than 15 years of experience in the hospitality industry. She's a graduate of Spelman University and holds a degree in economics.



Denise Dixon-Cooper is now the Baltimore Convention Center's (BCC) Director of Strategic Communications, a newly established leadership position within the organization. She'll lead the convention center's newly established marketing department. Cooper brings more than 15 years of marketing and communications experience. She previously served as director of strategic communications and events for innovation works and as CEO and chief brand strategist of her own consulting firm.



Nijad Fares has been named General Manager of 1 Hotel Seattle. Starwood Hotels, the hotel brand management company that operates Baccarat Hotels, 1 Hotels, and Treehouse Hotels, made the announcement. He has more than 20 years of international hospitality experience across lifestyle, luxury, and boutique hotels in Japan, California, Hawaii, and Switzerland. Fares joins 1 Hotel Seattle following his role as general manager of Aloft Osaka Dojima.

IMEX

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across our community, supporting the people and businesses that help make the week possible. The show's influence also extends well beyond those days in October. Meetings booked, partnerships formed and ideas exchanged here help shape future events in destinations around the world.

Making IMEX America a success takes the care and expertise of people across our hospitality community. Hotel teams, chefs, servers, drivers and event professionals bring care and expertise to gatherings of every size. Their work shapes how visitors feel about their time here. It is one of the things I appreciate most about Las Vegas: the attention paid to an individual guest in a city that operates on such an extraordinary scale.

After a full day of appointments and education, attendees can make the evening their own by reconnecting with colleagues over an exceptional

meal, seeing a show or discovering a part of the city they have never explored.

As IMEX America has grown, Las Vegas has continued to evolve alongside it. Sphere is one of the most striking examples, bringing technology, creativity and live entertainment together in ways that expand our sense of what an event can be. Our dining scene offers another kind of discovery, with celebrated chefs and local talent giving visitors a reason to return to a favorite table or try something entirely new. For meeting professionals, these experiences offer inspiration for how to engage an audience, celebrate a team or bring people closer together.

As we celebrate 15 years of IMEX America in Las Vegas, we're grateful for our partnership with the IMEX Group and for the industry professionals who make this gathering so meaningful. We look forward to welcoming you for years to come and to helping shape what comes next for the global meetings industry.

Rebecca Wright Named Interim CEO of SITE

By Todd McElwee

Rebecca Wright, CIS, CITP, has been appointed Interim CEO of The Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE). She succeeds Annette Gregg and will lead the association while a separate search for a permanent CEO takes place.

"It is a privilege to return to SITE and serve this community once again as Interim CEO," said Wright. "What has always made SITE special is its people: an exceptional team, committed Board and chapter leaders, and the relationships that connect our global community. My immediate focus will be on supporting the team, listening closely to our members and chapters, and building on the momentum already established across the association. I'm looking forward to reconnecting with members and industry colleagues at IMEX America and in the months ahead."

SITE said Wright is well known across its community and brings more than 15 years of experience in the incentive travel industry. A former chapter leader and President of SITE Chicago, she joined SITE as Head of Chapter Engagement in January 2020 and previously served as Interim CEO between October 2020 and November 2022. She has also been involved with ASAE, PCMA and MPI.



The appointment follows a comprehensive process led by SITE's Executive Committee and affirmed by the SITE International Board of Directors.

"I worked with Rebecca during her first term as Interim CEO, when I was President of SITE Türkiye," said Hasan Dinç, President of the SITE International Board of Directors. "Through the pandemic she kept our chapters connected to SITE, and I saw firsthand what that meant for them. She brings that same continuity now."

Last month, it was announced Gregg was concluding a four-year run leading SITE and SITE Foundation. She became CEO of the World Trade Centers Association (WCTA) on October 5.

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NEWS

Caroline Beteta Appointed Interim President & CEO of Brand USA

By Jonathan Trager

Brand USA, the destination marketing organization for the United States, announced on October 5 that Caroline Beteta has been appointed Interim President & CEO.

Beteta, who retired in September after nearly three decades as head of Visit California, brings extensive tourism leadership experience and a longstanding connection to Brand USA. She boasts previous service as chair of the group's board of directors and will start in the interim role on November 9.

"Brand USA has been close to my heart since its inception, and I am honored to step in at such an important moment for the organization and our industry," said Beteta. "My focus will be singular: securing Brand USA's reauthorization and ensuring this critical organization can continue its mission of welcoming the world to the United States. International inbound travel is vital to our nation's economy, communities and global competitiveness, and I look forward to working alongside Brand USA's board, team and our industry partners to help get reauthorization across the finish line."

Beteta led Visit California as president & CEO from January 1998 until her retirement in September 2026, while also serving the state as deputy secretary for tourism and later as a strategic advisor to the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development.

During her tenure, Visit California established the nation's first statewide tourism assessment program, opened international offices, launched global marketing campaigns, and led the industry's recovery from wildfires, recessions, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Brand USA said Beteta's ties to the organization go back to its founding. As national chair of the U.S. Travel Association, she helped unite the Travel Industry Association and the Travel Business Roundtable to lay the groundwork for Brand USA's creation before becoming the organization's vice chair of operations.

"On behalf of the board, we congratulate Caroline and welcome her back to Brand USA," said Todd Davidson, Chair of Brand USA. "Caroline has led this organization before, she knows our partners and our mission, and she built Visit California into one of the most respected destination marketing organizations in the world. Brand



USA and the U.S. travel and tourism industry are fortunate that a seasoned professional with her extensive experience,

insight and passion is stepping forward again, at this pivotal time, as

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George W. Bush, Barbara Pierce Bush Appearing at Convening Leaders

By Todd McElwee

President George W. Bush will appear on the PCMA Convening Leaders (CL27) Main Stage on January 1 with his daughter, Barbara Pierce Bush, to discuss leadership, public service, family, and lessons learned along the way.

The session will be moderated by longtime PCMA emcee Holly Ransom, CEO of Emergent. Convening Leaders will be held January 10–13 in Miami Beach.

The 43rd President of the United States, Bush served from 2001–2009. PCMA said he worked to expand freedom, opportunity, and security across the globe while also reforming America's education system and pursuing a comprehensive strategy to keep the nation safe after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

After his term, President Bush and former First Lady Laura Bush founded the George W. Bush Presidential Center in Dallas, a nonpartisan or-

ganization advancing the values of freedom, opportunity, accountability, and compassion. He's the author of four bestselling books.

Pierce Bush is the NBA's Senior Vice President of Social Impact and Inclusion, where she works with NBA offices around the world on community strategies focused on health equity, sustainability, civic engagement, and inclusion. She was Executive-in-Residence at Schmidt Futures, where she led its International Strategy Forum.

Pierce Bush co-founded Global Health Corps, which places young leaders on the front lines of health equity and served as its CEO for the first nine years. She's also a bestselling author.

This Main Stage session is presented by New Orleans & Company and New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center. The session is closed to media and is off the record.

Find more information at conveningleaders.org.

My Las Vegas

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flavorful noodle dishes, it's a local favorite for a reason and one of my go-to recommendations.

One museum you do not want to miss when visiting Las Vegas is **The Mob Museum**. It offers a fascinating look at the city's history, from its early connections to organized crime to its transformation into the world-class destination it is today. It's a uniquely Las Vegas experience that blends history, culture, and storytelling.

If you can get a ticket, see a show at **The Colosseum at Caesars Palace**. I've had the privilege of seeing Adele, Kelly Clarkson, and Jennifer Lopez

perform there during their residencies, and each experience was unique and incredible. The combination of world-class talent and an intimate venue makes for a truly unforgettable Las Vegas night.

Floyd Lamb Park at Tule Springs is my favorite place to get out into nature. When I'm looking to go for a jog or a walk, this 680-acre oasis is one of my favorite places to unwind, with scenic lakes, walking trails, wildlife, and beautiful mountain views. I especially enjoy seeing the peacocks roaming and taking in the beauty of the park's historic surroundings. It's the perfect setting to slow down, get some fresh air, and enjoy the outdoors.



NEWS

Choice to Acquire Alternative Outdoor Lodging Company Harvest Hosts

By Jordan Bradley

Choice Hotels International will acquire Harvest Hosts, a travel membership company offering unique stays for RV travelers.

The acquisition, announced by Choice on September 30, marks a step in a new direction for the hotel company, which will venture into the outdoor travel market.

According to Choice, members of its rewards program, Choice Privileges, are “particularly active” and enjoy both hotel and recreational vehicle (RV) travel. Harvest Hosts is a network of more than 9,500 business and private locations that are equipped to host an RV, including farms, wineries, breweries, golf courses, campground, and more. Members purchase annual memberships in one of three tiers that allow unlimited one-night stays at properties across the 49 contiguous United States.

Harvest Hosts was established in 2010 by Don and Kim Greene, a couple with a strong passion for RV traveling. The pair were inspired to start Harvest Hosts when they discovered France Passion, “a French travel booklet full of thousands of vineyards and farms throughout France that welcome RV-

ers to stay the night,” according to the Harvest Hosts website, and it has since grown from 600 properties to more than 9,500. Eventually, the couple sold Harvest Hosts to Joel Holland in 2018.

RVers who book sites through Harvest Hosts are encouraged to patronize their hosts’ businesses during their stay, offering a mutually beneficial ecosystem.

For Choice, the acquisition signifies the joining of “Choice’s scale, commercial capabilities and loyalty reach” and “Harvest Hosts’ unique offerings” in order to create the “opportunity to deepen engagement with existing members, introduce more travelers to Harvest Hosts and support the continued growth of both businesses,” Choice said.

“Choice Hotels has a long history of delivering quality travel experiences for value-minded consumers, and our acquisition of Harvest Hosts extends that reach into an attractive segment of the outdoor travel market,” said Dom Dragisich, President and CEO of Choice Hotels International. “Together we offer even more stay options for both of our companies’ guests.”

Through the acquisition, Choice will own Harvest Hosts in its entirety, purchasing outstanding shares from



An RV on one of Harvest Hosts’ more than 9,500 unique host sites ranging from farms, wineries, breweries, museums and campsites throughout the contiguous United States.

Stripes, an investor in the company since 2021, and other shareholders for \$130 million. When complete, Harvest Hosts will operate as a standalone business and furthers Choice’s asset-light strategy.

For Harvest Hosts, the acquisition will allow the company to share its unique stays with a wider audience, said Holland, who will stay on as the company’s CEO.

“The heart and soul of Harvest

Hosts is the unique connections we have built between our members, hosts and employees,” said Holland. “We share a love of the open road and the communities that make every journey memorable. Joining forces with Choice Hotels gives us an incredible opportunity to bring that experience to more people and accelerate our mission of creating millions of happier campers and communities.”



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NEWS

The Cosmopolitan to Open New Dining Outlet Early November

By Jordan Bradley

The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas is now accepting reservations for its new dining venue, The Corner Store Las Vegas, a SoHo darling making its debut out west.

According to MGM, “the ultra-coveted hotspot” originally opened in New York and “injects a new level of culinary energy” into the Las Vegas food scene.

The Corner Store is known for its menu of elevated American classics, with signature menu items such as lobster and caviar rolls, five cheese pizza rolls, the Corner Store Caesar salad, and a Wagyu French dip sandwich.

The original Corner Store was launched by Catch Hospitality Group—spearheaded by co-founder Eugene Remm and Executive chef Michael Vignolia—in 2024,

and has since been a regular host for celebrities the likes of Taylor Swift, Leonardo DiCaprio and Lady Gaga, according to the *New York Post*.

“For people who can’t get into The Corner Store, it is a way to experience the product, an opportunity to give access to more people,” Remm told the *Post*.

According to MGM, “the ultra-coveted hotspot” originally opened in New York and “injects a new level of culinary energy” into the Las Vegas food scene.

The Corner Store Las Vegas was established under the direction of Vignola and in collaboration with the Las Vegas location’s Executive Chef Daniel Bernardo.

The Corner Store Las Vegas will give guests access to an exclusive selection of premium meats and hand-cut steaks from The Butcher’s Counter, but the

venue’s drink menu will maintain some of the brand’s classic “SoHo favorites,” MGM said.

Developed in partnership with The



Cosmopolitan’s Head of Mixology Gedeon Tsegaye and Catch Hospitality’s Group Beverage Director Lucas Robinson, The Corner Store Las Vegas will feature the tomato, and sour cream & onion martinis—favorites of the New York menu—alongside new Las Vegas-exclusive creations including a rendition of the Oli’s Dirty Martini served with a trio of mascarpone caviar olives.

The venue will be able to accommodate 150 guests, Remm told the *Post*, ensuring that The Corner Store Las Vegas “still has the intimacy” the original location is “known for—and 150 seats is intimate in the Vegas market.”

The Corner Store is scheduled to open on November 9. Find more information or make a reservation at cosmopolitanlasvegas.mgmresorts.com

Caroline Beteta

continued from page 8

we work to secure Brand USA’s reauthorization.”

Nationally, Beteta was appointed to the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board, and she has served on the executive committee of the World Travel & Tourism Council. In 2016, she was inducted into the U.S. Travel Association’s Hall of Leaders.

Beteta succeeds Fred Dixon, who’ll depart Brand USA on November 13 after more than two years at the

helm. He returns to New York City as President & CEO of NYC Tourism + Conventions on December 1.

“Caroline helped create Brand USA and has led it successfully before. She knows our stakeholders, our markets and the reauthorization process well,” said Dixon. “Her experience will keep the organization on track in its mission of driving international travel and positively impacting businesses and communities across the U.S. I’m grateful to our board, our staff and our partners, and I look forward to working with Caroline to ensure a smooth transition.”

CVB Update

Discover Long Island (DLI) in New York unveiled its newly redesigned website on October 5, introducing a more immersive, editorial, and user-focused digital experience built around the ways people explore Long Island today.

The new DiscoverLongIsland.com website goes beyond traditional trip planning to serve both visitors planning a future getaway and Long Islanders looking for something to do right now. With discovery at the heart of the experience, the new website makes it easier to find what is happening across Suffolk County and the greater Long Island region, whether someone is planning a first visit, searching for this weekend’s events, or deciding where to explore that day.

“We wanted to enhance our digital profile for an experience that reflects the way people actually discover Long Island today,” said Discover Long Island President & CEO Sharon Wyman. “This new website is not simply a place to plan a trip. It is a place to be inspired, uncover something new, find what is happening now, and connect with the people, businesses, and communities that make Suffolk County so special. Whether you are a first-time visitor or a lifelong Long Islander, there

is always something new waiting to be discovered.”

Visit Savannah has unveiled “Stir Your Soul,” a new leisure campaign that captures the distinctive character of Savannah and the lasting emotional connection visitors develop with the destination.

The narrative foundation for the campaign, announced on October 5, expresses how Savannah invites people to experience the city on a deeper and more personal level. Its intention is to reflect the sense of discovery, connection and wonder that draws visitors to Savannah and remains with them long after they leave.

“As Savannah has grown and evolved, so has the way visitors experience our city,” said Angela Westfield, Chief Marketing Officer of Visit Savannah. “People come here for our history, architecture, and beauty, but what they remember most is how Savannah made them feel. Our new campaign captures that emotional connection while celebrating the people, places and experiences that make our destination unlike anywhere else.”

The campaign features entirely new creative that will appear across streaming, digital platforms, and other leisure-travel marketing channels.

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NEWS

Palm Beach Groups Seeking to Block Convention Center Hotel

By Jonathan Trager

Two West Palm Beach neighborhood groups filed a legal petition on September 30 seeking to block a hotel planned near the Palm Beach County Convention Center, arguing the city failed to complete required reviews before approving the project.

The Grandview Heights Neighborhood Association and West Palm Beach Neighborhood Alliance are asking a judge to overturn the city's approvals for the hotel, which is being developed by local firm Related Ross. The petition argues the city

failed to make required findings, including whether public infrastructure could support the project, and raises due-process concerns involving communications between city commissioners and the developer.

"They abandoned the master plan," Bill Brewer, an attorney representing the neighborhood groups, told news station WPBF. They are not acting in view of our clients as people that protect the public."

Brewer said the city should have conducted additional studies before commissioners approved the 18-story, 400-room hotel project in

August, including reviews of traffic, congestion, noise, and infrastructure.

The groups are asking a judge to prevent building permits from being issued while the case is reviewed. The city declined to comment because of the active legal matter.

The lawsuit came one day after Palm Beach County commissioners voted 6-1 on September 29 to approve a \$26 million agreement tied to the hotel. Under the deal, Related Ross will finance, build, and operate the project, while the county will acquire the land and completed hotel and lease them back to the developer

under an agreement that can extend for up to 97 years.

Residents of nearby Grandview Heights have raised concerns about traffic, construction noise, and the effect of additional development on the historic neighborhood.

"We are not taking legal action because we're against growth," Margaret Frazzini, President of the Association and the Alliance, said. "We're filing because somewhere along the way, residents became an obstacle to a decision that was already made."

Visit Reno Tahoe Wildfire Relief Concerts Raise More than \$90K

By Jonathan Trager

Visit Reno Tahoe's wildfire relief concerts featuring Ashanti and Trey Songz raised more than \$90,000 to support Northern Nevada wildfire recovery efforts, the organization announced on October 7.

The concerts, held at the Reno Events Center on September 24 and 25, brought the community together for a night of entertainment while generating financial support to those impacted by the wildfires. Net proceeds from new ticket purchases throughout

the month leading up to the Ashanti and Trey Songz concert were donated to the American Red Cross of Northern Nevada to support disaster relief and recovery efforts.

In addition to the funds raised, Visit Reno Tahoe provided more than 1,000 complimentary tickets to firefighters and first responders through 1st tix, showing appreciation to those who served during the wildfire response.

"We are grateful to everyone who came together to make these concerts such a powerful source of support for our community," said Mike Larragueta,

President & CEO of Visit Reno Tahoe. "The Reno Events Center has a unique ability to bring people together around moments that matter, and we're proud these concerts turned that space into something bigger, a chance to support wildfire recovery and honor the first responders who have worked tirelessly to protect Northern Nevada."

On October 6, Larragueta presented the donation to the American Red Cross of Northern Nevada during a check presentation at the Reno-Sparks Convention Center. The funds will support disaster relief and recovery

efforts, including financial assistance, health and emotional support, and recovery planning for individuals and families impacted by the wildfires in August.

The American Red Cross of Northern Nevada was selected as the beneficiary based on its ongoing relief and recovery efforts in the region. More than 1,100 people registered at overnight shelters, while Red Cross teams served more than 3,750 meals, with volunteers contributing more than 25,000 hours to the response. Visit Reno Tahoe provided space at the Reno-Sparks Convention Center to support evacuation needs.

On October 6, Larragueta presented the donation to the American Red Cross of Northern Nevada during a check presentation at the Reno-Sparks Convention Center.

Construction on Las Vegas Hard Rock Paused for "Vague Threat"

By Jordan Bradley

Hard Rock International officials elected to pause construction and evacuate personnel on a forthcoming hotel and casino on the Las Vegas Strip in the wake of alleged threats found on the site.

According to the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD), detectives were on the construction site on October 5 investigating "a vague threat of violence" to determine "any legitimacy" from the threats on the day.

"The construction site has decided to evacuate on their own out of an abundance of caution," the LVMPD said in an October 5 statement. Workers were evacuated around 9 a.m. local time.

Hard Rock officials did not return USAE request for comment by press deadline, but they provided local news outlet Fox 5 Vegas with a statement on October 5.

"Hard Rock and our Development partners hold nothing more important than the safety of our team members," officials said. "Out of caution, construction has ceased for the day while we address a safety concern. The property is secure, and we expect to resume operations tomorrow."

Representatives from the LVMPD confirmed to Fox 5 Vegas that a note was written inside a porta-potty on the construction site. Though officials did not share what was written, Fox 5 reported that the note contained a threat of gun violence on the job site.

At press deadline, responsible parties had not been identified, and charges had not been filed.

According to local news outlets, workers returned to the site the following day and continued working on the site of the forthcoming Hard Rock Hotel & Casino.



Mike Larragueta, President & CEO of Visit Reno Tahoe, presented a check for more than \$90,000 to the American Red Cross of Northern Nevada at the Reno-Sparks Convention Center on October 6. Also pictured are Regional CEO Heidi Ruster (left) and Executive Director Bridget Posson.



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NEWS

Signia Hilton Indianapolis Announces Seven F&B Outlets

By Jordan Bradley

When the Signia Hilton Indianapolis opens to guests in early December, the hotel will be ready to feed the road-weary traveler.

Hilton revealed details of the forthcoming Signia hotel's seven new restaurants, which were "designed as dynamic destinations in their own right."

The venues include Torchlight, a dramatic two-story rooftop cocktail lounge occupying the hotel's 38th floor; lobby bar Rosewater's; Heartwood, an all-day modern-American grill that will start off serving breakfast and lunch "before expanding into all-day dining in the spring"; Slipstream, an espresso bar, café and market designed as an homage to Indianapolis' racing heritage; Deck on 5, a seasonal rooftop pool deck; Club Signia, the Signia brand's personalized lounge experience; and an as-yet unannounced upscale dining destination set to debut next summer.

"At Signia Hilton Indianapolis, dining

will be woven into the rhythm of every stay, whether guests are visiting for a gathering, cheering on their favorite team, attending a concert or enjoying a local weekend downtown," said Kathy Heneghan, General Manager of the Signia Hilton Indianapolis.

The collection of bespoke outlets were developed in collaboration between hotel Executive Chef Dwayne Krisko and Director of Food and Beverage Kyle Wright and Hilton's StiR Creative Collective, the company's in-house food and beverage consultancy.

The collaborative team is "building a culinary program that celebrates Indianapolis while delivering Hilton hospitality through a distinctly Hoosier lens," Heneghan said.

As part of the culinary program, the Hilton Signia Indianapolis also boasts a luxury catering service, Modern Indiana Table, to accommodate its almost 100,000 square feet of meetings and event spaces on site.

The service offers guests and meeting planners the ability to "customize their events with interactive expe-



Rendering of the Torchlight's outdoor terrace

periences designed to bring Indiana's flavors and traditions to life," Hilton said, including cocktail labs, and themed meeting breaks centered around "elevated takes" on the Indiana State Fair and the region's history of dairy farming.

When it opens this December, the 803-room Indy Signia will be connected to the Indiana Convention Center by a climate-controlled sky bridge.

Reservations are currently open for stays at the Signia Hilton Indianapolis beginning on December 9.



Rendering of lobby bar Rosewater's



Rendering of the Slipstream café, espresso bar and market

ASAE Opens Annual Meeting Submissions Window

By Todd McElwee

The call for proposals has opened for the 2027 ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition, August 7–10 at the Charlotte Convention Center.

Sessions proposals must be educational and non-commercial. October 27 is the deadline to apply.

"This is your time to shine and share innovative ideas, practical strategies, or lessons learned that can help association professionals navigate evolving challenges and shape the future of our industry," ASAE said. "We want to hear from

you! We're seeking engaging, outcomes-focused sessions across a variety of topic areas, including AI, governance, leadership, meetings and events, strategy, workforce development, and more."

This year's Annual Meeting in Indianapolis attracted more than 5,300 attendees.

"This is your opportunity to share your expertise with thousands of association professionals and industry leaders at our community's premier event," organizers said.

Find more information [here](#).

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Houston is reimagining meetings with the transformation of the George R. Brown Convention Center. The ambitious redevelopment links world-class venues, public plazas, and parks into a walkable, connected district in downtown.

At the heart of this evolution: the new GRB South building, elevating the facility to one of North America's most advanced and flexible convention centers. And while construction continues, the GRB remains fully open, delivering seamless service and award-winning Houston hospitality.

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Atlantic City's Unique Location Offers Unmatched Access

Atlantic City is a city of firsts where history and innovation come together to create exceptional meetings and events. From the nation's first Boardwalk to a long legacy of welcoming visitors, the destination has always led the way in creating standout experiences. That legacy continues today through state-of-the-art venues, convenient transportation, and a compact footprint that keeps attendees close to everything they need. In Atlantic City, history inspires innovation, and every event benefits from a destination designed to perform with purpose.

Nestled between the land and sea, Atlantic City's unique location offers unmatched access to one-third of the nation's population. Convenient highway access and NJ TRANSIT Rail Service provide direct travel from Philadelphia to the Atlantic City Convention Center, making regional attendance simple and cost effective. Attendees can also fly into Atlantic City International Airport or Philadelphia International Airport, with service from a variety of airlines across key markets for easy regional and national access. Flying into Philadelphia? The American Airlines Landline Bus provides seamless connections to Atlantic City, complete with automatic checked baggage transfers, comfortable seating, and ease of accessibility. Upon arrival, hop on the Atlantic City Jitney, the city's most convenient and affordable group transportation, powered by clean compressed natural gas.

Atlantic City's history is filled with iconic firsts and cultural milestones that shaped both the city and American history. From the nation's first and longest Boardwalk to Resorts Casino Hotel, the first legal casino outside Nevada, the city has always set the stage for iconic experiences. It's the birthplace of Saltwater Taffy, the inspiration for the Monopoly board game, home to the nation's first beach patrol, and the site where the term "airport" was



From the nation's first Boardwalk to a long legacy of welcoming visitors, the destination has always led the way in creating standout experiences.

first coined. Historic firsts continue as the city was recently honored with the only Mississippi Freedom Trail Marker outside Mississippi, commemorating its role in the Civil Rights Movement. Today, landmarks like Jim Whelan Boardwalk Hall continue to host world-class events while showcasing the Atlantic City Experience, the city's free museum, and the world's largest pipe organ.

Memorable events begin at the LEED Gold and GBAC STAR-certified Atlantic City Convention Center. Spanning nearly 31 acres with 500,000 square feet of contiguous meeting and convention space, 45 meeting rooms, and a solar array rooftop featuring 13,000 panels, the venue has significantly reduced yearly energy consumption. These sustainable practices, along with eco-conscious initiatives across the destination, reflect Atlan-

tic City's commitment to protecting its unique coastal environment while hosting world-class events.

With over 1.8 million square feet of citywide meeting space, Atlantic City offers flexible venues to accommodate events of all sizes. From the expansive Atlantic City Convention Center to beachfront and waterfront venues, the destination provides a variety of options that suit any vision. Off-site venues like Renault Winery & Resort and Seaview Hotel and Golf Club offer sophisticated and charming settings, from scenic golf courses to rustic vineyards. For more unique experiences, local venues like Anchor Rock Club provide vibrant, creative atmospheres, while immersive outdoor spaces such as the historic Steel Pier allow planners to host unforgettable events over the Atlantic Ocean. Atlantic City's unique venues allow you to flex your event, ensuring an unforgettable experience tailored to your needs.

Whether you're staying in the Marina District or along the Atlantic City Boardwalk, the city offers over 18,000 rooms across a wide range of accommodations. From nine luxurious and historic casino resorts to family-friendly hotels and boutique properties, each offers top-tier service, modern amenities, and panoramic views, ensuring a memorable and comfortable experience.

Beyond the meeting rooms, attendees can immerse themselves in Atlantic City's vibrant neighborhoods, where art, culture, and history come alive. Through the 48 Blocks program, developed by the Atlantic City

Arts Foundation, visitors can explore more than 100 murals and historic sites that celebrate the city's diverse communities. From the historic streets of Ducktown to the lively energy of Midtown, Chelsea, and the Inlet, each neighborhood tells its own story and offers unique experiences to discover. With history and culture around every turn, Atlantic City's local community transform meetings into immersive and memorable experiences.

Atlantic City is committed to regenerative tourism, ensuring that every event contributes to a brighter, eco-conscious future. The destination leads with citywide initiatives, from beach and city cleanups that protect wildlife and ecosystems to eco-friendly dining practices. Attendees can engage with local non-profits through impactful volunteer projects, whether supporting the Boys & Girls Club of Atlantic City, empowering women at MudGirls Studios, or helping animals at the Humane Society of Atlantic County. Hosting a meeting in Atlantic City goes beyond business, it's an opportunity to meet with purpose, foster connections, and inspire action.

Our vibrant city awaits your arrival, offering historic landmarks, unique venues, and immersive neighborhoods that bring every gathering to life. Join us in Atlantic City, NJ, where the city's rich past and iconic firsts set the stage for unforgettable experiences. Together, we can create memorable events that leave a lasting mark before, during, and after your visit.

www.visitatlanticcity.com/meetings



Our vibrant city awaits your arrival, offering historic landmarks, unique venues, and immersive neighborhoods that bring every gathering to life.



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Greater New Orleans Hotel & Lodging Association (GNOHLA) is seeking its next Executive Director to lead, advocate for, and advance an industry that is central to the economic vitality, identity, and future of Greater New Orleans.

This is more than an association leadership role. It is an opportunity for an accomplished hospitality, tourism, or stakeholder-driven leader to serve as a visible industry advocate, relationship builder, and voice for New Orleans' hotel and lodging community at a time when hospitality continues to shape the region's economy, workforce, visitor experience, and global reputation.

Who is GNOHLA?

GNOHLA is a membership-based, nonprofit trade association representing the interests of the Greater New Orleans hotel and lodging industry. The Association brings together hotel leaders, allied businesses, community partners, government stakeholders, and tourism organizations to strengthen the hospitality community and advance the interests of its members.

Through advocacy, education, communication, industry programming, strategic partnerships, and member engagement, GNOHLA works to protect and promote one of the region's most important industries. And the stakes are significant.

New Orleans welcomed 19.46 million visitors in 2025, generating \$10.8 billion in visitor spending, while tourism and hospitality supported more than 85,000 jobs and careers. The hotel and lodging community is at the center of that economic engine.

The Opportunity

Reporting to the Board of Directors, the Executive Director serves as GNOHLA's chief executive and administrative officer and primary public representative, providing leadership across the Association's operations, advocacy, membership, financial performance, partnerships, programming, and external affairs.

The Executive Director will work closely with GNOHLA's Board, members, elected officials and government leaders, tourism partners, business leaders, and community stakeholders to ensure the Association remains a credible, influential, and highly visible voice for the hotel and lodging industry.

Few cities in the world are as closely identified with hospitality as New Orleans. This is an opportunity for a leader who understands that successful association leadership happens both inside and outside the organization, building relationships, anticipating issues, convening stakeholders, strengthening member value, and ensuring the industry has a strong voice on the issues that matter.

Who We Are Seeking

GNOHLA is seeking an accomplished, highly relationship-driven leader who brings:

- Senior leadership experience within hospitality, tourism, destination marketing, a trade or membership association, government/public affairs, economic development, or another public-private or stakeholder-driven organization
- Success in member, customer, or stakeholder engagement, sponsorship or partnership development, revenue generation, and event leadership
- Experience working effectively with a Board of Directors and volunteer leaders
- Strong stakeholder management, government relations, public affairs, or advocacy experience
- Financial and operational acumen with experience supporting revenue and membership growth
- Exceptional communication, public speaking, relationship-building, and external representation skills
- The credibility and presence to engage hotel executives, elected officials, tourism leaders, business partners, and community stakeholders

This is more than an Executive Director opportunity.

It is an opportunity to lead, convene, advocate, and influence on behalf of the people and businesses that welcome the world to New Orleans.



What Success Looks Like

Industry Advocacy

- Represent and advance the interests of GNOHLA members with government, industry, business, and community stakeholders.

Member Value & Engagement

- Build strong relationships with hotel and allied members, strengthen engagement and retention, and ensure GNOHLA remains relevant and responsive to the industry it serves.

Strategic Leadership

- Partner with the Board to identify emerging issues, establish priorities, and position the Association for continued influence and long-term success.

Visibility & Influence

- Serve as a credible and compelling public voice for GNOHLA and strengthen the Association's presence throughout the hospitality, tourism, business, and civic communities.

Organizational & Financial Strength

- Lead GNOHLA with operational discipline while expanding opportunities for membership growth, sponsorships, partnerships, programming, and other revenue sources.

Explore the Opportunity

Winner Partners has been exclusively retained by GNOHLA to lead the search for its next Executive Director. Inquiries, referrals, and expressions of interest may be directed to: GNOHLA@winnerpartners.net

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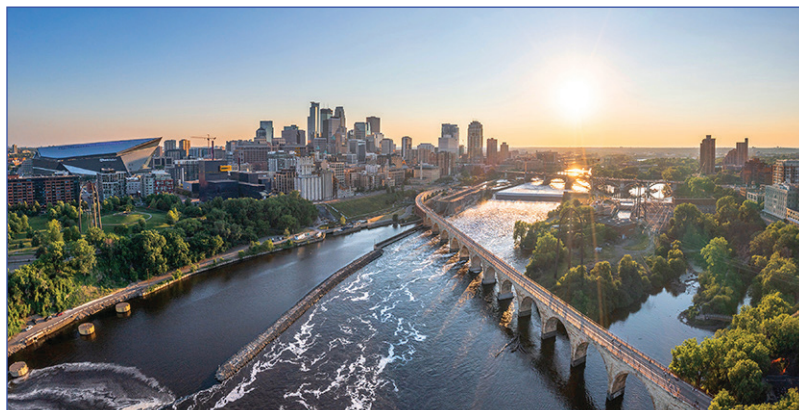
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